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EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE ON PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPLETION IN KISMAYO DISTRICT, SOMALIA

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EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE ON PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPLETION IN KISMAYO DISTRICT, SOMALIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of child abuse on primary school completion rates in Kismayo District, Somalia, using a cross-sectional, descriptive survey design that integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods. A total of 143 respondents were considered, with a representative sample of 105 determined according to the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970). The results reveal that awareness of sexual abuse is high among respondents, primarily acquired through peer communication. Notably, the highest incidence of sexual abuse was reported in grade 8, followed by grade 7, with incidents frequently involving physical actions such as pushing or pulling. Furthermore, the study identified Boda-Boda (motorcycle) riders as the primary perpetrators of emotional abuse. The findings highlight that child abuse, irrespective of socio-economic status, has a significant negative impact on students' well-being, leading to trauma and increased school dropout rates. The study concludes that child abuse in Kismayo District constitutes a severe violation of social justice and an infringement on children's rights. To address this pressing issue, it is essential to prioritize the welfare of children through enhanced resource allocation and robust support mechanisms by both the Kismayo District authorities and the Somali government. Recommendations include the implementation of comprehensive public awareness campaigns and the establishment of children's clubs in primary schools, both of which are aimed at educating children about their rights and empowering them to advocate for their own protection.

Introduction

Child abuse remains one of the most critical public health challenges of our time. Extensive literature has long documented that child abuse is neither a modern phenomenon nor an isolated event; rather, it is a historical constant present across all cultures and social strata (Boland, 2006; Koome, 2012). This phenomenon arises from a complex interplay of individual, familial, and

sociocultural factors rather than from isolated incidents (Flitter et al., 2003). In recent decades, increased recognition of the profound and enduring psychological and physical harm inflicted on victims has spurred both public and professional sectors to devote greater attention to this issue.

While many studies have explored the potential for positive student–teacher interactions within educational systems, the darker issue of teachers engaging in unprofessional conduct, including instances of sexual abuse with their students has not received equivalent scrutiny. This form of abuse, which is not confined to any one region, also affects countries such as Botswana, underscoring that no society is immune to this violation of children’s rights.

Globally, estimates suggest that roughly 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 are forced into sexual violence each year (World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). Research published by Clinical Psychology (2009) indicates that approximately 19.7% of females and 7.9% of males experience sexual abuse during childhood, with prevalence figures ranging from 10.1% to 23% in regions such as America and Asia. In North America, reported rates of childhood sexual abuse span from 15% to 25% for women and 5% to 15% for men (WHO, 2000). Notably, most perpetrators are known to their victims: about 30% are family members (including brothers, fathers, uncles, or cousins), around 60% are acquaintances like family friends or babysitters, and only roughly 10% are strangers (Wihbey, 2011).

The research further reveals that men are responsible for the majority of these offenses. Finkeller (1994) highlights that while women account for 14% to 40% of abuse against boys and 6% against girls, male offenders predominate—especially when the victims are prepubescent. In one U.S. study, 1,400 adult female perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse were found to have a heightened risk of developing substance dependence and psychiatric disorders (Giddnes et al., 1995). In instances of abuse, the physical harm inflicted may include internal lacerations, bleeding, and, in severe cases, organ damage that can be fatal.

Child sexual abuse encompasses a wide range of behaviors from voyeurism to rape, often occurring repeatedly over extended periods and perpetrated by individuals who have the trust of the child. In the United States alone, an estimated 60 to 80 million survivors have been affected, with abuse leading to long-term physical injuries, psychological trauma, declining academic performance, and increased risk of homelessness.

Prevalence rates of child sexual abuse vary geographically. European studies report an average prevalence of about 9.2%, whereas rates in America and Asia range between 10.1% and 23%. South Africa shows particularly alarming statistics, with reported prevalence rates of 60.9% for males and 43.7% for females. Other regions such as Jordan and Tanzania report rates of 27% and 25% respectively for men. For several countries—including Israel (15.7%), Spain (13.4%), Australia (13%), and Costa Rica (12.8%)—the prevalence in males remains below 10% (Wihbey, 2011). For females, the rates in some countries exceed 20%, with Australia (37.8%), Costa Rica (32.2%), Israel (30.7%), Sweden (28.1%), the United States (25.3%), and Switzerland (24.2%) among those most affected. Moreover, about 6% of all adults report an attraction to children, and such individuals may seek employment in environments that offer proximity to potential victims; in fact, 90% of abusers are individuals known and trusted by the child, often without any previous criminal records (WHO, 2000).

