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Peer network influence on intimate partner violence perpetration among urban Tanzanian men

Marta I. Mulawa[a,*], **Lusajo J. Kajula**[b], and **Suzanne Maman**[a]

[a]Department of Health Behavior, Gillings School of Global Public Health, the university of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, USA

[b]Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, Muhimbili university of Health and allied Sciences, Dar es Salaam, tanzania

Abstract

Male perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV) against women in Tanzania is widespread. Theory and empirical evidence suggest peer networks may play an important role in shaping IPV perpetration, although research on this topic in sub-Saharan Africa is limited. Grounded in social learning theory, social influence theory, and the theory of gender and power, the purpose of this study was to examine whether and how peer networks influence men's perpetration of IPV in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. We conducted in-depth interviews ($n = 40$) with a sub-sample of 20 men enrolled in the control condition of an ongoing cluster-randomised controlled trial. We purposively sampled participants who previously reported perpetrating physical IPV. To analyse the data, we generated narrative summaries and conducted thematic and interpretative coding. We saw no evidence that men self-selected into peer networks with certain values or behaviours. Rather, men described several mechanisms through which their peers influenced the perpetration of IPV, including: (1) the internalisation of peer network norms, (2) pressure to conform to peer network norms and (3) the direct involvement of peers in shaping couple power dynamics. Our findings suggest that peer networks influence men's perpetration of IPV and should be targeted in future programmes and interventions.

Keywords

Peer influence; intimate partner violence; men; tanzania

Introduction

Male perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV), which includes physical, sexual or psychological harm perpetrated against a current or former partner or spouse is a widespread public health problem (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006). Intimate partner violence directed against women in Tanzania is high, with 44% of all women ages 15–49 years reporting

Correspondence to: Marta I. Mulawa.

*Present address: Duke Global Health institute, Duke university, Durham, USA

ORCID: Marta I. Mulaw, http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9687-421X

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having experienced either sexual or physical violence since the age of 15 (MoHCDGEC MoH NBS OCGS and ICF 2016). The consequences of experiencing IPV for women are serious and include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, suicide, non-fatal injuries and death (Devries et al. 2013, 2014). Additionally, men's perpetration of violence has been associated with substance use and mental health outcomes among men (Okuda et al. 2015).

In order effectively to reduce the perpetration of IPV, we need an in-depth understanding of whether and how multilevel factors influence men's perpetration of it within this setting. Recent calls to address violence against women have emphasised the importance of understanding context-specific ‘macro and micro factors that underpin gender inequality and support violence’ (García-Moreno et al. 2015, 1691). For example understanding how men's perpetration of IPV in a specific setting is shaped by a dominant, or hegemonic, form of masculinity is particularly important for interventions that aim to change behaviour (Jewkes et al. 2015). This is because hegemonic masculinity typically emphasises the superiority of men over women and shapes men's and women's behaviour within societies by setting the stage for men to maintain power and dominance over women (Connell 1987).

Theory and emerging empirical research from other settings suggest that the peer context may play a particularly significant role in shaping men's attitudes towards violence as well as their IPV behaviour. One study of young people enrolled in a dating violence intervention in the USA, for example, found that exposure to dating violence among friends, even more than exposure to inter-parental violence, was an important predictor of subsequent violence perpetration (Arriaga and Foshee 2004). Other lines of research have explored the mechanisms through which peers may influence violent behaviour. For example scholars have demonstrated how the peer context gives rise to and enforces social norms that provide important information on the prevalence and appropriateness of perpetrating IPV (Witte and Mulla 2012). In a study of social norms for IPV among college students in the USA, researchers found that perpetrators over-estimated the prevalence of IPV among typical students compared to non-perpetrators, highlighting the importance of norms in understanding how the peer context shapes violence perpetration (Witte and Mulla 2013). Social learning theory suggests that individuals embedded in peer context characterised by norms accepting of IPV may, through a process of observational learning as well as through the reinforcement of peers, begin to internalise attitudes that are more accepting of IPV and be more likely to be violent with their partners than individuals who do not socialise with peers with norms endorsing IPV (Bandura 1973). Additionally, social influence theory posits that individuals may also feel pressured to comply with peer norms even if they do not internalise and adopt similar attitudes (Kelman 2006).

