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Influence of the Perpetrator–Victim Relationship in Sexual Violence Exposure on the Mental Well-Being of Young Adults in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya

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Abstract: Sexual violence is a significant social and psychological concern that can adversely affect the mental well-being of young adults. This study examined the influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure on the mental well-being of young adults in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya. The study was guided by Trauma Theory and the Ecological Model of Violence and adopted a mixed-methods approach using a convergent parallel design. The target population comprised 67,084 participants, including 67,077 young adults and seven key informants. Using Yamane's formula, 156 young adults were sampled, while seven key informants were purposively selected. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 30 through descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were thematically analysed. Findings indicated that the perpetrator–victim relationship was associated with the mental well-being of young adults exposed to sexual violence, particularly where perpetrators were trusted persons, intimate partners, or family members. Inferential analysis showed a strong and statistically significant relationship between the perpetrator–victim relationship and mental well-being ($r = .648$, $p < .001$). Regression analysis further showed a significant influence ($\beta = .359$, $p < .001$). The overall model explained 57.9% of the variation in mental well-being ($R^2 = .579$, $p < .001$). The study concludes that the perpetrator–victim relationship significantly affects young adults' mental well-being following sexual violence exposure. The study recommends trauma-informed counselling, confidential reporting and referral mechanisms, and relationship-sensitive psychosocial support for young adult survivors.

Keywords: *Perpetrator–victim relationship, Sexual violence exposure, Mental well-being, Young adults, Trauma, Kisauni Sub-County*

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1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) defines sexual violence as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts directed against a person's sexuality through force or coercion, regardless of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator. It includes rape, sexual harassment, sexual coercion, unwanted touching, attempted rape, and sexual exploitation (Krahé, 2023). Beyond physical harm, sexual violence can undermine mental well-being, contributing to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), emotional distress, suicidal ideation, and social withdrawal (Stockman et al., 2024).

The perpetrator–victim relationship is an important dimension of sexual violence because psychological outcomes may vary depending on whether the perpetrator is an intimate partner, family member, acquaintance, authority figure, or stranger (Jaffe et al., 2021). Violence perpetrated by someone known to the victim may involve betrayal, loss of trust, fear of disclosure, continued contact, and restricted access to support (Camp, 2022). Conversely, violence by strangers may heighten fear and perceptions of insecurity.

Despite these differences, much of the literature treats sexual violence as a general exposure, with limited attention to how the perpetrator–victim relationship influences survivors' mental well-being.

Globally, sexual violence remains a significant concern among young people. Sardinha et al. (2022) estimated that approximately one in three women globally have experienced physical or sexual violence, with young women particularly vulnerable. Evidence from the United States and Europe further links sexual violence with depression, anxiety, PTSD, emotional distress, and social difficulties among survivors (Molstad et al., 2023). However, existing evidence provides limited differentiation of these outcomes based on the relationship between perpetrators and victims.

Similar concerns have been reported in Africa. Studies in South Africa, Nigeria, and Uganda have documented depression, PTSD, anxiety, emotional instability, substance-use problems, and relationship difficulties among survivors of sexual violence (Jewkes et al., 2020; Adebayo, 2022; Kaggwa et al., 2023). Stigma and fear of discrimination may also discourage survivors from seeking psychosocial support (Ninsiima et al., 2021). Nevertheless, African research has largely examined the general psychological consequences of sexual violence, leaving the influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship insufficiently explored.

In Kenya, sexual violence remains a significant public-health and social concern. The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS, 2022) reported that 13% of women aged 15–49 years had experienced sexual violence. Survivors have also been reported to experience anxiety, despair, fear, low self-esteem, and impaired social functioning, particularly in vulnerable communities (Marenya, 2023). However, Kenyan studies have predominantly focused on prevalence, risk factors, and legal dimensions of sexual violence, with limited evidence on whether mental well-being varies according to the perpetrator–victim relationship.

