

Girls' Abuse in Tanzania Rural Secondary Schools

Hassan Iddy Hassan
Mkwawa University College of Education
Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies
Iringa, Tanzania
E-mail: hassan.hassan@udsm.ac.tz

Abstract

Considerable research has been conducted on the abuse of girls and women; however, there is little qualitative and smaller scale studies that are specific to Tanzania to provide particularised nuanced accounts of localised situations. Within a theoretical framework of African feminisms, this study explores the abuse of girls in one secondary school in a rural community of Tanzania. The data is from interviews and document review. The findings indicate that the girls experience sexual, physical, verbal or psychological abuse at school at the hands of their male teachers, which impact largely negatively upon their education. Despite such abuse of power by male teachers, it was observed that male teachers remain shielded from the consequences of sexually assaulting young school-girls, a situation which impedes efforts aimed to promote the education of the girl-child. The results provide crucial evidence on how to propose community-based interventions for preventing the abuse of the girl-child in schools.

Keywords: Girl abuse in schools, secondary education, African feminisms, Tanzania

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37759/ICE01.2023.04>

1.0 Introduction

Abusive behaviour towards girls in school is a global problem and a source of grave concern (Leach et al., 2014). It represents a violation of human rights and can have a negative impact on the girls' enrolment, attendance, participation and performance in schools. It is an obstacle to the attainment of gender equality in schools. Literature acknowledges that gender equality is integral to the achievement of universal quality basic education for all (Leach et al., 2014; United Nations [UN], 2016). As such, a country cannot claim to have attained universal access to quality basic education when most of its girls are abused in education settings.

The abuse of girls in and out of school has been a universal concern for years and has attracted the attention of the international community. The major international legal frameworks, such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action condemn violence and abusive behaviour against girls and women. They also call for all member countries to take appropriate measures to protect all the people, particularly girls and women, from all forms of violence and abuse. In 2015, the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal Four of the SDGs (SDG 4), and its corresponding targets, call for action by all countries to provide 'inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UN, 2016). Furthermore, SDG 5 calls for member countries to eliminate all forms of discrimination, violence and abuse against women and girls to ensure gender equality (UN, 2016). African countries are striving to accomplish these goals and Tanzania is no exception.

Over the past two decades, Tanzania has made considerable efforts in improving the enrolment, participation, and performance of girls in secondary schools, through the establishment of the Secondary Education Development Programme I (SEDP I) from 2004 to 2009 and SEDP II from 2010 to 2015. Although enrolments in lower secondary education indicate more females' enrolment than males (1,103,810 males and 1,218,449 females for governmental and non-governmental secondary schools) in 2020, this increased enrolment has not necessarily translated into improvement in the learning for many girls, especially

those living in rural areas. Some of the girls enrolled in secondary schools fail to complete their studies or repeat their grades whereas the majority of those who complete their secondary education fail to achieve good results in their final examinations relative to boys (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2020).

Though the reasons that lead to significant negative impacts on girls' educational experience and long-term outcomes in Tanzania are well known (Iddy, 2021a; 2021b; 2018), this study seeks to clarify the role that abusive behaviour plays in limiting the girls' educational opportunities and outcomes in Tanzania. Whereas many studies in Tanzania point to sexual abuse and violence against girls by teachers and boys in schools (McCran, 2017; Mlyakado & Li, 2019; URT, 2011), there are a few qualitative and smaller scale studies on the subject to provide more nuanced accounts of localised situations. Thus, this study attempts to fill this gap. It investigates the abuse of girls by teachers in one junior secondary school in one rural community of Tanzania. Furthermore, this study is unique as very few studies on girls' education in Tanzania have used African feminisms (a theoretical perspective for studying African girls and women living in Africa) to illuminate the data (Otieno, 2016). In this regard, this study adds to the breadth of studies in Tanzania and Africa in general that have utilised African feminisms in examining the girl-child dilemma.

2.0 Literature Review

In this study, the term 'abusive behaviour' against women refers to any act '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' (UN General Assembly, 1993). In the school context, a corporal punishment by teachers or prefects against girls constitute a physical abuse. Male teachers who engage in illicit sexual liaisons with school-girls are guilty of abuse. Likewise, teachers who engage in intimidating and aggressive behaviour of girls are guilty of committing such abuse (Mlyakado & Li, 2019).

Generally, a significant number of research studies identify violence and abusive behaviours at the hands of both teachers and male students towards the girl-child to be detrimental to her educational opportunities (Bisika et al., 2009; Chisamya et al., 2012). Some male teachers reportedly abuse their power as teachers to persuade the girls to have sexual trysts with them (Bhana, 2012). Sexual abuse by

teachers can have serious repercussions to school-girls as they may experience difficulties in concentrating in their studies, which in turn can lead to poor academic results.

Evidence shows that some school-girls are forced in illicit sexual affairs with their male teachers—who abuse their authority—for various reasons, including money, clothes, good grades and fear from violent repercussions from the male teachers should their advances be spurned (Jones, 2011; Leach et al., 2003). However, it is common for school-girls to refrain from willingly talking about their own sexual encounters with their male teachers, but instead to talk about other school-girls whom they know are having sex with their teachers (Leach et al., 2003). This is possibly due to the shame and stigma attached to such behaviour and a fear of being punished if a girl is found to be having sexual liaison with her teacher, which normally should be out of bounds.

