



Community Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Practices: Experience from Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT:

Children's sexual abuse is a global human right and public health issue that has a significant negative health and social impact on children's development and the community at large. This study was conducted in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania, aiming at assessing community responses to child sexual abuse practices. Specifically, it examined levels of community awareness of child sexual abuse, determined the extent of reported child sexual abuse incidences, and assessed community-based action mechanisms against child sexual abuse incidences in the study area. A cross-sectional study design was adopted, involving 399 heads of households and six key informants. Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire and a structured interview, respectively. The data were coded and analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Results showed that 241(60.4%) of the household heads had moderate awareness, 117(29.2%) had low awareness, and (10.4%) had high awareness of child sexual abuse. Further, there was a net decrease of more than 30.0% in child sexual abuse cases from 2020 to 2021 again increased from 2021 to 2022. This may predict a sudden increase in the forthcoming years if not well managed. Moreover, it was revealed that 117(29.2%) respondents contain cases at home, 84(21%) reported nowhere, 84(21%) reported to government authorities such as TPGCD and the Social Welfare Office, 57(14.4%) admitted the survivors to psychiatric or medical centers, and 57(14.4%) reported to religious leaders. The study concludes that most of the community members in Kinondoni Municipality have relatively moderate knowledge of child sexual abuse incidences despite some existing sensitization programs. This has led to poor community engagement in fighting against the same. The study recommends that there is a need for strong collaboration among multisectoral stakeholders, such as the government and private sector, in promoting community sensitization, awareness and engagement in fighting against child sexual abuse in Tanzania.

Keyword: community responses, child violence, child sexual abuse, child rights

INTRODUCTION

Children's sexual abuse is a global human right and public health issue that has a significant negative health and social impact on children's development (URT, 2020). Msangi (2017) argues that child sexual abuse is a serious human rights problem and a social and public health issue in many parts of the world, and its consequences can be distressing. This means no country is protected, rich or poor, from its effects (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). The United Nations' World Report on Violence Against Children was the first global study on all forms of child abuse, which showed that child sexual abuse was a common form of violence reported to be perpetrated by close relatives in domestic settings and in institutions responsible for child maintenance and welfare (World Bank, 2021).

In Africa, child sexual abuse is more prevalent and pronounced in certain environments due to contextual factors including the age, ability, gender, socioeconomic status of the family, and political stability of the country (WHO, 2019). Armed conflict has also made children vulnerable to sexual abuse, especially girls, in countries such as Nigeria, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (WHO, 2021). Similarly, in Kenya, 46% of the girls had experienced sexual abuse in the community. In Zimbabwe, 20% of girls experienced their first incident of sexual abuse while traveling to or from school (WB, 2022).

In Tanzania, nearly 1 in 3 females and approximately 1 in 7 males have experienced sexual violence, and almost three-quarters of both females and males have experienced physical violence prior to the age of 18 (URT, 2021). Similarly, the CSA survey revealed that 72 percent of girls and 71 percent of boys experienced sexual abuse (National Survey Report, 2021). Likewise, the LHRC (2021) Survey Report shows that the incidents of sexual abuse against children in Tanzania increased from 4,728 by mid-2019 to 6,376 by mid-2020, in which 91% of the reported abuse incidents were of sexual abuse, while 9% were physical and psychological violence. Moreover, almost 6.9% of girls and 2.9% of boys were physically forced into sexual intercourse before the age of 18 (URT, 2021).

Child sexual abuse limits the nation's ability to achieve sustainable development due to the fact that better health and quality primary and secondary education would not be achieved if children were not safe (Save the Children, 2021). The impact of sexual abuse on children is horrible, physically, psychologically, and socially. Children who have been victims of sexual abuse are often left with serious physical injuries, which can be particularly severe because their growing bodies are not yet fully developed (World Vision, 2020).

Despite the efforts made by the government, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations, including the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the National Child Development Policy of 2008, the Law of the Child Act (LCA) No. 21 of 2009, the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC-2017/18-2021/22), and the seven INSPIRE evidence-based global strategy of 2020-2030, the problem still exists (Muganyizi, 2020). This is evidenced by the increasing incidences of child sexual abuse despite various efforts of both the government and non-government organizations, including the establishment and enforcement of the Sexual Offenses Special Provision Act of 1998 and countrywide campaigns on the protection of children's rights (Mlekwa et al., 2019).

