

Effects of Students Suspension on their Psychological well Being in Boarding Secondary Schools in Nakuru County, Kenya

Dr. Briston E. E. Omulema¹, Esther Wanjiku Maina² & Lucy W. Mureithi³

Abstract

When corporal punishment and caning as a method of disciplining students was banned in Kenyan schools, it was replaced with guidance and counseling. Since many schools lacked professional counselors, some opted to use suspensions for minor and major cases of indiscipline. This decision did not consider the effect of students' suspension on the psychological well being of the students. This study therefore sought to investigate the effects of students' suspension on their psychological well being in boarding secondary schools in Nakuru county. The descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. A sample of 145 suspended students from seven schools was used. Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of a computer based statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for windows. The findings of the study revealed that suspensions had great effect on students' psychological wellbeing. From the findings, it is recommended that students need to be part of decision making and problem solving initiatives in order to reduce suspensions.

Keywords: Suspension, Psychological Well Being, Boarding Secondary Schools, Kenya

Introduction

Suspension is the exclusion of an individual from an institution for a period of time. Suspension in schools is used as a mechanism to deal with indisciplined students. Students who are found stealing or in possession of other students property, taking drugs, fighting, disobeying school rules, participating in strikes or school unrest among others, are likely to be suspended. A fifteen year old student from Woodson School in Fairfax committed suicide after suspension. Another student in the same school also committed suicide a day before returning to school for her second hearing of suspension (Michael, 2004). It is noted by Michael (2004), in Fairfax County in Maryland U.S.A. a student was suspended for taking a pill in school, and during the two weeks of suspension engaged in watching television and studying a handbook on heroin and other illegal drugs despite the fact that school work was sent to her online. Fenning (2009) observed that correcting behavior is necessary as long as this does not violate the students' education rights and their psychological well being. The suspended students do the same examination with others, whether or not they attended the required academic hours. This traumatizes some students and it can lead to a suicidal ideation, alienation, social and emotional imbalances and psychological problems. In North Carolina state two students who were kicked out of school for fighting claimed that the Beaufort school denied them their right to education. The case attracted interest from civil rights and education groups around the country (McDowell, 2011). Suspended students suffer emotional and social problems which lead to poor performance in academic work (Sanders, 2001). Excessive suspension of students result in increased socio-emotional problems, avoidance of teachers, stigmatization among peers and poor academic performance (Stinchcomb et al, 2006).

¹ Egerton University, P O Box 536-20115, Egerton, Kenya. Email: bristonomulema@gmail.com

² Nakuru Girls High School, Kenya Email: wamainaken@gmail.com

³ Laikipia University, Nyahururu, Kenya. Email: wmureithipj@gmail.com

According to Mongezi (2010), 29 students were suspended from Umthwalume High school in South Africa on suspicion that they were homosexuals. Mlilengo (2010) notes that in Nigerian schools, some students were suspended when they were found roaming in the street instead of being in school. After suspension, some students went back to school while others dropped out and engaged themselves in other unlawful activities. Christine (2001) notes that students from divorced, separated, single and unmarried parents are more likely to be suspended than students who are more from stable married families. Students living with both biological parents are less likely to have behavioral problems at school that result in them being suspended. Adolescent boys and to a lesser extent, adolescent girls living with divorced parents have higher delinquency scores and more likely to be suspended than adolescents from stable married families. Students who come from homes where parents have no time for them indulge in indiscipline acts in order to draw their parents' attention. They are likely to be suspended even though they have their biological parents (Hoffman 2006). Bell et al (2001) notes that without the service of professional counselors and without a parent at home during out of school suspension, some students are more likely to commit crime. Out of school suspension adolescents are also more likely to smoke, use alcohol, marijuana and cocaine and engage in sexual intercourse. Suicidal behaviour may be expected to occur more often at these times of violation. The lack of professional assistance at the time of suspension from school, at a time when a student needs it most, increases the risk of permanent drop-out. Some students dislike school and after the suspension period is over, they refuse any alternative offered to them and join a group of criminals. Skiba (2006), states that teachers and other professionals who have regular contact with students should be in the first line of communicating with parents and caretakers regarding disciplinary incidents. Except in the case of most egregious rule infractions, a school administrator should not be the first person to contact parents about disciplinary problems at school. Regular and continuous contact about less serious behavior or even positive interaction is more likely to yield a more constructive relationship between parents and schools than the occasional crisis-centered communication. This helps the students to remain in school as their behavior is corrected.

