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COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE ON CHILD ABUSE IN MTWIVILA WARD, IRINGA MUNICIPALITY, IRINGA REGION, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed community knowledge regarding child abuse in Mtwivila Ward, Iringa Municipality, Iringa Region, Tanzania. A cross-sectional mixed-methods research design was employed among 85 respondents selected through purposive and simple random sampling. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through Key Informant Interviews and one Focus Group Discussion. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS Version 26, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings showed a high level of general awareness of child abuse, with 100% of respondents reporting that they were aware of child abuse and able to identify common indicators, including injuries, fear and discomfort. However, knowledge was less comprehensive regarding less visible forms of abuse, particularly emotional abuse and neglect. Regarding child protection structures, 68.2% of respondents reported being aware of the existence of child protection committees, while 31.8% were unaware of them. Respondents identified poverty, drunkenness, family conflicts and lack of education as major perceived causes of child abuse. Physical injury was the most frequently recognized consequence, followed by death, drug abuse, school dropout, transmission of diseases, early pregnancy and emotional trauma. Qualitative findings further indicated that alcohol misuse, economic difficulties, inadequate knowledge of children's rights and inappropriate disciplinary practices may increase children's vulnerability to abuse. The study concludes that although community members in Mtwivila Ward have a high general awareness of child abuse, important knowledge gaps remain regarding emotional abuse, neglect, child protection structures and reporting mechanisms. The study recommends strengthening community education on all forms of child abuse, increasing awareness of child protection committees and reporting procedures, promoting positive and non-violent parenting practices and

strengthening collaboration among families, schools, community leaders, social welfare officers, health workers, police, religious leaders and child protection committees to improve the prevention, identification, reporting and response to child abuse.

KEYWORDS: Community knowledge; child abuse; child protection; reporting mechanisms; Mtwivila Ward; Iringa Municipality; Tanzania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is a major public health, social and human rights concern that affects children across geographical, socioeconomic, cultural and demographic settings. It encompasses physical, sexual and emotional abuse, as well as neglect and other forms of maltreatment that may adversely affect a child's physical, psychological, social and developmental well-being World Health Organization (2026). The consequences of child abuse can extend beyond childhood and may include physical injuries, emotional and psychological distress, impaired cognitive and educational development, difficulties in social relationships and increased vulnerability to health and social problems later in life (WHO, 2026). Although child abuse occurs in different settings, it is often hidden and only a proportion of affected children receive support from formal services (WHO, 2026).

Community knowledge is an important component in the prevention, identification and response to child abuse. Parents, caregivers, teachers, community leaders and other community members can play an important role in recognizing signs of abuse, protecting children, reporting suspected cases and linking affected children with appropriate services. The prevention and response to child maltreatment require a multisectoral approach involving families, communities, service providers and government institutions (WHO, 2026). Communities with limited understanding of child abuse may fail to recognize certain forms of maltreatment, particularly emotional abuse, neglect and harmful disciplinary practices. Social and cultural norms that support violence and corporal punishment have also been identified as community and societal factors associated with child maltreatment (WHO, 2026). Therefore, understanding the level of community knowledge is important for designing interventions that are appropriate to the local social and cultural context.

In many low- and middle-income countries, including countries in sub-Saharan Africa, child protection is influenced by social, economic, family, community and cultural factors. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, family difficulties, weak social support networks, social inequality and norms that support violence or corporal punishment have been identified as

factors that may increase the risk of child maltreatment (WHO, 2026). In some communities, corporal punishment may be regarded as an acceptable method of disciplining children, despite evidence linking corporal punishment with adverse physical, psychological, behavioural, cognitive and educational outcomes (WHO, 2025). In addition, children may have limited ability to independently report abuse or access protection services, particularly where abuse occurs within relationships of responsibility, trust, or power (WHO, 2026). These circumstances place an important responsibility on families and communities to recognize signs of abuse and take appropriate action.

