



Life Skills Training as a Child Protection Intervention in the Context of Community-Based Social Institutions in Mwingi Central Sub County, Kitui County - Kenya

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Abstract: *This study explores the role of life skills training as a child protection intervention within the context of community-based social institutions in Mwingi Central Sub County. The study focuses on how social institutions like the family, schools, religious institutions, non-governmental organizations and the community-based organizations like women and youth groups use life skills training as an intervention in child protection. The study adopted sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design that combines both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling procedures. By use of simple random sampling method, 2 Divisions, 5 Locations and 10 Sub Locations were selected for the study. This study's target population consisted of adult members of the households from 26,753 households and the sample size of 399 was calculated by use of the Yamane formulae. Probability stratified and systematic sampling methods were used to determine the relative number of households in each stratum. Through purposive and snowball sampling methods, the study also targeted 24 students both in school and out of school while 10 key informants were purposively selected. The findings of the study revealed that close and extended members family, schools, religious leaders and other community leaders were all involved in one way or the other in life skills training to children. The study's findings showed that community-based social institutions in Mwingi central sub county recognized the value of life skills training as a child protection intervention and actively took part in its implementation. The study concluded that life skills training as a child protection intervention is highly appreciated and commonly practiced among the community-based social institution in Mwingi Central Sub County. However, the study outlines several obstacles that need to be streamlined for effective implementation of life skills training among children and recommend that the departments of education and social services should develop and implement a more well-structured life skills training programs within the community-based institutions.*

Key words: *Life skills, community-based social institutions, child protection*

1.1 Study background

The responsibility of ensuring that children are protected from maltreatment has historically been a preserve of the family and other community members. However, there has been a shift in the last century towards more state-based intervention following change in the definition of child maltreatment and issues related to child rights being internationally endorsed (Lonne, Russ, Harrison, et al., 2021). The adoption of 1989 United Nations Convention of the rights of the Child (CRC) marked an important milestone towards need for children to be protected from violence, abuse, neglect treatment and exploitation among nations. However, despite remarkable efforts by families, communities and state parties, the challenge of responding to child abuse and neglect or other forms of child maltreatment still remains a serious social problem (McGregor & Devaney, 2020). In response to the increasing number of children who need protection from maltreatment, countries globally have adopted and implemented various forms of child protection programs, either formal, informal, or both (Higgins, Lonne, Herrenkohl & Scott, 2019). According to Balsellsa, Fuentes-Peláezb and Pastorb (2017), the role family and other community-based social institutions cannot be understated. Children, peers, family and other community-based social institutions could be active agents of reform in both the formal and informal child protection systems in they are well supported and actively involved in child protection processes (Balsellsa et al, 2017) .

According to UNICEF (2012), life skills training is defined as “...group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that can help people makes informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help lead a healthy and productive life...” From the UNICEF definition, life skills training, in schools, at the family level or by other community-based social institutions creates an opportunity for the inculcation of critical life capabilities to enable the recipients of those skills to operate correctly in the world of challenges. Likewise, life skills training could be viewed as an effective intervention approach towards solving community issues that affect a certain segment of the society for example children who need protection from either abuse or neglect (Okey-Orji and Ekenedo, 2019).

According to Mohapi & Pitsoane (2017), in a study conducted in South Africa on Life skills as a behavior change and strategy, there is evidence that life skills training has been successfully used as an intervention towards challenges affecting young persons aged below 19 years. According to the study findings, children who experience challenges like being orphaned or those who are affected by various forms of child abuse like; physical, sexual, child labour, emotional, FGM, early /forced marriage, and child neglect need life skills training for self-protection or for promotion and development of their abilities and courage to report when threatened with maltreatment. Nasheeda et al. (2019) posits that different types of life skills are relevant depending on the target and the social-cultural context they are being offered. For example, there are significant differences in the implementation of life skill training between developed and developing countries. In developed countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany life skills training is aimed at promoting healthy behaviors/attitude change and personal goal-setting among people who struggle with substance addiction, HIV/AIDS, and alcohol abuse. The implementation of life skills training among developing nations like India, South Africa, and Cambodia mostly emphasize on communication skills, assertiveness, having self-esteem, and changing attitudes towards engaging in sexual behavior (Nasheeda et al., 2019).

Kazemi et al. (2014) in a systematic review of existing literature that aimed to provide a rigorous overview of the efficacy of life skills training from a global perspective agreed with Nasheeda et al., (2019) that there is need for developing countries to develop life skills training programs to help children deal with underlying challenges facing them at family and community levels. Fernandez (2014) in review of Australian child protection program, the (OoHC) Out of Home Care, observed that a successful child protection strategy requires an integrated program that addresses not only the children's physical needs but also their emotional and psychological needs. The study noted that life skills training for children are an example of such programs. Prajapati, Sharma, and Sharma (2017) supported the views of Fernandez (2014) that the adoption of the life skills approach in child programming helps in effectively dealing with both the practical needs of the children as well as the psychosocial needs. Okyiko,

Mavole and Ngendo (2017) in a study on the relevance of social work education for social development in Kenya, agreed on the need for offering life skills training to different service providers especially to social workers. The study findings indicated that to contribute effectively in social development in Kenya, social workers should be facilitated to receive relevant education and skills. The study recommends need for social workers in Kenya acquiring education that is based on Afro centric systems of indigenous knowledge and community-based interventions within various social institutions and promotion of local values and practices.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The role of life skills training as a child protection intervention within the context of social institutions in Mwingi Central Sub County remains under-researched. This is despite existing literature showing wider recognition on importance of life skills in equipping children with essential tools for navigating life's challenges. The lack of comprehensive research on the role of life skills training in child protection in Mwingi central sub county hampers a holistic understanding of the factors that influence the relationship of life skills training and child protection within social institutions. There is therefore need for a study to determine the influence of life skills training in child protection within the context of social institutions like: family, schools, Faith-Based Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations. Understanding how these institutions incorporate life skills education into their existing programs is essential in assessing the influence of such interventions to child protection interventions. To address these gaps, this study seeks to Investigating community perception towards life skills training, perceived benefits, and understanding of its role in child protection within the context of social institutions in Mwingi Central Sub County. The social workers and the community-based social institutions within the child protection system have the task of protecting children at the family and community level and providing support in order to ensure normal child care and development conditions for children. It is important to note that that social institution using various child protection strategies like life skills training for children exist to help the family and communities overcome all difficulties and to raise children.

