

## **Impact of Child Abuse on Academic Performance of Pupils in Public Primary Schools in Kieni West Sub-County, Nyeri County.**

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**Abstract:** *Child abuse has become a global problem that needs to be tackled if children are to be given the right to education and freedom. Early exposure to adverse childhood experiences including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; neglect; violence; household dysfunction; parental substance abuse or mental illness; and an absent parent are strong predictors of poor academic performance. The main objective of this study was to investigate the impact of child abuse on the academic performance of pupils in public primary schools in Kieni West Sub-county, Nyeri County. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population for this study comprised 52 head teachers, 560 teachers and 2,275 pupils. A sample of 26 head teachers, 280 teachers and 228 pupils was selected using proportionate random sampling. Data was collected through questionnaires and interview schedules. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data and content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. Relationship between variables was tested using the Chi-square test. The findings of the study showed that pupils had low level of awareness of child abuse. Child abuse was found to affect school attendance, pupils' behaviour and learning disorders negatively and all the hypotheses were therefore rejected.*

**Keywords:** *Academic Performance, Child abuse, Learning disorder, Pupils' behaviour, School attendance*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Individual academic performance levels are affected by a host of factors outside of the classroom including home environments (Ramez, Widom, Browne, Fergusson, Webb & Sinow, 2009). Just as positive home environments of children can enrich their school experiences, negative environments can have a detrimental impact on both students' academic performance and their classroom behaviour. Ramez, et al. (2009) noted that one of the most potentially damaging of these environmental factors is child abuse. Taylor and Steward (2011) define child abuse and neglect as any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm. While child abuse may take many forms (e.g., sibling abuse, medical neglect, educational neglect), it is typically categorized into four domains: physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological or emotional abuse and neglect.

Child abuse comes in many forms, including sexual, physical, emotional, mental and neglect (Crosson, 2008). In America, every year more than 3 million reports of child abuse were reported (UNICEF, 2013). The United States had one of the worst records among industrialized nations – losing on average between four and seven children every day to child abuse and neglect. Child abuse can have many repercussions in a child's life, including impeding their growth and development. Unfortunately, the impact of child abuse can last a lifetime. One of the most critical consequences of chronic abuse is how it impacts a child's performance in school and interferes with the foundation a child needs to be successful throughout his or her school career (Crosson 2008). Children who have been abused and neglected tend to score lower than the general population on measures of cognitive capacity, language development, and academic achievement. Turton (2008) on a study in New York found a relationship between child abuse and poor academic performance and classroom functioning for school-age children.

As observed by Staff (2013) on a study in Australia, rates of substantiated child abuse and neglect have risen across the nation. An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2012 report found the number of children who were the subject of substantiated abuse rose from 31,500 to 37,800. In 2011-12, of the 170,000 notifications of suspected cases of child abuse and neglect reported, 46% were further investigated. About 37,800 of these cases were an increase from 31,500 the previous year. Emotional abuse was the most common, followed by neglect and physical abuse. The report found that girls were more likely to be the subject of sexual abuse than boys (Staff, 2013). According to Australian Childhood Foundation (2008) child abuse and neglect

have been shown to result in poorer academic performance, greater delinquency and substance abuse, and other behavioural problems that often result in poor labour market outcomes later in life. Overall, in the presence of abuse, production is lower than would otherwise occur and people who experienced abuse were slightly less likely to participate in the labour force and be employed full time, and slightly more likely to be unemployed or be employed part time. According to Polonko, Adams, Naeem and Adinolfi (2010) the issue of child abuse spreads to Middle East countries too. Findings also confirmed that child sexual abuse clearly does exist in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and is a cause for concern in MENA as it is throughout the world. Tyler and Brownridge (2008) added that child abuse and neglect (maltreatment) increases the risk of lower academic achievement and problematic school performance.

