

## Influence of Principals' Counselling Strategies on the Psychological Well-Being of Orphaned Students in Public Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

*Adopting counselling strategies such as peer, group, life skills and mentorship programmes has enabled secondary schools to reduce effects of low self-esteem, low self-confidence and low self-efficacy among orphaned and vulnerable. However, most orphaned children typically do not have access to counselling services and mentoring programs which might help them cope with their circumstances and keep their focus on their studies. This lack of support systems may make it more difficult for them to overcome the obstacles they face. This study sought to establish the influence of principals' counselling strategies on the psychological well-being of orphaned students in public secondary schools in Makueni County. Founded on the theory of psychological well-being, the study employed a descriptive correlational research design. The study targeted 1,979 respondents, including principals, teacher-counselors, and orphaned students from 393 public secondary schools. The sample size was 333 respondents selected through stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Data collection involved questionnaires for teacher-counselors and structured interviews for principals and students. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, particularly Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, facilitated by SPSS. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, providing narrative insights. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and data confidentiality, were rigorously followed. The findings show that there is a significant relationship between counselling strategies and the psychological well-being of orphaned students. The study found that the presence of counselling sessions in schools, dedicated counselling centres, and competent peer counsellors plays a pivotal role in positively influencing the psychological well-being of orphaned students. The study recommends that principals should prioritize the availability of counselling services within schools and ensure that teacher-counsellors are well-equipped through capacity building to provide guidance and support to students, especially orphaned ones. Furthermore, the government, through the Ministry of Education, should develop and implement policies that specifically address the psychological well-being of orphaned students within the education system by ensuring the availability of counselling services and mentorship programs.*

**Keywords:** Counselling Strategies, Orphaned Students, Psychological Well-Being, Public Secondary Schools

### I. INTRODUCTION

In many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, disciplinary management strategies such as counselling, parental involvement and strict adherence to rules and regulations have been designed by secondary schools to improve the psychological well-being of students. For example, in Nigeria, an assessment by Suleiman et al. (2019) show that adopting counselling strategies such as peer, group, life skills and mentorship programmes has enabled secondary schools to reduce effects of low self-esteem, low self-confidence and low self-efficacy among orphaned and vulnerable students. Suleiman et al. (2019) assert that secondary schools have initiated guidance and counselling centres with substantive teacher-counsellors tasked to undertake the responsibilities of offering services to students.

In the same token, in secondary schools in KwaZulu Natal Province in South Africa, Cicognani (2019) opines that, to improve the psychological well-being of students, schools have roped in parents, encouraging adherence to school rules and regulations. However, orphaned students in secondary schools have continued to manifest instances of low psychological well-being. Cicognani (2019) reports that, in secondary schools in South Africa, students have exhibited defiant and aggressive ways in and out of school settings such as disrupting school activities, bullying, drugs consumption, cultism, disobeying school rules and regulations. This implies that students' psychological well-being has become an issue of concern for educators and policymakers owing to the outbreak of aggressiveness among peers, violence within a teacher-student relationship and vandalism as well.

In Tanzania, there is a concerning increase in cases of low psychological well-being among students. According to a report by Mdamu (2017), the number of orphans in Tanzania surpasses the capacity of extended families and orphanages to adequately care for them. Mdamu (2017) highlights that 18.0% of orphans live solely with their mothers, 6.0% with their fathers, and 16.0% do not live with either biological parent; often experiencing low self-esteem and diminished self-efficacy beliefs as a result. These findings are supported by a survey conducted by Theophil and Mary (2021) in Dar es Salaam, involving 67 participants, which revealed that 67.9% of students reported experiencing low self-esteem and a lack of purpose in life, significantly impacting their academic engagement. Theophil and Mary (2021) noted that such issues are particularly prevalent among vulnerable and orphaned students, adversely affecting their school performance.

This supports the assertions by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2020) that orphans often face more emotional problems than other kids. These problems can be things like feeling sad, angry, or anxious because they haven't been able to cope with losing their parents. In simpler terms, orphans might feel worried because they don't have much control over their lives. UNICEF (2020) also recommends that schools need to take charge of planning, organizing, leading, and managing things for orphaned students.

