(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Technology-Triggered Gender-Based Violence (TTGBV) in Zanzibar

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Abstract

This article explores the growing problem of technology-triggered gender-based violence (TTGBV) in Zanzibar, focusing on how digital platforms expose children and young men to harmful content that encourages sexual abuse. While global and national frameworks emphasize the elimination of gender-based violence, institutional gaps in Zanzibar across law enforcement, education, and community structures have left children increasingly vulnerable to online grooming, pornography, and sextortion.

To address this gap, the study applies the Institutionalizing Social Ecological Model (ISEM), which highlights institutions as central actors in either preventing or perpetuating TTGBV. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys with adolescents and interviews with key stakeholders, the research demonstrates that technology not only facilitates abuse but also triggers children and young men to engage in sexual acts. The findings show that institutional weaknesses amplify these risks, making TTGBV both a digital and structural problem.

The article concludes by recommending urgent reforms in law, education, parental engagement, and survivor-centered services. By reframing TTGBV as an institutional challenge driven by technology, this study contributes new insights for safeguarding children's digital and offline lives in Zanzibar.

Keywords: Children; Community; Institutions; Society; Youth

1. Introduction

The spread of mobile phones, internet and social media has transformed communication among young people in Zanzibar, providing opportunities for learning, connection, and self-expression. These same technologies have been adopted across the country without cutting edge knowledge required for prevention and response. Increasingly, children, especially adolescent boys and girls, run the risks of being exposed to mature content, online grooming, sexual extortion and cyberbullying. Unlike traditional GBV, these violations often transcend physical spaces, leaving victims exposed both online and offline.

Despite rising complaints, responses remain fragmented. Institutions such as schools, police, courts, and NGOs struggle with limited digital literacy, outdated laws, and cultural norms that discourage reporting. This article investigates these dynamics through a modified Social Ecological Model that foregrounds the institutional role in mediating children's vulnerability to technology-triggered gender-based violence (TTGBV).

1.1. Background

For years, women and girls in Zanzibar have been subjected to deeply entrenched marginalization and systemic gender inequality. They have faced severe restrictions on mobility, limited access to justice, and frequent exposure to gender-

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based violence (GBV), often perpetrated with impunity. Social norms have traditionally reinforced the role of men as breadwinners, while boys were expected to follow in their fathers' footsteps, perpetuating patriarchal control.

Until 2011, convictions for GBV in Zanzibar were almost nonexistent with only one or two cases concluded per year, representing close to 0% of the conviction rate (United Republic of Tanzania, 2011 p.2). This was due in part to severe underreporting, as well as the normalization and trivialization of GBV by law enforcement agencies. The legal framework at the time was also unfriendly to survivors. For example, the Evidence Act of 1961 required corroborative evidence in rape cases, including testimony from at least four witnesses. Meanwhile, the Criminal Procedure Act of 2008 limited sentencing jurisdiction for Primary and Secondary Courts to a mere five and seven years, respectively.

A shift began with sustained advocacy and awareness efforts, primarily led by the Tanzania Media Women's Association – Zanzibar (TAMWA-ZNZ), in collaboration with other gender and human rights organizations. These efforts catalyzed a series of legal reforms aimed at addressing GBV and violence against children (VAC). Notable reforms include:

The Spinster and Single Parent Children Protection Act of 2005, which repealed the regressive Spinster, Widows, and Female Divorcee Protection Act No. 4 of 1985. The previous law had criminalized pregnancy outside wedlock and forced pregnant girls to drop out of school.

- The Evidence Act No. 9 of 2016, which now permits circumstantial evidence and the testimony of a single witness including a child in GBV cases.
- The Kadhi's Act No. 9 of 2017, which allows for recognition of matrimonial property division during divorce proceedings.
- The Criminal Procedure Act No. 7 of 2018, which extended sentencing powers in rape cases to primary and regional courts.
- The Penal Act No. 6 of 2018, which classified rape and gang rape as non-bailable offences and provided for a prison sentence of up to 30 years.

These reforms have led to a significant increase in GBV convictions. A notable turning point occurred in 2013, when the conviction rate rose to at least 1% (Ali, 2016 p.122). More recently, the Office of the Chief Government Statistician (OCGS) has played a key role in strengthening GBV monitoring through regular data updates. In 2024 alone, a total of 1,809 GBV cases were officially reported, of which 1,525 cases (84.3%) involved children. Among these child survivors, 82.3% were girls, with the most common offenses being rape, indecent assault, abduction, and unnatural sexual acts. The overall conviction rate albeit fluctuates, it stands between 16 to 19%.

Table 1 The trend of GBV cases, conviction rates and age group of interns serving jail sentences from 2022 to 2024.

YEAR	TOTAL REPORTED GBV CASES	CONVICTION RATE	% of Conviction	AGE 15-17	AGE 18-29	AGE 30-39	AGE 40-49	AGE 50+
2022	1,360	181	13.3	05	45	32	14	7
2023	1,954	374	19.1	02	69	27	11	2
2024	1,809	290	16.0	00	32	43	21	20

Source: OCGS

Despite the gains, GBV remains widespread, raising a critical question: Why does violence persist despite legal reforms, policy changes, and growing awareness? A particularly concerning trend is the age group of convicted perpetrators, with the majority falling between 19 and 35 years. While other factors such as power, influence, or systemic weaknesses may contribute to the problem, these lie beyond the focus of this study.

