

**Local narratives of sexual and other violence against children and young people in Zanzibar**

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## **Abstract**

Understandings of violence and especially sexual violence against children must be situated within the local context. The 2009 Violence against Children Survey in Zanzibar indicated that 6% of girls and 9% of boys reported having experienced sexual violence before the age of 18 years. This paper reports on an in-depth qualitative study conducted in Zanzibar to provide further insights to these findings by examining the circumstances for sexual and other violence against children in Zanzibar. Twenty-four in-depth interviews with young people and 18 focus group discussions with young people and adults were conducted in rural and urban Zanzibar. A further 8 interviews were conducted with parents and key stakeholders in government and NGO offices that provide services for children. The findings revealed that religious and cultural practices, which form the foundation of Swahili culture in Zanzibar, provide a moral frame for childhood development, but structural factors make children vulnerable to sexual violence. Both boys and girls are vulnerable to sexual violence in the home, neighbourhood, at school, and, in particular, at madrasa or Qur'anic schools. As religion and culture are strong influences on childhood, preventing sexual violence at madrasa schools would strengthen the positive aspects of religious teachings for ensuring a safe childhood.

**Keywords:** Zanzibar, context, children, sexual violence, Swahili culture

## Introduction

There is evidence that sexual violence against children is a significant problem worldwide, including Africa, occurring at home, at school and other institutions including workplaces. Increases in violence across Africa may be attributed to rapid social change such as urbanisation and the loosening of connections with extended family or the predominance of male patriarchy, where men are expected to exert control over women and children (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, and Rose-Junius 2005, Kisanga 2012). Such violence is shaped by factors including the age and gender of the child, availability, or not, of family and external services support and social, political, moral, and economic contexts including poverty (African Child Policy Forum 2014, Boyden and Mann 2005, Boakye-Boaten 2010, Jenks 2008, Fay 2013).

Sexual violence against children as a type of violence is complicated by ideas and constructions of gender, childhood and sexuality itself, as well as ideas and practices of love and protection, power and authority, which have the potential for abuse (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998). For Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998), childhood invokes ideas of personhood, morality, and social order which are culturally framed. Boakye-Boaten (2010) argues childhood in contemporary Africa is a contentious concept and challenged by influences from globalisation, which have impacted on cultural and institutional ideas of childhood, especially in the socialisation and education of children.

The 2009 Violence against Children Survey in Zanzibar, which interviewed young people aged between 13 and 24 years, indicates that 6% of girls and 9% of boys had experienced sexual violence before the age of 18 years (UNICEF Tanzania 2011). The most common form of childhood sexual violence reported by both girls and boys was unwanted attempted sex, sexual touching and forced sex (UNICEF Tanzania 2011). A further study in Zanzibar found that in between 20% and 35% of women surveyed were married before they were 15 years old (Smee 2012). The results of this survey have led to an increased focus on children's rights and child protection by the Zanzibar government. In collaboration with Save the Children and UNICEF, the Department of Social Welfare established 6 One Stop Centres in Zanzibar, which are drop in centres which host non-uniformed police officers; medical personnel and counsellors to provide health, legal and psychosocial services to children who have suffered violence. While these measures address response to violence experienced by children in Zanzibar there is a need to understand how to prevent violence in the first place.

While 2009 Violence against Children survey in Zanzibar provided information on the extent of violence it did not give insights into the circumstances of violence, and especially why more violence is reported by boys. Understandings of violence against children must draw on local ideas of childhood, sexuality and how these are constructed within the context, as noted above. This paper reports on an in-depth qualitative study conducted in Zanzibar to explore sexual and other violence against children in Zanzibar and to understand the perpetrators and circumstances of such violence as well as ways in which violence can be prevented.

