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Media Analysis of Albino Killings in Tanzania: A Social Work and Human Rights Perspective

Jean Burke, Theresa J. Kaijage and Johannes John-Langba

Murders of people with albinism are a recently emerging human rights issue in Africa, particularly Tanzania. Thus far, public debates about albino killings in Tanzania and other African countries have been dominated by media reports rather than academic writing. This paper presents the findings of a content analysis of Swahili and English Tanzanian media reports published between 2008 and 2011 on albinism and albino murders in Tanzania, and the diverse activities that have unfolded in response to these attacks. Using a human rights framework, the article explores these responses from a social work perspective. It finds that interventions are often framed with reference to African conceptions of humanness. These conceptions are found to be compatible with notions of human rights as relational, in which the various rights and responsibilities of different members of society are seen as interconnected. In practice however, some interventions have resulted in trade-offs between competing rights, causing further harm to victims and their families. To become sustainable therefore, interventions should aim to support all the human rights necessary for the well-being of Africans with albinism, their families and communities. Further research to this effect is recommended.

Keywords Albinism; Social Work; Human Rights; Tanzania; Media, Africa

Introduction

Over the past few years, reports of escalating violence against people with albinism in Africa, and particularly the United Republic of Tanzania,¹ have

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1. Henceforth referred to as Tanzania.

become prominent in local and international media. Africans with albinism are particularly stigmatised as people with white skin in black-skinned societies, and as people with disabilities of low vision or blindness and tendencies towards contracting skin cancers. Cultural beliefs and myths attribute magical powers and sub-human characteristics to people with albinism. The present violence against them, including murders, appears to be driven by traditional 'witchdoctors' and carried out by contract killers to meet a market for albino body parts believed to bring wealth and fortune. Moral condemnations of these killings have been expressed widely by the Tanzanian government, members of its Parliament, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations (UN) (Alum, Gomez, and Ruiz 2009), and in resolutions passed in the European (2008) and American Parliaments (2010). Unjust treatment which affects the well-being of persons with disability who are already vulnerable to discrimination and marginalisation is an area of concern for social work.

The murders of people with albinism (albinos) came to the attention of the world through the efforts of a Tanzanian BBC journalist in 2008 (Alum, Gomez, and Ruiz 2009; Ntetema 2008). Most of the ensuing writing about albino murders in Tanzania has been by newspaper journalists in media reports, and by bloggers. Several news articles have called on academics and social workers to apply themselves to the issue of albino killings (Navuri 2009; Mosha 2009). This paper contributes to academic writing on this human rights issue from a social work perspective by analysing reports published in the Swahili and English Tanzanian media between 2008 and 2011 on violence against, and murders of, people with albinism. The aim is to explore the involvement of various social actors in violating, or protecting, the rights of people with albinism, as well as strategies of preventing and responding to the violence. These explorations are guided by a human rights framework. The paper's specific objective is to document and support the endeavours of Tanzanian social workers by making evidence-based recommendations and participate in advocacy towards reducing albino murders in Tanzania.

It will be argued that the social work profession in Africa is uniquely situated to challenge this injustice and work in solidarity 'towards an inclusive society' and towards 'the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being' (International Federation of Social Work [IFSW] 2004). This paper will contribute to the building of knowledge about this newly emerging human rights issue with the purpose of guiding effective strategies and responses. The implications of the findings are considered in relation to human-rights-based social work practice to enhance the well-being of Africans, particularly Tanzanians, with albinism and their families.

Background

Albinism is a group of rare inherited conditions which affects the pigment in eyes, hair and skin of people throughout the world, including Africa. Research

literature on albinism in Africa has been dominated by epidemiological discussions about prevalence and a medical focus on genetics. Major health and social issues for Africans with albinism have been identified as skin cancer (Lookingbill, Lookingbill, and Leppard 1995; Luande, Henschke, and Mohammed 1985), impaired eyesight and the stigma from skin-colour difference. These adversely affect the social inclusion and access to education of children and adults with albinism (Lund 2001; Lund and Gaigher 2002). Current interventions and services include the provision of special schools, sun protection measures and outreach clinics (Lund and Gaigher 2002; McBride and Leppard 2002). Until recently, the major identified threat to Africans with albinism was skin cancer. There is growing recognition and acceptance that in Africa, people with albinism (PWA) are persons with disabilities. This is due to problems associated with the absence of melanin which affects pigmentation of their skin, hair, and eyes. The colour of their skin makes them vulnerable to skin cancer and their eyes are vulnerable to visual impairment (Wan 2003; Braathen and Ingstad 2006).

