



Dissertation title:

“Adolescent pregnancy in Tanzania: Exploring Women’s Realities and the intersection of Culture and Human Rights”.

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ABSTRACT

Adolescent pregnancy is one of the most challenging issues in Sub-Sahara countries and the United Republic of Tanzania is one of the countries with the highest rates worldwide, in the which is the reason why it is the geographic focus of the research. Even though the women's perspective on adolescent pregnancy and their human rights at stake is a question of importance, findings indicate that it has been given minimal levels of consideration in the literature to date. Thus, the focus of this qualitative research will be on the women that have had an early-childbearing experience when adolescents, and their views will be examined in correlation with culture, human rights and the discourses used by the intermediaries who support them.

Keywords: Adolescent pregnancy, human rights, culture, intermediaries

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1. Introduction

According to UNFPA (2017), Africa has the world's highest adolescent pregnancy rates. In Tanzania, according to the same report, one in every four girls aged 15- 19 had begun childbearing. The vast majority of these adolescents appear to be constrained by social and economic factors, resulting in the formation of families at a young age. In another context, this may not be a concern, but in this one, adolescent pregnancy jeopardizes young girls' economic prospects, education, social status, and life chances. This lack of girls' and women's control over their reproductive processes has a negative impact on their lives and is a violation of their human rights. Analyzing the lived realities of women who have experienced pregnancy as adolescents and focusing on women's agency is of critical importance women's agency but has received comparatively less attention in the literature, thus it will be the main goal of this study.

1.1 The Tanzanian Context

The United Republic of Tanzania is an east African country neighboring with Kenya and Uganda in the north, Rwanda, Burundi, and Democratic Republic of Congo in the west and Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique in the south and consists of 14 million people. According to a new World Bank poverty analysis (2023), even though the poverty has decreased in the past decade, half of the country's population still lives below the international poverty line, and a big amount is at risk of falling into it. Also, the report notes that during the COVID pandemic and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine the situation worsened, and the poverty rate increased in 2021 to 27% in comparison to 2019 that was 26.2%.

The Chato district, where the research was conducted, is one of the five districts in the Geita region of north-western Tanzania. The community's main source of income is seasonal farming, which does not provide them with much profit and exacerbates the scarcity of basic necessities like power and water. Aside from that, Chato is one of the districts in the country with the largest number of women-led households, which consist of single mothers, widows, grandmothers, and children who are frequently forced to engage in farm activities themselves or, in the case of girls, marry in order to make ends meet (OECD, 2022).

Across the African continent, children and women are among the most disadvantaged in the society and face many structural gender inequalities due to the cultural and social norms, especially in the isolated, rural areas; Tanzania is no exception. Due to poverty and women's low social status, child marriage rates in Chato are among the highest in the country; a trend that is associated with a range of gender-based inequalities including physical and sexual abuse, child pregnancy, child mortality, low educational attainment, and lack of capital accumulation. The World Bank (2022b) conducted two reports, the Tanzanian Gender Assessment 2022, and the Tanzania Gender-Based Violence Assessment 2022 that show the gender disparity in the economic aspect and voice and agency of the women, among others. Thus, it urges the Tanzanian Government to enhance the efforts to advance women's empowerment and gender equality by strengthening its policies and modifying the laws that undermine women and girls' rights.

Food and economic insecurity are among the reasons that have led to a substantial increase in teenage pregnancy and school dropout rates over the past few decades. Girls are exposed to different forms of exploitation and abuse, and incidents of early childbearing and marriage for dowry are common. Furthermore, the Tanzanian government's announcement of a legislation that explicitly bans pregnant girls and young mothers from attending school has not helped the situation, which results in them missing significant amounts of schooling. According to UNICEF (2019), 129 million girls are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa, including 32 million of primary school age, 30 million of lower secondary school age, and 67 million of upper secondary school age. In other words, education is not an option for many girls, which increases their vulnerability and perpetuates their marginalization.

1.2 Relevance to Human Rights

In this dissertation, I will approach adolescent pregnancy from a Human Rights perspective. Thus, I will analyze the issue in reference to the Conventions of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In addition, I will mention regional human rights treaties such as the African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW is an international legal instrument that aimed at eradicating gender discrimination and promoting equality (OHCHR, 1979). It has been ratified by 189 countries, including Tanzania in 1980 (OHCHR, 1980). The Convention condemns discriminatory laws (Article 2), proposes equal access to opportunities for women (Article 3), equal access to education opportunities (Article 10), and urges states to take into consideration the challenges faced by women in rural areas and take measures to ensure their participation in the community. In addition, there is the right to education, which includes counselling on family planning, health, and family well-being (Article 10), and equal rights in making responsible decisions about the number of children (Article 16), in regard to the protection of women's sexual and reproductive health rights.

Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The CRC is an international human rights treaty that was adopted in 1989, with the goal to fight against the discrimination against children and fight for their right to education currently (OHCHR, 1989). It has been ratified by 196 UN member states, including Tanzania in 1990 (OHCHR, 1990). Some of the children's rights outlined in this Convention establish the promotion of their right to education (Articles 28 and 29), the provision of adequate living standards, and include their protection from economic exploitation (Article 32) and sexual abuse (Article 34).

Tanzania is one of the countries that ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in 2003, that is a treaty that aims to protect the rights of pregnant girls to ensure the completion of primary and secondary education (Organization of African Unity, 1990). In general, there have been a series of documents such as CEDAW, CRC, and the ACRWC, that have attempted to address issues such as adolescent pregnancy as well as define who is considered to be a child. According to the ACRWC, a child is considered to be anyone below the age of 18, and in Tanzania under the Sexual Offenses Special Provision Act (1998), the minimum age of consent for sexual relationships is 18 too, unless married. In addition to this, the minimum age of marriage is set by the Law of Marriage Act at 15 for girls and 18 for boys and even though there was a repeal to change this by the High Court of Tanzania, it is still pending (World Bank, 2022b).

Tanzania along with Equatorial Guinea and Sierra Leone, are among the few countries in Africa, that have explicitly banned girls who are pregnant, married or are mothers from its schools with the strictest expulsion policy (Human Rights Watch, 2018a). This ban denies pregnant adolescent and young mothers the right to study in public schools, so it limits the access to education to big percent of the population and goes against the CRC and the CEDAW (HRW, 2021a). According to World Bank (2022a) keeping girls in school could have significant impact in the reduction of early childbearing and the lives of young mothers. In 2021 the policy of expelling pregnant teenagers from schools was still under debate in Parliament and President Samia Sululu Hassan reaffirmed that Tanzania would begin to offer an opportunity for girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy to complete their education (Reuters, 2021). Finally, on November 24th, 2021, the expulsion policy was revoked after the announcement of the education minister Joyce Ndalichako.

This change is a great step towards the promotion of the right to education for girls. At the same time, it will protect and support the girl child to reach her full potential. However, many obstacles remain when talking about the school attainment of adolescent mothers so the Tanzanian government should take action to support pregnant pupils reintegrate into the school environment (HRW, 2021b). Adolescent pregnancy is a complex issue and there are many reasons behind it such as social, cultural, and economic, which will be examined in this dissertation.

1.3 Set of research questions

This study relies on the belief that comprehending the complexities of this issue, as well as Tanzanian women's perceptions of their human rights based how they see themselves resisting the societal and cultural constraints, is the only way to meet these girls' and women's human rights. As a result, the emphasis will be on the stories of women who became pregnant as adolescents.

In addition, I will investigate the views of the intermediaries, which include educators, Village Executive Officers (VEOs), Village Chairpersons (VCs) and Non-governmental (NGO) staff members. The educators are the teaching staff members of the region's secondary schools; VEOs and VCs are community members who were elected as representatives; and lastly, there

are the staff members of an NGO that operates in the area, with whom I was in contact with for the sake of this research. This will provide a better insight into the cultural and social context of the women's community and the human rights discourse employed in the effort to address early childbearing among schoolgirls. This dissertation will aim to answer the following research questions:

- What are the realities of the pregnant girls and young mothers? Why is their human right to control their own reproductive processes not being met despite all the efforts and interventions?

Some following research questions this study attempts to answer are:

- What are the cultural and social norms in the region for early pregnancy? How are women affected differently than men?
- How do Tanzanian women who have experienced adolescent pregnancy and all that entails, perceive their human rights and mainly their control over their reproductive rights? What are their priorities? How do the intermediaries view these women's rights?

2. Literature Review

Over the last decades, research on child pregnancy in sub-Saharan countries has proliferated. This chapter will provide a review of the literature on adolescent pregnancy with a geographical focus on the United Republic of Tanzania. An important finding is that the majority of studies have as their primary goal the intervention and modification of the situation based on their own assumptions and end up emphasizing on girls' and women's behavior change for the prevention of teenage childbearing. Not many studies seek to examine the situation from the perspective of the young mothers themselves, give voice to them, while evaluating social, cultural norms, economic realities, and the religion and gender roles embedded in them. This chapter will briefly provide a review of the existing literature concentrating particularly in the following topics: the protective and risk factors behind teenage pregnancy, the social, cultural norms, the gender discrimination, the economic asymmetry, sexual exploitation, and the women's agency. However, it should be noted that all these aspects associated with adolescent pregnancy are intertwined and will be presented in the way they have been described in the literature.

My study seeks to contribute to this body of literature with its emphasis on human agency, I use an ethnographic approach through empirical data collection, which aims to reveal the lived experiences of Tanzanian women who have become pregnant as adolescents. Also, there will be a reference to the human rights at stake as they are perceived by women in this social and cultural context.

2.1 Protective and risk factors

Many studies (Hagues and McCarty, 2022, Macmillan and Copher, 2005) have been conducted to investigate the protective and risk factors behind child pregnancy, as well as the causes and the consequences of it. Hagues and McCarty (2022) researched the impact of the first birth in a woman's life, and identified several factors such as education, work, and wealth that could be portrayed as protective or risk depending on the circumstances. More specifically, the research depicted the important role that the socioeconomic situation of the family and the children's engagement with education play in the vulnerability of the girls and the likelihood of them being taken advantage of for sexual intercourse. This is confirmed by Macmillan and Copher (2005) who argue that advantaged adolescents who are supported by their family

members while being engaged in school attendance, have fewer chances of becoming parents or end up with limited educational and career opportunities compared to other disadvantaged ones. However, the issue is very complex, so Hague and McCarty (2022) were unable to determine casual connections between the possibility of girls in better socioeconomic positions having fewer chances of an early pregnancy or the reality that young mothers are less likely to be offered greater economic opportunities.

