



## Exploring Learner Behavior within School Context: A Study of Disciplinary Committees in Selected Secondary Schools of Southern Zambia

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aimed at establishing how disciplinary committees managed learner behaviour within the school context. The objectives of the study were to: establish how Disciplinary Committees dealt with acts of indiscipline; explore the perceptions of head teachers, deputy head teachers, senior teachers, class teachers and pupils on indiscipline; and identify strategies used by Disciplinary Committees in handling pupil indiscipline in selected secondary schools of Southern, Zambia. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select the head teachers, deputy head teachers, and class teachers, while random sampling procedure was employed to select pupils who participated in the study. The findings of the study revealed that punishment in form of manual work, suspension, and forced transfers were used. However, the penalty depended on the gravity of the case and this was done depending on the case done by the learners. With regard to the perceptions of the pupils and members of the disciplinary committees, it was found that most pupils knew where to report the cases of indiscipline in school. They also perceived these committees as effective enough in combating pupil indiscipline in school. As regards the strategies used by disciplinary committees to overcome indiscipline in schools, it was found that sensitization of the learners proved to be the most effective way of improving pupil behavior in schools. Furthermore, incorporating guidance and counselling services was yet another important method which the schools employed. Based on the findings, the study recommended inter alia that regular marking of the school attendance register by teachers should be enhanced and students who absent themselves from school without permission from the school should be dealt with so as to serve as deterrent measure to others. Disciplinary committees in schools should also consider having meetings more frequently so that they can discuss new ways and means of fighting Indiscipline.

### KEYWORDS:

Disciplinary committee, learner behaviour, pupil indiscipline, sensitization, guidance and counselling.

### INTRODUCTION

#### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Acts of indiscipline among pupils in schools have been repeatedly noted in Zambia and elsewhere. These acts have become an issue in learning institutions. Disciplinary Committees have become tools usually adopted to combat this vice. Kochhar (2001) posits that indiscipline is conceptualized as a behaviour that breaches rules and regulations of a school, and later undermines its effectiveness. Therefore, it takes discipline to blend and advance development at both personal and the national level.

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Various forms of pupil indiscipline cases are increasingly reported all-round the globe. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2009) reports on the frequency of certain pupil misbehaviour amongst secondary school pupils in England, Italy, Japan, Russia, Scotland and USA. According to the report, problems of indiscipline include absenteeism, arriving late at school, skipping class periods, violating dress code, classroom disturbances, cheating, vandalism, theft and inflicting physical injuries on other students (Muyabi, Kalimaposo, Mubita, Mulubale, Haambokoma, Milupi, Mundende, 2022). In order to curb indiscipline in secondary schools, disciplinary committees in schools established enforced school regulations on dress code, absenteeism, skipping class period, vandalism, theft and other acts of indiscipline. Those found wanting were subjected to corporal punishment, suspension and complete

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dismissal from school, depending on the nature of indiscipline committed.

In the same vein, in America, Clarke (2002) reported a number of pupil indiscipline cases which included violence upon teachers and other students, possession of controlled substances such as alcohol, robbery, engaging in habitual profanity, vulgarity, committing school assault to staff and making terrorist threats against the school authority. It was also found that schools resorted to the establishment of Disciplinary Committees which worked hand in hand with the state police. Through this collaboration, severe cases of indiscipline like assault of fellow students, members of staff, using of drugs and weapons such as guns and knives and other felonies were reported to the police.

In Zambia, there has been growing outcry by teachers, parents and other members of the community over indiscipline by pupils in schools. However, indiscipline has been dealt with to some degree in some schools in Zambia. For instance, it was reported by Mugala (2018) in a newspaper article titled "Disciplinary cases prevent 14 pupils from writing Grade 12 examinations", (Post newspaper Education supplement 8th November. Page 2-) in a case that involved 13 boys from named schools in Muchinga and Northern Provinces that "...it was resolved that 14 pupils would not sit for Grade 12 Examinations because they were facing disciplinary cases, said Provincial Education Officer." He said although it was a difficult decision to make, it was the only way of discouraging indiscipline and serious behaviour in schools and supporting the decisions made by the Disciplinary Committees, so that there is stability and discipline in schools and pupils can concentrate on learning". Furthermore, 21 Grade 12 High pupils were suspended for allegedly assaulting Grade 10 pupils at their school, the Province Education Officer said the pupils were given forced transfers and were made to repeat grade 11 wherever they went. The above statements clearly indicate some of the ways in which Disciplinary Committees dealt with indiscipline cases in some parts of Zambia.

The perception of pupils and other teachers with regards to how indiscipline is handled, has posed a major reason why indiscipline still persist in most schools. In Jamaica, for example, pupils in most schools have a negative perception towards school rules and regulations provided by the Ministry of Education aimed at enhancing the quality of education. This negative attitude may be attributed to the different backgrounds of the pupils. Some pupils come from places where acts of indiscipline are rampant and done freely on the streets. These find it hard to accept that coming late for classes, absenteeism, drinking alcohol at school, physical assault of fellow students and other acts are grave offences that need correction (Griffin, 1994). Rahul (2011) also

observed that most students went on strike, resorted to copying and cheating in examinations, insulted their teachers, tore away pages from the library books, wrote dirty things on the walls and practiced violence as a result of their negative perception of what discipline entails.

In Malaysia, acts of indiscipline in schools are also evident and is ranked as a major problem among students of primary and secondary schools and most students involved in such acts were not dealt with accordingly by the Disciplinary Committees in their respective schools because such students were rich, their parents bribed influential members of the Disciplinary Committees and their cases died sudden death as members of staff who wanted to proceed with such cases were threatened with unemployment" (Azizi, 2009). The resilience of relevant school authorities or Disciplinary Committees in handling indiscipline has made some teachers to also engage themselves in helping some pupils who are viewed to be 'sacred cows' cheat termly assessments and in some cases, during examinations. This has continued to be a growing concern and problem as the negative mind-set of pupils and some teacher tends to encourage indiscipline. For example, in the United States, 20 pupils were asked what can make them engage in indiscipline. Their response showed that they believed Disciplinary Committees at their respective schools did not have acceptable or just procedures when dealing with cases of indiscipline. The pupils went on to say that punishment was given in biased ways and those pupils coming from rich families or with parents from high positions in government, were mostly exempted from indiscipline charges despite being found wanting.

In Zambia, the story is no different, Banja (2001), showed that the most spoiled pupils involved in indiscipline at most schools in Central province of Zambia, were those who had their parents as members of staff at the same school. This in turn gave a rise to negative perceptions by the pupils regarding how the school authorities handled indiscipline and consequently made some pupils to engage in such acts as a way of trying to imitate their peers who felt they are untouchable.