Despite the strong theoretical justification and existing empirical research in other settings, research on peer influence on men's IPV perpetration in sub-Saharan Africa is limited. Qualitative research with Tanzanian boys has shown that boys feel pressured by their peers to demonstrate their masculinity at a young age (Sommer, Likindikoki, and Kaaya 2015). Another study, conducted by our team, found that Tanzanian men within the same peer network tend to share similar IPV perpetration behaviour as well as similar gender role attitudes (Mulawa et al. 2016). Gender role attitudes represent an individual's beliefs about

the appropriate roles and behaviours for men and women (McHugh and Frieze 1997) and have been consistently associated with men's perpetration of IPV. Our study found that men's peer networks were more internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous with regard to their attitudes towards gender roles as well as their IPV perpetration behaviours than would be expected by chance. This clustering of attitudes and behaviours within men's peer networks suggests that peer networks may be influencing or reinforcing the adoption of certain norms and behaviours among members. However, this study utilised cross-sectional data and was limited in its ability to infer causality and to describe the mechanisms underpinning the findings. Specifically, it was not possible to know what caused the peer network members to have similar gender role attitudes or violence perpetration behaviour. While it is possible that peer networks influenced men to adopt certain norms and behaviours (i.e. social influence), it is also possible that men within the same peer network were alike because those men purposefully joined, or selected into, peer groups with similar characteristics (i.e. social selection or homophily) (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001).

We undertook the current qualitative study to explore the role of peer networks in shaping IPV behaviours of male perpetrators. Our first aim was to better understand the extent to which social selection and/or social influence contributed to men being members of peer networks that are characterised by relatively homogenous attitudes towards gender roles as well as similar IPV perpetration behaviour. Our second aim was to understand the mechanisms, if any, through which peer networks influence men's perpetration of violence. Understanding how men's perpetration of violence is shaped by peer networks may provide valuable insight into future intervention efforts that aim to reduce men's perpetration of IPV.

Methods

Sampling and recruitment

This study was conducted within four wards of Kinondoni Municipality in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The participants in this study came from an ongoing cluster-randomised trial examining the effectiveness of a microfinance and health leadership intervention on incidence of sexually transmitted infections and the perpetration of IPV (Kajula et al. 2016). The clusters in this trial are stable peer networks, locally referred to as ‘camps’, that are comprised of mostly young men who socialise regularly in a fixed location. Since a previous quantitative analysis of the baseline behavioural data from the parent trial found that men within the same peer group shared similar IPV behaviours (Mulawa et al. 2016), this qualitative study was designed to help explain those findings. To this end, we purposefully sampled men who reported perpetrating physical violence against an intimate partner within the last year on the baseline behavioural assessment of the larger trial (conducted between October 2013 and March 2014). Additionally, because intervention activities within the trial were underway, we restricted our sample to men within camps that were randomised to the control arm of the study. The average age of men in the sample was 27 years (range 20 to 39 years). Additional demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Data collection

We conducted two waves of in-depth interviews ($n = 40$) with 20 men between March and June 2015. Interviews were conducted in Swahili by two male university-educated Tanzanian interviewers who were fluent in English and Swahili. Both interviewers received additional training on interviewing techniques and research ethics as a part of this study. A semi-structured interview guide was used to guide both waves of interviews, though the second interview was purposefully designed to allow the interviewers to follow-up on unanswered questions generated in the first wave. To explore whether men specifically joined camps based on perceived commonalities, the guide included questions about the participant's membership in his camp, his reasons for joining and his knowledge about the camp's reputation prior to joining. To better understand how individual beliefs may have been shaped by peers, the guide also contained questions about the participant's relationship with fellow camp members as well as conversations with peers about women and romantic conflicts. To further explore how men's attitudes and behaviours were shaped by their peer networks, participants were asked to reflect on changes they had observed regarding the attitudes and behaviours of their peers after those individuals joined the camp network. Finally, to provide additional context, we included personal questions about the participant's primary sexual partner, experiences with conflict with this partner and conversations that occurred about those experiences with fellow camp members. The first wave of interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes and the second follow-up interviews lasted an average of 23 minutes.

Interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants. Verbatim transcription of the audio recordings was completed by the interviewers, following a transcription protocol, using a transcription software. The research was approved by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Institutional Review Board as well as the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences Senate Research and Publications Committee. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in this qualitative sub-study. Participants were compensated for transportation costs with 10,000 Tanzanian Shillings (approximately US$6) at the end of each interview.

Data analysis

Qualitative data collection, translation and preliminary analysis occurred simultaneously so that the interview guides could be adapted to further explore themes emerging from the initial interviews. A female Tanzanian translator with a Master's degree translated the Swahili transcripts into English. To allow our team to stay close to the data, English translations were integrated into the original Swahili transcripts with the translated text inserted directly below each contribution of dialogue. The lead author (MM) read the transcripts as soon as they were available, providing regular feedback to the interviewers, noting emergent themes and developing narrative summaries to describe the stories told by each man.

After the data collection, translation and narrative summaries were completed, MM implemented a macro in a text-editing program to systematically delete the Swahili text from the transcripts. The English-only transcripts were then imported to Atlas.ti for coding.

We developed a codebook, including codes that were based on the topics covered in the interview guide and emergent codes identified during the development of the narrative summaries. We applied these codes to the transcripts and then generated reports for each code to identify key themes and potential sub-themes. We also developed matrices to ease the comparison within themes across participants (Miles 1994). The code reports and the matrices were used to examine ways in which the themes contributed to answering the research questions. We incorporated memo-writing to keep a record of the analysis and to document new ideas and thoughts about emerging themes (Saldaña 2009). Finally, we selected representative quotes to illustrate the key findings.

Findings

We present the results of the qualitative analysis in three sections. First, we describe men's camp-based peer networks and provide a summary of the reasons men gave for joining these networks. In this initial section we specifically address the first aim of this study by focusing on themes that inform our understanding of the extent to which social selection contributed to men joining specific peer networks. Next, to provide additional background on the norms within this context, we review how men perceived their peer network norms towards gender roles. Finally, to address the second aim of this study, we present three mechanisms through which peer networks were described as influencing men's perpetration of violence. Pseudonyms have been used to protect confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

Camp-based peer networks

It was common for men to describe their camp-based peer network as an important group of friends that in many ways resembled a family. Most men talked about being with their camp peers ‘most of the time’, typically saying that they could be found with their fellow camp members whenever they weren't working. One participant, Samson (age 21), who described spending most of his free time with his peers in their camp said the reason for this was simple: ‘there is no other place to go’. Furthermore, when describing the role of their camps, many participants described relying on their camp networks for social support, speaking often with fellow camp members about employment opportunities and about coping with other struggles they were facing.

Many participants said that all of their close friends were also members of their camp. Only a few participants talked about having close friends or family members who were not also members. However, even among participants who said all of their close friends were camp members, an overwhelming majority acknowledged that they could not talk with all camp members about personal problems. Rather, many participants described talking with a smaller, select group of close friends that were the most trusted. One participant put it this way:

> The relationships are close, but not all of them. Don't you know that you can be 30 people, but you have three or four true friends with whom you all stay, talk and plan? (Rashidi, age 31)

This sentiment was expressed by almost all of the men, though some men described only talking to one close friend and a few described being able to talk to a larger number of close friends.

Despite the fact that most participants described only sharing personal information with a small number of camp members, the larger camp networks were generally described as a cohesive unit. For example, one participant, Stanley (age 28), remarked, ‘we are all one thing, we understand each other well …’. This cohesion was also thought to contribute to the spread of information throughout the networks. Another participant described the diffusion of information in this way:

> I mean that the information can reach them quicker, because [they] are my close friends …. It means that we are all united, so it means that even if I give information to one person it is easy to reach all other members in the camp, even before any other ordinary person has known. (Benson, age 22)

When asked why they, in retrospect, joined their camp network, most participants reported knowing little about the camps before joining them. Many remarked that this camp was an obvious choice because of the location and proximity to the participant's residence or work. One participant, Said (age 32), reflected on his decision to join the camp in this way, ‘I chose that camp because it … I mean, I was born in that area, so you can’t go out of that part, while that is your home.’ Another participant, Francis (age 38), echoed this sentiment, saying that most of his neighbourhood peers were also members of the camp, explaining that, ‘That is, the houses are close together there. So, we are together all the time.’ Another participant, Juma (age 22), shared that he moved to the area and after moving found a group of peers who were in the street. He described feeling as though he ‘had to join them’ because he had no other friends.

