

## Socio-Cultural Dynamics Influencing Domestic Violence in Nyeri County, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

*For many years, domestic violence has been stereotyped as violence against women and girls, with men as perpetrators. However, in recent times, men have also become victims. Domestic violence is a violation of human rights and should not be condoned. Nyeri County has experienced tremendous development and, therefore, changes in terms of education, occupation, and economic activities, making it one of the richest counties in Kenya. With these changes in society, there is a high level of education, strong cultural adjustments, and economic endowment, and the expectation is that there should be harmony in the homes. On the contrary, as researchers and the media have documented, there is a lot of domestic violence. Therefore, this study is intended to answer the question "why" by interrogating the influence of socio-cultural dynamics on this domestic violence. This paper presents a discussion of the results of the objective, which was to investigate the nexus between socio-cultural dynamics and domestic violence in Nyeri County. The study used descriptive and evaluative research designs. The following respondents were sampled to participate in the study: 384 household heads, 12 assistant chiefs, 15 police officers, 30 religious leaders, 12 NGOs/CBOs, 3 sub-county administrators, and 20 village elders. The primary methods of data collection were interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic narrations, and findings were presented using narrations and descriptions. The study shows that the main socio-cultural factors that influence domestic violence are chauvinism, gender role exchange, alcoholism, and the MAU impact. The study recommends that there should be sensitization in the study area to help people utilize the positive changes in society, such as high education levels, to make a harmonious society instead of using it to fight among spouses.*

**Keywords:** Domestic, Dynamics, Family, Socio-Cultural, Violence

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence has, for many years, been stereotyped as violence against women. Definitions of GBV directly or indirectly point to women as the victims, while men are perpetrators. The majority of world societies are patriarchal (The World March of Women Advocacy, 2004). Thus, the men are given the responsibility of making decisions that the women cannot question. In most traditional societies, men created rules that had to be followed by women and children (Shell & Henlund, 2000). This included disciplining women through actions that are not friendly to them. Thus, women mostly emerged as the victims of domestic violence (Salami, 2010).

Nyeri County is one of the richest counties in Kenya, and this can be attributed to the changes that have occurred in the community, such as economic empowerment and high literacy rates, as well as the industrious culture and horticultural farming zeal among the residents. This means that there has always been a good flow of income in that region. With all the resources in the region, people do not struggle to get basic things such as food, shelter, and education, among other critical things for survival.

According to Muhindi (2012), Nyeri is one of the counties with the highest educated individuals in Kenya. Education in the region has brought about cultural adjustment and economic empowerment. Unlike in other counties in Kenya, women in the region have also been at the forefront of becoming educated for better means of living. With all this in place, the general society has set some expectations that are normally common among the educated and economically stable society. One of the expectations was that there would be harmony in homes within Nyeri County. Contrary to expectations, Nyeri has experienced an increase in domestic violence.

Bitrus-Ojiambo and King'ori (2016) argue that a high level of education brings about competition between the father and mother in the house because each of them wants to have a say in the house. Such completions cause unnecessary disagreement and might lead to violence in the house. Scholars such as Bitrus-Ojiambo and King'ori (2016) and some media houses in Kenya have clearly indicated that despite the high level of education and economic stability



in Nyeri County, domestic violence still exists. Therefore, it is of prime interest for this study to answer the question of why by interrogating the influence of social-cultural dynamics on this domestic violence.

In Nyeri County, the high prevalence of domestic violence is far from receding, with most of the disproportionately affected victims being women. Notably, Nyeri is one of the Kenyan counties that has and continues to post a remarkable and stellar economic performance. It has experienced tremendous development and, therefore, changes in terms of education, occupation, and economic activities, making it one of the richest counties in Kenya (Mutahi, 2017). With these changes in society, there is a high level of education, which has highly contributed to the holistic empowerment of both genders, thus making some of the women secure the most stable jobs that were primarily held by men; cultural adjustments, which have seen the decline in male dominance; and exchanging gender roles, among others.

Cultural adjustments have imprinted severe changes in feminine perception, which in turn has influenced the dynamics of domestic violence. Again, economic endowment and empowerment have significantly contributed to the independence of both genders since even women have become a reckoning force in various economic sectors that drive the development of the country (Njoroge, 2016). Among other factors, there ought to be a clear expectation that peaceful coexistence should be the order of the day and that peace and tranquility should prevail in all homesteads. On the contrary, there is a lot of domestic violence, as captured by scholars and the media. The former has conducted significant research to ascertain the validity of increased domestic violence in the county, with the latter being the voice to the outside world as it unearths the brutalities perpetrated by spouses to their intimate partners (Mucheru, 2014). Therefore, this study intends to answer the question "why" by interrogating the influence of socio-cultural dynamics on domestic violence.

