



Original Research

CHILD DEFILEMENT IN KAKAMEGA COUNTY, KENYA AND RELATED FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

In Kakamega County, child defilement is a public health and social problem, affecting many children. The prevalence of child defilement case in the County is significantly high. Research on the phenomenon of child defilement appears to be underdeveloped; but still ongoing. The trigger factors on the child defilement phenomenon seem to be linked on well known social issues. It is against this backdrop that the present study sought to establish the extent to which child defilement is associated with the prevailing socio-cultural and economic factors, substance abuse and family history. A descriptive survey design was employed to purposively pick and randomly select a sampling frame of 86 respondents comprising of 44 Gender Police Officers, 27 Social Workers, 9 Children Officers and 6 Probation Officers. Of the sampled respondents, seventy (70) of them were interviewed using a semi- structured questionnaire. Despite this scarcity of studies, this study empirically allowed the researcher to confirm that poor rural family attributes including socio-cultural factors related to past abuse (parental personal difficulties, past history, poor family structure and functioning as well as the characteristics of the environment that children grew from) could be associated to an increased risk for their child defilement. The study established that child defilement is a significant problem that exposes children to early pregnancies and marriages, HIV/AIDS and psychological trauma. Equally, majority of the defilements were perpetrated by persons known to the victims, namely family members and /or neighbours. Consequently, high levels of poverty, drug and alcohol abuse and ignorance of the illegality of the vices appeared to be key challenges in the fight against child defilement. It was therefore, concluded that child defilement can be fought more effectively by strengthening the existing, counselling, legal, child protection, rescue and gender recovery services.

Keywords: Child defilement, Sexual abuse, Socio-cultural, risk factors,

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INTRODUCTION

Child defilement is any type of sexual activity or contact, including rape that occurs on a child. Sexual abuse towards children can include non-contact activities such as indecent exposure (when children show you their private parts) after being coerced or forced by the offender such as asking them to look at sexual images and videos. In Kakamega County, child defilement is both a significant public health and social problem affecting hundreds of thousands of children (Omari, 2021; Oduma, 2015). Child defilement stands out as a critical social phenomenon as well as a human rights violation affecting millions of children worldwide. Globally, it is estimated that more than 230 million minors are defiled annually (Muindi, 2010). The problem is perceived to be more prevalent in developing countries where cultural practices such as child marriages are widespread and where popular misconceptions about having sexual intercourse with minors, as it is in the case with majority of Southern Africa countries, continue to encourage child defilement as a form of healing for HIV/AIDS (Oduma, 2015).

During the sexual act, the adult (perpetrator) uses the child without caring about the social and physical harm/abuse inflicted. By virtue of their relatively weak position, children are easily manipulated, thus resulting in defilement (Hewitt, 1998). Some of them are defiled repeatedly and in secrecy for many days, weeks or even years. The perpetrators therefore include parents, older siblings, close relatives or people considered to be family friends (Jangazya, 2013). However, available studies indicate that child defilement is mainly situational as caused by adverse circumstances which may force some children to engage in prostitution as a survival tactic (Hewitt, 1998; Peters & Olowa, 2010).

Child defilement is also a major contributor to mental health. Statistics indicate that about 20 percent of defiled children become mentally disordered. Defilement is also the leading cause of unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and attendant complications (WHO, 2011). It may also result in transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS (Jangazya, 2013). Broadly, child defilement is a major threat to the achievement of the sustainable development goals on the African continent. Equally, defilement has led to harmful effects; become increasingly topical issues among policy makers, practitioners and academicians.

In Kenya, there are policy provisions through the Children's Act (2001) that emphasize a shift towards promotion of children safety, especially for those in danger of child defilement. On the other hand, the Sexual Offences Act (2006) is the primary laws that deal with sexual offences in the country, since it has provisions that expressly defend the rights of the child regardless of their social status and the conditions they may be living in (FIDA, Kenya, 2006). However, despite efforts by various stakeholders namely communities, the police, judiciary, NGOs and other agencies responsible for child protection to enhance, sensitize and lobby the state for stiffer penalties, the child defilement menace still ranks high in Kenya police statistics.

Defilement does not only impact on the victim negatively but also presents mental and emotional effects on the concerned or affected families and neighbours (WHO, 2011). However, this problem has not been given the priority it deserves since the number of reported child

defilement cases in the country continues to rise annually at an alarming rate. Police crime statistics also shows that at least 200 cases of defilement are reported in the country every day (Sampson & Hart, 2013; Kenya Police Service, 2010). However, notwithstanding the availability of these aggregated statistics, there is no specific data on the incidence and dynamics of child defilement at the County levels. Furthermore, media reports indicate that at least ten cases of rape or defilement are reported in Kakamega County every week. However, the numbers may not reflect a true picture on the ground (Omari, 2021) since majority offences are unlikely to be reported due to fear of intimidations, threats or perceived culture of silence among the victims and/or their guardians. In 2018, rape, gender-based violence, child abuse and defilement cases accounted for 17.6% of the crimes that occurred in the County.

