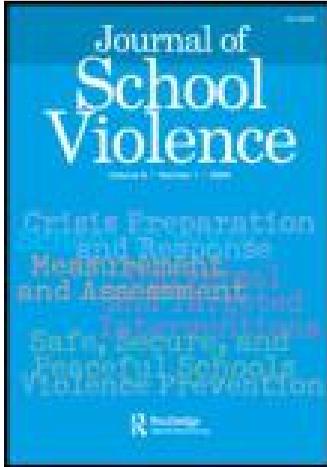


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### A Phenomenological Study of Sexual Harassment and Violence Among Girls Attending High Schools in Urban Slums, Nairobi, Kenya

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## **A Phenomenological Study of Sexual Harassment and Violence Among Girls Attending High Schools in Urban Slums, Nairobi, Kenya**

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*In 2003, 31% of young Kenyan women ages 15–24 reported sexual harassment and violence (SHV), with a majority experiencing sexual debut due to coercion (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). Data were obtained from a sample of 20 girls attending school in Kamu and Lafamu (pseudonyms used for the study sites), 10 girls who had dropped out of school, and 14 teachers, using structured interviews. A phenomenological approach was used to describe narratives of girls' experiences with SHV in and out of school. The findings indicated that girls experienced frequent SHV in and out of school despite the Sexual Offences Act enacted by the Kenyan Parliament in 2006 (Government of Kenya, 2006). Hence, stakeholders need to reengage and implement existing policies on sexual abuse among children and women.*

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At the International Conference on Population and Development, which was convened in Cairo in 1994, with delegates from 179 countries and 1,200 nongovernmental organizations, agreed on the goal of improving sexual and reproductive health, fostering reproductive rights, and stabilizing the world's population (Todd et al., 2004; United Nations Population Fund, 1995). At this meeting, reproductive health was defined to include sexual health, which arose out of the growing concern of escalating rates of HIV infections and the ever-increasing public health concerns on issues arising from violence against women and girls. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one of the sexual and reproductive health core functions is to tackle challenges to safe and fulfilling sexual relationships that include: discrimination by gender, inequitable health-care access, restrictive laws, sexual coercion, sexual exploitation, and gender-based violence (WHO, 2004). The current study sought to contribute to the existing literature on violence, particularly among young women in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), by highlighting the sexual violence experiences of girls attending two high schools in the urban slums of Nairobi.

### Sexual and School Violence Effects

Sexual violence is "any sexual act, attempted sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic women's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the survivor, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work" (Krug et al., 2002, p. 149). In schools, sexual violence is recognized as a public health problem detrimental to girls' psychosomatic health (Gådin & Hammarström, 2003) and as a social problem, expressed by students, educators, and community officials throughout the last decade (Bearinger, Sieving, Ferguson, & Sharma, 2007; Bennett & Finaran, 1998; Stein, 1995). Furlong and Morrison (2000, p. 71) defined school violence as "a multifaceted construct that involves both criminal acts and aggression in schools, which inhibits development and learning, as well as harming the school's climate." As such, school violence consists of physical injury, verbal aggression, sexual abuse, antisocial behavior, and minor acts of aggression (Klewin, Tillmann, & Weingart, 2003; Leach, 2003; Rabrenovic, Kaufman, & Levin, 2004). In this study, instances of sexual harassment and violence (SHV) occurred within the confines of the school, which jeopardized learning for the girls, thereby making the school environment unsafe.

Many aspects of women's sexual health are affected by violence or threat of violence. Among the outcomes for women who find themselves in

violent relationships and/or are exposed to other forms of sexual violence are: (a) inability to make sexual and reproductive choices, (b) increased risky sexual behavior, (c) pregnancy, and (d) sexually transmitted diseases (STDs; Campbell, 2002; Plitcha & Flalik, 2001). Such outcomes may be common among high school girls experiencing sexual violence in SSA schools. Research also indicates that sexual partnerships involving wealthier older men and adolescent girls often pose severe health threats to girls and women alike because of the reduced probability that such partnerships will entail the use of condoms (Luke, 2005). While SHV in the context of domestic violence has been well documented among married or formerly married couples in Kenya (Abuya, Onsomu, Moore, & Piper, 2012; Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2004; Emenike, Lawoko, & Dalal, 2008), little documented evidence is available with regard to SHV in the context of schools, especially as it relates to the sexual exploitation of girls by school staff including teachers.

### Gender Roles

In Kenya, as in other African societies, men have been accorded higher status than women since precolonial time (Kabira & Akinyi Nzioki, 1993). Therefore, formal education in precolonial Kenya carved out different paths for boys and girls. Boys were exposed to a different type of instruction that befitted their status as future men in the society. Girls, on the other hand, were instructed on chores that were geared towards becoming future women, who were meant to provide for the male, children, and extended families in their respective households.

