

Sexual Violence Prevalence Against Girls and Women: A Case of Meru District Council

Mwanaidi Selemani Mahanyu¹

Social Welfare Officer, Mount Meru Reginal Referral Hospital - Arusha,

P.O Box 1006 Arusha

Juma Almasi Mhina² and Rose Mtei³

Tengeru Institute of Community Development,

P.O Box 1006 Arusha.

Corresponding Author Email: almasi.juma@ticd.ac.tz/almasijuma@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract:

Despite efforts made by governments, communities, and development groups, sexual assault against girls and women has been rising globally. For instance, the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act of 1998, which specifies actions to be taken when sexual violence is reported, is in effect in Tanzania. This paper on sexual violence prevalent against girls and women is aimed at determining the extent to which sexual violence prevails in the study area. It used a sample size of 399 respondents, which included girls and women, who were obtained by using a simple random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire and a documentary review were used to collect data. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that the number of sexual violence occurrences could be determined. A scale interval of 0–1, 2–3, 4–5, 6–7, and over 8 cases per month was used to determine the number of sexual violence occurrences and, consequently, sexual violence prevalence. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze data in which frequencies and percentages were produced and presented in tabular forms. The study found that sexual harassment was the most prevalent form of sexual violence (22.1%), followed by child abuse (16.2%). These findings indicate that community members should be ready to unveil all actions that contribute to sexual violence practices and abandon cultural practices that give men the power to do whatever they wish to do to women and girls.

Keywords: Sexual violence, prevalence, girls, women

Introduction

In 2019, Yung et al noted that sexual violence is widespread, occurring in every culture, at all levels of society and in every country in the world. It is estimated that 641 million and up to 753 million ever married or partnered women aged 15 years and older have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at least once since the age of 15 (WHO, 2021). It is further estimated that 1 in 4 ever-married/partnered adolescent girls in the youngest age cohort (15–19 years old) is estimated to have already been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime. In 2021, Kuo et al. conducted a study which found that there is wide variation across the world, with Sub-Saharan Africa having some of the highest rates of sexual violence globally.

In Germany, 37% of women have experienced physical violence after the age of 16, and 58% of women report various forms of sexual harassment (Brendel, 2018). In India, sexual violence affects 1 in every 16 women in the country and most commonly occurs in adolescence (International Institute for Population Sciences [IIPS], 2018) as cited in Raj et al. (2020). Kuo et al. (2021) point out that in South Africa, 21.3% of women have experienced sexual and physical violence in their lifetime. In 2018, Murphy et al. contend that sexual violence against women and girls is also prevalent in Ethiopia.

In Jamaica, the rape of women and children is far more prevalent than homicides. Smith et al. (2019) noted that there are two cases of rape for every case of homicide. According to Murphy et al. (2018), prevalence estimates of rape victimization range between 56% and 79% of women having experienced sexual abuse from their husbands or boyfriends in their lifetime. These studies provide evidence of the prevalence of sexual violence worldwide.

According to URT (2020), from January to December 2018, a total of 31,863 sexual violence cases were reported, compared to 23,012 cases reported in a similar period in 2017. This represents an increase of 8,851 cases, or 38.5% of all cases in 2017. This is an indication that sexual violence in Tanzania is still increasing and prevails regardless of the government's effort to reduce it. For example, the Tanzanian government implemented the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act of 1998, which stipulates measures to be taken when sexual violence is reported. The Act states that any person who commits rape is subject to life imprisonment, or in any case, a sentence of not less than thirty years in prison

with corporal punishment and a fine, as well as an order to pay compensation to the person against whom the offence was committed for the injuries caused to such person in an amount determined by the court (URT, 1998). In this study sexual violence refers to any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act, or unwanted sexual comments or acts to traffic, that are directed against a person's sexuality using coercion by anyone, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including at home and at work.

Despite the available Acts that have been put forward to protect sexual violence against girls and women, such as the Sexual Offenses Special Provisions Act, 1998, the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977: Law Marriage Act, and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2008,

Tanzania continues to witness acts of sexual violence such as rape, unnatural offences, child desertion, child stealing, and genital mutilation. For example, a total of 23,012 cases of sexual violence were reported in 2015, compared to 21,517 cases in 2014. This is an increase of 1,495 cases, which is equivalent to 6.9%. Regions that have reported large numbers of sexual violence cases are Temeke (3,547), Ilala (2,479), Arusha (2,129), Morogoro (1,703), and Rukwa (1,498). Regions that have small numbers of such cases are Kusini Pemba (4), Kaskazini Pemba (13) and Mjini Magharibi (15) (URT, 2016). The trend was observed to have increased between 2017 and 2018 with 8,851 in the former and 31,863 in the latter (URT, 2020) as compared to 2014, 2015, and 2016. Other studies conducted in the study area include that of Magombola & Shimba (2021) who studied the factors influencing intimate partner violence among Maasai, Meru, and Iraqw. This study does not tell the extent to which sexual violence prevail in the study area. However, there is no documented evidence of the prevalence of sexual violence in Meru District Council. This sets up the basis for this study, to fill up the knowledge gap, the study intended to determine the extent to which sexual violence is prevalent against girls and women in Meru District Council.

