

Relationship between psychological forms of gender-based violence and students' test scores in public secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Studies on gender-based violence (GBV) among students in Kenya have focused mostly on the physical and sexual aspects of the violence and have not paid much attention to the psychological aspects and their direct effects on the academic performance of students. This article was specialized to look at the correlation between psychological GBV and the test scores of students in the public secondary schools in Bungoma County. The research design utilized in the study was a correlational research design based on the social feminism theory and the resilience theory to comprehend the impact of emotional abuse, insults, threats, isolation, and intimidation of learners on their academic accomplishment. There was a stratified random sample size of 1,104 students in a population of estimated student age of 15 to 17 years, amounting to about a quarter of a million students in 184 randomly selected secondary schools. Also, 184 guidance and counseling teachers, 3 sub-county directors of education, 13 GBV survivors, and 1 county woman representative were qualitatively sampled through purposive sampling. Collection of data was carried out by use of questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Likert-type scales saw into the psychological experiences of GBV, and the internal reliability of instruments was checked through the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. The descriptive and inferential statistics were used (Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and linear regression) to analyze quantitative data, whereas the qualitative data were analyzed on the basis of the themes. The findings showed a weak negative significant correlation between psychological violence and the student grades in internal school tests ($r = -.076, p = .037$), which meant that in cases of students exposed to emotional and psychological abuse, their performance in internal school exams was degraded. These results were also supported by qualitative data analysis, as the predominant themes identified involved constant experiences of verbal abuse, manipulation, and ostracism by peers and teachers that negatively affected self-esteem and academic motivation of the students. These findings are the testimony of the need to be more attentive to psychological violence in schools, which is one of the risky types of GBV. The study suggests specific recommendations, and they are the provision of adequate psychosocial support, emotional safety training, and inclusive school environments that are responsive and sensitive to emotional harm in students. Addressing psychological GBV, the article also provides stewardship in understanding the premise of educational equity and student well-being, in turn, in advocating the need to move policy and practice to promote safer and more supportive learning environments.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Bungoma County, Emotional Abuse, Psychological Gender-Based Violence, Public Secondary Schools, Resilience Theory, School Safety, Social Feminism, Student Well-Being, Test Scores

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is recognized universally as a human right and, as such, it is the duty of the state to provide education, and also as a prerequisite to sustainable social, cultural, and economic development of any country. The focus on the significance of inclusive and equal quality education, including the encouragement of lifelong learning opportunities to all of the learners, has been promoted at the global level by the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). The successful achievement of this objective is, however, jeopardized by the continued occurrence of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in most low- and middle-income countries, including Kenya, which adversely affects the safety, well-being and educational outcomes of learners (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2016). Although the problem of physical and sexual gender-based violence (GBV) has been intensively researched, its psychological component retains the less advanced presentation, that is, verbal abuse, ridicule, intimidation, isolation, and threats, which, otherwise, have not yet acquired a sufficient level of research and discussion despite their long-term effects on the emotional and academic development of learners (Muluneh et al., 2020; Nyoni, et al., 2023).

The psychological GBV, which is rather unwritten and naturalised in schools, may severely damage a self-image, psychological and emotional balance, and even the willingness to learn in the future. It is perpetrated by both peers, school administration and teachers, and it is frequently not opposed or checked in patriarchal societies that have a strong feeling of hierarchy (Maphosa, 2017). Emotional abuse in the form of accumulation of experiences also results in a high anxiety scale, lack of interest in the learning process and, in the most extreme cases, causes insufficient development of the learning process. UNESCO (2019) points out that violence of this nature at schools has the effect of producing unfavorable learning conditions that hamper the healthy intellectual development process and undermine the safeguarding capabilities, which schools are supposed to perform.

