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PARENTAL-BASED FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CHILD ABUSE IN IRINGA MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse remains a significant child-protection concern, with parental socio-economic conditions, parenting practices, family circumstances, and social norms potentially influencing children's vulnerability to abuse. This study examined parental-based factors contributing to child abuse in Iringa Municipality, focusing on Ruaha and Isakalilo wards. The study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-methods design. The study population comprised 4,676 parents and caregivers, from which 98 respondents were selected using proportional allocation and simple random sampling. In addition, eight key informants comprising social welfare officers, gender desk officers, teachers, and community leaders were purposively selected. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires and analysed using frequencies, percentages, and correlation analysis, while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. The findings indicate that 56.1% of respondents perceived low parental knowledge as a contributing factor to child abuse, while 60.2% reported that parental occupation influences the occurrence of child abuse. Furthermore, 61.2% associated household poverty with child abuse, while 56.1% indicated that parental marital status influences child protection. Social norms towards violence were identified as an important factor by 87.8% of respondents, while 65.3% perceived cultural beliefs as having potentially harmful effects on child discipline and protection. Qualitative findings further highlighted poverty, inadequate supervision, poor parenting practices, parental alcohol abuse, family conflict, parental separation, and limited knowledge of child protection as interconnected factors affecting children's safety and wellbeing. The study concludes that child abuse is influenced by multiple interacting parental

and household factors rather than a single cause. The study recommends strengthening parental education, positive parenting and non-violent discipline programmes, economic empowerment for vulnerable families, counselling and rehabilitation services for parents affected by substance abuse, and coordination among child-protection stakeholders in Iringa Municipality.

KEYWORDS: Child abuse, parental factors, socio-economic factors, parenting practices, parental substance abuse, child protection, Iringa Municipality, Tanzania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child abuse remains a major global public health and human rights concern because of its harmful effects on children's physical, psychological, emotional, and social development. Violence against children includes physical, sexual, and emotional violence, neglect, and other forms of maltreatment affecting individuals below 18 years of age. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2026) estimates that up to one billion children aged 2–17 years experience physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect each year. Violence against children frequently occurs within homes and other caregiving environments, where parents and caregivers are expected to provide protection and care. UNICEF (2026) further estimates that approximately 1.6 billion children globally experience violent punishment by caregivers at home. These figures demonstrate the continuing importance of understanding factors within the family environment that may expose children to abuse.

Parental care plays an important role in children's well-being because parents and caregivers are responsible for providing protection, supervision, emotional support, guidance, and appropriate discipline. Parenting practices, parental relationships with children, and approaches to discipline may influence children's vulnerability to abuse. Evidence from Tanzania indicates that strengthening parenting practices can contribute to reducing child maltreatment. For example, Lachman et al. (2020) found that parenting interventions were associated with reductions in child maltreatment and corporal-punishment endorsement among families in rural Tanzania. Similarly, WHO (2026) identifies positive parenting and support for parents as important approaches to preventing child maltreatment. These findings highlight the importance of examining parental circumstances when investigating child abuse.

Child abuse is also a significant concern in Tanzania. The Tanzania Violence Against Children Survey reported that 73.5% of females and 71.7% of males aged 13–24 years had

experienced physical violence before the age of 18, while emotional and sexual violence were also reported among both females and males (UNICEF, CDC, & MUHAS, 2011). UNICEF (2021) continues to recognise these findings as important evidence of the magnitude of violence against children in the country. In addition, research indicates that physical punishment remains socially accepted in some Tanzanian communities, which may contribute to the normalisation of practices that can negatively affect children (Kelly et al., 2022). The persistence of violence against children therefore calls for greater understanding of the parental and socioeconomic circumstances associated with child abuse.

The concern is also relevant to Iringa Municipality. According to The Guardian (2026), statistics for 2025 indicated that 138 children were victims of gender-based violence in Iringa Municipality. Although these figures represent reported cases of gender-based violence rather than the prevalence of child abuse in the municipality, they indicate that violence affecting children remains a local child-protection concern. However, municipal-level statistics provide limited information about the parental factors associated with child abuse within specific communities. There is therefore a need for context-specific evidence to improve understanding of the parental circumstances that may contribute to children's vulnerability to abuse.

Consequently, this study examines the contribution of parental socioeconomic factors to the occurrence of child abuse in Iringa Municipality. The study focuses on Ruaha and Isakalilo wards and seeks to generate empirical evidence that can contribute to improved parenting practices and child-protection interventions within the study area.

1.1 Specific Objective

The specific objective of the study was:

1. To assess the contribution of parental socio-economic factors on the occurrence of child abuse.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is guided by Ecological Systems Theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Social Learning Theory developed by Bandura (1977). Ecological Systems Theory explains child development and vulnerability to abuse as outcomes of interactions between children and their surrounding environments. The microsystem, particularly the family, is relevant to this study because parents and caregivers directly influence children's safety, care, supervision, and development. Parental socio-economic conditions, parenting practices,

caregiver stress, and family circumstances may therefore shape children's exposure to abuse. The theory also recognises that family experiences are influenced by broader social and economic conditions, including poverty, employment circumstances, and community environments. Thus, the theory provides a basis for examining how parental socio-economic factors may contribute to child abuse in Iringa Municipality.