### Need for the Current Study

Recent research in the global context shows that sexual violence remains an unaddressed problem in the education sector. While both male and female students are affected, there still exists a gender gap. Young women and girls experience much higher levels of violence that reflect broader gender inequalities in society (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005). Overall, the literature suggests that sexual violence is a violation of girls' and women's human rights and is detrimental to their physical and psychological health. Sexual violence limits the ability of girls and young women to achieve their educational potential, reduces opportunities to enhance family health, and limits their social and economic development (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005).

For the current study, the researchers worked from the premise that sexual violence is still common among young Kenyan women ages 15–24. Among this age group, 31% were reported to have experienced sexual violence (CBS, 2004). Given this trend, the International Conference on Population and Development goal of achieving universal access to

reproductive health for the world's women by 2015 is an elusive, and perhaps unrealistic, goal (United Nations General Assembly, 1999). This study brought to fore the narratives of school girls in Kenya to contribute their voices to the World Summit's recommitment to governments all over the world to pay attention to issues affecting girls' and women's reproductive health by 2015. Considering this backdrop, we sought to answer the question: What are the experiences of girls attending Kamu and Lafama schools with respect to SHV in and out of school?

## METHOD

### Study Population

The study population consisted of 20 girls attending school in Kamu and Lafamu, 14 teachers, and 10 girls who had dropped out of school. The two study sites are mixed daytime coeducational schools, where boys and girls learn together within the same classes. The schools are located in high poverty areas, thus offering a rich representation of disadvantaged girls' attempts and struggles towards obtaining secondary education. These schools are typical of other urban slum schools in terms of the number of students, student teacher ratio, and level of funding that they receive from the Ministry of Education. At each study site, Kamu and Lafama, 10 female students and 7 teachers were interviewed. The sample girls' ages were between 15 and 19 in Form Two through Form Four (Grades 10–12), and they had been in school for at least 2 years — a requirement that was also applied to the sample of dropouts. This was to allow for the initial transition into a high school.

### Sampling Techniques

#### SAMPLING OF INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

According to Polit, Beck, and Hungler (2001), phenomenological studies are frequently based on samples of 10 or fewer study participants. In-school girls were purposively sampled from Kamu and Lafama high schools in urban slums, Nairobi, with 10 in-school girls interviewed at each of the sites. Teachers were selected from the seven academic departments in the two study schools. Since there were between three and eight teachers in each department, the authors randomly picked one teacher in each department among those who consented to participate in the study. Seven teachers were selected from each of the two schools. This selection of teachers from across curricular areas potentially allowed for corroboration of a broad range of perspectives on the girls' in school violence experiences. A sampling technique (snowballing), where an identified respondent makes referrals to

other potential respondents they know and who possess some characteristics of the research interest, was used to reach the girls who had dropped out. Originally, we used a network of current teachers and students that enabled us to get to the first five girls who had dropped out of school. Once we had these five participants, the participants themselves provided referrals to other girls who had dropped out and were then included in the study. The schools' and girls' names used in this study are pseudonyms to protect the schools' and girls' identity.

#### CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPANT INCLUSION

The criteria for participant selection of students who were still in school included being female, having attended the school for at least 2 years, willingness to be tape recorded and photographed in the course of the interview, and ability to participate in a follow-up interview, if necessary. Teachers were currently teaching in the respective schools, willing to sign consent, be photographed and tape recorded, and able to participate in a follow-up interview. Participants who had dropped out of school also had to have attended school for at least 2 years, be willing to sign consent and participate in a follow-up interview. The 2-year attendance requirement was in order to allow participants to have had a significant experience with the schooling process. Participants were invited to sign consent forms if they were aged 18 or older, while those younger than 18 only signed if their parents or guardians had already signed.

#### Data Source and Collection

Data collection approval was through the Institutional Review Board at Pennsylvania State University. Preliminary data collected during the summer of 2007 and 2008 were incorporated into the study due to their relevance, since the pilot phase of the research was also looking at the same phenomenon of school girls' experiences with SHV. The main method for data collection was the use of structured interviews (see Table 1). These were conducted in person or by telephone by the lead researcher between September 2009 and November 2009. The in-person interviews were done in school for both girls and teachers. For those girls who had dropped out, interviews were conducted in the social hall that had been secured for the same purpose within the community where they lived. The interviews lasted 30–60 min. The mean length of the interview was 45 min for girls and 1 h for teachers.

