

**EXTENSIVENESS OF POLICE GENDER DESK PROACTIVE STRATEGIES IN
COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN PUBLIC SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN HAI DISTRICT, TANZANIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the Extensiveness of police gender desk proactive strategies in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District, Tanzania. Grounded in the Theory of Social Disorganization from the 1940s, a mixed methods approach with a convergent research design was utilized, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data. The target population included 6 police gender desk officers, 29 ordinary level public secondary schools, 4268 students, and 618 teachers in Hai District. A proportional stratified random sampling technique was employed to select 102 teachers and 429 students, while total population sampling was applied to select 9 heads of schools and 6 police gender desk officers, resulting in a total sample of 546 individual. The data collection instruments were validated by research experts at MWECAU in the field of education, and a pilot study was conducted in two public secondary schools. The reliability of the questionnaire for Likert scale items was estimated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, which were 0.75 for students and 0.80 for teachers. The reliability of qualitative data was ensured through peer debriefing and triangulation. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, and document analysis, adhering to ethical considerations throughout the research process. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data with SPSS version 22, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The study found that educational programs initiated by the gender desk effectively addressed violence against children. Teachers and students reported increased awareness and a reduction in violence, while school administrators observed improved student attitudes and behaviors, creating a safer, more inclusive environment. Specialized training for gender desk officers enhanced their ability to sensitively engage with affected children. Positive feedback from teachers, students, and administrators underscored the success of these initiatives. The study concluded that maintaining and enhancing these achievements is crucial. Continuous support and development of the programs are essential, providing a strong foundation for further efforts to create violence-free educational environments. To sustain and expand the success of these programs, the study recommends ongoing training and seminars for gender desk officers, strengthened collaboration with stakeholders, and targeted efforts to reach marginalized students. Continuous research and evaluation are vital for assessing long-term impact and identifying areas for improvement, ensuring the creation of safe school environments.

Keywords: Tanzania Police, Police Gender Desk, Violence, Violence against Children, Proactive Strategies, Public Secondary Schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a catalyst for both personal and national development. In Tanzania, it is regarded as a key resource that transforms lives and enhances future opportunities for both girls and boys (Mtasingwa & Mwaipopo, 2023). Education is considered a fundamental and empowering tool for improving lives, especially for children and young people. Despite the global educational systems' primary goal of enhancing access, participation, and equality for all children (UNESCO, 2019), significant challenges still persist. A major, often overlooked, barrier is gender-based violence (GBV) in schools, which severely limits many students' access to this essential right. GBV hinders secondary school students from fully achieving their right to education in terms of retention, involvement, and academic performance (Otieno, 2020; HakiElimu, 2020; and Vanner, 2019).

The persistence of gender-based violence (GBV) in various forms including sexual, psychological, economic, health, and physical, hinders sustainable social and human rights, as well as gender equity and equality in education worldwide, particularly in Tanzania (HakiElimu, 2020). Globally, at least 246 million children and teenagers experience violence in school each year (UNESCO, 2019). In 2019, one billion children aged 2 to 17 suffered physical and sexual abuse (World Health Organization, 2021). Studies show that 1% to 21% of girls globally experience sexual abuse before age 15, and between 150 and 73 million children under 18 have been forced into sexual relations or other forms of physical sexual violence (WHO, 2021, 2022; UNICEF, 2019). Many students in and around school environments face psychological violence, including bullying and sexual violence, such as forced sexual relations and pressure for sexual activity, as well as physical violence, especially corporal punishment (WHO, 2021, 2022; UNICEF, 2019; UNESCO, 2019). In Brazil, studies have linked violence against children to school structure and a lack of discussion on violent acts (Pereira et al., 2020). This issue highlights the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address GBV in educational settings and promote safer and more inclusive learning environments for all children.

Gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms continues to threaten the social and academic rights of secondary school students in Tanzania. Research indicates that before the age of 18, many children in Tanzania experience violence: one in three girls and one in seven boys face sexual violence (URT et al., 2016; HakiElimu, 2020). Physical violence impacts about 72% of girls and 71% of boys, while emotional violence affects around 25% of both genders. Reports show that 75% of male and female students experienced physical violence by adults before age 18, and 25% reported emotional violence by adults (HakiElimu, 2020). This violence undermines students' academic rights, social development, and overall well-being. Tackling GBV in educational settings is essential for creating safe and supportive environments where students can thrive academically and personally.

Various studies have revealed different perpetrators of GBV, especially sexual and physical violence among male and female students, including teachers, fellow students, and individuals around schools (HakiElimu, 2020). Parents often express concerns about violence against children in schools, deeply worried about their children's safety and well-being (HakiElimu, 2020). Factors such as peer pressure, poverty, orphanhood, domestic abuse, and the desire for independence contribute to the increase in street children (Ismail, 2020). Child abuse leads to school dropouts, health issues, unwanted pregnancies, and increased involvement in criminal activities among street children (Kayombo, 2020). Achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals, SDG 4 and SDG 5, and the URT Vision 2025, which emphasize access to education, quality, and equity, is challenging

with the prevalent GBV in schools. Addressing GBV in schools is crucial for achieving these educational objectives and fostering safe and supportive learning environments for all children.

