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The implications of gender-based violence on access to land for rural women's empowerment in patrilineal societies in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) perpetuates inequality, particularly in land ownership, disadvantaging women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite policies to address GBV, women in patrilineal societies like rural Tanzania still face discrimination in accessing land. While studies have explored gender gaps in economic performance, little research examines how GBV impacts women's land rights in these communities. This paper analyzes GBV's implications using desk review data, revealing persistent discrimination despite Tanzania's supportive policies. Key factors driving GBV and restricting land access are categorized as physical, socio-cultural, and individual. The study highlights how GBV reinforces systemic barriers, limiting women's asset ownership. By identifying these factors, the paper provides insights into improving women's empowerment and suggests policy measures to enhance their well-being. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address GBV and promote equitable land rights in Tanzania.

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Introduction

Promoting gender equality in access to land and ownership of assets is globally recognized as essential for sustainable development. In sub-Saharan Africa, the systems that define access to land and ownership of assets have continually been under debate because they warrant the exclusion of women (Dlamini, 2021; Muperere et al., 2021), hence being the basis of gender-based violence (GBV) against women. According to the World Health Organization (2022), approximately 1 in 3 women in sub-Saharan Africa experience some form of GBV, with economic violence such as denial of land ownership—being a significant contributor. GBV is the ferocity directed towards an individual on account of gender. It encompasses acts that impose physical, emotional, mental or sexual suffering or harm, threats of such acts, coercion and other liberty deprivations (Dlamini, 2021). It is a global concern since it has implications on people's economic, social, psychological and political well-being (Davies & True, 2024; Iyanda et al., 2021). Violence is regarded as gendered because it is committed against others just because they are women. GBV is not acceptable since it is a violation of human rights, which ruins the lives of women. It is a phenomenon that transverse cultures, nations, religions, and classes. Although violence against women is confronted as a crime against humanity in many nations, it has remained persistent (Davies & True, 2024; Iyanda et al., 2021; WHO, 2022).

GBV refers to any harmful act committed against an individual based on gender differences. It includes acts of force (physical or verbal) directed at an individual to inflict bodily or mental harm on him/her and perpetuate subordination (Murhula et al., 2021). The term also refers to the scopes within which violence against women occurs (Nkya, 2020). According to literature, GBV takes different forms such as sexual assault, rape, forced marriage, physical assault, denial of opportunities, resources or services (economic), and emotional or psychological abuse as different forms of GBV (Ajibefun et al., 2021; Murhula

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et al., 2021). The meaning of GBV has recently been extended to include acts that result from unequal power relations between women and men, especially in matters that have to do with ownership of resources, including land. This paper addresses the economic form of GBV, focusing on its impact on women's access to and control of land. In Africa, the mentioned form of GBV results from gender inequality between women and men in the ownership of resources, including land. In patrilineal societies of Africa, GBV has proved persistent, as family properties are primarily under men's control (Edwards-Jauch, 2022). For instance, a study by the Food and Agriculture Organization indicates that women in sub-Saharan Africa own less than 15% of agricultural land, despite contributing over 60% of labor to food production.

In these societies, women are deprived of the right to inherit land and other properties as individuals such that they can only inherit them through their spouses (Mhango & Matemba, 2024). The denial of women from inheriting or accessing land has many negative effects on societies, including a perpetual increase in gender inequality and masculinity (Dlamini, 2021). While they are denied the right to inherit land and other family properties, women contribute more to household food security than men do (Bapolisi et al., 2021), which means that they are the main breadwinners, especially in rural families (Hasan et al., 2021; Ibnouf, 2020; Singh & Helms, 2020). Therefore, denying them the right to access and own land counts among the GBV issues that are detrimental to the well-being of the entire humanity.

