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## Role of Peer Counseling on the Relationship between Prefects and the Students' body in public Secondary schools in Migori Sub-county, Migori County, Kenya

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### Abstract

This study was focused on the impact of peer counseling on the relationship between prefects and the students' body in public Secondary Schools in Migori district. Despite the significant role that peer counseling plays in enhancing healthy relationships through peer support, there has been persistent conflict, resentment and harassment of prefects by the student's body. Specifically, the study sought to assess the role of peer counseling on the relationship between prefects and the students' body. To achieve this objective, a descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The population targeted were the prefects and the form three students in these schools. Simple random sampling technique was employed in this study. Data was collected using questionnaires. The study employed the test retest method to do a pilot study in 3 schools that was not part of the sample used in the final data collection. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal consistency ("reliability") of the instrument the r value of 0.72 was realized, hence reliable. The study interviewed 76 students, 74 prefects and 7 heads of guidance and counseling department. The study established that peer counseling is beneficial in nurturing healthy relationship between prefects and the students' body, yet in its present form is less effective. The study also revealed that, there is antagonism between prefects and the students they lead. The study recommended that the guidance and counseling department should be

more vibrant in enhancing peer counseling in their schools and addressing issues in a timely manner in Secondary schools in Kenya.

**Keywords:** Kenya, Role, Peer-Counseling, Relationship, Prefects, Secondary, Students.

### Introduction

Prefects act as a link between the school management and the students' body (Lutomia & Sikolia, 2006). Although peer counseling is assumed to be a new field in the counseling profession, it has been in existence for a long time and its benefits is proven in many parts of the world. Organizations like the Alcoholic Anonymous, the Canadian paraplegic Association, the Canadian Association for Children with learning disabilities, Parents, groups and the School system have shown that peer counseling is an important service worth rendering (Berger, 2002). Peer influence can be more effective than teacher – learner relationship and schools that use peer to peer approach show success in establishing and nurturing positive relationships and a conducive school environment (Young, 2006).

In Britain and America, peer counseling has been part of the guidance and counseling program in schools for long. This has being effectively established and managed by training and coaching learners in life skills and on basic counseling skills. The teacher counselors select peer educators by inviting students to nominate two students that they are likely to confide in incase they are faced with difficulties. The nominated students are then trained and empowered with skills and techniques to help them reach out to other learners (Lepan, 2001). In Botswana and Uganda, peer counseling for teenagers is vital as it enables those in the same age bracket to discuss openly and to express personal problems and shortcomings about those in authority, parents, teachers and themselves in a free relaxed atmosphere (Rutondoki, 2000; UNESCO, 2002). Peer educators pass information that would not be easy for a teacher or a parent to divulge. For both countries, peer counseling is based on the principle that individuals with similar qualities and of the same age influence each other's behavior. This is due to the fact that a peer will help to find answers to some intricate questions that may be out of the scope of a teacher or a parent (Wango, 2009).

According to Bette (2013), Peer counseling is an interactive relationship within age groups aimed at influencing positive change. The peers discuss their problems amicably without getting involved in bad behavior and consequently improve their academics. On the other hand Santrock (2005) assert that peers are adolescents who are about the same In fact the current constitution of Kenya stipulates that they should be involved in key decisions that affect students (Republic of Kenya, 2010; Machogu, 2012). Prefects are young leaders who have authority bestowed on them by the school (Machogu 2012). Although prefects contribute positively to the leadership of public secondary school in Kenya, there is a persistent wave of conflict, hostility and resentment mated on prefects by other students (Ajowi & Simatwa, 2010).

More so, in the recent years, the relationship between prefects and the students' body in public secondary schools in Kenya have been more hostile and in certain instances, prefects have been violently handled by other students to the point of some even losing their lives (Lutomia & Sikolia, 2006; Ajowi & Simatwa, 2010). Previous researchers have therefore recommended the use of peer counseling as one of the factors in handling conflicts between prefects and the rest of the students (Kikuvi, 2004; Machogu, 2012).

