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# Actualizing the Impact of Counselling Services on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Public Primary Schools in Bagamoyo District

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**Abstract** : This study examined the impact of counselling services on preventing sexual harassment in public primary schools in Bagamoyo District, Tanzania. Specifically, it assessed the availability of counselling services, pupils' access to counselling, and the contribution of counselling services to preventing sexual harassment. The study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and employed a mixed-methods approach using a convergent parallel design. A sample of 159 participants was selected using simple random and purposive sampling techniques, guided by the Yamane formula and Bowley's proportionate allocation. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observation checklists. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that counselling services were available in most schools, although some pupils had limited access to them. Counselling services addressed academic challenges, personal problems, and harassment-related issues. The findings further showed that counselling helped pupils feel safer, understand their rights, receive emotional support, and gain confidence to report sexual harassment. Parents also identified confidential reporting, awareness creation, and the promotion of respectful school environments as important contributions of counselling services. However, barriers such as stigma, inadequate counselling personnel, limited access to services, and weaknesses in child protection practices hindered their effectiveness. The study concludes that counselling services play an important role in preventing sexual harassment by promoting awareness, emotional well-being, reporting, and pupils' safety. It recommends strengthening school counselling services, training teachers and counsellors, establishing confidential reporting mechanisms, and enhancing collaboration among schools, parents, and community stakeholders to ensure safe learning environments for all pupils.

**Keyword :** Counseling services, Sexual harassment prevention, Child protection and School counsellors

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## INTRODUCTION

Schools should be safe environments where all students have equal opportunity to learn and are respected. Sexual harassment and assault get in the way of this by making some students feel unsafe, disrespected, and unable to concentrate on their studies. Sexual harassment is a widespread and complex form of gender discrimination involving unwelcome, inappropriate, and typically coercive behavior of a sexual nature. It occurs in various settings such as the workplace, school, public spaces, and interpersonal relationships, and it occurs through physical behavior or words, typically to assert power or control over the victim (2021). The study of sexual harassment spans multiple disciplines, examining its definitions, causes, impacts, and strategies for intervention. As defined by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2021), sexual harassment is unwanted and inappropriate behavior that disrupts an individual from working, learning, or socially engaging in a respectful and safe environment. Components include unwanted sexual advances or conduct, and often but not always, a power imbalance such as employer-employee or teacher-student relationships (Powell & O'Neill, 2020). This creates a hostile environment that will impair their well-being, productivity, and safety (EEOC, 2021).

Sexual harassment in primary schools is a universal issue that affects children emotionally, psychologically, and academically. In the United States, the study of Davis and Thompson (2022) found that about 30% of primary school students experience sexual harassment, which can range from harassment through language to being touched. Many issues are left unresolved because teachers are often not trained to recognize or understand sexual harassment. Child victims are more likely to experience negative thoughts and feelings, such as anxiety and depression, and low self-worth that can lead to academic performance issues (Bauer & Perkins, 2021). Schools often do not have a clear sexual harassment policy, but use an anti-bullying policy which may not be targeted and is less effective (Miller & Chen, 2022). Counselling services, when offered to help children understand boundaries and manage sexual harassment, have shown to reduce sexual harassment incidents (Graham & Simmons, 2022). These highlighted a need for clear school policies, trained teachers, and counselling to address sexual harassment in their U.S. primary schools.

The issue of sexual harassment in primary schools has gained increasing visibility in Europe. In the UK, Johnson and Baker (2020) documented some disconcerting statistics regarding primary students experiencing sexual harassment, which mainly came from peers, and involved inappropriate comments and physical contact. In Germany, Martin and McKinley (2021) found similarly pernicious patterns of predominant verbal harassment that typically went unreported due to fear and shame. Dupont and Foucher (2022) found that French pupils exposed to sexual harassment reported emotional distress, including problems with anxiety and low self-worth, which consequently resulted in poorer academic performance. Rodríguez and

López (2020) reported that while anti-harassment policy is on the rise across European countries, such policies are not being implemented consistently and there was a large gap in teacher training. All of these studies illustrate the concerning need for comprehensive policies, teacher training, and support systems to address sexual harassment in primary schools across Europe.

