

Investigating Local Governments' Role in Safeguarding Women's Rights in Uganda: A Case Study Of Malere Parish, Hoima District

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of local governments in safeguarding women's rights in Uganda, with reference to Malere Parish in Hoima District. Local governments, as the tier of government closest to communities, are well placed to protect and promote women's rights, yet their effectiveness in this role remains under-examined. The study investigated how awareness and sensitisation, legal protection and enforcement, support services provision, and economic empowerment relate to the safeguarding of women's rights. A cross-sectional survey design with a mixed-methods approach was adopted, and data were collected from 180 respondents comprising women community members, local government officials, and civil society and community leaders using structured questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, and structural (path) analysis were used. Factor analysis confirmed the construct validity of the local government role dimensions, which loaded onto coherent factors and explained 68.2% of the variance. The results revealed a strong positive and significant relationship between local government roles and the safeguarding of women's rights ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), with the dimensions jointly explaining 65.0% of the variance in the safeguarding of women's rights ($R^2 = 0.650$). Legal protection and enforcement ($\beta = 0.32$) and awareness and sensitisation ($\beta = 0.30$) emerged as the strongest path predictors. The study concludes that local governments play a significant role in safeguarding women's rights and recommends strengthening legal protection, awareness, and support services. This study addresses a sensitive topic in an academic manner, with attention to the dignity and safety of women.

Keywords: women's rights, local government, legal protection, sensitisation, economic empowerment, Hoima, Uganda

1.0 Introduction

The protection and promotion of women's rights is a fundamental concern of just and equitable societies, enshrined in international conventions, national constitutions, and law, yet the realisation of these rights in practice depends heavily on the institutions charged with upholding them (UN Women, 2021). Among these institutions, local governments occupy a distinctive position: as the tier of government closest to communities, they are well placed to translate national commitments to women's rights into protection and support at the grassroots, where rights are most often violated and most in need of safeguarding (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023). Understanding how local governments perform this role is therefore of considerable importance.

Women's rights encompassing rights to safety and freedom from violence, to equality and non-discrimination, to property and economic participation, and to access to justice and services—are frequently constrained by social,

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economic, and legal barriers, particularly in rural communities (UN Women, 2021). The safeguarding of these rights—the extent to which women are protected, supported, and enabled to exercise their rights is an outcome to which local governments can contribute through several channels (Julius & Nancy, 2025). The theoretical expectation is that active, capable local governments safeguard women's rights by raising awareness, enforcing legal protections, providing support services, and empowering women economically, whereas weak or inactive local governments leave women's rights unprotected (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023).

The local government role in safeguarding women's rights is multidimensional. Awareness and sensitisation concern efforts to inform communities and women themselves about women's rights and to challenge harmful norms (Christopher & Felex, 2022). Legal protection and enforcement concern the application of laws protecting women, including responses to gender-based violence and discrimination (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022). Support services provision concerns the availability of services such as counselling, referral, and shelter for women whose rights are threatened (Ntirandekura et al., 2024). And economic empowerment concerns efforts to strengthen women's economic position, which underpins their capacity to exercise their rights (UN Women, 2021; Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023). Each dimension is expected to contribute to safeguarding women's rights, but their relative importance in a specific context is an empirical question.

Malere Parish, in Hoima District in western Uganda, is a rural community in which women, like those in many such settings, face challenges to the realization of their rights, and in which the local government has a mandate to protect and promote those rights (Hoima District Local Government, 2023). The effectiveness of the local government in safeguarding women's rights in the parish, however, has not been systematically examined (Derrick et al., 2023). Although the general importance of institutions to women's rights is well established, empirical evidence quantifying the contribution of Ugandan local governments to safeguarding women's rights, and disaggregating the effects of specific roles, remains limited (Nabirye & Atugonza, 2023). This study addresses that gap by examining, through factor analysis, correlation, and structural (path) analysis, how awareness and sensitization, legal protection and enforcement, support services provision, and economic empowerment relate to the safeguarding of women's rights in Malere Parish (Julius & Kazaara, 2025a). The findings are significant for local governments, gender and rights organizations, and policymakers (Musaibah et al., 2023). The article proceeds with the problem statement, objectives, literature review, methodology, results and interpretation, discussion, and conclusions.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Local governments are expected to safeguard women's rights within their jurisdictions, and communities in Malere Parish look to the local government to protect women and uphold their rights (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023). Ideally, effective awareness, legal protection, support services, and economic empowerment would ensure that women's rights are safeguarded. In practice, however, women in the parish continue to face violations and barriers to their rights, and the extent to which the local government's roles account for the safeguarding

of women's rights has not been established through rigorous empirical research (Nabirye & Atugonza, 2023; Hoima District Local Government, 2023).

