

Police Investigation of Sexual and Gender Based Crimes during Covid-19 Pandemic in Kenya.

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Abstract: The study is based on evidence-based information provided by police investigators who were attending Advance Investigation Course as well as Development Course 1/2021 at National Police Service Directorate of Criminal Investigations Academy South C, Nairobi Kenya. This paper focuses on the perceived increase of sexual and gender based crimes, the most prominent strategies being used to investigate sexual and gender based crimes, the challenges experienced by police investigators in the investigation of sexual and gender based crimes, determine whether sexual and gender based crimes are sufficiently investigated during this period in question and the requirements to enhance capabilities to effectively investigate sexual and gender crimes during Covid-19 pandemic period in Kenya. A descriptive survey research method was used with a sample size of 53 police investigators enrolled in the study. Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and documentary analysis were done to corroborate responses from the questionnaires. The data was voluntarily collected from the participants whose confidentiality was assured and analyzed using Micro Soft Excel and SPSS software. Study revealed an increase in new patterns of SGBCs as a result of online and financial influence. In addition, there are case backlogs in court. Hence, the study recommends for effective online reporting of SGBC as well as investigation, collaboration and partnership with other criminal justice agencies. Capacity building of police investigators on contemporary investigation legislation, policies and well-defined structures in line with ministry of health covid-19 safety measures, Equipping the police investigators with the right tools, powers and privileges to effectively respond, investigate and prosecute sexual offences, victim's protection using sentences which commensurate the crime committed. Community empowerment on best practices for sexual offences investigation procedures.

Key words: Covid-19, Gender, Investigation, Crime

Date of Submission: 13-05-2022

Date of Acceptance: 27-05-2022

I. Introduction

Internationally, human safety entails a secured environment where both property and human life is protected and any crime affecting the two are properly investigated, prosecuted and justice equally assured to the victims and perpetrators (Klockars, 1985). In London, the origins of modern investigation can be traced back to 18th Centuries and during this period, "Thief-Trackers" were hired at a specified fee by the theft victims to trace and recover stolen properties. They were playing the role of private investigators even though they were not trained on investigation procedures (Rawlings, 2002). However, public dissatisfaction by their techniques of operation led to the formation of Bow Street Runners who was well structured and coordinated in issues related to policing and investigation, (Osterburg and Ward, 2000).

The United Nations (UN) Security council resolution 1325, calls for upholding of Women's rights and justifiable response to impunity related to sexual and gender-based violence which undermines the foundation of the global peace and stability. It is worth noting that in some countries such as Syria and Myanmar some criminals have used sexual offences as a deliberate tool for conflict and as an effort to displace populations (Rawling, 2002).

Complexity surrounding the investigation of sexual and gender-based crimes in the international arena prompted UN Women Office for Human Rights Justice Rapid Response and the Permanent Missions in Canada, Lichtenstein, Ireland, Gambia and United Kingdom to convene human rights experts and investigators to chart the way forward on the importance of timely and quality investigations to sexually offences and other related cases (UNODC, 2020).

There are increased cases of communicable diseases in the African region such as Ebola, Influenza, Mumps, Norovirus, West Nile Virus, Tuberculosis, Chikungunya, Zika Virus and the most resent one Corona Virus Disease 2019 pandemic (CARE, 2020). Preventing threats of gender-based violence in Kenya during this delicate time of Covid-19 pandemic, demands for dedication and specialization.

Kenyan government is progressive in terms of formulation of policies relating to sexual and reproductive health in general, and has invested a substantial amount of money on human security and education. However, the gains for gender equality in the education sector for the last five years is now being derailed by increased cases of SGBCs. This is evidenced by National Council for Population and Development report (2021), which reported over 35,000 cases of teens pregnancies nationally during Covid-19 Pandemic period containment measures. additionally, there is consistent media reports indicating that one in five girls in age bracket of 15-19 years, is either pregnant or already a mother. The unintended pregnancies were due to rape, defilement and incest which are all offences prohibited in Sexual Offences Act.

The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of Covid-19 on SGBCs investigations during Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya and more specifically assess the increase of SGBCs, analyse strategies used to investigate SGBCs, examine the challenges experienced by police investigators in the investigation of SGBCs, determine whether SGBCs were sufficiently investigated, and evaluate the requirements to enhance capabilities to effectively investigate SGBCs during Covid-19 pandemic period in Kenya.