The Kenyan government has implemented a number of initiatives, such as free primary education and secondary school subsidies, to help orphaned children. These government programs have increased orphaned children's access to education (Kavoi, 2019). The extended communities and family of orphaned children frequently give crucial help in addition to government initiatives. According to a study by Nzomo (2021), many orphaned children in Makueni County rely on the assistance of neighbours, family members, and community-based organizations to meet their educational needs. NGOs are crucial for ensuring that orphaned children in Kenya have access to psychosocial and education support. Kwamboka (2020) asserts that groups like Save the Children and World Vision have significantly improved the health and academic performance of orphaned students in the region.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Students' unhealthy psychological well-being manifests itself in a variety of ways which include vandalism, truancy, smoking, disobedience, intimidation, delinquency, murder, assault, rape, theft and general violence (Njoroge & Nyabuto, 2019). In Makueni County, cases of low psychological well-being among orphaned students have become commonplace in secondary schools. A study by Muindi et al. (2020) revealed that instances of low psychological well-being have been on the rise among orphaned and vulnerable students in public secondary schools with 66.3% manifesting diminished levels of self-acceptance, 67.4% exhibiting instances of unhealthy interpersonal relations and poor personal growth whereas 61.9% low self-efficacy beliefs. According to Muindi et al. (2020), the prevalence of psychological problems, that is, low self-esteem, depression, anger levels and anxiety are all affecting the academic performance of orphaned students in secondary schools is high.

For orphaned pupils in Makueni, a big barrier is a lack of resources. Many orphaned students struggle to pay for essential educational costs including tuition, uniforms, textbooks, and test fees, according to Kioko (2018). The study showed how these financial difficulties frequently cause orphaned kids to drop out of school. The economic difficulties orphaned students in Makueni confront were also the subject of a research by Nzioka (2017), who discovered that they frequently participate in income-generating activities like casual labour to maintain their education. However, the pressure of both going to school and working to provide for their fundamental requirements can be overpowering and could have a bad effect on their academic performance.

It may be more difficult for orphaned children to excel in school since they typically lack adequate support systems. When Omondi (2020) investigated the resources available to orphaned students in Makueni, she found that many of them lacked access to psychological and emotional care. A person's mental health may be traumatized by losing a parent or guardian, which can cause low motivation and mediocre academic achievement. Omondi (2020) also made the point that orphaned kids typically don't have access to counselling services and mentoring programs which might help them cope with their circumstances and keep their focus on their studies. This lack of support systems may make it more difficult for them to overcome the obstacles they face.

To mitigate these challenges, secondary schools have initiated several psycho-social support mechanisms such as counselling to arrest the situation. This study seeks to establish the influence of principals' counselling strategies on the psychological well-being of orphaned students in public secondary schools in Makueni County.

### 1.2 Research objective

(i) To establish the influence of principals' counselling strategies on the psychological well-being of orphaned students in public secondary schools in Makueni County.

### 1.3 Research Hypothesis

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between principals' counselling strategies and the psychological well-being of orphaned students in public secondary schools in Makeni County.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 The Theory of Psychological Well-being

The Theory of Psychological Well-being (PWB), as postulated by Carol D. Ryff, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the multiple dimensions of psychological well-being, such as autonomy, positive relations with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, personal growth, and self-acceptance (Ryff, 2013). In the study on "Influence of Principals' Counselling Strategies on the Psychological Well-Being of Orphaned Students in Public Secondary Schools," this theory serves as a guiding framework to explore how the emotional and mental states of orphaned students are influenced by the counselling strategies implemented by school principals.

The theory posits that PWB is relatively stable but influenced by past experiences and personality traits (Ryff, 2014). This understanding aligns with the study's focus on orphaned students, who have experienced significant early life stressors, such as the loss of parents or caregivers. These stressors can lower their psychological well-being, leading to depression, lack of purpose, low self-efficacy, and self-confidence. However, Ryff's theory also suggests that exposure to moderately stressful events can build resilience, which is crucial for these students.

The study leverages the theory to assess how key dimensions of psychological well-being, such as autonomy, self-acceptance, and positive relations with others, are affected by principals' counselling strategies. For instance, principals who foster a supportive school environment can help orphaned students develop better self-acceptance and positive relations with peers, enhancing their overall well-being.

Empirical studies cited in the theory, such as those by Bluth et al. (2016) and De-Juanas et al. (2020), establish a positive correlation between social support and psychological well-being. This is critical in understanding how school principals' counselling strategies can provide the necessary support to improve orphaned students' well-being. The theory helps elucidate the link between emotional health and academic performance, showing that improved psychological well-being through supportive counselling can lead to better academic outcomes and life satisfaction.

