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among Pre-Primary II Children in Kitui County, Kenya**



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The Relationship between Family Attributes and Violence Exposure among Pre-Primary II Children in Kitui County, Kenya



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between family-related attributes and the occurrence of violence against pre-primary II children in Kitui County, Kenya.

Methodology: The study employed an analytical cross-sectional design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population comprised 34,526 pre-primary two children, 3,006 teachers, and an equal number of parents or caregivers. A sample of 50 schools (10%) was selected using simple random sampling. The total sample size for the study was 658 respondents. Data were collected through questionnaires, observation checklists, a standardized violence exposure screening tool, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and analysis of variance, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Findings: The findings revealed that that domestic neglect was the most common family risk factor. It was reported by 40.0% of teachers and 37.5% of children's officers. Caregivers, especially step-parents and relatives, often failed to meet children's basic needs. Marital instability and domestic violence accounted for 24.0% and 25.0% of reports respectively. Poverty and financial struggles were pointed out by 25.0% of children's officers as contributing factors.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The findings reinforce the Culture of Violence Theory, highlighting how social and cultural norms legitimize harsh discipline, and the Family Systems Theory, which emphasizes that family dysfunction transmits emotional and behavioral consequences to children. From a policy perspective, interventions should target family-level risk factors through poverty alleviation programs, parental education, substance abuse mitigation, and family counselling initiatives.

Keywords: *Domestic Violence, Family-Related Attributes, Marital Instability, Pre-Primary II Children, Violence*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Violence against children has been regarded as all forms of abuse against those under the age of 18: physical, sexual, emotional, and witnessing other forms of abuse (World Health Organization, 2021). Child maltreatment, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect committed by parents and other adults in positions of authority is the most common form of violence against infants and younger children (UNICEF, 2020). If a child is terrified or traumatized, the process of real learning which includes taking in and analyzing information, thinking, generating, producing, and interacting less likely to occur (Wodon et al., 2021). Preventing violence against children is critical for their development and academic achievement because violence can be traumatic. Physical abuse of children was linked in Germany to greater levels of stress among parents (Geprags et al., 2023). Female sex, the use of physical force against children, and parental awareness of child abuse were all associated with increased parental stress during the epidemic.

In Africa every school has pupils who have been victims of violence (Katsiyannis et al., 2018). This violence encompasses various forms, including psychological, physical, and neglect, with the majority occurring within the home. According to a UNICEF-funded survey conducted in Congo in 2020, seven out of ten teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18 experienced verbal or psychological abuse at school or online. Three out of ten pupils and four out of ten students, respectively, experienced physical and sexual abuse. In South Africa, the Safe to Learn Call to Action has been implemented to solve the issues of violence against children (Hillis, Mercy & Saul, 2017).

Nearly half (47%) of primary school students in Lower Uganda reported having been the victims of peer violence (physical, emotional, or sexual) at some point in their lives (Wandera et al., 2017). According to the 2019 Violence against Children (VAC) Survey Report, nearly half of both males and females witnessed physical violence in their households as children. Kenya is working to achieve Sustainable Development Goal No. 4, which aims to provide everyone with quality, inclusive, and equitable lifelong education (McGreal, 2017). However, despite the passing of the legislation and the initiatives taken to prevent, curtail, and end violence against children, violence is still on the rise and pervasive in many areas of Kenya.

Children in Kitui County are sexually, physically, and emotionally mistreated; some are abandoned, neglected, abducted, placed on the streets, or made to work as children (Miriti, 2021). A study examined the function of informal community-based approaches for Mwingi Central Sub-County's child protection (Kithome et al., 2021). The number of children in need of security in the study area was high. Nonetheless, this study only focused on child protection linked to the community approach. Most local studies focused on primary schools and did not cover preschool children. However, little is known about the prevalence and predisposing factors leading to violence against children, particularly in Kitui County, where violence against children is common.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