Potter (2010) found that early exposure to adverse childhood experiences affect the psychological, emotional and physical health of children. Other studies have also linked child abuse to poor academic performance. For example Sladea and Wissow (2007) provided evidence that childhood maltreatment is associated with emotional and behavioural problems throughout childhood suggested that maltreatment could lead to impaired academic performance in middle and high school. Coohey, Renner, Hua, Zhang and Whitney (2011) observed that negative health outcomes related to child maltreatment such as neglect, hunger, and all forms of abuse (i.e., sexual, physical, and emotional) are strong indicators of poor academic performance. Langsford, Miller-Johnson, Berlin, Dodge, Bates and Pettit (2007) also found out that early physical abuse affected behaviour of children and their academic performance. However, these studies have been conducted in other countries.

## **II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Child abuse has become a global problem and it has been established that many children in the developed world more so in America, are abused annually. This has extended to many African countries like South Africa and Nigeria (UNICEF, 2012). The case is no different in Kenya where thousands of children suffer child abuse per year (UNICEF, 2012). In Kieni West Sub-county, emotional, physical, sexual abuse, neglect and child labour are prevalent and such cases are reported to the Sub County Education Office on a monthly basis (Child Welfare Services, 2014). This is despite the declaration of the constitution of Kenya about children rights that children have a right to life, freedom and education (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). However, violation of children rights in form of child abuse is underreported and under-punished when discovered leading to high prevalence of child abuse.

Child abuse has been linked to poor academic performance. Apebende, Umoren and Ukppei (2010) for instance discovered that pupils who were not physically abused performed higher in primary science than those who were abused. Miller-Johnson, Berlin, Dodge, Bates and Pettit (2007) also found out that early physical abuse affected behaviour of children and their academic performance. Coohey, Renner, Hua, Zhang and Whitney (2011) observed that negative health outcomes related to child maltreatment such as neglect, hunger, and all forms of abuse (i.e., sexual, physical, and emotional) are strong indicators of poor academic performance. Sladea and Wissow (2007) also provided evidence that childhood maltreatment is associated with emotional and behavioural problems throughout childhood suggested that maltreatment could lead to impaired academic performance in middle and high school.

However, most of the cited local studies on child abuse have either been done in other regions in the country and they have been done in secondary schools or special schools. For instance, Muema (2012) found a link between child abuse and the academic performance of deaf children; Kemboi (2013) also found a positive relationship between child abuse and academic performance in children and Gathenya (2012) found out that child abuse negatively influenced academic performance. There was limited research linking child abuse to academic performance in public primary schools in Kieni West Sub-County thus creating a knowledge gap. Based on this background, it was imperative to study the impact of child abuse on the academic performance of pupils in public primary schools in Kieni West Sub- County, Nyeri County.

## **III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- i. To establish the level of awareness of child abuse among pupils in public primary schools in Kieni West Sub-County.
- ii. To determine the influence of child abuse on pupils' school attendance in public primary schools in Kieni West Sub-County.
- iii. To establish the relationship between child abuse and pupils' behaviour in public primary schools in Kieni West Sub-County.
- iv. To determine how child abuse contributes to learning disorders among pupils in public primary schools in Kieni West Sub-County.

### **Research Hypotheses**

- i.  $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between the level of awareness of child abuse among pupils and their academic performance
- ii.  $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between child abuse and pupils' school attendance
- iii.  $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between child abuse and pupils' behaviour
- iv.  $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between child abuse and learning disorders

## **IV. THEORETICAL LITERATURE**

### **Social learning theory**

This is one of the most influential models of parent-child relationships and closely associated with the ideas and findings of Bandura (e.g. Bandura, 1977). Broadly put, social learning theories argues that, children's real-life experiences and exposures directly or indirectly shape behaviour. The fundamental tenet is that moment-to-moment exchanges are crucial; if a child receives an immediate reward for his/her behaviour, such as getting parental attention or approval, then he/she is likely to do the behaviour again, whereas if she/he is ignored (or punished) then she/he is less likely to do it again (Twardosz&Lutzker, 2010). Other advocates have expanded this focus to consider the cognitive or 'mindful' processes that underlie the parent's behaviour (Putnam, 2006) and its effects on children. Whether the assessment and conceptual focus is on behaviour or cognitions, the model suggests that children learn strategies about managing their emotions, resolving disputes and engaging with others not only from their experiences, but also from the way their own reactions were responded to. For younger children especially, the primary source of these experiences is in the context of the parent-child relationship and the family environment.

