

Patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse (CSA) remains a major global human rights concern affecting the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of children. Despite growing policy commitments and legal frameworks, CSA continues to persist, particularly in rural communities where poverty, cultural norms, and weak protection systems increase children's vulnerability. This study examined the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District, Tanzania, with the aim of generating context-specific evidence to support prevention and intervention efforts. The study was guided by Social Disorganization Theory, which provided a useful framework for examining how weaknesses in social organization, community cohesion, informal social control, and socioeconomic conditions may shape the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse. It adopted a descriptive research design employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A sample of 398 respondents was obtained using Yamane's formula, involving household heads selected through simple random sampling and key informants purposively selected from community leaders, teachers, Ward Executive Officers, and social welfare officers. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides and analyzed through descriptive statistics and content analysis. The findings revealed that rape, sexual threats, sibling-perpetrated abuse, transactional sexual exploitation, and underreporting are common forms of CSA in Korogwe District. Quantitative results showed that 87% of respondents agreed that abuse cases often remain unreported due to fear, shame, and threats, while qualitative findings highlighted the influence of poverty, stigma, and cultural silence in perpetuating abuse. The study concludes that CSA in Korogwe District is a deeply rooted socio-economic and cultural problem requiring urgent intervention. The study recommends strengthening child protection systems, improving reporting mechanisms, enhancing community awareness, and addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities that expose children to abuse.

Keywords: Child Sexual Abuse, Child Protection, Korogwe District, Underreporting, Sexual Exploitation

I. INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a pervasive global human rights violation that undermines the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of children. It involves the exploitation of a child for sexual purposes by an adult or older adolescent, often resulting in long-term trauma and adverse life outcomes (Khamis *et al.*, 2025). Beyond individual harm, CSA reflects broader structural and social inequalities, including poverty, weak protection systems, and entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate silence and vulnerability (Allouche *et al.*, 2023). Understanding not only the prevalence but also the patterns and dynamics including forms of abuse, perpetrators, contexts, and reporting behaviors is critical for designing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Globally, CSA remains a significant concern despite increased awareness and policy commitments. The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 marked a major milestone in recognizing children's rights to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (Dahlial *et al.*, 2025). Nevertheless, the burden persists, with the World Health Organization [WHO] estimating that approximately 18% of girls and 8% of boys experience sexual abuse before the age of 18 (Finkelhor *et al.*, 2022). The persistence of CSA is closely linked to socio-economic inequalities, weak law enforcement, and limited access to justice systems (Bello, 2022). Furthermore, emerging trends such as online sexual exploitation demonstrate the evolving nature of CSA, with millions of abuse-related materials circulating globally each year (Carlisle *et al.*, 2025). While global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 16.2) emphasize ending violence against children, translating these commitments into effective, context-specific interventions remains a challenge (Schmitt *et al.*, 2024). Importantly, much of the global literature has focused on prevalence, with comparatively less emphasis on how abuse occurs in specific contexts its patterns and underlying dynamics.

In Europe, efforts to address CSA have led to significant legal and institutional reforms, particularly following high-profile abuse cases in the late 20th century (Woodlock *et al.*, 2026). Countries with strong child protection systems, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, demonstrate higher reporting rates and improved victim support services (Carroll, 2023). However, underreporting remains a major challenge due to stigma and social barriers (Lymo, 2023). In contrast, parts of Eastern Europe continue to face structural challenges, including poverty and under-resourced social services,

which increase children's vulnerability to abuse (Davis *et al.*, 2025). These regional differences highlight that CSA is not only a legal issue but also a socio-economic and cultural phenomenon shaped by contextual dynamics.

Similarly, in Asia, CSA is often deeply embedded within socio-cultural and economic structures. High prevalence rates have been reported in countries such as India, where more than half of children are estimated to have experienced some form of sexual abuse (Otterman *et al.*, 2024). Factors such as poverty, rapid urbanization, patriarchal norms, and weak enforcement mechanisms contribute to both the occurrence and concealment of abuse. In some contexts, technological advancements have introduced new forms of exploitation, including online sexual abuse (Borah *et al.*, 2025). While countries like South Korea and Japan have strengthened their legal frameworks, implementation gaps and cultural barriers continue to influence reporting and response patterns (Moller *et al.*, 2024).

Across Africa, CSA is strongly influenced by intersecting socio-economic and cultural factors, including poverty, gender inequality, and harmful traditional practices. Regional frameworks such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (AU, 1990) have provided a foundation for child protection; however, implementation remains uneven (Nyamu, 2026). Evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of children, particularly girls, experience sexual abuse before adulthood (Guiney *et al.*, 2024). In many African contexts, weak institutional capacity, limited access to education, and inadequate child protection services contribute not only to the prevalence of CSA but also to distinct patterns such as abuse within familiar environments, informal settlements of cases, and low reporting rates (Pineda *et al.*, 2023). These dynamics underscore the importance of context-specific studies that go beyond prevalence to examine how abuse manifests within communities.

