

Determinants of home-based violence against children in Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Violence against children remains a major global public health and human rights concern, with over one billion children experiencing physical, emotional, or sexual violence annually. In sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, cases of child violence have heightened despite the existence of legal and institutional frameworks aimed at protecting children. Nairobi City County has reported a growing prevalence of home-based violence against children, necessitating a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to this problem. This study examined the determinants of home-based violence against children in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study was guided by Frustration–Aggression Theory and Social Learning Theory. The study employed descriptive design. The target population comprised of 384 household heads, 2 deputy county commissioners, 17 chiefs, 34 assistant chiefs, 6 officers, 20 officials from the Children’s Welfare Department, 200 social workers, 200 head teachers, 30 psychologists/counselors, and 30 representatives of non-state actors, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and faith-based organizations (FBOs). Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 451 respondents. Data were collected through questionnaires, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically and presented narratively, while quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 and presented through tables, graphs and pie charts. The findings revealed that home-based violence against children in Nairobi City County commonly manifested through verbal altercations (44.2%), constant rebuke (41.6%), and denial of basic needs (40.9%), isolation (40.4%), punching (40.2%), and kicking (34.9%). The study further established that the major determinants of home-based violence against children were economic strain (25.2%), drug and substance abuse (19.7%), cultural practices and norms (10.0%), power and control dynamics (9.4%), marital conflicts (9.1%), and parenting-related challenges (5.9%). The study concludes that home-based violence against children in Nairobi City County is largely driven by socioeconomic, behavioral, cultural, and family-related factors. Addressing these underlying determinants is critical to reducing child victimization within households. The study recommends the implementation of comprehensive family assessment and support programs by government agencies and social service organizations to address economic hardship, substance abuse, family conflict, and intergenerational patterns of violence, thereby strengthening child protection and family well-being.

Keywords: Children, Child Protection, Determinants of Home-Based Violence, Home-Based Violence, Nairobi City County, Violence Against Children.

I. INTRODUCTION

Home-based violence remains one of the serious abuses of power where the perpetrators control and maltreat the victims through threats, intimidations and physical violence (Burt *et al.*, 2023). The perpetrated abuse oftentimes manifests in various forms, which include sexual, economic, physical and psychological violence that poses serious harm to the victim. Various forms of abuse include but are not limited to manipulation, assaulting, beating, hurting and terrorizing, mainly in the household level thereby constituting home-based violence. Research indicates that the likelihood of home-based violence on children ranges from 60% to 75% with an implication that children are adversely affected which in turn results to severe trauma, displacements, emotional interference and to an extreme extent, death (Adewale & Potokri, 2023).

Globally, more than one billion children remain vulnerable to violence annually. Physical, sexual, psychological, neglect and negligence, maltreatment and exploitation are the major forms of child abuse and tend to occur in various settings (The United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, 2020). These forms of violence inflict deep and long-lasting impacts that interfere with the general well-being of the children in their entire life. Advanced economies like the United States of America (USA) are not an exception in violence against children since they have recorded a significant number of cases of child abuse. In most recent studies, a number of foster parents in the US were found to have contributed to child abuse, especially in the absence of their parents (Grady *et al.* 2023). Accordingly,

violence against children by house helps is an emerging trend of violence typologies that contributes to the shocking and increased cases of child abuse. At the global level, violence in the domestic settings has oftentimes topped the agenda as one emerging challenge that requires urgent attention.

In Africa, violence against children remains an endemic problem. Most of the perpetrated violence against children tends to occur in the households, learning institutions, justice systems, workplaces and the society. They tend to take various forms including but not limited to physically violent activities such as corporal punishment, sexual and verbal harassments among others. Consequently, such manifestations of violence against children interfere with the development of children, and their psychological and emotional health. Additionally, it curtails children's education, inflicts social insecurity and consumes enormous national resources, especially in countries that are worst hit by the menace of child abuse (Perezniето et al., 2014). The high prevalence rates of violence against children are largely attributed to contextual factors such as age, capacity and the child's gender, the socio-economic status of the family and the ubiquity or absence of family support as well as the prevailing sociocultural norms and the efficacy of the existing children protection services. . A recent finding by the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF, 2014), revealed that violence against children was as high as 60 percent in countries like Morocco, Zambia, Mali, Ethiopia among others. Numerous atrocities on children by house helps have been reported by numerous media outlets across the continent. For instance, in Uganda, violence among house helps has been on the rise with a score of them imprisoned for violating the fundamental rights of children.

Like any other developing countries in the African continent, Kenya is not insulated from the menace of violence against children, especially that perpetrated by foster parents. Owing to the increased economic demands coupled with rapid urbanization, most of the Kenyan parents have been grappling with choosing between economic needs and the rearing of children; where majority have opted for the latter. Urbanized counties like Nairobi have been on the limelight with regard to the increased cases of home-based violence, with higher instances of violence being perpetrated by house helps (Kanuri, 2009; Otieno, 2018). Accordingly, Nairobi has the lion share of the nationwide cases of violence against children since it harbors a pool of working-class parents with limited options in taking care of children. Consequently, both men and women who are jobless tend to throng the city in the pursuit of employment opportunities (Gicharu *et al.* 2023). The lucky ones have secured employments as house helps. However, recently, both the printed and non-printed media have reported an increase in the atrocities committed by house helps on children. This in turn has intensified the prevalence rates of home-based violence against children in Nairobi and the country in general.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Even though consequences of violence against children may vary according to its nature and severity, short-term and long-term repercussions are often grave and damaging (Kivuva, 2023). Globally, millions of children in different countries have been subjected to various forms of abuse. The types of violence against children's prevalent countries in Sub-Saharan Africa ranging from sexual molestation, physical and emotional abuse as well as child labor (Khemthong & Chutipongdech, 2021). In recent decades, home-based violence has been widely regarded as one of the threats to Kenya's socio-economic prosperity through the far-reaching impact it imposes on society, with several instances outlined in the work of Donald *et al.* (2024). The menace remains an entrenched and pervasive form of violence in the country. Similarly, the country has witnessed a profound increment in child abuse, an emerging form of violence in domestic settings. Nairobi County epitomizes high prevalence of child exposure to household violence, especially physical, verbal, sexual and psychological violence which have afflicted multiple negative effects on children's cognitive and psychosocial development. Unfortunately, despite the seriousness of the menace, it continues to attract limited attention from the government, policymakers, and scholars, making the current study relevant. For instance, the existing laws have done little to protect children against violence (Wangamati *et al.* 2018). Similarly, despite the increment of home-based violence against children, the field has attracted scanty research, thus the necessity of the current study.

