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Gender equity and intimate partner violence among adolescents and young adults in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence (IPV) starts at a young age. In Tanzania, 32% of adolescent girls and young women report lifetime experience of physical or sexual IPV. Adolescence is a critical developmental period when young people are establishing beliefs around gender equity and violence and when programmes and interventions may be most influential. This study explored adolescent and young adult perspectives on gender equity and gender roles, and their links to IPV to inform the adaptation and implementation of an evidence-based gender empowerment curriculum for young people in Tanzania. We conducted 24 focus group discussions among young people ages 14–24, adult community members, and community and religious leaders. Five major themes were developed: social acceptance of traditional gender roles and male dominated families; generational divide on support for gender equity; a religious lens on gender equity and the tolerance of violence; the normalisation of violence; and recommendations to promote gender equity. Our findings suggest young people, particularly girls and young women, support gender equity concepts. However, pervasive social norms about traditional gender roles, perpetuated by adults and community leaders, inhibit gender equity. Recommendations included involving peers, family, and wider community in gender empowerment education; and engaging religious leaders.

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Introduction

Internationally, levels of intimate partner violence (IPV) are staggeringly high affecting approximately one in three women (Mannell et al. 2022). Sub-Saharan Africa has among the highest rates of IPV globally, which includes a high IPV prevalence among adolescents and young adults (Sardinha et al. 2022). In Tanzania, 32% of adolescents girls and young women ages 15–24 years report experiencing physical or sexual IPV at some point in their lifetime (Wado et al. 2021; Stöckl et al. 2014, Ministry of Health, Tanzania 2022). Determinants of IPV rates span multiple levels—individual, relationship, community, and societal—and include socioeconomic inequalities, lack of gender equity, and cultural norms that increase the risk of violence against girls and women (Heise 1998).

Experience of IPV at any age is associated with detrimental physical and psychological effects, including increased anxiety and depression, increased risk of HIV acquisition, and mortality (Abrahams et al. 2009; Jewkes et al. 2010). IPV experienced in adolescence can fuel a lifelong cycle of violence, impacting young women's lifetime physical and psychological health, and economic well-being . Adolescence is a vulnerable period, compounded by systemic gender inequity that put girls and young women at increased risk of violence when they are least likely to have the tools or agency to respond effectively, report abuse, or seek treatment (Chandra-Mouli, Chatterjee, and Bose 2016; Chandra-Mouli et al. 2019). IPV may double the likelihood of engaging in risky and unhealthy behaviour, including substance abuse, school drop-out, or high-risk sexual behaviour, the effects of which may emerge later in life (Silverman et al. 2001; Roberts, Auinger, and Klein 2005).

Adolescence is a time when young people are entering their first intimate partnerships and simultaneously establishing fundamental beliefs and attitudes around gender roles within these partnerships and acceptance or tolerance of violence. It is a window of opportunity during which violence prevention interventions may be most influential and effective, serving to prevent a lifetime of IPV and its negative effects (Blum et al. 2019).

Research on IPV prevention strategies and programmes and interventions to promote healthy relationships is limited among young populations and skewed towards high-income countries (De Koker et al. 2014). Understanding this population's perspectives on gender equity and gender roles in intimate partnerships and acceptance or tolerance of IPV, and how these might differ by gender, age or socio-economic status, can guide the development of effective programmes and interventions.

Interventions aimed at IPV prevention among adult women include a group-based gender empowerment curriculum called *Wananake na Maisha* (Swahili for *Women and Life*) (Kapiga et al. 2019) designed to develop skills to enhance women's agency to address gender inequities and IPV (Lees et al. 2021). In a cluster randomised trial (MAISHA) conducted in Mwanza, Tanzania, adult women in the intervention arm were less likely to report past-year physical IPV (adjusted odds ratio [aOR] 0.64, 95% confidence interval [CI] 0.41–0.99, $p = 0.043$), and were less likely to express attitudes accepting of IPV (aOR 0.45, 95%CI 0.34–0.61, $p < 0.0001$) or tolerant of IPV (aOR 0.68, 95%CI: 0.45-1.01, $p = 0.055$). Informed by this earlier work, the objective of the current study was to explore young people's perspectives on gender equity and gender roles, and the relationship with IPV to inform adaptation of the MAISHA curriculum for use with a younger population.

