

Cultural Understanding and the Impact of Domestic Violence Against Children in Uganda Communities: A Case Study of Child Maltreatment in Busoga and Acholi Regions

Timothy Kigonya (BA)

Department of Global Political Studies Malmö University Sweden

E-mail: tkigonya@gmail.com

Imaobong Olsson (Psy.D) (Corresponding author)

Graduate School of Behavioral Science

Southern California Seminary

2075 East Madison Avenue, El Cajon, California 92019 USA

E-mail: stanslot2@yahoo.com

Received: September 1, 2023 Accepted: October 12, 2023 Published: October 26, 2023

doi: [10.5296/jsss.v10i2.21413](https://doi.org/10.5296/jsss.v10i2.21413)

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/jsss.v10i2.21413>

Abstract

Child maltreatment is a grave concern affecting societies worldwide, with its impact extending across generations. This study delves into the intricate interplay of cultural, socio-economic, and institutional factors contributing to child maltreatment in Uganda's Busoga and Acholi regions. Guided by the case study methodology, the research examines the prevalence of child maltreatment, the influence of cultural norms and practices, the roles of cultural and religious leaders, and the challenges within the child protection system.

The findings reveal alarming statistics, highlighting the pervasiveness of child maltreatment, including corporal punishment in schools, child defilement, sexual violence, and child labor. The socio-economic context, particularly in northern Uganda, amplifies children's vulnerabilities due to poverty, disease, conflict, and the prevalence of orphans. Cultural norms and traditions significantly shape disciplinary practices, emphasizing community

involvement in child upbringing. Local cultural and religious leaders influence child discipline structures and advocate for children's rights. However, despite theoretical approaches to child protection, practical implementation lags, and identifying perpetrators remains challenging. Poor documentation and resource constraints hinder effective responses to child maltreatment, leading to a resource allocation disparity between urban and rural areas.

The implications of child maltreatment are profound, affecting children's physical, psychological, and emotional well-being, potentially leading to long-term consequences. The study recommends collaborative efforts involving government bodies, NGOs, cultural and religious leaders, and communities. Culturally sensitive interventions, practical implementation of child protection measures, and equitable resource allocation are vital components of a holistic approach.

Keywords: child maltreatment, Uganda, cultural norms, socio-economic vulnerability, child protection, cultural relativism,

1. Introduction

Child maltreatment is a pressing and pervasive issue in Uganda, raising concerns about the welfare and protection of its youngest citizens. Multiple surveys conducted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have shed light on the extent of this problem, specifically in the Northern and Eastern areas of the country. These reports consistently reveal a disturbing trend: children in these areas are increasingly vulnerable to various forms of abuse. The African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (2013a) played a crucial role in documenting and highlighting the severity of the problem. Their findings underscore the alarming prevalence of physical and sexual violence directed towards children, particularly in the Busoga and Acholi regions.

1.1 Statistics Reports

The Busoga region records the highest number of cases, where 84% of children have experienced abuse, followed by the Acholi region at 72%. These statistics underscore a broader concern for Uganda's youth's well-being and future prospects. Child maltreatment carries significant consequences, impacting not only children's immediate health and safety but also their long-term physical, psychological, and social development. Addressing this pressing issue is crucial for upholding human rights principles and ensuring that every child in Uganda can grow up in a safe and nurturing environment (African Network for the Prevention & Protection against Child Abuse & Neglect, 2013b).

1.1.1 The Legal Assumption and Universal Declaration

The legal assumption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 5, 1948, reports that any form of violence against a human being violates one's right, and the articles indicate that no one should be subjected to any form of torture or inhuman treatment. Therefore, the declaration has significantly influenced all states to apply these human rights principles in their national legislation. The Organization of African Union was another

significant step in expanding international rights standards in other parts of Africa (Murray, 2004a). Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child entails that children must be protected according to the provision embedded in the treaty. Given these international efforts by United Nations declarations, some African states still delayed complying with these efforts (Murray, 2004b).