Social Learning Theory complements Ecological Systems Theory by explaining how behaviours are acquired through observation, imitation, modelling, and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). Parents and caregivers are important behavioural models for children; consequently, exposure to harsh discipline, physical punishment, verbal aggression, neglect, or other harmful behaviours may influence children's experiences and behavioural responses. Conversely, positive communication, affection, appropriate supervision, and non-violent discipline can promote healthy behavioural patterns. The theory therefore helps explain how parental attitudes and practices may influence children's exposure to abusive behaviour. Together, the two theories provide a complementary framework for understanding how parental socio-economic conditions and parenting-related behaviours may contribute to the occurrence of child abuse in the study area.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 The Contribution of Parental Socio-Economic Factors to the Occurrence of Child Abuse

Empirical evidence indicates that parental socio-economic characteristics are associated with the occurrence of child abuse. Parental education, occupation, household economic status, marital status, social norms, and age can influence parenting practices, supervision, discipline, and the ability to meet children's needs. Lachman et al. (2020) found that parenting interventions in Tanzania reduced child maltreatment and corporal-punishment practices, while Doidge et al. (2020) identified low parental educational attainment as a factor associated with increased risk of child maltreatment. These findings suggest that limited parental knowledge and awareness of appropriate child-rearing practices may increase children's exposure to harmful disciplinary practices. Similarly, Gubbels et al. (2023) found that parental unemployment was associated with increased risks of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and overall child maltreatment, indicating that unstable employment may increase household stress and constrain parents' ability to provide adequate care and supervision.

Household economic conditions have also been linked to child maltreatment. Pelton (2020) reported that poverty may increase parental stress and limit access to basic household

resources, thereby creating conditions that increase the likelihood of neglect and violence. Roskam et al. (2022) further found that low socio-economic status was associated with parental burnout, which in turn was related to parental neglect and violence. Family structure may similarly influence children's vulnerability to abuse. Younas and Gutman (2023), in a systematic review, found that single-parent family structures and marital distress were associated with different forms of child maltreatment, although the effects may also depend on economic circumstances and social support. These findings indicate that parental employment, household economic status, and marital circumstances may interact to shape the conditions under which children are cared for and protected.

Social norms and parental demographic characteristics may also influence child abuse. Heise (2020) and Duong et al. (2022) found that acceptance of corporal punishment and perceptions that violence is a socially approved disciplinary practice can contribute to the normalisation and use of violent discipline. In addition, Assink et al. (2021) and Luo et al. (2025) indicate that parental age may be associated with child maltreatment, with younger parents potentially experiencing greater parenting, emotional, and economic challenges, while greater parental age and experience may offer some protection. The empirical literature demonstrates that parental socio-economic factors can influence children's exposure to abuse through economic stress, parenting knowledge, family circumstances, social norms, and caregiving capacity. However, much of the existing evidence is derived from international or national studies, creating a need for context-specific evidence on how these factors contribute to child abuse in particular communities. Therefore, the present study examines the contribution of parental socio-economic factors to the occurrence of child abuse in Iringa Municipality.

2.3 Knowledge Gap

Existing studies show that parental socio-economic conditions, parenting practices, family circumstances, and social norms influence child abuse. However, limited empirical evidence explains how these factors collectively contribute to child abuse in urban communities in Tanzania, particularly at ward level. Municipal statistics indicate the existence of child violence in Iringa but provide limited explanation of the parental and household factors associated with it. Therefore, this study addresses this contextual and geographical gap by examining parental factors contributing to child abuse in Ruaha and Isakalilo wards.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates that parental socio-economic factors (independent variables) and caregiving practices directly influence the occurrence of child abuse

(dependent variable) at Iringa Municipality. These factors shape how parents behave, discipline, and interact with their children.



Figure 1: Conceptual framework on Prevalence of Child Abuse.

Source: Researchers' Data (2026)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ruaha and Isakalilo wards of Iringa Municipality, Tanzania. A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was adopted to obtain both quantitative and qualitative evidence on parental socio-economic factors associated with child abuse. The study population comprised 4,676 parents and caregivers, including 1,785 from Ruaha and 2,891 from Isakalilo. The quantitative sample consisted of 98 parents and caregivers, determined using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 10% margin of error. Proportional allocation resulted in 37 respondents from Ruaha and 61 from Isakalilo, who were selected using simple random sampling. In addition, eight key informants were purposively selected, including social welfare officers, gender desk officers, teachers, and community leaders.

