

**Examination of Child Protection Practices in Primary Schools: A Case of Selected
Primary Schools in Mzuzu City in the Northern Education Division of Malawi.**

By

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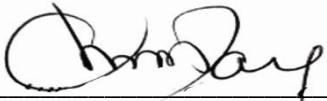
DECLARATION

I, **Banda Treazer (Sr.)** hereby declare that this study is my own work, and that it has not been submitted for a degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by complete references.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Sr. Cecilia Mzumara, Superior General of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (M.I.C.) who is my role model in life. She inspires me to be a hardworking person and to be courageous in facing the challenges of life. Through her generous sharing on academic grounds, I was enthused to choose and engage myself in the topic of this study. I also dedicate it to my parents who have been very supportive in my studies. May the Almighty God bless them all!

ABSTRACT

This study is about an examination of the child protection practices applied in primary schools. It draws from the scholarly arguments that children must be protected from all forms of violence, abuse and any form of maltreatment.

The study adopted a qualitative research design, an interpretivism paradigm and it was guided by grounded theory. Data was collected through document review, one to one interview of key respondents and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis and content analysis are the methods that were used to analyze the collected data. The study was conducted in four primary schools within Mzuzu City, in the Northern Education Division. Participants included headteachers, class teachers, learners, lead teacher for child protection and some members from Mother Group committee.

The study found out that primary schools do not have a unified child protection policy to function as a standardized guide in safeguarding children enrolled in their school. Nonetheless, each school uses its own initiatives to protect their learners from various forms of violence and abuse which eventually may affect their academic life. These include counseling of learners and teachers, meeting parents, provision of punishment to the perpetrators of school based violence, increased security within and around the school, and involvement of Mother Group.

Assessment of these child protection practices revealed that these practices are partially effective as their outcomes do not guarantee that learners are completely safeguarded from school based violence, or from home based violence and abuses. The study found out that some factors that limit the effectiveness of the practices include inadequate training for teachers, poor collaboration from some parents, and lack of skills for the Key stakeholders participating in child protection and financial constraints.

Most primary schools are not yet organized, they do not have established strategies and procedures on how to respond to safeguarding issues for the learners. In most primary schools teachers have not yet received any training on child protection. Consequently, much as they strive to safeguard learners through the child protection practices stipulated above, teachers lack expertise. There is need therefore to improve the child protection situation of primary school children. Teachers as well as key stakeholders for child protection, must be empowered through trainings and provision of necessary resources.

Key Words: Child protection practices, school based violence, home based violence.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CRC:	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DEM:	District Education Manager
ECM:	Episcopal Conference of Malawi
ETS:	Education and Teaching Studies Department
GIZ:	Gesellschaft for Zusammenarbeit
HBV:	Home Based Violence
HIV:	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
IACP:	International Association Conference of Police
MG:	Mother Group
MIC:	Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception
NGOs:	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPA:	National Plan of Action for Vulnerable Children in Malawi
PEA:	Primary Education Adviser
SBV:	School Based Violence
SDF:	School Development Fund
SIP:	School Improvement Plan

- SOFIE:** SOFIE is a three year Research Project supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC)
- SRGBV:** School-Related Gender-Based Violence
- UNESCO:** The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UN:** United Nations
- UNICEF:** United Nations Children's Fund
- USAID:** United States Agency for International Development
- VAC:** Violence against children
- WHO:** World Health Organization

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This study is about an examination of child protection practices in selected primary schools in Mzuzu. It draws from the scholarly arguments that children must be protected from all forms of violence, abuse and maltreatment (UNICEF, 2015). Malawi as a nation does not have a Child Protection Policy, instead it relies on a number of child related policies and Acts to cater for the protection of children in the country. There are also some non-state actors that have their own child protection policy such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Plan Malawi, faith based organizations like Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) and St. John of God. These non-governmental organizations implement the policy in their institutions and schools to ensure that children are safeguarded as they interact with them.

Cervancia et al. (2019) argue that the main goal of child protection policy or practices is to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence which impedes their holistic development. Violence against children (VAC) is a critical global problem that every country in the world faces and tries to eradicate. VAC comes in diverse forms that include neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional or psychological abuse, bullying, maltreatment and exploitation, cruelty and discrimination. Literature reveals that both boys and girls are vulnerable to violence, particularly younger children irrespective of ethnicity or socio-economic status (Cervancia et al., 2019). The experience of VAC does not have specific places where it emerges. It can happen anywhere at home, in school, communities, in religious gatherings, as well as online.

Batty (2005) stipulates that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) upholds global standards and gives every child the right to protection from abuse and exploitation. All the countries that consent the treaty commit themselves to protect children from all forms of

violence and to advance the rights of children principally to education, health and special care, security, privacy, and a decent standard of living (Batty, 005). Nations are legally bound by it and are expected to take the necessary legal, budgetary, administrative, and other measures to implement it. And Malawi is one of such countries.

Roche (2017), Ramiro et al., (2010) and Madrid et al. (2005) argue that globally, significant numbers of children experience maltreatment. However, preventive measures to child maltreatment are under researched and under-conceptualized. For instance, World Health Organization (WHO) (2016) and UNICEF (2015) stipulate that in the Philippines more than half of the children experience violence during their childhood, yet, policy and research on this topic remains in its infancy. Similarly, Chilangwa (2011) argue that in Zambia, the prevalence of Child abuse continues and it is a persistent part of life in rural and urban schools.

Likewise, UNICEF (2015) argues that in Nigeria approximately six out of every ten children suffer one or more forms of physical, sexual or emotional violence before reaching the age of 18, and more than 70 per cent of children experience violence repeatedly. UNICEF also observed that, usually the perpetrators of violence against children are persons the child knows and the violence often takes place where the child should be safe such as in their homes, in a neighbor's home, at school, and coming to or from school. Unfortunately, the majority of children do not speak out. They are silenced by fear, shame, stigma and a lack of knowledge of where to seek help.

The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi guarantees Fundamental Rights to all children in the country and empowers the State to make special provisions for children. As such the government of Malawi developed the National Children's Policy that aspires to produce an overall coordination of policies towards children, through mainstreaming the needs of children, (The Ministry of Gender; MALAWI, 2019). The Malawi government also has a Child Care,

Protection and Justice Act, that provides guidelines for parentage as well as the duties of children in the society, and a reference manual for child protection as a guide for social workers.

It is of paramount importance noting that the Malawi National Children's Policy aspires to coordinate a number of policies that concern children in Malawi. The Act, stipulates duties and responsibilities of parents towards their children. The reference manual contains guide lines for social workers whose focus is on the protection of children in the communities. But as of present the government of Malawi does not have a specific child protection policy for schools which can promptly guarantee the protection of children in schools.

This state leaves schools without specific guidelines and legislations to enable them safeguard learners effectively. There are a number of non-state actors that have their own child protection policy. These include, Plan Malawi, World Vision, Save the Children, and Faith Based institutions such as the Episcopal Conference of Malawi and St. John of God. However, it is worth noting that Policies for Non-Governmental organizations are developed for the purpose of responding to a specific mission of the organization.

Save the Children (2021) and National Plan of Action of the Government of Malawi (2015) reported that the child protection situation in the country remains dire. Based on the situation analysis conducted in 2013 by Save the Children, it was found that there were over 1.8 million vulnerable children in the country. As it is in many developing countries, the harsh reality is that children in Malawi are facing neglect, exploitation, abuse and violence which is against the future hope of the world. A child dies every 7 minutes as a result of violence (Save the Children, 2021).

Nyathi (2018) argues that in Malawi, Children account for over half of the country's population, yet their rights and needs are often seen as peripheral to development efforts. Poverty and child rights violation remain imbedded in Malawi (Nyathi, 2018). There is need

therefore for the government of Malawi to come up with a stand-alone policy or guide line hand book that can be guiding public institutions on how to protect and promote the rights of children.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Child protection is one of the key narratives that is taking the center stage among both scholars, state and non-state actors. Based on data from UNICEF (2020), half of the children aged between 13 and 15 are exposed to various forms of violence and abuse world-wide. In Malawi Child protection situation remains dire with over 1.8 million children experiencing various forms of violence (Save the Children, 2021).

Violence in and around schools is a violation of child rights that can cause serious life-long consequences on the child, impose negative socio- economic impact on communities, countries and the world. This is against the thinking that schools must be safe from all forms of violence. Hence, schools must be safe environments free from all forms of violence.

While such is the case, the real struggle in Malawian schools has been left to the schools themselves complemented by some non-state-actors such as Plan Malawi, ECM, St. John of God and CRS whose approach is guided by their own doctrines. Much as these offer complementary services, the absence of a national child protection strategy in the education sector, creates some loop holes. No meaningful scholarly attention has yet been made in this area. Hence, the focus of this study.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 Main objective:

The aim of this study was to examine the Child Protection Practices in the selected Primary Schools.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

Precisely the study aimed to:

1. Identify the child protection practices in selected primary schools in Mzuzu.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the child protection practices in the selected primary schools.
3. Examine factors that limit the effectiveness of the child protection practices and possible measures for their enhancement in Primary Schools.

1.4 Significance of the study

Findings of this study will act as an eye opener on the actual forms of violence and abuses primary school children are experiencing both at school and in their homes. They will raise the need to enact stiff strategies that will enable eradication of the experienced violence in order to ensure safeguarding primary school children. Henceforth, the findings will be shared with the District Education Manager (DEM) of Mzuzu City, the Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) of the different zones within Mzuzu City and the head teachers in the same zones. Apart from that, the findings will enrich the Malawian based literature.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

Due to my identity as a religious sister some of the key respondents in the two Church owned primary schools had some resistance to participate in the study. They could hardly draw a differentiating line between my identity as a student and as a religious sister who in their view may have had an intention of inspecting their schools. Nonetheless, after providing a thorough self-introduction and sharing with them the purpose of the study, they opened up and actively participated in the study. Data collected in the church owned schools was triangulated with the data collected from the government schools in order to ensure its validity.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives and the significance of the study. The next chapter discusses the main articles and reports reviewed in the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The current study aimed at examining the child protection practices in the selected primary schools in Mzuzu City. As such, this chapter presents a review of related scholarly literature and reports on child protection, on some strategies employed in schools to safeguard learners. It also displays various forms of violence and abuses faced by school going children. Literature review was conducted in order to allow related scholarly works inform and enrich the current study, as well as to reveal the gap that is existing in literature which could be filled by the current study.

2.2 Conceptualization of a child and child protection

According to WHO (2019) a Child is any person under the age of 18 years. Save the Children (2013) describes child protection as measures and structures for preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children. UNICEF (2015) stipulates that child protection entails safeguarding children from harm and that all children have the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation so that they can survive, learn, participate, play and develop. Save the Children reports that despite its dedicated child protection works and that of many other committed organizations, children all over the world continue to experience abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation every day, and grave violations of their rights continue to be witnessed.

This indicates that the efforts invested to ensure safeguarding children from harm are facing some challenges and have not yet fully achieved the desired goal. Likewise, in Malawi a considerable percentage of school-going children experience various forms of abuse within their system. Unlike other countries, one of the major contributing factors to the failure to fully

safeguard the children in primary schools in Malawi, could possibly be the absence of a National Child Protection Policy. The government of Malawi has left this role in the hands of NGOs such as Plan Malawi and Faith based Organizations to establish and implement Child Protection Policy, with an exception of the Malawi Police Service. Teachers in primary schools lack standardized strategies and principles to guide them in safeguarding children enrolled in their schools. This situation leaves primary school children vulnerable and at risk of experiencing violence and abuses. Malawian based literature does not explain this absence of a national child protection policy which could be guiding schools on child protection.

