

**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN TERTIARY  
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA: FOCUS  
KAKAMEGA COUNTY**

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**Abstract**

This study was about gender-based violence in tertiary education institutions in Kenya with special focus on Kakamega County. This follows an upsurge in incidents of reported crimes especially on media of gender based acts of violence within learning institutions. A descriptive design was preferred for this study. The study addressed the question: What is the magnitude of gender violence experienced by students within the tertiary education institutions in Kakamega County? With the view of gaining some insight on the subject, a survey was conducted among students in tertiary institutions in Kakamega County. Specifically the study sought to assess the magnitude of gender violence using acts of violence: Physical, Psychological and Sexual. The study also established the perpetrators of gender based violence in the institutions. A total of 450 students were sampled for the study. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used. Primary data collection techniques employed structured questionnaires, informal interviews and observation. The study established that in tertiary education institutions and students themselves were the main perpetrators of the acts of violence.

**Key words: Gender, violence, tertiary institutions, physical, psychological, sexual**

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## Introduction

Gender based violence in tertiary institutions is not a new phenomenon. Studies world over indicate that gender violence occurs in institutions of higher learning (Menon, 2009, UNDP & UNESCO, 2010 & Morley & Lussier, 2009). The violence is based on gendered stereotypes that targets students on the basis of their sex such as: rape, unwanted sexual touching, unwanted sexual comments, corporal punishment, bullying and verbal harassment (USAID, 2009). Some studies conducted in Goa India by Patel and Andrew (2001), established that 33% of the male and female students had experienced sexual abuse. Other studies conducted in Botswana and Uganda respectively, declared that 67% of girls reported harassment and teasing by teachers and 98% of students have experienced physical violence (Naker, 2005, Patel & Andrew 2001 & Rossetti, 2001). According to the Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) of 2008/9, Kakamega County was rated second to Siaya County in gender violence thus 56% and 60% respectively and the Kakamega District strategic plan 2005 - 2010 has also identified discriminatory socio-cultural practices and gender violence as a major impediment to development in the region. The common violence in the area includes wife battering, sexual abuse to the girl child, rape, sexual harassment and intimidation at work.

A study on teachers and students perceptions of factors contributing to violent behaviour among public secondary school students in western Kenya by Poipoi (2011) established sexual violence, rioting and fighting as the most prevalent forms of violence in the region. The acts of violence identified in the study are similar acts of gender violence this study sought to address at institutional level bearing in mind that the same students who were perpetrators of violence in secondary schools transit to tertiary institutions. Gender based violence in tertiary institutions has become a key concern. Learning institutions in Kenya have gradually gained unsavory reputation as venues of sexual assault and physical abuse. The rise in incidents of reported crimes especially on media of gender based acts of violence within learning institutions attest to threatened safety in institutions. Parents, teachers and students have raised concern over the negative consequences of the acts of gender based violence in the institutions. The trend is worrying especially when there is any student unrest in the institutions; the female students are normally raped while the male students are beaten up seriously. The studies therefore reveal that gender violence is

widespread and needs to be investigated. Findings from this study would help policy makers in capturing the essentials to eliminate gender violence in education institutions.

