



Effects of Gender-based Violence on Girl's Classroom Participation: Evidence of Public Secondary Schools in Kakamega East Sub County Kenya

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Abstract: Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant obstacle to girls' learning, limiting their ability to access, attend and complete secondary education. Despite government initiatives to promote equality in educational access, many girls experience physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, which may undermine their classroom participation. In Kakamega East Sub-County, persistent absenteeism, poor engagement and school dropout suggest that GBV may be an important but under-understood factor affecting girls' participation. This study examined the effect of sexual violence and harassment on girls' classroom participation in public secondary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya. The study was guided by Ecological Systems Theory and adopted a correlational research design targeting secondary school girls. Stratified and simple random sampling were used to select 388 respondents. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression. Sexual violence and harassment significantly reduced classroom participation, with harassment affecting concentration showing a substantial negative effect ($\beta = -0.276, p < 0.001$), leading to rejection of the second null hypothesis. The study concludes that GBV is an important predictor of girls' classroom participation and a substantial barrier to equitable secondary education. It recommends strengthening school-based child protection and GBV-prevention measures, enhancing guidance and counselling, increasing financial support for vulnerable girls, and strengthening collaboration among schools, parents, communities and government agencies. The findings are expected to inform education policy, protection programmes and interventions aimed at improving girls' participation and educational outcomes in Kenya.

Keywords: Gender based violence, Sexual violence, Classroom participation, Public Secondary Schools, Kakamega

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1. Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a widespread global phenomenon impacting people irrespective of culture,

social-economic background, and age with girls and women suffering disproportionately. In general terms, GBV means the acts of physical, sexual, psychological and economic harm inflicted upon an individual based on his or her gender (UN Women, 2022). Among adolescent girls,

particularly school-aged, GBV is most likely to be experienced in and around the school settings and seriously impedes their participation in educational processes. The school is supposed to be a safe environment that provides opportunities for learning yet, in some cases, it turns into a space of fear and violence because of abuse perpetrated by peers, educators and even community members (Leach et al., 2014). GBV not only denies fundamental human rights but creates an additional barrier to the provision of equitable and high-quality education for everyone. Though developed countries usually have school settings with strict policies and legislation regulating addressing and reporting GBV cases, the problem continues being persistent. For example, in the USA, cases of sexual harassment, bullying and dating violence among adolescent girls are rather common. In order to tackle the problem, there is a Title IX law, which obliges school administrators to deal with sex-based discrimination and violence including harassment and assault (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). However, various reports indicate the inconsistency in enforcing Title IX and many victims receive little or no help (Holland & Cortina, 2017). Consequently, the U.S. Department of Education developed new Title IX guidelines and encourages the implementation of survivor-centric strategies, peer education and sexual education.

The development of safe, inclusive and equitable learning environments has been based on the introduction of policies and interventions ensuring gender inclusivity, respect for diversity and safety from violence. With regard to Canada, there are various examples of policies that emphasize gender equality and wellbeing of students in the course of creating inclusive and safe learning environment. Though school violence in relation to girls is rare, research demonstrate that Indigenous girls and students from marginalized backgrounds remain disproportionately at risk of GBV (Berman et al., 2017). Therefore, there are several programs introduced by Canada for prevention and responding to GBV. They include the "Safe Schools" policy framework and the "It's Time" federal strategy (Government of Canada, 2023). Such programs employ an equity-based, trauma-informed approach focused on prevention through awareness campaigns, capacity building for educators, and developing support mechanisms for affected students. Also, schools should promote curriculum inclusion and gender-related discussion with students.

In addressing gender-based violence in educational settings, some countries have embedded gender equality principles directly into their national education frameworks, with schools required to promote inclusivity, monitor discriminatory practices, and respond proactively

to incidents of violence. Sweden, widely recognized for its progressive stance on gender equality, has acknowledged the continued existence of GBV, particularly in the forms of online harassment, intimate partner violence among adolescents, and sexual harassment within schools. Swedish education policy mandates the incorporation of gender equality education across all academic levels, aiming to instill values of respect and non-discrimination from an early age. In line with this, both the Education Act and the Discrimination Act require schools to carry out annual equality assessments and take active steps to prevent and address all forms of sexual and gender-based violence (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022). In addition, schools implement peer-led education and offer services for mental health support to provide students with a sense of safety, being heard, and empowered. They are supported by national campaigns and continuing teachers' training in gender-sensitive pedagogy, which creates school environments where all learners can be fully part of the school community and free from fear.

