EXPLORING THE ROLE OF GENDER NORMS IN PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN: THE CASE OF KIBAHA DISTRICT

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CERTIFICATION

The undersigned certify that they have read and hereby recommends for the acceptance by the Open University of Tanzania a dissertation entitled: **"Exploring the Role of Gender Norms in Preventing Violence against Children: The Case of Kibaha District",** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies of the Open University of Tanzania.

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DECLARATION

I, **Anna Saimon Mawalla**, declare that this dissertation is my own original work and that it has not been presented and will not be presented to any other University for the similar or any other award. Where other people's works have been used, references have been provided. It is in this regard that I declare this work as originally mine. It is hereby presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies of the Open University of Tanzania.

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Signature

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Date

DEDICATION

This work is lovingly dedicated to my dear husband, Merumba Mafuru Mramba whose unwavering love, patience, and support have been the foundation of my strength throughout this academic journey. Thank you for believing in me, encouraging me in moments of doubt, and standing by my side through every challenge. Your sacrifices, understanding, and constant presence have made this achievement possible. With all my love and deepest gratitude.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of gender norms in shaping the prevention of violence against children (VAC) in Kibaha District, Tanzania. Guided by Connell's Gender and Power Theory, the research adopted a qualitative case study design for in-depth exploration of how socially constructed gender norms influence community perceptions and responses to VAC. Purposive sampling selected 30 participants—parents, children, community leaders, and child protection stakeholders—ensuring diverse perspectives. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and document reviews, with strict ethical protocols observed to protect confidentiality and well-being. Thematic analysis using NVivo software identified key patterns and themes. Findings revealed that traditional gender norms strongly shape perceptions and responses within families and communities. Boys were socialized to endure physical punishment as masculinity, while girls were expected to remain silent and submissive, limiting disclosure and protection. Patriarchal household power dynamics constrained women from reporting abuse, while cultural and religious beliefs often reinforced violent discipline. However, positive teachings promoting compassion, collective parenting, and non-violent child-rearing were also identified and could support prevention strategies. The study concludes that addressing both harmful and supportive gender norms is critical for effective VAC prevention. It recommends gender-sensitive community education, women's empowerment in decision-making, and active engagement of men and cultural leaders in transforming violent norms toward inclusive, non-violent parenting.

Keywords*: Gender norms, Violence against children (VAC), Patriarchy, Child protection, Qualitative research, Kibaha District, Tanzania.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IDI	In-Depth Interview
MoHCDGEC	Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children
MSCL	Marine Services Company Limited
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPA-VAWC	National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children
TASAF	Tanzania Social Action Fund
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VAC	Violence Against Children
VAW	Violence Against Women
VWC	Village Welfare Committee
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This study examines how gender norms influence efforts to prevent violence against children in Kibaha District. It explores how societal expectations, power relations, and cultural beliefs shape protection strategies, stakeholder perceptions, and policy effectiveness, highlighting gaps and opportunities for gender-responsive interventions.

2.1 Background to the Problem

Violence against children (VAC) is a pressing global concern, affecting nearly one billion children aged 2–17 each year through physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (WHO, 2022). International frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.2 emphasize the urgency of ending all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence against children. Despite these global commitments, progress has been uneven. Harmful gender norms — including rigid expectations of masculinity and femininity — continue to perpetuate violence, limit reporting, and restrict access to protection services (UNICEF, 2023). In contrast, countries that have embraced egalitarian approaches, such as Sweden, Norway, and Canada, have reported significant reductions in VAC. These nations have adopted gender-sensitive policies, parental education programs, and legal frameworks promoting non-violent parenting and child-centered protection (Lansford & Deater-Deckard, 2012; UNICEF, 2021).

Regionally, sub-Saharan Africa bears a disproportionate burden of VAC, with cultural norms and structural inequalities reinforcing cycles of violence (Plan International, 2023). Research across the region shows that patriarchal power relations and culturally embedded practices normalize corporal punishment, silence children, and prioritize family reputation over child safety (Heise, 2018; Morna & Dube, 2022). Although advocacy and awareness campaigns have gained traction in countries like Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda, weak enforcement of legal frameworks and limited gender-sensitive interventions have hampered sustained progress (Kimani & Maina, 2020). Moreover, the intersection of poverty, inadequate social services, and gender inequality exacerbates children's vulnerability to violence in many African communities (UNICEF, 2023).

In Tanzania, VAC remains pervasive despite significant policy and legal efforts. National surveys indicate that almost three in ten girls and one in seven boys experience sexual violence before the age of 18 (UNICEF Tanzania, 2022). Instruments such as the Law of the Child Act of 2009 and the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (2023–2027) have established a framework for prevention and response. However, deep-rooted patriarchal norms, limited community awareness, and socio-cultural beliefs continue to undermine effective implementation. Studies show that corporal punishment is widely normalized as a disciplinary measure, while issues of family honor discourage open dialogue and reporting of abuse (Mganga & Kiwelu, 2022; Msuya, 2023).

At the local level, Kibaha District reflects these national and regional challenges. As a semi-urban area with strong traditional values and patriarchal systems, Kibaha presents a context where gender norms significantly shape child protection dynamics. Boys are often socialized to endure physical punishment as part of masculine identity, while girls are taught silence and obedience, reinforcing their vulnerability to abuse and limiting disclosure (Msuya, 2023). Although the district benefits from community structures such as religious institutions and child protection committees, these mechanisms often operate within frameworks that uphold male authority and cultural beliefs that tolerate violence. Empirical studies focusing specifically on the interplay between gender norms and VAC prevention at the community level in Kibaha remain scarce, highlighting the need for localized evidence to inform effective, culturally responsive interventions. This study addresses this gap by examining how both harmful and supportive gender norms influence perceptions, responses, and strategies for preventing violence against children within this context.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Violence against children (VAC) continues to be a pervasive global challenge, with the World Health Organization (2022) estimating that nearly one billion children aged 2–17 experience physical, emotional, or sexual abuse annually. While global frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and SDG 16.2 have emphasized child protection, harmful gender norms—rooted in rigid expectations of masculinity and femininity—persistently reinforce violence and silence victims (UNICEF, 2023). Evidence from countries such as Sweden and Norway shows that shifting these norms toward more egalitarian and non-violent ideals reduces

incidences of VAC through comprehensive, gender-sensitive frameworks that engage families, schools, and communities (Lansford & Deater-Deckard, 2012; UNICEF, 2021).

In sub-Saharan Africa, including Tanzania, the persistence of patriarchal systems and cultural beliefs continues to undermine efforts to protect children (Plan International, 2023). Existing studies in the region demonstrate that boys are frequently subjected to harsher forms of corporal punishment normalized as a rite of masculinity, while girls face heightened risks of sexual abuse compounded by cultural norms that discourage disclosure (Jewkes et al., 2015; Kimani & Maina, 2020). However, much of this literature provides broad analyses at regional or national levels, often neglecting localized contexts where socio-cultural nuances strongly shape perceptions and responses to VAC.

In Tanzania, research highlights the high prevalence of VAC, with almost three in ten girls and one in seven boys reporting sexual abuse before the age of 18 (UNICEF Tanzania, 2022). While the Law of the Child Act (2009) and the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (2023–2027) provide a policy framework, enforcement remains inconsistent, largely due to entrenched patriarchal norms and weak community-level engagement (Mganga & Kiwelu, 2022; Msuya, 2023). Existing studies have examined institutional and legal aspects of child protection but often lack an in-depth exploration of how localized gender norms interact with household power dynamics and community practices to either perpetuate or mitigate violence.

Specifically, there is a limited understanding of how gendered power structures within households, such as male-dominated decision-making and the silencing of women, shape responses to abuse. Moreover, few empirical studies have examined how cultural and religious practices, which sometimes normalize violence while simultaneously offering protective frameworks, operate in settings such as Kibaha District. This lack of nuanced, context-specific evidence creates a significant gap in informing effective, gender-sensitive interventions tailored to local realities.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by providing empirical, community-level insights into the ways gender norms function both as barriers and enablers of VAC prevention in Kibaha District. By capturing localized perspectives and experiences, this research will contribute to more targeted, culturally responsive strategies for child protection in Tanzania.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 Main Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to explore the role of gender norms in preventing violence against children (VAC) in Kibaha District,

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

i. To examine the influence of gender norms on community perceptions of violence against children in Kibaha District.

ii. To assess how gendered power relations affect the responses of families to violence against children.

iii. To identify culturally embedded gender norms that hinder or support violence prevention efforts in Kibaha District.

1.4.3 Research Questions

i. How do gender norms shape community perceptions of what constitutes violence against children in Kibaha District?

ii. In what ways do gendered power dynamics influence how families respond to cases of violence against children?

iii. What cultural practices related to gender norms either promote or inhibit efforts to prevent violence against children in Kibaha District?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it explores the role of gender norms in preventing violence against children (VAC), an area that remains under-researched in Tanzania despite the high prevalence of child abuse and entrenched patriarchal norms (UNICEF Tanzania, 2022; Mganga & Kiwelu, 2022). By focusing on Kibaha District, the study provides localized, empirical insights into how gendered expectations and power dynamics shape both the risk and prevention of VAC. These findings are vital not only for academic knowledge but also for designing culturally appropriate, gender-responsive interventions.

First, at the societal and national level, the findings will inform stakeholders—including policymakers, educators, religious leaders, and child welfare officers—about how specific gender norms contribute to the persistence or prevention of child

abuse. This can guide the development of context-sensitive policies and programs that target root causes of VAC rather than just symptoms (UN Women, 2021). For example, community education campaigns that challenge harmful masculinities and promote non-violent caregiving may help shift cultural narratives around child discipline and protection. The study will also support the implementation of the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (2023–2027) by providing evidence on how to integrate gender-sensitive strategies at the grassroots level.

Second, the study contributes to academic scholarship by addressing a research gap in how gender norms function both as barriers and enablers of child protection in Tanzania. Previous studies have primarily examined VAC from a legal or institutional lens, with little attention to the socio-cultural dimensions of gender (Jewkes et al., 2015; Msuya, 2023). By using a gender lens grounded in Connell's Gender and Power Theory (Connell, 1987), this study will offer new theoretical and empirical perspectives that future researchers can build upon, especially in sub-Saharan African contexts.

Lastly, the research empowers communities by highlighting local beliefs and practices that could be harnessed as protective factors. Understanding these cultural assets will help design more participatory and sustainable interventions, engaging both men and women in the transformation of gender norms and reduction of VAC (Plan International, 2023). In this way, the study aligns with broader goals of child protection, gender equality, and social justice, contributing to Tanzania's

commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 16.2 (End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children) (UNICEF, 2023; WHO, 2022).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

Chapter Two of this study presents a review of existing literature on gender norms and their impact on violence against children (VAC) in Kibaha District, Tanzania. It explores key concepts such as VAC, gender roles, and power dynamics, and examines how these factors influence child protection strategies. The chapter discusses the gendered nature of VAC, highlighting how societal expectations of masculinity and femininity contribute to the perpetuation of violence. It also reviews relevant studies from sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on Tanzania, and analyzes the role of legal and policy frameworks in addressing VAC. The literature highlights gaps in current research and identifies opportunities for gender-responsive interventions to improve VAC prevention in Kibaha District.