Both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to parents and caregivers and semi-structured interviews with key informants. The questionnaire collected information on parental socio-economic factors and the occurrence of child abuse, while interviews provided contextual information on parental circumstances and child-protection concerns. The questionnaire was prepared in English, translated into Kiswahili, and pre-tested before the main data collection. Secondary data were obtained from relevant municipal and ward reports, government documents, child-protection records, and academic literature to supplement the primary data.

Quantitative data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies and percentages were used to summarise respondents' characteristics and study variables, while correlation analysis was used to examine the

relationship between parental socio-economic factors and child abuse. Qualitative data from key-informant interviews were transcribed, coded, categorised, and analysed thematically. The qualitative findings were used to provide explanations and contextual understanding of the quantitative results. Findings from the two components were integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study problem.

Validity was enhanced through expert review of the research instruments, alignment of questionnaire items with the study objective, and pre-testing before the main data collection. Reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or above considered acceptable. Ethical procedures were observed throughout the study. Permission was obtained from the University of Iringa, Iringa Municipal Council, and relevant ward authorities. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of identification codes rather than names. Participants were also informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study without negative consequences. Given the sensitivity of child abuse, information obtained during the study was handled confidentially and participants were interviewed in appropriate and private settings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Data of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Female respondents constituted the majority (61.2%), while males accounted for 38.8%. In terms of age, respondents aged 46–55 years formed the largest group (34.7%), followed by those aged 36–45 years (32.7%). Respondents aged 26–35 years accounted for 16.3%, while those aged 56 years and above and 18–25 years represented 9.2% and 7.1%, respectively. The findings indicate that most respondents were middle-aged adults, who were likely to have substantial experience in parenting and caregiving.

Regarding marital status, married respondents constituted the largest proportion (48.0%), while single and divorced/separated respondents each accounted for 19.4%. Widowed respondents represented 13.3%. Educationally, respondents with secondary education formed the largest group (45.9%), followed by those with primary education (30.6%) and certificate or diploma qualifications (18.4%). Only 4.1% had no formal education, while 1.0% had university education. The distribution demonstrates that respondents had varied family and educational backgrounds, which provides useful context for understanding their experiences and perspectives concerning childcare and parental responsibilities.

In terms of occupation, business persons constituted the largest group (34.7%), followed by farmers (24.5%), casual labourers (16.3%), formally employed respondents (15.3%), and unemployed respondents (9.2%). Regarding the number of children, respondents with three to four children represented the majority (56.1%), followed by those with one to two children (30.6%), while 11.2% had five to six children and 2.0% had seven or more children. The respondents represented diverse socio-economic and family circumstances, providing an appropriate basis for examining the contribution of parental socio-economic factors to the occurrence of child abuse in Ruaha and Isakalilo wards.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by demographic characteristics.

Demographic characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex	Male	38	38.8
	Female	60	61.2
	Total	98	100.0
Age	18–25	7	7.1
	26–35	16	16.3
	36–45	32	32.7
	46–55	34	34.7
	56 and above	9	9.2
	Total	98	100.0
Marital status	Single	19	19.4
	Married	47	48.0
	Divorced/Separated	19	19.4
	Widowed	13	13.3
	Total	98	100.0
Level of education	No formal education	4	4.1
	Primary education	30	30.6
	Secondary education	45	45.9
	Certificate/Diploma	18	18.4
	University education	1	1.0
	Total	98	100.0
Occupation	Farmer	24	24.5
	Business person	34	34.7
	Employed	15	15.3
	Casual labourer	16	16.3
	Unemployed	9	9.2
	Total	98	100.0
Number of children	1–2	30	30.6
	3–4	55	56.1
	5–6	11	11.2
	7 and above	2	2.0
	Total	98	100.0

Source: Researchers' Data (2026)

4.2 The Contribution of Parental Socio-Economic Factors on the Occurrence of Child Abuse

This section presents and discusses the findings on the contribution of parental socio-economic factors to the occurrence of child abuse in Isakalilo and Ruaha wards of Iringa Municipality. The analysis focuses on parental education, occupation, household poverty, marital status, and social and cultural norms towards violence. These factors are examined to establish how parents' socio-economic circumstances and beliefs may influence their ability to provide appropriate care, supervision, protection, and positive discipline to children. The findings are presented using frequencies and percentages obtained from the 98 respondents. Each finding is interpreted in relation to the study objective and compared with findings from recent empirical studies to establish areas of agreement or difference. The section therefore provides evidence on how parental socio-economic circumstances may create conditions that increase or reduce children's vulnerability to abuse.

