



Women's Economic Empowerment and Intimate-Partner Violence among Young Women in Nyatike Sub-County, Migori County – Kenya

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Cite as: Ochieng, L. A., Chesikaw, L., & Khaemba, J. (2026). Women's Economic Empowerment and Intimate-Partner Violence among Young Women in Nyatike Sub-County, Migori County – Kenya. *International Journal of Social and Development Concerns*, 31(7), 102–117. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20479321>

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Oversight Imperials Consultants International Limited

Abstract: This study investigated the effect of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) interventions on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among young women aged 20–35 years in Nyatike Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya. Grounded in the Marxist-Feminist theory, the research applied a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design integrating a structured survey ($n = 139$) with in-depth interviews ($n = 25$), and 5 key informant interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques with the help of SPSS v26, while qualitative data were coded thematically using NVivo. From the findings, the pairwise correlation ($r = -0.09$) showed a weak negative relationship between empowerment and IPV, implying that economic empowerment slightly reduces IPV but is mediated by relational and sociocultural factors. Qualitative findings revealed that 73% of women reported reduced IPV after empowerment, while 7 % experienced an escalation linked to partner backlash. The study concludes that while WEE enhances financial independence, voice, and household respect, it is insufficient to eliminate IPV without gender-transformative components. Programs should integrate spousal engagement, GBV and mental health counseling, and community gender-norm dialogues. Policies should extend protection to cohabiting and separated women, strengthen educational and livelihood pathways, and embed gender-sensitivity in empowerment models. These strategies will better align economic empowerment with sustainable reductions in IPV and promote equitable development outcomes for rural women in in the study area and beyond.

Key Words: Women's Economic Empowerment, Intimate-Partner, Violence, Women

1.1 Background of the Study

Economic empowerment refers to the ability of individuals or groups to access and control financial resources, improve their economic status, and achieve financial independence. It encompasses access to income, employment opportunities, credit, assets, and financial services, enabling individuals to make informed economic decisions. Economic empowerment promotes self-sufficiency, enhances participation in economic life, and reduces vulnerability to poverty and economic shocks. As a key driver of equality, social inclusion, and sustainable development, it addresses systemic disparities based on gender, socioeconomic status, and other intersecting factors (Jatfors, 2017).

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses harmful acts perpetrated against individuals based on their gender, or acts that disproportionately affect individuals of a particular gender. It includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, as well as threats, coercion, and restrictions on freedom. GBV occurs in both public and private spheres and is deeply rooted in gender inequality, social norms, and institutional structures that sustain discrimination and marginalization based on gender identity or expression (Graaff, 2021).

Recent studies have increasingly explored the social dimensions of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly domestic violence and physical injury (Eger, 2021; Montserrat *et al.*, 2022). While earlier research often focused on immediate social contexts, Eger (2021) identified a significant gap in understanding how economic empowerment, such as financial independence or employment, might mitigate GBV risk. Similarly, Montserrat and Freijomil-Vázquez (2022) emphasized the importance of examining how access to resources and financial stability could reduce the prevalence of GBV. Both sets of scholars advocate integrating economic empowerment into GBV prevention strategies, particularly for women and marginalized populations.

Buvinic *et al.* (2022) highlighted the centrality of women's agency and decision-making in driving economic empowerment, noting positive associations with income growth and business profitability. In Nigeria, Obiagu (2023) used national survey data to examine the links between education, empowerment, and GBV. While increased education expanded women's public engagement, it did not uniformly protect them from intimate partner violence, especially when women had higher educational attainment than their male partners.

In Uganda, Ambler *et al.* (2021) conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of economic empowerment programs, including financial literacy and business training. The integration of couple-focused workshops and peer support networks improved both financial outcomes and community participation. Participants initiated businesses, increased their savings, and invested in children's education. Similarly, in Somalia, Glass *et al.* (2019) found that a multi-sectoral GBV protection program—incorporating economic components—significantly reduced women's vulnerability to repeated abuse. Kaburu and Read-Hamilton (2019) further emphasized the need for integrated, long-term programming that combines economic assistance with psychosocial support to promote sustained recovery and resilience.