The above statistics notwithstanding, the number of defilement cases in the county is likely to be much higher since the majority of defilement cases go unreported due to various reasons that make the victims remain silent (Omari, 2021). Although there are a number of stakeholders meant to track child defilement there is no clear evidence that this is happening. This situation therefore, calls for among others, an empirical inquiry into the factors that contribute to child defilement in order for society to formulate remedial strategies for tackling the social vice. From the foregoing discussion, the study objective was to explore the dynamics and contributory factors to child defilement in Kakamega County, Kenya. Thus, the study attempted to establish the socio-cultural factors that contribute to sexual defilement and in particular, the extent to which substance abuse and family disintegration contribute to child defilement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Socio-cultural factors that contribute to Defilement

Finkelhor's conceptual framework posits that defilement occurs only when four preconditions exist namely: a motivated perpetrator, an ability to overcome internal inhibitions toward sexual abuse, an ability to overcome external barriers to sexual abuse and a victim unable to resist the abuse (Rudolph, Zimmer-Gembeck & Shanley, 2018). Child defilement can take place within the family, by a parent, step –parent, sibling or other relative, or outside the home by a friend, neighbour, childcare person, teacher or stranger (Odum, 2015). It has been found that parental physical absence can lead to child defilement (Twum-Danso, 2019).

Attwood (2014) highlights that new technology in form of televisions, videos, cinemas, novels, music and some magazines with pornography have brought problems and peer pressure to children. Jones (2013) points out that child defilement can occur where there are men with abusive behaviours. Most perpetrators of child defilement are trusted adult acquaintances of the child who often target children lacking close adult supervision and craving adult attention. Victimization is usually gradual and children are befriended, slowly seduced and then coerced into silence (Russell & Purcell, 2016). The three issues which are critical to understanding child defilement are betrayal of trust and responsibility, abuse of power and inability of victims to make informed consent devoid of threat, wants or deprivation (Orina, 2014).

The population of known child offenders includes one time and habitual sexual offenders, intra family and extra family offenders or strangers and acquaintances and adults and juveniles or adolescents. Offenders also vary in terms of age, occupation, income level, marital status and ethnic group (Wormith & Olver, 2012). In most cases of child defilement, 60 percent of abusers are non-relative acquaintances such as friends of the family, baby sitters or neighbours while 30 percent are relatives such as fathers, uncles and cousins. However, majority of the perpetrators are acquaintances or relatives of the victims (Alao and Moojwane, 2008).

Child defilement offenders are assumed to be socially incompetent and unable to achieve intimacy with adults and are more likely to approach children. This may be related to offenders' early family attachment with parents (Lubaale, 2015; Oduma, 2015; Omari, 2021). In most cases, male victims who grow up to sexual abuse had identified with an older partner. Such an individual may identify with young males as the recipients of his affection hence rationalize his behaviour (Lubaale, 2015).

According to Bunusu (2011), the effects of forcible child defilement on victims include traumatic sexualization such as increase in salience of sexual issues and confusion about sexual identification and norms. This also includes stigmatization such as shame, guilt, low esteem and suicide, sense of betrayal, extreme dependency and powerlessness. Furniss (2013) identified the incidence of recidivism as among the key concerns about offender characteristics.

Horvath, Davidson & Choak (2014) identified four preconditions for incest and intra familial abuse to be a parent incapable of choosing adult-child boundaries, a vulnerable child, available opportunity and inability of the perpetrator to overcome external and internal inhibitions. Risk markers present in potential child defilement offenders include previous incest or sexual deviation in the family, a new male member of the household with a record of a sexual offence, loss of inhibition due to alcohol, loss of maternal libido or sexual rejection of the father and pedophilic sexual orientation especially in relation to sex rings and pornography (Opati, 2012).

Studies by Schein (2010) and Thompson and Wilkinjon (2010) assessed the cultural aspects of defilement in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Schein (2010), majority cases of defilement that occur are not reported to the concerned authorities because of prevailing socio-cultural constraints. It therefore, makes it more difficult to determine its prevalence (Schein, 2010). Besides, Thompson and Wilkinjon (2010) observed that many cultures, especially the East and Southern Africa regions practice early marriage which is often arranged at a very young age. These marriages present the most prevalent form of child defilement. The parents therefore, expose their children intentionally to defilement for material gain. This practice is still a common occurrence in parts of Africa, India, some parts of Latin America and the Caribbean countries. These parents make material choices for their daughters and sons with little regard for personal implications on children viewing since they regard the marriages as a source of social capital and economic gain (Thompson and Wilkinjon, 2010).

