

Perceptions on the social effects of conflicts in the lives of women in west Pokot County, Kenya

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Abstract

Women in conflict areas live in constant terror. Many communities are trapped in their homes for fear of violence and sexual abuse that prevent women from moving freely, restricting their social and economic activities. This paper is an analysis of the social problems faced by women in West Pokot County amidst the endless conflicts experienced. The study was carried out in West Pokot County where a random sample of two hundred women was obtained. A survey research design was used; questionnaires and interviews were the major data collection tools. Structured interviews were used to countercheck and supplement the responses from the questionnaires. Observation method, on the other hand, was used to provide information and aid in observing actual behavior of the respondents. The findings revealed that the women experienced many social problems during conflicts in West Pokot County. The main social problems were: displacement, bodily injury, and loss of property, loss of husband and family members, lack of basic needs such as food, water and shelter, lack of schools, and lack of medical facilities. The findings revealed that most of the women lived in a state of hopelessness and helplessness because of conflict related issues. It was recommended that the government and other stakeholders should increase the peace building capacities and women should be fully involved. The administrators such as chiefs, sub chiefs and village elders should also be incorporated in this peace building capacities. Finally there is need to set up support therapy groups to assist the women who have been affected by the overwhelming problems of the conflicts.

Keywords: Conflicts, Culture, Displacement, Social status, Illiteracy, Poverty

Introduction

The Pokot have been in conflict with Marakwet, Turkana, Sabinu and Samburu for a very long time. The conflicts are land related or cattle rustling related which have destroyed lives and property. These conflicts are attributed to depletion of resources, traditional cultural structures that protect the rights of all, high level of illiteracy and poverty (United Nations Environmental Programme UNEP) Report, 2009) ^[14]. Women in rural areas are afraid to go to their farms or to collect firewood for cooking. There is usually no law and order. The social disorganization and erosion of authority of traditional institutions of social control, coupled with abject poverty usually contribute to an increase in crime and delinquency. There is usually a large reservoir of unemployed young men who become accustomed to using violence and brutality during and after the conflicts posing a constant threat to women. Women in conflict prone areas are often under threat from indiscriminate attack. They are forced to labor and to feed soldiers in war-prone areas, thus, exposing them to the risk of reprisals by the opposing forces. This places them in inappropriate and difficult situations (Howes & Stevenson, 1999) ^[9]. Apart from straining to feed these soldiers, the women's personal safety is also threatened.

The presence of armed forces restricts women's free movement and this severely limits their access to supplies of water, food, medical assistance, especially for reproductive and maternal health and ability to tend their farms and animals. Women are also unable to communicate efficiently with other members and this leads to lack of community and family support (Lynn, 1994) ^[12]. Women are also faced with the possibility of developing childbirth complications due to the stressful conditions they are faced with during conflicts. A study on the perceptions of the effects of armed conflicts on maternal and

reproductive health in Burundi and Northern Uganda shows that maternal mortality and sickness are common in the conflict afflicted zones (Primus, Patience, Henrik & Johanne, 2015) ^[15]. Rape, forced prostitution, sexual slavery and forced impregnation are other crimes women face during conflicts. Women and girls have been systematically targeted for sexual violence in many conflicts. Lindsey (2000) ^[11] asserts that reliable statistics are not easy to obtain and those available are often based on the numbers of victims seeking medical help for pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases or termination of pregnancy. Women generally are usually too afraid to speak of their experiences for fear of ostracism by the family or community. Many of them believe that no one can help now that they have been violated.

Conflicts increase women household responsibilities. Many households are headed by women because the men are disabled, imprisoned, dead, or are away fighting. Women are forced to assume men's role including building and repairing houses, dealing with community leaders and other social roles. Women also have to feed and support their families alone, a task that overwhelms them. There is also an increased growth in the number of orphans and children separated with their parents and women have to take care of them and this is a major problem because most of them may not have enough for their own families.

At the end of the conflicts, women go through the enormous task of searching for their missing relatives and this may go on for many years. In many cases these relatives are never found. The inability to mourn and bury their loved ones has enormous impact on their lives and the coping mechanisms they adopt. Many women take up the role as heads of households, a role many of them had little or no preparation for and which is made difficult by the social constraints often imposed on them

(de Walque 2006, El-Bushra *et al.* 2002, Kumar 2001, Menon and Rodgers 2011, Schindler 2010, Shemyakina 2009, Zuckerman and Greenberg, 2004) [5, 6, 10, 13, 16, 17].

The paper is set to identify the social problems faced by women during conflicts in the West Pokot County in Kenya. The study is based on null hypotheses depending on the variable being discussed as presented in the results and discussion section.

The main objective of the study is to determine social problems women have encountered during conflicts in West County. This includes how women have been affected as a result of; displacement during conflicts, separation with family members, sexual and physical abuse, loss of family and property, lack of basic needs including medical facilities, education facilities, food and shelter.

