






'Young men should work hard': adult men's views of young people in Mwanza, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

In 2014, there were 1.8 billion young people aged 10–24 years globally, 16% of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. Young people are met with significant technological advancement but also constraints in securing stable livelihoods and broader cultural and societal changes. While praised for their ingenuity and resourcefulness, young people also face high expectations and judgment, both in terms of their capacity to contribute to their communities and in maintaining the moral and societal fabric. We conducted a photovoice exercise with 16 adult men aged 22 to 42 in Mwanza, Tanzania. After two days of training, participants were given nine days to take pictures of their family lives, activities outside their home and what is important to them. Thereafter, they were asked to choose, rank and provide captions for 25 photos and interviewed about their choices. The interviews were recorded, summarised, and analysed thematically. Young people, capturing anyone from a teenager to a 25-year-old, emerged as a key theme in all interviews and photographs. Other key themes in relation to young people were livelihood opportunities, with a strong connotation on 'hard work'; education, with an emphasis on the importance of letting young people attend school; gender equality in respect to fair distribution of household chores and women working to supplement family income; recreational activities and challenging environments for young men, capturing bad nutrition, poor road conditions, harmful work and living conditions, as well as decaying morals. Overall, adult participants both admired young men and women for their energy and innovation while also expecting them to prescribe to existing moral and community standards. Understanding the high expectations and concerns of adults and how those shape the environment in which young people transition into adulthood is key to develop programmes for young people by considering their local context.

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1. Introduction

In 2014, there were 1.8 billion young people aged 10–24 years globally, approximately 16% of which live in sub-Saharan Africa (UNFPA, 2014). Such estimates are often mentioned alongside negative phenomena like instability, unemployment and HIV/

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AIDS, producing notions of threat, despair and social disruptions (Martin et al., 2016). On the other hand, young people are perceived as a hope for Africa's future, seen as energetic and ingenious, praised for their potential to overcome challenges and moral decline due to their creativity, innovation, energy and perseverance (Martin et al., 2016; Sawyer et al., 2018). It is predicted that young people will drive the continent's population growth and technological and industrial transformation in the coming decade (Ross et al., 2021).

Expectations of adults on young people are high and so are aspirations of young people themselves for a successful, sustainable future. In many sub-Saharan African countries, starting a family and entering adulthood is linked to young people's ability to accumulate capital which would enable them to marry and establish households (Cole, 2011). These aspirations and future orientations of young adults are not only impacted by their personal ambitions and drivers, but also formed by their social environment, family relations and networks. These include cultural attitudes, beliefs, values and ideologies of adults in the areas where young people grew up and live. The expectations and aspirations are further impacted by broader macro-level issues such as global poverty, inadequate and irrelevant provision of education, and increasing unemployment rates (Mshana, Peter et al., 2022; Steyn et al., 2010). Under these circumstances, young people need to constantly adapt, reject and transform the cultural material that is passed down to them by prior generations (Mannheim, 1970). This enables them to make a living in an environment that makes it increasingly difficult for them to thrive. Young people need to negotiate their own decisions within the existing social, economic and cultural structures in their communities (Cole, 2011).

Tanzania, like in many other sub-Saharan African countries, experienced large societal shifts in the last decade, ranging from urban-rural migration, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, and the influences of globalization and technological advances that changed the structure of family life, increased expectations about economic prosperity and challenged existing gender and cultural norms (Mshana, Malibwa et al., 2022; Wamoyi et al., 2021). As elsewhere, it is also not uncommon in Tanzania for the older generation to criticize the behaviour and appearance of the younger generation exposed to new influences (Wamoyi et al., 2011) and to try and retain the norms and values they grew up with. Employment of young people is seen as vital by communities in Tanzania, with 'self-reliance' deemed a crucial marker for young adulthood and unemployed young people perceived as a source of worry and concern as they might engage in transactional sex, crime or alcohol and substance abuse (Banks, 2016). To understand the social fabric that young people navigate while growing into adulthood, this study seeks to analyse adult men's perceptions of young people in their communities.