1.1.2 Cultural Perception

In Uganda, some cultures do not accept human rights principles and their legal obligations because they perceive them to be a Western value. Cultural relativists are skeptical that human rights values function in conservation cultures because different cultures have different moral codes (Rachels & Rachels, 2003a). In other words, what may be right in one society may be considered wrong in another. Given that cultural norms and human rights standards entail different meanings in different societies, cultural relativism views that the norms of a culture reign supreme in the bounds of the culture itself (Rachels & Rachels, 2003b). In conjunction with human rights and culture, child maltreatment and abuse are human rights violations. However, the Busoga and Acholi regions have the most cases of physical and sexual violence against children, and the scale at which these crimes are committed has increased tremendously (Kajubu, 2011a). Uganda Human Rights Commission cases of child maltreatment, including severe beatings, sexual assaults, child labor, and child neglect, indicate that children in Busoga and Acholi regions are the most vulnerable to violation (African Network for the Prevention & Protection against Child Abuse & Neglect, 2013).

1.2 Challenges and the Concept of Child Maltreatment

Child maltreatment is a risk factor for abusive families in these regions; convicting the victimizers of accounts of child abuse creates a challenge amongst NGOs, the police, courts, and the communities because some victims and the bystanders who watch these actions against children take place refrain from providing explicit information on this problem (Munro, 2007). Furthermore, family members, the victims, and neighbors of abusive families hide information due to fear of threats from the perpetrators (Kajubu, 2011b). Child maltreatment is the direct assault against children, which results in physical, emotional harm, behavioral, social, and disability to a child who has been in this process (Arias et al., 2008).

1.3 Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

The research problem addressed in this study revolves around the cultural understanding and impact of domestic violence against children in Ugandan communities, specifically focusing on the Busoga and Acholi regions. Child maltreatment is a pressing issue in Uganda, particularly in the Busoga and Acholi regions, where reports indicate high incidences of physical and sexual violence against children. Despite international efforts, human rights principles, as indicated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are not uniformly accepted within the cultural contexts of these regions. Some cultures perceive human rights principles as Western values that may not align with their traditional moral codes. This

cultural relativism creates challenges for addressing child maltreatment effectively.

Additionally, the reluctance of victims, bystanders, family members, and neighbors to provide explicit information about child maltreatment due to fear of threats from perpetrators poses a significant obstacle. This reluctance hinders the efforts of NGOs, the police, courts, and communities in convicting the abusers and providing support for the victims. Given these challenges, it is crucial to investigate how cultural norms intersect with human rights values in the context of child maltreatment. Furthermore, understanding the dynamics that prevent reporting and addressing child maltreatment is essential for creating effective strategies to protect children's rights and well-being.

Research Questions:

1. Why is child maltreatment still a significant problem in Uganda's Busoga and Acholi regions?
2. How can culture and human rights law influence the protection of children from abuse?

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to thoroughly examine the issue of child maltreatment within the context of Uganda, specifically concentrating on the Busoga and Acholi regions. Through a comprehensive investigation, the study aims to uncover the root causes, manifestations, and repercussions of child maltreatment prevalent in these regions. By gaining a deeper understanding of this problem, the research seeks to contribute valuable insights that can inform the enhancement of efficient approaches and programs to protect the rights and safety of children in Uganda. Through this exploration, the study aims to shed light on the complexities of child maltreatment and provide a basis for fostering positive change in the lives of vulnerable children.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Child maltreatment is a serious problem with long-lasting consequences. Our study's focus on the Busoga and Acholi regions, where this issue is prevalent, brings attention to a critical concern that needs to be addressed. By investigating the root causes, manifestations, and consequences of child maltreatment, your study can inform the development of evidence-based policies and interventions. It can result in more effective strategies for protecting children in these regions. Exploring the influence of culture and human rights law on child protection adds depth to the study. It can provide insights into how cultural norms can be aligned with human rights principles to improve child well-being. Furthermore, our research contributes to the academic discourse on child maltreatment, culture, and human rights. It adds to the body of knowledge in these areas, potentially influencing future research and discussions. Additionally, our study can be used for advocacy, raising awareness about child maltreatment, and the importance of culturally sensitive interventions.

1.6 The Scope of the Study

The study primarily focuses on child maltreatment in Uganda's Busoga and Acholi regions.

