

An assessment of the influence of Police professionalism on the effectiveness of police gender desk

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Abstract

Introduction: Police gender desk initiative to curb GBV was brought forth as a response to the lobby group's outcry on the increase of GBV cases. As a result, the researcher analyzed the police professionalism on the effectiveness of police gender desk. Durkheim's structural functionalism theory and theory of change were used.

Method: Study employed mixed research method sample size of 200 respondents (GBV survivors) and 32 police officers was purposively selected. Questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions were adopted in data collection while analysis was done by help of SPSS version 2016.

Finding: Study findings revealed that Police professionalism had coefficients of the estimate which was significant based $\beta_2 = 0.900$ (p-value = 0.000 which is less than $\alpha = 0.01$), indicating that there was a strong positive relationship between political will and police gender desk on curbing GBV in Kathonzwani Makueni county.

Conclusion: The study concluded that police professionalism is key in attitude change in police officers attending GBV survivors' police gender desk collaboration with other stakeholders is crucial in intensifying gender advocacy and publicity.

Recommendation: The study recommends the NPS provides specialized training to gender desk officers to address attitude change and capacity building by integrating Gender-based violence studies in the recruits' training manual. NPSC to deploy more gender desk officers to curb understaffing Victims of GBV to be offered psychosocial support and be included in the Inua Jamii program in severe cases to help them restart their lives. The researcher urges NPS to consider the recommendations of this study to ensure functional and effective police gender desk in all police posts and police stations within Kathonzwani Makueni County, Kenya.

Keywords: Professionalism, gender-based violence, National Police Service, Police reforms

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the act that results to physical, sexual or psychological harm that is meted out primarily on account of the victim's gender. At the global level, international instruments were put in place to ensure that GBV crimes were brought to minimal if not fully eliminated. Afghanistan, Argentina, India, Colombia and Brazil are among the countries that came out to establish women police stations in bid to fight gender-based violence.

Kathonzwani is the second largest sub county in Makueni which has 3 number of registered intersex persons with a population of 79,780.39553 being men and 40,442 women. (KNBS 2019). This is the sub county that has over the years reported the highest prevalence of gender-based violence cases in Makueni County as at December 2022. According to the Makueni county crime statistics data report despite the existence of existing anti gender-based

violence measures. This brought by the concern of whether the police gender desks placed in every police station and post are effective in curbing gender-based violence as its initial purpose which is to ensure reduction of the gender-based violence cases.

Gender police officers deployed at the gender desk were expected to be adequately trained on matters concerning gender-based violence and are therefore expected to attend to GBV survivors with professionalism. Police reforms recommended incorporation of gender training in the initial and advanced training manuals used in training of police officers. It is on this backdrop therefore that this study was to evaluate the police Professionalism in regards to approach on GBV cases and how that affected the effectiveness of police gender desk in curbing gender-based violence cases.

The influence of police professionalism on addressing gender-based violence (GBV) has been widely studied in recent years, with a growing recognition of the important role that the police can play in preventing and responding to GBV. One area of research has explored the impact that police training and education can have on GBV prevention and response. Studies have found that when police officers receive training on GBV and are educated on the issue, they are better equipped to respond to GBV cases in a sensitive and effective manner (Vyas & Jolly, 2013). This can include training on how to recognize the signs of GBV, how to respond to survivors in a supportive manner, and how to effectively investigate and prosecute GBV cases. Another area of research has looked at the impact of police culture and attitudes on GBV response. Studies have found that when police officers hold attitudes that perpetuate gender-based stereotypes and discrimination, it can negatively impact their response to GBV cases (Lombardo & Richey, 2018). On the other hand, when police officers hold attitudes that are supportive of gender equality and are committed to addressing GBV, they are more likely to respond to GBV cases in a sensitive and effective manner.

Finally, the role of police accountability and transparency in addressing GBV has also been recognized in the literature. Studies have found that when police officers are held accountable for their actions and when there is transparency in their work, it can increase public trust in the police and lead to more effective responses to GBV cases (Martinez et al., 2015).

A study undertaken by Albert Wanjohi (2016) shown that gender police officers did not offer privacy to victims of GBV while reporting the cases. In some cases police officers did not notify the public on the services rendered at the police gender desk therefore some cases were never reported due fear of stigmatization and rededue. In some cases exhibit was mishandled by the police leading to failure of justice delivery at the court of law.

