

# Effectiveness of Police Gender Desks in the Protection of the Victims of Gender Based Violence in Tanzania: A Case of Ilemela District

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## ABSTRACT

This study discussed the Effectiveness of Police Gender Desks in the Protection of the Victims of Gender Based Violence in Ilemela District, Tanzania. The study sought to determine if the gender desks were effective since the GBV cases were on the rise. Ilemela district was used as a case study strategy because it has several gender desks and it has a many forms of violence incidences compared to other districts around Mwanza Region. The study used a qualitative approach, where semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion were employed to collect data. Moreover, the study was conducted by using descriptive research design to draw different perception of the participant and used thematic analysis to analyze the obtained information. The study findings reveal that, even though Police Gender desk in Ilemela district was formed to serve women and children, who might not be aware of their rights, either because of ignorance, religion or fear of their community, majority of victims reported to get good services and support from gender desk police officers. Participant interviewed reported that Police gender desk at Ilemela District provides good services to the victim however they had not been effective to prevent and combat women gender based violence due to various challenges which include fear of the women to report the incidences, ignorance, norms, tradition, and religions. The study recommends the Government, NGOs and other stakeholders to provide adequate knowledge to members that help them to disclose their problems hence get assistance.

**Keywords:** Gender-based violence, Police Gender Desks, Victims

## BACKGROUND

Gender-based violence (GBV) or violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a global pandemic that have emotional impact on women in their lifetime. Violence against women is also understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and this means all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in physical harm, sexual harm, psychological, or economic harm, or suffering to women (Ndyamukama, 2016; UNFPA, 2012; UNHCR, 2019). According to Tsapalas et al (2021), Gender-based violence is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender discrimination, and is one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies. Both women and men of Ilemela district experience gender-based violence but the majority of victims are women and girls (UNICEF, 2014).

The report compiled by the USAID Health Policy Initiative (2008), found that many forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, are seen as normal in Tanzania. Domestic violence or intimate partner violence perpetrated against women by their husbands or intimate partners is a significant problem in Tanzania due to this, many girls and boys are also exposed to violence in their homes as well as being exposed to forms of violence against children in their families, schools, and communities (McDougal, 2021; UNHCR, 2019; UNICEF, 2014).

Police Gender desk in Tanzania was first proposed by the Tanzanian Police Female Network (TPFNet), a professional association formed in 2007 that aims at improving the way the police relate to women in the

community (UNFPA, 2016; USAID, 2008). The initiative gained financial and operational support from UNICEF, UN Women organization and the European Union. By 2012, in Tanzania mainland there was a network of 417 desks in police stations across the country (UN Women, 2013; UNICEF, 2014; WHO, 2013). The establishment Police Gender Desk was aimed to respond sensitively and appropriately to women and children who are victims of violence and to improve security of women and children in their domestic and public space (Mwinula, 2006; URT, 2011). Police Gender Desk was formed to ensure that all cases related to gender violence and child abuse were eradicated in societies (Ndyamukama, 2016; USAID, 2008; UNODC, 2010; UNHCR, 2019). According to UNFPA, (2021) nearly half of Tanzanian women under the age of 50 have been physically, emotionally or sexually assaulted, by their partners, relatives, friends or people close to them.

Moreover, Police Gender desk was formed to serve women and children, who might not be aware of their rights, either because of ignorance, religion or fear in the community (Wanjohi, 2016; Nyange and Lyimo, 2017). According to UN, 2006 violence has so many types which include rape, genital mutilation, domestic violence and sexual assault. These are not reported or under-reported due to customs, religions and some other thoughtful reasons (Tanzania Police Female Network, 2018). In most of the African countries, where patriarchy system is mostly practiced men are in a higher position compared to women and children. Tanzania, like any other African countries, still practice traditional customs that put woman and girl child in a lower position. This has led to violence from men's towards women and girl children. Men use violence as a controlling behaviour to their intimate partner habitually prolong to physical punishment to the children as a way of disciplining them (Mathews 2018; Mlay 2020).

