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THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN CHILD PROTECTION IN NYAMAGANA MUNICIPALITY, MWANZA, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Despite the efforts done by the government and other public and private institutions in introducing and realising children's rights including protecting them from physical, emotional and psychological despoiled, children are still being violated in different areas within communities. Family as a primary institution can play a huge role in protecting children against any form of violation hence, presence of different incidence of child abuse made it necessary to conduct the study on the role of parents in child protection in the study area. The study was conducted in Nyamagana Municipality in Mwanza, Tanzania because it is among the major areas in which issues of child abuse are mostly observed. The area has a mixture of different people due to the presence of different economic activities including business and mining. The study was guided by the Psychosocial Child Development Theory. The study employed Cross-sectional research design. The study found that most of the respondents are less aware of children's rights. Furthermore, women in the study area are more obliged to raise their children but they fail to provide the required protection to them due to multiple responsibilities. The study also found excessive beating of children by their parents/guardian, denial to education and sexual abuse as the most reported child violations in the study area. Economic hardship, family separation and parents' misunderstandings were reported as challenges hindering roles of parents in protecting children in the study area. The study recommends that, public and private sectors as well as civil society's organisations to provide education to the community on the importance of protecting children.

Key words: Parents' role, child exploitation, children's rights, child abuse, child violation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Children are among vulnerable groups in the community who need to be protected for the betterment of the future generation. Children are perceived as 'lesser than' adults and passive dependents within families therefore, it is necessary to protect them against any kind of violation (Kisanga *et al.*, 2013). Protection is among other children's rights as stated in the Tanzania Child Development Policy of 1994 which was revised in the year 2008 and the Law of the Child Act of 2009. The revised version of the Child Development Policy of 2008 for example itemizes issues in relation to child protection as marriage at an early age, teenage pregnancies, care and upbringing of orphaned children, moral deterioration in the community, violence against children, child abuse and humiliation and worst forms of child labour (Guga *et al.*, 2009). In this case, child protection is a process of ensuring that children are secured or protected from any kind of maltreatment which affects their physical, psychological and mental capabilities.

Issues of maltreatment of children are being fought worldwide. According to DePanfilis (2006) private, government institutions and professionals such as law enforcement officers, health care providers, mental health professionals, educators, legal and court system personnel, and substitute



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care providers have been involved in efforts to prevent, identify, investigate and treat child abuse and neglect. Furthermore, the government of Tanzania has made different efforts to curb the situation including the introduction of Gender Desk to the focal points units within security institutions in which among other issues, it receives and investigates children's rights related complaints and provides legal aid services (Mashamba, 2016). However, the service does not have the financial or human resource capacity to fulfil its mandate so it is relying on external support to undertake its core function (Tanzania Child Rights Status Report, 2013). Tanzania has also ratified most major international human rights instruments on children. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) which was ratified on 10th July, 1991, (include the 2 optional protocols) the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (ACRWC) which was ratified on 9th May 2003 and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which was ratified on 21st August 1985. Tanzania has also been working to improve the legislative and policy environment on children's rights (Tanzania Child Right Forum, 2013).

Despite the legal frameworks including Policy and legislation on children's rights, literatures show that many children are still violated and most of the victims are female children (URT, 1996; Ng'ondi, 2015). According to UNICEF (2015) large number of boys and girls in Tanzania are affected by violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including child trafficking and child labour. A report on violence against children in Tanzania found that nearly one in three girls and one in seven boys experience some form of sexual violence before turning 18 (Tanzania Child Right Forum, 2013; The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), 2016). In additional to that, the study done by Ochieng on "The effect of child labour in Nyamagana Municipality" explains how children are involved in child labour and different harassment which are resulting from it. Efforts have been done by different public and private institutions, professionals and civil societies to curb the situation but, the existence of the problem in the study area explored the necessity of conducting the study on parents' role in child protection in the study area.

The study focused on parents because what is expected is that, family as a primary institution should be responsible in making sure that children (boys and girls) are protected from any form of violation and all evils that may harm them in one way or the other. This is due to the fact that, family members including parents are in a good position to observe physical, mental and psychological changes to their children. Therefore, family members specifically parents can easily recognise and take measures to different individuals who may abuse their children. It is in the family where a child can easily report when he/she receives any form of violation or abuse.

