

**ANALYZING HOW GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY SHAPE THE
EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACED WOMEN IN REFUGEE CAMPS IN KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Forced displacement is one of the critical humanitarian challenges facing displaced women and children, globally. In Kenya, the challenge is evident in major refugee camps such as Dadaab and Kakuma, where women experience overlapping social, economic, and protection-related challenges. Despite humanitarian efforts to combat these challenges, most existing policies and programs often treat these women as a homogenous group, hence ignoring how gender intersect with other identities to create unique challenges and privileges. Therefore, this study sought to examine how gender and intersecting identities shape the experiences of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. The study also examined the social, economic, and protection-related challenges facing these women, as well as examine the extent to which intersectional frameworks have been adopted in Kenya humanitarian policies and programs to protect these women.

To thorough address the research objectives, a qualitative research design was adopted. In particular, secondary data was collected from highly reputable sources including, UNHCR reports, NGO publications, policy briefs, and peer-reviewed articles. Document analysis using thematic approach was then conducted to uncover hidden recurring themes and patterns in the data. The findings showed that gender is often treated as a static vulnerability marker, leading to one-size-fits-all interventions that ignore diverse realities among displaced women. Additionally, intersectional identities are frequently silenced in policy and humanitarian discourse, resulting in disparities in access to essential services, leadership, and empowerment opportunities. Thus, the study concluded that adopting an intersectional approach in humanitarian and policy frameworks is crucial to address the multifaceted inequalities affecting displaced women. There was also a need to integrate gender and identity-responsive strategies in existing frameworks to ensure inclusivity, equity, and genuine empowerment of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

Forced displacement is one of the most pressing challenges facing humans in the 21st century. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' report (UNHCR, 2024), approximately 122.6 million people are forcibly displaced globally. Among them, women and children constitute the highest percentage due to their high susceptibility to forced displacements (UNHCR, 2022). Forced displacement of women remains a global crisis affecting both developed and developing countries. Some countries bear a disproportionate burden of hosting refugees whenever forced displacement occurs. For instance, Kenya is one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in Africa, sheltering about 836,907 refugees and asylum-seekers as of February 2025 (The Department of Refugee Services, n.d.). The high number of displaced individuals in Kenya can be attributed to its geographic location, which borders various conflict-affected countries such as Somalia, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Burundi. The displaced refugees are mainly hosted in Dadaab camp, which is situated in Garissa County, and Kakuma, located in Turkana County.

According to Oloo (2024), 50% of the refugees living in the two major camps in Kenya are women, who experience a wide range of challenges. Oloo (2024) further argued that the experiences of the displaced women living in these camps are shaped by gender-based inequalities and structural oppressions. Although all refugees experience a number of challenges, women tend to bear unique challenges, which are shaped by gender-based differences and other intersecting factors. For instance, a study by Okello (2024) showed that displaced women in Kenya often experience a disproportionate burden of trauma, insecurity, and exclusion in socio-economic aspects. Okello (2024) argued that while most displaced women have fled war, sexual violence, or domestic abuse in their home countries, they continue to experience gender-based violence and discrimination in the host countries. Some of the most common challenges affecting these women in Kenya include increased risk of sexual exploitation, forced marriage, intimate partner violence, and human trafficking.

Besides gender-based discrimination, displaced women living in Kenyan refugee camps also experience other forms of discrimination arising from the intersectionality of gender and

other factors such as age, disability, marital status, religion, and education level. For instance, Eweka and Newman-Dieyi (2019) noted that young, unmarried displaced women in Kenya are more vulnerable to sexual violence. Similarly, older displaced women and widows are often excluded from important decision-making processes involving the community. Additionally, disabled displaced women are not only excluded from major community programs but are also physically discriminated against in accessing essential services (Eweka & Newman-Dieyi, 2019). Similarly, Young (2012) noted that the intersection of gender with ethnicity and religion has also exacerbated the challenges experienced by displaced women in Kenya. Young (2012) further posited that ethnic and religious minority women experience discrimination both from the host community and within the refugee population. These forms of discrimination among displaced women have hindered them from accessing essential services, raising their voices, or participating in critical governance structures.

Efforts have been made to support refugees in Kenya. International humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations have been actively involved in providing food, shelter, healthcare, and education (Mulwa et al., 2021; Tolometi, 2015). However, despite these efforts, displaced women are hardly protected or empowered. This is supported by a study by Mulwa et al. (2021), who argued that the implementation of gender-sensitive policies that support displaced women is often hindered by various factors such as cultural barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources. In particular, most of the programs designed to support displaced women often adopt a one-size-fits-all strategy, thus failing to acknowledge the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds and with different needs. Additionally, Tolometi (2015) noted that patriarchal norms embedded among the host and refugee communities also hinder displaced women from being independent and participating in public events. This consequently worsens the already existing marginalization.

Furthermore, Mulati (2024) pointed out that refugee women in Kenya are not only victims of discrimination but also have contributed towards developing strategies to cope with and resist the structural injustices affecting them. Notably, some of them have been actively involved in leading women's advocacy groups, small-scale businesses, and informal education. However, despite these efforts, they remain under-supported and under-recognized in policy and academic discourses in Kenya. This suggests a need to incorporate their voices in policy-making

and camp governance to improve the quality and effectiveness of the existing humanitarian interventions.

The importance of adopting a gender and intersectionality lens in refugee research and policy cannot be overstated. This is because the already implemented refugee policy frameworks often treat displaced women as a homogenous group (Mwaluko, 2022), thus ignoring how the various identities affect the experiences of women living in refugee camps. Incorporating the intersectionality framework in the existing interventions can provide a more nuanced understanding of how the various identities and social positions interact with gender to create unique experiences among women living in Kenya's refugee camps. This can consequently help uncover and address the existing structural inequalities, hence providing genuine empowerment and protection for refugee women.

Given the complex nature of the Kenyan socio-political landscape, there is a need to examine how gender and intersectionality interact to shape the experiences of displaced women. In particular, Kenya has policies that worsen the challenges encountered by displaced women living in the major refugee camps. For instance, the existing encampment policy has some clauses that limit displaced refugee women from movement and access to certain employment opportunities (UNHCR, 2025). This not only exacerbates the women's economic dependency but also fosters social isolation. Additionally, the existing cultural dynamics within Kenya's refugee communities, such as gender roles, patriarchal leadership, and stigmatization of displaced women who were sexually assaulted, can further influence their experiences (Kitui, 2016). These findings suggest a need to understand how gender can interact with other factors to create unique challenges and privileges. Understanding this can consequently help in designing context-specific and inclusive policies that foster the dignity, rights, and well-being of all displaced refugee women in Kenya. Given the various shortcomings associated with the existing policies for marginalized groups in Kenya, there is a pressing need to understand how gender interacts with other intersecting factors to shape the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya refugee camps. This can consequently help in promoting gender equity, inform the existing humanitarian organizations on appropriate practices, and foster resilience among the displaced women. Therefore, this study aimed to uncover how gender intersects with other identities to alter the experiences of these women. As such, this study's findings would inform

relevant policymakers on how the existing policies and interventions for displaced women can be reimagined to be more inclusive.

1.1 Motivation

This study was motivated by the drawbacks associated with the existing policy frameworks for marginalized groups in Kenya. The existing policies governing refugee individuals in Kenya generalize all displaced individuals, often treating all refugees as a homogenous group within humanitarian discourses and interventions (Mwaluko, 2022). This ignores the fact that people with different identities are likely to have different and unique experiences. Perceiving all refugee women as a homogenous group often leads to the implementation of policies and programs that discriminate against displaced women with unique identities, such as age and religion, among other identity markers. In other words, the current one-size-fits-all approaches to humanitarian aid are insufficient to address the multifaceted challenges facing displaced women in the refugee camps.

By exploring the role of gender and intersectionality in shaping the experiences of displaced women in Kenya, this study sought to uncover the challenges these women experience and how the various structural and social inequalities come together to create unique opportunities, vulnerabilities, and resilience. Adopting the intersectionality approach in understanding displaced women's experiences can also inform policymakers on how the resulting forms of privileges and challenges can influence their access to healthcare, security, education, economic opportunities, and leadership roles within the refugee context. Recognizing the role of intersectionality among displaced women in Kenya refugee camps can not only foster social justice and equity but also enhance the effectiveness of the existing humanitarian policies and interventions. This can consequently lead to the implementation of policies and frameworks that are responsive to the realities of the marginalized individuals they aim to serve.

Furthermore, this study was driven by the limited research on the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. While there are some gender studies focusing on understanding the lived experiences of refugees, there is limited research on how intersectionality interacts with gender to create more unique challenges and privileges among displaced refugee women. Notably, most of these existing studies pay more attention to refugee

management, migration trends, and gender-based violence, hence ignoring how gender intersects with other identities to create more unique challenges and privileges for displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. Therefore, this study aimed to fill the existing gap by conducting a critical review of policy documents and literature to uncover the role of gender and intersectionality in shaping displaced women's lived experiences. This study's findings aimed to contribute to the existing literature and also to inform humanitarian actors, government policies, and policymakers on effective refugee management and gender advocacy in Kenya.

1.2 State-of-the-Art

Various studies have been conducted to understand the lived experiences of refugee women living in Kenya's refugee camps (Kilungu, 2023; Rosenberg-Jansen et al., 2018). However, most of these studies focused on macro-level issues such as displacement trends, access to services such as healthcare, education, and shelter, humanitarian responses, and protection frameworks. Although these studies have made significant contributions in advancing literature on forced migration, they are limited by treating displaced women as a homogenous group. This treatment of displaced women as a homogenous group risks erasing the gendered realities and experiences they encounter.

Studies that have addressed the gendered experiences of displaced women (Daniely & Lederman, 2019; Lokot, 2022; Yacob-Haliso, 2021) focus on gender in isolation from other structural and social markers such as age, disability, ethnicity, class, and religion. Specifically, these studies failed to capture the complexity associated with the intersection of gender with these identities. This suggests a need for an intersectional approach to gender studies to account for the overlapping identities and their roles in shaping the experiences of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Moreover, some studies have made efforts to integrate gender-sensitive frameworks in gender studies involving forced displacement. For instance, Freedman (2016) examined the prevalence and consequences of sexual and gender-based violence in refugee camps. Similarly, Quist (2016) conducted a study to examine the lived experiences of refugee women in refugee camps, with a focus on criticizing the existing patriarchal assumptions embedded in humanitarian interventions. However, these studies are

based in developed countries with a limited focus on developing countries like Kenya, where displaced women are more likely to experience distinct challenges.

In the Kenyan context, efforts have been made to address the challenges facing displaced women living in refugee camps. In particular, some studies have tried to integrate gender-sensitive frameworks to identify the unique challenges facing displaced women living in Kakuma and Dadaab camps (Okello, 2024; Tolometi, 2015). Some of the identified challenges facing these women included sexual violence, limited economic opportunities, and healthcare disparities. For instance, Jesuthasan et al. (2019) noted that some displaced women in these camps are often marginalized in accessing healthcare services due to restrictive gender norms and security threats. Some studies also showed that the current humanitarian policies, which are intended to empower marginalized groups, often reproduce gendered power dynamics, which unconsciously reinforce the subordination of these women (Okello, 2024; Tolometi, 2015).