Disciplinary Committees have been established in many schools to curb this vice, however, acts of indiscipline still persists. Parents and members of the community have expressed anxiety and dissatisfaction about the rising incidences of violence in schools in spite of the presence of school disciplinary management committees. In the Caribbean states, the problem of pupil indiscipline seems to be no different. Thompson (2009) posits that, "in Trinidad and Tobago policy-makers, teachers, parents and the public at large have been struggling to find solutions aimed at mitigating the problem of indiscipline in schools." Similarly, in Uganda, cases of indiscipline have been noted countrywide

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in both Faith Based and public schools (Ssekamwa and Lugumba, 2000). Furthermore, the study in Uganda revealed that, a number of schools suffered an alarming deterioration of discipline in the recent past, and the concern is on the role of Disciplinary Committees in inculcating a culture of discipline in schools.

In Zambia, cases of pupil indiscipline have not been any different from what is happening elsewhere. Disciplinary Committees are claimed to be well established in most schools but issues relating to pupil indiscipline have taken a lead in the both print and electronic media. The masterminds usually show concern that the lawlessness in such schools leave much to be desired, for it goes to account for the low academic performance in the institutions of learning and in many instances school administration does little to stop indiscipline especially if the perpetrator is related to one of the influential members of staff at the school (Nyeleti, Kalimaposo, Chisefu, Mubita, Mundende, Milupi, 2022).

It was reported by the Times of Zambia (2021) about some unruly Grade 12 pupils at a named school in Central Province of Zambia who set defiant rules that scared teachers from attending classes. According to the article, the pupils drafted rebellious rules and displayed them within the school premises. This prompted teachers to stay away from classes for fear of being victimized by the pupils. This scenario begs a question: What was the School Disciplinary Committee doing to let the situation reach such uncontrollable state?

Another example of riotous behaviour by pupils in Zambia is what happened to seven pupils of a named boarding school for boys in Central Province who were fined by the Magistrate over riotous behaviour. The Magistrate also extended the payment of the fine to 285 other pupils, who were absent from school on the day of the riot. The court ordered each of the pupils to pay K120 for riotous behaviour. The seven pupils, who appeared in court, were arrested during the riot which resulted in wanton destruction of school property. In passing judgment, the Magistrate said Zambia was a peaceful nation, hence riotous behaviour would not be condoned. She said the offence committed by the pupils was serious because it was retrogressive to national development. In mitigation, the pupils pleaded for leniency saying they would not repeat indulging themselves in unruly behaviour. They pleaded that they were school pupils, some of whom were going to write their final examinations at the end of the year. Some parents of the pupils, who attended the judgment, described the judgment as fair and warned their children to desist from misconduct in school (Lusaka Times, 2021).

Lack of discipline always hinders progress. It appears it is becoming a custom among Zambian youths to resort to unruly behaviour when aggrieved as a way of expressing their anger

or frustration. It should be noted that problems cannot be resolved by using unruly behaviour, there are better ways of expressing grievances such as dialogue. It is therefore the responsibility of school administration through the Disciplinary Committees to be proactive in dealing with issues of indiscipline and ensure that the acts of violence by pupils are dealt with diligently.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

It has been observed globally that discipline is the pillar of unity in every country (Mishra, 2012). In learning institutions, discipline to a greater extent enhances the attainment of a desirable quality education at all levels in learning institutions. In Zambia, a lot of information on pupil indiscipline has been brought to the fore through the media and a lot of effort has been made by the Government of the Republic of Zambia through the Ministry of General Education to provide a revised curriculum that offers an opportunity of instructing and guiding the pupils on morality through Religious Education and Civic Education. In addition to the curriculum, is the provision of guidance and counselling services in schools. Other efforts taken in ensuring good learning environment and behavioural modification of pupils in schools include in-service management training of the administrators. School managers are provided with the in-service management refresher courses aimed at equipping them with knowledge and skills of handling various issues in their work places, discipline inclusive (MoE, 1996:2). Despite the Government's efforts through the established programmes such as establishment of Disciplinary Committees in schools, indiscipline still remains a big challenge. Many studies have been conducted on secondary school discipline, however there appears a knowledge gap in the nature of indiscipline in schools and how Disciplinary Committees managed learner behaviour within the school contexts. It is against this background, that this study sought to establish how Disciplinary Committees managed cases of indiscipline in public secondary schools of Southern Province Zambia.

### **General Objective**

The general objective of the study was to investigate the nature of indiscipline in schools and how Disciplinary Committees managed learner behaviour within their school context in selected secondary schools of Southern Province Zambia.

### **Specific Objectives**

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To establish how Disciplinary Committees dealt with acts of indiscipline in selected secondary schools of Southern Zambia.
2. To explore the perceptions of head teachers, deputy head teachers, senior teachers, class

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teachers and pupils on indiscipline in selected secondary schools of Southern Zambia.

3. To identify strategies used by Disciplinary Committees in handling pupil indiscipline in selected secondary schools of Southern Zambia.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

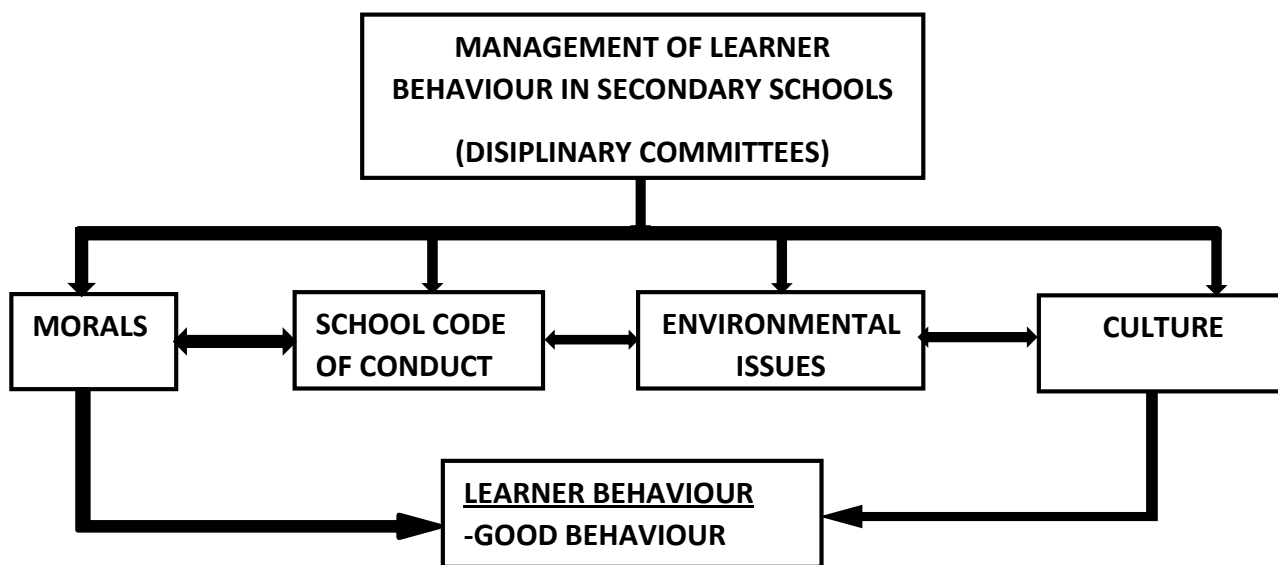
The study was guided by the Social Control Theory by Travis Hirschi (1969). This theory contends that all people, from the time they are born, are basically bad apples that must be controlled by laws, rules and regulations in order to keep society in check. It goes on to maintain that those who have a weak bond to societal controls end up participating in deviant or criminal behaviour. People follow rules and regulations because of ‘social bond’. Social bond, as insightfully observed by Hirschi (1969) is a sense of belonging or social ties that make one comply with the rules and regulations. Moreover, a deficit in social bonds results in the liberation from rules and regulations, while tightly bound individuals hold their aberrant behaviour at bay (Hirschi, 1969). Rules and regulations may connote different meanings for different people. Some people may perceive rules and regulation as infringement on their freedom while others may see them as liberating. However, they may perceive school rules and regulations aim to maintain order. School rules and regulations represent important control mechanisms to which learners or pupils conform. According to the theory, human beings normally respond to four social bonds to conventional society: attachment to others, commitment to conformity, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in the value or legitimacy of convention. These four elements of social bond may determine how students behave in school. Social