UNICEF (2015), reports that these violations are widespread yet, under-recognized and under-reported. It is therefore, suggested that solid data are needed to break the invisibility of child protection violations, to capture the true scale and extent of these phenomena, and to identify risk and protective factors. As UNICEF rightly puts it, this study gathered the needed data that will add to the local literature on the prevalence of various forms of violence primary school children are experiencing both at school as well as in their homes.

Besides, Kemoli and Mavindu (2014) followed by a report by Save the Children (2013) emphasized that for a long time, child protection in general has been perceived as a matter for the professionals specializing in social service, health, mental health, and justice systems. Child protection remains a duty to all, and more so a concern for other social scientists who contribute to the understanding of the concepts and strategies in child protection and the responsibility for adults and institutions with roles in ensuring the safety and the humane care of children under their care (Kemoli & Mavindu, 2014). Save the Children Sweden calls on everyone to take action and to engage and invest in child protection so that we fulfil our ambition to end all forms of violence against children.

The above scholarly allegations that child protection has been perceived as an issue for professionals, are also true to the mindset of most people in the designated sight of the current study. It is in the mind and even in the attitude of most Malawians to expect others to do certain things for them. Consequently, very few people view child protection as a crucial issue needing their attention and involvement.

Likewise, this study investigated the Child protection practices initiated by individual primary schools in the absence of the national child protection policy.

2.3 Child protection practices in schools

Reports by WHO (2019a); Policy Team (2021); UNESCO (2021a); and IACP (2007) on prevention of SBV suggest that there are several ways and strategies through which SBV can be prevented. They hold a common view that development and implementation of a comprehensive program strategizes prevent SBV. Such a program may comprise of social skills training, cognitive skills training, anti-bullying programs, drug and alcohol education, conflict resolution programs, anti-gang programs, training and technical assistance for teachers and staff, school rules, dealing with perpetrators as well as school physical security. Such programs have the ability to enable students develop healthy relationships, respect for fellow students as well as the adults they interact with and to refrain from violent behaviors.

UNESCO (2021b) describes the comprehensive program as a whole-school approach and stipulates that in order that the comprehensive response to SBV and bullying be effective, it should include a combination of policies and interventions. In addition to training and support for teachers, there must also be a strong political leadership, vigorous legal and policy framework to address SBV and bullying, partnership between the education sector and other government sectors and the NGOs.

Such a comprehensive program touches a wide range of the student's life depicting the possibility of making a considerable impact on the lives of students. If most schools could indeed develop and implement similar strategies, SBV would be reduced thereby certifying schools as safe and conducive environment.

Most primary schools in Malawi develop school rules and use them in dealing with perpetrators of SBV. However, there is minimal training for teachers on safeguarding learners.

Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) discuss that whole-school programme is another effective strategy for preventing SBV. They elaborate that whole-school programmes should be for long term and intensive. They must include mobilization of bullying -bystanders to be sympathetic with the victims rather than enforcing the bullies. They should be inclusive of training for parents and teachers must ensure that their boldness towards elimination of bullying is known and well understood by the students.

Much as whole-school programs are stressed, their implementation and achievement of the desired outcomes would greatly depend on the zeal and commitment of teachers who are key players. This implies that first and foremost teachers and all the staff of the school must be well trained, motivated and supported in their efforts to implement the programs.

WHO (2019a); Policy Team (2021) and IACP (2007) argue further that prevention of SBV can effectively be achieved through collaborative efforts by the school administrators and its stakeholders such as the teachers, parents, the school community, social and mental health professionals, law enforcement, security professionals, school based members, the business community as well as the emergency response personnel.

Volungis and Goodman (2017) debate that school connectedness may play a significant role towards prevention of SBV. They believe that efforts to prevent SBV ought to involve

measures that go beyond formal protocols. The quality of relationships between students and their teachers which builds their connectedness is key in preventing SBV.

Just as the informal curriculum is taken into consideration in education, the argument of the above scholars is worthy consideration. If teachers can develop and sustain health cordial relationships with their learners, it can encourage them to freely and trustingly report incidences of violence experienced or witnessed in the school. The more learners may report cases and teachers respond to each concern brought to them, the more schools can become safe environments for learners.

Provision of incentives to students for positive behaviour is another strategy that is deemed effective in eradicating SBV WHO (2019a) and IACP (2007). Instead of only focusing on punishing learners who enact various forms of violence on fellow learners, identification of well-behaved learners and awarding them in the presence of other learners can induce a change of mind for the learners who ill-treat others.

Besides that, IACP (2007) contends that controlled class size is another measure that may help in reducing school violence at classroom level. Sizeable classrooms are easily managed. They allow teachers to monitor the behaviour of individual learners in their class. Also learners control themselves because they are aware that the teacher can easily notice them if they misbehave or ill-treat classmates.

The researcher to the current study concurs with the above stipulation. Among the respondents to the current study, there were some who admitted that their classes are too big. Others have above 100 learners in a single classroom. They alluded that this condition makes it difficult for them to control all the learners. It was stressed by the teachers of the infant section that while the teacher is writing on the chalkboard or attending to some learners on one corner of the classroom, he or she realizes that learners on the other corner are ill-treating one another.

Provision of counseling services to students is another strategy for preventing violence in schools. Students with social development problems, family problems, substance abuse, gang tendencies, academic or emotional problems such as grief, depression and anger management and behavioral problems, must be encouraged to receive counseling services (WHO, 2019a).

According to Kourkoutas and Giovazolias (2015) counseling services that are child-centered appear to be effective in responding to students' problems. They stipulate that counseling has the ability to respond to the multiple students' challenges that teachers deal with such as bullying and other forms of school violence. Some studies and clinical reports portray that the externalized problematic behaviour of students, raises stress and confusion in teachers and eventually reduces their professional competence, disrupts the teacher-learner relationship, thereby negatively affecting the learning environment.

It is of paramount importance then for schools to ensure that counseling services are provided in their school and also that teachers are supported in their efforts to respond to students' challenges as a way of averting violence in their school.

Apart from that, Karmaliani et al. (2020) propagates a different strategy which they believe is effective in eradicating violence in schools. They argue that a well-designed and implemented '*Play-based life-skill intervention*' ably reduces peer violence. In their study conducted in public schools in Pakistan, they found that the intervention of the Right-To-Play which was delivered for a period of two years to children of grades 6 – 8, reduced peer violence both in schools as well as in the homes.

Since the intervention was experimented only in Pakistan, perhaps it can be tried also in other parts of the world to weigh its effectiveness and to further propagate and encourage other schools to apply it. At the same time, there could be a number of other aspects that schools would need to consider before implementing the intervention such as training of teachers who

would apply it, and also the availability of the resources that can be required. Nonetheless, if it worked well in Pakistan, perhaps it may also work in other parts of the world.

2.4 Effectiveness of the child protection practices in primary schools.

Atkinson (2013) deliberates that for child protection practices to be effective, they should contain the following seven principles; “Child protection is given strategic priority (despite financial pressures), Safeguarding is a shared responsibility and all staff understand how they contribute, Strong networks of communication between schools and local authorities, Established systems for regular on-going training and professional development, School systems enable staff to get to know their students well, through regular formal and informal contact, Students are aware of potential risks and have the language to voice concerns, A student-centered ethos.”

Findings of this study are partially in line with the arguments of Atkinson above. It was revealed that primary schools take initiatives to safeguard learners from various forms of violence. However, strategic priorities and systems for on-going training are not yet established.

UNESCO (2021) concurs with Maggie by proposing that development and implementation of a comprehensive program prevents SBV. Such a program may comprise training of skills, anti-bullying programs, anti-gang programs, school rules, dealing with perpetrators as well as school physical security.

The argument raised by UNESCO does not apply to the realities in the primary schools involved in this study. In the sense that, there is no such comprehensive program. However, each school has its own rules meant to respond to SBV.

According to McGill (2012) effective strategies for safeguarding children involve school-wide prevention, early intervention, and intensive services for students with significant emotional or behavioral needs, including those with disruptive, destructive, or violent behaviors. They extend beyond the schoolhouse door; they include administrators, teachers, families, students, support staff, and community agency staff. Everyone's support is important to safeguard our children.

Likewise, IACP (2007) agree with the above two scholarly works and states that, schools that have comprehensive violence prevention and response plans in place, plus teams to design and implement those plans, report improved academics, reduced disciplinary referrals and suspensions, improved school climate that is more conducive to learning, better staff morale, more efficient use of human and financial resources and enhanced safety.

A comprehensive violence prevention program would really be an ideal if primary schools in Malawi were developing it and implementing it. Unfortunately, most public schools in Malawi are far from reaching such levels of operating.

According to Joynes and West (2019), school violence occurs in a unique context in every school, making a one-size-fits-all approach ineffective. They believe that child protection policies or strategies help schools develop and carry out a violence prevention and response plan that can be customized to fit each school's particular strengths. Such a plan includes identifying and understanding the problem of school violence and its relationship to school climate, building a school-wide foundation that prevents most problems from occurring, recognizing, reporting, and using the early warning signs effectively and developing interventions to respond to students with troubling behaviors.

The argument of Joynes and West are in correlation with the findings of the current study especially their point that the occurrence of school violence is unique and that one-size-fits-all

approach may not be effective for all the schools. This study found that each of the four schools involved in the study had school rules, however, they were not uniform and the manner of applying them varies according to each school.

2.5 Factors that limit the effectiveness of the child protection practices in Primary Schools.

Hudson et al., (2019) Indicate that lack of capacity building is one of the factors that may hinder the effectiveness of the child protection strategies. They proponent that there is need to invest in skills and competencies that are sustainable. Training, peer learning, information, guidance, project management skills and other such interventions could all have apart to play in determining the effectiveness of the employed measures.

Findings of this study do not correspond to the argument of Hudson et al. in the sense that the selected schools under study are struggling to invest on training their key stakeholders particularly in this area of child protection.

Policy Team (2021) stipulate that there are numerous factors that may hinder the effectiveness of the established measures in ensuring the protection of children in schools. They outline a number of factors such as lack of strong leadership, poor family and community involvement and unsafe school physical environment.

The current study partially correlates with the discussion of Policy Team in the sense that on the one hand, some primary schools are failing to ensure safety of learners due to unsafe physical environment. On the other hand, some schools are making efforts to work with the community around their schools.

2.6 Violence in schools

Cervancia et al. (2019) and Roca-Campos et al. (2021) view Violence against children (VAC) as a crucial global problem that most countries in the world face and are trying to eliminate. They argue that school violence and bullying is a worldwide health problem that affects about 246 million children and young people every year. Likewise, Council of Europe (2021) discuss that the display of violence in school is expressed in various forms such as neglect, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, maltreatment, exploitation, cruelty, discrimination, bullying, intimidation and repression.

The findings of this study disclosed close similarities with the various forms of violence perceived by the above scholars. Through the one-to-one interviews, focus group as well as the review of documents, it was noted that similar forms of violence and abuses are experienced by Primary school children in Malawi, and that they are perpetrated by fellow learners, teachers, both biological or step parents and guardians.

Cervancia et al. (2019) argue that violence affects all children regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic status. According to United Nations (2016), about one billion children have experienced several sexual violence, emotional violence, bullying, or have witnessed violence in the past years, and almost three quarters are in Asia. Cervancia et al. (2019) debate further that around half of all children involved in bullying, they are both victims and perpetrators, and that they are the most troubled of all children involved in this manifestation of violence. According to their perception, among the perpetrators, boys are more likely to engage in physical bullying, while girls most often engage in verbal forms of harassment of their peers.

