

Ethnoracial Group Variation in Gender-Based Violence in the Dominican Republic: The Roles of Childhood and Community Violence Exposure in Risk of Physical Violence

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**Abstract:**

Violence against women, gender-based violence (GBV), has risen in the Dominican Republic (DR), especially among Haitian Dominican women in the bateyes. Immigrants from Haiti leave a country with high levels of interpersonal and community violence, including high levels of violence against children and violence against women.

Consequences of violence against children and normative community violence include the intergenerational transmission of family violence cultures as children learn local gender norms and interaction repertoires as well as strategies to manage interpersonal conflicts through power and verbal and physical aggression. Data for this research are drawn from both the country and bateyes 2013 DHS surveys. We evaluate whether level of severity of physical violence in the past 12 months varies by ethnoracial group, and whether ethnoracial group variation is grounded in subgroup distributions of violence exposure and socioeconomic characteristics. We observe significantly higher odds of severe physical violence among Haitian immigrants, but the higher odds of physical violence among Haitian Dominicans is due to their greater exposure to risks of violence such as SES and childhood violence exposure.

Keywords:

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## **Introduction**

Violence against women, gender-based violence (GBV), has risen in the Dominican Republic (DR), especially among Haitian Dominican women in the bateyes. Common triggers of violence against women are substance use and poverty, and more readily expressed in social contexts in which women are expected to be subordinate to men. Immigrants from Haiti leave a country with high levels of interpersonal and community violence, including high levels of violence against children and violence against women. Consequences of violence against children and normative community violence include the intergenerational transmission of violence as children learn local gender norms and interaction repertoires as well as strategies to manage interpersonal conflicts through power and verbal and physical aggression. We link these two literatures in an exploration of the role of ethnoracial identity and exposure to violence in shaping experiences in women's experiences with GBV. Greater understanding of ethnoracial variation in GBV elaborates subgroup variation in the social determinants of violence against women, thus facilitating public health and law enforcement interventions better targeted to particular social groups.

## **Ethnoracial Group, Haitian Immigration, and Place of Residence in the Dominican Republic**

Historically Haitians were recruited to the Dominican Republic to work in the government-owned sugar cane plantations called bateyes. Many migrants settled permanently in these rural bateyes, remaining after the sugar cane industry privatized. There are now several generations of Dominican-born Haitians in the impoverished bateyes, joined by much smaller flows of continued Haitian immigration. Haitian Dominican women have essentially been segregated to residence in the bateyes, whereas non-Haitian Dominicans reside in other rural areas and in the fast-growing urban areas. There is a sizeable stream of current undocumented Haitian migration to work in urban service sector jobs.

## **Violence against Women in the Dominican Republic**

Lifetime physical violence estimates for Dominican women increased from 16% in 2007 to 26% in 2013, and from 18% for Haitian Dominican women in the bateyes in 2007 to 30% in 2013. Likewise, lifetime sexual violence rates doubled to 10% for Dominican women, but remained at 10% for Haitian Dominicans between 2007 and 2013. It is difficult to determine how to apportion the causes of rising rates among better data collection, increases in women reporting events, and true increases in violence.

Violence against women may increase when substance abuse and poverty climb steeply in communities. Violence may also increase in communities where women are gaining economic independence thereby disrupting inegalitarian gender relationships (aka “backlash theory”). And in communities in which women are becoming empowered, the acceptability of violence against women may be declining among their families and neighbors or becoming entrenched as a community level of “backlash. .

## **Childhood Exposure to Violence**

Determinants of women’s risk of GBV are typically identified as constrained individual and household economic resources that reduce a woman’s intrahousehold bargaining power, prompting human development efforts to raise women’s economic and therefore relational independence. In contrast the “male backlash” studies show that such economic independence in communities with sustained traditional gender norms paradoxically places women at higher risk of GBV. “Male backlash” studies highlight the importance of changing gender norms in localities as essential to reducing women’s risk of GBV.

Trauma-informed research on children’s well-being articulates how directly and indirectly experienced violence against children negatively shapes a child’s life course trajectories. Children traumatized by violence, especially family violence, may not acquire developmentally appropriate attachments of trust and security to primary

caregivers, thus face a lifetime of conflictual or aggressive interpersonal relationships as adolescents and adults. Other mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of interpersonal violence are gendered, whereby boys replicate the traditional male attitudes and behaviors of dominance and superiority over women, whereas girls replicate the traditional female attitudes and behaviors of subordination and inferiority of women. A final set of mechanisms is are the biosocial determinants of emotional dysregulation and poor skills in interpersonal conflict management, collectively and cumulatively raising the risks of becoming either victims or perpetrators of interpersonal violence.

