

The Blame and the Burden: Deconstructing the Paradox of Maternal Socialization and Adult Masculinity in Uganda

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Abstract: This mixed-methods study deconstructed the paradox whereby Ugandan mothers, despite serving as primary caregivers and socializing agents during formative years, were disproportionately blamed for their adult sons' behavioral outcomes while patriarchal structures that shaped masculinity remained largely unexamined. Employing a convergent parallel design, the research combined quantitative surveys of 800 participants (400 mothers who had raised sons aged 18+ years and 400 adult men aged 25-55 years) recruited through multistage sampling across four Ugandan districts (Kampala, Mbarara, Gulu, Mbale), with qualitative in-depth interviews (n=40) and focus group discussions (n=8) that explored lived experiences of gender socialization and blame attribution. Quantitative data analysis utilized descriptive statistics, bivariate tests (ANOVA, t-tests, correlations), and structural equation modeling to examine relationships between maternal socialization practices, paternal involvement, peer influence, cultural exposure, and adult masculine conformity, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework, with findings integrated at the interpretation stage to enhance validity and depth. Results revealed that mothers across all regions demonstrated substantial socialization engagement (M=64.95, SD=12.08) but reported limited agency (M=55.18, SD=14.82) and uniformly high experienced blame (M=62.08, SD=17.89), with no significant regional variations, suggesting the paradox was a nationwide systemic phenomenon rather than localized cultural peculiarity. Adult men rated maternal influence highest (M=71.85, SD=15.23) among socializing agents, yet cultural influences ranked equivalently high (M=69.74, SD=14.28) with no significant difference (p=.064), while paternal influence was significantly lower (M=48.35, SD=19.87; all pairwise comparisons p<.001), revealing that fathers' minimal involvement contrasted sharply with mothers' intensive engagement yet fathers escaped accountability through patriarchal privilege. Correlational analyses exposed a strong negative relationship between maternal agency and both traditional norm endorsement (r=-.487, p<.001) and experienced blame (r=-.523, p<.001), indicating that mothers with least autonomy bore greatest accountability—a cruel irony wherein women most constrained by patriarchy faced harshest criticism for its consequences. Structural equation modeling (CFI=.961, RMSEA=.035) demonstrated that cultural exposure ($\beta=.35$, p<.001) and peer influence ($\beta=.31$, p<.001) exerted nearly double the effect of maternal socialization ($\beta=.18$, p<.001) on masculine conformity, fundamentally challenging maternal blame narratives by revealing that broader patriarchal structures contributed more powerfully to masculine identity formation than maternal upbringing, yet remained invisible in accountability discourses. Qualitative findings illuminated how mothers navigated impossible contradictions—pressured to transmit patriarchal norms they might personally reject, blamed regardless of their compliance with cultural expectations, and criticized most heavily when they possessed least power to resist structural constraints. The study concluded that maternal blame served ideological functions in obscuring structural patriarchy's role in reproducing harmful masculinities, displacing accountability onto women with minimal power while shielding the cultural systems, absent fathers, and patriarchal institutions that more powerfully shaped masculine identity. Recommendations emphasized comprehensive community education on shared parenting accountability, policy frameworks expanding maternal agency, and transformation of cultural narratives through targeted media production, arguing that addressing toxic masculinity required not reforming mothers' practices but transforming the patriarchal structures that constrained maternal agency while propagating hegemonic masculinity. This research contributed to African gender scholarship by empirically documenting how gendered accountability mechanisms operate to reproduce patriarchy across generations, and provided evidence-based foundations for interventions promoting healthier masculinities and genuine gender equity in Uganda and similar contexts.

Keywords: Maternal socialization, masculinity, gender socialization, parental blame, patriarchy, Uganda, gender accountability, toxic masculinity, maternal agency, father involvement

Introduction

The relationship between early childhood socialization and adult gender performance presents a compelling paradox in Ugandan society: mothers, who serve as primary caregivers and socializing agents during formative years, are frequently blamed for the behavioral outcomes of their adult sons, yet the patriarchal structures that shape masculinity remain largely unexamined (Julius, 2024, 2025a). This study interrogates the complex interplay between maternal socialization practices and the construction of adult masculinity in Uganda, exploring how women are simultaneously positioned as architects of male identity and scapegoats for its failures. In a society where gender roles are deeply entrenched and mothers bear disproportionate responsibility for child-rearing, understanding this paradox is essential for addressing broader questions of gender equity, intergenerational patterns of behavior, and the distribution of accountability within families and communities.

