Strategies Employed by Single Fathers in Preventing Violence against Children. A Case of Nzuguni Ward in Dodoma City

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Abstract

Violence against children has recently become detrimental. The study was conducted in Dodoma city at Nzuguni ward to examine strategies employed by single fathers in preventing violence against children, whereby a cross-sectional design was employed. A non-probability sampling procedure through the snowball technique was used to select single fathers, and a purposive sampling technique was used to obtain key informants, including a ward police officer, community development officer, social welfare officer, and ward executive officer. Data were collected using surveys, focus group discussions and interview methods, using questionnaires and checklists as tools. The study collected data from 65 respondents. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data, where frequencies and percentages were computed, and qualitative data were analysed through content analysis. The findings indicate that the majority of single fathers employ living with relatives and sending children to boarding schools as strategies to prevent violence against children. Other strategies include limiting interactions with others, talking openly and friendly with children, staying alone with children, and using caregivers and neighbours. The study concludes that strategies used have succeeded in preventing their children from violence in their households but have not ensured preventive measures outside their home place. Therefore, the study recommends collaborative efforts of different stakeholders in preventing and responding to violence against children. Furthermore, awareness of parents and guardians talking openly with children should continue being raised as it seems less employed.

Keywords: children, growing cities, single fathers, strategies, violence against children.

1. Introduction

Violence against children is a global issue that has attracted the attention of governments, researchers, development stakeholders, and development practitioners in both developing and developed countries as the result of the growth in prevalence rates, parents' increasing demands for protecting their children, and the occurrence of widespread social rejection (Stark & Landis, 2016; Arias-Rivera & Hidalgo Garcí´a, 2020). Violence against children includes all forms of maltreatment of people under 18 years of age. It includes maltreatment, bullying (including cyberbullying), youth violence, sexual violence, and emotional or psychological violence (WHO, 2022). Globally, it is estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2 to 17 years have experienced physical, sexual, and emotional violence or neglect in 2019, and 54% of children of similar age experienced the same in 2015 (WHO, 2020). The United Nations has put Target 16.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is to "end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and

all forms of violence against, and torture of, children" (WHO, 2022). These initiatives aim to ensure that all countries, stakeholders and individuals end violence against children.

In Africa, 50% of children between the ages of 2 and 17 years experienced one or more forms of violence in 2016 (UNICEF, 2017). Younger children aged between 2 and 14 years experienced significantly higher rates of any form of violence (87%) than children aged above 15 years. The existence of violence against children in Africa has influenced governments, civil societies and academia to strengthen violence reduction interventions to prevent and respond to violence against children (UNICEF, 2017). Governments in developing countries have taken various initiatives to end violence against children aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 16), the essential initiatives taken were the African Partnership to End Violence against Children set out in the SDGs, Africa Union Agenda 2063, the African Agenda for Children's Rights 2040 and other continental and sub-regional frameworks in Africa (End Violence Against Children, 2020).

In Tanzania, the government has realised the importance of protecting children in collaboration with different stakeholders. The country has made different efforts, including; the enactment of the Law of the Child Act No. 21 of 2009 and the establishment of Community-Based Children Protection Mechanisms through children protection committees from the ward level to raise awareness among parents and children themselves so that they can take effective action (URT, 2009; Reuben *et al.,* 2021). Despite these initiatives, The Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) report of 2018 documented that, from January to June 2018, a total of 6,376 incidents of violence against children were reported, 1648 more compared to the same period

in 2017. Most incidents were reported in Dar es Salaam (435), Mbeya (177), Dodoma (79) and other regions including Iringa and Manyara. One of the factors for increased incidents of violence against children in cities in Tanzania is single parenting (Better Care Network, 2017). Single-parent families in this context consist of a parent/caregiver and one or more dependent children without the presence and support of a spouse or adult partner who is sharing the responsibility of parenting (Garfield, 2009; Lindwall *et al.,* 2011). During the past several decades, the number of "traditional" two-parent families has decreased while the number of single-parent families has increased (UN Women, 2020). For instance, in 2010, Tanzania recorded about 58% of children aged 0-17 living with both biological parents, 19% living with their biological mother only, 6% living with only their biological father, and 17% not living with either biological parent (Better Care Network, 2015). However, some authors insist that every parent in families has a unique parenting style as such, single parents have to play a dual role in carrying out their lives as father and mother, and thus end up feeling stress, sadness, and even fatigue in parenting (Muslihat & Listiana, 2020); Neang, 2020 and Nielsen, 2023).