This research aims to explore a new and pressing concern: the increasing use of mobile technology among young men, particularly in Wi-Fi accessed spaces across Zanzibar. It seeks to understand whether mobile phone usage and internet access may be enabling or reinforcing harmful behaviors that contribute to GBV.

By examining this dimension, the study is not only addressing a potential trigger of GBV but also seeking to inform preventive strategies with the dual goal of protecting young men from falling into the trap of committing such acts, and supporting efforts to build a safer, more equitable society for all.

1.2. General Objective

To assess the underlying factors contributing to the involvement of young men and boys in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Zanzibar, with a particular focus on technology triggered GBV, and to explore educational and advocacy strategies for prevention.

1.3. Specific Objectives

- To evaluate the role of social media, pornography, and other online platforms in influencing children's and youths' engagement in TTGBV.
- To analyze family, community, and institutional factors that shape children's vulnerability to TTGBV.
- To identify gaps in existing laws, policies, and institutional responses related to TT GBV in Zanzibar.
- To propose educational, advocacy, and institutional reforms to prevent and respond to TTGBV against children.

1.4. Conceptualization of key terms:

Followings are conceptualization of key terms explaining their meaning and demarcation according to the context of the article.

1.4.1. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) & Violence Against Children (VAC)

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether occurring in public or private life United Nations Population Fund. (2025). Violence Against Children (VAC), on the other hand, refers to *any act of violence committed against a child under the age of 18, whether a boy or a girl*. In this article, the terms GBV and VAC will be used interchangeably, as both encompass forms of violence rooted in power imbalance and gendered vulnerability.

Clarifying Key Terms: TTGBV vs TFGBV

1.4.2. Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV):

Any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified using information and communication technologies (ICTs) or other digital tools, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms. Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI). (2022).

1.4.3. Technology-Triggered Gender-Based Violence (TTGBV)

This study introduces TTGBV as a new, distinct concept. Unlike TFGBV, which can exist through technology at any time, TTGBV specifically refers to incidents of GBV that are directly initiated or triggered by technology, highlighting the role of digital platforms in sparking or escalating violent behavior.

1.4.4. Key distinction

While TFGBV is well-documented, this study focuses on TTGBV to shed light on how technology can provoke GBV, rather than merely facilitate it. TFGBV is cited in references for context, but TTGBV is the core analytical focus.

1.5. International, Regional, and National Protocols and Strategies Governing GBV, VAC, and TFGBV

1.5.1. International & Regional Frameworks

Globally, several international instruments provide a strong legal and normative basis for combating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Violence Against Children (VAC).

Common is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) which obligates State Parties to adopt legal, policy, and institutional reforms to address all forms of violence and discrimination against women. Article 2: ask states to condemn discrimination and pursue all appropriate means to eliminate it, including legislative and policy measures and article 5 to modify social and cultural patterns that perpetuate stereotypes and discriminatory practices, which are often at the root of GBV.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) also provides strong protection against violence, particularly for girls and other vulnerable children. Key provisions include Article 19 which requires States to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect children from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse."

These global instruments are reinforced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which explicitly call for the elimination of violence, exploitation, and abuse against women and children.

At the regional level, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1990) safeguards African children from all forms of exploitation and abuse (African Union, 1990).

1.5.2. National Frameworks (Tanzania and Zanzibar)

Tanzania has domesticated many of these obligations through a combination of legal and policy instruments. The Cybercrimes Act, 2015 criminalizes child pornography, cyberbullying, publication of illicit sexual content, and misuse of ICT platforms, making it one of the first national laws to directly address elements of Technology-Facilitated GBV (United Republic of Tanzania, 2015). While the Cybercrimes Act, 2015 criminalizes technology-facilitated GBV, it is weak in preventing young men and boys from engaging in such crimes because it lacks preventive, educational, and gender-sensitive approaches. It focuses on punishment rather than addressing the root causes such as harmful masculinities, peer influence, lack of digital literacy, and early exposure to online violence-supportive content.

In Zanzibar specifically,

it has enacted Children's Act no 6 of 2011 and had just finalized implementation of its Action plan 2017 – 2022 adopted fully integrated approach recognizing the intersections between violence against women and violence against children building a coordinated national system to both prevent and respond to these forms of violence. However, as technology evolves, these two documents lack explicit attention to tech-triggered forms of violence highlight an important gap intervention.

2. Literature review and Theoretical Framework

This section presents the existing body of knowledge on Technology-Facilitated and Technology-Triggered Gender-Based Violence (TF-GBV and TT-GBV), highlighting global, regional, and national perspectives. It further introduces the Institutionalizing Social Ecological Model (ISEM) as the guiding theoretical framework for understanding the multi-layered influences shaping TTGBV in Zanzibar.

2.1. Literature review

Largely, Technology-Facilitated GBV is one of the areas that has been understudied, especially in the developing countries not alone the Technology Triggered GBV. Most of the existing literature focuses on the threat or sharing of pictures, audio, or video online without consent. Technology as a potential trigger for GBV, particularly among youth, remains a rare subject in literature. At the global level, the Australian Royal Commission (2025) found that 57% of young adults had experienced strangulation during sex, and over a third discovered this behavior through pornography. The report explicitly links these behaviors to the influence of misogynist online content and communities. While there is currently limited discourse or lecture explicitly framing technology as a "trigger" for sexual abuse by young men, this evidence underscores how online sexual cultures, distorted by misogyny and violence, can indirectly fuel abusive behaviors.