Additional studies from Europe indicate that between 6% and 36% of girls under 16 and about 15% of boys in the same age group have experienced some form of sexual abuse (Wihbey, 2011). In the United Kingdom, one in four young adults (25.3%) report severe maltreatment during childhood, with 13.4% of children aged 11 to 17 having experienced sexual abuse and 9.4% reporting such abuse in the past year (Giddnes et al., 1995). Africa, however, holds the grim distinction of having the highest reported rates of child sexual abuse (Ito et al., 1998), with abuse often occurring alongside other negative factors, such as a poor family environment or concurrent physical abuse (Kindler et al., 2000).

In North Africa, research shows that girls are predominantly the victims of sexual abuse, with 80% of assaults on boys and 95% on girls perpetrated by males (Frinkelhor et al., 1986). Boys abused by other boys frequently have a personal history of having been abused themselves; notably, these male perpetrators are not typically driven by adult same-sex attraction but rather by a predilection for prepubescent children (Finkelhor et al., 1986). Moreover, combined prevalence rates for all contact forms of abuse vary markedly across regions for example, ranging from 6% to 9% for females in the U.S. and reaching as high as 25% to 27% in Jordan. Similar patterns are observed among Arab Bedouins in Israel and Palestine.

In Nigeria, a study conducted in Zaria in 1998 found that 16% of female patients treated for sexually transmitted diseases were children under the age of five, while an additional 6% were

between six and 15 years old (UNFPA, 2005). In Ghana, interviews with mothers revealed that as many as 70% had given advice to their daughters involved in premarital sexual relationships. Notably, some older women did not view the exchange of gifts for sex as abuse or prostitution, but rather as a sign of a man's affection.

Concerns regarding sexual abuse by teachers in Botswana have been raised by various stakeholders including media outlets, civil society organizations, and practitioners. Although teacher codes of conduct clearly forbid unprofessional relationships with students, they often lack explicit measures to safeguard children's rights. Consequently, it is critical for all relevant parties to devise context-specific strategies to combat this form of abuse. A study conducted by Ike and Twumasi-Ankrah (1999) investigated sexual abuse perpetrated by teachers in senior secondary schools in Gaborone, examining both the immediate and long-term effects of such abuse on students. Social work professionals—recognized globally for their expertise in child protection and welfare—play an essential role in policy formulation, management, and direct intervention (Jacques, 2003).

Further illustrating the global reach of this issue, a 2009 report from the Kismayo Women's Hospital in Somalia noted that 43.5% of child abuse cases involved sexual abuse, with the average age for boys being around 10 years and approximately 20% of the cases involving children aged five or below. In Somalia, 71.5% of abuse incidents were perpetrated by individuals known to the child. In cases of incest, the incidence of abuse tends to decrease as children grow older, although the majority of victims are abused by trusted individuals. An alarming aspect noted in Somalia is the communal nature of child prostitution, where shared living spaces are misused for sexual exploitation, allowing perpetrators continuous access to their victims (Wekesa, 1999). The enduring physical and psychological consequences of such abuse significantly impair the future prospects and overall well-being of the affected children.

Research objectives

- (i) To establish the effects of sexual abuse on primary school completion rates in Kismayo district, Somalia
- (ii) To examine the effects of emotional abuse on primary school completion rates in Kismayo district, Somalia
- (iii) To determine the effects of physical abuse on primary school completion rates in Kismayo district, Somalia.

- (iv) To ascertain the relationship between child abuse and primary school completion rates in Kismayo district, Somalia.

Research Questions

- i. What are the effects of sexual abuse on primary school completion rates in Kismayo district, Somalia?
- ii. What are the effects of emotional abuse on primary school completion rates in Kismayo district, Somalia?
- iii. What are the effects of physical abuse on primary school completion rates in Kismayo district, Somalia?
- iv. What is the relationship between child abuse and primary school completion rates in Kismayo district, Somalia.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the tenets of social exchange theory as described by Robbins (2000). According to this perspective, every human relationship is formed and maintained through an implicit, subjective cost–benefit analysis that involves comparing the rewards and expenses of a given relationship with those of alternative options. In essence, if an individual comes to the conclusion that the costs such as emotional or physical harm of remaining in an abusive relationship outweigh the benefits, they are more inclined to terminate that relationship.

