

CHILD ABUSE AND PERSONAL SECURITY OF CHILDREN IN KAJIADO COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse remains a persistent social challenge that undermines the personal security and overall well-being of children in Kenya. Despite numerous legal and policy frameworks established to protect children's rights, many continue to face various forms of abuse including physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect. This research aimed to explore child abuse and its effect on personal security of children in Kajiado County, Kenya. Specifically, the study identified and established causes of child abuse, and effects of child abuse on personal security. The study was guided by Control Theory, General Strain Theory and Attachment Theory. A total of 88 participants were selected from a target population of 721, and the research adopted a descriptive approach. To select the most appropriate subgroups that would accurately reflect the entire population, the research utilized a mix of probability and non-probability techniques. For data collection, focus groups, structured interviews, and questionnaires were utilized. The analysis of the data involved descriptive statistics like percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations, in addition to content analysis. The collected responses were organized into tables and graphs for comparison and further analysis. The factors causing child abuse were cultural practices like child marriages, moranism and FGM. Personal factors included lack of interest in

education and lack of knowledge on children rights as well as fear to cause family conflicts by reporting. Child abuse has been identified as a significant contributor to various life stressors and challenges, including feelings of insecurity, suicidal ideation, strained social relationships, increased substance abuse, early pregnancies, school dropouts, child marriages, and long-lasting trauma. To address this issue, proactive strategies have been proposed, including the prosecution of offenders, community education on child abuse and children's rights, encouraging reporting to authorities and the media, establishing children's rescue centers, and creating sponsorship programs for underprivileged youth. The study recommends that the government and stakeholders should intensify efforts to facilitate the reporting of child abuse cases. Regular community sensitization programs should be implemented to raise awareness about the causes and effects of child abuse, as well as the available channels for reporting and accessing justice. Such initiatives are crucial for reducing the prevalence of child abuse and ensuring the safety and security of children both now and in the future.

Keywords: Child, Child Abuse, Crime, Personal Security, Moranism, Child Labour, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse refers to any act or omission by a parent, guardian, or caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2012), child abuse includes physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, inadequate care, and exploitation that adversely affect a child's health, development, dignity, and sense of well-being. Globally, child abuse remains a major concern, with an estimated one billion children experiencing some form of violence or neglect annually (WHO, 2019). Such experiences undermine children's personal security and are associated with long-term psychological, social, and health consequences (Finkelhor et al., 2020).

In developed countries, child maltreatment persists despite advanced child protection systems. In the United States, approximately 678,000 children were reported as victims of abuse and neglect in 2019, with neglect accounting for nearly 70% of cases and physical abuse for about 18% (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Similarly, in Mexico, child abuse is recognized as a serious public health issue, particularly in low-income communities. National data indicate that close to 60% of children have experienced physical or emotional abuse (SIPINNA, 2021).

Within Africa, the prevalence of child abuse varies across countries due to differences in socio-economic conditions, cultural practices, and the strength of child protection systems. Countries such as South Africa and Nigeria report high levels of child abuse, often exacerbated by poverty, gender inequality, and weak enforcement of child protection laws (Adewale et al., 2020). Studies from South Africa show widespread physical and emotional abuse, which significantly affects children's sense of safety (D'Amico et al., 2021), while in Nigeria, child sexual abuse continues to erode children's trust in caregivers and institutions (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2021).

In Kenya, several legal frameworks exist to safeguard children, including the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Children's Act (2001), the Sexual Offences Act (2006), and the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act (2010). These laws prohibit child labor, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse. Kenya has also ratified international instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, demonstrating commitment to child protection (Muchelule, 2014). However, enforcement of these laws remains weak. National studies indicate that nearly 60% of Kenyan children have experienced violence either at home or in school (KNBS, 2020). In Kajiado County, child abuse manifests through child labor, early marriages, moranism, and female genital mutilation, often justified by cultural norms. Children are frequently withdrawn from school to work or serve in households, exposing them to insecurity and long-term psychological harm. These persistent challenges underscore the need to examine child abuse and its impact on children's personal security in Kajiado County.

Statement of the Problem

Children are highly vulnerable to abuse and neglect due to their developmental stage and limited ability to protect themselves. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes the need for special protection and care for children to support their physical, mental, and social development. Despite this global commitment, child abuse remains a serious concern worldwide and in Kenya. According to the World Health Organization (2020), child maltreatment has long-term physical, psychological, and behavioral consequences. Abuse during early childhood disrupts brain development and increases the risk of depression, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, school dropout, and involvement in violence. Such experiences are also linked to chronic conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and suicide. Violence against children further affects education outcomes, with affected children more likely to disengage from schooling.