Methods

Study design

We used an ethnographic design to explore adolescents' and young adults' perspectives on gender equity and gender norms and how they influence gender roles and gender violence in intimate relationships. Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), allowing participants to share their personal insights and collective experiences. The social-ecological model provided the theoretical framework underpinning our approach and was used in the development of interview guides and in the analysis of qualitative data. This theory recognises that individual behaviour is influenced by interactions between a person's family and peers, and their surrounding community and social environment (Bronfenbrenner 1989; Bunton, Murphy, and Bennett 1991). Therefore, we also sought to explore the views of adults and community leaders. Given the strong influence of religion in Tanzanian culture, we included religious leaders in the study to explore their perspectives on gender equity in the context of religious teaching.

Study setting and population

This study was conducted in the rural and semi-urban villages of Nyamasale and Busisi, respectively, in Sengerema district of Mwanza region, in Northwest Tanzania. We made initial contact with community leaders in each village to identify schools, social institutions, and local community groups from which to recruit potential participants. To recruit young people ages 14–24 years, research staff, with the support of community leaders, identified local schools, youth groups, and community locations where young people gather and using purposive sampling to recruit youth participants in the FGDs. To recruit adults and community leaders, we used a similar sampling approach identifying community spaces and events from which to recruit adults, and identifying local schools, health centres, government bodies, churches and mosques from which to recruit local leaders. Snowball sampling allowed participants to identify and invite additional potential participants from their networks and social contacts (Goodman 1961).

A total of 24 FGDs were conducted among 197 participants within three different groups: (1) 16 FGDs with youth participants; (2) 4 FGDs with adult community members; and (3) 4 FGDs with community leaders including religious leaders, government officials, teachers, and health professionals. Each focus group consisted of approximately 8 participants. FGDs for young people were grouped by age (14–17 years and 18–24 years) to create an environment in which participants felt comfortable sharing perspectives and experiences about potentially sensitive topics. Table 1 summarises the three participant types together with age range and gender.

Data collection

FGDs took place between September 2022 and November 2022 and lasted 45–75 min. They were conducted in school classrooms outside of school hours, community meeting rooms, and entertainment halls. Study staff ensured spaces were quiet and

Table 1. Focus group participants.

	Busisi N = 105 (%)	Nyamasale N = 92 (%)
Participant type and age		
Adolescents ages 14–17	31 (30)	30 (33)
Young adults ages 18–24	35 (33)	30 (33)
Community leaders ages ≥18	21 (20)	16 (17)
Community members ages ≥18	18 (17)	16 (17)
Sex		
Female	51 (49)	44 (48)
Male	54 (51)	48 (52)

private, and that participants felt comfortable in these settings. A semi-structured interview guide was used to explore participants' perspectives on gender roles in intimate partnerships and acceptance and tolerance of IPV. The guide also explored participants' perspectives on the content of the MAISHA curriculum to inform adaptations that might best fit young peoples' developmental stages. Trained qualitative researchers of the same sex as group participants facilitated the discussions which were in Swahili. Participants were compensated TSH 6000 (~USD$2.50) for their time and cost of transport.