Sexual harassment in primary schools across Asia has becomes a massive concern. According to Tan and Lee (2020), 20% of children attending schools in Singapore reported experiencing sexual harassment, almost exclusively verbal harassment. Kobayashi and Nakano (2021) asserted that feelings of shame and fear of retaliation play a role in underreporting sexual harassment in Japan. In India, Sharma et al. (2022) found that harassment, with some form of physical contact and bullying, is a significant issue for many students, especially girls in both urban and rural settings. Zhang and Liu (2019) noted an increased awareness of sexual harassment in China, but insufficient policies in schools and teacher PD leave students vulnerable. Overall, the identified studies demonstrate significant gaps in prevention measures, policy compliance, and teacher training regarding sexual harassment in primary school settings in Asia.

Sexual harassment of school-aged children in primary schools in West Africa is also drawing increased attention. Amankwaa et al. (2020) found that almost 30% of pupils in Ghana said they experienced verbal and physical harassment, and most did not report these experiences because they were fearful or were not aware of the procedures for reporting. In Nigeria, Ezeani et al. (2021). Noted that harassment by peers and teachers occurs more frequently for girls. Ibrahim and Okeke (2021) recorded similar conditions in Sierra Leone where harassment from older students or staff is rarely dealt with due to ineffective policies. Mensah and Osei (2022) reported similar issues in Liberia showing how there is verbal and physical harassment of pupils and teachers are not trained and policies were not appropriate and were not enforced. This finding again shows the need for awareness campaigns, teacher training, and more effective policies on sexual harassment in primary schools in West Africa.

East Africa continues to grapple with issues relating to sexual harassment, especially in the case of Kenya and Uganda, where laws, social norms and cultural norms fall short of providing adequate support. Wambui (2021) wrote that many women in Kenya suppress reporting harassment because of a victim-blaming culture and silence. In Uganda, an additional challenge was public stigma and fear of retaliation by coworkers, which contributed to under-reporting (Musinguzi, 2020). Although there are laws, Njiru (2019) stated that weak enforcement and other systemic barriers prevent victims from accessing support and justice. It is perhaps more salient to note that some recent public awareness campaigns and legal reforms have raised hope for a better future for victims of sexual violence. Helping to demonstrate the need for better legal frameworks, increased institutional barriers to justice, and helping more victims move past the

stigma and report has helped push forward.

In Tanzania, sexual harassment remains a major problem in workplaces and learning institutions, amidst legal measures for protection. As outlined by Mturi and Mwaikambo (2020) cultural perspectives as well as awareness are barriers to recognizing and reporting harassment, which is even more difficult in rural areas. Mlay (2019) indicated that fear of retaliation, being fired from their jobs, or social isolation, makes most women reluctant to report, while the implementation of laws and policies, such as the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act, are inconsistent, and victims remain unaware of their rights and options for legal action. Gender norms that support ideal heteronormative masculinity as dominant and ideal femininity as submissive behavior support reporting harassment and observing sexual violence as an expectation (Leach and Humphreys, 2007; World Health Organization [WHO], 2018). McGill and Killeen (2021) also emphasized that even sufficient education about what constitutes sexual rights at school and from educators were not enough, meaning educators and administrators struggled to identify, recognize, and properly deal with harassment situations in the school.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which explains how five interconnected systems microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem shape individual development through direct and indirect environmental influences. Scholars such as Neal and Neal (2021) and Rosa and Tudge (2020) emphasize the theory's usefulness in modern contexts, especially in addressing child protection and sexual-harassment prevention by showing how attitudes and behaviors are shaped across multiple settings. The theory's strengths lie in its holistic, systemic view of how schools, families, cultural norms, and policies interact to affect student welfare, though its complexity and broadness make consistent application challenging. Despite these limitations, the theory is highly relevant to this study because it provides a multidimensional framework for understanding sexual-harassment prevention in primary schools: the microsystem highlights the counselor's direct engagement with pupils; the mesosystem underscores collaboration between families and schools; the exosystem recognizes the influence of external policies and resources such as government funding; the macrosystem reflects societal norms and cultural values that shape students' perceptions of harassment; and the chronosystem captures changes in policy and social attitudes over time. Overall, the theory enables a comprehensive examination of how multiple layers of influence collectively support prevention efforts and enhance pupils' safety and well-being in Bagamoyo District.