The pale physical appearance and vision impairment of persons with albinism marks them as of distinct appearance, particularly in people of African descent. Studies of their social experiences in Western countries (Wan 2003) and in Malawi (Braathen and Ingstad 2006) show that PWA experience discrimination due to stigma in some social settings while they are treated with respect in other situations, such as in families. Stigma and discrimination can be a concern for PWA from any part of the world. However, its recent manifestation in Tanzania and some other parts of Africa as violent attacks and murders is a striking difference which presents unique challenges for human rights practitioners in this region, including social workers. Some anthropological writings on infanticide of babies with albinism and cultural myths relating to human sacrifices (Imperato and Imperato 2006; McNeil 1997) point to past violence against Africans with albinism. However, more recent research examining Tanzanian albino murders from an anthropological and sociological perspective (Bryceson, Jonsson, and Sherrington 2010) critique the media for simply assigning blame to traditional superstitions. Instead, they eloquently argue that in the unpredictable context of Africa's recent mining boom, gold and diamond miners together with witchdoctors have *created* an albino fetish, as well as 'a market in body parts for the production of lucky charms' (358). Moreover, the internal migration of Tanzanians has destabilised the local political and moral economy of the regions concerned (Bryceson, Jonsson, and Sherrington 2010). Hence, the oppression of PWA cannot be understood only as arising from traditional beliefs, but also emerges for structural reasons which are related to rapid change and new forms of inequity in wealth and power.

International non-government organisations (NGOs) have documented cases of attacks and killings of PWA in Tanzania and other African countries to support their advocacy purposes. Based on their involvement in sheltering frightened PWA, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2009) published a useful advocacy report on the 'humanitarian crisis' facing PWA in the Great Lakes region. Under the Same Sun (UTSS), an NGO focused on promoting the well-being

of Africans with albinism, recently produced a film titled ‘White & Black: Crimes of Colour’ distributed and shown publicly for educational purposes. UTSS also compiled a comprehensive report for submission to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. This report convincingly demonstrates that children are the main targets of mutilation and murders; two-thirds of documented murders are children and nearly all attacks since 2011 involve mutilation of children (UTSS 2012). It documents 71 murders and 31 survivors of machete attacks in Tanzania since 2007 (UTSS 2012). The document also refers to 17 murders in Burundi, seven murders and two attempted murders in Kenya, with additional reports of murders and attempted murders in Swaziland, Guinea, Nigeria, South Africa, Congo and Zambia (UTSS 2012). Finally, it is believed that over and above the documented attacks and killings, many more have either not been reported or captured, making it difficult to assess their true scale.

Post-graduate students have researched albinism in the Tanzanian context (Segu 2011) and the issue of albino killings, focusing on stigma (McLeod 2010), the role of witchcraft and the recent behavioural changes evident in the killings (Mgwabati 2010). A study conducted by students from the Northwestern University of Law (Alum, Gomez, and Ruiz 2009) applied a legal human rights perspective to provide an initial analysis of events and strategies. In 2011, Kaijage Consultants (KC), a Tanzanian research and consultancy company, hosted a stakeholders meeting on albino protection, and, in 2012, visited the centres in Mwanza and Shinyanga where the Tanzanian government had sent children with albinism for protection. Their recommendations include the need for re-integration, guided by further research to assess family and community strengths (John-Langba *et al.* 2012).