1.3 Study objective

The overall objective of this study was to examine the role of life skills training as a child protection intervention in the context of social institutions in Mwingi Central Sub County, Kitui County Kenya.

1.4 The Conceptual Framework

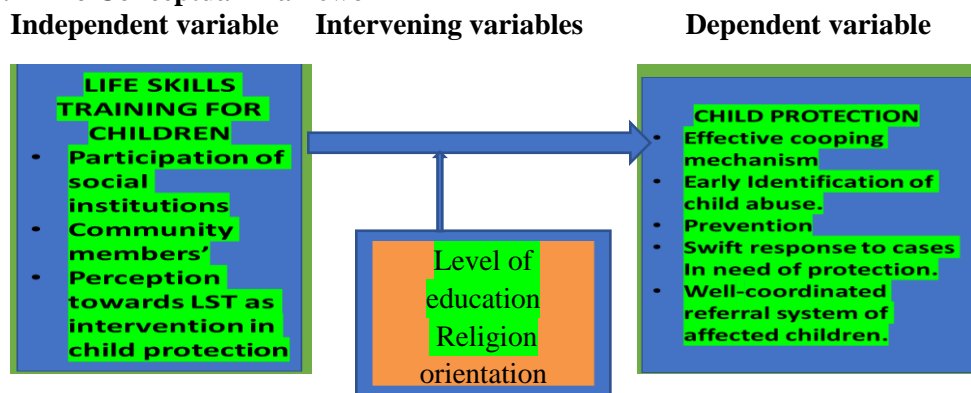


Figure 1: The Conceptual frame work
 Source: Researcher data, 2020

1.5 Theoretical framework

This study was guided by ecological systems theory that was introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner, in the 1970s. The Ecological systems theory offers a framework through which community psychologists examine individuals' relationships within communities and the wider society (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In the ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1977) highlighted the influence of environmental factors to children and how the development of children is influenced by different systems interaction among themselves within the wider systems.

The initial Ecological systems theory identified human developmental influence at four different levels: macro, exo, meso and micro levels. Microsystem factors are located within the immediate environment of the child and interact directly with the child like members of the immediate family. The Mesosystem brings the interconnections between the microsystems, such as the relationship between the family and teachers or relationship between the child's peers and the family. Exo-system are those factors that lie beyond the immediate environment of the child for example, a child's experience at home, as may be influenced by their parents experience at work. Macro system includes larger societal factors such as cultural values and overall economic conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The ecological systems theory places community-based social institutions at the center of child protection especially the role of prevention of child maltreatment before they happen. Different levels; micro-, meso-, and exo- and macro systems as identified by the systems ecological theory all represent various community-based informal social institutions like the family, extended members of the family, teachers, religious leaders, Non-governmental organizations and other community leaders as discussed in this study. 6.0 Empirical review

The role of life skills training in child protection cannot be understated. This is according to Saravanakumar (2020) who observed that life skills training programs are very important in children life because they create an opportunity for the development of critical life capabilities, as well as challenges coping abilities in a changing society. Other benefits associated with life skills training for children include helping in the improvement of their social competencies and problem-solving skills which help them in shaping their very own identity (Saravanakumar, 2020). The UNICEF (2012) global evaluation report on life skills training agrees that there is evidence of life skills education in helping children acquire relevant knowledge, skills, and attitude.

1.6 Life skill training by community-based institutions

1.6.1 Out of school life skills training

According to Okey-Orji and Ekenedo (2019), this category of life skills training is majorly conducted by mentors and peer educators to teach out-of-school children and youth skills to help them to successfully meander through challenges of life through self-management, negotiation skills, conflict resolution, and gender bases violence. The out-of-school life skills training programs are in most cases offered by the NGOs and other development organizations doing humanitarians' work. Life skills training in this category Involves the use of Information, Education, and Communication materials IEC, outreach programs, sensitization programs, life skills/vocational skills, and counseling to reach the target population (Okey-Orji and Ekenedo, 2019).

The UNICEF (2012) global evaluation of life skills education program, also recognizes the role of non-formal intervention in the provision of life skills to out-of-school children in a holistic manner in the areas where NGOs and some international organizations are implementing programs. The UNICEF report on global evaluation of life skills education program recommended that NGOs' works on life skills education should be well coordinated and incorporated with out-of-school education.

A study conducted by Mohammadzadeh, Awang, Ismail & Kadir (2019) among Malaysian orphanages to evaluate effects of life skills-based interventions on the mental health and self-esteem of the adolescences in those programmes revealed that life skills training had significant effects on decreasing the level of emotional problems. According to the study, life skills education is cost effective because it can be offered by local trainers. Sampled population in the study by Mohammadzadeh et al (2019) included all adolescents in the selected orphanages and data collection was by use of a questionnaire.