Data analysis

All FGDs were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim in Swahili, translated into English, and reviewed for quality of transcription and translation. Transcripts were imported and analysed using NVivo Version 12. We conducted a thematic analysis with the following steps (Clarke and Braun 2013). Three researchers (FM, LR, AC) independently read three transcripts to become familiar with the data and took notes on potential themes. They then developed a list of initial codes guided by the content of the transcripts and *a priori* codes following the structured question guide. Preliminary codes were reviewed and consensus was reached on codes used for coding additional transcripts (FM, LR, and AC). These included codes for 'traditional beliefs on gender roles', 'religious influences on gender equity', and 'generational differences related to tolerance of violence'. Additional *in vivo* codes, including 'globalisation' and 'gender roles vs. responsibilities', were discussed and agreed upon during independent coding. The study team then met to establish broad themes that captured underlying patterns across codes and created names for the final set of themes. All transcripts were grouped into these pertinent themes, and illustrative quotes were selected to exemplify each theme.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, researchers were trained in qualitative research methods and conducted the FGDs in Swahili to foster a comfortable environment for participants to express their views. FGD facilitators also transcribed and translated the discussions further ensuring data accuracy and reducing the risk of misinterpretation or loss of meaning. Researchers maintained reflexivity throughout data collection and analyses, acknowledging their own potential biases and ensuring that the participants' voices remained central, contributing to the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study's results.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was received from the institutional review boards at Weill Cornell Medicine (#21-08023866), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) (#26433), and the National Institutional for Medical Research in Tanzania (NIMR/HQ/R.8a/Vol. IX/38412). Before the FGDs, written informed consent was obtained from all participants ≥18, and assent was obtained from participants <18 years with written informed consent being obtained from a parent or guardian.

Results

We organise our results into five themes: social acceptance of traditional gender roles and male dominated families; generational divide on support for gender equity; a religious lens on gender equity and tolerance of violence; the normalisation of violence; and recommendations to promote gender equity.

Social acceptance of traditional gender roles and male dominated families

Adolescents and young adults acknowledged the predominant acceptance of traditional gender roles in intimate partnerships, but perspectives on deviating from these roles differed by sex. Female young people overwhelmingly recognised the social acceptability of commitment to traditional gender roles. However, they also perceived the value and benefit of sharing responsibilities within partnerships, with many girls and young women endorsing progressive perspectives and ambitions for gender equity.

> I can say it is important because if we both go to work…our family will be a better family. When there is mutual understanding between father and mother, development happens very quickly. Therefore, women must participate in economic activities. The significance of a 50-50 partnership is undeniable, and progress is achieved very quickly. (FGD6 Young Woman)

In contrast, young male participants tended to express beliefs that gender roles are rooted in tradition with a man as the head of a family and a woman's most important role related to childbearing and caregiving. For example, one young man stated:

> 'First of all, the man is the head of the family and his role is to go out there to work so that he can cater to the needs of the family. The woman on the other hand, her main role is to take care of the children and complete the tasks at home.' (FGD7, Young Man)

Some young men wholly rejected the concept of gender equity, citing bodily sex differences.

> You cannot just say that we are all equal, that is impossible… there are some things a woman cannot do. The man's body is built to do heavy work, something a woman can't do because of the way they are physically built. I honestly don't think equality is something that can be achieved. (FGD7, Young Man)

Other young men described how local customs and traditions stipulate inequity between men and women:

> Us youth can have similar opinions with the older people because many of us youth still live with their families, each family has ancestry which has its rules on what happens when men and women get into a relationship. So, the youth inherit knowledge of certain matters, so continue performing and fulfilling roles like our parents and older people through customs and traditions. (FGD11, Young Man)

For other young men, it appeared these traditional views were so engrained that inequity was a factual reality and not something that could be debated or reasoned:

> I personally think they can't be equal because men's and women's thoughts differ. The man is the head of the family, he sifts everything, he can listen to her opinions and if he does not see them as fit, he has to reject them. Women's opinions can either be right or wrong, it is the duty of the man to decide if it is right or not, she cannot decide just by herself, she has to consult you to see it is possible or not since you are the last say. (FGD7, Young Man)

Young men also described the negative impacts of challenging these traditional gender roles.

