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Breaking the Silence: Understanding Awareness and Culture of Silence in Reporting Gender Based Violence Incidents in Tanzania[1]

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Abstract

Gender-based violence is pervasive at every societal level, fraom global to local contexts. It occurs in various settings, including domestic spaces, public communities and workplaces. While awareness campaigns against gender-based violence are increasingly prevalent, uncertainties persist regarding the culture of silence in reporting such incidents. Existing literature acknowledges societal stigma and fear as barriers, but has not sufficiently examined the specific, household-level determinants of the entrenched culture of silence in semi-urban contexts. This paper examines levels of awareness, reporting rates and contributing factors to the culture of silence in reporting gender-based violence incidents in the selected wards of Dunda, Kiromo, Magomeni and Nianjema in Bagamoyo District Council. It utilises baseline survey data (n=477) collected in May 2024 at the household level. The study employs descriptive statistics and logistic regression analysis. Findings confirm a high awareness of GBV and available reporting channels, but reporting rates remain critically low. Contributing factors to this culture of silence include a lack of trust in authorities, concerns about confidentiality, fear of retaliation, lack of awareness of reporting tools, lack of support from duty bearers, insufficient resources, and cultural taboos. As a result, this culture of silence has led to inadequate reporting of gender-based violence incidents, potentially perpetuating the cycle of violence. Addressing this issue is important in promoting a more responsive, inclusive and supportive environment for victims to enhance societal well-being. Strengthening collective efforts in raising awareness, improving monitoring, creating safe spaces for reporting and building trust is recommended to advance gender equality and inclusivity.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, culture of silence, community development, gender equality, participatory governance

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1. Introduction

The National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children underscores the importance of responding to gender-based violence (URT, 2016). It highlights that 'investing in violence prevention initiatives has a positive impact on inclusive societal growth' (URT, 2016). Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical issue with far-reaching consequences at the global, national, and local levels. It is a serious violation of human rights that occurs when someone is harmed because of their gender (Yadav, 2023). This harm can take various forms, including physical, sexual, mental, or financial abuse. The consequences of GBV can be profound, leading to long-lasting impacts on victims and, in some tragic cases, fatal outcomes (Rezwana & Pain, 2021; Yadav, 2023). Rooted in gender inequality, GBV is perpetuated by discriminatory laws, unequal power relations, patriarchal norms and cultural practices that undermine fundamental human rights (Palermo et al., 2014). Attention has also turned to male victims, underscoring the widespread and diverse nature of GBV (Mahmoud, 2024).

Violence against women and girls is used to describe acts directed specifically at women, acknowledging the heightened vulnerability they face. However, GBV affects both men and women (Sawhney & Bhardwaj, 2025). Several factors contribute to the incidence of GBV, including hurtful traditional practices, alcohol consumption, limited access to education, a history of child and family abuse, restricted decision-making abilities, and experiences of depression (Mutambo, 2023). Although existing literature (URT, 2016; Kasungu, 2023; Mirlashari et al., 2024) identifies social stigma and fear as barriers to reporting violence, the deeply ingrained culture of silence raises fundamental questions that require community-level responses. While previous research has acknowledged the significance of societal stigma and fear, it has not thoroughly examined how this deeply rooted culture of silence at the household level may contribute to the underreporting of GBV incidents (Sawhney & Bhardwaj, 2025; Kasungu, 2023; Morrison, 2023). The lack of a baseline survey in previous studies on the extent of the culture of silence reveals a critical knowledge gap regarding the full range of obstacles to GBV reporting. This paper takes a more comprehensive approach to filling this gap. As a result, the prevalence of the culture of silence calls for measures such as baseline survey research at the household level to examine the magnitude of the problem. The paper, therefore, has three objectives: i) to identify levels of GBV awareness among community members, ii) to explore the rate of reporting GBV incidents, and iii) to determine factors contributing to the culture of silence in reporting GBV incidents in the selected wards in Bagamoyo District Council.

1.2 Awareness and Culture of Silence

Awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) refers to the extent to which individuals recognise GBV as a societal problem, understand its forms, and are knowledgeable about their rights and the available support systems (Perrin et al., 2019; Zain, 2012). The United Republic of Tanzania's National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children underscores the importance of responding to gender violence and highlights the need to invest in violence prevention by raising awareness of GBV issues (URT, 2016). Despite growing awareness and efforts to address GBV through policies, programs, and campaigns, a persistent culture of silence continues to hinder progress (Morrison, 2023). This culture of silence, defined by the reluctance or refusal of survivors to report their experiences, is fueled by societal stigma, fear of retaliation and distrust in legal systems (URT, 2016; Morrison, 2023). As a result, survivors remain silent, believing that their voices

will not lead to meaningful action, thus allowing abuse to continue and making it difficult for authorities to address the problem.

