

POLICY BRIEF

Accelerating county action to address Gender-Based Violence including Femicide

VIHIGA COUNTY



- GBV, including femicide, poses serious risks to basic human rights, including the rights to life, health, bodily integrity, and autonomy which cuts across culture, class, race, gender and geographical boundaries.
- Vihiga County faces a critical surge in Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Cultural hotspots like "disco matangas" and high rates of unreported incest within family settings threaten the fundamental human rights of women and children. Systemic barriers, including chronic underfunding and a 60% closure of rescue shelters due to donor dependency, have left survivors without essential protection or access to justice. To address this crisis, the County Government must urgently establish ring-fenced budget lines in the CIDP and legislate a prohibition on informal, out-of-court settlements for criminal GBV cases to ensure perpetrator accountability.

County specific gaps

- Hotspot Identification:** funeral vigils, locally known as disco matangas, are explicitly identified as situational hotspots where violence spikes dramatically. - *"Whenever there is a disco matanga, we almost always see a spike in violence especially against women, girls, and even sodomy of young boys. These gatherings often turn into hotspots for sexual and physical abuse, fuelled by alcohol, drugs, and lack of supervision. It has become a serious concern for our community."*
- Education Sector Risks:** Research in 2025 indicates high rates of psychological abuse and sexual harassment within public secondary schools, where 1 in 3 women believe wife-beating is justified under certain conditions.
- Specific Violence Trends:** The report notes that counties like Vihiga report high levels of sexual violence and incest, often occurring within extended family settings and remaining unreported due to stigma or customary conflict resolution.

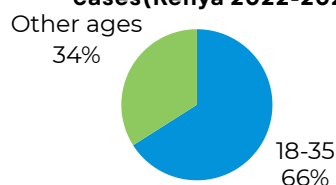
GBV in Kenya: Key Facts



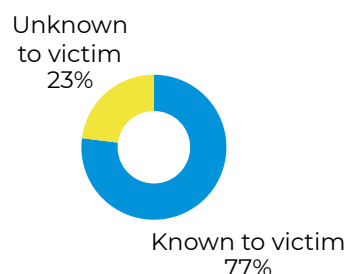
34%
of Women have experienced physical violence

21%
Women who have experienced sexual violence

Perpetrator age distribution in Femicide cases (Kenya 2022-2024)



Relationship of perpetrators to victims



"These repeated incidents of GBV without justice have contributed to distrust within the community here. This mistrust extends to law enforcement and judicial systems. We take matters into our own hands instead." - Survivor

"There is a concern over the capacity of the legal justice system and the police to handle gender-based violence (GBV) cases fairly and effectively." - Survivor

Key Challenges and Systemic barriers

Weak Enforcement and implementation

- **Laws exist but are not enforced:** Despite progressive legislation (Sexual Offences Act, PADV Act, FGM Act), enforcement is inconsistent, unprofessional, and lacks proper monitoring and evaluation systems.
- **Low Conviction Rates:** Poor investigations, inadequate witness protection, and judicial inefficiencies result in low conviction rates, reinforcing impunity.
- **Corruption and evidence tampering:** Bribery, evidence tampering, and witness intimidation within the police and judicial systems undermine justice.

Fragmented and underfunded support systems

- **Chronic Underfunding:** Less than 1% of global humanitarian aid goes to GBV interventions, and Kenya mirrors this. County budgets for GBV are minimal.
- **Donor Dependency:** Most GBV programs rely on short-term donor funding, leading to instability. The withdrawal of USAID funding led to the closure of approximately 60% of shelters nationally.
- **Fragmented service delivery:** Survivors must navigate multiple agencies (police, hospital, legal aid) separately, with no clear referral pathway, leading to delays and re-traumatization.

Family and Community obstruction of justice

- **Informal Settlements (ADR):** Traditional systems prioritize reconciliation and compensation over justice. Survivors are pressured to accept livestock or cash instead of pursuing legal action.
- **Families protect perpetrators:** Families often shield kin who are perpetrators to preserve family reputation, pressuring survivors to withdraw cases or remain silent.
- **Victim Blaming and Stigma:** Survivors are frequently blamed for provoking violence, deterring reporting. Comments like "hiyo ni mambo ya nyumbani" from police discourage survivors.

Inadequate capacity by frontline responders

- **Inadequate trained police & gender desks officers:** Gender desks are often described as "tokenistic," with officers lacking trauma-informed training. High staff transfer rates undermine training investments.
- **Forensic capacity shortage:** Kenya has very few forensic experts causing delays in evidence processing. Police lack basic forensic tools.
- **Limited training for community responders:** Chiefs, elders, and religious leaders often serve as first points of contact but lack formal training on GBV protocols, legal frameworks, or survivor-centered approaches.

Policy Recommendations for Accountability



Prohibiting Out-of-Court Settlements for Criminal GBV Cases

The Judiciary to issue a directive that explicitly prohibits the resolution of incest, defilement, and sexual violence cases through traditional dispute resolution mechanisms



Integrate Alcohol and Drug Control into GBV Prevention

The County Government, through NACADA and the County Alcohol Drinks Regulation Committee to enforce strict alcohol and drug control measures, including in higher learning institutions



Establish dedicated and ring-fenced GBV Budget Lines

- County Government to Include specific GBV budget lines in CIDs and Annual Development Plans, with at least 10% of county health and gender budgets allocated to support survivor services and coordination structures.
- Establish and Operationalize a County GBV Trust Fund that can receive contributions from both the county government and private sector partners to ensure shelter operations aren't interrupted by fiscal cycles.



Integrate Commodity Security into GBV Response

County Department of Health to ensure the health facilities have a 100% "never-out" status for Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) and emergency contraception. Aligning GBV response to county health system strengthening goals



Strengthen Community Accountability and Public Awareness

The County Government should strengthen community-based GBV prevention and response by integrating GBV awareness into monthly chiefs' barazas, displaying illustrated local-language IEC materials with reporting contacts at public spaces, and establishing anonymous reporting mechanisms to enable safe reporting of incest and family-based violence without fear of retaliation.



County Government through the department of Gender should fully operationalize and resource the existing GBV rescue centre to be fully functional and budget for at least one rescue center per subcounty