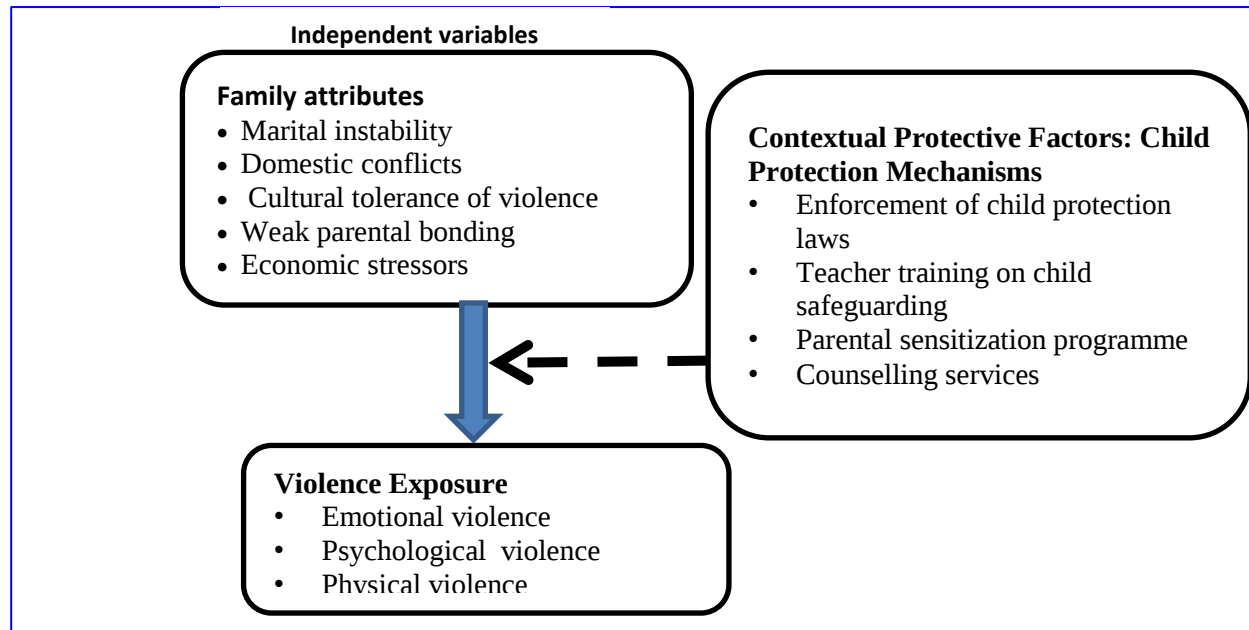
Violence against young children within school, family, and community settings remains a persistent global and national concern, despite the existence of extensive child protection frameworks. UNICEF's worldwide campaign to eradicate violence in and around schools and Kenya's strong legal and policy tools, such as the Children Act, the Children Bill (2021), the Sexual Offences Act (2006), and the National Children Policy (2010), are just two examples of the national and international stakeholders that continue to fund child protection initiatives. Evidence, however, shows that violence against children is nevertheless pervasive and, in certain situations, growing, especially among vulnerable age groups. At the local level, records from Kitui County that are currently accessible show that a sizable percentage of people in need of protection from sexual, emotional, and physical abuse are young children. These papers, however, are primarily descriptive and policy-focused, providing little scientific research on the particular characteristics that make pre-primary children more vulnerable to violence or the degree to which such violence affects learning outcomes during early childhood education. A crucial knowledge gap is the lack of context-specific, empirical data connecting characteristics that predispose preschoolers to violence with their academic performance.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between family-related attributes and the occurrence of violence against pre-primary II children in Kitui County.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 presents a conceptual framework that demonstrates the interconnection of variables of the study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complimentary theoretical traditions: Culture of Violence Theory (CVT) and Family Systems Theory (FST).

Culture of Violence Theory. Culture of Violence Theory, advanced by Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967), posits that violence is not merely an individual behavioural anomaly but may be embedded within social norms, instructional practices, and value systems that legitimize aggressive conducts under certain circumstances. The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its capacity to explain how macro level cultural norms and institutional practices may indirectly predispose pre-primary children to violence. In context where corporal punishment, harsh discipline or gendered power hierarchies are socially tolerated, children may experience violence as part of everyday socialization. These normative structures may operate within both family and school environments. However, while Culture of Violence Theory explains structural normalization of aggression, it does not sufficiently account for micro level relational dynamics within households. It also does not directly address developmental consequences for early learners.

