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Relationship between Community Involvement and Protection of Girl Child against Sexual Abuse: A case of Selected Primary Schools in Mbarara City South

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ABSTRACT: The study was about Community Involvement and Protection of the Girl Child against Sexual Abuse: A Case Study of Selected Primary Schools in Mbarara City South. The study aims to identify different forms of girl child sexual abuse in Mbarara City South, explore different ways of community involvement in the protection of the girl child against sexual abuse, and establish the relationship between community involvement and protection of the girl child against sexual abuse in Mbarara City South. The study used cross-sectional research design. The study targets head teachers, PTA members, teachers, community leaders, and pupils, with a total of 180 respondents. The study findings examined the various forms of girl child sexual abuse in Mbarara City South, the study reveals alarming instances of physical abuse, overt exposure to sexual content in schools, verbal abuse, exploitation, grooming, and even cases of human trafficking. The gravity of these findings underscores the immediate need for targeted interventions, emphasizing the importance of early recognition, community vigilance, and comprehensive strategies to address both online and offline abuse. The findings highlight crucial strategies for community involvement in protecting girl children against sexual abuse. Education and awareness campaigns, financial and material support to schools, community watch programs, guidance and counseling for teachers, and evaluation and improvement initiatives emerge as key components of an effective community-based approach. These strategies collectively contribute to creating a supportive environment, fostering awareness, and encouraging active participation in initiatives aimed at preventing and addressing girl child sexual abuse. The study concludes that community involvement plays a crucial role in protecting the girl child against sexual abuse in Mbarara City South. The findings demonstrate a moderately strong positive correlation between community engagement and initiatives aimed at safeguarding girls, emphasizing the need for heightened awareness, education, and mobilization efforts. Recommendations include developing strategies to enhance community engagement by addressing identified gaps, such as targeted communication campaigns, community forums, and incentives to encourage active participation in initiatives related to girl child protection. Empowering community leaders through capacity-building programs is also recommended to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead and support community-wide efforts against girl child sexual abuse.

Keywords: Classroom Environment, Learning Process, Teaching

I.   INTRODUCTION

According to (Gelles, 2019) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDA, 1970), approximately 900,000 girls in the United States have been severely injured or seriously injured; approximately 2,000 out of 1,000 girls were victimized and he died. People who survive the ordeal often suffer from depression, which takes time to recover physically.

According to the research conducted by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2016 on violence against children (Adeogun 2004), 133-275 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa are regularly exposed to violence. Parents, parent and teacher groups, local leaders, and school residents can participate in community partnerships to enhance teaching and learning in facilities (Adeogun 2014).

Similarly, child prostitution, child trafficking, child marriage, child labor, child abuse and child neglect are still prevalent in the country (Nigerian) (Aderinto, 2010). The consequences of this abuse are numerous and include teenage pregnancy and childbearing, youth insecurity and violence, leadership, youth,

unemployment of others, armed forces, sexual violence and school dropout. Most children in Nigeria are affected by these hazards (Adherents, 2010).

Kenya Violence against girls at school According to a household survey of more than 3,000 young people in Kenya, violence against girls is a serious problem (KVACS, 2010). The report focuses heavily on sexual violence and its impact on individuals trying to overcome the legacy of sexual and gender-based violence against girls in schools. Victims of child abuse are more likely to be exposed to risks such as drug and alcohol abuse, sex with multiple partners, and unprotected sex; this puts girls at risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Violence is still a harsh reality for thousands of children in Uganda; these children continue to engage in various forms of violence that are often permitted and encouraged by religion and practices throughout the center (Walakila, 2009). They are often victims of physical, sexual and emotional abuse in the family, school, care and justice, communities and working children (Naker, 2005).

The police report on the abuse of girls in Mbarara district showed that the number of perpetrators fell by 11.4% in 2018, with a total of 13,682 children, mostly girls, victimized (Mbarara Police Crime Investigation, 2018). An analysis of differences in the country's response to orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) and primary school girls exposed to violence in Mbarara found that 1,363 victims of violence from 10 districts were reported to the police; there are two reasons for this phenomenon. High risk (ANPPCAN, 2013).