The culture of silence is often rooted in cultural norms that discourage open discussions about violence, especially when the incidents involve domestic abuse or sexual violence (Madigele, 2024). Cultural expectations that prioritise family reputation over personal well-being contribute to the silence around gender-based violence (GBV) and normalise violence in many societies (Perrin et al., 2019). Inadequate support networks can make survivors feel alone and helpless, perpetuating the cycle of violence (Pokharel et al., 2020; Louie & Vasil, 2024). Social norms often pressure women to prioritise family honour or resolve issues informally through community mediation, especially in rural areas (Perrin et al., 2019). These practices reinforce the culture of silence and deny survivors access to justice. Even in urban areas with greater awareness, survivors frequently choose not to report due to fears of being judged or a lack of trust in the legal system (Goodman-Williams et al., 2024). The culture of silence has severe consequences: it allows perpetrators to act with impunity and leaves survivors without support or justice. Globally, surveys show a significant gap between reported cases and the actual prevalence of GBV, a trend also evident in Africa and Tanzania (World Bank, 2022a; World Bank, 2022b).

Globally, the scale of underreporting is alarming. The World Health Organisation (2024) indicates that one in three women endures physical or sexual violence, yet fewer than 40% seek assistance, and under 10% formally report it to the appropriate authorities. In developing countries, about 7% of all women who have been victims of gender-based violence have reported the incident to a formal source (Palermo et al., 2014). Survivors often avoid reporting due to societal pressure and fear of shame, leading to fewer cases being brought to the attention of authorities. In the United States, despite having better legal frameworks, two-thirds of sexual assaults go unreported, reflecting widespread distrust and fear of victim-blaming (Ceelen et al., 2019; Passmore, 2023; Goodman-Williams et al., 2024). For Chinese migrant women in Australia, only 33% of female survivors and 30% of male survivors reported seeking help for sexual and physical abuse, while over half of women 51% and nearly half of men 49% refrained from seeking help or disclosing the violence they faced (Louie & Vasil, 2024).

In Africa, the culture of silence is deeply rooted in traditional norms and systemic challenges (UN Women, 2024; Perrin et al., 2019). Many communities treat gender-based violence (GBV) as a private matter, discouraging survivors from reporting and seeking formal help (Perrin et al., 2019). In South Africa, only one in nine incidents of sexual violence is reported. Survivors often fear retaliation or social rejection, and the justice system is frequently perceived as ineffective (UN Women, 2024). In Uganda, women report sexual and gender-based violence at higher rates than men (Ssanyu et al., 2022). However, minimal reporting still occurs because women are financially dependent on their spouses and adhere to societal norms (Ssanyu et al., 2022). Men are often pressured by masculine norms, which condition them to remain silent about experiencing gender-based violence. Barasa et al. (2022) investigated the culture of silence in Kasarani, Kenya, particularly students' experiences with gender-based violence in schools. Their study revealed that pupils in schools are subjected to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, which often goes unreported or ignored. Additionally, fear of revenge from perpetrators further discourages students from reporting sexual violence. In Nigeria, the majority of women in their workplaces encounter rudeness, insulting remarks, bullying and sexual harassment (Agbaje et al., 2021).

Cultural and traditional beliefs, witchcraft practices, upholding family respect, jealousy, mistrust, communication breakdowns and intoxication all contribute to unending violence against women (Smee, 2012). Economic hardships, the obligation to pay a bride price and denying husbands their marital rights have contributed to violent practices against women. A cycle of abuse has resulted from the exploitation of the tradition of submissiveness, which has also contributed to the underreporting of gender-based violence (GBV) incidents (Smee, 2012). Poor law enforcement against GBV, societal stigma, embarrassment and bias in the legal system undermine victims' trust in the legal system, leaving them disillusioned and doubting their efforts to obtain justice (Mutambo, 2021). Women who are victims of violence often fear coming forward due to concerns about losing their jobs, retaliation from their abusers, harassment, embarrassment, stigma, victim-blaming, shaming and financial instability (Nahar, 2024).

Tanzania, like any other country around the world, has a large number of girls, boys, women, and men who have been subjected to various forms of violence, including sexual, physical, economic and psychological abuse (URT, 2023). In this context, the culture of silence in reporting different forms of abuse is a widespread problem that affects women, young girls and children at large. That is why one of the government initiatives was to develop the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC) (URT, 2016). In this plan, there was recognition that government efforts to address violence against women and children (VAWC) have been fraught with numerous challenges, ranging from national to sub-national levels, including financial and administrative constraints, as well as challenges within communities, families, and individuals' own capacities to address and respond to violence (URT, 2016).

The challenge in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) is the culture of silence surrounding the reporting of GBV (URT, 2016). Also, limited awareness and knowledge of social, economic, and legal rights among women and men, as well as inadequate service provision for survivors of violence, pose significant challenges in addressing various forms of GBV (URT, 2016). Because of a lack of trust and social stigma, survivors frequently decide not to report GBV incidents (Kasungu, 2023; Mirlashari et al., 2024).

2. Theoretical framework

To conceptualise the persistent culture of silence surrounding Gender-Based Violence (GBV) reporting, this study employs the socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This framework, notably adapted for interpersonal violence by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) and WHO (2016) and specifically to violence against women by Heise (1998), posits that individual behaviour and social phenomena are shaped by a nested system of interacting factors. These range from the individual level (microsystem), through interpersonal and community levels, to the broad societal level (macrosystem). This model provides the foundational structure for analysing the multi-layered barriers to reporting GBV i(Paat et al., 2025; Murphy et al., 2023).

