

Domestic Violence against Women in Ghana: An Exploratory Study in Upper West Region, Ghana

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Abstract

As elsewhere, domestic violence is prevalent in Ghana. This paper was conducted in the Upper West Region of Ghana and aimed to explore domestic violence from the perspectives of adult men and women. The study participants were selected based on purposive sampling. Due to its qualitative nature, 20 married male and female participants were recruited for the study. The data was obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Participants reported that domestic violence is a serious issue in the study area and 60% believed that it may not be justifiable. Eighteen participants identified husbands as main instigators of domestic violence. Participants thought that violence could have far-reaching effects. To understand comprehensively domestic violence in Ghana, we should explore some socio-demographic variables. Based on this study's findings, further research could use more representative sample (from all 10 regions of Ghana), employ more feminist ethnographic methodologies, and incorporate longitudinal designs in order to gain more in-depth perspectives on domestic violence. A more nuanced study could be carried out to investigate the relationship between domestic violence and education, as the present study suggests that education significantly decreases domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic, violence, patriarchy, feminist, Upper West Region

1.0 Introduction

In Ghana, there has been a burgeoning recognition among academic discourses coupled with a depth of commitment by the government of [Ghana] through the ratification of myriad of international conventions and the promulgation of several national policy and legal reforms in recent decades (for example, Domestic Violence Act 732, [2007]; Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit-DOVVSU [formerly Women And Juvenal Unit 2003]; 1992 Constitution, *among others*) that serve as measures to combat domestic violence. However, despite the plethora of international and national efforts, the issue of domestic violence still remains a significant social pandemic in Ghana, perhaps due to the patriarchal nature of the country (Meursing *et al.*, 1995; WHO, 2005). Although there is dual discourse surrounding domestic violence where both men and women could claim victimhood (Archer, 2002; White *et al.*, 2000), on the whole, the abuse is often asymmetrical (Dobash *et al.*, 1992; Heise *et al.*, 1994) and women tend to resort to violence as a defensive tool rather than an offensive act often following a repeated assaultive attacks by their male partners (Dasgupta, 2002; Bott *et al.* 2005). As Ogle *et al.* (1995) argue, women are socialised to regard their heterosexual relationship as a key component of their identity and self-worth, and may strive to preserve the relationship at all costs, even in the worst of abusive circumstances, when they have economic ability to escape. Notwithstanding this, it is important to remember that domestic violence constitutes a violation of the fundamental human rights of women, thus it hinders the achievement of gender equity and equality in a dominant patriarchal society (ICRW, 2009; UNICEF, 2000). Despite the high and pervasive incidence of domestic violence in Ghana, there is a paucity of empirically-driven research on it; hence the problem remains largely unexplored.

From the above exposition, a central question that remains significantly unexplored is: 'How far have we come and how much do we really know about the perspectives and attitudes of men and women on domestic violence in this region?'. Evidence demonstrates a strong associations between the complex and changing interwoven relation of domestic violence and low household income, low educational level of couples, consumption of alcohol and drugs, witnessing domestic violence during childhood, culture, religion, and social class (Haj-Yahia, 2000; Vakili *et al.*, 2010; Naved and Persson, 2005; De Rose *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, depending on cultural differences among perspectives, domestic violence might differ. By focusing on the perspectives of men and women on domestic violence in Ghana's Upper West Region, this study proposes to contribute substantially to our knowledge.

Studying the opinions and attitudes of men and women in the study region is of enormous significance and indeed, awareness of individual perspectives will provide a better understanding of varied cultural experiences and establish the seriousness or otherwise of domestic violence in the study area. Again, studying women and men's perspectives on domestic violence could give us a hint on the number of men who are most probable to beat their wives, girlfriends in certain circumstances. This could have significant implications for programs and policies designed to curb it.

1.1 Profile of Study Area

This study was conducted in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The region covers a geographical area of about 18,478km² and has a population of 702,110 with females comprising 51.4%, while males constitute 48.6% (GSS, 2012). The major ethnic collectivities include the Dagaba, Wala, Lobi, and Sissala. The dominant religions are Christianity and Islam. The Upper West Region is bounded to the east by Upper East region, La Cote d'Ivoire to the west, Burkina Faso to the north, and Northern region to the south. The primary economic activity is predominantly agriculture with approximately 65% of the labour force engaging in agriculture (Ghana Statistical Service, 2011). Women constitute the major part of the farm labour-force, as well as making the majority of contributors in the informal sector in Ghana.