This geographic limitation helps narrow the research to specific areas where child maltreatment is a significant concern. The study delves into the complex issue of child maltreatment, including its causes, manifestations, and consequences. It also explores the role of culture and human rights law in influencing child protection. Also, the study draws from various disciplines, including human rights, cultural studies, and social sciences, to provide a holistic understanding of the problem.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Legal Context of Child Protection in Uganda

Although violence against women by men is the most addressed issue on the human rights agenda, children are also victims of violence in one way or another. The laws of Uganda, through the Constitution of 1995, the Children Act of 2003, the Domestic Violence Act of 2009, and the Penal Code of 1950 regulate the legal mechanisms through which the state must provide judicial mechanisms about any injustices (Uganda Legal Information Institute, 2007). In 1990, Uganda ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Observing children's rights in areas of prevention and protection, survival, and development was a significant process. During the same process, educating communities on the agenda of child protection was also initiated by the Ministry of Gender, Ethics, and Integrity as part of capacity building (Uganda Children Rights NGO Network, 1997a).

2.1.1 ANPPCAN and OAU Involvement

In the same year, the African Network for the Prevent and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) was granted observer status by the Organization of African Unity (OAU). This recognition aimed to facilitate progress in considering children's rights as necessary within their objectives (Murray, 2004).

2.1.2 Underreporting of Child Abuse and Factors Preventing Reporting

Despite international and national efforts, including NGOs and human rights advocates in Uganda, there was a significant increase in child abuse cases in 2013. In Busoga and Acholi regions, approximately 64.4% of children experienced abuse. This abuse included neglect, defilement, domestic violence, and even sacrifices. The field study was conducted in Kitgum in the Acholi community and in Jinja district in the Busoga community (Uganda Children Rights NGO Network, 1997b).

In 2011, the Police Crime Unit reported 7,690 cases of child abuse, but only 1,775 were officially reported to the police. This number increased to 8,076 cases in 2012. The survey conducted revealed that several factors contributed to children not reporting abuse. These factors included a lack of knowledge about how and where to file complaints, threats from the abusers, dependence on the abusers for various reasons, and fear of being stigmatized by their families and society (Uganda Children Rights NGO Network, 1997c).

2.1.3 Effectiveness of International Efforts

Uganda's central and southern regions have experienced lower cases of child abuse than the

eastern and northern regions. This improvement is attributed to several factors of the effectiveness of international efforts that have been crucial in addressing child abuse issues in Uganda. The involvement of these organizations in advocacy, awareness campaigns, and support has likely contributed to a reduction in child abuse cases in some regions. However, the input of Uganda's government institutions, such as the police and courts. Their active participation in addressing child abuse cases suggests a commitment to enforcing laws and protecting children's rights. Also, child education campaigns are conducted by international and national human rights organizations like African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (African Commission on Human & Peoples Rights, 2013a).

These campaigns raise awareness about children's rights and the importance of reporting abuse. It is essential to recognize that the prevalence of child abuse can vary by region, and socio-economic, cultural, and historical factors may influence this variation. However, the situation remains challenging in other areas, such as the eastern and northern regions, indicating that there is still work to be done to protect children's rights across the country (African Commission on Human & Peoples Rights, 2013b).

2.1.4 Legal Procedures and Cultural Constraints

Lack of competence and corruption in Uganda: challenges related to legal proceedings, including a lack of competence and corruption issues. These factors have hindered proper investigations into cases involving child victims. This delay in the intervention process affects both state authorities and child campaigners, such as human rights organizations and legal institutions (Representing Children Worldwide, 2005). Customary laws and cultural norms in Uganda are diverse, and cultural norms and values often influence beliefs, customs, and human behavior. In many communities, parental care is the family's responsibility, and decisions regarding children are typically made within the family structure (African Network for the Prevention & Protection against Child Abuse & Neglect, 2013a).

Regarding corporal punishment, before the introduction of human rights laws in Uganda, corporal punishment in homes and schools was not seen as a threat to children's health. It was commonly used as a disciplinary measure and was culturally accepted. In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Sport banned corporal punishment in schools, but the practice persisted, especially in specific communities like Busoga. Therefore, there are continued challenges despite national efforts to address the issue of corporal punishment in schools; the practice continues to persist in some areas, particularly in the Busoga communities (African Network for the Prevention & Protection against Child Abuse & Neglect, 2013b).

2.1.5 The Distressing issue of child maltreatment and Traditional Practices in Uganda.

This passage continues to emphasize the distressing issue of child maltreatment and traditional practices in Uganda, providing further details and examples:

1. Consequences of Child Abuse: Children who suffer mistreatment and abuse, including physical injuries, sexual violence, and emotional abuse, can face severe consequences.

