Children in Need of Care and Protection-Analysis of Prevalence of Cases in Machakos County (2024)

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ABSTRACT

The protection and care of children is a fundamental right enshrined in international and national legal frameworks. Despite Kenya's ratification of multiple child protection laws and policies, children in need of care and protection (CNCP) remain a significant concern. This study analyzes the prevalence and categories of reported CNCP cases in Machakos County, Kenya, using secondary administrative data extracted from the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS) maintained by the Department of Children Services. The objectives of the study were to: determine the prevalence of reported cases of children in need of care and protection in Machakos County; assess the distribution of CNCP cases across Machakos sub-counties; examine the distribution of CNCP cases by age group; and evaluate intervention mechanisms employed in addressing CNCP cases in the county. Findings from 2024 CPIMS records indicate that child neglect was the most prevalent category, accounting for 47.1% of reported cases. Higher case concentrations were recorded in Mwala, Kangundo, and Matungulu sub-counties, while the majority of affected children were below 15 years of age. Intervention responses varied by case type, with joint parental agreements being the most frequently documented mechanism, alongside referrals to the Judiciary, the Department of Children Services, and community-based reconciliation. However, a substantial number of cases lacked documented intervention actions, highlighting gaps in case management and accountability. The study underscores the need for strengthened child-centered interventions, improved CPIMS documentation, and coordinated, community-based child protection responses in Machakos County.

Keywords: Case load, Child Protection, Child Neglect, Intervention Mechanisms, Prevalence,

INTRODUCTION

Child protection refers to the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harmful practices that endanger children's safety and well-being. Despite global and national efforts, millions of children remain vulnerable to violence, deprivation, and systemic neglect. According to UNICEF (2023), harmful social norms, cultural practices, and humanitarian crises continue to undermine children's rights and development globally.

International human rights instruments emphasize the need to safeguard children as part of broader commitments to family and societal welfare. Key among these are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),(United Nations, 1989). These instruments recognize the family as the fundamental unit of society and mandate state protection for all children, regardless of background or circumstances (United Nations, 1948, 1966a, 1966b, 1989).

Kenya has ratified and domesticated several international and regional legal frameworks (United Nations, 1989; African Union, 1990; International Labour Organization [ILO], 1999). These include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified in 1990), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ratified in 2000), and International Labor Organization Convention 182, (International Labour Organization [ILO], 1999) on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ratified in 2001). Domestically, Kenya has enacted key legislation such as the Children Act (2022) and the Sexual Offences Act (2006), as well as adopted

policies including the National Guidelines on the Management of Sexual Violence (2009) and the National Children Policy (2010). These efforts signal Kenya's strong commitment to child protection.

According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, children constituted approximately 23.8 million individuals, representing nearly 50% of the population (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019). This demographic reality underscores the urgency of implementing robust child protection systems. However, despite progressive legal frameworks, many Kenyan children remain at risk due to poverty, weak enforcement mechanisms, and family breakdowns necessitating further analysis of localized protection challenges such as those in Machakos County.

Background to the Study

Children are universally recognized as the most valuable and vulnerable segment of the population. Their well-being, safety, and development are essential to the health of any society (World Health Organization, 2020). However, millions of children around the world continue to experience neglect, abuse, exploitation, and abandonment oftenly within the very environments meant to protect them. It is documented that the up to one billion children aged 2 to 17 years have been victims of physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect globally (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020).

In Africa, the child protection situation remains particularly concerning. The African Union and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) estimate that over 35 million children in the continent live without parental care (African Union & ACERWC, 2023). These children are especially vulnerable to poverty, exploitation, child labour, sexual abuse, and recruitment into armed conflict. United Nation International Children Education Fund (UNICEF) report has shown that the African Countries data further highlight the scope of the problem in care on protection of children. In Sierra Leone, for example, 86.5% of children aged 1 to 14 have experienced some form of violent discipline at home, including physical and psychological abuse (UNICEF, 2023). Such widespread normalization of violence reflects deep-rooted social norms and limited enforcement of protective laws. Similarly, in Uganda, over 8 million children were reported to have been exposed to harm, violence, and exploitation by 2022 (UNICEF Uganda, 2022). Key protection issues include neglect, separation from family, child labour, and gender-based violence which is often exacerbated by poverty and weak institutional safeguards (Nereah, 2017, UNHCR, 2024).

