

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

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a significant challenge affecting the safety and well-being of students in many educational institutions in Kenya. However, research on school-related GBV has largely focused on its social and psychological consequences, with limited attention given to its effects on students' academic performance. This study examined the relationship between sexual forms of gender-based violence and students' test scores in public secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. The study was guided by Social Feminism Theory and Resilience Theory and adopted a correlational research design to examine the association between experiences of sexual violence and students' academic outcomes. Stratified random sampling was used to select 184 public secondary schools from a total of 342 schools in Bungoma County. A sample of 1,104 students was selected from an estimated population of approximately 250,000 students using simple random sampling. In addition, purposive sampling was used to select 184 heads of Guidance and Counseling departments, three Sub-County Directors of Education, thirteen survivors of gender-based violence, and one County Woman Representative. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed a moderate negative correlation between sexual forms of gender-based violence and students' test scores ($r = -0.45$), indicating that increased exposure to sexual violence was associated with lower academic performance. Qualitative findings further revealed that incidents of sexual violence often remain underreported due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and weak institutional response mechanisms. The study concludes that sexual gender-based violence negatively affects students' academic performance and highlights the need for stronger prevention measures, effective reporting systems, and improved psychosocial support services within schools.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Bungoma County, Sexual Gender-Based Violence, Sexual Harassment, Secondary Schools, Student Well-Being

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is known as a basic right for all human beings and this is a primary factor that contributes to social and economic development. Schools are expected to be safe places for students to learn, grow, develop their skills and reach their goals. But, gender-based violence (GBV) is still a threat to these objectives in many educational institutions. School related gender-based violence is defined as acts of sexual, physical and psychological harm that are committed in and around school and are based on power imbalances and harmful gender norms (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019)). These experiences can negatively impact the learning process by causing fear, emotional distress and a decrease in students' participation in learning activities. Sexual violence is a growing issue of concern for students and is one of the different types of school-related gender-based violence that impacts the well-being and education of students. Sexual gender-based violence could involve sexual harassment, unwanted touching, coercion, sexual intimidation and exploitation by peers or by authority figures in school settings. Learners can have strong psychological and academic implications arising from these experiences. Research indicates that children who experience sexual victimization are likely to suffer from emotional distress, self-esteem problems, and decreased ability to focus in class, which can have a negative impact on their school grades (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Victims of sexual harassment or coercion can sometimes withdraw from participation in classes, may be absent or may have trouble sustaining their grade level.

School related GBV is recognized as a significant impediment in reaching inclusive and equitable education at the global level. According to UNESCO (2019) millions of students are subjected to various types of violence in educational institutions, including sexual harassment and abuse. The experiences have a psychological impact on the students and reduce their capacity to engage in learning processes fully. The impact of sexual violence in educational settings can go far beyond the initial impact and impact academics long-term: academic engagement, academic achievement.

The prevalence of adolescent gender-based violence is a common issue in the context of Africa affecting the education of students. Studies in multiple African countries have reported a link between violence in school settings and diminished engagement in school and suboptimal achievement (Menaker et al., 2017). Likewise, Muluneh et al. (2020) reported that the adolescent who experiences violence in school environment has the challenge of concentration in class and poor performance in examinations. In Kenya, the issue of gender based violence in schools is gaining more concerns as it affects the safety and success of students in schools. Researchers in Kenyan secondary schools have established that violence in schools affects absenteeism, emotional stress and poor academic performance among the learners (Barchi & AbiNader, 2025). There are also indications in national reports that many children are suffering from various types of violence, such as sexual harassment and exploitation, despite the fact that there are laws and policies in place to ensure that children are protected from violence.

Based on the Bungoma County Assembly (2023), one of the areas where gender-based violence among adolescents continues to be reported in the community and school contexts is Bungoma County. There are national policies in place including child protection policies and legislation on sexual offences, but there is variable implementation at the school level. Consequently, there is a lack of uniform reporting procedures and stigma and fear of retaliation contribute to underreporting of sexual violence incidents in schools. Although there is increased focus on GBV issues in schools, there is limited empirical research that has focussed on the effect of sexual GBV on the academic performance of students in Bungoma County. Most of the research reported has concentrated on the prevalence and/or the social ramifications of violence, instead of on the actual impact of violence on students' academic internal outcomes, like their test results. The study thus aims at establishing the relationship between the sexual forms of gender based violence and students test scores in public secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. The study compares academic performance to experiences of sexual violence, and thus advances our understanding of the impact of unsafe school environment on students' learning and educational achievement.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

GBV is a significant problem in many schools worldwide, such as in Kenya, that impacts on students' safety, well-being, and achievement. Sexual violence is a growing issue in school settings, as it is one of the different categories of GBV. Sexual Gender Based Violence can be sexual harassment; unwanted sexual touching; coercion; sexual intimidation; other forms of sexual exploitation that happen within or around schools. These experiences can lead to fear, emotional distress and insecurity in students that can disrupt their ability to attend class, engage in learning activities and achieve good academic results (UNESCO, 2019). The issue of gender-based violence in school has been recognised globally as one of the major hindrances to inclusive and equitable education. There is evidence that sexual harassment or sexual abuse occurs for many youth during their school years, and these episodes are associated with psychological distress, low self-esteem, and decreased motivation to learn (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Students who have been sexually victimized then may have problems with school attendance, school engagement, and achievement.

Gender-based violence is an issue that persists among school-going adolescents in Kenya despite laws and policies in place to safeguard children from incidents of abuse. Sexual harassment and exploitation can happen within school settings, and can be carried out by a peer, teacher or person in the community. Many cases, however, are never reported because of stigma, fear of retribution or weak reporting systems in schools. Additionally, Bungoma County has had incidences of GBV among youth in the community and school setting (Bungoma County Assembly, 2023). Although there is widespread concern about the problem, there is a dearth of studies that have specifically investigated the impact of sexual GBV on students' academic performance in county public secondary schools. The aim of this study is thus to establish the correlation between sexual forms of GBV and students' performance in the test scores in the public secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

To determine the relationship between sexual forms of gender-based violence and students' test scores in public secondary schools in Bungoma County.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Social Feminism Theory and Resilience Theory, which provide a framework for understanding the occurrence of sexual gender-based violence and its potential effects on students' academic outcomes.

