



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL CRIME RESEARCH CENTRE

Fighting Crime Through Research



STUDY ON HOMICIDES IN KENYA





NATIONAL CRIME RESEARCH CENTRE

STUDY ON HOMICIDES IN KENYA

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FOREWORD

Homicide is one of the most serious violations of the right to life, and a critical indicator of the state of public safety and the criminal justice in any country. The apparent surge in homicide cases (murder, manslaughter, infanticide, and suicide pacts, as per the Penal Code, Cap 63, and Laws of Kenya), in the year 2024 raised considerable public and official concern that necessitated immediate action.

The study established a mix of factors and conditions intersecting at the individual, family and society levels underlying homicides in Kenya. Overall, the killings were linked to unresolved land and other disputes/conflicts at the family and societal levels; economic stressors; limited youth opportunities; cultural beliefs and societal norms; psychosocial and mental health problems; entrenching mob-violence culture; institutional and leadership failures.

Notably, males were overwhelming majority of victims as well as the perpetrators of homicides, while women were largely victims, with few cases of female perpetrators. A significant number of killings, particularly, of women and girls occurred in private settings such as homes, rental apartments, hotels, as well as Airbnbs. These killings were often perpetrated by intimate partners, family members, and other acquaintances, and were linked to relationship disputes/love triangles, crime-of-passion, domestic disputes, gender-based violence, land and witchcraft suspicions and business wrangles.

This report comes at a crucial time, as it provides a clearer outlook of the nature, scale and magnitude of this challenge, including national and county trends, demographic factors, and the justice system responses. These findings call for multi-sectoral collaboration between the national and county governments, law enforcement agencies, the Judiciary, civil society, and communities - to strengthen homicide prevention, investigation, prosecution, and victim support mechanisms.

It is my hope that this report will catalyse coordinated efforts to address homicides through improved data sharing, responsive policing, community engagement, and access to justice.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL / CHAIRPERSON
GOVERNING COUNCIL
NATIONAL CRIME RESEARCH CENTRE

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The Government's commitment and trust in the Centre to make meaningful contributions to the fight against crime through research has been a driving force behind this study. My gratitude also goes to the NCRC Governing Council under its chairperson, Hon. Dorcas Oduor, EGH (the Attorney-General of the Republic of Kenya), for its insights and policy direction. I also wish to appreciate the invaluable technical support and quality assurance provided by the Council's Research and Development Committee. Under the chairmanship of Mr. Samuel Wakanyua, it ensured that the final report complied with the necessary standards.

Special thanks go to Mr. Murimi Njoka from the University of Nairobi who co-led the research with me, and to Ms. Phyllis Muriuki, Mr. Stephen Muteti and Mr. Vincent Opondo from the Centre who helped coordinate field work and the review of the various drafts of the study. I also extend my thanks to various government agencies, non-governmental organisations, local communities, and all other stakeholders whose collaboration, shared expertise and experiences and willingness to engage in open dialogue during the entire research process made this study a success.

A meticulous technical review of the study was undertaken by Dr. Evelyne Asaala and editorial review by Mr. John Khakhudu Agunda. Their professional inputs greatly strengthened the study. Last, but by no means least; I am sincerely grateful to all the internal and external administrative teams whose behind-the-scenes work often goes unnoticed for their direct or indirect contributions to the success of this study

It is our hope that this report will serve as an invaluable information resource to policymakers, practitioners, researchers and Kenyans in general towards informed strategic and operational interventions to mitigate the homicides problem.

DR. MUTUMA RUTEERE
DIRECTOR/CEO
NATIONAL CRIME RESEARCH CENTRE

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBD	Central Business District
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DCI	Directorate of Criminal Investigations
DPP	Director of Public Prosecutions
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GK	Government of Kenya
HQ	Headquarters 2
ICCSP	International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes
MCA	Member of County Assembly
NCCK	National Council of Churches of Kenya
NCRC	National Crime Research Centre
NGAO	National Government Administrative Officer
NIS	National Intelligence Service
NPS	National Police Service
ODPP	Office of Director of Public Prosecutions
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes
USA	United States of America

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

- Criminal Justice:** This refers to the system of ensuring the resolution of criminal incidents. The key actors are the police, prosecution and the Judiciary. However, there are other players such as probation, children's department, and civil society.
- Femicide:** Femicide or feminicide is the specific killing targeted at women and girls. These are killings more often due to entrenched socio-cultural factors and can be hidden or obvious.
- Gender:** Gender refers to the social and cultural ideas, values, beliefs and practices around males and females within the society. When we refer to gender in this research, we do not have a bias towards any side.
- Homicide:** This is the killing of a human being by another. For this research, we are considering killings categorised as murder, manslaughter, infanticide and suicide pacts or suicide by agreement. We have not included deaths as a result of accidents, abortion and suicides.
- Infanticide:** Infanticide refers to killings of children under one year old. Most of these occur within the first few weeks of the child's birth and are committed by family members. Newborn babies are normally targeted as "unwanted" children.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Head of the Public Service via a letter dated 28th October 2024 directed the National Crime Research Centre (NCRC) “to conduct an in-depth study into the sudden surge in homicide cases. The study should identify any underlying trends and possible markers; and would be submitted to the relevant law enforcement agencies....”

The apparent rise in homicide cases (murder, manslaughter, infanticide and suicide pacts, as per the Penal Code, Cap 63, Laws of Kenya) in Kenya in 2024 raised considerable public and official concern. On various occasions, the media carried reports of killings of men, women and even children in various parts of the country. Some were executed in a gruesome and horrifying manner. Other incidents appeared to be the work of mass/serial killers.

These cases provoked widespread public anxiety and also official concern. Political and religious leaders, the media and civil society groups all called for action on the incidents. The apparent increase in the killings of women, in particular, provoked fears that the country may be witnessing a growing spectre of femicide. In November 2024, President William Ruto expressed concern over “the rising cases of femicide” and pledged that the government would act decisively to address the killings (*Daily Nation*, November 3, 2024). The then acting Cabinet Secretary for Interior, Musalia Mudavadi, in December termed femicide “the elephant in the room” for the security sector in Kenya (*Eastleigh Voice*, December 19, 2024).

While there have been many popular explanations in the media, there is a general lack of clarity and consensus on what may have led to this apparent surge. From a policy perspective, it is important to unravel this puzzle so as to design appropriate and effective interventions. It is specifically important to establish the nature and details of the apparent surge; what accounted for it; what the data means in terms of victims and perpetrators; and whether there were particular areas/localities and circumstances associated with the increase. Research and analysis are needed to guide measures to stem the tide of the killings and assist relevant agencies in their interventions.

This study provides an assessment and explanations of the recent sudden increase in homicides in Kenya. It specifically presents:

1. An analysis of patterns and trends of homicides in Kenya in 2024;

2. Explanation of the causes, drivers and conditions responsible for the apparent surge in homicides, including the killings of women, girls and children;
3. An analysis criminal justice preventive and response measures and their adequacy in dealing with homicides; and,
4. Recommendations to relevant agencies.

The study draws insights from the National Police Service (NPS)’s annual statistics on homicides, the 2024 data on homicides as recorded by the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) and data from interviews with key informants and focus group discussions in 15 counties. These counties were selected based on the numbers of reported homicides, as recorded in the DCI data. These were Vihiga, Busia, Kakamega, Embu, Isiolo, Homa Bay, Kisii, Kisumu, Nakuru, Narok, Kilifi, Mombasa, Kiambu, Nyeri, and Nairobi. In total, the study reached 582 respondents. The study also benefitted from relevant secondary literature.

In Kenya, homicide offences are provided for in the Penal Code (Division IV) and include murder, manslaughter, infanticide and offences connected to suicide (suicide pacts).

Findings from the Study

1. Patterns and Trends

In 2024, the DCI recorded 1,011 cases of homicides that fit within the definition as per Kenyan law. Of these, 70 percent of the victims were male, with females accounting for 30 percent. Of the perpetrators, 630 were male and 88 females with several cases where the perpetrators were not known. There were 149 such incidents.

In summary, the 2024 DCI data of reported/recorded incidents shows that males were the highest number of victims. This might sound surprising, given the many cases of killings of women reported in Kenyan media. Police data is, however, quite reliable and the higher percentage of male victimisation is consistent with the records over time and like those from other countries across the world. Male perpetrators were the overwhelming majority in all cases.

In 2024, however, the NPS annual statistics recorded a total of 3,015 cases of homicides classified as murder, manslaughter, infanticide, procuring abortion, concealing birth, suicide, and causing death by dangerous driving. There are a number of reasons why the annual NPS statistics are

different from those of the DCI. First, the NPS statistics include categories such as death by reckless driving. These are ordinarily handled by the Traffic Department and not the DCI. There are also many cases that at the recording stage are categorised by the recording officer as either murder, or manslaughter but on further investigation may not actually qualify as such. The determination of whether an incident qualifies as manslaughter rather than murder is conclusively made at the prosecution stage.

This study relied on the DCI data for its analysis since it was made available as a detailed record of incidents - with information on the circumstances, motives and context. These detailed accounts have made it possible to undertake various kinds of analyses that would not be possible with the annual summary statistics.

2. Apparent Surge in Killings

The study concludes that from the annual police statistics, there is no indication that there was a surge in the killings in 2024.

However, whether there was an increase in homicides or not, the perception of most members of the public is that there was. This is a problem for the relevant agencies as perceptions are critical in determining whether people have confidence in the various measures and interventions to address crime.

Unfortunately, the current system of official data recording, reporting and case management makes it difficult to establish the actual facts and trends. For one, the summary annual statistics the NPS provides have no details of the incidents. There is also a challenge with the classification. It is not possible, for example, to establish whether an incident is manslaughter or not until it reaches the prosecution stage, and yet that category is included in the annual statistics.

The National Coroners Service Act of 2017 was enacted to provide a framework for investigations and determination of the causes of reported sudden, unexplained and unnatural deaths. The Service ensures that these deaths are investigated by a qualified officer. However, the operationalisation of the law and hence the Service is pending.

Without data for several years, it is difficult to establish whether 2024 experienced a surge or not. Currently, the only available annual time series data on homicides is the summary statistics from

the NPS headquarters in Nairobi. These statistics are just numbers without comprehensive information on the victims, perpetrators, status of investigations, location, and context, among others. Without the details of each of these incidents over the years, the summary statistics available make it difficult to establish an accurate picture of trends and patterns. Summary statistics are also not well-suited for comprehensive analysis, comparison, planning and informed decision making.

This is a key finding in this study. Comprehensive data is the starting point for effective interventions to address the problem of homicides in Kenya. Currently, police and policy actors do not have the accurate picture for strategic interventions beyond specific incidents.

3. Location and Contexts of Killings

While homicides could potentially happen in any place, there are specific places and contexts that the data and evidence point to as accounting for most incidents:

Informal Settlements in Urban Areas

In all the urban areas, data from the police and field interviews confirm that homicides were largely concentrated in the poorer neighbourhoods – and, in particular, informal settlements and slums and adjacent areas. In Nairobi City County, 70 per cent of the homicides were concentrated in Starehe/Kamukunji, Kariobangi, Kayole, Mathare, Embakasi, Njiru and Kasarani. These areas constitute what could largely be the Eastlands of Nairobi. The same is the case in other urban areas.

Places where land conflicts were widespread

Land conflicts were at the heart of many of the disputes that led to killings within families, among neighbours and business partners and also fuelled animosity between communities. Many of those interviewed pointed out that land disputes linked to succession within families were a common reason for the killings. Others were linked to disputes over land between buyers and sellers

Places with Inter-ethnic/Inter-communal Conflicts

Border areas where different ethnic communities have long-running land and resource conflicts were also hotspots for the killings. Tensions and conflicts over grazing and farming, sometimes

led to deaths and revenge killings. In the Narok-Kisii, Bomet-Kisii and Isiolo border areas, some of the killings were attributed to these conflicts.

Domestic and Private Spaces

A significant number of homicides, and, in particular, those of women and girls occurred in private settings such as homes in both the rural and urban areas, rental apartments, hotels, as well as Airbnb mainly in the urban areas. These killings were often perpetrated by intimate partners, family members, or business and other acquaintances, and were linked to domestic disputes, business wrangles and gender-based violence.

Public Spaces

In the urban areas, some homicides occurred in poorly lit streets, dark alleys, and around entertainment places, especially at night. Victims were sometimes attacked during robberies, gang violence, or after disputes in bars and nightclubs.

4. Perpetrator Profiles

Overall, the data from DCI suggests that the majority of the perpetrators were young males aged between 20 and 40 years. In Nairobi and Mombasa, most of the perpetrators were in their 20s and 30s. There were a few cases (10.1%) where women were the perpetrators. These were largely cases linked to domestic violence, infanticides and relationship disputes/love triangles as well as land and witchcraft suspicions.

Most homicides were committed by people who had a form of relationship with the victims either as neighbours, intimate partners, family members, acquaintances or business relations.

Overwhelmingly, therefore, the perpetrators were not strangers to the victims.

5. Victim Profiles

Men were the primary victims, especially in cases related to cattle rustling, communal conflicts, drunken altercations, land-related conflicts and many mob violence cases resulting from suspicions of theft. On the other hand, women were predominantly killed in incidents of domestic violence, land/property succession disputes, love triangles and other crime-of-passion related incidents.

In some places, the perpetrators targeted people in employment and the business persons/community. In other places, elderly women, especially those living alone in rural areas and whose husbands were far away working in towns, were often victims of rape and killings. Women returning home from funeral vigils and *disco matanga* in places such as Busia were also targets.

6. Conditions and Drivers of Homicides

The study established that there was a mix of conditions that explain homicides in Kenya. Overall, however, the killings were linked to unresolved conflicts at the family and societal levels; psychosocial and mental health problems; economic stressors and limited youth opportunities; cultural beliefs and societal norms; and institutional and leadership failures.

i. Deep-Seated Family, Community, and Business Conflicts

Unresolved Family Conflicts

Many of the killings were driven by deep-seated family, community and business conflicts. At the family level, disputes between spouses and within the family over land, love and relationships, children and inheritance, finances and other resources, were widespread.

At the society/community level, business and land disputes were prevalent. Many resource-based conflicts, such as those over land or grazing rights, were long running in some regions and often escalated into lethal violence due to the lack of effective dispute resolution frameworks.

Conflicts over Resources

In the rural areas, conflicts over land for grazing, farming and settlement are a major driver of homicides. Disputes often escalate into violence and killings.

ii. Psycho-Social Factors

Mental Health and Psychosocial Issues

Mental health and psycho-social problems were a key explanation for some of the killings. Individuals with weak anger control and mental health problems were easily triggered into violence, particularly, when relationships experienced challenges, or when faced with economic

stress. Some of the gruesome killings where victims' bodies were dismembered may be attributed to individuals with such mental challenges.

Drugs and Substance Abuse

The study established that there were many cases where alcohol and drug abuse escalated the disputes into fatal violence. Alcohol and drugs accelerate aggressive behaviour and impair judgement, leading to killings.

iii. Limited Youth Opportunities and Vulnerability

The country has a bulging youth population (80%), many of whom are struggling to find meaningful opportunities for earning livelihoods. Many young people are also well-educated but there are limited opportunities for gainful employment. This fuels frustration and makes them vulnerable to enlisting into illicit economics of drug peddling and others to join criminal gangs. These economies were linked to violence, including killings by gangs.

iv. Cultural Beliefs and Societal Norms

Cultural beliefs and norms significantly contributed to the killings across the country. The belief in witchcraft led to accusations against individuals - mostly elderly men and women - and their subsequent killing. Sometimes the killings of alleged witches took the form of mob violence. Patriarchal norms that privilege and reinforce male dominance also fuelled violence in families and among couples, leading to killings of women who rejected these norms. For instance, there were incidents where some girls were killed for rejecting forced marriages.

v. Institutional and Leadership Failures

The study established that weaknesses and failures in institutions significantly contribute to the violence and homicides in the country.

Systemic Weaknesses in the Entire Criminal Justice Chain

Across the country there was a widespread public perception that security agencies are unable and ineffective in preventing the killings.

Leadership Failure

Leadership across the families, communities and the wider Kenyan society seems to be in a crisis and lethal violence reflects that failure. Institutions and actors that should provide advice, guidance and solutions in many cases fuelled the violence. There were many accounts of political leaders influencing the release of homicide suspects.

v. Mob Violence

There is a growing culture of mob violence and vigilantism. This culture is explained by the low levels of trust in law enforcement and criminal justice institutions. Communities saw mob violence as a more effective and swift way of delivering justice to suspected criminals. There were many cases of lynching of suspected thieves and those accused of witchcraft.

vi. Entrenched Gender-based Violence

Many killings of women are linked to widespread gender-based violence. As has been noted in various studies over time, this violence is endemic in all parts of the country. Many of the killings attributed to crimes of passion and by intimate partners are linked to this culture of violence. Moreover, even before a killing happens, it is often preceded by a history of violence that is seen as “normal”, and, which is rarely punished.