Tanzania has undertaken various initiatives to combat violence against children, recognizing its prevalence and trends. These efforts include the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA VAWC 2017/2018-2021/2022), the Sexual Offence Special Provisions Act of 1998, and the Law of Marriage Act No.5 of 1971. Additionally, the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children was established, along with the Social Welfare Department (URT, 2011). Other measures include the Tanzania Police Female Network (TPFNet) and the adoption of Human Rights Instruments such as TAMWA, TAWLA, and the Tanzanian Legal and Human Rights Centre. The government has also set up community-based child protection mechanisms/committees to prevent and address sexual violence against children nationwide. These Child Protection Committees (CPCs) employ strategies like door-to-door campaigns, advice-giving, service provider mapping, and awareness-raising (Buhori, 2022).

Despite Tanzania's efforts to address violence against children, the issue still persists. Contributing factors include students' lack of awareness about reporting mechanisms, a shortage of police officers, poor selection of gender desk officers, the diversion of gender and children desk officers to other police duties, and insufficient funding for gender desk programs (Mussa & Mohamed, 2019; Buhori, 2022). Apart from this initiative yet there is a gap remains in understanding the extent to which Police Gender Desks effectively prevent and respond to violence against children, particularly regarding proactive strategies. This study seeks to evaluate the extensiveness of proactive strategies implemented by Police Gender Desks in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District to address this gap. Violence significantly hinders children's educational progress, affecting their emotional well-being, academic performance, and overall development. Society has a fundamental responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of children. Gender-based violence, which arises from various environments such as home, school, and community, includes issues like early marriage, forced dropout, coerced sexual relationships, cultural practices, corporal punishment, and rape (Mtasingwa & Mwaipopo, 2023). Studies revealed that children face abuse from family members, teachers, peers, and motorcycle drivers (Lucas, 2024). Ismail (2020) identifies peer pressure, poverty, orphanhood, domestic abuse, and the quest for independence as factors contributing to the rise of street children. Kayombo (2020) found that child abuse leads to school dropout, health problems, unwanted pregnancies, and increased involvement in criminal activities among street children.

The Tanzanian government established the Police Gender Desk to address gender-based violence and safeguard children from harm. The desk's goals include assisting victims, investigating incidents, collecting evidence, facilitating prosecutions, and encouraging preventive actions within the education system. While the study offers an overview of the impact and forms of violence against children in Tanzania, a more thorough critique could explore the underlying causes of violence, suggest solutions, incorporate various viewpoints, and assess the effectiveness of government measures. Consequently, this study aims to evaluate the extensiveness of the Police Gender Desk's proactive strategies in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Violence presents major challenges to children's educational advancement, affecting their emotional health, academic achievement, and overall growth. Society has a fundamental responsibility to ensure children's safety and well-being. Parents frequently express concerns about

violence in schools. They have a deep concern for the safety and well-being of their children in schools (HakiElimu, 2020). Gender-based violence, which can originate from various settings such as home, school, and community, includes issues like early marriages, forced dropouts, coerced sexual relationships, harmful cultural practices, severe corporal punishment, and rape (Mtasingwa & Mwaipopo, 2023). Abuse involves family members, teachers, peers, and motor-cycle drivers (Lucas, 2024). The study by Ismail (2020) identifies peer pressure, poverty, orphanhood, domestic abuse, and a desire for independence as factors driving children to the streets, increasing their vulnerability to violence and exploitation. The study by Kayombo (2020) found that child abuse often leads to school dropout, health problems, unwanted pregnancies, and higher involvement in criminal activities among street children. Despite these issues, children are often hesitant to report physical and sexual violence due to fear of the perpetrators, lack of knowledge about reporting channels and support services, and societal and cultural norms (Kimaro & Biswalo, 2024).

Tanzanian government created the Police Gender Desk to combat gender-based violence and protect children from violence in schools. The Gender Desk's objectives include supporting victims, investigating, facilitating the prosecution of perpetrators, and promoting preventive measures in the education system. However, the extent to which Police Gender Desk's proactive strategies in preventing violence against children in educational settings remains uncertain. Therefore, this study investigated the extensiveness of proactive strategies implemented by the Police Gender Desk in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

The study was guided by one research question:

1. To what extent are police gender desk proactive strategies effective in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District?

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of this study offer important insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the proactive strategies used by the Tanzania Police Gender Desk in addressing violence against children. Policymakers and education authorities can use this information to refine existing policies, create new strategies, and allocate resources more efficiently to address violence in schools. By evaluating the effectiveness of these proactive measures, we can pinpoint gaps and challenges within the existing child protection systems in public secondary schools. This information is crucial for efforts to bolster and refine these systems, ultimately ensuring the safety and well-being of students.

