

## The Impact of the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence on Women in Kakamega County, Kenya

Mukabi Narotso Benardatte

Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology Kakamega, Kenya

Email: benarben@gmail.com

**DOI Link:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v5-i6/1670>

**Published Date:** 13 June 2015

### Abstract

In most African societies women still occupy inferior positions both in the family and society as there is discrimination against them in terms of participation in decision making. This situation becomes worse in times of conflict where women become vulnerable and suffer most in terms of sexual violence, displacement widowhood among others. The 2007/2008 post-election violence (PEV) marked one of the darkest period in Kenya's history characterized by widespread killings and destruction of property in many parts of the country including Kakamega County. The overall objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of the 2007/2008 PEV on women in Kakamega County, Kenya. The conceptual framework of the study was drawn from Liberal Feminism and Conflict theories as well as the United Nations Agenda for Peace. The study adopted descriptive survey and explorative research designs. Questionnaires, interviews, and observation methods were used to collect primary data while secondary data was obtained through analysis of documents and reports from relevant offices, library and internet. The main respondents were 384 household heads, while key informants were 38 head teachers of primary schools, 33 Community Based Organizations (CBO) heads and 9 Assistant Commissioners. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics thus frequencies, averages, variability and percentages were calculated. The results obtained were presented using tables, graphs, pie charts, maps, figures chi-square and thematic narrative technique. The study reaffirmed that there was negative impact of PEV on women which included gender violence, displacement of families, widowhood and trauma. Apart from contributing to existing knowledge on the role of women in conflict management, this research would be of benefit to policy makers, security managers, academicians, communities in Kakamega County, and Kenya at large. The study recommended enhancing capacities by dealing with root causes of conflicts, strengthening security personnel and promotion of national cohesion.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Impact, Post-Election Violence, Sustainable Peace

### Abbreviations:

PEV	-	Post-Election Violence
CBOs	-	Community Based Organizations

## IDP - Internally Displaced Persons

**Introduction**

Throughout the world accounts of war tend to portray men as the conflict resolvers and women as passive innocent victims. In conflict situations, women are much more disadvantaged compared to men. Women tend to be the most vulnerable victims of various forms of violence, from domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, to sexual torture and other types of sexual violence. They also suffer disproportionately from displacement and deprivation (Boulding, 1988). Women are thus caught in a vicious paradox: while they are the main civilian victims of conflicts, they are often powerless to prevent the conflict, and are excluded from decision making positions, and negotiations.

During the Second World war, in Europe women faced a lot of challenge including detention with or without family members, displacement and had to be accompanied by their children to refugee camps, abduction, torture, amputation and mutilation, forced recruitment to fighting by force, and a variety of physical and sexual violation including rape and forced pregnancy, forced prostitution, forced marriage, increased exposure to sexually transmitted infections, and widowhood (Mazurana, 2006). Further, the literature reviewed on the works of Mazurana indicates that women are at a high risk of sexual exploitation in situations where the social structures and networks that protect them are strained or no longer function, and where justice and policing mechanisms are unable to fill the gaps or are colluding in violence. In Columbia young women gave themselves or were given by their families to paramilitary forces in order to try to stave off violence against their families.

According to the center for European studies (2004), after the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia, there were huge population displacement majority being women and children. There was mass rape and numerous killings of women and children during this war. It is estimated that close to 20,000 women and girls were raped, there were internally displaced of over 1,000,000 people majority being women (Walsh, 2000). According to Maja (2009) during the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya, many women experienced sexual violence in Kakamega County region, but due to the tension during that period, a large number did not seek medical attention and this greatly contributed to the trauma they experienced. Maja further indicated that many families were internally displaced and had to seek refuge in schools, police stations and churches. Majority of those who were in the IDP camps were women and children. Standards of sanitation were compromised and they experienced malnutrition. In 2007/2008, Kenya experienced post-election violence following the disputed presidential election results. The former President Mwai Kibaki of Party of the National Unity (PNU) was declared winner, and this prompted Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Party (ODM), and his followers who were dissatisfied with the results to claim rigging. As a result, supporters of each party turned against the other in most parts of the country leaving about 1500 people dead and 250,000 displaced (Maja, 2009). Kakamega County was one of the regions that experienced severe post-election violence. According to the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commissions Report (2008), in Kakamega County 31 people were reported dead in Kakamega Central Sub-County, 18 in Lugari, 12 in Mumias West and many were reported injured. Businesses were destroyed and quite a number of people were internally displaced ending up in camps in and police stations. According to Maja (2009), there were also Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) flocking back from other parts of the country where violence was taking place. As a result various stakeholders came up with ways of peace building, for instance the Government formed Peace Commissions in all the

