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EXAMINING THE NATURE OF VULNERABILITY EXPERIENCED BY NATIONAL POLICE RESERVISTS IN TURKANA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

In many African countries, National Police Reservists (NPRs) play a critical role in enhancing community security, particularly in remote and conflict-prone regions where formal law enforcement agencies have limited presence. In Turkana County, Kenya, NPRs are instrumental in supplementing the Kenya Police Service to maintain peace and order. However, despite their indispensable contribution, NPRs face numerous forms of vulnerability that significantly affect their safety, morale, and effectiveness. This study examined the nature of vulnerability experienced by National Police Reservists in Turkana County. The research was anchored on Stark Rodney's Vulnerability Theory (1987), which explains how individuals or groups become more exposed to threats due to structural, institutional, and community-based factors. A descriptive research design was employed, covering all sub-counties in Turkana. The study population comprised 875 individuals, including NPRs, officers from the County Commissioner's office, village managers, and Members of the County Assembly. A sample size of 109 respondents was obtained using stratified random sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and key informant interviews. NPRs and village managers participated in interviews, while officers and MCAs filled out structured questionnaires. A pilot study was conducted in West Pokot County to ensure validity and reliability of the instruments, with reliability confirmed using Cronbach's alpha. Findings revealed that NPRs in Turkana County experience multiple layers of vulnerability, primarily emanating from civilian threats, inter-communal hostilities, and inadequate institutional support. A significant proportion of NPRs reported being threatened, intimidated, or assaulted by civilians from rival communities, often leading to physical harm and psychological trauma. Community-level vulnerability was also found to be reinforced by negative perceptions towards NPRs, including mistrust and discrimination. At the state level, NPRs face challenges such as insufficient logistical support, inadequate protective gear, and lack of structured welfare systems. Policy gaps and weak legal protection further exacerbate their exposure to risk. These vulnerabilities not only compromise the personal security of NPRs but also undermine their operational capacity in maintaining peace and responding effectively to security incidents. The study concludes that vulnerability among NPRs is a complex, multi-dimensional issue that stems from community dynamics, weak state structures, and policy neglect. It recommends that the government enhance the legal and institutional framework governing NPR operations, provide adequate protective resources, and improve welfare systems to strengthen their resilience and operational effectiveness.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Turkana County has for decades been characterized by persistent insecurity driven by armed banditry, cattle rustling, resource-based conflicts, and cross-border violence. In response to these recurring threats and the limited presence of formal state security structures, the Government of Kenya has relied heavily on National Police Reservists (NPRs) as a community-based security mechanism. NPRs serve as a vital link between the state and local communities by leveraging their deep understanding of the terrain and capacity for rapid response in volatile areas (Mkutu, 2013). Despite their crucial role in supplementing state security operations, NPRs often face significant vulnerabilities that threaten both their personal safety and operational effectiveness. Addressing these vulnerabilities is essential for strengthening security governance and fostering sustainable peace in Turkana County (NPS, 2019).

The establishment of police reservists in many parts of Africa reflects a strategic attempt to complement state security efforts in traditionally ungoverned regions where insecurity is prevalent. This aligns with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which underscores the importance of community participation in security and peace processes (United Nations, 2010). However, NPRs remain inadequately integrated into formal security structures, often lacking representation in key security decision-making platforms. Consequently, they operate in high-risk environments with minimal institutional support, exposing them to threats from armed civilians and bandits. For

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example, the National Police Service (2019) reported that 25 NPRs were killed in the line of duty, five of whom were targeted by civilians during patrols.

The vulnerabilities experienced by NPRs are multifaceted. Politicization and lack of standardized recruitment have led to discrimination and bias (Okumu & Kioko, 2018), while inadequate equipment, remuneration, and welfare support further weaken their capacity (Agande, 2015; Kiprop & Oduor, 2025). Moreover, negative community perceptions and the proliferation of illegal firearms exacerbate their exposure to danger. This situation mirrors experiences in other African contexts where non-state security actors whether called reservists, militias, auxiliaries, or civilian defense forces face similar risks and marginalization (Baker & Scheye, 2007; Mkutu & Wandera, 2013).