Control Theory has been used by scholars to study how school rules and regulations are followed or not followed as they are administered by the school’s Disciplinary Committee. Jenkins, (1997) and Stewart, (2003) for example, have concentrated on the school as an important mechanism of social control. Of notable significance is the schools ability through the Disciplinary Committee to control an individual’s behaviour regardless of other significant background factor’s influences. The execution of school rules and regulations by the school’s Disciplinary Committee may determine its effectiveness or ineffectiveness. As such, school rules and regulations are important arenas for reducing or curbing indiscipline or misbehaviour by learners by means of delinquency prevention programmes.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of the study presents the interrelationship between independent and dependent variables in the study that influences students’ discipline and how Disciplinary Committees manages learner behaviour in secondary schools.

The major criterion to measure a functional and performing disciplinary committee is an orderly and good school which has high degree of discipline among its learners. The degree of discipline among the learners and effectiveness of the disciplinary committee is determined by the interplay of the various school factors that influences it and this includes morals, code of conduct in schools, environmental issues and the cultural background. This enhances orderliness and creates a conducive learning environment that can improve the learners’ performance.



**Figure 1: Flow chart showing the management of learner behavior through disciplinary committees**

**METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design**

This study used a descriptive survey design to investigate how Disciplinary Committees manage learner behavior

(indiscipline) in selected five secondary schools in Kalomo District of Southern Province of Zambia.

Descriptive design is a strategy appropriate for obtaining the exact information concerning the status of a phenomenon.



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Gall and Meredith (2003) and Kalimaposo (2010) contend that descriptive survey is the most appropriate when the purpose of the study is to provide a detailed description of the phenomenon.

### **Target Population**

Newman (2006) describes the target population as the concretely specified large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample and to which results from the sample are generalized. In this case, the study targeted a population comprised four secondary schools in Southern Zambia.

### **Sample Size**

Kalimaposo (2010) defines sample as a subset of elements taken from a population which is considered to be representative of the population. The sample for this study comprised 141 participants consisting of 1 head teacher, 2 deputy head teachers, 11 heads of department, 2 senior teachers, 26 class teachers and 99 pupils.

### **Sampling Procedure**

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008) sampling is a process by which a certain portion of a given population is selected for study. Further, Orodho & Kombo (2002) define sampling as a process or criteria that the researcher puts across to gather people, places or things to study.

This study employed simple random and purposive sampling procedures to select the participants for the study. Simple random sampling was used to selecting the pupils and teachers to participate in the study. According to Moore, George and McCable (2006), simple random sample (SRS) of size " $n$ " consists of " $n$ " individuals from the population chosen in such a way that every set of " $n$ " individuals has an equal chance to be part of the study sample. Purposive sampling was used to select the head teachers, deputy head teachers by virtue of their positions. Newby (2010) and Kalimaposo (2010) define purposive sampling as a non-random sampling which has a specific purpose aligned to the goals of the investigation.

### **Research instruments**

The main research tools used for data collection were semi structured questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

In the data collection process, the research instruments were prepared of which a pilot study was conducted, so as to test

the reliability and validity of the research instruments. Wiersma and Jurs (2005) posit that it is necessary that research instrument be piloted as a way of determining validity and reliability.

The researcher sought permission from the Provincial Education Officer of Southern Province to conduct the study. Further, the researcher sought permission from the head teachers of the secondary schools from which the study was conducted. Thereafter, the researcher visited the schools and collected the necessary data for the study.

Before commencement of data collection, the importance of the study was explained to the participants. Interviews were conducted with the school head teachers and the disciplinary committee members, while the data from the teachers and pupils was collected through the questionnaires which was administered by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

Miles and Huberman (1994) define data analysis as the process of systematically searching and arranging the raw data with the aim of increasing ones understanding of the data. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection and analysis. The qualitative data that was collected through interviews was analysed using thematic analysis which is a process of arranging responses according to various themes in relation to the research questions. The quantitative data that was collected through the questionnaires was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 21) to generate descriptive statistics.

## **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

The study findings are presented in line with the study's objectives and themes emerging from the study findings focusing on selected schools in Southern Province of Zambia. The objectives of the study were to establish how disciplinary committees dealt with acts of indiscipline; explore the perceptions of the head teachers, deputy head teachers, senior teachers, heads of departments and class/subject teacher; and identify strategies that could be used by the disciplinary committees in handling pupil indiscipline.

### **Gender and highest qualification of the participants**

The study participants were asked to state their gender and the highest academic qualification they possessed. The results were as shown in Table 4.2.