This tendency of distancing from the offence also extends to male teachers. Generally, male teachers rarely admit having sexual trysts with their students (as it is unethical and irresponsible), but instead point at school boys having sexual relations with girls or refer to other male teachers from other schools (Iddy, 2018; Jones, 2011). This should not be surprising because such behaviour breaches their professional code of ethics in addition to abusing the trust society entrusts in them. Inevitably, the penalty is outright dismissal for any teacher caught condoning such behaviour.

Because of the secretive and abusive nature of such acts, most of the sexual abuses by male teachers upon hapless girls go unreported to the relevant authorities for them to obtain redress because the victims are largely unwilling to talk about their experience, do not know whether such incidents are offences, do not know the school procedure to follow to report, fear revenge from the perpetrators, dread the teachers will be punished, fear that they will not be trusted or unduly fear that they will be blamed for causing problems to the teacher (Bisika et al., 2009; Iddy, 2018). However, when such behaviours are officially reported by the girls or their parents, evidence shows that teachers are not punished let alone is any disciplinary measures taken against them for their illicit sexual behaviours against girls (Grant, 2011). Instead, girls who report such behaviours are regularly victimised, mocked and stigmatised by the teachers and students (Leach et al., 2003). This discourages girls from reporting the sexual incidents by their teachers. In consequence, they

continue suffering silently the consequences, particularly under the infamous culture of silence, which in turn may affect their active and effective participation in academic activities, with a negative effect on their results.

Apart from abusive sexual behaviours, male teachers also resort to abusive language towards the girls. A study by Leach et al. (2003) found teachers to use phrases such as ‘useless people’, ‘villagers/bush people’, and ‘children of the poor’ when communicating with girls. Teachers were reported to deliver sexist comments. When girls responded to the questions, teachers reportedly commanded them not to respond as though they were responding to their boyfriends. Or when they swept the floor, the teacher who was not satisfied with the sweeping reportedly said: ‘Is that how you clean your boyfriend’s room?’ These are sexist and derogatory remarks. In another study by Dunne (2007), a teacher greeted a girl as his wife. This kind of language may affect the girls’ behaviour and affect their full participation in the classroom and school in general and may cause dropout cases and/or poor performances.

3.0 African Feminism(s)

‘African feminisms’ provide useful theoretical framework through which to explore the experiences of African girls and women living in Africa. African feminisms are not only concerned with the right to vote, the female body, gender and/or sexuality as it is the case with Western radical and liberal feminisms. Instead, they are humanistic feminisms (Steady, 1987, p. 4), because they ‘recognise the inherent, multiple roles of women and men in reproduction, production, and the distribution of wealth, power, and responsibility for sustaining human life’ (Badejo, 1998, p. 94). Arndt (2002) describes four features that define African feminisms. First, African feminisms emphasise the idea of co-operation with men to improve the status of women. Secondly, they aim to criticise and challenge patriarchal structures. Third, African feminisms aim to discuss the roles of men and women in the context of other oppressive mechanisms, including cultural imperialism, neo-colonialism and racism. Fourth, African feminisms, apart from criticising the patriarchal structures, endeavour to find new alternatives likely to free women from oppression.

Extant literature (see, for example, Atanga, 2013; Chiweshe, 2018; Tamale, 2014) shows that there is no single African feminism, but various ‘African feminisms’ due to cultural, linguistic, political, religious and geographical diversities prevailing

on the continent which interact with and affect the way African women's conceptualisation of feminism. Given this diversity, many African feminist scholars suggest the usage of the term African feminisms rather than the singular African feminism (Atanga, 2013; Chiweshe, 2018; Tamale, 2014). Apart from these differences, African feminisms share several things. First, they all reject the Western meaning and origin of the term 'feminism', because they tend to redefine the concept to represent rightly African women's cultural experience (Nkealah, 2016). Second, they all depend on indigenous models, as they draw the necessary tools for empowering women and educating men on the histories and cultures of African people (Nkealah, 2016). Third, they all insist on gender inclusion, collaboration and the accommodation of both women and men to improve the living conditions of women in Africa (Chiweshe, 2018; Nkealah, 2016). Fourth, they all fight against patriarchal dominance, which manifests itself in social, political, cultural and economic structures, such as the family, employment, education, law and religion (Nkealah, 2006). Furthermore, they all fight against oppressive and harmful cultural traditions (Nkealah, 2006), against the poor economic and living conditions of African women (Ampofo et al., 2008) and against sexual assault (Oyekan, 2014).

