

## RESEARCH

# Pathways of romantic jealousy to intimate partner violence in Mwanza, northern Tanzania

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## Funding information

European Research Council Grant IPV Tanzania, Grant/Award Number: 716458

## Abstract

**Objective:** The goal of this research is to establish the pathways through which romantic jealousy leads to intimate partner violence.

**Background:** Physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence is widespread, with one in four women reporting it globally. Romantic jealousy is a known risk factor for intimate partner violence, yet little is known about the pathways that link it to intimate partner violence, especially in Africa.

**Method:** We used a qualitative design, interviewing 18 adult women in Northern Tanzania to understand their experiences and reflections of intimate partner violence. To grasp the mechanisms through which jealousy can trigger intimate partner violence, our analysis utilizes the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

**Results:** Intimate partner violence and romantic jealousy emerged as major issues in women's lives in this study. We established six pathways linking these variables: women confronting their partners because of infidelity, partners' anger because women confronted their mistress, women refusing to have sex or talk with their partners because they were jealous, male partners failing to control or regulate their emotions and becoming violent, and men feeling that their masculinity is threatened.

**Conclusion:** In this study, intimate partner violence against women was largely men's reaction to their interpretation of perceived triggers of romantic jealousy and emotions as a threat to their masculinity and dominance.

**Implications:** Interventions aiming to prevent intimate partner violence need to address the pathways linking the

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violence to romantic jealousy and include this connection in their programming.

#### KEYWORDS

Africa, hegemonic masculinity, intimate partner violence, pathways, romantic jealousy

## INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a multifaceted human rights violation ingrained in gender and structural inequalities within society, impacting women's physical, mental, and emotional health (García-Moreno & Stöckl, 2009). Globally, at least one in four women experience physical and/or sexual IPV during their lifetime (Sardinha et al., 2022). In Africa, 33% of women reported physical and sexual IPV and nonpartner sexual violence in their lifetimes, among the highest levels globally (Sardinha et al., 2022).

Over the past few years, there has been a diversification of programs aimed at preventing and addressing IPV. These include but are not limited to supporting women's economic empowerment, health sector approaches, community mobilization, and legislative and justice sector responses, as well as policy commitment and legislative reforms (Ellsberg et al., 2015). Yet, the number of women subjected to IPV from their partners globally has largely remained unchanged (Sardinha et al., 2022). Research suggests that designing and implementing effective IPV interventions requires a deeper understanding of the risk factors of IPV (Starmann et al., 2017). The risk factors need to include those that are direct causes of IPV as well as those highlighting common characteristics of those experiencing and perpetrating IPV.

Romantic jealousy has been established as a key risk factor for IPV (Foran & O'Leary, 2008). Romantic jealousy is defined as a complex set of emotions, thoughts, or actions that accompanies the behavioral expressive component of control, anger, frustration, tension, or embarrassment, following a threat to the existence or quality of a relationship (Babcock et al., 2004; White, 1981). Emotions of romantic jealousy are paradoxical and have the ability to threaten and endanger the very relationship an individual is trying to protect (Cano & O'Leary, 1997). Experience of this jealousy may lead to consequences for the person expressing it, the partner, and even the rival perceived or proven to threaten the relationship (Martínez-León et al., 2017).

People across all societies and cultures often misinterpret romantic jealousy as a sign that their partners care and, therefore, as an expression of love (Boyce et al., 2016). The feelings that romantic jealousy causes are experienced by both men and women and expressions of romantic jealousy depend on personality, relational features, and the cultural context (Aloyce et al., 2022; Buss, 2000; Cano & O'Leary, 1997). However, there are various negative consequences of romantic jealousy, such as physical and emotional IPV impacting women (Pavela et al., 2014), which highlights the gendered nature of romantic jealousy that puts women in a disadvantageous position. Jealousy is one of the major motivations for men to murder their female partners, whereas the majority of women reported murdering their partners as self-defense against violence and intimidation (Campbell et al., 2003; Stöckl et al., 2013; Wilson & Daly, 1993).

