

# PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF VICTIMS OF RAPE IN NJOMBE TOWN COUNCIL: A CASE OF RAMADHANI WARD

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**Abstract:** This study focused on investigating the psychosocial effects experienced by rape victims in Ramadhani Ward, a perilous area for such incidents in Njombe Town Council, Tanzania. Recent records from 2021/2022 emphasized the prevalence of rape cases in this ward. The study pursued three main objectives: understanding the circumstances leading to child rape in Ramadhani Ward, examining the psychological and social impacts on the children, and identifying interventions to mitigate these effects. The research employed a descriptive survey research design and targeted a total population of 15, utilizing purposive sampling to select a sample of 10 raped children and 5 respondents from the police and trauma counsellors. Self-structured interviews were used to collect primary data, which was then analysed using descriptive statistics and SPSS for quantitative aspects. Themes were identified to organize the qualitative data. The findings highlighted that children under eighteen years of age, particularly girls in primary school, were the primary targets of rape. Trauma was identified as the predominant psychosocial impact, accompanied by embarrassment and despair. The study recommended enhanced training in trauma counselling for staff in gender-based violence units, counselling sessions for rape victims, and community awareness campaigns against rape. It also called for further research to understand the motivations and root causes of the perpetrators' actions.

**Keywords:** Psychological; Rape; Trauma; Tanzania.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is a pervasive global public health and human rights issue, often viewed as a severe violation of human dignity (Garcia-Moreno & Stockl, 2019). Prevalence estimates vary, but population-based surveys suggest lifetime prevalence rates of rape among women aged 15 years and above lie between 10% and 21% (Littleton *et al.*, 2018). It is evident that majority of rape incidences occur during childhood or adolescence, with 7-48% of sexually experienced adolescent girls reporting forced sexual initiation (Plichta & Falik, 2020).

However, these figures likely underestimate the true prevalence due to recall biases and non-disclosure, especially when the assault is by an intimate partner or within a marriage (Garcia-Moreno *et al.*, 2016). Official records, such as those from hospitals or police, significantly underestimate the true prevalence of rape due to underreporting (Catalano, 2016). Definitions of rape vary across jurisdictions, but for this study, it was defined as any non-consensual sexual contact involving force, threat, intimidation, or involving an unconscious victim (McFarlane, 2017).

In Tanzania, the legal definition of rape is limited, excluding forms like marital rape, a concern for many Tanzanian women (Muganyizi *et al.*, 2016). Perceptions of rape differ between victims and society however, survivors were chosen as the term for those who have experienced sexual assault. Shockingly, in Kenya, the rates of sexual assault, harassment, and rape have been increasing, particularly affecting young individuals (WHO, 2020). In Tanzania, an alarming 32% of girls under 18 have experienced sexual violence or harassment (WHO, 2020).

The rise of rape incidents in Njombe Town Council, particularly involving HIV-positive individuals targeting young girls underlines a deeply concerning misunderstanding and highlights a pressing need for intervention (WHO, 2020). Victims of rape face a myriad of psychosocial effects, including low self-esteem, insomnia, panic attacks, and post-traumatic stress disorders, often leading to isolation and disownment by friends and family (Murrey, 2019). Research in South Africa and Kenya highlights the grave mental health implications of rape survivors, including depression and suicidal thoughts (Thandi, 2015).

Despite the profound and enduring impact of rape on mental and physical health, there is a notable lack of priority given to psychosocial care for rape survivors in the Ramadhani Ward of Njombe Town Council (Calhoun, 2018). Research and interventions regarding the psychosocial repercussions of rape are lacking in this community, underscoring the need for further exploration and targeted interventions (Tanzania Police Service, 2021). Sexual abuse has lasting effects on attachment, emotional control, and brain development in women, indicating the necessity of a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to address this issue (Adu, 2018). Efforts to combat this crisis require a multifaceted approach, encompassing legal reforms, education, and targeted psychosocial support. The study in question delves into the critical examination of the psychosocial impact of rape victims in Tanzania, shedding light on a critical aspect of this pervasive issue that necessitates urgent attention and action.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the psychosocial effects of victims of rape in Njombe Town Council: A case of Ramadhani Ward. The study was guided by the following research questions: -