In Tanzania, child protection is addressed through national laws, policies and programmes intended to safeguard children from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. The Law of the Child Act, 2009 provides a legal framework for protecting children's rights and promoting, protecting and maintaining their welfare (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2009). Tanzania has also developed the National Plan of Action to End Violence against Women and Children, 2024/25–2028/29, which provides a national framework for preventing and responding to violence against women and children through coordinated actions involving relevant stakeholders (URT, 2024). These legal and policy measures demonstrate the national commitment to protecting children from violence and abuse. However, the existence of laws and policies alone does not eliminate child abuse and effective prevention and response also require awareness, community participation and accessible child protection services (WHO, 2026).

Child abuse and violence against children remain important concerns in Tanzania. Findings from the national Violence against Children Survey conducted in 2009 documented substantial experiences of physical, sexual and emotional violence among children and young people in Tanzania (UNICEF, CDC, & MUHAS, 2011). UNICEF reported that nearly three in ten girls and one in seven boys experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18, while more than seven in ten children experienced physical violence before reaching adulthood (UNICEF Tanzania, 2016). The same evidence indicates that many children who experienced violence did not disclose their experiences, while relatively few cases were reported to the police. Stigma, shame, family and community pressure and concerns about family separation were among the factors identified as barriers to reporting (UNICEF Tanzania, 2016). These findings demonstrate the importance of strengthening community knowledge and awareness as part of broader efforts to prevent and respond to child abuse in Tanzania.

Iringa Municipality, like other urban communities in Tanzania, comprises households with diverse social, economic, educational and cultural backgrounds. Children interact with

parents, caregivers, teachers, peers, neighbours and other community members in different environments, including homes, schools and other community settings. Understanding how community members perceive and recognize child abuse in this setting is therefore important. Differences in educational attainment, socioeconomic circumstances, cultural beliefs and exposure to child protection information may influence people's knowledge and responses to child abuse. However, these factors should be examined empirically rather than assumed to influence community knowledge in a particular direction.

Community knowledge regarding child abuse may include understanding of the different forms of abuse, warning signs, causes and risk factors, consequences, prevention measures and appropriate reporting and referral mechanisms. Adequate knowledge among community members may facilitate early recognition of abuse and appropriate referral of affected children to available protection and support services. The WHO identifies early recognition, response and support services, parent and caregiver education, positive parenting and community-level prevention as important components of preventing and responding to child maltreatment (WHO, 2026). Consequently, assessing community knowledge can help identify specific information gaps that may need to be addressed through locally appropriate awareness and prevention interventions.

However, the existence of child protection laws, policies and interventions does not necessarily mean that community members possess adequate knowledge about the different forms of child abuse, their warning signs, risk factors, consequences, prevention measures and appropriate reporting mechanisms. Local evidence on community knowledge is therefore necessary to identify knowledge gaps and inform context-specific child protection interventions. In Iringa Municipality, such evidence may provide useful information for strengthening awareness programmes, community-based prevention strategies, referral mechanisms and collaboration among families, schools, health facilities, social welfare services, law enforcement agencies and community leaders.

This study therefore focuses on community knowledge towards child abuse in Iringa Municipality. Specifically, the study seeks to generate evidence on the extent to which community members understand child abuse, including its forms, signs, causes, consequences, prevention and reporting mechanisms. The findings may contribute to the development and improvement of locally appropriate strategies for preventing child abuse and strengthening the protection and well-being of children in Iringa Municipality and similar settings.

Existing studies in Tanzania have examined child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse and have identified gaps in community awareness, understanding of causes and consequences, children's rights and reporting mechanisms. However, most studies have focused on specific forms of abuse and have been conducted outside Iringa Municipality. There is limited empirical evidence on the overall level of community knowledge regarding child abuse in Iringa Municipality, particularly knowledge of its forms, causes and consequences and relevant legal frameworks. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess community knowledge of child abuse in Iringa Municipality and provide context-specific evidence to support child protection interventions.