### **Community Exposure to Violence**

GBV occurs ecologically, according to the World Health Organization. Individual characteristics are associated with individual propensities to victimize and/or become violence victims, but are embedded in local, regional, and national normative climates. At the national level, laws against IPV are essential for individuals to abandon gendered norms and behaviors, for example. But women and men accomplish their daily lives in particular communities which may simultaneously reflect and contradict national norms. Communities in transition, particularly where girls' levels of education are rising to more approximate boys' levels, and where adult women have more opportunities to contribute to household economic fortunes through work outside the home, are locales where traditional and nontraditional perspectives about gender, intimate partner relationships, and the value of children mix. Changes in cultural norms traditionally follow advances in female education, a cultural diffusion model. Consequently gender role innovators live in risk of conflict with more traditional normbearers, thus paradoxically raising risks of GBV.

### **Hypotheses**

We hypothesize that Haitian immigrants will report higher odds of less severe and more severe physical violence due to their Haitian exposure to higher levels of all types of

violence. We hypothesize that Haitian Dominicans will report higher levels of physical violence than rural and urban Dominicans due to their disproportionately higher levels of poverty and lower levels of education.

## **Data and Methods**

Data and Sample Data for this research are drawn from the 2013 DHS survey of the Bateyes Estatales of the Dominican Republic and the 2013 DHS survey of the nation (called ENDESA 2013). Face-to-face interviews were used to collect four data components: household surveys, surveys of women between the ages of 15 and 49, and surveys of men between the ages of 15 and 59. Most surveyed women were selected to complete a violence module, interviewed by women but only if the interview could be completed privately and without interruption of husbands, boyfriends, or partners. The violence module asks about violence in general but focuses on domestic violence. In the Bateyes and ENDESA, around 90% of lifetime and 12-month prevalence levels of sexual or physical violence among women occurred to ever-partnered women. Therefore, we restricted the analytical sample to the 1,143 women in the Bateyes and the 5,769 women in the ENDESA who were ever-partnered.

## **Measures**

### Ethnoracial Group, Place of Residence, and Migration

Women born in the bateyes (n=784) are Haitian Dominicans, whereas women born outside the bateyes (n=4,100), whether in rural (n=1,640) or urban places (n=3860), are categorized as Dominicans. Some small portion of the Dominican subsample may be of Haitian descent, but the data do not permit stronger claims about ethnoracial identity in the Dominican Republic. Haitian immigrants (n=480) are women who were born in Haiti, whether currently living in (n=172) or outside bateyes (n=308).

### Gender-Based Violence

Women were asked both lifetime and recent (i.e., in the past 12 months) experiences with physical, sexual and emotional violence from an intimate partner. For each violence indicator, women were asked if they ever experienced it and whether they experienced it in the past 12 months. Recent experience (coded as 1) is defined as having often or sometimes experienced violence in the past 12 months, whereas women who had never experienced violence or whose experience is more than 12 months prior to the interview are coded as 0.

Physical violence is defined as having been pushed, slapped, punched, pulled, dragged or kicked, strangled or burned, or threatened with a weapon. Severe violence occurs when a woman has been strangled, burned, or threatened with a weapon and less severe physical violence covers the remaining violent activities. Approximately 14% of the sample experienced physical violence in the past 12 months, with higher prevalence of less severe physical violence (13.5%). (See Table 1). Haitian immigrants have levels of GBV that are comparable to native-born women (see Table 2). Haitian Dominican women report higher prevalence levels of physical violence than Dominican women in urban areas, whereas rural and urban Dominican women have comparable levels.