4.2.1 Contribution of low parental knowledge to child abuse

The findings indicate that 56.1% of respondents agreed that low parental knowledge contributes to child abuse, while 43.9% disagreed. The higher proportion of agreement suggests that limited parental knowledge is perceived as a contributing factor to child abuse in the study area, particularly through inadequate understanding of child development, children's rights, positive parenting, and appropriate disciplinary practices. However, the 43.9% disagreement indicates that low parental knowledge alone may not fully explain the occurrence of child abuse, as other factors such as parenting practices, household economic conditions, parental substance abuse, and family circumstances may also influence children's exposure to abuse in Ruaha and Isakalilo wards. To supplement the quantitative findings, qualitative information was collected through interviews with Ward Executive Officers (WEOs) from Isakalilo and Ruaha wards. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain detailed explanations of how the level of parental education contributes to the occurrence of child abuse. The qualitative responses were analysed thematically and are presented to provide deeper understanding of the quantitative findings. During the interview with the Ward Executive Officer from Isakalilo Ward, the officer explained that:

Low parental education can contribute to child abuse because some parents have limited knowledge about children's rights and proper ways of disciplining children. Some parents consider beating, shouting at or insulting children as normal methods of correcting bad behaviour. They may not understand that excessive physical punishment and emotional mistreatment can negatively affect children. Limited education also makes it difficult for

some parents to understand information provided by social welfare officers about child protection (Ward Executive Officer, Isakalilo ward, interview conducted on 18 June 2026).

The response indicates that low parental knowledge may contribute to child abuse by limiting parents' understanding of children's rights, positive discipline, and child-protection practices. This supports the quantitative finding that 56.1% of respondents agreed that low parental knowledge contributes to child abuse. During the interview with the Ward Executive Officer from Ruaha Ward, the officer similarly explained that:

Some parents with low knowledge on upbringing a child have limited awareness of appropriate child-care and protection practices. They may rely on traditional methods of discipline without considering the effects on children. Some also do not know where to report cases of abuse or seek assistance when there are problems at home. Therefore, lack of knowledge can make it difficult for parents to recognise behaviours that constitute child abuse (Ward Executive Officer, Ruaha ward, interview conducted on 8 July 2026).

The response suggests that limited parental knowledge may encourage reliance on traditional disciplinary practices and reduce awareness of child-protection and reporting mechanisms. This further supports the quantitative finding that parental knowledge is an important factor associated with child abuse in the study area. The finding is supported by Vermeulen et al. (2023), who examined child maltreatment during school and childcare closures and found that lower parental educational level was the largest identified family risk factor for child maltreatment, with a risk ratio of 10.28. The study also identified parental unemployment and larger family size as additional risk factors. This supports the present study because it demonstrates that parental educational disadvantage can increase vulnerability to child maltreatment, particularly when combined with other socio-economic difficulties. Similarly, Haque et al. (2021) examined children's exposure to psychological abuse and neglect in rural Bangladesh. Their study found that additional parental and household characteristics were associated with children's exposure to maltreatment, although parental education itself was not statistically significant for all forms of maltreatment. Importantly, the study found that an increase in parental/household resources such as schooling was associated with reduced risk of some forms of neglect. This provides a useful comparison with the present study, while also showing that the relationship between parental education and child abuse may differ according to the type of abuse and the social context. The present finding that 56.1% of respondents identified low parental education as a contributing factor is broadly consistent with recent evidence, particularly the findings of Vermeulen et al. (2023). However, the contrasting evidence from Haque et al. (2021) suggests that education should be considered

together with other factors rather than as an independent cause of child abuse. The study therefore suggests strengthening parental education programmes on child rights, positive parenting and non-violent discipline, while simultaneously addressing other socio-economic challenges affecting families in the study area.

4.2.2 Contribution of parental education/knowledge level on child upbringing

The findings in Table 2 show varied perceptions regarding the influence of parental education on child upbringing. The largest proportion of respondents (39.8%) reported that parental education does not affect child upbringing, while 25.5% indicated that it improves parenting skills and another 25.5% reported that it reduces child abuse cases. Only 9.2% believed that higher parental education increases child abuse cases. Thus, 51.0% of respondents associated parental education with positive parenting outcomes, suggesting that education may improve parents' knowledge of child development, children's rights, communication, and appropriate disciplinary practices. However, the 39.8% reporting no effect indicates that education alone may not determine parenting quality, as household income, parental attitudes, caregiving practices, and family circumstances may also influence child upbringing.

The finding is consistent with Davis-Kean et al. (2021), who linked parental education with parenting through knowledge, beliefs, resources, and parenting practices, while Lang et al. (2021) found caregiver education to be associated with child-abuse risk alongside other family factors. Similarly, Ruiz-Casares et al. (2022) demonstrated the value of structured parenting programmes in reducing physical and emotional punishment among caregivers. These findings suggest that both formal education and practical parenting knowledge are relevant to positive child upbringing. Therefore, strengthening parenting education, positive-discipline skills, and child-protection awareness may help improve child-rearing practices in Ruaha and Isakalilo wards.

Table 2: Contribution of parental education level on child upbringing.

