

Determinants of Family Ethical Values on Marriage Stability: A Study of Kinondoni Municipality in Dar es Salaam

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how intersecting gender and economic inequalities influence family ethical values and marital stability in Kinondoni Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Framed within intersectionality and feminist political economy perspectives, it conceptualises family ethical values as socially constructed entities shaped by power relations intertwined with gender norms, labour informality, and economic precarity. The study targeted the married segment of the population in Kinondoni Municipality in Dar es Salaam. Utilising a mixed-methods research design, the study includes a survey of 283 married individuals, complemented by qualitative focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Findings reveal that poverty (86%), informal employment (70%), digital media (84%), and gendered moral expectations converge to create unequal ethical responsibilities within marriages, with women disproportionately shouldering the burden of familial cohesion. This research concludes that the perceived moral decline in family structures reflects entrenched structural inequalities rather than merely the erosion of cultural values. Demonstrating the relevance of intersectionality in understanding marital stability within urban African contexts, the study significantly contributes to contemporary family studies. It emphasises the necessity of examining both socio-economic and gender dynamics to comprehend marital relations fully, encouraging scholars and policymakers to consider these vital factors in their analyses. Through this lens, we can better address the challenges families face and promote equitable policies aimed at enhancing marital stability amidst prevailing inequalities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Family ethical values are crucial in shaping marital relationships. They guide expectations around responsibility, respect, fidelity, and commitment. Traditionally, families have been seen as stable units that pass down moral values from one generation to the next. However, recent social changes, especially urbanization, economic insecurity, and shifts in gender roles, have significantly impacted how ethical values are developed and negotiated in marriages. In sub-Saharan Africa, families find themselves at a crossroads between long-standing patriarchal norms and rapidly changing socio-economic conditions. In Tanzania, growth in informal jobs, rising living costs, and more women participating in income-earning activities have changed marital expectations while maintaining many existing gender hierarchies. As a result, ethical values in families are not just cultural traditions; they are continually shaped through daily negotiations influenced by inequality. Many studies on family ethics and marital stability focus on cultural or functional explanations that view ethical values as shared norms for social cohesion. These approaches often ignore how power dynamics and structural inequalities affect moral expectations differently for men

and women. Feminist scholars argue that family ethics often mask unequal divisions of labor, economic dependence, and gendered moral responsibility, especially for women (Connell, 2009; Christianson, Teiler & Eriksson, 2020). This study aims to fill that gap by using intersectionality, which shows how gender interacts with economic status, job conditions, and social norms to shape experiences within marriage. The research focused on one key objective: to examine how the intersection of gender and economic inequalities influences family ethical values that support marital stability in Kinondoni Municipality.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study used a mixed-methods research design that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the relationship between family ethical values and marital stability in Kinondoni Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This design effectively captures general trends in perceptions of family ethics and the detailed experiences that shape these values. Mixed-methods research works well for exploring complex social issues like marriage, ethics, and inequality (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

2.2 Study Area and Population

The research took place in Kinondoni Municipality, chosen for its economic diversity, high urbanisation levels, and prevalence of informal jobs. The target population included married people living in the municipality, which provided a relevant context for the research goal.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

The quantitative part used a stratified random sampling method, resulting in a sample of 283 respondents. This ensured representation across different demographics, such as gender, age, education level, and employment status. This approach aimed to provide a complete view of family ethical values among various societal groups. The qualitative part, on the other hand, used purposive sampling to select 24 participants for focus group discussions and six key informants made up of community development workers, religious leaders, and social welfare practitioners. The purposive sampling method aimed to gather insights from individuals with different perspectives and experiences related to family ethics and marital stability.

2.4 Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to assess perceptions of family ethical values, marital stability, economic pressures, and gender roles. The survey included Likert-scale questions and multiple-choice items, allowing respondents to express their views on factors that influence family ethical values. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and gender-segregated focus group discussions. These methods were selected to encourage open dialogue, enabling participants to share their experiences genuinely. Key areas of interest included understanding views on family ethical values, the impact of gender and economic insecurity on marital stability, and the challenges faced in maintaining marital fidelity and cohesion. Focus groups had 6 to 10 individuals, promoting lively discussions, while interviews were conducted in Swahili and later transcribed for analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential techniques to clarify relationships among economic conditions, gender dynamics, and marital stability. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 26) software was used for these analyses, helping to identify trends and patterns in the data. Qualitative data went through thematic analysis, guided by