The Theory of Psychological Well-being thus provides a foundation for assessing how psychosocial factors contribute to the well-being of orphaned students. By considering the theory's insights into the connection between emotional states and cognitive functioning, the study aims to reveal how psychological well-being, influenced by principals' strategies, impacts the academic performance and overall life satisfaction of orphaned students in public secondary schools.

### 2.2 Empirical Review

Various international perspectives have defined counselling practices with a common theme. Norwich (2015) characterizes counselling as an interactive process that brings together the counselee, often someone vulnerable seeking assistance, and a trained therapist. The primary objective of this interaction is to empower the counselee to better navigate their inner self and the realities of their environment. Eddy (2016) contends that education serves the vital function of creating opportunities for students to reach their full potential across multiple dimensions, including educational, vocational, personal, emotional, and moral development.

In the Netherlands, Kauchak (2016) conducted a study revealing that counselling practices embedded within different secondary schools serve as an integral component in enhancing students' psychological well-being. Guidance and counselling services, as highlighted by Kauchak (2016), equip students with the skills to assume greater responsibility for their decisions and enhance their capacity to comprehend and accept the consequences of those decisions. This underscores the notion that the ability to make informed choices is not an inherent trait but, like other skills, can be nurtured and developed.

Building on these insights, Nugent (2017) emphasized that teachers play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of comprehensive counselling programs, highlighting their significance in the daily lives of students. Teachers are the most influential figures in the lives of students, significantly shaping their experiences, whether positively or negatively. In a study conducted in Malaysia, Othman and Baker (2017) further underscored the crucial role of teacher-counsellors as the frontline in identifying students' specific needs that may impact their enrolment and participation in school activities. Teacher-counsellors serve as key advisors to students and represent a vital avenue for personalized learning experiences.

In most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is a popular view that successful school counselling practices involve, to some reasonable degree, voluntary students' participation (Celestine, 2017). For example, in South Africa,

Muribwathoho and Shumba (2016) note how a student perceives counselling might serve as a barrier to the process. To support this assertion, Lephoto and Hlalele (2020) carried out a study in Lesotho which revealed that counselling services in secondary schools are essential for the psychological well-being of the students. This implies that counselling services are an important aspect in helping, developing and enhancing psychological resources that mediate the wellbeing of students in secondary schools. In other words, counselling enables students to deal with challenges while at school.

In Kenya, the provision of guidance and counselling services in schools was formally started in the 1970s (Celestine, 2017). This was as a result of the 1967 and 1968 careers conference reports. This was followed by the establishment of the Guidance and Counselling Unit in the Ministry of Education in July 1971. Before the year 1971, guidance and counselling services in schools mainly concentrated on career guidance which was almost entirely based on the voluntary efforts of teachers who somehow felt motivated to provide it. In secondary school settings, guidance and counselling services were commenced to cater to learners with social, personal, psychological, educational and vocational problems (Republic of Kenya, 2019). In a study carried out in Kisumu District, Ajowi and Simatwa (2010) established that the role of guidance and counselling in the administration and improving the psychological well-being of students who are undergoing psychological challenges in schools has been recognized by the various government policy documents since independence.

In Makeni County, secondary schools have embraced counselling as a tool for enhancing the psychological well-being of students with daily challenges. A study carried out in a sample of 19 secondary schools in Makeni County by Mutinda (2014) revealed that counselling activities undertaken in schools help students who are vulnerable to cope with stressful situations like loss of parents and select careers, based on aptitude and interest and not on familiarity or perceived status of the career. However, these assertions need further re-examination as Mutinda (2014) as well as other empirical researchers have not articulated how each counselling strategy adopted by schools influences the psychological well-being of orphaned students in secondary schools.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationship between strategy implementation and organizational performance. Conducted in Makeni County, the study targeted 1,979 respondents, including principals, teacher-counselors, and orphaned students from 393 public secondary schools. The sample size was 333 respondents selected through stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Data collection involved questionnaires for teacher-counselors and structured interviews for principals and students. A pilot study validated and assessed the reliability of research instruments, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.802 indicating high reliability. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, particularly Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, facilitated by SPSS. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, providing narrative insights. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and data confidentiality, were rigorously followed. Logistical planning ensured efficient data collection, supported by a data assistant, and robust data management practices were implemented.

### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Findings

##### 4.1.1 Response Rate

The respondents who participated in this study were 66 principals, 169 teacher-counsellors and 98 orphaned students in public secondary schools in Makeni County, Kenya. The response rate was presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Questionnaires Return Rate**

Respondents	Sample	Returned	Return Rate
Principals	66	27	40.9%
Teacher-counsellors	169	148	87.6%
Orphaned Students	98	90	91.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>79.6%</b>

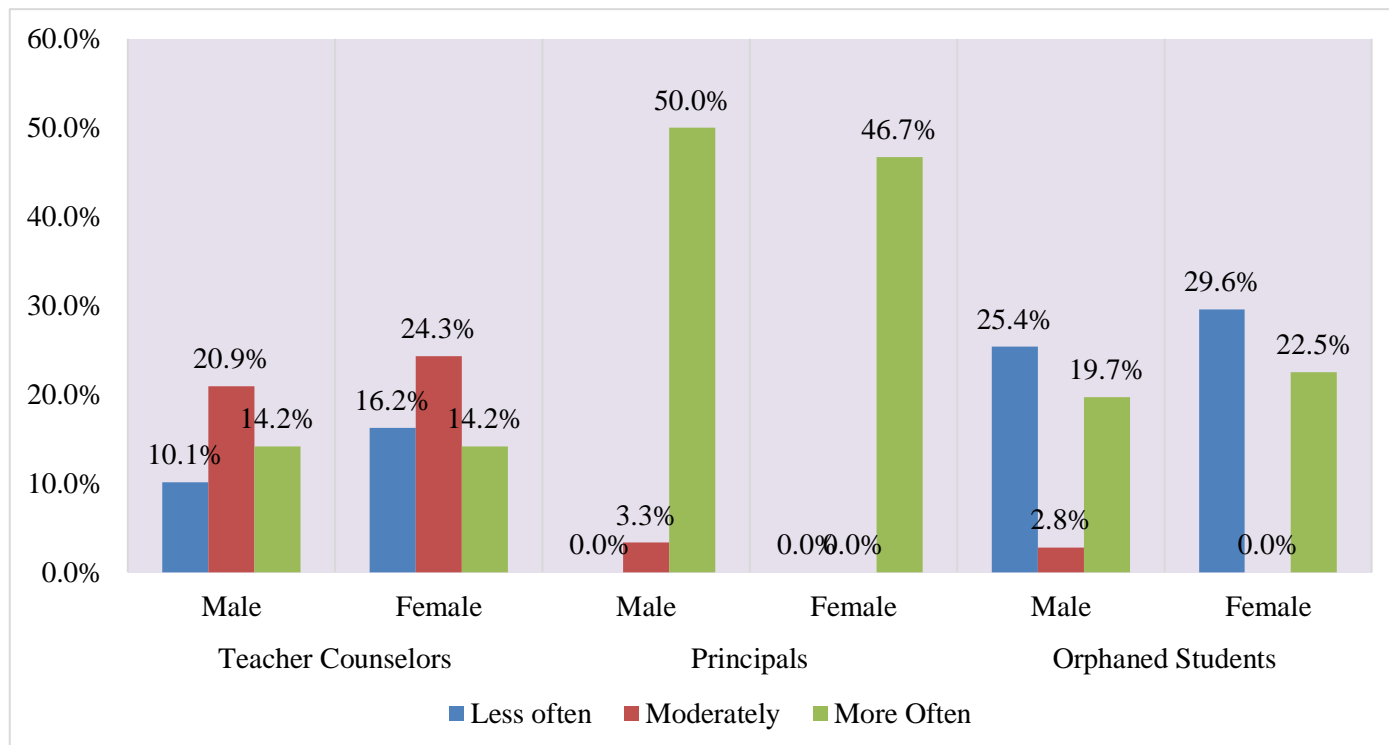
The questionnaires return rate as presented in Table 1 shows that 40.9% of the principals, 87.6% of teachers and 91.8% of the orphaned students participated in the study. Overall, the response rate was 79.6%. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) observe that a 50 percent return rate is adequate for analysis and reporting. A response rate of 60



percent is good and a response rate of 70 percent and over is very good. The response rate for this study was therefore very good since it was over 70 percent. This would provide the required information for purposes of data analysis hence this could enhance sample representation and meaningful generalization.

#### 4.1.2 Principals’ Counselling Strategies

Additionally, data on the distribution of gender and levels of principals’ enforcement of counselling strategies was collected. The results are summarised in Figure 1.