In Kenya, GBV remains a pressing concern, especially for adolescent girls and young women from low-income backgrounds. According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2022), 29.9% of women aged 15–49 have experienced emotional violence, 27.8% physical violence, 10.8% sexual violence, and 10.7% economic violence by an intimate partner nationally. This has significantly contributed to poverty, limited access to education, and scarce employment opportunities. This study aims to examine the effects of women's economic empowerment initiatives in this context, to inform evidence-based strategies to reduce IPV and promote gender equity.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive socio-economic and public health crisis, disproportionately affecting young women and limiting their autonomy, economic security, and well-being. In Migori County, 46.7% of women aged 15–49 experience emotional violence, 46% physical violence, 11.6% sexual violence, and 13.0% economic violence by an intimate partner (Kenya

Demographic and Health Survey, 2022). However, the specific prevalence and lived realities of IPV in Nyatike Sub-County remain undocumented, obscuring the intersectional challenges young women face, including restricted education, economic marginalization, and entrenched gender norms. This gap hinders the development of effective, context-specific interventions. Women’s economic empowerment (WEE) is widely promoted as a strategy to reduce GBV by fostering financial independence and enhancing decision-making power. However, empirical evidence remains inconclusive—while economic resources may help women escape abusive relationships, they may also provoke retaliatory violence or reinforce power imbalances. The extent to which WEE interventions in Nyatike influence young women’s exposure to IPV remains unexplored. Without rigorous analysis, interventions risk being ineffective or counterproductive. This study, therefore, seeks to determine the effect of WEE interventions on IPV prevention in Nyatike Sub-County, generating evidence to inform more sustainable and contextually responsive solutions.

1.3. Objective of the Study

This study intended to examine the effect of women’s economic empowerment on intimate-partner violence among young women in Nyatike Sub-County

1.4 The Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

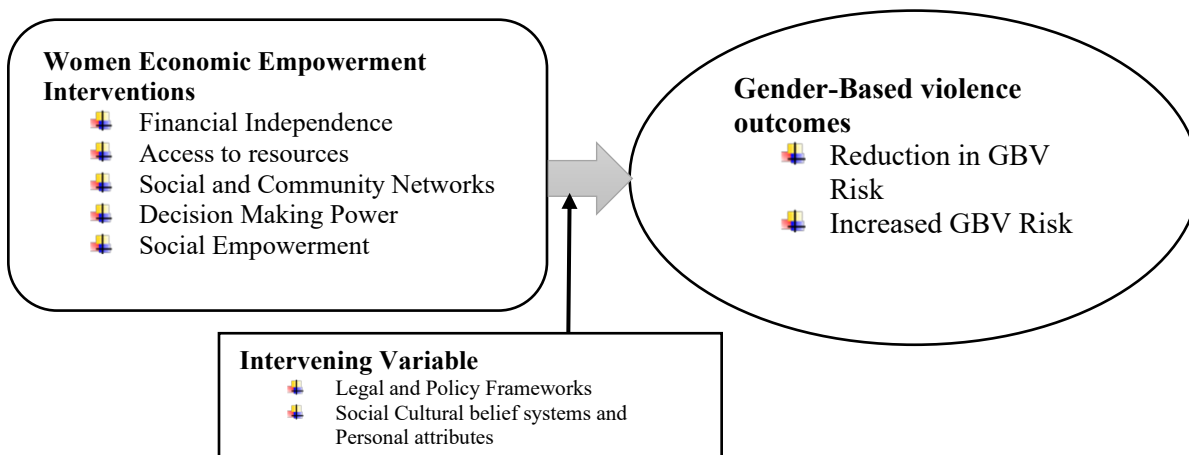


Figure 1: *The Conceptual Framework*

Source: *Own Conceptualization, 2025*

1.5 Literature Review

In this section, theoretical and empirical reviews are presented.