The study findings are beneficial to the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government (MoICNG) policy makers and the Directorate of Criminal Investigation (DCI) which is mandated to investigate sexual offences in relation to Sexual Offences Act 2006 (SOA) by providing information on the extent to which Covid-19 have fueled teen's pregnancies and provide an insight on intervention measures to effectively investigate SGBCs using modern technologies for effective service delivery to the members of the public. The study findings are also useful to the Ministry of Health (MoH) by providing information on health needs of the sexual and gender-based crime victims for a gendered decision making both for the victims and perpetrators taking into the account the constraints experienced by the health sector as a result of Covid-19 pandemic.

Mapping the increase of sexual offences cases in Kenya during Covid-19 pandemic, is difficult, but the existing literature indicates an alarming statistics which call for an evidence based research to ascertain the purveyors involved in this act, strategies that can best be used to investigate such offences, challenges characterized by the investigation of SGBCs, as well as the requirements to enhance the investigators capabilities including policies, and legislations to enhance sexual offences investigations in Kenya during Covid-19 pandemic period in Kenya for effective justice delivery and a secured society (UNODC, 2020).

II. Methodology

To achieve the study objective, the descriptive survey design was used. This research design provides evidence-based research techniques in collection of data through the use of questionnaires which incorporated a combination of both open-ended and structured questions, with the latter being used for analytical purposes while the former providing additional context and understanding. Qualitative data was also obtained from key informants who were part of the population and not part of the sample to get in-depth understanding of the subject matter from the experts. A four level Likert items was used to measure attitudes of respondents. The target population was 64 police investigators who were attending advance investigation course as well as development course at the DCI Academy and a sample of 45 (70% of the target population) were simple randomly selected from the population. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), the sample size was statistically significant for analysis. Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics and the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents assured. Qualitative data was analysed into themes and presented in verbatim to corroborate findings from the questionnaires.

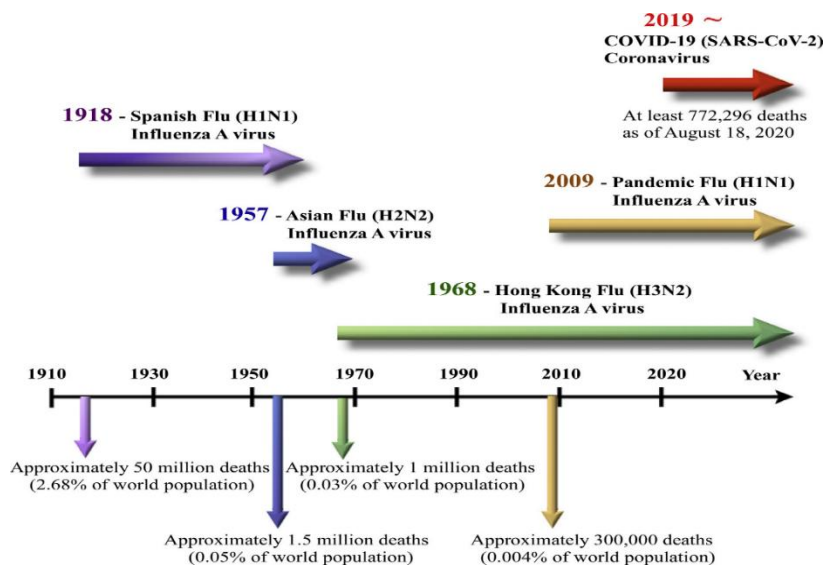
III. Literature Review

The study is anchored on Feminist Theory and Routine Activity Theory (RAT). The feminist theory holds that in almost all the societies, males dominate the females as due to culture and societal settings as well as pandemics such as Covid-19, which continue to pave way for continuous male power. Hence, breeding oppression on sexual and gender-based crimes which are an infringement on women's human rights. Being that Feminist theory is not a one answer fill it all, the study adopted RAT by proposed by Cohen and Felson in 1979 which postulates that offenders, targets and activities meet during every day and the behavioral decisions then determines how they act. Crime then occurs in the context of everyday routines as a motivated offender, potential target and absence of capable guardian converge in space and time. Today, the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic breeds a unique opportunity for the offenders to commit sexual and gender-based crimes. A good example is the prevailing opportunities such as prolonged closer of schools breeding a unique situation where school going girls and boys remain at home in the absence of parents. Vulnerability in a situation where a breadwinners lost their jobs or life and children have been left to take care of themselves. As well as the absence of capable guardians as a result of ineffective legal environment in the criminal justice system leading to delays in prosecution of SGBCs during Covid-19 Pandemic period.