7. Killings of Women and Girls

The study established that a culture of violence underpins the killings of women and girls.

Relationships and Domestic Violence

Most women and girls were killed in incidents linked to violence within the family and relationships. Women were often killed by men they were in a relationship with - whether longterm or casual. In addition, women were killed in places where they were expected to be most safe - the home or private spaces. This speaks to the entrenched culture of normalisation of violence against women.

Patriarchal Norms

Some patriarchal cultural norms are responsible for fuelling some of the killings of adult women and girls. Women were killed when they rejected arranged or forced marriages, and when they decided to end relationships with men. Many times, men expressed a belief in the “ownership” of women in their lives and justified the violence on that basis.

Stigmatisation of Elderly Women

The Stigmatisation of elderly women as witches in some areas of the country has left them vulnerable to killings, including by mob violence.

Sexual Attacks and Violence

In some cases, women were killed to conceal evidence of sexual assault, rape and defilement. Commercial sex workers were particularly vulnerable since they operate in the shadows, afraid of the authorities and their clients are not required to present their details at lodgings and rental places.

Weak Social Support and Justice System

Women’s vulnerability to violence and killings is exacerbated by the lack of a social support system for those at risk. There was very limited assistance for women subjected to violence by their spouses, partners or family. Those seeking to leave violent relationships had very few support services available to them.

8. Killings of Children

Children are often killed within the family context and often by someone close to them such as (step) parent or other member of the family. Often, children were incidental victims of conflicts between their parents. In some cases, mothers were manipulated or provoked by the stepfathers to commit the killings.

9. Criminal Justice Responses

Police and DCI

The study established that the police usually accord more seriousness to homicide cases than other crimes. Whenever a killing occurs, the police will respond, even if there might be delays.

The Directorate of Homicide Investigations under the DCI provides strategic leadership in the investigations and resolution of homicide cases. However, the study established that the Directorate is faced with capacity and resource challenges that make it difficult to deliver on its mandate. The following are the key challenges that constrain police interventions:

Investigative Quality

Police and DCI investigations into homicide cases were widely regarded as inadequate. The public and other experts felt that the DCI officers do not always conduct thorough and adequate investigations due to lack of equipment and enough personnel and corruption. Poor investigations result in failure to identify and arrest the perpetrators, premature termination of investigations and failure to secure community support by giving evidence.

Corruption

Corruption was reported as a key concern in virtually all the interviews, often before the question was even posed to the respondents. It was viewed as endemic and responsible for compromising the entire justice process. There were widespread allegations of collusion between the investigators and the perpetrators.

Limited Resources

Police are faced with a serious and chronic shortage of specialised equipment and tools to undertake quality investigations. In an entire county, the DCI may have only one car and one camera. Sometimes, forensic equipment may not have the reagents needed to run the tests required.

Skills and Training

There are challenges pertaining to skills and training of police officers to effectively deal with homicides. Not all the officers are well-trained to address the complexities of some of the homicides.

Limited public cooperation

Police as well as other respondents pointed out that the public is reluctant to provide support in investigations. Weak community cooperation was attributed to a number of reasons, including fear that corrupt police officers will share information with perpetrators; fear of retaliation by criminals;

limited witness protection; and in some cases, community members' complicity with criminals due to close relationships and cultural norms. Most members of the public expressed distrust of the police, hence the reluctance to cooperate with them.

Prosecution

Case Preparation

Interviewees noted that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) faces challenges in building strong cases due to the poor police investigations, leaving them with incomplete cases with insufficient evidence. Delays in prosecuting cases were also occasioned by lapses in coordination between investigators and prosecutors.

Resource and Capacity Constraints

There is a shortage of experienced personnel to handle complex homicide cases and prosecutors often find themselves overwhelmed by the high number of cases. This often results in delays.

Public Perceptions

When suspects are released on bail/bond and disappear or when cases are withdrawn due to technicalities, the community often perceives the prosecutors as corrupt or ineffective. The public understanding of the criminal justice system and role of prosecutors is limited.

Corruption

There were allegations of corruption in prosecutions. However, in some cases, such as plea bargaining, it is likely that the public misinterprets this as corruption.

Judiciary

Delay and Backlog of Cases

Homicide cases take a long time to complete, typically about seven years or more, with respondents frustrated by what they termed as "unending mentions". This delay is caused by many factors, including understaffing, gaps in police investigations and securing of witnesses.

Judges also often get transferred, further slowing down cases.

Sentencing and Public Perceptions

There were complaints about sentencing and what the public perceives as inconsistency in judgments. This could be attributed to the fact that the public does not understand that each case is decided on its own merit. In addition, families of victims generally felt that the justice system favors perpetrators over victims. Bail and bond are often misunderstood as release from custody through corruption.

Corruption

There are widespread perceptions that justice is for sale in Kenya and that the Judiciary is also corrupt in its handling of homicide cases. The public reported that there are court “agents” or “brokers” who organise and negotiate for this corruption. They also coordinate corruption between the courts and the other criminal justice actors.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the data, the field interviews and analysis, this study makes several conclusions and presents recommendations to various actors. A key conclusion is that a majority of those killed in Kenya were killed by people they knew, or were in a form of relationship of one kind or another. Second, unresolved conflicts at the family and community levels explain most of the killings. Third, killings are fuelled by a growing culture of violence driven by, among others, the low public confidence in the criminal justice agencies and a perception that it is easy to get away with crime. Fourth, homicide data, as reported to the NPS and DCI headquarters, does not lend itself to comprehensive analysis to guide strategy and policy. Fifth, there was no single driver of the various killings across the country. Rather, there was a host of drivers that intersect at the individual, family and society levels.

In light of these findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Develop an incident-based system of homicide data

The NPS and DCI should revise the current system of reporting homicides to the headquarters from summary statistics to reporting of incidents. An incident-based system of reporting will give crime and policy analysts the required information to run analyses

and understand trends and see connections between incidents across the country. An incident-based system will also provide the data necessary to understand crime trends and patterns for strategic and policy planning. This is an area where the National Intelligence Service can support the NPS in the development of the system.

2. Strengthen and improve the quality of police investigations

The NPS should urgently enhance the capacity of investigators through better training and also enhance their numbers across the country. Scenes of crime officers and gazetted officers are too few to adequately serve the country's needs.

3. Enhance police capacity for forensic analysis

NPS should address the problem of lack of essential reagents that often delay investigations by the DCI. There is also a need to ensure that the DCI forensics unit has the resources to expeditiously undertake analyses.

4. Strengthen the Directorate of Homicide Investigations

The establishment of this Directorate is an important step in addressing homicides in a more efficient and strategic manner. However, the Directorate needs strengthening in terms of capacity strengthening for its officers as well as the technology and resources to undertake analyses of trends and patterns and also provide the necessary support to homicide investigators.

5. Operationalise the National Coroners Service Act

While the National Coroners Service Act of 2017 provides a framework for investigations and determination of the cause of reported sudden, unexplained and unnatural deaths, it is yet to be operationalised. The Act needs to be operationalised to address the gaps in the determination of circumstances of deaths.

6. Promote public trust in the criminal justice system

Across the country, there is a serious trust deficit in the criminal justice system that undermines efforts to address these killings. There is, therefore, a need for all actors in the criminal justice system (the NPS, Prosecution and the Judiciary) to address the problem of public trust in the criminal justice system. This will address mob violence and also the problem of non-reporting and non-cooperation.

7. NPS to address “cold cases”

There are a significant number of cases that have remained unsolved for many years and which the public believes will never be solved. These “cold cases” are part of the reason that the public has little confidence in the ability of the police to address homicides. The failure to resolve cases also undermines the rule of law and may also fuel more killings as the perpetrators believe that they may escape punishment. The Cold Cases Unit within the Directorate of Homicide Investigations needs to be strengthened with more resources and capacity to resolve these cases. The National Intelligence Service should support the NPS in addressing these complex cases.

8. Educate the public on plea bargaining, bail and bond

The ODPP, NPS and the Judiciary should intensify public awareness and education on innovations such as plea bargaining as well as the process of bail and bond. The public often sees these as evidence of corruption rather than innovations to ensure justice.

9. Enhance the capacity of the Government Chemist

Investigations into homicides are often delayed by the backlog in analysing samples by the Government Chemist. There is therefore, a need to enhance its capacity and establish more offices across the country.

10. Strengthen support to victims of crime

The NPS and the ODPP need to address the gap in support to families of victims of homicides. Information on the progress in investigations is not usually available to the families of victims, leading them to despair and lose faith in the criminal justice system.

11. Address the drivers of killings in a coordinated manner

Given the multidimensional nature of the drivers of homicides, there is a need for a coordinated approach by the national government to addressing the various conditions. Key among the drivers of the killings is unresolved land conflicts and other disputes over resources. The responsibility for addressing these is not exclusive to the criminal justice agencies but rather requires policy and strategic leadership of the national government. The Ministry of Interior and National Administration is best-placed to provide leadership on this.

12. Address the problem of alcohol, drugs and substance abuse

The study established that alcohol and drug abuse are often linked to homicide by increasing aggression and impairing judgement. There is a need for interventions that address the growing problem of the sale and use of drugs and alcohol abuse across the country, and, in particular, among youth. This requires a coordinated approach to address prevention as well as enforcement. The National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) is best-placed to provide leadership on this.

13. Address harmful cultural practices and patriarchal norms

Some of the killings were linked to cultural beliefs in witchcraft as well as patriarchal tendencies that promote child marriage and gender-based violence. The Ministry of Interior and National Administration through the National Government Administrative Officers (NGAO) framework is well placed to provide leadership on this. In addition, the County governments, educational institutions, other non-state actors like the media, NGOs can also play a pivotal in public sensitization and awareness programmes.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

While homicides (murder, manslaughter, infanticide, and suicide pacts, as per the Kenyan Penal Code), have always been a key concern in crime prevention and management in Kenya, the year 2024 saw heightened public and official concern over an apparent surge in homicide cases. This concern continued well into 2025. On many occasions, the media has carried reports of killings in various parts of the country, including gruesome cases killings of women, girls and even children. From these media reports, some of the killings of women and girls were allegedly by persons close to them, including husbands or boyfriends, other intimate partners, family members or relatives. As for the male victims, some were killed by persons known to them and others by acquaintances and strangers.

In January 2024, two young women were killed in Airbnbs in Nairobi. Starlet Wahu Mwangi was strangled and stabbed to death in Nairobi's South B neighbourhood by a man she had accompanied to a rental (*Daily Nation*, January 7, 2024). Two weeks later, 20-year-old university student Rita Waeni Muendo was murdered in an Airbnb in the Kasarani suburb of Nairobi after she was lured through Instagram messages (*Daily Nation*, January 19, 2024). Her brutal killing - with the head decapitated - shocked the country so soon after the killing of Starlet Mwangi. In July, several bodies were found dumped in an abandoned quarry at Kware, Mukuru, in Nairobi, with the Director of Criminal Investigations (DCI) announcing that the killings were the work of a serial killer (*Star*, July 15, 2024). The killing of a mother, Waris Daud, her 21-year-old daughter, Amina Abdirashid, and 12-year-old niece Nuseiba Dahir in October further amplified the concern over the killings of women (*Daily Nation*, October 23, 2024).

These cases continue to evoke widespread public anxiety and official concern. Political and religious leaders as well as non-state groups have all expressed concern over the rising cases of killings. In November, President William Ruto expressed concern over "the rising cases of femicide" and vowed that the government would decisively act on the issue (*Daily Nation*, November 3, 2024). The then acting Cabinet Secretary for Interior, Musalia Mudavadi, on December 18 termed femicide "the elephant in the room" in the security sector in Kenya (*Eastleigh Voice*, December 19, 2024).

However, there is a general lack of clarity on what may have led to this apparent surge. It is therefore important to establish the nature and details of the apparent surge; what accounts for the surge; what the data means in terms of victims and perpetrators; and whether there are particular areas/localities and circumstances that are affected. Put simply, the puzzle that needs to be unravelled is the magnitude and nature of the increase, if any for the explanations for such change. Insights from this analysis are key to what needs to be done differently to prevent a recurrence in future. The insights and recommendations are specifically crucial to various agencies such as the National Police Service, the Director of Public Prosecution, National Intelligence Service, and the relevant national and county government agencies in their strategic interventions.

1.2 Background

While homicide is often the better recorded type of violent crime, it is also a complex and nonhomogenous crime that defies any single explanation. There are differences in the characteristics of different types of homicides as well a wide array of perpetrator motivations, a wide variety in the nature of violent interactions that result in killings, as well as the nature of weapons used, among others. Moreover, homicides are also part of the broader category of violent events further complicating the contexts in which they happen. Homicide victimisation of women and girls is also linked to the wider problem of violence against women, further adding to the explanatory variable(s) and to the complexity of the problem (UNODC, 2019).

In legal terms, homicide can be justifiable or unlawful, depending on the circumstances. This distinction is important, as policy interventions require clarity on the extent to which the incidents reflect criminal intent and behaviour.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC's) International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) has provided a more precise categorisation of "intentional homicide" defined as the "unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury" (UNDOC, 2015). According to this classification, three characteristics must be met for a killing to qualify as intentional homicide:

1. The killing of a person by another person (objective element);
2. Intentionality- intention of the perpetrator to kill or seriously injure the victim (subjective element); and,

3. Unlawfulness of the killing- meaning that the law considers the perpetrator liable for the unlawful death (legal element).

This definition comes with several exclusions that allow for better counting and classification. Killings that are excluded include: killing due to legal interventions; justifiable homicide in selfdefence; attempted intentional homicide; homicide without the element of intent is nonintentional homicide; non-negligent or involuntary manslaughter; assisting suicide or instigating suicide; illegal feticide; and euthanasia. (UNDOC, 2015) However, offences such as assaults leading to death are a grey area since the intention to kill may be difficult to establish. (Oberwittler, 2019)

The killing of women and girls has been recognised as a specific category of homicides that is often different from the killing of males (UNODC, 2022). This is linked to the larger challenge of violence against women that has structural and cultural roots in all parts of the world. Different jurisdictions address this as per their legal codes with some recognising this structural violence and others approaching it as part of the problem of general homicides.

UNODC and UN Women point out that the “majority of intentional homicides of women and girls are gender-related” and that “the largest share of gender-related killings of women and girls are homicides perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members” (UNDOC, 2022). These killings have also been referred to as “femicide” or “feminicide”(UNDOC, 2022). The “gender-related” grounds include the ideology of men’s entitlement and privilege over women, social norms regarding masculinity, and the need to assert male control or power, enforce gender roles, or prevent, discourage or punish what is considered to be unacceptable female behaviour (UNDOC, 2022). In every jurisdiction, the majority of the victims of homicides are male (UNODC, 2013). However, females are disproportionately victims of homicides committed at/around homes.

Globally, national-level data on homicides is usually from criminal justice/law enforcement and medical records. Overall, data on homicides is much more reliable than other crime categories since most homicides are reported to the authorities or a body is discovered, setting off an investigation and documentation. In addition, hospitals often have precise guidelines on the recording of deaths, including homicides. As a result, homicide data and statistics are a good proxy indicator of the violent crime situation in a country. Nevertheless, there are also significant

challenges with homicide data. Access to statistics and data is often difficult owing to the sensitive nature of the crime and the fact that the field of homicide investigations is often closed to most researchers. Moreover, in homicide research, there is no data from the victims since they are already dead. Access to perpetrators is also often limited, and the data is most likely less reliable, unlike in other forms of crimes (Ioannou and Hammond, 2015).

1.2.1 Homicide in Kenyan Law

Homicide offences are provided for in the Penal Code (Division IV) and include murder, manslaughter and offences connected to suicide.

Murder

Section 203 of the Penal Code provides that “any person, who with malice aforethought causes death of another person by an unlawful act or omission, is guilty of murder.” For an act or omission to qualify as murder, the following ingredients must be present: the victim died; the accused person committed the unlawful act/omission, which caused the death; and the perpetrator must have had malice aforethought (Amenge and Asaala, 2024). According to Kenyan law, every homicide is unlawful unless it was authorised or occurred as an accident.

Manslaughter

Section 202 of the Penal Code states that “any person who by an unlawful act or omission causes the death of another person is guilty of the felony termed manslaughter.” This offence “covers all unlawful killings, which do not amount to murder” and refers to “all unlawful killings, which do not amount to murder” (Amenge and Asaala, 2024).