In Kenya, NPRs predominantly operate in arid and semi-arid regions, particularly in the north, where they play an indispensable security role. However, historical disarmament campaigns, inadequate legal protections, and outdated policy frameworks have further undermined their effectiveness (Ombati, 2012; NPS, 2013). Turkana County's reliance on NPRs remains high, yet persistent insecurity including closure of schools, displacement of communities, and livestock losses underscores the precariousness of their situation (KNCHR, 2018). The legal framework, dating back to the colonial period, has not sufficiently evolved to address their operational and welfare needs, leaving them vulnerable both to external threats and institutional neglect. This study, therefore, examines the nature of NPRs' vulnerability in Turkana County and its implications for broader security management in the region.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Kenya's conflict-prone regions such as Turkana County, National Police Reservists (NPRs) are a vital extension of the state's security system. They help counter persistent threats like cattle rustling, intercommunal clashes, armed banditry, and cross-border incursions by leveraging their local knowledge and community trust. Despite their critical role, NPRs operate under extremely vulnerable conditions. They face inadequate training, lack of essential equipment and logistical support, and minimal or no financial remuneration. Their ambiguous legal status further exposes them to personal risks and denies them adequate institutional protection.

These structural weaknesses undermine their capacity to provide effective security services, erode public confidence in security institutions, and weaken broader peacebuilding efforts. The absence of a coherent policy framework also raises concerns about the sustainability and strategic relevance of the NPR program. While their contribution to community security is widely acknowledged, there is limited empirical evidence on the nature and extent of their vulnerabilities, their lived experiences, and the operational challenges they face. This study sought to address this gap by examining NPR vulnerabilities in Turkana County and their implications for security management, with the goal of informing targeted policy interventions to strengthen community-based security strategies.

1.3 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Examining the Nature of Vulnerability Experienced by National Police Reservists in Turkana County, Kenya

1.4 JUSTIFICATION

Among the pillars of vision 2030 is security. The security pillar aims at strengthening security and peace building initiatives as well as supporting the measures aimed at management conflicts in the conflict-stricken areas. Consequently, this study recognizes that the realization of this vision as well as the full implementation of the United Nation Security Council resolution 1325 on peace and security is dependent on the participation of security sectors given that they are the most vulnerable whenever there are cases of insecurity. In Kenya and especially in ASAL, the NPRs forms part of the security sector.

Moreover, the NPRs play a critical role in supporting formal security structures in Turkana County, which faces persistent threats such as inter-communal conflict, cattle rustling, and cross-border incursions. Despite their strategic importance, NPRs often operate in harsh environments with limited institutional support, inadequate training, insufficient logistical resources, and exposure to high personal risk. These vulnerabilities compromise their safety and the overall effectiveness of security management in the region.

Finally, Turkana County remains very volatile, with recurring violent incidents that threaten both the safety of local communities and also regional stability and development. The Kenyan government has increasingly relied on NPRs as force multipliers to fill gaps in formal policing. However, without addressing the systemic and structural challenges faced by these reservists, their contribution to long-term peace and security remains unsustainable and at risk of exploitation by non-state armed groups.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Police Reserve (NPR), formerly the Kenya Police Reserve, plays a crucial role in policing hard-to-reach pastoralist areas in northwestern Kenya. However, the NPR faces several challenges, including issues that could lead to discrimination. The NPR's recruitment processes have been criticized for discriminatory tendencies, lack of standardized criteria, and politicization (Mkuttu& Wandera, 2013). These factors can lead to inconsistent deployment across different ethnic communities and potentially disadvantage certain group. The NPR, facing

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issues like politicization and lack of standardized recruitment, could potentially be subject to discrimination claims. These studies had some shortcomings arising from their failure to address the effects of these vulnerabilities especially their implications on security.

An assessment by Agade (2015) explored the challenges that the Kenya Police Reservists and home guards face in Turkana County over the period 2010 to 2015. The study found out that the challenges that the Kenya police reservist face in Turkana County are largely attributed to the way they have been treated by the state in addition to the security challenges that the County has faced for many decades. For instance, the challenge of small arms inflow, low state penetration and armed inter-communal conflicts. It was therefore found out that since the state does not have a strong hold on the home guards and reservists, they face many security challenges and since they are in most cases unpaid, they have resorted to joining private security companies that pays them. The main gap from the study is that it only gives a comprehension of the challenges faced by KPRs and does not give a comprehension of the effects of these challenges.