1.5.1 Theoretical Review

Marxist Feminist Theory: This study is guided by Marxist Feminist theory. Feminist theory, rooted in the broader socio-political movements for gender equality, provides a critical lens for analyzing the intersection of economic empowerment and intimate-partner violence (IPV). Marxist feminist theory, in particular, emphasizes how economic structures perpetuate gendered power imbalances that contribute

to IPV. According to recent scholarship, economic disempowerment exacerbates women's vulnerability to violence by reinforcing financial dependency and limiting their agency (Fraser, 2016; True, 2018). Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) initiatives, such as vocational training, financial literacy programs, and microfinance interventions, aim to counter these disparities by increasing women's access to and control over economic resources (Chant & McIlwaine, 2019). Marxist feminism situates IPV within the context of capitalist exploitation, arguing that economic systems reinforce patriarchal norms that subordinate women (Connell & Pearse, 2017). Economic empowerment programs disrupt these structures by reducing dependency on male partners and increasing women's bargaining power within households and communities. Economic empowerment alone is insufficient if structural inequalities remain unaddressed. For instance, women in informal economies often face heightened risks of exploitation and harassment despite financial independence (Kabeer, 2018). Feminist theory also underscores the importance of intersectionality, recognizing that gender-based oppression intersects with other forms of marginalization, such as class, ethnicity, and disability (Crenshaw, 2016). Women from marginalized groups experience compounded forms of discrimination that shape their economic opportunities and exposure to GBV (Ssenyonjo, 2020). Therefore, WEE interventions must be tailored to address the specific needs of diverse populations, ensuring that economic inclusion efforts are equitable and context-sensitive (Cornwall, 2019).

Critiques of Marxist feminist theory highlight several challenges. Some scholars argue that traditional Marxist perspectives on gender are overly deterministic, focusing primarily on economic factors while underestimating the role of cultural and psychological dimensions of gender oppression (Walby, 2018). Additionally, the applicability of Western-centric feminist frameworks in non-Western contexts is contested, as cultural norms and socio-political dynamics influence the effectiveness of economic interventions in addressing GBV (Kandiyoti, 2019).

Addressing these critiques requires an integrative approach that combines economic, legal, and social strategies to tackle IPV effectively. Marxist feminist theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the link between economic empowerment and IPV. By challenging systemic inequalities, WEE interventions contribute to reducing women's vulnerability to violence. However, a holistic approach—incorporating intersectional perspectives and addressing structural barriers—is necessary to ensure sustainable and transformative change. Future research should focus on the long-term impact of economic interventions on GBV reduction, particularly in rural and underserved regions where gender disparities are most pronounced (Miedema *et al.*, 2021).

1.5.2 Empirical Review

Effect of Women's Economic Empowerment on Intimate-Partner Violence

Research highlights a complex relationship between women's economic empowerment (WEE) and Intimate-partner violence (IPV), emphasizing how financial autonomy can mitigate intimate partner violence (IPV) risks. Economic dependency is a key factor in increasing women's vulnerability to IPV, while employment and education enhance financial independence and decision-making power, reducing exposure to violence (Duvvury *et al.*, 2019; UN Women, 2021). Economic empowerment initiatives, such as microfinance, savings programs, and vocational training, have demonstrated potential in fostering resilience against GBV. Financial literacy, in particular, strengthens women's agency by enhancing their ability to manage resources and assert financial independence (Hunt & Samman, 2019). Microfinance programs have been instrumental in enabling women to gain control over household

decisions, thereby reducing their susceptibility to violence (Kabeer, 2018). Similarly, vocational training equips women with skills that enhance employability and reduce economic reliance on abusive partners (Baird *et al.*, 2016).

Empirical evidence from multiple contexts underscores the protective role of WEE programs against GBV. For instance, in India, financially independent women reported lower incidences of violence due to increased decision-making authority and access to resources (Deininger *et al.*, 2020). In Bangladesh, participation in microfinance programs bolstered women's economic autonomy and strengthened social support networks, leading to a decline in domestic violence (Haque & Islam, 2022). Legal and institutional frameworks play a crucial role in determining the success of WEE programs in reducing IPV. In Mexico, restrictive financial policies hindered women's entrepreneurship, thereby increasing their economic dependence and exposure to IPV (Lee & Chang, 2020). These examples illustrate that economic empowerment can mitigate IPV but must be complemented by legal and social interventions to ensure a sustainable impact.