In Tanzania, CSA remains a widespread and persistent problem. National data indicate that nearly one in three girls and a significant proportion of boys' experience sexual violence before the age of 18 (Mhina *et al.*, 2023; Nguma & Isango, 2022). The government has taken steps to address CSA through legal frameworks such as the Law of the Child Act (2009) and initiatives like the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (Mwakyambiki, 2023). However, challenges persist in implementation, particularly in rural areas where socio-economic constraints, cultural norms that stigmatize victims, and limited access to justice systems hinder effective prevention and response (Mahanyu *et al.*, 2022).

In Korogwe District, these challenges are particularly pronounced. The district is characterized by rural settings, economic hardship, limited infrastructure, and restricted access to social and legal services. Such conditions not only increase children's vulnerability but also shape the patterns and dynamics of CSA, including where abuse occurs, who the perpetrators are, how cases are handled, and whether incidents are reported (Babune & Salum, 2024; Mwakyambiki, 2023). Cultural practices and gender norms further contribute to silence and normalization of abuse, often leading to informal resolution of cases within families or communities. Despite these realities, empirical evidence specifically examining the patterns and contextual dynamics of CSA in Korogwe remains limited.

Existing studies in Tanzania have primarily focused on the prevalence, socioeconomic determinants, and consequences of child sexual abuse (CSA), with a considerable proportion conducted in urban and peri-urban settings (Mahanyu *et al.*, 2022). While these studies have generated important insights into the magnitude and impacts of CSA, they provide limited evidence on the context-specific patterns and dynamics through which abuse occurs in rural communities, particularly in Korogwe District. Consequently, critical aspects such as the predominant forms of abuse, characteristics of perpetrators, circumstances under which abuse occurs, victim-perpetrator relationships, and reporting and disclosure behaviors remain inadequately understood within this setting.

This knowledge gap is significant because the effectiveness of child protection interventions depends not only on understanding the prevalence of abuse but also on comprehending the mechanisms and contextual factors that shape its occurrence. The absence of localized empirical evidence limits the ability of policymakers, practitioners, and child protection agencies to design interventions that respond to the specific realities and risks faced by children in rural communities. As a result, prevention, reporting, response, and prosecution efforts may fail to adequately address the factors that facilitate CSA at the local level.

This study contributes to the literature by moving beyond prevalence-based analyses to provide a comprehensive examination of the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District. Specifically, it generates context-specific evidence on how CSA manifests within a rural Tanzanian setting, identifies characteristics of victims and perpetrators, and explores the circumstances surrounding abuse and disclosure. By addressing an under-researched geographical and social context, the study enriches the existing body of knowledge on CSA in Tanzania and contributes empirical evidence that can be used for comparative analysis across different settings. The findings are expected to inform the development of evidence-based interventions, strengthen child protection systems, and support the formulation of policies that are responsive to the realities of vulnerable children in Korogwe District and similar rural contexts. This study examined patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District, Tanzania. It specifically examined the common patterns and forms of child sexual abuse, factors influencing reporting and disclosure of child sexual abuse cases and socio-economic, cultural, and contextual circumstances contributing to child sexual abuse in Korogwe District.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Child sexual abuse (CSA) remains a pervasive global human rights and child protection concern, with profound physical, psychological, emotional, and social consequences for children (Khamis et al., 2025). Despite international commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Sustainable Development Goal 16.2, CSA continues to affect millions of children worldwide. Evidence indicates that approximately 18% of girls and 8% of boys experience sexual abuse before the age of 18 (Finkelhor et al., 2022). In Africa, the problem is further shaped by poverty, gender inequality, harmful cultural practices, weak institutional capacity, limited access to justice, and inadequate child protection services, which may contribute not only to the occurrence of abuse but also to underreporting and informal settlement of cases (Guiney et al., 2024; Pineda et al., 2023). In Tanzania, CSA remains a persistent concern despite government interventions through the Law of the Child Act (2009) and the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (Mwakyambiki, 2023). National evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of children experience sexual violence before adulthood, while poverty, stigma, cultural norms, and limited access to justice continue to constrain effective prevention, reporting, and response (Mahanyu et al., 2022; Mhina et al., 2023; Nguma & Isango, 2022).

