Child Labor as a predictor of Students' Enrolment in Selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between child labor and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. The study seeks to specifically achieve the following specific objectives; i) To examine the relationship between domestic work and students' enrolment, ii) To examine the relationship between manual labor and students' enrolment, and iii) To examine the relationship between sexual exploitation and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. The study was based on a sample of 76 participants which comprised of head teachers and teachers picked from four selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District. Both descriptive analysis and correlation analysis techniques were utilized to provide an understanding to the study phenomenon. The study found out that domestic work has a strong negative and statistically significant relationship with students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. The study also found out that manual labor has a very strong negative and statistically significant relationship with students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. Further, the study found out that sexual exploitation has a strong negative and statistically significant relationship with students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. Therefore, the study concludes that child labor in terms of domestic work, manual labor, and sexual exploitation has a negative and significant association with students' enrolment in that a reduction in the various forms of child labor resultantly leads to an enhancement in students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. The study recommends that the school administrators in partnership with the local authorities should conduct community awareness campaigns about the long-term benefits of education and the risks of child labor through engaging local leaders and parents to shift cultural norms around work and schooling which would significantly influence an improvement in students' enrolment in Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

Keywords: Child Labor, Domestic Work, Manual Labor, Sexual Exploitation, and Students' Enrolment.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study evaluates the relationship between child labor and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

A. Historical Perspective

Globally, the rapid industrialization led to high demand for cheap labor, including that of children. Many children worked in factories, mines, and agriculture often under harsh conditions, and education became a lower priority for families leading to low school enrolment rates. However, in the late 20th century, organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF began focusing on child labor eradication, linking it directly with access to education. In some developing countries, the introduction of policies like free primary education, school feeding programs, and conditional cash transfers helped reduce child labor and

improve students' enrolment (Xayavong & Pholphirul, 2018). In Africa, many countries including Uganda have undertaken policy shifts and interventions pushed for child labor eradication and education access such as eliminating school fees leading to a spike in students' enrolment. However, despite policy gains, child labor remains widespread due to poverty, conflicts, and weak enforcement, leading to a decline in students' enrolment in different countries (Putnick & Bornstein, 2019).

B. Theoretical Perspective

The study was coordinated by the Human Capital Theory proposed by Becker in 1964. The theory posits that education is an investment in future productivity and earnings (Becker,1964). According to Holden and Biddle (2017) families may weigh the long-term benefits of schooling against the immediate income or labor contribution from children. For instance, in poverty-stricken households, the perceived short-term economic value of child labor often outweighs the long-term benefits of education, leading to low enrollment or high dropout rates. Thus, this theory was embraced and applied to the study as it offers a linkage between child labor and students' enrolment.

C. Contextual Perspective

The study was carried out amongst certain government aided secondary schools in Kayunga District, Uganda examining the relationship between child labor and students' enrolment. This was thought-out because of the limited studies undertaken in the district relative to child labor and students' enrolment predominantly in government aided secondary schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. Furthermore, Kayunga district was thought-out due to the low students' enrolment in Kayunga District revealed by reduced school attendance rates, delayed enrollment, or complete dropout, low completion rate, and low student retention rates particularly in Government Aided Secondary Schools (Kayunga District Local Government, 2022). For instance, between 2018 and 2022, Kayunga District experienced a 12% decline in secondary school enrolment, with only 68% of students completing their education (Kayunga District Local Government, 2022). This low completion rate contributed to social unrest, rising crime, and widening inequality. It also affected workforce quality, economic growth, and in some cases led to school closures.

D. Conceptual Perspective

Child labor refers to the employment of children in work that deprives them of their childhood, potential and dignity; harmful to their physical and mental development; and interferes with their schooling by preventing them from attending school, forcing them to leave school prematurely, and requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. Child labor includes slavery, trafficking, child prostitution or pornography, and illicit activities like drug trafficking (Adesoji, 2018). Student enrolment refers to the process of officially registering or entering students into an educational institution such as a school, college, or university, for a given academic period (Lesanayo & Keis, 2021). In this study, child labor was envisioned in form of domestic work, manual labor, and sexual exploitation, while students' enrolment was envisioned in form of school attendance, academic performance, retention rate, dropout rate, and completion rate.

E. Statement of the Problem

The government of Uganda through several ministries has put in place various policies with the objective to eliminate child labour, particularly in hazardous sectors like agriculture and domestic work aimed to improve students' enrolment in schools in the different districts in the country. For example, the National Child Labour Policy of 2006 has been instigated promoting access to education for working children, creating awareness campaigns about the harms of child labor, and strengthen enforcement of labor laws, which targets child labor reduction as a means to improve school attendance and student enrolment (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2019; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018).