Economic empowerment interventions help address IPV in sub-Saharan Africa. In South Africa, economic empowerment programs have facilitated women's escape from abusive relationships by improving their financial resilience and access to legal protection (Jewkes *et al.*, 2019). In Nigeria, research demonstrated that financial autonomy correlates with reduced IPV, advocating for expanded economic opportunities tailored to rural women's needs (Oyediran *et al.*, 2019). In Uganda, economic empowerment initiatives improved women's economic outcomes and fostered resilience through vocational training and community support networks (Ambler *et al.*, 2021). Despite these successes, the relationship between WEE and IPV remains mediated by socio-cultural factors. While economic independence can act as a safeguard, it may also provoke backlash, particularly in contexts where gender norms are rigidly enforced (Kabeer, 2018). Such shifts in traditional gender roles may trigger retaliatory violence as men perceive economic empowerment as a threat to their authority (Ellsberg *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, IPV survivors' attitudes toward empowerment influence their help-seeking behaviors and access to support services (Kou Aune, 2017). Structural barriers, including discriminatory inheritance laws, weak legal enforcement, and restricted financial access, further exacerbate economic dependence and vulnerability to violence (Garcia & Martinez, 2021). The inadequacy of support services exacerbates IPV challenges. In South Africa, limited access to shelters and counseling services hinders survivors' ability to leave abusive environments (Wright & Smith, 2019). These issues underscore a holistic approach that integrates economic empowerment with legal protections and gender-sensitive policies.

Kenyan studies show mixed outcomes on the impact of WEE on IPV. While microfinance and entrepreneurship programs improve financial security, entrenched gender norms sustain power imbalance, limiting their effectiveness (Njuguna, 2016). IPV persists despite empowerment, indicating that financial autonomy alone does not guarantee protection, and cultural resistance further legitimizes violence (Bannister & Moyi, 2019). Funding gaps, weak GBV law enforcement, and cultural resistance further undermine progress (Gillum & Doucette, 2018). Limited education and vocational training heighten economic vulnerability, restricting sustainable livelihoods (Robinson *et al.*, 2016), while poverty, food insecurity, and climate change exacerbate IPV risks in marginalized regions (Bannister & Moyi, 2019).

1.6 Methodology

Study Design: The study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed methods design. The design enabled integration of quantitative patterns and qualitative lived experiences to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between women’s economic empowerment and intimate partner violence. The mixed methods approach was considered appropriate because intimate partner violence is a complex social issue that requires both statistical analysis and exploration of personal experiences, perceptions, and relational dynamics.

Study Area: The study was conducted in Nyatike Sub-County, Migori County. It is the largest sub-county in Migori, with a population of 176,162 and 39,559 households across 1,417.9 square kilometers (KNBS, 2022). Nyatike is predominantly rural, with poverty levels estimated at 40% (KDHS, 2022). The local economy relies on subsistence agriculture, fishing, mining, sand harvesting, and small-scale trading. The region faces significant socio-economic challenges, including entrenched patriarchal norms, early marriages, and economic dependence on male partners, exacerbating gender inequalities and vulnerability to gender-based violence (GBV) (Makario, Mutui, & Muhingi, 2023). Migori County, including Nyatike, has a high prevalence of GBV (KDHS, 2022), highlighting the need for targeted interventions. Given these dynamics, Nyatike provides a critical context for examining how WEE interventions influence young women’s agency and exposure to IPV.

Study Population: The target population comprised of young women aged 20–35 years participating in women’s economic empowerment interventions including savings groups, vocational training programs, and livelihood support initiatives within Nyatike Sub-County. The study also involved key informants including program officers, community leaders, and gender-based violence service providers.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure: The study involved:

Stratified random sampling techniques was used recruit women in the survey using questionnaire as data collection tool. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify interviewees and Key informants, while snowball sampling technique assisted in identifying participants with relevant lived experiences regarding IPV and empowerment.

