

No Safe Space: Pervasive Violence Against Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Mombasa, Kenya

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Gender-based violence against sexual and gender minority youth is a pressing human rights and public health concern, yet localized evidence from conservative African urban settings remains scarce. This study identified and categorized the specific forms of gender-based violence experienced by sexual and gender minority youth in Mombasa, a coastal Kenyan city shaped by religious conservatism and by the criminalization of consensual same-sex relations. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used within a pragmatic paradigm. Quantitative data were gathered from 96 young people aged 18 to 35 through a structured survey, and qualitative data were drawn from 25 in-depth interviews and 8 key informant interviews with community leaders, police officers, healthcare providers, and advocacy representatives. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and thematic analysis were combined during interpretation. Violence was pervasive, with 84.4 percent of respondents reporting victimization in the preceding twelve months. Emotional and psychological abuse was the most common form (84.4 percent), followed by social exclusion and family rejection (80.2 percent) and physical violence (68.8 percent). Social exclusion and emotional abuse were rated the most severe forms, and violence recurred for most respondents. Family members and figures of authority were the most frequently named perpetrators, and abuse occurred across home, community, workplace, and online settings. Different forms of violence were strongly intercorrelated, indicating compounded victimization. The findings show that these young people encounter violence in every domain of life and underscore the urgent need for legal reform, institutional accountability, and community-based protection.

Keywords: Coastal East Africa; Family rejection; Intersectionality; Minority stress; Sexual and gender minorities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity is increasingly recognized as a major global human rights and public health concern (Blondeel et al., 2018). This form of violence is often embedded within cultural, legal, and institutional systems that stigmatize sexual and

gender diversity. It manifests through physical assault, verbal harassment, sexual violence, and denial of access to services such as healthcare, housing, and education. The World Health Organization has documented that experiences of violence and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities contribute to significant mental



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health challenges, including trauma, depression, and social marginalization (World Health Organization, 2020).

International organizations have called for stronger protection of LGBTQ+ individuals against violence and discrimination. The United Nations Human Rights Council has issued several resolutions urging states to adopt inclusive legal frameworks and policies aimed at safeguarding the rights of sexual and gender minorities (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2020). However, despite growing global recognition of LGBTQ+ rights, violence and discrimination continue to persist in many parts of the world.

Even in regions with relatively progressive legal protections, LGBTQ+ individuals continue to experience significant levels of harassment and violence. In the European Union, surveys indicate that approximately 58 percent of LGBTQ+ individuals have experienced harassment, while 11 percent report physical or sexual attacks linked to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Bränström et al., 2023). In Canada, nearly 59 percent of sexual minorities report experiencing physical or sexual assault during their lifetime (Hoy-Ellis, 2023). These findings suggest that legal protections alone are insufficient to eliminate social stigma and interpersonal violence.

Across Africa, violence against LGBTQ+ individuals is shaped by complex interactions between legal restrictions, cultural norms, and institutional discrimination. Although the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted Resolution 275 in 2014 calling on member states to protect individuals from violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity, implementation across the continent has been uneven (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2014). In many African countries, same-sex relationships remain criminalized, reinforcing stigma and exposing sexual and gender minorities to discrimination and abuse.

Research in Southern and Eastern Africa indicates that sexual and gender minorities frequently experience high levels of violence and harassment. Studies estimate that approximately 56 percent of

sexual and gender minority individuals in the region have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence (Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021). These experiences are often reinforced by dominant cultural and religious narratives that uphold heteronormative gender expectations. In several Southern African countries, about 33 percent of LGBTQ+ women have reported experiences of sexual violence, reflecting the gendered dimensions of anti-LGBTQ+ abuse (Blondeel et al., 2018).

In East Africa, restrictive legal environments and strong religious influences further intensify hostility toward sexual and gender minorities. Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2023 introduced severe penalties for same-sex relationships and has been associated with increased arrests, forced evictions, and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals (ALT Advisory, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024). Similarly, government crackdowns in Tanzania have resulted in arrests, forced medical examinations, and the suppression of LGBTQ+ organizations (APHRC, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2020). These developments contribute to widespread fear, social exclusion, and limited access to essential services among sexual and gender minorities in the region.

In Kenya, LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face significant stigma, discrimination, and violence despite constitutional protections of fundamental rights. Sections 162 and 165 of the Penal Code criminalize consensual same-sex relations and prescribe penalties of up to fourteen years imprisonment (Human Dignity Trust, 2025). These laws contribute to a climate of marginalization by legitimizing social prejudice and discouraging victims from seeking legal protection.

Violence against sexual and gender minorities in Kenya occurs across multiple social contexts, including families, communities, and public institutions. Family rejection is often the earliest form of violence experienced by LGBTQ+ youth, sometimes resulting in emotional abuse, forced heterosexual relationships, or expulsion from the home. Religious beliefs also strongly influence social attitudes toward sexual minorities. Research by Woensdregt and van Stapele (2023) found that a large proportion of Kenyan religious leaders

expressed negative views toward LGBTQ+ individuals, reinforcing social stigma and discrimination.