School-based GBV is a serious challenge in Kenya especially in the rural regions. Psychological violence is among the most and least reported types of abuse amongst adolescents according to Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS, 2022). Bungoma County has turned out to be amongst the areas with the most serious prevalence of GBV in the nation with about 23 percent of the reports of sexual and gender-based torments already being registered in the county, exceeding the national average of 13 percent. Though physical and sexual forms of abuse have received more academic and media coverage, psychological forms are still invisible and at large in policy, as well as, research. Experiences of ridicule, intimidation, and manipulation of emotions are normal occurrences faced by students especially girls perpetrated by their peers and teachers. All the boys, being victims too, often mask their pain under social loyalty with masculinity that leads to a lack of reporting (Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW-Kenya, 2022).

Many researchers have indicated a correlation between GBV and the decreased academic achievement, and violence has been identified as a factor that causes truancy, deteriorating test results, and higher dropout rates (Jesca, 2017); Peart, 2019). Nevertheless, the research articles are more likely to generalize GBV and do not focus on the particular contribution of psychological violence to the academic outcomes. In most instances, national examination performance results e.g., Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) are adopted as the main benchmark of academic success, which, in fact, does not indicate the underlying struggle that students undergo in the area of internal classroom tests (Gichuhi, 2023.; Bravo-Sanzana et al., 2022). It is a gap in the literature that impedes the elaboration of specific interventions that can overcome emotional violence as a discrete factor influencing the performance of learners.

The effects of emotional abuse are usually compounded in rural counties such as Bungoma where poverty, cultural conservatism, and institutional silence all come together. Most of the public secondary schools lack the necessary capacity to identify or intervene in GBV of a psychological nature. There remain severe gaps in child protection and psychosocial support within Kenya's education system. A recent UNICEF report highlighted a critical shortage of trained child welfare officers, noting that 39 of Kenya's 47 counties have fewer than four social service professionals per 100,000 children. Many existing staff lack proper induction and continuous professional development, which leads to overwhelming caseloads and burnout, leaving emotional violence largely unaddressed (UNICEF, 2025). This is further aggravated by weak coordination and monitoring mechanisms between education, social services, and protective agencies, which hinder effective reporting and response systems in schools (Kissui, 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

The research was based on two theories, which are Social Feminism and Resilience Theory. Social Feminism gives us a scope to view the patriarchal and institutional power relations that perpetuate emotional violence in schools and hence keep victims quiet (Hooks, 2000). This is complemented by the Resilience Theory, which looks into the factors that made students revert to their normal lives of studying despite the ever present threat of emotional abuse to the lives of students despite the adversity that they underwent and proceed with the academic work (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2008). Such a combination of frameworks guarantees the presence of a multidimensional explanation of the interaction between structural inequalities, emotional trauma, and student performance.

This study contributes to closing a knowledge gap since it pays specific attention to psychological GBV, and using internal academic outcomes. It presents a localized, empirical knowledge about the effect of emotional abuse on students test scores in classrooms and the dire need of introducing gender-sensitive interventions with psychosocial considerations to Kenyan secondary schools. The results will be used to recommend policy and practices in the area of emotional safety and support networks thereby making the learning system inclusive and protective to all learners.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Gender-based violence (GBV) in Schooling still poses a danger to the rights of education and the lives of students, especially in Bungoma County which is located in the Kenyan countryside. Although physical and sexual GBV have been in the spotlight, psychological violence consisting of insults, threat, humiliation, isolation and abuses have hardly attracted research, policy, and school-level preventive measures. Nevertheless, these emotional abuses of children have significant implications on the mental health or mind, self-worth, and cognitive abilities of children, and these aspects are fundamental to succeeding academically. The prevalence of GBV is high in Bungoma County, the

region where the form of violence against women and girls is most common in the country (UNESCO, 2019). Students and particularly girls are victims of everyday emotional violence by peers and teachers. Such experiences do not always have a record, have not been addressed, or even been punished because of the lack of institutional voice, poor reporting mechanisms, and the normalcy of abuse. Whereas prior literature has developed overarching connections between GBV and poor academic performance, little has been done in disaggregating the construct of psychological violence as a unique element or understanding its connection with intrapersonal test marks. This paper helps to fill this important gap because it identifies the relationship that exists between psychological forms of GBV and academic performance among students in government secondary schools within Bungoma. The results will inform more specific, evidence-based plans to enhance not only emotional safety but also overall improvement as well as the educational achievements of all learners.