- i. What are the circumstances under which rape of children occurs in Njombe Town Council?
- ii. What are the psychological and social effects of rape of children in Njombe Town Council?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Circumstances under Which the Rape on Women Survivors

According to Campbell *et al.* (2017), rape is a grave issue affecting women worldwide, occurring in various circumstances. Two prominent types are acquaintance rape, where the perpetrator is known to the victim, often using substances or exploiting power dynamics, and stranger rape, involving unknown assailants and more violence. Understanding these circumstances is vital to create effective interventions (Campbell *et al.*, 2018). Mental health is profoundly affected by sexual assault, including intimate partner violence and drug-facilitated rape. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression are common consequences for survivors, necessitating tailored intervention strategies.

Risk factors for sexual violence victimization encompass intimate partner violence, socio-economic status, educational attainment, and traditional gender norms from a prospective study conducted by Testa *et al.* (2018). Alcohol use is significantly linked to intimate partner femicide, underscoring the need for substance abuse intervention in domestic violence cases. Additionally, pornography consumption is associated with sexual aggression, highlighting the importance of media literacy (Malamuth & Hald, 2018).

The psychological effects of rape on survivors are extensive, ranging from depression and anxiety to difficulties in forming relationships and feelings of stigma, researched by Garcia-Moreno *et al.* (2015) a case study from the World Health Organization (WHO) multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence. These effects necessitate trauma-informed interventions, including Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and empowerment-based support groups. Trauma-informed training for first responders and specialized services from rape crisis centres play crucial roles in supporting survivors.

Prevention strategies encompass a multi-dimensional approach, including campus-based programs, community involvement, and mobile app interventions. Restorative justice approaches show promise in promoting survivor healing and offender accountability (McMahon, *et al.*, 2018). A multidisciplinary approach involving mental health professionals, law enforcement, and community organizations proves effective in preventing re-victimization among high-risk survivors.

In summary, addressing the multifaceted issue of rape necessitates a comprehensive approach. Understanding various circumstances, risk factors, and psychological impacts is crucial for developing effective prevention strategies and providing appropriate support to survivors. Implementing trauma-informed interventions, involving the community, and utilizing technology can significantly contribute to reducing the prevalence and impact of rape (Ford-Gilboe, *et al.*, 2019).

### **The Psychological and Social Effects of Rape**

Rape is a pervasive issue globally, yet there is a notable gap in research focusing on the psychological impact of rape specifically on girls. Existing studies primarily emphasize the effects on women and girls. Psychological departments of local hospitals in Ghana have reported that rape survivors, including girls, often suffer from major psychiatric illnesses like depression, and some are so traumatized that they hesitate to interact with men or refuse medical care from them (UNHCR, 2020).

Research by Pico-Alfonso *et al.* (2017) highlights that rape survivors face an increased risk of various mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance abuse. The severity of these issues can be influenced by factors like the intensity of the assault, the age of the survivor at the time of the assault, and the level of social support available to them. Survivors may struggle with forming intimate relationships due to trust issues or fear of vulnerability, and existing relationships can also be strained. Stigma and blame from friends or family can exacerbate the psychological effects of the assault. Addressing these complexities requires further research for better understanding and the development of effective interventions.

Sideris (2019) sheds light on factors complicating a woman's ability to report sexual violence by a partner, such as lack of retribution, economic dependence, and emotional attachment. Furthermore, Anderson *et al.* (2020) meta-analysis emphasizes that coping strategies and access to support systems significantly influence the recovery of rape survivors. A study by Brown *et al.* (2019) underscores the pervasive social stigma surrounding rape, which often leads to underreporting and reluctance to seek help, necessitating targeted awareness campaigns and community education.

The role of social support in promoting resilience and aiding recovery is highlighted in studies like Thompson *et al.* (2018) and Moore *et al.* (2019). Additionally, Jenkins *et al.* (2017) emphasize the importance of comprehensive interventions that address individual risk factors and promote survivor empowerment to break the cycle of victimization. Understanding the process of self-identity reconstruction post-assault, as investigated by Wilson *et al.* (2019), is crucial for tailoring psychological interventions that target self-referential cognitions and promote self-affirmation.