Some studies (Miller, 2001, Remes *et al.*, 2010) have also focused on the parent-child behavior that could act as risk or protective factor depending. Miller (2001) after her two decades analysis of research on the parental, environmental, and biological influences on the likelihood of adolescent pregnancy, she concluded that parent-child relationship as one of the most important factors. She divided her study of parenting into key themes: parental support/connectedness, control/regulation, and parent-child communication. Based on her findings, she indicated that authoritarian and negligent parenting contributed to the development of a poor relationship between the parent and the child, had a negative impact on the latter, and increased the chance of pregnancy and thus, served as a risk factor. In their research on the reasons behind child pregnancy, Remes *et al.* (2010) seem to agree with Miller and stresses the importance of working with parents in order to alter community and social norms in regard to youth sexuality and subsequently, teenage pregnancy, through raising awareness on family planning, gender equality and achieving better communication. Additionally, Miller's research (2001) also identifies some risk factors for adolescence, such as biological factors and hormone levels, or the how dangerous is the area the minor lives in, or if the minor is part of a single-parent family with brothers and sisters older than her.

2.2 Social and Cultural norms

Research on teenage pregnancy has concentrated heavily on the sexual behavior patterns in Tanzania. Mwanga *et al.* (2011) touched on the issue of sexual behavior and showed the connection between the cultural and socio-economic factors on risky sexual behavior and traditional practices of three study communities. The research shared community's opinions for sexually active persons in order to highlight repressive attitudes in society and indicated the ignorance that characterizes the affected communities which contributes to child pregnancy.

Wight *et al.* (2006) studied permissive and restrictive rules in the sexual culture of rural northern Tanzania through an in-depth ethnographic approach. Their observation-based study showed that rules as set at that specific region seem to both encourage and restrict sexuality through its contradicting standards. In Tanzania pupil abstinence is the sexual norm, which means students are expected to delay having sex until they graduate out of respect for their parents. According to the findings of their research, sexual beliefs seem to be socially produced by cultural norms, they are still unable to prevent students from engaging in sexual intercourse. In addition, parents, teachers, and communities expressed their disapproval of sexual and reproductive health education, with the belief that it will encourage youth to be sexually active. Thus, seeing that sexual discourse among minors is prohibited, they prefer ignorance around subjects such as contraception, HIV and even menstruation, which seems to widen the gap between generations and increase the youth's vulnerability even more. However, according to Ross (2007) who conducted an adolescent sexual health intervention in Tanzania in mid-2002, with the goal of raising awareness about sexual reproductive health, decreasing child pregnancy, and preventing HIV transmission, there was no increase in rates of sexual activity during the three-year trial period, as expected by parents. Instead, there was significant progress in teenage sexuality views. Thus, the researchers stressed the importance of focusing on influencing the community cultural, which define decision making among the two genders and the power dynamics, in order to achieve a sustainable impact on the society.

Wight *et al.* (2006), in their ethnographic research on the restrictive and permissive forms mentioned above, also highlight the inconsistent and conflicting messages that society often delivers to the youth population owing to stereotypes and conservatism, which have an impact on human agency. They explain the nature of these messages using examples that they identified in society. On the one hand, parents always favor boys in order to secure better educational and future work opportunities, and the stereotypes that are cultivated promote men's masculinity. On the other hand, girls are undervalued and sexualized from a young age and appear to be unable to obtain essential goods due to poverty, leaving them with the option of engaging in sexual relationships in order to do so and to find acceptance within their peer group. On top of that, findings indicated that in certain Tanzanian communities there is the belief that all relationships between genders are primarily sexual, which results in minors avoiding interaction or simply concealing any sort of relationship formed with the other gender prior to marriage.

Unluckily, due to the phenomenal shame of some community members with strong religious beliefs, there is a lack of follow-up in cases of pregnant minors, as well as a lack of data representation. Instead, community members often prefer to deal with cases of adolescent pregnancy due to rape or sexual intercourse of a minor with an older man, privately through compensations and seeking justice is avoided. According to Calvert (2013), many unintended births in Tanzania are caused due to the misinformation that characterizes the community and the difficulty to acquire modern contraception in combination with the early sexual debut or the high number of sexual partners which is pretty frequent in Tanzania. Wight (2006) concludes that sexual culture is a complex issue that is based on different perspectives and customs that require collective approaches in order to shift.

2.3 Gender Discrimination

Many studies (Sigalla *et al.*, 2018; UN, 2006; Leach, 2006) have also emphasized the structural inequalities and power imbalances between men and women. In general, in comparison to other rights, women's rights are a relatively recent addition to the agenda and regularly undermined. Pimentel *et al.* (2021) focused a lot on intimate partner violence and economic abuse as due to the structure of the society and the gender inequality in Tanzania, this phenomenon is normalized, and women seem to be unable to claim their rights. It has been identified that some societies accept the intimidation and humiliation of girls, and there are also occasions when they are sexually assaulted, emotionally abused, or victims of domestic violence (UN, 2006). The findings on Luke's (2003) research on risky sexual behaviors revealed a gender gap in HIV transmission among teenagers, which is exacerbated by gender discrimination, and a lack of sexuality education. According to Hague's (2017) study on gender inequality within family, schools and the community, females confessed feeling and being treated as inferior and discriminated against within those environments, which proves that there is an unequal allocation of rights. Findings showed that boys and men are prioritized in the majority of the households by being provided with more educational opportunities, material goods, freedom, even food. Also, there are families that prove the girl's worth by the bride price she will reach and her performance at the household chores while boy's education and independence are promoted.

Hagues (2019) sought to identify whether women were being sexually exploited in and around the school, taking into consideration the findings of the research and the common knowledge of Tanzania being a country where the issue of sexual exploitation of schoolgirls as a phenomenon is highly frequent, even within educational institutions. According to Sommer (2010) this historically rooted devaluation of girls and women, as well as the 'patriarchal ideas' are set up as barriers to the continuation of school attainment, as parents, for example, are often scared that their daughters will be impregnated in the school environment by their classmates, teachers or by village men they meet on the way there. According to the results of Hagues (2019) research, sexual exploitation within schools was portrayed as a major risk factor, so she proposed turning school into a safe environment where all girls would feel accepted and local trained women would serve as mentors and advocates to protect the girls. A similar project was implemented by Mgalla, Schapink, and Boerma in 1998, aiming at raising awareness through women guardians within schools about reproductive and sexual health and, notably, HIV and other STDs. The necessity of which emerged from the findings of the interviews conducted when the majority of the girls reported being abused by either schoolboys, or teachers, and a few of them reported rape or other forms of forced sex and sexual harassment. Many years later, the reality of girls in Tanzania does not seem to have changed. Although interventions like this one are important, their focus still seems to be based on behavior change, especially of young women, or the encouragement of them to abstain from sexual intercourses or use contraceptive methods. What intervention like this do not seem to take into account is the way women seem to be targeted and the situation in which the pregnancy occurred, such as the possibility of coercion by men.

2.4 Economic Asymmetry and Sexual Exploitation

The focus on the correlation of the economic realities with sexual intercourse is essential as it allows us to think about the power imbalances. The practice of 'transactional sex' is very prevalent in the literature and a common occurrence in Tanzania and researchers take many different approaches towards it trying to investigate the consequences of the practice or the motivations of the parties involved. It is a cultural practice that can be defined as sex in return for money, material objects, or grades, and revolves around the logic of reciprocity and is driven largely by poverty, illiteracy among others. Luke (2003) underlines the age and economic

disparities that define sexual interactions in sub-Saharan Africa through a conceptual framework based on diverse power dynamics. She argues that the concept of ‘transactional’ sex is prevalent because of gender power relationships and economic asymmetries that prevent impoverished adolescent girls negotiating about their sexual encounters with older men to preserve their reproductive and sexual health rights. This is analyzed in the cultural context of Sub-Saharan, where male dominance is actively encouraged, even in sexual decision-making. that do not give lots of chances to women to take control over their lives.

Several studies have been conducted in Tanzania to better understand the issue of sexual exploitation of girls and women. According to Hagues and McCarty’s research on the consequences of pregnant girls’ exclusion from education in Mwanza, Mshana, Kaatano, and Chungalucha (2022) the practice of ‘transactional sex’, seems to be culturally acceptable and involves lots of pressure on the girls, physical abuse, and harassment. What is rather concerning is that, despite its severe stigma, in some cases this practice appears to be encouraged by parents or at least not opposed by them, especially in geographically isolated, rural areas where girls seem to be considerably more vulnerable due to the high poverty rates. It is an undoubtedly often used practice for girls to meet basic needs and it is based on the belief that if you do not acquire commodities before a sexual intercourse, you are disrespected and demeaned, as it has been discussed in the section below. Remes *et al.* (2010) on their research that focused on sexual and reproductive health, frames this as an issue of "modernization". Thus, they link early sexual encounters to women’s desire to consume modern products or other benefits, such as admission to video screenings.

It is important to highlight the distinction some studies (Remes *et al.*, 2010; Mwanga et al. 2011; Hagues, 2019) make between fishing and non-fishing communities. According to Mwanga et al. (2011) who initiated research in two fishing and one non-fishing communities in three northern Tanzanian districts, sexual promiscuous behavior was very present in all of them. However, according to the interviews, in the fishing communities or the remote fishing islands known as ‘vizingani’ in particular, the pre or extramarital relationships are much more frequent. These risky sexual behaviors are adopted to combat food insecurity and unequal opportunities for men and women and are based on different traditional practices such as ‘chomolea’, meaning quick paid sex. The main difference between those two types of communities lies around the fact that selling fish is very profitable and fisherman are often

uneducated, powerful men who live in isolated areas where the ignorance and lack of education of the rest the community members is also very prevalent.