The Koech Commission (Republic of Kenya, 1999) aware of the peer approach counseling by Teens (PACT) in other countries also noted the need to introduce peer counseling services in education and training institutions throughout the country. The peer counselors or teens could then be entrusted with the task of disseminating the knowledge, skills and attitudes they had learnt and acquired to their peers in the school and the community. Additionally, the commission recommended that peer counseling services should also be used to manage discipline and interpersonal relations as well as to combat HIV/AIDS in all educational institutions in the country.

In line with the recommendation of the Koech commission on the establishment of peer counseling in schools, Wango (2006) reveals that 74% of secondary schools in the country have peer counselors. He further emphasizes the importance of having peer counselors in each class to give direction to other students and to support them where necessary. Although, prefects are expected to give peer guidance and counseling, instead of policing over the students body, most of them have inadequate knowledge and skills in counseling and as such are not well equipped in handling issues like drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, hatred, isolation and open criticism from other students (UNESCO, 2012).

Wango (2006) seems to concur with Karanja & Bowen (2012) that prefects who receive peer counseling training are more confident and tend to be more skillful and persuasive as they relate with other students. Unfortunately, there seems to be no uniform structure for evaluating peer counseling programme in secondary schools in Kenya (UNESCO, 2012).

Following The Koech Report (1999), peer counseling has been embraced in all public secondary schools in Kenya and its complementary role in peer education and peer support is widespread (Wango & Mungai, 2007). Peer counseling in schools in Kenya can be traced back to the early 1980's. Unfortunately, to date, peer counseling programme in public secondary schools is still faced with adverse challenges ranging from lack of trained peer counselors to the enormously taxing job of syllabus coverage and lack of uniformity in implementation of the programme in different schools (Wango, 2006). It is therefore upon this background that the current study seeks to establish the impact of peer counseling on the relationship between prefects and the students body.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the significant role that peer counseling plays in enhancing healthy relationships through peer support, there has been persistent conflict, resentment and harassment of prefects by the student's body (Republic of Kenya, 2010; Simatwa, 2012). Moreover, even with the use of peer counseling in all public secondary schools in Kenya, the relationship between prefects and the student's body is so strained and Migori district is not an exception. Far worse, the hostile relationship has even led to the death of some prefects resulting from beatings or being dozed off by fire in their rooms by other students (Lutomia & Sikolia, 2006; Ajowi & Simatwa, 2010; Machogu, 2012). Peer counseling is a helping process that uses safety, engendered by a special kind of relationship between individuals in the same age bracket facing similar challenges to get access to a great part of their resolve as a means of responding to the challenges of their lives. It uses specific skills and techniques in that relationship to help peers become more competent,

creative and content (Wango & Mungai, 2007). Ironically, despite the increasing interest in the key role that peer counseling play in interpersonal relationships, little is known about its impact on the relationship between prefects and the student's body in public secondary schools in Kenya (Machogu, 2012; Ajowi & Simatwa 2010).

The current study will therefore, establish the impact of peer counseling on the relationship between prefects and the student's body in public secondary schools in Migori Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya.

## **Role of Peer Counseling on the Relationship between Prefects and the Students Body**

### **History and Role of Peer Counseling in Schools**

According to Salzer (2002) assert that the effectiveness of peer support derives from a variety of psychosocial processes which include: social learning theory, social comparison theory, helper therapy principle, experiential knowledge and social support. Furthermore, Salzer and Shear (2002) while focusing on social learning theory, argue that, since peers have undergone and survived relevant experiences they are more credible role models for others. They add that, interactions with peers who are successfully coping with their experience or illness are more likely to result in behavior change. By interacting with others who are perceived to be better than them; peers are given a sense of optimism and something to strive for. Moreover the helper therapy principle suggests four key benefits to those who provide peer support; increased sense of interpersonal competence as a result of making an impact on another person's life, development of a sense of equality in giving and taking between herself/himself and others, helpers gain new relevant knowledge while helping, the helper receives social approval from the person they help and others (Riesseman, 1965; Skovolt, 1994). Experiential knowledge is specialized information and perspectives that people obtain from living through a particular experience such as (substance abuse, sexual abuse) and when shared contributes to solving problems and improving the quality of life (Shubert & Borkman, 1994).