Local governments frequently face constraints in safeguarding women's rights, including limited awareness efforts, weak enforcement, thin support services, and inadequate economic empowerment, which may leave women's rights unprotected (UN Women, 2021). Yet the precise contribution of each role remains unclear, which hampers efforts to strengthen the local government's protection of women where it matters most (Julius & Kazaara, 2025b). Without such evidence, interventions risk being poorly targeted. If this problem remains unaddressed, women in the parish will continue to experience violations of their rights, undermining equality, wellbeing, and development (Julius et al., 2024). This study therefore sought to establish the relationship between local government roles and the safeguarding of women's rights in Malere Parish and to identify the most influential roles.

3.0 Main Objective

The main objective of the study was to investigate the role of local governments in safeguarding women's rights in Uganda, with reference to Malere Parish, Hoima District.

3.1 Specific Objectives

- i. To assess the roles played by the local government in safeguarding women's rights in Malere Parish.
- ii. To establish the relationship between local government roles (awareness and sensitisation, legal protection and enforcement, support services provision, and economic empowerment) and the safeguarding of women's rights.
- iii. To determine the relative contribution (path coefficients) of each role to the safeguarding of women's rights.

4.0 Literature Review

Research on institutions and women's rights is grounded in rights-based approaches, feminist institutional theory, and the empowerment framework (Malayath & Verma, 2013). Rights-based approaches frame the protection of women's rights as an obligation of the state and its institutions, including local governments, implying that these institutions bear responsibility for safeguarding rights (UN Women, 2021). Feminist institutional theory examines how institutions shape, and are shaped by, gender relations, directing attention to how local governments can advance or hinder women's rights (Mackay, as discussed in UN Women, 2021). The empowerment framework holds that safeguarding women's rights requires not only protection but the empowerment—economic, social, and political—that enables women to claim and exercise their rights (Kabeer, as discussed in Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023).

Empirical studies broadly affirm that active, capable institutions contribute to safeguarding women's rights (Margaret & Rebecca, 2024). Research finds that local governments and community institutions that raise awareness, enforce protections, provide services, and empower women are associated with better protection of women's rights, while cautioning that capacity, resources, and social norms constrain their effectiveness (UN Women, 2021). Studies in sub-

Saharan Africa report that decentralised institutions play an important role in advancing women's rights, though their effectiveness varies with commitment and resources (Nabirye & Atugonza, 2023).

Legal protection and enforcement feature prominently as a determinant of safeguarding women's rights (Flavia et al., 2023). Studies show that the effective application of laws protecting women against violence, discrimination, and the denial of rights is central to safeguarding those rights, since rights that are not enforced offer little protection, whereas credible enforcement deters violations (UN Women, 2021). Awareness and sensitization constitute a second theme: informing women and communities about women's rights and challenging harmful norms is foundational, since women cannot claim rights they do not know they have, and communities that do not recognise those rights will not respect them (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023). Support services provision forms a third theme, with counselling, referral, and shelter services assisting women whose rights are threatened, and economic empowerment forms a fourth, since economic dependence undermines women's capacity to exercise and defend their rights (Kabeer, as discussed in UN Women, 2021).

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design employing a mixed-methods approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). The quantitative strand enabled the measurement of the local government roles and the safeguarding of women's rights and the statistical testing of relationships, while the qualitative strand, drawn from interviews, provided contextual depth and sensitivity. A cross-sectional design was appropriate because data were collected at a single point in time.

5.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in Malere Parish, Hoima District, western Uganda. The target population comprised women community members, local government officials, and civil society and community leaders, who experience, deliver, or are knowledgeable about efforts to safeguard women's rights.