Methodology

The study was carried out in the West County of Rift Valley Province, Kanyarkwat location, Katikamor sub-location and Kopulio location, Nakuyen sub-location. The study adopted survey method which was deemed relevant due to the vastness of the area covered (Frederick & Lori-Anne, 2006).

The target population consisted of women above the age of twelve years, chiefs, sub-chiefs and the elders in the study areas. The total adult population in the two areas of study was one thousand nine hundred and fifty of which six hundred and fifty were women. The women in West Pokot County were chosen because they were perceived to be the vulnerable population living in conflict prone areas. The chiefs and sub-chiefs due to their constant interaction with women victims during conflicts and administrative nature of their job are known to influence a lot about the conflicts in their areas.

Consequently they were viewed as being able to have insights, opinions, and feelings on the effects of conflicts in the lives of women. A sample of 100 women in each sub location was randomly selected making a sample of 200 women. The total population of women in Katikamor sub-location was approximately 350 while Nakuyen was 300. In addition, there was one chief, one sub-chief and six elders from the respective sub-locations. One elder represented each of the six villages in the sub locations.

The study used questionnaires, interviews schedules and observation methods for data collection. Chi square tests were also performed to establish the effects as presented in the two different study locations at 0.05 levels of significance. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) [3].

Results and Discussions

Distribution of Displaced women

Table 1 shows the distribution of the women displaced from their homes in Kanyarkwat location and Kopulio location; 69 per cent of the respondents were displaced in Kanyarkwat while 82 per cent were displaced in Kopulio. The number of women who were not displaced in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio were 30 per cent and 29 per cent in the two locations respectively. There were no responses from two women one in each location.

As indicated in table 1 $X^2=7.871$ for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance and it was concluded that a majority of women were displaced in Kanyarkwat and in Kopulio. This shows that there was a significant difference in the distribution of displaced women in the two locations of Kanyarkwat and Kopulio.

Table 1: Distribution of Displaced Women

Displacement	Kanyarkwat		Kopulio		Mean
	Frequency observed	Frequency expected	Frequency observed	Frequency expected	
Yes	69 (69)	70 (70)	82 (82)	90 (90)	75.5
No	30 (30)	29 (29)	17 (17)	9 (9)	23.5
No response	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD					34.728
Variance					1206.06
Calculated chi-square value(X^2)					= 7.871
Degrees of freedom					= 2
level of significance					= 0.05
X^2 critical(0.05,2)					= 5.991

Studies indicate that most of the displaced persons in the world are from Sub-Saharan Africa and the majorities are women and children (Clara, F. & Ruth, V., 2009) [4]. This displacement occurs because during conflicts there is destruction, physical insecurity, disruption of livelihoods and shortages of food leading to people fleeing their homes and seeking refuge in the neighboring places or countries.

Cases of Separation

The number of respondents who were separated from their husbands and family in the two locations were 13 per cent and 17 per cent in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio, respectively. On the

other hand the respondents who were not separated from husbands and family were 85 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 82 per cent in Kopulio. Two percent and one per cent of the respondents in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio respectively did not respond. Table 2 denotes the information. With the chi square value of 11.82 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance, it is safe to conclude that the majority of women did not separate from husbands and family in the two districts. From the findings it is clear that there was a significant difference of women who were separated from their husbands in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio.

Table 2: Cases of Separation

Separation	Kanyarkwat		Kopulio		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	13 (13)	25 (25)	17 (17)	25 (25)	15
No	85 (85)	74 (74)	82 (82)	74 (74)	83.5
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD	34.749				
Variance	1207.515				
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)	= 11.82				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
level of significance	= 0.05				
X ² critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991				

According to Bennet *et al.*, (1995) [2] men and women get separated during conflicts because men do the fighting and are at times detained, misplaced, may go missing, dead or they spend long periods in the war front.

Disappearance of relatives

The number of respondents who indicated that relatives had disappeared during the conflicts was higher in Kanyarkwat than in Kopulio. Those who said relatives had disappeared were 28 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 72 per cent in Kopulio. The respondents who said they did not experience the problem of relative's disappearance were 70 per cent and 27 per cent in the two districts respectively. Three respondents did not give their opinions on the disappearance of their relatives. Calculated chi square value was 8.30 for v=2 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. It was concluded that most relatives disappeared in Kopulio as compared to those in Kanyarkwat during conflicts, the reason being that the environment in Kopulio was more volatile than that in Kanyarkwat.