In some countries long-term, policy-supported approaches have been established which combine prevention, education and cultural change in school settings. In fact, GBV in educational institutions is a national priority in Australia, particularly due to rising incidences of sexual assault and peer harassment in both secondary and tertiary schools. In response to these issues, the government launched the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children (2022-2032) which provides for interventions in schools aimed at addressing the root causes of GBV. A key element of this plan is the "Respectful Relationships" education program, which equips children from early childhood through to high school with the ability to confront harmful gender norms, to understand consent and to develop respectful, healthy relationships (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022). The programme has been assessed and there have been positive impacts on students' attitudes towards gender equality and reduced tolerance of violence. Furthermore, the programme has created a culture change across the school by engaging teachers, parents and communities in promoting safety, respect and inclusiveness in learning environments.

Increasingly, more responses have focused on policy change and strengthening safeguarding policies, fostering student voices, and institutionalizing accountability in school systems, with regard to school-based gender-based violence. GBV in schools is a critical issue and has been acknowledged as such by the United Kingdom, especially following the Ofsted review in 2021 which revealed how common sexual harassment is among children in schools across the primary and secondary education system. The

UK government subsequently updated its statutory guidance in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' which required a whole school approach to safeguarding, with clear reporting procedures established and regular staff training on responding to disclosures (Ofsted, 2021). In addition to these policy changes, an increasing number of grassroots initiatives, like the “Everyone's Invited” campaign, have been important in raising awareness, engaging students, and driving a culture shift at school in dealing with sexual violence and harassment. These efforts are intended to help keep students safe, as well as fostering an atmosphere of accountability and respect so that all children are able to learn in a safe, inclusive, and empowering setting. In addition, such efforts are consistent with global development priorities, especially SDG4: Quality Education is inclusive and equitable and ensures all learn and enjoy life-long learning.

Multi-sectoral strategies have been necessary in several Sub-Saharan African countries, involving both legal measures and school-based initiatives, as well as community engagement, to tackle school-related gender-based violence. GBV in school is a huge issue in South Africa, especially for learners, where physical abuse, sexual harassment and forced relationships between teachers and learners and between learners and peers occur. The government has, in turn, developed a series of policy frameworks such as the National School Safety Framework (NSSF) and the Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools. These initiatives stipulate that the schools introduce a whole school approach to their safety and promote regular monitoring, psychosocial support, and reporting processes (Department of Basic Education, 2019). Moreover, Life orientation courses are taught to learners on gender rights, consent and respectful relationships. However, this is not of consistent quality in some areas, and regular training and monitoring at the school level are needed, thus emphasizing the need for ongoing training and monitoring systems at the school level.

Interventions to prevent gender-based violence in schools in some sub-Saharan African countries have included policy changes, school-based interventions and working with civil society groups to create safe learning environments. In this regard, Nigeria has taken a multi-faceted approach to addressing the common problems of school-based GBV, ranging from sexual harassment, corporal punishment, to forced early marriage, all of which impede girls school participation and retention. In response to these challenges, the Federal Ministry of Education has drafted a National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools (2016) that offers a broad-based approach to

addressing GBV in schools. The policy highlights the establishment of child protection committees, strengthening of student reporting systems, and the engagement of parents and leaders who can encourage school safety (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016). Moreover, campaigns and awareness-raising initiatives like those of UNICEF and ActionAid have helped to educate and advocate on behalf of girls, empowering them to report abuse and hold the perpetrators accountable. These good intentions have still resulted in a lack of effectiveness in the implementation of these programmes, especially in rural and conflict-prone areas of the country, due to continued weak enforcement of the law and socio-cultural norms (UNICEF, 2021).

Strategies to prevent gender-based violence in schools can be extensive and include country-specific strategies, national strategies and action, curriculum-based prevention and collaboration with community and international actors, before focusing on country specific actions. In Uganda, this holistic strategy has been implemented to address the multiple dimensions of poverty, transactional relationships and teacher-student abuse that hinder girls' education. All schools are encouraged to incorporate good sexuality education into their school curriculum, form a GBV committee, and build safe spaces through community awareness building and mentoring by students (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019). International partners have backed up these initiatives by supporting “safe spaces” programmes, which offer life skills training and knowledge about the rights and reproductive health of girls. Despite this, the implementation of policies is uneven, a severe lack of reporting, and the stigma associated with being a victim remain a barrier to achieving gender equality in Ugandan education.