Given its historical emphasis on altering negative, aggressive behaviour in children, models of parenting based on social learning theory have tended to emphasise parental conflict, coercion and consistent discipline. But more theorists have incorporated positive dimensions of parenting as a way of promoting child positive behaviour and affect, improving the pleasurable nature of parents' and children's interactions with one another (Lloyd, Mete & Grant, 2009). Social learning theory is applicable to this study because it brings about child-parent relationship which is the tenet of child abuse. Parents who have strong relationships with their children may not abuse their children while those with weak relationships tend to abuse their children. Strong relationships make children to rely on their parents when they need help and they also help parents to support their children in education. This enhances the children's academic performance. Poor relationships between parents and children which may have been caused by child abuse make children fear their parents. With this kind of relationship, children are unlikely to seek help from their parents because they fear them. Consequently, such children are unlikely to perform well compared to their peers with parental support.

## **V. EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

### **5.1 Pupils' level of awareness of child abuse**

According to Buxton (2010), at times children are not even aware that they are being abused or just being corrected by their parents. A study by Finkelman (2010) about child abuse in New York showed that the majority of pupils indicated that they were not aware of what child abuse entailed. After explaining to the participants about the types of child abuse, the majority of pupils indicated that they had experienced those acts of abuse, particularly corporal punishment both at home and in class, bullying, neglect through denial of food as punishment, verbal abuse and emotional abuse. This tally with findings by Bussien (2011) in Australia who found out that the majority of children thought that their abuse was normal treatment that adults had every right and duty to give to them because they were not aware that they were being abused. However, there is a very thin line between normal upbringing of children and child abuse particularly in most countries. Nonetheless, this study did not connect awareness of child abuse and the performance of the children.

Wasik (2011) on a survey of home visiting programs for abused and neglected children and their families in Korea, found out that two-thirds of the parents were whipping their children and 45% confirmed that they had hit, kicked or beaten them. However, 78% of the children in the study reported that this kind of treatment was normal for disciplinary actions. Another survey by Hoefnagels (2010) on mass media and disclosures of child abuse in the perspective of secondary prevention in Romania found that 4.6% of children were suffering severe and frequent physical abuse, including being hit with an object, being burned or being deprived of food. Nearly half of Romanian parents admitted to beating their children "regularly" and 16% to beating their children with objects. However, 64% of the children were unaware that what they were going through was abuse. The study did not link awareness of child abuse to the children's academic performance. However, the current study investigated the impact of child abuse on pupil's academic performance.

### **5.2 Influence of child abuse on pupils' school attendance**

Child abuse may affect the way children attend school. For example, America Finkelhor (2008) on a study on childhood victimization: violence, crime, and abuse in the lives of young people reported that experiencing abuse and/or neglect impacts children's school performance in multiple ways, including lower grades, increased absences, increased disciplinary problems and higher rates of school dropout. Finkelhor (2008) added that the school non-attendance for abused children was more than three times higher than that of their non-abused counterparts. These deficits appeared to exceed those of children suffering other forms of social disadvantage.

Research by International Labour Organization (ILO, 2012) on child labour as a form of child abuse found out that most child labourers begin working at a very young age, are malnourished, and work long hours in hazardous occupations; frequently they do not attend school. Short term, the most obvious economic impact of child labour at the family level is an increase in household income. Long term, the under-accumulation of human capital caused by low school attendance and poor health is a serious negative consequence of child labour, representing a missed opportunity to enhance the productivity and future earnings capacity of the next generation. Dunne (2007) on a study about schools and the production of gendered identities in Ghana and Botswana reported that over 50% of abused children experienced some type of difficulty in school, including poor attendance and disciplinary problems.