Men's perceptions of peer network gender norms

We asked participants to describe the way men in their camp network viewed women and the roles women had in relationships and society more broadly. Many participants suggested that among their peers, women were viewed as being less important and having lower levels of decision-making power within their relationships. This view was described by most of the men, with Samuel (age 31), describing it this way: ‘when we are seated here at the camp, a woman is seen like an entertainment provider’. In contrast to the subordinate role of women, men reported that their male peers believed that men typically had the power to make decisions. As Abdul (age 33) put it, ‘the man has the power in the family to plan for what to do’. Thus, the perceived peer network gender norms described by the participants in this study were generally traditional: men perceived their peers as largely viewing women as inferior to men.

A smaller number of participants initially described peer gender norms that were more egalitarian, but even those views were usually clarified as not being truly equal. For example, one participant, Jackson (age 39), who was asked how men in his camp think about the position of women said, ‘We completely don't undermine the position of a woman … the way I know, is that a woman now has almost the same rights as a man’. When the interviewer probed about the phrase almost the same rights and asked whether men in his

camp thought men and women were actually equal, Jackson clarified: ‘Isn't she a woman? Because even in the Bible, it is written that a woman is needed to be under a man’. As illustrated in this exchange, even men who initially described more equitable peer gender norms ultimately believed that most men had views that elevated the position of men in relation to that of women.

Additionally, we asked participants whether they perceived significant differences among the ways in which their fellow camp members viewed women. Most of the participants believed that men tended to have similar views towards women. For example, another man, Salim (age 20), was asked specifically, ‘Are there some in the camp who differ in their perception on how they think about a woman?’ He answered, ‘No, many of them have those thoughts, that a man should be first and a woman later on’. It was also common for participants to remark that men's elevated position relative to women was not just something embraced by their peers, but something found in their street and also in their wider community and society, saying ‘it is like that in our African communities’ (Abdul, age 33). Thus, in addition to perceiving that their peers held traditional gender norms, men in our study also perceived little variation in the views held by their peers.

While none of the participants described peer network gender norms that emphasised equality between genders, some participants acknowledged that their society was changing to embrace equality between men and women. One participant, Frank (age 23), described the changes this way: ‘I can say that women nowadays are doing jobs that were only for men. For instance, you can find a woman carrying concrete’. In addition to describing jobs that were now acceptable for women, some participants also talked about the fact that more and more women were working and supporting themselves financially. This resulted in the women being less reliant on their male partners, and this was seen to shape their relationship dynamics, as illustrated by this participant:

> In relationships, normally a man is the one who makes decisions. But since nowadays everyone is doing his/her own financial activities, some of the women are doing some activities while others are not. So, when you meet a woman who is doing her activities you can't decide for her. (Said, age 32)

Thus, this participant suggests that these changing gender role dynamics (e.g. women being able to support themselves financially or having jobs that were historically male-dominated) have implications for power within relationships such that those women will likely have greater levels of decision-making responsibilities.

Mechanisms through which peer networks influence men's behaviours

During the in-depth interviews, men described three overarching mechanisms through which peer networks were found to influence men's perpetration of IPV. These mechanisms were: (1) men's internalisation of peer network norms, (2) men feeling pressured to conform to peer network norms without personally internalising those norms and (3) the direct involvement of peer networks in shaping couple power dynamics.

Internalising peer network norms

Men described a process through which they or their close friends came to internalise their peer network norms. This process of adopting and internalising peers' norms was often described as resulting from being exposed to new ideas, having in-depth conversations in which a consensus was reached and seeking advice from close friends or leaders within the peer networks.