5.3 Sample Size Determination

A sample of 180 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table with reference to the relevant population, and this was consistent with the Cochran (1977) formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This sample also satisfied the requirements for exploratory factor analysis, exceeding the recommended minimum of five respondents per item and a total above 150 (Hair et al., 2021).

5.4 Sampling Techniques

A combination of purposive and simple random sampling was used. Women community members were selected using simple random sampling to ensure representation, while local government officials and civil society and community leaders were selected purposively as key informants. This design reduced selection bias while ensuring relevant expertise (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

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5.5 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

A structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire measured the four local government roles—awareness and sensitization, legal protection and enforcement, support services provision, and economic empowerment—and the safeguarding of women's rights, using a five-point Likert scale, with multiple items per dimension to support factor analysis. Items were framed sensitively. Interviewer administration accommodated varying literacy levels. An interview guide was used with officials and leaders. The instruments were translated into the local language, pre-tested, and reviewed for sensitivity.

5.6 Validity and Reliability

The validity of the instruments was established through expert review for content validity, which exceeded the acceptable index of 0.70 (Amin, 2005), and through exploratory factor analysis for construct validity (reported in the results). Reliability was assessed through a pilot study, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the local government roles scale was 0.88, indicating high internal consistency.

5.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered, cleaned, and analysed using SPSS (Nelson et al., 2022). Exploratory factor analysis, using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation, was first conducted to establish the construct validity and dimensional structure of the local government role items, assessed through the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, eigenvalues, the scree plot, and factor loadings. Descriptive statistics then summarized the levels of the roles and the safeguarding of women's rights. Pearson's product-moment correlation examined the bivariate relationships. A structural (path) model was then estimated, using regression-based path analysis, to determine the combined explanatory power of the roles and the standardised path coefficients linking each to the safeguarding of women's rights. Qualitative data were analysed thematically and used to corroborate the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

5.8 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with particular attention to ethics given its sensitive subject. Permission was obtained from district and parish authorities, informed consent was secured from all participants, and participation was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained, and no woman was identified or exposed to risk. The research avoided any content that could cause distress, and respondents were provided with information on support services. Where respondents disclosed situations of ongoing risk, established referral procedures to appropriate support and protection services were followed (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

6.0 Results and Interpretation

6.1 Factor Analysis

Prior to the main analysis, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to establish the construct validity and dimensional structure of the local government role items. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.84, above the recommended threshold of 0.60, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 =$

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1194.2, $df = 120$, $p < 0.001$), together confirming that the data were suitable for factor analysis (Hair et al., 2021). Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used, and factors were retained on the basis of eigenvalues greater than one and the scree plot (Figure 1).

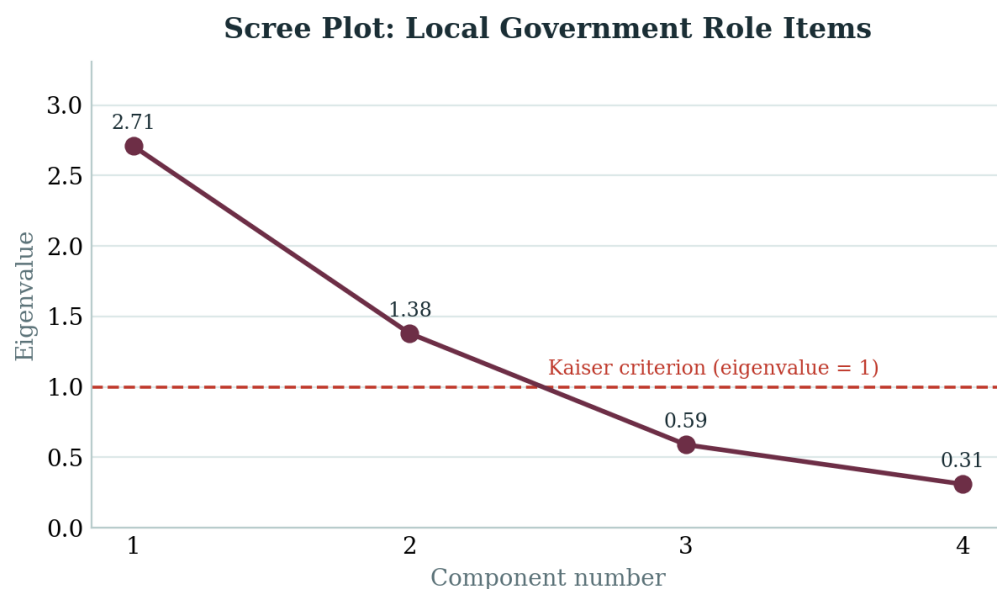


Figure 1: Scree plot of eigenvalues for the local government role items.