African feminisms consider the different roles and responsibilities that men and women assume to ensure the continuous survival of their families and communities (Atanga, 2013). As men and women perform their roles in the communities, which could be biological, cultural, socio-economic and other roles, many problems emerge for women (Badejo, 1998; Steady, 1987). A typical example of such problems is the failure of girls and women to participate effectively in education. In a similar situation, the theory attributes the subordination of girls and women to structures and institutions that adhere to the patriarchal system, which is the system of domination of men over women, manifesting itself within the family, institutions, community and the nation (Atanga, 2013; Mekgwe, 2008). In other words, men have supreme power over all matters and are the ones who control and own the resources and the decision-making process (Coetzee, 2001; McFadden, 1997). As such, this system affects women, because all the power in the family, community and the nation remain completely in the hands of men.

In the same vein, African feminisms treat women's oppression and subordination as an integral part of the socialisation process within the family (McFadden, 1997).

Moreover, the morals instilled into the girls by their parents during childhood affect the girls' future participation in economic, social and political sectors (McFadden, 1997). Under the traditional African set-up, girls tend to be sufficiently inculcated with values and attitudes to prepare them to assume their future roles as wives and mothers (Apusigah, 2009). In consequence, this socialisation denies girls an opportunity to shine in other activities that are beyond the home environment. Furthermore, girls are instilled with culturally inscribed beliefs of minimal power aspiration, respect, obedience and submission, and greater dependency on men (McFadden, 1997). Such qualities are at odds with the notion of placing girls in an equal position with men. Such qualities also compel girls to feel inferiors to males, hence making them defenceless against verbal, sexual and physical harassment and abuse (Hari, 1998).

Furthermore, African feminisms recognise that women's oppression is caused by religious and cultural traditions as well as norms that discriminate against women (Chukwuma, 2007). Such traditions include child marriages, dowry payment, polygamy, female genital mutilation and nutritional taboos (Onaeme, 2012). Similarly, women's oppression and subordination in Africa result from harsh economic conditions and poverty (Chukwuma, 2007; Steady, 1987). African feminisms also treat women's oppression to be caused by some policies and laws that discriminate against women (for example, the disciplinary policy of expelling pregnant girls from schools, the Marriage Act), a lack of laws that protect girls and women from violence and other forms of oppression, and the poor implementation of the existing policies (Kolawole, 1997; Mikell, 1995).

4.0 Methodology

This study was conducted in one rural community found in Tabora region of Tanzania. To observe ethical issues, the name of the study village remains anonymous. Tabora region was purposively chosen primarily because it ranks among the lowest regions in the country in terms of female school enrolments, attendance, and performance relative to boys in secondary schools (URT, 2020). The village was deliberately selected based on my familiarity with the area. I was born, grew up and attended the local primary school in this village. This familiarity of the place was important in securing entry into the village and in gaining access to potential participants.

Based on the 2020 data available at the office of the Village Executive Officer (VEO), 5,033 people live in the selected village, of which 2,465 are males and 2,568 are females. The village is not occupied by any homogeneous groups. Whereas the native people of the village are the Sukuma; other ethnic groups include the Nyamwezi, Nyiramba, Waha, and the Nyaturu. The village is characterised by a tropical climatic condition, with most people practising agriculture, livestock keeping and business as the main economic activities.

The village has one secondary school, which was the focus of my study. This secondary school was established in 2006, with the first students graduating in 2009. By December 2020, the records indicate that the school had 520 students (Form I to IV), of which 295 were girls. There were 12 male teachers and three female teachers. Since its establishment, this secondary school has succeeded in sending 64 students (between 2010 and 20120) to Form V and tertiary colleges, but only 21 were girls due to the low performance of girls in the final national Form IV Examinations relative to boys.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and specifically employed an ethnographic research design to capture the lived experiences of girls' abuse and violence in one secondary school. This approach facilitated an understanding of the views and perceptions of respondents on the abuse of girls in secondary schools. This paper represents the views of 16 participants who were purposively engaged in the study, comprising four school-girls, two school-boys, three teachers, one headmaster, four parents, one VEO, and one District Education Officer (DEO). All the participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and could withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished.

Relevant data for this study was collected using interviews and document review. Participants were invited to participate in a single semi-structured interview lasting no more than an hour. The interview sessions were audio-recorded with informed consent from the participants. All the interviews were conducted mainly in Kiswahili, the national language, and later transcribed and translated into English. Furthermore, three documents, which were largely accessed online, were subjected to a critical examination. These documents include the Basic Education Statistics in Education, the professional code of ethics for teachers in Tanzania, and the 1997 Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (URT).

All the data collected were analysed using Creswell's thematic analysis which consists of five stages: Preparing and organising data for analysis, reading and memoing, describing and analysing data into themes, interpreting the data and representing the data (Creswell, 2013). The study was informed by African feminisms as a theoretical perspective, which supported the interpretation of the findings.

The study obtained approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Newcastle (Australia) and permits from the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Regional Administrative Secretary of Tabora region, District Executive Director, VEO and the head of school. All the participants signed a consent form. Parents or guardians of school children signed parental consent forms to allow their children to participate in the study. Moreover, all the participating children, whose parents had signed the parental consent forms, signed a consent form. Accordingly, all the participants' names have been deidentified when quoting their statements during the reporting of the findings to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. I have used pseudonyms instead of real names.