In Korogwe District, the problem may be particularly influenced by rural socio-economic conditions, economic hardship, limited infrastructure, and restricted access to social and legal services. These conditions can shape not only children's vulnerability to CSA but also the patterns and dynamics through which abuse occurs, including the forms of abuse, characteristics and relationships of perpetrators to victims, circumstances surrounding abuse, and decisions concerning reporting and disclosure (Babune & Salum, 2024; Mwakyambiki, 2023). Cultural practices, gender norms, stigma, and community or family-based mechanisms for handling cases may further discourage victims from reporting abuse or result in cases being resolved informally. However, existing studies in Tanzania have predominantly focused on the prevalence, determinants, and consequences of CSA, with considerable attention given to urban and peri-urban settings (Mahanyu et al., 2022). Consequently, empirical evidence remains limited regarding the specific patterns and contextual dynamics of CSA in rural communities, particularly in Korogwe District. Critical aspects such as the predominant forms of abuse, victim-perpetrator relationships, circumstances under which abuse occurs, and factors influencing reporting and disclosure therefore remain inadequately understood.

This knowledge gap is important because effective child protection interventions require an understanding not only of the magnitude of CSA but also of the contextual mechanisms and circumstances that shape its occurrence, reporting, and response. The limited availability of localized evidence may constrain policymakers, child protection practitioners, and other stakeholders in designing interventions that address the specific risks and barriers experienced by children in rural communities. Therefore, this study examined the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District, Tanzania, focusing specifically on the common patterns and forms of CSA, factors influencing the reporting and disclosure of CSA cases, and the socio-economic, cultural, and contextual circumstances contributing to its occurrence. By addressing this contextual evidence gap, the study contributes to the understanding of CSA in rural Tanzania and provides empirical evidence that can inform context-specific prevention strategies, strengthen child protection and reporting mechanisms, and support more responsive policies and interventions.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To examine the common patterns and forms of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District, Tanzania.
- ii. To assess the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District, Tanzania.
- iii. To examine the factors influencing reporting and disclosure of child sexual abuse cases in Korogwe District, Tanzania.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Social Disorganization Theory, developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay in 1942. The theory emerged from their studies of juvenile delinquency in urban neighborhoods in Chicago, USA (Shaw & McKay, 1942). The theory posits that a community's ability to maintain social order and prevent deviant behavior is weakened by structural factors such as poverty, high residential mobility, family disruption, and low educational attainment (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020). Its key constructs include social cohesion, informal social control, and collective efficacy, all of which are influenced by the socio-economic environment of a neighborhood (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024).

The theory assumes that when communities lack stable social institutions and social networks, they become less capable of regulating behavior effectively, thereby creating conditions in which deviant behaviors, including criminal

acts such as child sexual abuse, may proliferate (Buhori, 2024). In contexts characterized by poverty, weak family structures, and limited community surveillance, children may become more vulnerable to abuse because of inadequate social monitoring and weakened community guardianship (Magesa & Shekuwe, 2024). Social disorganization has also been associated with various forms of child vulnerability globally, particularly in the Global South, where socio-economic inequalities can heighten children's exposure to harm (Kavenagh & Maternowska, 2024).

This theory is suitable for the present study because it provides a framework for understanding how weakened socio-economic and community structures may contribute to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in specific geographical settings such as Korogwe District (Khamis et al., 2025). It emphasizes the role of broader social and economic conditions, including poverty, unemployment, weak family structures, and ineffective community institutions, in shaping behavior and increasing children's vulnerability to abuse (Nguma & Isango, 2022). The theory therefore provides a useful lens for examining how community-level conditions may create an environment in which child sexual abuse can occur, remain hidden, or go unreported.

However, a key limitation of Social Disorganization Theory is its relatively limited focus on individual psychological and biological factors. Consequently, it may not adequately explain personal, interpersonal, or family-level dynamics that contribute to abusive behavior (Abera et al., 2021). The theory also tends to emphasize neighborhood-level effects without sufficiently accounting for cultural and contextual variations across different societies. This limitation is particularly relevant when applying the theory to rural African settings, where social structures, cultural norms, family relationships, and community mechanisms may differ considerably from the urban U.S. contexts in which the theory was originally developed (Reuben et al., 2022). Despite these limitations, the theory remains relevant to the present study because it helps explain how community-level socio-economic conditions and weakened social structures may shape the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Common Patterns of Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse (CSA) occurs in diverse forms and contexts, and its patterns are shaped by social, economic, cultural, family, and institutional conditions. Existing empirical studies in Tanzania and other contexts have identified several manifestations of CSA, including rape, sexual threats and harassment, abuse perpetrated by peers or family members, sexual exploitation, and situations in which cases remain unreported. However, the extent to which these patterns occur and the circumstances surrounding them vary across geographical and social contexts. Examining these patterns is therefore important for developing context-specific child protection and prevention interventions.