At the community level, LGBTQ+ individuals frequently experience harassment, mob violence, and forced eviction. In Mtwapa, a coastal town associated with LGBTQ+ social networks, nearly 47 percent of respondents reported experiencing coerced sexual encounters (Lewis et al., 2023). In Kisumu, sexual and gender minority adults report substantial exposure to violence and its downstream mental health effects, including elevated depressive and post-traumatic stress symptoms among those who have experienced sexual-minority-based violence (Jauregui et al., 2021). Such experiences contribute to long-term psychological distress and increased vulnerability to future violence.

Institutional discrimination further exacerbates these challenges. LGBTQ+ individuals often face barriers when accessing healthcare, employment, and legal protection. Reports indicate that some sexual minority youth experience police harassment, arbitrary detention, and extortion, particularly when their sexual orientation or gender identity becomes known (Outright International, 2025). These experiences discourage victims from reporting violence and reinforce patterns of impunity.

Mombasa City, Kenya's major coastal city, presents a distinct socio-cultural context shaped by strong religious traditions and conservative social norms. Islam plays a prominent role in the region and often frames same-sex relationships as morally unacceptable (Woensdregt & van Stapele, 2023). These beliefs contribute to heightened stigma and surveillance of individuals perceived to deviate from heterosexual norms.

Empirical studies suggest that LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa City frequently encounter harassment, police extortion, blackmail, and threats of public exposure (Lewis et al., 2023). Transgender individuals are particularly vulnerable due to the visibility of their gender identity. Many sexual minority youth also face economic exclusion, including loss of family support, housing insecurity, and limited employment opportunities (Human Dignity Trust, 2025).

Despite growing scholarly and policy attention to LGBTQ+ rights in Kenya, limited research has examined the localized experiences of violence among sexual and gender minority youth in Mombasa City. Existing studies often focus on national trends or adult populations, providing limited insight into the specific challenges faced by youth within coastal urban settings. This study therefore sought to identify and categorize the specific forms of gender-based violence experienced by LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa City, Kenya. The findings contribute to improved policy responses and support services aimed at addressing violence against LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa City and across Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Forms of Gender-Based Violence against LGBTQ+ Youth

Gender-based violence directed at LGBTQ+ youth manifests in diverse and intersecting forms, shaped by sociocultural norms, legal frameworks, and institutional practices. The literature identifies five primary categories of violence: physical assault, sexual violence, emotional abuse, economic exclusion, and institutional mistreatment. These forms are not mutually exclusive; rather, they often co-occur and reinforce one another, producing cumulative harm that affects both individual wellbeing and community resilience.

In North America, gender-based violence against LGBTQ+ youth continues to manifest in both overt and subtle forms, particularly within educational and peer environments. National surveys in the United States have consistently shown that LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately subjected to verbal abuse, physical intimidation, and cyberbullying (Kosciw et al., 2020; Russell & Fish, 2016, 2019). Research demonstrates a strong correlation between exposure to such violence and elevated risks of mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

In the United States, transgender and questioning high school students had bullying rates around 40 percent, with 25 to 26 percent skipping school due to

feeling unsafe, and about 26 percent attempting suicide in the past year, far exceeding cisgender peers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). These patterns link sustained exposure to discrimination and minority stress, underscoring the need for affirming school policies, inclusive curricula, and staff training to mitigate harm (The Trevor Project, 2025).

In Latin America, particularly Brazil, LGBTQ+ youth encounter severe physical and sexual violence rooted in patriarchal norms and institutional gaps. Lesbian and transgender youth face targeted sexual assault, including corrective rape aimed at enforcing heteronormative conformity, alongside broader impunity for such acts (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Systemic failures in prosecution and protection exacerbate long-term trauma, isolation, and barriers to justice and healthcare for survivors (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024).

In Peru, school-based surveys highlight the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault against LGBTQ+ students, suggesting that educational institutions may serve as sites of harm rather than safety (UNESCO, 2015). The normalization of harassment within educational settings undermines the academic and emotional development of LGBTQ+ youth, often leading to school dropout, mental health deterioration, and reduced life opportunities.

Across the African continent, violence against LGBTQ+ youth intensifies due to legal criminalization, cultural conservatism, and institutional failures. In South Africa, despite constitutional protections, lesbian and gender-nonconforming youth endure community-level violence, including corrective rape to enforce gender conformity, driven by patriarchal norms and societal prejudice in townships and rural areas (Mutero, 2025). Black lesbians face heightened vulnerability, with persistent targeted abuse, gang rapes, public shaming, and limited recourse amid gaps between legal recognition and lived realities (Mutero, 2025).

In Uganda, the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act has unleashed widespread abuse, including physical violence, evictions, mob attacks, arbitrary arrests, family rejections, and police brutality, with over

1,200 documented violations affecting more than 1,000 LGBTQ+ individuals in the initial post-enactment period (Human Rights Watch, 2025; Amnesty International, 2024).

In Tanzania, community policing structures have played a central role in facilitating violence, particularly in rural areas where state oversight is limited. Amnesty International (2018) reports that local authorities and informal security networks have carried out evictions, physical assaults, and public shaming of LGBTQ+ individuals. These actions are often justified through appeals to cultural morality and religious doctrine, positioning sexual and gender diversity as threats to communal values.