Kenya is not exempt from these challenges, while it has adopted robust legal frameworks such as the Children Act (2022), the Sexual Offences Act (2006), and ratified international instruments including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child—implementation remains uneven. According to National Council on the Administration of Justice (NCAJ, 2023) factors such as poverty, family disintegration, and insufficient community support continue to drive many children into conditions requiring state intervention.

Machakos County, located in Kenya's Eastern Region, has recorded an increase in children in need of care and protection (CNCP). These include cases of child neglect, abandonment, defilement, and lack of access to essential services such as education and legal documentation. While data from the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS) provides useful insights, limited localized research has been done to analyze trends and intervention outcomes in Machakos. This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the prevalence and categories of CNCP cases in Machakos County. The findings aim to inform better-targeted responses by government and non-state actors working to protect vulnerable children in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Kenya's comprehensive legal and policy frameworks on child protection, the number of children in need of care and protection (CNCP) remains alarmingly high. Cases of child neglect, abuse, abandonment, and exploitation continue to be reported across various counties, including Machakos. Children in need of care and protection lack access to basic services, supportive family environments, or effective state protection mechanisms. Although child protection structures are there such as the Department of Children Services (DCS) and local and international agencies that focus on care and protection of children, there exist gaps in the coordination, implementation, and sustainability of interventions. Furthermore, a lack of localized data-driven analysis has hindered effective planning and targeting of child protection programs in Machakos. Without

concrete evidence on the prevalence, nature, and distribution of CNCP cases, policy responses risk being generic and reactive rather than preventive and strategic. This study seeks to fill this knowledge gap by providing an empirical analysis using secondary data of CNCP cases in Machakos County. It aims to generate insights that can guide policy-makers, child protection practitioners, and community stakeholders in developing targeted and sustainable interventions.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the prevalence of cases involving children in need of care and protection (CNCP) in Machakos County, Kenya.

The specific objectives are to:

i. Determine the prevalence of reported cases of children in need of care and protection in Machakos County.

ii. Assess the distribution of cases within Machakos sub-counties.

iii. Examine the distribution of cases within Machakos sub-counties by age group.

iv. Evaluate intervention mechanisms employed in addressing CNCP cases in the county.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design using secondary administrative data to examine reported cases of children in need of care and protection (CNCP) in Machakos County. Data were extracted from the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS), a national administrative case management platform maintained by the Department of Children Services (DCS) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. CPIMS routinely captures child protection cases from the information reported by government officers and implementing partners. The analysis covered all CNCP cases recorded in Machakos County during the year 2024 across the eight sub-counties: Masinga, Yatta, Matungulu, Kangundo, Mwala, Kathiani, Mavoko, and Machakos Town.

The unit of analysis for this study was a reported CPIMS case entry. Due to the administrative nature of CPIMS data and limitations in consistently verified unique child identifiers, the analysis focused on case-level records rather than confirmed unique children. A child may be associated with more than one CNCP category; however, cases were classified according to the primary category recorded at the time of reporting. The counts presented therefore total reported case entries per category. Basic data cleaning was undertaken to identify obvious duplicate entries based on overlapping characteristics such as sub-county, case category, age group, sex, and reporting period, though full de-duplication at the individual child level was not feasible.