2.0 Empirical Literature Review

2.1 Awareness of Child Abuse

Awareness of child abuse is an important factor in the prevention, identification, reporting and response to abuse. Community awareness may involve the ability of community members to identify different forms of child abuse, recognize signs and symptoms, understand children's rights and identify individuals or situations that place children at risk and know where suspected cases can be reported. Empirical studies in Tanzania have demonstrated variation in community understanding of child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse.

Recent evidence from Arusha District provides further support for the importance of community awareness. Shekuwe (2025) investigated community knowledge and perceptions of child sexual abuse using a mixed-methods approach. The study reported that respondents demonstrated substantial awareness of some consequences of child sexual abuse, but awareness of reporting mechanisms was comparatively limited. The study also identified stigma, family pressure and weaknesses in implementation of protective mechanisms as factors affecting reporting.

In another study conducted in Arusha, Lukumay et al. (2023) examined community awareness of children's rights and its relationship with child sexual assault. Using a cross-sectional design involving 299 children from primary and secondary schools, the researchers reported inadequate community awareness of children's rights and the effects of child sexual assault. The study further found that responses to suspected abuse were frequently handled at family or individual level rather than collectively through formal authorities.

2.2 Knowledge of the Signs of Child Abuse

Knowledge of the signs of child abuse is an important component of community capacity to identify children who may be experiencing physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect. Signs of abuse may include physical injuries, changes in behaviour, fear, withdrawal, emotional distress, sexualized behaviour, poor school attendance and other psychological or developmental changes. Community members who are able to recognize these signs are better positioned to identify children at risk and facilitate timely reporting and referral.

The study related to Kelly et al. (2022) examined community perspectives and experiences of physical punishment in Tanzania through ethnographic research. The study found that physical punishment remained socially supported in some contexts and that community members attached different meanings to disciplinary practices. Some practices that may be interpreted through a child-rights framework as violence were instead understood locally as acceptable discipline. The findings demonstrate that community knowledge of the signs of abuse can be influenced by social and cultural interpretations of children's behaviour and discipline. Consequently, a community may recognize severe physical injury as abuse while failing to recognize less visible or culturally normalized forms of violence.

2.3 Knowledge of Child Protection Committees

Child protection committees are important community-level structures for preventing and responding to violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and other risks affecting children. Their responsibilities may include identifying children at risk, raising community awareness, receiving and referring reports, monitoring children's welfare, supporting affected children and linking communities with formal institutions such as social welfare, police, health facilities and schools. Community knowledge of these committees is therefore important because their effectiveness depends partly on whether community members know that they exist, understand their roles and know how to access them.

An important finding from Gwanyemba et al. (2016) was that the existence of a child protection structure did not automatically result in effective protection. The study found weaknesses in the capacity of some community structures to manage cases appropriately. This indicates that knowledge of the existence of child protection committees should be accompanied by knowledge of their specific roles, responsibilities, limitations and referral procedures.

Also the study conducted by Reuben et al. (2022) examined the effects of community-based child protection mechanisms on sexual violence against children in Rombo District, Tanzania. The mixed-methods study involved 158 participants, including 108 survey

respondents, 40 focus group participants and 10 interview participants. The researchers found that community-based child protection mechanisms contributed to increased community vigilance and willingness to report sexual violence against children. The mechanisms also improved access to services, case handling, referrals to police and social welfare officers and collaboration among child protection actors.

2.4 Community Knowledge of Causes and Consequences of Child Abuse

Understanding the causes and consequences of child abuse is essential for effective prevention. Community members who understand the factors that increase children's vulnerability may be better able to identify risk situations and participate in preventive interventions. Similarly, knowledge of the consequences of abuse can influence community perceptions of the seriousness of the problem and encourage early intervention and reporting. The UNICEF Tanzania study on the drivers of violence against children, published in 2017, provides important empirical evidence on factors underlying violence against children. The study examined socio-cultural norms and practices that contribute to violence against children and found that violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation were persistent concerns. It emphasized the influence of adults and authority figures as perpetrators and highlighted the importance of changing social norms and practices that tolerate or normalize violence against children.

