

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

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of peer-related factors on the psychosocial adjustment of students in public secondary schools in Bomet County, Kenya. Psychosocial adjustment is demanded of students once they enter secondary school. Numerous research on psychosocial adjustment done have not examined the impact of peer-related factors on students' psychosocial adjustment. Psychosocial and social-ecological theories served as the study's foundation. Convergent parallel mixed research design and the pragmatic research philosophy were employed. Data was gathered from form three pupils, guidance and counselling teachers, and deputy principals. With 555 participants, a sample of 88 public secondary schools was selected from a total of 294 secondary schools in Bomet County. Interview schedules and questionnaires were used as data collection tools. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered, and they were analysed thematically and using descriptive statistics, respectively. According to the study, the majority of public secondary schools had created initiatives to increase students' awareness of the negative effects of peer-related factors; students' psychosocial adjustment was found to have a strong positive significant relationship with peer-related factors ($r=0.615$). According to the study's findings, students who have experienced peer-related problems can benefit from advice and counselling in order to successfully adjust to school. According to the study, schools should implement a program to evaluate students' peer-related factors, raise awareness of the guidance and counselling services that are available, and encourage students to seek assistance from the department whenever they encounter problems that they are unable to handle in class.

Key terms: Academic performance, peer-related factors, psychosocial adjustment.

INTRODUCTION

Psychosocial adjustment is an umbrella term that encompasses three dimensions: psychological adjustment as reflected in emotional/behavioural problems/disorders and self-esteem; social adjustment and peer relationships; and school performance. Adjustment is defined as a process wherein one builds variations in the behaviour to achieve harmony with oneself, others or the environment with an aim to maintain the state of equilibrium between the individual and the environment. The adjustment has been analysed as an achievement as well as a process in psychology (Conley et al., 2013).

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

Peer victimisation is linked to behavioural problems (Idsoe et al., 2021), as well as decreased cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation capacity (Palamarchuk & Vaillancourt, 2022). Adulthood may see many of these effects (Moore et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2017). According to a review of the literature, attempts to lessen the detrimental effects of peer victimisation on teenage mental health have mostly concentrated on curbing bullying behaviour, with little success (Gokkaya, 2017; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Jadambaa et al., 2020).

Further, treatment for the impacts of bullying frequently commonly happens in school group settings (Gokkaya, 2017). In contrast, studies examining certain psychological interventions that directly assist the sufferer have been overlooked. In order to address this, the current study examines how peer victimisation affects students' psychological adjustment in public secondary schools located in Bomet County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Peer-Related Factors and Psychosocial Adjustment

Students' psychosocial adjustment in school is largely influenced by the student's perception of social acceptance or rejection by their peers. The level of classroom integration determines the level of the student's performance in school, both in terms of academic outcomes and extracurricular activities. (Sentse et al., 2017). Moreno et al. (2020) argued that a perceived lack of social acceptance of a student from their friends' can make them develop a traumatic experience associated with a negative assessment of their life and can cause emotional distress. Further, Esposito et al. (2019) indicated that a student lacking social acceptance from peers might lead to external problems such as anger, hostility, and high levels of anxiety. Poor integration of students in the classroom has been found to cause the development of antisocial behaviours, including bullying and violence in schools. A study to assess the relationship between school integration, psychosocial adjustment, and aggression among adolescents by León Moreno et al. (2021) found a significant positive relationship between life satisfaction, sociometrist type, and aggression among adolescents. The study investigated the relationship between rejections, preferable, neglected, life satisfaction, and psychological discomfort in adolescents in Spain. The study found that snubbed students in school revealed less satisfaction with life and aggressiveness. In addition, regardless of the boys' social metric type in the class, they exhibited lower psychological distress than girls. They also revealed less involvement in bullying or aggressiveness. However, adolescents who had controversial behaviour displayed high involvement in bullying and cyber aggressiveness.

Research indicates that the frequency of bullying is a key factor affecting adolescent mental health. Adolescents who are frequently bullied are more likely to experience severe depression, and some victims may even become perpetrators, bullying their peers or others. Recently, studies have also begun to examine how different forms of bullying influence adolescent mental health. It has been found that the type of bullying is a crucial factor as well. Early research focused on identifying which forms of bullying had the most profound impact on mental health, but findings

have varied across countries and regions. For example, 1,302 people participated in a survey by Maunder et al. (2010), which included staff, teachers, and students from four secondary schools in England. According to their findings, students were most harmed by physical bullying. Chen et al. (2012) conducted a survey of middle school students in Taiwan, China, using two samples: 605 and 869 students. They discovered that relational bullying—which includes spreading rumours and cyberbullying—had a greater effect than verbal or physical bullying. Data from 10,273 secondary school students in Victoria, Australia, from the inaugural adolescent health survey, which was carried out in 2009, was examined by Thomas et al. (2017). Of the four types of bullying (name-calling, rumours, neglect, and physical bullying), they found that neglect had the largest correlation with mental health.

An investigation on the effects of psychosocial variables on first-year students in campus adjustment in Delta State, Nigeria, by Obumse and Egenti (2021) found that peer pressure had a highly significant effect on social adjustment on the campus. The main focus of the study was to evaluate the influence of peer pressure on students' self-efficacy. Peer pressure had a greater influence on the student's social adjustment in school. Thus, the study recommended that parents and teachers in learning institutions should observe changes in adolescents' behaviour in order to manage the effects of destructive peer group pressure on social adjustment. Da Silva et al. (2020) examined the bidirectional relationship between bullying perpetration and internalising among the youth. The main objective of the study was to document the patterns of behaviour exhibited by bully victims and develop interventions for the prevention of peer victimisation. Through a cross-section study involving 13,200 youths aged between 12 and 17 years, they found out that the majority of the youth suffered long-term mental challenges after being victimised by their peers. However, exposure to the perpetrators and subsequent intervention preventing bullying significantly reduced the psychological effect caused to the victims. Internalising problems, if not controlled or prevented through appropriate mechanisms, can lead to an increased probability of bullying others.