Globally, the novel human coronavirus disease (Covid-19) was first reported in Wuhan- China in late December, 2019 and it subsequently spread worldwide. The Covid-19 is the fifth flu-pandemic to be documented since 1918 (Figure 1). It was officially named severe acute respiratory syndrome virus 2 (SARS-Cov-2). The disease is believed to be a spillover of an animal coronavirus and later adopted the ability of human-human transmission and is highly contagious (UNODC, 2020). Governments all over the world have come up with some measures such as movement restrictions, lockdowns, keeping social distancing and wearing of face masks. These measures have also come along with their own challenges across all spheres ranging from all sectors of the economy such as education, health, trade, social protection and criminal justice system (Lawrence, et.al 2020).

Figure 1: Timelines of five Pandemics since 1918 -2020

Source: Biomedical Journal 43/2020/328-33.



According to Policy briefs report on impact of Covid-19 on women (Gender tool box, 2020), as much as more men are dying due to Covid-19 complications, the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on women are diversely exacerbated through change in priorities and relocation of resources leading to an increase in sexual and gender- based crimes.

In the midst of Covid-19 pandemic, developed countries are adopting new measures to improve on their SGBCs reporting system as well as investigation. A good example is the United States of America (USA), which has come up with hotline texting chat platform to enable victims of sexual and gender-based crimes seeking immediate help to report such incidences without their perpetrators knowledge that the act is being reported to the police (United Nations, 2020). Australia on the other hand, has come up with Domestic Resource Centre which offers specific guidance and support for families who experience sexual and gender -based crimes. While France has set up a warning system that alerts the police about the required help using code words in cases of SGBCs. Beijing on the other hand, has come up with a system in which the judicial courts hear the sexual and gender- based crime cases virtually using cloud-based and online platforms despite the Covid-19 containment measures (United Nations, 2020).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the response is different as some countries are in the denial stage and have not fully accepted that the effects of Covid-19 pandemic on humanity is real and lives are being lost on a daily basis. As well as challenges posed in sectors such as education and criminal justice system. This is contrary to Campbell (2020), which has so far noted that the first step to respond to SGBCs during Covid-19 pandemic is to first acknowledge the fact that it is an existing contemporary life-threatening problem at this delicate point in time. However, other researchers observed that measures such as community awareness creation and Multi-Agency Cooperation enhancement about the Pandemic should be highly encouraged to erode the denial among developing countries. However (UNFA,2020) encourages the need to respond to SGBCs during covid-19 pandemic through initiating effective communication among teens and women in general who are likely to become victims. Campbell (2020), world view is different as it advocates for proactive response measures which incorporate multidisciplinary stakeholders' collaboration such as the police investigators, healthcare providers, community gate keepers, donors as well as the media personnel who have a mandate in awareness creation about the sexual and gender-based crimes.

In Kenya, sexual and gender- based crimes have been one of the human rights violations even before Covid-19 pandemic as a report by (UNFA,2020), indicates that 378,397 teenage pregnancies were recorded between July 2016 and June, 2017. Again, data from health survey (2014), shows that one in every 5 girls between 15-19 years is either pregnant or already a mother and over 13,000 teenage girls drop out of school. The situation might be worse as a result of containment measures imposed by the government such as schools’ closures, movements restrictions and lockdowns. Reports from Government Managed Health (2020), states that more than 4000 adolescent girls likely visited health facilities for antenatal services in Machakos County. This is a wakeup call in reference to wider reforms happening across the criminal justice system as a result of covid-19 pandemic and SGBCs investigations.

Legal provisioning against SGBCs are enacted in the Constitution of Kenya (2010), Children’s Act (2001), Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2011), Policy on Gender and Development (2019), Prevention against violence Act (2015), National policy for Eradication of FGM (2019), Counter Trafficking Act (2011) and Sexual Offences Act (2006). Due to Covid-19 pandemic threat, the Kenyan Government is adopting some measures such as online and specialized personnel investigation and capacity building training to enhance investigators knowledge and skills to respond to SGBCs during Covid-19 pandemic. therefore, it’s worth determining the perception of police investigators on the SGBCs paradigm shift as well as their effectiveness.

IV. Findings and Discussions

A total of 53 police investigators who were attending Advance Investigation Course and Development Course 1/2021 from different Directorate of Criminal Investigation departments/stations were enrolled to the study. out of which 39 (73.6%) male, 11 (20.8%) female respondents and 3 (5.6%) who did not reveal their gender answered the questionnaires that were used in the final data analysis (N=53). (Table 1.1).