### 1.1 Objective

The objective of this study was to evaluate the nexus between socio-cultural dynamics and domestic violence in Nyeri County, Kenya

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive and evaluative research design. Both probability and non-probability sampling procedures were employed. Non-probability comprises purposeful sampling and convenient sampling, while probability encapsulates proportionate stratified random sampling. The number of households in Nyeri County is 248, 050 (KNBS, 2019). To attain a valid and reliable sample size, the researcher used Fischer's *et al.* (1998) formula which is as follows

$$n = \frac{x^2PQ}{y^2}$$

Where n=desired Sample Size (assuming) the population will be greater than (10,000).

X = is the Standard normal Deviation set at 1.96 which corresponds to 95% confidence level

P=is the proportion in the target population estimated to have particular characteristics. If there is no reasonable estimate then it will use 50% study which therefore use (0.5) ½

Q = (1.0 – P)

Y = the degrees of accuracy desired here corresponding to the 1.96

Basing on replacement method therefore the utilization of the formula was:

$$n = \frac{X^2PQ}{Y^2} \text{ is quite relevant}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Therefore } n &= \frac{(1.96)^2 \times \frac{1}{2}(1-\frac{1}{2})}{(0.05)^2} \\ &= \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 (1-0.5)}{0.05^2} \\ &= \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05 \times 0.05} \\ &= \frac{1.96 \times 1.96 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 \times 10^6}{0.05 \times 0.05 \times 10^6} \\ &= \frac{196 \times 196 \times 25}{25 \times 100} = \frac{38416}{100} \end{aligned}$$

$$n=384.16 \sim 384$$

n=384

The household sample size was thus 384. This sample size was be divided by 3 to get the house hold sample size from every sub-county. So, from every sub-county, the house hold sample size will be 128 households.

The household heads, National Police Service, business entities, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, sub-county commissioners, village elders, and assistant chiefs were sampled from the respective populations and areas to afford equal participation opportunities in the study. In this case, proportionate simple random sampling, convenience, and purposive techniques were used. In this method, 50%, 10%, or even 30% of the particular groups were sampled, and the sample sizes were determined (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The sample size of the study population was 384 for household heads, fifteen (15) National Police Service (Police Officers), twelve (12) Assistant Chiefs, twenty (20) village elders, twelve (12) non-governmental organizations (NGOs), three (3) sub-county administrators, and thirty (30) business entities, bringing the total sample size to four hundred and seventy-six (476). The primary methods of data collection were interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic narrations, and findings were presented using narrations and descriptions.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 Socio-cultural Factors Influencing Domestic Violence in Nyeri County

The study sought to investigate the socio-cultural dynamics influencing domestic violence in Nyeri County. Respondents were asked to discuss the main factors that contribute to domestic violence. The results are discussed in this section.

##### 3.1.1 Alcoholism

Consumption of alcohol alters the mind of the users, hence making them vulnerable to doing and saying things that they did not intend to. In simple terms, alcoholism could magnify their negative behaviors, leading to domestic violence. Therefore, alcohol could be the exact cause of domestic violence in Nyeri County. Still, it is undeniably one of the standard agitators that increase the prevalence of domestic violence in this county. People who are heavily into alcoholism may act more angrily, aggressively, or violently when under the influence of alcohol than when they are sober. This means that whenever they are drunk, it is easier for cases of domestic violence to occur.

It is evident that a good number of the respondents acknowledge alcoholism as a major cause of domestic violence in Nyeri County. In an interview with assistant chiefs of the Ngangaririthi location, he confirmed that the rate of use of alcohol in these areas has been rising, which also causes a rise in cases of domestic violence. He stated that:

*Despite the efforts that my administration is trying to put in place, the issue of alcoholism is still rampant. It is not once or twice that I have solved cases in various homesteads of problems that arise due to alcohol. In a recent case, the wife came to my office to solve an issue where the husband had drunk more than he could pay and asked the local bar owner to cut some trees on his farm. The woman was not ready to have the trees cut as this is what she wanted to use to take her son to school (Interview with chief, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).*

This is one of the examples of how alcoholism is ruining the families in society. The police also confirmed that they had had such experiences in the cases they solved daily. According to police, alcoholism has become the reason why crime is committed in the community, especially domestic violence. One police officer pointed out that:

*There are many instances where you find the husband has sold some of the home items to be able to cater for his drinking habits. Others sneak things from their households and sell them to satisfy their drinking urges. Recently, we were called to retrieve a motorbike belonging to a wife whose husband had sold at a loss to pay alcohol bills (Interview with police officer, 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).*

Prolonged exposure to alcoholism according to research has been found to make the brain adapt to the changes that are associated with alcohol, thereby making drinking the chief medium through which the addicted persons tend to deal with intimate partners, job and marriage life. Alcoholism has been found to dominate the cognitive capability of the intimate partners, their emotions and actions against the backdrop of equality of gender to cause divorce or separation. In heterosexual marriages, some studies have indicated that 3.4 per cent of females and 9.7 per cent of males are dependent on alcohol and substance abuse which according to the findings have been a threat to health, marriages and a potential cause of domestic violence (Silali, 2019). Most researchers are in consensus that alcohol normally operates as a situational factor that can speed up the likelihood of violence by impeding inhibitions, misguided judgments and hindering a person's capability to interpret things right with the excessive consumption increasing the

intimate partner violence by providing a haven for arguments between couples which in most cases culminates in physical beatings and injuries.

### 3.1.2 Chauvinism Ideology

According to Rollero et al. 2021, chauvinism is an unreasonable belief one could develop which is full of dominance or superiority amongst a particular individual or gender. In this study, male and female chauvinism are among the main socio-cultural dynamics influencing domestic violence in the study area. Male chauvinism is, therefore, the behavior, opinions, or attitude that men in Nyeri County have over the women they live with within this area. These men could disparage, patronize, or denigrate females since they believe that women are inferior to them. Thus, they deserve lesser treatment or attention than what is socially considered equal. Rollero et al. 2021 claims that male chauvinists believe they are virtuous and strong, whereas they view women as unworthy, weak, and inferior. If men have this perspective in any social setting, many domestic violence cases will be, especially when women try to fight back and stand on their ground.

Based on the results, it is evident that most of the respondents had an idea of what male chauvinism is and the role it plays in the prevalence of domestic violence in the county. In an interview conducted with several assistant chiefs, they claimed that this is an issue that they have noted to be widespread in the community. Some men believe that a woman is not supposed to lead in any end; hence they disagree with being led by a woman. An assistant chief from Karima, Othaya Sub-county pointed out that:

*Most men believe that women are second class human beings. For example, women are not supposed to have any say over the finances of a homestead. I remember an instance when a case was brought to my office after an argument between a husband and wife over splitting the tea bonus given yearly to farmers by KTDA. The wife wanted to purchase some cows, but the husband could not agree since he felt the woman was dominating. They had a fight and the woman was badly injured (interview with assistant chief, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022).*

This is an example of an instance where male chauvinism is witnessed. Men do not want to practice an idea, even if it is beneficial, simply because it comes from a woman. In an interview with some police officers in Nyeri County, they also affirmed that cases of male chauvinism are prevalent. The police officers shared their experiences with similar circumstances, illustrating that a male chauvinistic idea caused domestic violence. The following is a confession by one of the police officers.

*There was a day we arrested a man over domestic violence. After listening to both parties, the husband was mad since the wife had decided to sell one of their goats to pay fees for their candidate who was in form four and had been sent home for a week plus due to lack of school fees. At this juncture, this was the right call to make since the wife was worried about their son's education, but the husband felt that the woman had no power to make such decisions since he was the head of the family. The woman sold a goat, and the man was very mad when he came home and found the goat missing. He battered the wife until she became unconscious claiming that she had crossed her lane as a woman (Interview with police officer, 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2022).*

Feminism seeks to celebrate and appreciate female sexuality. In most cultures, men have treated women as sex objects for a long period, and these cultures still entertain the thought that women must be decently dressed to avoid arousing men by fully covering their bodies (Lewis, 2021). Some societies often assume themselves as enlightened and exploit female sexuality in the mass media constantly, by advertising their nudity or scantily dressed women in televisions and movies, yet majority of these women fear breastfeeding in public domains. Based on the workforce, feminism seeks to deal with the unfairness, oppression, and discrimination that women experience in their workplaces. Unequal salaries remain persistent within the workforce and are worse when the race factor is counted (Lewis, 2021). However, data registered show that women earn less than their male colleagues. With this regard, feminism seeks to attain equal opportunities and fair treatment for women to gain similar prospects within various fields of work, and culture, and above all, equal respect in a range of roles assigned.