Suicide Pacts

Under Section 209 of the Penal Code, causing death to another person as a result of an agreement with the other person or person to their own lives is considered manslaughter.

Infanticide

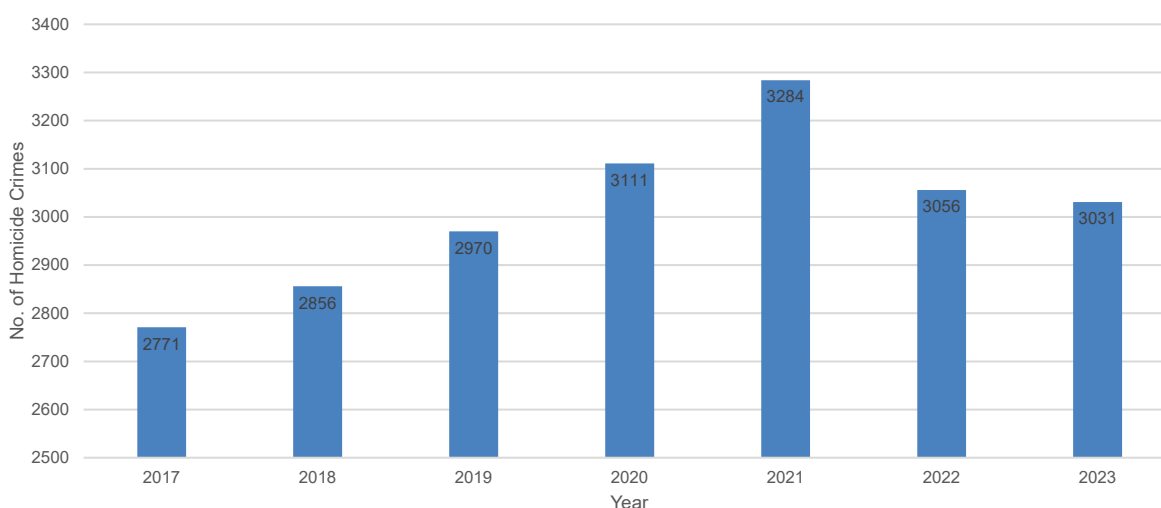
Under Section 210 of the Penal Code, manslaughter also refers to the conduct where a woman by an act or omission causes the death of her child, who is under the age of 12 months by reason of suffering from mental effects of childbirth or lactation.

1.2.2 Kenya Homicide Data and Trends

In global comparative terms, Kenya does not appear as a country where homicide is at an epidemic level, as several other countries post a much higher rate. According to the UNODC (2023), Kenya has a rate of 4.87 per 100,000 against the Africa regional rate of 10.94. Nevertheless, crime is local and hence the consequences of victimisation are often felt individually and locally. Therefore, while cross-country ratings are of some policy value, it is the national and local level data and trends that are most informative to national level actors. In any case, the wellbeing of each victim in terms of the psychosocial and economic value of the deceased to their families and dependents is a matter of concern for the families, friends and authorities irrespective of the global trends.

A review of crime data and homicide statistics in the period 2017 to 2023 in Kenya suggests that homicides peaked in 2020 and saw a sharp decline in 2023 (figure 1).

Figure 1: Homicide incidence in Kenya (2017-2023)



Data Source: National Police Service (NPS) *Annual Crime Reports*

Table 1 shows the trends by the proportion of the homicide cases compared to the total reported offences in the country.

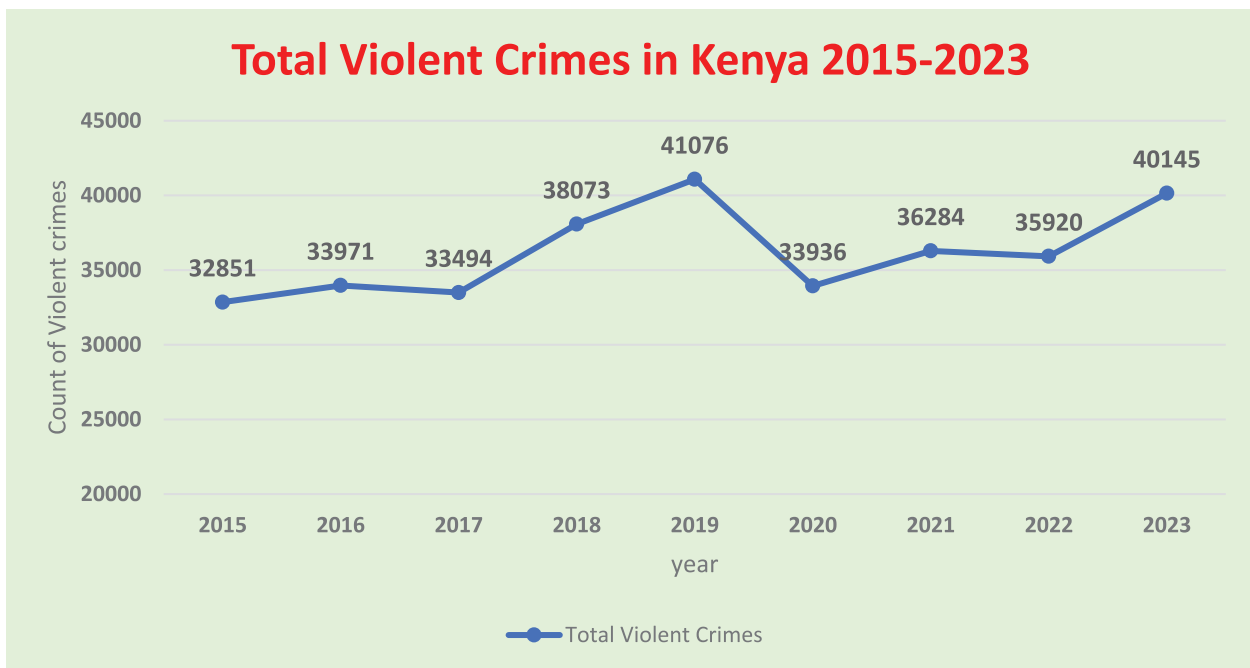
Table 1: Homicide Trends as a Proportion of all Offences

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Count	2,771	2,856	2,970	3,111	3,284	3,056	3,031
Total count of crimes	77,992	88,268	93,411	69,645	81,272	88,083	104,842
% of homicide to total offences in the country	3.55	3.24	3.18	4.47	4.04	3.47	2.89

Data Source: NPS *Annual Crime Reports*

From the statistics, the number of homicides increased steadily each year (from 2,771 in 2017 to 3,031 in 2023). The data shows some fluctuations over the years, with a notable and sharp increase in the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020 and 2021). The percentage of homicides relative to total crimes was highest in 2020 (4.47%) and lowest in 2023 (2.89%) possibly indicating some progress in managing homicide crimes compared to other types of offences. However, data suggests that while the total number of homicides decreased, other crimes also rose significantly, particularly in 2023, with 104,842 total crimes reported – the highest in the report period. An analysis of police data also shows that there was an increase in violent crimes in 2023 as Figure 2 indicates.

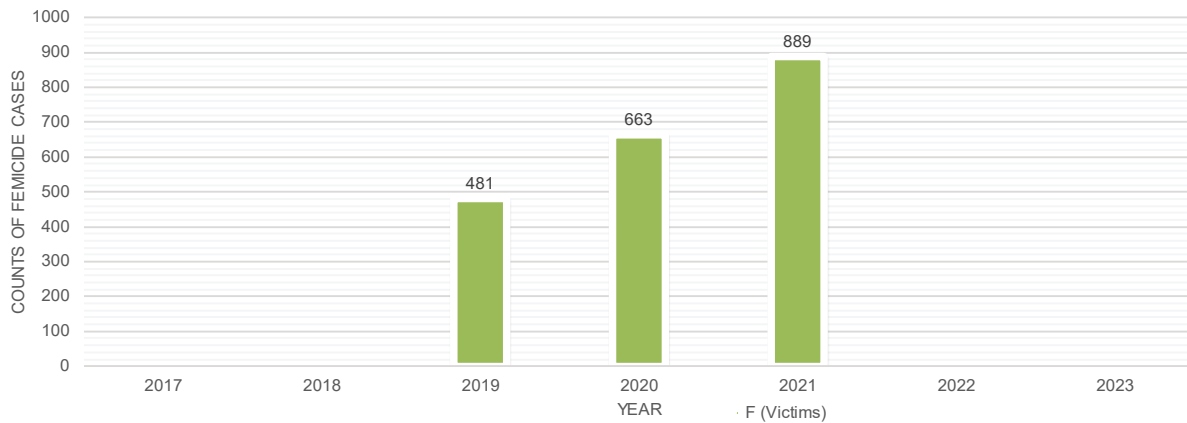
Figure 2: Number of Total Violent Crimes in Kenya 2015-2023



Data Source: NPS *Annual Crime Reports*

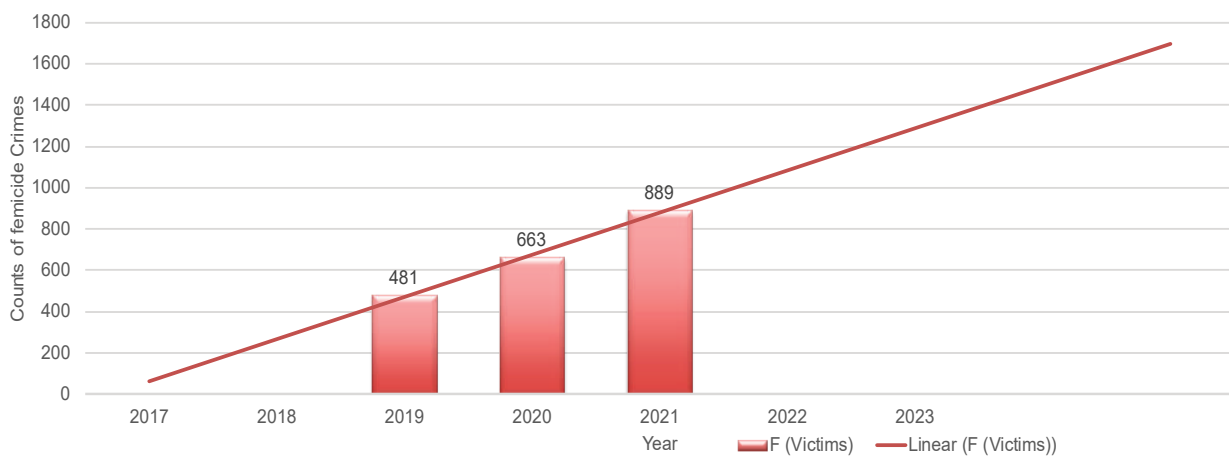
The annual police report does not consistently provide gender disaggregated statistics, making it difficult to establish trends and patterns on the killings of women and girls in Kenya. However, partial statistics are available for the years 2017 to 2023 (Figure 3). The bar chart below shows a steady upward trajectory, indicating that if the factors contributing to female homicide victimisation rates remain unchanged, the count is likely to be higher with a fear of continued increase in the current and subsequent years.

Figure 3: Trends of Female Homicide Victimization 2017-2023



Data Source: NPS *Annual Crime Reports*

Figure 4: Forecast on Trends of Female Homicide Victimization



Data Source: NPS *Annual Crime Reports*

The trend line above shows a projected continuous increase in cases of female homicide victimisation if the prevailing conditions persist. The projection is for illustrative purposes, having been based on limited data (2019-2021) and also considering that homicide counts in Kenya

include categories such as suicide. Nonetheless, the increasing trend remains an issue of policy concern.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Kenya's homicide rate remains relatively low in comparison to those of other countries in the region and globally (UNODC, 2023). Like elsewhere in the world, homicides in Kenya, are fairly well- recorded following reports to the police or the discovery of bodies.

As the data above shows, between 2017 and 2023, the numbers of reported homicides steadily increased in 2020 and 2021. This surge during the Covid-19 period remains unexplained. The number of homicides began to decrease in 2022, and continued in 2023. The total number of crimes, however, increased even as homicides declined in 2022.

However, the media and popular reports of a surge in homicide cases, including the killing of women, girls and children, present a sharp reversal of the trend that started in 2022. There are no standard explanations of why homicides increase at a particular time. Studies on trends in the USA have noted that surges have been associated with drugs and illegal guns crises, or crises in law enforcement, among other factors (Fagan and Richman, 2017). In South Africa, homicide rates have been on the upswing since 2012 after an initial post-apartheid decline (Bruce, 2023). The murder surge in South Africa has been linked to weaknesses in the criminal justice system, gang violence, inequality and alcohol and drug use, among other factors (Bruce,2023; Matzopoulos, et al,2024). However, no studies have so far been undertaken in Kenya to explain the national trends in homicide incidents.

While police statistics are largely available, it is not clear whether the apparent increase is linked to an upswing in violent crimes, in general, or whether it is only homicides that might be on the rise. Neither is it clear whether there are particular places (neighbourhoods) that are most affected, or whether these homicides are linked to particular categories of perpetrators or victims. In addition, there are no studies on whether there have been any changes in law enforcement and criminal justice measures that may be linked to this apparent surge.

In light of these key knowledge gaps, it is difficult for policy actors and criminal justice institutions to effectively respond to the problem. A comprehensive study in all its dimensions is, therefore, key to the prevention and management of this challenge.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess and explain the apparent surge in homicides in Kenya.

Specific Objectives

1. To map out the patterns and trends of homicides in Kenya in 2024.
2. To evaluate the patterns and trends of homicides in Kenya in 2024.
3. To establish and explain the causes, drivers and conditions responsible for the apparent surge in homicides.
4. To establish and explain the causes, drivers and conditions responsible for the apparent surge in the killings of women, girls and children.
5. To assess the criminal justice preventive and response measures and their adequacy in dealing with homicides.

1.5 Justification of the Study

While data and statistics on homicide provide important insights into trends and patterns, the explanations, reasons and drivers for homicide surges are not straightforward. In particular, national level trends, while important, often mask critical particularities that are key to interventions. Studies of crime surges in other countries suggest that certain proximate factors may be at play. In the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, Kansas City, USA, suffered a sustained surge in homicides, registering three times the national average. Gun prevalence was identified as a key factor and law enforcement measures to intercept the weapons effectively addressed the problem (Gladwell, 2019). In the 1990s, various studies indicated that there was a close correlation between the epidemic of illegal drugs and homicides in various US cities (Fagan and Richman, 2017). Between 2019 and 2020, the US murder rate rose by 30%, in what was “the largest single-year increase in more than a century” (Gramlich, 2021). No clear cause has been identified for this surge, although various researchers point to a “complex ecology” of factors at play, including the socio-economic consequences of Covid-19 and deterioration in policecommunity relations (Fagan and Richman, 2017; Gramlich, 2021). Studies in South Africa have also reached the same conclusion that homicides are linked to multiple factors in the society (Matzopoulos, et al, 2024; Lamb; 2023: Bruce, 2023).

It could be that homicides are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods and driven by possession of weapons such as guns and/or illegal drugs, as the Kansas studies established.

Indeed, in South Africa, “20% of all reported murders occur in just 30 policing areas” (Lamb, 2025). However, without that understanding, it is likely that scarce resources (both personnel and financial) will be wasted on other areas and with interventions that cannot fully address the problem. Reports may suggest that there is disproportionate homicide victimisation of females, which in itself points to a serious crime and social phenomenon. However, it is important to also understand the profiles of such victims, the places of victimisation, as well as the risk factors.

Another possible explanation for the increase is in the quality of police investigations into homicides. If there is poor (real or perceived) quality in police investigations or general response to crime, this could explain a surge in homicides. It could also be that there are such other gaps in the justice chain such as non-prosecution of perpetrators. The contexts and circumstances where these homicides take place provide an important indicator of the risks as well as proximate and wider contextual factors.

Effective interventions require granular analysis of data as well as contextualised interventions. However, the demands and exigencies of the work of criminal justice actors (police, prosecution, judiciary, and others) do not allow for such studies. Instead, their time and resources are usually consumed by the demands of the resolution of individual cases.

This study, therefore, provides an urgently needed analysis of the extent of the apparent surge in homicide cases in Kenya, including the killings of women, girls and children. It also examines the drivers and conditions that fuel homicides. Finally, the study provides recommendations on what the criminal justice and security actors (and specifically, the police, ODPP and NIS) can do to prevent and stem the tide of homicides.

1. 6 Scope of the Study

The primary focus of this study was on the homicides that occurred in 2024, and, in particular, the apparent surge. The cases selected for study were therefore restricted to 2024. However, the trend analysis in homicides also paid attention to data in the last five years. The choice of counties for field study was guided by data from the DCI, which also guided the choice of specific localities

for interviews. The study also relied on key informants' information in choosing localities for focus group discussions.