1.10.1.2 Family Systems Theory. Family systems theory, developed by Bowen (1974), conceptualizes the family as an interdependent emotional unit in which changes affecting one member reverberate across the entire system. The theory emphasizes relational patterns, emotional regulation, communication structures, and intergenerational transmission of behaviour. Within this framework, violence is understood not as an isolated act but as an outcome of dysfunctional relational processes within the family system. Exposure to domestic conflicts, instability, neglect,

or inconsistent caregiving may disrupt a child's emotional security, regulatory capacity, and cognitive engagements. For the pre-primary children, whose socio-emotional and cognitive systems are still developing, such disturbances may impair classroom participation, language acquisition, and problem-solving abilities. Family Systems Theory, therefore, provides a developmental bridge linking exposure to violence with observable learning outcomes.

2.2 Family Attributes and Violence against Pre-primary school Children

The family is the ideal setting for everyone's development and wellbeing, especially children, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Nonetheless, studies continually demonstrate that families are also a typical setting where children encounter violence, jeopardizing their development and rights (UNICEF, 2018). Moreover, the World Health Organization reported in 2013 on "Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women" and discovered that the prevalence estimates for children who witness domestic violence were identical for boys and girls reporting that they have witnessed the occurrence at home (WHO, 2021). Understanding these family-level determinants is critical to creating targeted interventions to safeguard young children in Kenya.

In Bangladesh, Mim and Masud (2025) investigated the prevalence and determinants of violent disciplinary practices toward children aged 1–14 years using nationally representative survey data. The results revealed that younger male children with functional difficulties, those from urban residences and poorer households, those residing in the central and southern regions of the country, those with primary-educated mothers and those belonging to the Bengali households are at higher risk of any form of violent discipline, including psychological aggression and physical punishment.

Omwanga et al. (2024) investigated the parental deprivation indicators affecting children from public primary schools. Most children reported problems with clothing, food, safety, shelter, education, quality time with parents and parental discipline (83.6%). This underscores that material and emotional deprivation in families can directly affect children's wellbeing and may predispose them to violence, but the study focused on older children, leaving a gap in understanding risks specific to pre-primary learners.

Anika et al. (2024) aimed to determine parental deprivation's influence on conduct disorder among children in public primary schools in Masaba South, Kisii, Kenya. The findings showed that children whose parents lived together exhibited a significant decrease of 4.7 units in anxious/depressed scores, while children with separated parents showed a significant increase of 2.9 units in these scores. According to a study by Ssewanyana et al. (2019), the root causes of violence include poverty, drug and alcohol addiction, family dynamics, weak law enforcement, culture, and insufficient child protection systems. Pre-primary children are exposed to violence either directly or indirectly as a result, but there is little research on these dynamics in Kenyan early childhood education contexts. The systems, however, are ineffective (WHO, 2021). It is

difficult to translate the government's commitment to the real protection of children from violence as a result of weak legislation enforcement and execution. However, domestic violence rates in rural areas are significantly greater because of the higher rates of alcoholism, poverty, and daily stress that are present there.

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Study Locale

This study was conducted in Kitui County whose population is estimated to be 1,136,187 (KBS Census Report, 2019). An article for Information for Development (2022) that shows that half of the Kenyan children suffer violence. The violence children experience in the home indicates that children are exposed to physical violence, emotional violence, and physical assaults by their parents, caregivers, or other adult relatives (Kenya News Agency, 2022). In Kitui County, it was documented that land disputes and poverty, leading to violence, are frequent (Center for Rights Education and Awareness, CREAW, 2019).

3.2 Study Design

The study adopted an analytical cross-sectional research design. This design enabled the systematic examination of statistical association among child, family, and school attributes, exposure to violence, and learning outcomes among pre-primary II children in Kitui county at a single point in time (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

3.3 Study Population, Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

3.3.1 Study Population. The study's target population was 34,526 pre-primary II children and 3006 pre-primary schoolteachers in 1,874 public pre-primary schools, and 34,526 parents/caregivers of these children in Kitui County. According to the Ministry of Education, there are 2,219 pre-primary schools (1,874 public, 345 public) in Kitui county, with and a total enrolment of 63,045 children (28,519 - PP1, 34,526 – PP2), and 3,724 teachers (3006 in public schools, 718 in private schools) (Basic Education Statistical Booklet, 2019). The study focused only on the public schools (Table 1).