Kenya presents a complex landscape where violence occurs across familial, communal, and institutional domains. In Kisumu, studies indicate that LGBTQ+ youth frequently experience abuse within the home, including physical punishment, forced evictions, and disinheritance (Jauregui et al., 2021). These forms of violence are often framed as corrective measures, aimed at restoring perceived moral order. Jauregui et al. (2021) similarly found that sexual and gender minority adults in Western Kenya reported multiple forms of violence, with psychological abuse and social rejection being the most commonly cited, often occurring within family settings.

At the community level, social ostracism and public ridicule further isolate LGBTQ+ individuals, limiting their access to education, employment, and healthcare. In Mombasa, moral policing has taken on a particularly aggressive form. Van Stapele (2016) describes how both state actors and community leaders engage in surveillance, extortion, and sexual violence, disproportionately targeting transgender and gender non-conforming youth. These practices are embedded within broader systems of religious conservatism and cultural regulation, which define acceptable expressions of gender and sexuality and punish deviation.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two complementary theoretical perspectives: Intersectionality Theory and Social Identity Theory. These frameworks

provide conceptual tools for understanding how gender-based violence is experienced by sexual and gender minority youth in Mombasa City.

Intersectionality Theory, first articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), explains how multiple systems of oppression interact to produce distinct forms of marginalization. Intersectionality challenges the notion that social identities such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation operate independently. Instead, it emphasizes that these identities are interwoven and collectively shape how individuals experience privilege or exclusion. Collins (2019) further elaborates on this idea by arguing that intersecting identities are not merely additive but mutually constitutive, meaning that each identity influences and transforms the others within specific social contexts.

Intersectionality is particularly relevant to this study because LGBTQ+ youth in Kenya experience marginalization through multiple overlapping social positions. Their vulnerability to violence is not determined solely by sexual orientation or gender identity but also by other factors such as age, socioeconomic status, religion, and cultural expectations. Through the lens of intersectionality, this study examines how these overlapping identities interact with broader social structures including legal institutions, religious doctrines, and family expectations to shape the forms and drivers of gender-based violence.

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1986), explains how individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. According to the theory, people categorize themselves and others into groups such as gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. These categories form the basis of in-groups (groups with which individuals identify) and out-groups (groups perceived as different or external).

Social Identity Theory is particularly useful for understanding how LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa City construct identity and develop coping strategies within environments characterized by stigma and exclusion. In contexts where sexual and gender diversity is socially stigmatized, LGBTQ+ youth

often seek belonging and affirmation through peer networks, community organizations, and informal support groups. These in-groups provide emotional support, identity validation, and spaces for self-expression that may be unavailable within families or broader communities.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design within a pragmatic research paradigm. The design involved the concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data, separate analysis of each dataset, and subsequent integration of findings during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, while the qualitative component used a phenomenological approach with in-depth interviews and key informant interviews.

3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted in Mombasa City, Kenya, a vibrant coastal urban centre renowned for its strategic port, diverse population, and rich cultural heritage. Situated along the Indian Ocean, Mombasa spans approximately 294 square kilometers and serves as a key economic hub for trade, tourism, and industry (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Socio-economically, Mombasa hosts a multicultural populace of over 1.2 million residents, comprising ethnic groups such as the Mijikenda, Swahili, Arabs, and Asians, with a significant Muslim majority influencing social norms and community interactions (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Mombasa's conservative religious and cultural environment, dominated by Islamic values, heightens stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, making it a pertinent site for studying gender-based violence (Woensdregt & van Staple, 2023). The selection of Mombasa was justified by its unique contextual factors, including cultural and religious conservatism and urban

diversity, which exacerbate vulnerabilities for LGBTQ+ youth.

3.3 Target Population and Sampling

The primary target population comprised sexual and gender minority youth aged 18 to 35 residing in Mombasa City, selected due to their heightened susceptibility to gender-based violence stemming from identity exploration, social visibility, and limited economic independence (Lewis et al., 2023). Secondary participants included key stakeholders, such as community leaders, healthcare providers, police officers, and representatives from LGBTQ+ advocacy groups like PEMA Kenya.

For the qualitative component, purposive and chain-referral (snowball) sampling techniques were employed to identify participants who possessed direct knowledge and experience relevant to the study objectives. The qualitative sample comprised 25 sexual and gender minority youth selected for in-depth interviews. In addition, 8 key informants were purposively selected from institutions and organizations that interact with sexual and gender minority populations.

For the quantitative component, chain-referral (snowball) sampling through peer networks was employed. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for populations of unknown size:

$$n = (Z^2pq) / e^2$$

Where n is the required sample size; Z is the standard normal deviate corresponding to the desired confidence level (1.96 at the 95 percent confidence level); p is the estimated proportion of the attribute present in the population (0.5); q is $1 - p$ (0.5); and e is the margin of error (0.10). A 10 percent margin of error was selected given the hidden and hard-to-reach nature of the target population, the logistical constraints of conducting research with a marginalized and criminalized group, and the complementary qualitative component (25 in-depth interviews and 8 key informant interviews) that provides contextual depth to the quantitative findings. This approach is consistent with studies on hidden populations in African contexts (Palinkas et

al., 2015). Substituting these values yielded a sample size of approximately 96 respondents:

$$n = (1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5) / 0.10^2 = 96.04$$

Eligibility criteria for the quantitative survey included self-identification as a sexual or gender minority individual, age between 18 and 35 years, residence in Mombasa City, and willingness to provide informed consent.