Various studies reveal different violence against children in single-parent families. Ganji *et al.* (2013) found that in single-parent families, the degree of violence against children is more than that of normal families. Muslihat and Listiana (2020) support that single parenting has adverse effects, such as psychological problems, because the single parent does not have enough time for communication about the needs of the child, supervision and monitoring, which provides room for violence against children. Makona (2018) found that children from single-parent families experienced more violence against children than those who live in

families with two parents. Tran *et al.* (2021) and Ben-David (2021) highlight that children living in a single-parent family are at risk of experiencing child maltreatment, such as neglect, lifetime sexual abuse, and multiple types of child maltreatment. Henry (2017) supports that children living with single parents are 'housed like animals', are left without food and are unsupervised for many hours or days. The study found that the work of some single parents requires them to work at night or leave very early in the morning; this increases the chance of violence against children. Kroese *et al.* (2021) add that the likelihood of adolescent crime increases when children are born or living with a single parent compared to children growing up with both biological parents.

In this context, studies explained types of violence experienced by children in single-parent families and the effects of single parenting on children; no studies documented the strategies employed by single fathers in preventing violence. Undertaking this is important since there has been a problem of increased violence against children in single-parent families in developing countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, and one could wonder how single fathers prevent violence against children in urban areas. Therefore, this study explored strategies used by single fathers in curbing violence against children.

2.   Materials and Methods
2.1. Study Area and Research Design
The study was conducted in Dodoma City, particularly in Nzuguni Ward. The area was selected because it has a higher population than other wards in the city. According to the 2022 Population and Housing Census, the Nzuguni ward had 50,454 people, of which 24,223 were males and 26,231 were females (URT, 2022), which is high compared to other wards. Dodoma is one of the growing cities in Tanzania; it is overpopulated due

to the governmental shift from Dar es Salaam and people's migration from other regions for commercial and social activities. However, the population differs from one ward to another, whereas some are more populated and others are not. According to WHO (2022), communities experiencing high populations have a higher likelihood of experiencing violence against children. The study used the cross-sectional research design, whereby data were collected from streets at a single point at a time. This enabled the study to get a snapshot of the respondents, which provided a clear picture of the study area. The study collected various strategies in this context, providing a comprehensive overview of the current practices.

2.2. Sampling Procedures and Sample Size
The unit of analysis under this study was a single father living with children in households for six months and above. The study's sample size was 96 respondents, and it was obtained using Cochran's (1963) formula for an unknown population. However, the study reached 65 respondents, equal to 68% of the targeted respondents. This percentage is an acceptable response rate in social science research surveys. According to Ali et al. (2021), an acceptable range for response rates in social sciences could be from 30% to 70%.

The targeted number was not reached due to the nature of the respondents; some were not found at home, despite the efforts of several visits and communication that did not help to get them. According to Henry et al. (2021), many household heads in urban areas work long hours or have multiple jobs, making them not at home during typical survey times. Likewise, urban households often have diverse and irregular schedules, making it hard to find a time when everyone is at home.

The study used non-probability sampling, specifically a snowball sampling technique, to obtain single fathers. Using snowball sampling was possible as Mtaa Executive Officers (MEOs) directed the researchers to the first few single fathers living with children in their areas for interview. After that, the interviewed single fathers referred the researchers to other single fathers they knew. This enabled researchers to collect data from up to 65 respondents. On the other hand, a purposive sampling technique was used to obtain key informants, including the Ward Executive Officer, Social Welfare Officer, Community Development Officer and Ward Police Officer. These key informants were selected because of their role in child protection.

2.3. Data Collection Methods and Tools
The study collected primary data from single fathers and key informants (Ward Executive Officer, Social Welfare Officer, Community Development Officer and Ward Police Officer). These data were collected through surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. The survey used a questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions to collect data from single fathers. Interviews with key informants used checklists as a tool for data collection. Interviews allowed a dynamic and adaptive conversation whereby the researcher probed deeper into interesting or unexpected responses, leading to more comprehensive data collection. In addition, focus group discussion used a checklist as a tool for data collection, whereby one focus group discussion with eight child protection committee members. This technique enabled the participants to provide diverse information regarding strategies employed by single fathers to prevent violence against children.

