



**Jumuga Journal of Education,
Oral Studies, and Human Sciences (JJEOSHS)**

editor@jumugajournal.org

<http://www.jumugajournal.org>

Volume 5, No. 1, 2022

Alleviation of Child Abuse as a Religious Duty

Examining the Role of the Catholic Church in Promoting Child Welfare in Kajiado County, Kenya

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Abstract

In Kenya, cultural practices have idiomatically remained a big thorn in the flesh among the various pastoral communities of Kenya. These pastoralist regions have remained traditionally undeveloped areas; either by design or by default. Such areas have posed a major challenge to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) No. 5 globally, as well as in Kenya. This research article sets out to investigate the role of the Catholic Church in alleviating Child abuse in Kajiado County, which is directly addressing SDG No. 5, which requires the "Elimination of all harmful practices, such as child [abuse], early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation." Specifically, the research article evaluates the Catholic Church's social teachings and activities which enhance the alleviation of child abuse in Kajiado County. Besides identifying the challenges faced by the Catholic Church, it equally assesses the strategies adopted by the said Church in order to overcome this enigmatic problem of child abuse. This research article is set on the premise that the failure to eradicate child abuse will lead to the continuous psychological, emotional, physical and poor developmental growth of children, hence failing to attain SDG No. 5. The research article is justified by the need to respond to the alarming reports by media, opinion leaders and members of the community concerning the prevalence of child abuse amongst the Maasai communities in Kenya. For good results, this research article has adopted a descriptive survey design in order to collect in-depth data from a diversified sample of respondents who represent the whole Kajiado County population. Simple random and purposive sampling methods were used to choose a sample size of a number of respondents. At the end of the research article it has been revealed that the Catholic Church has social teachings on caring, creating a safe environment for children and ably demands integrity from the assigned the care-givers. Although it was an uphill task and a major challenge in reporting and investigating cases of child abuse, due to some cultural restrictions, the Church has adopted measures such as forming the Diocesan children and youth departments, which helps in formulating policies and advises their respective Church committees on appropriate measures to be taken on child protection. It is finally recommended that the civil authorities and the Sub-County Children Department could protect victims of abuse through giving proper information on the children rights and also by speedily liaising with the authorities in arresting child abusers.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Child Rights, Church, Policies, culture, and collaboration.

Introduction

The Global Monitoring Report (2012) reminds us that education is not only about making sure that all children can attend school. It is actually about setting young children up for life, by giving those opportunities to grow and find decent work, earn a living as well as contribute to their communities and societies, and finally fulfill their potential. Equally, the World Health Organization (WHO 2014), states that the devastating ramifications of child abuse in the world today are a concern of the global community. The organization (WHO, 2014) also expounds that mistreatment of children incorporates emotional, Psychological, physical, emotional abuse, and neglect, with an international estimate that there are over 40 million children who have suffered from exploitation. Without much struggle, one could say that this is a small number when it comes to the undeveloped countries.

Amongst our African communities' mistreatment and mishandling of many children, it is often mistaken with child discipline. According to Abbas (et al 2015), approximately 22.6% of adults were physically abused as children, 36.3% went through emotional abuse, and 16.3% were neglected. Girls were more likely to be abused than boys. The rate of exploitation of girls stood at 18% while that of boys stood at 7.6%. Such mistreatments have the potential to damage the health of the victims; a phenomenon that would lead to developmental challenges such as mental stress, loss of self-esteem, physical harm, and neglect. Mental stress emanates from verbal harm which leaves painful memories in the brain of the victimised. A study by Bankole and Arowosegbe (2014: 139), in Nigeria, noted that the secondary school children who experienced physical and verbal abuse were likely to have low self-esteem as seen in their difficulties when forming peer relationships, as compared to their peers who weren't abused in their formative stages. In this research article, we shall evaluate the role of the Roman Catholic Church in Kajiado County and its social teachings, as well as their input in alleviating Child abuse. And finally, strategies of curbing the above challenges will also be addressed. Waweru (2011:1) argues that although engaging the African Christians in such debates is a challenging task, the problem is at our door steps.

Catholic Church in Kajiado

At a denominational level, the Catholic Church affirmed the UN recommendations on child rights. Catholic for Choice (2013: 14) argues that the Pope approved the UN resolutions on child rights as an indication of goodwill to guarantee the protection of children's rights. The demand for appropriate safety of children from all forms of violence and custody of children were the paramount resolutions of the UNCRC in 1989 (UNICEF, 2009). It is good to note that the Catholic Church is mother to a number of institutions such as schools, hospitals, and children's homes hosting children. The idea that children could be abused in a Catholic Church institution was an unimaginable.

