

# Sexual Violence Against Children In Makueni County, Kenya: An Advocacy Agenda

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the phenomenon of Sexual Violence against Children in Makueni County, employing Michel Foucault's theory of power relations as a conceptual framework. The article responds to the scholarly community's invitation to delve into the intricacies of sexual violence perpetrated against minors. The primary purpose of this paper was to investigate the issue of sexual violence against children in Makueni County, Kenya, with the ultimate goal of developing innovative strategies for effective advocacy aimed at putting an end to this problem. The paper scrutinizes the encounters of six children within a framework that portrays minors as lacking power and adults as possessing it in Makueni County, Kenya. The results indicate that the issue of violence against children can be attributed to power dynamics, as expounded upon in this research. The findings of this research hold significant insights for the execution of child safeguarding initiatives by the Makueni County administration and its collaborators in development, in addition to caregivers, social workers, instructors, and therapists who are involved in supporting sexually abused children. The paper presents a persuasive argument for the implementation of an advocacy strategy that employs the Seven INSPIRE framework strategies. The aim of this approach is to eradicate all types of violence against children. It is recommended that additional investigation on this subject be conducted utilizing the phenomenological approach.*

**Keywords:** *Violence against Children, Michel Foucault, Power Relation, Abuse*

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## I. Introduction

Sexual violence perpetrated against minors involves the mistreatment of individuals under the age of eighteen through the utilization of sexual connotations, actions, sounds, images, discussions, games, pornography, or insinuations that are related to sexual activity. This may include the penetration of the genital area, whether by natural or unnatural means (ANPPCAN, 2000). The Kenya penal code uses the term sexual assault for sexual abuse against children as a scenario in which an individual engages in non-consensual sexual intercourse with a female individual, whether she is a woman or a girl, is considered to be an instance of unlawful carnal knowledge. The act of obtaining consent through the use of force, threat, intimidation, fear of bodily harm, false representation, or impersonation of a spouse is considered a criminal offense known as rape (Attorney General , 2009).

Despite the fact that the majority of nations have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, there remains a persistent worldwide apprehension regarding the prevalence of child abuse (Cohen & Nordas, 2014). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child specifically addresses socio-cultural factors unique to Africa with regard to child protection. However, there are ongoing challenges in effectively implementing the existing laws to safeguard children (Njehu, 2015). The United Nations' Study on Violence against Children provides a comprehensive analysis of the prevalence of child abuse and violence on a global scale (Pinheiro, 2006). The World Health Organization (W.H.O) has reported that in 24 predominantly high- and middle-income countries, sexual violence prevalence among individuals under the age of 18 varied between 8% and 31% in girls and 3% to 17% in boys (World Health Organization., 2020).

The present study reports on the findings of the Violence against Children Survey conducted in 14 countries with low and lower-middle-income status. The results indicate that the prevalence of sexual violence among females aged 18-24 years before the age of 18 years varied across the countries, with the lowest rates reported in Cambodia and Lao at 4% and 7%, respectively, and the highest rates in Zimbabwe and Uganda at 33% and 35%, respectively. Further, prevalence among male individuals was found to be 3% in El Salvador and

4% in Cambodia, while the highest rates were observed in Kenya (18%) and Haiti (21%) (World Health Organization., 2020).

In addition, Max and Pelvis conducted a study which revealed that female college students reported experiencing coercive sexual encounters with family members in 43% of cases, acquaintances in 33% of cases, and strangers in 24% of all cases. The prevalence of abuse among male victims was found to be 17% by family members, 53% by acquaintances, and 30% by strangers. The mean age of perpetrators was 32 years for female victims and 27 years for male victims. The mean age of male victims at the time of the offense was 10 years, while that of female victims was 11 years. Approximately 50% of the individuals experienced victimization during the period of four to six years of age. According to Max and Pelvis (2005), the likelihood of abuse was found to be twice as high for females aged 6 to 12 years compared to males (Max and Pelvis, 2005).

In Kenya, the prevalence of sexual violence against children is exceptionally high, at 62.6% (KNBS, 2020). The reported cases at the Gender Based Violence Recovery Centre (GBVRCs) of the Mental Health Department in Kenyatta National Hospital and The Nairobi Women's Hospital demonstrate the depth of the challenges facing children and women in Kenya. According to the Child Rights Advisory Documentation and Legal Centre, 79% of girls in Kenya of the age of 13-15 years are sexually abused (Gender Violence and Recovery Centre , 2013). This concurs with the Kenya's National Survey on Violence against youth girls that reports 32% of females and 18% of males experience sexual abuse while they were children ( National survey on violence against children, 2014).