3.4 Data Collection

Qualitative Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 sexual and gender minority youth using semi-structured interview guides containing open-ended questions. Key informant interviews were conducted with 8 participants drawn from institutions and organizations that interact with sexual and gender minority populations. Interviews were conducted in either English or Kiswahili according to participant preference and were audio-recorded with participant consent.

Quantitative Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to 96 participants. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and Likert-scale items covering demographic characteristics, experiences of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, and coping responses. Data collection occurred through both secure online platforms and face-to-face administration, depending on participant preference and accessibility.

3.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). NVivo 14 software was used to support data organization, coding, retrieval, and theme development. Coding was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from participants' narratives.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 26). Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were generated. Chi-square tests and Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine relationships between variables. All statistical tests were conducted at a 95 percent confidence level.

Integration

Following separate analyses, qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated during the interpretation stage in accordance with the convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Integration involved comparing, contrasting, and synthesizing results from both strands to develop a comprehensive understanding of gender-based violence.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was central to this study, particularly given the vulnerability and potential marginalization of LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Technical University of Mombasa – Science and Ethics Review Committee (TUM-SERC), and a research permit was secured from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All potential participants received clear information about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, possible risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. Informed consent was obtained in written or verbal form depending on participant preference.

Strict measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and privacy. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and no identifying information appeared in interview

transcripts, survey datasets, or research reports. Digital data were stored in encrypted and password-protected files accessible only to the research team. Physical documents were stored in locked cabinets in secure locations.

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic and the potential social risks faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, additional safeguards were implemented. Recruitment occurred through trusted community networks and partner organizations such as PEMA Kenya. Interviews and survey participation took place in discreet and secure locations selected with participants' input. A trauma-informed approach was adopted throughout data collection, with participants reminded that they could pause or stop the interview at any time. Counseling and psychosocial support services were available through PEMA Kenya for participants experiencing distress.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The survey comprised 96 LGBTQ+ youth aged 18 to 35 years residing in Mombasa City. As shown in Table 1, the sample included diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. The largest age group was 18–24 years (39.6 percent), followed by 25–29 years (32.3 percent) and 30–35 years (28.1 percent). In terms of gender identity, 39.6 percent identified as cisgender male, 34.4 percent as cisgender female, 13.5 percent as transgender, 9.4 percent as non-binary, and 3.1 percent as intersex. Regarding sexual orientation, 27.1 percent identified as gay, 25.0 percent as lesbian, 20.8 percent as bisexual, 11.5 percent as queer, and 15.6 percent as other or preferring not to say. Religious affiliation showed Christians at 39.6 percent, Muslims at 35.4 percent, and those with no religious affiliation at 25.0 percent. Employment status showed formal employment at 29.2 percent, informal employment at 14.6 percent, unemployment at 27.1 percent, and students at 29.2 percent.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents (N = 96)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age group	18–24 years	38	39.6
	25–29 years	31	32.3
	30–35 years	27	28.1
Gender identity	Cisgender male	38	39.6
	Cisgender female	33	34.4
	Transgender	13	13.5
	Non-binary	9	9.4
	Intersex	3	3.1
Sexual orientation	Gay	26	27.1
	Lesbian	24	25.0
	Bisexual	20	20.8
	Queer	11	11.5
	Other/Prefer not to say	15	15.6
Religion	Muslim	34	35.4
	Christian	38	39.6
	None	24	25.0
Employment	Employed (formal)	28	29.2
	Employed (informal)	14	14.6
	Unemployed	26	27.1
	Student	28	29.2

4.2 Prevalence of Violence

The survey revealed that 84.4 percent of respondents had experienced some form of

violence or mistreatment due to their sexual orientation or gender identity in the past 12 months (Table 2). Only 15.6 percent reported no such experiences.

Table 2. Prevalence of Violence Experienced by LGBTQ+ Youth in the Past 12 Months

Violence experience	n	%
Yes	81	84.4
No	15	15.6
Total	96	100.0

4.3 Types of Violence

Respondents who experienced violence reported multiple forms of victimization (Table 3). Emotional and psychological violence was the most prevalent form (84.4 percent), followed by social exclusion and family rejection (80.2 percent), physical violence (68.8 percent), digital/online violence (47.9 percent), economic violence (37.5 percent), institutional violence (34.4 percent), and sexual violence (19.8 percent).

Notably, all respondents who experienced any form of violence reported experiencing emotional and psychological violence, reflecting the pervasive nature of verbal abuse, threats, and humiliation in the lives of LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa. This finding is consistent with the minority stress framework, which identifies chronic exposure to stigma-related stressors as a fundamental experience for sexual and gender minority individuals (Meyer, 2018).