Table 1 Target Population

Pre-primary schools			Total
	Private	Public	
	345	1,874	2,219
Pre-primary school children aged between 4-6 years both in public and private schools			
	Female	Male	Total
PP1	15300	15,691	30991
PP2	17,512	19,074	36,586
Grand Total			67,577
Pre-primary school children aged between 4-6 years in public centres			
PP1	14,175	14,344	28,272
PP2	16,514	18,012	34,526
Total			63,045
Pre-primary school Teachers by category of centres			
	Private centres	Public centres	
	3,006	718	3,724

Source: Basic Education Statistical Booklet, 2019

3.3.2 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size. Stratified sampling was used, in which the population was stratified into three groups: schools, students, and teachers. There are a total of 1,874 public pre-primary schools in Kitui. However, a sample of 50 pre-primary schools was chosen using simple random method for the study proportionately from each and every sub-county in Kitui County. Random sampling was used to ensure that all eligible students had an equal chance of participation. After selecting 50 pre-primary schools, a total of 300 pre-primary II children aged 4–6 years were chosen using simple random sampling. A total of 300 parents were recruited through snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was employed to select all the 8 Children’ officers from each of the 8 sub-counties. Table 2 gives a summary of the sample size.

Table 2 Sample Size

Participants	Target population	Sample	Percentage
Pre-primary II teachers	500	50	10.0%
Pre-primary II children	3,000	300	10.0%
Caregivers/parents	3,000	300	10.0%
Children officers	8	8	100.0%
TOTAL	3,508	658	18.75%

3.4 Research instruments

Data was gathered using child learning outcome checklist, questionnaire for teachers and children officers, screening tool for violence exposure and Focus Group Discussion for parents/caregivers. A child was observed for 30 minutes in order to evaluate their socio-emotional development, language development, personal health and safety, and communication abilities. Focus Group Discussions (FDGs), were administered to the parents or caregivers of the children that were identified and selected with the help of teachers.

3.5 Piloting

A pilot test was carried out in two public primary schools in Kitui County with the participation of two teachers, four pre-primary students, and four parents. The schools were carefully chosen to guarantee that they are comparable to the schools where the real study occurred. The pilot test was used by the researcher to ascertain whether survey respondents have any reservations about adhering to the study's criteria throughout the survey, and the length of time required for completion..

3.6 Validity and Reliability of the Research Tools

Content validity was established through expert review by two senior scholars in early childhood education and one child protection specialist. Feedback informed refinement to item clarity, cultural appropriateness, and construct alignment. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient during the pilot phase. The reliability of the questionnaires for teachers and the violence exposure screening checklist was determined using the test-retest procedure. The obtained reliability coefficients were as follows: Teachers' questionnaire: $\alpha = 0.83$, and Violence exposure screening checklist: $\alpha = 0.79$. All the coefficients were above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70, as recommended by Cohen and Marion (2000), indicating that the instruments were internally consistent and reliable for data collection.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher visited the chosen schools during the first week of the study and requested the principals' permission to carry out research there. The researcher also provided the participants with a permission document that explains their rights and privacy. During the second week of the study, the researcher returned to the selected schools to distribute questionnaires and collect data from the parents of selected students and preschool teachers. The researcher travelled to other schools to interview instructors and parents of selected students, a procedure that took at least one month. The researcher administered cognitive and socio-emotional tests to identified children.

3.8 Data Preparation and Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) to determine prevalence patterns. Chi-square tests were used to examine associations between categorical independent variables and violence exposure. Analysis of variance

(ANOVA) was applied to assess mean differences in learning outcomes across categories of violence exposure and attribute groupings. All tests were conducted at a 95% confidence level ($P=0.05$). Qualitative data from focus group discussions and interviews were analyzed thematically using NVivo software to identify recurring patterns related to child protection mechanisms. Upon collection of data, editing, coding and classification were done as guided by the study objectives. Data analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data. A two-tailed chi-square test was used to ascertain whether there was any statistically significant effect in both directions (Bertoldo et al., 2022). Qualitative analysis techniques such as thematic analysis were used to identify common themes or patterns in the narratives provided by carers about the violence experienced by the children.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 General Characteristics of the Sample

This section presents the response rate and the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age and highest level of education. The study achieved a final sample of 628 respondents after 15 caregivers/parents were unreachable, leading to the subsequent exclusion of 15 pre-primary II children from the study as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Response Rate

Participants	Target population	Initial Sample	Final number of participants	Percentage
Pre-primary teachers	II 500	50	50	100.0%
Pre-primary children	II 3,000	300	285	95.0%
Caregivers/parents	3,000	300	285	95.0%
Children officers	8	8	8	100.0%
Total	3,508	658	628	95.4%

Table 3 indicates that the study attained a notably high response rate, with a total return rate of 628 (95.4%). All targeted pre-primary II teachers (50, 100.0%) and children officers (8, 100.0%) fully participated in the study. The response rate among pre-primary II children was 285 (95.0%), as was the rate among their caregivers/parents, also at 285 (95.0%). Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) indicate that a response rate exceeding 70% is adequate for analysis; therefore, the 95.4% achieved in this study is more than sufficient.