Collecting data using different methods ensured triangulation, which enhanced the validity, robustness, and comprehensiveness of research findings. Using multiple methods allowed the verification of findings and increased the credibility and reliability of the data. It provided varied perspectives on violence against children, leading to a more holistic understanding. It helped mitigate different biases that could be brought by one method since each method has its strengths and weaknesses, which were offset by one another.

2.4. Data Processing, Analysis and Presentation
Both qualitative and quantitative data were analysed in this study. The collected data were processed before analysis. The process involved data editing to detect errors and omissions, coding, entering into Statistical Product and Service Solutions (IBM SPSS) Statistics version 27 computer programme, and cleaning and verification. Then, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and strategies employed by single fathers to prevent violence against children, where frequencies and percentages were computed. Quantitative data were presented in tables and figures. In addition, qualitative data analysis included transcribing audio recordings of interviews and focus groups to create textual data for analysis. Then, the identification and analysis of recurring themes and patterns in the data were done. Narrative analysis focused on the stories obtained from focus group discussions to appreciate their experiences and the attached meanings. The presentation of qualitative data included providing rich and detailed descriptions of the findings, supported by quotes from the participants.

2.5. Ethical Consideration
To ensure ethical issues, the researchers obtained the research clearance from the Institute of Rural Development Planning,

PO-RALG, the Regional Administrative Secretary, Dodoma City Council and the Nzuguni ward. Participants informed consent was obtained after explaining the study's objectives, and freedom to participate unconditionally and quit if found uncomfortable was considered. Moreover, participants' identities were not disclosed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

3.   Results
3.1.   Characteristics of the respondents

Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents (97%) their age were 30 years and above, and only (3%) their age ranged between 20 and 29 years, meaning that at their age, they had already started the responsibility of taking care of their children. About the level of education, 49.2% of the respondents had primary education, with a few (13.8%) having higher education. It further shows that 40% of the respondents were separated, followed by 30.8% of the widowed respondents. Based on occupation, most of the respondents (55.4%) were self-employed, with very few (16.9%) being civil servants. Also, the majority of the respondents (58.5%) lived with children for 1-5 years, with very few (4.6%) who lived with children for less than one year.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Age	20 – 29	2	3
	30 – 39	12	18.5
	40 – 49	21	32.3
	50 – 59	20	30.8
	60 and above	10	15.4
Education level	Primary	32	49.2
	Secondary	14	21.5
	Higher Education	9	13.8
	No formal education	10	15.4
Marital status	Married	14	21.5
	Single	5	7.7
	Separated	26	40
	Widowed	20	30.8
Occupation	Civil servants	11	16.9
	Smallholder farmers	18	27.7
	Self-employed	36	55.4
Number of Children	1	10	15.4
	2	14	21.5
	3	18	27.7
	4	10	15.4
	More than 4	13	19.9
Period of living with children	Below 1 year	3	4.6
	1 - 5 years	38	58.5
	>5 years	24	36.9

3.2. Strategies employed by single fathers in Preventing Violence against children

The findings in Figure 1 indicate that more than one-third (34%) of the respondents opted to live with relatives as a strategy to prevent violence against children because they trusted them and to ensure close supervision of their children, followed by (31%) of the

respondents who revealed that they sent children to school because they believed that boarding schools were safe places for their children. Moreover, a few respondents (15%) limit their children's interaction with others to ensure safety and avoid copying unacceptable behaviour. 6% of the respondents use caregivers and talk with children openly and friendly to ensure safety, create awareness, and build confidence in their children so that they can be able to identify violent acts, be free to explain to parents and fight against them

themselves. 5% of the respondents curbed violence by staying alone with children because they had no one to take care of them at home and ensured safety and close supervision. Furthermore, very few respondents (3%) employ the strategy of leaving children with their neighbours.