A study by Karishma (2019) confirmed the important role of Non-Governmental Organizations in offering out of school life skills training. According to the study by Karishma (2019) life skill training offered by these NGO help in placing the disadvantaged youth at a position where they can effectively have gainful labour. The findings of the study showed that life skills training targeting the non-elite girls in New Delhi provided effective platform towards empowerment of these women whose efforts towards gainful labour were limited and regulated along lines of caste and class.

A report by WHO-INSPIRE (2016) showed that NGOs have previously played a huge impact on the reduction of violence against children through life skill training. For example, in Uganda, an NGO called Raising Voices implemented a programme that was aimed at reducing violence perpetrated by teachers to children aged 11-14 years. The programme was conducted among 42 schools in Luwero District and was very effective in reducing violence by the teacher to children by 49%.

The majority of out-of-school life skills programs by the local and international agencies in Kenya and in other developing countries target disadvantaged members of the community like children affected by child labor, who for some reason dropped from school (ILO, 2011). For example, the ILO/IPEC (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour) life skills training program targets older children who have been withdrawn from child labour. The training program was designed to promote an integrated inclusive approach that uses both skills and livelihood training with other basic life skills. Some of the approaches in the ILO /IPEC training program for the out of school children include life skills, informal basic education, community-based mobile, and outreach training approaches, vocational training in rural areas, and formal/informal apprenticeship.

1.6.2 The role of family in Life Skills Education

Lidaka and Lanka (2014) highlighted the important role of family in life skills training. According to the study, family offers a better atmosphere for the acquisition of life skills for young people because it allows each family member to learn and improve skills with the help and support of other family members. The study by Lidaka & Lanka (2014) concluded that in a socially functional family setup, the function and duties of each member of the family are achieved systematically which provides the youth and children an excellent opportunity to acquire life skills. However, social roles in a dysfunctional family pose social challenges and a non-healthy environment for the acquisition of life skills.

In a study conducted in Western Cape, South Africa, Spamer (2017) underscored the importance of offering life skills education to children by parents and caregivers. However, according to Spamer (2017) not all caregivers have the necessary skills to offer life skills education to children, especially children whose parents work long hours, abusive parents/relatives, or those children under the care of old grandparents. According to the study, parents and caregivers should be given the requisite skills to effectively provide life skills education to their children. Additional results of the study by Spamer (2017) showed that child protection professionals should ensure that various actors involved in child protection receive the appropriate training in life skills. According to the study, this can be accomplished jointly by public awareness meetings led by area chiefs and other government officials who can be qualified as life skills trainers of trainers.

A study by Gartland, Riggs, Muyeen, et al. (2019) that sought to explore factors associated with resilience outcomes in children exposed to social adversities showed that a number of factors contribute to children resilience across different socio-cultural backgrounds; at individual level, in school, at home or at the community level. At the family and in other social domains, good relationship with care givers and positive parenting approaches and social support from relatives and friends were identified in this study as key factors associated with resilience. The study by Gartland, et al (2019) adopted a systematic review approach with the main target as children aged 5–12 years and exposed to ‘social adversity’.

1.6.3 The role of Faith-Based Organizations

Okey-Orji and Ekenedo (2019) asserted that religious institutions and religious leaders have a great opportunity to create awareness against all forms of domestic violence affecting members of society. According to the study, religious leaders can be sensitized to teach children and youth skills for positive behaviour. Bonnin and Pillai (2013) agreed that there is a significant relationship between spirituality/ religion and the awareness of life skills. This was according to results of a study conducted among students at Amrita University in India on the effect of spiritual practices on social work (students) perception of life skills. Religious teachings, according to the results of the research, have a direct effect on psychological skills because they help youth cope with stress and emotions as a result of different struggles in life, where they find love and compassion within their religion and religious leaders' teachings.

Kurian and Kurian (2014) in a study on nexus of life skills training and social work practice described social work as a potential profession that effective can use life skills training to impact on the life on the general population. The study findings showed that among the important basic concepts commonly used by social workers in their profession and which are important in solving community-based challenges are; empathy, self-awareness, decision-making and inter personal relationships.

1.6.4 Life skills training for children in Kenya

The empirical literature review on life skills training in Kenya exhibited inclination of life skills training towards education institutions unlike in other community-based social institutions. However, despite this development, studies show that life skills training in schools are faced with a number of challenges. Such studies included a study conducted by Okech and Role (2015) in Hill Primary School, Eldoret Municipality, Kenya. The study findings showed that despite teachers in Kenyan schools appreciating the important role of life skills training in transforming children facing challenges, life skills training is not accorded the attention it deserves in schools. The study findings showed that, time allocated to life skills training in school was not enough and teachers spend more time to other subjects to finish their syllabus in time.

Mwangangi, Ayot, Ondigi and Mumo (2018) in a study on status of life skills education in secondary schools in Kibwezi Sub County, Makueni County, Kenya, observed that Life skills training for students are very beneficial. The study findings further indicated that life skills training prepare children to be resilient and to adequately deal with future challenges in life as they may occur. The study findings showed that despite the importance attached to life skills training for children 57% of the respondents indicated that their respective schools lacked appropriate resources for life skills training. The study recommended sensitization of all stake holders involved in life skills training for children, equipping of schools and induction training for teachers.

Waingajo and Mwangi (2018) in a study on life skills and life skills education in Kenya noted that, as Kenya underwent through the education reforms, there was need for deliberate efforts to integrate learners acquisition of life skills competencies. The study by Waingajo and Mwangi (2018) affirmed that life skills’ training empowers

children to participate in national development. This view is supported by Wanjiku (2017) who observed that, life skills education among secondary school learners in Kenya is faced with challenges because of inadequate skills and poor attitude among teachers. The study findings by Wanjiku (2017) also indicated that in many schools, only a few teachers have appropriate skills recommended by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE). The study adopted descriptive survey design and targeted 32 public secondary schools. In total, 1310 students, 32 principals and 120 teachers participated in the study.