Tanzanian government responses have included the Presidential appointment of a Member of Parliament (MP) with albinism, a ‘secret ballot’ (for citizens to anonymously submit names of those suspected to be involved in the body part trade) and temporary suspension of traditional healers’ licenses to practice, with the aim of eliminating the market demand for albino body parts. Alum, Gomez, and Ruiz (2009) note that laws for protection of PWA exist but need to be effectively executed. International responses are generally limited to political rhetoric, whilst media and international NGOs have been more successful in conducting awareness-raising and advocacy work. The Tanzanian government and the Tanzania Social Workers’ Association (TASWA) have identified violence against Africans with albinism as an urgent issue requiring research expertise (Moshia 2009; Magege and Mngodo 2012); and African social work scholars indicate that locally initiated research is important for developing authentic and relevant responses to societal problems (Mupedziswa 2001; Mwansa 2011). Despite being identified as a crucial rights issue, justifying a call for more research to be conducted in Tanzania and beyond, social work research on violence against PWA has yet to be published.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this paper were drawn from print and online media reports of albino killings in Tanzania. With few other sources such as research reports or journal articles, media reports become an important source for information about events, public knowledge and opinions. The media study analysed online versions of print newspaper articles from the websites of three media companies, i.e. IPP Media Group (ippmedia.com), Majira (majira.co.tz) and Mwananchi Communications Ltd (mwananchi.co.tz). The private media company, IPP Media, based in Dar es Salaam, is a wide content provider for news in East Africa, comprising nine newspapers published in both English and Swahili, two television stations, three radio stations and one internet news website (ippmedia.com). Print media accessed through ippmedia.com for this study included articles from the Swahili newspapers, Nipashe, Nipashe Jumapili, Alasiri and the English papers, The Guardian, Sunday Observer and This Day. The Mwananchi Communications Ltd website was accessed for articles from the print newspapers of The Citizen (English) and Mwananchi (Swahili). Finally majira.co.tz was accessed for Majira articles. In short, this project does not involve human participants but relies on publicly available secondary data.

Searches for newspaper articles were conducted in the online sites by using the keywords, *albino*, *albinism*, *ngozi* (skin) and *ulemavu* (disability). The online versions of available articles from the nine newspapers listed above were collected from 2008 to 2011 and saved into data files. The preliminary results presented here report on the content of a set of 274 articles, including 121 English articles and 153 Swahili articles. The data set was limited by what was available in internet search engines, which may be extensive but not exhaustive, and the collected articles were not written for the purposes of this study. While the accuracy of media reports cannot be guaranteed, digital media allows free access to recent phenomena which is hard to reach any other way. Only text has been coded at this stage.

Content analysis was chosen as a flexible method generating reliable replicable data, and is well-suited to the investigation of recent events (Stokes 2013, 139). This study comprised a mix of problem-driven analysis motivated by questions about the phenomena, focusing on expressions of attitudes, supported by text-driven thematic analysis developed from repetitive reading of the texts, focusing on linguistic references (Krippendorff 2004, 346). The content analysis was based on coding adapted from other media studies (Gulati 2011) and on theoretical criteria, particularly framing analysis (Giles 2010), human rights and social work theories. Data were analysed thematically using the Nvivo9 computer programme to address the main research questions. Articles were recoded for variables which were added throughout the coding process, assisted by word frequency searches. While multiple analysts can provide inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff 2004), it is not uncommon for experienced researchers to be sole analysts (Entman 1991 cited in Giles 2010, 148; Gulati 2011; Stokes 2013). As this was a small, unfunded project, only a single analyst was available. Reliability thus had to be ensured by using repeated coding and checking.

The collected articles were sorted into categories according to their sources, story trigger and primary content. The most frequent type were court reports describing trials of arrested suspects, followed by reporting of attacks on victims based on police reports and interviews. A significant number of articles focused on announcements and speeches made by the president, prime minister, MPs and other government officials, while others reported on visiting celebrities, activists and diplomats, as well as fund-raising events or launches of groups or a movie, probably sourced from press releases. Fewer articles were journalist-initiated, either as editorial opinion or investigative papers, presenting interview material with PWA and families or focusing on research plans and results. Strategies to prevent and respond to the attacks on PWA were identified in the media reports and analysed across diverse levels of society by grouping them in categories related to the nature of the activities and their level of agency, such as individuals and families, local groups and communities, national and international levels. These strategies may be described as ranging from coping strategies at the individual level, to interventions at the state or structural level, intimating some form of organisation and planning (See [Table 1](#) below). A broad human rights framework was used for analysis in order to be open to emerging discourses, that is, using the international legal framing of rights, wider social and community rights, as well as a grounded approach from how everyday language of rights is commonly expressed by people in the community.