The primary strength of the socio-ecological model lies in its rejection of simplistic, victim-blaming explanations. It interestingly argues that a survivor's decision to remain silent is not merely a personal choice but the outcome of a complex system of influences (Heise, 1998). This makes it an exceptionally relevant tool for the present study, which seeks to move beyond documenting low reporting rates to understanding the interconnected "why" behind them (Paat et al., 2025; Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). The model's

utility is in its ability to generate a holistic research design. It ensures that survey instruments and analysis do not focus narrowly on individual awareness but also probe relationship dynamics, community governance, and the perceived alignment of national policies with local realities (WHO, 2021). It theoretically predicts that interventions targeting only one level (e.g., awareness campaigns at the individual level) will fail if contradictory forces at the community or societal level (such as institutional mistrust or patriarchal norms) are not simultaneously addressed (García-Moreno et al., 2015).

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Setting and Design

The study was carried out in Bagamoyo District, situated in Tanzania's Coastal Region, approximately 75 kilometres north of Dar es Salaam. Bagamoyo District consists of 11 wards; however, this study focused on four selected wards: Dunda, Kiromo, Magomeni and Nianjema. These wards were purposefully selected due to their demographic diversity and varying levels of exposure to gender-based violence (GBV) awareness campaigns. Dunda, Magomeni, and Nianjema are situated in urban areas, where greater access to educational programs, healthcare services and community resources may enhance GBV awareness and reporting. In contrast, Kiromo is primarily a semi-urban area facing challenges, including limited access to awareness initiatives, which may contribute to lower levels of GBV reporting. The population in these wards varies in terms of socioeconomic status, education levels, and cultural practices. Rural areas often adhere to more traditional gender roles, which may hinder the reporting of GBV incidents. Moreover, local institutions such as police stations, health centres, and NGOs working on GBV differ in their effectiveness and reach across the wards. This selection of wards allowed the study to examine the diverse factors influencing GBV reporting in both urban and semi-urban socioeconomic contexts. It provides a comprehensive perspective on how cultural norms, shaped by different locations, impact GBV awareness and reporting.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data were collected through a baseline survey. Four wards, Dunda, Kiromo, Magomeni and Nianjema were purposively selected as semi-urban areas, with 120 households sampled from each ward. A household list was prepared under the supervision of local leaders at the hamlet level. Systematic sampling of households was implemented using a list provided by local authorities, ensuring geographic representation at the ward level. In each ward, the sample size was proportional to the size of the hamlets. Following the exclusion of three households due to missing data, the final sample comprised 477 households. Data were collected in May 2024 using a structured questionnaire designed to assess social and demographic information, awareness, experiences and the monitoring and reporting of GBV incidents.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using Statistical Software for Data Science (Stata) version 17. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise demographic variables, awareness levels, reporting rates, and factors contributing to the culture of silence. Meanwhile, logistic regression was employed to explore the relationships between factors such as education level, internet access, participation in awareness campaigns, and the likelihood of reporting GBV.

3.4 Empirical Model

Equation 1 below illustrates the use of a logistic regression model to examine people's awareness of gender-based violence (GBV). This model predicts the likelihood of GBV awareness based on demographics, socioeconomic traits, and other social variables. Logistic regression is appropriate for analysing binary dependent variables.

1. $Pr(Y_{it} \mid X) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{it} + \beta_2 X_{it} + \beta_3 X_{it} + \beta_4 X_{it} + \beta_5 X_{it} + \beta_6 X_{it} + B_7 X_{it} + \beta_8 X_{it} + \beta_9 X_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$

   Where $X = 1,0$

Y is the dependent variable.

$\beta_{i's}$ Parameters

X_{it} Are the independent variables

$$Pr(GBV\ Awareness_{it} \mid X) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Agegroup_{it} + \beta_2 Sex_{it} + \beta_3 MartStatus_{it} + \beta_4 Education_{it} + \beta_5 Occupation_{it} + \beta_6 Literacy_{it} + \beta_7 Internetaccess_{it} + \beta_8 Campaign_{it}$$

$$Pr(GBV\ Reporting_{it} \mid X) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Gender_{it} + \beta_2 Education_{it} + \beta_3 MartStatus_{it} + \beta_4 Education_{it} + \beta_5 Occupation_{it} + \beta_6 Phone_{it} + \beta_7 Internetaccess_{it} + \beta_8 Campaign_{it} + \beta_9 Emergencyhotline_{it} + \beta_{10} Governmentrepplatform_{it} + \beta_{11} Reportingplaceaware_{it} + \beta_{12} Safereporting_{it} + \beta_{13} Reporinganonymously_{it}$$

4. Findings and Discussion

The variables included in this study's descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1, derived from the baseline survey dataset consisting of 477 observations. The table provides a summary of key statistical metrics for each variable examined, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values. This data is essential for understanding the sample characteristics and forming the foundation for further analysis.

