



The influence of intimate partner violence on children's growth at Liwale Township in Liwale District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of intimate partner violence (IPV) on children's growth and development at Liwale Township, Liwale District-Tanzania. Specifically, it assessed the causes and consequences of IPV on children's growth, as well as strategies for reducing IPV in the community. The study was guided by social learning theory and control theory. The study adopted a case study design. This paper employed purposive sampling, particularly criterion sampling, to select participants with direct experience of IPV. Snowball sampling was also used to identify additional participants through referrals from social workers and trusted community leaders; a total sample size of 30 participants was targeted. Data were collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The study revealed that the primary causes of IPV in Liwale Township were excessive alcohol consumption, poverty, and low levels of education. Additional significant triggers included women's refusal to have sex with their spouses and women leaving home without their husband's permission. These factors collectively contribute to the occurrence and persistence of IPV within the community. The findings showed that IPV has severe negative consequences on children's growth and development. These include emotional distress, sleep disturbances, mental health decline, poor academic performance, increased levels of depression, anxiety, stress, behavioural disorders, and, in some cases, suicidal ideation. Furthermore, children raised in violent households often learn and model violent or abusive behaviours. The study concludes that the causes of intimate partner violence (IPV) are common and can be effectively managed by all stakeholders. However, the effects of IPV on children are devastating with some parents becoming sources of misery rather than caregivers for their children. The study recommends that Social Welfare Officers (SWOs) should conduct targeted workshops to educate villagers on the risks associated with IPV and the available legal protections. Furthermore, the government should strengthen collaboration with Social Welfare Officers (SWO), One-Stop Centre Officers (OSC) and Gender and Children's Desk (GCD) to pool resources for community development and the protection of human rights.

Keywords: Children's Growth, Causes of DV, Consequence of DV, Intimate Partner Violence

I. INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), encompasses physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, or economic abuse within intimate relationships, remains a critical global public health and human rights concern, particularly in households with children. Exposure to such violence disrupts children's developmental pathways, leading to short- and long-term impairments in emotional regulation, social interactions, cognitive functioning, and physical health.

Globally, a number of studies have indicated that, children witnessing IPV experience trauma comparable to direct victimization, increasing risks for anxiety, depression, aggression, cognitive delays, and intergenerational violence perpetuation (Doroudchi et al., 2023; Forke et al., 2019; Rangarasu et al., 2024). In most developed countries like USA and Canada, recent research highlights associations between IPV exposure and developmental delays, poor academic performance, and social challenges (Doswell et al, 2025). For example, in the USA, IPV exposure correlates with heightened mental health issues and behavioral problems in children, persisting into adolescence (Black et al, 2025). Similarly, Canadian investigations show rising rates of adjustment difficulties due to child exposure to IPV (Doswell et al, 2025). In Europe, literature emphasizes long-term mental health risks and resilience factors amid IPV. For instance, UK-based study reveals that children exposed to various forms of domestic violence (DV) exhibit emotional well-being deficits, mental health issues, and behavioral problems over time (Skafida & Devaney, 2023). Equally, German and Swedish research aligns, noting moderate associations between intimate partner violence (IPV) and depressive disorders or self-harm, underscoring the need for ecological interventions (Global Burden of Disease, 2023).

In middle income countries, IPV prevalence ties to cultural and economic factors, with children showing depressive symptoms, insecurity, and posttraumatic stress (Al Majali, & Alsrehan, 2023). For example, Cuban



perspectives highlight family violence's disruptive effects on personality development and emotional spheres. In Saudi Arabia, patriarchal structures exacerbate violence, impacting children's psychological and cognitive growth (Shen & Xu, 2023). In some Asian countries, including Philippines, Singapore, and Indonesia, reveal cultural norms and economic stressors as key drivers, with exposed children facing reduced concentration, learning motivation, and IQ declines (Patel, 2025; Vaishnav et al., 2023). Indian studies link IPV to hindered cognitive development and educational attainment (Iyus, 2022).

IPV is a widespread problem throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa with some of the highest global rates appearing in Southern and East Africa. For example, the observation in Rwanda identified physical abuse, emotional abuse and intimidation, verbal abuse as primary manifestations, with national spouse violence rising from 40% in 2015 to 46% in 2020 amid broader socioeconomic pressures (Mukasano & Mugiraneza, 2023). In Uganda cultural attitudes normalizing violence within patriarchal structures compound these risks, as documented in analyses linking IPV to gender inequality and household stress (Dadi et al., 2024). In Kenya, across all counties, bullying was indicated to be as common form of gender-based violence (GBV) as threats of physical violence (52 percent), with girls more affected than boys (Otieno, 2020).

Although the problem of IPV has been widespread in Tanzania, some studies conducted in Lindi Region such as by United States Agency for International Development [USAID] (2016) and United Republic of Tanzania [URT] (2011) focused just on IPV without integrating it with influence on children's growth. There are a number of causes of IPV depending on the situation and circumstances in a particular time when violence happens. Here are some causes but not limited to these situations: Male partners who drink alcohol are more likely to experience all forms of violence. Also, women who have witnessed their fathers beating their mothers; many household members and polygamous marriages are more likely to experience violence. In addition, women from middle income households were more likely to experience sexual violence compared to women from poorer households (Kinyondo et al, 2021). Other factors mentioned were excessive use of alcohol, low level of education, lack of employment, lack of awareness of the legal rights and policies (Rugimbana, 2019).