### Childhood Violence Exposure

Childhood sexual abuse is defined as having been forced to have sex before age 15 or age at first sex occurring before age 15. Childhood physical abuse is measured by whether a woman was “ever physically hurt” by a family member: mother, father, brother, sister, or other relative. We sorted these into 2 types of family violence: physical abuse by a parent, and physical abuse by a sibling or other relative. Childhood violence exposure also includes indirect experience through witnessing fathers ever beating a woman’s mother. Nearly one quarter of women first had sex before they were 15 years old (see Table 1). Less than 1% had forced sex before the same age. Approximately 1% were physically hurt by a parent and nearly 3% were physically hurt by a sibling or other relative. Nearly 15% witnessed their mother beaten by their father. Haitian immigrants have levels of childhood violence exposure that are comparable to native-born women (see Table 3). Haitian Dominican women have higher prevalence levels of voluntary sex

before age 15 than Dominican women, but levels of forced sex before age 15 is comparable across ethnoracial-place groups. Rural Dominican women are less likely than urban Dominicans and Haitian Dominicans to experience physical harm by a parent, sibling, or other relative. Urban Dominicans are more likely than rural Dominicans or Haitian Dominicans to have witnessed their father beating their mother.

### Community Violence Exposure

Community-level violence exposure was defined as level of acceptance of GBV norms and level of exposure to injury from weapons, as reported in the men's survey. GBV norms are indicated by level of acceptance of wife beating and prevalence of having sex with girls by men in each geographic locale. Men were asked whether a husband was justified in beating his wife under one or more of these scenarios: she refuses to have sex with her husband, she burns the food, she neglects her children, she goes out without his permission, or she argues with him. Among all locales, community support for GBV norms is indicated when 10% of men in the locale approve of wife beating in any of the reported scenarios or 5% of the men had recent sex with a girl younger than 15. Among all locales, exposure to violence from weapons is indicated when 5% or more of the men reported injuries from weapons in the preceding year. Community violence is lowest when considering injury prevalence (8.09%) and highest when considering wife beating norms (14.8%).

### Control Variables

We consider how the effect of childhood and community exposure to violence may be conditioned by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. (See Table 1.) The mean age of women is in her early 30s.

Socioeconomic factors that may condition the effect of violence exposure to GBV are women's levels of education, wealth, and work status, affording them both less traditional gender norms and economic independence from partners. Nearly half of the analytic sample are among the two poorest wealth quintiles and slightly more than half worked outside the home. Education is widely dispersed with approximately 20% of the

sample with very low levels of completed education and approximately 20% with very high levels of education.

### Procedures

Data are weighted and the estimates are adjusted for complex survey design structures, using STATA14. We conduct logistic regression to determine the odds of GBV, adding factors sets of ethnoracial category, childhood violence exposure, community violence, and sociodemographic factors in 4 separate models.

### **Results**

The odds ratios of experiencing less and severe physical violence in the past 12 months is presented in Table 4. Haitian Dominicans and rural Dominicans have comparable odds of less severe and more severe physical violence to urban Dominicans. Haitian immigrants are more likely than native-born women to report experiencing severe violence in the preceding 12 months, but are equally likely to experience less severe versus no physical violence (see Model 1 in Table 4). The higher odds of severe physical violence against Haitian immigrants persists across models, indicating a relatively robust effect. The odds decline with introduction of sociodemographic characteristics, suggesting that a portion of their risk is grounded in Haitian immigrants higher levels of poverty. The odds are reduced further when introducing variation in levels of community violence, which suggests that Haitian immigrants may be more exposed to violence in the community.

Childhood sexual abuse, especially forced sex prior to age 15, is associated with higher odds of more severe recent physical violence. Experiencing physical abuse from a sibling or other relative raises the odds of experiencing recent less severe physical abuse, but is unassociated with more severe physical abuse. Witnessing their mothers' beatings by fathers and directly experiencing parents' physical abuse are unassociated with severity of physical violence. Women who live in high violence communities,



evidenced by relatively high injury levels from weapons, have higher odds of experiencing more severe physical abuse.

Older women are less likely than younger women to experience less severe physical violence, an observation consistent with the age-graded distribution of violence against women. Less severe and more severe physical violence experience declines steadily across higher wealth quintiles. Consistent with the “male backlash” hypothesis, working women experience significantly higher odds of less severe and more severe physical violence. Women who completed primary school are more likely than women with little primary schooling to report less severe physical violence in the preceding 12 months.

## **Conclusions**

Haitian immigrants experience significantly higher levels of more severe physical violence, suggesting the strong influence of a culture more normatively tolerant of individual, family, and community violence. Further research might explore the context of the immigrant destination in shaping women’s exposure to severe physical violence, such as human trafficking and sex worker employment.