Table 1: Response Rate

	Frequency	Percent
Male	39	73.6%
Female	11	20.8%
Other	3	5.7%

The demographic information of the respondents that were assessed includes level of education, positions held in the unit and level of experience in investigation. (Figure 2) majority 45% indicated that they had bachelor’s degree, 30% had masters, 17.5% have diploma while 5% have secondary certificates.

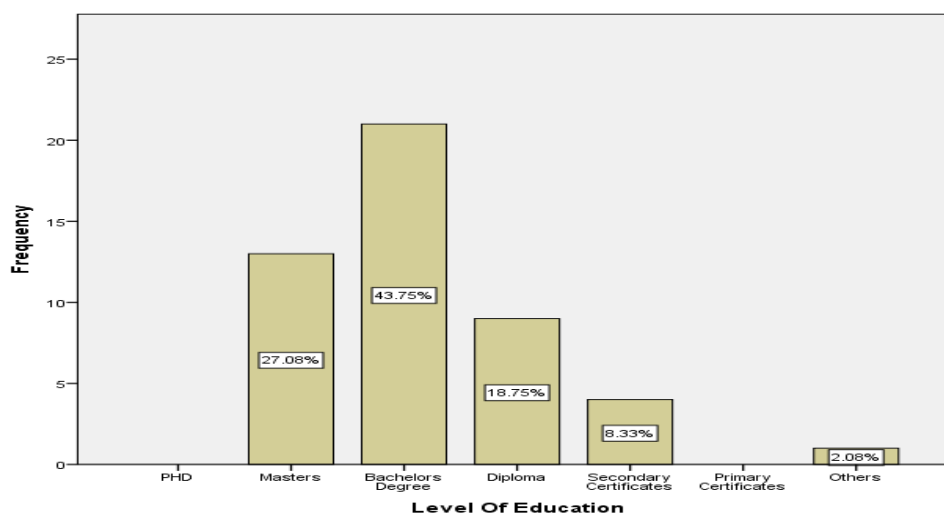
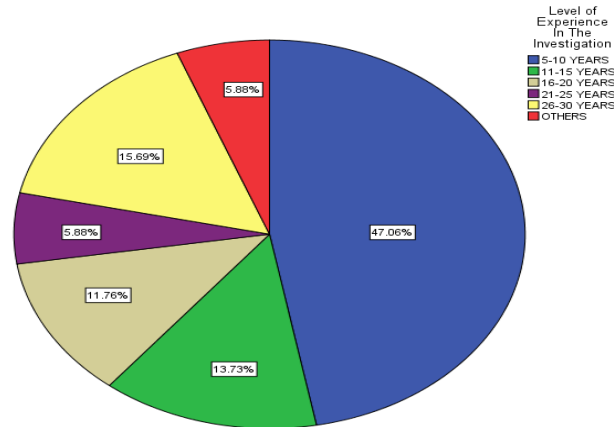


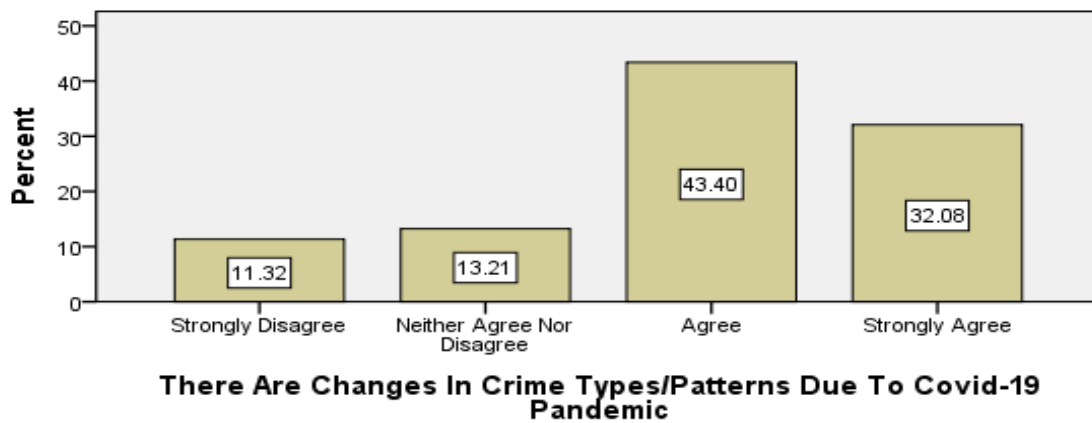
Figure 2: Level of Education.