> If I start helping my partner with chores that are considered to be women's tasks or should not be done by men, the community and family will start complaining secretly. Others will believe I have been bewitched by the lady, when you do 'women's chores' they start believing that the woman is emasculating the man in the family or relationship. These words can start causing a rift in the relationship. (FGD11, Young Man)

Among young people of both sexes, a distinction was drawn between participants' perceptions of roles vs. responsibilities in the family. Some participants expressed support for balancing responsibilities in the family and acknowledged the positive impact of women helping with responsibilities that were traditionally for men, for example, earning money to support the family and, vice versa, men helping with chores related to the house or children: 'The first importance in division of responsibilities in relationships is that it reduces conflict in the family.' (FGD12, Young Man)

However, the role of the man as the natural head of the household was overwhelmingly the norm. 'The role of the man is to be the breadwinner… even though [women] are also working we should help each other.' (Female YA) Both young women and young men referred to men being 'the backbone in the family', 'the person with a final say', 'the head of the family', and 'main supervisor of the family'. These views were often based on the belief that men were physically stronger than women, and beliefs that men have specific responsibilities, such as owning land or setting a daughter's bride price.

Generational divide on support for gender equity

Young people of both genders described how their perspectives and acceptance of the concept of gender equity differed from that of their parents and elders which were described as 'outdated' and from 'past times'. One young adult man commented:

> The mindset of the youth has changed, the older generation did things a certain way, you cannot find men from that generation carrying a child on his back but the youth doing that while going to the market with their wives is something normal. (FGD7, Young Man)

Participants spoke about this as a deliberate departure from the traditional perspectives of the previous generation. One male adolescent commented, 'there is a huge difference in the ideas…the youth is changing the ideologies that exist…ideologies that are negative.' (FGD8, Young Man). A minority opinion was expressed by another young man who acknowledged that he was 'going against [his] fellows' when he referenced the female Tanzanian president to explain the enormity and irreversibility of these changes.

> You cannot deny equal rights for all when even at this point the head of the country is a woman. Personally, I think it should be equal, when both men and women are in a family, they should have an equal say in family decisions and especially now that we have become digital, women are even better than us, we are 49[%] and they are at 51[%]. It will reach a point the woman will have the final say in most families because of these equal rights. (FGD7, Young Man)

Perspectives on the impact of these differences on intimate relationships varied. Some young people acknowledged that the generational shift in changing beliefs on gender equity led to departures from traditional values, some of which were welcomed while others could have negative effects.

> A woman might tell her daughter to wear long clothes, or to greet people with respect by kneeling down to the floor… Now we are ruled by globalisation and term those things as outdated while in reality other roles/responsibilities are fair. For example while greeting now we don't kneel down to the floor…[Yet] we are wearing short clothes we are tempting men which might lead to bad things. (FGD5, Young Woman)

One of the male adolescents highlighted a lower tolerance for violence among young people:

> The youth now are in the globalisation age, you cannot unnecessarily punish a woman, but in the past, any mistake by a woman would result in a beating. The youth now sit down and talk things through. (FGD8, Young Man)

Adult participants similarly recognised generational shifts in perspectives on gender roles. However, they focused more on what they perceived as the negative influence that globalisation has had on young people's morals which in turn negatively affect traditional values and, consequently, intimate partnerships. One male leader commented 'Now traditions and cultures are in conflict with development.' (FGD2, Male Leader). He used the example of young people not valuing marriage and traditional family structures:

> Globalisation has captured a majority of young people….girls may be lucky to get pregnant….[but] she gives birth to the child and [the child] will be the last one and she is going to prepare her independent life, she has no plan of getting married. (FGD2 Male Leader)

Another male community leader said that because young people have broken with traditional gender roles and responsibilities in a partnership, relationships have suffered:

> A man has his responsibilities and a woman has her responsibilities. But right now, the youth of today have really broken the traditions and customs. Because everyone is struggling alone, as far as they know, that's why you will often find in romantic relationships now, everyone is going their own way, and everyone is working as they want. The community should be educated so that they will know women's and men's responsibilities. (FGD2 Male Leader)

A few adults described this generational shift more positively: 'now their [young people's] attitude is to cooperate more and support each other to succeed…the young people of today are more positive.' (FGD2 Male Leader). A female leader commented on how young people are more outspoken in their refusal to accept violence, stating that 'they don't tolerate it [violence] because they have been very ambitious, it depends on the moral values they have, what kind of environment they were raised in.' (FGD1, Female Leader).