The study can empower various stakeholders including teachers, parents, school administrators, and law enforcement by showcasing effective strategies for tackling adolescent violence in schools. It can serve as a platform for these groups to collaborate and coordinate, fostering a safer and more supportive school environment. The findings add to the existing research on school violence prevention and provide an opportunity to develop new insights. Additionally, the study can raise public awareness about violence against children in schools and advocate for necessary policy and practice changes. It helps mobilize support from the community, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to collectively combat violence and promote a safe learning environment.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in the Theory of Social Disorganization, developed by Shaw and McKay in the 1940s. This theory posits that crime and deviance emerge when social institutions lose their control over individuals. It attributes criminal behavior to weak institutions, their ineffective agents, and communities' inability to enforce social control. According to the theory, neighborhoods with weak social ties, deteriorating infrastructure such as poorly maintained buildings, roads, and public spaces, and high residential mobility tend to have higher crime rates. In the context of addressing violence against children in schools, Social Disorganization Theory suggests that schools in disorganized communities may struggle to maintain a safe and supportive learning environment. The theory emphasizes the importance of social cohesion and institutional support in preventing youth criminal behavior.

Shaw and McKay's theory emphasizes the role of social institutions, such as family, schools, and local government, in shaping individuals' behavior and adherence to societal norms. When these institutions fail to provide adequate guidance and support, particularly in disadvantaged areas, children may be at greater risk of experiencing violence and victimization. Effective police gender desks, according to Social Disorganization Theory, could serve as a critical external social control mechanism. By actively engaging with schools and communities to address violence, these specialized units can help mitigate the impact of disorganization and promote a safer environment where children feel protected and supported.

Furthermore, Social Disorganization Theory highlights the need for targeted interventions and community partnerships to strengthen social bonds and restore order in crime-affected neighborhoods. By addressing underlying social issues and improving institutional capacity, police gender desk strategies can significantly contribute to building resilience against violence among children in public secondary schools. This approach supports the theory's view that strong social structures are crucial for maintaining order and reducing crime within communities.

Strengths of the Theory

The strengths of Social Disorganization Theory are highlighted by its strong empirical support, particularly through the pioneering research of Shaw and McKay, which connects neighborhood characteristics (such as poverty, residential mobility, and ethnic diversity) to crime rates. The theory shifts the focus away from individual pathology or moral failings to emphasize environmental and structural factors, providing a broader perspective on the root causes of crime. It offers practical insights for crime prevention by underscoring the need to strengthening community institutions and social cohesion. Furthermore, its comprehensive approach includes various social institutions such as families, schools, and local governments in fostering environments that discourage criminal behavior. Its flexibility also allows it to be combined with other theories to address modern issues, maintaining its relevance in analyzing and tackling social problems.

Weaknesses of the theory

The theory overlooks the influence of individual agency and personal characteristic on violent behavior. It mainly concentrates on urban environments, often neglecting crime patterns in rural and suburban areas. Accurately assessing social disorganization can be challenging and subjective. Moreover, the theory may not sufficiently address cultural differences and how cultural norms

affect crime. While it provides practical policy recommendations, implementing these measures can be challenging due to various political, economic, and logistical issues in Tanzania.

Application of the Theory to the Study

The Social Disorganization Theory in tackling violence against children in public secondary schools emphasizes the need to reinforce social control mechanisms to address the failure of social institutions. According to this theory, violence against children is more prevalent in communities where institutions such as families, schools, and local authorities are weak or ineffective. Police gender desks, which are specialized units trained to address gender-based violence and child protection issues, serve as external social control mechanisms. They provide essential guidance, support, and intervention. By implementing these targeted strategies, the study seeks to improve social cohesion and stability in schools and their communities, thereby reducing child violence. This approach aligns with the theory's emphasis on the importance of robust social structures by integrating community context into maintaining social order and developing intervention strategies to enhance the desks' effectiveness and contribute to safer school environments.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

A critical analysis of empirical studies on Police Gender Desk (PGD) proactive strategies in combating violence against children is essential for understanding their effectiveness across different contexts. PGDs, specialized units within police forces, employ various measures such as awareness campaigns, community engagement, training, and confidential reporting mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence against children. This literature review examines research from various countries, highlighting successes, challenges, and key factors influencing the effectiveness of these strategies. By synthesizing these findings, the review provides valuable insights into improving current practices and developing new approaches to protect children in educational settings.