Although peer counseling is assumed to be a new field in the counseling profession, it has been in existence for a long time and its benefits is proven in many parts of the world. Organizations like the Alcoholic Anonymous, the Canadian paraplegic Association, the Canadian Association for Children with learning disabilities, Parents groups and the School system have shown that peer counseling is an important service worth rendering (Berger, 2002). In Britain and America, peer counseling has been part of the guidance and counseling program in schools for long. This has being effectively established and managed by training and coaching learners in life skills and on basic counseling skills. The teacher counselors select peer educators by inviting students to nominate two students that they are likely to confide in incase they are faced with difficulties. The nominated students are then trained and empowered with skills and techniques to help them reach out to other learners (Lepan, 2001). In Botswana and Uganda, peer counseling for teenagers is vital as it enables those in the same age bracket to discuss openly and to express personal problems and shortcomings about those in authority, parents, teachers and themselves in a free relaxed atmosphere (Rutondoki, 2000; UNESCO, 2002).

Peer influence can be more effective than teacher – learner relationship and schools that use peer to peer approach show success in establishing and nurturing positive relationships and a conducive school environment (Young, 2006).

According to Bette (2013), peer counseling is an interactive relationship within age groups aimed at influencing positive change. The peers discuss their problems amicably without getting involved in bad behavior and consequently improve their academics. On the other hand Santrock (2005) assert that peers are adolescents who are about the same age or maturity level and tend to be similar in their attitudes towards school, school performance and educational plans. Moreover, due to the large student population in schools, there are few guidance counselors and training peer counselors is a tool that can be used to help learners who are in need of counseling (Wango, 2009). Study by Chereshi (2006) asserted that peer educators help in identifying learners with problems and when necessary refer them to the teacher counselor. The significance of peer counseling in Kenyan schools show that it has contributed in decreasing use of substance abuse and unprotected sexual behavior. Although it is has not well grounded in Kenya schools, it is rapidly taking root as an instrument for enhancing healthy relationships, positive attitude and behavior change and enhancing academic performance (Kenya Institute of Education, 2004).

### **School Based Peer Counseling**

As a social being, man has always needed peer counseling in some way or the other and schools as part of the society is not left out in the provision of this service to the prefects and the student's body (Agrawal, 2006; Wango & Mungai, 2007). The School environment is dynamic and learners are faced with diverse challenges which may be academic, social, emotional and personal. However through peer counseling, peers interact, listen to and address each other's needs (MOEST, 2004; Tindi & SiSil, 2008). On the other hand peer counseling and the nurturing of close relationships contribute to personal growth, by enhancing the individual's ability to their response and action (Brown, 2005).

The Koech Commission report (Republic of Kenya, 1999) aware of the peer approach counseling by Teens (PACT) in other countries also noted the need to introduce peer counseling services in education and training institutions throughout the country. The peer counselors or teens could then be entrusted with the task of disseminating the knowledge, skills and attitudes they had learnt and acquired to their peers in the school and the community. The commission highlighted the need to put in to consideration the successful stages of physical, emotional and mental development of these particular counselors and that peer counseling should combine drama, music, information Education and communication (IEC) materials and counseling. Additionally, the commission recommended that peer counseling services should also be used to manage discipline and interpersonal relations as well as to combat HIV/AIDS in all educational institutions in the country. Peer counseling was therefore integrated in to the guidance and counseling programmes to help learners cope with personal, socio-emotional and academic problems. In line with this peer education and counseling clubs have been created in schools and colleges (Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), 2004).