2.4 Women's Agency: How do women see themselves?

Another important aspect connected to early childbearing many authors refer to, is the exclusion from education due to the expulsion law of the Tanzanian government. Thus, Hagues (2019) in the past stressed the need of the elimination of the expulsion law that keeps pregnant girls and young mothers excluded from education, in one of her recommendations at the individual, micro, and macro levels to better the community's, family's, and girls' well-being. Even though the law has been modified, the situation seems to remain the same, because the country lacks a strategy to support pregnant girls to reintegrate into the school environment (HRW, 2022). Furthermore, the interviews of Hagues (2019) research demonstrated that the community is also not ready to accept young mothers back to school and the rest of the students also seem to disapprove of them attending school along with the parents who advocate for the expulsion of pregnant girls from school. This acts as a consequence or adolescent pregnancy and as a driver factor too seeing that it leads to high rates of school dropout, economic insecurity, engagement in sexual intercourse and high rates of more pregnancies of the young mothers. In other words, while women's options appear to be limited, they are nonetheless expected by society to make a change, regardless their lack of resources. The community does not see education as a right, but rather as a reward or punitive action if a child misbehaves. This stands as a breach of international human rights commitments.

The majority of the studies, have as a dominant theme the behavior change of young mothers without taking into consideration the situations they face. There have been only a few studies (Vermeulen *et al.*, 2015; Maluka *et al.*, 2018) seeking to explain men's role and attitudes and have shown the importance of the emotional support for the mother and even the potential prevention of sexual transmitted diseases and HIV and it is highly recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2015) and the Tanzanian Minister of Health. This is not the main focus of the study, but it is essential to acknowledge that the abovementioned studies still make individuals responsible and take the focus from the cultural context.

Ruzibiza (2021), is one of the few studies conducted in Rwanda, that focused on the perspective of women. Rwanda is one of the countries where school attendance of pregnant girls is

authorized and there is even a support framework for the reintegration of the young mothers back to school. Nevertheless, according to the study, this is still insufficient due to the gendered and stereotypical messages of morality and the stigma coming from society as one of the most harmful repercussions along with the family support withdrawal and the isolation of the girls. What is noteworthy is that there is usually not room left for any other narrative other than the accusation of the girls and women in case a pregnancy occurs due to premarital sex because of their 'disobedience', even in case of coercion by an older man, teacher, or even NGO staff member.

Overall, lived experiences of women who have had an early pregnancy, and the impact on their life, have been ignored. This review found no published studies from similar contexts in sub-Saharan Africa investigating how Tanzanian women who experienced early childbearing, see themselves, understand, and interpret their human rights of the process of how they are receiving them within the community in which they reside. It is critical to analyze their perspectives in relation to the cultural and societal norms for early pregnancy in the society in sub-Saharan Africa contexts, where women's behavior is strongly influenced and shaped by traditional gender roles and community beliefs and expectations. As part of a larger evaluation, the views of the educators, VEOs, VCs, and NGO staff members who support them and act as intermediaries were explored, as were the human rights discourses that they employ in their efforts to address early pregnancy among schoolgirls in rural Tanzania. As a result, there is a need to analyze the perceptions of the women, and it is this particular gap that this paper intends to explore and add to the literature through this ethnographic perspective. Through this qualitative data collection, the role of parents, men and the community emerged as significant factors, which we will be examined here.

3. Theoretical Framework

In recent decades, a number of critical approaches have been proposed to analyse the complex questions surrounding gender, culture, and human rights. For this critical study, I will draw upon the conjunction between universalism and relativism, the 'vernacularization of human rights' concept by Merry (2012), and Hodgson's (2011) discussion about culture and women's priorities. In addition, the study intends to build upon Okin's (1999) multiculturalist debate by and previous research on the feminization of poverty by Chant (2008) in order to contextualize and theorize the experiences of the participants to my interpretations. The theoretical framework described below was deemed adequate given the critical nature of this study.

3.1 Universalism Vs relativism

Since the implementation of the UDHR there has been tension between 'universalists' and 'relativists', in terms of the role of culture in understanding human rights. On the one hand, universalists stress the importance of the global acceptance of the human rights in all cultural settings. On the contrary, relativists are opposed to obliging *all* communities to adopt human rights ideas that are not necessarily in accordance with their beliefs. Human rights may be universal, but there is still complexity in their interpretation owing to the societal and cultural factors (Lentin, 2004). In the aftermath of the 1999 Statement on Human Rights on the Declaration on Anthropology and the Human Rights Committee for Human Rights of the American Anthropological Association several questions have been raised. Anthropology is frequently linked to the discussion over how a declaration may be relevant to all human beings while leaving concepts such as cultural inferiority and backwardness in development behind, which are employed by regimes that have established hegemony.

Countries with high adolescent pregnancy rates, such as Tanzania, are frequently 'attacked' by Westerners seeking to intervene and tackle the issue. However, they often neglect to consider the cultural and societal context they are implementing their interventions for. Through their own lens the situation appears completely different than through the eyes of the Tanzanian women residing in the community. These women face daily struggles and challenges that should be acknowledged, and the women should be seen. What they don't seem to consider is that, as Tierney (2007) writes in her article on participant observation, according to the

principle of cultural relativism, no culture is superior to another, thus they should all be understood and evaluated on their own merits. Measuring human rights is rather challenging, seeing that the ideas of justice are shaped by a variety of variables, but we should strive to shift each system toward a more human rights-oriented approach. Mubangizi (2012) stresses the necessity of engaging more deeply with the current context of cultural relativism in order to effectively handle the accompanying challenges related to entrenched views in particular communities while advancing human rights and showing respect.

3.2 ‘Vernacularization’ of human rights

Merry (2012) chooses not to participate in the universalism-relativism debate, but rather complicates it by shifting the parameters and questioning the extent to which human rights are effective in reducing the authority of community leaders or the state over the most disadvantaged. Thus, she introduces the concept of "vernacularization" of human rights, which she defines as the adaptation and translation of international human rights law principles and universal concepts to local contexts. It is a process of negotiation through global ideas in the cultural spaces of diverse communities that promotes agency and develops new ways of understanding social justice. She illustrates how ineffective it is to try to force Western ideas on many communities all over the world and describes the concept of ‘intermediaries’ who play a critical role in this and are the ones who have a solid awareness of both international human rights and local, regional, and religious customs. They are the ones responsible for identifying ways to translate the human rights language derived from international law into local communities, as well as highlighting violations and advocating good practices through the use of a human rights discourse.

The ‘vernacularization’ of human rights is not an easy assignment to achieve since the power of this role comes vulnerability owing to the difficulty of keeping the balance between the opposing sides. Merry also introduces the term ‘indigenization’, which is often used in development projects to describe how human rights terminology is presented in various social and cultural settings, with diverse religious beliefs, and values. Merry (2012) employs the concept of ‘vernacularization’ transnational ideas such as human rights approaches to structural violence against women. This notion will be used in this dissertation to examine how transnational ideas about early childbearing among schoolgirls are translated by middle people

in the local cultural context of the young mothers in Tanzania, as well as how the young mothers themselves perceive them. The phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy has widely been condemned by the international community, which has made significant efforts to alter the situation without always considering the historical conflicts, and socioeconomic context. Through the ‘vernacularization’ concept, human rights could be translated in a way that they will be understood by the Tanzanian women in their own setting and they will be able to be involved in the process of promoting their rights themselves, portrayed as agents, with the support of the intermediaries.

Merry and Levitt (2017) further investigated the clash between culture and rights in a gendered context. They conclude that they do not have to be against each other but support the flexibility of human rights should be adaptive to fit different cultural contexts. They argue that there is a conflict between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. They set female genital mutilation (FGM) as an example and contrast it with other types of surgical bodily alteration and link them both with societal pressure and social expectations for women. Indeed, locals insist on preserving their culture in the face of globalization while westerners use the human rights framework to build on colonial tales from the past. Women’s real concerns such as poverty, are often not acknowledged, and women are portrayed as passive victims of an authoritarian, backward society. Human rights can be interpreted in a variety of ways in local contexts, and organizations have adopted many unique approaches.

3.3 Whose priorities?

Hodgson (2011) adds a new perspective to the literature by analyzing the debate between the “the culture of rights” and “the rights of culture”, the conflicting concept of progress, and its correlation with gender roles. Through her work with the Maasai tribe she seeks to explore the extent to which human rights make a difference or serve as an efficient means for women and other vulnerable groups to preserve the rights they are entitled to against the oppressive regime through analyzing international anti- female genital mutilation (FGM campaigns). The latter, seem to portray African women suffering and shape interventions to protect them from culture while Maasai that seem to abstain from international human rights legislation. Blaut (1993) addresses the concept of the "critique of Eurocentrism," which portrays Europe as the ideal and the primary player in establishing human rights doctrine, despite the fact that numerous non-

European peoples have contributed and shared significant viewpoints that should be acknowledged (Frezzo, 2015).

Culture, in Maasai activists' eyes, is dynamic and formed by people's daily interactions, therefore it may be a source of strength or oppression. Nonetheless, Tanzanian feminists often view it as a tool of oppression for women, undermining progress and equality due to its links to the Maasai tribe's lengthy history of cultural practices. According to the findings of Hodgson's (2011) research, Maasai encourage cultural survival through practices and rituals and refuse to connect it with the chronic devaluation of women. Instead, they believe that other historical and political factors such as colonialism have played their part in this and feel that their priorities and their own identification of their community's problems are not respected by the global arena. Based on the narrations of the Maasai women, they pursue gender equality in rights, no roles and believe in the 'complementarity' of the genders and set their own development and political empowerment as their priorities.

Lastly, Dorothy Hodgson examines the connection of female genital mutilation (FGM) being reframed human rights issue instead of a health concern. Donors, the government, international and national activists have shown their disapproval of this cultural practice and ask for its abolition by the tribe through threats for prosecution. Similarly, teenage pregnancy in Tanzania has sparked widespread attention in the international world and several groups have been undertaking multiple humanitarian missions for decades to change the sexual behavior in the country and promote education instead. In my thesis, I am planning to apply this theory, to shed light on Tanzanian women's priorities while challenging western perspectives prone to cultural biases and investigate the impact of gender and social norms.