## Methods

Zanzibar is a small island archipelago off the east coast of Africa comprising two islands, Unguja and Pemba. The study was conducted in 4 districts, 1 rural (Makunduchi) and 1 urban (Mwera) in Unguja and 1 rural (Micheweni) and 1 urban district (ChakeChake) in Pemba. Data collection in each district involved 6 in-depth interviews with boys and girls aged 15 to 24 years (total 24), and 4 focus group discussions with adult women, adult men, and young women and men aged 15 to 24 years (total 16). In Unguja, 4 in-depth interviews were conducted with carers/parents of children who had experienced sexual violence, 2 focus group discussions, 2 with madrasa teachers and 1 with government school teachers and 6 key informant interviews. Participants were recruited through local leaders and community organisations, including One Stop Centres. The research was led by the first author (SL) who has conducted research in Zanzibar and Tanzania for over 20 years and is fluent in Swahili. SL also conducted 9 months ethnographic observation in the capital, Stone Town, which is situated in the urban district in the Island of Unguja, and has conducted previous ethnographic research in Stone Town and a coastal village over 3 years in the late 1990s.

The first author recruited and trained 6 students from the Diploma Course in Child Protection at the Zanzibar University to conduct the interviews and discussions in an ethical manner, which included ensuring informed consent and confidentiality. Specific training was also provided on how to ask about violence and related topics in a sensitive and non-judgemental way, and providing referral to the One Stop Centres for counselling or advice if young or adult participants became distressed, according to a referral guideline developed with Save the Children.

She also conducted focus group discussions with female participants and an experienced researcher from mainland Tanzania supported the Zanzibari interviewers to conduct focus group discussions with men. All interviewers with young people were conducted by the student interviewers who were gender-matched with the participants. Before each interview or discussion participants were asked to provide informed consent. Permission for recording the interview/discussion was requested. One key informant and one young person refused to be recorded and notes were taken for these interviews.

All discussions and interviews were conducted in Swahili and recordings were directly translated to English. Following each interview and discussion, SL and the 6 interviewers conducted a debrief in order to refine questions. Field notes were written for each interview or discussion by the student interviewers. The transcripts were imported to NVIVO 10 software and a framework analytic approach was used to analyse the data which included both inductive and deductive analysis (Ritchie et al. 1994). A coding tree was developed according to the key research questions and all transcripts were coded according to this coding tree. Through an iterative process, the coding tree was modified to include new nodes. A synthesis of key themes and findings was then developed.

**Commented [P1]:** And who was this? The second author? If not, is she or he appropriately acknowledged at the end of the paper?

This is Elisha Hilala who I have acknowledged at the end of the paper. Shall I add his initials (EH)?

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Zanzibar ZAMREC ethics committees. This research involved young people and a sensitive topic therefore a referral system was set up with the One Stop Centres in each district and all participants were provided with a referral information sheet. A protocol for this study was developed outlining how the disclosure of different forms of violence would be handled and who would take responsibility for child safety (see Devries et al. 2015).

### **The local context**

Zanzibar forms part of the Swahili culture that extends along the coast of east Africa, which is locally conceived of as a single civilisation (*Ustaarabu*) with a shared history, culture, language (*Swahili*) and religion (*Islam*) (Middleton 1994, Askew 1999, Larsen 2009). Islam is central to the historical formation of Swahili culture and the arrival of Islam on the east African coast around the 9th century marks the development of the Swahili civilisation (Middleton 1994, Hodgson 2011).

The majority of Zanzibaris follow the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam, but island communities are characterised by a high degree of social and religious diversity, with Ibadhi and Sufi influences and reformist and fundamentalist approaches to Islam also playing a part in the Muslim community's composition (Parkin, Cohen, and Rapport 1995, Parkin 2000). Whilst Islam is an important part of Swahili identity, so is its cosmopolitanism, which Fair (2004) argues reflects a 'sophisticated appreciation for international mixing and appropriation of cultural styles and symbols' (Fair 2004: 13).<sup>1</sup>

Swahili society is strongly gendered with men maintaining power and influence over women, particularly in the public sphere, although this is changing as women gain employment outside the home (Beckmann 2010). Women's rights in Zanzibar at a political and everyday level are strongly impacted upon by religion, and while Zanzibar draws on international human right standards, women's rights are also influenced by transnational understandings of Islam (Hodgson 2011).