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**Table 4.2: Gender and highest academic qualification of participants**

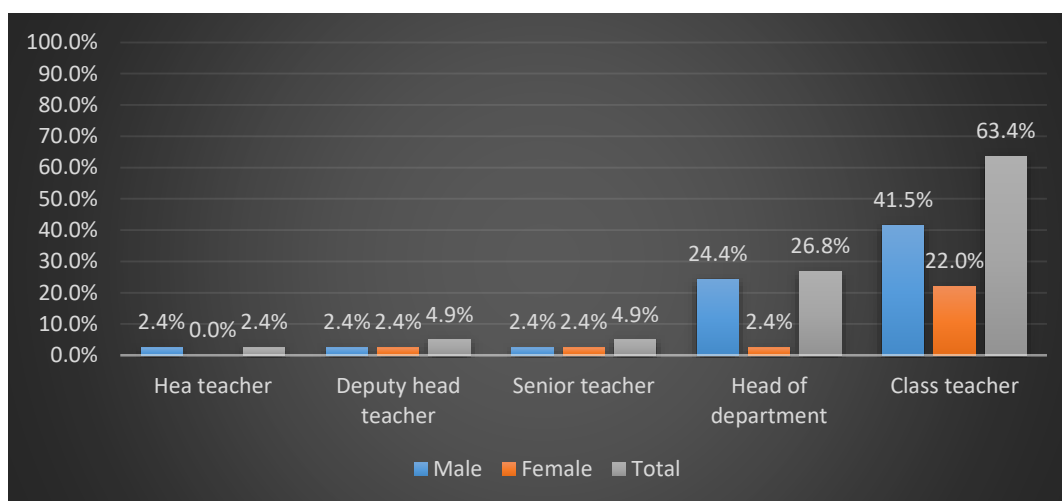
Highest academic qualification	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Primary Teachers' Certificate	1 (2.4%)	-	1 (2.4%)
Primary Teachers' Diploma	1 (2.4%)	-	1 (2.4%)
Special Education Degree	-	1 (2.4%)	-
Secondary Teachers' Diploma	6 (14.6%)	1 (2.4%)	7 (17.1%)
Secondary Teachers' Degree	21 (51.2%)	10 (24.4%)	31 (75.6%)
Total	29 (70.7%)	12 (29.3%)	41 (100.0%)

As can be seen from the table, of the total participants who participated in the study, the majority of them, and 31 (75.6%) were Secondary Teachers' Degree holders. Among these, 21 (51.2%) were males and 10 (24.4%) were females. The table further shows that 7 (17.1%) of the participants indicated that they had a Secondary Teachers' Diploma as their highest academic qualification. Of these, 6 (14.6%) were

males whereas one participant, representing 2.5% of the total participants was female.

**Position held in school by participant by gender**

Participants were asked to indicate the position they held in school and the following emerged as shown in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2: Position held by participants in school (n = 41)**

Source: Field data

Figure 4.2 shows that the majority, 26 (63.4%) of the participants who took part in the study indicated that they were class teachers. Among this category, 17 (41.5%) were males whereas 9 (22.0%) were females. Further, the figure shows that 11 (26.8%) were heads of departments, of which

10 (24.4%) were males and one, representing 2.4% of the total participants was female.

**Length in teaching at secondary school level and Gender**

In terms of the above variable, the findings were as illustrated in Table 4.3 below.

**Table 4.3: Length in teaching at secondary school level**

Number of years in teaching	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
1 – 2	3 (7.3%)	-	3 (7.3%)
3 - 4	1 (2.4%)	2 (4.9%)	3 (7.3%)
5 – 6	1 (2.4%)	2 (4.9%)	3 (7.3%)
7 – 10	10 (24.4%)	2 (4.9%)	12 (29.3%)
11 – 15	5 (12.2%)	1 (2.4%)	6 (14.6%)
16 – 20	4 (9.8%)	4 (9.8%)	8 (19.5%)
Above 21	5 (12.2%)	1 (2.4%)	6 (14.6%)
Total	29 (70.7%)	12 (29.3%)	41 (100.0%)

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As indicated in Table 4.3, most of the participants had been teaching at secondary school level for a period of between 7 and 10 years. Of these, 10 (24.4%) were males and 2 (4.9%) were females. This category was followed by 8 (19.5%) who indicated that they had been teaching at secondary level for between 16 and 20 years. Of these, 4 (9.8%) were males and the other 4 (9.8%) were females. The other findings were as presented in the table.

### Whether participants saw the need of having a disciplinary committee in school

To gather information on this variable, data were collected from the head teachers, deputy head teachers, senior teachers, heads of departments and class/subject teacher. The findings revealed that all the participants agreed that there was a dire need for a disciplinary committee in school.

When asked to give reasons for their response, the following emerged. One of the head teachers said:

*There is definitely a need for a disciplinary committee in the school because they help in making objective recommendations that can help in the administration of discipline in school in a fair and proper manner following the laid down procedures.*

A teacher at one of the schools had this to say:

*Yes, I feel most pupils are indisciplined and if left alone, issues of indiscipline will reach escalating levels. Pupil behaviour should be closely monitored. I feel [pupil discipline should not be left*

*in the hands of one person. Thus a committee should be constituted to allow for diverse views in dealing with offending pupils.*

Another teacher argued thus:

*There's need to have a disciplinary committee to critically look into pupil discipline and ensure that discipline is maintained among the pupils. The committee will also adjudicate over disciplinary cases. Also pupils will abide by the set school regulations.*

Further, a head of department contributing to this issue reported as follows:

*Because learners come from different family backgrounds they have different challenges because of their earlier life orientation. The committee brings sanity to the learning environment. Suffice to mention that a well-disciplined society is the product of good morals, excellence and uprightness. The final resultant is improved learner performance and character growth.*

### Whether the school had a functional disciplinary committee in school

The responses on this variable were as indicated in Figure 4.3 below.

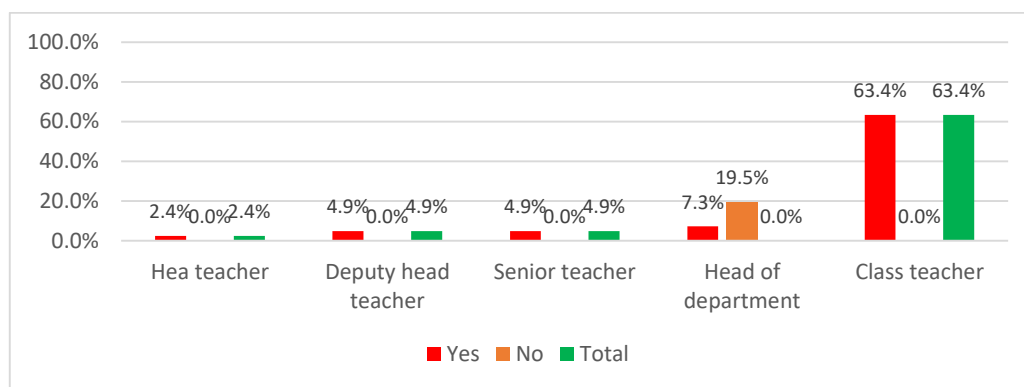


Figure 4.3: Presence of a functional disciplinary committee in school (n = 42)

Source: Field data

The figure above shows that out of the total participants, 26 (63.4%) of the teachers; 2 (4.9%) deputy head teachers; 2 (4.9%) senior teachers; and one head teacher, representing 2.4%, all agreed that their respective schools had a functional disciplinary committee.