However, the establishment of the women police gender desk was initially due to the nature of violence. Sometimes the victim failed to disclose their problems to the male police officers (Korkmaz, 2020; Mathews 2018; Sardinha and Fahmy, 2014; Freccero, 2015).

Furthermore, the desk formed created a chain of communication which requires every police officer to understand what to do when he/she receives an issue on gender and children abuse by contacting other officials for instructions on what to do (TPFNet, 2007; Fetahu, 2015; Nyange and Lyimo, 2017). The desk decided to provide victims with several services, which include PF3 access, Arrest of Defendants, Filing of Case, Collection of Articles and Evidence, Investigation and Visiting the scene as well as Sending File to a Lawyer and finally to Court (Barrett & Marshall 2017; Wanjohi, 2016; UNHCR, 2019). It also accommodates men, the elderly, businessmen, politicians, various leaders, youth, people living with disabilities, and children in conflict with the law in the sense of theft, smoking marijuana, drug abuse and misconduct (UNICEF, 2012; UNHCR, 2019; UNFPA, 2021).

Gender-based violence in Tanzania is known as a tool with no social or economic boundaries and affects women and girls of all socio-economic backgrounds. This tool aimed and needed to address gender-based violence at all levels (Ndyamukama, 2016; UNHCR, 2019). Therefore, this research intended to examine the effectiveness of the police gender desks in the protection of victims of gender-based violence in Ilemela District.

The study was guided by three specific objectives:

1. To collect views of the people on the effectiveness of gender desks towards the protection of victims of gender-based violence in the Ilemela District
2. To find out strategies used by police gender desks in the improving protection of the victims of gender-based violence in Ilemela District
3. To find out factors that affect the effectiveness of police gender desks on the protection of the victims of gender-based violence in the Ilemela District

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach and case study design was used in this study. The study employed a case study design of the Police Gender and victims of Gender based violence to get a deeper insight and understand as suggested by (Creswell and Clark 2007: 23). The study chose qualitative approach because it would allow the researcher to explore the experiences of victims and Police Gender desk. The study was conducted in Ilemela District, Mwanza city because it has many police gender and children desks. The researcher chose Ilemela District due to their experience in many gender and children violence incidences compared to other districts in Mwanza (Nyange and Lyimo, 2017). The targeted populations of this study were victims of gender-based violence, social workers, and police officers. The selection of this targeted population was associated with the nature of the information which the researcher desired to obtain. The sample size in this study was 30 participants as suggested by Boddy, (2016) who opined that the general recommendation for in-depth interviews is to have a simple size of 20-30, and that is we're building segments within the population, in some cases a minimum of 10 participants is acceptable basing on the population integrity.

Moreover, this study employed a semi structured interview in order to explore the participants experience opinions and feelings hence obtain the depth information about the problem under the study (Boddy, 2016; Creswell and Clark 2007: 23). The use of semi structured interview helped the researcher to obtain person's thoughts and suggestions on how the Effectiveness of Police Gender Desks will protect the Victims of Gender Based Violence in Ilemela District, Tanzania. The study analyzed data by using thematic analysis as suggested by (Creswell, 2014; Babbie, 2017). Analysis started by preparation and organization of data collected from interview sessions. After that the researcher reviewed and explores the data in relation to the objectives that the researcher has, the researcher created initial codes in order to determine whether the data collected are merited and correspond to the themes created.

## FINDINGS

After analysis of the data certain themes emerged that indicated the Effectiveness of Police Gender Desks in the Protection of the Victims of Gender Based Violence in Ilemela District, Tanzania. The majority of the participants interviewed were female. This indicates that majority of the GBV survivors of Ilemela district were female. The study reported that before the existence of the women police gender desks in Ilemela district, victims of sexual violence – who are primarily women and children – would have to approach the man police desk to disclose their experience, which proved a major barrier and deterrent in reporting violence. Participant reported hardship when disclosing them to the men police gender desk.