Nekesa, (2009) carried out a study on the influence of child labour on children's attendance and discipline in primary schools in Kampala District. The study was carried out after evidence of increased child labour in different parts of Uganda. The study found out that there was a strong positive correlation between child labour and school attendance. There were many cases of children who failed to go to school because of child labour. There were also more cases of indiscipline among children who experienced child labour. Ruto (2009) on a sexual abuse study in Kenya also noted that some abused children felt as if they were different from other pupils hence opted to stay out of school.

### **5.3 Influence of child abuse on pupils' behavior**

According to Crosson (2008), child abuse affects the way the abused children behave. Ward (2013) on a study about abuse affects school work in Britain found out that children who are abused and neglected at home are more likely than their peers to do badly at school, to have behaviour problems and to become victims of bullying. The study includes the finding that child abuse in the first five years of life almost triples a child's likelihood of having multiple physiological, behavioural and academic problems at school. These students may have a change in behaviour, such as increase irritability, aggression and anger. Their behaviours may be inconsistent. These students may show a change in school performance and have impaired attention and concentration and more school absences.

According to Herman (2012) on a study on trauma and recovery: the aftermath of violence from domestic abuse in India, abused and neglected kids are 25 per cent more likely to experience problems such as delinquency, teen pregnancy and teen drug use and 11 times more likely to be arrested for criminal behaviour as a juvenile. The findings further showed that 66 per cent of people in drug treatment programs reported being abused as children, and over 30 per cent of abused and neglected kids eventually victimize their own children. Children who get abused often feel isolated, fearful and untrusting, and these immediate emotional effects can transform into lifelong consequences, including low self-esteem, depression and relationship difficulties. According to Herman (2012) about 80 per cent of young adults who were abused as children met the diagnostic criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder at age 21, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders and suicide.

Shumba and Abosi (2011) on a study about the nature, extent and causes of abuse of children with disabilities in schools in Botswana were of the opinion that a traumatic event can seriously interrupt the school routine and the processes of teaching and learning. There are usually high levels of emotional upset, potential for disruptive behaviour or loss of student attendance unless efforts are made to reach out to students and staff with additional information and services. Another study in Sudan by Omer (2015) on the prevalence of child abuse and associated psychological and physical health problems showed that emotional maltreatment significantly correlated with most problem behaviours. Additionally, each form of child maltreatment had independent effects on depression, anxiety problems, low self-esteem and poor physical health. According to Government of Kenya (2007) adolescents who have experienced abuse might suffer from depression, anxiety or social withdrawal. African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) (2010) on a study on awareness and views regarding child abuse and child rights in selected communities in Kenya found out that victims of child abuse are known to be at high risk for engaging in risky behaviours and acting out in school. They might have problems socializing with other children and adults and completing or focusing on assignments.

