

Patriarchy and gender-inequitable attitudes as drivers of intimate partner violence against women in the Central Region of Ghana

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SVRI Forum 2019
22 October 2019





Background

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- ❖ **Research has highlighted high prevalence of violence and tolerance of violence against women in Ghana. ¹**
- ❖ **For those who seek to end women's exposure to VAW, and develop culturally appropriate interventions, understanding how men who use violence justify it is critical for developing the tools with which to dismantle male dominance and control over women**

GDHS (2008) found:

- 1 in 5 women experience sexual and/or physical IPV in the past year ²

RRS Baseline survey found:

- 21% of women aged between 18 -49 years experienced sexual and/or physical IPV ³
- 23% of men aged ≥ 18 yrs reported having perpetrated sexual and/or physical IPV ⁴
- High levels of emotional IPV victimization/perpetration.

* Intimate partner Violence (IPV) :- violence experienced within a relationship (perpetrated by partner, husband or boyfriend)

Study Aim

We draw on the narratives of men who acknowledge their use of violence over their wives and girlfriends in Ghana and show how a range of social, cultural, and religious factors – flowing from patriarchy – intersected to inform the construction of a traditional masculinity, and how men draw on this to legitimize their violence

Study Aim

- Trial conducted in 4 districts located in the Central Region of Ghana
- RAs primed to identify men who reported experience of IPV (as perpetrators) during the baseline survey
- IDIs with 17 adult men (aged 18 or older)
- Data were analyzed thematically

Men make decisions at home and perform his roles

- ❖ Most men held a view that decision-making in the home is a preserve of men, and also responsibility men cannot abdicate, as it is part of their expected gender roles

At home I make the decisions and perform my roles and do the things that I'm supposed to do for my wife when it comes to our chop money [i.e. money for food and the home and other things]'

- ❖ Man's failure to provide direction to his family would reflect badly on him as a man, in so doing call into question his masculinity
- ❖ Yet, on the other side, this socially sanctioned duty of men to provide direction to his family primarily worked to elevate and emphasize men's position as superior to women and other males (e.g., boys) in the gender hierarchy
- ❖ Men considered that the hierarchical gender structure described here, with men occupying the top most position, needed to be respected by the wives to prevent violence in their homes
- ❖ Any challenge to it from a wife could result in beating from her husband

Men make decisions at home and perform his roles cont.

- ❖ To argue and substantiate their view that a man is the head of the household, some men drew on religious teachings and texts

'As Christ is the head of the church so is a man to the house'

- ❖ Several of the men drew on the higher authority of 'God's law' to justify their view that they were superior to women

'If we are to be honest, even the Bible makes us understand that the man is the head of the family'

- ❖ It was in the context of a perceived challenge to men's rules and authority that men emotionally and or physically harmed their female partners

'Women are not regarded in society'

- ❖ Men shared contrasting attitudes and experiences regarding gender relations between men and women
- ❖ Some shared narratives that suggested they thought women were sub-human or intellectually inferior

'I think that since women are not regarded in the society that's why they're not allowed to make decisions, we count them as part of our cooking utensils and other things'

- ❖ While some men reasoned that it was progressive for a man to consult with his wife when taking decisions, they stressed that the final decision-making lies with the man

'A man [takes the decision] but a woman also brings her idea to touch, so it's going to be 70-30'

'Women are not regarded in society' cont.

- ❖ Almost all men preferred a wife who exhibited a femininity characterized by obedience towards her husband
- ❖ The notion that a good woman acquiesces to men was a strategic tool in bolstering this traditional masculinity and worked to sustain these men's dominance over women
- ❖ Practically, the men's stated preference for a subservient wife was another tactic for controlling women and ensuring that they be fearful and subservient to their husbands, and thereby conform to their dictates
- ❖ The ever-present threat of violence underpinned this

'Men should provide, and women must cook'

- ❖ Rigid and distinct gender roles which were conspicuously reflected in the attitudes and practices of these men
- ❖ Men's dominance of decision-making was one male gender role, but there were many more that were perceived as ingrained in inflexible and unchanging 'culture'

'The difference here is, in the case of a woman, your responsibilities are to clean the home, tidy up everywhere including the toilets, and cook for the man'

- ❖ The need to reinforce men's supremacy over women, primarily informed the gender roles for women
- ❖ Many men expressed the view that a man's place is outside the home; where he is expected to toil to earn money for his family's upkeep
- ❖ This provider role—a key trait of the traditional masculinity which was valued by most of the men comes with clearly stipulated responsibilities that a man must perform

'Men should provide, and women must cook' cont.