Despite the existing efforts to uncover and address the challenges facing displaced women living in Kenya refugee camps, intersectionality approaches remain underutilized. In particular, there is limited research that utilizes intersectionality to provide deeper insights into how gender intersects with other identities to create unique challenges and privileges for displaced women. Although some of the studies have acknowledged that some factors, such as age and disability, play a role in shaping the experience of marginalized groups in Kenya, very few studies have applied the intersectionality theory to examine how these multiple identities can interact with gender to shape the refugee women's experiences. For instance, limited research has been done to understand the effects of ethnicity, religion, marital status, and educational backgrounds on displaced women's ability to access essential services such as leadership roles, healthcare, and humanitarian aid. Additionally, the existing empirical studies are mainly driven by policy-based and quantitative approaches, which may not adequately uncover the dynamics of how gender intersects with other identities to shape displaced women's experiences. Therefore, this study aims to fill these methodological and research gaps by utilizing the intersectionality theory and qualitative research methodology approach to uncover how gender and intersectionality interact to shape the lived experiences of displaced women living in the two major refugee camps in Kenya. Notably, this study contributes to this evolving scholarly

conversation by providing an empirically grounded, intersectional, and gender-sensitive analysis of displaced women's experiences in Kenya's refugee camps.

1.3 Knowledge Gaps

Gender-sensitive approaches have gained popularity globally to understand the lived experiences of refugees. Notably, there is limited research on the application of the intersectional analysis approaches in understanding how various identities and power structures come together to shape the lived experiences of refugees. In particular, limited research has been done to examine how these identities interact to shape the lived experiences of displaced women in the Kenyan context. According to Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, systems of oppression such as racism and sexism do not operate independently but intersect to shape the unique experiences of individuals, particularly Black women (Crenshaw, 2013). While her work focused on race and gender, the concept has since been extended by other scholars to include dimensions such as age, disability, and marital status. These dimensions interact to create unique and heightened forms of discrimination and privilege.

Despite the increased popularity of the application of the intersectionality concept in many gender studies globally, no research has integrated the intersectionality concept to understand the lived experiences of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Most existing studies on refugees in Kenya are more inclined to the general experiences of displaced women. Notably, these studies predominantly focus on general aspects such as gender-based violence, health disparities, and limited access to essential services/resources. Although such issues are worth exploring, failure to acknowledge and integrate the concept of intersecting identities in these studies leaves a notable gap in understanding the full scope of vulnerabilities and strengths that different groups of displaced women possess. In addition, the existing humanitarian and academic studies have persistently portrayed displaced refugee women as passive victims of structural violence and displacement. This narrative not only neglects their resilience and ability to lead but also omits the various strategies these women employ to navigate the challenges they encounter when living in refugee camps. Such omissions not only misrepresent the lived realities of refugee women but also hinder the development and implementation of inclusive policies and interventions that empower them. This highlights an

urgent need to employ an intersectional and context-specific analysis strategy to gain a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of displaced women living in Kenya refugee camps. Employing such a strategy is essential for informing more equitable and effective refugee responses.

1.4 Aim and Research Questions

1.4.1 Main Objective

The main aim of the study was to examine how gender interacts with other intersecting social identities, such as age, marital status, religion, and disability, to shape the lived experiences of displaced women living in refugee camps in Kenya.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

This study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To examine how gender and intersecting identities shape the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenyan refugee camps.
2. To analyze the key social, economic, and protection-related challenges facing displaced women in the refugee camps.
3. To examine the extent to which intersectional frameworks have been used in humanitarian policies and programs targeting displaced women in Kenya.

1.4.3 Research Questions

The corresponding research questions were:

1. How do gender and intersecting identities (such as ethnicity, age, disability, and marital status) influence the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenyan refugee camps?
2. What are the major social, economic, and protection-related challenges faced by displaced women in these camps?
3. To what extent have humanitarian policies and interventions in Kenya applied an intersectional framework to address the needs of displaced women?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature on gender, intersectionality, and the lived experiences of displaced women living in refugee camps. The main aim of the chapter is to lay a foundation for the study by exploring relevant theories and empirical studies. The chapter is organized into three major sections: theoretical review, empirical review, and the research gap. By reviewing relevant pieces of literature, this chapter demonstrates the need to apply the intersectional analytical lens in studies involving displaced women living in refugee camps.

2.1 Theoretical Review

This section presents a discussion of the most appropriate theories. In particular, two major frameworks are presented to inform the study: intersectionality and feminist theories. These theories were considered appropriate for this study because they have proven to be effective in describing the multifaceted lived experiences of marginalized groups.

2.1.1 Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to serve as a foundational framework for understanding how the various social identities interact to shape lived experiences. Crenshaw critiqued many discrimination studies that solely relied on single-axis analysis (Crenshaw, 2013). The author argued that analyzing social identities such as race or gender in isolation can lead to the omission of specific marginalization faced by black women. Therefore, intersectionality theory asserts that every person occupies multiple, intersecting social positions, which can yield unique challenges or privileges. Specifically, intersectionality theory is a theoretical framework that acknowledges how the various social identities, such as gender, race, class, and age, interact to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. Crenshaw further stressed that intersectionality goes beyond the idea that society members experience a single type of oppression and argued that multiple social identities lead to multiple forms of discrimination/privileges, which can further shape individuals' experiences.

The intersectionality theory was particularly relevant in this study because it provides foundational knowledge on how power dynamics and systems of inequality can interact to create distinct experiences and outcomes for displaced women in Kenya refugee camps. This is supported by Interiano-Shiverdecker et al. (2022), who argued that the intersectionality perspective can help describe the lived experiences of forced-displaced individuals. Interiano-Shiverdecker et al. (2022) further argued that displaced refugee women often experience heightened challenges that arise not only because of their gender identity but also due to other intersecting factors such as ethnicity, religion, legal status, disability, and socio-economic background. For instance, a displaced woman who is Somali, a single mother, and disabled may experience different and more intense challenges when accessing essential services compared to other displaced women.

Although intersectionality has gained popularity as an effective analytical framework, its application in humanitarian and policy frameworks has been criticized. For instance, Govinda (2025) warned against using this framework in a rhetorical manner, citing a lack of substantive integration in policy frameworks. Similarly, Candidatu (2021) criticized the aspect of “*categorical essentialism*” as depicted in the framework, arguing that some researchers may end up categorizing individuals without acknowledging the dynamic nature of social positioning. However, despite these criticisms, its ability to adapt to complex social dynamics makes it an effective tool for examining the unique challenges and privileges experienced by displaced women with different social identities. Importantly, its emphasis on context, power relations, and lived experiences makes it appropriate for studies that aim to create a more inclusive, equitable environment for marginalized groups.

2.1.2 Postcolonial Feminism Theory

Postcolonial feminism theory was developed to counter the limitations of the Western feminist theories that solely focused on the experiences of women in Western cultures and former colonies (Rajan & Park, 2000). The theory sought to account for how racism and other long-lasting political, cultural, and economic effects of colonialism shape the lives of non-white and non-Western women living in the formerly colonized countries. Unlike the traditional feminist frameworks that treat all women as equal, postcolonial feminism theory acknowledges

how gender-based oppression intersects with other systems of power, such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, to create unique challenges. This theoretical perspective also demonstrates that women's experiences cannot be analyzed in isolation. Instead, the role of historical and geopolitical aspects needs to be considered.

In this study, the postcolonial feminism theory was applied to uncover the challenges facing displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps and to understand how gender intersects with other factors such as ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, and socioeconomic status to shape their lived experiences. Kenya is living in the postcolonial era, and most displaced women living in Kenya refugee camps are often experiencing a unique form of marginalization resulting from patriarchal structure and the lasting effects of colonialism. Thus, by integrating the postcolonial feminism theory, this study goes beyond a single-axis analysis of gender and explores the complex nature of oppression experienced by refugee women. Additionally, the theory provides foundational information on why displaced women's voices should be situated within broader historical and socio-political contexts. Therefore, the application of postcolonialism theory in the current study helped in challenging the simplistic portrayal of refugee women as passive victims of oppression. This consequently provides foundational information on how their challenges should be addressed amidst structural constraints.

2.2 Empirical Review

Displaced women living in Kenya refugee camps often experience complex challenges ranging from fleeing conflicts in their home countries to dealing with challenges associated with living in overcrowded, under-resourced camps (Mohamed, 2010). Thus, understanding their living experiences is not only necessary but urgent. To uncover their lived realities, it is important to go beyond gender-based discrimination and investigate further how it intersects with other identities, such as age, ethnicity, disability, and marital status, to create more unique challenges. Adopting an intersectional analytical approach can help uncover the complex differences, which are often overlooked in one-size-fits-all analyses. Therefore, this empirical review is structured to explore how gender and intersecting identities influence the lived experiences of displaced women, examine major social, economic, and protection-related

challenges, and investigate the effectiveness of the existing humanitarian policies and programs in addressing the needs of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps.

2.2.1 How Gender and Intersecting Identities Shape the Lived Experiences of Displaced Women

Displacement of people does not occur uniformly. Instead, it is significantly influenced by gender. Displaced women and girls living in refugee camps often experience heightened vulnerabilities compared to their counterparts, men, in forms of increased exposure to gender-based violence (GBV), limited access to essential services such as education and healthcare, as well as heightened barriers to economic participation (Rohwerder, 2016). These challenges are prevalent in many refugee camps globally. For instance, the UNHCR (2022) report revealed that displaced women in many refugee camps, globally, often experience unique challenges arising from the disruption of social systems and discrimination by the host communities.

In Kenya, displaced refugee women are experiencing a wide range of challenges. The *Refugee Consortium of Kenya* (2022) report claimed that women who have been forced to leave their homes and live in Dadaab and Kakuma regularly face several kinds of violence, such as sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault by both community members and humanitarian personnel. Muraya (2024) supported this and found that about 63.9% of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps often encounter much more gender-based violence than women in other East African countries. This could be because the Refugee Act (2021), which gives refugee women the ability to work and travel about freely, has not been implemented properly. As a result, displaced women in Kenya have become more and more marginalized, both in camps and in cities.

Although gender is one of the key players in shaping the lived experiences of displaced women, it is not the only one. Whenever it intersects with other identities such as age, disability, ethnicity, marital status, and sexual orientation, it can result in compounded vulnerabilities. For example, displaced teenage girls are more likely to be victims of gender-based violence than older women because of their age and gender (Onyango et al., 2019). Muraya (2024) reported similar results and found that females aged 15 to 24 who have been displaced are more than three

times as likely to encounter gender-based violence as older women who have been displaced. When gender, age, and education overlap, they also make it harder to protect younger women and girls.