In the Global South, there is a glaring absence of robust mechanisms to systematically track, regulate, and respond to TT-GBV. Women and girls are the most affected group, often experiencing a continuum of abuse ranging from online harassment and cyberstalking to image-based sexual exploitation (Alangea et al., 2020; Choudhury, Barua, & Bhattacharya, 2023; UNFPA, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

Choudhury, Barua, and Bhattacharya (2023), in their scoping review of 97 studies across low- and middle-income countries in Asia, emphasize that digital violence disproportionately targets adolescent girls and young women, who often lack the digital literacy and protective knowledge necessary to safeguard their online information. The authors argue that weak institutional protections, coupled with ambiguous or outdated legal definitions of TF-GBV, leave survivors with minimal recourse. Importantly, they highlight that reporting is systematically undermined by stigma, fear of retaliation, and entrenched patriarchal power structures that silence victims while shielding perpetrators. Their review also observes that while the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated internet penetration and digital engagement, it simultaneously intensified exposure to TF-GBV, creating a "double burden" the digital space, while opening new opportunities for youth, also becoming a site of compounded violence.

UNFPA (2024) extends this analysis to the global scale, documenting that 58% of adolescent girls worldwide report experiencing some form of online harassment, with image-based abuse and cyberbullying emerging as the most prevalent forms. The agency underscores that the psychological toll is severe, including anxiety, depression, and in some cases, suicidal ideation, yet survivors often lack access to survivor-centered support systems. UNFPA's global framework *Making All Spaces Safe* further warns that TF-GBV is frequently under-recognized in national legal systems, with most countries relying on outdated cybercrime provisions that fail to capture the gendered nature of digital harms.

At the Tanzanian level, Technology and Media Convergence (2023) in its study titled Online Gender-Based Violence in the Eyes of Journalism found that 16% of respondents had experienced Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), while 19% were unsure. Among female journalists who had faced such abuse, only 11% reported it to the appropriate authorities, citing fear of stigma and lack of institutional support.

Further, the World Bank (2022) report on Tanzania highlights the structural and institutional gaps in addressing GBV across the country, including limited mechanisms for monitoring and responding to both offline and technology-facilitated forms of violence. The assessment notes that while legal frameworks exist, enforcement is weak, coordination among government agencies and civil society is inconsistent, and resources for survivors are inadequate. These gaps mirror the challenges observed in TF-GBV, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions, including digital literacy initiatives, survivor-centered support, and updated legal protections.

UNFPA (2023) raised an urgent call to action after high-profile cases in Zanzibar revealed how adolescent girl's private images were stolen and circulated without consent, often leading to social ostracization rather than institutional redress. Addressing a crowd of participants in the 2023 anniversary of 16 Days of Activism, the agency highlighted a policy-implementation gap, noting that while some reporting mechanisms exist, institutional frameworks remain ill-equipped to adapt to digital harms. Weak regulations limit digital literacy among youth, and cultural secrecy further constrain justice pathways, leaving survivors exposed to both online and offline reprisals.

2.2. Theoretical Framework: Institutionalizing Social Ecological Model (ISEM)

This study is grounded in the theory of the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM). This model recognizes that our actions as individuals are deeply embedded in the society in which we live, and that for lasting change to happen, this ecology of actors must go through the same rigor of transformation (Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). Barnes, 1997; Fulu & Miedema, 2015 & Courage to Act Foundation,2022) SEM believes that violence is not the product of individual pathology alone but is a multi-level system of influence. A system of human development extends beyond a dyad and includes larger interpersonal structures triads, tetrads, and beyond. The effectiveness of the dyad (e.g., parent-child) critically depends on the presence and supportive participation of third parties such as relatives, friends, and neighbors. If these actors are absent or disruptive, the developmental process breaks down, much like a three-legged stool that is unstable if one leg is broken or shorter than the others" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.5) This makes it particularly relevant for understanding Technology-Triggered Gender-Based Violence (TTGBV), where harm arises from the interplay of personal digital practices, societal norms & values and peer dynamics.

However, in the context of Zanzibar, the SEM requires modification to apply effectively. Existing models tend to subsume institutions within either the community or societal level understanding its importance in prevention, perpetuation and prosecution. When examining TTGBV, institutions including law enforcement agencies and media play a distinct and central role. They can act as protectors, enablers, or silencers of violence, and their absence or dysfunction creates a vacuum that perpetrators exploit.

To capture this dynamic, this article proposes the Institutionalizing Social Ecological Model (ISEM), which embeds *institutions* as a distinct analytical layer situated between the relationship and community levels. The ISEM therefore consists of five interrelated levels:

- Individual level – Youth experience in GBV, youth involvement.
- Relationship level – Youth relationship at home, peer pressure, school, internet, school and media
- Community level – Collective parenting systems Utilizing Communal meetings, Communal elders, Mosques and Community networks.
- Societal level – Cultural norms and values (muhali), shared places where GBV is committed and key players on the fight.
- Institutional level –formal enforcement mechanisms such as policy and legal frameworks, regular programing and communication to ensure protection, prevention, participation and response.

By institutionalizing SEM, the model highlights how institutional (in)action is not merely an outcome of community or societal forces but an active determinant of children's vulnerability to TTGBV. For example, when police lack capacity to investigate cyber-harassment, or when schools fail to teach digital safety, institutions amplify risk rather than reduce it. Conversely, effective institutions can disrupt cycles of harm by providing survivor-centered support and ensuring accountability.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative study that employs a variety of methods to collect preliminary data including questionnaires, interviews and document review. These participants were selected through a purposive sampling method, used by TAMWA, ZNZ in 2022 and modified in 2025 especially on review of documents and interviews with grass root networks.

