

Challenges Faced by Village Elders in Security Risk Management in Kitui West Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya

Musinga, Paul Mitau,¹ Dr. Duncan Ochieng, Ph.D.² Dr. Emily Okuto, Ph.D.³, Dr. Simon Muthomi, Ph.D.⁴

^{1,4}Africa Nazarene University Kenya.

²National Police Service,

³National Defense University-Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Village elders play an important role in grassroots security risk management through local surveillance, information gathering, conflict management, identification of emerging security threats, and collaboration with formal security agencies. However, their capacity to perform these functions may be constrained by institutional, resource, social, and operational challenges. This study examined the challenges faced by village elders in security risk management in Kitui West Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. The study was guided by Protection Motivation Theory and Structural Functionalism Theory. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The target population comprised 70,871 community members, 110 village elders, 33 sub-chiefs, 11 chiefs, and 21 police officers, giving a total target population of 71,046. A sample of 204 respondents was selected using stratified sampling and simple random sampling within the identified respondent categories. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to village elders, community members, sub-chiefs, and police officers, while key informant interviews were conducted with chiefs. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and presented using tables, while qualitative responses from key informant interviews were analysed thematically using content analysis. The findings indicate that village elders faced multiple and interconnected challenges in security risk management. The most prominent challenges included ineffective information flow (97.6%), inadequate training and capacity (96.4%), lack of remuneration frameworks (95.3%), and inadequate support from formal security agencies (95.3%). Other challenges included weak government support, poor recruitment criteria, weakened traditional governance systems, unclear mandates, limited recognition, and lack of motivation, illiteracy, community mistrust, and perceptions of bias in decision-making. The study concludes that although village elders possess significant potential to contribute to grassroots security risk management, their effectiveness is constrained by inadequate institutional, financial, training, informational, and operational support. The study recommends structured training and capacity building for village elders, as well as a clear institutional framework to define their roles, strengthen coordination with security agencies, and provide appropriate support.

Keywords: Village elders, security risk management, grassroots security, community policing, traditional governance.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the rise of insecurity the world over, the need for inclusive security risk management is inevitable. In this light, the need to include everyone in the security arrangements of any society cannot be underestimated (Gill, 2014). Managing Security risks is the unceasing practice of identifying security risks and putting in place countermeasures. In a study on why security fails, Speight (2012) points out that security has a significant influence on the sustainability of a society. Conversely, wayward insecurity can lead to societal breakdown. As a result, myriads of scholars have delved into the subject of security risk management (Gill, 2014) because as

the adage goes, "it is better to prevent than to cure." Irrespective of concerted efforts, security often fails. This could be averted if vigilance is enhanced. This current study is founded on the premise that village elders play a crucial function in improving vigilance at the grassroots level, which can lead to enhanced security risk management.

In Wichita, Kansas, United States of America USA), Aleem et al., (2013) posits that local measures aimed at dealing with security breaches, as well as structured security governance, play pivotal roles in reigning in on insecurity. At the village or town level, local security arrangements can aid in bridging security gaps. With the right facilitating sociopolitical arrangements, communities, through their local leaders, village elders, as in the case of this current study, can participate in reducing security vulnerabilities. Wakefield (2014) argues that security risks are enhanced by factors such as weakness in law enforcement, lack of professionalism among security agencies, lack of finances and technological advancements. By enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies, it is possible to control rises in complexities and vulnerability in security risk management. However, the role played by village elders in buttressing law enforcement and security risk management remains a grey area in academic discourse (Button, 2008). This leads to the question, "what is the role of village elders in security risk management in today's increasingly complex and topsy-turvy world?" Focused on the USA Nguyen (2019) argues that various security management strategies are employed. One of the strategies security agencies use to check the propensity for crime happening at grassroots levels is by watching communication processes and putting in place strategies aimed at keeping an eye on suspected individuals. Village elders could play a key role in watching potential criminals.

Elders in North America play critical roles in security risk management. A study of the Navajo Tribal Court among the indigenous peoples of the Americas shows that indigenous security systems that include elders enhance self-governance and avert security risks in the region (Sandu, 2018). In Eastern Europe, elders among the traditional Gypsies and the Chechens in the Caucasus are often chosen as mediators or arbiters due to the respect and credibility accorded to them by the community. This also plays a pivotal role in security risk management (Sandu, 2018).