3.4 Gender and culture

Okin's work (1999) highlights some fundamental conceptual questions concerning the connection between gender and culture and the contradictory features between feminism and multiculturalism. Thus, the research defines them both and discusses the impact of multiculturalism on women and the reality that cultures are mostly produced by men, particularly when it comes to minority rights. She discusses the limits that come with the protection of special rights for groups in terms of their members' individual freedom. Okin

claims that powerful males have the primary purpose of controlling women's lives and bodies, imposing their conservative ideas through the concept of culture, and restricting their potential, resulting in the universal rights of men and women not being equally preserved. Families teach the girls that they are less valuable than boys and that their sexuality is mainly for reproductive purposes or to serve their spouse when they marry. In addition to this, women get blamed and punished by 'powerful' men who are unable to control their sexual impulses but more than willing to define women's reproductive processes. The main focus of this dissertation is Africa, namely, Tanzania, and the issue of adolescent pregnancy which is closely impacted by the gender roles in the community. Women are oppressed and have merely lost the control over their reproductive processes in the gendered society and their choices are often predetermined by powerful men.

Furthermore, the study above provides examples of cultural practices with dominating themes such as personal, sexual, and reproductive life from throughout the world, all of which appear to interfere with women's lives to a far higher level than men's lives. Many scholars have criticized Okin for oversimplifying complex issues and repeating the same heated feminist argument that prioritizes gender before race and culture, without acknowledging historical and cultural backgrounds in her liberal arguments; however, she still raises some important topics that are very closely related to human dignity (Weinbaum, 2001).

3.5 Feminization of poverty

Chant (2008) seeks to investigate gendered preconceptions about poverty, along with its origins, and its alleviation. The author introduces the term 'feminization of poverty' which refers to the assumption that poverty is far more widespread, severe, for women than in males. Furthermore, it is a more difficult situation to alter for women than for males due to the high number of barriers and the disproportionality of the load for each. Despite the fact that there is little evidence to prove the claim that women-headed households are poorer than their male counterparts in any systematic way, Chant still makes the association. Women-headed families are regarded as the most vulnerable and discriminated against of social groupings; they are overrepresented among the poor, especially in rural societies. Gendered poverty should be looked at through a more inclusive and holistic lens, which leads to its conceptualization and links it to other variables too, such as social exclusion, the marginalization of the poor, and

other dimensions such as self-esteem, choice, and power. The recognition of poverty as a 'gendered experience' is critical to this debate, and the term has had such a significant impact on advancing the poverty agenda. Policymakers view things differently and voiced their worries in national and international discourses and social development. Gender equity is critical and strongly tied to poverty reduction and economic prosperity. Tanzania is a society with a high number of women-led households who often face many challenges that are connected to their economic hardships and disadvantaged position in the society. It is very frequent that an adolescent pregnancy can lead to a girl having to raise a family on her own and this could trap her and her children into a cycle of poverty.

To summarize, in the previous section I attempted to understand culture, gender, and human rights by drawing on different theories. More particularly, I referred to the universality or relativism of human rights and linked it to Merry's 'vernacularisation' concept (2012) and its complexity. I followed by introducing Hodgson's (2011) discussion on culture and human rights, as well as Okin's (1999) work on culture and gender. Finally, I provided an insight into the 'feminization of poverty' by Chant (2008) to demonstrate how poverty affects genders differently. All the above points to the vital role human agency plays, in identifying problems as perceived by subjects and comprehending the 'other'. Additionally, it has attempted to show that the more open we are to listening to the women's struggles, the more likely the interventions will meet their needs and tackle those challenges. The section that follows will go through the methodologies that were employed for the data collection in this study.

4. Methodology

Given the already complex nature of the debate on early childbearing among schoolgirls, what emerges from the literature reviewed in the previous chapter is the need for further empirical research focusing on the lived experiences of the Tanzanian women who have experienced adolescent pregnancy. Through this research, I am exploring how they perceive their human rights as well as how they see themselves in the gender roles determined by cultural and social norms in their community. Also, the perceptions of intermediaries such as educators, VEOs, VCs, and NGO staff members will be presented. In the chapter that follows, I discuss the methodology of this dissertation by elaborating on the methods that underpin this study, as well as my research design and my involvement as a researcher in organizing and conducting the focus groups and interviews. Following that, I present the procedure for recruiting participants, collecting data, and completing the research analysis. Lastly, I refer to the way I handled the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

4.1 Research Design

In the fall semester of 2022, I completed an internship at an NGO in London that implements humanitarian projects throughout Africa with the goal of supporting women-led households and children. After I shared my research objectives, the NGO agreed to introduce me to their staff members who operate in the Geita region in Chato District, Tanzania, which is the geographic focus of my research. The staff members were eager to support my research by escorting me to the field visits in the different villages and schools. Prior to my arrival in Tanzania, I maintained close contact with the three NGO staff members, whom I briefed about the purpose of my study, the duration of my stay, and the research's target group. After our first meeting, they introduced me to some of the people in the villages, and we planned field visits to the rest of the villages where I wished to conduct interviews and organize focus groups. Furthermore, they gave their insight on which villages and secondary schools should be selected based on the challenges that these communities face, and they initiated contact with the secondary schools' headmasters, the VEOs, and the VCs to assemble the teachers and women, respectively. In addition, they provided feedback on the preliminary questions I had developed for each group to verify that no religious or cultural values were violated, as well as translating the consent forms into Swahili.

The NGO staff members supported my collection of data by accompanying me on the field visits to four villages and two secondary schools, where one of the staff members acted as an interpreter during the interviews and focus groups and served as a cultural broker throughout. I was the one asking the questions during the interviews and coordinating the discussion during the focus groups. I conducted the interviews with the NGO employees in English. At the beginning of the sessions, I introduced myself as a master's student who conducts research on adolescent pregnancy and I assured the participants that their participation in the research would not affect their treatment by educators, VEOs, VCs, and NGO staff members. I explained to the participants that the study's main goal is to give Tanzanian women who have experienced pregnancy as adolescents a chance to narrate their stories of motherhood, as well as to identify the cultural and social norms in the communities. Also, I let them know that the findings will be utilized to raise awareness about the challenges associated with adolescent pregnancy, potentially leading to future improvements.

4.2 Participants of the research

I conducted individual interviews and focus groups for the purposes of the research. Due to the high interest in participation, I decided to conduct focus groups with the Tanzanian and individual interviews with the second group of secondary school educators, VEOs, VCs, and NGO staff members. Also, the focus of the study was women's lived experiences, so it was vital to listen to as many women's narrations as possible. All the respondents were above the age of eighteen and I recruited them via a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. I completed the selection alongside the NGO staff members who are more familiar with the population. For the selection they took into account factors such as the participants' willingness to participate, the importance of empowering the most rural areas that lack humanitarian support by the international community, and the high rates of child pregnancy in regions. Lastly, the United Republic of Tanzania was the geographical focus, and more specifically, Chato district, because it is where the NGO staff members operate.

Women

For the purpose of the study, forty-four women, ranging in age from 18 to 69 years old, with an average age of 29 years old, were recruited to participate in focus groups. Their selection was based primarily on their childbearing experience as adolescents. The participants were drawn from four different villages across Chato District to guarantee community representation

and divided into five groups. The first three groups were represented by women in their twenties, and the rest of the groups were represented by women in their thirties and older. It was very interesting to see how young mothers shared their opinions along with women who have become pregnant as adolescents decades ago. Their ages, religious beliefs, job experiences, and educational levels varied. Participants in the focus groups that I organized and coordinated included Roman Catholics, Adventists, Muslims, Pentecostals, Christians, Anglicans, and other traditional faiths (Table 1). Also, participants were engaged in activities such as farming, mining, tailoring, or selling products such as fish, porridge, nuts, fruit, and vegetables in order to earn their income. The focus groups with women were designed to investigate their lived experiences of motherhood in the cultural and social context.

Table 1: Women

Code	Age	Religion	Number of Children	Level of education ¹	Employment
A1	20	CMK	2	Form1	Farming
A2	22	Roman Catholic	1	Form 2	-
A3	19	Roman Catholic	2	Form 4	Farming
A4	19	AICT	1	Form 3	Farming
A5	20	Roman Catholic	1	-	-
A6	26	Pentacostal	3	Form 3	-
B1	26	Pentacostal	2	Standard 7	Farming
B2	18	Roman Catholic	Pregnant	Form 4	-
B3	25	Roman Catholic	2	Form 2	-
B4	24	Pentacostal	1	Form 4	-
B5	22	Roman Catholic	1	Standard 7	Farming
B6	23	Roman Catholic	2	Form 4	Farming
B7	25	Roman Catholic	2	Standard 4	Farming
B8	24	Roman Catholic	1	Form 1	Farming
C1	22	Pentacostal	3	Standard 7	Selling porridge
C2	22	Pentacostal	2	Form 2	Tailoring
C3	20	Adventist	1	Standard 7	Selling fish
C4	18	Islam	1	Standard 7	Selling fish
C5	18	Adventist	1	Standard 6	Selling tomatoes
C6	19	Roman Catholic	1	Standard 6	Selling fish
C7	18	Roman Catholic	1	Standard 6	Selling fish
C8	18	Roman Catholic	1	Form 4	Selling fish
C9	20	Anglican	1	Form 3	Housekeeper
C10	19	Anglican	1	Form 2	Selling nuts
D1	52	AIC	9	Standard 7	Farming
D2	42	Roman Catholic	7	Standard 7	Farming
D3	45	TIG	6	Standard 7	Farming
D4	26	EAGT	2	Standard 7	Farming
D5	44	Roman Catholic	7	Standard 7	Farming
D6	30	AIC	3	Standard 5	Farming
D7	29	Roman Catholic	3	Standard 7	Farming
D8	40	AIC	8	Standard 2	Farming
D9	37	Roman Catholic	8	-	Farming
D10	69	EAGT	7	-	Farming
D11	48	Anglican	6	-	Farming
D12	40	Roman Catholic	10	Standard 7	Farming
D13	60	Roman Catholic	10	-	Farming
D14	34	Roman Catholic	4	-	-
D15	27	Roman Catholic	4	-	-
D16	33	AIC	5	Standard 5	Farming
D17	69	Lutheran	8	-	Farming
D18	42	AIC	6	Form 2	-

¹ The Tanzanian education system operates with a 2-7-4-2-3 structure. In other words, the education system consists of 2 years of pre-primary school, 7 years of primary school (standard 1 to 7 and ages 7 to 14), 4 years of secondary school (form 1 to 4), followed by 2 years of advanced secondary school (form 5 to 6). Students who pass the exams may continue to university for another 3 years, and those who fail have the option to attend an advanced vocational school instead for the same number of years (International Trade Administration, 2021).