Effect	Frequency	Percent
Improves parenting skills	25	25.5
Reduces child abuse cases	25	25.5
Has no effect	39	39.8
Increases child abuse cases	9	9.2
Total	98	100.0

Source: Researchers' Data (2026)

4.2.3 Influence of parental occupation on the of child abuse

The findings show that 60.2% of respondents agreed that parental occupation influences the occurrence of child abuse, while 39.8% disagreed. The higher proportion of agreement suggests that parental occupation is an important factor associated with child abuse in Isakalilo and Ruaha wards. This may be explained by differences in income stability and the ability of parents to meet children's basic needs. Unstable or poorly paid occupations may increase financial stress and frustration, potentially contributing to inappropriate parenting practices, whereas stable employment may provide greater economic security and reduce household pressures.

The finding is consistent with Kim (2021), who found that increases in male unemployment were significantly associated with increases in child-maltreatment hotline calls in the Republic of Korea. Similarly, Judd et al. (2023), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of 60 studies, found that parental unemployment was associated with an increased risk of child maltreatment, with paternal or any parental unemployment associated with an 82% higher risk in representative population studies. These findings suggest that child-abuse prevention should address not only parenting practices but also household economic stability, employment opportunities, and income-generating activities. This is particularly relevant in the study area, where parents engage in farming, business, casual labour, and formal employment.

4.2.4 Contribution of parental employment and income stability to child care and protection

The findings in Table 3 show that 60.2% of respondents reported that stable employment improves child care and protection, while 32.7% indicated that unemployment increases parental stress and may contribute to child abuse. Only 7.1% reported that parental occupation has no effect. These findings suggest that employment and income stability influence parents' capacity to provide basic needs, supervision, and protection. Stable and adequate income may reduce financial stress and improve household security, whereas unemployment, low earnings, unstable employment, or demanding working conditions may increase economic pressure and reduce parental availability. Thus, the influence of employment on child care should be understood not only in terms of whether parents are employed, but also in relation to income adequacy, job stability, working conditions, and time available for parenting.

The finding is supported by Amos et al. (2023), who found that parental unemployment was associated with increased risks of physical abuse, neglect, and overall child maltreatment,

with an 82% higher risk of child maltreatment reported in general-population studies. Similarly, Wang et al. (2023) found that parental employment and financial difficulties were associated with poorer child well-being and increased child maltreatment, partly through parental mental health, parenting practices, and family relationships. Therefore, the finding that 60.2% of respondents associated stable employment with improved child care, while 32.7% linked unemployment with parental stress, highlights the importance of household economic stability in child protection. Efforts to prevent child abuse should consequently include employment support, income-generating opportunities, and social support for economically vulnerable parents alongside parenting and child-protection interventions.

Table 3 Contribution of parental employment and income stability to child care and protection.

Effect	Frequency	Percent
Stable employment improves child care	59	60.2
Unemployment increases stress, leading to abuse	32	32.7
Has no effect	7	7.1
Total	98	100.0

Source: Researchers' Data (2026)

4.2.5 Contribution of household poverty to child abuse

The findings indicate that household poverty was widely perceived as a factor contributing to child abuse, with 61.2% of respondents agreeing and 38.8% disagreeing. The higher proportion of agreement suggests that household economic conditions may affect parents' and caregivers' ability to provide adequate care and protection, particularly when they struggle to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, education, health care, and housing. Persistent financial difficulties may increase parental stress, family conflict, and the risk of neglect or harsh disciplinary practices. However, poverty should not be regarded as a direct or automatic cause of child abuse, as supportive family relationships, effective coping mechanisms, social support, and positive parenting may protect children even in economically disadvantaged households. Conversely, child abuse may also occur in financially stable households due to factors such as poor parenting practices, substance abuse, family conflict, and inadequate supervision. To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative information was obtained through interviews with Social Welfare Officers to provide professional perspectives on parental and household factors associated with child abuse in the study area. The interviews focused on socio-economic conditions, parenting practices, parental substance use, family relationships, and parents' ability to provide

appropriate care and protection, with the information analysed thematically. During the interview with Social Welfare Officers, one officer explained that:

The most common parental factors we encounter include poverty, poor parenting practices, alcohol abuse and family conflicts. Some parents have difficulties providing basic needs for their children, while others use harsh physical punishment when disciplining children. Alcohol use can also affect the way parents care for and supervise their children, sometimes leading to neglect or violence (Social Welfare Officer, Isakalilo ward, interview conducted on 24 June 2026).

The response indicates that child abuse may result from the interaction of socio-economic and parental factors. Poverty may limit parents' ability to provide basic needs, while alcohol abuse, harsh discipline, and family conflict may further weaken effective caregiving and supervision. This finding supports the quantitative result that 61.2% of respondents associated household poverty with child abuse. Another Social Welfare Officer added:

We also handle cases involving inadequate parental supervision, separation between parents and poor communication within families. Some parents leave children without proper supervision because of work or other responsibilities. In other cases, parents may be separated or have conflicts, and the children become affected emotionally and sometimes physically. Lack of knowledge about children's rights and appropriate parenting is also a challenge (Social Welfare Officer, Ruaha ward, interview conducted on 10 July 2026).

