

# Influence of Peer Counselling Strategies on Gender-based Violence among Students in Selected Private Tertiary Institutions in Thika Sub-county, Kiambu County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

**Statement of the Problem:** Peer-counselling plays an important role in minimizing instances of gender-based violence among students. However, in Thika Sub-county, cases of gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions have been on the rise.

**Purpose of the Study:** To assess the influence of peer counselling strategies on gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions in Thika Sub-county, Kiambu County, Kenya.

**Methodology:** The study adopted mixed methodology and thus applied concurrent triangulation research design. Target population comprised 58 deans of students, 113 college counsellors and 2356 peer-counsellors totaling 2527 respondents from which a sample of 345 respondents (13.6%) was obtained using Yamane's Formula. Stratified sampling was applied to create five strata based on zones in Thika Sub-county. From each zone, five deans of students and five college counsellors from five colleges were sampled using purposive sampling. However, from each zone, simple random sampling was applied to select 59 peer counsellors to avoid bias. This sampling procedure realized a sample size of 25 deans of students, 25 college counsellors and 295 peer counsellors. A questionnaire was used to collect data from peer counsellors whereas an interview guide was used to collect data from deans of students and college counsellors. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics such as linear regression analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-Version 23) and presented using tables.

**Findings:** The study found that cases of gender-based violence among students in private tertiary colleges have been on the rise for the last five years (2018 to 2022). However, introduction of peer counselling strategies has not, to a great extent, reduced instances of GBV among students.

**Recommendations:** Private colleges should continue training students as peer-counsellors to help model behaviour patterns of their peers. They should continue planning and organizing counselling sessions for students to enable them generate solutions to their behavioural problems without depending on any significant adult.

**Keywords:** *Peer-counselling, gender-based violence, private tertiary institutions.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender-based violence is a form of violence which is perpetrated against partner in different families all over the world. According to Sugg, Thompson, Thompson, Majuro and Rivara (2014), gender-based violence is a term describing violence that is committed against an intimate partner. Sugg et al (2014) noted that such forms of violence usually take the form of verbal or physical, coercion or life-threatening deprivation, directed at an individual. This causes physical or psychological harm, humiliation or arbitrary deprivation of liberty that perpetuates male or female subordination. In Colombia, Heise, Ellbeeg and Gottmoeller (2014) assert that different forms of violence against partners, though rarely reported and relegated to levels of minimal importance, have become more prevalent.

Among students in learning institutions, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2020) also posits that violence against male or female partner has been a long-standing social problem in the world and a violation of human rights which occurs in all settings and among all social, economic, religious and cultural groups. A report by Dutton and White (2019) shows that, in Haiti, cases of gender-based violence meted by students against male or female partners stand at 34.8% with 13.6% having led to death and total incapacitation of the victims. In the United States of America, statistics showed that about 834,700 partners are physically assaulted and/or raped by an intimate partner every year (Tomison, 2018). To mitigate the effects of the phenomenon of violence among students, learning institutions have embraced peer counselling strategies.

Peer counselling is a well-documented concept of counselling. As Stoops et al (2011) point out, it is a personal method of change and is based on the idea that most people prefer to seek out their peers for help when experiencing challenges, frustrations, concerns and general problems. Stoops et al (2011) have documented that transition from home to private tertiary institutions is sometimes a stressful and emotional experience for junior students, requiring a structured support network. In other words, when students join schools for the first time, some of them experience emotional stress due to a change in the environment as well as behavioral and developmental gaps (Francis, 2012). In a study carried out in Philadelphia, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) noted that during the peer counselling or mentoring sessions, individual students offer their junior colleagues an opportunity for self-knowledge and self-development through individual or group interventions. Understanding and knowledge of oneself and the environment gained through counselling and mentoring leads to personal development and good decision-making. To corroborate these assertions, Smylie, Conley and Marks (2002), in a study conducted in Chicago, noted that senior students act as mentors who provide their young colleagues with a pool of knowledge that could be tapped on, to help polish their disciplinary, behavioral and some particular key skills that were said to be pertinent in career development. This points to the fact that any junior student looking for a mentor is expected to seek out for positive and pleasing behavior patterns and personality, besides a mere successful track record. Peer counselling gives students an opportunity to work on their issues and concerns without fear and intimidation. Smylie et al (2002) discovered that peer supervision increased in the peer counselors' empathy, respect, genuineness as well as concreteness. Through such skills, a student peer counselor is aligned to build a rapport with the peer they are counselling, making it easier to make an impact, and for the client to make sound decisions.