In Kenya, cultural practices such as initiation ceremonies and the view that the onset of puberty is the cut-off point between childhood and woman hood, means that adolescents are not

defined as children in many cultural practices. This is also the basis for early marriage (Obwoye, Ngundo & Kyule, 2018). Some parents are known to marry off their young girls to older men in order to obtain money to meet educational fees for their male siblings and for other purposes. In pastoral communities, early marriages are common where parents marry off their young girls in exchange for livestock. These exchanges, of cattle for girls and women, form an integral part of the local economy (Grace, 2014). Omari (2021) observed that child defilement in Kakamega County is seen to be present throughout the history of human interactions and in some cultures it is ingrained in the historical and sociological development of society. Given the availability of folks that emphasize the relationship between kin that are in actual practice are incest taboos.

Jones (2013) has it that child defilement cases are likely to occur where by mothers are in short-term relationships and where fathers take little responsibility for care and protection. These children placed in informal foster or adoptive situations with friends or relatives when their parents emigrate pose a risk to children for defilement and neglect. Additionally, the loss of one or both parents by death, migration or family separation can result in child defilement (Jones, 2013). According to a study by Bolen (2002), males are at greater risk when they lived with both non-natural parents or with only their mothers and also when they lived with both non-natural parents or with only their fathers. Females were also at a greater risk when they lived with any males in the household after their parent's separation. Hence, in many parts of the world, socio-cultural factors are great contributors to increased cases of child defilement.

METHODS

To explore the prevailing status of factors contributing to child defilement in Kakamega Sub County, the study adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population in this study is defiled children. However, due to difficulties involved in accessing defiled children at their homes and/or institutional contexts, and the mandatory ethical considerations regarding interviewing of minors, the study opted to interview indirect data providers, namely: 60 Gender Police Officers, 12 Children Officers, 8 Probation Officers and 36 Social Workers.

It integrated both primary and secondary data. For primary data, a semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data from Social Workers, Children Officers and Probation Officers. The semi-structured questionnaires collected data from respondents with in-depth knowledge on child defilement (that is Probation Officers, Children Officers and Social Workers). Secondary data were collected from the Kenya government reports, minutes and policy documents, police reports on child defilement, newspapers and journal articles, among other relevant sources. Responses obtained from the interview tools constituted qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS computer software and excel worksheets and presented through frequency distribution tables. Regarding qualitative data, the first step was to transcribe all key informants' notes and analysed.

Prior to arriving at the interview sample, different categories of respondents were purposively identified. These are: Social Workers, Children Officers, Probation Officers and

Gender Police Officers. As Bryman (2016) observes, the objective of the purposive sampling was to identify and interview respondents with in-depth knowledge of the study subject. A perusal of the staff lists of the respective institutions yielded a target population of 116 potential respondents. Their respective distribution was 36 Social Workers, 12 Children officers, 8 Probation Officers and 60 Gender Police Officers. Having gotten the universe, a proportionate sampling criterion was used to pick an interview sample of 86 (100%) respondents. Of these, 70 (80%) responded as follows. 22 Social Workers, 7 Children's Officers; 5 Probation Officers and 36 Gender Police Officers. Failure by the randomly selected 16 (19%) respondents to participate in the interview was as a result of their unavailability at the time of the interview and/or reluctance to respond to the data collection instrument due to unexplained personal reasons.

RESULTS

Majority (49%) of the respondents were aged 31-40 years, 16 (23%) were aged 41-50 years, 11 (16%) were over 50 years while 9 (13%) of them were aged between 20 and 30 years. Based on the above distribution, majority (72%) of the officers were aged 31-50 years. This implied that most of the officers working in different capacities in the children's welfare department understood their respective roles well and most likely discharged their duties as expected of them.

Table 1: Respondents Characteristics

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	39	56
Female	31	44
Age		
20-30 years	9	13
31-40 years	34	49
41-50 years	16	23
Over 50 years	11	16
Level of Education		
KCPE	2	3
KCSE	25	36
Diploma	11	16
Bachelors	26	37
Masters	6	9
Job Designation		
Social workers	22	31
Children officers	7	10
Probation Officers	5	7
Gender Police Officers	36	51

n=70

Concerning the respondents' level of education, 26 (37%) had bachelor degrees, 25 (36%) secondary level of education, 11 (16%) diplomas, 6 (9%) masters, and 2 (3%) had obtained primary level education. Thus cumulatively, majority 43 (62%) of the respondents had at least a diploma qualification hence the officers were of reasonable academic level. Only 2 (3%) of respondents had primary level certificates, and both served as social workers.