2.2 Conceptualization of Terms

2.2.1 Gender Norms

Gender norms are socially constructed expectations and roles assigned to individuals based on their perceived sex. These norms influence behaviors, responsibilities, and societal roles, often prescribing what is considered appropriate for men and women (UN Women, 2021). They are shaped through cultural, religious, and familial systems and are reinforced by institutions and social practices (Connell, 2009). In this study, gender norms refer to the culturally embedded expectations in Kibaha District that shape how boys and girls are raised, disciplined, and protected. These norms influence perceptions of masculinity and femininity, often justifying unequal

treatment and acceptance of violence. The study investigates how such norms both contribute to and potentially prevent violence against children (VAC), depending on their construction and application within community settings.

2.2.2 Violence Against Children (VAC)

The World Health Organization (2022) defines violence against children as all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse. This includes acts that result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity. In this study, VAC encompasses both direct and indirect forms of harm physical punishment, emotional neglect, sexual abuse, and institutional failure to protect children. The study recognizes that experiences of VAC are gendered: boys are often subjected to harsher physical discipline, while girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse (UNICEF Tanzania, 2022). The research seeks to understand how gender norms in Kibaha District shape these patterns of violence and influence responses from families and communities.

2.2.3 Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and dominate in roles of leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control over property (Walby, 1990). It is maintained through laws, cultural beliefs, and institutions that privilege male authority while subordinating women and children. In the context of this research, patriarchy refers to the dominance of male decision-makers within families and community structures in Kibaha District. This system legitimizes male control

over discipline and family reputation, often resulting in the silencing of abuse cases and resistance to gender-sensitive interventions. Patriarchy thus becomes both a direct and indirect contributor to the perpetuation of VAC by reinforcing power hierarchies that disadvantage children, especially girls.

2.2.4 Gender-Responsive Interventions

Gender-responsive interventions are strategies designed to address the specific needs, risks, and experiences of individuals based on their gender. These interventions aim to challenge harmful gender norms and promote equality by recognizing how gender influences access to protection and services (UN Women, 2021). This study defines gender-responsive interventions as community or institutional strategies that integrate an understanding of gender dynamics into the prevention of VAC. These include policies, programs, and educational initiatives that actively engage both men and women, address harmful stereotypes, and strengthen protection mechanisms for all children. In Kibaha District, such interventions are viewed as essential tools for transforming social attitudes and promoting non-violent, inclusive child-rearing practices.

2.2.5 Child Protection Systems

Child protection systems refer to formal and informal structures, laws, policies, and services that aim to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children (UNICEF, 2021). These systems involve collaboration between state, civil society, and community actors. In this study, child protection systems are conceptualized as the combination of national legal frameworks (such as

the Law of the Child Act, 2009) and community-level mechanisms operating in Kibaha District. The study examines how these systems interact with prevailing gender norms—whether they reinforce existing inequalities or challenge them. Particular attention is paid to how these systems either support or hinder gender-sensitive responses to VAC.

2.3 Theoretical Framework: Connell's Gender and Power Theory

Connell's Gender and Power Theory, first articulated by Raewyn Connell in 1987 in her influential work *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how gender relations are structured and maintained within societies. The theory moves beyond individual behavior to examine the broader social, cultural, and institutional systems that produce and sustain gender inequality. Connell identifies three interrelated structures that underpin these inequalities: the division of labor, the division of power, and cathexis.

The division of labor refers to the allocation of work—both paid and unpaid—according to gender, typically placing women in caregiving and domestic roles while men occupy positions of authority and decision-making. This separation reinforces the idea that men are the primary enforcers of discipline, while women's roles are limited to nurturing and support. The division of power addresses the unequal distribution of authority and control across both public and private domains. In many societies, men hold greater power in decision-making at all levels, from household governance to community leadership, thereby influencing responses to issues such as

violence against children. The third structure, cathexis, concerns the emotional and sexual attachments that are shaped by cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity. This includes societal norms around emotional expression, relationships, and acceptable behaviors for men and women. Collectively, these structures sustain patriarchal systems that normalize male dominance and female subordination.

A central concept in Connell's framework is hegemonic masculinity, which represents the culturally dominant ideal of male behavior that legitimizes men's dominance over women and other forms of masculinity. This ideal often rewards toughness, authority, and emotional restraint among men while valuing obedience, submission, and nurturing qualities among women. Such constructions of gender contribute to the perpetuation of violence by framing it as a legitimate means of discipline or authority, particularly in relation to children.

Connell's Gender and Power Theory has been widely applied in research examining the intersections of gender, violence, and social norms. For example, Heise (1998) used the framework to explain the structural drivers of intimate partner violence, highlighting how societal and institutional arrangements reinforce abuse. In the field of child protection, Jewkes et al. (2015) demonstrated how male authority figures and entrenched gender norms can normalize corporal punishment and sexual abuse. Similarly, studies in sub-Saharan Africa (Morna & Dube, 2022; Msuya, 2023) have applied Connell's framework to explore how patriarchal traditions impede reporting of violence while also identifying cultural practices that can be mobilized to protect

vulnerable groups. These applications underscore the theory's usefulness in uncovering the systemic factors that both hinder and enable violence prevention.

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to the present study, which explores the role of gender norms in preventing violence against children in Kibaha District. The division of labor is linked to the first objective, which examines how gender norms influence community perceptions of violence against children. In this context, traditional roles that grant men authority over discipline and position women primarily as caregivers shape the way different forms of violence are understood and justified. The division of power aligns closely with the second objective, which assesses how gendered power relations affect family responses to violence. Male dominance in household and community decision-making often determines whether cases of abuse are reported, concealed, or addressed informally. Finally, cathexis relates to the third objective, which seeks to identify culturally embedded gender norms that hinder or support violence prevention. Norms that valorize male toughness, emotional suppression, and female obedience have direct implications for the willingness of individuals and communities to challenge violent practices and adopt non-violent disciplinary approaches.

By situating the study within Connell's Gender and Power Theory, this research is able to critically examine how structural gender arrangements sustain harmful practices while also identifying opportunities for gender-responsive interventions. The theory provides a lens through which to interpret the complex interplay between

cultural beliefs, institutional structures, and interpersonal relationships in shaping both the risks and protections associated with violence against children.

2.4 Empirical Literature Review

This section reviews existing studies related to the role of gender norms in preventing violence against children, focusing on three key areas: how gender norms shape perceptions of violence, how gendered power dynamics influence responses to violence, and the potential opportunities for gender-responsive interventions. By examining prior research, this review identifies knowledge gaps and contextual variations, providing a foundation for understanding how these factors operate in Kibaha District.

2.4.1 Gender Norms and Perceptions of Violence Against Children

Research indicates that societal gender norms play a significant role in shaping perceptions of violence against children (VAC). These norms often dictate the acceptability of different forms of punishment, with discipline being gendered in various cultural contexts (UNICEF, 2021). For instance, in many African societies, boys are subjected to harsher corporal punishment under the assumption that it fosters resilience and masculinity, while girls face psychological control and social restrictions to ensure conformity to gender roles (Jewkes et al., 2015). In Tanzania, Mganga and Kiwelu (2022) found that communities tend to view physical violence against boys as a disciplinary necessity, whereas cases of violence against girls— particularly sexual abuse—receive more attention due to their perceived impact on family honor. Such perceptions contribute to significant disparities in the way cases

of VAC are reported, with underreporting being common, especially for boys who experience physical or emotional abuse.

Studies also reveal that gendered perceptions influence institutional and parental attitudes toward violence. A study conducted in Kenya by Kimani and Maina (2020) demonstrated that parents often view strict discipline as essential in preparing children for adulthood, but the nature of discipline varies based on gender. This finding aligns with research by Msuya (2023) in Kibaha District, which highlights that local beliefs reinforce the idea that boys should endure physical hardships, leading to normalized physical punishment that goes unchallenged. These findings underscore the need to challenge traditional gender norms and promote alternative, non-violent disciplinary measures through education and advocacy efforts.

2.4.2 Gendered Power Dynamics and Responses to Violence Against Children

The response to violence against children is heavily influenced by gendered power structures, which often determine whether a case is addressed or dismissed. Research shows that patriarchal systems privilege male authority figures in making decisions regarding child protection, which can suppress efforts to seek justice for child victims (Heise, 2018). In many African communities, male elders, religious leaders, and family heads hold significant power in deciding how cases of VAC are handled, often prioritizing family honor over the well-being of the child (Plan International, 2023).

Msuya (2023) conducted a study in Kibaha District and found that within patriarchal family structures, cases of VAC—particularly those involving male perpetrators—

are often concealed to avoid social stigma. Women, despite being primary caregivers, frequently lack the authority to challenge such decisions, limiting their ability to advocate for children's rights effectively. Similarly, Mganga and Kiwelu (2022) observed that in Tanzanian legal and social welfare systems, responses to child abuse cases are often shaped by gender biases. For instance, institutions tend to take cases of sexual abuse against girls more seriously than cases of physical or emotional abuse against boys. This gendered prioritization affects the allocation of resources and legal attention, leaving certain forms of violence inadequately addressed.

Studies also highlight how gender power dynamics operate within formal child protection systems. Research by Kimani and Maina (2020) in Kenya found that male-dominated law enforcement agencies often lack gender sensitivity in handling cases, discouraging victims—especially boys—from reporting abuse. Similar findings were noted by Morna and Dube (2022) in South Africa, where social workers expressed frustration over the challenges of working within patriarchal institutions that prioritize adult male authority over children's rights. These studies suggest that meaningful change requires targeted gender-sensitive training for law enforcement officers, social workers, and community leaders to ensure that responses to VAC are equitable and effective.

2.4.3 Opportunities for Gender-Responsive Interventions in Addressing Violence Against Children

Despite the entrenched challenges posed by gender norms and power dynamics, there

are opportunities to implement gender-responsive interventions that can enhance child protection efforts. UNICEF (2023) emphasizes the importance of community-based education programs aimed at transforming societal attitudes toward VAC. Such programs challenge the normalization of violence as a disciplinary tool and promote alternative, non-violent parenting techniques. Evidence from Tanzania's National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (2023–2027) suggests that incorporating gender-sensitive approaches into existing child protection policies has the potential to yield positive outcomes if properly implemented at the community level (Msuya, 2023).