## **Methodology**

The study was based on a descriptive survey design (Kombo, 2006 & Mugenda & Mugenda 2003) focusing on the magnitude of gender based violence experienced by students in tertiary education institutions. The study was conducted in Kakamega County which is located in Western Kenya bordering Bungoma County to the North, Trans Nzoia County to the North East, Uasin Gishu County and Nandi Counties to the East, Vihiga county to the South, Siaya County to the South West and Busia County to the West (Figure 3.1). The County lies between Latitude 0.2833°N and Longitude 34.7500° E. The County is on an area of 3,224.9 Km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 1,660,651 (County Factsheet, 2011). The County experiences temperatures ranging from a minimum of 10.3°C to a maximum of 30.8°C with an average of 20.5°C. The rainfall ranges between 1,250 - 1,750 mm per annum. Kakamega has a mix of both subsistence and cash crop farming, with sugarcane being the preferred medium to large scale crop. The county has three large sugar factories namely: Mumias, Butali and West Kenya, Commercial businesses; 'Boda-Boda' Transport business. There is also a significant tourism centering on Kakamega Forest, Caves and Crying Stone of Ilesi. There are also natural resources such as Gold and Arable Land (County factsheet, 2011). Kakamega has a strong culture that has tended to increase cases of gender-violence in the region and statistics from FIDA for three months; April to June 2013 indicate that there were 1527 cases of gender violence recorded. The ideologies include cultural practices such as wife inheritance, initiation and polygamy (District Strategic Plan, 2005-2010). Students particularly boys become violent in schools because during initiations they are advised to be aggressive, strict, brave and not 'joke' around with ladies. Kakamega was suitable for the study because it has experienced violence cases in schools and frequent riots in the university which brings about gender based violent acts therefore studying its effect in training institutions has realized data for policy makers in the County (P.D.E, 2009). The population for this study was 18,000 students from tertiary institutions. A stratified random sampling method was used to select the institutions (Fraenkel & Wallen 2012); simple random sampling was used to select respondents for the study. A sample size decision model by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) was used to determine the sample size of 450 students. The study used

primary data which was collected by the help of questionnaires (Kombo& Tromp, 2006). Data was analyzed using descriptive analyses such as means, modes, percentages, frequencies and narratives by aid of computer packages.

## Results and Discussion

The responses of the acts of physical violence by gender in tertiary education institutions were outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Act of Physical Violence Experienced in the Institution By Gender**

			<b>Act of Physical Violence Experienced in the Institution</b>		
			<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Gender	Male	Count	53	159	212
		Expected Count	64.2	147.8	212.0
	Female	Count	62	106	168
		Expected Count	50.8	117.2	168.0
		<b>Count</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>380</b>
		Expected Count	115.0	265.0	380.0
<b>Total</b>					

**Source:** Field Data 2014

As shown in Table 1, 54% (62) of female students and 46% (53) of the male students experienced physical violence. The difference in the frequency is not significant giving an indication that both gender experience physical violence. This study is consistent with the results obtained by Action Aid International Kenya (2011) who concluded that physical violence was the most frequent form of violence in the institution for both male and female students. The findings, corroborate well with a study by Makepeace (1986) on courtship violence which established that there were no significant differences for most forms of inflicted violence on both males and female students. This study contradicts the findings of the British Crime Survey

(2002) which established that only 19% of men had experienced violence. This study established that male students were equally violated as the female students.

Several indicators on gender violence for this study were used to assess whether the students had experienced any act of physical/psychological and sexual violence. These indicators consisted of perceived acts such as; beating or fighting (punching/kicking/slapping), grabbing (pulling hair, pinching, twisting ear lobes), use of weapon (sticks, stones, knives), whipping or caning, pushing or tripping, itching powder, excessive physical labour and denied food/ water in college. All responses were derived from a five-point Likert scale and included; **1=** Once, **2=** Rarely (once a year), **3=** Often (every 3-4 months), **4=**Very often (1-4 times a month), **5=** All the time (3-7 times a week). The results were analyzed and presented as weighted means displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Frequency of acts of Physical Violence Experienced in the Institution**

Acts of Physical Violence	Frequency of how they are experienced		
	No Respondents	of Weighted mean	Overall average
Food or water is denied	27	39%	8%
Excessive physical labour	37	36%	10%
Itching powder is used	34	38%	10%
Pushing or tripping	61	31%	14%
Caning or whipping	56	40%	17%
Use of weapon	87	34%	23%
Grabbing(pulling hair, twisting ear lobes)	9	35%	2%
Beating or fighting	69	33%	17%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>380</b>		<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Survey Data 2014

As indicated in table 2, the students were asked if they had been denied food or water as an act of physical violence, 39% of the respondents had been denied food with an overall average of 8%. When asked if excessive labour had been used as an act of physical violence, 36% of the

respondents had experienced excessive labour giving an overall mean of 10%. The highest percentage for this question showed that, the act was being carried out every three to four times a year, that means once in a semester a student experiences this kind of physical violence. When asked who were the perpetrators of this act of violence, the teaching staff emerged to be the main perpetrators. The study established that there were some tertiary institutions giving students corporal punishment such as excessive labour. When a student stays out of class for one week on punishment, it becomes difficult to catch up with the rest of classmates. When asked about use of itching powder as an act of physical violence, 38% with 10% overall average had experienced the act of violence. The study established that the acts were perpetrated by police officers during student unrest in the institutions or some were from straining relationships among the students. When asked about being pushed or tripped as an act of physical violence, 31% had been pushed or tripped while the overall average mean was 14%. This study established that the respondents experience this act of physical violence all the time in the institutions. This act of violence is likely to lead to accidents that can result to disability. From the findings, respondents were violated on a daily basis making learning environment uncondusive in the institutions.