A study done by Kasyoka Asami L (2018) indicates that the police officers at the police gender desk are corrupted to either delay the court case or to conduct shoddy investigations. With some police officers colluding with the perpetrators to frustrate victims of GBV with delay tactics.

In conclusion, the literature highlights the important role that police professionalism play in addressing GBV. By providing training and education, promoting positive attitudes, and ensuring accountability and transparency, the police can make a significant contribution to preventing and responding to GBV.

Research methods

This research study employed mixed research methods for collecting, analyzing and integrating quantitative data by use of surveys and interviews. This research methodology was used because it provided better understanding of the research problem.

Research Design

This study employed descriptive survey research design. Mugenda (2012), stated that a descriptive research design explains research variables. Using descriptive method enables the researcher acquire wide range of data as it incorporates use of questionnaire as a tool of data collection according to Ritchie *et al.* (2013) descriptive research design allowed effective designing of pre- structured questionnaire by having both closed ended and open-ended questionnaires. Eventually making it easy to interpret data on the influence of political will, police professionalism and police gender desk collaboration with other stakeholders in curbing GBV.

This research study took place in Kathonzwani, Makueni county Kenya. Kathonzwani has a total of six locations which are Kiangini, Kituluni, Kwa-Kavisi, Thavu, Ituka, and Kivingoni each sub-location has a village administrator according to the county government, the assistant chief oversees such an area according to the National government.

Target Population and Sample Size

Study target population was 200 respondents of gender-based violence and 32 police gender desk officers in police stations and post within Kathonzwani in Makueni County. The study adopted the stratified sampling method. The sample was divided into two groups; the survivors of GBV and the police gender desk officers forming the strata. From the strata simple random sampling was employed for the GBV survivors featuring the three genders. Census sampling was used in sampling of the gender desk officers in respect to their ranks the researcher got the details of the GBV survivors through the selected police stations, the survivors of gender-based violence interviewed and those who participated in the focus groups discussions. The focus group discussion was made up experts well versed with police gender desk dynamics.

Data Collection

This study engaged representatives from the office of the DPP, a judiciary official, NGO group representative, Police genders officers and victims of GBV. This enabled the researcher collect data that represented the entire Kathonzwani sub-county, the area of interest during the study. Yamane (1967) simplified Formula was used to obtain sample which 200 respondents were selected as a sample population. The study purposively selected 32 police gender desk officers from Kathonzwani police station, Mavindini police station, Kitise police post, Mbuvo police post, Kathuni police post, and Kavumbu police post.

This study collected primary and secondary data. Primary data was gathered by use of semi-structured questionnaires, focus groups, and Interview schedules secondary data was gathered by reading the past documented scholarly articles.

Research Findings

Introduction

This section presents research findings and presents a detailed study analysis. The study’s aim was to assess the influence of police gender desk officers’ professionalism on the effectiveness of police gender desk in curbing gender based within Kathonzweni, Makueni Kenya. The findings of the study were represented in a report gotten from the study respondents.

General Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic characteristics of a respondent helps the reader to understand background of the respondents based on gender, age, and education level and place of work and designation.

This information is illustrated as shown in Table below.

Table 1: General characteristics

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender for survivors of GBV	Male	68	41
	Female	98	58
	Intersex	02	1
	Total	168	100
Gender for police officers	Male	16	59
	Female	11	41
	Total	27	100
Age for survivors of GBV	18-30 years	72	43
	31-40 years	79	47
	Above 40 years	17	10
	Total	168	100
Level of Education for GBV Survivors	0 level	120	67
	Diploma	42	23
	Undergraduate	12	7
	Postgraduate	6	3
	Total	180	100

Table 1, findings reveals that a good number of the gender-based violence survivors were female at 58% while male survivors of GBV crimes were 41%. Lastly intersex survivors of GBV were 2%. This clearly denotes that women are the most affected gender, which is in line with the findings by of Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, (1999) who found that due to a variety of societal and cultural variables, women make up the majority of victims of gender-based. Women may also be more susceptible to violence due to poverty and economic uncertainty since they may

be dependent on their spouses for financial assistance and unable to exit violent situations (Jewkes, 2002). The data also indicates that intersex persons are equally victims of gender-based violence.

