

# **Influence of Psychological Gender-Based Violence on Household Livelihood Sustenance: Implications for Mental Wellness among Women in Tharaka North Sub-County, Kenya**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Psychological gender-based Violence continues to undermine sustainable rural development by reducing household productivity, increasing vulnerability, and weakening community resilience. Among its various forms, Psychological Gender-based violence affects psycho-social well-being of households as well as mental health conditions. However, empirical evidence on its influence on household livelihood sustenance and mental wellness among women in rural Kenya remains limited. This study examined the influence of Psychological Gender-based violence on household livelihood sustenance and its implication on mental wellness among women in Tharaka North Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. The study was guided by the Sustainable Livelihood Theory and Femicide Theory. The study adopted a mixed research design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from 392 respondents comprising household representatives and key informants using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and simple linear regression analysis using SPSS Version 31.0, while qualitative data were analysed thematically using NVivo Version 14. The findings established that Psychological Gender-based violence significantly reduced household livelihood sustenance and increased mental stress. It further increased cases of trauma and negatively affected self-esteem levels. Psychological violence had a statistically significant negative influence on household livelihood sustenance ( $R^2 = 0.563$ ,  $P < .001$ ), demonstrating that households experiencing higher levels of psychological gender-based violence were more likely to experience increased mental health related issues and reduced livelihood outcomes. The study concludes that preventing Psychological Gender-based violence is essential for improving mental wellness and strengthening livelihood resilience among women in Tharaka community. It recommends improving survivor support services and integrating violence prevention initiatives into rural livelihood mental health programmes.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender-based psychological violence is a painful reality for millions of people around the world. The conversation around Psychological Gender-based violence has traditionally focused on women, largely because they remain the most frequent victims. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2024), most acts of Psychological Gender-based violence are committed by men, with intimate partners. Psychological Gender based violence deeply affects household livelihood making it harder for families to stay financially stable, meet basic needs, and live healthy lives. This kind of Gender-based violence comes in different forms, including sexual harassment, emotional violence, and verbal abuse. Psychological and sexual violence like constant insults or threats, can lead to depression, anxiety, and fear, making it difficult for women to make decisions or participate in everyday life (EIGE, 2022). It can also prevent women from working or taking care of their families, since women often play a major role in providing food, income, and care, violence against them can also lead to children missing school, poor nutrition, and rising household stress. One of the most direct consequences of Psychological Gender-based violence is the disruption of women's economic participation. According to the National Family Health Survey-India (NFHS-5), nearly one in three women (29.3%) aged 18–

49 who have ever been married report experiencing spousal violence (MoHFW, 2021). Women subjected to Psychological Gender-based violence are more likely to miss work, have lower productivity, or even be forced to leave employment due to injuries, mental trauma, or controlling partners. Psychological Gender-based violence significantly disrupts women's livelihoods and Mental well-being across Africa. In West Africa, particularly Nigeria, a study by Okoroafor et al. (2024) found that over 90% of surveyed women farmers in Enugu and Anambra States were aware of Psychological Gender-based violence, with many reporting experiences of verbal, and sexual abuse. These forms of violence were linked to psychological distress, increased anxiety, and diminished household income, ultimately threatening food security and encouraging rural-urban migration. According to the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, Tharaka-Nithi County has a significant problem with psychological gender-based Violence. Approximately 35% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have been psychologically abused since they were 15, and 14% had done so during the last 12 months. Notably, household survey report (2022) points out that 13% of women in Tharaka-Nithi county are victims of gender based sexual violence. Given the prevalence of psychological Gender-based violence in the county, over half (46%) of women who had ever been married or in a relationship reported experiencing violence from their most recent partners, and 33% had done so in the previous 12 months (KNBS, 2022).