Police officers working in informal settlements often face elevated levels of victimization, which undermines their ability to deliver effective security services. Kilatya and Kavivya (2021) examined police victimization and insecurity in Mathare North, highlighting how exposure to violent environments, inadequate protection, and strained community relations create heightened risks for security personnel. Their findings emphasize that structural and community-level vulnerabilities can lead to reduced operational capacity and increased insecurity. This mirrors the experiences of National Police Reservists in Turkana, who similarly face layered vulnerabilities from both the community and institutional frameworks, affecting their morale and effectiveness in maintaining security.

Claudia (2016) assessed the various forms of vulnerability of police reservist in Johannesburg in South Africa. Specifically, the study examined the perceptions of both the white reservists and the black reservists. Using the interviews to collect information, the study found out that while the white reservists join the national police reserve as a hobby, the blacks join the reserve as an opportunity for employment. It assessed the level of vulnerability of the police reservists in Johannesburg on the basis of race and gender. From the findings it was established that the requirements to join the police reserve has been largely characterized by racism, class and gender something that has been linked to the broader societal processes. Some examples of this discrimination included the requirement that one has to have a high level of proficiency in English which some of the blacks intending to join the police reserve do not have. This phenomenon according to the study took roots from the time of the racial and apartheid rule. Additionally, in the areas of Johannesburg like Guateg where there is a big population of white people, majority of the reservists are white people who join the reserve as a hobby and protect their fellow white people. Finally, the study finds that black people who are police reservist are poorly paid something that from the standpoint of the society has become acceptable for black people and in which case white people continue to gain from the social subordination of the black people. In terms of promotions, it was also found that in the area white reservists are given more priority than black reservist. The nature of vulnerabilities addressed in this study may however not be applicable to Kenya since it is race oriented.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Vulnerability was adopted as its primary theoretical lens, specifically focusing on two prominent sub-theories that elucidate distinct pathways to victimization: Deviant Place Theory (Stark, 1987) and Victim Precipitation Theory (Wolfgang, 1957). This integrated framework provides a valuable structure for analyzing the complex factors contributing to the vulnerability of National Police Reservists (NPRs) operating within Turkana County's challenging security environment, while acknowledging the critical need to assess the limitations and contextual relevancy of these theories. Deviant Place Theory, conceptualized by Rodney Stark in 1987, posits that vulnerability arises primarily from *exposure* to high-risk environments. This perspective emphasizes that individuals become victims not through inherent personal characteristics or actions, but simply by virtue of their location within socially disorganized, crime-prone areas. The probability of victimization escalates significantly based on geographical context. For NPRs in Turkana County, this theory offers compelling initial relevance.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.7.1 Research Design

A mixed research design was adopted more on case study research in examining the relationship between vulnerability of the NPRs and security management in Turkana County, Kenya. As pointed out by McCombes (2019), In other words the case study research design helps in identification of the characteristic of a specific and narrowly defined subject hence instead of describing individuals, objects or elements with generalities they focus on interesting cases that tend to challenge assumptions and reveal something that is new regarding a research problem. Qualitative Case Study Design was used because Turkana County has unique geographical, socio-political, and security dynamics. A case study allows for in-depth, contextual exploration of NPR vulnerabilities and security management systems. It is also useful to gather detailed, context-specific data from multiple stakeholders using interviews, focus groups, and document reviews. A target population in a study was 875 (Government of Kenya ,2023) encompasses, a group of people, objects or elements that are of interest to research and upon which

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inferences can be made. The population of this study consisted of National Police Reservist, representatives from office of county commissioner, MCAs and village managers. The preference of this population is prompted by the security challenges and forms of vulnerability that they have since faced.

1.7.2 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

As explained by Kothari and Guarav (2014), a sample size is a section of a research populace that is selected with a goal of making an analysis on the research matter as well as making inferences. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted in the selection of the sample size. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) the proportion of the sample size from a population is determined by the population size hence with a population below 1000, the sample size was 30-50% of the population. From the current study, the sample size was 30% of the population broken down into the various sub counties in Turkana County as shown in Table 3.2. Additionally, to get the perspective from the locals 33 village managers was selected through a purposive simple random technique. Table 1.1, presents the sample size.