On level of experience (Figure 3) majority of the respondents 47.06% indicated that they have served in the investigation department for (5-10 years) and 13.73% indicated (11-15 years), 11.76% indicated (26-20 years), 5.88% indicated (21-25 years), 15.69% indicated (26-30 years) while 5.88% indicated (others).



4.1 Sexual and Gender-Based Crime Patterns during Covid-19 Pandemic.

During Covid-19 Pandemic lockdowns in Kenya, quite a number of reports indicated a significant increase in Sexual Gender Based Crimes especially where teens were the victims. Determining the SGBCS patterns (Figure 4). Majority of the respondents (43.4%) agree that there are changes in the crime types/patterns due to Covid -19 pandemic, 32.08% strongly agree ,13.21% neither agree nor disagree while 11.32% strongly disagree.

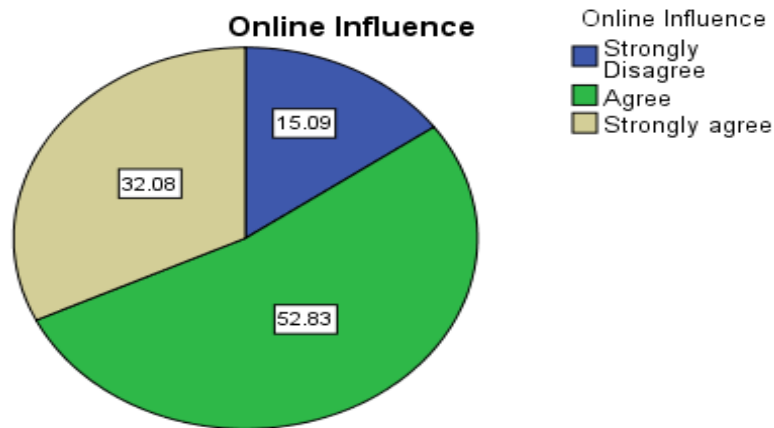


The findings were corroborated with Rockowitz et al. (2021), conducted a prospective cross-sectional study on patterns of sexual violence against adult and children during Covid-19 Pandemic and observed that humanitarian crisis such as conflict, natural disasters and disease outbreaks are associated with changes in crime patterns of SGBCs. The findings were further corroborated with FGD where the respondents were in agreement that Covid-19 Pandemic has caused devastating social disruption and majority of family breadwinners have lost their jobs and some have lost their business opportunities that were the only livelihood sources, others have also succumbed as a result of Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, women and children are now the most vulnerable group as summarized by a Key Informant as follows:

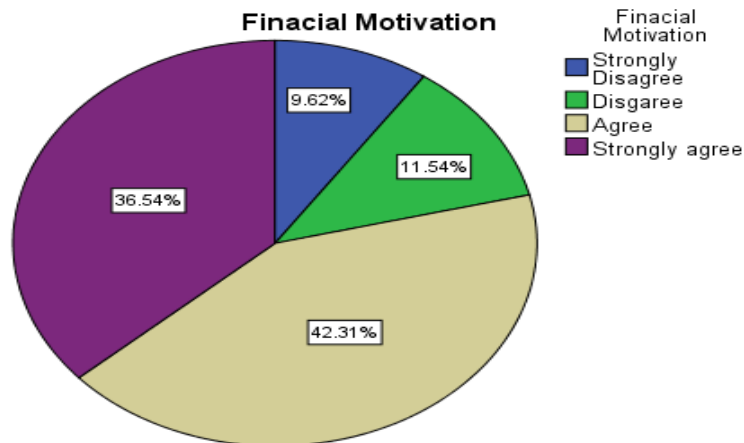
“Physical abuse, attempted rape/complete rape, sexual harassment, texting offensive messages without consent, coerced/production of pornographic materials, domestic violence, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse and Stalking were among the frequent reported cases of SGBCs during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This kind of offences were rarely reported to police before the outbreak of Covid-19, and the majority of the victims are women and teens”.

4.2 Factors motivating perpetrators to commit SGBCs during Covid-19 pandemic.

Focusing on the delicate situation the police officers are facing in SGBCs investigation, as well as their experience, the respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions as to what motivates the offenders to commit SGBCs during Covid-19. (Figure 5), Findings, majority 53.83% agreed that Online influence the vice, 32.08% strongly agree while 15.09% of the respondents strongly disagree.