Intermediaries

Finally, four teachers from two secondary schools, six VEOs and VCs from three of the villages, and three NGO staff members participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Their ages varied from 33 to 56 years old, with an average age of 29 years old, and both genders were represented equally. The participants' field of expertise, formal education, origin, and years of work experience varied too (Table 2). The interviews with the intermediaries attempted to depict the views of the school environment and the community on child pregnancy, its impact, and the role of the intermediaries in addressing it.

Table 2: Educators , VEOs, VCs, NGO Staff members

Role	Code	Age	Gender	Religion	Years of work experience	Formal education	Area of education
Educator	E1	35	F	Christian	10	Bachelor	Swahili
Educator	E2	36	M	Christian	8	Bachelor	Civics
Educator	E3	34	M	Christian	8	Bachelor	Economics
Educator	E4	34	M	Christian	8	Bachelor	Political Science
VC	F1	51	M	Roman Catholic	23	Standard 5	Small course for medical care
VEO	F2	55	M	Roman Catholic	22	Standard 7	Small course for administration
VC	F3	33	F	Lutheran	4	Form 4	Journalism diploma
VC	F4	46	F	Roman Catholic	30	Standard 7	-
VEO	F5	56	F	Adventist	3	Standard 7	-
VEO	F6	56	M	Pentacostal	18	Standard 7	-
NGO staff	G1	36	F	Roman Catholic	10	Bachelor	Economics
NGO staff	G2	33	F	Roman Catholic	10	Bachelor	Political Science
NGO staff	G3	45	M	Roman Catholic	20	Bachelor	Economics

4.3 Research Methods

Qualitative methods

I employed qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews in combination with focus groups and participant observation to help acquire valid primary data. Landman (2006) emphasizes the significance of the method utilized to conduct reliable social science research, as well as the identification of the topic at stake, the collection and presentation of evidence. The research revolved around Tanzanian women who have experienced adolescent pregnancy and their perceptions of their human rights in correlation with the social and cultural norms of their community. I created space for the women who are the subjects to share their stories through the storytelling method in order to ensure a greater understanding of the complexities of the issues discussed.

The sequence of the questions was somewhat flexible, beginning with introductory comments and a general question on the impact of pregnancy for the first group and on the frequency of the phenomenon of early childbearing among schoolgirls in the region for the second group. The major body of questions was divided into three sections: individual, community, and human rights, with key questions exploring the issue of adolescent pregnancy, followed by recommendations. The questions were predetermined but open, allowing for flexibility in their order depending on the row of the conversation or additional clarifications via a set of associated prompts when appropriate. The purpose was to allow the participants the freedom to respond with this less structured and adaptive approach so that misconceptions could be cleared up and anticipated answers could be produced that revealed the respondent's true beliefs (Barnett, 2002). The average duration of the interviews was thirty minutes and one hour for the focus groups, depending on the number of participants, which ranged from 6 to 8.

Ethnographic methods

Participant observation is a method that entails the researcher's commitment to stay at a specific location for a set period of time, observe and experience the lives of the people in their own setting, and ask the questions the author requires answers to, after intellectualizing the observations and transforming them into data (Bernard, 2011). In this scenario, I had the opportunity to navigate the community to understand where they were coming from, after being introduced to them through the NGO staff members. This community-based approach, allowed for interactions with several community members, including religious figures such as priests, educators, or doctors, as well as the chance to investigate what they identified as a problem. There was room for me to take my distance in order to reaffirm my neutrality, avoid imposing my beliefs, and view the cultural background. This combination of observation, interviews, and focus groups, allowed for the identification of patterns and behaviors, the comparison of different contexts, perspectives, and dynamics, and the exposure of oppressive practices in society. The main participants in the interviews and focus groups were two distinct groups of people in order to investigate the context from different perspectives.

4.4 Data Analysis

Content analysis

The basic approach in this study was a content analysis of the data obtained from the participants, which was affiliated with interpretive and hermeneutic paradigms. I analyzed the content with a focus on the relevance of individual occurrences for the participants, and the parameters of the analysis were determined by the stories narrated by the respondents. I used testimonies drawn from the data collected from the interviews and focus groups to acquire a better understanding of the different points of view of the participants in the two groups and identify the gaps in the storytelling.

For the sake of this thematic analysis, I recorded the focus groups and interviews, and afterwards I transcribed the data, as indicated by Graneheim and Lundman (2004). I requested the interpreter to check the data to ensure that everything was correctly transcribed and to validate the facts, and I proceeded with putting them together with the field notes that I produced through participant observation. Subsequently, I identified the themes, classified the key features into categories and subcategories based on their commonalities, and processed them by defining relevant codes to different variables. Later, I had a brief overview of the dominant views, which I linked to the main research question and the following ones, and the human rights of Tanzanian women who are at stake in certain contexts narrated by them. As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), I looked for common points that led to generalizations, constructed, and related them to theories, and tested the validity of the conclusions.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

In this section, I will name some ethical considerations that I kept in mind in order to ensure the safety and integrity of the participants and to avoid causing potential harm to them. Firstly, I selected the participants through an assessment along with the NGO staff members and informed them about the interview in advance with all the necessary details about the topic, the duration, and the number of questions. Aside from that, consent forms were distributed to all participants in Kiswahili and English, informing them about the research's goals, the fact that

interviews and focus groups would be recorded, and that the results of the research would be made public. I explained the purpose of the research and the content of the consent form verbally before they signed it, and time was left aside for questions. I assured the interviewees that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation at any time. I initiated the research with all the particular safeguards in terms of research ethics to protect the integrity of those with whom I interacted as indicated by Tierney (2007).

Also, I obtained the permission from the headmasters, the VEOs and the CEO of the NGO in order to ensure authorization and accessibility in the region for research purposes. The interviews were held in a location where the participants felt comfortable and safe, acknowledging their vulnerability. I stored the background data of the participants, such as professional and educational background, gender, and religious beliefs, safe and separate from their names, which I wrote manually, so that respondents could not be identified and further stigmatized. To ensure the participants' privacy, the personal data were erased along with the audio recordings shortly after being transcribed into text following the interviews and focus groups. Most importantly, pseudonyms were utilized to safeguard participants' identities and the staff members of the NGOs that escorted me to the field visits, remained anonymous since the ethical conduct of the research was given first priority. My project subject to an ethics review procedure at the Arctic University of Norway, UiT.

4.6 Limitations of the study

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, only a small sample of the population took part in the interviews and focus groups, therefore contributing to the data collection. As a result, particularly given the diversity of a nation like Tanzania and all of its tribes, it is hard to generalize the findings beyond the geographical focus of the research. Furthermore, I was only able to make observations within the constraints of my brief visit. Nonetheless, the women's narratives were analyzed, providing a deeper understanding of their priorities and struggles; hence, the outcomes of this study may be used as a form of information to advance future research.

5. Results

In this chapter, I will discuss and interpret the findings from the interviews and focus groups in conversation with the theory raised earlier in order to contextualize and conceptualize the participants' experiences in the light of my interpretations. More particularly, there will be an analysis of the views of women who have experienced pregnancy as adolescents, as well as the perspectives of the intermediaries on the phenomenon of pregnancy among schoolgirls, all in relation to cultural, social, and human rights norms. The intermediaries have been appointed as educators, VEOs, VCs, or NGO staff members and their profiles will be specified to distinguish them from the mothers. Based on my interviews with both the women and the intermediaries, the following themes emerged from this research on adolescent pregnancy: 1) societal and cultural norms; 2) economic vulnerability; and 3) women's agency. These themes, divided into some subthemes are framed and developed in the sections below.

5.1 Theme 1: Societal and cultural norms.

In the first theme, some participants described the different societal expectations and cultural norms on adolescent pregnancy for women and men, which are influenced by gender norms in society. All participants agreed that women are the ones most affected in comparison to men when a pregnancy occurs between two adolescents.

Women are stigmatized.

In discussing societal expectations, the clear majority of the women cited three key points: being held accountable and blamed for the pregnancy, even in circumstances of coercion; and being abandoned by the men who impregnated them and their parents. During the focus groups, the women repeatedly referred to the hardships they face raising a child on their own because the majority of the men run away in the news of pregnancy in order to avoid responsibility. Aside from that, women described revealing the news to their parents as equally traumatic, with some parents becoming violent and kicked them out of the house. They confessed feeling humiliated and trapped in a situation lacking experience and resources, facing the marginalization and exclusion from the community. In contrast, as reported, boys or men were

seldom arrested or had to face any consequences whatsoever, owing to the difficulty of providing proof of who the father is. Maya, a 22-year-old mother of three, shared her thoughts:

My father started to chase the man who was responsible for the pregnancy, but the man ran away and escaped. They all do this, but the women are the ones who take care of the family. Because of what I did, I lost my parents' affection; they abandoned me. This is very painful.