2. Methods

This analysis analysis utilized 16 photovoice interviews conducted in Mwanza city, Tanzania, between April and November 2019 for a larger study that focused on adult men's views and experiences of intimate partner violence. In carrying out the larger

study, the research team collaborated with street leaders to purposefully recruit participants with different demographic characteristics – such as age, type of employment, ethnicity, and where they grew up – to represent diverse viewpoints. This resulted in 30 in-depth interviews with adult men using a flexible interview guide in Swahili. Out of those, 16 men aged 22 to 42 years old were invited to also take part in the photovoice exercise (Wang et al., 1996; Wang & Burris, 1997). These were selected based on their diverse viewpoints and situation in life (Mukumbang & van Wyk, 2020). Photovoice was chosen as it is a participatory method to inform policy and that gives a voice to participants, especially among people with high illiteracy rates to structure their own narratives (Wang et al., 1996).

The 16 photovoice participants were trained for two days on how to use cameras and the ethics of using pictures for research, including verbal and signed consent and the right of individuals over their pictures (Hannes & Parylo, 2014; Mshana et al., 2022). After the training, the men had nine days, including two weekends, to take pictures of their general family life, their relationship(s), what was important to them and the activities they undertook when outside of their home. The researcher visited the men throughout the data collection period to review the pictures they had taken. Thereafter he arranged individual face-to-face interviews with the participants in a private setting, in which they were each requested to select 25 photos from the ones they took. In the interviews, the reasons for selecting those 25 photos were discussed, and participants were asked to rank the chosen pictures in order of importance. For each chosen photo men were also asked to provide a caption.

The interviews were audio-recorded and summarized by two researchers in detailed reports with verbatim quotes. The pictures from the photovoice were stored in computer folders with specific identifiers for each interview. The research team held weekly meetings to discuss the findings of the photos and the interviews and to review the emerging patterns. While the data analysis process of the original study was focused on men's family lives and how they spent their time outside the home, researchers were also guided by the themes emerging from the data. One of the emerging themes based on grounded analysis (Glaser et al., 1968) was the view adult participants had of young people. After this theme emerged, the team re-read each summary and examined the photos and captions chosen by the participants to assess how they captured and represented young people (Glaser et al., 1968). Participants did not define the age range they considered when talking about 'young people', yet they used the Swahili word 'Vijana', which refers to teenagers and young people in their twenties.

The study received ethical approval from the Tanzanian National Health Research Ethics Committee and the ethics committees of the UK London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the German Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich. All participants provided written informed consent and the photovoice participants obtained verbal consent from all the people captured in the pictures. For those recognizable in the photos, they obtained signed consent.

Table 1. Participants' sociodemographic characteristics.

IDI Number	Age (Years)	Education	Occupation	Number of pictures taken (N = 1645)
IDI 03	37	Form II ³	Hotel worker	164
IDI 04	33	STD IV ¹	Barber	104
IDI 07	37	STD VII ²	Casual labourer	85
IDI 08	40	STD VII ²	Tailor	46
IDI 11	35	STD VII ²	Farmer	63
IDI 12	34	STD VII ²	Mason	724
IDI 13	42	Form IV ⁴	Truck driver	40
IDI 14	25	Form IV ⁴	Barber	127
IDI 17	25	STD VII ²	Motorcycle driver (<i>bodaboda</i>)	56
IDI 18	33	STD VII ²	Religious teacher	36
IDI 19	31	STD VII ²	Motorcycle driver (<i>bodaboda</i>)	41
IDI 26	22	STD VII ²	Fisherman	33
IDI 27	25	STD VII ²	Fisherman	37
IDI 28	22	Form IV ⁴	Fish dam cleaner	44
IDI 29	25	STD VII ²	Security guard	30
IDI 30	24	Form IV ⁴	Farmer	15

¹Primary education incomplete, ²Primary education complete, ³Secondary education incomplete, ⁴Secondary education complete

3. Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of the 16 men who participated in the photovoice are displayed in Table 1. The 16 participants took a total of 1645 photos, with one participant only taking 15 photos (see Table 1).