Birgen & Murungi (2018) agreed with Okech & Role (2015) and Wanjiku (2017) on the importance of having life skills training in Kenya. However, Birgen & Murungi (2018) noted that despite teachers fully supporting and embracing introduction LST in schools, the whole programme was faced with many challenges. These challenges include; inadequate teaching and learning resources, preparation for teachers and inadequate refresher courses for teachers.

In support of the views by Birgen and Murungi (2018), Kitivui (2016) in a study conducted in Kitui Central Sub County, Kenya agreed that, while 68.2% of school had life skills training programmes, 77.8 % of teachers in those schools had not attended in-service training programmes since they graduated from teachers training colleges. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and targeted 72 primary schools. The study findings by Kitivui (2016) also indicated that 84.6% of teachers in those schools lacked appropriate learning and relevant teaching material.

1.6.5 Summary of literature review and research gaps

A number of studies recognized that life skills training to children were significant in preparing children to effectively deal and cope with challenges as they may come, presently and in future. This included studies by: Mohapi & Pitsoane (2017) Nasheeda et al., (2019) Saravanakumar (2020)

Studies have also showed that life skills training for children were practiced both at home, school, by faith-based leaders in the places of worship and at the community level mostly by aid and development organization. However, the literature reviewed showed that life skills training in most of Africa countries were faced with challenges like lack of training, lack of equipment's in schools and ignorance by some teachers who ignore life skills training for other subjects.

Regarding life skills training in Kenya, the study also looked into the works of Okech and Role (2015) Wanjiku (2017) Birgen & Murungi (2018) Kitivui (2016) Mwangangi, Ayot, Ondigi and Mumo (2018) Waingajo and Mwangi (2018) Okyiko, Mavole and Ngendo (2017). The studies reviewed were majorly on school-based life skills training for children. Some challenges identified through literature review in Kenya included need for training of all persons involved in life skills training including parents, teachers and religious leaders.

After review of the literature, the following gaps were identified: First, the studies placed greater focus on the importance of life skills training from a school perspective, as well as the application of life skills training to psychosocial issues such as truancy, substance misuse, HIV/AIDS, and sexual relationship challenges. As a result, reviewed studies failed to show how life skills training to children influence child protection both the family and community levels.

Second, the reviewed studies differed with this study mainly on geographical setup, methodological approach and the scope. The reviewed studies mainly used either qualitative or quantitative methods of data collection. This study used mixed-research method approach where data was collected from diverse source within the community.

1.7 Research Methodology

Site description : This study was conducted in Mwingi Central Sub County, Kitui County in December 2020. The county borders Tana River County to the eastern side, Makueni to the west, Tharaka Nithi to the north and Machakos on the southern side. The Kamba is the predominant ethnic group inhabiting the county and the total population for Mwingi central sub county is 108,713 persons living in 26,753 households, with the total land area of 1,146.4 sq. KM (KNBS, 2019). Administratively, Mwingi central sub county has 4 Division, 14 Locations and 32 Sub Locations. In terms of political representation, the Sub County has one constituency and six wards. Kitui County experiences harsh climatic conditions with rainfall ranging between 500-1050 mm annually. Erratic rainfall and unfavourable climatic conditions in Mwingi Central Sub County all contribute to increased child vulnerability due to recurring drought and food insecurity (CIDP, 2018). According to the Kitui county CIDP (2018), statistics shows that 5.5 percent of children under the age of 18 years and 3.8 percent under the age of 14 years are vulnerable. Child vulnerability in Kitui County is mainly categorized in the following groups: children living with relatives of grandparents; orphaned children; and children who are at risk of various forms of abuse and neglect like, child marriage, child labour, neglect due to poverty of parents, child pregnancy and children living with aged/elderly caregivers (Mwinzi, Kathuri & Kinzi, 2020).

The Research design: This study adopted explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. This study opted for explanatory sequential mixed research approach because it provides the researcher with many advantages like providing the researcher with a more in-depth understanding of the quantitative data as supported by the qualitative data (Creswell, 2018).

Study population and target population: This study's target population consisted of adult members from 26,753 households in Mwingi Central Sub County. The target population was guided by the research main objective, which was to determine the role of life skills in child protection in the context of contribution of community-based social institutions. The study also targeted children aged 12 and 17 (both in and out of school) as well as key informants who were in a position to provide information about the research issue to complement the data from the adult members of the households

Sample and sampling techniques: This study employed both probability and non-probability sampling procedures. Probability sampling was used to ensure that each case had the same chance of being included in the sample. Non-probability sampling was used in situations where few cases were needed to be sampled mainly for purposive reasons. First, using simple random sampling method, 2 divisions were selected from the 4 divisions in the sub county. Simple random sampling was used so as to accord every division equal chance of being included in the sample. Subsequently using simple random sampling, 5 locations from 14 locations were selected from the sampled 2 divisions. Simple random sampling was also used to select 10 sub locations from the total of 32 sub locations in Mwingi central. The selected 10 sub locations were: Enziu, Kavuni, Kavuwani, Mwingi, Kisama, Kivou, Ithumbi, Kyanika, Thonoa and Waita. The study sample size of 399 for this study was calculated from total number of 26, 735 households and by use of mathematical formulae developed by Taro Yamane in 1967 (Israel, 2003). In order to have equal distribution of households in each sub location, the study used probability stratified sampling where the sampled units were calculated in proportion to the relative number of households in each stratum. The relative size of each sub location was determined by stratified proportionate formula. After getting the sample size for each 10 sub locations, the next step was to sample specific households in each sub locations. In each of the sampled sub location, a sampling frame was constructed and assigned numbers from one to the last. Households were selected through systematic sampling until the desired number in each sub location was achieved. The 3rd household in each ward was included in the sample and subsequently,

and the Kth number used was every 9th household in each of the sampled sub location. Inclusion of the 3rd household in each sub location was to insure against any possible human bias in using systematic sampling. The assistant chiefs provided the list of households in each respective sub location.