intersectionality and feminist theory frameworks. The analysis included several careful stages: researchers became familiar with the data through multiple readings of the transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the content. Initial coding involved an open coding approach to identify significant themes, patterns, and recurring ideas within the interviews and focus group discussions. The codes were then grouped into broader themes capturing the social and economic factors influencing family ethical values. Finally, the thematic analysis focused on key themes, such as economic stressors, family responsibilities, and the effect of digital media on marital relationships.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Tengeru Institute of Community Development (TICD), the regional Administrative Secretary for Dar es Salaam, and the Administrative Secretary of Kinondoni Municipality. Informed consent was acquired from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the research process, and all participation was entirely voluntary.

3. RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex of Respondents	Male	170	60.07
	Female	113	39.93
	Total	283	100.0
Age Group	Between 18 - 30 years	38	13.43
	Between 31 - 43 years	116	40.99
	Between 44 - 56 years	78	27.56
	57 years old and above	51	18.02
	Total	283	100.0
Marital Status	Married	214	75.6
	Divorce/divorcee	45	16.0
	Widow/widower	24	8.4
	Total	283	100.0
Education Level	Primary	74	26.0
	Secondary level	85	30.0
	Tertiary	82	29.0
	University	42	15.0
	Total	283	100.0
Employment	Formal	113	40.0
	Informal	170	60.0
	Total	283	100.0

Source: Field data (2024)

3.1 Sex of Respondents

Most respondents were male (60.1%), which highlights ongoing gender power dynamics in family and marriage. Current feminist research suggests that men's dominance in family discussions comes from

cultural norms that support male authority in decision-making, moral guidance, and resource control (Dworkin et al., 2020; Wyrod, 2019). This indicates that prevailing views on family ethics and marital stability in the study may reflect masculine moral values that emphasize provision, authority, and social respectability. In the same note, the significant presence of women (39.9%) points to the importance of women's ethical contributions within marriage. Recent intersectional feminist analyses show that women often bear the brunt of emotional support, caregiving, and maintaining relationships, even when their moral authority is limited (Chant & Sweetman, 2019; Rao, 2020). These gendered expectations intersect with economic dependence and cultural norms, which restrict women's ability to uphold marital stability despite facing unequal power dynamics.

3.2 Age Group

The majority of respondents were aged 31 to 43 years (41.0%) and 44 to 56 years (27.6%). This age group faces heightened family responsibilities, financial pressures, and caregiving tasks. Recent feminist studies of life stages indicate that age interacts with gender and job status, deepening inequalities in marital expectations, especially for women enduring cumulative caregiving roles during mid-life (Hankivsky et al., 2018; Razavi et al., 2022). The low representation of younger respondents (18 to 30 years) limits understanding of new marital ethics informed by gender equality, digital relationships, and trends in delayed marriage. In contrast, older respondents (57+) show ethical frameworks focused on endurance and the permanence of marriage. Modern researchers suggest that these ethical views often normalise unequal gender roles while portraying women's sacrifices as virtuous (Archambault, 2020; Dery & Diedong, 2021). This generational difference illustrates that family ethics adapt to social, economic, and temporal factors instead of staying the same. Marital Status The high percentage of married respondents (75.6%) offers a solid basis for examining real ethical practices within marriage.

However, feminist critiques warn against equating a stable marriage with fair relationships. Research shows that women often stay in marriages due to barriers like financial insecurity, societal stigma associated with divorce, and the expectation of female sacrifice (Makama & Samson, 2023; Oduro et al., 2021). Including divorced or separated (16.0%) and widowed (8.4%) individuals provides important insights into marital disruption. Recent intersectional studies reveal that divorce often highlights gender-based vulnerabilities, such as economic marginalization and the moral blame that disproportionately affects women (Clark & Hamplová, 2019; Zuo & Tang, 2023). These findings suggest that breaches of ethical values arise not just from personal shortcomings but are tied to unequal social and institutional structures.

