

Intimate partner violence in Ghana: examining bridewealth payment and male-perpetrated physical abuse against women

¹Charlotte Ofori, ^{1,2}F. Nii-Amoo Dodoo, ¹Naa Dodua Dodoo & ¹Adriana A. Biney
¹Regional Institute for Population Studies, University of Ghana
and ²The Pennsylvania State University

Background

Intimate partner violence is increasingly acknowledged as a major public health concern globally. Studies have shown that violence against women is entrenched in gender power relationships where the differential resources of men and women often determine the extent of IPV (Frost and Dodoo, 2009; Michau *et al.*, 2015). Globally, about a third of women would be victims of male-perpetrated physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence. In sub-Saharan Africa, 37 percent of women would be victims of male-perpetrated intimate physical and/or sexual violence (World Health Organization, 2013). Differential power dynamics between intimate partners have been deepened not only by economic or social advantages (Kaukinen, 2004; Panda and Agarwal, 2005; Dodoo and Frost, 2008; Weitzman, 2014), however, the cultural context within which unions are arranged could encourage approval and perpetration of violence against women (Bowman, 2003; Frost & Dodoo, 2009, 2010; Horne, Dodoo, & Dodoo, 2013).

In sub-Saharan Africa, where marriage is widespread, bridewealth, an important cultural marriage practice is transferred from the man's family to the man's family to legitimize unions. Bridewealth payment transfers rights to the women's sexual, reproductive and domestic services to men and compensates the woman's family for the loss of her labour (Dodoo & Frost, 2008; Frost & Dodoo, 2010; Goody, 1973; Horne *et al.*, 2013). Bridewealth payment potentially deepens power imbalances especially when some men consider the exchange of wealth to mean that women have been purchased. Bridewealth is not always paid in full although the ideal situation in some cases is for the negotiated amount to be made in full. In some situations, the negotiated amount is partially paid till full payment is made. Also, couples may be allowed to live together even when bridewealth has only been negotiated till initial payment is made.

Studies have shown that the power dynamics within these different scenarios have implication for women's reproductive well-being (Horne *et al.*, 2013). While studies have examined the socio-demographic and economic reasons for violence; we still have limited accounts of the relationship between the cultural context, specifically, bridewealth payment and male's perpetration of physical abuse against their female intimate partners in contemporary times. Traditionally, bridewealth is paid to maintain kinship ties and ensure marital stability. Overtime, bridewealth-payment has been linked with the use of violence against women. Does bridewealth increase the risk of male-perpetrated intimate partner violence? In this study we examine intimate partner violence from the perspective of the one who pays bridewealth, and the one who perpetrates intimate partner violence, men.

Theoretical underpinning

This study is underpinned by the social exchange and resource models. Proponents of the resource theory argue that the availability of resources between couples determines the levels of violence perpetrated (Allen & Straus, 1979; Goode, 1971). Resources include income, education, occupation and other social positions of power. According to the resource theory, individuals who have more resources may be less likely to use violence to command respect or obedience in that, their resources are likely to do that for them (Goode, 1971). On the other hand, when resources like income and social status are not available, men may resort to violence as an alternative resource (Goode, 1971). Men who have more resources may be more likely to pay the negotiated bridewealth. It is expected that differences in completeness of bridewealth payment would be associated with male-

perpetrated violence. According to the social exchange model, when the benefits of violence outweigh the cost, individuals are more likely to be violent (Gelles & Straus, 1979). The basic hypothesis is that individuals provide services and assume that their actions will be reciprocated thus, when such expectations are not met, disapproval and conflicts are inevitable. In this case bridewealth, exchanged between the man and woman's family fundamentally creates a binding obligation between the man and his wife and has implication for the success of the union. As Horne et al. (2013, p.11) describe it, "if the exchange breaks down ripple effects extend beyond the two actors to other group members." Payment potentially supports norms and may provoke disapproval when individuals deviate from norms as enabled by bridewealth payment.

Data and methods

The data for this study is from Bridewealth Payment and Normative Constraints on Women's Lives in Ghana (Bridewealth Study) conducted by the Regional Institute for Population Studies, University Of Ghana. This study was conducted in 18 communities with distinct traditional practices in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The data for this study is restricted to 579 men who indicated at the time of the study that they were in intimate unions. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee for the Humanities (ECH) at the University of Ghana. A vignette experiment was used to obtain information about bridewealth payment, norms, practices, and reproductive and health outcomes from respondents in the selected communities. Respondents answered questions regarding stories in the vignette. In addition, they responded to other demographic, social, marriage history, and bridewealth status questions.

Dependent variable: Men were asked if they have beaten their partners. The responses to the question were 1 'Yes' and 2 'No'. Those who indicated that they have ever beaten their

partners were categorised as 1 'Yes, perpetrated physical abuse', and those who indicated that they have never been beaten by their partners were categorized as 0 'No, never perpetrated abuse.'