Buhori (2024), in a study conducted in Kilwa District, Tanzania, examined the determinants of child sexual abuse, with particular emphasis on its prevalence and contributing factors. The study identified community awareness and weaknesses in reporting mechanisms as important issues influencing the identification and reporting of abuse. The findings suggested that inadequate awareness among community members may limit their ability to recognize, prevent, and respond to abuse, while weaknesses in reporting mechanisms may contribute to the underreporting of cases. The study therefore emphasized the importance of community education, awareness creation, and engagement of local leaders and other stakeholders in preventing child sexual abuse. These findings demonstrate that the occurrence and visibility of CSA are influenced not only by individual perpetrators and victims but also by the capacity of communities to recognize and respond to abuse.

Similarly, Khamis et al. (2025) examined child sexual abuse among school-aged children in Dodoma, Tanzania. Their findings highlighted the prevalence of abuse alongside challenges associated with underreporting and limited awareness among children. The study further identified peer influence as an important factor associated with the occurrence of abuse, suggesting that children may be exposed to sexual abuse not only by adults but also through interactions with other children and peers. The authors emphasized peer education, school-based awareness programmes, and the creation of safe environments in which children can disclose abuse. These findings broaden the understanding of CSA by demonstrating that abuse may occur within children's social networks and that schools can serve both as potential settings of vulnerability and as important platforms for prevention and disclosure.

Evidence from educational institutions further illustrates the complexity of CSA patterns. Bihagara et al. (2025), in their study of secondary schools in Ngara District, identified institutional weaknesses, inadequate safeguarding policies, and insufficient teacher training as factors associated with the persistence of sexual abuse. The study emphasized the importance of establishing effective safeguarding systems and safe reporting channels within schools. The findings indicate that institutional environments can influence both children's vulnerability to abuse and their capacity to report incidents. This suggests that understanding CSA requires attention not only to individual-level characteristics but also to the institutional structures responsible for protecting children.

At the family level, Mathias et al. (2024) examined knowledge and perceptions of CSA among parents and children in Morogoro Municipality. Their findings revealed gaps in knowledge among children regarding abuse indicators and their rights, as well as limited communication between parents and children on issues related to sexual

abuse. The study suggested that inadequate family communication may reduce children's ability to recognize inappropriate behavior and seek assistance. It further showed that some parents underestimate the prevalence of CSA, potentially limiting their ability to protect children effectively. The findings highlight the importance of family relationships and communication in shaping children's vulnerability, recognition of abuse, and disclosure behavior.

Gholami et al. (2024), in a study conducted in Ahvaz, Iran, similarly examined parents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding CSA. The study identified parental misconceptions and inadequate knowledge of protective measures as important barriers to effective prevention. Increased parental awareness was associated with improved preventive practices, reinforcing the importance of educating parents about child protection, risk recognition, and available support mechanisms. Although the study was conducted outside Tanzania, its findings are relevant because they demonstrate the broader importance of parental knowledge and community-based education in preventing CSA.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that child sexual abuse is a multidimensional problem that manifests across family, peer, school, and wider community environments. The literature indicates that CSA may involve different perpetrators and forms of abuse, while inadequate awareness, weak reporting mechanisms, institutional weaknesses, limited family communication, and socio-economic vulnerabilities may influence both its occurrence and visibility. However, the existing studies tend to examine particular dimensions of CSA separately. For example, some focus primarily on determinants and community awareness (Buhori, 2024), others emphasize peer influence and school-based prevention (Isanzu & Josia, 2024), while others focus on institutional protection (Bihagara et al., 2025) or parental knowledge and practices (Mathias et al., 2024; Gholami et al., 2024). Consequently, there remains limited integrated evidence explaining the patterns and dynamics of CSA within a specific rural community context.

2.2.2 Socio-Economic and Cultural Context of Child Sexual Abuse

The literature further suggests that CSA is influenced by broader socio-economic and cultural conditions. Poverty, family instability, unequal power relations, cultural norms, stigma, and weak community protection mechanisms can create conditions that increase children's vulnerability to abuse and discourage disclosure. In rural communities, these factors may be particularly important because access to social welfare, health, legal, and child protection services can be limited. Buhori (2024) demonstrates the importance of community-level conditions by highlighting the relationship between community awareness, reporting, and responses to CSA. Similarly, Mathias et al. (2024) demonstrate that family-level knowledge and communication influence children's ability to recognize and disclose abuse. These findings suggest that vulnerability to CSA cannot be adequately understood by examining children in isolation; rather, it must be examined within the social environments in which children live and interact.

The theoretical literature supports this broader interpretation. Social Disorganization Theory, developed by Shaw and McKay (1942), argues that weakened community structures and social institutions can reduce a community's capacity for informal social control. Conditions such as poverty, family disruption, and weak community networks may therefore create environments in which deviant behavior is more difficult to regulate. This perspective is particularly relevant to CSA because weak community surveillance, limited institutional capacity, and poor social cohesion may reduce children's protection and facilitate the concealment of abuse.