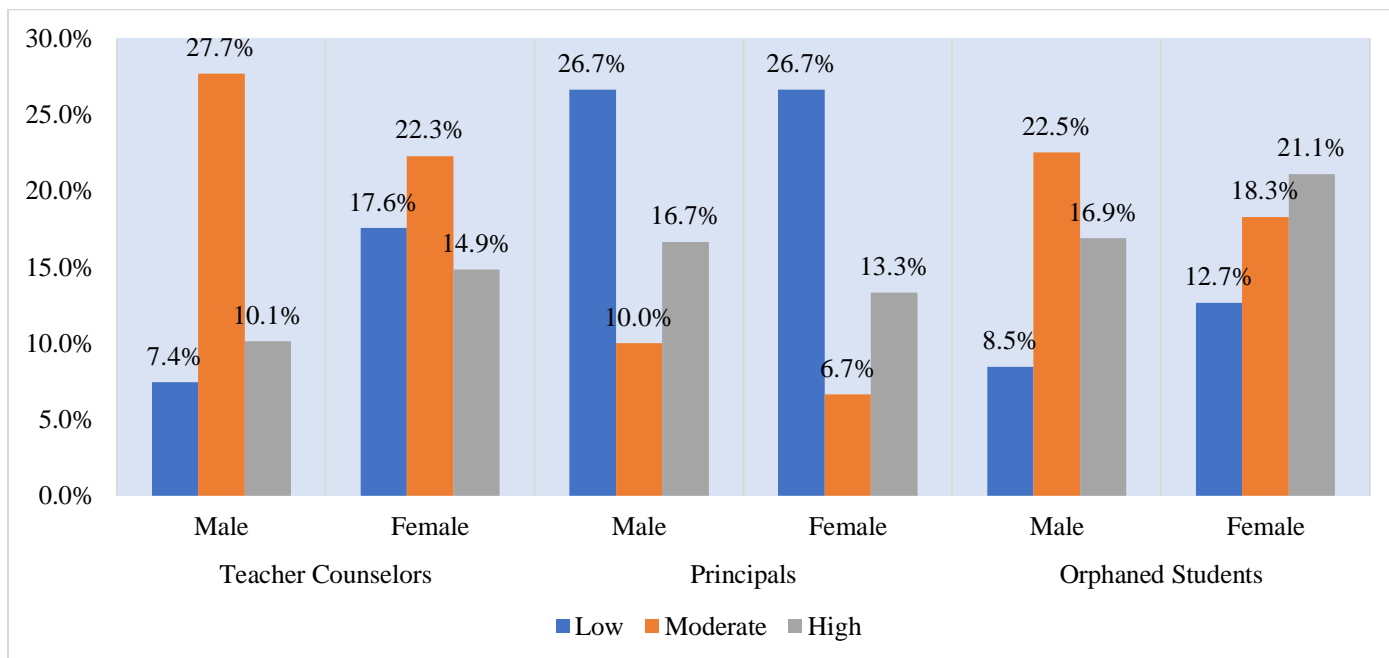


**Figure 1**  
*Distribution of Respondents across Gender and Levels of Principals’ Counselling Strategies*

As per the data, 50.0% male and 46.7% female principals engaged in counselling more often. Also, 3.3% male and 0.0% female principals engaged in counselling moderately. All principals engaged in counselling. About 14.2% male and 14.2% female teacher counsellors engaged in counselling more often. Also, 20.9% male and 24.3% female teacher counsellors engaged in counselling moderately. Finally, 10.1% male and 16.2% teacher counsellors engaged in counselling less often. About 19.7% male and 22.5% female orphaned students were involved in counselling more often. Also, 2.8% male and 0.0% female orphaned students were involved in counselling moderately. Finally, 25.4% male and 29.6% female orphaned students were involved in counselling less often.

#### 4.1.3 Psychological Wellbeing of Orphaned Students in Public Secondary Schools in Makueni County

Teacher counsellors were requested to rate the psychological well-being of orphaned students. In this case, the teachers were supposed to assess and report orphaned students’ well-being in terms of purpose in life, positive relations, autonomy, and self-acceptance. The responses are summarised in Figure 2.