Some may develop addictions to drugs or engage in violent activities like murder.

Research and clinicians suggest that untreated abused children may experience exclusion and isolation from society, leading to severe psychological issues (Gelles & Lancaster, 2005).

2. **Children on the Streets:** Many children who are homeless in Uganda have become abuse victims. This abuse stems from various sources, including armed conflicts and abuse within their own families, relatives, and even teachers. The high number of such children poses a significant challenge for the government, as resources are often insufficient to address their needs effectively (John Paul II Justice & Peace Centre, 2011).
3. **Traditional Child Sacrifice Practices:** The passage mentions the disturbing issue of traditional child sacrifices in Uganda. Some individuals believe that sacrificing a child brings them wealth. This practice is particularly prevalent in the Acholi community. Parents and relatives may be involved in these rituals, often linked to the worship of ancestral gods. The rituals involve symbolic elements connected to historical tombs, and witch doctors dress formally to perform these ceremonies (Refugee Documentation Centre & Legal Aid Board, 2011a).
4. **Violence at Home and Street Life:** African Network for the Prevention & Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) indicates that children who experience or witness violence at home are more likely to run away from their homes and end up being homeless. These street children are often forced into criminal activities, such as joining gangs, pickpocketing, and robbery, to survive (African Commission on Human & Peoples Rights, 2013).
5. **Age of Victims:** Disturbingly, the passage reveals that a significant percentage (22%) of defilement and rape cases involve children as young as 2 and 3 years old, and many of these crimes are perpetrated by family members. The passage provides a chilling example of a 3-year-old boy who survived a ritual in which his body parts were cut off (Refugee Documentation Centre & Legal Aid Board, 2011b).

2.1.6 The Role of Civil Society Organization

The role of civil society organizations, particularly the African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), in advocating for and promoting human rights, especially children's rights, in Uganda and across Africa. Here are the key points:

1. **Expansion of Human Rights Campaigns:** The international objective was to extend human rights campaigns across Africa, creating NGOs in alignment with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) played a significant role in officially recognizing human rights in African states. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights was adopted in 1981, and an independent commission on human rights was established to monitor advancements and progress in this area (Murray, 2004).

2. ANPPCAN's Role: The Organization of African Unity (OAU) granted observer status to the NGO ANPPCAN in 1990. This recognition aimed to emphasize the importance of children's rights. ANPPCAN established a chapter in Uganda in 1992 to extend human rights campaigns at both national and local levels. The Uganda chapter specifically aimed to address the issue of child abuse in various regions and communities (African Network for the Prevention & Protection Against Child Abuse & Neglect, 2013a).
3. ANPPCAN's Efforts: Over the past 25 years of its existence in Uganda, ANPPCAN has made significant efforts in combating child abuse and neglect. Between 1990 and 2012, the organization strategically expanded its operations, focusing on advocacy, networking, service delivery, research, and organizational development (African Network for the Prevention & Protection Against Child Abuse & Neglect, 2013b).

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed in our study is the Cultural Relativist Theory. This framework focuses on understanding and analyzing cultural practices, norms, and beliefs within their specific cultural contexts without imposing external judgments or values. Still, it aligns with understanding domestic violence against children within the cultural contexts of the Busoga and Acholi regions.

3.1 Cultural Relativist Theory

Cultural relativism underscores the importance of recognizing that cultural norms, values, and practices can vary significantly across different societies and communities. In the context of child vulnerability, this theory highlights the need to understand child vulnerability by considering the unique cultural dynamics of the Busoga and Acholi communities. Employing the cultural relativist theory means acknowledging that cultural perspectives influence vulnerability and child protection definitions. It involves examining how these specific communities perceive and respond to the challenges faced by children. Proponents of Cultural Relativist Theory, including Elizabeth Zechenter, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Edward Tylor. These scholars argue that cultures shape human existence according to their values and norms, and rights may differ among cultures based on their structural foundations (Wilson, 1997).

Cultural relativism recognizes that what might be considered child maltreatment in one culture could be seen as a form of discipline, restraint, or even a cultural tradition in another society. It highlights the variability of beliefs and practices within different cultural contexts. The sequence of societal beliefs can influence the cultural legitimacy of rights. What is morally right in one society may be considered morally wrong in another. This perspective raises questions about how child vulnerability and protection are understood and practiced within these cultural contexts (Hayden, 2001).