The problem of GBV continues to persist and act as a hindrance to the education of girl children in Kenya based on statistics at the national level. The 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey reports that 34% of women aged 15-49 have suffered physical violence, while 13% of them have been victims of sexual violence (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2023). Almost half of adolescent girls in Kenya aged between 13-17 have faced physical violence, and school is not a safe place for them due to peer and teacher harassment (UNICEF, 2019). The country has developed a National Policy on GBV and included GBV prevention in the education sector.

On the county level, Kakamega has understood the importance of GBV through policies such as Kakamega County Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Policy (2020-2030), which is meant to enhance the creation of safe

learning environments and more stringent measures to implement it (Kakamega County Government, 2020). Even though there isn't much data on a sub-county level, it has been recorded that the Network for Research and Governance and Transparency International Kenya have experienced an increasing number of GBV cases in schools in the Kakamega East Sub-County. These cases include physical, sexual, and economic abuse, which can affect the attendance and performance of the girls in class.

Education statistics from recent times show huge discrepancies in the school participation rates of girls in different sub-counties within Kakamega County. For example, although Kakamega East Sub-County reports drop-out rates of roughly 25%, research in other regions such as Kakamega South and Kakamega Central sub-counties has indicated lower drop-out rates ranging from 15% to 18% (Ingado, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2021). In addition, whereas Kakamega North Sub-County still experiences higher cases of teenage pregnancies and absenteeism, almost 20% of girls within the area are absent from schools owing to GBV and vulnerability issues, in contrast to only 12% in Lugari Sub-County. The aforementioned statistics suggest that Kakamega East Sub-County is one of the worst-affected areas as far as girls' school attendance is concerned, especially because of the high level of domestic wrangles that might involve GBV, including physical, sexual, and economic abuse. As a result, there is a need to conduct localized studies to determine the exact relationship between GBV and girls' school attendance in Kakamega East.

Given the lack of disaggregated data at the sub-county level, especially for rural areas like Kakamega East, this study is necessary to fill the evidence gap. It aims to systematically assess the forms and frequency of GBV affecting secondary school girls and analyze its direct influence on their school participation. By producing localized data, the study will inform county education authorities, school leadership, and community stakeholders on how to implement effective, context-sensitive interventions that safeguard girls' right to education and promote gender equality.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The research has been anchored on the Ecological Systems Theory formulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). According to the theory, an individual's development is affected by different environmental systems, from

immediate environments to larger structures of society. These systems comprised microsystem, mesosystem, exo system, macrosystem, and chronosystem, among others, that interact to affect the behaviors and decisions of an individual. The main focus of the theory was to show the relevance of understanding both the experiences of an individual and the impact of family, peers, institutions, policies, and culture. It was appropriate for research aimed at addressing social problems like GBV since it occurred in various systems of a girl's environment and affected her involvement in education.

In addressing the research problem of investigating the impact of physical violence on girls' schooling, the ecological theory played a crucial role in understanding the concept of physical violence in terms of the microsystem whereby the girl learners interact with their environment through their schoolmates, school teachers, and their families at the immediate level. Learners who were subjected to physical punishment and abuse by teachers or fellow students developed fear and absenteeism, thus reducing their presence in schools.

It also helped achieve the second and third objectives in examining the impact of sexual abuse and psychological/emotional abuse on classroom participation and engagement. These types of GBV emanate from the mesosystem and exosystem, where there are no adequate measures to report and prevent the abuse since there is no school leadership and parents who are involved. For example, when schools do not provide safety in classrooms and emotional abuse is normalized within communities, girls will be unable to engage in classwork. As highlighted by Bronfenbrenner, such an experience is not a one-off event but is influenced by the interaction between the micro and macro system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

With regards to the goal of studying the effect of economic abuse on school retention, the theory took into consideration factors like macrosystems and exosystems that include issues like poverty, gender expectations, policies, and structures which put girls at risk of transactional sex and economic abuse. This shaped their decision of how to either complete or drop out of school. In case the needs of a girl are not met financially, and the school system does not offer any help, she will get into exploitative situations which will interfere with her education. Ecological systems theory gave the research the ability to view GBV not only as an individual but as a result of many interdependent systems.

