

Relationship Between Cultural Practices and Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Rural Settings in Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract: Domestic violence cases remain prevalent despite numerous mechanisms put in place to curb the crime in rural settings in Bungoma County in Kenya. The various facets of reported cases of domestic violence included sexual abuse, physical assault, psychological torture, economic negligence and verbal abuse among others that are meted out against family members or intimate partners mostly affecting women and children. Domestic violence is classified among silent crimes because most people in society do not report or talk about them meaning that majority of the victims suffer in silence. To supplement efforts by the Government, interest groups and Non-Governmental Organizations in mitigating domestic violence crimes in Kenya, this study sought to determine the relationship between cultural factors and prevalence of domestic violence in rural settings in Bungoma County in Kenya. The study employed a correlational research design on a population of 358,942 comprising of household heads, the police and chiefs. Stratified, proportionate and purposive sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 388 respondents. An interview guide and a scale in form of a questionnaire measuring the prevalence of domestic violence crimes and that of related cultural factors was used to collect the required data. A pilot study was conducted in Nzoia County to determine the reliability of the research instruments. The reliability was estimated using Cronbach Alpha coefficient and a reliability coefficient of 0.74 was obtained. Qualitative data were analysed by use of MAXQDA while quantitative data using SPSS version 29. Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between cultural factors and prevalence of domestic violence in rural settings in Bungoma County in Kenya. The findings indicated that there was a positive relationship between the cultural factors and prevalence of domestic violence in rural settings in Bungoma County in Kenya. It was recommended that the criminal justice system, interest groups, law enforcers and household members to respectively involve the society through community based initiatives which aim at eradicating the negative gender norms that promote high prevalence of domestic violence, create awareness campaigns against negative cultural stereotypes that discourage the culture of reporting domestic violence cases and embrace gender equity by culturally promoting power balance within the households to reduce the high prevalence of domestic violence in the society.

Keywords: Cultural Factors, Domestic Violence, Households, Prevalence, Rural Settings.

1. Introduction

Domestic violence is prevalent among people from different backgrounds and geographical boundaries as it has been documented as a global concern mostly affecting women and children (Lloyd, 2018). Approximately 30 percent of women globally have encountered violence from their intimate partners (Lanchimba *et al.*, 2023) while over 25 percent of women aged between 15 years and 49 years of age have faced domestic violence at least once in a lives (WHO, 2021). Aspects of domestic violence span from physical assault, sexual abuse, verbal insults, emotional manipulation, silent treatments to economic negligence among others within the context of marriage, cohabitation, or any form of family setup. Pan (2006) noted that refugee families were at risk of domestic violence due cultural differences and norms. For instance, in the United States, differences between cultural values of a family's native country seem to cause a great deal of conflict especially for women and young girls who are compelled to shift family roles. Among the cultural issues that have a profound impact on the rural domestic violence is conformity to traditional roles of gender and patriarchal practices (Memiah *et al.*, 2018). In most rural settings in Africa, there has been a tradition of male supremacy and female submission within intimate relationships (Bates *et al.*, 2023). Men are socialised to assert authority and control over female partners, while women are expected to take up the domestic responsibilities in submission to the husband and the in-laws. Such imbalanced power relationships can create a favourable environment for domestic violence because an abuser who is more empowered may assume the right to control the household members physically, emotionally and economically.

In many rural settings, arranged marriages, bride price payments, and polygamous relations occur which affect the household dynamics and the relations between family members (Lanchimba *et al.*, 2023). Arranged marriages or polygamous unions can lead to limited agency and autonomy for women, hence making them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitations

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by spouse or in-laws (Bates *et al.*, 2023). There exists social discrimination towards divorce and separation that prevents people from seeking help or leaving abusive relationships because they fear being criticized or being outcast by the community (Memiah *et al.*, 2018). The social pressure to maintain marriage and family honour could force victims of domestic violence to remain in abusive relationships because they are scared of bringing disrepute or disgrace to the family. In some communities, spousal violence might be tacitly accepted as a way of supervising discipline or enforcing obedience within the family unit (Bates *et al.*, 2023). Cultural views that underplay domestic violence as only a minor problem or blame the victims for provoking abuse contribute to create cycles of abuse and hence silence the victims.