In addition, the majority of the respondents (87.7%) revealed that the extent to which the employed strategy helped to prevent violence against children was high. This implies that the strategies employed were effective.
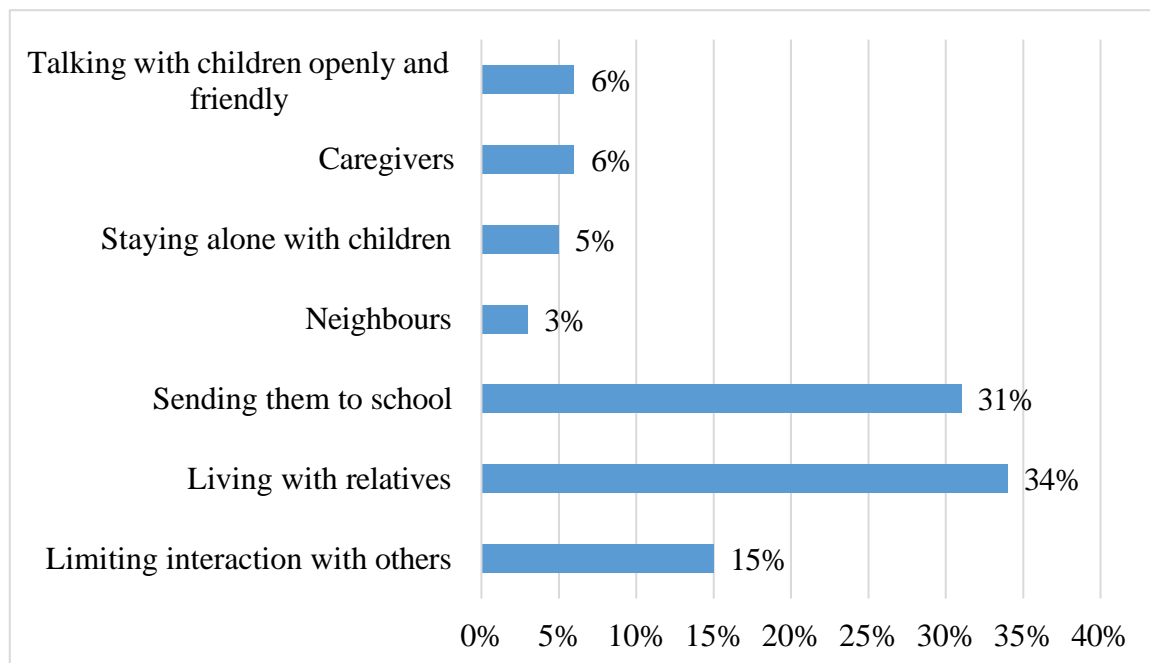

Figure 1. Strategies employed by single fathers to prevent violence against children

The interview with the key informants revealed that men living with children alone without their wives is not ethical; they do not recommend it; however, it has been difficult to avoid due to social and economic challenges which separate them from their families. They revealed that they have been encouraging those families to make sure they have preventive measures to avoid violence against children. Surprisingly, they revealed that violence against children has been common in families with single mothers and families with both fathers and mothers due to assuming that their

children are safe, compared to single fathers who take serious precautions. Key informants revealed different strategies observed in single-parent families, including living with relatives, employing domestic workers, and sending them to school.

During KII, one informant emphasised that;

> "…. *Living with relatives recently is unsafe; people are not trusted. We hear some violent acts perpetuated by very close relatives. We experts insist much on carefulness even for those who live with relatives;*

children are at risk even in home places where it was previously believed safe places...; instead, we remind parents to talk openly and be friendly with their children so that they can be free to disclose different issues to them. However, it is challenging as some parents, especially fathers, still feel shame to talk with their girl children on some issues..." (KII with social welfare officer, March. 2024).

In addition, the focus group discussion revealed that the number of families with single fathers living with children has increased in the study area. The increase in single-father families is due to social and economic challenges in the families. The biggest challenge has been how to ensure that they do not encounter violence in their lives. This has made fathers come up with many strategies to ensure that they prevent violence for their children. That attention has made them prevent violence to a large extent in their families and the ward in general. This precaution needs to be also taken by all members of communities to ensure violence against children is ended in families and communities in general. During FGD, one participant said that;

"...*Some single fathers have decided to stay with their close relatives so their children could be cared for. However, living with relatives is not very safe nowadays because even relatives are the perpetrators of violent acts, and people are not trusted at all... very complex animals. Even blood relatives do some of the reported violent acts...*" (FGD with one of the representatives of the Children Protection Committee, June. 2024).