The gap is particularly relevant in Mombasa County, where socioeconomic vulnerabilities and urban pressures may heighten exposure to sexual violence. The Costa et al., (2022) documented cases involving young people aged 18–24 years, including those living in informal settlements in Kisauni Sub-County. Despite this evidence, empirical research remains limited on how the relationship between perpetrators and victims shapes the mental well-being of young adults in the area. This study therefore examined the influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure on the mental well-being of young adults in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya

1.2 Statement of Problem

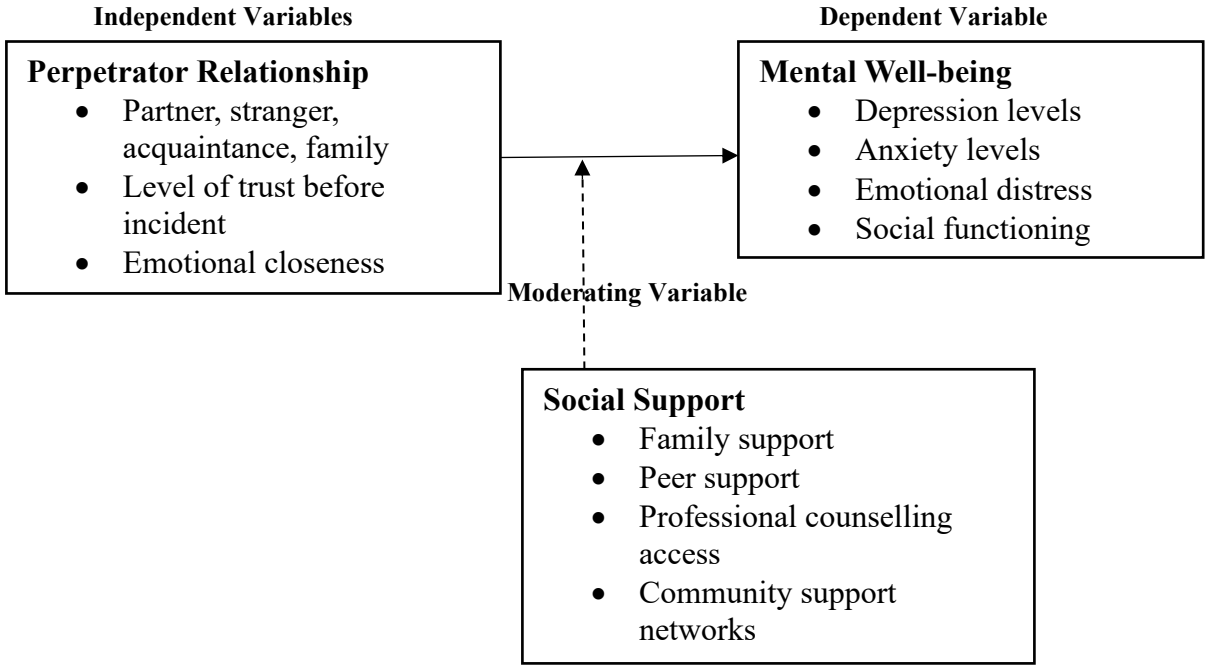
Sexual violence is a major public health concern because of its adverse effects on survivors' mental well-being, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and emotional distress (WHO, 2024). In Kenya, sexual violence remains prevalent, with 13% of women aged 15–49 years reporting lifetime experience of sexual violence and 7% reporting experience in the preceding 12 months (KNBS, 2023). The problem was also evident in Mombasa County, where Olum et al. (2025) documented 3,122 survivors who accessed the Gender-Based Violence Recovery Centre at Coast General Teaching and Referral Hospital between 2017 and 2023, with 89% reporting that the perpetrator was known to them. However, the mental-health consequences of sexual violence may vary according to the perpetrator–victim relationship, as violence perpetrated by intimate partners, family members, acquaintances, or strangers may involve different experiences of trust, betrayal, fear, and continued contact (Oga et al., 2022). Despite the importance of this relationship, limited empirical evidence exists on its influence on the mental well-being of young adults exposed to sexual violence in Kisauni Sub-County. This study therefore examined the influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure on the mental well-being of young adults in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya.

1.3 Research Objective

The perpetrator-victim relationship may shape the psychological impact of sexual violence by influencing trust, fear, disclosure, and access to support. Understanding this relationship is therefore important in explaining variations in survivors' mental well-being. Therefore, the objective of the study was to examine the influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure on the mental well-being of young adults in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The figure below presents the conceptual framework of the study. The independent variable was perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure while the dependent variable was mental well-being of young adults in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya. The study has also noted the moderating variable, which is not the focus of the study.



Source: Researcher (2026)

2. Literature Review

The paper reviews empirical literature on the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure and its influence on the mental well-being of young adults. It synthesizes existing evidence, identifies gaps, and provides the basis for examining this relationship among young adults in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Trauma Theory and the Ecological Model of Violence.