Table 1.1: Sample Size

Category	Target population	Sampling method	Sample size
National police reservists	630	Purposive random sampling	35
Office of County Commissioner officers	102	Simple Random	31
Members of County Assembly	32	Simple Random	10
Residents (village Council)	111	Simple Random	33
Total	**875**		109

Source: Government of Kenya (2023)

1.7.3 Methods of Data collection and Analysis

The collection of data in the current study was done using questionnaires both open and close ended. Key informant interviews were also done covering the national police reservists and village managers who acted as representatives of the locals. The choice of the interviews among the two groups is due to the level of literacy and nature of their work. Mostly they operate from the field hence using key informant interviews was the ideal method of collecting data from them. On the other hand most MCAs and the officers working in the office of the county commissioner are literate and can read and understand the questionnaires for themselves therefore questionnaires was ideal for this category.

Prior to data collection an authorization letter from the University was obtained and this was followed by authorization from NACOSTI. During the data collection process, the respondents were assured of their confidentiality and hence they were not required to disclose their identities e.g. names. Two research assistants were employed to conduct the data collection process which was done between November 2024 to December 2024.

1.8 NATURE OF VULNERABILITY OF NPR IN TURKANA COUNTY

1.8.1 Introduction

Data collection was done between the months of November 2024 to December 2024. A total of 109 respondents were targeted. Their responses were analyzed and interpreted.

1.8.2 Demographic Information

Response Rate

This section presents the respondents' rate of response in percentage. Figure 4.1 shows the response rate on the basis of those who gave their responses and those who didn't respond.

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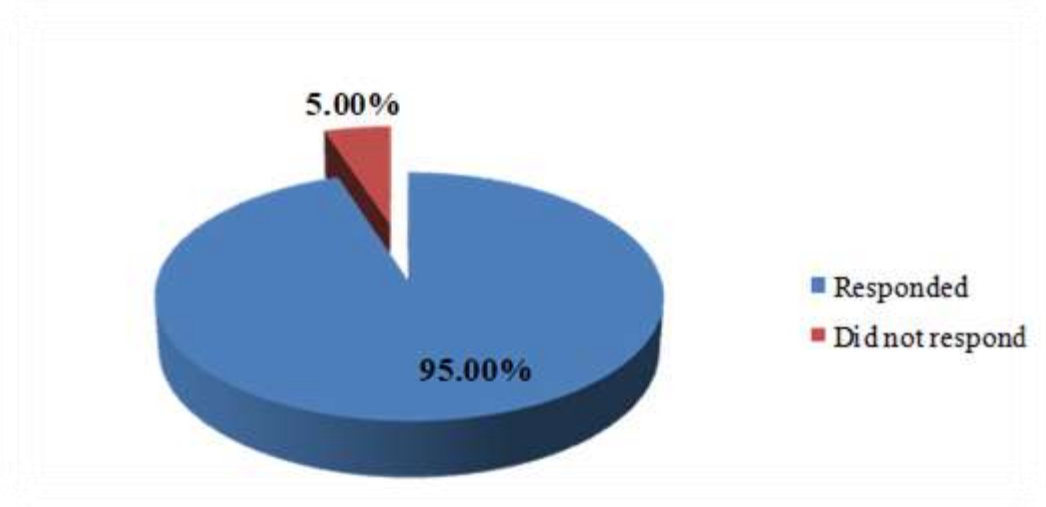


Figure 1.2: Rate of Response

Source: Research Findings (2024)

From the findings in Figure 1.2, the rate of response was 95%. Only 5% of the targeted respondents did not respond. The ninety five percent rate of response was considered sufficient for carrying out an analysis based on the threshold of 50% set by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013).

Age Distribution

The respondents' age brackets were analyzed based on three categories; 20-30 years, 30-40 years and 40-50 years.