One of the most effective gender-responsive strategies highlighted in the literature is the engagement of male community leaders in child protection advocacy. Research by Morna and Dube (2022) in Southern Africa found that programs that actively involve men—especially those in leadership positions—help shift perceptions about child protection and promote accountability. In Kibaha, similar approaches have been piloted through community-based child protection committees, though challenges persist in scaling up such initiatives due to resource limitations and resistance to change (Msuya, 2023).

Legal and policy reforms also present a viable opportunity for addressing VAC through a gender lens. The African Union (2021) recommends that governments integrate gender perspectives into child protection frameworks, ensuring that interventions address both boys' and girls' vulnerabilities equally. This is particularly relevant in Tanzanian contexts, where gendered biases in reporting and institutional

responses have contributed to disparities in how cases are handled (Mganga & Kiwelu, 2022). Strengthening legal enforcement mechanisms, improving gender-sensitive training for child protection professionals, and enhancing community participation are key recommendations emerging from empirical studies.

Moreover, innovative approaches such as digital reporting platforms and child-friendly safe spaces have shown promise in improving VAC reporting rates. A study by UNICEF (2023) in Uganda found that mobile-based reporting mechanisms increased the willingness of both boys and girls to report abuse, particularly in cases where community leaders were perceived as biased. If adapted to the Tanzanian context, such strategies could complement existing interventions and offer an additional avenue for ensuring children's safety.

In summary, while gender norms and power structures significantly shape perceptions and responses to VAC, there are clear opportunities to implement gender-sensitive interventions. The literature underscores the need for transformative strategies that challenge patriarchal norms, strengthen institutional responses, and engage all stakeholders in creating a safer environment for children. By addressing these factors, interventions can become more effective in reducing VAC and ensuring long-term social change.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The framework posits that these elements collectively shape the dynamics of violence prevention. Harmful gender norms and unequal power relations perpetuate

VAC, while positive cultural and institutional practices can be harnessed to enhance prevention strategies. The study operationalizes this framework by exploring how these interactions manifest at the community level in Kibaha District and how they inform opportunities for gender-sensitive interventions.

Conceptual Framework: Gender Norms and VAC Prevention in Kibaha District
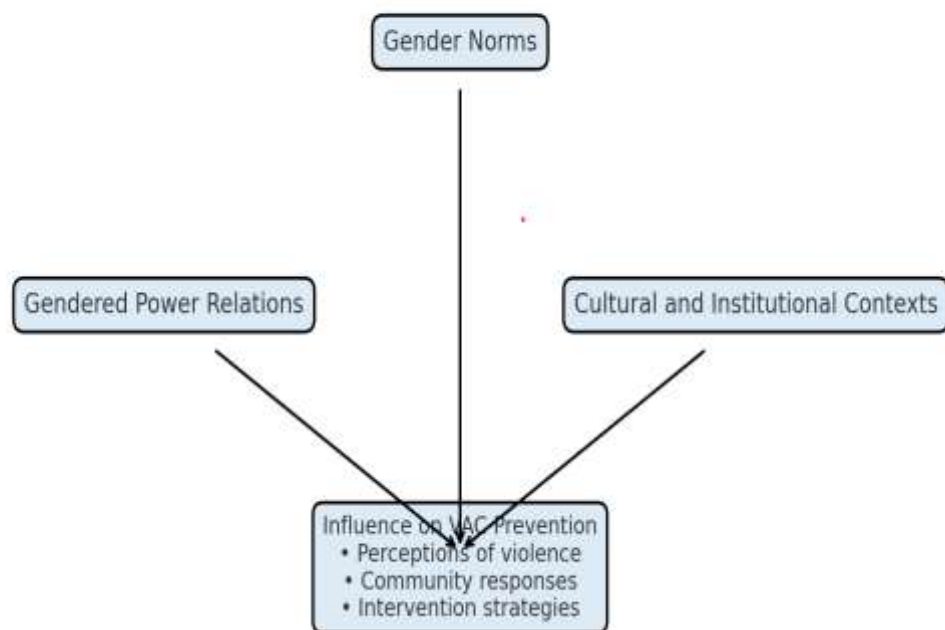
Source: Researcher 2025

2.6 Research Gap

Existing literature extensively explores the intersection of gender norms, power dynamics, and violence against children (VAC). Studies have established that societal gender norms significantly shape perceptions of VAC, influencing how different forms of violence are understood, tolerated, or condemned. Research by Jewkes et al. (2015) and Kimani and Maina (2020) highlights that boys often

experience harsher physical discipline under the assumption that it builds resilience, while girls face restrictive social control mechanisms aimed at reinforcing traditional gender roles. Similarly, scholars such as Heise (2018) and Mganga and Kiwelu (2022) have demonstrated how gendered power relations affect institutional responses to VAC, with patriarchal structures often silencing or downplaying cases, particularly when perpetrators are male authority figures. These studies collectively underscore the role of cultural and systemic gender biases in shaping both the occurrence and response to VAC.

Despite these contributions, there remains a significant gap in localized studies that critically examine how gendered social structures influence VAC in specific Tanzanian contexts, particularly in Kibaha District. While research such as Msuya (2023) has investigated child protection challenges in Kibaha, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific ways in which gender norms shape perceptions of violence against children in this region. Furthermore, while existing studies acknowledge the influence of gendered power relations on responses to VAC, they often focus on legal and policy shortcomings without deeply exploring how these power dynamics operate within families and communities at the grassroots level. Additionally, while global and regional reports (Plan International, 2023; UNICEF, 2023) advocate for gender-responsive interventions, there is limited research assessing the feasibility and effectiveness of such interventions in Kibaha District's socio-cultural and policy environment.

This study seeks to address these gaps by providing a logical analysis of how gender

norms shape perceptions of VAC in Kibaha District, investigating the role of gendered power dynamics in influencing responses to VAC, and exploring viable gender-responsive interventions tailored to the local context. By focusing on these aspects, the study contributes to the body of knowledge by offering empirical insights that can inform more context-specific policies and interventions aimed at reducing VAC in Tanzania.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the study design, population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and analysis procedures. It also discusses ethical considerations to ensure credibility and adherence to research standards in exploring gender norms and violence against children in Kibaha District.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This study is guided by the constructionist philosophy, which asserts that social realities, including gender norms and violence against children, are socially constructed through interactions, beliefs, and cultural practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Constructionism emphasizes understanding how individuals and communities interpret and assign meaning to social phenomena rather than assuming an objective reality (Creswell, 2014). Given that gender norms and power dynamics influencing violence against children are shaped by societal perceptions and experiences, constructionism provides an appropriate lens to explore these influences in Kibaha District. Prior studies on gender and social norms have effectively applied this approach to examine subjective interpretations and community-based responses to social issues (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This philosophy aligns with the study's qualitative nature, enabling an in-depth exploration of how gender norms shape child protection strategies and community interventions.

3.2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a case study design, which is suitable for in-depth exploration of complex social issues within a specific context (Yin, 2014). A case study allows for a holistic examination of how gender norms shape perceptions, responses, and interventions related to violence against children in Kibaha District. Unlike broad survey approaches, a case study provides a detailed understanding of social behaviors, beliefs, and institutional responses through multiple sources of data, including interviews, focus groups, and document analysis (Stake, 1995). This design aligns with the constructionist philosophy, as it captures the lived experiences and social interactions that construct gender norms and child protection strategies (Merriam, 2009). Previous studies on gender-based violence and child protection have successfully employed case study methods to uncover localized social dynamics and inform context-specific interventions (Flyvbjerg, 2011). By focusing on Kibaha District, this study generates rich, contextually grounded insights that contribute to gender-responsive child protection policies and practices.

3.3 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena, such as how gender norms influence perceptions of violence against children. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the meanings, experiences, and social contexts that shape individuals' behaviors and interactions (Creswell, 2014). This approach allows for an in-depth investigation of the subjective realities of individuals and communities in Kibaha District, enabling the researcher to explore the ways in which gender norms and power dynamics shape

child protection efforts (Patton, 2002). Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, are particularly suited for capturing the nuanced, context-specific insights that quantitative methods may overlook (Silverman, 2016). Furthermore, qualitative research aligns with the constructionist philosophy, as it focuses on interpreting how social realities, such as violence against children and gender roles, are socially constructed and understood by different stakeholders (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through this approach, the study aims to generate rich, detailed data that informs gender-responsive strategies for preventing violence against children.

3.4 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kibaha District, located in the Coast Region of Tanzania, approximately 40 kilometers west of Dar es Salaam. Kibaha was characterized by a mix of urban and rural settings, with a diverse population that included both farming communities and urban dwellers. The district was chosen for its representation of broader national issues related to gender norms, violence against children (VAC), and social power dynamics.

Kibaha District was particularly relevant for the study due to its social and economic composition. According to the 2022 Population and Housing Census, Kibaha had a population of around 500,000 people, with a significant number of children and youth under the age of 18 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). This demographic was crucial, as the study focused on the experiences of children and their interactions with the social norms surrounding them. Additionally, Kibaha faced challenges typical of Tanzanian districts, including limited access to resources, high levels of

poverty, and a lack of comprehensive implementation of child protection policies (Msuya, 2023). These conditions made the district an ideal location for examining how gender norms influenced the prevention of violence against children.

Kibaha had also been identified as a community with prevalent gendered power imbalances that affected various aspects of life, including child protection practices. The area had been documented as having strong patriarchal values, with traditional beliefs surrounding family roles and discipline being common in households (Mganga & Kiwelu, 2022). Such values often influenced the ways in which violence was tolerated or mitigated within families and communities. Moreover, while national policies and frameworks such as the Law of the Child Act (2009) and the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (2023–2027) existed, enforcement was often weak, and cultural practices continued to hold sway over policy implementation (UNICEF, 2023). This context provided a critical backdrop for understanding how gender norms influenced local child protection responses.

Comparatively, other regions of Tanzania might not have reflected the same combination of urban-rural demographic, patriarchal traditions, and limited policy enforcement, which made Kibaha District a unique and relevant setting for this research. The district offered a snapshot of the intersection between traditional gender norms and modern challenges in child protection, providing the necessary data to address the research questions about how these norms shaped perceptions, responses, and intervention opportunities for VAC.

Thus, Kibaha was considered an appropriate site for exploring the roles of gender norms in the prevention of violence against children, offering both a representative and context-specific setting that was crucial for developing gender-responsive child protection strategies in Tanzania.

3.5 Study Population

The study population for this research consisted of children, parents, community leaders, and local child protection stakeholders within Kibaha District. The selection of these groups was rooted in their direct or indirect involvement in the occurrence, prevention, and response to violence against children (VAC).

3.5.1 Children

The primary focus of this study was on children aged 5 to 18 years, as they represented the most vulnerable group in terms of exposure to violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse (UNICEF, 2023). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), children constituted about 40% of the population in Kibaha, making this demographic the most affected by VAC. This age group provided critical insights into how gender norms were internalized and influenced the way children perceived and reacted to violence. The selection of children was done through purposive sampling from schools and community centers within Kibaha, ensuring that a diverse representation of age, gender, and socio-economic status was captured.