While the government of Uganda seeks to support girls through the first education in the world and enforce the law that every child has the right to education (MoES, 2018), parents and other partners must provide school and tuition fees to private schools (UNICEF, 2019). However, the average school dropout rate is 45%, the majority of which are girls.

This is partly due to inequalities in preventing and responding to violence and abuse against girls (UNICEF Annual Report, 2019). More importantly, social participation has no impact on success in stopping high rates of pregnancy, early pregnancy, child labor and sexual violence, especially during the Covid 19 pandemic (Tondeur, 2021). Therefore, while society should play an important role in protecting children from abuse, unfortunately it is society that is vulnerable to abuse! (Tug, 2021).

This study aims to investigate whether community engagement strategies can improve the protection of girls from sexual violence. A case study of selected primary schools in the north of Mbarara city.

This study was guided by the following objectives and research questions:

i. To find out different forms of girl child sexual abuse in Mbarara City South.
ii. To identify different ways of Community Involvement in the protection of Girl Child against Sexual Abuse in Mbarara city south.
iii. To establish the relationship between Community Involvement and Protection of Girl Child against Sexual Abuse in Mbarara city south.

Research Questions

i. What are the different forms of school girl child abuse in Mbarara city south?
ii. What are the different ways of community involvement in the protection of Girl Child against Sexual Abuse in Mbarara city south?

Research Hypothesis

H_0: There is no significant relationship between community involvement and girl child sexual abuse in Mbarara city south?

Justification of the Study

These findings may provide insight to all policy makers and stakeholders in the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development; Children's non-governmental organizations (NGOs), schools, child protection authorities and the wider community support the results. Community engagement and protection from sexual exploitation of primary school girls in Kakoba Division, Mbarara District.

For society at large, the findings will most likely provide recommendations on taking necessary measures to solve the problems caused by community engagement to protect girls in primary school from sexual abuse.

These findings will most likely add valuable information to the body of knowledge of future researchers examining issues related to community participation and the protection of girls at home.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Underpinnings

Uri Bronfenbrenner's (1979) family systems model and human ecological theory were used in the research. Bronfenbrenner realized that the development of the human body and mind would be completed

through social interaction and interaction between different systems (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macro system).

Ecological systems theory explains how a child's environment affects his or her development by focusing on interconnected systems and processes in four physical environments (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem). In other words, the theory explains the development of the child through the influence of the child's development and the environment.

The term "microsystem" refers to the tight community with which children interact every day and is often used to describe their environment. It is a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relationships that develop people in their faces in particular situations, with features of physical and social conditions that allow or inhibit participation in the local environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Close family, Friends at school and work, teachers, supervisors, and neighbors are often examples of this. At this stage, relationships are considered two-way; this means that the people in the child's life will directly influence him or her and vice versa.

Children often cannot change the structure defined as microsystems and exosystems. The interactions between the various microsystems that make up the lives of young people form the mesosystem. Because it is an important part of microsystems, it involves many connections between groups such as family and church, peer group and family, or home and school.

Ecosystems focus on the connection between two or more environments; Even though she doesn't have a growing child, she still has an indirect influence on him. The external system consists of other people and places that children may not have direct contact with but can influence them. Parents' workplaces, larger communities, and extended family members are some examples of these places and individuals.

The people and places that have the greatest impact and impact on children are considered macrosystems. It includes children's cultural, legal and social values, as well as political and financial institutions, as well as children's thoughts and ideas.

The temporal system is the fifth layer of ecosystem theory that deals with time. The timing of a child's physical development can directly affect them. The child's age will also affect his thinking, which will affect his later development. Ecological systems theory can reveal the many factors that influence child development by examining multiple systems that affect children simultaneously. Therefore, ecological systems theory will contribute to this research by examining protective systems, rules and policies to explain how children's urban environments are affected and how girls at school can be protected from violence. In other words, this theory helps explain how a girl goes to school to develop as a result of her development and social environment.

Different Forms of Girl Child Abuse

Physical assault

The infliction of a non-accidental physical injury on a child is sometimes referred to as physical abuse. The harm may not have been intentional on the part of the parent or caregiver and is not necessarily the result of accident, but instead of excessive or unjustified corporal punishment for the child at that age.

