Community Policing Strategies for Prevention of Gender-Based Violence in Babati District Council, Northern Tanzania

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Abstract:

This paper analyzed the community policing strategies for mitigating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Babati District Council (DC), Northern Tanzania. The study adopted a mixed-method research approach research design. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to obtain 111 respondents. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and, documentary reviews. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis techniques were used to analyze the findings. Results show that despite government efforts to enhance community policing spanning more than 50 years, there are still gaps in community awareness of the initiatives. However, there are positive results regarding the reduction of incidences of GBV attributed to community policing in the study area. It recommends improved outreach, cultural sensitivity training, and education initiatives to ward police officers who are at the forefront of community policing. Also, enhanced transparency, communication, and community involvement are key in ensuring that community policing bears fruits in combating GBV effectively.

Key Terms: Community policing, strategy, gender-based violence

1. Introduction:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) defines gender-based violence (GBV) as any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. It persists as a pervasive issue globally, deeply intertwined with historical gender inequalities and power dynamics. Rooted in patriarchal norms and harmful social attitudes, GBV has plagued societies for centuries, manifesting in various forms of violence against women and girls (Ngulube, 2018). Historically, women faced systemic violence, viewed as property, and subjected to persecution, domestic abuse, and other forms of violence, reflecting the entrenched nature of gender-based violence within societal structures (Spence, 2017; Butler, 2007).

Colonialism and imperialism further exacerbated GBV, with women enduring sexual exploitation under colonial rule, perpetuating cycles of violence and discrimination (Beyene, 2014; De Souza & Selis, 2023). Despite social progress, GBV remains a significant concern globally, disproportionately

affecting women. Statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate alarming rates of physical and sexual violence against women, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address this pervasive issue (WHO, 2021).

In East Africa, GBV continues to pose a significant challenge, with high prevalence rates of violence against women and girls. Studies reveal the increase in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Rwanda and the high incidence of physical violence against women in Tanzania, underscoring the pressing need for effective interventions to combat GBV within these regions (Bahati *et al*., 2022; Nyato *et al*., 2019).

To address the complex problem of GBV, the Tanzanian government has implemented legislative measures and policies like the Sexual Offenses Special Provisions Act of 1998 to provide legal protection for survivors and criminalize specific forms of violence. Additionally, initiatives such as police gender desks have been established to support survivors and promote gender equality, reflecting efforts to combat GBV at both legal and community levels (Warioba, 2019; Ngaiza & Omari, 2022).

Community policing strategy has emerged as a vital approach to preventing and mitigating GBV, emphasizing collaborative efforts between law enforcement, community organizations, and members to address the root causes of violence (Karera, 2021). For instance, problem-solving cooperation and community dialogue strategies have shown promise in fostering community engagement, increasing awareness, and developing effective prevention strategies that promote respect and equality, crucial in combating GBV within communities (Corbin *et al.,* 2021). To shed light on the role of community engagement in addressing this persistent issue, this paper analyzed community policing strategies in the prevention of gender-based violence in Babati District Council, Northern Tanzania.

2. **Objective of the study:**

The paper analyzed community policing strategy in the mitigation of GBV in Babati DC. Specifically, it sought to analyze;

1) Community policing strategy in mitigation of GBV in Babati DC
2) Determine the impact of community policing strategy on the prevention of GBV in Babati DC
3) Outline challenges facing community policing strategy in the prevention of GBV in Babati DC

3. literature review:

Theoretical Literature Review: The study was guided by Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977). The theory explains how individuals acquire, adapt, and alter behaviors linked to GBV through observation, modeling, and reinforcement, the research aimed to elucidate how community policing initiatives impacted attitudes, norms, and conduct to prevent GBV occurrences (Bandura & Hall, 2018). This theoretical framework offered insights into the mechanisms of behavior acquisition and transformation within the realm of community policing interventions, providing a foundation for comprehending potential avenues to decrease instances of GBV within the studied context (Akers, 2017).

Empirical Literature Review: several researchers have investigated community policing and GBV. In South Africa, Yamile (2021) evaluated how community policing strategies specifically combat GBV outside schools, aiming to assess the role of law enforcement in broader community contexts. In Uganda, Kasigire (2022) explored varied perceptions of GBV within the police force and communities, stressing the necessity of adequate police training and stakeholder engagement to reduce GBV effectively. While aligned with this study's focus on understanding GBV perceptions, this research delves comprehensively into the effectiveness of community policing methods in combating GBV.

