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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to analyze the male police officers' dominance and reporting of crimes against women in Murang'a County, Kenya. There has been a growing research interest in examining police officers' response to victims of crime, but very few studies empirically assessed challenges that women survivors of crime face while reporting to the police. The survey utilized Ex-Post Facto design in the study; whereas the target population was a total of 45 respondents with a sample size of 41. The sampling projection was 20 civilian women, 5 civilian men, 5 Police constables, 2 Corporals, 2 Sergeants, 2 Inspectors, 2 Chief Inspectors, 2 Senior Superintendents and 1 Commissioner. The data was collected through both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews, observation and perusal of secondary sources. The study collected two types of data: quantitative and qualitative. Descriptive statistics was employed in analyzing the quantitative data. The descriptive statistics included measures of both central tendency and variability. The measures were mean, median, mode, range and standard deviation. They were presented visually by tables and graphs. Qualitative data was analyzed by focusing on the identification and reporting of themes within the collected data. Findings from the qualitative data were presented in verbatim quotes and narrative form. It was found women expressed their dissatisfaction with being attended to by male police officers. The study concluded that the NPS gender-imbalance is the contributor to over-representation of male police officers in all areas of police deployments, resulting into rare occurrences of interactions between members of the public and female police officers. The study makes recommendations for the NPSC to ensure there is full implementation of the existing laws and formulate policies regarding recruitment of police officers, and specialized training of police officers on recording and investigating crimes committed against women.

Key Words: Police Service, Service Dissatisfaction, Male Dominance, Case Reporting, Gender-Imbalance

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the overrepresentation of men in law enforcement, male police officers frequently fail to adequately address a number of issues that directly affect women. The two groups' interaction is majorly at the Report and Enquiries office, crime investigation and crime scenes. The way male police officers attend to female victims of crime is of a major concern. Crimes against women are, occasionally, dismissed by male police officers, or not taken seriously as a crime. In addition, male police officers distrust such women and subject them to intimidating interrogation. These unprocedural practices result into the women keeping off from further reporting of crime. In scenarios where complaints by women cannot be found in police records, it is not an indicator, on one hand, that women are no longer victims of crime and the general public is satisfied by police performance (Miller & Armstrong, 2018). Miller and Armstrong (2018) argued this is a sign the general public has lost trust in the handling of complaints by the police.

Women are, often, victims of physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. In addition, they fall victim to damage to their property, intimidation, stalking, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and forced marriages. Sexual violence, for example, impacts women's lives in devastating ways (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Many suffer from illnesses or accidents, and some are unable to work or look after their family. Significant emotional trauma and misery are also experienced by women, including feelings of despair, self-loathing, fear, anxiety, insomnia, and suicide thoughts. Human Rights Watch (2017) claims that in cases of sexual assault, the trauma is made worse by the victim's husband, family, and community's constant dread of denial.

The current Kenya National Police Service (NPS) has a history which dates back to 1907, when it was established as a Police force. It remained a male dominated force until 1951 when the first female

police officer, Elizabeth Nyaruai Macharia was recruited (Ndung'u, Daily Nation 2010). There have been frequent recruitments of more women, but their numbers cannot match those of men. Women account for 11% of the total population of the NPS. That is the background against which, in most police stations, male police officers take lead in handling of female victims of crime, because female police officers' numbers are either negligible or there is no representation at all.

Male officers appear biased in handling female victims of crime because of their own lack of understanding. It is not surprising, hence, for example, for a male police officer handling a case of malicious damage to a spouse's car by a husband, to remark "it is difficult to understand how a man can be guilty of unlawfully damaging his own car." Some forms of domestic violence are often minimized and treated by police officers as less serious (Retief & Green, 2015).

A male police officer is a human being and can perpetrate a crime against his spouse. He can, for example, perpetrate an assault or malicious damage to the spouse's property. In the event that it occurs, for example, domestic violence, against his spouse. In that regard, the spouse needs to report, but is, in most cases, reluctant. They fear the officer at the Reporting desk could be male and may side with the perpetrator. The victim's fear is also premised on the fact that the male officer will decline to document and properly investigate the case.