Independent variables: Men were asked whether bridewealth had been negotiated in their current union; the responses were 1 'Yes' and 2 'No'. Respondents who answered 'Yes' to the question above were then asked; 'what is the status of bridewealth in your current union?' The responses were 0 'Paid in full' 1 'Partially paid' 2 'Not paid'. All other respondents who indicated that bridewealth was not negotiated in their current union were also coded as 2 'Not paid'. Control variables included are age, level of education, religious affiliation, employment status, number of children ever born, observing violence as a child, duration of marriage and ethnicity. The datasets were analysed using descriptive statistics to examine male-perpetrated intimate partner violence, and selected characteristics. Binary logistic regression models are presented.

Results

Background characteristics of men

The results show that a fifth (20.9%) of all men in intimate unions had ever beaten their female partners (see Table 1). On completeness of bridewealth payment, more than half of the men reported that bridewealth had been fully paid. A fifth also stated that bridewealth had not been paid or negotiated. Again, a quarter reported that bridewealth had been partially paid in their current union. Individual characteristics, person history and community level variables are presented of men are presented in Table 1. The mean age of respondents was 47.3 years. More than eight in ten men were Christians however, 46.98 percent were Orthodox Christians, and close to two in five were Pentecostals/Charismatics. Majority of men in had some JSS education, and one in three had secondary or higher education. More than a tenth

had no education or primary school education. Over eight in ten (86.01 percent) were employed. Clearly half had 1-2 children, and a quarter of them observed violence between their parents or caregivers.

The mean duration of marriage was 15.95 years. With regards to ethnicity, a quarter identified as Matrilineal Guan, and equal proportions of men were Patrilineal Akan and Patrilineal Guan.

Multivariate results

The results show that men who stated that bridewealth had not been paid were 2.60 times as likely to have perpetrated physical violence against their wives compared to their counterparts who reported that bridewealth had been fully paid. With regards to religion, the study shows that married men who identified with Pentecostal/charismatic Christian religion were less likely to have been perpetrators (OR=0.55, p-value<0.05) compared with the reference category. There is a marginally significant inverse relationship between level of education and perpetrating physical violence. Men with secondary/higher education were less likely to be perpetrators. The results show that with increasing age, men were less likely to have been perpetrators. Married men who have 1-2 children were 0.51 times less likely to have been perpetrators compared with those who have 2 to 4 children. From Table 2, it can be observed that with increasing duration of marriage, men were more likely to have reported that they have ever beaten the wives.

Further, men who indicated that they observed violence between their parents or caregivers as children were 1.793 times as likely to have ever beaten their wives compared to those who had never observed violence between their parents or caregivers. Men who identified with Matrilineal Guan (OR=1.92, p-value<0.05) and Patrilineal Akan (OR=2.31, p-value<0.01) were more likely to have been perpetrators.

Discussion and conclusion

The results suggest male-perpetrated intimate partner violence is prevalent. About one in five men had ever beaten their wives. Similar studies have shown that male-perpetrated abuse is prevalent in the sub-region (Speizer, 2010; Mulawa *et al.*, 2018). The results suggest that bridewealth is associated with male-perpetrated violence. Men who were in unions where bridewealth had not been paid at all were more likely to perpetrate physical abuse. Non-payment could imply that men lack the needed resources required to make bridewealth exchanges. This potentially challenges masculinities and could instigate the use of violence to gain control. It is possible that when bridewealth is unpaid, couples are more likely to have relatively higher levels of disagreements concerning legitimizing their unions, and this could have implications for violence.

This initial study uses quantitative data to highlight this relationship in the sub-region. Further research is required to examine the cultural context within which unions are formed, examining bridewealth payment and the pathways through which this phenomenon has implications for violence against women in unions. The study shows that level of education, number of children ever born, age, ethnicity and duration of marriage are associated with physical abuse perpetration. Personal history of exposure to violence was found to be significantly associated with being a perpetrator. Men who observe violence between their parents are more likely to internalize and normalize such acts of violence, thus replicating them in adult relations (Panda and Agarwal, 2005; Abramsky *et al.*, 2011).

The study begins to challenge the reliance on individual level variables to examine the intimate partner violence in specifically sub-Saharan Africa. If research in the sub-region seeks to induce change and reduce the high incidence of male-perpetrated violence against women,

cultural context and practices must be considered. Further analyses will examine the interaction effects education and level of bridewealth payment men violence perpetration.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of men by socio-demographic and economic characteristics