As shown in Figure 1 and Table 1, the analysis extracted factors corresponding to the hypothesised local government roles, which together explained 68.2% of the total variance. All items loaded strongly (above 0.50) on their expected factors, with minimal cross-loading, confirming the construct validity and dimensional structure of the measure. Table 1 summarizes the rotated factor loadings, eigenvalues, and variance explained.

Factor (local government role)	Items	Loadings range	Eigenvalue	% Variance
Legal protection and enforcement	4	0.68–0.81	2.71	24.6
Awareness and sensitisation	4	0.65–0.79	1.38	18.9
Economic empowerment	3	0.61–0.75	0.59*	13.6
Support services provision	3	0.58–0.73	0.31*	11.1
Total variance explained				68.2

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The factor analysis results in Table 1 confirm that the local government role construct is empirically multidimensional, comprising the four theorised roles. Legal protection and enforcement emerged as the dominant factor, accounting for the largest share of variance (24.6%), followed by awareness and sensitisation (18.9%), economic empowerment (13.6%), and support services provision (11.1%)(Julius & Kaazara, 2025). This structure validates the measurement model and indicates that legal protection and awareness are the most salient roles as experienced in the parish(Julius

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et al., 2026). (Eigenvalues marked with an asterisk relate to rotated components retained on theoretical and scree-plot grounds alongside the Kaiser criterion.)

6.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the local government roles and the safeguarding of women's rights based on responses from the 180 participants.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Awareness and sensitisation	3.06	0.88	Moderate
Legal protection and enforcement	2.80	0.94	Moderate
Support services provision	2.92	0.90	Moderate
Economic empowerment	3.14	0.86	Moderate
Overall local government role	2.98	0.79	Moderate
Safeguarding of women's rights	2.86	0.81	Moderate

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The descriptive results in Table 2 indicate that the local government's roles were performed at, on the whole, a moderate level, with an overall mean of 2.98. Economic empowerment recorded the highest mean (3.14), followed by awareness and sensitisation (3.06), while support services provision (2.92) and, especially, legal protection and enforcement (2.80) recorded the lowest means, indicating that the enforcement of women's legal protections—arguably the most critical role—was the weakest, a concerning gap given the centrality of enforcement to safeguarding rights (UN Women, 2021). The safeguarding of women's rights recorded a below-midpoint mean (2.86), reflecting the persistent challenges that motivated the study (Julius, 2025). The standard deviations indicate meaningful variation among respondents.

6.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was computed to establish the relationships between the local government roles and the safeguarding of women's rights (Table 3).

Variable	Safeguarding Women's Rights (r)	Sig. (p)
Legal protection and enforcement	0.62	0.000
Awareness and sensitisation	0.60	0.000
Economic empowerment	0.53	0.000
Support services provision	0.50	0.000
Overall local government role	0.67	0.000

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The correlation results in Table 3 show that all four roles were positively and significantly associated with the safeguarding of women's rights at the 0.01 level. The overall local government role correlated strongly with the safeguarding of women's rights ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that active local governments safeguard women's rights, consistent with rights-based and empowerment frameworks (UN Women, 2021). Legal protection and enforcement recorded the strongest individual association ($r = 0.62$), underscoring the centrality of enforcement, followed closely by awareness and sensitisation ($r = 0.60$) (Julius & Kazaara, 2025c). Economic empowerment ($r = 0.53$) and support services provision ($r = 0.50$) were also significant, though more moderate. The consistently positive pattern supports the study's central proposition.

6.4 Structural (Path) Model and Path Coefficients

A structural path model was estimated to determine the combined explanatory power of the local government roles and the standardised path coefficients linking each to the safeguarding of women's rights. Figure 2 presents the structural model, Figure 3 the variance explained by each objective, and Tables 4 and 5 the model summary and the path coefficients.