Therefore, the Holy See (Office of the Bishop of Rome) often presents progress reports concerning how they are safeguarding child rights to the UN as a way of implementing the UN recommendations on child rights. Catholics for Choice (2013: 14) noted that the latest report presented to the UN in 2012 ratified that all proceedings regarding breach of the Catholic Church's Canon Law should be confidential and secret to protect the witness, church integrity, as an implicated party. In a world where people want accountability and openness, confidentiality could be interpreted as an attempt to cover up cases of child abuse in the Catholic Church. Despite the secrecy requirement, no one is forbidden from reporting claims of violations of child rights to the civil authorities. This research article investigated if there is a cover-up of allegations of child abuse for fear of breaking the principle of confidentiality.

Worldwide, the Catholic Church has certified and formulated additional guidelines and mechanisms for mitigating child abuse, exploitation, and neglect. USCCB (2002) noted that the conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States (US) approved a charter for safeguarding young people and children from maltreatment. The UN Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) defined a minor as an individual who is below the age of eighteen years. The child rights charter adopted by the USCCB deals with aspects such as ensuring that there is a safe environment for children, giving proper response to claims of child abuse and punishing the offenders of child abuse. Further devotion of the Catholic Church to lessening child abuse is demonstrated by the Catholic Diocese of Parramatta in

Australia which has formed strong child protection guidelines. In the guidelines, the clergy, foster caregivers, volunteers, teachers, and the rest of the staff handling children are mandated to safeguard the security of children as a fundamental child right.

In Africa, the enormous cases of child abuse have prompted the African church to alleviate child abuse. Research statistics indicate that around 50% of African children between the ages of two and seventeen totaling approximately 200 million have had exposure to at least one form of violence (Hills, Mercy & Amobi, 2016). In South Africa, 34% of children who are aged between 15 and 17 years reported to have undergone physical abuse, 16% were emotionally abused, and 20% were sexually violated (Badoe, 2017). In Sierra Leone, there were thousands of children who died as soldiers during the civil war; girls were sexually abused by adult soldiers while teenage boys suffered from child labor (Honwan, 2011). In the above incidences, the authors do not adequately bring out the voice of the church in the prevention of children from abuse. Hence the need to examine the role of the church in Africa in the alleviation of child abuse is the motivation for this research article.

The Catholic Church comprehends the scriptural significance of mitigating child maltreatment. According to the Ethiopian Catholic Church (2011), children must be protected because they have a key role in the church. The sacred responsibility is derived from the instruction of Jesus to his followers to embrace childlike qualities such as humility and innocence before God so that they can enjoy the privilege of entering the Kingdom of God (Luke 18:17). Given the special recognition that Jesus grants children in the Kingdom of God, the church, just like Jesus who embraced children, has a critical role in welcoming children into a safe environment. O'Neill et al (2010) further claim that the Catholic Church plays the role of a good shepherd whenever it seeks to safeguard and/or prevent violations of child rights. They refer to Psalms 23 which illustrates that God is a caring shepherd to humanity. In this case, the Lord acts as a role model to Christians by reminding them to protect care and nurture not just their children but also those in their surroundings. Part of the motivation for this research article was to establish whether Catholic Church in the study area is emulating Christ in safeguarding children from any form of abuse.

The Catholic Church in Kenya owes its origin to the building of the Kenya-Uganda Railway. The British colonial government started construction of the railway in 1896 at the port of Mombasa, reaching Kisumu in 1901 and Kampala in 1903 (Farnworth, 2011). In 1899, after the arrival of the railway line in Nairobi, Bishop Emile-Auguste Allgeyer (1856-1924) led the Holy Ghost Mission in penetrating the Kenyan territory. Holy Ghost Missionaries established the St. Austin mission in Nairobi which later grew to become a Metropolitan Archdiocese of Nairobi, establish an industrial training station, and launched outstations such as Kabaa in Kiambu, Gatanga in Mura'ga, and Kabaa in Ukambani (Ngari, 2016: 4). The Consolata Missionaries from the Consolata Society of Turin joined the Holy Ghost missionaries in Kenya in 1902. They erected a mission station in Kiambu before spreading to Limuru (1903), and Thika (1906). Muranga became the base of the Consolata missionaries in addition to the Nyeri vicariate formed in 1909 led by vicar Filipino Perlo. Consolata mission established four mission stations in Meru between 1922 and 1913. Consolata missionaries were predominantly Italian while the Holy Ghost Missionaries were French. They faced competition from Mill Hill missionaries who entered Kenya in 1901 and set their first base in Kisumu before spreading in Mumias in 1904. Mill Hill Missionaries opened other mission stations in Nakuru (1908), Kisii (1910), and Nyahururu (1911). Ngari (2016:5-6) further observed that the establishment of mission stations sprung up fierce competitions over regional boundaries. As a result, there was an agreement that Consolata Mission takes the Mt. Kenya region while the Holy Ghost mission concentrates on Kiambu, Nairobi, and Kamba regions among others.