However, UNICEF (2012) decries lack of uniform policy from the ministry of Education in regards to the running of peer counseling unit in Secondary schools. In line with the recommendation of

the Koech commission on the establishment of peer counseling in schools, Wango (2006) reveals that 74% of secondary schools in the country have peer counselors. He further emphasizes the importance of having peer counselors in each class to give direction to other students and to support them where necessary. Unfortunately, a proportion of schools have established the peer counseling unit yet peer counselors have not received the necessary training that can help them offer support to other students (UNICEF, 2012). According to Tindi and Silsil (2008) one of the objectives of peer counseling program in schools is to work on behavioral, social and academic adjustments of adolescent learners to reap maximally from their school experience. Lutomia and Sikolia (2008) and Ministry of Youths and Sports (2008) assert that peer counseling program is vital in educational settings as a learner counsels with the other, will be at ease as they share many things in common: socio-economic status, age, class among others.

Peer counseling is a process that refers to the joint effort to harness the capacity that individuals similar to the other have to console, appease, befriend one another, to mediate in conflicts and to reconcile those alienated from each other (Wango, 2006; Lutomia & Sikolia, 2006). The Koech Commission (TIQET, Republic of Kenya, 1999) also emphasizes the need of taking peer counseling seriously since public schools deal with a large number of young people who are searching for their own identity in a rapidly changing world. Other studies further reiterate that prefects who have been given supervisory and guidance role by the school administration need to benefit from the guidance and counseling programme (Republic of Kenya, 2002, Nasibi, 2003; Ajowi & Simatwa 2010). As much as the relationship between prefect's and the students body has been an area of potential conflict and peer counseling has been used as one of the strategies in managing such conflicts, the impact of the programme in enhancing relationship between prefect's and the student's body is still unclear.

Although (Wango, 2006; Simatwa, 2012; Machogu, 2012) argue that peer counseling is an essential element in nurturing healthy relationship between prefects and the student's body, there are no clear guidelines from the ministry of Education Science and technology (MOEST) on how schools can use peer counseling to enhance interpersonal relationship between prefects and the students body in public secondary schools. According to Simatwa (2012) only 50% of prefects and the student's body perceive peer counseling as a worthwhile programme that help in easing tension whenever they are overwhelmed by circumstances around their coexistence in school. He adds that 50% of prefects and the student's body perceive peer counseling negatively as a waste of time as it only evokes images of individuals with mental problems. From this study the extent to which peer counseling has impacted on prefects and student's body is unclear. Unfortunately, there is no adequate information on the impact of peer counseling on the relationship between prefects and the students body. The current study sought to establish the impact on peer counseling on the relationship between prefects and the students body in public secondary schools in Migori sub-county.

#### **Role of heads of Guidance and Counseling department /Role of Peer Counselors**

The heads of guidance and counseling department work in conjunction with the heads of schools in the effective implementation, management and evaluation of peer counseling program. The guidance and counseling teacher have to participate in the selection training and induction of

peer counselors in their schools (Bette, 2013). MOEST (2009) elaborates the functions of the guidance and counseling teacher as the coordinator and supervisor of the peer counseling program by looking at the welfare of the peer counselors and the other students as well as setting time for peer sessions, training, induction and assigning duties to the peer counselors.

Gladding (2004) defines peer counselors as students that are selected and trained to serve their fellow colleagues and teacher in charge of the department in diverse ways.

Nevertheless, Tindi and Silsil (2006) points out those peer counselors are students appointed by their schoolmates or the head teacher in an effort to increase interaction between the learners. Hence they are trained to serve other students through helping relationships. Furthermore the best students in terms of personal qualities and educational achievement are selected as they are supposed to act as good role models to other learners. The Ministry of Youth and Sports (2008) opines that peer counselors provide lessons on decision making skills to help combat the effects of negative peer influence.

The guidance and counseling teacher has been charged with the responsibility of developing the training manual for peer counselors on key areas: life skills, basic counseling skills, academic coaching, career guidance and group counseling techniques. Other topics that are discussed include conflict management and resolution skills, self awareness and referral skills (MOEST, 2009).

