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Dynamics of violence disclosure among women in Kenya: trends, changes and associated factors

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Abstract

Background Kenya has ratified and enacted several frameworks and laws in a bid to reduce the incidence of IPV and improve disclosure of violence experience. With these legal and structural mechanisms in place, women's disclosure of IPV is expected to show a positive trend over the years. We examined the trends and factors associated with disclosure of IPV among women in Kenya.

Methods The 2008, 2014 and 2022 Kenya demographic and health survey data was used, with a weighted sample of 6,093 women aged 15–49 years. The sample size for 2008, 2014 and 2022 were 1350, 1165, and 3578, respectively. Violence disclosure was the outcome variable. A logistic regression model was fitted to estimate the predicted probabilities (margins) of reporting violence for each year. Additionally, a multivariable logistic regression was performed to assess factors associated with violence disclosure using a backward stepwise approach.

Results We found a statistically significant increase in the odds of disclosing violence by 65% from 2008 to 2022 [OR = 1.65; 95%CI: 1.41–1.94, $p < 0.001$]. The odds of disclosing violence increased significantly by 35% from 2008 to 2014 (OR = 1.35, $p = 0.003$), and further declined by 23% from 2014 to 2022 (OR = 1.23, $p = 0.012$). Violence disclosure significantly increased with age. Women in the richest wealth index (AOR = 1.78, 95% CI: 1.46–2.16), those currently working (AOR = 1.23, 95% CI: 1.08–1.41), had witnessed parental violence (AOR = 1.14, 95% CI: 1.01–1.29), or had partners who drank alcohol (AOR = 1.41, 95% CI: 1.24–1.59) were also more likely to disclose violence.

Conclusion The findings from this study indicate that violence disclosure among women in Kenya has significantly increased over the years. Women in higher wealth quintile, currently employed, and those exposed to violence in their parental homes were more likely to disclose violence, highlighting the importance of economic empowerment and addressing intergenerational transmission of violence in increasing disclosure rates.

Keywords Violence, Disclosure, Women, Public health, Social science

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Background

Violence against women is an infringement of fundamental human rights, as well as a serious public health concern [1]. According to the World Health Organization [2], one-third of women of reproductive age have ever been victims of physical or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. In Kenya, it is estimated that 36.6%, 31.8%, and 13.1% of women aged 15–49 experience physical, emotional and sexual intimate partner violence (IPV), respectively [3]. This high prevalence of IPV in Kenya is unacceptable and mars the country's vision to end all forms of violence against women by 2030 [4, 5].

It must be noted that in a majority of IPV situations, victims refuse to disclose their experience; hence, exacerbating the likelihood of a vicious cycle of violence. For instance, Boudreau et al. [6] report that among young women only 27.8% were able to disclose their experience of intimate sexual violence. The level of IPV disclosure is low when compared to other African countries including Ethiopia (51%) [7] and Tanzania (40%) [8]. This makes disclosure of IPV experience an important matter in the fight to end all forms of violence in accordance with the sustainability development goal (SDG) target 5.2 [9].

Over the years, Kenya has ratified and enacted several frameworks and laws in a bid to reduce the incidence of IPV and improve disclosure of violence experiences. These laws include the Kenyan Constitution of 2010, the sexual offences Act of 2006, and the Protection against Domestic Violence Act, of 2015 [10]. According to Ahmed et al. [10], the establishment of gender desk services in Kenya has helped to improve violence disclosure even though there is still room for improvement. With these legal and structural mechanisms in place, women's disclosure of IPV is expected to show a positive trend over the years. However, to the best of our knowledge and after an extensive literature search, there is no published evidence of the dynamics in women's disclosure of IPV in Kenya. This knowledge gap needs to be filled to inform policymakers and stakeholders and assess the progress that the country has made towards improving violence disclosure. To this end, we aimed to examine the trends and factors associated with the disclosure of IPV among women in Kenya.

Methods

Design and data source

For this study, we sourced the data from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) conducted in 2008, 2014 and 2022. These three-year survey points were selected to enable us to ascertain the trends and patterns in violence disclosure. The KDHS adopts a cross-sectional design to collect data on several maternal, sexual and reproductive health and rights, nutrition and healthcare seeking indicators [11]. It employs a two-stage

sampling technique that ensures that the data is representative at the regional and national levels [11, 12]. We focused on data from the individual recode (IR) file of the respective survey years. Only variables with complete observations were included in our study. The sample size for 2008, 2014 and 2022 were 1350, 1165, and 3578, respectively. The pooled sample size was 6,093.

