

Prevalence Of  
Students' Sexual  
Harassment In  
Secondary Schools  
In Nyamira And  
Kiambu Counties,  
Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Student Sexual Harassment (SSH) has become a pervasive problem in institutions of learning worldwide. Thousands of students are affected daily, regardless of their gender. Reports from both the electronic and print media attest to the presence of diverse forms of SSH in Kenyan secondary schools. However, there seem to be no clear investigative reports of the actual forms of SSH in secondary schools that can provide data critical in guiding any intervention strategies. This study sought to describe and explore the prevalent forms of SSH in selected secondary schools in Nyamira and Kiambu Counties, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised 23,659 students, 678 teachers, 88 Deputy Principals and 88 Coordinators of Guidance and counselling in schools. Samples were obtained through Purposive and Proportionate sampling techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using the

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while qualitative data were analyzed and presented in narrative form. Findings revealed that verbal sexual harassment was the most prevalent form of SSH harassment in schools. The study also showed that sexual harassment prevalence is not associated with school type. Further analysis revealed that most incidents of SSH took place in classes and sometimes even in unexpected places like the clothes line. The findings also revealed that most forms of sexual harassment were peer related. The study recommended active stakeholder involvement with a view to stemming sexual harassment in schools.

**Key Words:** Sexual harassment, secondary schools, pervasive, prevalence, forms of sexual harassment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kenya greatly values the education of its citizenry and like all other countries, recognizes the role of education in national development. Education is touted not only as a basic factor in socio-economic development and productivity but also as a gateway to increased individual earnings and subsequently reduced inequalities (MoE, 2007). Further, Kenyans consider education as key towards poverty alleviation, a contributor to better and improved health care and good governance. It is against this backdrop that the country has witnessed exponential growth in education since independence in 1963. This growth has nonetheless, not been without challenges. Reports from the print and electronic media indicate that Student Sexual Harassment (SSH) has become a rampant problem in most secondary schools notwithstanding the supervisory role bestowed on the Ministry of Education as the overseer of education services within the country.

The media reports indicate that SSH is not only rampant but pervasive in both public and private secondary schools. What's more, the formal and informal reports point out that this harassment in secondary schools is on an upward trajectory. There is however limited investigative data on the actual prevalence in secondary schools. This lacuna in knowledge is likely to pose a challenge in terms of crafting mechanisms towards eliminating SSH.

The Ministry of Education (MOE), Kenya defines SH as *any unwelcome, usually repeated and unreciprocated sexual advances, unsolicited sexual attention, demand for sexual access of favors, sexual innuendo or other physical conduct of a sexual nature, display of phonographic material, when it interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment (MOE, 2011)*. Sexually harassing behaviours are unpleasant, unwelcome, offensive, intimidating and humiliating (Dunne et al, 2006). They are believed to take different forms. According to Robinson (2000), sexual harassment encompasses physical, visual, or verbal sexual acts experienced by a person from another person at the time or later. In addition, these acts assert a person's sexual identity over the identity of another person making them feel embarrassed, frightened, hurt, uncomfortable, degraded, humiliated or compromised. They have the further result of diminishing the person's power and confidence.

Across the globe, SH is considered a profound social and public health problem experienced among all racial, ethnic, religious and socio-economic groups (Hussin, 2015). It is a problem that has become a near epidemic in schools in (Chang, Hayter, & Lin, 2010) and is considered a risk factor for lifelong problems including low self-esteem (Witt, Rassenhofer, Brahler, Plener, & Fegert, 2018). According to Smit and Plessis (2011, p.173) SH is a 'burning issue' and a 'silent problem' which has not received sufficient attention in the education sector yet it is causing many students distress leaving them feeling upset and disappointed.

Reports in the Kenyan media have left many lingering questions amongst stakeholders about the sexual safety of students in schools. In 2018, three students were raped at night at Moi Nairobi Girls secondary school as they used the bathrooms. In the same year, at Loreto Msongari in Kiambu County a student was sexually harassed while she slept. In her own words, the student said: *I was asleep in my bed when I felt a hand gag my mouth. I was then ordered to climb down and I obeyed in fear. It was then that the three girls started touching me all over my body and telling me how beautiful I was. One even licked my private parts*, (Citizen TV News, 2 June, 2018). In 2016, St. Caritas Mariana Secondary school in Thika West was closed by officials from the Ministry of Education and 72 students sent home over allegations of sexual abuse at the school headed by a Nigerian priest (Citizen Digital, September 5, 2018).

Incidents of SH have also been reported at Kakamega Boys High School in 2018 where a student was sodomised and at Maseno Boys in 2017 where a student was gang raped by form 3 and 4 boys. Historically, one of the worst forms of sexual violence in secondary schools in Kenya took place in 1990 at St. Kizito High school located in the then Eastern Province. The incident claimed the lives of 19 female students following a rape ordeal at night that was propagated by male students who accused the female students for refusing to take part in a strike they had organised earlier in the day (Wane, 2009). Seventy survivors of the rape incident were left with psychological trauma.

There have also been reports of cases of SH at Kangubiri Girls in Nyeri in 2006, at Keveye girls from Western Kenya in 1996, at Mareira mixed secondary school in 1996 and in Bombolulu in 1998. There are indications that the actual statistics may be higher only that these incidents remain largely unspoken due to their sensitive nature. In Kenya, there is generally a culture of silence surrounding issues of sex in schools and because of this; it is extremely difficult to obtain accurate statistical data on its magnitude and prevalence in learning institutions.