In order to determine the impact of peers on form one pupils' transition to secondary school, Sarah et al. (2016) conducted a study in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The study design employed was an explanatory survey. The study focused on 14,043 first-graders in Uasin Gishu County, 207 school administrators, and 207 counsellors. The results showed that peers had a significant impact on form one students' adjustment, confirming that a friendly and encouraging social environment had a good impact on students' adjustment and retention in school. The significance of peer support is heavily emphasised, with the role of other school stakeholders being entirely ignored. According to the study, a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere aids in kids' adjustment and raises their school retention rate. This study examined the impact of peer victimisation on the psychological adjustment of students in public secondary schools in Bomet County, whereas the previous study concentrated on the adjustment of form one students in secondary school in Uasin Gishu County. According to the current study, students' school adjustment and, in turn, their academic success depends heavily on the psychological support of their peers, teachers, significant others, and the entire school environment.

Family-Related Factors Influencing Students' Psychosocial Adjustment

Family-related factors present the interaction that occurs between parents and children. The parents can either be biological parents or step-parents who live with the children under one roof (Kay et al., 2019). Sanders and Turner (2018) hold that parents should support and help children to grow and become physically, mentally, psychologically, morally, and socially upright. Further, children brought up in an intact family with strong unity lead to proper reasoning, interacting well with peers in the learning institution, behaving well and working tirelessly to achieve academic goals. Parents typically believe that their life experience may offer the best protection for their children, and children are expected to heed their parents' wishes and follow the rules. Their children will always require their parents' care and assistance since they will never grow up (Qiang, 2011).

Family factors, according to research on bullying, are very important in the development of personalities of

children who are bullying or victims of others. The attitudes and behaviours of families greatly affect the behaviour of children in social life. Any negative attitude between either of the parents and the child, excessive punishment, physical discipline / inconsistent and loss of control, using a socially acceptable physical attack, negative relationship between the parents and the child, and the nature of the child are very important elements in terms of bullying (Kanik, 2010). Moreover, the overprotective behaviours of parents and their dependence on the family make the child a potential victim of bullying. The opposite of this, which is to free the child, not to show love and attention, lack of empathy, domestic violence and conflicts increase the likelihood of bullying (Gökler, 2009).

Family transitions have an impact on children throughout their lives and are linked to early family formation, lower income, decreased mobility, a higher chance of high school dropout, a lower chance of completing university, and more (Bloome, 2017; Hampden-Thomson & Galindo, 2015). Parents play a vital role in the emotional growth of children. They help them define who they are as human beings and influence how each adapts to societal norms. The home is the first place the children discover the importance of values and what it means to belong. From childhood, youth are conditioned to believe that the family is comprised of a mother, father and children (Encyclopedia Britannia, 2017). Common non-normative transitions include parents' separation/divorce. Access to resources, low attachment, income, ownership of marital property, unequal property sharing in the event of a separation or divorce, having a large family, poor parenting, and a lack of conflict resolution skills are some of the major factors influencing intra-family constellations in Kenya (Njenga, 2016).

A family environment is composed of a family unit of a mother, father, children, and other members residing within the same house and interacting freely among themselves (Kurt, 2022). Alam and Hadler (2018) argue that the family environment strongly influences children's behavioural and cognitive environment. In other words, the family environment is considered to be the quantity and quality of emotional, social, and mental support available at home. An adolescent's

student social adjustment is linked to his school and home relationship. It is asserted that a student living in a well-integrated home helps control the attitude and behaviour wholesomely in school life.

It has been observed that social adjustment and parenting style are related (Garcia et al., 2020). In-depth studies on the role of families in peer victimisation and psychosocial adjustment among Kenyan adolescents attending public secondary schools are still lacking, nevertheless. According to Shradha and Surila (2015), there is fierce competition in today's world to establish a strong position and then fight to keep it.

In a study by Ozcinar (2006), it was revealed that the family serves as the primary socialisation unit and is, therefore, a key influence on a child's development. As society becomes more materialistic and modernised, adolescents face increasing challenges in adjustment compared to previous generations. Parenting plays a crucial role in a child's emotional security and attachment, as parents who are attentive to their child's needs for safety and care foster secure bonds (Bowlby, 1988). Literature on parenting suggests that by combining warmth (acceptance) and control, four parenting styles can be identified, each associated with distinct developmental outcomes for children (Durbin et al., 1993). These parenting styles, categorised by levels of demandingness and responsiveness, include: Indulgent (Permissive), Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Uninvolved (Maccoby et. al., 1983). Each style reflects a balance of parental responsiveness and demandingness, leading to varied impacts on child development.

Indulgent Parents are more responsive than demanding, often lenient and allowing considerable self-regulation. They avoid enforcing mature behaviour and rarely confront their children (Baumrind, 1991). Indulgent parents can be further divided into democratic, who are lenient but engaged, and non-directive, who allow more freedom. Permissive parents, for example, let their children regulate their activities and make life decisions without much parental guidance (Baumrind, 1966). **Authoritarian Parents**, on the other hand, are highly demanding but not responsive. They enforce strict

rules and expect obedience without question. These parents value control and authority, shaping their children's behaviour according to strict standards, often through punitive measures (Baumrind, 1991). Obedience is expected without explanation. **Authoritative Parents** balance demandingness with responsiveness. They set clear expectations but encourage open discussion and reasoning as children grow older. Authoritative parents guide their children's actions with support and communication, fostering both assertiveness and social responsibility (Baumrind, 1996).