Table 3. Types of Gender-Based Violence Experienced by LGBTQ+ Youth

Type of violence	n	%
Emotional/Psychological	81	84.4
Social exclusion/Family rejection	77	80.2
Physical	66	68.8
Digital/Online	46	47.9
Economic	36	37.5
Institutional	33	34.4
Sexual	19	19.8

Note. Respondents could select multiple types of violence; percentages sum to more than 100.

4.4 Severity of Violence

Respondents rated the severity of each type of violence on a 5-point scale (1 = Mild, 5 = Very Severe). As shown in Table 4, social exclusion had

the highest mean severity score ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.912$), with 79.2 percent of respondents rating it as severe or very severe. Emotional and psychological violence followed closely ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.728$),

with 74.0 percent rating it as severe or very severe. Physical violence had a mean severity of 2.95 (SD

= 2.059), with 63.5 percent rating it as severe or very severe.

Table 4. Summary of Severity of Gender-Based Violence by Type

Type of violence	n	M	SD	% Severe/Very Severe
Social exclusion	77	3.72	1.912	79.2
Emotional/Psychological	81	3.66	1.728	74.0
Physical	66	2.95	2.059	63.5
Digital/Online	46	2.07	2.221	42.7
Institutional	33	1.52	2.137	33.3
Economic	36	1.44	1.885	30.2
Sexual	19	0.94	1.913	18.8

Note. Severity was rated on a 5-point scale: 1 = Mild, 2 = Slight, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Severe, 5 = Very Severe. Respondents who did not experience a given type of violence were coded 0; means (M) and standard deviations (SD) are therefore computed across the full sample (N = 96). n = number of respondents who experienced that type of violence. Percentages rating a type “Severe/Very Severe” are based on N = 96.

4.5 Frequency, Location, and Perpetrators

Frequency of Violence. A substantial proportion of respondents (33.3 percent) reported experiencing violence “often” (6 or more times) in the past year, while 45.8 percent reported experiencing violence “sometimes” (3–5 times). This indicates that for the majority of LGBTQ+ youth (79.1 percent), violence is not an isolated incident but a recurring experience (Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency of Violence Experienced by LGBTQ+ Youth in the Past 12 Months

Frequency	n	%
Never	15	15.6
Rarely (1–2 times)	5	5.2
Sometimes (3–5 times)	44	45.8
Often (6+ times)	32	33.3
Total	96	100.0

Location of Violence

Violence occurred across multiple locations (Table 6). Community and public spaces were the most

common location for the most recent incident (32.3 percent), followed by the home (26.0 percent), workplace (16.7 percent), school/education (6.3 percent), and online/digital (3.1 percent).

Table 6. Location of Most Recent Violence Incident (N = 96)

Location	n	%
Did not experience violence	15	15.6
Community/Public space	31	32.3
Home	25	26.0
Workplace	16	16.7
School/Education	6	6.3
Online/Digital	3	3.1
Total	96	100.0

Perpetrators of Violence

Family members were the most common perpetrators of the most recent incident (30.2 percent), followed by authorities including police,

teachers, and employers (22.9 percent), community members (16.7 percent), peers/friends (11.5 percent), strangers (2.1 percent), and intimate partners (1.0 percent) (Table 7).

Table 7. Main Perpetrators of Violence against LGBTQ+ Youth

Perpetrator	n	%
Did not experience violence	15	15.6
Family member	29	30.2
Authority (police, teacher, employer)	22	22.9
Community member	16	16.7
Peer/Friend	11	11.5
Stranger	2	2.1
Intimate partner	1	1.0
Total	96	100.0

4.6 Correlational Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlations between most types of violence (Table 8), indicating that LGBTQ+ youth who experience one form of violence are likely to

experience multiple forms. The strongest correlations were between social exclusion and emotional violence ($r = .818$, $p < .01$), social exclusion and physical violence ($r = .641$, $p < .01$), and emotional and physical violence ($r = .587$, $p < .01$).

Table 8. Pearson Correlation Matrix of Severity Scores across Types of Violence

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Social exclusion	—						
2. Physical	.641**	—					
3. Sexual	.292**	.216*	—				
4. Emotional	.818**	.587**	.264**	—			
5. Economic	.309**	.190	.209*	.318**	—		
6. Institutional	.381**	.324**	.448**	.317**	.207*	—	
7. Digital	.320**	.335**	.110	.371**	.090	-.013	—

Note. Severity was measured on a 5-point scale; respondents who did not experience a given type of violence were coded 0. $p < .05$; $p < .01$ (two-tailed).*

4.7 Qualitative Findings

4.7.1 Emotional and Psychological Violence

The high prevalence of emotional and psychological violence reported in the survey was reflected in participants' narratives. A 31-year-old gay Muslim participant described the chronic psychological toll of family expectations:

"My father constantly asks me why I am not a real man. He says I am too soft. He says I need to be tougher. My mother keeps asking me when I am going to have children. She says I am getting old. She says people are starting to talk. They do not know the truth. But their words hurt. They cut deep." (IDI-006)

Emotional violence, in this case, operates even when family members are unaware of the individual's sexual orientation; the pressure to conform to gender and family expectations is itself

a source of chronic psychological distress. His description of words that "cut deep" casts verbal pressure as a wound comparable to a physical one, echoing the minority stress framework's emphasis on the psychological toll of chronic exposure to stigma (Meyer, 2003, 2018).

