

## **Causes of frequent incidences of fire in high schools and what we can do as psychologists to assist?**

Recently there have been many cases of destructive fires in Kenyan secondary schools. Since the 1980s the rate at which school fires have been taking place has increased to a greater rate. This has caused alarm to many schools, government, parents and other stakeholders. After a statistical research this fires often occur at a specific times all of them but all of them have many different reasons behind as to why they happened and how.

**Poor preparation for exams.** Students when they have poorly prepared for exams especially the major ones for example, MOCKS and KCSE they tend to opt causing restlessness in the school rather than taking the examination. This is also ascribed to exam phobias. Students eventually decide to do something that will stop or make them not sit for those exams such as; burning dormitories or the classes they are going to use. These exam phobias are caused by high expectation by parents or teachers, irregular coverage of the syllabus, fear of failure, losing control of exam, low self esteem etc.

As psychologist we urge teachers to help student to develop regular good studying habits such as finishing of syllabus early enough to reduce stress of the eleventh hour, ensuring regular attendance of classes by students, giving enough time for revision to boost confidence and reduce anxiety, ensuring students have enough sleep and also practicing of meditation which boosts concentration power. For uncontrollable phobia or anxiety experienced among the students it is necessary for administration to seek help from a professional such as psychologist or therapist where cognitive behavioural therapy can be applied which is effective.

**Poor communication between students and administration.** Students have regularly blamed management for not listening to their requests. Schools have been burned for simple reasons such as food, school outings and a forced daily school routine. As psychologists we advocate for a proper, open and free channel of communication in the school. This creates a safe place or environment where everybody's opinion and concern is listened and appreciated. This enables students to realize and feel that they are an important parcel of school fraternity and they matter very much. It is essential for the management to act upon students requests and if it is not possible to is also very important to inform them and explain. This prevents students causing fires so as to catch the management's attention on their concerns.

**Peer influence.** Bad company ruins good morals. Peer pressure can be active peer influence (a friend enticing you to do something you wouldn't do) or passive peer influence (mimicking other people's behaviour). During adolescence many youths are easily influenced. Some do things to either please others or get accepted. Negative influence has caused students to do negative things for example; burning the school down. As psychologists we campaign the management of the school to engage students in many preventional and socio-emotional learning programs that attempt to counteract in negative peer influence. It is also necessary for teachers to be keen and identify the students who majorly the core in influencing others to do a risky behaviour and deal with them. Some may have mental issues that lead to such acts hence professional counselling can be involved.

**Poor parenting.** Another significant cause is that parents do not take the initiative to guide their children. Many students who are culprits of causing fire in schools have been victims of indiscipline. Parents have the ability to identify underlying issues among their children and help them rectify them but many opt to ignore or assume discipline is only to be done by teachers in school. When a child lacks parental guidance it is easier for them to do what they feel like. Psychologically it is good for a parent to reinforce good behaviour and punish the bad behaviour. This helps avoid repeated actions of small-small irrational behaviour among the student which may lead to a major illogical act which may be costly such as burning schools. It is also psychologically advised for parents to show unconditional support and encouragement to their children. This helps them determine their worth and behave better.

**Overloaded curriculum.** The education system in Kenya is pretty much loaded. The pressure comes from too much work, too much expectations and less time to cover all that work. That has caused students and teachers to be in stress mode. This has highly been contributed by the pandemic (COVID-19) which led to many changes happening in the normal system of the school curriculum. Terms have been adjusted leaving students with a very short time of resting. This has caused pressure in many less privileged homes where fees payment and school preparation has become a heavy burden. This stress has caused students to act irrationally due to tension hence burning down schools so as to force themselves to get a break or rest from school. As psychologists we acknowledge the importance of rest. Having enough breaks for students to rest prevents monotony, decreases stress, increases productivity, boosts brain function and provides opportunity for students to learn and practice social skills for example; Active listening

**Poor school management.** The management is very important in any institution this also applies in schools. Many managements in schools have resulted into a political field where instead of focusing on the duties allocated to them they are focused on what they can gain from the seats they hold. They are more after corrupting school finances than utilizing them well. Fires can result from small issues like faulty electrical installation. This results when school management does not conduct proper inspection after work done. As psychologists we can urge that school management should come up with clear guidelines on how to carry office duties and enrol a follow-up system and supervision. This will henceforth prevent many unseen and seen crises.

**In conclusion,** it is recommended to establish the training of the needs of educational stakeholders in the area of disaster preparedness. For example, having adequate fire extinguishers and knowing how to use them. Also it is very necessary for all stakeholders to work together as a team having the same objective of having a peaceful and convenient environment and holding educational talks on dangers of fire. Fires are not only a threat to buildings occupants but also property and school environment.

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