3.1. Use of Questionnaires

The main tool used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaires were designed using clear and unambiguous language to ensure that participants could understand and respond effectively. A combination of closed-ended questions (yes/no answers) and open-ended questions (requiring detailed responses) was used.

To ensure representativeness, Cochran's formula was applied normally suitable for large or unknown population.

$$e = \sqrt{(Z^2 * p * (1 - p)) / n}$$

- Margin of error ≈ ±5.69% at 95% confidence
- Sample summary and allocation
- Total completed questionnaires: 297
- Reported precision (margin of error): ±5.7% at 95% confidence (p = 0.5)
- Youth: 198 (66.0%; 113 male and 85 female). Parents: 66 (22.2%) and Community coordinators: 33 (11.1%)

3.2. Key Informant Interviews

The study involved grass root network members for both Unguja and Pemba to demonstrate their experience the grass root interventions on TTGBV. Grass root network being community activists are oriented on mirage of activities in their communities in a bid to both prevent and respond GBV and hence TTGBV. Some 10 grass root network members were therefore on board in the survey. This is complemented by document review inherent in the fight against TTGBV.

4. Analysis of Data and Findings:

This section analyzes data collected through questionnaires and interviews with youths, elders, Shehia coordinators, and Shehas. All statistics below are preserved exactly as reported in the Swahili source and organized under the ecological model.

4.1. Individual Level

This explains the individual level of the ISEM including the knowledge of the youth in reporting and factors contributing to youth involvement in TTGBV.

4.1.1. The level of reporting abusive cases in the previous years:

The study revealed that out of the 198 youth respondents, 66 (33%) indicated that cases of abuse and violence were not reported in previous years. About 26% stated that there was no awareness or sensitization at the time, while 23% mentioned that such cases were reported only occasionally. Meanwhile, 8% of respondents noted that it was considered a taboo to report these matters. These findings suggest that reporting of such issues has increased in recent years due to community sensitization and the establishment of justice-seeking mechanisms. Previous underreporting was largely associated with limited awareness and cultural barriers, consistent with prior studies showing that awareness campaigns and legal reforms significantly influence community willingness to report gender-based violence (UN Women, 2020; Jewkes et al., 2015).

The low level of awareness in earlier years contributed to the underreporting of these cases, as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 2 Youth Responses on the Reporting of Abuse and Violence in Previous Years (N = 198)

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cases were not reported	73	37%
There was no awareness/sensitization	57	29%
Cases were reported occasionally	50	25%
Reporting was considered taboo	18	9%
Total	198	100%

Parents by 84% said these incidents were not reported due to lack of sensitizatin programes. Amid the awareness campaign through media and community resource persons people have realized that it no langer a taboo to disclose sexual violence and that this is the only way to shun away perpetrators ' said Ms Amria Haji of Magomeni, Unguja'.

4.1.2. Factors Contributing to Male Youth Involvement in Acts of Abuse

Respondents were asked to choose three factors commonly attributed to the increased involvement of GBV by young men. These factors were lack of education, poverty, access to internet, peer pressure, freedom, seduction from girls and others. The study found that approximately 50% of respondents including 17% parents, 23% youth, 10% community coordinators acknowledged that internet access is the leading factor influencing male youth to engage in acts of abuse. This is primarily linked to the misuse of social media platforms and mobile phones. The newspaper *Mwananchi* (Wednesday, May 4, 2017), in its article *"How Globalization Brings Negative Changes,"* critically examined how young people have become deeply immersed in the misuse of digital technologies, highlighting the urgent role of parents and the state in safeguarding society.

Excessive freedom was cited as the second most significant factor at 21% where desires among young women often encourage male youth to exploit and manipulate them, leading to acts of abuse. Medical professionals also associate this trend with psychological challenges, as many young men devote substantial time to sexual thoughts rather than focusing on more constructive issues. This tendency places male youth in situations where they are more likely to pursue exploitative sexual behavior by any means.

Figure 1 In the picture are some of young men and boys gathered in wifi accessed places to use the service at their discretion

Studies in Kenya and Uganda highlighted that digital technologies, while offering opportunities for learning and connection, have also opened avenues for online grooming, exposure to pornography, and peer pressure that normalize exploitative behaviors (Ndunda, 2020; UNICEF, 2021). Globally, the trend is echoed in evidence from both developed and developing contexts, where globalization and the digital revolution, if not balanced with education and regulation, heighten young people's vulnerability to sexual risks and abusive practices (Byrne & Burton, 2017 p.44). The third factor was lack of education at 16% where youth use the internet with limited knowledge of what to take and what not take.

In Mjini Ole Shehia, a 12-year-old girl in the sixth grade was raped by her 23-year-old biological brother. Although the mother discovered this, she forbade all her children from talking about the matter to anyone. The family relocated the young man to Tanga region, Tanzania Mainland where the mother emphasized to the relatives there to take good care of her. The affected child was unable to continue her studies, as her mother withdrew her from school.

4.2. Relationship Level

This discerns the relationship of youth with actors and places essential on TTGBV. It ranges from parents who raised them and places associated with them.

4.2.1. The role of family members in guiding boys and young men

At the relationship level, the Social Ecological Model emphasizes the influence of close interpersonal interactions, particularly family members, peers, and immediate community figures, on shaping behavior. The data presented in Table 2 demonstrates that parental and familial roles were central to preventing youth from engaging in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the past.