The response suggests that inadequate supervision, parental separation, family conflict, and limited knowledge of child rights may increase children's vulnerability to abuse. In particular, parents' work responsibilities may reduce the time available for supervision, while separation and poor communication may negatively affect children's emotional and physical well-being. The finding further demonstrates that child abuse is influenced by multiple interconnected parental and family circumstances rather than poverty alone.

The finding is supported by Roskam et al. (2022), who examined the relationship between poverty and child maltreatment and identified low socioeconomic status as one of the major antecedents of child maltreatment. Their study further found that parental burnout provides an important pathway through which poverty and socioeconomic difficulties may contribute to child maltreatment. This supports the present finding by showing that economic hardship can increase parental strain and consequently affect parenting behaviour. Similarly, Maguire-Jack and Sattler (2023) examined the relationship between neighbourhood poverty, family economic well-being and child maltreatment using longitudinal data from 4,898 children. They found that neighbourhood poverty had a lasting effect on child neglect, and that this

relationship was mediated by family monetary well-being. This supports the current finding that household economic conditions can influence children's vulnerability to maltreatment, particularly neglect. Therefore, the finding that 61.2% of respondents associated household poverty with child abuse is consistent with recent empirical evidence. The results suggest that reducing child abuse in the study area requires not only child-protection and parenting interventions but also measures addressing household economic vulnerability, including income-generating opportunities, employment support and assistance to families experiencing severe financial hardship.

4.2.6 Impacts of household poverty on children

The findings in Table 4 show that household poverty affects children through several pathways. Poor living conditions were the most frequently reported impact (51.0%), followed by increased child neglect (26.5%) and family stress (20.4%), while only 2.0% reported no effect. These findings suggest that poverty may compromise children's welfare by limiting access to adequate food, clothing, housing, education, health care, and supervision. Financial difficulties may also require parents to spend long hours seeking income, reducing their availability for childcare. Furthermore, persistent economic pressure may increase parental frustration, family conflict, and inappropriate disciplinary practices, particularly where poverty is combined with poor coping mechanisms or substance abuse. Thus, poverty should be understood as a condition that may increase children's vulnerability to neglect and abuse rather than as a direct cause of abuse in every household.

The finding is supported by Sattler (2023), who found that children from families experiencing multiple poverty-related risks were more likely to experience physical and supervisory neglect. Similarly, Wang et al. (2022) found that economic hardship was associated with psychological aggression, physical assault, and neglect among Asian American and Pacific Islander families, partly through increased parenting aggravation. These findings support the present results by demonstrating that economic hardship can affect children through poor living conditions, parental stress, and harmful caregiving practices. The fact that 98.0% of respondents identified at least one negative impact indicates that household poverty was widely perceived as affecting children's welfare in the study area. Therefore, addressing child abuse in Ruaha and Isakalilo wards should include measures to improve household economic conditions, basic living standards, parental support, and access to child-protection services.

Table 4: Impacts of household poverty on children.

Impact type	Frequency	Percent
Increases neglect	26	26.5
Causes family stress	20	20.4
Leads to poor living conditions	50	51.0
No effect	2	2.0
Total	98	100.0

Source: Researchers' Data (2026)

4.2.7 Influence of parental marital status on child protection

The findings show that 56.1% of respondents agreed that parental marital status influences child protection, while 43.9% disagreed. The higher proportion of agreement suggests that family structure may influence the availability of caregivers, household stability, supervision, and the sharing of caregiving responsibilities. Separation, divorce, or the death of a parent may increase caregiving and financial responsibilities for the remaining caregiver and may expose children to family conflict or reduced supervision. However, marital status alone does not determine child protection, as supportive single-parent households may provide safe environments, while children in married households may still experience abuse because of family conflict, substance abuse, harsh discipline, or inadequate supervision. Thus, the influence of marital status should be considered together with the quality of family relationships, economic circumstances, and parenting practices. The qualitative findings provide further insight into the effectiveness of existing child-protection interventions. A Social Welfare Officer from Isakalilo Ward explained that:

The existing interventions have been helpful to some extent, particularly through parental counselling, community awareness meetings and education on children's rights. These interventions have helped some parents understand the importance of positive discipline and proper supervision. However, their effectiveness is still limited because not all parents participate in the programmes, especially those who are difficult to reach or those who are not willing to change their parenting practice (Social Welfare Officer, Isakalilo Ward, interview conducted on 26 June 2026).

This response indicates that parenting counselling, community awareness, and education on children's rights have contributed to improving parental knowledge and caregiving practices. However, limited participation among some parents reduces the reach and effectiveness of these interventions, suggesting a need for more inclusive and accessible parenting programmes. Another Social Welfare Officer explained:

The reporting and follow-up mechanisms have helped us to identify and respond to some cases of child abuse. We work with local leaders, teachers and parents when cases are reported. However, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate staffing, family resistance and fear of reporting abuse sometimes affect the effectiveness of interventions. Some cases are also settled within families without being formally reported (Social Welfare Officer, Ruaha Ward, interview conducted on 12 July 2026).

