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Synergistic Collaboration of the Government and Rwandan Educational Institutions in Minimizing the Dynamics of Student Violence

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Abstract

Despite governmental and multilateral efforts to curb violence in schools, secondary students in Rwanda continue to experience various forms of abuse, particularly in home and school settings. This study investigated the dominant types of violence affecting students and examined how these vary by demographic characteristics. Using a cross-sectional quantitative design, data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 191 students from one district in Rwanda. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses (T-tests and ANOVA) revealed that psychological and physical violence were the most prevalent forms, occurring both at home and in school. Additionally, environmental, structural, and sexual violence were reported. The study found that factors such as gender, age, class level, class repetition, father's education, and school location significantly influenced students' experiences of violence. These findings highlight the need for targeted, context-sensitive strategies that consider student demographics in efforts to prevent and manage violence in Rwandan secondary schools.

Keywords: Quality education, Discipline management, Violence, Academic achievement, Sustainable peace

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

Managing student discipline remains a critical concern in education, particularly in contexts where violence both within and outside the school continues to undermine learners' well-being and academic success. In Rwanda, the experiences of secondary school students regarding violence are of growing concern, especially as the country works to consolidate peace following a history of conflict. This study explores how violence experienced in school and home environments influences student behavior and how effective discipline management can contribute to sustainable peacebuilding in education. Research has shown that disciplinary measures aimed at addressing student misconduct are vital for ensuring a safe and productive school environment (Eisenbraun, 2007). The physical and social climate of schools, including classroom interactions, plays a significant role in how misbehavior is managed. Despite policy efforts by the Rwandan government and its partners to eliminate

violence in schools, various forms of abuse including physical, psychological, structural, and sexual violence persist. Understanding the typologies of violence and their effects on students is thus essential for crafting informed, evidence-based interventions.

According to global and regional studies, middle-school-aged children especially in the United States are frequently subjected to neglect and abuse, with reports indicating that 74.9% experience neglect, 18.3% physical abuse, and 8.6% sexual abuse (Niyonagize & Mukamazimpaka, 2021). Inadequate care at home correlates with increased risk of mortality and negative psychosocial development, affecting learners' classroom behavior and learning outcomes. Similar concerns are echoed globally, where over 1.5 billion children are estimated to be affected by domestic violence, though only a fraction of these cases are formally reported (Zirimwabagabo & Sikubwabo, 2022). In the school setting, these adverse experiences can manifest in reduced attention, disruptive behavior, and disengagement from learning. For some students, particularly those burdened by domestic responsibilities, the classroom becomes more of a refuge than a place of academic engagement. These behavioral outcomes are deeply shaped by students' home environments, often resulting in noticeable differences between respectful and disrespectful learners. Peace education scholars have long investigated the impact of both physical and non-physical violence such as historical trauma and cultural marginalization on learners and educators (McDermott et al., 2022). Within the African context, studies have established a positive correlation between effective discipline management and student academic performance (Yastibaş, 2021). Leadership styles in schools are particularly influential in shaping learning environments that either curb or exacerbate student violence, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where complex socio-political realities intersect with educational challenges (Ndwandwe, 2024). In East Africa, issues such as sexual violence and teenage pregnancy, especially in Kenya, continue to compromise students' educational outcomes and contribute to school dropout. These challenges are emblematic of broader social and psychological disruptions that hinder learning and long-term peacebuilding. In Rwanda, a post-genocide society, addressing these issues is especially urgent to ensure that schools serve not only as centers of learning but also as pillars of peace and social transformation. Hence this study seeks to explore this gap by understanding the types of violence experienced by children in Rwanda and how the violence varies among secondary school students. It sets out to examine the types of violence experienced by secondary school students among selected schools using the following two questions (1) What are the forms of violence experienced by students in secondary schools in Rwanda? (2) How does students' experienced violence vary by students' background (gender, age, class, class repetition, parental level of education, family location, and school location)?

1.2 Context and Problem of the Study: Violence and Education in Rwanda

Despite the Rwandan government's efforts to improve school environments, domestic violence remains a serious and complex issue, reportedly more severe in Rwanda than in neighboring countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya (Lanchimba et al., 2023). The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) has responded by implementing behavioral regulations in schools and encouraging stronger student–teacher relationships. These relationships are believed to foster discipline and enhance academic performance, as improved communication between teachers

and students contributes to greater self-control and mutual respect (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). However, the persistence of violence against children, particularly among adolescents aged 14 to 16, continues to undermine these efforts. The World Health Organization (2002) reported that 24.4% of girls and 28.2% of boys in this age group had experienced physical violence. These figures have increased in recent years to 32.6% and 29.2%, respectively (UNESCO, 2014). Poverty and household vulnerability further expose children to neglect, abuse, and exploitation, limiting their ability to succeed in school. Although collaboration between parents and teachers is critical for promoting positive student behavior and academic achievement, such partnerships are often weak or absent in practice (Ilfiandra et al., 2023). The lack of meaningful stakeholder engagement contributes to the persistence of school-based violence and undermines national efforts to build safe, inclusive, and effective learning environments.

For many parents in Rwanda, schools are perceived as safe environments for learners due to the professional oversight of teachers. In cases where students are sent home for disciplinary reasons, parents are expected to assume the role of caretakers or watchdogs. However, the lack of a sustainable and collaborative partnership between teachers and parents often leaves students vulnerable to dangers that go unnoticed by both parties (Ngidi & Kaye, 2022). Alarming reports have highlighted instances of sexual coercion in schools, where Rwandan girls are pressured by teachers in exchange for favorable grades or extra coaching (Pontalti, 2013). School leaders frequently hesitate to confront such abuses or report them to authorities, which perpetuates a culture of silence and impunity (Plessis & Mestry, 2024). As a result, victimized students suffer significant psychological consequences, including loss of self-esteem, shame, anxiety, and disengagement from school. Education is not only a pathway to personal growth but also a foundation for human rights, dignity, and national development (Tangwe, 2023). Yet, in Rwanda, school-aged children are sometimes subjected to heavy labor, excessive punishment, sexual harassment, and physical abuse, all of which compromise their educational experience and development (Niyonagize & Mukamazimpaka, 2021; Tangwe, 2023). These violations hinder the goal of providing quality, equitable, and rights-based education. Furthermore, domestic violence and socio-cultural inequalities, particularly those based on gender and power dynamics, continue to negatively affect student behavior, academic performance, and discipline (Taylor et al., 2011). Despite comprehensive national and international legislative frameworks promoting children's rights and school safety, physical violence in Rwandan secondary schools remains a persistent challenge. Alternative disciplinary strategies are rarely implemented, complicating efforts to foster sustainable peace and positive learning environments.

1.2.1 Multidimensional Measures to End School Violence

A well-functioning school environment is characterized by cohesion, fluid interpersonal relationships, and effective institutional functioning, all of which contribute to clearly identifiable educational outcomes (Lindell, 2022; Mele et al., 2010; Tangwe, 2022). Such an atmosphere is only possible within a calm, respectful, and supportive setting. Bufacchi (2005) argues that the absence of hostility and violence—conditions in which individuals do not seek to subdue or harm one another—lays the foundation for peaceful coexistence. When these

conditions are lacking, individuals may resort to aggression, learned either through direct experience or by observing others (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Environments marked by violence and coercion reflect a breakdown of rights-based governance and hinder the consolidation of democratic values, often resulting in systemic violations of human rights (Dicklitch, 2011). In this context, social interaction theory views violence as a powerful actor that not only produces but also shapes behavior. It emphasizes the role of coercive authority in enforcing behavioral conformity, often leading to the subjugation of the weaker party (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Empirical evidence demonstrates that the behavior of teachers plays a critical role in shaping student learning outcomes. However, it also reveals that teacher behavior can contribute to environments where intentional, threatened, or actual use of physical force leads to feelings of shame, psychological harm, and deprivation among learners (Glaser, 2002; Li, 2018; Tangwe, 2022). Assessing this issue in Rwanda is particularly complex given the country's ongoing post-genocide recovery. The legacy of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi continues to influence societal dynamics, making objective analysis of violence in schools challenging. Nevertheless, the Government of Rwanda, along with international partners, has implemented significant policy measures aimed at reducing violence and promoting peace and inclusion within educational institutions (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019).