The most dominant theme that emerged in all photovoice interviews was related to the employment of young people and their livelihoods, as displayed in Figure 1. The four key emerging themes captured children, parenting and education, relationships and gender equality, recreational activities, and challenging environments. Two underlying positions

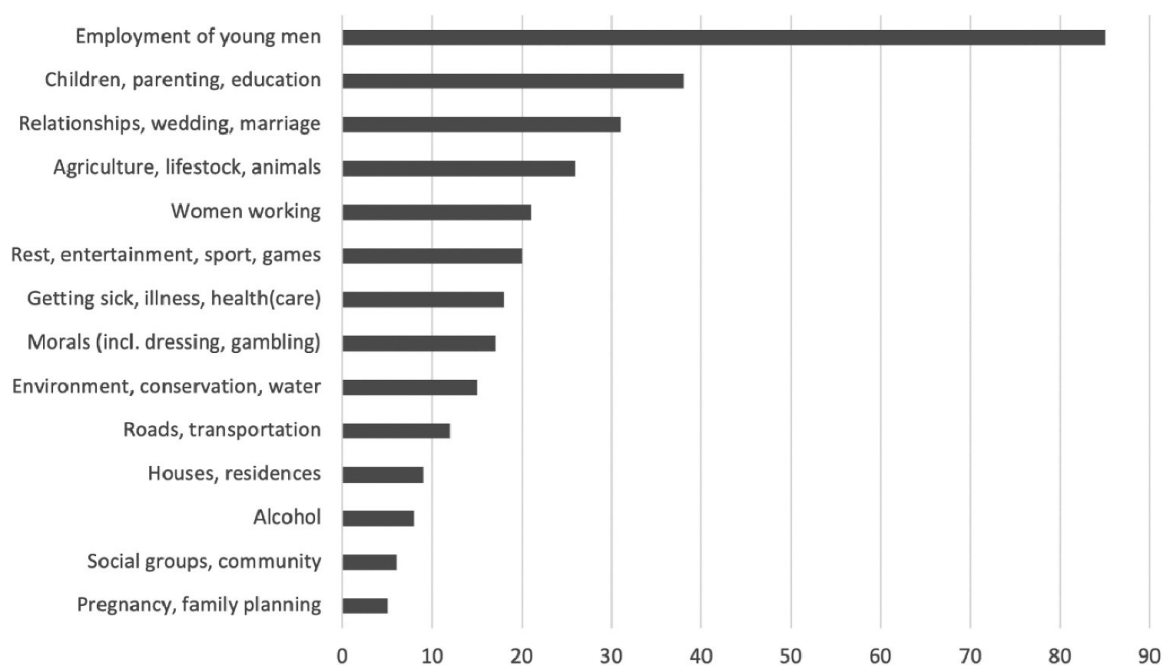


Figure 1. Picture captions as developed by participants to title photographs they took.

emerged from men's narratives on all themes. First, men acknowledged and praised young people for their achievements and advances while concurrently also voicing moral and normative expectations and cautions they have of young people despite acknowledging the constraints and challenges they are facing. These will be discussed under each theme.

3.1 Livelihood and employment of young people

Livelihood was the most prominent theme across all photovoice interviews. Adult men voiced a lot of admiration towards young people's ability to ensure their livelihood, praising their ability to work hard, being creative and have a high capacity to advance themselves: *'...as young men who are the workforce of the nation'* [IDI 04, age 33, barber]. At the same time, acknowledging the difficult economic situation young people face, they also expressed strong recommendations, such as demanding young men to take up even hard, poorly paid and unpleasant income-generating activities.

Young men working hard

The theme of young men as hard workers depicted nearly exclusively young men working as street vendors, cooks, farmers, tailors, waiters, and garbage collectors. In these pictures, participants praised young people for their commitment and dedication, working long hours and making strong efforts to obtain and keep employment. This is exemplified in the reasoning one man gave for taking [Picture 1](#): *'I want tell the community that there are some young men who are working and not sleeping until mid-night because it was around 2:00 am when I took the photo'* [IDI 13, age 42, truck driver].



Picture 1. Young man selling food in the street late at night.



Picture 2. Young man roasting and preparing a goat.

The men took pictures of young men working on computers, showing their appreciation for those young men who despite limited education are able to work with technologies they themselves cannot master. Another one showed a young cook creatively decorating a roasted goat (Picture 2), stating: ‘...*anything or any work may have its own creativity, and that creativity may be part of something that make you earn more income...*’ [IDI 03, age 37, hotel worker].