Although personal safety education empowers children with knowledge and skills to protect themselves, many children remain exposed to abuse. The United Nations, through Sustainable Development Goal 16.2, calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against children (UNICEF, 2020). In Kenya, the Children's Act (2001) provides a legal framework for protecting children by criminalizing acts such as sexual abuse, forced marriage, neglect, and physical violence. However, evidence shows that abuse persists. Wilson (2015) found that eight out of ten school-going children in Kenya experience physical or verbal abuse, while three out of ten report sexual abuse, with homes and schools being the most unsafe environments. In Kajiado County, children continue to face widespread violations of their rights. Ajema et al. (2016) report that many children are denied education and are instead subjected to child labor, early marriage, female genital mutilation, and physical abuse. The study further revealed that 41% of children had witnessed abuse at home, while 45% experienced abuse from teachers or relatives. Despite existing laws and policies, cultural practices, weak enforcement, and limited child safety awareness persist. Consequently, this study sought to examine the impact of child abuse on children's personal security in Kajiado County and propose appropriate intervention strategies.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To analyse the different causes of child abuse in Kajiado County.
- ii. To evaluate the effects of child abuse on personal security in Kajiado County.

Research Questions

The study questions were:

- i. What are the causes of child abuse in Kajiado County?
- ii. How does child abuse affect personal security in Kajiado County?

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Causes of Child Abuse and its Influence on Personal Security

Meinck, Cluver, Boyes, and Mhlongo (2015) explored the risk and protective elements related with physical and sexual abuse among children and adolescents in Africa,

pinpointing 23 research studies that consistently showed elevated rates of child abuse across different groups of children and adults. The research revealed that being exposed to sexual violence, bullying, and living in rural versus urban areas are societal-level elements that play a role in child abuse. Child maltreatment was caused by household-level variables such as non-nuclear families, poverty, and domestic violence. Age, handicap, physical health, behaviour, and gender were the kid-level characteristics that contributed to child maltreatment. These results pinpoint important contributing elements that could serve as the main focus of treatments aimed at preventing child abuse. However, there is a contextual gap as this study was done expansively in Africa while the current study was conducted in Kajiado County.

Pangapanga, Thangalimodzi, and Pangapanga (2015) conducted a study on the types, causes, and impacts of abuse on the development of children in communities in southern Malawi. It also looked at how counselling and guidance might lessen the negative consequences of abuse on a child's development. 400 people from communities in Southern Malawi were chosen to take part in the study using a two-stage sampling process. Numerous types of maltreatment on infant development were discovered by the study. Physical, emotional, careless, sexual, and verbal are a few examples. It was discovered that these assaults are frequently influenced by elements including poverty, the perpetrator's prior history of abuse, and the absence or weakness of policies regarding child abuse. Abuse of children has been shown to have a number of negative effects on their development, including early marriage, behavioural issues, mental illness, PTSD, and infectious infections. The study revealed that victims of abuse might never forget the abuse for the rest of their life, which is concerning. Positively, the study concluded that counselling and guidance are essential to reducing the impacts of child abuse, particularly when it comes to advocating for policies and offering counselling for mental stability, self-worth, and self-esteem.

Effects of Child Abuse on Personal Security

An evaluation of the influence of child abuse and neglect on children in Latur, India, was conducted by Dahake, Kale, Dadpe, Kendre, Shep, and Dhore (2018). A range of experiences that are dangerous or damaging to the kid and the consequence of actions or inactions on the part of a responsible caregiver are covered in the evaluation. The authors evaluated websites and municipal guidelines and conducted a quick literature search on the effects of child abuse and neglect. According to these research, acute stress brought on by child abuse throws off equilibrium and causes both short-term and long-term hormonal and metabolic abnormalities in the body and brain. The study concluded that there are significant, long-term links between adult health risk behaviors and illnesses and child maltreatment and neglect. Abuse or neglect, for example, might have relatively modest bodily impacts, like as scrapes or bruises, or more serious ones, such as shattered bones, hemorrhage, or even death.

Kenya's Ministry of Labour and Social Protection conducted a survey on child abuse in 2019. The survey gauges the frequency, type, and effects of sexual, emotional, and

physical abuse of children and young people. The study improves the nation's ability to create effective child protection systems and plan, carry out, and assess programs aimed at preventing violence. Among the results are a number of noteworthy discoveries that offer important new perspectives on the lives of Kenyan children and young people. It was discovered that the effects of violence against children extend much beyond the initial event, and victims of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse may have serious health and social repercussions in the short to long term. According to behavioural and neurobiological research, early childhood exposure to violence can impact brain development and increase a child's vulnerability to a variety of mental and physical health issues that can persist into adulthood, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and anxiety or depressive disorders.