A study conducted in Meru, Karatu and Monduli districts-Tanzania asserted that harmful traditional practices and other cultural reasons were mentioned as the main cause of IPV among the respondents (Magombola & Shimba, 2021). Women's attitudes towards wife-beating were based on the respondents' acceptance of wife beating under at least one out of five circumstances—she goes out without telling him, she neglects the children, she argues with him, she refuses to have sex with him, and she burns the food (Vyas et al, 2018). IPV has long lasting psychological effects such as depression and low self-esteem, which further compromise the victim's ability to acquire a basic standard of well-being (Rugimbana, 2019). IPV occurs in all cultures although the intensity and type of violence may differ from one culture, social class, level of education and geographical location to another. The problem is that IPV continues to be highly prevalent in Tanzania despite efforts in legal and policy interventions at local and international level. This study presents the findings on causes of IPV consequence of IPV, and curbing IPV by conducting seminars of raising awareness to community members and establishment of by-laws as the strategies of reducing IPV.

Despite global and national efforts to safeguard children's rights, IPV remains a persistent challenge that disrupts the foundational stages of child development. In Tanzania, and specifically within the Liwale Township, children are increasingly exposed to domestic strife, yet the specific local triggers and the depth of the growth impact remain insufficiently documented. The sources of IPV in such contexts often include socio-economic stressors such as poverty and unemployment, cultural norms perpetuating gender inequalities, alcohol abuse, and unequal power dynamics within households, which collectively fuel family conflicts and perpetuate cycles of abuse (Kinyondo & Joseph, 2021; Magombola & Shimba, 2021). Yet, there is a critical gap in understanding the localized sources of violence unique to the socio-economic fabric of Liwale Township.

Furthermore, the consequences on children's growth are profound and long-lasting, manifesting as heightened anxiety, depression, cognitive impairments, school absenteeism or dropout, early pregnancies or marriages among girls, and increased risk of behavioral problems or future violence perpetration, all of which hinder their ability to thrive and contribute to societal well-being (Ramos de Oliveira et al., 2022; Harrison, 2021; Harris et al., 2025). Equally, although the consequences on children's cognitive and social growth are feared to be severe, local interventions often lack a data-driven foundation to effectively reduce the occurrence of such violence. In this sense, without identifying these specific drivers and outcomes, children in Liwale Township risk long-term developmental stagnation, and the cycle of violence may continue unabated. This study, therefore, sought to investigate the drivers, growth costs, and mitigation strategies for IPV in Liwale Township. This study, specifically assessed the determinants of IPV in Liwale Township, developmental impacts of IPV on children in Liwale Township and the community-based mitigation strategies in Liwale Township.

1.1 Research Questions

The presented study was guided by the following questions.



- i. What are the primary socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological factors contributing to intimate partner violence in Liwale Township?
- ii. How does exposure to intimate partner violence impact the physical, psychological, and developmental well-being of children in Liwale Township?
- iii. What community-based mechanisms and strategic interventions can be effectively implemented to reduce the prevalence of intimate partner violence and support victims in Liwale Township?

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (SLT) is the school of behavioral thought that looks at both the internal and external thought processes (Pingley, 2017). SLT was propounded by Albert Bandura (Bandura, 1977). Through social learning theory, we see the importance of modeling and communication (verbal and non-verbal) for children and their developmental growth. Through much research and experimentation, it was determined that children often will model the behaviors of those around them. In a famous study by Albert Bandura in 1961, he studied children at the Stanford University Nursery School using a doll named “Bobo” (Bandura et al., 1961). During this study, children watched researchers acting aggressively towards the doll then, when children were left alone with the doll, they modeled that behavior and extended that aggression towards other toys (Bandura et al., 1961). The SLT was established to show how children often will model the behavior of those around them particularly the parents/guardians. In this perspective children exposed to IPV do model the behavior of their parents/guardians and ultimately being affected emotionally, mentally, psychologically and academically.

This theory is particularly apt for guiding the study because it directly addresses how exposure to parental or guardian violence influences children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth in settings like Liwale Township, where community norms and limited external interventions may reinforce such modeling. By framing IPV as a learned process, SLT justifies the study's focus on children's development as not merely a byproduct of trauma but as an active replication of observed power imbalances.

2.2 Control Theory

Control Theory (CT) is based on the assumption that many family conflicts result from an individual's need to obtain and maintain power and control within a relationship(s). The motivation underlying the abuser's behavior is the power and control that she or he is able to exert over other members of the family (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Stark, 2007). The more powerful members of families (for instance fathers, parents, husbands) often use threats, force or violence to obtain compliance from less powerful family members (for example children, wives) (Goode, 1971). Threats, force, and violent behaviors are intended to prohibit the less powerful members of the family from engaging in behavior that the controlling individual does not want, while establishing a demand for “desirable” behaviors to occur (Goode, 1971).