The lead researcher and each participant agreed on a time and place for the interviews and all interviews were tape recorded for later transcription and analysis. The interview process was informal and began with a

**TABLE 1** Interview Protocol

- 
1. (a) What is your name?  
(b) Where do you go to school?
  2. (a) How long a distance do you travel to your school in the morning?  
(b) After school, how long do you travel to your destination?
  3. What have you experienced in traveling back and forth to school that is particular to female students?
  4. (a) Tell me about your experiences traveling to and from school each day.  
(b) Think of a specific day you traveled to school and tell me what happened at various points on your way to school.
  5. Please describe the general neighborhood where you and your family stay.
  6. (a) What are some common negative comments you hear often uttered by the people around your neighborhood about students in general?  
(b) What do you think or feel about these comments?
  7. Please take me through your normal school routine.
  8. (a) During the school day, what sort of experiences may be unique to the female students in the school?  
(b) How have these experiences influenced your learning?
  9. How would you describe the interaction between you and the male pupils in class?
  10. What do you experience in your family daily that has negatively affected your schooling?
  11. What happens in school that, in your opinion, is a form of sexual harassment to the girls?
  12. (a) Describe for me the relationship between you and the teachers.  
(b) In your opinion, what aspects of this relationship enhance your school experience, and which one(s) do not?
  13. (a) Do you work? If so, do you work in the house or outside your household?  
(b) Explain what kind of work you do.  
(c) Do you work before you go to school or after?  
(d) Is the work you do required of you on a daily basis?
  14. Despite all that you experience what makes you keep coming to school?
  15. How can your experiences in school be made better?
- 

short conversation to establish rapport. The lead researcher then asked a series of questions, according to the protocol, that were designed to obtain a descriptive account of the girls' experiences. Participants in the interview were asked to clarify and elaborate on their experiences, perceptions, and the meaning that they attributed to their experiences with SHV in school. Following the interviews, counselors were enlisted with the main role of providing professional counseling to the girls, if needed.

### Analytical Procedure

This study used Nvivo software to facilitate storage and manipulation of the data. We reviewed the transcripts several times to identify relevant codes within the chunks of data, looking either for phrases that occurred frequently or having an eye for unique occurrences within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first reading was to familiarize us with the responses and to gain insights and clues as to what was contained in the data. In the second

reading, we were looking for the ideas, phrases, concepts, and words that were most pronounced in the data: for example, “fear,” “danger,” “harasses,” “rape,” “intimidate,” “touching,” “slapped,” and “forced.” We also looked for phrases like “they call you,” “they follow you,” “boys are the ones who go to school,” “have forced sex,” “forced girls to have sex,” “name-calling,” and “blocked pathways.” These words and phrases formed the root of the themes that emerged from the data. The subsequent readings resulted in initial codes to organize participant responses on the basis of our research questions.

Subsequently, the initial codes allowed us to tentatively group the data, make descriptions, and extract quotes from the data chunks to support the emerging categories, based on the patterns and interpretations given to a code or sets of codes. This process is described as creating multidimensional categories to give the researcher a basic frame of analysis (Patton, 2002). With subsequent readings of the transcripts, we merged several codes that allowed data chunks to fit into categories that were already established by the initial coding. For example, touching, pushing, forced girls to have sex, name-calling, and blocked pathways, fit into the thematic category sexual violence and harassment on the way to school. With further analysis, related broad categories emerged to form three broad themes: SHV in school; SHV out of school; consequences of SHV.

The identification of codes, categorization, and development of themes were guided by the methodological qualitative approach inherent in phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological qualitative approach focuses on understanding, “the meaning or nature of experience of persons” (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). The current study sought to “obtain the intricate details . . . feelings, thought processes and emotions” of adolescent girls that “are difficult to extract or learn through more conventional research methods” (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). The current study focused on the phenomenological tradition because we were interested in the lived aspects of human phenomena, which was achieved by a methodology that highlights “how someone actually experienced what has been lived” (Giorgi, 1985, p. 1).

Phenomenology focuses on “the essence and structure of experience” (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). In using this approach, we were interested in explicating “how complex meanings are built out of simple units of direct experience” (Merriam, 2002, p. 7); in this case, how poor urban girls in the two schools made sense of their experiences of SHV in and out of school. This procedure entailed recollections of the lead researcher’s experience of the phenomena as a young girl who was schooled in Kenya—called *epoche*. Through *epoche*, which begins with documenting one’s own experience, one is able to have a clear mind and to isolate other experiences that might influence the interpretation of the girls’ experiences. In essence, this means not being judgmental about the natural world of the girls’ experiences before

starting the phenomenological analysis. Thus, the outcome of the analysis would be the experience of SHV, as expressed by the girls.

This process was followed by phenomenological reduction of the transcripts, which is the identification and treatment of statements in the transcript as having equal value. Imaginative variation, a process that seeks to assign meaning to the data already reduced, was then employed. Meaning gives interpretation to the broad thematic areas already identified.