1. 7 Theoretical Framework

1.7.1 Grounded Theory

This research was guided by the Grounded Theory, associated with sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1965).

Studies underscore the heterogeneous nature of homicides and hence the diverse theoretical explanations of the phenomenon. Biological and psychological theories focus on the individual perpetrator and victim, while sociological theories are focused on the socio-ecological conditions such as the collapse of relationships as well as economic deprivation and exploitation. A significant volume of literature focuses on the individual offender- looking at the reasons and explanations for their offences. There has also been a growing body of research on the local-level conditions seeking to understand specific neighbourhoods or streets or “problem places” (Andresen and Hodgkinson, 2019). Other studies look at the macro-level, examining socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts, for example, poverty and unemployment.

Different theories have been applied to homicide studies depending on whether the interest is to understand the person or the place, or both. Social control, anomie theory, learning theory, and social disorganisation theory have all been prominent in research on homicides. However, a unified theory that combines these three analytical levels of individual, locality and macro-level conditions does not exist.

In the absence of such, a grounded theory provides a good guidance on how to approach the qualitative component of the study. Grounded theory is associated with sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1965) and provides researchers with the tools to conceptualise patterns and structures and undertake comparison. As Strauss & Corbin (1994) note, central to this theory is “a general method of [constant] comparative analysis”. In grounded theory the research undertaking and theory generation are two sides of the same coin since theory is developed inductively from the data. The researcher generates theories from observations and analyses. The down-side is that this approach is time-consuming and the researcher bias can skew the findings.

Analysis and Variables

For policy interventions, it is not appropriate to privilege, a priori, one analytical level over the other. There is a significant policy interest in understanding whether there are particular and common individual characteristics associated with the perpetrators. Moreover, we need to understand the profiles of victims and whether there are common characteristics that may be linked to their victimisation. It is important to understand the relationships (if any) between victims and perpetrators. Equally important are societal level characteristics. The settings and places where homicides happen as well as the socio-economic profiles of those communities may be important in stemming the tides of homicides.

This study was, therefore, interested in both the individual and community conditions. A blend of these approaches provides us with useful tools to analyse and study the problem of homicides in Kenya.

A critical question is what to take as the unit of analysis. Data suggests that there is no specific county or neighbourhood that stands out as the “problem place”. Neither does the data suggest that there is a specific category of perpetrators associated with the surge. Indeed, this study, sought to identify whether there are such “problem places” or perpetrators or victims who fit particular profiles. In that case, the most appropriate unit of analysis for this study was identified as the homicide situation or event itself. This allowed the analysis of place, individual, circumstances, and even weapons. The UNODC classification of crimes provides some useful guidance on the key disaggregating variables in studying and documenting homicides. These are in addition to the standard, perpetrator-victim details that are part of official law enforcement records.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the research design, methods and tools of data collection and management, data analysis and ethical considerations.

2.2 Research Design

Typically, homicide research follows non-experimental methodologies since it would be unethical and impossible to set up experimental groups (Lu-Anne Swart, et al., 2019). Accordingly, this research was designed as a non-experimental study.

The study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study made use of quantitative data to establish trends and patterns on homicides. Quantitative data was primarily from the NPS/DCI records. Qualitative data was obtained from key informants and focus group discussions as well as selected human-interest stories of victims' close family members and perpetrators. Qualitative data was used to explain the trends, place, relationships and contexts.

2.3 Study Sites

Field data was collected in 15 selected counties that from the DCI data showed above- average levels of homicides. These were Vihiga, Busia, Kakamega, Embu, Isiolo, Homa Bay, Kisii, Kisumu, Nakuru, Narok, Kilifi, Mombasa, Kiambu, Nyeri, and Nairobi. In those areas where there was an above-average concentration of homicide incidents, focus group discussions (FGDs) as well as key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted.

2.4 Sample Size Determination

Appropriate samples of 20 to 30 informants were selected per county. The justification for this sample size was from a review of more than 20 qualitative crime studies using the grounded theory.

2.5 Data Collection Methods and Tools

2.5.1 Methodology Workshop

A methodology workshop bringing together subject matter experts to interrogate the focus and quality of the approach and tools was convened before the study was rolled out. The workshop gave input to the study design and revisions were made thereafter.

2.5.2 Police Records

The study looked at the actual NPS/DCI records of reported homicides in Kenya in 2024 and in areas identified as presenting the largest number of incidents. While regions do not exist in the political administration of the country, the police command structure is still organised along regions. Police data on homicides and other crimes is, therefore, documented as per region. The study used this data to settle on 15 counties across seven (7) regions as presented in table 2¹:

Table 2: Sampled Counties and Justification

Region	Selected County	Justification
Western	Vihiga	High number of homicides in region at 27 (22 men and five women)
	Busia	More women than men Total homicides: 8 (men- women 7, unknown 1)
	Kakamega	Highest number of homicides in the region at 29. Regional HQ and the need to seek approval from the Regional Commander
Eastern	Embu	Highest number of homicides in region at 38 (27 men and 11 women)
	Isiolo	More women than men- Total homicides: 8 (1 man; 7 women)
Nyanza	Homa Bay	Highest number of homicides in region at 42 (men 30; women 12)
	Kisii	High number of women victims Total homicides: 28 (men 17 and

¹ North Eastern had very few cases to warrant coverage. However, it is possible that there was poor reporting of cases or they were handled informally, as seen in a widely publicised case on <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/gender/27-nights-of-terror-inside-the-chilling-audio-diary-of-teen-refugee-whorecorded-her-own-murder--4981474>

Region	Selected County	Justification
		women 10)
	Kisumu	Regional HQ and the need to seek approval from the Regional Commander. Total homicides: 32 (men 28; women 4)
Rift Valley	Narok	Highest number of homicides in region at 41 (men 34 and women 7)
	Nakuru	Total homicides: 29 (men 14 and women 15) More women victims than men Regional HQ and the need to seek approval from Regional Commander
Coast	Kilifi	Highest number of homicides in region at 47 (men 31 and women 16)
	Mombasa	Regional HQ and the need to seek approval from Regional Commander Total homicides: 25 (men 22 and women 3)
Central	Kiambu	Highest number of homicides in region at 41 (men 24 and women 17)
	Nyeri	Total homicides: 16 (Men 7 and women 9) More women victims than men Regional HQ and the need to seek approval from Regional Commander
Nairobi	Regions with highest the incidents: Starehe- 19 Njiru- 16 Kasarani- 14 Embakasi North- 7 Embakasi South- 4 Lang'ata- 4 Kamukunji-4	Total homicides: 77 (men 52 and women 29)

2.5.3 Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

The data recorded in Table 2 required explanations as well as interpretations. These explanations and interpretations were drawn from key informant interviews (see tool used as appendix 1) with the following:

- i. Police officers - patterns, interpretations on victims, perpetrators, and contexts. Interpretations on causes and drivers. Assessment of effectiveness of police interventions;
- ii. Police- regular on the beat. Patterns, interpretations on victims, perpetrators, and contexts. Interpretations on causes and drivers. Assessment of effectiveness of police interventions;
- iii. Prosecution (ODPP) as they handle the cases after the police;
- iv. Judiciary; and,
- v. Local CSOs and community leaders - for example local business people including NGAO officers- Interpretations on causes and drivers as well as crime experts.

A total of 30 FGDs (two per county) were conducted with selected population groups to test and further interrogate some of the insights emerging from the data. The tool used is presented as Appendix 2). To cap it all, human interest stories of victims' family members and perpetrators were collected. The tools used form Appendices 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 3 summarises the total sample reach (582) across the 15 counties during the fieldwork that took place between 16th and 29th March 2025.

Table 3: Total Sample Reached

County	NPS		DCI		Judiciary		ODPP		Lawyers		CSOs		Deceased's Families		Perpetrators		FGDs		Other		Total		County Total
By Sex	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	T
Mombasa	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	15	13	0	0	27	14	41
Kilifi	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	2	2	1	0	4	0	12	10	0		25	14	39
Nairobi	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	2	0	2	2	4	14	12	0	0	22	23	45
Nakuru	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	3	0	12	12	0	0	23	15	38
Narok	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	12	12	0	0	24	13	37
Kisii	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	2	0	3	2	13	11	0	0	24	16	40
Embu	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	12	12	1	0	22	18	40

County	Total	Total	Other		FGDs		Perpetrators		Deceased's Families		CSOs		Lawyers		ODPP		Judiciary		DCI		NPS		County
By Sex	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	T
Isiolo	2	0	2	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	12	12	0	0	22	17	39
Nyeri	2	0	2	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	12	12	1	1	24	17	41
Kiambu	2	0	2	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	18	6	0	0	28	7	35
Kisumu	0	1	3	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12	13	0	0	21	18	39
Homa Bay	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	0	2	1	1	2	1	3	0	12	12	0	0	20	20	40
Kakamega	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	1	2	0	2	1	9	11	0	0	15	18	33
Busia	1	0	1	2	1	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	2	0	2	2	11	12	0	0	22	18	40
Vihiga	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	10	12	0	0	19	16	35*

2.6 Validation Workshop

2.7 Methods of Data Analysis

2.8 Ethical Considerations

- i. Informed consent was sought from the respondents and sampled institutions before the commencement of the data collection.
- ii. Confidentiality was observed during data collection and analysis.
- iii. Anonymity was observed: data was collected anonymously as no personally identifiable information was collected in the study. The study does not have any record of names.
- iv. Data protection as envisaged in the Data Protection Act, 2019 has been adhered to.,
- v. Observance of the “Do No Harm” principle to the respondents, especially those in FGDs, victims’ families and perpetrators was strictly observed.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the findings from the KIIs and FGD interviews. It also discusses the results through linkage to the police and DCI data and other literature.

3.2 Patterns and Trends

Insights from Police Data

Two sets of data and statistics have informed this study. The first is the NPS annual summary statistics and the second is the DCI record of homicide cases across the country. The NPS summary statistics are drawn from the reports recorded by the police in the Occurrence Book at the station level. The DCI data, on the other hand, is a record of the incidents that the DCI has taken up as homicides.

In 2024, the NPS recorded a total of 3,015 cases of homicides classified as murder, manslaughter, infanticide, procuring abortion, concealing birth, suicide, and causing death by dangerous driving. In the same year, the DCI data had 1,011 cases of homicides.

Table 4: NPS Annual Summary Homicides Statistics

OFFENCE	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
a) Murder	187	152	169	141	153	160	154	193	146	150	175	156	1936
b) Manslaughter	10	4	2	2	2	3	6	4	0	2	6	10	51
c) Infanticide	3	6	2	2	3	4	3	3	4	4	1	1	36
d) Procuring Abortion	2	7	2	1	3	2	2	1	3	1	3	2	29
e) Concealing birth	4	3	2	4	4	0	0	4	6	6	1	1	35
f) Suicide	66	48	38	43	63	54	48	48	56	60	45	48	617
g) Causing death by drunk-driving	31	27	17	30	32	28	29	14	25	26	31	21	311
Sub – Total	303	247	232	223	260	251	242	267	240	249	262	239	3015

Source: NPS Data (2024)

There are a number of reasons why the NPS statistics are different from those of the DCI. The NPS statistics include categories such as death by reckless driving that are ordinarily handled by the Traffic Department and not the DCI. There are also some cases that at the recording stage that may be categorised by the recording officer as either murder, or manslaughter, but on further investigation may not actually qualify. For instance, the determination of whether an incident qualifies as manslaughter rather than murder is conclusively made at the prosecution stage. Data discrepancy can, therefore, be as a result of definitional and classification differences, jurisdictional differences (NPS records all cases of violent and sudden death), differences in classification, and administrative or recording errors.

This study relied on the DCI data for its analysis since it was made available as a detailed record of incidents - with information on circumstances, motives and context. These detailed accounts made it possible to undertake various kinds of analyses that would not be possible with the annual summary statistics.

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Table 5: Homicide Incidents across Kenya's Regions and Counties, 2024

Region	County/Sub-County	Total Homicide Count
North-Eastern	Garissa	12
	Mandera	8
	Wajir	4
Eastern	Embu	38
	Kitui	35
	Meru	28
	Machakos	21
	Makueni	20
	Tharaka-Nithi	15
	Isiolo	7
	Marsabit	2
Nyanza	Homa Bay	42
	Migori	40

Region	County/Sub-County	Total Homicide Count
	Kisumu	32
	Kisii	28
	Siaya	22
	Nyamira	18
Coast	Kilifi	47
	Kwale	26
	Tana River	27
	Mombasa	25
	Lamu	8
	Taita-Taveta	8
Western	Vihiga	27
	Bungoma	22
	Busia	8
	Kakamega	29
Central	Kiambu	41
	Murang'a	26
	Nyeri	16
	Kirinyaga	6
	Nyandarua	4
Rift Valley	Narok	41
	Trans-Nzoia	37
	Nakuru	29
	Bomet	21
	Turkana	19
	Elgeyo-Marakwet	18
	Baringo	15
	Kajiado	17
	Kericho	12
	Laikipia	5
	Nandi	4
	Uasin Gishu	6
	Samburu	12
Nairobi		80
Total		1,011

Source: DCI (2024).

From the DCI data on the 2024 homicides, the study tabulated 1,011 cases within the definition of homicide as per Kenyan law. Of these, 70 per cent of the victims were male with females

accounting for 30 per cent. In terms of perpetrators, 630 were male and 88 females with several cases where the perpetrator was not known. There were 149 incidents where the perpetrators were unknown.

Overall, the DCI data shows that males were the highest number of victims. This might sound surprising, given the many reported cases of killings of women in Kenya, however, police data is quite reliable and the higher percentage of male victimisation in DCI records is consistent with the national records over time and also the records from other countries across the world (UNODC, 2019). Male perpetrators of homicide were the overwhelming majority in all cases.

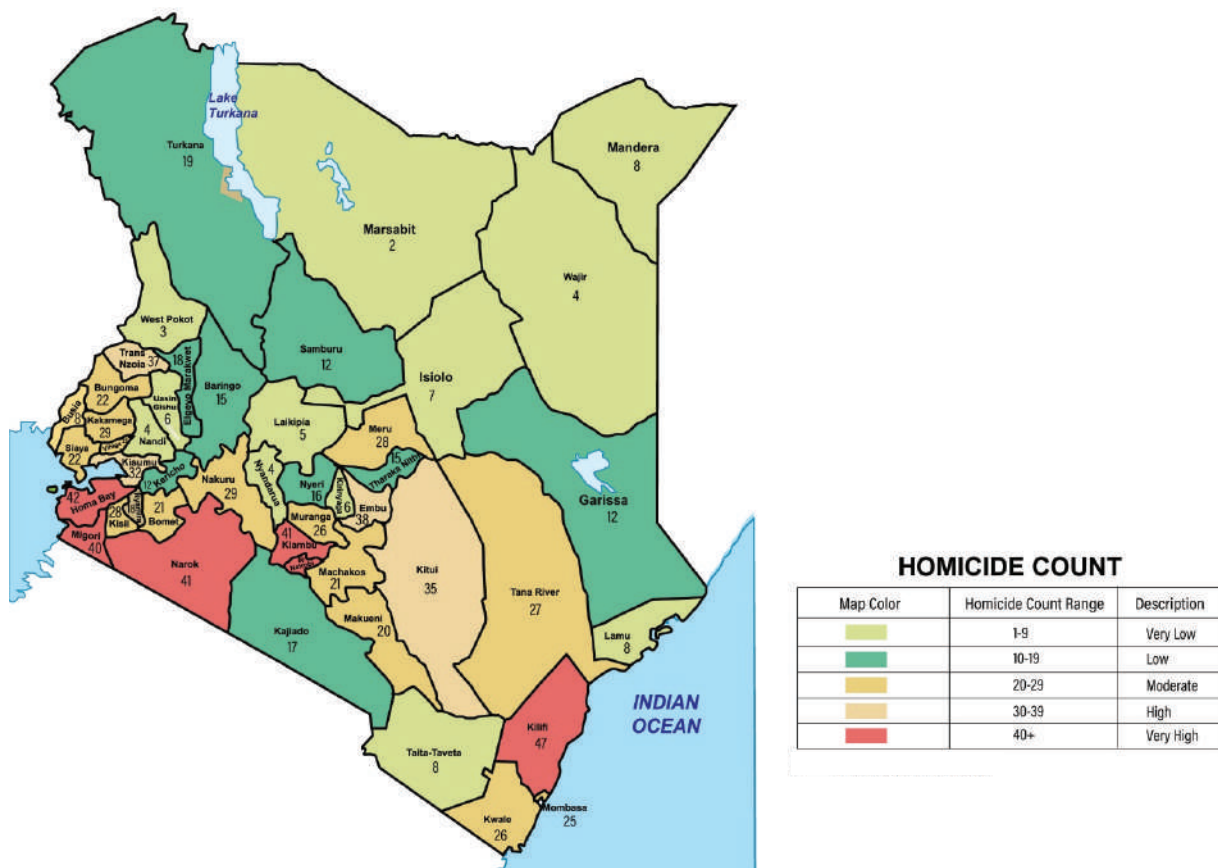
Another observation is that while the data was reported per region and per county, it does not mean that the incidents were evenly distributed across the breadth of a county. Rather, there were specific areas such as Eastlands in Nairobi County that seemed to contribute to a higher percentage of cases.