1.2.2 Management Mechanisms of Violence in Secondary Schools in Rwanda

Rwanda has established a robust legal and policy framework aimed at preventing violence and protecting vulnerable populations, particularly children (Isimbi et al., 2018). Notably, the Legal and Policy Framework for Children's Rights led to the passage of a comprehensive bill in June 2012 focused on the rights and protection of children-effectively serving as a "Bill of Rights" for Rwandan youth (Abbott & Sapsford, 2012). Furthermore, the country has ratified major international conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified September 19, 1991) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ratified May 30). Despite these advancements, the effective prohibition of violence in homes and alternative care settings has not yet been realized (End Violence Against Children, 2021). The 1988 Civil Code, through Article 347, granted parents the "right to correction." Although this provision was repealed by Law No. 32/2016 of 28/08/2016 governing persons and family, the revised law fails to explicitly prohibit corporal punishment or affirmatively reject the outdated notion of the "right to correction." While Rwanda's constitution affirms the sanctity of the human person in Article 10 and prohibits torture, physical abuse, and degrading treatment in Article 15 (Olusegun & Adelayo, 2017), gaps in implementation persist. The government's commitment to aligning national legislation with international norms is commendable; however, translating legal protections into tangible outcomes remains challenging (Dorigoni et al., 2020). In practice, corporal punishment is still administered in schools by educators and administrators as a disciplinary mechanism aimed at maintaining classroom control, enforcing obedience, and shaping moral character (Dorigoni et al., 2020; Tangwe, 2022). This persistent reliance on punitive discipline undermines the vision of creating peaceful, rights-respecting educational spaces. As Dicklitch (2011) and Tangwe (2022)

argue, such contradictions between policy and practice create a complex and often unattainable pathway to achieving a serene and protective learning environment for all children in Rwanda.

1.3 Review of Literature

1.3.1 Feasibility of Discipline, Rights Protection, Void of Corporal Punishment

Although international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 19) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948, Article 1) explicitly prohibit all forms of violence against children, the translation of these global norms into actionable, enforceable protections remains inconsistent (Tangwe, 2022). These conventions are designed to be universally applicable, yet their effectiveness depends heavily on how individual countries incorporate them into national legislation (Dietz, 2000; Ember & Ember, 2005). In Rwanda, the government has made notable strides in aligning with international child protection standards. This includes the passage of the Law on the Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence (2008, revised in 2011) and the Law No. 54/2000 of 14/12/2011 on the Rights and Protection of the Child—often described as Rwanda's "Bill of Rights" for children (Isimbi et al., 2018; Olusegun & Adelayo, 2017). However, despite these legal reforms, implementation gaps persist. The full protection of children's rights remains elusive, indicating a mismatch between legislative intent and practical outcomes. These shortcomings have contributed to the continued exposure of children in Rwanda to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, particularly within domestic and school environments. This situation reflects a broader issue of "human rights disobedience," where aggressive and harmful behaviors persist despite legal prohibitions. Moreover, unprofessional teacher conduct, teacher absenteeism, weak family structures, ineffective school leadership, and unsafe school environments have all been identified as contributing factors to the persistence of violence in Rwandan secondary schools (Plessis & Mestry, 2024). These issues reveal a critical research gap: while policies exist, little is known about how effectively they are enforced in practice, how violence manifests in everyday school settings, and what contextual barriers hinder the creation of safe, rights-based educational environments in Rwanda.

1.3.2 Corporal Punishment and its Normative Articulation

Cultural norms strongly influence perceptions of acceptable disciplinary practices. Norms, defined as the expected rules of behavior within a particular society, often shape what is deemed customary and appropriate (Dietz, 2000). Within many societies, including Rwanda, corporal punishment (CP) has historically been viewed as a normative and effective method of discipline. Scholars such as Khewu (2012) define CP as the infliction of physical pain intended to correct behavior, often resulting in emotional distress. Similarly, Ember and Ember (2005) describe it as any form of punishment or discipline directed at a dependent child through physical means. The normative discourse around CP becomes problematic when considering its proximity to child abuse. Tangwe (2023) emphasizes that corporal punishment and child abuse often lie on a continuum, making it difficult to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. When CP is administered excessively or frequently, the outcome may cross into physical and emotional abuse. Arnstein (2009) argues that any act intended to inflict pain whether physical, psychological, or emotional on a child constitutes CP, and when repeated or

intensified, should be classified as abuse. Despite longstanding cultural support for CP, research increasingly challenges its legitimacy. Studies have documented that CP can have severe and lasting effects on children's physical and mental health. These include increased aggression, behavioral disorders, drug and alcohol use, criminal tendencies, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Lanchimba et al., 2023; Plessis & Mestry, 2024; Quintero & Fida, 2023). Quintero and Fida (2023) note that over 90% of parents in the United States have admitted to using physical punishment, underscoring how entrenched this practice is, even in high-income countries. Further complicating the issue is the cultural belief in strict parenting as a form of care. Tangwe (2023) links this belief to Confucian-inspired values where elders are expected to discipline children to instill obedience, loyalty, and respect for authority. These cultural frameworks reinforce the idea that harsh discipline is an act of love rather than harm. Legally, parental rights to raise children have historically been treated as private matters, with legal systems upholding parental authority in child-rearing (Barakat & Bengtsson, 2018). In Rwanda, although the government has made significant strides to prohibit CP through legislation, institutional reforms, and multilateral partnerships, the practice remains widespread and socially acceptable (Barakat & Bengtsson, 2018). The Rwandan government has enacted multiple legal instruments aimed at child protection; however, physical violence in both schools and homes persists. Corporal punishment remains the most common and socially normative form of violence against children in Rwanda, reflecting a gap between legal prohibition and community practice. This disconnect is compounded by a range of systemic issues such as unprofessional conduct by teachers, teacher absenteeism, weak family structures, poor school leadership, and unsafe school environments (Plessis & Mestry, 2024). These structural challenges not only undermine legal frameworks but also perpetuate cycles of violence that are normalized under the pretext of discipline. The literature reveals a consistent contradiction: while international and national laws prohibit corporal punishment, cultural norms and systemic weaknesses continue to enable its practice. This contradiction raises important questions about how legal norms are internalized and enforced in specific contexts, particularly in post-conflict societies like Rwanda.

1.3.3 Religiosity and Corporal Punishment

Religious justifications for corporal punishment, particularly among conservative Protestant communities, remain a significant influence on disciplinary practices. These groups often rely on biblical texts such as Proverbs 13:24 ("spare the rod, spoil the child") to legitimize physical discipline, framing it as divinely sanctioned (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Tangwe, 2017). Conservative Protestant ideology views human nature as inherently sinful, thus requiring firm discipline as a moral corrective. In this theological context, the Bible is interpreted as the ultimate authority in all matters of family life and child-rearing, including the use of corporal punishment (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). However, this perspective stands in direct conflict with universal human rights frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which prohibits violence against individuals, including children (Arnstein, 2009; Fadiji & Reddy, 2020). Moreover, other biblical passages such as 1 Samuel 2:9, Exodus 14:14, and Psalms 11:5 promote peace and explicitly reject violence, exposing a theological contradiction within scripture itself. This inconsistency challenges the selective interpretation of scripture

that supports corporal punishment. Despite the growing consensus among global faith-based organizations including Religion for Peace and the Kyoto Declaration (2006) which advocate for non-violence, dignity, and compassion toward children, conservative religious ideologies continue to legitimize corporal punishment (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2013). These conflicting interpretations point to a critical gap in understanding how religious beliefs perpetuate violence against children, particularly in settings where religion remains a powerful social institution. Therefore, little research has explored the tension between conservative religious doctrines and universal child protection frameworks especially in how these dynamics influence attitudes toward corporal punishment in education and parenting. Further investigation is needed to understand how religious authority shapes practices that contradict legal and moral commitments to children's rights, particularly in contexts such as Rwanda, where religion plays a central role in community life and education. In the Rwandan context, the 2021/22 Education Statistical Yearbook indicated the protestant position as an inferior position regarding school ownership (see Figure 1 below),

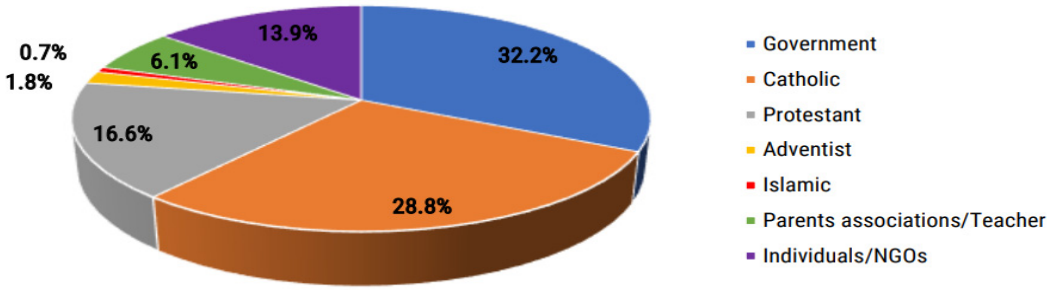

Figure 1. Percentage of schools by owner

Figure 1 above, presents data on school ownership, providing the involvement of different stakeholders within the education system. Out of a total of 4,842 schools, government-owned schools account for 32.2%, with 1,559 establishments. Catholic-affiliated schools make up 28.8%, representing 1,393 schools, while Protestant schools comprise 16.6% with 803 institutions. This shows that as protestants with a position of subscribing to violence from their different tradition, it is apparent that their influence in support of corporal punishment would have been limited only to about 1/3 of the population. A cursory view of the prevalence of violence or corporal punishment would hypothetically indicate that this may be dependent on the culture or the people's way of life.