Table 1: Summary of characteristics variables

Variable	Definition and measurement	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Age	Age group (18-24 years, 25-34 years, 35-44 years, 45-54 years, 55-64 years and 65 and above)	3.528	1.385	1	6
Sex	Sex of respondent (1 = Male; 0 = Female)	1.314	.469	1	3
Education level	Education level of respondent (no education, informal education, primary education, secondary education, university education and vocational education)	2.308	.946	1	7
Marital status	Marital status of respondent (cohabitation, divorced, married, separated, single, widow, widower)	3.56	1.373	1	7
Occupation	Occupation of respondent (no occupation, business, farmer, fisher,)	2.105	1.463	1	6
Internet access	Internet access (1 = Yes; 0 = No)	1.279	.449	1	2
campaign	Awareness of campaigns addressing GBV (1= Yes; 0 = No)	2.027	.54	1	3
phone	Phone ownership (1 = Yes; 0 = No)	1.931	.254	1	2
Emergency hotline	Awareness of emergency hotline (1 = Yes; 0 = No)	1.103	.304	1	2
Reporting platform	Awareness of government reporting platform (1= Yes; 0 = No)	3.281	.877	1	5
Aware of where to report	Awareness of where to report (1 = Yes; 0 = No)	1.715	.452	1	2
Aware of reported incidents	Awareness of reported incidents (1 = Yes; 0 = No)	1.256	.437	1	2
Safe reporting	Safe reporting (1 = Yes; 0 = No)	2.635	.595	1	3
Reporting anonymously	Reporting anonymously (1 = Yes; 0 = N0)	2.987	1.108	1	4
Literacy	Read, write (None, Only read, Read and Write)	2.786	.6014	1	3

4.1 Awareness of gender-based violence

Understanding of the term GBV, its forms, and awareness of incidents was investigated. The data shows that 90% in Dunda, 89.2% in Kiromo, 89.2% in Magomeni, and 82.1% in Nianjema responded "yes" to having an understanding of the term gender-based violence. Conversely, 10% in Dunda, 10.8% in Kiromo, 10.8% in Magomeni, and 17.9% in Nianjema reported "no" regarding their awareness of GBV. This implies that the majority of respondents at the household level are aware of the term gender-based violence.

Table 2: Awareness of the term gender based violence

	Dunda		Kiromo		Magomeni		Nianjema	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Yes	107	90	107	89.2	107	89.2	96	82.1
No	12	10	13	10.8	13	10.8	21	17.9

Regarding different forms of GBV, multiple responses were given. The responses reveal that respondents are aware of various forms of GBV. These include physical violence (41.2%) in Table 3, which reflects a greater recognition of direct acts of injury. Physical violence involves behaviours that aim to cause or result in bodily pain or injury. It often reflects imbalances in social power and may be used to assert control or compel compliance with particular demands through coercive means (Van Der Veur et al., 2007).

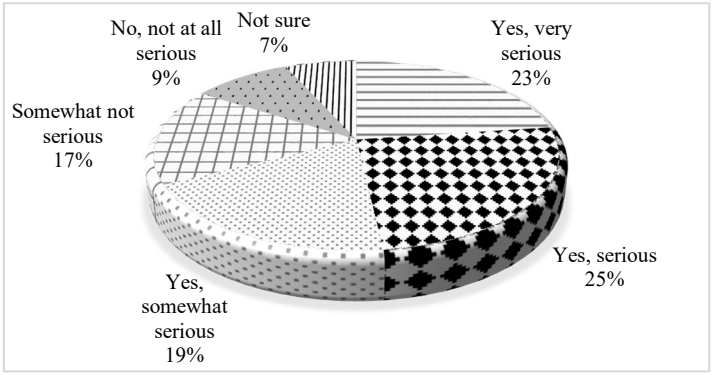
Approximately 32.7% of respondents reported sexual violence, demonstrating the alarmingly widespread awareness of non-consensual sexual actions. The reality of financial control and deprivation, which can significantly restrict an individual's autonomy, is highlighted by economic violence (8.2%). Economic deprivation can increase a victim's vulnerability to other forms of violence and may also be a factor that triggers the occurrence of additional abusive behaviours (Van Der Veur et al., 2007). Other forms of GBV include cyberbullying (2.8%), which highlights growing concerns about technology-based abuse and psychological or emotional violence (10.4%).

Table 3: Awareness of forms of gender-based violence

Forms of gender based violence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical	379	41.2
Psychological or emotional	96	10.4
Sexual	300	32.7
Mental	42	4.5
Economic	76	8.2
Cyber bullying	25	2.8

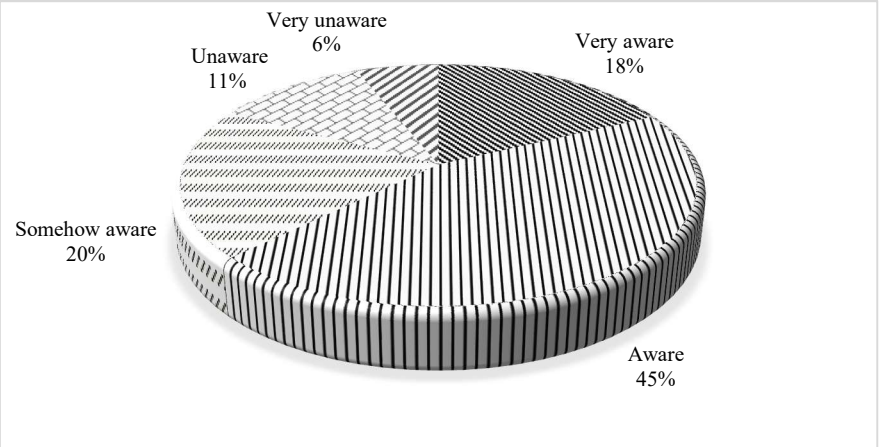
In Graph 1, respondents were asked to what extent they perceive GBV as a serious issue in their community. The findings show that, although the degree of concern varies, most respondents consider gender-based violence to be a serious issue in their community. GBV is perceived as "very serious" (23%), "serious" (25%) and "yes, somewhat serious" (19%). Approximately 67% of respondents perceive that GBV is a serious issue in their community. However, (17%) of the respondents think gender-based violence is "somewhat not serious" and (9%) reported, "not at all serious". About (7%) of respondents were "not sure," indicating a degree of uncertainty. The findings show majority of the respondents perceive gender-based violence to be a serious issue in their community.