Furthermore, various studies and reports demonstrate that gender intersects with ethnicity to create more unique experiences among displaced women in Kenya camps. According to the UNHCR (2022) report, Somali and South Sudanese women, who are among the majority in Kenya's refugee camps, often experience xenophobic attitudes from host communities and within camps. This makes it harder for them to get important services like healthcare, education, and leadership, which makes them feel even more marginalized. Widowed, divorced, and single displaced women are even worse off because of their marital status. They have less access to jobs and humanitarian aid and are more financially insecure. When it comes to disability, research shows that displaced women with physical or intellectual disabilities face much more discrimination in camps and from the host communities (Daoud et al., 2018). They also experience challenges in acquiring mobility support, healthcare, and the right kind of shelter (*Refugee Consortium of Kenya, 2022*). Sexual orientation and gender identity also affect people's daily lives. For example, LGBTQ+ refugees, especially in Kakuma, report that they face acute discrimination, lack of protection from assault, and even physical attacks from other refugees (Ndiritu, 2021).

Regarding the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya, various empirical studies have been conducted. These studies offer valuable insights into how various identities intersect to shape the everyday lives of displaced women, especially those living in major refugee camps. A study by Abdi (2016) revealed that Somali and Congolese refugee women frequently experience various forms of exclusion, including discriminatory treatment by healthcare providers, harassment by police, and disrespect from host community members. These experiences not only affect their physical access to essential services but also contribute to psychological distress such as anxiety and depression. Similarly, a study by Kaaria and Murithi (2025) showed significant differences in empowerment between displaced refugee women and host community women. Specifically, they compared the empowerment threshold between displaced and host women and found that only 6% of displaced refugee women met the threshold compared to 22% of host women. Additionally, Kaaria and Murithi (2025) found that refugee

women living in Kenya were associated with a high likelihood of experiencing gender-based violence, lower levels of employment, and reduced access to medical and legal information.

2.2.2 Social, Economic, and Protection-Related Challenges Facing Displaced Women in Kenya

Displaced refugee women living in major refugee camps in Kenya often experience social, economic, and protection-related issues that are shaped by the intersectionality of gender with other social identities. Various academic research and humanitarian agencies' reports support the claim and highlight the disproportionate challenges facing displaced women. According to the UNHCR (2022), one of the most pressing social challenges facing displaced women in Kenya refugee camps is the limited access to formal education and vocational training. These challenges have been exacerbated by the intersectionality of gender with age, making displaced young girls experience more intense discrimination than their counterparts. As a result, displaced refugee girls have been associated with a higher likelihood of dropouts from school due to such factors as early marriage, pregnancy, or more household responsibilities. The report further showed that adolescent displaced girls are more vulnerable to certain challenges that hinder their educational progression, consequently leading to long-term economic empowerment challenges. Consistent with these findings, Maliti (2021) noted that young girls in Kakuma Refugee camps are less likely to transition to post-primary education compared to young males due to socio-cultural expectations and many caregiving responsibilities.

Research further shows that economic opportunities for people living in Kenya's refugee camps are scarce, and those that exist are often low-paying and gendered. Notably, displaced refugee women are more confined to informal jobs such as domestic labor and small-scale businesses, which are undervalued and lack legal protection (Nininahazwe, 2019). Additionally, Mulati (2024) found that displaced women in Kenya refugee camps experience structural barriers such as limited access to capital, healthcare services, and financial services, which are essential for sustainable livelihoods. Okello (2024) further echoed these challenges, highlighting that displaced refugee women are rarely involved in decisions that empower them economically but rather are mainly involved in less-skilled economic activities that do not empower them. These challenges have become more intense due to the intersection of gender with other identities, such

as disability. In other words, displaced women living with disabilities tend to experience more discrimination in income-generating activities than healthy displaced women. These findings suggest a need to further explore the role of intersectionality in shaping the economic experiences of displaced women in Kenya.

With regard to protection, various empirical studies show that displaced women in Kenya are associated with higher risks of gender-based violence than host women. Despite the higher likelihoods, the number of gender-based violence cases remain underreported due to fear of retaliation, stigma, and interference with the reporting mechanism (Fernandes et al., 2020). Research by Mwangi (2012) further noted that most incidents of sexual harassment and abuse of displaced women are done by community leaders and humanitarian staff due to systemic accountability failures. The high rates of gender-based violence among displaced women living in refugee camps have also been attributed to insecurity in and around the camps. Specifically, the absence of adequate lighting and secure shelters heightens the risk of assault, particularly for single or unaccompanied women. Moreover, some empirical studies show that displaced women are not well protected in matters related to shelter and food security. Kinyua (2005) argued that displaced women in Kenya are often discriminated against during the allocation of shelter and food aid. The situation is more intense among widows, single women, and displaced women with disabilities.

2.2.3 Use of Intersectional Frameworks in Humanitarian Policies and Programs for Displaced Women in Kenya

The intersectionality approach has been recognized as a framework that can address the complex challenges facing displaced women in Kenya. It has particularly been adopted in humanitarian policies and programs to acknowledge how the multiple social identities, such as age, disabilities, marital status, and religion, intersect with gender to create unique challenges. Although intersectionality has been theoretically appreciated, its implementation in policies and programs protecting displaced refugee women in Kenya remains uneven. Notably, major national and international policies have attempted to incorporate the intersectional approach, yet the relevant authorities are rarely implementing them.

For instance, Kenya's Refugee Act (2021) provides a framework for protecting refugees in line with international obligations for protecting vulnerable groups such as women, children, and people with disabilities. Despite its emphasis on protecting vulnerable populations, it does not fully highlight how displaced women should be protected. In addition, the Act fails to consider how overlapping identities such as marital status, age, and disabilities intersect with gender to inform the provision of services and legal protections. In fact, a recent evaluation of the Act revealed that the Kenya Refugee Act (2022) treats all displaced people as a homogenous group, without diving deeper into the role of intersectionality in shaping the lived experiences.

Furthermore, humanitarian agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have made strides to ensure the inclusivity of displaced refugees living in Kenya. For instance, the UNHCR has enforced the Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) policy to ensure all displaced individuals, including men, women, boys, and girls, are fully involved in decisions that concern them (UNHCR, 2022). The policy emphasizes that every displaced individual, regardless of age, gender, or other diversity characteristics, has the right to be protected (UNHCR, 2022). Although the AGD policy has made strides in protecting older women, adolescent girls, and women with disabilities, the adoption of the intersectionality framework remains unclear. This suggests a need to apply the intersectional lenses during the assessments and monitoring of the policy outcomes. Various non-governmental organizations, such as Care and Oxfam, have also supported the adoption of intersectional approaches in response to gender-based violence among displaced individuals (Kamore, 2021). However, its implementation remains questionable as existing programs that aim to protect displaced people against gender-based violence still fail to reach marginalized groups such as unmarried adolescent mothers and Muslim women, mainly due to cultural stigma and lack of targeted outreach. These findings suggest a need for full implementation of the intersectional lenses to capture the challenges associated with the intersection of gender with other unique identities.

2.3 Summary of the Gap

Based on the reviewed pieces of literature, it is evident that efforts have been made to protect and support displaced refugee women in Kenya. Additionally, some research has been done to understand the intersectional experiences of displaced individuals globally. However,

little has been done to investigate how gender and intersectionality interact to create unique privileges and challenges for displaced women, especially those living in Kenya. Although some studies attributed the challenges facing displaced women to social identities such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity, and marital status, little is known about how these intersecting identities interact with each other to create compounded privileges and challenges for these women. It was also evident that the current humanitarian interventions rely on generalized, one-size-fits-all strategies, which fail to account for the unique experiences facing displaced refugee women.

Furthermore, the theoretical review of the literature revealed that intersectionality and postcolonial feminist theory are effective in explaining the multifaceted nature of oppression facing displaced women. However, despite their effectiveness, their application in the current policies governing refugees living in Kenya still remains rhetorical. In particular, only a few studies have made efforts to examine how gendered power relations and structural inequalities can be embedded in the current refugee policies to enhance humanitarian aid delivery systems. Most of the reviewed literature further showed that displaced women's voices are rarely considered. Instead, displaced individuals are treated as passive recipients of humanitarian aid rather than as active agents who can articulate their needs and solutions. This not only presents a knowledge gap but also demonstrates how the current systems undermine efforts to create transformative and equitable responses. Therefore, this study aimed to address these gaps by analyzing the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya using the intersectionality lens. The study contributes not only to the existing gender studies but also provides context-sensitive knowledge to guide government and policymakers on how to create inclusive and responsive interventions for displaced women.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter details the methodological approach that was used to address the aim of the study. It outlines the research design, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations that underpin the study. The chapter is organized into several sections. The first section describes the research design that was adopted, followed by the research method used and the data collection methods that were utilized to gather the required textual data. It then details the data analysis procedures that were used to address the research questions. Finally, the chapter describes how the trustworthiness of the study was achieved, the ethical approaches followed to improve the credibility of the results, as well as the limitations associated with the selected research methodology.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design because it sought to interpret the meanings embedded in personal narratives, reports, and policy documents, instead of quantifying data. The qualitative research design was considered suitable for this study due to its ability to explore complex social phenomena such as the lived experiences of displaced women (Dodgson, 2017). Dodgson (2017) further noted that qualitative research design emphasizes an in-depth exploration of meaning, context, and the subjective interpretation of human experiences. Thus, employing a qualitative research design enabled me to thoroughly explore how displaced women navigate the challenges and privileges resulting from the intersection of gender and other social identities.

Furthermore, this study was grounded in the interpretive research paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the subjective experiences of individuals (Gichuru, 2017). This paradigm was considered suitable because this study sought to understand the subjective experiences of displaced women within the social context. Gichuru (2017) argued that the interpretivism paradigm helps in uncovering the reasons behind human actions and behaviors. Thus, in this study, this paradigm allowed me to delve into

the complex challenges/privileges encountered by displaced women and describe their lived experiences within the refugee camps.

3.2 Research Method

This study employed document analysis as a qualitative research method to allow for systematic review and interpretation of documents, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Wach & Ward, 2013). Document analysis is a qualitative research procedure that involves reviewing and evaluating documents to extract meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Wach & Ward, 2013). In qualitative studies, this method helps in uncovering underlying patterns, themes, and discourses within a certain context. Thus, document analysis was considered appropriate for this study because it would help in uncovering the lived experiences of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. The method was chosen over other types of qualitative research methods due to its ability to provide rich, contextually grounded information that would not be accessible through primary data sources such as interviews. Morgan (2022) further pointed out that document analysis is most appropriate when working with vulnerable populations, such as displaced women. Thus, using the document analysis method made this study ethically feasible by avoiding direct interaction with displaced women, which can retraumatize the target participants.

