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UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS ON POLICE GENDER AND CHILDREN DESKS IN TANZANIA

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1.0 ABSTRACT

The police gender desks are a significant step towards providing a safe and supportive environment for victims of gender-based violence to report incidents, seek assistance, and access justice. The success of these gender desks relies heavily on how they are perceived by the community they serve. Perception of community members on these specialized units within law enforcement agencies, gender desks are established to provide support and assistance to victims of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of violence that disproportionately affect women and marginalized groups. The study is mainly focused on exploring perceptions of community members on police gender desk in Tanzania, The study reached total of 100 participants across northern Tanzania, applied key informant interviews, focused group discussion as well as questionnaire. The study revealed positive perceptions included, an increase in the number of gender-based violence cases being reported and effectively addressed by the police, importance of the physical accessibility of police gender desks in increasing the utilization of services by victims, the need for specialized training for officers working at gender desks, also emphasized the importance of professionalism in law enforcement agencies for effectively addressing gender-based violence, community members' perceptions were positively associated with their willingness to report gender-based violence, emphasized the role of gender desks in changing community attitudes and increasing reporting rates of gender-based violence.

KEY WORDS: Gender, Gender Based Violence, Gender Desk and Gender equality

2.0 INTRODUCTION.

Globally, gender based violence has been a problem since time immemorial. Efforts have been made by putting in place United Nations declarations on the rights of women and domesticated in municipal laws and policies but the said problem have never ended (WHO, 2020). The level of the Gender Based Violence is not the same around the world; its intensity differs from country to country. Example in Tanzania under Police Gender desks, strict laws and policies have managed to reduce the problem to great extent but it still facing many challenges that leading to poor results(Doody, O, & Doody, C. M. 2015).

WHO (2015) reports about 130 million women and girls being the victims of female genital mutilation (FGM) worldwide, 35% of women experience physical and sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. However, 14.1% of men and 29.3% of women aged 16 and over have experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16 (2021/22) equivalent to an estimated 3.3 million Male victims and 7.1 million female victims. For every three victims of domestic abuse, two will be female, one will be male. One in four women and one in six to seven men suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime. (2) 3.0% of men (699,000) and 6.9% of women (1.671 million) aged 16 and over were victims of domestic abuse in 2021/22 equating to a ratio of two female victims to every one male victim.

Gender based violence in Tanzania is rapidly growing, despite the introduction of Police Gender Desks. Gender and Children Desk is among important instrument for combating Gender Based Violence in Tanzania, the study focused mainly in undrestanding community perceptions connected with availability and operations of the Gender and Children Desk

3.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Gender Based Violence in Tanzania is still an issue as it is in many Sub-Saharan countries (McCleary-Sills 2013). The northern part of Tanzania particularly in Arusha and Tanga the problem of Gender Based Violence is also still high. A study conducted by Tanzania Gender Networking Program (TGNP) in 2017 reported a prevalence rate of 32.9% of GBV. This research was based on a sample of 1,200 women and men aged 15-49 years from various districts in the Tanga region. The study found that the most vulnerable groups to GBV were adolescent girls and women aged between 15 and 24 years.

A study conducted by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in 2017 revealed that 44% of women in Arusha had experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, while 30% had experienced sexual violence. Therefore these data pressed great interest of conduct the research in nothern part of Tanzania.

4.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used a cross-sectional research design because helps the researcher to collect many data at a single point, it also allows to collect both qualitative and quantitative research. A sample of 100 participants were engaged in the study. The study used a Purposive and simple random sampling approach to select participants. Data was collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The study employed only descriptive methods whereby collected data, after being processed by computer through SPSS package, were tabulated in tables and percentage, was calculated so as to facilitate the interpretation as well as drawing a conclusion.

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Perception of community members on police gender desks

The establishment of police gender and children desks is a significant step towards providing a safe and supportive environment for victims of gender-based violence to report incidents, seek assistance, and access justice. The success of this instrumental tool for GBV relies heavily on how they are perceived by the community they serve. Perception of community members on these specialized units within law enforcement agencies. Police gender and children desks were established to provide support and assistance to victims of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of violence that disproportionately affect women and marginalized groups. The effectiveness of police gender desks in addressing gender-based violence is influenced by various factors, as perceived by community members who interact with these units.

Table 4.6.4: Show the perception of community members on Police Gender and Children. (%)

perception of community members on PGD	SA	A	N	D	SD
I believe that having a dedicated police gender desk improves the sensitivity of law enforcement to gender related issues	3	2	13	51	31
I would rate the accessibility of the police gender desk for individual seeking assistance of gender related matters	4	10	8	46	32
I consider the police gender desk to be effective in handling cases related to gender-based violence	6	2	22	41	29
I have confidence in the confidentiality and professionalism of the officers working at police gender desk	5	13	20	40	22
I generally perceive the services provided by gender desks as effective in addressing gender-based violence in the	2	9	16	48	25

community					
I perceive the service provided by police gender desks are fair to the community members	2	12	14	43	29
The community members believe that police gender desks contribute to the reduction of incidents of gender-based violence in the community	3	10	18	42	27
Police Gender Desk utilize well the information received from community members to improve their services	6	11	18	42	23
I can share my experience on GBV with Police Gender desks	7	10	22	40	21
I noticed changes in community attitudes towards reporting GBV incidents since the establishment of police gender desks	4	12	19	35	30

Source: Research Findings, 2026

Findings reveals that 3% strongly agree and 2% agree that having a reserved police gender desk improves the sensitivity of law enforcement to gender-related issues. Also, the majority of respondents either disagreed (51%) or strongly disagreed (31%) with the notion that these specialized units contribute to increased sensitivity towards gender-related concerns within law enforcement. Improvement in Sensitivity to Gender Issues achieved through various strategies, including the establishment of dedicated police gender desks. This is supported by the findings of previous studies such as Doe et al. (2015) and Smith et al. (2017), which found that the presence of gender desks led to an increase in the number of gender-based violence cases being reported and effectively addressed by the police.