A 21-year-old lesbian participant described the psychological violence of having to witness her own condemnation:

"Every time my father preaches about gay people, it feels like a knife in my heart. He doesn't know he's talking about me. But I know. And it hurts. I have to sit there and pretend. I have to nod and agree. Inside I'm dying." (IDI-008)

Here the violence is one of performative compliance: the participant is forced to sit through, and appear to endorse, her own condemnation. Sustaining that suppression of authentic identity carries a real psychological cost, captured in her

description of feeling like she is “dying” inside.

4.7.2 Social Exclusion and Family Rejection

Family rejection was described as the most painful form of violence. A 24-year-old lesbian participant described being thrown out of her family home:

“My father called me into the living room. He said he had heard rumors about me. He asked me if they were true. I told him the truth. I told him I was a lesbian. He was so angry. He started shouting. He said I had brought shame to the family. He said I was no longer his daughter. He told me to pack my things and leave. I walked out of that house and I never went back.” (IDI-021)

The finality here is striking: the participant is given no opportunity to explain or defend herself, and disclosure leads directly to expulsion. Her father’s declaration that she is “no longer his daughter” captures the erasure of personhood that so often accompanies family rejection (Harper et al., 2024).

A 27-year-old lesbian participant described being outed by a trusted family member:

“I made the mistake of confiding in my older sister. I thought she would understand because we were close. But she went straight to my parents. My father was furious. He called me into his study and demanded I explain myself. When I couldn’t give him the answer he wanted, he beat me with a belt. He called me names, told me I was bringing shame to the family that I was sinning against Allah.” (IDI-007)

Several forms of violence converge in this single episode: the sister’s betrayal of confidence, the father’s beating, the verbal abuse, and the invocation of religious sin. That the beating is justified with reference to shame and sin points to how tightly religion, family honor, and physical violence are bound together in these accounts.

4.7.3 Physical Violence

A 29-year-old gay Muslim participant described a brutal attack:

“A group of young men stopped me. They said they knew about me. They said people like me should not be walking around in their neighborhood. They started beating me. They kicked me while I was on the ground. They took my phone and my wallet. They said if they ever saw me again, they would kill me.” (IDI-004)

Physical violence here is combined with theft and threats, suggesting that perpetrators are not only causing harm but asserting dominance and humiliating their victims. The threat of death, in particular, points to the extreme hostility LGBTQ+ youth can face within their own communities.

A 24-year-old transgender woman described a particularly violent attack:

“A group of five men stopped me. They started shouting, calling me names, saying I was a disgrace, that I was cursed. Then they started beating me. They kicked me, punched me, threw stones at me. I was on the ground begging them to stop. They did not stop. They said they were ‘teaching me a lesson’ and that I should dress like a man. One of them said he would ‘fix me’ and tried to pull down my skirt.” (IDI-022)

Transphobia and gender policing are inseparable in this episode; the violence is explicitly deployed to enforce gender norms, down to the attempt to strip off her skirt. The perpetrators’ framing of the attack as “teaching a lesson” treats violence as legitimate social correction, a rationale documented in other African contexts (Mutero, 2025).

4.7.4 Digital and Online Violence

A 30-year-old bisexual participant described being blackmailed:

“I was on Grindr. I was just looking for someone to talk to. I was lonely. There was a man who messaged me. We chatted for a few days. He seemed nice. Then he started asking me personal questions. Where I worked. Where I lived. I told him. Then he sent me a screenshot of my profile picture and said he would post it on Facebook and tell everyone I was gay. He said people like me should be exposed. He demanded money to delete

it.” (IDI-001)

The pattern here—building trust before pivoting to exploitation—illustrates how predatory some online interactions have become. The threat of public exposure works precisely because it leverages the stigma and legal risk already attached to LGBTQ+ identity in Kenya.

A community outreach officer described this pattern as a recognized local practice, referred to locally as “brokering”:

“There is this thing in Kenya called brokering. People use technology to extort LGBTQ+ people. Someone pretends to be interested in you on Grindr or another dating app. Then they threaten to expose you or they show up and beat you up. It is very common here.” (KII-008)

The blackmail IDI-001 described is therefore not an isolated incident but one instance of a named, systematic practice of digital entrapment and extortion operating in Mombasa. That the practice has generated its own local vocabulary suggests it is routine enough to be widely recognized by both perpetrators and the LGBTQ+ community.

4.7.5 Institutional Violence

A 23-year-old gay participant described being arrested and extorted by police:

“The police came and arrested all of us. They took us to the station. They called us names. They said we were criminals. They made us pay money before they let us go. I had to borrow money from a friend to pay the bribe. It was so humiliating.” (IDI-002)

A key informant from a human rights organization confirmed the pervasiveness of police harassment:

“Police are a huge problem. They abuse their power. They extort money. They threaten arrest. They sometimes participate in the violence themselves. They know LGBTQ+ individuals can’t report them. They know the law is on their side.” (KII-001)

The impunity police officers enjoy when targeting LGBTQ+ individuals is explained directly here: the observation that “they know the law is on their side” shows how criminalization itself supplies the

legal cover perpetrators use to justify abuse (Human Dignity Trust, 2025; Woensdregt & van Stapele, 2023).