The study conducted by Kelly et al. (2022) demonstrated the importance of social norms in understanding the causes and interpretation of violence against children. Their Tanzanian ethnographic study found that physical punishment remained socially accepted in some communities as a method of childrearing. The meaning attached to physical punishment differed between community perspectives and rights-based definitions of violence. This finding is important because acceptance of corporal punishment may reduce community recognition of certain behaviours as abusive and may therefore affect both prevention and reporting.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted in Mtwivila Ward, located in Iringa Municipality, Iringa Region, Tanzania. The ward was purposively selected because it represents an urban community where children live, attend school and interact with different members of society. In addition, the ward has experienced reported cases of child abuse, making it an appropriate setting for investigating community knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding child abuse.

3.2 Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional research design, whereby data were collected from respondents at a single point in time. This design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to assess the existing status of community knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding child abuse without following respondents over an extended period.

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to selected community members, while qualitative data were obtained through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The cross-sectional design was selected because it is economical, time-efficient and suitable for descriptive studies.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised residents of Mtwivila Ward in Iringa Municipality. According to the 2022 Tanzania Population and Housing Census, Mtwivila Ward has a total population of 12,466 people, from which the study sample was drawn.

The ward was selected because it experiences urban challenges such as poverty, unemployment and inadequate awareness of child rights, which are associated with increased risks of child abuse and neglect. Therefore, it provided an appropriate setting for examining community knowledge toward child abuse.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

3.4.1 Sample Size

The sample size refers to the number of respondents selected from the target population to participate in the study. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n = required sample size

N = total population (12,466)

e = margin of error (0.10)

Therefore, the required sample size for the study is 85 respondents.

Table 1: Distribution of Sample Size.

S/N	Category of Respondents	Number
i.	Parents and Guardians	40
ii.	Religious Leaders	10
iii.	Youth Representatives	15
iv.	Child Protection Members	5
v.	Key informant and focus group discussion	15
Total		85

Source: Researcher, 2026

3.5 Data Collection Methods

3.5.1 Primary data collection

Primary data were collected through questionnaires, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

3.5.1.1 Quantitative data collection

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to community members. The questionnaires consisted mainly of closed-ended questions designed to collect information on community' knowledge toward child abuse. The questionnaire was prepared using simple and clear language to facilitate respondents' understanding.

3.5.1.2 Qualitative data collection

Qualitative data were collected through Key Informant Interviews and one Focus Group Discussion. Key Informant Interviews involved community leaders, teachers, religious leaders, child protection committee members, parents and youth representatives who possessed relevant knowledge and experience regarding child protection.

One Focus Group Discussion consisting of ten participants was conducted. Participants were purposively selected to ensure representation of different community groups. The discussion explored community knowledge toward child abuse.

3.5.2 Secondary data collection

Secondary data were collected through documentary review. Sources included books, academic journals, government reports, child protection policies, census reports and publications from organizations such as UNICEF, WHO and the Ministry responsible for community development and child welfare. These documents provided theoretical foundations, policy context and empirical evidence relevant to the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Product for Social Sciences Version 26. Before analysis; completed 85 questionnaires were checked for completeness, consistency and accuracy. The data were then coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages and tables, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and their knowledge regarding child abuse..

3.6.2 Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data obtained from interviews and Focus Group Discussions were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved transcription of recorded interviews, repeated reading of transcripts for familiarization, coding of meaningful statements, grouping

similar codes into categories and developing broader themes. Major themes that emerged included community understanding of child abuse, causes and consequences of child abuse and the legal framework on child abuse

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study to protect the rights, privacy and well-being of all participants. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the University as well as from the Municipal level before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their participation was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from parents, guardians, or adult participants before collecting data. Since the study involved issues related to child abuse, care was taken to avoid questions or procedures that could cause unnecessary emotional distress. Participants were treated with respect and their safety and dignity were given priority throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The results Table show that the most of the respondents (64.7%) were aged between 18–25 years, 25.9% were aged between 26–35 years, while 9.4% of respondents were aged between 36–45 years. The inclusion of respondents from different age groups provided an opportunity to obtain information on community knowledge of child abuse from individuals at different stages of adulthood.