However, regardless of all the incredible efforts to increase school enrollment, students' enrolment is still low in Kayunga District revealed by reduced school attendance rates, delayed enrollment, or complete dropout, low completion rate, and low student retention rates particularly in Government Aided Secondary Schools in the district (Kayunga District Local Government, 2022). Evidence indicates that there was a reduction of 12% in the number of students enrolled into secondary education in 2022 as compared to 2018, with only 68% of these completing secondary education contributing to low completion rate in secondary schools in the district (Kayunga District Local Government, 2022). This has consequently led to social unrest or instability, higher crime rates, increased inequality, lower workforce competency, reduced economic growth, and in some circumstances leading to school closures. Therefore, it was due to this that this study examined the relationship between child labor and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

F. Objectives of the Study

➢ General Objective

The general objective of this study was to examine the relationship between child labor and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

➢ Specific Objectives

The study seeks to specifically achieve the following specific objectives;

- To examine the relationship between domestic work and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.
- To examine the relationship between manual labor and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.
- To examine the relationship between sexual exploitation and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

> *Study Hypotheses*

The specific objectives were guided by the following alternative hypotheses;

H$_{a1}$: There is a significant relationship between domestic work and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

H$_{a2}$: There is a statistically significant relationship between manual labor and students' enrolment in selected

Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

H$_{a3}$: There is a statistically significant relationship between sexual exploitation and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

> *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework on the association between Child Labor and Students' Enrolment.
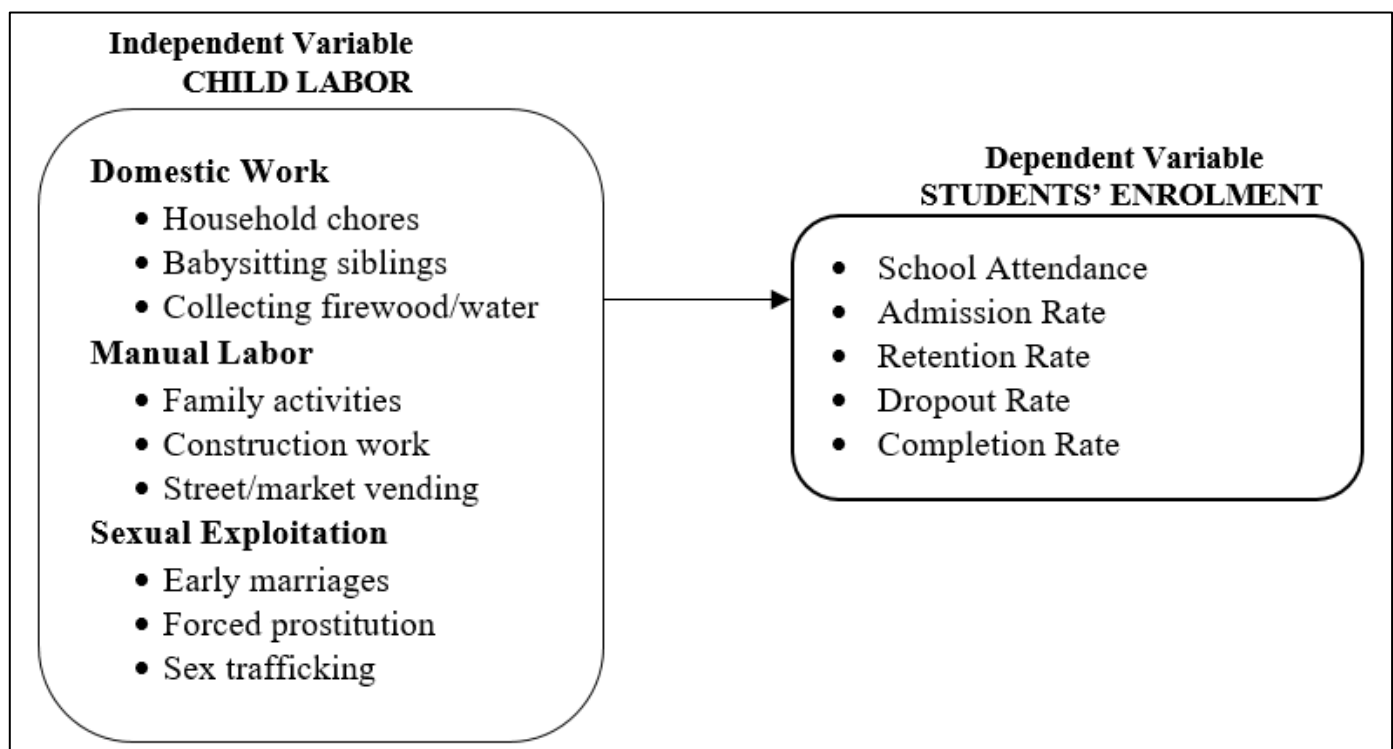