1.2 Research Objective

The main objective of the study was to examine the determinants of home-based violence against children in Nairobi County, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was grounded in frustration-aggression theory and social learning theory.

2.1.1 Frustration-aggression theory

The theory was coined by scholars including Dollard and Miller in early 20th century. It was later improved by Berkowitz in the wake of 1960s. The theory postulates that aggression mainly emanates from frustrations, specifically

when one fails to secure his/her objectives (Grady *et al.* 2023). In its early years of formation, it was restructured by Miller and Sears to state that not only frustration necessitates the need to react but some forms of aggression are one possible outcome. Within the study context, the theory can be used to explain how parents and caregivers who are constantly confronting frustrations resulting from economic struggles where they are unable to provide for their children tend to be frustrated from which they can turn violent and redirect such violence to children. However, the theory has failed to shed light on the specific reasons that would lead to aggression, culminating in the adoption of social learning theory.

2.1.2 Social Learning Theory

The theory is attributed to the influential works of Albert Bandura (1977). He opined that people observe behaviors mainly from social interactions (Adewale & Potokri, 2023). The theory postulates that everything that we partake in has been learned. Much of the learning in mankind stems from behavioral observations of other people's actions as well as from imagining the dire consequences of our actions. It is embedded in several assumptions; that people's learning come through observations and emulation; the rewards, especially punishment that may arise from one's actions pose direct effects on both learning and observations (Wangamati *et al.*, 2018). In the context of the study, home-based violence, precisely violence against children stems mainly from observation and imitation. For instance, courtesy of printed media, house helps get access to information related to the plight of their colleagues and their ultimate response on the same. Most of them tend to own this information and become eager to experiment it on the children whom they are supposed to be protecting.

2.2 Empirical Review

A study by Mekonnen and Tsega (2024) focused on the child sexual abuse and its determinants among children with reference to Addis Ababa Ethiopia. Through a systematic review and meta-analysis, the study found that children who were exposed to substance and drugs abuse were vulnerable to various forms of child violence, especially sexual violence. In particular, the study found that children who use alcohol were more likely to experience sexual abuse. This was attributed by the ability of alcohol consumption to alter one's consciousness and ability to solve problems. Chepkwony (2015) investigated the factors contributing to child abuse. When parents and caretakers engage themselves in drugs consumption, it may results in drunkardness and frustration. Her findings reveal that a significant portion of parents and caregivers abuse and drugs substance. In particular, the study attributed alcohol consumption and drunkardnes to heightened cases of child violence.

A study by Mutai *et al.* (2020) weighted in the associated impacts of drugs and substance abuse among the young people in Kenya. They posited that drug and substance abuse has continued to ruin youth and subsequently education despite various measures taken to stop it. The study probed the underlying factors that push the young people to abuse drugs and the associated impacts therein. The study employed survey research design and was conducted in secondary schools in Dagoretti Division, Nairobi. Data was collected with the help of questionnaires. Data was organized and prepared for analysis by coding and entry in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software programme. The study established that majority of students' abuse drugs to feel high and was a result of peer pressure. It was also noted that poor performance is the greatest effect of drug and substance abuse among students.

A study by Mukhandia (2014), focusing on the determinants of drugs and substance abuse with reference to Kabuchai sub-County in Bungoma revealed that majority of respondents indicated that most parents are poor role model to their children, also the peer pressure plays a big influence to drug use among the students. Majority of the respondents also agreed that socio-economic factors and cultural practiced determines highly the use of drugs in our secondary school. In light of this, the study went on to recommend that the parents should have good parenting to their children. It also reminds that sensitization should be done adequately especially through posters in that connection strict policies should be designed to guide drug use.

In India, New Delhi, Daral *et al.* (2016) examined family characteristics that predispose adolescent girls to increased risk of abuse, mainly physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. Stratified random sampling was done among classes 7th to 12th of government girls' schools of a semi-urban area of Delhi, and a total of 1060 adolescent girls participated. Majority were in mid-adolescence. Approximately 70% study subjects faced at least one form of maltreatment. Physical abuse was faced by 42.6%, sexual abuse by 26.6%, emotional abuse by 37.9% and neglect by 40.1% of study subjects.

Kambaga and Muriuki (2020) investigated the determinants of sexual exploitation of young children in the Coastal region with reference to Mombasa North. The study cited lack of education as one of the contributing factors to tourists' sexual exploitation of children. The study found that at least 15% of children who were directly involved in commercial sex tourist were uneducated, suggesting how lack of education exposes children to various forms of violence.