When items (i) parents talking to young men, (ii) female parents educating girls on self-protection, and (iii) parents forbidding their children from committing abuse are combined, they form the variable *"Parents educating their young men."* This combined factor accounted for a large proportion of responses across groups: 57 youth (29%), 31 parents (47%) and 25 shehia coordinators (76%) recognized that parents have a great role in educating and guiding their children. This highlights the critical role of parental guidance in shaping norms and preventing deviant behavior.

Another prominent factor was the role of the media (15% among shehia coordinators, 7% among parents, and 6% among youth. Similarly, the proportion of respondents reporting that *no action was taken* was notable among youth (14%) and parents (4%), which reflects potential gaps in structured interventions within families and communities.

This analysis suggests that strong parental engagement serves as a protective factor against youth involvement in GBV, echoing findings in broader literature where parental monitoring, open communication, and value-based guidance reduce the likelihood of risky or violent behavior among adolescents (Knerr, Gardner, & Cluver, 2013; Jewkes et al., 2015 Byrne, J., & Burton, P. 2017). By focusing at the relationship level, it is evident that familial structures in Zanzibar played a pivotal role in mitigating GBV risks in the past, although reliance solely on parents without systemic support may leave gaps when parental capacity is limited. The generation gap is persistent mostly in rural areas. Parents are less likely to be online, and children rarely seek assistance from parents to learn how to navigate the Internet Byrne, J., & Burton, P. 2017 p.45.

4.2.2. Places where young men most often gain knowledge from

On the other hand, young men when asked about the current situation, they revealed that most of their knowledge comes from peer pressure at 35% followed by internet access 31 %, home contributes to 12%, schools at 11% and media 9 %.
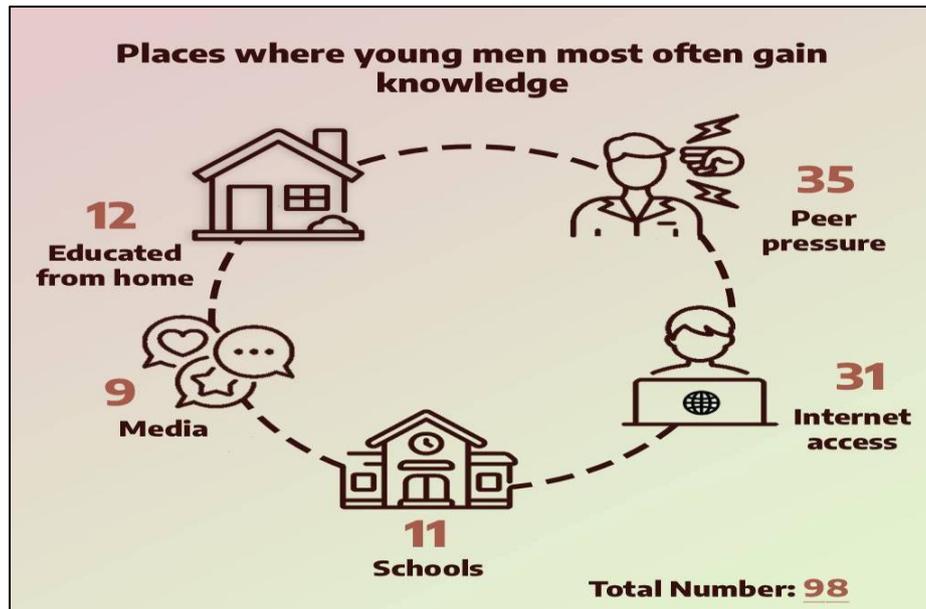
Figure 2 Places where young men gain knowledge from

The findings reveal a concerning trend in how young men acquire knowledge related to social and behavioral issues. A significant proportion (35%) attributed their main source of influence to peer pressure. This highlights the central role of friends and social groups in shaping attitudes and behaviors. Peer influence, while common during adolescence, often increases the likelihood of risky behaviors when not moderated by parental or institutional guidance.

The internet (31%) emerged as the second major source, underscoring the growing role of digital spaces in information acquisition. While online platforms can be beneficial for learning, unregulated exposure frequently leads to misinformation and the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). For young girls, the internet emerged third at 20% slightly higher than peer pressure. This finding is relevant to what Livingstone & Helsper, 2007 p.11 found that girls reach a plateau at around 6 or 7 opportunities while boys continue to expand their online opportunities until they reach a plateau by the age of 16-17 years. The present fall-off in girls' opportunities fits feminist theories of adolescent development, pointing to a gendered culture and expectations that disadvantages teenage girls.

Only 12% of the young men cited home education as their primary source of knowledge. This comparatively low figure signals a weakening of family influence, which research shows is critical for early value formation and moral guidance (Collins & Laursen, 2004).

"As a sister, I noticed my young brother could spend the whole day sitting at the corner of our house, looking at his mobile phone. Whenever I approached him, he quickly closed it and denied doing anything unusual, though he looked nervous. At times, he even appeared physically uneasy, struggling to hide his arousal. With time, I came to realize that he was always watching pornographic videos. That explained his secrecy and discomfort. This made me understand how easily the internet can influence young men and push them into these habits." *Samhat Ali, Bububu, Unguja Urban West.*

Her testimony strongly connects with the observation of the Chairperson of the Grassroots Network from Pemba South that most parents rarely sit with their sons to openly discuss the dangers of internet use. Home-based education about such issues remains very rare, and only a few knowledgeable families have the ability and courage to approach their young men and speak openly about the aftermath of harmful online practices. "These days, many parents have become like the ones being guided by their children when it comes to using the internet and especially smart phones. In some families, young people even use the phone as if it were family television. Because of this, it is not common to see parents sitting with their sons to explain the negative effects of internet use. Instead, it is often the youth who teach their parents how to use social media". This has created a gap, because the responsibility of guiding young people on the dangers of the internet such as addiction, harmful content, and health impacts is left unfulfilled.