1.2 Research Objectives

To investigate the relationship between psychological forms of gender-based violence and students' test scores in public secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study relied on two theoretical frameworks: Social Feminism Theory and Resilience Theory, which have provided a critical and interpretive framework for understanding the issues affecting the academic performance of students due to psychological gender-based violence (GBV).

Social Feminism Theory promotes the role of structural disparities and patriarchal rules in continuing emotional mistreatment in schools. It assumes that in many cases, educational institutions reflect broader power relations within society, such that gender roles and expectations shape and define learning behaviors, attitudes, and access to opportunities (Hooks, 2000). These patterns occur in school as teacher student relationships, peer hierarchy, and condoning emotional abusive behaviours, particularly with girls, and students who are gender nonconforming. The theory assists in the comprehension of how normalized abuse may assume the form of words and forms of nonthreatening acts of social intimidation, and unequal access to social resources, training in schools through gendered power relations, which promotes structural disadvantage and limits academic opportunities.

The Resilience Theory, in its turn, looks into the adaptive and prosperity process of individuals in unfavorable conditions. According to the work by Masten (2001), resilience is not a personal attribute, but a process, which is dictated by both internal/environmental defense and external conditions. School-based resilience occurs among some scholars who are resilient despite the occurrence of emotional violence, and who are guided by good peer or teacher relationships, or inner motivation (Ungar, 2008). With this theory in mind, the view on why certain students still perform well in their schoolwork even in instances where other students in the same situations of abusive behavior have failed to do so is subtle.

These frameworks, in combination, illustrate why it is essential not only to document the consequences of psychological GBV on academic performance but also to understand the institutional contexts and personal coping strategies underlying them.

2.2 Empirical Review

Many studies have documented the negative effects of GBV on access, retention, and performance in education, but comparatively few have directly addressed psychological GBV and its impact on test scores.

As Muluneh et al. (2020) describes, psychological violence is less visible since it causes emotional pain that distorts concentration, memory, and the learning process in general. The study by Chigiji, et al. (2018) in Zimbabwe has found that verbal abuse and humiliation of the students by teachers result in high rates of low engagement and apathy towards studying. Similarly, the Tanton et al. (2023) study found that emotional abuse teenagers scored lower in the standardized tests than their counterparts.

School-related gender-based violence (GBV) research in Kenya has been largely based on sexual violence and corporal punishment, and relatively less attention has been paid to emotional abuse. The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC, 2025) explained the seriousness of psychological and emotional violence, such as verbal abuse and emotional harm, in Kenyan schools, noting that such experiences are frequently associated with other types of violence and multiplied the impact of such violence on both the well-being of learners and their academic achievements. Likewise, Gichuhi (2023) noted that repeated cases of emotional GBV often caused withdrawal and lack of interest in schooling, especially in girls in rural areas.

Although the findings of current research attest to the fact that psychological GBV hurts learning, the majority use broad indicators like the KCSE or dropouts as signs of academic achievement. Many do not disaggregate by type of violence or evaluate the effect on internal test scores, which are more relevant to everyday academic performance. In addition, the majority of existing studies lack a theoretical framework that enables them to examine how the relationship between the power structure and the emotional resilience of students unfolds.

In the case of this research, the identified gaps met these objectives specifically because the research was dedicated to psychological manifestations of GBV (insults, threats, emotional manipulation), and how they impacted on internal test scores of students in public secondary schools of Bungoma County. It is based on Social Feminism as well as Resilience Theory, and it brings new empirical evidence to support the fact that many policy, advocacy, and psychosocial interventions in schools are needed.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study was a correlational research design to determine the relationship between psychological gender-based violence and test scores among students in government secondary schools in Bungoma County. The design was suitable for identifying the direction and intensity of relationships between variables without controlling them, which is why it could be used to study naturally occurring phenomena, such as emotional abuse and academic outcomes. It has also enabled the researcher to measure the magnitude with which psychological GBV affects academic achievement, which is appropriate within the context of this study, given the emphasis on non-experimental observation (Muluneh et al., 2020).