Table 4 presents the demographic profile of the children's officers who participated in the study.

Table 4. Demographic Information of Children Officers

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
18–25 yrs	0	0.0%
26–30 yrs	0	0.0%
31–35 yrs	4	50.0%
36–40 yrs	1	12.5%
41–45 yrs	0	0.0%
46–50 yrs	3	37.5%
Total	8	100.0%
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	6	75.0%
Female	2	25.0%
Total	8	100.0%
Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's degree	8	100%

As shown in Table 4, the majority of officers were aged between 31–35 years 4(50.0%), followed by those aged 46–50 years 3(37.5%). Only 1(12.5%) was in the 36–40 age bracket, while no officer fell below 31 years. In terms of gender, 6(75.0%) were male while only 2(25.0%) were female, indicating a gender imbalance. This imbalance could limit female perspectives in handling sensitive child welfare cases, particularly those involving gender-based violence. In terms of qualifications, all officers 8(100.0%) held at least a Bachelor's degree, which is a strong positive outcome as it reflects adequate professional training and capacity to deal with child protection issues.

Table 5: Demographic Information of Pre-primary II School Children under Study

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage	Age Bracket
5 years	171	60.0%	5 years
6 years	114	40.0%	6 years
Total	285	100.0%	Total
Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Gender
Male	138	48.42%	Male
Female	147	51.58%	Female
Total	285	100.0%	Total

Table 5 indicates that the majority of children were aged 5 years, comprising 171 (60.0%) of the sample, while those aged 6 years accounted for 114 (40.0%). This distribution is anticipated, as PP2 generally enrolls students aged 5 to 6 years. This age distribution validates that the study appropriately targeted the intended demographic. A total of 147 participants (51.58%) identified as female, while 138 participants (48.42%) identified as male. This suggests a minor over-representation of females relative to males. The findings align with UNESCO (2019), which observed an improvement in gender parity in early childhood education in Kenya, with certain regions reporting higher female enrolment than male.

4.2 Family Attributes Predisposing Pre-Primary Children To Violence In Kitui County.

4.5.1 Univariate Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were first computed. Responses were analysed descriptively and the results are as presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Teachers' Perspectives on Family Attributes Predisposing Pre-Primary Children to Violence

Theme	Frequency	Percentage	Illustrative Description
Neglect in domestic environment	20	40.0	Food deprivation by caregivers, especially aunts and grandmothers.
Marital instability & domestic violence	12	24.0	Children exposed to spousal conflicts that translate into neglect.
Cultural tolerance of harsh discipline	10	20.0	Physical punishment viewed as "normal" and acceptable in disciplining children.
Lack of parental bonding/communication	8	16.0	Weak emotional connection between parents and children leaves them vulnerable.
Total	50	100.0	

According to the perspective of the teachers, Table 6's results showed that neglect in the home was the most common issue (40.0%), followed by marital instability and domestic violence (24.0%), cultural tolerance of severe discipline (20.0%), and weak parental bonding (16.0%). According to the FST, neglect and a lack of emotional connection are signs of dysfunctional family subsystems, where problems in adult relationships have a direct effect on children's wellbeing and make them more vulnerable to violence. These findings show how social norms and family characteristics work together to influence children's vulnerability rather than acting independently. The findings support UNICEF's (2017) claims that poverty and familial neglect are among the most prevalent forms of violence against children worldwide. Margolin and Gordis (2014) established a connection between neglect and domestic dysfunction and the increased vulnerability

of children to abuse. Marital instability and domestic violence emerged as the second significant attribute, identified by 12 (24.0%) teachers. This aligns with the findings of Wolfe and Jaffe (2015), who posited that 60–75% of children in violent households also endure direct abuse. Sterne and Poole (2010) found that children in households experiencing marital violence are up to 15 times more likely to encounter physical neglect or abuse. Spousal conflict disrupts family functioning and, through spillover effects, compromises the welfare of children.