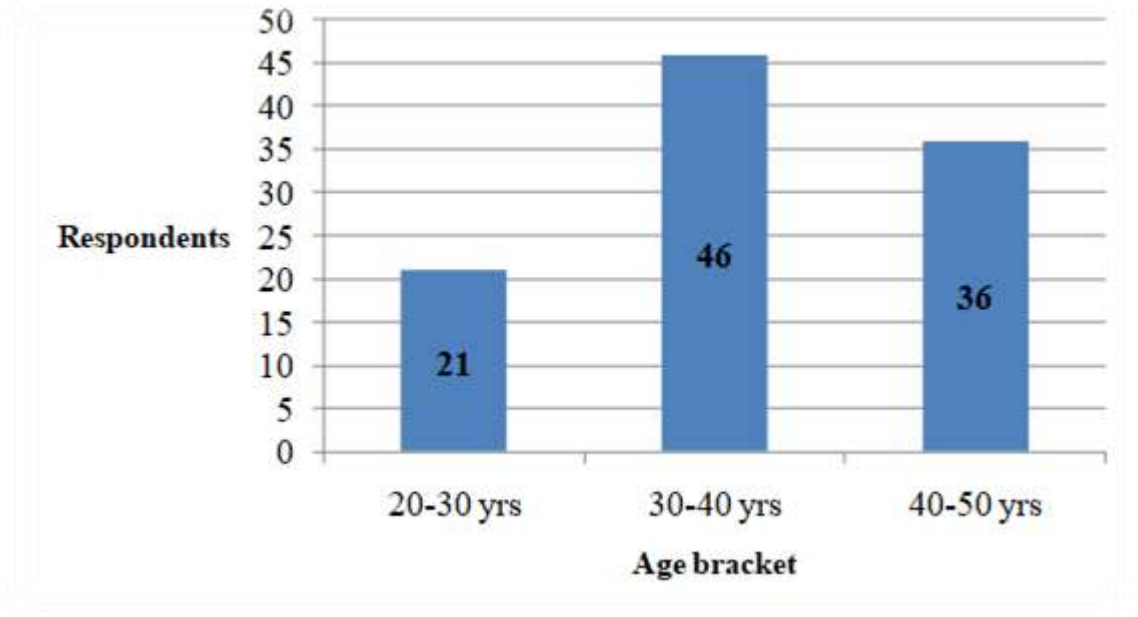


Figure 1.3 shows the age brackets of the respondents.

Source: Research Findings (2024)

From the result in Figure 1.3, the number of participants in the age bracket of between 20 to 30 years was 21 while those in the age bracket of 30 to 40 years were 46. Moreover, 36 respondents were between the ages brackets of 40 to 50 years. This implies that majority of respondents were above 30 years hence this means that they had witnessed a lot of happenings in terms of vulnerability of NPRs hence could give a comprehensive information.

Gender Distribution

The respondents' gender was analyzed based on the male and female number of respondents.

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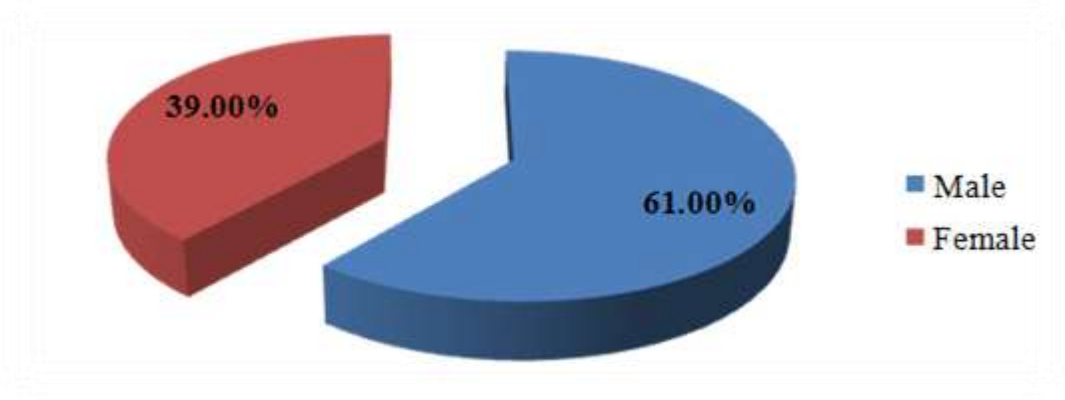


Figure 1.4 shows the gender of the respondents.

Source: Research Findings (2024)

From the findings in Figure 1.4, the male respondents were 61%whereas the female respondents were 39%. From the findings, it is apparent that both genders were well represented and hence could give diverse perspectives on the subject matter.