Whereas in most cases (82.8%) the suspected perpetrator was known, there were some (17.2%) where the details were missing. Since the police records are as at the time the matter was reported, it is likely that the identity of the suspected perpetrator was uncovered in the subsequent investigations. However, given that the Occurrence Book records are not updated, the available data does not show what progress had been made on the matter by the time of this study.

Figure 5: Map of Homicide Cases across the Country

Source: DCI Data (2024)

Nairobi, Kilifi and the Nyanza region counties of Migori and Homa Bay recorded the highest cases of homicide as did Kiambu and Narok. Conversely, the northern counties of Garissa, Mandera, and Turkana have lower incidents.



The homicide cases in the police data cover the categories of offences as provided for in the law: murder, manslaughter, infanticide and suicide pacts. The data is based on incidents reported to the police and recorded in the Occurrence Book. Given the gravity of homicide, it is correct to conclude that these incidents represent a fair picture of the problem. There are, of course, other incidents that never reach the police and never get reported. This was also confirmed in various consultations with key informant interviews and FGDs.

The question of “intentional homicide” presents some challenges in the DCI data. What the data presents is the determination of the recording officer that the particular incident is “murder”, “manslaughter” or “infanticide. It is, therefore, not possible to determine the numbers of incidents that the prosecution decided to proceed with as originally recorded by the police and the final determination by the Judiciary. Ideally, this is the kind of incident-by-incident analysis that would be important to establish how the cases travel through the criminal justice system.

Apparent Surge in Killings

A key question is whether homicide cases were on the increase in 2024, and if so, what would explain that?

This question can only be answered through the analysis of data over the years. From the annual NPS statistics, there is no indication that there was a surge in the killings in 2024.

Figure 6: Homicide Crimes in Kenya 2015-2024



Data Source: NPS *Annual Crime Reports*

Unfortunately, the current system of official data recording, reporting and case management makes it difficult to establish the actual facts and trends. Without data from several years, it is difficult to establish whether 2024 experienced a surge or not. Currently, the only available annual time series data on homicides is the summary statistics from the NPS headquarters.

While all incidents are recorded at the station level, what is usually sent to the NPS headquarters, are the aggregate statistics from each region. The details of each incident remain at the county level where they were reported. There is also a challenge in the categories of reported statistics.

The summary statistics reported over the years, include categories such as “death from reckless driving”, and “suicide”, which do not fit within the definition of homicide in Kenyan law and, therefore, do not give an accurate picture of the trends. Categories such as “manslaughter” included in the aggregate statistics also present challenges, given that it is not possible to establish whether an incident is manslaughter or not until it is determined at the prosecution stage.

Whether the homicides objectively increased or not, it is important to note that the perception of most of the members of the public is that they did. This needs to be addressed as perceptions are critical in telling whether people have confidence in various measures and interventions to address crime. Those interviewed also believed that there were many cases of killings that remained unreported. One such respondent stated that in his Nairobi neighbourhood, “many street children are killed and this is never reported”.

Kenya enacted the National Coroners Service Act of 2017 to provide a framework for investigations and determination of the cause of reported sudden, unexplained and unnatural deaths. A Coroners Service would ensure that these deaths are investigated by a qualified officer. The operationalisation of the law and hence the service is, however, pending.

The state of homicide data and its reporting is a key finding in this study. Comprehensive data is the starting point for effective interventions to address the problem of homicide. At the moment, however, police and policy actors do not have an accurate picture for strategic interventions beyond specific incidents.

The current system of reporting of summary statistics from the counties to the DCI and National NPS headquarters is not suitable for comprehensive analysis, comparison, planning and informed decision making. The statistics are just numbers without comprehensive information on victims, perpetrators, status of investigations, location, and context. Without the details of each of the incidents, the summary statistics available make it difficult to establish an accurate picture of trends and patterns. What is needed is an incident-based system that will include more information on victims, perpetrators, status of investigations, location, and context, among other factors.

Locations and Context of Killings

The study sought to assess whether there are places where killings mostly take place. While homicides could potentially happen in any place, there are specific places and contexts that the data and evidence point to.

Informal Settlements in Urban Areas

In all the urban areas, data from the police and field interviews confirm that homicides were largely concentrated in the poorer neighbourhoods – and, in particular, informal settlements and slums and adjacent areas. Most of those interviewed, including police officers, noted that it is very rare for killings to occur in the more affluent areas.

In Nairobi County, 70 per cent of the homicides were concentrated in Starehe/Kamukunji, Kariobangi, Kayole, Mathare, Embakasi, Njiru and Kasarani areas that constitute what could largely be ‘Eastlands’ of Nairobi.

In Mombasa, the hotspots were Likoni and Kisauni, while in Kilifi, most homicides were concentrated in Ganze, Magarini, Kaloleni and Chonyi and Kilifi North. In Kiambu, the informal settlements of Kiandutu, Kiganjo, Umoja, and Majengo in Thika, accounted for most of the homicides while in Nyeri Central, most of the homicides were in Blue Valley, Witemere, and Majengo neighbourhoods.

In many of these neighbourhoods, the killings were attributed to criminal gangs. The study teams were told that many gang members are drug users and many times will resort to violence and killings as they rob individuals for money to fuel their addiction. Some of the gangs mentioned in Mombasa include Rejected Gang, Wakali Kwanza, and One-Man Soldier. In both Mombasa and Kilifi, gangs are popularly referred to as “Mapangale” as they wield machetes (*pangas*). In Kisumu County, a notorious Tindo (metal-bar-wielding) gang was profiled as responsible for major attacks at night in urban areas. In a recent study by the NCRC(2025), over 100 organised gangs were identified with a high prevalence noted in Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, and Kiambu.

In addition, poor urban areas also attract other criminals who might not belong to gangs. These perpetrate other forms of crime and violence that may result in killings. These areas are also where there are high numbers of idle and jobless youth easily available for hire as killers.

Places where Land Conflicts are Widespread

Across the country, land conflicts are at the heart of many of the disputes that lead to killings within families, among neighbours and business partners and also fuel animosity between communities. Many of those interviewed cited land disputes linked to succession within families as a common reason for killings. Others were linked to disputed ownership of land between buyers and sellers.

Incomplete and disputed adjudication in places such as Embu and Isiolo counties were cited as part of what fuels killings. Where there is high land pressure such as in Kisii, some of the victims were accused of witchcraft as a ploy to take away their land.

Judicial resolution of land disputes takes too long - sometimes decades- and it is an expensive process out of reach for most people. Without alternatives, some resort to violence, leading to the many homicides.

Places with Inter-ethnic/Inter-communal Conflicts

Border areas where different ethnic communities have long-running land and resource conflicts were also hotspots for killings. Tensions and conflicts over grazing sometimes lead to killings and revenge killings. In the Narok-Kisii, Bomet-Kisii, Vihiga-Nandi and Isiolo-Meru border areas, some of the killings were attributed to these conflicts.

Domestic and Private Spaces

A significant number of homicides, and, in particular, those of women and girls occurred in private settings such as homes in both rural and urban areas, rental apartments, hotels, as well as Airbnbs mainly in towns. These killings were often perpetrated by intimate partners, family members, or business and other acquaintances, and were linked to domestic disputes, love triangles, business wrangles and gender-based violence.

Public Spaces

In urban areas, some homicides occurred in poorly lit streets, dark alleys, and around entertainment spots, especially at night. Victims were often attacked during robberies, gang violence, or after disputes in bars and clubs. An interviewee from the DCI in Nyeri County noted that some cases involving the killing of women occurred in towns such as Nyeri and Karatina, particularly where victims were accosted after leaving clubs. The officer explained:

“Killings of women almost all the time involve a love triangle, especially among students, and alcohol is often a trigger for the killing. In Nyeri, a few women have been killed while coming from clubs and walking home alone. They are normally accosted and killed, but when we investigate, it’s always a love triangle.”

Perpetrator Profiles

Overall, as the data from DCI suggests, the majority of the perpetrators of homicides were young males aged between 20 and 40 years. In Nairobi and Mombasa, most of the perpetrators were in their 20s and 30s. There were a few cases (10.1%) where women were the perpetrators. These were largely cases linked to domestic violence, love triangles, infanticides, as well as land and witchcraft suspicions.

Most homicides were perpetrated by people who had a form of relationship with the victims either as neighbours, intimate partners, family members, acquaintances or business relations. Overwhelmingly, perpetrators were not strangers to the victims. They had a form of relationship with the victim(s) prior to the incident(s).

Across the 15 counties, the perpetrators were mostly young men with close relations to the victims. Except for few cases of random killings by juvenile gangs and cattle rustlers, in over 75 percent of the cases, there was a relationship between the perpetrator and victim, either as a family member, or neighbour. This underscores the fact that homicide is committed by persons who know the victims well and have had prior relations with them.

The case of a convict in Narok Prison illustrates this:

“I am 25 years old and I am here serving a five-year sentence for manslaughter after killing my brother-in-law. This in-law used to beat my sister (his wife) very often and would even follow her and beat her in our compound. One night he beat her at their matrimonial home and she ran to our home. He followed her while drunk and armed with a knife and started beating her in our presence. I decided to defend her by grabbing the knife from him and stabbed him, killing him on the spot.”

Most female victims were killed by individuals they were close to. These include husbands, boyfriends, intimate partners, family members, or relatives. There were several cases of women

killed by men with whom they were in casual relationships. This finding is consistent with findings in other parts of the world, where the majority of the killings of women and girls are committed by intimate partners or other family members. According to Fox, et al., (2009) women are more likely than men to be victims of sexual assault, stalking, intimate partner violence, physical assault and family violence - including physical and psychological abuse, neglect, and witnessing family violence.

A prosecutor with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Nakuru County highlighted the following about the perpetrators:

“Cases of homicide in this county are many. In Bahati North area of Nakuru, a man killed his wife over a domestic dispute. In Njoro area, an enraged man stabbed his wife on the thigh on allegations that she had infected him with HIV-AIDS and she bled to death in their matrimonial bed, where her body was found, with her 11 months-old child crying. He later presented himself to the police. In 2024, at Eveready area, towards Salgaa, a lady used a concoction of pesticides to poison and kill her grandmother to cover evidence of money she had taken from her. CCTV footage exposed her crime. We have also had several cases of murder from Mawanga and Sewerage areas of Nakuru Town and Kuresoi.”

A 35-year-old convict (aged 28 at the time of offence) serving 12 years imprisonment for manslaughter in Nakuru GK Prison after killing his wife had this to say:

“I lived well with my wife (who was a teacher) for seven years until her behaviour started changing, becoming rude to me in addition to reports of her infidelity. One day, I returned home unexpectedly from a Kenya Defence Forces recruitment, where I wanted to join the forces, only to find my wife in bed with a man who managed to escape through the window. On inquiring about the man, she responded rudely as she was drunk and an argument ensued and we fought. In the process, I stabbed her and she fell down and died. I reported to the chief and I was later arrested by the police.”

On the other hand, male victims were more likely to be killed by strangers- in the course of robbery or mob violence. Like female victims, however, the 2024 police data shows that most males were also killed by people they knew.

Overall, intimate partners were the main perpetrators in cases of crimes of passion, inheritance disputes, and domestic violence.

Neighbours in land-related conflicts were also key perpetrators in some of the killings and also cases of “mob justice.” In most crime-related killings many of the perpetrators were young male members of criminal gangs.

A few cases have been attributed to suspected serial killers. In July 2024, several bodies were discovered in an abandoned quarry in Nairobi, and police attributed the killings to a serial killer. The killing of a female taxi driver was also attributed to a serial killer.

In 15 per cent of the cases, the police recorded the perpetrator as “unknown” in the 2024 data. It is, however, important to note that DCI records change as investigations progress and it is likely that in some cases, the perpetrators finally get identified.

Table 6: Perpetrator-Victim Relationship Patterns

Victim Group	Common Perpetrators	Typical Relationship
Women and girls	Husbands, partners/ boyfriends, family members	Intimate/close relations
Men	Acquaintances, friends, strangers	Mixed/varied
Children	Family members, caregivers	Close relations
Multiple victims	Serial killers, unknown assailants	Often unknown

Victim Profiles

Men were the primary victims, especially in cases related to cattle rustling, communal conflicts, drunken altercations, land-related conflicts and many mob justice cases resulting from suspicions of theft.

Women, on the other hand, were predominantly killed in incidents of domestic violence and crimes of passion, land/property succession disputes, love triangles and other crime of passionrelated homicides.

In some places, crime-related homicides targeted people in employment and the business persons/community.

In some places, elderly women, especially those living alone in rural areas and whose husbands were working in other towns, were often victims of rape and killings. Women returning home from funeral vigils and *disco matanga* in places such as Busia were also targets.

There were cases of bodies of young men found after being killed in urban areas of Mombasa, Kisumu, Nairobi’s Eastlands and Nakuru. Some of those interviewed alleged that the killings were by law enforcement officers, while others attributed them to gang rivalries. One of those interviewed for this study stated that disappearances of people who ended up dead was common in his neighbourhood and that his “friend was arrested in 2023 and was later found dead in Mathare”.

Overall, young people between the ages of 17 and 30 were particularly vulnerable to homicide killings, often falling victim to relationship conflicts or substance abuse-related violence. Female college students of between 20 and 30 years were mostly killed by partners and in some cases casual male acquaintances. A police officer underscored the vulnerability of university or college girls and the killing of women in Kisumu:

“We are trying to solve two murder cases of university girls killed in Airbnbs by persons they met casually on the streets and in clubs and went out for drinks with. The naivety and allure of flashy lifestyles by college-going girls is a major issue of concern.”

The elderly were also targeted in inheritance disputes, while children were sometimes victims of domestic violence or caught in the cross-fire of family feuds. Children were rarely direct targets but were occasionally incidental victims of violence. In some cases, children were victims of parental violence with some beaten to death by their own parents as a form of punishment or during domestic disputes.

Table 7: Victim Characteristics

Victim Group	Common Circumstances/Context
Women and girls	Domestic/intimate partner violence, femicide
Children	Domestic/family violence
Men	Varied: acquaintances, strangers, gang disputes, suspicion by police

3.3 Conditions and Drivers of Homicides

The study established that there was a mix of conditions that explain homicides. Overall, however, the killings in Kenya were linked to unresolved conflicts at the family and social levels; psychosocial and mental health problems; economic stressors and limited youth opportunities; cultural beliefs and societal norms; and institutional and leadership failures.

1. Deep-Seated Family, Community, and Business Conflicts

Unresolved Family Conflicts

Many of the killings were driven by deep-seated family, community and business conflicts. At the family level, disputes between spouses and within the family over land, love and relationships, children and inheritance, finances and other resources, were widespread. Many young couples did not have support systems to enable them to resolve their disputes before they escalated into violence. Disputes over land and other property in families were also a key reason for many of the killings. Inheritance and succession disputes were frequently cited as reasons for killings between siblings, cousins, or other close relatives. In the rural areas, land-related disputes were particularly deadly, while in urban settings, financial disagreements and relationship conflicts were common. In Embu and Kilifi and Kisii counties, for example, elderly parents were often killed by their own children in property disputes, while in Kiambu and Nyeri, family-level quarrels, particularly in polygamous households, were a common precursor to homicide. A DCI officer in Kisii County stated:

“There are numerous homicide cases, especially in Kisii Central Sub-County. A good percentage of these cases are tied to land disputes. And it is men who are mostly killed because land, which is scarce in this area, is normally inherited by men and when it is disputed, the perpetrators and victims are usually men fighting over it.”

The family unit has undergone significant transformation due to urbanisation, modernization and the other influences. This transformation has weakened the old kinship bonds and also led to competition over shrinking resources such as land. Sharing and inheritance of family property is most times a source of family disputes. Where these disputes are not satisfactorily resolved, this often results in violence and killings.

At the society/community level, business and land disputes were also prevalent. Many resourcebased conflicts, such as those over land or grazing rights, were long running in some regions and often escalated into violence due to the lack of effective dispute resolution frameworks.