In the traditional African society, female chauvinism was manifested in various ways. For instance, the Agikuyu experienced some sort of female dominance during the Wangu wa Makeri chieftainship. Wangu wa Makeri was a powerful Kikuyu chief during Kenya's colonization by the British (Wanjiru & Kaburi, 2015). The woman came to prominence after falling into a relationship with Karuri wa Gakure, a tribal chief from Murang'a. After Wangu's husband learned about it, he was awarded the chieftainship to which he declined making Wangu assume the position. The woman is known for her notoriety against taxpayers. She even utilized men as her seat during her reign showing how men had

become inferior to women. Before Wangu's rule, there was a time when the community experienced a power shift from men to women. Men played subservient and subordinate roles which were seen as a derogatory tradition. Men experienced a lot of suffering alongside women practicing polyandry. According to narratives, men were able to assume their position as the dominant gender by impregnating all women at the same time (Wanjiru & Kaburi, 2015). Through feminism, domestic violence cannot be evaded as evidenced by the above experiences.

### 3.1.3 Poverty and Unemployment

Gateri et al. (2021) states poverty is the primary driver of domestic violence in the community today. Poverty is that state when an individual cannot be able to meet their basic needs in life and hence has to depend on someone else for their survival. Unemployment accelerates this problem since one does not have any source of income; hence they have to abide by the rules set by the provider for survival. Being the provider makes one feel in power and deserves control over the other party, which could quickly turn to domestic violence.

The issues of poverty and unemployment have been identified as a cause of domestic violence in Nyeri County. Results from interview with NGOs and other community-based organizations indicate that most women in Nyeri County are unemployed, which makes them susceptible to domestic violence since their husbands are the providers. An official from Caritas Nyeri stated that:

*You will find a mother of four children does not have any source of income, hence entirely depends on her husband. Even if she is faced with various domestic disagreements, she has to be submissive since she has no income which can help her raise the children alone (Interview with NGO official, 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2022).*

The above explanation explains why most women in Nyeri County still hold onto their marriages even if they are full of violence. The idea was backed up by an interview with police officers from Nyeri town who stated that:

*Referring to the arrest in the Majengo area, the woman had to remain with her husband even after daily beatings since she had no other option in life. She was not employed and had children; hence she had to take the beatings for the sake of her children till we took the matter into our hands (Interview with a police officer, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2022).*

Findings in this study have revealed poverty as one of the major drivers of domestic violence as well as the causative factor of the same, thus tending to determine the woman's capability to get involved in violence. It has been hindering women's ability to choose whether to stay or walk out of violent relationships. It deprives women of their ability to assert control over the essential resources and their ability to make independent and informed decisions on matters that touch the daily livelihood of the household, due to male dominance. The existing institutions and some societal beliefs have also impeded women's access to both tangible and intangible resources thus, making them more vulnerable to challenge the status quo of male domination (Mutuku, 2007).

### 3.1.4 Stereotypes

Stereotypes are the perceptions or images painted on the residents of Nyeri as far as women are concerned. In most cases, people are judged based on the impression they are tainted with. Across various social media platforms and media stations, there is this lousy picture is painted on Nyeri women based on some incidents in different parts of Nyeri. The few cases are generalized, and all the women in Nyeri are presented as rude, non-submissive, cunning, and have other negative beliefs about them, which plays a massive role in the issue of domestic violence.

Stereotypes play a considerable role in this county's domestic violence cases. Women seem to be more affected by these scenarios based on the statements mentioned by some women in the interview room. For example, when interviewing community-based groups, the following issue was raised by one of the women.

*Everyone in society sees Nyeri women as immoral. There were a few instances in Mukurweini when we heard that some women cut their men's genitals, and they poured hot water on them in other areas. However, those are only three scenarios; hence we should not all be judged (Interview with CBO leader, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2022).*

The issue was confirmed by religious leaders who were in for the interview. According to religious leaders, men are afraid of women in Nyeri; they already have this picture in their minds that these women are heartless. One of the pastors mentioned the following.

*Nowadays, it is hard to trust any woman from Nyeri. This behavior spreads like a wave across the country, which started in Mukurweini. Once a man is drunk, they fear many things including waking up to find that their wife cut off their private parts (Interview with religious leader, 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2022).*

According to the founder of the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986), social learning follows the following principles: observation, attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The people living in Nyeri County learn about domestic violence by observing and imitating or copying the aggressive behaviors of their neighbors who fight in their homes. Stereotypes play a very big role in creating a violent society, and children copy from this. Before engaging in a particular observed act of domestic violence, an individual analyzes the possible benefits and penalties that may arise and then seeks for reactions from others so as to come up with rules that they will use even in future. As a result of this, the knowledge about domestic violence is gained directly through experience, and the perpetrators equip themselves with much complex mechanisms than the specific actions they previously observed (Hoffman & Edwards, 2004). Previous studies by Sims et al. (1997) suggest that learning the skill of how to build relationships is an important part of development for children. The studies also indicate that adult relationships are established based on childhood relationship skills. Children are therefore the most susceptible social group to learning about domestic violence by observing and imitating the behaviors of adults in their surroundings or acts they see in the mass media. Children in Nyeri County tend to display violent behaviors later in their adulthood because they have observed other people acting violently for a long period of time and these aggressive behaviors have been modeled and negatively reinforced in them.