Length of Service as NPR

The length of service as NPR were analyzed based on 3 groups; 0-10 years, 11-20 years and over 20 years and the findings are as shown in Figure 1.5.

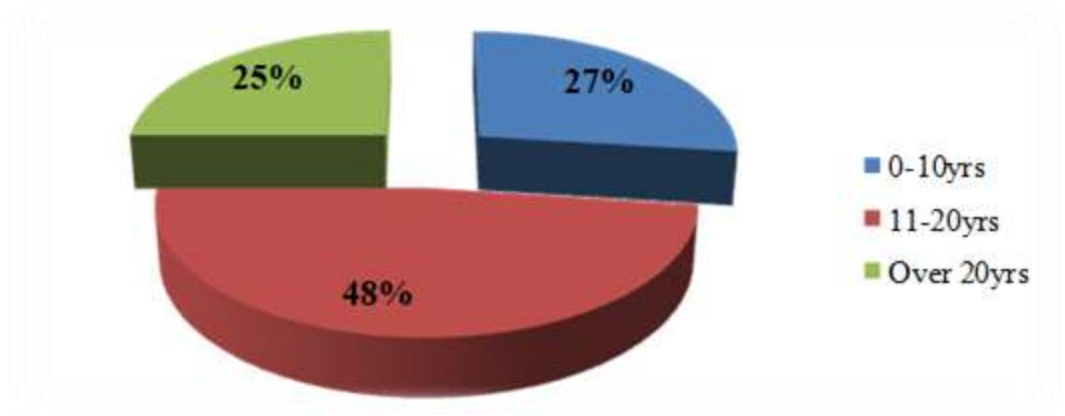


Figure 1.5 Length of Service as NPR

Source: Research Findings (2024)

From the result in Figure 1.5, majority of the respondents (48%), had service as NPR for between 11 to 20 years, followed by those who had served for between 0-10 years at 27% and those above 20 years at 25%. This implies that most respondents had served above 11 years and therefore had adequate experience as NPR therefore could be relied upon to give comprehensive information on vulnerability of NPRs

Sub County of Residence

There were six sub counties considered in this study; Turkana Central, Turkana North, Turkana East, Turkana West, Turkana South and Loima. The respondents were selected from all the six sub counties and the findings are as shown in Figure 1.6.

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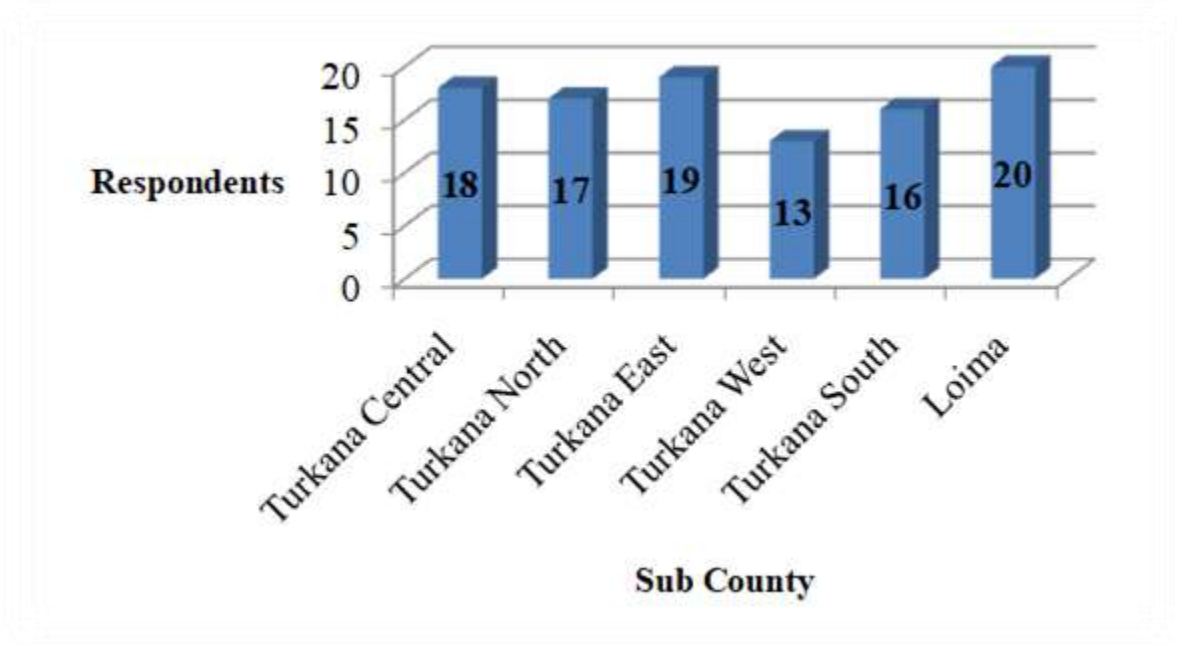