Results

Voices heard in the media

Some voices are represented extensively in the news articles, with politicians and government officials quoted the most, followed by leaders of albino associations and police. Individual PWA are quoted frequently (more often leaders than victims), with religious leaders and relatives of PWA less so. To an even lesser extent, the words of celebrities, village government leaders, teachers, businessmen, academics, diplomats and leaders of human rights group are included in articles. The voices that are least heard are the attackers themselves (except in a limited way in court proceedings). Notably absent are the voices of those suspected as driving the attacks, such as traditional witchdoctors, members of the wealthy elite and business people seeking quick wealth, some of whom have been named to police by those already arrested, but with insufficient evidence to justify criminal charges against them.

The media presence of social workers is low in the collected material, although the main focus in two (out of 274) articles. Both articles emphasise the potentially significant role social workers can play in responding to the 'societal problem' (Guardian 7 September 2010) of albino murders. Majira (18 April 2009) quotes the Social Welfare Commissioner as calling for the government to recognise, train and employ professionals (including social workers), 'and these

Table 1. Examples of the diversity and multiple levels of activities to prevent or respond to the albino attacks.

Activity level and type	Individual	Group/Community	National	International
Identify (or control) the perpetrators	Report to police	Village leaders investigating locally	Register all and ban some traditional healers, 'Secret ballot', Police training	Interpol investigation
Punish the perpetrators/enforce law		'Mob justice'	Arrest suspects and put on trial	
Provide protection	Family escort, Stay at home, 'Restrain at home', Bury body in the house	Community security	Police distribute cell phones	
Remove to safer place	Seek asylum in police station, Move to other regions, Move to relatives or boarding school	Build special school, Provide scholarships to boarding schools, Red Cross camps for internally placed persons	Move children into boarding schools	Award refugee status
Public awareness	Cultural and sporting events organised by celebrities, Publication of children's books	Media coverage, Movies screenings	Issue government statements	Media coverage
Provide services to affected	Donations of cell phones by citizens	Skin care health services Schools Companies		Sponsor injured woman with albinism for operation and house
Research	Post-graduate students theses	NGOs and PWA groups surveys and needs assessment	Develop register of persons with disabilities	Collaboration between UN, UNICEF, International NGOs and local partners

problems could possibly end easily'.² This is after arguing that a 'lack of professionals addressing social issues is a huge challenge confronting our society' (Majira 18 April 2009). The commissioner's statements may go towards explaining the minor presence of voices from social workers and academics.

Strategies

The types of activities most frequently referred to in the media reports are: identifying and punishing the perpetrators, raising public awareness, providing protection, moving potential victims to safer areas, rendering services to the affected, working towards law reform, engaging in political activism, and conducting research. References to persuasion and moral education are also evident but more latent. Some of the strategies to prevent or respond to albino attacks are criticised and debated in the press, a number of which highlight the complexities involved in protecting and promoting potentially competing rights.

The most prominent activities reported and recommended as solutions in the press articles are the identification, arrest and punishment of perpetrators. The police force is the major actor in this, but also relies on information and cooperation from the community. Government actions to support this include the national exercise set up for people to inform authorities of murder suspects. Cases are reported of villagers telling police when they find limbs. Wider identification is also called for, that is, of traditional witchdoctors and elite funders. The arrest, conviction and sentencing of offenders are law enforcement measures seen to provide a deterrent to future attacks by sending a strong message regarding the seriousness of the crime and relaying national disapproval. If law enforcement is ineffective or slow, 'mob justice' (people taking the law into their own hands) becomes a real possibility and concern.

At the level of coping strategies, the media describes family members escorting children with albinism to school, and when walking in public. Some PWA are hidden at home, with some reports of cases where children have been forcibly restrained. Individuals with albinism have sought asylum in police stations or moved to safer regions. Families have sent their children with albinism to boarding schools, camps, or to stay with relatives in safer areas to remove them from dangerous environments. These actions may be accompanied by persuasion or claims for protection and described in terms of seeking refuge. An extensively reported government intervention has been the movement of children with albinism from their family homes into special schools and camps for the disabled for the sake of their protection. While this form of segregation has increased security, various concerns are also reported, notably: overcrowding; inadequate facilities; incidents of child abuse, and family members abandoning children and their responsibilities towards them. The intervention's impact on families is acknowledged to a lesser extent. For example, the Guardian observes

2. Note that quotations from Swahili language have been translated into English by the first author.

that the stigmatising beliefs and responding actions have continued ‘to wreck havoc in many households, as families broke up, dispersing members to the streets and special camps for their safety’ (27 October 2011), thus acknowledging that anxiety and fear of violent attacks, and measures which prioritise safety over most other concerns are causing damage to family unity and well-being.