During my interviews with the intermediaries, I was informed about many different approaches used to translate the human rights agenda into the local cultural context in order to tackle teenage pregnancy while also supporting young mothers. Most of the VEOs, VCs and educators admitted having adopted strict measures, such as punishing and fining young women who became pregnant in the community. On the contrary, NGO staff members operate in the villages independently so they have chosen to employ a friendlier and more informative approach. They described to me the workshops they organize with adolescents with the goal of human rights awareness and empowerment as a prevention method of adolescent pregnancy and weekly discussions addressing parenting and its challenges with young mothers. In line with this, Merry's and Levitt's study (2017) on the 'vernacularization' of human rights provides examples of 'vernacularizers' who attempted to provide an adequate and reframed meaning to address communal issues through local practices, folk stories, and street plays, as a means of advocacy and campaigning. When asked about the ways the NGO seeks to translate human rights in the cultural context, NGO staff member, 33-year-old Malika, explained:

As an NGO we plan weekly and monthly workshops and seminars with women and the broader community. There we address a new topic every week, such as hygiene, sexual and reproductive processes, education, economic empowerment. We explain everything through the community's everyday challenges and try to find solutions.

However, according to Merry (2012), the 'vernacular' of the intermediaries is not always successful, especially when women's struggles and realities are overlooked. In my research in Tanzania, I found that women were held responsible for getting pregnant and presented as sinful even in cases of rape. Also, VEOs and VCs in the role as intermediaries frequently adopted unhuman measures in order to prevent teen pregnancy and 'teach girls a lesson' while disrespecting their dignity. VEO, 33-year-old Yasmin, claimed that:

If a young mother is caught not taking good care of her children, we punish her. We either put her a fine or we ask her to clean the office, dig holes, or carry bags of cement as a punishment. Not all of them are forced, some of them like to have sex or get convinced. Laws should get stricter.

This viewpoint was frequently supported by VEOs and VCs who condemned the girls and punished them. During the interviews they were confident about the strict measures they have taken believing they were doing the right thing and not acknowledging the reinforcement of the stereotypes of the girls in the communities, that are already cultivated due to gender discrimination, patriarchal standards, and cultural beliefs. In contrast, during the focus groups, women emphasized a lot on the fact that they are not immoral and there are reasons behind their actions such as the lack of resources and support from their parents. Also, they referred to the fact that they are strongly stigmatized by the community members even if they acknowledge the hardships they face. Strong measures for men also existed, but they were hardly implemented due to the assumption that women are the ones who should ‘behave’ and prevent sexual intercourse and, subsequently, pregnancy from happening. Some of the NGO staff members appeared to acknowledge the limits on girls’ and women’s choices of and made more of an effort to support them by translating human norms into the local vernacular. For example, the NGO staff members informed me about the activities and workshops they occasionally organize with women to enhance human rights awareness and show girls that they deserve a life free of marriage.

Girls, in particular, face severe stigma in their communities and school environment, and even suffer harsh punishments, and public humiliation because of their sexual encounters, all of which violate their right to privacy and dignity (Human Rights Watch, 2018b). Similarly, Okin (2001) has emphasized how, in many communities with patriarchal traditions across Latin America, rural Southeast Asia, and West Africa, a girl’s sexual behavior is linked to the family’s honor. A girl may be punished or even murdered if she is seen to have disgraced or degraded her family, even if it was due to rape, while the same does not apply for men. These long-held prejudice assumptions due to gender bias exacerbate gender disparity, resulting in discrimination and greater marginalization.

In this particular case, female participants commented on the community's attitude toward the phenomenon of child pregnancy, which appeared to be based on conservative ideas and strong religious ties and beliefs, deeply embedded in the culture. These views tend to judge the girls who have engaged in sexual intercourse before the age of 18, since it is against religion, the cultural and social norms and portray them as immoral. In most situations, community leaders are the ones who promote such stiff beliefs to new generations that oppose to any alteration. Most of the women in the focus groups reported that women and girls still feel isolated, and ostracized from the community, and are criticized even by their old classmates at school. Sonya, a mother of two aged 33, confessed:

In the community, they judge us, ignore us, and laugh at us. We are not respected, and they see us as people with no future. They call us bad names, such as Msimbe². Nobody wants to get married with a woman with a name like this.

In most of the groups, women participants reported being called Msimbe that as explained by them, it is a derogatory comment usually made for women who have given birth to children without being married. Young mothers expressed their concerns about the prejudice their children, who were born out of wedlock, encounter in the community. According to the interviews, despite Tanzania's apparent recognition of the high value of children, and the adoption of strong and punitive measures to ensure that children are well cared for by the young mothers, as mentioned above, children are still not accepted as members of the community and are stigmatized. This goes against the right of the child to be protected against discrimination (CRC, Article 2) and reinforces the vulnerability that defines women-led households. As a consequence, the children of the teen girls will be raised in an environment with restricted choices, which will hinder them from reaching their full potential and impact their development. Therefore, the stigma of an adolescent pregnancy seems to affect not just the pregnant girls but, on a lesser scale, their children as well. Jacob, a 34-year-old teacher from a secondary school, highlighted the new law introduced by the government that allows young mothers to return to school and expressed his concerns about the community's stance, which deems them prostitutes.

² Msimbe (sing.), means unmarried or widowed women standing on her own without a man (Wight et al., 2006)

The president declared that pregnant girls would be allowed to return to school, but society is not ready for that. The community sees the girls as prostitutes, and even teachers sometimes do not accept them back to school.

However, when discussing community's attitude, Jacob seemed to agree and referred to them as prostitutes himself, which shows that he frames teenage pregnancy as the girl's fault since she chose to engage in paid sex. Although intermediaries are expected to employ the language of human rights and translate it into cultural norms, this is not always the discourse they use. Instead, they penalize women for making poor decisions and having sex, or they try to persuade them not to.

Women are at risk.

According to the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), women's right to health includes their sexual and reproductive health. Early childbearing and illegal, hazardous abortions endanger hundreds of girls each year, contribute to high maternal mortality rates, and limit their right to health (Calvert, 2013). Similar to what Okin (1999) has noted, gendered dominant groups in certain communities restrict the individual freedoms of women in the name of 'culture' in their effort to control their personal, sexual, and reproductive life. She wonders, among others, why women are always the ones who compromise their individual rights in order to conserve cultural heritage, and why women's rights are never set as a priority.

In this current study, the tension between 'the right to culture' and 'universal human rights' is extremely prominent. During the interviews, women complained about the lack of information around pregnancy in their restricted communities, which had a significant impact on the decisions they made regarding their future. Some of them reported not even being able to detect pregnancy symptoms, birth complications and being scared to seek advice from their parents, doctors, or professors. In other words, as defined by CEDAW, their right to education, which includes counselling on family planning, health, and family well-being (Article 10), and women's equal rights in making responsible decisions about the number of children (Article 16), were restricted. Maria, a 20-year-old- woman, stated:

When my mother found out about the pregnancy, she beat me a lot. Also, there were many complications with my pregnancy, so I was referred to another hospital, where I was treated for another week. Luckily, my baby and I survived.

And 22-year-old Anna described how her aunt tried to convince her to undergo an illegal abortion at the risk of losing her life.

My aunt told me that if you have an abortion, there are two possibilities: either you live or you die. I was terrified and refused to proceed with the abortion.

Sexual and reproductive health interferes with a number of women's rights, including the right to life, the right to privacy, and the prohibition of discrimination. In the sake of equality and bodily integrity, women should be able to make autonomous decisions about their own bodies and reproductive processes. Women's rights must be protected and fulfilled by the state and promoted and respected by the intermediaries. In this case, the intermediaries have the power and should be the ones to secure girls' and women's equality in reproductive health, including access to contraception and the option to terminate or not the pregnancy, rather than judging them for matters over which they had no complete control. As indicated by the UN (1998), this is primarily the woman's decision which has the potential to influence her whole future personal and familial life and has a significant impact on enjoyment of other human rights.

5.2 Theme 2: Economic vulnerability.

The United Republic of Tanzania is one of the world's poorest countries, and while many Tanzanians are impoverished, women and men appear to be impacted differently. In the second theme, participants examined the disadvantaged position of women due to the lack of resources, the sexual exploitation of the girls, and the way women see themselves in the gender norms enforced by the community.

Women end up in a circle of poverty.

Economic and social status in Tanzania is difficult to be modified or improved, particularly for single mothers, who are among the most vulnerable. As a result, it is very frequent for disadvantaged families to pass on their financial condition to their children (World Bank,

2019). Chant (2008) outlines the ‘privatization of poverty’ concept which explains the economic disadvantage that women-led families face, despite their resistance, as a result of hegemonic structures of society. During the focus groups, mother participants explained how women of female-headed households are strongly stigmatized and suffer the greatest effects of poverty, which limits their children’s development since they are more likely to get trapped in a cycle of poverty.

All I want is to provide to my children everything I never had in order for them to have a brighter future than I did. It is difficult because of my financial situation. All I can do is at least consult my daughter to not be convinced by men who want to harm her and my son to respect girls.

Yohana, a 35-year-old NGO staff member, discussed the impact of parenthood on teenage pregnancy along with family resources:

Due to lack of time and resources, parents, and especially single mothers, find it extremely hard to adequately care for their children. Young people are impoverished, so even if they pass to the next class, their mothers do not have the capacity to pay the costs, especially for the girls. Therefore, sometimes girls may attempt to meet unmet needs through relationships with older men who substitute their parents.

Even though individuals from all groups seem to agree on some facts, such as women’s economic hardships and communal marginalization, they still interpret them differently. Teachers, who are supposed to support and defend these women, often do not completely understand the constraints these women face and tend to label them in the same negative stigmatizing terms that are used by broader society. For example, Jacob, a 34-year-old secondary school teacher, realized that they are trapped in a vicious cycle that is difficult to escape; nonetheless, he classifies girls as prostitutes and puts the burden of change upon the young women.

At the end of the day, they end up becoming prostitutes just like their mothers. They live in a circle that is nearly impossible to break. The parents are performing their role because they do not have time to guide them. Some of the parents are not educated, so they do not understand the value of education. Instead of insisting that the children should attend school, they treat children as a source of labor.