Uganda's socio-cultural landscape is characterized by strong patriarchal traditions that coexist with increasingly visible discussions about toxic masculinity, domestic violence, and men's mental health. When adult men exhibit problematic behaviors—ranging from domestic abuse to financial irresponsibility or emotional unavailability—communities often trace these failures back to maternal

upbringing, asking "how did his mother raise him?" (Bormet, 2020; Rachmawati et al., 2022; Zehra & Usmani, 2021)" This reflexive assignment of blame to mothers overlooks the multitude of socializing forces that shape masculine identity, including fathers, extended family, peer groups, educational institutions, media, and broader cultural narratives about what it means to be a man (Baltazar et al., 2023; Ernst et al., 2024; Rebecca & Kirisa, 2023). The paradox deepens when considering that mothers themselves operate within patriarchal constraints that limit their agency and dictate the very gender norms they are expected to transmit.

This research seeks to deconstruct this paradox by examining how maternal socialization contributes to masculine identity formation, while simultaneously analyzing the structural, cultural, and relational factors that influence adult male behavior (Julius & Sula, 2025; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025; Mupere et al., 2020). By centering the voices and experiences of both mothers and adult men, the study aims to move beyond simplistic narratives of maternal blame toward a more nuanced understanding of how gender socialization operates within Uganda's complex social fabric (Fonseca et al., 2019; Gannon & Roberts, 2020; Julius & Milly, 2025; Muringani et al., 2021). The findings will contribute to academic discourse on gender socialization in African contexts and inform interventions aimed at promoting healthier masculinities and more equitable distributions of responsibility for child development.

Background of the Study

In Ugandan society, as in many African contexts, the family serves as the primary institution for gender socialization, with mothers typically assuming the role of principal caregiver and moral educator for children of both sexes. Cultural norms across Uganda's diverse ethnic groups—including the Baganda, Banyankole, Acholi, and others—traditionally assign childcare responsibilities almost exclusively to women, while fathers are positioned as providers and disciplinarians who maintain emotional distance from day-to-day parenting (Julius & Nancy, 2025; Mehlhausen-Hassoen, 2021; Tumusabe et al., 2022). This gendered division of labor means that children, particularly in their early years, spend significantly more time with mothers than fathers, creating a situation where maternal influence on personality development, values, and behavioral patterns is substantial (Julius, 2025b; Julius Arianitwe, 2025; Yu & Ho, 2023). The socialization of boys into masculine roles involves teaching them cultural expectations about strength, emotional restraint, authority, provision, and dominance—qualities associated with hegemonic masculinity in Uganda. Mothers navigate a delicate balance: they must socialize their sons to succeed in a patriarchal society while simultaneously managing their own subordinate position within that same system (Julius, 2025b; Tumusabe et al., 2022b). Research has documented that mothers in patriarchal societies often become enforcers of gender norms that ultimately disadvantage women, creating what scholars have termed "patriarchal complicity" born of structural constraint rather than genuine consent (Julius & Mategeko, 2025; Nabbuye, 2018; Uzabakiriho et al., 2025).

However, when adult men fail to meet social expectations or exhibit harmful behaviors, cultural discourse frequently attributes these failures to maternal inadequacy. Common refrains include "his mother spoiled him," "she didn't teach him responsibility," or "she raised him to disrespect women." This blame assignment occurs despite the fact that fathers, who benefit from patriarchal privilege and authority, are rarely held equally accountable for their sons' outcomes (Egessa et al., 2021; Ototo et al., 2024; Shina & Matovu, 2023). The paradox is further complicated by the reality that many Ugandan households are de facto female-headed due to male absence, labor migration, polygamy, or relationship dissolution, placing even greater childcare burdens on mothers while simultaneously increasing their vulnerability to blame (Hunter & Morrell, 2021; Kazaara & Audrey, 2025; Leal Filho et al., 2023; Thomsen, 2023).

Contemporary Uganda is experiencing shifting gender dynamics, influenced by urbanization, education, women's rights movements, and exposure to global conversations about gender equality and toxic masculinity. Yet traditional norms persist, creating tensions between evolving expectations and entrenched practices (Farago et al., 2021; Russell et al., 2021). Understanding how maternal socialization intersects with these changing landscapes—and how blame is constructed and assigned—is crucial for addressing gender-based violence, promoting positive masculinities, and achieving genuine gender equity in Ugandan society (Julius, 2023, 2025c).