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In Sub-Saharan Africa, research has indicated that private tertiary institutions have embraced the concept of peer counselling as an effective professional counselling (World Bank, 2008). In Botswana, the University of Botswana introduced the peer counselling program spearheaded by students in 2003 which has produced positive results as reflected in the shared experiences of such students. The University of Botswana Careers and Counselling Centre, peer counselling program, trains and equips students with skills to enable them to help their peers (Marks & Printy, 2003). Peer counselors unlike professional counselors are available to help their peers anytime and their counselling sessions are informal discussions and conversations which are not threatening. Peer counselling believes that peers have the ability to reach out and change each other since they understand one another better.

Sithole (2008), in a study conducted in KwaZulu Natal Province in South Africa, posited that, to this end students are expected to build their own databases of prospective student mentors and design an action plan for connection. They are to certify first on what they want to learn from the prospective mentors, before contacting them. These findings further affirm the fact that student mentorship was therefore a one good road to decisiveness on career development with students. The student mentors offer assistance to junior colleagues in settling into the new schedule and lifestyle of tertiary institution life. In Kenya, peer counselors play a critical role in mentoring new students (RoK, 2012). A study conducted in Machakos Central Division by Muli (2011) revealed that peer counselors develop friendships through their participation in mentoring programs and usually derive satisfaction from helping a younger student, and possibly shaping his or her life in a positive way. Thika Sub-county is not an exception with peer counselors being the in-thing in most private tertiary institutions where members of peer counselors act as peer mentors to new students, the peer mentees, in a particular subject, behavior pattern or lifestyle (Muli, 2011). In Thika Sub-county, instances of gender-based violence among students in tertiary institutions have been on the rise. For example, a report of a study undertaken by the Ministry of Public Service and Gender (2021) shows that there was a 36.0% spike in gender-based violence cases in 2020 when 5,009 cases were recorded with GBV among students. As a mitigant, tertiary institutions have embraced counselling strategies. This move led to the need for a new approach to education to be formulated and a new management strategy of how order is to be created in private tertiary institutions. In other words, all these incidents make it necessary to strengthen peer counselling services to manage GBV in learning institutions.

In an empirical study conducted in Thika Sub-county, Kindiki (2009) found that establishment of peer counselors was driven by the need of enhancing effective teaching and learning and an even more, the urgent need to tame school unrest within schools. Kindiki (2009) noted that student leaders are a tremendous help to the school and play a particularly important role in mentoring younger students. These findings affirm the fact that the position of student leadership forms a valuable part of a student's personal development opening their mind to new levels of responsibility and participation in a very positive way. However, Kindiki (2009) failed to articulate how different peer counselling activities influence gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Peer counselling strategies play an important role in shaping the behaviour of students in learning institutions. However, in private tertiary institutions in Thika Sub-county, the situation is different since there have been many cases of gender-based violence among students. As noted earlier, a report of a study undertaken by the Ministry of Public Service and Gender (2021) shows that there was a 36.0% spike in gender-based violence cases in 2020 when 5,009 cases were recorded with GBV among students. As a mitigant, tertiary institutions have embraced counselling strategies. Despite these observations, much was yet to be done to interrogate the influence of counselling strategies on gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions, thus, the study.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To assess the status of gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions in Thika Sub-county.
- ii. To examine the influence of peer counselling strategies on gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions in Thika Sub-county.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was guided by social learning theory which was postulated by Albert Bandura (1977) who viewed learning by observing others as the role model. The theory emphasizes on learning that take place within the social context. The theory states that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling. The theory proposes that after observing the model, the student observes mentally, processes the information by selecting, organizing the incoming stimuli from the environment into a cognitive of map. This shows that behaviour, personal (and cognitive), and environmental factors operate interactively. Bandura believes that punishment in whatever form does not work as well as reinforcement and may backfire on us. In this study, it is posted that the tutors should work cooperatively in guiding and counselling students for the purpose of achieving high standards of discipline. On the other hand, students have to see themselves, as instruments, which the future society depends upon. Thus, they should aim to be role models.