### Statement of the Problem

Many people, especially women, experience psychological gender-based violence such as sexual violence, emotional harm, and financial control. These acts affected not only the individuals involved but also the mental wellbeing of entire households. Gender based violence often results in lost income, broken family relationships, poor food security, and emotional stress. Despite ongoing awareness creation and legal interventions, Psychological Gender-based violence continue to be a significant challenge affecting mental health and households livelihoods. Most existing research largely focused on women as victims of economic deprivation, which was important, but this had limited the understanding of how their mental health wellness was affected too. This study therefore sought to address this gap by examining the influence of psychological gender-based violence on household livelihoods and mental wellness of women in Tharaka North Sub-County, with the aim of informing policies and programmes that would support survivors of all genders and strengthen household and community resilience. Therefore, the study sought to examine the influence of psychological gender -based violence on household livelihood sustenance and implication on mental wellness of women in Tharaka North Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Gender-based violence has increasingly gained attention due to its far-reaching impacts on individuals and households globally. Psychological Gender-based violence includes emotional abuse, threats, controlling behaviour, verbal aggression, humiliation, and coercive tactics that significantly affect mental health, productivity, and economic stability of households. Bogat et al. (2020) define psychological gender violence as: "A pattern of coercive behaviours that undermine an individual's mental and emotional well-being, such as intimidation, humiliation, and constant criticism, leading to long-term psychological harm. Postmus et al. (2022) describes psychological gender based violence as: "Non-psychological acts of harm aimed at controlling, belittling, or instilling fear in a person, which can lead to anxiety, depression, and a sense of powerlessness over time. Psychological Gender-based violence affects household livelihood sustenance globally, this form of abuse, characterized by emotional manipulation, threats, and intimidation, undermines individuals' mental health, limiting their capacity to contribute to household well-being. Similarly, in Brazil, Psychological Gender-based violence exacerbated economic dependency, making it challenging for victims to escape abusive relationships and improve their livelihoods (Santos & Ribeiro, 2021). These dynamics contributes to prolonged poverty, mental health issues and household instability.

A global study by Yount et al. (2021), titled "Global Patterns of Psychological Intimate Partner Violence and Associated Risk Factors," analysed data from over 124,000 women across 36 low- and middle-income countries. The study revealed that Psychological Gender-based violence is widespread, with a prevalence ranging from 5 to 49 percent. It often occurs alongside sexual violence. The study emphasized that Psychological Gender-based violence is a distinct and damaging form of violence that warrants separate recognition in policy and practice. In Western contexts, Eckert (2018) conducted a study involving women bloggers from the United Kingdom.

The study found strong associations between Psychological Gender-based violence and financial insecurity, poor mental health, and diminished capacity to make economic decisions. Survivors faced challenges in maintaining employment and managing household responsibilities. Cavanaugh et al. (2022) therefore recommended trauma-informed financial empowerment programs within domestic violence support services to build economic resilience among affected individuals. In Nigeria, Oduro et al. (2020) investigated how psychological abuse affects women's mental health. Their study involved 500 women from both urban and rural settings, using a quantitative approach to examine the correlation between emotional abuse and mental health conditions. The researchers found that controlling behavior and verbal abuse were associated with increased cases of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Psychological Gender-based violence contributed to long-term emotional distress, social isolation, and increased financial dependence.

In Kenya Njiru et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study in Nairobi to examine how Psychological Gender-based violence affects women's socio economic and mental well-being. The study found that emotional abuse, including insults, threats, and controlling behaviour, led to increased mental challenges and social exclusion. The study recommended gender sensitization campaigns and targeted economic empowerment programs to help women become more independent and resilient in the face of such abuse. Hatcher et al. (2020) looked at the mental health of people living with HIV and AIDS through the lens of psychological livelihood interventions. Though not centered on intimate partner violence, the study related psychological wellbeing to mental health and livelihood support. Using a randomized controlled trial with 45 experimental and 9 control participants, the researchers found that those receiving support showed marked improvements in mental health, including lower levels of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. Better food availability, increased psychological activity, and active community engagement contributed to this improvement. This supports the idea that tackling emotional abuse can restore the economic productivity and psychosocial wellbeing of affected individuals. Together, these studies highlight the global and multifaceted nature of Psychological Gender-based violence. Whether in the form of intimate partner abuse, digital harassment, political surveillance, or stigma associated with health conditions, Psychological Gender-based violence profoundly affects individuals' mental health, economic productivity, and household stability.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. According to Creswell (2018), a descriptive research design enables researchers to systematically collect, analyse, and present information about a phenomenon as it exists within a particular population. The design was considered appropriate because it facilitated the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the prevalence, causes, and effects of Psychological Gender-based violence on household livelihood and mental wellness among women. The target population for this study comprised 58,388 respondents drawn from households and key stakeholder groups within Tharaka North Sub-County. A sample of 392 respondents were used for this study. The study employed a combination of stratified random sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling techniques to select respondents from the target population of 58,388 respondents in Tharaka North Sub-County. A stratified sampling approach was adopted to ensure adequate representation of all respondents thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the study findings.