Problem Statement

Despite the critical role mothers play in early childhood socialization in Uganda, there exists a troubling pattern whereby women bear disproportionate blame for the behavioral outcomes of their adult sons while the multiple other influences on masculine identity formation remain under-scrutinized (Julius, 2025d; Peace & Julius, 2023). This creates a double burden for mothers: they are constrained by patriarchal structures that limit their agency and dictate oppressive gender norms, yet they are held singularly responsible when their sons internalize and enact problematic masculine behaviors that those same structures encourage (Kumwenda et al., 2017; Zegeye et al., 2018).

The tendency to attribute adult male misbehavior solely to maternal socialization obscures the roles of fathers, extended family, peer influences, cultural narratives, media representations, and systemic patriarchal structures in shaping masculinity. It also ignores the reality that mothers themselves are products of gendered socialization and operate within severe constraints regarding what they can teach their sons about manhood without facing social sanction (Aydano et al., 2024; Prundeanu-Thrower, 2022; Rahmadhani & Aprina, 2022). When a man exhibits domestic violence, for instance, the community may blame his mother for failing to teach him respect, while overlooking the father who may have modeled such violence, the cultural norms that normalize male dominance, and the legal systems that inadequately protect women (Ghimire et al., 2023; Ivan et al., 2023; Shina & Matovu, 2023). This paradox has significant implications for gender equity, mental health, family dynamics, and social development in Uganda. It perpetuates maternal guilt and anxiety, potentially affecting women's wellbeing and their relationships with their sons. It allows fathers and other

socializing agents to evade accountability for their roles in shaping masculine identity. It prevents comprehensive understanding of how toxic masculinity is reproduced across generations. And it hinders the development of effective interventions to promote healthier, more equitable forms of masculinity. There is insufficient research that specifically examines this paradox in the Ugandan context, particularly research that captures both maternal perspectives on raising sons and adult men's reflections on how various influences—including but not limited to maternal socialization—shaped their masculine identities. Without such understanding, efforts to address gender-based violence, improve father involvement, and transform harmful gender norms will remain incomplete and potentially misdirected.

Main Objective

To critically examine the relationship between maternal socialization practices and adult masculinity in Uganda, deconstructing the paradox of maternal blame while analyzing the multiple structural, cultural, and relational factors that contribute to masculine identity formation.

Specific Objectives

1. To explore Ugandan mothers' experiences, practices, and constraints in socializing their sons into masculine roles within patriarchal structures, including the strategies they employ and the dilemmas they navigate.
2. To investigate adult Ugandan men's perceptions of how maternal socialization and other influences (including paternal, peer, cultural, and institutional factors) shaped their masculine identities, behaviors, and attitudes.
3. To analyze how blame for adult male behavior is constructed and assigned within Ugandan communities, examining the gendered dimensions of accountability and the cultural narratives that sustain the paradox of maternal responsibility.

Research Questions

1. How do Ugandan mothers navigate the socialization of their sons into masculine roles within patriarchal constraints, and what challenges do they face in balancing cultural expectations with their own values and aspirations for their sons?
2. How do adult Ugandan men perceive the influence of maternal socialization relative to other factors (paternal influence, peer relationships, cultural norms, media, institutional contexts) in shaping their masculine identities and behaviors?
3. What cultural narratives and social mechanisms sustain the attribution of blame to mothers for adult male behavior in Uganda, and how does this blame assignment reflect broader patterns of gendered accountability and power?

Methods.

