Author's response to reviews

Title: Gender norms in transition: a qualitative study on community understanding of intimate partner violence in urban Tanzania

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Title: Moving from frustration to questioning traditional gender norms: a qualitative study on community understanding of intimate partner violence in urban Tanzania

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To the editor,
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Moving from frustration to questioning traditional gender norms: a qualitative study on community understanding of intimate partner violence in urban Tanzania

On behalf of the authors, I am pleased to submit a revised version of the above referenced manuscript in response to the reviewers’ comments.

We have made efforts to respond to all the comments given by the reviewers which we believe have improved our manuscript considerably.

We provide; in the following pages a point by point response to the itemised comments as given in the reviewers’ report. Our points are in bold and italic after each of the comments given by the reviewers.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Rose M Laisser
For Authors
Reviewer: Stephen Lawoko

1) The authors need to add an elaborate presentation of theories on causes and consequences of violence against women in the introduction. This is especially crucial as they discuss their findings in relation to one of these theories (i.e. ecological model). This suddenly appears in the discussion without prior mention in the background. Also, there are several theoretical models explaining violence causation. The reason why they discuss their findings only in relation to the ecological model is not clear. They need to explain why they choose this framework alone or discuss their findings in relation to the different frameworks in general. The later is preferred.

We understand the reviewer’s concern about the need to include theories on causes and consequences of violence in the background section of our manuscript. We have now incorporated a section in the background (pg 7-8) on theories as suggested. We have included the culture of violence, power, feminist and social learning theories as well as the ecological model as seen below:

**Theories on causes and consequences of IPV against women**

There are several theories about the causes and consequences of IPV against women that are relevant for this study. Culture of violence theory focus on gender related norms that permit use of violence by a dominant group to others. Intimate partner violence is therefore seen more frequently in societies where men are considered superior and dominant [32]. The theory emphasizes the increased risk of violence in societies where violence has become integrated into the culture [18, 26, 28]. Power theory takes a step further by pointing specifically to the influence of power in violent relationships. Levinson’s [32] ethnographic study identified four elements of power; economic inequality between men and women, use of IPV to control the family, men’s authority, decision making powers and bureaucracy in divorce process as determinants of domestic violence. Feminist theory [33] relates IPV to the power of men as the dominant class. Men have more access to symbolic
and material resources and materials than women who are devalued, secondary and inferior to men. IPV against women is therefore given less weight because male dominance influences all aspects of life. If the power relation is threatened IPV may in fact increase due to conflicting expectations on masculinity [18]. However, in societies where women’s status is very high or very low, the level of IPV may be low since violence has no role in reinforcing male authority. Still in societies where sanctions are strong and functional (legal or cultural) IPV can decrease due to controlled male authority. Social learning theory focuses on the social context where behaviour is a result of observational learning, modelling and imitation [34, 35]. Males’ violent behaviour is a result of own previous experience of violence or of having witnessed their mothers being abused [36, 37]. The ecological model [38] offers a comprehensive understanding of risk factors linked to IPV at different levels. The individual level indicates biological characteristics and other individual experiences related to gender norms and expectations which in many settings predict men to perpetuate IPV towards their women partners [36, 37]. Other individual IPV risk factors build on social learning theory and include witnessing violence or being abused as a child or as an adolescence [19], having partners who are excessive alcohol or drug users [7, 37, 39] or being financially dependent [40, 41]. The relationship level refers to the immediate context in which abuse may occur such as male control over family resources, decision making power, economic inequalities’ and high levels of controlling behaviours [21, 32, 42, 43]. The community level is extended to family, neighbours, work and other social networks. Risk factors include restrictive marriage norms [19], honour killings [44] and lack of social support from others due to the silence associated with violence [18, 27]. The societal level includes dominant societal norms, laws and socio-economic policies that may influence sanction mechanisms. Lack of specific policies and laws to protect IPV affected women and lack of adequate sanction mechanisms for perpetrators are risk factors for IPV [18]. Accepting and practicing polygamous relationships has also been linked with IPV against women in sub-Saharan Africa [20, 45].
In the beginning of the discussion we have justified the use of the ecological model as follows:

Our findings denoted a community in transition, where the effects of intimate partner violence had started to fuel a wish for change. Consistent with the ecological model developed by Heise [38] the results indicated linkages between individual, relationship, community and societal influences for both understanding and response to IPV against women. Hence, this discussion will follow the ecological model which gives a comprehensive and important framework for illustrating community perceptions of violence against women including IPV [53]. See Figure 2.