3.2 Study Area

The study was based on the area of Bungoma County in Kenya, where the prevalence of gender-based violence, including elements of emotional abuse in schools, is high (KDHS, 2022). The county has both urban and rural primary and secondary schools, and the sample provides a representative size of both urban and rural communities to study the impact of psychological violence on learner performance. The choice of schools in the region was conditioned because there were constant reports of verbal abuse, threats, and emotional neglect by peers and teachers.

3.3 Target Population

The target population consisted of approximately 250,000 students in 342 government secondary schools in Bungoma County. Additionally, it was primarily conducted to educate individuals in the Heads of Guidance and Counseling sections, Sub-County Directors of Education, GBV survivors, and the County Woman Representative, who provided knowledge on emotional GBV, as well as institutional policies and responses to the issue. These groups were selected due to their significant influence on the education and policy practice environment.

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

In this research, both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling methods were used so that there would be a full representation. A stratified random sampling was used to select 184 schools in the county with 342 open secondary schools. A stratification was done using the sub-county level to guarantee balance in geography. Simple random sampling was used to sample 1,104 students in the chosen schools. This process minimized selection bias and accorded each student an equal chance of being selected. On the other hand, the qualitative section of the study used purposive sampling in determining the research participants. Specifically, they were purposely recruited 184 heads of the departments of Guidance and Counseling, 13 GBV survivors, 3 Sub-County Directors of Education, and 1 Woman Representative of a county due to their knowledge and experience in Guidance and Counseling and/or because of lived experience in the purpose of a study. The advantage of the mixed-methods sampling design was to ensure the maximum validity and reliability of the study since not only was the overall results statistically representative, but also the qualitative data could be selectively captured since it was of high-quality.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The study used both the quantitative and qualitative research designs in order to collect comprehensive and credible data. Quantitative measure was to be carried out by the use of a structured questionnaire that would be administered in a face-to-face manner. The methodology allowed the researcher to define ideas, clear confusion, and bring consistency in the interpretation of the questions. The questionnaire collected data about the existence of psychological GBV that were faced by students and their performance in the recent test. Semi-structured interviews with willing GBV survivors, education officers, and school counselors were used in the qualitative component and

were used to collect detailed descriptions of emotional violence and institutional responses. There was also document analysis to review the school policies, disciplinary records and GBV reports in existence. These reports provided information about the background of the implementation and how the schools address and/or fail to address psychological abuse. A pilot study was carried out in a mixed-day secondary school which was not part of the final sample to determine the validity and reliability of the instruments. The tools were refined with the help of pilot feedback to be less culturally irrelevant, ambiguous, and inapplicable.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

To enhance validity, the research tools were reviewed with academic research experts and modified based on the results of the pilot study. They examined whether their items aligned with the research goals and were culturally applicable. Validity was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient, indicating an acceptable internal consistency among the questionnaire’s questions. This affirmed the reliability of the measurement of the constructs of psychological GBV and academic performance with the instruments (Nyoni et al., 2023).