Table 1: Sampling Frame

Category	Sampling Technique	Sample Size	Instrument
Survey (Women participants)	Stratified random sampling	139	Questionnaire
In-depth interview participants (program coordinators, field officers, community leaders, and county officials)	Purposive sampling	32	Interview guide
Key informants (program implementers, community leaders, and local administrators)	Purposive sampling	5	KII guide

Source: Field Data (2025)

Data Collection Methods: Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to women participating in empowerment programs. Quantitative Sample size was estimated using Solvin

Formula of 1960. The questionnaires captured socio-demographic information, participation in WEE interventions, and experiences of IPV. This is the Slovin’s formula:

$$\text{Sample (n)} = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$$

Where “n” represents the sample size

“N” represents the population, in this case 213 participants.

“e” represents the margin error (in this case, it is 0.05, for a 95% scientific confidence interval)

This was substitute into the Yamane Formula as follows;

$$\text{Sample (n)} = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$$

$$n = \frac{213}{1+(213 \times 0.05^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{213}{1+(0.5325)}$$

$$n = \frac{213}{1.5325} = 138.9$$

Therefore $n = 139$

139 young Women (Aged 20–35) were selected purposively from different villages within Nyatike Sub-County, and selected based on their involvement in one or more WEE initiatives such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), vocational training programs, or business start-up grants. Recruitment was facilitated through WEE program partners and local community health workers confidentially and safely. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. The interviews explored women’s lived experiences regarding empowerment, household power relations, financial autonomy, and violence.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical techniques with the help of SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and correlation analysis were used. Qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Emerging themes related to empowerment, gender norms, household dynamics, and violence experiences were identified and interpreted.

1.7 Study Findings Presentation and Discussion

Response Rate

Survey was conducted with a total of 139 participants. The survey response rate is captured in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Response Rate from the Study

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Responded	134	96.40%
Not responded	5	3.60%
Total	139	100%

Source: *Field Data, 2025*

Out of a total of 139 participants interviewed, 134 responses were received, representing a high response rate of 96.40%. 5 participants did not respond, accounting for 3.60% of the total number sampled. These

are respondents who did not consent for the study. These figures demonstrate a high level of engagement and provide robust data for analysis.

Demographic Data

This subsection provides an analysis and presentation of the demographic information of the study participants. The data collection tool examined four demographic parameters: age, gender and year of study.

Age of Participants

Table 3: Age of Participants

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-24 Years	46	34.33%
25-29 Years	64	47.79%
30-35 Years	24	17.91%
Total	134	100%

Source: Field data, 2025

The age distribution of the survey respondents reveals a predominantly youthful demographic. The largest segment falls within the 25–29 years age group, comprising 47.76% of the sample. This is followed by participants aged 20–24 years, who represent 34.33%, while the 30–35 years cohort accounts for 17.91% of respondents. This breakdown indicates that over 82% of participants are under the age of 30, reflecting a largely young adult population. Such a demographic profile is consistent with early-career individuals or those actively engaged in community-based programs, vocational training, or economic empowerment initiatives. The age structure provides a relevant foundation for interpreting the study’s findings, particularly in relation to aspirations, vulnerability to IPV, and responsiveness to empowerment interventions.

Survey Marital Status of the Respondents

Table 4: Marital Status of the respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	72	53.73%
Single	32	23.88%
Co-habiting	13	9.70%
Separated/Divorced	11	8.21%
Widowed	6	4.48%
Total	134	100%

Source: Field data, 2025

From the survey, the marital status data reveals that a majority of respondents (53.73%) were married, followed by 23.88% who were single. A smaller proportion reported being cohabiting (9.70%), separated or divorced (8.21%), and widowed (4.48%). This distribution suggests that over half of the participants were in formal marital unions, with an additional segment engaged in informal partnerships. The

presence of diverse marital categories including separation, widowhood, and cohabitation provides robust data for interpreting family-related dynamics, particularly in relation to intimate partner violence, economic decision-making, and empowerment pathways. The predominance of married respondents may also influence the types of support systems accessed and the relevance of interventions targeting household-level change.