In addition, the abuser may feel the need to gain control over how other family members think and feel (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Stark, 2007). Abusers, in an effort to maintain control over other members of the family, may use many forms of intimidation, such as coercion, isolation, economic abuse and denial of personal blame (Pence & Paymar, 1993). The victim(s) typically learn how to respond or challenge the abuse/abuser and it may become too overwhelming or dangerous for the victim(s). As a result, the victim(s) may begin to modify his/her/their own behavior, slowly giving up control in order to survive and avoid continued abuse. Isolating the victim from any social contact may be the most harmful form of intimidation the abuser uses because the possibility of escape for the victim(s) is greatly reduced in the absence of social support (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Stark, 2007). In this perspective, CT is showing how the less powerful in the family can be controlled by the powerful and hence that becomes the source of IPV. The less powerful, for example children, can be affected much and find means to escape the threat and become street children, drop out from schools and other emotional and physical effects.

Both SLT and CT synergize effectively. This dual framework strengthens the study's rigor by combining psychological and sociological insights, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of IPV's sources, effects, and solutions in Liwale Township. For instance, SLT-informed assessments of consequences can be enriched by CT's focus on power, leading to holistic interventions like family therapy that both re-model positive behaviors and equalize power structures. This choice aligns with interdisciplinary approaches in IPV research, ensuring the study contributes meaningfully to Tanzanian child protection efforts while being grounded in established theory.



III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a case study design as the most appropriate technique in guiding the study. A case study design enables the researcher to rely on multiple sources of data for triangulation purposes.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Liwale District of Lindi Region. The study area was specified at Liwale Township, this area was selected because this area reflects the unique challenges of a developing semi-urban center. It experiences a "culture of silence" and low help-seeking behavior common in Southern Tanzania, where only a fraction of victims seeks formal services. This makes it an ideal site to study the effectiveness of current local government strategies and "gender desks" in reducing violence.

3.3 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised children (aged 10–17) exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), surviving parents or guardians, Social Welfare Officers (SWO), One-Stop Centre Officer (OSC), Gender and Children's Desk (GCD), Village Executive Officer (VEO) and primary school head teacher (PSHT) within Liwale Township.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

To recruit participants, the study employed a two-pronged non-probability sampling approach. First, purposive sampling, specifically criterion sampling, was used to select individuals with direct, firsthand experience of the phenomenon, ensuring that participants met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Second, snowball sampling was utilized to identify and recruit "hidden" victims of IPV through referrals from initial participants, such as social workers and trusted community leaders. This method was particularly effective for accessing vulnerable or hard-to-reach populations who might not otherwise be identified through conventional sampling techniques (Naderifar et al., 2017). Based on established qualitative standards for case studies, a total sample size of 30 participants was targeted. This included children and parents/guardians and 10 key informants (Social Welfare Officers, Police Gender and Children's Desk officers, and primary school teachers), ensuring a diverse range of perspectives on IPV within the community.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data saturation was achieved when continuous data collection and analysis revealed no new themes, categories, or significant insights from subsequent interviews, indicating that redundant information was being collected (Malterud et al, 2016). Primary data were collected through a dual-method approach comprising semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), designed to triangulate individual narratives with collective communal insights. The study employed purposive sampling to select 30 participants, specifically 15 children, 10 parents/guardians, and 5 key informants: including SWOs, OSC, GCD, VEOs and PSHT. This sample size was calibrated to achieve data saturation while facilitating a granular exploration of the drivers of violence and potential mitigation strategies. To complement these individual accounts, FGDs were convened with community leaders to examine the socio-cultural ramifications of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) from a shared perspective.

3.6 Data Analysis

The resulting qualitative data were subjected to Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, thematic review, defining and naming themes, and final report production. This systematic analytical process is highly effective for identifying recurring patterns and extracting nuanced meanings from diverse participant testimonies, ensuring the findings are both robust and contextually grounded.

The trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation (using multiple data sources like children and police officers), through providing "thick descriptions" of the Liwale township context so others can determine if findings apply elsewhere. And finally, through keeping an "audit trail" of all raw data and coding decisions. Regarding ethical considerations, written consent will be sought from guardians, and verbal assent from children. For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality pseudonyms was used (for example, respondent A) to protect the identities. To ensure the interview process does not re-traumatize children. A referral system to local counselors in Liwale was in place (World Health Organization, 2016).



3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance and permission were secured prior to fieldwork. Informed written consent was sought from adult participants and guardians, while verbal assent was obtained from child participants (World Health Organization [WHO], 2016). To protect participant anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in place of real names. Furthermore, to prevent potential re-traumatization during interviews, a structured referral system to local counselors in Liwale was established and maintained throughout the study (WHO, 2016).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This section reviews the determinants, impacts, and community responses to intimate partner violence (IPV). Respondents identified key causes of IPV such as overdrinking, poverty, low levels of education, women's refusal to have sex with their spouses, and women going out without permission. Exposure to IPV was found to affect children's emotional well-being, sleep patterns, and mental health, while also influencing their education, social life, and longer-term developmental trajectories. In response, community-based mitigation strategies in Liwale Township include public education on the root causes and harmful effects of IPV, conflict-resolution approaches that engage both partners, the use of village children's councils to raise awareness of children's rights, and the empowerment of village committees specifically tasked with addressing IPV and gender-based violence.

4.1 Determinants of Intimate Partner Violence

This subsection discusses the causes of IPV. Respondents identified several causes of IPV, including overdrinking, poverty, low levels of education, women's refusal to have sex with their spouses, and women going out without permission.