In Tanzania, Mwangoka (2022) investigated challenges faced by the Police Gender Desk in addressing GBV, emphasizing the role of media and awareness campaigns in combating GBV. While relevant to this study's GBV mitigation goal, this research delves extensively into community

policing practices' effectiveness in mitigating GBV and optimizing law enforcement efforts. Also, Kazeri *et al.* (2024) assessed the impact of the Tanzania Police Gender and Children Desk (TPGCD) in reducing GBV, highlighting its effectiveness in resolving cases and raising community awareness. This study aligns with the broader analysis of community policing strategies in combating GBV, aiming to explore diverse approaches beyond the TPGCD to effectively address GBV within communities.

None of the reviewed studies analyzed community policing strategies in the prevention of gender-based violence in rural settings, hence the gap addressed by the current study.

4. Methodology:

Sampling: Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to obtain 111 respondents from a sampling frame of 31,441 people residents of two Wards and seven villages of Babati DC. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and documentary reviews. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis techniques were used to analyze findings.

Data collection methods: The study used two main methods of data collection; structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data from community members, providing an understanding of their perceptions and experiences related to community policing and GBV. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews of key informants including the District Police Gender Desk head, Ward Police Officers, Ward Executive Officers, and Village Chairpersons. These guides were personalized to elicit qualitative perspectives in addressing GBV issues within the study area.

Data analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics to obtain frequencies, percentages, graphs, and charts to provide an overview of respondents' responses. Graphs and charts were generated to visualize the data, providing an overview of community members' perceptions of community policing effectiveness in

addressing GBV in Babati DC. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. In this method, data were categorized into themes and patterns generated from interview transcripts as correctly argued by Creswell & Creswell (2018). Then, patterns and relationships were systematically explored to uncover an understanding of the effectiveness of community policing in preventing GBV.

5. Results and Discussion:

5.1 Community policing strategies in mitigation of GBV in Babati DC

The study analyzed community policing in mitigating GBV in Babati DC. To gauge community awareness of the general concept of community policing, respondents were asked to respond to three statements (awareness of community policing, interaction between ward police officers and the community, and whether the community participates in efforts to mitigate GBV in the area). Results show that a significant proportion 55 (66.3%) of respondents expressed a lack of awareness regarding the operations of community policing, 62 (74.7%) of respondents disagreed with the notion that community members frequently engage with ward police officers concerning GBV concerns, and 65 (78.3%) disagreed on the active involvement of community members in preventing GBV.

These findings indicate that despite many years of government efforts in community policing, still more than half of the respondents are not aware of the initiatives in Babati DC. Community policing in Tanzania dates back to 1973 when the government introduced the People's Militia popularly known as *Sungusungu* under the People's Militia Act of 1973 (amended in 1989) and revised in 2002 under Penal Code Cap. 112. In 2006 a special community police department was established within the Tanzania Police Force. This could be because ward police officers who are spearheading the concept of community policing do not blend with the community or are simply not available as reported by Mussa (2019) in his assessment of community policing in Zanzibar.

Low awareness could also be due to insufficient community engagement and ineffective information dissemination as reported by Kasigire (2022).

Moreover, the results indicating disagreement among respondents regarding the frequency of interactions between community members and ward police officers concerning GBV suggest a lack of engagement that may stem from various causes such as inadequate awareness of reporting channels, cultural barriers, poverty, and patriarchal norms (Mwangoka, 2022). To enhance the effectiveness of community policing in preventing GBV, proactive dialogue, education on reporting methods, and addressing cultural sensitivities become imperative to bridge these gaps. These findings resonate with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which underscores the role of social interactions and observational learning in shaping behaviors and responses within a community setting. Strengthening the positive impacts of community policing in preventing GBV necessitates fostering community engagement, providing education on prevention strategies, and addressing cultural barriers to encourage active participation.

These findings point towards the necessity for the implementation of enhanced community-police engagement strategies and cultural sensitivity training to cultivate more effective partnerships in addressing GBV concerns. Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that includes improved educational initiatives, enhanced community-police engagement strategies, and an understanding of diverse forms of community involvement.