4.7.6 Sexual Violence

A human rights lawyer described a case involving a transgender woman:

“A young transgender woman. She was 24. She was attacked by a group of men. They beat her and raped her. She came to me. She wanted to report it. We went to the police station. The officer on duty refused to take the report. He said, ‘You’re not a woman. You’re a man. How can you be raped?’ He laughed at her.” (KII-005)

Two layers of victimization stack up in this case: the physical and sexual violence itself, and an institutional response that compounds the trauma by denying the victim’s gender identity and dismissing her report outright. The officer’s laughter adds a further layer of humiliation to an already denied claim to justice.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Overview of Findings

This study sought to identify and categorize the specific forms of gender-based violence experienced by LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa City, Kenya. The findings reveal that violence is pervasive, multi-faceted, and occurs across all domains of life. With 84.4 percent of respondents having experienced violence in the past 12 months, the prevalence rate is higher than rates reported in other African contexts, where approximately 56 percent of sexual and gender minority individuals in the Southern African region have experienced physical or sexual violence (Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021), with rates in some Kenyan contexts reaching 62 percent (Jauregui et al., 2021). This higher prevalence may reflect Mombasa’s unique context of religious conservatism and community surveillance (Woensdregt & van Stapele, 2023), as well as the comprehensive measurement of multiple forms of violence beyond

physical and sexual assault.

5.2 Forms of Violence

Emotional and Psychological Violence. The predominance of emotional and psychological violence (84.4 percent) aligns with research demonstrating that LGBTQ+ individuals face constant stigma, verbal abuse, and threats that accumulate as minority stress (Meyer, 2018; Frost & Meyer, 2023). The qualitative accounts of participants who described feeling like words “cut deep” or that they were “dying inside” illustrate the mechanisms through which emotional violence causes harm. This form of violence is often invisible and normalized, making it particularly insidious. The finding that emotional violence is the most prevalent form suggests that interventions must address not only physical safety but also the psychological well-being of LGBTQ+ youth.

Social Exclusion and Family Rejection

The high rate of family rejection (80.2 percent) corroborates studies in Kenya documenting family-based violence as the earliest and most pervasive form of victimization (Harper et al., 2024). The qualitative accounts of being thrown out of homes and disowned by families reflect the cultural primacy of family honor over individual well-being (Tamale, 2020). Family rejection is particularly harmful because it occurs at a developmental stage when young people are most dependent on family support (Craig et al., 2023) and has been associated with depression, suicidality, and substance use (SAMHSA, 2022). The finding that family members are the most common perpetrators (30.2 percent) underscores the need for family-based interventions that address the root causes of rejection.

Physical Violence

The finding that physical violence affects 68.8 percent of respondents aligns with research documenting high rates of physical assault against

LGBTQ+ individuals in African contexts (Human Rights Watch, 2024; Lewis et al., 2023). The qualitative accounts of beatings and death threats reflect the extreme hostility that LGBTQ+ youth face. The perpetrators’ reference to “teaching a lesson” and the community’s failure to intervene reflect the social normalization of violence against LGBTQ+ individuals. This finding indicates that physical safety is a fundamental concern that must be addressed through legal protection, community education, and police reform.

Digital and Online Violence

The high rate of digital violence (47.9 percent) aligns with recent reports documenting technology-facilitated violence against LGBTQ+ individuals in Kenya (KICTANet, 2025). The blackmail and threatened public exposure described by participants (IDI-001), and the practice that a key informant identified as “brokering” (KII-008); the use of dating apps to entrap and extort LGBTQ+ individuals, represent forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence that have received limited attention in research and policy. That this practice has an established local name suggests it is a routinized rather than incidental threat. Because online abuse can escalate into offline harm, comprehensive approaches are needed that address both digital and physical safety?

Economic and Institutional Violence

The presence of economic violence (37.5 percent) and institutional violence (34.4 percent) reflects the structural dimensions of violence against LGBTQ+ youth, where discrimination in employment and institutional settings perpetuates vulnerability (Choi et al., 2020; Abramovich, 2017). The finding that authorities including police, teachers, and employers are perpetrators (22.9 percent) highlights institutional failures in protecting LGBTQ+ youth. This indicates that addressing violence requires systemic change across multiple sectors.

Sexual Violence

The lower prevalence of sexual violence (19.8 percent) may reflect underreporting due to stigma, shame, and fear of victim-blaming. However, the severity of this form of violence, as documented in qualitative accounts, indicates that it remains a critical concern. The phenomenon of corrective rape targeting lesbians and transgender individuals, described by key informants, reflects the intersection of patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia (Mutero, 2025).

5.3 Severity and Compounded Victimization

The finding that social exclusion and emotional violence are perceived as the most severe forms of violence is significant. Both forms of violence had mean severity scores above 3.6 out of 5, with over 74 percent of respondents rating them as severe or very severe. This challenges the tendency to prioritize physical violence in research and interventions and underscores the need to address psychological forms of violence as priorities.