On the centrally to the perception of the above scholars, in Malawi both boys and girls across the infant, junior and senior sections of the primary schools, engage in physical bullying and verbal harassment towards fellow learners.

Nonetheless, Psaki et al. (2017) and USAID (2015) hold mixed views on the effects of school-violence on education in Malawi. They have a consensus that violence at school is a common experience for both girls and boys. Yet, they have a different view when it comes to the effects it presents on students. For example, Psaki et al. (2017) argue that there is little evidence that school violence disrupts schooling as expected. In other words, Psaki et al perceives that violence in school does not impact students in any negative way.

On the controversy, USAID reports that many students who experience violence subsequently miss school. According to the studies USAID conducted in 2015, 22% of female students and 4% of male students miss school due to sexual violence, 10% of female students and 12% of male students miss school due to physical violence by classmates, 21% of female students and 14% of male students missed school due to physical violence by teachers.

Nonetheless, Psaki et al. (2017) deliberate further that violence at home is also common in Malawi, and may disrupt schooling for both girls and boys but in different ways. Girls are more likely to drop out, while boys are more likely to be absent as a result of domestic violence. Understanding the impact of widespread violence is crucial, both to protect young people, and to avoid reversing the tremendous progress made globally in increasing school enrollment.

From the opinions presented by USAID and Psaki above, it can be seen clearly that both boys and girls absent themselves from school as a consequence of the experienced violence. This is true to the findings of this study. It was observed that most children who experience HBV absent themselves from school. Some learners come late to school, while others are exhausted and sleepy in class. In the end, they do not concentrate in class, some of them fail to catch up with their peers and finally they do not do well in their termly or yearly examinations. Their poor academic performance becomes a hindrance for excelling in their education.

WHO (2019) reported that preventing violence in the broader society can directly benefit the core aim of schools to educate children, foster high-quality lifelong learning, and empower learners to be responsible global citizens. This is because in schools, the provision of education and organized activities are themselves powerful protection against violence.

Besides that, Council of Europe (2021) view violence in schools as a threat that creates insecurity and fear among learners. This condition harms the general school climate and infringe pupils' right to learn in a safe, unthreatening environment. Schools cannot fulfil their role as places of learning and socialization if children are not in an environment free of violence. Cervancia et al. (2019) deliberates further in the same line that Children who are victims of abuse tend to develop low self-esteem, feel sad and fearful, avoid interaction with other people, and experience anxiety attacks. Most likely such children may not experience a progressive and productive life as they grow. This would eventually result into a poor productive society. According to Council of Europe, every child has the right to live free from physical and psychological violence. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires states to take all appropriate measures to protect the child from violence.

In addition to the violence perpetrated among learners, this study revealed that learners in some primary schools are learning in fear. Their school environments are threatened by some crews and gangs. This condition is also harming the general school climate and is infringing the rights of the children to learn in a safe environment.

2.7 Bullying in school

Jan (2015) and Provis (2012) advocate that bullying has a significant and endless problem in the lives of school going children. They argue that bullying affects both the perpetrators and the victims, as well as the bystanders. Bullying may include verbal and physical assaults, threats, 'jokes' or language, mockery and criticizing, insulting behavior and facial expressions.

They argue further that bullying involves repeated acts over time attempting to create or enforce one person's or a group's power over another person or group which is an imbalance of power. This could be social power and or physical power. They deliberate further that bullying can be displayed in three basic forms of abuse namely emotional, verbal, and physical. Bullying typically involves subtle methods of coercion such as intimidation.

From the arguments, one may presume that indeed bullying is a subtle form of abuse that may threaten the weak children who are targeted by their stronger counterparts. In a school where bullying exists, it may imply that children are not safe, children are facing challenges that may block them from benefiting from the education offered if fear overwhelms them.

Chandran and Madhavan (2018) perceive the occurrence of bullying as mainly taking place within the school specifically in the playground, classroom, between classroom blocks, in the toilets or while commuting to and from school. According to the scholars, bullying is specially observed in primary school level. Bullying happens between large numbers of children when gathered together and tends to arise mainly when there is least adult supervision.

The latter two scholars have raised pertinent issues in their arguments above. The specific places they have indicated as corners where bullying takes place, are indeed risky areas. It is less likely that teachers in the school visit such areas. This situation leaves children at high risks of being bullied with mounting sentiments of insecurity. The current study investigated in four local Malawian primary schools and it established that indeed bullying is prevailing mostly in class rooms, during break time, at the playground, at the toilets and on the way back home when learners knock off. It outlined further that primary schools employed various measures to safeguard children from bullying such as counseling, meeting parents, punishments and increased security in schools.

Rigby and Thomas (2010) argue that bullying creates barrier to learning with negative outcomes on part of both students and institutions. According to their studies, this is the case because those who are directly or indirectly involved in bullying engage in abusive behavior while those who are bullied may opt to regularly absent themselves from school. They argue further that bullying among students not only decreases their academic performance but also causes mental health problems and physical injury.

2.8 Physical abuse

Reports by the South African Government (2021); the United States Children's Bureau (2019) and SOFIE Malawi (2009) view Physical abuse as consisting of Physical violence that occurs when one or more individuals deliberately perpetrate physical harm or pain on another person. They argue further that Physical abuse is a non-accidental physical injury to a child caused by a parent, caregiver, or another person responsible for a child. Such injury is considered an abuse regardless of whether the person intended to hurt the child or is a result of excessive physical punishment (Melinda 2020).

Many physically abusive parents insist that their actions are simply forms of discipline measures to make children learn to behave. Yet, there is a big difference between using physical punishment to discipline someone and physical abuse. According to the studies conducted by US Children's Bureau (2019), Physical abuse include; scratching or biting, pushing or shoving, throwing, grabbing, choking, shaking, hair-pulling, slapping, punching or hitting, use of a weapon; gun, knife, or other object, and use of restraints or one's body, size, or strength against another person. Physical violence also includes encouraging other people to do any of the above acts on another person.

In the above arguments, among the various examples of the forms of physical abuse outlined, there are some that may not be observed in the location of this current study. For instance, use

of weapon such as gun is a situation that does not happen among school going children in Malawi. Similarly choking is also a rare form of physical abuse to be registered in Malawi. Surprisingly, this study has established that in some schools there are some learners who under the influence of their membership to a crew, carry various weapons such as knives, nails, metals, hammer and different sharp objects. The objects are used to harm or threaten fellow learners who are their targets or innocent learners just for the sake of instilling fear in them or provoking others to fight with them.

Corporal punishment is a form of physical violence against children. Initially its practice in schools is discouraged. However, some educators still use it despite the knowledge that it is a violation of the rights of children. This current study also found out that some teachers in primary schools, are still using corporal punishment disregarding the global restrictions.

2.9 Theoretical framework

This study was informed and guided by the Grounded theory which focuses on lived experiences of people in the real world. The theory was advocated by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Creswell, 2012). Grounded theory is a process of collecting and analyzing qualitative data to generate categories in order to study a natural phenomenon that appear relatively complex, poorly controlled and cluttered (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Among the key characteristics of the grounded theory, those that informed and guided this study include theoretical sampling, constant comparison of codes and themes, categorization of codes, memo writing and generation of the core categories (Astalin, 2013).

Theoretical sampling guided the on-going process of coding the data that was collected from the four primary schools engaged in the study, comparing it, and grouping similar data into categories and core categories. This process enabled the selection of the most important data that eventually permitted the identification of the child protection practices the selected primary

schools are applying to safeguard learners from SBV, HBV and abuse. Since this was an on-going process, theoretical sampling was stopped when theoretical saturation was achieved. Thus, when no more new ideas were extracted from the information given by the respondents.

The theory guided the researcher to keep returning to the original data source in order to attain in-depth data and to continuously keep checking and rechecking the generated categories. It guided the researcher to examine data, to develop categories, to refine categories into core categories, to compare the original data with the emerging categories and finally to identify the core categories as the main child protection practices that are applied across the four primary schools under study.

Creswell (2012) indicates that in studies where grounded theory is applied, data collection and data analysis processes are woven through the research process. Guided by this understanding, collection of data and data analysis were done concurrently in the study. Eventually, this process enhanced the identification of the child protection practices primary schools are using, assessing their effectiveness and the examination of the factors that are limiting their effectiveness.

2.10 Conclusion

From the articles, documents and various reports reviewed in this chapter, what comes out commonly is that despite the efforts made by various organizations and social workers on child protection, children world-wide still experience various forms of violence and abuse. Equally, findings of this study revealed that even though primary schools in Malawi are applying various child protection practices, learners still experience various forms of violence and abuse.

Further, literature suggests that a comprehensive programme must be established in schools in order to ensure safeguarding students. This proposition is in controversy with the realities revealed by the findings of this study. None of the four primary schools engaged in the study

demonstrated the existence of a well-established comprehensive program. The absence of such a program can be assumed as the main contributing factor that leads to the partial effectiveness of the child protection practices applied in primary schools in Malawi.

This chapter has reviewed related articles and reports that examines the child protection situation world-wide. It has appraised literature that stipulates strategies for prevention of SBV and safeguarding children from all forms of violence and abuse. Also, the chapter has presented the theoretical framework that informed and guided the study. The next chapter outlines the methodologies that were used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The study examined the child protection practices that are applied in selected primary schools. This chapter presents the approach and the paradigm of the study, the research site as well as the sampling techniques that were used in the study. Further the chapter outlines the methods and tools through which data was collected and analyzed.

3.2 Research approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. This is an approach that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems (Daniel, 2016). It is an approach that gathers participants' experiences, perceptions and behaviour. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative approach at its core, asks open-ended questions whose answers are not easily put into numbers., instead, it answers the how and why problems. Qualitative research has the ability to explain processes and patterns of human behavior that can be difficult to quantitate.

Consequently, qualitative approach was deemed applicable to this study that focused on examining the practices primary schools are using to protect learners from various forms of the violence, a phenomenon children experience both at school as well as at home.

3.3 Research Paradigm

Constructivism paradigm was applied in this study so as to study human behavior in the daily life rather than in the controlled environment. According to Lodico et al., (2006), constructivists assert that all knowledge comes from our experiences and reflections on those experiences.

Likewise, Cohen et al. (2018) stipulates that constructivism paradigm builds knowledge from understanding individuals' unique viewpoints and the meaning attached to those viewpoints.

The basic assumption guiding the constructivism paradigm is that knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process and, the researcher should attempt to understand the world lived experience from the point view of those who live in it (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Therefore, constructivism paradigm enhanced gathering of detailed data from the lived experiences of the informants of this study. The collected data was triangulated through data collection instruments such as open-ended questions and audios from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Eventually, the child protection practices that are used in primary schools in Malawi were identified from the data itself.

3.4 Research design

According to Creswell (2012), research design is viewed as the overall plan that spells out the manner in which the research is apprehended, effected and the modality through which the findings will be put together. In the case of the current study, a qualitative research design was used. Data was collected through diversified strategies in order to validate the findings. These include interview of key informants who were selected purposively, document review, focus group discussion, recording and transcription of the conversations. Thematic analysis and content analysis are the two methods that were used to analyze the collected data.

3.5 Research Site, Population and Sampling Techniques

3.5.1 Research site

The study was conducted in four Primary schools in the Northern Education Division within Mzuzu City. The schools were paired based on location and in view of a possibility that a pair

may reveal similar forms of violence experienced by the learners who live more or less in the same vicinity. The prevailing incidents were to be compared in terms of similarities and differences of the forms of violence, abuse and the child protection practices employed by teachers in each school.