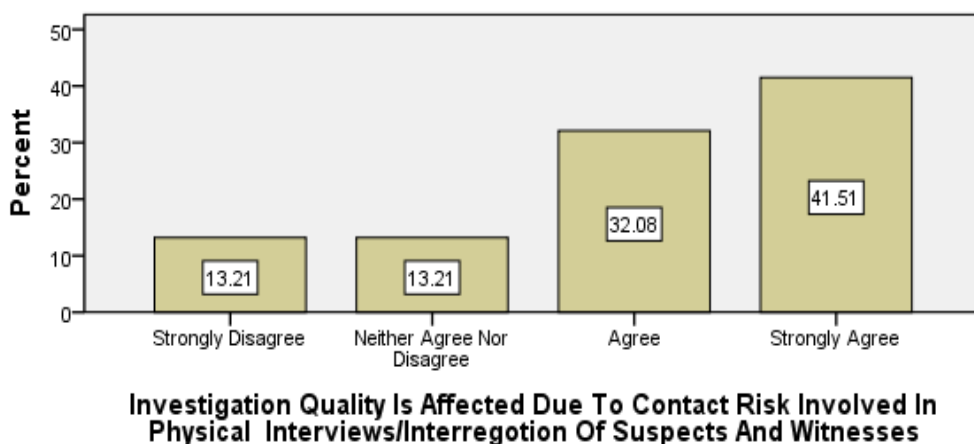


The existing literature indicates that financial capability and at the same time lack of financial capability is a motivational factor in SGBCs. The respondent’s opinion was sought as to whether financial was a motivating factor in SGBCs (Figure 5), and the majority, 42.31% of the respondents agree, 36.54% strongly agree, 9.62% strongly disagree while 11.54% disagree.

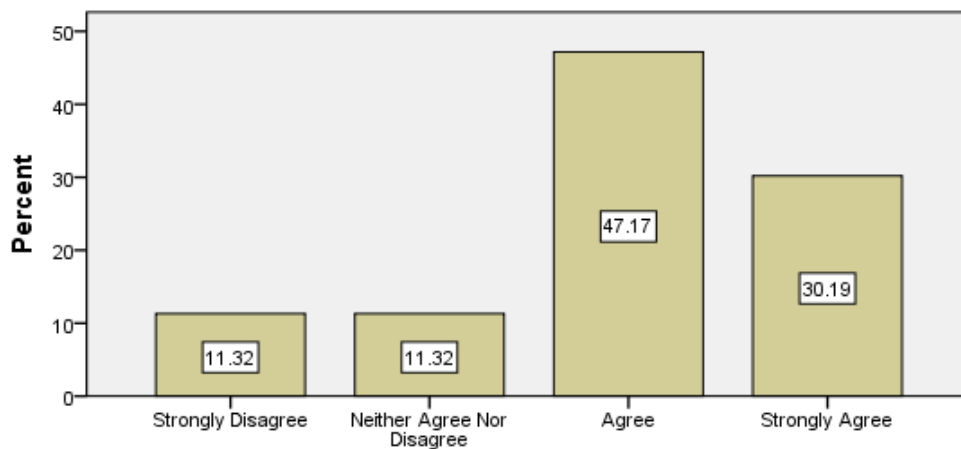


4.3 Challenges Faced by the Police in investigating SGBCs during covid-19 pandemic.

Sexual Gender based is a complex crime to investigate especially during Covid-19 pandemic as in ideal circumstances, it lacks direct evidence and as a result, the police investigator rely on circumstantial evidence. In regard to challenges experienced in the investigation of SGBCs during Covid-19 Pandemic, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement whether quality of investigation was affected due to contact risk involved in physical interviews/ interrogation of suspects and witnesses (Figure 6). Majority 41.51% Strongly agree, 32.08% agree, 13.21% strongly disagree while 13.21% neither agree nor disagree.



On determining the court flexibility on handling SGBCs during Covid-19 Period, (Figure 7) the respondents were asked to indicated their level of agreements whether their ware backlogs in court in relation to SGBCs, and 47.17% of the respondents agreed, 30.19% strongly agree, while 11.32% respectively strongly agree and neither agree nor disagree.