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis comprised both quantitative and qualitative processes, aligning with the mixed-methods design of the study. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26 was used to analyze the quantitative data from student questionnaires, respondent characteristics and the prevalence of psychological GBV. Summary information, including frequencies and percentages, was derived using descriptive statistics, presented in the form of pie charts and bar graphs. Relationships and significance levels were then tested using inferential statistics. In particular, the direction and strength of the association between the students and their test scores, as well as the psychological GBV, were determined using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to find out whether the significance of the differences in the academic performance depended on the differences in the level of exposure (Gichuhi, 2023). Thematic analysis and discourse were used to analyze interviews and document-based qualitative information. It was made possible by data coding, determining patterns and duplications of themes, and examining data in broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts. The direct quotes were also included in the final analysis. The reason behind this was to retain the voices of the participants and to guarantee the authenticity of the findings. These qualitative observations complemented the results of the statistical analysis and offered a more detailed and extensive picture of psychological violence effect on academic progress (UNESCO, 2019).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The section presents the findings of both quantitative and qualitative data with observations on the effects of psychological gender-based violence (GBV) among the students enrolled in government secondary schools in Bungoma County. The results have been tabulated in thematic manner because the objective of the study was to examine emotional abuse and its impacts on internal test scores of students.

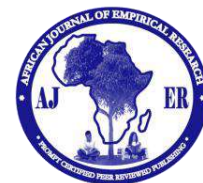
4.1 Nature and Frequency of Psychological GBV

The findings were that psychological violence was rampant in most Bungoma County secondary schools. According to students, they were victims of numerous types of emotional mistreatment, including verbal insults, ridicule, intimidation, and social exclusion. Table 1 demonstrates that ridicule was most frequently used based behavior with 26.5 percent of students citing that it happened to them, followed by humiliation (18.6 percent), verbal threats (14.3 percent), and social exclusion (10.1 percent), as part of the student reactions analyzed in the thesis.

Table 1
Frequency of Psychological GBV Experienced by Students

Type of Psychological Abuse	Frequency	Percentage
Ridicule	293	26.5%
Humiliation	206	18.6%
Verbal Threats	158	14.3%
Social Exclusion	111	10.1%
Other	336	30.5%

These experiences were often dismissed by staff as disciplinary mechanisms or student conflicts, with little acknowledgment of their emotional harm. One student remarked,



“Sometimes teachers ridicule us in front of our classmates and call us names like ‘blockhead’ or ‘failure’. It becomes hard to speak up in class again.”

Another added,

“The teacher once told me that I should not bother coming to school since I would amount to nothing. I started skipping school”.

These qualitative accounts confirm that psychological GBV is both frequent and psychologically damaging to students' classroom engagement and participation.

Academic Performance

The academic performance of students was measured using their most recent internal examination scores. The analysis showed an overall mean score of 58% (SD = 10.2), with male students averaging 59% and female students 57%. Urban schools recorded higher mean scores (62%) than rural schools (55%). Nearly 42% of the students scored below the pass mark of 50%, indicating a substantial proportion of learners were at risk of underachievement. These results provide the baseline for assessing how psychological forms of GBV may influence variations in students' academic outcomes.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Academic Performance

Group	Mean (%)	SD	% Below Pass Mark
Overall	58	10.2	42%
Male students	59	—	—
Female students	57	—	—
Urban schools	62	—	—
Rural schools	55	—	—

4.2 Relationship between Psychological GBV and Academic Performance

The quantitative analysis employed Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation to establish the relationship between psychological GBV and students' test scores. The findings indicated a negative correlation ($r = -.076$) that was statistically significant ($p = .037$), as shown in Table 3. Though the correlation is weak, it is significant enough to suggest that students exposed to more psychological abuse tend to perform worse academically.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation between Psychological GBV and Academic Performance

Variable Pair	N	Pearson's r	p-value
Psychological GBV & Test Scores	1104	-0.076	0.037

These findings are in line with Gichuhi, (2023) who observed similar negative effects of emotional violence on academic outcomes, noting that emotional stress undermines concentration, motivation, and participation in learning activities. Teachers interviewed in the study confirmed this pattern. A head of the Guidance and Counseling department explained,

“We have seen bright students deteriorate after being constantly targeted by negative remarks from teachers. Some even stop attending certain lessons”.

This reinforces the view that emotional safety is integral to student academic performance.