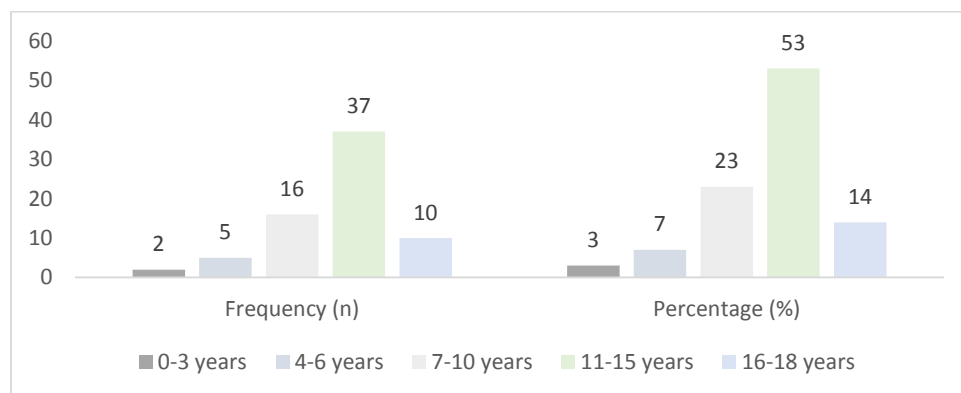


Figure 1: Ages of Defiled Children

Based on the statistics in Figure 1, majority 37 (53%) of the children defiled were aged 11-15 years and the least defiled were aged 0-3 years, which accounted for 2 (3%). Also at risk were children aged 7-10 years, where 16 (23%) of the respondents confirmed that this category was actually at high risks. Ten (14%) of the respondents indicated that children aged 16-18 years stood the risk of defilement while 5 (7%) of them said that children aged 4-6 years were vulnerable to child defilers. Based on the distribution, cumulatively children aged between the ages of 7 and 17 years were most vulnerable to child defilers, accounting for 53 (76%) of the total responses.

Prevalence of Child Defilement

Respondents were asked to rate the prevalence of child defilement in their jurisdictions and give reasons for their perceived ratings. Their responses are captured in Figure 2 below.

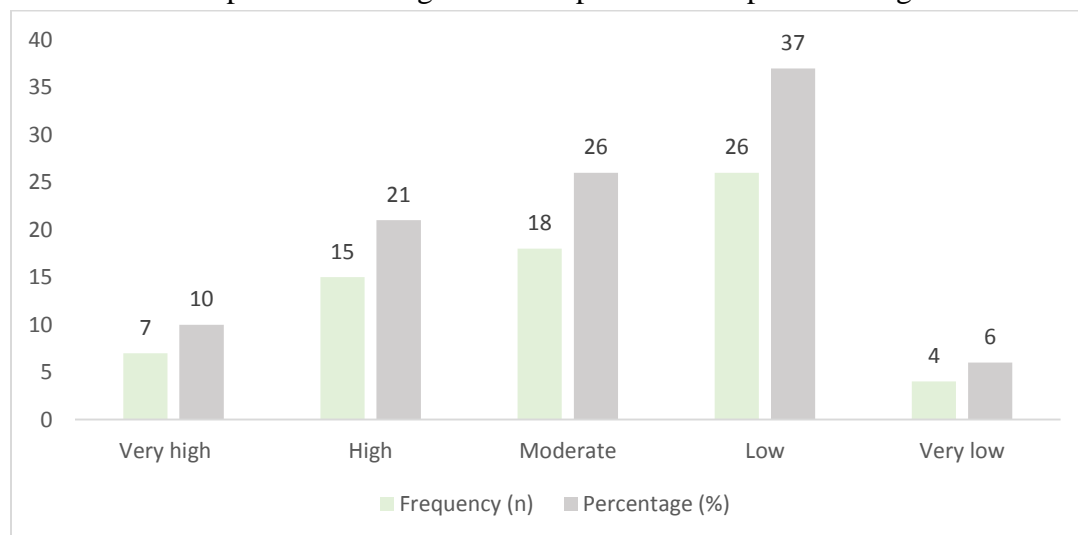


Figure 2: Prevalence of Child Defilement

Statistics in Figure 2 indicate that 26 (37%) of the respondents reported that the incidences of child defilement were low, 18 (26%) said they were moderate, 15 (21%) said they were high, 7 (10%) said they were very high, and 4 (6%) indicated that the cases were very low. Based on this distribution, it can be argued that on average the rate of cases of child defilement in Kakamega was significant (31%) enough to cause concern among all the child welfare officers in the area. Another important question raised with the respondents was the location of defilement. This question was central to understanding the risky environments for young children so that they can avoid getting exposed to potential sex tormentors as shown in Pie-chart in Figure 3 below.