This being the case, the study intended to answer the following questions: Whether parents are aware of children's rights including children right to protection and its impacts to the child development? Whether they have a role to play on raising and protecting their children? And whether they face challenges in protecting their children? The results of this study will expose the position of parents in promoting and implementing children rights specifically children right to protection; provide a way for the government and other public and private institutions to determine the position of parents in fighting against child violence; and providing education on the importance of protecting children for the betterment of the future generation.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by the Psychosocial Child Development Theory which was developed by Eric Erikson's. Among aspects of the mentioned theory is that, during the early stage of life, it is important for children to receive consistent care for them to learn to trust people in the world around them (Eaker & Walters, 2002). Development continues as children grow, in the development process



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children face new struggles through which they learn new skills that serve them throughout life. In the growing process, children need to be cared by being protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence. Child Protection is very important for the child well-being. Violence or exploitation of any kind can undermine any other child well-being outcome, just as a safe environment provides children with the opportunity to develop across all the outcomes (World Vision International, 2014). Bad childhood experiences such as abuse, exploitation and neglect are believed to have long-term consequences on well-being and children behaviour. Among the consequences are difficulties in school/learning, poor health and problems in gaining employment and interacting socially, frequently for their whole lives (ibid).

The Psychosocial Child Development Theory is applicable in this study because it exposes the importance of protecting children from child violence which affects them mentally, spiritually and psychologically. A psychologically affected child faces difficulty in life because of fear which is resulting from the violence he/she had faced. Child violence if not well handled can possibly reduce the confidence level of children. The statement is supported by the study done by Vachon *et al.*, (2015) which shows that, child violence results into equivalent psychiatric and behavioural effects, ranging from anxiety and depression to rule-breaking and aggression. In order to rescue children from violence, different institutions including family needs to be involved. For this reason, there was a need to assess the role of parents in child protection for the betterment of the future generation.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Description of the Study Area

The study employed a cross sectional research design (survey). The design was selected based on the nature of the study and its objectives. According to Setia (2016), in a cross-sectional study, the investigator measures the outcome and the exposures in the study participants at the same time. In this study survey design was used to assess parents' role in protecting their children against child violation as among ways of implementing children's rights as stipulated in Tanzania Child Development Policy of 1994 which was revised in the year 2008 and the Law of the Child Act of 2009.

This study was conducted at Nyamagana Municipality in Mwanza region. The region is divided into seven districts namely Ukerewe, Magu, Kwimba, Sengerema, Missungwi, Ilemela and Nyamagana. The region headquarters is located in Nyamagana District. This study was conducted at Nyamagana Municipality because is among the major areas in which issues of child abuse are mostly observed due to concentration of population resulting from presence of different economic activities including business and mining.

3.2 Sampling Procedure

The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling procedures. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select key informants from the Ward and Village levels where by Ward executive officers, community development officers, Village executive officers, village chair persons and councillors were involved. On the other hand, Simple Random Sampling procedure was used to select 60 households. The reason of having the mentioned number of households was due to the homogeneity of the expected results whereby the answers from the respondents are likely to be comparable or identical. Moreover, the population in which the sample is drawn falls in the same geographical position and therefore they are having the same characteristics. According to Jager *et al.* (2017) homogeneity in research implies that the population/data/results are the same.



3.3 Methods and Tools for Data Collection

This study used both primary and secondary data. Desk review was used to get secondary information by reviewing different studies of the same to back up the primary data. On the other hand, interviews were used to collect the primary data from households and the key informants. The Questionnaire with close and open-ended questions were used to collect information at the household level while a checklist was used to gather information from the key informants. A tape recorder was used to record information from the key informants after being permitted to do so by them on the other hand; a diary was used to record the information from the respondents at the household level specifically when answering the open-ended questions.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data obtained through questionnaire were analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) where by tables with percentages were generated. On the other hand, content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data obtained from the key informants and respondents specifically those which were obtained through open ended questions within the questionnaires. The processes involved in content analysis were: transcription of the recorded data; returning the transcribed data to the participants specifically the key informants for verification; coding process; creating categories with the like codes and reading carefully and establish the cases.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Parents' Awareness on Children's Rights

The aim of this section is to determine whether parent know that children have their rights including being protected against any violence. It aims at establishing parents' understanding on children's rights. Data were obtained by asking the respondents to list children's rights they know. Then the answers were linked to the children's rights as stipulated in regulatory frameworks including Child Development Policy which formed the percentages (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of responses based on understanding of children rights

Child right	Percent (%)
Survival right	28.3
Development right	23.3
Protection right	28.3
Participation right	8.3
Non-discrimination right	11.7
Total	100.0

The findings in Table 1 reveal that, children's rights including children right to protection are either less or not known in the study area. The findings also provide evidence that, every mentioned child right is known by less than 30% of the population. The said statement is also supported by one of the key informants who reported that;

"Most of people in this area are less aware of the children's rights as well as the whole process of caring for them. To them, children should listen and act according to the parents will...the scariest thing is that, parents do not have much time for taking care of their children...." (Key Informant Interview, Igoma Ward).