Various factors contribute to adjustment challenges among at-risk children. For example, Baker and Heller (1996) found that childhood behavioural disorders were linked to family stress and maladjustment. Higher externalising behaviours in children were associated with negative family impacts and more authoritarian parenting practices. Early childhood adjustment is often shaped more by parental characteristics and the family environment than external factors. Kaufmann et al. (2000) studied the relationship between parenting styles and socio-emotional adjustment in elementary school children, finding that authoritative parenting was associated with fewer maladaptive behaviours and more positive adjustment indicators. Goran and Kerstin (2007) examined parent-adolescent conflicts in Swedish adolescents, finding that authoritative conflict resolution (based on mutual respect) was linked to better adjustment, whereas authoritarian and indulgent conflict patterns were associated with lower psychosocial adjustment.

Several studies (LeDoux et al., 1998) have highlighted the relationship between family environment factors—such as cohesion, expressiveness, organisation, and conflict—and adjustment. Lee et al. (2006) identified distinct parenting patterns that differentially influenced adolescents' behaviour and adjustment, linking family interactions to academic achievement and self-concept development. The behaviours and dynamics within the family play a vital role in shaping an individual's adjustment and behaviour patterns (O'Leary, 1995). Accordingly, self-esteem can be derived from possessing intellect, riches, a nice home, a fancy car, and a prominent

position (Melgosa, 2010). According to Ulrich & Robins' (2014) research, self-centred motivation is demonstrated by the holding of principles and valued beliefs as well as a want to assist others. According to empirical research, adults who have higher self-esteem have less anxiety (Sailer et al., 2014).

Njoku (2021) sought to determine the effect of family structure on psychosocial adjustment in secondary schools in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The study focused mainly on single and step-parent families and how they influenced the student's psychosocial adjustment in secondary school. It was observed that there was a significant influence of family structure on the psychosocial adjustment of students in secondary schools in Ebonyi. The findings could not be generalised to represent the findings of family environment because the data was only obtained from single and step-parent families. Therefore, this study addressed the gap by focusing on the family environment at large.

Kay et al. (2019) conducted a study to examine the impact of family constellations on the psychosocial adjustment of university students in Nakuru County, Kenya. Specifically, the study focused on self-efficacy, self-esteem, social skills development, pro-social behaviour and emotional intelligence of regular university students. The result indicated that self-efficacy and self-esteem had statistically significant differences with the different family setups. The study used undergraduate students, whereas this study used secondary school students.

School-Related Factors

Secondary school pupils in Kenya, particularly those starting from one, struggle to strike a balance between their personal demands and how these requirements are met in the classroom. Both psychological and social factors are important in any social setting, such as school, in order to achieve desirable attitudes, good relationships and proper self-understanding that will enhance students' adjustment to the new environment.

A school is an institution that provides the individual with social responsibilities, self-control and respect for other individuals, as well as with education and

training. Every child and young person has the right to get access to education in a safe school environment (Leach, 2005). However, children / young people can be deprived of these rights for many reasons, and unwanted behaviours defined as bullying in schools can be encountered. Research indicates that bullying, one of the most significant issues facing schools, has become more widespread and is impeding their ability to function as safe establishments (Gökler, 2009; Hoşgörür & Orhan, 2017).

Bullying is characterised as the systematic use of aggression by an individual to injure someone he perceives to be weaker (Olweus, 2013). While some scholars define bullying as intentional aggression directed at others, others contend that aggressive behaviour must be repeated on a regular basis to be considered bullying. As a result, the researchers have not fully agreed upon the definition (Yaman et al., 2011). Bullying is defined as "intentional, repeated, negative (unpleasant or hurtful) behaviour by one or more persons directed against a person who has difficulty defending himself or herself" by Olweus (1993), who also provided the term that is most frequently used. The literature indicates that bullying behaviours vary between boys and girls (Perkins & Montford, 2005) and that children who experience domestic violence are more likely to be bullied themselves (Grinberg et al., 2005). Girls are less likely than boys to be bullied by or bully others in school, despite the fact that boys tend to engage in direct bullying-type behaviours while girls mostly employ indirect bullying techniques (Gültan, 2019). Bullying at school has detrimental psychological impacts that both bullies and victims will experience for the rest of their lives. Adolescent trauma will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on a person's life (UNICEF, 2018).

Bullying in school has been shown to have a detrimental impact on children's physical and mental health by lowering attendance and encouraging absenteeism. Bullying is a syndrome in schools because its effects extend beyond school life and can have detrimental effects, including suicide (Yaman et al., 2011; Yelboğa & Koçak, 2019). Bullying is a hot topic that organisations, particularly the "Ministry of Education" and the media, focus on because of the rise in bullying incidents in our nation's schools in

recent years and the cases that result in death. Research on bullying in Turkey is also gaining traction daily (Yelboğa & Koçak, 2019). According to a study by Yelboğa and Koçak (2019), bullying can be physical, emotional, social, or psychological, and it is not impulsive or unplanned but rather deliberate, methodical, and planned. Although there are more boys than girls who are bullied, victims of bullying are equally distributed throughout the sexes. Girls, as a collective, exclude the victim they choose, but boys are frequently motivated by personal abilities. The percentage of people who reported being bullied declined steadily between the ages of 8 and 16, while the percentage of people who reported being bullied did not decline.

On the other side, bullying at school refers to the deliberate, voluntary, and persistent physical targeting of a weaker classmate (kick, slap, push, pull, etc.). To verbally abuse, insult, ridicule, chastise, and degrade 3) to spread rumours, gossip, and threaten to take money or other belongings from students who are less powerful. This kind of aggression leaves the victims alone and separates them from their friends, causing discomfort where the victim is powerless to defend herself (Gültan, 2019; Yelboğa & Koçak, 2019).