Conflicts over Resources

In the rural areas, conflicts over land for grazing, farming and settlement, were a major cause of homicides. Disputes often escalate, leading to violence and killings. A judge interviewed in Narok County pointed out that in those circumstances, men were the majority of the victims:

“In this county, men aged below 34 are the most likely to be killed and it is normally over grazing land disputes. The incidents usually happen when the perpetrator and the victim are drunk and that is why I mostly convict the perpetrators of manslaughter because the incidents are not usually premeditated.”

In some families and communities, killings over land were related to boundary disputes and/or ownership and inheritance. Related to this were business rivalries, where differences over transactions lead to killings. These same differences were reported in the killings of commercial sex workers by their customers after disagreements over payment.

2. Psycho-Social Factors

Mental Health and Psychosocial Issues

Mental health and psycho-social problems were a key explanation for some of the killings. Individuals with weak anger control capacities and mental health problems were easily triggered into violence, particularly when relationships experience difficulties or when faced with economic stress. Some gruesome killings where victims' bodies were mutilated may be attributed to individuals with mental challenges. In many cases, the perpetrators were young men unable to manage their anger.

One offender, interviewed in prison, informed the study team that one is not in a normal mental state at the time of killing. Various interviewees underlined the mental health dimension. However, services available to individuals with high risk of mental illness and violence are very limited

across the country. By the time the criminal justice system is engaged, it is after killings when it is already too late.

Drugs and Substance Abuse

The study established that in many instances alcohol, drug and substance abuse escalated disputes into fatal violence. There were cases of both victims and perpetrators being on drugs or being intoxicated before the killings. Substances commonly mentioned include marijuana, *miraa/muguka* and hard drugs, mainly in Nairobi and the coast (Kilifi and Mombasa). Others perpetrated the killings while under the influence of illicit alcohol such as *chang'aa*, and secondgeneration spirits.

A senior police officer in Kisii County explained how drugs fuel homicide:

“There is one case we are handling where a man, who was a boda-boda rider, killed his wife while they were both drunk. The husband had smoked bhang (marijuana) and returned home and found that his favourite ugali meal had not been prepared. He used a cooking stick (mwiko) to hit his wife on the head and she died instantly, leaving behind a child aged four years and eight months.”

Another illustration of homicide is the case of a 32-year-old convict serving a 20-year jail term in Nakuru County:

“I differed with my brother in a busaa drinking den at night while we were all drunk after he accused me of having an affair with his wife. As I walked towards home, I was suddenly attacked in the dark. I fought the attacker only to realise it was my brother. Since it was near our home, the commotion attracted our elder brother, who came to separate us. However, I accidentally cut my brother, who had come to separate us and he bled to death.”

3. Limited Youth Opportunities and Vulnerability

The country has a bulging youth population (80%), many of whom are struggling to find meaningful opportunities for earning a livelihood. Many are well-educated and skilled but are faced with limited opportunities for gainful employment. Globally, a youthful population coupled with limited economic opportunities is always linked to high levels of crime and violence.

Many young people in Kenya have found themselves in the illicit economics of drug peddling with others joining criminal gangs. In some cases, urban development projects have led to job losses further increasing youth vulnerabilities. For example, the study team was informed that the

beautification programme of Kisumu City led to the closure of many youth-run informal businesses, restricted access to the central business district by hawkers and resulted in the relocation of markets out of town. This has inadvertently led to the rise of violent and murderous youth gangs around Kisumu who can kill for anything, sometimes in broad daylight.

Due to the exposure to technology and social media, youth now aspire for more luxurious lifestyles at a faster pace than the older generations. Without opportunities to occupy them, many have been lured into gangs, and drug abuse, that are sometimes glamorised by the media. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the weakening of the family structure as these young people move out of their homes and end up without any social support.

While economic hardships and poverty do not always lead to killings, they increase desperation, and vulnerability. This leads some young women into high risk commercial sex work. The study established that there were incidents where young women in Nairobi's Njiru and Kasarani areas as well as Kilifi North were lured by clients and traffickers into dangerous situations that led to homicides.

4. Cultural Beliefs and Societal Norms

Cultural beliefs and norms significantly contribute to the killings across the country. The belief in witchcraft, in particular, leads to accusations against individuals, especially elderly men and women, and their subsequent killing. Sometimes the killings of alleged witches take the form of mob violence. This was particularly common in Kisii, and Kilifi counties. Sometimes these accusations of witchcraft were ploys to take over land and other properties of the victims.

Patriarchal norms that privilege and reinforce male dominance have also fuelled violence in families and relationships leading to killing of women. In many parts of the country, retrogressive cultural practices such as wife beating/battery are common. A murder convict in Vihiga Prison reported killing his wife by mistake while 'disciplining' her:

"I inadvertently killed my wife when 'disciplining' her. It is normal in my community to beat a wife. On the fateful day, I was drunk and overdid it. I regret now that she is no more."

Some men do not accept rejection from women and resort to violence as a way of asserting their dominance. One participant in a male focus group discussion held in Kiambu highlighted this:

“We had two cases where two ladies were killed in domestic quarrels. Some men do not accept rejection—they would rather kill than be left by a lover.”

Many communities tolerate or justify violence as a means of resolving disputes. Settling scores for slain relatives appears to be common, particularly where there is little or no confidence with law enforcement and the criminal justice system in general.

5. Institutional and Leadership Failures

The study established that weaknesses and failures in institutions significantly contribute to the violence and homicides.

Systemic Weaknesses in the Entire Criminal Justice Chain

Across the country, there was widespread public perception that security agencies are unable and ineffective in dealing with killings. Many of those interviewed saw the police as distant and limited in their responses to incidents of violence, only turning up when someone has been killed. They noted that there were many cases that went cold and as a result there was widespread perception that one can kill and never be held to account.

The criminal justice system was also seen as too slow and riddled with inefficiencies and loopholes that allow the perpetrators to escape justice. In other words, there was a perception that killings are significantly driven by systemic failures in the criminal justice system.

A judge in Narok County observed the following on institutional weaknesses as contributors of homicides:

“The players in the criminal justice system must learn to fast-track cases and dispute resolution. I have observed that accused persons resort to taking the law into their hands by killing the parties they have disagreed with when they perceive that they are not getting justice or it is delayed. I have noticed less serious offences of unresolved assaults escalating into killings.”

Leadership Failure

This study established that dysfunction at the family level significantly contributes to the lack of guidance to young people making them ill-prepared to fit within communities, institutions and the nation. Many respondents were convinced that how children are raised, right from the family level is wanting.

Community leadership and cohesion have also weakened due to changing socio-economic conditions. The introduction of ‘Nyumba Kumi’ (ten houses) and community policing by the government was aimed at strengthening community engagement and monitoring of their own security concerns, respectively. These models were condemned by many respondents as failing to provide unity and local level security due to dominance by elderly persons, who do not understand and relate well with the many young persons. Community members of these mechanisms however face significant challenges as they are volunteers and they do not even receive any support to facilitate their interventions in the community. As a result, they are demotivated, and also alleged to be involved in extortion in some areas.

Other key institutions above the family and community include educational and religious organisations and those in the criminal justice system. These institutions were seen by respondents as ineffective in their respective mandates and responsibilities. Educational and religious institutions had failed in their preparatory and moulding roles. Criminal justice actors in the police, prosecution and the Judiciary are seen as not providing proper deterrent punishment to prevent homicides and crime, in general. Many see the criminal justice system as corrupt and even when suspects are granted bail, the public believes that they have corrupted their way out. It is even popularly said that, “a rich man/person cannot suffer under the law” or that, “this one cannot be punished because the father/mother owns the police”.

At the national level, those elected every five years in the wards, constituencies, counties and nationally are seen as failing to articulate the visions of orderly and peaceful communities, counties and the nation at large. Respondents complained that their elected representatives lead elitist lives only coming back to them during elections time to bribe the desperate youth and other vulnerable groups for votes. In some cases, these elected leaders intervene to subvert justice. One interviewee informed this study: “I know a case of six young men who stabbed a woman to death and the local MCA intervened to have them released and they ended up stabbing another one.” Some politicians also use criminal groups to kill.

6. Mob Violence

There is a growing culture of mob violence and vigilantism across the country. This culture was explained by the low levels of trust in law enforcement and criminal justice. Communities see mob

violence as a more effective and swift way of delivering justice to suspected criminals. There were many cases of killings through the lynching of suspected thieves and those accused of witchcraft.

7. Entrenched Gender-Based Violence

Many killings of women were linked to widespread gender-based violence. As has been noted even in other studies, gender-based violence is endemic in all parts of the country (Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development, 2024; Kenya Health and Demographic Survey, 2022). In many cases of women killed as a result of domestic disputes, interviews showed that there had been a history of violence that was never addressed. Many of the killings attributed to crimes of passion and by intimate partners were linked to this culture of violence.

In Kisii County, an NCKK official underscored this:

“We have a case here where a man killed his wife and attempted to kill his father due to her suspected infidelity. She had for some time been accused of engaging in sexual affairs with her father-in-law and alleged to have a child with him. One day, her husband was alerted that she had been seen in a nearby stream with the father-in-law. The husband followed up and caught them in the act. They ran away but he later killed the woman and injured his father.”

3.4 Killings of Women and Girls

From the DCI data for 2024, female victims were 303 out of the 1,011 cases. This represents 29.97% of the homicides. Although the figures and proportion appear small, it is important to pay attention to the issue, given the apparent surge in the killings of women across the country, the circumstances in which they were killed and the brutality associated with many of the incidents.

The data shows that the majority of women were killed in spaces where they should feel most safe: homes, and accommodation places such as hotels and Airbnbs. Most (80%) of the killings were by persons who knew the victims well and with whom they were or had been in some form of relationship or were related. Most of the killings were, therefore, not random.

These killings were shaped and driven by broader societal and institutional failures to protect women and address underlying causes of violence. In most instances, there had been a trend and culture of gender-based violence before the killing.

The conclusion of this study is that women in Kenya were most often killed under conditions involving intimate partner violence, relationship conflicts, property disputes, gender-based violence, and socio-economic or cultural pressures. The underlying causes are deeply embedded in societal norms, economic pressures, and systemic weaknesses in protection and access to justice.

Relationships and Domestic Violence

Within the family set-up there were many cases where disputes over land, property or inheritance triggered the killing of women by their spouses and other family members. This was, especially, so in families with unresolved resource (land and finances) conflicts.

There were several cases of killings explained as linked to love triangles or where women were killed by men they had rejected. The study established that in some cases when the relationship ended, the men felt bitter and believed that the women “shouldn’t go free after betraying them”.

Young men interviewed during the study told the researchers that they often felt a sense “ownership” over the women with whom they had a relationship. This belief in the “ownership” of women fuels the violence and killings. A youthful convict serving a 20-year sentence for murder at Kodiaga Prison in Kisumu County confessed to killing his partner over alleged infidelity:

“I killed my girlfriend when I found out she was cheating on me with a friend. I could not bear the pain of years of emotional and financial investment in her. Unfortunately, one of us had to die.”

The killings of women in most cases were the end-point in a long history of violence. As a result, some of the killings were, therefore, not a surprise when they happened. These cases are illustrative of weak social support mechanisms right from the family level to the State. They also signify negative masculinities not well-socialised to accept rejection.

Patriarchal Norms

Some patriarchal cultural norms fuel the killing of women and girls. Some women were killed for rejecting arranged or forced marriages. A case in point, which emerged at the time of this study, was one of a girl at Dadaab Refugee Camp in Garissa County, who was killed after she declined an arranged marriage. This case attracted public attention after the teenager’s ordeal video was broadcast in news and social media channels. It is possible that in communities with high male

dominance and family and social structures that limit women's and girls' free expression, some killings may go unreported or disguised as normal deaths out of illness or other causes.

Stigmatisation of Elderly Women

The stigmatisation of elderly women as witches in Kisii, Kilifi, and other parts of the country has left them vulnerable to killings, including through mob violence. Respondents pointed out that where allegations of witchcraft were involved, even the police were not as quick to respond as in other cases.

Sexual Attacks and Violence

In some cases, women were killed to conceal evidence of sexual assault such as rape and defilement. Commercial sex workers were particularly vulnerable as they operate in the shadows, afraid of the authorities and their clients are not required to present their details at lodgings and rental places. Sex workers have nowhere to complain when threatened or violated and are, therefore, an easy target for sex exploitation, which can occasion violence and homicide. One interviewee in Nairobi stated: *"I have a friend who was a commercial sex worker. She was killed and no justice was done for the girl."* The situation is worse where the alleged perpetrators are foreigners, as they are even more difficult to track down.

Weak Social Support and Justice System

Women's vulnerability to violence and killings is exacerbated by the lack of a social support system for those at grave risk. There was very limited assistance and help for women subjected to violence by their spouses, partners or family. There were no social workers to assist women in need and very few facilities to shelter those who may need to exit abusive situations. Safe houses are few with studies indicating that the country had 54 shelters limited to only 18 of the 47 counties with only two of those managed by the government (UN Women, 2023).

The closest help for many of the women is the chief or village elders or *"wazee wa Nyumba Kumi"*. However, most of these only offer some form of mediation and have no resources or support to extend to victims. The mediation measures were reported to be weak and most perpetrators ignored them without any consequences. The police were seen as too far removed and

unlikely to offer any support. Moreover, in many cases, by the time the police respond decisively, the women will already have been killed.

The main motives and contexts can be summarised as follows:

Table 8: Motives and Contexts for the Killing of Women

Motive/Context	Typical Perpetrator	Common Setting
Intimate partner violence	Husband/boyfriend	Home, private spaces
Love triangles/infidelity claims	Current/former partner	Home, hotels, public areas
Property/inheritance disputes	Family members	Rural homes, family land
Gender-based/sexual violence	Acquaintance/stranger	Various
Economic/financial disputes	Partner, family	Home, business premises
Cultural/traditional practices	Family, community	Rural, peri-urban
Mob justice/witchcraft	Community mobs	Rural, informal settlements
Criminal exploitation	Clients, gangs	Urban and rural hotspots

3.5 Killings of Children

Children were mainly killed within the family and often by someone close to them such as a (step) parent or member of the family. In many instances, children were incidental victims of conflicts between their parents. In some cases, mothers were manipulated or provoked by the stepfathers to commit the killings. There were also cases of “unwanted” babies being thrown into the bush or garbage dumps to die. A police officer in Vihiga narrated a case where a woman killed her child in order to get married:

“A lady under our custody in a murder cases confessed to killing her four-yearold-child out of desperation to get married. An innocent baby’s life was cut short by the very person that should have provided love and care. This is the level of moral decadence that we are in as a society.”

Children born out of incestuous relationships are also thrown away to die. These killings were driven by the stigma of unplanned pregnancies or pregnancies from rape and incestuous relationships. There have been cases where a partner decides to kill the entire family and him or herself. In some rare cases, the study established that children were killed for financial gain, such as insurance fraud or to remove a perceived economic burden on the family in cases of children

living with disabilities. Cultural beliefs such as witchcraft also play a role with some children targeted and killed if perceived as cursed or a source of misfortune.

3.6 Criminal Justice Responses

Over the years, there have been significant reforms to enhance the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. However, the study identified some key challenges and systemic weaknesses that undermine public confidence and trust in the relevant institutions. The key findings touched on the police, prosecution and the Judiciary.

Police and DCI

The study established that the police accord significant seriousness to homicide cases unlike other crimes. Whenever a killing occurs, the police will respond, even if not always on time. The Directorate of Homicide Investigations under the DCI was established to provide strategic leadership in the investigations and resolution of homicide cases. However, the study established that the directorate is faced with capacity and resource challenges that hamper the delivery of its mandate. Within the police service, the study identified the following key challenges:

Investigative Quality

Police and DCI investigations into homicide cases were widely regarded as inadequate. Those interviewed felt that DCI officers do not conduct thorough and adequate investigations due to lack of equipment, limited personnel and corruption. Poor investigations result in failure to identify and arrest the perpetrators, premature termination of investigations and failure to secure community support in giving evidence.

There were also significant concerns over poor scene management leading to contamination of crime scenes before forensic teams arrive. The police also have limited forensic equipment and capacity leading to delays in processing of evidence. Limited numbers of investigators and specialised personnel such as gazetted officers and crime scene experts also significantly undermine investigations.

Corruption

Corruption was reported as a key concern in virtually all the interviews, often even before the question was posed to respondents. It was viewed as endemic and responsible for compromising

the entire justice process. There were widespread allegations of collusion between the investigators and the perpetrators. Many of the respondents pointed out that they did not believe that the police would investigate a homicide or threat without a bribe. Whether it is real or a mere perception, this significantly undermines public trust, and cooperation of the public in giving evidence and reporting potential homicide.