4.1.1 IPV Caused by a Partner who Overdrinks Alcohol

Excessive alcohol consumption by a partner was identified as one of the major causes of intimate partner violence (IPV). The findings showed that in some households, when a parent drinks heavily, the intoxicated parent often becomes violent, slapping, hitting, beating, or choking women and children. In addition, children are sometimes subjected to loud shouting, which disturbs their sleep. These accounts were corroborated by Social Welfare Officers, who reported the following:

Overdrinking is a primary contributor to intimate partner violence (IPV) within society. When parents become intoxicated, they often experience diminished emotional regulation and begin to misbehave. These individuals tend to exhibit more frequent verbal outbursts after consuming alcohol, as liquor heightens the likelihood of aggression, anger, and short-tempered reactions (Social Welfare Officers, personal communication, March 11, 2026).

Similar findings were observed during an interview with an officer from the One-Stop Centre, who emphasized that excessive alcohol consumption is a primary cause of IPV. The officer reported the following:

...there is a high prevalence of excessive alcohol consumption among couples in the ward. In many cases, one or both partners show signs of chronic alcohol dependency, which often results in serious neglect of domestic responsibilities. This addiction frequently leads to the failure to fulfill familial obligations and acts as a major trigger for recurring household conflicts and interpersonal tension (One-Stop Centre Officer, personal communication, March 11, 2026).

It is a common experience in many communities that some individuals become slaves to liquor. When drunk, they tend to lose their senses and misbehave by causing trouble to others (Babcock & Iyican, 2022). Likewise, such individuals often exhibit the same behaviour in their households. Some become irresponsible towards their families, and this kind of behaviour makes intimate partner violence (IPV) inevitable. The findings of this study contradict the social control theory, which posits that individuals need to obtain and maintain power and control within relationships. In this case, either parent can become a slave to liquor: whether the man or the woman. However, in most families with alcoholic parents, male parents are the primary victims of alcohol. Some studies have shown that alcohol affects cognitive and physical functions, thereby reducing self-control and leaving individuals less capable of negotiating non-violent resolutions to conflicts within relationships (Magombola & Shimba, 2021).

Similarly, Kinyondo et al (2021) pointed out that women with male partners who drink alcohol are more likely to experience all forms of violence. However, women should remain at home to take care of the children and the household; otherwise, if they go to bars to drink alcohol with their husbands, this can lead to IPV and ultimately affect the children's growth.



4.1.2 Poverty as a Source of Domestic

The study found that poor living conditions in some families create significant pressure and stress on parents, which may lead to intimate partner violence (IPV). This observation was corroborated by Social Welfare Officers, who stated:

...one of the significant drivers of IPV in Liwale Town Ward is economic instability and the lack of sustainable income for one or both partners. When financial precariousness is concentrated on the woman, it creates a state of total economic dependency. This power imbalance is frequently exploited by the male partner to exert control. In such cases, the husband may withhold essential resources or neglect familial needs as a form of disciplinary control. Furthermore, the woman's lack of financial contribution is often weaponized against her through verbal degradation, where her unemployment is used to justify mistreatment and marginalize her role within the household (Social Welfare Officers, personal communication, March 13, 2026).

This indicates that a lack of sustainable household income often generates chronic economic stress, which acts as a known catalyst for domestic instability and conflict. While financial security does not insulate a family from all problems, its absence significantly increases a household's vulnerability to various social crises. Sometimes a man's income alone may not meet all the family's needs. In such situations, both husband and wife need to work hard for the survival of the family. When only one partner generates income while the other does not, conflict may arise between them. In this regard, studies suggest that women need to be financially empowered, as financial empowerment reduces their economic dependence on their partners. This can decrease their level of submission and consequently reduce the risk of triggering IPV (Kinyondo et al., 2021).

4.1.3 Low Level of Education of Some Individuals

Data from the interviews suggest that traditional belief systems and limited awareness of human rights significantly contribute to intimate partner violence (IPV) in Liwale Township. In this community, corporal punishment is often culturally justified as a necessary tool for child discipline rather than an act of aggression. Furthermore, some women reported a normalized perception of marital violence, viewing it as an inherent part of domestic life. This indicates that deeply ingrained social norms rather than a lack of intelligence shape the acceptance of violence within households. This was confirmed by a primary school head teacher who stated:

...in this ward, limited education and awareness have led to the normalization of intimate partner violence (IPV) among women. Education is a vital necessity for the community, as the current lack of knowledge prevents residents from understanding their legal rights (Primary School Head Teacher, personal communication, March 12, 2026).

This highlights that basic education on social issues is essential in any community and does not necessarily require many years of formal schooling. Some individuals only need short courses or awareness-raising seminars lasting between three days and one week to become conscious of various issues affecting their social lives. For instance, education on human rights and the rights of women and children can be effectively delivered through short-term awareness campaigns organized by stakeholders. Studies conducted in Kenya and Tanzania have linked low levels of education to an increased risk of IPV. Societal factors such as the justification of wife-beating and limited media exposure reinforce the normalization of violence (Tadesse et al., 2025). Similarly, justification of physical IPV by men in East Africa was found to be higher among those with no or low education. Uneducated individuals are more likely to adhere to harmful cultural perceptions of male control over partners and often lack exposure to gender equity norms (Demissie et al., 2025).