Social Feminism Theory, associated with scholars such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1998) and later socialist feminist theorists including Eisenstein (1979) and Jaggar (1983), explains gender-based violence as a product of structural inequalities embedded within social, political, economic, and institutional systems. It explains gender-based violence. The theory argues that patriarchal structures create unequal power relations between men and women, which often normalize different forms of violence against vulnerable groups.

Within educational institutions, these inequalities may manifest through sexual harassment, coercion, intimidation, and other forms of sexual exploitation directed toward students (Benbenishty et al., 2019). Such practices reflect broader societal norms that tolerate gender inequality and silence victims of violence. In school environments, individuals in positions of authority or social power may misuse that power, creating conditions that expose students to sexual violence. Consequently, Social Feminism Theory helps explain how sexual gender-based violence within schools reflects broader societal power relations and institutional practices that may fail to adequately protect learners. Resilience Theory, advanced by Norman Garmezy (1985) and further developed by Ann Masten (2001), focuses on how individuals adapt and function positively despite experiencing adversity. The theory emphasizes the role of protective factors that enable individuals to cope with stressful or traumatic experiences.

In the context of education, students who experience sexual gender-based violence may suffer emotional distress, fear, anxiety, and reduced psychological well-being. These challenges can negatively influence concentration, motivation, school attendance, and overall academic performance. However, Resilience Theory suggests that protective factors such as supportive school environments, positive peer relationships, effective guidance and counseling services, and strong family support systems can help students cope with such experiences and maintain academic engagement. By integrating Social Feminism Theory and Resilience Theory, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding both the structural causes of sexual gender-based violence and the individual coping mechanisms that influence students' academic performance. While Social Feminism Theory explains the systemic power inequalities that contribute to gender-based violence, Resilience Theory highlights how students respond to such adversity and the factors that may mitigate its negative academic consequences.

2.2 Empirical Review

Empirical research indicates that GBV has a negative impact on school children's educational outcomes and experiences. Sexual GBV such as sexual harassment, sexual coercion, sexual exploitation and unwanted sexual contact have been extensively reported in schools in various parts of the globe. These experiences can foster unsafe learning contexts which negatively affect student's focus, mood, and engagement in classroom learning.

The worldwide research confirms that sexual abuse in school has a significant impact on students' psychological welfare and academic involvement. Adolescents who are sexually harassed or sexually assaulted have been shown to experience lower academic motivation and engagement in class activities, and lower academic achievement (Mugo et al., 2025). The same applies to Molstad et al. (2021) who found that sexual violence exposure in students affects student attendance, focus, and performance, as a result of trauma and emotional distress.

GBV among school-going adolescents is generally reported as an impediment to school attendance in Africa. In a systematic review of studies undertaken in the Sub Saharan Africa region, Beyene et al. (2019) concluded that sexual violence is common among female students in schools, often has psychological consequences, and can result in school absenteeism and poor academic performance. Likewise, Meyer et al. (2018) reported that children who had sexual violence in schools in Uganda had increased odds of having disrupted attendance to school and lowered academic performance.

Research in Kenya has also identified and documented the high incidence and effects of SGBV in schools. Menaker et al. (2017) noted that sexual harassment and sexual coercion are common in Kenyan schools, and that this is a worry and source of emotional distress for pupils, which impact their ability to concentrate on learning. Muluneh et al. (2020) also noted that internment in school due to sexual violence reduces participation in school and negatively affects students' academic performance. In a similar study, Nyoni et al. (2023) report that gender-based violence in public secondary school in Kenya is associated with psychological stress, which adversely affects the students' academic engagement and performance.

Other research has also emphasized that sexual exploitation and sexual coercion might impact students' learning and education. Adolescents facing sexual exploitation in rural Kenyan communities tend to suffer emotional distress and from a lack of motivation to pursue academic studies, according to Barchi and AbiNader (2025). Furthermore, Nyoni et al. (2023) found that fear of stigma, retaliation and institutional silence often prevent victims from reporting sexual violence thus perpetuating such acts in schools.

Despite the vast amount of research that has been done on gender-based violence in schools, the majority of literature has been exploring the prevalence and social effects of gender-based violence, rather than the direct links to students' academic performance metrics such as test scores. Additionally, little empirical studies have specifically looked into how students' academic performance is associated with sexual forms of gender-based violence among public secondary schools in Bungoma County. The study, therefore, aims at addressing this gap by investigating the relationship between sexual forms of gender-based violence and students' test scores in public secondary schools of Bungoma County, Kenya.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a correlational research design to determine the relationship between sexual forms of gender-based violence and students' test scores in public secondary schools in Bungoma County. The design was suitable because it allows researchers to examine the direction and strength of relationships between variables without manipulating them. Correlational designs are commonly used in educational and social research to study naturally occurring phenomena such as violence and academic outcomes (Muluneh et al., 2020).

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Bungoma County, Kenya, where cases of gender-based violence among adolescents have been reported in both community and school environments. Previous reports have shown that gender-based violence remains prevalent in several parts of Kenya, including Bungoma County (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2022; Centre for Rights Education and Awareness [CREAW]-Kenya, 2022). The county contains both rural and semi-urban public secondary schools, making it appropriate for examining the relationship between sexual gender-based violence and students' academic performance.

3.3 Target Population

The target population consisted of approximately 250,000 students enrolled in 342 public secondary schools in Bungoma County. Additional participants included Heads of Guidance and Counseling departments, Sub-County Directors of Education, survivors of gender-based violence, and the County Woman Representative. These participants were selected because of their involvement in addressing gender-based violence and student welfare in schools.

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used. Stratified random sampling was used to select 184 secondary schools from the 342 public secondary schools in the county. Simple random sampling was then used to select 1,104 students from the selected schools. Purposive sampling was applied to select 184 guidance and counseling teachers, 13 GBV survivors, 3 Sub-County Directors of Education, and one County Woman Representative who had knowledge and experience regarding gender-based violence in schools.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Questionnaires were administered to students to collect quantitative data on their experiences of sexual gender-based violence and their academic performance. Interviews were conducted with education officers, guidance and counseling teachers, and GBV survivors to obtain qualitative insights on sexual violence in school environments. Document analysis was also used to review school records and reports on gender-based violence cases. A pilot study was conducted in a mixed day secondary school that was not included in the final study sample.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

The validity of the research instruments was ensured through expert review and pilot testing to confirm that the items measured the intended variables. Reliability of the questionnaire was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to assess internal consistency of the items.