Religious lens on gender equity and tolerance of violence

Participants' views were influenced by how they perceived concepts of gender and violence were addressed in religious texts. For example, some young people talked about Christianity and the Bible supporting the general concept to 'do good', 'stop evil like violence', and 'to stop bad deeds'. One young man expressed: 'In religion we are taught to live in harmony and cooperation' (FGD20, Young Man) and another stated: '[The Bible] teaches about love. People should live in peace. It forbids bad deeds like stealing, adultery. You should love one another.' (FGD19, Young Man). Another young man referred to religious text to condemn violence against women: 'The writings say you shouldn't do to someone what they don't want done to them and if they do bad to you, you shouldn't [seek] revenge…and that supports gender equality, that you shouldn't beat your wife and do to her what goes against God.' (FGD11, Young Man)

However, when participants, both adults and young people, were probed further about the concept of gender equity in religion, the consensus was that traditional gender roles were strongly supported by both Christian and Islamic teaching. One young man referred to the Bible which he said supported the traditional model of men as head of the house: 'The Bible says that the role of the woman in a family is to give birth and care for the family while the man is to be the breadwinner, find food…and to ensure the family is fed.' (FGD7, Young Man). Both young women and young men discussed how, according to the Bible, women are considered to be 'under man', and that it 'didn't give women authority to find her own income.' (FGD5, Young Woman) Some, however, recognised and questioned the conflict that these interpretations of religious scripture posed for the concept of gender equity:

> When it comes to religion, I can say that it brings discrimination and conflict in gender equality. It is written in the Bible…that the woman has no authority to lead at whatever level, even the family level. The woman is termed as weak, these words are what weaken the woman's decision-making power on her life. Taking the woman as a weakling goes against gender equality, why should the woman be termed as a weakling if we are both created by God? (FGD11, Young Man)

Religious leaders echoed the sentiment that gender equity was not a concept supported in religious texts, 'I am a pastor, the Bible says that we men are the head of the family and God said that all the work that was done under the sun was for men. Now a woman she has come to help a man with responsibilities that burdened him, as an assistant for other few things.' (FGD2, Adult Man). Similarly, Islamic religious teachings were perceived to be in conflict with the concept of gender equity. Some young women and young men made frequent reference to women as 'ornaments' or 'decoration' in the home, with women being positioned 'under the man' with primary responsibility for the household and rearing children.

> In Islam, when you marry a woman she is not supposed to work, her main role in the home is to wash clothes, dishes… in fact when you marry her you should find her a house helper so that she can focus on giving birth and raising children and not any other work. (FGD7, Young Man)

And one young woman commented:

> [Regarding] gender equality and the Quran, what I have heard that we women are below the men. That means you are not compared, you as the woman are already under the man. He will decide what you should do, he will go out to work and fend for the family and you will not be allowed to do so, meaning you will be limited to being a housewife. (FGD6, Young Woman)

Adult Muslims in the study held similar views to those described above:

> In the Quran, a woman and a man are actually different because a woman is [a] house ornament/decoration, so now if you say you should look for gender equality, you will struggle with it because wife should stay at home, man should provide for the family (earn income) that's what Quran says. (FGD1, Adult Woman)

Young people in the study were open to promoting gender equity by engaging with religious leaders to educate congregations about the issues.