Women own property separately from their husbands; and have relative autonomy over their sexuality, choosing their own partners after the first marriage; and they have *de facto* rights over their children (Caplan 1984, Askew 1999). As Gearhart (2013)

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that religion and culture are not seen as distinct in Zanzibar,. Swahili culture is a complex, changing and hybrid culture that 'resists simplistic definitions as well as the imposition of clear boundaries' (Larsen 2009: 9). It encapsulates shared values and practices around childhood and sexuality by emphasising and maintaining values linked to Islam (see Stiles, Thompson, and Hirsch 2015).

noted in Lamu, these gender-roles are shaped in childhood, by the domains in which girls and boys move (public/private), labour division (work/domestic) and rights and responsibilities. Despite these different domains, the rearing and protection of children has primarily been the concern of family and neighbours. Protection of children is, though, increasingly a concern for the state government, which has ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and has passed the Zanzibar Law of Child Act in 2009.

## **Findings**

### ***Constructions of childhood in Zanzibar***

Whilst views varied there emerged a consistent view that ideas and constructions of childhood are strongly influenced by Islamic teachings and practices. No specific aspects of Islamic teaching and practice were described by participants when discussing childhood; rather a generalised view emerged that religion and culture guide children in their development.

Our traditions are built upon good behaviour, such that there are things we like and don't like in our society with respect to our beliefs, certain things are allowed while others are not. Meaning that the society, religion and traditions shapes the people to live loving and secure lives with respect and integrity (Female Focal Person, One Stop Centre, KII)

Drawing on Islamic teachings participants described childhood as three distinct stages, in which physical, intellectual and moral development are built up.

From 1 year to 7 years we should play with children, taking care of them, giving them esteem, showing love and tenderness. From 8 to 14 years we should teach them how to worship, and this is the age to learn rituals. If we rear them well, when they are between 15 and 21 years they will become good people, having got this foundation it is not easy for them to be influenced by bad groups (Male Madrasa Officer, Ministry of Education, KII)

In the early-years, play is the most important feature of childhood. In the urban and rural areas children are free to play in the streets, unmonitored by adults.

We say that children learn through playing and interaction, because the more freedom you give to your children to play and interact with others the more the children's mind becomes bright and gains a lot of experience (Female Focal Person, One Stop Centre, KII)

The importance of play diminishes through childhood, and older children are not expected to play.

Playing is good for the child while s/he is young since they learn through playing, but when s/he reaches adolescence s/he should know what to do and not to do, how to live with others and how to interact with the adults (Female Focal Person, One Stop Centre, KII)

As children get older the main emphasis is on learning, either at school, at madrasa, or from elders in the community.

The biggest influence is the madrasa, our Islamic teachings, followed by a good influence from peer groups, and at school. If they have good influence then they will behave well (Rural woman, Micheweni, FGD)

Madrassa schools are an essential part of religious education for children in Zanzibar and all girls and boys are expected to attend single sex classes from the age of 5 years. These are either government or private enterprises, which may or not be attached to a mosque. Alongside religious education, madrasas also provide a forum to teach religious and cultural practices, with a focus on moral and respectful behaviour, as well as discipline.

The main role [of the madrasa] is to keep the children safe, to educate them appropriately, when they go for recess time they go separately according to gender. We pray to God, they are taught to respect the elders in order to educate them for future life (Urban boy, Mwera, FGD)

Well the teachings restrict children in various aspects such as dressing style and behaviour. The religious teachings emphasise decent dressing, to wear the Buibui<sup>2</sup> and Dira<sup>3</sup> and proper behaviour. For example, girls are told to fully cover their body parts. As for boys, they are taught not to sag their trousers and to wear well-fitting clothes (Rural woman, Micheweni, FGD)

Madrassa education is thus seen to protect children from adopting harmful behaviour as well as occupying children who would otherwise learn inappropriate behaviour from other children.