3.3 Level of Education

Differences in education showcase unequal access to ethical resources and gender awareness. Recent feminist education research links higher education to greater support for equal gender norms, shared decision-making, and non-violent conflict resolution in marriage (Bhana & Mayeza, 2022; Stromquist & Fischman, 2019). These attitudes may contribute to greater marital stability by facilitating negotiation and compromise. However, intersectional scholars caution that limited education among women usually results from systemic inequalities rather than personal choice (Unterhalter et al., 2021). Respondents with lower education might rely on traditional ethical frameworks that emphasize obedience and staying in marriage. While these norms can help maintain marital stability, they may also limit women's agency, obscure relationship injustices, and heighten the risk of unresolved conflicts (Heise et al., 2019).

3.4 Employment Status

The majority of respondents were in informal employment (60.0%), showing the link between economic

instability and family ethics. Recent feminist political-economy research shows that informal work is often precarious, low-paying, and gender-biased, particularly affecting women and increasing their unpaid caregiving duties at home (ILO, 2023; Kabeer, 2020). Economic instability places pressure on marital relationships and challenges ethical values like fairness, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. Formal employment (40.0%) can increase financial stability and negotiation power, especially for women, allowing for more equitable ethical discussions within marriage (Chant et al., 2021; Esquivel, 2022). Employment status interacts with gender, education, and marital status to shape whose ethical contributions are recognized and whose sacrifices go unnoticed. These issues highlight that family ethical values are deeply rooted in economic conditions, not just personal morality. Apart from demographic information, Table 2 presents findings about factors influencing family ethical values and marriage stability.

Table 2: Determinants of Family Ethical Values on Marriage Stability

Statement		Frequency	Percentage %
The presence of social media (Telegram, WhatsApp, etc.) has caused violation of family ethical values	Strongly Disagree	5	2
	Disagree	17	6
	Neutral	22	8
	Agree	116	41
	Strongly Agree	123	43
Believing in witch-doctors to solve marital problems caused violation of family ethical values.	Strongly Disagree	9	3
	Disagree	9	3
	Neutral	74	26
	Agree	125	44
	Strongly Agree	66	23
Violence has caused violation of family ethical values.	Strongly Disagree	10	4
	Disagree	25	9
	Neutral	44	16
	Agree	79	28
	Strongly Agree	125	44
Alcoholism and drug abuse has caused violation of family ethical values.	Strongly Disagree	9	3
	Disagree	20	7
	Neutral	55	19
	Agree	120	42
	Strongly Agree	79	28
Prostitution, adultery and homosexuality has caused violation of family ethical values	Strongly Disagree	8	3
	Disagree	29	10
	Neutral	55	19
	Agree	118	42
	Strongly Agree	73	26
Poverty has caused violation of family ethical values.	Strongly Disagree	0	0
	Disagree	5	1

	Neutral	36	13
	Agree	124	44
	Strongly Agree	118	42

The findings of this study indicate that respondents overwhelmingly perceive social media use, violence, poverty, substance abuse, belief in witch-doctors, and sexual morality issues as major contributors to violations of family ethical values. When examined through the lenses of intersectionality and feminist theory, these perceptions reveal how ethical challenges within Tanzanian families are shaped by interlocking systems of gender inequality, economic hardship, cultural norms, and shifting social structures rather than isolated individual behaviours.

3.5 Poverty, Gender Inequality, and Ethical Erosion in Families

Poverty emerged as the most strongly endorsed factor, with 86% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that it causes violations of family ethical values. Intersectional feminist assert that, poverty operates not merely as an economic condition but as a structural force that intersects with gender, education, and marital power relations (Crenshaw, 1989; Chant, 2023). In Tanzania, where patriarchal norms position men as primary providers, economic insecurity often destabilises masculine identity and marital authority, increasing stress and conflict within households (Silberschmidt, 2021). Empirical studies in Tanzania demonstrate that households experiencing chronic poverty report higher levels of marital conflict, reduced cooperation between spouses, and weakened ethical commitments such as mutual responsibility and respect (Vyas & Jansen, 2018). Feminist political economy scholarship further argues that women disproportionately absorb the consequences of poverty through unpaid care work, economic dependence, and limited bargaining power, thereby constraining their ability to challenge unethical practices or exit harmful marriages (Razavi, 2024). Thus, the strong perception of poverty as an ethical threat reflects lived realities in which economic deprivation undermines both relational stability and moral accountability within families.