Physical assault is a type of abuse that frequently takes place in educational settings, particularly when it takes the shape of correction or physical punishment. For the sake of correction or control, Straus (2014) defines corporal punishment as the application of physical force with the goal of inflicting pain on the body but not injury. The use of corporal punishment has been outlawed in numerous American schools. This is not the case in Nigeria, where using physical punishment to correct and discipline young children is highly valued. Despite the fact that spanking is a culturally acceptable method of teaching children a lesson, most teachers use it out of rage, which often results in bodily harm to the child in the form of bruises and pains.

Emotional Abuse

Verbal, mental, and psychological maltreatment are other terms used to describe emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is defined by the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (2016) as "acts or omissions by the parents or other caregivers that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders." Therefore, emotional abuse can be defined as any attitude, behavior, or inaction on the part of a caregiver that affects a child's mental health, social development, or feeling of self-worth. Even though it is the most frequent, cruelest, and devastating sort of abuse, it is arguably the least understood. It undermines a child's sense of self, leading him or her to believe they are unworthy, useless, and unable. A youngster suffers more when they are repeatedly humiliated, shamed, scared, or rejected than if they had been physically abused. As a result, most kids frequently isolate themselves, which can contribute to sadness and a lack of focus in class (Khartri, 2014).

Sexual Assault

By employing, using persuasion, inducing, enticing, or coercing any child to engage in, or assist another person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct, CAPTA (Khartri, 2014) defines sexual assault as taking place. It includes rape, molestation, prostitution, or other types of sexual exploitation of minors or incest with children

whether it occurs in caretaker or interfamilial relationships. The most frequently unreported type of child abuse is sexual abuse because of the secrecy that surrounds these situations. Children who have been sexually molested experience emotional issues as a result of guilt and humiliation (Corwin & Olafson, 2017).

Sexual abuse occurs frequently and interferes with a child's natural, healthy growth in households, schools, and throughout society. There is a propensity for instructors to take advantage of the young, innocent, harmless, and naive schoolgirls, particularly in schools with young male teachers. Some educators entice these parents, who occasionally receive parental attention in return, into having extramarital affairs and relationships. Other times, professors deprive parents of their rights and grades in order to satisfy their sexual needs (Corwin & Olafson, 2017).

Negligence

This is a failure to give the child with the bare minimum of care, including shelter, food, clothes, education, supervision, medical attention, and other essentials for the child's physical, mental, and emotional growth. In this case, the child's health and safety are at risk because the guardians or parents failed to carry out duties that were essential for the child's wellbeing. Even though this tragic situation is really depressing, it occurs frequently. The ethics of the profession are violated and teachers' self-worth and dignity are diminished when they permit themselves to fall so low in enticing and occasionally coercing parents into affairs (Gelles, 2019).

Child Exploitation

The practice of using a child for labor or other purposes for the gain of others is known as child exploitation, sometimes known as child labor or child trafficking. Child exploitation is the systematic practice of using children for labor without adequate pay and without taking into account their health and safety (Newton, 2015). These kids are forced to perform laborious tasks in farms that are beyond their years, and some are obliged to hawk goods for extended periods of time while going without nourishment. Such kids will eventually leave school and rarely gain anything from their schooling. These kids are wounded on a physical, emotional, moral, and intellectual level by the time they reach adulthood.

Different ways of community involvement on the protection of school Girl Child against Sexual Abuse.

The Ugandan government adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children in 1992, promising to protect kids from many types of social, economic, cultural, and political exploitation and abuse. These pledges were further domesticated by the Republic of Uganda's 2017 Constitution, which established children's rights in article 34 and served as the foundation for the enactment of cap. 59 of the Children Act. The Children Act outlines children's rights, provides for child care, protection, adoption, family and children's courts, and assigns extensive responsibilities and duty for the welfare of children to local councils, the Probation and Social Welfare Office, and the family and children's courts. In order to provide legal assistance to children and families with issues, the Family Protection Unit was established in every police station.

Section 14 of the Act states that the family and children courts have the authority to hear and decide criminal charges against a child subject to sections 93 and 94; and applications relating to child care and protection. The family and children courts also have the authority to exercise any other jurisdiction granted to them by this or a subsequent Act. According to Sections 20–25 and 32 of the Act, the department of probation and social welfare is in charge of safeguarding children's welfare and supervising the application of the Children Act. The probation and social welfare officers are represented by the Community Development Officers (CDOs) at the lowest levels, from sub-county to village.