Compared to urban Dominicans, Haitian Dominicans experience less physical violence, whether less severe or more severe physical violence once the associated risks of poverty are considered. We expect that national efforts to raise women’s levels of education, improve women’s access to formal employment, and other women-centered efforts will reduce violence against women in the bateyes. Efforts to reduce bateyes children’s exposure to violence will further interrupt the intergenerational transmission of GBV.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

	Proportion/ <i>M</i> [SD]	Count/Range
<b><i>Childhood Victimization</i></b>		
Had sex before age 15	22.5	1483
Forced to have sex before 15	0.68	45
Phys. abused by m/f	1.08	71
Phys. abused by sib/relative	2.72	179
Phys. abused by any family	3.74	246
Witnessed father beat mother <sup>a</sup>	14.6	961
<b><i>Community Violence</i></b>		
Men justifying wife-beating	4.42 [6.09]	0 – 47.6
Locality has 10% or more justifying	14.8	972
Men injured by weapons	1.00 [2.38]	0 – 18.8
Locality has 5% or more injured	8.09	533
Men with child sex partner	1.21 [2.59]	0 - 15
Locality has 5% or more with child partner	11.3	744
<b><i>Recent Intimate Partner Violent Victimization</i></b>		
Any physical violence (ever in past year)	13.9	915
Severe physical violence (ever in past year)	4.82	317
Less severe physical violence (ever in past year)	13.5	890
<b><i>Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics</i></b>		
Haitian migrant	6.86	452
Place of residence		
Urban	58.6	3860
Rural	24.9	1640
Bateyes	16.5	1086
HH wealth quintile		
Poorest	30.7	2020
Poorer	23.0	1514
Middle	18.5	1215
Richer	15.8	1040
Richest	12.1	797
Education in years		
0 – 4 years	18.1	1194
5 – 8 years	27.5	1814
9 – 12 years	34.1	2243
13+ years	20.3	1335
Worked in past year	57.5	3787
Age in years	32.2 [9.04]	15 - 49
N		6586

Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, 2013 ENDESA, 2013 and 2013 Bateyes.

**Table 2. Victimization: Childhood, Community-Level, and Past Year Physical Violence**

	Recent Physical Violence
<b><i>Childhood Victimization</i></b>	
R had sex before age 15	19.5 <sup>a</sup>
Did not	12.3
R forced to have sex before age 15	33.3 <sup>a</sup>
Was not	4.62
Mother/father physically hurt R	19.1 <sup>a</sup>
Did not	13.8
Sibling/relative physically hurt R	33.8 <sup>a</sup>
Was not	13.7
R witnessed father beat mother	18.7 <sup>a</sup>
Did not	13.1
<b><i>Community Violence</i></b>	
Men justifying wife-beating 10% +	17.6 <sup>a</sup>
Less than 10%	13.3
Men injured by weapons 5% +	6.19
Less than 5%	4.69
Men with child sex partner 5% +	13.8
Less than 5%	14.4
<b><i>Race and Place</i></b>	
Haitian migrant	15.7
Dominican-born	13.8
Bateyes residence	16.6
Rural residence	13.2 <sup>a</sup>
Urban residence	13.5 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Violent Victimization (Total)</b>	<b>13.9</b>
N	6586

Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, 2013 ENDESA, 2013 and 2013 Bateyes.

<sup>a</sup> comparison is statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level or lower