Graph 1: Perceive gender-based violence as a serious issue



Graph 2 presents awareness of any incidents of gender-based violence occurring in the community. In general, (623%) of the surveyed respondents are aware of gender-based violence incidents occurring in their community. These include respondents who reported "aware" (45%) and "very aware" (18%). Respondents are either fairly aware of or very aware of GBV incidences occurring in their community. However, (20%) of them reported "somehow aware" of what is happening in their community, indicating that they are aware of GBV events but are unsure. On the other hand, (11%) reported "unaware" and (6%) "very unaware" of the GBV incidents in their community.

Graph 2: Awareness of gender-based violence incidents



4.2 The significance of other variables to the level of awareness

The results from Table 4 provide insights into several variables that influence individuals' awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) and its various forms. Age was found to negatively impact awareness; for instance, studies have shown that older individuals often have lower awareness of GBV (Murphy et al., 2023). One possible reason is that older generations were not exposed to the same information that younger generations receive through modern media channels and community outreach initiatives. They grew up in a time when campaigns and educational programs about GBV were far less common. On the other hand, higher literacy levels and stronger educational backgrounds appear to enhance GBV awareness. This is likely because education and reading skills provide individuals with greater access to information, enabling them to learn about local events and social issues more effectively.

Another significant factor in raising awareness is access to the Internet. Several major GBV campaigns, such as "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence," are widely disseminated on social media with slogans like "Break the Culture of Silence" and "Break the Cycle of Violence" to reach a large audience (UN Women, 2021). Through these platforms, people can recognise the warning signs of abuse and access resources for support (Klugman, 2017). Community programs, including seminars and awareness sessions led by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), provide a more direct means of educating communities about gender-based violence and strategies to combat it. However, there is no correlation between GBV awareness and a person's marital status, sex or occupation. Being married, identifying as a man or a woman, or working in a particular field does not necessarily imply a higher level of GBV awareness. Instead, education, internet access and participation in targeted awareness efforts appear to be the key factors in increasing knowledge about GBV.

Table 4: Significance of other variables to the level of awareness of gender-based violence

Variables	Awareness
Age_group	-0.249**
	-0.101
Gender	-0.213
	-0.335
Education	0.752***
	-0.233
Occupation	-0.058
	-0.112
Marital	0.033
	-0.112
Literacy	0.542***
	-0.208
Internet access	1.334**
	-0.552
Campaign	0.998***
	-0.285
Constant	-2.658**
	-1.091
Observations	477
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

4.3 The rate of reporting gender-based violence incidence

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of where to report incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) in their community. According to the data in Table 5, 86.3% of respondents reported knowing where to report GBV cases in their area. This indicates that the majority of community members are aware of the appropriate reporting channels for GBV incidents, facilitating response and action. A high level of awareness can contribute to breaking the cycle of violence by ensuring that survivors receive the necessary support. When the majority of household members know where to seek help, it fosters a safer environment for GBV survivors.

Table 5: Awareness of where to report incidents of gender-based violence

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
es	412	86.4
No	65	13.6

Respondents identified various offices where they could report GBV incidents in their area. Table 6 presents multiple responses, showing that 28.5% of respondents preferred the police gender desk as their primary reporting office for gender-based violence incidents. In addition, 27.5% reported the hamlet office, 22.9% mentioned the ward office, and 14.6% indicated the district council office. The lowest percentage (6.5%) selected a mosque or church as their preferred reporting location. The police gender desk, which is located closer

to the community at the ward level, is perceived as the most approachable office for reporting GBV incidents.

Table 6: Offices where to report incidents of gender-based violence

Reporting offices	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ward office	307	22.9
District council office	182	14.6
Police gender desk	336	28.5
Mosque / Church	88	6.5
Hamlet office	329	27.5

Table 7 presents responses regarding whether respondents have ever reported an incident of gender-based violence. The data indicate that the level of reporting GBV incidents is low in the selected wards. The majority of respondents reported "no" to having ever reported a GBV incident: 85.8% in Dunda, 90% in Kiromo, 82.5% in Magomeni and 85.5% in Nianjema. These findings suggest that a culture of silence persists regarding the reporting of gender-based violence. The results imply that most respondents have never reported GBV incidents, even when they were aware of such cases in their community. This highlights a significant gap between awareness of GBV incidents and the actual reporting rate.

Table 7: Have you ever reported any incidents of gender-based violence?