## Findings

The objective of the study was to examine how psychological gender-based violence affect household Livelihoods and Mental Health of women in Tharaka North Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County. The regression findings revealed a highly strong and statistically significant negative correlation between psychological gender-based violence and household livelihood sustenance ( $R = -0.794$ ,  $R^2 = 0.630$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.629$ ,  $F = 664.380$ ,  $p < .001$ ). On mental wellness, the model predicted 63.0% of the variance among the respondents making it the most significant one.

Table 1. Respondents' Perceptions on Household Livelihood Sustenance and mental wellness (n = 392)

| Survey Statement                                                     | DS n (%)   | D n (%)    | NS n (%)   | A n (%)     | AS n (%)    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. We have slept hungry in this household                            | 58 (14.8%) | 47 (12.0%) | 58 (14.8%) | 112 (28.6%) | 117 (29.8%) |
| 2. There has been experience of going without water in the household | 65 (16.6%) | 52 (13.3%) | 63 (16.1%) | 105 (26.8%) | 107 (27.3%) |
| 3. I often experience lack of sleep .                                | 52 (13.3%) | 39 (9.9%)  | 23 (5.9%)  | 153 (39.0%) | 125 (31.9%) |
| 4. There has been poor hygiene in the household                      | 73 (18.6%) | 58 (14.8%) | 65 (16.6%) | 99 (25.3%)  | 97 (24.7%)  |
| 5. There was denial to good social life in the household             | 63 (16.1%) | 48 (12.2%) | 58 (14.8%) | 110 (28.1%) | 113 (28.8%) |
| 6. I feel discriminated in this household                            | 58 (14.8%) | 42 (10.7%) | 53 (13.5%) | 114 (29.1%) | 125 (31.9%) |
| 7. We have experienced poor health in the household                  | 53 (13.5%) | 36 (9.2%)  | 59 (15.1%) | 118 (30.1%) | 126 (32.1%) |
| 8. Sometimes this home experiences high levels of anxiety            | 58 (14.8%) | 43 (11.0%) | 62 (15.8%) | 111 (28.3%) | 118 (30.1%) |
| 9. I attribute violence to high stress levels in this household      | 48 (12.2%) | 36 (9.2%)  | 52 (13.3%) | 126 (32.1%) | 130 (33.2%) |
| 10. My self esteem levels has recently gown down                     | 42 (10.7%) | 31 (7.9%)  | 47 (12.0%) | 131 (33.4%) | 141 (36.0%) |

**Key:** DS = Disagree Strongly; D = Disagree; NS = Not Sure; A = Agree; AS = Agree Strongly.

**Source:** Study Findings (2026)

An analysis of the results of the Table 1 shows that the responds perceive Psychological Gender-based violence has having had an adverse effect on livelihoods sustainability and mental wellness within the household in Tharaka North Sub-County. Most respondents felt their households faced different challenges in their livelihoods stemming from the sexual violence, trauma, poor health, social exclusion, discrimination and low self-esteem.

Study results indicate that Psychological Gender-based violence is linked to resource limitations that affect households' ability to meet their basic needs. The results also align with the findings of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2024) suggesting that household gender violence is associated with food insecurity, increased mental health and decreased access of households to essential services. The ILO report (2023) has made similar observations, suggesting that psychological gender-based violence has significant negative impacts on the mental wellness and household economic resilience. The findings also show that 50.0% of the respondents noted poor hygiene within their household; and that 56.9% of the respondents noted their family's social life was denied because of circumstances related to sexual violence. The results suggest that psychological Gender-based violence has implications for social welfare and the living conditions besides economic well-being. UN Women (2024) reported that survivors of gender-based violence are often socially excluded, and stigmatized, which in turn negatively impacts community participation leading to reduced household welfare. A one-unit rise in Psychological Gender-based violence lowers household means of living

support by 0.821 units, as indicated by the regression coefficient ( $B = -0.821$ , 95% CI =  $-0.883$  to  $-0.758$ ). The strong negative influence of psychological abuse is confirmed by the standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta = -0.794$ ). With  $t = -25.776$ ,  $p < .001$ , the t-statistic shows that this association is very statistically significant.