4.3 Gendered Experiences of Psychological GBV

The findings also revealed gendered patterns in the experience of psychological violence. Girls were more likely to face mockery, shame, and body-related humiliation, particularly around menstruation, while boys reported isolation, emotional neglect, and harsh discipline. This gender disparity is captured in several student statements. For instance, one female student respondent noted,

“The teacher mocked me in front of the class for being dirty during my periods. I felt ashamed and did not return to school for three days”.

Similarly, a male student explained,

“Boys are expected to be tough. The teachers say you are weak when you cry or when you report bullying. And so, we keep silent”.

Such reactions show that social construct helps determine the character and shape of emotional abuse, as girls are exposed to embarrassment and boys to self-crisis and suppression. These forms of gender are indeed in line with

what Nyoni, *et al.* (2023) argues, as the traditional gender roles influence the perception and outcome of GBV in schools.

4.4 Institutional Response and Policy Implementation Gaps

Although the results show a positive relation to psychological GBV concerning institutions, the policy promises made by the Ministry of Education show that the system is poor in its reactions towards psychological GBV. Most schools do not have clear guidelines for detecting, reporting, and intervening in instances of emotional abuse. School officials interviewed showed that cases of emotional violence were not noticed or addressed formally.

One of the Directors of Education in a Sub-County said,

“Schools pay more attention to violence of a physical or sexual nature. The problem of emotional abuse is difficult to trace, and no tools are offered in order to tackle the problem.”

This affirmation leads to a significant decrease in follow-through at the national level and in practice at the school level. Irregularities in reporting these GBVs were also discovered in the document reviews. As an example, a majority of schools had unorganized GBV registers or competent individuals to process emotional abuse cases. Furthermore, students stated that a fear of retaliation, coupled with a lack of confidence that their report would be believed, deterred them from reporting their absence.

4.5 Coping Strategies and Student Resilience

There were also some positive findings regarding the students' resilience in the face of the challenges. Other students said that they developed coping mechanisms so as not to lose track of their academic objectives despite being constantly maltreated emotionally. These included peer support, personal motivation, and spiritual strength.

One student affirmed,

“Even when teachers shout or humiliate me, I try to stay focused. I want to be the first in my family to join university”.

These expressions align with Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001), which posits that individuals may develop adaptive responses to adversity. However, such coping mechanisms should not be relied upon as a substitute for structural interventions, as the emotional burden on students is substantial and often long-lasting.

4.6 Institutional and Socio-Cultural Factors Reinforcing Psychological GBV

While psychological violence is often normalized in school settings, its persistence is significantly influenced by institutional cover-ups, weak enforcement of policies, and socio-cultural silence—all of which create a fertile ground for emotional abuse to thrive. Interviews with Sub-County Directors of Education (SCDEs), Guidance and Counseling heads, and the County Woman Representative revealed widespread concern over the failure of schools to effectively respond to emotional and verbal forms of abuse.

One SCDE explained:

“We receive cases of verbal abuses from teachers and parents. But when we try to follow up, they say the issue has been sorted at home. Many schools do not even document these cases”.

This illustrates a pattern of institutional negligence where psychological abuse is treated as minor misconduct, rather than a form of violence that impacts learning outcomes. In some cases, teachers accused of humiliating or ridiculing students were protected by school administrators or teacher unions, making it difficult to hold perpetrators accountable (Wangechi, 2021).

Students' testimonies also highlight the emotional burden caused by impunity. One survivor of psychological GBV shared:

“When you report insults from a teacher, they say you are being dramatic or disrespectful. You just learn to keep quiet”.

This silence is reinforced by social norms that discourage vulnerability, particularly among boys, and by a lack of safe reporting mechanisms in schools (Barasa *et al.*, 2021). As one SCDE emphasized:

“The major problem is not lack of laws, but how schools respond. If the victim is threatened or the matter is settled privately, the damage is still there but now invisible”.