Pooling of resources with the aim of increasing protection is one form of cooperation reported in the press in detail, with contributors being individuals—often businessmen—companies, NGOs, and various government entities. Usually the amounts given and donors’ names are listed, sometimes with an exhortation by the donor or journalist to emulate the action. For example, two identified businessmen donated 300 and 50 cell phones respectively, and ‘urged other businessmen to help in stopping the criminals from getting away with their dirty deals by joining hands with the police’ (Guardian 6 January 2009). Well-wishers gave 19 million shillings to buy phones, and a phone company provided 5,000 shilling vouchers to each of the 300 phones to be given to PWA. Sometimes quite complex collaborations involving private citizens, local groups, NGOs and government efforts are described. For example, it is reported that the government would sponsor ten children with albinism to join ‘a special boarding primary school for disabled children in Tanga region’ (Daily News 1 April 2009) with the district council paying security guards to escort them to the school, an international NGO providing funding for essentials like uniforms and books, and an identified ‘good Samaritan’, having pledged to donate 200,000 shillings for the children. Furthermore, a local group of PWA reportedly plans to buy land and build a special school in the district. This would allow children to be accommodated safely in close proximity to their families (Daily News 1 April 2009).

Several news articles state that there is no clear information about the number of PWA in Tanzania and their needs, or of those who have been killed. Some needs assessments and surveys have been conducted by partnerships between international organisations and local NGOs. For example, UNICEF with UTSS and Kaijage Consultants found that centres for children with albinism are overcrowded and lack facilities; and Plan International sponsoring TAS (Tanzanian Albino Society) found that parents were afraid to send their children to school. The purposes of these studies were generally to assist in planning how to respond, such as building special schools. Also reported are interviews with academics or students doing postgraduate theses, as well as excerpts from their research in the fields of social welfare, anthropology and law, aiming to better understand the current situation. One journalist compared the tactics used by police to go undercover to investigate a case as similar to previous ones used by journalists. The media reports only on ad hoc efforts by some NGOs and district councils to identify and count PWA, together with an explanation that a national law would be promulgated to establish a special registry of people with disabilities, including albinism.

Human rights

A large number of the articles used the words *rights*, *justice* and *haki* (meaning both rights and justice). While rights and their violations are mostly written about in general terms, some specific rights are named, particularly the right to life, to education, to health services, to work, to freedom of movement and political participation. Also mentioned are categories of rights including those belonging to children, disabled persons and citizens. There is recognition of how different rights affect each other, especially how protecting the safety and security of PWA may deny them other rights. For example, a lawyer is reported as saying ‘The albino pupils do not attend school and adult ones are in constant hideouts, which violates the right to work and the right of movement’ (Sunday Observer 8 March 2009). Keeping safe then affects the ability of PWA to exercise many other rights. Reference to freedom is another way this is expressed. ‘Albinos have now become a business and their lives are uncertain. Is it lawful to deny albinos the right to life? Who can remove their humanity, when will they be free in their own country?’ (Majira 8 April 2009). When someone’s right to life is insecure, they cannot enjoy basic freedoms.

Some articles highlight legal definitions and processes of human *rights* by making reference to the Constitution of Tanzania, international conventions on human rights and institutions like Tanzania’s Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance. The murderous acts are condemned as violations of human rights, but responsibility for this more often credited to the perpetrators than the government of Tanzania. The President and Prime Minister are frequently cited in the press, giving clear statements of support for PWA. For example, Rt. Hon. Pinda is quoted as saying: ‘They are our fellow human beings. I want all of us, as Tanzanians to ensure they get the same rights as everyone else, especially the right to life’ (Guardian 21 September 2011). At times, the government’s efforts are commended, yet there is also criticisms of inaction coming from activists, lawyers and PWA themselves. In 2009, a group petitioned the High Court about ‘the government’s failure to fulfil its responsibilities’ in terms of the constitution, noting specifically that it had failed ‘to provide accessible skin health care services to persons with albinism, to safeguard the lives of albinos and failed to provide a report on the state of albino killings or establish strategic plans which could enable the same to access education’ (Guardian 19 March 2009).

