



# Innovative Solutions to Gender-Based Violence in Kisii County: A Localized Policy Framework for Prevention and Survivor Support

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**Executive Summary:** *Kisii County grapples with an entrenched issue of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), spanning domestic violence, sexual assault, and harmful cultural practices, eroding social cohesion and impeding progress. Despite existing legal frameworks like the Constitution of 2010 and national statutes addressing GBV, challenges persist in reporting and prosecuting offenders, leaving victims without adequate recourse. Regional commitments to combat GBV, such as Kenya's adherence to international protocols, underscore the collective determination to eliminate such violations, but gaps in execution persist. Drawing from extensive research and stakeholder engagements, this policy brief highlights Kisii County's dire GBV landscape. Alarming statistics from the National Crime Research Centre expose high rates of child sexual exploitation, signaling an urgent need for robust interventions. Identified challenges include legislative gaps, insufficient budget allocation, and inadequate support structures for GBV survivors. The proposed recommendations aim to address these gaps by advocating for collaborative legislation development, enhanced funding for GBV activities, and the creation of comprehensive safe spaces. These strategic measures aspire to fortify Kisii County's response to GBV, fostering resilience and support for survivors while advancing a more effective approach to combatting this pervasive issue.*

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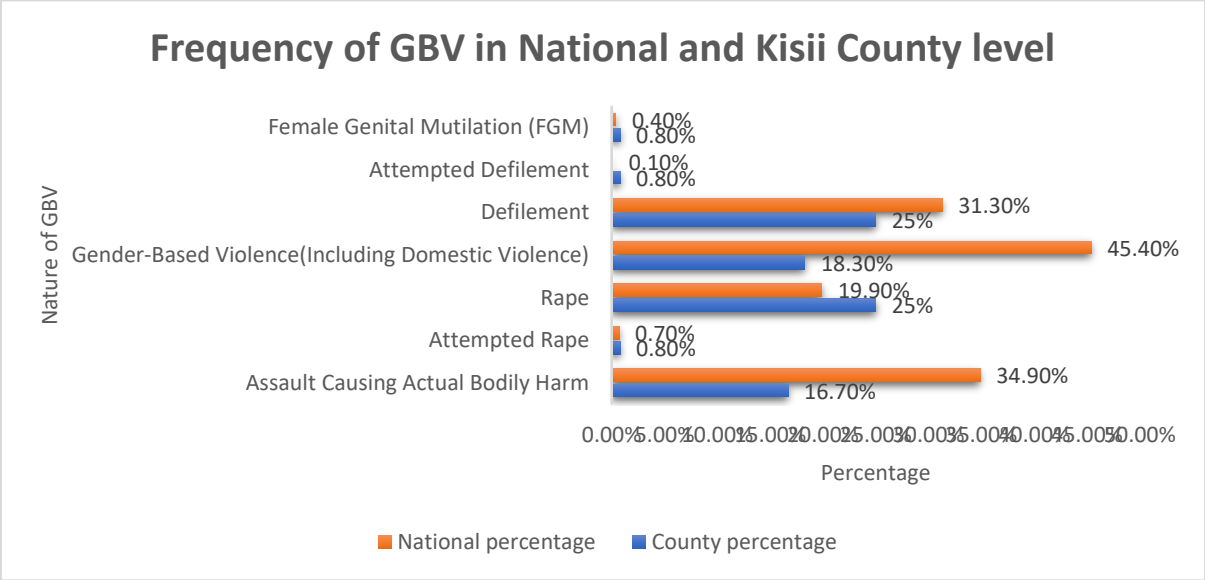
## 1. Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a critical and widespread issue in Kisii County, disproportionately affecting women,

children, and other vulnerable populations. Despite existing national and local initiatives aimed at preventing and addressing GBV, the prevalence of violence, including sexual assault, domestic abuse, and harmful cultural practices, remains alarmingly high. The persistence of

these issues is largely attributed to deep-rooted patriarchal norms, lack of comprehensive survivor support systems, and inadequate implementation of laws designed to protect victims. Recent data highlights the severity of GBV in Kisii County. According to the Kenya National Crime Research Centre (2022), 35% of women in Kisii have experienced physical or sexual violence, and over 20% of reported cases involve children. The Kenya Health Information System

(2023) indicates that over 1,200 GBV cases were reported in Kisii County in the first half of 2023 alone, with domestic violence and sexual abuse being the most common forms of violence. In addition, harmful cultural practices, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriages, continue to exacerbate the situation, particularly in rural areas where awareness of legal protections remains limited.