The last step of the phenomenological analysis is called the synthesis of meaning and essences. The process of synthesis “is the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomena as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). This is an integrative process that involves the use of imagination, creativity, and knowledge of the interpretive process to highlight the experiences of the participants. In the following section, we present results highlighting the experiences of girls with SHV and the meaning that the girls attributed to these experiences.

## FINDINGS

### Sexual Harassment

#### THE CONTEXT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

There were four ways in which SHV were experienced by girls attending high schools. These were: (a) the way girls were defined and constructed in the African context in Kenya, (b) the treatment they received from their parents, (c) the negative attitudes that ensued from the perceptions of others about them, and (d) the danger that loomed in the neighborhood of the schools. Social construction was found to influence how girls and women were culturally defined—as inferior to males. Boys carried the gendered nature of the society and the construction of the girls into the schools. Thus, boys used negative language towards girls to erode their self-esteem and influence them to be amenable to their demands, which made girls vulnerable to SHV. With regard to specific schools, SHV seemed more pronounced among participants from Kamu School, with explicit illustrations from the girls of the occurrence of the phenomenon. Moreover, participants from both Kamu and Lafama described the prevalence of SHV on the way to school. Additionally, participants from Lafama School provided explicit explanations about the occurrence of SHV at home (Abuya, Onsomu, & Moore, 2012).

#### SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

SHV were major obstacles that adolescent girls experienced both within the school and out of school. Almost all of the 20 girls (95%) who were part of

the in-school sample had experienced one form or another of SHV in school. All girls in Kamu School experienced sexual violence in the classroom. The girls were unanimous that boys justified and perpetuated their actions to their female classmates. They said, "They intimidate girls, by saying . . . there are others who will want us to touch them . . . you girls keep pretending and yet you want to be touched."

All ( $n = 10$ ) of the in-school girls in Kamu School reported that boys were the key perpetrators of the violence. They carried this out in the classroom by leaving their respective seating places and moving to sit closer to girls. When no one seemed to be watching, they embarked on touching the respective girls. Trina captured the sentiment of her fellow schoolmates when she reported, "Boys in our class used to come to where I was sitting and start touching me like this [silence]." Other boy classmates extended this treatment to other girls in the same class. She said, "Some of the boys wanted to sit near a girl just to touch her."

Teachers from Kamu added that even male teachers are responsible for sexually molesting girls while in school. This is what one of the interviewed teachers had to say about SHV of girls in school:

Boys may be the key culprits. But it has been reported to one of the guidance and counseling teachers, that one of the teachers is also taking advantage of their tender age and having sexual relationships. Girls are lured and they get into the relationship without understanding the consequences. . . . That is one factor that is bringing down the girls. The girls will be in class physically, but they cannot concentrate.

Moreover, most girls noted that they were vulnerable to sexual encounters in school when teachers are not in class. One of the participants, in Kamu School, Jose highlighted the plight of the girls in respect to SHV when they are alone, "SHV happen when we are on our own in class, because they can't do that when the teacher is in class."

#### SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

The entire in-school sample of girls in Kamu School expressed that they experienced sexual harassment and violence outside the classroom on the school campus. Teachers were not usually close during the breaks: tea break (when the teachers break for tea and the students take their bathroom breaks), lunch break, after-school breaks (when the students clean their classes and get them ready for the following school day), and on Saturdays (when the students come to school for private studies). It is during such times that girls are touched, slapped, and forced into sexual encounters in school. Gracy, one of the girls who witnessed sexual encounters in school between her fellow classmates said:

Some girls have been caught in intimate situations in these rooms [classrooms that have been converted into temporary sleeping rooms for Form Four students—twelfth graders revising for their final exams] where boys who come from far to stay in. For example . . . a girl was caught in one of these rooms with the boy, and she was sent away from school.

The harassment sometimes extended to sexual intercourse in school. Some participants, who were still in school, felt that girls could be victims of sexual advances including sexual intercourse. Alise emphatically said, “It is the boys who force the girls to have sex.” This gave a sense of the force, which characterized such sexual encounters in school. This was corroborated by one of the teachers, who, while admitting that boys are to blame, also put the blame on some of their fellow teachers.

On the other hand, 25% of the in-school sample noted that there are girls who have encouraged the boys in perpetuating sexual encounters in school. Bewa’s sentiments suggested this when she observed that “some girls, however, make the first move on the boys.” Fifty percent of the in-school sample from Kamu School revealed that girls were put in situations of material need or want, and their boyfriends became key players in alleviating the need or want. Thus, their cooperation with the boys was for the girls’ own good. Lighte, one of the girls in this category noted, “Girls help themselves financially or receive gifts by getting boyfriends who they pay back by giving their bodies for sex.”