2) Another matter related to the above is that the authors assert that they intended to “develop a model of relationship between community members understanding of intimate partner violence, their views on support of survivors and solutions to prevention”. This is rather confusing as their findings in my view confirm much to what is already reported in literature and in theoretical models including the ecological model. By both viewing their findings in relation to current theories and developing a model, they risk overcrowding the paper making it difficult to align the aims, results and consequent discussion. I suggest they should be content with a more elaborate discussion of their results in relation to theory. Development of a model would have been appropriate only if the results provided new insights beyond what is already known.

We acknowledge the reviewer’s comment and agree that we in this paper have discussed our findings in relation to existing theory rather than developing a model of our own, still using a grounded theory approach in the analytical process. We have therefore omitted the statement about aiming at developing a new theory in the method section (Design: 1st paragraph pg 10) as follows:
The data was analysed using the steps for grounded theory [46]. The findings were summarised into a model (Figure 1) and later integrated into existing theoretical framework for understanding IPV against women.

3) There is previous work done on community perceptions on intimate partner violence. This being a main theme of the paper, I feel the introduction does not cover adequately the literature in that regard, thus giving a wrong impression that such work is scarce.

We realise that we may have limited our referencing, focusing more on qualitative studies in this area. However, we see the need for including papers on community perceptions based on survey data from other settings including sub-Saharan Africa. These are the references that we have added in the introduction and that we also have discussed when relevant.

Minor essential revision

4) The methods and results are easy to follow. On page 10 however, the authors indicated that they used drawings and newspapers headlines etc. To trigger discussions. Could this have biased the discussion towards a more sympathetic view about violence? This may be added in the discussion as possible factors affecting results. Also, in general the authors have avoided a discussion of general shortcomings of the methods used in this study

To acknowledge possible shortcomings of any study is important. We have made efforts to be transparent about the procedures for increasing the trustworthiness (pg 15) and also included a section on limitations towards the end of our discussion section as seen below:-

Study Limitations

The study was conducted in a community characterized by a patriarchal system where women are culturally considered to have a subordinate status and minimum influence on decision making even regarding their own health. Although this may limit the application of the findings to other contexts there are many settings with similar gender norm systems that may recognize both the understanding and response to IPV described in this paper.

The approach in focus group discussions may have given an overly positive view of the transition in gender norms with participants avoiding to express deviant views justifying violence. However, our interpretation is that the discussions were free and reflected an increasing awareness about the seriousness of gender based violence. We also noted the complexity of the situation with community members being
trapped within traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity when at the same
time realising the harmful consequences of those expectations.

5) As already mentioned, the discussion should focus on discussing the findings in
relation to theoretical models of IPV. Also, the fact that community members on one
hand endorsed IPV but on other expressed concerns about it reveals a complex
picture. This is not discussed in detail. Could it be a reflection of societal transition?
Or methodological design issues e.g. the methods used sort of acted as an
intervention naturally leading to sympathetic attitude as the discussion progressed?
The discussion may benefit from incorporation of plausible explanations to this
complex picture. Also, how does this complex finding fit in the theoretical models of
IPV causation and control?

We agree with the reviewer and have re-structured the discussion section to
clearly indicate the relations with the ecological model and also included other
theories when relevant. See pages 23-31.

We think the observed complexity of community views reflects a transition in
gender norms including violence rather than being a methodological drawback.
Our study limitation indicates this (see above) and we have also elaborated on
this in two places towards the end of the discussion to clarify our views.

Many community members had started to question the norms that allow for violence
to be accepted at the time being trapped by the power of internalised traditional
gender norms. This illustrates how transition in norms on a societal level causes
tension at the individual and community level [18, 39].

Today there is evidence of effective strategies to prevent IPV [64] emphasising
primary prevention targeting behavioural and attitudinal change at younger ages and
engaging both men and women in challenging harmful gender norms. However,
Since the determinants of IPV are complex and vary between different cultural settings and levels, there is a need for countries such as Tanzania to be more proactive in research to evaluate such approaches for their relevance and applicability in the Tanzanian context [18, 65].