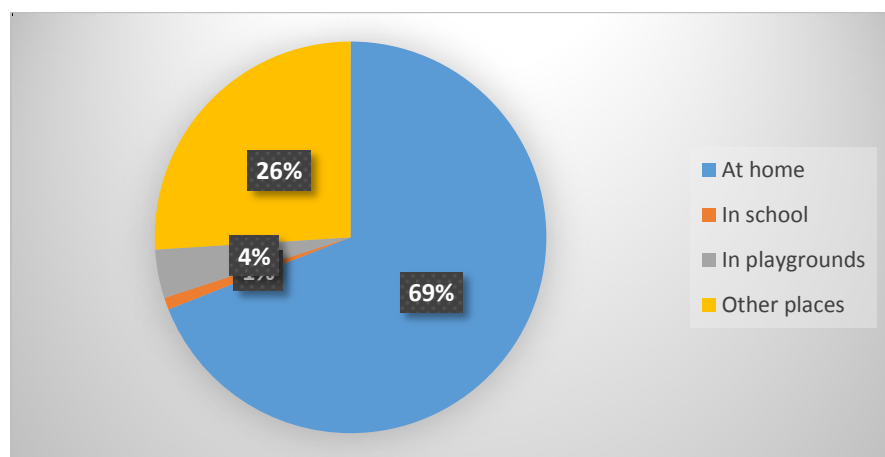


Figure 3: Location of Defilement

Majority of respondents 48 (69%) indicated that most defilements incidences took place within the home environment. Other risky areas for the minors were “‘other’ areas”, which included but not limited to relatives’ houses, friends’ houses, social events such as prayer vigils and birthday parties for friends and other close relatives. Playgrounds and schools registered the lowest defilement locations, accounting for 3 (4%) and 1 (1%) respectively. Respondents were also asked to state the most common perpetrators of defilement in their respective areas. This question was important in identifying individuals who posed the greatest dangers to children, when it came to the question of child defilement as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Perpetrators of Child Defilement

Perpetrators of Child Defilement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Neighbours	36	51
Teachers	0	0
Religious leaders	2	3
Law enforcers	2	3
Close family members	19	27
Other persons	11	16
Total	70	100

Most common perpetrators of defilement were neighbours, accounting for 36 (51%). Close family members were also notorious in defiling children since they accounted for 19 (27%) of the respondents. There were also ‘other’ perpetrators who included guardians, friends to the children or friends to their parents and strangers who together accounted for 11 (16%). No respondent thought that teachers were responsible for child defilement. Respondents were also asked to state the age brackets of child defilers. This was critical for determining risky age categories so that the children can be guarded against such people. Table 3 presents a summary of these responses.

Table 3: Age Bracket of Child Defilers

Age Bracket of Defilers	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
18-22 years	15	21
23-27 years	21	30
28-32 years	6	9
33-37 years	13	19
38 and above years	15	21
Total	70	100

The most common (21, 30%) defilers were aged 23-27 years while the least were aged 28-32 years; a group which attracted 6 (9%) responses of the totals. The age groups of 18-22 years and 38 & above years ranked second with 15 (21%) responses each. These were followed by individuals aged 33-37 years, which attracted 13 (19%) responses. Respondents were also asked to indicate how many of the victims known to them stayed with family members, volunteers, rescue centers, foster parents or guardians or any other close member of the society. A summary of these responses is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Who do the Victims of Defilement Stay with?

Whom Victims stay with	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Family member	33	47
Volunteers	5	7
Rescue center	3	4
Foster parent/ guardian	7	10
Other factors	22	31
Total	70	100

Table 4 indicates that close to one-half 33 (47%) of the victims of defilement stayed with family members. Furthermore, other trusted members of the society who were grouped under ‘other’

persons hosted 31% of the victims of defilement. These may be members of the clergy such as the Pastors, Padres, Imams and other such people in religious leadership. The least popular avenue for seeking refuge for victims of defilement were rescue centers and volunteers, accounting for 3 (4%) and 5 (7%) of the responses respectively.

CHILD DEFILEMENT RISK FACTORS

Family structure and societal functioning

Respondents were also asked for their opinions regarding some documented propositions on assumptions that contribute to child defilement. The results showed that there were several contributory factors to defilement of children in Kakamega County. However, the study picked on specific propositions on which the opinions of the respondents were sought. These bordered on the environment in which the child was raised, the socio-economic situation of the home where the child was brought up, parental care or the lack of it, issues of sex and sexuality, information from the people living with the child and exposure of the child to sexual abuse.

