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Prevalence of Bullying in Public Secondary Schools: A Case of Selected Schools in Machakos County, Kenya

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Abstract:

This study sought to assess the prevalence of bullying in selected public secondary schools in Machakos sub-county, Machakos County. The objectives of the study were:

- *To determine the various forms of bullying behavior that are experienced among students,*
- *To establish the relationship between the gender of students and forms of bullying,*
- *To examine the prevalence of bullying and*
- *To examine risk factors contributing to bullying.*

The researcher employed a descriptive research design. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling were used to select 280 respondents. The study used both open and closed-ended questionnaires to collect data. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 23.0. The study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to describe quantitative data, which were then analyzed, interpreted, and presented in the form of tables and figures. The study revealed that bullying existed in Machakos County more in boys' schools than girls' schools and forms of bullying varied with gender. Boys suffered more physical and cyberbullying, while girls suffered more sexual and verbal bullying activities. School environment and academic performance were leading as risky factors of involvement in bullying. The study concluded that the prevalence of bullying exists in Machakos County and recommended seeking strategies for curbing it.

Keywords: *Bullying, bully, victim, child, boy, girl, form, prevalence*

1. Introduction

As noted by Alison (2016), bullying is a global problem experienced in schools and has a long-term and short-term negative impact on the health of those being bullied as well as the victims. Research conducted by Olweus (1992) showed that a child has their self-governing fundamental rights to feel very safe in their schools and to be free from the oppressive feelings associated with bullying. Henceforth, initiatives in bullying and bullying prevention have increased widely, mostly in schools (Allen, 2010). School bullying can be defined as an intentional activity with repeated aggressive acts on the student or students, mostly on other weaker students (Omoteso, 2010). It is usually repeated harm to an individual or to a group by another with unequal power. The power imbalance means that the dominant group or individual tends to cause disturbance or harm to the less dominant one for a long time (Berger, 2007). There are many studies that have been carried out on the forms of bullying in schools, while very little has been done on the prevalence of bullying in specific parts of Kenya like Machakos County and this has put many young people at risk.

Shafqat (as cited in Al-Raqquad, Al-Bourini, Al Talahin, & Aranki, 2017) noted that bullying in schools does occur anywhere in the school compound. This could be in classes as students do their group work or school activities, around the school buildings, within or under their school buses. School bullying is a widespread issue that affects school students in many parts of the world and is a distress to their lives either professionally, academically, or psychologically (Al-Raqquad et al., 2017). A study conducted by Sekol and Farrington (2016) established that more bullies than non-bullies had been bullied before. As noted by Burton and Leoschut (2013), other studies in Germany and Belgium showed a ratio of 1.1% and 6.2%, respectively, of girls who had experienced sexual harassment in 2005. In Britain, bullying is regarded as an individual attack against another or a group attack against other groups.

According to a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2014) report, the most common perpetrators of physical violence among adolescent boys were their peers and teachers. Among the adolescent girls, parents and other caregivers were the most common perpetrators of physical violence. The report also noted that teachers were being mentioned by a good proportion of girls in some countries such as Zambia (10%), Democratic Republic of Congo (11%), Timor-Leste, Moldova, and Zimbabwe (12%), Cameroon (16%), Tanzania (28%), Nigeria (32%), Kenya (42%), and Uganda (48%).

In Kenya, new students in secondary schools, especially in the lower forms (for example, form ones) and those who transferred at junior levels, are undergoing bullying almost all the time. A case in point is when the senior students borrow things like money, clothes, and books from the younger fellows and never return (Githinji, 2001).

2. Research Method

2.1. Participants

The target population consisted of form one and form two students from the selected secondary schools from all the three zones in Machakos sub-county and the total number of respondents was 935 students. The selection of the schools was purposely made to ensure good representation from different zones and depended on the specific schools, which are few with mixed day and boarding. The study selected them purposively to avoid choosing schools with other unwanted characteristics and also focused on the schools within the Machakos municipality that had the need.

The study used a purposive method to get the number of boys' and girls' boarding schools as well as public mixed day and boarding per zone. Stratification started from the zones whereby Machakos sub-county, which has three zones with thirty-nine (39) schools and each zone formed a strata and the schools within the zones were stratified into public mixed and boarding schools as well as girls and boys boarding schools.

The study adopted a descriptive study design specifically on selected public day and boarding schools in Machakos sub-county, Machakos County. Kumar (2005) asserted that descriptive research design is used to get information concerning the status of the phenomena and to describe what exists in line with prevailing conditions in a situation. The descriptive research design establishes and records the state of things to determine the status of the population under study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). These research designs can be applied both in preliminary and exploratory studies to permit researchers to gather information and summarize, analyze, present, and interpret the data collected to clarify the matter (Orodho, 2003). For this study, a descriptive research design was chosen to reduce bias while maximizing the reliability of the data collected. The descriptive research design collects data from the public about their perceptions, values, behaviors, and attitudes about the phenomena at hand (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012).