4.1.4 Women Refusal to have Sex with their Spouses

Refusal of sexual intimacy was reported in many households, particularly when a spouse was under the influence of alcohol or when partners failed to communicate effectively. It was reported that coercive sexual demands and forced sexual acts are widely practiced and often considered normal. This issue was clearly articulated in one of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) held at Kilipwike Village:

...forced sexual encounters and demands for sex against a woman's will are pervasive issues in the local area. Despite their frequency, these matters are rarely treated with the necessary seriousness. If a victim reports the issue to elders, she is typically advised to tolerate the situation and keep it confidential for the sake of family unity (FGD, March 13, 2026).

The quotation above suggests that women's refusal to engage in sex as demanded by their spouses is often influenced by differences in sexual needs and motivations between men and women. While men may require only physical opportunity, women generally need emotional connection or a conducive atmosphere. However, in some cases, women refuse sex because their spouses fail to fulfill family needs. In such situations, women spend considerable time worrying about meeting household responsibilities, which negatively affects their mood for sexual



intimacy. These findings are consistent with those of Ikwara et al (2025) who reported that sexual violence within IPV includes forced intercourse or coercion. Higher odds of such violence are linked to partner alcohol consumption and attitudes that justify violence when a wife refuses sex. Refusals often occur when spouses are intoxicated or demand sex without prior communication. Similarly, studies conducted in the Tanzanian context note that forced sexual acts in marriage are under-reported or downplayed due to cultural expectations that women should tolerate such demands for the sake of family stability. Women are sometimes advised, or themselves view, such acts as part of their marital duty (Luoga et al., 2025).

4.1.5 Women Going Out Without Permission

According to the findings, some women respond to domestic tension by visiting friends or neighbours for short periods without informing their husbands. These unexplained absences often generate feelings of mistrust, which can escalate into incidents of intimate partner violence (IPV). Participants in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) at Makonjiganga Village described the situation as follows:

...one identified cause of IPV is the practice of some women leaving the home without notifying or obtaining permission from their partners. In some instances, a woman may depart early in the morning to visit friends and remain away until late evening. Such unannounced absences often foster suspicion and mistrust in the husband, which can ultimately escalate into violence (FGD, March 13, 2026).

Social norms in Liwale Township emphasize a centralized household hierarchy in which the husband holds ultimate authority. Within this cultural framework, respect and obedience are traditionally expected to be shown to the male head of the family, whose decisions are considered final. Women are expected to remain at home to manage childcare, and any departure requires prior notification or explicit permission from their spouses. Deviating from these expectations is perceived as misconduct that often triggers conflict. Consequently, a husband may resort to physical discipline, such as beating or slapping, or verbal abuse to punish perceived disrespect. These findings align with Control Theory, which posits that individuals may use violence to obtain and maintain power within a relationship. In this context, the husband is positioned as the absolute controller of the household; submissiveness is expected from all family members, and any resistance is viewed as a provocation that justifies violence.

Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have noted that women going out without permission or notifying their partners can trigger suspicion and mistrust, leading to violence. This is largely because patriarchal norms position husbands as the final decision-makers who require obedience from their wives (Nakie et al., 2025; Tadesse et al., 2025). Similarly, IPV remains a pervasive issue in Tanzania. According to the 2022 Demographic and Health Survey, approximately 40% of women (ranging from 38.9% to 41.1%) have experienced such violence. This incidence is statistically correlated with the socio-cultural normalization of physical discipline and the prevalence of male controlling behaviours. As Luoga et al (2025) and Nyongoli et al., (2025) observe, traditional norms in various regions often characterize a woman's autonomous social participation as a provocative act, thereby significantly increasing the risk of domestic conflict. These findings support the cultural expectation in Tanzanian and East African contexts that women must notify or seek permission from their husbands before going out. Failure to do so is seen as disrespect to male headship and may invite violence as a means of maintaining control and family harmony. Awareness and education interventions could play a vital role in challenging these deeply rooted norms.

4.2 Developmental Impacts of IPV on Children

This section discusses the various ways in which intimate partner violence (IPV) affects children. It focuses specifically on emotional well-being, sleep patterns, and mental health. In addition, the study analyses how exposure to violence influences children's education, social life, and future developmental trajectories.

4.2.1 Emotional Feelings

Witnessing IPV has profound long-term effects on children in the community. According to participants, children raised in violent home environments often lack the foundational confidence and psychological security necessary for healthy adult development. The data suggest that a peaceful and conducive home environment is a critical prerequisite for a child's future determination and professional success. Findings indicate that domestic violence creates a fear-based dynamic that silences children, making them reluctant to request necessary school supplies or seek personal support. This lack of communication often results in educational deprivation, as children eventually lose interest in their studies when their material needs remain consistently unmet. Beyond material concerns, the frequent witnessing of IPV replaces parental love with hostility, severely damaging the child's emotional development and long-term relationship with their guardians. In practice, children often exhibit significant hesitation in their relationships with the abusive parent. They frequently experience profound internal conflict: while they may still feel love for the parent, they simultaneously harbour fear and resentment due to the pain inflicted upon them and other family members.



These findings are consistent with Social Learning Theory, which posits that children model the behaviours of those in their immediate environment. Consequently, a parent's aggressive or harsh actions significantly shape a child's behavioural development. The findings mirror a study conducted in Uganda, which found that childhood exposure to violence including witnessing intimate partner violence (IPV) is significantly associated with increased mental distress, fear, suicidal ideation, and emotional instability. Children in such environments often internalize their fear and avoid expressing vulnerability. Furthermore, they frequently emulate the aggressive behaviours modeled by their parents (Kisaakye et al., 2024). Similarly, a study conducted in Tanzania revealed that high exposure to domestic violence leads to significant mental health challenges, persistent fear, low self-esteem, and fractured parent-child bonds. The research indicates that witnessing parental violence contributes to emotional instability in children and creates notable hesitation in their willingness to seek external support (Mkinga et al., 2025).