The central tenets of Cultural Relativism and its implications in the context of child-rearing practices and human rights, particularly in the Busoga and Acholi communities. It is rooted in

the observation that moral systems are closely tied to culture. It recognizes that different cultures have their unique moralities and beliefs. This perspective acknowledges that moral values are not universal but are shaped by the cultural context in which individuals live (Moeckli et al., 2010). In the specific context of the Busoga and Acholi communities, the passage notes that these two communities have distinct cultures with different cultural practices, including variations in child-rearing practices. It underscores the diversity of cultural practices even within a single country or region (African Network for the Prevention & Protection Against Child Abuse & Neglect, 2013).

Cultural Relativism can challenge the relevance of legal obligations in the context of human rights theories and practices. It is because Cultural Relativism posits that moral standards are culturally contingent, and as a result, what may be considered a human rights violation in one culture may not be seen as such in another. It also highlights the tension between the ideologies of universal human rights standards and the extreme diversity of religious and cultural practices worldwide. It is an essential consideration in human rights, as it raises questions about balancing the recognition of cultural diversity with the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights (Zechenter, 1997).

The passage underscores the complexity of applying universal human rights principles in culturally diverse contexts. It suggests that Cultural Relativism challenges imposing a single set of moral and legal standards on all cultures and emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting different communities' unique cultural backgrounds and practices. However, it also acknowledges the ongoing debate regarding the compatibility of universal human rights with cultural diversity. Researchers and policymakers often grapple with these issues when addressing human rights concerns in culturally diverse regions like Busoga and Acholi.

4. Methodology

The methodology used in a case study focused on child maltreatment in the Busoga and Acholi regions. The process is based on the case study method, which comprehensively examines specific cases within a particular context. The case study method is used to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena within their real-life context. It's particularly suitable for researching topics involving cultural contexts and social issues, such as domestic violence and child maltreatment. Yin (2009a) states that a case study is a strategy that thoroughly explores a phenomenon within its naturalistic context. This strategy aims to compare theoretical concepts with real-world empirical observations. The methodology involves gathering data from various sources to provide a well-rounded understanding of child maltreatment in the Busoga and Acholi regions. These data sources include media reports, articles, books, human rights reports, journals, and surveys.

This diverse set of sources helps capture theoretical and practical evidence related to the subject (Yin, 2009b). This case study focuses on child maltreatment in the Busoga and Acholi regions. By employing the case study method, the researchers aim to delve deep into the specifics of child maltreatment within these cultural contexts, allowing for a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of the issue. The methodology emphasizes studying child

maltreatment within its real-life context. It means considering the cultural, social, economic, and historical factors contributing to these regions' child maltreatment. Such an approach helps researchers understand the phenomenon as it occurs naturally, without isolating it from its broader context.

The combination of various data sources, ranging from media reports to academic journals, is intended to provide both theoretical insights and practical evidence. It allows the researchers to validate or challenge existing theories about child maltreatment while grounding their findings in real-world observations. Furthermore, the methodology employed in this case study involves a focused examination of child maltreatment in the Busoga and Acholi regions. The case study method is chosen for its ability to provide a deep understanding of complex phenomena within their natural contexts, and the utilization of diverse data sources contributes to a comprehensive exploration of the topic.

4.1 Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to how your research can produce consistent and stable results when measurements are repeated under similar conditions. In the case study method, reliability ensures that the information collected is consistent and dependable. One way to enhance reliability in a case study is through triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources, methods, or researchers to confirm findings. It can reduce the risk of bias or errors in data collection (Yin, 2009; Gerring, 2007 & Stake, 1995a). Therefore, we ensure we thoroughly document our research process, including data collection procedures and any changes made during the study. So, transparency allows for the replication of our study by others, enhancing reliability.