4. Discussion

Living with relatives is a strategy revealed mostly by single fathers as a strategy they use to avoid violence against children. These findings support the study by Makona (2018) and Cuartas et al. (2022) that relatives provide a safer environment for children when parents are away at home, which reduces the risk of violence. Families with strong relative networks provide additional contributions of support and supervision for children, thus reducing their exposure to potential violence. In most cases in Africa, where a family has relatives, including grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relatives, children have been supported and get guidance, care, and protection (Evans et al., 2022; Rabe & Kumswa, 2022).

Limiting interaction with others as a strategy to avoid violence against children among single fathers is supported by WHO (2020) that by limiting interactions with potentially harmful environments, children are less likely to experience violence. This strategy is critical in contexts where children may experience a risk of meeting violence. Also, the study is supported by UNICEF (2017), that children should stay in controlled and safe environments that protect children from violence. The study by the United Nations highlights that violence against children can occur in various settings, including schools, homes, and communities. Interactions with family members, peers, and authority figures can sometimes lead to violence. Based on this context, Yule et al. (2019), Han & Kim (2018), and Jansson et al. (2022) underscore the importance of creating safe environments and promoting positive interactions to protect children from violence.

Sending them to school as a strategy to avoid violence against children this finding is contrary to Save for Children (2024) and UNICEF (2024) that in schools, there are no hundred safe environments; in some schools in developing countries, children experience violence, such as harassment, bullying, and corporal punishment. Their studies highlight the need for

government and stakeholders to make schools safe places for children to learn; schools need to be as safe havens for all children and free of violence. According to Closs et al. (2022), Erita et al. (2022), and Tapia-Fonllem et al. (2022), suitable learning environments which are free from violence against children influence students' learning experiences. Likewise, a positive environment enhances students' enthusiasm and performance.

In addition, the study findings indicate that single fathers mainly opted to live with relatives as a strategy to prevent violence against children because they trusted them and to ensure close supervision of their children, and send children to boarding school because they believed that schools were safe places for their children. These findings support the Netting *et al.* (2023) study that the husband/father may live elsewhere with the backup of relatives to support caring for their children. Likewise, the study supports the study by Martin & Zulaika (2016) on who cares for children and Landale et al. (2011) on the living arrangements of children of immigrants.

Using caregivers as a strategy to avoid violence against children supports the study by Magesa et al. (2024) study, which found that the majority of the respondents in Mbeya city are involved in the implementation of parents' and caregivers' support strategies for reducing violence against children. Their participation in the prevention of violence against children involved escorting them to school, providing basic needs and building close relationships with them. Thus, caregivers can provide child protection and contribute to children's positive and healthy development.

In addition, findings from key informants and focus group discussions revealed that preventive measures taken by single fathers to prevent violence against children have reduced and prevented

violence against children. According to WHO (2022), violence against children can be prevented. Preventing violence against children requires that efforts systematically address risk at all four interrelated levels of risk such as individual, community, relationship and society. According to UNICEF (2020), preventing violence against children requires a collective effort involving families, governments, communities, and organisations rather than placing the burden solely on families. This highlights the need for single fathers to have their own preventive strategies as well as for different stakeholders to take their role in preventing violence against children.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that single fathers in urban areas send their children to school, live with their relatives, limit the interaction of their children with others, use caregivers, use neighbours, and stay alone with children and talk with children openly and friendly as strategies in preventing violence against children. These strategies have succeeded in preventing their children from violence in their households but have not ensured preventive measures outside their home place. This highlights the need for more collaborative efforts among different stakeholders at different levels such as family, community, societal and relationship (parents, family members, relatives, neighbours, education institutions, religious institutions, police officers, social welfare officers, local and central government in preventing and responding to violence against children. Moreover, strengthening the children's protection committee is encouraged so that they can work effectively and independently in preventing violence against children. This will also help them increase awareness through community meetings and cooperation in acting when any child violent act occurs. Furthermore, talking openly and friendly

to children is highly encouraged by parents, guardians and other stakeholders who work closely with children to enhance self-awareness and self-confidence among children and enable them to be part fighters against violence against them.

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