Measures

Outcome variable

The outcome variable was disclosure of violence experience. This variable was derived from the question, "Have you told anyone about violence you have experienced". The response was binary, 0=no and 1=yes. Responding yes to this question meant that the participant disclosed violence that they had experienced.

Explanatory variables

We selected the following variables as explanatory variables: age (15–49 years), place of residence (rural and urban), educational attainment (no formal education, primary, secondary, and higher), wealth index (poorest, poorer, middle, richer, richest), current working status (yes or no), year of survey (2008, 2014, and 2022), exposure to parental IPV (yes or no), and partner alcohol consumption (yes or no). Additionally, media exposure was included. Media exposure was created as an index variable of those who read newspapers/magazines, listened to the radio and watched television at least once a week. The selection of these variables was informed by previous studies that found these factors to be significantly associated with violence disclosure [7, 13, 14].

Statistical analysis

To begin with the analysis, we first evaluated the data for the three survey years. In each survey year, we kept only variables of interest and excluded all missing values. Renaming and recoding of the variables were done in the respective survey year data. Data was cleaned for 2008, 2014, and 2022 and appended to have one dataset. This dataset comprised 6,093 observations of women aged 15–49. To address imbalances in the sample distribution, we applied the sample weight v005. We then performed some cross-tabulations to assess the prevalence of violence disclosure for the respective years. Pearson's chi-square test was computed to check for statistical differences in the distribution of violence disclosure. A logistic regression model was fitted to estimate the predicted probabilities (margins) of disclosure of violence for each year. Subsequently, the 'lincom' command was used to compute the differences in odds of reporting between the years. This was done to estimate the percentage change over time. We also computed two sets of binary logistic regression to assess the factors associated with

disclosure of violence among women. The first model assesses the crude association between each explanatory variable and violence disclosure. In the second model, we ran a multivariable logistic regression model. Variables were selected into the multivariable logistic regression by following a backward stepwise approach. The results from the multivariable logistic regression were presented in adjusted odds ratio (AOR) with their corresponding 95% confidence interval (CI). All analyses were conducted with STATA version 18 (StataCorp, College Station, TX, USA) and R.

Results

Participants characteristics

The pooled data shows that most participants were aged 25–29 years (21.7%), resided in rural areas (65.4%), and

had primary education (49.6%). The majority of women had media exposure (68.1%), currently working (63.7%), belonged to the richest wealth index (22.0%), had not witnessed parental violence (56.2%), and had partners who did not drink alcohol (61.8%) (Table 1).

Trends in violence disclosure, 2008–2022

Figure 1 shows an increasing trend in violence disclosure among women in Kenya between 2008 and 2022. In 2008, only 14.3% of women told another person about the violence they had experienced. This increased to 20.4% and 28.5% in 2014 and 2022, respectively.

Table 1 Distribution of weighted sample characteristics

Characteristics	2008 n (%)	2014 n (%)	2022 n (%)	Pooled n (%)
Overall	1350	1165	3578	6093
Age				
15–19 years	54 (4.0)	31 (2.7)	344 (9.6)	438 (7.2)
20–24 years	284 (21.0)	209 (178.0)	647 (18.1)	1138 (18.7)
25–29 years	280 (20.8)	297 (25.5)	748 (20.9)	1324 (21.7)
30–34 years	247 (18.3)	217 (18.6)	527 (14.7)	986 (16.2)
35–39 years	177 (13.1)	167 (14.3)	574 (16.3)	932 (15.3)
40–44 years	155 (11.5)	125 (10.8)	356 (10.0)	636 (10.4)
45–49 years	152 (11.2)	117 (10.1)	370 (10.4)	639 (10.5)
Residence				
Urban	288 (21.3)	478 (41.0)	1329 (37.1)	2106 (34.6)
Rural	1062 (78.7)	687 (59.0)	2249 (62.9)	3987 (65.4)
Education				
No formal education	192 (14.2)	98 (8.4)	229 (6.4)	512 (8.4)
Primary	843 (62.4)	674 (57.8)	1528 (42.7)	3021 (49.6)
Secondary	259 (19.2)	318 (27.3)	1275 (35.6)	1869 (30.7)
Higher	56 (4.1)	75 (6.5)	546 (15.3)	691 (11.3)
Media exposure				
No	926 (68.6)	292 (25.0)	770 (21.5)	1945 (31.9)
Yes	424 (31.4)	873 (75.0)	2808 (78.5)	4148 (68.1)
Wealth index				
Poorest	262 (19.4)	221 (19.0)	621 (17.4)	1102 (18.1)
Poorer	258 (19.1)	237 (20.3)	735 (20.5)	1232 (20.2)
Middle	253 (18.7)	207 (17.8)	687 (19.2)	1148 (18.8)
Richer	276 (20.5)	269 (23.1)	797 (22.3)	1343 (22.0)
Richest	300 (22.2)	231 (19.8)	738 (20.6)	1267 (20.8)
Currently working				
No	427 (31.6)	289 (24.9)	1482 (41.4)	2214 (36.3)
Yes	923 (68.4)	875 (75.1)	2095 (58.6)	3878 (63.7)
Witnessed parental violence				
No	696 (51.6)	646 (55.5)	2078 (58.1)	3427 (56.2)
Yes	656 (48.4)	519 (44.5)	1500 (41.9)	2666 (43.8)
Partner drinks alcohol				
No	792 (58.7)	729 (62.6)	2241 (62.6)	3766 (61.8)
Yes	557 (41.3)	436 (37.4)	1337 (37.4)	2327 (38.2)