Table 5: Factors that Contribute to Child Defilement

Statement	1= strongly disagree	2= disagree	3= neutral	4= Agree	5= strongly agree
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
A majority of defiled children come from rural poor family backgrounds	1 (1)	2 (3)	3 (4)	25 (36)	39 (56)
Children raised by single parents are mostly defiled	2 (3)	9 (13)	18 (26)	31 (44)	10 (14)
Parents have neglected their parental roles	4 (6)	2 (3)	13 (19)	25 (36)	26 (37)
Majority of parents shy away from discussing reproductive health issues with their children, as they considered it a taboo topic	1 (1)	4 (6)	5 (7)	36 (51)	24 (34)
Children who witness sexual abuse at home are at more risk of defilement	2 (3)	18 (26)	7 (10)	21 (30)	22 (31)
Children who spent most of their time with other children are least likely to be defiled	2 (3)	16 (23)	17 (24)	26 (37)	9 (13)
Girls are mainly perceived as a source of wealth/ income, hence likelihood of early marriages	10 (14)	18 (26)	20 (29)	11 (16)	11 (16)
The local community shy away from reporting defilement cases for fear of stigmatization or superstitious reasons	4 (6)	12 (17)	11 (16)	28 (40)	15 (21)
Other factors	61 (87)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (1)	8 (8)

Generally, 92% of the respondents agreed that majority of defiled children come from poor rural families. Myrtill et al. (2019) lists the following factors as major characteristics of poor rural families: low levels of educational attainment; a relatively large number of children; relatively low access to material resources, social and physical infrastructure; and, higher susceptibility to community-wide exogenous shocks. A similar trend was reported to be the case among children raised by single parents, according to 41 (58%) of the respondents. Also, 51 (73%) of the respondents were of the view that parents have neglected their parental roles, thus exposing their children to sexual abuse. It also emerged that children who witness sexual abuse at home are at more risk of being victims of defilement as echoed by 43 (61%) of the respondents. Such children were likely to erroneously think that it is fashionable to engage in sex even at tender age.

Children who spent most of their time with other children are least likely to be defiled as echoed by 35 (50%) of the respondents. Among those interviewed, 22 (32%) of them opined that young girls were being exposed by their parents to defilement by men who appeared to 'buy' the latter. Furthermore, 28 (30%) were not in agreement with this suggestion while 20 (29%) expressed neutral responses. Communities in Kakamega County are also thought to shy away from reporting defilement cases for fear of stigmatization and/or an ill omen befalling the family. This was more so, if the perpetrators were of a higher social standing in the society. In fact, 43 (52%) of the respondents agreed that this was actually happening, 23% denied.

Respondents were asked to state the relationship between broken families and child defilement based on a 5-point Likert scale and the results were as follows.

Table 6: Relationship between Broken Families and Child Defilement

Broken Families & Child Defilement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very high	18	26
High	31	44
Moderate	15	21
Low	6	9
Very low	0	0
Total	70	100

Based on the responses in table 6, majority of the respondents (70%) felt that the contribution of broken families to child defilement ranged from high to very high extent. Fifteen percent (21%) attributed it to a moderate extent, 6 (9%) to a low extent, and none of them (0%) thought that the effect was to a very low extent. From this distribution, generally a greater majority of the respondents, which accounted for 49 (70%), felt that broken families highly influenced child defilement. Based on varied domains on this factor, 42 (60%) of the respondents thought that family disintegration highly contributed to child defilement. Fifteen (21%) of the

respondents said that the influence of family disintegration on child defilement was to a moderate extent, 9 (13%) said the influence was very high, 4 (5%) was low while none of them thought that the influence was to a very low extent.

Respondents were also asked to rate drug and substance abuse in their area. Based on a 5-point Likert scale, the responses are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Prevalence of Drug Abuse on Child Defilement

Prevalence of Drugs	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very high	14	20
High	26	37
Moderate	21	30
Low	7	10
Very low	2	3
Total	70	100

As majority of respondents observed in table 7, 40 (57%) thought that the prevalence of drugs and substance in the area was high or very high, 21(30 %) moderate, 9 (13%) was low. Moreover, respondents were asked to state the influence of specific drugs/substances on child defilement. This question was intended to gauge the extent to which some of the commonly abused drugs and substances influenced child defilement. These drugs included alcohol, bhang, glue sniffing, cocaine and narcotics and others. A summary of the results is presented in table 8.

Table 8: To What Extent Does Each of the Listed Drugs Influence Defilement?

Types of Drugs	1= Very low	2= Low	3=neutral	4= High	5= Very high
Alcohol	3 (4)	14 (20)	9 (13)	24 (34)	20 (29)
Bhang	7 (10)	4 (6)	19 (27)	24 (34)	16 (23)
Glue	35 (50)	15 (21)	11 (16)	4 (6)	5 (7)
Cocaine and narcotics	41 (59)	9 (13)	9 (13)	9 (13)	2 (3)
Other drugs	70 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

A vast majority of respondents 63% considered the contribution of alcohol abuse to child defilement to range from high to very high. However, 17 (24%) of them did not see it as a major factor. But 9 (13%) of the respondents were not sure (neutral) if alcohol abuse lead to child defilement. With regard to bhang majority of the respondents (57%) rated it from high to very high. On the other hand, majority of the respondents (71% and 72%) thought that sniffing glue

and use of cocaine and narcotics did not influence child defilers to commit the crime as presented in Table 8.