Sexually abused children experience feelings of confusion, guilty, anger, mistrust, sadness, psychological and emotional deprivation (Kenya Demographic and Health Survey , 2014). These abuses expose the girls especially to low self-esteem which in return interferes with the girls social functioning and affects their performance in school. Other negative impacts of sexual violence against children include increased risk of diseases, reduced interest in school and psychological trauma (Abuya, Ciera, & Kimani-Murage, 2012). Moreover, sexual violence perpetrated against children is often considered a taboo topic within communities, as there is a prevailing societal belief that such abuse is either non-existent or not widespread enough to merit public discourse. This phenomenon suggests that some child victims and their families may not pursue avenues for seeking redress in cases of sexual abuse due to concerns about potential social isolation (Jones, 2003).

### **Research purpose**

The purpose of this study was to find out the challenges inhibiting effective elimination of sexual violence against children in Makueni County and to present key issues and recommendations for future policy advocacy and campaign work on the issue while contributing to existing knowledge on this subject.

### **Statement of problem**

Sexual violence against children and women in Kenya is on the rise (Kenya Demographic and Health Survey , 2014). Further research indicate that 46% of 18-24years old young women had faced sexual violence as well as 52% of young men of the same age group. This records indicates that more criminal cases in sexual abuse related cases than any other in the history of the nation (UNICEF, 2020). In 2012 alone, the Gender Violence Recovery Centre at Nairobi Women's Hospital recorded 2,532 incidences of sexual violence against women and girls alone (GVRC, 2012). The most recent data, in Makueni County shows that in the year 2019, a total of 1,648 GBV cases were reported in the county among which only 43 of these cases where prosecuted through the court (Makueni Law Courts, 2019).

The low progression of cases from the reporting at the County's Gender Violence Recovery Centre at the Makueni Level IV hospital to the courts indicating a problem. This is because the number of cases at the law courts represents only 5.6% of the cases reported and recorded at the recovery center (Government of Makueni County , 2020). In the period between 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2020 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021, a total of 110 cases of GBV against children were recorded at the Makueni Gender Based and Recovery Centre. These cases are all from the age set of 15-19 years which is was the most affected. Out of the 110 cases, 92 were on sexual assault representing 92%. Of the 92 cases, only 5 were male meaning that girls are at a higher risk of sexual violence even though cultural norms prevent reporting by boys through perpetuation of the culture of silence.

Even with the implementation of The Children Act of 2001, there are still concerns about children not being protected adequately against sexual abuse among other child abuses and this has led to Kenya being ranked at 122 out of 180 countries in the End of Childhood Index that takes a look at the events that rob children of their childhoods (Save the Children, 2020). The social media has taken a lot of space in airing these phenomenon, considering it as an increasing social problem. Moreover, the Constitution of Kenya (2010) clearly outlines the measures for safeguarding children from sexual exploitation. According to Article 53, children are entitled to protection from all forms of abuse. However, it is observed that incidents of sexual abuse are increasing.

Whereas it is known that parents play a critical role in protecting the rights of the children including in the context of sexual violence, the emerging challenges demonstrate that there is still a barrier of knowledge,

attitude and practice among the parents to be able to fully defend, protect and support children in the societies. This is a valuable study that is yet to be undertaken. The need to conduct an advocacy program that is informed by these challenges is the essence of this study. It is for this purpose that the study is carried out with an aim of developing a people centered advocacy approach towards the elimination of sexual violence against children from a perspective that brings about mindset change, knowledge and right attitudes among the communities of Makueni County.

### **Objectives of the study**

#### **Main Objective**

The main objective of this paper was to explore the situation of sexual violence against children with a view of formulating transformative strategies for effective advocacy that promotes the elimination of sexual violence against children in Makueni County through a careful analysis of the challenges faced and causes of the vice.

#### **Specific Objective**

In order to come up with transformative strategies that guarantee effective and people led elimination of sexual abuse against children in the long-term perspective, the paper explored the four objectives listed below:

- 1) To find out the challenges inhibiting effective elimination of sexual violence against sexual violence in Makueni.
- 2) To create awareness on the effects of sexual violence against children and the impacts on the lives of the children.
- 3) To examine how to enforce current sexual violence policies in order to increase elimination rates.
- 4) To determine how transformational child protection mechanisms can be improved to adequately ensure communities, institutions and families are safer for children.