Provincial Headquarters whose role was to ensure peace and reconciliation in the regions and organize counseling services for the traumatized victims of PEV. Further, the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management formulated a Draft National Policy on Peace Building and Conflict Management (GOK, 2009). Based on this background, the study sought to establish the impact of the 2007/2008 post-election violence on women in Kakamega County with an aim of coming up with intervention strategies for sustainable peace in the County and Kenya at large.

### **Methodology**

Focus of the study was restricted on the role played by women in conflict management following the 2007/2008 post-election violence. This study was specifically on women because women as child bearers seek conditions that enable society to be peaceful for the sake of their children (Odongo, 2004). It is important to note that the key informants and respondents for the study were both male and female since both had knowledge on the role of women in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV.

The study was confined to the three Sub-Counties of Kakamega County, Kenya which were extensively affected by the 2007/2008 PEV thus, Kakamega Central, Mumias West and Lugari, In this study, exploratory and descriptive survey research designs were adopted to evaluate the impact of the 2007/2008 PEV on women in Kakamega County. According to the 2009 census, the three sub-counties (Kakamega central, Mumias West and Lugari) of had a total population of 616,335 and a total of 203,282 households (KNBS, 2009). A total of 384 household heads was utilized as the sample size. The study focus having been on women, out of the 384 household respondents 60% were female while 40% were male thus 230 female (kakamega central 76, mumias west 78, lugari 76) and 154 male (kakamega central 51, mumias west 52 ,lugari 51). The 384 were not sampled in the category of key informants and this was meant to avoid double responses cases. Therefore, a total of 464 respondents/key informants, comprising of 384 household heads, 38 head teachers of primary schools, 33 heads of CBOS and 9

Assistant Commissioners formed the sample size for this study hence the total sample size was 464. The study used a questionnaire as a tool of data collection for the 384 household heads respondents. Items in the questionnaire comprised of structured questions which measured the objective responses and unstructured questions which measured the subjective responses. This were personal interviews where the researcher had face-to-face sessions with key informants thus, 38 head teachers of primary schools, 33 heads of CBOs and 9 Assistant Commissioners mentioned above. On observation method, the researcher physically visited the three Sub-Counties and divisions under study and observed various variables of the study guided by an observation checklist.

The study collected secondary data published and unpublished, on the role of women in conflict management from libraries of the various universities, publications, and reports from organizations like UNICEF, PLAN, UNIAID, UNESCO and websites, journals, research reports, Government papers, policies and oral speeches from individuals.

To enhance validity and the researcher conducted a pilot study by which pretesting of tools was done on a few respondents in a non-targeted region for the research which also experienced the 2007/2008 post-election violence. The instruments were presented in three locations of Busia County in Western Province and these were Marachi East, Bukhayo West

and Teso East. Using test/retest method the researcher administered questionnaires and interview schedules to the pilot respondents to fill and were collected, after two weeks the same respondents were given the same questionnaire again to fill. The pilot study was done in Busia County a non-targeted region for the study. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics thus means, frequencies, averages, variability and percentages and the results were presented through tables, pie charts, line graphs, maps figures, graphs, chi-square and thematic narrative technique. The qualitative data collected through the use of in-depth interview were coded, thematized and discussed as a report. The findings of the questionnaire were presented using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency, tables and graphs.

### Results and Discussion

The objective of the study was to evaluate the impact of 2007/2008 Post-election violence on women. This section gives the findings of this objective.

Table 1.

