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The Influence of Peer-victimisation on the Psychosocial Adjustment of Students in Public Secondary Schools in Bomet County, Kenya

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to examine the influence of peer victimisation on the psychosocial adjustment of students in public secondary schools in Bomet County, Kenya. In spite of many studies undertaken on psychosocial adjustment, no study has been carried out on the influence of peer victimisation on students' psychosocial adjustment. The study was anchored on social-ecological and psychosocial theories. Pragmatism research philosophy was used, and a convergent parallel mixed research design was used. Data was collected from deputy principals, guidance and counselling teachers and three students. A sample of 88 public secondary schools was drawn from a population of 294 secondary schools in Bomet County with 555 participants. Data collection instruments were questionnaires and interview schedules. Quantitative and qualitative information was assessed utilising descriptive analysis. Statistics, and thematically, respectively. According to the study, the majority of Bomet County's public secondary schools had created initiatives to increase students' understanding of the negative effects of peer-related variables. Additionally, the study demonstrated that there was a substantial positive correlation between peer-related characteristics and the students' psychosocial adjustment ($r=0.615$). According to the study's findings, adolescents who have experienced peer-related problems can benefit from guidance and counselling in order to successfully adjust to school. According to the study, schools should implement a program to evaluate students' social and psychological stressors at school, raise awareness of the guidance and counselling services that are available, and encourage students to seek assistance from the department whenever they encounter problems that they are unable to handle.

Key words: Academic performance, peer victimisation, psychosocial adjustment, psychological stressors.



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INTRODUCTION

Peer victimisation is when stronger students exert psychological or physical oppression over weaker students in the learning environment, intending to dominate them (Delgado et al., 2013). One in three children worldwide are victims of bullying, making peer victimisation or bullying a widespread social issue (UNESCO, 2019). A wide range of symptoms, such as loneliness, suicidal thoughts and intent, depressive symptoms (Ferraz & Rice, 2020), social anxiety, generalised anxiety, and, more recently, symptoms of separation anxiety, panic disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, are linked to bullying during adolescence (Ferraz et al., 2022).

Peer victimisation is linked to behavioural problems, as well as decreased cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation capacity. Adulthood may see many of these effects (Moore et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2017). According to a review of the literature, attempts to lessen the detrimental effects of peer victimisation on teenage mental health have mostly concentrated on curbing bullying behaviour, with little success. Further, treatment for the impacts of bullying frequently commonly happens in school group settings. In contrast, studies examining certain psychological interventions that directly assist the sufferer have been overlooked. In order to address this, the current study examines how peer victimisation affects students' psychological adjustment in public secondary schools located in Bomet County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students' psychosocial adjustment in school is largely influenced by the student's perception of social acceptance or rejection by their peers. The level of classroom integration determines the level of the student's performance in school, both in terms of academic outcomes and extracurricular activities. (Sentse et al., 2017). Moreno et al. (2020) argued that a perceived lack of social acceptance of a student from their friends' can make them develop a traumatic experience associated with a negative assessment of their life and can cause emotional distress. Further, Esposito et al. (2019) indicated that a student lacking social acceptance from peers might lead to external problems such as anger, hostility, and high levels of anxiety. Poor integration of students in the classroom has been found to cause the development of antisocial behaviours, including bullying and violence in schools. A study to assess the relationship between school integration,

psychosocial adjustment, and aggression among adolescents by Moreno et al. (2021) found a significant positive relationship between life satisfaction, sociometrist type, and aggression among adolescents.

The study investigated the relationship between rejections, preferable, neglected, life satisfaction, and psychological discomfort in adolescents in Spain. The study found that snubbed students in school revealed less satisfaction with life and aggressiveness. In addition, regardless of the boys' social metric type in the class, they exhibited lower psychological distress than girls. They also revealed less involvement in bullying or aggressiveness. However, adolescents who had controversial behaviour displayed high involvement in bullying and cyber aggressiveness.