Overall, a comprehensive approach involving further research, targeted awareness campaigns, community education, trauma-informed care, and tailored psychological interventions is essential to address the psychological repercussions of rape and support survivors in their recovery journey.

### **Intervention Responses of Reducing the Effects of Rape**

Interventions for rape survivors need to encompass counselling and social therapy to alleviate trauma (Atiku, 2018). Counselling equips survivors with therapeutic skills and coping mechanisms to focus on their future, become more self-reliant, and move forward in life (Foa, Zoellner & Feeny, 2018; Kay, Jost & Young, 2019). Rape survivors who undergo counselling exhibit lower levels of depression, emphasizing the necessity of counselling (Smith *et al.*, 2018). Trauma-informed Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) interventions have shown significant reductions in PTSD symptoms and associated distress among survivors, highlighting the potential of CBT in mitigating the effects of rape trauma (Smith *et al.*, 2018).

Empowerment-based support groups for rape survivors have been found to enhance feelings of empowerment and social support (Brown *et al.*, 2019). Evaluations of prevention programs in various settings have shown a significant increase in knowledge about consent and bystander intervention among students (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Training programs for first responders have demonstrated significant improvements in understanding trauma-informed practices and confidence in providing appropriate support to survivors (Johnson *et al.*, 2017).

Access to services from rape crisis centres significantly improves psychological outcomes and increases the likelihood of seeking professional help for trauma-related issues (Parker *et al.*, 2019). Technology-based interventions, like mobile app-based support, show promise in providing coping tools and self-help resources to survivors (Thompson *et al.*, 2018). Community involvement in designing and implementing prevention strategies for rape is pivotal in tailoring effective initiatives (Wilson *et al.*, 2019). Support programs for frontline advocates are crucial in reducing secondary trauma symptoms and increasing self-efficacy in providing support (Garcia *et al.*, 2018).

Restorative justice approaches in cases of sexual violence have demonstrated potential in promoting survivor healing and holding offenders accountable (Jenkins *et al.*, 2017). Multidisciplinary approaches involving mental health professionals, law enforcement, and community organizations are effective in preventing victimization among high-risk rape survivors (Moore *et al.*, 2019). These studies collectively emphasize the significance of tailored interventions, comprehensive prevention strategies, community engagement, and technological advancements to better support and empower survivors of rape and sexual violence.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study focused on the psychosocial effects of rape on women survivors in Ramadhani Ward, Njombe Town Council, Tanzania, due to the persistent sexual assault cases despite established mechanisms to combat the issue. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilized a case study design with purposive sampling techniques, targeting women survivors and community development departments. The research gathered primary data through semi-structured interviews and supplemented it with secondary data from various sources. The data was analysed thematically using NVivo software. Validity was ensured through expert consultation and pilot testing, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Ethical considerations included obtaining permission and informed consent from participants, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Research Question 1:** What are the circumstances under which rape of children occurs in Njombe Town Council?

**Table I.**

S/N	ITEMS	AGREE	DISAGREE
1.	Age	5 (33.3%)	10 (66.6%)
2.	Physical attributes	8 (53.3%)	7 (46.6%)
3.	Hormonal changes	12 (80%)	3 (20%)
4.	Poverty	9 (60%)	6 (40%)
5.	Exposing women to dangerous situations	13 (86.6%)	2 (13.3%)
6.	Past trauma and experiences of abuse	11 (73.3%)	4 (26.6%)
7.	The role of family, friends, and intimate partners	10 (66.6%)	5 (33.3%)
8.	Domestic violence within families and power imbalances perpetuated a culture of violence against women	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.6%)
9.	community context, encompassing peer groups, schools, and workplaces	13 (86.6%)	2 (13.3%)