3.5.2 Population and sample

According to Creswell (2012), a target population is a group of people who share specific characteristics and who the researcher is interested in examining. The current study was interested at the implementers as well as the beneficiaries of the child protection practices in the selected primary schools. Therefore, the targeted population were the head-teachers, all the teachers and all the learners in the targeted four primary schools. The identification of the population for the current study is in line with (Saldana and Leavy, 2011) who argue that study population is the group of elements from which you actually draw your sample. Further, they argue that target population refers to the total group of population units from which the sample is to be drawn.

The research sample comprised of key informants who were purposively selected. It encompassed 10 class teachers, 3 head teachers, 1 lead teacher for child protection, 3 members of the Mother Group, and 4 focus groups that were conducted with some learners selected from standard 3 to 6 comprising of both boys and girls.

3.5.3 Sampling techniques

Two techniques were used in this study namely; purposive sampling and Snowball sampling. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the two pairs of the Primary schools from two different zones within Mzuzu City. In each pair there was one school that is government school and another one which is a mission school. Snowball sampling was utilized to reach out to specific class teacher, and the learners who provided relevant information to supplement the

data collected from the head teachers, lead teacher for child protection and the reviewed documents identified purposively.

Etikan (2017) and Gentles et al. (2015) argue that purposive sampling technique is grounded on the judgment of the researcher as to who would provide the best information towards the achievement of the objectives of the study. It permeates selection of a sample that is most useful to the purposes of the research. They argue further that this technique centers on the premise that seeking out the best cases for the study produces the best data, and research results are sourced directly from the cases sampled. The researcher of this current study focused on the people capable of having the required information, who would also be willing to share it. Hence the choice of these two sampling techniques.

3.6 Data collection methods and tools

Data was collected through in-depth interviews of key informants and document review. Tools that were used include guiding questions for interviews and focus group discussions, an audio recorder and a writing pad. The interview guides are attached to this study as appendices.

In-depth interviews were conducted at two different levels for the purpose of validating the collected data. Namely one-one interviews and focus group discussions. One-to-one interviews were conducted with the headteachers, lead teacher from the child protection committee and with the class teachers. While focus group discussions were done with learners and the members of the Mother Group (MG) committee.

Headteachers provided more detailed information on child protection issues across all the three sections of infant, junior and senior sections in primary schools. Most class teachers provided class room level information with a few of them who also shared vast information beyond their class room on how their schools handle safeguarding issues for their learners. Members belonging to the two committees as stipulated above, shared the procedures they use in

handling child protection matters emanating from SBV as well as HBV. They also outlined the outcomes of their interventions as well as the challenges they face in striving to safeguard learners.

Four focus group discussions were conducted in all the four primary schools engaged in the study. Each group had twenty learners comprised of both boys and girls from four classes namely standard three, four, five and six. Some learners belonging to the above classes were purposively selected. These were deemed capable of expressing their real experiences of the child protection practices their schools are using to protect them from the various forms of violence they and their fellow learners experience.

Richards and Lyn (2014) and Paradis et al. (2016) commend the choice of the methods and tools that were applied in this study. They argue that interviews are used to gather detailed information on people's experiences in understanding social phenomena. Interviews may offer insights you never expected would come your way.

Consequently, interviews were deemed a vital tool to enable the collection of in-depth information from the targeted respondents on their experiences of implementing the child protection practices initiated by their specific schools, on the uprising cases of violence in their schools, on how they handle such cases in order to continue safeguarding the children, and on the effectiveness of the child protection practices they are using.

3.7 Data analysis methods

This study adopted two data analysis methods namely; content analysis and thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) and Nowell et al. (2017) indicate that thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions. It is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting

themes found within a data set. The latter scholars believe that a rigorous thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings.

Nowell et al., (2017) argue further that thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights. Thematic analysis is also useful for summarizing key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organized final report.

Alongside the guidance obtained from the grounded theory, thematic and content analysis facilitated the process of examining the collected data, identification of common topics and ideas that came up repeatedly. Enabled familiarization with the data, coding, categorizing codes into meaningful themes, naming and defining themes, reviewing themes, and eventually to come up with the write up of the findings.

This process enabled the identification of the major themes which in this study are the actual child protection practices primary schools are using to safeguard learners. It facilitated the assessment of the effectiveness of the identified practices as well as the examination of some factors that limit their effectiveness. Henceforth, the analysis methods employed in this study facilitated the analysis and the summarization of the key features of the large amounts of the collected data. They enabled a well-structured approach of handling data and the organization of this final report.

3.8 Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness of the study and also to reduce the effect of researcher's biasness, the researcher ensured that data collection as well as data analysis was conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the

process is credible (Nowell et al., 2017). According to Gunawan (2015), data analysis conducted in a systematic approach can be transparently communicated to others. Henceforth, member checking, triangulation, detailed transcription, coding, memo writing, content and thematic sampling and analysis were utilized.

3.9 Ethical consideration

The study systematically and carefully adhered to Ethical consideration throughout the process especially before, during and after the collection of data. The proposal of the research underwent ethical clearance at the research department of Mzuzu University (Reference can be made to Appendix 1). The researcher obtained permission from the University through the department of Education in Teaching Studies, (reference can be made to Appendix 2).

Similarly, permission was given from the DEM s' office as well as from the head teachers of the schools that formed research site of this study, (Ref: Appendix 3). The researcher had the consent of the respondents and all the informants were informed of confidentially pertaining to their personal identification as well as about the information they shared with the researcher.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research approach, the paradigm and the theoretical framework that guided the study. Further, the chapter has presented the research site of the study and the sampling techniques that were applied. Data collection methods have also been highlighted in this chapter as well as the ethical consideration and the methods that were used to analyze the collected data. The next chapter contains the presentation and discussion of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study was to examine the child protection practices in the selected primary schools within Mzuzu city. This chapter presents the results of field work. It discusses the findings and incorporates related scholarly work. The chapter contains data that was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and review of documents. The results are presented in the order of the three objectives of the study.

4.2 Child protection practices in primary schools

Guided by the characteristics of the grounded theory specifically of thematic sampling, constant comparison of codes and generation of core categories of the collected data, five core categories were identified as the main child protection practices the four selected primary schools are using to protect learners. These core categories are as follows: counseling, giving punishment to the perpetrators of SBV, meeting parents, increased security within and around the school, and involvement of the mother group. These practices are applied across the infant, junior and the senior sections of the primary school.

4.2.1 Counseling

Most schools use counseling as a tool to safeguard the victims of school based violence (SBV). This practice is also used as a tool to reform the behavior of the perpetrators. McLaughlin Colleen et al. (2013) perceive counselling as an effective strategy for alleviating problems caused by children with emotional, social and behaviour difficulties.

Counseling permits early interventions for reformation of the behaviour of children who intentionally or subconsciously maltreat others. Most primary schools hold this belief and

treasure counselling as the most practical measure for reducing SBV thereby creating safe environment in the school for the rest of the learners.

Counseling enables teachers to respond to various forms of violence experienced among learners and to inquire more about the violent case from the victims, eye witnesses as well as from the perpetrators. Such interrogations help them determine the causes of the incidence, to identify the contributing factors to the incidence and to provide proper support and guidance to the victim, to the perpetrator as well as to the eye witnesses.

Informants explained further that counseling is also utilized in trying to eradicate the bullying behaviour in the school. Primary school children bully fellow learners for various reasons and in different situations. For instance, if someone performs better in class than the bully, he or she is bullied. Some class monitors are bullied by noise makers for reporting them to the class teacher who punishes them. Quiet children are also bullied for no reason. In some instances girls in the senior section are bullied for refusing to engage themselves in a boy-girl relationship. Some learners bully others because they are influenced and empowered by their membership to a crew.

The study revealed that there are various forms of SBV that are experienced among primary school children. These include: bullying, beating, spitting, stealing, snatching, pushing, smuggling porridge, frightening, revenging, mocking, name calling, fighting, laughing at one another, forced boy-girl relationships, boys watching girls at the toilets, ganging up against fellow learners, exchanging strong-vulgar words among boys and girls.

Children who experience such forms of school violence are traumatized, some start to dislike school, develop fear, and some of them drop in their academic performance. Gupta (2022) stipulates that people who are traumatized, their brain switches to survival mode which affects their concentration and the ability to pay attention to the present activity. In the long run,

children who experience school violence during their primary school level, may develop psychological distress that can affect further levels of their education.

Gupta (2022) argues that reasons for exerting violence on others are not simple nor are they straightforward. Societal life today is greatly affected by the social media, therefore it can also be assumed that in addition to these reasons, some children may be replaying what they saw on the media, while others may replay the violence they experience at home.

Therefore in the attempts to respond to such situations, teachers utilize counseling. An informant explained;

“We counsel the bully and urge him to stop such a behaviour, we also frighten him that we shall call his parents and we shall give him a transfer.”

An informant stated that:

“We usually call all of them together and we question them. Often the bullies refuse the accusation at the beginning but when we insist and frighten them, then they start to explain that they were revenging on something that the victim may have done to them. Or that they beat their friend because he or she refused to share them some food, or that someone stepped on them be it accidentally or deliberately”.

On the utilization of counseling in response to cases of learners ganging up against fellow learners, a respondent explained that;

“Some learners plan and gang up to beat a fellow learner when they knock off. So at times we become aware of this in seeing that a certain learner is just roaming around in the school instead going home after knocking off.

When we inquire more that is then you find that the child explains that some fellow learners have planned to beat him up so he is passing time in the school to avoid finding them still on the way waiting for him.

So the following day we call the learners who were mentioned to have gang up. We counsel them, and perhaps give them a kind of a punishment. But then it becomes as if we have made the situation worse for the victim. So for the victims some absent themselves more from school in fear that they will be treated badly by the gang.”

Counseling is also used to respond to some forms of violence experienced by learners when they go to receive porridge. The study revealed that some primary schools are well organized and are procedural in the manner children receive porridge. In such schools, children receive porridge class by class and there are some teachers who monitor the process. Whereas in schools that are less organized, children smuggle and push one another as they queue to receive porridge. Older children push younger ones to get through the queue so that they can receive the porridge earlier than others.

At other times when the children realize that the prepared porridge is in smaller quantity and may not be enough for everybody, they push one another so that they can get a share before it finishes. Besides that, in some schools that are on open grounds, some older boys come from elsewhere and snatch porridge from the children. In this instance, the child loses both the porridge and the cup because every child brings a cup from his or her home.

Hence teachers employ counseling to reprimand those who violate the right to access food of others, as well as to console, support and encourage the victims.

Besides, informants expressed that counseling is applied in their attempt to eradicate the behaviour of laughing at fellow learners when one fails to read properly or responds wrongly to the teacher’s question;

“We advise them not to be doing that because they are all learning, so if they laugh then they are discouraging their friend from attempting to respond to questions in class.”

Counseling is a practice that help teachers to support the victims of school-based violence. It enables them to encourage the victims and to assure them of their safety in the school. Also, this practice provides emotional healing to the victims.

An informant explained:

“In so doing, the one who was bullied feels better and emotionally is healed because children feel better when they know that the one who was troubling them has been talked to by adults. Also, the victim is healed, forgives and feels that justice has prevailed since counseling has taken place.”

Also one of the class teachers said

“Through counseling I encourage the child who is a victim to continue coming to school and assure him/her that the bully will be handled accordingly.”