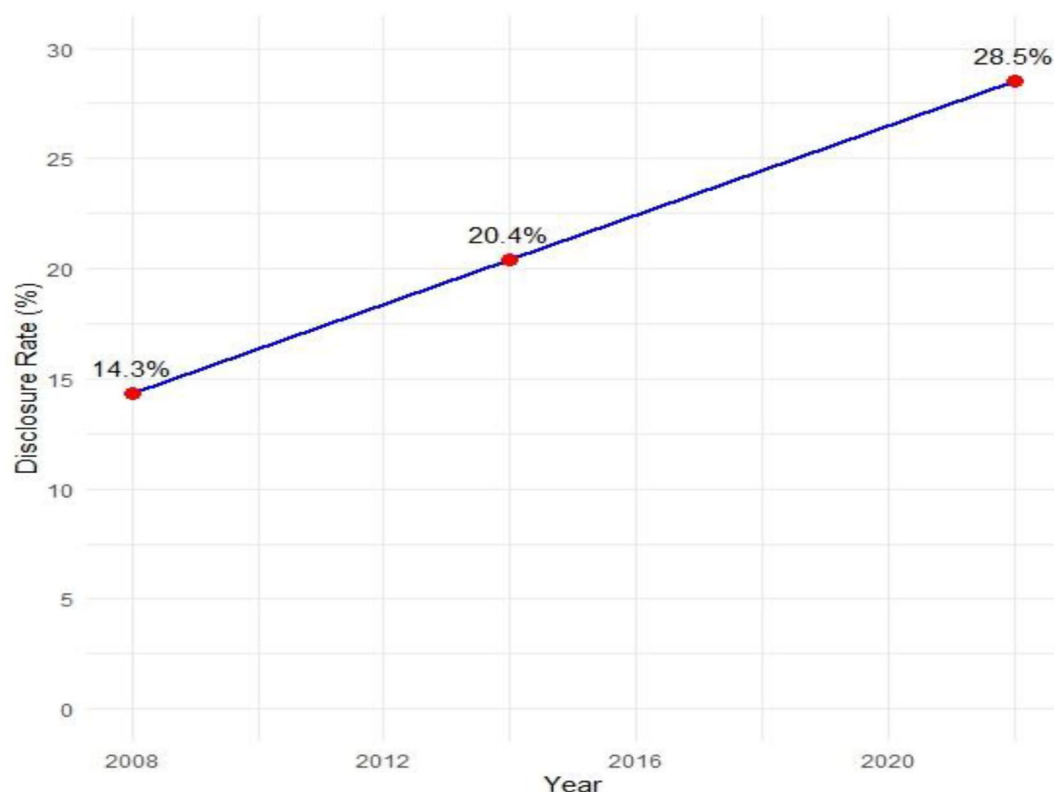


Fig. 1 Trends in violence disclosure among women in Kenya, 2008–2022. NB: The estimates are weighted

Prevalence of violence disclosure among women in Kenya, 2008–2022

The pooled prevalence of violence disclosure was high among women aged 35–39 years (30.3%), those living in urban areas (28.3%), and those with higher education (32.4%). Women with media exposure had a disclosure rate of 26.3%, while those in the richest wealth quintile disclosed at 30.2%. Currently working women disclosed violence at a rate of 25.2%, and women whose partners drank alcohol reported the highest disclosure rate at 28.7% (Table 2). Similar patterns were observed for the respective survey years.