2.2. Instruments

Data collection involved the use of questionnaires, which contained closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather data from the students. The researcher used both structured (close-ended) and unstructured (open-ended) to obtain information from the students. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, namely:

- Section A, which involved demographic data.
- Sections B, C, D and E, which were based on the specific stated study objectives.

The questionnaires were issued to all selected students in every selected school and guided them on how to answer them with the help of a research assistant.

2.3. Data Analysis

The researcher read through all the data and organized the comments from the questionnaires into similar experiences or concerns, depending on the research objectives. In both the descriptive and inferential statistical data analysis, the collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 22). Coding was done to organize all the responses into specific, manageable categories, whereby each of the items on the survey instrument was coded systematically and accurately for all the entries. In answering the research questions, both the descriptive and inferential statistical data analysis procedures were used, whereby inferential statistical data aided the researcher in reaching appropriate predictions or inferences. In making the survey data more comprehensive, a simple descriptive analysis was used in this study (Kumar, 2005). The distribution of gender, demographic characteristics and bullying activities students was computed and contrasted using the Chi-Square statistics (χ^2). Besides, to test the relationship between gender and bullying risk factors among students, Pearson's product-moment correlation (r) was used.

3. Results and Discussions

The results and findings of the study are analyzed below.

3.1. Discussion Section

Table 1 shows the population analysis of each school. The total sample size was 280 students.

Type of School	School	Form 1		Form 2		Total	Sampled 30%
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls		
Public mixed day and boarding	Katoloni	76	51	44	57	228	67
	Kwanthanze	48	50	40	37	175	53
Boys' public boarding school	Centre for Excellent	120		112		232	70
Girls public boarding school	Mumbuni Girls		167		133	300	90
	Total	244	268	196	227	935	280

Table 1: Population Analysis of Each School

Source: Author (2021)

3.2. Forms of Bullying among Students in Secondary Schools

The first objective of this study was:

- To determine the various forms of bullying behaviors that are experienced by students in selected public secondary schools in Machakos sub-county, Machakos County.

The participants sampled in this study were asked to respond to various statements on forms of bullying. This section, therefore, presents the results of the different forms of bullying. The statements are analyzed as shown below.

3.3. Student's Involvement in Bullying Activities

The study sought to find out the respondent's responses on the frequency of their involvement in bullying activities. Table 2 shows the results.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	91	32.53
No	189	67.47
Total	280	100.00

Table 2: Respondents' Views on Involvement in Bullying

According to the analysis in table 2, 67.5% of the students indicated that they had not been involved in any form of bullying, while 32.5% agreed they had been involved in bullying activities. The results indicate declining occurrences of bullying in schools from the previous years after much involvement of different stakeholders to address the problem.

3.4. Prevalence of Forms of Bullying and Participation

The study results in figure 1 show that 71.5% of the students participated in bullying activities as observers, 16.1% as victims, and 12.45% participated as bullies. This indicates that bullying activities still exist in public schools. Figure 1 illustrates the respondents' participation in bullying.

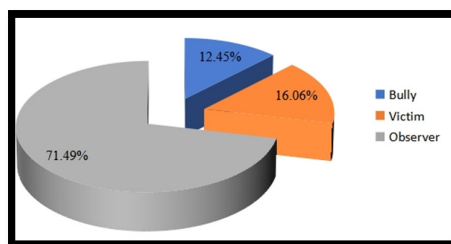


Figure 1: Respondents' Participation in Bullying

3.5. Prevalence of Forms of Bullying as Per Form

The study findings in table 3 show that bullying is common among form one students (52.6%), followed by form two students (19.28%), form four (14.46%) and form three (13.65%). This shows that the frequency of bullying is common in lower forms and decreases with progressive classes. The students in form one are more prone to bullying than the students in forms two, three and four. Table 3 presents the respondents' views on bullying as per forms.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Form one	146	52.61
Form two	53	19.28
Form three	39	13.65
Form four	42	14.46
Total	280	100.00

Table 3: Respondents' Views on Bullying as Per Forms

3.6. Prevalence of Bullying in Public Mixed Day and Boarding Schools

The study sought to find out where bullying is common in public mixed and boarding schools and the findings are tabulated in table 4.