Household heads' perception of the impact of post-election violence on women

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Bad things that women experienced during elections	90	23.4
Consequences of violence on women	32	8.3
How elections affected women negatively	122	31.8
Inhuman actions on women	18	4.7
Negative account of elections	52	13.5
Outcome of post-election violence	70	18.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Source: Field Data

From table 1, most respondents 31.8% (122) perceived PEV as how elections affected women negatively, 23.4% (90) perceived that they are bad things that women experienced during elections, 18.3% (70) perceived it's the outcome of post-election violence, 13.5% (52) indicated that it's the negative account of elections, 8.3% perceived it as consequences of violence on women while 4.7% (18) perceived it as inhuman actions on women. From the findings of this study, majority of the respondents had knowledge on meaning of the impact of post-election violence on women. Respondents were asked to outline the extent to which post-election violence led to certain impacts on women. The responses were summarized in table 2. From the results in table 2, most of the respondents indicated the impact of PEV on women as 87.8% (337) death/widowhood, as during violence many people were killed and as husbands died they left their wives as widows.

Table 2.

Impact of 2007 post-election violence on women

<b>Impact</b>		<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Total</b>
Trauma	F	50	12	38	284	<b>384</b>
	%	13.0	3.1	9.9	74.0	<b>100.0</b>
Lack of social support	F	15	36	103	230	<b>384</b>
	%	3.9	9.4	26.8	59.9	<b>100.0</b>
Death/widowhood	F	0	11	36	337	<b>384</b>

	%	0.0	2.9	9.3	87.8	<b>100.0</b>
Displacement	F	0.0	12	66	306	<b>384</b>
	%	0.0	3.1	17.2	79.7	<b>100.0</b>
Torture	F	0.0	21	83	280	<b>384</b>
	%	0.0	5.5	21.6	72.9	<b>100.0</b>
Sexual abuse	F	5	11	69	299	<b>384</b>
	%	1.3	2.9	18.0	77.8	<b>100/0</b>
Disruption of education	F	10	21	56	297	<b>384</b>
	%	2.6	5.5	14.6	77.3	<b>100.0</b>
Lack of health services	F	0.0	32	72	280	<b>384</b>
	%	0.0	8.3	18.8	72.9	<b>100.0</b>
Malnutrition	F	0.0	16	92	276	<b>384</b>
	%	0.0	4.1	24.0	71.9	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Data

According to Table 2, 79.7% (280) cited displacement, many people in the County were internally displaced and had to seek refuge in churches, schools and police stations. Majority of these people were women and their children. 77.8% (299) indicated sexual abuse, the women and girls were raped by gangs during the 2007/2008 PEV and also by the police officers who were in that region to ensure peace. According to UNESCO, (2006) in Liberia girls as young as ten years and women were sexually exploited by soldiers and militia had a number of women in different internally displaced camps who they would exploit sexually in exchange for giving the women money to buy food and other basic necessities. Women who are refugees and asylum seekers are sometimes sexually exploited by border guards, police, and military. According to Maja (2009) during the 2007/2008 post-election violence, many women experienced sexual violence in Kakamega County region, but due to the tension during that period, a large number did not seek medical attention and this greatly contributed to the trauma they experienced. 74.0% (284) of the household heads respondents indicated trauma. In Somalia, due to long political conflict the women who went to the United States of America as refugees or immigrants have been surveyed and the clinical studies show that they are heavily traumatized by the war and nearly all of them were affected in one way or another. As a result, these women suffer considerable psychological harm because of the prolonged conflict (Schchman, 2004). 71.9% (276) indicated malnutrition, conflicts and violence disrupt lives and livelihoods, destroys societies and economies and reduces people's access to basic services (ACTION 2003). Following the 2007/2008 PEV, people were unable to access basic needs mainly food because roads had been closed by gangs of the youth. 72.9% (280) indicated torture women and girls were tortured during 2007/2008 PEV by the gangs from the communities that were against theirs. This was because they were vulnerable unlike their male counterparts who ran in to hiding when the gangs arrived. Women had to remain behind guarding their children and were easily tracked by the attackers who exposed them to all manner of torture. 77.3% (297) of the household respondents cited disruption in education and it is important to note that majority of these children in primary schools are under the age of ten years and hence very close to their mothers for emotional and social security. In case of conflict in the community the children will not attend school due to insecurity and considering that their teachers will be affected by the same. The children will cling to their mothers; this worsens the situation for the mothers who have themselves and their children to safeguard (UNESCO, 2006).

