

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN KAJIADO COUNTY, KENYA.

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ABSTRACT

Gender mainstreaming focuses on gender equality by emphasising that women's and men's problems, interests and viewpoints are considered during policymaking. This study examined how affirmative action challenged the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado in Kenya. The survey was anchored on the feminist theory and social role theory. The study adopted a descriptive research design targeting 1,500 employees of the county government of Kajiado spread out in various departments. A stratified random sampling procedure was utilised to select a sample of 150 participants. A questionnaire was employed to gather primary information. The collected data was analysed using quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics that led to linear regression modelling. Qualitative analysis involved thematic narration for the open-ended questions in the research tool. Data results were presented using frequency tables, percentages and a regression model. The study found that affirmative action significantly influenced the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado. Affirmative action exhibited a positive influence on the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado. This study recommends an enhancement of affirmative action in Kajiado County to promote gender mainstreaming in the county.

Key words: affirmative action, gender mainstreaming, gender-based violence.

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.

Gender mainstreaming is the process of evaluating how laws and policies affect men and women at all levels and in all sectors. This method guarantees that men and women are treated equally in the planning, carrying out, evaluating, and appraising of processes and projects across all domains (UN Women, 2023). It entails organizing, developing, improving, implementing, and evaluating policy processes to ensure that policymakers integrate a gender equality viewpoint in all protocols, programs as well as activities, regardless of their level and stage (EU, 2023). In this respect, gender mainstreaming relates to the advancement of gender parity through its systematic integration into all policies, processes and procedures as well as systems, structures and culture of the organization (Jacquot, 2020). As a result, gender mainstreaming is a tactic whose ultimate objective is to achieve gender equality (Barford, 2021).

The concept of gender mainstreaming originated from the third UN Conference on Women in 1985 (George & Kuruvilla, 2022), with subsequent commitments like Sustainable Development Goal 5 and various national, regional, and international action plans. Gender mainstreaming aims to normalise gender issues and achieve parity, globally embraced for advancing female rights. Implementation varies worldwide, with the United States experiencing persistent gender inequalities despite advancements (Levine et al., 2020). In the European Union, notable progress has been observed and reflected in the 2022 global gender gap index where EU countries dominate the top spots (World Economic Forum, 2023). However, gender inequalities persist, indicating ongoing efforts within the EU. The Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa report the lowest gender mainstreaming scores, attributed to factors like political apathy, resource scarcity, conservative beliefs, and patriarchal structures (Derichs & Fennert, 2021).

Regionally, Sub-Saharan Africa faces mixed results in gender mainstreaming, with countries like Rwanda, Namibia, and South Africa performing relatively well. Still, many lags in crucial indicators due to marginalisation in political leadership, economic empowerment, education, and healthcare access (Mendum et al., 2018). Gender mainstreaming gained popularity in Kenya, with the country signing various UN agreements on gender equality.

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Policies and institutions, such as the national policy for prevention and response to gender-based violence and the State Department of gender affairs, illustrate Kenya's commitment (Mwendwa, 2019). While the 2010 constitution enshrines principles of human dignity, equality, and non-discrimination, successes like property rights and fair employment practices coexist with challenges, indicating the need for further integration and implementation of gender mainstreaming in the country.

Statement of the Problem

The 2022 World Economic Forum (WEF) report revealed Kenya's gender gap index score as 72.9%, indicating progress towards gender equality through gender mainstreaming. However, despite this relatively positive score, significant gender gaps persist in areas such as economic participation, labour market access, educational attainment, health, and political representation. Women and girls consistently scored lower than their male counterparts in these dimensions, highlighting ongoing challenges in achieving comprehensive gender parity in Kenya (World Economic Forum, 2023). Meanwhile, despite widespread support for gender mainstreaming, its impact on dismantling entrenched power structures rooted in racism, harmful masculinity, and male privilege remains limited in many countries (Moodley *et al.*, 2019; Derichs & Fennert, 2021).