#### **Research Questions**

Based on the objectives mentioned above, the research sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the challenges inhibiting effective elimination of sexual violence against children in Makueni?
- 2) What is the level of implementation of current policies on sexual violence against children?
- 3) How can transformative elimination of sexual violence against children be improved, sustained and advanced?
- 4) What advocacy needs to be carried out to create and improve awareness on effects of sexual violence against children with an aim of bringing social change?

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This study uses the theory of power relation with particular to subject and power by Michel Foucault (Foucault M. , *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, 2003), integrated theory of sexual offending by Ward and Beech on adverse environments facing the individual and their interaction with each other that shapes ones unique psychological functioning (Ward & Beech, 2006), and the attachment theory by Marshall and Barbaree which talks of deficiencies in the development of social skills (Marshall & Barbaree, 2002) as lenses through which to analyze the situation of sexual abuse against children in Makueni county presents itself. The push and pull factors such as power over, poverty levels, parental availability, living conditions, ignorance of the laws on sexual violence, and cultural norms are commonly believed to be the underlying root causes of the increasing sexual violence against children in Makueni County.

Foucault argues that power is dispersed across society and operates through several mechanisms and behaviors, rather than being predominantly concentrated inside individuals or institutions. In instances of child sexual abuse, power can emerge in diverse forms:

1. **Structural Power:** Institutions such as schools, children's homes, or even families may exert influence over children, establishing conditions where abuse can take place. These conditions, including poverty, resource scarcity, and social inequality, can worsen the power imbalance and increase children's susceptibility to exploitation.
2. Foucault also examined the ways in which power functions through surveillance and disciplinary systems. Regarding sexual violence among children, offenders may establish dominance by employing tactics such as manipulation, compulsion, or threats. Meanwhile, victims may have a sense of powerlessness, leading them to refrain from resisting or reporting the abuse due to fear of repercussions or societal disapproval.
3. Foucault created the concept of biopower, which pertains to the management and domination of populations through methods like medicalization and normalization. Societal conventions and views towards gender, sexuality, and childhood can play a role in perpetuating child sexual violence or suppressing the voices of victims.

In addition, attachment theory, founded by John Bowlby and further elaborated by other scholars such as Marshall and Barbaree (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990), provides valuable insights into how early connections

and experiences influence the development and behavior of individuals. Attachment theory can provide insights into the relationship between disturbances in attachment patterns and the occurrence of sexual assault among children in Makueni County. This understanding can provide light on how both victimization and perpetration are influenced by these disruptions.

Attachment theory suggests that the nature of early connections, especially with primary caregivers, impacts individuals' capacity to establish safe attachments and manage emotions throughout their lifespan. Children who have safe attachments are more likely to develop healthy relationships defined by trust, empathy, and effective communication. Individuals who have insecure attachments, such as neglect, abuse, or inconsistent caring, may encounter challenges such as diminished self-worth, obstacles in establishing connections with others, and susceptibility to exploitation.

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Attachment theory can provide insight into how trauma and interpersonal violence can interfere with normal attachment processes, making children more susceptible to victimization, particularly in the case of sexual abuse among children in Makueni County. In addition, persons who commit sexual violence may have also experienced insecure relationships or trauma throughout their own youth, thus perpetuating a cycle of abuse.

### **Global Perspectives**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically addresses the entitlement to safeguarding against mistreatment. This encompasses instances of sexual exploitation perpetrated against minors. As per the provisions of Article 19, it is incumbent upon the States Parties to undertake all necessary legal and societal measures to safeguard children from any kind of physical or psychological violence, harm, mistreatment, or exploitation (Grugel, 2013). Over the course of the past five years subsequent to the Stockholm Agenda for Action, a notable influx of novel global mechanisms has emerged with a specific emphasis on the establishment of norms and implementation of measures pertaining to matters concerning children, such as instances of sexual abuse. A good example of these instrument is the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998 and the international Labor Organizations (ILO) Convention of 1999 that was concerned on the prohibition and elimination of all forms of child labor globally.

The aforementioned international instruments underscore the critical importance of granting children the chance to articulate their perspectives on all issues that concern them. Further, children's views are expected to be considered in relation to their maturity and age (UNCR, 1989). These rights for children to be heard includes the rights of the very young ones. Article 8 of the European Court of Justice is responsible for the maintenance of these noted rights. Additionally, Article 6 of the European Convention confers the entitlement to a just trial and outlines the fundamental entitlements of the accused. In all inquiries, it is expected that legal avenues for redress and decision-making processes will take into account the objective of promoting the best interests of the child. Moreover, the discourse regarding the desire of minors to engage in a more active role within the judicial system aligns with the objectives of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as stated in Article 12.