Aldrich and Sawada (2015) posit that communities in Japan that have higher levels of social capital and trust saw less loss of lives during the 11 March 2011 tsunami. This was due to the respect accorded to the guidance of elders on the imminent risk of the Tsunami long before it occurred (Aldrich & Sawada, 2015). In China, Faria (2016) points out that China has used ancient ways to manage disputes and security risks.

In Nigeria, Karimu and Osunyikanmi (2012) study, posit that gathering information in regard to crime requires the help and support of the public. At grassroots levels, support by village elders and the public could buttress security risk mitigation processes. Hertzberger (2007) points out that sharing information on crime-related issues such as terrorism requires the cooperation of more than one intelligence unit and security agents. Intelligence sharing can be crucial in reigning in on security risks, and since village elders can be part and parcel of these intelligence teams, they could contribute to security risk management. Regrettably, literature shows that village elders are often faced with capacity challenges. This could significantly limit their ability to make tangible contributions to security risk management. A World Bank (2011) report on "conflict, security, and development" argues that village communities are formed because of recognizing the need for human safety. Since time immemorial, communities have had their ways of curbing security vulnerabilities. At the core of this have been traditional justice systems that include the input of village elders.

In Africa, elders have played pivotal roles in security risk management at local levels, as evidenced by the Kpelle people of Liberia, Ndendeuli of Tanzania, and the Somali community (Renders, 2012). This has played a critical role in identifying potential security risks. In Rwanda, traditional systems that include elders have also played vital roles in the maintenance of peace and aversion of security risks (Mutisi, 2012). Madegwa (2014), in a study focused on the Karamoja region of Uganda, posits that traditional approaches contribute to security risk management in East Africa. These approaches include the input of village leaders and opinion shapers. In Kenya, Kungu (2015), in a study focused on Muhoroni Sub County, Kenya, postulated that village committees play pivotal roles in enhancing local security. At the helm of these communities in the village, committees are elders. These elders are well versed with local occurrences and can enhance intelligence gathering processes, which can

contribute to security risk management. According to the Government of Kenya (GOK, 2015), the Nyumba Kumi (Ten Houses) Initiative is an important component of the draft procedures for the implementation of community policing, highlighting the central role of the initiative in promoting community participation in security and crime prevention. The NKI emphasizes the need for local surveillance. This initiative, which is backed by village elders, creates "synergies between state and non-state actors in conflict management and crime prevention. In this regard, village elders play essential roles in identifying and reporting potential crimes, which are central to security risk management. However, the efficacy of the NKI in reigning on security risks in Kitui County is yet to be systematically studied.

Unfortunately, village elders face overwhelming challenges in their day-to-day work. Kenya National Assembly (2019), in one of their proceedings, while recognizing the role of village elders in handling security issues through the NKI, also takes note of the challenges faced by these elders. In this regard, the elders face challenges that include but are not limited to lack of remuneration and inadequate recruitment criterion. Village elders are also faced with challenges related to the lack of strong support from the prevailing formal security agencies (Kungu, 2015). There is also a lack of effective flow of information between village elders and security agencies. Additionally, village elders face challenges related to weakened traditional governance systems. In this regard, Okumu (2012) and Sharamo (2014) point out that there is reduced recognition of the role of elders in security and peace processes. This challenges the ability of these elders to deal with security risk vulnerabilities adequately. Due to the breakdowns of societal values, insecurity has been increasing in most parts of Kitui County. This has led to various security risks, including but not limited to gang membership, violence towards others, stealing, and substance abuse, among others (Mwangi, 2015). This shows the ecological context in which people live, including Kitui West Sub-County, has a significant influence on crime. From the preceding discourse, it is evident that village elders could play pivotal roles in security risk management. This stems from the fact that at the village, elders have limitless opportunities to gather intelligence and detect security vulnerabilities at grassroots levels. However, the extent to which village elders contribute to security risk management in Kitui County of Eastern Kenya is yet to be systematically studied.