Understanding romantic jealousy as a risk factor for IPV is crucial for designing appropriate IPV prevention strategies. A recent systematic review focused on identifying the pathways leading from romantic jealousy to IPV established a gap in evidence from low- and middle-income countries, especially from sub-Saharan Africa. The systematic review found few of the studies provided an in-depth qualitative exploration (Pichon et al., 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, two studies have reported that men often reacted with violence in response to their own perceived or proven jealousy when their partner interacted with other men or were not at home (Aloyce et al., 2022; Kyegombe et al., 2022). To broaden the evidence-based research in a country as highly affected by IPV as Tanzania, this paper

reports on in-depth interviews with 18 women in Mwanza, Tanzania, seeking to answer the following question: What are the pathways through which romantic jealousy triggers IPV against women?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This analysis draws on the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) to explore the expressed feelings of romantic jealousy in the context of norms of masculinity, and different forms of patriarchal ideals influencing IPV in the relationships between men and women in Mwanza, Tanzania. Based on women's narratives, we use this concept of hegemonic masculinity to clarify how couples interact in a family and what their expectations and emotional demands are of their partner. In particular, the concept of hegemonic masculinity focuses on the larger cultural context (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2015). In our study, we seek to explore how women in their narratives interpret different reactions of themselves and their partners in a patriarchal context where traditional gender norms and roles dominate.

In a patriarchal context, social interactions revolve around male domination, with men being situated at an advantageous position (Lloyd, 1991). The patriarchal context is depicted as responsible for the creation and perpetration of hegemonic masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a range of practices through which stereotypically male traits are idealized as the masculine cultural ideals, legitimizing men's domination over women or other men who are regarded as feminine or less powerful (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Under this perspective, IPV is in most cases used deliberately and systematically by men to maintain supremacy and control over their female partners (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). In sub-Saharan Africa where patriarchy still dominates, masculinity norms are invariably used to express men's power and dominance over women (Sikweyiya et al., 2020). In this study, we use the concept of hegemonic masculinity to explain how such norms influence the interpretation and reaction to partner's acts to elucidate the mechanisms through which romantic jealousy can trigger IPV within couples.

## METHODS

### Study design

We analyzed in-depth interviews that were conducted as part of a large longitudinal cohort study called MAISHA, Swahili word for life. This was a mixed-methods research study investigating the predictors and consequences of IPV in Mwanza city, Tanzania. Mwanza is located along the shores of Lake Victoria in the northwestern part of the country. The qualitative inquiry was done to gain a deeper understanding of women's experiences, thoughts, and reflections of IPV. An open-ended topic guide with probes was pilot tested prior to the actual interviews to assess clarity and participants' interpretation of the questions. It should be noted that the interviewers did not ask participants directly about romantic jealousy in relation to IPV, but that these views emerged inductively from women's accounts of different forms of IPV and romantic jealousy in their current relationships or in their community.

### Participants and recruitment

Through purposive sampling, we recruited 18 women participants who were participating in the MAISHA trial (Kapiga et al., 2017). These women were sampled from a pool of 85 women who reported changes in their experiences of sexual IPV between the baseline and endline survey of the trial. Changes in sexual IPV were chosen because they are a manifestation of severe IPV in a couple (Mchome et al., 2020). The purposive sampling ensured that women from different socioeconomic and

cultural backgrounds were included, specifically from different ethnicities, religious groups, age groups, and with different income-generating activities in Mwanza city (see Table 1). All women who were approached were given information about the additional qualitative interviews and provided consent for their participation. Women's ages ranged from 27 to 57 years, and all were fluent in Swahili (i.e., the widely spoken national language). Women also had been residents of Mwanza city for at least 2 years.

## Data collection

Two trained female interviewers, aged 26 and 28 years, conducted the interviews. The interviewers had previously collected quantitative survey data for the MAISHA study and, therefore, had in-depth experiences in researching sensitive topics with female participants. All interviews were conducted in Swahili, the interviewers' and participants' first language. The questions in the topic guide ranged from women's conceptualization of ideal relationships, reflections on their own relationships, their experiences of IPV, behaviors they regarded as IPV, and their children's upbringing (see supplemental materials). The interviews took about 1 to 2 hours. Women could choose the place where interviews could be conducted in private, which included their households, nearby restaurants, and hotels. With the women's consent, all interviews were audio recorded. After the interviews, interviewers wrote notes that captured participants' emotions, impressions of the interviews, and any other relevant information. The field notes were discussed on a daily basis among the research team and were useful to interpret the findings. Each participant was reimbursed a total of 8,000 Tshs (~3.5 USD) and offered referral options if wanted for their experiences of IPV.

## Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Medical Research Coordinating Committee (MRCC) of the National Institute for Medical Research in Tanzania (ref: NIMR/HQ/R.8c/Vol.1/614), the

**TABLE 1** Demographic information of the study participants

Study ID	Age	Relationship status	No. of children	Education	Occupation
500050-00014-14	43	Married	4	Completed secondary	Tailor
500031-00049-01	45	Married	5	Completed primary	Farmer
500031-00014-02	44	Married	2	Completed secondary	Farmer
500031-00085-07	48	Widow	3	Incomplete primary	Floweret
500031-00052-09	43	Married	1	Incomplete secondary	Unemployed
500031-00080-31	32	Divorced	2	Completed primary	Unemployed
500028-00028-08	37	Married	3	Completed primary	Entrepreneur
500028-00022-11	27	Single	1	Diploma	Entrepreneur
500028-00043-19	45	Married	1	Completed primary	Entrepreneur
500050-00019-33	37	Divorced	4	Incomplete primary	Unemployed
500031-00038-07	45	Married	None	Completed primary	Entrepreneur
500028-00022-04	30	Married	2	Completed primary	Entrepreneur
500028-00010-27	30	Married	1	Completed primary	Entrepreneur
500028-00044-20	36	Divorced	3	Diploma	Hotelier
500028-00021-08	43	Married	2	Completed primary	Entrepreneur
500028-00008-09	41	Married	2	Completed primary	Entrepreneur
500028-00043-02	49	Married	1	Completed primary	Unemployed
500031-00001-12	43	Married	2	Completed primary	Entrepreneur

Ethics Committee of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (ref: 11918) in the United Kingdom, and the Medical Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich (ref: 21–0507). The local government authorities also gave permission to work in their administrative areas. All participants consented and participated freely after reading and signing the informed consents.

## Data analysis

All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Thereafter, a sample of the transcripts was translated back into Swahili by a different translator to ensure the translation quality. All transcripts were analyzed in Swahili—the original language used to collect data for this study and the local language of the researchers who did the data analysis. The team first reviewed five transcripts in-depth together to identify deductive and inductive codes in addition to the analytical concepts that had emerged from notes taken during the fieldwork. Patterns and relationships between the inductively developed codes were identified and the main themes were synthesized, which reflected the participants' articulations of romantic jealousy in relation to IPV. Examples of these codes were women's and men's acts resulting in romantic jealousy, reasons for jealousy, pathways between jealousy and IPV, or women's and men's behavior after being jealous. Afterward, two researchers coded all transcripts using NVivo 12 software. The first author triple-checked all codes and reread all the transcripts to get a holistic impression of what emerged from the data about romantic jealousy. All authors reviewed the emerging themes at all stages of the coding. Subsequently, the findings were written up along the main final themes.

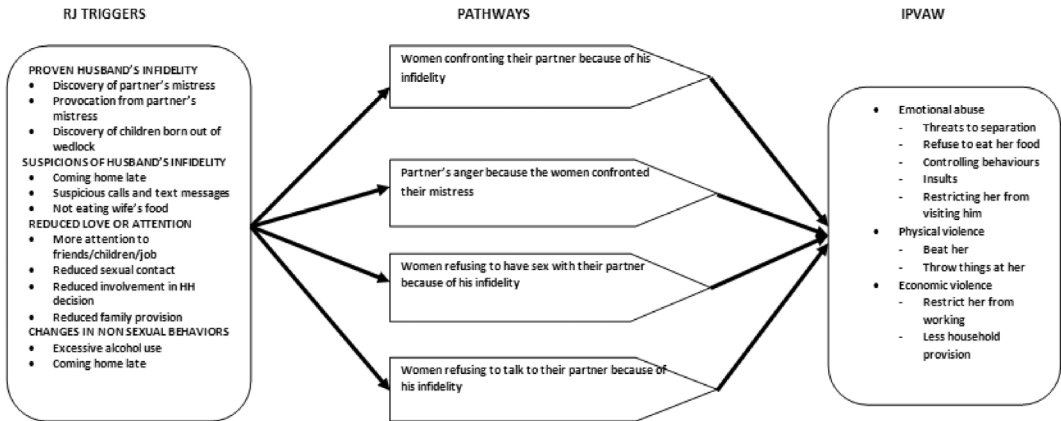
## RESULTS

Women in our study described romantic jealousy as a salient emotion that was experienced by both men and women in their community. Participants used Swahili phrases such as “*wivu wa kimapenzi*” meaning jealousy associated with romantic relationships, and “*wivu wa kupitiliza*” or “*wivu wa kupindukia*,” which means excessive jealousy. They also used the phrases “*hali ya wivu*” or “*wivu*” referring to a situation involving jealousy or simply jealousy. Participants discussed issues that triggered romantic jealousy, couple's responses or reactions to it, and its consequences. Although a few participants described romantic jealousy as a sign that her partner loved her or cared, the majority associated it with negative impacts on women and their intimate relationships. These included insults, accusations of infidelity, threats to separation, attempts to being stabbed, being chased, and controlling behaviors such as monitoring their movements and communications. Women also described acts of economic IPV because of romantic jealousy, such as husband's reduced household provision, restricting them from working, stealing their money, or refusing to pay loans they both agreed on borrowing from the women's microfinance groups. Experiences of physical IPV included extreme forms, such as being stabbed and beaten up. Sexual IPV because of romantic jealousy was less frequently described and captured situations of forced sex and excessive demand for sex by male partners.