In Tanzania, GBV is perpetrated under the patriarchal ideology, a social apparatus that puts women under men's subordination by giving men power and ownership of resources, including land, while keeping women powerless and without ownership rights (Maliganya & Kalinga, 2023). Tanzania ranks among the lowest in gender equality for land ownership, with only 19% of women holding land titles compared to 81% of men, as reported by the Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics. Tanzania's land governance is structured around two primary statutes—the Land Act No. 4 of 1999 and the Village Land Act No. 5 of 1999. The Land Act provides for general land administration while the Village Land Act specifically governs customary land rights in rural areas, where most women reside. These Acts recognize women's rights to own, inherit, and use land either individually or jointly. Despite these legal provisions, enforcement remains weak, and customary practices often prevail, limiting women's practical access and control over land. Customary law, which governs the majority of land transactions in rural Tanzania, frequently places women at a disadvantage, especially in inheritance matters. While the legal framework acknowledges equality in land ownership, deep-rooted patriarchal norms continue to override statutory protections. This disconnect between legal provisions and practical realities underscores the systemic barriers that perpetuate GBV and restrict women's land rights, setting the stage for examining the specific implications in Tanzania.

Given the prevalence of GBV in the patrilineal societies of Africa, some efforts, including establishing policies and programs within governments and Non-Governmental and Faith-Based Organizations such as churches and mosques, have been implemented to combat it in many African countries (Magezi & Manzanga, 2020). Other efforts include the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995; the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development of 1997 (Ngaiza & Omari, 2022), and the 2003 Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. In Tanzania, the Customary Laws, Islamic laws, statutory laws, the 1997 Constitution and the Declaration Order of 1963 which all prohibit gender discrimination (Mhango & Matemba, 2024) have been applied to solve issues related to GBV. Nonetheless, using international laws on GBV issues, including the 2003 Maputo Protocol, has remained a daunting challenge. Hence, it is therefore increasingly becoming evident that unless they are customized to fit the different laws used to address GBV-related issues (Ngaiza & Omari, 2022), GBV will persist.

Despite the presence of sound legal frameworks for addressing GBV, gender inequality in access to and ownership of land persists in many African societies. This is largely a result of the ordinary utility of accepted laws among leaders, women, and men (Davies & True, 2024). Studies have examined the gender gap in firm performance indicators that characterize sales and employment growth in Africa (Nguyen et al., 2023; Rude, 2022; Sun & Zou, 2021). However, little is known about how gender-based violence affects women's access to and ownership of land in the patrilineal societies of sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the context of Tanzania (Nguyen et al., 2023; Rude, 2022; Sun & Zou, 2021). According to Kongela (2020), inequality in land ownership between men and women is a worldwide challenge, Africa and Tanzania included.

Previous studies report mixed findings on gender inequality in land ownership in Tanzania (Lusasi & Mwaseba, 2020). Some report that women are more favored than men in land issues (Mkoba & Krieken, 2020). Others (e.g. Muperere et al., 2021) report that women are unprivileged. Muperere et al. (2021) points out that 'Women's entitlements in using and managing land and other resources can pave the way to their well-being and empowerment, especially in the least developed nations.' Nevertheless, little is known about how GBV affects women's access to resources such as land for women in rural areas. This gap in understanding is particularly critical given that rural women in Tanzania, who constitute approximately 70% of the female population (Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), face heightened vulnerabilities due to customary practices that prioritize male land ownership. Although the empowerment of women in patrilineal societies has been a topic of interest, very few studies on this issue have been conducted. In filling the identified gap, it is essential to probe more by analyzing the implications of GBV on women's access to and ownership of land in the patrilineal societies of Tanzania. Therefore, this paper examines the policy environment for addressing GBV in land ownership and access, the implications of GBV on women's access to and ownership of land resources, and the factors behind GBV which limits women's access to land in Tanzania.

2. Theoretical perspectives

In response to the complex nature of gender inequality in land ownership and its connection to GBV, this paper adopted the Radical Feminist Theory as the primary theoretical lens. This theory was selected because it directly confronts the systemic patriarchal structures that exclude women from land ownership in Tanzania's patrilineal societies, offering a clear lens to examine the roots of economic violence. This theory best aligns with the paper's objective of exploring structural power imbalances that hinder women's access to, control of, and ownership of land in patrilineal societies such as those found in Tanzania. Patriarchy, understood as a system where men hold dominant power over social, legal, and economic institutions, underpins these imbalances. The Radical Feminist Theory posits that patriarchy is the oldest and most entrenched form of domination, with male control over women institutionalized in social, legal, and economic structures of governance (Brandão, 2023). According to this theory, patriarchal domination not only determines household power dynamics but also shapes broader community norms, customs, and institutional arrangements—including land tenure systems. For instance, in rural Tanzania, customary practices often favor male heirs, restricting women's independent access to land despite legal protections.