The property of a kid must be protected by every local government body; however, they are not permitted to distribute such property. Additionally, local government councils are tasked with mediating when a child's rights, including their property rights and other rights, are being violated. Children with impairments, as well as other needy and vulnerable children, must receive special consideration, and they must all be registered and helped as needed. Local governments also need to work to reunite kids with their guardians and parents when they get separated.

The relationship between community involvement and protection of girl child abuse

A study on school community relationships for the previous 15 years by Ballen and Moles (2013) found that some strategies for parent and community involvement in the educational process were found to have significantly improved the quality of parents ' educational experiences and their achievement in elementary and primary schools. However, Campbell (2018) points out that the current challenge for educational reformers and researchers is to better understand both the characteristics of effective parent and community involvement and the relevant conditions in educational systems and communities under which such involvement has the most beneficial effects. The majority of schools in developing nations don't even make it clear who is in charge of managing parent and community involvement in elementary public schools.

Onsomu and Mujidi (2017) affirm that their observations show that in the majority of African nations, teachers don't seem to encourage parents to get more active in their parents ' educations or facilitate

community involvement. Some of these perform less or no home visits, give parents less instructions, change the times they meet with the kids, and discover less efficient communication methods. Naidoo and Anton (2013) argue in support of their position by stating that, in the majority of cases, the family and community are not given the opportunity to manage the business of education, creating site-based decision-making that includes parents, redesigning the school structure to be less bureaucratic, impersonal, and budget-driven, and generally removing obstacles to parent involvement in the context of necessary systemic changes. This is true for Khabutola, who face similar difficulties.

According to Onsomu and Muj idi (2017), East and Central Africa still experience problems related to almost the same issues. To start, school administrations fail to forge partnerships with parents because they believe that they are unimportant to the educational process because they don't even understand what is being taught. Second, because most parents have low educational backgrounds, unfavorable attitudes, and a significant level of illiteracy, anything related to education intimidates them. Third, parents are prevented from visiting their children at school due to the lengthy travel distances and high travel costs. Fourth, the majority of parents did not see the need to become engaged since they thought teachers could handle it on their own. Primary schools in Mbarara City South, Mbarara City in western Uganda, and throughout Uganda are no exception to this; there is a current need to consciously build relationships between the schools and the community to ensure community involvement in school management.

Community partnerships allow the school and the community to share the burden of running the schools and assisting children in achieving their educational goals, without which neither the school nor the community can prosper (Tondeur, 2013). This is evident from the community involvement in Ugandan schools and their academic performance. The Ugandan environment experience the poor performance trends of the schools especially in the academic, the presence of the state of the community involvement in the state of the community especially in rural Uganda is quite complicated and in their environment.

As mentioned above, multiple studies have looked into a variety of concerns pertaining to the protection of children's rights; yet, a number of difficulties remain unresolved. With this investigation, we tried to dig deeper into the problems. Studies by Laura (2017), Abigaba 1998, and Odongkara 1999, for instance, were conducted primarily in rural regions. Given that the circumstances in rural and peri-urban areas varied and have various effects on the protection and advancement of children's rights, this study employed both rural and peri-urban approaches. While local governments and other actors working to defend children's rights in these areas may have obligations similar to those outlined in the Children Act, they may encounter various difficulties in their day-to-day work.

III.   METHODOLOGY

Research Design

For this study, a cross-sectional study design and descriptive research were employed, utilizing a mixed research approach.

Study Population

The population, referring to the entire group of people, events, or items of interest that the researcher wished to investigate, formed the base from which the sample or subjects of the study were drawn (Bryman, 2004). Mbarara City South division had a total of 60 registered Primary schools, comprising 39 government-aided and 21 Private Primary Schools (Mbarara City Inspectors' Report, 2022). Therefore from this, a total population of 224 respondents was considered.