The mission stations were responsible for the penetration of Catholicism in Kenya when they grew up into established Catholic Churches with several outposts. Ngari (2016) claims that Nairobi grew from a mission station to a Metropolitan Archdiocese of Nairobi on 25th March 1953. Nyeri, Meru, and Kisumu were the first Dioceses. Ngong Diocese was formed in 1959 and confirmed its official diocese status in 1976 with Emeritus Collins Davis becoming their first bishop. Other bishops that have worked in the Ngong diocese include: Cornelius Schilder (2003-2009), Bishop John Cardinal Njue (2009-2012), and John Oballa Owaaa who took over in 2012 and is still serving as its current bishop. As per the 2019 statistics, Ngong Diocese has 35 priests serving a population of 217,500 representing 11.8% of the Total population (Catholic-hierarchy, 2021). Noonkopir parish, located in Isinya Sub-

County and managing Divine Providence Children Home and St. Monica Primary Academy, is one of the 35 parishes under the prefecture of Ngong Diocese. This is an indication that the church commands a large following in an area that has many protestant denominations. One expects that the Catholic Church plays a critical role in mitigating child abuse because of its presence in Isinya Sub-County.

Collaborative efforts between the Catholic Church and the education sector of the government have witnessed great strides in lessening the incidences of child abuse. The ratification of the child protection policy in consonance with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) establishes an active department of children's services, and guarantees the safeguarding of child rights (Nzilani, 2012). In order to curb this menace, the government approved the recent Basic Education Act No.14 of 2013 which protects children from any form of beating, child labor, and psychological and mental harassment (GoK, 2013, Gathogo, 2001). Implementation of this policy has ensured that children are not brutally caned, listened to, and verbally abused. Despite these efforts, child abuse in Kenya is still a matter of serious concern. UNICEF (2016) report revealed that 32% of females and 18% of male children have been sexually abused as teens. The statistics further disclosed that 9% of males and 13% of females have been physically and emotionally abused at their tender age. This raises the question of whether there could be challenges hindering child protection efforts. Research by Nzilani (2012) in Kitui, found that victims do not report perpetrators of child abuse for fear of tainting the name of the family, especially if the abuser is a family member. Again, perpetrators may bribe the guardians or parents of the victims to cover the incident and fail to report the crime of abuse. In this research article, the researcher intended to investigate if there is a cover-up of cases of child abuse in the County and see how to deal with such issues.

Masaai Children in Kajiado

The Maasai people in Kajiado County are pastoralists; commonly known as nomads, or traveling animal herders. Pastoral nomads travel to find land with pasture where their animals can graze. This means that without being settled in one place, poses a major challenge to child care. The Maasai people keep livestock such as cattle, goats, and sheep. Their animals are their main source of income. In such circumstances of pastoralists, child abuse cannot be underestimated. Hence we have to engage various methods of reflection in African Theology, the methods which seeks to confront all kinds of marginalization in African context (Waweru 2020:7). Archambault (2009) observed that 12% of Maasai children confirmed being tricked or coerced into sexual exploitation. The home, school, and even church environments were seen as good environments for perpetuating the abuse. Towet, Oino, and Matere (2014) lamented the ongoing female genital mutilation (FGM) of girls below 13 years in the area. Also, they were concerned about physical punishments where 50% of them beat their children as a normal disciplinary practice. On their part, teachers and parents validate corporal punishment as a mechanism of instilling discipline and respect among children as they grow up. The marginalization of children in Africa is a postcolonial problem.

In Kajiado County, schools are used as centers of maturing the children. It is in this area where they learn English and Swahili, as well as 'An Introduction to their indigenous language,' the Maa language, which is spoken at home. The boy child is responsible for tending livestock as part of their daily chores. Since cattle are so important to the Maasai people, this job is highly honored. The boy child has no much choice when it comes to grazing the animals. Kajiado County is not left behind in worsening the exploitation of children in Maasai land. According to Ajama (2016 et al) the abuse of children at home particularly on verbal abuse stands at 21% with over 60% of parents accepting that they beat their children. At school, 74% of teachers acknowledged corporal punishment, because the community believes it's the best medicine for managing rebellious behavior. Ajama et al (2016) continue to disclose that 43% of teachers acknowledged that verbal bullying targeting children from humble backgrounds and those with HIV and AIDS was common. Moreover, 5% of children admitted to having had voluntary sexual relations with their peers while 15% were forced. Based on this background, the article evaluates the critical role played by the Catholic Church in mitigating child abuse within the County.