While covert bullying refers to subtle yet aggressive, disguised, non-physical behaviour that is concealed from educators, parents, and other adults, traditional bullying refers to more readily observed overt behaviour, such as being kicked, struck, or having personal belongings stolen or destroyed (UNESCO, 2019). Peer interactions, for instance, can be exploited to damage victims by ignoring them, socially excluding them, or spreading false rumours in an effort to undermine their sense of acceptability and belonging (Cross et al., 2009).

Research indicates that the frequency of bullying is a key factor affecting adolescent mental health. Adolescents who are frequently bullied are more likely to experience severe depression, and some victims may even become perpetrators, bullying their peers or others. Recently, studies have also begun to examine how different forms of bullying influence adolescent mental health. It has been found that the type of bullying is a crucial factor as well. Early research focused on identifying which forms of bullying had the most profound impact on mental health, but findings have varied across countries and regions. For example, 1,302 people participated in a survey by Maunder et al. (2010), which included staff, teachers, and students from four secondary schools in England. According to their findings, students were most harmed by physical bullying. Chen et al. (2012) conducted a survey of middle school students in Taiwan, China, using two samples: 605 and 869 students.

They discovered that relational bullying—which includes spreading rumours and cyberbullying—had a greater effect than verbal or physical bullying. Data from 10,273

secondary school students in Victoria, Australia, from the inaugural adolescent health survey, which was carried out in 2009, was examined by Thomas et al. (2016). Of the four types of bullying (name-calling, rumours, neglect, and physical bullying), they found that neglect had the largest correlation with mental health.

According to a major cross-sectional survey conducted by Baier et al. (2018), which involved 10,638 ninth-grade students in a German federal state, psychological cyberbullying had the biggest effect on the mental health of both boys and girls. Peer or teacher relationship bullying was also important, and sexual cyberbullying had an especially negative impact on girls' mental health. It's interesting to note that this study did not find that physical bullying significantly impacted mental health.

The second area of inquiry looks into how different types of bullying affect adolescents' mental health, depending on their gender. For instance, Turner et al. (2013) studied 1,874 middle and high school students in North Carolina to investigate the effects of verbal, physical, and cyberbullying on mental health, including depression and suicidal thoughts. According to their research, women experienced higher degrees of depression after cyberbullying than men did, but there was no appreciable difference in either gender's intention to terminate their lives following bullying of any kind. Shongwei et al. (2021) used data from the 2013 Global School-based Student Health Survey conducted in Eswatini to investigate gender differences in the impact of bullying on mental health among 2,920 children aged 15 to 17.

They found that both boys and girls who were bullied experienced loneliness and feared becoming victims again. Similarly, using data from the 2015 U.S. Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance System, Kim et al. (2019) found that school bullying had a more negative psychological impact on girls than on boys. In their study of a sample of 7,182 American teenagers in grades 6 through 10 from the 2005 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey, Wang et al. (2009) found that girls are generally more prone to facing relational bullying compared to boys who experience verbal or physical bullying. Yen et al. (2014) discovered that middle school students were more negatively impacted by bullying in terms of their mental health than high school students, despite the fact that there hasn't been much research looking at how bullying affects different age groups. Compared to overt bullying, covert bullying

has been shown to be just as harmful to the mind (Baldry, 2004; Ferraz & Rice, 2020), and it can occasionally leave social and psychological scars that last into adulthood (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Prinstein et al., 2001; Archer & Coyne, 2005).

An investigation on the effects of psychosocial variables on first-year students in campus adjustment in Delta State, Nigeria, by Obumse and Egenti (2021) found that peer pressure had a highly significant effect on social adjustment on the campus. The main focus of the study was to evaluate the influence of peer pressure on students' self-efficacy. Peer pressure had a greater influence on the student's social adjustment in school. Thus, the study recommended that parents and teachers in learning institutions should observe changes in adolescents' behaviour in order to manage the effects of destructive peer group pressure on social adjustment. Da Silva et al. (2020) examined the bidirectional relationship between bullying perpetration and internalising among the youth. The main objective of the study was to document the patterns of behaviour exhibited by bully victims and develop interventions for the prevention of peer victimisation.