Literature Review

The study is guided by sociocultural theory which grew from the work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), who believed that parents, caregivers, peers, and the culture at large are responsible for developing higher-order functions. According to Vygotsky, learning has its basis in interacting with other people. Once this has occurred, the information is then integrated on the individual level.

Vygotsky claimed that children's minds are born with basic biological limits. Each culture, on the other hand, supplies "intellectual adaptation tools." These tools enable children to make adaptive use of their abilities in the context of their culture. For example, one culture, may place a premium on memory techniques such as note-taking. Others may rely on aids such as reminders or rote memorization (a technique that uses repetition). These distinctions influence how a child learns by offering "tools" that are culturally appropriate. However, if children's minds are born in a society where sexual violence practice prevails, they tend to develop behavior that reflect what they saw during their physical and mental growth. If they grow up in peer groups, for example, gang groups in which sexual violence practices seem to be normal, the children will adapt and practice those behavior in their lifetime.

Further, if the children are born in a culture where men dominate women in such a way that they do whatever they feel on them, such as practicing sex without women or girls' consent, they will do the same when they become adults. This phenomenon entails that sexual violence will keep on prevailing in such a society unless that society, particularly men, is culturally changed.

The prevalence of sexual violence in many parts of the world has been reoccurring regardless of efforts made to handle it. In 2016, Hillis et al. conducted a systematic review of population-based surveys on the prevalence of violence against children which documented that over 50% of girls aged 15–17 years old in Africa and Asia had experienced violent discipline in the past year. Children here include girls of all ages, as mentioned, girls who are still in school, and some, because of culture and norms, they are married at that young age. Such cultural and traditional norms and practices pave the way for the persistence of sexual violence among girls. Goessmann et al. (2020) contend that there is a high prevalence of sexual violence during childhood and adolescence, as over a quarter of the participating students reported having experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. According to this study, the most common experience of sexual violence was non-contact abuse in terms of online media exposure, a form of violence that is increasing in schools as well as other contexts. This is an indication that sexual violence prevalence is also contributed to by the existence of social media, where girls and women can be harassed through the media. In this case, technology forms a platform where sexual violence practices can be

committed. Also, it has been noted that most of sexual violence practices occurs at family level and committed by relatives such as uncles, grand furtherers and others.

According to Orindi (2020), girls aged 10–14 years old have experienced violence in the past 6 months or ever experienced violence. Overall, psychological violence was the most prevalent, both within the past 6 months (32.8%) and over life time (54%), followed by physical violence (16.3%), and sexual (7.1%). These findings justify the fact that sexual violence prevails in various forms. It may take place depending on the circumstances or location where the girl is found. If it is an open space, then physical violence such as touching may take place, while in hidden places, sexual practices can be committed against their will.

Kabeer (2014) asserts that the global estimate for non-partner sexual violence, based on findings from 81 countries, was 7.2%. This ranged from 12.6% in high-income regions to 11.9% in Africa and 4.9% in Southeast Asia. Underreporting can occur as a result of underestimates and stigma associated with sexual violence, more so in some countries than others, making comparison difficult. The prevalence of sexual violence was lowest in high-income countries, for example, North America, Europe, and Australia.

The prevalence of sexual violence practices is a result of many reasons, such as the culture in which a girl or a woman is born. There has been a tendency that whatever a man or a husband tends to do to his wife or girlfriend is right. For example, if a man prefers to have sex with his partner, he can do so without any consent. According to Mwanakuzi & Nyamhanga (2021), married adolescent girls expressed concern that culture and parental and guardian teachings render them incapable of negotiating sex. Many women were taught to be obedient to their husbands by their aunts, mothers, or grandmothers in preparation for their weddings. This included not refusing to have sex against their husbands' wishes. Being submissive means allowing men to do whatever they want to their partners. Sometimes, men use verbal threats and/or physical beatings to force married adolescent girls into submission (Mwanukuzi & Nyamhanga, 2021). In 2020, Orindi et al. conducted a study looking at risk factors for violence found that women's economic status and norms that place women's status in society at a lower position have a significant association with violence experience (2020). According to Magombola & Shimba (2021), the causes of sexual violence (especially interpersonal sexual violence) vary depending on economic, social, and other