A study by Donald et al. (2024) focused on the perspectives of key informants on child abuse in Ghana posits that child abuse is a complex issue, a myriad of factors are likely to underpin its occurrence. Compounding the issue is the fact that mostly, these factors are interactive and operate within the individual, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chrono-systems, making it difficult to identify all the factors that contribute to child abuse due to lack of reliable reporting systems and other possible contributing factors. In his study, key informants reported that children were abused mainly due to poverty; cultural and religious beliefs; and ignorance of child protection laws. Surprisingly, apart from gender no other individual attributes or characteristics were among factors that could place children at higher risk for abuse. Leung *et al.* (2008) study investigated the determinants of child abuse in Southern China. The study noted that child maltreatment is a serious and common problem in China. This study findings reveal that the prevalence of psychological aggression, corporal punishment, severe physical maltreatment and very severe physical punishment were 78.3%, 23.2%, 15.1% and 2.8% respectively.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted descriptive research design. The descriptive design was deployed to obtain data on personal experiences, events and situation with respect to the variables of the study (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Descriptive research is directed at making careful observations and detailed documentation of a phenomenon of interest (Bhattacharjee, 2019). In this study the researcher conducted surveys using household questionnaires and conducted in-depth interviews and Focus Group discussions to have a deeper understanding on the determinants of home-based violence against Children in Nairobi City County.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Nairobi County. The study randomly selected 4 sub-Counties for study. However, based on Based on 20% sampling units as supported by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), 2 out of 4 sub-counties were purposely selected due to the magnitude of home-based violence in the area. Embakasi Central and Mathare Sub-counties were thus selected as they were the ones with higher prevalence of home-based violence against children in the County.

3.3 Target Population

The study population was a combined population of Nairobi City County which according to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) in 2019) stood at 4.3 million people. From this, the study's targeted population comprised of 1.4 million household heads, 2 deputy county commissioners; 17 chiefs; 34 assistant chiefs; police officers mandated to curb the maltreatment of children in the County; 20 officials from Children's Welfare Department, 200 social workers, 200 head teachers, and 30 psychologists/counselors and 30 Non-state actors including NGOs, CBOs and FBOs.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

Sampling technique allows the researcher to empirically derive a small group from the targeted population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The study adopted both purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Simple random sampling technique was used because it allows every researcher an equal chance of selection. Specifically, it was adopted to sample household heads. Purposive sampling was used to sample chiefs and assistant chiefs, police officers, psychologists, head teachers, NGOs, FBOs, CBOs officials and the officials from the children's welfare department.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The study used both primary and secondary data. For primary data interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires and observations were used as follows. Household Questionnaires were used to collect from the household heads. Interview guides were used to obtain rich and contextual information from key informants who were major actors and stakeholders in home-based violence in Nairobi City County. Key informants who were interviewed were Deputy County Commissioners, chiefs and assistant chiefs, police officers, officials from Children welfare department, head teachers, psychologists, and heads of NGOs, CBOs and FBOs. Focused group discussions guide was used to collect data from the social workers. The researcher utilized observation method to observe the physical impacts of home-based violence in the study area. On the other hand, various documents such as research publications, government reports, and other relevant minutes from meetings such as records from chiefs' office, website searches, newspaper and magazine publications and other relevant literature were reviewed as secondary data.

3.6 Data Analysis

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), analyzing data incorporates a process of acquiring and searching for meaning to information collected by the researcher in a bid to present the same in a better and clear way to enhance understanding. Quantitative data was obtained with close-ended survey questions in the questionnaires. SPSS version 25 was used in analyzing the quantitative data. It gave frequency distribution, means and percentages. The analyzed outcomes were presented in diagrams, percentages, tables and graphs to give a clear knowledge on the influence on home-based violence on children development in Nairobi County. Qualitative analysis was adopted for the interview and focus group discussion findings. The yielded data was transcribed before coding into categories, organized according to the respective research items reflecting the study objectives. The themes were separately structured based on the objectives. Generalization of the analyzed data was subsequently made and results presented in narrative form as well as through verbatim quotation of the study participants.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

To ensure the conformity of the study to ethical requirements, the researcher acquired permission to conduct research from the University and other relevant bodies. The researcher obtained research approval letter from MMUST upon acceptance and approval of the research proposal by the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies (DPS) of MMUST. The researcher then used the letter to seek for research permit from NACOSTI to ascertain the legality and the authenticity of the study.

The process of data collection was done on voluntary basis. None of the respondents were compelled to provide information they were not willing to give. Respondents were encouraged to provide information freely and in good faith to the researcher on the basis that confidentiality of their views was guaranteed. Confidentiality and privacy of the respondents were ensured by making the research instruments anonymous and the respondents were assured that their responses were not to be used for any other purpose apart from academics.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4. 1 Findings

4.1.1 Manifestations of Home-based Violence against Children in Nairobi County, Kenya

The study sought to establish the manifestation of home-based violence against children in Nairobi County. The findings are shown in Table 1; The response rate for the households is as shown in Table 1;

Table 1

Response Rate

Category	Administered	Returned	Response rate
Questionnaires	384	341	88.80%

The validity of the findings are met since according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 50% is adequate for data analysis, interpretation and reporting of the findings; a response rate of 60-69% is considered to be good while that above 70% is considered excellent and outstanding. Therefore, the study met Mugenda & Mugenda recommendation as evidenced by an excellent response rate.

Table 2

Manifestation of Home-based Violence against Children in Nairobi County

Manifestation of Home-based violence against children	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagreed
Denial of basic needs	74 (21.7%)	73 (21.4%)	69 (20.2%)	66 (19.4%)	59 (17.3%)
Kicking	64 (18.8%)	74 (21.7%)	72 (21.1%)	76 (22.3%)	55 (16.1%)
Punching	64 (18.8%)	68 (19.9%)	73 (21.4%)	62 (18.2%)	74 (21.7%)
Verbal Altercations	68 (19.9%)	62 (18.2%)	83 (24.3%)	60 (17.6%)	71 (20.8%)
Isolation	69 (20.2%)	71 (20.8%)	69 (20.2%)	68 (20.2%)	64 (18.8%)
Constant Rebuke	71 (20.8%)	57 (16.7%)	71 (20.8%)	68 (20.0%)	68 (20.0%)
Sexual Violence	74 (21.7%)	65 (19.1%)	63 (18.5%)	54 (15.8%)	85 (24.9%)