2.2.3 Reporting and Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse

Another important dimension emerging from the literature is the challenge of reporting and disclosure. The reviewed studies indicate that the existence of CSA does not necessarily translate into formal reporting. Limited knowledge, fear, stigma, weak reporting mechanisms, and inadequate institutional responses can prevent children and families from disclosing abuse. Buhori (2024) identified weaknesses in reporting mechanisms as a significant challenge, while Khamis et al. (2025) highlighted limited awareness and peer-related factors that may complicate disclosure among children. Bihagara et al. (2025) further demonstrated the importance of safe reporting channels within schools. Collectively, these findings indicate that reporting is influenced by both individual and structural conditions. Effective child protection therefore requires not only awareness creation but also accessible, confidential, trusted, and responsive reporting systems.

2.2.4 Synthesis of the Literature and Research Gap

The reviewed literature establishes that child sexual abuse is a complex social problem occurring across multiple settings, including families, schools, peer networks, and communities. Previous studies have provided important evidence on determinants, parental and children's knowledge, peer influence, institutional weaknesses, awareness, and reporting mechanisms. However, important gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature examines specific determinants or dimensions of CSA rather than the broader patterns and dynamics through which abuse occurs within a particular community. Second, the reviewed studies provide limited integrated evidence on the relationships between the forms of abuse, perpetrators, circumstances surrounding abuse, socio-economic conditions, and reporting or disclosure behavior. Third, although studies have been conducted in different parts of Tanzania, including Kilwa,

Dodoma, Morogoro, and Ngara, there is limited empirical evidence specifically addressing these interconnected dimensions of CSA in Korogwe District.

This geographical and contextual gap is important because the occurrence, concealment, and reporting of CSA may be shaped by local socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, family structures, community institutions, and access to protection services. The present study therefore addresses this gap by examining the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District, with particular attention to the forms of abuse, perpetrators and their relationships with victims, circumstances associated with abuse, and factors influencing reporting and disclosure. Unlike studies that focus predominantly on prevalence or individual determinants, the present study integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how CSA manifests within a rural Tanzanian community. This approach contributes context-specific empirical evidence that can inform community-based prevention, strengthen child protection systems, improve reporting and response mechanisms, and support the development of interventions that are responsive to the realities of children and families in Korogwe District and similar rural settings.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Description of the study Area

This study was conducted in Korogwe District due to socio-economic conditions linked to child sexual abuse (CSA). The district experiences high poverty levels, with more than 7,000 households benefiting from the TASAF III programme in 2017 through support amounting to TZS 2.9 billion across 80 villages. Poverty increases children's vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. The district also faces educational challenges, including a high teacher turnover rate in public secondary schools, poor academic performance, and persistent gender inequality caused by poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural practices such as early marriage. In addition, the district's large population, limited healthcare facilities, and expanding school population highlight the need for focused research on CSA. These factors make Korogwe District an important area for examining the Patterns and Dynamics of Child Sexual Abuse in Korogwe District, Tanzania.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District, Tanzania. The design was appropriate because it enabled the systematic collection and analysis of data to describe the existing situation without manipulating variables. It also facilitated the identification of trends, relationships, and experiences associated with child sexual abuse in the study area. Furthermore, the descriptive design provided a clear understanding of the problem, thereby supporting the development of practical recommendations for community interventions and policy actions.

3.3 Study Population and Sample Size

3.3.1 Study population

The study targeted a diverse population in Korogwe District to obtain comprehensive insights into the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse. The primary respondents included 68,277 household heads, selected based on the 2022 Population and Housing Census data. In addition, 20 community leaders from different localities were involved to provide contextual perspectives, together with 2 Ward Executive Officers (WEOs) responsible for local governance. The study also included 28 teachers and 26 social welfare officers engaged in child protection services. This combination of participants ensured a comprehensive understanding of the issue from both community and institutional perspectives.

3.3.2 Sample size

In this study, the sample size was determined using Yamane's formula, a widely used method for calculating sample size in survey research. The formula is expressed as follows:

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

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size (68,277 households)

e = acceptable sampling error

A 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 0.05 were assumed.

$$n = \frac{68277}{1 + 68277 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 398$$

Accordingly, a total sample of 398 respondents was obtained. The sample was distributed between household respondents and key informants to ensure both breadth and depth of information. Of the total sample, 322 household respondents were selected through simple random sampling. This technique ensured that each household within the population of 68,277 had an equal chance of being selected, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the findings.

In addition, 76 key informants were purposively selected based on their expertise, roles, and experience in matters related to child sexual abuse within the community. These included 20 community leaders, 2 Ward Executive Officers (WEOs), 28 primary school teachers, and 26 social welfare officers. Their inclusion was important due to their direct involvement in child protection and their ability to provide detailed insights into the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse in the district.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

This study employed both simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Simple random sampling was used to select household respondents, ensuring that each household had an equal chance of being selected and allowing for the generalization of findings across the district. Purposive sampling, on the other hand, was used to select key informants with specialized knowledge relevant to the study. The selection of key informants was based on their roles in child welfare, experience in community service, and ability to provide expert insights into the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse.