Christle (2005), states that to reduce students' suspension, classroom management should be encouraged in the school set up. Teachers need to be properly equipped on how to handle a majority of minor classroom disruptions and to defuse rather than escalate behavior incidences. Expulsions and long-term suspensions should be reserved for offences that place other students or staff at risk of physical or emotional harm. It is appropriate to segregate repeat offenders from the general school population to preserve the safety of the school environment, but a focus on keeping students in active learning environment, even in a separate facility, if necessary, should be maintained. There is need for administrators to implement preventive measures that can improve the school climate and also improve the sense of community and belonging. Instead of suspensions, the administrators should seek to reconnect alienated students and to re-establish the school bond for students at risk of discipline problems. The connection to school is a critical factor in preventing youth violence. School alienation has been found to be a key factor in the development of both juvenile delinquency and school violence. Evidence suggests that procedures that assess the gravity of a given threat hold greater promise than student suspension in identifying and addressing threat to safety (Vossekul, 2002). Research conducted by Walker and Burn (2006) found that an improved collaboration and communication between student's school administrators, parents, law enforcement officers, mental health professionals and counselors helps in developing alternative programmes rather than suspensions to deal with disruptive students.

This helps to reduce the psychological effects on suspended students; it also improves the academic work of the students. The integrated service addresses the most serious and challenging behavior (Walker & Burn, 2006). Howard (2003) observed that legislative initiatives encourage schools to provide an array of disciplinary alternatives prior to school suspension and expulsion. The practice of suspensions and expulsion will continue to be part of the disciplinary resources available to schools for handling disruptive and violent behavior, and in some cases are necessary to protect students and teachers from serious disruption and violence, although students who are removed from school are placed at risk of a host of psychological outcomes. These outcomes include depression, emotional conflicts, low self-esteem, withdrawal, demoralization, conflict with peers and parents and an inability to manage peer pressure. Programmes such as positive behavior support or bullying prevention assist schools reduce reliance on school suspension and expulsion should be put in place in order to increase the student's opportunity to learn. Corporal punishment was banned in Kenyan schools in the year 2000 and replaced with guidance and counseling as a means of dealing with students with maladaptive behaviours (Siringi, 2000).

However, many schools opted to use suspensions for minor and major indiscipline cases. In Enderasha school in Nyeri, students were suspended after setting a dormitory ablaze and consequently killing two students (Moses, 2010). In 2008, there were many cases of school unrest and many students were suspended from schools. The exclusions of students from school, by school authorities, never considered the effects of suspension on psychological well being and academic performance of the students suspended. Suspensions of students mean that one misses all learning activities for some time. This may be a burden to the suspended student. This study therefore investigated the effects of students' suspension on their psychological well being in boarding secondary schools in Nakuru county Kenya.

The Objectives of the Study Were

- (i) To determine the causes of students suspension in boarding secondary schools in Nakuru County.
- (ii) To determine the effect of students suspension on their psychological well being in boarding secondary schools in Nakuru County.

Research Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was employed in this study since the researchers wanted to collect information on the basis of the current status. The study adopted survey design as it is the most recommended for gathering behavioural data relating to psychological studies (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The design was considered as most appropriate for this study since it encompasses the use of data collection instruments such as questionnaires and interview schedules for extensive and in-depth studies (Oso & Onen, 2009). The target population consisted of 3917 students from seven boarding secondary schools. The accessible population was 228 students who had been suspended. These schools are found in both urban and rural setting. A sample size of 145 students was selected. The students' sample size was arrived at by using the formula provided by Kathuri and Pals (1993). The schools were randomly selected, 4 from urban and 3 rural settings in Nakuru county. Further, proportionate sample of respondents was selected in mixed schools to obtain representative boys and girls respondents. A five Likert scaled questionnaire was used to gather data from students. It provided respondents with a series of statements in which they could indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement. The respondents were to react to items by ticking either: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD). The study employed frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations to analyze data. The responses of the 145 student respondents were computed and results generated with the aid of a computer programme, the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for windows. The first objective of the study sought to determine the causes of students' suspension in boarding secondary schools. The parameters used to measure this aspect included being drunk, stealing, fighting, participating in strikes, breaking school rules, use of vulgar language, improper dressing, drug abuse, defiance, academic indiscipline, sexual misbehaviour, deviant to school religious practices and being in possession of dangerous weapons. Yes and No responses were tabulated as indicated in table I. represents the number of respondents.