### Empirical Literature Review

#### 1. Counseling Services in Preventing Sexual Harassment Among Pupils

Empirical review refers to the systematic review of previous research primarily to assess what is currently known about a particular topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Across the

globe, research has pointed to the importance of counselling services as both a strategy to intervene with and prevent sexual harassment between pupils. For example, Johnson, Roberts, & West (2020) examined the effectiveness of structured counselling interventions in U.S. schools using a quasi-experimental research design and reported significant decline in harassment occurrences at schools with robust counselling services. Authors attributed participants' improved assertive socializing with students, higher understanding of boundaries, and clear reporting mechanisms in place from school counsellors resulted in the decline of harassment cases in schools. In another mixed-methods study, Miller, Brown, & White (2021) focused on the role of school counselling to facilitate a safer learning environment and reported that comprehensive counselling services were primary in reducing students experience harassment. Thompson et al. (2019) completed longitudinal study on mental health benefits of counselling programs and found regular and continued meetings with a counsellor increased the student's identity as a "whole" individual lessening acting on anxiety and/or fear in students, reduced bullying, and in turn, prevented harassment. Similarly, Wilson and Carter (2022) conducted a survey-based research design to examine peer led counselling programs in U.S. schools, primarily around students receiving guidance from their peers as counselling, and reported students receiving counselling from peers were more likely to report harassment experiences and felt empowered to intervene with harassment instances.

Various research studies in Europe also highlight counseling services as effective for addressing sexual harassment in schools. Adams and Clarke (2021) undertook a qualitative case study that highlighted the role of accessible and confidential counseling support in addressing the psychological impact of harassment, and noted that regular interactions with a counselor lead to a greater culture of respect that empowered students to intervene. Garcia and Collins (2020) conducted a quasi-experimental study in Spain that showed the reduction of bullying and harassment by schools using a counseling program that addressed emotional intelligence and conflict resolution. Svensson and Ohlsson (2021) conducted a descriptive research study in Sweden that explored the impact of school counseling on the development of safer school environments. They highlighted that consistent support from counselors lead to increased reporting of harassment and bullying incidents. Finally, Delacroix, Lambert, & Martin (2022) used a program evaluation in France to demonstrate the positive impact of school counseling programs that focused on prevention and early intervention of sexual harassment - it allowed students to recognize inappropriate behaviors, and seek help before a situation became serious.

Counselling services are increasingly seen as essential in improving safety in schools and tackling sexual harassment in African context. Dube and Ncube (2022) conducted a comparative study in Zimbabwean primary schools, showing that schools with active, adequately resourced counselling

services experienced significantly lower cases of harassment, compared to schools that did not have any counselling services. The counsellors' work in helping students learn to identify, avoid, and report harassment to school officials was integral in the function of counselling in these schools. The need to incorporate cultural sensitivity into counselling techniques to better address local norms that may lead to harassment was another area for action in the study. In Nigeria, Adebayo and Olayinka (2021) conducted a survey study and they found similar results that schools with extensive counselling services also had lower rates of harassment. Students that attended schools with counselling were also taught about positive relationships (and being able to identify unhealthy relationships) and conflict resolution skills by school counsellors which were key functions of counselling in schools. Similarly, a case study of counselling in schools by Moyo and Chikozho (2020) in South Africa demonstrated that counselling services diminished harassment in school. Moreover, students learned to develop emotional resilience and self-awareness to avoid bullying and harassment incidents in the future. Ndungu and Omondi (2022) in Kenya engaged in qualitative research to show that one counselling program in the schools created safety and support by allowing students to discuss their issues, which resulted in reducing harassment.