In Kajiado County, gender inequality poses a substantial challenge, manifesting in alarming rates of sexual violence, prevalent cases of female genital mutilation (FGM), high incidences of teenage pregnancies and early marriages, low educational transition for girls, limited women's representation in elected positions, restricted land ownership rights for women, economic disempowerment, and insufficient influence of women in family planning decisions. These issues are attributed to harmful cultural beliefs, entrenched traditional practices, and a patriarchal social order. The observed manifestations of gender inequalities in Kajiado County suggest potential gaps in the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming in the region. The study emphasises a lack of understanding regarding the extent to which affirmative action affects gender mainstreaming in Kajiado County as a focal point for further research.

Justification

Gender mainstreaming is crucial for ensuring women's participation and equal rights at all levels. It serves as a powerful tool to advance gender parity by prioritizing both male and female perspectives in the formulation, execution, and assessment of protocols and programs across society and government. This approach aims to accommodate the needs of everyone, promoting a more equitable, productive, and sustainable society for both women and men.

Kajiado County was selected for study due to ongoing gender inequality issues, including high rates of FGM, adolescent pregnancies, early marriages, and sexual and gender-based violence compared to other counties. The world relief gender equality report from 2020 highlighted low educational transition, economic empowerment, land ownership rights for women, and a shortage of females in administrative and elective positions. These challenges indicate gender mainstreaming gaps that require attention. Proximity to Nairobi County also made it convenient for the researcher based there to gather and supervise data.

This report provides insights for policymakers on implementing gender mainstreaming for achieving gender parity in devolved units, offering guidance for national development plans like Vision 2030 and SDGs. The findings are crucial for the county government of Kajiado and its leaders, serving as a basis to accelerate gender mainstreaming strategies. The study is valuable for other counties, civic activists, NGOs, and community groups promoting gender equality. For the general community in Kajiado County, the study emphasizes the transformative impact of gender mainstreaming, and it contributes to local literature, providing a reference for further research.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Howland *et al.* (2021) investigated challenges to gender mainstreaming in environmental change, farming, nourishment and food security in Honduras and Guatemala. The study examined the obstacles to gender mainstreaming in these two countries' policies using a case study approach. Results showed that despite having taken on several obligations on a global scale regarding gender issues, having gender-marked strategies, and having legislative gender bodies, gender mainstreaming in the strategy cycle was lax in the two countries. Poor policy translation from the international level, a lack of affirmative action in structural policies at the national level, and a lack of knowledge and competence on gender integration into national policies and programs were all cited as reasons for the low level of gender mainstreaming.

In Nigeria, Adeoti (2021) undertook an empirical study to determine the barriers to gender mainstreaming in the management of water resources at the river basin level. The survey aimed to explore if the subsequent policies and legal frameworks guiding the operational mandates of the country's river basin development authority mainstreamed gender in their responsibilities and initiatives for managing water resources at the river basin level. The study's findings showed that gender mainstreaming and women's participation were not enshrined in Nigerian laws governing water resources management functions and programs, which posed a significant obstacle to gender mainstreaming in the work of the nation's river basin development authorities. The major water resources policy, legislative instruments, institutional policies, and arrangements of the river basin development authority all needed to be fundamentally changed to mainstream women in the country's water sector.

Raji (2020) undertook a study that explored the perceptions of gender mainstreaming among men in Murang'a County, Kenya. The study revealed that most of the surveyed men had negative perceptions of gender mainstreaming programs and projects especially those that were tailored only to women's empowerment. Most of the respondents did not express support for gender mainstreaming as they held the belief that it was biased towards improving the welfare of women while neglecting that of their male counterparts. The lack of a comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy in the form of affirmative action policies was found to be a contributor to the masculinity crisis among men in the county. The study argued that latent male backlash towards gender relations and the reported masculinity crisis in the county could be potentially averted through the application of a more inclusive gender mainstreaming strategy.

