



# Challenges of Lack of Community Awareness and Its Impact on Child Sexual Assault in Tanzania: The Case of Arusha, Tanzania

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study intended to examine the challenges associated with community awareness on children rights and the rate at which child sexual assault in Tanzania has been increasing. A cross section research design was deployed. The target population was children aged between 10 to 17 years old from both primary and secondary schools in three districts of Arusha region. The sample size was 299 respondents. The study applied a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approach in order to complement to one another and implication of some data in situations. In addition the researcher approached the study on social work perspective. The data was analyzed by using descriptive and

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correlation measurements and themes for qualitative information. The findings of the study revealed that, there is negative correlation between community awareness on children rights and increasing/decreasing rate of child sexual assault by ( $r=0.114$ ). Further, a negative correlation between community awareness on children rights and frequent reporting of incidences to authorities by ( $r= -0.361$ ). Furthermore, the majority of the community members do not respond to child sexual assault collectively, instead, response is on family/individual bases. The study concludes that, there is inadequate level of community awareness on children rights and effects of child sexual assault in the communities. The planned interventions to end Violence against Women and Children, lacks financial and structural commitments. The study further recommends a review of National Plan of Action to End - Violence against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC) to improve the structure and commit adequate resources for effective implementation.

*Keywords: Community awareness; child rights; child sexual assault; law enforcement.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Zhao and Stasko 2002 argue that, community awareness refers to the degree that people generally know social norms and people's different roles within the community, and issues that affect the community. Other scholars like [1], view community awareness as a general knowledge, created through interaction between community people and their environment. It involves states of knowledge as well as dynamic process of perception and action. Therefore community awareness generation is considered as core element of successful disaster risk reduction. Salam's definition has elements which the researcher perceived important as far as community awareness is concerned. These elements are; knowledge, perception and action. On the researcher's view, community awareness means a degree to which people generally know their roles in the community and issues that impact the community positively or negatively and hence respond to those issues collectively. In this study, community awareness is knowledge and perception of the community about child rights which impact on collective response to curb child right violation including child sexual assault.

This study intended to examine the relationship between community awareness on children rights and the increasing/decreasing rate of child sexual assault in Tanzania basing its implications on social work perspectives. Child sexual assault is one of several types of child sexual abuse. It is a problem that violates children human rights, degrades their dignity and social values, for example the value of worth of the person. The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of

people who are vulnerable [2]. This study was guided by two theories: ecological system theory and social disorganization theory complementarily. Knowledge of the theories helped in the understanding of aspects or indicators in the variables which determine the state of children welfare. The variables reflect the environment in which children interact as result, they end up protected or abused sexually. The results depend on the reaction from the environment and unity of the community. The statistics show that child sexual assault is a global pandemic which its prevalence indicate 14 percent and 20 percent among European and North American girls respectively [3]. Moreover, 92.3 percent of adolescent were reported to have experienced their first child sexual assault (CSA) before the age of 16 in the Caribbean.

Globally, 7.9 percent of males and 19.7 percent of females faced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years [4]. Furthermore, other prevalence rates were 9.2, 10.1, and 23.9 percent in Europe, America, and Asia respectively. African region showed the highest prevalence rate of 34.4%. While Africa rate was 34.4 percent the rate in Tanzania was 27.9 percent females and 13.4 percent males. These have experienced at least one incident of sexual violence before the age of 18 [5,6]. Different measures have been made to eradicate the problem without success. The establishment of the United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child [19], Africa Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child [20], (Law of Child Act 2009) just to mention a few are among the measures. Despite these measures the problem persisted and increase steadily. This situation raises many questions as to why the incidences are on increase instead of decrease, what is wrong with the interventions: are the communities fully aware of children rights and effects of sexual assaults like rape, sodomy, and

abduction? This question prompted the researcher to undertake this study in order to check whether there is relationship between community awareness and increasing rate of CSA incidences.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study deployed across sectional research design due to the nature of study. The target population were children aged 10 to 17 years old from both primary and secondary schools in three districts of Arusha region. The study used a sample size of 299 calculated using Yamane formula (1967) from the population of children (810,089) obtained from national census [6]. Arusha region was selected among region affected by the problem of child sexual abuse as data showed; Arusha 808 cases, Tanga 691, Shinyanga 505, Mwanza 500 and Ilala 489 ([17,21,25], LHRC; 2018, [22,16,23]). Further, the study applied multistage simple random sampling technique: whereby stage one, selected three districts. Stage two, selected 2 wards from the selected districts and stage three, selected 2 villages/schools from each ward and therefore made the total number of schools participated twelve. The study deployed a mixed methods of data collection for triangulation purpose. Semi structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative information while, interview guide was used to collect qualitative information. The collected data were first, edited, classified and assign numerical values before entered into Scientific Social Research Package (SPSS) version 20. Then, the incidents of child sexual assault (quantitative data) were analyzed using descriptive and correlation statistics. While data collected using interview guide was analyzed by using themes.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Distribution of Respondents

This study involved a total number of 299 respondents, among them 97 respondents were students from primary schools while 202 respondents were students from secondary schools. Table 1, shows the distribution of respondents by location in terms of district and sex. The numbers are in percentages.