Through a cross-section study involving 13,200 youths aged between 12 and 17 years, they found out that the majority of the youth suffered long-term mental challenges after being victimised by their peers. However, exposure to the perpetrators and subsequent intervention preventing bullying significantly reduced the psychological effect caused to the victims. Internalising problems, if not controlled or prevented through appropriate mechanisms, can lead to an increased probability of bullying others. In order to determine the impact of peers on form one pupils' transition to secondary school, (Sarah et al., 2016) conducted a study in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The study design employed was an explanatory survey. The study focused on 14,043 first-graders in Uasin Gishu County, 207 school administrators, and 207 counsellors. The results showed that peers had a significant impact on form one students' adjustment, confirming that a friendly and encouraging social environment had a good impact on students' adjustment and retention in school.

The significance of peer support is strongly highlighted, while the contributions of other school stakeholders are overlooked. The research indicates that a supportive and inviting environment helps students acclimate and

improves their retention rates at school. This study examined the impact of peer victimisation on the psychological adjustment of students in public secondary schools in Bomet County, whereas the previous study concentrated on the adjustment of form one students in secondary school in Uasin Gishu County. According to the current study, students' school adjustment and, in turn, their academic success depends heavily on the psychological support of their peers, teachers, significant others, and the entire school environment.

METHODOLOGY

A research design is regarded as a scheme, a strategy, an outline, or a plan that a researcher adopts to collect data, analyse and answer specific research questions or test the study's hypothesis (Creswell, 2016). Plans and processes for study that cover everything from general hypotheses to specific techniques for gathering and analysing data are known as research designs (Creswell, 2009). The study assumed a pragmatic research paradigm as data was collected systematically using a descriptive survey. It adopted a mixed method research of inquiry in a transformative procedure, which is an approach that combines or is associated with both qualitative and quantitative methods (Ayi, 2012). It involved collecting and analysing data from both approaches so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either quantitative or qualitative (Creswell & Plano, 2007). Instruments for data generation were questionnaires and interview schedules. The data collected was both quantitative and qualitative. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data, and themes were used to convey the qualitative data.

The data was collected simultaneously to understand the research problem (Creswell, 2009). This is because educational institutions are social setups which face various complex challenges that require solutions which are appropriately addressed through research that makes use of both qualitative and quantitative. Because of the foregoing reasons, the study chose to use mixed methods with the concurrent strategy of quantitative and qualitative. The level of MMR approach employed was, therefore, qualitative and quantitative (Creswell, 2013).

(Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), The main MMR approach is the third strategy in educational research. It is described as a type of study in which the investigator blends qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study

draws strengths from both approaches. Additionally, it connects quantitative and qualitative data. Research has become complex, interdisciplinary, and dynamic, and there is a need to complement the methods. The strategy is meant to allow the researcher to mix and match the design components that offer the best option to answer the research questions, which is to solve the problem of the study. It is a creative and expensive form of research and legitimises the use of multiple methods of data collection.

The target population is the accessible population within the area of study and which the researcher intends to study. It consists of the total number of subjects or total environment targeted in conducting the study. All deputy principals, guidance and counselling instructors, and form three pupils from public secondary schools in Bomet County made up the study's target group. The target population for the public secondary schools in Bomet was 29152, which included 294 public secondary schools (County Director of Education, 2023), 294 deputy principals, 294 guidance and counselling instructors, and 28564 from three pupils. Therefore, the target group is a particular subset of the general population that is most suited to act as the main source of data for the study.

According to (Kumar, 2018), this technique is preferred when selecting objects with specific characteristics of interest to the researcher. Additionally, due to their heterogeneity, the schools were chosen using stratified sampling procedures. The schools have different characteristics as classified by the Ministry of Education. The schools are either day, boarding, single-gender, or mixed. The researcher selected the schools proportionately.

Finally, one guidance and counselling teacher and one deputy principal from the sampled school also participated in the study. Purposively, the deputy principals were chosen for the study because they handle disciplinary cases in the school and, therefore, they have information on peer victimisation cases and the interventions undertaken to ensure that the perpetrators and victims are counselled to adjust well socially and psychologically.

Table 1 presents the sample frame. It indicates the proportion of the sample size as arrived at from the target population.

