



**International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)**

A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)

Volume-IV, Issue-VI, May 2018, Page No. 21-29

Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

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## **Gender-Based Domestic Violence against African Men:**

### **A Case of the Gusii of Kenya**

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#### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to assess the status of gender-based domestic violence in Kenya with specific reference to Gusii men by their spouses and relatives. The study sought to interrogate the causes, patterns and impacts of gender-based domestic violence against men. A stratified random and purposive sample of 80 men were identified and interrogated on their exposure to gender based domestic violence. Additionally, a sample of 100 female respondents were interviewed and interrogated on reasons and results of women motivated and perpetuated gender based domestic violence against their male counterparts. The study integrated qualitative and quantitative data analysis of the data. The study established that gender based violence against men is real. Men are exposed to various forms of violence from their family members and mainly from their spouses. The forms of violence vary however verbal abuse and stalking are more prevalent. Gender-based violence against men occur home on weekly basis during the evenings. The study established that spouses are the leading perpetrators of gender based violence motivated by economic and financial factors. The study established that male victims and survivors of domestic gender based violence choose to remain silent. The study established that gender-based violence against men has adverse effects to the individual, family and society.*

***Key Words: Gender, Gusii, violence, me***

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**DOI: 10.29032/ijhsss.v4.i6.2018.21-29**

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**1.0 Introduction:** Studies show that gender-based domestic violence is a persistent phenomenon globally. It cuts across geographical regions, races, ethnicities, classes, religions and gender orientations and other intersections. Gender based violence is a pervasive inhuman practice, public health concern and a costly affair resulting from unequal power relations between men and women. Globally, baseline surveys and studies on domestic gender-based violence establish that women and young girls form the majority of

victims while men and boys experience it to a lesser extent (Gender Violence Recovery Centre, Wednesday, and April, 2018). Men have been portrayed in these studies as the main perpetrators of gender-based domestic violence. Despite the fact that men form the other significant percentage of victims and survivors of gender-based domestic violence, acts of domestic gender-based violence against men has been on the increase in the recent past (National Gender and Equality Commission, 2017). Yet, minimal focus has been given to domestic gender-based violence against men and boys.

Existing, international, regional and national level legal frameworks have been ratified and domesticated to address all forms of violence against women and girls. Gender based violence has historically been addressed from women and girls' standpoint. Gender based violence against men and boys has been ignored or minimally explored due to cultural stereotyping that masculine violence. Recent surveys at the regional levels have established that gender-based domestic violence against men is on the increase. However, this reports have majorly highlighted gender based domestic violence against men in conflict situations or in refugee camps. Little is known about gender based violence against men at the household level despite the magnitude of the problem.

A recent survey by the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), found that 39% of women and girls aged 15 years and above have experienced domestic violence in Kenya. The study revealed that 85.4 % survivors of gender based violence were women and 69.7 % were male survivors. Comparatively, the study revealed that the percentage of male victims of gender based violence that sought for medical treatment was low to that of women. This survey raised a number of critical questions on the undocumented cases of gender-based domestic violence against Kenyan men in relation to causes, forms and impacts. Studies on gender based violence in Kisii have paid major attention to women while men have been ignored (Nyabuto, 2007).

A study by Silberschmidt, (1999) on gender antagonisms among the Gusii men and women, revealed that both the Gusii men and women are frustrated by each other. However, women's frustrations are different and increasing whereas their husbands socio-economic conditions is becoming worrisome. This study laid the foundation for understanding the cultural legitimacy of wife beating among the Kisii. The study further established that the Gusii man was quickly losing his main role as household head and provider whereas the woman's identity and socio-economic position was getting enhanced. The study did not adequately interrogate the impact of declining masculinity and women's rising socio-economic status on gender antagonism among the Gusii.

The significance of this study is to uncover the level of gender based violence against men by interrogating the root causes and impacts from and a historical point of view. The study is aimed at informing various stake holder on the other face of gender based domestic violence that needs attention in funding and policy consideration.

**2.0 Research methodology:** The findings reported here were conducted among the Kenyan Gusii men and women between January and April 2018. A total of 180 respondents

were sampled through stratified purposive sampling techniques. The sample size was drawn from the general public, teachers, medical officers, religious leaders and security agents. The sample was drawn from village and urban areas of Kisii County. The selection criteria for the sample for Gusii men and women was being a resident of Kisii county for more than 18 years, born in Kisii, speak *Ekegusii* language and a being registered voter in any of the nine constituencies of Kisii county.