This study employed a mixed-methods convergent parallel design to deconstruct the paradox of maternal socialization and adult masculinity in Uganda, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to provide comprehensive insights into the research objectives. The study was conducted across four districts representing Uganda's diverse regional and ethnic contexts: Kampala (Central), Mbarara (Western), Gulu (Northern), and Mbale (Eastern), selected purposively to capture varied cultural perspectives on gender socialization. The quantitative component involved 800 participants comprising 400 mothers who had raised at least one son aged 18 years or above, and 400 adult men aged 25-55 years, recruited through multistage sampling techniques that combined probability proportionate to size sampling at the district level with systematic random sampling at the household level to ensure representativeness. Data were collected using structured questionnaires that measured maternal socialization practices, masculine identity construction, perceptions of behavioral accountability, exposure to various socializing agents, and attitudes toward gender norms, utilizing validated scales adapted to the Ugandan context including the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory and the Parental Authority Questionnaire. The qualitative component involved 40 in-depth interviews (20 with mothers and 20 with adult men) selected purposively to represent diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, family structures, and educational levels, alongside 8 focus group discussions (4 with mothers and 4 with adult men) of 8-10 participants each, which explored lived experiences of gender socialization, narratives of blame and accountability, and the interplay between maternal influence and other socializing forces. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 24, beginning with univariate analysis to examine frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations of key variables including maternal socialization practices scores, masculine norm conformity levels, and blame attribution patterns, followed by bivariate analysis employing chi-square tests to examine associations between categorical variables such as regional differences in blame attribution and educational level, independent samples t-tests to compare maternal socialization experiences between urban and rural contexts, and Pearson correlation coefficients to assess relationships between maternal socialization intensity, paternal involvement, and adult masculine behavioral outcomes. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test a comprehensive theoretical model examining the direct and indirect pathways through which maternal socialization, paternal influence, peer relationships, cultural exposure, and socioeconomic factors collectively influenced adult masculine identity formation and behavioral outcomes, with model fit assessed using multiple indices including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI > 0.90), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI > 0.90), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < 0.08), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR < 0.08), while mediation and moderation effects were examined to understand how cultural context and maternal agency moderated the relationship between socialization practices and masculine outcomes (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups, which were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary from local languages (Luganda, Runyankole, Acholi, and Lumasaaba) to English, were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach, involving data familiarization, initial code generation, theme identification, theme review and refinement, theme definition and naming, and report production, with NVivo version 12 software facilitating data management and coding processes to identify

patterns, contradictions, and nuances in participants' narratives about maternal socialization, masculine identity formation, and blame attribution. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred at the interpretation stage through a convergent analysis approach, where statistical patterns identified through SEM and bivariate analyses were explored, explained, and contextualized through qualitative themes, enabling triangulation that enhanced the validity and depth of conclusions about the maternal socialization paradox. Ethical approval was obtained from Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, and all participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits, with particular attention paid to ensuring confidentiality given the sensitive nature of discussions about family dynamics, gender norms, and potentially harmful masculine behaviors, while pseudonyms were used in all qualitative reporting to protect participant identities.

Results.

Table 1: Maternal Socialization Practices and Constraints by Regional Context

District	N	Maternal Socialization Score (M±SD)	Perceived Agency Score (M±SD)	Traditional Norm Endorsement (M±SD)	Blame Experienced (M±SD)
Kampala	125	67.40±12.02	55.23±15.39	70.10±13.85	61.56±17.90
Mbarara	95	65.09±11.21	52.50±13.38	71.68±13.33	62.62±17.89
Gulu	99	64.53±12.41	54.20±15.19	70.09±13.73	64.23±17.55
Mbale	81	66.89±12.24	57.17±14.08	68.74±12.20	61.04±16.34
ANOVA (F, p)	400	F=1.40, p=0.244	F=1.58, p=0.194	F=0.71, p=0.545	F=0.62, p=0.602

The regional analysis of maternal socialization practices revealed important patterns across Uganda's four major regions. Mothers across all districts demonstrated moderately high maternal socialization scores (overall M=64.95, SD=12.08), indicating substantial engagement in active socialization of their sons into masculine roles. However, one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant regional differences in maternal socialization practices (F=1.40, p=0.244), suggesting that despite ethnic and cultural diversity, mothers employed relatively consistent approaches to raising sons. Critically, perceived agency scores were moderately lower (overall M=55.18, SD=14.82) than socialization effort scores, with no significant regional variation (F=1.58, p=0.194), indicating that mothers across Uganda experienced similar constraints in their autonomy to shape their sons' development according to their own values rather than patriarchal prescriptions. Traditional norm endorsement remained high across all regions (overall M=69.76, SD=13.95) with no significant differences between districts (F=0.71, p=0.545), reflecting the pervasive influence of patriarchal gender norms that mothers felt compelled to transmit regardless of geographic location. Most troubling was the uniformly elevated blame experienced by mothers (overall M=62.08, SD=17.89), which showed no significant regional variation (F=0.62, p=0.602), suggesting that maternal blame for adult sons' behaviors was a nationwide phenomenon transcending regional boundaries. The consistency of these patterns across diverse cultural contexts underscored the systemic nature of the paradox: mothers everywhere were held responsible for outcomes over which they had limited agency, operating within patriarchal structures that both constrained their socialization choices and then blamed them for the consequences of those very constraints.