The impact of violence and bullying in primary schools may lead to lasting consequences on the educational, and emotional life of the children affect. Victims may not feel safe to be in the school. They may lose their sense of belonging to that school and eventually their zeal and interest to engage oneself in academic activities diminishes.

Learners who are witnesses of school violence or bullying tend to feel bad for failing to stop it. Psychologically they get traumatized and may develop a thinking that schools are not a safe place for them. The experience may lead to academic stagnation or continued struggles in one’s education. A report by UNESCO (2021b) agrees with this notion and emphasizes that primary schools must employ comprehensive strategies and interventions to violence and bullying in order to effectively safeguard children.

Apart from that, the child protection practice of counseling is also used by Head teachers to correct the misconduct of the teachers, particularly those who use corporal punishment, report late for duties and for those who absent themselves regularly from duties.

Primary school children experience corporal and other forms of punishment effected by teachers in the attempt to reform their characters. Some children are punished for coming late to school while others are punished because of their misbehavior. Those who bully fellow learners, make noise in class or portray any misbehavior; are pinched, whipped or beaten by teachers. If their offense is deemed grave, they are requested to sweep or slash the school surroundings, plant flowers or dig trash holes.

Unfortunately, some learners come late to school because of their tough situation at home. This category of learners can be punished everyday if the class teacher does not take time to find out the cause of the late coming for that child and make some interventions. Lawrent (2012) argue that corporal punishment is eligible of affecting the physical, emotional and the academic performance of its victims. Teachers are aware that corporal punishment is globally prohibited. Yet, despite that knowledge, they value and believe that it is a practical way of disciplining children in school.

Hence, head teachers utilize counseling to condemn such unacceptable behaviour of teachers. The practice is applied at face-to-face level, during the caucus meetings, or during teachers' staff meetings.

4.2.2 Punishing the perpetrators of SBV

Giving punishment is another child protection practice that schools use to counter SBV among learners. After inquiring more about an incident of bullying or ill-treatment perpetrated by learners to fellow learners, teachers counsel the perpetrators and thereafter they give them a punishment. This practice is meant to help the perpetrators feel and realize that what they did was wrong, hence they should desist from repeating the act. Also, this practice is meant to ensure that the victims are safeguarded since the perpetrators have been disciplined.

It was also noted that teachers ensure that the type of the punishment they give tally with the age of the concerned learners to avoid abusing them since their intention is to discipline the offenders and not to harm them. Examples of the punishment they give include mopping the classroom, picking litter or sweeping around the school premises, planting flowers, slashing, or digging a *trash-pit*.

One of the informants explains:

“The teacher as the class manager is supposed to give a punishment to the misbehaving learner after classes when they knock off. The child should feel that he or she did something wrong in class. But the punishment must match the age of the child. For example, a child of standard three cannot be asked to dig a trash-pit, he or she can be requested to bring a hoe from home, prepare flower bed and plant some flowers there. The older learners for example those of the senior section, they are the ones we can give a punishment like slashing around the premises of the school or to dig a garbage-pit. So when the child finishes the punishment, you sit down with him and counsel him.”

Nonetheless, a report by WHO (2019a) and Nieman et al. (2004) stipulates that the unacceptable behaviour of learners can be dealt with by establishing measures that prevent the violence instead of using punishment as a means of disciplining learners. They suggest that schools can apply curriculum-based activities which would keep learners ever busy in the school, participating actively to activities that motivate them and helps them develop self-esteem and self-control.

Effective discipline aims at instilling values, fostering acceptable behaviour in the child and raising emotionally mature adults. It is about changing behaviour, not about punishing children. Measures for disciplining children should help them become emotionally and socially mature adults.

It is a fact that when parents entrust their children to schools, they expect teachers to be more supportive, caring, understanding and acquainted with friendly measures for disciplining their children and not adding harm on the already created harm when SBV occurs. Schools have the responsibility of ensuring that all the children enrolled in their school are safeguarded from any form of violence be it effected by fellow learners or by staff members including teachers.

4.2.3 Meeting parents

Meeting parents is another Child Protection Practice primary schools are using to safeguard children from the violence perpetrated among learners as well as for the home based violence experienced by some learners which eventually affect their academic life.

Through interviews with class teachers and focus group discussions with learners, it was noted that the practice of meeting parents is utilized after observing that there is no behavioral improvement in learners who bully or ill-treat fellow learners even after counseling and giving them a punishment several times. Hence in order to safeguard the children who are victims of their behaviour, parents of the bullies or violence perpetrators are invited to the school for discussions and further resolutions.

An explicit explanation from an informant goes;

“Initially, we start by counseling them and we give them a punishment. When they repeat the misbehavior, we give them a warning in the presence of their parents. If they still misbehave, the headteacher calls their parents again and gives them the transfer letter so that they can change the environment, may be the change may help them to improve.”

The study disclosed that some learners are violent, bully and ill-treat fellow learners because in their homes there is lack of parental care. Others portray this unpleasant behaviour because they are under the influence of alcohol such as sachets of spirits or some drags like Chamba.

Such type of children do not receive home based education on character building and they lack guidance on how to live well with other people.

An informant explained;

“This behaviour is starting from the locations where they are coming from. Children of these days engage in smocking with other people who are older than themselves. So, we are not sure if they also carry the cigarette to be smocking while here in the school. So, when they excuse themselves from the teacher as if they are going to the toilet, they would go there to smock Chamba, and even to drink some sachets of beer. So, when coming back from there, the teacher you see that the behaviour of that child has changed, because now he is behaving under the influence of the alcohol and Chamba. So, these things start from home and they bring them here in the school.

So, as I mentioned earlier on that some children lack parental care. Had it been that parents of those children were caring enough and following them up, I don't think that such bad behaviours would have taken root in them. So, since parents nowadays are busy with their own things, they don't observe or check on what their children are doing.”

Hence, parents of the above category of learners are called in the school for disciplinary measures for their children. The school enlightens them on the need for home based education. Thereafter the school together with the parents counsel the concerned child, and the school assigns the parents the role of monitoring their child while at home in order to enhance improvement in his or her behavior.

Based on their study conducted on safeguarding children and prevention of SBV, report by WHO (2019b) and Martin et al. (n.d.) advocate that creating and maintaining good relationships with parents is vital. They also observed that parents are key in ensuring that healing is taking place in the children who have been victims of SBV. Research portray that

most children who have experienced violence at school get affected emotionally, socially as well as academically (WHO, 2019b).

Hence, parents are crucial in the provision of support and care to their child as a means of sustaining healing in their child. Involvement of parents must therefore be towards the provision of support to both learners who are perpetrators of SBV as well as those who are victims. The initiative of schools in working hand in hand with parents is recommendable and it ought to be continued.

Besides that, the practice of meeting parents is also employed to safeguard some learners who are experiencing HBV and abuses which eventually affect their academic life. Upon the observation of teachers that a certain learner in their class portrays some signs of a possible experience of HBV and abuse, such as coming late to school regularly, appearing not to be a free child like others, usually sleeping in class, at times coming without writing materials or without proper dressing, the school takes up a step to inquire more about that learner.

The inquiry is either done by chatting with the concerned learner, or by finding out more from the people within their neighborhood. Upon confirming that the learner is indeed experiencing HBV and abuse, the school invites the parents or guardians of that learner for discussions in the hope that the homely situation of that child may improve. If the attempts of the school fails, a further step is taken where the school engages interventions of the Mother Group.

Children staying with guardians or step parents are prone to being overburdened by household chores and others are treated as house helpers. The academic life of such children is negatively affected in that, they are often late at school, absent themselves from school, are often exhausted or sleepy in class, their minds are preoccupied and they fail to concentrate in class. There is lack of parental care, sincere love and the required academic support.

Malawi Government- Child Care, Protection and Justice Act (2010) condemns such malpractice. It stipulates that *“The fact that a parent or guardian has responsibility for a child, shall not entitle him or her to act in any way which would be incompatible with any court order made in respect of the child.”* In such a home, the child cannot be able to excel in the academic life. The child is vulnerable and powerless to liberate oneself. It requires some external forces to save and safeguard such a child. It is paramount that teachers be vigilant to identify learners going through such traumatic experiences. They must be encouraged to be quick in responding to such situations because HBV and abuse are rarely standalone events, but rather they overlap (Policy Team, 2021).

The practice of meeting parents is further applied to safeguard children who are experiencing various forms of abuse perpetrated by their own biological parents or guardians. There are some children who come from needy families that are economically struggling and can hardly find their daily basic needs. Children from such families are often requested by their parents or guardians to absent themselves from school in order to take care of younger siblings, to manage some household chores, to participate in their business or to do some piece work so as to source some money for the family. Resultantly, such children are often absent from school and their academic performance dwindles. Hence, the child protection practice of meeting parents is deemed a practical means to safeguard such children.

4.2.4 Increased security within and around the school

Some schools have increased security within and around the school premises in order to safeguard learners from the external threats they experience. For instance, among the four schools engaged in this study, one school has been experiencing threats from some crews¹ that

¹ The word “Crews” was a direct expression from the respondents and it is used in the text without any alteration.

are blooming in the communities around the school. The crews are different groups that have specific names such as Boko Haram, Bengendebengende, Gaza Empire, Vampire Girls, Boko Haram Sisters, Sim Gaza, Mbulunje Sisters, Getto Dingi, Young Gaza, G.I. and others. Crews are gangs composed of people of different ages and they act as warriors that fight fellow crews.

Some learners enrolled in this school and are members to any of those crews, bully fellow learners in the school. They do so because their membership makes them feel stronger and powerful than fellow learners. Some learners deliberately provoke others who become their targets once they respond to their bullying behaviour. They report the targets to their crew which in turn come to the school and ill-treat the target. If they do not find their target, they beat up innocent learners or the relative to their target as a way of forcing him or her to reveal where they could find their target. The crews are fierce. They move with weapons and they do not fear nor do they respect anyone in the school.

Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) describe their boldness and reasoning as aggressive and low levels of empathy towards others. Some informants testified that learners belonging to specific crews, want to be feared and to be considered powerful. Both the teachers and learners are vulnerable in these schools as they are prone to the attacks of the crews. Unfortunately, the schools are on open grounds. This creates double threats to learners and they cannot feel safe in the school.

Samati (2017) concurs with this view and explains further that, almost 70% of children in primary schools in Malawi are victims of bullying. There is need for the schools and other higher education authorities to intervene with strict measures in order to make primary schools safe and conducive environment for the children.

Consequently, in order to safeguard learners from such threats, some primary schools have increased security within and around the school. They have employed additional day and night

security guards. They are working with the community police who come to patrol the school on various events especially on the day of closing the term because schools were mainly affected on such a day where several learners were targeted and attacked. Also, they opted to be varying the occurrence of the school closing ceremony, at times they would do it on a Thursday instead of the usual day, Friday. At other times they would do it on Friday, but would ensure that the whole ceremony is completed by 7:30 am.

Besides that, in another school, girls were not feeling safe as they go to the toilet because boys were following and watching them. A wall fence has been constructed around the toilets so as to ensure their safety.

Other schools have also constructed wall fence around the entire school premises to safeguard learners from various external forces such as older boys who come from elsewhere to snatch porridge from learners.

4.2.5 Involvement of the mother group

Engagement of the Mother Group (MG) is a child protection practice utilized in primary schools to safeguard children who experience HBV and abuse from their step parents or some relatives who have become their guardians.