Through focus group discussion with women police gender desk of Ilemela District reported an increase in reporting of violence against children with hundreds of cases per year compared to several years before female gender desk. Since the establishment of the women police gender desks victim especial women and girls have reported many cases. Women police gender desk reported to experience a lot of positive changes during their management. Evidence showed that knowing the existence of Police Gender Desk was considered as one of the most important factors in regard to the Effectiveness of Police Gender Desks in the Protection of the Victims of Gender Based Violence in Ilemela District, Tanzania. Most of the participant who interviewed in this study agreed that they have at one point or another know about police gender desk. From different perception provided by these participants gender desk has been perceived as a department within the police force in Tanzania that is responsible with different cases related to gender-based violence and violence against children. Participants reported respectable approaches used by police gender desks in solving their problems. Participants seemed satisfied with the support of police gender desk in their area.

Additionally, the most common form of violence reported by participants was emotional violence; however,

a large number of participants reported sexual violence. Among those who reported violence, most indicated that they had been subjected to multiple types of violence. The study revealed that women and girls were more likely to discuss physical violence as occurring in the home while harassment, emotional violence, and discrimination were more likely to occur outside of the home. The main perpetrators of sexual violence were husbands, uncles, brothers, neighbors and owners of the home where the respondents were residing.

Such situation was explained during FGDs by one participant who held that, “traditional practices are major causes of Gender violence”. Harmful traditional practices, such as widow inheritance, in which a woman is “inherited” by her husband’s family upon his death; widow cleansing, wherein a widow is urged to have sex with a man to cleanse herself of evil spirits, harmful nutritional practices whereby, for example, women may not be allowed to eat eggs while pregnant; and so called same sex marriage, wherein infertile or older women pay bride wealth for a girl and force her to be a surrogate mother.” The focus group discussants noted that Police gender desk at Ilemela District had been effectively to prevent and combat women gender based violence in spite of having various challenges which include fear of the women to report the incidences, ignorance, norms and tradition and religions.

However, another emerged theme discussed about the number of Police Gender Desk workforce in Ilemela district, Mwanza region. The researcher wanted to find out if the participants know how many Gender Desk workforces Ilemela district have and the skills involved. Participant’s response seemed not to know the size of Gender Desk in their area. Majority reported that they know Gender desk are few/ not enough to deal with all the cases and claims of Gender Based Violence and Child Abuse due to the high number of cases reported to the desk. Furthermore majority of participants did not know the skills of Police Gender Desk while few participants who their children were victim reported that due to going different session with their children to the station they discover some to of the members from the Police Gender Desk got special training on Gender Based Violence and Child Abuse so as to deal with all cases of Gender Based Violence and Child Abuse effectively. They experienced good decision making skills, team work spirit, cooperation, and good communication skills “they were good listener”.

Other theme emerged was satisfaction of the Victims of Gender Based Violence. The participant where asked if they are satisfied with the services they get from the desk. Majority of Participants reported to be satisfied with the services they get from the gender desk while few did not satisfy with the services they get. This shows that the Police gender desk in Ilemela district performs well their activities to the victims of gender based violence which lead to the satisfaction of the victims.

## DISCUSSION

Results from the study indicated that Ilemela police gender desks are effective due to the fact that all individuals who go there for help are treated equally. Victims have equal rights to live free from violence, discrimination and abuse. Gender based violence violates fundamental human rights including the right to life, security, dignity and physical and mental integrity (UNHCR, 2019). Protecting the victims is crucial to Ilemela police gender desk, where they work hard to promote gender equality and challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes. This concurs with Fetahu, 2015; Nyange and Lyimo, 2017 that the protection of victims through Police Gender Desk is satisfy and effective by the service provided and the number of cases succeeded. Through raise public awareness to encourage members to report gender violence, many cases have been reported.