The results presented in Table 2 show that the most of the respondents (51.8%) were female and (48.2%) were male. The distribution was therefore relatively balanced, with females constituting a slightly larger proportion of the respondents. The inclusion of both sexes provided information about community knowledge of child abuse from male and female community members. The finding is comparable with Kibusi et al. (2021), who found that 58 (52.3%) of the respondents were women and 53 (47.7%) were men. Abeid et al. (2015) also included both men and women in their community-based study of knowledge and attitudes towards rape and child sexual abuse in rural Tanzania. The inclusion of both sexes in these studies demonstrates the importance of obtaining community perspectives from different groups when examining knowledge of child abuse. Nevertheless, the present study did not statistically test whether sex was associated with knowledge of child abuse. The findings showed that (56.5%) respondents were married, while (43.5%) were single. Thus, married respondents constituted a slightly larger proportion of the study participants, although both groups were substantially represented. The finding is comparable with Abeid et al. (2015),

who reported that 62.2% of respondents in their rural Tanzanian study were married or cohabiting, while 27.7% were single and 10.1% were divorced, separated, or widowed. The inclusion of married and single respondents in the present study provided perspectives from community members with different household and family circumstances.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents. (n = 85)

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age group	18–25 years	55	64.7
	26–35 years	22	25.9
	36–45 years	8	9.4
Total		85	100.0
Sex	Male	41	48.2
	Female	44	51.8
Total		85	100.0
Marital status	Single	37	43.5
	Married	48	56.5
Total		85	100.0
Education level	Primary education	34	40.0
	Secondary education	43	50.6
	College/University	8	9.4
Total		85	100.0
Occupation	Teacher	23	31.8
	Entrepreneur	36	42.4
	Farmer	22	25.9
Total		85	100.0

Source: Research data (2026)

The results presented in Table 2 show that the majority of the respondents (50.6%) had attained secondary education (40.0%) had attained primary education and (9.4%) had attained college or university education. Therefore, most respondents had attained primary or secondary education, while only a small proportion had received higher education.

This finding compared to Mohamed (2015), who assessed knowledge, attitudes and practices concerning child abuse among community members in Zanzibar West District. The study reported that respondents had general knowledge of child abuse, although the study also demonstrated that knowledge of the existence of child abuse did not necessarily mean that respondents had comprehensive understanding of all aspects of child protection. The present study similarly distinguishes general awareness of child abuse from more specific knowledge of child protection mechanisms.

4.2 Awareness of Child Abuse

4.2.1 Awareness of child abuse among respondents

The findings show that (100.0%) respondents reported that they were aware of child abuse. This indicates a very high level of awareness of child abuse among the respondents in Iringa Municipality. The finding suggests that child abuse is a recognized issue within the community. High awareness may be associated with respondents' exposure to information about child abuse through schools, health facilities, community meetings, mass media, religious institutions, family experiences and child-protection programs. Awareness of child abuse is important because it can help community members recognize abusive behaviours and take appropriate measures to prevent and report cases. The finding is consistent with empirical evidence from Tanzania. Mohamed (2015), in a study entitled Child Abuse in Zanzibar West District, Tanzania: Assessment of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice, found that 100% of the 100 parents, caregivers and community members who participated in the study were aware of child abuse. This finding is similar to the present study and suggests that high level awareness of child abuse can also be observed among communities in other parts of Tanzania.