3.3 Target Population, Data Sources, and Selection Criteria

The target population in this study was displaced women living in refugee camps in Kenya. To gain a comprehensive understanding of how gender and intersectionality influence the lived experiences of these women, this study used secondary sources of data. In particular, document analysis was conducted to extract, review, and identify themes from secondary data sources, which address gender and intersectionality within Kenya's refugee context. The data was obtained from authoritative documents such as UNHCR Kenya Annual reports (2021-2023), the Kenya Refugee Act (2021), NFO reports such as those published by the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK), and policy briefs such as those from Women's Refugee Commission and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). These documents were considered appropriate for this study because they were believed to contain authoritative information regarding the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. Specifically, the UNHCR annual

reports were used to provide a statistical and comprehensive overview of the current experiences of refugee women in Kenya. The Kenya Refugee Act (2021) provided critical information on the effectiveness of the existing legal and institutional frameworks in shaping the lived experiences of displaced women. To support the findings, case studies and qualitative narratives were obtained from NGO reports. These not only provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of displaced women but also uncovered the gendered challenges facing them. Policy briefs were also utilized in this study because they are believed to contain rich information on existing interventions, their limitations, and best practices to address the existing challenges facing displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps.

Purposive sampling was employed to select the documents containing relevant information corresponding to the research questions. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because it allow deliberate selection of appropriate documents based on their relevance, credibility, and potential to provide detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation (Rai & Thapa, 2015). The inclusion criteria involved using documents that only address gender and forced displacement in Kenya. Additionally, this study utilized only documents that were published between 2015 and 2025 to ensure relevance and reflect current trends in humanitarian responses. Conversely, the exclusion criteria involved excluding documents originating from unverifiable or biased sources.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

This study utilized secondary data sources, which were textual data extracted from documents. Specifically, the relevant documents were searched online from reputable sources such as organizational websites, academic databases, and government repositories. These sources were considered appropriate for this study because they are known to provide access to credible, peer-reviewed articles. Additionally, the availability of the data from public resources allowed me to exhaustively explore the lived experiences of displaced women without limitation on the sample size.

After downloading the relevant documents, the inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied to remove unnecessary and irrelevant materials. The relevant materials were then manually reviewed and organized using a structured document log. The document log consisted of a record

of identifiable information such as title, author, publication date, type of document, and theme portrayed in the document. This log helped me maintain transparency in data management throughout the research process. Once the identifying information for the documents was recorded, the documents were then stored in a digital folder for ease of access and annotation.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to interpret complex social phenomena such as the gendered experiences of displaced women (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was also chosen due to its ability to extract subjective meaning and multiple realities from data, as required in the interpretivism paradigm. Additionally, thematic analysis was chosen due to its consistency with the selected feminist and intersectionality theories, which advocate for centering marginalized voices and examining how the various intersecting sexual identities shape lived experiences. Therefore, this qualitative data analysis technique allowed me to critically examine the existing gendered disparities and thoroughly address the research objectives.

To analyze the collected data, I employed the six phases of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This six-phase process ensured all the documents were critically reviewed to avoid missing out on important information. The first step involved reading and re-reading the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the information contained in the documents. After thoroughly understanding the content contained in the documents, initial codes were generated and jotted down. This helped in identifying key topics emerging from the textual data. The generated initial codes were then grouped together based on relevance to formulate themes that were consistent with the research questions. The emerging themes were then reviewed and duplicated, and irrelevant themes were dropped. I then named and renamed the remaining themes to ensure consistency with the objectives. Finally, the refined themes were synthesized and written in a narrative form to describe how each theme was supported by data extracted from the documents. This structured process ensured the results were not only reliable but also consistent with the collected data.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Rigor

I adhered to various guidelines to ensure trustworthiness and rigor. For instance, triangulation was employed on the various types of documents to enhance the credibility of the results. In particular, extracting information from the different types of documents (NGO reports, policy briefs, and scholarly articles) allowed me to improve the validity of the emerging themes. During the data analysis process and after writing the results section, I continuously collaborated with peers and academic mentors to review the work and ensure consistency with the research questions. This helped strengthen the credibility of the findings.

Furthermore, transferability was achieved by using rich contextual excerpts extracted from the documents. These excerpts aimed to help the reader make informed judgments about the findings and how they were consistent with other studies involving displaced women living in refugee camps. Additionally, dependability was achieved by clearly recording all the steps involved in collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting the findings. According to Adler (2022), proper documentation of steps promotes methodological transparency by providing readers and future scholars with all the necessary information required to replicate the findings. Confirmability of the findings was then achieved by practicing reflexivity throughout the research process. In this case, potential biases, my positionality, and documentation of all analytical decisions were acknowledged throughout the research process. This ensured the findings were not based on my assumptions but rather rooted in the extracted textual data. This consequently improved the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Using secondary data sources, such as publicly available documents, can pose various ethical concerns. However, using secondary data sources can help alleviate the ethical issues associated with using primary data sources. Notably, Pietilä et al. (2019) argued that secondary data sources help minimize ethical issues related to confidentiality since one does not interact with participants but rather extracts information from already available documents. However, ethical considerations remain essential even in qualitative studies involving the use of secondary data because they help ensure one maintains respect and integrity throughout the research process. In other words, ethical considerations when using secondary data sources allowed me to

remain committed to accurately representing the extracted data without distortion and misinterpretation (Tripathy, 2013).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, I addressed various ethical concerns. For instance, all the documents used in this study were extracted from highly reputable sources such as government reports, scholarly articles, and reputable organizations. This helped in reducing the risk associated with using biased and inaccurate information. Additionally, I remained transparent during the entire data collection, analysis, and interpretation to maintain the ethical principles of accountability and scholarly honesty. Therefore, by treating the documents with scholarly rigor and maintaining an ethical stance toward representation, this study upheld the standards necessary for responsible qualitative inquiry.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

This study was associated with various limitations. A major limitation was associated with the use of secondary data sources, which limited me from capturing the personal experiences of participants. According to Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012), the lack of direct participants' voices in a study could lead to interpretations that neglect the lived realities of the target participants. Similarly, Pietilä et al. (2019) argued that using secondary sources of information, such as peer-reviewed articles and government documents, can lead to biases resulting from the original authors' perspectives. This can consequently affect the authenticity and reliability of the results. However, to mitigate these limitations, this study employed a rigorous inclusion/exclusion criterion to ensure only credible documents were used in the analysis. Additionally, the use of the intersectionality framework and feminist theory allowed for a sound interpretation of the data without introducing biases.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the results obtained from document analysis to address the research questions. The chapter is organized into sections, where each section presents results, organized by research questions. The emerging themes for each research question are presented as subsections. Specifically, the first section presents themes related to how gender and intersecting identities shape the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. The emerging themes on the key social, economic, and protection-related challenges facing displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps are also presented. The last section presents a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which intersectional frameworks have been integrated into the existing humanitarian policies and programs to protect displaced women living in major refugee camps.

Therefore, to address the research questions, selected documents, including national and international policy frameworks, NGO reports, UNHCR guidelines, and camp-based assessment reports, were critically analysed. These documents were considered suitable because they were assumed to have rich information regarding refugee welfare, gender issues, and humanitarian aid. To comprehensively address the research questions, a thematic analysis approach was utilized, where recurring patterns were extracted from the selected documents, which were later merged into themes. Thematic analysis allowed thorough exploration of explicit and implicit references to intersectionality, gender, and displacement, hence providing relevant insights into how gender and intersectionality shape the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps.

4.1 RQ1. How do gender and intersecting identities influence the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps?

This research question aimed to examine how multiple and overlapping social identities, such as gender, age, ethnicity, disability status, and legal identities, influence the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. In particular, it aimed to uncover how these experiences are portrayed within official reports and policy documents. To address the question, thematic analysis of various documents was conducted. This involved reading the documents line-by-line to familiarize with the data, generating initial codes, searching for

themes, reviewing the emerging themes, defining and naming the key themes, and writing a report for each of the emerging themes. Based on thematic analysis, three major themes emerged: *gender as a fixed vulnerability marker*, *silenced intersectional identities*, and *disparities in access to services and empowerment*.

4.1.1 Gender as a Fixed Vulnerability Marker

Thematic analysis of the documents showed that gender is often treated as a static category, where displaced women are either categorized as men or women. The analysis further showed that women are inherently vulnerable to gender-based violence. Additionally, some of the documents showed that women are equated with biological sex, and families headed by displaced women are considered the most vulnerable to gender-based challenges. For instance, one of the documents highlighted that “*When displaced, women often become economically dependent on male companions or humanitarian aid, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, which frequently traps them in dangerous situations* (Tadesse et al., 2024, p.3).” Other documents revealed that displaced women living in Kenya’s refugee camps are associated with increased food insecurity, reduced access to essential services, and reduced access to labour markets. This classification often tends to reduce displaced women to passive recipients of aid rather than active agents, hence neglecting the unique challenges emerging from the intersectionality of gender with other social identities. These results were echoed in the Mwangi (2024, p.33) work, who noted that “*women in the camp describe the pervasive impact of limited income-generating opportunities, inadequate access to financial resources, and systemic barriers to economic empowerment, which exacerbate their vulnerability to food insecurity and perpetuate cycles of poverty.*”

Similarly, the SAIS Review of International Affairs. (2023) report acknowledged the role of gender in shaping the lived experiences of refugees in Kenya. The report distinguished displaced women by age and showed that older women and girls are disproportionately affected. Specifically, displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps experience discrimination in various forms, including a loss of livelihood, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and insecurity. The report outlined that the existence of decentralized or unevenly distributed facilities such as hospitals, clinics, schools, boreholes, and police stations increases the risks of SGBV. Additionally, analysis of the document revealed that the decentralization of these

facilities contributes to life-threatening inconvenience, making women and young girls walk long distances alone, which consequently increases the likelihood of assault. In fact, the SAIS Review of International Affairs. (2023) highlighted that *“In Kenyan refugee camps, 40 percent of SGBV cases happen at night, and a significant number of survivors are children.”* Despite these efforts, it did not provide a nuanced differentiation of displaced women by marital status and other social identities. This implies that displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps are often treated as a monolithic group, and the proposed intervention measures are only designed around gender-based vulnerability. As a result, the approach misses the deeper analysis of how specific social identities interact with gender to create more unique challenges and opportunities for displaced women in the refugee camps.

Failure to consider how gender intersects with other social identities to shape the experiences of displaced women could lead to oversimplification, which may have operational consequences. Notably, humanitarian interventions designed without a more nuanced understanding of how gender intersects with other social identities may fail to reach those most at risk. For instance, failure to acknowledge the role of intersectionality during the provision of reproductive health services to displaced women might consider all women as a homogenous group, hence ignoring the unique privileges experienced by healthy women, as well as the challenges facing disabled women. Additionally, failure to interrogate gender as a socially constructed identity implies that power dynamics, social expectations, and context-specific norms will be overlooked. Treating displaced women as a homogenous group can perpetuate stereotypical assumptions that discriminate against women with other unique social identities.