	Dunda		Kiromo		Magomeni		Nianjema	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
No	103	85.8	108	90	99	82.5	100	85.5
Yes	17	14.2	12	10	21	17.5	17	14.5

In addition, respondents who reported having filed incidents of gender-based violence were asked to indicate the offices where these incidents were reported. The responses reveal that: 50.8% reported the incident to the police gender desk, 32.9% reported to the ward executive office, 8.9% reported to the regular police station, 4.5% reported to a family member, and 2.9% reported to a friend. These findings suggest that household members prefer the police gender desk at the ward level when seeking help. The preference for the police gender desk and the ward executive office highlights the need for accessible services that address survivors' concerns with sensitivity and confidentiality at the ward level. Furthermore, the fact that over half of the respondents who reported GBV incidents preferred the police gender desk underscores the importance of such offices at the ward level. This suggests the value of continued investment in community-based and specialised reporting mechanisms at the grassroots level.

Table 8: Offices where gender-based violence incidents were reported

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Police station	6	8.9
Ward Executive Office	22	32.9
Police gender desk	34	50.8
Family member	3	4.5
Friend	2	2.9

In addition, respondents who reported GBV incidents were asked to indicate the extent to which they were satisfied with the support they received. The responses reveal that nearly

half of the respondents (46.3%) were "somewhat unsatisfied", and no one reported being "very satisfied" with the support they received after reporting an incident. When combined with those who were "unsatisfied" (12%) and "very unsatisfied" (6%), these findings show that a majority of respondents experienced varying levels of dissatisfaction. However, 25.4% expressed that they were satisfied, while 10.4% preferred not to disclose their level of satisfaction. These results suggest that although some survivors found the support to be at least somewhat satisfactory, most respondents perceived room for significant improvement in the available support mechanisms. The fact that a majority were "somewhat unsatisfied" could indicate that while some felt partially supported, they also encountered barriers that prevented them from feeling fully satisfied.

Table 9: Levels of satisfaction with the reported GBV incidents

Levels of satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very satisfied	0	0
Satisfied	17	25.4
Somehow unsatisfied	31	46.3
Unsatisfied	8	12
Very unsatisfied	4	6
Prefer not to say	7	10.4

Respondents were also asked whether their community provides an option for reporting incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) anonymously. More than half (53.9%) indicated that their community offers such an option, highlighting a positive step toward ensuring that survivors and witnesses of violence can seek help without fear of exposure or reprisal. However, 18.6% of participants stated that no such option exists, illustrating that while some communities may have anonymous reporting structures in place, others still lack this critical mechanism. Additionally, 10.1% of respondents said they were "not sure," while 17.4% reported "don't know", suggesting a significant level of uncertainty or lack of awareness regarding the existence of these reporting channels. Establishing anonymous reporting systems for GBV incidents could enhance trust and encourage a culture of reporting, ultimately contributing to efforts to combat gender-based violence.

Table 10: Anonymity option for community members to report GBV incidents

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	257	53.9
No	89	18.6
Not sure	48	10.1
Don't know	83	17.4
Total	**477**	**100**

Findings in Table 11 show that text messages are the most frequently cited method for community members to report incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) anonymously, accounting for 40.1% of responses. The use of suggestion boxes, often placed in safe, communal locations, ranks second at 29.7%, suggesting that tangible, drop-box-style reporting remains a popular choice for those who wish to remain anonymous. Meanwhile, 15.8% of respondents mentioned phone calls, reflecting the enduring relevance of direct voice-based communication when physical interaction is not required. WhatsApp messages, at 11.1%, indicate a smaller but still significant number of individuals turning to app-based channels for reporting. In contrast, only 3.3% opted for face-to-face methods, likely because

maintaining anonymity is more challenging in person. These patterns underscore the community's preference for reporting methods that ensure privacy and minimise potential risks or fears of retribution. Text messaging, suggestion boxes, and phone calls offer individuals a sense of security, convenience, and the ability to report incidents without revealing their identity. By comparison, WhatsApp remains an emerging option and is less accessible in semi-urban areas like Bagamoyo, possibly due to factors such as limited smartphone ownership or high data costs. The low response rate for face-to-face reporting highlights the importance of anonymity for individuals choosing to come forward with concerns about GBV.

Table 11: Ways for community members to report GBV incidents anonymously

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Text messages	267	40.1
Phone call	106	15.8
Suggestion box	198	29.7
Face-to-face	22	3.3
WhatsApp message	74	11.1

On the other hand, Table 12 responses show that the majority of respondents (68.9%) believe that maintaining confidentiality is "extremely important" in encouraging local community members to report incidents of gender-based violence. About 19.8% consider it "very important," while only 7.5% think it is "moderately important." In addition, 2.7% and 1.1% of respondents rated confidentiality as "slightly important" and "not important at all," respectively, highlighting the overwhelming consensus that protecting survivors' identities and maintaining privacy are essential for fostering a supportive reporting environment.