These results show that psychological gender-based abuse greatly compromises household mental wellness. The stress, worry, and social impairment that follow compromise household social stability too. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, so confirming that psychological abuse significantly affects mental wellness of household members, contributing to social isolation, less family cohesiveness, and degraded house resilience. Participants said that fear, shame, and low self-esteem drive victims to stay away from community activities, self-help groups and religious activities. This is a precursor to mental health related issues. The regression findings revealed a highly strong and statistically significant negative correlation between psychological Gender-based violence and household income sustenance ( $R = -0.794$ ,  $R^2 = 0.630$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.629$ ,  $F = 664.380$ ,  $p < .001$ ). On influence of psychological Gender-based violence on household support, the model predicted 63.0% of the variance in family life support—making it the most significant

A one-unit rise in Psychological Gender-based violence lowers household means of living support by 0.821 units, as indicated by the regression coefficient ( $B = -0.821$ , 95% CI =  $-0.883$  to  $-0.758$ ). The strong negative influence of psychological gender-based abuse is confirmed by the standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta = -0.794$ ). With  $t = -25.776$ ,  $p < .001$ , the t-statistic shows that this association is very statistically significant. Participants repeatedly said psychological abuse including verbal assault, bullying, humiliation, threats, and emotional manipulation compromises victims' emotional mental well-being and capacity to pursue meaningful work. Respondents said that ongoing emotional abuse saps their confidence, focus, and drive.

Participants also said that psychological abuse interferes with victims' capacity to make wise decisions about wealth, investments, and life planning. Constant worry, anxiety, and emotional manipulation usually result in bad financial decisions and less involvement in household decision-making, therefore influencing general household economic stability.

The qualitative results also showed that psychological gender-based abuse causes social isolation, less family cohesiveness, and degraded house resilience. Participants said that fear, shame, and low self-esteem drive victims to stay away from community activities, self-help groups, and group projects. This reduces social support systems' access and means of existence that may help to raise family welfare. The regression findings revealed a highly strong and statistically significant negative correlation between Psychological Gender-based violence and mental health among women ( $R = -0.794$ ,  $R^2 = 0.630$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.629$ ,  $F = 664.380$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

A one-unit rise in Psychological Gender-based-violence increases mental health related issues by 0.821 units, as indicated by the regression coefficient ( $B = -0.821$ , 95% CI =  $-0.883$  to  $-0.758$ ). The strong negative influence of psychological gender based Violence is confirmed by the standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta = -0.794$ ). With  $t = -25.776$ ,  $p < .001$ .

By lowering victims' emotional state, decision-making ability, motivation, and level of involvement in daily activities, mental health is compromised. The stress, worry, and social impairment that follow compromise household emotional connectedness and household survival.

Participants repeatedly said psychological abuse including verbal assault, bullying, humiliation, threats, and emotional manipulation compromises victims' emotional well-being and capacity to pursue meaningful work. Respondents said that ongoing emotional abuse saps their confidence, focus, and drive, which makes it challenging to properly engage in meaningful family activities. The qualitative results also showed that psychological gender-based abuse causes social isolation, less family cohesiveness, and degraded house resilience. Participants said that fear, shame, and low self-esteem drive victims to stay away from community activities, self-help groups, and group projects. This reduces social support systems' access and means of existence that may help to raise family welfare.

One person said:

*Those who go through ongoing emotional abuse shut themselves off from other people. They stop assisting in community projects that could help to better their lives. "C1 Another respondent pointed out: Participant "Psychological Gender-based violence destroys family ties and lowers member cohesiveness, therefore impeding economic recovery."*

Participant C2 These results support the regression results by showing how psychological gender-based abuse lowers social participation, weakens family resilience, and compromises mental health that support long-term living.

## CONCLUSION

Psychological gender-based violence has a significant impact on household livelihood sustenance and mental health of women in Tharaka North Sub-County, this is manifested through, verbal harassment, and assault, which increases mental health related issues such as emotional trauma, stigma, fear, low self-esteem, and social isolation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations recommend that:

- i). There should be an increase in awareness programmes among the people in order to prevent psychological gender-based violence within households in Tharaka Nithi County.
- ii). Psychosocial and mental health services should be incorporated into community development programmes in order to address effects of Psychological Gender-based violence on mental health among the vulnerable population such as women

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