The response suggests that collaboration among social welfare officers, local leaders, teachers, and parents supports the identification and management of child-abuse cases. However, limited resources, inadequate staffing, family resistance, fear of reporting, and informal settlement of cases constrain effective child protection. Strengthening reporting mechanisms, follow-up services, staffing, and community participation may therefore improve intervention effectiveness. The finding is supported by Tran et al. (2021), who found that children living in single-parent families were more likely to experience neglect than those living in two-parent families. Similarly, van Berkel et al. (2024) found that parental separation was common among maltreated children and was particularly associated with emotional neglect and emotional abuse, partly through inter-parental conflict. These findings support the present result that marital status may influence child protection, particularly when separation or family instability is accompanied by conflict, reduced parental availability, or economic difficulties. However, the 43.9% of respondents who disagreed further indicates that marital status should not be considered a direct cause of child abuse but rather a factor that interacts with other parental, economic, and family circumstances.

4.2.8 Contribution of parental marital status on children's wellbeing

The findings in Table 5 show that 51.0% of respondents reported that single-parent families may reduce parental supervision, while 45.9% indicated that divorce increases emotional stress among children. Only 3.1% reported that parental marital status has no effect on children's wellbeing. Thus, 96.9% identified at least one negative effect, suggesting that changes in parental marital circumstances may affect children's supervision, emotional wellbeing, family relationships, and access to household resources. However, marital status should not be considered an automatic cause of poor child wellbeing, since children's experiences may also depend on parenting quality, economic conditions, social support, and the quality of parent-child relationships. During the interview, a teacher from Isakalilo Ward explained that:

Parental socio-economic status has a significant influence on children's performance and behaviour at school. Children from families with low income may come to school without

adequate food, school materials or proper clothing, which can affect their concentration and participation in learning. Some children may also be absent from school because their parents cannot meet certain school-related needs. Financial difficulties at home can also cause stress, which may affect children's behaviour and interaction with teachers and other pupils (Teacher, Isakalilo Ward, interview conducted on 30 June 2026).

The response indicates that low parental socio-economic status may negatively affect children's school performance and behaviour by limiting access to basic needs and learning materials. Financial difficulties may also create stress that affects concentration, attendance, and interaction with teachers and other pupils. This suggests that household economic conditions can indirectly influence children's wellbeing through educational participation and emotional adjustment. The teacher further explained that:

Children from economically stable families are generally more likely to receive the materials and support they need for learning. Parents who have stable employment or businesses may also have more opportunities to communicate with teachers and monitor their children's progress. However, poverty does not mean that every child will perform poorly, because parental encouragement and commitment can also make a difference (Teacher, Isakalilo Ward, interview conducted on 30 June 2026).

This response suggests that economic stability may improve children's access to educational resources and parental support. However, the teacher's observation that parental encouragement and commitment can make a difference indicates that economic status alone does not determine children's wellbeing or performance. Positive parental involvement may help reduce some of the challenges associated with household poverty. The finding is supported by Kleinschlömer and Krapf (2023), who found that parental separation was associated with increased emotional and behavioural problems among children, particularly where parent-child conflict was present. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2023) found that prolonged parent-child separation was associated with emotional, social, educational, and health-related outcomes among adolescents and young adults. These findings support the present results, particularly the 45.9% who associated divorce with increased emotional stress and the 51.0% who linked single-parent families with reduced supervision. However, parental marital status should be understood as one factor interacting with parenting practices, economic circumstances, family relationships, and social support. Therefore, families experiencing separation or divorce may require additional counselling, parenting support, and child-protection services to promote children's wellbeing.

Table 5: Contribution of parental marital status on children's wellbeing.

Effect	Frequency	Percent
Single-parent families reduce supervision	50	51.0
Divorce increases emotional stress in children	45	45.9
No effect	3	3.1
Total	98	100.0

Source: Researchers' Data (2026)

4.2.9 Contribution of parental social norms toward violence to child abuse

The findings show that 87.8% of respondents agreed that parental social norms towards violence contribute to child abuse, while 12.2% disagreed. The large difference of 75.6 percentage points indicates a strong perception that beliefs accepting or justifying violence as a disciplinary practice contribute to child abuse in Isakalilo and Ruaha wards. When physical punishment, beating, or other forms of violence are regarded as acceptable parenting practices, such behaviours may become normalised and reproduced across generations. This may make it difficult for parents and communities to distinguish between discipline and abuse, thereby increasing children's exposure to violent practices.