Table 12: Importance of confidentiality in encouraging community members to report GBV incidents

Importance levels of confidentiality	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Extremely important	329	68.9
Very important	94	19.8
Moderately important	36	7.5
Slightly important	13	2.7
Not important at all	5	1.1
Total	**477**	**100**

Table 13 presents the influence of various variables on the level of reporting GBV incidents. Victims and witnesses are more likely to come forward when there are readily available methods for reporting GBV. Key factors that increase the likelihood of reporting include awareness of GBV incidents, access to emergency hotlines, knowledge of reporting procedures (including anonymous options) and awareness campaigns. These findings align with other studies, which suggest that easily accessible reporting channels and clear information can help reduce the stigma associated with GBV (Murphy et al., 2023). However, the data indicate that factors such as gender, education, and occupation do not significantly influence whether a person reports GBV. This is consistent with research showing that social support networks and the availability of useful resources often play a

more significant role in reporting behaviour (Klugman, 2017). Although household members are generally aware of where to report GBV incidents, reporting rates remain low. Even when individuals know how to report, they may still encounter deeper barriers, such as a lack of confidentiality from local authorities, fear of stigma, or distrust in authorities (Palermo et al., 2014; van der Burg & Young, 2024).

Table 13: Influence of various variables on the level of reporting on GBV incidents

Variables	Reporting
Gender	-0.158
	-0.347
Education	-0.0106
	-0.172
Occupation	0.128
	-0.098
Marital status	0.0572
	-0.106
Phone number	0.857
	-1.065
Internet access	-0.159
	-0.349
Campaign	0.530*
	-0.285
Emergency hotline	0.830**
	-0.414
Government reporting platform	0.119**
	-0.165
Reporting place awareness	1.177**
	-0.624
Gbv incidents awareness	1.775***
	-0.333
Safe reporting	-0.00525
	-0.372
Reporting anonymously	0.0633**
	-0.158
Constant	-10.92***
	-2.502
Observations	477

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.4 Contributing factors for the culture of silence

The culture of silence in the context of gender-based violence (GBV) refers to the societal tendency to remain quiet or avoid discussing issues of violence, particularly in intimate or familial settings (Ricoy-Cano et al., 2025; Keratiloe et al., 2022). This silence is rooted in multiple factors, including distrust in authorities, fear of retaliation, stigma, lack of confidentiality, and insufficient support from duty bearers. Table 14 presents the factors influencing the culture of silence. Since respondents were allowed to select multiple reasons, the total responses may exceed the total number of respondents.

Table 14: Contributing factors for culture of silence in GBV reporting

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of trust in authorities	109	14
No response or action from the duty bearers	65	8
Lack of confidentiality	200	26
Fear of retaliation	98	13
Unaware of reporting options	55	7
Lack of evidence	94	12
Lack of support from duty bearers	73	9
Insufficient resources	20	3
Cultural taboos	38	5
Prefer not to answer	19	2

4.4.1 Lack of Confidentiality

A major contributing factor to the culture of silence is the absence of confidentiality, which was identified by 26% of the total responses. Confidentiality plays a crucial role in encouraging victims to report gender-based violence (GBV). When victims fear that their personal information will be exposed or that their cases will not be handled with discretion, they are less likely to come forward. A breach of confidentiality can further victimise survivors, making them feel vulnerable and unsafe. Many victims worry that if their testimonies and personal information become public, it could lead to stigmatisation, public humiliation, or retaliation from their offenders. Mirlashari et al. (2024) argue that a lack of confidentiality discourages survivors from sharing their experiences of GBV, as it breeds mistrust. This lack of privacy exacerbates the culture of silence, as women fear shame, judgment, and potential consequences from their community or medical professionals (Mirlashari et al., 2024). Maintaining privacy is essential for the safety and well-being of survivors. Failure to uphold confidentiality, when cases are shared publicly, discourages others from seeking help.

4.4.2 Lack of Trust in Authorities

The culture of silence around gender-based violence (GBV) is influenced by a lack of trust in authorities (14%). Victims of GBV are often hesitant to report abuse due to fears that their complaints will not be taken seriously or that their abusers will not be held accountable. This is particularly true in communities where law enforcement is unavailable, overburdened or corrupt. Mutambo (2023), in an investigation of socio-cultural factors contributing to low reporting levels of GBV cases, found that poor law enforcement, societal stigma and embarrassment, and bias in the legal system all undermine victims' trust in the legal system, leaving them disillusioned and doubtful about seeking justice. This suggests that a lack of trust and confidence in the ability of authorities to effectively address GBV reflects concerns about their responsiveness, transparency and effectiveness. Without addressing these trust issues, many individuals will likely remain reluctant to seek help or report abuse, further exacerbating the culture of silence.

4.4.3 Lack of evidence

One of the obstacles to reporting gender-based violence (GBV) is a lack of evidence (12%). This issue arises because many GBV incidents occur in private settings, often without witnesses or concrete proof. Reporters face procedural challenges when they are asked to

support their claims with evidence. As a result, many offenders escape punishment due to insufficient proof, leading to underreporting of sexual violence cases.

4.4.4 Fear of retaliation

Fear of retaliation (13%) has been identified as a key factor contributing to the culture of silence in reporting GBV incidents in the selected wards of Bagamoyo. This fear is deeply rooted in social and relational dynamics, where survivors feel vulnerable to negative consequences if they disclose their experiences. Retaliation can manifest in various ways, including threats of harm and social isolation, creating an environment where survivors choose silence over reporting. Female employees are particularly at risk of losing their jobs or facing retaliation, which can lead to financial instability (Nahar, 2024). Power imbalances within gender and family structures exacerbate the fear of retaliation. Without reliable institutional support, survivors often believe that reporting will worsen their situation rather than resolve it (Kreft, 2023; Nahar, 2024).