Concerns about a lack of livelihood opportunities for young people

Yet while they acknowledged the initiative and hard work of young people, men were also worried about the limited economic opportunities of young people and wanted to provide guidance. The most prominent recommendation was that young people should not be picky and ignore jobs below standard or with low pay. While this was in part because they believed that even substandard jobs allow young people to enter the employment and afford a livelihood for themselves, they were also concerned about their communities. This concern was twofold: adult men worried that young men might negatively affect the community by becoming involved in criminal activities, drinking and hanging around or that the community might misunderstand young people and view them as lazy and burden to their families.

‘When a young man is working people won’t think bad of him because they believe that you are earning an income and therefore you can afford some basic requirements. For instance, community members believe that if someone is “just seated” without working that this person is more likely to be involved in bad scandals like of theft, because if it occurs the first suspects will be those who are not working’ [IDI 14, age 25, barber].

Another solution that adult men offered to improve the livelihood opportunities related to their wish to transfer knowledge and training to young people, highlighting the need for young people to receive teaching and guidance, for example, by training young women in tailoring clothes or passing on knowledge on when to harvest crops (Picture 3).



Picture 3. Female tailor apprentice working with a sewing machine.

3.2 Children, parenting and education

The emphasis on education of young people for their future development and lifelong well-being was articulated in all interviews. Taking photographs of adolescent girls carrying out domestic chores ([Picture 4](#)) and young men grazing cattle were accompanied by critical quotes, regarding the impact of chores on young people's learning and school



Picture 4. Young girl preparing a meal for the whole family.

attendance: ‘...how can a child of almost thirteen years be able to prepare food for eight people ... while this child is supposed to be at school?’ [IDI 18, age 33, religious teacher].

Adult men differed on their views of whether young people should participate in household chores at all, as some participants explicitly argued that this is expected of young women. However, they all agreed that those chores should not interfere with their homework, learning or attending school.

3.3 Relationships and gender inequality

Issues around gender inequality mainly came up in relation to sharing household chores. Again, there were contrasting views, even in the statements of individual participants. Most of the men saw the sharing of household chores between young men and women as positive. Picturing young men and women cooking together, they pointed out the benefits of husband and wives collaborating. Similarly, a man took a picture of young men washing clothes, highlighting that men can also do these kinds of tasks. Adult men were keen to emphasize that ‘*Young ladies shouldn’t be behind*’ [IDI 14, age 25, barber], meaning that young women, if not in school anymore, should also involve themselves in income-generating activities. One participant took a picture of a young female entrepreneur, stating: ‘...when a young lady sees it, she will believe in herself that: *I am also capable!*’ [IDI 14, age 25, barber].

This position however was not uniformly expressed by all adult men in the photovoice exercise, with some also expected women to take care of all household chores. Overall, most adult men still depicted young men and women in their traditional roles, with young women being mainly portrayed in relation to housework, typically female types of employment and children, whereas men were the nearly exclusive focus in the discussions on livelihoods and suggestions for young people to work hard. For example, a participant related that ‘*a woman is a person who should take care of the home, she should do cleanliness*’ [IDI 14, age 25, barber].

3.4. Recreational activities

Men were appreciative of the need for young men to enjoy their recreational time to relax, set their minds off work and gain new ideas while watching sports or playing sports together with friends. They did not mention recreational activities for young women. They especially welcomed young men gathering in groups. In the following example, the young motorcyclists regularly meet in their group after work:

‘...they discuss things that are constructive based on their work. Therefore, they become respectful towards the community and the community is happy because they provide them with transport. It is also beneficial for their families because the group gives advice on family issues. He may come to the group, having had some misunderstandings with his wife. He can discuss it with fellow young men in that group. They might tell him “do this” or “don’t do that”, like beating her. So, when he works, earns an income and buy things like food and goes home with it, they can enjoy it. This is when his relationship with his family becomes good’ [IDI 19, age 31, motorcycle driver].

However, men also took many pictures of behaviours negatively influencing young men during their recreational time, such as alcohol use and gambling, worrying that this leads young people to acting antisocially, losing money and starting arguments with their wives

upon returning home, in addition to the negative image the community may have of seeing them engaging in drinking and gambling.