5.0. Results and Discussion

5.1 Male Teachers Abusing Their Power as Educators

Analysis of the interview data shows that there were a number of consistent references from different research participant cohorts that mentioned the problem of male teachers abusing their power as educators. For example, Sofia, a school-girl aged 17, explained the difficulties:

A girl can go to school and find her teacher seducing her. So, if she refuses, she can find herself being punished every day. So, a girl uses more time thinking about that relationship rather than thinking about studies (Sofia, school-girl).

Another school girl, Aisha also aged 17, said:

Another challenge comes from male teachers. Some of them seduce female students. If they are rejected, they make female students fail examinations or administer unnecessary punishment to them (Aisha, school-girl).

School boys also seemed to be aware of the problem:

The girls may be seduced by their teachers. This makes the girl uncomfortable when the teacher is in the class teaching. Sometimes, the girl may be given unnecessary punishments by that teacher if she repulses the advances (Paul, school-boy).

There seems to be a consensus that a school-girl is placed in a difficult position and may even be punished if she does not agree to illicit sexual liaisons. Some mothers also seemed to be aware of this problem: “She may be in the class, for example, and her teacher wants to start an illicit love affair with her. That is one of the challenges...” (Judith, mother).

However, not all parents were sympathetic to the difficulties school-girls face:

You find that some teachers are not ethical. Instead of teaching the girls what they are supposed to teach, they start seducing them. And since some girls are cowards, they accept to be in relationship with their teachers... So, this may result in teenage pregnancies (Azzah, mother).

Azzah reflects the seriousness of pregnancies outside marriage and perpetuates a range of stereotypes on the sexuality of young girls. In this extract the responsibility of resisting sexual advances rests with a young girl and if a pregnancy does eventuate the blame, responsibility would also fall squarely on the girl-child. This goes against the Department of Education’s policy which requires teachers to abstain from having illicit sexual trysts with school-girls (URT, 2002), but in rural and remote areas local attitudes prevail and proving a teacher’s culpability is extremely difficult. This finding regarding the sexual abuse of girls by male teachers is consistent with the findings of other studies undertaken in Africa (see, for example, Bhana, 2012; Chisamya et al., 2012; Grant, 2011; Jones, 2011). Implicitly, sexual relations between male teachers and school-girls can result teen-age pregnancies that curtail the education of the girl-child. Indeed, this situation in turn leads to school expulsion for the school-girls affected:

There are legal actions that we take based on government directives. That, once a girl is pregnant and it is proved beyond doubt,

according to the directives, she is expelled from studies (Magesa, Headmaster).

This exemplifies the legalised practice which oppresses women. In this regard, African feminisms proffer that some laws, policies and guidelines punctuate problems for women and, therefore, call for the reform of such policies (Kolawole, 1997; Mikell, 1995). This practice violates girls' right to access education as stipulated in the Constitution of the URT.

The comment by Azzah above also raises an important issue. Tatu admitted that school-girls were disturbed by some of the misbehaving male teachers who proposed 'love'. Although Tatu condemned male teachers for being unethical, she also placed the blame on the girls, stating that they were cowardly and consented to sleep with their teachers. The question worth asking here is: Why is it that some mothers blame the girl-child for this situation? Some African feminist theorists try to explain this situation by observing that this is how marginalised groups survive in society. As women, they are still marginalised and oppressed in the society and, therefore, vulnerable as adults. So, to survive, they have to take on the thinking of males, the dominant group, namely the patriarchy (Monagan, 2009; Nanda, 2012). In other words, it is a protective mechanism for surviving in an oppressive patriarchal society. So, from the perspective of Azzah and other mothers, they are in a situation where they are powerless, and need to justify this behaviour. As it is hard for mothers in a male-dominated society to speak out on a male teacher abuse of the girl-child. And if that happens, these mothers would no doubt be in trouble and their husbands would be horrified. So, Azzah's comment could indicate how marginalised groups survive in the Tanzanian rural society.

5.2 Society's Attitudes Perpetuate the Continuance of Sexual Abuse

Another aspect for emphasis is how the participants of this study talked about these sexual abuses by male teachers. They used soft words or euphemisms to express the behaviours of the male teachers, such as 'love relations', 'seducing' or 'love affairs'. This is influenced by society, as it remains taboo to talk openly about such things. For example, Sofia, a school-girl aged 17, used the following words in her narrative about male teachers' sexual abuse.

Some girls do engage in love affairs with their teachers for fear of being punished every day. So, when a girl is in sexual relationship

with her teacher, do you think there is learning there? (Sofia, school-girl).

Again, Azzah's narrative above "... since some girls are cowards, they accept to be in relationship with their teachers..." suggests the use of soft words when noting a sexual abuse done by teachers. This is a significant challenge in fighting the abuse of girls by male teachers. Such words contribute to allowing such behaviours to happen and keeping male teachers safe. 'Love' relations imply there is consensus and a more equal relationship of power than is apparent from the evidence. These behaviours by male teachers towards school-girls deserve no other label than being termed as sexual assaults and an abuse of power. In other words, if male teachers have illicit sexual liaisons with school-girls this constitutes sexual assault and an abuse of their power. Such naming and shaming can help reduce the conduct of such behaviours. Therefore, society's attitudes that perpetuate the continuance of these behaviours by male teachers by normalising such practices, even when there are laws and policies making such behaviour illegal.