Denial of Basic Needs: The findings in Table 4.1 reveal that 21.70% (74) of the respondents agreed that the denial of basic needs, such as food, constitutes a form of physical violence. Meanwhile, 21.41% (73) of the respondents disagreed with this perspective, indicating a nearly equal split in opinions. Those who strongly agreed accounted for 20.23% (69) of the responses, while 19.35% (66) remained neutral, and 17.30% (59) strongly disagreed. This

distribution suggests a relatively even division in perceptions, with a slight majority leaning toward agreement or strong agreement that denying basic needs is a form of violence. The notable proportion of neutral responses (19.35%) highlights ambiguity in how respondents perceive this issue, reflecting the complexity of defining and recognizing such forms of abuse. Qualitative findings from key informants further reinforced these findings. This is illustrated by the yielded FGDs where one of the members stated that;

“Some children are suffering from preventable illnesses due to lack of proper basic needs such food and shelter. If you ask some of them, they will tell you that their parents are capable of providing for them but they were being punished because of some small mistakes. This suggests that some parents leverage on the deniability of basic needs to unleash discipline to their children...I think this is wrong and unacceptable. I don't see it costly when parents and caregivers adopt other means such as slight punishment when children are wrong. If you withhold food for your child in the name of punishing your child, are you even listening to yourself? Some parents and caregivers are just evil people”. (Focused group discussions with social workers held on 23rd November, 2024).

Also, a key informant with an official from the Children's Welfare Department yielded the following;

“Some African parents deliberately maltreat their children by denying them essential need. I know sometimes children make mistakes but such mistakes do not tantamount to the deniability of basic needs which are the blood life for every child's survival. My organization has worked with other partners and even established rescuing centers for children of home-based violence. Every month, we normally receive 10-20 cases of children who have been denied basic needs, especially food and medical attention. It is also worthy to note that majority of these children come from slum areas and this suggests the deplorable conditions some of them go through. I understand that for some parents, it is beyond their capability to provide essential needs to their children due to economic hardships but other children have also reported that their parents and caregivers deliberately denied them food and shelter as a form of punishment which further reveal that some children in this County are deliberately denied basic needs and this is contrary to children's rights”. (Key informant interview with NGO official held on 22nd November, 2024).

These revelations are consistent with Njoroge *et al.* (2023) whose findings reveal that the denial of basic needs to children constituted a form of violence on children and was mainly perpetrated by their family members and caregivers. The findings also reveal that some parents embraced this as a form of punishment which they opined goes against children's rights.

Kicking: The data yielded from respondents' narration reveal that kicking was one of the prevalence forms of physical violence on children and was often deployed as disciplinary measure or from anger by the parents and caregivers as well as the family members. The researcher was informed that kicking was orchestrated by the parents and caregivers for various reasons. In view of this, some saw it as a way of instilling discipline on children, others opined that it was from out anger and frustration citing economic hardships, constant domestic violence and substance abuse which they argued culminated in violence. Some respondents argued that because of cultural normalization of corporal punishment, other parents and caregivers resorted to kicking which often goes unreported despite its seriousness. It also emerged that power imbalance where adults exerted enormous physical control, dominating children hence making kicking a possibility in the event of violence. The respondents also reported that kicking manifested in various forms which mainly included targeted kicks, frequent physical assault, public humiliation where children are kicked in the presence of their peers and other family members to shame them and the use of objects which they stated constituted wearing heavy shoes or using both blunt and sharp objects to intensify harm. One member of a focused group discussions reinforced these assertions in the following manner;

“I think the issue of kicking of children has been entrenched in households as a form of punishment because of our cultural practices that permit corporal punishment as the most effective way of reinforcing discipline on children. You will find that most of the reported cases of physical abuse on child must include kicking and this justifies its high prevalence rates in most households in Nairobi County. I think we also emphasize on culture yet in certain occasions, some parents and caregivers normally resort to this form of punishment as a way of expressing anger and frustration. The situations become worse when they use it frequently against children”. (Focused group discussions with social workers held on 19th November, 2024).

These assertions corroborate with Njoroge *et al.* (2023) whose findings suggest that kicking was one of the manifestation of physical violence on children and was prevalent both in rural and urban settings. The study further indicate that physical violence on children inflicted untold suffering to the children including physical harm, psychological torture and significantly impacted on children's growth and development.

Punching: The qualitative data yielded from focused group discussions with a section of social workers found that punching was a form of physical violence on children that was committed to children under the guise of discipline instilling. The respondents informed the researcher that this form of discipline often turned into abuse because some parents and caregivers used it to cause bodily harm to the children, others deployed it frequently as a form of punishment

on children and also when its utility left lasting psychological trauma to the victim. Similar to kicking, the respondents cited economic stressors that inflicted frustration and anger among the parents and caregivers, normalization of corporal punishment and the weak enforcement of laws as the key enablers of punching. These assertions were echoed by one member of a focused group discussions who explained it as follows;

“To me, punching is not bad. However, it becomes bad when it is used by the parents and family members as frequently and as form of punishment. Sadly, other parents have normalized punching which violates children’s rights. Recently, a child narrated to me that his father punched him because he was associating with other peers whom the father did not like...he reported to me that his father had punched countless times. Upon physical examination, I found that the child has suffered bruises in almost all parts of the body. This example is a testament of what other children go through. The cases of punching might be on the rise but because of underreporting, it remains significantly low”. (Focused group discussions with social workers held on 2nd December, 2024)

These assertions support the findings of the social learning theory, emphasizing the role of cultural norms in perpetuating violence. In some communities, punching may be viewed as an acceptable form of discipline, making it difficult to address the root causes of abuse and promote alternative parenting practices. By challenging these harmful cultural norms and promoting positive parenting practices, stakeholders can help reduce the prevalence of violence in households. This approach aligns with the findings of Dube *et al.* (2023), who highlighted the polarized perceptions of punching as a form of violence.