4.2.2 Sleep Disturbances

Regarding sleep disturbances that happen to children, the study found that these issues are frequently a direct consequence of intimate partner violence (IPV). In environments characterized by extreme domestic chaos, children often resort to sleeping outside their homes to escape harsh punishment from parents or guardians. This reality was underscored during a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in Naluleo Village, where participants noted:

...a study on local street children found that nearly half of those surveyed (10 out of 15) were wandering in the streets due to familial discord. Participants noted that when parents separate and the father brings a new partner into the home, the environment often becomes hostile for the children. To avoid these difficult living conditions, children frequently choose to leave home and survive on the streets (FGD, March 13, 2026).

The findings imply that healthy child growth requires a favourable environment, including adequate nutrition and quality sleep. Children need peace and tranquility to develop properly; even during sleep hours, they should not experience disturbances. Shouting and noise during sleeping time constitute noise pollution, which negatively affects children's growth and mental development. Broader East African analyses note that adverse home environments resulting from violence often drive children to seek refuge elsewhere, such as on the streets. This leads to poor sleep quality, unmet growth needs due to lack of tranquility, and negative impacts on mental development (Kisaakye et al., 2024; Tadesse et al., 2025). These effects often manifest early through behavioural changes, including excessive irritability, emotional distress, sleep problems, fear of being alone, immature behaviour, and difficulties with language development (Harrison, 2021). Optimal child development therefore depends on a supportive home environment that ensures proper nutrition and undisturbed sleep. Domestic violence frequently disrupts this environment, pushing children onto the streets where they experience inadequate sleep and stunted growth (Kisaakye et al., 2024; Tadesse et al., 2025). Consequently, providing a peaceful home is essential for meeting children's fundamental developmental needs.

4.2.3 Mental Health Decline

Exposure to IPV is a significant driver of mental health decline in children. These effects manifest as anxiety, cognitive disorders, depression, and suicidal ideation. An officer from the One-Stop Centre highlighted this correlation, noting:

...the psychological impact on a child who witnesses regular parental disputes and physical violence is profound. Victims frequently suffer from lowered self-esteem, diminished confidence, and persistent anxiety, which can lead to the development of severe mental health issues over time (One-Stop Centre Officer, personal communication, March 11, 2026)

Children exposed to IPV are forced to navigate a hostile domestic environment defined by frequent verbal threats and the tangible evidence of physical aggression. Repeatedly witnessing bodily harm to a parent or the destruction of household property induces a state of persistent hyper-vigilance, eventually resulting in profound psychological impairment. Research conducted in Kenya supports this, establishing that children exposed to IPV exhibit significant mental health challenges such as nightmares alongside feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, and depression (Kaleka & Onsarigo, 2025). Similarly, a study in Rwanda observed that offspring exposed to parental IPV showed an increased likelihood of developing anxiety and depression, directly attributable to the traumatic impact of witnessing violence (Bahati et al., 2024).

4.2.4 IPV Affects Academic Issues of Children

Findings reveal that a violent household environment directly undermines a child's educational stability. Nocturnal conflicts between guardians frequently result in sleep deprivation, causing children to arrive late or miss school entirely. Moreover, when IPV leads to family dissolution, children are often deprived of essential parental support, resulting in chronic truancy and eventual withdrawal from the education system. These educational gaps are



profoundly damaging, as the loss of academic opportunities significantly restricts a child's future career prospects and overall quality of life. One of the children (aged 16) shared the following:

"...I missed numerous classes due to the depression and anxiety I experienced while my parents were frequently fighting throughout the night. This led to my poor academic performance" (Survivor of IPV, personal communication, March 11, 2026).

Primary school head teacher corroborated these findings, stating:

...children who are subjected to excessive labor, verbal aggression, food insecurity, and physical harm often develop a pattern of tardiness or chronic truancy (Primary School Head Teacher, personal communication, March 12, 2026).

Many children living in high-conflict homes exhibit poor academic performance. Their education is disrupted by stress and a lack of focus, as they are often preoccupied with the volatile environment at home. Systematic reviews of adolescents in Africa indicate that IPV and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) are significant risk factors for school dropout (Rogers & Ashworth, 2024). Broadly, empirical evidence demonstrates that IPV significantly reduces educational attainment, with emotional abuse having the most profound negative impact on student outcomes.

4.2.5 Effects of IPV on the Social Lives of Children

The study found that children subjected to verbal abuse and insults from parents or guardians experienced increased incidences of depression, anxiety, stress, and behavioral disorders. When the home environment becomes dangerous or hostile, some female children may view early marriage as a means of escape. This trend was evidenced by a 20-year-old respondent who shared:

"...I opted for marriage to find relief from my stepmother's abuse; I was very young at the time. My stepmother would beat me, insult me, and subject me to various forms of humiliation. I felt worthless and decided to seek consolation outside our household. That is when I found a man to marry me" (Survivor of IPV, personal communication, March 11, 2026).