In the East Africa region, counselling services have also been recognized as a vital strategy to address harassment and improve safety in schools. A quantitative study from Uganda conducted by Okumu and Mwangangi (2021) found that counselling programs impacted the reported number of harassment incidents, specifically with trained counsellors playing an essential role in helping students understand their boundaries and giving them the confidence to report. In Tanzania, Chacha et al. (2020) examined the role of school counselling using a mixed-methods design and found that schools with school counselling departments reported better school climate and a decrease in bullying behaviours, in the course of making awareness about harassment. Additionally, in Ethiopia Kebede and Tadesse (2021) conducted a program evaluation study and similarly reported that school counselling programs lowered sexual harassment incidents, as school counsellors were involved in both addressing the psychological consequences of harassment and carried out some preventative work such as encouraging respectful behaviour and open communication among students. Finally, a qualitative phenomenological study from Rwanda, Tumwesigye and Kyamwilu (2022), highlighted the importance of school counsellors' work in promoting an inclusive and supportive environment so that victimized students felt more comfortable to report the harassment and seek support, which ultimately helped facilitate a reduction in sexual violence in schools.

Likewise, the role of counselling in addressing sexual harassment in schools has been documented in Tanzania. Mwenda et al. (2023) collected data using a descriptive survey research design and examined public primary schools. Their findings

showed that well-trained counsellors contributed to a significant reduction in harassment. Counsellors were instrumental in teaching students about personal safety, conflict resolution, and acceptable conduct. Counselling programs in schools further reinforced preventive initiatives, including discussions that openly examined harassment and provided a means for confidential reporting. Mwenda et al. (2023) stressed that the presence of counselling staff in the school environment was critical to fostering a trusting association with counselling; as a result, students were more inclined to seek support and report incidences of harassment when they were assured that their confidentialities would be honoured. In support of Mwenda et al. (2023), Olweny (2020) conducted a qualitative study that also identified the benefits of school-based counselling programs in minimizing bullying and harassment, and the accessibility of counselling programs was noted as an aspect that contributed to improved safe learning environments. Kato and Shayo (2022) supported the findings of Olweny (2020) and Mwenda et al. (2023), adding that a well-established counselling program could improve the school environment to allow for a culture where students feel empowered to report school misconduct and learn ways to prevent misconduct.

In carrying out this study, I want to express the importance of counselling services as an effective and supportive service for pupils situated in schools. In my view, counselling is an essential element for supporting pupils facing challenges of psychological, social, emotional, and academic nature. I believe that constructive counselling, effectively dealing with issues that have developed early, will promote overall health and progress, and if not dealt with early, can prevent issues from developing.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews and observations, to examine the effectiveness of counselling services in preventing sexual harassment in public primary schools in Bagamoyo District.

A convergent parallel design allowed numerical trends such as pupils' awareness, reporting procedures, and access to counselling to be assessed alongside contextual insights from school counsellors, teachers, head teachers, education officers, and parents.

The target population included all stakeholders involved in counselling services, and sampling employed both simple random and purposive techniques to ensure representativeness and depth.

The study area, Bagamoyo District, was selected due to its high rates of gender-based violence, limited counselling structures, socio-cultural practices exposing girls to risk, and low parental engagement. A total sample of 159 participants was drawn using the Yamane formula and Bowley's proportionate allocation.

Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, and observation checklists, all validated through expert review, pilot testing, and reliability checks yielding strong Cronbach's Alpha scores for pupils and acceptable consistency for parents.

Qualitative trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Data collection followed ethical procedures, including institutional approval, informed consent, and child-sensitive protocols. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS with descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, and triangulation strengthened the study's overall validity.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

### The Impact of Counseling Services on Preventing Sexual Harassment

The objective explored the impact of counseling services on preventing sexual harassment in public primary schools. The researcher sought to gather information from pupils, headteachers, District Education Officers (DEOs), Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and school counsellors regarding how counseling services contribute to preventing sexual harassment among pupils. Information presented in this section was obtained first from pupils and parents, who responded to a questionnaire by indicating whether they strongly agreed, agreed, were undecided, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the given statements. Secondly, headteachers, WEOs, DEOs and school counsellors participated in interviews to provide their information.