One theme that emerged to explain how men came to internalise the norms held by their peers was that men's membership in their peer networks exposed them to new ideas. Benson (age 22) mentioned, ‘There is a certain topic that we discuss. That one which women say about equal rights to all, or women are needed to be equivalent to men’. He went on to describe how some men in the camp talk about the importance of retaining control within their relationships even though society seemed to be pushing them to treat women as equals. For example, Benson explained how his peers felt that equal rights pertained to ‘certain women who have a good life, perhaps they inherited money’ and not relevant to ‘the lives of us poor people’. From his perspective, and that of his peers, earning more money than a woman in their context was an important way to ensure respect from that partner. Another participant talked about older camp members who share their views about how women ought to act:

> Because in the camp, we stay with elders who speak about those same issues …. Meaning that a woman is supposed to be this way, to be this way, to be this way …. Do you see? So, if you don't know, there are things which you can take from there … (Stanley, age 28)

As illustrated in this quotation, one way that men could adopt new beliefs about gender roles was learning about new ideas regarding gender roles from members and leaders within the camp networks. In this case, Stanley felt that a young man could adopt certain beliefs after talking with elders in the camp.

Men also described more in-depth conversations in which a consensus was reached as a way through which men could come to internalise peer network norms. For example, one participant, Frank, described the following relevant scenario:

> As you may find 20 people seated and watching football …. Sitting and exchanging ideas such stories on football. So, everyone will have his own thought but one can have correct thoughts, which will make everyone to listen to what he is talking about. (Frank, age 23)

In this example, one individual happens to have a convincing argument that results in the others taking notice. Another participant, Godfrey (age 30), described a similar process through which camp members came to change their attitudes or behaviours. This was exemplified by the following statement, which took place after the participant said that camp members were generally similar to one another in terms of their perceptions towards women. When asked to explain why that is, Godfrey talked about the group's discussions and processes through which they come to agreement: ‘We like to meet together and we deeply discuss something until everyone understands …. So, our habits are in fact similar'. These conversations were seen as opportunities for individuals to change their own beliefs and

behaviours after engaging in deep reflection. Notably, examples of consensus-building discussions included instances when one individual with a persuasive argument appeared to drive the process as well as other instances characterised by broader debate and discussion among all participants.

Finally, participants frequently talked about sharing stories about their relationships with their fellow camp members in order to seek and receive advice. In fact, many study participants described seeking influential guidance from a close friend when dealing with relationship conflicts. For example, when Benson (age 22) described beating his partner because she was disrespectful to him, he described receiving ongoing counsel from a close friend in the network, and specifically described being supported in his decision to use violence. In fact, the Benson explained how his friend helped him understand that ‘sometimes, if you beat her, that is when she starts to understand that [her behaviour] is a problem’. As illustrated in this example, seeking advice from a close and trusted peer was one way in which men came to adopt and internalise new norms that were embraced by their peers.

Conforming to peer network gender norms

In contrast to the internalisation of peer network norms, several participants described feeling pressured to conform to network norms, even if they did not fully agree or internalise those norms. The way in which men described feeling pressure to have perceptions in line with their peers was distinct from the internalisation of peer norms described earlier. This was most vividly described by a participant in the following exchange that took place after discussing changes that new members had undergone with regard to their views towards women:

> Raymond: Now what perceptions do those men have about women when they come in the camp, and after they have joined, do their perceptions change or how is it?
>
> Samson: Aaaah, our perceptions …. That is, when you enter the camp, it is as if you have entered school. You can't put on a pair of jeans, but you must put on school uniform, so that you look the same as your fellows. (age 21)

This idea that men feel pressure from their peers to appear as though they have beliefs consistent with their peers' norms illustrates the mechanisms through which peer network gender norms come to shape men's behaviours. Another participant, Emmanuel (age 26), who talked about his peers ‘imitating behaviours’ of other camp members described an active process through which his peer network acted to pressure men to behave in a certain way:

> We have informed each other that we have our own directives that guide us how to live. And if someone goes against the procedure we will trace him …. And know even if you do it in a faraway place, we will take action on you.