Similarly, as part of gender mainstreaming research, Kelly (2019) investigated the obstacles towards facilitators of ladies' engagement in governance in Nigeria. The study aimed to provide evidence regarding Nigerian women's participation in politics and governance, as well as the accompanying enablers and impediments. The study's findings showed that women's representation and participation in Nigerian politics and governance were insufficient. It was noted that while Nigeria's successive administrations had ratified international agreements and implemented national policies to increase the participation of women, little had been done to put those policies into practice. The absence of effective government action in terms of legal and administrative measures to encourage gender mainstreaming in the political arena was blamed for the poor engagement of women in governance and political issues. A possible solution to the low women's involvement in governance and politics in Nigeria was advocating for affirmative action from the state.

Mwendwa (2019) investigated how gender mainstreaming affected women's involvement in the execution of county development projects in Kenya's Kilifi County. A total of 109 respondents were chosen from among employees of county government programs and members of NGOs. The study's results revealed that women's involvement in the execution of county development projects in Kilifi County was quite low, indicating significant gaps in the county's efforts to mainstream gender challenges. The study noted that though affirmative action-related laws and policies exist in the county's development projects policies, there was little action in adhering to these policies during the implementation of the county development projects. The study thus called for enforcement action on affirmative action policies and guidelines in the execution of development projects in the county.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory traces its roots to Mary Wollstonecraft's writings between 1759 and 1797, marking the inception of feminist thought in the liberal tradition. This theory advocates for complete economic, political, and social equality between the sexes. Central to feminist thought is the belief in oppressive systems that lead to exclusion and discrimination based on overlapping identities. The theory asserts that challenging and overturning these oppressive systems is possible through knowledge, advocacy, and action, promoting understanding and change (Goulimari, 2020).

The feminist theory is built upon the principle of advocating for practical actions to increase gender equity rather than merely discussing equality, expanding human choice by providing both men and women the opportunity to develop talents and interests beyond stereotypical roles and eliminating gender stratification by challenging social and legal standards restricting educational, career, and pay opportunities for women. It is also founded on the principle of combating sexual violence against women and advancing sexual and reproductive rights for women, emphasizing women's control over their sexuality and reproduction (Finlayson, 2016; Meagher, 2019). Notable support for feminist theory includes its role in fostering a better understanding and resolution of unjust gender relations, promoting gender equality, breaking gender stereotypes in workplaces, and contributing to a fair and healthy society for both men and women (Roberts & Connell, 2016). However, the theory faces criticism for its

woman-centred perspective, potentially neglecting men's viewpoints on gender equality and unique rights issues. Critics argue that it exaggerates women's vulnerabilities, encourages misandry, disrupts cultural ethics, and denies natural gender differences (Mohajan, 2022; Ferguson, 2017; Allen, 2018; Goulimari, 2020).

Relevant to the current study, feminist theory aims to uncover how individuals interact within systems and offers strategies to challenge and eliminate oppressive systems and institutions. Feminists seek constructive change by dismantling power structures, overcoming oppression, and addressing hurdles resulting from these systems to advance justice and equality for both sexes.

Social Role Theory

Social role theory, introduced by Alice H. Eagly in 1987, is a social psychological theory that explains the variability and consistency of social behaviour between genders. It posits that a combination of social and biological factors shapes differences and similarities between men and women. The theory's central premise is that societal roles undertaken by men and women are the primary contributors to behavioural distinctions, influenced by physical differences, gender stereotypes, and socialization. Social roles, as outlined by Eagly (1987), designate women to be more likely housewives, primary caregivers, and participants in the care economy, while men often assume roles requiring physical strength, confidence, and leadership, serving as primary breadwinners (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Eagly's theory contends that gender inequalities are accentuated in formal institutional roles but are less prominent otherwise, with societal ideologies and status beliefs hindering efforts to achieve gender equality (Egbert & Sanden, 2019).

However, the theory has faced criticism for promoting segmented occupations, prioritizing social conformity over challenging social policies and offering an incomplete depiction of the socialization process. Critics argue that it reinforces conventional notions of how individuals should behave, express themselves, and interact, potentially limiting its explanatory power. Some also contend that the theory falls short in explaining power dynamics, especially when individuals may be coerced into certain behaviours by those in positions of authority rather than consensually fulfilling a designated role (Layder, 2015; Biddle, 2013; Jackson, 2018).