3.5.2 Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians play a crucial role in shaping the gender norms that influence the prevention and perpetration of violence against children. According to studies by Plan International (2023), the role of parents in reinforcing or challenging harmful gender stereotypes is fundamental in preventing VAC. In Kibaha District, where traditional views on gender roles prevail, parents' perceptions of gender and violence can either support or hinder effective child protection. Approximately 60% of Kibaha's households are headed by men, while the remainder are female-headed households, often facing more significant socio-economic challenges (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). These varying family structures provided insights into how gender norms are enacted within the household and their impact on child protection practices.

3.5.3 Community Leaders and Local Child Protection Stakeholders

Community leaders, including religious leaders, local government officials, and child welfare officers, also formed a crucial part of the study population. These individuals influenced policy implementation, community attitudes, and response mechanisms to VAC. As noted by Msuya (2023), local leaders often mediated child protection cases based on entrenched cultural and gendered norms, sometimes prioritizing family reputation over the best interests of the child. The involvement of local child protection stakeholders helped in understanding institutional and community-based responses to VAC and how gender norms shaped these responses.

Given that Kibaha had a population of around 500,000, with an estimated 200,000

children (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), a sample of 200 participants was selected for interviews, focus groups, and community meetings, including children, parents, and local leaders. This sample size ensured diversity and representativeness, providing a comprehensive view of how gender norms affected VAC prevention in Kibaha.

By focusing on these groups, the study captured a holistic view of the issue and provided insights into the complexities of gender norms and their impact on VAC prevention strategies.

3.6 Sampling Design and Procedures

The sampling design for this qualitative study employed purposive sampling, a non-random sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who were particularly knowledgeable or experienced regarding the research phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Since the study aimed to explore the influence of gender norms on the perceptions, responses, and prevention of violence against children in Kibaha District, participants were selected based on their direct or indirect involvement with child protection, gender norms, and VAC.

3.6.1 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study as it allowed for the selection of individuals who possessed a deep understanding of the topic due to their role in child protection, their experience as community members, or their personal or professional engagement with the issues under investigation (Patton, 2002). This method helped capture the perspectives of a diverse group of participants, ensuring that a broad

range of insights was obtained, particularly from those with firsthand experience or knowledge of VAC and its gendered dimensions.

The study focused on the following groups:

- **Children aged 5–18 years:** Children from local schools, community centers, and youth groups were selected based on their ability to articulate their experiences and perceptions of gender norms and violence.

- **Parents/guardians:** These were selected based on their direct influence on children and their roles in either reinforcing or challenging gender norms in the family setting.

- **Community leaders and local child protection stakeholders:** Local leaders such as religious leaders, village elders, and social workers were chosen for their influence in child protection matters and their awareness of gendered responses to violence against children in their communities.

The purposive sampling procedure ensured that participants were selected based on their relevance to the study's objectives, providing in-depth insights into the role of gender norms in VAC.

3.6.2 Sample Size

Qualitative research often does not require large sample sizes, as the goal was not to generalize findings to a larger population but to achieve an in-depth understanding of the issue (Babbie, 2010). For this study, the sample size consisted of approximately 30–40 participants, including children, parents, and community leaders. This sample

size was sufficient to capture a range of perspectives without overwhelming the study's qualitative focus, which prioritized depth of information over breadth (Creswell, 2014).

The sample size also allowed for thematic saturation, the point at which no new information emerged from further data collection (Guest et al., 2006). By the time thematic saturation was achieved, the study had gathered enough rich, detailed data to answer the research questions comprehensively.

3.6.3 Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through community-based organizations, local schools, and child protection agencies operating within Kibaha District. A letter of invitation, explaining the purpose of the study, was sent to local leaders and institutions, requesting their assistance in identifying suitable participants. Parental or guardian consent was obtained for children under 18 years, and informed consent was collected from adult participants.

Given the sensitive nature of the study, confidentiality and ethical considerations were paramount. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence (Babbie, 2010). To encourage open and honest responses, participants were assured of the anonymity of their participation, and all data were stored securely.

3.7 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

For this study, qualitative data collection methods were employed to explore the perceptions, experiences, and meanings associated with gender norms and violence

against children in Kibaha District. The data collection methods chosen included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. These methods were appropriate as they allowed for a deep understanding of the social dynamics at play, focusing on the perspectives of participants rather than relying solely on numerical data (Creswell, 2014). The use of multiple methods also enhanced the validity and depth of the findings, allowing for triangulation of data (Patton, 2002).

3.7.1 In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were used to gather detailed personal accounts from key stakeholders, such as community leaders, parents, teachers, and social workers. The interviews allowed the researcher to capture participants' individual experiences and reflections on gender norms and their impact on perceptions of violence against children (Kvale, 2007). The semi-structured interview guide allowed for flexibility, encouraging participants to elaborate on their thoughts, which was crucial for exploring the complexities of the topic (Babbie, 2010).

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were used to gather collective insights on the role of gender norms in preventing violence against children, providing an opportunity for participants to discuss and reflect on the topic in a group setting. This method was particularly useful for understanding how community members' collective beliefs and attitudes shaped the broader understanding and response to issues such as child protection and violence (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Groups were formed according to

predefined criteria such as age, gender, and community role, ensuring a variety of perspectives were captured.

3.8 Data Analysis and Presentation

The analysis of the qualitative data collected in this study will be conducted using thematic analysis, a method that is well-suited for identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to examine how gender norms shape the perceptions and responses to violence against children in Kibaha District by identifying recurring themes, categories, and relationships within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process involves familiarizing with the data, coding the data for significant patterns, categorizing these patterns, and interpreting the findings in the context of the research questions.

Given the complexity and volume of qualitative data, the study will employ NVivo software for data management and analysis. NVivo is a powerful tool for qualitative data analysis that aids in the organization, coding, and interpretation of textual data (QSR International, 2018). It supports the thematic analysis process by enabling researchers to efficiently manage large datasets, apply codes to specific sections of text, and identify emerging themes and patterns (Flick, 2014). NVivo's ability to handle various data types such as interviews, focus group discussions, and documents makes it an ideal choice for managing and analyzing the data in this study (Bazeley, 2013).

The use of NVivo software enhances the rigor of the analysis by ensuring systematic and transparent coding, which aids in the development of well-founded themes and conclusions (Saldana, 2016). It also facilitates the triangulation process, enabling the researcher to compare data from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings.

3.9 Qualitative Rigor

Ensuring rigor in qualitative research is essential to the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. This study will employ strategies such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013). Credibility will be enhanced through triangulation, using multiple data sources and methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, along with member checking to ensure that the interpretations align with participants' experiences (Patton, 2002). Transferability will be addressed by providing rich descriptions of the context, enabling readers to assess if the findings can be applied to similar situations (Morse et al., 2002). Dependability will be ensured by maintaining an audit trail, documenting each step of the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), and using triangulation to increase the robustness of findings (Denzin, 1978). Confirmability will be supported through reflexivity, where the researcher continuously reflects on their role in the study and the potential biases they may introduce (Finlay, 2002).

To further enhance rigor, reflexivity will be employed to ensure that the researcher's assumptions and biases do not unduly shape the findings (Finlay, 2002). An ongoing

self-reflection process will be maintained to critically examine the researcher's influence on the study. Triangulation of data, methods, and perspectives will be used to create a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, thus improving the confirmability of the findings (Patton, 2002). These combined strategies of rigor—credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, triangulation, and reflexivity—ensure that the study's results are trustworthy and grounded in the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Morse et al., 2002; Patton, 2002). By using these practices, the study aims to produce valid and reliable insights into the influence of gender norms and power dynamics on responses to violence against children in Kibaha District.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are paramount in qualitative research to ensure the protection and respect of participants, as well as the integrity of the research process. This study will adhere to the principles outlined in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) and the ethical guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017). First, informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring that they are fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences (Creswell, 2013). The consent process will also include an explanation of confidentiality measures, assuring participants that their identities and responses will be protected throughout the research process.

Additionally, the study prioritized participant privacy by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. All data were stored securely, and identifying information was removed from transcripts and reports (Merriam, 2009). The principle of beneficence guided the study, ensuring that the research did not cause harm and that the benefits of the study, such as contributing to improved child protection strategies, outweighed any potential risks (Creswell, 2013). Participants were also given the option to review and confirm their data to ensure accurate representation of their views, thus enhancing the credibility of the research. Finally, the study was conducted with cultural sensitivity, recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds and beliefs of participants, as cultural competence was crucial when addressing sensitive issues such as violence (Ponterotto, 2005). These ethical guidelines ensured that the study was conducted responsibly, with respect for participants' rights and well-being.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISSUSSION

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on the specific objectives

outlined in Chapter One. The findings are derived from qualitative data collected

through In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted

with key stakeholders in Kibaha District, including parents, children, community

leaders, and child protection actors. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how

gender norms influence the prevention of violence against children (VAC) in the

study area.

4.2 Influence of Gender Norms on Community Perceptions of Violence Against

Children in Kibaha District

In Kibaha District, gender norms deeply shape how violence against children (VAC)

is understood and tolerated. These norms are learned early in life and internalized

across generations, influencing the behaviors of parents, community leaders, and

children themselves. Respondents across both In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus

Group Discussions (FGDs) consistently described how gender expectations

determine whether certain violent actions are perceived as discipline or abuse.

> *"In our community, when a boy is beaten for misbehaving, people*
> *say it's normal, that he is being made strong. But if a girl is*
> *slapped, it becomes a serious issue, sometimes taken to the village*
> *leader."* IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

This quote reflects the belief that boys should endure physical punishment as part of

their socialization into masculinity, while girls are viewed as needing protection due to their perceived fragility or value to family honor. Such double standards contribute to underreporting of violence against boys and silence about emotional abuse toward girls.

Another recurring theme was the use of traditional gender roles to justify or excuse violence. Community members spoke of how expectations for obedience, especially among girls, could lead to punitive parenting practices.

> *"If a girl answers back or refuses to cook, some parents will say she is not respecting her role and beat her. It's not always called violence—it's correction."*— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025

In this context, violence is often disguised as a form of moral correction, particularly for girls who fail to conform to submissive roles. This highlights how gendered expectations are used to legitimize physical and psychological control.

The gendered labeling of behavior also emerged as a key factor. Participants noted that assertiveness in boys is praised, while similar behavior in girls is punished.

> *"When boys are loud or aggressive, people say it's normal. But if a girl shouts or argues, they say she is wild and beat her to teach manners."* IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

Such framing reinforces unequal perceptions of what is acceptable behavior and who deserves protection. It also places girls in a position where silence is associated with virtue, discouraging them from reporting abuse.