factors. Poverty, a lack of work, low agricultural productivity, and a lack of assets are all considered economic causes. Early marriage, lack of inheritance, restriction of free speech, denial of education, and polygamy are all examples of social elements that degrade and discriminate against women. The use of marijuana and alcohol also contributes to sexual violence practices. According to WHO (2016), alcohol consumption, especially at harmful and hazardous levels, is a major contributor to the occurrence of intimate partner violence and the links between the two are manifold. Alcohol has been reported to affect cognitive and physical function, thus reducing self-control and leaving individuals less capable of negotiating a non-violent resolution to conflicts within relationships.

Material and Methods

The study was carried out at Meru District Council (MDC), one of the seven councils that comprise the Arusha Region. Meru District Council has a population of 331,165, of which males were 162,115 and females were 169,050. The study employed a cross-sectional research design to determine the extent to which sexual violence prevails among girls and women. The sample size was determined by using the Yamane (1967) formula with a 5% sampling error and a confidence interval of 95%. A sample size of 399 was obtained after subjecting 169,050 girls and women to the formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N * (e)^2}$$

Whereby;

n is the number of sample size

N is the number of girls and women in the study area

e is the sampling error (5%)

To obtain the requisite sample size, the study used a probability sampling approach. In this situation, a simple random sampling method was utilized to select respondents from a sample frame of all Meru District Council girls and women. A sampling frame (a list of women and girls) was first obtained, and then girls and women were chosen at random from the list. Simple random sampling was chosen since it ensures that all girls and women in the population have an equal chance of being included in the study. This sampling strategy yielded a sample of 399 girls and women. The data for the study came from both primary and secondary sources. Data was collected using structured surveys and documentary review methods. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data, which was provided in tabular form with frequencies and percentages.

Results

Prevalence of Sexual Violence in Meru District Council

It was the intention of this study to determine the extent to which sexual violence prevails in the study area. The respondents were asked to itemize the number of cases of various forms of sexual violence occurring per month. The cases were given in terms of class intervals of 0 – 1, 2 – 3, 4 – 5, 6 – 7, and over 8 cases per month for easy record keeping and listing. The class intervals were used to measure the extent to which sexual violence prevails in the study area. The number of occurrences given in percentage reflects how many times per month a given respondent was sexually offended. Sexual violence form with the highest occurrence, i.e., many cases are regarded as the most prevalent in the study area. The study found that sexual harassment at 34 (22.1%) is the most prevailing form of sexual violence, followed by child abuse at 25 (16.2%) and intimate sexual violence at 17 (11.0%). As shown in Table 1, the least common forms of sexual violence in the study area are incest (7.5%), forced marriage (13.4%), and female genital mutilation (13.4%).

Table 1:

Extent of Sexual Violence Prevalence

<i>Prevalence of Forms of Sexual Violence</i>	<i>Cases Per Month (%)</i>				
	0 - 1	2 - 3	4 - 5	6 - 7	Over 8
<i>Rape</i>	65 (42.2%)	38 (24.7%)	17 (11.0%)	17 (11.0%)	16 (10.4%)
<i>Sexual Harassment</i>	54 (35.1%)	32 (20.8%)	21 (13.6%)	13 (8.4%)	34 (22.1%)
<i>Forced Marriage</i>	51 (33.1%)	40 (26.0%)	36 (23.4%)	14 (9.1%)	13 (8.4%)
<i>Female Genital Mutilation</i>	65 (42.2%)	31 (20.1%)	23 (14.9%)	22 (14.3%)	13 (8.4%)
<i>Intimate sexual violence</i>	53 (34.4%)	42 (27.3%)	23 (14.9%)	20 (13.0%)	17 (11.0%)
<i>Forced prostitution and trafficking</i>	58 (37.7%)	29 (18.8%)	29 (18.8%)	22 (14.3%)	16 (10.4%)
<i>Child Abuse</i>	57 (37.0%)	30 (19.5%)	23 (14.9%)	19 (12.3%)	25 (16.2%)
<i>Incest</i>	78 (50.6%)	36 (23.4%)	19 (12.3%)	14 (9.1%)	7 (4.5%)

Source: Field Data, 2020

Discussions

Sexual harassment

A significant number of respondents 34(22.1%) indicated that sexual harassment appeared to be the most prevalent sexual violence in Meru District Council. It was indicated that over 8 cases of respondents reported having been sexually harassed. These findings are similar to Vyas (2021), who found that sexual assault and harassment are prevalent across all age groups, with the largest group of victims being between 11 and 15 years of age. The findings are also supported by Goessmann et al. (2020), who asserted that the most common type of sexual violence reported across samples was passive contact abuse, such as being unwillingly touched by someone. A study conducted by Castico (2015) found that women are prone to sexual harassment at work at any time and year of working tenure.