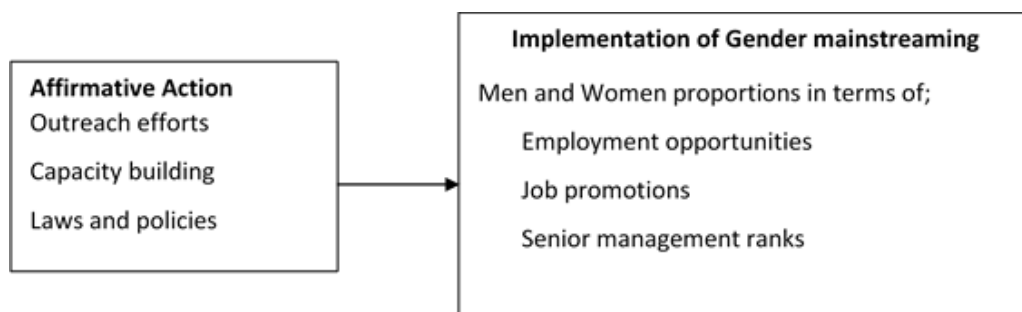


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher (2023)

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kajiado County using a descriptive research design. The study targeted the employees of the county government of Kajiado from 5 selected departments of the county government of Kajiado stationed in the county headquarters. The 5 selected departments include agriculture, livestock veterinary services and fisheries; health services and public health; education and vocational training; public service, administration and citizen participation and gender, social services, culture, tourism and wildlife. Based on current hr records of the county, there are 1,500 employees of the county working in the 5 selected departments in the county headquarters (HR Department, County Government of Kajiado, 2023). The sample size was 150 participants, which is 10% of the study's target population and the sample was chosen using stratified random sampling. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The study also used linear regression analysis to check whether the variables under investigation were related. The null hypothesis for the study was that affirmative action did not influence the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado.

FINDINGS

The study sought to examine how affirmative action challenges the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado. 150 participants were targeted, and the study realised a response rate of 100%. In terms of gender, most (63.3%) of those who responded were male while 36.7% were female. The respondents' age, half (50%) of the respondents were aged 30 - 39 years, 26% were aged 18 - 29 years and 18.7% of the respondents were aged 40-49 years. A small number (5.3%) of the respondents were aged 50 years and above. On the respondents' education level, a significant proportion of those who responded had tertiary-level education which accounted for 50% of the respondents, 48% had university-level education while a small percentage of the respondents had secondary-level education (2%). None of them had primary-level education. On the respondents' marital status, results demonstrated that the majority (64%) of the respondents were married, 30% were single, 3.3% were separated/divorced and only 2% of the respondents were widowed. Regarding their religious affiliation, the majority (97.3%) of the respondents were Christians, 2% were Muslims and 0.7% of the respondents said they did not belong to any religion. Lastly, on the period the respondents had worked in their work posts, most (54%) of the respondents had worked for 1-5 years while the remaining 46% of the respondents had worked in their workstations for 6-10 years.

Respondents' perception of six statements regarding the influence of affirmative actions on gender mainstreaming in the county was sought.

Statements on affirmative action	Mean	Sd
Gender issues have not attained the right prominence in the county policies, programs and projects	3.0117	1.20776
There's a lack of knowledge and capacity for gender integration into county policies and programs	2.8596	1.22386
There is a need to put into action already existing affirmative action laws in the county's policies, programs, projects and activities	4.0175	.97301
Latent male backlash towards affirmative action and gender equality issues serves as a leading barrier to gender mainstreaming in this county	3.1287	1.08782
There is a need to integrate a gender equality perspective in all county policies, programs and projects	4.0117	.94551
Greater emphasis on outreach efforts and capacity building on gender mainstreaming is needed in this county	4.0409	.91624

Source: Research Data (2023)

