

# Evaluation of access to established coping mechanisms against poverty-induced child violence in Mpigi District, Uganda

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored access to coping strategies against poverty-induced violence among children living in impoverished conditions in Mpigi District. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires and documentary analysis. A total of 109 participants consented to take part in the study. Results revealed a high incidence of violence against children, with respondents acknowledging various forms of abuse, including physical (hitting/slapping), psychological (verbal abuse), sexual (assault and rape), and economic (withholding resources) violence. Children from economically disadvantaged households were particularly vulnerable to these abuses. Specifically, 46.2% of participants agreed, and 12.8% strongly agreed, that children experience physical violence within their homes. Moreover, 51.3% agreed, and 15.4% strongly agreed, that children face psychological violence in domestic settings. Notably, 33.3% of participants agreed, and 23.1% strongly agreed, that children endure sexual violence, while 38.5% agreed, and 30.8% strongly agreed, that children experience economic violence, including the withholding of financial resources. These findings highlight an urgent need for comprehensive strategies to protect children from sexual exploitation and to support survivors. Addressing sexual violence is crucial for safeguarding children's rights and promoting their overall well-being. The study also revealed the extent of economic violence faced by children in impoverished households in Mpigi District, suggesting that such violence perpetuates cycles of poverty and vulnerability by denying children access to basic needs and increasing the risk of child labor. Tackling economic violence is essential for ensuring that children's fundamental needs are met and for reducing child labor rates. Identified coping mechanisms included seeking social support from family and friends (56.4%), utilizing formal support and legal services (69.3%), accessing public recreational facilities (69.3%), engaging in income-generating activities (65.9%), participating in community-based groups (23.1%), and seeking professional help (15.4%). This study underscores the barriers marginalized populations face in accessing formal support services and highlights the need for culturally sensitive and accessible mental health resources. Addressing psychological violence is vital for promoting children's mental health and preventing long-term emotional harm.

**Keywords:** Poverty-induced violence, Coping strategies, Economic violence, Child abuse, Social support, Mental health resources

## INTRODUCTION

Violence against children is a grave violation of human rights with significant repercussions for their physical, psychological, and social well-being [1]. In impoverished communities, this violence is especially prevalent, with children experiencing various forms of abuse that hinder their development, perpetuate cycles of poverty, and threaten their future opportunities [2]. Physical violence, psychological abuse, sexual exploitation, neglect, and exposure to violence within the home or community are among

the most pervasive forms of violence affecting children worldwide, as documented in extensive literature [3,4]. Physical violence, the most prevalent form of violence in impoverished communities, often leads to serious injuries, disabilities, and long-term health consequences [5]. Research by Save the Children highlights the detrimental effects of physical violence on children's development and well-being, noting associations with poor academic performance, behavioral

problems, and emotional trauma [6]. Psychological violence, including emotional abuse, verbal harassment, and intimidation, is also common among children in poverty-stricken areas [7,8]. Poverty-related stressors, such as financial insecurity and social isolation, are significant contributors to heightened levels of psychological violence in households and communities [9]. UN Women (2020) notes that psychological violence has lasting impacts on mental health, with affected individuals experiencing elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. For children, exposure to psychological violence is linked to low self-esteem, behavioral issues, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships [10]. Sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, and exploitation, is another devastating consequence of poverty [11]. Poverty-related vulnerabilities, such as limited access to education, employment opportunities, and safe housing, increase the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, especially among children in regions like Mpigi District [12]. Human Rights Watch has documented the prevalence of sexual violence against women and girls living in poverty, revealing the interplay of economic marginalization, gender-based discrimination, and social stigma [13]. Children in impoverished communities face heightened risks of sexual exploitation and trafficking, often with limited access to protective services and legal recourse [14]. In Mpigi District, Uganda, poverty exacerbates the vulnerabilities of marginalized populations, heightening the risk of violence against children. Santaularia et al. [15] suggest that economic deprivation compounds other disadvantages, such as gender-based discrimination and social exclusion, thus intensifying the prevalence of violence in impoverished households [15]. Violence against children not only violates their rights but also perpetuates cycles of poverty by hindering educational attainment, limiting future employment opportunities, and undermining community cohesion [16]. Globally, the link between poverty and violence against vulnerable populations has received considerable attention [17]. Scholars such as Mill et al., have examined the interconnectedness of poverty, gender inequality, and violence, highlighting how these issues affect diverse societies [18]. International organizations like the United Nations have recognized poverty as a critical factor exacerbating violence against children [19]. Within the African context, poverty and