3.6 Violence as a Structural Violation of Family Ethical Values

The finding that 72% of respondents associate violence with violations of family ethical values aligns with feminist perspectives that understand intimate partner violence as rooted in gendered power relations rather than individual moral failure. In Tanzania, violence against women remains prevalent and socially normalised in some contexts, particularly where patriarchal norms justify male authority and discipline within marriage (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] & ICF, 2023). Intersectionally, women who experience violence are often simultaneously disadvantaged by poverty, low educational attainment, and limited access to legal or social protection, intensifying their vulnerability (Jewkes et al., 2022). Feminist scholars argue that violence erodes the ethical foundations of marriage by undermining trust, dignity, and reciprocity, which are central to family ethical values (Connell & Pearse, 2023). The strong agreement among respondents therefore, reflects an implicit recognition that violence constitutes a profound moral failure rooted in unequal gender relations.

3.7 Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, and Masculinities in Crisis

Alcoholism and drug abuse were identified by 70% of respondents as causes of ethical violations within families. Feminist and intersectional scholarship links substance abuse to socially constructed masculinities, particularly in contexts of unemployment and economic marginalisation (Silberschmidt, 2021). In Tanzania, empirical evidence shows that alcohol abuse is significantly associated with intimate partner violence, neglect of family responsibilities, and marital instability (Vyas & Jansen, 2018).

Contrarily, feminists argue that substance abuse does not affect family members equally. Patterns of harm reinforced. Women and children disproportionately experience the consequences of gendered financial deprivation, emotional insecurity, and exposure to violence (WHO, 2023). Intersectionality further reveals that substance abuse intersects with class, education, and rural–urban divides, shaping how ethical violations manifest across different family contexts.

3.8 Social Media, Digital Intimacy, and Ethical Tensions

An overwhelming majority of respondents (84%) agreed that social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram contribute to violations of family ethical values. Feminist digital scholarship argues that digital technologies reshape intimacy, trust, and moral expectations within relationships by facilitating secrecy, surveillance, and alternative social networks (Banet-Weiser, 2024). In Tanzania, the rapid expansion of mobile phone use has altered marital communication patterns, often without corresponding ethical frameworks to regulate digital conduct within marriage. Intersectionally, access to and control over digital technologies is gendered. Men are often afforded greater freedom and privacy online, while women’s online behaviour is more closely monitored and morally scrutinised (Udupa & Dattatreyan, 2023). Empirically, studies in East Africa suggest that social media can intensify jealousy, suspicion, and accusations of infidelity, thereby weakening ethical norms of honesty and fidelity within marriage (Mutongi & Wamoyi, 2022).

3.9 Witch-Doctors, Cultural Beliefs, and Gendered Moral Blame

The belief that reliance on witch-doctors contributes to ethical violations (67% agreement) reflects enduring tensions between traditional belief systems and contemporary family ethics in Tanzania. Intersectional feminist anthropology cautions against interpreting such beliefs solely as irrational or unethical, emphasising instead how they emerge within contexts of limited access to formal healthcare, counseling, and social support (Nyamnjoh, 2022). Empirical studies indicate that women are disproportionately blamed in cases of infertility, illness, or marital misfortune, often being accused of witchcraft or moral failure (Federici, 2023). From a feminist ethical standpoint, such practices violate principles of justice and dignity, as they reinforce gendered scapegoating and power asymmetries within families. The findings, therefore, highlight how cultural beliefs intersect with gender and structural inequality to undermine ethical relations in marriage.

3.10 Sexual Morality, Stigma, and Structural Inequality

The perception that prostitution, adultery, and homosexuality violate family ethical values endorsed by 68% of respondents must be interpreted critically within the Tanzanian context, where such practices are legally prohibited and socially condemned. While these acts are widely framed as moral transgressions, a feminist and intersectional perspective highlights that such moralisation often obscures underlying structural pressures. Women’s involvement in transactional sex, for example, is frequently driven by economic survival strategies in contexts of poverty, unemployment, and unequal access to resources, rather than deliberate defiance of family ethics (Wamoyi et al., 2019; Butler, 2022).

Similarly, the Intersectional feminism emphasises that ethical judgments rooted in stigma can themselves constitute ethical violations, as they reinforce exclusion, discrimination, and social inequality (Connell & Pearse, 2023). Thus, while Tanzanian social norms and laws define these behaviours as violations of family ethics, an intersectional feminist reading shows that moral discourses may reproduce structural inequalities and gendered injustices, even as they claim to uphold ethical standards.