Such institutional and cultural dynamics exacerbate the psychological harm experienced by students, resulting in increased stress, absenteeism, and disengagement from schoolwork (Gichuhi, 2023). These findings align with the Social Feminism framework, which views emotional abuse as an extension of broader power structures that marginalize student voices (Hooks, 2000), and Resilience Theory, which explains why some students endure and adapt under psychological strain while others falter (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2008).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The findings affirmed that psychological GBV (in the form of verbal insults, threat, humiliation, isolation, and intimidation) is largely associated with poor academic performance amongst students. Though this relationship was moderate to low in some aspects, the qualitative data proved to be the development of a well-established culture of emotional abuse, which was tolerated to a significant degree in schools. The findings, obtained with the help of the prism of the Social Feminism Theory, point to the notion that psychological violence in school is a reverberation, as much as a validation, of institutionalized power-hierarchies and patriarchal systems. The victims are girls/boys who are mocked at, emotionally blackmailed, and verbally demeaned by their teachers, other students, and even school administrators. These forms of contact abuse continue to go unreported or unresolved, caught between the teeth of cultural silence, fear of backlash or administrative cover-ups and thereby adding more emotional weight on the learners.

The Resilience Theory explains how certain students resist change and learn to cope with emotionally challenging environments. The strength, however, can gloss over the damage in this situation. Academic focus may become a survival mechanism that students uphold or enhance; however, this survival requires fragile support, which cannot be maintained without institutional assistance. The research also identified what it termed as weak points in the delivery of gender-sensitive policies and reporting systems at the school level. Despite national policies aimed at fighting child abuse, such as the Basic Education Act, the Sexual Offenses Act, and child protection guidelines, even where such policies are implemented, there is very poor enforcement in the schools or a poor understanding of them in schools. The majority of schools in Bungoma do not have proper psychosocial support, qualified personnel, or a secure environment where students can report psychological abuse, hence leading to the trend of emotional abuse and poor academic performance.

5.2 Recommendations

Following the results of the study, several practical measures are suggested to enhance the academic performance of students through managing psychological gender-based violence (GBV) in the setting of public secondary schools in Bungoma County. The enhancement of school-based psychosocial support systems is first critical. Schools should have fully equipped counseling centers that are securely staffed with trained psychological counselors. These centers would give students a safe and confidential environment where they can report cases of emotional abuse and take the necessary care so that they can counteract the negative psychological effects that affect their academic performance. Moreover, the Ministry of Education is supposed to introduce and establish mandatory in-service training on psychological GBV identification, prevention, and mitigation among teachers. Academic and emotional abuse may include verbal insults, humiliation, threats, and intimidation, which numerous educators may not take seriously. Therefore, it is important to build awareness on these issues to improve professional ethics practice and reduce the normalization of emotional abuse in schools.

Additionally, schools should create a reporting mechanism which is clear and anonymous so that students can report psychological violence without the fear of rebuke. This can be through suggestion boxes, encrypted online forums or student welfare officers. These reports should not be overlooked; they should be investigated and corrective and protective measures taken subsequently. The Life Skills and Civic Education curriculum should also include psychological GBV sensitization. Through educating students on the meaning of emotional abuse, understanding resilience and the rights of students in school, a culture of self-advocacy and respect towards each other will be created. Communal and parental involvement should not be restricted to the school walls. The sensitization forums and workshops are supposed to be used to equip the parents and the local leaders with knowledge on how to identify the emotional violence and assist the learners who are in distress, as it is the cultural norms that encourage the silence on the GBV. Regular school environment audits should be conducted by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and the Ministry of Education (with the cooperation of county education offices) to enhance the effectiveness of policies. Emphasis during these audits should also include how the institutions are handling the problem of emotional abuse, and those institutions that are found to be involved in the cover-ups of such instances should be called to account. Lastly, new studies on a more local and longitudinal basis should be pursued to investigate the gendered effects of psychological GBV further. Psychological violence is an interpersonal outcome that is not disaggregated in such research and thus cannot build specific strategies and evidence-based policy intervention to GBV.

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