There Are Substantial Case Backlogs Due To Covid-19 Pandemic

The findings were further corroborated with Government of Kenya (2020), On Covid-19 Gender Assessment report, which observes that Institutions such as National Police Service, Director of Public Prosecutions, judiciary, Ministry of Health and Education, whose operations were heavily impacted by Covid-19 pandemic. Others includes; National Gender Research and Documentation Centre, Kenya Law Reforms Commission, The Attorney General Office, National Gender and Equality Commission, The, National Assembly Such and National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC). However, all these institutions are mandated to promote peace and gender equality. Hence, despite their response to SGBCs, still abound challenges. During a KIIs it was clear that teen pregnancies is prohibited by Sexual Offences Act as a person below the age of 18 years consent to asexual relationship. But closed culture syndrome in our societies, play a key role in “normalizes sex with minors as well as marriage”. It also came out clearly that sharing of information as well as collaboration among these institutions to effectively fight the vice, is still a big challenge as lamented by one KII:

“Our society is characterized by closed cultural beliefs and attitudes where SGBCs are rarely reported to police for fear of victimization as most perpetrators are close relative. In addition, there is lack of awareness, lack of political will to fight the vice and lack of collaboration between institutions mandated to fight the vice”.

4.4 Strategies used by the police to investigate SGBCs during Covid-19 Pandemic

Police Investigators were asked to shed light on the need of paradigm shift in strategies used by the police on investigation of sexual and Gender Based Crimes during Covid-19 Pandemic (See Table 2), majority (45%) agreed that there is need for SGBCs Investigation paradigm shift to online investigation during Covid-19 Pandemic, while (5%) strongly agreed, (27.5%) strongly disagree, while (22.5%) disagree.

On the need to adopt Approved Standard Operation (SOP) in SGBV Investigation the majority (47.5%) agreed, (25%) strongly agreed, (17%) disagree while (10%) strongly disagree.

On specialized personnel investigation majority (45%) agree, (30%) strongly agree, while (12.5%) strongly agree and disagree respectively.

	Frequency	Percent
Valid DISAGREE	9	22.5
STRONGLY DISAGREE	11	27.5
AGREE	18	45.0
STRONGLY AGREE	2	5.0
Total	40	100.0

Table 4: Approved Standard Operation Procedures (SOP)

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	DISAGREE	7	17.5
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	4	10.0
	AGREE	19	47.5
	STRONGLY AGREE	10	25.0
	Total	40	100.0

Table 5: specialized personnel investigation

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	DISAGREE	5	12.5
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	5	12.5
	AGREE	18	45.0
	STRONGLY AGREE	12	30.0
	Total	40	100.0

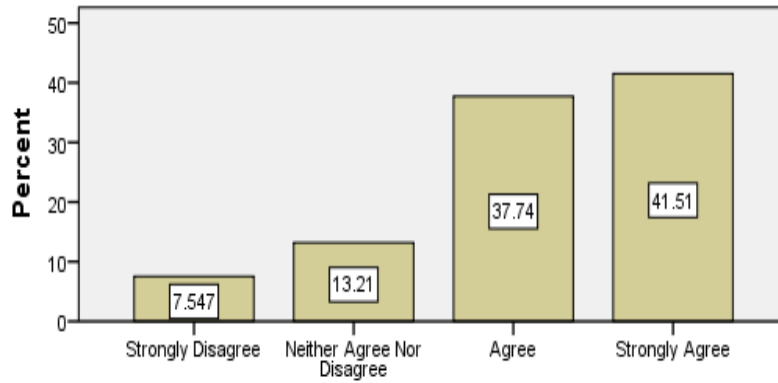
Effective organizational change management involve understanding the need for change, communicating and involving employees, developing change plans, implementation of change plan and thereafter evaluating success. According to Government of Kenya (2021) report on health access and practices during Covid-19, there is need for involvement of Multi-Agency actors to step in and offer right innovative proactive measures such as telehealth services, hotlines cellphone numbers for reporting cases of SGBCs and rescuing of Victims of SGBCs, public awareness creation as well as survivors led-online investigation. The SGBCs Investigation Paradigm shift is supported by the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, (2020) which provides for the manner of collection, analysis, tracking and access to forensic evidence related to Sexual assault especially during Covid-19 Pandemic.