Table 1 Sample Frame (Researcher 2023)

Category	Target population	Sampling technique	Size
Schools		10% of the target population and stratified	29
Students		Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula	379
G&C Teachers		30%	88
Deputy head teachers		30%	88
Total	29152		555

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Peer-victimisation and Student Psychosocial Adjustment

The objective of the study was to assess the influence of peer victimisation on the psychosocial adjustment of students in public secondary schools in Bomet County. A

semi-structured questionnaire from the student, a structured questionnaire from the G&C teachers, and an interview schedule from the deputy principals were used to collect data for this goal. The results, which are shown in Table 2, included both quantitative and qualitative information.

Table 2: Student statement on Peer-victimisation (Field Data 2023)

<i>Student Statement on Peer-Related Factors</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>UD</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Students help their friends to overcome the stress resulting from bullying in school.</i>	12 3.3%	52 14.4%	30 8.3%	185 51.4%	80 22.2%	3.75	1.06
<i>Students report cases of peer victimisation in school to the relevant department for action to be taken.</i>	28 7.8%	59 16.4%	29 8.1%	189 52.5%	55 15.3%	3.51	1.16
<i>Peer counsellors are well-trained to offer counselling services to students bullied in school.</i>	22 6.1%	28 7.8%	52 14.4%	153 34.2%	135 37.5%	3.89	1.17
<i>Student leaders are effective in identifying and reporting students with bullying habits.</i>	50 13.9%	44 12.2%	41 11.4%	110 30.6%	115 31.9%	3.54	1.4
<i>Peer counsellors are well-trained to assist in providing psychosocial support to affected students.</i>	28 7.8%	20 5.6%	61 16.9%	148 41.1%	103 28.6%	3.78	1.15
<i>Students encourage each other to participate in extracurricular activities to enhance socialisation.</i>	8 2.2%	12 3.3%	62 17.2%	167 46.4%	111 30.8%	4.0	0.9
<i>The peer counsellors provide support through group counselling sessions to reduce the impact of bullying in school.</i>	32 8.9%	27 7.5%	62 17.2%	124 34.4%	115 31.9%	3.73	1.23

Table 2 indicates responses on students' peer-related factors. On whether students helped their friends to overcome the stress resulting from bullying in school, 12 (3.3%) strongly disagreed, 52 (14.4%) disagreed, 30 (8.3%) were undecided, 185 (51.5%) agreed, while 80 (22.2%) strongly agreed. The study further sought to unveil whether students reported cases of peer victimisation in school to the relevant department for action to be taken; hence, 28 (7.8%) strongly disagreed,

59 (16.4%) disagreed, 29 (8.1%) were undecided, 189 (52.5%) agreed, while 55 (15.3%) strongly agreed.

On whether the peer counsellors were well trained to offer counselling services to students bullied in school, 22 (6.1%) strongly disagreed, 28 (7.8%) disagreed, 52 (14.4%) were undecided, 153 (34.2%) agreed, while 135 (37.5%) strongly agreed. The study also asked respondents if student leaders were effective in

identifying and reporting students with bullying habits, and responses were: 50 (13.9%) strongly disagreed, 44 (12.2%) disagreed, 41 (11.4%) were undecided, 110(30.6%) agreed, while 115 (31.9%) strongly agreed.

On whether peer counsellors were well trained to assist in providing psychosocial support to affected students, 28 (7.8%) strongly disagreed, 20 (5.6%) disagreed, 61 (16.9%) were undecided, 148 (41.1%) agreed, while 103 (28.6%) strongly agreed. On whether students encourage each other to participate in extracurricular activities to enhance socialisation, 8 (2.2%) strongly disagreed, 12 (3.3%) disagreed, 62 (17.2) were undecided, 167 (46.4%) agreed, while 111 (30.8%) strongly agreed. On whether peer counsellors provided support through counselling sessions to reduce the impact of bullying, 32(8.9%) strongly disagreed, 27 (7.5%) disagreed, 62(17.2%) were undecided, 124 (34.4%) agreed, while 115 (31.9%) strongly agreed.