Discretionary revision

6) This first part of the title “from frustration to questioning traditional gender norms” I feel reflects only positive the positive elements of the findings in this study, while hiding some crucial evidence that IPV is still tolerated in the society. I would prefer a more neutral title. Why the second part of the title on its own” a qualitative study on community understanding of IPV in urban Tanzania”?

We understand the reviewer’s concern in relation to the title. However, we think that in the model the move from being frustrated towards questioning traditional gender norms is still valid and given in a context where it is clear that there is still a long way to go. But we agree that the title may benefit from taking a more neutral stand. Thus we have decided to change the title into:

Gender norms in transition – A qualitative study on community understanding of intimate partner violence in urban Tanzania.
Reviewer: Angela Taft

1) This is a thoughtful and interesting article and I enjoyed reading it as others will. I make suggestions about how to improve the clarity of the argument and some organisation of the discussion.

The study aims to explore community members understanding and responses to IPV. It explores and describes an important catalyst for change. The period when citizens of both sexes experience shifting gender roles and norms (in an peri-urban Tanzanian community) reflecting transition in their attitude to intimate partner violence (IPV). The analysis cleverly using Heise ecological model of IPV, highlights opportunities for change which is why it is important. I believe clarifying the role of and emphasising the analysis in the ecological model could strengthen the importance of the study’s findings. I also recommend some restructuring for clarity and suggested reconsiderations of one aspect of the findings.

We thank the reviewer for the positive recognition of our study and hope that we have managed to address the valuable comments below:

Major revision

2) Research Tools: Please give us your thematic guide as an appendix. Did you base it on the ecological model (EM)? As the EM is so important, please describe how it informed your thematic guide and your analysis. Please explain what ‘support’ bottom p9 means- are you referring or asking about legal, economic or social support for victims? Other upcoming Tanzanian researchers may wish to duplicate your method, please be clear about how you opened the discussion and then developed your themes.

We agree with the reviewer’s comment that we should be open about our pre-understanding and the methods used. The thematic guide was actually provided already in submission but may have been omitted due to us not labelling it
correctly. We have now included as additional file – Appendix 1 and elaborated on its content in the text and specified the meaning of support. We did not have the ecological model as a basis for the development of the guide but our general understanding of IPV included the levels of the ecological framework. The method section has been revised accordingly (Page 13):

Research tools
We prepared a thematic guide (Appendix 1) with four general themes namely; social cultural factors, policy environment, risks and help seeking behaviours in violent relationships and the last was a theme on future expectations of care, support and IPV prevention. The specific areas covered included community awareness and experiences of IPV as well as gender norms and attitudes towards marriage, IPV consequences, family, social, medical and legal support, the elders’ and local government leaders’ roles and the participants’ suggestions for prevention. We were guided by a general understanding of IPV in developing the guide. However, during data collection and initial analysis this pre-understanding was put within brackets [48].

In the data collection section we have elaborated on how we opened up the discussion and probed with the help of the thematic guide as seen below (1st paragraph pg 12)

Data collection
Data was collected for 4 months and the FGDs were moderated by a male and a female researcher who were both working with studies on violence. After introducing ourselves to the focus group participants we opened up the discussion by showing a drawing of a woman who looked sad and the discussants where asked to reflect on possible reasons for her state without prior mentioning IPV. Later, we showed them more specific newspaper headlines, such as “What does it mean when a father beats his wife in front of the children?” to initiate a discussion on IPV and its consequences. We used a thematic guide (Appendix 1) to help us probe further.
3) **Analytical procedures**: Please tell us who the ‘we’ is - usually initials are fine. Who performed open coding? - and did the EM - was there any –cross –coding-and did the EM inform your coding? If so, how? That is, did the EM levels emerge or were you actively seeking them? Figure 1 is not helpful but a coding model showing how your categories relate to each other would be.

We agree with the reviewer’s comments and have specified who we are in terms of the coding process. Using a grounded theory approach for the analysis included making efforts to put our pre-understanding within brackets during the coding process. The fitness to the ecological model emerged towards the end the analysis, when situating the results in relation to existing theories as seen in the text (pg 14):

**Analytical procedures**
The FGDs were transcribed verbatim in the Kiswahili language, which is the official language in Tanzania. Later they were translated into English to enable a joint analysis by the research team. Following a grounded theory approach the text was imported into the Open Code 2007 program [49] to facilitate the coding process. After reading the transcripts, RL and ME performed an open coding of the text, constantly comparing similarities and differences by going back to the original text. In the next step RL and ME performed selective coding where relevant codes were further conceptualized leading to the development of four main categories and eight sub-categories relevant to our research focus (Figure 1). On the basis of these categories and sub-categories, a core category was constructed to capture the essence of the findings. In a last stage the analysis was integrated and compared with existing theory.