Bivins (2023) carried out a qualitative instrumental case study at Walden University in the United States, examining sexual violence and the university's response to it. The study, which focused on female college students aged 18 to 21, found that sexual violence significantly restricts education and is worsened by difficulties in reporting incidents on campus. Through detailed individual interviews and document analysis, the research assessed factors, intervention strategies, and policies concerning sexual violence, using an ecological model framework. Major findings included persistent concerns about sexual violence, obstacles to reporting and accessing support services, deficiencies in online programs, and ambiguous Title IX policies. Recommendations called for addressing reporting barriers, enhancing educational programs, and clarifying Title IX regulations. The study's findings could influence legislative, policy, and procedural reforms to address sexual violence on college campuses. However, it concentrated solely on sexual violence among college-aged females and did not address violence against secondary school students under 18 or the broader strategies for combating violence in public secondary schools. To address this gap, this study aimed to examine the extent to which police gender desk proactive strategies were effective in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District

Koris (2022) investigated the effects of a gender-transformative, whole-family support intervention designed to boost protective measures against violence for adolescent girls in internally displaced communities in Maiduguri, Borno State, Northeast Nigeria. Using a theoretical framework, the study selected 86 participants from the program through criterion

sampling. The results showed a decrease in tolerance for and instances of violence against girls within households, along with heightened community support for girls' protection rights. Despite these improvements, deeply rooted patriarchal norms remained among participants. The study emphasized the challenges of changing gender norms in conflict-affected areas and recommended comprehensive approaches that address relational, community, and structural factors driving violence against girls. It also stressed the importance of building trust within communities. However, the reliance on self-reported changes could introduce social desirability bias, raising concerns about the reliability of the findings. To address gaps in understanding proactive strategies, this study aimed to examine the extensiveness of police gender desks proactive strategies in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District.

Tantu et al., (2020) examined the prevalence and contributing factors of gender-based violence among female high school students in Wolaita Sodo, Ethiopia, using a cross-sectional approach. They collected data from 604 female students via a structured questionnaire and multi-stage stratified sampling. The study found that the prevalence of sexual violence was 30.5% before joining the school, 37.2% after joining, and 22% during the current academic year. The high incidence of gender-based violence calls for intervention from government, non-governmental organizations as well as other responsible bodies to tackle factors associated with GBV. Weak and ineffective public policies exacerbate the issue and impact civil society efforts.

The study provides valuable insights into the prevalence and factors associated with gender-based violence (GBV) among female high school students in Wolaita Sodo, Ethiopia, its focus solely on this specific population may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or populations. Also the use of a structured questionnaire for data collection may have limitations in capturing the nuanced experiences of GBV among the participants. However, it leaves a gap on generalizability of the findings and in capturing the nuanced experiences of GBV among the participants. Hence, the current study filled the gap by examining the extensiveness of proactive strategies implemented by police gender desks in combating violence against children specifically in public secondary schools in Hai District.

Kamusiime et al. (2022) conducted a study to explore the functionality and connectivity of networks and their influence on the prevention and response to violence against children (VAC) in East Africa. The study utilized an exploratory qualitative approach, with participants selected using a bottom-up purposive method. Data collection methods included focus group discussions, interviews with network leaders at the grassroots, district, and national levels, and conversations with VAC network funders. The study found that due to the complex and multidimensional nature of VAC, the responses to it are similarly varied and multifaceted. Networking for VAC can take multiple forms depending on the objective, and these networks can have unspecified durations. Strategic decision-making in networking brings numerous benefits, such as increased visibility and voice, greater impact, and improved efficiency. While the study's exploratory qualitative approach and purposive participant selection might introduce bias, and reliance solely on focus group discussions and interviews may not fully capture network functionality and connectivity, it does highlight methodological limitations. To address these gaps, the current study employs a convergent mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, interviews guide, questionnaires guide, and document analysis guide, to examine the extent to which proactive strategies implemented by police gender desks in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District

Josephat and Mbuti (2021) evaluated the effectiveness of strategies employed by local government leaders in Arusha City to combat violations of children's rights, involving 168 leaders from 24 wards and using a sample of 96 selected through simple random sampling. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, revealing strategies such as specialized police desks for children's rights cases, community education, protection committees, legal aid from local authorities, prosecution of perpetrators, and family events promoting children's rights. However, the study's reliance on structured questionnaires may have missed the complexity of children's rights violations, and its focus on local government leaders' perspectives potentially overlooked other important stakeholders, such as children. Addressing these gaps, the current study includes children as respondents and employs interviews guide, questionnaires guide, and document analysis guide to assess the extent to which proactive strategies implemented by police gender desks in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District.

7. DEMONSTRATION OF KNOWLEDGE GAP

Previous studies have shown mixed perspectives on combating violence against women and children. For instance, Ally and Paul (2022) found that sexually abused street children experience various types of sexual encounters, with rape and sodomy being the most common forms of abuse. Molefe (2022) highlighted that while some believe culture contributed family conflicts, others disagree. Additionally, some studies indicate that communities are unaware of the National Action Plan for addressing violence against women and children but are familiar with the strategies implemented by the Tanzania Police Force (TPF) to tackle violence against children (Mlay, 2020). The study of Alber et al. (2018) noted that numerous organizations are already deeply involved in preventing violence against women and children.

Empirical studies have indicated that strategies for combating violations of children's rights include specialized desks at police stations for children's rights cases, education to the community, protection committees that coordinate and monitor violations of children's rights, awareness-raising, provision of advice, communication, identification of children, referral of abused children, and mapping and monitoring of children (Josephat and Mbuti, 2021; Reuben et al., 2022). Although the literature highlights effective measures for addressing violence against children, none of the reviewed studies specifically focus on the proactive strategies employed by police gender desks to combat violence against children in secondary schools. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap by assessing the extent to which proactive strategies used by police gender desks in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai District.