3.5 Questionnaire as Data Collection Method

A questionnaire consisting of close-ended questions was used as the primary data collection tool to gather quantitative information for the study. The close-ended format ensured standardization, facilitated data analysis, and enabled the efficient collection of measurable responses. The questionnaire was carefully designed to capture key variables related to the research topic and was administered directly to household heads in Korogwe District, who were identified as the primary respondents. The administration process ensured clarity of the questions and minimized response bias, while maintaining confidentiality and encouraging honest participation.

3.5.2 Key Informants Interview Guide

A key informant interview guide was used to collect qualitative data for the study. The guide was designed to obtain in-depth insights from key informants with relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic. These included community leaders, social welfare officers, and the Ward Executive Officer (WEO), who are key stakeholders in understanding the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse.

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions tailored to each group to capture diverse perspectives while ensuring sensitivity and respect for participants' experiences. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and a trauma-informed approach during interviews, were carefully observed. The information obtained from the interviews complemented the quantitative data and contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

3.6 Data analysis

Data for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to categorize and summarize the various patterns and forms of child sexual abuse reported by respondents. This approach provided a clear overview of the most prevalent types of abuse, such as defilement, harassment, incest, and exploitation. In addition, mean scores from Likert scale items were used to assess respondents' perceptions of the severity and frequency of these patterns. In addition, qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis approach.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Common Patterns of Child Sexual Abuse in Korogwe District

The findings in Table 1 indicate that various patterns of child sexual abuse are prevalent in Korogwe District. A considerable proportion of respondents agreed that rape is common in the area, with 66.1% indicating agreement or strong agreement ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.24$). Similarly, 77.9% confirmed that children are frequently exposed to sexual threats, including unwanted touching and verbal abuse ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.97$). The data further show that 76.4% reported cases of sexual abuse involving siblings ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.92$). In addition, 67.4% acknowledged that children are forced to work or engage in sexual activities in exchange for money ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.19$). Notably, 87% of respondents agreed that cases of abuse often go unreported due to fear, shame, or threats ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.05$).

These results suggest that child sexual abuse in Korogwe District occurs in multiple forms, ranging from direct sexual assault to coercive practices linked to economic hardship. The high proportion of unreported cases points to a

culture of silence driven by fear and stigma, which may perpetuate the cycle of abuse. The occurrence of abuse within sibling relationships further indicates that risks extend beyond strangers and are also embedded within family dynamics and close relations. In addition, the link between sexual exploitation and survival strategies highlights the vulnerability of children in economically disadvantaged households, suggesting that socio-economic deprivation plays a significant role. The relatively high mean scores and low standard deviations indicate consistency in respondents' perceptions, underscoring that child sexual abuse is not an isolated issue but a widespread community problem.

Table 1*Common Patterns of Child Sexual Abuse in Korogwe District*

Statements	SD f(%)	D f(%)	N f(%)	A f(%)	SA f(%)	Mean	Std. Dev
Child sexual abuse such as rape is common in this area	24 (7.5)	52 (16.1)	33 (10.2)	125 (38.8)	88 (27.3)	3.63	1.24
Children are frequently subjected to sexual threats (such as touching or verbal abuse)	9 (2.8)	23 (7.1)	39 (12.1)	144 (44.7)	107 (33.2)	3.98	0.97
Cases of child sexual abuse have been reported here by siblings	10 (3.1)	19 (5.9)	47 (14.6)	177 (55.0)	69 (21.4)	3.86	0.92
Children are forced to work or have sex for money	18 (5.6)	49 (15.2)	38 (11.8)	125 (38.8)	92 (28.6)	3.69	1.19
Child sexual abuse is often not reported due to fear, shame or threats	17 (5.3)	15 (4.7)	10 (3.1)	140 (43.5)	140 (43.5)	4.15	1.05

Key: SD = Strongly Disagree (1), D = Disagree (2), N = Neutral (3), A = Agree (4), SA = Strongly Agree (5)

The findings align with previous studies that highlight the complex and often hidden nature of child sexual abuse in Tanzania and beyond. Buhori (2024) and Magesa & Shekuwe (2024) similarly report that poverty and family structures significantly contribute to child abuse, while Msangi (2017) emphasize the persistence of child-on-child abuse in Dodoma. Internationally, Guiney et al. (2024) and Henkhaus (2022) note that childhood abuse has long-term effects on victims' well-being, education, and economic outcomes. The underreporting of abuse due to stigma and threats mirrors findings by Russell et al. (2024) in developing countries, where weak reporting systems hinder child protection. Overall, the Korogwe findings support United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF's] (2017) observation that violence against children in Tanzania remains widespread and requires both preventive and responsive interventions.