We have taken out Figure 1 since it did not seem helpful. We have instead included a figure showing the relationship between the categories and the sub-categories in the beginning of the result section to make the presentation easier.
to follow. Since we later tested the fitness of our results into the ecological model we think it is better suited for being included in the discussion section, structuring the presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justified as part of male prestige</td>
<td>Men having different blood, Influenced by the power of money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewed as discreditable but unfair</td>
<td>A shame to admit, A threat to huma dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results in emotional entrapment</td>
<td>Self-blame, Temporary tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A wish for change</td>
<td>Fed up with passivity, Gender norms in transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Category</td>
<td>Moving from frustration to questioning traditional gender norms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Relationship of the core categories- categories and the sub categories

4) I did not find a summary at the opening of this section helpful, as it then read repetitively. I recommend a rewrite of this section (perhaps an ‘overarching concept’ and then sub- categories- summarise it briefly if you have to and then insert Figure 2. We can then see how the sub categories relate to each other and the EM. The word category is overused. It could be better I believe to start with a more detailed account of your first sub-category as on p13. You are thus presenting and building your arguments about your subjects’ views. Use these sub categories as sub headings to guide your readers through your arguments. Sometimes you do. P15 but others you don’t p14.

Thank you for these comments. We have taken the summary of the results in the beginning of the section and started with a brief conceptual overview of the core findings. We have, as described above included Figure 1 here to make the
relationships between the categories and sub-categories presented clearer to the reader. We have made efforts to re-write the section in accordance with the reviewer’s recommendation building up our arguments on the basis of the sub-categories also used as sub-headings. The overuse of the word category has been considered in the re-writing of the text.

See Results section pp 16-23

5) I suggest you structure the discussion as you do in the results section of your abstract- according to the structure of the EM. It is too discursive at present and you have not signposted the levels of the model and they overlap in certain sections. I also suggest you consider the discretionary point below about gender norms.

Point taken. We have revised the structure of the discussion according to the levels included in the ecological model. We fully agree with the reviewer’s comment about the effects of patriarchal gender norms on the expectations on men. We have included a paragraph giving our thought about this in relation to our study.

See Discussion section pp 24-31-

Minor essential revision

6) ABSTRACT: You refer to the category ‘viewed as discreditable and unfair’ while in the body of the article it is referred to as discreditable but unfair’. Make sure these are consistent.

Thank you for this observation, which we have considered and corrected. We have also checked the other categories for consistency.
Correction made on the first page of the Abstract to read
“Viewed as discreditable but unfair”

7) BACKGROUND: Your background is well-written introduction to the issues. It would be helpful to add a few sentences about how easy/difficult it is for a woman to separate or divorce.

Thank you for the positive remarks. We have added a sentence on difficulties for women to separate and divorce in sub-Saharan Africa on the last two sentences pg 5 as seen below:-

Socio-cultural norms and judiciary systems [24] often make it difficult for women to leave violent partners. In many settings religious norms cause further constraints since they often include strong believes that marriages should be maintained at any cost even if divorce is accepted by the civil law [19]. Negative attitudes from the police, financial dependency, family ties and consideration for the children put additional pressure for women to stay in violent relationships [17, 25-27]

8) METHODS: Your descriptions of design and setting are sound, a few grammatical points- p.7 Third sentence- Did you mean, FGDs are good for generating information on how norms, systems and attitudes.... Six rows from the page – a male breadwinner who...p8 offence

Thank you for the observations. We have taken care of the grammatical errors mentioned above. It now reads as. offence (pg 11 the last sentence of the first paragraph)

9) Your purpose and whether or not you succeeded in your selection is not fully clear to me. Please clarify what you are aiming for first- social-economic diversity? Mixed in sexes and professions? And then tell us how you selected community members. I think most of the information is in this section, but it is not clear.
We have re-structured the section to make the process of selecting informant clearer.