Primary data was obtained through participative methodologies that included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Questionnaires with open and closed questions were used to generate responses on socio-economic and political background of the respondents, forms of violence, rate of exposure, causes of violence and the impacts of gender-based domestic violence against Gusii men. Secondary data was obtained from published and unpublished documents. Both primary data and secondary data were compared, triangulated, analysed qualitatively and quantitatively.

### 3.0 Research results

#### 3.1 Characteristics of the respondents

**Table 1: Age distribution of the respondents**

Age range	Frequency	Percentage
18-26	22	12.2%
27-35	58	32.2%
36-44	54	30%
45-52	30	16.7%
53-61	16	8.9%
Total	180	100%

Most of the respondents were in their productive ages accounting for 78.9%. The elderly, young men and women formed a tiny minority of 21.1%. This reflects the demographic reality of the county population in which a critical section of the population is in their youthful and productive years.

**Table 2: Marital status of the respondents**

Marital Status	Men		Women		Total
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	%
Single	10	5.6%	18	10%	15.6%
Married	48	26.7%	60	33.3%	60%
Divorced	4	2.2%	3	1.7%	3.9%
Separated	12	6.7%	5	2.8%	9.5%
Widow/Widower	6	3.3%	14	7.8%	11.1%
Total	80	44.5%	100	55.6%	100%

As illustrated in table 2, most of the respondents were married. Respondents who were single accounted for 15.6%, widows/widowers accounted for 11.1%, separated accounted for 9.5% while divorcees were the least with 3.9%. Higher rates of male as divorcees or

separated cases than women is attributed to the availability of more options to men compared to women in problematic unions. It also implies that women stay in abusive marriages for longer periods than men.

**Table 3: Respondents' sources of income**

Main source of income	Men		Women		Total %
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Salary	45	25%	30	16.7%	41.7
Family Business	5	2.7%	6	3.3%	6.1
Own Business	12	6.7%	56	31.1%	37.7
Husband/wife	18	10%	8	4.4%	14.4
Total	80	44.4%	100	100%	100

Majority of the respondents were dependent mainly on salary as the main source of income. However, male respondents' were more depended on income from salary for sustenance than women. The findings also established that own business ventures were the main source of income to the majority of the female respondents (31.1%) compared to male's 6.7%. The study showed that both men and women dependence on family business was nearly the same. However, it was established majority of men were more depended on their wives source of income at 10% to women's 4.4%.

### 3.2 Patterns of gender based violence against Gusii men

**Table 4: Distribution of forms of gender-based violence against Gusii men**

Form of violence	Extent				Total %
	Very Large	Large	Moderate	Least	
Physical	4(2.2%)	20(11.1%)	120(66.7%)	36(20%)	100%
Psychological	15(8.3%)	37(20.6%)	84(46.7%)	44(24.4%)	100%
Verbal	56(31.1%)	78(43.3%)	26(14.4%)	20(11.1%)	100%
Threats	14(7.8%)	55(30.6%)	68(37.8%)	43(23.9%)	100%
Rape/wife inheritance	6(3.3%)	26(14.4%)	42(23.3%)	106(58.9%)	100%
Denial of sex	32(17.8%)	43(23.9%)	72(40%)	33(18.3%)	100%
Denial of meals	36(20%)	40(22.2%)	32(17.8%)	72(40%)	100%
Stacking	20(11.1%)	72(40%)	36(20%)	52(28.9%)	100%

The responded observed that men are subjected to various forms of gender based violence. The leading forms of domestic violence against men are verbal abuse (74.4%), stalking (51.1%) and denial of meals (44.2%) Other significant forms of violence against Gusii men were denial of sex (40.7%) and issuance of threats (38.4%). As illustrated in table 4, men victims of gender based violence experience rape or wife inheritance and physical violence at of violence at lower rates.

**Table 5: Distribution of violence locations among the Gusii people**

Violence locale	Frequency	Percentage
Home based	98	54.4%
Place of work	38	21.1%
Public spaces	16	8.9%
When on transit	28	15.6%
Total	180	100%

From table 5, it was established that most forms of violence occur at home (54.4%) and in work places (21.1%). The respondents observed that gender-based violence against men when on transit was higher than the violence they experienced while in public spaces. Low levels of violence against men in public spaces was attributed to the Gusii patriarchal ideology which limits women verbal space in public spaces.