violence against children intersect in complex ways influenced by historical, social, and economic factors. Poverty disproportionately impacts women and children in African communities, emphasizing the need for holistic solutions to address structural inequalities [21]. Initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 prioritize poverty eradication and gender equality as essential pillars for sustainable development, signaling the continent's commitment to addressing these intertwined issues [22]. In Mpigi District, the historical context of poverty and violence against children reflects broader national and continental dynamics, shaped by unique local factors. Community-based organizations and local authorities have launched grassroots initiatives to address poverty and violence, underscoring the importance of context-specific interventions tailored to Mpigi's socio-economic landscape. Theoretical frameworks such as Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Feminist Theory provide valuable insights into the dynamics of poverty and violence. Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement in their social environment [22]. In contexts of poverty and violence, this theory implies that children may internalize and reproduce violent behaviors they witness due to socio-economic conditions. Exposure to violence in impoverished communities can perpetuate cycles of aggression through social learning mechanisms [23]. Feminist Theory offers a critical lens for understanding how gender, power, and poverty shape experiences of violence against women and children [24]. Going further, Feminist Theory emphasizes how patriarchal structures and economic inequalities increase the vulnerability of marginalized groups to violence. In Mpigi District, entrenched gender norms and socio-economic disparities contribute to the disproportionate impact of poverty-induced violence on women and children.

This study aims to examine the relationship between poverty and violence against children in Mpigi District, using Social Learning Theory and Feminist Theory as guiding frameworks. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide insights into the structural and social dynamics contributing to violence in impoverished communities and inform the development of targeted interventions to protect children and promote well-being in Mpigi District.

## METHODOLOGY

### Scope of the study

The study focused on children living below the poverty line in Mpigi District, Uganda. Given the focus on poverty-related violence, the population included individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds within impoverished households in

both rural and urban areas of the district. The inclusion criteria specified participants to be residents of Mpigi District, aged below 18 years and have experienced or witnessed violence within the household.

### **The study design**

The study employed a multi-stage stratified sampling technique to select individuals who have experienced or witnessed violence within the household from the community. First, the district was stratified into rural and urban areas. Then, villages or urban neighborhoods was randomly selected from each stratum. Within the selected villages or neighborhoods, households were sampled

using systematic random sampling. During household visits, screening questions was used to identify individuals who meet the inclusion criteria of having experienced or witnessed violence within the household. Selected individuals who meet the criteria was invited to participate in the study through informed consent processes.

### **Validity**

Validity refers to the degree to which data accurately represent the phenomenon under study [25]. The tool was designed to collect valid data by ensuring that all items in the conceptual framework were reflected in the tool. To further ensure validity, the researcher aligned the questionnaire items with the

study's conceptual framework. The research supervisors reviewed and validated the instrument, evaluating relevance, wording, and clarity of items. The instrument was refined until the content validity index (CVI) reached at least 0.7, the minimum recommended CVI for survey studies.

### **Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure. For example, if a person steps on a weighing scale multiple times, the scale should provide the same reading each time. If different values are obtained, the scale would not be considered reliable. To ensure

reliability in this study, respondents were able to answer items in each section by selecting an appropriate choice easily, which facilitated consistent responses.

### **Data collection**

Primary data sources included information directly obtained and analyzed by the researcher, for example via questionnaire surveys conducted on the sample population. Primary data was used because their authenticity, specific nature, and up to date information. A questionnaire was used for collecting quantitative data well designed which was closed-ended questionnaire covering demographic

information, socio-economic status, experiences of violence, and coping mechanisms. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions using semi-structured interview guides. These guides explored participants' perceptions and experiences of poverty-related violence, as well as their coping strategies and support networks.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While key informants, such as Social workers, Parish Chief, and Parish counselors, were consulted to offer qualitative insights, their perspectives did not

entirely capture the full range of coping mechanisms used by children living in poverty in Mpigi District to address the impact of violence.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher sought approval and permission from the relevant sources, beginning with Kampala International University. An introductory letter was obtained from the office of the Dean of the School of Education, College of Education, and External Studies; it was presented to the respective authorities in the district and shared with all respondents. Participants were fully informed about the objectives of the study, and they were reassured

that their responses would be treated as confidential and used solely for academic purposes related to this particular research. The researcher ensured that no participants were harmed or abused, either physically or psychologically, during the research process. A climate of comfort and respect was maintained, and any confidential information or situations where respondents did not wish to disclose their names were handled with integrity.