Pg 11 as seen below:-

Selection of informants
We selected our informants purposively from the Temeke District hospital catchment area. The Temeke District management helped us to select four peri-urban wards out of the 18 wards in the district. To minimize travel, we randomly selected one of the 4 wards since there was no expected socio-economic variation among them. Three streets within this ward were randomly picked from a list of streets given by the local government leaders. The local leaders were more familiar with the surroundings, so they assisted us to approach community members that would capture the demographic and socio-cultural variation in the area. The specification was that they should be between 15-59 years of age and likely to have met with people affected with IPV at work or in their community. The local leaders provided us with a list of names indicating professions for those employed and business for the self or unemployed. A member of the research team (RL) picked names purposively to ensure covering a variation in terms of sex, age and profession (teachers, accountants, secretaries and agricultural officers) including religious leaders. The final sample of informants is shown in Table 1.

10) Well done on the considerable scale of your focus groups. As you mention religion and discuss the Muslim and Christian representation, can you briefly tell us about these in your background and their relevance/attitudes to IPV.

We hope that the reflections on how religion affects family relations and gendered expectations in the background are satisfactory. We have also included a sentence in the Study setting to clarify this further (Pg 11).
Christians have strong beliefs that marriage is a life commitment increasing the acceptance of IPV and making it hard for women to leave violent relationships. Muslims’ strict divorce procedures further increases the likelihood of Muslim women tolerate violent relationships.

11) It is commendable that you had backup support for your subjects. What did you do if someone became distressed as a result of their experience?

We have added a few sentences illustrating how sensitive episodes were handled. See Pg 14-15 last paragraph of the ethical considerations.

During the introductory part of the FGD the participants were encouraged to agree to keep the information discussed within the group. Discussants that reacted emotionally when recalling experiences of IPV were politely asked to leave the discussion and offered to talk to one of the team members until they recovered and decided to return. None of the participants wanted to be referred to the counsellor.

12) Your opening paragraph about generalisability does not belong here, but later in the discussion. Your point about repeat visits that the authors are not from the area. Were any Tanzanian? Please tell us more about relationship to the area to allow readers to judge how open people may have been about this topic with you. You say that the research team held peer debriefing- is that just your team – about the study’s progress. Did you check meanings/accounts with any local people?

We have moved the opening paragraph to the end of the discussion. We have also clarified the pre-understanding of the research team, in terms of cultural competence. Pg 15
Trustworthiness

Two of the research team members RL and HL were Tanzanians, speaking the local language Kiswahili fluently. The other research team members (LN and ME) reside abroad with extensive experience from cross-cultural collaboration. To increase the credibility, the research team made repeated visits to the study site. Prolonged engagement in the field by RL helped to build trust with the community representatives. Preliminary findings were subjected to member-checks with two Temeke district residents to confirm meanings of certain local expressions. The research team also had continuously peer debriefing sessions of study progress.

Discretionary revision

13) You rightly outline the rigidity of Tanzanian male gender norms and their harmful consequences in power imbalance in families and illustrate this with quotes illustrating the traditional male role of economic, sexual and general decision-maker. However, you do again rightly illustrate examples of female to male gender-based violence when those roles are unable to be fulfilled. You then say you are only talking about male to female violence. However, you miss an opportunity to discuss the damage when these roles are rigidified and harmful to males unable to fulfil them and women are able to exercise power and agency in abusive ways and find other men who do fulfil them. Mothers in law in India who abuse their daughters-in-law are also examples of the damaging sequelae of rigid gender norms and women with no better ways to exercise their power. It does not destroy the argument that the overwhelming numbers of victims are women. It gives your arguments a more nuancing and strength, because change will happen best if men are involved and have a stake in it.

As stated earlier we fully agree with the reviewer and discussed how gender norms may affect power relations and expectations on what it is to be a man and being a woman with its long term effects.
We have given a comment on this on page 29 paragraph 2 on the last sentence of as seen below:-

At the individual level aggression can also emerge from frustration over an inability of a man to control the female partner [62] an area not much elaborated the FGDs. However, our findings showed that men who were unable to fulfil their expected gender roles as bread winners suffered IPV from their women partners/wives. The women were said to engage in relationships with other men or use violent acts towards their husbands/partners. Such gender norm sequelae are important issues to recognize and address and points to the need of engaging men in strategies to prevent gender based violence.