These patterns of control manifest in the persistent exclusion of women from land inheritance and ownership, despite legal reforms intended to promote gender equality. Radical feminists argue that the root of women's oppression is located in male supremacy, which is sustained through family structures, traditional customs, and gendered interpretations of resource ownership. This perspective highlights how men are positioned as primary custodians of land, perpetuating women's subordination. In the context of Tanzania, where both statutory and customary land laws exist, the latter tends to reinforce patriarchal norms that deprive women of land ownership even when legal frameworks attempt to guarantee equality (Maliganya & Kalinga, 2023). This theoretical approach is particularly useful for understanding how GBV—including economic violence emerges from structural power imbalances that privilege men as custodians and inheritors of land. Economic violence, such as denying women land rights, reinforces their dependence and vulnerability, a key concern this study seeks to address.

Drawing on Radical Feminist Theory, this study reframes land inequality as more than a legal or economic issue, presenting it as a profound expression of patriarchal control that requires transformation through legal reforms and socio-cultural change. This framing shifts the focus to the deep-rooted societal norms that sustain gender disparities, urging both policy changes and cultural shifts. Radical Feminist Theory provides a powerful analytical framework for exploring the connection between GBV and women's restricted access to land. It enables the study to investigate how institutional policies, family dynamics and community practices interlock to limit women's land rights. This perspective enables a critical analysis of institutional, familial, and community practices that uphold gender disparities in resource ownership, highlighting the systemic obstacles that must be addressed to achieve equitable land access.

Ultimately, this framework guides the study in uncovering actionable pathways to dismantle patriarchal barriers and promote equitable land access for women in Tanzania.

3. Methodology

This paper is based on desk-based research, which involved the systematic review and analysis of secondary data sources. This method enabled us to immerse ourselves in the policies and narratives shaping women's experiences, uncovering rich insights into the challenges they encounter. This approach enabled the researchers to extract in-depth, context-rich insights from policy texts, legal frameworks and academic literature related to GBV and land ownership. The aim was to assess the status and implications of GBV on women's access to and ownership of land in Tanzania, in light of the government's policy and legal efforts to address these inequalities. Through this careful exploration, we sought to understand how Tanzania's legal and policy frameworks impact women's ability to secure land rights in practice.

A systematic documentary review approach was used to collect published and unpublished secondary data. The process began with a deliberate effort to gather diverse sources, ensuring a comprehensive view of GBV and land rights issues. The documents reviewed included national policies, development plans, gender equality laws, and international human rights instruments. For instance, we analyzed Tanzania's Gender Policy of 2003 to evaluate its commitments to gender equity, alongside international frameworks like the Maputo Protocol to assess their influence on national policies. Additionally, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and relevant grey literature were accessed through academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, and official websites of government institutions (e.g., Tanzania Ministry of Lands, and UN Women). We employed targeted searches using terms like 'gender-based violence Tanzania', 'women's land ownership' and 'customary land tenure' to identify relevant materials, ensuring a broad and inclusive collection of sources. Secondary data sources were policies and legal provisions, such as the Gender Policy of 2003, the 1995 Land Policy, and other related literature. Different resources such as reports, policies, laws, and various studies on GBV were reviewed to get the required information. The collected data were assembled to remove duplication and brought up together in a usable format before being analyzed to answer the objectives of this paper.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (i) documents published between 1995 and 2023 that specifically address GBV, land access, women's rights and related policy frameworks in Tanzania or sub-Saharan Africa; (ii) relevance to the objectives of this study; (iii) availability in English and (iv) credibility of source (e.g. government or academic). The 1995–2023 timeframe was selected to encompass Tanzania's pivotal land reforms, starting with the 1995 Land Policy, while the English-language requirement facilitated consistent analysis. We prioritized credible sources, such as peer-reviewed articles and official reports from the Ministry of Lands, over less reliable materials like unverified online posts. Documents that were out of scope, duplicated across sources, or lacked adequate methodological rigor were excluded. In total, 35 key documents were reviewed. This selection process involved meticulous screening to confirm that each document directly contributed to understanding GBV's impact on land rights, such as studies addressing customary inheritance practices. Documents reviewed are presented in [Table 1](#). The purpose of this approach was to examine GBV in the context of land rights by assessing government efforts to create an enabling environment for equitable access to land and other assets.

