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# An Assessment of the Level of Safety of School Environments and its' Effect on Implementation of Child Friendly Schools Initiative in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines school safety measures that have been put in place in primary schools to address the concerns for learner friendly environments in Uasin Gishu county, Kenya. The study was guided by the following objective: To assess the level of safety of school environments and its' effect on implementation of child friendly schools initiative. This study was guided by resiliency theory as proposed by Krovetz (1998). Resiliency theory defines the protective factors in families, schools, and communities that exist in the lives of successful children and youth and compares these protective factors with what is missing from the lives of children and youth who are troubled. This study adopted a pragmatic approach to research and a mixed methods research design. From the 338 public primary schools in the county, a total of 103 schools were sampled to participate in the study which constituted 30% of the target population. A total of 103 headteachers and 103 class seven class teachers and 2,259 class seven pupils, who were grouped into 202 focus group discussions, participated in the study. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics as well as qualitative techniques. It was established that there is a need for schools to put in place safety measures and rethink their emergency preparedness and response plans. Headteachers and teachers should mobilize resources towards the provision of essential materials such as lightning arresters, fire extinguishers and first aid kits, all of which would enhance safety in the schools in case of emergencies.

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### Introduction

Faced with challenge of global terrorism, child abduction and trafficking and others forms of school violence, all stakeholders in the education sector battle with the issue of child safety within the school system. It is notable that most schools in Kenya have experienced forms of school violence that has resulted in massive destruction of property and in some cases lives through unexplained fire tragedies. The goal of school safety program would therefore be to create and maintain a positive and welcoming school climate, free of drugs, violence, intimidation, and fear – an environment strongly supported by the community in which teachers can teach and students can learn. Schools should be safe and secure places for all students, teachers, and staff members without a safe learning environment, teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn.

Day and Golench (1997) classified policies that would promote school safety in four types. These types are response or dealing with misbehaviour, expectations in form of a model for appropriate behaviour, students should follow preventive strategies and programs that inhibit misbehaviour and lastly community focus where community groups are included in initiatives to address the problem of school violence. These apparently reflect the situation in Kenya schools where set rules are believed to discourage inappropriate behaviour.

The community should be involved in formulation of a school safety programme as recommended by Day & Golench (1997) who suggest that root causes of school violence go beyond the borders of school grounds.

Studies about student academic achievement and building conditions conclude that the quality of the physical environment significantly affects student achievement. There is sufficient research to state without equivocation that the buildings in which students spends a good deal of their time learning does in fact influence how well they learn (Earthman, G 2004:18).

According to Vaduganathan (2005), quality of education primarily resides within school facilities among other factors. Entwistle et al (1990) also observes that a well desired educational facility is one that effectively meets the present educational and social needs of its occupants. In addition, such a facility should meet statutory regulations and other agreed health and safety equipments as well as provide adequate security against unauthorized access.

Decaying environmental conditions such as peeling paint, crumbling plaster, non-functioning toilets, poor lighting and inadequate ventilation coupled with unhealthy and insecure educational environments have all been too common a phenomenon the world over. UNICEF (2006) further observes that natural lighting and ventilation of toilets are important for cleanliness and removal of bad odours.

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There should be enough light to inspect for cleanliness; therefore the use of natural light is recommended in combination with light colours for the interior.

In Kenya threats to school safety can emanate internally – within the school environment or externally – from the wider community. Safety threats can be characterized by incidents ranging from minor discipline problems such as disobedience to dangerous actions in form of physical threats, bullying, vandalism, gang related activities and school arson attacks.

Day and Golench (1997), reiterate that school violence affects the entire student body, the staff and the community as a whole. The safety manual further notes that violence in schools takes the form of teacher – on – learner violence and learner – on – learner violence. Teacher – on learner's violence takes the form of physical violence such as corporal punishment, sexual assault, twisting / pulling of ears, slapping and pushing. Some teachers also emotionally abuse learners through verbal abuse and harassment, taunts and belittling. These abuses and harassments affect the learners' ego and self-esteem. On the other hand, learner-on-learners violence is often characterized by physical attacks, sexual assault and bullying all of which are illegal.