5.3 Some Girls are not Willing to Report Cases of Sexual Abuse

Interestingly, only one school-girl admitted being propositioned by a male teacher and rejecting the 'love' proposal: "I was seduced by a certain male teacher. I rejected his proposal... (Sofia, school-girl)." This situation created troubles as she started experiencing frequent beatings, insults and harassment from the teacher she had rejected. The other three school-girls were not willing to talk about their own experiences. Instead, they talked about other girls whom they said were seduced or having 'love affairs' with their teachers. References to this behaviour were made by school-girls as well as school boys and mothers. The participants had knowledge of unwanted sexual advances from teachers; therefore, this appears to be a serious and an all too common practice. Leach et al. (2003) also came up with similar results, as some school-girls confessed to have faced illicit advances from teachers. However, no one admitted to having illicit sex with a teacher. This appears to be a common practice used by most of the school-girls to distance themselves from the offence. This may be due to the social stigma attached to such behaviour or the fear of being held responsible as it is against school law and can lead to expulsion if found culpable (Iddy, 2021a; 2018). In this study, the school-girl, who admitted being sexually-harassed by her male teacher,

is a courageous young girl for speaking out against a vice that continues unabated based on evidence from the girls, boys and parents.

From an African feminist viewpoint, this research indicates that there is unequal relationship of power that relates to both gender and class. The current cultural context of male dominance and patriarchy is so powerful that some women are unwilling to see the lack of agency available to young vulnerable girls; and the position of male teachers seem unassailable, hence largely unchallenged. The consequences for young school-girls is that they see school as a dangerous place and not a haven, with some mothers and fathers preferring their daughters not to go to school at all.

5.4 Teachers' Reactions to Girl-child Abuse Issue

Female Teachers Agree that Girls Experience Sexual Abuse

A female teacher agreed that male teachers made advances to their students. She also confirmed that girls were frequently punished and insulted if they spurned the advances of their teacher:

Of course, one of the challenges is that of being seduced by their teachers... When the teacher seduces a girl and the girl rejects him, in any way that girl will be in trouble. She can frequently be punished and insulted (Vick, female teacher).

In another account, she added:

Girls feel shy to come to our office to ask questions because there are some male teachers who seduce them. As a result, they know that asking questions will result in awkward answers from male teachers whose sexual advances they have spurned (Vick, female teacher).

At this school, 11 teachers shared one office space that served as a staffroom. The headmaster, second master, academic master and discipline master respectively—all males—had separate individual offices. The lack of privacy in the staffroom made many girls reluctant to go there for any academic related inquiry for fear of being verbally harassed by the teachers whose advances they had spurned. This situation is likely to affect girls negatively in relation to both their school

attendance and performance. Such girls avoid visiting the staffroom to avoid exposing themselves to a predatory male teacher hell-bent on abusing his authority. In this context, this avoidance serves as a defensive mechanism that allowed them to steer clear of the prying eyes errant male teachers.

Male Teachers Reject Abusing Girls Sexually

On the other hand, male teachers blatantly dismissed such allegations, arguing that the school-girls fabricated this issue against them to tarnish their image. For example, Denis, a male teacher explained:

Problems sometimes happen. When you advise a girl on her errant conduct and she receives the advice negatively, she can create some falsified claims against you as a way of reacting against your goodwill towards her. She can lie that you have seduced her, knowing that it is not true. That tendency discourages teachers from helping school-girls (Denis, male teacher).

Similarly, Mathias, another male teacher, said:

A certain student wrote to a teacher a message on a piece of paper that read 'If you continue monitoring or punishing me, I will tarnish your image, I will tell your fellow teachers that you are seducing me' (Alan, male teacher).

Implicit in the two statements from the male teachers is a case of shifting blame. As such, they were either not making advances to their students as they claim, or they were unwilling to admit to luring girls into illicit sexual affairs. Instead, they suggested that the school-girls were telling lies to revenge against teachers who were actively monitoring their behaviour in and outside the school. On the other hand, the teachers were avoiding implicating themselves in what they know is unprofessional and unethical. Certainly, the incriminating girls' testimony and that of the female teacher indicate that there was something amiss in the behaviour of some of the male teachers. In any case, if they were the perpetrators they could not admit publicly, a common strategy men use when they abuse their power to maintain control.

Whereas the male teachers blatantly refused to acknowledge that they harassed the school-girls, the only female teacher who participated in this study openly admitted that such malpractices existed in the school, though she did not reveal the identities of the culprits. This finding is consistent with that of Leach et al. (2003), who found that female teachers admitted that some male teachers had sexual liaisons with their school-girls despite the male teachers denying such claims. In other words, educated women can fight to improve the living conditions of fellow women in society (Iddy, 2018). Implicitly, women's status in society is likely to improve when all women have a sound education.