2.1.1 Trauma Theory

Trauma Theory was developed by Herman (1992) to explain how traumatic experiences can disrupt psychological functioning, safety, trust, emotional stability, and an individual's sense of control. The theory is particularly applicable to sexual violence, which can overwhelm an individual's coping capacity and result in persistent psychological difficulties (Herman, 1992; Tahan et al., 2021).

Trauma Theory suggests that the psychological effects of sexual violence vary according to the nature and circumstances of the traumatic experience (Pemberton & Loeb, 2020). The perpetrator–victim relationship is therefore important because violence by an intimate partner, family member, acquaintance, authority figure, or stranger may generate different experiences of betrayal, fear, loss of trust, and difficulty seeking support. These experiences may contribute to anxiety, depression, emotional distress, and post-traumatic stress symptoms.

The main strength of Trauma Theory is its ability to explain the psychological pathways through which sexual violence affects mental well-being. However, it gives relatively limited attention to broader social and structural factors that influence vulnerability to sexual violence (Blehm, 2025). Despite this limitation, the theory is appropriate for the present study because it provides a framework for examining how the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure influences the mental well-being of young adults.

2.1.2 Ecological Model of Violence

The Ecological Model of Violence was adapted from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and applied to violence by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010). The model explains violence as the outcome of interacting factors at the individual, interpersonal, community, and societal levels. It therefore provides a framework for understanding sexual violence within the broader social and environmental context.

At the individual level, characteristics such as age, psychological factors, and substance use may influence vulnerability to sexual violence. At the interpersonal level, family, peer, and other relationships, including the perpetrator–victim relationship, may influence both exposure to sexual violence and its psychological

consequences (Cardeli et al., 2022). At the community level, poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, and unsafe environments may increase vulnerability, while societal factors such as cultural norms, gender inequality, and attitudes towards violence may sustain conditions that facilitate sexual violence (WHO, 2021).

A major strength of the model is its holistic perspective, which recognizes that sexual violence and its consequences are shaped by interacting individual, relational, community, and societal factors. However, its broad scope may make it difficult to isolate the contribution of specific factors, while providing less detail on the psychological processes underlying trauma. Despite these limitations, the model complements Trauma Theory by placing individual experiences within their wider social context.

The Ecological Model of Violence is therefore relevant to this study because it provides a framework for examining how the perpetrator–victim relationship, together with individual and contextual factors, may shape the mental well-being of young adults exposed to sexual violence. It further supports understanding the potential role of social support within interpersonal and community environments in reducing adverse psychological outcomes. Thus, the model provides a suitable framework for examining the influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure on the mental well-being of young adults.

2.2 Review of Empirical Literature

Review of empirical literature examines existing empirical evidence on the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure and its influence on the mental well-being of young adults. The review synthesizes findings from previous studies to establish what is known and identify the empirical gap addressed by the study in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya.

2.2.1 Influence of Perpetrator-Victim Relationship on Mental Well-Being Among Young Adults

The perpetrator–victim relationship is an important factor in understanding the mental health consequences of sexual violence among young adults. Violence perpetrated by a trusted or known person may intensify psychological harm through betrayal, fear, humiliation, loss of trust, and difficulties in coping and recovery (Ullman, 2023). The nature of the relationship may also influence disclosure, help-seeking, and access to social support, thereby shaping survivors' mental well-being.

Evidence from international studies supports this relationship. In Finland, Hisasue et al. (2020) found greater psychological distress and poorer quality of life among women exposed to violence by close relationship partners than among those assaulted by strangers. Similarly, Moulding et al. (2021) reported higher depressive, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms among survivors whose perpetrators were intimate partners or family members. Emotional attachment and dependence on perpetrators also discouraged reporting. In Zimbabwe, Winter et al. (2020) found that sexual violence by known perpetrators was associated with greater mental anguish, fear, and social isolation among young women. These findings suggest that relational proximity may intensify the psychological consequences of sexual violence. However, differences in social and institutional contexts limit their direct applicability to young adults in Kenyan communities.

African evidence further demonstrates the importance of the perpetrator–victim relationship. Schneider et al. (2025) found that acquaintances, neighbours, and intimate partners were frequently identified as perpetrators among sexually assaulted girls in Burundi. Survivors reported anxiety, shame, and other psychological difficulties, while closeness to perpetrators created barriers to disclosure and access to psychosocial services. However, the study focused on girls and did not specifically assess the independent influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship on mental well-being among young adults.