Participants were further asked to state who chaired the school disciplinary committee. Of the total study participants, 40 (97.6%) indicated that the deputy head teacher chaired the committee, while one participant accounting for 2.4% of the

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total participants indicated that a selected teacher chaired the committee.

As regards to the above variable, the following emerged as shown in Table 4.4 below.

**Participants’ rating of the discipline levels in school**

**Table 4.4: Rating of the discipline levels in school by participants**

Position of participant	Rating			Total
	Bad	Good	Fair	
Deputy head teacher	-	1 (2.4%)		1 (2.4%)
Senior teacher	-	-	2 (4.9%)	2 (4.9%)
Head of department	1 (2.4%)	2 (4.9%)	8 (19.5%)	11 (26.8%)
Class teacher	7 (17.1%)	8 (19.5%)	11 (26.8%)	26 (63.4%)
Total	8 (19.5%)	11 (26.8%)	22 (53.7%)	41 (100.0%)

As depicted in Table 4.4, more than half of the participants, 22 (53.7%) indicated that their discipline levels in schools were fair. Of these, 11 (26.8%) were class teachers and 8 (19.5%) were heads of departments. Generally, from the above data, it is evident that the rate of discipline levels in the schools under study were fair.

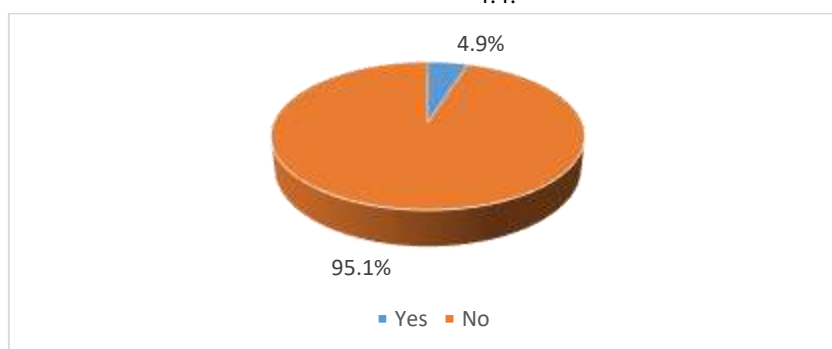
**Permanence on the school disciplinary committee**  
 Participants were required to indicate whether they were permanent members of the school disciplinary committee. Their reactions were as shown in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Whether participant was a permanent member of the Disciplinary committee at your school**

Position of participant	Response		Total
	Yes	No	
Deputy head teacher	2 (4.9%)	-	2 (4.9%)
Senior teacher	2 (4.9%)	-	2 (4.9%)
Head of department	3 (7.3%)	8 (19.5%)	11 (26.8%)
Class teacher	3 (7.3%)	23 (56.1%)	26 (63.4%)
Total	10 (24.4%)	31 (75.6%)	41 (100.0%)

Statistics from the above table shows that most of the participants, 31 (75.6%) indicated that they were not permanent members of the school disciplinary committee, while 10 (24.4%) said they were.

**Whether all teachers need to get involved in the day to day learner discipline process**  
 Participants were asked to say whether schools should involve all teachers in the day to day learner discipline process. Reactions to this issue were as illustrated in Figure 4.4.



**Figure 4.4: Whether all teachers should be involved in the day to day process of the disciplinary committee (n = 41)**  
 Source: Field data

The figure above generally shows that the majority of the participants, 39 (95.1%) were of the view that not all teachers should be involved in the day to day processes of disciplinary committee functions. Only 2 (4.9%) agreed to the notion.

Participants were further asked to indicate if there was any role that an individual teacher can play in disciplining the learners. The study finding revealed that all the participants

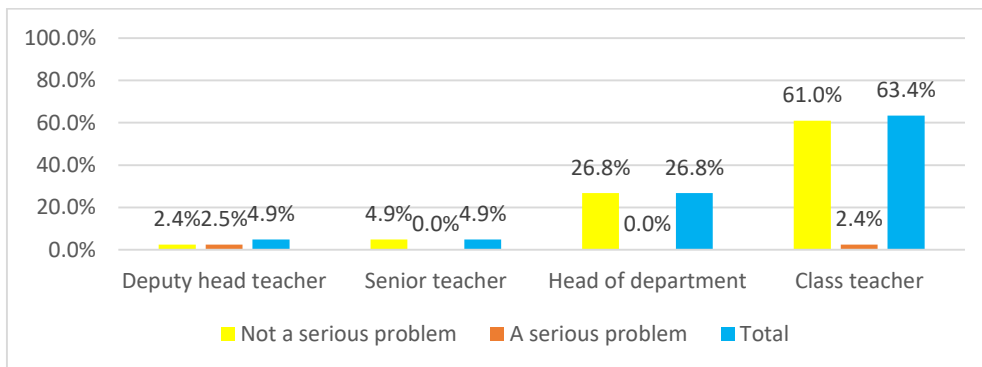


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who participated in the study were all in agreement to the idea.

**How participants rated the rate of absenteeism among the teachers**

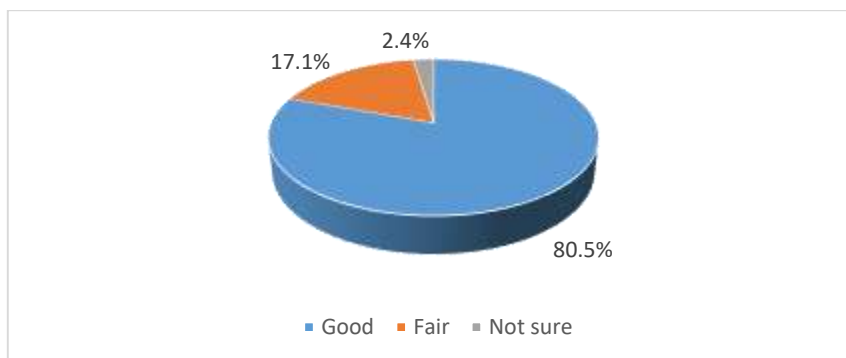
The study also sought to find out the rate at which the teachers absented themselves from work. This was with a view to establish the seriousness of the act. It is believed that teacher absenteeism from work was a factor to pupil indiscipline. The study findings on this variable were as shown in Figure 4.5.



**Figure 4.5: Whether teacher absenteeism was an issue in school (n = 41)**  
 Source: Field data

As can be seen from the figure, the majority of the study participants, 39 (95.1%) indicated that it was not a serious problem whereas 2 (4.9%) said it was a serious problem. From the above information, it could be stated that teacher absenteeism was not an issue in the schools under study.