4.2.3. Places where young women most often gain knowledge from:

Contrastingly, girls presented the highest score in this category at 31% reported being educated at home, indicating that family remains the most significant influence on their knowledge and behavior. This suggests that parental guidance, especially from mothers and female relatives, continues to play a central role in shaping girls' values and understanding. It also reflects cultural expectations where families, particularly in traditional settings, assume greater responsibility for educating girls at home (Collins & Laursen, 2004, pp. 344–348).

Schools (11%) and the media (9%) ranked lowest, despite their potential to serve as structured and authoritative platforms for knowledge dissemination. This limited role of formal education and mass media reflects institutional gaps in addressing youth needs, particularly regarding gender and social behavior (UNESCO, 2019).

Taken together, these results illustrate that young men are increasingly shaped by external, and sometimes unreliable, sources of knowledge rather than family and institutional structures. This is despite the earlier assurance that parents educate their young men. The education package does not include TTGBV due to lack of guidelines and awareness among parents who have limited knowledge about internet access to their children. The shift aligns with the Social Ecological Model at the relationship level, showing how peer and digital influences outweigh family and educational systems in determining youth behavior especially on a subject which is not clear to parents. Strengthening family engagement and integrating digital literacy into school curricula may counteract the dominance of peer and online influences.

4.3. Community level:

This looks at the communities and how prepared they are in addressing issues of TTGBV to young people. It highlights the exposure also of the young people to their community initiatives.

4.3.1. Educational initiatives on issues of abuse targeting young boys in communities

Out of the 198 youth, 87 (43%) acknowledged that efforts are being made to educate young men to recognize issues of abuse in their communities, while 72 (36%) reported that such education has not yet reached their areas. Those who confirmed the existence of such initiatives stated that education is delivered through community meetings, religious gatherings, and anti-abuse committees at the *shehia* level, in collaboration with Shehia coordinators and grass root networks. These efforts were evident across all districts of Unguja and Pemba.

The study found 82 equal to 72.5% of the young men connected to community organizations such as community meetings, communal elders, community networks and Mosques. This shows that there are structures in the communities that community educators can leverage on. However, in some communities, these have been used already with the example of Unguja South at Jambiani and Kajengwa. Jambiani has a tourism training college for the residents, and the people of Jambiani and nearby areas use the students to advise others on the proper use of social media to prevent harassment. "This is the same with Kajengwa which promote education in their shehia by providing young people with training on the proper use of social media to prevent harassment" said the grass root network leader.

When evaluating the Dorchester CARES Project, a child abuses prevention programme in Boston, Massachusetts, and applying the Social Ecological Model, Barnes (1995, p. 19) found that social networks not only increased people's knowledge and use of available services but also enabled them to apply that knowledge. Harmful behaviors—such as the use of harsh physical discipline with children were reduced ($r = -0.25$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that community attachment and supportive social networks function as protective factors, helping individuals manage stress and avoid abusive practices. By extension, in addressing Technology-Facilitated GBV, strengthening community ties can serve a similar protective function: increasing awareness and digital literacy, reinforcing pro-social norms and peer accountability, and reducing the likelihood that young men will download and consume inappropriate content that can trigger or escalate into abusive acts.

4.4. Society Level

The society was screened on where exactly cultivate this act of TTGBV and the cultural perspective embedded in.

4.4.1. Context in which Youth/Teenagers committing GBV practices are normally obtained:
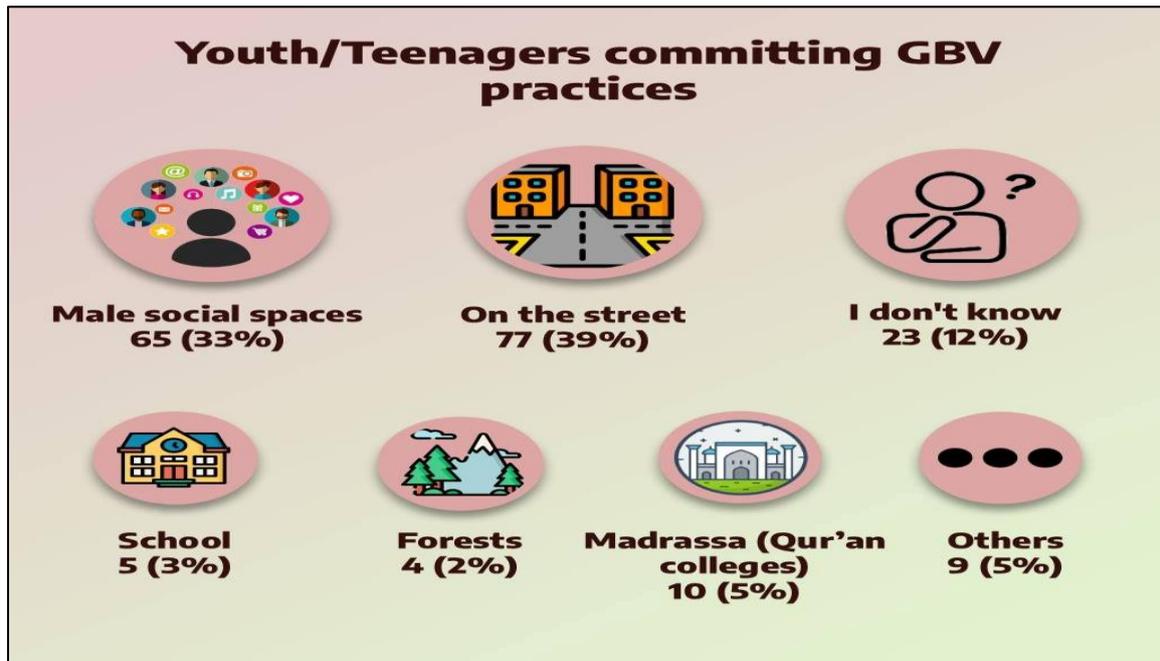