### Pathways of romantic jealousy toward IPV against women

Our analysis of women's accounts established six pathways on how jealousy experienced by men or women led to men's perpetration of IPV, with four pathways focusing on how jealousy experienced by the woman led to IPV against her and two on how male jealousy led to IPV against a female partner. For details, see Figure 1.

## I. Romantic Jealousy in women leading to IPVAW



**FIGURE 1** Pathways linking romantic jealousy experienced by women to intimate partner violence against women  
*Note.* HH = household; IPVAW = intimate partner violence against women; RJ = romantic jealousy

## Pathways linking romantic jealousy experienced by women to IPV

The four pathways that connect romantic jealousy experienced by women to IPV against them by their partners include women confronting their partner because of his infidelity, partner's anger because the women confronted their mistress, women refusing to have sex with their partner because of his infidelity, and women refusing to talk to their partner because of his infidelity.

### *Women confronting their husband because of his infidelity*

Confronting their partners following proven or suspected infidelity was one of the pathways that connected romantic jealousy experienced by women to IPV. Examples of husband's infidelity included the discovery of their partner's mistress, encountered provocations from their partner's mistress, or the discovery of their partner's children born out of wedlock. These proofs of their partner's infidelity alerted women to a threat in their relationships and triggered romantic jealousy. Women reported suspicions of infidelity when their partners came home later than expected, when their partners received suspicious calls and text messages, and when their partners refused to eat their food. Women confronted their partners in person or through mobile phones. Their partners' reactions to these confrontations were often the starting point for later IPV. A participant narrated how fights with her partner began after confronting him.

The fight arises because of his mobile phone most of the time, because I sometimes find bad suspicious messages on it. That really annoys me and whenever I ask or confront him about it he starts asking me how did you find this information? Why were you touching my phone? And from there he starts the fights. (In-depth interview no. 12, 30 years)

Another participant discussed,

[...] the more children you have, the more he realizes that you are just his and you will just be at home. But then it happens that you need him and you wish he would keep on coming home early like before at around 09 or 08PM instead he comes at 01 or 02 AM because he knows he will just find you home no matter what. [...] and

whenever you ask him why he is coming at such late hours, he acts like you are nagging him because he doesn't want to be confronted. That's where his problematic treatment [violence] starts. (In-depth interview no. 11, 45 years)

### *Partner's anger because the women confront their mistress*

A few participants spoke about how they confronted their partner's mistress as a response to jealousy that was triggered by suspicions or proof of their partner's infidelity. Confronting their partner's mistress led to IPV once their male partners found out. A participant explained how this amplified her partner's anger.

When he came out [husband went out of the guest house], I went through the stairs. I didn't want to call him because if I did he might have hit my big pregnant belly. I told myself to not embarrass him or embarrass myself so I went inside the room. That woman was all over me, hugging me, calling me sister in law, telling me she heard that I went looking for her. I told her you are not my sister in law, you have been sleeping with my husband. Then I started insulting her. You know anger.... My friend wanted to beat her, but I told her to let her go because fighting could make us end up in jail and I didn't want that because I was worried of giving birth to my baby in jail. She [friend] even suggested we boil hot water and burn her but I told her to let her go.... Later she went at my husband's working place crying. That woman is really stupid. She told him I confronted her about having a relationship with him and that I beat her and called many people on her while not even the neighbors knew what we were arguing about. He then called me and insulted me and told me he didn't want to find me at home by the time he was coming back. I was around when he came back. From that day he stopped eating food at home for a month. He even stopped talking to me. The pain I was feeling in my heart can hardly be understood by anyone. (In-depth interview no. 16, 41 years)

### *Women refusing to have sex with their partner because of his infidelity*

Participants reported denying sex to their male partners as a response to proven or suspicions of infidelity because they lost their mood to have sex as a result, while others mentioned to still give in into sex despite not being in the mood for it to avoid fighting with their partners. For some of those who refused to have sex with their partners, they explained that this led to IPV, including insults, the accusation of having sex with another man, beating them, threats to leave them, and other vengeful acts that affected these women emotionally. A participant explained about her husband's abusive acts in response to being denied sex after events that raised suspicions or proved his infidelity acts.