Data show that it was not so much a question of girls complying with boys’ sexual overtures in school, but rather SHV were the results of them fearing the repercussions that came with refusing to play along, especially if they were asked for sexual favors. As Jamu observed:

If you fail to adhere to what they want . . . if they ask for sex, and you do not agree, you stand to be ridiculed. This makes girls agree to have sex in school because of the fear of being ridiculed and made to feel small. Being a girl, when you make a mistake in class, afterwards the boys will laugh at you. And on the way home, they get an opportunity to harass you, and intimidate you, by telling you that you know nothing.

Thus, when girls succumbed to the pressures put on them and the hope of keeping ridicule at bay, they agreed to the sexual advances and encounters as suggested by boys.

#### SHV ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL

Out of school, SHV occurred along the way to and from school, and at home. Along the way to school, girls are prone to be harassed by idlers, strangers, *matatu touts/makangas* (an assistant to the driver—mainly young men to

whom passengers give money as payment for the journey they are about to take in a van). Of the girls, 100% in the school sample had experienced sexual harassment out of school. SHV experienced by the girls included name-calling and insults, aggressive pushing and touching, blocked pathways on the way to school, transactional sex, and even rape. For instance, one girl reported that she was actually raped while on her way from school. Bewa was “forced” into a car and “they later raped me.” She was taken to Nairobi Women’s hospital, where she was treated, but she could not continue the treatment indefinitely because, “things I was supposed to be tested for are over, so I am supposed to pay for further tests which my family cannot afford.”

Aggy, one of the girls who has experienced SHV on the way to school, observes, “The men always disturb me, call me, push you back, touch me as I am walking. If you refuse, they abuse you. Yes, they abuse you and laugh at you.” Alise experienced harassment when she was called “bad names” by strangers and had been “stopped on the way to school” by men who tried to tell her “some things of sexual nature and advances.”

The plight of Aggy and Alise, as related to the insults and name-calling, was shared by 35% of the girls from the two study sites. Although the girls experienced this kind of harassment at different times, the similarity lies in the manner in which the events occur. For instance, name-calling and insults always followed the attempts by the harassers to get attention and persuade the girls to succumb to their sexual advances and demands. Thus, in the cases for which data are available, strangers and the idlers use name-calling along the way to school to get girls to notice their sexual overtures. For example, Racheli and Cynthia were abused when the men were unable to forcefully talk to them. Cynthia observed, “They abused me . . . they wanted me to greet them by force, and when I refused they pushed me around.” Racheli confirmed this by noting that “they want to talk to you, but when you refuse, they start calling you names.”

#### TRANSACTIONAL SEX: MONEY AND GIFTS

Transactional sex was another form of sexual exploitation that characterized girls’ attempts to complete their education in the two study sites, Kamu and Lafama. Transactional sexual relationships included an exchange element—exchange of money or gifts for sex. Even with government subsidies to schools to reduce the school fees, school pupils still need to purchase books, uniforms, school supplies, and additional fees are needed for other informal activities as well as finding or paying for costs of transportation to and from school whenever needed (Collins, 2009). Thus, schooling increases the chances that adolescent girls will need money, thereby making them more vulnerable to sexual demands by the older males in exchange for the gifts received (Collins, 2009).

In certain instances, transactional sexual relationships started with males telling the girls that they are attracted to them or that they are in love with them. About 50% of the girls vividly recounted their experience with transactional sexual relationships. For example, Gracy stated, “The catch is they say that they love you, and yet they just want to have sex with you.” Girls sometimes complied, and then the harassers quickly followed up with the offer of money, as Gracy further observed:

As we go home in the evening, a majority of men have finished their work and they have a little money they will give you if you can agree with what they tell you. The money is given to you so that they get to you, and get what they want. If you are not principled and you give in, then, they will destroy your life.

The lure of money and lack of basic needs played a part in making Gracy and other girls likely to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Girls will be given money for “their needs especially if your parents cannot afford.” Becka said, “Most of us girls are given money by the sugar daddies, when our parents cannot give. We need some things, which we may not do without. So, we are eventually forced to have sex to pay off.” Prewa agreed with Gracy—money to buy sanitary supplies being at the forefront of girls engaging in transactional sex. Prewa narrated:

As a girl, you have so many things that you need, so it forces you to get an older man who can provide you with those things. . . . If girls are not financially stable, it forces them to go out and look for money from those who are older and willing to provide. And sometimes, many girls can become prostitutes.