The materials were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This approach allowed us to engage deeply with the documents, identifying patterns that illuminate the systemic barriers women face in accessing land. The process involved open coding, where recurring words and phrases relating to gender-based violence, land policy, and access inequalities were identified. Words like 'patriarchal norms', 'land tenure disparities' and 'economic violence' surfaced repeatedly, guiding our focus on key issues. Codes were then organized into broader themes (e.g., legal barriers, customary practices, policy gaps), which were compared and synthesized. Interpretation of these themes formed the basis for answering the research objectives and drawing conclusions. [Table 1](#) presents a selection of key documents reviewed in the study.

To ensure robust findings, we employed triangulation, cross-referencing policy documents with scholarly critiques and government evaluations to validate our interpretations. To ensure the credibility and quality of data, triangulation was applied by comparing policy texts with scholarly critiques and

Table 1. Policy/acts/documents reviewed.

S/N	Policies/documents reviewed in brief	Year
1	The draft National Land Policy of 2016 attempts to address the core problems related to poor coordination and implementation of the earlier Land Policy of 1995 (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development, 2016).	2016
2	Tanzania National Land Policy 2nd Edition	1997
3	Women and Gender Development Policy which was adopted in 2000. The Policy emphasizes the integration of gender equality in policies, plans, development strategies, and actions in all sectors and levels in the development process. The policy also empowers women by giving them more opportunities in all spheres, including politics, leadership positions, management, and economic development (URT, 2004)	2000
4	The third National Five-Year Development Plan (FYDP III) for the period 2021/2026 is a nationwide multisector document aiming at achieving the goals set in the National Development Vision 2025. The plan aims to improve the agricultural sector by strengthening effective training and research programs to benefit key stakeholders, including youth, women, and people with disabilities. The plan targets to improve Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment in the Country (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2021)	June 2021
5	The National Micro-Finance Policy (2000) establishes guidelines for achieving gender equity in access to financial services to empower women economically.	2000
6	The Land Act No. 4 and The Village Land Act No. 5 of 1999. An Act to provide for the management and administration of land in villages and related matters. Grant and Management of Customary Rights of Occupancy have also been discussed (The United Republic of Tanzania, 1999)	1999
7	United Nations Gender Equality Policy of 2011: The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is charged with assisting in the realization of all human rights for all people. As a result, non-discrimination based on gender is a fundamental principle of human rights law (UN Women, 2011)	2011

Source: Authors construction, 2022.

evaluations from peer-reviewed sources. We further enhanced reliability by systematically documenting the coding process and conducting multiple reviews of codes to ensure consistency, thereby strengthening the validity of our qualitative analysis. Documents were selected to ensure representation across time (from 1995 to 2023), policy types (national, regional, international), and domains (legal, economic, social). This thoughtful selection process helped us construct a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between policies, laws and social practices affecting women's land rights in Tanzania.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the key findings obtained for this paper. Specifically, the section starts by presenting the strategies of addressing GBV in women's access to land; the implications of GBV on women in accessing and owning land and assessing the perceived factors promoting gender-based violence against women's access to land. To ensure clarity, we employed qualitative content analysis, systematically coding data from 35 documents to identify themes that directly address our research questions: what strategies mitigate GBV in land access, how GBV impacts women's land rights, and what factors perpetuate this violence. This method allowed us to uncover patterns and insights aligned with our objectives of evaluating Tanzania's policy environment and GBV's effects on women's land ownership.

4.1. Strategies of addressing GBV in women's access to land

The data in Table 2 imply that gender parity in land ownership is yet to be achieved as men still hold larger proportions of land compared to women. This discrepancy is an indication of ineffective application of land rights, (Idriss, 2023). Table 2 summarizes key strategies from global and Tanzanian sources, highlighting efforts to empower women, reform laws and engage communities to address GBV in land access, directly responding to our objective of assessing policy effectiveness. As such Magambo and Nyamwesa (2022) argue that, the government does not have to keep on making more laws, policies, and regulations; rather it has to focus on ensuring effective enforcement, implementation, and monitoring of the existing ones. Along this, there is a need to educate the community on women's property rights. Then, the government's policy objectives have to include gender mainstreaming and enhancing women's participation in development activities and decision-making. Such objectives will act as game changers

Table 2. Strategies to address GBV in women's access to land.

