

Attitudes and Experience of Intimate Partner Violence Among Ever-Married Women in Uganda

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Abstract:

We examine how imbalanced gender-relations driven by the cultural norm of male domination sustain IPV in Uganda. We use the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (2016 UDHS) to assess the prevalence and risk factors of IPV. We focus on ever-married women ages 15 to 49, who were administered the domestic violence module. We use data on N=7536 women who completed interviews. Preliminary results show that almost 57 percent (56.9%) of women had experienced violence at some point in their lives after turning fifteen. The prevalence of IPV was highest among participants, who were in older age groups, who resided in rural areas, and who had low levels of education. Despite recent government interventions via various legislative initiatives, IPV is still relatively high and require further research and more evidence driven policies and actions. We discuss the findings through the theoretical lens of resource, status inconsistency, patriarchy, and gender roles.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the most common forms of violence worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013), up to 70 percent of women around the world experience physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives (Kimuna & Okemwa 2022). Other studies show that IPV occurs in all settings and among all socioeconomic, religious affiliations, racial, and ethnic groups. Overwhelmingly, IPV is experienced by women; and this burden is a concerning issue for Ugandan women and for women around the world.

According to data from the latest Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 51% of Ugandan women age 15-49 had experienced violence at some point in their lives after turning fifteen, with 22% of such violence occurring within one year before the survey (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016). It should be noted that the percent of women experiencing violence from the current study has decreased, from 60% in 2006 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016) to 51% in 2016. The decrease may be due to warranted government responses via various legislation initiatives, including but not limited to, the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that was signed in 1985, as well as the 2010 Domestic Violence Act. Despite this decline, IPV is still relatively high and requires further research and more evidence driven policies and actions. In this study, we use the Uganda 2016 DHS to examine how poverty and imbalanced gender-relations sustain IPV experience of ever married women in Uganda. We discuss the findings using the theoretical lens of resource, status inconsistency, and gender roles.

Theoretical Perspectives

IPV has been analyzed through many different theoretical lenses, including patriarchy. Many African societies are patriarchal, and women have limited resources and power within the home, which makes them vulnerable to IPV (Kimuna & Okemwa 2022). For example, in explaining IPV Klomegah (2008) uses the resource theoretical lens to argue that violence against women may be perpetuated in a society where male patriarchy is a measure to keep power in the hands of the dominant group. The dominant group uses resource and force to maintain power; the norm of female subordination is deep-rooted in gender relations, and thus the idea that women would justify IPV despite being the victims of violence, becomes understandable (Klomegah 2008; Ogland et al. 2014). The justification by the victims has been reported to be statistically correlated with IPV. Ogland et al. (2014) found that women who believed violence from a partner was justified were 98% more likely to experience violence. Additionally, Speizer (2010) reported that women viewed IPV more positively than men for violence based on perceived unacceptable behaviors. Further, Women who were from more rural regions of Uganda viewed the violence more positively than women from urban areas.

Certain factors can be indicative of women's justification of IPV such as contribution to household income. In regard to justification and contribution to household income, women were less likely to agree with IPV when they were contributing as much financially as their husbands (Mann and Takyi 2009). Additionally, researchers have reported that having joint decision making within a marital union decreases the perceived justification of abuse, which was the case in Mann and Takyi's (2009) research using DHS data for Ghana.

Moreover, household wealth has often been used to measure predictability of IPV. Using Uganda 2006 DHS data, Ogland et al. (2014) found that income is correlated with experiencing IPV. Again, looking through a resource theory lens, women from higher level income

households were less likely to experience IPV compared to those from lower income households (Ogland et al. 2014). From the Uganda 2016 DHS, nearly 57 percent (59.6 %) of women who were grouped in the lowest quintile for wealth had experienced violence since the age of fifteen compared to 44.1% of women from the highest quintile for wealth experiencing violence (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016).

On the other hand, status inconsistency, another theory often used for violence against women, sees IPV as a result of men's lack of resources when directly related to their female partner's resources (Ogland et al. 2014). In line with that theory, women with more education than their partners are expected to experience more IPV than their counterparts with lower education than their partners. However, the results for status inconsistency are mixed. Behrman (2019) found that with the decrease in men having more education than women, there is an increase in the likelihood of women experiencing IPV. This is contrary to Ogland et al. (2014), whose study concluded that women who were more educated than their husbands were more likely to experience one form of IPV, sexual violence and not physical and emotional violence. It is also inconsistent with the data reported from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2016), which showed that education for women decreased the likelihood of experiencing IPV. These inconsistencies may be due to the duration of study; Behrman (2019) was looking at the change over a ten-year period. Further, employed women are more likely to experience violence than women who are not employed, despite their ability to contribute to the household income (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016).

Although education and employment statuses are different, both relate to women gaining resources, which may increase the likelihood of IPV. Additionally, Mann and Takyi (2009) found support for Gelle's theory of identity, stating that men may feel that their identity is being

questioned when they are not the sole breadwinner, which might lead to abuse. Accordingly, IPV is intertwined with traditional gender roles and their performance. Traditional gender roles and socialization patterns implicitly or explicitly dictate what men and women do and how they behave (Kimuna et al. 2018; Mann & Takyi 2009).

Controlling behaviors of a partner or spouse can be indicative of IPV or gender-based violence (GBV) against women. Oglan et al (2014) found that physical violence against women in relationships were 69% more likely to occur when the male partner in that relationship exhibited control issues. Physical violence increased as the number of controlling characteristics in male partners increased (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016).

Additionally, a woman's autonomy and decision-making ability may have some effect on their experience with violence. Women who live in a household where men are the sole decision makers are more likely to be subjected to physical violence than those who live in households where they have some say in decisions.

Finally, alcohol use is another variable measured in relation to IPV. Cunradi et al. (1999) examined the relationship between alcoholism and IPV against women and men. Findings showed that regardless of racial and ethnic groups, tendencies for alcohol problems were positively correlated with IPV. This suggests that IPV can be exacerbated when coupled with issues concerning alcohol regardless of gender. These findings were also similar to Zhan et al.'s (1994) Russian study that found that drinking was associated with IPV at rates similar for both men and women, with participants who preferred drinking on the streets or in parks, even more likely to engage in IPV. The analyses reported by the UDHS is concurrent with this research as it reported that women are 84% more likely to experience issues of domestic violence if their husband or partner was reported "often drunk" (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016). This is

compared to women who reported that their partner “did not drink”, making up 45% of the population that experienced IPV. Additionally, the numbers reported for men experiencing IPV with alcohol issues are similar (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016). However, there is contradictory literature, which showed that frequently drinking alcohol lowered the likelihood of IPV (Bennet et al. 1994).

Data and Methods

Data for this study are drawn from the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) coordinated by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics. This is a nationally representative probability sample of women ages 15 to 49 who were administered the GBV module. We exclude never married women and focus only on ever married women to examine factors associated with IPV. The 2016 UDHS interviewed never married and ever married women ages 15 to 49 and men ages 15 to 54 who were randomly selected to be administered the domestic violence module. At the start of every interview, informed consent for the survey was obtained from the respondents and protection of their anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. To prepare for a possibility of abused women asking for help, a list of organizations that provide help was constructed. Detailed information on sampling procedure and IRB approval for the Uganda DHS can be found in <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR333/FR333.pdf>.

We analyze these data to determine factors that increase the likelihood of IPV with a focus on women’s experiences and their socio-demographic characteristics. Moreover, we examine how women’s own attitudes to female abuse, or their rationalization of male domination, correlates with their experiences of abuse in male-female relations. Both descriptive and multivariate analyses are conducted.

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