Statement of the Problem

Security risks remain an important concern in rural communities. In Kitui County, the breakdown of societal values has been associated with security risks including gang membership, violence, stealing and substance abuse. Although formal security measures have been established to address insecurity, achieving sustainable security has remained challenging. Village elders could potentially complement formal security structures because of their knowledge of local communities and their proximity to local events. However, their capacity to perform this function has not always been adequately supported or systematically understood. Existing Kenyan studies have identified several challenges affecting village elders, including poor information flow between elders and security agencies, weakened traditional governance systems and reduced recognition of their role in security and peace processes (Okumu, 2013; Sharamo, 2014). Other studies have identified inadequate remuneration, poor recruitment criteria and lack of strong support from formal security agencies (Kungu, 2015; Kenya National Assembly, 2019). However, the extent to which these challenges affect village elders in Kitui West Sub-County has not been systematically established. The problem is therefore not necessarily the absence of village-level actors capable of contributing to security management, but rather the constraints that may prevent those actors from performing their functions effectively. Understanding these constraints is important for developing policies and interventions that can strengthen grassroots security management.

Research Objective

The objective of the study was to analyse the challenges the village elders face in security risk management in Kitui West Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework.

Protection Motivation Theory

Protection Motivation Theory (PMT), developed by Rogers (1975) based on earlier work by Leventhal (1970), explains how individuals respond to perceived threats through two appraisal processes: threat appraisal and coping appraisal. Threat appraisal involves assessing the severity and likelihood of a threat, while coping appraisal concerns response efficacy and self-efficacy (Fisher et al., 2018). In this study, PMT provides a basis for understanding how village elders perceive and respond to security risks through surveillance, information gathering, identification of threats, and crime prevention. Their ability to perform these functions may be affected by inadequate training, resources, remuneration, information flow, and institutional support. Response efficacy is particularly relevant because it concerns the perceived ability of a response to reduce the effects of a threat (Floyd et al., 2000). However, PMT has limitations in explaining the broader social and institutional conditions that influence the effectiveness of village elders (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Structural Functionalism Theory

Structural Functionalism is a sociological theory concerned with the relationships among social structures and institutions and the functions they perform in maintaining social order and stability. Merton (1968) expanded the theory by examining how different social structures contribute to the functioning of society. Functionalist perspectives emphasize that social institutions perform interconnected functions that contribute to the stability and integration of the wider social system (Cancian, 1995; Ishiyama & Breuning, 2010). Applied to this study, the theory views village elders as community-level structures that contribute to peace and security through conflict resolution, surveillance, information sharing, and collaboration with formal security agencies.

The theory is particularly relevant in explaining the institutional and social challenges affecting village elders. Traditional security mechanisms in African communities have increasingly faced challenges from modern security and legal systems that may not adequately integrate indigenous approaches (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). Similarly, the absence of effective policy and legal frameworks has constrained the integration of traditional institutions into peace and security processes (Mbwire & Dube, 2017), while weakened traditional governance systems have contributed to the neglect of the roles of village elders (Sharamo, 2014). Structural Functionalism therefore provides a useful framework for examining challenges such as weakened traditional governance systems, inadequate institutional recognition, unclear mandates, poor coordination with formal security agencies, and ineffective information flow.

Empirical Literature Review

Previous studies demonstrate that traditional and community-based actors can contribute significantly to security and peace processes. In Papua New Guinea, Boege (2011) found that in Bougainville, the capacity of local elders is challenged by weak local customary institutions. Although elders and chiefs in the customary institutions relied on legitimate existing local norms to manage escalations of manage security risks, they were often challenged by poor government support (Boege, 2011). This current study sets out how these challenges face village elders in the Kitui West Sub-County of Kenya. Village elders often face immense challenges in their work processes. This has been evidenced in Papua New Guinea, as stated above, in which the capacity of local elders to contribute to peace and security processes during the wars was thwarted by the weak local customary institution (Boege, 2011). Although elders and chiefs in the customary institutions relied on legitimate existing local norms to manage escalations of conflicts and manage security risks, they were often challenged by poor government support. The role of elders in security risk management was thwarted by a lack of formal and informal mechanisms for guiding elders in peace-building efforts (Boege, 2011). This means that they often rely on simplistic blanket approaches to security risk management and cannot also handle complex security risks.

A study by Hudda (2018) shows that among the Somalis, the role of elders in security risk management was thwarted by a lack of formal and informal mechanisms for guiding elders in peace-building efforts. In this regard, they relied on blanket, simplistic approaches to security risk management. The elders could not also handle complex security risks. Although there are some formal mechanisms for recognizing the input of village elders in security processes in Kenya, such as the NKI, the extent to which capacity challenges face village elders in Kitui West Sub-County can be difficult to understand without studies like this present one. Ajayi and Buhari (2014), in a study focused on the Igbo and Yoruba communities in Nigeria as well as the Pondo of South Africa, showed that the roles of indigenous mechanisms for security management are challenged by modern approaches that are not based on African values. Modern African states based on western legal and security frameworks often fail to integrate traditional approaches, a scenario that will be investigated by this current study.