Using purposive sampling, 12 students, at least one from each 10-sub location of both genders aged between 12 and 17 years and who were attending schools were also selected for the study. Using non-probability snowball sampling, the study sampled 12 children, at least one from each 10-sub location who was not attending school by the time of the study due to one reason or the other while 10 key informants were purposively selected for the study.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the 10 key informants was guided by people who were directly involved in child protection like the government officer, religious leaders and non-governmental organizations. However, the study avoided interviews with politicians who may show open bias in responding to study questions under investigation.

Methods and Tools of data collection

Interviews: This study conducted household interviews for the adult household members within the sampled households by use of questionnaires. The questionnaire was deemed fit for this category of informants because it helps the researcher in maintaining uniformity and consistency in the questions to be asked (Creswell, 2015). The questionnaires in this study contained semi structures questions that were intended to address all the study questions. This study also conducted in-depth interviews for 10 key informants using a Semi-structured interview guide. The 10 key informants included the OCPD Mwingi central, 1 Chief from Waita location, the Sub-county Director of education Mwingi Central, Children Officer, Social development officer, Person(s) in charge of the gender and children desk at Mwingi police station, 1 religious' representative, 1 social worker from Ithumbi child development program, 1 Programme Officer with CHRCE (Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education) and the Deputy Sub County Commissioner Mwingi Central Sub County. This study used semi-structured interview guides for the sampled 24 children: 12 out of school children aged between 12 & 17 years who had encountered child abuse, neglect or maltreatment in their lifetime as well as 12 children aged 12-17 who were attending school during the time of the study. In the use of semi-structured interview guides, the researcher was able to explore important issues relevant to the topic from the respondents like their personal experiences, attitudes, and perception concerning the research topic (Leavy, 2017). The interview schedule in this study contained semi-structured open-ended questions developed around the themes to be explored.

Data analysis procedures: The quantitative data was first coded, counter checked, and re-arranged before being entered into the computer during the review of the quantitative data obtained by the use of questionnaires. The Statistical Package for Social Science was used to analyze the data (SPSS version 20). After the data analysis, the data was summarized by use of descriptive statistics and was presented using graphs, charts, and tables. Qualitative Data collected through interviews of the key informants and in-depth interviews with children was recorded through notes taking by the researcher. All the data collected through qualitative means was carefully organized and summarized on daily basis. The relevant information to the study was therefore sorted from the raw data, which then was used by the researcher in developing and naming the themes through thematic analysis. Each theme was analyzed to determine how it fitted into the overall study questions. The following phases of qualitative data analysis were followed: data transcription, identifying relevant features, coding relevant themes, reviewing the themes and coding them a second time, defining the themes and coding them a third time, and lastly producing a report.

1.8 Data Presentation and Interpretation of Research Findings

Response rate: With a view of ensuring the validity of the results, the researcher conducted the response rate analysis. From the expected 399 respondents, 348 questionnaires were filled and returned. According to table 1, the response rate for the household adult members was 348 (87.2%).

Table 1- Response rate

Response	N	Percentage
Filled questionnaires	348	87.2
Unfilled questionnaires	51	12.78
Total	399	100

Source: Field data, 2020

Background and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section discusses the demographic information and attributes about the respondents. The study results presented here include: respondents’ gender, age, religious background, education attainment and occupation. Specifically, some of the demographic attributes may have direct influence to their role in child protection.

Gender of the respondents: The researcher sought to get data from both males and females and therefore the study participants were asked to state their respective gender.

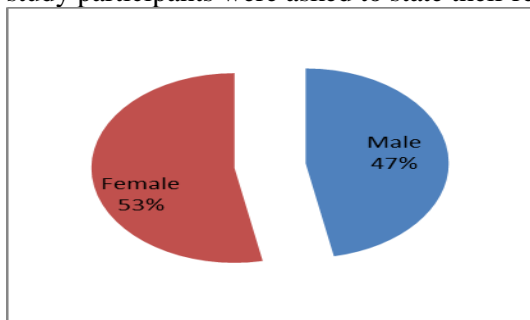


Figure 2- Gender of the respondents

Source: Field data, 2020

As posted in figure 1, out of the total 348 respondents who participated in this study, 163 (47%) were men while 185 (53%) were female. This study results could be attributed to the fact that the 2019 National Census recorded slightly more women than men in Mwingi Central Sub County. Records from the KNBS (2019) show that out of the total population of 108,713 residents in Mwingi Central Sub County, 56,174 (51.7%) were female while 52,539(48.3%) were men.

Respondents’ highest level of education attained

Respondents were asked to state their highest level of education achieved as part of the level of education review.

Table 2 - Education of the respondents

Level of education	Frequency	Percent
None	73	21.0
Primary	175	50.3
Secondary	70	20.1
Tertiary college	22	6.3
University	8	2.3
Total	348	100.0

Source: Field data, 2020

According to table 2, the following responses were obtained: None 73 (21.0%); Primary 175(50.3%); Secondary 70(20.1%); Tertiary college 22 (6.3%); University 8(2.3%). The study results are a reflection that over 70% of the respondents had attained either primary or secondary level of education, while 73(21%) indicated that they did not have education attainment at any level. According to the study results, not many respondents had attained higher levels of education with only 22 (6.3%) and 8 (2.3%) having attained tertiary colleges and university level of education respectively. The low education attainment at higher levels could be attributed to the many socio-economic challenges facing the residents in the sub county. These study results were corroborated by Laurens et al (2020), that there is direct link between education attainment and child maltreatment and hence need for protection. Higher education attainment could result to more knowledgeable service provision and better targeted interventions for children in need of protection.