Olweus (1994) distinguished three types of bullying despite the fact that there are various typologies: verbal bullying, physical bullying, and social exclusion. Social exclusion is regarded as indirect bullying, but the latter two are treated as direct bullying because they are observable (Smith & Ananiadou, 2003). While open attacks like pushing, hitting, teasing, threatening, and damaging a peer's belongings are examples of direct bullying, exclusion from the social group, gossip, embarrassment, or cyberbullying are examples of indirect bullying that does not require the victim and bully to come into direct contact (Li, 2006).

Indirect bullying frequently occurs both on and off school grounds, while direct bullying occurs in the classroom or in the schoolyard. According to reports, girls are more likely to experience indirect bullying, while male students are more likely to experience direct bullying (Berger, 2007; Pepler et al., 2006; Rigby & Johnson, 2005). Typical Features of Bullying at School According to studies, bullying at school varies

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by nation and culture (Gültan, 2019; Hoşgörür & Orhan, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2003).

Although bullying among young people can occur in any setting, it typically occurs at school or on the way to and from school. Young people involved in bullying are at risk of poor school functioning, as measured by attitudes toward school, academic performance and absenteeism (Nashina et al., 2005). They may suffer significant psychological distress (Salmon et al., 1998), (Arseneault et al., 2006) and, in rare instances, take their own life (Marr & Field, 2001). Young people with serious psychosocial problems might experience problems associated with attention, behaviour, and emotional regulation, which interfere with their ability to learn (Nashina et al., 2005).

Although it is more common among boys and girls in elementary schools, bullying at school seems to be a complicated issue that peaks in its most severe manifestations around puberty. According to the most recent UNESCO data from 2019, 32% of pupils say they have experienced bullying from their peers at school at least once in the previous month. According to Olweus (2007), bullying is the persistent misuse of authority among peers, characterised by aggressive verbal, physical, and psychological actions by perpetrators against their helpless victims. Therefore, it is a very immoral phenomenon that jeopardises the welfare of people who are affected by it (Ortega-Ruiz, 2020). Bullying's abusive dynamics frequently start as a dispute in which the aggressor rapidly establishes unequal power and control over the victim. The social environment in the classroom plays a significant role in how this phenomenon starts, ends, or worsens, as well as the resulting level of victimisation experienced by the victimised student. More precisely, the set of explicit and implicit guidelines that students use to determine what conduct is appropriate in interpersonal relationships (Saarento et al., 2015).

Students in recent years have been evaluated on both individual and contextual factors, such as their social skills or conflict-resolution abilities, as well as openly stated bullying norms. Nonetheless, challenging circumstances have a significant impact on how bullying dynamics have changed throughout time. Few research has examined how these two characteristics

interact to affect bullying dynamics and, most intriguingly, the involvement of defensive and aggressive behaviour (Gaffney et al., 2019; Huitsing et al., 2019). The prevalence of bullying varies throughout student classrooms and entire schools.

Peer group dynamics, instructor traits, and demographic factors (such as class size) can all be used to identify risk factors at the classroom level. Differences in bullying at the classroom level do not appear to be adequately explained by demographic characteristics. For example, there is no concrete proof that the number of bullies or victims in a class is correlated with its size. When an association has been discovered, it frequently goes against what is typically expected: bullying has been found to be more prevalent in smaller classrooms as opposed to larger ones.

A number of additional demographic options have either produced contentious results or failed to adequately explain disparities between classes (such as the percentage of males or immigrants in a school). Peer group dynamics or teacher attributes are better suited to explain classroom variations (Saarento et al., 2015). Bullying behaviour is linked to classroom hierarchy: bullying is more common in highly hierarchical classrooms where authority (who usually makes decisions) and peer status (like popularity) are concentrated in a small number of people rather than being dispersed equally.

According to a recent study (Garandeanu et al., 2019), bullying eventually rises as a result of classroom hierarchy rather than the other way around. On the other side, bullying cannot thrive in a non-hierarchical classroom setting. Additionally, the reasons why children in particular classrooms are more likely to engage in bullying can be explained by classroom norms. Low levels of anti-bullying attitudes, positive expectations about the social consequences of pro-bullying behaviour, and negative expectations about the social consequences of victim behaviour are all indicators of pro-bullying norms, and they are all linked to students' increased likelihood of engaging in bullying in the classroom (Nocentini et al., 2013).

Researchers have worked hard over the last three decades to examine how bullying and victimisation affect people's physical, mental, social, and overall welfare. The key findings indicate that compared to their peers who are not victims, adolescents who experience bullying miss more school and exhibit symptoms of poor academic performance (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2011), report higher levels of loneliness and worse health (Fekkes et al., 2006), and experience higher levels of anxiety and depression (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). The intensity of the victimisation experience has an impact on these adverse consequences as well. According to research by Van der Plog et al. (2015), victims who experienced multiple or frequent bullying, as well as those who were bullied by several people, suffered more than victims whose experiences were less frequent or committed by fewer peers. Reijntjes et al. (2010) examined the connection between bullying and internalising issues. They came to the conclusion that these issues seem to be both causes and effects of peer victimisation, creating a "vicious cycle" that raises the stability of peer victimisation. Additionally, research has connected suicidal thoughts to victimisation (Holt et al., 2015; Klomek et al., 2015). Being bullied is linked to serious mental health symptoms in the short term, as noted by Arseneault et al. (2010) in their review. It also has long-term consequences that may endure until late adolescence. In a recent systematic study, McDougall and Vaillancourt (2015) emphasised the need for a multifaceted and intricate model to comprehend the direct and indirect connections between experiences of peer victimisation and subsequent adult outcomes.