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the data. Inferential statistics including Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to determine the relationship between sexual gender-based violence and students' test scores (Gichuhi, 2022). Qualitative data from interviews and document analysis were analyzed using thematic analysis and presented in narrative form.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Univariate Statistics

Univariate analysis examined the distribution of test scores across different levels of sexual violence exposure (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Most of the Time) to assess its relationship with academic performance. Descriptive Statistics for Test Scores: Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of students' test scores based on their reported experiences of sexual violence.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics for Test Scores and Sexual GBV Experience*

Experience of Sexual Violence	Mean Test Scores	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Never	600.00	150.00	350	800
Rarely	520.00	160.00	400	700
Sometimes	480.00	180.00	300	800
Most of the Time	450.00	200.00	0	800

The results indicate that students' test scores were lower if they experienced sexual violence frequently. Students who reported never experiencing sexual violence (600) and those who reported experiencing it most frequently (450) had the highest and lowest mean scores, respectively. Higher exposure to sexual violence also resulted in an increase in the standard deviation, which means that there was more variation in academic performance among students exposed to sexual violence. Some pupils' achievement was fairly stable, while others made much worse performance. The findings indicate that sexual violence can have a negative impact on academic performance because it causes psychological distress, fear and emotional disruption which negatively affects students' concentration and involvement in learning.

4.2 Gender and Age Distribution

Table.2 presents the descriptive statistics for gender and age among the respondents.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics for Gender and Age*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Gender	50% Male	50% Female	–	–
Age	15.27	1.31	12	22

The sample was evenly distributed between male and female students. The mean age of respondents was 15.27 years, indicating that most participants were within the typical age range of secondary school students. The age distribution ranged from 12 to 22 years, reflecting variations in school progression and entry age in public secondary schools. Gender and age were considered important control variables because they may influence both exposure to sexual violence and students' ability to cope with its consequences. A box plot analysis of the test score distribution further confirmed the pattern observed in the descriptive statistics. Students who reported frequent exposure to sexual violence generally recorded lower test scores compared to those who reported no such experiences.

4.3 Bivariate Statistics

Bivariate analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between sexual violence and academic performance. Two statistical techniques were used: Pearson correlation analysis and the Chi-square test. Pearson Correlation Analysis. Table 3 shows Pearson Correlation Between Sexual Violence and Test Scores

Table 3*Pearson Correlation Between Sexual Violence and Test Scores*

Variable	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Sexual Violence	-0.45	0.000

The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.45$) indicates a moderate negative relationship between sexual violence (independent variable) and students' academic performance measured by test scores (dependent variable). The statistically significant p-value ($p < 0.001$) indicates that the relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. This suggests that increased experiences of sexual violence are associated with lower student test scores. The finding aligns with existing literature showing that trauma, fear, and emotional stress negatively affect cognitive functioning, concentration, and learning outcomes. The scatter plot further illustrates this relationship, showing that students who reported experiencing sexual violence generally recorded lower test scores than those who did not report such experiences. Pearson Correlation Matrix for Different Forms of Sexual GBV. Table 4 presents Pearson Correlation Matrix for Different Forms of Sexual GBV.

Table 4*Pearson Correlation Matrix for Different Forms of Sexual GBV*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Grades (End of Term 1)	1	.109**	-.099**	-.036	-.062	.129**	-.121**	.001
2. Forced Sex / Rape / Attempted Rape	.109**	1	.452**	.248**	.217**	.408**	.282**	.193**
3. Inappropriate Touching	-.099**	.452**	1	.314**	.242**	.278**	.270**	.109**
4. Forced to Watch Pornography	-.036	.248**	.314**	1	.336**	.217**	.190**	.147**
5. Unwanted Sexual Compliments	-.062	.217**	.242**	.336**	1	.169**	.220**	.122**
6. Sodomy / Anal Rape	.129**	.408**	.278**	.217**	.169**	1	.275**	.164**
7. Stalking	-.121**	.282**	.270**	.190**	.220**	.275**	1	.192**
8. Forced Abortion	.001	.193**	.109**	.147**	.122**	.164**	.192**	1

Note. N = 751. ** The correlation at 0.01 level (2 tailed) is significant.

Table 4 outlines the associations between students' end-of-term test scores and experiences of sexual violence such as forced sex, inappropriate touching, unwanted sexual compliments and stalking. Academic performance was correlated with forced sex/rape/attempted rape with a positive and statistically significant correlation ($r = .109$, $p < .01$). Likewise, the relationship with performance for sodomy/anal rape was found to be positive ($r = .129$, $p < .01$). These relationships are statistically significant, but weak, meaning that they could be an indirect interaction such as coping or resilience which was not measured in this study. By comparison, there was a significant negative correlation between inappropriate touching and academic performance ($r = -.099$, $p < .01$). There were also negative correlations for other types of sexual violence with stalking ($r = -.121$, $p < .01$), unwanted sexual compliments ($r = -.062$, $p = .087$) but not for the latter.

Others, including being forced to view pornography ($r = -.036$, $p = .326$) were not significantly related to academic performance. This could be due to low prevalence among respondents or due to indirect effects that are not measured in the academic outcome measures. Overall, the results indicated that sexual violence was significantly related to academic performance ($r = .219$, $p < .01$), meaning that students' academic outcomes are correlated with their experience of sexual violence. The findings are in line with the previous studies. Barchi and AbiNader, (2025).and Muluneh, et al.. (2020)., found that sexual harassment and intimidation had a negative effect on academic performance, as it created fear, anxiety, and avoidance of school. Likewise, UNESCO (2019) reported that sexual violence also impacts students' attendance, focus and motivation at school.

4.3.1 Chi-square Test of Gender and Sexual Violence

A chi-square was conducted to establish whether a significant relationship existed between the gender and experience of sexual violence. The test was applied to determine whether there was any significant difference between the rates of sexual violence in the male students and female students. The Chi-Square test indicated that the Chi-Square = 12.5 and $p = 0.01$ which was below $p = 0.05$. This pointed out that gender and sexual violence were closely related. This finding indicated that the female students were more susceptible to sexual violence than the male students. The outcome correlates with the existing literature which indicated that there was a higher rate of the sexual violence among female students within the education sector. The results underscore the need for gender-specific interventions in efforts to combat sexual violence.