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Constant Rebuke: The quantitative data was corroborated with the findings yielded from the focused group discussions and key informant interviews with social workers and psychologists. The discussants mentioned that constant rebuke was epitomized by the use of harsh criticisms, verbal reprimands and demeaning language as a form of strict disciplining of children. The discussions also yielded various manifestations of constant rebuke. In view of this, the respondents identified frequent yelling where the parents raise their voices in anger over small mistakes by the children. Secondly, the respondents identified demeaning remarks such as “stupid”, “good for nothing” by the parents and caregivers mainly with the view to shame the child. Public humiliation of children also emerged where the parents and caregivers publicly scolded their children in front of their peers, siblings and even neighbors as a way of enforcing compliance. The researcher was also informed that some parents set up ambitious and unrealistic expectations for their children whereby if the children fail to achieve, they were being punished. Moreover, the discussions also yielded threatening and intimidating statements such as telling the children they will not succeed, they will be ejected from the house if they feel to behave well. For instance, during a focused group discussions with social workers, one member echoed these assertions by stating the following;

“Parents and caregivers have adopted various strategies to enforce compliance and instill discipline in their children and constant rebuke is one of them. This form of violence on children is often overlooked yet it severely affects the growth and development including interfering with psychological and emotional well-being. For example, when you constantly scold your child by telling him he/she is stupid and cannot be successful...this child will perceive himself as a failure and foolish and this may severely affect the child. You will find some parents have normalized this form of violence yet it is very bad and should be condemned. Shockingly, recently, a child committed suicide and left a note indicating that he was fed up with the constant demeaning by his parents...this is how serious constant rebuke of children is...something must be done urgently to save our children from this scourge” (Focused group discussions with social workers held on 11th November, 2024).

These assertions corroborate with Mwadeghu (2015) whose study established that constant rebuke of children was one of the subtle form of violence on children with the main perpetrators being the family members and caregivers and to some extent the peers. The study noted that constant rebuke of children had profound consequences on the child including the feeling of being unwanted and neglected, hindering the free interactions with his/her peers, affect the academic performance and most significantly affects his/her psychological and emotional well-being.

Sexual Violence: Key informant interviews conducted with the police officers, NGOs officials and officials from the Child Welfare Department indicated a serious concern in relation to sexual violence against children, particularly incest. Interviewees spoke openly about sexual abuse of children but they did not raise it to the same degree. For instance, one of the interviewees asserted the following;

"I must admit that there is sexual abuse of children. Most of these abuses are perpetrated by intimate persons such as caregivers and in worst cases their parents. Our organization has set up a rehabilitation center for the children who are victims of sexual abuse, where we counsel them and provide any relevant assistance they need. Since we only take a hundred girls annually, we only find about, we only find about 10-20% of those girls have suffered some form of sexual abuse, especially defilement and oral sex. Shockingly, we have also handled sodomy, a type of sexual abuse on young boys and suspect the cases might be on the rise...you know this form of sexual abuse is often underreported owing to the fear of victimization or stigmatization". (Key informant interview with NGO official held on 16th November, 2025).

Another key informant interview with an officer from Child Welfare Department yielded the following;

"From our records, I can admit that sexual abuse on children is mostly done by those well known to them such as family members. Uncles, brothers and strangers are rarely the perpetrators. There is a surge in incest...the perpetrators know it is wrong but they do it anyway...shockingly, it is mostly the uncles and even some of the fathers. You find that mothers fear reporting these cases because they may be forced out from their homes, so they opt to keep quiet for them to survive. Also, children are also powerless because when some of them reported these cases, they can be punished severely" (Key informant interview with an official from the Child Welfare Department held on 17th November, 2024).

These findings are consistent with Gale *et al.* (2024) whose studies relied on a report published by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection in 2019. The report established that that 62.6% of females who had experienced childhood sexual violence, experienced multiple incidents before the age of 18.197 Among females who experienced any childhood sexual violence, 18.4% experienced the first incident aged 13 years or younger, 26.6% aged 14 to 15 years, and 54.9% between the age of 16 to 17 years. Among females ages 18-24 years old that experienced sexual violence in childhood, just over a quarter had more than one perpetrator involved in the first incident. It is important to recognize that boys also experience sexual abuse however; the 2019 report indicates females are more than twice more likely to experience sexual violence in childhood than males.

The findings are consistent with Ward *et al.* (2018) whose study suggest that sexual abuse is one of the least prevalent forms of violence against children, but that children who have been sexually abused are at higher risk of other forms of violence, and that children who have experienced violence are at a higher risk of sexual abuse. Violence in families whether physical abuse of children or violence between other family members, is a particular concern because of both its serious developmental consequences and the possible intergenerational transmission of such violence.

The study established that home-based violence against children in Nairobi City County manifests through multiple forms, including verbal altercations, constant rebuke, denial of basic needs, isolation, punching, kicking, and sexual violence. These findings corroborate global and regional studies which have consistently demonstrated that violence against children is multidimensional and often extends beyond physical abuse to include emotional, psychological, and neglect-related forms of violence. For instance, Leung *et al.* (2008) found that psychological aggression was the most prevalent form of child maltreatment in Southern China, while Daral *et al.* (2016) reported that emotional abuse and neglect affected 37.9% and 40.1% of adolescent girls in India, respectively. Similarly, the current study's finding that verbal altercations (44.2%) and constant rebuke (41.6%) were among the most prevalent forms of abuse suggests that emotional violence remains deeply entrenched within households and is often normalized as a disciplinary strategy.