**Table 6: Recurrence of gender based violence against men**

Mode of violence	Extent				Total %
	Very large	Large	Moderate	Least	
Morning	25(13.9)	32(17.8%)	39(21.7%)	84(46.7%)	100%
Daytime	12(6.7%)	26(14.4%)	34(18.9%)	108(60%)	100%
Evening	27(15%)	68(37.8%)	54(30%)	31(17.2%)	100%
Daily	8(4.4%)	56(31.1%)	23(12.8%)	93(51.7%)	100%
Weekly	16(8.9%)	87(48.3%)	48(26.7%)	29(16.1%)	100%
Monthly	37(20.6%)	120(66.7%)	18(10%)	5(2.8%)	100%
Yearly	48(26.7%)	129(71.7%)	2(1.1%)	1(0.6%)	100%

The respondents observed that gender-based violence against men was more severe during the evenings (53.3%) and during the morning sessions (30.7%). Men are likely to experience low levels of gender based violence during the day time (21.1%). The study established that although a significant population of men experience gender based violence on daily basis (35.5%), the probability of gender based violence occurrence increases with time. The respondents established that on monthly basis a significant section of men experience some form of violence. Of the 80 male respondents 81.3% observed that they experience some form of violence on a weekly basis.

### 3.3 Causes of gender-based domestic violence against Gusii men

**Table 7: Causes of gender-based domestic violence against Gusii men**

Cause of violence	Extent				Total %
	Very large	Large	Moderate	Minimal	
Stress	9(5%)	88(48.9%)	58(32.2%)	25(13.9%)	100%
Sexual reasons	32(17.8%)	90(50%)	20(11.1%)	38(21.1%)	100%
Finances	24(13.3%)	102(56.7%)	17(9.4%)	37(20.6%)	100%
Personal hygiene	26(14.4%)	56(31.1%)	19(10.6%)	79(43.9%)	100%
Drug abuse	33(18.3%)	87(48.3%)	6(3.3%)	54(30%)	100%

Insecurity	7(3.9%)	28(15.6%)	13(7.2%)	132(73.3%)	100%
Polygamy	2(1.1%)	65(36.1%)	34(18.9%)	79(43.9%)	100%
Socialization	5(2.8%)	16(8.9%)	23(12.8%)	134(74.4%)	100%
Age	8(4.4%)	24(13.3%)	46(25.6%)	102(56.7%)	100%
Health status	2(1.1%)	36(20%)	60(33.3%)	82(45.6)	100%
Unfaithfulness	16(8.9%)	78(43.3%)	53(29.4%)	33(18.3%)	100%
Economic reasons	12(6.7%)	118(65.6%)	36(20%)	14(7.8%)	100%
Change in gender roles	14(7.8%)	65(36.1%)	80(44.4%)	21(11.7%)	100%

Most of the responded identified economic reasons (72.3%), finances (70%), and sexual issues (67.8%) as the leading causes of gender-based domestic violence against Gusii men. Other significant causes of gender based violence against men were drug abuse (66.6%), stress (58.4%, unfaithfulness (52.2%) and personal hygiene (45.4%). The respondents observed that the rising status of women has led to increasing female headed households. This has resulted in changing gender roles at the household level that have created conflicts that have been severe to the men folk. The study also established that men in polygamous unions are likely to suffer from gender based domestic violence as compared to those married to one woman each. The respondents noted that men suffer some forms of violence due to their health status. Men suffering from diseases such as HIV/AIDS particularly are ignored and blamed for the HIV/AIDS status of their spouses even they are not to blame. Violence against men in relation to age and women's socialization is the least contributor of gender-based domestic violence.

**Table 8: Perpetrators of gender- based domestic violence against Gusii men**

Perpetrator	Extent				
	Very large	Large	Moderate	Least	%
Father	8(4.4%)	19(10.6%)	58(32.2%)	95(52.8%)	100%
Mother	21(11.7%)	32(17.8%)	112(62.2%)	15(8.3%)	100%
Father in-law	1(0.6%)	3(1.7%)	15(8.3%)	161(89.4%)	100%
Mother in-law	3(1.7%)	11(6.1%)	25(13.9%)	141(78.3%)	100%
Brother	18(10%)	24(13.3%)	40(22.2%)	98(54.4%)	100%
Wife	36(20%)	86(47.8%)	30(16.7%)	28(15.6%)	100%
Sister	2(1.1%)	6(3.3%)	14(7.8%)	158(87.8%)	100%
Concubines	3(1.7%)	4(2.2%)	12(6.7%)	161(89.4%)	100%
Brother in-laws	2(1.1%)	4(2.2%)	26(14.4%)	148(82.2%)	100%
Sister in-laws	3(1.7%)	2(1.1%)	5(2.8%)	170(94.4%)	100%
Son	6(3.3%)	18(10%)	27(15%)	129(71.7%)	100%
Daughter	2(1.1%)	6(3.3%)	9(5%)	163(90.6%)	100%

The 65% of the male respondents observed that they had experienced some form of violence from their wives on weekly basis. The main perpetrators of gender based violence

against men were their spouses (67.8%), their mothers (29.5%), brothers (23.3%) and fathers (14.4%). The study established that there were multiple perpetrators of gender based domestic violence against men. The study revealed that in-laws and daughters are the least perpetrators of gender based domestic violence against men. Additionally the respondents cited concubines, as the others source of domestic violence against accounting for 3.9%.