The study was also guided by the Family Systems Theory which as proposed by Straus and Gelles (2005). This theory holds that intimate partner violence is an expression of conflict within the family that can best be understood through examination of social structures contributing to the use of violence. Within the context of this study, conflict between family members, which may also imply intimate partners, are universal and inevitable and violence is seen as one of the means of resolving predictable conflict. This implies that as couples fail to address adequately their interpersonal disputes and disagreements, anger and bitterness build up over time, which eventually leads to an outburst or heavy physical and verbal abuse. This theory explains the recurrent gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions. This theory underscores the fact that counselling strategies adopted by private tertiary institutions are key to reducing cases of gender-based violence among students. That is, peer counselling strategies which private tertiary institutions are

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expected to mitigate the rising cases of gender-based violence among students.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted mixed methodology and thus applied concurrent triangulation research design. Target population comprised 58 deans of students, 113 college counsellors and 2356 peer-counsellors totaling 2527 respondents from which a sample of 345 respondents (13.6%) was obtained using Yamane's Formula. Stratified sampling was applied to create five strata based on zones in Thika Sub-county. From each zone, five deans of students and five college counsellors from five colleges were sampled using purposive sampling. However, from each zone, simple random sampling was applied to select 59 peer counsellors to avoid bias. This sampling procedure realized a sample size of 25 deans of students, 25 college counsellors and 295 peer counsellors. A questionnaire was used to collect data from peer counsellors whereas an interview guide was used to collect data from deans of students and college counsellors. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics such as linear regression analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-Version 23) and presented using tables.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This section presents the findings of the study based on the objective. It also outlines the methods of presentation of the study findings and discussions.

### **RESPONSE RATES**

In this study, 295 questionnaires were administered to peer-counsellors out of which 291 questionnaires were filled and returned. At the same time, 19 Deans of Students and 20 college counsellors were interviewed. This yielded response rates shown in Table 1;

**Table 1: Response Rates**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Sampled Respondents</b>	<b>Those Who Participated</b>	<b>Achieved Return Rate (%)</b>
Deans of Students	25	19	76.0
Peer-counsellors	295	291	98.6
College counsellors	25	20	80.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>95.7</b>

**Source: Field Data (2023)**

Table 1 shows that Deans of Students registered a response rate of 76.0%, peer-counsellors registered 98.6% whereas college counsellors registered a response rate of 80.0%. On average, this yielded a response rate of 95.7%, which affirmed the assertions of Creswell (2014) that a response rate above 75.0% is adequate and of suitable levels to allow for the generalization of the outcomes to the target population.

### **Gender-based Violence among Students in Selected Private Tertiary Institutions**

The study sought to assess incidences of gender-based violence among students in selected private tertiary institutions. This was measured by collecting data on reported cases of gender-based violence among students for the last five years (2018-2022). Results are shown in Table 2;

**Table 2: Number of Reported Cases of Gender-based Violence among Students Selected Private Tertiary Institutions in Thika Sub-county (2018-2022)**

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Number of GBV Cases</b>
2018	101
2019	112
2020	94
2021	134
2022	153

**Source: Field Data (2023)**

Table 2 shows that cases of gender-based violence among students in private tertiary colleges have been on the rise with a notable rise from 2019. These findings corroborate the findings of a study carried out by World Health Organization (2013) which also found that prevalence of physical or sexual intimate partner violence ranged from 15 to 71% and 4 to 54%, respectively, and the prevalence of emotional violence ranged from 20 to 75%. These findings further support the findings of a study conducted by WHO (2019) that estimated that the lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence among female youths aged 15-19 was 29.4 and 31.6% for ages 20-24. A study undertaken in Haiti by Krug et al (2021) also revealed that schools and universities were highly vulnerable to GBV.

This further lends credence to the findings of another study which was conducted in South Africa among adolescents aged 10-17 years in which Meinck et al (2016) revealed that the lifetime prevalence of physical abuse was 56.3%, emotional abuse 35.5% and sexual abuse 9%. These findings point to the gravity of gender-based violence in different parts of the world and private colleges in Thika being no exception. From the study findings, cases of GBV among students has increased and has become a grave concern to different stakeholders.