### **Regional Perspectives**

Each member state of the Organization of the African Unity is expected to adhere to the rights and welfare of the child. The African Charter establishes a framework for the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa within the framework of the Organization of African Unity. The mentioned charter was enacted on the 21st of October in 1986 and is dedicated to the advancement of a diverse range of human rights, including but not limited to civil and political rights, socio-economic and cultural rights, as well as individual and collective rights (Manisuli, 2012). (Manisuli, 2012).

The African Charter comprises essential legal frameworks that pertain to various rights, including but not limited to the right to non-discriminatory enjoyment of rights (as stated in Article 2), the right to life (as stated in Article 4), the right to human dignity (as stated in Article 5), the principle of equality among all peoples (as stated in Article 19), the right to existence and self-determination (as stated in Article 20), the right to the free

disposal of natural resources (as stated in Article 21), and the right to a satisfactory and clean environment (as stated in Article 24), among others (Nnamdi, 2005).

### **The Kenyan Perspective**

#### *The Constitution of Kenya, 2010*

Article 53 of the Kenyan Constitution of 2010 delineates several rights that are to be implemented. According to the content of this article, minors possess an entitlement to receive safeguarding and nurturing from their respective guardians. Article 53, subsection (d) stipulates that minors possess an entitlement to safeguarding against maltreatment, disregard, detrimental cultural customs, all manners of aggression, barbaric handling and penalties, as well as perilous or exploitative employment (Kenya, 2010).

#### *The Children's Act, 2001*

Act No. 8 of 2001, commonly referred to as the Children Act, was enacted into law in the year 2001. The implementation of the Children's Act happened on March 1, 2002. The primary aim of this legislation is to provide for various aspects of child welfare, including parental responsibility, fostering, adoption, custody, maintenance, guardianship, care, and protection. Additionally, it seeks to establish a framework for the management of children's institutions and to uphold the principles outlined in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child at a national level.

#### *The Sexual Offences Act 3, 2006*

The Sexual Offences Act of 2006 incorporates provisions for safeguarding children. Sections 12 to 16 of the Sexual Offences Act of 2006 pertain to the safeguarding of minors from a range of offenses, including but not limited to the promotion of sexual offenses involving minors, child trafficking, child sex tourism, child prostitution, and child pornography (Mwangi, 2015)

### **Makueni County, Kenya**

#### *Overview*

The research was conducted within the jurisdiction of Makueni County. A systematic approach was employed to select a representative sample of documentaries pertaining to narratives of children who have experienced sexual abuse. The sample was drawn from each of the six sub-counties that comprise the county. The six sub-counties, namely Makueni, Mbooni, Kaiti, Kilome, Kibwezi East, and Kibwezi West, are represented.

Makueni County is geographically located in the southeastern region of the country, sharing borders with Machakos County to the north, Kitui County to the east, Kajiado County to the west, and Taita Taveta County to the south. The geographic coordinates of the county are situated within the range of Latitude 1° 35' and 3° 00' South and Longitude 37°10' and 38° 30' east. The total land area covered by the county measures 8,008.7 Km<sup>2</sup> (Government of Makueni County, 2018). The locality under consideration is inhabited by a total of 987,653 individuals, comprising 497,942 females and 489,691 males. The proportion of individuals who are children is 12.1 percent of the total population (KNBS, 2020).

Moreover, Makueni County is characterized by a diverse ethnic composition, with the Akamba community being the predominant group, accounting for approximately 98.1% of the total population. The predominant language spoken by the inhabitants of Makueni County is Kikamba. The region is predominantly characterized by the Christian faith, although there exist other religious groups such as the Muslim and Hindu communities. (Government of Makueni County, 2015). The area exhibits a semi-arid climate with limited rainfall. The primary economic pursuits of the region include agriculture, as well as small-scale trade and marketing of commodities. (Government of Makueni County, 2018).

At the county level, there exist various legislative frameworks that facilitate the promotion of justice and provision of support towards the elimination of gender-based violence (GBV), which encompasses sexual abuse perpetrated against minors within the county. One of the legal frameworks in place is The Makueni County Sexual and Gender Based Violence Policy, which outlines strategies and mechanisms for addressing challenges related to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) within the County. The framework is designed to facilitate gender transformation and synchronization with the aim of achieving lasting and sustainable change. The framework facilitates the development of effective approaches for the allocation of resources that are adequate, well-coordinated, and actionable in the implementation of activities aimed at addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). These strategies encompass the following: ensuring the SGBV database is current, enhancing skills and knowledge, engaging important actors, establishing secure environments, fostering cooperation and coordination, providing ongoing financial backing for SGBV initiatives, and promoting legal education.