Comparison of violence disclosure between years, 2008–2022

The odds of reporting violence have increased by 65% from 2008 to 2022 [OR=1.65; 95%CI: 1.41–1.94, $p<0.001$]. Our findings show that the odds of disclosing violence in 2014 was higher than in 2008 [OR=1.35; 95%CI: 1.11–1.65]. Also, violence disclosure in 2022 was 1.23 times higher than in 2014 [OR=1.23; 95%CI: 1.05–1.43] (Table 3).

Factors associated with violence disclosure among women in Kenya, 2008–2022

The results revealed that compared to the youngest age group (15–19 years), women aged 30–34

years (AOR=1.53, 95% CI: 1.10–2.12), 35–39 years (AOR=1.56, 95% CI: 1.12–2.17), and 40–44 years (AOR=1.53, 95% CI: 1.08–2.17) were more likely to disclose violence. Also, women in the richest wealth index had the highest odds of disclosure (AOR=1.78, 95% CI: 1.46–2.16). Women who were currently working (AOR=1.23, 95% CI: 1.08–1.41), had witnessed parental violence (AOR=1.14, 95% CI: 1.01–1.29), or had partners who drank alcohol (AOR=1.41, 95% CI: 1.24–1.59) were also more likely to disclose violence. Additionally, the likelihood of disclosure increased significantly over time, with women surveyed in 2022 being more likely to disclose violence than those surveyed in 2008 (AOR=1.79, 95% CI: 1.52–2.11) (Table 4).

Discussion

Our study reveals that there has been a 65% increase in women's disclosure of violence between 2008 and 2022. This upward trend is likely a reflection of the concerted efforts made by the Kenyan government and various non-governmental organizations to create an environment that encourages and supports survivors in coming forward. Key among these efforts is the implementation of legal and structural frameworks such as the establishment of gender desks at police stations, which provide a more supportive and specialized response to cases of gender-based violence, and the enactment of the

Table 2 Proportion of women who disclosed violence in Kenya, 2008–2022

Characteristics	Proportion of women who disclosed violence 2008–2022			
	2008 n (%)	2014 n (%)	2022 n (%)	Pooled n (%)
Age				
15–19 years	8 (15.1)	2 (6.2)	70 (20.4)	82 (18.8)
20–24 years	40 (14.0)	48 (22.9)	168 (26.0)	258 (22.7)
25–29 years	28 (10.0)	66 (22.1)	217 (29.0)	315 (23.8)
30–34 years	43 (17.4)	46 (21.2)	153 (29.1)	244 (24.7)
35–39 years	24 (13.4)	40 (24.0)	214 (36.7)	283 (30.3)
40–44 years	28 (18.1)	23 (18.6)	107 (30.1)	160 (25.2)
45–49 years	23 (14.9)	13 (10.7)	89 (23.9)	125 (19.6)
Residence				
Urban	64 (22.1)	106 (22.2)	420 (31.6)	597 (28.3)
Rural	130 (12.2)	131 (19.1)	599 (26.6)	869 (21.8)
Education				
No formal education	22 (11.5)	21 (21.9)	40 (17.4)	83 (16.1)
Primary	108 (12.9)	144 (21.4)	428 (28.0)	684 (22.6)
Secondary	51 (19.8)	63 (19.8)	354 (27.8)	476 (25.5)
Higher	12 (21.1)	9 (12.0)	197 (36.1)	224 (32.4)
Media exposure				
No	131 (14.2)	51 (17.6)	196 (25.5)	376 (19.3)
Yes	62 (14.7)	186 (21.3)	823 (29.3)	1090 (26.3)
Wealth index				
Poorest	30 (11.6)	48 (21.7)	139 (22.4)	219 (19.9)
Poorer	26 (10.1)	46 (19.3)	218 (29.6)	294 (23.9)
Middle	43 (17.1)	43 (20.6)	185 (26.9)	273 (23.8)
Richer	28 (10.3)	46 (17.0)	218 (27.4)	297 (22.1)
Richest	65 (21.8)	55 (24.0)	259 (35.1)	383 (30.2)
Currently working				
No	54 (12.7)	60 (20.7)	367 (24.8)	489 (22.1)
Yes	139 (15.1)	177 (20.3)	652 (31.1)	977 (25.2)
Witnessed parental violence				
No	107 (15.3)	123 (19.0)	572 (27.5)	812 (23.7)
Yes	87 (13.3)	115 (22.1)	447 (29.8)	655 (24.6)
Partner drinks alcohol				
No	99 (12.5)	143 (19.6)	545 (24.5)	799 (21.2)
Yes	95 (17.0)	95 (21.8)	470 (35.2)	668 (28.7)