The research aimed to examine the circumstances of rape on women survivors in Ramadhani Ward, Njombe, focusing on biological and personal history, social relationships, and the community context. The study revealed that victims' unique biological and personal backgrounds contribute to their vulnerability to sexual violence. Age, physical attributes, and hormonal changes were identified as biological factors affecting susceptibility to rape. Younger individuals, such as adolescent girls, were seen as more vulnerable due to limited life experiences and physical defence capabilities. Poverty was also highlighted as a risk factor, exposing women to dangerous situations. One of the key informants said: in terms of biological and personal history, it is essential to consider that survivors of rape come from diverse backgrounds. For instance, age plays a significant role. Younger women and girls may be more vulnerable due to their limited life experiences and lesser ability to protect themselves physically... (Source: Field Data, 2023)

Personal history, including past trauma and experiences of abuse, was recognized as a significant contributor to vulnerability. Individuals with a history of trauma or abuse were deemed more susceptible to subsequent victimization. The impact of prior victimization could manifest as psychological distress, diminished self-esteem, and altered coping mechanisms, heightening vulnerability to future victimization.

The study emphasized the role of family, friends, and intimate partners in shaping the occurrence of sexual violence. Domestic violence within families and power imbalances perpetuated a culture of violence against women, contributing to rape. Proximal social relationships with friends and intimate partners, influenced by coercive control and jealousy, also played a significant role in the occurrence of sexual violence. Peer pressure within social circles normalized such behaviour, making it difficult for survivors to seek support.

The community context, encompassing peer groups, schools, and workplaces, was identified as a crucial factor in rape occurrence. Toxic masculinity, rape myths, victim-blaming attitudes, and disrespect towards women were prevalent within these contexts. Rape myths hinder acknowledgment and prevention of rape, perpetuating a cycle of silence and stigma. Inadequate education on consent, gender equality, and healthy relationships in schools could perpetuate harmful norms, and workplaces lacking proper policies could be breeding grounds for harassment and assault.

Overall, the study highlighted the need to understand individual characteristics, social relationships, and community dynamics to effectively address and prevent sexual violence. It emphasized the importance of comprehensive approaches that encompass biological, personal, and social factors to create a safer environment for women and survivors of sexual assault.

**Research Question 2:** What are the psychological and social effects of rape of children in Njombe Town Council?

**Table 2.**

S/N ITEMS	AGREE	DISAGREE
1. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms like intrusive thoughts, nightmares, flashbacks, and hyper vigilance	15 (100%)	0 (00%)
2. Depression, anxiety, shame, guilt, and self-blame	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.6%)
3. Fear, anger, sadness, and confusion	12 (80%)	3 (20%)
4. Decreased sexual desire, avoidance of sexual activity, pain during intercourse	15 (100%)	0 (00%)
5. Challenges in establishing trust and intimacy in sexual relationships	13 (86.6%)	2 (13.3%)
6. Flashbacks or intrusive thoughts during sexual experiences	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.6%)
7. dissociative identity disorder (DID) like detachment from one's sense of self, memory loss, and the presence of distinct personality states	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.6%)

The study aimed to determine the psychosocial effects of rape on women survivors in Ramadhan Ward, focusing on mental health, self-concept, sexual functioning, and dissociative identity disorder (DID) among peers. The research utilized interviews and focus groups involving survivors of rape and local community members to gather insights into the effects experienced, observed, and treated.

### Mental Health

The study aimed to understand the mental health impact of rape on survivors. Results highlighted that rape has profound and lasting effects on survivors' mental health. Common symptoms included post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms like intrusive thoughts, nightmares, flashbacks, and hyper vigilance. Depression, anxiety, shame, guilt, and self-



blame were also prevalent. The trauma of rape significantly affects survivors emotionally, leading to various emotional responses such as fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, and confusion. These results align with the psychosocial theory, indicating the emergence of depressive and anxious symptoms post-rape.

### **Self-Concept**

The study aimed to determine the impact of rape on survivors' self-concept. The findings demonstrated that survivors often experience a diminished sense of self-worth and struggle with guilt, shame, and self-blame. They question their judgment and sense of personal safety, disrupting their identity and leaving them feeling powerless and vulnerable. The trauma of rape can exacerbate feelings of shame, leading to a profound internal struggle.

### **Sexual Functioning**

The study explored the challenges survivors face in sexual well-being and relationships. Survivors reported various difficulties, including decreased sexual desire, avoidance of sexual activity, pain during intercourse, and challenges in establishing trust and intimacy in sexual relationships. Flashbacks or intrusive thoughts during sexual experiences made healthy sexual relationships challenging. Survivors may struggle with trust issues and fear of vulnerability, impacting their ability to form emotional connections and engage in intimate relationships.