## **II. Methodology**

This study employs a Foucaultian perspective and the Attachment theory to comprehend the phenomenon of violence directed towards children in Makueni County. The study employed a qualitative methodology, which is well-suited for elucidating and interpreting the experiences of children who have been abused. The research involved analyzing secondary data that was accessible within the county, as well as scrutinizing documentaries on sexual abuse that were provided by the relevant department. The rationale behind employing this methodology is that qualitative research methods are designed to investigate the lived experiences of individuals. (Polkinghorne, 2005). Further, qualitative research is interpretive in nature (Stake, 2010). It follows a holistic approach that guides creating the understanding of the issues of a phenomenon (Yin, 2011).

The primary purpose of qualitative research is therefore on investigating personal experiences and their meanings in their natural and context-specific settings (Creswell, 2007). This section delineates the diverse methodologies employed in the study and furnishes a systematic framework for executing the task in a comprehensive manner that would engender outcomes conducive to advancing an advocacy strategy aimed at eradicating sexual violence perpetrated against minors in Makueni County.

### **Narrative and Content Analysis**

This paper invokes a qualitative research approach with narrative and content analysis as key research methodologies. The methodologies employed were crucial in the examination of six documented video narratives that depict the perspectives of sexually abused minors in the six sub-counties of Makueni County. These narratives were officially recorded by the Department of Gender and Social Services in Makueni County and subsequently archived in the Gender Violence and Recovery Centre, which is operated by the county government. The incidences involve six children, each representing a sub county whose pseudo names are used as follows: Joy and Grace aged 13 and 12 respectively who were sexual abused by their fathers, Pendo, a mentally challenged child aged 12 who was sexually abused by a relative, Paul and Amani aged 14 who were sexually abused by their neighbors at various times while Peter aged 13 who was sexually abused by his relative.

Narrative analysis facilitates comprehension of the abuse victims in the study by providing insight into their personal experiences through the narration of their stories. It indicates that the researcher would not only interpret their own perspectives on sexual violence among children, but also analyze the manner in which it is portrayed in the narrative (Riessman, 1993). Secondly, the methodology of content analysis aims to offer a descriptive analysis by facilitating the identification of patterns and frequencies of occurrences (Carson, 2008). Further, the content analysis is made possible by listening to the voices and visualizing the issues raised in the documentaries.

This methodology promotes the tenet of qualitative research that emphasizes and honors the participants own words as generative of meaning and knowledge (Mugenda M. , 2008). In this paper, content analysis is conducted in three steps: listening to the audio-video to grasp the information and capturing of the voices of the sexually abused children as they tell their stories, transcribing the words from the audio-visual into texts, defining the categories and themes emanating from the six stories, coding the thematic issues for presentation in relation to power relations experienced by the victim of the sexual violence against children in the context of Makueni county.

### **Secondary Data**

The paper also utilized secondary data and documented information sources including program department's annual reports of sexual abuse against children, guidelines, policies and cabinet papers reports, strategic plans, baseline surveys by the department of Gender and Social Services in Makueni County and recorded in the county's Gender Violence and Recovery Centre run by the county government. The department and the center are primarily in charge of the day to day programing in the advocacy of sexual violence against children at the county level.

Further, secondary data was derived from the county's integrated development plan 2018-22, County long term plans including Vision 2025 and the child protection plan of 2019. With the use of these documents the researcher was enabled to enhance an investigation on learning what is already known and what remains to be learned about sexual violence against children in the department and at the Gender recovery center. Further enhancement was enabled by reviewing other secondary sources on studies done in the county by other actors such as the World Vision- Makueni, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), National Gender Recovery Centre (NGRC) and the SDGs that facilitated linking the county level planning, statistics, prevalence and strategic interventions towards child protection in general.

Secondary data analysis takes this one step further, including a review of previously collected data in the area of interest. While it is a flexible approach that can be utilized in several ways, it is also an empirical exercise since the documents are written by the stakeholders of Makueni and concerns the lived lives and experiences of

sexual violence against children in Makueni. This is similar to collecting and evaluating primary data (Doolan & Froelicher, 2009).

