



Between a rock and hard place? The toxic interface of online and in-person intimate partner violence against female college students in Tanzania

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Background

- Violence against Women (VAW) is a global problem with devastating social, economic & health consequences
- Emerging evidence shows that digital technologies exacerbate VAW
- There is lack of clarity on how contextual factors drive VAW through online and in-person spaces
 - E.g. socio-economic dynamics & sexual exchange



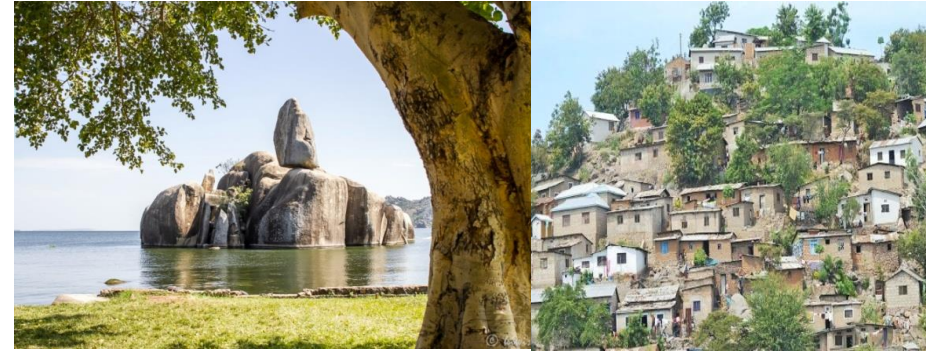
Objectives

- Determine the forms of online violence against female college students in Mwanza, Tanzania
- Establish the interaction between online & in-person violence
- Determine how contextual factors influence the observed forms of online & in-person violence



Methods

- Study conducted in Mwanza city, on southern shores of lake Victoria
- Stratified higher learning colleges in city into public & private colleges
- Sampled 4 colleges into the study
 - Multi stage purposive sampling
 - Two public & two private colleges





Methods (2)

- In-depth interviews (IDIs) with 31 purposively sampled students
 - Aged 20 – 24 years
- Interviews conducted using a semi structured guide
 - In Kiswahili (national language)
- Data collection in stages to allow for reflection on the process & emerging findings
- Multistage inductive & thematic data analysis process





Results

Main forms of online violence

- Psychological violence
- Controlling behaviours
- Sexual harassment

Main perpetrators

- Current or past intimate partners
- Other men within their social & academic networks including male college lectures
- Online strangers



Psychological violence

- Male partners used shaming, and sextortion (blackmail) to exert psychological pressure & abuse through online interactions
- Shaming aimed to ruin the reputation of female students through online circulation of nude photos or rumors
- Sextortion happened when the males shared or threatened to share widely pictures they took in intimate moments
 - For money or sexual favour



Shaming

One of our fellow students got into this scandal and it spread among us...They were videos of her recorded having sex. She was having sex with a person who wasn't her permanent boyfriend and that person recorded her. After some time her real boyfriend got them too...She attempted to commit suicide but luckily they saved her. She was expelled from college.

[IDI 13, 24 years]



Controlling behaviours

- Men felt entitled to monitor & control online activities of their female partners
 - Monitored comments & pictures posted online
 - Monitored interactions & communication with other men
- Intense coercive control from partners of female students who had bought them phones
- Same was for those who paid for their partner's use of the internet



Monitoring & control

I had this male friend who wrote a comment on my Facebook post saying you look good babe. I was upset with that comment. It also caused problems between me and my partner. I didn't know that my partner was tracking these comments. After seeing it he was really mad, he shouted at me and told me to delete that post...I went and delete it. It brought us quarrels.

[Interview 01, 24 years]



Online sexual harassment

- Mostly perpetrated by male college students & male lecturers
- To initiate such harassment, men obtained the students phone numbers from the social groups which they were both members
 - Or from their friends without their permission
- Sexual harassment also in form of sharing of sexually offensive materials
- Some males followed up the student's online harassment with text messages or phone calls



Harassment

In the past there was another guy [class mate] that used to send me threatening texts. He was sexually interested in me but I refused him. He started sending me those texts saying he would do something bad to me. Worse enough I was arranged in the same class group discussion with him. There is a way he would look at me harshly that got me even more scared of him. By that time I was in the first year. That guy really gave me a hard time online and even face to face

[IDI 20, 24 years]



Contextual drivers of violence

- Exchange of mobile phones & costs for internet connection for new or ongoing sexual relationships
- Age disparate sexual relationships
- The desire for modern digital devices and lifestyles
- Inadequate provision by parents
- Excesses of new found freedom away from close parental supervision



Interface of online & in-person violence

- Online activity linked to suspected infidelity main link to online and in-person violence
- In most cases, males accused female partners of having relationships with other men
- Romantic jealousy was the main trigger of both online and in-person IPV and often leading to severe violence



Conclusions

- Rigorously developed hybrid interventions should engage the toxic combination of online & in-person VAW
- Interventions need to address the wider structural drivers of VAW such as transactional sex and age-disparate sexual relationships
- Support systems for victims at higher learning colleges need to be strengthened

Next steps: Findings from this analysis informed design of survey with 600 female students



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