Methodology

This research article adopted a descriptive survey design since it gives a description of the area that covers a wide area; and represents the study population within the County. For Waweru (2011:3), such a methodology will allow a smooth juxtaposition so as to assess the encounter between Africa and the Bible as a 'dialogue or a transaction'. The design applied questionnaires as tools for gathering quantitative data and interview schedules to assemble qualitative data that is in tandem with the themes of the scope of research. The data collection tools generated information that was utilized in establishing the findings of the research.

Using Yamane's formula, the research article determined an ideal sample size of 330. Both purposive and random sampling methods were used to narrow down the ideal sample size from 330 to 105. Qualitative data from respondents were analyzed and presented in form of narratives and verbatim responses while tables, charts, and graphs were used to present quantitative data.

The situation on the ground

Interestingly, the Maasai community is so much concerned with their children that, in their traditional greetings, children are prioritized. Such a priority for children is expressed in greeting each other *Casserian Engeri*, which means, "And how are the children?" Maasai do not ask each other 'how are you'? Or 'how is your day'; rather, interest is on children. For Waweru (2011:3), though the missionaries brought the Bible and Christianity as 'a package deal', they did not always have their own ways. Africans were able to negotiate and survive the scourge by relativizing and resisting, as well as modifying the Bible with uncanny creativity. Hence, it is enigmatic for such a community like the Maasai to have child abuse. The investigations on the ground however exhibited the existence of child abuse within the County. Nevertheless, initiatives by the Roman Catholic Church to alleviate the same are clearly noticeable. This is because 'the Africans in their own ways were able to negotiate and transact with the Bible for their own good' and within their socio-cultural milieu (Waweru 2011:3).

Existence of Child Abuse and Compliance with Social Teachings

To determine the type of cases of child abuse, the research article engaged a dialogue with the Children's department at Kajiado and enquired from several respondents on their views concerning Child abuse within the County. Below are the results that emerged for the dialogue between the authors of this article and the people on the ground:

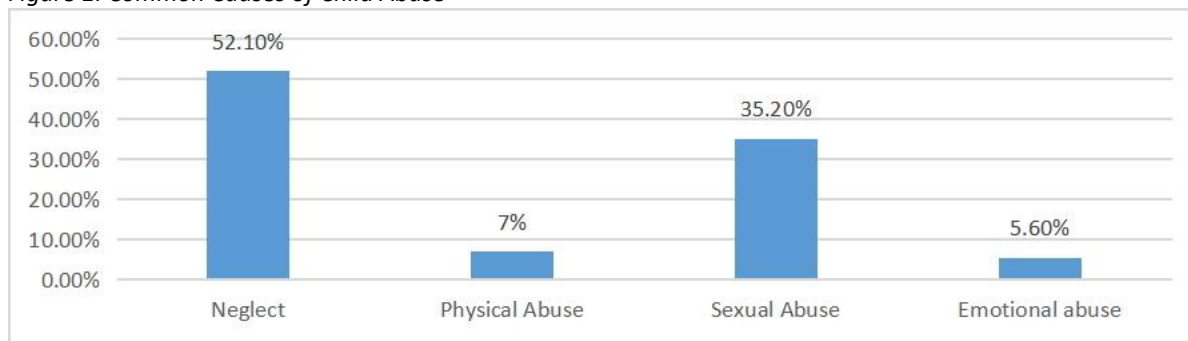
Table 1: Cases of Child Abuse in the County

Abuse Category	1 st July 2016-30 th June 2017		1 st July 2017-30 th June 2018		1 st July 2018-30 th Dec2019		1 st -30 th Jan 2020	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Neglect	85	63	112	92	180	185	10	8
Physical abuse	2	31	4	5	6	7	4	5
Defilement/sexual abuse	-	1	-	1	5	30	1	-
Child labor	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Annual Total	87	95	116	98	192	217	15	13

Source: Kajiado East Sub-County Children's Office

From Figure 1, the data presented portrays child neglect (52.10%) as the most common form of child abuse, followed by sexual (35.2%), physical (7%) and emotional abuse (5.6%). From the cases reported at the children's department in Isinya, the number of children neglected from 1st July 2016 to January 2020 is the highest as witnessed in Table 1. The total number of reported cases of neglected children at the children's department was 148 from 1st July 2016 to 1st June 2017, 204 from 1st July 2017 to 3rd June 2018, 365 from 1st July 2018 to 30th December 2019 and 18 cases in January 2020.