### **Statistical analysis**

After data collection, confirmatory factor analysis and reliability analysis were conducted to ensure validity and reliability. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to aid in this

process. Additionally, the interview questions were reflective of those in the questionnaires, allowing for the collection of relevant data and ensuring consistency and dependability [5].

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study explored the coping mechanisms adopted by children living in poverty within Mpigi District to mitigate the effects of violence. The findings revealed that a significant proportion of respondents agreed that seeking social support is a common coping mechanism among individuals living in poverty. Specifically, 46.2% agreed and 23.1%

strongly agreed that children and women in poverty-stricken households often turn to trusted individuals for emotional support and guidance. This finding underscores the importance of social networks in buffering the effects of violence and promoting resilience among vulnerable populations. Addressing social isolation and promoting

community support systems are essential for enhancing the well-being of children living in poverty. The findings also suggested that engaging in positive coping activities is prevalent among individuals living in poverty. A considerable proportion of respondents (38.5% agreed and 30.8% strongly agreed) acknowledged that children and women in poverty-stricken households often utilize recreational activities or hobbies as a means of coping with violence. This finding highlights the importance of providing opportunities for constructive engagement and skill-building to empower individuals to cope with adversity effectively. Promoting access to recreational programs and creative outlets can enhance the resilience of children and women facing violence in poverty-affected communities, supporting the

achievement of the third objective of the study. The findings also indicated that seeking professional help is less commonly endorsed as a coping mechanism among individuals living in poverty. Only a small proportion of respondents (12.8% agreed and 2.6% strongly agreed) reported that children in poverty-stricken households actively seek professional support to address violence. This finding underscores the barriers to accessing formal services faced by marginalized populations and highlights the need for culturally sensitive and accessible mental health resources. Strengthening mental health services and reducing stigma surrounding seeking self-help professional support behaviors are critical for ensuring equitable access to support for children living in poverty.

**Table 1: Showing findings on coping mechanisms adopted by children**

STATEMENT	SA		A		N		D		SD		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Children living in poverty in Mpigi District seek support from family and friends to cope with the effects of violence.	130	33.3	90	23.1	10	2.6	60	15.4	100	25.6	390	100
Accessing formal support services, such as counselling and legal assistance, is an effective coping mechanism for children facing violence in impoverished households in Mpigi District.	120	30.8	150	38.5	2	0.5	80	20.5	38	9.7	390	100.0
Engaging in income-generating activities helps children in Mpigi District mitigate the effects of poverty-related violence.	95	24.4	162	41.5	3	0.8	60	15.4	70	17.9	390	100.0
Participation in community-based support groups is a valuable coping mechanism for children experiencing violence in Mpigi District.	30	7.7	60	15.4	90	23.1	150	38.5	60	15.4	390	100.0

**Source: Primary Data, 2024**

The results of this study highlight the coping mechanisms adopted by children living in poverty in Mpigi District to manage the effects of violence. Social support, engagement in positive coping activities, and professional help-seeking emerged as

key mechanisms, with varying levels of utilization. These findings align with, and provide a nuanced view of, existing literature on how vulnerable populations cope with poverty-induced violence.

**Seeking Social Support as a Coping Mechanism**

The study found that a significant portion of respondents agreed that seeking social support is a common coping mechanism among impoverished children and women, with 46.2% agreeing and 23.1% strongly agreeing. This finding aligns with studies that underscore the role of social networks as a buffer against the psychological impacts of violence. For instance, research by Goodman et al., highlights

that social support from trusted individuals can mitigate the negative effects of violence by promoting resilience and emotional stability among children and women in poverty-stricken settings [26]. Similarly, social networks and community relationships act as protective factors, helping individuals process and cope with trauma more effectively [27]. However, the present study brings

a localized perspective to these findings by emphasizing the importance of addressing social isolation and strengthening community support systems specific to Mpigi District. This contrasts with studies in higher-income or urban settings, where social isolation may be less pervasive and support systems more robust. The findings suggest that fostering local support networks is particularly

