

# **Intimate Partner Violence in Ghana: Examining Bridewealth Payment and Male's Perpetration of Wife-beating**

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## **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 & Dodoo, 2009; Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt, & Zimmerman, 2015). Globally, about a third of women are victims of male-perpetrated physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence. In sub-Saharan, 37 percent of women are 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 (Dodoo & Frost, 2008; Kaukinen, 2004; Panda & Agarwal, 2005; 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; Christine Horne, Dodoo, & Dodoo, 2013).

In sub-Saharan Africa, bridewealth payment, an important marriage practice which transfers rights to the women's sexual, reproductive and domestic services to men have implication for violence against women (Dodoo & Frost, 2008; Frost & Dodoo, 2010; Goody, 1973; Christine Horne et al., 2013). Bridewealth is exchanged to legitimize unions. Bridewealth payment produces 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 is for the negotiated amount to be made in full. In some situations, 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 after bridewealth negotiation. 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 cultural context, specifically, bridewealth payment and male's perpetration of physical abuse against their female intimate partners in contemporary times. Does bridewealth actually subordinate women and increase 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.

## **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 597 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 beaten by their partners were categorized as 0 ‘No, never perpetrated abuse.’

**Independent variables:** Married 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 wife-beating, and other respondent variable. Binary logistic 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 level 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

**Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents**

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

s.d=standard deviation

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. Slightly 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/caregivers. The mean duration of marriage is 15.95 years. With regards to community 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 2.547 times as likely to have perpetrated physical violence against their wives compared with their counterparts who reported that bridewealth had been fully paid. With regards to religion, the study shows that married men who affiliate with Pentecostal/charismatic Christian religion are less likely to have been perpetrators 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 are less likely to be perpetrators. The results show that with increasing age, men are less likely to have been perpetrators. Married men who have 1-2 children are 0.490 times as likely to have been perpetrators. From Table 2, it can be observed with increasing duration of marriage, men are 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 are 1.793 more likely to have ever beaten their wives. Men who identified with Matrilineal Guan and

Patrilineal Akan are more likely to have been perpetrators.

**Table 2: Predicted odds ratio from binary logistic regression model on young male's approval of wife-beating**

| Respondent's characteristics        | Odds Ratio         | Standard Error |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| <b>Level of bridewealth payment</b> |                    |                |
| Full payment( <i>ref</i> )          |                    |                |
| Partial payment                     | 1.208              | 0.351          |
| No payment                          | 2.547**            | 0.807          |
| <b>Religious affiliation</b>        |                    |                |
| Orthodox ( <i>ref</i> )             |                    |                |
| Pentecostal/Charismatic             | 0.549*             | 0.137          |
| Other                               | 1.185              | 0.380          |
| <b>Level of education</b>           |                    |                |
| Junior secondary( <i>ref</i> )      |                    |                |
| No education                        | 0.518 <sup>+</sup> | 0.205          |
| Secondary/Higher                    | 0.611 <sup>+</sup> | 0.153          |
| Age                                 | 0.952***           | 0.013          |
| <b>Number of children ever born</b> |                    |                |
| 1-4children ( <i>ref</i> )          |                    |                |
| 0-1 children                        | 0.490*             | 0.173          |
| 5 or more                           | 0.938              | 0.276          |
| <b>Duration of marriage</b>         | 1.044**            | 0.015          |
| <b>Observed violence as child</b>   |                    |                |
| No                                  |                    |                |
| Yes                                 | 1.793*             | 0.457          |
| <b>Lineage</b>                      |                    |                |
| Matrilineal Akan( <i>ref</i> )      |                    |                |
| Matrilineal Guan                    | 1.938*             | 0.631          |
| Patrilineal Akan                    | 2.320**            | 0.717          |
| Patrilineal Guan                    | 1.403              | 0.470          |

<sup>+</sup>p<0.1 \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001. The model includes, employment status ref=reference category

### Discussion and conclusion

The results suggest that wife-beating is relatively prevalent. About one in five men had ever beaten their wives. Similar studies have shown that wife-beating is prevalent in the sub-region (Mulawa et al., 2018;

Speizer, 2010). The results suggest that full bridewealth payment is protective against perpetration of wife-beating. Men who were in unions where bridewealth had not been paid at all were more likely to perpetrate physical abuse. 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 (Abramsky et al., 2011; Panda & Agarwal, 2005).

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.

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