Another way that rights are framed in the media is as *human rights*. PWA are described as *humans* who deserve the same rights as others. It is common to make a link between humans and their right to life by drawing on spiritual conceptions of life. For example, an executive of a media company called on society to seek an end to albino killings ‘in the knowledge that all human beings belong to God and have the right to live’ (Guardian 23 April 2010). In this way, rights are perceived in terms of how we treat each other, and as giving rise to the moral claim that it is wrong to take a life which is sacred. Narrating how killers sawed off a victim’s leg, a journalist wrote that ‘all human beings are born free

and equal in dignity and rights and they are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards each other in spirit of brotherhood' (Sunday Observer 8 March 2009). This example shows how *human* rights can be presented both in 'Western' and 'African' terms, referring both to the ability to reason and to show caring acts as fundamental to our humanness. This emphasis on what it means to be human as opposed to being non-human is also highlighted in the following statement, which compares the killing of PWA to being 'slaughtered like chickens at the whims of wealth-hungry individuals' (Sunday Observer 22 March 2009).

Indeed, a potent theme threading through the press coverage concerns the nature and value of being human. At heart of the attacks is the idea that PWA have become commodities, perceived as sub-human or non-human by their attackers. While universally condemning the idea that 'albinos have now become a trade' (Majira 8 April 2009), the media also reports on the monetary values of their body parts, varying from 10 to 400 million shillings, noting that 'one leg can yield up to \$2,500' (Guardian 28 February 2009). Such commodification is justifiably criticised for undermining communal notions of humanity. Thus, the media overall delivers strong messages that as humans, PWA are intimately included in social relationships; for example, the Prime Minister is quoted as referring to PWA as 'our fellow countrymen and women, our own kith and kin' (Guardian 22 September 2009), while a TAS leader is cited as asserting that 'we are your children, you have given birth to us' (Nipashe 10 February 2009). Through this attributed kinship it then becomes possible to conclude that 'every person in Tanzania is a victim of albino killings' (Guardian 7 September 2010), which means 'their safety falls squarely on our shoulders' (Sunday Observer 1 March 2009). Hence, the value of being human and therefore part of close societal relationships has corresponding claims on the community to love and protect such potential victims. These notions of connectedness and moral relationships have implications for human rights practice.

Discussion

The results presented above provide a preliminary summary and selection of strategies, relevant to human rights, in response to the recent surge of violence against people with albinism. This section discusses the multilevel complexity of these strategies and analyses them within a human rights framework, with particular reference to African conceptions of human dignity. It interrogates dilemmas related to the concept of vulnerability, applies a moral approach and recommends how human rights practice—including social work—can contribute in sustainable ways. The content analysis of media reports demonstrates the diversity of strategies used at all levels of society with the aim of protecting Tanzanians with albinism and dealing with violence and discrimination affecting them. There are also similarities across these levels, such as families, community security forces and government bodyguards acting to escort the movement of PWA, or the often complex pooling of resources to meet needs (see [Table 1](#)).

While the government has been active and vocal, though not always effective, many local initiatives have emerged from the actions of individual citizens, groups of people with albinism and communities, expressing empathy and solidarity with fellow humans who are in danger.

In this media analysis, human rights are situated within a legal framework in which the state is the agency that guarantees human rights, but it also positions rights as the responsibility of the community which includes, at one extreme, those who are violating the rights of fellow-citizens and at the other, those individuals and groups who act to protect them. The understanding that responsibilities for human rights exist at ‘multiple levels of human community’ (Ife and Fiske 2006, 299) highlights the legitimacy of these diverse sites of action and the multiplicity of rights-claims expressed in the local press. Reid (1995) argues that rights ought to be embedded within a moral conception of interdependence and relational concepts of solidarity, community, participation and responsibility. In a kind of implied reciprocity based in the moral nature of persons then, rights-claims held by people with albinism occur in conjunction with corresponding responsibilities held by others in relation to them, with the end of caring and protection. Thus, rights are ‘legitimate claims’ involving three intersecting dimensions: social, legal and personal (Crichton *et al.* 2006). Social rights comprise claims that are legitimised by religion, ideology, traditions, culture and general social assent. While legal rights are sanctioned by international and national law, they also interact with customary and religious law and practice. The personal dimension of rights concerns ‘how individuals perceive their rights, based on their experience, knowledge and multiple influences from the social dimension’ (Crichton *et al.* 2006, 2043). The national response to the plight of people living with albinism in Tanzania highlights both intersections and disconnects between the social, legal and personal dimensions of rights in that personal rights are reportedly violated due to economic interests and cultural norms, beliefs, and notions of spirituality. These localised practices have emerged from the intersection of the global economy’s extractive processes with local conditions of poverty and inequity. And yet, while there are culturally specific reasons behind the violations and murders of Tanzanians with albinism, there are also cultural imperatives in the strong public local response against such practices. Such complexities are not simply explained by reference to the contested human rights principles of cultural relativism and universality (Reichert 2006).