2.2 Empirical Review

Sexual violence and harassment is one of the most common forms of GBV that learners face worldwide, and it has an impact on school participation, especially of girls. These acts are sexual contact, sexual comments, force, attempted force, assault, and harassment, both physical and electronic. Girls are disproportionately affected, but boys are also victims, especially in settings where they may be too scared to report due to silence and stigma. The school environment, which should be a safe place of growth and development, becomes a hostile environment for the victim and results in absenteeism, inability to concentrate, emotional trauma, and eventual school dropout. While there is a gap in local, gender-disaggregated data and action, there is a great need to understand the extent of sexual violence in schools and its impact on participation.

The evidence indicates the extent to which sexual violence has become an issue in West Africa, particularly in schools. In Nigeria, a study by Fawole et al. (2015) in Ibadan looked into sexual coercion and abuse among in-school adolescents and revealed that almost 30% of all female students had been sexually harassed by men (peers and teachers alike). The victims had a higher prevalence of absenteeism and emotional withdrawal, which sometimes led to poor academic performance. However, the study was primarily based on self-reported data without a school level or an administration perspective. The current study addresses this by combining students' and teachers' experiences to gain deeper insights and by investigating the impact of these experiences on girls' participation and retention in school in rural Kenyan context.

Bhana and Anderson (2013) conducted a mixed-methods study in South Africa, which revealed that sexual harassment is a form of violence experienced by both girls and boys in schools, perpetrated by peers in an acceptable manner and by weak disciplinary systems. The researchers noted that sexual harassment was common in unsupervised areas of the school, such as corridors and playgrounds. Students, typically girls, would miss school or section of the school in order to avoid harassment, and those boys who would not succumb to harassment were labelled as "weak" and "gay". This study offered some useful comparisons between genders but did not include quantitative findings on the impact of sexual violence on participation rates such as attendance and dropout. This is an attempt to be addressed by the current study which provides measurable indicators of school participation and disaggregating the data by GBV dimensions and frequency.

UNESCO (2020) conducted a cross-national study on school-related gender-based violence which showed that more than 246 million children are subjected to sexual and physical violence in school or in its vicinity every year. The report highlighted the link between school violence and negative school experiences, such as early exit from school and low enrolment particularly among adolescent girls. While informative, this report was generalized across multiple countries and contexts, and in not focusing specifically on sub-national or rural dynamics, where cultural silence and stigma may be more entrenched. The focus of this study is to look at the factors in the local context that influence sexual harassment in rural secondary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County.

In the United States, Hill and Karl (2017) conducted a longitudinal study that explored sexual harassment in middle and high schools, which found that nearly 48% of girls and 22% of boys had been verbally or physically sexually harassed. Embarrassment, fear and depression were common emotional side effects, resulting in victims being absent or not participating in school activities. The study provided a general perspective of the problem in developed environments but may not be applicable to rural African schools where gender norms and supports vary significantly. This paper fills that gap by studying the socio-cultural factors which affect sexual harassment in a rural Kenyan context and their effect on school enrolment.

UNESCO and UNGEI (2021) recently found, in the case of Ethiopia, that girls who experience sexual harassment are at risk of being affected academically as a result of fear of attending school, shame, and lack of institutional support. It further stated that boys are not allowed to speak up about their experiences of fear of emasculation or associated with weakness. The study did not, however, examine in detail the difference in these experiences between public and private schools, or the role of school infrastructure (e.g., lack of gender-sensitive facilities) in the risk. In this study, the boarding and day categories of school type as well as institutional characteristics are included as control variables, to give deeper context.

Njue and Askew (2004) examined the issue of transactional sex and sexual coercion among schoolgirls in Nyanza Province, Kenya. It found that poverty, lack of sanitary provisions and poor implementation of school rules allowed for the formation of coerced sexual relationships between male teachers or older students and girls. Many girls who became involved in such relationships were held back from school because of being ashamed, falling pregnant or fear of being victimized. The study is applicable to Kenya, but it is fairly old and concentrates on

sexual exploitation, not on non-transactional harassment (such as verbal abuse or groping). This current research extends this discussion by not only documenting coercive types of sexual violence but also documenting non-coercive forms. The current study extends this conversation to capture both coercive and non-coercive forms of sexual violence as well as to enhance the understanding of the impact of these types of sexual violence on school attendance and classroom engagement.