Anti-bullying initiatives have been the subject of much research, with several school-based programs having undergone scientific evaluation. Such programs are frequently successful, according to Farrington and Ttofi's (2009) meta-analysis, which found an average reduction of 20–23% in bullying others and 17–20% in being bullied. According to Langford et al. (2015) and Ttofi & Farrington (2011), the effects are less pronounced when programs are assessed using stricter designs, like randomised controlled trials, and they also differ significantly amongst programs. It should be mentioned that certain programs have no good results, have never been studied, or have been

evaluated so inadequately that no conclusions about their impact can be made. Such programs are frequently successful, according to Farrington and Ttofi's (2009) meta-analysis, which found an average reduction of 20–23% in bullying others and 17–20% in being bullied. According to Langford et al. (2015) and Ttofi & Farrington (2011), the effects are less pronounced when programs are assessed using stricter designs, like randomised controlled trials, and they also differ significantly amongst programs. It should be mentioned that certain programs have no good results, have never been studied, or have been evaluated so inadequately that no conclusions about their impact can be made.

It is possible that a program achieves its best results when all of its components are employed together, but it is also possible that some components are in charge of the positive results while others have little to no impact. The cost-effectiveness of interventions must be evaluated from the standpoint of public health. Ttofi and Farrington (2011) looked into what makes bullying prevention programs effective. Based on an evaluation conducted across programs, they came to the conclusion that the success of programs is correlated with their duration (in days or months) and intensity (in hours). This implies that in order to achieve the intended results, programs must be extensive and long-lasting. The authors also found that disciplinary procedures (i.e., sanctions within a warm context) and parent training/parent meetings were associated with program effectiveness. The secret to success is the mobilisation of bystanders or the silence of the majority when bullying is occurring. According to research, peer witnesses' reactions have a critical role in either preventing or promoting bullying. Furthermore, rather than encouraging the behaviour of the bullies, some of the most successful programs, like the Finnish-developed KiVa anti-bullying program, focus on raising bystanders' awareness, empathy, and self-efficacy to support their victimised peers (Kärnä et al., 2010).

Despite the fact that Ttofi and Farrington's (2011) analysis did not find that adding the element "work with peers" strengthened the effects of anti-bullying programs, their coding work with peers defined it as "formal engagement of peers in tackling bullying"

(including the use of formally assigned peer mediators, or peer supporters), as opposed to educating students about the role of all peers and creating guidelines for bystander intervention in classrooms. Both theoretically and empirically, the latter kind of approach is strongly advised (Salmivalli, 2010). Current research indicates that formal peer helpers who intervene in bullying have minimal impact on persistent bullying. However, it should be mentioned that a study by Palladino et al. (2015) indicated that bullying among teenagers could be decreased by designating peers as educators and integrating them into awareness-raising. The way that preventative programs are implemented varies from school to school and from teacher to teacher. Depending on the resources and dedication in the schools, even programs that were intended to be intensive can be conducted more or less intensively. Additionally, teachers may modify some important aspects of the programs; in other words, they may choose not to administer the program as intended. There is proof that more implementation fidelity is linked to better results, such as a larger decrease in students' bullying experiences (Haataja et al., 2014).

In conclusion, school-wide initiatives to stop bullying are frequently effective. However, the results of these programs differ; some consistently have beneficial impacts, while others show little to no evidence of success. How can the diverging effects be explained? Programs must be comprehensive, duration-oriented, and faithfully carried out. Both the employment of disciplinary measures with bullies and the involvement of parents appear to increase the consequences. Improving anti-bullying norms and behaviours in classrooms is essential, as is educating kids about the role of the entire group in perpetuating bullying.

Nevertheless, little study has been done on this link with respect to protective behaviour. Less than half of teenagers who observe bullying take a defensive stance despite the fact that most students acknowledge bullying as an unethical activity in which the victims should be protected (van der Ploeg et al., 2017). Furthermore, a new study indicates that if the behaviour is not accepted by the peer group's implicit norms, protecting the victim may have detrimental social repercussions (Pouwels et al., 2018). A person

who practices pro-social conduct develops strategic, voluntary behaviour that benefits others (Eisenberg et al., 2006). This psychosocial skill involves the person becoming interested in other people's issues in order to assist them and offer socially acceptable solutions (García-Fernández et al., 2022). Low levels of pro-sociality have been linked in the past to aggressive behaviour in bullying situations (Zych et al., 2018). The social and moral elements that shape teenage behaviour, such as the emotional support kids receive in the classroom, actually have an impact on pro-social behaviour, which changes with age (Dereli, 2019).

According to García-Fernández et al. (2022), when defenders against bullying assist and encourage the victim, they may also become the target of aggression. However, it has also been discovered that bullies can dominate material and social resources by employing pro-social tactics (Roberts et al., 2020). Significant variations have been found in the impacts of age and gender. According to recent cross-cultural research and meta-analyses, boys are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviour (Smith et al., 2020) and girls in defensive behaviour (Ma et al., 2019). Generally speaking, boys are less likely than girls to exhibit social and normative adjustment (Bjärehed et al., 2020; Jiménez & Estévez, 2017; Longobardi et al., 2018), but pro-social skills are contrary (Roberts et al., 2020). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that pro-social abilities and social and normative adjustment decline throughout adolescence and then resurface in the latter stages of the transition to adulthood (Carlo & Padilla-Walker, 2020; Jiménez & Estévez, 2017).

Bullying and victimisation may happen early in life, but longitudinal studies show that the impacts can last a lifetime. This is because there is mounting evidence linking the experience of bullying to mental health issues later in life (Bond et al., 2001). A study conducted in the United States of America also revealed that the attackers in over two-thirds of 37 mass school shootings felt "persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others" and that revenge was an underlying motive. Longitudinal studies also show that the propensity to bully at school significantly predicts subsequent antisocial and violent behaviour (Rigby, 2003). General practitioners play a crucial role in the assessment and management

of young people affected by bullying. As a result, many students may experience severe social and psychological imbalances that may impact their relationships with others and, ultimately, their ability to achieve their life goals. Poor academic performance is a major contributor to the student's stress level and leads to the fear of failure and expulsion; depression can cause absenteeism and desperate sentiments, which interfere with healthy study habits and further reduce academic performance; and learners who do not receive the necessary psychosocial support and adequate social skills to enable them relate to others may develop aggressive behaviour and poor adjustment, leading them to consistently exhibit behavioural patterns associated with low levels of adjustment, such as low self-competence and hesitancy to participate in school activities, among other behaviours, and may eventually drop out of school (Rob & Callahan, 2011).