Theoretical Framework

Control Theory

Control Theory explains child abuse as a result of power and control dynamics within family relationships (Bostock & Williams et al., 2002). Dominant family members often use threats, coercion, or violence to enforce compliance from weaker members, particularly children, creating conditions for abuse driven by fear and vulnerability. Loseke (2005) notes that coercive behaviors are used to control actions, emotions, and opinions of dependent family members. Due to their dependence on caregivers, abused children may internalize these experiences, leading to prolonged fear, insecurity, and normalization of violence into adulthood. This theory focuses on the causes of child abuse especially in the home setting. It also indicates the eventual behaviour of the abused child as they grow based on maltreatment, either positive or negative. The theory can help elucidate the context and causes of child abuse including the parent/guardian conduct on child discipline, care, and influence on behaviour.

General Strain Theory (GST)

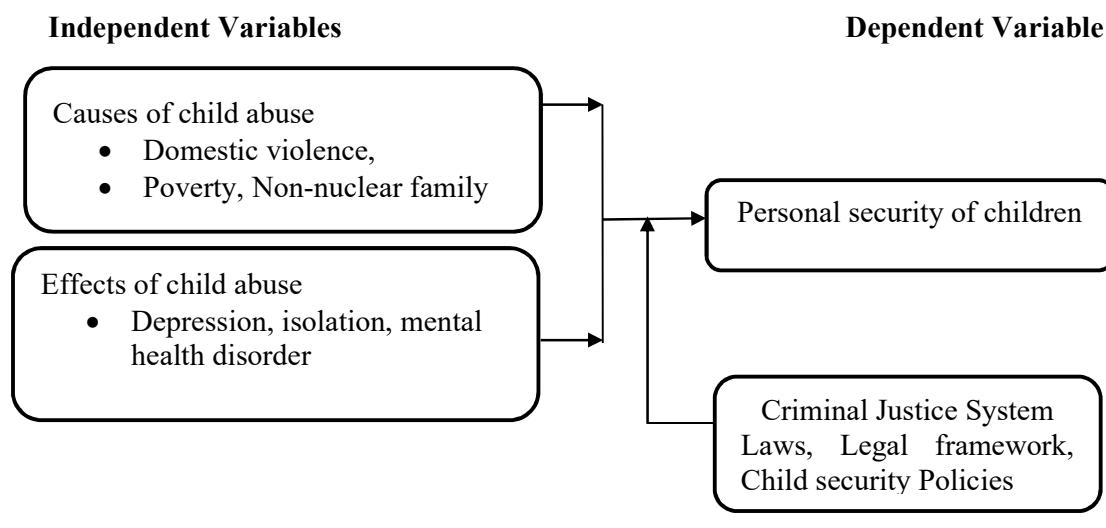
General Strain Theory (GST), proposed by Agnew (1992), explains how negative experiences such as child abuse create strain that may lead to delinquent behavior. Child abuse is viewed as an unfair and severe strain that, when combined with weak social control, increases pressure to adopt illegal coping mechanisms (Agnew, 2001). GST distinguishes between objective and subjective strains, with subjective strains being stronger predictors of crime due to individual perceptions (Iratzoqui, 2018). Strain commonly arises from loss of valued goals, negative treatment, or failure to achieve expectations (Agnew, 1992). Such strains generate negative emotions that may lead victims of child abuse to insecurity, social isolation, and delinquent behavior. The theory is relevant to this study as it explains the link between child victimization, insecurity, and criminal behavior (Song, Wenzel & Cho, 2021). Focusing on the studies that explore how child abuse influences various outcomes such as criminal activities, individual safety, and the impact on the community through the victims' social conduct, this theory is essential for this research as it helps in analyzing the GST forecasts concerning the link between being victimized and engaging in criminal behavior.

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory, proposed by Bowlby (1973), explains how early relationships between children and caregivers influence behaviour, emotional development, and security. Attachment refers to behaviours that promote closeness to a caregiver perceived as stronger or more protective. Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified four attachment types: secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent, and disorganized-disoriented. Secure attachment is associated with sensitive and responsive caregiving, which promotes a child's sense of safety and emotional regulation (Main & Solomon, 1990; Tarabulsky et al., 2008). In contrast, insecure attachment styles arise from inconsistent, neglectful, or frightening caregiving. Insecure-avoidant children tend to withdraw emotionally, insecure-ambivalent children display resistance or heightened dependency, while disorganized attachment reflects fear and lack of trust in caregivers.

Research indicates that children who experience abuse or neglect are more likely to develop insecure, particularly disorganized, attachment patterns, leading to heightened insecurity and emotional distress (Cicchetti et al., 2006). This theory is relevant to the study as it explains how caregiver-child relationships influence children's sense of security, willingness to disclose abuse, and interactions with parents, teachers, child welfare officers, and law enforcement.