This comment is in line with Wight (2006), who addresses the dichotomy between restrictive and permissive values, and the contradicting standards in Tanzanian society's perspectives. On the one hand, cultural norms constrain girls' choices and put them in a frame they must fit, with sexual intercourse among minors widely condemned in Tanzanian community. Girls' education, on the other hand, is not prioritized because of economic fragility, and girls are sexualized and expected to say yes to sex to make ends meet. Workload for girls at home, or even child labor is a common problem in many households, according to the Tanzanian Government's National Strategy on Gender and Children (2015), and is one of the main reasons for school dropout (HRW, 2021a). Moreover, according to the data gathered, some girls and women seem to understand their worth as human beings attached to the money men are willing to pay and brag between them for the high awards they receive in exchange for sex.

This generates confusing and difficult-to-navigate double standards of morality and expectations of girls and women. Reportedly, interventions that have been conducted to consult girls in order to prevent them from becoming pregnant and urge them to stay at school, but in this context, where girls have less economic means, they do not seem to have much possibility of saying no. Therefore, all the above infringe on the right to protect children from work labor (Article 32), and sexual exploitation (Article 34), as outlined by the CRC, the right to education (Article 28 and 29), and the right to development.

Women must prioritize their needs: Education over food?

It should be mentioned that, due to the region's economic difficulties, access to education should not be taken for granted, and the percentage of pupils completing secondary school is low. This creates a barrier for children, particularly females, to look beyond everyday survival and strive for a brighter future, since less than one-third of Tanzanian children attend lower secondary school, according to the World Bank (2019). The disparities between rural and urban regions are major and women's economic exclusion make it difficult for women-led households to have food security (HRW, 2021a). In this case, women participants confessed the hardships they faced as a result of lacking the basics which did not allow for education to be prioritized. The following is an abstract from an interview with Elsa, a 22-year-old woman who lives in a village that engages in fishing activities:

Oh, education is very important. But I needed to eat, so I skipped school in order to work, and provide for my parents. How can you study if you don't have books? Not even a place to live.

Sandra, a 33-year-old NGO employee, elaborated:

Temptation is all around us. However, I think that people's responses to temptation vary depending on their background. How can you protect yourself from temptation without having the resources or guidance from your family?

As stated by Hodgson (2011), development projects often fail to evaluate all the aspects of an issue or focus on women's priorities. We should always think carefully whose rights are protected and become the priorities of advocacy and funding. For example, during discussions, Maasai women identified economic insecurity, a lack of legal rights, and their political marginalization, as their main problems, rather than female genital mutilation as the government and the global arena thought. Tanzanian women experience early pregnancy often out of choice, and as a result, they are denied access to education and other basic human rights. As it was derived from the discussion with the girls, they are in need of economic empowerment, to feel secure and respected in the society, and to be able to make decisions for themselves.

Women get exploited: Is this a choice?

Tanzania is a low-income country where girls' and women's choices are often limited because of their economic status and a lack of resources to satisfy their basic needs. As proven by the testimonies of these women, the practice of 'transactional' sex is highly common, especially in communities where men engage in fishing activities. Girls often engage in sexual intercourse with older men in the community who have money and power over them in the hope that these gifts will help them escape the economic hardship. This leads to women having little control over their sexuality and, subsequently, the likelihood of an unintended pregnancy. Nineteen-year-old Georgia woman, narrated her story:

At that time, I lacked basic necessities such as school supplies and other things, so I was forced to enter into a relationship thinking that the money would provide me with the school supplies.

In characterizing poverty as a ‘gendered experience’, Chant (2008) challenges how gender equality can be attained when the essentials are lacking. Reportedly, most of the students have to walk several kilometers to school. This long walk is fraught with peril, particularly for the girls, who risk being taken advantage of or even raped by males. Even though the girls often recognize the dangers of walking to school, they still want to be educated, therefore they choose to take this path. Furthermore, even if they are aware of the risks of having sexual relations with an older man, they often consider this as their only alternative. They are both agents and actors, making the best decisions they can given their restricted options. Due to the power imbalance, girls and women are in a vulnerable position lacking essentials and autonomy, which makes it harder for them to negotiate and choose to engage in sexual intercourse. Teachers also discussed the long distances from home to school, acknowledging the dangers this entails for girls and informed me about the initiative of some schools to construct dormitories near their campuses to host female students. Christopher, a 36-year-old teacher at a secondary school, explained:

For example, school is almost a 12-kilometers walk every morning. Some of the students beg for a lift and eventually get into trouble with the men who give them lifts. When there is nothing to eat, it is easy for girls to be seduced.

5.3 Theme 3: Women’s agency and perception of their human rights.

The third theme that emerged involved women’s narration of their experience of motherhood and their perceptions of their human rights and priorities. A situation cannot be altered if it is not understood; hence, we should examine it through Tanzanian women’s eyes.

‘My dreams are dead’: A different narration of motherhood.

When mothers were asked to talk about their maternal experiences, even though their experiences varied, they were all negative. Women did not necessarily identify the early childbearing experience in a negative way as such, but rather the circumstances and consequences of it. Not girl or woman ever wants to be raped or forced to engage in sexual intercourse and be abandoned to raise a kid on her own, but girls and women make a choice of

walking to school or accepting gifts or even engaging in a sexual intercourse with an older man, based on their vulnerable position and were taken advantage of. Even if a girl had different aspirations and wished to attend school, pregnancy makes it is impossible for her to pursue her right to education, have job opportunities, remarry, and follow her dreams in general. During the focus groups, when I asked women about the differences in their life compared to other girls who did not experience an early pregnancy when at school, they repeatedly said that after the pregnancy, ‘their dreams are dead’. Maria, a 22-year-old woman, recognized that:

After the pregnancy, my life became miserable. The one who is at school is focused on reaching her dreams, whilst others we are concentrating on overcoming life’s obstacles and suffering.

When the mothers in each group were asked if they would return to school if they could, the majority of them gave a positive answer. However, Elsa, a 22-year-old woman, explained why she might be hesitant:

I already have two children that depend on me, so I would not go back to school. My dreams died when I got pregnant at grade 6. My first kid has already started school. How does one proceed with their education if she wants to?

The government’s announcement of a law prohibiting pregnant girls and young mothers from attending school, was a breach of the right to education, as well as a measure that prevented girls from reaching their full potential and sentenced them and their families to a cycle of injustice (Human Rights Watch, 2018a). Furthermore, according to Tanzania’s Education Act, females were compelled to undergo obligatory pregnancy tests and were expelled in the event of a positive result, although boys remained to attend school with no disruption and men were not prosecuted for their illegal act (World Bank, 2019). In other words, girls were regarded as though they were ‘criminals’ who had to hide from their parents at home and their teachers at school, the two places where they meant to feel safe. The complexity of human rights norms lies in the fact that they can be interpreted in various ways by different actors with diverse cultural backgrounds, even if they are considered universal (Merry, 2012). For example, during the interview with the 34-year-old teacher, Jacob, he did not express his disapproval of the expulsion law, or the way teachers like him had to handle the matter when they suspected that a girl was pregnant, and instead he insisted on the importance of strict measures for both genders:

Our actions to address child pregnancy were standard. After we suspected that a girl was pregnant, we had to measure her, take her to the hospital so that we get proof, report the incident to the authorities, and then expel her from school.

Even if the expulsion law has changed, there still seem to be many barriers, such as the government's lack of support for the reintegration and school attendance of young mothers at school, as highlighted by several participants. Thus, the girl's right to an education is still infringed.

Women's human rights claims

Human rights may be considered universal, yet their complexity allows for different interpretations depending to economic and cultural circumstances. Findings indicate that transnational ideas, and hence human rights, are rejected by specific groups who show resistance and reluctance to cede control over other subordinate groups. When the UDHR was signed, it sparked a major debate between feminists and multiculturalists, who fought for women's rights and cultural preservation, respectively (OHCHR, 1948). Thus, another convention, the CEDAW, was held in order to defend the well-being and quality of women's lives. Even though it was widely accepted and supported, lots of countries rushed to make reservations on name of culture and religion. Christopher, a 36-year-old secondary school teacher, identified technology as a method to transform human rights knowledge:

They were aware of their human rights as a result of technology, globalization, and social media. They understand their entitlement to health and education, which they were also taught in civics class at school, and they know that their parents should provide them with necessities such as books, food, and water.

Interestingly enough, during another interview, Edward, a 51-year-old VEO, cited the same reasons as the interviewer above -globalization and social media- as the major causes of child pregnancy rather than a way to raise awareness for human rights. More specifically, he insisted that rates of childbirth among schoolgirls have increased over the past decades due to the influence of technology and the materialistic mindset of younger generations. According to the findings of my participant observation, locals often blame adolescent pregnancy on post-colonialism effects and the modernization of the younger generations, which contradicts their

desire to preserve their traditions. In other cases, pregnancy can be depicted as a blessing, but this is not the case in this setting owing to economic insecurity and the social and cultural beliefs.

Blurr (1995) explored a further conceptualization of societal norms around adolescent pregnancy through social constructionist theory and in relation to economic growth, social trends, and power relations. He claims that framing adolescent pregnancy as a problem is a societal construct that first developed in Africa the past decades. In the past, children were valued in African culture, and teenage pregnancy was entirely accepted and normalized with no harsh condemnation of pregnant teens. Thus, even though it has been almost 30 years ago since Blurr stated this view, this portrayal of teenage pregnancy as a 'crime' from traditional leaders of the community and religious figures, is still the case. This is connected to Merry's (2012) view of the ongoing conflict between modernity and culture, in which some African societies want to live locally and simply in this era of consumerism because they disapprove of the way cultural life is changing in response to globalization.

Human rights may be culturally defined, however there are basic foundations and commitments by states to defend human rights. In reality, the fundamental human rights violation is not that a girl got pregnant but the fact that she lacks control over her reproductive processes, which contradicts international law. Not the pregnancy itself, but the conditions in a girl's life in rural Tanzania are the ones that place her in a disadvantaged position of not having proper guidance and sufficient resources to define her life, thus, violate her rights. In contrast, societal, economic, and cultural structures of society that favor males exacerbate gender disparities and aggravate the situation. Women's agency, even over their own bodies, is frequently ignored due to the lack of education, career possibilities, and decision-making in the private and public sphere, and powerful men get to make the decisions instead. In line with this, Okin (1999), analyzes conflicts between feminism and multiculturalism. She criticized the way girls and women in some societies appear to be dominated by powerful men who get to define their reproductive processes on their behalf.