Main occupation of the respondents

The researcher sought to know the main occupation of the respondents and the study findings as detailed in figure 2 showed that: 178 (51.1%) indicated they were farmers, 55 (15.8%) were doing business, 47 (13.8%) were informal employment and 66 (19.0%) were working as casuals.

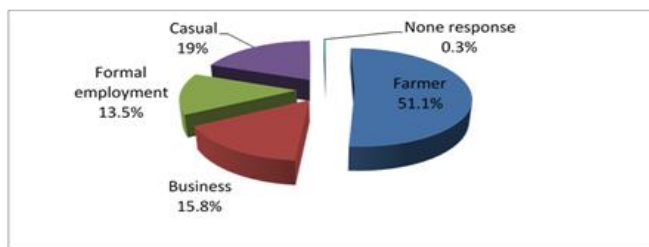


Figure 3- Main occupations of the respondents

Source: Field data, 2020

According to the study results, 51% of respondents were farmers. The results were confirmed by interview with the Key Informants participants who concurred that majority of residents in Mwingi were doing farming on a subsistence basis and the harvest was very unpredictable due to erratic rainfall, and therefore most of the households in Mwingi Central Sub County experience perennial food insecurity which could be an explanation for high child vulnerability to abuse and neglect. Occupation of members of the community who are either parents or guardian to child provides an indication on the family and community members’ ability to provide social support which is very important to children in need of protection for maltreatment.

Children who needed child protection

The researcher engaged with the respondents with an aim of determining the prevalence of child maltreatment in the study area. The respondents were asked whether they had encountered children who had suffered or were at risk of various forms of child abuse, neglect or any other forms of maltreatment and therefore needed protection during their stay in their community.

Table 3- Children who needed child protection

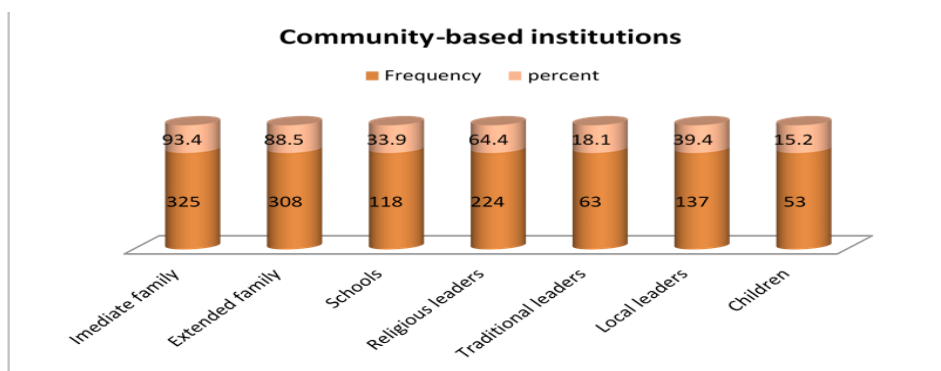
	Frequencies	Percentage
Yes	339	97.4
No	8	2.3
Don't know	1	0.3
Total	348	100

Source: Field data, 2020

According to table 3, the following responses were received: 339 (97.4%) respondents indicated that they had come across children who require protection while 8 (2.3%) indicated that they had not, while 1 (0.3%) indicated that they didn't know. The study findings indicated that 97.4% of the participants confirmed the prevalence of child abuse, neglect and forms of child maltreatment in the study area, a situation that necessitated need for appropriate child protective measures from either the government formal units or through other alternative ways like through informal community-based social institutions.

Community-based social institutions and child protection

The researcher engaged with the study participants with an aim of determining various community-based social institutions involved in child protection.



Source: (Author, 2020)

Figure 4- Community-based social institutions involvement in child protection

The following multiple responses were received: members of the immediate family 325 (3.4%); members of the extend family 308(88.5%); religious leaders 224(54.4%); traditional leaders 63(18.1%); local leaders 137(39.4%); children 53(15.2%). According to the study results, as shown on figure 5, there was high involvement of members of immediate family members and the extended members of the family in child

protection. The study results also showed that teachers, religious leaders as well as other community leaders all played a key role in child protection. The study results were confirmed by the interviewed children who indicated that whenever they encountered situations that required protection, parents, relatives, teachers and religious leaders offered reliable solutions.

Life skills training for children

The researcher sought the views of the respondents regarding whether children within the area of the study received life skills training.

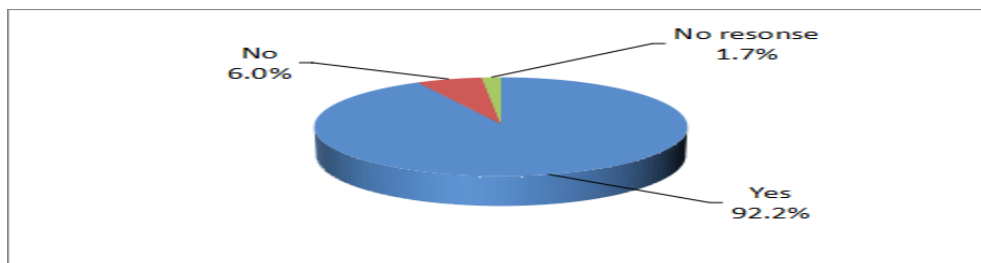


Figure 5- Life skills training for children

Source: Field data, 2020

As per figure 4, the following responses were received: Yes 321 (92.2%), No 21(6.0%), and don't know 6 (1.7%) According to the study results, participants were overwhelming of the opinion that children in the community receive life skills training. An interview with the key informants confirmed that life skills training within the community were done continuously as children grow up. The research findings were corroborated by Prajapati, Sharma, and Sharma (2017) who noted that life skills training for children was a very important aspect in child-rearing because it provided children with skills to deal with both the practical needs of the as well as the psychosocial needs and other challenges they may encounter in life.