Characteristics	Number	Percent (%)
Perpetrated physical violence		
No	458	79.1
Yes	121	20.9
Level of bridewealth payment		
Fully paid	324	55.96
Partially paid	140	24.18
Not paid	115	19.89
Religious affiliation		
Orthodox	272	46.98
Pentecostal/charismatic	226	39.03
Other	81	13.99
Level of education		
No education/primary	76	13.13
Junior secondary	307	53.02
Secondary/higher	196	33.85
Employment status		
Not employed	81	13.99
Employed	498	86.01
Number of children ever born		
0-1 child	83	14.34
2-4	284	49.05
5 or more	212	36.61
Observed violence as a child		
No	464	80.14
Yes	115	19.86
Ethnicity		
Matrilineal Guan	148	25.56
Matrilineal Akan	157	27.12
Patrilineal Akan	137	23.66
Patrilineal Guan	137	23.66
Continuous variables		
Age	Mean	s.d
	47.3	14.7
Duration of marriage	15.95	12.86

s.d=standard deviation

Table 2: Odds ratios (CI) from binary logistic regression models of perpetrating physical abuse by completeness of bridewealth payment and selected characteristics, among men

Characteristics	Odds Ratios(CI)
Completeness of bridewealth payment ^[Full payment]	
Partial payment	1.22 (0.69-2.16)
No payment	2.60** (1.39-4.86)
Religious affiliation ^[Orthodox]	
Pentecostal/charismatic	0.55* (0.34-0.90)
Other	1.19 (0.63-2.22)
Level of education ^[Junior secondary]	
No education/primary	0.51 ⁺ (0.24-1.12)
Secondary/higher	0.62 ⁺ (0.38-1.01)
Employment status ^[Not employed]	
Employed	1.22 (0.61-2.44)
Age	0.95*** (0.93-0.98)
Duration of marriage	1.04** (1.01-1.08)
Number of children ever born ^[2 to 4 children]	
0 to1 child	0.49* (0.25-0.99)
5 or more	0.94 (0.53-1.67)
Observed violence as a child ^[No]	
Yes	1.79* (1.09-2.96)
Lineage ^[Matrilineal Akan]	
Matrilineal Guan	1.92* (1.01-3.64)
Patrilineal Akan	2.31** (1.26-4.23)
Patrilineal Guan	1.37 (1.26-4.23)
Sample size	579
R-squared	0.102

⁺p<0.1 *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. [] =reference category. CI= Confidence Interval

References

- Abramsky, T. *et al.* (2011) ‘What factors are associated with recent intimate partner violence? findings from the WHO multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence’, *BMC Public Health*, 11(1), p. 109. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-11-109.
- Bowman, C. G. (2003) ‘Domestic violence : Does the African context demand a different approach ?’, *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 26, pp. 473–491. doi: 10.1016/S0160-2527(03)00082-7.
- Dodoo, F. N.-A. and Frost, A. E. (2008) ‘Gender in African Population Research : The Fertility / Reproductive Health Example’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, pp. 431–452.
- Frost, A. E. and Dodoo, F. N.-A. (2009) ‘Men are Missing from African Family Planning’, *Contexts*, 8(1), pp. 44–49. doi: 10.1525/ctx.2009.8.1.44.
- Frost, A. E. and Dodoo, F. N.-A. (2010) “‘The Man Comes to Marry the Woman’ : Exploring Adolescent Boys” Gendered Expectations for Bridewealth and Marriage Among the Akwapim of Southern Ghana’, *Marriage and Family Review*, 49(1–2), pp. 41–59. doi: 10.1080/01494921003648563.
- Goody, J. (1973) “‘Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia.’”, in Goody, J. and Tambiah., S. J. (eds) *Bridewealth and Dowry*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press., pp. 1–58.
- Horne, C., Dodoo, F. N.-A. and Dodoo, N. D. (2013) ‘The Shadow of Indebtedness: Bridewealth and Norms Constraining Female Reproductive Autonomy’, *American Sociological Review*, 78(3), pp. 503–529. doi: 10.1177/0003122413484923.
- Kaukinen, C. (2004) ‘Status Compatibility , Physical Violence , and Emotional Abuse in Intimate Relationships’, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, pp. 452–471.
- Michau, L. *et al.* (2015) ‘Prevention of violence against women and girls: Lessons from practice’, *The Lancet*. Elsevier Ltd, 385(9978), pp. 1672–1684. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61797-9.
- Mulawa, M. *et al.* (2018) ‘Perpetration and Victimization of Intimate Partner Violence Among Young Men and Women in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania’, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(16), pp. 2486 –2511. doi: 10.1177/0886260515625910.
- Panda, P. and Agarwal, B. (2005) ‘Marital Violence , Human Development and Women’s Property Status in India’, *World Development*, 33(5), pp. 823–850. doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.01.009.
- Speizer, I. S. (2010) ‘Intimate Partner Violence Attitudes and Experience Among Women and Men in Uganda’, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25(7), pp. 1224–1241. doi: 10.1177/0886260509340550.
- Weitzman, A. (2014) ‘Women’s and Men’s Relative Status and Intimate Partner Violence in India’, *Population and Development Review*, 40(1), pp. 55–75.
- World Health Organization (2013) ‘Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence’, 2013, p. 57. doi: 10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2.