Makenzie (2010), observes that bullying and harassment are often through separately, however both involve a more powerful person or group oppressing a less powerful person or group, often on the grounds of difference. These differences can be related to culture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, ability or disability, religion, body size and physical appearance, personality, age, marital status, parenting status or economic status. In Ohio, there is fronting of social skills as part of violence prevention education (Begun, 2001). These are skills to enhance problem solving, conjure emotions, promote peaceful behaviour, and improve communication skills. The social skills are similar to the life skills introduced in Kenyan school's curriculum after the post-election violence (2007). These are given as proactive safety procedures. The school management has a role responsibility of administering the health and safety measures rather than being glued only to use of producing academic results.

UNICEF (2006) observes that the physical environment of school, including its surrounding neighbourhoods, is crucial to children's safety and security. In order to increase school safety, fences should be built to protect children from harmful outside influences, such as drug peddling, sexual harassment or physical violence. Guarding and supervision of the school and school yard is usually necessary. Expansive school yards with many large buildings or unprotected areas may need additional staff or other security measures, such as emergency notification or alarm systems that can alert students and teachers to an ongoing emergency. Planning should take into consideration the need for and type of facing around a school. Often in rural setting, the school will need to be physically separated from the rest of the community in order to create a child-friendly space and maintain that space differently from the rest of the environment. The fence and gates are also important to protect the property during non-school hours. In case of school gardens, the fence protects the garden from pilferage and animal pests.

A safe school environment is one that is free from all forms of child abuse. Child abuse consists of anything which individuals, institutions or processes, like education systems, child labour, tribal clashes or retrenchment, do or fail to do

which directly or indirectly harm children or damage their prospects of safe and healthy development into adulthood (NACECE, 2002). Forms of child abuse may be broadly classified into the following: socio-cultural, physical sexual, emotional, and child labour. Socio-cultural abuses are those practices which are perpetrated under the cover of the culture of the community. Examples of these include female genital mutilation, child marriages, gender bias, and customary and religious practices. Physical abuse includes caning in schools, families and other institutions, battering, violently shaking, scalding and burning. Cases of child abuse include incidences of corporal punishment, child rape and molestation. Others include early marriages, female genital mutilation, child labour, child neglect, abandonment, displacement and street life. All these instances impact negatively on the achievements attained in the quest for free schooling. It is worth noting that child friendly schooling is crucial if the goal of EFA is to be attained and if quality education has to be achieved then child rights to and in education is very critical. The following incidences are a clear testimony that there is need to seriously address the state of the Kenyan child. Corporal punishment of students is banned but occasionally occurs in practice. Incidences of excessive punishment of pupils or students in schools have contributed to injuries or loss of lives of affected children. A case in point was an incident in March 2004 in which police in Naivasha arrested two teachers for caning several children, seriously injuring one of them (UNICEF, 2009).

Concerning displacement of children, UNICEF and the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK) conducted a survey, which revealed that approximately 800 children had been left behind by their families in Molo town. Hundreds of children in Rift Valley province have been living without parents, and in harsh conditions, ever since the Kenyan Government began resettling people displaced during the violence that followed the December 2007 elections. Children stay as long as three months before seeing their parents as they instruct them to stay behind as they go back to till their farms in Rironi, 10 km from Molo town. Unlike their colleagues these children do not go back to their homes to their families at the end of the school day. Such children act as household heads and sometimes the only breadwinners.

These vulnerable children are members of thousands of families that were displaced in parts of Rift Valley. In response, the government initiated 'Operation Rudi Nyumbani', or Operation Return Home, with the aim of resettling the displaced people back to their farms. In towns such as Molo, Nakuru and Eldoret, many parents returned to their farms but opted to leave their children behind. "Back there in the farms, there is no life, no food, no school," said one of the displaced persons. "They are better off in the town, and safer there, and they can continue going to school" (UNICEF, 2009:2). It is therefore apparent that many factors within and outside the school impact on schooling. Urgent interventions are necessary to identify these categories of excluded children in order to address their challenges.