4.1.2 Determinants of Home-based Violence against Children in Nairobi County

The study sought to establish the determinants of home-based violence against children. The findings are as shown in Table 3;

Table 3*Determinant of Home-based Violence against Children in Nairobi County*

Determinant	Frequency	Percentage
Economic strain	86	25.22%
Drugs and substance abuse	67	19.65%
Mental health related issues	42	12.31%
Cultural norms	34	9.97%
Power and control dynamics	32	9.38%
Marital conflicts	31	9.09%
Lack of education and awareness	29	8.50%
Parenting	20	5.87%

As shown in Table 3, the findings suggest that economic strain was one of the leading determinants of home-based violence against children as evidenced by 86 (25.22%) respondents. From the findings, 67 (19.65%) respondents cited drugs and substance abuse as yet another determinant of home-based violence against children. Power and control dynamics also emerged as one of the leading determinants of home-based violence against children in Nairobi City County as evidenced by 32 (9.38%) respondents. Furthermore, 42 (12.31%) respondents opined that mental health related issues also contributed to home-based violence against children; 29 (8.50%) respondents were of the view that lack of education and awareness in certain areas in Nairobi City County contributed to home-based violence against children while 31 (9.09%) and 34 (9.97%) cited marital conflicts and cultural norms as determinants of home-based violence against children respectively. Moreover, 20 (5.87%) respondents opined that parenting also played a role in home-based violence against children.

Economic Strain: The quantitative findings align with the results obtained from both key informant interviews and focused group discussions where the study participants reinforced economic strain, especially at the household level as one of the determinants of home-based violence. Some respondents cited pervasive poverty and overcrowding, especially in informal settings as some of the leading drivers of economic pressures at the household level. An interview with one of the NGO official yielded that;

“Most families in Nairobi City County are thriving under deepest economic distress....some cannot even afford three meals a day. What happens when parents and caregivers lack alternative sources to sustain livelihood? Obviously they get stressed and angered. Often, this may force them to use children to escape from such stress. You will find that the perpetrators of child violence are stressed up and failures to cope up with this often make them to target children who are always innocent”. (Key Informant Interview with an NGO official held on 1st December, 2024).

The respondents also linked economic strain with the appalling living conditions of some residents of Nairobi City County, especially in informal settlements. They opined that with increased poverty and economic uncertainties, most people opted for cheaper and affordable settlements making them to end up in slums which are often overcrowded. A focused group discussions with a section of the social workers yielded the following;

“Economic strain is not only associated with unpredictable income or lack of it but also the living conditions of the families. In view of this, you will find that failure by most of the families in Nairobi City County to afford quality housing has forced them into single-room dwellings, especially in the informal settlements. Such dwellings normally lack both privacy and personal space which leads to constant friction and enormous stress environment where children annoyance can quickly escalate into violence”. (Focused group discussions with social workers held on 15th November, 2024).

This finding is consistent with previous empirical studies that have identified poverty and socioeconomic deprivation as key drivers of child abuse. Donald et al. (2024), in Ghana, found that poverty was among the most significant factors contributing to child abuse, while Mwadeghu (2015) observed that impoverished living conditions and inadequate provision of children's basic needs increased children's vulnerability to neglect and violence in Kenya. The findings also align with Frustration-Aggression Theory, which posits that individuals experiencing persistent frustration arising from economic hardships are more likely to redirect aggression toward vulnerable family members. In Nairobi's informal settlements, overcrowding, unemployment, and income insecurity appear to create stressful environments that heighten the risk of violence against children.

Drugs and Substance Abuse: The quantitative findings were consistent with those obtained from key informants who emphatically asserted that drugs and substance abuse, especially at the household level were among the predisposing factors of child violence. For instance, a key informant interview with one of the officials from the Children's Welfare Department yielded the following;

“Typically, many parents are drunkard or drug addicts and they do this mainly to evade stress. Sometimes, when some of the parents or caregivers are drunkard, they tend to unleash violence against children. I think the situation is worsened by poor living conditions and lack of reliable source of income which

increases their level of stress. One of the parents once told me that he had to abuse drugs because he was hopeless and did not know what to do...he would even extend such stress to his class six pupil whom he confessed he used to punish without any wrong doing...this tells how children whose parents are addicted to drugs are suffering in silent. I think the government must now move with speed and put an end to the menace of drugs and substance abuse which continues to threaten the survival of children and their general well-being". (Key informant interview with an official from the Children's Welfare Department held on 11th November, 2024).

These findings are consistent with Ikwara *et al.* (2025) whose study found that partner alcohol consumption was also found to be a significant risk factor for sexual violence, with women whose partners consumed alcohol having higher likelihood of experiencing various forms of violence and children were neither isolated. The association between alcohol use and domestic violence against children has been well-documented globally, with research suggesting that alcohol use can reduce inhibitions, increase aggression, and impair judgment, all of which can escalate the likelihood of child violence. In Kenya, alcohol consumption is often linked to community norms around masculinity, where men's alcohol consumption may serve as a proxy for aggressive or dominant behavior, which can translate into an increased risk of violence against their partners and children.

As revealed by one of the discussants, the study found that children residing in informal settlements were vulnerable to drugs and substance abuse because these settlements were characterized by cheap liquor and were easily accessible. In view of this, the discussant reasserted the following:

"Informal settlements in this city is mainly characterized by cheap liquor and alcoholism has become a norm...the men in this place are highly addicted to alcoholism which makes them to lose their senses. Due to the pervasiveness of cheap liquor, some of these men sometimes rape and inflict physical injuries on children which makes this place highly hostile for children...given this situation, you find that most parents cannot even send their children to the shops after 7 pm thinking that they may be harmed". (Focused group discussions with social workers held on 7th December, 2024).