Regarding policies, legal frameworks supporting prosecution of SGBCs in the Criminal Justice Systems, KII's range of knowledge on the following:

“DGs Goal No.5, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Conventio Violence Against Women (COVAW), African Union Agenda 2063, Protocol to the African People’s Rights (AI Constitution of Kenya (2010), National Gender and Development Policy 2030, National Land Policy, Kenya Vi. Menstrual Hygiene Management Policy (2029-2030), sessional Paper No. 2 on Gender Equality and Developn National Policy for the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation, Sessional paper No. 2 of 2019 on national gender and development, Protection Against Domestic Violence Act No. 21 of 2015, Marriage Act No. 4 of : Political Parties Act (2011), Matrimonial Property Act No. 49 of 2013, Model Legislative Framework on S Gender-Based Violence for County Government 2017, Law of Succession Act revised (2018) (2015), Prohibitio Act 2011, Employment and Labour relations Act No. 20 of 2011, Sexual offences (Amendment) regulations 20 offences rule of court (2014), The Penal Code Cap 63 Laws of Kenya, The Children Act, 2001, The Sexual Offi 2006 and HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Act, 2006”.

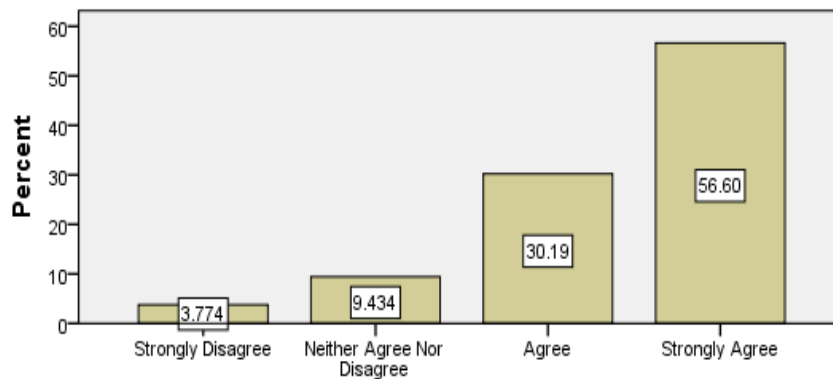
4.5 Contemporary requirements to enhance capabilities including legislation, policies and structures for SGBCs Investigations during Covid-19 pandemic.

Establishing successful police case investigation in adynamic environment like the one posed by Covid-19 calls for analyzing the existing investigation structures, policies and human capital. Respondents opinion was sought on the contemporary requirements to enhance capabilities on SGBCs investigation during Covid-19 (Figure 8), majority 41.51% agreed that there is need to enhance police investigators capacity building on contemporary investigation, legislation policies and well-defined structures in line with Ministry of Health Covid-19 Safety measures. 37.74% agreed, 7.54% strongly disagree while 13.21% neither agree nor disagree.



Capacity Building Of Police Investigators On Contemporary Investigation, Legislation Policies And Well Defined Structures In Line With Ministry Of Health Covid-19 Safety Measures Is Effective

On the effective partnership and collaboration with other criminal justice partners (Figure 9), 56.6% of the respondents strongly agree that effective partnership and collaboration with all criminal justice systems is practiced, 30.19 % agree, 9.43% neither agree nor disagree while 3.77% strongly disagree.



Effective Partnership And Collaboration With All Criminal Justice System Is Practiced

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study revealed an increase in new patterns of SGBCs as a result of Covid-19 pandemic. The study further revealed other risk factors such as online and financial influence. In addition, there are case backlogs in court. However, despite the SGBCs prevalence, Police investigation remains one of the neglected as the existing legislatives are often inadequate and do not address the contemporary SGBCs investigation challenges. The study therefore concludes that response to Covid-19 Pandemic is associated with paradigm shift and calls for moving away from business as usual to a more modern ways as reflected in other relevant Ministries such as Health and Education. The study hence recommends for effective online reporting, Investigation, Collaboration and Partnership with other criminal justice agencies on cases of SGBCs. There is also need to enhance Police investigators knowledge and skills on SGBCs, adoption of more robust legislation, policies and well-defined structures to help in the prosecution of SGBCs perpetrators. Covid-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity for equipping the police investigators with the right tools, powers and privileges to effectively respond, investigate and prosecute SGBCs. It also important that the police are well equipped to provide effective SGBCs victims protection, this will enhance reporting of SGBCs without fear of intimidation.

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Isaiah Ochieng Abillah. "Police Investigation of Sexual and Gender Based Crimes during Covid-19 Pandemic in Kenya." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 11(05), 2022, pp 01-10. Journal DOI- 10.35629/7722