Statement of the Problem

The National Police Service has been dominated by male officers. The dominance has resulted into most of the duties, including handling female victims of crime, left to male police officers. They are perceived to be biased while handling female victims of crime, often subject the victims to intimidating interrogation, adopt the attitude of mistrusting the victims and are non-responsive. Female survivors of crime, generally, suffer

trivialization, humiliation and embarrassment. Kenya government and some international conventions have tried to introduce gender desks in various police stations to help women survivors get better attention when reporting their cases, but the situation is still bad. This study, therefore examined the challenges women survivors of crime face while reporting to the police.

Research Objective

The general objective of this study was to analyze male police officers' dominance and reporting of crimes against women in Murang'a County, Kenya. Specifically, the study examined the challenges women survivors of crime face while reporting to the police. The study aimed at answering the following research question;

- What challenges do women survivors of crime face while reporting to the police?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The necessity to address the issues that revolve around police response to crimes against women is discussed through the theory of Equity Feminism, developed in 2017, by Christina Hoff Sommers. She is a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. The theory has featured in two of her scholarly works: "The War against Boys" and "Who stole Feminism." It revolves around gender equity, for it advocates for equal rights for women, girls, men and boys. All of them need to be treated fairly, and accorded both respect and dignity. According to her, women and children are vulnerable and will be exposed to mistreatment, harm, ridicule and trauma in the absence of equity feminism. She advocated for special protections for women and children, more so against domestic violence and sexual assault, because without the protection, they will end up being an oppressed and silenced class. She singled out rape as a serious crime which must be properly addressed by the police and courts of law.

The theory is relevant to the variable of implications of gender-imbalance on handling of female survivors of crime as expressed in mocking, ridiculing, biasness and humiliation. Police sexism is particularly dangerous when it comes to crimes against women. This can be something as basic as failing to file a case in accordance with initial contact guidelines, embarrassment and finger-pointing, or even claims that the victim or survivor filed a fraudulent report.

Police officers must, all the time, exercise fairness when handling female victims of crime. Make sure that women and girls have equal access to police services as men and boys while abstaining from all forms of discrimination. The dedication of the police to a perpetrator- and victim-centered approach to crime acts as an effective deterrent to violence against women.

The kind of protection male police officers ought to offer female victims of crime is keenly listening to them, comforting those who appear traumatized, and ensuring that the matter is subjected to due process. Due process should involve gathering enough evidence and arraigning the suspect in a court of law, where both sides; plaintiff and defendant alike, will be listened to. When caring for criminally abused women, police must implement the law uniformly and fairly. They can only offer this as their most potent crime prevention method. Male police officers must bear in mind that female officers are capable of, or even better placed than them, in handling female victims of crime.

Empirical Review

Crime-reporting by Women

Male police officers are perceived to be violent in handling issues. Their policing style may, in the end, impact negatively on reporting of cases by female victims. This style is dreaded by female victims of crime who, for the fear of likely aggression, would rather not interact with a male police officer. According to Feminist Majority Foundation and the National Center for Women and Policing (1999), quoted by Small (2016), Metropolitan Los Angeles

paid \$63.4 million between 1990 and 1999 for allegations of use of excessive force and other aggressive behavior by male police officers (2016). On the contrary, she received \$2.8 million for making comparable accusations against female authorities, according to the Feminist Majority Foundation and the National Center for Women and the Police (1999), which were both mentioned by Small (2016).

Men identify with one another so intensely that some feel it is an attack on them, whenever another man has been accused by a woman, for example, of rape. It is fairly common for male police officers to distrust female victims of rape. Sexual assault is the most under-reported crime because male police officers the victims first come into contact with, treat them with disbelief (Engel, 2017). Friends and family members readily believe a woman when she tells them that they were, for example, sexually assaulted, but the same is not the case whenever the woman reports a male police officer. Most women are discouraged by accounts of the nasty experiences other victims have had to go through while explaining the offence ordeal, in order to be believed. In most circumstances, police trust perpetrators more than victims. This is, especially, when the rape has occurred, for example, on a university campus and the perpetrator is a classmate, popular person such as a student's leader, or when he is a workmate.