If a child is not attending the madrasa s/he will end up sitting at home, the madrasa protects them from bad deeds, because they will be influenced to smoke and drink (17 year-old urban boy, ChakeChake, IDI no.1)

### ***Discipline and authority in childhood***

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<sup>2</sup> The *buibui* (lit. spider) was originally a one piece black garment that covered a woman from head to toe but in more recent times it is a two-piece dress and head scarf

<sup>3</sup> A long colourful dress, with a head wrap

In discussions about the disciplining of children, adult participants focused on the need to punish children who did not adhere to respectful behaviour. Verbal punishment was described as the first response by parents and was seen as effective if supported by family, neighbours and community leaders. Some adult participants argued that physical punishment was acceptable if the child did not respond to verbal punishment. This was disputed by many young people themselves, who were far more critical of physical punishment.

Once a child has made a mistake, s/he deserves to be punished, but not beyond a limit. You should not slap or use a fist, as it is against law to beat as you may cause him/her to suffer from pain. It doesn't make sense that injuring a child through punishing them will prevent them from making mistakes (Urban boy, ChakeChake, FGD)

Whilst young people did not always agree with physical punishment they agreed with the ideas of respectful behaviour and transgression of this, to them, was unacceptable. Those who did not adhere to such behaviour were seen to be either *watu wabaya* (bad people) who perpetrate violence, or those that deserved to face the consequences of such transgression.

Discussions about discipline focused on the diminishing authority over children by parents and elders in the community. Whilst young people did not talk about directly disrespecting parents or other elders, some accounts revealed that they were dismissive of parental authority, especially in relation to knowledge and education.

That's the biggest challenge, because children trust technology more than they trust us parents, they do not to hear a thing we say to them! We try our level best but they don't listen (Rural woman, Micheweni, FGD)

Many participants, especially young people, voiced distrust in authority figures to protect children and promote children's rights, especially politicians and the police. However, religious leaders still hold authority amongst young Zanzibaris, especially in the rural areas. Such authority resides in maintaining respect and moral behaviour.

When you take a child to madrasa s/he develops religiously and adopts Zanzibari traditions. In the village, she can't walk with her head uncovered, because when a sheikh meets her he will punish her later at the madrasa, unlike in town where the sheikh can't do anything (17 year-old urban girl, Mwera IDI no. 8)

Thus, the continued authority of religious leaders was explained through their role in ensuring that children learn how to be moral and respectful citizens. However, as will be shown in the next section there were numerous accounts of the abuse of this authority by madrasa teachers and others, and the inability to challenge such abuse was explained by young people in terms of a lack of children's agency and rights.



Even the parents also have to be trained so that they might know “my child has the right to what and what”, so as to reduce child abuse (17 year-old urban boy, ChakeChake, IDI no. 2)

However, the idea that children have rights was seen by some adult participants as a challenge to parental and religious authority.

The government keeps insisting that there are children rights. Firstly, through Islamic religion it is a mistake, because rights of children belong to fathers. These children have become so strong because the government has focused on their rights. It has reached a point that parents are being punished by the government when they punish a child (60 year-old urban man, Mwera, IDI no. 9)

### ***Vulnerability and responsibility in childhood***

Much of the discussion about childhood focused on the vulnerability of children under 7, but there were also concerns voiced about vulnerable older children, especially girls. After the age of 7, accounts of childhood focused on taking responsibility, especially in terms of respect and appropriate behaviour.

From birth, children are in their parents’ hands, they are responsible for everything that happens to the child. ...after she reaches 7 years old she will start wearing clothes that fully cover her body, not to wear tight clothes or skinny jeans (Urban girl, Mwera, FGD)

As this quotation highlights respect and appropriate behaviour were conflated with appropriate dressing. Zanzibar girls in particular were expected to cover the body and the head, and this dress code was seen as expression of Swahili culture and religious values.

If a girl grows with religion she will grow very well. A parent can make her distinguish the good from the bad, such as dressing within religious limits. Also, religious dressing conserves our culture and achieves respect towards children, which will help them grow along the right path (Urban girl, Mwera, FGD)

Non-observance of appropriate dressing by girls was often described as being *uchi* (naked) and was noted to occur more often in the towns.