### **Peer Counselling Strategies and Gender-based Violence among Students in Private Tertiary Institutions**

The study sought to examine how peer counselling strategies influence gender-based violence among students in selected private tertiary institutions. Descriptive data were collected from peer-counsellors and results are shown in Table 3;



**Table 3: Views of Peer-counsellors on Influence of Peer Counselling Strategies on Gender-based Violence among Students in Private Tertiary Institutions**

Test Items	Ratings				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
	%	%	%	%	%
Peer-counsellors always share their personal experiences as a way of helping their peers reduce cases of gender-based violence	60.2	9.5	3.9	7.8	18.6
Peer counselling has not enabled students to model each other's behavior as a way of reducing cases of cases of gender-based violence	23.7	9.3	3.1	42.3	21.6
In private colleges, peer counselling has been used to handle students' disciplinary cases as a way of reducing GBV	77.1	5.2	3.9	10.0	3.8

**Source: Field Data (2023)**

Table 3 shows that 60.2% of peer-counsellors strongly agreed with the view that peer-counsellors always share their personal experiences as a way of helping their peers reduce cases of gender-based violence as did 9.5% who agreed, 3.9% were undecided, 7.8% disagreed whereas 18.6% strongly disagreed. The study found that 23.7% of the peer-counsellors strongly agreed with the view that peer counselling has not enabled students to model each other's behavior as a way of reducing cases of cases of gender-based violence while 9.3% agreed, 3.1% were undecided, 42.3% disagreed whereas 21.6% strongly disagreed. Majority (77.1%) of the peer-counsellors strongly agreed with the view that, in private colleges, peer counselling has been used to handle students' disciplinary cases as a way of reducing GBV while 5.2% agreed, 3.9% were undecided, 10.0% disagreed whereas 3.8% strongly disagreed.

These findings are consistent with the findings of a study conducted in Philadelphia in which Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) revealed that peer counselling is important in shaping the behaviour patterns of students since, during the peer counselling or mentoring sessions, individual students offer their junior colleagues an opportunity for self-knowledge and self-development through individual or group interventions. These findings further support the findings of a study undertaken in Chicago in which Smylie et al (2002) also established that, during peer counselling, senior students act as mentors who provide their young colleagues with a pool of knowledge that could be tapped on, to help polish their disciplinary, behavioral and some particular key skills that were said to be pertinent in career development. This implies that through peer counselling, a student can define their career interest and make necessary career and other general decisions. This further supports the assertions of Marks and Printy (2003) that, in Botswana, after this realization, the University of Botswana introduced the peer counselling program spearheaded by students in 2003 which has produced positive results as reflected in the shared experiences of such students. The University of Botswana Careers and Counselling Centre, peer counselling program, trains and equips students with skills to enable

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them to help their peers. A study carried out in KwaZulu Natal Province in South Africa by Sithole (2008) also found that, through peer counselling, students are expected to build their own databases of prospective student mentors and design an action plan for connection.

In the same token, a study carried out in Machakos Division by Muli (2011) also established that peer counselors develop friendships through their participation in mentoring programs and usually derive satisfaction from helping a younger student, and possibly shaping his or her life in a positive way. These findings further corroborate the findings of Kindiki (2009) who did a study in Thika Sub-county which revealed that establishment of peer counselors was driven by the need of enhancing effective teaching and learning and an even more, the urgent need to tame school unrest within schools. Kindiki (2009) noted that student leaders are a tremendous help to the school and play a particularly important role in mentoring younger students. They coordinate co-curricular activities and deal with cases of discipline and taking responsibility of students' welfare.

These findings are indicative of the fact that peer counselling has become a key strategy which many learning institutions adopt to shape the behaviour patterns of students and hence reduce cases of gender-based violence. This points to the fact that any junior student looking for a mentor is expected to seek out for positive and pleasing behavior patterns and personality, besides a mere successful track record. Peer mentoring and counselling give students an opportunity to work on their issues and concerns without fear and intimidation. Through such skills, a peer-counselor is likely to build a rapport with their peers, making it easier to have an impact by making sound decisions. Peer counselling allows students to work on issues of their concern with the accepting support of their peers. In other words, these findings underscore the vitality of student leadership as crucial and forms a valuable part of a student's development opening their mind to new levels of responsibility and participation in a very positive way.