1.3.4 Scholars Position on Corporal Punishment

Despite growing advocacy for nonviolent child-rearing, corporal punishment (CP) continues to be deeply embedded in many societies due to longstanding cultural acceptance and empirical claims supporting its effectiveness (Ember & Ember, 2005; Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). Parents and teachers who have inherited these beliefs often see no justification to abandon such practices, thereby perpetuating intergenerational cycles of violence. This normalization

reflects how deeply CP is entrenched in socialization processes, where children internalize and replicate violent disciplinary models practiced by adults. Several theoretical frameworks support the persistence of CP. The social interaction theory posits that violence is a learned behavior acquired through observation and imitation, particularly from authority figures like parents and teachers (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Dietz (2000) further contributes through the structural strain model, which suggests that violence becomes a coping mechanism in environments marked by social and economic stress. Similarly, the complexity theory (Ember & Ember, 2005) links physical punishment to high-control, low-autonomy social settings, where adults themselves are tightly supervised and, therefore, demand strict obedience from children. The social spillover theory argues that institutionalized adult violence (*e.g.*, corporal punishment in schools) models and justifies violent behavior among children (Straus & Paschall, 2009). In Rwanda, like much of sub-Saharan Africa, patriarchal and hierarchical cultural structures reinforce the acceptability of corporal punishment (Straus & Paschall, 2009; Tangwe, 2022). These systems often promote violence as both a means of discipline and social control. Durlak et al. (2011), and Lindell (2022) assert that children are more likely to engage in violent behaviors when such actions are modeled or legitimized by teachers, further reinforcing harmful norms. Despite these theoretical insights, there remains a critical research gap. Few studies have empirically examined how these frameworks manifest in the daily lived experiences of children in Rwandan schools and homes. Moreover, little is known about the mechanisms through which CP is socially transmitted, justified, or challenged in educational and family contexts shaped by authoritarian norms. This underscores the need for context-specific, interdisciplinary research that interrogates the cultural, institutional, and psychological factors sustaining CP in Rwanda, particularly in relation to social learning, power dynamics, and generational trauma.

1.3.5 Educational Quality and the Importance of Alternatives to Corporal Punishment

The literature strongly advocates for a shift from punitive disciplinary practices toward Alternative to Corporal Punishment (ATCP) approaches that emphasize respect, communication, and emotional support in the teacher-student relationship. As Khewu (2012) explains, discipline should be viewed as a developmental strategy, not merely a punitive one, involving nonviolent measures such as verbal warnings, community service, and structured learning environments that foster accountability and student growth. These alternatives align with broader educational goals of nurturing well-rounded individuals, grounded in moral, emotional, and social competence. The child-centered pedagogy model reinforces this perspective by calling for learning spaces that are both supportive and motivating, consistent with universal quality education standards (Pillay, 2014; Straus & Paschall, 2009). ATCP practices reflect core values such as social justice, democratic participation, and empowerment through nurturing, positive adult-child relationships and the use of reinforcement techniques to promote desirable behavior (Agbenyega, 2006; Möller & Bellmer, 2023). In the Rwandan context, the government, alongside its international partners, has made significant commitments to instill these values into national education systems and eliminate violence from schools. However, despite global awareness of children's exposure to violence across African countries, empirical evidence remains scarce on the specific types of violence

experienced by Rwandan children both at home and at school. More critically, there is a significant gap in understanding how these experiences intersect with children's demographic and background characteristics, limiting the ability to design targeted, evidence-based interventions for violence prevention in Rwanda.

2. Method

Achieving the planned objectives of this study, it was imperative to identify the techniques and methods used. Hence, in this part of the study, we present the research approach, Instrumentations, data collection procedures and data analyses.

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional design using a quantitative approach to collect data. Data was scooped quantitatively from secondary and primary sources and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Kothari, 2004). The question for this study were based on managing discipline without resorting to any violence with the key objective aimed at understanding the influence of violence on peace development and schooling in Rwanda. It was dependent on a cross-sectional survey and adopted the quantitative research approach (Lloyd, 2018) with structured and closed-ended questionnaires. These questionnaires were adapted from different typologies (WHO, 2002; Galtung, 1990) and theories of violence like (Anderson & Bushman, 2002) as can be seen in the section of instrumentation. In this section, a concise identification of the different methods we employed to get the findings of the study.

2.2 Study Sample

The study was conducted in Rwanda's Huye district in day secondary schools. Using a simple random sampling technique, four coeducational schools were selected based on the subsequent criteria: having both lower and advanced secondary levels and being a mixed school. With the use of the simple random sampling, 191 students attending these four-day schools in the district of Huye were selected. They were selected from the bulk of the students' class population and indicated anyone of such element was accorded the same probability of inclusion in the sample (Gall et al., 2007). The sample population could only be approached after permission obtained from the school leaders in the district and the school. The randomly selected students were assured that all information collected could be used for research purposes and nothing else. The sample of the study was comprised of students that were male and females, between the ages of 15-20 years.

2.3 Instrumentation

The research instruments utilized in this study were adapted from established and validated scales developed by reputable institutions (Hamburger et al., 2013). To ensure contextual appropriateness and measurement accuracy, the questionnaires were piloted and validated within the Rwandan educational context. This validation process enhanced both the reliability and the variability of the instrument. All respondents received the questionnaire with identical wording and in the same sequence to maintain consistency in responses and reduce bias. The

development and deployment of the questionnaire were guided by careful consideration of the study's nature, scope, and objectives. The instrument comprised five subscales, each corresponding to a specific dimension of violence: physical, psychological, environmental, structural, and sexual violence.

2.4 Physical Violence

Corporal or physical violence, characterized by the infliction of physical pain as a disciplinary method, is often intended to bring about behavioral change without necessarily causing injury (Olusegun & Adelayo, 2017). Common practices include hitting, slapping, spanking, kicking, pinching, and shaking (Straus & Fauchier, 2013; Gershoff, 2002). To measure this construct, a Likert-scale instrument adapted from Hamburger et al. (2013) was used. Originally comprising 22 items, the scale was refined to 15 items to improve clarity and contextual relevance. An example item includes: "At home, how often have you been slapped on your face or your head with the hand?" Responses were recorded using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Never to 4 = Often. Although the original psychometric properties were not reported in full, the pilot test conducted in the Rwandan context yielded a Cronbach's alpha (α) reliability coefficient of 0.80, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

2.5 Psychological Violence

Psychological violence was measured using adapted scales focused on bullying and victimization experiences both at home and in school. Bullying, to Kyriakides et al. (2006), refers to situations in which a student is subjected to repeated negative actions by other students, parents, or relatives, resulting in emotional harm. The instrument used for this study was based on the scale developed by Hamburger et al. (2013), originally comprising 22 items but reduced to 15 items for contextual appropriateness and clarity. An example item includes: "At home, how often have your parents said they wished you were never born?" Responses were recorded on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Never to 4 = Often. The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.76 obtained from the pilot study.