> First, I would advise religious leaders to talk about gender equity. Because we can see larger congregations meet at the church and mosque, so when a pastor or sheikh will talk about gender equity everyone will take and act on it. (FGD19, Young Man)

> If I heard it said in my church I will be happy. Even if I would have never heard it from somewhere but if they talk it in my church, I will become aware of it and I would not commit anything wrong. This knowledge will stick in my mind and I can transmit the knowledge even to my grandchildren when I am old. (FGD19, Young Man)

Normalisation of violence

While many young people expressed progressive views about gender equity and were less accepting of violence compared with their elders, others described situations in which violence was justified or socially acceptable.

> Some women who are full of pride…that if their man speaks to them, they just ignore him…he may have told you he needs you to fold his clothes, but he comes back and finds that you haven't folded the clothes…what follows is being beaten. An outsider will agree with that action citing the woman's arrogance. (FGD5, Young Woman)

A young adult man described how so long as violence was infrequent, it should be tolerated:

> I personally think physical violence can be tolerated as long as it is not regular if you get me… there are some cases where people say that for a man to beat his wife then she must have done something to truly trigger him. In some cases, one can just tolerate it and let it go but there are other cases that cannot be tolerated, for instance there are men who will go out to get drunk and it will be obvious to all that he will go beat up his wife. If it happens less often, then it can be tolerated. (FGD7, Young Man)

Another young man referred to generational differences in perspectives that justify violence. He provided an example of how a woman might choose to dress:

> 'For older people…if a woman wears short clothes or trousers they view her as promiscuous and if she is violated they will think its fine, but us youth take that issue lightly (wearing short clothes or trousers).' (FGD7, Young Man)

Recommendations to promote gender equity

Both adults and young people stated that education was key to promoting healthy relationships.

> The first thing to be done…is providing education in schools, to educate those with different beliefs regarding gender equity. (FGD11, Young Man)

> They should be educated about unhealthy cultures/norms…those related to forced marriages… education about those things may help to reduce gender-based violence and create equality. (FGD5, Young Woman)

They also highlighted the role that education could play in tackling unhealthy cultural norms.

> Education, education is very important because some things are influenced by our culture. Lacking equality is due to the culture, that people hold and believe that this is what people should follow. When people are educated, for example, [regarding] owning various properties…they will understand that this is not only men's right. Our culture has promoted that these are things for men only… but if they are given education, people will gain self-awareness. (FGD1, Adult Woman)

Both adults and young people agreed that involving religious leaders in this kind of education could have a positive impact. One young adult man said: 'Religion has a great contribution in the society by educating, reminding them by actions and thoughts.' (FGD20, Young Man). Similarly, a female adolescent suggested that a religious leader could be more impactful than other educators in the community, 'You may find that some of the young people are educated by other people, but they do not understand, but when they go to church and are educated by a pastor, catechist or priest, they understand.' (FGD21, Young Woman).

Discussion

This study identified several insights for understanding young people's perspectives on gender equity and tolerance of intimate partner violence. Young people,

particularly young women, were more likely to support gender equity concepts than adults, but social norms supportive of traditional roles were a strong influence and many participants described many scenarios in which violence could be acceptable. This suggests a disconnect that could be addressed with targeted skills building or training on conflict negotiation and violence prevention.

IPV reduction programs have increasingly sought to shift social norms that promote gender inequity and acceptance of violence (Shaw et al. 2023; Abramsky et al. 2014). For young people, social norms can carry particular importance. Their behaviour is directly associated with their developing understanding of the social and cultural context in which they live (Crone and Dahl 2012). Our results reinforce the importance of social networks for young people, suggesting that multi-level interventions may have the most impact on shifting young people's attitudes on gender equity and IPV. Young people also discussed views and beliefs about traditional gender norms that were reinforced by religious scriptures (Boyer et al. 2022). They were receptive to leaders talking about gender equity and violence prevention in the context of religious teachings. Religion is highly influential in Tanzanian culture and could be a critical component of interventions aiming to change community-level gender norms (Downs et al. 2017; Mwakisole et al. 2023).