Furthermore, the study revealed that child protection is often gendered in ways that are harmful to both boys and girls. While girls may be kept close due to fear of

sexual violence, boys are often left unsupervised under the assumption that they are tougher.

> *"Girls are told to stay home and not talk to strangers, but boys are free to roam, even at night. When something bad happens to boys, it's blamed on their stubbornness."*— *FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This illustrates how protective practices can themselves be discriminatory, exposing boys to risk and reinforcing the idea that they should not show vulnerability. In addition to family practices, interviewees pointed out the role of schools in reinforcing gendered discipline.

> *"At school, boys are caned more than girls. Teachers believe boys are more difficult to control, so they beat them to make them listen."*— *IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

Institutionalized corporal punishment in schools reflects and amplifies community beliefs, embedding gender disparities into formal systems of discipline.

Participants also identified a link between gender and silence around abuse. While girls may be protected, they are also pressured not to speak up when abused, particularly by male relatives.

> *"When a girl is abused by someone in the family, many parents say she should keep quiet to protect the family name. It becomes a secret."*— *FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This silence, rooted in norms about family honor and female purity, often prevents justice and perpetuates cycles of abuse.

Male dominance in decision-making was another theme that emerged. Community leaders, who are often male, were described as gatekeepers in handling abuse cases.

> *"Most community decisions are made by men. If a case of child beating is reported, they first ask whether the child deserved it, especially if it's a boy."*— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

Such practices show how gender norms interact with power structures to obstruct child protection, reinforcing the legitimacy of adult male authority over children's rights. Participants further explained that certain violent behaviors are normalized due to the way gender is socially constructed.

> *"People say boys must learn through pain. That's why no one stops the beatings unless there are injuries. It's like pain is part of growing up male."* — FGD/Kibaha/April 2025

This normalization of violence as a tool for constructing masculinity demonstrates how harmful norms can perpetuate trauma and desensitize communities to abuse. Cultural rituals were also mentioned as reinforcing gender roles that facilitate VAC.

> *"During initiation, boys are told not to cry even if beaten. Crying is for girls. This stays in their minds and makes them hide pain or abuse later."* — IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

These practices not only discourage reporting of violence but also create emotional repression among boys, with long-term psychological consequences. Additionally, the study revealed how mothers often lack decision-making power in disciplining children, even when they disagree with violent methods.

> *"Even if a mother doesn't want the child to be beaten, the father's word is final. She cannot stop him, especially if it's the son being punished."* — FGD/Kibaha/April 2025

This reflects the patriarchal structure in many homes, where women have caregiving responsibilities but limited authority to protect children from violence. Some

respondents linked harmful gender norms with religion and tradition.

> *"Some people say the Bible says to use the stick and not spare the child. They think this means it's their duty to beat children, especially boys." — IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

Religious texts and interpretations are sometimes used to justify harsh discipline, especially in patriarchal contexts where questioning authority is discouraged.

Lastly, some participants noted that awareness is growing but that progress is slow due to the deep-rooted nature of gender norms.

> *"Nowadays some parents are changing. They talk to children instead of beating. But it's not common yet, because people still believe real discipline comes from pain."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This indicates a continuous shift in community attitudes, highlighting significant opportunities for implementing gender-responsive education aimed at challenging entrenched traditional beliefs and fostering safer, more equitable child-rearing practices.

4.3 Influence of Gendered Power Relations on Family Responses to Violence Against Children in Kibaha District

In Kibaha District, gendered power structures heavily influence how families respond to cases of violence against children. These dynamics are particularly evident in the unequal authority between men and women in household decision-making, the cultural silencing of mothers, and the prioritization of family honor over child safety. Participants in the in-depth interviews shared lived experiences that illustrate how patriarchal hierarchies shape family-level protection practices.

> *"In our home, even if the mother disagrees with how the child is punished, she cannot stop the father. His word is final."*— *IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This quote underscores how men, as heads of households, often hold ultimate authority over disciplinary matters. Women's caregiving roles are thus reduced to implementation rather than influence, leaving them powerless to intervene even when they sense harm. Such hierarchies normalize violence and silence dissent from more nurturing parental figures.

> *"When a father beats a child and the mother tries to intervene, she is told she is spoiling the child or disrespecting her husband."*— *IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

Here, the act of defending a child is recast as disobedience to male authority. The expectation that women must be submissive to their husbands overrides their protective instincts, revealing how gendered expectations compromise child safety in favor of preserving patriarchal order.

> *"In many families, issues of violence are not taken outside the home unless the man agrees. Even serious abuse is kept private."*— *IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This highlights how men function as gatekeepers of justice in the domestic sphere. The decision to report violence or seek help is often contingent upon male approval, which can delay or suppress intervention, particularly when the perpetrator is a male relative.

> *"Most men believe it is their right to discipline the child in any way they see fit. The community rarely questions that."*— *IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

The perception of male entitlement to discipline reinforces impunity for violent behavior. Communities normalize this authority, further undermining protective mechanisms for children and reinforcing patriarchal norms that prioritize male control over child welfare.

> *"Women can notice when a child is emotionally disturbed, but they cannot speak about it if the man says it's just misbehavior."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This illustrates how emotional violence often goes unacknowledged due to male dismissal. Mothers, who are often attuned to psychological signs of trauma, are denied legitimacy in naming or addressing non-physical forms of violence, contributing to prolonged child suffering.

> *"Even if a child is sexually abused, some families first ask what the child did wrong. This happens especially when the abuser is related to the father."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This tragic insight reflects the intersection of patriarchy and denial. Instead of prioritizing the child's protection, families may focus on shielding the male abuser—especially if he holds authority—thus compromising justice and reinforcing systemic silence.

> *"Sometimes mothers want to report abuse, but they are warned that if they go to the police without the father's consent, they will face divorce or violence."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

Fear of retaliation limits mothers' ability to seek justice for their children. The threat of economic and social abandonment acts as a coercive tool, trapping women in silence and perpetuating the cycle of violence within the family unit.

> *"The village elders usually listen to the father when there is a problem. Even if the mother complains, she is told to obey and solve the issue at home."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

Community-level structures mirror household hierarchies, where male authority is prioritized in resolving disputes. This undermines women's agency and contributes to a culture where child abuse is managed informally, often with inadequate outcomes.

> *"I have seen a mother cry for her daughter who was beaten badly, but she was told it's not her place to interfere with the father's way of discipline." — IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This emotional account shows how empathy and protective instincts are suppressed by rigid gender roles. Women's distress is often invalidated, reinforcing the idea that caregiving must remain passive and secondary to male judgment.

> *"Most fathers do not attend child protection meetings. They say it's a woman's matter, yet they control the decisions at home."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This irony reveals a structural gap in community engagement: while men exert control over family decisions, they disengage from forums designed to promote child welfare. This creates a vacuum where critical perspectives on violence are ignored or resisted.

> *"Even boys are not allowed to express pain. If a boy complains of being beaten, the father says he is weak and must be a man."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

Patriarchal power not only marginalizes women but also polices boys' emotional expression. This form of gendered control limits recognition of abuse and

discourages male children from seeking help, reinforcing harmful masculinities.

> *"The father decides whether the child should be taken to hospital after a beating. If he says no, even the mother cannot take the child alone."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

Medical care, a basic right, becomes conditional upon patriarchal permission. This power imbalance endangers children's health and further illustrates the disempowerment of mothers within male-dominated households.

> *"The child's pain becomes a private matter if the abuser is powerful. Family reputation is more important than justice for the child."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This final quote powerfully encapsulates the core issue: family honor and male status often take precedence over a child's safety and dignity. In such contexts, gendered power relations not only obscure accountability but also institutionalize silence around violence.

In the FGDs, participants discussed how gendered power hierarchies within family's influence how cases of violence against children are handled. Across groups, it was evident that patriarchal authority continues to dictate family responses, often silencing women and prioritizing the control and reputation of male figures over the wellbeing of children. The discussions revealed multiple layers of power relations that shape protection, silence, or escalation of child abuse within households.

> *"In our homes, it is the man who decides everything. Even if the child is seriously beaten, the mother waits for the father to say what to do next."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This quote illustrates how male-dominated decision-making processes hinder timely responses to violence. Mothers, who may be more emotionally connected to the child's suffering, are left powerless to act. This reinforces structural gender inequality and places children at risk of further harm due to delayed or absent interventions.

> *"Sometimes the child tells the mother what happened, but she says 'wait until your father comes'—even if the matter is serious."—FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Here, even the initial response to disclosure is deferred to the male head, reflecting how deeply embedded gendered authority shapes maternal behavior. This delay can discourage children from speaking up again, especially if they perceive that urgency and care are not guaranteed.

> *"When the child is beaten by the father, the mother cannot ask questions. If she does, it becomes a fight between the parents."—FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This finding exposes how power dynamics not only silence women but also create tension that discourages them from advocating for their children. Fear of conflict becomes a barrier to child protection, sustaining a culture of silent suffering.

> *"In most families, if a child is abused by an uncle or male neighbor, the father may choose to 'settle it at home' instead of reporting."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This reflects how male privilege extends beyond the nuclear family to shield other male figures from accountability. Protecting the family's image and male solidarity often overrides the pursuit of justice for the abused child.

> *"If a mother wants to go to social welfare without telling the husband, she risks being beaten or divorced."—FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

The threat of violence or marital breakdown deters mothers from seeking outside help, even in cases of serious abuse. This fear is a manifestation of structural gendered power that undermines the safety net available to children within the family.

> *"Some fathers say a 'real man' must discipline his child. They don't see beating as violence—it's a father's duty."—FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This statement reveals how socialized norms about masculinity contribute to the normalization of violence. When discipline is conflated with control and toughness, children become recipients of force rather than guidance, and mothers' objections are dismissed as weakness.

> *"Even when mothers want to stop a child from being beaten, they are told they are too soft or that they are spoiling the child."—FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Such accusations discourage maternal advocacy and reinforce the belief that women are too emotional or incapable of making sound judgments about discipline. This not only disempowers women but also perpetuates violence through social ridicule.

> *"In family meetings, it's usually the men who speak. Women may whisper their thoughts later, but their views are not given priority."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This reveals how even within informal family conflict resolution spaces, male voices

dominate. The marginalization of women in these forums results in protection strategies that often fail to address children's best interests.

> *"There was a time a child was molested, and the mother wanted to report, but the family said it would bring shame. The father refused to take action."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Family reputation, especially as defined by male heads, often supersedes justice for the child. This silence allows perpetrators to act with impunity and contributes to underreporting of sexual abuse cases, particularly when the abuser is a known figure.

> *"Even boys are not allowed to cry or complain when they are hurt. Their fathers tell them to 'be strong like a man.'"— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This observation demonstrates how gendered power also constrains boys, imposing emotional repression and discouraging help-seeking behavior. Such expectations foster a toxic form of masculinity that normalizes suffering in silence.