Table 3 Comparison of violence disclosure between years, 2008–2022

Years	Predicted probabilities Margin [95%CI]	p-values	Years comparison	Odds of disclosure OR [95%CI]	p-values
2008	0.17 [0.15–0.19]	< 0.001	2014 vs. 2008	1.35 [1.11–1.65]	0.003
2014	0.22 [0.20–0.24]	< 0.001	2022 vs. 2014	1.23 [1.05–1.43]	0.012
2022	0.26 [0.24–0.27]	< 0.001	2022 vs. 2008	1.65 [1.41–1.94]	< 0.001

Protection Against Domestic Violence Act of 2015 [10]. This Act has been pivotal in offering legal protection and recourse to victims of IPV, thus fostering a climate of trust in the system and reducing the fear of retaliation or stigma associated with reporting. Despite the increasing trend, the observed violence disclosure rate is lower than what has been reported in Ethiopia (51%) [10] and Tanzania (40%) [8]. Thus, highlighting a need for more

concerted effort to be made to encourage women's disclosure of IPV.

Women in the richest wealth index had a 78% higher likelihood of disclosing IPV compared to those in the poorest category. This finding aligns with existing literature, which suggests that economic empowerment plays a crucial role in enabling women to break the silence around IPV. It also supports our findings that individuals who are employed are more likely to disclose IPV

Table 4 Factors associated with violence disclosure among women in Kenya, 2008–2022

Characteristics	Model I COR (95%CI)	Model II AOR (95%CI)
Age		
15–19 years	Ref.	Ref.
20–24 years	1.41 [1.02–1.95]*	1.34 [0.96–1.87]
25–29 years	1.47 [1.07–2.01]*	1.31 [0.95–1.82]
30–34 years	1.72 [1.25–2.37]**	1.53 [1.10–2.12]*
35–39 years	1.81 [1.31–2.51]***	1.56 [1.12–2.17]**
40–44 years	1.79 [1.28–2.53]**	1.53 [1.08–2.17]*
45–49 years	1.38 [0.97–1.96]	1.19 [0.83–1.71]
Residence		
Urban	Ref.	-
Rural	0.74 [0.65–0.84]***	-
Education		
No formal education	Ref.	-
Primary	1.43 [1.19–1.72]***	-
Secondary	1.59 [1.30–1.95]***	-
Higher	2.01 [1.57–2.58]***	-
Media exposure		
No	Ref.	-
Yes	1.29 [1.14–1.47]***	-
Wealth index		
Poorest	Ref.	Ref.
Poorer	1.33 [1.11–1.60]**	1.29 [1.07–1.56]**
Middle	1.26 [1.04–1.52]*	1.19 [0.98–1.44]
Richer	1.31 [1.09–1.57]**	1.24 [1.03–1.49]*
Richest	1.79 [1.49–2.16]***	1.78 [1.46–2.16]***
Currently working		
No	Ref.	Ref.
Yes	1.35 [1.19–1.53]***	1.23 [1.08–1.41]**
Witnessed parental violence		
No	Ref.	Ref.
Yes	1.09 [0.97–1.23]	1.14 [1.01–1.29]*
Partner drinks alcohol		
No	Ref.	Ref.
Yes	1.48 [1.31–1.67]***	1.41 [1.24–1.59]***
Year of survey		
2008	Ref.	Ref.
2014	1.35 [1.11–1.64]**	1.41 [1.15–1.72]**
2022	1.65 [1.41–1.94]***	1.79 [1.52–2.11]***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

(-) Variables excluded after backward stepwise approach

incidence. The result may be explained from the perspective that women with greater financial resources are less economically dependent on their intimate partners, reducing the fear of economic repercussions such as losing financial support, housing, or custody of children, which often acts as a barrier to disclosure [7]. Another school of thought is that women with a better economic status are less likely to tolerate act of violence from an intimate partner [15]. As such, they are more likely to disclose violence to prevent perpetuation. Furthermore, economic security may also bolster a woman's self-esteem

and sense of agency, making her more likely to assert her rights and seek help when faced with violence.