The police gender desk officer’s majority were male at 59% while female gender desk officers were 41%. This denotes the gender balance at the gender desk but still shows the need for more female gender officers as majority of the victims of GBV were female.

Table 2: Level of Education

Demographic	Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
Level of education for GBV Survivors	Primary education	70	42
	O level	50	30
	Diploma	30	18
	Undergraduate	12	7
	Postgraduate	6	4
	Total	168	100
Level of education for gender desk police officers	O level	15	56
	Diploma	7	26
	Undergraduate	3	11
	Post graduate	2	7
	Total	27	100

The table 2 shows that majority of GBV survivors have acquired primary school education at 41%.those with O level education at 30% those with diploma education are 18% undergraduates at 7%and post graduates at 4%.this data clearly shows the dire need to sensitize community members and these survivors needs to be sensitized through their local radio stations, in churches and have their artist compose songs and poems to educate their community on gender based violence so as to understand the root cause of gender based violence. There is need to encourage survivors to speak up in case that the police will believe them and support them as GBV crimes thrives in silence. Education level for gender desk officers shows that a good number have acquired o level education an indicator that educating them on gender- based violence would be seamless which would now be a great move to curbing gender-based violence.

Focus Group Discussions Results;

What is your take on the effectiveness of police gender desk services at Kathonzweni Police station?

The effectiveness of police gender desk services at police stations is to provide specialized assistance and support to individuals experiencing gender-based violence. These desks are staffed by trained police officers who are equipped to handle the unique and sensitive nature of gender-based violence cases. The goal is to provide a safe and supportive environment for victims to report incidents and receive assistance in navigating the criminal justice

system. The police gender desk also aims to improve the overall response and investigation of gender-based violence cases within the police force.

Do you have any knowledge/ experience of the services offered at the Police Gender Desk?

The quality of services provided by the police gender desk varies and is influenced by factors such as training and capacity of the officers, available resources, and the overall political will to address gender-based violence. The services provided by the police gender desk in Kenya can be limited, with some victims facing challenges such as unavailability of specialized officers, lengthy procedures, and insensitive attitudes from police officers. On the other hand, some individuals have reported positive experiences with the police gender desk, praising the sensitivity and responsiveness of the officers handling their cases.

What exactly do you think contributes to the shortcomings in services?

Lack of specialized training and capacity: Many police officers may not be adequately trained in handling gender-based violence cases, leading to inadequate response and investigation.

Insufficient resources: The police gender desk may not have adequate resources, including staff, funding, and technology, to carry out their functions effectively.

Inadequate political will: The issue of gender-based violence may not receive the necessary attention and prioritization from the government and law enforcement, leading to limited resources and support for the police gender desk.

Attitudes and biases of police officers: Some police officers may hold biases and stereotypes about gender-based violence and the victims, leading to insensitive and dismissive attitudes.

Systemic barriers in the criminal justice system: The overall criminal justice system in Kenya may not be equipped to handle the complexities of gender-based violence cases, leading to lengthy procedures and limited support for victims.

Addressing these factors is crucial for improving the efficacy of the police gender desk in curbing gender-based violence in Kenya.

In your opinion and experience, what's your suggestion to improve the effectiveness of gender desk at the station?

Providing specialized training and capacity building: Police gender desk officers need to be trained in handling gender-based violence cases, including how to handle victims sensitively, properly investigate cases, and gather evidence.

Increasing resources: The police gender desk should be provided with adequate resources, including staff, funding, and technology, to carry out their functions effectively.

Enhancing political will: The government and law enforcement should prioritize the issue of gender-based violence and provide necessary support to the police gender desk to carry out their functions effectively.

Addressing attitudes and biases of police officers: The police force should work to eliminate any biases and stereotypes that police officers may hold about gender-based violence and the victims. This can be done through sensitivity training and ongoing efforts to promote a culture of equality and respect.

Strengthening the criminal justice system: The overall criminal justice system in Kenya should be strengthened to effectively handle gender-based violence cases and provide support to victims. This can include streamlining procedures, increasing resources, and establishing specialized courts to handle such cases.

Implementing these suggestions could help improve the efficacy of the police gender desk in curbing gender-based violence.