The boyfriends who provide girls with money include schoolboys, boys in the neighborhood, matatu touts, and “sugar daddies.” The matatu touts were identified by the girls in both Kamu and Lafama as being one of the perpetrators of the transactional sexual relationship outside school. What was interesting in the case of the matatu touts was that the gift was in the form of free rides in the matatu in the morning and in the evening. Girls known to the touts entered the matatus and took their strategic seats either at the front of the van or at the back. The tout already knew that he was not going to ask for any money from the girls as payment for their ride. From Rowa’s perspective, over 25% of the girls also enjoyed the admiration that came with knowing someone who was able to give them something for free. She noted:

The girls just sit there, wait for a makanga who is admiring them, and some of these people are married men. But girls are always attracted to

the exchanges and favors given to them by these men. . . . We seem to enjoy it at times when someone offers us something for free, like a ride. Occasionally, you notice that a girl is not paying the fare sometimes. . . . Rides for free all the time without paying fare . . . such matatus will always be full.

Sugar daddies, who girls met outside the school, also gave them money. This was observed by nearly 17% of the girls in school. The sugar daddies were older men, and like the touts, were also married. Thus, the schoolgirls were easy prey for them, especially when they realized that they easily accept money. Becka, a participant from Lafama School, said, "Most of the girls are given money by these sugar daddies and they are forced to have sex."

In addition, boyfriends, who were usually older from the same school and in the neighborhood, also had sex with girls and gave girls money in return. Aggy was one of the girls whose schooling was compromised by a lack of basics that made her succumb to sexual complicity so that her boyfriend could provide for herself what her aunt could not. Aggy's hope was on the boyfriend, whom she relied on to give her pocket money. She was forced to "have sex with him so that he could give her some pocket money." She not only agreed to a paid sexual relationship, but she seemed to naively trust the boyfriend and timidly said, "He always says that I should trust he cannot do anything bad." Lighte of Lafama School observed that girls fell into this trap of accepting money in exchange for sexual favors when money was not forthcoming from their parents to provide for their needs. She said, "Some of us girls are not given money by our fathers. We help ourselves by getting a boyfriend."

According to Gracy, when girls got money from their boyfriends, the touts, or the sugar daddies to buy their basic needs, it was not free because "afterwards they must pay . . . with sex." Girls were forced to complete their part of the transaction by availing themselves for sex as the repayment. One girl vividly explained how this scenario played out:

When you see somebody treating you that nice these days . . . the day he will ask you to pay his money is when all that they have been interested in comes out. And he will not want the money he gave you, but he will ask you for something else. . . . He will ask you for sex, because that is what they are interested in. So, girls find themselves cornered when it reaches a time when these people want their money back. A girl has no other choice but to do that . . . have sex.

Consequently, repeated sexual intercourse with the touts, sugar daddies, and boyfriends left the girls exposed to pregnancies, constant threats to STDs, fear of contracting HIV, and threats to their lives. In the most

frighteningly severe cases, they were threatened with death if they did not succumb to their part of the bargain.

As relates to the vulnerability to contract HIV virus, nearly half of the girls concluded that it was futile for them to expect anything less than repeated sexual demands from the men. This exposed them to HIV virus, because it was unclear how many other girls a particular man had solicited for sex in exchange for money, let alone if they are using condoms. Prewa emphasized:

Of course, they sleep with you, and all the time they give you money . . . and you may not know if they have HIV virus or AIDS. It means that you can get infected or even get pregnant if they don't use the appropriate measures.

For many young girls in the study, it was a matter of choosing to comply with the sexual demands of the boyfriends, sugar daddies, and matatu touts in order to get money for the basics. This was not an easy way of life, but about 33% of the girls had to endure this to be able to continue with their schooling process.

### Consequences of SHV

Several consequences from the SHV experienced by girls included the risk of disease, reduced interest in learning, thereby having a careless attitude, inconsistency in reporting, and psychological trauma. All girls who were part of the in-school sample expressed that, at one point in time, they suffered from one or other effects of SHV.

#### RISK OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE

One of the consequences of SHV was that the girls did not get to decide whether they could use protective measures during sexual intercourse. This happened in those instances when the girls had obtained favors from the boys in the form of money or gifts. The boys dictated the terms of repayment. Lighte, a study participant from Lafama School elucidated this point when she said, "The boy is the one who is being paid back, so he gets to decide whether to use protection or not . . . the girl doesn't have any voice towards it . . . she cannot make the decision."

Moreover, "When a girl is forcefully raped, the harassers seldom use condoms," as pointed out by Lighte. Brimwe further explained how girls found themselves in the situations where they became pregnant:

They want to cheat you that they love you, and when you are cheated they will go ahead and sleep with you. And before long you may become

aware of the consequences, either pregnancy or you get a sexually transmitted disease.