Fig 1 Conceptual Framework

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

> *Child Labor and Students' Enrolment*

Child labor has a significant negative impact on students' enrollment in schools in that children who work especially in agriculture, domestic service, or informal trade often miss school entirely or attend irregularly. Long working hours leave children too tired or unavailable for school, leading to low attendance or frequent absenteeism (Yeyie, 2020). According to (Hyoungjong, Jieun and Dong-Eun (2021) child labor influences students' enrolment in education through several direct and indirect mechanisms, often leading to reduced access, participation, and completion of schooling. Working children have less time for classes, homework, and rest, resulting to many missing school or attending part-time, disrupting their learning process and leading to poor performance or dropout, resultantly affecting students' enrolment in school.

Child labor directly interferes with school enrollment by limiting time, energy, and motivation for education. It creates a cycle where children who miss out on school are more likely

to remain in poverty and pass that burden to the next generation. Economic pressure forces families to prioritize short-term income over long-term education. Children often leave school prematurely to support household needs, especially during harvest seasons or family crises (Nnaemeka & Osita, 2023). More so, the authors assert that child labor competes directly with schooling, acting as both a cause and consequence of low enrolment. Reducing child labor through social protection, education incentives, and community awareness is essential to improving access to and completion of education (Nnaemeka & Osita, 2023).

According to Boutin and Jouvin (2022) child labor has a profound negative impact on students' enrolment across many developing countries, especially in rural and impoverished regions. When children are engaged in work either paid or unpaid, they often do not enroll in school at all. Families may prioritize income or labor contribution over formal education. The authors asserted that children in rural areas often engage in subsistence farming or fishing, and herding cattle and these may never be sent to school because the family relies on their labor for survival leading to missed opportunity to gain basic

literacy and numeracy, as well as widening inequality, as only children from better-off families attend school, thus affecting students' enrolment (Boutin & Jouvin, 2022). Additionally, Xayavong and Pholphirul (2018) assert that many children start or enroll into school but drop out early when their labor becomes more valuable to the household, particularly during planting or harvest seasons, or when family income declines, leading to incomplete education, reduced chances of escaping poverty, and higher youth unemployment in the long run.

According to Wanjiru, Ezne and Kibathi (2024) child labor negatively influences school enrolment by preventing initial enrolment, leading to absenteeism and dropout, undermining educational quality and achievement, and deepening social and gender inequalities. To break this cycle, it requires policies that enforce child labor laws, provide economic support to vulnerable families, improve access to free and quality education, and raise awareness of the value of schooling over child labor, which might increase students' enrolment in schools (Wanjiru et al., 2024). Similarly, Aladejuyigbe (2022) argued that child laborers are often too tired to participate actively in class or do homework. Physically demanding jobs drain their energy and enthusiasm for learning which leads to poor learning outcomes and increased repetition of classes or complete withdrawal from school.

Children domestic work, which typically involves household chores such as cleaning, cooking, fetching water, and caring for siblings, has a profound influence on students' enrolment in school. This type of work often falls on children, especially girls, in many regions, and can significantly hinder their access to formal education. Domestic work often takes up a significant portion of a child's time, leaving them little room for attending school regularly, missing lessons, which leads to falling behind in classwork, and decreased academic performance due to fatigue and lack of time for homework (Adesoji, 2018). Additionally, Yeyie (2020) postulated that in some families, the demands of domestic work can make it impossible for children to continue their education. Children, especially girls, are often expected to leave school early to focus on household chores, leading to many girls not finishing secondary education or not enrolling at all.

Domestic work can be physically demanding and emotionally taxing for children. This exhaustion can negatively affect their focus, mental health, and overall ability to thrive in school which leads to increased dropout rates due to mental and physical exhaustion, and decreased ability to concentrate in school, resulting into poor academic performance (Putnick & Bornstein, 2019). The authors assert that children who work as domestic helpers in their own homes or in others' households are often physically tired and mentally drained from long hours of work, which leaves them too exhausted to study or attend school regularly, which also affects these children's enrolment into school (Putnick & Bornstein, 2019).