Maternowska, Keesbury, and Kilonzo (2009) have observed that until the 2003 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS), there was no nationally representative data on sexual violence in Kenya. Few institutions bother to document or keep any records on SH. As a result, determination of prevalence remains elusive and tedious. Besides, there are few empirical studies on SH focusing on secondary schools. The few available studies have either been situated in the work place, in primary schools, in tertiary institutions and in households.

Consequently, there is need for investigation and documentation of the exact nature and prevalence of SH in secondary schools hence warranting this research.

Protection of students against Sexual Harassment (SH) has received international recognition. Article 4 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) obligates governments to create environments where children can grow to their full potential. Article 34 of the UNCRC specifically obligates governments to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation (UNICEF, 2001). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) requires that all member states of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) protect children against any form of SH through implementation of protective measures such as creation of internal school policies, rules and procedures to prevent child sexual abuse or deal with it in the event it happens. These provisions notwithstanding, student SH remains nagging even in countries that have ratified these protocols, Kenya inclusive (UNICEF, 2001; Gadin & Hammastrom, 2005).

### **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Schools are supposed to be child friendly providing conducive learning atmospheres where students are protected from all forms of harm. In Child Friendly Schools (CFSs) students are protected from threats such as rape, physical beating, humiliation, sexual harassment, taunts from fellow students and even physical hazards such as pollution, noise, fires and unhygienic environments. Yet, formal and informal reports of sexual harassment directed at students signifies that this may not be the case. Sexual harassment is increasing in notoriety. Even so, its magnitude varies from school to school and from County to County. Available statistics show that the Central region of Kenya reportedly leads at 67.4%, followed by Nyanza (51.4%), Coast (47.8%), Rift Valley (30.4%), Nairobi (23.1%) and Western (21.8%). Despite the existence of substantial global and local studies on SH, few studies have expressly interrogated the forms of SH rampant in different learning environments in secondary schools. This study sought to describe and explore prevalent forms of SH in both public and private secondary schools in 2 purposively sampled counties in Kenya.

### **1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The main objective of this study was to determine the prevalent forms of sexual harassment in secondary schools in Nyamira and Kiambu Counties, Kenya.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS**

Based on the stated objective the study sought to answer the following questions: What are the prevalent forms of SH witnessed and or experienced by students in secondary schools in Nyamira and Kiambu Counties? In which locations within the school are SH incidents likely to take place? Who are the persons involved in these incidents?

The study also sought to test the following hypothesis: There is no significant difference between prevalent forms of sexual harassment and type of secondary school.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual Harassment (SH) occurs in different forms. At the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in 2007, Meyer (2007) identified fourteen forms of sexual harassment:

- Sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks.
- Showing of sexual pictures, photos or messages.
- Sexual graffiti (writing sexual messages on bathrooms, walls etc.)
- Spreading sexual rumours
- Calling one gay or lesbian
- Spying on someone dressing or showering
- Flashing or mooning someone.
- Touching, grabbing or pinching someone in a sexual way.
- Intentionally brushing or pinching someone in a sexual way.
- Pulling at someone's clothing in a sexual way
- Pulling off one's clothes down
- Blocking one's way or cornering someone in a sexual way
- Forcing one to kiss him or her
- Forcing one to do something sexual rather than kissing.

The USA under Title IX (a law that prevents SH in schools) broadly categorizes sexual harassment into Quid Pro Quo and Hostile Environment Sexual Harassment. Quid Pro Quo harassment happens when a student's participation in an educational programme or activity is supposedly pegged on their willingness to submit to a sexual request whereas hostile environment sexual harassment involves sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal, non-verbal, or physical conducts of a sexual nature (AAUW, 2011).

Studies have established that SH varies in frequency of occurrence and severity. Whereas some forms of SH occur rarely and may be mild, others occur more frequently and their effects may be moderately severe or very severe. Rape, sexual coercion, sexual assaults are considered as some of the most severe forms of SH. They are debilitating, they leave victims psychologically traumatised and terrified besides eliciting lots of silence and denial (Mwiti, 1997; Wane, 2009; Hill & Holly, 2011).

Understanding prevalent forms of school-based SSH is important in determining strategies that can be used in eliminating it. Shah and Thepa (2005) recognize however that unavailability of reliable statistical data is a hindrance. The problem is further compounded by the lack of clear boundaries between what exactly constitutes

SH, teasing or flirting which are considered as mutually acceptable, enjoyable and pleasant between the parties involved (Young, Melissa, Ashbarker & Smith, 2008).

Moreover, the fact that SH incidents are hardly reported and recorded (Ruto, 2009) makes it even harder to fully comprehend those forms of harassment that are prevalent among students. Estimating prevalence is also made difficult by differences in perception between the sexes. Whereas men have often been quoted describing SH as harmless fun, women have described their experiences as deeply violating (Hollomotz, 2006). This calls for interpretation of SH sometimes from a gender perspective.

Nevertheless, an increasing amount of research has begun to offer much needed insights on the common forms of student sexual harassment (AAUW, 1993, 2001, 2003, & 2006; Young, Grey & Boyd, 2008; Hill & Holly, 2011; UNICEF, 2014; Gruber & Finneran, 2016; Bendixen, Daveroni & Kennair, 2018). Analysis of research studies on School-Based Gender Violence (SBGV) by UNICEF (2014) in the Asian and Pacific regions reported varied findings. In Australia, UNICEF reported that 61% of 3,134 students who had been enjoined in a national wide survey mentioned verbal abuse as the most prevalent form of harassment in their schools. In Turkey and China, besides verbal abuse, students reported being forced to take off their clothes, take nude photos and have sex with fellow students as more prevalent forms. From Hongkong, 42.3% of students indicated experiencing verbal violence in the form of teasing or being the subject of sexual rumours.