He is abusive. He might even threaten to leave me or do something bad.... He even says if you don't want to have sex with him it's better he add another person who will provide it to him whenever he wants it. What for? (In-depth interview no. 15, 43 years)

The other participant, whose husband had a second wife, explained how he accused her of cheating on him following her refusal to have sex with him after not coming home for a month and not providing for the family.

Because it's abusive when you accuse me of having other men while I don't have them despite not fulfilling your responsibilities as a father. You take a whole week without knowing what your family feeds on and then complains that she has another man. [ ] After all, under normal circumstances I should have a man, but I finish the whole month without any, yet you come and accuse me of being with other men. (In-depth interview no. 07, 37 years)

### *Women refusing to talk to their partner because of his infidelity*

Women treated their partners with silence or avoided confronting them after feeling jealous because their partners changed and started giving more attention to friends, children, or jobs; because their partners reduced sexual contact and involvement in household decisions; or because their partners provided less for their family. For some of them, this triggered IPV as their partners interpreted the silent treatment and lack of confronting them as proof of cheating on them. A participant explained,

And when I decide to use my psychology and stay with him quietly, without confronting him/asking for answers, he gets suspicious and starts accusing me that I probably have other men. He doesn't even get to reason on why I am acting like that or focus on the real reason on why we don't understand each other. (In-depth interview no. 11, 45 years)

### **Pathways linking romantic jealousy experienced by men to IPV against women.**

Pathways linking romantic jealousy experienced by men to IPV against women included male partners failing to control or regulate their emotions when they suspected their female partner's infidelity or male partners perceiving their masculinity to be threatened (see Figure 2).

#### *Partners failing to control or regulate their emotions when they suspected their female partner's infidelity*

Participants associated suspicions of female partner's infidelity leading to IPV with their husband's failure to regulate their emotions, calling this lack of emotional control a medical disorder or obsession of men with their female partners. In the participants' narratives, the reason why men suspected their partners of infidelity were changes in women's behaviors that included leaving home without permission, coming home late, and denying sex. Men's poor ability to control or regulate their emotions led to perpetration of IPV. A participant explained how her first husband slapped her until she fainted because of his suspicions of infidelity despite finding her at her parents' home with her young child.

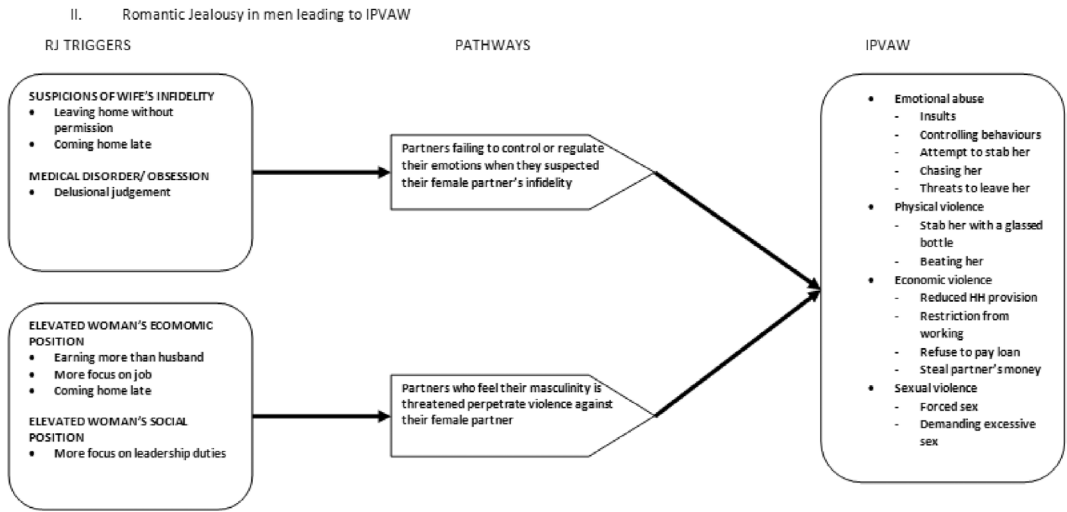
He asked my brother-in-law to come and look if I really went to my parents, and he had a letter for me full of threats, that he would divorce me if I didn't go back now. I gave it to my dad to read, after that my dad told me to leave. He gave me 250 shillings for the bus fare and asked me to go back to my husband. So, I carried my child and left. When I reached there, he slapped me. Just one slap, just one but I swear to God, I fainted. Thank God, I was living in a rented house and I had a young child so the owner of the house saw my husband running away and my young child crying. (In-depth interview no. 18, 43 years)

Another participant explained how her obsessive and controlling male partner is capable of harming her if she leaves his sight without him knowing what she is doing.