Administrative child protection data are subject to variability in completeness and documentation quality. In this dataset, a notable number of cases (151) lacked documented intervention mechanisms, reflecting gaps in case recording, follow-up, or system updating rather than absence of response. These data quality limitations were considered during interpretation. Descriptive statistical techniques were applied to generate frequencies and percentages by case category, sub-county, age group, sex, and intervention mechanism, with results presented using tables and figures to enhance clarity and transparency.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents an analysis of cases involving children in need of care and protection (CNCP) in Machakos County, based on 2024 data extracted from the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS). The findings are categorized by case type, sub-county distribution, age group, and intervention mechanisms.

Prevalence and Categories of CNCP Cases

Analysis of CPIMS records indicates that child neglect was the most prevalent CNCP category in Machakos County in 2024, accounting for 47.1% of all reported case entries as shown on Figure 1. This finding highlights neglect as the dominant child protection concern within the county. Other reported categories included children in custody, defilement, child offenders, physical abuse, abandonment, and orphan hood. A further 9.9% of cases fell under multiple vulnerability categories, including destitution, disability, succession disputes, lack of legal documentation, school dropout, refugee status, and sodomy-related cases. These diverse categories reflect the multidimensional nature of child protection challenges faced by the county.
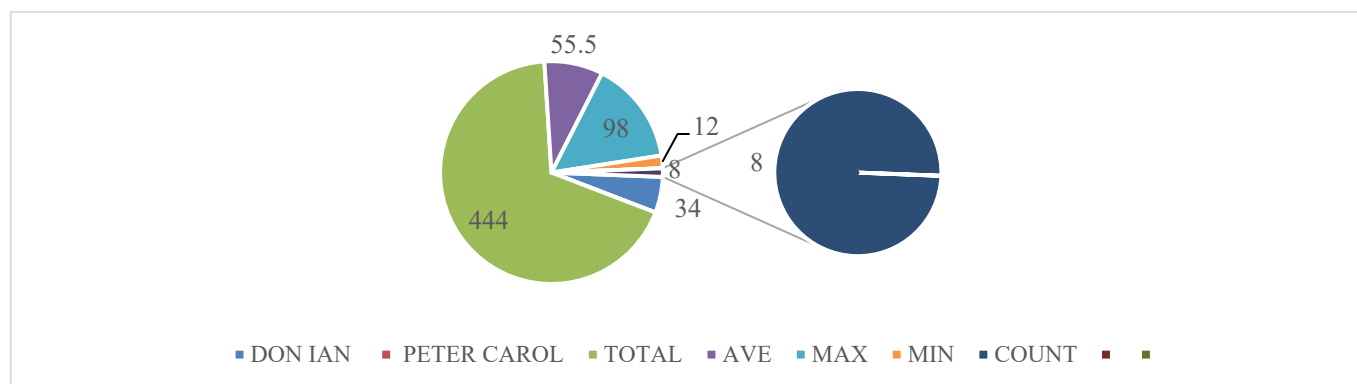

Figure 1: Analysis of cases of children in need of care and protection

Case Distribution by Sub-County

The analysis further revealed notable variations in cases prevalence across the eight sub-counties of Machakos as indicated in Table 1. Mwala Sub-county recorded the highest number of CNCP cases, with a total of 99 (55 male and 44 female). Kangundo followed with 76 cases (37 male and 39 female), while Matungulu reported 62 cases (28 male and 34 female). Masinga Sub-county registered 42 cases (18 male and 24 female), and Machakos Town recorded 31 (24 male and 7 female).

Table 1: Categorization of case by Sex in Sub-counties

S.No	Sub-County	Male	Female	Total
1	Mwala	55	44	99
2	Kangundo	37	39	76
3	Matungulu	28	34	62
4	Masinga	18	24	42
5	Machakos Town	24	7	31
6	Mavoko	<12	<12	<12
7	Kathiani	<12	<12	<12
8	Yatta	<12	<12	<12

The remaining sub-counties—Mavoko, Kathiani, and Yatta—each reported fewer than 12 cases. These differences may be attributed to factors such as population density, varying levels of community awareness and reporting, or disparities in service access and child protection infrastructure.