2.6 Environmental Violence

Environmental violence was assessed by examining the extent to which students were exposed to unsafe or antisocial behaviors within their school environment. According to Gunzelmann (2004), all children require physical protection, safety, and structured regulation in order to grow, learn, and flourish. Environmental safety concerns are particularly relevant in communities characterized by diverse social interactions and varying degrees of cohesion (Eisenbraun, 2007). In this study, students were asked to report the frequency of five key antisocial behaviors occurring on their school campuses—drug use, vandalism, alcohol consumption, fights, theft, bullying, and weapons possession—using a five-point Likert scale adapted from Rosenblatt and Furlong (1997), ranging from 1 = Not at all to 5 = Very much. The environmental violence subscale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.92.

2.7 Structural Violence

Structural violence was examined as a form of harm embedded in systemic inequities and social norms that perpetuate injustice and exclusion. Unlike direct physical aggression, structural violence operates subtly through institutionalized inequality, resulting in both physical and psychological harm (Chrobak, 2022; Quintero & Fida, 2023). It is considered among the most pervasive and damaging forms of violence due to its roots in exploitative and unjust socioeconomic systems (Mukherjee, 2007; Ndwandwe, 2024). To measure this construct, a five-item scale developed by Midgley et al. (2000) was used. An illustrative item from the scale is: "I feel upset because my parents and teachers have different ideas about what I should learn in school." Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Not at all true to 5 = Very true. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.83.

2.8 Sexual Violence

Sexual violence, defined as any sexual act perpetrated by any person regardless of relationship to the victim and occurring in any setting—including home, school, or workplace—is considered a serious form of abuse and violation (Krug et al., 2002). In this study, sexual violence was assessed using a seven-item scale adapted from the *International Child Abuse Screening Tool—Children's Version* (ICAST-CH) developed by Meinck et al. (2018). An example item includes: "Has anyone touched your private parts or made you touch theirs?" Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Never to 4 = Many times. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.86.

2.9 Data Collection Procedure

Prior to initiating data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Protestant University of Rwanda, followed by formal authorization from district authorities and school administrators. Upon receiving these approvals, the researchers visited the selected schools and informed both administrators and students about the purpose of the study and the procedures involved in data collection. With the support of classroom teachers, the researchers facilitated the administration of the questionnaires during regular school hours at the start of the second semester of the 2024 academic year. Students were selected according to the sampling criteria and completed the questionnaires under the supervision of both the researcher and the teachers. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes. Participants were encouraged to ask questions if they needed clarification and were explicitly informed that they could skip any items that made them feel uncomfortable, thereby ensuring informed and voluntary participation throughout the process.

2.10 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Prior to analysis, the data underwent thorough processing, which involved editing, coding, classification, and tabulation to ensure it was suitable for statistical evaluation (Kothari, 2004). The editing phase was conducted immediately after data collection to ensure accuracy,

consistency, and completeness in line with the objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the data and address the research questions. To examine whether significant differences existed in students' experiences of violence based on demographic or contextual variables, inferential statistical tests were applied. Specifically, the Independent Samples t-test and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to determine any statistically significant variations in reported experiences of violence among groups.

3. Findings/Results

In this section, the analysis of the data is presented beginning with the demographic characteristics of respondents, followed by the types of violence experienced by students. The section also shows how students experienced violence varies by students' background such as gender, age, class, class repetition, parental level of education, family location, and school location.

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Sample Respondents

As illustrated in Table 1, of the 191 student respondents, 96 (50.3%) were male and 95 (49.7%) were female, indicating a balanced gender distribution within the sample. Regarding age, 47.6% (n = 91) of students were under 15 years old, 38.7% (n = 74) were between the ages of 16 and 20, and 13.6% (n = 26) were 21 years or older. In terms of academic level, most respondents were enrolled in Senior 6 (S6), Senior 2 (S2), and Senior 3 (S3), respectively. Concerning repetition history, 46.6% of students reported repeating a class at least once, 5.8% had repeated two or more times, while 47.6% had never repeated a class. The findings suggest that over half of the students (52.4%) experienced some level of academic repetition, potentially indicating underlying challenges related to educational quality and structural factors. Parental education levels also reflected socioeconomic disparities. Among mothers, 67.0% had completed only primary education, 18.8% had not finished secondary school, 8.4% had obtained a high school certificate, 4.2% had earned a bachelor's degree, and just 1.6% held a master's degree. Similarly, fathers' education levels showed that 66.0% had completed primary education, 15.7% had completed ordinary secondary school, 9.4% held a high school certificate, 4.7% had obtained a bachelor's degree, and 4.1% had a postgraduate qualification. Additionally, 57.1% of students reported living in rural areas, 29.3% in semi-urban areas, and only 13.6% in urban areas. This distribution implies that a majority of the sample came from rural settings, reinforcing the narrative of limited access to quality education and socio-economic challenges in these regions (Kothari, 2004).

3.2 Forms of Experienced Violence by Student

This section presents an analysis of the levels of various forms of violence experienced by students both at home and in school. These include physical and psychological violence in both settings, as well as environmental, structural, and sexual violence. Descriptive statistics were used to capture the frequency and intensity of these experiences. As shown in Table 1, the data provide an overview of the prevalence and types of violence reported by students, offering insight into the patterns and nature of violent incidents within their daily environments.

Table 1. Forms of violence experienced by the student

Forms of violence	Never		Once		Sometimes		Often	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Physical Violence at Home	118	62.0	30	15.9	39	20.3	4	1.8
Psychological violence at home	99	51.6	29	15.2	72	37.7	11	5.5
Physical Violence at School	109	56.9	27	14.2	40	20.8	15	8.0
Psychological violence at school	97	50.7	29	15.3	45	23.3	21	10.7
Environmental violence	101	52.9	22	11.4	50	26.1	18	9.6
Structural violence	91	47.6	30	15.7	35	18.3	35	18.3
Sexual violence	161	84.2	13	6.9	13	6.7	4	2.2

Source: Primary data, 2024.

As indicated in Table 1, 15.9% of students reported experiencing physical violence at home once, 20.3% experienced it sometimes, and 1.8% experienced it often. These results suggest that approximately 38.0% of students encountered physical violence in the home setting. With regard to school-based physical violence, 14.2% of students reported experiencing it once, 20.8% sometimes, and 8.0% often, amounting to a total of 43.0% of students having experienced physical violence at school. In terms of psychological violence at home, 15.2% of students reported experiencing it once, 37.7% sometimes, and 5.5% often. This means that 58.4% of students were exposed to psychological violence within the home environment. At school, psychological violence was reported by 15.3% of students as occurring once, 23.3% sometimes, and 10.7% often, indicating that 49.3% of students experienced psychological violence at school. Environmental violence was also prevalent: 11.4% of students experienced it once, 26.1% sometimes, and 9.6% often. Combined, this indicates that 47.1% of students experienced environmental violence at least once. Regarding structural violence, 15.7% of students reported experiencing it once, while 18.3% experienced it sometimes and another 18.3% reported experiencing it often. This brings the total prevalence of structural violence to 52.4%, either at home or school. Finally, sexual violence was reported less frequently. According to Table 1, 6.9% of students experienced it once, 6.7% sometimes, and 2.2% often, totaling 15.8% of students who reported some form of sexual violence, either at school or at home. These findings demonstrate that multiple forms of violence are present and persistent within the educational and domestic environments of Rwandan students.

3.3 Students' Background and Experienced Violence: Violence and Gender

The types of violence experienced by students were tabulated with gender and analyzed to determine the percentages of violence by gender as seen in Table 2

Table 2. Students experienced violence by gender

Type of violence	Gender	Never		Once		Sometimes		Often	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Physical Violence at Home	Male	55	56.8	16	17.1	22	23.2	3	2.9
	Female	64	67.8	14	14.3	15	15.8	2	2.1
Physical Violence at School	Male	54	57.0	15	15.2	20	20.9	7	6.9
	Female	53	56.8	13	13.2	20	20.8	9	9.2
Psychological violence at home	Male	45	46.9	18	18.8	28	28.6	5	5.7
	Female	54	55.9	11	11.6	25	26.8	5	5.7
Psychological violence at school	Male	49	50.6	16	16.7	24	25.0	7	7.7
	Female	50	51.8	13	13.8	20	21.6	12	12.8
Environmental violence	Male	53	55.3	12	12.3	25	26.0	6	6.4
	Female	57	59.8	7	7.8	21	22.1	10	10.3
Structural violence	Male	45	46.8	17	17.7	16	16.7	18	18.8
	Female	46	48.4	13	13.7	19	20.0	17	17.9
Sexual violence	Male	82	85.4	7	7.3	7	7.3	0	0.0
	Female	80	84.3	7	6.9	5	5.4	3	3.4

Source: Primary data, 2024.