The Ministry of Labour and Human Resources Development officers nominally enforced the minimum age statute, and the government worked closely with COTU and the ILO's International Program for the Elimination of Child Labour to eliminate child labour. The government's Free Universal Primary Education Program resulted in the return to school in 2003 of approximately one million children who formerly were working; more than one million children were

believed still to be working. The researcher also notes that very little known research in the field of school safety and child friendly school environment has been done in Uasin Gishu coupled with the fact that some schools were completely razed down during the 2007/2008 post election violence it becomes paramount to carry out a study of this nature in the county. The county among others has also experienced other forms of school violence that has resulted to loss of properties and lives.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since the inception of Free Primary Education in the year 2003 it is noteworthy that many children in Uasin Gishu county in Kenya, are still unable to access education due to home or school related reasons. It is in this perspective that the Ministry of Education in Kenya and the UNICEF agreed to improve the learning conditions in schools in an attempt to promote child friendly schools. Despite concerted efforts towards sustainable education in Uasin Gishu county it is a fact that parents live with a lot of fears in relation to the safety of their children as they travel to and from school due to hazards within and outside schools. Addictive substances, violence, pornography as well as emergency preparedness always tops the agenda of important stakeholders. This study therefore was focused on assessing the safety considerations put in place in primary schools in order to address the implementation of child friendly schools initiative.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a pragmatic approach in order to gain entry into the school health programmes and its influence on the implementation of the CFS initiative. CFS as a concept is solely aimed at enabling children to have meaningful learning experiences in schools and better the outcomes of school attendance. To a pragmatist, the mandate of science is not to find truth or reality, the existence of which are perpetually in dispute, but to facilitate human problem-solving.

The study therefore utilized the mixed-methods approach and a descriptive survey research design which involved a concurrent collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Thus the study triangulated questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions in order to best describe the health promoting programmes in schools and its influence on implementation of CFS initiative.

In this study the 338 primary schools were stratified into seven educational divisions, from which 103 primary schools were selected proportionately from the divisions. This represented 30% of the primary schools in the County. A stratified random sample is a useful blend of randomization and categorization, which enables both quantitative and qualitative process of research to be undertaken (Cohen and Manion, 2003). A sample size of 30% of the headteachers and class seven teachers and 10% of class seven pupils participated in the study. This agrees with Kerlinger (1986) who noted that a sample size of at least 10%-30% is a good representation of the entire population. A total 103 headteachers as well as 103 class teachers were sampled to participate in the study. A total of 2,259 class seven pupils were grouped into 202 focus group discussions consisting of 11 pupils each. This is supported by Cozby (2001) who notes that groups of between 6-12 members are recommended for focus group discussions.

### **Results and Discussion**

The study sought to establish the level of safety of school environments which is an important component in boosting the implementation of child friendly schools initiative.

The level of safety of school environment was looked at by measuring the following variables: guidance and counselling programmes prevention of violence prevention of violence safety preparedness freedom from addictive substances and effectiveness of security personnel. The respondents were asked to indicate their rating of these variables on a 5 point likert scale as follows: 5=excellent, 4=good, 3=satisfactory, 2=unsatisfactory, 1=poor.

### **Guidance and Counselling Programmes**

35.4% (73) of the respondents rated peace, citizenship, guidance and counseling programmes in promotion of child friendly environment as good, 23.3% (48) indicated excellent while 20.0% (43) rated it as unsatisfactory. Those who rated it as satisfactory and poor were 18.0% (37) and 2.4% (5) respectively. This implies that most of the schools provide necessary guidance and counseling and peaceful environment to enhance a child friendly environment. The findings indicate how schools have put in place measures to provide a suitable disciplining environment to the pupils. This agrees with Begun (2001) who noted that in Ohio, there is fronting of social skills as part of violence prevention education. These are skills to enhance problem solving, conjure emotions, promote peaceful behaviour, and improve communication skills. The social skills are similar to the life skills introduced in Kenyan school's curriculum after the post-election violence of 2007/2008. The school management has a role responsibility of administering the safety measures rather than being glued only to role of producing academic results.