In the past, children were dressed in decent clothing, unlike today in town you can meet a child who is dressed naked, you can’t say that is decent clothing or traditional Zanzibari clothing (17 year-old urban girl, Mwera, IDI no. 8)

The dress code was less stringent for boys, but did include wearing a *kanzu*<sup>4</sup> when attending madrasa, the mosque and all day on Fridays. Whilst trousers and a shirt are acceptable at other times, there was a local proscription against *saggy* Western style clothes associated with Hip Hop style.

This behaviour of wearing saggy trousers by boys! My son is a good example, if I tell him off he says “mother you are old fashioned”. I once bought clothes for my son and his brother was whispering to him “what kind of clothes are those”, at the same time laughing. So, they want to have their freedom, which can lead to moral decay (Urban woman, Mwera, FGD)

Discussions about responsibility also focused on children’s safety. Both adults and young peoples suggested that children’s safety is the main responsibility of parents and the immediate family. Many adults also discussed the responsibility of neighbours and the community to keep children safe, and concerns that this responsibility is diminishing.

But today Zanzibari society is not like this; it is so selfish, only a mother or father takes care of children, whilst the family and community is apart. As a result, they do not stop a child when they go wrong (Male Madrasa Officer, Ministry of Education, KII)

### ***Sexual learning in childhood***

Interviews and discussions with participants did not ask about sexual learning directly. However, there were discussions that highlighted the lack of education of children about sexual matters. Instead it was acknowledged, even in remote rural areas in Pemba, that children and young people were learning about sex from each other, from the Internet, television and mobile phones and that Swahili cultural values, in particular modest dressing and behaviour, were being challenged by *utandawazi* (globalisation) brought about by the media. There was also mention of the challenge posed to cultural values and practices by tourism, although this did not arise as a major concern.

Nowadays ethics are different from the past, we imitate foreign culture, we watch the television, we imitate hair styles and ways of dressing in order to look beautiful (Urban girl, ChakeChake, FGD)

Concern was also raised by adults about children’s exposure to pornography, especially on smartphones. Adults articulated how they are unable to protect children from such images as children were more adept at using this technology. Such exposure was seen as particularly damaging to children’s sexual behaviour.

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<sup>4</sup> A kanzu is a long white robe.

Well, this advancement (in phones) is beneficial but only to those who use it properly, but not to those who misuse it. Here in Pemba, for example, naughty boys use phones to watch naked bathing women and then share these videos through social media, which is shameful and not of any benefit to them. And these social media for sure they negatively affect our children's behaviours (Rural woman, Micheweni, FGD)

As well as concern about children's exposure to inappropriate sexual images there were also concern about the lack of control over liaisons between young peoples. Boys and girls have few opportunities to meet in private, there are few social venues when boys and girls can mix and those that do happen at home are monitored by adults. However, some adult participants articulated concerns about sexual liaisons at public ceremonies where, they argued, young people used secluded places to meet and have sex. These sexual encounters were described as sexual violence by adult participants as they violated cultural and religious proscriptions against pre-marital intercourse.

During the Eid festival, we are told not to give children evening dresses, but girls don't abide by this, they just put them on and trap bad men who mistreat them (17 year-old rural girl, Makunduchi, IDI no. 10)

### ***Sexual violence against children***

All the participants reported that children in Zanzibar were vulnerable to sexual violence. The most often cited form of sexual violence was rape. Some participants suggested that girls were more vulnerable to rape, whilst others suggested it was boys. Rape against boys was described as *kuwaliti* (sodomy).

The issue of rape is about girls, although there is homosexual rape most victims are girls (16 year old urban girl, ChakeChake, IDI no. 2)

Currently in Zanzibar most of the men are practising homosexuality, boys are being sodomised and the most offenders for this are male teachers (Urban girl, ChakeChake, FGD)

There were also discussions about underage and forced marriage and early pregnancy as form of sexual violence.

How can you impregnate a 15, 13 or 12-year-old child, this is definitely violence (18 year-old urban boy, ChakeChake, IDI no. 3)

### ***Places and perpetrators of sexual violence***

Participants emphasised that the perpetration of sexual violence in Zanzibar takes place in a number of locations including the family home, the neighbourhood, schools and the madrasa.