Pregnancy, sometimes an outcome of forced SHV, often meant that girls had no choice in what befell them, as Vero reiterated, "It is not their wish to get pregnant; it is by accident, some are forced to do it," referring to having a sexual encounter.

#### REDUCED INTEREST IN LEARNING

The teachers noted that girls who had experienced SHV often developed a careless attitude in class and towards their schoolwork. Moreover, such students stopped taking their studies seriously and lacked discipline in school. A teacher participant of Kamu School pointed out, "These girls are very undisciplined. And they don't even care. In class, they don't take their studies seriously."

The girls themselves also noted this lack of concentration in class. Almost all girls were unanimous in their views that when a girl was touched in class, without her consent, she often lost her ability to concentrate. This happened because the girls' attention got diverted to the relationships with the boys. Jose recounted this effect on girls: "If boys start to touch you, you will not concentrate. You will only concentrate on playing with the boys. There needs to be a lot of self-control." This participant suggested that there was need for self-control if the girls were to continue in school.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

For other girls, the effect of SHV was so traumatic that they kept it a tight secret until such a time that they could be sure that whoever they told their secret to would be able to keep it in confidence. Nellya painfully explained this sentiment that was shared by three other girls, "For most of us who have undergone the experience, we keep it to ourselves and die slowly from within." The phrase "dying slowly from within" shows the trauma, pain, and psychological stress that girls who have been sexually molested go through; especially when they cannot trust anyone with their secret, let alone get access to counseling.

### DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to highlight the experiences of girls attending Kamu and Lafama schools with regard to SHV in and out of school. From the narratives of girls, this study established that sexual violence characterized the experiences of girls attending the two schools. The study highlighted

that: (a) school was a risk factor for SHV; (b) the perpetrators of the sexual violence were varied, from boys in the same school to idlers, matatu touts and even teachers; (c) there is a relation between social construction, poverty, and transactional sexual relationship; and (d) SHV affects girls' reproductive health and well being.

Most of the in-school participants experienced one form or another of SHV while they were in school. In this regard, the experiences of the girls in this study support the findings of Mensch and Lloyd (1998) that schools can reinforce gender inequality by subjecting girls to SHV by their fellow students and teachers. Girls in this study attended school in an urban environment in a metropolitan city. Yet, being in school in an urban setting did not shield them from instances of SHV. This finding concurs with what Webster (1999) found in western Kenya, that SHV transcends school type. In addition, the very fact that SHV of girls occurred within the confines of an urban school environment could be an indication of how the growth of a slum, as a consequence of urbanization, can complicate women's sexual vulnerability (Dodoo, Zulu, & Ezeh, 2007), especially among girls attending high schools.

This study further identified numerous perpetrators of sexual violence. These ranged from boys in the same school, boyfriends outside school, idlers, matatu touts, and sugar daddies. At one level, the study highlights the role of their peers (boys in the same school, and out-of school) in making girls vulnerable to sexual violence, similar to what Leach and Sitaram (2007) have found. The vulnerability brought about by peers is beyond the encouragement of girls and boys to get involved with sexual relationships. At another level, the study brings to the fore the impact that men who work within the public transportation sector in Kenya have on the experiences of girls, and reinforces the sugar daddy dilemma in a school girl's life (Luke, 2003, 2005).

In addition, the study points to the various reasons why girls succumbed to SHV in and out of school. This ranged from personal reasons (desire to have a boyfriend), to economic reasons—to provide for other needs and wants. In the latter category, some girls complied with those who had sexual relations with them in order to meet their basic needs. Sexual complicity resulted from social construction and poverty. In essence, poverty affected parental capacity to fulfill their obligations to their daughters, and social construction of girls made parents' obligation less salient. In turn, this meant that girls' needs ranging from basic sanitary supplies, food, lighting, to school fees, were often unmet. Transactional sex was one means some girls used to obtain these fundamental needs. Therefore, transactional sex characterized the experiences of these adolescent girls attending Kamu and Lafama schools, a finding that mirrors the effects of what economic hardships can do to poor urban girls especially in SSA. These findings are similar to those of Luke (2003) who that found, throughout the world, girls often

find themselves trading sex as a strategy for meeting their most essential needs—this is more profound in SSA.

As a result of the SHV, neglect due to social construction of girls and subsequent transactional sex, girls were unable to negotiate safe sex in these relationships in which they find themselves. The female students' inability to negotiate for safe sexual relations put them at risk for early pregnancy and jeopardized their capability to stay safe and disease free. Girls were still unable to use the information from their high school education, to increase their chances of adopting self-protective behaviors (Rihani, 2006). Thus, it would appear that the amount of high school education the girls received did not necessarily protect them from SHV. We can only speculate that Rihani (2006) may have been accurate in asserting that it is only after completion of their schooling that girls would have attained adequate knowledge to be able to withstand advances of boys and men, and be in a position to negotiate safer sexual relations.