Using a Likert scale, respondents were asked to give their opinions regarding various propositions touching on socio-cultural factors. These included teenage marriages, traditional belief systems and assured cure of HIV/AIDS among others. Their responses are as summarized in the table 9.

Table 9: Influence of Socio-Cultural Factors on Child Defilement

Extent to which child defilement is associated with socio-cultural factors	1= Very Low	2= Low	3= neutral	4= High	5= Very High
Teenage marriages	11 (16)	15 (21)	8 (11)	23 (33)	13 (19)
Cultural rites of passage	15 (21)	7 (10)	30 (43)	13 (19)	5 (7)
Traditional belief system	9 (13)	14 (20)	16 (23)	23 (33)	8 (11)
Assured cure of HIV/AIDS	20 (29)	11 (16)	14 (20)	9 (13)	16 (23)
Other cultural factors	70 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	(0)	0 (0)

Teenage marriages emerged as one of the contributory factors to child defilement, given that the majority, 36 (52%) of the respondents considered its influence as high or very high. Although cultural rites of passage also influenced child defilement, only 18 (26%) of the respondents saw it as a problem. A similar trend was witnessed regarding traditional belief systems, with 21 (44%) of respondents conceding that this was actually a problem, though 23 (33%) did not think so. However, 16 (23%) were neutral. Regarding the belief that HIV/AIDS cure was associated with child defilement in Kakamega County, 31 (45%) of the respondents disagreed while 25 (36%) agreed and 14 (20%) were neutral in their responses.

Parents' personal and parental difficulties

Ordinarily, defiled children end up devastated, especially in circumstances where their parents or guardians are not in a position to meet their basic needs, including emotional necessities such as counseling and parental advice. Their basic needs were categorized as food, clothing, school fees, adequate shelter, parental or caregiver protection and other requirements. Based on a 5-point Likert scale, these responses are summarized in table 10.

Table 10: To What Extent are Parents/Guardians' Able to Cater for Defiled Children's Needs?

Defiled Children's Needs	1= Very Low	2= Low	3= neutral	4= High	5= Very high
Food	11 (16)	3 (4)	21 (30)	18 (26)	17 (24)
Clothing	8 (11)	8 (11)	23 (33)	16 (23)	15 (21)
School Fees	15 (21)	8 (11)	16 (23)	14 (20)	17 (24)
Adequate Shelter	5 (7)	10 (14)	22 (31)	24 (34)	9 (13)
Parental/caregiver protection	11 (16)	6 (9)	14 (20)	15 (21)	24 (34)
Other needs	68 (97)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (3)

Based on the statistics in table 10, 35 (50%) of respondents agreed that the parents or guardians were able to meet the needs of defiled children in terms of food. Twenty-one (30%) of those interviewed were neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing while 14 (20%) of them disagreed. On clothing, 31 (44%) of the respondents thought that the parents or guardians were able to meet these needs while 16 (22%) disagreed and 23 (33%) held neutral views. Regarding school fees, 31 (44%) of the respondents agreed while 23 (32%) disagreed that parents or guardians were actually able to meet these needs for their defiled children. Sixteen (23%) of the respondents did not agree or disagree with this view; they were neutral in their responses. About adequate shelter, 33 (47%) of the respondents agreed that parents/guardians were able to afford, 15 (21%) disagreed, while 22 (31%) were neutral in their responses. On parental/caregiver protection, 39 (55%) agreed, 17 (25) disagreed, while 14 (20%) held neutral grounds.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study set out to investigate the prevalence of child defilement in Kakamega County. Its specific study objectives were to assess the prevalence of child defilement, establish personal, socio-cultural and economic factors that contribute to child defilement, ascertain the extent to which substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and family disintegration contribute to child defilement and elicit suggestions for combating the social vice in the County. Key findings are summarized systematically as per the study objectives namely: personal, socio-cultural and economic factors contributing to child defilement, influence of substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and family disintegration and suggestions for combating child defilement.

It was observed that many study participants are of the view that child defilement was prevalent in Kakamega, hence high enough to cause a great concern among all the child welfare officers. Some of the parents had abdicated their parenting roles hence exposing their children to defilers. High levels of poverty also played a significant role in contributing to incidences of

child defilement as poor children were being enticed by defilers using food or other valuable items in exchange for sex.

Alcoholism, drug abuse and joblessness among most men made them freely loiter around, thus posing high risks to minors as their defilers. Almost all victims of child defilement were girls, a reflection of the danger that faces the girl child and the risks she is exposed to when it comes to the issue of defilements. As in other previous studies, it emerged that majority of children were defiled in their early ages. This revelation is consistent with the findings of a survey on child defilement by Childline Kenya (2017) which reported that most children had been subjected to at least one incident of child defilement before they turned 18 years. In this study, all the respondents opined that girls were the most common victims while a study by Rassi and Nyamu (2012) established that almost 100 percent of the sexually abused children were girls with 90 percent of them being slum dwellers. The study further established that young girls, especially those from the slum or other poor backgrounds were lured with money by men who ended up defiling them.