Participants were required to state the pupil – teacher relationship in school. Their reactions were as illustrated in Figure 4.6 below.



**Figure 4.6: Rating of pupil – teacher relationship (n = 41)**  
 Source: Field data

As can be seen from the figure, the majority of the participants, 33 (80.5%) were of the view that it was “good”, while 7 (17.1%) indicated that it was “fair”. However, one of the participants, representing 2.4% of the total participants was not sure. Generally, the findings of the study points to the fact that pupil – teacher relationship in the schools studied was cordial.

*pupils from bad to good through these interactions.*

A further question was asked to the respondents to state reasons for their responses. One of the teachers had this to say:

Another teacher was of the view that;

*I see pupils interact with the teachers easily to air their problems and I have noticed a change in the lifestyle of*

*We are the parents to these children. Each teacher has contact with pupils that they meet in small groups. Counselling pupils in small groups is more effective than in large groups. The disciplinary committee cannot handle all cases including minor ones like noise making. In this respect, individual teachers can come in.*

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Another teacher revealed the following:

*There is good rapport between the teachers and some pupils. The teacher is not there just to teach a subject but also to help pupils to be responsible citizens. This happens when individual teachers interact with the pupils in school.*

Yet another teacher responded thus:

*Each teacher has a responsibility to ensure all the pupils directly or indirectly under his/her control behave in a manner that does not breach classroom or school rules.*

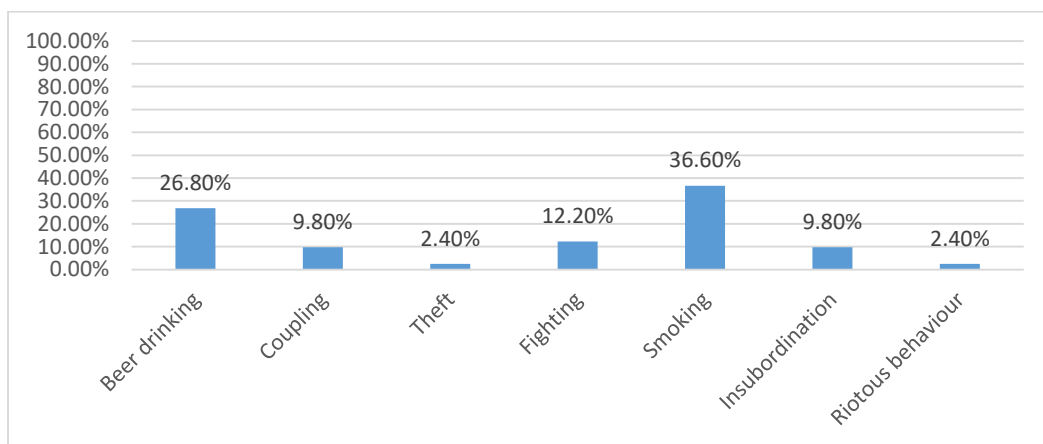
Further, the study revealed that some teachers were of the view that the schools were big and if all disciplinary matters

were left to the disciplinary committee, then certain cases may not be attended to resulting into bigger problems in school.

In terms of how often learners were engaged in talks that led to learner discipline, the study revealed that the majority, 29 (70.7%) of the participants indicated that they regularly held talks with the learners whereas 11 (26.8%) said the irregularly held talks with the learners on the subject. Further, the study showed that one of the participants did not respond to this question.

**Most frequent cases handled by the disciplinary committee**

Figure 4.7 shows the findings on the most frequent cases handled by the disciplinary committee in school.



**Figure 4.7: The most frequent cases handled by the disciplinary committee in school (n = 41)**

*Source: Field data*

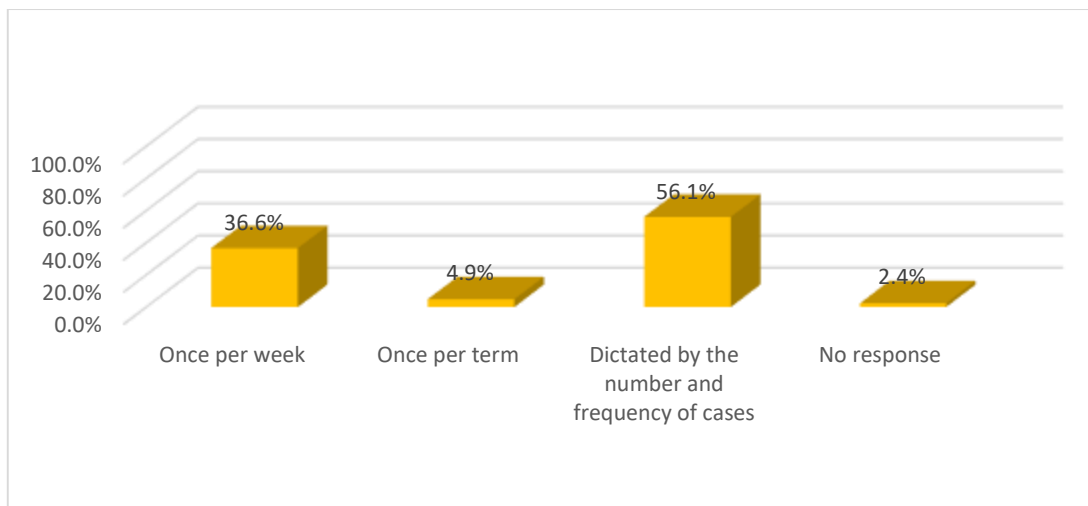
From the figure, it can be seen that the most frequent cases handled by the school disciplinary committees in the schools that participated in the study were smoking, 15 (36.6%) and beer drinking, 11 (26.8%). Others were fighting, 5 (12.2%); insubordination, 4 (9.8%); coupling, 4 (9.8%); riotous behaviour, 1 (2.4%); and theft, 1 (2.4%), in that order.

The study participants were also asked to indicate any other cases that the school disciplinary committee frequently handled. These included: going out of school boundary, absconding classes, absenteeism, improper dressing, abortion, and late coming.

**whether the disciplinary committee was swift in responding to cases of indiscipline**

In terms of how swift the committee was in responding to cases of indiscipline in schools, the study findings showed that the majority, 37 (90.2%) of the participants reported that it was swift, while 2 (4.9%) said it was not swift and 2 (4.9%) did not respond to the question.