**Figure 2**  
Overall Ratings of Orphaned Students’ Psychological Wellbeing as Rated by Teacher Counsellors, Principals and Orphaned Students

Figure 5 shows that the teacher counsellors rated the male orphaned students’ psychological well-being as moderate (27.7%), low (7.4%), and high (10.1%). The teachers also rated female orphaned students’ psychological well-being as moderate (22.3%), low (17.6%), and high (14.9%). Principals rated the male orphaned students’ psychological well-being as moderate (10.0%), low (26.7%), and high (16.7%). The principals also rated female orphaned students’ psychological well-being as moderate (6.7%), low (26.7%), and high (13.3%). Male orphaned students rated their own psychological well-being as moderate (22.5%), low (8.5%), and high (16.9%). Finally, female orphaned students rated their own psychological well-being as moderate (18.3%), low (12.7%), and high (21.1%).

Responding to the question, “How often does your principal undertake counselling activities for orphaned students in your secondary school?” The principals reported that the counselling activities for orphaned students in their schools were a weekly activity, occasionally inviting external speakers. This report was confirmed by the students who reported that in most of their schools they held counselling session every week.

Responding to the question on the influence of principal’s counselling strategies on the psychological well-being of orphaned students in their secondary schools, 21 principals said,

“The counselling sessions in our schools have a positive impact on the psychological well-being of orphaned students in their secondary schools”. On the other hand, 72 students said,

“The counselling in our school always helps us in improving psychological well-being of orphaned students in their secondary schools”

#### 4.1.4 Correlation Analysis

The researcher tested hypothesis  $H_{01}$  which stated that;

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant relationship between principals’ counseling strategies and the psychological well-being of orphaned students in public secondary schools in Makueni County.

To test this hypothesis, Pearson’s Correlation coefficient was used. The results were presented in Table1.



**Table 1**  
*Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the Relationship between Principals’ Counselling Strategies and The Psychological Well-Being Of Orphaned Students*

		Counselling strategies	Psychological Wellbeing of Orphaned Students Scores
Counselling strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.401(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	148	148
Psychological Wellbeing of Orphaned Students Scores	Pearson Correlation	.401(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	148	148

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows that a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.401, p < 0.01$ ) between principals’ counselling strategies and the psychological well-being of orphaned students in public secondary schools in Makueni County. Since the p-value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, null hypothesis  $H_{01}$  is rejected. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between these two variables

The findings suggest that the implementation of counselling strategies by principals positively influences the psychological well-being of orphaned students. When schools prioritize providing counselling support and resources to orphaned students, there is an associated improvement in their emotional stability and overall well-being.

#### 4.2 Discussions

As per the findings, respondents indicated their principal often helps in setting up peer counselling centres. The study’s results agree with Kauchak (2016), who revealed that counselling practices adopted by different secondary schools form an integral part of an exercise aimed at promoting students’ psychological well-being. Additionally, Nugent (2017) indicated that, next to counsellors, teachers are the most important components in implementing a successful comprehensive counselling programme. In other words, teachers are the key adult figure in the average school day. They are the most influential figures, be it positive or negative, to the average student. To lend credence to these findings, Othman and Baker (2017), revealed that teacher-counsellors represent the first line of defence in identifying students’ special needs which positively or negatively hamper their desire to enrol and participate in school activities. They are the key advisors to the children and represent the best hope of personalization of learning.

According to the study’s results, the strength of a person's relationships and their sense of belonging in a social setting are key components of social well-being. The findings are congruent with Keyes (1998), who indicated that social well-being is a component of psychological well-being, especially among students. Social well-being is especially important for orphaned students in Kenya's public secondary schools because of the distinctive social obstacles they could face. Congruent with this study’s findings, the study by Wang (1997) found that schools have a significant influence on the development of peer connections. Principals should employ discipline strategies that address both behavioural issues and the development of healthy peer relationships. The assertions are supported by Ryan and Deci (2000), who indicated that principals should play a critical role in creating a sense of acceptance and belonging in schools, Ryan and Deci (2000). Principals who encourage inclusiveness and celebrate variety contribute to the social wellness of orphaned children. Similarly, a study by Oyedele et al. (2016) reveals orphans are less likely to perform well in class since they lack the basic needs such as love from parents to motivate them to learn and succeed in school. These orphaned students have to go through distress alone without proper guidance, which severely impact their psychological wellbeing while in school in the long run.

The findings indicate that principals play a critical role in minimising stigma. Consequently, children from all backgrounds feel included, and this contributes to positive psychological well-being of orphaned students. The assertions are congruent with those of Bano et al. (2019), who found that orphaned children are often looked down upon because of their situation and this tend to affect their psychological wellbeing in the long run, no matter the situation. Similar to the findings by Hermenau et al. (2015), rules and regulations that specifically discourage any form of discrimination and stigmatization from the institutions or other students within the institutions have a positive influence on orphaned students’ psychological well-being.