Case Distribution by Age Group

UNICEF (2014) emphasizes that age-disaggregated data is critical for understanding the specific needs, vulnerabilities, and rights of children at different developmental stages, and for informing targeted interventions and policies that address those unique needs effectively. In this study, as shown in Figure 2, age-disaggregated data demonstrated that the majority of CNCP cases involved children under the age of 15. In Mwala Sub-county, for example, 35 cases were reported among children aged 0–5 years, 22 among those aged 6–9 years, 29 among those aged 10–15 years, and 12 cases among those aged 16–18 years. A similar age profile was observed in other

sub-counties, with the highest frequency consistently among younger children (0-5 year) with a total of 101 cases. These findings suggest that early childhood and pre-adolescence are the most critical periods of vulnerability, requiring focused preventive and protective interventions during these formative years. The results are shown in Figure 2.
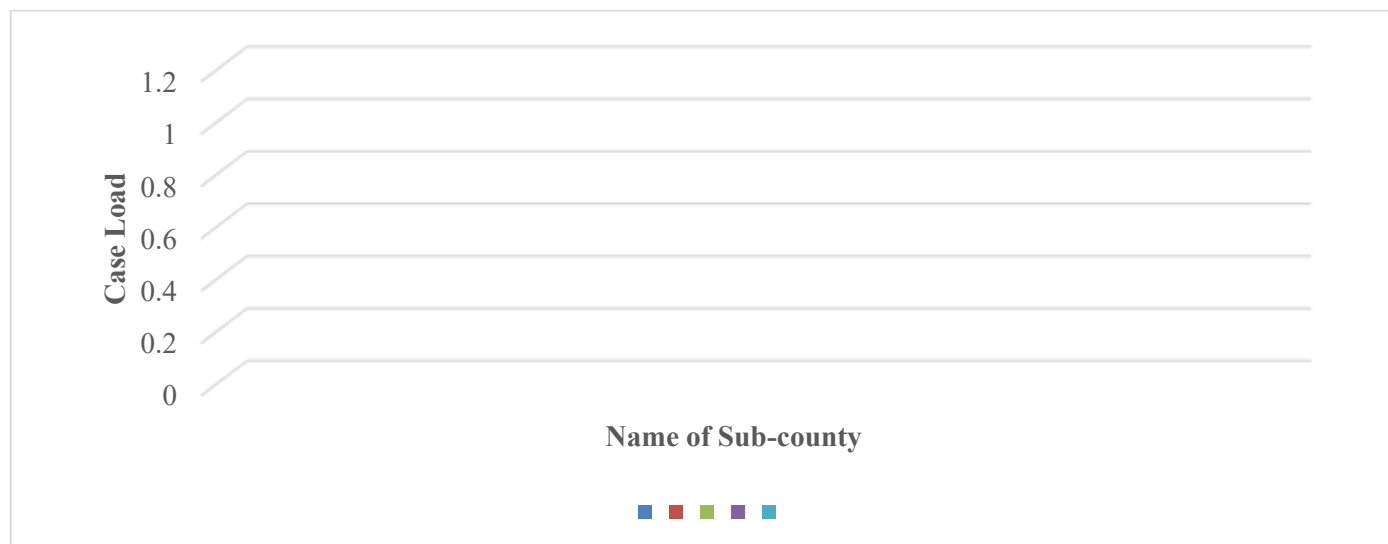

Figure 2: Case Load Distribution by age range

Intervention Mechanisms

The study also examined the various mechanisms employed to address cases involving children in need of care and protection as shown on Figure 3. The analysis of intervention mechanisms revealed a mixed approach combining formal statutory processes and informal resolution mechanisms. Joint parental or guardian agreements were the most frequently documented intervention, particularly in cases related to neglect and domestic disputes. Formal referrals were also recorded, with 27 cases referred to the Judiciary and 26 cases directed to the Department of Children Services (DCS) for further action. Community-based reconciliation was applied in 23 cases, while seven cases were referred to non-state agencies. Additional interventions included placement in statutory institutions and Charitable Children Institutions (CCIs).