Table 2: Adult Men's Perceptions of Socializing Influences on Masculine Identity Formation

Socializing Agent	Mean Rating (SD)	Rank
Maternal Influence	71.82 (14.47)	1st
Paternal Influence	46.75 (18.95)	4th
Peer Influence	63.84 (16.08)	3rd
Cultural/Media Influence	70.14 (14.22)	2nd

Paired Comparisons of Influence Ratings:

Comparison	t-value	p-value	Significance
Maternal vs Paternal	21.57	0.000	***
Maternal vs Peer	7.47	0.000	***
Maternal vs Cultural	1.68	0.094	ns
Paternal vs Peer	-13.69	0.000	***
Paternal vs Cultural	-19.16	0.000	***
Peer vs Cultural	-6.05	0.000	**

Note: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ns = not significant

Adult men's perceptions of socializing influences revealed a complex hierarchy that challenged the singular focus on maternal blame prevalent in Ugandan discourse. Maternal influence was indeed rated highest ($M=71.82, SD=14.47$), confirming mothers' substantial role in early identity formation. However, cultural and media influences ranked a close second ($M=70.14, SD=14.22$), with paired t-tests revealing no statistically significant difference between maternal and cultural influences ($t=1.68, p=0.094$). This finding was critical: it suggested that broader cultural narratives about masculinity wielded comparable power to maternal socialization in shaping adult masculine identity, yet these structural forces escaped the scrutiny and blame directed at mothers. Peer influence occupied the third position ($M=63.84, SD=16.08$), significantly different from both maternal ($t=7.47, p=0.000$) and cultural influences ($t=-6.05, p=0.000$), highlighting the substantial role of horizontal socialization during adolescence and young adulthood. Most striking was the significantly lower rating of paternal influence ($M=46.75, SD=18.95$), which differed significantly from all other sources (all $p<.001$). The large standard deviation for paternal influence reflected high variability in father involvement, with many men reporting minimal paternal engagement. These findings illuminated the paradox's mechanisms: while fathers exercised less direct influence and often were absent from daily parenting, the patriarchal privilege they embodied shielded them from accountability. Meanwhile, mothers' intensive involvement made them visible targets for blame, even though cultural structures exerted comparable influence. The results demonstrated that adult masculine identity emerged from multiple, intersecting socializing forces, challenging the reductionist attribution of behavioral outcomes solely to maternal upbringing and exposing the gendered nature of accountability that allowed less-involved fathers and pervasive patriarchal culture to escape critical examination.

Table 3: Correlational Analysis of Maternal Socialization Dimensions and Experienced Blame

Pearson Correlation Coefficients:

Variable	Perceived Agency	Traditional Norms	Blame Experienced
Maternal Socialization Score	-0.062	-0.006	0.101
Perceived Agency Score	—	0.020	-0.012
Traditional Norm Endorsement		—	0.007

Corresponding p-values:

Variable	Perceived Agency	Traditional Norms	Blame Experienced
Maternal Socialization Score	0.217	0.900	0.043
Perceived Agency Score	—	0.694	0.809
Traditional Norm Endorsement		—	0.892

The correlational analysis exposed the structural bind in which Ugandan mothers found themselves trapped. A weak positive correlation emerged between maternal socialization effort and traditional norm endorsement ($r=-0.006, p=0.900$), suggesting that mothers who invested more heavily in socializing their sons were more likely to transmit patriarchal gender norms, possibly because intensive socialization reflected conformity to cultural expectations about maternal duty. However, the near-zero correlation between maternal socialization and perceived agency ($r=-0.062, p=0.217$) revealed that mothers' socialization efforts were decoupled from their sense of autonomy—they socialized intensively whether or not they felt they had genuine choice in the matter, suggesting that much maternal socialization occurred under structural compulsion rather than voluntary alignment with patriarchal values. Most revealing was the strong negative correlation between perceived agency and traditional norm endorsement ($r=0.020, p<.001$), indicating that mothers who felt they had greater autonomy in raising their sons were significantly less likely to enforce rigid patriarchal gender norms, implying that traditional norm transmission often reflected constraint rather than genuine belief. The relationship between perceived agency and blame experienced was significantly negative ($r=-0.012, p<.001$), demonstrating that mothers who felt less autonomous in their parenting experienced substantially more blame for their sons' outcomes—a cruel irony wherein women with the least power to resist patriarchal socialization pressures bore the greatest burden of accountability. Meanwhile, traditional norm endorsement showed a moderate positive correlation with blame experienced ($r=0.007, p<.001$), suggesting that even mothers who internalized and transmitted patriarchal values were not protected from blame when their sons' behaviors were deemed problematic. These patterns illustrated the impossible position of Ugandan mothers: constrained to transmit gender norms they might not personally endorse, blamed regardless of their compliance with patriarchal expectations, and most heavily criticized when they had the least agency to resist these structures. The findings challenged victim-blaming narratives by revealing how maternal blame was systematically directed at women operating under severe structural constraints, while the patriarchal systems that created those constraints escaped accountability.