In rural western Kenya, transactional sex is widely cited as a coping mechanism for material deprivation; the findings emphasize that transactional sex contributes to girls' exposure to sexual coercion, pregnancy, and stigma, which all significantly contribute to absenteeism and school drop-out among secondary aged girls. (Thiaw et al., 2024).

A recent randomized study of cash transfer programs in Malawi revealed that conditional cash transfers (linked to school attendance) led to a marked increase in the number of days attended and to a decrease in early sexual debut and pregnancy (Baird, McIntosh, & Özler, 2011). This means that any measures taken to decrease the pressure on girls to be involved in unsafe sexual encounters may have a positive indirect impact on school enrollment, by decreasing the exposure to sexual exploitation.

Similarly, a systematic review of school-based gender-based violence (SBGBV) in sub-Saharan Africa combined various country studies and identified that sexual harassment and informal sexual exchange around schools are repeatedly linked to increased absenteeism, decreased attention in school and increased drop-out rates, underscoring the importance of in-school protections and community economic supports.

This study was guided by Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model, originally developed by Joyce L. Epstein (2001) and further elaborated in Epstein (2011). The model is founded on the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which posits that learners' educational outcomes improve when schools, families, and communities work collaboratively. Epstein identifies six types of parental involvement, namely parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. These forms of involvement strengthen learners' academic achievement, social development, and competence acquisition.

The model is appropriate for this study because it explains how parental involvement contributes to learners' acquisition of collaboration competency under the CBE

curriculum. The study focuses on parents' involvement in extended activities, assigning and monitoring shared household tasks, and parents' involvement in resource acquisition, which are consistent with Epstein's framework.

The School-Family-Community Partnership Model, developed by Joyce L. Epstein in 2001, provided a robust theoretical foundation for the study on parental involvement in fostering collaboration competency within the CBE in primary schools of Kakamega South Sub-County, Kenya. This model posits that education thrives through overlapping spheres of influence (school, family, and community) structured around six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2011). For the study's objectives focusing on homework activities, resource acquisition, and decision-making, the model elucidates how these parental roles cultivate collaboration skills, such as teamwork and shared problem-solving, which are central to CBE's core competencies. The framework highlights how parental engagement bridges home-school gaps, enabling practical group activities and modeling cooperative behaviors, with evidence linking such involvement to enhanced curriculum outcomes (Ranji et al, 2024).

Specifically, the study's emphasis on involvement in homework activities aligns with Epstein's "learning at home" type, where parents guide practical tasks like group experiments, fostering critical thinking and peer interaction crucial for collaboration competency (Epstein, 2011). Assigning and monitoring shared household tasks corresponds to the "parenting" and "collaborating with the community" types, as parents provide materials (e.g., textbooks, study spaces) and tap community resources to support collaborative projects, addressing material shortages common in Kenyan rural schools (Gatwiri & Gichuru, 2025). Involvement in decision-making, through PTA participation, reflects Epstein's "decision-making" type, where parents' roles in governance model collective problem-solving, creating school cultures that reinforce learners' teamwork skills (Kigwilu & Akala, 2020). These aspects are empirically supported, with studies showing significant correlations between parental involvement and CBC competency acquisition, directly tying parental actions to collaboration skill development (Ranji et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between gender-based violence and school participation among secondary school girls in

Kakamega East Sub-County. The study was conducted in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya, targeting 13,500 girls from 39 public secondary schools. A sample of 388 respondents was selected using Yamane (1967) formula at 0.05 level of precision. The respondents were selected using proportionate stratified sampling, where each school formed a stratum, while simple random sampling using class registers was used to select individual girls. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to female students.

The questionnaires contained rating-scale items measuring frequency of sexual violence incidences, type of perpetrator, accessibility of reporting mechanisms and learners' school participation. Responses were rated on a Likert scale. The dependent variable was school participation measured on an interval scale. The instruments were piloted among 15 girls in two secondary schools in neighbouring Kakamega South Sub-County. Validity was established through expert review and piloting, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficients for the study scales ranged from 0.84 to 0.91, with an overall coefficient of 0.89, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation, independent t-test and multiple linear regression. Means, frequencies and standard deviations were used to summarise the variables, while Pearson correlation established the relationship between number of sexual violence incidences and participation index. Independent t-test determined