Loss of husband

The findings for the respondents who lost their husbands during conflicts are as recorded by 20 per cent in Kayarkwat and 28 per cent in Kopulio. A large proportion of respondents, 78 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 71 percent in Kopulio, said their families were not affected by the problem of losing their husbands during the conflicts. A total of three women in both districts did not respond. Concerning loss of husbands the calculated chi square value was 7.60 for v=2 degrees of freedom at the 0.05level of significance; the null hypothesis

was, therefore, rejected. There was significant difference among the respondents who lost their husbands due to conflicts related reasons in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio locations. The conclusion made was that women in the two locations did not lose their husbands to a large extent due to conflict related reasons.

Loss of other member (s) of family

On views regarding loss of family members during conflicts, 39 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 61 per cent in Kopulio while 59 per cent and 38 per cent said their families did not lose any member in Kanyarkwat and Kopuliot respectively. Those who made no responses were a total of three per cent in both districts. From the table, the calculated chi square value was 9.56 for v=2 degrees of freedom at the level of significance of 0.05. The conclusion was that while a majority of women in Kopulio lost their family members, a more or less similar number did not lose their family members in Kanyarkwat. This means that Kanyarkwat was not as volatile as Kopulio.

Loss of property

A large proportion of respondents said they lost their property during the conflicts; 74 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 84 per cent in Kopuliot; while 24 per cent and 15 per cent in Kanyarkwat and in Kopulio respectively, said their families did not lose any property. Those who did not respond were a total of three per cent in the two locations. This information is denoted in Table 3 with a calculated chi square was 6.96 for v=2 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. A safe conclusion made was that a majority of women lost property during conflicts in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio locations.

Table 3: Loss of Property

Loss of property	Kanyarkwat		Kopulio		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	74 (74)	69 (69)	84 (84)	90 (90)	79
No	24 (24)	30 (30)	15 (15)	9 (9)	19.5
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD	35.482				
Variance	1258.969				
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)	= 6.962				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
level of significance	= 0.05				
X ² critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991				

Loss of property after death of husband

A proportion of respondents had lost property to family members, such as animals and land after the death of their husbands during conflicts, that is, 74 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 84 per cent in Kopulio lost property after death of their husbands, while 24 per cent and 15 per cent in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio respectively didn't lose their property after death of husbands. Three per cent of the respondents from the two districts did not give their opinions. The calculated chi square value was 6.96 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. The conclusion made was that women lost property to relatives who discriminated against them after their husbands died.

Sexual and physical abuse

Rape Cases

Table 4 denotes the cases of rape among the respondents. Five per cent of the respondents in the two districts were raped. A large proportion of the respondents, 93 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 94 per cent in Kopulio, were not raped. A total of three respondents in the two locations made no response. With a chi square value of 11.71 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance, it was concluded that a majority of women were not raped during the conflicts. The findings are recorded in table 3 below.

Table 4: Cases of Rape

Rape	Kanyarkwat		Kopulio		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	5 (5)	10 (10)	5 (5)	10 (10)	5
No	93 (93)	85 (85)	94 (94)	85 (85)	93.5
No response	2 (2)	5 (5)	1 (1)	5 (5)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD	41.458				
Variance	1718.788				
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)	= 11.706				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
level of significance	= 0.05				
X ² critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991				

Lindsey (2000) ^[11] asserts that reliable statistics are not easy to obtain and those available are often based on numbers of victims seeking medical help for pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases or termination of pregnancy.

Unwanted Pregnancies

This was recorded as a result of the many rape cases. A proportion of the respondents indicated that they had never been affected by the problem of forced pregnancies due to rape during the conflicts. Ninety four per cent in Kanyarkwat and 93 per cent in Kopulio are those who said they had not experienced this problem during the conflicts. Four per cent and 6 per cent of the respondents in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio in the two locations respectively were affected by this problem. A total of three per cent in the two locations did not respond. The chi square value was 11.91 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. It was concluded that forced pregnancies due to rape were not rampant in these conflict prone areas.

Physical Injury

The respondents who experienced bodily injury were 30 per cent and 40 per cent in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio respectively. Those who did not experience bodily injury were 68 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 30 per cent in Kopulio. A total of three

women in the two locations did not give their responses. With the calculated chi square value of 8.23 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at the level of significance of 0.05 it is concluded that the majority of women in Kanyarkwat did not experience bodily injury in comparison to the ones in Kopulio. According to Filkins (2000) women have tended to be classified as the "vulnerable" group during conflicts, but in some areas women have actively engaged in armed conflicts and have been injured or killed as the men folk.

Lack of basic needs

A large number of the respondents indicated that their families lacked basic needs such as food, water, and proper shelter during conflicts. Table 5 shows over ninety per cent of the respondents in the two districts lacked basic needs; 96 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 90 per cent in Kopulio. A total of nine per cent of the respondents in the two districts were of the opinion that they did not lack basic needs, while two per cent did not respond. From the table the calculated chi square value was 9.72 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. It appears that women lacked basic needs in form of food, water, and shelter during conflicts. Most families relied on humanitarian assistance.