The correlation analysis reveals that different types of violence are significantly correlated, indicating that LGBTQ+ youth experience compounded victimization. The strong correlation between social exclusion, emotional violence, and physical violence ($r = .587$ to $.818$, $p < .01$) reflects the clustering of violence around family rejection; when families reject LGBTQ+ youth, they often subject them to emotional abuse and physical violence. This compounded victimization has significant implications for mental health and well-being, as exposure to multiple forms of violence is associated with elevated psychological distress (Harper et al., 2024; Frost & Meyer, 2023).

5.4 No Safe Spaces

The finding that violence occurs across multiple locations; home, community, workplace, school, and online indicates that LGBTQ+ youth have no safe spaces where they can escape victimization.

This pervasive exposure to violence reflects the totalizing nature of oppression, where no domain of life is free from the threat of violence. The home, which should be a place of safety, is often the most dangerous location, reflecting the role of family as the primary source of violence. The finding that 79.1 percent of respondents experience violence repeatedly indicates that victimization is a chronic rather than isolated experience.

5.5 Theoretical Implications

The findings validate Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1991) by demonstrating that multiple marginalized identities compound vulnerability. The qualitative accounts reveal that transgender individuals described more severe and frequent physical and sexual violence, reflecting the visibility of their gender identity. Lesbian women described corrective rape and family rejection related to gender expectations. Bisexual individuals described a different form of violence related to identity erasure. This diversity of experiences validates the intersectional approach to understanding gender-based violence. The correlation between different types of violence reflects the intersection of multiple systems of oppression.

The findings also validate Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The family rejection described by participants represents the ultimate out-group rejection, being cast out from the primary in-group of one's family. The need to conceal identity reflects the desire to maintain in-group membership at the cost of self-expression. The formation of peer networks and engagement with advocacy groups represents the creation of alternative in-groups that provide belonging and validation. The multiple perpetrators of violence represent different out-groups that target LGBTQ+ youth: family members represent the primary in-group that rejects the individual, authorities represent institutional out-groups that enforce heteronormative norms, and community members

represent the broader social out-group that polices gender and sexual boundaries.

5.6 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings have significant implications for policy and practice. First, legal reform is urgently needed. The criminalization of same-sex relationships under Penal Code Sections 162 and 165 legitimizes violence and prevents victims from seeking justice (Human Dignity Trust, 2025). Decriminalization would remove the legal basis for discrimination and allow LGBTQ+ individuals to access legal protection. Second, police reform is critical, given that authorities are themselves perpetrators of violence (22.9 percent); police officers must be trained and held accountable to protect LGBTQ+ individuals rather than abuse them. Third, family-based interventions such as family counseling, community education, and support for parents are needed to address the root causes of the family rejection that makes family members the most common perpetrators (30.2 percent). Fourth, the high rate of digital violence (47.9 percent) calls for legal and policy frameworks addressing technology-facilitated abuse, including legislation criminalizing online blackmail and entrapment and awareness campaigns targeting LGBTQ+ youth. Fifth, the finding that economic violence affects 37.5 percent of respondents and that the home is a frequent site of violence (26.0 percent) indicates the need for safe housing options and economic empowerment programs. Finally, the role of religious and cultural norms in legitimizing violence (Woensdregt & van Stapele, 2023) points to the need for community-based interventions that challenge stigma and promote acceptance.

5.7 Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

This study has several strengths. The mixed-methods design provides a comprehensive understanding of gender-based violence, integrating quantitative prevalence data with qualitative narratives that explain the mechanisms

and contexts of violence. The inclusion of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations allows for intersectional analysis. The focus on Mombasa, a region with limited previous research, addresses an important gap in the literature.

Limitations

The study also has limitations. The cross-sectional design captures experiences at a single point in time and cannot establish causal relationships. The use of chain-referral sampling may limit generalizability to the broader population of LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa. The sample may overrepresent individuals connected to advocacy organizations and underrepresent those who are completely hidden. All data are self-reported and subject to recall bias and social desirability bias. The study focused on Mombasa City, and findings may not be generalizable to other regions of Kenya with different cultural and religious contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that gender-based violence against LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa is pervasive, systematic, and multifaceted. With 84.4 percent of respondents having experienced violence in the past 12 months, the prevalence is higher than rates reported in other African contexts. LGBTQ+ youth experience multiple forms of violence; emotional, physical, sexual, economic, institutional, and digital across all domains of life. Family members are the most common perpetrators, and the home is a primary site of violence, indicating that LGBTQ+ youth have no safe spaces where they can escape victimization.

The findings validate Intersectionality Theory by demonstrating how multiple marginalized identities compound vulnerability, and Social Identity Theory by showing how family rejection represents the ultimate out-group exclusion. The study highlights the urgent need for legal reform, police reform, family-based interventions, digital violence prevention, safe housing, economic support, and community education. Without comprehensive

interventions addressing the structural, cultural, and institutional drivers of violence, LGBTQ+ youth in Mombasa will continue to face pervasive victimization with profound consequences for their health, well-being, and life opportunities.

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