differences based on type of perpetrator and reporting mechanisms. Multiple linear regression was used to determine the predictive influence of gender-based violence on school participation using the model $Y = a_0 + a_1X_1 + a_2X_2 + a_3X_3 + \epsilon$ where Y = school participation, X_1 = number of incidents, X_2 = type of perpetrator, X_3 = accessibility of reporting mechanism. Diagnostic tests for multicollinearity and normality of residuals were conducted. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < .05$, and findings were presented using tables and narrative descriptions. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw. Clearance was obtained from NACOSTI, data were securely stored and reported in aggregate form, while measures were taken to minimise potential harm and protect participants' welfare.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive Statistics for independent variables were measured using rating items, where learners were asked to rate their experiences of sexual violence and harassment in the present school term. The learners were required to rate between 1 and 5, where 1 is Never and 5 Very Often, and the results are presented. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Sexual Violence and Harassment

Code	Sexual Violence and Harassment Item	Mean	SD	Min	Max
SV1	I have received unwanted sexual comments, jokes, or remarks from someone.	2.97	1.19	1	5
SV2	I have experienced unwanted touching or sexual advances.	2.41	1.22	1	5
SV3	I have felt unsafe coming to school because of sexual harassment.	2.56	1.28	1	5
SV4	Sexual harassment has affected my concentration during lessons.	2.74	1.17	1	5
SV5	I know a girl who has missed school because of sexual harassment or sexual pressure.	3.18	1.09	1	5
Sexual Violence Index		2.77	0.89	1.00	5.00

Source: Field Data (2026).

Learners reported medium levels of sexual violence and harassment, with item means ranging from 2.41 to 3.18 on the 1-5 scale. The highest-rated aspects were knowing a girl who has missed school due to sexual harassment or

pressure (M = 3.18, SD = 1.09) and receiving unwanted sexual comments, jokes or remarks (M = 2.97, SD = 1.19), indicating prevalent verbal harassment and its indirect impact. Other notable experiences included sexual

harassment affecting concentration during lessons ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.17$) and feeling unsafe coming to school ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.28$). Lower but still significant ratings were observed for experiencing unwanted touching or sexual advances ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.22$). Standard deviations ranging between 1.09 and 1.28 suggest moderate variability in learners' experiences. Overall, these findings indicate that while physical forms of harassment were less frequently reported, verbal harassment and vicarious experiences of absenteeism are prevalent among girls.

4.2 Bivariate Analysis between Sexual Violence and Classroom Participation

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between each item and the school participation score (Y), which is the composite index of classroom participation. The findings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Pairwise Pearson Correlation Matrix between Sexual Violence Indicators and Classroom Participation

Variable	SV1	SV2	SV3	SV4	SV5	School Participation (Y)
SV1	1.000					
SV2	0.521 (0.001)	1.000				
SV3	0.486 (0.001)	0.564 (0.001)	1.000			
SV4	0.547 (0.001)	0.501 (0.001)	0.611 (0.001)	1.000		
SV5	0.439 (0.001)	0.416 (0.001)	0.462 (0.001)	0.488 (0.001)	1.000	
School Participation (Y)	-0.474 (0.001)	-0.421 (0.001)	-0.538 (0.001)	-0.566 (0.001)	-0.358 (0.001)	1.000

Note: Values in each cell represent Pearson's correlation coefficient (r), with the corresponding p-value shown in parentheses.

As shown in Table 2, all items of sexual violence and harassment (SV1 to SV5) had negative and statistically significant correlations with the composite school participation score at $p < 0.001$. The correlation coefficients ranged from moderate (SV5, $r = -0.358$) to moderate-strong (SV4, $r = -0.566$). The strongest relationships were observed for SV4 (Sexual harassment has affected my concentration during lessons, $r = -0.566$), SV3 (I have felt unsafe coming to school because of sexual harassment, $r = -0.538$), and SV1 (I have received unwanted sexual comments, $r = -0.474$). These results suggest that psychological impacts of harassment involving concentration and safety are most strongly associated with reduced school participation.

These findings imply that sexual violence practices associated with fear, psychological distress, and distraction are more strongly associated with lower participation. Feeling unsafe and difficulty concentrating appears particularly important, as it directly undermines classroom engagement. Moderately strong correlations were also observed for unwanted comments (SV1) and unwanted touching (SV2), suggesting that direct victimization contributes significantly to reduced participation.