To explore this objective in detail, the researcher focused on three key aspects: having counselling services in schools, receiving counselling services safely from sexual harassment because of counselling services, and the impact of counseling services on preventing sexual harassment

**1. Counselling Services at Schools**

This is the first aspect of the first objective. Respondents were supposed to show whether they have counselling services at schools. Their responses are presented in Figure 1.

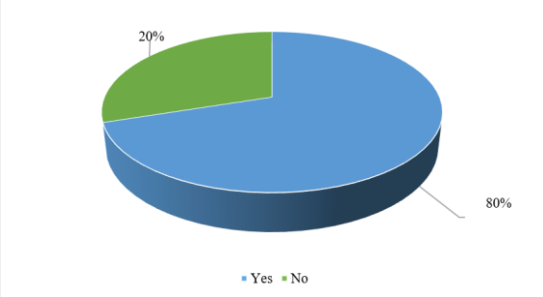



**Figure 1.**
**Counselling Services at Schools (n=100)**

**Source:** Field Data (2025)

Figure 1 indicates that a majority of 80 (80%) of respondents perceive counseling services as available and effective in schools, a substantial minority of 20 (20%) feel they are lacking or inadequate. This gap is particularly concerning when considering the issue of sexual harassment towards pupils. The 20% who find counseling services wanting may represent individuals who have experienced or witnessed such harassment and found no recourse or support within the school system. Such a gap raises concerns about the consistency and accessibility of counseling services across different school contexts. Even within the majority group, the perception of availability does not necessarily equate to the effectiveness of services in handling sensitive issues such as sexual harassment. Supporting this, Johnson

et al. (2020) found that a reduction in harassment incidents was linked to improved pupil assertiveness, clearer understanding of personal boundaries, and the establishment of well-defined reporting mechanisms facilitated by school counselors. These findings align with the ecological theory, which emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their environments, suggesting that enhancing support systems at the school level can empower pupils and create safer educational spaces.

**2. Receiving Counselling Services Safety from Sexual Harassment Because of Counselling Services**

This is the second aspect under the first objective where respondents were asked to show whether they receive counseling services, types of counselling services received, as well as the safety of pupils from schools from sexual harassment after counseling services. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**
**Receiving Counselling Services Safety from Sexual Harassment Because of Counselling Services (n=100)**

| Category | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Received counselling services | Yes | 70 | 70 |
| | No | 30 | 30 |
| | **Total** | **100** | **100** |
| Types of counselling services | Academic | 32 | 32 |
| | Personal problem | 32 | 32 |
| | Harassment related | 36 | 36 |
| | **Total** | **100** | **100** |
| Safety of pupils after counselling services | Yes | 75 | 75 |
| | No | 25 | 25 |
| | **Total** | **20** | **100** |

**Source:** Field Data (2025)

The data presented in Table 1 illustrates the respondents' experiences with counselling services in relation to sexual harassment, including access to counselling, types of services received, and the perceived impact on their sense of safety.

**Access to Counselling**

Among the 100 people asked, 70 (70%) reported that they have used counselling services, and 30 (30%) reported that they haven't accessed counselling services. This indicates that most of the individuals surveyed have had a chance to use counselling services, which allows for the inference that counselling services were readily available in the high school. However, the 30% that did not use counselling services represent a key gap that must be addressed to promote inclusion and equity for all students. Almost one-third of the individuals surveyed did not use counselling services, indicating that there may be barriers, whether having sufficient and accessible counselling staff and service availability, limited knowledge of counselling feedback by the students, and/or the stigma associated with getting help. The school should consider expanding the availability and access to counselling services, increasing awareness around what counselling is (that it is not just for students in crisis), and encouraging students to come forward for assistance with their fears around the safety and comfort of using the service. Directly supporting this claim and recommendation, Thompson et al. (2019) found that students who interact with their counselor consistently help alleviate the anxiety and fear of the student, which ultimately assists in

decreasing bullying and harassment. This emphasizes the importance of increasing awareness and accessibility of counselling services among high school students, and students need to be encouraged to use it.