Table 3: Effectiveness of Police Gender Desk Curbing Gender-Based Violence

Descriptive Statistics					
Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
When I reported the matter to the police it was handled very fast	180	4.00	5.00	4.0938	.29614
The police were very professional	180	4.00	5.00	4.0625	.24593
The police station is accessible	180	3.00	5.00	4.0000	.25400

The results in Table 4.3 show that a mean score of 4.0938 strongly agreed that when the victims/survivors reported the matter to the police it was handled very fast, a mean score of 4.0625 strongly agreed that the police were very professional and finally a mean of 4.000 strongly agreed that after the police station is accessible at any given time. The findings imply that the police gender desk in Kathonzweni, Makueni county-Kenya are effective. Some studies have found that having specialized units within the police focused on addressing gender- based violence can improve the response of law enforcement to these crimes and increase the likelihood of perpetrators being held accountable (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006).

For example, a study conducted in Kenya found that the establishment of police gender desks resulted in increase of reported cases of gender-based violence and indicates an improvement in the quality of investigations into these crimes (Ojiambo, 2008). Similarly, a study conducted in South Africa found out that the introduction of police gender desks was associated with improved police response and a greater willingness among victims to report incidents of violence (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002).

Gender Desk Police Officers’ Professionalism.

The study sought to evaluate ways in which Police professionalism influence the effectiveness of police Gender Desk in curbing gender -based violence in Kathonzweni Sub-County Makueni ~~Cur~~ Kenya?

Table 4.5: Gender Desk Police Officers’ Professionalism.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Police Gender Deskofficers have the requisite training	32	4.00	5.00	4.0625	.24593
Police refer the survivors to the medical team for Evidence collection and treatment withoutdelay.	32	4.00	5.00	4.9375	.24593
Forensic evidencecollected by the police is well Preserved.	32	4.00	5.00	4.0625	.24593
Certain cases of GBVpose challenges to the Gender officers who are sometimes tempted to advise the victims to drop the case to avoid losing it	32	4.00	5.00	4.9375	.24593
Police at the genderdesk get frustrationsfrom non-co-operating perpetrators, politicians, or some local administrators	32	4.00	5.00	4.9375	.24593
In many instances, relatives of the perpetrators interfere with investigations and other case management Procedures	32	4.00	5.00	4.9375	.24593
At times officers facedelays due to inadequate Facilitation	32	4.00	5.00	4.9375	.24593
Officers with experience face transfers in the middle of handling complex cases	32	4.00	5.00	4.9375	.24593
Valid N (list wise)	32				

According to the study, a mean of 4.0625 respondents stated that they strongly agreed that Police Gender Desk officers have the requisite training. A mean of 4.9375 strongly agreed that they were involved police refer the survivors to the medical team for evidence collection and treatment without delay a mean of 4.0625 strongly agreed that Forensic evidence collected by the police is well preserved. The research found out that a mean 4.9375 respondents acknowledged that they certain cases of GBV pose challenges to the Gender officers who are sometimes tempted to advise the victims to drop the case to avoid losing it. With a mean score of 4.9375, participants strongly agreed that in many instances, relatives of the perpetrators interfere with investigations and other case

management procedures. A mean of 4.9375 respondents agreed that at times officers face delays due to inadequate facilitation. A mean of score of 4.9375 strongly agreed that officers with experience face transfers in the middle of handling complex cases. These findings imply that professionalism of police officers assigned to gender desks can significantly impact their effectiveness in addressing gender-based violence. When police officers assigned to gender desks are highly trained and possess a strong understanding of gender-based violence, they are better equipped to respond to victims and investigate such crimes. This result in a more victim-centered approach and an increased likelihood of successful investigations and convictions. In conclusion, the professionalism of police officers assigned to gender desks is essential to their effectiveness in addressing gender-based violence. Governments and law enforcement agencies should invest in development of professional trainings of the police gender desk officers to ensure that police officers serving at the gender desk are adequately trained on gender-based violence so as to perform their duties in a competent and ethical manner.

Conclusions

Police gender desk officers professionalism had coefficients of the estimate which was significant basing on $\beta_2 = 0.900$ (p-value = 0.000 which is less than $\alpha = 0.01$), an indication that there was a strong positive relationship between gender desk police professionalism and efficacy of police gender desk in curbing gender-based violence. These findings imply that professionalism of police gender desk officers assigned to gender desks can significantly impact their effectiveness in addressing gender-based violence. When police officers assigned to gender desks are highly trained and possess a strong understanding of gender-based violence, they are better equipped to respond to victims and investigate such crimes. This result in a more victim-centered approach and an increased likelihood of successful investigations and convictions.