3.5. Challenging environment and concerns about moral decay

Adult men showed a high appreciation of the difficult environments young people live in, mentioning various temptations and bad examples. One related to poor nutrition of young men, with a picture portraying a young man eating sugarcane in a large piece rather than in small pieces. The others showed a woman dressed inappropriately in a short skirt when visiting an office or barely dressed women on playing cards. In both examples, adult men voiced concerns about moral decay of young people, which they saw as potentially threatening the whole community. They also held the community, especially parents, accountable for allowing adolescent girls to marry to obtain the bride price, decrying the negative effect it has on young girls.

Adult men also portrayed dangerous and challenging physical environments young men lived in, including poorly constructed housing and hazardous toilet facilities, highlighting the unhygienic environments that may affect people's health. Road accidents were also featured in several photographs, displaying motorcycles or toppled trucks, and referring to the danger of roads being used by animals, people and vehicles simultaneously when discussing pictures they took of busy roads. While some respondents claimed that motorcycles lead to more road accidents [IDI 13, age 42, truck driver], another respondent claimed them to be a safe means of transportation which obviates the hardship of walking long distances by foot [IDI 03, age 37, hotel worker]. Larger environmental issues, such as the need for natural conservation and the lack of water were also mentioned as affecting young people. One picture showed a young man waiting with a container for water to arrive (Picture 5), with the respondent stating: '*...for now... because God has made it to rain, but for some time water has become a problem...*' [IDI 12, age 34, mason].



Picture 5. Young man waiting for water.

4. Discussion

Young people emerged as a central theme for adult men participating in this photovoice exercise, without them being explicitly asked about it in any phase of the research process. The analysis revealed that adult men viewed young people both idealistically as well as realistically acknowledging the uncertainty and challenges they face – two views that often stood in strong contrast. Adult men admired young people and had a very positive image of them, while also creating strong normative, moralistic expectations regarding the behaviour they expected them to adhere to. They believed that a strong work ethic, which included accepting low-paying and hard income-generating activities, as well as a respectful and morally upright behaviour, were essential for them to be valued by the community and contribute to it.

These views of adult men provide important insights into the challenges young men and women face when crafting their own vision for their future, as the views of adult men represent the cultural circumstances of their close environments, which young people need to adapt, reject or negotiate when becoming young adults (Cole, 2011). Adult men were not necessarily aware that the social world young people navigate is more urbanized, mobile and globally networked than ever before (Sawyer et al., 2018), lacking an understanding of how this shapes their health and lifestyles. As their image of the world young people navigate is not always compatible with young people's realities, adult men's solutions and expectations, for example, about taking any available jobs, might be inappropriate. This is likely to put additional pressures on young people to carve out and make decisions on their own future. The influence of adults' social norms and expectations on young people could potentially also have an impact on the implementation of interventions that are offered to young people to improve their livelihoods, well-being and health. To this day, these influences are rarely acknowledged or addressed in the design and delivery of impact interventions, despite the fact that we know that the opinion of the social environment yields an influence on young people in their decision whether to participate in an intervention or not (Aguirre Velasco et al., 2020).

Our study has several limitations. Despite emerging as a prominent issue, our photovoice study never aimed to investigate adult men's views of young people. A more dedicated study would have provided more diverse and therefore comprehensive perspectives, including the voices of young people themselves or adult women. Nevertheless, getting adult men's views of young people is a first step in this direction and it should be noted that seven of our participants were aged 25 or younger. Furthermore, the focus of the preceding qualitative interviews on men's views and experiences of violence against women might have led men to raise the issue of gender inequality due to social desirability. While most men took many pictures, a few men only took a limited number, citing time constraints, suggesting that the pictures only provide a snapshot of viewpoints and insights in this community. Still, the photovoice provided unique insights that did not emerge from the in-depth interviews, allowing participants to lead the narrative of the subsequent interviews by permitting them to prioritize issues that are most important to them (Nykiforuk et al., 2011).

5. Conclusion

The future of young people is a primary concern for many adult men in Mwanza, Tanzania. The latter have high expectations of them regarding their creativity and potential, but also in respect to their moral and normative behaviour. Interventions seeking to promote young people's livelihoods and well-being need to be aware of these contextual expectations in their programming as programmes involving young people do not happen in a vacuum but in a social fabric that is governed by norms and expectations that are seldom clear to people.

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