4.4 Multivariate Statistics

Linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of sexual violence on test scores while accounting for other relevant factors. This approach allowed the study to control for variables such as gender and age, thereby isolating the unique contribution of sexual violence to students' academic performance.

4.4.1 Linear Regression Analysis

Table 5*Linear Regression Results for Test Scores and Sexual Violence*

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value	p-value
Intercept (β_0)	550.00	90.00	6.11	0.000
Sexual Violence (β_1)	-45.67	110.85	-0.41	0.684

Based on the regression analysis, the coefficient of sexual violence was -45.67, which meant that those students who had experienced sexual violence were most likely have a score 45.67 lower than those students who had not

experienced sexual violence. The p-value of 0.684, however, was greater than 0.05, meaning that the relationship between sexual violence and the test scores was not statistically significant, after controlling for other factors. This could imply that the effect of sexual violence on test performance could be moderated by other variables, such as psychological support, resilience, or other external factors, which were not included in this model. Figure 1 presents a scatter plot illustrating the relationship between experiences of sexual violence and students' test scores. The figure included a fitted regression line, which helped visualize the direction and strength of the association between sexual violence and academic performance. Each point represents an individual student's test score in relation to their reported experience of sexual violence.

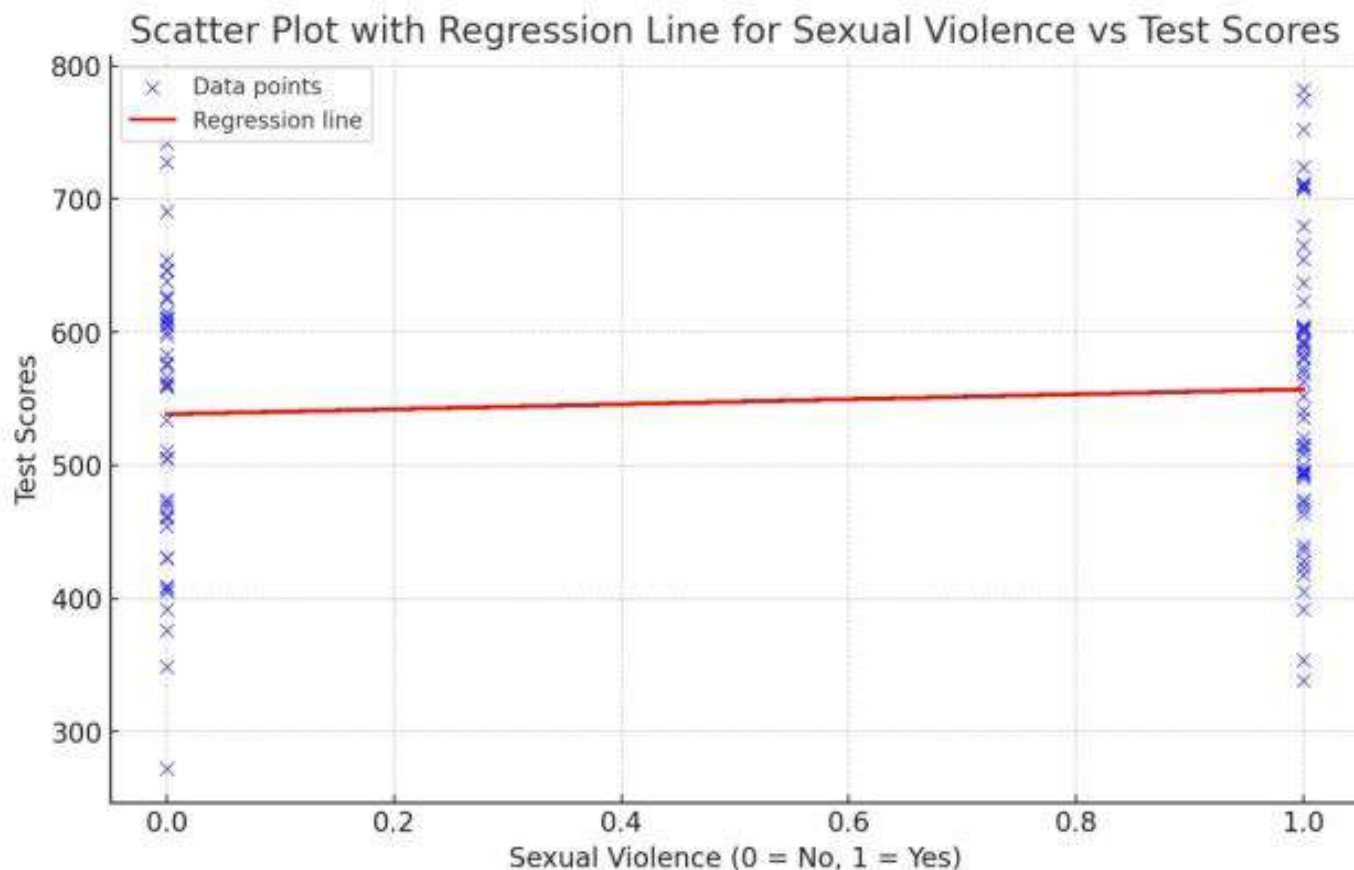


Figure 1
Scatter Plot With Regression Line for Sexual Violence vs Test Scores

The above scatter plot depicted the correlation between the experience of sexual violence (x-axis, where 0 meant no experience and 1 meant experience) and test scores (y-axis). The blue points were students and their experience of sexual violence, and their test scores were plotted. The red regression line was the estimated correlation between sexual violence and academic performance. The line was downwards, which meant that there was a negative relationship. This was an indication that the more the experience of sexual violence, the lower the test score, this led to rejection of the null hypothesis which stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between sexual forms of gender-based violence and students' test scores in public secondary schools in Bungoma County.

4.5 Diagnostics Tests For Regression Model

To validate the results of the regression model, diagnostic tests for normality and multicollinearity were performed. Normality of Residuals: The normality of the residuals was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test. This test checked if the residuals from the regression analysis followed a normal distribution. The W-value of 0.98 and p-value of 0.070 showed that the residuals were normally distributed since the p-value was more than 0.05. This indicated that the regression model fulfilled the normality assumption of residuals, which was a positive indication of the validity of the regression findings.