However, the theory goes further than a mere calculation of tangible outcomes. It emphasizes that individual expectations play a crucial role in determining relationship satisfaction. For instance, as Payne (2005) explains, even when two individuals experience similar outcomes within their relationships, their levels of satisfaction can differ markedly due to their distinct personal expectations or “comparison levels.” A person with lower expectations might perceive a relationship even one that is abusive as relatively acceptable, whereas someone with higher expectations may find the same situation intolerable. Thus, while satisfaction (the gap between actual outcomes and expectations) is a key indicator, it alone does not determine whether a person will remain in an abusive relationship or leave for an alternative that promises greater benefits.

In the context of addressing girl child sexual abuse, social exchange theory provides a useful framework. It reinforces the point that the responsibility for abuse lies with the perpetrator rather

than the victim. Moreover, it sheds light on why sexually abused children might seek out supportive and validating responses from trusted adults. Their decision to disclose the abuse is often based on their anticipation of receiving empathy and assistance, which is shaped by their previous experiences and expectations regarding adult responses.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate the complex relationship between child abuse and primary school completion rates in Somalia. The use of a mixed-methods strategy enabled the collection of comprehensive data, with quantitative methods providing measurable evidence of the prevalence and effects of child abuse, while qualitative methods offered nuanced insights into the lived experiences, perceptions, and social contexts influencing these issues. This approach ensured that the study captured not only statistical trends but also the human stories behind them, resulting in a more nuanced and holistic analysis.

The research focused on a target population of 143 individuals from the Kismayo District (Children's Rights and Save the Child NGO, 2024), encompassing a range of stakeholders directly and indirectly affected by child abuse. These included children under the age of 18 who had experienced abuse, their parents or guardians, local council members, police officers, and representatives from two non-governmental organizations actively engaged in child protection initiatives. A sample size of 105 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, ensuring that the selected participants constituted a statistically representative subset of the broader population.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

N = sample size

N = the population size

e = level of significance (fixed)

$$n = \frac{\frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}}{1 + \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}} = \frac{\frac{143}{1 + 143(0.0025)}}{1 + \frac{143}{1 + 143(0.0025)}} = \frac{143}{1 + 0.3575} = \frac{143}{1.3575}$$

n = 105 respondents

Sampling was carried out using a combination of techniques tailored to the different categories of respondents. Simple random sampling was used to select children, parents, and NGO officials, providing each individual within these groups an equal opportunity for inclusion and reducing bias. For police officers and local government officials, purposive sampling was employed, ensuring that individuals with relevant expertise and professional involvement in child protection were intentionally included in the study. Additionally, multi-cluster sampling was used to achieve geographical representativeness across different parts of Kismayo District, thereby capturing diverse perspectives influenced by locality.

Data collection incorporated multiple instruments to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews conducted using a structured interview guide, supplemented by direct observations and a review of relevant documents such as police records, academic publications, and unpublished reports. These sources provided valuable contextual insights that enriched the interpretation of the findings. The quantitative component consisted of semi-structured, self-administered questionnaires designed to collect measurable data on the frequency and effects of different forms of child abuse on primary school completion. All data collection tools were pre-tested to ensure reliability and validity, with content reviewed by subject matter experts and inter-rater methods applied to assess consistency.

Data analysis followed a systematic process for both types of data. Qualitative data were subjected to thematic content analysis, where transcripts were thoroughly reviewed and coded to identify recurring themes, patterns, and contradictions. This helped reveal the underlying social and emotional dynamics influencing children's experiences. On the other hand, quantitative data were coded, organized, and analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS and Microsoft Excel. The analysis produced both descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics (e.g., regression and correlation analyses), allowing the study to assess the strength and significance of relationships between child abuse and school outcomes. The integration of both datasets enabled triangulation, reinforcing the credibility and reliability of the results.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. To facilitate access to the field and obtain permission from relevant authorities, an introductory letter was secured from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants,

ensuring they fully understood the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. The confidentiality of responses was maintained, and additional measures were taken to protect the welfare of vulnerable participants, especially the child victims. Though the study faced some logistical challenges, including delayed responses, scheduling conflicts with mobile participants, limited financial resources, and time constraints, these were mitigated through careful planning, persistent follow-ups, and by building trust and rapport with the participants.