### **Advocacy SWOT/TOWS Analysis**

This paper considered SWOT/TOWS analysis as a methodology suitable for presenting the totality of the experience of sexual violence against children in Makueni County. It interacts with the narratives, content and secondary data in a holistic manner as a basis for understanding the situations from a strategic planning point of view. This is vital for the formulation of an advocacy plan and strategy as recommended at the end of the paper. TOWS is a variant of the SWOT Analysis Methodology and it involved a systematic and comprehensive assessment of the external and internal factors. This approach entails the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, followed by a subsequent analysis aimed at aligning the strengths with opportunities and the threats with weaknesses. The application of this technique is employed in the research to address any deficiencies in the SWOT analysis by facilitating the following:

- a) **Strengths–Opportunities:** It helps in the use of internal strengths to take advantage of the opportunities available.
- b) **Strengths-Threats:** It helps in the use of strengths to minimize threats.
- c) **Weaknesses-Opportunities:** Helps in improving weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities.
- d) **Weaknesses-Threats:** Helps to eliminate weaknesses to avoid threats.

### **Problem Tree Analysis Methodology**

The SWOT/TOWS analysis was further analyzed through the problem tree analysis methodology to advance the issues in the challenges posed by sexual violence against children in the county. The utilization of problem tree analysis facilitates the stakeholders in developing a pragmatic comprehension and consciousness of the issue at hand through the identification of the underlying causal factors and their consequential impacts (DFID, 2003). It is a critical process whose main output is a tree-shaped diagram in which the trunk represents sexual violence against children in the county as the focal problem, while the roots represent the causes as discussed in the video narratives and secondary data. The effects of the phenomenon were analyzed through the problem tree picking from the comments in the documentaries by individual care givers and stakeholders involved in the documentary. The employed methodology facilitated the researcher in constructing a coherent system of causality and correlation, as well as in the visualization of their interconnections. Further, a solution/objective tree analysis was done bringing out logical steps in providing solutions and recommendations towards a change in a long-term perspective.

### **Stakeholder Analysis**

From the annual reports, program documents, policy frameworks and cabinet papers on sexual violence of the county department of Gender, children and social services, the researcher was able to undertake stakeholder analysis. This was made possible by the mapping of various stakeholders utilized by the department in co-funding various programs within the department and partners whom they project in their long-term strategic plan.

Schiffer and Peaker define stakeholders as “any group of people organized, who share a common interest or stake in a particular issue” (Schiffer & Peakes, 2009). These actors are important in determining the actual programming of the advocacy since they have been tackling SVC and have interests in the same communities. Their interests can be described as those who are affected by or who can affect a particular decision or actions. They are critical in designing the final decisions and implementation thereof through funding or collaborative exercises (Freeman & Reed, 2001).

## **III. Discussion On Findings**

This section presents analyzed data and interpretation of information gathered in the study. It consists of responses to the inquiries posed during the investigation and serves as the groundwork for developing a transformative advocacy plan aimed at eradicating sexual violence against minors in Makueni County.

### **Types of Sexual violence against Children in Makueni County**

There are various forms of sexual violence perpetuated in the county as provided by 2019 Annual Report on the Status of Sexual Violence against children in Makueni County and the narrative documentaries. According to the report incest (39%) was classified as sexual violence by close family members of a child who are said to be the providers and educators of the children, hence involved in their lives daily. Defilement (27%) which included rape and attempted penetration was by neighbors, teachers and close relatives. Oral sex (25%) was mostly performed on boys and it included various types. Other forms of sexual abuse against children was documented as 9% which included inappropriate touching of both girls and boys in their private parts and suggestive teasing (Government of Makueni County, 2020).

### **The Lived Experience and Consequences of Sexual Violence against Children in Makueni County**

The experiences from the narratives in the documentaries correspond with the definitions of sexual violence of children as well as the definition of power relations used in this research. All six narratives involve sexual violence of children below 18 years as recognized by the laws of Kenya. The incidences indicate the use of manipulative words to the children involved, threats, presence of force and coercion. Further, the study found that both girls and boys experienced sexual violence. Each of the emerging themes are discussed below: First, children are abused by those close to them, whom they trust, respect and rely on for primary needs. All six children were abused by people they recognized i.e. Joy and Grace were abused by their fathers, Pendo was abused by her well known neighbor while both Amani and Peter were abused by people referred to as relatives. The abusers as mentioned are expected to be the protectors of the rights of the children and educators whom the children should gain knowledge and related support towards their own growth and development. Fathers are expected to be the key providers and protectors of the family and children in particular.