Recommendations

The professionalism of police officers assigned to gender desks is critical to their effectiveness in addressing gender-based violence. The National police service commission needs to ensure that all police gender desk officers are well trained on gender based violence. The study showed that in all police stations and police posts, repartees were handled with care in some of the facilities there were written charts on waiting time expected before the gender cases were determined at the station level but to the contrary GBV survivors were complaining of being harassed and shamed by police offices as they were lodging the complains, the case of the lady who was a bar attendant clearly shows that police professionalism was not promising and that police needs to undergo training in order to effectively attend to GBV cases with professionalism and in respect to human rights. This study recommends that all police officers need to take interest in learning on gender-based violence even on their own as gender-based violence information is available online.

Possible interventional strategies for improving GBV

Training of the gender desk police officers

Gender-based violence victims have severally complained of their discouragement from reporting the gender-based crimes citing that some of the police gender desk officers don't handle the victims of gender based violence with dignity while some even end up soliciting bribes from the victims so that they can facilitate bringing the perpetrators to book. This is an absolute lack of common human dignity. This, therefore, calls for the National police service need to ensure that gender studies and human rights studies are incorporated in the basic recruit training courses manuals in all recruit training campuses to ensure that all police officers are well conversant with gender-based violence crimes and their charges and more important on evidence collection and presentation as well as exhibit preservation. Handling gender-based violence crime victims need to be done with a lot of dignity therefore training and in-service training on the same is highly required. After the initial training and posting, the gender police officers need to be receiving in-service training that will help them be updated on the first changing GBV crimes mode of Operandi in order to adequately address the cases. There is a need for the National Police Service Commission to ensure that an adequate number of ladies are recruited to the service to ensure that there is a balance in the staffing of gender desk police officers to ensure that female victims report cases without fear. It will equally be prudent for gender desk officers to receive training and exchange programs with the county government officials and all the court users to learn as there are complains that gender based violence male victims are mostly mocked by the police at the police desk due to the underlying social and cultural norms associated with masculinity especially when the gender based violence is on intimate partner violence against men this is mostly contributed to by non-recognition of women as perpetrators of intimate violence. It is therefore evident that training police gender desk officers will ensure that officers will be able to handle victims of gender-based violence crimes with professionalism.

Transfer of police gender desk officers

Transfer of police gender desk officers is a serious hindrance to fight against gender-based violence because police gender desk-trained officers are few in number and therefore there is a need to retain trained officers. the National police service commission need to ease transfers or ensure that the transferred gender desk officer is replaced by another trained gender desk officer. Cases have been there where a trained gender desk officer is replaced with a police officer who has been serving in war zones and had not been trained on gender-based violence crimes least to say that it takes a while for these officers to get accustomed to the cases and introducing them to handling sensitive pending court cases touching on gender based violence takes time and the transferred officers have to keep appearing to courts to give evidence, which in most cases becomes hard therefore delaying justice to the victims of gender based violence due to insufficient information relay due to network hitches and in most instances facilitation of these officers to appear to courts and worse still those posted in volatile areas and are fully incapacitated to appear to courts in their previous duty stations.it would be prudent for the service to set some period of time that will be documented on when gender desk officers are the transferred at least for three years within that period the gender

desk offices therefore will know when they might be due for transfers and avoid taking up gender based cases which might take long in the court of law before justice is served.

Police gender desk facilitation

All police stations need to have functional police gender desks to avoid the complaints of gender desk police officers handling GBV cases out the general police report desk which is risking violation of the gender-based violence victim's right to privacy. The National Police Service need to partner with other stakeholders to ensure that they put in place needs to safe rooms and safe houses to take in victims of gender-based violence who are still traumatized and are in in good position to return to their usual homes and ensure that their basic needs are attended to by the government. Police gender desk requires additional funds to be added to the national police service budget so that the service can fully facilitate every police facility to have in place a fully functional police gender desk.

Police gender desks are not adequately financed as they lack the capacity to even provide basic services like offering p3 forms to victims and others lacking vehicles to facilitate gender desk officer to take victims of gender-based violence for medical services within the appropriate time and for timely evidence collection and preservation. There will be need for the government to ensure that there will be specific resources for police gender desk such that they will have motor vehicles specifically for mitigating gender-based violence.

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