Sample Size

The categories of respondents in the study encompass a diverse range of stakeholders, each with unique perspectives and roles within the community. Head teachers, representing educational leadership, PTA members, advocating for parental involvement and support, teachers directly involved in classroom instruction, community leaders shaping local policies and initiatives, parents with a vested interest in their children's education, and police officers providing security and community engagement, form a comprehensive cross-section of societal influencers. The varying sample sizes reflect differences in the populations of these groups, with larger samples such as community leaders (106) and parents (30) indicating a broader representation, while smaller samples like police officers (4) may suggest a more specialized focus. Despite differences in size, the inclusion of each category ensures a multifaceted understanding of the study's subject matter, offering insights from multiple perspectives. Additionally, the distribution of respondents across these categories underscores the interdisciplinary nature of the study, recognizing the interconnectedness of education, community, and law enforcement in addressing social issues. This approach promotes holistic analysis and facilitates the development of comprehensive strategies informed by the input of diverse stakeholders, ultimately contributing to more effective solutions and community outcomes.
The study sample size was determined using the Sample size determination formula.

N

$$S = \frac{}{1 + (e2)}$$

$$S = \frac{327}{1 + 327(0.05)2}$$

$$S = \frac{327}{1 + 327(0.0025)}$$

$$S = \frac{327}{1 + 0.8175}$$

$$S = \frac{327}{8175}$$

1.

$S = 180$

Thus, the study considered a sample of 180 respondents as distributed in Table 3.1

Table 3.1: Showing population and Sample Size

Category	Population	Sample size	Sampling
Head teachers	10	10	Purposive sampling
PTA member	10	10	Purposive Sampling
Teachers	120	106	Simple random sampling
Community Leaders	30	20	Simple random sampling
Parents	50	30	Simple random sampling
Police officers	04	04	Purposive sampling
Total	**224**	**180**	

Validity of the Research Instrument

According to Blumberg et al. (2005), a measurement tool's validity is frequently described as how well it complies with its stated objectives. According to Robson (2011), a research instrument's validity refers to how well it actually accomplishes its intended purpose. It relates to how accurate the outcomes are.

Validity

The questionnaire was given to subject-matter experts to be evaluated for each item's applicability to the subject matter to test the validity of the instrument. Manga (2012). The questionnaire was rated under two levels of relevance: relevant and irrelevant. The questionnaire that was rated relevant and irrelevant was calculated as a ratio of the total number of questions in the questionnaire, and the researcher then calculated the Content.

Validity Index (CVI) using the following formula:

$$CVI = \frac{Relevant}{Irrelevant}$$

The instrument was regarded as legitimate when the acceptable rate was 0.7 and above. CVI values of 0.7 and higher were considered valid, according to Amin (2005).

Reliability of the Research Instrument

The researcher administered questionnaires to thirty respondents who were not the actual study participants. Their responses were recorded, and after a two-week period, the same respondents were administered questionnaires for a second time, and again, their responses were recorded. This was done to ascertain the consistency of the research instruments in collecting relevant data. The degree of resemblance between the two groups of answers was assessed. The reliability of the instruments was evaluated using Pearson's linear Correlation Coefficient (PLCC), according to the researcher.

Data Collection Procedure

Following the researcher's receipt of approval from Bishop Stuart University's Research and Ethics Committee, a letter from the research coordinator introduced him to the primary school principals, who then introduced him to the instructors. Arrangements were made with research participants after establishing and agreeing upon timetables. The researcher spoke with each of the sampled participants in person at each location to obtain their consent and secure the time of their choosing.

Data Analysis

For categorical demographic variables as well as some Likert scale responses, descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were supplied.

Qualitative Analysis

To transform qualitative data into concise, comprehensible sentences, content analysis was used. This method of analysis was preferable when qualitative data had been gathered in a textual format, such as data gathered through face-to-face interviews, as proposed by Sekaran (2009). A thematic method was utilized to find themes, categories, and patterns in examining qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought permission from Bishop Stuart University Research Ethics Committee (BSU-REC). Once granted authorization, the researchers proceeded with the data collection process from the selected primary schools. Ample time was given to the participants to ensure accurate and error-free responses to the posed questions. The researcher obtained permission from the appropriate authorities concerning respondent opinions, communicated the study's aims to the respondents, and ensured that the data were interpreted in compliance with general methodology standards and handled with the strictest confidentiality.

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