These findings were corroborated by a Gender and Children's Desk, who observed:

...one of the effects of IPV in our village is the prevalence of early pregnancies and child marriages. Households characterized by frequent IPV make children feel unsafe. Consequently, they often abandon their homes in search of peace. During this transition, young girls frequently end up cohabitating with men. These girls often enter marriages unwillingly and bear children in impoverished environments, leading to a cycle of hardship for both the mother and her offspring (Gender and Children's Desk, personal communication, March 12, 2026).

Ideally, a stable family raises children in a nurturing environment where parents resolve conflicts constructively. A family plagued by severe violence becomes chaotic, profoundly affecting children during their formative years. Just as adults avoid instability, children instinctively seek peace and tranquility. If a home is defined by stress and frustration, children may choose to flee; this often leads to them living on the streets or, in the case of girls, falling into early pregnancy and forced marriage. Furthermore, early marriage itself can become a secondary source of IPV, as the young bride may lack the maturity or agency to navigate marital dynamics and decision-making. These findings align with research by Harrison (2021), which indicates that adults exposed to violence as children are at a significantly higher risk of substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, criminal behavior, suicidal tendencies, and secondary enuresis (bedwetting) compared to those raised in non-violent households.

4.2.6 Effects on Children's Future Growth

The findings further reveal that children exposed to IPV often suffer long-term consequences that persist into adulthood. Children frequently normalize these behaviors as a coping mechanism; for instance, boys may grow up believing that domestic violence is an acceptable behavior, while girls may come to believe that being subjected to abuse is a normal or deserved part of a relationship. A primary school head teacher clarified this issue as follows:

...IPV affects children's future relationships with others. When a child witnesses frequent violence in their household, it inevitably impacts their adult relationship with their spouse. Violence becomes normalized to them because they experienced it throughout their childhood; it becomes part and parcel of their life, deeply ingrained in their mindset (Primary School Head Teacher, personal communication, March 12, 2026).

These findings imply that a child's early years are critical for the development of healthy emotional stability in later life. Children raised in abusive environments may either adopt these violent behaviors themselves or develop pervasive feelings of cowardice and fear. Research suggests that boys who observe their fathers abusing their mothers are at a significantly higher risk of abusing their own wives. Similarly, Kinyondo et al. (2021) found that women who witnessed their fathers abusing their mothers are more likely to experience various forms of violence in their own adult lives compared to those from non-violent homes. These findings align with Social Learning Theory, which



emphasizes that children model the behaviors of those around them. In this context, both verbal and non-verbal communications between parents as well as the direct interactions between parents and children serve as blueprints for the child's future emotional health and interpersonal conduct. If the modeled behavior is violent, the child is likely to replicate that cycle in their own future family.

4.3 Community-Based Mitigation Strategies

This sub-section explores the various strategies and mechanisms employed to prevent and curb IPV within the study area. In Liwale Township, diverse stakeholders have initiated efforts to address this issue, including: educating the public on the root causes and detrimental effects of IPV, utilizing a conflict-resolution approach by engaging both partners involved in IPV cases, leveraging village children's councils to promote awareness of children's rights and empowering village committees specifically tasked with handling IPV and gender-based violence.

4.3.1 Providing Education and Raising Community Awareness

The findings indicate that ward and village officers utilize various methods and specialists to educate the community. Village assembly meetings serve as a primary platform to sensitize community members and children in particular regarding the impacts of IPV. Furthermore, social welfare and community development experts from the district or ward levels frequently visit villages to conduct educational sessions. Social Welfare Officers officer elaborated on these efforts:

...IPV is a sensitive issue in our community. Consequently, the village council has established IPV as a standing agenda item in both closed sessions and regular quarterly village assembly meetings. Through these forums, villagers are reminded of the impact of IPV on community members, especially children. Education is provided by community development officers, social welfare officers, and the police through the One-Stop Centre (Social Welfare Officers, personal communication, March 12, 2026).

The testimony above suggests that officials in Liwale Township and its surrounding villages are committed to significantly reducing, and ideally eliminating, IPV. Reaching out to the grassroots level to provide education on how violence disrupts child development is a vital strategy. It is particularly encouraging that village government councils have institutionalized this issue by making IPV a permanent agenda item, which serves as a constant deterrent to potential perpetrators. Research supports the necessity of involving specialists in these educational efforts. According to Kivuvani et al. (2025), the transition from general community discussions to "expert-led" sessions involving Social Welfare and Police departments is a documented trend in Kenya and Tanzania. This shift ensures that community members gain not only social awareness but also essential legal literacy regarding their rights and the consequences of violence.

4.3.2 Using the Mediation Approach by Meeting with Partners Involved in IPV

Through the Social Welfare Department, partners involved in severe IPV cases specifically those reported to official channels are summoned for intervention. The Social Welfare office collaborates closely with the One-Stop Centre (OSC) to provide counseling. These sessions emphasize the importance of avoiding conflict by highlighting the detrimental effects of violence and the extent to which children suffer as a result. In cases where the violence is severe and the perpetrator refuses to take responsibility, Social Welfare officers, in coordination with the police, initiate legal proceedings. A Social Welfare Officers explained the process:

...this Social Welfare office receives numerous complaints regarding IPV. When we receive such a complaint, our first step is to issue a summons to the partners in conflict. They are required to come to the office for counseling, where we educate them on the side effects of IPV, particularly its impact on children. In certain cases, one or both partners are sued in court, which serves as a primary legal instrument for resolution (Social Welfare Officers, personal communication, March 12, 2026).