The PEV victims were unable to access health facilities as roads had been closed by gangs and also the health caregivers could not go to work due to security reasons. Some of the injured died because of over bleeding and could not access hospitals. This is in agreement with Mazurana, (2006) who indicated that the impact of violence on women is detention with or without family members, death, widowhood, displacement and have to be accompanied by their children to refugee camps, abduction, torture, amputation and mutilation, forced recruitment in to fighting force and groups, slavery, and a variety of physical and sexual violation including rape and forced pregnancy, forced prostitution, forced marriage, increased exposure to HIV/AIDS.

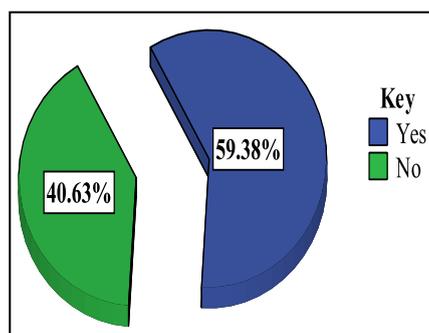


Figure 1 Schools affected by PEV

Source: Field Data

From the results in figure 1, most schools 59.38% (23) were affected by post-election violence while only 40.63% (15) were not. Respondents were further asked to indicate the effects of PEV on pupils. This was important for this study because how the PEV affected the pupils in turn had an impact on their mothers considering that these primary school children are aged below ten years.

From table 3, most school Head teachers key informants 26.3% (10) indicated that pupils were absent from schools. During the 2007 PEV, children could not go to school because of the insecurity and a number had to seek refuge together with their mothers to IDP camps. The girls were vulnerable and could not get out as they would be raped by gangs on the way to school.

Table 3.

Impact of PEV on pupils

Impacts	Frequency	Percent (%)
Absenteeism	10	26.3
Trauma	2	5.2
Children became orphans	2	5.2
Displacement	10	26.3
Learning was interrupted	3	7.9
Lost friends	2	5.3
Lost relatives	7	18.5
Lost parents	2	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Data

The teachers did not report to work because some had been displaced and were also in IDP camps, yet some were injured. The results from interview with head teachers 26.3% (10) cited many school children they were displaced as they had to accompany their mothers to IDP camps for safety. Those who remained in their homes were too traumatized to get out of their homes.

18.5% (7) lost relatives, 7.9% (3) learning was interrupted, while 5.2% indicated trauma, caused by the experiences of the PEV. Children became orphans, loss of parents and loss of friends 5.3%. Head teachers were also asked to indicate whether pupils were affected by PEV. The results were summarized in figure 2.

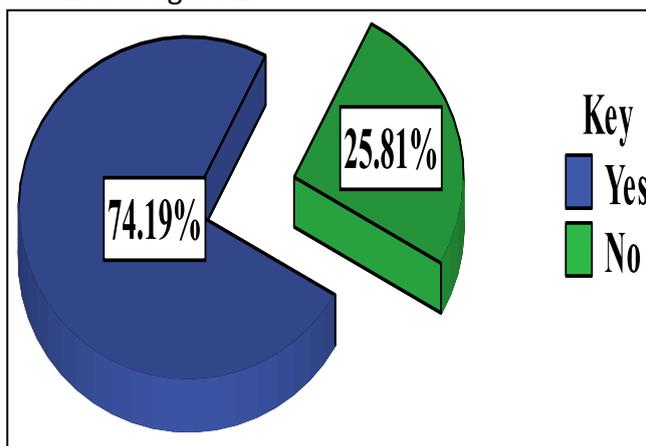


Figure 2 Pupils affected by PEV

Source: Field Data

From the results in figure 2, 74.19% (28) of the respondents indicated that pupils were affected by PEV and 25.81% (10) indicated otherwise. The distribution of responses across the three sub-counties is given in figure 3.