8. METHODOLOGY

The study used a convergent design within a mixed methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection simultaneously to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population included 6 police gender desk officers from Hai district police (Hai district police, 2024), 29 heads of secondary schools, 4268 students, and 618 teachers from ordinary level public secondary schools in Hai District (Hai District Council, 2024), totalling 4921 individuals. From this population, a sample size of 546 was selected, comprising 9 ordinary level public secondary schools, 102 teachers, 429 students, 9 heads of schools, and 6 gender desk police officers. Data collection methods included questionnaires, interview guides, and document analysis. Questionnaires were distributed to teachers and students to gather quantitative data, while interview guides were used to collect qualitative data from police

gender desk officers and heads of schools. Document analysis provided additional qualitative insights by reviewing relevant documents.

To ensure the validity of the data collection instruments, they were validated by two MWECAU research experts in education, ensuring that the data collected would be accurate and reliable. A pilot study was conducted in two public secondary schools not included in the main study, which helped test and refine the instruments. The reliability of the quantitative instruments was estimated by using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, which were 0.75 for students and 0.80 for teachers, indicating acceptable reliability levels. For qualitative instruments, reliability was ensured through peer debriefing and triangulation techniques. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, organizing the data into frequencies, percentages, and means to facilitate drawing inferences. This analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), which allowed for efficient handling and interpretation of the quantitative data. Concurrently, qualitative data analysis began early in the data collection process using thematic analysis, enabling the identification and analysis of patterns and themes within the qualitative data, providing deeper insights into the study's research questions.

Ethical considerations were diligently observed throughout the study to ensure the integrity and ethical soundness of the research process. Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring they were fully informed about the study's purpose and their involvement. Confidentiality and privacy of participants' information were strictly upheld to protect their identities and personal data. Participation was entirely voluntary, with participants free to withdraw at any point without consequences. The study took measures to minimize any potential harm or discomfort to participants and was conducted with a strong commitment to research integrity. Additionally, the necessary institutional review and approval were obtained to ensure compliance with all ethical and regulatory standards. These comprehensive ethical measures ensured that participants' rights and well-being were protected throughout the research process.

9. FINDINGS

The study sought to investigate the extent police gender desk proactive strategies effective in combating violence against children in public secondary schools in Hai district. The information to address this concern was obtained from students, teachers, heads of schools and Police gender desk officers. The rate of percentage described as ≤ 20 =extremely minority; 21-49 = minority; 50-59 = moderate; 60-69 = majority; 71-89 = very high majority; 90-99 = extremely majority; 100=overwhelming majority (Taherdoost, 2019). The mean score > 3 for the item indicates that Gender Desk Proactive Strategies is Effective and a mean score < 3 indicates that the Gender Desk Proactive Strategies is not Effective while exactly mean score of 3 implies that the Gender Desk Proactive Strategies was Effective or not effective in Combating Violence Against Children (Chyung & Hutchinson, 2023). Table 1 show the responses of teachers and students' on extent police gender desk proactive strategies effective in combating violence against children in public secondary schools.

Table 1

Teachers and Students' Responses on Extent Police Gender Desk Proactive Strategies are Effective in Combating Violence against Children in Public Secondary Schools (n=102, n=429)

<u>Socio-Cultural Factors</u>	<u>VSE</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>ME</u>	<u>HE</u>	<u>VHE</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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S/n			F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	
I	Educational programs conducted by gender desk raise awareness about violence against children, helping to reduce instances of violence	Teachers	9	8.8	15	14.7	26	25.5	33	32.4	19	18.6	3.37
		Students	30	7.0	15	3.5	59	13.8	151	35.2	174	40.6	3.99
Ii	Active community engagement prevents violence against children by fostering a supportive and protective environment.	Teachers	4	3.9	16	15.7	26	25.5	34	33.3	22	21.6	3.53
		Students	24	5.6	51	11.9	97	22.6	141	32.9	116	27.0	3.64
iii	Training teachers and staff to identify signs of violence enables early detection and quick intervention, preventing further harm to the child	Teachers	3	2.9	7	6.9	29	28.4	41	40.2	22	21.6	3.71
		Students	30	7.0	42	9.8	85	19.8	132	30.8	140	32.6	3.72
iv	Specialized training gender desk officers improve their ability to engage with children who have experienced violence sensitively	Teachers	4	3.9	16	15.7	33	32.4	37	36.3	12	11.8	3.36
		Students	27	6.3	57	13.3	98	22.8	121	28.2	126	29.4	3.61
v	Dedicated helplines and reporting mechanisms provide an accessible way for reporting incidents of violence against children	Teachers	5	4.9	9	8.8	29	28.4	46	45.1	13	12.7	3.52
		Students	24	5.6	38	8.9	96	22.4	125	29.1	146	34.0	3.77
vi	Motivating the community to report violence against children enables early intervention, preventing further harm to the child	Teachers	8	7.8	7	6.9	24	23.5	35	34.3	28	27.5	3.67
		Students	34	7.9	26	6.1	87	20.3	128	29.8	154	35.9	3.80
vii	Visiting school to provide education on children’s rights leading for better equipped to identify and report potential incidents.	Teachers	7	6.9	11	10.8	20	19.6	42	41.2	22	21.6	3.60
		Students	38	8.9	25	5.8	60	14.0	121	28.2	185	43.1	3.91