One may get raped while walking in the street, also a child can be raped inside the house by a father, uncle, cousin or brother as such. In the streets it happens like that and it happens to both male and female children (17 year old urban girl, Mwera, IDI no. 9)

Perpetrators within families were most often reported to be fathers, step-fathers, uncles or older male siblings. Sexual violence by neighbours was also reported.

One of my neighbours took a child from the mainland as a housemaid, she is 15 years old and so she needs help. I am the street representative and I told him to return the child back home instead of abusing her, this will create problems for you, but he has not agreed with me (18 year-old urban boy, Mwera, IDI no. 7)

One sheikh attempted to rape his own child. He was a leader who wanted to do such an abuse to his child (24 year-old rural girl, Micheweni, IDI no. 4)

Other accounts of sexual violence focused on perpetration by strangers, often described as *watu wabaya* (bad people) or by gangs who use alcohol or drugs. Children were particularly vulnerable to attacks by strangers when they visit isolated areas to collect water or firewood or on route from home to school.

Those (children) without latrines go to the bush to urinate. There they find abusers who can rape the child (Urban boy, Mwera, FGD)

One young woman described such an encounter.

I was going to find coconut husks in our farm, after collecting I was about to leave when a man came around, he asked me "what are you doing here?". "I am collecting coconut husks and I am about to leave" I replied. "Who did you come here with?" asked the man. "I came alone, and you can see me alone, so why do you ask who did you come with?" I replied, "I just want to know" said the man. But he had a hidden aim, he moved away and I thought he had gone when suddenly he attacked me and closed my mouth so that I couldn't scream. But God protected me, someone came from behind with a whip and when he saw he ran away (24 year-old rural girl, Micheweni, IDI no. 4)

Sexual violence perpetrated by teachers was described, but most accounts focused on sexual violence perpetrated by male madrasa teachers against boys.

On the one hand the madrasa helps in terms of religious teaching, on the other hand it is destructive. This is because currently in Zanzibar most of the men are practising homosexuality, and the greatest percentage that do this are male madrasa teachers. When you take your son to madrasa

he undergoes such deeds when he is seven years old, nine or ten, experiencing that act, you see he is already psychologically damaged, and later he practices this with his fellow students (Urban girl, Chakechake, FGD)

Accounts of sexual violence against girls by male madrasa teachers revealed stories of sexual humiliation and rape.

Whilst there are good things, there are some madrasa teachers who are damaging children, boys are being sodomised by madrasa teachers. And girls are told to go there and sweep and then the teacher inserts his finger [in her]. This happened at the [\*\*\*\*] madrasa; he was caught and punished (Urban Woman, Mwera, FGD)

The madrasa teachers, I always hear that they are raping, many of them. I have read of one case from Zanzibar Leo newspaper, one of the madrasa teachers told the students to take off their clothes, I don't know which kind of mistake they did and he was charged because it is wrong to tell a student to undress and remain with underwear only. And the next case was the madrasa teacher here in this neighbourhood. He raped his students, about six children. He was jailed for thirty years (17 year-old urban girl, Mwera, IDI no. 8)

Accounts of the sexual violence perpetrated at madrasa also included incidents involving other students.

You find a child is going to madrasa and is being harassed by not only teachers but also class-mates (Urban boy, ChakeChake, FGD)

Such accounts were confirmed by the key informants.

I have attended several seminars in my working experiences and madrasas are the major contribution to abusing children, the madrasa teachers destroy the boys. Even parents don't trust madrasas now, and dislike taking their children to the madrasa, they think is better to bring someone to teach them at home rather than taking a child to madrasa (Female member of staff, Safe House, KII)

### ***Child protection and sexual violence***

Lack of protection of children from sexual and other violence was the most often cited reason for children's vulnerability. As described above, participants were concerned about children's safety and protection in both private and public spaces.

Whilst some of the accounts described punishment for madrasa teachers for perpetrating sexual violence, there was widespread concern amongst participants that madrasa teachers, in particular, are not being held accountable for their actions.