The identified patterns of child sexual abuse in Korogwe District, including rape, sexual threats, sibling abuse, and exploitation for money, can also be explained through theoretical perspectives. Social Learning Theory (1989) suggests that abusive behaviors may be learned within families and communities, while Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) explains how socio-economic deprivation may pressure children and families into survival-driven harmful practices. In addition, the high prevalence of unreported cases reflects stigma and fear, consistent with Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

These statistical findings are further reinforced by qualitative evidence obtained through interviews with key informants and survivors, which provide deeper insight into the patterns, prevalence, and underlying dynamics of abuse. The qualitative data complement the quantitative results by illustrating how different forms of abuse are experienced within the community. For instance, several respondents emphasized that rape remains one of the most prevalent forms of abuse affecting children in Korogwe District, a finding that is consistent with the quantitative results presented earlier. One community leader noted:

"We have many cases where young girls are forced into sexual acts by older men, especially when they are sent to collect water or firewood in isolated areas. Unfortunately, most of these cases are not reported because families fear stigma and retaliation from perpetrators." (Interview with community leader :11/06/2025).

In line with the quantitative finding that 77.9% of respondents reported frequent sexual threats, key informants revealed that many children experience inappropriate touching, verbal harassment, and intimidation both at home and in public spaces. A social welfare officer explained:

"Children, particularly girls, often report that they are touched inappropriately by neighbors or even relatives. Sometimes it starts with verbal jokes that appear harmless but later escalate to more serious abuse." (Interview with social welfare officer: 15/06/2025).

The issue of sibling-perpetrated abuse, reported by 76.4% of survey respondents, was also echoed in Interviews. A school counselor narrated:

"It is shocking, but we have encountered cases where older siblings or cousins abuse younger children in the same household. Parents are often unaware because they assume their children are safe at home, yet abuse happens behind closed doors." (Interview with School counselor: 18/06/2025).

Additionally, qualitative findings support the survey results that 67.4% of respondents agreed children are forced into sexual acts for money or favors. Economic hardship was repeatedly mentioned as a driver of transactional sexual abuse. One parent explained:

"Poverty pushes some children into dangerous situations. I know girls who agree to relationships with Bodaboda riders in exchange for money or free rides to school. Parents are often silent because the small financial support helps the family." (Interview with parent: 18/06/2025).

Consistent with the 87% who acknowledged underreporting of abuse, respondents highlighted cultural stigma, fear, and intimidation as major barriers to seeking justice. A gender activist stated:

"Most cases never reach the police or courts. Families prefer to settle matters secretly because they feel reporting will bring shame. In some cases, perpetrators threaten victims and their families, making them too scared to speak out." (Interview with Gender Activist: 23/06/2025).

Generally, the qualitative evidence aligns with the quantitative findings by demonstrating that child sexual abuse in Korogwe District follows recurring patterns: rape, harassment, abuse within families, transactional sex, and widespread underreporting. Together, these findings highlight a deeply entrenched problem shaped by poverty, cultural silence, and weak protection mechanisms. This underscores the urgent need for awareness, stronger reporting systems, and community-based interventions to safeguard children.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the patterns and dynamics of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Korogwe District, Tanzania, focusing on common forms of abuse, factors influencing reporting and disclosure, and the socio-economic, cultural, and contextual circumstances associated with its occurrence. The findings demonstrate that child sexual abuse is a serious and multifaceted problem in the district, occurring within family, community, and other social environments. The study established that several forms of child sexual abuse are commonly experienced in Korogwe District. Sexual threats, including inappropriate touching and verbal harassment, were particularly prominent, with 77.9% of respondents agreeing that children are frequently exposed to such experiences. Rape was also identified as a common form of abuse, with 66.1% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that it occurs in the area. Furthermore, 76.4% of respondents reported cases of sexual abuse involving siblings, demonstrating that children may face risks not only from strangers but also from people within their immediate family and social networks. The findings also showed that 67.4% of respondents acknowledged situations in which children are forced to work or engage in sexual activities in exchange for money.

The study further established that child sexual abuse is substantially underreported. A total of 87% of respondents agreed that cases are often not reported because of fear, shame, or threats. The qualitative findings reinforced this result by showing that stigma, fear of retaliation, intimidation, and concerns about bringing shame to families discourage victims and their families from reporting cases to authorities. In some circumstances, families prefer to resolve cases informally, thereby limiting access to formal justice and child protection services. The findings also demonstrate that the occurrence of CSA is closely connected to socio-economic and contextual conditions. Poverty and economic hardship were associated with children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation, particularly where children or families depend on financial support or other material benefits. The qualitative findings further indicated that abuse may occur in isolated locations and within familiar relationships, including among siblings, relatives, neighbours, and other people known to children. These findings suggest that CSA in Korogwe District cannot be understood solely as an individual problem; rather, it is embedded within broader family, community, economic, and institutional conditions.