Tanzania's Child Development Policy of 2008 entrusts community members to be one of the most important actors in protecting children from any kind of violence, including sexual abuse, at the household, community, and national level (URT, 2008). Community awareness, active participation, and responses are instrumental in the prevention of child sexual abuse in Tanzania (Kisanga et al., 2020). However, community responses to child sexual abuse are not well studied, especially in urban areas of Tanzania (Abeidet et al., 2019).

Therefore, it was important to conduct thorough research on assessing community responses to child sexual abuse practices. The objective of this study was to assess community responses to child sexual abuse practices in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in Dar es Salaam Region, which is among the five cities where child violence, specifically child sexual abuse, is reported to be rampant; others are Tanga, Mbeya, Mwanza, and Dodoma (LHRC, 2022). The study site was Kinondoni Municipality. It was selected because it is one of the most highly impacted by child sexual abuse in the Dar es Salaam Region, with 63% of the CSA incidents documented by the government in 2022 (URT, 2023; LHRC, 2023; Msangi, 2017).

The study involved households as a sampling unit, whereby the heads of the household were interviewed. A sample size of 399 households was used as determined by the Yamane (1967) formula for a known population of 45,720 households found in the selected wards of the study area, as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \quad n = \frac{45720}{1 + 45720(0.05)^2} \quad n = 399$$

The study employed multi-stage random sampling, whereby three stages were applied in the sampling process. In the first stage, the study sampled the three wards randomly from the district. In the second stage, one village was sampled from each ward, and the proportionate sample of households was picked randomly from a list of households residing in a particular village or street, which was provided by the village or street executive officer.

Data for this study were collected using a structured household survey and interviews with the heads of households and key informants, respectively. A questionnaire was designed to collect information on the socio-demographic and economic attributes of the sampled population, community awareness of CSA, and community responses to CSA practices, while an interview checklist was used to collect information on the extent of reported cases of CSA and how community members respond to CSA practices in the study area.

The key informants were three Ward Executive Officers and three Social Welfare Officers from the study area. Analysis of data involved a blend of qualitative and quantitative methods as it was ensured to effectively address challenges associated with each method individually (Birkinshaw, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-economic Status of the Respondents

Sex of the Household Heads

Sex of the heads of households was assessed, and the process of data collection involved both men and women in order to eliminate the child sexual abuse bias. Table 1 shows that, out of 399 respondents, 275(69%) were male and 124(31%) were female. This big variance gives the impression that most households are patriarchal, so there might be a high possibility of gender-based violence, including child sexual abuse, at the household level.

These findings are supported by Carletto et al. (2021), who found that child sexual abuse in India was associated with the sex of the heads of households.

Age of Respondents

Age has been found to determine how active and economically productive family members are based on productive activities, their ability to earn a living, and their increased ability to promote or reduce child sexual abuse (Khamis, 2020). Table 1 shows that out of 399 respondents, 33(8.3%) were below 20

years old, 174(43.7%) were between 31 and 43 years old, 166 (41.6%) were between 44 and 56 years old, 58(14.5%) were between 57 and 79 years old, and 8 (2.1%) were 80 years old.

This implies that, child sexual abuse was rampant in most of the households whose heads was of young ages ranging from 20 to 35; however, some incidences were also observed in those households whose heads' ages ranged from 41 to 6 years. These findings concur with Chikoko *et al.* (2019), who found a significant relationship between the age of heads of households and the prevalence of child sexual abuse at the household level.

Table 1: Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents (n = 399)

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	275	69
	Female	124	31
Age	≤ 20	33	8.3
	21-40	174	43.7
	41-60	166	41.6
	61-80	58	4.1
	≥80	8	2.1
Education Level	Informal education	41	10.4
	Not completed primary education	83	20.8
	Standard seven	150	37.5
	Secondary education and above	124	31.2
Marital Status	Married	241	60.4
	Not Ever Married	8	2.1
	Divorced	83	20.8
	Widow/Widower	50	12.5
	Separated	17	4.2
Household size	1-3	33	8.3
	4-6	100	25
	7-9	216	54.1
	≥10	50	12.5
Total		399	100.0

Source: Field Data (2023)

Education Level

It was important to assess the level of education of the heads of households, as it may affect gender relations and child sexual abuse at the household level. Table 1 shows that, out of 399 respondents, 150(37.5%) had primary education, 124(31.2%) had secondary education, and above, 83(20.8%) did not complete primary education, while 41(10.4%) had informal education.