Because you can't walk alone, it's impossible.... And if it happens I have sneaked out to somewhere even for five minutes, if am not careful on my way back he could even stab me with the knife.... He is such an unpredictable person because he suffers from a jealousy disease, it's like he has a certain insect, a germ which gets activated. (In-depth interview no. 04, 48 years)

In addition, alcohol consumption was described as an amplifier of men's feelings of romantic jealousy and an important influence on men's ability to emotionally control themselves. Participants described men's alcohol intake as a reason for their changed behaviors, such as coming home late, taking





**FIGURE 2** Pathways linking romantic jealousy experienced by men to intimate partner violence against women  
*Note.* HH = household; IPVAW = intimate partner violence against women; RJ = romantic jealousy

negative advice from their peers, believing in gossip, and engaging in unwanted sexual behaviors including cheating on their partners. A participant associated getting drunk with escalating fights among a couple with partners who had romantic jealousy feelings over each other in her community:

Interviewer: Hmm! So why does it occur that they fight and tear or put off each other's clothes?

Respondent: It is just some intimacy-related jealousy. No one trusts the other. Worse enough they drink alcohol. After getting drunk, whenever he sees his partner with someone of the opposite sex they start fighting. It is so challenging. (In-depth interview no. 18, 43 years)

Another participant blamed the changes in her relationship on the influence of her partner's friends who consumed a lot of alcohol:

Interviewer: So, amongst the things we have been discussing concerning issues about sexual violence, humiliation, asking for anal sex, and forcing you to have sex even when you are not willing, was he like this from the start or he just changed as you lived together?

Respondent: He changed. He wasn't like this before. Changes occurred as we lived together.... Sometimes I think when he goes out to drink alcohol with his alcoholic friends he gets bad advice. With those kinds of advice and conversations, and experience from women he is cheating with, you may find that it gets him eager to come home and taste those things with his partner. (In-depth interview no: 03, 44 years)

*Partners who feel their masculinity is threatened perpetrate IPV*

The other pathway of romantic jealousy in men to IPV occurred if the partner felt his masculinity being threatened by actions of their female partners whose economic or social positions had elevated. Participants referred to partner's perceptions of different actions related to their elevated economic and social position that they felt threatened their male partner's masculinity and triggered romantic jealousy in men. This was particularly the case when women earned more than their partners or held a leadership position. According to the women, men feared

that this would change the women's personality and behavior and therefore destroy their relationship or their ability to perform their roles as wives. In response, men perpetrated different forms of IPV including controlling behaviors. A participant explained,

Mmh, he used to work in the past but was unable to work for a long period of time, about 2.5 years ago. So the family had to depend on me for paying the rent, food and school fees for kids. But because he is a man he used to feel like I was arrogant just because I was the one working and I could manage it all. He then started picking up fights every day. Whenever I came back home late he said I wasn't at work and that I was busy dealing with "other issues." I used to cook in a canteen for a woman who supplied food for workers in a fish factory. So there are days when fish were easily obtained at night. Whenever workers worked at night, we the cooks had to stay and cook for them. You see, therefore in the morning, I do attend morning shifts as usual but sometimes I continue until at night.... So one day he got angry, he attacked me when coming from work. He said I was not coming from work, he beat me up, and he stabbed me with a glass because he had a bottled glass. (In-depth interview no. 06, 32 years)

In addition, participants narrated choosing to focus more on work as a way of coping with their partners once they became jealous or suspected infidelity. This response was specifically applied to situations in which the male partner reduced the amount of financial support to the household to secure funds for their children and family at large. One participant reported to have decided to work on multiple jobs in response to her husband's reduction in household provisions and refusal to pay the loan they had both agreed on processing from the microfinance organization. Her partner became violent toward her. She explained,

So, I got another job in January where I had to deliver money at different points after some sales. They would access the machines I used to provide the receipts to confirm whether the sales matched the amount I delivered. This was a bit of a process so it took some time. I only got home late at around 7 PM. One day when I reached home, he took all my things, threw them outside and asked me to leave his house. Many people gathered and watched him chase me. I felt so abused by him that day. (In-depth interview no. 09, 45 years)

## DISCUSSION

This in-depth analysis of 18 Tanzanian women's narratives established a salient connection between women's and partner's romantic jealousy and IPV. IPV occurred when women confronted their partner because of his infidelity, women confronted their partner's mistresses, women refused to have sex with their partners, or women ceased talking to them because of their partner's infidelity. Male partners became violent when they suspected or proved female partners infidelity or when they felt their masculinity to be threatened. The majority of these pathways repeatedly emerged in most of the women's narratives except that about women confronting their husband's mistresses, which only occurred in one interview.