Studies by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002 & 2008) revealed that more than 150 million girls and 70 million boys persistently endure painful incidents of SH across the globe. In the USA, SH is prevalent in middle and high schools (AAUW, 2006 & 2011). The AAUW findings submit that more than 80% students are sexually harassed while in school.

Studies done from Britain, Canada, China, Israel, Norway and Germany have established that SH is on the rise in and out of secondary schools (Canadian Press, 2008; Wei & Chen, 2011; Bendixen et al., 2018; Witt et al., 2018;) In Canada, a survey of 1800 students in 23 high schools showed that over 50% of girls were victims of unwanted sexual comments and gestures which affected not only their health but their adjustment, worth and overall wellbeing in school (Larkin,1997). A similar study conducted among Junior high school students in China revealed that SH in the form of name calling and rumour mongering was common and that this harassment negatively affected perpetrators and victims alike (Wei & Chen, 2011).

In South Africa, Ghana, Botswana, Ethiopia and Uganda SH is a reality in secondary schools with students thought to suffer in multiple ways ([www.hrw.org/reports/2001/safrica](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/safrica)). Research from different institutions in Africa according to Bunyi (2003) reveals that constant derogatory verbal remarks, rape and other types of GBV are regularly perpetrated on students. Terrance, Logan & Peter (2004) believe that derogatory remarks and other sexual forms of violence provide some of the reasons why students lack confidence and why they are low in academic achievement.

In Kenya, there have been several cases of sexual harassment reported secondary schools. This is in spite of laws, policies and guidelines protecting minors against sexual abuses. The Sexual Offences Act (SOA) criminalizes all acts of SSH. The Act stipulates that anybody who sexually harasses children is liable to 3 years imprisonment or to a fine of not less than 100,000 Kenya shillings or both (Republic of Kenya, 2006). Moreover, the Gender Policy in Education (GPE) crafted in 2007 sought in article 2.15 to eliminate SH and any form of Gender Based Violence (GBV) directed at children.

The existence of SOA and GPE notwithstanding, there are many lingering issues surrounding the sexual safety of students in schools (Wachira, 2018). In 1990, nineteen female students died following a rape ordeal at St Kizito High School in the then Eastern Province. This was one of the worst forms of sexual violence to be reported in Kenya's education history. The rape was propagated by male students who accused the female students for refusing to take part in a strike they had organised earlier in the day (Wane, 2009). Seventy survivors of the rape incident were left with psychological trauma.

Sex harassment-related incidents have also been reported at Moi Nairobi Girls secondary school where 3 students were raped at night as they used the bathrooms in 2018, Loreto Msongari in Kiambu County in 2018, St Caritas Mariana Secondary school, Kakamega Boys High School in 2018 where a student was sodomised, Maseno Boys in 2017 where a student was gang raped, Kangubiri Girls in Nyeri in 2006, at Keveye girls from Western Kenya in 1996, at Mareira mixed secondary school in 1996 and in Bombolulu in 1998.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design adopting qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. The study locale was selected secondary schools Nyamira and Kiambu Counties, Kenya. The choice of the study locale was dictated by media and field reports presenting the areas as some of the places where sexual abuse was thought to be rife. Existing statistics at the time of the study indicated that the Central region of Kenya in which Kiambu falls led in reported cases of sexual abuse at 67.4%, followed by Nyanza (51.4%), Coast (47.8%), Rift Valley (30.4%), Nairobi (23.1%) and Western (21.8%) (Johnstone, 2002). Further, a baseline survey on GBV in Kenya by the National Commission on Gender had cited Nyamira County as one of the most affected areas in sexual abuse (NCGD, 2010).

The targeted population comprised 24,513 respondents (88 deputy principals, 88 coordinators of G&C, 766 teachers and 23,659 students). Stratified random sampling was used to arrive at the desired school sample size. The schools were first stratified into Public and private secondary schools. After stratification, the researcher proceeded to conduct proportionate random sampling where 20% of schools were selected to participate in the study from the two strata. A sample size of 380 students was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970)



Table of Sample size Determination. Students were selected across forms 1-3 students. School deputy principals of the selected schools, G & C coordinators and teachers were purposively chosen to participate in the study.

### 3.1 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The study used a School Sexual Harassment Questionnaire (SSHQ) for students and teachers to collect quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interview and Focus Group Discussion guides. The researcher conducted interviews which targeted deputy principals and coordinator of G & C as key informants. Three FGDs were conducted one with female students only, another with male students and a third one of mixed gender. To determine if the instruments for this study were reliable, Cronbach's alpha was calculated using SPSS. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.978 for teachers and 0.931 for students which indicated a very high level of internal consistency for our scale with these specific samples.

The study observed ethical principles of research. The researcher sought and obtained informed consent from participants. This research also upheld the principle of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research period and beyond (Bhattacharjee, 2012). This means that neither the researcher nor the reader can relate a given response to a specific respondent or group of respondents.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and presented in the form of frequency distribution tables and graphs. Qualitative data were analyzed based on similarity of emerging themes, patterns and relationships and in narratives and presented in the actual voices of the informants.