The Results further concur with the study of González & Garrido, (2015) that, the police gender desk play an important role in preventing, protecting, and fight against gender-based violence. 80% of women interviewed reported to have positive feeling and they were very satisfied with the police performance on dealing with gender-based violence. Another study by Honda & Ogawa, (2021) reported that GBV in Japan

carries three “invisibilities”: difficulty for female survivors to speak out and be heard; gender inequality, and GBV-related damage, which results to poor social assistance and a lack of experts to work with GBV survivors.

On the other hand, the study findings indicated that police gender desk of Ilemela District have been providing knowledge to victim hence help disclose and have more awareness of gender violence practices (Mathews (2018). However, the police gender officers also are given training by the government and NGOs dealing with gender violence to help them know how to deal with victims. Police gender desk reported to solve hundreds of cases per year compared to several years ago. The above context comply with findings of Nyange and Lyimo, (2017); Ndyamukama, (2016); UNHCR, (2019); Korkmaz, (2020); Mathews (2018) which point out that police officers working at gender desks experienced training and knowledge that help them deal with different cases concerning gender and children issues and thus helps victim to gain psychological relief and treatment.

Moreover, the study indicated that the challenges of gender based violence must be tackled as a gender equality and human rights issue that requires increased gender equality measures. Police gender desk duty is to reduce GBV and Violence against children incidences since it was created for that goal. Participant stated that main duty of Police gender desk was to solve some problems of gender victims’. The study by Tsapalas et al (2021) supports the above fact that, gender desk plays a major role of helping the victims. During FGDs, a police officer reported majority of victims did not know where or who to report to, had fear from not being understood, fear from not being acknowledged, fear from getting perpetrator(s) into trouble especially close friends or family and fear from being psychologically victimized by police officers who were unknowledgeable on gender violence related cases.

The findings above concur with TAWLA, (2014) that the trainings and knowledge given to helps the police desk to deal with victim in friendly environment where the victims of violence feel safe, comfortable and impressed to speak out truth without hesitation. Such measures encourage others to report their incidences. Through the patience of police desk and their services people reported to start understand importance of reporting the GBV (Ndyamukama, 2016; Wanjohi, 2016).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study broadens the understanding of Gender Based Violence, and the effectiveness of the police dealing with gender and children’s desk. Moreover, the study collected the views and opinions of victim participants about the strategies used by police gender desks in the improving protection of the victims of gender-based violence in Ilemela District. Furthermore, this study contributed to a deeper understanding of the impact of Gender Based Violence (GBV) to the general public so that the community can fight against it. The study indicates that Tanzania, in particular, is still facing gender-based violence and violence against children. People living in remote areas are most victims of such incidences because they don’t know where to get help in spite of having Police Gender Desk in their area. Most initiatives and services established such as the police gender and children’s desks, NGO’s, CBO’s, FBO’s and other stakeholders do not reach or cover most victims. Police force needs to have deliberate efforts to ensure that challenges are resolved so as to eliminate GBV.

This study recommends that the government should give awareness to the citizen about gender desk; this will help the victims to know where to address their problems. The victims of gender based violence might not get the required services from the gender desk due to their unawareness on the existence of the gender desk in their area. However, police gender desk, NGOs and other agencies should continue protect, promote, empower, solving community problems and make encourage survivors of Gender Based Violence and Child Abuse to speak out or express their internal problems and to maintain secrecy/ humanity of affected persons,

to arrest and take to the court of law the criminals of Gender Based Violence and Child Abuse, to ensure the girls, women and children know their rights and all the victims of Gender Based Violence and Child Abuse get the lawful help, health services and psychosocial support services.

Additionally, the Government of Tanzania and NGO's must put more effort on providing knowledge and skills to Police Gender Desk hence help the victim confidential.

## ABBREVIATION

GBV Gender Based Violence

MOHCDGEC Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children.

UNFPA United Nation Fund Project Agency

UNHCR United Nations High Commission for Refugees

UNIFEM United National Development Fund for women

WHO World Health Organization

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