Table 4

Impact of PEV on County’s schools

Impact	Frequency	Percent (%)
Destruction of schools property	4	30.8
Displacement of learners and parents	2	15.4
Use of schools as IDP camps	2	15.4
Decreased enrolment	2	15.4
Learning was interrupted	3	23.1
Death of parents/guardians	2	15.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Data

From table 4, most of the affected schools 30.8% (4) indicated destruction of property, and a case cited was a private school in Lugari Sub-County which was completely destroyed as indicated by observation checklist and illustrated by plate. 23.1% (3) indicated that learning was interrupted, 15.4% (2) indicated displacement of learners, parents & guardians, decrease in enrolment and death of parents/guardians. From the Observation checklist there was evidence of destroyed schools as indicated in plate 1 below in Lugari Sub-County. Similar results were obtained from interviews with heads of schools which showed that schools were affected through destruction of schools property, conversion of schools into IDP camps hence

displacement of learners, loss of learning hours as well as loss (through death) of parents and guardians. This was also supported by what was observed as per the observation checklist, whereby homes were destroyed as indicated below in plate 2, and 3 in Kakamega Central and Mumias West Sub-Counties respectively.

According to the Center for European Studies (2004), after the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia, there were huge population displacement majority being women and children. There was mass rape and numerous killings of women and children. During conflicts more women and children die from malnutrition preventable diseases and complications of childbirth than die as a result of fighting. At the very time when they most need them, clinics and hospital doctors, nurses, medicines and contraceptives are likely to be in short supply due to the instability of war. In periods of armed conflict, girls and women lose possibility of gaining formal education more easily than boys (UNESCO, 2006). Sexual violence on the way to school makes some parents keep their daughters at home. Liberia's civil conflict had a crippling impact on education, 80% of schools were destroyed, 56 % female and 39% male never attended school (UNESCO, 2006). Schools in Cambodia and Angola were closed for many years because they sit in the middle of a mine field.

Displaced mothers and learners had to run to IDP camps hence learning was disrupted. Women and children tend to be the most vulnerable victims of various forms of violence, from domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, to sexual torture and other types of sexual violence. They also suffer disproportionately from displacement and deprivation (Boulding, 1988). This is also supported by the observation checklist pictures taken showing destruction of homes, shops, property and schools in the three Sub-Counties as indicated below in plates 1, 2, 3, and 4.



**Plate 1. A Destroyed School in Lugari Sub-County**

**Source: Field Data**



**Plate 2 A Destroyed home in Kakamega Sub -county**  
**Source: Field Data**



**Plate 3 Destroyed home in Mumias Sub-County**  
**Source: Field Data**



**Plate 4 Destroyed shops in Lugari Sub-County**  
**Source: Field Data**

### **Conclusions**

The objective of the study was to evaluate the impact of 2007/2008 PEV on women and the study added some knowledge to the empirical research by revealing the impact of 2007/2008 PEV on women within the county which are diverse and dynamic. From the study findings, widowhood, internally displaced, and sexual abuse were the most cited. Many people especially women and children were displaced when their homes were destroyed and took refuge in churches, schools and police stations as indicated by the observation checklist. They lived under harsh and unhygienic conditions in some instances there was outbreak of communicable diseases. During the violence, many men lost their lives leaving behind widows to fend for their families. The health of the victims was compromised as many people especially children suffered from malnutrition. The study recommended that the government should ensure lasting peace by dealing with the causes of violence before it erupts. There is need for enhancing capacities in search for triggers and root causes, as well as consequences which may set a new source of future conflicts by analyzing the goals and objectives of intervention strategies this is because of the negative impact violence has not only on the women but also on education and the economy of an area. Arresting perpetrators may bring justice as well as avoid future incidences alike; with recruitment of more security personnel who are well trained and well capacitated may not only bring calm but also stability within the region.

### **Corresponding Author**

DR. MOSES W. POIPOI  
MASINDE MULIRO UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
P.O. BOX 190 -50100  
KAKAMEGA KENYA  
EMAIL ADDRESS  
[wpoipoi@mmust.ac.ke](mailto:wpoipoi@mmust.ac.ke)

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