Domestic violence being a cultural factor that overlaps with social, economic, and political dynamics is well experienced in the Kenyan rural communities (Winter *et al.*, 2020). The eradication of the root causes of domestic violence requires a multifaceted approach which includes the challenging of the culturally engrained norms and the acceptance of gender equality as well as the fostering of the source seeking help and support (Memiah *et al.*, 2018). Through the collective effort of communities, legislators, and local groups, such changes could be instigated that emphasizes the protection of individuals' rights and safety, consequently lowering the rates of domestic violence in rural Kenya. Lanchimba *et al.* (2023) and Bates *et al.* (2023) put it that bad culture promotes high prevalence of domestic violence in rural setting. Notably, these cultures which are so dear to people of a specific origin can be seen as outdated by someone who is not familiar with the culture. Cultural aspects of domestic violence in rural Kenya can pose serious challenges to its survivors who are often overwhelmed, and cannot seek help or get out of abusive marriages as it undermines their confidence. Stigma against divorce or separation could prevent survivors to access support services or go to the courts for legal recourse against attackers (Winter *et al.*, 2020). On account of this, cultural practices that emphasise the family unit and solidarity could inhibit people from exposing domestic violence or getting help from external sources (Bates *et al.*, 2023). Meanwhile survivors of domestic violence remain quiet, cut off from the community and without the assistance or support required to escape from abusive relationships. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the relationship between cultural practises and prevalence of domestic violence in rural settings of Bungoma County in Kenya.

2. Objective of the study

To assess the relationship between cultural factors and the prevalence of domestic violence in rural settings in Bungoma County in Kenya.

3. Research Hypothesis

The study hypothesised that there was no statistically significant relationship between cultural factors and the prevalence of domestic violence cases in rural settings in

Bungoma County in Kenya.

4. Methodology

The study was carried out in Bungoma County, located in Western Kenya. A correlational research design was adopted to examine the relationship between cultural practices and prevalence domestic violence. The population of the study was 358,942 comprising of 358,796 households, 92 chiefs and 54 police officers. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 388 respondents. Data were collected via questionnaires and interview guide. A pilot study was conducted in Trans-Nzoia County in order to validate and check on the reliability of the research tools. A reliability coefficient of 0.74 was obtained through Cronbach Alpha coefficient method. Analysis of data was enabled through correlation analysis, categorical regression analysis and descriptive statistics. The results were represented in figures and tabular form.

5. Results and Discussions

The following is how the results of the study were presented and discussed.

A. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The study engaged 384 household heads who responded to the questionnaires as well as two chiefs and two police officers who were subjected to the interview guide. The age distribution of the household heads indicated 41-50 years 30.7%, 31-40 years 30.5%, 50 and above years 21.4% while 18-30 years 17.4%. The household heads who had attained mid-level college were 20.1%, those with no formal schooling were 14.2%, those with primary education were 24.6%, secondary education were 27.8% while university education were 13.4%. regarding the gender of the respondents, the female household heads were 61.5% while the males were 38.5%. This indicates that more households were headed by females. The most household heads who participated in the study were married (39.0%), those that were divorced represented 8%, the separated were 17.9% and the singles were 23.3% while those who did not affiliate with any of the marital status indicated were 11.8%. The employment status for the household heads were categorised as casual worker 147 (39.2%), employed (13.9%), self-employed (31.6%) and unemployed (15.2%). The study also regarded the monthly income of households. Households earning below 10,000 Kenyan shillings per month were 30.5%, 10,001-15,000 were 18.4%, 15,001-20,000 were 20.9% and above 20,000 were 30.2%. The chiefs were above the age of 50 years, one was female and the other one was male, both had midlevel college as the highest level of education, were married and affiliated to the Christian religion. The two police officers were aged between 41 and 50 years, one had attained midlevel college education and the other one had a university bachelor's degree, one affiliated to Christianity while the other one was a Muslim and they were both married.