### 3.1.5 Change of Gender Roles

Ademiluka (2018) argues that both cultural identities and roles identify people's histories, including their traditions. Cultures are said to nourish the belonging, pride, resilience, connection, and intersectional identities between the people and their community. Therefore, culture is one of the best tools which could be used to explain the occurrence of domestic violence in Nyeri County. African culture is known to be unequal, especially for women in the community, since men have more power and control than women.

Based on the data collected after interviewing various respondents, the issue of the exchange of cultural roles played a considerable role in the prevalence of domestic violence in the community. The village elders held a substantial belief that women were expected to be submissive to their husbands. One of the village elders alluded that:

*There is massive exchange of the culture in the modern society more so in Nyeri County. This is experienced in a scenario where women tend to play the role of men and vice versa. This form of cultural roles exchange creates societal commotion. For example, some unemployed men in Nyeri are forced to stay at home and look after their children as women go to work. Such men are ridiculed by other men something that prompts them to resist this form of exchange of roles. Thus, their resistance brings commotion at home since women cannot manage to go to work and take care of the children at the same time (FGD with village elders, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).*

The police backed up the statement from other respondents in Nyeri County after they shared their experiences during their time in service. The police affirmed that they have dealt with many cases resulting from the exchange of societal roles. One officer said the following during an interview:

*I remember a case where we arrested a man who hit his wife since he came home late and found that she had not cooked. In attempt to ask her why she had not cooked, the woman was rude to her husband, and the man was provoked and pushed her, where she fell off a hard surface and succumbed to injuries. The woman had insisted that she cannot go to work and leave the man in the house, just to find he had not done anything in that house. She claimed that since she was the one providing for the family, the man should embrace the roles of the traditional woman and do the house chores, including cooking for the family (Interview with police officer, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2022).*

The structural functionalism theory states that domestic violence may occur when there is a change of roles and responsibilities among family members or between partners. The society in general expects men to perform the instrumental roles and women to perform the expressive roles and when these gender roles and responsibilities are not maintained, conflict often occurs. Increased women empowerment and the rising level of education in Nyeri County have led to shifting of gender roles and responsibilities and therefore increased cases of domestic violence. According to a study done by Muthee et al. (2019), women empowerment by the law, economic empowerment of these women, their increasing engagement in politics, leadership, and governance, among other relative gender empowerment factors, have led to increased cases of domestic violence in Nyeri County. This is because the women in the county endeavor to take over the instrumental roles that are meant for men. This then creates fear and frustration that the woman will take the position of the man in the family and they start fighting (Muthee et al., 2019). Moreover, with the increasing level of education in the county, when the women get educated and feel more learned, they become frustrated when they do not get much recognition as they should within the household, and this results in domestic fights.

### 3.1.6 Education

According to Lloyd (2018), education plays a huge role in the development of the community. However, lack of complete education can be concluded as one of the primary reasons for the prevalence of domestic violence in Nyeri County. The current education or civilization includes educating children and other individuals through the correct education system on the dangers of domestic violence and raising awareness among the community. Therefore, the more uneducated the community members are, the more domestic violence cases will be experienced.

Education is still another major issue that is affecting the community, thus causing cases of domestic violence. In an interview with some individuals working in NGOs in Nyeri County, they claimed that there are people who do not understand the negative impacts of domestic violence. The following is a confession from one of the assistant chiefs who participated in an interview.