3.11 Qualitative Findings

3.11.1 Family Ethical Values and Gender Roles

Qualitative findings elucidated that family ethical values are profoundly shaped by entrenched gender norms. Female respondents frequently articulated a perceived moral obligation to uphold family unity, underscoring the pressures women face in maintaining familial cohesion, particularly during economically challenging times. One participant reflected:

"As a woman, I feel it's my duty to keep the family together. Even when times are tough, people look to us for strength."

3.11.2 Economic Insecurities

The qualitative data revealed that economic insecurities, particularly originating from informal employment, significantly impact marital stability. Several participants recounted the stress associated with unstable incomes and its detrimental effects on marital relationships. A male respondent narrated that;

"When I'm out of work, it creates tension at home. My wife expects me to provide, but I can't. It's hard."

This comment reflects the correlation between economic pressures and marital strain, often shifting moral blame onto women for not fostering family harmony.

3.11.3 Influence of Social Media

Digital media emerged as a salient factor influencing family dynamics and ethical values. Numerous participants voiced concerns regarding the mistrust engendered by social media interactions, with a female respondent stating that;

"I have seen many relationships break because of social media. It creates suspicion, especially when my husband talks to women online."

This indicates that ethical expectations are increasingly mediated by technological advancements, complicating traditional moral frameworks within marriages.

3.11.4 Domestic Violence and Moral Accountability

Discussions also highlighted the intersection of economic stress and domestic violence, with many respondents attributing incidents of violence to economic frustrations. One participant expounded that;

"When there's no money, things can get heated. But somehow, I'm always the one blamed for not keeping the peace."

This finding emphasises that moral expectations are not only gendered but also exacerbate the cycle of abuse and accountability within marriages.

3.11.5 The Role of Informal Employment

Finally, participants largely associated informal employment with heightened relational strain. The absence of stable income frequently led to unmet expectations regarding familial roles, resulting in a pervasive sense of moral failure among both genders. Overall, the qualitative findings elucidate that family ethical values are intricately intertwined with socio-economic realities, challenging reductive interpretations of moral decline within familial structures. The findings indicate that family ethical values and marital stability are strongly shaped by economic insecurity and gender norms. A majority of respondents identified poverty and unstable income as major factors undermining family ethics. Informal employment was associated with stress, conflict, and reduced capacity to meet marital expectations.

Gender differences were evident in how ethical responsibility was distributed. Women were more frequently identified as morally responsible for maintaining family harmony, respect, and fidelity, even in

situations where economic hardship was the primary source of marital strain. Men's failure to fulfil provider roles due to unemployment or low income often resulted in tension, yet moral blame was disproportionately directed toward women.

3.11.6 Social media

Social media emerged as an important influence on family ethical values. Respondents associated digital communication with mistrust and infidelity, with women's online behaviour subjected to greater scrutiny than men's. Domestic violence and substance abuse were also identified as factors contributing to marital instability, often linked to economic stress and power imbalances.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that family ethical values and marital stability in Kinondoni Municipality are shaped by the intersection of gender norms, economic inequality, and broader social transformations. Ethical values within marriage are socially constructed, reflecting unequal distributions of power, responsibility, and resources, rather than simply a decline in cultural morals. Violations of these values are better understood as responses to structural economic insecurity, persistent patriarchy, and evolving cultural and technological contexts. Applying an intersectional feminist perspective highlight that marital stability can coexist with inequality and shifts the focus from individual moral failure to structural accountability. Strengthening ethical resilience in Tanzanian families therefore requires not only moral guidance but also policies and interventions addressing poverty, gender-based violence, unequal power relations, and social exclusion.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Policy Measures:** Social protection programmes should be strengthened to support individual engaged in informal employment and reduce economic stress within households.
- **Gender-Transformative Interventions:** Community and faith-based programmes should promote equitable gender relations, shared decision-making, and fair distribution of domestic and emotional labour.
- **Family and Marital Education:** Marital counselling and family life education should integrate discussions on economic realities, gender equality, and power relations rather than focusing solely on moral behaviour.
- **Future Research:** Further studies should adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches to examine how intersecting inequalities shape family ethics across different regions and social groups.

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