No.	Source	Strategies
1	SIDA (2015)	A shift of focus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing women as survivors, actors, and agents of change through empowerment Women's economic empowerment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower women as agents of change. • Promote women's economic empowerment. • Secure women's land and property rights.
2	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2012)	Policy Making and Legal Protection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce and enforce GBV legislation. • Promote gender equity among men and boys. • Collaborate with faith-based and cultural authorities.
3	USAID (2020)	Train partners on handling GBV in land documentation. Include women in land documentation processes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement gender-responsive conflict resolution. • Conduct community awareness programs. • Collaborate with traditional authorities for gender equality. • Collect and analyse data on land and GBV links.
4	Global Protection Cluster (2019)	Involve women and vulnerable groups in HLP evaluations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess to protection of HLP rights for women and vulnerable groups. • Collaborate across sectors to address GBV threats.
5	U.N. (2013)	Ensure women's participation in decision-making. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address all forms of discrimination. • Align laws and policies for gender equality. • Secure women's land rights constitutionally.

Source: Authors reviews, 2022.

in the mission of addressing the concerns. These recommendations underscore the need for practical action, aligning with our goal to identify actionable strategies that empower women and reduce GBV in land ownership.

Putting this in the context of Tanzania, one can comprehend that having a female president for the first time in Tanzania's history indicates that gender inclusiveness in political affairs has been made into practical terms. The country has specific policies and procedures developed as strategies to reduce poverty and address women's issues. These include the Gender-Focused Trade Policy (2023), Small and Medium Enterprise Development Strategy (2023), Mingude and Dejene (2021) and Agricultural Development Strategy (2022). It is also vital to encourage specific community-based programs as a way to fight poverty. Such programs that are underway in Tanzania include the Health, Sanitation, and Water, Community Social Development Programme, the Social Action Trust Fund, and the Social Action Fund. These programs have sections that focus on vulnerable groups to improve their standards of living. These initiatives reflect Tanzania's commitment to gender equity, supporting our objective to evaluate how policy efforts create an enabling environment for women's land rights, though challenges in implementation persist.

The strategies for addressing GBV take into account the importance of empowering women, particularly in patrilineal societies. Empowering women in land issues gives them the power to access, own, and use land for individual, family, and national development purposes (Mubofu & Mambo, 2021). From the perspective of the Radical Feminist Theory, these strategies are not just developmental—they are interventions aimed at dismantling structural male dominance embedded in customary land tenure systems. Focusing on empowerment, legal reform, and participation, the strategies counteract the patriarchal norms that have historically denied women equal land rights. Literature has analyzed them and discussed women's access to and ownership of land and other properties. The strategies discussed in the literature are presented in Table 1. This alignment with Radical Feminist Theory highlights how our findings address the objective of understanding GBV as a structural barrier, emphasizing the need for transformative change in Tanzania's land tenure systems.

4.2. The implications of GBV on women in accessing and owning land

GBV has numerous implications according to various studies conducted in other African communities. The repercussions of GBV for legal aid and services imply that women are disadvantaged in necessities including the right to own resources including land (Nkya, 2020). The implications are summarized in

Table 3. Table 3 outlines the severe consequences of GBV, such as exclusion from decision-making and limited land access, directly addressing our objective to assess how GBV undermines women's land ownership and perpetuates inequality.

Table 3 shows the different implications of GBV on women's access to and control of land. Among the implications are inadequate participation of women in decision-making on land issues, limited use of communal land by women, discrimination in land ownership, gender inequality and loss of control over the land. The implications of GBV are more observed among unemployed women than among employed ones (Miranda, 2020). This is because employed women are empowered economically, socially, and psychologically, thus capable of fighting for their right to access and own land. These findings underscore the Radical Feminist perspective that GBV in land access is not only a social or cultural issue but a structural form of oppression entrenched in the broader power hierarchy. Women's exclusion from land ownership is used as a mechanism to maintain dependency and subjugation. The lack of formal land rights leaves women economically vulnerable, reinforcing the cycle of powerlessness and making them more susceptible to other forms of gender-based abuse. These insights directly address our objective to examine GBV's impact, revealing how it perpetuates economic vulnerability and limits women's autonomy in Tanzania.