Secondly, instances of sexual violence perpetrated against children occur among female minors in the absence of their mothers. The girls in the narratives consistently report that their mothers were absent during instances of sexual abuse. According to Joy and Amani's recollection, their mothers were engaged in gainful employment to support their households. Women play a crucial role in ensuring the availability of food and financial resources for their families, particularly with regard to the sustenance and education of their children. This study affirms findings by scholars that demonstrate that failure of parental availability and supervision on children poses a greater risk for children falling into sexual abuse trap (Madu, 2003). As Joy's mother narrates, she feels guilty of the status of her abused child and regrets that she was away. Thirdly, these sexual violence incidents are not once or twice. As Pendo narrates: "I was harassed several times by different people since I was in elementary school: first by father several times and later my own uncle" (GMC, 2019). As seen in this narrative, these children are affected and shaped by the incidences and this is evident by the way Pendo gives meaning to understanding sex and sexual selves. During court proceedings, the child is reportedly unable to confront the perpetrator and is observed crying consistently throughout the proceedings as well as on the journey home.

Fourthly, the experience of sexual abuse inflicted upon minors is profoundly distressing and causes lasting harm to the victims. They live in constant apprehension, fearing that the culprits may reappear and exploit them once more. They experience fear and have a strong aversion towards men, especially their own fathers. These individuals have the belief that the wrongdoers possess authority and engage in sexual exploitation, while they themselves are devoid of power and are innocent. Furthermore, this aligns with the attachment theory, which posits that trauma is a significant consequence.

Fifth, there are many effects of abuse on the children. These includes absenteeism in school, poor performance in school, unwanted pregnancies and diseases as found in the study. The statement suggests that the vulnerable minors are subjected to intimidation due to circumstances beyond their control, and are objectified as sexual targets by acquaintances such as relatives and neighbors who perpetrate acts of sexual violence against them, despite being aware of their status as victims of prior abuse. It implies a sense of passivity, powerlessness, and lack of human agency. According to scholarly observations, the state of powerlessness places children in a psychological state of helplessness, which can be a devastating condition that requires external support and assistance in order to be healed (Jordan, 2013).

### **Gaps, Challenges and Deterrents Hindering SVC Policy Implementation**

Despite the comprehensive policies, structures, plans and programmes put together by the county government towards ensuring effective elimination of sexual violence against children in the county, the study found that there has continued to be challenges in the implementation and the enforcement of these legal instruments. This is evident through the analysis of county policy implementation reports of the department of Gender, Children and Social Services as well as voices from stakeholders documented in the sub county documentaries that informed the study on the challenges facing the implementation of the County policies of Sexual Abuse against Children. Each of these challenges is highlighted below:

### **Poor Coordination, Engagement and Harmonization of activities by SVC/GBV Actors at both National and County Level**

Whereas all policies on SVC and those for GBV in general are implemented at the county level, there was no evidence of the coordination and consolidation of milestones of the interventions done by the county, national governments as well as non-state actors serving in Makueni County. Although the County government through the department of Gender, Children and Social Services is charged with the mandate of coordination of these actors (Government of Makueni County, 2018), the annual reports did not demonstrate any documentation of activities, synergies or co-funding with the other stakeholders.



### **Inadequate Resources**

The search for legal redress and the capacity building of communities requires adequate resources, both human and financial. The county government resources, especially manpower and fiscal are limited. Further, the communities do not prioritize SVC/GBV programs as they would do with physical projects such as ECDE classrooms, water infrastructures and roads. The county department was one of the least funded. For the financial year 2020/2021, the study found that the department was allocated only a total of Kshs. 165 million out of a total budget of 11 billion shillings. Community capacity building, dissemination of SVC information, public engagement, training programmes and sponsoring gender-related courses in schools and community institutions cannot be done where the resources are inadequate.

### **Cultural Barriers**

The culture of the Akamba people of Makueni, just like others in Kenya and Africa in general is characterized by structural inequalities between men and women that patronages power differences (Sultana, 2011). Women are culturally considered subordinate to men and this has facilitated the mainstreaming of SVC/GBV as a means of solving conflicts at the household level. As an accepted social norm of discipline women whenever they are wronged the culture hinders them from seeking legal redress (Stephanie, 2015). This is because culturally, women would fear violating these social norms especially in disclosing what is happening hence leaving in fear and guilty of internalized consequences of their culture. These fears derail them from seeking legal redress making them more vulnerable in the society.