Notably, 151 cases lacked documented intervention mechanisms within CPIMS. This represents a significant case management and accountability gap within the child protection system and underscores the need for improved documentation, follow-up, and supervisory review of cases prior to closure.

Figure 3: Top Cases Intervention Mechanisms

DISCUSSION

This study examined the prevalence, distribution, and intervention mechanisms of reported cases of children in need of care and protection (CNCP) in Machakos County using administrative data from the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS). The findings demonstrate that child neglect constituted the most prevalent category of reported CNCP cases in Machakos County, accounting for nearly half of all cases. This pattern is consistent with broader Kenyan and regional evidence indicating that neglect is often the most commonly reported child protection concern due to persistent household economic stress, caregiver burden, parental absence linked to labor migration, domestic conflict, and substance abuse. Neglect is also more visible to communities and service providers compared to other forms of abuse, which may contribute to higher reporting rates. Studies by UNICEF and the World Health Organization similarly identify neglect as a dominant form of child vulnerability in low- and middle-income contexts characterized by poverty and weak social protection systems. Similarly, regional and global patterns of institutionalization, alternative care, and child protection system gaps have been documented in other low- and middle-income contexts (Desmond et al., 2020; Petrowski et al., 2017; National Crime Research Centre [NCRC], 2020).

On the geographic distribution of CNCP cases in Machakos County, the findings revealed substantial variation across sub-counties, with Mwala, Kangundo, and Matungulu recording the highest number of reported cases. These differences may reflect a combination of population size, socio-economic conditions, levels of community awareness, proximity to child protection services, and the strength of local reporting and referral structures. Sub-counties reporting fewer cases may not necessarily experience lower incidence but may instead reflect underreporting due to limited access to services or weaker child protection infrastructure. Similar spatial disparities have been documented in other Kenyan counties, underscoring the importance of localized and context-specific child protection interventions.

In relation to age-disaggregated analysis, the finding showed that children below the age of 15 accounted for the majority of reported CNCP cases, with the highest concentration among children aged 0–5 years. Younger children are inherently more vulnerable due to their high dependency on caregivers, limited capacity for self-protection, and inability to independently report abuse or neglect. Early childhood is also a critical developmental stage, and exposure to neglect or abuse during this period has well-documented long-term physical, cognitive, and psychosocial consequences. These findings align with child protection scholarship emphasizing early prevention and family-centered support as key strategies for reducing CNCP risks.

Regarding analysis on intervention mechanisms from the study, the finding revealed that joint parental or guardian agreements were the most frequently documented response, particularly in cases related to neglect and domestic disputes. While such agreements may be appropriate in low-risk family conflict situations, their widespread application raises concerns when used in higher-risk cases such as sexual violence, severe physical abuse, or chronic neglect. Best practice child protection guidance emphasizes the need for risk-sensitive, child-centered decision-making, including mandatory referral to statutory and judicial mechanisms where child safety is compromised. The use of community-based reconciliation further highlights the need for clear referral and escalation guidelines for frontline officers.

A particularly significant finding is the large number of cases with undocumented intervention mechanisms. Rather than indicating lack of response, this gap points to systemic weaknesses in case documentation, supervision, follow-up, and inter-agency coordination. Incomplete documentation undermines accountability, limits assessment of intervention effectiveness, and constrains evidence-based planning. Strengthening CPIMS through mandatory action fields, supervisory validation prior to case closure, routine data audits, refresher training for CPIMS users, and improved coordination between the Department of Children Services and implementing partners would substantially enhance child protection system performance.

Overall, the findings indicate that CNCP cases in Machakos County are driven by interconnected socio-economic, familial, and institutional factors. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated approach that combines family strengthening, community engagement, improved service accessibility, and robust data systems. Aligning intervention strategies with identified risk patterns and strengthening accountability mechanisms is essential for improving both prevention and response outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the prevalence, distribution, and intervention mechanisms associated with reported cases of children in need of care and protection (CNCP) in Machakos County using 2024 administrative data from the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS). Guided by four specific objectives, the study provides a county-level snapshot of reported CNCP case patterns and the responses employed within the child protection system.