For the question of caning or being whipped as an act of physical violence, 40% of the respondents had been caned or whipped with an overall mean of 17%. From the findings, the majority of respondents experience the act of physical violence on a daily basis. The respondents identified fellow students as the main perpetrators. The study established that students fight in the institutions to maintain dominance especially in the relationships. Some are caned during students unrest while others identified use of drugs as the cause of the violence. On the use of weapon as an act of violence, 34% of the respondents had been violated by use of a weapon with overall average of 23%. The findings established this act of violence to be the highest and most prevalent in the institution. Respondents use of weapons gives an indicator that the institutions are not safe for the students. The experience of the act of physical violence every three to four times a year is equivalent to every semester. The students whose hair had been grabbed (pulling hair, twisting ear lobes) as an act of physical violence were 35% with an overall mean of 2%. The findings show that the act of physical violence exists in the institutions. When asked about being beaten or fighting as an act of violence, 33% of the respondents had been beaten with

overall mean of 17%. This findings show that being beaten as an act of physical violence rates higher in the institutions making them unsafe for the respondents.

From the results given, most of the acts of physical violence occur often (3-4 times a month) and very often (1- 4 times a month). This shows that 75% of the students experience physical violence in a month. This study backs up Chege's findings (2012) that identify institutions as providing a complexity of social sites in which gender violence occurs, mainly against female students. From the FGDs, the female students expressed concern that they are always beaten by their male boyfriends who treat them as 'wives who need to be disciplined'. The study corroborates Wood (2007) assertion that, the social structure has normalized violence; for example in the family institution many parents still encourage girls to be physically reserved and sensitive to relationships while the boys are encouraged to be physically aggressive and to control. A female student narrated during oral interview:

'My boyfriend expects me to provide for the house where we stay and any time he comes back and finds that there is no food I am beaten thoroughly' (OI, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014).

Male students identified excessive physical labour and beating or fighting as the major acts of physical violence experienced. Excessive physical labour was cited mainly by students from colleges where the lecturers still punish students. Acts of using weapon was cited to be the highest in the institutions. This occurs mainly when students strike and the perpetrators were identified to be uniformed officers. Fighting among students was second to the use of weapon and during the FGD; students linked fighting to failed or suspicion in their relationships and drug abuse. This act occurs mostly in the universities which tend to have more freedom to students as compared to those in colleges. From the study almost all the students have experienced physical violence in the institutions. The findings agree with Menon, (2009) and Carolyn, *et al.* (2011) whose study concluded that gender violence is a pervasive problem in educational institutions which results in sexual, physical, or psychological harm to men and women.

**Table 3: Frequency of acts of Sexual Violence Experienced in the Institution**

Acts of sexual violence	Frequency of how they are experienced		
	No of Respondents	Weighted mean	Overall average
Frequency of which one is coerced to look at sexual acts/ pornographic materials	28	34%	7%
One gets sexual comments	21	34%	5%
One exposes their genitalia	23	34%	6%
Pinching breasts buttocks or genitalia are touched	50	39%	15%
Objects are inserted into genitals	60	37%	17%
Forced sex or coerced sex occurs in exchange for food, gifts or money	83	35%	22%
Rape/forced/unwanted sex (vaginal, anal, oral) cases occur without use of weapons or death threats	29	32%	7%
Rape/forced/unwanted sex (vaginal, anal, oral) cases occur by use of weapon or death threats	86	32%	21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>		<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Survey Data 2014

