Author's response to reviews

Title: Community perceptions of intimate partner violence- a qualitative study from urban Tanzania

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

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Author’s response to reviewers: see the following
March, 11th 2011

Rachel Neilan  
Executive Editor, BMC-series Journals  
Biomedical Central Floor 6, 236 Gray’s Inn Road  
London, WCIX 8HL  
E-mail: editorial@biomededcentral.com

Re: MS: 2699251384760587
Gender norms in transition: a qualitative study on community understanding of intimate partner violence in urban Tanzania

On behalf of all authors of this paper, I am pleased to submit a second revision of the above referenced manuscript in response to the reviewers’ comments.

We have responded to the comments as a way to further improve our manuscript.

We provide a point-by-point response to the itemised comments as given in the reviewers’ reports. Our points are in bold italics after each of the comments.

Due to changes made in the wording of two categories —“Viewed as discreditable and unfair” and “Shifting tolerance” we have also amended figure 2.

As suggested we have also subjected the manuscript to a language review and copy editing to improve the style of written English. The changes are indicated with track changes in the submitted manuscript.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

For the Authors,
Reviewer: Stephen Lawoko
Comment:

The authors have responded well to all but one of my concerns expressed below: The title of this work should be considered very carefully. I still argue that the new title "Gender roles in transition...." creates the illusion that there is a positive change in Tanzania stakeholders’ views towards IPV. Yet, there are at least as many positive as there are negative findings in this work. Moreover, there are no previous studies from this context acting as a gold standard for comparison to imply there is a change (or transition). Unless the authors in their discussion compare what was with what is (as per their findings), transition cannot be assumed! Let us not give the impression that development in Tanzania with regard to IPV is promising, when the data does not clearly speak for that. As I had in the earlier review indicated, a more neutral title is called for. Otherwise, all the issues raised previously have been well addressed by the authors.

Thank you for the positive comments.

We understand the reviewer’s concern and changed the title to be more neutral:

Community perceptions of intimate partner violence – a qualitative study from urban Tanzania
Reviewer: Angela Taft

Comments:

1. Dear authors
   I am happy with the majority of your revisions and I think the article reads more clearly now, especially your results section. Much better title also.
   We are pleased with the positive response to our revised manuscript but hope that the reviewer will also accept the revised title as indicated above.

2. Minor essential revisions
   - P.7 Your study limitation section: your study has strengths worth acknowledgement too - your efforts at a diverse and representative sample, your coding and checking accounts but you should acknowledge that while you cannot generalize these results to all areas of Tanzania (or Africa) you feel they are in line with many other studies.
   - We appreciate the valuable suggestions from the reviewer and have shortened and revised the limitation section on page 30-31 of our manuscript as follows:

   **Strengths and limitations of the study**

   *Among the strengths of the study are the methodological efforts to achieve a diverse and representative sample of informants from the community and the rigour of the coding and analysis phases. The use of focus groups may have given an overly positive view of the transition in gender norms if participants avoided expression of deviant views that justify violence. We think that the discussions were open, free and reflected an increasing awareness about the seriousness of gender-based violence. We also noted the complexity of the situation with community members who are trapped within traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity and at the same time realise the harmful consequences of those expectations. While the study results cannot be generalized to all areas of Tanzania (or Africa), they are in line with many*
other studies from settings characterized by similar gender norm systems [18, 19, 21, 23, 53, 61].

- P.8 Your references to the new WHO report (thanks - I hadn't seen it). You say 'there is evidence of effective strategies etc...This is not what they say (see Section 3.2 p. 36 onwards) but they call for more and better evidence of prevention etc. You need to amend this and then you can use it for your call for more research.

We agree with the reviewer and have amended and revised the last part of that section on page 31 to read as follows:

The report also underscores that the elimination of violence requires targeting the gender-based norms that exacerbate discrimination against women. Since the determinants of IPV are complex and vary between cultural settings and levels, there is a need for countries like Tanzania to be more pro-active in research that evaluates the relevancy and applicability of different preventive approaches [64]. Studies to evaluate strategies that emphasize primary prevention, target behavioural and attitudinal change at younger ages, and engage both men and women in challenging harmful gender norms are specifically called for [18,65].