Results and Discussion

Table I: Causes of Students' Suspensions from Schools

Causes	N	YES	NO	TOTAL
		%	%	
Being drunk	141	9.9	90.1	100
Stealing/possession of stolen goods	143	51.7	43.3	100
Fighting	139	12.2	87.8	100
Participating in strike	142	54.2	45.8	100
Breaking school rules	141	56.7	43.3	100
Use of vulgar language	142	9.9	90.1	100
Improper dressing	141	7.1	92.9	100
Drug abuse	139	33.1	66.9	100
Disobedience	142	59.4	45.1	100
Academic indiscipline	144	28.3	71.5	100
Sexual misbehaviour	144	5.6	94.4	100
Disobeying religious practices	141	3.5	96.5	100
Possession of dangerous weapons	143	12.6	87.4	100

As shown in table 1, 51.7 percent of the students were suspended because of stealing or being in possession of stolen property. Stealing is rampant in boarding schools. Students in boarding secondary schools come from different cultural backgrounds. Some cultures believe that taking other peoples' property is not stealing. The results concur with Sarason and Sarason (1993) who asserted that culture has a profound effect on both the individual and social structure. The results revealed that 56.7% of students were suspended because of breaking school rules while 54.1% participated in school strike. When students are together, they act as a mob without reasoning. An issue like the quality and quantity of food can make students to go on strike. These findings concur with Siringi (2000) who asserts that students are suspended due to involvement in school strike. Most of the students suspended were disobedient 59.4 percent. However, there were other minor causes of suspension as can be seen in the table. A small percentage of 3.5% of students were suspended because of not following the school's religious practice, 5.6% were for sexual misbehavior, 7.1% because of improper dressing and 9.9% for using vulgar language. From these findings it can be concluded that other causes of students' suspension such as use of drugs, fighting, academic indiscipline are not so pronounced in these schools. The second objective sought to determine the effect of suspension on students' psychological well being. The suspended students were given questionnaires with a number of common psychological problems. The problems were presented in point Likert scale (1-5) which gave a threshold mean of 2.5. A mean of 2.5 and above indicated that student's suspension affected their psychological well being while a mean of below 2.5 shows that suspensions did not affect their psychological well being.

Table 2: Common Psychological Problems of Suspended Students

Problem	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Feel inadequate	144	2.8811	1.03794
Not accept myself	139	2.8561	1.06022
Emotional conflict	142	3.0845	0.94150
Feel inferior	140	2.2500	1.01871
Get depressed	143	3.2378	0.86365
Have low self-esteem	141	3.0426	0.96268
Mood swings	139	2.6978	0.96268
Anxious	140	2.2857	1.09469
Demoralized	144	3.2153	0.91730
Withdrawn	145	2.9379	0.94443
Mean of means	145	2.7848	0.50694

As can be observed from table 2 suspended students suffered psychologically since the responses from the students are above the threshold mean of 2.5. From the table, it can be seen that out of 10 items, only two are below the threshold mean. Among the major psychological problems experienced by suspended students were emotional conflicts, with a mean of 3.2378 which makes students unable to cope with school activities. As indicated with a mean of 3.0428 suspended students get depressed, this obviously reduces concentration in academic and other activities in school environment. Suspension affects a student's self esteem which interferes with students self perception. These findings agree with those of Fenning (2007) who asserts that suspension is a key factor in the development of both juvenile delinquency and school violence. It can also be observed that suspension demoralizes students as seen in the table with a mean of 3.2153. From the total means of the suspended students, it is very clear that suspension affects students psychologically and thus needs to be addressed in Kenyan schools. According to Walker and Burns (2006) improved collaboration and communication between students, teachers, administrators, counselors, law enforcement officers and mental health professionals would help in developing alternative programmes to suspension to deal with disruptive students. This is expected to help reduce the psychological effects on suspended students and to change student's maladaptive behavior in schools. The mean of means was 2.7848 which is an indication that the suspension of students from the boarding secondary schools affects their psychological well being. Stinchcomb et al (2007) asserts that frequent suspensions of students from schools because of non-violent issues affect their psychological well being. Raffaele (2003), concurs with these findings and notes that suspensions without intervention measures to change the students misbehavior is another stressor that when compounded with what is already occurring in their lives predisposes them to even higher risks of psychological problems.

Conclusions and Recommendations

From the findings two conclusions were made:

- (i) Stealing of other students' property, disobedience and breaking the school rules and regulations were the major causes of suspensions which could be dealt with within the school set up.
- (ii) Suspensions greatly affected students psychologically.

From the study it is recommended that:

- (i) Students need to be part of decision making and problem solving initiatives in order to reduce suspensions.
- (ii) Schools should have student's open forums once a week to air their concerns and views without fear of victimization.
- (iii) There is need to improve collaboration and communication among students, teachers, parents and administrators.
- (iv) Policy makers, educators, health and social agencies, and professional counsellors need to look into the students' behavior before implementing any disciplinary measures.

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