Figure 3 Context in which youth commit GBV from

Public spaces commonly known as maskan dominate: Most of the young men report "on the street" (39%) and "male social spaces" (33%) as the main contexts where GBV occurs. This suggests that informal, public, or peer-dominated environments provide opportunities for such behaviors. Peer influence, lack of supervision, and exposure to social norms that tolerate aggression may play a role here. Male social spaces were also mentioned by parents at 42% saying the spaces are misused to plan or perpetrate harassment. "When investigating nature of crimes, you realize that these spaces are the used to discuss and design criminal activities especially on GBV and sometimes it descends to gang rapes", said one of the parents in Kijini, Makunduchi, Unguja south.

4.4.2. Cultural values and norms

One of the serious challenges fueling increased GBV cases in Zanzibar is the culture of secrecy (muhali). This tradition, deeply rooted in family honor and community reputation, discourages victims and their families from reporting cases, even when there is strong evidence. Grassroots networks have observed that sometimes cases are watertight, yet families either refuse to report or decide to withdraw at the final stages of investigation.

In the context of TTGBV, this culture of silence has several negative implications including perpetuation of impunity, normalization of abuse, erosion of trust in justice systems, reinforcement of gender inequality and barrier to awareness and prevention. "A 13-year-old child was subjected to abuse early this year, 2025 and her father came to seek advice from my people of which we convinced to report the claim to the police force", said the grass root network leader from Unguja North. Capitalized on that was the Pemba North Grass Root leader who said it takes them months to convince families to report the claims and only to ask for withdrawal when it reaches higher level especially at the Director of Public Prosecutor (DPP) or Court. Thus, *muhali* undermines the fight against technology-triggered GBV by shielding perpetrators, silencing victims, and weakening institutional responses.

4.5. Institutional Level

This part exhibits the level of which institutions prevent TTGBV, respond and gaps that still exist in the current reality.

4.5.1. Prevention side with the example of awareness raising:

The data shows that there are no structured programs to educate young men and women about Technology triggered GBV. The country therefore relies on adhoc programs rendered by both state and non-state actors. This shows lack of effort in the matter hence risks negative repercussions. According to Activists from Grass root networks awareness information is issued by relevant organizations such as Union for Youth Development in Unguja North, Grass root networks, Paralegal Associations, Union for Women Development in Unguja North and TAMWA, ZNZ. The use of a

channel, especially the media, is very useful because the media is always very influential and its impact is unprecedented. Wanyande as quoted by Kweyamba maintains that media are public oriented and can reach a wider audience or cause messages to reach a wider audience than any other form of communication. Grass root network Leaders have associated much of the changes with the improved awareness from the media houses. "Community Radios and Correspondents have played major role on changing community mindsets about GBV and TFGBV through their call-in programs aired on regular basis", said a grass root network Leader from Pemba North. The impact of the media is clearly seen when they focus on the same issue, frame in a similar way (consonance) and if they do so with perseverance (Walgrave (2004) p.8). However, the media programs by many actors including TAMWA, ZNZ depend on the mercy of donors and therefore offered only when there is fund and when there is no fund, the subject is not discussed. Media houses themselves have not been empowered enough to shoulder responsibility by offering special programs or articles on the matter on a regular basis.

4.5.2. TTGBV response

Reporting and Actions improvement: Gone were the days when GBV were committed with impunity. Due to awareness raised and legal changes, claims are reported and prosecuted. The data indicates the conviction rate is at 16% on average tracking from 2022. This was the result of the establishment of special courts, gender desks within the police force, fast tracking of GBV within the court system and office of DPP and increased awareness of reporting. Others are changes of laws and release of GBV reports on regular basis by the Office of the Government Statistician.

4.5.3. Gaps which still exist

The conviction rate is still low

Factors contributed to low rate of conviction are twofold, underreporting and gaps within the law enforcement agencies. Underreporting is defined in the culture of silence, stigma and fear of retribution while at the institutional level; culture of trivialization, favoritism and corruption are the most rampant.

Data gap

The national data provides data of the GBV, age of perpetrators, convictions and even adopted persons with disabilities. The data however, does not show about the reach out programs to youth who are at risk and the behavior of those who have been released from jail sentences. In the TTGBV, the data is completely missing in the country reports.