This quotation matches with the findings in Table 1 which reveal that children rights are either not or less known by the respondents in the study area. The quote also reveals that, despite having either no or less education of children rights, parents do not have much time for taking care of their children. This needs efforts from the government and other private organisations including Civil Society



Organisations to educate the community on the children's rights and their importance to the child growth. This kind of education was demanded by some of parent in the study done by Remes *et al.* (2010) which state that;

"... parents expressed a need for knowledge and skills related to parenting so that they can address social influences to children both through family- and community-based strategies" (Remes *et al.*, 2010, Desk Review)

The issue of needing parental caring knowledge by some of parents as reported in the desk review quote shows the readiness of parents to be educated on parenting issues. One of the issues which is needed in parenting is knowing children rights therefore, capitalizing on the shown parents' demand of being educated can possibly be the solution of making sure that the community understands children's rights including children's right to protection. It has to be understood that, knowledge on parental caring is definitely being empowered by having knowledge on children's rights including children right to protection. This is because parental caring includes protecting a child from any kind of violence which has impact to a child physical, psychological and mental growth. The idea of knowledge to the parent on parental caring including understanding the children rights is also being supported by Wamoyi *et al.* (2010) who suggested that parents should be educated on how to communicate with their children so as to understand their difficulties and avoid different risks which results from any kind of child violation including contacting HIV/AIDS, STIs and unwanted pregnancies.

Moreover, the findings in Table 1 and from the desk review reveal weakness of the implementation of the Child Development Policy which directs on children rights and the efforts of other Non-governmental organisations who are dealing with providing education on children's rights. This is because parents in the study area are either less or not aware of not only children right to protection but also other children's rights. This calls for the efforts of the government and other public and private institutions including CSOs to intervene and educate parents on children rights and the importance of implementing them for the benefit of the future generation.

4.2 Kinds of Child Violation in the Study Area

4.2.1 Forced sex/rape as a child violence

Many respondents mentioned forced sex/rape as among child violence which results to early pregnancy for girls and death of young mothers during giving birth in the study area. In explaining the issue, one of the respondents reported that;

"...my child was impregnated by a man who forced her for sex. The situation made her to be out of school" (Interview, Igoma Ward).

Another respondent said that;

".... My thirteen years young sister was raped by unknown people and she was badly hurt, she got pregnant and she died when giving birth" (Interview, Igoma Ward).

The quotes above reveal that, forced sex is among the courses of early pregnancy and death of young girls in the study area. It is also contributing to drop out from school and the increased number of orphans due to death of young mothers during birth. This is a serious issue which needs to be addressed by enforcing the established rules and regulations pertaining rape cases including Law of the Child Act of 2009 and Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act of 1998. Enforcing rules and



regulations where everyone who commits rape is convicted will reduce the incidences of rape cases. However, findings from the desk review which was obtained from the study done by Abeid *et al.* (2014) shows different direction specifically on how rape is perceived within communities where they reported that;

“Participants perceived rape of children to be a frequent and a hidden phenomenon.”
(Abeid *et al.*, 2014, Desk review).

Findings from the desk review confirm the existence of forced sex/rape and its consequences as reported by the respondents of this study. The desk review findings are further explaining that rape for children is frequent and a hidden agenda. In other words, rape cases are hardly presented to the responsible organs which make it to be a repetitive action to some societies. The study done by Muganyizi *et al.* (2005) shows that most of the rape cases are disclosed for non-legal purposes because of the close relation the victim has with the perpetrator/committer of the offence. The study reveals that there are children who are being raped by the closest people to the family and the situation makes them reluctant to report the case to the responsible organs. This situation needs efforts from the government and other private and public institutions to educate the community on the issue of being transparent in reporting rape incidences to protect children whereby the established laws and regulations can be applied to find justice to the rape victims including children. The community has to jointly fight people who abuse children regardless of their existing relationships. Everyone should consider someone’s child as their own. The finding of this study reveals the strength of The Psychosocial Child Development Theory which shows the importance of protecting children from child violence which affects them mentally, spiritually and psychologically.