According to the data presented in Table 2, approximately 43.2% of male students reported experiencing physical violence at home at least once, compared to 32.2% of female students. This suggests that male students are more likely to experience physical violence at home than their female counterparts. In terms of physical violence at school, 43.0% of male students and 43.2% of female students reported experiencing such violence, indicating that both genders encountered similar levels of physical violence in the school setting. Regarding psychological violence at home, 53.1% of male students experienced this form of abuse compared to 44.1% of female students, implying that males were more exposed to psychological violence in domestic environments. In contrast, psychological violence at school was nearly equally experienced, with 49.4% of male students and 48.2% of female students reporting exposure, suggesting minimal gender disparity in this context.

With respect to environmental violence, the findings show that 44.7% of male students and 40.2% of female students experienced such conditions, indicating a slightly higher prevalence among male students. This may suggest both higher exposure and potentially greater involvement by male students in environmentally violent behaviors or settings. In terms of

structural violence, 18.8% of male students and 17.9% of female students reported experiencing it, showing only a marginal difference, but again pointing to slightly higher exposure among male students. Lastly, sexual violence was reported by 14.6% of male students and 15.7% of female students, indicating that female students experienced marginally more sexual violence compared to their male peers. These gendered patterns of violence suggest the need for tailored interventions that account for the specific vulnerabilities and experiences of both male and female students (Hamburger et al., 2013; Olusegun & Adelayo, 2017).

The study also explored whether there were statistically significant differences between male and female students in their experiences of violence. To determine this, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 3, which presents the mean scores and standard deviations for each form of violence (physical, psychological, environmental, structural, and sexual), disaggregated by gender, along with the corresponding t-values, degrees of freedom, and significance levels (p-values). This analysis helps assess whether gender differences in experiences of violence are statistically meaningful or due to chance.

Table 3. Comparison of the average mean scores between male and female students in terms of experienced violence

Types of Experienced Violence	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p-value
Physical Violence at Home	Male	96	13.76	3.85	2.73	0.00*
	Female	95	12.29	3.56		
Physical Violence at School	Male	96	14.21	4.35	0.06	0.53
	Female	95	14.59	4.05		
Psychological violence at home	Male	96	3.86	1.64	1.09	0.27
	Female	95	3.62	1.43		
Psychological violence at school	Male	96	9.49	3.51	0.06	0.54
	Female	95	9.81	3.62		
Environmental violence	Male	96	9.09	2.88	0.12	0.90
	Female	95	9.15	3.02		
Structural violence	Male	96	2.07	1.18	0.04	0.99
	Female	95	2.07	1.19		
Sexual violence	Male	96	8.64	2.46	2.33	0.02*
	Female	95	9.64	3.41		
Total	Male	96	61.12	14.41	0.02	0.97
	Female	95	61.17	12.53		

Source: Primary data, 2024.

The results revealed gender-based variation in the types of violence experienced by students. Overall, male students (M = 61.12, SD = 14.41) reported slightly higher levels of violence than female students (M = 61.17, SD = 12.53), though the difference was not substantial in total violence experienced. However, a statistically significant difference emerged in physical violence experienced at home, with males reporting significantly more incidents than females, $t(189) = 2.73$, $p < .05$. Similarly, a significant difference was observed in sexual violence, with females experiencing more sexual violence than their male counterparts, $p < .05$. These findings suggest that while male students are more likely to experience physical violence at home, female students are disproportionately affected by sexual violence.

3.4 Violence and Age

The results show that, with the exception of physical violence at home, $F(2, 190) = 2.41$, $p > .05$, physical violence at school, $F(2, 190) = 2.81$, $p > .05$, and structural violence, $F(2, 190)$

= 0.49, $p > .05$, there were statistically significant differences among the three age groups (<15, 16-20, and 21 and above) in terms of the other forms of violence experienced. Specifically, significant differences were found in psychological violence at home, $F(2, 190) = 6.43$, $p < .05$; psychological violence at school, $F(2, 190) = 4.81$, $p < .05$; environmental violence, $F(2, 190) = 10.13$, $p < .05$; and sexual violence, $F(2, 190) = 3.74$, $p < .05$.Figure 1 illustrates that students aged 21 and above experienced the highest overall levels of violence (M = 66.65, SD = 13.54), followed by those aged 16-20 (M = 60.73, SD = 13.34), and those under 15 years (M = 59.72, SD = 13.30). These findings suggest that older students, particularly those aged 21 and above, are more vulnerable to various forms of school and home violence, especially in the psychological, environmental, and sexual domains.

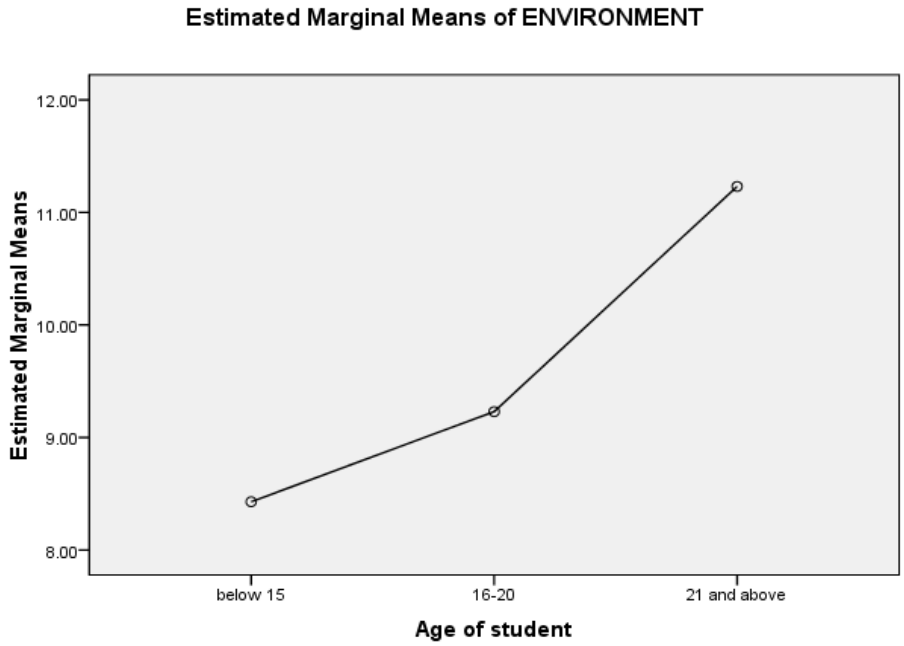

Figure 1. Means plot for total students' experienced violence according to age

Source: Primary data, 2023.

3.5 Violence and the Class

The results reveal that, with the exception of physical violence at home, $F(4, 190) = 0.97$, $p > .05$, and psychological violence at school, $F(4, 190) = 1.37$, $p > .05$, there were statistically significant differences in the types of violence experienced across the six academic classes-namely S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6. Significant variations were found in physical violence at school, $F(4, 190) = 5.64$, $p < .05$; psychological violence at home, $F(4, 190) = 5.42$, $p < .05$; environmental violence, $F(4, 190) = 3.23$, $p < .05$; structural violence, $F(4, 190) = 3.43$, $p < .05$; and sexual violence, $F(4, 190) = 3.98$, $p < .05$. Specifically, students in S2 reported higher levels of physical violence at school (M = 16.00, SD = 4.90) and psychological violence at school (M = 10.80, SD = 4.51) compared to other class levels. Students in S3 experienced

greater levels of structural violence (M = 2.51, SD = 1.17), while students in S6 reported the highest experiences of psychological violence at home (M = 4.31, SD = 1.71) and environmental violence (M = 9.56, SD = 3.46). As illustrated in Figure 2, students in classes S2, S3, and S6 are disproportionately affected by various forms of violence ranging from physical and psychological to environmental, structural, and sexual violence when compared to their peers in other classes. These results highlight the importance of class-specific interventions and support systems aimed at mitigating exposure to school-related violence.