From the table, the respondents agreed with the views that there was a need to put into action already existing affirmative action laws in the county's policies, programs, projects and activities (mean=4.0175, sd= 0.97301); there was a need to incorporate gender equality viewpoints in entire county policies, programs and projects (mean=4.0117, sd=.94551) and that greater emphasis on outreach efforts and capacity building on gender mainstreaming was needed in the county (mean=4.0409, sd=0.91624). However, the respondents were generally neutral on views that gender issues had attained the right prominence in the county policies, programs and projects (mean=3.0117, sd=1.20776); there was a lack of knowledge and capacity for gender integration into county policies and programs (mean=2.8596, sd=1.22386) and that latent male backlash towards affirmative action and gender equality issues served as a leading barrier to gender mainstreaming in their county (mean=3.1287, sd=1.08782).

Further, the respondents were requested to identify measures which could be adopted to address the affirmative action challenges that impeded the realization of mainstreaming of gender within Kajiado County. From offered responses, some of the key interventions that could help in addressing the affirmative action hurdles impeding implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county included ensuring full enforcement of existing affirmative action laws and policies while also incorporating gender balance, equality and equity perspectives in all county policies including job opportunities and promotions; educating communities on the importance of gender inclusivity in all county activities; increasing awareness among county employees on the significance of affirmative actions, rules, laws and policies and integrating gender mainstreaming into the county projects and budget processes which could be achieved through training and capacity building for county employees regarding the importance of affirmative action; greater recognition and appreciation of women's roles in the society alongside promoting their engagement in making decisions at higher ranking levels in the county's leadership; fostering an open-minded atmosphere and reinforcing policies to safeguard the rights of all genders and promoting accountability in affirmative action implementation and eradication of cultural beliefs and norms that perpetuate gender bias and inequities. The findings therefore demonstrated that fostering affirmative action could help advance gender mainstreaming in Kajiado County.

The study results agreed with the findings of Howland *et al.* (2021) who, in a gender mainstreaming study in Honduras and Guatemala, attributed the low implementation of gender equality policies within the two countries to inadequate affirmative action laws in the countries' policies at the national and sub-national levels. Similarly, in Nigeria, Adeoti (2021) reported that low enforcement of affirmative action legal provisions was a significant obstacle to gender mainstreaming implementation in the country's river basin development authorities. Raji (2020) in a study on perceptions of gender mainstreaming among men in Murang'a County, Kenya also reported that most of the surveyed men had negative perceptions of gender mainstreaming programs and projects especially those that were tailored only to empowering women. The lack of comprehensive gender equality tactics in the form of affirmative action policies was found to be a contributor to the masculinity crisis among men in the county. Kelly (2019) in a study in Nigeria, opined that the state should advocate for affirmative action programs as a possible solution to the low women's involvement in governance, gender mainstreaming included. Mwendwa (2019) also noted that women's involvement in the execution of county development projects in Kilifi County was quite low, indicating significant gaps in gender mainstreaming efforts in the county which was attributed to low adherence to existing affirmative action-related laws and policies in the implementation of the county's development projects and policies.

Gender mainstreaming was abstracted using three sub-constructs (employment opportunity, job opportunity and senior management ranks).

Statements on gender mainstreaming implementation	Mean	Sd
Employment opportunities		
Employment opportunities within your county government are equitable for both men and women.	2.8407	.78947
Gender-specific recruitment or training programs promote gender balance within your county government.	2.8226	.93196
Gender-based impartiality in recruitment processes within your county government is observed.	3.0027	.86019
Job promotions		
Job promotions within your county government are accessible to both men and women.	3.2787	1.14855
Policies/initiatives aimed at promoting gender equity in job promotions within your county government.	3.0348	.71014
Your county government actively address barriers to gender-based job promotions	3.1262	1.27193
Senior management ranks		
The composition of senior management ranks within your county government is diverse concerning gender.	3.1700	1.20837
Initiatives/policies aimed at achieving gender diversity in senior management positions within your county government.	2.8946	.79265
Your county government actively addresses gender-related biases or stereotypes in senior management appointments and decision-making processes.	3.1929	1.15267
Gender mainstreaming implementation	3.0404	.34418