Nonetheless, one of the interviewees added that:

> *"I think it is very important for our pupils to have access to counselling, particularly when trying to address delicate topics like sexual harassment. We have a counsellor available, however, not all students are currently using the service. This is largely because some students haven't heard about the service and others are hesitant to discuss counselling for fear of being stigmatised. We are attempting to raise a profile of the service by publicizing it to our pupils at assembly time, and encouraging teachers to refer students if they think it might help. Ultimately, I would like all of the pupils to feel secure and knowledgeable about access to counselling."*(Interview 2, August 2025).

This implies the headteacher's awareness of the importance of counselling and acknowledges the existing barriers to access. This suggests that while counseling services may be available, they are not being used effectively due to limited visibility and cultural/social barriers. It is positive that the headteacher made a commitment to increase visibility and reduce stigma; however, for a sustainable change, schools must take the next step to incorporate awareness plans to increase the normality of referral systems, making these support systems rely within the operating systems of schools. Similar to Thompson et al. (2019), awareness to reduce stigma around therapy or counseling, is an important component to increasing access for students. Drawing from ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), a student's well-being is influenced by multiple interconnected environments such as family, school, and community. Therefore, for lasting impact, schools must implement structured awareness campaigns, normalize counseling, and ensure support systems are integrated into daily school life, involving the school, parents, and the wider community.

**Types of Counselling Services**

When asked about the types of counselling services received, 36 respondents (36%) indicated they had received harassment-related counselling, 32 (32%) received help with personal problems, and 32 (32%) received academic counselling. The highest proportion of respondents seeking support for harassment-related issues demonstrates that sexual harassment is a significant concern within the school environment. It also reflects the importance of counselling as a frontline response to such cases. This data implies that harassment-related issues are common enough to represent nearly half of all counselling sessions. This underscores the need for well-trained school counsellors who can handle sensitive cases effectively and confidentially. Additionally, the school should invest in proactive education and prevention programs to

reduce the occurrence of harassment and not rely solely on reactive counselling.

This aligns with Wilson and Carter (2022), through a survey-based study of peer-led counseling programs in U.S. schools, that students receiving guidance from peer counselors were more likely to report harassment and feel empowered to prevent such behaviors. This reflects the potential for proactive and peer-supported interventions in reducing harassment. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) further explains that a student's behavior and safety are influenced by multiple interacting environments such as family, peers, school, and community, highlighting the need for comprehensive prevention programs that engage all these levels, rather than relying solely on reactive counseling.

**Effectiveness of Counselling in Promoting Safety**

Regarding the effectiveness of counselling in promoting safety, 75 respondents (75%) reported feeling safe after receiving counselling services, while 25 respondents (25%) did not feel safe. This suggests that counselling positively impacts most students' perception of safety and well-being. However, the fact that a quarter of the respondents still feel unsafe indicates that counselling alone may not be sufficient for everyone. While the majority benefit from counselling, the 25% who do not feel safer point to the need for broader institutional support. This could include stricter enforcement of anti-harassment policies, improved reporting mechanisms, and better coordination between counsellors, teachers, and school leadership. A more holistic, school-wide approach is necessary to create a consistently safe and supportive student environment. Adams and Clarke (2021) emphasized the role of accessible and confidential counseling services in addressing the psychological effects of harassment. They noted that regular counselor-pupil interactions helped foster a culture of respect and empowered students to speak out, supporting the need for ongoing and integrated counseling efforts within schools. Again, one of the respondents showed that:

> *"In my experience, counselling has played a significant role in helping pupils feel safer at school. When students are given a safe space to talk about their experiences, especially related to harassment, they feel heard and supported. Over time, I've seen that those who regularly attend sessions become more confident and can better set boundaries and report inappropriate behavior. Counselling helps them cope and take proactive steps to protect themselves".* (Interview 9, August 2025).