### 4.1 FINDINGS

#### 4.1.1 TYPE AND CATEGORY OF SCHOOLS IN THE STUDY SAMPLE

Table 1 presents information regarding type and category of schools in the sample.

Table 4.1: Type and Category of Schools

Sub County	Public Sec. Schools			Private Sec. Schools			Total
	Mixed schools	Girls' only schools	Boys' only schools	Mixed schools	Girls' only schools	Boys' only school	
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
Nyamira South	5(18.75)	2(12.5)	2(12.5)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	9(52.9)
Thika West	2(31.25)	2(12.5)	1(6.25)	2(12.5)	1(6.25)	0(0)	7(41.2)

Source: research data

Findings showed that 14(82.4%) public and 3(17.6%) private secondary schools participated in this study of which 9(52.9%) were mixed, 5(29.4%) were girls only and 3(17.6%) were boys only secondary schools. The number of public secondary schools in Kenya greatly surpasses private ones. According to the Basic Education Statistical Booklet, in 2014 alone, there were 7, 686 (88.0%) public secondary schools compared to 1,048 (12%)

private secondary schools in Kenya and that this number has been rising owing to increased demand for education (MOE, 2014).

**4.1.2 RESPONDENTS' CLASS ENROLMENTS**

The study sought information regarding the class levels of the student respondents. The findings are captured in figure 4.2.

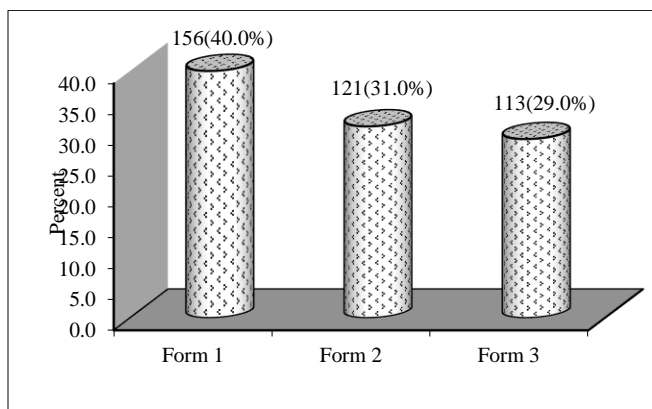


Figure 4.1: Students' class enrollments

Figure 4.1 shows that 156(40.0%) were from form 1, 121(31.0%) were from form 2 and 113(29.0%) were from form 3. Since proportionate random sampling was used to arrive at the desired sample size, the findings therefore indicate enlarging class sizes as you descend from form three to form 1. This most likely explains successful government efforts to increase transition from primary to secondary schools. Grade level is an important aspect in sexual harassment research. Mboya (2016) in a study found that in secondary schools; form 2 students were more often the target of sexual abuse as their age puts them in a situation where they were more sexually active and more sexually desirable to men. However, as they transitioned to form 3 and 4 there was a marked reduction in SH attributed to increased education and empowerment. Mboya opined that at senior classes, the students were more equipped with skills that enabled them make better decisions and resist SH incidents too.

**4.1.3 FORMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

The researcher sought to establish forms of SH in the sampled schools.

Table 4.2: Respondents' Views on Forms of SH in Schools

Description of SH incident	Teachers' views				Students' views			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
<b>Verbal Sexual Harassment</b>								
Sexual comments, gestures or jokes directed at you or someone else	16	47.1	18	52.9	240	62.7	143	37.3
Spreading of sexual rumours about you or others	12	35.3	22	64.7	170	44.6	211	55.4
Using of obscene, dirty or vulgar language within the school	15	44.1	19	55.9	218	57.4	162	42.6
Calling others sexually suggestive names such as 'sweetie' 'baibe' etc	14	41.2	20	58.8	213	55.8	169	44.2

Students asking or being asked for sexual favours either by fellow students or adults within the school	8	23.5	26	76.5	93	24.4	288	75.6
Whistling and ogling at others in a sexually suggestive manner	12	35.3	22	64.7	140	37.2	236	62.8
<b>Physical Sexual Harassment</b>								
Touching, grabbing or pinching someone in a sexual way	10	29.4	24	70.6	141	37.2	238	62.8
Students being forced into sex (raped) by other students or by adults within the school	6	17.6	28	82.4	67	17.8	310	82.2
Forced hugging and kissing of students	4	12.1	29	87.9	109	28.6	272	71.4
Students touching their body parts inappropriately	9	26.5	25	73.5	172	45.9	203	54.1
Students being promised or being given rewards in return for sexual favours	10	29.4	24	70.6	97	26.3	272	73.7
Intentionally brushing on or cornering someone passing	11	33.3	22	66.7	138	37.2	233	62.8
Indecent exposure or pulling one's clothes down	9	26.5	25	73.5	99	26.8	271	73.2
<b>Visual Sexual Harassment</b>								
Spying on someone or being spied on while dressing, bathing or changing clothes or using the wash rooms	12	35.3	22	64.7	107	28.7	266	71.3
Sending or receiving sexually suggestive messages and videos e.g. by phone or small written notes etc	6	17.6	28	82.4	172	45.9	203	54.1
Drawing or sending drawings of sexual images and graffiti either in exercise books, on walls in the school, on desks or on personal computers	11	32.4	23	67.6	168	45.4	202	54.6
Showing or being shown pornographic pictures, such as pictures of naked people	8	24.2	25	75.8	162	43.7	209	56.3
Incidents of sending or receiving suggestive content by email	7	20.6	27	79.4	116	31.6	251	68.4
Posting sexually suggestive content on the black board or on the notice board	9	27.3	24	72.7	98	26.6	271	73.4