Results

Knowledge of sexual abuse

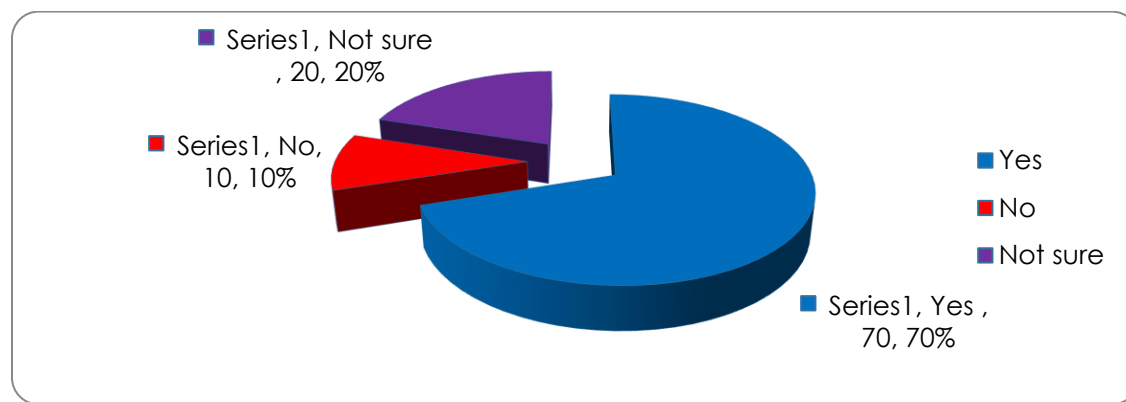


Fig. 1: Respondents' Awareness of Sexual Abuse

Source; Primary data, 2024.

As indicated in the figure above, 70% of the interviewees indicated that they were aware of sexual abuse, while 20% expressed uncertainty about the issue, and the remaining 10% reported having no knowledge of it. These findings suggest that a substantial number of children are cognizant of sexual abuse, which may imply that many have experienced some form of abuse. However, due to their young age, only a few cases are formally reported to the police; rather, incidents are often disclosed in school settings, where they are sometimes classified as minor. Despite this classification, the impact on the victims is significant, contributing to adverse outcomes such as school dropouts.

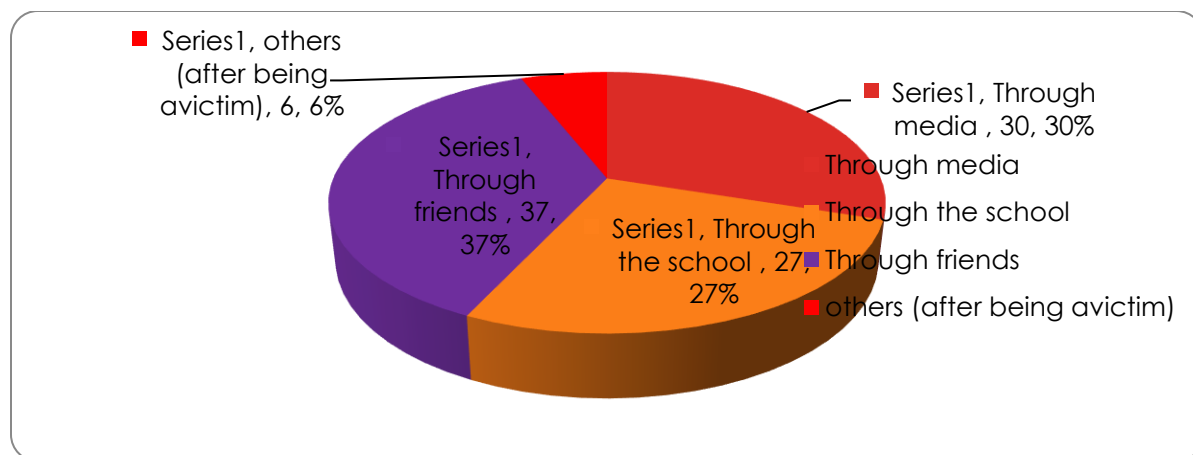


Fig. 2: Respondents' Opinions on how they came to know about sexual abuse

Source: Primary data, 2024.