Validity refers to how our research accurately measures what it intends to measure. In a case study, validity ensures that the findings reflect the true nature of the phenomenon under investigation. So, the type of Validity in Case Studies is construct validity. It concerns whether the variables we are studying represent the theoretical concepts we intend to explore. To establish construct validity, ensure that our research design and data collection methods align with our research questions and objectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

4.1.1 Approval and Ethical Consideration

The case study regarding child maltreatment in Busoga and Acholi Regions and the Department of Global Political Studies Malmo University Sweden approved the Institutional Review Board (IRB), allowing the researchers to use data from sources including media reports, articles, books, human rights reports, journals, and surveys on cases regarding the community. This approval indicates that the study underwent a thorough review process to ensure compliance with ethical standards. It also underscores our commitment to conducting ethical research, especially in a sensitive area like child maltreatment.

5. Results

In order to gain a clear understanding of the research questions, we will look at the statistics-based data from sources, including media reports, articles, books, human rights

reports, journals, and surveys on cases.

5.1 The Statistics

Statistics regarding child maltreatment, specifically corporal punishment in schools and various forms of abuse, in the Busoga and Acholi Regions.

5.2 Corporal Punishment in Schools

In the Busoga and Acholi Regions, school corporal punishment has increased significantly. 81% of children in these regions have experienced physical punishment from their teachers. Despite legislation passed in 2006 to ban all forms of corporal punishment in schools, this practice remains prevalent (African Network for the Prevention & Protection Against Child Abuse & Neglect ANPPCAN, 2011a)

5.2.1 Corporal Punishment at Home

52% of children in these regions have experienced corporal punishment at home. It indicates that physical punishment is not limited to schools but is also occurring within the family environment (African Network for the Prevention & Protection Against Child Abuse & Neglect ANPPCAN, 2011b)

5.2.2 Child Defilement

According to the Uganda Annual Crime and Traffic Road Safety Report, there were 7,564 cases of child defilement. This number represents an increase from the 7,360 cases reported in 2009. Child defilement is a serious crime involving the sexual abuse of children and is a grave concern in these regions (Ochen et al., 2017a).

5.2.3 Sexual and Emotional Violence

In 2012, 84.8% of Busoga and Acholi Regions children reported experiencing sexual and emotional violence. Girls are particularly vulnerable, with 47.8% having experienced sexual abuse. Boys are also affected, with 44.4% having experienced sexual and emotional violence (Ochen et al., 2017b). The statistics paint a disturbing picture of the prevalence of child maltreatment, including corporal punishment in schools, child defilement, and various forms of abuse in the Busoga and Acholi Regions. They suggest that despite legislative efforts to address these issues, there is still a significant gap in protecting the rights and well-being of children in these areas.

5.2.4 Socio-economic and Cultural Factors

The socio-economic and cultural factors are the complex and interconnected issues that contribute to child maltreatment in the communities of Uganda, particularly in the Acholi region. These factors are deeply rooted in the social fabric and traditions of the region and have significant implications for the well-being of children:

5.2.5 Vulnerable Child Population

Uganda has a substantial child population of 17 million, with a significant portion (65%)

facing vulnerabilities such as insecurity, poverty, disease, and conflict (Save the Children & the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2009a). Northern Uganda, specifically the Acholi region, bears a disproportionate burden, with 80% of the vulnerable child population residing there. A large number of children (2.3 million) in Uganda are orphans, with war and AIDS being significant contributors. Approximately 38% of children have been affected by war, and 46% are impacted by the AIDS epidemic (Save the Children & the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2009b).

5.2.6 High Incidence of Sexual Violence/ Child Labor

Alarming, 80% of children reported in media and police crime reports are believed to have experienced sexual violence. A significant proportion (1.76 million) of children in Uganda is engaged in child labor, which reflects economic hardships and limited access to education (Save the Children & the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2009c).

5.2.7 Economic Pressures on Youth/ Neglect of Children Born to Young Parents

High unemployment among youth drives young girls below 15 into commercial sex work for economic survival. Boys are often employed in labor-intensive roles on large plantations to support their families financially. Children born to young parents face neglect due to the economic challenges faced by their families, which can affect their well-being (Uganda Child Rights NGO Network, 2005)

5.2.8 Forced Marriages and Economic Survival/ Cultural Norms and Traditional Practices

Forced marriages of young girls, often under 17 years old, are seen as a strategy for economic survival by some families. Marrying a wealthy individual is perceived as a means to ensure financial support for the family's needs. Cultural norms and traditional practices, supported by village chiefs and community elders, play a significant role in justifying practices such as forced marriages (Drani et al., 2011a). Addressing child maltreatment in this context requires comprehensive and culturally sensitive interventions that address socio-economic challenges and deeply ingrained cultural practices. It might involve improving economic opportunities for families, raising awareness about child rights, and engaging with local leaders to promote more child-friendly practices. Education and empowerment programs for girls and young women could also help break the cycle of early marriage and exploitation.