Mean IPV Prevalence Survey Scores by each Demographic Factors

Table 5: IPV Incidence by Marital Status

Marital Status	Mean IPV Prevalence Score
Separated/Divorced	7.18
Co-habiting	6.69
Widowed	4.42
Single	4.06
Married	4.00

Source: *Field data, 2025*

The data presented in Table 4.8 illustrates the mean prevalence scores of intimate partner violence (IPV) across different marital status categories among young women in Nyatike Sub-County. The findings reveal notable variation in IPV experiences based on relationship status. Women who are separated or divorced report the highest mean IPV score (7.18), suggesting that experiences of violence may have contributed to or intensified during the dissolution of their relationships. Similarly, those who are cohabiting report a high IPV Prevalence Scores of 6.69, indicating elevated IPV risk in less formalized unions where legal or social protections may be weaker.

In contrast, widowed women report a IPV Prevalence Scores of 4.42, while single and married women report the lowest IPV prevalence scores at 4.06 and 4.00, respectively. These lower scores may reflect reduced exposure to intimate partner dynamics or more stable relationship environments. Overall, the data underscores the importance of considering marital context when designing IPV prevention and response strategies. Interventions should be particularly attentive to women in non-marital or formerly partnered relationships, where the risk of violence appears most pronounced.

Table 6: Effect of Women’s Economic Empowerment on IPV: Pairwise Correlation

	<i>Economic Empowerment</i>	<i>IPV Prevalence</i>
<i>Economic Empowerment</i>	1.0000	
<i>IPV Prevalence</i>	-0.0909	1.0000

The correlation coefficient between economic empowerment and IPV prevalence is -0.0909 , indicating a very weak negative relationship. This suggests that as women’s economic empowerment increases, the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) tends to decrease slightly but the association is minimal. This result indicates that empowerment may contribute to safer relationships, but the weak correlation also suggests that other factors such as social norms, partner attitudes, or community support may mediate this effect.

Table 7: Kruskal-Wallis Test Results on IPV Prevalence by Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Chi ² (with ties)	df.	P value
Age	4.663	2	0.097
Marital Status	10.429	4	0.034
Number of Children	3.193	4	0.526
Education Level	11.435	6	0.076
Occupation	6.077	5	0.299
Duration in empowerment	4.195	3	0.241

Source: Field data, 2025

The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine whether IPV prevalence scores varied significantly across six demographic characteristics: age, marital status, number of children, education level, occupation, and duration in economic empowerment programs. Among these, marital status was the only variable that showed a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 10.429$, $df = 4$, $p = .034$), indicating that IPV prevalence differs meaningfully across relationship categories. This suggests that women's experiences of IPV are shaped in part by their marital context, with some groups facing greater vulnerability than others.

Two other variables—age ($p = .097$) and education level ($p = .076$) approached statistical significance. While not meeting the conventional threshold of $p < .05$, these results suggest potential trends worth further exploration. Age-related variation may reflect generational differences in relationship dynamics or reporting behavior, while education level may influence IPV risk through increased awareness, autonomy, or access to resources.

The remaining variables, number of children ($p = .526$), occupation ($p = .299$), and duration in empowerment programs ($p = .241$) did not show statistically significant differences in IPV prevalence. This indicates that, within this sample, IPV scores were relatively consistent across these groups. However, the absence of statistical significance does not rule out meaningful variation; these factors may still interact with other social or economic conditions that influence IPV risk. Overall, the Kruskal-Wallis results highlight marital status as a key differentiator of IPV prevalence, with suggestive patterns emerging for age and education. These findings provide a foundation for deeper analysis, including post-hoc comparisons and integration with qualitative data, to better understand the social dimensions of IPV and inform targeted interventions.