Source: Research Data (2023)

Respondents indicated that the employment opportunities within the county government were not equitable for both men and women (mean=2.8407, sd=.78947), gender-specific recruitment or training programs did not promote gender balance within the county government (mean=2.8226, sd=.93196) and gender-based impartiality in recruitment processes within county government is not observed (mean=3.0027, sd=.86019). Regarding job opportunities, the respondents portrayed a neutral stand on whether; job promotions within the county government were accessible to both men and women (mean=3.2787, sd=1.14855), policies/initiatives aim at promoting gender equity in job promotions within the county government (mean=3.0348, sd=.71014) and whether the county government actively address barriers to job promotions that are gender based (mean=3.1262, sd=1.27193).

On senior management ranks, the composition of senior management ranks within the county government was not diverse concerning gender (mean=3.1700, sd=1.20837), initiatives/policies do not aim at achieving gender diversity in senior management positions within the county government (mean=2.8946, sd=.79265) and the county government does not actively address gender-related biases or stereotypes in senior management appointments and decision-making processes (mean=3.1929, sd=1.15267). On average, gender mainstream implementation was neutral (mean=3.0404, sd=.34418).

The findings demonstrated that there was progress made in implementing gender mainstreaming across the three years in Kajiado County showcasing the increasing focus on gender equality and inclusivity within aspects of employment and career development in the county. In contrast, studies by Vyas-doorgapersad and Bangani (2020) in South Africa; Adeoti (2021) in Nigeria and Kelkay (2022) in Ethiopia showed very low progress in gender mainstreaming implementation in the countries' public sectors. Previous research, highlights the need for

proactive initiatives and policies aimed at achieving gender balance in leadership positions and addressing biases in decision-making processes (Mwendwa, 2019; Adeoti, 2021), as the current study appears to be neutral.

Further, a summary of data associated with the putting into action of mainstreaming of gender in the county government of Kajiado, over three years, specifically in the areas of employment opportunities, job promotions and senior management ranks is depicted in Table 3.

Parameters	2017	2018	2019
Employment opportunities	11,201	17,650	21,999
Job promotions (<i>that took gender mainstreaming into account</i>)	984	1,342	1,998
Senior management ranks (<i>that took gender mainstreaming into account</i>)	2,212	2,598	3,330

Source: Research Data (2023)

In 2017, there were 11,201 employment opportunities created. In 2018, this number increased to 17,650. By 2019, it further increased to 21,999 employment opportunities. On job promotions, in 2017, 984 job promotions took gender mainstreaming into account in 2018, this number increased to 1,342, and by 2019, it further increased to 1,998 job promotions with a gender mainstreaming focus. For senior management ranks, in 2017, 2,212 individuals reached senior management ranks with gender mainstreaming considerations. In 2018, this number increased to 2,598, and by 2019, it further increased to 3,330 individuals in senior management positions with a gender mainstreaming perspective.

From the results above, the upward trend suggests efforts by the county government to expand job opportunities and potentially address workforce needs and economic development goals. A growing emphasis on promoting gender equity and inclusivity in career advancement opportunities within the county government. In addition, the number of individuals reaching senior management ranks with a focus on gender mainstreaming has also shown a steady increase over the years. This indicates efforts by the county government to enhance gender diversity and inclusivity in senior leadership positions.

Despite the positive trends, it's essential to examine potential challenges and barriers that may hinder the full realisation of gender mainstreaming goals, including institutional resistance, cultural norms, and resource constraints. Existing literature highlights the importance of creating inclusive and diverse work environments through the expansion of job opportunities to contribute to economic development, reduce unemployment rates, and foster social inclusion within communities (Adeoti, 2021; Howland *et al.*, 2021). According to Kelly (2019), leadership commitment, organizational culture, and structural changes are important in fostering gender-inclusive career pathways within governmental organisations.