Other men also talked about ways in which their camp's directives, or rules, could explicitly dictate acceptable behaviour. If members were found to be breaking these rules, they were often confronted and sometimes removed (or threatened with removal) from the network. It is interesting to note that Emmanuel went on to say that he had never seen a member change

his personal views towards women after joining the camp. In this way, the network was seen to have an important influence on men's behaviours, but this was not seen as happening through the transformation of individual beliefs and attitudes.

Several men also described how men could feel pressured by their peers to actually engage in violence with a partner. Most of these examples involved men being pressured to beat the man who was having an affair with his wife or girlfriend. But in some of these cases, men were also pressured by their peers to take action against their partner. This was illustrated by one of the participants, Hassan, who described an example of peers having an active role in romantic conflicts and taking action. He said:

> Beating a partner? There in the camp, he is being convinced to do so by people. He can be convinced by the guys and then go to beat his partner or the man who is taking his partner. There is that one who doesn't have the habit of fighting, and if it happens that someone is convincing him, you will be surprised …

As illustrated in this quotation, a group of peers could pressure a man ‘who doesn't have the habit of fighting’ to take violent action against his partner. This peer pressure to engage in a specific behaviour was distinct from the internalisation of peer norms that occurred through more in-depth discussions and advice from influential individuals.

While none of the participants described actual events in which peers in their network spoke out against violence, some of the men talked about how it could hypothetically be possible that their peer networks could be used to pressure men against being violent. For example, Frank (age 23), mentioned, ‘So if you have done something wrong to her or used bad language to her in public they can tell you, “what you have done is not right.”’ Frank also mentioned that it could be possible that such a conversation could happen in response to him telling his peers about a fight. He seemed to think that the network could have a role in speaking out against disrespectful behaviour, particularly if it were to occur in public. Another participant, Jackson (age 39), mentioned that it would be possible for his wife to come to his camp to tell his fellow camp members that he had beaten her. He described a possible scenario this way:

> It is possible that I quarrelled with my wife yesterday and she went to accuse me to a fellow member, saying, ‘Do you know what your friend did to me yesterday? He provoked me … and beat me because of this ….’ Then you find that he calls me and tells me that what I did was not good.

While these hypothetical examples were not as rich as the real-life examples of men feeling pressured to conform to existing gender norms in embracing violence, it is notable that some men thought of examples in which peer pressure could be used to reduce violence.

Direct involvement of peer networks in shaping couple power dynamics

Another mechanism through which peer networks were described as shaping IPV was through their direct involvement in influencing couple dynamics. Occasionally, men's peer networks took an active role in engaging the female partners of their male members. For example, one participant, David (age 23), described a fight his friend had with his partner when he learned that she had been cheating on him. After being badly beaten and kicked by

her partner, the woman ‘ran to the police to take a [police report]’. When the network members learned the police were looking for their member, they intervened:

> We called his fancé and told her, ‘Eeeh, that one is your partner, and if you have quarrelled, these are marriage issues …. You cannot go to take a [police report], as you will bring to him other problems.’ Truly at times you find other women understand us.

As illustrated in this quotation, peer networks sometimes played a role in maintaining power dynamics within romantic relationships. In this example, the man's peers engaged with the woman to communicate their belief that violence was a part of being married and that she should not report conflict or seek help from the police in response to conflict. Other men also provided examples of how their peers acted on their behalf when talking to their partners and communicating their belief that woman ought to tolerate violence.

Discussion

We undertook this qualitative study to explore the role of peer network gender norms in shaping the IPV behaviours of male perpetrators. When studying how peers and peer norms shape individual behaviour, it is often difficult to differentiate between social influence and social selection processes. This is because both mechanisms can result in peer groups with internally homogenous attitudes and behaviours. Thus, we were interested in better understanding the extent to which male perpetrators described social selection and social influence processes contributing to them being members of peer networks with similar attitudes towards gender roles and IPV perpetration behaviour. We specifically asked what men knew about the peer networks before they joined and inquired about their reasons for becoming members. Most participants reported knowing little about the camps before joining, and many participants remarked that their primary impetus for joining their camp was the convenient location and proximity to the participant's residence or work. None of the participants mentioned joining their camp because the camp had a certain reputation or because they expected to be with certain types of peers. Thus, we did not find support for the notion that men were self-selecting into peer networks to be with peers who held similar values and/or behaviours, particularly those related to IPV. Rather, our findings suggest that men joined peer networks for practical reasons, irrespective of the reputations of those networks, and became similar to their peers as a result of social influence.