Qualitative Findings

Economic Changes Since Joining the Program

Most participants described positive financial transformations. In summary, the following responses were documented: - Starting or expanding businesses; Improved ability to save, borrow, and budget; Purchasing assets or livestock and Greater financial independence and stability. One self-employed woman narrated the following. *“Loaning and savings have supported me to start my business, which is currently going on well.” (WOSE003, 2025).*

A number of respondents reported improved relationships with their partners after joining the empowerment programs, citing: Increased respect and equality; Reduced verbal abuse and IPV; Greater support for their businesses and shared financial responsibilities. One of married and self-employed

woman narrated: “Currently, I’m being respected in the house... I have a voice and there’s more love.” (WOSE006, 2025). Another said, “I can now do my own things without asking him for money.” (WOSE009, 2025).

Most women reported that their partners responded positively to their financial independence, often expressing support, pride, or appreciation. A few noted ambivalence or resistance, especially in early stages. One married woman narrated the following with respect to the above claim. “He is positive towards it and sees the essence of me joining VSLA because I can support him.” (WOSE008, 2025). Most participants reported increased respect, reduced verbal abuse, or greater equality in their relationships since joining empowerment programs. A few noted no change, and one reported persistent disrespect. “There is improved respect... I have a voice in the house.” (WOSE002, 2025)

Discussion of findings

Effect of women’s economic empowerment on intimate-partner violence among young women in Nyatike Sub-County

The study shows that **73.13 %** of respondents said their experience of intimate-partner violence (IPV) had decreased since they participated in economic-empowerment activities, **7.46 %** reported that violence had increased, **3.73 %** said it stayed the same, and **15.67 %** marked the question as not applicable because they had never experienced IPV. Most participants felt safer in their relationships after receiving support such as village savings and loan associations activities, start-up capital, and vocational training; a small minority felt that violence had gotten worse or remained unchanged, and a modest group indicated that the question did not apply to them.

These findings suggest that improving women’s financial independence can translate into greater personal agency, stronger negotiating power within households, and heightened self-esteem, all of which are known to deter abusive behavior. At the same time, the fact that 7.46 % of respondents reported an increase in IPV highlights the risk of backlash when traditional gender norms are challenged, underscoring the need for complementary psychosocial and legal safeguards. The importance of this result for the study lies in its empirical support for the hypothesis that economic empowerment can act as a protective factor against IPV. It demonstrates that financial interventions are not merely about income generation but also have measurable social benefits. However, the data also expose a weakness: the cross-sectional design cannot confirm causality, and the “not applicable” category (15.67 % of the sample) may conceal women who were either never exposed to IPV or who were reluctant to disclose it, potentially biasing the overall picture.

Recent studies also show the same patterns. A longitudinal study in Kenya found that women who joined savings groups reported lower levels of partner violence over two years (Kimani, 2017). Similarly, a mixed-methods evaluation of micro-enterprise programs in Bangladesh showed that financial autonomy reduced the likelihood of IPV, though a subset of participants experienced heightened tension during the early stages of income change (Rahman & Hossain, 2019). In contrast, a randomized trial in Tanzania reported no significant reduction in IPV after a vocational-training program, attributing the null effect to the absence of concurrent community-level gender-norm interventions (Moyo, Kinyua, & Ochieng,

2021). The divergent outcome in the Tanzanian case highlights that economic empowerment alone may be insufficient without broader societal engagement.

The Nyatike results align with Kenya's Vision 2030 and the national Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, both of which promote integrated livelihood and protection components to curb gender-based violence. The 7.46 % increase reported by a minority of participants signals that current policies must also prioritize risk-mitigation measures such as counseling services and legal aid—to pre-empt possible backlash.

Relationship between IPV Prevalence and Women's Economic empowerment: insights from in-depth interviews

The in-depth qualitative interviews revealed that the majority of young women in Nyatike Sub-County who participated in economic-empowerment programs reported having endured some form of intimate-partner violence, with emotional abuse emerging as the most common experience, followed by economic and physical violence; only a handful mentioned sexual or social-control abuse. Most women were married, had completed secondary school and were self-employed, and they described how participation in Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) and other livelihood groups had helped them start or expand businesses, save money, and purchase assets, which in turn fostered a sense of financial independence. Many participants also noted that this newfound economic agency was linked to improved spousal respect, reduced verbal aggression and, in several cases, a decline in physical confrontations, although a small subset reported no change or even persistent disrespect from their partners.