The findings established that child neglect was the most prevalent CNCP category, accounting for nearly half of all reported cases. This underscores neglect as the dominant child protection concern in Machakos County. The distribution of cases varied across sub-counties, with Mwala, Kangundo, and Matungulu recording the highest concentrations of reported cases, while other sub-counties registered lower figures that may reflect differences in reporting capacity, service accessibility, and child protection infrastructure rather than actual incidence. Age-disaggregated analysis further revealed that children below the age of 15—particularly those aged 0–5 years—were the most affected, highlighting early childhood as a critical period of vulnerability requiring targeted preventive and protective interventions.

Analysis of intervention mechanisms showed reliance on a mix of informal and formal responses, with joint parental or guardian agreements emerging as the most frequently documented approach. While such mechanisms may be appropriate in certain low-risk family dispute contexts, their widespread use raises concerns about risk sensitivity, particularly for cases involving sexual violence, severe physical abuse, or chronic neglect. Of particular concern is the substantial number of cases with undocumented intervention actions, which points to systemic weaknesses in case documentation, follow-up, supervision, and accountability within CPIMS and the broader child protection system.

Overall, the findings indicate that CNCP cases in Machakos County are shaped by interconnected socio-economic, familial, and institutional factors. Although the study does not assess trends over time, it provides important empirical evidence to inform child protection planning, service targeting, and system strengthening at the county level. Addressing documentation gaps, aligning interventions with assessed risk, and strengthening coordination among stakeholders are essential steps toward improving child protection outcomes for vulnerable children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance the care and protection of children in Machakos County:

1. Strengthen Family-Based Prevention and Support

Given the predominance of child neglect, there is a need to reinforce family strengthening initiatives, including positive parenting programs, caregiver psychosocial support, and household economic empowerment interventions. Preventive efforts should prioritize families with young children, who were identified as the most vulnerable group.

2. Adopt Risk-Sensitive and Child-Centered Intervention Pathways

Clear decision-making guidelines should be developed and enforced to ensure that intervention mechanisms are aligned with the level of risk faced by the child. While joint parental or guardian agreements may be suitable for low-risk family disputes, cases involving sexual violence, severe physical abuse, abandonment, or chronic neglect should be mandatorily referred to statutory and judicial mechanisms to safeguard child welfare.

3. Improve CPIMS Documentation and Accountability Mechanisms

The high number of cases with undocumented intervention actions highlights the need for improved data management within CPIMS. Mandatory completion of intervention fields, supervisory review prior to case

closure, routine data quality audits, and refresher training for CPIMS users should be institutionalized to enhance accountability and evidence-based decision-making.

4. Enhance Sub-County Targeting and Service Accessibility

Sub-counties with higher reported CNCP caseloads particularly: Mwala, Kangundo, and Matungulu should be prioritized for targeted outreach, prevention, and response interventions. At the same time, efforts should be made to strengthen reporting systems and service accessibility in sub-counties with lower reported cases to address potential underreporting.

5. Strengthen Inter-Agency Coordination and Community Engagement

Improved collaboration among the Department of Children Services, the Judiciary, law enforcement agencies, health providers, and non-state actors is essential for effective case management and follow-up. Community structures, including local leaders, religious institutions, and civil society organizations, should be supported to enhance early identification, referral, and prevention of CNCP cases.

2. Promote Future Research and Trend Analysis

Future studies should undertake longitudinal analysis of CPIMS data to assess trends in CNCP cases over time and evaluate the effectiveness of different intervention mechanisms. Such evidence would support more proactive, preventive, and resource-efficient child protection programming at both county and national levels.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can contribute to building a more responsive, inclusive, and sustainable child protection system in Machakos County.

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