5.5 Males Support Each Other to Oppress Females

The VEO and the DEO were also asked about the allegations of male teachers engaging in illicit sex activities with their female students. In particular, the VEO defended the male teachers, refusing to believe that this type of behaviour still existed. He cited two examples to show the extent to which male teachers spent time monitoring and punishing students who were involved in love affairs. He argued that if the teachers were implicated in illicit sexual affairs with their students, then they would not see the value of following up and punishing female students who engaged in premarital sexual behaviours. Furthermore, in defence of the male teachers, he said that even if such errant behaviours, it would be on a very negligible scale:

This has never happened. It may be just rumours from parents. I remember it was either in 2013 or in 2014 when teachers... took trouble to investigate and punish a school-girl who was caught involving in sexual affairs. If male teachers had this behaviour, they would have not seen the need to follow up the conduct of this school-girl. For this, I defend the teachers. I have never heard of it... Anyway, maybe I shouldn't say much and if there are any, it may be so small a percentage (Marco, VEO).

On the other hand, the DEO was not categorical as he said that it was possible that some male teachers engaged in illicit sexual affairs with their students, but he had not received any formal complaint from the students or their parents. He said that may be such issues had been reported and addressed appropriately by the school headmaster at the school level:

Such allegations have not yet been reported to me officially by students or their parents. I think it is possible that such issues happen at the school level. But it is also possible that students decide to report the incidents to the headmaster, not to me here. The headmaster has an authority to address them depending on the nature of the allegations (Dilunga, DEO).

When asked about this issue, the headmaster responded as follows:

I also hear the rumours from the people in the streets. The girls have not reported such cases to me. So, as the head of school, I cannot work on the rumours... (Magesa, Headmaster).

The headmaster's statement needs qualification. He appears to be defensive to protect the image of his school and his fellow male teachers. As this study's findings illustrate, cases of sexual abuse have been brought to the attention of the school authorities. For example, consider the following testimonies of the girls interviewed for this study:

There was a male teacher who was proposing to a girl, that girl rejected and reported the issue to the matron and head of school. However, no action was taken against that teacher. We see him continuing with his duties... (Martha, school-girl).

I was seduced by a certain male teacher and rejected his advances. But the teacher continued approaching me, promising that he will give me money if I accept him. I finally reported the matter to the headmaster for further action... (Sofia, school-girl).

Thus, how come the headmaster speaks of none of the cases having been reached his office when both these incidents occurred in his school? This denial exemplifies of how men support each other when women are oppressed. Yet, the protecting of the male teacher accused of sexually harassing young school-girls sends wrong signals to both the victims and the perpetrators. Paradoxically, it is almost 53 years since the first president of Tanzania, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, said in 1968, 'Let us have an equal society in which all members have equal rights and equal opportunities and that nobody can be exploited or exploit' (Nyerere,

1968 in Brock-Utne, 2004). The question worth exploring here is: Why are there so many people protecting abusive male teachers?

One possible answer could be that there are teacher shortages in the country. Since the law requires the teacher to be expelled and jailed for 30 years in prison if found guilty of sleeping with a school-girl (URT, 2016), hiding the sexual abuse seemed to be a possible short-term solution to maintaining the few available teachers. Another way to explain this situation is that, according to feminist theories, this strategy is a continuation of male chauvinism and sexism fostered by the dominance the male gender enjoys, thus perpetuating the system that already disadvantages school-girls in so many ways. In patriarchal societies, men generally tend to support other men regardless of whether they are breaking the law, to maintain male power (Acker, 1987; Arnot, 2007). As findings from the current study indicate, any girl who accuses a male teacher of sexual abuse and harassment is dubbed a liar or a trouble-maker, or there are denials that such behaviours are non-existent. Under these circumstances, girls get blamed for what is happening or are labelled as liars because their vulnerability and lack of power in the teacher-student in-equilibrium.

As was mentioned above, African feminisms insist on the idea of the teamwork of both women and men to improve the poor conditions of women in societies (Arndt, 2002; Chiweshe, 2018; Nkealah, 2016). This runs counter to some Western feminist theories, which to some extent focus on excluding men in the battle to improve women's conditions (Hussain & Asad, 2012). However, African feminisms try to find a space where there is recognition of the value of women's work to society alongside recognition of the value of men's work to society, and how both genders can work together to improve life and women's condition in society (Chiweshe, 2018; Nkealah, 2016). Therefore, as male teachers are still protected by male government officials and the head of the school whilst sexually assaulting school-girls because of their lack of an awareness of the unequal power relations, it seems that there is a long way to go towards improving the status of women in African societies and rural Tanzania in particular. Women's conditions would improve when men change their actions and start collaborating with women effectively to produce better living conditions for both men and women.

5.6 Girls are Verbally Harassed by Male Teachers

Another way that male teachers behaved inappropriately, as reported by research participants, was the use of abusive language towards the girls:

One day while we were sweeping the floor in the morning at school, a male teacher passed by and greeted a girl in public as his wife... (Zurfa, school girl).

A certain male teacher called me a useless and stupid person and that I will not pass the final examination; I will end up being married (Martha, school girl).