Overall, the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence provides a context-specific understanding of the patterns and dynamics of CSA in a rural Tanzanian setting. The findings indicate that effective prevention and response require more than awareness creation alone. They require strengthened community protection systems, accessible and trusted reporting mechanisms, stronger family and community surveillance, and interventions that address socio-economic vulnerabilities and cultural practices that contribute to silence and non-disclosure. The study therefore contributes empirical evidence that can support the development of context-responsive child protection interventions in Korogwe District and other rural communities facing similar challenges.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed: Strengthen community-based awareness and prevention programmes. Korogwe District authorities, in collaboration with social welfare departments, schools, community leaders, civil society organizations, and child protection actors, should strengthen continuous community awareness programmes on child sexual abuse. The programmes should focus on helping children, parents, caregivers, and community members recognize different forms of abuse, understand children's rights, identify risk situations, and understand where and how to report suspected cases. Particular attention should be given to sexual threats, sibling and family-related abuse, and sexual exploitation, which emerged as prominent patterns in the study. Establish and strengthen safe, confidential, and child-friendly reporting mechanisms: The high level of underreporting identified in the study requires the establishment of reporting systems that children and families can access without fear of stigma, retaliation, or intimidation. Schools, health facilities, social welfare offices, police, and community structures should provide clear and confidential channels for reporting suspected abuse. Reporting mechanisms should be child-friendly, accessible, responsive, and linked to appropriate referral and protection services.

Strengthen child protection and referral systems at the community level: District authorities should strengthen coordination among social welfare officers, police, health facilities, schools, community development officers, local government leaders, and other relevant stakeholders. Clear referral pathways should be established so that children who experience abuse can promptly access medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, protection, and other appropriate services. This is particularly important in rural areas where access to specialized services may be limited. Intensify interventions addressing poverty and children's economic vulnerability: Since the findings associate economic hardship with children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation, child protection interventions should be linked with appropriate social and economic support programmes for vulnerable households. Community livelihood initiatives, social protection programmes, school retention support, and targeted assistance to economically vulnerable families should be strengthened to reduce situations in which children become dependent on adults or engage in risky relationships in exchange for money, transport, food, or other material support.

Strengthen family-based child protection and parental engagement: Parents and caregivers should be equipped with knowledge and practical skills for identifying signs of sexual abuse, communicating with children about personal safety and boundaries, and responding appropriately to disclosures. Families should be encouraged to create environments in which children can speak openly about uncomfortable or inappropriate experiences without fear of blame or punishment. Particular attention should be given to risks occurring within households and among siblings or other relatives. Strengthen safeguarding measures in schools and other child-serving institutions: Schools should establish and regularly implement child safeguarding policies, codes of conduct, confidential reporting mechanisms, and procedures for responding to suspected abuse. Teachers, school counsellors, and other staff should receive regular training on recognizing signs of abuse, handling disclosures, maintaining confidentiality, and referring cases to appropriate authorities. School-based prevention programmes should also equip children with age-appropriate knowledge about personal boundaries, consent, unsafe behaviour, and available sources of help.

Address cultural norms, stigma, and informal settlement of abuse cases: Community leaders, religious leaders, parents, teachers, and other influential actors should be engaged in challenging cultural practices and attitudes that encourage silence, victim-blaming, or informal settlement of child sexual abuse cases. Community dialogue should emphasize that CSA is a serious violation of children's rights and that cases should be reported and handled through appropriate child protection and justice mechanisms rather than being concealed or resolved informally. Strengthen protection of children in high-risk and isolated environments: The study's qualitative findings indicate that children may be exposed to abuse when accessing water, firewood, transport, and other services in isolated locations. Local authorities and communities should therefore identify high-risk locations and develop appropriate safety measures, including community monitoring, safer routes, child-friendly transport arrangements, and awareness of risks associated with isolated environments.

Improve coordination and accountability among child protection stakeholders. A coordinated district-level child protection mechanism should regularly bring together local government authorities, social welfare officers, police, health providers, schools, community leaders, and civil society organizations. The mechanism should monitor reported cases, referrals, response times, protection outcomes, and emerging risks while ensuring that information is handled confidentially and ethically. Such coordination would help reduce fragmentation in prevention, reporting, response, and follow-up. Future research should examine the dynamics of CSA using longitudinal and mixed-method approaches. Future studies should investigate how socio-economic conditions, family relationships, cultural norms, perpetrator characteristics, and community-level factors interact over time to influence the occurrence and reporting of child sexual abuse. Research should also examine the effectiveness of different prevention and reporting interventions in rural Tanzania. Comparative studies across rural and urban districts would further help determine which patterns are context-specific and which are more widely prevalent.



Declaration of Interest

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