Almost all pathways in our study correspond with five of the six pathways suggested in a recent systematic review on infidelity, romantic jealousy, and IPV against women (Pichon et al. 2020), with the exception of the pathway on women who suspected their male partner's infidelity being unable to negotiate condom use that was only found in Pichon et al. (2020). The two new pathways this study established included women confronting their husband's mistress and partners failing to control or regulate emotions.

Our results found that changes in one partner's behavior triggers romantic jealousy in the other and influences reactions from them that later affect the whole relationship and the family at large because of prevailing social norms around masculinity. These triggers of romantic jealousy included issues around partner's proven or suspected infidelity; acts that suggested reduced love or attention from a partner; changes in other nonsexual behaviors, such as excessive alcohol use, coming home late, or obsession; as well as elevated women's social and/or economic position. Our study was placed in a highly patriarchal society; hence partner's interactions are framed within the patriarchal cultural context. In addition, cultural practices provide an overarching context through which community members perceive, accept, or reject IPV (Few & Rosen, 2005). The theoretical constructs from the concept of hegemonic masculinity can possibly explain the role and influence of these norms in interpreting the partner's reactions and decision-making over behavior from their partners that were perceived to threaten the quality of their relationships and family at large.

The role of both actual and suspicions of infidelity in triggering romantic jealousy and escalating IPV against women that emerged from this analysis is strongly embedded in the patriarchal context of the study area, which supports norms around masculinity that accept men's infidelity and highly condemn women's infidelity (Howard-Merrill et al., 2022). In this study, both partners reacted to infidelity-related issues; however, only women experienced IPV as a result of suspected or proven infidelity. Women in our study never reported reacting to suspicions or proven infidelity with violence toward their male partners. The findings also correlate with the systematic review by Pichon et al. (2020), which found that women who were suspected of infidelity by their partner experienced a wide range of severe acts of physical IPV but not vice versa. The reasoning for this was that men perceived women's infidelity as a threat to their desired masculinities, which were centered on men's ability to control their partners. Women in our study did not perpetrate IPV against their partners after suspected or proven cases of infidelity, most likely because of the underlying cultural legitimacy in the patriarchal contexts through hegemonic masculine norms that allows men to have extra marital affairs, as argued by Kyegombe et al. (2022) in Rwanda and Uganda.

Furthermore, in the Tanzanian context, men are expected to lead and play the role of the major provider in their families (Mshana et al., 2022). Our study found that men's emotions of jealousy and IPV perpetration due to women's elevated social and economic position or prioritizing income generating activities was strongly linked to their fear of losing their power because they as men are not performing their expected foremost provisional and leading roles as male breadwinners (Mshana et al., 2022). When women improved their economic position, men worried that their partners acquired new power that could affect their role performance as wives or mothers and even lead to infidelity as they might become attracted to men of higher economic or social position than them. Yet, women's motives to engage in income generating activities was the desire to provide for their children, especially when their partner couldn't meet the economic expectations of their roles as before or due to fear of partners abandoning their families.

The role of social norms in shaping behaviors has been acknowledged before, pointing out that social norms intersect with other factors to cause individuals' acquiescence with different social practices, including harmful ones (Cislaghi & Heise, 2019). Hegemonic masculinity norms are one potential mediator to explain the pathways between romantic jealousy and IPV in a patriarchal context like Mwanza, as they play a significant role in assessing and interpreting the environment jealousy creates and govern the reaction given to it and directed to someone who reacts with their emotions of jealousy. With the supreme power that men possess in patriarchy societies (Morrell et al., 2012), women find themselves in a relatively disadvantaged position with masculine norms favoring men's well-being and maintenance of the superior position. As observed in our findings, emotions of jealousy were felt by either partner, but it was men who ended up perpetrating violence against their female partners either because they

were jealous themselves or as a backlash against their partners' reactions to their own feelings of jealousy, which they interpreted as undermining.

A few other recent studies that analyzed the relationship between romantic jealousy and IPV also found an association with inequitable gender norms. For instance, in a study among Tanzanian men that analyzed romantic jealousy in men, hegemonic masculine norms were highlighted as a predominant issue that reinforced triggers for romantic jealousy in men (Aloyce et al., 2022). In the current study, these norms influenced the triggers for romantic jealousy in men as well as an interpretation of the reactions women gave to jealous partners. A systematic review of romantic jealousy and relationships also discussed romantic jealousy as a complex emotion affected and influenced by factors linked to the sociocultural environment, such as gender norms (Martínez-León et al., 2017). This study, therefore, expands the scholarly understanding on the gendered relationship between romantic jealousy and IPV against women, suggesting the pathways through which the two are linked together. It also highlights the role of hegemonic masculinity norms in interpreting the jealousy environment, specifically partner's reactions on jealousy which in many cases leads to IPV.