Table 5: Lack of Basic Needs

Lack of basic needs	Kanyarkwat		Kopulio		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	96 (96)	90 (90)	93 (93)	85 (85)	94.5
No	3 (3)	9 (9)	6 (6)	14 (14)	4.5
No response	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD	42.834				
Variance	1834.788				
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)	= 9.724				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
level of significance	= 0.05				
X ² critical(0.05,2)	=5.991				

Lack of Schools

This was established with regard to the number of schools available. The numbers were higher in Kopulio 70 per cent as compared to 53 per cent in Kanyarkwat. Those who indicated that they had sufficient schools were 45 per cent and 29 per cent in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio respectively; three per cent of the respondents did not give their opinions. A calculated chi square value of 7.89 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance was performed. Education was largely affected in the conflict prone areas of Kanyarkwat and Kopulio. Although it was higher in the Kopulio (70%) compared to (53%) in Kanyarkwat, conflicts hampered the construction of schools in the areas.

Lack of Medical Facilities

A large proportion of the respondents indicated that they lacked medical facilities during conflicts. Ninety two per cent in Kanyarkwat and 83 per cent in Kopulio were affected by this problem. The other respondents, 6 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 16 per cent in Kopulio were of the opinion that they did not lack medical facilities and a total of three per cent of the respondents in both districts did not respond. The calculated chi square value is 8.033 for $v = 2$ degrees of freedom at a level of significance of 0.05. It is concluded that a majority of women in the two districts are in dire need of medical facilities during and after conflicts.

Child Birth Complications

This may have been as a result of the lack of medical facilities without which women encounter complication at birth since most of them performed child birth on their own without assistance from trained medical practitioners. The study showed 68per cent of the respondents in Kanyarkwat and 78 per cent in Kopulio as compared to those who did not experience child birth complications represented by 30 per cent and 21 per cent in the two districts respectively. A calculated chi square value was 7.23 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at the

level of significance of 0.05. This reported significant difference among the respondents who experienced child birth complications in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio. This shows that a majority of women in these conflict prone areas experienced child birth complications. This may have been as a result of lack of medical facilities, personal hygiene and since the poverty levels were high most of the women lacked proper diet.

Sickness due to lack of hygiene

Majority of the respondents indicated that they had been sick due to lack of hygiene, 85 per cent in Kanyarkwat and 82 per cent in Kopulio. The respondents who had not been sick due to personal hygiene were 13 per cent and 17 percent in Kanyarkwat and Kopulio respectively. A total of three women did not respond. With a calculated chi square value of 10.88 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance it confirms that sickness was rampant due to hygiene problems in both Kopulio Location and Karkwat Location. The respondents from the two districts experienced sickness due to lack of hygiene; the reasons being that poverty and illiteracy were rated high in these areas.

Detention and Imprisonment

The respondents who indicated that they have never been faced with detention or imprisonment during the conflicts were a majority, 92 per cent in Kanyarkwat Location and 93 per cent in Kopulio Location as compared to those who had been detained and imprisoned because of conflict related reasons, that is, 6 per cent in each of the two districts. Three per cent of the respondents did not give their opinions on this in the two districts. This information is denoted in Table 6. Calculated chi square value was 8.94 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at the level of significance of 0.05. It was safely concluded that a majority of women did not go through detention or imprisonment during conflicts. The reason for this is that the conflicts in these two districts were more concentrated on livestock theft.

Table 6: Detention and Imprisonment

Detention and Imprisonment	Kanyarkwat		Kopulio		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	6 (6)	15 (15)	6 (6)	10 (10)	6
No	92 (92)	84 (84)	93 (93)	89 (89)	92.5
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100(100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD	41.736				
Variance	1741.879				
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)	= 8.942				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
level of significance	= 0.05				
X ² critical (0.05,2)	= 5.991				

Conclusion

The prevalent rates of displacement, sicknesses due to lack of hygiene and medical facilities, losses of family members and property, poverty, lack of schools and medical facilities are high. This is of significance in both locations although Kopulio Location portrayed higher prevalence rates in some cases.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. The government, social services, NGOs, and church organizations, through awareness programmes, should teach the women how to maintain hygiene conditions when in displacement, and put up medical facilities as well as encourage them to seek help when they are sick.
2. The stakeholders should give information on what precautions women could take to avoid rape and when it occurs when and where they can get medical help.
3. The government and other stakeholders should set up technical or vocational institutions in the two districts to encourage the youth who are used to pastoral life to join these institutions to learn practical skills which could give them self-employment which would be a good alternative to traditional pastoralist life.
4. The study also recommends that the government and other stakeholders should create boarding schools in the two districts and avail scholarships for the girls in the areas affected by conflicts. This will enable them to continue with formal education and improve their lives.

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