Table 2 further presents the descriptive analysis of the influence of peer-related factors on the students' psychosocial adjustment. The findings showed that most students helped their friends overcome the stress from peer victimisation in the school. The results also revealed that the affected students reported peer victimisation to the school authority for action to be taken. This was indicated by a mean of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 1.16, respectively. The school management also trained peer counsellors who were instrumental in offering counselling services to the affected students ($m=3.89$; $Sd=1.17$).

A related study has confirmed that the impact of bullying on victims is often greater than that of other forms of peer aggression or victimisation (Felix et al., 2011; Turner et al., 2014; Ybarra et al., 2014). For example, In comparison to peers who encountered peer victimisation that was not bullying or who reported no victimisation, Felix et al. (2011) discovered that students in Grades 5 through 12 who experienced bullying reported lower levels of life satisfaction, school connectedness and hope. In a nationally representative sample of children and young adults between the ages of six and seventeen, Turner et al. (2014) found that power imbalance independently increased the traumatic impact of peer victimisation. These findings are especially important because of the long-term effects of peer victimisation in school (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015).

In addition to peer counselling, the student leaders in the school were effective in identifying and reporting students who were found victimising others ($m=3.54$; $sd=1.40$). The study also found that peer counsellors were well-trained in providing psychosocial support to the affected students. This support includes encouraging the students to participate in group activities such as extracurricular activities and group counselling sessions that include group discussions on matters affecting them in school. Similarly, a study by Moreno et al. (2020) argued that the social inclusion of victimised students helped them overcome traumatic experiences associated with a negative assessment of their lives, which could cause emotional distress. Maiwa et al. (2021) found that peer counselling helped victimised students adjust psychologically in school.

The study collected information from guidance and counselling teachers regarding the impact of peer-related factors on students' psychosocial adjustment. Table 2 presents the findings. Most respondents agreed that the school's peer counsellors were well-trained to provide professional support to victimised students ($M=3.96$; $Sd=0.42$). The guidance and counselling department organised group counselling sessions where affected students interacted with peer counsellors on specific days of the week.

The interaction among students during these sessions helped the department to identify and resolve emerging peer victimisation issues in the school ($m=4.13$; $sd=0.58$). Peer counselling also encouraged students to confide in their peers, particularly peer counsellors, about bullying incidents, including the types and locations of such activities. These findings imply that the guidance and counselling department can work effectively with the peer counsellors in the school to reduce peer victimisation and assist the affected students in adjusting socially and psychologically to the learning environment in the school.

According to a related study by Juvonen & Graham (2014), between 20 and 25 per cent of young people are directly involved in bullying as either victims, offenders, or both. Similarly, extensive research from Western nations indicates that between 4 and 9 per cent of young people regularly engage in bullying practices, while between 9 and 25 per cent of school-age children experience bullying. There is also a smaller minority of young people known as bullies/victims who are both

bullies and victims of bullying. A recent meta-analysis of the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying in various situations (Modecki et al., 2014) included 335,519 youth (12–18 years old) as a total sample.

The authors calculated a mean prevalence of (15%) for engagement in cyberbullying and 35 per cent for traditional bullying (both perpetration and victimisation roles). The primary findings indicate that, in comparison to their peers who are not victims, adolescents who experience bullying miss more school and exhibit symptoms of poor academic performance (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2009), report higher levels of loneliness and worse health (Fekkes et al., 2006), and experience higher levels of anxiety and depression (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). The intensity of the victimisation experience has an impact on these adverse consequences as well. According to Van der Plog et al. (2015), victims who experienced multiple or frequent bullying, as well as those who were bullied by several people, suffered more than victims whose experiences were less frequent or committed by fewer peers.

Reijntjes et al. (2010) examined the connection between bullying and internalising difficulties. They came to the conclusion that these issues seem to be both causes and effects of peer victimisation, creating a "vicious cycle"

that raises the stability of peer victimisation. Suicidal ideation has also been connected in studies to victimisation (Holt et al., 2015; Klomek et al., 2015). Being bullied is linked to serious mental health symptoms in the short term, as noted by Arseneault et al. (2010) in their review. It also has adverse effects that may persist into late adolescence.