There are times a woman may be torn between reporting and not reporting, for example, sexual assault, to a male police officer, for fear of police response. Instead of interviewing her as a victim, the police interrogate such a victim as a suspect (Miller & Armstrong, 2018). According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2019), one of the main challenges facing the elimination of violence against women is inadequate response from the police. In addition, failure to manage GBV leads to high levels of perpetrator impunity (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2019).

In most cases, the interrogation is characterized by intimidation, yielding into the victim to bow to the pressure of being branded a suspect. The worst think that befalls the woman is to eventually recant her statement. Female victims of crime are met with differential male police behavior, for example, reluctance to arrest the perpetrator, after the report has been made. The presence of a weapon and the assailant being a stranger, are the characteristics that can convince the police to believe a female victim of crime at the time of reporting (Powers & Socia, 2016).

Most men are extremely chauvinistic, with male police officers not exceptional. This attitude puts off female victims of crime for being unable to bear the perceived police bias. Reporting sexual violence to a male police officer, especially when it is his colleague as a suspect, is a daunting task for a victim. Cases in point are in what Human Rights Watch documented in their report of 2017, following the post-election violence in August and October, 2017, in Kenya. Human Rights Watch (2017) asserts that individuals in uniform, including police officers, are accused of raping women in Bungoma, Kisumu, and sections of Nairobi's informal communities. When they did report their cases, they were occasionally humiliated or verbally attacked before being sent away without the police recording their accounts (Human Rights Watch, 2017). As reported by the police and quoted by Human Rights Watch (2017), "there was nothing the police officers could do if complainants could not identify the perpetrators."

Male police officers have a victim blaming culture in which they make the assumption that women are to blame for all the crimes they fall victim of. It is, therefore, not surprising to hear comments such as "she should not have gone to that party," "what does she expect if she wears a dress that is short?" "she asked for it," and "it is her own fault for drinking so much," attributed to male police officers. Engel (2017) argued a victim is blamed, whenever she goes to report, for not taking precautions to avoid the sexual assault. The survivor

is shamed and blamed for her own victimization, and denied the comfort and support she requires (Engel, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The survey utilized Ex-Post Facto design in the study. The design made it possible for the researcher to look into what has already taken place. In this regard, the main focus was what women went through as they reported their cases to male police officers. Data was obtained from female survivors of crime, police officers and secondary sources which included police records. The survey was carried out in the men and women groups, and NPS workplaces within Murang'a County. Murang'a County is one of the five counties in the Central region of Kenya. It is bordered by Nyeri, Kiambu, Nyandarua, and Kirinyaga, Embu and Machakos to the north, south, west and east, respectively. The county occupies a total area of 2,558.8 square kilometers. The workplaces are at the levels of police posts, police stations and Sub-county and County police head offices. The choice was informed by reports of poor handling of women who had approached police to report crimes. The target population was 45 respondents. It included civilian women and men who had past experiences of reporting crime at police stations, police officers of all ranks; that is, Constable, Corporal, Sergeant, Inspector or Chief Inspector, Superintendent or Senior Superintendent, and Commissioner, working in Murang'a County. The survey made use of simple random sampling with regard to police officers. Snow-balling was utilized in sampling female and male civilian persons within the communities in Murang'a County. The reason behind the selection of this particular type of sampling technique was because it was difficult to find potential participants since they came from different backgrounds of the wider population of the general public. The sample size was 41.

Five instruments: questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, secondary sources, and observation taken advantage of. The survey utilized

both open-ended and close-ended questionnaires administered to police officers of the ranks of constable, corporal, sergeant and inspector. Open-ended questionnaires gave the respondents a limitless chance to freely give answers according to what they knew, felt and understood. They presented an opportunity for the researcher to probe deeper into the respondents' answers, for the purpose of gaining detailed and valuable information about the problem. Close-finished polls expected the respondents to browse an unmistakable arrangement of pre-characterized responses. Close-ended questions proved useful because the participants gave either very brief answers, and were spared of lengthy explanations which could have put them off. Secondary sources that included police station Duty-rosters, Occurrence books, Crime registers, Nominal roll and case files were perused. The Duty rosters reflected deployment of officers; Nominal rolls showed the total number of police officers including their sex; Occurrence books indicated reports on offences against female persons; Charge registers assisted in getting information on the type and number of offences that may have been investigated and taken to court; while Case-files reflected cases taken to courts. The researcher also employed Observation in the study. A trained research-assistant, positioned himself strategically near one of the police stations to observe in case female survivors of crime appeared and how they could be received and attended to.