Limited Resources

The study established that the police are faced with a serious and chronic shortage of specialised equipment and tools needed to undertake quality investigations. In an entire county, the DCI may have only one car and one camera. While the DCI has a Forensic Laboratory in Nairobi to support investigations, those interviewed indicated that in some cases, the reagents needed to run tests are lacking.

Skills and Training

There are challenges pertaining to skills and training of police officers to effectively deal with homicides. Not all officers are well-trained to address complex homicides. Regular training of DCI officers is also limited, leading to critical capacity gaps.

Limited Public Cooperation

Police and other respondents pointed out that the public is reluctant to support the police in investigations. Weak community cooperation was attributed to a number of reasons including: the fear that corrupt police officers will share information with perpetrators; fear of retaliation by criminals; limited witness protection; and in some cases, community members' complicity with criminals.

An official of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) in Kisii County stated:

“This place has many homicide cases and they appear to be on the increase. Unfortunately, the local community is not adequately supportive in addressing the problem because some of its members hide the perpetrators and do not like to share information with the authorities. Even the Council of Elders system in Kisii County, which helps in solving community problems, is not strong enough.”

Prosecution

Case Preparation

Interviewees noted that the ODPP faces challenges in building strong cases due to the quality of police investigations, leaving them with incomplete cases with insufficient evidence. Delays in prosecuting cases were also occasioned by lapses in coordination between the investigators and prosecutors. Prosecution-led investigations have been tried but this is yet to gain traction. Police investigators, who are expected to testify, are often transferred before a case is concluded and securing their appearance in court faces delays. Prosecutors are also transferred before the conclusion of cases, slowing down the prosecution.

Resource and Capacity Constraints

There is a shortage of experienced personnel to handle complex homicide cases and prosecutors often find themselves overwhelmed by the high numbers of cases. This often results in delays.

Public Perceptions

When suspects are released on bail/bond and disappear or when cases are withdrawn due to technicalities, the public often perceives prosecutors as corrupt or ineffective. The public understanding of the criminal justice system and role of prosecutors is limited.

Corruption

There were allegations of corruption touching on prosecution. However, in some cases, such as plea bargain, it is likely that the public misinterprets this as corruption.

Judiciary

There have been some positive developments by the Judiciary over the years, including an efficiency increase of 14% in the resolution of criminal cases in the last two years and a performance management score of 93.7% (Judiciary Annual Report, 2022/2023). Nevertheless, the study identified several concerns on homicide cases.

Delay and Backlog of Cases

Homicide cases take a long time to complete, typically about seven years or more with what respondents termed as unending mentions. This delay is occasioned by many factors including understaffing, gaps in police investigations and securing of witnesses.

Judges often get transferred, further slowing down cases. The Judiciary is not responsible for all the delays but once the matters are before courts, the public believes that it is at fault.

Sentencing and Public Perceptions

There were complaints about sentencing and what the public perceives as inconsistency in judgements. This could be attributed to the fact that the public does not understand that each case is decided on its own merit. In addition, families of victims generally feel that the justice system favours the perpetrators over victims. Bail and bond are misunderstood as release from custody through corruption.

Corruption

There is a widespread perception that justice is for sale in Kenya and that the Judiciary is corrupt in its handling of homicide cases. The public reported that there are court “agents” or “brokers” who organise and negotiate and coordinate corruption between the courts and the other criminal justice actors.

3.7 Reforms and Innovations

In spite of these challenges, there have been several reforms and innovations within the criminal justice system aimed at improving the delivery of justice. The prosecution and Judiciary have introduced plea bargaining as a way of hastening the conclusion of cases. This has had a positive impact in reducing the trial periods. In addition, the Judiciary has established mechanisms by posting additional judges to some stations such as Kiambu to reduce the case backlog. Nonetheless, families of homicide victims often feel short-changed in the plea-bargaining arrangements as they are not fully involved.

The ODPP and the police are increasingly using innovations such as prosecution-led investigations to strengthen cases before they are presented to courts.

Other innovations include alternative dispute resolution as well as diversion working with the ODPP.

3.8 Communities and Justice

In some cases, families and communities seem to hide the criminals and even refuse to give evidence. Police officers interviewed pointed out that this is part of the reason why it has been difficult to solve homicide cases.

In many places, such as the informal settlements of Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru and Kisumu, many expressed fear that cooperating with the police would lead them to being associated with crime and could lead to their incarceration. One respondent stated: *“I know someone who reported someone as a possible member of Al-Shabaab and ended up being arrested himself.”* In areas where there are criminal gangs, the public expressed fear that they could trace the witnesses and punish or even kill them, hampering reporting and/or giving evidence.

Some communities report cases to local authorities, while others rely on traditional justice systems such as *Maslaha* to resolve conflicts. In Isiolo County, for instance, young men have been killed in the past while herding livestock due to conflicts over grazing land and water points. Those interviewed stated that some of these incidents are rarely reported to the authorities.

A judicial officer explained why some of these incidents are not reported:

“The community believes they have their own ways of resolving such issues, so they do not see the need to involve the criminal justice system.”

Instead, cash and in-kind settlements are used to compensate the victims’ families. While these methods may be acceptable within the communities, they are unlawful and undermine the rule of law.

Mob violence/ (in)justice is prevalent in areas where people have lost faith in law enforcement. Some of those interviewed alleged that in some cases, the police encourage the public to “deal” with suspected criminals through this mob (in)justice. Ultimately, these forms of addressing problems undermine justice and perpetuate cycles of violence.

CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents summary of the findings with regards to patterns and trends of homicides; causes, drivers and conditions responsible for the apparent surge in homicides including the killing of women, girls and children; and analysis of the criminal justice preventive and response measures; and their adequacy in dealing with homicides. The chapter also provides the conclusions, recommendations and areas for further research.

4.2 Summary of Major Findings

4.2.1 Patterns and Trends

A review of the data on homicides reported to the police in 2024 reveals a fairly high number of homicides across the country (Table 4). The study tabulated 1,011 cases that fit within the definition of homicide as per Kenyan law. Of these, 70 per cent of the victims were male with females accounting for 30 per cent. Where the perpetrators were known, 630 were male and 88 female. There were 149 incidents involving unknown perpetrators.

In summary, the 2024 DCI data of reported/recorded incidents shows that males were the highest number of victims. This might sound surprising, given the many reported cases of killings of women in the media. Police data is, however, quite reliable and the higher percentage of male victimisation is consistent with the records over time and like those from other countries. Male perpetrators of homicides are the overwhelming majority in all cases.

4.2.2 Apparent Surge in Killings

The study concludes that from the annual police statistics, there is no indication that there was a huge increase in the killings in 2024.

However, whether there was the case or not, it is important to note that the perception of most members of the public is that there was. This, in itself, is a problem for relevant agencies as perceptions are critical in determining whether people have confidence in the various measures and interventions to address the problem.

Unfortunately, the current system of official data recording, reporting and case management makes it difficult to establish the actual facts and trends. For one, the summary annual statistics the NPS provides have no details of incidents. There is also a challenge with classification of incidents. It is not possible, for instance, to establish whether an incident is manslaughter or not until it reaches the prosecution stage, yet that category is also included in the annual statistics.

The National Coroners Service Act of 2017 was intended to provide a framework for investigations and determination of the causes of reported sudden, unexplained and unnatural deaths in the country. A coroner's service would ensure that the deaths are investigated by a qualified officer. The operationalisation of the law and hence the service is, however, pending.

Without data from several years, it is difficult to establish whether 2024 experienced a surge or not. Currently, the only available annual series data on homicides is the summary statistics from the NPS headquarters. These statistics are just numbers without comprehensive information on victims, perpetrators, status of investigations, location, and context. Without these details of the incidents, over the years, the summary statistics make it difficult to establish an accurate picture of trends and patterns. Summary statistics are also not well-suited for comprehensive analysis, comparison, planning and informed decision making.

This is a key finding in this study. Comprehensive data is the starting point for effective interventions to address the problem of homicide in Kenya. At the moment, police and policy actors do not have an accurate picture for strategic interventions beyond specific incidents.

4.2.3 Locations and Contexts of Killings

While homicides can happen in any place, there are specific localities and contexts that the data and evidence point to as accounting for most incidents:

Informal Settlements in Urban areas

In all the urban areas, data from the police and field interviews confirm that homicides were largely concentrated in the poorer neighbourhoods – and, in particular, the informal settlements and slums and adjacent areas. In Nairobi City County, 70 per cent of the homicides were occurred in Starehe/Kamukunji, Kariobangi, Kayole, Mathare, Embakasi, Njiru and Kasarani.

These areas constitute is referred to as the Eastlands of Nairobi.

Places Where Land Conflicts were Widespread

Across the country, land conflicts were at the heart of many of the disputes that led to killings within families, among neighbours and business partners, and also fuelled animosity between communities. Many of those interviewed pointed out that land disputes linked to succession within families were a common reason for killings. There were also killings linked to disputed ownership over land between buyers and sellers.

Places with Inter-ethnic/Inter-communal Conflicts

Border areas where different ethnic communities have had long-running land and resource conflicts were also hotspots for the killings. Tensions and conflicts over grazing and even farming, sometimes led to killings and revenge killings. In the Narok-Kisii, Bomet-Kisii and Isiolo border areas, some of the killings were attributed to these conflicts.

Domestic and Private Spaces

A significant number of homicides, and, in particular, those of women and girls occurred in private settings such as homes in both the rural and urban areas, rental apartments, hotels, as well as Airbnbs mainly in urban areas. These killings were often perpetrated by intimate partners, family members, or business and other acquaintances, and were linked to domestic and relationship disputes, business wrangles and gender-based violence.

Public Spaces

In urban areas, some homicides occurred in poorly lit streets, dark alleys, and around entertainment places, especially at night. Victims were sometimes attacked during robberies, gang violence, or after disputes in bars and clubs.

4.2.4 Perpetrator Profiles

Overall, the data from DCI suggests that the majority of the perpetrators of homicides were young males aged between 20 and 40 years. In Nairobi and Mombasa, most of the perpetrators were in their 20s and 30s. There were a few cases (10.1%) where women were the perpetrators. These were largely cases linked to domestic violence, infanticides and relationship disputes/love triangles as well as land and witchcraft suspicion.

Most homicides were perpetrated by people who had a form of relationship with the victims either as neighbours, intimate partners, family members, acquaintances or business relations.

Overwhelmingly, therefore, perpetrators were no strangers to the victims.

4.2.5 Victim Profiles

Men were the primary victims, especially in cases related to cattle rustling, communal conflicts, drunken altercations, land-related conflicts and many mob violence cases, resulting from suspicions of theft. On the other hand, women were predominantly killed in incidents of domestic violence, land/property succession disputes, love triangles and other crime of passion-related homicides.

In some places, the perpetrators targeted people in employment and the business persons/community. In other places, elderly women, women living alone in rural areas and whose husbands were away working in other towns were often victims of rape and killings. Women returning home from funeral vigils and *disco matanga* in places such as Busia County were also targets.

4.2.6 Conditions and Drivers of Homicides

The study established that there was a mix of conditions that explain homicides. Overall, however, the killings were linked to unresolved conflicts at the family and societal levels; psychosocial and mental health problems; economic stressors and limited youth opportunities; cultural beliefs and societal norms; and institutional and leadership failures.

i. Deep-Seated Family, Community, and Business Conflicts

Unresolved Family Conflicts

Many of the killings were driven by deep-seated family, community and business conflicts. At the family level, disputes between spouses and within the family over land, love and relationships, children and inheritance, finances and other resources, were widespread.

At the society/community level, business and land disputes were also prevalent. Many resource-based conflicts, such as those over land or grazing rights, were long running in some regions and often escalated into lethal violence due to the absence of effective dispute resolution frameworks.

Conflicts over Resources

In rural areas, conflicts over land for grazing, farming and settlement, were a major driver of homicides. Disputes often escalated leading to violence and killings.

ii. *Psycho-Social Factors*

Mental Health and Psychosocial Issues

Mental health and psycho-social problems were a key explanation for some of the killings. Individuals with weak anger control capacities and mental health problems were easily triggered into violence, particularly when relationships experienced difficulties, or when faced with some economic stress. Some of the gruesome killings where victims' bodies were dismembered may be attributed to individuals with mental challenges.

Drugs and Substance Abuse

The study established that there were many cases where alcohol and drug abuse escalated the disputes into fatal violence. Alcohol and drugs accelerate aggressive behaviour and impair judgement, leading to killings.

iii. *Limited Youth Opportunities and Vulnerability*

The country has a bulging youth population (80%), many of whom are struggling to find meaningful opportunities for earning a livelihood. Many young people are also well-educated but there are limited opportunities for gainful employment. This fuels frustration and makes them vulnerable to recruitment into the illicit economics of drug peddling and others to join criminal gangs. These economies are linked to violence, including killings by gang members.

iv. *Cultural Beliefs and Societal Norms*

Cultural beliefs as well as norms significantly contribute to the killings across the country. The belief in witchcraft, in particular, led to accusations against individuals - largely elderly men and women - and their subsequent killing. Sometimes the killing of alleged witches took the form of mob violence. Patriarchal norms that privilege and reinforce male dominance also fuelled violence in families and relationships leading to killings of women who rejected these norms. For instance, some girls were killed for rejecting forced marriage.

v. Institutional and Leadership Failures

The study established that weaknesses and failures in institutions significantly contribute to the violence and homicides.

Systemic Weaknesses in the Entire Criminal Justice Chain

Across the country, there was a widespread public perception that security agencies are unable and ineffective in dealing with killings.

Leadership Failure

Leadership across the families, communities and the wider Kenyan society seem to be in crisis and lethal violence reflects that failure. Institutions and actors, who should provide advice, guidance and solutions, in many cases fuelled the violence. For instance, there were many accounts of political leaders influencing the release of homicide suspects.

xi. Mob Violence

There is a growing culture of mob violence and vigilantism across the country. This is explained by the low levels of trust in law enforcement and criminal justice institutions. Communities see mob violence as a more effective and swift way of delivering justice to suspected criminals. There were many cases of killings through the lynching of suspected thieves and those accused of witchcraft.

xii. Entrenched Gender based Violence

Many killings of women are linked to widespread gender-based violence. As has been noted in various studies, gender-based violence is endemic countrywide. Many of the killings attributed to crimes of passion and by intimate partners are linked to this culture of violence. Moreover, even before a killing happened, it was often preceded by a history of violence that is seen as “normal” and which is rarely punished.

4.2.7 Killings of Women and Girls

The study established that there is a culture of violence that underpins the killings of women and girls.

Relationships and Domestic Violence

Most women were killed as a result of relationships and domestic violence. Women were often killed by men they were in a relationship with- be it long-term or casual. In addition, women were killed in places where they were expected to be most safe, the home or private spaces. This speaks to the entrenched culture of normalisation of violence against women.

Patriarchal Norms

Some patriarchal cultural norms are responsible for fuelling the killings of women and girls. Women were killed for rejecting arranged or forced marriages, and when they decide to end relationships with men. Many times, men express a belief in the “ownership” of women in their lives and justify violence on that basis.

Stigmatisation of Elderly Women

The stigmatisation of elderly women as witches in some parts of the country has left them vulnerable to killings, including by mob violence.

Sexual Attacks and Violence

In some cases, women were killed to conceal evidence of sexual assault, rape and defilement. Commercial sex workers were particularly vulnerable, as they operate in the shadows, afraid of the authorities and their clients are not required to present their details at lodgings and rental places.

Weak Social Support and Justice System

Women’s vulnerability to violence and killings is exacerbated by the lack of a social support system for those at risk. There was very limited assistance and help for women subjected to violence by their spouses, partners or family. Those seeking to leave violent relationships had no support services to turn to.

4.2.8 Killings of Children

Children are often killed within the family context and often by someone close to them such as (step)parent or member of the family. Often children were killed as incidental victims of conflicts between their parents. In some cases, mothers were manipulated or provoked by their children’s stepfathers to commit the killings.

4.2.9 Criminal Justice Responses

Police and DCI

The study established that the police usually accord a more significant seriousness to homicide cases than to other crimes. Whenever a killing occurs, the police will respond, even if there might be delays. The Directorate of Homicide Investigations under the DCI was established to provide strategic leadership in the investigations and resolution of homicide cases. However, the study established that the directorate is faced with capacity and resource challenges that make it difficult to deliver on its mandate. The study identified the following key challenges that constrain police interventions:

Investigative Quality

Police and DCI investigations of homicide cases were widely regarded as inadequate. The public and other experts felt that the DCI officers did not conduct thorough and adequate investigations due to lack of equipment, inadequate personnel as well as corruption. Poor investigations resulted in failure to identify and arrest the perpetrators, premature termination of investigations and failure to secure community support in giving evidence.

