

Reviewer's report

Title:Community perceptions of rape and child sexual abuse: a qualitative study in rural Tanzania

Version:3**Date:**20 June 2014

Reviewer:Daniel Edward Wight

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Major compulsory revisions

General: The English used in this paper needs to be checked carefully by a fluent English speaker. There are various grammatical mistakes, such as inconsistent tenses, and other examples of poor English. See, for instance, bottom p. 13, top p.15, top p. 16, top half p.26, top p. 30. The poor English seems to be concentrated in those parts of the paper that have been revised, as if the revisions have not been checked by someone with good English.

Although there has been some attempt to present the findings in a more sophisticated way, most of the viewpoints are still reported as homogeneous. It is striking, for instance, how virtually no gender differences are reported in viewpoints on rape and abuse.

p.5, bottom: Why is the tradition of Chagulaga Mayu necessarily patriarchal, as implied? This should be explained.

p.5, bottom: Should be clarified that these initiation rites are specific to particular ethnic groups, not all Tanzanians.

p.6, middle onwards: The implication that matrilineal societies are less gender segregated than patrilineal societies needs to be supported with reference to the literature. This summary of the literature on sexual culture in Tanzania would benefit from greater specificity, clarifying which aspects of culture are associated with which ethnic groups or regions of the country. At present it is a rather arbitrary collection of different customary practices. One approach would be to concentrate on the practices related to the ethnic group(s) being studied, i.e. the Ndamba and Pogoro. At minimum it should be indicated how the customary practices relate to the Ndamba and Pogoro, or there should be some acknowledgement that this is not currently documented.

p.10, bottom and Table 1: The rationale should be given for recruiting two groups of religious leaders and only one of ordinary 'community members'.

p. 11, middle: The explanation of FGDs repeats sentence at start of Methods section.

p.13, bottom: The statement 'young female participants revealed minimum awareness of what really constitute[s] rape' implies that a single, objective

definition of rape exists. The authors must clarify what definition they are using: e.g. their own, that of Tanzanian law, or that of UN agencies? In the middle of p.19 there is a reference to 'rape within marriage' yet under Tanzanian law this does not exist. At the start of the paper the authors should clarify how they are using the term 'rape'.

p.15: An important disagreement over rape within marriage is reported, on which opinions are likely to differ by gender, yet there is no reference to the sex of the participants presenting different viewpoints. If the transcripts do not allow such clarification this should be stated as a limitation of the study.

p.16, top: The wording here is particularly problematic. E.g. 'Informants' perceptions on the increase in sexual violence is attributable to a number of factors...' should be 'Informants attributed the increase in sexual violence to a number of factors...'. Later, the sentence 'Even though majority of the participants criticized some old traditions and considered them harmful to the society some practices were still acknowledged.' needs changing, since the 'Even though' makes no sense.

p.17: The sentence 'The wife would avoid sex to prevent herself from getting HIV/AIDS if she knew that the husband had a mistress.' seems unrelated to the rest of the paragraph and it is unclear how she could avoid sex given the acceptance of men's right to have sex within marriage, reported in previous section.

p.18, middle: The reference to the Freemasons' Society is confusing and needs more explanation.

p.19, top: There is a critical ambiguity in the first sentence. Do victims of rape fear being blamed for the sexual encounter itself, or for reporting the rape, or both?

p.20, Section 5: These findings are presented as if everyone across all group discussions shared these opinions. Yet the group of professionals included police officers. Did they also agree with this powerful condemnation of the police and judiciary?

p.25, bottom: The sentence starting 'We see power dimension conflicting with economic dimension..' is poorly written and unclear.

p.26, top: The statement that 'the challenge is that there are no clear pathways on how best to tackle these strongly ingrained attitudes.' is then followed by examples of how to tackle these attitudes. The statement needs re-writing. There are now numerous approaches around the world to modifying gender power relations: the authors should acknowledge this and, ideally, draw on reviews of what seems most effective.

p.26, bottom: The section on symbolic dimensions starts with symbolic issues and then switches to alcohol. The second half of the paragraph should be moved elsewhere.

p.27-28: Emotional dimensions. Again, this section starts with emotional issues but then moves on to unrelated topics: how victims' reporting of rape is shaped by the characteristics of the perpetrator; the role of poverty, etc.. The discussion is rather rambling, with a totally unexplained reference to 'caste'.

p.29, top: What was the first author's 'prolonged engagement in the field'? What role did s/he play?

p.29-30: The discussion of strengths and limitations should acknowledge more fully that FGDs can make it very difficult for people to express viewpoints counter to the dominant norms. There is a claim that 'the discussions were free' but no evidence given for this. Unless participants were also interviewed individually, or in different contexts, it is impossible to know how constrained they were in the group discussions. For instance, would it have been easy for women to argue that rape should be recognised within marriage? This limitation of group discussions can be acknowledged without invalidating the study.

p.30, Conclusions: Although the authors refer to the structural factors underlying the problem and to successful interventions that tackle these (e.g. the IMAGE project), their recommendations are entirely at the level of training programmes. Their own findings, and the literature they review, would suggest the need for interventions at multiple levels, especially at the macro level, e.g. through legislative changes and mass media campaigns. The recommendations should be further developed.

Level of interest:An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English:Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review:No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests other than a concern that the authors build on the existing research on this topic in Tanzania, which includes papers and books that I co-authored.