Multicollinearity Check: Multicollinearity among the predictor variables (sexual violence, gender, and age) was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Table 5 shows that all VIF values were below the threshold of 5, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern and that the variables were suitable for inclusion in the regression model.

Table 5
VIF Scores for Sexual Violence, Gender, and Age

Variable	VIF
Sexual Violence	1.85
Gender	1.10
Age	1.55

The values of VIF of all the predictors were much less than the value of 10, which showed no multicollinearity issue in this model. This implied that the predictor variables were not too dependent on each other, making the regression coefficients reliable. The results of the analysis of sexual Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and test performance in Bungoma County indicated an important tendency, and the degree of importance of the relationships was different. The univariate statistics revealed that those students who reported more frequent sexual violence were more likely to record lower scores on the test, which aligned with the adverse effect of trauma on academic performance. This correlation was also supported using Pearson correlation analysis with the sexual violence and test scores having a moderate negative relationship.

The Chi-Square test revealed that female students were more affected by sexual violence, consistent with general findings in research on gendered violence. However, the linear regression model indicated that the effect of sexual violence on test scores was not statistically significant when other factors were held constant, suggesting that these factors might moderate or mediate the relationship. Such findings meant that there must be certain actions that must be formulated to help in the fight against sexual violence in schools, such as gender sensitive programs and support groups that may help the students deal with the trauma. The finding that sexual violence was associated with performance during tests conducted internally, even though it was evident that sexual violence was correlated with performance, future research should strive to seek the dynamic associations between psychological, emotional, and environmental factors, which contribute to the academic performance of the victims of GBV.

4.6 Hypothesis Testing for the Sexual GBV and Test Scores

Table 6 presents the regression results testing the hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between sexual gender-based violence and students' test scores in public secondary schools in Bungoma County. Linear regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between each form of sexual violence and academic performance. The table reports the correlation coefficient (R), coefficient of determination (R^2), F-value, p-value, unstandardized coefficient (B), t-value, significance level, and the decision on the null hypothesis.

Table 6
Linear Regression Results For Sexual Forms of GBV and Students' Test Scores

Form of Sexual Violence	R	R^2	F	p-value	B (Unstd.)	T	Sig.	Decision on H_0
Overall Sexual Violence	0.195	0.038	29.688	0.000	-0.254	-5.449	0.000	Reject H_0
Forced Sex/Rape/Attempted Rape	0.031	0.001	0.732	0.393	-0.039	-0.855	0.393	Fail to Reject H_0
Inappropriate Touching	0.207	0.043	33.692	0.000	-0.128	-5.805	0.000	Reject H_0
Forced to Watch Pornography	0.038	0.001	1.093	0.296	0.053	1.045	0.296	Fail to Reject H_0
Unwanted Sexual Compliments	0.078	0.006	4.542	0.033	0.108	2.131	0.033	Reject H_0
Sodomy/Anal Rape	0.136	0.018	14.012	0.000	-0.230	-3.743	0.000	Reject H_0
Stalking	0.118	0.014	10.575	0.001	0.276	3.252	0.001	Reject H_0
Forced Abortion	0.028	0.001	0.572	0.450	0.041	0.756	0.450	Fail to Reject H_0

Overall Sexual Violence: The results showed that the overall sexual violence, inappropriate touching, unwanted sexual compliments, sodomy/anal rape and stalking were statistically significant with the test scores of students as the P-values were less than 0.05, and the null hypothesis was rejected. On the other hand, forced sex/rape/attempted rape, and forced to watch pornography did not have significant impacts on academic performance as the p-values were above the 0.05 level, resulting to failure to reject the null hypothesis. These findings illuminate the dissimilar effects of particular sexual violence on the academic performance of the students.

The findings were aligned with the results of Muluneh et al. (2020).) who found out that traumatized, anxious, and distracted students who were exposed to sexual abuse performed poorly in schools. Similarly, Barchi and AbiNader (2025).) discovered that sexual victimization and academic performance showed statistically significant negative correlation in Kenyan secondary school students.

Cases of Forced Sex/Rape/Attempted Rape.: The regression analysis yielded a non-significant result ($p = .393$) with $R^2 = .001$, indicating that forced sex/rape/attempted rape did not have a statistically significant relationship with

test scores. However, UNESCO (2019) noted that the impact of forced sexual violence may manifest in non-academic outcomes, such as school failure or teen pregnancy, which were beyond the scope of the academic performance measures used in this study. Inappropriate Touching: This type of sexual violence had a strong negative correlation with academic performance whose $R^2 = .043$, $F = 33.692$, $p = .001$ and $B = -0.128$, $t = -5.805$. Such findings confirmed the claim that improper touching caused psychological distress, which caused disturbance in cognitive processing and classroom engagement (Banyard et al., 2009).

Forced to Watch Pornographic Materials. The analysis revealed a non-significant effect ($p = .296$), indicating that being compelled to view pornography did not have a direct impact on academic test scores. However, Pathmendra et al. (2023) caution that such exposure may have long-term effects on cognition and emotion, including desensitization and poor social relationships, which could, in turn, affect learning over time. Unwanted Sexual Compliments: Test scores did not have a significant association with unwanted sexual compliments ($R^2 = .006$, $p = .033$), but their correlation was a positive one ($B = +0.108$). This was a surprising consequence, which may be explained by the inconsistency in reporting or the normalization of verbal harassment among students, as reported by Muluneh et al. (2020), who reported the instances of underreporting harassment by the victims because of stigma or peer pressure. Sodomy/Anal Rape: There was a statistically significant negative correlation between sodomy and academic outcomes ($R^2 = .018$, $p < .001$). Anal rape had a significant psychological impact that could result in long-term trauma, absenteeism, and inability to focus on academic tasks (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

Stalking: The regression showed that there was a significant positive correlation between stalking and test scores ($R^2 = .014$, $p = .001$), and that $B = +0.276$. Whereas this finding seemed counterintuitive, it could be a reporting or data anomaly or a contextual issue peculiar to the study population to which a further qualitative inquiry is justified.