4.2.2 Awareness on the meaning of child abuse among respondents

The findings presented in Table 3 show that (54.1%) respondents defined child abuse as a situation where a child is harmed, mistreated, or neglected by a parent, caregiver, or another person. Further (30.6%) respondents described child abuse as physical, emotional, or sexual harm, including neglect that affects a child's health, growth, development, or well-being. The remaining (15.3%) respondents defined child abuse as any behaviour by adults or older individuals that violates a child's rights, safety, dignity, or healthy development. These findings indicate that most respondents had a basic understanding of child abuse, while a smaller proportion demonstrated a broader understanding that included children's rights, dignity, safety and development.

The qualitative findings from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions provide further explanation of these quantitative findings. Participants from FGD described child abuse is any action or failure to act by a parent, caregiver or another person who can cause physical, emotional or sexual harm to a child, including neglect. This view demonstrates a relatively comprehensive understanding because it recognizes both harmful actions and failures to act, while also identifying physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect. Similarly, a key informant explained that Emotional abuse and neglect are sometimes

not recognized as abuse because some people consider them normal family matters or forms of discipline (Interview, 6/8/2026).

The finding is further supported by Kelly et al. (2022), who conducted ethnographic research involving children and adults in a peri-urban community in Tanzania. Their findings showed that community members held different understandings of physical punishment and its relationship to violence against children. The researchers found that physical punishment remained socially supported in some contexts and that the meaning attached to particular disciplinary practices differed from rights-based understandings of violence against children.

Table 3: Definition of child abuse among respondents. (n=85)

Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
Is when a child is harmed, mistreated, or neglected by a parent, caregiver, or another person	46	54.1
refers to physical, emotional, sexual harm, or neglect that affects a child's health, growth, development, or well-being	26	30.6
is any behaviour by adults or older individuals that violates a child's rights, safety, dignity, or healthy development	13	15.3
Total	85	100.0

Source: Research data (2026)

4.3 Knowledge about the signs of child abuse

The findings show that (100.0%) reported that they identified signs of sexual abuse in children. This indicates a very high level of awareness among community members in Iringa Municipality and suggests that respondents may be able to recognize possible indicators of sexual abuse. Such awareness is important because early recognition can facilitate timely protection, referral and support for affected children. The finding is supported by the World Health Organization, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing physical, behavioural and psychological indicators when identifying children who may have experienced sexual abuse. WHO guidelines highlight the role of caregivers and frontline professionals in identifying suspected abuse and ensuring appropriate support and protection (World Health Organization, 2017).

The findings show that respondents identified injuries, fear and discomfort as signs of child abuse where by (33.5%), identified injuries as a sign of child abuse (33.1%), identified fear and (33.5%) identified discomfort. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents were able to recognize physical and emotional indicators that may suggest that a child is

experiencing abuse. The findings suggest that respondents had a high level of understanding of the observable signs of child abuse.

Table 4 Signs of child abuse in children. (n=85)

Variables	Frequency	Percept (%)
Injuries	80	33.5%
Fear	79	33.1%
Discomfort	80	33.5%
Total	239	100.0%

Source: Research data (2026)

The findings also indicated that some forms of abuse, particularly emotional abuse and neglect, may receive less attention than physical or sexual abuse. A participant explained: The commonly reported forms include physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional abuse and child labour. Physical punishment and sexual abuse are among the major concerns. These findings suggest that although community members may have general awareness of child abuse, there are still gaps in understanding the different forms and consequences of abuse.

4.4 Community knowledge on existence and the roles of child protection committees

The study assessed the level of community knowledge regarding the existence of child protection committees in their respective areas. The findings show that (68.2%) respondents reported that they knew about the existence of child protection committees, whereas (31.8%) respondents reported that they did not know about such committees. These findings indicate that the majority of community members had knowledge of child protection committees; however, a considerable proportion of the respondents remained unaware of these important child protection structures. The qualitative findings from the Key Informant Interview support the quantitative results. The key informant explained that some community members are aware of the existence of child protection committees because they have previously used these structures to report cases of child abuse. The key informant stated:

Some members of the community know that there are child protection committees because some of them tend to report cases to these committees when child abuse occurs. Through reporting and interacting with the committees, they become aware of where they can seek help and report cases concerning children. (Interview held on 6/8/2026).