Conceptual Framework



Source: (Researcher, 2023)

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Child Abuse and Personal Security

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design. A descriptive design is concerned with systematically obtaining information that describes existing phenomena by asking questions relating to the current status of the subjects of the study (Saunders et al., 2019). In this context, the study aimed to describe and understand the prevalence, causes, effects, and preventive strategies of child abuse in a real-world setting without

manipulating any variables. A descriptive approach facilitates the collection of quantitative data through surveys and qualitative insights through interviews or focus group discussions, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Target Population

A population refers to a large group of individuals, objects, or entities that are relevant for practical purposes. The specific group targeted for information gathering is known as the target population. According to Kasomo (2015), a population is defined as any collection of organizations, individuals, or objectives that share at least one common characteristic. Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) describe the target population as the actual or hypothetical group of people, events, or items that the researcher aims to analyze and from which they will derive the study's findings.

Table 1: Target Population

Category	Population
Children survivors	233
Parents/guardians	233
Law Enforcement	219
Village elders	30
Children Officer	6
Total	721

Source: Department of Social Services, Children's Department, National Police Service & Kajiado County Government.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Both probability and non-probability sampling methods were applied in this study. Depending on the study's objectives, the researcher will employ distinct sample strategies for both probability and non-probability sampling procedures to choose the participants (Kothari, 2015). Snowball sampling was the method utilized to choose the survivors. Snowball sampling, according to Ghaljaie, Naderifar, and Goli (2017), is a non-probability sampling approach that researchers employ to find possible participants in studies where people are difficult to find. Snowball sampling is a useful technique for analyzing individuals in special care or vulnerable populations. Actually, it gives researchers access to vulnerable groups. The researcher located them in Kajiado town's children's department and police stations. The local government provided the researcher with access to survivors and their guardians as well. Purposive sampling was utilized to select the key informants from the police, and convenience sampling was also utilized to select the children's officers.

Purposive sampling is frequently employed in qualitative studies to pinpoint and choose instances that offer a rich source of insights regarding the topic under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020). A sample of forty village elders, with a maximum of ten

members in each of the four civic wards, were selected. Every individual or member of the population has an equal and fair chance of being selected thanks to this system. The following formula was utilized to calculate the sample population (Yamane, 1967).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \dots$$

Where n = Sample size, e = margin of errors, N = population size

The sample was computed using the formula above as follows:

Total population size (N) = 721

Margin of error (e) = 10 percent

$$n = \frac{721}{1+721(0.1)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{721}{8.21}$$

$$n = 87.8$$

The sample was 88 respondents.

Table 2: Sample Size

Category	Population	Sample	Proportion %
Children survivors	233	23	26.1
Parents/guardians	233	23	26.1
Law Enforcement	219	22	25.0
Village elders	30	16	18.2
Children Officer	6	4	4.6
Total	721	88	100

Source: Children's department, National Police Service & County Government of Kajiado

A total of 88 participants made up the study's sample size.

Data Collection Instruments

The data were collected through structured interview, questionnaires and Focus Group Discussion. Structured interviews involve asking respondents a predetermined set of questions in a fixed order. This approach ensures consistency in data collection and allows for comparability of responses. Questionnaires consist of a set of structured questions designed to collect information efficiently (Kothari, 2008; Newing, 2010). They were administered to police officers and child protection officers and were aligned with the study objectives. The questionnaires contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to obtain in-depth insights into child abuse and child protection issues (Nyumba et al., 2018). Four FGDs were conducted, each comprising police officers, guardians, village elders, child survivors, and children officers, totaling 40 participants. Each discussion lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed in this study. Quantitative data from structured questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. SPSS version 26 was used for

data coding, entry, and analysis to generate clear and interpretable statistical results (Saunders et al., 2019). Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended questionnaire items were analyzed thematically. The data were organized into themes aligned with the study objectives, including causes of child abuse, effects on personal security, challenges faced by law enforcement, and preventive measures. Manual coding, supported by NVivo software, was used to identify key themes and patterns. Qualitative findings were presented narratively and supported by selected direct quotations to enhance credibility and authenticity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Causes of Child Abuse

Analyzing Kajiado County's many children abuse manifestations and causes was the initial goal.

Nature of Cases on Child Abuse in Kajiado County

The research aimed to explore the various reported cases of child abuse in Kajiado County. The police were asked to cite the observed cases within the community they serve.