The representation of data on Table 1, reflects the population of children in a schools who have participated in the study. For instance Arusha City Council was represented by 187 children,

Meru District Council by 68 and Karatu District Council by 44. The percentages are shown on the table respectively.

### 3.2 Knowledge of the Community on Children Rights and Increase in CSA

The UN convention on the Rights of the Child, commits member states taking action on child protection through a number of articles including sexual exploitation and abuse. Also, the convention in article 3 (1) and 3 (2) demands all parties responsible for a child welfare being an individual or institutions to take into consideration the interest of the child. Knowledge in this study was used interchangeably with awareness. According to Gafoor (2012) awareness or knowledge has different dimensions depending on settings (milieu) that is knowledge without direct teaching or a combination of awareness content domains, awareness of consequences, realization or/ and awareness as perception. In the same note Morin [7] while specifying self – awareness, argued that, self-awareness represents the capacity of becoming the object of one's own attention. This means a person becomes actively identifies, process, and stores information about the self.

However when the subjects of the study were asked whether they know the rights of children. The findings showed that 70.6 percent of the respondents indicated to have knowledge about children rights against 29.4 percent of them who have shown to have no knowledge. The percentages of responses were categorized into three levels; low, moderate and high as follows: low level: below 50%, moderate 50%- 69% and high 70%-89%. Therefore the data indicate a moderate level of community knowledge on children rights. When the Pearson correlation coefficient was run to measure the direction of the two variables: awareness on children rights (KCR) and increasing trend of incidences (CKAT), the result indicates a negative correlation between the two variables ( $r = -0.114$ ). The findings of the study, imply that as the knowledge of community increases, the incidences of CSA decreases. In the same note, Tintor [8], found that there is relationship between education / empowerment and the initiative of community institutions that educate and invigorate citizens. The results of relationship between community awareness on children rights and increase/decrease in children sexual assault is illustrated on Table 2.

**Table 1. Distribution of respondents by sex and district level by percentage (n=299)**

District	Sex		Total
	Girls	Boys	
Arusha CC	31.8	30.8	62.6
Meru DC	11.7	11.0	22.7
Karatu DC	8.7	6.0	14.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>52.2</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Research design 2021

**Table 2. Relationship between community awareness on CR and trend of CSA**

Variables		Did you ever heard about children’s rights?	How is the trend of child sexual assault in your area?
Did you ever heard about children’s rights?	Pearson Correlation	1	-.114*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.049
	N	299	299
How is the trend of child sexual assault in your area?	Pearson Correlation	-.114*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	
	N	299	299

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Source: Research findings 2021

**Table 3. Trend of child sexual assault cases in study area**

District	Period		
	2018	2019	2020
Arusha	175	331	333
Meru	46	37	68
Karatu	28	37	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>469</b>

Source: Regional social welfare unit, 2021

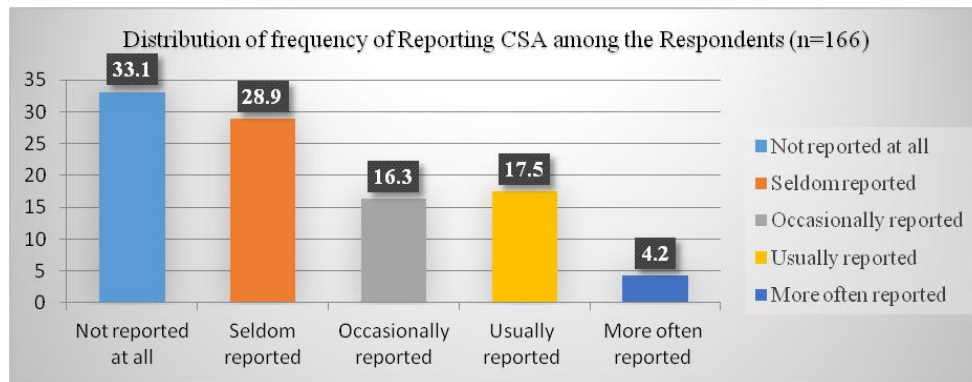
Moreover, secondary data indicate that the trend of child sexual assault in 2018 to 2020 has been on increase except for Meru district which shows decrease from 46 in 2018 to 37 in 2019 as represented on Table 3