As shown in the table 3, 34% of the respondents were coerced to look at sexual acts/ pornographic materials with an overall average of 7%. When asked if they got sexual comments within the institution, the study established 34% and 5% average mean. The study established Sexual violence to be common and students get violated on a weekly basis. When asked if one has ever exposed their genitalia to the respondents within the institution, 34% with overall



average of 6% had experienced the act of sexual violence. For those who had ever been pinched breasts buttocks or touched genitalia within the institution, 39% with overall average of 15% had experienced the act of sexual violence. This act of sexual violence seemed prevalent in the institutions as results show that 52% of the respondents experience it on a semester basis. On the question of objects being inserted into genitals within the institution, 37% with 17% overall mean experienced the act of violence. For forced sex or coerced sex in exchange for food, gifts or money within the institution, 35% and an overall average of 22% of the respondents had experienced the act. This study established that having forced sex as an act of violence occurs on a daily basis in the institutions. When asked if they have ever been raped/forced/unwanted sex (vaginal, anal, and oral) with or without use of weapons or death threats within the institution, results from weighted means for both the respondents who had been raped by use and without use of weapon and death threat were 32% with overall mean of 21%.

From the results given, most of the acts of sexual violence occur often (3-4 times a month) and very often (1-4 times a month). This shows that 75% of the students experience sexual violence in a month and most of the students have at one time in life experienced acts of sexual violence. The findings of this study concur with Kawuwa *et al.* (2010) study on Sexual assault which concluded that sexual assault is still a common finding in our institutions and the findings established that sexual violence was the most common in Nigerian institutions. In the FGD, most students cited being coerced into sexual acts by their fellow students and lecturers. Poverty was cited as the main cause of these acts of violence. Female students who must buy food for sustenance end up receiving offers from men and ‘must pay back by having sex’ and if they show signs of disobeying then they get threatened with weapons to give in for sexual acts. The findings confirm a report by ACORD (2010) which states that most women depend on men for their sustenance and, therefore, become vulnerable to male aggression. Men use their considerably higher economic status to impose unreasonable demands on women and enforce these demands through sexual and gender-based violence.

**Table 1: Frequency of acts of Psychological Violence Experienced in the Institution**

Acts of psychological violence	Frequency of which they are experienced		
	No	of	Weighted Overall

**Table 1: Frequency of acts of Psychological Violence Experienced in the Institution**

	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>mean</b>	<b>average</b>
One is afraid to say no to someone	33	28%	8%
One is afraid to participate in class after an act of violence	30	27%	7%
One is threatened, intimidated, frightened with harm or punishment	33	30%	9%
One is insulted, called names and shouted at	26	37%	9%
One is rejected by someone	47	27%	11%
Friends force respondents to do what they don't want	28	36%	9%
Lecturers force respondents to do what they don't want	60	24%	13%
Lack of care and support can be used	39	32%	11%
Receiving threats by email, sms or telephone	48	31%	14%
Receiving threatening or unwanted letters	36	29%	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>		<b>100%</b>

As shown in the table 4, the students who were afraid to say no to someone as an act of psychological violence were, 28% with an overall average mean of 8% .This study established that students who were violated could not refuse the act due to fear of the unknown consequences. Those who were afraid to participate in class after an act of psychological violence were, 27% with an overall average mean of 7% .This study established that the psychological act was frequent. This is one of the acts that had respondents for all levels on the Likert scale. On the question of being threatened, intimidated, frightened with harm or punishment as an act of psychological violence, 30% with an overall average mean 9% had experienced the violence. The study established that 10% of students get threatened and intimidated on a daily basis. This kind of environment in the institution may not be conducive for academic progression. When asked if they have ever been insulted, called names and shouted at as an act of psychological violence, 37% with an overall average mean of 9% had experienced psychological violence. For being rejected by someone as an act of psychological violence, 27%

with overall average mean of 11% had been rejected. When asked if they have ever been forced by friends to do what they don't want as an act of psychological violence, 36% with an overall average mean of 9% had been forced. The findings indicate that peer pressure has a great influence on students' decision making. They will do things or engage in activities against their will to please their friends. When asked if lecturers have ever forced them to do what they don't want as an act of psychological violence, 24% with an overall average mean of 13% had experienced the act of violence. The results indicate that students are vulnerable to their lecturers. They are not in a position to turn down the request even when they feel it is against their wish. The overall average for this act is second highest for all acts of psychological violence for this study. When asked if they have ever experienced lack of care and support as an act of psychological violence, 8.0% have experienced lack of care in life, 32% with an overall average mean of 11% had an experience. For receiving threats by email, sms or telephone as an act of psychological violence, 31% with an overall average of 14% had experienced the act. Students who are threatened get stressed and may not be able to concentrate in class.