#### **5.4 Contribution of child abuse to learning disorders**

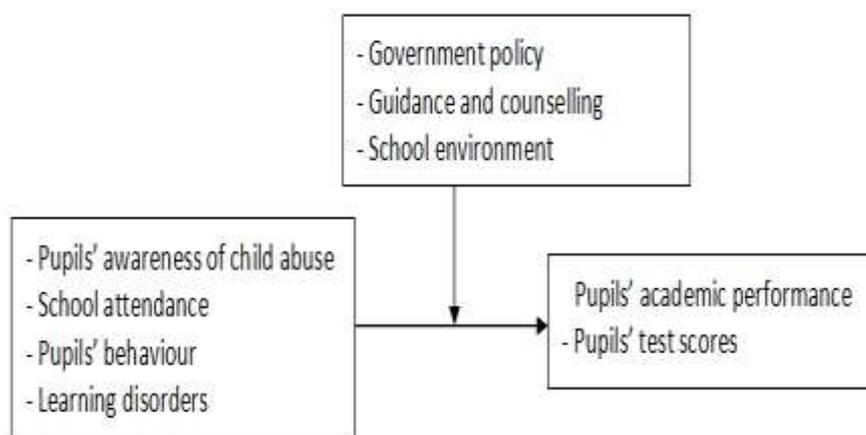
It is not surprising that children who have been abused are at significantly increased risk for a host of developmental and psychiatric problems, including internalising problems such as anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and posttraumatic stress disorder, and externalising problems such as aggression, impulsiveness, delinquency, hyperactivity and substance abuse (Turton, 2008). It has been assumed that many of these problems are the extreme end result of psychological attempts to cope with abuse. However, there has also been growing evidence that these problems may be a direct result of physical damage to the brain.

According to Maizura and Salwana (2010) on a study on intelligent interpretation and analysis of child sexual abuse forensic evidence; learning disabilities are among the conditions for which abused children are at increased risk. Some 30% of abused children have severe learning problems and almost as many suffer from attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. It is not surprising, therefore, that many abused children show poor academic achievement. Although few studies have shown direct links between emotional or sexual abuse and the development of LD, the brain changes caused by such abuse are similar to those that cause (or are at least implicated in) LD.

Research by Coyne (2014) on the link between child abuse and common learning disability in Toronto revealed that more than a third of dyslexic adults were physically abused as children. It found that 35 per cent of adults with the learning disability, most commonly characterized by difficulty reading, said they were physically abused by someone close to them before the age of 18. In contrast, only seven per cent of those without dyslexia reported similar abuse. Teicher, Tomoda and Andersen (2006) on a study about neurobiological consequences of early stress and childhood maltreatment make strong associations between child maltreatment and learning difficulties and/or poor academic achievement. Abuse and neglect in the early years of life can seriously affect the developmental capacities of infants, especially in the critical areas of speech and language.

UNESCO (2010) Education for All (EFA) global monitoring report on reaching the marginalized indicated that abuse and neglect was related to poor school achievement and delays in language development. The report added that chronic child abuse affected maths scores and reading scores negatively but higher intelligence and daily living skills (e.g., ability to dress oneself, ability to perform household tasks) were protective factors against poor math and reading performance.

#### **5.5 Conceptual Framework**



The dependent variable is pupils' academic performance. The independent variables are pupils' level of awareness, school attendance, pupils' behaviour and learning disorders. These have a direct link to pupils' academic performance. Children who are more aware of child abuse are more likely to report the same hence suffer from the same less than their counterparts who are not aware. On the other hand, children who are abused have a higher chance of school non-attendance. Pupils' behaviour may change due to child abuse and abused children may get learning disorders compared to non-abused children. All these affect the way pupils perform. However, factors like government policy, school environment and guidance and counselling may intervene. A supportive government policy on child abuse may reduce cases of child abuse in a school hence promote pupils' academic performance. Guidance and counselling may also help abused children to deal with the abuse hence reducing the effects of child abuse as well as encourage pupils to report when they are abused hence reducing

the cases of child abuse. Finally, a school environment that condones child abuse promotes it and this affects pupils' academic performance negatively while one that fights child abuse reduces it hence enhancing pupils' academic performance.

## **VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The research adopted a descriptive survey research design. Orodho and Kombo (2002) define a descriptive research design as a type of research method that is used when one wants to get information on the current status of a person or an object. It is used to describe what is in existence in respect to conditions or variables that are found in a given situation. This method was appropriate for this study because it was effective in collecting data from a large number of respondents from all the sampled schools.

### **Study Population**

The target population for this study comprised the head teachers and teachers and pupils of the 52 public primary schools in Kieni West Sub-County. There are 52 head teachers, 560 teachers and 2,275 class 7 pupils (County Education Office, 2014).