An African conception of human dignity and rights is evident in many of the media stories. The way in which people with albinism are described as brothers and sisters, as part of a ‘we’, positions them as included in the ‘family of Tanzanian society’. This reflects how Nyerere (1974) spoke about rights and freedoms, as resting on ‘people-centred development’ fostered by education for self-reliance and extension of kinship to all Tanzanians. The notion of ‘our common humanity’ is a fundamental aspect of *human* rights and should form an essential part of any public awareness activities. Ife and Fiske (2006) explain that this ‘human’ element in the concept of human rights highlights the importance

of 'connectedness, interdependence and communicative engagement, which constitute our common humanity' (Ife and Fiske 2006, 230). In the African context, reference to being created by God, within loving relationships and desiring freedom, is a common way of describing such humanity. Conceiving of human dignity as 'our capacity for loving relationships' as espoused by Metz (2012, 27), means that violation of human rights must necessarily involve 'thinking of others as separate and inferior' (Metz 2012, 33) such as when attackers treat people with albinism as non-human commodities, or children are segregated from society. An African conception of human dignity as derived from networks of relationships, which combines a communal identity and solidarity in caring for other's quality of life (Metz 2012, 27), positions the community, rather than Western concepts of autonomy, as the ground of human rights

A familiar dilemma when working with vulnerable groups in society concerns the question of how to respond to clashes between different rights. Furthermore, we are warned by Brown (2011) that vulnerability is a concept that may 'be at odds with rights' (316). For example, when applied to the case of Tanzanian children with albinism, the notion of vulnerability can legitimate claims on resources and leverage action because its location in moral obligations makes it 'a route to social justice' (Brown 2011, 318). However, it can also be used to justify social control which is apparent in the state intervention of placing children with albinism in secure schools. A social work perspective can contribute towards the development of a shared understanding that even when social control is exercised to protect the right to life and safety, it may simultaneously deny basic rights to autonomy and normality, only realisable when individuals and groups are able to live freely in their communities (Table 2). While residential care may be a life-saving crisis intervention, it cannot be a sustainable solution as it has negative consequences in terms of separating families and leading to sub-optimal outcomes in terms of the social and emotional development of children. Thus, a group of Tanzanian social workers and other stakeholders recently expressed grave concerns regarding the continued fear experienced by people with albinism and about emerging evidence that children who are experiencing stigma, discrimination and exclusion from social and communal activities, are presenting with emotional and behavioural problems (John-Langba *et al.* 2012). Not only are interventions which prioritise safety over psychosocial concerns likely to have limited efficacy, but they can also lead to long-term psychological problems among the intended beneficiaries (Foster 2002). Hence, human rights professions have a role to play in alerting policy-makers to the dangers of ignoring rights that are crucial to basic freedoms and well-being.

The harms resulting from rights abuses impact not only those who are affected directly but on society more generally. Attacks and killings of people with albinism are often described in the news articles as wicked or evil actions carried out by evildoers. Such descriptions exemplify the thesis of Hugaas (2010) that social workers can be confronted with the phenomenon of moral evil, defined as acts 'intentionally inflicting pain and suffering' (Hugaas 2010, 266), suggesting that hence, there is a need for a discourse on moral evil among social workers

Table 2. Examples of trade-offs between competing rights of children with albinism.