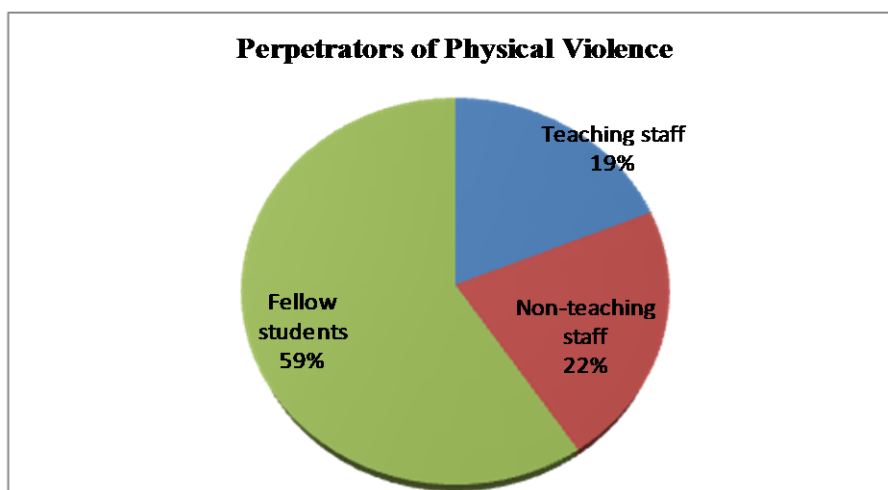
From the results given, most of the psychological violence occurs often (3-4 times a month) and once a year. This shows that 65% of students experience the act frequently. From the FGDs, the students explained that they were not able to concentrate in class due to psychological violence. The male students identified relationships as the main cause of this violence. Some gave examples of students who have committed suicide after failing in a relationship. The study identified prevalent acts of psychological violence as: threats of harm or abandonment, humiliation, deprivation of contact, isolation, abusive tactics and behaviors. One student said he could not allow someone messing with his girlfriend when he was alive. Psychological abuse leads to destruction of a person's self-esteem or sense of safety, often occurring in relationships where there are differences in power and control (Follingst & Dehart 2000). A variety of terms were used interchangeably with psychological abuse, including emotional abuse, verbal abuse, mental cruelty, intimate terrorism and psychological aggression. From the findings of the study, it is established that students despite their gender experience gender violence, however the female students experience more violence than the male students. Gender and power as discussed by Prato and Walker (2004) indicates that, violence is a significant aspect of the power struggles and relationships both between men and women, and between dominant and subordinate.

Women commit slightly more violent acts against men than the reverse, but men more often than women inflict injuries and death. The threat of men's physical and psychological violence against women has been analyzed as a major source of gender inequality. The use of assault, rape, sexual harassment, and emotional abuse not only are damaging to women but also limit women's power by reducing their ability to exit from harmful domestic relationship.

According to Prato and Walker (2004), gender stereotypes legitimize and cause gender differences in power, they saddle women especially with care giving obligations that limit their power by monopolizing their lives and limiting both their freedom to exit relationship and their resource control. This was recognized in the study when male students expect their female counterparts to take charge of household responsibilities even when both are students at the same level. Physical and emotional violence have received the most attention as the means by which men hold destructive power over women. Another way that men hold destructive power is in possession and command over social roles that threaten or actually carry out physical force on women. Understanding power as relational and dynamic enables one to describe ways that greater equality can be realized and that male students will treat their female counterparts on an equal basis.

### **Perpetrators of Gender Based Violence in Institutions**

The study sought to find out the main perpetrators of gender violence in the institution by asking respondents to select from: the teaching staff, non teaching staff and fellow students against each type of gender violence.