Another objective was to examine personal, socio-cultural factors that influenced child defilement in the study area. This meant that a child's economic, social and cultural predisposition greatly contributed to his/her safety, or the lack of it. Based on the results, the respondents agreed that the respective parents neglect their parental roles, hence exposing their young children to sexual abuse. A similar leaning was observed regarding the proposition that communities and parents shy away from discussing sexual reproductive health issues with their children, which they probably consider as a taboo subject. This tends to expose young children to sexual abuse from people who are likely to take advantage of their ignorance on sexual matters and end up defiling the child.

It can be observed from findings that socio-cultural factors leading to child defilement are not dimensions or elements, but rather are determining conditions insofar as they report essentialities of human behaviour. Cultural aspects such as religiosity, customs and traditions provide a set of meanings that cannot be ignored as major triggers for child sexual abuse incidents in Kakamega County. Equally, the link between cultural aspects and sexual abuse is clear from the obtained study findings as well as that observed by Omari (2021). For instance, sexual incidents towards children as reported by study participants has been largely absorbed by culture, and although, for that very reason, it has ceased to be something new and attractive, the truth is that it has left a deep mark that has led from the exaltation of sex to its trivialization and, from there, to disenchantment.

Substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and family disintegration played a significant role on child defilement. It emerged that there were many drug peddlers and alcohol dealers and addicts who defiled children when they were under the influence of the stuff. Furthermore, bhang was commonly planted in the area which made it easily available to criminals who defiled children. Due to the influence of drugs and alcohol, some parents/guardians abdicated their parental responsibilities, thus exposing their children to child defilement. It also emerged that some

parents and/or guardians were influenced by drugs and alcohol to defile their own children. Additionally, drugs caused the defilers to lose any sense of morality and saw the children as mature women.

The above findings are in tandem with what has been documented by previous studies. For instance, Ogude (2011) and Oduma (2015) on the causes of child defilement in Kenya established that majority of the defilers were closely related to the victims and in most cases are never reported to the authority for action to be taken. The author also noted that house-helpers who may be grouped under 'other' in this study also were perpetrators of child defilement. The study also indicated that some defiled minors choose to keep to themselves. Contrary to common belief, homes are no longer safe havens for children since it emerged in this study that 69% of the defilements took place at home. In fact, Cradle (2007) indicated that homes account for almost 75% of the contexts of defilement. This implies that the Kenyan child is not safe at home, in the community or in school. Teenagers growing up in broken families stood high risk of being defiled by some community members who took advantage of their vulnerability with 43 percent of respondents expressing this opinion. Teenage marriage was one of the contributory factors for child defilement since as teenage girls experienced changes in their bodies, they are likely to rush into experiencing sex and early/teenage marriages as a means of satisfying their curiosity and/or actualizing their sexual desires.

From a set of individual, family and socio-cultural factors that increase a child's vulnerability to being sexually abused, a history of sexual immorality and attributes of rural poor families in Kakamega been established as one of the factors increasing this risk the most in a children being sexually molested (Odum, 2015; Omari, 2021; Ogude, 2011). Nevertheless, the continuity of sexual victimization across generations has not been the subject of a large body of scientific writing and little is understood about how family background and the aspect of poor rural families contribute the sexual abuse acts as a risk factor in the sexual victimization of children, especially females as determined by study findings.

CONCLUSION

Research on the phenomenon of child sexual abuse appears to be underdeveloped though still ongoing, whereas the phenomenon seems to be prevalent and well known to social issues. Despite this scarcity of studies, existing empirical data allowed the present study to confirm that poor rural family attributes including socio-cultural factors related to past abuse (parental personal difficulties, past history, poor family structure and functioning, as well as the characteristics of the environment that children grew from) could be associated to an increased risk for their child defilement. However, it is important to emphasize that these data mainly reveal the needs of families in rural environment not to perceive girl-child as a source of wealth, which is an emerging reason for increased child defilement in the study area.

Given the implication of the present study findings, it is essential that policy-makers and enforcers consider a number of mechanisms to address the increased prevalence of child

defilement in Kakamega County. Some of these included enhanced counseling services, reliable legal avenues and establishment of child protection units, legal rescue centers as well as gender recovery centers. These will enable victims deal with their psychological, legal, physical and other needs that were instrumental in their recovery processes. It is therefore, concluded that a concerted effort by all key stakeholders is essential to combating child defilement. Relevant authorities therefore, need to work closely with the national government to eradicate poverty, which seems to be a major contributor to child defilement.

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