The study also established that the disciplinary management techniques used in schools are closely related to psychological health. The findings agree with Wang (2017) that disciplinary procedures affect students' mental health. However, constructive discipline techniques like restorative justice procedures can benefit students' psychological well-being. Restorative justice strategies put an emphasis on making amends, creating connections, and encouraging

empathy, all of which are consistent with Kenyan culture's collectivist ideals. This study's findings agree with existing literature that the psychological well-being of orphaned pupils is supported in schools by having supportive principals. For instance, Nzomo and Mutisya (2019) study emphasizes the importance of leadership in determining the culture of a school. Principals found that a supportive learning environment is appropriate because it benefits all students, including orphans, by embracing a transformational leadership style that is marked by support, empathy, and a focus on individual needs. The assertions are echoed by Mbugua (2018) who said that leaders should be culturally responsive.

The study's findings concur with Bowen (2017) who points out that community involvement may significantly improve the social well-being of orphaned pupils. Similar findings were reported by Stefanski et al. (2016), who said that schools that cooperate with the neighbourhood community give these pupils access to extra support systems. These collaborations can include counselling, extracurricular activities, and mentoring that help strengthen students' feelings of social belonging (Stefanski et al., 2016). Participation in the community enhances schooling while also enhancing the overall wellbeing of orphaned pupils. Orphaned students in Kenyan public secondary schools must have a strong sense of social well-being in order to maintain psychological health. By using discipline management techniques that foster wholesome peer relationships, inclusiveness, and community involvement, principals can have a beneficial impact on this dimension.

The study established that the effects of psychological health on educational outcomes go beyond academic success. The findings concur with Helliwell and Wang (2013), who indicate that psychological well-being is a key sign of a country's general performance and standard of living. Subjective well-being also includes physical well-being. This implies that fostering psychological health inside the school system might have significant positive effects on society. Similarly, a research by Suldo et al. (2011) also emphasised the long-term influences of psychological well-being on professional performance and overall happiness. Higher levels of wellbeing among students during their academic years are associated with greater likelihood of pursuing rewarding occupations and leading fulfilled lives.

The findings indicate that principals' leadership strategies have a significant impact on the psychological health of orphaned pupils. The results align with those of Sabwami et al. (2020) who found that principals' leadership styles affect orphaned pupils. Those who demonstrated transformational leadership traits like empathy, support, and collaborative decision-making fostered an inclusive and nurturing learning environment. These settings were proven to greatly improve the mental health of orphaned students. These pupils' emotional needs were better catered to by transformational leaders, who also offered a secure environment for their progress. In a similar line, Damiano (2022) looked at how principal leadership styles affected the mental health of orphaned pupils. Once more, it was discovered that emotional health in students is positively connected with transformational leadership. The psychological difficulties experienced by orphaned pupils were significantly lessened by principals who demonstrated empathy, support, and a dedication to developing healthy student-teacher connections. These findings highlight the need of transformative leadership in developing a safe learning environment for vulnerable pupils.

According to the study findings, principals should strive to create a supportive environment for learners. These findings concur with the assertion that the development of a positive school climate is crucial for the mental health of orphaned students as shown in (Jessiman et al., 2022). It was established that orphaned children's psychological wellbeing was positively impacted by administrators who actively created a climate of inclusivity, empathy, and support inside the school. These principals promoted an atmosphere where children felt respected, safe, and understood, which helped them build their emotional fortitude. Similar findings were reported by Alem (2020) who asserted that leaders who promoted a supportive school climate were better at helping orphaned pupils emotionally. The principals made sure orphaned pupils had the support and understanding required for their psychological wellbeing was made possible thanks in large part to the principal's leadership in developing a nurturing school culture.

The study findings established that orphaned students face significant challenges and principals' initiatives to offer counselling services help them cope. The findings agree with Maingi (2019) who asserted that principals' leadership affected the assistance provided to pupils who had lost a parent. Principals should be proactive and compassionate in recognizing and meeting orphaned students' emotional needs. By showing a sense of concern and empathy for their students, principals who actively connect with those who have experienced loss contribute to their psychological wellbeing. Emotional support is crucial in assisting orphaned students in overcoming their grief and moving forward with their academic careers on more solid emotional ground. The findings echo those of Cooper (2021) who indicated that orphaned pupils who received direct encouragement and counselling services from principals expressed higher levels of psychological wellbeing. The lives of orphaned students are greatly impacted by the principals who take the time to listen, encourage, and foster an inclusive school climate. This emphasizes how crucial principle leadership is in identifying and meeting the special requirements of orphaned kids, ultimately enhancing their well-being.