An assessment of respondents' perspectives on how they learned about sexual abuse revealed several distinct channels of awareness. The largest segment, comprising 37% of the respondents, reported that they first became aware of sexual abuse through conversations with friends. This finding suggests that peer interactions play a crucial role in disseminating information about sensitive issues among young people. In addition, 27% of the respondents indicated that they became informed about sexual abuse in the school environment, highlighting the significance of formal educational settings and possibly school-based awareness programs in raising awareness about abuse. Moreover, 30% of the respondents attributed their understanding of sexual abuse to media sources, including radio, television, and newspapers, which underscores the important role that mass media plays in educating the public about such critical issues. Finally, a smaller group of respondents mentioned that their awareness of sexual abuse emerged from personal experiences; after becoming victims, they were able to recognize and comprehend the nature of the abuse and its detrimental effects on children. This multifaceted dissemination of knowledge not only illustrates the varied sources through which young individuals learn about sexual abuse but also emphasizes the need for comprehensive educational and support programs across different platforms to ensure that accurate and timely information reaches all segments of the population.

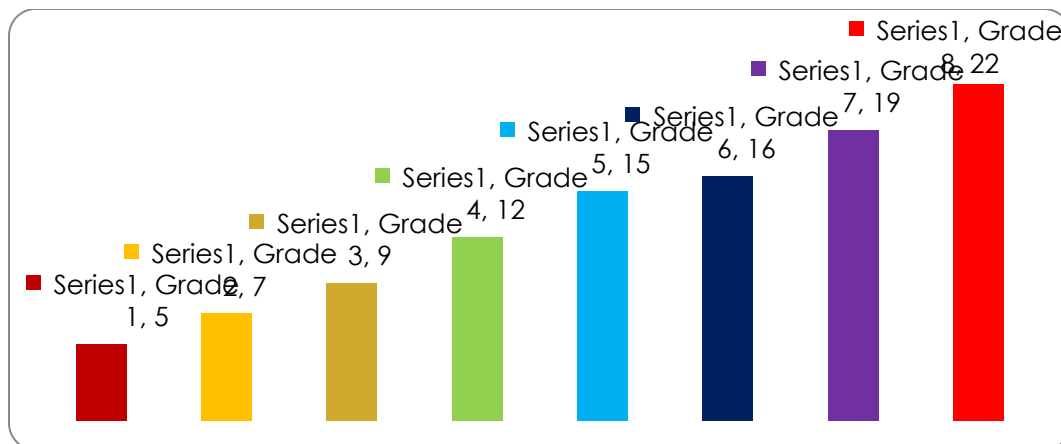


Figure 3: Respondents' views on the study grade at the period of sexual abuse

Source; Primary data (2023)

When respondents were asked to specify the grade level at which they experienced sexual abuse, a range of responses emerged. The largest group, 22%, indicated that the abuse occurred in grade 8, making it the most frequently reported grade level. This was closely followed by 19% of respondents who stated that the abuse occurred in grade 7. Additionally, 16% reported that the abuse took place in grade 6, while 15% indicated grade 5 as the time of occurrence. A notable 12% of respondents identified grade 4 as the point at which they experienced abuse. Further down the scale, 9% reported that the abuse happened in grade 3, and 7% indicated grade 2. Lastly, a smaller group of 5% revealed that sexual abuse occurred as early as grade 1. These findings not only highlight the varying grade levels at which abuse occurs but also underscore the need for targeted interventions at multiple stages of a child's educational journey to better protect them and provide timely support.