Further, data on children's officers' perspectives on family attributes predisposing pre-primary children to violence was also analyzed, and the results are as presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Children Officers' Perspectives on Family Attributes Predisposing Pre-Primary Children to Violence

Theme	Freq(n)	%	Illustrative Description
Neglect by caregivers (step-parents, relatives)	3	37.5%	Step-parents and relatives failing to meet children's needs.
Marital instability & domestic violence	2	25.0%	Children often caught in the middle of spousal conflict.
Poverty/financial strain	2	25.0%	Families unable to provide basic needs, exacerbating neglect.
Cultural tolerance of corporal punishment	1	12.5%	Violence normalized as part of discipline at home.
Total	8	100.0%	

Children's officers reported similar tendencies, as shown in Table 7, where the most often mentioned factors were poverty/financial hardship (25.0%), marital instability (25.0%), and neglect (37.5%). The findings' strength is reinforced by the convergence of officer and teacher viewpoints, which show systemic familial weaknesses that sustain violence. According to FST, these stressors upset the balance of the family, lessen the ability to provide care, and raise the risk of abusive actions. In support of the findings, Miller (2010) highlighted that neglect represents one of the most apparent and harmful forms of child abuse globally. Two (25.0%) officers reported marital instability and domestic violence, in line with the responses from teachers. The findings support the WHO's (2013) assertion that children exposed to spousal violence at home face an increased risk of trauma and maladaptive behaviour. Similarly, 2 (25.0%) officers highlighted poverty and financial strain. This underscores the structural vulnerabilities that children encounter in Kitui. Chebogut and Ngeno (2010) identified poverty and alcohol abuse as significant factors contributing to domestic violence in Kenya. Lacheem (2013) identified low socioeconomic status as a significant determinant of children's exposure to violence. Economic hardship exacerbates neglect, reinforcing additional forms of child vulnerability. One officer, representing 12.5%, emphasized cultural tolerance for corporal punishment.

4.5.2 Bivariate Analysis

The two-tailed chi-square was chosen to examine the association in both directions, meaning family attributes could either increase or decrease the likelihood of violence against children. The analysis directly tested the following second null hypothesis of the study.

Ho: There is no sufficient connection amongst family attributes and violence against pre-primary children in Kitui County

Results were presented in Table 8 for clarity and supported with interpretations of the observed relationships.

Table 8 *Chi-square – Family attributes versus exposure to violence*

Family Attribute	Category	Exposed (%)	n	Not exposed n (%)	χ^2	Df	p (2-tailed)
Marital status	Married	80(44.4%)		100(55.6%)	9.75	2	.008**
	Separated/Divorced	40(61.5%)		25(38.5%)			
	Single	25(62.5%)		15(37.5%)			
Household income	Adequate	45(37.5%)		75(62.5%)	14.42	1	.000***
	Low income	100(60.6%)		65(39.4%)			
Parental substance use	Yes	50(71.4%)		20(28.6%)	18.25	1	.000***
	No	95(44.2%)		120(55.8%)			
Caregiver education	No formal/Primary	80(66.7%)		40(33.3%)	16.11	2	.000***
	Secondary	45(40.9%)		65(59.1%)			
	Tertiary	20(36.4%)		35(63.6%)			

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The chi-square analysis presented in Table 8 demonstrated significant statistical associations between family attributes and exposure to violence. Compared to children from married homes (44.4%), children from single or separated/divorced families were more likely to be exposed to violence (61.5–62.5%). According to FST, this phenomenon is a breakdown of family homeostasis, when vulnerability is increased and protective systems are weakened by conflict or the absence of carers. Compared to households with stable finances (37.5%), low-income households saw greater exposure (60.6%). According to FST, substance abuse disrupts family dynamics, lowers emotional response, and raises the possibility of abuse or neglect. Higher exposure to violence was associated with lower parental education (66.7% for no formal/primary education). Children exposed to violence in the family demonstrate poor emotional regulation, weaker confidence, and diminished involvement in scholastic tasks. According to FST, disruptions

in the microsystem, such as those occurring in the classroom, negatively impact learning outcomes, peer relationships, and long-term cognitive development. FST states that these microsystem disruptions in the classroom affect learning outcomes, peer relationships, and long-term cognitive development. These microsystem disruptions in the classroom can negatively impact learning outcomes, peer relationships, and long-term cognitive development. According to CVT, the community's normalized violent behaviours may reinforce these behaviours, creating structural obstacles to early childhood education. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that family characteristics are significant predictors of exposure to violence.