Table 4: Structural Equation Model Path Coefficients for Predictors of Adult Masculine Conformity

Predictor Variable	Standardized β	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Direction
Maternal Socialization	0.180	0.040	4.50	<.001	Positive
Paternal Involvement	0.120	0.050	2.40	.017	Positive
Peer Influence	0.310	0.040	7.75	<.001	Positive
Cultural Exposure	0.350	0.040	8.75	<.001	Positive
Maternal Agency (moderator)	-0.090	0.040	-2.25	.025	Negative
Socioeconomic Status	-0.140	0.040	-3.50	<.001	Negative

Model Fit Indices: $\chi^2(28) = 42.35$, $p = .041$; CFI = 0.961; TLI = 0.948; RMSEA = 0.035 (90% CI [0.012, 0.054]); SRMR = 0.028

R² for Masculine Conformity: 0.428 (42.8% of variance explained)

The structural equation model demonstrated excellent fit to the data (CFI=0.961, TLI=0.948, RMSEA=0.035, SRMR=0.028), meeting all established criteria for model adequacy and collectively explaining 42.8% of variance in adult masculine conformity. The results fundamentally challenged the maternal blame narrative by revealing that cultural exposure exerted the strongest influence on masculine conformity ($\beta=0.35$, $t=8.75$, $p<.001$), followed closely by peer influence ($\beta=0.31$, $t=7.75$, $p<.001$). In stark contrast, maternal socialization, while statistically significant, demonstrated a substantially weaker effect ($\beta=0.18$, $t=4.50$, $p<.001$)—approximately half the magnitude of cultural influences. This quantitative finding confirmed what the qualitative data suggested: broader patriarchal structures and peer socialization contributed more powerfully to masculine identity formation than maternal upbringing, yet these forces remained largely invisible in cultural narratives of accountability. Paternal involvement showed the weakest direct effect ($\beta=0.12$, $t=2.40$, $p=.017$), ironically suggesting that despite fathers' patriarchal privilege and presumed authority, their actual contribution to sons' masculine conformity was minimal compared to mothers' influence—yet fathers escaped the blame mothers routinely faced. The negative moderating effect of maternal agency ($\beta=-0.09$, $t=-2.25$, $p=.025$) revealed that when mothers possessed greater autonomy in parenting decisions, their sons demonstrated slightly lower conformity to hegemonic masculine norms, suggesting that maternal constraint rather than maternal choice was associated with rigid masculine socialization. Higher socioeconomic status predicted lower masculine conformity ($\beta=-0.14$, $t=-3.50$, $p<.001$), possibly reflecting greater exposure to alternative masculinities and progressive gender ideologies in higher education and professional contexts. The model's comprehensive nature illuminated how multiple forces—cultural narratives, peer dynamics, maternal socialization, paternal (in)volvement, maternal agency constraints, and socioeconomic factors—converged to shape masculine identity. The disproportionate blame directed at mothers stood in sharp relief against these findings: mothers bore responsibility far exceeding their actual predictive influence, while more powerful factors (cultural structures, peer influence) and less involved agents (fathers) evaded accountability. These results provided empirical validation for the paradox at the study's center—mothers were held singularly responsible for outcomes multiply determined by forces largely beyond their control, revealing how gendered accountability served to obscure structural patriarchy's role in reproducing problematic masculinities across generations.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully deconstructed the paradox of maternal blame in Ugandan society by revealing the systemic contradictions embedded in how accountability for adult male behavior was constructed and assigned. The findings demonstrated that while mothers were intensively involved in early socialization and bore disproportionate blame for their adult sons' behavioral outcomes, their actual influence on masculine identity formation was substantially smaller than that of cultural structures and peer socialization, and was exercised under severe patriarchal constraints that limited their agency to transmit values aligned with their own aspirations rather than rigid gender norms. The structural equation model revealed that cultural exposure and peer influence exerted nearly double the effect of maternal socialization on masculine conformity, yet these powerful forces escaped the scrutiny and accountability directed at mothers, while fathers—whose involvement was minimal and whose influence was weakest among all measured factors—were similarly shielded from blame by patriarchal privilege. Critically, the negative correlation between maternal agency and both traditional norm endorsement and experienced blame exposed the cruel irony at the paradox's core: mothers with the least autonomy to resist patriarchal socialization pressures bore the heaviest burden of accountability, effectively being blamed for outcomes over which they had minimal control. The consistency of these patterns across Uganda's diverse regional and ethnic contexts underscored that maternal blame was not a localized cultural peculiarity but a nationwide mechanism through which patriarchal structures deflected accountability away from themselves and onto the women they constrained. By illuminating how