Allowing women to own land has many benefits, including improvement of household economy and security, reduction of all kinds of violence, and removal of inheritance biases to enhance gender equality (Ali, 2023; Doneys et al., 2022). Thus, land ownership can lead to economic empowerment of women. However, there are problems facing women who own land, including being threatened by husbands and husbands' families, being labelled selfish and being isolated from the husband's family members (Antwi-Agyei et al., 2023). These problems lead to psychological torture and discouragement of women, hence the need for women to understand that they have equal rights to access and own land like men. This duality of empowerment and resistance underscores our research focus on the complex implications of GBV, highlighting the need for both legal protections and cultural shifts to support women's land rights.

4.3. Factors promoting gender-based violence against women's access to land

The factors influencing GBV against women in access to land have been divided into physical, social, cultural and individual, as shown in Table 4. The individual factors promoting GBV against women's access to land are also discussed. Table 4 categorizes the multifaceted factors driving GBV, from poor law enforcement to cultural norms, addressing our objective to identify the root causes perpetuating violence in land access.

Table 3. The implications of GBV on women in accessing and owning land.

No.	Author(s)	Findings on implications of GBV
1	Mingude & Dejene (2021)	Women are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to funds & credits • Excluded in decision-making on land issues • Faced with discrimination laws (inheritance) • Limited in using communal land • Excluded in the property right
2	Miranda (2020)	Ownership of land by women leads to an increase in their empowerment and a decrease in instances of violence against them.
3	Malapit et al. (2020)	• GBV is a result of men and women disempowered
4	Maliganya & Kalinga (2023)	• Women have no control over land as the primary resource in the rural areas
5	Mwamasangula & Gibore (2024)	• Lack of legal ownership of land; women are required to access land through their husbands
6	Muperere et al. (2021)	• Women are discriminated against from land-owning • Gender inequality on land issues
7	Albezreh et al. (2022)	• Lacking sufficient assets to fight for their right to land • Women encounter obstacles when trying to obtain land for farming due to conflict between them and men within families

Source: Authors reviews, 2022.

Table 4. Factors promoting GBV regarding women's access to land.

No.	Factors	Issues
1	Physical factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor enforcement of law • Family and community structure • Lack of livelihood opportunities
2	Sociocultural factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture • Religion, laws, and norms • Family breakdown • Lack of confidence
3	Individual factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brother's complex and self-hurt (Igbolekwu et al., 2023) • Isolation/discrimination • Stigma • Lack of information on gender equality • The misconception of gender equality • Poor participation in sensitive gender equality programs

Source: Authors reviews, 2022.

4.3.1. Physical factors promoting gender-based violence against women's access to land

As indicated in Table 4, the physical factors that influence GBV against women in access to land stem from poor enforcement of laws on gender equality in land issues, family and community structure whereby males are seen as superior and land owners, especially in patrilineal societies, and lack of livelihood opportunities. According to Lusasi and Mwaseba (2020), women face symbolic violence due to the patriarchal system that portrays men as dominant and women as subordinate. Therefore, family and community structures are obstacles to attaining gender equality in land issues. Other studies reveal that there are sound policies and programs for ending gender equality but they are poorly implemented (Filate, 2022). This leads to the continuing gender imbalance in patrilineal societies. It is necessary to ensure that the community is empowered through education on equal power relations which results in gender parity in access and ownership of resources like land. This would motivate women to work hard to ensure food security and enable them to use land as collateral to get loans for investment in other livelihood activities. These findings align with our research question on factors promoting GBV, emphasizing how weak enforcement and patriarchal structures hinder equitable land access.

Property grabbing is another physical factor that influence GBV against women in patrilineal societies in Tanzania (Chianchiano, 2021). Due to this, some women die in the process of protecting their property, while others lose their homes and means of support. Moreover, the harassment and humiliation involved in property grabbing damages women's self-esteem, making it harder for them to stand up for their rights (Eniola & Aremo, 2023). In Africa, (Tanzania included), unequal distribution and ownership of land between women and men is reported to have different effects. Most studies report that women are discriminated in land ownership (Muperere et al., 2021; Lusasi & Mwaseba, 2020), but some researchers show that they (women) are not (Kongela, 2020). This analysis responds to our objective of identifying GBV factors, highlighting how physical barriers like property grabbing exacerbate women's vulnerability.

