

Experiences, Knowledge and Perceptions of Women on Gender Based Violence;

Abstract:

This study was conducted between March and July 2007 in Thika municipality, Kenya. The aim was to determine the experiences, knowledge and perceptions of women on gender based violence among the married and cohabiting couples. Objectives: To establish the level of knowledge and describe the perceptions of married women on gender based violence. The study also aimed at identifying the types of gender based violence that women in Komu sub-location were subjected to. Study design: Descriptive cross-sectional study which had with quantitative aspect. Setting: Komu sub-location, Thika Municipality, Kenya. Subjects: Two hundred and three (203) married and cohabiting women. Results: Legally married subjects accounted for 146(71.9%), while 56(27.6%) were cohabiting. The age of study subjects ranged from 18-54 years, with mean age of 28.76 years. Majority (n = 145, 71.9%) had attained secondary education and above. Most subjects (n = 166, 86%) got information on GBV from mass media. Among the types of GBV, domestic violence 91.1% and sexual violence 71.4% were the most known. Health problems associated with GBV were physical injuries 88.2% as a result of domestic violence, severe bleeding 83.3% due to FGM and death during child birth 74.9% arising from early marriages. Almost half (45%) of respondents acknowledged the existence of rape in marriage while 36% disputed its existence. About 39% felt the ideal age of marriage for girls is between 18-22 years while 80.8% said girls should not undergo FGM. Majority 92.6% knew women in the community who had suffered from GBV and 54.2% of respondents had been victims of GBV. Conclusion: This study recommends urgent mitigation strategies such as professional help to GBV victims be made readily available and accessible at the community level. The study also suggests that strengthening of community based education could help to increase women's knowledge and empower them to seek help for abuse, while also enlightening the whole community of the negative effects of GBV. Lastly, the researchers recommend that further studies be carried out to establish the contribution of cultural practices and stereotypes in perpetuation of GBV.