Mbwirire and Dube (2017) undertook a comparative analysis of challenges faced by traditional institutions in peace and security processes. Collection of data was by questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and with community members, and in-depth interviews with Key Informants who included community members, traditional chiefs, council members, and traditional chiefs (Mbwirire & Dube, 2017). The findings obtained show that traditional security risk management institutions were faced with a lack of a clear policy as well as a legal framework for using traditional mechanisms in security processes. This current study tests the veracity of these findings in Kitui West-Sub County.

Kenya National Assembly (2019), in a report on the NKI, investigated the challenges faced by village elders in carrying out their duties at the village level. The report shows that the elders played pivotal roles in enhancing security at the village level. However, the findings obtained show that the elders were faced with challenges such as lack of clear frameworks for remuneration and poor recruitment criterion. Kungu (2015), in their study, focused on Muhoroni Sub-County in Kisumu County, Kenya, and found out that village elders were faced with numerous challenges. In most cases, village elders do not have strong support from traditional security agencies, for instance, the police as well as other security agencies (Kungu, 2015). This means that there is a lack of effective flow of information between village elders and security agencies, which could thwart security risk management. This survey aims at finding out the extent to which the outcomes are relevant to elders in Kitui West Sub-County.

The challenges facing village elders have also been studied by Sharamo (2014) in Isiolo County." The study was based on primary data sources. The findings obtained show that village elders faced challenges related to weakened traditional governance systems. This meant that their roles in security risk management processes were increasingly being neglected. The former study relates to this current study since it was focused on the Eastern Region of Kenya, as is the case with this current study. Conversely, a descriptive study by Okumu (2013) focused on Laikipia County in Kenya established that village elders faced credibility challenges due to a lack of recognition as pivotal security actors at grassroots levels. This challenged their ability to adequately deal with security risk vulnerabilities. There was thus a need to put in place mechanisms aimed at strengthening the role of village elders in security risk management as conceptualized in this current study. The present study aims at investigating the veracity of the outcomes in the Kenyan phenome.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey design to analyse the challenges faced by village elders in security risk management in Kitui West Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. A descriptive survey design evaluates and reports existing conditions and describes the characteristics of a population or phenomenon under study. According to Cohen et al., (2007), descriptive research is concerned with systematically describing existing conditions, characteristics, and phenomena within a given population. Similarly, Cooper and Schindler (2003) explain that a descriptive study is concerned with establishing who, what, when, where, and how. The design was therefore appropriate for describing the challenges experienced by village elders and the institutional and social conditions affecting their contribution to security risk management within the study area.

The study was conducted in Kitui West Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. The Sub-County covers an area of 726.4 square kilometres and comprises of eleven locations: Mutonguni, Kauwi, Yalatani, Kangondi, Musengo, Kakeani, Mutini, Kivani, Mutanda, Katutu and Usiani. Each location has at most three sub-locations. According to the 2019 census, the Sub-County had a population of 70,871 people (KNBS, 2019).

The Sub-County borders Mwingi West, Kitui Rural, and Kitui Central Sub-Counties. The main economic activities in the area are small-scale rain-fed agriculture and cattle keeping. This area was chosen because since it has seen increases in insecurity challenges due to the breakdown of societal values which has made it hard for village elders to adequately deal with security risk vulnerabilities (Mwangi, 2015).

Target population comprises every element which meets the criteria to be included in the study (Grove et al., 2015). This study targeted village elders nationally, sampled from 33 sub-locations in Kitui West Sub-County. The target population comprised 70,871 village members (33,887 males and 36,983 females), 110 village elders, and 33 sub-chiefs from the 33 sub-locations as well as 11 chiefs from the 11 locations (KNBS, 2019). The study also purposely targeted 21 police officers from the sub-county as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Target Population

Category	Target Population
Village Members	70,871
Village Elders	110
Sub-Chiefs	33
Chiefs	11
Police Officers	21
Total	71,046

Source: KNBS (2019).