### **Sampling Procedure**

The sample was selected using proportionate sampling method. The sample size was in proportion to the target population whereby 50% of the schools were selected according to Ryan (2013). From the selected 26 schools, all the head teachers (26) were part of the sample. Among the 560 teachers, 280 which is 50% formed the sample. In addition, 228 pupils which is 10% also participated in the study. A sample of 50% was preferred because according to Gray (2004), the bigger the sample, the better it represents to target population. In total, the sample had 534 respondents.

**Table 3.1** Sample Size in Relation to Target Population

	Target Population	Percentage (%)	Sample size
Head teachers	52	50%	26
Teachers	560	50%	280
Pupils	2,275	10%	228

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedule and document analysis. A questionnaire was used to collect primary data from the teachers and pupils. The questionnaire was semi structured. The items of the questionnaires were based on the objectives of the study which were on level of awareness of child abuse, pupils' attendance, pupils' behaviour and learning disorders. The questionnaires had open and closed ended items accompanied by a list of possible alternatives from which the respondents selected the answer that they felt best suited their responses. They were appropriate for this study since it was dealing with a sensitive issue and they ensured anonymity of the respondents. These are easier to administer and economical in terms of time and money and are easier to analyse. An interview schedule was used to collect primary data from the head teachers. Interviews were appropriate for the head teachers as they were relatively few and interviews would allow collection of additional information regarding the topic of the study. Class 7 test scores were used as secondary data to test for pupils' performance because they were a standardized. A pilot study in two randomly selected public primary schools in Kieni East Sub-County (Chaka and Karundas primary schools) was conducted so as to test the validity and reliability of the instrument.

### **Data Analysis**

Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to analyse data from each objective of the study. Chi-square test was used to establish the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

#### **Response Rate**

The study had a sample population of 534 and out these, 448 respondents returned fully filled questionnaires. The response rate was therefore 83.9%.

#### **Level of awareness of child abuse among pupils**

##### **Pupils' awareness of child abuse**

**Table 4.1** Pupils’ Awareness Of Child Abuse

Response	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	75	32.9
No	153	67.1
Total	228	100.0

As shown in Table 4.1, 67.1% of the teachers reported that pupils were not aware of child abuse while 32.9% said that they were aware. This means that even if there were many pupils who suffered from child abuse, there could be many of them who did not know that it was child abuse. All the head teachers also rated pupils’ awareness of child abuse as very low or average.

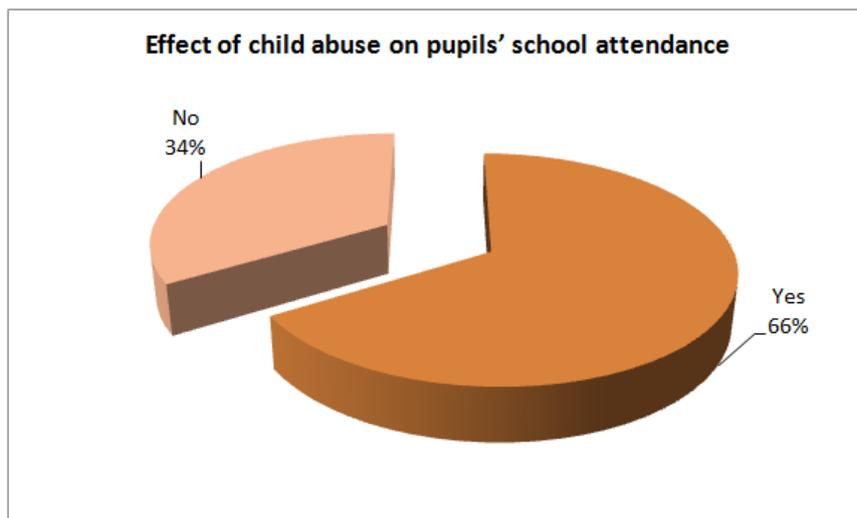
**Table 4.2** Chi-square test on level of awareness of child abuse

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	111.740 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	108.569	1	.000
Likelihood Ratio	114.525	1	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	111.249	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	228		

According to Table 4.2 the Chi-square value is 111.740 and p-value is 0.000 which is lower than 0.05. These results indicate that significantly the level of awareness of child abuse can influence the academic performance of pupils. The hypothesis was therefore rejected.