### **Inferential Analysis**

To verify the influence of peer counselling strategies on gender-based violence among students in selected private tertiary institutions, data were collected on how often (Often = 3, Sometimes = 2 and Never = 1) peer counselling is organized and undertaken in the 19 sampled private tertiary institutions and the cumulative number of reported cases of gender-based violence for the last five years (2018-2022). Results are shown in Table 4:



**Table 4: How Often Peer Counselling is Undertaken and Number of Gender-based Violence in Selected Private Tertiary Institutions**

<b>How Often Peer Counselling is Organized in Private Tertiary Institutions</b>	<b>Number of Gender-based Violence in Selected Private Tertiary Institutions</b>
1	27
2	34
3	29
1	28
2	31
3	39
3	21
1	49
1	45
1	27
3	18
2	26
3	19
3	13
2	22
1	41
1	40
1	46
3	39

**Source: Field Data (2023)**

Table 4 shows that, in selected private tertiary institutions where peer counselling is frequently undertaken, cases of gender-based violence have gone down. In other words, the higher the number of times peer counselling activities are organized and undertaken, the lower the number of reported cases of gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions. The results in Table 4 were subjected to linear regression analysis and the results are shown in Table 5:

**Table 5: Relationship between Peer Counselling Strategies and Gender-based Violence among Students in Selected Private Tertiary Institutions**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	43.475	4.954		8.776	.000
Frequency of Peer Counselling	-6.271	2.315	-.549	-2.709	.015

a. Dependent Variable: Number of Cases of Gender-based Violence among Students in Tertiary Institutions

Table 5 shows linear regression analysis which generated a linear model of the form; **Number of Cases of Gender-based Violence among students = 43.475 - 0.549Frequency of Peer Counselling**. From the linear regression analysis, the coefficient for number of cases of gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions attributed to peer counselling strategies is -0.549 (negative). This indicates that for every increase in the number of times peer counselling is undertaken, the number of cases of GBV in colleges is expected to decrease by a factor of 0.549. The value 43.475 indicates that the number of cases of GBV is not reduced by peer counselling alone, but on other activities which take place within tertiary institutions such as increasing parental support, reducing drugs and substance abuse and improving socio-economic status. In the same breath, from the results in Table 9, the p-value, 0.015 is less than 0.05, that is, a low p-value ( $0.015 < 0.05$ ). These results indicate that there is significant influence of peer counselling strategies adopted by colleges on gender-based violence among students in private tertiary institutions.

### **Thematic Analysis**

During the interviews, the deans of students and college counsellors also responded in favour of the view that peer counselling is crucial since it has enabled peer-counsellors share their personal experiences which has helped their colleagues to understand the dangers of gender-based violence. Dean of Student, DoS1, noted;

*Since the adoption of peer counselling in my institution, there has been a reduction in cases of GBV among students. This is attributed to the fact that, through peer counselling, students are able to acquire skills that enable them to assist their colleagues in avoiding misadventures and unbecoming behaviour patterns. This is achieved through the sharing of personal experiences by erstwhile victims of GBV, who are able to provide insights on how they overcame similar challenges.*

The college counselors expressed similar sentiments, highlighting the effectiveness of peer counseling in preventing gender-based violence (GBV) by allowing peer counselors to share their personal experiences and challenges with GBV.

These views further emphasize the importance of peer counseling strategies that involve sharing personal experiences with GBV. The interviewees also noted that peer counseling enables students to model each other's behavior, thereby reducing cases of GBV. During peer counseling or mentoring sessions, individual students offer their junior colleagues an opportunity for self-knowledge and self-development through individual or group interventions. In brief, the varied outcomes suggest that peer counseling has emerged as a

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prominent approach that numerous educational institutions employ to influence the conduct of students and consequently mitigate instances of gender-based violence. By utilizing such competencies, a student peer counselor is equipped to establish a connection with the individual they are counseling, thereby facilitating a more effective intervention and enabling the client to make informed choices. This implies that, with proficient peer counseling, students can address their concerns with the empathetic assistance of their peers.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the aforementioned findings, it is apparent that there has been a significant increase in incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) among students in selected private tertiary institutions over the past five years (2018 to 2022), particularly with a notable surge starting in 2019. In response to these challenges, the private tertiary institutions have implemented counseling departments aimed at providing students with peer counseling services. The study findings indicate that while peer counselling, such as sharing personal experiences, has not been entirely effective, there has been a discernible decrease in GBV cases among students in the selected private tertiary institutions.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that private tertiary institutions should continue training students as peer-counsellors to help model behaviour patterns of their peers. This will go a long way in making students take charge of the solutions to their personal problems and behavioural challenges. The Ministry of Education should formulate policy requiring every learning institution, public or private, to conduct sensitization campaigns on the dangers of engaging in gender-based violence among students.

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