Table 1
Correlation analysis between cultural practices and prevalence of domestic violence

		Prevalence of Domestic violence		Cultural factors
Spearman's rho	Prevalence of Domestic violence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.776*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.015
		N	374	374
	Cultural factors	Correlation Coefficient	.776*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	.
		N	374	374

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2
Categorical regression model of cultural practices on prevalence of domestic violence

	Standardized Coefficients				
	Beta	Std. Error	df	F	p-value
I consider marriage a culturally sacred institution.	0.007	0.111	1	0.004	0.947
I strictly adhere to the cultural definition of a family	-0.121	0.109	3	1.239	0.295
I expect men to be the primary bread winners of their families	0.179	0.120	2	0.431	0.013
Women are expected to prioritize family and household duties	-0.108	0.088	1	1.493	0.223
Arranged marriages practices exist in the society.	-0.058	0.097	2	0.357	0.700
Men should forcefully exert their authority as the head of the family	0.246	0.088	1	0.266	0.026

Dependent Variable: Prevalence of domestic violence

B. Relationship Between Cultural Practices and Prevalence of Domestic Violence

The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between cultural practices and prevalence of domestic violence. The null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant relationship between cultural factors and the prevalence of domestic violence cases in rural settings in Bungoma County in Kenya was tested at a significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient, categorical regression model and descriptive statistics were conducted.

The results of correlation analysis between Cultural Practices and Prevalence of Domestic Violence were indicated in Table 1.

Information in Table 1 indicates a correlation coefficient of 0.776 between cultural factors and prevalence of domestic violence in Bungoma County in Kenya and a p-value of 0.015. Since the p-value was less than the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$, then the relationship between cultural practices and prevalence of domestic violence was significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected implying that there was a statistically significant relationship between cultural practices and prevalence of domestic violence in Bungoma County in Kenya. The correlation coefficient value was positive and approaching towards one denoting that there was a strong positive correlation between cultural practices and prevalence of domestic violence. This implies that an increase in cultural practices leads to an increase in prevalence of domestic violence while a decrease in cultural practices leads to a decrease in the prevalence of domestic violence. This finding is in agreement with studies by Memiah *et al.*, (2018) and Vargas (2023) which noted that strong ties with the negative cultural norms can greatly promote the high prevalence of domestic violence in the society.

The categorical regression model of cultural practices against prevalence of domestic violence was conducted and the findings indicated in Table 2.

Based on information in Table 2, the positive Beta values suggested that the cultural practices were associated with higher prevalence of domestic violence while negative Beta values

suggest that cultural practices are associated with lower prevalence of domestic violence. In addition, the p-values that were less than the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$ indicated a statistically significant association of the cultural practices to the prevalence of domestic violence. Therefore, based on information in table two, the cultural practices that had positive Beta values as well as P-value < 0.05 were significantly more likely to be associated with higher prevalence of domestic violence. This means that the cultural practices "I expect men to be the primary bread winners of their families" with Beta = 0.179 and p-value = 0.013 as well as "Men should forcefully exert their authority as the head of the family" with Beta = 0.246 and p-value = 0.026 significantly increased the likelihood of prevalence of domestic violence in Bungoma County in Kenya. These results were consistent with the research findings by Memiah *et al.*, (2018); Bates *et al.*, (2023) and Vargas *et al.*, (2023) which reported that cultural factors were some of the significant contributors of high prevalence of domestic violence in the rural settings. Some biased cultural factors promote biased gender roles and consequently toxic masculinity which breeds a favourable environment for domestic violence in the rural settings. This points to the need for interventions that challenge harmful cultural norms and promote gender equality. By addressing these beliefs and encouraging more equitable and respectful family dynamics, efforts to reduce domestic violence can be more effective and sustainable.