viii	Organize seminars that provide parents and community members information on preventing violence against children	Teachers	5	4.9	18	17.6	22	21.6	38	37.3	19	18.6	3.47
		Students	114	26.6	78	18.2	74	17.2	80	18.6	83	19.3	2.86
ix	Engagement of protection committees that coordinate and monitor violation of children’s rights	Teachers	5	4.9	13	12.7	28	27.5	37	36.3	19	18.6	3.51
		Students	41	9.6	42	9.8	85	19.8	154	35.9	107	24.9	3.57
x	Collaborating with schools and community leaders to build trust and establish ongoing relationships focused on child protection.	Teachers	6	5.9	6	5.9	25	24.5	39	38.2	26	25.5	3.72
		Students	48	11.2	16	3.7	49	11.4	132	30.8	184	42.9	3.90
Grand mean score		Teachers											3.55
		Students											3.68

Source: Field Data, (2023)

Key: VSE= Very Small Extent, SE= Small Extent, ME= Moderate Extent, HE= High Extent, VHE= Very High Extent

Data in Table 4.3 portrays that the moderate (51%) of teachers and very high majority (75.8%) of students indicated a high extent and very high extent that educational programs conducted by gender desk raise awareness about violence against children, helping to reduce instances of violence. The minority (23.5%) of teachers and (10.5%) of students indicated to a small extent and very small extent to the item while minority (25.5%) of teachers and extremely minority (13.8%) of students indicated to a moderate extent to the item. The data implies that the educational programs conducted by the gender desk have played a significant role in raising awareness about violence against children and reducing instances of violence in public secondary schools. This means that hat the educational initiatives undertaken by the gender desk are making a meaningful difference in addressing and mitigating violence against children within the school environment. The study findings align with the study by Mhango and Matemba (2024) in Tanzania which showed a significant decrease in reported cases of violence against children after implementing educational programs focused on prevention, intervention, and support mechanisms. This indicates that the educational initiatives undertaken by the gender desk are effectively addressing and reducing violence against children within the school environment. The study also highlighted the essential role of gender desks in creating safe and supportive learning environments for students. These findings offer strong evidence that these programs have significantly contributed to reducing violence and promoting safer conditions for children. This has also appeared during the argument with head of school “A” who through face-to-face interviews shared the views that, “*Our gender desk has organized various workshops, training sessions for both teachers and students to raise awareness about different forms of violence against children, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse*” (Head of school A, personal communication, April 08, 2024)

Also, the head of school “B” gave the view that:

At our school, the educational initiatives led by the gender desk have been crucial in tackling violence against children. These programs feature interactive sessions, workshops, and awareness campaigns aimed at fostering empathy, respect, and healthy relationships. As a result, we have observed a positive change in our students' attitudes and behaviors. They now have a deeper understanding of the consequences of violence and the significance of creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. These initiatives have promoted open dialogue and equipped students with the knowledge and skills to resolve conflicts peacefully. (Head of school B, personal communication, April 09, 2024)

The information provided by the heads of schools indicates that the educational programs led by the gender desk have been successful in addressing violence against children. These programs have effectively raised awareness, promoted positive attitudes and behaviors, and empowered students to help create safer school environments. Both heads of schools highlight the positive impact on student attitudes and behaviors, noting a significant shift towards increased awareness of the consequences of violence and a commitment to maintaining a safe and inclusive learning environment. These findings suggest that the gender desk's educational programs have not only raised awareness but also instilled a sense of responsibility and agency in students to actively participate in violence prevention efforts. The study findings align with Mohamed et al. (2023) in Unguja-Zanzibar, which concluded that community education and awareness about children's rights are vital for enhancing efforts to combat gender-based violence.

Data in Table 4.3 show that the moderate (57.6%) of students and minority (48.1%) of teachers indicated a high extent and very high extent that specialized training gender desk officers improve their ability to engage with children who have experienced violence sensitively. The extremely minority (19.6%) of teachers and (19.6%) of students indicated to a small extent and very small extent to the item while minority (32.4%) of teachers and (22.8%) of students indicated to a moderate extent to the item. The data indicates that there is widespread recognition of the positive effects of specialized training for gender desk officers on their ability to interact sensitively with children who have experienced violence. The findings suggest that such training is largely viewed as beneficial, providing officers with essential skills and knowledge. Officers who have undergone this training demonstrate increased sensitivity and patience when dealing with children.