Manual labor refers to physically demanding work, often in agriculture, construction, or other forms of unskilled labor. This type of labor can significantly influence students'

enrollment in school, especially in developing locations where children are frequently engaged in such work. Manual labor often requires long working hours, which can conflict with school schedules, leaving children with little time or energy to attend classes regularly, leading to frequent absenteeism, as well as missing important lessons, leading to academic underperformance and disengagement from school (Lesanayo & Keis, 2021). The authors also assert that manual labor, especially in physically demanding tasks like farming or construction, can cause fatigue and stress, leaving children too tired or mentally exhausted to focus on their studies, leading to limited cognitive engagement in school activities due to physical and mental fatigue (Lesanayo & Keis, 2021).

According to Holgado, Maya-Jariego, Ramos, Palacio and Romero-Mendoza (2019) sexual exploitation of children, which includes trafficking, sexual abuse, and forced prostitution, significantly impacts students' enrollment in education. This harmful practice not only endangers children's physical and emotional well-being but also has long-lasting effects on their ability to access and complete education. The authors assert that children who are victims of sexual exploitation often experience emotional trauma, fear, and stigmatization, which can lead them to withdraw from school either temporarily or permanently, leading to increased dropout rates, poor academic performance or disengagement from school, and reduced participation in education activities due to emotional distress and mental health issues (Holgado et al., 2019).

III. METHODOLOGY

> *Research Design*

This study took up a correlational research design integrated with a quantitative approach. A correlational research design explores relationships between variables without implying causation in a particular study population (Kassu, 2019). Therefore, this research design helped the researcher determine whether a relationship exists between child labor and students' enrolment, and the strength and direction of that relationship. The quantitative approach enabled the researcher to use numerical data and statistical methods, reducing personal bias and increasing the accuracy and reliability of findings on the study objectives.

> *Target Population and Sample Size*

The study took on a target population of 8 Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda (Kayunga District Local Government, 2022). Though, because to the time limitation the researcher took on 4 Government Aided Secondary Schools out of which a sample was picked that engaged in the study. The study was based on a sample of 76 participants which comprised of head teachers and teachers picked from four selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District to provide numerical data that was utilized to give answers to the study objectives.

> *Sampling Procedure*

The researcher considered both convenience sampling and simple random sampling to select respondents who participated in the study. Convenience sampling is where a

researcher selects participants who are easily accessible, readily available, or willing to participate in the study which was utilized to select head teachers. Simple random sampling was engaged to choose teachers from the secondary schools to engage in the study. Simple random sampling gives every individual in a population an equal chance of being selected into the sample (Elfil & Negida, 2017).

➤ *Data Collection Methods*

• *Questionnaire Survey Method*
A questionnaire survey method is a data collection technique in which a researcher uses a structured set of written questions to gather information from a group of respondents (Mathiyazhagan, 2018). The questionnaire survey method helps the researcher to collect structured, consistent, and scalable data from a large group of respondents in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Thus, this method enabled the researcher to obtain structured, quantifiable, and consistent data from participants on the study topics in the shortest time possible.

➤ *Data Collection Instruments*

• *Structured Questionnaire*
A structured questionnaire is a type of data collection tool used to collect information from respondents in which the questions are pre-determined and formulated in a specific, standardized order (Acheung, 2019). The study used structured questionnaires to collect numerical and statistical data from school head teachers and teachers containing closed-ended questions and prearranged responses which were self-administered to participants in the different selected schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. The structured questionnaires were utilized to ensure consistency in responses, making it easier to analyze and compare data.

• *Data Analysis*
The study utilized both descriptive and correlation analysis techniques to examine the quantitative primary data collected. Descriptive analysis was used when evaluating participants' demographic data presented in an understandable form using measures such as frequencies and percentages to provide a clear and organized summary of the data collected in a study. To examine the relationship between child labor and students' enrolment, Spearman's rank correlation analysis was utilized to measure the strength and direction of a monotonic relationship between two variables and to test the significance of the relationship at a 99% confidence level. Spearman's Rank Correlation is ideal for measuring the relationship between two variables, especially when the data is ordinal or non-parametric (Jerrold, 2016).

• *Ethical Consideration*
The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the university as a requirement for attaining authorization from school administrators in the various secondary schools to carry out the survey in their school premises before undertaking the study.

The researcher also fully informed participants about the nature, purpose, and benefits of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate.

Additionally, the researcher ensured the protection of participants' confidentiality and information as well as the integrity of the research process.

IV. STUDY FINDINGS

The findings indicated in this section encompass the descriptive data on the demographics of respondents and correlation analysis to give answers to the study objectives.