Studies by Dunne (2007) in Ghana and Botswana and Leach et al. (2003) in Ghana, Malawi, and Zimbabwe came up with similar findings. In other words, this malpractice that disadvantages the girl-child in the school environment is not just a local problem as it appears to be widespread. The female teacher, Vick, claimed that girls reported to her (as a matron) that male teachers used words such as ‘failures’, ‘losers’, ‘useless people’ and ‘future wives’. This kind of verbal abuse disappointed and discouraged girls. Such words—coming as they do from teachers, who are supposed to serve as role models—have significant negative impacts on girls’ ability to learn. In consequence, the girls start believing that they are only meant for marriage, something that augurs well with traditional modes of socialisation in a patriarchal society. Some might even be prompted to quit school and get married.

This study, alongside others in Africa (Bhana, 2012; Bisika et al., 2009; Chisamya et al., 2012; Dunne, 2007; Grant, 2011; Leach et al., 2003), confirms that teacher behaviour which is an abuse of power relates to both class and gender continues in male-dominated patriarchal societies where men feel the need to assert authority. For female students, in particular, this tendency contributes to schools being unsafe places in addition to contributing to lowering the school performance levels of the girl-child and female students’ withdrawal from education.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper has taken an African feminisms approach as a theoretical tool for analysing the abuse of girls in one secondary school in one rural community in

the Tabora region of Tanzania. The results provide evidence that abusive behaviours against girls continue unabated in school, which impact upon their education. It has shown that girls experience various forms of abuse at the school which are sexual, physical, verbal or psychological at the hands of their teachers. This situation can lead to teenage pregnancies (which in turn leads to school expulsion) and the illicit sexual liaisons with their teachers could also lead to girls contracting sexually-transmitted diseases, including the dreaded and still incurable HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, the multi-faceted abuses of the school-girls can lead to poor attendance, lower academic performance and high dropout rates for girls, because school is no longer a safe place for them. Despite the abuse of power by male teachers towards the girls, it was observed that male teachers were still protected from the consequences of sexually assaulting young school girls. This scenario impedes efforts aimed to promote girls' education. Based on the evidence from this study, it is apparent that abusive behaviour against school-girls is both a cause and consequence of inequalities between male and female obtaining in a society.

Indeed, abusive behaviour against girls in school is a major threat to national development and our efforts to realise the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 (TDV 2025) and to reach the Sustainable Development Goals. The TDV 2025 aims to transform Tanzania into a middle-income (semi-industrialised) country by 2025. This goal can be compromised if girls—an important segment of society—continue to be abused in school. Furthermore, an inclusive and equitable quality secondary education, as stated in SDGs, will not be achieved unless girls feel and are safe in school. The war against HIV/AIDS will also not be won unless sexual abuse is stopped especially for girls. Similarly, the incidences of physical and mental health problems among adults could not be reduced until all forms of abuse against children are eliminated. Indeed, exposure to abuse or violence during childhood can lead to a broad range of mental and physical health problems during adulthood (URT, 2011). Therefore, building a better future must start with ensuring the safety of each girl at school by creating safe and supportive learning environment, which are free from fear, abuse and discrimination. When girls stay safe in school and have access to a better-quality education, they can reduce poverty, increase their income, improve agriculture, control population, improve their family health, educate their children, reduce child mortality rates, and end child marriages (Sperling et al., 2016).

The research reported here has, therefore, helped to fill the gap with respect to smaller scale qualitative studies on the abuse of girls. It has provided evidence of the extent and severity of girls' abuse in a rural community. Moreover, it has added to the breadth of studies in Tanzania and African that utilise African feminisms, showing how patriarchy affects girls' secondary schooling. Using African feminisms, as a theoretical lens, has helped to place the study within the realities of an African context. Overall, until the abuse of girls in school is acknowledged and strong measures put in place to mitigate it, Tanzania will be unable to provide truly inclusive and equitable quality universal secondary education by 2030.

References

- Acker, S. (1987). Feminist theory and the study of gender and education. *International Review of Education*, 33(4), 419-435.
- Ampofo, A. A., Beoku-Betts, J., & Osirim. M. J. (2008). Researching African women and gender studies: New social science perspectives. *African and Asian Studies*, 7(4), 327-341.
- Apusigah, A. A. (2009). The gendered politics of farm household production and the shaping of women's livelihoods in Northern Ghana. *Feminist Africa*, 12(12), 52-68.
- Arndt, S. (2002). Perspectives on African feminism: Defining and classifying African- feminist literatures. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 17(54), 31-44.
- Arnot, M. (2007). Education feminism, gender equality, and school reform in late twentieth century England. *International Studies in Educational Inequality, Theory and Policy* 2, 207-226.
- Atanga, L. L. (2013). African feminism? In L. Atanga., S. Ellece, L. Litosseliti and J. Sunderland (Eds.), *Gender and language in African contexts: Tradition, struggle and change* (pp. 301-314). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Badejo, D. (1998). African feminism: Mythical and social power of women of African descent. *Research in African Literatures*, 29(2), 94-111.
- Bhana, D. (2012). Girls are not free – In and out of the South African school. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(2), 352-358.
- Bisika, T, Ntata, T., & Konyani, K. (2009). Gender-violence and education in Malawi: A Study of violence against girls as an obstruction to universal primary school education. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 18(3), 287-294.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2004). Peace research with a diversity perspective: A look to Africa. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 9(2), 110-123.