4.3.2. Socio-cultural factors influencing gender-based violence against women in access to land

The socio-cultural factors influencing GBV against women in access to land are related to the way a certain community's culture can determine land ownership based on gender relationships. They are also related to religious laws and norms, and family breakdown. In the patrilineal societies in Tanzania, a married woman is usually viewed as a foreigner and an outsider with no right to own land in the clan (Felix & Kayode, 2023). She is expected to act this way to persuade the clan that she is the right person to be trusted in the new clan. Therefore, she must behave appropriately towards her mother-in-law for the first few years (Felix & Kayode, 2023). So, women think that once they gain their in-laws' trust, they will be more likely to rely on them for support in times of difficulty. Acting decently during the first few years can also help a woman learn more about her husband's clan. She needs to be aware of the process used to make decisions and understand when and how to challenge the new clan. These cultural expectations illuminate our research question on GBV factors, revealing how deeply ingrained norms restrict women's land rights and perpetuate violence.

In patrilineal societies, a woman is considered her man's property and thus she cannot own any resources. Even in her parent's home, she cannot own land (Amoako, 2024). Women do not inherit land

from their parents as the community expects them to access land from their spouses upon marriage (Issa-Zacharia & Marení, 2024). Traditionally, Tanzania has had both matrilineal and patrilineal systems, with matrilineal communities (e.g. Luguru, Zaramo, Makonde, Yao) once allowing land inheritance through the female line (Kongela, 2020). However, as Gray et al. (2024) argue, matrilineal societies have undergone a significant transformation, especially after the villagization program of the 1970s which imposed uniform land administration systems. These reforms disrupted customary practices and often replaced them with male-centered systems, thereby weakening traditional matrilineal inheritance rights. In contrast, patrilineal societies continue to dominate, where men are the exclusive custodians of land, and women can only access land through marriage or male relatives. Even in matrilineal communities that still exist today, the introduction of statutory legal frameworks and male-dominated political structures has eroded the authority of women as land custodians. Thus, the line between the two systems has increasingly blurred, with patrilineal dominance becoming the norm. Today, matrilineal norms have begun to change because of different factors. Similarly, patrilineal societies have also begun changing, leading to egalitarianism or mutual decision-making among spouses (Kilgallen et al., 2022). Despite the changes pointed out by Kongela (2020), Gray et al. (2024) reiterate that patriarchal communities still dominate in Tanzania. Consequently, the miscellaneous results regarding gender inequality in land ownership based on either matrilineal or patrilineal societies in Tanzania call for the policy environment to be further reviewed to allow equality in land distribution among men and women in the country unquestionably. This discussion further supports the Radical Feminist view that patriarchy adapts and reasserts itself even within systems originally favorable to women, such as matrilineal societies. The shift in land governance norms over time reflects how structural power seeks to entrench male authority, even when legal or customary practices begin to evolve. This historical shift addresses our objective to understand GBV's structural roots, showing how cultural changes have reinforced patriarchal control over land.

4.3.3. Individual factors promoting gender-based violence against women's access to land

Individual factors for GBV against women's access to land are viewed as a combination of isolation/discrimination, stigma, exposure to GBV, the lack of information on gender equality (Muperere et al., 2021; Popoola et al., 2023). The misconception of gender equality and a lack of participation in sensitive gender equality programs (Sekoni, 2023). There are incidences where an individual faces different obstacles, which aggravate gender inequality in patrilineal societies. A lack of awareness about the regulatory framework and individual rights makes many women blind about what to do. Also, many women are exposed to GBV as a result of culture as well as family and community systems, where women are considered weak and less valued. Most of them are less informed on gender issues and their land rights. These individual barriers directly respond to our research question on GBV factors, highlighting how lack of awareness and societal stigma undermine women's ability to claim land rights.

There are established laws and policies, including property and land laws and land Acts which need to be harmonized to protect women on land issues. Protecting women can be achieved by promoting gender equality in ownership and access to land. In Tanzania, women's land rights are protected by legal frameworks such as property, inheritance, matrimonial, and human rights (Munisi, 2023). However, literature shows that what is in the legal framework differs from what is practiced. This is because women are less aware of the legal frameworks that state their rights to own and access land (Lusasi & Mwaseba, 2020; Muperere et al., 2021). Thus, it is vital for the legal frameworks, including laws that protect women on land issues be mainstreamed and enforced in the patrilineal societies in Tanzania to ensure equality in land ownership by formalizing land tenure and issuing land titles. This can act as one of the measures to combat GBV through improved power relations between women and men as far as ownership of resources for economic empowerment is concerned. This gap between policy and practice supports our objective to evaluate Tanzania's policy environment, underscoring the need for education and enforcement to bridge this divide.