This indicates that most of the household heads had just completed primary education, while few had attained secondary or college education. This further implies that children whose heads of households had low education levels were at high risk of facing child sexual abuse because of gender blindness among the household members. This is supported by Bakari *et al.* (2018), who found a negative correlation between the education level of the heads of the household and the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the household.

Marital Status

Table 1 shows that, out of 399 respondents, 241(60.4%) were married, 83(20.8%) were divorced, 50(12.5%) were widowed, 17(4.2%) were separated, and 8(2.1%) were never married. This implies that most of the heads of households were married, so this may indicate that child sexual abuse is most prevalent among children who are living with both of their parents and/or with other intimate relatives. However, there were some incidences of child sexual abuse among children whose parents were divorced; thus, the perpetrators were the close sexual partners of their parents. These findings are contrary to Kimani (2018), who found that children are more likely to face child sexual abuse if their parents are separated or not married because they tend to live with their relatives, who may possibly abuse the children sexually.

Household Size

Likewise, household size is an important determinant of child sexual abuse (Ngongi, 2019). Table 1 shows that out of 399 heads of households, 216 (54.1) had 7 to 9 members, 100(25%) had 4 to 6 members, 50(12.5%) had more than 10 members, and 33(8.3%) had 1 to 3 members. This implies that most of the households in the study area have a large number of members, ranging from 6 to 12. It may further indicate that most children who face sexual abuse come from households whose members are above the national average of 4.7 (URT, 2022). It is possible that a large number of household members may accelerate child abuse, which may be perpetrated by close relatives such as uncles, cousins, and in-laws in extended families.

These findings are similar to those of Ajao et al. (2020), who found that most of the children who face sexual abuse in Malawi are those who live in extended families, and the identified perpetrators were intimate relatives, as also implicated in this study.

Level of Community Awareness on Child Sexual Abuse

The level of community awareness of child sexual abuse in the surveyed ward was determined using three indicators, which are high, moderate, and low. These findings are clearly presented and discussed in this section. Findings in Figure 1 show that 241(60.4%) of the household heads had moderate awareness, 117(29.2%) had low awareness, and (10.4%) had high awareness of child sexual abuse. This indicates that about 89.6% of the surveyed heads of households do not understand well the meaning of child sexual abuse.

It was further proved during the interview with the Ward Social Welfare Officer, who had this to say:

"...most of the community members consider rape and wife battering as gender-based violence, but they have less knowledge of the other implications of child sexual abuse, which normally manifest in various forms such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, and taking or sharing sexual images without someone's consent. This has made family members contain so many cases at home, normalizing these incidences. (KII, 15th April 2023).

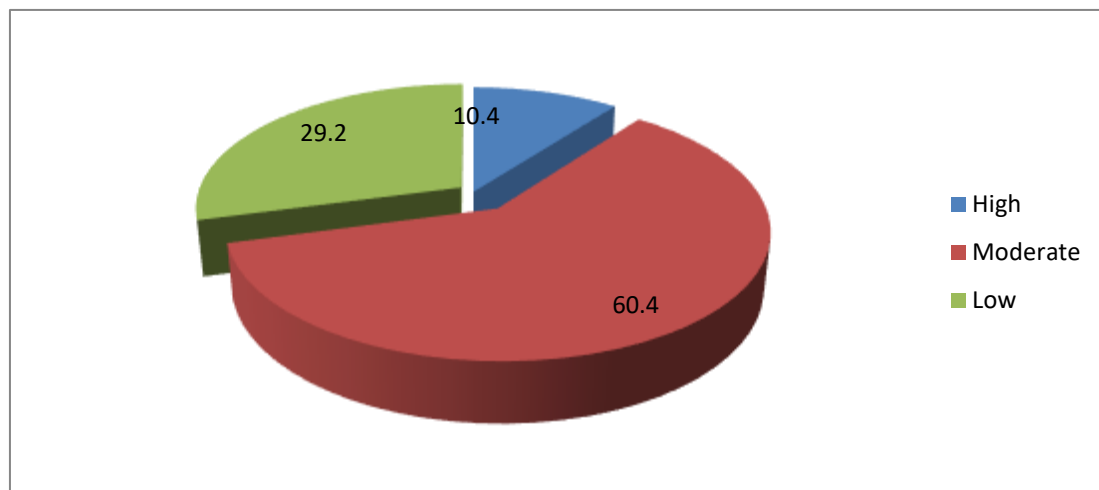


Figure 1: Level of community awareness on child sexual abuse (n = 399)