- Small grammatical points - I think from your data (in English) that 'viewed as Discreditable AND unfair' is what is meant - but up to you as you know Kiswahili.

We have changed to “Viewed as discreditable and unfair”...

- Discussants 'who' not 'that' as they are people...p17

On pg 15 (under ethical consideration section) of the manuscript we have changed the word to read...”Discussants who reacted ...” (last but one sentence on page 14).
• p.6 Jewkes ET AL have
Since Jewkes is the only author of reference 18 we have not added et al in the text.

p.7 Second last sentence - don’t you mean violence rather than 'due to controlled male authority'.?

We have changed the sentence to:

“Where sanctions are strong and functional (legal or cultural,) IPV can decrease because of controlled violence within those societies”.

• p.11 Top para 'muslim women toleratING'... middle para..community members WHO.

We have changed these texts on page 11 to:

Strict Muslim divorce procedures further increase the likelihood of Muslim women tolerating violent relationships (second sentence)
and
The local leaders were more familiar with the surroundings, so they assisted us in approaching community members who could capture the demographic and socio-cultural variation in the area. (Middle paragraph 4th sentence)

• p.12 Top para.. 'prior mentioning OF IPV.

We have made corrections on page 12, top paragraph, to read:

.....discussants were asked to reflect on possible reasons for their state without first mentioning IPV.
Discretionary revision

- p.15. Suggest "Discussants WHO reacted emotionally ...were politely INVITED to leave .... and SUPPORTED to talk etc."
- bottom sentences... used to promote study RIGOUR.... was tested by constant COMPARISON/CHECKING between etc..

We thank the reviewer for the observations and suggestions. We have made the suggested changes on pg 15:

*Discussants who reacted emotionally when recalling experiences of IPV were politely invited to leave the discussion and supported by one of the team members until they recovered and decided to return

and

A flexible guide, emergent design, multidisciplinary research team, verbatim transcriptions, and predefined analytical procedures were used to promote study rigour. During the analysis, the fitness and relevance of emerging categories were tested by constant comparison and checking between the text, codes and categories, and by paying specific attention to outliers or negative cases.

- p.21 Title Temporary or SHIFTING? tolerance?

We agree with the reviewer and have changed the labeling of the sub-category to “Shifting tolerance” as indicated below.

*Shifting tolerance

Shifting tolerance describes a process where, at a certain point, women started to look for help or revenge in an effort to escape or receive help in their relationship.*
• p.24 Societal level 'resolve family conflicts and (ADEQUATE OR INADEQUATE) provision etc

The sentence is corrected on the second paragraph page 24 of our manuscript and reads:

.... men’s violence to resolve family conflicts and provision of inadequate policies and structures......

• p.29 2nd para have also been associated WITH having witnessed...not much elaborated IN the FGDs... point to the need FOR engaging..
• bottom para accepted at the SAME TIME AS.. being trapped.

The grammatical errors have been corrected as follows:

On page 29, 2nd paragraph:

*Men’s violent behaviours are associated with having witnessed abuse... and

......... an area not frequently discussed in the FGDs

......... address and point to the need for engaging men in strategies to engage in gender-based violence...

Bottom paragraph:

*Many community members had started to question the norms that allow violence to be accepted and at the same time feel trapped by the power of internalised traditional gender norms.*
Dear Editor

Due to changes we made in the wording of two categories –‘Viewed as discreditable and unfair” and “Shifting tolerance” we have amended figure 2.

Justified as part of male prestige
• Men having different blood
• Influenced by the power of money

Viewed as discreditable and unfair
• A shame to admit
• A threat to human dignity

Fed up with passivity
• A wish for change
• Gender norms in transition

Results in emotional entrapment
• Self-blame
• Shifting tolerance

MOVING FROM FRUSTRATION TO QUESTIONING TRADITIONAL GENDER NORMS

“...the solution to IPV problems should come from above... I mean initiated by the cabinet members... We may fail to solve matters individually...”

“People fight at night with doors closed. Who will open them for you?....We need strong laws that are strictly followed”

“IPV should stop; you know the women we beat are other people’s sisters and mothers”

“After 3 years of suffering I decided to end the silence and shared the dangers ...with my brother who assisted me for a divorce. It was not possible alone.”

Figure 2