The study findings align with the research by Kazeri et al. (2024) in Meru District, Tanzania, which demonstrated a significant reduction in gender-based violence (GBV) incidents in regions with Tanzania Police Gender and Children Desk (TPGCD) centers. This decrease is likely due to the proficiency of the officers, enhanced by their training on GBV issues. This training encompasses handling and resolving reported GBV cases and raising awareness about GBV among community members.

The findings are in line with the views of the heads of schools who shared their thoughts through face-to-face interviews. The head of school “C” said, “*Trained officers demonstrate enhanced sensitivity and patience when engaging with children. They have cultivated effective communication techniques and use suitable language and tone to make sure the children feel listened to and understood*” (Head of school C, personal communication, April 15, 2024). Another head of school “J” also shared, “*We've observed significant progress in how trained gender desk officers interact with these children. They are now more capable of establishing a secure and supportive environment, building trust, and encouraging the children to share their experiences*” (Head of school J, personal communication, April 29, 2024).

The insights from the heads of schools indicate that specialized training for gender desk officers has led to significant improvements in their interactions with children who have faced violence. The findings suggest that this training has enhanced the officers' sensitivity, patience, and communication skills, contributing to the creation of a safe and supportive environment. This environment fosters trust and encourages children to share their experiences.

Data in Table 4.3 also show that the majority (61.8%) of teachers and (63.4%) of students indicated a high extent and very high extent that training teachers, staff and students to identify signs of violence is highly effective for early detection and quick intervention, preventing further harm to the child. The extremely minority (10.8%) of teachers and (16.8%) of students indicated to a small extent and very small extent to the item while the minority (28.4%) of teachers and extremely minority (19.8%) of students indicated to a moderate extent to the item. Results indicates that both teachers and students agree on the value of training educators and staff to recognize signs of violence. This consensus underscores the importance of early detection and intervention in preventing further harm to children. It reflects a shared understanding of the crucial role that early intervention plays in protecting and supporting children who may be experiencing violence. The findings align with the Theory of Social Disorganization, developed by Shaw and McKay in the 1940s. This theory emphasizes that training programs for teachers and school staff to identify signs of violence against children enable early detection and quick intervention. By doing so, schools can better protect children and maintain social control, thus preventing violence and fostering a more cohesive and stable community. This proactive measure helps counteract the weakening of social institutions, such as family, schools, and local government, which the theory identifies as a key factor in the occurrence of crime and deviance.

Data in Table 4.3 show that the moderate (54.9%) of teachers and (59.9%) of students indicated a high extent and very high extent that active community engagement prevents violence against children by fostering a supportive and protective environment. The extremely minority (19.6%) of teachers and (17.5%) of students indicated to a small extent and very small extent to the item while the minority (25.5%) of teachers and (22.6%) of students indicated to a moderate extent to the item. Again, the data show that the moderate (54.9%) of teachers and minority (60.8%) of students indicated a high extent and very high extent that engagement of protection committees that coordinate and monitor violation of children's rights. The minority (17.6%) of teachers and (19.4%) of students indicated to a small extent and very small extent to the item while the minority (27.5%) of teachers and extremely minority (19.8%) of students indicated to a moderate extent to the item. The data indicates that both teachers and students strongly acknowledge that active community involvement and the participation of protection committees are effective methods for preventing violence against children and ensuring their rights are protected.

The study findings align with Mohamed et al.'s (2023) study in Unguja-Zanzibar, which emphasized the critical role of community involvement in protecting children. This involvement is seen as a crucial first step in advocating for children's rights by educating them about their rights and increasing their awareness. Therefore, the engagement of protection committees is vital, and there is a need for community education to enhance awareness of children's rights.

During the in-person interviews with the head of school "F," the head of school reported that:

Active community involvement is crucial for establishing a safe and nurturing environment for our children. Engaging community members, parents, local leaders, and organizations allows us to tackle the underlying causes of violence and implement preventive strategies effectively. Community support enhances our initiatives to encourage positive behavior

and ensures the safety and well-being of students both inside and outside the school (Head of school F, personal communication, April 18, 2024).

Another head of school “G” also shared:

We've partnered with local NGOs, parent-teacher associations, and community leaders to set up workshops, awareness campaigns, and neighborhood watch programs. These efforts are designed to educate the community on the importance of child protection, offer support services to families in need, and build a network of trusted individuals who can step in when violence or abuse occurs. Through collaboration with the community, we can form a united front against violence and ensure the rights of every child are protected (Head of school G, personal communication, April 22, 2024)

The insights from the school heads suggest a strong acknowledgment of the crucial role active community involvement plays in fostering a supportive and safe environment for children. They stress the need to engage diverse stakeholders, including community members, parents, local leaders, organizations, NGOs, and parent-teacher associations, to address the root causes of violence and effectively implement preventive strategies. The study's findings align with Mohamed et al. (2023) study in Unguja-Zanzibar, which emphasized the role of the community in protecting children as a crucial initial step in advocating for children's rights. Additionally, the study indicated that social corruption arises from community relationships, which can make it difficult for victims' families to report offenders to legal authorities. However, if the community is engaged, informed, and aware of children's rights, there is likely to be an increase in the reporting of violence-related cases.