Providers of life skills training

The researcher asked the participants to state their perception based on which the role of community- based social institutions and their role in life skills training.

Table 4- Providers of life skills training

Institution	Frequency	Percentage
Family members	208	59.7
Schools	53	15.20
Religious leaders	51	14.70
Other community leaders	12	3.40
Don't know	24	7.00
Total	348	100

Source: Field data, 2020

According to the study results as indicated in table 4, the following responses were received: Family members 208 (59.7%); Schools 53 (15.20%); Religious leaders 51(14.70%) Other community leaders12 (3.40%);

don't know 24 (7.00%). Respondents were of the opinion that most of life skills training to children were offered by members of the family a view which was corroborated through an interview with Key informants who noted that life skills training for children happen more at family level because children spend more time with their relatives and extended members of the family.

The study findings were corroborated by an earlier study by Okey-Orji & Ekenedo (2019), a study on life skills acquisition, a panacea for domestic violence among adolescents in Nigeria which highlighted four categories of life skills training: in-school life skills education; out-of-school life skills education; home life skills education; the role of faith-based organizations. According to Okey-Orji & Ekenedo (2019), all of the main players, both formal and informal, must actively participate in the holistic provision of life skill training to children. Lidaka & Lanka (2014) agreed with the study's results that family plays an important role in the development of life skills because children in a family are given the opportunity to learn and develop new social and life skills with the help of adults and older siblings.

Perception towards significance of LST to children

The study sought the opinion of the respondents regarding their perception on the significance of life skills training as an intervention in child protection.

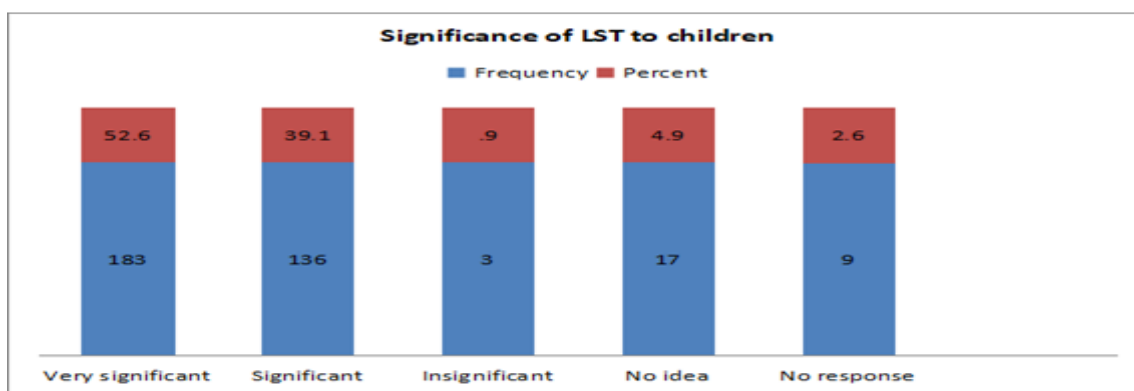


Figure 6: Perception towards significance of LST in child protection

Source: Field data, 2020

According to figure 5, the following responses were received: very significant 183(52.6%), significant 136 (39.1%) insignificant 3(0.9%) no idea 17 (4.9%) and 1 (2.6%) participant did not respond to this question. According to the study results, 183(52.6%) and 136 (39.1%) respondents felt that life skills training to children as an intervention in child protection were very significant and significant respectively.

These study results were supported by an interview with Key informant and children in school who agreed that life skills training to children was a significant intervention to address child maltreatment because it was being done by people well known to them and on continuous basis. The UNICEF (2012) global assessment report on life skills found evidence of life skills education assisting children in acquiring appropriate awareness, skills, and attitudes, supporting the current study findings on the high rating provided by the participants.

Reasons attached to significance of LST

The researcher sought views of the study participants regarding reasons attached to significance of life skills training to children. As per table 5, the following responses were received: children are very vulnerable and need such skills 84 (24.1%), it is our responsibility to offer LST 80 (23.0%), it is our culture to offer LST to children 40 (11.5%), LST prepares children well for adulthood 46 (13.2%) children should be able to make informed choices in life 26 (7.5%), don't know; 72 (20.7%)

Table 5- Reasons attached to significance of LST

Significance of LST	Frequency	Percentage
Children are very vulnerable	84	24.1
It's our responsibility to offer LST	80	23.0
It's our culture to offer LST to children	40	11.5
Prepares children for adulthood	46	13.2
Children able to make Informed choices	26	7.5
Don't know	72	20.7
Total	348	100.0

Source: Field data, 2020

The study results showed that study participants attributed significance of life skills training to children to a number of reasons: 84 (24.1%) respondents felt that because of high vulnerability of children due their age; life skills training were very significant. This was confirmed by Interview with children who revealed that children especially girls were to greater extend vulnerability of because of their tender age, gender and because they were prone to abuse at the hands of adults, some of whom were their relatives. 80 (23%) respondents felt that life skills training to children very significant because it is the responsibility of the members of the community to do ensure children are protected and they grow to be responsible members of the community.