The study found out that most of the children who experience HBV and abuse have poor academic performance, and they do not integrate easily with fellow learners. This is because most of such children are denied the chance to study at home or to do homework and are often overloaded with household chores. They are often exhausted and sleepy in class, regularly absent themselves from school and have low self-esteem. Therefore, in the efforts to safeguard learners from HBV and abuse, primary schools collaborate with the MG.

The MG plays the role of visiting the neighborhood of the concerned learners in order to acquire more information about the violence and abuse experienced by the learner. They work hand in hand with the school to engage the concerned step parents or guardians towards improved home environment for the concerned learner.

Through this child protection practice, the MG together with the support from the block leaders continue following up on the family of the victim. The practice ensures that the concerned child is given the opportunity to fully participate in various school activities and to access education just as any other child of their age. The cooperation between the school, the MG, and the support from the block leaders is seen to be effective in protecting children from the various forms of violence and abuse experienced at home.

4.3 Effectiveness of the child protection practices in primary schools

Thematic sampling and constant scrutiny of the categorized data enhanced the process of assessing the outcomes of the practices primary schools are using to protect children in primary schools. Consequently, the study revealed that the five CPP are partially effective in ensuring the protection of children. This was portrayed by the outcomes observed after applying them to resolve cases of SBV, HBV and abuse. For instance, after counseling or punishing perpetrators of SBV some learners improve their behaviour, others portray temporal improvement.

Others pretend to have changed in the presence of the teachers but continues the bullying behaviour, while others just change their targets.

Similarly, after meeting parents or guardians, there is temporally behavior change of SBV perpetrators, recurrence of SBV. After involvement of the MG there is resistance, negligence and defensiveness of some parents and guardians. Whereas with the increase of security within and around the School premises, learners are only safe when are within the school premises

but still face threats from crews as soon as they leave the school. The following paragraphs presents the findings in details supported by some extracts of the information from respondents.

4.3.1 Counseling

The study revealed that counseling as the child protection practice that is commonly used in primary schools, is partially effective portrayed by its varied results. After being counseled, some learners improve their behaviour, others portray temporal improvement, and others pretend to have changed in the presence of the teachers but continues the bullying behaviour, while others just change their targets. One respondent gives an example of those who pretend to have improved their behaviour and those who change their targets:

“Some bullies change, they stop that behaviour. But others are just troublesome boys, they do not stop, but instead of beating or treating badly the same learner who had reported them, they start maltreating other learners. Though to the one who had reported them, they at times ill-treat verbally.”

“As you talk to them in class they pretend as if it has ended but they fight outside when they knock off, on their way home.”

Another respondent explained a situation where learners do not improve their behaviour after counseling them;

“We counsel them. So, in talking to them we enlighten them of the consequences they can face once anything bad happens to them in connection to the crew they are belonging to. Nonetheless, much as we advise them, it seems they do not stop belonging to those crews. It appears like those crews have tough rules for anyone who could withdraw his or her membership. So, some of the children may still be maintaining their membership in fear of what the crew would do to them.”

Similarly, there are other learners who do not belong to any crew but still more do not change their behavior after counseling them. An informant elucidated as follows;

“At times they stop just for the moment you have counsel them, but after a shot while you hear that he has again done something else, may be has beaten someone else. Some children it’s as if the bullying behaviour is inborn. So, for them behavioral improvement is very temporal, they stop just at that time when you talk to them, and as a teacher once you forget about following them, they continue bullying other learners. But there are some also who stop that behaviour when you talk to them.”

A respondent shared another situation where the violent situation even becomes worse for the victim after counseling;

“So, the following day we call the learners who were mentioned to have gang up. We counsel them, and perhaps give them a kind of a punishment. But then it becomes as if we have made the situation worse for the victim. So, for the victims, some absent themselves more from school in fear that they will be treated badly by the gang.”

“There are some learners who do not stop even after counseling them several times, and the headteacher has even transferred some of them in fear that they can teach other children their bad behaviour. Because children easily copy behaviours from one another and especially in seeing that what their friends are doing seem to be enjoyable they easily copy.”

On one hand, the above direct quotations from the collected data, reveal that counseling as the child protection practice commonly valued and used in most primary schools, is partially effective. While the main aim of using counseling is to protect learners from the SBV effected by fellow learners, the practice does not completely change or transform the behaviour of the perpetrators of SBV. Such outcomes do not guarantee total protection of the children prone to SBV.

On the other hand, counseling enables teachers to encourage the victims and to assure them of their safety in the school. This practice provides emotional healing to the victims in the sense

that, he or she has confidence in the measures employed by the teachers and believes that if anything else happens once again, the teachers will be there to protect him or her.

At the same time, it is necessary that in the process of counseling, teachers avoid giving an impression to the victim that they are creating a problem for themselves or others by reporting the violence or the abusive incident they have experienced Policy Team (2021). Teachers must ensure that the victim is not drawn into the state of feeling ashamed for disclosing what she or he has gone through.

On the part of Head teachers' usage of counseling to correct the misconduct of the teachers, the practice also yields varied results. Some teachers admit their negligence and recklessness especially the newly qualified teachers who would pre-occupy themselves with cellphones during teaching time, as well as some experienced teachers who come back to their senses after being counseled. Hence, they improve their behaviour. While others do not care about the advices given by their head teacher. This is because some teachers do not really care much about the academic welfare of the learners, others familiarize their work, others just underrates the role of the head teacher or are in conflict with the head teacher and would like him or her fail to excel in the work.

4.3.2 Punishing the perpetrators of SBV

Much as primary schools give various forms of punishment to the wrong doers in order to curb SBV, the study found out that the practice is partially effective in protecting victims of SBV. After utilizing this practice, a gradual behavioral improvement is observed in some of the learners who bully or ill-treat fellow learners in different ways. Some learners do not stop the violent behavior even after being punished, instead, they change their targets. While others do not change their unacceptable behaviour even after counseling them in the presence of their parents.

Respondents explained that the nature of the punishment they give is determined by the class and age of the offender. For example, children from the infant and the junior section are usually asked to pick up litter or to sweep in their class room. While offenders from the senior section are given different punishments such as to prepare flower beds, source and plant the flowers, to slash around the premises of the school or to dig trash holes. Despite that teachers in primary schools are aware that this practice does not guarantee total protection of the victims of SBV, they continue to utilize the practice. This situation could be due to lack of alternative skills or expertise for the teachers on how to reform the behaviour of the perpetrators of SBV.

4.3.3 Meeting parents

As schools apply this child protection practice to reform the behaviour of the perpetrators of SBV, the responses of parents and guardians vary, thereby conditioning the effectiveness of the practice. Most biological parents who are invited to the school for collaborative measures towards improved behaviour of their child, respond positively and cooperate with the school. Whereas among step parents or guardians, their responses are often negative. Most of them portray an attitude of not being concerned, some do not value the invitations of the school and others seem not to care about matters concerning the step child or the child they are keeping on behalf of a relative.

Similarly, as schools utilize this child protection practice in order to safeguard learners who experience violence and various forms of abuse at home that negatively affect their academic life, the outcomes are different. Parents who overload their children in order to ease the family's economic stress in search for daily needs, easily understand the interventions of the school towards an improved academic life of their child. They adjust their life style and the child is given the needed time to study at home as well as to attend classes as required.

On the other hand, some guardians such as step parents or relatives who are keeping the concerned children, are defensive. They ignore the interventions of the school. Some do not come to the school when invited, others accuse the concerned child, while others even transfer their child to another school. Below is a testimony given by an informant:

“We invite the parents to the school and enlighten them on the need to be considerate for the child. Most parents understand and indeed often there is an improvement. The response is often positive from the needy families. But usually, it is less positive on the part of the step mothers. Others even don’t come to the school when we invite them for discussions.”

The above explanation by one of the respondents, revealed that the effectiveness of the child protection practice of meeting parents is conditioned by the nature of the parenthood to the concerned SBV perpetrator. Hence the practice partially protects learners from SBV.

4.3.4 Increased security

Through the in-depth interviews, it was revealed that the effectiveness of the practice of increasing security within and around the school is conditioned by the nature of the physical threat experienced in the school.

In schools that increased and tightened security, protection for learners was ensured. For instance, in schools that had constructed wall fence around the entire school premises, there were less incidences where older boys would come from elsewhere to snatch porridge from learners. This simply indicates that learners are protected. They receive and consume their porridge with freedom and without being anxious of losing both their share as well as their cup.

Similarly, in schools where girls were uncomfortable to visit toilets because boys would hide to watch them. Girls are protected. They comfortably and confidently attend school every day with certainty that they are safe.

One informant said that:

“For the case where boys were following up girls when they go to the toilet, this was happening when there was no wall fence, but now there is a wall fence around so the toilets are inside. So presently this is providing safety for the girls to go to the toilet and to help themselves comfortably.”

While in the schools that are collaborating with the community police and have employed additional day and night security guards, learners are being safeguarded only when they are within the premises of the school. However, the threats are still being experienced by some targeted learners who still experience attacks.

A respondent explained as follows:

“We are closely working hand in hand with the community police. So on each school closing day they come around for patrolling around the premises of the school. But at times we hear that while everything was completed here in the school, some children were attacked on their way home.”

This situation signals a continued problem which has just changed its pattern. There is need therefore to still invest more efforts on how to eradicate the problem, or to investigate more on it in order to come up with more effective measures to eradicate it.

Various primary schools have established different strategies to ensure that the level of physical security in and around their school premises has been modified accordingly. International Association of Chief Police (IACP), IACP (2007) proposes that schools could also adopt policies that would allow searching learners and all the visitors that come in the school for weapons and drugs. In one of the four schools under this study, the head teacher showed the researcher a carpentry hammer that was found in the bag of one of the learners. It would indeed be effective if schools could be able to establish measures for searching them. These can be manually done considering that most primary schools struggle to run activities that require financial input.

Primary schools could also come up with various initiatives that advocate elimination of bullying. One of such initiatives could be “*Anti-gang Programs*” IACP (2007). Almost 90 % of the respondents of this study mentioned that some learners gang up to beat fellow learners for various reasons. Gang² influence can be destructive to the school as well as to the academic life of the learners who are victims. Membership to a gang empowers the child to engage in violent acts because he or she is certain of the support of the gang. It is vital for schools to consider establishing policies and strategies that can eliminate gang membership in order to safeguard all the learners and to have a conducive environment in the school.

4.3.5 Involvement of the mother group

The study revealed that the practice of involving MG is considerably effective in protecting learners from HBV and abuse. Interviews that were conducted with class teachers, child protection lead teacher and some members of the MG portrayed that most of the learners who were being abused and experienced various forms of violence effected by step mothers or some guardians, have been safeguarded. Most of these learners are now granted opportunities to fully participate in school activities.

An informant explained more on this aspect as follows:

“So many children have been helped through this committee even though it works with struggles, or it has just a few members who are really committed. For example, some girls who were forced to get married have been returned to their parents and back to school. Some children who are kept by guardians and were maltreated at home blocking them from learning well in school have been helped. Some children who come from very needy families have been assisted with some writing materials as well as with school uniforms.”

² The term “Gang” in this context is used to refer to a group of learners who mobilize themselves to maltreat fellow learners in the school or on their way home after knocking off at school.

Nonetheless, there is still a small percentage of children who are given partial opportunities. They are allowed to go to school but still face some challenges when it comes to given time for homework and self-study while at home.

There are also situations where the Mother Group with the help of the city child protection social workers have been able to rescue some children from an abusive home to the home of another relative who after assessment is deemed eligible to care for such a child. This instance come-by after observing that the step parents or guardians living with the concerned child are not complying with the interventions agreed upon with the MG.