These assertions reflect the findings of Mutai *et al.* (2020) whose study indicated that drugs and substance abuse was common in informal settlements with young people being the most vulnerable persons. The study established that the major cause of vulnerability is low income resulting from poor access to gainful employment. In slum areas with low income opportunities and a loss of trust, high incidence of crime and drug abuse concentrate. Patrolling the informal settlements poses a challenge due to its expansive as well as congested nature. Policing and securing of the informal settlements occurs on the outskirts of Pipeline Estate, which has assumed the lifestyle of the slums. Though 50 percent of the youth in Mukuru kwa Njenga indicated that cannabis is the most common substance, drinking of illicit brews and cheap Keg beer goes on uncontrollably. Consumption of brews is accompanied with smoking of Cigarettes and Bhang, chewing of Khat and Kuber as well as injection of harder drugs such as heroin and cocaine.

The study also found that drugs and substance abuse was not confined to parents and caregivers but also children. Regarding this, focused group discussions with social workers revealed that children who were addicted to drugs and substance abuse were highly likely to be exposed to other forms of violence, especially sexual abuse. Continuous substance abuse by some children was cited to have been altering their consciousness and jeopardized their ability to resolve problems. One discussant expounded these assertions by explain the following:

"Drugs and substance abuse is not confined to some parents and caregivers but also children. The accessibility of abused drugs have become easier than ever before and most of our children are accessing them and abuse them at a profound rate...you find that the continuous abuse of substances like alcohol no only interfere with their memory but also increased them to other forms of violence...for instance, young girls who are drug addicts are constantly exposed to sexual abuse". (Focused group discussions with social workers held on 3rd December, 2024).

Drug and substance abuse emerged as the second most significant determinant, accounting for 19.7% of responses. This finding aligns with studies by Chepkwony (2015) and Mekonnen and Tsega (2024), which established a strong relationship between substance abuse and child victimization. Chepkwony (2015) found that over half of parents and caregivers involved in child abuse consumed alcohol and other substances, while Mekonnen and Tsega (2024) demonstrated that substance abuse increases children's vulnerability to sexual violence. Otieno (2018) established that majority of students' abuse drugs to feel high and was a result of peer pressure. The authors further noted that poor performance is the greatest effect of drug and substance abuse among students. Mukhandia (2014), focusing on the determinants of drugs and substance abuse with reference to Kabuchai sub-County in Bungoma revealed that majority of respondents indicated that most parents are poor role model to their children, also the peer pressure plays a big influence to drug use among the students. Majority of the respondents also agreed that socio-economic factors and cultural practiced determines highly the use of drugs in our secondary school. In light of this, the study went on to recommend that the parents should have good parenting to their children. It also reminds that sensitization should be done adequately especially through posters in that connection strict policies should be designed to guide drug use. It

4.1.3 Power and Control Dynamics

“Power dynamics, especially at the family level is a contributor of child violence...for instance, men often feel they are superior to women simply because they are the breadwinners and majority of women including children depend on them for survival for care and financial support. Sometimes, some men wield this power excessively, especially when punishing the child. Since the mother is powerless, there is nothing she can do to save the child. This perpetuates the culture of child violence”. (Key informant interview with a psychologist held on 13th December, 2024).

Cultural Practices: Most of the key informants of the study cited culture, demonstrating its significant influence on child violence. Key informants extensively referenced the cultural practices that facilitated child abuse with those from other ethnicities not believing such abuse is wrong and violates the fundamental rights of children. Despite the prohibition by the Kenyan legal infrastructure, cultural practices that abuse children continue to thrive coupled with underreporting of the child abuse related cases.

“There is this common phrase that is often used by the perpetrators of child abuse; “spare the rod, spoil the child”. The use of such phrase reflects is a testament of societal acceptance of physical punishment as a necessity and effective form of discipline both at home and in learning institutions”. (Key informant interview with a psychologist held on 13th December, 2024).

“Many communities in Kenya today view sexual abuse as a taboo due to its associated stigmatization. Children who are sexually abused, especially girls are in fear of reporting such a harrowing incidence because they can be punished...you will find that if the issue emerges, the girls who are often victims are stigmatized and discriminated against. Sometimes, their parents send them out of the city to avoid further stigma. It is not only the girls who are stigmatized, but their families, as well” (Focused Group Discussions with social workers held on 19th November, 2024).

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“Most of the households in Nairobi City County are characterized by a strong culture of silence pertaining to family matters. Most of these families continue to perceive violence as a private issue and they strongly discourage reporting it to the outsider...you will also find that victims who report any form of violence meted on them end up being stigmatized or shamed....so they opt to remain silent and believe me this is very bad” (Key informant interview with social workers held on 3rd November, 2024).

The findings align with Wangamati *et al.* (2019) who avers that Kenya is a highly patriarchal society, resulting in women and girls predominately being considered subordinates, whilst men remain the providers. It is suggested this leads to a lack of reporting, often due to the stigma brought upon the victim, the perpetrator, and the family, but more frequently because reporting abuse can lead to the loss of the main ‘breadwinner’, resulting in severe poverty.

Similarly, the findings align with Wangamati *et al.* (2019) who postulate that in patriarchal societies, hierarchy is emphasized and children’s complaints are deemed unreliable when an adult refutes the claim. Such conditions increase the vulnerability of children to child sexual violence (CSA). Their study emphasized the need for parents to be sensitized on how best to evaluate their children’s safety and find safe spaces and non-abusive help. Furthermore, parents should be encouraged to discuss sexuality matters with their children.

Lack of Education and Awareness: The study found that lack of awareness and education contributed to the prevalence of home-based violence against children, especially by both the professionals and communities. The participants expressed lack of awareness in the context of the victim and the perpetrator whom they posited lack knowledge that their cultural practices that hurt children tantamount to criminal offence punishable by the existing laws. The respondents further extended such lack of awareness to the role of the Child protection unit both from a victim perspective and other law enforcement officers who were largely unaware they existed and this made some of them to fail to make referrals of serious cases related to child abuse to other relevant units.