A religious leader who raped a boy was caught and reported but the police didn't take action (Urban Woman, Mwera, FGD)

In response to lack of effective punishment of perpetrators informal systems of punishment were sometimes set up by families, especially in cases where the perpetrator and victim families know each other. These agreements often involve some financial payment by the perpetrators family, or in some instances, the marriage of the perpetrator and victim to avoid stigma and shame for the victim. However, there was some concern that this was not an appropriate punishment and would not prevent future incidents of sexual violence from occurring.

When it [rape] occurs, some parents pretend to resolve it as a family and end the issue in the manner "oh this is your cousin let's end the issue". It will never end since the rapist has such a tendency, and he will commit rape over and over again. If they discipline such a person, he will never repeat it (17 year-old girl, Mwera, IDI no. 8)

### ***Prevention of violence against children***

Except for the key informant interviewees, there was very little knowledge or experience of programmes to prevent sexual violence against children in Zanzibar. A few participants had heard of the local One Stop Centres for children reporting sexual violence, some had heard about media campaigns, but few had detailed knowledge about these initiatives. When asked for suggestions on how sexual violence should be prevented, participants focused on improving knowledge on sexual violence and educating the community about the problem.

Elders must be given knowledge concerning this problem of sexual harassment. If elders aren't knowledgeable, they won't understand about its effects and problems (Urban boy, Chakechake, FGD)

Whilst most participants acknowledged that rape was the fault of the perpetrator, some suggested that inappropriate dressing increases a girl's vulnerability to being raped. Some of the suggestions for remedy focused on the need for parents and the community to take more responsibility for children's safety, whilst ensuring that children behaved well.

Well, parents should re-adopt the unity we used to have in upbringing our children, every parent should protect their neighbours' children and also promote religious teachings. Since we don't spend enough time with them this will help to guide them in our absence, the teachings will have impact on them and eventually they will behave (Rural woman, Micheweni, FGD)

For instance, the dressing traditions, as said earlier, emphasises covering the female body fully, female bodies have a certain sexual impact on men

thus if they are covered, issues like rape will be dealt away with completely (Rural woman, Micheweni, FGD)

Suggestions also focused on the government's responsibility to address perpetration.

Why won't you, "Save the Children", arrange more seminars to educate people on these issues. There is the Ministry of Women and Children, what is it doing? Rape cases are increasing, and different types of abuse are prevailing. If they take serious measures against the perpetrators, it would be a lesson to the rest of the community (Urban woman, Mwera FGD)

There were a few suggestions of ways to protect children from sexual violence at madrasa schools. With many schools being run by private businesses or religious organisations, suggestions focused on the need to register each madrasa with the Mufti Office, which is a government office that addresses religious affairs in Zanzibar. Further to this, there were suggestions to monitor the recruitment of teachers, and provide higher quality teaching training.

Hence, I think the madrasa need to be registered before they are opened, as well as looking for ethical teachers, not just employing any person (Female member of staff, Safe House KII)

## **Discussion**

This in-depth qualitative study has revealed that sexual and other violence against children are a major concern to Zanzibaris. Many of the quotations, when translated into English, do not convey the depth of participants' feelings about this issue. While discussions about sex, especially in relation to children, would have been a taboo subject not so many years ago, participants were articulate and well-informed about the issue. This may be due to a number of recent media campaigns and, especially, efforts by local and international NGOs to raise awareness about this issue following the 2009 Violence against Children survey. It may also be due to a greater openness about talking about sexual matters after many years of HIV campaigns (see Lees 2013).

### ***Constructions of childhood in Zanzibar***

Accounts of childhood in this study suggests that socialisation of children in Zanzibar draws strongly on religious and cultural teaching, with a focus on moral behaviour. From the accounts provided in this study, identity formation also occurs outside the private domain, and specifically in madrasa schools. Here, as in the home and the wider community, childhood is constructed as a stage in preparation for becoming a moral and respectful Zanzibari citizen. Accounts by young people concerning the importance of moral behaviour, especially appropriate dressing for girls, suggest that

socially constructed ideals of being a girl or a boy in Zanzibar are internalised and made their own (see Gill 2008).