#### **Engagement in Positive Coping Activities**

A considerable proportion of respondents (38.5% agreeing and 30.8% strongly agreeing) reported that children and women in poverty-stricken households often turn to recreational activities and hobbies to cope with violence. This finding aligns with studies highlighting the role of constructive engagement and skill-building as resilience-promoting activities. Recreational activities, such as sports, arts, or community events, provide psychological relief and a sense of normalcy for children and women facing violence [29]. Additionally, structured activities offer children an opportunity to develop problem-solving skills and self-confidence, enabling them to cope more effectively with adversity [30]. The present study's finding suggests a unique

#### **Professional Help-Seeking as a Coping Mechanism**

Notably, only a small proportion of respondents (12.8% agreeing and 2.6% strongly agreeing) reported that children in poverty-stricken households actively seek professional help to cope with violence. This finding aligns with extensive literature documenting the barriers marginalized populations face in accessing formal support services. Studies show that stigma, financial constraints, and cultural beliefs contribute to lower rates of professional help-seeking among impoverished populations, particularly in rural or low-resource settings [32, 33]. This resonates with the present study's findings, suggesting that marginalized populations in Mpigi District may experience similar barriers to professional support

#### **Comparative Perspective and Implications**

Comparing these findings with similar studies reveals both shared themes and contextual distinctions. The role of social support as a coping mechanism appears universally significant across diverse settings, reinforcing its importance in mitigating the effects of violence. However, this study's focus on Mpigi District reveals the need to enhance social networks specifically in rural communities, where formal resources are scarce. Similarly, the value of recreational activities as a coping mechanism aligns with global studies, yet the emphasis on community-based programs and

critical in rural, impoverished communities where formal services may be scarce. This perspective resonates with another study which observed similar coping patterns in rural Kenyan communities, further underscoring the contextual significance of social support in regions with limited resources [28].

perspective on the role of accessible recreational programs in rural, impoverished settings like Mpigi District. While prior studies primarily emphasize skill-building as a means of personal development, this study highlights how such activities can be particularly effective in buffering against violence-related trauma. In this context, promoting recreational and creative outlets may be more than just a coping strategy; it could serve as a crucial intervention for enhancing resilience among impoverished populations. This insight supports the view expressed in community-based research which shows that access to recreational programs in low-income settings significantly impacts mental health outcomes [31].

Moreover, the findings underscore the critical need for culturally sensitive and accessible mental health resources. Research emphasize that culturally tailored interventions can effectively encourage professional help-seeking in communities where stigma or mistrust towards formal mental health services exists [34]. This insight is particularly relevant for Mpigi District, where socioeconomic and cultural factors may exacerbate reluctance to seek professional support. Therefore, the study calls for targeted strategies to normalize help-seeking behaviors and reduce barriers to mental health support for children in poverty-affected communities.

creative outlets reflects an adaptive strategy suitable for impoverished regions. On the other hand, the finding that professional help-seeking is less common underscores systemic challenges, such as stigma and limited access, faced by marginalized populations globally. However, the study highlights the compounded barriers in rural Ugandan settings, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive interventions. These findings echo similar calls in studies on African and other low-resource contexts, which advocate for locally tailored mental health resources [35].

#### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the findings of this study offer critical insights into the coping mechanisms adopted by children living in poverty to manage violence. Social support and engagement in positive coping activities

emerge as significant resilience factors, while professional help-seeking remains underutilized due to systemic barriers. Addressing these findings requires fostering social networks, promoting

recreational opportunities, and developing culturally sensitive mental health resources. By comparing these findings with other studies, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of poverty-

induced violence in rural, impoverished contexts and underscores the importance of contextualized interventions to support vulnerable populations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance access to seeking self-help professional support services for children, including counseling, peer support groups, and recreational activities, to strengthen their resilience and coping strategies.
- Foster collaboration between schools, NGOs, and community organizations to create safe spaces and opportunities for children to express themselves and access professional support.
- Encourage ongoing dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders, including parish counselors, chiefs, police officers, and local leaders, to develop and implement context-specific interventions addressing violence against children.
- Foster partnerships with research institutions and universities to conduct further studies on the long-term impact of

poverty-related violence on children's development and well-being

- Investigate the intersectionality of poverty and other social determinants, such as gender, ethnicity, and disability, in shaping experiences of violence among children.
- Explore the effectiveness of community-based interventions, including peer support networks and community-led initiatives, in preventing and responding to violence against children in impoverished households.
- Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term outcomes and trajectories of children exposed to poverty-related violence, including their educational attainment, mental health, and socio-economic status.

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