Figure 1: Common Causes of Child Abuse



This research article attributes the high cases of child neglect in the area to the birth of children out of wedlock, which stands at 49.30%. Most children born out of wedlock suffer from neglect, either by one parent or both. Children born by teenage girls, whose partners are not supportive and run away from the responsibility of raising a child, end up being neglected. For some children under the upbringing of grandparents, poverty and old age do not allow them to raise themselves well. As a result, the needs of children such as education and food are not sufficiently catered for. Other contributing factors to child neglect include the absence of parental love (26.80%), poverty (22.50%) and rape (1.4%). A child whose relatives do not demonstrate sufficient love for him/her through the provision of clothing, education and food among other needs feels neglected. Mary (05.06.2020) echoes the idea that poverty among some families is responsible for child neglect. In most cases, some poor parents prioritize the purchase of food and payment of some bills at the expense of their children.

The existence of a child prompted the researcher to find out if the local Church complies with Catholic Church's social teachings on child protection. The majority of respondents (93.5%) noted that the Catholic Church complies with the teaching on caring about the safety of children. To them, the organization of the parish and the restrictions put in place comply with child protection guidelines as stipulated by teachings in catechism and Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) and have played an enormous role in enhancing the dignity of children.

Ratzinger (2014) identifies specific catechism teachings which refer to children as beings that enjoy the likeness of God. As creatures of God, Christians are called upon to demonstrate love and responsibility for one another. By showing love, Christians cherish, love and care for the little ones. In that regard, the idea of neglect, abandonment and abuse of children is supposed to be eradicated in Christian circles. It is this love that is also motivating Catholics to help neglected children and support child rescue homes such as Divine Providence Children Home.

Martin Kimani (OI, 10.6.2020) avers that the Church has always ensured that children go through the teachings on catechism as a way of sensitizing them on the need to love one another and value their dignity as members of the image of God. They are always taught that Jesus loves them and treats them as important beings. He used them as an example of humility when he told the congregation to behave like children so that they can enter the kingdom of God (Mat.18:34). The love for each other enables children to report cases of abuse to their parents, teachers and the priest. That way, they take care of each other. Again, sensitized children can easily identify possible signs or potential of child abuse at home, in school and in church.

Further, the Church generally provides a safe environment for children (85.9%) and has the guidelines regulating the integrity of those taking care of children as affirmed by (70.4%) of the respondents. The researcher was shown a copy of the guidelines developed by the KCCB which each staff, caregiver, and volunteer handling children's affairs are supposed to adhere to. The guideline booklet required them to make a personal commitment to child protection by signing a commitment form (Njue, 2014). In the form, they are obligated to confirm that they have understood and are cognizant of the duty to act according to the demands of the document, comprising of reporting instances of child abuse that have or are happening from the guidelines on policies and procedures, the

people are made aware of how to recognize child abuse, procedures and general guidelines on safeguarding children.

The role of the Catholic Church in alleviating the Child abuse

The researchers discovered that counseling of victims and perpetrators of child abuse and community sensitization was the key initiative of the church in collaboration with the children's department, which has the legal mandate to take further action. The children's department intervenes by referring some cases to court, rescuing the children, joint-parental agreements, and advocating for child maintenance. As a result of what is happening on the ground Africans engaged postcolonial theologies of liberation which includes: feminism, black, African women as well as reconstruction theologies (Gathogo, 2008a, 2008b), which are now seeking to 'interpret the Christian message from the perspective of the children and the marginalized' (Waweru 2020:20).

The research article enquired from respondents to establish the presence of actual counseling for both the victims and perpetrators of child abuse. Approximately, 85% of respondents affirmed the existence of guidance and counseling services, 11.25% denied and 3.75% failed to give either a negative or affirmative response. In the institutions run and sponsored by Noonkopir Parish, such as: St. Monica Primary Academy and Divine Providence Children's home, teachers and caretakers were playing a central role in basic guidance and counseling. In the church, the local priest, assistant priests, and catechists were acting as counselors (Simon Musyoki, OI, 06.6.2020).

Having affirmed that guidance and counseling take place, there was evidence that even after counseling, some pupils were still afraid of those who perpetuated violence against them at home and in school. For instance, Esther Moguche (OI, 10.06.2020) argued that some children need frequent referrals to professional counselors since they still exhibit signs of depression and trauma, especially neglected and sexually abused children. Further, sexually defiled girls appear to have formed a lack of trust in men. Could it be that the counseling did not achieve its purpose due to the incapacity of a counselor? During theological training and spiritual formation, an observation of the curriculum shows that the content does not have adequate counseling skills, especially for extreme cases of child abuse compared to professional counselors.