A piloting study was done at Machakos County, where open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires were dispatched in good time. The questionnaires were supplemented by interviews. For the research to evaluate what it was intended to, the researcher ensured that the data gathering instrument to be used; questionnaire in this respect, was specific to the objectives of the study. That was done during the piloting. The aim of the survey was to explore whether the results obtained met all the requirements of the scientific research method. Analysis of the quantitative data was by

descriptive statistics. The statistics employed included mean, median, mode, percentage, frequency, standard deviation and range. They were executed in tables and graphs. Analysis of qualitative data began immediately the data became available. Qualitative data was analyzed as per the themes and patterns formed. The data was presented in narrative and verbatim quotation forms.

Reporting of Crimes by Women

The study sought to establish what women go through at the time of reporting crime to police. Information collected from a total of 13 police officers using a Likert scale served as the main source of data for this study. The Likert scale comprised a set of answer options ranging from 1-5:- 1. SD – Strongly Disagree, 2. D – Disagree, 3. NS – Not Sure, 4. A – Agree, and 5. SA – Strongly Agree. The responses were analyzed and discussed as illustrated in Figure 1.

FINDINGS

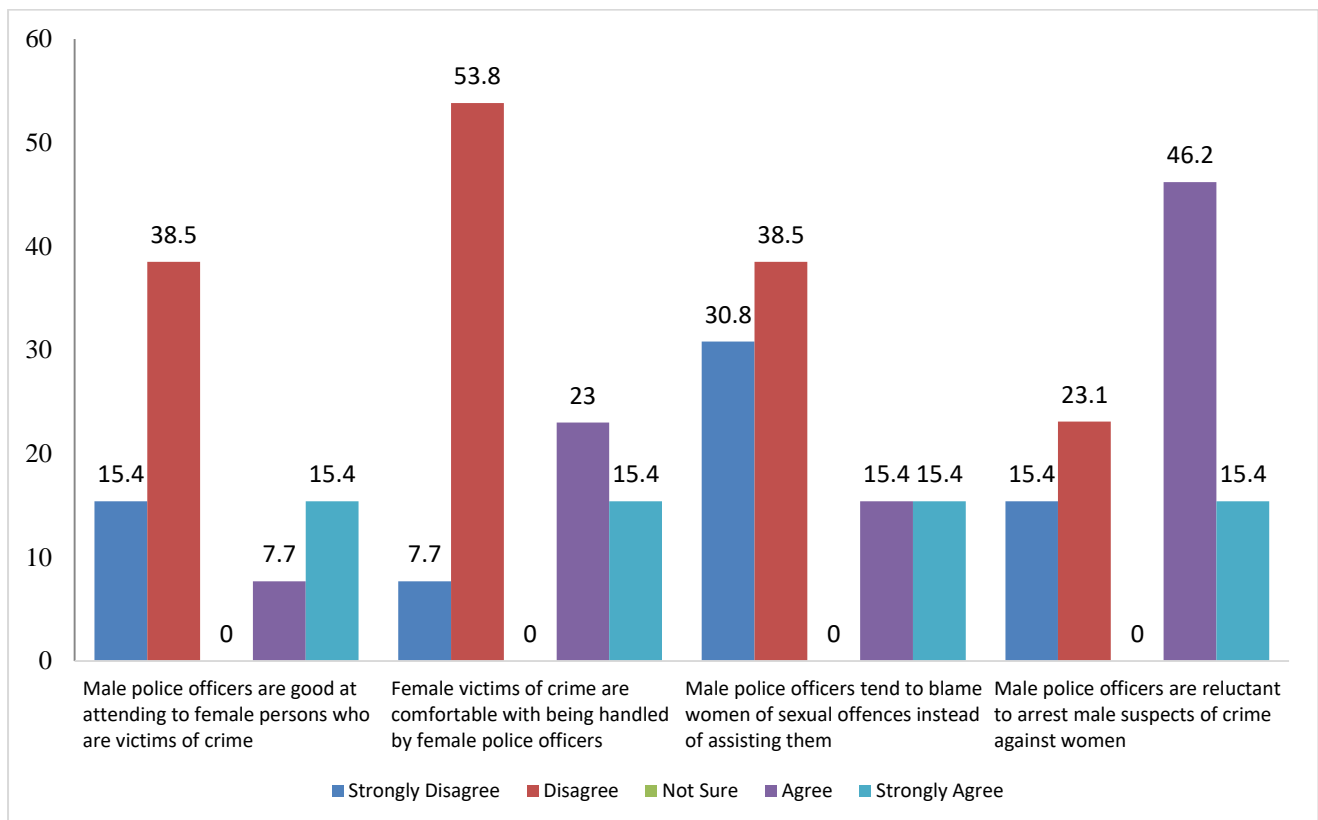


Figure 1: Reporting of Crimes by Women

Source: Researcher

The findings in Figure 1 portray a majority of the respondents disagree male police officers are good at attending to female persons who are victims of crime, and female victims of crime are comfortable with being handled by female police officers. Most of the respondents disagreed that male police officers both tend to blame women for sexual offences instead of assisting them and are reluctant to arrest male suspects of crime against women.

The attitude of the police towards SGBV, in particular, is essential in providing a sense of security and satisfaction to women seeking justice and protection from violence (Sahay & Abdullah, 2020). Sahay & Abdullah (2020) aver that negative attitude of police may result into the untimely registration of complaints by the victims and complicate the police management of the situation. Doubting the victim by police personnel remains a major factor for low reporting of gender-based

violence (Common Cause and Lokniti Programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2019).

Police ceased to be form the main source of help for the victims of crime as a result of their negative attitude towards survivors. As a result of police attitude negatively impacting the trajectory of cases, protection of the victims, and prevention of such cases in the future, becomes impossible. This creates a negative perception of the police, which in turn discourages the victims from pursuing their cases.