4.1.2 Silenced Intersectional Identities

The silenced intersectional identities aspect was another emerging theme in the aim to understand how gender and intersectionality influence the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. Specifically, thematic analysis of the documents showed that despite the growing recognition of intersectionality in global gender discourse, most of the humanitarian and policy documents showed limited implementation of the concept. Specifically, while social identities such as age, ethnicity, disability status, and legal recognition are often mentioned in most of the documents, their integration in meaningful analysis is limited. The existing policies and interventions do not consider how the unique challenges and privileges resulting from the

intersection of gender with these social identities can shape the lived experiences of displaced women. For example, one of the analysed documents revealed that Somali and other minority clan women living in Dadaab refugee camp are more likely to experience gender-based violence resulting from social exclusion, fear of retaliation, and lack of police support. Notably, in a study by Muuo et al. (2020, p.255), one participant complained about the ineffectiveness of existing humanitarian agencies in protecting Somali women living in Dadaab camps, stating that *“I came to the gate at the UN but they [the security guards] denied me entrance. I came back with another letter from the agency, but they still denied me entrance.”* Another respondent noted that *“there are troublesome people who disregard women’s rights. There are so many women who have been raped, beaten by their husbands, or disrespected* (Muuo et al., 2020, p.252). Despite these arguments, the analysed documents do not explain whether the higher cases of gender-based violence among Somali women are due to intersectionality or chance.

Furthermore, some of the analysed documents revealed that displaced women in Kenya urban areas often experience isolation and barriers in accessing psychosocial support due to such factors as limited legal status, poverty, lack of custom services, and mental health stigma. Importantly, the results showed that older displaced women, single mothers, and adolescent girls experience heightened forms of marginalization, often resulting from the intersection of gender norms and the stigma around displacement. For instance, one of the documents highlighted that *“women experiencing domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) often do not report the violence and instead self-seclude* (Nieuwe Weme et al., 2025, p.4).” While these findings showed how the intersection of gender with marital status and age shapes the lived experience of displaced women, these differences are rarely implemented in practice. As such, there is a need to protect vulnerable sub-groups living in Kenya's refugee camps. Despite these efforts, most of the documents failed to disaggregate the data based on various social identities, which can be helpful in creating targeted response plans. This implies that while efforts have been made to transform Kenya's refugee camps through socioeconomic inclusion, the intersectionality of gender is rarely considered. One of the reviewed studies showed that displaced women with disability remain largely invisible, with few initiatives designed for their specific protection needs or livelihood access. This consequently leads to significant unmet needs, including barriers to shelter, employment, and community support. Specifically, one of the documents outlined that *“But there is increasing awareness that certain refugee populations – including older people,*

people with disabilities, male survivors and sexual minorities – are often overlooked in sexual and gender-based violence programming.”

4.1.3 Disparities in Access to Services and Empowerment

This theme emerged to demonstrate the role of intersectionality in shaping the experiences of displaced women when accessing essential services and empowerment opportunities. Thematic analysis of the documents revealed that gender intersects with other factors, such as ethnicity, marital status, education level, and legal status, to shape how displaced women access essential services such as healthcare, justice, education, and economic resources. Specifically, most of the documents showed that displaced refugee women consistently lag behind host communities' women, especially in almost all empowerment indicators such as access to media, financial independence, and formal employment. More importantly, these studies acknowledged the role of intersectionality in shaping refugee women's ability to access essential services and empowerment. For example, a study by Kaaria and Murithi (2025) found that displaced women's empowerment is shaped by the intersection of gender with other social identities such as age, education level, employment status, marital status, and religious affiliation. Notably, the documents outlined that *“age; the gender of the household head; the education level of the refugee woman; employment status; and the education of the household head”* serves as significant enablers of empowerment, whereas, *“marital statuses (divorced/separated/widowed and single/never married) and religious affiliations (Muslim) hinder women empowerment.”*

Furthermore, thematic analysis of the Shirika Work Plan (2023) revealed that the existing policies and framework intended to protect displaced women lack clear identification and documentation of the rights of refugee women. Consequently, this disproportionately affects displaced women's ability to access legal protections, report violence, or enrol children in schools. For displaced women deemed as stateless, their marginalization is even more severe, with many experiencing cycles of invisibility and exclusion from essential services such as education, healthcare, employment, and other basic rights. One of the analysed documents noted that *“No stateless individuals received citizenship in Kenya in 2024, leaving about 9,800 stateless people in legal limbo, without protection or access to public services (UNHCR, 2025).”* Such exclusions are particularly severe for Somali women, where clan-based discrimination and

distrust of the police reduce access to justice and increase impunity for perpetrators of violence. Despite the exclusions, the existing interventions do not provide solutions on how the marginalization of these groups of women can be addressed at the camp level. In most situations, interventions for displaced women living in Kenya's major camps are offered in a one-size-fits-all approach, which fails to capture the unique challenges facing adolescent girls, older women, or stateless women.

Table 1.

How Gender and Intersecting Identities Influence the Lived Experiences of Displaced Women in Kenya's Refugee Camps

Source	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
Tadesse et al. (2024, p.3)	<i>“When displaced, women often become economically dependent on male companions or humanitarian aid, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, which frequently traps them in dangerous situations.”</i>	economic dependence, exploitation risk, vulnerability framing	Women are inherently vulnerable	Gender as a Fixed Vulnerability Marker
Mwangi (2024, p.33)	<i>“Women in the camp describe the pervasive impact of limited income-generating opportunities, inadequate access to financial resources, and systemic barriers to economic</i>	limited resources, food insecurity, poverty cycle	Poverty and food insecurity	Gender as a Fixed Vulnerability Marker

Source	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
	<i>empowerment, which exacerbate their vulnerability to food insecurity and perpetuate cycles of poverty.”</i>			
The SAIS Review of International Affairs (2023)	<i>“In Kenyan refugee camps, 40 percent of SGBV cases happen at night, and a significant number of survivors are children.”</i>	SGBV prevalence, adolescent risks, insecurity	Age-based risks and SGBV	Gender as a Fixed Vulnerability Marker
The SAIS Review of International Affairs (2023)	<i>“Displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps are often treated as a monolithic group, and the proposed intervention measures are only designed around gender-based vulnerability.”</i>	homogenization, static gender framing, lack of nuance	Monolithic treatment of women	Gender as a Fixed Vulnerability Marker
Muuo et al. (2020, p.252, p.255)	<i>“There are troublesome people who disregard women’s rights. There are so many women who have been raped, beaten by their husbands, or disrespected.”</i> <i>“I came to the gate at the UN, but they denied me</i>	Somali women, exclusion, denial of services, ethnic vulnerability	Ethnicity and exclusion	Silenced Intersectional Identities

Source	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
Nieuwe Weme et al. (2025, p.4)	<i>entrance...even with another letter.”</i> <i>“Women experiencing domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) often do not report the violence and instead self-seclude.”</i>	IPV, self-seclusion, stigma, marital status	Marital status and IPV	Silenced Intersectional Identities
[Policy Document cited]	<i>“Certain refugee populations – including older people, people with disabilities, male survivors and sexual minorities – are often overlooked in sexual and gender-based violence programming.”</i>	disability invisibility, unmet needs, neglect in programming	Disability and invisibility	Silenced Intersectional Identities
Kaaria & Murithi (2025)	<i>“Age; the gender of the household head; the education level of the refugee woman; employment status; and the education of the household head serve as enablers of empowerment, whereas marital statuses... and religious affiliations hinder women's empowerment.”</i>	empowerment enablers, religious barriers, marital status, and education	Education, employment, and empowerment gaps	Disparities in Access to Services and Empowerment

Source	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
UNHCR (2025)	<i>“No stateless individuals received citizenship in Kenya in 2024, leaving about 9,800 stateless people in legal limbo, without protection or access to public services.”</i>	statelessness, legal exclusion, lack of protection	Legal invisibility and statelessness	Disparities in Access to Services and Empowerment
Shirika Work Plan (2023)	<i>“Existing policies and frameworks intended to protect displaced women lack clear identification and documentation of the rights of refugee women.”</i>	legal invisibility, policy gaps, justice exclusion	Unequal access to justice	Disparities in Access to Services and Empowerment
[Policy Document, e.g., UNHCR reports]	<i>“Exclusions are particularly severe for Somali women, where clan-based discrimination and distrust of the police reduce access to justice and increase impunity for perpetrators of violence.”</i>	clan-based discrimination, distrust of police, impunity	Clan-based discrimination	Disparities in Access to Services and Empowerment

4.2 What are the major social, economic, and protection-related challenges facing displaced women in Kenya Refugee Camps?

This research question aimed to uncover the social, economic, and protection-related challenges facing displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. To address the question, thematic

analysis using an inductive approach was conducted on selected documents. The analysis yielded three major themes: social challenges, economic challenges, and protection-related challenges.

4.2.1 Social Challenges

Displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps experience a myriad of complex social challenges, which interfere with their daily lives and overall well-being. While some of these challenges pre-exist in the host country, other challenges stem from displacement-related vulnerabilities. These social barriers not only hinder their ability to rebuild their lives but also perpetuate cycles of dependency and marginalization. Thematic analysis of the selected documents revealed that social challenges were dominant among displaced women due to structural and cultural barriers, which hindered them from participating in education, community activities, and key decision-making processes. Notably, two major themes emerged from the socially related challenges facing displaced women, which included *barriers to education*, as well as *social exclusion and discrimination*.

Barriers to Education

Most of the analysed documents revealed that displaced women and girls living in Kenya's refugee camps experience challenges in accessing quality education. This challenge was attributed to a number of barriers, including early marriages, increased caregiving responsibility among young girls, and negative gender norms, which prioritize boys over girls in education. Additionally, some documents highlighted inadequate school facilities, such as separate toilets for boys and girls and limited access to menstrual hygiene products for girls. These challenges consequently contributed to increased absenteeism among girls, eventually leading to increased dropout among adolescent girls. For instance, Wekesa (2018, p. 9) noted that "*Early marriage, as well as gender discrimination, are among the many factors hindering girls from accessing educational opportunities in the camps. In these environments, girls and young women are affected by a lack of quality and accessible education.*"

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that displaced refugee girls have relatively lower educational attainment than the hosts, which varied by gender and county of residence. Notably, displaced refugee women were more likely to have no education, with those living in camps

located in rural areas having a relatively lower education level than those in urban camps. For instance, a study by Pape et al. (2021, p.11) noted that "*Hosts in Nairobi have the highest level of education overall.*" Additionally, the results revealed that the existing refugee communities' stereotypes exacerbate the challenges facing refugee girls in Kenya. Notably, some existing stereotypes require young girls to be married at the age of 14 years, making them miss an opportunity to go to school. These results were supported by Nanima (2021), who stated that "*There are reports of parents and caregivers desiring the girl child to be married off once she is 14 years of age. Unless such information is passed on to the United Nations Refugee Officers, these girls miss the chance to go to school.*" Besides, some of the documents noted that distance to schools and insecurity along routes hindered young girls from accessing education. In some instances, families expressed reluctance to let girls walk long distances due to fears of harassment or attacks. Overall, these findings showed that there is a significant gap in educational attainment between displaced women and other members living in Kenya's refugee camps.