- ❖ Material provision was a critical feature of the traditional masculinity, valorized by most men
- ❖ To attain this masculinity, men had to provide for their wives and children
- ❖ Any failure to provide triggered frustration in their wife and, sometimes, a violent response from the men

'Chop money can also generate violence in the house. Maybe even if the man is financially unstable, he [husband] won't even inform the woman of the fact that he doesn't have money today but the moment the woman asks for money, then he will use pride. Pride can never solve that problem'

- ❖ If the wife questioned the men's inability to provide, men interpreted this as a direct assault on his masculinity and would use violence to temporarily reclaim his honour

'She is mine and must allow me to do it(sex)'

- ❖ Several men emphasized that the wife's responsibility towards her husband centered around her 'pampering' him ('pampering' meant to sexually pleasure and satisfy the male partner)
- ❖ Two reasons appeared to inform these men's sexual entitlement on their female partners: the **bride-price** and the notion that '**men own their female partner** (i.e. 'You are my girl')
- ❖ Men's entitlement to be 'pampered' by their wives was inextricably tied to their view that because the man had paid bride-price for his wife and met other customary demands from the wife's family, he was entitled to her sexually

'How can I marry you and put a ring on your finger and when I want to have sex you say no? If you won't do it then it means you don't love me'

- ❖ The payment of bride-price emphasized men's sense of ownership of their wives and entitlement to their bodies

Beating as discipline

- ❖ Men viewed partner violence as a strategy to discipline a female partner

'In marriage it is not always smooth, there will definitely be beatings, but they are no big issues'

- ❖ Through first diminishing and even dehumanizing women, men found it easier to inflict violence on their female partners
- ❖ When a wife was judged to have misbehaved, or had been disobedient, men felt it was their responsibility to discipline her

'I came from the farm only to find my wife sleeping instead of joining me in the farm. Meanwhile, she wasn't sick... nothing happened. She wasn't injured. I gave her a lesson [beating]'

- ❖ Beating their wives was a necessary form of discipline for a disobedience or shirking responsibilities, something that men could not abdicate. For them, it was part of being a man

Conclusion

- ❖ An array of social, cultural, and religious factors—deriving from patriarchy—coalesced to inform the construction of a traditional masculine position which the men aspired to occupy
- ❖ it was through performing or aspiring to achieve this form of masculinity that men used different forms of violence against their female partner
- ❖ Traditional masculinity displayed or aspired to by these men was rooted in patriarchal power relations in which men were positioned as superior to and dominant over women
- ❖ Findings highlight how some structures of patriarchy (i.e. men's violence and patriarchal mode of production) play out to subordinate women and inform the construction of a traditional masculinity—which often manifested itself through display of extreme gender-inequitable attitudes and use forms of violence against female partners

Implications for programmes

- ❖ It is difficult to see how interventions to prevent IPV can be effective without transforming the dominant construction of masculinity
- ❖ Building respect for and admiration of women, acknowledging domestic partnership and promoting shared decision-making are essential elements of programmes that seek to disrupt authoritarian patriarchies and prevent male perpetrated IPV
- ❖ Programmes should also address cultural and other context specific factors that drive male perpetrated IPV
- ❖ Widespread community-based change is most likely needed to enable and sustain change in masculinity, drawing on contributions from traditional and religious leaders as well as other community members

Acknowledgement

The Study was funded by UK Aid from the United Kingdom government, via the [What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls? Global Programme](#). The funds were managed by the South African Medical Research Council. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

We thank the participants for sharing their thoughts and experiences.

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