In addition, knowledge could produce more positive results if all segments of the community share same intents as UNICEF [24], commented that, applying heuristic to CSA prevention could be done by educating the general public including parents, professional and children. Comment from UNICEF (ibid) interrelationship between human beings and the environment which he/she lives in. Whereby the environment is interconnected systems or layers. The study noted that, although ecological approach is relevant to this study, its practicability does not happen automatically, but the systems require supervisions and coordination for achievement of intended goals. This may imply that, community members would have been aware of children

rights if the community awareness would have been done by social welfare /community development officers and child protection committees.

### 3.3 Community Knowledge on Children Rights and Rate of Reporting Incidences

In relation to knowledge of the community on children rights and increase in child sexual assault, the researcher wanted to examine also, whether knowledge on the rights of children would influence frequent reporting of incidences. The findings indicate that 33.1 percent of the respondents pointed out that, incidences were not reported at all. While 4.2 percent of them pointed that incidences were reported more often. The details of the distribution of the respondents’ response is illustrated on Fig. 1. Distribution of Frequency of Reporting CSA among the Respondents



**Fig. 1. Distribution of reporting CSA among the respondents**

Source: Research findings 2021

Parallel to the quantitative findings, the qualitative findings indicate that community members may not report incidences because of fearing revenge and because of social capital as one the participant narrated that;

*“Community members have a tendency of fearing (they fear retaliation of being raped) especially if the reporting person is a woman and no man is around. Also fear to be blamed and be witched”, (CDO; 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022).*

Social capital refers to the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people with norms of reciprocity [9]. As such they hide perpetrators as elucidated by one of the participants that;

*“The community is passive: it hides the perpetrators because of social capital (relatives, neighbours), for example they use grass to settle critical issues and a belief that people who have committed sex together have become relatives because they have mixed blood. This make them solve such matters at home traditionally. Some are limited by poverty from fighting the rights of*

*their children hence they end up compromising with perpetrators (SWO; 5th April, 2022).*

Further, community members may not report incidences because of prolonged legal procedures, because investigation takes long time even if an offender is caught red-handed. One of the study participant posits that;

*“Prolonged legal procedures discourage community members from reporting incidences to police. Therefore sometimes they opt to beat the offenders. However it depends on the status of the offender and survivor in terms of economic power, social influence, and cruelty”, (NGO Social worker; 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022).*

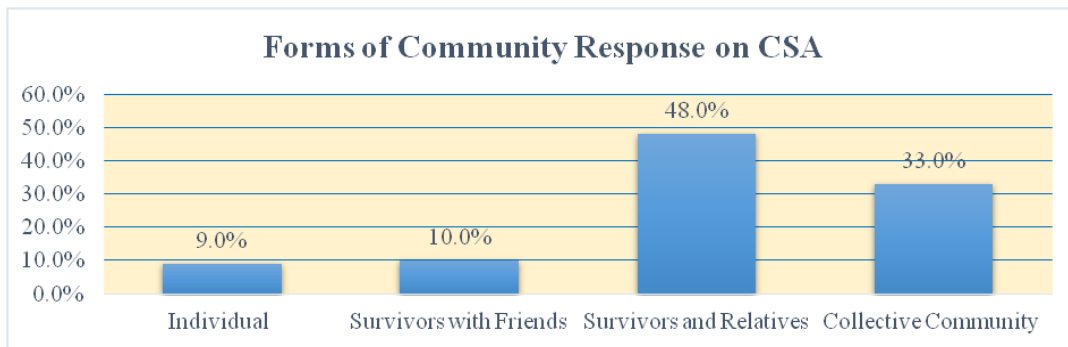
When the Pearson correlation coefficient was run between community awareness on children rights KCR and frequent of reporting child sexual assault (FR) the results show the value of ( $r = -0.361$ ). Literature provide factors that may interfere peoples’ attitude of reporting. Some of such factors, include; a crime not being serious enough, the police not doing anything, a crime not be suitable for the police, a crime can be solved without help from the police, [14,10,15].