Table 3: Police Reports on Child Abuse Cases in Kajiado County

Occurrence	Frequency	Percent
Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Responses		
Unwanted pregnancies	0	0.0
Children are married off	4	18.2
Children sent away from home	8	36.4
Drop out of school and married off	8	36.4
Children commit suicide	2	9.0
Total	22	100.0
Police Officers Responses		
Child Labour	1	5.6
Sexual Abuse	5	27.8
Corporal Punishment	2	11.1
Negligence	2	11.1
Early Marriages	6	33.3
<i>Moranism</i>	2	11.1
Total	18	100.0

Source: (Field Data, 2023)

The findings presented in Table 3 demonstrate that 72.8% of parents, guardians, and caregivers identified common forms of child abuse as children being sent away from home and dropping out of school to be married off at an early age. This was corroborated by police officers, who noted that early marriages and sexual abuse are among the most frequently reported child abuse cases in Kajiado County. In the cultural context of Kajiado County, largely inhabited by the indigenous Maasai community practices such as arranged child marriages, early sexual activity for girls, and *moranism* (involving young boys in warrior activities like cattle rustling) remain prevalent. These traditional norms, while deeply rooted, often expose children to high-risk environments, increasing

their vulnerability to physical harm, exploitation, and emotional trauma, thereby severely undermining their sense of safety and personal security. The findings align with earlier studies by Ajema, Muraya, Karuga, and Kiruki (2016), who also identified moranism, early pregnancies, and school dropouts as persistent challenges affecting children in the region.

The findings gathered from the interviews with children officers indicated that the cultural practices of the Maasai community predispose children to abuse. Some of the named cultural factors leading to child abuse in the region as highlighted in the Focus Group Discussions were child labour, marriages, FGM and *moranism*. The village elders decried the prevalence of traditional cultures on the role of the child in modern society. Discussants expressed that some of the parents were illiterate, had no value for education and exposed their children to traditional roles of cattle herding for boys and house chores for girls in preparation for their future responsibilities as adults, and in accordance to Maasai culture.

Focus group discussants cited lack of education as the major cause for child marriage for girls, and arrangements that could not be opposed made girls as young as eleven years to enter into marriage, being presumed mature (but to the contrary).

Male Discussant 9.23 cited that “*in case of unwanted pregnancy, the girl was married off quickly to reduce family shame in the community. In some cases, the man responsible may not be willing to take the lady as a wife and therefore torments her once she enters his homestead.* He adds that “*a woman must take care of the home once married and there is no argument about the nature of chores she is given to undertake. So, the child once given for marriage is presumed a woman who can perform all expected duties of a wife. If she fails, the husband has a right to discipline her.*” Thus, early marriage teenagers are in this sense exposed to child labour, early sex, parenthood, and making family decisions that are meaningful for adults. This makes them vulnerable to life insecurity.

A lady discussant (5.23) cited that “*the young girls were not biologically ready for sexual intercourse, leading to health challenges during and after birth. They were at times married to old men against their will and tended to run away and beaten to get back to matrimonial homes by the husband and her parents. This is traumatic to the young girls and an abuse of fundamental rights of life.*”

In addition to that, elders cited that some of the factors exposing youngsters to child abuse were unresponsive parents, poverty, fear of consequences of curses from the elders, fear of victimization by the perpetrators, being unaware of their rights, lack of interest in education and community lifestyle.

Recent Trends of Child Abuse

The study evaluated the recent occurrence of child abuse in Kajiado County to unearth prevalence and trends of the vice in recent past, as well as the level of insecurity of the children.

Table 4: Recent Reports of Child Abuse

Year	Frequency	Percent
Before 2020	8	23.5
2020-2021	10	29.4
2021-2022	16	47.1
Total	34	100

Source: (Field Data, 2023)

The findings presented in Table 4 table indicates a concerning trend in the prevalence of child abuse over recent years. Prior to 2020, there were 8 reported cases, representing 23.5% of the total incidents. This number increased to 10 cases (29.4%) during the period from 2020 to 2021, and then escalated dramatically to 16 cases (47.1%) between 2021 and 2022. The total number of reported cases reached 34, with 100% representing the overall statistics. This upward trend reveals a growing concern regarding the personal security of children in Kajiado County, which may be influenced by numerous socio-cultural and economic factors. Increasing rates of child abuse can be correlated with underlying issues such as economic instability, shifts in cultural practices, and a lack of effective protective mechanisms for children (Wamaya, 2021). The significant rise from the earlier years to the period between 2021 and 2022 indicates an urgent need for intervention and protective measures within the community.

The Person Responsible for Child Abuse

Table 5: Respondents' Views on Who is Responsible for Child Abuse

Category	People to blame	Frequency	Percent
Police officers	Parents/guardians and teachers	6	30.0
	Parents/guardians and community elders	12	70.0
Village elders	Parents/ guardians	13	100.0
Children	Parents	4	100.0
Officers			
Survivors	Parents/Guardians/Caregivers	22	100.0

Source: (Field Data, 2023)