Figure 4.1 Sub County of Residence

Source: Research Findings (2024)

From the result in Figure 1.6, the respondents from Turkana Central sub county were 18, Turkana North were 17, Turkana East were 19, Turkana West were 13, Turkana South were 16 and Loima were 20. The findings show that all the sub counties in Turkana County were represented hence adequate and comprehensive information on the nature of vulnerability of NPRs could be obtained.

1.9 Nature of Vulnerability of NPR in Turkana County

The descriptive statistics on the nature of vulnerability of the NPR in Turkana County is as shown in Table 17.

Table 1.7: Nature of Vulnerability of NPR in Turkana County

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Majority of the threats and intimidations of the National Police Reservists are done by the civilians from neighboring communities	14%	15%	2%	40%	29%
The National Police Reservists are sometimes assaulted by civilians leading to grievous bodily harm	9%	13%	2%	46%	30%
The cases of National Police Reservists being subjected to threats and intimidations is prevalent in Turkana County	4%	9%	2%	45%	40%
There is vulnerability of the National Police Reservists in the society as they are perceived to be misusing firearms	10%	15%	4%	38%	33%
The community vulnerabilityhave hindered the National Police Reservist in executing their duties	2%	9%	1%	47%	41%

Source: Research Findings (2024)

From the outcome in Table 1.7, sixty nine percent (69%) of the respondents agreed (40% agreed and 29% strongly agreed) that majority of the threats and intimidations of the National Police Reservists are done by the civilians from neighboring communities. However, 29% of the respondents disagreed (15% disagreed and 14% strongly disagreed). A key informant stated:

There is generally a negative perception from the neighboring communities towards the NPRs from this County. This is attributed to the constant fights between the NPRs and the criminals from the neighboring community. As a result, it has become a constant feature for an NPR to be victimized.

Another Key informant stated:

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> I witnessed one of my friends who is National police reservist being gunned down due to as he attempted to pursue some cattle rustlers, we had to flee to escape being killed.

The findings reinforce the report by the NPS (2019) which stated that civilians and bandits have been responsible in killing the NPRs while on patrol. A study by Njeri (2018) found that one of the challenges that reservists face is killings from neighboring communities.

According to 76% of the respondents agreed (46% agreed and 30% strongly agreed) that the National Police Reservists are sometimes assaulted by civilians leading to grievous bodily harm. Besides, 22% disagreed (13% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed). From the findings it is apparent that vulnerability of the NPRs is largely contributed by the communities. The findings are further collaborated by the opinions from the Key Informants (KI).

A KI stated:

> There have been at least 3 cases of serious assaults of the NPRs over the last four weeks leading them to sustain serious injuries and the preliminary investigations indicate that it was executed by civilians.

Another KI however stated:

> While NPRs have frequently been assaulted by civilians, most of the cases have been out of the existing hostilities between them and civilians as they sometimes handle thei duties unprofessionally.

The findings are consistent with the findings from previous studies. For instance, Baker and Scheye, (2007) established that the NPR job is mostly voluntary but involving for instance in some cases they are assaulted and killed as they attempt to make arrests.

According to 85% of the respondents, (45% agreed and 40% strongly agreed), the cases of National Police Reservists being subjected to threats and intimidations are prevalent in Turkana County. On the other hand, only 13% (9% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed) that the threats and intimidations are prevalent in Turkana County. From the findings it can be concluded that the NPRs are victimized in the form of intimidation of threats.