This highlights that counselling is a reactive service and a preventive tool that empowers pupils. It implies regular access to professional emotional support enhances students' sense of security and resilience. As a result, investing in counselling services contributes directly to building a safer school environment, where pupils are more likely to report harassment and engage in healthy peer interactions. Supporting this view, Garcia and

Collins (2020) found in their study in Spain that counselling programs focused on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution significantly reduced incidents of bullying and harassment, demonstrating the effectiveness of such preventive approaches in improving school climate.

Furthermore, parents were asked to show the importance of counselling services in preventing sexual harassment. Their responses are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.**
**Parents' Responses on the Importance of Counselling Services in Preventing Sexual Harassment (n=47)**

| No. | Importances | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Raises awareness and educates students about sexual harassment and their rights. | 38 | 81.3% |
| 2. | Provides a safe, confidential space for reporting incidents. | 35 | 75% |
| 3. | Empowers victims with emotional support and confidence to speak up. | 41 | 87.5% |
| 4. | Promotes a positive, respectful, and safe school environment. | 32 | 68.8% |

**Source:** Field Data (2025)

Table 2 illustrates that all respondents understand the ability of counselling service to help prevent incidents of sexual harassment. A significant majority, 41 of 47 (87.5%) of respondents believe that counselling helps empower victims with emotional support and provide confidence to report, while 38 respondents (81.3%) strongly agree that counselling also serves to raise awareness and educate students on their rights. In addition, 35 respondents (75%) felt counselling also serves to create a safe and confidential environment for reporting, while 32 respondents (68.8%) agree that it serves to educate and promote a respectful and safe school community. This feedback speaks to the importance of counselling in responding to incidents, but also in attempting to mitigate incidents through education, support, and developing a safe school culture The data from this feedback suggests counselling services could be increased and fully integrated into school safety policies. The high rates of support for those roles indicate that if schools want to achieve that they need to get serious about investing in good counsellors, have up-to-date and regular student education programs on the issue, and a confidential reporting structure that is advertised to students. Doing so could serve to prevent the eventuality of incidents of sexual harassment and allow for a safer and supportive educational space for all students.

In support of this, Delacroix et al. (2022) utilized a program evaluation approach to show that school counselling initiatives focusing on prevention and early intervention have significantly reduced solicitation behaviours in sexual harassment. They found that school counselling programs contributed to students recognizing inappropriate behaviours and seeking assistance prior to escalation. This includes Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasizes several, interconnected environments that can affect a child's development. By embedding counselling within the microsystem of the school and connecting it to broader safety policies

and community awareness (mesosystem and exosystem), schools create a comprehensive support network that empowers students and promotes safer, healthier interactions.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that counseling services play a vital role in preventing sexual harassment among primary school pupils in Bagamoyo District by improving awareness, offering emotional support, and empowering students to report inappropriate behavior. Schools with more visible and accessible counseling services demonstrated improved pupil confidence, increased reporting of harassment, and greater feelings of safety. However, a notable proportion of pupils still lacked access to these services, while some who received counseling continued to feel unsafe, indicating that counseling alone is insufficient without strong institutional structures. Challenges such as stigma, limited parental involvement, inadequate staffing, and weak implementation of child protection policies continue to inhibit the effectiveness of counseling interventions. Overall, the findings affirm that counseling is a critical but underutilized component of school safety systems and must be strengthened through coordinated school, family, and community efforts.

### Recommendations

The study recommends that schools in Bagamoyo District strengthen and expand counseling services by increasing trained counseling personnel, improving visibility of services, and conducting regular awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage pupil utilization. Schools should institutionalize clear, confidential, and child-friendly reporting mechanisms, integrated with comprehensive anti-harassment policies enforced consistently by school leadership. Collaboration between schools, parents, and community stakeholders should be enhanced to create a multi-layered support system aligned with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Furthermore, ongoing capacity-building programs should be provided for teachers and counselors on identifying, managing, and preventing sexual harassment. Finally, the Ministry of Education should allocate adequate resources to schools, ensure implementation of national child protection guidelines, and monitor compliance to guarantee safe learning environments for all pupils.

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