Table 2: Case Intervention by the Children Department

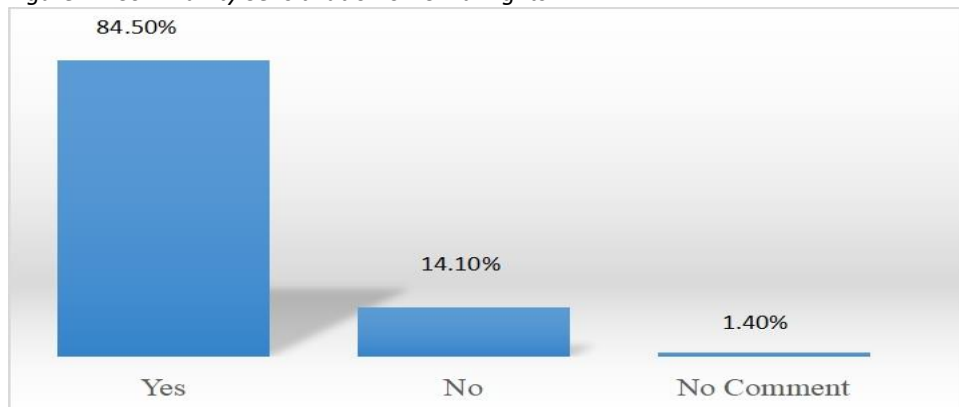
<i>Intervention Strategy</i>	1 st July 2016 30 th June 2017		1 st July 2017- 30 th June, 2018		30 June 2018- 30 th Dec2019		1 st Jan 2020- 30 th Jan 2020	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Joint Parental Agreement	31	24	32	20	43	30	6	3
Rescue and Placement in School	42	48	5	2	2	5	-	1
Referred to court	50	42	23	20	37	26	1	1
Referred to Non-state Agencies	1	2	11	12	-	-	-	-
Child Maintenance	3	2	0	0	12	17	1	2
Total	127	118	71	54	94	78	8	7

Source: Children's department, Isinya Sub-County, Kenya.

Table II above shows the intervention measures adopted by the Sub-County Children's department. The statistical figures from 1st July 2016 to 30th January 2020 demonstrate the cases that are reported directly to the children's department by the community. The church refers some cases to the children's department which it is either unable to resolve or to reduce the burden of cases. At least 20% of the cases of referrals are from the church as noted by Jane Mahui (OI, 10/6/2021). Table 2, further indicates that the children's department resolves the cases by referring some to court. Between 1st July 2016 and 31st January 2020, the children department had referred 200

cases comprising of 111 males and 89 victims of child abuse to the court. This is a clear show of a healthy collaboration between the church and the civil authorities.

Figure III: Community Sensitization on Child Rights



From the findings in Figure III, 84.5% of the participants indicated an affirmative response concerning community sensitization on child rights, some respondents (14.1%) had negative response other (1.4%) did not give any comments probably because of not being sure. From the respondent's views, public sensitization campaigns are conducted through sermons; functions presided over by priests such as marriage and burial ceremonies, and through the women and men's associations. Public sensitization campaigns have unmasked cases of child abuse in the community. For instance, community members have gained the courage to speak out against incidents of neglect, defilement and physical abuse happening in the community.

The openness of the community members to express themselves has assisted the church to implement her Child Policy and Protection Program (CPPP) which aims at educating people about the defense of child rights. (Njue, 2018). Through community awareness, the CPPP initiative has attempted to eradicate retrogressive cultural attitudes which grant liberty to child abuse. For instance, community awareness campaigns against FGM, child labor, early marriages and sexual abuse have helped in enabling the community members to gain insight into the long-term effects of their culture on the development of children. Julius Naipanoi OI, 06.06.2020) suggests that after the sensitization campaigns the community has started to discuss some aspects of their culture that are not helping their future generation. Though the youth and young adults appear to embrace the campaigns, the aged people appear to be fighting for the retention of their culture and are not willing to change. Having grown up in the traditional cultural setting without exposure to education and a modern understanding of child rights, the old men and women are a hard group to deal with.

The Challenges of Reporting Cases of Child Abuse

Respondents were granted an opportunity to air their views regarding reporting cases of child abuse. Results of the investigation revealed that only 23.75%, 25% and 21.25% of teachers, parents and clergymen respectively were extremely willing to report. One expects that majority of members of the community are willing to report. Statistics further reveal that 30%, 20% and 22% of the teachers, parents and clergymen respectively were completely not willing to report cases of abuse to relevant authorities.

Though they unanimously agreed on the importance of reporting violence against children to relevant authorities, an interview with Maurice Otieno (OI, 06.06.2020), revealed that the long procedures of investigating the claims of abuse and backlash from families of the perpetrators and the community were an obstacle. He explained that some cases which may go all the way to the court are considered time-consuming for the teacher who ends up spending a lot of time and resources to seek justice. As a result, teachers decide to handle the cases of violation internally by counseling the culprits and victims without reporting and subjecting them to legal

procedures. On backlash, Maurice Otieno (OI, 06.06.2020) lamented that some community members offer a negative reaction to child abuse. They do not like teachers who are too quick to report cases. They want teachers to be discreet about it. That is why they can become harsh to an extent that the concerned teacher starts living in fear, especially if the culprit is from an influential family.