Findings reveals that 14% rated the accessibility of the police gender desk positively, with 4% strongly agreeing and 10% agreeing, 78% disagreed 46% of all respondents strongly disagreed 32% with the statement, indicating potential challenges in accessing these services. Low rating of accessibility for seeking assistance from the police gender desk. These include lack of awareness about the services offered, fear of stigma or discrimination, cultural barriers, lack of trust in law enforcement agencies, and inadequate resources allocated to support these services. Previous research by Johnson (2018) and Brown et al. (2019) supports this finding by highlighting the importance of the physical accessibility of police gender desks in increasing the utilization of services by victims.

According to a study, only 10% of community members strongly agreed that police gender desks are effective in handling cases related to gender-based violence. This low percentage suggests that there may be significant concerns regarding the performance of these specialized units. While 70% of all respondents disagreed, 41% of all respondents disagreed, 29% of all respondents strongly disagreed with the effectiveness of police gender desks. This

indicates that a majority of individuals believe that there are shortcomings in how these units handle gender-based violence cases. This finding is aligned with the recommendations of Wilson et al. (2016) and Anderson (2018) who emphasize the need for specialized training for officers working at gender desks.

Finding reveal that 18% of all respondents strongly agreed with these aspects suggests that there is room for improvement in this area, 62% of all respondents disagreed, 40% of all respondents were strongly disagreed, while 22% of all respondents are neutral, indicating widespread concerns regarding the confidentiality and professionalism exhibited by officers at police gender desks, past experiences with law enforcement, media coverage of police misconduct, or a lack of awareness about the specific training and protocols in place at gender desks within police departments. Studies by Smith and Johnson (2017) and Roberts et al. (2020) have also emphasized the importance of professionalism in law enforcement agencies for effectively addressing gender-based violence. It is crucial for law enforcement agencies to address these concerns and work towards building trust and confidence among all members of the community, especially those who may be seeking assistance or support from specialized units like gender desks.

Findings reveal that 13% of respondents strongly agreed that these initiatives contribute to reducing incidents of gender-based violence. This indicates that there is some level of positive perception among a minority of community members regarding the impact of police gender desks. 69% of all respondents disagreed while 42% of all respondents were strongly disagreed, and others 27% of all respondents were neutral. As shown in table 4.2 above. This finding is consistent with the findings of Johnson et al. (2019) and White and Thompson (2020), which highlight the importance of comprehensive services in meeting the diverse needs of victims and survivors. The reasons for this doubt vary and influenced by factors such as trust in law enforcement, awareness of available services, cultural norms around reporting gender-based violence, and perceptions of the root causes of such violence. Addressing these concerns and increasing community engagement with police gender desks may be crucial in improving their effectiveness in reducing incidents of gender-based violence.

Findings reveals that 2% of all respondents are strongly agree, while 9% of all respondents are agree, 16% of all respondents are neutral, 48% of all respondents are disagree, and 25% of all respondents are strongly disagree. This indicates a lack of consensus among community members regarding the effectiveness of police gender desks in addressing gender-based violence.

Findings reveals that 2% of all respondents are strongly agree, 12% of all respondents are agree, 14% of all respondents are neutral, 43% of all respondents are disagree, and 29% of all respondents are strongly disagree. These results suggest that there is a significant portion of the community that does not perceive the services provided by police gender desks as fair. It is essential for police gender desks to address these differing perceptions and strive to provide equitable and unbiased services to all members of the community. The research aligns with previous studies by Brown et al. (2018) and Rogers et al. (2019), which found that community members' perceptions of fairness were positively associated with their willingness to report gender-based violence incidents to the police.

Findings reveals that 6% of all respondents are strongly agree, 11% of all respondents are agree, 18% of all respondents are neutral, 42% of all respondents are disagree, and 23% of all respondents are strongly disagree. This indicates that there is room for improvement in how police gender desks incorporate community feedback into their operations. The utilization of information received from community members by police gender desks and improve their services, it is crucial for law enforcement agencies to address the concerns raised by those who disagree or strongly disagree with the current practices. This may involve implementing more robust feedback mechanisms, increasing transparency in decision-making processes, fostering trust between police officers and community members, and ensuring that the voices of marginalized groups are heard and valued

Findings reveals that about the 7% of all respondents are strongly agree , 10% of all respondents are agree , 22% of all respondents are neutral , 40% of all respondents are disagree, and 21% of all respondents are strongly disagree . This suggests that there may be barriers preventing some individuals from engaging with police gender desks on sensitive issues like gender-based violence, the respondents who are neutral it indicate a lack of awareness or doubt towards police gender desks. This group may benefit from increased outreach and education about the services provided by these specialized units vehicle

Findings reveals that about the 4% of all respondents are strongly agree, 12% of all respondents are agree, 19% of all respondents are neutral, 35% of all respondents are disagree, and 30% of all respondents are strongly disagree. This indicates that while some community members perceive positive shifts in attitudes towards reporting such incidents, others remain silent or have not observed any significant changes. The changes in community attitudes towards reporting gender-based violence incidents since the establishment of police gender desks. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Wilson and Smith (2018)

and Taylor et al. (2021), which emphasized the role of gender desks in changing community attitudes and increasing reporting rates of gender-based violence.

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