Policy and legal guidance

Currently, Zanzibar does not have a specific policy framework that directly guides young men and women on the responsible use of digital information and communication technologies. While there are general ICT strategies and legal provisions such as the Zanzibar ICT Policy (2016) and aspects of the Penal Act (2018) that touch on cybercrime, data protection, and online ethics, these are not tailored to address the unique vulnerabilities and opportunities facing young people in the digital age. Mitchell & Wells, 2007; Rice et al., 2012 Livingstone, S., & Smith, P. K. (2014 put it although the relations among online and offline risks are not fully explored, offline risk, risk-taking or victimization have an online dimension which should be considered when addressing the problem. It is important not to overreact to cases of online risk of harm by simply removing the child's access to the internet or mobile phone. Not only will many children not report the online dimension of a problem for fear of losing their phone or computer but also those same technologies may be a source of private information, social support or other help to the child even as it brings risks (Livingstone, S., & Smith, P. K. 2014. p.647).

In practice, this policy gap means that many young men and women access and use digital information without clear guidelines on issues such as digital literacy, online safety, responsible social media use, rights, cyberbullying, and protection from technology-triggered gender-based violence. Young people therefore remain exposed to misinformation, harmful online content, exploitation, and privacy risks. Most African countries including Algeria, Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Southern Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda treat privacy laws as general provisions, without considering the unique vulnerabilities faced by children in the digital environment. Laws lack explicit provisions tailored to specific needs in the online space for children and young men (Child Protection and Safety Online in Africa, 2025, p 34). The report indicated Tanzania runs a risk due to high digital illiteracy rates with limited and inadequate capacities in enforcing rights in the online spaces.

Yet some countries are ahead of others with the example of Rwanda which buttressed its Child Online Protection Policy of 2019 with the Ministerial order in 2024 outlining obligations of service providers in protecting children online. The Order aims to promote the safety and protection of children while accessing online content, to protect them against

harmful content and to raise awareness about parental control over child online activities and content filtering tools. The scope of application of the Order is wide as it extends to people or organizations who broadcast or provide content online or provide access to online content (Ibid Child Protection and Safety Online in Africa p.14).

On GBV in general in Zanzibar, the response has improved vividly shown in the fast tracking of the cases through DPP and the Court. The grass root network Leader in Pemba south for example said, DPP officials have been accompanying the network to the field training families on the importance of taking legal actions. Members however mentioned that corruption and favoritism continue to eat the systems in the sector especially when involving people with high profile connections and money. The level of GBV awareness and response can be translated into TTGBV. Much as individuals and families must be blamed but as Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) put it basic science needs public policy even more than public policy needs basic science.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This section presents the key conclusions drawn from the study and outlines actionable recommendations to address Technology-Triggered Gender-Based Violence (TTGBV) against children in Zanzibar. It emphasizes institutional accountability, legal reform, digital literacy, and collaborative action as essential pathways toward building safer digital environments for children.

5.1. Conclusions

This study has examined the rising phenomenon of technology-triggered gender-based violence (TTGBV) against children in Zanzibar through the lens of the Institutionalizing Social Ecological Model (ISEM). The findings demonstrate that while children are highly exposed to risks of online grooming, pornography, and sextortion, institutional weaknesses, including slow adaptation of legal frameworks, limited digital literacy, and insufficient survivor-centered services remain central drivers of vulnerability.

The analysis reveals that TTGBV is not simply an individual or family issue, but a structural problem rooted in gaps across education systems, law enforcement, community awareness, and digital governance. Without deliberate institutional action, the gains achieved in GBV prevention over the past decade risk being undermined by new and more complex forms of abuse.

By reframing TTGBV as an institutional challenge, this research highlights the urgent need for coordinated reforms that address both the technological and socio-cultural dimensions of violence against children. The ISEM framework provides a practical entry point for situating children's safety at the intersection of individual behaviors, family practices, community norms, and institutional responses.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions, I recommend the following:

- **Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks**
  - Update existing child protection and GBV laws to explicitly cover TTGBV, including online grooming, sextortion, and cyber-bullying.
  - Ensure alignment with international conventions such as CEDAW, CRC, and the Maputo Protocol, and integrate TF GBV into the implementation of SDGs 5 and 16.
- **Enhance Institutional Capacity**
  - Equip law enforcement, judiciary, and social welfare officers with specialized knowledge and tools to investigate and prosecute TTGBV.
  - Establish survivor-friendly digital reporting and referral mechanisms that ensure confidentiality and timely response.
- **Integrate Digital Literacy and Safeguards in Education**
  - Incorporate age-appropriate digital safety modules into school curricula, focusing on responsible internet use, consent, and online rights.
  - Train teachers and school counselors to recognize early signs of online exploitation and provide guidance to students.

- **Community and Parental Engagement**
  - Develop public campaigns using media and direct communication to raise awareness among parents and guardians about the risks of TTGBV and the importance of digital monitoring and open communication.
  - Strengthen community-based child protection committees to include digital risks in their prevention strategies.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships**
  - Foster collaboration between government, NGOs, academia, and technology companies to create child-safe online spaces.
  - Encourage telecom providers and social media platforms to adopt stronger content moderation, child-safety policies, and reporting systems in the Zanzibar context.
- **Research and Data Systems**
  - Establish a national TTGBV monitoring system to collect, analyze, and disseminate reliable data on the prevalence, patterns, and impact of online abuse.
  - Support further research on the intersection of TTGBV with broader issues such as disability, poverty, and urbanization.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest associated with the conduct or publication of this research.

Statement of Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained through the research and ethics review procedures of Zanzibar University and TAMWA-Zanzibar. All data-collection activities, including questionnaires, interviews, and document review, were conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

Statement of Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Photographs of youth and young boys shared within WiFi-accessed spaces were intentionally blurred to protect their identities.

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