This implies that most of the respondents rarely understand incidences that fall under sexual abuse against children, which is why some commit it with less knowledge. These findings are supported by Minja (2021), who found that most cases of child sexual abuse in Mbeya Region are associated with low awareness among the members of households about child sexual abuse incidences. Moreover, these findings differ from those of Ezekiel (2017), who found that child sexual abuse incidents in rural areas of Tanzania are associated with traditional beliefs and witchcraft as opposed to levels of awareness of the subject matter.

The Extent of Reported Child Sexual Abuse Incidences in Msasani Ward

Incidences of reported child sexual abuse were assessed in order to understand the responses of community members to violations of child rights. Data from the Tanzania Police Gender and Children Desk and Social Welfare offices were solicited in Kinondoni Municipality, and the results are presented under this section. It can be observed from Table 2 that there was a net decrease of more than 30.0% in child sexual abuse cases from 2020 to 2021. This was probably due to increased sensitization by the government authorities and non-governmental organizations, which enabled community members to stop committing these crimes. However, there is an observed increase in reported cases of child sexual abuse of 2% and 48.4% from 2020 to 2022, respectively. This is probably due to the growing rate of belief in witchcraft, which makes people commit sexual abuse to children or those of their close relatives for the sake of getting wealth and perceived high social status.

It was further proved during the interview with one of the Tanzania Police Gender and Children Desk Officers from Kinondoni Municipality, who reported that:

"...a growing rate of mental health problems and attendance at witch doctors or witch crafts has led to increased incidences of child sexual abuse in our ward. I think this is rampant because more than 50% of the perpetrators associate this reason with their actions toward children though with maximum confidentiality. (KII, 20th June 2023).

These findings comply with Mkonyiet al. (2021), who found that most families believe CSA is uncommon within Tanzanian culture, although some associate it with witchcraft; as stated by one of the participants,

"...these issues of child sexual abuse are taken as witchcraft. Others [family members] went to witch doctors and were ordered to have an affair with a child, so they would become successful. So, relatives will not follow up on the case because they were given the money."

Table 2: Child Sexual Abuse Incidences Reported to PGCD in 2020-2022 in KMC

Child Sexual Abuse incidence	2020		2021		2022	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Rape and forced sex	26	28.8	21	33.8	30	32.6
Impregnation of school girls	18	20	10	16.5	16	17.3
Hiding out of school girls	22	24.4	14	22.5	20	21.7
Child molestation	13	14.4	9	14.5	12	13.0
Psychological abuse	11	12.4	8	49.6	14	15.2
Female Genital Mutilation	NR*	-	NR*	-	NR*	-
Total incidences	90	100.0	62	100.0	92	100.0

*Not Reported to the Police Gender and Children Desk

Community-Based Action Mechanisms against Child Sexual Abuse

It was equally important to assess the mechanisms used by community members in responding to various incidences of child sexual abuse. Figure 2 shows that out of 399 respondents, 117(29.2%) contain cases at home, 84(21%) report nowhere, 84(21%) report to government authorities such as TPGCD and the Social Welfare Office, 57(14.4%) admit the survivors to psychiatric or medical centers, and 57(14.4%) report to religious leaders.

It was further reported during the interview with the Ward Executive Officer that:

"There is a tendency in our ward that when a child is sexually abused, the family members normally contain cases at home, and others report the case, but when the day of trial arrives, they do not appear to court, abandon the case later, or report nowhere out of fear of losing their family member and shame because the perpetrators are always the intimate." (KII, 22nd June 2023).