This statement helps to explain why a relatively large proportion of respondents (68.2%) reported knowing about child protection committees. The experience of reporting cases appears to contribute to community awareness of the committees. It also suggests that child

protection committees are not merely theoretical structures but are known and accessed by at least some community members when child protection concerns arise.

Table 4.5: Knowledge on existence and roles of Child Protection Committees. (n=85)

Parameters	Frequency(=85)	Percent (%)
Yes	58	68.2
No	27	31.8
Total	85	100.0
Roles of child protection committees		
Identify children at risk of facing child abuse	156	41.9%
Raise community awareness about child rights and protection issues	65	17.5%
Receive and report child abuse issues	58	15.6%
Monitor the safety and well-being of children	18	4.8%
Support affected children's	55	14.8%
Support affected children	20	5.4%
Total	372	100.0%

Source: Research data (2026)

The findings from the Focus Group Discussion further support the quantitative results. Participants demonstrated awareness that child protection committees existed within their communities. One participant explained: We know that there are child protection committees in our area. These committees are there to deal with issues affecting children and when a child is abused or there is a problem concerning a child, community members can report the matter to the responsible people so that appropriate action can be taken.

This finding is supported by evidence from the Iringa region, particularly research conducted in Kilolo District by Kopweh and Onsarigo (2026). Their study found that parents had varying levels of access to child protection information, while some community members had inadequate understanding of child abuse identification and reporting procedures. The study also identified limitations in community participation and emphasized the need to strengthen community capacity to participate effectively in child protection activities. These findings are relevant to the present study because they demonstrate that the presence of child protection structures within a community does not necessarily mean that all community members are aware of them or understand how to access and use them. Thus, the effectiveness of child protection committees depends not only on their existence but also on the extent to which communities are informed about their roles, responsibilities and reporting procedures. One member from interview explain that

Some community members are aware of these committees because they are interacting with them and used them to report child abuse concerns however, community members who have never encountered or reported a child abuse concern may have limited knowledge about the existence and functions of these committees. Therefore, awareness of child protection committees appears to be influenced not only by general community sensitization but also by people's direct experiences and interactions with child protection structures (Interview held on 6/8/2026).

The findings therefore suggest that while child protection committees have achieved a reasonable level of visibility in the community, greater efforts are required to ensure universal awareness. Strengthening community education about where to report child abuse, the functions of child protection committees and the procedures for obtaining assistance may contribute to improved reporting practices and ultimately strengthen child protection in Iringa Municipality.

4.5 Community knowledge on Causes and consequences of child abuse

4.5.1 Knowledge on Causes of child abuse

The finding presents respondents' views on the perceived causes of child abuse in Iringa Municipality. Drunkenness was identified by (94.1%) and lack of education by (32.9%) also poverty was identified by (30.6%). These findings indicate that child abuse is perceived as a multidimensional problem influenced by economic, family and behavioural factors. This indicates that economic hardship was perceived as an important factor contributing to child abuse. Poverty may increase parental stress and make it difficult to meet children's basic needs. This finding is consistent with Tanzanian research showing that poverty increases children's vulnerability to protection violations Parents in the FGD supported this finding by explaining that economic difficulties may affect children's care. Lack of money makes it difficult for parents to meet children's basic needs. A teacher noted that

Some parents lack knowledge about children's rights and proper ways of disciplining a child and some of the parents after drinking alcohol they change their reactions to their children which lead to some of them being abused because of parent's excessive use of alcohol (Interview held on 6/8/2026)

Table 6: Community Knowledge of causes of child abuse. (n=85)

Parameters	Responses	Percept%
Poverty	85	30.6%
Drunkenness	80	28.8%
Lack of education	28	10.1%

Family conflicts	85	30.6%
Total	278	100.0%

Source: Research data (2026)