- Chisamya, G., et al. (2012). Gender and education for all: Progress and problems in achieving gender equity. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(6), 742-755.
- Chiweshe, M. (2018). African men and feminism: Reflections on using African feminism in research. *Agenda*, 32(2), 76-82.
- Chukwuma, H. (2007). *Women's quest for rights: African feminist theory in fiction*. In Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table Forum on Public Policy.
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A191817956/AONE?u=anon~1fe7fb3a&sid=googleScholar&xid=f61c2431>
- Coetzee, D. (2001). South Africa education and the ideology of patriarchy. *South Africa Journal of Education*, 21(4), 300-304.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry research design: Choosing from five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Dunne, M. (2007). Gender, sexuality and schooling: Everyday life in junior secondary schools in Botswana and Ghana. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 27(5), 499-511.
- Grant, M. (2011). Girls' schooling and the perceived threat of adolescent sexual activity in rural Malawi. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 14(1), 73-86.
- Hari, P. (1998). *Parents' and community attitudes towards girls' participation in and access to education and Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMT) Subjects*. Nairobi: African Development Education Association.
- Hussain, B., & Asad, A. Z. (2012). A critique on feminist research methodology. *Journal of Politics and Law*, 5(4), 202-207.
- Iddy, H. (2021a). The right to education for the girl child in Tanzania: Contradictions and confusions in legislation and practices. *Gender Issues*, 38, 324-343.
- Iddy, H. (2021b). Changing perceptions of the value of girls' secondary education among the parents in rural Tanzania. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2021.1982048
- Iddy, H. (2018). *Girls and secondary education in rural Tanzania: Perceptions, obstacles and future possibilities*. Unpublished PhD thesis, the University of Newcastle.
- Jones, S. K. (2011). Girls' secondary education in Uganda: Assessing policy within the women's empowerment framework. *Gender and Education*, 23(4), 385-413.

- Kolawole, M. M. (1997). *Womanism and African consciousness*. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Leach, F., Dunne, M., & Salvi, F. (2014). *A global review of current issues and approaches in policy, programming and implementation responses to School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) for the education sector*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Leach, F., et al. (2003). *An investigative study of the abuse of girls in African schools*. London: DFID.
- McCran, D. (2017). *An exploratory study of child sexual abuse in Tanzania*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Dublin Institute of Technology.
- McFadden, P. (1997). *The challenges and prospects for the African women's movement in the 21st century*. <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/30/152.html>
- Mekgw, P. (2008). Theorizing African feminism (s): The colonial question. *Quest. An African Journal of Philosophy*, 20(1), 11-22.
- Mikell, G. (Ed.). (1995). *African feminism: The politics of survival in sub-Saharan Africa*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mlyakado, B. P., & Li, J. C. M. (2019). Sexual exploitation of adolescent students in Tanzania: Implication for social services. *International Social Work*, 62(3), 1104-1116.
- Monagan, S. (2009). Patriarchy: Perpetuating the practice of female genital mutilation. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 2(1), 160-181.
- Nanda, S. (2012). Women as the oppressed in the God of small thing. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, III(III), 1-7.
- Nkealah, N. (2016). (West) African feminisms and their challenges. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 32(2), 61-74.
- Nkealah, N. (2006). Conceptualizing feminism(s) in Africa: The challenges facing African women writers and critics. *English Academy Review*, 23(1), 133-141.
- Onaeme, F. (2012). Reducing gender discrimination and violence against women through library and information services. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*, 765.
- Otieno, M. V. M. (2016). *The influence of school matrons on girls' educational experience and social participation in Tanzania*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington.
- Oyekan, A. O. (2014). African feminism: Some critical considerations. *International Journal of Philosophy*, 15(1), 1-10.

- Sperling, G, Winthrop, R., & Kwauk, C. (2016). *What works in girl's education: Evidence for the world's best investment*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- Steady, F. C. (1987). African feminism: A worldwide perspective. *Women in African and the African Diaspora*, 3-24.
- Tamale, S. (2014). Exploring the contours of African sexualities: Religion, law and power. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 14, 150-177.
- United Nations [UN]. (2016). *The sustainable development goals report 2016*. New York: UN.
- UN General Assembly. (1993). *Declaration on the elimination of violence against women*. New York: UN.
- URT. (2020). *Pre-primary, primary, secondary, adult and non-formal education statistics: Regional data*. Dodoma: President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government.
- URT. (2016). *The Written laws (miscellaneous amendment) (no.2) Act, 2016*. *Government Gazette No.21. Vol.97 dated 20th May 2016*. Dar es Salaam: Government Printer.
- URT. (2011). *Violence against children in Tanzania: Findings from a national survey 2009*. Dar es Salaam: UNICEF.
- URT. (2002). *Public Service Act, 2002 and Regulations 2003*. Dar es Salaam: Government Printers.