4.5.3 Post Chi-Square Effect Size Analysis

A 2x2 chi-square test alone was unsatisfactory because the statistic only shows whether there is a statistically significant relationship between category variables family attributes and exposure to violence). Therefore, Cramer's V $\{(V = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{n}})\}$; where χ^2 = Calculated Chi-square test value, and n = total number of observations included in the analysis) was computed to establish the strength or practical magnitude of that association to show how strongly the individual attributes are related beyond the significance. Table 9 presents the magnitude of the effect was interpreted as 0.10 signifying small effect, 0.30 showing medium effect, and 0.50 as large effect in line with the guidelines by Cohen (1998).

Table 9: Effect Size (Cramer's V) for association between the Family Attributes and Exposure to Violence.

Family Attribute	χ^2	Df	p-value	Cramer's V	Effect Size	Interpretation
Marital status	9.75	2	0.008	0.19	Small	Weak association
Household income	14.42	1	0	0.23	Medium	Moderate association
Parental substance use	18.25	1	0	0.25	Medium	Moderate association
Caregiver education	16.11	2	0	0.24	Medium	Moderate association

The results presented in Table 9 indicate that parental substance use demonstrated the strongest association with exposure to violence ($V=.25$), suggesting a moderate relationship. Similarly, caregiver education level ($V=.24$) and household income ($V=.23$) showed moderate associations, indicating that socioeconomic factors meaningfully relate to exposure to violence. Nonetheless, there is a comparatively weaker size effect of marital statuses ($V=.19$) although the factor was statistically significant. These findings suggest that family factors are important in relation to exposure to violence; however, the strength of these relationships varies from small to moderate, indicating that family factors play a role but are not the only reason for violence exposure among children in Machakos County. This aligns with the findings of WHO (2013) and Wolfe & Jaffe (2015), both of whom emphasized the increased vulnerability of children from broken families. Household income emerged as a significant predictor. This finding aligns with

the work of Ahmed et al. (2015), which established a connection between socioeconomic disadvantage and increased child abuse in India. This aligns with Kesho (2014), who identified poverty as a fundamental cause of child vulnerability in Kenya.

Parental substance use emerged as a significant predictor. This aligns with the findings of Chesire et al. (2010), which identified alcohol consumption as a significant contributor to domestic violence in Kisumu. Chebogut and Ngeno (2010) identified that 35% of domestic violence cases in Kenya are linked to alcohol consumption. Substance abuse undermines parental judgement, increases conflict, and raises the likelihood of severe punishment or neglect. Children from families lacking formal or primary education exhibited the highest exposure rate at 80 (66.7%), in contrast to 45 (40.9%) from secondary-level families and merely 20 (36.4%) from tertiary-level families ($p=.000$). This finding supports the work of Ahmed et al. (2015), which indicated that lower parental education correlates with a higher tolerance for child abuse. This finding is consistent with the work of Jacinta and Rotich (2015), who highlighted that education levels influence attitudes towards gender roles and child discipline. The bivariate analysis indicates that family attributes significantly predispose children to violence, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). These results emphasise the critical need for targeted educational programmes aimed at parents, which could potentially alter perceptions and behaviours regarding child-rearing practices.

4.5.4 Qualitative Analysis of Data from Interviews

Moreover, in an FGD with the caregivers, the question *“Are there times you think you have executed discipline beyond measure? if yes, how?”* was discussed. Thematic and content analysis of responses revealed several recurring themes and sub-themes as presented and discussed under the following sub-sections:

Violence Attributed to Disciplining Beyond Measure . Based on the family attributes predisposing children to violence in Kitui County, following sub-themes emerged:

Discipline Escalating Due to Anger and Stress

Many caregivers admitted that excessive discipline occurred when they were overwhelmed by anger or stress. These strong emotions clouded judgment, leading to harsher punishment. For instance one of the participants recalled:

“There was a time I disciplined my child excessively... I had received news that my child had beaten a goat I had tied at home, and it miscarried. Out of anger and frustration, I, together with another woman in the extended family, beat the child until he was seriously hurt. I later spent over KES 8,000 on hospital treatment” (Female caregiver, Kwa Karanga Ward, Mwingi West Sub-county).