5.2 The impact of community policing strategy on the prevention of GBV in Babati DC

In this objective, the study assessed the effectiveness and outcomes of community policing strategies in combating GBV. The respondents were asked to respond to three statements related to how community policing is effective. Results show that 54 (65.1%) of respondents agreed that they have observed a reduction in GBV incidents due to

community policing efforts and 29 (34.9%) disagreed. Also, the majority of the respondents 54 (65.1%) acknowledged a reduction in GBV incidents attributed to community policing efforts. Documentary review corroborated these findings since there was a notable decrease in reported cases of GBV decreased from 153 in 2022 to 129 in 2023 in the district (Kazeri, et al (2024). Regarding the safety of girls and women due to community policing strategy, 57(68.7%) of the respondents believed that community policing has contributed to creating a safer environment for girls and women. As for whether community policing strategies improved trust between the police force and community regarding GBV, 61 (73.5%) of respondents agreed that community policing has contributed positively (Table 2).

The results indicating a decrease in GBV incidents due to community policing efforts signify a positive impact. Potential causes of this reduction could include empowering communities, fostering partnerships, training officers effectively, targeted interventions, and supportive legal changes that prioritize prevention and survivor assistance. This finding aligns with Kazeri *et al.'s* (2024) study in Tanzania, where the majority perceived the Tanzania Police Gender Desk officers were reported to be highly trained in mitigating GBV. These findings resonate with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, illustrating how positive reinforcement, community engagement, and visible policing practices can shape behaviors and perceptions, underscoring the crucial role of social interactions and modeling in preventing GBV effectively.

The results showing that community members believe community policing enhances safety for girls and women suggest a positive perception of its impact. Potential reasons for this belief may include increased visibility of law enforcement, community involvement, and trust-building initiatives. This finding contrasts with Tandika's (2023) study in Tanzania, indicating challenges faced by gender desks in preventing GBV due to fear, ignorance, cultural norms, traditions, and religious beliefs. To strengthen community

policing's positive impact on preventing GBV, fostering trust, increasing awareness, and culturally sensitive interventions are essential.

The results showing the belief that community policing strengthens trust between the police and the community regarding GBV suggest a positive perception of its impact on relationship-building. Possible causes for this belief could be the presence of female officers at the police gender desk, cultural sensitivity in policing approaches, improved communication, and visible policing efforts. This finding contrasts with Okallo's (2017) study, which found limited evidence of community policing's effectiveness in addressing SGBV despite its potential benefits.

5.3 Challenges facing community policing strategy in the prevention of GBV:

In this objective, the study assessed complexities surrounding the utilization of community policing for GBV prevention in Babati DC. Results indicate that cultural barriers hinder community policing in addressing GBV highlighting significant challenges. Potential causes could include ingrained traditional beliefs, limited education levels, socioeconomic factors such as poverty, and fear of retaliation. These findings align with Nkya's (2020) study in Tanzania and Zikhali's (2019) study in Zimbabwe, which identified various forms of violence and obstacles like cultural norms, low literacy rates, poverty, and fear. To enhance community policing's impact on GBV prevention, culturally sensitive training, community education programs, and partnerships with local leaders are recommended.

The results also reveal mixed perceptions of confidentiality in handling GBV cases indicating a divided view within the community. Possible causes could include concerns about privacy breaches, lack of trust in the system, and past negative experiences. To improve confidentiality and trust, enhancing training on handling sensitive cases, ensuring clear policies on confidentiality, and establishing support mechanisms for survivors are essential. These results contrast with Mhango and Matemba (2024) who identified factors such as

resolved cases, police training, and community awareness as key to reducing GBV.

The split perception of community distrust towards the police in GBV matters underscores existing challenges in building trust. Potential causes may include past negative experiences, lack of transparency, cultural factors influencing perceptions of law enforcement, inadequate resources for addressing GBV cases, and a lack of understanding or sensitivity. To enhance trust and collaboration, fostering open communication, community engagement initiatives, and sensitivity training for officers could be vital. These results align with Nkya's (2020) study in Tanzania, highlighting various forms of violence and obstacles like traditional beliefs, low literacy, poverty, and fear.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations:

This study concludes that despite government efforts to enhance community policing spanning more than 50 years, there are still gaps in community awareness of the initiatives. However, about whether community policing reduces incidences of GBV, there are positive responses and documentary reviews attest to that. This signifies a positive impact which shows that efforts related to empowering communities, fostering partnerships, training officers effectively, targeted interventions, and supportive legal changes that prioritize prevention and survivor assistance started to pay off.

The study recommends improved outreach, cultural sensitivity training, and education initiatives. Enhanced transparency, communication, and community involvement are key. Also, by fostering proactive dialogue and encouraging active community participation, community policing can play a fundamental role in combating GBV effectively.

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