> *"Mothers say they are closest to the children and know when something is wrong, but their opinions are often ignored during family decisions."—FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Despite being the primary caregivers, mothers are frequently excluded from decision-making processes. Their intimate knowledge of the child's well-being is devalued, reinforcing hierarchical gender dynamics that jeopardize timely interventions.

> *"When abuse happens, fathers often blame the mother for not raising the child well, even if they were not involved in parenting."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This tendency to shift blame further disempowers mothers and protects male authority from scrutiny. It deflects accountability and reinforces the notion that child-rearing failures are the woman's burden alone.

> *"Many men say issues of children are women's responsibility, yet they control all the major decisions, even those about punishment or reporting abuse."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This contradiction highlights the complexity of power dynamics—where caregiving is feminized, but authority is masculinized. The resulting gap leaves women responsible but without the power to protect, and children vulnerable within a fragmented system of care.

4.4 Culturally Embedded Gender Norms That Hinder or Support Violence Prevention Efforts in Kibaha District

The focus group discussions revealed a complex interplay between traditional beliefs and gender expectations that either hinder or support violence prevention. Participants shared culturally rooted insights some of which sustain silence and control, while others promote compassion, collective responsibility, and protection. The following quotes illustrate how gender norms embedded in Kibaha's culture shape community attitudes and intervention practices.

> *"In our traditions, a girl must be quiet and obedient. If she complains about being beaten, people say she is disrespectful."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This quote demonstrates how cultural values of female submission inhibit disclosure and protection. Girls are taught that silence is a virtue, even in the face of abuse, which makes it difficult for them to speak out or seek help. This hinders violence prevention, as community members interpret a girl's protest as disobedience rather than a call for safety.

> *"Boys are expected to be tough. If they cry after being punished, they are mocked and told they are not real men."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Cultural expectations around masculinity lead to the normalization of physical violence against boys. Emotional expression is discouraged, and vulnerability is equated with weakness. This suppresses reporting and fosters acceptance of violence as a legitimate part of male upbringing, reducing the chances for early intervention.

> *"We are taught that disciplining a child with a stick is love. If you don't beat, you are seen as a careless parent."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Such beliefs present a major barrier to preventing violence, as they frame abuse as care. Parents fear social judgment for adopting non-violent methods, and as a result, corporal punishment becomes institutionalized within family and community norms. This illustrates how cultural definitions of love and responsibility can unintentionally perpetuate harm.

> *"Even today, some elders say a woman should not question a man's way of disciplining the children."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Here, patriarchal norms restrict women's influence in family decisions about discipline, leaving mothers unable to challenge harmful practices. This quote highlights how male authority is upheld through cultural tradition, even when it puts children at risk. Women's voices—despite their caregiving roles—are often excluded from protective action.

> *"In our religion, we are taught to protect the weak. Some religious leaders now preach against beating children, saying it is not godly."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This quote shows how cultural and religious teachings can be a source of support for violence prevention. By framing non-violence as a moral duty, progressive religious messages are helping to shift attitudes and open space for gender-sensitive caregiving within the community.

> *"In some families, when a girl is raped, she is blamed for bringing shame. The solution becomes marriage, not justice."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Harmful cultural beliefs about female purity and family honor create a climate of victim-blaming and silence. Violence against girls is often concealed, and perpetrators go unpunished to protect family reputation. This deeply entrenched gender norm undermines legal justice and denies survivors the right to protection and healing.

> *"Older women in the community sometimes tell young mothers not to report abuse. They say, 'We raised children with beatings and they turned out fine.'"— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This quote highlights the intergenerational transmission of harmful norms. Even women, despite experiencing or witnessing abuse, may perpetuate it through advice based on tradition. This makes transformation difficult unless older voices are also engaged in community education.

> *"There is a belief that a father's anger is natural, and children should stay away when he is upset. No one tries to talk to him."—FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Cultural acceptance of male anger as uncontrollable discourages intervention, especially when men are perceived as untouchable in the home. This norm enables violent outbursts to go unchecked and discourages collective responsibility for children's safety.

> *"When girls reach puberty, they are expected to stay home more. If they are beaten, people say it's for their own protection."—FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Protection and control become blurred in this context, where restrictive gender norms justify physical violence as a way to preserve purity. While presented as care, such actions limit girls' freedom and ignore non-violent forms of guidance.

> *"There are traditions of communal parenting. If a child is misbehaving, any adult can correct them—even without beating."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This quote reveals a culturally embedded strength: collective responsibility for child upbringing. When rooted in compassion rather than violence, such norms can be a powerful foundation for prevention programs. Recognizing and reinforcing these positive traditions could help replace harmful practices.

> *"Sometimes traditional healers are called to 'heal' a child's misbehavior through rituals, not beatings. These rituals are about calming, not hurting."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

While controversial, this example demonstrates alternative approaches that are non-violent and culturally accepted. These traditions—though spiritual—offer a contrasting narrative to physical punishment and could be integrated into community strategies that emphasize emotional support.

> *"There are now some men who are starting to say that hitting children is wrong. They talk about it in meetings and churches."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

This positive shift shows that cultural change is possible. When men challenge violent norms in public spaces, they model alternative masculinities and signal to others that nurturing is not gender-exclusive. Such voices are critical to transforming community standards.

> *"The problem is, change is slow because elders think new ways are disrespectful to our traditions."— FGD/Kibaha/April 2025*

Resistance to change is rooted in the perception that reform threatens cultural identity. Efforts to prevent violence must therefore engage with tradition respectfully, framing alternatives as evolution rather than rejection. Only then can sustainable cultural transformation take root.

The in-depth interviews provided detailed personal accounts of how cultural gender norms—both harmful and supportive—influence efforts to prevent violence against

children (VAC) in Kibaha District. These norms are deeply entrenched in traditions, religious beliefs, and everyday parenting practices. While many reinforce silence and corporal punishment, some were seen to offer pathways for protection and change.

> *"In our culture, if a child talks back to an elder, especially a girl, it is seen as shameful. Beating becomes the solution to restore order."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This quote reveals how respect is culturally equated with silence and submission, particularly for girls. Such norms legitimize violence as a means of maintaining authority and suppressing expression. These practices not only silence children but also discourage them from reporting abuse or seeking help.

> *"The community believes that if a boy cries when punished, he will grow up weak. So we are taught not to comfort boys when they are hurt."—IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This illustrates how masculinity is constructed through emotional suppression. By denying boys comfort, communities reinforce the idea that pain is part of becoming a man. This not only normalizes violence but also creates barriers for boys to voice emotional or physical suffering.

> *"Traditionally, it is said that 'a child's ears are in the buttocks,' meaning that beating teaches better than words."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This proverb captures a widely accepted cultural justification for corporal punishment. Such sayings are passed through generations and serve to legitimize physical violence as educational. They pose a major challenge to modern efforts advocating for non-violent parenting.

> *"A woman questioning how her husband disciplines the child is seen as disrespectful. She may even be accused of destroying the family."*— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

Here, the intersection of gender roles and family loyalty prevents women from challenging harmful practices. This quote reveals how cultural expectations around female obedience silence mothers, further exposing children to unopposed violence.

> *"In our tradition, protecting the family's name is more important than talking about abuse, especially if the abuser is a male relative."*— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

This shows how gendered family reputation, often linked to male figures, leads to the suppression of abuse cases. Children's safety is sacrificed to protect male status and uphold communal honor, obstructing justice and healing.

> *"Our elders say a man who doesn't beat his children doesn't love them. So violence becomes proof of care."*— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

Love is culturally interpreted through physical discipline, a deeply rooted belief that complicates prevention efforts. This inversion of affection and aggression makes it difficult to introduce alternative methods of child guidance that emphasize empathy and communication.

> *"There are traditional teachings during puberty where girls are told to endure suffering without complaint. It's preparation for being a wife."*— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

Such cultural rites of passage normalize endurance of pain and silence, particularly for girls. They prepare them to tolerate abuse later in life, both as children and future wives, thus perpetuating cycles of gendered violence and subjugation.

> *"Even when violence happens, many families first consult clan elders—not the police or welfare officers—because it is seen as a private matter."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This reflects how traditional structures are prioritized over formal child protection mechanisms. While culturally trusted, such informal processes often lack the tools or willingness to hold perpetrators accountable, especially when they are male family members.

> *"Sometimes religion supports peace. Some pastors now teach that children should be corrected with words, not with beatings."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

Amid harmful norms, positive change is emerging from faith-based teachings that promote non-violent discipline. This quote reflects how cultural institutions—when aligned with children's rights—can become allies in transforming violent norms.

> *"There are grandmothers in the village who tell stories that teach kindness and respect, not fear. These stories are different from the old ways of control."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

This offers a hopeful view of cultural evolution, where oral traditions can transmit protective messages. Such narratives challenge harsh discipline and affirm nurturing values that support violence prevention in culturally acceptable ways.

> *"In some areas, local leaders discourage public discussion about abuse. They say it ruins the village's image."— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025*

Community image is often protected at the expense of truth and justice. This culture of denial sustains impunity and undermines children's rights to protection, as addressing abuse is perceived as betrayal rather than responsibility.

> *"We were raised to believe that whatever happens in the home stays there. Reporting outside is betrayal."*— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

This norm promotes a culture of silence that shields abusers and discourages external intervention. While it aims to preserve family unity, it paradoxically enables prolonged suffering and prevents children from accessing support systems.

> *"Some men now speak at village meetings, saying we need to change how we treat children. It encourages others to listen."*— IDI/Kibaha/April 2025

The involvement of men in challenging harmful gender norms is a powerful catalyst for change. This quote emphasizes that when respected male figures advocate for non-violence, they help dismantle stereotypes and model new cultural pathways toward child protection.

4.5 Discussion of the Findings

4.5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter Four in relation to the three specific objectives of the study. The discussion is grounded in the Gender and Power Theory by Raewyn Connell (1987), which frames the analysis of how power, labor, and emotional attachments (cathexis) are organized along gender lines. The findings are also discussed alongside previous empirical studies, theoretical insights, and policy frameworks reviewed in Chapter Two. The discussion highlights the centrality of gender norms in shaping perceptions, responses, and interventions related to violence against children (VAC) in Kibaha District and similar cultural contexts.

4.5.2 Gender Norms and Community Perceptions of Violence Against Children

The study revealed that deeply rooted gender norms significantly influence how violence against children is perceived in Kibaha District. Community perceptions are not neutral; rather, they are shaped by cultural expectations around masculinity, femininity, and obedience. Boys are often expected to endure harsh discipline as a pathway to becoming "strong men," while girls are socialized to be submissive and quiet. These gendered expectations affect how violence is justified, reported, or ignored.