The use of mediation suggests that Liwale Township prioritizes counseling as a primary conflict-management tool. These interventions typically occur at the Village Executive Officer (VEO) or OSC offices. However, when counseling fails to reconcile the household or curb the violence, formal legal measures are pursued. Despite its local popularity, experts raise several concerns regarding this approach: Research suggests that mediation assumes a level of "rough parity" between parties. Equally, studies highlight that many parties may not recognize certain behaviors as "violent" due to entrenched social norms. If mediators focus strictly on "improving communication," they may inadvertently overlook or minimize physical aggression by treating it as a "normal" relationship conflict rather than a criminal matter (Via Mediation Centre, 2023).

4.3.3 Using Children's Councils and Other Committees to Raise Awareness About IPV

Ward and village governments have taken proactive steps to curb IPV and other forms of violence. To prevent IPV, villages have established children's councils and utilized existing village committees as platforms for



intervention and education. Central to these efforts is the National Strategy to Eradicate Violence Against Women and Children, known in Swahili as *Mkakati wa Taifa wa Kutokomeza Ukatili dhidi ya Wanawake na Watoto (MTAKUWA)*. These platforms are used to raise awareness and highlight the detrimental effects of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), IPV, and Violence against Women (VAW). A Village Executive Officer (VEO) emphasized this by stating:

...the village government council provides education to individuals about IPV through various village committees and through MTAKUWA. The committee dealing with violence is particularly effective because it includes members from across the entire Village Council. This committee discusses the specific problems and challenges faced by households within the hamlets and identifies ways to overcome them (Village Executive Officer, personal communication, March 10, 2026).

The establishment of specialized committees and councils to educate and sensitize villagers is a strategic approach to curbing IPV. By fostering consciousness at the grassroots level regarding the causes and consequences of violence, community members may shift their attitudes and choose de-escalation over conflict. Furthermore, involving children's councils is a vital initiative; it instills values of empathy and love from a young age, potentially preventing the development of violent tendencies later in life. Beyond local initiatives, the government has announced various financial packages to support GBV organizations and their service users (Speed et al., 2020). However, challenges in implementation remain. A study in Mbeya in 2026 found that while 96% of the community could identify various forms of violence, only 35% were actually aware of the National Plan of Action to End Violence against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC/MTAKUWA). This suggests that while these committees exist, their specific mandates and the national strategies they represent are not yet fully understood by the general public (George & Mwampashe, 2026).

4.3.4 Establishment of Bylaws

In addition to other preventive measures, the formation and enforcement of village bylaws have been adopted as a strategy to reduce the occurrence of IPV. These local regulations are designed to mitigate the adverse effects of violence on the community, particularly the severe consequences for children. A village Executive Officer clarified the application of these laws:

...legal steps are taken against anyone involved in IPV. The villages have established bylaws, and they are enforced effectively. The police are involved when it becomes necessary to arrest perpetrators and initiate legal action (Village Executive Officer, personal communication, March 10, 2026).

The establishment of bylaws represents a significant step toward preventing IPV in Liwale Township. When a village effectively enforces these regulations, it can yield positive results in reducing violence. Many villagers tend to respect and obey their local leaders and the rules they implement. However, for these bylaws to be truly effective, legal experts must remain accessible to support victims through the judicial process. Contemporary literature and research offer the following insights into this study: villagers in Tanzania often place higher trust in their Village Executive Officers (VEOs) and Village Chairpersons than in the distant formal court system. Consequently, when a VEO enforces a bylaw, it serves as an immediate and powerful deterrent (George & Mwampashe, 2026). Conversely, some researchers argue that bylaws are only as effective as the individuals enforcing them. If village leaders hold patriarchal views, they may enforce bylaws selectively, occasionally dismissing "moderate" IPV as a private family matter rather than a legal violation (Magesa, 2024). Furthermore, survivors of GBV and other forms of violence require consistent assistance from lawyers to navigate the legal system and cope with the harmful consequences of abuse (Speed et al., 2020).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that the primary drivers of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in the study area specifically alcohol abuse, poverty, and limited access to education are manageable challenges that can be effectively mitigated through the concerted efforts of all stakeholders. A critical finding of this research is the devastating impact of IPV on the household; rather than fostering a nurturing environment, many parents have become the primary source of their children's distress. It is the fundamental obligation of parents, rather than external parties, to provide the essential parental and spiritual guidance children require for healthy development. Finally, the study highlights that ending this cycle of violence necessitates a collaborative approach, where community members particularly those directly affected by IPV work alongside government officials. The establishment and enforcement of village bylaws serve as a vital deterrent, as the threat of sanctions and legal consequence encourages greater compliance and communal order.



5.2 Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study recommends that Social Welfare Officers (SWOs) and other key stakeholders intensify their educational outreach within village communities. A well-informed public is significantly better equipped to recognize, prevent, and address the root causes of IPV and other forms of gender-based violence. While existing interventions have laid a helpful foundation, there is an urgent need for the development of more robust and diverse strategies to combat the problem comprehensively. To achieve this, the government should actively cooperate with Social Welfare Officers (SWO), One-Stop Centre Officers (OSC) and Gender and Children's Desk (GCD) for pooling resources, sharing technical expertise, and implementing sustainable solutions to overcome the multifaceted challenges of IPV.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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