4.2.2 Excessive beating and child labour as child violence

Based on the findings, excessive beating and child labour were also mentioned as among child violence in the study area. When responding on the types of child violence present in the study area, one respondent reported that;

“Most of children in this area are used as cheap labour in many activities including business, home activities and at the mining area which makes them not to go to school at all. But also, there are others who are receiving excessive beating from the parents/guardian include being injured with fire” (Interview, Igoma Ward).

The quote above is also supported by the information from one of the key informants who reported the issue of excessive beating of children in the study area as follows;

“The most reported child violation in this area is excessive beating by their parents/guardians and sexual abuse. Those child violations are highly reported by family members or neighbours. Because of this, most of children run away from home and became street children or engage in child labour. So, you find out that the large numbers of street children have parents but they run away from being violated by the parents or Guardian.” (Key Informant, Igoma Ward).

The quote from the key informant is matching with the findings from the respondents which shows that excessive beating and child labour are among other child violence which make some of children to run away from home and become street children. Running away from home by children is the beginning of child labour because they are forced to engage in different activities such as begging, home activities, stealing and other illegal activities for their survival. Engaging in such activities puts



children in great danger of being abused and also killed especially when they are caught stealing . Parents/guardians should understand that child mistreatment is also among child violation as stipulated in the revised version of the Child Development Policy of 2008. It is important for any parent/guardian to use correct ways of warning their children including having conversations with them instead of mistreating them with excessive beating and the like. Parents have to be in the fore front in protecting their children from excessive punishments which create a sense of fear than learning and adopt good and acceptable behaviour.

Parents need to understand that the failure of parents to protect their children leads to child abuse including sexual harassment and humiliation which results in psychological and mental destruction to children. According to Lamont (2010), child abuse and neglect can affect all domains of development physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioural and social which are often interrelated. Results from this study also proves the strength of the Psychosocial Child Development Theory in which among of its aspects explain that, during the early stage of life, it is important for children to receive consistent care so that they can learn to trust the people around them in the world.

4.3 Roles of parents in protecting their children against child violations

Role of parents in protecting their children against violations was assessed based on observing respondents' sex and occupations. Therefore, the study aimed at exploring the sex and occupation of the respondents in relation the roles they play in protecting children against different child violence as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of sex and occupation of the respondents

Variable	Percent (%)
Sex	
Male	21.7
Female	78.3
Occupation	
Farmer	40
Teacher	5
Household	11.7
Businessmen	26.7
Others	16.7

4.2.2 Respondents' sex and child protection

Most of the respondents in this study were female having 78.3 percent while male were 21.7 percent. Since the unit of analysis was the household, women were mostly found at home than men. This implies that, women in the study area are obliged to take care of the family including raising and protecting children. This was also revealed by one respondent who explained that;

"...my husband always wakes up early in the morning and come back during night when I and my children are sleeping. So, I am the one to take care for the children and other home responsibilities. At the same time am also involved in selling "chapati" (pan cake) so we can get something to it with the children" (Interview, Igoma Ward).

The findings from the respondents are supported by the key informant information who exposed that;

"Men are less participating not only in protecting their children but also in implementing other children's rights. Among the reasons is difficult economic condition of many households in this area which leads male parents to find different



opportunities that can enable them to take care of their families. However, some of male parents run away from their responsibilities specifically when they feel like they are failing to take care of their families. This makes the whole burden of raising children to remain to female parents.”(Key Informant, Igoma Ward).

These quotations reveal that women in the study area are in charge in raising and protecting children in the study area than men. The quote also reveals that despite taking care of children women are also involved in other entrepreneurial activities to get money for family care. This shows that women in the study area are playing multiple roles of raising children, home chores as well as involving in income generating activities. This shows the importance of women in the implementation of Child Development Policy in which other children’s rights including children right to protection are insisted. However, having multiple roles can make a mother to have little time of protecting children which can lead in exposing them to danger of being violated especially when she leaves them at home for other income generating activities.