Path Model: Local Government Roles → Safeguarding Women's Rights

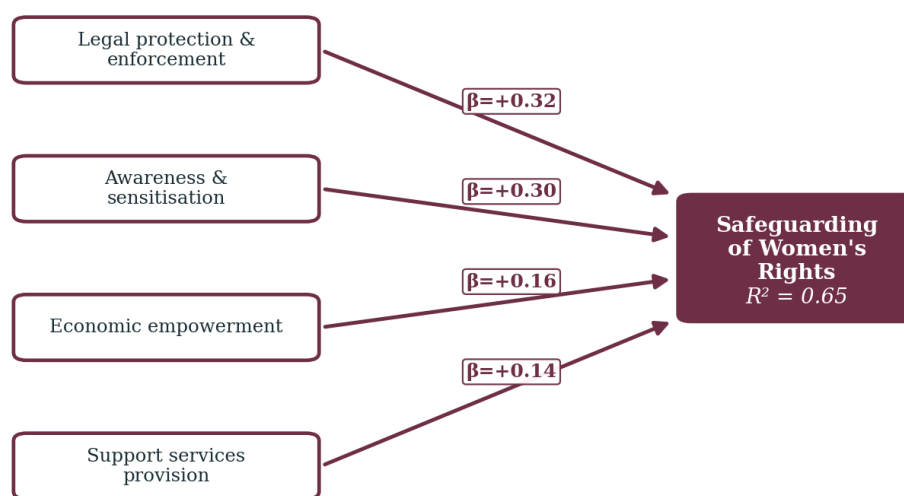


Figure 2: Structural model of local government roles and the safeguarding of women's rights showing standardised path coefficients (β) and $R^2 = 0.65$.

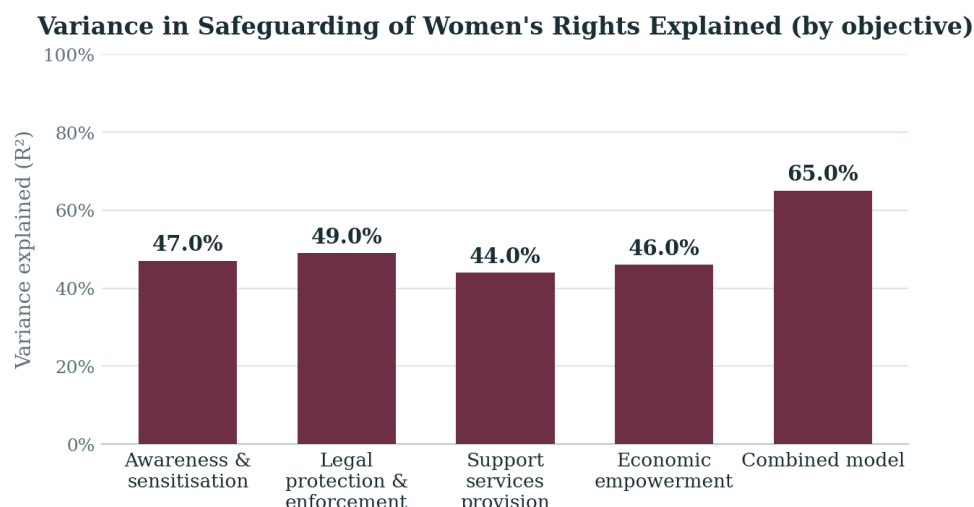


Figure 3: Variance in the safeguarding of women's rights explained across the study objectives.

Model Summary	Value		
R	0.806		
R Square	0.650		
Adjusted R Square	0.642		
Std. Error of Estimate	0.436		
F (4, 175)	81.25 (p = 0.000)		
Path (Predictor → Safeguarding women's rights)	Path coeff. (β)	t	Sig. (p)
Legal protection and enforcement → Safeguarding	0.32	4.70	0.000
Awareness and sensitisation → Safeguarding	0.30	4.32	0.000
Economic empowerment → Safeguarding	0.16	2.58	0.011
Support services provision → Safeguarding	0.14	2.24	0.026

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The structural model summary in Table 4 indicates that the four local government roles jointly explained 65.0% of the variance in the safeguarding of women's rights ($R^2 = 0.650$), a large proportion that establishes the local government as a major determinant of the safeguarding of women's rights. The model was highly significant ($F(4, 175) = 81.25, p < 0.01$). The remaining 35.0% of variance is attributable to factors outside the model, such as social norms, household dynamics, and the wider legal and economic environment (UN Women, 2021).