3.7. Forms of Bullying Experienced among Students in Secondary Schools

The findings of this study pointed out that bullying exists in Machakos County, and most students participated more as observers than bullies. This finding is in line with several studies globally and regionally that pointed out that bullying still exists in schools (UNICEF, 2014). As noted by Kartal and Bilgin (2009), the acts of bullying can have physical, emotional, and psychological effects as well as affect the academic performance and social development of an individual. Bullying makes life very uncomfortable for students and many of them find school quite an unsafe place to stay (Maliki et al., 2009).

The study findings on forms of bullying established that 71.5% participated in bullying activities as observers, 16.1% as victims and 12.45% as bullies. It was also noted that most of the bullying happened to students in form one and the cases decreased as students moved to higher classes. This is also echoed by Farrington (1993) and Yen (2010), who found out that most bullying is common among students in their first year or class and decreases as grade level (class) and age of students increases.

The study revealed that there were various forms of bullying, including physical, psychological, verbal, and sexual and cyberbullying. Among the different forms of bullying, verbal bullying was the most common, followed by psychological, sexual, and physical, and the least common was cyberbullying. The above analysis is supported by findings in a study by Quiroz et al. (2006), who analyzed different forms of bullying, such as physical bullying, which includes beating, slapping, or forcing somebody to do something; sexual bullying involves touching and use of sexual dirty language and signs; verbal bullying involves insulting, spread false rumors, incitements, and threats. Some of these messages could lead to suicidal thoughts (Sherry, 2013). The above argument is also supported by other studies conducted in Australia by Spiel and Strohmeier (2011), which showed that verbal bullying is common. This is also echoed by Ndeti et al. (2007) on studies done in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, showing that verbal bullying was common among students. Alongside traditional forms, cyberbullying is also a common type of bullying and involves the use of upsetting messages or name-calling, leading to emotional disturbance (Bureau of Market Research, 2012).

Response	Frequency	Percent
Boys	36	13.65
Girls	50	18.07
Day scholars	19	7.23
Boarders	84	30.52
Boys boarders	53	19.28
Girls boarders	28	10.04
Girls day scholars	2	1.20
Total	280	100.00

Table 4: Respondents' Views on Bullying in Mixed Day and Boarding Schools

From the above data analysis, students in boarding schools are more likely to be bullied (30.5%), with more prevalence in boys (19.3%) than girls' boarders (10.1%), while bullying seems to be more prevalent in girls' schools (18.1%) than in boys (13.65%) schools. The frequency of bullying is higher in boys' boarding (19.2%) than in girls' boarding schools (10%), while it is higher with boarders than in day scholars.

3.8. Prevalence of Forms of Bullying

The participants were provided with various statements to determine the frequency of bullying in schools, and the results are shown in table 5.

Forms/Types of Bullying	Never		Rare		Often		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Physical	148	53.01	89	32.93	39	14.06	280	100.00
Verbal	84	30.54	84	30.92	106	38.54	280	100.00
Psychological	140	50.20	78	28.11	58	21.69	280	100.00
Sexual	184	66.27	50	18.47	42	15.26	280	100.00
Cyber	182	65.86	61	22.89	30	11.24	280	100.00

Table 5: Respondents' Views on the Types of Bullying in Schools

3.9. Forms of Bullying

The study revealed that 53% of the respondents indicated that physical bullying never occurred, 32.9% said it was rare and 14.06% said it occurred often. Regarding verbal bullying, 30.5% indicated it never happened, 30.9% said it was rare, and 38.5% said it occurred quite often. On Psychological bullying, 50.2% indicated never, 28.1% rare and 21.7% often. On sexual bullying, 66.27% said it never happened, 18.47% said it was rare and 15.26% said it occurred quite often. Regarding cyberbullying, 65.86% indicated it never happened, 22.89% said it was rare, and 11.24% said it occurred quite often. From the above forms of bullying, verbal bullying was the most common, followed by psychological 21.69%, sexual 15.26%, physical bullying 14.06% and cyberbullying 11.24%. This analysis again depended on the type of gender, as revealed in another analysis that some types are more common in girls, like verbal and sexual bullying, while physical bullying and cyberbullying are more common in boys. The above results concur with a study done in Australia (Spiel & Strohmeier, 2011) and another one done in Nairobi County (Ndeti et al., 2007). However, a study by Salmivalli, Kärnä, and Poskiparta (2011) in Finland disagreed with these sentiments. The study found that physical bullying was the highest form of bullying in schools.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings discussed from the study revealed that bullying activities are common in Machakos County, but the frequency has declined in recent years. The most common form of bullying was verbal in all types of schools and was higher in boys' boarding schools. The study findings revealed that the prevalence of bullying is higher in boys' boarding schools than in girls', day-mixed and boarding schools.

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