As pointed out by many other researchers, men tend to express hegemonic masculinity through almost all their social relations (Messerschmidt, 1993). Endorsement of traditional beliefs about manhood put men and people close to them at risk of engaging and promoting in health risk behaviors (Courtenay et al., 2002). These health risk behaviors may include sexual risk practices, violent behaviors, and suicide among others. Strong adherence to traditional masculine norms is also associated with increased odds of mental health issues in men (Iwamoto et al., 2012). This being the case, the worst can be expected when romantic jealousy, a blended emotion with complex evoking situations (Cano & O'Leary, 1997), is combined with mental health problems in men. As was observed in a recent study on men, those who lost control because they were jealous went to the extreme extents of murder, suicide, or perpetrated other forms of extreme violence to their partner or partner's lovers (Aloyce et al., 2022). In the current study as well, one participant described her jealous partner's behavior to be associated with the germ that activated the jealousy disease.

## Implications

It is not unexpected for couples to have feelings of jealousy if they feel their relationship to be threatened by someone else (Cano & O'Leary, 1997). Whether this becomes a problem depends on how men and women cope or react to their feelings of jealousy. However, their reactions depend on their cultural context and the norms they abide by. For instance, in this context, a man refusing to eat food prepared by his partner is considered a serious way of punishing her emotionally (Mshana et al., 2022). Providing skills to help couples cope with romantic jealousy and improve couple communication is therefore crucial to avoid escalation of violence among them. The design of interventions should consider the couple's context, discourage hegemonic norms and traditional practices that entertain violence, and promote new and friendly ways of solving problems among couples. In many societies in sub-Saharan Africa, it is common for partners to search for marital advice and conflict solutions from elders in their families, but this might be ineffective when they are also subjective and highly adhering to the toxic traditional norms reared by the patriarchal culture that is likely to favor men and leave women in a position to suffer IPV.

The use of gender transformative programming—which has been successful in supporting couples to reduce the contribution of romantic jealousy to conflict and violence in their relationship by improving a couple's communication strategy, to discuss trust and honesty in a relationship, and to identify nonviolent strategies to deal with suspicions of jealousy—has been found to work for both partners (Kyegombe et al., 2022). The curriculum can be aligned with a new

paradigm shift of gender equality and good couple communication skills, among other things, to help solve relationship and marital conflicts among couples in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, the significance of the communication skills interventions was also highlighted in a recent study on romantic jealousy and IPV (Aloyce et al., 2022). These can be complemented with mental health interventions, especially for men who suffer from anxiety and depression (Iwamoto et al., 2012). The mental health interventions can play an important role to enhance their good mental state that can allow better problem-solving skills including coping well with jealousy in their marital relationships. The interventions should also include demoting unhealthy practices done in the name of adhering to masculine norms and equip men with skills to accept women empowerment initiatives and handle empowered women without considering them a threat.

## Limitations

There are limitations to note in our study. The study wasn't initially designed to explore romantic jealousy in intimate relationships. The theme emerged inductively from women's narratives on their experiences in intimate relationship and factors that led to their experience of IPV. Designing questions on romantic jealousy and potential probes from the beginning would have allowed a deeper exploration of the topic. Also, our findings are based on in-depth interviews with 18 women in Mwanza city and may therefore not be transferable to other settings. However, we sampled women from different ethnic groups and with diverse social demographic characteristics, and many of the pathways we found coincide with those identified in Pichon et al. (2020), hence for similar settings the findings can be applicable.

## Conclusion

To the best of our knowledge this is the first study of its own to explore in depth the relationship between IPV and romantic jealousy among female participants in Tanzania. The relationship between romantic jealousy and IPV remains understudied, and therefore insights from our study can inform further research and much needed standardization of quantitative measures, which would allow for a deeper exploration of jealousy and its relationship with IPV.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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**How to cite this article:** Aloyce, D., Mshana, G., Peter, E., Malibwa, D., Buller, A. M., Mchome, Z., Kapiga, S., & Stöckl, H. (2024). Pathways of romantic jealousy to intimate partner violence in Mwanza, northern Tanzania. *Family Relations*, 73(2), 843–857. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12880>