Besides that, it was observed that in schools where the MG is active, most learners are being safeguarded from home based violence and abuse through their interventions. On the other hand, where the MG is less active, schools face some challenges of poor collaboration with parents. Some step parents or guardians respond rudely to them, others do not turn up to the school when invited, and others just transfer their ward to another school. One respondent explained:

“We have tried to call the guardian, the Aunt but she never comes. She went to get these two children from Ntcheu, but she does not care about their education. Actually, she openly says that if herself was not educated these ones too, cannot be educated so there is no need for her to bother about academic life for them.”

Consequently, learners who are victims of home violence or abuses and are enrolled in a school where MG is less active, have limited likelihood of being safeguarded and eventually, they fail to excel in their education.

IACP (2007) argue that school administrators have the responsibility to make efforts to incorporate their key stakeholders in crucial matters pertaining the running and management of the school. The protection of their learners is one of those important matters where schools

should work hand in hand with the stakeholders. As such, it can be deduced that in schools where the MG are less active, the question should go to the school administration to check on how open and creative they are in engaging them. In order to effectively safeguard learners either from HBV or SBV, it is necessary for schools to stimulate the active participation of the stakeholders in planning as well as in actualizing the established strategies.

The Policy Team (2021) contends that there is no single specialist who can ably have a complete picture of the needs and the circumstances surrounding a child. Collaboration with stakeholders is key in ensuring safe environment for children wherever they can be. In this instance, the involvement of the MG is vital because the teachers alone, may not be able to respond accordingly to the safeguarding issues affecting children enrolled in their school.

4.4 Factors that limit the effectiveness of the child protection practices

The process of continuously returning to the original data, comparing codes constantly and generating core codes enable the identification and examination of the factors that limit the effectiveness of the child protection practices. Eventually, five main limiting factors were revealed by the study namely; inadequate training for teachers and lack of standardized guide lines on child protection, poor collaboration from some parents, threats created by the crews, lack of financial resources and finally challenges faced by schools while working with the MG.

4.4.1 Inadequate training for teachers on child protection

The study found out that most primary schools have limited numbers of teachers who have received a training or any form of orientation on how to respond to issues concerning safeguarding children. Out of the four schools involved in this study, only one school has a lead teacher and a committee for child protection. Almost all the teachers in that same school have received the training.

In another school only one teacher received the training which was organized by a certain NGO.

This teacher was also a responded to this study, below is what she said:

“Yes, I have received while teaching here at St. Peters Primary School. It took place at St. John of God in March 2022 during the School holidays. I went alone as an HOD for my section though I was supposed to go together with two other HODs. This training was organized by St. John of God mainly it was centered on special needs education but the topic of Child Protection was also tackled.”

In another school none of the respondents had received the training.

A Responded expressed this as follows:

“No, I have never receive any training on child protection. I just use my own ideas and experience on how to assist and resolve the issues of the children.”

In another school, the HT expressed that one teacher had received the training though this teacher was not in the school at the time the study was conducted.

This being the situation, counseling is used with a certain level of expertise for those who ever had a training on child protection while others use their initiatives to respond to various forms of violence experienced by learners. Teachers who have not received any training lack empowered and guidance on how to respond and assist victims.

Respondents highlighted the rising of complex issues centering on the academic, social, emotional and behavioral difficulties experienced by primary school children. Kourkoutas & Giovazolias (2015) and Volungis & Goodman (2017) argue that teachers need support from the specialized school-base counselors to train and equip them with basic skills for responding to students’ challenges. The contemporary issues existing in schools today need to be dealt with some background knowledge if learners are to be helped efficiently. Training on child protection strategies for teachers should be promoted so that teachers are guided and empowered to safeguard children in schools.

4.4.2 Poor collaboration from some parents

As primary schools strive to safeguard learners from SBV, they lack the cooperation of some parents or guardians whose children are perpetrators of SBV. There are some parents who resist initiatives employed by the school to induce development of good morals in such children.

When schools invite parents or guardians for disciplinary meetings, some do not turn up at the school, others are rude, defensive and justify themselves, while others do not comply on what the school requests of them after the disciplinary meeting, instead, they transfer their child to another school.

One responded explains her observation of the outcomes of this child protection practice:

“The response is often positive from the needy families. But usually, it is less positive on the part of the step mothers. Others they even don’t come to the school when we invite them for discussions.”

Besides that, there are some parents or guardians who are just too occupied with their endeavors and have no time to offer home based education to their children, hence, their children lack some societal values, good morals and are not guided on how to live well with others.

The continuity of the social and moral education offered in schools require consolidated efforts between the school and the parents or guardians. As such absence of this collaboration limit the child protection practices employed in schools. Scholars such as Topor et al. (2010) stipulates that parental involvement in the basic education of a child is one of the core factors that contribute to outstanding academic performance. Likewise, schools are certain that effective collaboration with parents in the attempts to reform the character of the learners who bully or maltreat fellow learners in school, is key.

Counseling of SBV perpetrators in the presence of their parents has proved to be effective. Most of the learners whose parents value the interventions of the school, have improved their

behaviour thereby creating conducive and safe environment for other learners. Efforts of schools in ensuring safeguarding children are obstructed when parents do not cooperate or comply with the agreed measures.

4.4.3 Threats created by the crews

There is fear among the staff members and learners in primary schools that experience attacks from the crews. This is because such crews are fierce, do not respect or listen to anyone in those schools and are unpredictable as to the time they can plan to attack some learners in the school. Additionally, much as these crews are fierce, they are freely blooming in the society.

Young children are being recruited and trained for violent deeds. The crews are left liberal in the society. This builds up fear in the teachers as well as the learners. It leaves teachers powerless since they cannot control such crews on their own. Much as schools strive to safeguard children, the assaults of the crews are beyond their abilities and leaves the school vulnerable.

Below is an explanation of one of the respondents;

“These crews behave like warrior groups. So, children belonging to different crews treat one another violently in the school. A number of times here in the school we have had incidences where a crew comes from the community in search of a learner with warlike tools; such as knives, metal bars, knives, sharp carpentry objects etc.

When the crew come, they do not fear any body and they do not listen to anyone. This happens repeatedly on school closing day.”

Gupta (2022) stipulates that it is imperative to act against school violence because victims and eye witnesses of SBV are likely to get traumatized and its impact may persist into adulthood. Some respondents explained that the situation was reported to the state security office but tangible interventions are yet to be put in place. In the meantime, schools are collaborating with

the community police and have employed additional security guards in the school. Safety in the concerned schools as well as in the society where the crews are operating, is at risk since the crews are spreading freely. There is need to deter their growth before deteriorating the society.

4.4.4 Lack of financial resources

Public Primary schools have limited financial resources and face challenges in sourcing them. This fact constrains them from organizing regular trainings for members of staff as well as for their key stakeholders. They lack some crucial skills including the expertise on safeguarding children enrolled in their school. This reality is limiting the child protection practices in most primary schools.

Some schools utilize various funds such as SDF, SIP, and PTA Fund to organize trainings for the key stakeholders and to offer them little incentives. Motuapuaka et al. (2015) urges the management of schools to be zealous and creative enough in finding the required resources because the quality of the input of stakeholders depends on their preparedness. Primary schools should continue being resourceful and maximizing available resources rather than just waiting on the government provisions. They need to continually support their key stakeholders with ongoing training if a meaningful collaboration is to be obtained, and the desired goals achieved.

4.4.5 Challenges faced by schools while working with the mother group

The involvement of the MG in safeguarding children is greatly valued by primary schools, nonetheless, some challenges are faced in the process which at times limit the effectiveness of the practice. It was discovered that the training offered to the committee members of the MG greatly depends on how the school manages to source funds in order to organize and offer the training.

In some schools the training is offered once a year while in some schools it can be offered once every term. As such, some members in the committee do not have adequate training to equip and to enable them discharge accordingly the responsibilities given to them.

Further, it was noted that choice of members to be in the committee is based on one's availability and willingness to serve. As such, some members lack the basic literacy skills and this makes it difficult for them to play some roles that require reading and writing. A respondent explained as follows:

“Often the people chosen are those who do not know how to read or write. This becomes a challenge in accomplishing some tasks such as report writing on the work done. Also sometimes those chosen lack leadership skills. At other times the people who could have abilities to do recommendable work do not accept the responsibility, hence anyone who accepts is chosen to be in the committee. Hence as a school, we work with these stakeholders with struggles.”

Apart from that, the work is done on voluntary basis hence, some members regularly excuse themselves when requested to do some tasks or even to attend some meetings. A responded explains:

“This work is on voluntary basis so it is not all of them who commit themselves as required. Some members give a lot of excuses. We all know how the economic challenges we are facing in the world of today so when they come they all want to be given food and to sign in an expectation of receiving allowances.”

Also another responded explained further that:

“The government expects these people to work on voluntary basis, but can someone really work if he/she has no food in his home. Certainly not. There are some people with a good will but the reality of poverty makes it difficult for them to work with dedication as they wish to.”

As a result, there are usually just a handful members who really commit themselves to handle the responsibilities and at times continuity in responding to certain issues is cut off. This factor limits the effectiveness of the involvement of the MG in safeguarding the children.

Motuapuaka et al. (2015) argues that efficiency of the involvement of stakeholders require investment of time, training and resources, and finding the right people to work with as stakeholders if the work is to be done well. Primary schools are facing numerous challenges in working with the MG because most of the vital elements as argued by Erika et al, are beyond their control. Teachers in all the four schools under this study stipulated that the selection of the members of the mother group is either done by parents when they assemble in the school, or by the block leaders. It is very likely that often the people chosen are not the right people for the designated responsibilities.

Besides, it takes the initiatives of the head teachers to source funds and arrange trainings for the MG members in order to equip them for the expected tasks. Head teachers testified that the roles played by the active members of the MG are recommendable. It is vital then for the school management as well as the higher authorities in the education sector to ensure that the required resources are available in order to certify the effectiveness of the involvement of the MG.

4.4.6 Measures for enhancing effectiveness of the child protection practices

The findings revealed three main possible measures that could enhance the effectiveness of the child protection practices applied in the selected primary schools as follows; sensitization meetings with parents and the communities surrounding the schools, combined efforts by the society and the state to eradicate crews, and lastly, increased government support to the primary schools.

4.4.6.1 Sensitization meetings

It was suggested that primary schools should be organizing regular meetings with parents or guardians where information about behaviour of learners can be shared. Schools can use such occasions to share the challenges they face as they strive to safeguard all the learners in the school due to the unpleasant behaviour of some learners.

They can also enlighten parents about their role towards a better upbringing of their children. Schools can use such meetings to sensitize and to guide parents on how they can be monitoring their children at home. Eventually there shall be combined efforts in eradicating violence in schools and in safeguarding learners from SBV in primary schools.

4.4.6.2 Combined efforts by the society and the state to eradicate crews

Some propositions came up from some respondents particularly those who have witnessed the attacks of some crews in the school. Since the crews are fierce, there is need for the society and the security arms of the government to combine efforts in order to eradicate them.

There is need to interrogate the founder of the crews and key followers. One of the key respondents of this study disclosed the prospective founder of the crews which gives a green light that the root source can be dealt with. The crews destabilize the peace in the schools and overpowers the child protection practices applied in the school. As such, there is a dire need for combined efforts to stop the spread of the crews and to eradicate them. Below is a suggestion from one of the respondents:

“So, there is need for the Police to come in together with the Malawi defense force to deal with these crews otherwise, we are building up danger for ourselves. As these children are growing and those crews are becoming stronger and stronger, grave things may start happening in our society.”