### **Prevention of Violence**

On the schools enforcement of policy on prevention of violence and corporal punishment through positive disciplining in child friendly schools, 33.0% (68) of the respondents said the enforcement was good, 21.8% (45) rated it as satisfactory while 18.4% (38) indicated unsatisfactory. Those who thought the enforcement was excellent represent 14.6% (30) while 12.2% (35) saw the enforcement as poor. This finding contradicts with Makenzie (2010) noted that violence in schools existed in the form of bullying and harassment. Day and Golench (1997) were however, emphatic on how school violence affects the entire student body, staff and the community as a whole. It is very important for school managers to put in place measures that would help promote zero tolerance to violence and harassment in schools. Pupil harassment affects the learners' ego and self-esteem and is counterproductive on general school participation.

### **Safety Preparedness**

When asked to rate the putting of safety measures in place (e.g. fire extinguishers, fire escapes, drills, lighting arresters, first aid kits and school fence) to enhance child friendly school, 37.9% (78) said it was poor, 25.7% (53) rated it as unsatisfactory while 18.9% (39), 10.2% (21) and 7.3% (15) indicated the safety as satisfactory, good and excellent respectively. Other studies about student academic achievement and building conditions conclude that the quality of the physical environment significantly affects student achievement. This agrees with Earthman (2004) who states that the buildings in which students spend a good deal of their time learning does in fact influence how well they learn.

### **School Environment**

The respondents were asked to rate how free the school environment is from hazardous/risky materials/buildings and it is evident that 27.2% (56) of the respondents rate it as good,

22.8% (47) rated it as satisfactory, while 19.9% (41) rated it as excellent. Those who rated it as unsatisfactory and poor represented 19.4% (40) and 10.7% (22) respectively. Respondents' ratings of emergency preparedness and response plan measures by all children shows that 26.7% (55) of the respondents indicated it as poor and 26.2% (54) saw it as satisfactory. Moreover 16.0% (33) rated it as good while 25.7% (53) saw it as unsatisfactory however 5.3% (11) indicated that it was excellent. This means that most of the schools ensure safety of the environment by eradicating hazardous and risky materials however little is done in emergency preparedness. UNICEF (2006) observes that the physical environment of school including its surrounding neighbourhoods, is crucial to children's safety.

#### Addictive Substance and Pornography

Further on how free the school environment is from addictive substances, violence and pornography in establishment of a child friendly environment, 34.5% (71) of the respondents rated it as excellent, 23.3% (48) saw it as good while 17.5% (36) indicated it as satisfactory, 13.1% (27) and 11.7% (24) of the respondents rated the school environment as unsatisfactory and poor respectively. It is therefore clear that most of the schools are free from addictive substances that could have otherwise distorted the child's mind. Makenzie (2010) notes that a healthy school environment refers to a physical environment (e.g. lighting, temperature and noise) that is conducive to learning and a psycho-social environment, that supports individual and family differences, promotes a personal growth, wellness and healthy relationships. UNICEF (2006) further observes that natural lighting and ventilation of toilets are important for cleanliness and removal of bad odours. There should be enough light to inspect for cleanliness.

UNICEF (2006) further observes that the physical environment of school, leaving space, including its surrounding neighbourhoods, is crucial to children's safety and security its increase school safety, fences should be built to protect children from harmful outside influences, such as drug peddling, sexual harassment or physical violence. Constant supervision of the school and school yard is also very necessary. Expansive school yards with many large buildings or unprotected areas may need additional staff or other security measures, such as emergency notification or alarm systems that can alert students and teachers to an ongoing emergency.

#### Effectiveness of Security Personnel

The Table 1 also shows that 35.0% (72) of the respondents rated the discharging of duties by the school

security personnel to guarantee a child friendly school environment as good, 23.3% (48) indicated satisfactory. However 18.4% (38), 13.6% (28) and 9.7% (20) rated it as excellent, poor and unsatisfactory respectively. The school environment in most of the schools is secure because of the efficiency of the security personnel. According to Vadugnathan (2005), quality of education primarily resides within school facilities among other factors. Entwistle et al (1990) also observes that a well desired educational facility is one that effectively meets the present educational and social needs of its occupants. In addition, such a facility should meet statutory regulations and other agreed health and safety equipments as well as provide adequate security against unauthorized access. Decaying environmental conditions such as peeling paint, crumbling plaster, non-functioning toilets, poor lighting and inadequate ventilation coupled with unhealthy and insecure educational environments have all been too common a phenomenon the world over.