A further question was asked to the participants to indicate how often the committee met to hear cases of pupil indiscipline. Their responses were as shown in Figure 4.8



**Figure 4.8: Frequency at which the committee met to discuss disciplinary cases (n = 41)**

*Source: Field data*

As demonstrated in Figure 4.8, most of the participants, 23 (56.1%) indicated that the disciplinary committee met to hear cases as dictated by the number and frequency of the cases. This was followed by those who said “once per week”, represented by 15 (36.6%) of the total participants.

**Whether the disciplinary committee incorporate guidance and counselling services**

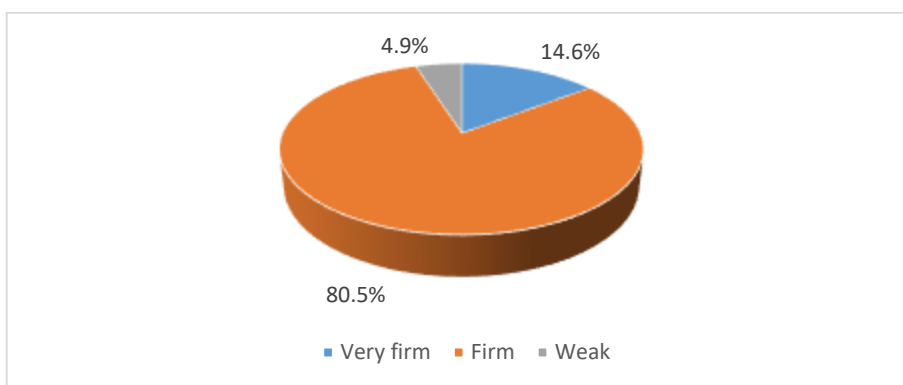
Guidance and counselling services being a department that guides gives guidance to pupils in schools, it was found appropriate to establish from the participants whether this section was given a place in the committee. The findings of the study were that, 34 (82.9%) of the participants said “yes”

while 6 (14.6%) said “no” and one participant did not respond to the question.

As to whether the disciplinary committees take time to sensitise the learners on school rules and appropriate behaviour, the findings revealed that 31 (75.6%) said “yes” whereas 9 (22.0%) said “no” and one of the participant did not answer this question.

**Firmness of the school disciplinary committee**

The study participants were asked to indicate how firm the disciplinary committee was at their respective schools. Their reactions were as shown in Figure 4.9 below.



**Figure 4.9: How firm is the disciplinary committee in your school (n = 41)**

*Source: Field data*

As can be observed from Figure 4.9, the majority of the participants indicated that the committee was “firm” while 6 (14.6%) said it was “very firm”. However, 2 (4.9%) of the participants were of the view that the committee was weak.

**Type of punishment given to pupils found guilty of offences**

In terms of the type of punishment given to the offenders, the study findings revealed the following as the most prominent

ones; giving warnings, open transfers, manual work and suspending the offenders

**Whether teacher has ever given verbal warnings given to offenders**

As regards to this variable, the following were cited as some of the offences in which the pupils were given verbal warning; truancy, coming late for school and lessons,

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fighting, improper dressing, beer drinking, using abusive language, and coupling.

### **Whether teacher has ever given an open transfer to offenders**

Open transfers were issued to pupils who committed offences such as beer drinking, coupling, being found smoking, stealing and abortions.

### **Whether teacher has ever given manual work as punishment to offenders**

In terms of the above variable, the offences included smoking, beer drinking, stealing, absconding classes, fighting, going out of school boundaries without permission, missing writing a test(s), improper dressing and insubordination,

### **Advice to enhance disciplinary committee effectiveness**

Respondents were asked to state the kind of advice they offered to the disciplinary committee with a view of enhancing its functions. To this effect, data were collected from the head teachers, deputy head teachers, teachers, and heads of departments through interviews. Their reactions were as presented below.

#### **Head teachers**

One of the head teachers said:

*When cases of indiscipline are reported, they should be dealt with immediately. There should be no segregation in dealing with cases. Further, parents should be communicated to if need arise.*

#### **Deputy head teachers**

One of the head teachers said:

This can be achieved by encouraging teachers to take up the responsibility of looking after the children lovingly. When children are shown love and concern, they tend to change behaviour faster than when treated harshly.

#### **Teachers**

Teachers in separate interviews revealed the following as presented in the subsequent paragraphs. Some of the major findings were as follows:

Teacher "A" reported thus:

*There is need for parents to be part of the disciplinary committee. If not, at least once in a week a parent representative should sit in the disciplinary committee meeting so that even parents should understand*

*offences committed by their children and counsel them from home.*

Teacher "B" said the following:

*People in the committee must be of good reputation. Cases before the committee must be handled in a fair manner regardless of offender's relationship to a member of staff. Officers of the committee must declare interest when handling cases of their relatives. Further, there must be consistence in the punishment given to the offenders.*

Teacher "C" was of the view that;

*The disciplinary committee chair person should be active and ensure that when there is a case in school, immediately sitting should take place. The other issue is on school rules. I feel these should be updated regularly to suit the contemporary trends of indiscipline among pupils.*

Teacher "D" had this to say:

*I feel as a school, several reminders to pupils on regular basis focusing on school rules should be availed to pupils especially during assemblies and through class teachers who meet these pupils almost on a daily basis. Avail pupils with the code of conduct.*

Yet another teacher said the following:

*Teachers need to work hand in hand with the disciplinary committee. Each and every teacher must be a disciplinarian so that pupils are able to see team work in them. Also disciplinary cases that are brought to the committee that are beyond the teachers should be reported to the committee other than just over looking and that cases reported should be handled firmly.*

#### **Heads of departments**

The major findings from the heads of departments were as presented below.

One of the head of departments reported as follows:

*Schools can only have functional disciplinary committees if the schools' central administration does not hold all powers that render the disciplinary committees irrelevant. If disciplinary*

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*committees are to be effective, the central administration should work collaboratively with the committee and effect recommendations given for disciplinary action for the cases.*

Another head of department had this to say:

*I feel that firstly, disciplinary committees should be meeting more regularly to get abreast with the committee rules. Secondly, they should not be shielding sensitive offences as they promote recurrent of such behaviour in other pupils. Thirdly, they should avoid scandalizing a member who has erred during the deliberations; instead let them sit and discuss the matter appropriately. Also punishment given to offenders should match with the offence committed.*

The other head of department was of the view that;

*There is need to engage parents and pupils in making decisions. The committee should meet frequently and making sure that no offence goes unpunished. Pupils should also have easy access to school rules. Further, pupils should be sensitised on the importance of following school rules.*

### DISCUSSION FINDINGS

#### How disciplinary committees dealt with acts of indiscipline in secondary schools

The study sought to establish how disciplinary committees dealt with acts of Indiscipline schools. The study findings revealed that schools mostly gave warnings, open transfers, manual work, and also suspending the offenders. Offences in which verbal warnings were given to the offenders included truancy, coming late for school and lessons, fighting, improper dressing, beer drinking, using abusive language, and coupling. However, in some instances, offences such as beer drinking, coupling, being found smoking, stealing and abortions attracted open transfers. The study has also shown that smoking, beer drinking, stealing, absconding classes, fighting, going out of school boundaries without permission, missing writing a test(s), improper dressing and insubordination, attracted manual punishment as a penalty for committing such offences depending on the gravity of the offence as deemed by the committee. These findings concur with Harold (2014), who carried out a study of how best learners can be prevented from riotous behaviour in Arizona, USA. His study findings revealed that learners were likely to desist from various behaviour when they were aware of the

consequences that could result from indulging themselves in any form of indiscipline. Those who were found wanting were punished severely, others suspended or expelled completely so as to send a signal other pupils in the school. Furthermore, the disciplinary committee ensured that equal cases were dealt in the same manner regardless of who committed them.