**Table 3. Independent Variables by Childhood Violent Victimization**

	Early Sex	Forced Sex	Parent Abused	Family Abused	Witnessed Abuse
<b>Haitian migrant</b>	24.8	0.22	2.65	0.44	13.1
Dominican-born	22.4	0.72	2.72	1.12	14.7
<b>Bateyes residence</b>	30.2	0.55	3.22	1.47	12.8
Rural residence	22.1 <sup>b</sup>	0.61	1.95 <sup>b</sup>	0.73 <sup>c</sup>	13.5
Urban residence	20.5 <sup>b</sup>	0.75	2.90	1.11	15.6 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Age, 15 – 19 years</b>	39.9 <sup>a</sup>	1.35	4.64	1.93	18.8
20 – 24 years	23.2	0.64	3.40	1.29	18.8
25 – 29 years	23.7	0.26 <sup>b</sup>	3.66	1.53	17.6
30 – 34 years	21.2	1.00	2.09 <sup>b</sup>	0.84 <sup>c</sup>	13.0 <sup>b</sup>
35 – 39 years	17.5	0.62	2.27 <sup>b</sup>	0.93 <sup>c</sup>	13.1 <sup>b</sup>
40 – 44 years	17.7	0.94	1.42 <sup>b</sup>	0.83 <sup>c</sup>	10.7 <sup>b</sup>
45 – 49 years	21.7	0.25 <sup>b</sup>	2.02 <sup>b</sup>	0.38 <sup>b</sup>	10.1 <sup>b</sup>
<b>HH wealth quintile, Poorest</b>	32.0 <sup>a</sup>	0.89	2.48	0.99	14.7
Poorer quintile	24.3	0.99	3.50 <sup>c</sup>	1.39	15.4
Middle quintile	18.9	0.16 <sup>b</sup>	2.14	0.58	13.9
Richer quintile	16.0	0.58	2.21	1.63	14.2
Richest quintile	9.03	0.50	3.39	0.75	14.3
<b>Years of education, 0 – 4</b>	41.1 <sup>a</sup>	0.75	1.93	1.09	11.6 <sup>a</sup>
5 – 8 Years of education	30.6	1.16	2.09	0.99	15.9
9 – 12 Years of education	15.7	0.40	2.90 <sup>c</sup>	1.07	15.1
13+ Years of education	6.29	0.45	3.97 <sup>b</sup>	1.20	14.8
<b>Worked in past year</b>	52.1 <sup>a</sup>	0.77	2.90	1.14	14.9
Did not work in past year	47.9	0.57	2.47	1.00	14.1
<b>Violent Victimization (Total)</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>14.6</b>
N					6586

Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, 2013 ENDESA, 2013 and 2013 Bateyes.

Note: All comparisons tested against the variable's base category; higher order categories are not compared against each other

<sup>a</sup> all comparisons are statistically significant, when compared to base category, at the  $p < .05$  level or lower

<sup>b</sup> individual comparison statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level or lower

<sup>c</sup> individual comparison statistically significant at the  $p < .10$  level

**Table 4. Multinomial Logistic Regression: Recent Physical Violence, None versus Less Severe and None versus More Severe**

<i>No Recent Physical Violence versus...</i>	<u>Model 1</u>		<u>Model 2</u>		<u>Model 3</u>		<u>Model 4</u>	
	<i>Less Severe Violence</i>	<i>More Severe Violence</i>	<i>Less Severe Violence</i>	<i>More Severe Violence</i>	<i>Less Severe Violence</i>	<i>More Severe Violence</i>	<i>Less Severe Violence</i>	<i>More Severe Violence</i>
Haitian migrant	0.879	2.136***	0.891	2.254***	0.789	1.855**	0.777	1.832*
Place of residence (Urban=0)								
Rural	0.962	0.828	0.975	0.850	0.847	0.740	0.826	0.780
Bateyes	1.365	1.005	1.332	0.971	0.997	0.750	1.001	0.712
First sex before 15			1.297*	1.734**	1.161	1.605**	1.162	1.612**
Forced for sex before 15			1.762	10.030***	1.607	9.711***	1.562	9.452***
M/F physically hurt R			1.319	1.377	1.220	1.401	1.233	1.388
Sib/Rel physically hurt R			3.518***	2.255	3.320**	2.208	3.323**	2.218
Witnessed F beat M			1.300	1.418	1.223	1.390	1.224	1.366
R's HH wealth quintile (Poorest=0)								
Poorer					0.859	0.703	0.856	0.712
Middle					0.664*	0.616*	0.654*	0.638
Richer					0.454***	0.426**	0.445***	0.452**
Richest					0.308***	0.318**	0.299***	0.341**
R worked in past year					1.665***	1.529*	1.674***	1.483*
R's education (0 – 4 years=0)								
5 – 8 years					1.592*	1.265	1.569*	1.285
9 – 12 years					1.256	1.522	1.248	1.549
13+ years					1.312	0.887	1.298	0.904
R's age in years					0.982*	0.995	0.982*	0.996
Pct. of men in community...								
10 % + Justify 1+ reasons to beat wife							1.026	1.378
5% + Recent weapon injury							0.741	1.691*
5% + Recent sex partner under 15							0.870	1.042
Constant	0.110***	0.057***	0.097***	0.044***	0.158***	0.056***	0.169***	0.047***
N	6579							

Cells: Exponentiated Coefficients  
 \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$