4.4.6.3 Increased government support

Some key informants expressed their desire for amplified government financial support. Since most primary schools are financially constrained, it is thought that if the government would include a certain percentage on the package that is usually granted to them, it would enable facilitation of trainings of their key players in safeguarding children enrolled in their schools.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented results of the researcher's field work and their discussion. The selected key characteristics of the grounded theory of coding the collected data, thematic sampling, constant comparison of codes, memo writing and generation of core categories of the collected data in this study, enabled the identification of the five child protection practices as the core categories in the study. These five core categories are the main child protection practices the four selected primary schools are using to protect learners. That's, Counseling for learners who are victims, eye witnesses and perpetrators of SBV. Punishment to the learners who perpetrate violence to fellow learners and meeting parents of the same category of learners.

These three practices are oriented at dealing with the perpetrators of school violence intending to reduce or eradicate SBV. They are meant to safeguard and support victims of SBV since the perpetrators have been dealt with.

Besides the above three measures, some primary schools have intensified security within and around the school premises in order to safeguard learners from external threats. Such threats include various crews that come to attack some learners in the school and some outsiders who come during break time to snatch porridge from the learners. The security has been intensified by employing additional day and night security guards, and by constructing wall fence around the entire school premises.

Another child protection practice that primary schools are using is to involve the mother group who is one of their key stakeholders. They engage them in striving to safeguard learners from the violence and abuse experienced at home which in turn affect their academic life negatively.

Further, the study revealed that the above five child protection practices are partially effective. This was observed through the outcomes that display temporal improvement in the behaviour of the learners who perpetrate SBV as well as through the resistance schools come across from the step parents or guardians of the learners who experience HBV and abuse.

Compliance to the guidance provided by the grounded theory, constant comparison of codes and generation of core categories in this study, disclosed the main factors that limit the effectiveness of the child protection practices utilized to protect primary school learners. Most teachers have not yet been trained on child protection, there is poor collaboration between primary schools and some parents and guardians, primary schools are financially constrained hence, have difficulties in organizing trainings for their key stakeholders on child protection. Most members of the MG lack literacy skills thereby limiting their efficiency. Much as some primary schools have increased security within and around school premises, learners still face attacks by the crews as they leave the school for home. This implies that the problem has not yet been resolved, learners are still at risk of the attacks from the crews.

Respondents proposed some possible solutions to the factors that limit the effectiveness of the child protection. These include sensitization of parents, increased financial allocations from the government towards training of key stakeholders and intervention of the security department of the government in eradicating the crews.

The next chapter will present conclusion of the study and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to examine the child protection practices applied in the selected primary schools within Mzuzu City. This chapter presents the conclusion of the study based on the findings from the field work and their discussion. The chapter also presents the recommendations of the study.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has portrayed that primary schools do not have a child protection policy to function as a standardized guide in safeguarding children enrolled in their school. However, each school uses its own initiatives to protect their learners from violence and abuse which eventually may affect their academic life.

The study found that in the absence of the standardized guide or policy on child protection for schools, there are five main child protection practices primary schools are utilizing. These include Counselling, meeting parents and guardians (of children who perpetrate SBV or of learners who are victims of HBV), giving punishment to learners who perpetrate SBV, increased security within and around the school premises, and lastly involvement of Mother Group.

Findings of the study have revealed that the five main child protection practices utilized in primary schools, are partially effective. It can be deduced as such since the outcomes of the applied practices do not guarantee that learners are completely safeguarded from SBV in primary schools, or from HBV and abuses.

On one hand, learners are safeguarded through these practices since the learners who perpetrate SBV are counseled, disciplined through punishment and the initiatives of the schools in

engaging their parents. By tightening physical security within and around the school as well as by incorporating the interventions of the MG.

On the other hand, the study has portrayed that much as teachers in primary schools do their best to safeguard learners from SBV, as well as from HBV and abuses, there are times where their efforts do not produce the desired outcomes. For instance, in situations where some learners would improve their behaviour partially or change their targets and continues to ill-treat fellow learners. Also, in instances where step parents or guardians would not comply with the interventions of the school. Perhaps this situation could be attributed to the limiting factors that the study revealed in objective three.

Further, the study found out that the effectiveness of the five child protection practices discussed in this study is limited by a number of factors namely, inadequate training for teachers, poor collaboration from some parents, lack of skills for the Key stakeholders participating in child protection and financial constrains for the primary schools.

The study gives an overview that most of the primary schools are not yet organized and they do not have established strategies and procedures on how to respond to safeguarding issues for the learners. For example, out of the four schools under this study, only one school has a lead teacher and a committee for child protection. In addition to that, most primary school teachers have not yet received any training on child protection. Out of the 10 teachers who were key respondents to the study, only three ever received a training and all these are from the same school that has a lead teacher and an active committee.

In most primary schools, teachers are using their own initiatives and personal experiences to respond to the safeguarding issues of their learners. Much as they are applying the child protection practices stipulated above, teachers lack expertise. It is out of their good will to assist learners that they make efforts to safeguard them.

Furthermore, much as the involvement of the MG in safeguarding learners from HVB is valuable, Primary schools face some challenges in working with the mother group. Most members of the mother group committees lack literacy skills, a reality that hinders the effectiveness of their participation. Services of the mother group are rendered voluntarily hence, there is lack of commitment and there are numerous excuses when they are needed to handle some tasks. Other limiting factors include poor collaboration from parents, threats enacted by the crews and financial constraints which hinders schools from ensuring regular trainings for their key stakeholders such as the teachers and the mother group.

Some possible solutions to the limiting factor may include initiating regular trainings for teachers and the mother group members on child protection. This measure can empower the key players in safeguarding children and it can certify improved efficiency of the practices employed in primary schools.

There is also need for the security arm of the government to work with the communities to stop the blooming of the crews and to eradicate them in order to safeguard children who are the future citizens of the country.

5.3 Recommendations

With regard to the interpretation and the discussion of the findings, the study recommends that:

1. The Government of Malawi through the Ministry of Education should come up with an independent national child protection policy for the Education Ministry. The policy will be a standard guide for all the schools both in the public as well as in the private sector. Availability of the policy will ensure the protection of children across all the levels of education in Malawi.

2. The Ministry of Education should put in place strategic measures for ensuring that teachers are trained on child protection and that the child protection policy is fully implemented in schools.
3. Headteachers together with the management teams in Primary schools should ensure the establishment of specific committees on child protection to guarantee protecting learners from all forms of violence and abuses experienced either at school or at home. This would promote creation of safe and conducive environments for children to learn effectively, study and do their homework efficiently.
4. The management of primary schools should come up with meaningful IGAs in order to source funds for carrying out trainings of their key stakeholders instead of just waiting for financial support from the government.
5. The research was conducted in four Primary schools in the Northern Education Division. A replicate of the study could be done in other Education Divisions for a comparative analysis of the child protection practices applied on the various forms of violence or abuses experienced by the primary school children and the child protection practices employed in schools.
6. Further study could be conducted to establish the background of the crews that are blooming in some locations within Mzuzu City. Such a study could assist in developing practical strategies on how to eradicate the crews as they are threatening the normal societal life within the city.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Approval from Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

Mzuzu University
Private Bag 201
Luwinga
Mzuzu 2
MALAWI
TEL: 01 320 722

MZUZU UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MZUNIREC)

Ref No: MZUNIREC/DOR/22/16 22/03/22

Sr. Treazer Banda,

Mzuzu University,

P/Bag 201,

Mzuzu.

Email:

treazerbanda@gmail.com

Dear Sr. Banda,

RESEARCH ETHICS AND REGULATORY APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR

PROTOCOL REF NO: MZUNIREC/DOR/22/16: EXAMINATION OF CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN EDUCATION DIVISION OF MALAWI.

Having satisfied all the relevant ethical and regulatory requirements, I am pleased to inform you that the above referred research protocol has officially been approved. You are now permitted to proceed with its implementation. Should there be any amendments to the approved protocol in the course of implementing it, you shall be required to seek approval of such amendments before implementation of the same.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of issuance of this approval. If the study goes beyond one year, an annual approval for continuation shall be required to be sought from the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) in a format that is available at the Secretariat. Once the study is finalised, you are required to furnish the Committee with a final report of the study. The Committee reserves the right to carry out compliance inspection of this approved protocol at any time as may be deemed by it. As such, you are expected to properly

Committee Address:

*Secretariat, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee, P/Bag 201, Luwingu, Mzuzu 2;
Email address: mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw*

maintain all study documents including consent forms.

Wishing you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours Sincerely,



Gift Mbwele

MZUZU UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR

For: CHAIRMAN OF MZUNIREC

Appendix 2: Letters of Introduction from the DEM's office

Ref. No MZC/DEM/B1A

April
13th ~~May~~ 2022

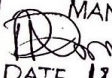
FROM: THE DISTRICT EDUCATION MANAGER, P.O. BOX 629, MZUZU.
TO : THE HEAD TEACHERS:-
AREA 1B PRIMARY SCHOOL
ST AUGUSTINE PRIMARY SCHOOL
ST PETERS PRIMARY SCHOOL
ZOLOZOLO PRIMARY SCHOOL

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

The bearer of this letter, Sr Treazer Banda, a student of Master's Degree in leadership and Management in Education at Mzuzu University. She would like to conduct a research in your schools.

Her research is focusing on Child protection practices in primary schools. Permission is granted to do so.

Your usual cooperation is always appreciated.

DISTRICT EDUCATION
MANAGER

DATE 13.04.22
P.P. RKOSIOX 629
MZUZU
Ag. DISTRICT EDUCATION MANAGER

Appendix 3: Letters of Introduction from the Department of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

Department of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies

Private Bag 201
L u w i n g a
M z u z u 2
M A L A W I

Tel: (265) 01 320 575/722
Fax: (265) 01 320 568
mdolo.mm@mzuni.ac.mw

30th March 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: TREAZER BANDA Sr.

Sr Treazer Banda is a registered Master of Education (Leadership and management) Program student at Mzuzu University. She has been cleared by the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) to collect data for the research study she is conducting as a requirement for the program.

Kindly assist her accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Margaret M. Mdolo

Program Coordinator

Appendix 4: Interview guide questions for headteachers

1. What are the practices or strategies your school is utilizing to ensure the protection of learners?
2. How were the teachers as well as the supporting staff oriented to implement the practices mentioned above?
3. What are the procedures that are to be followed by the staff members of your school in responding to school based violence? And as the Headteacher, how do you ensure that teachers as well as the support staff are following those procedures?
4. What do you do to help staff members understand that child protection is a core responsibility? And how do you know that all staff give priority to keeping children safe and feeling safe in your school?
5. If bullying may prevail in your school, what would be the strategies your school would follow to terminate or reduce it?
6. In your own perception, what could be some of the factors that limit the effectiveness of the child protection practices or strategies your school is using?
7. What are your suggestions that would help improve the effectiveness of those child protection practices?

Appendix 5: Interview guide questions for class teachers

1. As a teacher, what do you do in order to respond to violence or bullying happening in your classroom or within and around your school?
2. How do you assist learners who are victims of school based violence?
3. How do you identify children who are experiencing home based violence, and how do you assist them so that despite their unfortunate experience they could still be able to learn and progress in their academic life?
4. In your own understanding what should head teachers or teachers be doing to ensure that children are protected in the school?
5. In your own perception, what could be some of the factors that limit the practices or strategies from protecting children effectively?
6. What are your suggestions that would help improve the effectiveness of the child protection practices?
7. As a teacher have you received any training on child protection