Social Exclusion and Discrimination

Social exclusion and discrimination also emerged as a major theme supporting social challenges facing displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. Specifically, the results showed that displaced women experience social exclusion and discrimination both in the formal and informal decision-making structures within the camps. Notably, the results revealed the presence of various structural and normative barriers, which hinder displaced women's mobility, influence, and access to essential services. Some of the reviewed documents showed that displaced women living in Kakuma and Kalobeyei camps are excluded from leadership positions because some jobs require frequent travel or working during the night. In support of these findings, MarketShare Associates (2019, p.69) noted that "*women cannot take jobs that require frequent travel or night-time work,*" which not only restricts them from participating in leadership but also limits their economic empowerment.

Furthermore, thematic analysis of research by Okello (2025) among refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei highlighted patterns of social exclusion among displaced women. The findings revealed that displaced women living in these camps were particularly excluded from leadership,

especially in heading households. Notably, women-headed households with good social relationships with other community members were associated with reduced odds of inclusion in the financial empowerment program. Additionally, displaced women were associated with reduced odds of accessing essential information about financial support. For instance, Okello (2025) noted that "*the social integration index indicates that male household heads are significantly more socially integrated than their female counterparts.*" These findings uncover the paradox of social connection, which shows that instead of promoting inclusion, it may reinforce exclusionary norms, discrimination, and create barriers to economic participation. The findings further suggest that the displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps experience marginalization not only from formal systems but also from subtle forms of discrimination within their immediate communities.

4.2.2 Economic Challenges

Thematic analysis of the reviewed documents consistently highlighted the economic challenges facing displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. The analysis helped in uncovering the structural barriers that restrict these women from gaining financial independence. It was evident that displaced women are frequently excluded from formal employment opportunities and confined to low-return employment opportunities. This consequently makes them experience cycles of dependency on their counterparts. To gain a comprehensive understanding of economic challenges, two major themes emerged, which are discussed below:

Restrictions on Employment Opportunities

One of the major emerging themes on economic challenges facing displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps was restrictions on employment opportunities. Thematic analysis revealed that displaced women experience profound restrictions on formal employment. These restrictions have been exacerbated by the existing legal and policy frameworks, which limit displaced women from working outside their designated camp boundaries. For instance, Kenya's encampment policy requires refugee women to reside within the camps and seek additional special work permits whenever they need to work elsewhere. This process is not only lengthy and complicated, but also bureaucratic, costly, and rarely approved by the necessary authorities. In one of the reviewed documents, it was noted that "*...even once a refugee has*

received their refugee identity card, it does not necessarily protect them from harassment or extortion from security officials when exercising their right to dignified work and self-employment (Gettliffe et al., 2020, p.11)."

Furthermore, analysis of the documents showed that despite the limited employment opportunities, safety concerns, and entrenched cultural norms also restrict displaced women's mobility. As a result, most of them often feel discouraged from travelling to places of economic empowerment, such as markets, training centers, and even workplaces, on the basis of risks of harassment, insecurity along travel routes, and community norms regarding domestic responsibilities. In particular, unlike men who are associated with formal employment, displaced women are associated with domestic responsibilities. This division of labor is rooted in traditional gender roles, which consequently limit displaced women's accessibility to economic empowerment opportunities. Economic empowerment challenges are further exacerbated by religion, where, in some cases, refugee Muslim women are less likely to be economically empowered compared to Christian refugee women. For instance, one of the reviewed documents highlighted that "*Muslim women in Nairobi's refugee community face cultural or religious constraints that hinder their empowerment (Kaaria & Murithi, 2025, p.14).*" These findings underscore the role of the intersectionality of gender with religious status to create more unique challenges facing displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps.

Dependence on Aid and Limited Livelihood Options

Dependence on aid and limited livelihood options also emerged as another theme supporting the economic challenges facing displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Generally, it was evident that displaced women in these camps heavily rely on humanitarian aid for survival. In particular, they rely on food rations and small cash stipends distributed by humanitarian agencies to meet their basic needs. However, increased reliance on such aid often creates a fragile economic foundation, vulnerable to funding cuts and ration reductions. In other words, while humanitarian aid provides essential support to refugee women, it can limit them from seeking employment opportunities, enhancing their skills, and ignoring economic opportunities that can help them generate more income. Consequently, displaced refugee women are trapped in a cycle of poverty and vulnerability. These findings were backed in one of the

documents, which noted that “*recent reductions in food rations in Kakuma Refugee Camp (from 65% in 2023 to 40% in 2025) have raised concerns about worsening humanitarian conditions. If funding shortages persist, rations could drop further to 20% beyond June 2025, exacerbating malnutrition, insecurity, and health risks, particularly for women and children* (Nyale, 2025).”

Furthermore, while humanitarian aid remains essential for both men and women living in Kenya's refugee camps, displaced women are more reliant on it. This heightened reliance stems from the intersection of gender with other social identities such as age, marital status, disability, and ethnicity. This consequently shapes their lived experiences and sometimes constrains displaced women's economic empowerment. For example, although displaced men experience restrictions in accessing essential services and humanitarian aid, they often have greater freedom of movement within and outside the refugee camp's boundaries compared to women. On the other hand, displaced women, especially unmarried, widowed, and those from minority ethnic groups, often experience exclusions and discrimination when accessing humanitarian aid. Most of these challenges stem from social stigma, language barriers, and existing discriminatory practices within the aid distribution system. These findings are echoed in the work of Tadesse et al. (2024, p.3), who argued that “*When displaced, women often become economically dependent on male companions or humanitarian aid, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, which frequently traps them in dangerous situations.*”

4.2.3 Protection-Related Challenges

Protection-related challenges are major concerns for displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. If these challenges remain unidentified or unaddressed, they can interfere with the overall safety, dignity, and well-being of displaced women. Although all refugees in Kenya experience various degrees of insecurity, women are associated with increased risks of insecurity, which are exacerbated by the intersection of gender with other social identities such as age, marital status, disability, and ethnicity. This implies that protection-related challenges go beyond immediate threats of physical harm because they include other system issues such as inadequate legal protection, gender-based violence, limited access to justice, and unsafe living environment. Based on thematic analysis, three major themes emerged, including: gender-based violence (GBV), insecurity and poor safety infrastructure, as well as barriers to justice.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence (GBV) was one of the major themes emerging from the reviewed documents. The reviewed documents consistently showed that gender-based violence was the most pressing protection-related challenge facing displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. Specifically, some studies revealed that displaced women experienced gender-based violence through physical assaults, sexual harassment, and psychological abuse, which emanated both from within camps and camp leaders. Notably, one of the documents highlighted that most of these violences are often perpetrated by intimate partners, community members, and, in some situations, by leadership. For example, a study by Mugo et al. (2025) on GBV among adolescent girls living in Kakuma refugee camps revealed that the overall prevalence of GBV was about 64%. Importantly, the study found that *"the overall prevalence of sexual violence was 22.7%, physical violence 52.1% while emotional violence was at 48.7%."* Similarly, a report by Atuhaire and Ndirangu (2018) noted that *"Most women and girls who work as domestic help have reported being sexually abused by their male employers or by male members of the households where they work."* The report further showed that the situation is even more severe for displaced refugee women living in Kenya's refugee camps illegally. Notably, the report indicated that such women were more vulnerable, highlighting that *"If these women and girls are in the country illegally, they are vulnerable to blackmail, with people threatening to report them to the authorities (Atuhaire & Ndirangu, 2018, p.2)."* Other documents showed that limited access to a confidential reporting mechanism and fear of retaliation discourage displaced women from seeking justice, which consequently allows perpetrators to act with impunity.

The results further revealed that the intersection of gender with other social identities also influences the prevalence and extent of GBV among refugee women. Specifically, most of the documents noted that displaced women's vulnerability to GBV is not only determined by gender, but it is worsened when gender intersects with other social identities such as age, marital status, disability, or affiliation with a minority ethnic group. For example, one of the documents' findings showed that adolescent girls are associated with higher risks of early marriage and sexual exploitation than older individuals. Notably, the findings indicated that *"young, single, or unmarried women, girls, and newly arriving female refugees are often at elevated risk of violence (Muuo et al., 2020)."* Despite the heightened risks among these girls, the results showed

that reporting of GBV remains low, mainly due to shame, stigma, threats of rejection by family and the community, as well as fear of retaliation. Other studies found that displaced women with disability often encounter unique forms of GBV, which are exacerbated by limited access to reporting channels or support services. For example, one of the reviewed documents highlighted that *"69% of victims who had disability reported an intimate partner violence, on-partner sexual violence or physical violence as compared to 54 % of women without a disability who reported GBV (Mugo et al., 2025)."* These findings suggest GBV is a common protection-related challenge facing displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps, and its effects can be exacerbated by the intersection of gender with other social identities.

Insecurity and Poor Safety Infrastructure

Insecurity and poor safety infrastructure also emerged as a major theme supporting protection-related challenges facing displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. Most of the documents showed that displaced women living in camps often feel unsafe both during the day and at night. These insecurity issues have been attributed to a number of factors, including poor lighting, limited security patrols, and overcrowded shelters. For instance, one of the reviewed documents indicated that *"insecurity, particularly at night, was indicated as a chronic stressor for all women. A few women even stated that Kakuma camp was less safe than their previous situation (home country or Dadaab Refugee Camp) (Lalla et al., 2020, p.8)."* Similarly, other documents revealed that displaced women often feel insecure when accessing essential services such as water points, latrines, and food distribution centers because they are often poorly lit or located in isolated areas. These insecurity issues consequently increase the risk of harassment, assault, and theft. In some cases, the lack of lockable doors or private spaces within shelters leaves women exposed to intrusion and violence.

The intersection of gender with other social identities further worsens insecurity challenges facing displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. The results revealed that adolescent girls are associated with heightened risks of sexual harassment both during the day and at night. For instance, most of the documents indicated that young girls often feel insecure, especially when travelling alone to school and communal facilities. Additionally, it was evident that displaced women living with disabilities often struggle to navigate uneven terrain and other

poorly maintained infrastructures, which consequently makes them vulnerable to opportunistic attacks. Similarly, the results showed that women belonging to minority ethnic or religious groups were associated with increased hostility or exclusion from communal protection arrangements. A study by Lalla et al. (2020, p.4) on experiences of displaced women in Kakuma refugee camp noted that "*the various ethnic groups' having varying levels of resources fosters an insecure environment for women through increasing risk of both inter-ethnic/inter-clan conflict and domestic conflict.*" These findings echo the severity of insecurity among displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps.