In Kenya, evidence similarly indicates that perpetrators are often known to survivors. Costa et al., (2022) identified friends, boyfriends, and acquaintances among commonly reported perpetrators of sexual violence. In Nairobi informal settlements, Sarnquist et al. (2024) found greater emotional distress, fear, and depressive symptoms among survivors when perpetrators were known rather than strangers. These findings highlight the roles of trust, dependency, stigma, and fear of social consequences in shaping survivors' psychological experiences and help-seeking. Nevertheless, evidence from Nairobi may not fully reflect the social and cultural dynamics of coastal communities.

Empirical evidence indicates that the perpetrator–victim relationship is associated with survivors' mental well-being, with violence by known perpetrators often linked to greater psychological distress. However, most previous studies have examined this relationship as part of broader sexual violence or domestic violence research rather than specifically determining its influence on mental well-being among young adults. Evidence from Kisauni Sub-County remains limited**,** creating an important contextual and empirical gap. The present study therefore examined the influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure on the mental well-being of young adults.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach using a convergent parallel design, whereby quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed separately and integrated during interpretation. The design enabled the study to examine the influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure on the mental well-being of young adults.

The study was conducted in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya. The target population comprised 67,084 participants, including 67,077 young adults aged 18–24 years and seven key informants. A sample of 156 young adults was determined using Yamane's formula at an 8% margin of error, while the seven key informants were purposively selected, giving a total sample of 163 participants.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires for young adults and semi-structured interviews for key informants. The instruments were reviewed by experts and pilot-tested with 16 respondents in Changamwe Sub-County. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients above 0.70 considered acceptable. The alpha coefficients ranged from 0.815 to 0.891, with an overall reliability of 0.856.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 30 through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression. The regression model was $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$, where Y represented mental well-being and X represented the perpetrator–victim relationship. Qualitative data were analysed thematically and integrated with quantitative findings.

Ethical approval and relevant research authorisations were obtained. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, and the right to withdraw were maintained throughout the study.

4. Results and Discussion

The study targeted 156 young adults and seven key informants. Of the 156 questionnaires administered to young adults, 150 were successfully completed and returned, representing a response rate of 96.2%. All seven key informants participated in the interviews, yielding a response rate of 100%. The study achieved a response rate of 96.3%. This high response rate provided an adequate basis for data analysis and enhanced the credibility of the study findings. Holtom et al. (2022) notes that a response rate of 70% or higher is generally considered adequate in social science research. The findings are presented using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Response on Perpetrator-Victim Relationship

n=150

Statements	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)	Mean	Std Dvt
Sexual violence committed by someone known to the survivor has greater emotional effects than violence committed by a stranger.	8 (5.3)	14 (9.3)	18 (12.0)	62 (41.3)	48 (32.0)	3.85	1.12
Young adults may feel betrayed when the perpetrator is someone they trust.	6 (4.0)	12 (8.0)	16 (10.7)	60 (40.0)	56 (37.3)	3.99	1.06
Sexual violence committed by an intimate partner causes greater psychological distress.	10 (6.7)	15 (10.0)	20 (13.3)	58 (38.7)	47 (31.3)	3.78	1.17
Recovery is more difficult when the perpetrator is a family member	12 (8.0)	18 (12.0)	22 (14.7)	55 (36.7)	43 (28.6)	3.66	1.24
The relationship between the survivor influences my mental well-being.	7 (4.7)	13 (8.7)	19 (12.7)	61 (40.7)	50 (33.3)	3.89	1.11
The closer the relationship with the perpetrator, the greater the emotional impact.	8 (5.3)	11 (7.3)	17 (11.3)	63 (42.0)	51 (34.0)	3.92	1.08
The relationship between the perpetrator has no influence on my emotional recovery.	46 (30.7)	50 (33.3)	18 (12.0)	22 (14.7)	14 (9.3)	2.39	1.27
Composite Mean and Standard Deviation						**3.64**	**1.15**

Source: Field Data (2026)

As shown in Table 1, the composite mean of 3.64 (SD = 1.15) indicates that respondents generally agreed that the perpetrator–victim relationship influences the mental well-being of young adults exposed to sexual violence. The highest-rated statement was that young adults may feel betrayed when the perpetrator is someone they trust (M = 3.99, SD = 1.06), with 77.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This was followed by the view that closer relationships with perpetrators are associated with greater emotional impact (M = 3.92, SD = 1.08).