Forced Abortion: Academic performance was not significantly associated with forced abortion ($p = .450$), suggesting the absence of a direct relationship. However, previous studies like Muluneh et al. (2020) indicated that girls subjected to forced abortion often experience trauma, which could negatively affect their education over time. Among the eight types of sexual violence studied, 5 (in general sexual violence, inappropriate touching, unwanted sexual compliments, sodomy and stalking) had significant correlation with test scores of students. Three (forced sex, forced abortion, and forced pornography exposure) were not statistically significantly related.

These results highlight the complex and varied effects of different types of sexual gender-based violence (GBV) on academic performance. They support previous research (UNESCO, 2019), which indicates that sexual GBV can have a detrimental impact on educational outcomes, even though some of these effects may not be directly observable through academic test scores.

4.7 Theoretical Interpretation of Findings

The researchers concluded that different forms of sexual gender-based violence had subtle yet measurable effects on students' test scores. Higher academic performance was significantly associated with covert or chronic forms, such as stalking and inappropriate touching, whereas more severe forms, such as rape or sodomy, also showed a positive correlation with test scores. This unexpected pattern can be explained by Resilience theory, which suggests that some survivors both boys and girls respond to trauma by developing compensatory mechanisms, such as focusing more on their academic work as a means of restoring or maintaining self-worth. However, this resilience does not imply that no harm has occurred; rather, it represents a survival strategy that may deteriorate over time if repeated psychological stress is not addressed.

From the perspective of Social Feminism theory, sexual violence in schools represents a form of institutionalized gender inequality. Practices such as institutional silence, victim blaming, and impunity serve to perpetuate these acts. These social structures discourage both male and female victims from reporting abuse, thereby reinforcing a vicious cycle of violence and marginalization in education. In the public secondary schools of Bungoma County, girls were disproportionately affected by sexual forms of violence.

4.8 Qualitative Data on Relationship Between Sexual GBV and Students' Tests Scores

The interviews aimed to identify the most common types of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) affecting learners. Guidance and Counseling teachers repeatedly reported a pattern of casual sexual relationships among girls that undermined school participation. Several teachers and officers attributed part of this pattern to media and mobile-phone exposure: learners reportedly have access to phones and online content that normalizes sexual behaviour, increasing their exposure to sexual content and risky practices. These local observations are consistent with recent Kenyan studies showing a strong association between adolescents' exposure to sexual content via phones or social media that increased likelihood of risky sexual behaviour and early sexual debut, which can interrupt schooling and heighten vulnerability to SGBV (Muluneh et al., 2020); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Kenya, 2024).

4.8.1 Most Common Forms of Sexual Violence

From the interviews, it was established that the most common cases of sexual GBV were inappropriate touching, flirting, unwanted touching, defilement, gang rape, teacher–student sexual relationships, and transactional sex involving boda-boda riders and community members. Interviewee narrated:

“I received one case of sexual GBV involving a form 2 girl and a primary school teacher. The girl’s parent and uncle had reported the case to the police and the children’s office. The girl went missing and after she was found, she wanted to commit suicide. It was discovered that the girl had contracted a sexually transmitted disease. (IDI24, 12 January 2026)”

In another school, (IDI43) responded concerning defilement at home by a relative;

“Yes. We reported the case of defilement at the chief’s office, principal and sub-county education office. The girl was taken to hospital tested and treated. We did counseling to the girl. She was also taken to stay with another relative where she thought it was safer. The case is still active and we hope justice will be served.” (IDI43, 18 January 2026)

Another (IDI53) explained;

“There is also an ongoing case about a teacher who had canal knowledge of a girl in his school. Currently the case is ongoing and we hope it will not be interfered with (IDI53, 24 January 2026).

One of the GBV survivors pointed out that the most common forms of sexual GBV girls had to encounter on daily basis included Sexual jokes, flirting and whistling from peers and boda-bodas

Another Participant, Form 3 Female confessed;

“I was impregnated by a teacher who teaches in a neighboring school. When the wife got the information, she threatened to kill me if I did not abort the baby. She took me to hospital and pretended to be my sister and told the doctor that I was raped and got pregnant so the pregnancy was terminated” (Participant, Form Three Female, 6 February 2026.)

Despite cases of boys being underreported, there was this case that reached the Interview with (IDI2) confirmed the incidence;

“There was this case of a teenage boy whose mother was critically ill. He went to seek for assistance from a neighbor who told him “to first face the wall”(meaning he wanted to have anal sex) he forced him to have anal sex with him before he could assist him with the cash pay for the mother. It came out when the boy contracted STI and on interrogation, he revealed what had transpired. (IDI2, 14 February 2026)”

There was also a case of Rape that occurred to one of the girls as it was confirmed by (IDI62). The student was greatly traumatized and unable to cope with school life. She narrated;

“Just last month, we had a case. A girl was gang raped while at home. She had been sent to the shop in the evening. A group of men bounced on her and dragged her in the bushes. She was gang raped and left unconscious. At home nothing was done, so when she came to school, we were unable to assist, since the girl had already taken a shower, and did not know the perpetrators. We took her to hospital and back to school. At school, she was unable to cope. She was not eating, going to class and not talking to anyone. We called the mother, to take her home since we feared she might do something silly while in school. We don’t know whether she will come back” (IDI62, 21 February 2026)

The qualitative findings supported the quantitative results, showing that sexual gender-based violence (GBV) undermines students’ academic performance. Guidance and counseling teachers, education officers, and survivors reported that sexual violence occurs both within and outside school environments. Common forms included inappropriate touching, unwanted sexual advances, defilement, teacher–student sexual relationships, and transactional sex involving boda-boda riders and community members. These findings align with previous studies showing that adolescents exposed to sexual exploitation and forced relationships face higher risks of school dropout, emotional trauma, and disruption of learning (Muluneh et al., 2020); UNICEF Kenya, 2024). Survivors described severe psychological effects including trauma, depression, fear, withdrawal, absenteeism, and suicidal thoughts, all of which interfere with concentration, memory, and classroom engagement.

Several narratives illustrated these impacts. One Form Two student who was sexually abused by a teacher later attempted suicide and contracted a sexually transmitted infection. In another case, a girl who was gang-raped on her way home temporarily withdrew from school due to emotional distress. Although girls were more frequently affected, cases of male victimization were also reported, including a boy forced to engage in anal sex by a neighbor. These accounts show how sexual GBV contributes to lower academic performance through trauma-related cognitive disruption, reduced instructional time, and increased school-related anxiety. Similar patterns have been reported in regional and international studies documenting school-based sexual harassment and abuse by peers, teachers, and community members (Meyer et al., 2018).