**Table 4. Community awareness on CR and frequent reporting of CSA to authorities**

Correlations		Did you ever heard about children’s rights?	How often are the incidents reported
Did you ever heard about children’s rights?	Pearson Correlation	1	-.361**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	299	166
How often are the incidents reported	Pearson Correlation	-.361**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	166	166

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research findings 2021



**Fig. 2. Forms of community response on CSA among respondents**

Source: Research findings 2021

Further, Holland [10] argued that the degree of loss or threat and the availability of alternative sources of help have been found to affect a person's decision to report a crime to the proper authorities. However, although the reasons presented by researchers may be true, the arguments was considered as the result of lack of community awareness on children rights and effects of child sexual abuse altogether. Therefore community awareness is an important factor in eradication of child sexual assault. UNICEF [11,18], commented that, although individual programmes can achieve important positive impacts, a more integrated system can produce multiplier effects greater than the individual interventions.

### 3.4 Community Awareness on Children Rights and Collective Response on Incidences

Knowledge on children rights is a factor that can induce essence of respecting and protecting children from violation of their rights. The community therefore, respond to any abusive behavior toward children collectively. The findings of this study show that 48 percent of the respondents indicate that survivor and relatives respond to incidences of child sexual assault. While 33 percent of the respondents indicated collective community response while, 10 percent and 9 percent of the respondents indicated survivor with friend(s) and individual response respectively. In line with these data, it was also revealed that, community members do not show unity in responding to incidences of CSA. Further it was revealed earlier that there was a culture of not reporting incidences of CSA in community. One of the research participants elucidated that;

*"The community is passive, protection of a child is not considered as the community responsibility*

*but rather of the family and particularly nuclear family. Also prolonged legal process is disappointing", (NGO-Social worker; 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022).*

Protection of the child is not considered as a community responsibility but rather a responsibility of a family. The details of the responses are exemplified on Fig. 2.

In the same note, Holland [10] commented that, when victims are scared or want to protect themselves, there is a stronger chance, that they would call the police and vice versa. In the same note, Pandey and Reddy [12], found that CSA was widely underreported, despite its global prevalence irrespective of socioeconomic diversity amongst different nations. Moreover the community is not united in responding to incidences and taking actions against perpetrators of those incidences. Instead the problem is seen as concerned with survivor and the relatives alone. Community response, is different from individual response on child sexual assault. This is because the offenders, cannot easily spot out a single person to blame or retaliate.

The social disorganization theory propounds that disorganized community has little solidarity among residents and lack cohesion or integration no wonder why the study revealed that the problem of child sexual assault was left as a family responsibility. Perpetrators are hidden rather than taken to justice systems and opt on traditional measures to solutions. The national plan of action to end violence against women and children [13], was one of the established interventions to end the problem of child sexual assault among other child violence. The plan, identified that stopping violence in public spaces requires multi-dimensional actions of engaging

all members of a community in a holistic manner. This is relative to what social work practice call interdisciplinary approach. Despite, the good plan ineffectiveness have been noted in the implementation as the study revealed that the structures planned to implement the strategy face a lot of challenges including lack of finance and inconsistent attendance by members as one of the research participants narrated that;

*The committee is not active as meetings are not held as per plans and some members do not attend (CDO, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022).*

According to the findings and support of literature, collective community response matters a lot in prevention and ending child sexual assault and this can only happen with community awareness raising and coordination of initiatives for effective functioning of systems.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

##### **4.1 Conclusion**

Challenges of lack of community awareness on child rights and its impact on child sexual assault is of important in the initiatives of fighting to end child sexual assault. However, this study, noted that, communities lack commitments in protecting children due to inadequate awareness on children rights and the effects of child sexual assault. These result into using traditional measures of dealing with perpetrators which subject survivors to secondary abuse. Moreover, there is inadequate unity among community members in responding to incidences of child sexual assault. Furthermore, the planned interventions (NPA-VAWC) missed its intended goals due to lack of finance and structural defects.

##### **4.2 Recommendations**

The Prime Minister's office which is responsible for coordination of the (NPA-VAWC), famously known in Swahili as MTAKUWWA, should allocate adequate resources including funds for the implementation of planned activities at grassroots level. District Executive Directors should demand reports for the implementation of MTAKUWWA activities in every quarter including the trend of child sexual assault from Ward/Village Executive Officers. Social welfare/community development officers should reach the community, mobilize stakeholders to

form allies, carryout sensitizations on the law of the child Act, children rights and effects of child sexual assaults and establish children councils in schools. Civil society organizations including religious institutions should sensitize the community to respect rights and protect children them from violence. The perpetrators of child sexual assaults should be report to police and the community members should cooperate to give witness of perpetration to the court of law.

#### **CONSENT**

As per international standard or university standard, parent(s) written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

#### **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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