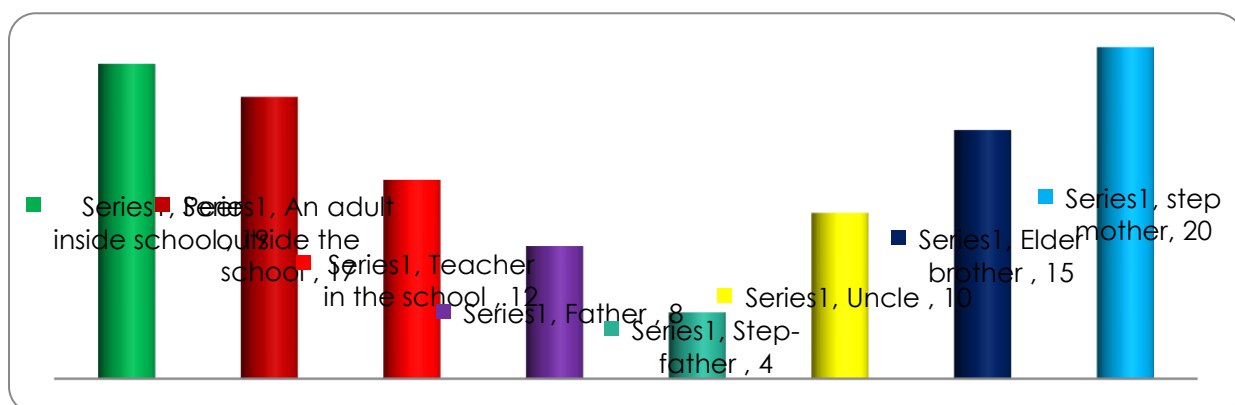


Fig. 4 Respondents' Views on the Culprits of the sexual abuse

Source: Primary data, 2024.

When respondents were asked to identify who was responsible for perpetrating the sexual abuse, a diverse range of answers emerged. The largest group, 20% of respondents, indicated that their stepmother was responsible for the abuse. Close behind, 19% reported that the abuse was perpetrated by a peer within the school. In addition, 17% of the respondents attributed the abuse to an adult outside the school environment. Another 15% revealed that their elder brother was the abuser, while 12% indicated that a teacher at their school was responsible. Furthermore, 10% of respondents identified an uncle as the perpetrator, and 8% pointed to their father. Finally, 4% of the respondents stated that the abuse was carried out by a step-father. These findings illustrate the complex and multifaceted nature of the abuse, highlighting that perpetrators come from various familial and social relationships. This complexity underscores the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address abuse across different relational contexts, ensuring that protective measures and support systems are tailored to the unique circumstances of each case.

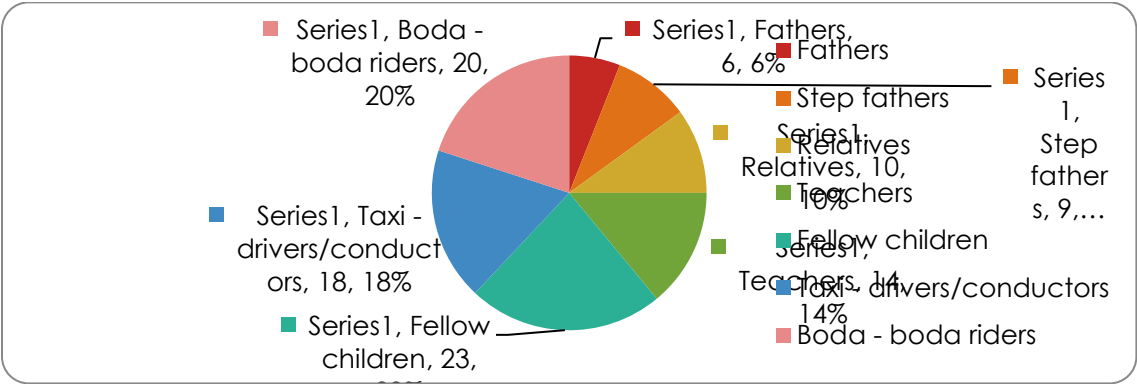


Figure 5: Respondents’ View on the most likely culprits of emotional abuse of children
Source: Primary data, 2024.

An assessment of children’s views regarding the perpetrators of emotional abuse revealed a diverse range of responses. The largest proportion of respondents (23%) identified boda-boda riders as being responsible for emotional abuse, suggesting that these individuals are seen as significant contributors to the problem. Additionally, 20% of the respondents attributed the abuse to fellow children, indicating that peer interactions also play a role in such experiences. Moreover, 18% of the children indicated that taxi drivers or conductors were responsible, while 14% pointed to teachers as perpetrators of emotional abuse. Furthermore, 10% of respondents believed that relatives were involved, and 9% identified step-fathers as responsible. Finally, a smaller yet notable percentage of children reported that fathers were accountable for the emotional abuse they experienced. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of emotional abuse and highlight

the need for comprehensive, context-sensitive interventions that address the various sources of abuse across different social and familial relationships.