This study's findings suggest several policy implications and recommendations concerning girls' SHV, education, and overall health. The Ministry of Education (MOE), with the help of the Kenya Institute of Education, and with support of the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture, and Social Services could examine ways to strengthen the gender sensitive curricula within the school syllabi. In addition, because the challenges that face girls are results of SHV the MOE might reconsider the introduction of comprehensive sex education in all schools—especially schools in the urban slums—to enable girls to learn communication and interpersonal skills and explore their goals, values, and options (McKeon, 2006). Communication skills, in addition to a successful high school education, might enable these young women to improve their negotiation skills when faced with difficult and dangerous situations that characterize transactional sex or rape. Starting it in primary schools as a way to equip girls with life skills to handle sex-related issues would enhance the potential benefits of sex education.

One such intervention that has been proven to be successful in developing countries is sexuality and relationships education (SRE). This type of education allows students, especially girls, to reflect on long established gender norms that jeopardize their health and lay the foundation for fulfilling sexual lives later in life (Rogow & Haberland, 2005). Primary schools in Kenya can introduce SRE in order to teach girls these skills early in life. In high school, guidance and counseling programs can strengthen such skills.

Moreover, in schools like Kamu and Lafama, school principals can encourage the school counselors to increase counseling for both boys and girls on the importance of coexisting as members of the same school community. Almost all schools in Nairobi Province have established guidance and counseling departments (GCD). Thus, the MOE through the Teachers Service Commission, in liaison with the school principals, could strengthen

the expertise of the teachers in the GCD for effective student counseling. Counseling will help girls traumatized by SHV to come to terms with the trauma, and thereby start the healing process. Counseling will also help boys become more accommodating to the girls in and out of class, and refrain from sexually harassing girls. Furthermore, counseling will offer teachers opportunities to talk to all other students in class about academic and social issues. Such sessions were already identified by teachers in this study as being both diagnostic and therapeutic to the students. For girls who have been exposed in one way or another to sexual related violence, counseling needs to be integrated with medical check-ups for pregnancy, STDs, and HIV testing. This will improve the general reproductive health concerns of the affected adolescent girls.

In order to tackle issues of SHV out of school, school principals in the affected schools, with the help of the community members, might initiate a walking school bus (WSB). This will enable girls from the slum neighborhoods, which are prone to sexual predators, to be escorted to and from schools. A WSB has been used in the United States and other countries to promote safety among elementary school children (Kong et al., 2009).

The MOE, the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, and school principals, through the Kenya Secondary Schools' Heads Association need to push for full implementation of the Sexual Offences Act of 2006 to cover sexual offences in and out of schools. The Kenyan Parliament enacted the Sexual Offences Act in 2006 to "make provisions about sexual offenses, their definition, prevention and protection of all persons from harm from unlawful sexual acts, and for connected purposes" (Government of Kenya, 2006, p. 4). This act can provide a legal framework for scaling-up the crackdown on sexual harassers in and out of school. As it is now, the act does not provide specific remedies for sexual offenders who prey on schoolgirls. The act needs to be applied without reservation or leniency for any sexual harassers and offenders.

### Limitations

The findings of this study were limited because the sexual experiences of girls were documented from the girls' and teachers' understanding of the problem. Moreover, due to the limited sample of girls (both in school and out of school) and teachers, future research needs to widen the scope of the study by collecting data on a larger sample of the population to bring to the fore the extent of SHV in schools in SSA. In addition, we are cautious in the interpretation of our results because of the limitations with this particular method of inquiry—phenomenology. The study was conducted on a selected sample of in- and out-of-school girls and teachers. The purposive sampling procedure, which was nonrandom, decreased the generalizability of findings. However, it may be considered generalizable to other urban slums in Kenya and SSA.

## Conclusion

Sexual harassment and violence in and out of school are threats to the education of girls and their overall sexual and reproductive health. The narratives of these girls point to the fact that sexual violence continues unabated in many isolated parts in Kenya. Such in- and out-of-school SHV in schools undermines the core function of sexual and reproductive health as proposed by the WHO to include tackling challenges to safe and fulfilling sexual relationships which include: discrimination by gender, inequitable health-care access, restrictive laws, sexual coercion, sexual exploitation, and gender-based violence (WHO, 2004). Future research documenting the prevalence and factors contributing to school SHV by teachers in urban and rural public high schools in Kenya need to be investigated. This will inform parents, school administrators and counselors, school programs, and policy makers about improving and ensuring a safe school environment for girls in school.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no interest or influence by any organization toward the submission of this work.

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