The finding is supported by Duong et al. (2022), who found that parents' positive interpretations of their own childhood experiences of corporal punishment contributed to perceived norms supporting its use, while social networks also influenced perceptions of acceptable discipline. Similarly, Masath and Nkuba (2023), in a study of 893 caregivers and 914 children in Tanzania, found that positive attitudes towards violent discipline and caregivers' own childhood experiences of violence were associated with the use of violent discipline. These findings support the present result that social norms can shape parental disciplinary practices. Therefore, reducing child abuse requires interventions that address not only individual parenting behaviour but also community beliefs that normalise violence. Parenting education, community awareness, and promotion of positive and non-violent disciplinary practices may help challenge harmful social norms in Isakalilo and Ruaha wards.

4.2.10 Contribution of cultural beliefs on child discipline

The findings in Table 6 show that 39.8% of respondents reported that cultural beliefs promote physical punishment as a method of disciplining children, while 25.5% indicated that cultural beliefs reduce child protection. Together, these responses account for 65.3%, suggesting that a substantial proportion of respondents perceived cultural beliefs as having potentially harmful effects on child discipline and protection. Cultural beliefs may shape parents' understanding of acceptable disciplinary practices, with physical punishment sometimes

viewed as a traditional means of promoting obedience and respect. When such practices are normalised, parents may reproduce disciplinary methods experienced during their own childhood, making it difficult to distinguish between discipline and abuse. Cultural emphasis on parental authority may also discourage children from reporting mistreatment and community members from intervening in family matters. However, 34.7% reported that cultural beliefs have no effect, indicating that culture does not influence child discipline uniformly and that parents may maintain cultural values while adopting non-violent disciplinary practices.

The finding is supported by Masath and Nkuba (2023), who found that 93.3% of caregivers in Tanzania reported using violent discipline and that positive attitudes towards violent discipline and caregivers' own childhood experiences of violence were associated with its use. Similarly, Duong et al. (2022) found that parents' interpretations of their childhood experiences of corporal punishment and perceived social norms influenced their acceptance of physical punishment. These findings support the present result by demonstrating that beliefs and social experiences can contribute to the continuation of violent disciplinary practices across generations. Therefore, the 65.3% of respondents who identified either promotion of physical punishment or reduced child protection highlights the importance of addressing harmful cultural beliefs in child-protection interventions. Community awareness, parental education, and promotion of positive and non-violent discipline should be used to challenge practices that expose children to violence while respecting constructive cultural values.

Table 6: Effects of cultural beliefs on child discipline.

Effect	Frequency	Percent
Promotes physical punishment	39	39.8
Reduces child protection	25	25.5
No effect	34	34.7
Total	98	100.0

Source: Researchers' Data (2026)

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion of the Study

The study concludes that parental socio-economic factors, parenting practices, and parental substance abuse are important factors associated with the occurrence of child abuse in Iringa Municipality, particularly in Ruaha and IsaSkalilo wards. The findings indicate that limited parental knowledge of child rights and appropriate child upbringing, economic hardship,

unstable employment, poverty, marital challenges, and social norms that tolerate violent discipline may create conditions that increase children's vulnerability to abuse, neglect, and inadequate protection. The study also found that parenting practices, including the use of physical punishment, inadequate supervision, poor communication, and limited emotional support, are important areas requiring attention. In addition, parental alcohol and substance abuse was identified as a significant concern because it may interfere with parents' ability to provide appropriate care, supervision, and protection. Overall, the study concludes that addressing child abuse requires a coordinated approach that combines parental education, positive parenting practices, socio-economic support, substance-abuse interventions, and stronger collaboration among social welfare officers, teachers, health workers, police, community leaders, and families. Strengthening these areas can contribute to a more supportive environment for children and improve the effectiveness of child protection efforts in Iringa Municipality.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, recommendations focus on improving parenting practices, addressing socio-economic challenges, reducing parental substance abuse, and strengthening child protection mechanisms. Social Welfare Officers, Community Development Officers, teachers, and local leaders should provide formal parental education and training on child upbringing, positive discipline, emotional care, communication, children's rights, and effective supervision, while encouraging parents to replace physical punishment, insults, and threats with non-violent parenting approaches. Iringa Municipality should strengthen economic empowerment programmes for vulnerable parents through vocational training, savings groups, and income-generating activities, while counselling, referral, and rehabilitation services should be strengthened for parents affected by alcohol and substance abuse. Local authorities should also strengthen child protection systems by improving coordination among social welfare officers, teachers, health workers, police, and community leaders, and communities should be educated on available reporting mechanisms and encouraged to report suspected cases of child abuse promptly. Further studies should examine more deeply the relationship between parental substance abuse and child abuse, particularly how the frequency of alcohol or substance use influences neglect, violence, and poor supervision, as well as assess the effectiveness of formal parental education and training in positive discipline, supervision, communication, and emotional support. Future research should also investigate how parental education, poverty, unemployment, income instability,

and substance abuse interact to influence child abuse, using larger samples and, where appropriate, incorporating children's perspectives.

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