The whole-school approach is currently being used in efforts to reduce the mental health effects linked to bullying victimisation. This method adopts a socio-ecological viewpoint in which families, school communities, and governments collaborate to carry out anti-bullying and educational initiatives (Cross et al., 2011). Reducing bullying behaviour is a good thing, but it might not be enough to help specific victims. In order to reduce bullying behaviour and victimisation, for instance, a systematic and meta-analytic review that examined the effectiveness of programs focused on 12 countries in three regions (North America, Europe, and Scandinavia) found 65 distinct school-based bullying intervention and prevention programs (Gaffney et al., 2019).

Importantly, most of these programs had not been evaluated and implemented more than once using separate samples. According to Gaffney et al. (2019), just four out of the sixty-five programs had undergone more than two evaluations with different evaluators and in different locations. When taking into account all four programs, the whole school strategy was modestly successful, reducing victimisation and perpetration by roughly 15–16% and 19–20%, respectively, indicating that both issues are still common. The findings, however, indicate that the

whole-school strategy isn't always the best and may not work for every youngster.

In addition, Bear et al. (2018) noted that a positive school climate fosters positive student development, a low suspension rate, a low victimisation rate, an improvement in academic performance, and better mental health. In fact, the effectiveness of the whole-school approach is frequently questioned, with researchers concluding that programs vary from somewhat effective to not at all and, in some circumstances, to increased victimisation and exclusion (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Gaffney et al. (2019) concluded that the whole-school approach may not be the best strategy to combat bullying perpetration and victimisation and that targeted interventions are required to help individual children. Calls have been made for high-quality assessments to demonstrate cost-effectiveness and identify the elements of the whole-school anti-bullying strategy that decrease victimisation and perpetration (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007).

Akanni and Oduaran (2018) carried out another research investigating the mediating roles of academic self-efficacy and academic adjustment among Nigerian university students. A sample of 621 beginning students involved in this study reported their academic self-efficacy, academic adjustment, social support and life satisfaction. Results revealed that social support networks from family and faculty members enhanced students' academic adjustment and consequent satisfaction in school life. Social support encompasses social integration as well as the actual and perceived availability of social support experienced by the students. Although the findings of this study report a positive and significant relationship between psychosocial support and students' academic achievement, the current study was still necessary since it used a different sample, 362 form-one students in Kenya. Similar results were obtained by Lephoto and Hlalele (2021) in their study carried out among students in Lesotho. The study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives on the position of guidance and counselling as a core component for school-based psychosocial support. The sample comprised of 18 teachers. The results revealed that psychosocial support is important in the life of the students,

although it focused more on material needs. To address the issues that contribute to the complex social challenges that negatively impact students and life in school life in general, similar other factors must be put into consideration to ensure students' issues are met in entirety. The current study, therefore, went beyond the provision of support based on material needs to address students' social and psychological needs.

Onyekuru (2020) investigated schools' role in students' social adjustments in Emohua local government secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study indicated that students must adjust to social and school settings to foster their academic performance. The correlational results established that school settings had a strong negative and significant influence on social adjustment. The study concluded that teachers must help students to have proper social adjustment. The study looked at social adjustment, and the current study focused on psychosocial adjustment.

The concerns that students have when they transfer from a smaller to a larger school, as well as how the abrupt changes in size, location, and their own role within a large organisation can impact their identities as learners, have been highlighted by earlier research, such as Wang'eri et al. (2012). Secondary school pupils in Kenya, particularly those starting from one, struggle to strike a balance between their personal demands and how these requirements are met in the classroom. Both psychological and social factors are important in any social setting, such as school, in order to achieve desirable attitudes, good relationships and proper self-understanding that will enhance students' adjustment to the new environment.

Previous research, for example, Wang'eri et al. (2012), has brought to light the anxieties that students experience as they move from a smaller to a bigger school and how the sudden differences in space, size, and their own position within a large organisation can affect their identities as learners. Those who build secure relationships have fewer problem behaviours and exhibit high levels of self-esteem, form positive self-concepts, exhibit leadership, and engage in pro-social skills. Support from peers and significant others

in the school may play significant support roles in helping them to adjust to the school.

Unfortunately, many of these students are inadequately prepared for the realities of secondary school and the demands of adjusting to the academic system and daily tasks, as well as developing a new array of social relationships with classmates, teachers, and other significant members of the school community may be quite overwhelming (Ndung'u, 2024). Kyalo and Chumba (2011) have similarly reported poor school adjustment. They contend that as students adjust to the school environment, they face a wide range of difficulties. One of the ongoing issues plaguing Kenya's education system is students' inability to adapt to the classroom setting.

METHODOLOGY

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

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

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Johnson & Onwuegbuze (2004), the main MMR approach is the third strategy in educational research. It is defined as a class of research where the researcher combines Quantitative and qualitative methods. The study draws strengths from both approaches. It also bridges the gap between quantitative and qualitative data. Research has become complex, interdisciplinary, and dynamic, and there is a need to complement the methods (Cohen et al., 2007). The strategy is meant to allow the researcher to mix and match the design components that offer the best option to answer the research questions, which is to solve the problem of the study. It is a creative and expensive form of research and legitimises the use of multiple methods of data collection.