Consistent with previous literature [7, 16], we found that the odds of disclosing IPV was significantly higher among women whose partners consumed alcohol. Alcohol consumption is known to impair judgment, lower inhibitions, and increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior [17]. When under the influence, individuals may be more prone to lose control, leading to more frequent and severe acts of violence against their partners. This heightened risk of aggression likely compels women

in these situations to seek help by disclosing their experiences of IPV. Moreover, the relationship between alcohol consumption and IPV disclosure may also be influenced by the perceived unpredictability of violence. Women with partners who consume alcohol might experience a greater sense of fear and uncertainty, as the episodes of violence may be more volatile and unpredictable. This unpredictability can create a heightened sense of urgency for women to disclose the violence to protect themselves and their children from potential harm [7]. The hope is that by disclosing the violence, they might receive support from family, friends, or authorities, which could help to avert further aggression.

Our study also revealed that women who had witnessed parental violence were 1.14 times more likely to disclose their experience of IPV. This finding corroborates a study conducted in Uganda [14] that found 5.4 times higher odds of violence disclosure among women who had witnessed parental violence than their counterparts who had not. A similar pattern of association has been reported in the United States [18]. A possible explanation for this association is that women who grew up in environments where violence was prevalent may develop a heightened awareness of the dangers and consequences of IPV. Having witnessed the effects of violence firsthand, these women might be more attuned to recognizing abusive behaviors and more likely to view disclosure as a necessary step to seek help and prevent further harm. Furthermore, experiences of witnessing parental violence may also instill a sense of resilience or a desire to break the cycle of violence, motivating these women to speak out rather than suffer in silence.

Implications of the findings

This study highlights a need for social interventions and violence disclosure advocacy to target young women since they have lower odds of disclosure. Also, the positive association between wealth status and violence disclosure suggest that poverty alleviation programs and financial empowerment initiatives may be effective strategies in reducing underreporting. The association between witnessing parental violence and disclosure emphasizes the need for intergenerational approaches that address the cycle of violence within families.

Strengths and limitations

One of the strengths of this study is the sampling approach. The two-stage sampling technique ensures that the findings are representative at the national and regional level. As such, we are able to generalize our findings of the larger population of women 15–49 years in Kenya. Secondly, we used appropriate statistical analytical approaches to estimate the trends, percent changes and associated factors. The detailed analysis makes

room for replication of the analysis in similar contexts as Kenya. Despite these merits, we cannot infer causality since the KDHS is based on a cross-sectional design. The findings may not be generalizable in understanding violence disclosure among men. Moreover, since the study was based on secondary data, we were limited to only variables in the dataset. This means that key confounders such as availability of social support, previous experience with law enforcement and social service, level of community violence, and cultural norms were not controlled in our regression model.

Conclusion

The findings from this study indicate that violence disclosure among women in Kenya has significantly increased over the years. Women in higher wealth brackets, those who are employed, and those exposed to violence in their parental homes are more likely to disclose violence, highlighting the importance of economic empowerment and addressing intergenerational transmission of violence in increasing disclosure rates.

Abbreviations

AOR	Adjusted Odds Ratio
COR	Crude Odds Ratio
CI	Confidence Interval
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
KDHS	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey

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Author contributions

JO conceived and designed the study. JO and CA contributed to the design of the analysis. JO performed the formal analysis and provided methodological insights. JO, AKD, CA and KSD drafted the initial manuscript. KSD supervised the research. All authors read, revised and approved the final manuscript for submission. JO had the responsibility of submitting the manuscript.

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Data availability

The datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study is available in the Measure DHS repository: <http://dhsprogram.com/data/available-datasets.cfm>.

Declarations

Ethical approval and consent to participate

We did not need to seek ethical clearance because the KDHS dataset we used is publicly available. We obtained the datasets from the KDHS Program after completing the necessary registration and getting approval for their use. We followed all the ethical guidelines that pertain to using secondary datasets in research publications. Details of KDHS data and ethical standards followed can be found here: <http://goo.gl/ny8T6X>.

Consent for publication

None declared.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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