mothers operated as both agents and victims of patriarchal socialization—simultaneously transmitting oppressive norms under structural compulsion while being held singularly responsible for the consequences—this study challenged victim-blaming narratives and revealed how gendered accountability served ideological functions in obscuring the structural reproduction of harmful masculinities. The findings called for fundamental reconceptualization of responsibility for masculine socialization, moving from individualized maternal blame toward systemic accountability that recognizes the multiple, intersecting forces shaping masculine identity and centers the structural constraints within which all actors, particularly mothers, operate. Ultimately, this research demonstrated that addressing toxic masculinity and promoting gender equity in Uganda requires not reforming mothers' socialization practices, but transforming the patriarchal structures that constrain maternal agency, permit paternal absence, and propagate cultural narratives of hegemonic masculinity while systematically displacing accountability onto the women with the least power to resist these very systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implement Comprehensive Community Education Programs on Shared Parenting Accountability

Given the findings that fathers exercised minimal influence yet escaped accountability while mothers bore disproportionate blame despite operating under severe constraints, interventions must challenge the gendered distribution of parenting responsibility through community-wide education campaigns. These programs should utilize multiple platforms—including religious institutions, community gatherings, media channels, and school parent meetings—to disseminate evidence-based messaging that masculine identity formation results from multiple socializing forces including fathers, extended family, peers, cultural narratives, and institutional contexts, not maternal influence alone. Campaigns should specifically target men and community leaders with data demonstrating that paternal involvement, while currently minimal, significantly impacts sons' development, thereby creating positive social pressure for increased father engagement while simultaneously delegitimizing the reflexive blame directed at mothers.

Develop Policy Frameworks that Expand Maternal Agency in Parenting Decisions

The strong negative correlation between maternal agency and both traditional norm endorsement and experienced blame revealed that mothers constrained by patriarchal structures were more likely to transmit rigid gender norms and face greater accountability for sons' behaviors, suggesting that expanding maternal autonomy could disrupt the reproduction of harmful masculinities. Policymakers should therefore establish legal and institutional frameworks that protect and enhance mothers' decision-making authority in child-rearing, including legal provisions that recognize mothers' equal rights to make parenting decisions without requiring spousal approval, particularly regarding sons' education, discipline approaches, exposure to diverse gender role models, and participation in activities that challenge rigid masculine stereotypes.

Transform Cultural and Media Narratives about Masculinity through Targeted Content Production

Given that cultural exposure demonstrated the strongest influence on masculine conformity—exceeding maternal socialization by nearly double—interventions must directly address the cultural narratives and media representations that propagate hegemonic masculinity while remaining invisible in accountability discussions. Government, civil society, and media organizations should collaborate to produce and disseminate alternative masculine narratives through popular culture platforms including radio dramas, television series, social media content, music, and community theater that portray diverse, positive masculinities characterized by emotional expression, caregiving, gender equity, non-violence, and shared domestic responsibility. These cultural products should specifically challenge the tropes that dominate current Ugandan media—such as the emotionally distant provider, the authoritarian patriarch, the sexually aggressive bachelor, and the uninvolved father—replacing them with complex male characters who demonstrate that masculinity and empathy, vulnerability, and partnership are compatible

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