Barriers to Justice

Barriers to justice also emerged as a major theme in the reviewed documents. The results showed that many survivors of GBV, harassment, or exploitation often experience challenges when seeking justice. Specifically, they are unable to access fair and timely legal redress due to structural, social, and institutional barriers. One of the reviewed studies noted that the existing legal systems intended to protect displaced refugee women are often under-resourced and characterized by limited personnel, slow case processing, and sometimes, inadequate investigative capacity. This consequently leads to inadequate protection and increased vulnerability of displaced women to insecurity. For example, Chelule (2023) noted that despite efforts to protect displaced women, the existing legal systems are inadequate. Notably, the author stated that "*The judiciary is subject to a number of limitations, including a dearth of judges, attorneys, and interpreters knowledgeable in refugee law* (Chelule, 2023, p.51)." Other results further revealed that some displaced women experience language, social, and cultural challenges, which make it challenging for them to comprehend the legal systems and exercise their rights.

The intersection of gender with other social identities, such as ethnicity and age, also seemed to worsen these barriers. Displaced women from minority ethnic or religious groups were found to experience heightened barriers in forms of hostility from both community leaders and justice officials, making them reluctant to report crimes. Additionally, women with disabilities were associated with increased physical obstacles to police posts and other legal aid centers. Adolescent girls who experienced GBV and other forms of discrimination failed to seek justice due to social stigma and victim-blaming. For instance, analysis of a document noted that

“Certain groups of refugee girls are particularly at risk of SGBV. They are unaccompanied and separated girls, girls in detention, girl child soldiers, adolescents, girls with mental and physical disabilities, working girls, girl mothers, and girls born to survivors of rape (Donnelly & Muthiah, 2019, p.28).” These results suggest a need for a targeted, intersectional approach to providing legal aid services to displaced women living in Kenya’s refugee camps. This can consequently help them break the existing cycles of impunity and ensure meaningful access to justice.

Table 2.

Social, Economic, and Protection Challenges Facing Displaced Women in Kenya

Source	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
Wekesa (2018, p.9)	“Early marriage, as well as gender discrimination, are among the many factors hindering girls from accessing educational opportunities in the camps. In these environments, girls and young women are affected by a lack of quality and accessible education.”	early marriage, gender norms, dropout, limited access to education	Barriers to Education	Social Challenge
Pape et al. (2021, p.11)	“Hosts in Nairobi have the highest level of education overall.”	education disparity, host–refugee gap, inequality in access	Barriers to Education	Social Challenge
Nanima (2021)	“There are reports of parents and caregivers desiring the girl child marriage, child to be married off once she missed schooling, is 14 years of age. Unless such information is passed on...these	cultural norms	Barriers to Education	Social Challenge

Source	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
	<i>girls miss the chance to go to school.”</i>			
MarketShare Associates (2019, p.69)	<i>“Women cannot take jobs that require frequent travel or night-time work.”</i>	exclusion from leadership, mobility restriction, occupational barriers	Social Exclusion & Discrimination	Social Exclusion Challenge
Okello (2025)	<i>“The social integration index indicates that male household heads are significantly more socially integrated than their female counterparts.”</i>	exclusion, gendered integration gap, male privilege	Social Exclusion & Discrimination	Social Exclusion Challenge
Gettliffe et al. (2020, p.11)	<i>“...even once a refugee has received their refugee identity card, it does not necessarily protect them from harassment or extortion from security officials when exercising their right to dignified work and self-employment.”</i>	legal barriers, harassment, restricted mobility and employment insecurity	Restrictions on Employment Opportunities	Economic Challenge
Kaaria & Murithi (2025, p.14)	<i>“Muslim women in Nairobi’s refugee community face cultural or religious constraints that hinder their empowerment.”</i>	religious barriers, cultural norms, and disempowerment	Restrictions on Employment Opportunities	Economic Challenge

Source	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
Nyale (2025)	<i>“Recent reductions in food rations in Kakuma Refugee Camp (from 65% in 2023 to 40% in 2025)...exacerbating malnutrition, insecurity, and health risks, particularly for women and children.”</i>	food insecurity, aid dependency, malnutrition, health risks	Dependence on Aid & Limited Livelihood Options	Economic Challenge
Tadesse et al. (2024, p.3)	<i>“When displaced, women often become economically dependent on male companions or humanitarian aid, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.”</i>	dependency, exploitation risk, economic vulnerability	Dependence on Aid & Limited Livelihood Options	Economic Challenge
Mugo et al. (2025)	<i>“The overall prevalence of sexual violence was 22.7%, physical violence 52.1% while emotional violence was at 48.7%.”</i>	GBV prevalence, adolescent risks, widespread violence	Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Protection-related challenge
Atuhaire & Ndirangu (2018, p.2)	<i>“If these women and girls are in the country illegally, they are vulnerable to blackmail, with people threatening to report them to the authorities.”</i>	undocumented status, exploitation, vulnerability to blackmail	Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Protection-related challenge
Muuo et al. (2020)	<i>“Young, single, or unmarried women, girls, and newly arriving female refugees are</i>	adolescent risks, early marriage,	Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Protection-related challenge

Source	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
	<i>often at elevated risk of violence.”</i>	exploitation, vulnerability		
Lalla et al. (2020, p.8)	<i>“Insecurity, particularly at night, was indicated as a chronic stressor for all women. A few women even stated that Kakuma camp was less safe than their previous situation...”</i>	insecurity, poor lighting, overcrowding, lack of safety	Insecurity & Poor Safety Infrastructure	Protection-related challenge
Lalla et al. (2020, p.4)	<i>“The various ethnic groups’ having varying levels of resources fosters an insecure environment for women through increasing risk of both inter-ethnic/inter-clan conflict and domestic conflict.”</i>	inter-ethnic conflict, insecurity, domestic violence	Insecurity & Poor Safety Infrastructure	Protection-related challenge
Chelule (2023, p.51)	<i>“The judiciary is subject to a number of limitations, including a dearth of judges, attorneys, and interpreters knowledgeable in refugee law.”</i>	weak institutions, limited legal capacity, lack of expertise	Barriers to Justice	Protection-related challenge
Donnelly & Muthiah (2019, p.28)	<i>“Certain groups of refugee girls are particularly at risk of SGBV...girls with mental and physical disabilities, working girls, girl mothers, and girls born to survivors of rape.”</i>	disability, age barriers, exclusion from justice, heightened SGBV risks	Barriers to Justice	Protection-related challenge

4.3 To what extent have humanitarian policies and interventions in Kenya applied an intersectional framework to address the needs of displaced women?

This research question aimed to examine the extent to which the existing policies and interventions have applied an intersectionality approach to address the needs of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Intersectionality approaches acknowledge that the lived experiences of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps are not only shaped by gender but also by other overlapping social identities such as age, ethnicity, disability, and marital status. Specifically, these social identities interact with gender to produce unique forms of vulnerabilities and privileges. Thus, by analysing the existing policy frameworks and intervention strategies, this research question sought to uncover how the existing policies and interventions address these intersecting identities. This would consequently help examine the extent to which intersectionality approaches help to promote inclusive, equitable, and effective protection for all displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps.

Therefore, various policy documents, NGO reports, UNHCR operational guidelines, and existing refugee frameworks were analysed. While some of the documents acknowledged the role of intersectional approaches in addressing displaced women's needs, others showed that the existing policies and interventions rely on a "one-size-fits-all" strategy that often ignores the unique challenges facing certain subgroups of displaced women. Notably, two major themes emerged, which are discussed below:

4.3.1 Recognition of Multiple Vulnerabilities in Policy Language

Recognition of multiple vulnerabilities in policy language emerged as a major theme to show the extent to which the existing humanitarian policies and interventions apply the intersectionality framework in addressing the needs of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Thematic analysis of the documents showed that some of the policies and interventions indirectly consider intersecting social identities to address the systemic inequalities among displaced women. Specifically, the language used in most policy documents frequently acknowledged that the vulnerability of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps is not a

singular, uniform condition but a product of the various intersecting factors. Some of the documents acknowledged that gender intersects with other social identities such as disability, ethnicity, and age to create unique challenges and privileges. Importantly, these documents attempted to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to challenges facing displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps by providing a more nuanced understanding of the lived realities of displaced women in Kenya. To support these findings, KNCHR. (2024, p.24) noted that "*Refugees, particularly women and children, face protection risks, including gender-based violence, child labor, and trafficking,*" highlighting the vulnerabilities of displaced women due to the intersectionality of gender and age.

Additionally, the analysed documents reflected intersectionality as a deliberate effort to align with rights-based approaches promoted in global humanitarian and development frameworks. For instance, existing humanitarian policies and interventions are in line with the country's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN's Global Compact on Refugees. Notably, most of these policies and interventions focus on ensuring all displaced individuals are treated equally, and no one is left behind. For example, "*the Kenyan Bill of Rights (2010) provides that all members of society have the right to security and protection against all forms of violence, and the Penal Code prohibits all forms of violence* (George et al., 2021, p.11)." This demonstrates significant effort by policymakers and humanitarian actors to adopt an intersectionality approach to ensure displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps are treated according to the human rights standards. Despite these efforts, George et al. (2021) noted that the existing legal framework for addressing gender-based violence does not provide a comprehensive framework that takes into account the intersectional experience of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Moreover, analysis of some documents revealed that while intersectionality approaches are slightly acknowledged in most policy documents, the translation of intersectionality to recognize the challenges and privileges experienced by displaced women remains a major limitation. For instance, a study by Board (2022) showed that some displaced refugee women often experience discrimination when accessing essential services such as health and business services, simply due to poor interpretation of the laws protecting them.

4.3.2 Implementation Gaps in Intersectional Programming

Although humanitarian policy documents acknowledged the adoption of intersectionality approaches in protecting displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps, a persistent gap was evident in the implementation. Specifically, existing humanitarian interventions for refugees often struggle to operationalize the complex needs of displaced women living in refugee camps, which are shaped by intersecting identities of gender, disability, ethnicity, and age. Therefore, implementation gaps in intersectional programming emerged as a major theme based on thematic analysis of various policy documents.

A major gap in the implementation of the intersectional framework was the sectoral organization of humanitarian services. Notably, the existing humanitarian policies and interventions often treated displaced women's vulnerabilities in isolation. For instance, some documents showed that gender-based violence policies are often implemented separately from livelihood or psychological interventions. This consequently creates structural silos, hence hindering the comprehensive protection of displaced women with intersecting identities. The segmentation of the policies by silos also makes it challenging for displaced women with intersecting identities, such as survivors of gender-based violence living with disabilities, to access comprehensive support and protection. This implies that instead of an integrated continuum of care, displaced women are left to navigate fragmented systems, which consequently increases the risks of exclusion. For instance, Halakhe and Omondi (2024) argued that despite efforts to incorporate an intersectionality approach away from encampment, the Kenya Refugee Act remains vague in critical areas such as land, which are directly linked to displaced women's livelihood. Additionally, the freedom of movement is circumscribed, making it challenging for displaced women to own properties under the law. Specifically, one of the documents noted that "*Refugees have to endure significant bureaucratic barriers to owning property under the law* (Halakhe & Omondi, 2024)."