**Influence of child abuse on pupils’ school attendance**

**Effect of child abuse on pupils’ school attendance**



**Figure 4.1** Effect of child abuse on pupils’ school attendance

Majority of the respondents (66%) reported that child abuse affected pupils’ school attendance while 34% reported that child abuse had no effect on school attendance. This shows that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that child abuse affected school attendance.

**Table 4.3** Chi-square test on child abuse and school attendance

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	129.975 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	145.091	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	106.746	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	228		

According to Table 4.3, the Chi-square value is 129.975 and the p-value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. These results indicate that significantly child abuse can influence school attendance. The hypothesis was therefore rejected.

### Child abuse and pupils' behaviour

**Table 4.4** Child abuse affects pupils' behaviour

Response	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	186	81.6
No	42	18.4
Total	228	100.0

According to Table 4.4, majority of the teachers (81.6%) reported that child abuse affected the behaviour of the abused pupils. The other 18.4% of the teachers reported contrary. These findings showed that child abuse had an effect on the way pupils behaved.

**Table 4.5** Chi-square test for child abuse and pupils' behaviour

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	198.509 <sup>a</sup>	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	186.683	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	129.842	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	228		

According to Table 4.5, the Chi-square value is 198.509 and p-value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. These results indicate that significantly child abuse can influence pupils' behaviour. Based, on this, the hypothesis was rejected.

### Child abuse and learning disorders

**Table 4.6** Kind of learning disorders portrayed by abused children

Learning disorder	Frequency	Per cent
Reading problems	45	19.7
Mathematics problems	113	49.6
Writing problems	46	20.2
Poor concentration	24	10.5
Total	228	100.0

As shown in Table 4.6, abused children had reading problems according to 19.7% of the teachers, 49.6% said that abused children had mathematic problems while 20.2% said that such children had writing problems. The other 10.5% said that abused children had poor concentration. These findings showed that child abuse led to various learning disorders affecting learners' performance.

**Table 4.7** Chi-square Test on Child Abuse and Learning Disorders

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	206.971 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	130.923	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	71.162	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	228		

According to Table 4.7, the Chi-square value is 206.971 and p-value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. These results indicate that there was a statistically significant relationship between child abuse and pupils' learning disorders. The hypothesis was therefore rejected.

## VII. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Discussion of Findings

The first objective was on the level of awareness of child abuse among pupils. Findings showed that a significant number of pupils had suffered from child abuse at home. Majority of the teachers did not think that pupils were aware of child abuse. Most pupils did not report cases of child abuse since as majority indicated, nothing was done after reporting. The most common form of child abuse was verbal abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and child labour. Most pupils had not been taught about child abuse and the few who had been taught received the information from the media, church and friends and school. Majority of the teachers were of the opinion that awareness of child abuse affected pupils' academic performance. The Chi-square test results (p=0.000) indicated that the level of awareness of child abuse had a statistically significant influence on the academic performance of pupils. These findings were in line with Finkelman (2010) findings which showed that the majority of pupils were not aware of what child abuse entailed. They also concurred with Hoefnagels (2010)

who observed that 64% of the children were unaware that what they were going through (for example beatings) was abuse. They also corresponded with Coohy, et al. (2011) findings which showed that negative health outcomes related to child maltreatment such as neglect, hunger, and all forms of abuse (i.e., sexual, physical, and emotional) are strong indicators of poor academic performance. The findings also concurred with Langsford, et al. (2007) findings who found out that early physical abuse affected behaviour of children and their academic performance.