*It is painful that we have men and women in society who do not understand the adverse effects that domestic violence has on the community. Unfortunately, in most cases of domestic violence, the children suffer the most. Some children have shown hate, especially to their fathers, for beating their mother, and some boys have grown up knowing that women should be beaten in case of arguments. Most of the men who beat their wives are not properly educated (Interview with assistant chief, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2022).*

This was a painful confession since the respondent seemed to be agonizing from that instance. The same ideology was supported by the sub-county administrators, as they claimed that statistics show the number of street children in Nyeri has increased. This is attributed to the cases of GBV, especially where the parents do not understand the value of education. When parents have continuous conflicts, children suffer, and the parents fail to take action to help their children continue with their education. One of the sub-county administrators had this to say:

*There is a growing number of street children in the streets of Nyeri town and other big towns in the county. In making a follow-up, most of the children claimed that their father chased them away with their mother or their mother ran away in search of peace, then life got hard, and they ended up in the streets. They come to the streets and no one follows them up to understand their academic journey, as their parents do not know the importance of quality education (Interview with sub-county administrators, 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2022).*

One partner may opt to pursue a higher education level and this can make the other partner see it as a threat which can also lead to domestic violence due to jealousy and fear that he or she will obtain a higher status in the society. Old customs have largely affected the advancement and status of women in society. Some women speak out their minds concerning the traditional values and say that they are interfering with and limiting their space for personal development (Khan & Mazhar, 2017). Modern women are actively involved in opposing social norms on women and they have a great yearning for social liberty. On the other hand, some women who are not empowered have little or no desire at all for social freedom and they do nothing about it, they are contented with following the traditional way of life. Research shows that women's norms that are defined culturally should be considered if a transition from patriarchy is to occur. Education empowers women and it is the key to getting rid of outdated customs that have suppressed the desires of women.

### 3.1.7 The Mau Mau Impact

During the colonial period, most men in Nyeri became members of MAU MAU warriors. MAU MAU was a group of men, mostly Kikuyu from various areas in the central region of Kenya whose major foundation was to advocate for violent resistance to the trials of the British government dominating Kenya. Most of the men who belonged to this group took an oath under the Kikuyu Central Association, ensuring that they remained united. The oath was also a form of brotherhood meant to hold these warriors together in the fight against the British colonial government (Presley, 1988). Most Kikuyu men in Nyeri County found themselves in the middle of the war. Most of them were taken to join the other men from other regions in central Kenya to fight against the British government. The MAU MAU guerrilla war took place in forests, majorly Mount Kenya and Aberdare ranges. These mountains acted as major hideouts for the MAU MAU warriors, hence forcing them to stay for longer durations in an attempt to plan for attacks on the British camps in the region. As a result, women in Nyeri County were left behind by their husbands to look after their families and properties thus taking the throne and making the tough decisions that these men could have made if they were still in their homes. Women in Nyeri County were expected to discipline their children, find resources for them, educate them, and oversee marriages, among other responsibilities the Kikuyu community had designated to be performed by men. Generally, women had to play their roles as mothers and as the fathers in their families.

The results of the study found out that after the war was over and Kenya had gained its independence, the MAU MAU warriors were free to get back to their homes, and this is when they realized that exchange of roles had taken place. Unfortunately, most of them had died in the war, and those who managed to come out were old and weak. They faced a significant challenge in society in terms of gender roles since they found most of the women had already taken their place. Since childhood, most of the daughters in Nyeri County had learned that their mothers took care of them and the family; hence, they continued with the spirit and did not recognize their fathers, husbands, or brothers. MAU MAU MAU men from Nyeri County committed domestic violence to take back their place in the community. In an interview with a CBO official in Kieni sub-county, he made this statement;

*When I returned from the forests, I found my family had nearly forgotten me. Yes, they knew me by name and history, but since I had stayed for long without contacting them, it made them forget me. I did not have any recent memory I shared with them, making it challenging for my children to recognize me or my place in the family. All of them believed their mother was responsible for their life, and when I ordered them, they never listened to me. Their mother had already taken control; hence they could even ignore me when I tried to make any orders in the family (Interview with a CBO head, 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2022).*

The statement shares the pain of a MAU MAU warrior who returned and found his wife sitting on his throne. Children could not listen to him since they only knew about their mother. Since the wife had been alone for a long time, she also got used to making the decisions hence she could not take any orders from her husband. As the husband tried to take back his place and control, domestic violence in Nyeri County was an inevitable occurrence. The impact is still felt today as those daughters who grew up seeing their mothers being there for families continue with their mothers' legacies making it a challenge for the men to take control at the family level. This has in turn caused domestic violence in the county.

Nyeri County is named as the epicentre of the MAU MAU resistance. The county was home to Dedan Kimathi and fellow heroes such as Stanley Mathenge, Gititi Kabutu and Waruhiu Itote. Nyeri County is therefore the home for MAU MAU memorial. During the MAU MAU guerilla war, most men went to fight in the forest. The war was continuous hence the men were away from home for a long time. This MAU MAU impact has ever since brought conflicts between men and women in Nyeri County. During this time, women were left to handle all the household responsibilities. This included raising children, tilling the land, rearing cattle among others. They took the position of the heads of families when the husbands left. Eventually, some of the men died in the forests fighting and hence did not return, some returned when they were injured and others suffered permanent disabilities. There are those that came back when they were so weak and old to concentrate on household responsibilities. The rest were mentally affected by the disturbing events they witnessed as their counterparts were killed by the British colonizers. This turn of events made the women take and maintain the lead in their families.