4.8.2 Main Perpetrators of Sexual GBV

This section sought to establish the main perpetrators of sexual forms of GBV through in depth interviews with various respondents. In another interview concerning who are the main perpetrators of sexual GBV, (IDI53) narrated;

“Sexual violence is very common. Incest is on the rise. These girls born out of wedlock and left at home by their mothers face a lot of sexual abuse by relatives they live with. They are abused by grandfathers, uncles and other relatives. You hear these reports and when you follow up, it’s like the girls live under certain threats so they do not open up or not willing to speak. We also have cases of sexual abuse from step fathers sexually abusing their step daughters.” (IDI53, 4 March 2026)

In another interview, (IDI71) expressed the following concerning the perpetrators of sexual GBV;

“Teacher’s relatives and Bodabodas lure and ferry girls for free to school. These bodaboda people assist the girls with small cash until they get used to each other and eventually sexual GBV sets in.” (IDI71, 11 March 2026).

The interview findings reveal that the main perpetrators of sexual gender-based violence (GBV) against adolescent girls are often individuals known to the victims. According to interviewee ID53, cases of incest involving grandfathers, uncles, and stepfathers were frequently reported, particularly among girls living with extended family members. These perpetrators often exploit their authority within the household, while fear and stigma discourage survivors from reporting the abuse, contributing to significant underreporting. Interviewee IDI71 also identified teachers, relatives, and boda-boda operators as common perpetrators. Boda-boda riders were reported to lure girls with free rides or small amounts of money, creating dependency that may lead to exploitative sexual relationships. This reflects patterns of transactional and coercive sexual abuse commonly observed in economically vulnerable settings.

Overall, the findings show that sexual GBV is frequently perpetrated by individuals who hold social, economic, or institutional influence over the victims. Incidents occurring within families, schools, and communities highlight how authority and trust can be exploited, while weak reporting systems and limited protection mechanisms allow many perpetrators to avoid accountability. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that perpetrators are often known to the victims, including relatives, teachers, peers, and community members (Muluneh et al., (2020).; Meyer et al. (2018).; Barchi and AbiNader (2025). Studies also document the growing role of boda-boda operators in facilitating transactional sexual relationships along school routes.

4.8.3 The Most Affected Gender

The interviews from the SCDEs, County woman Representative and Guidance and Counseling teachers confirmed that girls were the most affected gender in terms of sexual Gender Based Violence (GBV). Though there were cited cases of Boys having experienced Sexual gender-based violence.

“Both genders are affected. Though the girls are most affected by GBV cases especially cases of Incest and defilement. The only difference is that most boys are silent about it. They believe that it is against the Bukusu culture for a man to complain about certain thing ((IDI62, 19 March 2026).

Interviews confirmed that girls were the most affected by sexual GBV, though cases involving boys existed and were likely underreported due to cultural stigma. This echoes broader research in Kenya and East Africa, where male victimization is under-reported because societal norms discourage disclosure by boys, while girls bear the brunt of defilement and incest cases (Mugo et al., 2025).; UNICEF Kenya, 2024).

4.8.4 Cases of Cover-Ups and Systemic Barriers

Qualitative data from interviews with education officers and the County Woman Representative substantiated the quantitative findings, painting a troubling picture of systemic cover-ups. According to the (IDI4);

“Cover-ups are a major challenge in dealing with sexual GBV in Bungoma County. Notoriously, through kangaroo courts where perpetrators normally bribe the chiefs so cases go nowhere. Remember cases committed at home level must start at the chief’s office before they proceed to court so such cases are handled at home and not follow the legal process. Normally, my office facilitates such cases to proceed to court (IDI4, 27 March 2026).

Interviewee (IDI1) narrated one disappointing incidence;

“I received one case of sexual gender GBV involving a form2 girl and a primary school teacher. The girl’s parent and uncle reported the case to the police and the children’s office. The girl went missing and after she was found, she wanted to commit suicide. It was discovered that the girl had contracted a sexually transmitted disease. But the girl adamantly refused to cooperate(IDI1, 3 April 2026).

He continued to explain how the teacher involved interfered case. He explained that the alleged teacher bribed the parents and when TSC tried to intervene, the complainants refused to cooperate saying the matter had been settled at home. KNUT also tried to protect the teacher”

The officer expressed his frustration in the way the case was later handled. He narrated;

“There was a lot of interference by the teacher. It was alleged that he bribed the parents and when TSC tried to intervene, the complainants refused to cooperate saying the matter had been settled at home. KNUT also tried to protect the teacher. The teacher was a primary school teacher (IDI2, 9 April 2026).

Qualitative findings from stakeholders reinforced the quantitative results, indicating a pattern of cover-ups in handling gender-based violence (GBV) cases in Bungoma County. Interviewee IDI4 reported that some cases were resolved through informal “kangaroo courts,” where chiefs were allegedly bribed, allowing perpetrators to avoid formal legal processes. Similar concerns were raised by interviewee IDI2, who explained that many cases reported at the household level were first taken to the chief’s office but were often diverted into private settlements rather than formal court proceedings. This practice undermines the justice system and leaves survivors without adequate protection.

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that GBV cases are frequently resolved informally by community leaders and family members, shielding perpetrators and discouraging victims from reporting (Meyer et al., 2018). Research from Kenya similarly shows that chiefs and elders often mediate sexual violence cases informally, prioritizing compensation over justice for survivors. Overall, the findings suggest that the GBV response system in Bungoma County is weakened not by the absence of legal frameworks but by failures in their implementation, influenced by corruption, socio-cultural norms, and institutional alliances. Strengthening accountability, improving oversight of school-related cases, and protecting survivor-centered reporting systems are therefore critical for addressing these systemic gaps. In another interview, it was pointed out concerning the challenges faced when dealing with sexual GBV;

“Many times, Some principals cover up their teachers, Some principals are culprits themselves, so in such a scenario, our office becomes handicapped. The cases committed at home are the worst. Victims are threatened, until it becomes very hard for the truth to come out. Incest cases in most cases are covered up through kangaroo courts. The village elder might do their work, but the chiefs are the greatest obstacle. They take bribes from the perpetrators and let them go free (IDI3, 16 April 2026).