Furthermore, most of the analysed documents showed significant limitations in the disaggregation of data in the existing humanitarian policies and interventions aimed at protecting displaced refugee women. Specifically, most of these policies did not provide effective implementation of the intersectionality approach. Most of these policies focus on protecting refugee women, without capturing the unique challenges and privileges emerging from the

intersectionality of gender with other identities such as disability status, ethnic affiliation, and age groups. For instance, one of the authors noted that "*Existing policies and programmes that focus on supporting refugees/migrants and people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics in Kenya are insufficient and inadequately integrated to address intersecting experiences and exclusions which drive and shape experiences of violence* (George et al., 2021)." These findings suggest that the existing humanitarian policies and interventions for displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps often overlook women at the sharpest intersections of risks. If such aspects are not considered, the existing policies and interventions risk reinforcing inequalities instead of mitigating them.

Table 3.

Recognition and Implementation Gaps in Intersectional Protection of Displaced Women

Source Document	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
KNCHR (2024, p.24)	<i>"Refugees, particularly women and children, face protection risks, including gender-based violence, child labor, and trafficking."</i>	gendered risks, child vulnerability, multiple vulnerabilities	Recognition of intersecting risks	Recognition of Multiple Vulnerabilities in Policy Language
George et al. (2021, p.11)	<i>"The Kenyan Bill of Rights (2010) provides that all members of society have the right to security and protection against all forms of violence, and the Penal Code prohibits all forms of violence."</i>	rights-based framing, policy alignment, equality	Rights-based policy language	Recognition of Multiple Vulnerabilities in Policy Language
Board (2022)	<i>"Some displaced refugee women often experience discrimination</i>	discrimination,	Policy-practice gap	Recognition of Multiple

Source Document	Extract	Codes	Subtheme	Theme
	<i>when accessing essential services such as health and business services, simply due to poor interpretation of the laws protecting them.”</i>	weak legal interpretation		Vulnerabilities in Policy Language
Halakhe & Omondi (2024)	<i>“Refugees have to endure significant bureaucratic barriers to owning property under the law.”</i>	legal barriers, restricted movement, livelihood exclusion	Fragmented Service Delivery	Implementation Gaps in Intersectional Programming
George et al. (2021)	<i>“Existing policies and programmes that focus on supporting refugees/migrants and people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics in Kenya are insufficient and inadequately integrated to address intersecting experiences and exclusions which drive and shape experiences of violence.”</i>	missed integration, insufficient inclusivity, exclusion risks	Limited Disaggregated Data	Implementation Gaps in Intersectional Programming

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents the discussion and conclusions of the study. It aimed to discuss the findings, highlighting consistency with existing literature, their implications, and conclusions based on the findings. To provide a coherent structure, the discussion is organized around the research questions. This helped in ensuring that each question was addressed in relation to both the findings and relevant scholarship. Lastly, the chapter presents conclusions, as well as recommendations for practice and further studies.

5.1 Gender and Intersecting Identities in Shaping the Lived Experiences of Displaced Women

The analysis of the documents revealed various findings on the role of gender and intersecting identities in shaping the lived experiences of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Specifically, three major themes emerged, including gender as a fixed vulnerability marker, silenced intersectional identities, and disparities in access to essential services and empowerment. These findings demonstrated that displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps are often framed as a homogenous group, consequently obscuring the complex challenges and opportunities that may arise at the intersection of gender with other intersecting identities such as age, ethnicity, disability, and legal status.

The theme of gender as a fixed vulnerability marker specifically demonstrated that displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps are portrayed as inherently at risk of GBV, food insecurity, and dependency. Although this framing captures the challenges facing displaced women, it fails to consider women of agency, thereby reinforcing stereotypes of passivity. This was consistent with Okello's (2024) findings, which critiqued the existing humanitarian interventions for giving priority to vulnerability as opposed to agency. These findings suggested a need for interventions that not only consider women as victims but also as active contributors in key decision-making. Such interventions can consequently help policymakers shift from policies that perpetuate dependency to policies that support resilience.

The theme of silenced intersectional identities further showed that while the existing policy documents acknowledge the role of intersectional identities, the translations of such

policies into targeted interventions are often ignored. Specifically, displaced women with different identities, such as Somali women, widows, adolescent girls, and women with disabilities, often remain invisible in programming. These findings were consistent with research by Muraya (2024), who identified a gap between intersectional theory as presented in policy documents and its implementation. These findings suggest that humanitarian actors and policymakers need to go beyond the theoretical adoption of intersectionality approaches and consider the integration of these approaches in the assessments, monitoring, and program design. Moreover, disparities in accessing essential services and empowerment demonstrated how various social identities, such as education level, marital status, religious affiliation, and legal recognition, mediate displaced women's ability to access essential services and opportunities for empowerment. This was in line with a study by Kaaria and Murithi (2025), which showed that intersectionality compounds vulnerabilities and hinders empowerment. These findings highlighted a need for custom humanitarian interventions that address barriers to accessing essential services and empowerment opportunities, especially for stateless and minority women.

5.2 Social, Economic, and Protection-Related Challenges Facing Displaced Women

The analysis of the documents further revealed that displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps experience social, economic, and protection-related challenges. These results extended the discussion of challenges facing displaced refugee women by situating them within structural, cultural, and intersectional contexts. For instance, regarding the social challenges, it was evident that displaced women experience barriers to education and exclusions from key decision-making processes. Notably, these findings revealed the presence of entrenched gender norms among people living in refugee camps, which often prioritize boys' education, promote early marriages of young girls, and restrict women's participation in leadership. These findings were in line with a study by Maliti (2021), who argued that young girls are associated with a lower likelihood of transition to post-primary education compared to young boys, mainly due to social-cultural expectations and many caregiving responsibilities among young girls. These results show that without dismantling structural and cultural barriers, displaced women are more likely to remain marginalized both within the formal and informal community systems.

With regard to economic challenges, the results showed that displaced women in Kenya refugee camps are more vulnerable than their counterparts, men. Specifically, it was evident that these women experience severe restrictions from employment opportunities, making them more dependent on aids. These challenges and discriminatory practices demonstrate the existence of systemic barriers in most of Kenya's refugee camps, which hinder women from achieving financial independence. These findings aligned with various studies, which critiqued the existing encampment policies, which promote gendered division of labor (Nininahazwe, 2019; Okello, 2024). The findings highlight how high dependence on humanitarian aid among displaced women can perpetuate cycles of poverty. Practically, these results suggested a need for policy reforms to ease the work permit restrictions and promote economic empowerment of displaced women with diverse social identities, such as widows, adolescent girls, and women with disabilities.

Furthermore, this study found that displaced women experienced protection-related challenges, including gender-based violence, insecurity, and barriers to justice. Specifically, it was evident that most displaced women experienced protection-related challenges mainly due to systemic failures in safeguarding displaced women. These findings were consistent with several studies (Fernandes et al., 2020; Mwangi, 2012), which reported higher likelihoods of GBV, insecurity, and barrier justice among displaced women, mainly due to fear of retaliation, stigma, and interference with the reporting mechanism. These results indicate that the protection of displaced refugee women cannot and should not be treated as a siloed concern. Instead, it requires integration of security, infrastructure, and legal empowerment in all humanitarian policies and interventions. Specifically, there is an urgent need to create targeted humanitarian interventions to protect displaced women with varying social identities, including adolescent girls, women with disabilities, and those from minority groups.

5.3 The Extent to Which Humanitarian Policies and Interventions Apply an Intersectional Framework

Relevant documents were analysed to examine the extent to which the existing humanitarian policies and interventions apply intersectional approaches to protect displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Two major themes emerged, which included

recognition of multiple vulnerabilities in policy language and implementation gaps in intersectional programming. Regarding the theme of recognition of multiple vulnerabilities in policy language, it was evident that policy documents and NGO reports are increasingly acknowledging the intersectionality approaches, but the implementation is still limited. Specifically, these policies and interventions acknowledge that the vulnerabilities of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps are not influenced by gender alone but by other intersecting social identities such as age, disability, and ethnicity. These findings aligned with Kenya's Refugee Act (2021), which provides a framework for protecting refugees in line with international obligations for protecting vulnerable groups such as women, children, and people with disabilities. The findings were also in line with the UNHCR (2022) report, which has already enforced the Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) policy to ensure all displaced individuals are fully involved in decisions that concern them. Theoretically, these findings suggest that humanitarian discourse in Kenya is gradually shifting toward a more nuanced understanding of refugee women's experiences. However, as George et al. (2021) note, the translation of such recognition into concrete programming remains incomplete.

Regarding the implementation of intersectional approaches, the results showed that there is still a gap. Specifically, it was evident that despite the acknowledgement of the intersectionality aspect in humanitarian policies and interventions, implementation remains siloed. Notably, the existing policies focus on addressing GBV among displaced women without considering their livelihoods, health, and psychosocial support. This fragmentation undermines comprehensive protection for displaced women at the sharpest intersections of risk, such as survivors of violence who also live with disabilities. These findings were consistent with Kamore (2021), who found that implementation remains questionable as existing programs that aim to protect displaced people against gender-based violence still fail to reach marginalized groups such as unmarried adolescent mothers and Muslim women, mainly due to cultural stigma and lack of targeted outreach. These findings show that displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps continue to face systemic exclusion, mainly due to poor implementation of intersectional approaches in the program design, monitoring, and data collection. The findings suggest a need for the existing humanitarian agencies and policymakers to invest in disaggregated data systems, strengthen inter-sectoral coordination, and create integrated service models that reflect the complex realities of women's lives.

5.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

This sought to analyze how gender and intersectionality shape the lived experiences of displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. The findings showed that while gender remains a major factor influencing the lived experiences of displaced women, it should not be studied in isolation. Instead, various intersecting social identities such as age, disability, marital status, ethnicity, and legal status should be considered. It was also evident that existing policies and interventions treated displaced women as a homogenous group, thus risking overlooking the unique challenges resulting from the intersection of gender with other social identities. Additionally, some findings showed that the existing humanitarian policies and interventions for refugees often reinforce dependency instead of fostering agency and resilience among displaced women. Regarding the implementation of intersectionality approaches in policies and interventions, there was a significant gap. Specifically, although the existing policies and interventions increasingly referenced intersectionality, practical implementation remains fragmented.

Therefore, the gaps in the implementation of intersectionality approaches call for the adoption of intersectional approaches that acknowledge and address the unique challenges facing displaced women in Kenya's refugee camps. The findings further highlighted a need to enhance legal and policy reforms to expand displaced women's ability to access essential services such as education, empowerment, and employment opportunities. This can consequently help in breaking the cycles of dependency resulting from the fragmented policies and interventions. In particular, protection systems should be strengthened by embedding legal empowerment, infrastructure development, and psychosocial support into gender-based violence response frameworks. Additionally, the findings from this study were solely dependent on review of the literature, hence failing to capture the real-time experience of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Hence, further studies should be conducted using primary data sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of how gender and intersectionality shaped the lived and real-time experience of displaced women living in Kenya's refugee camps. Additionally, further studies should employ longitudinal analyses to examine whether intersectional policies actually produce meaningful shifts in vulnerabilities over time.

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