### 3.4 Impacts of gender- based domestic violence

**Table 9: Distribution of immediate reactions to violence**

Response to violence	Frequency	Total %
Self defence	35	19.4%
Violence	24	13.3%
Silence	88	48.9%
Withdrawal	15	8.3%
Crying	6	3.3%
Reporting abuse	4	2.2%
Feelings of hatred	8	4.4%
Total	180	100%

On the immediate reactions to gender-based domestic violence against men, it was established that male victims largely remain silence (48.9%), use self defence mechanisms (19.4%) and others resort to violence (13.3%). The respondents observed that male victims of gender-based domestic violence do not report abuse against them despite perpetrators being well known to them. This silence and underreporting of gender based violence against men shows that the Gusii culture does not expect the male to be victims of gender based violence. The respondents observed that male victims are mainly silent due to stigmatization that will result after reporting cases of violence against them when the main sources are their spouses.

**Table 10: Sources of help to male victims of gender-based violence**

Source of Help	Frequency	Percentage
Family members	50	27.8%
Police/chiefs	6	3.3%
Religion leaders/prayers	17	9.4%
Keep to self	107	59.4%
total	180	100%

The respondents observed that if the male victims of gender based violence where ether persuaded or sought help the majority (59.4%) would still keep to self, 27% alert family members, 9.4% seek intervention of religious leaders or pray about the issue. The study reveals that male victims of gender based violence trust religious leaders and spiritual intervention as compared to the local administrators. The study established that male victims of gender based violence trust their family members and church members or leaders than local administrators or the police. The respondents observed that the local

administrators and police ignore cases of gender based violence against men or handle them casually.

**Table 11: Impacts of gender based violence on victims**

Main impacts of gender based violence	Frequency	Percentage
homicide	9	5%
Adultery	32	17.8%
Polygamy	13	7.2%
Depression	43	23.9%
Physical injury	39	21.7%
Separation	28	15.6%
Divorce	16	8.9%
Total	180	100%

Majority of the respondents observed that gender based violence against men mainly led to depression (23.9%), increased cases of physical injuries(21.7%) and adultery(17.8%). Other severe results of gender based domestic violence against the men are separation (15.6%) and divorce (8.9%). The study established that gender based violence against the male is likely to result in them entering into polygamous unions (7.2%).

**4. Conclusions and implications:** The study established that marital status had a direct relationship with gender-based violence against the Gusii men. The study established that married men are mainly exposed to various forms of violence. The study revealed that the main perpetrators of gender-based domestic violence against men are spouses and their mothers. The study established that in-laws play the least role as perpetrators of gender-based domestic violence against men. The study established that forms of gender based violence against the Gusii men are verbal and stalking. The study established that majority of Gusii men encounter violence at home on weekly basis and mostly during evening hours.

The study established that the main causes of gender based domestic violence against the Gusii men are premised on economic, financial and sexual factors. The study established that male victims of gender-based domestic violence immediate reactions are maintaining silence, self-defence or resorting to violence. The study established that majority of the male victims of gender based violence keep to self and do not seek for help. In cases where the male victims seek help it is mainly from the family members or religious guidance. Insignificant number of male victims of gender-based domestic violence consider to file reports of abuse against them to the local administrators or police. Gender based domestic violence against men results in depression and in severe homicide at individual level. To the family it leads to separation, divorce, extra marital liaisons and new polygamous unions. Generally gender based violence against men is a very expensive affair to the individual and family.



The study recommends that both the national government and county governments in Kenya need to pay attention to raising cases of gender based violence of all forms including that facing men. The national and county government need to:

- declare gender based violence against men as public health problem;
- undertake baseline surveys of gender-based domestic violence against at county or ethnic level with the aim of understanding their forms, manifestations and causes;
- assess whether existing strategies and mitigation strategies to combat gender based violence address the whole gender framework including men; and,
- initiate awareness programs that advocate for elimination of all forms of violence against both men and women.

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