The target population is the accessible population within the area of study and which the researcher intends to study. It consists of the total number of subjects or total environment targeted in conducting the study (Onen & Oso, 2009). All deputy principals, guidance and counselling instructors, and form three pupils from public secondary schools in Bomet County made up the study's target group. The target population for the public secondary schools in Bomet was 29152, which included 294 public secondary

schools (County Director of Education [CDE], 2023), 294 deputy principals, 294 guidance and counselling instructors, and 28564 form three pupils. Therefore, the target group is a particular subset of the general population most suited to act as the main source of data for the study.

According to Kumar (2018), this technique is preferred when selecting objects with specific characteristics of interest to the researcher. In addition, stratified sampling techniques were used to select the schools because of their heterogeneity in nature. The schools have different characteristics as classified by the Ministry of Education. The schools are either day, boarding, single-gender, or mixed. The researcher selected the schools proportionately. One guidance and counselling teacher and one deputy principal from the sampled school also participated in the study. Purposively, the deputy principals were chosen for the study because they handle disciplinary cases in the school and, therefore, they have information on peer victimisation cases and the interventions undertaken to ensure that the perpetrators and victims are counselled to adjust well socially and psychologically. The sample frame is presented in Table 1. It indicates the proportion of the sample size as arrived at from the target population.

Table 1 Sample Frame

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

Source: Researcher (2023)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Peer-Related Factors and Student Psychosocial Adjustment

The first objective of the study was to assess the influence of peer-related factors on the psychosocial adjustment of students in public secondary schools in

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

Table 2: Student Statement on Peer-Related Factors

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

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 2 indicates responses on students' peer-related factors. On whether students helped their friends to overcome the stress resulting from bullying in school, 12(3.3%) strongly disagreed, 52(14.4%) disagreed, 30(8.3%) were undecided, 185(51.5%) agreed, while 80(22.2%) strongly agreed. The study further sought to unveil whether students reported cases of peer victimisation in school to the relevant department for action to be taken; hence, 28(7.8%) strongly disagreed, 59(16.4%) disagreed, 29(8.1%) were undecided, 189(52.5%) agreed, while 55(15.3%) strongly agreed.

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

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

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

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undecided, 124 (34.4%) agreed, while 115 (31.9%) strongly agreed.

Table 1 further presents the descriptive analysis of the influence of peer-related factors on the students' psychosocial adjustment. The findings showed that most students helped their friends overcome the stress from peer victimisation in the school. The results also revealed that the affected students reported peer victimisation to the school authority for action to be taken. This was indicated by a mean of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 1.16, respectively. The school management also trained peer counsellors who were instrumental in offering counselling services to the affected students ($M=3.89$; $SD=1.17$).

A related study has confirmed that the impact of bullying on victims is often greater than that of other forms of peer aggression or victimisation (Felix et al., 2011; Turner et al., 2014; Ybarra et al., 2014). For example, In comparison to peers who encountered peer victimisation that was not bullying or who reported no victimisation, Felix and colleagues (2011) discovered that students in Grades 5 through 12 who experienced bullying reported lower levels of life satisfaction, school connectedness, and hope. In a nationally representative sample of children and youth aged 6 to 17 years, Turner et al. (2014) found that power imbalance independently increased the traumatic impact of peer victimisation. These findings are especially important because of the long-term effects of peer victimisation in school (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015).

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

Maiwa et al. (2021) found that peer counselling helped victimised students adjust psychologically in school.

The study collected information from guidance and counselling teachers regarding the impact of peer-related factors on students' psychosocial adjustment. Table 4.4 presents the findings. Most respondents agreed that the school's peer counsellors were well-trained to provide professional support to victimised students ($M=3.96$; $SD=0.42$). The guidance and counselling department organised group counselling sessions where affected students interacted with peer counsellors on specific days of the week.

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

According to a related study by Juvonen & Graham (2014), between 20 and 25 per cent of young people are directly involved in bullying as either victims, offenders, or both. Similarly, extensive research from Western nations indicates that between 4 and 9 per cent of young people regularly engage in bullying practices, while between 9 and 25 per cent of school-age children experience bullying. There is also a smaller minority of young people known as bullies/victims who are both bullies and victims of bullying. A recent meta-analysis of the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying in various situations (Modecki et al., 2014) included 335,519 youth (12–18 years old) as a total sample.

The authors calculated a mean prevalence of 15 per cent for engagement in cyberbullying and 35 per cent for traditional bullying (both perpetration and victimisation roles). The primary findings indicate that, in comparison to their peers who are not victims,

adolescents who experience bullying miss more school and exhibit symptoms of poor academic performance (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2011), report higher levels of loneliness and worse health (Fekkes et al., 2006), and experience higher levels of anxiety and depression (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). The intensity of the victimisation experience has an impact on these adverse consequences as well. According to Van der Plog et al. (2015), victims who experienced multiple or frequent bullying, as well as those who were bullied by several people, suffered more than victims whose experiences were less frequent or committed by fewer peers.

Reijntjes et al. (2010) examined the connection between bullying and internalising difficulties. They came to the conclusion that these issues seem to be both causes and effects of peer victimisation, creating a "vicious cycle" that raises the stability of peer victimisation. Suicidal ideation has also been connected in studies to victimisation (Holt et al., 2015; Klomek et al., 2015). Being bullied is linked to serious mental health symptoms in the short term, as noted

by Arseneault et al. (2010) in their review. It also has long-term consequences that may endure until late adolescence.

The study's findings are consistent with a recent systematic review by McDougall and Vaillancourt (2015), which emphasised the need for a sophisticated and multidimensional model to comprehend the direct and indirect relationships between peer victimisation experiences and outcomes as an adult. Lastly, Wolke and Lereya (2015) validated the severe repercussions of bullying above and beyond other environmental and personal factors by examining research on genetically identical monozygotic twins who lived in the same homes but were discordant for bullying experiences.