Regarding school safety, most of the pupils responded;

*We feel safe in any place within the school compound because of proper security measures provided and on our way home security was guaranteed because of good neighbourhood. This is attributed to good relationship between the school and the community at large.*

The third objective of this study was to assess the level of safety and protectiveness of school environments in enhancing child friendly schools implementation process in Uasin Gishu County. Information obtained shows that 74.7% of the respondents rated peace, citizenship, guidance and counseling programmes in promotion of child friendly environment as good. Most of the schools therefore provide necessary guidance and counseling and peaceful environment to enhance a child friendly environment. On the schools enforcement of policy on prevention of violence and corporal punishment through positive disciplining in child friendly schools, 69.4% of the respondents said the enforcement was satisfactory. Most of the schools provide a suitable disciplining environment to ensure good environment of the students. When asked to rate the putting of safety measures in place (e.g. fire extinguishers, fire escapes, drills, lighting arresters, first aid kits and school fence) to enhance child friendly school, 63.6% said it was poor. It is necessary for all schools to ensure safety in the schools and to always be ready for any emergency that may arise within the school by putting the safety materials in place accordingly.

**Table 1. Safety in Schools and Child Friendly Schools Initiative.**

Statement	Excellent		Good		Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory		Poor		Total	
	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
Peace, citizenship, guidance and counselling programmes promote child friendly schools	48	23.3	73	35.4	37	18.0	43	20.9	5	2.4	206	100.0
Schools enforcement of policy on prevention of violence and corporal punishment through positive disciplining has already enhanced a child friendly school	30	14.6	68	33.0	45	21.8	38	18.4	25	12.1	206	100.0
Safety measures are in place (e.g. fire extinguishers, fire escapes, drills, lighting arresters, first aid kits and school fence) making our school friendly to pupils	15	7.3	21	10.2	39	18.9	53	25.7	78	37.9	206	100.0
The school environment is free from hazardous/risky materials/buildings	41	19.9	56	27.2	47	22.8	40	19.4	22	10.7	206	100.0
The school has emergency preparedness and response plan and measures understood by all children	11	5.3	33	16.0	54	26.2	53	25.7	55	26.7	206	100.0
The school is free from addictive substances, violence and pornography in effort towards a child friendly environment	71	34.5	48	23.3	36	17.5	27	13.1	24	11.7	206	100.0
The school security personnel discharge their duties in cautious manner that guarantees child friendly school environment	<b>38</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>100.0</b>

When the respondents were asked to rate how free the school environment is from hazardous/risky materials/buildings 69.9% of the respondents rated it as good. However on emergency preparedness and response plan measures for all children show that 52.4% of the respondents were unsatisfied. This means that most of the schools ensure safety of the environment by eradicating hazardous and risky materials however little is done in emergency preparedness.

Further on how free the school environment is from addictive substances, violence and pornography in establishment of a child friendly environment, 75.3% of the respondents rated it as good. It is therefore evident that most of the schools are free from addictive substances which may harm the child's mind. Moreover 76.7% of the respondents rated the discharging of duties by the school security personnel to guarantee a child friendly school environment as good. The school environment in most of the schools is secure because of the efficiency of the security personnel.

### Conclusion

Schools should put in place safety measures and rethink the emergency preparedness as well as a response plan. Headteachers and teachers should mobilize resources towards the provision of essential materials such as lightning arresters, fire extinguishers and first aid kits, all of which would enhance safety in the schools in case of emergencies. They should also have good emergency response plan that would eliminate all forms of risks that can emanate from the school compound or outside the school compound. All these if put in place would enhance the quality of teaching and learning and enhance the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

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