It is evident from table 4.2 that different forms of SH were either experienced or witnessed in the schools under study. Table 4.7 shows that there were similarities and differences in perceptions among the respondents on the forms of SH that had either been witnessed or experienced in the past one year. In regard to verbal sexual harassment, majority of the teachers 16(47.1%) and students 240(62.7%) reported the presence of sexual comments, gestures or jokes. Another 15(44.1%) teachers and over 57.4 % ( 218) students reported use of obscene, dirty or vulgar language had been used within the school besides the use of sexually suggestive names such as 'sweetie' and Baibe'. About a quarter of teachers and students (24%) were in agreement that students asking and being asked for sexual favours by fellow students or adults within the school was the least form of verbal sexual harassment witnessed in schools.

There were differences in respondents' views in regard to physical sexual harassment. Whereas majority of students, 172(45.9%), reported students touching their body parts inappropriately, majority of teachers reported that much of the physical harassment experienced involved intentionally brushing on or cornering someone as they passed. Other incidents reported included:

- Sending or receiving sexually suggestive messages and videos e.g. by phone or small written notes experienced/witnessed by 116(45.9%).
- Drawing or sending drawings of sexual images and graffiti either in exercise books, or on walls in the school, on desks or on Personal computers 168(45.4%).
- Showing or being shown pornographic pictures, such as pictures of naked people 162 (43.7%).

Table 4.7 also reveals that 310(82.2%) students denied experiencing or witnessing someone being forced into sex (raped) by other students or by adults within the school in the past year. This implies that rape within the school setting though reportedly happening (teachers 17.6%, students 17.8%) yet the findings demonstrate that it was statistically low.

**4.1.4 FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE**

Table 4.3 and 4.4 capture respectively students' and teachers' views in respect to the frequency of occurrence of the identified forms of SH.

*Table 4.3: Students' Perspectives on Frequency of Occurrence*

Description of incident	Frequency of occurrence					
	Never	Once a week	More than once a week	Once a month	More than once a month	Once a year
<b>Verbal sexual harassment</b>						
Sexual comments, gestures or jokes directed at you or someone else	50.3%	12.2%	16.1%	5.9%	10.5%	4.9%
Spreading of sexual rumours about you or others	68.5%	5.5%	12.7%	2.9%	7.1%	3.2%
Using of obscene, dirty or vulgar language within the school	54.2%	12.6%	18.6%	3.7%	7.6%	3.3%
Calling others sexually suggestive names such as 'sweetie' Baibe' etc	60.1%	11.0%	15.2%	1.4%	11.7%	0.7%
Asking or being asked for sexual favours either by fellow students or adults within the school	84.5%	3.2%	4.4%	2.3%	4.4%	1.2%
Whistling and ogling at others in a sexually suggestive manner	74.2%	9.0%	9.0%	3.4%	2.8%	1.6%
<b>Physical Sexual Harassment</b>						
Touching, grabbing or pinching someone in a sexual way	73.9%	8.7%	7.8%	2.2%	4.3%	3.1%
Students being forced into sex (raped) by other students or by adults within the school	90.1%	1.4%	2.3%	1.7%	1.4%	2.9%
Forced hugging and kissing of students	82.1%	4.5%	5.1%	3.0%	3.6%	1.8%
Students touching their body parts inappropriately	67.5%	6.9%	12.5%	2.6%	5.9%	4.6%
Students being promised or being given rewards in return for sexual favours	84.8%	4.0%	4.3%	1.9%	2.5%	2.5%
Intentionally brushing on or cornering someone passing	74.4%	7.0%	9.5%	2.8%	5.1%	1.3%
Indecent exposure or pulling one's clothes down	83.7%	4.3%	4.6%	2.2%	3.4%	1.8%
Spying on someone or being spied on while dressing, bathing or changing clothes or using the wash rooms	82.1%	6.5%	5.2%	2.5%	2.2%	1.5%
<b>Visual Sexual Harassment</b>						
Sending or receiving sexually suggestive messages and videos e.g. by phone or small written notes etc	69.8%	7.5%	8.5%	4.1%	7.1%	3.1%
Drawing or sending drawings of sexual images and graffiti either in exercise books, or on walls in the school, on desks or on personal computers etc	70.7%	7.7%	9.1%	2.4%	5.9%	4.2%
Showing or being shown pornographic pictures, such as pictures of naked people	72.2%	5.4%	10.2%	2.0%	7.8%	2.4%
Sending or receiving sexually suggestive content by email	80.8%	4.5%	4.5%	2.2%	6.4%	1.6%
Posting sexually suggestive content on the black board or on the notice board	84.0%	4.3%	3.7%	1.2%	4.3%	2.5%

There were varied frequencies of occurrence, associated with the three identified forms of SH. Table 4.3 reveals that incidents associated with verbal sexual harassment were more commonly experienced with almost half of

the students (49.7%) reporting sexual comments, gestures or jokes directed at them or someone else more either experienced or witnessed more than once a week in the past year. Forty per cent of students reported that the use of obscene, dirty or vulgar language within the school was quite common also occurring more than once a week.