These findings illustrate that empowerment interventions can simultaneously address poverty and gender-based violence by reshaping power dynamics within households. The narratives confirm that financial control is a central trigger of IPV and that when women gain the ability to contribute economically, partners are more likely to view them as allies rather than threats, thereby reducing conflict. However, the data also expose persistent barriers: time constraints, partner resistance, loan-repayment pressures and limited childcare support continue to hinder full participation, and some women still experience frequent violence despite economic gains, suggesting that financial empowerment alone does not eradicate deep-rooted gender norms. The importance of these insights lies in their ability to validate the quantitative results while adding depth to the mechanisms of change. They prove that livelihood programs such as VSLA can be a catalyst for both economic stability and relational transformation, yet they also highlight weaknesses in program design particularly the need for integrated gender-sensitivity training for both women and their partners, and for services that address emotional and psychological trauma. Without these complementary components, gains in income may not translate into lasting reductions in violence.

Similar conclusions have been reported in recent literature. A study of micro-finance groups in Kenya found that women's increased savings and loan access were associated with greater household decision-making power and lower reports of physical IPV (Kimani & Owuor, 2017). Research on the "Women's Empowerment in Agriculture" project in Ghana showed that financial literacy training reduced economic coercion and improved spousal communication (Mensah et al., 2019). Conversely, a randomized trial of cash-transfer program in Tanzania observed modest income gains but no significant decline in emotional abuse, attributing the gap to insufficient community-level gender norm

interventions (Miller et al., 2021). These divergent outcomes underscore that financial resources must be paired with normative change to achieve comprehensive IPV reduction.

1.8 Conclusion

Although 73 % of participants reported a decrease in IPV after joining empowerment activities, a small but significant minority (7 %) experienced an escalation of violence, underscoring the risk of backlash when entrenched gender norms are challenged. The weak negative correlation ($r = -0.09$) between empowerment scores and IPV prevalence suggests that financial gains alone cannot fully mitigate abuse; relational dynamics, partner resistance, and broader sociocultural factors continue to mediate outcomes. Consequently, interventions must move beyond income generation to incorporate gender-transformative components such as spousal involvement, comprehensive GBV counseling, and mental-health support.

1.9 Recommendations

Kenya's Violence-Against-Women Act and related policies should be amended so that every woman, regardless of whether she is married, co-habiting, separated or in an informal union, is explicitly covered by the law. This means that women who experience intimate-partner violence (IPV) must be able to call GBV hotlines, obtain safe-housing and receive free legal aid without having to prove a formal marriage. To make the change effective, police officers, health-care workers and community leaders need systematic training that teaches them to screen for IPV in all household arrangements, not only in legally recognized marriages. Future livelihood programs must move beyond the simple provision of income-generating activities and incorporate gender-transformative components. First, cash-oriented initiatives such as Village Savings and Loan Associations, poultry-farming projects, or vocational-training courses should be paired with couple-workshops that teach equitable decision-making, respectful communication and joint financial planning. Second, on-site counselling and rapid-response support must be made available for households where a woman's new earnings provoke backlash; this will help prevent the 7 % rise in violence that was observed in the study. Third, the focus should be on the quality of employment: programs ought to promote stable, salaried jobs, childcare-friendly work schedules and mentorship that improve business sustainability, rather than assuming any informal activity automatically reduces IPV. Finally, each economic cohort should be linked to community-level gender-norm campaigns that challenge harmful masculinity ideals and celebrate shared household responsibilities. When these elements are combined, the model can harness the 73 % reduction in IPV reported by participants while mitigating the risk of increased violence. Long-term protection against IPV is best secured by investing in education and sustained support networks. Expanding adult-literacy programs and creating clear pathways to secondary education for young women will reinforce a proven buffer against violence.

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