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey was done to explore the challenges women survivors of crime face while reporting to the police. The majority of victims who were interviewed claimed that after coming into contact with the police, they became secondary victims and were subjected to further psychological torture. These victims' discontent with how the police treated them during interviews was one of the main justifications they provided. It was ascertained that male police officers are not good at attending to female persons who are victims of crime. The respondents' narratives provided evidence which made some victims abandon their cases. They complained of male police officers often subjecting women to embarrassing questions and intimidating interrogation. For a majority of the women who were interviewed, they would prefer not to report a crime than being treated to embarrassment, humiliation and trivialization. Additionally, it was stated that a lot of victims left the police station when they first reported because of the male officers' impatience, victim blaming, lack of empathy, and victim harassment during questioning. Insufficient training on gender matters was cited by a number of respondents as one of the contributors to male police officers' limitation in investigating crime against women.

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Women become victims of police apathy every time they try to lodge complaints. As a result, crimes go unreported and it was noticeable SGBV increased in the homesteads. Greater visibility and representation of female police officers may increase their accessibility and access to vital services that can properly identify and address the needs of women's situations. The involvement of more women in NPS can close the gender inequalities in equal opportunity and access to justice.

The study recommended for specialized training of police officers on recording and investigating crimes committed against women is paramount. In so doing, the officers would be able to sharpen their skills on how to handle women who have been offended. To treat women with respect, find out what brought them to the police station, and make sure they are in a fit state to give a statement about what happened, the police should receive gender-awareness training. Police must be cautious, patient, and sensitive when speaking with women who have experienced violence. Police are supposed to conduct all such interviews in a way that respects the privacy and confidentiality of the victims in order to encourage women survivors to readily provide complete details and recount facts of the crime. The top management of NPS should consider offering regular human rights training to the officers, with a focus on upholding everyone's human rights and respecting and protecting their dignity.

Areas for Further Research

This study focused on the challenges that women go through while reporting crimes to the police. It was recommended that studies be carried out to establish how men are treated by the police as they report crimes. Further research is needed to examine how work and life challenges affect the performance of Kenyan male police officers.

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