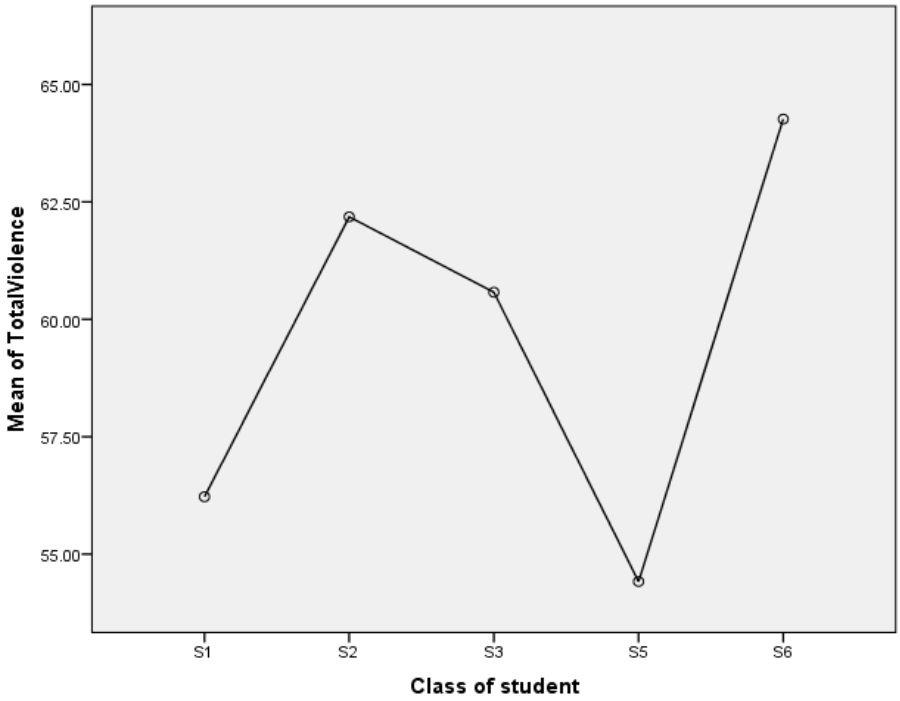

Figure 2. Means plot for total students' experienced violence according to students' classes

Source: Primary data, 2024.

3.6 Violence and Class Repetition

Findings indicate that, aside from physical violence at home and school, psychological violence at home and school, structural violence, and sexual violence, there is no statistically significant difference among students based on repetition status—categorized as never repeated, repeated once, and repeated twice or more. However, a statistically significant difference was observed in relation to environmental violence, $F(2, 190) = 3.47$, $p < .05$. Specifically, students who had repeated a class twice or more reported experiencing higher levels of environmental violence (M = 11.36, SD = 3.00) compared to those who had repeated once or not at all. This suggests that repetition status may be a contributing factor to students' exposure to environmental threats within school settings, warranting targeted interventions for repeaters to ensure a safer and more inclusive learning environment.

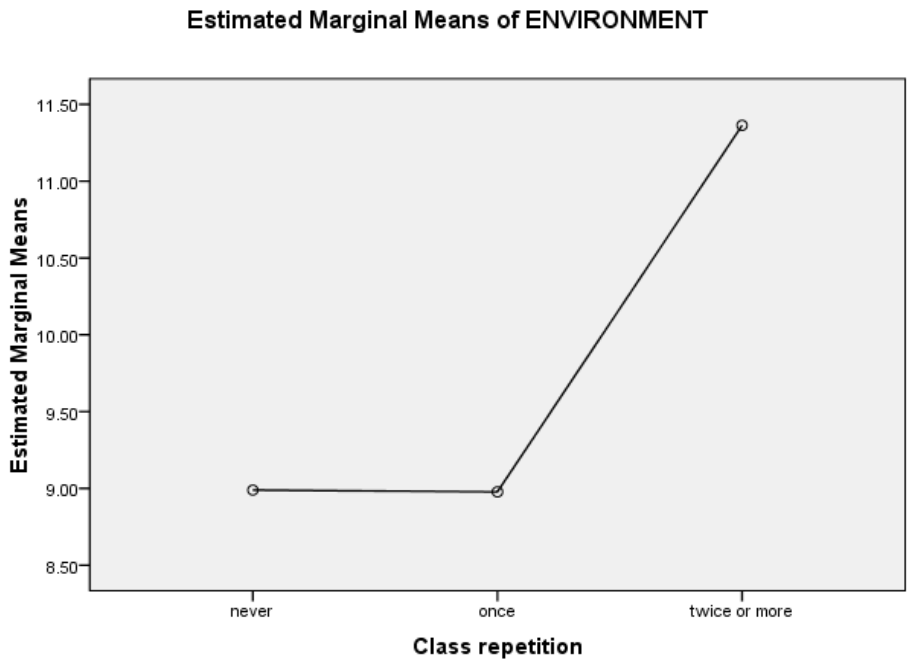

Figure 3. Violence and class repetition

Source: Primary data, 2024.

3.7 Violence and Mothers Level of Education

Concerning violence and students' mothers' level of education, the findings indicate no statistically significant differences in the students' experiences of physical, psychological, environmental, structural, or sexual violence across the five categories of maternal education levels ($p > .05$). These results suggest that the educational attainment of students' mothers does not have a significant impact on the likelihood or severity of violence experienced by students. In other words, maternal education level does not appear to serve as a protective or risk factor for students' exposure to various forms of violence within the home or school context.

3.8 Violence and Fathers Level of Education

The results reveal that, with the exception of psychological violence at home, there are no statistically significant differences in the students' experiences of physical violence at home ($F(5, 190) = 1.50$, $p > .05$), physical violence at school ($F(5, 190) = 1.22$, $p > .05$), psychological violence at school ($F(5, 190) = 0.68$, $p > .05$), environmental violence ($F(5, 190) = 0.73$, $p > .05$), structural violence ($F(5, 190) = 0.61$, $p > .05$), and sexual violence ($F(5, 190) = 0.55$, $p > .05$) across the six categories of fathers' educational attainment (primary, ordinary level (O/L), advanced level (A/L), bachelor's degree, master's degree, and PhD). However, a statistically significant difference was found in students' experiences of psychological violence at home based on their fathers' education level ($F(5, 190) = 4.15$, $p < .05$). Specifically,

students whose fathers had only a primary education reported experiencing higher levels of psychological violence at home (M = 4.02, SD = 1.54) than students whose fathers had higher educational qualifications. These findings suggest a negative correlation between fathers' educational attainment and the incidence of psychological violence at home: as the level of education increases, the likelihood of children experiencing psychological violence decreases. This trend is illustrated in Figure 4 and aligns with existing research linking parental education to positive parenting practices and lower rates of child maltreatment.

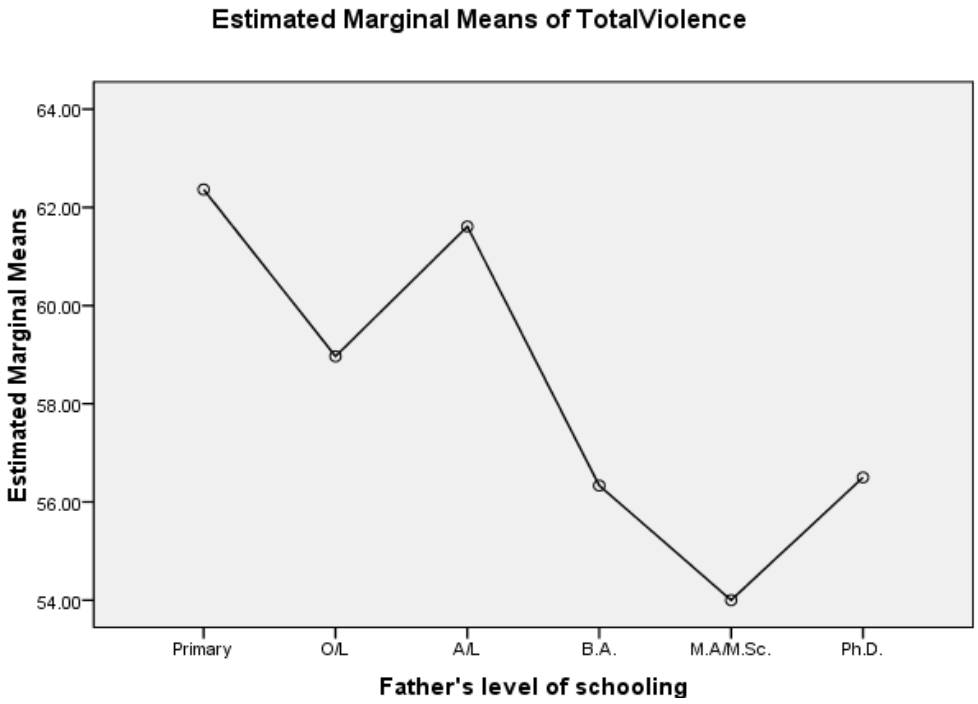

Figure 4. Means plot for total students' experienced violence according to father's level of education

Source: Primary data 2024.