Source: National Crime Research Data 2020

This policy brief presents a comprehensive framework to address GBV in Kisii County. It calls for the development of robust legislation, increased budgetary allocations for GBV programs, the establishment of safe spaces for survivors, and a focus on community-based awareness campaigns. These strategies aim to create a sustainable approach to reducing violence, empowering survivors, and fostering gender equality.

### 1.1 Challenges Facing GBV Prevention in Kisii County

One of the most significant challenges in addressing GBV in Kisii County is the gap between the legal framework and its enforcement. While Kenya has established progressive laws, such as the Sexual Offenses Act (2006) and the Children’s Act (2001), the implementation of these laws remains weak. In Kisii, there is a preference for traditional justice systems over formal legal channels, especially in rural communities. This informal approach often leads to minimal consequences for perpetrators and a lack of justice for survivors. Law enforcement personnel, including police and judicial officers, often lack sufficient training to handle GBV cases sensitively and effectively, further hindering the prosecution of offenders. Another pressing issue is the lack of budgetary support for GBV prevention and response programs. Although Kisii County has made

efforts to raise awareness of GBV, funding for essential services—such as medical, psychological, and legal support for survivors—remains insufficient. Without adequate resources, survivors are left without proper care and rehabilitation, making it difficult to break the cycle of violence. There is also a critical shortage of shelters and safe spaces, which are essential in protecting survivors and providing immediate care. Currently, survivors are often left in the same environments where the abuse occurred, exposing them to further harm.

Cultural norms and practices also contribute to the high rates of GBV in Kisii County. Harmful practices such as FGM and early marriages are still prevalent, driven by patriarchal values and societal pressure. Community attitudes towards gender roles often stigmatize survivors of GBV, discouraging them from reporting incidents and seeking help. These cultural barriers create an environment where violence against women and children is normalized and perpetuated, making it even more challenging to address the root causes of GBV.

### 1.2 Policy Recommendations

To effectively combat GBV in Kisii County, several targeted interventions are needed. First, it is essential to strengthen the legal framework by enacting a Gender-

Based Violence Act that addresses the specific needs and contexts of the county. This Act should provide clear guidelines for the protection of survivors, establish harsher penalties for perpetrators, and ensure community involvement in reporting and preventing violence. In tandem, law enforcement and judicial officers must undergo specialized training on GBV case management to ensure that survivors receive the support they need, and offenders are held accountable.

The budgetary allocation for GBV programs must also be increased. Kisii County should prioritize funding for survivor rehabilitation services, awareness campaigns, and training programs for key stakeholders, including healthcare providers, law enforcement officers, and community leaders. By ensuring that GBV prevention and response are adequately funded, the county can develop a sustainable approach to addressing violence and supporting survivors.

Another key recommendation is the establishment of safe centers and shelters for survivors of GBV. These safe spaces should be accessible to individuals across both urban and rural areas, providing immediate protection, medical care, psychological support, and legal assistance to survivors. By creating a network of safe spaces, the county can help prevent survivors from returning to dangerous environments and offer them a path toward healing and recovery.

Community-based awareness and education campaigns are also critical. Community leaders, local organizations, and schools must be engaged to raise awareness of the dangers of GBV and challenge the cultural norms that perpetuate violence. Campaigns should specifically focus on changing attitudes toward gender roles and harmful practices such as FGM. Men and boys should also be actively involved in these initiatives as key allies in the fight against GBV.

Finally, empowering women's groups and community networks can significantly strengthen the response to GBV. Kisii County should leverage the influence of local women's groups to create community-based networks that provide support to survivors, advocate for their rights, and report cases of GBV. These groups can also be instrumental in training women in leadership, economic empowerment, and advocacy, all of which contribute to reducing gender inequalities and addressing the root causes of GBV.

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