Nonetheless, some incidents were reported as having rarely occurred in the sampled schools in the past one year. These include rape and forced sexual harassment. The study attributed this to the severe penalty associated with SH. Under the Sexual Offences Act, SH is a crime which carries a jail term of not less than three years and or a fine of not less than one hundred thousand shillings or both (Republic of Kenya, 2006). The same severe penalty is stipulated in the TSC Act Cap 34 Schedule 3 which spells disciplinary action including summary dismissal of a teacher reported as sexually harassing a student (TSC, 2010). Unfortunately, The TSC Act does not specify the penalty for student- to-student harassment since their mandate is limited to those in the teaching service.

Table 4.4: Frequency of Occurrence of Forms of SH – Teachers’ Perspectives

Description of incident	Frequency of occurrence					
	Never	Once a week	More than once a week	Once a month	More than once a month	Once a year
<b>Verbal sexual harassment</b>						
Sexual comments, gestures or jokes directed at you or someone else	76.7%	10.0%	6.7%	3.3%	0.0%	3.3%
Spreading of sexual rumours about you or others	86.7%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Using of obscene, dirty or vulgar language within the school	90.3%	6.5%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Calling others sexually suggestive names such as ‘sweetie’ Baibe’ etc	82.9%	6.9%	0.0%	3.4%	3.4%	3.4%
Asking or being asked for sexual favours either by fellow students or adults within the school	82.1%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%
Whistling and ogling at others in a sexually suggestive manner	78.6%	10.7%	3.6%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%
<b>Physical Sexual Harassment</b>						
Touching, grabbing or pinching someone in a sexual way	77.8%	7.4%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	3.7%
Students being forced into sex (raped) by other students or by adults within the school	86.7%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Forced hugging and kissing of students	90.3%	6.5%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Students touching their body parts inappropriately	82.8%	6.9%	0.0%	3.4%	3.4%	3.4%
Students being promised or being given rewards in return for sexual favours	82.1%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%
Intentionally brushing on or cornering someone passing	78.6%	10.7%	3.6%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%
Indecent exposure or pulling one’s clothes down	82.8%	3.4%	3.4%	6.9%	3.4%	0.0%
Spying on someone or being spied on while dressing, bathing or changing clothes or using the wash rooms	77.8%	7.4%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	3.7%
<b>Visual Sexual Harassment</b>						
Sending or receiving sexually suggestive messages and videos e.g. by phone or small written notes	93.1%	6.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Drawing or sending drawings of sexual images and graffiti either in exercise books, or on walls in the school, on desks or on Personal computers etc	81.5%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%	7.4%	3.7%

Showing or being shown pornographic pictures, such as pictures of naked people	82.8%	6.9%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	6.9%
Sending or receiving sexually suggestive content by email	86.7%	6.7%	0.0%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Posting sexually suggestive content on the black board or on the notice board	85.2%	3.7%	0.0%	3.7%	3.7%	3.7%

Over 40% teachers reported the presence of sexual comments, gestures or jokes directed to students or someone else in their schools with 14.8% saying that these acts were experienced and or witnessed once a year thus indicating that the frequency of occurrence was low. Over forty percent teachers reported the use of obscene, dirty or vulgar language within the school with a fairly considerable number (22.6%) reporting that these incidents were experienced once a week. On the contrary, spreading of sexual rumours was the least form of verbal sexual harassment reported by 3.3% of teachers.

Table 4.4 further reveals that incidents of calling others sexually suggestive names such as ‘sweetie’ ‘baibe’ were experienced and or witnessed by majority (41.2%) of students with 20.0% of teachers reporting that this was experienced once a week. These findings were confirmed by a key respondent. In an interview with the deputy principal of one of the sampled schools said thus:

Use of obscenities is rampant in school. Students often come to report to us that other students have used dirty and vulgar language on them such as calling them ‘Malaya’ (Kiswahili word for prostitute). Yet of course they are those who use sweet words to entice others such as ‘beshte’ (meaning favourite one). In most cases the boys are reported as the offenders.

Similar views were echoed by a female student during an FGD session:

I have been abused. I have been called funny names by my class mates. I have been told I have killer eyes. I have heard this even from my own close friends. I have been told I walk with a swag that attracts men. I don’t find it kind.

A male student also said he has been told he runs after girls yet according to him this was untrue.

In terms of frequency of occurrence use of obscene and sexually suggestive language occurred much more frequently in schools. This finding is consistent with previous research. Opobo and Wandega (2011) found that sexually suggestive language topped the list of reported SH incidents of sexual harassment in schools in Uganda. This was pegged at 19% followed by fondling at 13%, pornography 6.3% and exposure of sexual organs by adults to children 4%. Hill and Holly (2011) in a survey study involving a sample of 1,965 students found that unwanted sexual comments, jokes or gestures, and name calling made up the bulk of the reported incidents of SH in middle and high schools in the USA.

After establishing the existence of different forms of sexual harassment witnessed and or experienced in secondary schools in the past year, the study sought to determine which of these forms was most prevalent. The researcher cross-tabulated the forms of SH witnessed in schools against students’ and teachers’ views on their frequency of occurrence. The findings are captured on table 4.10.