The society and school environment has changed drastically and as such the social networks that existed in the traditional society and ensured young people were nurtured in close neat environment is no more. (Ndichu, 2005). Studies by Ndichu (2005) further adds that the school environment is so volatile and many learners benefit from the support of their peers. Wango and Mungai (2007) also recount the value of peer counseling as it is believed students are always the first to notice when their colleague is depressed, worried, anxious and they often confide in one another what disturbs them. Then this occurs their reaction is immediate acceptance, understanding and consoling as well as providing a warm support through peer group support. Wango and Mungai (2007) further adds that people will only listen and absorb each other's ideas and opinions in the formal and informal groups of their choice. This is observable in peer counseling groups in secondary schools where students are seen as more understanding and empathic than the teacher. Peer counseling has many advantages to the students, prefects and the whole school community. This is due to the fact that the counselee is given the opportunity to emulate someone who m she/he reached out to. The prefect or student is given the opportunity to develop coping skills that work as they work with the peer counselors they are relating to. According to Thomas (1990) training of peer counselors provide the youth with skills that enables them to assist one another cope with physical, sexual, emotional and interpersonal issues during adolescence. This also enhances the clients feeling of selfworth, affiliation, recognition as well as raising their level of information since they are able to identify with a counselor who listens and empathizes with them. Peer counseling group is advantageous as it provide the adolescent with the opportunity of identifying with peers (Lines, 2006).



### Techniques for Peer Counseling

There are different approaches used in peer counseling. The choice of the approach used depends on the needs of individual students and the skills of the peer counselor. The general approach is where by one peer counselor is put at the point of contact and is the first person that is reached by the individual person seeking help. It is the responsibility of the peer counselor to assess the nature and magnitude of the problem to determine who could best work with this individual and determining the length of the involvement. The generalist works for a short duration with the person and then refer to a more skillful person depending on the needs of the client (Schimmel, 2008).

The instructional peer counselor helps individuals to move from being totally dependent on the helper to being more independent through coaching and training in areas that the counselee seems to be lacking in, i.e. Social skills, functional skills and academic skills.

Additionally the outreach model involves going out to people to make known to them the importance of peer to peer approach on challenges and to give them hope to help them nature a positive attitude in life and dealing with life challenges (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

Finally, advocacy as a technique helps people work their way through systems so that they can get their rights through education and awareness campaigns (Sisco, 1992).

The rehabilitation model assumes that the counselee must internalize his/her weaknesses and shortcomings and be willing to make changes from within her/him-self. The peer counselor assists the counselee by envisioning the environment and helping him/her what in the environment needs to be changed for the counselee to function in a more balance way (Young, 2006).

Still, the work of Young (2006) further states that team building and group activities allow students to work together with their peers to develop an understanding of a topic or situation. By engaging adolescents in the completion of group activities they are allowed to experience the joy of shared experience and cooperate lessons thus benefit from skills shared by their peers.

### Methodology

A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The target population were the prefects and the form three students in these schools. There were 20 public secondary schools, 20 heads of guidance and counselling, 1000 form three students and 240 prefects in public secondary schools in Migori Sub-county. The total population under study was 1260.

**Table 1. Sampling Procedure**

Respondents	Target Population	Percentage	Sample Size
<b>Heads of G/C Dept.</b>	20	100	20
<b>Students</b>	1000	30	300
<b>Prefects</b>	240	30	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>1260</b>		<b>392</b>

Table 1 indicates the number of respondents representing the target population in public secondary schools in Migori Sub-county. All the 20 guidance and counselling teachers were purposively selected because they were few and had the required characteristics (Bloomberg and

Volpe 2008). Since 30 percent has been a number considered to be statistically significant, the researcher therefore used it to get the sample size, in dealing with students and prefects as supported by Best and Khan (2006). Questionnaires are very convenient tools where a large numbers of subjects are to be handled. Questionnaires facilitate easy and quick responses (Day, Harris & Hadfeild, 2002). The quantitative data emanating from the field were edited, coded and then numbered. They were then entered into a database prepared in SPSS version 17 that aided in analyzing the data. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically. For quantitative data, Cross tabulation, and frequencies were adopted and the findings were presented using graphs, tables, frequencies and percentages.