Data in Table 4.3 show that the moderate (55.9%) of teachers and minority (37.9%) of students indicated a high extent and very high extent that organize seminars that provide parents and community members information on preventing violence against children. The minority (22.5%) of teachers and (44.8%) of students indicated to a small extent and very small extent to the item while the minority (21.6%) of teachers and extremely minority (17.2%) of students indicated to a moderate extent to the item. This suggests that many teachers appreciate the importance of these seminars in informing parents and community members about how to prevent violence against children. They see these seminars as a valuable tool for increasing awareness and encouraging preventive actions.

The study findings reflect what was proposed by the study of John et al. (2021) in Kenya which revealed that School administrators recognize how informing and educating parents and community members can help prevent violence and foster a safer environment for children. They emphasize the importance of taking proactive steps and highlight how seminars can play a key role in achieving this objective. In addition to that, during the face-to-face interview, the Police Gender Desk Officer “F” claimed that:

We design the seminars to be interactive and informative, incorporating presentations, discussions, and practical exercises to actively involve participants and enhance learning. The topics we address include understanding children's rights, creating safe environments, promoting positive parenting, and accessing support services. Additionally, we bring in guest speakers, such as child psychologists, social workers, and legal experts, to share their expertise and respond to participants' questions. (Police Gender Desk Officer F, personal communication, March 27, 2024)

The information from the Police Gender Desk Officer suggests that the police department is dedicated to organizing seminars that are not only educational but also interactive and practical.

These seminars are designed to equip parents and community members with essential knowledge and skills to prevent violence against children. They are structured to be comprehensive and collaborative, focusing on raising awareness and empowering participants. Through their engaging format, thorough content, expert involvement, and cooperative approach, these seminars play a vital role in educating and mobilizing the community to safeguard children's rights and well-being. The findings indicate that ongoing education is necessary, particularly in rural areas where awareness is limited, due to the influence of perpetrators and harmful cultural norms in the community.

The study findings are in line with the study by Tandika (2023) in Ilemela-Tanzania which highlighted *that* despite of the Participant interviewed reported that Police gender desk (PGD) provides good services to the victim women and children, they are still unaware of their rights, either because of ignorance, religion or fear of their community, fear of the women to report the incidences, norms and tradition, so there is highly need for (PGD), Government Organization, NGOs and other stakeholders to provide adequate knowledge to members that help them to disclose their problems hence get assistance.

In summary, the study found that educational programs conducted by the gender desk have been moderate effective in raising awareness about violence against children and reducing instances of violence in public secondary schools, with grand mean scores of 3.55 for teachers and 3.68 for students. This effectiveness is evidenced by the positive responses from both groups, with a majority indicating a high level of agreement that these programs have played a crucial role in addressing and mitigating violence against children. The study also reported a significant decrease in the number of violence cases following the implementation of these educational programs, which focused on prevention, intervention, and support mechanisms. Moreover, interviews with heads of schools highlighted the positive impact of these programs on student attitudes and behaviors, noting a shift towards a safer and more inclusive learning environment. Additionally, specialized training provided to gender desk officers has enhanced their ability to engage sensitively with children who have experienced violence, as reported by both the officers and school administrators.

10. CONCLUSION

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that the proactive strategies implemented by the Police Gender Desk, including educational programs and seminars designed to raise awareness about violence against children, have proven moderately effective. Feedback from educators, students, and school leaders indicates a notable increase in awareness and a significant decrease in reported instances of violence, marking a promising step forward in reducing harmful behaviors within school communities. The emphasis from school heads on the importance of sustaining these seminars highlights the ongoing value and necessity of continuous educational efforts. Specialized training for gender desk officers has further enhanced their sensitivity and effectiveness in interacting with children, contributing to a safer school environment. Moreover, active community involvement and protection committees are crucial for preventing violence and safeguarding children's rights. Seminars for parents and community members are essential for promoting awareness and preventive measures. Overall, these findings underscore that a comprehensive approach encompassing education, community engagement, and specialized training is vital for addressing and mitigating violence against children in schools. Continued collaboration and investment in these strategies are key to creating a safer and more supportive environment for all children.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that students should be supported to actively participate in educational programs and workshops conducted by gender desk officers which will make them informed about their rights as students and to understand that all forms of violence are unacceptable. Students should be encouraged to speak up and seek help if they or someone they know experiences violence. Additionally, Teachers should creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment where students feel comfortable discussing issues related to violence. Teachers should facilitate open dialogue and provide support to students who may be experiencing violence. Furthermore, heads of schools should prioritize the sustainability of educational programs conducted by gender desk officers by allocating necessary resources, time, and support. Gender desk officers should continue organizing and delivering educational programs that raise awareness about violence against children not only to school members but also to the community where the students from because those school are the day school. It is essential to regularly update the content of these programs to address emerging issues and challenges effectively. Through these concerted efforts, we can work towards creating safer and more supportive environments for all children within our school communities.

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