**Figure 1: Perpetrators of Physical Violence in the Institution**

Results in Figure 1 identify fellow students 59% as the main perpetrators of physical violence followed by non teaching staff at 22% and lastly teaching staff at 19%. From the FGDs, students identified relationship as the main source of conflicts that lead to physical violence among the students fraternity as fight to maintain dominance. Also mentioned were; the teaching staff and non teaching staff from colleges where punishment still exists. The students are subjected to physical punishment under the supervision of non teaching staff. Students identified uniformed officers; the policemen, administration and the army for assaults during strikes. The students cited some of their colleagues who have lost their lives and others seriously injured during the strike.

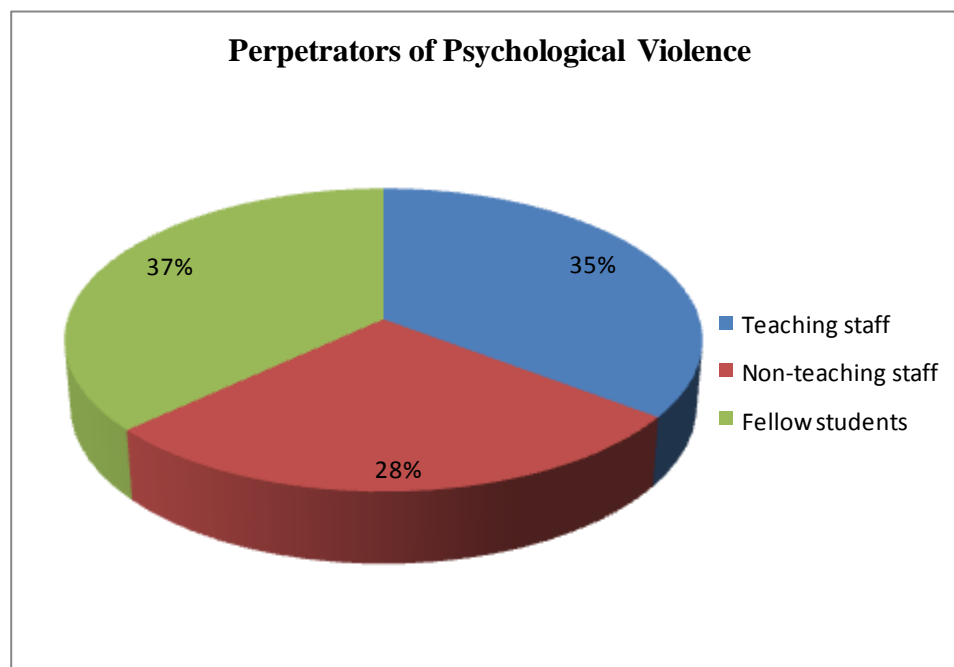
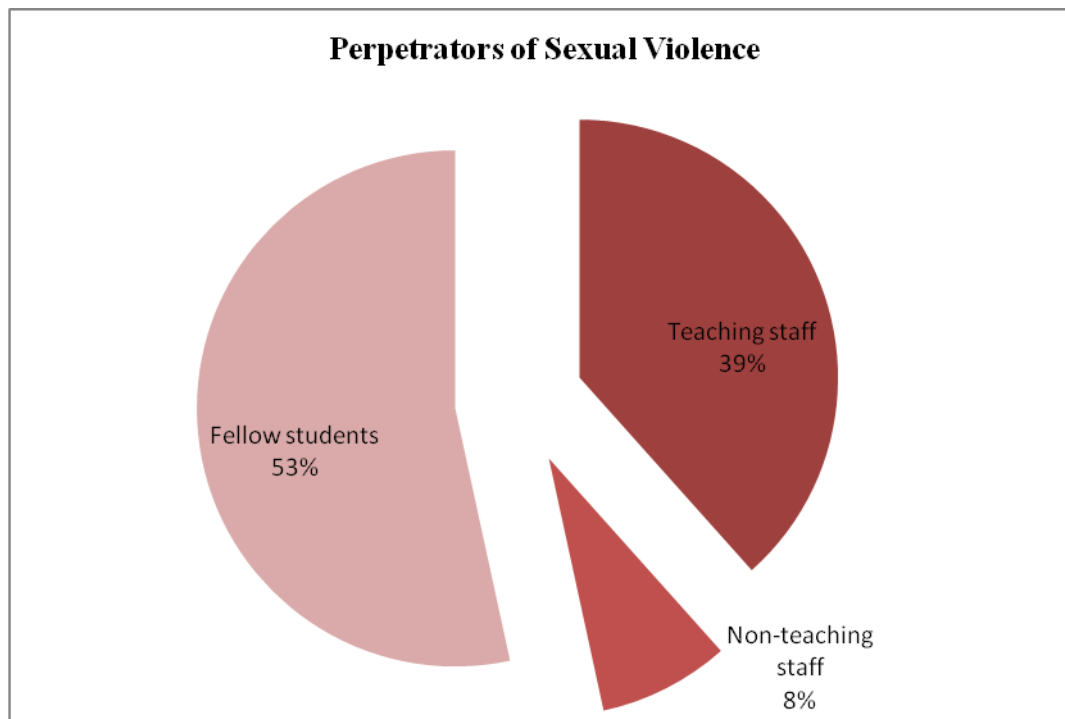
**Figure 2: Perpetrators of Psychological Violence in the Institution**