It is argued that most women experience sexual harassment at initial stages of work. Some men use the first contact to hook a woman for their sensual gratification, and some women feel that it is secure to be in the hands of a man. In these years, most female workers are single, so they think that these approaches could lead to marriage. Soon or later, they discover that men are after sexual gratification. These findings are also in line with the study by Smith et al. (2017) who found that in the United States, about 1 in 3 women (36.3%) experienced some form of contact sexual violence (sexual harassment) during their lifetime. According to Smith et al. (2017), estimates of lifetime experiences of contact sexual violence ranged from 29.5% to 47.5%. This is an indication that not only in the study area does sexual harassment prevail but also in other parts of the world. According to Vyas (2021), among 15–23-year-old females who had ever had sex, 17.5% reported they had experienced physical violence and 5.2% reported having experienced sexual violence by a male partner in the last 6 months, mainly sexual harassment. Further, Oberg et al. (2019) contend that women and girls experiencing sexual harassment had 9 or fewer years of education, were students or without occupation.

Child Abuse

This is among the forms of sexual violence reported to prevail in Meru District Council. It was found that 25 (16.2%) reported that child abuse occurs over 8 times in a month. These findings are similar to that of Mwanukuzi & Nyamhanga

(2021), who assert that sexual violence, particularly child abuse, is a serious problem in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The prevalence of child abuse in Tanzania is estimated at 37%, with the majority of the victims in rural areas. This indicates that sexual violence is prevalent among children. Young girls have been forced to have sex even if they are not willing to do so. Sometimes unpleasant sexual practices are introduced to them, simply because they cannot make a proper decision. Usually, men take advantage of children's ages to give them rewards in lieu of sex.

Intimate sexual violence

The intimate sexual violence, which involves sexual violence between a husband and a wife, it was found that 17 (11.0%) cases occur over eight times per month. Usually, men take advantage of dominance against women so that whatever they decide on sexual matters, women have nothing to say. Even if the wife is not ready for sex, men use their power to satisfy themselves sexually. The findings are similar to Mwanukuzi & Nyamhanga (2021), who found that 33% of young women aged 15 to 24 in Tanzania have experienced intimate partner violence. According to Magombola & Shimba (2021) in Maasai, Meru, and Iraqw communities, male domination and especially patriarchy systems have positioned women in a submissive position, rendering them susceptible and weak to enduring beatings and other forms of violence in the name of culture. According to Dobash & Dobash (1979), patriarchy causes gender disparity in marriage and the family, and patriarchal standards are frequently associated with wife assault and wife beating, which can be considered as one form of men's dominance over women. Intimate sexual violence is also contributed by past history, as WHO (2016) reports that a history of violence in the male partner's family (having experienced violence as a child) and growing up in an impoverished family are important factors related to perpetrating partner violence.

Generally, it can be deduced from the study that almost all forms of sexual violence covered in this study are prevalent in Meru District Council. Some forms of sexual violence occur at a lower rate than others, such as incest, which involves relatives to relatives such as sister and brother and daughter and father. Some of sexual violence can only be known to the public if survivors are ready to expose the occurrence of such practices. When confronted with sexual violence, some survivors do not report the incident to the appropriate authorities. As a result, no actions are taken against the perpetrators. In this situation, perpetrators keep on committing sexual violence, and hence the prevalence of sexual violence in the study area.

In conclusion, sexual harassment, child abuse, and intimate violence are the most prevalent forms of sexual violence in Meru District Council, despite the existence of various Acts. such as the Sexual Violence Act of 1998, the United Republic of Tanzania Constitution of 1977, the Law Marriage Act, and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2008, all of which aim to prevent the occurrence of sexual violence practices in the society. Male dominance over women, past history, and cultural factors are all major contributors to the prevalence of sexual violence. This calls for the community, non-governmental organizations, and the government to take the necessary measures to curb the situation. Community members should be ready to unveil all actions that contribute to sexual violence practices and abandon cultural practices that give men the power to do whatever they wish to do to women and girls. Also, the community should be ready to expose individuals committing sexual abuse to girls and women instead of conducting negotiations with survivors in favor of perpetrators. The cases should be reported to government authorities, particularly police and magistrates, for further action in accordance with Tanzania's various Acts.

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