

**“Give Her a Slap or Two... She Might Change”:
Negotiating Masculinities Through Intimate Partner
Violence among Rural Ghanaian men**

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Areas of research interest: Men and masculinities, gender-based violence, Gender
and sexualities

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Literature on gender-based violence and legal frameworks in Ghana

- Since the 1980s, feminist scholars, social activists, development practitioners, and NGOs have committed significant energy and resources to studying and understanding the complexity of gender-based violence against women more broadly. An extensive body of literature has been produced in this respect
- Focused on one side of the problem while neglecting the other equally important component-

To gain a nuanced understanding of how intimate partner violence becomes possible within a specific cultural context

How do men talk about and make sense of growing up as men?

How might the process of growing up as men promote men's tolerance of or resistance to intimate partner violence?

Methodology

- men aged between 30 and 45 years across six rural communities were recruited
- six (6) focus group discussions (FGDs) with 30 purposefully selected men.
- Each group comprised of five (5) participants from different families in each community.
- Sixteen (16) semi-structured in-depth interviews
- A thematic analytical framework was used

Making 'Men' Of Out 'Boys' And the Violence of Masculinization



Growing up as a chaotic and limiting process

You know, girls become wives and they are expected to learn kitchen stuff to be good wives. Boys become breadwinners. These messages were clear in our minds when we were growing up, but hey, I just wanted to try something else...just being curious about life. I still remember the day that I went to help my sisters in the kitchen. My father punished me very well for doing that. Boys don't do kitchen stuff. (Frank IDI)

Fathers always want to see their boys behave like '*doo le kyii ra*' (an active and assertive boy). When you don't behave like this, even your own peers will bully you. I used to fear that I will be hurt or even killed if I fight others. But my friends took advantage of that and bullied me several times. So, my peers will beat me up when I go out to play. When I return, my father also punishes me for allowing my friends to bully me. It was kind of tough for me. But you know, it was all for my own benefit. Today, you cannot just walk on me like that and gets away with it. No. You pay a price for that (John FGD)

Regulating 'Disruptive Femininities'

- [We] all know that a woman will always be a woman and she must lower herself for her husband. When she constantly causes problems that may bring shame to the husband, the husband has the right to correct her. When a woman displays a bad behavior in the public, people would ask: Whose wife is she? The shame comes to the husband. So, when all attempts to let her change fail, give her a slap or two... She might change. You know, some women are like children...they need some force to change. People will understand you. You've tried your best. It is not your fault (FRANCIS, IDI)

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- To me, violence against your wife does not speak well of you as a man. Not at all! I always tell my friends that violence against your wife does not define you as a 'man'. But I think some women understand that language better than words. Rather than using violence, I will hold her hand tight to tell her that she is going beyond bounds as a woman. To me, this is not violence. I only want to put fear in her to be a good wife. I am not like those men who always abuse their wives everyday. (Andy IDI)

- My findings build on the work of men's studies theorists (e.g., Kopano Ratele, Jeff Hearn, Michael Flood, Gary Barker etc.) and feminist scholars (e.g., Rachel Jewkes, Floretta Boonzaier, Raewyn Connell etc.) who have called for a more critical understanding of social norms on masculinities and femininities as potentially useful starting point in grappling more meaningfully with the question of why, and how some men perpetrate violence against intimate partners

My findings further highlight that interventions aiming to address the oppression of women should not only focus on understanding how women may navigate their everyday violent subjectivities and experiences, but more crucially, we should be concerned to critically understand and theorize how men and women may make sense of themselves as social subjects who are constantly in dialogue with the larger political context in which they reside.

This is so because approaching violence predominantly from the lived experiences and perspectives of women alone is likely to be less productive as this may fail to thoroughly engage the broader practices of unequal gender relations, sociocultural and material conditions, and patriarchal ideologies that may produce and legitimize violence in specific situations.

Discourses around hegemonic masculinity sometimes encourage men to be violence towards women. Such discourses are equally likely to shape how women in abusive relationships may make sense of their violent experiences. In a gender inequitable society such as northwestern Ghana, hegemonic masculinity affords greater social status, power, and cultural legitimacy to most men than women in relationships

As described and articulated by a sample of men in northwestern Ghana, acts of violence against women are further reinforced by dominant notions that a man has the cultural right and moral obligation to secure the obedience and subservience of his wife through 'appropriate' and 'corrective' violence. These are widely articulated to be acceptable and even warranted in specific cases

If the ultimate aim of our research, policy-making, and advocacy is meant to contribute to the development and promotion of a gender conscious and liberatory society, I would argue that men should be approached as subjects of feminist interventions.