Similarly, 73.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the relationship between the survivor and perpetrator influences mental well-being (M = 3.89, SD = 1.11). Further, 73.3% agreed or strongly agreed that sexual violence by someone known to the survivor has greater

emotional effects than violence by a stranger (M = 3.85, SD = 1.12). Sexual violence by an intimate partner also recorded substantial agreement, with 70.0% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it causes greater psychological distress (M = 3.78, SD = 1.17). In addition, 65.3% agreed or strongly agreed that recovery is more difficult when the perpetrator is a family member (M = 3.66, SD = 1.24).

Conversely, the negatively worded statement that the perpetrator–victim relationship has no influence on emotional recovery recorded a low mean (M = 2.39, SD = 1.27), with 64.0% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This further supports the view that the nature and closeness of the relationship are important in shaping survivors' emotional recovery.

These findings indicate that sexual violence perpetrated by trusted or closely connected individuals may have greater psychological consequences because it can involve betrayal, loss of trust, fear, shame, and difficulties in seeking support. The findings are consistent with Trauma Theory, which explains how traumatic experiences can disrupt emotional security and trust, and with the Ecological Model of Violence, which recognises interpersonal relationships as an important context influencing violence and its consequences. The findings also agree with Ullman (2023), who observed that sexual violence perpetrated by acquaintances may be associated with substantial psychological and emotional consequences, and with Hisasue et al. (2020), who found poorer psychological outcomes among individuals experiencing violence within close relationships.

The qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative results. Key informants reported that sexual violence in Kisauni Sub-County was predominantly perpetrated by individuals known to survivors, particularly intimate partners, family members, friends, and acquaintances. One key informant noted that *"most of the cases we see involve people who are already known to the survivor, especially partners, friends and acquaintances"* (K1). The findings further indicated that violence by trusted individuals was associated with betrayal, loss of trust, fear, shame, emotional pain, social isolation, and reluctance to seek help. As one key informant explained, *"It is more painful when the person who violates you is someone you trusted because you keep asking yourself why they did it and whether you can trust anyone again"* (K2).

Generally, findings demonstrate that the perpetrator–victim relationship is an important factor in understanding the mental well-being of young adults exposed to sexual violence. Closer or trusted relationships, particularly involving intimate partners and family members, may intensify psychological distress and complicate emotional recovery and help-seeking.

Inferential Statistics Findings

Inferential analysis was conducted to determine the influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure on the mental well-being of young adults in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya. Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analyses were used after confirming that the data satisfied the relevant regression assumptions.

Diagnostic Tests

The diagnostic tests confirmed that the data were suitable for correlation and regression analysis. The residuals were approximately normally distributed, while the scatterplots indicated that the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were satisfied. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 1.96, falling within the acceptable range of 1.5–2.5, indicating independence of errors. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as tolerance values ranged from 0.459 to 0.779 and VIF values from 1.284 to 2.176. Cook's Distance values ranged from 0.001 to 0.084, indicating no undue influence from individual observations.

Table 2: Diagnostic Tests

Diagnostic Criterion	Obtained Value	Decision
Durbin–Watson	1.96	Satisfied
Tolerance	0.459–0.779	Satisfied
VIF	1.284–2.176	Satisfied
Cook's Distance	0.001–0.084	Satisfied

Source: Field Data (2026).

The results confirm that the data met the relevant assumptions for Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression. Correlation between Perpetrator–Victim Relationship and Mental Well-Being

Pearson correlation analysis established a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between the perpetrator–victim relationship and mental well-being among young adults ($r = 0.648$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	r	p-value
Perpetrator–Victim Relationship and Mental Well-Being	0.648	<0.001

Source: Field Data (2026).

The finding indicates that variations in the perpetrator–victim relationship were significantly associated with variations in the mental well-being of young adults. The strength of the correlation suggests that the nature and closeness of the relationship between the survivor and perpetrator are important in understanding mental well-being following sexual violence exposure.

Influence of Perpetrator–Victim Relationship on Mental Well-Being

Multiple linear regression was used to determine the unique influence of the perpetrator–victim relationship on mental well-being while controlling for forms of sexual violence exposure. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2,147) = 98.624$, $p < 0.001$, and explained 57.9% of the variation in mental well-being ($R^2 = 0.579$).