The study found that sexual violence is not discussed in public and this explained why fewer cases of rape and other domestic violence are reported to the police unless when severe and attracts media attention. Victims were found to fear reporting cases especially where a family member was involved because if they are found guilty and end up in jail, the victim is condemned as the one who has caused the problem hence the victim being turned into the villain (Saltzman, 2005). This scenario leads to many victims suffering in silence while trying to protect and secure their families (Ondicho, 1993). This links masculinity and GBV in the society (Coalition of Violence Against Women, 2013).

### **Economic Barriers**

In Makueni County, the study found that female participation in economic activities is at 54.7% compared to the male participation at 70.9% (Government of Makueni County, 2018). This is informed by the tradition that the Kamba women in Makueni County were considered to have their primary roles in the kitchen, child birth and rearing. They have traditionally been denied the opportunities for participation in economic activities and empowerment which has had implications in causing SVC/GBV. Gender-based poverty is a pressing issue, with women being disproportionately affected due to factors such as inequality, restricted access to and ownership of land, limited income-generating opportunities, and marginalization in critical economic services and decision-making processes (Government of Makueni County, 2018).

Conversely, the redress mechanisms for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SVC/GBV) necessitate the payment of legal fees for the purpose of case filing, remuneration of legal counsel, transportation expenses, and other associated costs that are essential for the pursuit of justice. This low economic empowerment of the women derails them from independently seeking redress for themselves and their children. Such economically disadvantaged victims experience abuse and cannot afford to pay for the legal fees (Johnson, 2002).

### **Legal Illiteracy**

Communities must have knowledge on the legal system to be able to guide themselves in seeking redress. The awareness of their legal rights and responsibilities are empowering. Legal literacy therefore promotes the ability to recognize when a problem or conflict is a legal one and when a legal solution is available. From the narratives in the documentary, it was found that the victims are not empowered to take necessary action. They did not know where and how to access information concerning SVC/GBV. The lack of awareness and education on the legal requirements, rights and procedures can cause injustices especially for the most vulnerable.

## **IV. Conclusion**

The paper set out to research on the situation of sexual violence against children in Makueni County with a perspective of developing a transformational advocacy plan that is facilitating policy change and advocating social justice from a people centered approach. The basis of the formulation of the transformational strategies relied on voices of children, their guardians and lead institutions in Makueni county that are documented and archived at the County's Gender Based Violence Recovery Center and secondary data on the policies, program reports, strategic plans and interventions achieved by the county department of gender, Children and social services.

The topic of sexual violence against minors is relevant to the region's actual experiences and illustrates the difficulties, obstacles, and dilemmas raised by the literature study and theoretical underpinnings. Communities are rendered ineffective as a result of the failure to implement policies that protect children's rights, a lack of understanding among the populace about the process of seeking legal remedy, and insufficient financial resources among impoverished families to pursue legal action to its conclusion. Examining sexual violence through Foucault's framework and Attachment theory urges us to analyze the larger social and institutional circumstances in which such abuse occurs, as well as the power dynamics that shape people's experiences and responses.

The paper proposes an advocacy plan aimed at mitigating the challenges and eradicating the menace with the collaboration of all stakeholders.

## **V. Recommendations**

- 1) The paper proposes an advocacy plan that will guide the government of Makueni County and other stakeholders in facilitating an enabling environment for the affected communities towards the elimination of sexual violence against children in the County. The form of the advocacy should be twofold: policy and social justice advocacy and the type should be a people centered advocacy to achieve meaningful social change.
- 2) The seven INSPIRE framework strategies for elimination of sexual violence against children is recommended to be used in the advocacy plan.
- 3) Further research using the phenomenological methodology to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

## **VI. Ethical Considerations**

Here, the main concern was to ensure that the research is conducted within acceptable standards and principles of research work. During the field research, the researcher ensured that all participants were informed of the nature of the study and their consent to participate in the data collection exercise was obtained. The researcher ensured that the participants understood the purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary. Further, informant's identities were protected by the researcher and no personal information was required. Codes instead of names were used as identifiers to enhance identity protection (anonymity). The researcher shall ensure that all data is well stored with a view of furthering the participant's confidentiality and ensuring that they are not put at risk due to poor data storage.

Lastly, in the formulation of the findings, recommendations and conclusion the researcher ensured that all that is informed by the research shall be presented to stakeholders in a manner that edifies the participants. It is expected the overall objective of the research shall be met through the recommendations and solutions for child sexual abuse phenomenon in Makueni County and the Kenyan society at large.

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## **Disclosure**

The author reports no conflict of interest in this work.