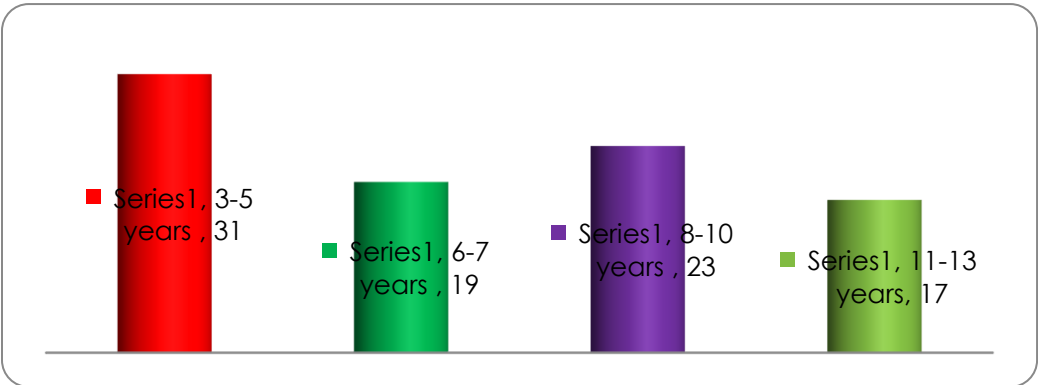


Figure 6: Summary statistics on respondent’s views on most common age of emotionally abused children, *Source; Primary data (2024)*

According to Figure 6 above, 31% of respondents indicated that the most common age range for emotionally abused children is between 3 and 5 years old. This was followed by 23% of respondents who identified children between 8 and 10 years old as the most frequently affected group. Additionally, 19% reported that children aged 6 to 7 years are commonly subject to emotional abuse, while 17% noted that those in the 11 to 13-year age bracket are also significantly vulnerable. These findings suggest that emotional abuse spans a broad range of childhood, with early childhood (3–5 years) being particularly at risk, yet highlighting that older children are not exempt from experiencing such abuse.

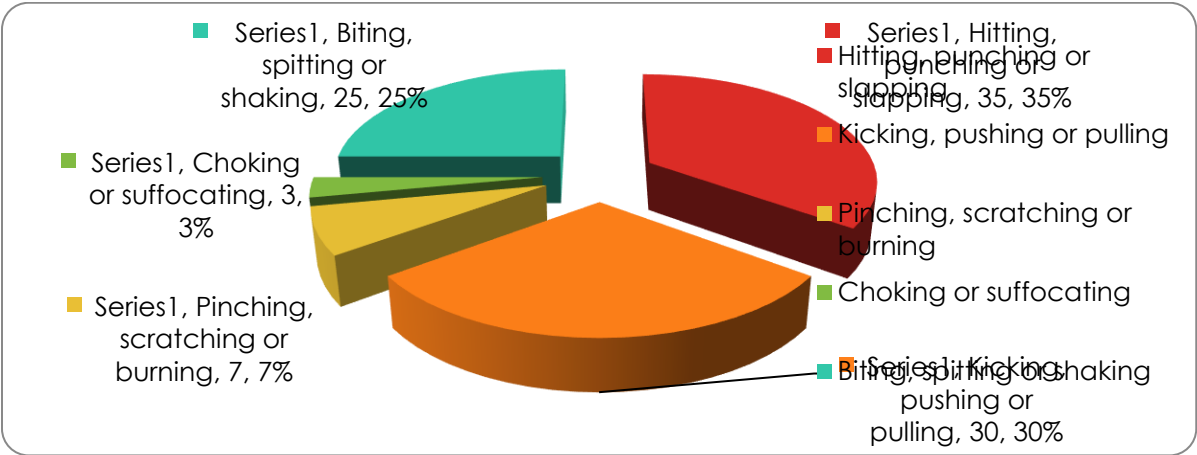


Figure 7: Summary statistics on respondent’s views on effects of physical abuse on the school going children, *Source; Primary data (2024)*

When respondents were asked to describe the effects of physical abuse on school-going children, a range of responses emerged. The most frequently reported forms of abuse, cited by 35% of respondents, were hitting, punching, or slapping. In addition, 30% of respondents identified kicking, pushing, or pulling as common abusive behaviors. Furthermore, 25% of respondents noted that children were subjected to shaking or biting as forms of physical abuse. A smaller group, 7%, mentioned that punishments such as pinching, scratching, or burning were also inflicted upon the children. Lastly, some respondents reported instances of choking and suffocating as additional manifestations of physical abuse. These findings highlight the diverse and severe nature of physical abuse experienced by school-aged children.