5.3 Cultural Factors and Community Involvement

In Uganda, disciplining children is deeply rooted in cultural norms. Parents commonly punish children for wrongdoings, which is accepted in society. In Busoga and Acholi regions, raising a child takes a whole community and emphasizes the collective responsibility for upbringing. Extended families have a traditional role in childcare and protection, contributing to the support system for children (Drani et al., 2011b)

5.3.1 Roles of Cultural and Religious Leaders

Local cultural and religious leaders have a significant role in maintaining the discipline structure for children. These leaders advocate for children's rights and challenge cultural

norms that lead to harsh punishments. Cultural leaders play crucial roles in family structures, community security, and protection, particularly in the Acholi regions ((Drani et al., 2011c)

5.3.2 Challenges of the Child Protection System in Uganda

While theoretical approaches to child protection might be in place, practical implementation could be faster. Identifying and disclosing perpetrators of child abuse is challenging, affecting the prosecution process. Documentation and accurate record-keeping of cases help effective intervention and response. Insufficient financial resources and human capital hinder NGOs and state agencies from expanding services for children, from education to health awareness (Drani et al., 2011a)

Urban areas receive more resources than rural areas, contributing to a disparity in education quality, particularly in the Busoga and Acholi regions. Addressing these cultural factors and challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that involves collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, cultural leaders, religious institutions, and communities. Strategies could include awareness about child rights, strengthening the child protection system through improved monitoring and documentation, and ensuring equitable resource allocation across urban and rural areas. Recognizing the vital roles of cultural and religious leaders and involving them in advocating for better child protection practices can contribute to positive change in these communities (Winkler & Sodergaard, 2008).

6. Discussion of Findings

The findings are supported by various scholars, including cultural relativists including Elizabeth Zechenter, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Edward Tylor, that cultures shape human existence according to their values and norms, and rights may differ among cultures based on their structural foundations (Wilson, 1997). What might be considered child maltreatment in one culture could be seen as a form of discipline, restraint, or even a cultural tradition in another society (Hayden, 2001). The perspective acknowledges that moral values are not universal but are shaped by the cultural context in which individuals live (Moeckli, 2010).

The findings also reveal alarming statistics related to child maltreatment, including corporal punishment in schools, child defilement, and various forms of abuse. Notably, many children experience sexual violence, and child labor is widespread. The socio-economic context in Uganda, especially in the northern regions, contributes to children's vulnerabilities (African Network for the Prevention & Protection Against Child Abuse & Neglect, 2013).

Poverty, disease, conflict, and many orphans place children at risk. Cultural norms and traditions play a significant role in disciplining children. The practice of using punishment for wrongdoing is deeply ingrained, and community involvement in child upbringing is emphasized (Winkler & Sodergaard, 2008).

Cultural and religious leaders greatly influence maintaining discipline structures and advocating for children's rights. They also challenge cultural norms that endorse harsh punishments and contribute to community security and protection. Despite the presence of theoretical approaches to child protection, practical implementation is slow, and the

identification of perpetrators is challenging (Drani et al., 2011)

Poor documentation and a lack of resources hinder the effective response to child maltreatment cases. There is a disparity in resource allocation between urban and rural areas, impacting the quality of education and support services for children. The prevalence of child maltreatment has severe implications for children's physical, psychological, and emotional well-being. It can lead to long-term consequences for their development and prospects (Gelles & Lancaster, 2005).

6.1 Limitations of the Study and Delimitations of the Study

In research, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations and delimitations of the study to provide transparency and context for the findings. The study primarily relies on data from media reports, articles, books, and human rights reports. These sources may only sometimes provide a complete and unbiased picture of child maltreatment in the Busoga and Acholi regions. The accuracy and comprehensiveness of these sources could limit it. The study cites data from sources such as the African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) from 2011. The data may have changed since then, and a lack of more recent data could limit the study's relevance. While valuable for in-depth exploration, the case study method may only capture part of the diversity of experiences and perspectives within the communities studied. It may also be limited by the availability and willingness of participants to share their experiences. The study specifically focuses on the Busoga and Acholi regions of Uganda. Findings may not directly apply to regions or countries with different cultural, social, and economic contexts.