Our second aim was to understand the mechanisms through which peer network gender norms might influence men's perpetration of violence. Our results suggest that peer networks influence men through multiple mechanisms. First of all, men gave examples of individuals internalising their peer network's prevailing norms. This occurred after being exposed to new ideas, as well as after reaching a consensus within in-depth group discussions. Men also described seeking advice from camp members and leaders when responding to conflicts. This overarching mechanism is supported by social learning theory, which broadly suggests that learning occurs through observation of others and through the observation of the consequences of that behaviour (Bandura 1973). In other words, by being exposed to new ideas, engaging in in-depth discussions and seeking advice from peers with inequitable gender norms, men observed their peer's actions and consequences of those actions and

subsequently internationalised attitudes that were more inequitable towards gender roles and more accepting of IPV. These findings are consistent with previous qualitative research done with boys and young men in northern Tanzania, which found that that modelling of violence (primarily within the household, but also among peers) played a significant role in shaping men's views towards violence (Sommer, Likindikoki, and Kaaya 2013). Internalising norms is also one of the key processes of social influence described by Kelman (2006). Kelman notes, additionally, that internalisation occurs when peer norms are ‘congruent’ with an individual's own value system. This suggests that individuals are unlikely to adopt peer norms that are drastically different from the individual's prior beliefs.

Secondly, men described feeling pressured to conform to network gender norms, even when not internalising those norms. Men gave examples of feeling like they needed to conform to be accepted by their peers and also talked about stories in which men engaged in violence as a direct result of their peer's persuasion. When describing this mechanism, men spoke of the external pressure they felt from their peers to behave in a certain way. This differs to the consensus-building conversations they provided as an example for how they internalised network norms in the first mechanisms. Feeling pressure to conform to network norms is a mechanism described by social influence theory, which posits that a key social influence process called ‘compliance’ occurs when an individual is pressured to comply with peer norms even if they do not internalise and adopt similar attitudes (Kelman 2006). This finding is also consistent with other qualitative work from Tanzania (Jakobsen 2016) that has illustrated the salience of social norms and the pressure community members feel to conforming to norms enforced by violence. Other qualitative research with adolescent Tanzanian boys similarly found that young boys reported feeling ‘intense pressure’ from their male peers to demonstrate their masculinity by engaging in sexual relationships at an early age (Sommer, Likindikoki, and Kaaya 2015).

Finally, men also described ways in which men's peer networks intervened directly within couples to maintain power dynamics that condoned the use of violence. In this mechanism, men's peer groups don't simply influence behaviour through the propagation of norms that men either internalise or feel pressured to conform to; instead the peer groups directly reach out to men's partners to reinforce the man's position of power within the relationship. While this mechanism is not described in social learning or social influence theories *per se*, it serves as a nice illustration of the interactions between factors at the peer level and dyad level within an ecological framework for conceptualising IPV.

Our results have several implications for interventions aiming to reduce the perpetration of IPV. First of all, since our results suggest that men's perpetration of IPV is influenced by peer network gender norms, our findings highlight the importance of interventions that transform gender norms within social networks. Gender-transformative interventions aim to reconfigure gender roles and norms surrounding masculinity to be more equitable. A systematic review of recent gender-transformative programme found that these interventions can modify inequitable gender norms so that they become more equal (Dworkin, Treves-Kagan, and Lippman 2013). Engaging with peer networks to transform peer network gender norms is particularly important given our finding that network norms appear to influence men's perpetration of violence in part by pressuring men to conform to norms even if those

men hold dissenting attitudes. Changing individual attitudes in this case would not be as effective as transforming broader peer norms around gender roles and violence. Indeed, masculinities scholars highlight the need for '[changing] ideals shared at a societal level' in order to strive for sustained changed in harmful norms (Jewkes et al. 2015; S113). Since our study explored the role of peer networks in shaping IPV behaviours, the intervention implications of our findings are largely restricted to the peer network-level. However, previous qualitative work in Tanzania has shed light on other factors at the familial and neighbourhood level that shape masculinity norms (Sommer, Likindikoki, and Kaaya 2014). Other research in Tanzania has found evidence of community-level factors associated with IPV, including levels of male unemployment and area-level poverty (Vyas and Heise 2016). Our findings support critically engaging men's peer groups as a part of broader societal interventions.