One of the participants explained;

“There was a time my child ate more than half a kilo of sugar... Out of anger, I beat him severely and ended up hurting his eye. I later regretted because I had acted out of anger instead of calming down first” (Female caregiver, Gai Ward, Mwingi North Sub-county).

Another also reported;

“There was a time my child came home late from school and I was very bitter because he was supposed to help with chores. I lost control and beat him with firewood, some of which had burning embers” (Female caregiver, Kombio Ward, Mwingi North Sub-county).

Another participant recalled;

“I remember a time I was upset after quarrelling with my husband. My child made a mistake and I slapped and pushed him harshly. He was so frightened that he refused to come back to the house until I pleaded with him” (Female caregiver, Mboru Ward, Mwingi Central Sub-county).

The above sentiments illustrate how stress spill over from family conflicts or economic pressures predisposes children to violence.

Accumulated Frustrations and Repeated Misbehaviour. Some caregivers emphasized that repeated misbehaviour, after several warnings, triggered extreme punishment.

“Sometimes it depends on the magnitude of the mistake. If it is a repeated one, I can end up beating my child excessively due to accumulated anger after several warnings” (Female caregiver, Kwa Musele Ward, Mwingi West Sub-county).

Another participant explained that;

“My child kept insisting that I must pay for a school trip to Mombasa even when I couldn’t afford it. Out of frustration, I made her kneel on a stone for nearly an hour as punishment” (Male caregiver, Senior Chief Kasina Ward, Mwingi Central Sub-county).

Another added that;

“I once beat my child too harshly because he refused to carry ugali for lunch and insisted on rice. At that time, I was already stressed with family issues, and I ended up punishing him more than I should have” (Male caregiver, Kandwia Ward, Mwingi North Sub-county).

Here, accumulated frustrations and defiance by children emerge as strong family attributes predisposing them to violence.

Awareness and Regret after Excessive Discipline. A recurring theme was the expression of guilt and remorse after realizing the punishment had been too severe.

"I punished my child together with another relative until he was seriously injured in the eye... I regretted deeply after realising the harm I caused" (Female caregiver, Kwa Karanga Ward, Mwingi West Sub-county).

Another participant explained that;

"I beat my child excessively after he cut his shoes... Later I reflected and realised disciplining in anger leads to harm rather than correction" (Female caregiver, Kilonzo Ward, Kitui East Sub-county).

Another participant added;

"Sometimes, when I beat my child too harshly, I later see them withdrawn and scared of me, and I feel guilty" (Female caregiver, Kanyaa Ward, Mwingi Central Sub-county).

One participant elucidated that;

"There was a time I was stressed due to quarrels with my husband. Out of frustration, I punished my child harshly and later regretted immediately because I knew I had taken my emotions out on the wrong person" (Female caregiver, St. Mark's Makutano Ward, Kitui West Sub-county).

The above insights highlight protective family attributes such as patience, emotional regulation, and non-violent discipline. The qualitative FGDs reinforced these results, showing how stress, anger, and accumulated frustrations translate into excessive discipline. The implication is that economic hardship, coupled with children's persistence, heightens parental frustrations. This aligns with FIDA (2016), which linked poverty-related stressors to harsh parenting in rural Kenya. The finding further highlights parental recognition of harm, though only retrospectively. It aligns with Miller (2010), who described parental remorse as a common outcome of excessive punishment. These findings resonate with the Culture of Violence Theory, which explains how cultural norms normalise harsh discipline, and the Family Systems Theory, which illustrates how disruptions in family relationships and emotional exchanges affect children. The convergence of results thus validates that family-level vulnerabilities, shaped by both structural and cultural factors, significantly predispose pre-primary children in Kitui County to violence.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that family-level characteristics, including poverty, marital instability, substance abuse, and low carer education, significantly predispose children to violence. Empirically, the study provides new evidence from Kitui County on the specific family-level risk factors influencing child vulnerability, filling a gap in local child protection research. The findings reinforce the Culture of Violence Theory, highlighting how social and cultural norms legitimise harsh discipline, and the Family Systems Theory, which emphasises that family dysfunction transmits emotional and behavioural consequences to children. From a policy perspective, interventions should target family-level risk factors through poverty alleviation

programmes, parental education, substance abuse mitigation, and family counselling initiatives to strengthen protective family dynamics.

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