A key informant stated:

> Intimidation and threats against the NPRs is not anything uncommon in Turkana County. In fact, most of the killings that have been reported were preceded by threats. One of the NPRs killed some two months ago had been threatened several times at night by unknown people.

However, one of the KI stated:

The threats and intimidations against the NPRs are very prevalent; however, in some cases these threats are reactionary as they also sometimes intimidate civilians. Nevertheless, they do a lot in terms of security management.

A study by Claudia (2016) pointed that in SouthAfrica; most of the police reservists of black race are usually subjected to threat sometimes coming from the whites; a scenario that can be traced back to the apartheid rule.

Majority of the respondents (71%) also agreed (38% agreed and 33% strongly agreed) that there is vulnerability of the National Police Reservists in the society as they are perceived to be misusing firearms. On the contrary, 25% disagreed (15% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed). From the finding it is clear that there is a perception whether justified or not that sometimes the police reservists are misusing firearms hence contributing towards their vulnerability.

A key informant from Loima Sub County confirmed:

The issue of police reservists misusing firearms is a reality; in fact there are cases where you hear that someone has been shot by the reservists despite not being a criminal. In some cases, the firearms they hold end up in the hands of criminals in exchange of money.

Another KI stated:

Some of the NPRs in our location are having serious financial challenges in their homes and that is why in some cases they hire out their firearms to criminals for money. This challenge is increasingly undermining the security efforts in our area.

The findings are consistent with previous studies done. According to Nyasike (2012), the NPRs have had to endure vulnerability coming from various fronts including the state which sometimes perceive them as misusing firearms.

Finally, 88% of the respondents agreed (47% agreed and 41% strongly agreed) that the community vulnerability have hindered the National Police Reservist in executing their duties. On the other hand, 11% disagreed (9% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed). Based on the majority of the respondents it is apparent that community vulnerability had greatly hindered the NPRs in the execution of their duties.

A key informant confirmed this aserting that:

> One of my neighbors is a police reservist and from our conversations each time we meet, he tells me that with the negative perception from some community members including some of our neighbors, sometime he feels less motivated to offer protection. He told me once that some neighbors labeled him a traitor despite sacrificing his life to protect them on daily basis.

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Another KI indicated:
An NPR from my sub location was shot death by a community member who was later arrested and from his testimony he indicated that they had been having long standing enmity.

A report by the National Police Service, Kenya (2019), confirms this. According to the report, civilians and bandits killed 25 NPRs in 2019, in the line of duty whereby 5 of the killings were caused by civilians. The killings were executed in the form of targeting the NPRs who were on patrol.

1.10 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that most NPRs have resorted to joining private security companies due to vulnerability. Further the study concludes that the cases of depression, deaths, misuse of firearms and worsened state of security in Turkana County are attributed to vulnerability of the NPRs in Turkana County.

The study also concludes that the nature of vulnerability of the NPRs in Turkana County takes the forms of assaults, intimidations, threats and killings. The study also concluded that majority of the threats and intimidations of the National Police Reservists are done by the civilians from neighboring communities.

The study also concludes that the major contributors of vulnerability of the NPRs are; negative perception from their communities, lack of goodwill from the government in terms of supporting them, proliferation of illegal firearms in the community, discrimination from the government and lack of adequate support from the community.

The study also concludes that vulnerability of the NPRs had resulted in loss of lives, stress and depression of NPRs and misuse of firearms which ultimately has led to worsened insecurity. Finally, the study concludes that some of the ways in which vulnerability of NPRs occur was through lack of taking care of welfare of NPRs in terms of remuneration, their training needs being ignored and lack of facilitation in terms of equipment's.

1.11 RECOMMENDATION

The following were recommended based on the findings;

i. The study also recommends that the government should step in and fully support the NPRs in terms of facilities and equipment's to use like the uniforms, shoes, modern guns and vehicles for patrols.
ii. The study also recommends that the welfare of the NPRs should be addressed. The policy on NPRs should be reviewed to ensure that they get a financial incentive every month so that they can be able to sustain the needs of their families and be able to tackle insecurity incidences effectively.
iii. The study also recommends that the county through the national government should create a counseling department to help those NPRs going through depression as well as their families going through stress and depression due to loss of their loved ones serving as NPRs.

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