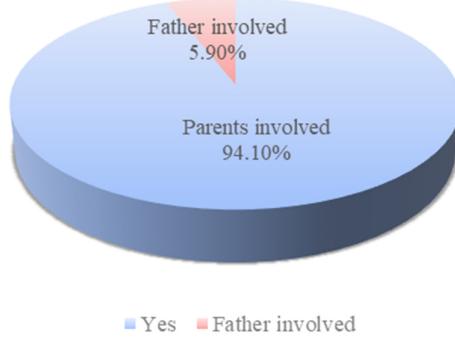
As shown in Table 5, 30% of police officers attributed child abuse to parents/guardians and teachers, while a larger proportion (70%) blamed parents/guardians and community leaders. Notably, all village elders concurred that parents/guardians are primarily responsible for child abuse cases. Furthermore, interviews with children's officers, elders, and survivors revealed unanimous agreement (100%) that parents are to blame for the prevalence of child abuse in Kajiado County. This consensus underscores the central

role that parental and guardian actions or inactions play in shaping children's safety and security.

These findings reflect a broader cultural context where the responsibilities of parents and guardians extend deeply into the personal security of children. The control theory offers insight into this dynamic, suggesting that because parents possess authority over their children, they have the power to exercise parental control, which, in some instances, results in abuse. For example, the practice of child marriage often justified by tradition illustrates how parental authority can be misused to compromise a child's safety. Girls are frequently married off to older men against their will, exposing them to physical and emotional harm, thereby directly undermining their personal security.

The interview results further reinforce this link, with 94.1% of children's officers agreeing that parents are involved in child abuse cases, as depicted in Figure 2. This high percentage indicates that parental influence significantly contributes to the insecurity faced by children in Kajiado County. Traditionally, parents are expected to safeguard their children; however, cultural practices such as arranged marriages and traditional upbringing often hinder children's ability to exercise personal security measures. These practices, coupled with limited educational opportunities, leave children vulnerable to abuse and diminish their capacity to protect themselves. Overall, the findings suggest that addressing the cultural and societal factors influencing parental control is crucial for improving the personal security and well-being of children in Kajiado County.

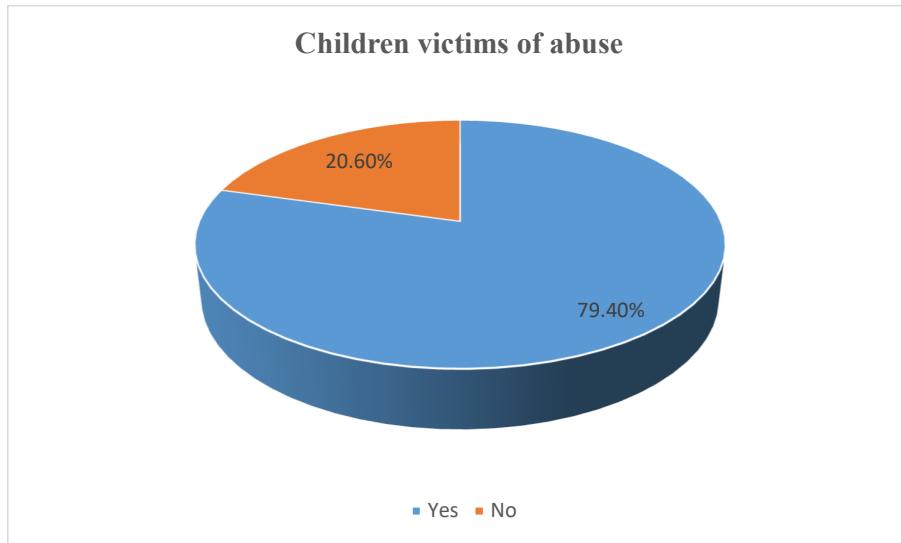
Parents' involvement in child abuse



Source: (Field Data, 2023)

Figure 2 Parents' Involvement in Child Abuse

The parents, guardians and caregivers were asked whether the children under their care had ever suffered from child abuse and as shown in Figure 4.6, majority (79.4%) accented. Out of those who agreed, 67.6% cited that they did not report the cases.



Source: (Field Data, 2023)

Figure 3: Children Under Care Being Victims of Abuse

Results of the Focus Group Discussions support this finding, with village elders revealing that the parents were involved in some cases like FGM as they were the ones who made the decision whether children should be circumcised or not. The findings were in line with Ajema, et.al. (2016) Kajiado County study revealing that more than half of the parents reported to have severely beaten their children as a way of punishment in the last six months. Further Meinck, et.al. (2015) showed that caregiver level factors leading to child abuse were parenting and caregiver-child relationship. Kajiado community being mainly Maasai have a long-ingrained attachment to family traditions where parents control the lives of their children and at times the mechanism might not conform to conventional notions of child abuse, with severe punishment not considered physical abuse. Further, neglect in terms of education is common, though the parents/guardians do not find this any form of child abuse, hence observation of child maltreatment by respondents.