Nakpodia (2010) in his study on Teachers' disciplinary approaches to students' discipline problems in Nigerian secondary schools found that cases of pupil indiscipline attracted suspension and/or expulsion. Some of the cases that attract suspension or expulsion include: truancy, tardiness, insubordination, disobedience to teachers, insulting a teacher, talking back, hitting a teacher, cursing or calling other students bad names, fighting with another student, inattentiveness in class, going out of school premises without permission, smoking, use of drugs or alcohol, refusal to stay for detention, refusal to clean the grounds as ordered, failure to maintain silence, lack of civility, failure to adhere to time schedules, destruction of school property. As a way of resolving these problems, the pupil is given a hearing prior to suspension or expulsion. Further, parents of the offending pupil are invited to the disciplinary committee hearing if the sanction of expulsion is expected.

Clarke (2002) also reported a number of pupil indiscipline cases in America which included violence on teachers and other students, possession of controlled substances such as alcohol, robbery, engaging in habitual profanity, vulgarity, committing school assault to staff and making terrorist threats against the school authority. This study revealed that as a way to control indiscipline in schools, disciplinary committees were established in schools which worked hand in hand with the state police. Through this collaboration, severe cases of indiscipline like assault of fellow students, members of staff, use of drugs which are not allowed by the law and many others were reported to the police.

#### Perception of pupils and teachers on discipline in school

The study findings are similar to the situation in Malaysia, where acts of indiscipline in schools are also evident and is ranked as a major problem among students in primary and secondary schools and most students involved in such acts were not dealt with accordingly by the disciplinary committees in their respective schools because such students were rich, their parents bribed influential members of the disciplinary committees and their cases died sudden death as members of staff who wanted to proceed with such cases were threatened with unemployment (Azizi, 2009). The resilience of relevant school authorities or disciplinary committees in handling indiscipline has made some teachers to also engage themselves in helping some pupils who are viewed to be



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'sacred cows' cheat in termly assessments and in some cases, during examinations. Therefore we see that some pupils have lost trust in reporting cases of indiscipline at their school due to how disciplinary committees responded. Another example is from the United States, where 20 pupils were asked what can make them engage in indiscipline. Their response showed that they believed disciplinary committees at their respective schools did not have acceptable or just procedures when dealing with cases of indiscipline. The pupils went on to say that punishment was given in biased ways as pupils from affluent backgrounds were mostly exempted from indiscipline charges despite being found wanting.

The study findings showed that most teachers assist the disciplinary committee in handling cases of Indiscipline among learners. However, their involvement has limits as they only deal with minor offences, the big responsibility lies in the hands of the disciplinary committee and if they don't swiftly respond to issues raised to discourages other teachers from helping henceforth the levels of Indiscipline being so rampant (Garfield, 2008). Clarke (2002) also added that the management in schools can have full support of the teachers if they swiftly act and handle issues fairly and by so doing they will create an atmosphere where Indiscipline will be unpopular among learners.

### **Strategies used by disciplinary committee to deal with indiscipline at school**

As regards the strategies used to overcome the problems of indiscipline in Zambian secondary schools, the study findings showed that suspension, manual work and forced transfer were some of the major ways in which schools tried to enforce discipline in schools. These offered as examples to the other pupils who had not yet committed offences related to pupil indiscipline. Further, there has been vigorous sensitisations in schools rendered to pupils by the school authorities and teachers on the evils of involving in indiscipline behaviours. The above findings are similar with those of Simatwa (2007), who in Kenya conducted a study that focused on the management of pupil discipline. The findings of this study also showed that among the various common cases of indiscipline included noise making, coming late for classes, indecency, drug abuse, rioting and possession of inflammable substances. To resolve this situation, the Ministry of Education in Kenya has taken a step to sensitize pupils in schools where such acts are evident on the dangers of engaging themselves in such acts. In an effort to prevent and resolve pupil discipline problems and ensure efficient functioning of the school, there has to be reasonable disciplinary policies and procedures. These policies and procedure are made more specific at individual school levels as rules and regulations.

Discipline problems in schools have been serious breaches of school discipline policy that had profound negative effects on the schools. One of the salient factors that attributes to the problem is peer group influences. Negative attitude of their friends such as responsibilities, cooperation, time management, respecting adults, disobeying rules and regulations are some of the contributing factors from the peer-group for the prevailing problems. Management problems in schools like dissatisfaction among teachers, pressure from the school PIBG and high expectation of the parents shouldn't reflect to poor education. It is very important that the school management should play a dominant role to ensure all the students perform well not only in academic but also in good behaviour to avoid any negative impact

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that students' discipline problems have grown into an epidemic in Zambian secondary schools and various disciplinary approaches are employed by the school authorities to curb this trend. If the discipline, which the society needs in other to create an enabling school environment is lacking, there would be disorder and devastation in schools. It should be noted that a disciplined mind is an asset to any society, and the school is part of the process for training the youth in order to produce a balanced and disciplined citizen.

In terms of how disciplinary committees dealt with cases of indiscipline in secondary schools, these included giving verbal warnings, open transfers, suspending or expelling the offenders. The penalty depended on the gravity of the case and this was done depending on the case committed by the learners.

As regards the strategies used by disciplinary committees to overcome indiscipline in schools, it was found that sensitization of the learners proved to be the most effective way of improving pupil behavior in schools. Furthermore, incorporating guidance and counselling services was yet another important method which the schools employed as it helped in addressing reasons why some pupils misbehaved.

### **6.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The disciplinary committees in schools ought to increase sensitization to learners on the importance of obeying school rules during school assemblies and lessons.

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2. Disciplinary committees in schools should consider having regular meetings to discuss new ways of curbing indiscipline.

3. Regular marking of the school attendance register by teachers should be enhanced and students who absent themselves from school without permission from school authorities should be dealt with so as to serve as deterrent for other students.

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