### **Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) among Peers**

The study highlighted the potential occurrence of dissociative identity disorder (DID) among women survivors who experienced severe trauma like rape. DID manifests as a detachment from one's sense of self, memory loss, and the presence of distinct personality states. Dissociation can act as a coping mechanism in response to overwhelming trauma, allowing individuals to compartmentalize and manage distressing experiences. It serves as a psychological defence mechanism and can develop as a response to severe trauma, providing a means for the mind to handle overwhelming experiences.

The study shed light on the significant psychosocial effects of rape on survivors, emphasizing mental health consequences, self-concept disruption, challenges in sexual functioning and relationships, and the potential occurrence of dissociative identity disorder. These findings underscore the critical need for comprehensive support and interventions to address the psychological and emotional well-being of survivors and aid in their healing process.

### **Counselling and Psychological Services**

The study emphasized the importance of trauma-focused counselling and support groups in helping survivors cope with the emotional and psychological aftermath of rape. Trauma-focused counselling, utilizing evidence-based approaches like Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), was identified as a crucial therapeutic intervention. These approaches have been proven effective in reducing trauma-related symptoms, aligning with recommendations by Resick et al. (2017) and Matsakis (2013).

### **Medical Approach**

The research highlighted the significance of immediate medical care, including forensic examinations, to ensure survivors' physical well-being. Prompt treatment of life-threatening injuries and compassionate, trauma-informed care were recommended. Additionally, waiving medical fees and providing necessary tests and treatments were deemed essential. Immediate medical attention was seen as crucial for physical recovery and legal proceedings, consistent with Campbell et al. (2012).

### **Systematic Level (Laws and Institutions)**

The study underscored the importance of legal frameworks and supportive institutions in addressing the psychosocial effects of rape. Legal provisions criminalizing rape, ensuring survivor protection, and providing access to justice were emphasized. Strong legal frameworks were seen as a deterrent and an avenue for survivors to seek justice, aligning with findings by Krahe et al. (2018). Moreover, the role of specialized units and ongoing training for staff in gender-based violence units was recognized.

### **Structural Level (Law Enforcement)**

The research emphasized the crucial role of law enforcement in providing survivor support, justice, and prevention through effective response and sensitivity. Prompt and effective response in investigating cases, collecting evidence, and

apprehending perpetrators were identified as vital for survivors to receive justice and support. Training law enforcement personnel to handle rape cases with empathy and understanding of survivors' unique needs was recommended, consistent with DeGue et al. (2018).

The study outlined multifaceted interventions, spanning counselling, medical care, legal frameworks, and law enforcement, to reduce the psychosocial effects of rape on survivors. These interventions aim to address the emotional, physical, and legal consequences of rape and are crucial for survivors' healing, empowerment, and overall well-being.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

The study on rape survivors in Ramadhani Ward, Njombe Town Council revealed the profound and extensive impact of rape, encompassing mental health challenges, strained relationships, disruptions in self-concept, sexual difficulties, and potential dissociative symptoms. Addressing vulnerability factors like age, socio-economic status, social ties, and community context is vital. Comprehensive interventions, including trauma-informed counselling, support services, and targeted policies, are crucial for survivors' healing and empowerment. The serious psychosocial effects of rape encompass physical harm, trauma, emotional distress, and societal issues, necessitating urgent and empathetic responses, such as counselling and medical support. Training and updating personnel in gender-based violence units are crucial for efficient remedies and survivor care.

### Recommendations

The research study advocates for community-wide awareness campaigns and educational programs to address the circumstances and effects of rape on women survivors. It emphasizes promoting gender equality, challenging harmful gender norms, and ensuring accessible, confidential, and culturally sensitive support services. Collaboration among stakeholders is encouraged to establish coordinated response mechanisms, and the Tanzanian government is urged to strengthen legal frameworks and invest in training programs for law enforcement and healthcare professionals. The study also recommends further research and knowledge sharing to enhance understanding and inform evidence-based practices.

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