G-C statement on Peer-Related Factors

The study sought to find out the responses of the deputy principals on peer-related factors. They were provided with 6 statements on a Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The responses are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3 G-C Statement on Peer-Related Factors

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

Source: Field Data (2023)

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

One of the deputy principals had this to say

Excerpt 1

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

The deputy principals revealed that student leaders, especially class prefects, report cases of peer victimisation to the school management through the respective class teachers or the boarding master. During the interview, the majority of the deputy principals indicated that young students were mostly prone to bullying from older students.

On the influence of other peers on psychosocial adjustment, one of the deputy principals had this to say;

Excerpt 2

The school has several social clubs, and students are encouraged to register for at least one club. In addition, students are also encouraged to take part in extracurricular activities. The school management believes that some vices, such as peer victimisation, drug abuse, and absenteeism, can be minimised by encouraging inclusivity through group participation. Cases of psychosocial distress among students can be identified by assessing students who don't want to participate in these activities.

Lastly, the deputy principals indicated that the schools had a guidance and counselling department responsible for handling students with psychosocial distress. The department had guidance and counselling teachers. However, they were not trained to conduct psychological counselling for students. The interviews also revealed that the G & C department was less involved in managing conflicts among students, as most disciplinary cases were handled by the disciplinary committee of the school.

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

The study indicated further that a warm and supportive environment helps the students adjust and further increases the retention rate in school. The study focused on form one student's adjustment in secondary school in Uasin Gishu County, while this study focused on the influence of peer victimisation on psychosocial adjustment among students in public secondary Schools in Bomet County.

Discussion

The study was aimed at finding out whether there is an existence of a strong support mechanism that can cushion the students in coping with psychosocial issues affecting them while at school. To this end, the study established that there is a prevalence of peer victimisation in public secondary schools in Bomet County. This ranged from physical bullying as well as psychological victimisation, which negatively affects the student's mental state. However, the findings of this study were able to support the conclusion that despite the presence of psychological stressors, most students helped their friends overcome the stress from peer victimisation in school. The affected students reported peer victimisation to the school authority for action to be taken. At the same time, the study established that the guidance and counselling department trained peer counsellors who were instrumental in offering counselling services to the affected students. These students were carefully selected from among the rest and taken through the process of counselling. Besides, they were also sensitised to the ethical and personality requirements of counsellors. The students received tremendous

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

In addition to peer counselling, the student leaders in the school were effective in identifying and reporting students who were found victimising others. This was also strengthened by sensitisation of students on their rights and campaigns against bullying or any other type of mistreatment of students. At the same time, the student leaders were a critical link between the school management and the students as they could identify and report the students' changes in behaviour. Further, the study found that the peer counsellors were trained on how to handle students with psychosocial stress; this includes encouraging the students to participate in group activities such as extracurricular activities and group counselling sessions that include group discussions on matters affecting them in school.

Finally, the study established that some guidance and counselling teachers through the peer counselling clubs organised group counselling sessions where affected students interacted with peer counsellors on specific days of the week. These sessions could provide an opportunity for interaction between teachers and students, allowing peer counselling teachers and peer counsellors to identify and resolve emerging peer victimisation issues. Peer counselling teachers also encourage students to confide in their peers, particularly peer counsellors, about bullying incidents, including the types and locations of such activities. However, because of fear of reprisals, some students feared disclosing the stressors to the counsellors. At the same time, a few students expressed reservations about the confidentiality of the peer counsellors and, as such, could not fully disclose all the psychological experiences that they were going through to them. However, in many cases, the peer counselling model was found to be very effective and efficient in responding to the psychological needs of the students in the selected schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Firstly, it can be concluded that peer-related factors have a significant influence on the student's psychosocial adjustment. Peer counselling and student leadership in school are very instrumental in establishing patterns of peer victimisation, perpetrators of the vice, and the affected students. Since the students do understand what experiences they are undergoing while at school and at home, such forums can go a great deal in reinforcing a culture of peer-to-peer mentorship and assistance. Therefore, the training of peer counsellors is essential in ensuring that they are able to identify and address issues related to peer victimisation. Students also encourage their peers to participate in extracurricular activities to promote inclusivity. Group counselling sessions held by peer counsellors help in addressing challenges that students face in school. Similarly, on school-related factors, the study concludes that, indeed, these factors affect the student's psychosocial adjustment. Several schools had policies in place regarding measures to be taken in case of indiscipline cases in general but did not address peer victimisation. The study noted that in most schools, the management encouraged students to report cases of bullying. Still, there were no means of reporting these cases apart from approaching the management or teachers directly. This discouraged most students as they feared being victimised further. The absence of suggestion boxes or protection of identity was a limiting factor towards reporting all cases as is supposed to be. This ends up making some students fail to disclose information that may be helpful.

Recommendations: Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendation was made to the Ministry of Education, the administration, management of the public secondary schools, the guidance and counselling department, and other policymakers: To evaluate students' social and psychological pressures at school, the school has a program in place. In order to address the effects of peer victimisation and raise knowledge of the guidance and counselling services that are available, the school administration should step up its sanitisation initiatives. When students encounter problems that they are unable to handle at school, the school should urge them to report them or

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seek assistance from the guidance and counselling department. In order to protect the privacy of students reporting instances of peer victimisation, schools should also have suggestion boxes available. Guidelines for regular meetings between students, instructors, and parents to discuss concerns impacting students should be established by the school through the guidance and counselling division. Separate from the school disciplinary committee, the school sets up a well-run guidance and counselling department with qualified instructors whose only responsibility is to provide professional guidance and counselling services within the school. In order to improve guidance and counselling's ability to address the new behavioural shifts in pupils, in-service training should be planned. The Ministry of Education should develop complex procedures and policies that govern the creation, functioning, and reach of school-based guidance and counselling services. In order to help the kids, especially with character and spiritual development, the department should work closely with the school sponsors.

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