The study established that for orphaned students to succeed in school environments, principals should ensure they offer extra assistance and inclusive policies. The findings are in agreement with Onyango (2021), who looked at how principal leadership affected the creation and application of inclusive policies that catered to the needs of orphaned kids. Principals who support inclusive policies help to foster a welcoming and encouraging learning environment. This in turn decreases feelings of loneliness and encourages a sense of belonging, which has a good effect on the psychological health of orphaned kids. Similar findings are echoed by Alem (2020), who said principals who actively engaged in conflict resolution and used restorative justice strategies helped create a more peaceful and emotionally supportive learning environment. These methods not only successfully handled disagreements but also assisted students in developing more solid interpersonal ties, thereby improving their psychological wellbeing. In support of the assertions, Mendenhall et al. (2021) indicated that orphaned pupils perceive the methods used by principals to solve conflicts and counsel fair, sympathetic, and good express higher levels of psychological well-being. Students' emotional health was significantly aided by principals who placed a high priority on peaceful dispute resolution because they did so by fostering a sense of safety and understanding among their students.

From the findings, it is shown that the multifaceted and influential role of school principals in shaping the psychological well-being of orphaned students in secondary schools extends to their involvement in counselling efforts. Principals who prioritize inclusive policies, supportive school climates, and collaborative decision-making processes play a pivotal role in enhancing the psychological well-being of these vulnerable students, offering them the emotional support and sense of belonging that are vital components of effective counselling efforts. One of the key ways in which principals contribute to counselling efforts is by creating a school environment that is conducive to emotional well-being. By fostering a supportive school climate, principals set the stage for effective counselling interventions. Orphaned students, who often face unique emotional challenges, benefit immensely from an environment where they feel safe, respected, and understood. This welcoming atmosphere, championed by principals, provides the foundation upon which counselling efforts can thrive. Moreover, principals who prioritize inclusive policies send a clear message that all students, including orphaned ones, are valued members of the school community. This inclusivity extends to counselling services, ensuring that orphaned students have equal access to the emotional support they require. It eliminates any potential stigma or barriers that might hinder orphaned students from seeking counselling, creating an environment where they feel comfortable seeking help.

In addition, collaborative decision-making processes, as emphasised by principals, are integral to effective counselling efforts. When stakeholders, including counsellors, teachers, parents, and students, are actively involved in decision-making, it results in a more holistic and comprehensive approach to addressing the psychological needs of orphaned students. Principals who facilitate such collaboration ensure that counselling services are tailored to the specific needs of these students, making them more effective in promoting psychological well-being. Furthermore, principals who champion counselling efforts contribute to a culture where seeking emotional support is normalized. By openly endorsing and promoting counselling services, they help reduce the stigma often associated with seeking help for emotional challenges. This reduction in stigma is particularly crucial for orphaned students, who may be hesitant to seek support due to feelings of shame or isolation. The principals' leadership in creating inclusive policies, fostering supportive school climates, and facilitating collaborative decision-making processes paves the way for effective counselling interventions. Principals who prioritize these aspects not only improve the psychological well-being of orphaned students but also contribute to a school environment where seeking emotional support is encouraged and normalized. This, in turn, empowers orphaned students to overcome their emotional challenges, thrive academically, and build a brighter future.

## V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The hypothesis enriches our understanding by establishing a significant relationship between counselling strategies and the psychological well-being of orphaned students. The triangulation of data from various sources, including school records, counsellor interviews, and student self-reports, reaffirms this relationship. It underscores that the presence of counselling sessions in schools, dedicated counselling centres, and competent peer counsellors plays a pivotal role in positively influencing the psychological well-being of orphaned students.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that principals should prioritize the availability of counselling services within schools and ensure that teacher-counsellors are well-equipped through capacity building to provide guidance and support to students, especially orphaned ones. Furthermore, the government, through the Ministry of Education, should develop

and implement policies that specifically address the psychological well-being of orphaned students within the education system by ensuring the availability of counselling services and mentorship programs.

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