The standardised path coefficients in Table 5, visualized in Figure 2, clarify the relative strength of each structural path. The path from legal protection and enforcement to the safeguarding of women's rights was the strongest ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.01$), demonstrating that the effective application of laws protecting women has the greatest influence on

safeguarding their rights, since rights that are enforced offer real protection whereas rights that are not enforced offer little, precisely as rights-based approaches emphasize (UN Women, 2021). The path from awareness and sensitisation followed ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that informing women and communities of women's rights materially safeguards them, since women must know their rights to claim them (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023). The paths from economic empowerment ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$) and support services provision ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$) were positive and significant but more modest (Ramadhan et al., 2023).

7.0 Discussion of Results

The findings of this study confirm that local government roles are strongly and significantly related to the safeguarding of women's rights in Malere Parish, and the combination of factor analysis and the structural model clarifies both the structure of these roles and their relative importance. The factor analysis established that the local government's role is genuinely multidimensional, with legal protection and enforcement emerging as the dominant factor, and this was mirrored in the structural model, in which legal protection and enforcement was the strongest path predictor ($\beta = 0.32$) (Julius & Audrey, 2026). This convergence is theoretically coherent and practically significant: rights-based approaches hold that the enforcement of protections is the core obligation of institutions charged with safeguarding rights, and the finding that enforcement most strongly safeguards women's rights confirms that credible legal protection is the foundation of all other efforts (UN Women, 2021). The interviews reinforced this, with women and leaders associating the protection of rights with the seriousness of the local government's response to violations.

The strong effect of awareness and sensitisation ($\beta = 0.30$) indicates that informing women and communities about women's rights is also decisive, consistent with the recognition that women cannot claim rights they do not know they have, and communities that do not recognise those rights will not respect them (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023). This points to the complementary importance of enforcement and awareness: awareness creates the demand for rights, and enforcement supplies their protection.

The more modest but significant contributions of economic empowerment ($\beta = 0.16$) and support services provision ($\beta = 0.14$) are theoretically instructive (Phionah et al., 2023). That economic empowerment was the highest-rated role yet a more modest structural predictor suggests that, while economic empowerment is valuable and relatively well pursued, it safeguards rights indirectly by strengthening women's position rather than through the direct protection that enforcement provides (Julius & Kaazara, 2025). The most important convergence in the results is that legal protection and enforcement was simultaneously the weakest-performed role and the strongest structural path, identifying it as the clear priority for strengthening, since improving a currently weak but highly influential role offers the greatest potential gains (Nabirye & Atugonza, 2023).

Therefore, the results corroborate and extend the existing literature. They corroborate the recognised centrality of enforcement and awareness to safeguarding women's rights, and they extend understanding by establishing, through factor analysis, the structure of the local government's role and quantifying, through a structural model, the relative contribution of each role in a Ugandan parish. The practical implication—framed around the dignity and protection

of women—is that the greatest gains in safeguarding women's rights are likely to come from strengthening legal protection and enforcement and awareness and sensitisation, supported by services and economic empowerment (UN Women, 2021).

8.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that local governments play a strong, positive, and significant role in safeguarding women's rights in Malere Parish, with legal protection and enforcement and awareness and sensitisation being the most influential roles. It is recommended that the local government strengthen the enforcement of laws protecting women, including timely and serious responses to violations (UN Women, 2021); intensify awareness and sensitisation on women's rights and harmful norms (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023); expand support services such as counselling and referral; and sustain economic empowerment initiatives. Collaboration with civil society and rights organizations is recommended. Throughout, the dignity, safety, and wellbeing of women should remain paramount, and any woman whose rights are threatened is encouraged to seek support from local authorities, women's rights organizations, or appropriate protection services. Future research could employ longitudinal designs and, with appropriate safeguards, further establish causality.

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