4.4.5 Lack of support from duty bearers

Lack of support from duty bearers (9.5%), such as local authorities, law enforcement, or healthcare providers, can leave victims feeling abandoned and helpless, further contributing to the broader culture of silence in the community. A major concern for survivors is the perception that reporting GBV cases to authorities may not result in meaningful action. In many instances, survivors feel that the response from police or healthcare workers is insufficient (Matoy et al., 2024), discouraging them from coming forward. For example, survivors may have experienced situations where their cases were ignored by those responsible for assisting. This sense of futility within the system further entrenches the silence around GBV, as victims may choose to remain silent rather than face disappointment or retaliation.

4.4.6 Cultural taboos

Cultural taboos play a significant role in discouraging victims of GBV from speaking out or seeking help. This is supported by Piedalue et al. (2020), whose study highlights how certain social norms and traditional beliefs create an environment where GBV is seen as a private matter that should not be openly discussed. Cultural expectations often demand total obedience to one's spouse, further suppressing victims' voices. Cultural and traditional beliefs, such as practising witchcraft, upholding family respect, and preserving social harmony, contribute to the culture of silence surrounding GBV. These norms stigmatise victims, discouraging them from reporting due to fear of shame, blame, or social isolation (Smee, 2012). Many victims remain silent to avoid being labelled as disrespectful or disruptive to community harmony. This cultural conditioning reinforces the notion that reporting GBV may bring shame to families or violate deep-seated traditions. Victims often feel pressured to remain silent because of the widely held belief that maintaining family honor is more important than seeking justice, as speaking out could embarrass their families (Nahar, 2024). Victim-blaming attitudes, such as blaming women and girls for sexual assault or justifying a husband's use of physical violence to discipline his wife, are often perpetuated by community leaders, institutions, and service providers, including law enforcement, healthcare, and education sectors. These harmful beliefs are sometimes viewed as necessary for maintaining the family's reputation within the broader community (Perrin et al., 2019).

4.5 Model Validation

Model	HL χ^2	HL p-value	AUC	% Correctly classified	Mean VIF
Awareness	10.19	0.2521	0.7561	88.47%	1.75
Reporting	3.20	0.9213	0.8957	88.26%	1.25

To assess the reliability and predictive accuracy of the logistic regression models, several diagnostic tests were conducted. The Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test indicated that both models fit the data well. For the awareness model, the test yielded $\chi^2 = 10.19$ ($p = 0.2521$), while the reporting model produced $\chi^2 = 3.20$ ($p = 0.9213$). Since the p-values exceed 0.05, there is no evidence of lack of fit, suggesting that the predicted probabilities align closely with observed outcomes. The models' ability to discriminate between outcomes was assessed using the Area Under the Receiver Operating Characteristic Curve (AUC). The awareness model achieved an AUC of 0.7561, indicating acceptable predictive ability. The reporting model also demonstrated stronger performance, with an AUC of 0.8957, reflecting excellent discrimination between respondents who report and those who do not. Both models correctly classified approximately 88% of observations, further confirming strong predictive accuracy. Multi-collinearity diagnostics showed low mean Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values (1.75 for the awareness model and 1.25 for the reporting model), indicating no evidence of problematic correlation among explanatory variables. This supports the stability and reliability of the estimated coefficients. Overall, these diagnostic results confirm that the models are well specified, statistically reliable, and suitable for inference.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigated the specific dynamics of the culture of silence surrounding gender-based violence (GBV) in selected wards in Bagamoyo district with three clear objectives: to assess community awareness levels, to determine actual reporting rates, and to identify the factors that prevent reporting. The findings show that while awareness of GBV and formal reporting channels is high, the rate of reporting incidents to authorities remains low. This disconnect identifies the core of the problem not as a lack of knowledge, but as a systemic failure in the environment where reporting should occur. The study makes several key contributions. Theoretically, it provides empirical validation and context-specific elaboration of the socio-ecological model, demonstrating how factors at the individual (fear, shame), interpersonal (retaliation, family pressure), community (distrust in local authorities, lack of confidentiality), and societal (cultural taboos) levels interact to enforce silence. It underscores that interventions targeting only one level, such as awareness campaigns, are insufficient against this interconnected web of barriers. Several factors contribute to this culture of silence, including distrust in authorities, fear of retaliation, lack of confidentiality, insufficient support, cultural taboos, and a lack of awareness about reporting mechanisms. These barriers not only perpetuate cycles of violence but also hinder victims from accessing essential services such as medical and psychosocial support or holding perpetrators accountable. The study underscores the urgent need for holistic and sustained efforts to dismantle the culture of silence and create a supportive environment for GBV survivors. Addressing this issue is crucial in promoting a more responsive, inclusive, and supportive society where victims feel safe seeking justice and support. To achieve this, enhanced collective efforts are needed, including raising awareness, strengthening monitoring systems, creating safe spaces for reporting, and building trust. Therefore, promoting gender

equality among different stakeholders and ensuring inclusive participation in GBV prevention initiatives are recommended.

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