Sampling involves obtaining a section of a population to represent the larger population from which data are required (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). The study employed proportionate stratified sampling to obtain participants from the different respondent categories. Thereafter, simple random sampling was used to obtain respondents from each stratum.

The sample size was determined using the formula $n=1+N\epsilon^2$, resulting in a total sample of 204 respondents, comprising 100 village members, 52 village elders, 25 sub-chiefs, 10 chiefs and 17 police officers, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample Size

Category	Target Population	Sampling Formula	Sample (n)
Village Members	70871	$n=N/1+N\epsilon^2$	100
Village Elders	110	$n=N/1+N\epsilon^2$	52
Sub-Chiefs	33	$n=N/1+N\epsilon^2$	25
Chiefs	11	$n=N/1+N\epsilon^2$	10
Police Officers	21	$n=N/1+N\epsilon^2$	17
TOTAL	71046		204

Source: Authors (2020).

The study employed questionnaires for village elders, community members, sub-chiefs and police officers, and a semi-structured Key Informant Interview (KII) guide for chiefs. The instruments were developed based on the study objective. The questionnaire comprised sections on respondents' demographic characteristics and

questions addressing the study objective. The semi-structured interview guide was similarly developed from the study questions. The interviews provided an opportunity to obtain additional information from chiefs and to probe issues emerging during the interviews. The qualitative information obtained from the interviews was used to corroborate and provide further explanation of findings from the questionnaires. For the purposes of this article, particular attention was given to responses concerning remuneration, government support, recruitment criteria, support from formal security agencies, information flow, traditional governance systems, training and capacity, mandates, motivation, community trust, recognition and other challenges affecting village elders' security-related functions.

Data processing and analysis involved examining the collected information using appropriate statistical and analytical procedures (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data, and the findings presented using tables and charts. Responses to open-ended questions were analysed using content analysis (White, 2004). The qualitative findings were organized thematically and presented through prose descriptions and selected verbatim quotations from key informants. The qualitative findings were used to complement and explain the quantitative findings concerning the challenges faced by village elders.

Before data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Letters of authorization were also obtained from African Nazarene University and the Kitui County Commissioner's Office. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents and permission to participate was sought. Respondents were assured of anonymity and were informed that the information collected would be used strictly for academic purposes. Respondents were therefore not required to provide their names on the research instruments.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Empirical Findings Discussion

The study sought to analyse the challenges faced by village elders in security risk management in Kitui West Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. Data were collected using five-point psychometric scale statements, closed-ended and open-ended questions, and key informant interviews. The findings from the five-point scale statements are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Challenges that Village Elders Face in Security Risk Management

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev.
Lack of remuneration is a challenge to village elders	4.7	3	3.6	56.2	32.5	4	0.95
Village elders are supported by government to prevent security risks	27.8	63.3	2.4	4.1	2.4	2	0.82
Social structure breakdown has affected village elders	2.4	16	42.6	26.6	12.4	3	0.96
There are policies to support village elders' knowledge on security issues	20.1	70.4	4.7	3.6	1.2	2	0.71

The findings in Table 3 indicate that lack of remuneration was a major challenge facing village elders, with respondents agreeing with the statement ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.95$). This suggests that the absence of adequate remuneration may reduce the motivation of village elders to undertake security-related responsibilities. The finding is consistent with Okumu (2013), who identified remuneration as an important challenge affecting village elders. Similarly, the Kenya National Assembly (2019) identified remuneration as a challenge associated with the work of village elders. The lack of a clear remuneration framework may therefore undermine the sustainability and effectiveness of their contribution to grassroots security risk management.

Respondents disagreed that village elders were adequately supported by the government to prevent security risks ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 0.82$). This finding implies that limited government support may constrain the ability of village elders to perform their security-related functions effectively. The finding agrees with Boege (2011), who identified inadequate government support as a constraint on the effectiveness of customary security institutions. The qualitative findings reinforced this concern. One chief stated:

“There was a lack of support from chiefs and senior government security officials to the chiefs. This limited the capacity of these village elders to handle some security risks.” [Respondent C10].

The finding therefore suggests that stronger institutional support and coordination between village elders and government security structures are necessary to enhance grassroots security risk management.