4.3.2 Community knowledge on possible consequences of child abuse

The findings present respondents' views regarding the possible consequences of child abuse. The findings indicate that physical injury was the most frequently reported consequence, identified by (23.3%), followed by death, reported by (15.4%), drug abuse, reported by (14.6%) and school dropout, reported by (13.8%). The predominance of physical injury suggests that physical harm is the most readily recognized consequence of child abuse among respondents, possibly because injuries such as bruises, fractures, burns and other forms of bodily harm are more visible than psychological and behavioral consequences. A key informant interview from the social welfare officer explained that,

Most of the cases we receive involving children are associated with physical and psychological harm. Some children come with visible injuries, while others show emotional and behavioral changes that may not be immediately noticed. (Interview held 6/8/2026)

The finding on school dropout is also supported by research conducted in Kinondoni Municipality. Ntumigwa (2022), using a cross-sectional mixed-methods design involving 181 respondents, examined the consequences of sexual relationships among secondary school students and identified school dropout as an important educational consequence. In addition, research on vulnerable living conditions in Tanzania found that students living in vulnerable environments were more likely to leave school early. These studies support the present finding that child protection problems can have serious implications for educational participation and completion. The relationship between child abuse and school dropout can also be highlighted through a WEO key-informant interview.

When children experience violence or serious problems at home, some of them lose interest in school, become absent from classes or eventually stop attending school. The problem becomes worse when the child does not have a safe and supportive family environment (Interview held on 6/8/2026).

Table 4.7: Possible consequences of child abuse.

parameters	Frequency (n=85)	Percent (%)
Physical injury	118	23.3%
School drop out	70	13.8%
Emotional trauma	39	7.7%
Early pregnancy	63	12.4%

Drugs abuse	74	14.6%
Transmission of diseases	65	12.8%
Death	78	15.4%
Total	507	100.0%

Transmission of diseases was also identified by respondents because they recognize that some forms of child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can expose children to sexually transmitted infections and other health problems. This is particularly important in community child-protection programs because abuse may have consequences that are not immediately visible. The WHO recognizes child maltreatment as having consequences for physical and reproductive health as well as long-term social and psychological functioning.

Early pregnancy may occur where children experience sexual abuse, coercion, exploitation or other forms of sexual violence. It can consequently interfere with schooling and expose girls to additional social, economic and health challenges. The Tanzanian study by Tesha (2025) specifically found that sexual abuse frequently resulted in early pregnancy as well as school withdrawal and dropout. This provides empirical support for the present finding from Iringa Municipality. A Social Welfare Officer could therefore be quoted in the discussion said that We have seen cases where early sexual activity and unplanned pregnancy make children more vulnerable. Some of these children subsequently experience difficulties continuing with school and require social welfare support. (Interview held on 6/8/2026).

5. CONCLUSION AN RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that community members in Mtwivila Ward, Iringa Municipality, have a high awareness of child abuse. Large number of respondents reported being aware of child abuse and were able to identify common signs such as injuries, fear and discomfort. However, some knowledge gaps remain, particularly regarding emotional abuse, neglect, child protection committees and appropriate reporting mechanisms. Respondents identified drunkenness, poverty, family conflicts and lack of education as important perceived causes of child abuse, while physical injury, death, drug abuse and school dropout were among the commonly identified consequences. Generally, although the community recognizes child abuse as a problem, there is a need to strengthen specific and practical knowledge on prevention, reporting and protection of children.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthening community education on all forms of child abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect and increasing community awareness of the existence, roles and locations of child protection committees. Communities should also be educated on appropriate reporting mechanisms and available protection and support services for affected children. Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to use positive and non-violent methods of disciplining children, while community-based interventions should address alcohol misuse, family conflicts and economic difficulties that may increase children's vulnerability to abuse. In addition, collaboration among families, schools, community leaders, social welfare officers, health workers, police, religious leaders and child protection committees should be strengthened to improve the prevention, identification, reporting and response to child abuse. Particular attention should be given to emotional abuse and neglect because these forms of abuse may be overlooked or regarded as normal family matters.

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