Correlational Analysis

Variables	Affirmative action	Gender mainstreaming implementation
Affirmative action	1.0000	
Gender mainstreaming implementation	0.1280 (0.001)	1.0000

Source: Research Data (2023)

The correlation matrix above shows that affirmative action with an association coefficient of 0.128 indicated a moderately favourable connection with gender mainstreaming implementation. This means that an increase in affirmative action is associated with a moderate increase in gender mainstreaming implementation, holding other variables constant.

Linear Regression

Gender mainstreaming implementation	Coef.	Std. Error.	T-value	P-value	[95% conf Interval]	Sig
Affirmative action	.136	.037	3.68	.005	.032 .240	**
Constant	2.821	.134	21.01	0	2.556 3.086	***
Mean dependent variable		3.042		Sd dependent variable	0.346	
R-squared		0.016		Number of observations	150	
F-test		12.814		Prob > f	0.005	
Akaike crit. (aic)		122.044		Bayesian crit. (bic)	128.327	
*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$						

As illustrated in the table above, the linear relationship between gender mainstreaming implementation and affirmative action variable was significant, since the f calculated = 12.814 was greater than the f tabulated ($f_{(tab)} = 3.85$), and the associated p value=0.005 was less than $\alpha=0.05$, given that the study allowed an error of 5% (95% level of confidence). This means that the study regression model is statistically fit. The linear relationship is as in the equation below.

$$Y = 2.821 + 0.136X_1$$

Where;

Y = implementation of gender mainstreaming (the dependent variable)

X₁ = affirmative action (independent variable)

The study examined how affirmative action challenged the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado. From the results above, the study also rejected the null hypothesis that affirmative action did not influence the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado. The rejection of the null hypothesis implies that affirmative action did influence the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado. As to the extent of affirmative action’s influence on the implementation of gender mainstreaming, a one per cent increase in affirmative action by the county government of Kajiado, will lead to a 13.6 per cent increase in gender mainstreaming implementation in Kajiado County government. This denoted that affirmative action had a positive influence on the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Kajiado County. Similar observations were made in studies by Oosthuizen *et al.* (2020) and Rawłuszko (2019) who also established that affirmative action was a significant positive determinant of successful implementation of gender mainstreaming policies and initiatives. Similar views were shared by Kelly (2019), Maheshwari and Nayak (2022) as well as Vyas-doorgapersad and Bangani (2020) who also cited that affirmative action was an enabler for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study sought to examine how affirmative action challenges the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado. The study realised a response rate of 100% after conducting follow-ups so that the unfilled questionnaires could be completed by the Kajiado county workers. In terms of gender, most of the respondents were male as compared to female, were aged between 30 to 39 years, had on average a college-level education, and were married. On their religious affiliation, most of the respondents were Christians. Regarding the period the respondents had worked in their current workstations, the majority had worked for between 1 to 5 years.

Derived findings demonstrated that affirmative action had a positive and significant influence that challenged the successful realisation of gender mainstreaming. As to the question of the extent of influence, affirmative action leads to a 13.6% improvement in gender mainstreaming implementation in the Kajiado County government. As such, this empirical enquiry asserts that affirmative action had a favourable and consequential influence that challenged the accomplishment of gender mainstreaming in the county government of Kajiado, Kenya.

While the findings from this study underscore the positive influence of affirmative action on gender mainstreaming implementation within the Kajiado County government, they also resonate with broader discussions in the existing literature on gender equity and diversity within governmental organizations. The observed improvement in gender mainstreaming attributed to affirmative action initiatives aligns with Howland *et al.* (2021) who emphasise the pivotal role of proactive policy integration and interventions in advancing gender equality and inclusivity in the workplace.

Policy, the study recommends that policymakers focus on enhancing the application of affirmative action policies and initiatives that have proven effective in improving gender mainstreaming. In practice, organisations can focus on integrating affirmative action principles into their practices and policies to actively promote gender mainstreaming which may involve the development of clear guidelines and monitoring systems to ensure that affirmative action initiatives are effectively implemented.

Suggestion for further studies

Comparative studies with other counties or regions can help in identifying valuable lessons and workable solutions, more so on affirmative action projects/initiatives, which could be utilised to improve gender mainstreaming in county governments in the country.

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