Table 4.5: Prevalent Forms of Sexual Harassment

	Students' views		Teachers' views	
	F	%	F	%
Verbal sexual harassment	141	40.3%	19	70.4%
Physical sexual harassment	125	35.7%	4	14.8%
Visual sexual harassment	84	24.0%	4	14.8%

Findings on table 4.5 show that verbal sexual harassment is the most prevalent form of SH in schools. This finding corroborates with studies from Asia and the Pacific regions. A UNICEF analysis of studies from those two regions established that verbal sexual harassment was the most prevalent form of SH in schools (UNICEF, 2014). The UNICEF analysis further revealed that students often forced other students to take their clothes off, take nude photos of themselves and even have sex with fellow students. Studies by the AAUW found that unwanted sexual comments, jokes or gestures and name calling were quite prevalent in schools (AAUW, 1993 & 2001). Witkowska and Menckel (2005) using a sample of 540 students found that sexualized conversations, attractiveness rating, and name calling, comments about gender and sexual comments were the most prevalent forms of SH in Swedish schools. Similarly, Ruto (2009) in a survey study conducted in selected schools in Kenya found out that 6 in every 10 children suffered verbal sexual abuse most of which was rich with expressions that had sexual connotations especially referring to private body parts. Young et al., (2008) too found results consistent with those of the present study. In their study carried out among disabled students in Uttar Pradesh, India, Young et al revealed that joking in a sexually offensive way; name calling, spreading and participating in rumours were most prevalent among disabled students (Young et al, 2008).

The study sought to explore the relationship between prevalent forms of SH and type of school using the following hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between prevalent forms of sexual harassment and type of school.

Data pertaining to this hypothesis were collected from respondents, analyzed and presented in table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Prevalent Form of SH \* Type of school

Type of SH	Type of school			Total
	Boys Sec. school	Girls Sec. school	Mixed Sec. school	
Verbal Sexual Harassment	39(40.2%)	40(43.5%)	62(38.5%)	141(40.3%)
Physical Sexual Harassment	28 (28.9%)	31(33.7%)	66(41.0%)	125(35.7%)
Visual Sexual Harassment	30(30.9%)	21(22.8%)	33(20.5%)	84(24.0%)
	97 (100%)	92 (100%)	161(100%)	350(100%)

Chi-square ( $\chi^2=5.81$  df=4  $p <0.05$  (Critical  $\chi^2 = 9.49$  at  $p <0.05$ ))

Based on the percentage number of respondents, 43.5% (40), verbal sexual harassment was most prevalent in girls' only schools, while physical sexual harassment took place more often in mixed secondary schools 41.0% (66) and visual sexual harassment 30.9% (30) in boys' only secondary schools. The findings reveal that whereas girls are likely to be more sexually abusive verbally, boys are more dominant in the use of visual sexual

harassment. Yet when both sexes are put together in mixed secondary schools, physical sexual harassment was most compared to the other two forms of SH. Talking about prevalence of physical sexual harassment a deputy principal made the following observation during an interview:

One of the major challenges we have in this school is forced hugging and touching among members of the opposite sex. We have dealt with this problem in the past yet it continues coming up time and again.

Another informant shared the following view:

Physical sexual harassment is a major problem in our school. This happens in 'coupling' relationships. Much of this coupling is forced. It is always a challenge to us since the girls and boys who have coupled up behave as though they are married. Sometimes you see these 'couples' engaging in long deliberate hugs during breaks.

Another respondent said:

If you accompany students for activities like drama, you may be surprised what you see. In school boys in coupled relationship harass girls by demanding that they (the girls) wash their school uniforms and do stuff for them. Unfortunately, the girls oblige. The situation gets worse when the boy restricts the girl from talking to other boys as he already 'owns' her. This affects the performance of the harassed girl. We have noted though that this harassment is two way. You know, even girls harass fellow girls who seem to be coming near boys they consider their 'partners'....

These views were not only limited to teachers. During an FGD session, students confirmed prevalence of physical sexual harassment. One female student expressed instances of physical sexual harassment coming especially from boys in their class.

Boys from our class are always dropping their hands into our blouses. You try to stop them yet they do it when you least expect. They do this to us a lot more during break time and even during games time. This is disrespectful.

This statement from the female respondent indicates that physical sexual harassment was a bother and the affected students felt offended as they considered it a lack of respect.

To determine the significance of the relationship between the prevalent form of SH and the type of school, a chi-square test was done at 0.05 level of significance. The calculated chi-square statistic was found to be  $\chi^2 = 5.81$  whereas the critical chi-square value was found to be  $\chi^2 = 9.49$ . Since our  $\chi^2$  statistic (5.81) was lesser than the critical value (9.49) at  $p = 0.05$ , the study accepted the hypothesis which stated that there was no relationship between prevalent form of SH and type school. The interpretation of the results is that no form of SH may be associated with school type.

This finding went contrary to expectation. In a study in Kericho and Kipkelion Districts, Mburu (2013) found that non-physical sexual harassment in the form of sexual attention was quite prevalent in mixed secondary schools and that the non-physical forms affected girls more than boys. The findings revealed that girls suffered a lot of distraction from students of the opposite gender which ultimately affected their performance in national exams.



**4.1.5 LOCATIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

The study sought to find out places where SH was likely to take place. Table 4.6 provides a summary of the findings.