During a focused group discussions with a group of social workers, one social worker stated the following;

“The high prevalence rates of home-based violence can be largely attributed to lack of knowledge both by the perpetrators and the victims. Regarding the perpetrators, they lack proper knowledge on how detrimental child violence is on the general welfare of the child while the victims, mainly children also lack knowledge and they don’t know when they are exposing themselves to this vice...I think the government should mount awareness campaigns and such should target both the perpetrators and the victims”. (Focused group discussions with social workers held on 16th December, 2024).

The findings are consistent with the study conducted by Kambaga and Muriuki (2020) who investigated the determinants of sexual exploitation of young children in the Coastal region with reference to Mombasa North. The study cited lack of education as one of the contributing factors to tourists’ sexual exploitation of children. The study found that at least 15% of children who were directly involved in commercial sex tourist were uneducated, suggesting how lack of education exposes children to various forms of violence. A contention made by Herath and Sharma (2007) cited by Kambaga and Muriuki (2020) assert that most children who have been reported to experience child abuse and exploitation are found to experience acute poverty, low literacy among parents, inadequate education facilities, and non-enforcement of child protection and criminal laws. This shows that the initial cause of child sex exploitation is parental illiteracy rather than the child’s literacy levels. This can be supported by the fact that the interaction between the children and the tourists becomes more likely for children with upper primary and secondary levels of education, that is, between tourists and children who have some basic level of education rather than children who have not gone to school or are in lower primary.

Marital Conflicts: Most study participants cited the chaotic nature rooted in some family environments as one of the major predisposing factors of child violence. Participants argued that the safety of the children depended on the stability of the family. Some posited that the increasing pattern of interpersonal conflicts inside families exposes children to various forms of abuse including physical and emotional abuse. These assertions are reflected by one participant who stated the following;

“Generally speaking, domestic violence within households also contribute to entrenched violence against children...when parents are engaged in a physical confrontation, the child may be found stuck in the confrontation...violent confrontation can also lead to the child sustaining physical injuries, especially when hit by an object or punch during the milieu” (Focused Group Discussions with social workers held on 22nd November, 2024).

A key informant interview with a psychologist yielded the following;

“Child violence is not only confined to sexual, physical or verbal violence but also psychological violence...by this I mean when a child constantly witnesses his/her parents fighting, he or she can suffer from trauma or even stress which may in turn interfere with an emotional well-being...believe me, this is one of the most worst form of child violence and it continues to kill children in silent” (Key informant interview with a psychologists held on 9th November, 2024).

The findings are consistent with a study conducted by Daral *et al.* (2016) in New Delhi, India with reference to semi-urban area. The study examines family characteristics that predispose adolescent girls to increased risk of abuse, mainly physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. Stratified random sampling was done among classes 7th to 12th of government girls' schools of a semi-urban area of Delhi, and a total of 1060 adolescent girls participated. Majority were in mid-adolescence. Approximately 70% study subjects faced at least one form of maltreatment. Physical abuse was faced by 42.6%, sexual abuse by 26.6%, emotional abuse by 37.9% and neglect by 40.1% of study subjects. The most frequent perpetrator of physical and emotional abuse was mother, and of sexual abuse were friends, relatives or neighbors. No or low education of father increased odds of physical and emotional abuse, while odds of physical abuse and neglect were lower if mothers were housewives. Excessive arguments between parents and history of maltreatment in parents increased odds of child maltreatment in study subjects.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the determinants of home-based violence against children in Nairobi City County. It established that violence against children remains a pervasive and multidimensional problem rooted in interconnected socioeconomic, behavioral, cultural, and family-related factors. The findings demonstrate that home-based violence manifests not only through physical abuse such as kicking and punching but also through psychological and emotional abuse, including verbal altercations, constant rebuke, isolation, and denial of basic needs. The prevalence of these forms of violence indicates that many children experience abuse as part of their daily household interactions, often disguised as discipline or parental authority. Therefore, overall, the study concludes that home-based violence against children in Nairobi City County is not merely an individual or family problem but a broader social and developmental challenge driven by structural inequalities, harmful social norms, inadequate parenting skills, substance abuse, and weak preventive support systems. Effective prevention therefore requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach that simultaneously addresses household vulnerabilities, community attitudes, and institutional child protection mechanisms.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the Government of Kenya, Nairobi City County Government, child protection agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners strengthen economic empowerment interventions targeting vulnerable households. This should include livelihood support programs, vocational training, income-generating initiatives, social protection schemes, and targeted cash-transfer programs aimed at reducing economic stress, which emerged as the leading determinant of home-based violence against children. To this end, the government should intensify efforts to combat drug and substance abuse through stricter regulation of illicit alcohol and drugs, particularly in informal settlements. Community-based rehabilitation programs, psychosocial support services, and substance abuse awareness campaigns should be expanded to address addiction among parents, caregivers, and youth. Integrating substance abuse prevention into child protection programs would significantly reduce household violence risks.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, through the Department of Children Services, should strengthen parenting education programs that promote positive parenting practices and non-violent disciplinary approaches. Such programs should equip parents and caregivers with conflict-resolution skills, stress management techniques, child development knowledge, and alternative methods of discipline that respect children's rights and dignity. Similarly, the government and relevant stakeholders should invest in accessible family counseling and mental health services to address psychological distress, family conflicts, and intergenerational trauma. Community counseling centers and school-based psychosocial support programs should be strengthened to provide timely interventions for both caregivers and children.

The study further recommends for the implementation of a comprehensive public awareness to challenge harmful cultural beliefs and practices that normalize violence against children. Religious leaders, community elders, teachers, and local administrators should be actively engaged in promoting child rights, reporting of abuse, and positive social norms that discourage corporal punishment and other forms of violence. Moreover, the Department of Children Services, law enforcement agencies, and local administration should strengthen child protection reporting mechanisms and improve enforcement of child protection laws. Child-friendly reporting channels, confidential complaint systems, and community surveillance structures should be established to encourage reporting while protecting victims from stigma, retaliation, and secondary victimization.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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