The findings of the research correspond with a recent systematic review conducted by McDougall and Vaillancourt (2015), which underscored the importance of a complex and multifaceted model to comprehend the direct and indirect connections of peer victimisation experiences and outcomes as an adult. Lastly, Wolke and Lereya (2015) validated the severe repercussions of bullying above and beyond other environmental and personal factors by looking at studies on genetically identical monozygotic twins who were discordant for bullying experiences despite sharing the same homes.

G-C Statement on Peer-Related Factors

The study sought to find out the responses of the deputy principals on peer-related factors. Six statements on a Likert scale that varied from strongly disagree to strongly agree were issued to them. The responses are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3 G-C Statement on Peer-Related Factors (Field Data 2023)

G-C statement on Peer-Related Factors	SD	D	UD	A		SA	M	SD
The peer counsellors are well-trained on how to support and handle bullied students in a professional manner	0	0	3	24		2	3.96	0.42
	0	0	10.3%	82.8%		6.9%		
There are group counselling sessions where victims of bullying interact with peer counsellors.	0	2	20	5		2	3.24	0.69
	0	6.9%	69.0%	17.2%		6.9%		
The peer counsellors provide day(s) within the week to encourage group counselling sessions.	0	0	3	19		7	4.13	0.58
	0	0	10.3%	65.5%		24.1%		
Interaction between students assists us in identifying and solving emerging bullying issues.	0	0	2	13		14	4.41	0.63
	0	0	6.9%	44.8%		48.3%		
The peer counsellors encourage the student to open up to other students, especially to peer counsellors, on cases of bullying in school.	0	0	0	24		5	4.17	0.38
	0	0	0	82.8%		17.2%		
The school management supports peer counsellors in running their clubs and meetings.	0	0	0	17		12	4.41	0.50
	0	0	0	58.6		41.4%		

Table 3 indicates the responses to the deputy principals' victimisation. Interviews with the deputy principals indicated that cases of victimisation were being reported in schools. In some schools, the deputy principals confirmed that the prevalence of psychosocial distress led to increased absenteeism and dropout cases. One of the deputy principals had this to say

Excerpt 1

One boy claimed to have been forced to smoke a cigarette in school; when he declined, the student was forced to undress and dance in front of the perpetrators. When the ordeal was done, the student sneaked out of school and went home. The parents could talk to the affected student, who later agreed to return to school. However, he was accompanied by his parents.

The deputy principals revealed that student leaders, especially class prefects, report cases of victimisation to the school management through the respective class teachers or the boarding master. During the interview, the majority of the deputy principals indicated that young students were mostly prone to bullying from older students. On the influence of other peers on psychosocial adjustment, one of the deputy principals had this to say;

Excerpt 2

The school has several social clubs, and students are encouraged to register for at least one club. In addition, students are also encouraged to take part in extracurricular activities. The school management believes that some vices, such as victimisation, drug abuse, and absenteeism, are minimised by encouraging inclusivity through group participation. Examining students who refuse to participate in these activities can reveal signs of emotional discomfort.

Finally, the deputy principals mentioned that the school's guidance and counselling departments were in charge of dealing with children who were experiencing psychological problems. There were counsellors and guidance teachers in the department. However, they were not trained to conduct psychological counselling for

students. The interviews also revealed that the G & C department was less involved in managing conflicts among students, as most disciplinary cases were handled by the disciplinary committee of the school.

In order to determine the impact of peers on form one pupils' transition to secondary school, Sarah et al. (2016) conducted a parallel study in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The study design employed was an explanatory survey. The study focused on 14,043 first-graders in Uasin Gishu County, 207 school administrators, and 207 counsellors. The results showed that peers had a significant impact on form one students' adjustment, confirming that a friendly and encouraging social environment had a good impact on students' adjustment and retention in school. The significance of peer support is emphasised, with the role of other school stakeholders being entirely ignored.

The study indicated further that a warm and supportive environment helps the students adjust and further increases the retention rate in school. This study examined the impact of peer victimisation on the psychological adjustment of students in public secondary schools in Bomet County, whereas the previous study concentrated on the adjustment of form one students in secondary school in Uasin Gishu County.