Corruption

Corruption was reported as a key concern in virtually all the interviews, often even before the question was posed to the respondents. It was viewed as endemic and responsible for compromising the entire justice process. There were widespread allegations of collusion between the investigators and the perpetrators of crimes.

Limited Resources

Police are faced with a serious and chronic shortage of specialised equipment and tools needed to undertake quality investigations. In an entire county, the DCI may have only one car and one camera. Sometimes forensic equipment may not have the reagents needed to run the needed tests.

Skills and Training

There are challenges pertaining to skills and training of police officers to effectively deal with homicides. Not all officers are well trained to address the complexities of some of the homicides.

Limited Public Cooperation

Police and other respondents pointed out that the public is reluctant to support the police in investigations. Weak community cooperation was attributed to a number of reasons, including fear that corrupt police officers might share information with the perpetrators; fear of retaliation by criminals; limited witness protection; and in some cases, community members' complicity with criminals due to close relationships and cultural norms. Most members of the public expressed distrust in the police, hence their reluctance to cooperate with them.

Prosecution

Case Preparation

Interviewees noted that the ODPP faces challenges in building strong cases due to the poor quality of police investigations, leaving them with incomplete cases with insufficient evidence. Delays in prosecuting cases are also occasioned by lapses in coordination between investigators and prosecutors.

Resource and Capacity Constraints

There is a shortage of experienced personnel to handle complex homicide cases and prosecutors often find themselves overwhelmed by the high numbers of cases. This often results in delays.

Community Perceptions

When suspects are released on bail/bond and disappear, or when cases are withdrawn due to technicalities, the public often see the prosecutors as corrupt or ineffective. The public understanding of the criminal justice system and role of prosecutors is limited.

Corruption

There were allegations of corruption in prosecution. However, in some cases, such as plea bargaining, it is possible that the public misinterprets this as corruption.

Judiciary

Delay and Backlog of Cases

Homicide cases take a long time to complete, typically about seven years or more, with respondents frustrated by what they termed as “unending mentions”. This delay is occasioned by many factors, including understaffing, gaps in police investigations and securing witnesses.

Judges also often get transferred, further slowing down the cases.

Sentencing and Public Perceptions

There were complaints about sentencing and what the public perceives as inconsistency in judgements. This could be attributed to the fact that the public does not understand that each case is decided on its own merit. In addition, families of victims generally felt that the justice system favours perpetrators over victims. Bail and bond were misunderstood as release from custody through corruption.

Corruption

There were widespread perceptions that justice is for sale in Kenya and that the Judiciary is also corrupt in its handling of homicide cases. The public reported that there are court “agents” or “brokers” who organise and negotiate for this corruption and coordinate corruption between the courts and the other criminal justice actors.

4.3 Conclusions

Arising from the police and DCI data, the field interviews and analysis, this study makes several conclusions and presents recommendations to various actors. A key conclusion is that a majority of those killed in Kenya were victims of people they knew, or were in a relationship of one kind or another. Second, unresolved conflicts at the family and community levels explain most of the killings. Third, killings are fuelled by a growing culture of violence driven by, among other factors, the low confidence in the criminal justice agencies and a perception that it is easy to get away with crime in Kenya. Fourth, the homicide data held by the NPS and DCI headquarters does not lend itself to comprehensive analysis to guide strategy and policy. Fifth, there was no single driver of the various killings across the country. Rather, there were a host of drivers that intersect at the individual, family and society levels.

4.4 Recommendations

In light of these conclusions, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. The NPS should revise the current system of reporting homicides to the headquarters from summary statistics to full incidents

An incident-based system of reporting will give policy analysts the required information to undertake analyses and generate a more comprehensive understanding of trends and connections between incidents across the country. An incident-based system will also provide the data necessary to understand crime trends and patterns for strategic and policy planning. This is an area where the National Intelligence Service can provide support to the NPS to develop the system.

2. Strengthen and improve the quality of police investigations

The NPS should urgently enhance capacity of investigators through better training and increase in personnel. Scenes of crime officers and gazetted officers are too few to effectively and efficiently respond to the needs.

3. Enhance police capacity for forensic analysis

NPS should address the problem of lack of essential reagents that often delays investigations by the DCI. There is a need to ensure that the DCI forensics unit has the resources to expeditiously undertake analyses.

4. Strengthen the Directorate of Homicide Investigations

The establishment of this directorate is an important step in addressing homicides in a more efficient and strategic manner. However, the directorate needs capacity strengthening for its officers, technology and resources to undertake analysis of trends and patterns and also provide the necessary support to homicide investigators across the country.

5. Operationalise National Coroners Service Act

While Kenya enacted the National Coroners Service Act of 2017 to provide a framework for investigations and determination of the cause of reported sudden, unexplained and unnatural deaths, it is yet to be operationalised. The Act needs to be operationalised and the service established to address the gaps in determining these deaths.

6. Promote public trust in the criminal justice system

There is a serious trust deficit in the criminal justice system that undermines efforts to address killings. There is, therefore, a need for all actors in the criminal justice system (NPS, ODPP and Judiciary) to address the problem of public trust in the criminal justice system. This will address mob violence and also problem of under and non-reporting.

7. NPS to address “cold cases”

There are a significant number of cases that have remained unsolved for many years and which the public believes will never be solved. These “cold cases” are part of the reason that the public has low confidence in the ability of the police to address homicides. The failure to resolve cases also undermines the rule of law and may fuel more killings as perpetrators believe that they can escape punishment. The Cold Cases Unit within the Directorate of Homicide Investigations needs to be strengthened with more resources and capacity to solve these cases. The National Intelligence Service should support the NPS to address some of these complex cases.

8. Educate public about plea bargaining, bail and bond

The ODPP, NPS and Judiciary should continue educating the public on innovations such as plea bargaining as well bail and bond. Currently, the public sees these as evidence of corruption rather than as innovations to ensure justice.

9. Enhance the capacity of the Government Chemist

Investigations into homicides are often delayed by the backlog in the analysis of samples by the Government Chemist. There is need to enhance its capacity and open more offices across the country.

10. Strengthen support to victims of crime

The NPS and the ODPP need to address the gap in support to families of victims of homicides. Information on progress on investigations is not usually available to families of victims, leading them to despair and lose faith in the criminal justice system.

11. Address the drivers of killings in a coordinated manner

Given the multidimensional nature of the drivers of homicides, there is a need for a coordinated approach by the national government in addressing the various conditions. Key among the drivers is unresolved land conflicts and disputes over resources. The responsibility for addressing these is not exclusive to the criminal justice agencies but

rather requires the policy and strategic leadership of the national government. The Ministry of Interior is well placed to provide leadership on this.

12. Address the problem of alcohol, drugs and substance abuse

The study established that alcohol and drug abuse are often linked to homicide cases by increasing aggression and impairing judgement. There is a need for interventions that address the growing problem abuse of drugs and alcohol across the country and, in particular, among the youth. This requires a coordinated approach to address prevention as well as enforcement dimensions. The Ministry of Interior is best-placed to provide leadership on this.

13. Address harmful cultural practices and patriarchal norms

Some of the killings were linked to cultural beliefs in witchcraft as well as patriarchal norms that promote child marriage and gender-based violence. The Ministry of Interior is best-placed to provide leadership and coordination on this.

4.5 Areas of Future Research

This study has identified several issues that call for further in-depth research in the future. First, the issue of mental health and homicides. There have been several cases of perpetrators with suspected mental health problems. The area of mental health and crime remains largely understudied in Kenya and a future study will significantly contribute to much needed policy knowledge on this issue. Second is the issue of children in conflict with the law and in particular those who have committed homicide crimes. The individual as well as social factors that shape the life trajectories of such children would provide critical insights on how and where to intervene effectively. Third, there is a need to understand the extent to which recidivism is linked to violent crime and in particular the crimes of homicide. Fifth, and finally there is need for more granular research into the vulnerabilities of categories of individuals most at risk of violent crimes, including violence.

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APPENDICES: TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION

Appendix 1: Key Informant Guide

(State and non-state actors, e.g., Police/ Prosecution/ Judiciary/ Lawyers/other Experts including CSOs)

Name of County _____

Name of Sub-County _____

Name of Organisation _____

Designation/position of the KII _____

Date & Place of KII: _____

Introduction

Hello, my name is, and I am working for the National Crime Research Centre (NCRC), which is a State Corporation established by the National Crime Research Centre Act (CAP 62 Laws of Kenya). The Centre is conducting a study on homicide in Kenya. It aims to assess the causes of killings, especially in 2024 and the best ways to address the issue. As a stakeholder in matters of safety in this area, we request you to participate in this exercise by providing information on the subject. Your participation is purely voluntary. The information shared will be treated with a high level of confidentiality without disclosing your identity. Do you agree to participate?

IF YES PROCEED WITH THE KII. IF NO, CLOSE THE SESSION AND THANK THE RESPONDENT.

Thank you

1. In your assessment, how serious is the homicide issue/problem in this locality/area? Why/why not?
2. Please share your experience of the homicide cases in the last 12 months. Were they an increase or decrease and why?

3. Who was/were killed? Where did it happen? Did the perpetrators have any relationship with them?
4. What were the circumstances surrounding the killings?
5. What do you think are the root causes of the killings?
6. Can you share what you know about those involved in the incident?
7. In general, are there specific groups of people (men and boys, WOMEN AND GIRLS, elderly, persons with disabilities, etc.) who have experienced more killings? If so why? If killings were generally for every category of people, why do you think so?
8. Are there circumstances specific to this locality/area that could be said to contribute to incidents of homicide?
9. Generally, why are women and girls being killed? Among the females, who is more vulnerable? (rural-urban, younger – elderly, etc.). Under what circumstances are women and girls being killed?
10. What has been the response of the criminal justice sector (probe for police/DCI, ODPP, judiciary/courts) to the killings? What happened after the incidences? *Follow-Up on Justice System Efficacy by these probes for example:*
 “What are your comments on investigations, prosecutions and sentencing?”
 “Can you comment about corruption and homicide cases?”
11. In general, what are the challenges associated to solving the incidence of homicide in this area? Are there challenges linked to the broader criminal justice system?
12. Please share your suggestions on how these challenges can be addressed. By who?
13. What role have families and communities played in supporting or resolving homicide and femicide? Probe for ideas, beliefs, traditions, etc.
14. In general, do you feel safe in your/this community? How about the general public? Why or why not?
15. Do you have any questions to ask?

I/we thank you for your time and cooperation in this research.



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Appendix 2: FGDs Per County

(One for males and one for females (ensure youth membership in each – 4 youth 18-35 years and if possible 1-2 Persons with Disabilities))

Name of County _____

Name of Sub-County _____ Name

of Organisation _____ Take

names for FGDs (names and ages + disability status).

Date & Place of FGD: _____

Introduction

Hello, my name is, and I am working for the National Crime Research Centre (NCRC), which is a State Corporation established by the National Crime Research Centre Act (CAP, 62 LoK). The Centre is conducting a study on homicide in Kenya. It aims to assess the causes of killings, especially in 2024 and the best ways to address this issue. As stakeholders in matters of safety in this area, we request you to participate in this exercise by providing information on the subject. Your participation is purely voluntary. The information shared will be treated with a high level of confidentiality without disclosing your identity. Do you accept to participate?

IF YES, PROCEED WITH THE FGD. IF NO, CLOSE THE SESSION AND THANK THE PARTICIPANTS.

Thank you!

1. In your assessment, how serious is the homicide issue/problem in this locality/area?
Why/why not? PROBE FOR THE CASES, CIRCUMSTANCES AND ROOT CAUSES.
2. In general, are there specific groups of people (locality, men and boys, women and girls, elderly, persons with disabilities, etc.) who have experienced more killings? If so why? If

3. Generally, why are women and girls being killed? Among the females, who is more vulnerable? (rural-urban, younger – elderly, etc.). Under what circumstances are women and girls being killed?
4. What has been the response of the criminal justice sector (probe for police/DCI, ODPP, judiciary/courts) to the killings? What happened after the incidence?

Follow-Up on Justice System Efficacy by these probes, for example:

1. “Were there any delays in investigations?
2. If yes, what caused them?” 3. “Were there any reported cases of corruption in handling homicide cases?????4????
5. In general, what are the challenges associated to solving the incidence of homicide in this area? Are there challenges linked to the broader criminal justice system?
6. In general, do you feel safe in your community? Why or why not?
7. Do you have any questions to ask?

I/we thank you for your time and cooperation in this research.



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Appendix 3: In-Depth Interview (IDI) for Families of the Deceased

Name of County _____

Name of Sub-County _____

Description of the IDI respondent, for example, relation to deceased _____

Date & Place of IDI: _____

Introduction

Hello, my name is, and I am working for the National Crime Research Centre (NCRC) which is a State Corporation established by the National Crime Research Centre Act (CAP 62 of the Laws of Kenya). The Centre is conducting a study on homicide in Kenya. It aims to assess the causes of the killings, especially in 2024 and the best ways to address the issue. As a stakeholder in matters of safety in this area, we wish to request you to participate in this exercise by providing information on the subject. Your participation is purely voluntary. The information shared will be treated with a high level of confidentiality without disclosing your identity. Do you agree to participate?

IF YES, PROCEED WITH THE INTERVIEW. IF NO, CLOSE THE SESSION AND THANK THE RESPONDENT.

1. Please share your experience of the homicide cases in this area in the last 12 months.
2. Now, we are sorry for your loss and hope justice was or will be served to you and the family. Please narrate to me your experience: Who was/were killed in this family? What is your relationship to them? Where did the incident occur?
3. What were the circumstances surrounding the killing?
4. Can you share what you know about those involved in the incident?
5. In general, are there specific group of people (locality, men and boys, WOMEN AND GIRLS, elderly, persons with disabilities, etc.) who have experienced more killings? If so why? If killings were generally for every category of people, why do you think so?
6. How was the case of your family member handled (a probe for police/DCI, ODPP, Judiciary/courts)? What happened after the incidence? Was justice done? What could have been done differently? Please give us more details.
7. In general, what are the challenges associated to solving the high incidence of homicide in this area?
8. Please share your suggestions on how these challenges can be addressed. By who?
9. Do you have any questions to ask?

I/we thank you for your time and cooperation in this research.



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Appendix 4: In-Depth Interview (IDI) with Perpetrators

Name of County _____

Name of Sub-County _____

Description of the IDI respondent, e.g., relation to deceased _____

Date & Place of IDI: _____

Introduction

Hello, my name is, and I am working for the National Crime Research Centre (NCRC), which is a State Corporation established by the National Crime Research Centre Act (CAP 62 Laws of Kenya). The Centre is conducting a study on homicide in Kenya. It aims to assess the causes of the killings, especially in 2024 and the best ways to address this issue. As a stakeholder in matters of safety in this area, we would therefore request you to participate in this exercise by providing information on the subject. Your participation is purely voluntary. The information shared will be treated with a high level of confidentiality without disclosing your identity. Do you accept to participate?

IF YES, PROCEED WITH THE INTERVIEW. IF NO, CLOSE THE SESSION AND THANK THE RESPONDENT. **Ensure Ethical Clearance:** Engaging perpetrators requires **prior legal and ethical approval** from prison authorities.

1. Please tell me/us about yourself. Who you are and why you were/are in custody (police or prison)? What happened and why do you think you ended up there/here?
2. Do you have any information on the person(s) who died? Probe for details on the relationship and reasons behind the killing (real or alleged).
3. In general, within this area or where you allegedly committed the crime, are there specific group of people (men and boys, women and girls, elderly, persons with disabilities, etc.) who have experienced more killings? If so why? If killings were generally for every category of people, why do you think so?
4. How was your case handled by the criminal justice sector (probe for police/DCI, ODPP, judiciary/courts) to the killings? What happened after the incidence? Were you satisfied with the process? Please give us more details.
5. In general, what are the challenges have you faced in resolving your case?
6. Please share your suggestions on how these challenges can be addressed. By who?
7. Before this situation, did you ever seek help (counseling, police, and family) to resolve the conflict? Please share.
8. Do you have any questions to ask?

I/we thank you for your time and cooperation in this research.



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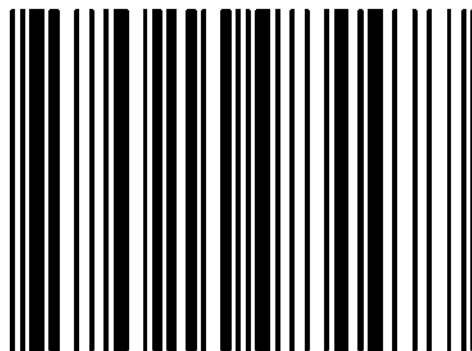
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