The formalization of land tenure significantly motivates both general development and women's empowerment. However, as a counterpoint to tenure formalization, a traditional land tenure system is

frequently considerably biased against women, especially in African countries including Tanzania. Ali (2023) propounds that the vast margin of women's land titling, which we refer to as the limitation of these changes, must be overcome in any policy aspect to increase their land ownership. According to Muperere et al. (2021), most rural women are illiterate or unaware of the present entitlements and less involved in administration institutions. Therefore, the process of empowering women on land ownership needs to be accompanied by the provision of education on the legal framework for land ownership, the customary tenure system, and accessing social identity. The Tanzanian government's on-going efforts to formalize land tenure overlook the gender dimension, thus the current policy also formalizes the existing skewed female land ownership arrangements (Muperere et al., 2021). The status of women's informal land ownership, which is still not legally established in the country, has raised concerns among many gender activists. The 1999 Land Act, which incorporates many sections guaranteeing ownership rights to women who co-live with their spouses, is lauded as one of the land laws that recognize women's rights as landowners. However, the legal revisions have not fully been translated into ownership rights (Ali, 2023; Hasunga et al., 2022). These findings align with our objective to assess policy effectiveness, revealing how formalization efforts fail to address gender disparities without targeted interventions.

Solar and Ricart (2022) influenced Tanzania's land tenure formalization. This theory underscores that formalization would mean freeing up the informal sector's 'dead capital' and promoting economic development. This disagreement is explained by its rarity and the importance accorded to it. Although this is a common challenge for all, women are considered the most disadvantaged group. More efforts are being made to guarantee equitable land access for gender-inclusive sustainable development (Ngohengo, 2022). Despite the Tanzanian efforts to address gender inequality concerning land ownership through the reforms of land laws. Ngohengo (2022) recently established that there had been a significant shift in how men obtain and govern the land, outranking customary matrilineal norms. It was thus concluded that when formulating diverse resource access and resource mobilization policies in Africa, policymakers and governments should consider this issue from the perspective of gender equality. This shift in land governance addresses our research question on GBV factors, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive policies to counteract male-dominated systems.

Several principles were established by the 1999 Land Act, which was updated in 2019 to help protect women's land rights. The impact of these reforms has been negligible thus far, as studies on land laws report that gender disparities are associated with women's access, control, and ownership of land (Muperere et al., 2021). Tanzania is ranked 130th out of 159 countries with a high gender inequality index score of 0.539 (Magambo & Nyamwesa, 2022; Vyas et al., 2023). This ranking contextualizes our findings, supporting our objective to highlight the persistent gender disparities in Tanzania's land ownership landscape and the urgent need for effective policy implementation.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This study has explored the profound implications of gender-based violence on rural women's access to land and their broader empowerment within Tanzania's patrilineal societies. It has identified key barriers physical, socio-cultural and individual that perpetuate systemic discrimination, limiting women's ability to own and control land resources despite legal frameworks like the Land Act of 1999. These barriers, including patriarchal norms, weak law enforcement, and limited legal awareness, not only restrict women's economic agency but also heighten their vulnerability to violence and exploitation. The findings highlight that, while women are vital to Tanzania's agricultural and economic development, rooted gender biases and inadequate institutional support continue to weaken their land rights and inclusive empowerment.

To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is essential. Strengthening the enforcement of gender sensitive land laws through inclusive local governance structures, particularly by integrating women into decision-making roles, is critical to aligning customary practices with national standards. Community-based legal education, delivered through accessible platforms like radio broadcasts and village meetings in local languages, should be prioritized to empower women with knowledge of their rights. Additionally, providing affordable or free legal aid services and engaging traditional leaders to challenge discriminatory norms will foster an enabling environment for equitable land access. These coordinated

efforts, combining legal reform, education and cultural transformation, offer a pathway to reducing GBV, enhancing women's land ownership, and promoting inclusive development across Tanzanian communities.

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Author contributions

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Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available in a publicly accessible repository, upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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