3.8 Violence and Family Location

Results indicate that, with the exception of environmental violence, there were no statistically significant differences in the experiences of physical violence at home ($F(2, 190) = 2.48$, $p > .05$), physical violence at school ($F(2, 190) = 0.89$, $p > .05$), psychological violence at home ($F(2, 190) = 0.60$, $p > .05$), psychological violence at school ($F(2, 190) = 0.55$, $p > .05$), or sexual violence ($F(2, 190) = 1.71$, $p > .05$) among students based on their family location—urban, semi-urban, and rural. However, a statistically significant difference was found in the levels of environmental violence experienced by students from different family locations ($F(2, 190) = 3.90$, $p < .05$). As illustrated in Figure 4, students residing in semi-urban areas reported experiencing higher levels of environmental violence, followed by those in

urban areas, with students from rural areas reporting the least exposure. These findings suggest that environmental risk factors associated with violence may be more prevalent or visible in transitional (semi-urban) contexts, possibly due to socio-economic instability, limited infrastructure, and population density in such areas (Eisenbraun, 2007; Gunzelmann, 2004).

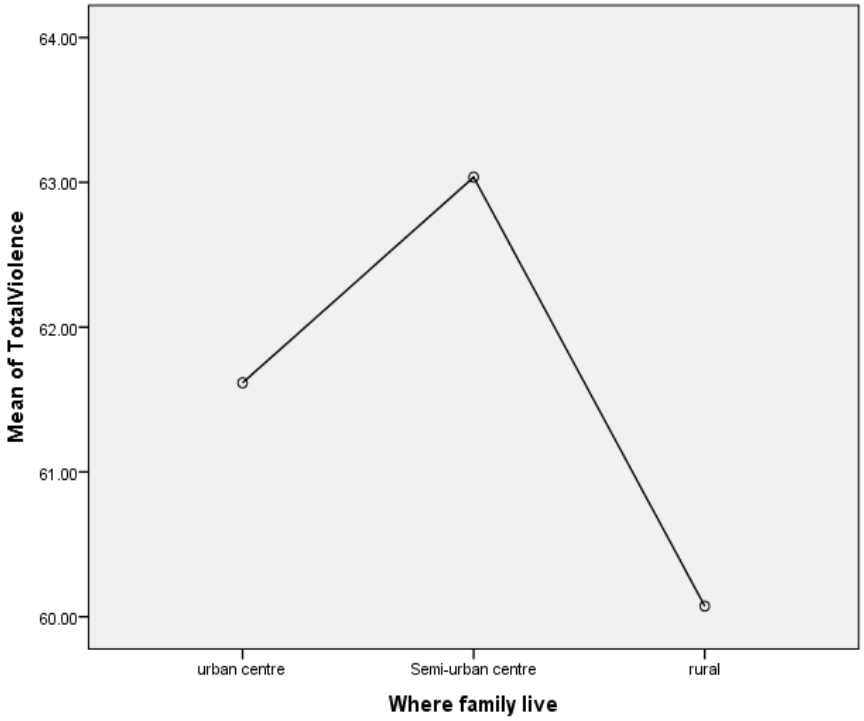

Figure 5. Means plot for total students' experienced violence according to students' family location

Source: Primary data 2024.

3.10 Violence and School Location

Findings reveal that students in semi-urban school settings experienced the highest levels of physical violence at home (M = 14.28, SD = 4.26), psychological violence at home (M = 3.84, SD = 1.62), and environmental violence (M = 10.28, SD = 3.11). In contrast, students in rural schools experienced more physical violence at school (M = 15.02, SD = 4.01) and psychological violence at school (M = 10.03, SD = 3.52) compared to their urban and semi-urban counterparts. Meanwhile, students attending urban schools reported experiencing higher levels of sexual violence (M = 9.89, SD = 3.71) than those in other locations. These findings suggest that the school's geographical context plays a significant role in shaping students' exposure to different forms of violence. Semi-urban areas appear to present complex socio-cultural dynamics that heighten risks of violence in home environments, while rural schools exhibit greater challenges related to disciplinary violence and school climate. Urban areas, though typically considered more resourced, revealed concerning levels of

sexual violence exposure, indicating a need for targeted interventions across all school locations.

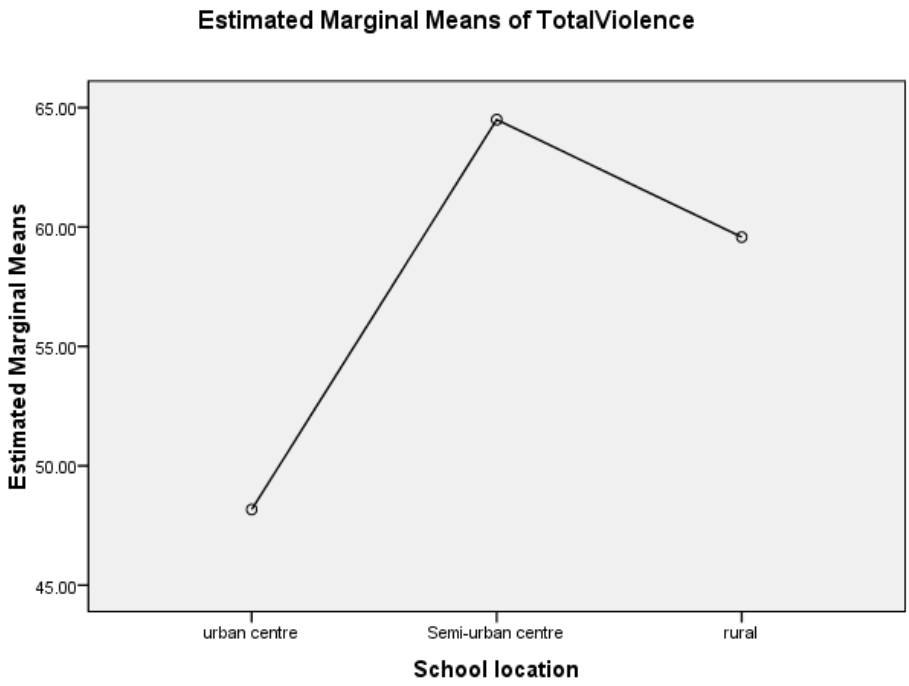

Figure 6. Means plot for total students' experienced according to school location

Source: Primary data 2024.

4. Discussion

The home and school environments are foundational ecosystems for managing and shaping student behavior. Within these spaces, disciplinary practices are intended not merely to correct misconduct but to promote student safety and foster conducive learning environments (Eisenbraun, 2007). This study evaluated the prevalence of violence experienced by students in selected secondary schools in a district of Rwanda, aiming to contribute to the discourse on peacebuilding in education.

Findings reveal alarmingly high levels of violence affecting Rwandan students. Specifically, 38.0% experienced physical violence at home, and 43.0% reported physical violence at school. Psychological violence was even more pervasive, with 58.4% of students subjected to it at home and 49.3% at school. Environmental violence affected 47.1% of students, while 52.4% experienced structural violence at least once either at school or at home. Additionally, 15.8% reported experiencing sexual violence in at least one setting. These findings are consistent with studies by de Wet (2024), and Tangwe (2022), who observed that, despite awareness campaigns and policy efforts, violence in schools remains disturbingly widespread. Comparable data from Cameroon (Tangwe, 2022) indicated similarly troubling figures,

demonstrating the regional character of this problem: 23.9% experienced physical violence at home, 23.2% at school, 18.9% psychological bullying at home, 22.7% at school, and 24.0% reported sexual abuse.