Presley (2019) explains that there are women who participated in significant numbers in nearly every aspect of the war waged by the Land and Freedom Army. They engaged in the nationalist associations to improve their economic status, gain access to the political process, get more education, and regain alienated land. These women were respected and this explains how women's involvement produced a tradition of female leadership in post-MAU MAU Kenya. Gachihi (1986) further states that there are women who carried out important tasks such as smuggling vital provisions such as medicine and clothing while acting at the same time as couriers of information through many hazardous routes. These brave women could not stand to be controlled by men. They instead took power and domineered them.

### **3.1.8 Agikuyu Traditional Matriarchal Society**

Traditionally, the Kikuyu community was considered to be matriarchal. As a result, the community refers to itself as "*Nyumba ya Mumbi*," interpreted as "House of Mumbi." Mumbi is a woman's name, suitable for the Kikuyu community and its generations to identify themselves after mothers or women's names. One can comfortably name their children after their mothers in the Kikuyu community. This means that ideally, women were considered the leaders among the Kikuyu communities, Nyeri not being an exception.

Elders in Nyeri County believe that women in Kikuyu community are responsible for building up a home. It is easier for women to bring up children effectively compared to their fathers. This is evident as it is a requirement that for any man who needs to be identified as a leader among the Kikuyu community, he must be married and have children. Men who have responsible wives are respected as they have someone to take care of the generation (Wanjiru & Kaburi, 2015). Having a woman in their life, men are considered whole, meaning that a woman is an essential tool in the

community. Unfortunately, the women took advantage of this and took control of the responsibilities of men; hence they tried to take back their control under *Wangu wa Makeri* mythology. According to one of the elders;

*Under Wangu wa Makeri mythology, Nyeri men tried to regain control by impregnating their women. This skill was borrowed from Maasai men among other communities where pregnancies were used to make women weak for them to be able to control them. Unfortunately, not all women can get pregnant at the same time. Some were already breastfeeding, and others were old enough not to get pregnant while others were barren; hence it was hard to take complete control over all women in the Kikuyu community (FGD with village elder, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2022).*

Those women who could not get pregnant remained the significant opposition that most men faced in the community. The barren, breastfeeding, and old did not listen to their husbands since they did not have something to weaken them, leading to an increase in domestic violence in Nyeri county.

Wanjiru and Kaburi (2015) argue that the Kikuyu Community was traditionally matriarchal. That is why the community calls itself "*Nyumba ya Mumbi*". Even clans are named after the nine daughters of Gikuyu and Mumbi. In the Kikuyu Community children comfortably take their mother's name as the surname if the woman is unmarried. The woman was ideally the traditional leader in the Kikuyu Community and even had the role of naming the children once they were born. The Kikuyu community was from the beginning a matriarchal one because of the reproductive role of women which gave them the right to own the children and to establish matrilineal clans. The women, therefore, were able to wield political, social, and economic power. During that time, men took orders from women who largely practiced polyandry. The men were subordinate to women and untold suffering was caused to them during the era. However, there occurred a power shift from the female gender to the male gender when men interacted with other communities such as the Maasai and they learned that men should be leaders and not women. Therefore, they arranged to make all women pregnant at the same time, and at that point of women's weakness men were able to seize the power and all the other values associated with women's power and authority were reversed. For instance, polygamy replaced polyandry as the source of power; women became subordinate and compliant (Wanjiru & Kaburi 2015).

Cultural norms, beliefs, and values shape the society hence culture is always a factor in conflict. Culture determines the behavior of the people and how they respond to obstacles they face in life and it therefore plays a role in ending or perpetuating violence. The culture of the people living in Nyeri County is changing. Despite that, some cultural practices still encourage conflict by supporting aggression towards others as a means to respond to the obstacles one faces. Previous studies have shown that most African communities still hold view that fathers can exercise power, which may involve violence, over other members of the household if they act against the cultural norms (Mshweshwe, 2020). Differences in beliefs between the old and new cultural norms amongst family members causes frustration as some may feel insecure and this will subsequently lead to aggression and violence. According to research done by Connell (2017), men who feel that they have lost their manhood identities tend to use violence as their only way of demonstrating masculinity. The dynamics of culture in the society have therefore caused frustrations between couples and among family members thus leading to domestic violence in Nyeri County.