The results concurred with the findings by ANPPCAN (2021) which indicated that parents were to blame as they were involved in the child abuse. Economic hardships and life stressors in recent times have affected the compassionate nature of many. It is important to note that the recent Covid 19-pandemic has left many parents without jobs and incomes. It has conflicted parenting nature and causes for aggression that may culminate to child abuse. Further, school closure during the pandemic meant the children were at home and they had to work. Further, their lack of schoolwork made them idle and ready for any escapades of life including sex leading to unwanted pregnancies and forced marriages for girls, and *moranism* for the boys.

Frequency of Child Abuse Reporting

The research aimed to explore the frequency of child abuse cases reporting in the study location. This was to unearth whether the cases were brought to light for actions necessary against perpetrators.

Table 6: Child Abuse Cases Reporting Frequency

Category	Period	Frequency	Percent
Police officers	Weekly	6	46.2
	Monthly	7	53.8
	Total	13	100.0
Village elders	Monthly	1	6.2
	Quarterly	15	93.8
	Total	16	100.0
Children officers	Daily	4	100.0

Source: (Field Data, 2023)

As per the Table 6, case reports were received weekly (46.2%) and monthly (53.8%) at the police station. Majority (93.8%) of the village elders cited to receive such cases monthly, while all the children's officers (100%) receiving such cases daily. Thus, reporting of child abuse depended on the office or institutions to which the report was to be made. Notably, it can be deduced that victims of child abuse were crying for help from all quarters they could get help, especially the children's department of government. However, with knowledge of rights, the victims may pursue justice through the police. Also, the research aimed to explore the gender most vulnerable to child abuse. The children officer and all the police officers (100%) said girls were at greatest risk of abuse in this community. When asked why they indicated that girls were more vulnerable, majority of the respondents reported that the significant reason was due to the patriarchal society expectations, and also the cultural practices. Being brought up with paternal inclinations of weaker sex the girl is prone to abuse from boys, men and even women, exposing her vulnerability and insecurity in the community.

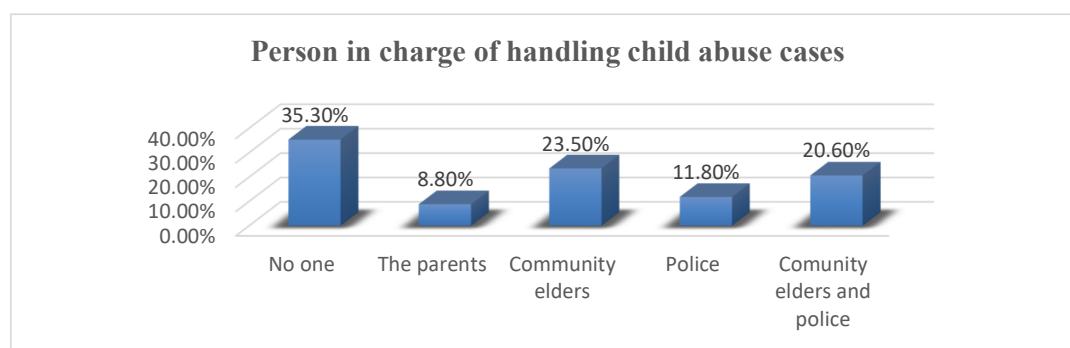
The feedback from participants in the Focus Group Discussions, which included four groups of selected respondents, was insightful. Each group comprised two police officers, two guardians, two village elders, two child survivors, and two child officers, totalling 40 members across all discussions. The findings revealed that 84.6% of participants agree that girls are particularly vulnerable, while the remaining respondents highlighted that boys are also at risk. One discussant (m, 14.23) emphasized the vulnerability of girls, stating:

“Girls are raised to be subordinate to men, starting from an early age. By adolescence, they are often viewed primarily as future wives and are discouraged from attending school. In contrast, boys are brought up to be leaders within their families, households, and communities, often assuming authority over women. As a result, they are generally permitted to discipline girls as they see fit. Additionally, young men are allowed to pursue and sometimes coerce or force teenage girls into sexual activity, which can lead to early pregnancies. Consequently, girls are introduced to motherhood

unprepared and face numerous challenges related to childbirth and childcare, often without adequate support or resources.”

Boys were particularly vulnerable to child abuse due to limited access to education and their involvement in labour aimed at building family wealth through cattle rearing. Additionally, young men were introduced to *moranism* and faced various dangers, including threats from wild animals and human adversaries, while herding. The strict cultures create assault threats by parents and guardians if boys do not tend to the cattle, especially in order to get education. At times, they are ostracised by the father and have to seek basic human needs from the community, which may be challenging. Notably, their future lives are bound to traditions and may not venture into the world where other opportunities available can transform their lives. The information of gender vulnerability on child abuse is dependent on communities and notably, the girl child is most vulnerable in Kajiado County. Knowing the gender that is more vulnerable can help focus prevention strategies on them, hence reduce chances of child abuse occurring.