Both young men and women talked about the traditional roles of women to manage the housework and childrearing, and men to provide financially for the family. However, young women consistently pointed out the potential benefits of women breaking this norm by working outside the home to financially contribute to the household, thereby supporting the partnership and the family. Aside from monetary gain, young women also suggested gender equity would reduce conflict within relationships and bring harmony to the family through sharing responsibilities and promoting women's equal value in the home. Many young men discussed their reluctance to push back against social norms because of how they would be judged or scorned by others, if, for example, they shared household responsibilities with their female partners. Young men also frequently cited biological differences as justification for inequity and evidence that traditional roles are not changeable. These findings align with other studies indicating that with the onset of puberty, girls are more likely to question and challenge gender inequities than boys (Leer et al. 2022; Syed 2017), whereas boys are pressured by peers and socially expected to prove masculine toughness, presenting as overtly promoting inequitable gender norms (Ragnarsson et al. 2008; Stern et al. 2003).

Early adolescence is a period characterised by rapid cognitive and behavioural changes and dynamic development of social relationships (Galambos, Berenbaum, and McHale 2009). It is recognised as a time of great opportunity to intervene and impact social and emotional development to promote positive physical and mental health trajectories (Yeager 2017). This applies specifically to interventions aiming to shift restrictive gender norms since it is when young people begin to conceptualise abstract concepts like gender but before beliefs and attitudes become cemented by growing social and societal pressures (Yeager 2017; Lane, Brundage, and Kreinin 2017; Kågesten et al. 2016). Early learning during adolescence about self and social relationships can shape identity along with beliefs, attitudes, and behavioural tendencies (Crone and Dahl 2012). Our data indicate that young people in Tanzania are

developmentally ready and eager to discuss these topics and would benefit from similar messaging.

While social norms and networks strongly influence young people's attitudes and beliefs, their perspectives nonetheless differed distinctly from those of adults. The drivers of these differences may be multifactorial. Across many cultures and centuries, young people tend to have novel ideas compared to older generations. Further, since 2001, Tanzania has provided free access to primary education for boys and girls, and enrolment in secondary education has tripled for girls and quadrupled for boys between 2004 and 2010 (UNICEF 2016). Tanzania has also had a female President since 2021, and as of 2023, 37% of the seats in the national parliament were held by women, changing the landscape of gender equity in the country at the highest levels (World Bank and Gender Data Portal 2024). These policy-level influences may have resulted in messaging on gender equity reaching more young people, making them more widely supported.

Both young people and adults referenced globalisation, often in the context of explaining why generations differed in their support of gender equity or tolerance of violence. Globalisation was generally equated with influence from global perspectives that promoted increased awareness, education, and subsequent support of gender equity and was described as a reason for young people's diversion from traditional gender roles. While our results indicate that though many young people may state being supportive of the concept of gender equity, their tolerance for violence is persistent. Translating theory into practice in relationships is a challenge and young people need functional tools to help resolve conflict, improve communication, and ultimately decrease violence.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths of this study include the qualitative approach using an in-depth exploration of young people's perspectives on gender equity and tolerance of violence to reveal nuanced attitudes and beliefs not captured in quantitative data. It also adds to a limited evidence base about these perspectives among young people of both genders in low-income settings. Limitations include the fact that this was an exploratory project, and the findings may not represent the views of young people and community members outside of the study setting limiting generalisability.

Conclusion

This qualitative study provides a rich understanding of young people's views on gender equity and tolerance of IPV in Tanzania. Despite assertions that violence is less acceptable among a younger generation, our findings reveal a dissonance, with young people describing scenarios in which violence would be tolerated. Addressing this dissonance requires targeted interventions through education and training, community engagement, and experiential learning. By creating an environment that facilitates open dialogue among young people and between young people and their social networks of family, elders, and the wider community, we can begin to address

the influence of pervasive traditional gender norms and foster greater acceptance of gender equity and lower tolerance for violence.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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