Head covering for girls and women has been used as a marker of status and identity throughout the history of Zanzibar (Fair 2004). Hodgson (2011) has argued, however, that the recent rise of political Islam in Zanzibar, which conceptualises women's rights within a religious frame, has strengthened the use of head covering as symbol of Swahili identity for women and girls. This view is supported by the accounts from this study, which suggest that head covering has become one of the most important signifiers of Swahili identity.

### ***Sexuality and sexual violence in Zanzibar***

Whilst Swahili culture was evoked in this study to discuss childhood it did not frame discussions about sexual violence itself. Participants reported that the perpetrators of sexual violence are mostly men in positions of authority. This suggests a nuanced analysis about how these positions of power are produced and maintained by cultural rules, such as the separate spheres of influence women and men, and inequalities of power between women and men and adults and children. Further research is being conducted by the authors to understand how power relations operate in madrasa schools, and are shaped by cultural and religious practices.

Linked to discussions of childhood and sexual violence were concerns with the moral decline of sexual behaviour in Zanzibar society. Participants, particularly adults, voiced concerns about the availability of sexual and pornographic material on the Internet and smartphones. This resonates with findings in Beckmann's (2010) study, which also related Zanzibari girls' sexual behaviour to media influences. Beckmann's research, however, did not explore moral concerns within same-sex relations in Zanzibar. Participants in this study openly discussed homosexuality, but while earlier research by Amory (1998) has described a complexity of same-sex relationships in Swahili culture, the discussions in this study focused largely on 'homosexuality' (using the English word) as an act of sexual violence towards boys.

This highlights an issue about the way in which sexual violence is defined by Zanzibaris. While rape is clearly defined as sexual violence, some accounts of sexual violence by the adults included behaviours and acts that involve consent by individual young people, such as liaisons at ceremonies. This differs from the definitions of sexual violence that may be used by international NGOs, for example, where lack of consent may be the defining feature. Further research is needed to understand whether the inclusion of consensual sexual activity between young people and between same-sex partners, is considered sexual violence because it is not sanctioned within the moral frame of Swahili culture. Whilst there was some suggestion that girls would be less vulnerable to sexual violence if they adhered to the forms of 'moral' behaviour described above, many young people in this study argued that children's vulnerability to violence is exacerbated by poor knowledge about their rights, and lack of punishment for perpetrators. Thus, they argue for a stronger focus on the responsibility of family, community, government, police, and local and religious

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leaders to protect children from sexual violence. In particular, there were calls to protect children at madrasa schools from unqualified and unmonitored teachers.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations to the study. Research was not conducted with children under the age of 15 years for ethical reasons, and thus does not draw on their own accounts. However, many of the young people interviewed were under 18 years of age and thus provided some of their own recent experiences. The study also did not address the prevalence of sexual violence in madrasa schools and other environments, and thus only reflects participants' perceptions of this. Findings do however provide some understanding of the contexts in which sexual violence occurs, including places of perpetration and types of perpetrators.

### **Conclusions**

Study findings suggest that while Swahili culture strongly frames ideas of childhood and sexuality, sexual violence is best understood as a structural issue requiring intervention. Findings point to the important role of religious education in shaping ideas about childhood and sexuality, and participants' accounts underscore how sexual and physical violence at madrasa schools is an important issue that needs to be addressed. Participants' descriptions of the influence of madrasa teachings in shaping ideas of appropriate and moral behaviour suggest that these may offer an appropriate avenue for introducing training to teachers, parents and children on children's sexuality, rights, and how to keep children safe from sexual and physical violence. The lack of accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence also suggests that interventions for prevention and response may usefully be linked. In addition to offering an ethical approach to violence prevention, this may have the added benefit of increasing support among community members and other stakeholders for programmatic and intervention activities.

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DOIs are not needed if the journal has been printed in paper form, please amend accordingly

Journal names have to be written in full

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