After comprehending the level of willingness, it was important to dig deeper and understand the general reasons why cases of child abuse would go unreported. Respondents were allowed to give reasons why there is general unwillingness to report the various forms of child abuse. The respondents (91.5%) indicated that there is a general reluctance and lack of willingness to report cases of child abuse. This does not however mean that there were no cases that were reported. It implies that there are many unreported cases which are not documented by the police, chief, Church or the children's department. The lack of 100% disclosure of child abuse cases shows that the community might be having some reservations regarding the interests of the child and fear that if the relatives, for instance, are convicted; the child may not be well-taken care of by strangers.

Table 13: Why Cases of Child Abuse May not be Reported

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>To protect the image of the church</i>	42	53.125%
<i>Bribery of the Victim's family</i>	38	47.5%
<i>Parents hide information on child abuse</i>	50	62.5%
<i>Fear of exit from the Church</i>	35	43.5%
<i>Threats and intimidation of the victim's family</i>	39	48.75%
<i>Protecting children from abuse is not the responsibility of the church</i>	30	37.5%

Table 13 above attributes the church's reluctance to disclose information related to child abuse to the need to protect her image and reputation (62.5%) and the fear that family members and part of the congregation may exit the Church (43.5%). Given that the church started operating in a predominantly Maasai community, though now Kajiado is a metropolitan County, there is a new understanding that the Maasai will leave the church if claims of child abuse are reported to the civil authorities. On the part of the congregation, some of them (in confidentiality) claimed that the Church should not bother with safeguarding children from abuse 'because it is not her responsibility' (37.5%). They base their notions on the many organizations handling issues of children leaving the church in order to concentrate their efforts on evangelization. There exist non-governmental organizations that are campaigning against child abuse, but with the prevalence of child abuse, the church has a role to play. It cannot stay calm as it witnesses the violation of child abuse in Isinya or any other part of the county.

The Church leaders opine that exposing practices of child abuse, especially in areas where priests are involved as the real culprits, to the public may damage their image irreparably, and instead work against both the whistleblower-dependent and the culprit-priest who is ironically depended upon by a huge constituency of the locality. It is no wonder that the pontifical secrecy code protected the church leaders. For a long period, sexual abuse of children involving priests has been covered by the pontifical secrecy code (Francis, 2019). Pontifical secrecy allowed the church officials to hide from sharing information on sexual abuse. However, Pope Francis abolished the secrecy requirement claiming that it is outdated and that the affected clergymen should go ahead and cooperate with civil authorities. It is hoped that with the abolition of the secrecy guideline code, priests will contribute to a further reduction in cases of abuse within the church environment.

Though Canon Law, regards sexual molestation of children as a crime, its practical application further protects the image of the Church and not the victims. Beal, Coriden and Green (2000) observe that the whole process of investigating child abuse to punishment is kept confidential in the church setting for fear of affecting her integrity. The sexual offences are confidential. Even after confirming the nature of the allegation, section 1341 of the Canon Law specifies that a bishop is obligated to penalize a priest on the condition that brotherly correction, rebuke and care have completely failed in reforming the offender. As a result, Stephanie (06.06.2020) argues, that the Canon Law has made the bishops go easy on sexual offence allegations involving the priest. Though we have not heard of a case in Kajiado, most priests are always just transferred and a few are stripped of their pastoral duties in some cases. If the issues are serious the bishop refer priests for counseling. What this means is that the victims are always left on their own without justice. In other words, sometimes, the church emphasizes trying to reform the offender, if he is a priest, without concentrating on the justice for the victim.

From a community point of view, Table 13 discloses the difficulties encountered in the community in reporting cases of child abuse. For instance, some parents hide information concerning cases of child maltreatment (62.5%). Concealing information and hiding the offender and victim is common in Isinya, especially when the case involves incest or a family friend. They do not want the reputation of the family to be tainted because of the shame associated with child abuse. In some cases, neighbors may fail to report claims of abuse even when it is clear that there is child abuse for fear of spoiling the good neighborly relationship.

(a) Enhancing Reporting Cases of Child Abuse

On reporting and investigative procedures, the researcher collected data about how the Church attempts to solve the challenge of reporting and investigating child abuse claims within and outside the church environment, the respondents were rested to give their views. They expressed their opinions on measures that appear to be working and those that are not.