In other words, the vast majority of the girls had no intention of becoming pregnant or even having a sexual intercourse with a man for money, but likely consider this as their only alternative. As a result, they lost control over their reproductive processes. Another occurrence reported by some of the mother participants was them being forced into a sexual intercourse by a member of their community, a relative or a male teacher at school which breached their

right to bodily integrity, amongst other human rights (UN, 2015). The necessity of women to exercise their human rights is also stressed by UN (2022), who associates the impact of the societal roles of women on the women's freedom to control of their own bodies. Girls and women should be free to make their own decisions, even the ones affected by poverty of stigmatisation within their communities. In this situation, adolescent pregnancy interferes with girls' and women's sexual health and reproductive rights, and hence their freedom to determine when they wish to get pregnant and shows the societal oppression of women. Girls reported setting as a priority their education but their right being restricted due to the circumstances of poverty in their region. Nadia, a 20-year-old girl, confessed:

Our communities do not respect our human rights. We feel terrified, and we don't feel safe. Also, some parents deny their children with the right to an education.

Hodgson (2011) questions whether a rights-based discourse can serve as an emancipatory strategy for women to facilitate gender justice and provides examples of women who asserted their rights to speak, be heard, be respected, and set priorities. She claims that we should not neglect the agency of the subjects, in her case the Maasai women, and attempt to comprehend their culture and religion in their own terms, as well as the historical processes, the intersectionality of the rights of women or indigenous people and the significance behind them. She proposes educating women in order for them to make their own choices and focusing on women's priorities and giving them voice to make their own choices for the development of their community. Similarly, when women participants in my research were asked which human rights they recognized during focus groups, they mentioned the 'right to be listened to' and the right to 'be appreciated,' among others, demonstrating their great need for human agency and decision making which are aiming the things that they lack within their community. Although the majority of women participants seemed to recognize some of the human rights, several expressed that they did not feel safe or protected at all and that their rights had been abused or restricted in some way. Sixty-nine-year-old Stella, mother of seven children, insisted that:

To be protected and have someone to offer us advice and listen to us. We have the right to believe in ourselves, have self-confidence, be respected, appreciated, and be cared for. The government should stand up for those human rights. The girls deserve a better life.

6. Discussion

In the following section I will highlight the main findings of the research. During the interviews and focus groups, the different role players agreed with the facts, and the situation these girls find themselves into, but they still shared different perspectives and interpretations of them.

According to the findings of this research, women do not see themselves as immoral, but in their eyes, they made the best decision given their restricted choices. They explained how the pregnancy occurred, either because they were convinced to engage in a relationship with an older man in exchange for money or were forced into a sexual intercourse by family members, with teachers at school or village men. They also referred to the reasons behind their unplanned pregnancy such as lacked basic necessities and support by their family members which put them in a disadvantaged and vulnerable position. In regard to the situation where they are now as young mothers, they have lost the respect from their parents, they are excluded from education and stigmatized by the society.

The intermediaries on the other hand, during the interviews seemed to interpret things differently. They often portrayed girls as prostitutes that enjoy sexual intercourses with older men and receiving gifts in exchange. They recognized the lack of guidance and supervision by the girl's parents and the lack of basics provided for them such as food or school supplies, but they still saw 'transactional sex' as a choice the girls would happily make. Also, they put all the blame to the girls that give in to the temptation and not the older men who sexually exploited them. Some of the approaches employed to address the issue of adolescent pregnancy was fines and strict punishments by VEOs and VCs, mandatory pregnancy tests and school expulsion by educators and educational workshops and seminars by the NGO staff members.

According to the 'vernacularization' of human rights introduced by Merry (2012), intermediaries are the ones with the power to structure the society's understanding of human rights. They should be able to translate global ideas into the local context while supporting and advocating for the vulnerable and marginalized in the society and aiming at the eradication of the discrimination. In this case, the intermediaries seem to be the ones who perpetuate the stigmatization of the pregnant girls and young mothers. There is a gap in their opinion and the reality these girls are facing which reinforces the attitudes since women are caught in the

broader social and economic context which is structured based on the power relations and gender roles of the society. Thus, the broader cultural context, appears to create a situation where women are further stigmatized and have less support. Also, the economic insecurity influences the choices the women make and their sexual behavior.

7. Conclusions

This dissertation aims to make a substantial and effective contribution to answering the research question and exploring the key points and need for research related to this current situation. In light of this, this study created an open space for Tanzanian women to reinterpret their human rights and understanding of their culture, which is primarily structured by governments and NGOs in Tanzania. The study was conducted while abstaining from patronizing attitudes, making assumptions, or putting labels on behalf of the people. The conclusion was drawn on the basis of an extremely comprehensive analysis that not only defined the obstacles along the way but, examined how oppressive the system is.

Through this qualitative study, I sought to highlight the realities of women who have experienced adolescent pregnancy, which is addressed in this study as a human rights issue and identify the reasons why their human right to control their own reproductive processes is not met despite all the efforts and interventions that have taken place over the past decades. Furthermore, I focused on the influence of social norms and economic realities that have gender roles and religious beliefs embedded in them. Lastly, I sought to understand how these women perceive their human rights and what their priorities are, and I explored the views on adolescent pregnancy of intermediaries who support them in the community.

My findings show that most of the literature on adolescent pregnancy is based on interventions aimed at changing the situation rather than examining the underlying variables that are creating the situation in the first place. One of the reasons that these women's circumstances have not changed is that the majority of the government's or non-governmental organizations' initiatives target young girls and women, encouraging them to change their behaviors, even if they are stuck in the social and cultural setting of the community. Vulnerable individuals are always expected to change, yet they are the ones least capable of doing so, making it is extremely difficult. The focus, however, is rarely on men or the community members. In other words, the stakeholders that seek in intervene in the community end up causing further harm by reinforcing the stigmatization of girls and women due to their inability to change. Instead, girls and women should be educated and supported with the purpose of making good decisions for themselves and the international community should not only target girls and women, but include them as active agents in projects that address challenges that affect them.

My findings reveal the key role the intermediaries play in this situation, as introduced by Merry (2012) through the ‘vernacularization’ of the human rights concept. The vast majority of the interventions in the community are monitored and implemented by them. They have attempted to prevent teenage pregnancy in the name of human rights, but the situation has not changed significantly. As identified by my research, a reason for this could be that the intermediaries themselves blame the girls and think that this is the girls’ fault because of their provocative behavior. Teachers, the community, and family members do not recognize their partial responsibility for teen pregnancy due to the lack of resources, sexual education, and support provided to girl teenagers. Economic insecurity seems to be both a driving factor and a result behind the sexual behaviors of girls and women who are in a disadvantaged position, impoverished, and have higher possibilities of being exploited. In practice, this means that interventions on adolescent pregnancy should acknowledge the economic insecurity these girls and women are facing, which is a driving factor that often leads to ‘transactional sex’ and economic dependence and aim at equality and economic empowerment.

The issue of adolescent pregnancy is complex, so the situation is much bigger than this. Adolescent pregnancy is deeply influenced by the social values and beliefs around women’s sexuality that lie around the notion that her role is to reproduce. This study shows that women understand their vulnerable position, and the greater impact an adolescent pregnancy has on them compared to men. In the process of getting control over their reproductive rights, they get pregnant due to their restricted choices, so they see teenage pregnancy as a violation of their reproductive rights and other human rights it interferes with.

Understanding the complexity of this issue, the pregnant girls’ and young mothers’ lived experiences, and the way their choices are restrained, is a way to meet their human rights. The issue of adolescent pregnancy has to be framed and understood in the local context, and women and men at all levels of society and traditional leaders should be part of it. I hope that future researchers will see the value in women’s agency and let the subjects identify what they perceive as a problem and what their priorities are.

8. Recommendations

Even if the expulsion law that prevents girls from attending school has changed, the reality of the girls remains unchanged. Thus, the Tanzanian government should offer clear direction and guidance to schools to ensure that adolescent mothers have the chance to return to school, and that the school is sufficiently prepared to accommodate them. It should also implement laws and regulations for pregnant girls' and young mothers' protection, as well child protection initiatives on a local and national level. The president should mandate all teachers to accept young mothers at the school environment and stop reporting them to the local authorities in the name of the old expulsion law and abstain from behaviors that further perpetuate the stigma of the girls. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology should also guarantee that pregnant students and adolescent mothers receive the assistance they need to complete their education and take school exams, such as childcare support.

Along these lines, more advocacy is required at the national, regional, and district levels to influence policymakers', teachers', and community leaders' attitudes towards sexual activity and the sexual and reproductive health needs of schoolchildren as well as to strengthen measures aimed at protecting schoolgirls from sexual exploitation. There is a necessity for the entire community to be educated about the legislation, including the illegality of a girl under 18 to give consent for sex, in Tanzania, if not married. In this way, parents and community leaders would recognize the gender discrimination against schoolgirls and women, as well as the severity of acts such as sexual exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, boys and men of each community should also be educated through seminars and workshops that raise awareness and promote dialogue on gender equality, human rights, family planning, and more specifically, sexual and reproductive health rights. Also, sexuality education course should be provided at schools for all students starting in primary school.

Another recommendation is adopting mechanisms to hold boys and men accountable, which might serve as a preventive, besides punitive measure. This way, the men would face the consequences of their choices and think twice before acting. Training women for income production through small-scale businesses to minimize their reliance on low-paid, seasonal farm employment, as well as the rates of child labor, child marriage and consequently, adolescent pregnancy, and raise women's status in the community. The international community and civil society organizations should exert greater pressure on the Tanzanian

government to adopt a comprehensive strategy that ensures that pregnant pupils and young mothers have the opportunity to complete secondary education. Also, development projects should place women's agency at the centre of their interventions. For the girls to obtain their human rights, a joint effort is required.

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