The study also sought to establish persons in charge of handling child abuse cases to investigate who in the community took responsibility for child protection. As shown in Figure 4.7, 35.3% of the respondents were not aware of the responsible person (s) 20.6 %⁸ citing community elders and police. This showed a serious challenge on the awareness levels on who to report to in case of child abuse occurrence in the area. On the other hand, there was knowledge of participants on the importance of government officers and community elders as responsible persons for community welfare including child security. Likewise, the study by Badoe (2017) acknowledged the significance of the communal character of most societies, where key players such as queen mothers and traditional chiefs, women's organizations, and community health workers play a crucial role in promoting the wellbeing of children. However, interventions for public awareness of child abuse resolution centres were critical in Kajiado County.



Source: (Field Data, 2023)

Figure 4: Persons in Charge of Handling Child Abuse Cases

Effects of Child Abuse on Personal Security of Children

A large majority (91.2%) of the child survivors reported that life had become more stressful and difficult following abuse, and they experienced heightened feelings of

insecurity. Only 8.8% of the children indicated that they had fully healed and returned to a sense of normalcy. According to children's officers, victims frequently expressed suicidal thoughts and struggled with social interactions, often withdrawing from peers and community life. Some survivors turned to child marriages as a form of escape, which further exposed them to abuse and unsafe living conditions. These findings highlight how child abuse disrupts a child's ability to feel physically and emotionally secure, both immediately and in the long term. Victims often become socially withdrawn, experience challenges adapting to adult roles prematurely particularly teen mothers such as unsafe abortions and mistreatment in forced marriages. These factors cumulatively undermine their personal security, defined not only by safety from harm but also by the ability to live a stable, autonomous, and dignified life.

Further insights from Focus Group Discussions revealed a rise in drug and alcohol use among survivors of child abuse. Several girls became pregnant and subsequently dropped out of school or were coerced into early marriages. One female participant (4,23) remarked that "*some children suffered emotional trauma after abuse*," pointing to the deep psychological scars that persist long after the abuse ends. These outcomes are clear markers of social insecurity, as survivors face increased risks of poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and disrupted futures. The General Strain Theory helps explain this trend, suggesting that abuse creates intense emotional strain, reducing a victim's self-control and increasing the likelihood of delinquent behavior. These findings are consistent with those of Pangapanga et al. (2015), who noted that child maltreatment leads to a wide array of adverse effects, including mental illness, PTSD, behavioral disorders, vulnerability to disease, and early marriages. Most disturbingly, the study confirmed that many survivors may carry the trauma of abuse throughout their lives, highlighting the critical and enduring threat to their personal security.

The psychological toll of child abuse extended to caregivers as well. 72.8% of parents and guardians admitted experiencing self-blame and emotional trauma following their children's abuse, while 63.6% reported feeling they had failed in their protective roles. As one interviewee (11,24) expressed, "*parents had to stay and support the victim of child abuse even if they didn't know what to do to help them*."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concluded that all the children survivors reported to have suffered one form of abuse or another. However, child labour was the most common form of child abuse. Others included FGM, assault, child marriages and early pregnancy. The common age for the cases of child abuse was children between 11 and 15 years. Some cultural factors causing child abuse included cultural practices like child marriages, *moranism* and FGM. Other causes were personal factors like lack of interest in education and lack of knowledge on children rights, parental factors like fear to cause family conflicts by reporting and fear of repercussions. These causes and forms of abuse highlighted the nature of insecurity among children in Kajiado County.

Also, the research concluded that there were various negative effects of child abuse on the survivors. Most of the abuse happened at home and involved their parents and the children blamed them. The security implications of child abuse were illuminated in the study results. The survivors of child abuse were negatively affected by the abuse as they were very fearful as they went to report. They also reported that after the abuse their lives had become very stressful and difficult and they felt insecure, had suicidal thoughts and they found it difficult to socially interact with others. They also got into early marriages to escape, there was increased drug and alcohol use among victims of child abuse. Some children got pregnant and were forced to drop out of school or were married off. The effects created vulnerability of the victims while trying to adjust to their new situation in society upon abuse.

Recommendations

In ensuring that the forms and nature of child abuse are reported, there is need for exerted efforts by government and stakeholders to ease the process of reporting cases of child abuse. This will ensure all cases are reported and necessary legal action taken to prevent further occurrence in Kajiado County.

Child abuse has an effect on victims and parents as well. It is therefore critical that parents take more responsibility in educating the children on their personal security. Further, engagement of government institutions will ensure that the victims are salvaged from vulnerability, assured of quality education and a bright future, and thus building their self-esteem and awareness of safety precautions and rights. Teachers should counsel the survivors so that they can overcome the negative effects of child abuse and move on with their lives.

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