Interventions criticised in media	Criticisms	Competing rights	
		Either -	Or -
Children restrained (even by force) at home	Child neglect and abuse	Right to security	Right to education, right to freedom of movement, right to freedom from abuse
Children placed in institutions	Overcrowding and inadequate facilities, child abuse	Right to protection, right to education	Right to freedom from abuse, right to freedom of movement

and the societies in which they are based. Moreover, children who have lost their right to basic freedoms as the cost attached to protection of their lives exemplify how evil has wide-reaching repercussions in individual lives, causing real and extensive harm that social work is called to prevent. The roles of victim and offender can, and often do blur, but not in the case of albino killings where they are clear, recognisable polarities. However, Hugaas (2010) highlights that situated between those two poles, there is a third position of bystanders and witnesses who in the face of moral evil have a responsibility not to be 'silent or indifferent' (Hugaas 2010, 274), but instead to translate moral commitments into advocacy and practice.

Implications for Human-rights Social Work Practice

While social work is not prominently featured in the media reports analysed here, it ought to be in the frontline of upholding and defending the well-being of vulnerable people such as those with albinism in East Africa. The violence towards people with albinism highlighted in local media has been accompanied by a realisation of the need—and opportunities—to address other challenges faced by this vulnerable group, including stigma and lack of access to education and adequate health services. Interventions based on a holistic conception of human rights as indivisible emphasising interdependence and social inclusion, will work towards keeping children closely connected with, and integrated into their families and communities in order to enhance the well-being of all who are affected by albinism. Through public education and sustainable services, local communities can be supported in overcoming roles of silent bystanders, instead embracing their moral responsibilities towards their members.

Human rights practitioners, such as social workers, have a role in being vocal witnesses for social change and prevention of harm. Hugaas (2010) argues that social workers should 'prioritise prevention of moral evil' and act as 'moral agents' to provide moral guidance, education and some social control (Hugaas 2010, 275). One crucial way of doing this is by being outspoken witnesses for

social change rather than silent bystanders, upon which evil seems to depend. This role can be exercised at all levels, from the local to the global spheres, through collective engagement with local, regional and global structures to promote the human rights of vulnerable groups such as those concerned in this paper. For example, the Tanzanian Social Workers Association has potential to be a pressure group to comment on, and influence national policy by issuing public statements and offering critique (Burke and Ngonyani 2004). While local practice may involve working closely with those communities that are most affected, creative partnerships can be formed across national boundaries with other workers and communities facing similar issues in cooperative action (Ife 2012). Social workers and other human rights practitioners should not only promote the causes of vulnerable groups, but facilitate the input of the voices of the marginalised into forums such as government commissions, human rights-based NGOs, regional groups such as the African Union, and global structures such as UN agencies (Ife 2012).

Based on an analysis of online media sources, this paper highlights a diverse range of issues relating to persons with albinism in Tanzania. Much more social research using a variety of methods and sources—including those people most affected—is needed to explore the causes, contributing factors and impact of the multiple issues affecting Africans with albinism and the violations of their rights. Well-designed research may also assist us in understanding how new manifestations of human rights abuses arise in rapidly changing societies, and how best to promote communal well-being in such contexts. Findings from further research could assist in developing programs which are family and community-centred in approach, thereby addressing both the physical safety and psychosocial needs of children with albinism. Tanzanian social workers have conducted preliminary needs assessments (John-Langba *et al.* 2012) to inform such evidence-based interventions. Thorough research could contribute to the design of sustainable programs that support the human rights necessary for the well-being of Africans with albinism, their families and communities.

Conclusion

This analysis of Tanzanian media reports demonstrates the multiple levels of activities employed to address the physical threats to people with albinism. The human rights analysis of these activities highlights firstly the complex harm which results from prioritising certain rights over others when in fact these are inseparable. Secondly, it draws attention to the importance of community relations and responsibilities to righting these injustices. This is illustrated in the example of moving children into safe schools, which ensures their physical safety and security but compromises other freedoms, rights, and psychosocial well-being. Obstacles to making the rights to survival and development for children living with albinism a reality are mutually reinforcing and require evidence-based interventions directed towards their best interests and that of

their family. This paper recommends that further research be conducted to support the development of sustainable family and community centred interventions which address both the right to safety and rights relating to integration in society. With this outlook, the social work profession in Africa will be well situated to challenge the injustice affecting people with albinism and to promote social inclusion, individual and community well-being.

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