Boys who experience corporal punishment are perceived as receiving essential training for adulthood, while girls who face similar treatment may be seen as victims, but only if they conform to idealized standards of femininity. Assertive behavior in girls is often labeled as disrespectful, thus justifying punitive responses. This aligns with Connell's (1987) concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, where toughness and emotional suppression are rewarded among males, and compliance is expected from females.

Moreover, the study found that emotional abuse and psychological control are under-recognized forms of violence, particularly when exercised within the culturally accepted bounds of "discipline." These findings echo research by Jewkes et al. (2015), which highlights how social norms mask certain forms of abuse by embedding them in tradition. The implication is that interventions must go beyond legal reform to engage with social norms that normalize violence under the guise of correction or moral upbringing.

4. 5.3 Gendered Power Relations and Family Responses to VAC

A central finding of this study is that gendered power dynamics within families have a profound impact on how cases of VAC are handled. Fathers are typically positioned as ultimate decision-makers in disciplinary and protection matters. Mothers, though often closer to children emotionally, are frequently silenced or threatened when attempting to intervene. In extreme cases, women risk violence or divorce if they attempt to report child abuse without the father's consent.

This reflects Connell's "division of power," which posits that male dominance is institutionalized not only in public but also in private spheres. The authority granted to men within the household reinforces their control over how and whether violence is addressed. This power imbalance silences women's voices and delays necessary responses to child abuse, putting children's safety at risk.

The study also found that community-based resolution mechanisms tend to favor the male perspective. In cases of abuse, male elders often discourage external reporting to "protect the family name" or avoid shame. This finding is supported by Msuya (2023) and Mganga & Kiwelu (2022), who found that community elders in Tanzanian settings often prioritize social harmony and patriarchal control over justice for children. The persistence of such practices means that even when abuse is acknowledged, it is unlikely to be reported formally unless the abuser is considered socially disposable.

4. 5.4 Culturally Embedded Gender Norms That Hinder or Support Violence Prevention

The findings show that cultural norms are not uniformly harmful; rather, they are ambivalent some inhibit and others support violence prevention. Harmful norms include beliefs that a "good" child is obedient, silent, and subject to adult control without question. These norms make it difficult for children to report abuse or for caregivers—especially women—to act decisively. The proverb "a child's ears are in the buttocks," frequently quoted in interviews, encapsulates how violence is viewed as both disciplinary and loving.

Patriarchal interpretations of religion also reinforce harmful practices. Some respondents cited religious justifications for beating children, interpreting scriptural references to "the rod" as literal encouragement for corporal punishment. These findings reflect the work of Heise (2018), who argues that the confluence of religious doctrine and patriarchy reinforces social acceptance of child abuse in conservative communities.

However, the study also surfaced promising cultural values and shifts. For instance, traditions of communal caregiving and storytelling were identified as potential vehicles for promoting empathy and non-violence. Religious leaders who reinterpret scriptures to encourage non-violent parenting were seen as important allies in cultural transformation. Likewise, men who challenge traditional norms and speak out publicly against VAC were credited with influencing others positively. These

findings are consistent with Plan International (2023), which emphasizes the need to mobilize cultural and religious actors in promoting protective gender norms.

4. 5.5 Theoretical Implications

The findings validate Connell's Gender and Power Theory as a relevant framework for understanding VAC in patriarchal societies. The "sexual division of labor" was evident in the gendered roles assigned to mothers (nurturing but powerless) and fathers (authoritative but emotionally distant). The "sexual division of power" manifested in how male authority overrode women's decisions in both disciplinary and protective matters. Finally, "cathexis" was illustrated in the emotional socialization of boys and girls—boys were taught to endure and conceal pain, while girls were taught to internalize blame and avoid confrontation.

This triangulation of theory and data reinforces the argument that gender is not merely a background variable but a central organizing principle in the social structure of violence and care. The implication is that gender-responsive interventions must address all three dimensions of power simultaneously to be effective.

4. 5.6 Practical and Policy Implications

The findings suggest several practical implications. First, child protection efforts must be integrated with gender norm transformation strategies. Interventions should not only raise awareness about VAC but also challenge the social norms that justify or conceal violence. Community-based campaigns, led by trusted figures such as elders and faith leaders, are essential for legitimacy and cultural resonance.

Second, interventions must empower women within households and community decision-making structures. This includes legal empowerment, economic support, and leadership development so that mothers can act in the best interests of their children without fear of retaliation.

Third, engaging men and boys is essential. Transformative programs that reframe masculinity to include care, empathy, and emotional expression can reduce the pressure on boys to endure violence and on men to uphold harmful traditions. Creating safe spaces for intergenerational dialogue on discipline and parenting could further shift norms at the grassroots level.

The discussion shows that gender norms in Kibaha District have a profound influence on how VAC is defined, justified, and addressed. While many of these norms perpetuate harm, others hold potential for promoting non-violence and protection—especially when reinterpreted through a gender-equitable lens. Addressing violence against children in such settings requires culturally grounded, gender-responsive strategies that challenge patriarchal structures while building on positive community values. By centering gender and power in the analysis, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural systems can be mobilized to protect children and promote justice.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Findings

This study explored the role of gender norms in influencing the prevention of violence against children (VAC) in Kibaha District. Using qualitative methods, the research examined the ways in which community beliefs, gendered power dynamics, and cultural practices shape both the perception and response to violence. The findings are organized according to the study's three specific objectives.

The first objective sought to examine how gender norms influence community perceptions of VAC. The study found that traditional beliefs around masculinity and femininity deeply shape how violence is interpreted and justified. Boys are expected to endure harsh punishment as a rite of passage into manhood, while girls are taught to be submissive, obedient, and silent. These norms normalize physical punishment for boys as discipline and frame girls' silence as a sign of respect. Emotional abuse is often unrecognized, and assertive behavior—particularly among girls—is punished as defiance rather than treated as a form of expression or need for care.

The second objective focused on assessing how gendered power relations affect family responses to VAC. The study revealed that male authority dominates disciplinary and protective decisions in the household, leaving mothers with limited ability to intervene. Fathers are often seen as the final decision-makers, and their actions—regardless of severity—are rarely questioned. Women who attempt to challenge violent behavior or report abuse risk verbal abuse, marital conflict, or

social alienation. In many cases, reporting to external institutions such as police or social welfare offices is discouraged to protect family reputation. This patriarchal structure not only silences women but also endangers children by normalizing violence within the family setting.

The third objective aimed to identify culturally embedded gender norms that either hinder or support violence prevention efforts. The findings demonstrate that while many traditional beliefs perpetuate violence such as the notion that "a child's ears are in the buttocks"—others offer avenues for transformation. Practices such as communal parenting, storytelling, and faith-based teachings that emphasize kindness and empathy are emerging as supportive strategies for non-violent child-rearing. In some areas, progressive religious leaders and men who challenge harmful norms are shifting attitudes and promoting protective behaviors. However, resistance remains strong among elders who perceive change as a threat to cultural identity.

Overall, the study highlights that gender norms in Kibaha District are complex and multi-layered. They can both hinder and support efforts to prevent violence, depending on how they are interpreted, reinforced, or challenged by community members, families, and institutions.

5.2 Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the centrality of gender norms in shaping how violence against children is perceived, practiced, and addressed in Kibaha District. Gender is not merely a background factor—it is a foundational lens through which discipline, protection, and family honor are understood. The patriarchal organization

of families, in which men dominate decision-making and women are assigned caregiving roles with limited authority, has direct implications for the safety and wellbeing of children.

While legal frameworks and national policies exist to protect children from violence, they are often undermined by deeply entrenched cultural norms and power imbalances at the household and community level. The normalization of corporal punishment, the silencing of women and children, and the prioritization of male reputation over child safety contribute to a culture of tolerance for violence. Yet, within this landscape, there are also promising signs of change. Community members are beginning to question traditional norms, and alternative values—centered on empathy, shared responsibility, and peaceful parenting—are gaining traction, particularly through religious and communal platforms.

Therefore, any effective strategy to prevent violence against children in Kibaha and similar contexts must address not only individual behavior but also the broader cultural systems that sustain inequality and justify harm. Transforming gender norms is not a peripheral task—it is essential to building safer, more nurturing environments for all children.

5.3 Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusion, this study recommends a multifaceted, culturally grounded, and gender-responsive approach to preventing violence against children in Kibaha District. First, it is crucial that community-level interventions directly engage with the cultural beliefs and gender norms that underpin violent

disciplinary practices. Rather than dismissing tradition, interventions should seek to reinterpret it in ways that affirm children's rights and dignity. For example, proverbs and stories that have historically justified corporal punishment can be reshaped to promote non-violence, empathy, and dialogue.

Second, there is a need to empower women within family structures and community leadership. This includes promoting women's participation in family decision-making, supporting mothers who report violence, and addressing the social risks they face—including stigma and retaliation. Women's lived experiences as primary caregivers make their perspectives critical in identifying and responding to child abuse. Their voices must be centered and protected in any child protection strategy.

Third, engaging men and boys as allies is essential. Initiatives should be developed that challenge harmful versions of masculinity and offer alternative models that value emotional expression, shared caregiving, and respectful discipline. Men in positions of authority—such as religious leaders, elders, and local government officers—must be mobilized to speak publicly against violence and model gender-equitable behavior.

Fourth, traditional and religious leaders must be viewed as partners in change rather than obstacles. When equipped with accurate information and engaged respectfully, these leaders can play a pivotal role in shifting harmful cultural norms and legitimizing new forms of parenting that uphold children's rights. Training programs that integrate religious teachings with child rights frameworks could be especially powerful in bridging the gap between cultural values and legal mandates.

Lastly, efforts to prevent violence must be backed by strong community-based child protection systems. These systems should be inclusive, gender-sensitive, and accessible to all families—especially women and children. Reporting mechanisms must be confidential and free from retaliation, while support services should be well-resourced and responsive to the gendered dynamics of abuse. Schools, clinics, and religious institutions must also be integrated into these systems to ensure a coordinated response.

In conclusion, the prevention of violence against children in Kibaha District requires an intentional and sustained effort to transform the gender norms that shape parenting, protection, and power. By challenging harmful traditions while honoring the values that promote care and responsibility, communities can move toward a future where children are raised with dignity, love, and safety.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX 1: IN DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

In-depth Interview Guide:

Introduction to the Interview:

- **Introduction to the Researcher**: Briefly introduce yourself, your role, and the purpose of the study.

- **Informed Consent**: Explain that the interview will be recorded (if applicable) and that the participant's responses will remain confidential.

- **Confidentiality**: Assure the participant that their identity will not be disclosed, and participation is voluntary.

- **Purpose of the Study**: Inform them that the study is exploring how gender norms in Kibaha District impact the prevention of violence against children.

- **Duration**: Mention the approximate duration of the interview (e.g., 30-60 minutes).

- **Questions or Concerns**: Invite the participant to ask questions or express any concerns.