Table 4: Reporting and investigative Procedure

Statement	Yes	No	Not Sure
	%(F)	% (F)	% (F)
The Church has a public desk or office that allows the public to report cases of child abuse	25% (20)	61.25%(49)	13.75%(11)
It is a mandatory duty for all church leaders to report claims of abuse	47.5%(38)	32.5% (26)	20% (16)
Cases of child abuse are reported promptly	58.75%(47)	22.5%(18)	18.75% (15).
Child abuse cases are no longer covered up	46.25%(37)	37.25%(30)	16.25% (13)
Victims and those reporting child abuse are protected	62.5% (50)	20% (16)	14
Some cases of abuse referred to police or the Sub-County children office for investigation and possible prosecution	48.75(39)	45%(36)	6.25%(5)
Reporting and investigating claims of child abuse lasts for not more than three months	48.75%(39)	36.25%(29)	15%(12)

Note: F- frequency, % -percentage

The Catholic Church is committed to enhancing reporting and investigation of cases of child abuse. The renewed commitment to child protection stems from the need to implement child protection guidelines advocated by the papal authority. Table 4 above gives a summary of their views.

The research articles’ findings further indicate that the parish ensures that cases of child abuse are reported promptly (58.75%) and that it is a mandatory requirement for the clergy to report cases of child abuse (47.5%). This means the clergy’s failure to report cases of child abuse might be an individual’s lack of willingness and not because the church forbids it.

The need to live according to the concept of valuing the dignity of children has contributed to the mandatory reporting requirement. This is also a deviation from the past when the clergymen could decide to report the cases of abuse at will. After reporting, the investigation procedure requires that the accused is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty. This is a way of avoiding rumored and malicious allegations which do not carry weight and are meant to tarnish the reputation of the accused.

There are other positive measures adopted by the Church. They include the church protecting the victims and reporters of child abuse (62.5%), and referring some cases of child abuse to the police or the Sub-County Children Department (48.75%). Cases of referral are those that the church is unable to handle, for instance, those that require the perpetrator to be arrested or be compelled to appear in court by the police.

In addition, there is the requirement that reporting and investigation of claims should not take more than three months (48.75%). The shortening of the period of investigation to ninety days is a welcome move for the church. Again, it has attempted to demonstrate mechanisms the cover up of cases of child abuse (46.25%). An observer can laud these mechanisms as an ideal commitment of the Catholic Church to safeguard the children against all forms of abuse in the research article area. These strategies have given the victims of child abuse to be open about cases of abuse. It has instilled fear in the perpetrators of abuse and enabled the religious staff and the community to view child abuse as a serious criminal offence. That way, it has tried to change the attitude of the congregation on how they view children concerning respecting their dignity as people who are created in the image of God.

Future Strategy on Child Abuse

Based on these findings, this research article proposes a future strategy on dealing with Child abuse in the Kajiado County and the nation at large. First, the church should strongly incorporate the chiefs and clan elders in sensitizing the community on progressive cultural practices through vigil education and open-air meetings, especially for the aged who appear to strive for retention of some cultural practices that are oppressive to children. Secondly, there is need for collaboration among the stake holders such as the clergy, police, chiefs, education department and the courts to protect victims and those who report cases of abuse in the society from threats and intimidation. The concerted effort will enhance the level of willingness of parents, teachers, and clergymen. Additionally, the courts and children's department should consider speeding up the delivery of justice to avoid cases of abuse dragging in courts for a long time. Thirdly, it is the suggestion of this research article that children's homes could be safer for children under threat, if only the concerned Children's department keeps an eye on them. Given the fact that not all cases of abused children can fit in a children's home, it is prudent that the community is sensitized to enhance the adoption of neglected and other abused children into existing families. This will ease pressure on children's homes and other rescue centers for abused children.

Conclusion

The research article explored the role of the Catholic Church in alleviating child abuse. Using the descriptive survey design, the research article established that child neglect was [and is] the most common form of child abuses in the County of Kajiado. It is largely caused by poverty, single motherhood resulting to insufficient love, and rape by foster parents. Some of the key initiatives for alleviating child abuse in the research article area included counseling victims and perpetrators of child abuse as well as holding community sensitization campaigns through seminars. The greatest obstacle to the reduction of child maltreatment is the unwillingness to report these vices. On a positive note, Noonkopir parish has ably attempted to solve the challenge of reporting and investigating child abuse claims, within and outside the church environment. The parish ensures that cases of child abuse are reported promptly; and that, it is a mandatory requirement for the parents to report all cases of regarding child abuse. This means that parental failure to report the vice might be an individual's lack of willingness and not because the society forbids it. Other measures include: demanding protection of victims and reporters of child abuse (the whistleblowers); and referring cases of child abuse to the police. Based on these research findings, this article has

strongly recommended the need for the incorporation of chiefs and clan elders in sensitization of the community on progressive cultural practices through open-air meetings, especially for the aged who strive for the retention of the traditional cultural practices that now fossilized and giving up in their very joints. Child abuse is a vice that must give way to progressive ideas and practices that will build the twenty-first century.

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