This points at a legal system that has failed in making the perpetrators accountable and making them untouchable. One officer also explained the following concerning cover-up incidents;

“Cover-ups are the major obstacles in dealing with GBV cases. Teachers unions always try to protect the teacher, some principals try to cover-up their teachers. Worst still, victims cover up their perpetrators out of fear or sometimes when the perpetrators bribe the victims’ families. On the other hand, relatives cover-up their kin. It’s a whole complex thing to deal with ((IDI164, 22 April 2026).

Interview findings indicated that many GBV cases were handled informally within families or clans rather than through formal institutions. Kinship ties and social norms often discouraged survivors from seeking legal assistance, while economic vulnerability led some families to prioritize family cohesion over justice. Students in day schools were reported to be particularly vulnerable because they returned home daily and were therefore more exposed to abusive household environments compared to students in boarding schools.

These observations align with existing research linking poverty and intimate partner violence (IPV), particularly in low- and middle-income settings. In Kenya, Owiti (2019) found that lower wealth levels were strongly associated with IPV among young women. Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa similarly identify socioeconomic status, extended family dynamics, and informal conflict-resolution systems as important predictors of GBV. The findings also point to systemic barriers that limit access to justice and support for survivors. Interviews revealed instances of family interference, protection of perpetrators within institutions, and weak reporting mechanisms. National studies likewise document how informal settlements, bribery, and family pressure discourage reporting and allow perpetrators to avoid accountability (Nyoni et al., 2023; Meyer, et al., 2018).

4.8.5 Effectiveness of Gender Policy Framework

On answering about the effectiveness of Gender policy and legal frameworks in dealing with GBV in schools, one (IDI1) commented;

“The government policy framework works are effective but the challenge is that these cases reach our desk when evidence has been watered down or when it’s too late. Sometimes you get from the third party, and when investigation starts, the victim does not cooperate. The Re-entry policy, Basic Children’s act and Sexual Offences Act are effective” (IDI1, 24 April 2026).

The government policy framework works are effective but the challenge is that these cases. Participant, Form 2, Female;

“When the incident happened, I first told my teachers. They listened but didn’t take any serious action. I learned later that the school had a child protection policy, but I was never informed about it. Reporting was difficult because I was afraid of retaliation from the perpetrator. I think awareness about these policies needs to be clearer and students should know where to go for help.” (Participant, Form Two Female, 28 April 2026).

A commentary of one education officer stated that the government policy frameworks the Children Act, Sexual Offences Act, and Re-entry policy were theoretically sound but failed practically due to late reporting of cases or due to

evidence tampering. According to comparative assessments, Re-entry policies in Kenya only enhance retention in the case of a strong implementation, but not in the case of weak implementation and stigma (Mugo et al., 2025).

4.8.6 Effect on Academic Outcomes

The qualitative data highlighted the negative impact of sexual GBV on students' academic outcomes, including suicidal thoughts, teenage pregnancy, dismissal from school, trauma, stigmatization, and school withdrawal.

Participant, Form 3, Female

"I lost concentration at school as a result of being bullied by an older student. I would skip school every now and then due to the fear of bumping into them at the corridors. I would run around panicking when doing exams and forget all that I had learned. Regular counseling and mentorship, in my opinion, would be instrumental in restoring the confidence of students, including me, in order to perform better."
(Participant, Form Three Female, 30 April 2026).

The systematic reviews and local studies proved that sexual victimization was linked to lower academic performance, absenteeism, school dropout, and lower engagement (Molstad *et al.*, 2021; Meyer, et al., (2018). The observed pathways, which included psychological trauma, health outcomes, and institutional/familial outcomes, justified the negative relationship with test scores of the students found in the quantitative analysis. These results, along with comparative literature, confirmed the shapes of sexual GBV, the female pre-eminence, the pattern of known perpetrators, the cover-ups by the system and the adverse educational consequences. They also affirm the fact that policy structures though theoretically correct, were not that effective due to challenges of implementation. The holistic approach enhances the validity of the quantitative results and pinpoints important policy and interventions to reduce SGBV and its educational effects.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study revealed that there is a prevalence of sexual gender based violence in public secondary schools in Bungoma County and that it has a negative effect on student's academic performance. The quantitative findings indicated that there was a moderate negative relationship between sexual violence and the students' test scores, with students who experienced sexual violence regularly having lower test scores. Inappropriate touching, stalking, and unwanted sexual advances were especially correlated with decreased academic engagement. The qualitative results also highlighted that sexual violence takes place in schools and in the community, and is perpetrated by both teachers and peers and relatives and community members. Survivors indicated trauma, fear, absenteeism, and loss of focus in class. Other systemic issues identified in the study were informal dispute resolution, family pressure, and limited enforcement of existing policies. In conclusion, the results suggest that sexual GBV negatively affects students' learning capacity, pointing to the need for better protection and reporting systems within schools.

5.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the study results, the following measures are recommended to mitigate sexual gender-based violence and to support the affected learners in public secondary schools. First, help and counseling services should be reinforced in schools to offer psychosocial support to the students who suffer sexual violence. A trained counselor may be able to help the victim deal with the trauma and regain confidence and motivation to return to school. Second, there is a need for school/reduction authority reporting and responding systems for sexual GBV cases. Pupils should be told where and how to report abuse without fear of reprisal. It is important to have confidential reporting channels and protective policies that help to encourage victims to seek assistance.

Third, there is a need for the awareness and sensitization programs to be deeper in the schools and communities. Children's rights and dignity must be protected and there are consequences of sexual violence which should be made known to students, teachers, parents and community members. Fourth, education authorities need to create and implement robust monitoring and accountability systems to reduce covering up, and to ensure procedures are followed in a suitable legal manner when sexual violence occurs. A multi-sectoral approach that involves the cooperation and partnership of schools, local government, child protection services and law enforcement is crucial for effective action on GBV. Lastly, there is a need for investment in the development of preventative interventions such as gender-focused education programmes and interventions embedded in the community that highlight and address negative social norms and power imbalances that can lead to sexual violence. These measures may contribute to making schools safer places for all learners to learn, free from fear and intimidation.

Declaration of Interest

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