### 3.1.9 Land and Inheritance Issues

Land and inheritance form the basis of possessions. Therefore, if there is an issue in land and inheritance, that particular domestic violence scenario would be based on the passion for properties. In African communities, as pointed out by Lloyd (2018), it is difficult to find men and women fighting over land and inheritance since the community have been shaped so that women are not expected to own land or other property. This idea was supported by the village elders during FGDs, and the following comment was made at some point.

Even in history, it was hard to find a lady fighting with her husband over land and possession. African men divided their land and inheritance amongst their sons since the ladies believed that they would be married; hence they belonged to those homesteads where they were married to (FGD with village elder, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).

However, the dynamics in the current society have dictated a different shift. As the constitution states, all children are equal, and should be treated equally by their parents. In Nyeri County, parents are slowly embracing the shift, and this is bringing unwanted feelings among the residents. There are several cases where a family disintegrates because a woman has been given land by the father. The woman starts to utilize the land to grow crops or even constructs some commercial houses. This does not go well with the men. They feel that if a woman owns property, she will dominate them. As a result, the man demands that the woman should either reject the land or leave his home.

Land and inheritance issues have contributed to domestic violence in ways. One of them is that it has elicited greed among the family members. Once the owner of the property dies, some members develop the need to oppress the widow and orphans by demanding a bigger share of the property. Land and inheritance are not just matters of intergenerational wealth transfer but also matters of creating conflict (Harari, 2019). Despite the existence of a will and the intestacy law of equal share of the inheritance among the heirs and they admit equal sharing principles, conflict is still likely to occur. While some properties are divisible, others may be indivisible and at the same time desired by all the beneficiaries such as a highly valued antique watch.

Challenges may arise in the process of sharing the highly prized items equally. In such a situation, questions such as the following may arise; can a valuable necklace and the family Bible be shared fairly among more than one person in the family? This is where the case of all heirs demanding an equal share arises even if the will had specified who would own what. This may cause conflict since each heir has a varying perception of being treated fairly (Chelimo, 2018). Although fairness may mean an equal share of something, it takes into consideration the various principles of being rightful or deserving. For instance, an estate may be shared fairly but fail to be equal. Depending on how being fair can be determined in various circumstances, competing definitions of fairness may be many. To avoid conflict among the heirs, the government of Kenya has enacted several provisions that help land and inheritance issues to be addressed peacefully.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Conclusions

The main objective of the study was investigating the nexus between socio-cultural dynamics and domestic violence, the study found out that there is a correlation between the two. The study sought to investigate the prevalence of socio-cultural factors influencing domestic violence in Nyeri County. The factors included male chauvinism ideology, matriarchal society, education, exchange cultural norms, alcoholism, poverty and employment and poor enforcement of laws and policies.

The results indicated the respondents agreed that male chauvinism ideology contributed to domestic violence and was fueled by the existing cultural beliefs that prioritize male domination over women. The respondents were in cognizance of the changing nature of the society and as a result, matriarchal nature of the society was also influencing domestic violence. Similarly, the exchange of cultural norms was a factor that influenced domestic violence in the study area. Some women have been gradually taking the roles preserved for men in the study area as revealed by the findings. This was again attributed to the gradual departure of male domination and contributed to slight reduction of domestic violence. Further, the respondents agreed that education was a game changer in the reduction of domestic violence although it was a gradual process. As a result of education, most women were being empowered though significant progresses are yet to be made.

The study found that alcoholism was an emerging factor that contributed to domestic violence in the study area. Some respondents admitted that they were addicted to drugs and substance abuse that made them to desert their roles, especially men. Again, poverty and employment contributed to intense domestic violence as they admitted that lack of employment was making people idle, stressed and as a result, they engaged in gender -based violence to reduce their anger and dissatisfaction. Poverty subjected young women to sexual exploitation as some of them were unable to secure essential needs such as sanitary pads.

In conclusion, the results presented in this section indicate that there is a correlation between socio-cultural dynamics and domestic violence in Nyeri County. Some of the main socio cultural concerns that influence domestic violence include male chauvinism, feminism ideology, the Agikuyu Matriarchal culture, Alcoholism, poverty and unemployment, stereotypes and the Mau Mau impact. The study concludes that the changes in people's way of life have contributed to violence in Nyeri County instead if harmony in the families as one would expect.

### 4.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that there should be sensitization in the study area to help people utilize the positive changes in the society such as high education levels to make a harmonious society instead of using it to fight among spouses. The society should be helped to curb dangerous dynamisms such as alcoholism so as to maintain sanity among family members.

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