The study was aimed at finding out whether there is an existence of a strong support mechanism that can cushion the students in coping with psychosocial issues affecting them while at school. To this end, the study established that there is a prevalence of victimisation in public secondary schools in Bomet County. This ranged from physical bullying as well as psychological victimisation, which negatively affects the student's mental state. However, the findings of this study were able to support the conclusion that despite the presence of psychological stressors, most students helped their friends overcome the stress victimisation in school. The affected students report victimisation to the school authority for action to be taken.

At the same time, the study established that the guidance and counselling department trained peer counsellors who were instrumental in offering counselling services to the affected students. These students were carefully selected from among the rest and taken through the process of counselling. Besides, they were sensitised to the ethical and personality requirements of counsellors. The students

received tremendous support from their colleagues and were trusted with the process of offering counselling to them, whether group or personalised. This made the affected students cope with psychosocial stressors and thus improve their academic performance.

In addition to peer counselling, the student leaders in the school were effective in identifying and reporting students who were victimising others. This was also strengthened by sensitisation of students on their rights and campaigns against bullying or any other type of mistreatment of students. At the same time, the student leaders were a critical link between the school management and the students as they could identify and report the students' changes in behaviour.

Further, the study found that the peer counsellors were trained on how to handle students with psychosocial stress; this includes encouraging the students to participate in group activities such as extracurricular activities and group counselling sessions that include group discussions on matters affecting them in school.

Finally, the study established that some guidance and counselling teachers, through peer counselling, organised group counselling sessions where affected students interacted with peer counsellors on specific days of the week. These sessions could provide an opportunity for interaction between teachers and students, allowing peer counselling teachers and peer counsellors to identify and resolve emerging victimisation issues. Peer counselling teachers also encourage students to confide in their peers, particularly peer counsellors, about bullying incidents, including the types and locations of such activities. However, because of fear of reprisals, some students feared disclosing the stressors to the counsellors.

At the same time, a few students expressed reservations about the confidentiality of the peer counsellors and, as such, could not fully disclose all the psychological experiences that they were going through to them. However, in many cases, the peer counselling model was found to be very effective and efficient in responding to the psychological needs of the students in the selected schools.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: First, it can be said that victimisation peers have a significant influence on the student's psychosocial adjustment. Peer counselling and student leadership in

school are very instrumental in establishing patterns of victimisation, perpetrators of the vice, and the affected students. Given that students are aware of the experiences they encounter both at school and at home, such forums can significantly strengthen a culture of peer-to-peer mentorship and support. Consequently, it is crucial to train peer counsellors to recognize and tackle issues related to victimization. Additionally, students motivate their peers to get involved in extracurricular activities to foster inclusivity. Group counselling sessions held by peer counsellors help in addressing challenges that students face in school.

Similarly, the study concludes that several schools had policies in place regarding measures to be taken in case of indiscipline cases in general but did not address victimisation. The study noted that in most schools, the management encouraged students to report cases of bullying. Still, there were no means of reporting these cases apart from approaching the management or teachers directly. This discouraged most students as they feared being victimised further. The absence of suggestion boxes or protection of identity was a limiting factor towards reporting all cases as is supposed to be. This ends up making some students fail to disclose information that may be helpful.

Recommendations: Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendation was made to the Ministry of Education, the administration, management of the public secondary schools, the guidance and counselling department, and other policymakers;

Students' social and psychological pressures at school are evaluated by the school through a program. In order to address the effects of victimisation and raise knowledge of the guidance and counselling services that are available, the school administration should step up sanitisation initiatives. When students encounter problems that they are unable to handle at school, the school should urge them to report them or seek assistance from the guidance and counselling department. In order to protect the privacy of students reporting instances of victimisation, schools should also have suggestion boxes available.

Guidelines for regular meetings between students, instructors, and parents to discuss concerns impacting students should be established by the school through the

guidance and counselling division. Separate from the school disciplinary committee, the school sets up a well-run guidance and counselling department with qualified instructors whose only responsibility is to provide professional guidance and counselling services within the school. Programs for in-service training should be designed to improve the ability of guidance and counselling to address the new behavioural trends in pupils. The Ministry of Education should develop complex procedures and policies that govern the creation, functioning, and reach of school-based guidance and counselling-services

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