Despite ongoing interventions by the Rwandan government and its multilateral partners, these results suggest a gap between policy intentions and school-level realities. Government policies and frameworks, including those embedded in Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), advocate for safe, inclusive, and rights-based learning environments. Yet, violence continues to manifest in physical, psychological, structural, and sexual forms. This dissonance indicates that policy mechanisms have not yet been fully internalized or enforced at the grassroots level of schools, where children remain highly vulnerable. The study also analyzed student characteristics to determine how experiences of violence vary across demographics, particularly gender. Results show that both male and female students are affected, though with different patterns. Males reported experiencing significantly more physical violence at home, whereas females were more likely to report sexual violence. These gendered experiences align with UNESCO (2014) data, which reported that school-related gender-based violence affected 32.6% of girls and 29.2% of boys globally. These figures underscore that, while gendered violence may manifest differently, both boys and girls remain at substantial risk. Findings further corroborate earlier research by Niyonagize and Mukamazimpaka (2021) and Tangwe (2022), which pointed to persistent gender disparities in the types of violence students experience.

These results expose a fundamental disconnect between the formalized rhetoric of peace and protection promoted by governmental policy and the lived experiences of students in schools. Even where statistically significant gender-based differences exist, the broader picture is one of systemic vulnerability, where students—regardless of background—face a multitude of threats to their safety and psychological well-being. The complexity and persistence of violence reveal the limitations of policy alone in curbing these trends and call for more synergistic and action-oriented collaboration between government agencies and educational institutions. Addressing these dynamics requires not only punitive policies or awareness campaigns, but also a holistic, community-based approach involving school leaders, teachers, parents, and students themselves. Education for peace, child protection training, trauma-informed pedagogy, and community accountability mechanisms must be institutionalized within the school ecosystem. Moreover, ongoing evaluation, teacher support, and a strong child advocacy framework are essential to bridge the gap between national goals and school realities. Furtherance to this, the findings affirm that violence in Rwandan schools remains a pressing concern, demanding stronger synergy between the government and educational institutions. Without a collaborative, systemic approach rooted in accountability, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity, the aspiration to provide violence-free learning environments will remain elusive. Understanding the multifaceted dimensions of school-based violence necessitates a comprehensive investigation into how contextual and demographic variables influence student vulnerability. This study explored patterns of violence across age, class level, repetition history, parental education, and family location to assess where targeted governmental and institutional interventions may be most impactful in

Rwanda's education system.

Moreover, the findings from the analysis revealed significant differences in students' experience of violence across age groups. In particular, students aged 21 and above experienced higher levels of psychological violence at home and school, environmental violence, and sexual violence compared to their younger counterparts ($p < .05$). This may be attributed to age-related expectations or power imbalances exacerbated by rigid school hierarchies. These findings call for age-sensitive interventions that acknowledge the unique psychological pressures and social vulnerabilities faced by older students, especially those who may have repeated classes or experienced prolonged school enrollment (Tangwe, 2022). Class level also emerged as a significant variable. Students in Senior 2 (S2) experienced higher levels of physical and psychological violence at school, while those in Senior 3 (S3) experienced more structural violence, and Senior 6 (S6) students reported more psychological violence at home and greater exposure to environmental violence ($p < .05$). The recurrence of violence among S2, S3, and S6 students indicates that critical transitional or examination years may be pressure points for intensified violence. These variances suggest an urgent need for government-school collaboration in creating targeted, grade-specific counseling and behavior support programs that foster peace and emotional resilience.

In addition, class repetition often symptomatic of learning difficulties or inadequate support systems was significantly associated with environmental violence ($p < .05$). Students who had repeated a class two or more times reported higher exposure to environmental threats such as vandalism, substance abuse, and bullying. This reinforces the notion that an unsafe learning environment not only impedes academic success but also compounds psychosocial vulnerability (Tangwe, 2022). Government and school authorities must respond by addressing both academic and environmental risk factors, promoting inclusive policies that foster safe spaces for students with varying academic trajectories.

Family location also influenced students' exposure to violence, particularly environmental violence. Students from semi-urban areas reported the highest exposure, followed by those from rural settings ($p < .05$). These findings may reflect infrastructural disparities, school overcrowding, or lack of supervision that contribute to disorderly environments in non-urban contexts. This supports the call for context-specific investments in school safety infrastructure and community policing strategies as part of the broader peace education agenda (UNESCO, 2014). Interestingly, the mother's level of education was not statistically significant in predicting students' exposure to any form of violence. However, the father's level of education was associated with psychological violence at home ($p < .05$). Students whose fathers had only a primary education experienced more psychological violence compared to those whose fathers attained higher education. This trend aligns with previous research by Tangwe (2022), who reported that parental education particularly paternal correlates with parenting practices and the use of non-violent disciplinary strategies. These results suggest that educational initiatives targeting parents, particularly fathers, could help reduce violence in the home, thereby supporting government-led campaigns for child protection and well-being.

Consequently, the findings affirm that while Rwanda has made substantial policy strides toward peace education and child protection, student experiences of violence remain stratified across social, demographic, and institutional lines. To reduce violence and cultivate peace in schools, the government and educational institutions must engage in synergistic collaboration. This includes strengthening monitoring mechanisms, expanding psychosocial support programs, improving the learning environment, and sensitizing parents and school personnel about non-violent disciplinary alternatives. Without addressing the layered and localized nature of school violence, efforts toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4-quality education for all may remain aspirational rather than transformational.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that the collaborative efforts between government stakeholders and Rwandan educational institutions to prevent and mitigate school-based violence remain insufficiently operationalized. Despite the existence of policies and institutional frameworks, the mechanisms for managing discipline, protecting students' rights, articulating school norms, and promoting alternatives to violence often remain abstract rather than actionable (Tangwe, 2022). The findings underscore the urgent need to transform rhetorical commitments into concrete, context-specific interventions that address the lived realities of students in Rwandan secondary schools. Although the Rwandan government mindful of its tragic history of genocide has taken commendable steps toward fostering peace education and safeguarding learners, implementation gaps continue to impede progress. As this study demonstrates, violence persists in various forms, particularly physical, psychological, and environmental, disproportionately affecting students based on gender, age, class level, repetition history, and school location. These disparities reflect a deeply embedded challenge that extends beyond formal policy into the cultural, social, and institutional fabric of school environments (de Wet, 2024; UNESCO, 2014).

Sustainable peacebuilding in education thus demands more than regulatory compliance—it calls for a holistic reorientation of values and behaviors. The promotion of a culture of discipline and peace must be rooted in Rwanda's societal customs, traditions, and collective psyche. It must be nurtured continuously through inclusive stakeholder engagement, consistent policy enforcement, and the empowerment of students, teachers, and parents alike. Achieving meaningful change also requires that discipline not be equated with violence, but instead aligned with restorative practices that promote dignity, empathy, and democratic participation (Eisenbraun, 2007; Agbenyega, 2006).

In sum, while the Rwandan government's vision for a violence-free educational system is both noble and necessary, its realization hinges on a synergistic, systemic approach. Schools must become not just spaces of instruction but environments of peace where learners feel safe, valued, and empowered to thrive. The gradual development of institutional structures and policy enforcement mechanisms is encouraging, but without sustained commitment, inclusive monitoring, and culturally grounded implementation strategies, the dream of lasting educational peace may remain elusive.

6. Recommendations

This study has unravelled some hidden aspects of violent abuse in Rwandan society and after thorough reflections, the researchers deemed it necessary to identify possible quick measures (practice) to stem the tides and long-lasting measures to sustain its implementations as a follow-up (research).

6.1 Practice

The government should identify more policy measures to handle the different power displays and promote more gender balance and mainstreaming. Different strands of violence are the resultant outcome of different societal norms and should be controlled.

Stakeholders regarding education should put in place mechanisms to control all types of violence in school as the attempts are made but the effects are yet to be felt.

Each institution of learning should put in place monitoring units for follow-up and reporting the nuances of different actions.

6.2 Research

An empirical study using qualitative methods should be engaged to get the perceptions and the experiences of the students and teachers to understand the different trends noticed in this study.

7. Limitations

This study utilised the quantitative methods in research to ascertain the essence of discipline and how it is managed. Due to this method, it was not possible to get the experiences and opinions of respondents. It will be interesting to use qualitative methods to get required insights from the respondents including observations to gauge the impact of the absence of discipline in the lives of students and their effect in education.

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Authors Contributions

Dr. Tangwe, was responsible for conceptualization, design, data acquisition, drafting manuscript, critical revision of manuscript, Dr. Bizimana, handled the data analysis, interpreting, critical revision of manuscript, Dr. Niyibizi, was responsible for data acquisition, conceptualization, critical revision of manuscript while Dr. Nyiramana, and Mrs. Mukanziza, were responsible for drafting the manuscript, and data analysis. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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