On the other hand, relatively lower (though still significant) correlations were found for knowing a girl who missed school due to harassment (SV5, $r = -0.358$) and unwanted touching (SV2, $r = -0.421$). This suggests that while vicarious and physical experiences are impactful, the internalized psychological consequences have a more direct impact on learners' day-to-day participation than indirect experiences. Overall, the findings indicate that psychological forms of sexual harassment play a more critical role in reducing learners' school participation than vicarious experiences.

4.3 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of the Effect of Sexual Violence on Classroom Participation

For testing the impact of sexual violence and harassment on schooling, multiple linear regression analysis was performed. Model 1 was the one with five sexual violence measures as independent variables, whereas Model 2 considered control variables (age and class). Regression coefficients (β), p-values for the coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), adjusted R^2 , F-statistic, and significance of the model are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Results for the Effect of Sexual Violence on Classroom Participation

Predictor	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	p-value	β	p-value
Unwanted sexual comments (SV1)	-0.143	0.019	-0.136	0.024
Unwanted touching/sexual advances (SV2)	-0.118	0.041	-0.111	0.048
Feeling unsafe due to sexual harassment (SV3)	-0.247	<0.001	-0.236	<0.001
Sexual harassment affected concentration (SV4)	-0.289	<0.001	-0.276	<0.001
Know a girl who missed school due to harassment (SV5)	-0.102	0.036	-0.097	0.043
Age (Control)	—	—	-0.058	0.211
Class/Form (Control)	—	—	0.073	0.114
Constant	4.316	<0.001	4.247	<0.001
Model Statistics	Model 1		Model 2	
R ²	0.452		0.466	
Adjusted R ²	0.445		0.457	
F-statistic	62.71		47.58	
Model p-value	<0.001		<0.001	

Dependent Variable: School Participation (Composite Index)

The regression results showed that all the five indicators of sexual violence and harassment had negative and statistically significant impact on classroom participation in both models. For model 1, the strongest predictor of lower concentration ($\beta = -0.289$, $p < 0.001$) was sexual harassment during lessons (SV4), followed by feeling unsafe coming to school because of sexual harassment (SV3) ($\beta = -0.247$, $p < 0.001$). The other indicators also were statistically significant and were negative, meaning that greater experiences of sexual violence and harassment were associated with lower levels of participation in class activities. The sexual violence indicators accounted for a total of 45.2% of the variance in classroom participation.

All five indicators were still statistically significant, but regression coefficients decreased slightly, after accounting for age and class level in Model 2. The control variables were not statistically significant which implies that the relationship between sexual violence and participation in the classroom was not statistically dependent on the age and class level of the learners. The control variables slightly improved the explanatory power of the model to 46.6%, showing that there is a slight improvement in the fit of the model.

Overall regression models were statistically significant, such that the predictor variables accounted for a significant proportion of the variation in classroom participation (Model 1: $F = 62.71$, $p < 0.001$; Model 2: $F = 47.58$, $p <$

0.001). Thus, the null hypothesis accepting that sexual violence and harassment do not have a statistically significant effect on girls' participation in their classes in public secondary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County, was rejected. The study thus finds that sexual violence and harassment have a significant negative impact on the participation of girls in class, especially in terms of fear, difficulty to concentrate during the learning process and discouragement to participate regularly in school activities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of gender-based violence goes beyond the immediate impact of violence in the form of physical or emotional trauma to the educational experience of the learners. Among the various forms of gender-based violence, each one of these forms independently affected the participation of learners in classroom activities regardless of demographic factors. This study therefore confirms that gender-based violence is a significant factor which affects classroom participation negatively.

5.2 Recommendation

The study recommends that:

1. The Ministry of Education should strengthen the implementation and enforcement of school-based gender-based violence prevention and child protection policies in all public secondary schools.
2. School administrators should establish and strengthen confidential reporting, guidance and counselling, and learner support systems to prevent and promptly respond to all forms of gender-based violence affecting girls.
3. Parents, guardians and community stakeholders should work collaboratively to eliminate physical, sexual, psychological and economic forms of abuse while providing supportive home environments that promote girls' regular participation in school.
4. The Government and development partners should expand financial support programmes, including bursaries, provision of learning materials and menstrual hygiene products, to reduce economic barriers that limit girls' participation in secondary education.

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