Table 1: Regression Analysis Model

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Dependent Variable: primary school completion	
	B	Std.E				R Square	0.463
(Constant)	1.630	.239	1.582	8.016	.000	Adjusted R Square	0.346
Sexual abuse	-.152	.044	-.144	-3.445	.003	Sig.	0.000
Emotional abuse	.345	.044	.279	5.627	.000		
Physical abuse	.421	.052	.295	6.211	.000		

Source; Primary data (2024)

Table 1 demonstrates that accounted for 34.6% of the variance in primary school completion (Adjusted R² = 0.346). Further analysis shows that physical abuse was the strongest predictor (Beta = 0.295, p < .001), followed by emotional abuse (Beta = 0.279, p < .001), and sexual abuse (Beta = −0.144, p = .003). These findings suggest that while physical and emotional abuse are significant, sexual abuse—often concealed—has an especially harmful impact on school children. Moreover, the study reveals that a range of factors contribute to the sexual abuse of children by teachers. Many victims choose not to report these incidents due to fear of blame or further victimization, exacerbating the issue. This alarming trend has drawn considerable concern from civil society organizations, practitioners, and community members, as it poses a significant threat to children’s rights. Consequently, it is imperative that all relevant stakeholders develop and implement context-specific strategies to combat this problem effectively. Although teacher codes of conduct generally

prohibit unprofessional relationships with students, they often fall short in explicitly safeguarding the rights of children, underscoring the need for more robust protective measures.

Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between child abuse and primary school completion rates in the Kismayo district of Somalia. The findings reaffirm that child abuse is not only a global concern but also a profound violation of children's rights and social justice within the local context. In Kismayo, such maltreatment contributes significantly to psychological distress, increased dropout rates, and poor developmental outcomes among children. It is therefore crucial that the well-being and best interests of children are placed at the forefront of policy priorities by both local authorities and the Somali government. Achieving this will require strategic investment in child protection services and the adoption of robust, child-centered policies aimed at fostering safe and supportive environments for growth and learning.

The research underscores the inherent right of every child to a safe, nurturing, and dignified upbringing by parents, caregivers, educators, and the broader community. The heightened vulnerability of children to abuse and neglect demands urgent systemic reforms that prioritize their holistic development and protect them from harm.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of integrating professional social work services within schools as a strategic approach to improving educational outcomes and family engagement. Many schools currently lack the capacity to effectively support at-risk students or collaborate meaningfully with families. The deployment of trained school-based social workers skilled in communication, family systems, and cultural competence can bridge this gap. These professionals can enhance parental involvement, address family-related challenges, and contribute to transforming schools into inclusive hubs for learning, care, and community support.

Recommendations

- i. The government must deliberately develop, finance, and implement extensive education initiatives that focus on children's rights, the adverse effects of abuse in school settings, and clear protocols for reporting incidents.

- ii. Local authorities should take the responsibility of establishing children's clubs within primary schools in the Kisimayo district to serve as safe spaces for learning and discussion about children's rights.
- iii. The Education Ministry should invest in comprehensive training programs for teachers, administrators, and community members to build a robust support system capable of addressing and managing cases of child abuse. Training should include topics such as child protection, gender-responsive education, counselling techniques, and effective reporting procedures. This capacity-building measure will ensure that the support network within schools and the broader community is well-equipped to protect children and respond to abuse cases.
- iv. The government should adjust ministerial budgets to bolster the state's capacity to fulfil its national and international commitments towards child protection. Sufficient funding should be directed toward the execution of awareness campaigns, regular school supervision visits, and the training of relevant personnel.
- v. Non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations should promote a collaborative approach that involves men and boys in the efforts to combat child abuse and promote gender equality.

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