Respondents were uncertain about whether the breakdown of social structures had affected village elders ($M = 3.0$, $SD = 0.96$). This finding suggests that the weakening of traditional social structures may have affected the position and effectiveness of village elders, although respondents did not express a strong consensus. The finding is consistent with Sharamo (2014), who observed that weakened traditional governance systems contributed to the declining role of elders in peace and security processes. Ajayi and Buhari (2014) similarly observed that indigenous mechanisms for peace and security management can be challenged when modern security approaches fail to adequately integrate traditional institutions.

The qualitative findings further indicated that village elders experienced declining community trust and recognition. One chief observed:

“The village elders were faced with challenges related to lack of support and trust by village members. They were often seen as being biased in their judgments. This limited the motivation in dispensing their duties.” [Respondent C6].

The finding implies that weakening social structures and declining community trust may reduce the legitimacy and cooperation necessary for village elders to perform their security functions.

Respondents disagreed that there were policies to support village elders' knowledge of security issues ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 0.71$). This indicates a perceived gap in the policy and institutional framework supporting village elders. The finding is consistent with Mbwirire and Dube (2017), who observed that traditional security institutions face challenges arising from the absence of effective policy and legal frameworks for integrating traditional mechanisms into peace and security processes. The qualitative findings also identified lack of clear mandates as a major constraint. One chief explained:

“The village elders lacked clear mandates. This meant that their duties were not well defined in the existing laws.” [Respondent C8].

This suggests that clearer policies, mandates, and institutional guidelines could strengthen the role of village elders and improve their coordination with formal security agencies.

Further findings on specific capacity challenges are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Other Capacity Challenges

Statement	Percentage	
	Yes	No
a) Village elders are faced with challenges such as a lack of clear frameworks for remuneration	95.3	4.7
b) Village elders are faced with the challenge of poor recruitment criterion	56.8	43.2
c) Village elders lack strong support from formal security agencies such as the police force and other security agencies	95.3	4.7

d) There is a lack of effective flow of information between village elders and security agencies, which could thwart security risk management	97.6	2.4
e) Village elders face challenges related to weakened traditional governance systems, which means that their roles in peace and security processes are being neglected in the current society?	77.5	22.5
f) Village elders lack training and the capacity to adequately deal with security risk vulnerabilities	96.4	3.6

The most frequently reported challenge was ineffective information flow between village elders and security agencies, identified by 97.6% of respondents. This finding implies that weak communication and information-sharing mechanisms may hinder the timely identification, reporting, and management of security risks. It also suggests that village elders may possess locally relevant information that is not effectively transmitted to formal security agencies. The finding is consistent with Kungu (2015), who reported that village elders often lacked strong institutional support and relationships with formal security agencies. The qualitative findings also indicated that unclear mandates and weak institutional relationships constrained the work of village elders. From the perspective of Protection Motivation Theory, access to information is important in threat appraisal and the development of appropriate responses to security threats. Fisher et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of perceived response efficacy and self-efficacy in responding to threats. Strengthening information-sharing mechanisms between village elders and formal security agencies could therefore improve the timely management of security risks.

Lack of training and capacity to deal with security risk vulnerabilities was identified by 96.4% of respondents. This indicates a substantial capacity gap among village elders and suggests that they may lack the knowledge and skills required to identify, assess, report, and respond to emerging security risks. The finding is consistent with Okumu (2013), who identified capacity-related challenges affecting village elders. Madegwa (2014) similarly observes that traditional leaders can play important roles in averting security risks and preventing conflict escalation, but such roles require appropriate capacity. The finding also relates to Protection Motivation Theory, particularly the concept of self-efficacy. Where village elders lack the knowledge and skills required to respond to threats, their confidence and actual capacity to undertake security-related functions may be reduced. Regular training and capacity building could therefore enhance their effectiveness in grassroots security risk management.

A total of 95.3% of respondents identified inadequate support from formal security agencies as a challenge. This finding indicates that weak relationships between village elders and formal security institutions may limit collaboration in preventing and responding to security risks. The finding agrees with Kungu (2015), who found that village elders often lacked strong support from formal security agencies, including the police.

The qualitative findings reinforce this result. Respondent C10 reported that inadequate support from government security officials limited the capacity of village elders to handle some security risks. The implication is that stronger collaboration, communication, and institutional recognition between village elders and formal security agencies could enhance community-based security risk management.