Section 1: Participant Background Information

This section gathers contextual information about the participant's background and involvement in community work or related issues.

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself and explain your role in Kibaha District?

2. How long have you been involved in work related to children's rights or violence prevention in this area?

3. What do you consider to be the most pressing issues related to violence against children in Kibaha District?

Section 2: Understanding of Gender Norms (Objective 1)

This section focuses on exploring the participant's understanding of gender norms in Kibaha District and how they may contribute to or prevent violence against children.

1. How would you define gender norms in the context of Kibaha District?

2. What are some common gender expectations or roles that children (both boys and girls) are expected to follow in your community?

3. How do these gender norms impact children's behaviors, rights, and access to protection from violence?

4. In your opinion, how do gender norms influence the way children, especially girls, are treated by their families and communities?

5. Are there specific gender norms that might contribute to the perpetuation of violence against children? If so, can you provide examples?

Section 3: Role of Traditional and Cultural Practices in Shaping Gender Norms (Objective 2)

This section seeks to understand the influence of traditional and cultural practices on gender norms and their impact on children's experiences of violence.

1. What traditional or cultural practices are prominent in Kibaha that shape the roles of boys and girls?

2. Do these practices have an impact on how children experience or are protected from violence?

3. How do cultural beliefs or practices around masculinity or femininity contribute to children's vulnerability to violence?

4. Can you share examples where traditional beliefs have either prevented or perpetuated violence against children in Kibaha?

5. How are gender norms enforced through community practices (e.g., family structures, community gatherings, education)?

Section 4: Community Efforts and Interventions to Address Gender Norms and Prevent Violence (Objective 3)

This section focuses on exploring existing community interventions and how they challenge gender norms or prevent violence against children.

1. Are there any community-based programs or initiatives in Kibaha that focus on preventing violence against children? If yes, can you describe them?

2. In your opinion, how effective are these programs in challenging or changing harmful gender norms?

3. How do local leaders (e.g., elders, religious figures, teachers) address gender norms related to violence prevention?

4. Do you think that the current interventions are sensitive to gender issues and the unique experiences of boys and girls? Why or why not?

5. Have you seen any positive changes in the community regarding attitudes toward gender roles and the prevention of violence against children?

Section 5: Barriers to Effectively Addressing Gender Norms and Preventing Violence (Objective 4)

This section identifies challenges and barriers that hinder the effective prevention of violence against children in relation to gender norms.

1. What challenges or barriers do you think prevent effective implementation of gender-sensitive violence prevention strategies in Kibaha?

2. How do societal attitudes and traditional beliefs about gender contribute to resistance or difficulties in preventing violence against children?

3. Are there any community attitudes or misconceptions that undermine efforts to address violence against children and gender norms?

4. How do legal or policy frameworks in the district either support or hinder addressing gender-based violence against children?

5. What are some challenges faced by social workers, educators, or law enforcement in tackling these issues from a gender perspective?

Section 6: Recommendations and Suggestions for Improving Gender Norms and Violence Prevention (Objective 5)

This section aims to gather recommendations for improving interventions and addressing gender norms to prevent violence against children.

1. What do you think needs to change in the community's understanding of gender roles in order to reduce violence against children?

2. How can education and awareness campaigns be improved to challenge harmful gender norms in Kibaha?

3. What role do you think the government or local authorities should play in supporting efforts to change gender norms and prevent violence against children?

4. Are there any new programs or initiatives you would recommend to better address violence prevention in relation to gender norms?

5. What do you see as the key factors to successfully changing gender norms and reducing violence against children in Kibaha District?

Conclusion

- **Closing Remarks**: Thank the participant for their time and valuable contributions to the study.

- **Clarification of Next Steps**: Briefly explain the next steps in the research process, such as data analysis and report writing.

- **Contact Information**: Offer your contact details in case the participant has further questions or would like to learn about the results of the study.

APPENDIX 11: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Focus Group Discussion Guide:

Introduction to the Focus Group:

- **Introduction to the Facilitator**: Briefly introduce yourself and your role in the research study.

- **Purpose of the Study**: Explain the goal of the focus group, which is to explore the role of gender norms in preventing violence against children in Kibaha District.

- **Confidentiality**: Assure participants that all opinions shared will remain confidential, and that individual responses will not be attributed to anyone in particular.

- **Informed Consent**: Inform participants that their participation is voluntary and that the discussion will be recorded (if applicable) to ensure accuracy.

- **Ground Rules**: Set ground rules for respectful conversation, such as listening to others, not interrupting, and sharing thoughts openly.

- **Duration**: Mention the expected length of the session (e.g., 60-90 minutes).

Section 1: Participant Introduction

Start by encouraging participants to introduce themselves briefly, including:

1. Name (if they are comfortable sharing) and role in the community.

2. How long they have lived in Kibaha District.

3. What they know about violence against children and gender norms in their community.

Section 2: Understanding of Gender Norms (Objective 1)

This section will explore participants' perceptions of gender norms and how they impact children's lives.

1. How would you define gender norms in your community, especially when it comes to children?

2. What specific gender roles are children (boys and girls) expected to follow in Kibaha District?

3. How do these gender roles affect children's rights, behavior, and treatment in the family and community?

4. In your opinion, do gender norms help prevent or contribute to violence against children? Can you give examples?

Section 3: Gender Norms and Children's Vulnerability to Violence (Objective 2)

This section focuses on how gender norms contribute to violence or protection for children.

1. Do you think that certain gender norms (e.g., masculinity for boys, femininity for girls) make children more vulnerable to violence in any way? How?

2. Are there differences in how boys and girls are treated in terms of protection from violence? Can you give examples?

3. How do gendered expectations in the community influence children's access to safety or violence prevention?

Section 4: Role of Culture and Traditions (Objective 3)

This section explores how cultural and traditional practices reinforce or challenge gender norms that influence children's experiences with violence.

1. What traditional or cultural practices in Kibaha shape the gender roles of boys and girls? How do these practices affect how children are treated in your community?

2. Are there any cultural beliefs that contribute to violence against children? If so, how do these beliefs shape the way boys and girls experience violence?

3. How do elders, religious leaders, and community leaders influence children's experiences of gender norms and violence in your community?

Section 5: Community Efforts to Address Gender Norms and Violence (Objective 4)

This section explores the community's efforts to prevent violence and challenge harmful gender norms.

1. Are there any community initiatives or programs in Kibaha that focus on preventing violence against children? How are these programs addressing gender norms?

2. In your opinion, how effective are these programs in changing harmful gender norms and preventing violence against children?

3. How do local leaders (e.g., elders, religious leaders, educators) support or challenge gender norms to protect children from violence?

Section 6: Barriers to Preventing Violence and Changing Gender Norms (Objective 5)

This section identifies barriers to addressing gender norms and preventing violence against children.

1. What challenges does the community face in preventing violence against children, particularly in relation to gender norms?

2. Are there any barriers in the community that make it difficult to address gender-based violence or change harmful gender norms? What are they?

3. Do you think that the community is open to changing harmful gender norms? Why or why not?

Section 7: Recommendations for Action (Objective 6)

This section focuses on gathering recommendations for improving interventions and addressing gender norms to prevent violence against children.

1. In your opinion, what should be done to change harmful gender norms in the community to protect children from violence?

2. How can the government, community leaders, or organizations work together to better prevent violence against children through addressing gender norms?

3. What specific actions would you recommend to reduce gender-based violence against children and improve their safety in Kibaha District?

Conclusion

- **Closing Remarks**: Thank the participants for their time and valuable insights.

- **Final Thoughts**: Ask if anyone has any final thoughts, suggestions, or comments they would like to share.

- **Follow-up Information**: Inform the participants about the next steps in the research, including how the findings will be shared with the community (if applicable).

- **Contact Information**: Provide your contact details in case participants have any questions or would like further information.

THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA

Ref. No OUT/**PG202086135**   **22ⁿᵈ May 2025**

Town Director,
Kibaha Town Council,
P.O. Box. 30112,
KIBAHA.

Dear Director

RE: RESEARCH CLEARANCE FOR MS. ANNA SIMON MAWALLA, REG NO: PG202086135

2.   The Open University of Tanzania was established by an Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1992, which became operational on the 1ˢᵗMarch 1993 by public notice No.55 in the official Gazette. The Act was however replaced by the Open University of Tanzania Charter of 2005, which became operational on 1ˢᵗJanuary 2007.In line with the Charter, the Open University of Tanzania mission is to generate and apply knowledge through research.

3.   To facilitate and to simplify research process therefore, the act empowers the Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania to issue research clearance, on behalf of the Government of Tanzania and Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, to both its staff and students who are doing research in Tanzania. With this brief background, the purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Ms Anna Saimon Mawalla Reg.No: PG202086135,** pursuing **Master of Arts in Gender Studies (MAGS).** We here by grant this clearance to conduct a research titled **"Exploring the Role of Gender Norms in Preventing Violence Against Children, Case of Kibaha District"** She will collect her data at your area from 1ˢᵗ June to 10ᵗʰ July 2025.

4.   In case you need any further information, kindly do not hesitate to contact the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) of the Open University of Tanzania, P.O.Box 23409, Dar es Salaam. Tel: 022-2-2668820.We lastly thank you in advance for your assumed cooperation and facilitation of this research academic activity.

Yours sincerely,

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA

Prof.Gwahula Raphael Kimamala

For: VICE CHANCELLOR

JAMHURI YA MUUNGANO WA TANZANIA
OFISI YA RAIS
TAWALA ZA MIKOA NA SERIKALI ZA MITAA
HALMASHAURI YA MJI KIBAHA

Unapojibutafadhalitaja:

Kumb. Na. HB.106/268/01/103

18/06/2025

Afisa Mtendaji Kata,
Kata ya Msangani,
S.L.P.30112,
Halmashauri ya Mji Kibaha

YAH: KUFANYA UTAFITI Ms. ANNA SAIMON MAWALLA

Rejea somo tajwa hapo juu.

2. Ofisi ya Mkurugenzi wa Mji Kibaha imepokea barua yenye kumbukumbu namba **AB.123/202/01C/269** ya tarehe 10/06/2025 toka kwa Katibu Tawala wa Wilaya ya Kibaha ikimruhusu kufanya utafiti.

3. Kwa barua hii napenda kukujulisha kuwa ofisi imemruhusu mwanachuo huyo kufanya utafiti wake katika Kata yako.

4. Mada yake ya utafiti ni:- *"Exploring the role Gender Norms in Preventing Violence against Children: A case study at Kibaha District"*.

5. Muda wa utafiti huu ni kuanzia tarehe 01 Juni,2025 hadi tarehe 10 Julai,2025.

6. Tafadhali apewe ushirikiano

Getruda Kalenzi
**K.n.y: MKURUGENZI WA MJI
KIBAHA**

Nakala:
1. Ms. Anna S. Mawalla
   Mtafiti

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