*Table 4.6: Locations of SH*

Place	Teachers		Students	
	N	%	N	%
In class	12	27.9%	156	24.1%
Play ground	7	16.3%	122	18.8%
Dorm	7	16.3%	108	16.7%
Corridors	6	14.0%	64	9.9%
Kitchen	0	0%	14	2.2%
Dining hall	1	2.3%	56	8.6%
Staff room	3	7.0%	37	5.7%
Toilets	4	9.3%	60	9.3%
Others	3	7.0%	21	3.2%
At the hanging lines			10	1.5%
Total	43	100.0%	648	100.0%

According to majority of teachers, 12(27.9%) and students 156(21.1%), most SH incidents took place in classes. This can be explained by the fact that as a learning area, students spend most of their time there. The second most common location for SH was the play ground cited by 122(18.8%) students and 7(16.3%) teachers followed by the dormitory. Other places mentioned were the corridors, the staffroom and the toilets. None of the teachers considered the kitchen as a likely venue for SH despite 14(2.2%) students highlighting it as a possible location. This is probably because it is frequented by students during meal times and during such times there is supervision by a teacher. The study also established that unusual places such as the clothes hanging lines provided grounds for SH. As observed by one student:

You can be harassed even in the hanging lines as you go to hang your clothes. Last weekend a boy from my class followed me as I was putting my uniforms out to dry. It was late Saturday afternoon. This boy has always pestered me to have a relationship with him. I felt that something bad might happen to me. The hanging lines are behind our dorms. I was forced to shout at him to stop following me. He was ashamed. He went away.

Espelage et al. (2016) in a study done among Middle School Youth in the USA established that empty hallways (corridors), classrooms, gym locker rooms or gym classes, the cafeteria (kitchen) and bathrooms (toilets) were some of the common locations of SH. Moreover, the findings showed students were sexually harassed even as they passed through electronic equipments such as lifts, during times of school activities and largely during the absence of an adult.

**4.1.6 PERSONS INVOLVED IN SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

The study sought to find the persons mostly involved in SH in secondary schools. The findings are shown on table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Persons Mostly Involved in SH

	Student perspectives		Teacher perspectives	
	N	%	N	%
Student & student	304	57.3%	26	65.0%
Student & teacher	77	14.5%	7	17.5%
Student & non-teaching staff	32	6.0%	-	-
Student and other adult	52	9.8%	2	5.0%
Teacher and teacher	58	10.9%	5	12.5%
Teacher and other adults	8	1.5%	-	-
Total	531	100.0%	40	100.0%

Table 4.7 shows that most cases of SH according to 304(57.3%) students and 26(65.0%) teachers were peer related, involving students harassing or being harassed by fellow students. The results indicate that there was substantial teacher to student harassment as reported by 77(14.55%) students and 7(17.55%) teachers, harassment between students and non-teaching staff 32(6.0%) as well as harassment involving students and other adults. This was reported by 52(9.8%) students and 2(5.0%) teachers.

Peer sexual harassment in schools is not a new phenomenon. Idoko et al., (2015) established that the highest amount of SH was carried out by students on students (92.9% of male and 77.2% of female victims). AAUW studies conducted across middle and high schools in USA registered results similar to those found in the present study (AAUW, 1993, 2001, 2006). Similarly, Ruto (2009) in a study on SH in schools in Kenya noted the prevalence of peer sexual harassment.

It is interesting that 7(17.5%) teachers admitted to teacher involvement in student sexual harassment. This admission in a way is a personal indictment. This is because teachers are not only educators but they are *in loco parentis* relationship with their students which makes any form of SH between them and students inappropriate and unacceptable (De Wet, 2010). Teachers have a role to ensure a safe and peaceful school learning environment. Unfortunately the findings of the present study reveal that some of the teachers may be perpetrating SH on their students. Speaking during the 43<sup>rd</sup> Kenya Secondary School Heads Association (KESSHA) annual conference in Mombasa attended by 8000 principals from secondary schools across the country, the chairman of KESSHA admitted that there were cases of errant teachers and principals who preyed on their students and sent a warning signal to them (Daily Nation, Sunday June 17, 2018). The KESSHA chairman decried blanket condemnation which roped in many innocent others. In the past the teachers' employer, the TSC, has taken action including sacking those found culpable at the completion of investigations. This has however, not eliminated the vice.

#### 4.2 SUMMARY

The first objective of this study was to establish the prevalent forms of SH in different learning environments in selected secondary schools within the chosen study locale. Descriptive statistics revealed that verbal sexual harassment was the most prevalent form of SH in secondary schools whereas the least prevalent was visual sexual harassment. Some of the most common forms of verbal sexual harassment reported included the use of

sexual comments, gestures or jokes directed at the student or someone else within the school, use of obscene, dirty or vulgar language and calling others sexually suggestive names such as 'sweetie' Baibe' etc.

Further analysis showed that even though verbal sexual harassment seemed more prevalent in girls' only schools and physical sexual harassment in mixed secondary schools yet chi-square results indicated that there was no significant statistical relationship between form of sexual harassment and type of school. This meant therefore that no form of SH would be ascribed to a given school type.

At any rate, the locations where SH most frequently took place according to the findings of this study were classes, corridors, toilets and dorms. The findings also revealed that SH was likely to take place in unexpected places such as the clothes hanging lines when students went to put out their clothes to dry. In terms of the persons mostly involved in SH, the study established that much of the harassment in secondary schools was propagated by students on their fellow students (peer sexual harassment).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that verbal sexual harassment was the most prevalent form of SH in the selected secondary schools within this study locale. Based on the findings above, the study recommends that all stakeholders in the field of education ranging from policy makers, parents, students and the school leadership take an active role in ridding schools of SH of whatever form. This means active sensitization. This can be done during stakeholder forums such as school open days including school Annual General Meetings (AGM) and the creation of stakeholder-led rules and regulations to deter any such actions from happening. The stakeholders could be made to be signatory to these rules for them to be taken seriously.

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