The second objective was on the influence of child abuse on the school attendance. Findings showed that most respondents were of the opinion that child abuse affected school attendance. Child abuse negatively affected school attendance among the abused pupils because physical injuries made the abused children go to hospital hence missing school. The abused pupils were also ashamed to go to school and child abuse caused poor performance which de-motivated pupils from attending school. Other abused pupils withdrew and feared teachers hence kept away from school. Child abuse was rated to affect school attendance to a great extent. The Chi-square test showed a p-value of 0.000 indicating that child abuse had a statistically significant influence on pupils' school attendance. These findings agreed with Finkelhor (2008) findings that school non-attendance for abused children was more than three times higher than that of their non-abused counterparts. This means that abused children were unlikely to attend school compared to the pupils who were not abused. This would affect their academic performance negatively. This was also in line with findings by UNICEF (2012) that severe physical injury and head trauma in particular may negatively impact learning, attendance and performance.

The third objective was on establishing the relationship between child abuse and pupils' behaviour. Findings showed that most of the respondents were in agreement that child abuse affected the way pupils behaved. As indicated by most respondents, abused pupils did not interact with other pupils, they feared their teachers, they were inactive in school, and some were hostile and aggressive, socially unapproachable, shy while others became bullies. Child abuse was found to affect pupils' behaviour to a great extent. The Chi-square test produced a  $p=0.000$  showing that there was a statistically significant relationship between child abuse and pupils' behaviour. This was in line with Crosson (2008) who declared that child abuse affected the way the abused children behave. These were also in line with Government of Kenya (2007) findings that adolescents who have experienced abuse might suffer from depression, anxiety or social withdrawal. They also agreed with ANPPCAN (2010) findings that victims of child abuse are known to be at high risk for engaging in risky behaviours and acting out in school. They might have problems socializing with other children and adults and completing or focusing on assignments. All these affect school performance negatively.

The final objective was on the influence of child abuse on learning disorders. Findings showed that all the respondents reported that child abuse affected pupils' learning negatively. The abused children were found to have various learning disorders like reading, writing and mathematics problems as well as poor concentration. Majority of the respondents reported that the abused and the non-abused pupils did not perform the same. However, majority were unaware of the connection between child abuse and learning disorders. Most pupils were of the opinion that non-abused pupils had an advantage over the abused ones. This shows that the pupils felt that child abuse affected learning negatively. The Chi-square test produced a p-value of 0.000 showing that child abuse had a statistically significant influence on pupils' learning disorders. This was in line with Coyne (2014) who revealed that most children with learning disorders had been physically abused as children. This showed that there was a link between child abuse and learning disorders.

## **VIII. CONCLUSIONS**

The study concluded that there was a significant influence of level of awareness about child abuse on pupils' academic performance. Although the pupils suffered from various types of child abuse, many were unaware that they were being abused. Child abuse was found to significantly influence school attendance because it increased absenteeism among the abused pupils. Child abuse affects pupils' behaviour negatively as abused pupils behaved differently and negatively from the non-abused ones. Child abuse affects learning disorders negatively with abused children having learning disorders and performing worse than the non-abused ones.

### **Recommendations of the Study**

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that the information on child rights in social studies is insufficient to teach about child abuse hence the Ministry of Education should ensure that child abuse is sufficiently taught. The school management, churches, media and non-governmental organizations should also be more vigilant in creating awareness about child abuse, not only among pupils but also among all school stakeholders and the community. The school management should strengthen their channels of reporting about child abuse as well as the way they handled different cases of child abuse. This would make it easier for the abused children to report abuse cases as well as cope better if abused and improve the quality of their lives.

Peer counselling among pupils should be encouraged as pupils can reveal secrets among their peers hence making it easier to take action.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The study was not exhaustive. As such, further investigation should be carried out to find out other factors which could be contributing to the poor performance among the learners in Kieni West Sub-County, Nyeri County.

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