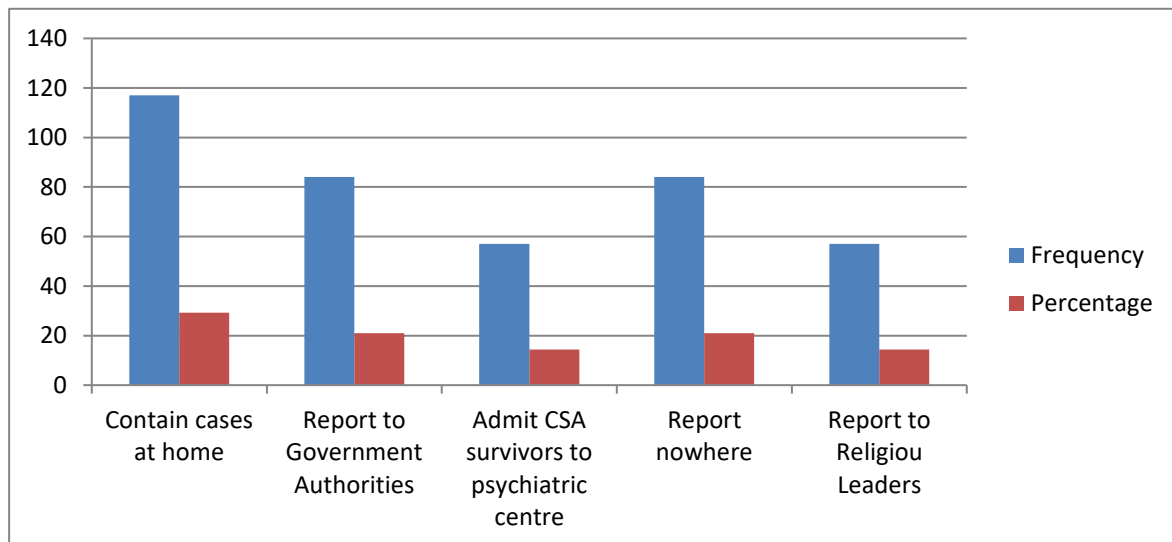


Figure 2: Community-based response mechanisms to CSA in the study area

This implies that almost more than 50% of household members do not report child sexual abuse incidences to responsible government authorities. This further accelerates the prevalence of these cases at the family and community levels. These findings are supported by Mages (2021), who found that most community members do not report child sexual abuse cases in Msasani ward because perpetrators are close family members, friends, relatives, and neighbors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that most of the households and community members in Kinondoni Municipality have relatively moderate knowledge of child sexual abuse incidences. This implies that community sensitization programs on the same matter have not been effectively implemented. Further, the extent of reported cases of child sexual abuse decreased from 2020 to 2021 but again increased from 2021 to 2022. This may predict a sudden increase in the forthcoming years if not well managed. Moreover, there is a high tendency to not report child sexual abuse cases to relevant authorities such as Mtaa and Ward offices, courts, and the Tanzania Police Gender and Children Desk. This is evidenced by the findings that most cases have been contained at home.

Recommendations

It is recommended, based on this study, that:

The government of Tanzania should make sure that the Law of the Child Act, No. 21/2009, Child Development Policy (2008), and the Sexual Offenses Special Provision Act of 1998 are made aware to community members so as to increase their awareness of child sexual abuse and gender-based violence in general. Also, the government should strengthen the punishment for those who abuse children. Because those who commit abuse of children are mostly assaulted, and they know very well that what they have done is totally wrong, but the cases of adult abuse of children are still rampant. So by strengthening punishment for those who commit this offense in one way or another, we can reduce the rampant number of cases.

The Women and Children Committees at the ward and village level, together with community case workers, should work in hand with the government and other stakeholders in reporting child sexual abuse cases and take legal action against perpetrators of child sexual abuse in order to educate other people who would commit the same. The community should work together to ensure the safeguard of the children in the community. In the event that a person abuses a child, it should be ensured that justice is being saved.

Families, as primary institutions, should play a role in protecting their children from all forms of abuse. Parents or caregivers should talk to their children about sexual abuse matters so their children can take care of themselves, or they can report to their parents immediately after a person abuses them. They should also engage themselves in appropriate parental care, avoid abusing child rights, and create a friendly environment for their children to feel comfortable and communicate with them.

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