The findings also show that there are men who are responsible to their families but they do not have time to be close to them. The situation makes a male parent to have a little social support in raising, caring and protecting children. On the other hand, the quote shows that there are irresponsible male parents who abandon their families and leave the burden to female parents. This forces the female parent to play the role of both parents at the same time. Having multiple roles reduce time for a female parent to take care of their children because of being busy. Literature shows that many children are neglected by their parents in terms of less caring on them, no dedicated time to know what they face on their daily life (DePanfilis, 2006). Less caring is among emotional abuse which is the failure of a parent, a guardian or a family member to dedicate time to listen, talk and observe their children in terms of providing an appropriate and supportive environment and include acts that have an adverse effect on the emotional health, physical and mental development of a child.

Worth noting, the situation of being busy can possibly lead children to find other economic activities to survive at their young age which may result into child exploitation. According to Medrano &Tabben (2012), Child exploitation is the use of children for someone else’s economic or sexual advantage, gratification or profit, often resulting in unjust, cruel and harmful treatment of the child. Moreover, the study done by Dahake *et al.* (2018) reveals that child violation causes traumatic stress, which disrupts homeostasis causing both immediate and long-term endocrine changes in metabolism and neurophysiology. It induces acute stress in victims to increase chances of developmental problems during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. It has to be noted that nowadays most of children are being maltreated by people who are very close and trusted with the family or even the family itself.

In view of the above, there is a need for the government, public and private sector to put more emphasis on educating both parents on the risks that face children as a result of less or not being protected and the implications of it to their entire life. Moreover, the initiative of educating parents on other ways of creating money like entrepreneurial activities and agricultural activities through irrigation system should be done by the government and non-governmental organisations. Doing so will enable some of male parents to be closer to their families and protect their children rather than waking up and go to work leaving the children sleeping and coming at the night when they have already slept. This situation can make children to be closer to both parents (father and mother).



4.2.3 Parents' Occupation and child protection

Parent's occupation in the study area was considered as among the contributing factors to the failure of most of parents to protect their children. It was found that 40 percent and 26.75 percent of the respondents were farmers and business men/women respectively. The findings also show that 35 percent of the farmers who constitute 40 percent were women. Hence, being a woman and a farmer or a business woman makes them to spend most of their time at work. It was also reported that most of the farms are very far from home places so when parents go to the farms, they leave their children at home to take care of themselves. For example, one of the respondents commented that;

".... many children are abused in this area where most of them are impregnated through rape because they are sometimes left alone at home when parents travel for economic activities including business and farming as well as marriages separations"
(Key Informant, Igoma Ward).

This quote explains further that children are being left alone at home to take care of themselves which means that children are also denied the right to education because they have to find different means of surviving in the absence of their parents. The findings also provide evidence that women are overworked which is more disadvantageous for their children's safety. While the study done by Santoso *et al.* (2018) elaborates that parents (fathers and mothers) must work together to contribute in providing care for their children.

4.3 Challenges facing parents in protecting their children

The study findings show that, economic hardship, family separations and misunderstandings between parents are the most challenges facing parents in protecting their children. Ideally, economic hardship is a problem to many families whereby both parents become busy finding for money to support their families and forget other roles of nurturing, discipline, protecting and educate their children. As a result, they tend to become sponsors than parents to their children. The situation leads children to grow and/or being raised by other people including house help or other relatives. This being the case, when children face different challenges, they find it difficult to report to the parents because they are hardly available at home. Sometimes parents realise that their children have been abused while is too late. There is a need for the parents to find time for their children where they can know what they are facing and also to tell them what they can do to avoid those kinds of abuses. It is important to note that, if you value something, you will always find time for it. Therefore, if parents really value their children, they should find time for them.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that children's rights are not well known to most of parents in the study area. This is evidence that the Child development Policy in which children right to protection is found is less implemented in the study area. The study also concludes that, economic activities and separation of parents result in the failure of parents to protect their children. Results of this study prove the strength of the Psychosocial Child Development Theory in which among of its aspects explain that, during the early stage of life, it is important for children to get consistent care so that they can learn to trust the people around them.

5.2 Recommendations

The government through government officials such as community development officers and legal officers at all levels of the government should put emphasis on educating the community on children's rights for the betterment of their individual life and the country at large. Moreover, other public and



private sectors as well as Civil Society Organisations including Non-governmental organisation and Faith Based organisations should be included in educating communities on children's rights and the importance of protecting them. Doing so ensures proper implementation of Child Development Policy of 1994 which was revised in 2008. The provided education should focus on: The importance of both parents to care and protecting their children; Informing parents and children on the laws and be encouraged to open up whenever they are abused by any person even if is the parent or family members and the importance of implementing the established laws for those who abuse children regardless of the existing relationship they may be having.

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