### Results and Discussions

Heads of guidance and counselling were asked whether there was peer counselling programme in their schools and all of them responded in the affirmative. Majority (85.7%) of the heads of guidance and counselling stated that in their opinion peer counseling was more instrumental in enhancing healthy interactions between prefects and the students' body. This fact was supported by Gysbers and Henderson (2001) who alluded that peer counselling programme has been a prudent and valuable initiative.

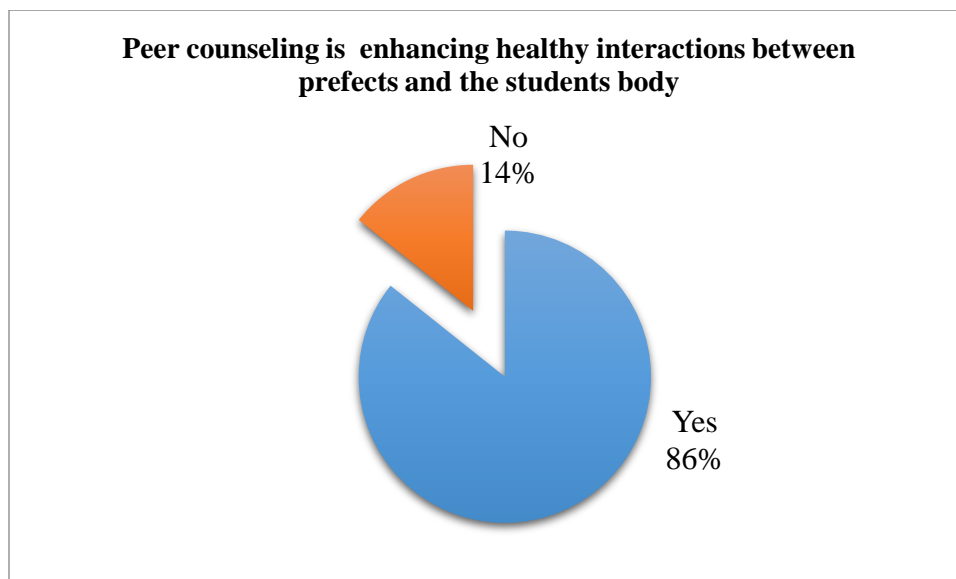


Figure 1: Opinion of the Guidance and Counseling Heads on the Effects of Peer Counseling

This figure illustrates the opinion of the guidance and counseling heads on the effects of peer counseling on enhancing healthy interactions between prefects and the students' body.

From the cross tabulation in this section the opinion of the guidance and counseling heads show the benefits of peer counseling and importance of a healthy relationship between prefects and the students body. Although they express having time to guide, listen and give feedback to peer counselor and prefects it is realized that peer counselors and prefects are not efficiently trained due to insufficient time and a lack of clear school policies on the training of prefects and peer counselors. This emphasized when they admit at 42% that prefects receive less than two trainings

in one year, which was in line with sentiments of (Lines, 2006; Yambo & Tuitoek, 2014). A healthy relationship between prefects and the students' body is important for the school to succeed in meeting its goals Peer counseling is a helping process that uses safety, engendered by a special kind of relationship between individuals in the same age bracket facing similar challenges to get access to a great part of their resolve as a means of responding to the challenges of their lives. It uses specific skills and techniques in that relationship to help peers become more competent, creative and content (Wango & Mungai, 2007).

### Recommendations

The department of guidance and counseling in the various schools need to be more vibrant in enhancing peer counseling in their schools and addressing issues in a timely manner so as to get to the root cause of unbecoming behavior that may contribute to unhealthy relationship between prefects and the student's body. They should help the prefects by acquiring enough information and evidence that should help deal with matters at hand appropriately.

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