Table 4: Influence of Perpetrator–Victim Relationship on Mental Well-Being

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	p-value
Sexual Violence Exposure and Perpetrator–Victim Relationship → Mental Well-Being	0.761	0.579	0.573	98.624	<0.001

Source: Field Data (2026).

Importantly, perpetrator–victim relationship had a positive and statistically significant influence on mental well-being ($B = 0.351$, $\beta = 0.359$, $t = 5.739$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 5: Predictor of Mental Well-Being

Predictor	B	β	t	p-value
Perpetrator–Victim Relationship	0.351	0.359	5.739	<0.001

Source: Field Data (2026).

The result indicates that a one-unit increase in the perpetrator–victim relationship score was associated with a 0.351-unit increase in the mental well-being score, holding forms of sexual violence exposure constant. The statistically significant coefficient demonstrates that the perpetrator–victim relationship makes an independent contribution to explaining variations in mental well-being.

The finding is consistent with the descriptive results, which showed that respondents generally agreed that the nature of the relationship with the perpetrator influences emotional and psychological outcomes. In particular, respondents reported stronger effects where the perpetrator was someone trusted, an intimate partner, or a family member. The finding also supports Trauma Theory, which explains that sexual violence perpetrated by a trusted or closely connected person may intensify feelings of betrayal, fear, loss of trust, and emotional distress. The Ecological Model of Violence further supports the finding by locating the perpetrator–victim relationship within the interpersonal context in which violence occurs.

Hypothesis Decision

The null hypothesis that *the perpetrator–victim relationship in sexual violence exposure has no significant influence on the mental well-being of young adults in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya* is rejected, since $p < 0.001$. The study therefore concludes that the perpetrator–victim relationship has a statistically significant influence on the mental well-being of young adults.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that the perpetrator–victim relationship is a critical determinant of the mental well-being of young adults exposed to sexual violence in Kisauni Sub-County, Mombasa County, Kenya. The findings established a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between perpetrator–victim relationship and mental well-being ($r = 0.648$, $p < 0.001$). Multiple regression further confirmed that perpetrator–victim relationship significantly predicted mental well-being ($\beta = 0.359$, $p < 0.001$), after controlling for forms of sexual violence exposure. These findings demonstrate that the nature and closeness of the relationship between the survivor and perpetrator are important in shaping psychological and emotional outcomes following sexual violence.

The descriptive findings further reinforce this conclusion, with respondents indicating that sexual violence perpetrated by someone known to or trusted by the survivor may have greater emotional consequences. Respondents also reported that violence involving intimate partners and family members may intensify psychological distress and make emotional recovery more difficult. The findings suggest that the interpersonal context of sexual violence should therefore be considered when assessing the mental well-being needs of young adult survivors.

The findings are consistent with Trauma Theory, which emphasizes the effects of betrayal, loss of trust, fear, and emotional disruption following traumatic experiences. They also support the Ecological Model of Violence, which recognizes the perpetrator–victim relationship as an important interpersonal factor influencing experiences and outcomes of violence. However, the closeness of the relationship may also complicate disclosure, reporting, access to support, and recovery, particularly where the perpetrator is a trusted person, intimate partner, or family member.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Strengthen relationship-sensitive psychological support services.

Mental well-being interventions for young adults exposed to sexual violence should consider the perpetrator–victim relationship when assessing survivors' psychological and emotional needs. Counselling and psychosocial services should provide appropriate trauma-informed interventions for cases involving intimate partners, family members, trusted persons, and other known perpetrators, as these relationships may intensify emotional distress and complicate recovery.

2. Strengthen confidential reporting and referral mechanisms.

Department of Children Services, and gender-based violence response organisations should strengthen confidential and survivor-centred reporting and referral mechanisms for young adults exposed to sexual violence. These institutions should establish clear referral pathways linking survivors to counselling, psychosocial support, medical care, protection, and legal services, particularly where the perpetrator is a family member, intimate partner, or trusted person. Such mechanisms would facilitate timely support while protecting survivors from further emotional and social harm.

3. Enhance capacity of service providers to address relationship-related trauma.

Healthcare providers, counsellors, social workers, community-based organisations, and other frontline actors should be equipped with trauma-informed skills for addressing sexual violence involving known or closely connected perpetrators. Particular attention should be given to betrayal, loss of trust, fear, emotional distress, and barriers to disclosure and recovery. Strengthening such capacity would improve the responsiveness of mental well-being services to the specific circumstances surrounding sexual violence exposure.

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