The lack of a clear remuneration framework was identified by 95.3% of respondents. This finding reinforces the results presented in Table 3 and indicates that remuneration is not only perceived as a general challenge but also as a specific institutional gap. Okumu (2013) similarly identified remuneration as an important challenge affecting village elders, while the Kenya National Assembly (2019) highlighted remuneration and recruitment criteria as issues concerning the work of village elders. The finding suggests that a clear and sustainable framework for facilitating or remunerating village elders could improve their motivation and willingness to perform security-related responsibilities.

A total of 77.5% of respondents identified weakened traditional governance systems as a challenge. This finding suggests that changes in social organization and the declining influence of traditional institutions may have reduced the capacity of village elders to perform their customary roles in peace and security. Sharamo (2014)

similarly observed that weakened traditional governance systems contributed to the declining role of elders in peace and security processes. Ajayi and Buhari (2014) further noted that indigenous peace and security mechanisms may be weakened where modern security approaches fail to adequately integrate traditional institutions. The finding supports the Structural Functionalism perspective underpin the study. Village elders constitute part of the local social structure through which communities organize and respond to security risks. Weakening this structure without establishing effective institutional linkages with formal security agencies may create gaps in grassroots security management.

Poor recruitment criteria were identified by 56.8% of respondents. Although this proportion was lower than that reported for the other challenges, it indicates that more than half of the respondents considered recruitment an important concern. Inappropriate or unclear recruitment criteria may affect the competence, legitimacy, and community acceptance of village elders. The Kenya National Assembly (2019) similarly identified recruitment criteria as an issue concerning village elders. The finding suggests that transparent and appropriate recruitment criteria could help ensure that individuals selected as village elders possess the credibility, community acceptance, and capacity required to perform their responsibilities effectively.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the challenges faced by village elders are interconnected rather than isolated. Weak information flow, inadequate training, limited institutional support, lack of remuneration frameworks, weakened traditional governance systems, unclear mandates, and concerns regarding recruitment collectively affect the capacity of village elders to contribute effectively to security risk management. These findings support both Protection Motivation Theory and Structural Functionalism Theory by demonstrating that effective security risk management depends not only on the capacity of individual actors but also on the strength of the social and institutional structures within which they operate.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that village elders face multiple and interconnected challenges in contributing to security risk management in Kitui West Sub-County, Kenya. The most prominent challenges identified were inadequate remuneration, weak government support, poor recruitment criteria, inadequate support from formal security agencies, ineffective information flow, weakened traditional governance systems, lack of training and capacity, unclear mandates, limited recognition, lack of motivation, illiteracy, community mistrust, and perceptions of bias. The study findings particularly demonstrate the magnitude of several challenges. A large majority of respondents identified ineffective information flow (97.6%), lack of training and capacity (96.4%), lack of remuneration frameworks (95.3%), and inadequate support from formal security agencies (95.3%) as challenges. The findings demonstrate that village elders have potential to contribute to grassroots security management, but their effectiveness is constrained when they operate without adequate institutional, financial, informational, and training support. Strengthening their contribution therefore requires integration rather than isolation of village-level actors within the wider security system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the national and county governments should establish clear policy and institutional frameworks defining the responsibilities, limits, and reporting relationships of village elders in security risk management. Clear and sustainable remuneration mechanisms should be developed. The findings indicate that lack of remuneration and unclear remuneration frameworks are major constraints. Any remuneration arrangement should be anchored in appropriate government policy and legal frameworks. Village elders should receive regular training in security awareness, conflict management, information gathering and reporting, community policing, emerging security risks, and appropriate referral mechanisms. Training should be designed according to the grassroots responsibilities of village elders. Formal security agencies, particularly the police and relevant national government security structures, should strengthen coordination and information-sharing mechanisms with village elders. The exceptionally high proportion of respondents identifying ineffective information flow demonstrates the importance of establishing reliable communication channels. The recruitment and selection of village elders should be strengthened to ensure that individuals appointed to these positions possess community legitimacy, integrity, appropriate knowledge of local conditions, and the ability to work

collaboratively with formal security institutions. Government and non-governmental security actors should encourage communities to respect and support village elders. Community confidence is essential because elders depend on local cooperation and information to perform their functions. The village elders should be more meaningfully integrated into appropriate policy formulation and grassroots governance processes dealing with peace and security. Such integration should preserve the positive elements of traditional governance while ensuring that village-level security activities remain consistent with formal legal and institutional structures.

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