Figure 2 also identifies fellow students at 37% as the main perpetrators of psychological violence followed by teaching staff at 35% and non-teaching staff at 28%. From the FGDs, most students expressed having undergone psychological violence from fellow students. The violence is based on struggling relationships. The female students said they are always dumped

by their boyfriends when they get into a new relationship. The ladies said that they are seriously hurt by this act until they sometimes feel like revenging through getting into other relationships that end up harming them instead of healing.

Male students cited incidences where their colleagues have committed suicide after being rejected by their girlfriends. The female students cited non-teaching staff for denying them essential services when they turn down their request of friendship. The female students gave an example of finance officers who keep sending them home to collect school fees even when they had cleared their fee balances just because the ladies were not willing to give in for sexual favours. Male students cited frustration when they are dating the same female student with non-teaching staff who have money to dish out.



**Figure 3: Perpetrators of Sexual Violence in the Institution**

Figure 3 shows that the main perpetrators of sexual violence in the institution are fellow students at 53% followed by the teaching staff 39% and non-teaching staff at 8%. From the findings of this study, students are the main perpetrators of the three types of gender violence, followed by the teaching staff and non-teaching staff. From FGDs the female students expressed concern that

most of them came from girls schools where they had very little interactions with male students, therefore they find it a challenge to be in a mixed institution with little or no rules. The students have the highest percentage of perpetrators of sexual violence because they are always together in classes and social places where the acts of violence occurs. Orientation week was cited to be one of the worst moments for the first year students in the institutions. For the colleges which have this kind of orientation where students have to wake up very early to run for fitness (morning runs), the second year men and some of the lecturers rape female students during the morning run.

The students gave a recommendation that there should be a consideration for female or male students institutions only. From the FGDs, female students cited teaching staff for demanding sex for marks. Some female students do not mind giving in for sex as long as they pass their exams with high grades. The findings agree with Quaicoe-Duho (2010) whose results established that some male lecturers in Ghana and Tanzania “consider it their right to demand sex for grades”, Akaab (2011) revealed that the majority of sexual violence act took place in the office of the lecturer. The findings by Imonikhe, *et al.* (2012) on teachers’ and students’ perception of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions revealed that sexual harassment is prevalent. Students cited some lecturers as furious people who must receive what they want from students and this is confirmed by findings of Gaba (2010) which revealed that sex for grades in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria is a reality and stressed that the male lecturers in particular, see themselves as tiny ‘gods’ and as such act unprofessionally and believe that they will not be caught.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study concludes that gender based violence is widespread in tertiary education institutions and students themselves are the main perpetrators of the acts of violence. On the basis of these findings the study recommends a formation of Gender Studies Institute (GSI) to address issues of gender based violence. The GSI as an integral unit of the institution should take an active role in contributing to the knowledge and functioning of the institution by facilitating a learning environment that is conducive to gender justice. A healthy interaction between women and men in class rooms, seminars, group work and at various fora in the institution should be encouraged.

This will help promote gender sensitivity and remove gender stereotypes and prejudices that lead to gender based violence.

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