Other reasons were given by the study participants to justify the significance of skills training for children was that life skills training was viewed by the community members as deeply entrenched into the cultural and religious responsibility and expectation of the community members. This study results were supported by an interview with key informants who viewed life skills training to children as a biblical calling and also an important aspect of Kamba culture, where not only the parents but also other close relatives took it as their responsibility. Prajapati et al. (2017) concurred that children facing challenges like an emotional breakdown from various challenges need skills to cope with those challenges as they come.

Suggestions for improving life skills training to children

The researcher engaged with the study participants with a view getting their suggestions related to the ways of improving provision of use of life skills as an intervention to child protection and these were the results: schools should take LST serious like any other subject 27 (7.8%) train community members on LST 73(21.0%) LST should be enhanced by everyone in the community 68 (19.5%) local leaders should be more Involved in LST 39 (11.2%).

Table 6- Suggestions for improving life skills training to children

Suggestions for improvement	Frequency	Percentage
Schools should take LST serious	27	7.8
Train community members on LST	73	21.0
LST should be enhanced by everyone	68	19.5
Local leaders should be more Involved	39	11.2
Total	141	100.0

Source: Field data, 2020

The study finding showed that there was need for schools take life skills training more seriously, views that were corroborated by Okech and Role (2015), who suggested that teachers offer life skills training the weight it deserves in school, just like any other subject such as mathematics. Birgen & Murungi (2018) agreed with the study's results about the importance of improving life skills training in schools, but they also recognized that life skills training in schools faces a number of obstacles, including a shortage of funding, understaffing, and teacher training, all of which must be addressed.

Earlier studies also confirmed study findings from the interview with children in school who felt that teacher give more prominence to other subjects like mathematics, science and English at the expense of life skills training. For example, a study conducted by Kitivui (2016) in Kitui Central Sub County revealed that 77.8 % of teachers in primary schools had life skills programs but the respective teachers in those schools had not attended in-service training programs since they graduated from teachers training colleges. Kibret (2016) agreed with the study's results on the need to raise public consciousness about life skills. He suggested that the preparation be more concentrated and tailored to the beneficiaries' local competition. These researchers also agreed with the idea that more public knowledge and training on life skills for children is required.

The study findings were corroborated by interview with key informants who suggested that awareness on life skills training should be offered to members of the community through public meetings and Public fora by government (TOTs) trainers of trainers and child development organizations working in Mwingi central sub county. Key informants interviewed agreed with the study findings that life skill training should be a responsibility of every member of the society and should be done continuously. Interview with key informants also suggested need of having a more focused and targeted life skills training for children that address specific needs life child abuse and neglect.

Nasheeda et al., (2019) corroborated the study findings that despite several actors playing a central role towards the acquisition of life skills to children, there was a need for policymakers and child protection practitioners of developing strategies that shall solve challenges related to enough resources, relevant skills to providers of life skills, monitoring and evaluation and sustainability of the programs. This study showed that particularly there was a need for ensuring the family members and extended members of the family have the right skills in life skills training.

1.9 Summary of the findings

The study was conceived to explore the role of life skills training as a child protection intervention in the context of community-based social institutions in Mwingi Central Sub-County.

The key findings are discussed herein and the study's main conclusions and recommendations were focused on the analyzed data, which helped the researcher in drawing those conclusions and recommendations.

The study objective sought to examine how life skills training as an intervention initiative influence child protection. To respond to this question, the study looked into various aspects which included: The role of various community-based social institutions in life skills training to children; respondents' perception towards the significance of life skills training to children as an intervention to child protection and the perception of the respondents on the role of life skills training as an intervention in child protection. The study also explored challenges that may hinder effective provision of life skills training by various institutions.

The findings of the study revealed that family members, extended members of the family, schools, religious leaders and other community leaders were all involved in one way or the other in life skills training to children. The study results showed that family member and members of the extended families played a greater role in life skills training than other institutions of the community. The study results also showed high response rate on involvement of other community-based institutions like schools and religious leaders on life skills training.

The study results indicated that life skills training were significant and highly rated by respondents as an intervention towards child protection. Some of the reasons given by the respondents were that it was the responsibility of the family and community members to offer life skills; other felt that it was a cultural and religious responsibility for family, relatives and other community members to give life skills training to children. The study revealed that children needed life skills training because of their vulnerability and therefore they needed problem solving and coping skills.

The study results established that there were gaps that needed to be filled so as to have more effective life skills training at the family and the community level. The study results revealed that although life skills training was being offered by all the community-based social institutions, there existed some challenges because the training was not being offered in a well-structured manner. The study findings revealed that life skills training to children in schools were also faced with challenges like lack of refresher training to teachers on life skills training, lack of facilities in schools and teachers using time allocated for life skills training for other subjects like mathematics and science.

1.10 Conclusion

The study concluded that there was high involvement of community-based social institutions in children using life skills training as a child protection intervention. The study also concluded that to have effective life skills training some gaps needed to be filled. First, not everybody in the community was involved in life skills training for children; secondly, not everyone in the community could adequately conduct life skills training. Therefore, this study concluded that despite high involvement of community-based social institutions in life skills training, there is need for active involvement of all actors within the community at various levels in order to achieve a more effective child protection intervention through life skills training. The study also concluded that there is need for a well-coordinated life skills training programme, which is funded and supported by the government.

1.11 Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

- (i) To the Departments of Children Services, Social Services and the department of Education - Life skills training programs as an intervention towards child protection should be supported with enough resources, monitoring and evaluation strategies, and proper sustainability mechanisms.

- (ii) To the Departments of Children Services, Social Services and the department of Education: Life skills training to children should be offered in a more focused and targeted manner to address specific practical needs of children like abuse and neglect.

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