➤ *Findings on the Demographics of Respondents*
The study evaluated the demographics of respondents who took part in the study from the selected government aided secondary schools in the district, and the results are given in Table 1;

Table 1 Demographics of the Respondents

Demographics			
Category	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	45	59.2
	Female	31	40.8
	Total	**76**	**100.0**
Age Bracket	25-30 years	7	9.2
	31-35 years	12	15.8
	36-40 years	23	30.3
	Above 40 years	34	44.7
	Total	**76**	**100.0**
Education Level	Diploma	6	7.9
	Bachelors	61	80.3
	Masters	9	11.8
	Total	**76**	**100.0**
Marital Status	Married	54	71.1
	Single	22	28.9
	Total	**76**	**100.0**
	1-3 years	13	17.1

Time Worked at the School	4-5 years	21	27.6
	Above 5 years	42	55.3
	Total	**76**	**100.0**

Source: Primary data, 2025

Table 1 specifies findings on the demographics of respondents who took part in the study from selected government aided secondary schools in Kayunga district. The results exposed that majority 45 (59.2%) of respondents were males and 31 (40.8%) of respondents were females. The study results also exposed that most 34 (44.7%) of respondents were aged above 40 years, followed by 23 (30.3%) of respondents who were aged between 36-40 years, then 12 (15.8%) of respondents who were aged between 31-35 years, and the least proportion 7 (9.2%) of respondents were aged between 25-30 years.

In addition, the study results exposed that majority 61 (80.3%) of respondents had acquired a bachelors' education level, followed by 9 (11.8%) of respondents who had acquired a masters' education level, and the least proportion 6 (7.9%) of respondents had acquired a diploma education level. Related to marital status, the study discovered that majority 54 (71.1%) of respondents were married and the least proportion 22 (28.9%) of respondents were single.

Further, the study results exposed that majority 42 (55.3%) of respondents had worked for over 5 years at the given government aided secondary school, followed by 21 (27.6%) of respondents who had worked for 4-5 years at the given government aided secondary school, and the least proportion 13 (17.1%) of respondents had worked for 1-3 years at the given government aided secondary school.

➢ *Findings on the Objectives of the Study*
This section presents the findings about the specific study objectives.

● *Relationship between Domestic Work and Students' Enrolment in Selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda*
The study sought to examine the relationship between domestic work and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. The relationship was analyzed using Spearman's Rank correlation analysis and the findings are given in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation Findings on the Relationship Between Domestic Work and Students' Enrolment in Selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda

		Domestic Work	Students' Enrolment
Domestic Work	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.572[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	76	76
Students' Enrolment	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	-.572[**]	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	76	76
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Primary data, 2025

The study results in Table 2 shown that domestic work has a strong negative and statistically significant relationship with students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda (r = -0.572, N = 76, P-value = 0.000) at a 0.01 significance level. The findings imply that a reduction in domestic work considerably and significantly leads to an enhancement in students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

● *Relationship Between Manual Labor and Students' Enrolment in Selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda*
The study also sought to examine the relationship between manual labor and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. The relationship was analyzed using Spearman's Rank correlation analysis and the results are given in Table 3.

Table 3 Correlation Findings on the Relationship Between Manual Labor and Students' Enrolment in Selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda

		Manual Labor	Students' Enrolment
Manual Labor	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.750[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	76	76
Students' Enrolment	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	-.750[**]	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	76	76
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Primary data, 2025

The study results in Table 3 shown that manual labor has a very strong negative and statistically significant relationship with students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda (r = -0.750, N = 76, P-value = 0.000) at a 0.01 level of significance. The findings imply that a reduction in manual labor substantially and significantly leads to an enhancement in students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

- *Relationship Between Sexual Exploitation and Students' Enrolment in Selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda*

The study further sought to examine the relationship between sexual exploitation and students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda. The relationship was analyzed using Spearman's Rank correlation analysis and the results are given in Table 4.

Table 4 Correlation Findings on the Relationship Between Sexual Exploitation and Students' Enrolment in Selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda

		Sexual Exploitation	Students' Enrolment
Sexual Exploitation	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.688[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	76	76
Students' Enrolment	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	-.688[**]	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	76	76
. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Primary data, 2025

The study results in Table 4 shown that sexual exploitation has a strong negative and statistically significant relationship with students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda (r = -0.688, N = 76, P-value = 0.000) at a 0.01 level of significance. The findings imply that a decrease in sexual exploitation comprehensively and significantly leads to an enhancement in students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that child labor in terms of domestic work, manual labor, and sexual exploitation has a negative and significant association with students' enrolment in that a reduction in the various forms of child labor resultantly leads to an enhancement in students' enrolment in selected Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the school administrators in partnership with the local authorities should conduct community awareness campaigns about the long-term benefits of education and the risks of child labor through engaging local leaders and parents to shift cultural norms around work and schooling which would significantly influence an improvement in students' enrolment in Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kayunga District, Uganda.

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