Since study findings highlighted the importance of advice-seeking behaviour in the adoption and internalisation of peer norms, future network-based programmes and interventions may also want to consider engaging individuals who play central roles in their networks with regard to advising other network members in ways to resolve conflict (Valente and Pumpuang 2007). Additional research is warranted to understand the advice network structure within these peer groups. Based on this information, future interventions could be designed to leverage the social influence processes identified in this study in part by engaging the central individuals in gender-transformative programming.

Furthermore, men in our study perceived peer network gender norms that were largely traditional and emphasised men's power within relationships. Understanding these perceptions is very important as an individual's behaviours are thought to conform to their own perceptions of whether that behaviour is viewed as acceptable or prevalent among their peers. It is important to note, however, that men's perceptions of their peer network gender norms may not accurately capture actual gender role attitudes of their peers. This is because it is well documented that individuals have a tendency to underestimate healthy norms (e.g. related to exercising) among their peers, while overestimating risky norms (e.g. related to engaging in substance use). In fact, a recent study in this setting compared quantitative perceived HIV testing norms with actual HIV testing norms among men's closest friends and found evidence of this phenomenon in that men (and particularly those who had not tested for HIV) were biased towards assuming that their friends had not yet tested (Mulawa et al. 2016). Those findings showed that men misperceived their peer testing norms, and suggested that correcting those misperceptions may be an intervention opportunity. Thus, future research should examine whether men overestimate the extent to which their peers hold riskier, traditional gender norms that condone violence. If so, correcting potential misperceptions about peer network gender norms may be an intervention opportunity that could reduce IPV perpetration.

It is important to note that the men enrolled in our study were purposively selected to participate because they had reported perpetrating physical IPV in a previous behavioural survey and we were interested in better understanding how their peer network gender roles shaped their IPV perpetration behaviour. As a result, we were limited in our ability to examine the ways in which peer network gender norms may be protective against the

perpetration of violence. A couple of participants mentioned hypothetical examples in which peer networks could reduce violence and we would have surely uncovered many other ways in which peer network norms could reduce or prevent IPV had that been a focus of the study. One way that peer networks could reduce behaviours like IPV perpetration in a positive way is through exerting social control over deviant behaviours. Additionally, having peers who hold pro-social beliefs (such as valuing societal rules that maintain order and being committed to conventional activities) has been associated with lower levels of partner violence among adolescents in the USA (Foshee et al. 2013). Future research should further explore the positive effects that peer network norms can have on preventing and reducing violence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our findings improve our understanding of how peer networks shape men's perpetration of IPV. Specifically, we showed that men's perpetration of violence is socially influenced by the gender norms characterising their peer networks. Men described adopting and internalising the gender norms of their peers and also feeling pressure to conform to their network's gender norms. Their peer networks also played a role in shaping couple power dynamics. Thus, our results highlight the importance of interventions that transform gender norms within social networks. Future interventions should specifically consider targeting individuals who play central roles within the peer advice networks with gender-transformative interventions. Finally, since men may be overestimating the extent to which their peers hold traditional gender norms, correcting potential misperceptions may be an intervention opportunity that could lead to reductions in IPV perpetration among men.

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Table 1

Demographic characteristics of participants ($n = 20$).

Variable	Men % (*n*)
Age in years	
20–24	40.0 (8)
25–29	25.0 (5)
30 +	35.0 (7)
Education	
Primary school or less	75.0 (15)
Some secondary school	10.0 (2)
Secondary school completed or more	15.0 (3)
Marital history	
Never married	65.0 (13)
Ever married	35.0 (7)
Number of sexual partners in last year	
0	5.0 (1)
1	70.0 (14)
2	10.0 (2)
3+	15.0 (3)
Years of camp membership	
< 2	15.0 (3)
2–3	25.0 (5)
4–5	30.0 (6)
6 +	30.0 (6)