The cultural practices regarding marriage as a sacred institution, adherence to cultural family definitions, expectations of women's household duties and the existence of arranged marriages did not show statistically significant association with prevalence of domestic violence in Bungoma County in Kenya as indicated in Table 2. This is because the cultural practices had positive Beta values as well as p-values that were greater than the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. This suggests that these specific cultural practices did not play a decisive role in influencing the occurrence of domestic violence within the studied context. While these beliefs are culturally significant, they do not appear to directly impact the prevalence of domestic violence. The results imply that other factors, possibly related to power dynamics and traditional gender roles,

may be more influential in driving domestic violence. Efforts to address domestic violence should focus on those factors that have a more direct and significant impact on its prevalence. The finding of the study is in agreement with studies by Memiah *et al.*, (2018) and Vargas (2023) who found out that cultural factors contribute greatly to the occurrence of domestic violence. also, the study finding is in agreement with the research done by Bates *et al.*, (2023) who found that cultural norms that deem violence as acceptable or appropriate can also lead to the spread of domestic violence in rural Kenya.

The interview guides generated qualitative data from chiefs and police officers which was used to triangulate information generated for the household heads. The chiefs and police officers reported that men should not be given the ultimate authority over everyone else within the households. Therefore, it was deduced that majority of the women in the rural settings lacked the necessary support against negative cultural stereotypes that propagated dependence on men instead of self-reliance. This finding was consistent with Walker-Descartes *et al.*, (2021) who reported that women and the vulnerable in the society needed support against the biased cultural norms in order to be able to realize self-reliance and reduce dependence on men. Such support systems served to reduce prevalence of domestic violence in the society by clarifying the dangers of continuing to hold onto the negative cultural practises. This was supported by the sentiments of Police 1 who purported that “*Culture gives men the power to be the ultimate heads of their families. This gives most of them the power to domestically abuse wives and children without question. Such negative practises should be shunned to reduce the high cases of domestic violence in the society.*” The chiefs and police officers were on the opinion that the high prevalence of domestic violence in the rural areas in Bungoma County was deeply rooted in cultural practices that promoted male masculinity. According to Mutahi (2017), Luhya community reported the highest prevalence of domestic violence in Kenya mainly attributed to by the cultural practises of the community. Chief 1 explained “*men are culturally expected to be toxic and this makes them to be at a position of physically abusing the rest of the family members like children and wives.*” This is an opinion that was generally alluded to by all the interviewed respondents. There was a general feeling that culture propagated a toxic environment for domestic violence through negative cultural aspects the society had clung on to for centuries. Undoubtedly, this related to the high prevalence of domestic violence in rural areas. This finding is in line with the study by Memiah *et al.*, (2018); Pat (2006) and Bates *et al.*, (2023) who all found that the major stamping block to the success towards management of the high domestic violence in rural areas is because highly rooted some negative cultural practises promote toxic

masculinity in the society. Men are culturally made powerful to dominate females in the households.

6. Recommendations

- Policy makers in the criminal justice system may need to ensure enactment of laws and policies which are culture sensitive while also upholding the protection of rights of the vulnerable people against domestic violence in the society.
- Interest groups may consider creating culturally sensitive educational campaigns aimed at challenging and changing harmful cultural norms and practices that perpetuate domestic violence in the society.
- The law enforcement agencies may be required to create awareness about negative cultural stereotypes that discourage the culture of reporting domestic violence cases.
- Household members could embrace gender equity by culturally promoting power balance within the family units in order to reduce the high prevalence of domestic violence in the society.
- Community policing should effectively be rolled out in order to easily identify and bring to justice the perpetrators of domestic violence within households.

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