The study's findings are based on data up to a certain point in time (up to the knowledge cutoff date in September 2021). The study may not reflect changes or developments occurring after that date. The study relies on limited data sources, including media reports and existing literature. It may only encompass some potential data sources, such as interviews with community members or government officials, which could provide additional insights. The study acknowledges the influence of cultural norms on child maltreatment. However, it may not delve deeply into the nuances of these cultural factors, as this is a complex and multifaceted topic. Resource constraints may limit the study, including budget, time, and access to certain areas or communities within the regions under investigation. Findings from this specific study may not be easily generalized to other cultural contexts or regions with different socio-economic and cultural factors.

7. Conclusion

The study has shed light on the critical issue of child maltreatment in Uganda's Busoga and Acholi regions. The findings underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of child maltreatment, influenced by cultural norms, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and the roles of cultural and religious leaders. Culture plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of child maltreatment, with practices that might be considered abusive in one context being viewed as disciplinary measures or traditions in another. It highlights the importance of understanding child rights within specific contexts and the need for culturally sensitive interventions.

The statistics presented in this study paint a distressing picture of child maltreatment, with high rates of corporal punishment in schools, child defilement, sexual violence, and child labor. These issues are compounded by the socio-economic challenges children face in these regions, including poverty, disease, conflict, and the prevalence of orphans. Cultural and religious leaders emerge as pivotal figures in perpetuating harmful practices and advocating for children's rights. Their influence in maintaining discipline structures and challenging cultural norms underscores the potential for positive change when engaging with local leaders in child protection efforts. The study has also highlighted significant challenges within the child protection system in Uganda. Practical implementation lags behind theoretical approaches, perpetrators often go unidentified, and there are issues with documentation and resource constraints. Resource allocation disparities further exacerbate children's challenges, particularly in rural areas.

The prevalence of child maltreatment has severe implications for children's physical, psychological, and emotional well-being, potentially leading to long-term consequences that affect their development and future prospects. In light of these findings, collaborative efforts must be undertaken to address child maltreatment in these regions. Interventions must be culturally sensitive, involve local leaders, and focus on practical implementation, documentation, and resource allocation. The protection and well-being of children should be a collective responsibility, and their rights should be upheld and safeguarded. While this study provides valuable insights into the issue of child maltreatment in the Busoga and Acholi regions of Uganda, further research and action are needed to effect meaningful change. This study is a starting point for understanding and addressing children's complex challenges in these regions. It underscores the urgency of protecting their rights and ensuring their well-being.

7.1 Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, different recommendations can be put forward to address the issue of child maltreatment in Uganda's Busoga and Acholi regions. Collaborate with government agencies and NGOs to ensure the practical implementation of child protection policies, including laws prohibiting corporal punishment and abuse. To enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies and child protection services to effectively identify and address cases of child maltreatment.

Develop targeted awareness campaigns that educate communities, parents, teachers, and religious leaders about children's rights and the detrimental effects of child maltreatment. Promote culturally sensitive educational programs emphasizing positive discipline techniques as alternatives to punitive measures.

Engage cultural and religious leaders as advocates for children's rights and agents of change within their communities. Facilitate training and workshops for leaders to equip them with the knowledge and tools to challenge harmful cultural norms and practices.

Improve data collection systems to ensure accurate and comprehensive records of child maltreatment cases. Enhance documentation practices to support effective intervention, prosecution, and tracking of cases.

Advocate for equitable resource allocation between urban and rural areas, ensuring that children in all regions have access to quality education, healthcare, and support services. Allocate resources to support vulnerable families and give them opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty.

Promote community-led initiatives that encourage collective responsibility for child protection. Establish community-based support networks that can identify and address child maltreatment cases and assist at-risk families.

Conduct further research to understand the nuanced cultural factors that contribute to child maltreatment and explore effective intervention strategies within the local context. Establishing a monitoring and evaluation system to check progress in reducing child maltreatment and to inform evidence-based policies and interventions. Also, create a comprehensive and sustainable approach to child protection and foster collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, academic institutions, cultural leaders, religious institutions, and international organizations.

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