In Ghana in general and the Upper West Region in particular, gendered-based role differentiation, discrimination, male domination and superiority which give prominence to patriarchal beliefs and gender misconception are entrenched and pervasive hence domestic violence continues to be pervasive (Ofei-Aboagye, 2000; Ampofo and Boateng, 2008). The role of women in Ghana is epitomised by Mbiti (1991), who says, "a woman is a flower in a garden and her husband is the fence around it" (p. 59). Furthermore, it has been observed that there are inequalities and disparities in the fields of economic and political patterns of the Ghanaian society (Annin, 2009). Women have less decision making power both at the domestic sphere and the public realm. Representing half the population, women are numerically significant in the population of Ghana; however, they experience gender-based discrimination including domestic violence, powerlessness, poverty, and social and political exclusion from active participation in the national development of the country (Sossou, 2006).

The government of [Ghana] has recognised the debilitating impact and health cost of domestic violence and this has facilitated the passage of the Domestic Violence Act 732, [2007]. Although this Act was promulgated to protect women and children, its framework is premised on a masculinist edifice and ideology; hence the episode of domestic violence is still enormously prevalent even in this millennium era. Growing unemployment combined with harsh economic conditions and high fertility rates hinder the ability of men to fulfill their role as bread winners, and violence is reported to give men an opportunity to reaffirm their masculinity and status-quo.

2.0 Research Approach and Design

Feminist scholars (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991) have argued that the quantitative research method over-generalises research findings, hence, its inability to adequately interpret and solve social phenomena. Thus, it fails to fully comprehend the complex socio-economic and cultural contexts that shape rural life and, in particular, ignores local people's perspectives and understanding. Qualitative research methods are utilised by feminists to study social and cultural phenomena and assist researchers to understand people and their social and cultural contexts. However, the feminist use of qualitative research methods and the rooting of knowledge in the description of individual experiences have also been criticised, since some argue that it imperils the researcher never to move beyond them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Creswell, 2012).

This study used a qualitative research method which aimed to understand and explain the research participants' meanings and opinions on the topic (Morrow and Smith, 2000; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Qualitative research method addresses the researcher's process of self-awareness and self-reflection, and capturing meanings, opinions and experiences of respondents. Thus, a qualitative research approach is useful as it rests on the idea that social reality is complex, dynamic, and is socially and historically constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The use of qualitative methods deepen our understanding of the dynamic and specific nature of social realities being investigated and this enables the study to capture the qualitative nuances and other important elements peculiar to individuals and groups in the study.

2.1 Data Collection

This study employed semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used as it provides opportunity to gain deeper knowledge from the research participants on domestic violence (Henn *et al.*, 2006). Ethically and morally, one can hardly use participant-observation to gather information on wife-beating although it could provide valuable information about the daily activities of informants.

The research participants were identified with the assistance of a male 'gatekeeper'¹. Contact was made with the 'gatekeeper', based on pre-existing relationship, as well as ahead of time. The 'gatekeeper' was competent enough to effectively mobilise informants for the interviews. The 'gatekeeper' has command of respect, has adequate knowledge of, and experience in the locality so that respondents could take the study seriously. He, however, has no influence on the data collected from informants as data transcription and analysis were done solely by the researchers. In qualitative research, 'gatekeepers' are very useful in assisting the researcher gain access and develop trust and confidence with the community of study (Hatch, 2002). The researchers and 'gatekeeper' engaged in several conversations about the respondents necessary for this study. The 'gatekeeper' together with the researchers contacted participants that met the study selection criteria and asked them if they were interested in taking part in the study after the purpose and process of the study were explained to participants. A principal criteria for participation in the study was that one should be a married resident of the study area. If the participants agreed to take part in the study, their particulars were noted down and scheduled a visit with them during which a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study and what participating in the study entailed were explained. This was an introductory conversation with participants and later followed by formal interviews.

2.1.1 Participants Recruitment and Sample

As a way to gain multiple views on domestic violence in the region, ten (10) male and female participants respectively were purposively sampled and recruited for the study from different communities within the study area. Agyedu *et al.* (1991) argue that purposive sampling enables researchers to intentionally select specific individuals whose experiences are central to understanding a phenomenon under study. Patton (2002) however caution that researchers should be mindful of the limited number of cases which purposive sampling can examine. As a way to gain different perspectives and experiences on domestic violence due to the different characteristics of the different respondents (male and female, educated and non-educated) in the study region, purposive sampling was adopted for this study.

The study sample included 10 married men and 10 married women participants (5 literates² and 5 illiterates from each category). Hearn plausibly suggests that, in order to stop men's violence against women, it is useful to understand how men understand violence and their attitude towards it (1998). The above selection criteria have enabled the researchers to gain different perspectives on domestic violence in the study region. The inclusion of both educated and non-educated participants was meant to create fairness, divergence, and variation of responses that reflect the perspectives of educated and non-educated informants alike.

2.1.2 Interviews

The strategy for interviewing was to capture the deep meaning and understanding of domestic violence in the informants' own words. Semi-structured interviews were used since they were neither highly structured nor unstructured; hence helped created a comfortable conversation between the researchers and the research subjects.

¹ The 'gatekeeper is the Assembly member who is elected through majority votes in a poll and a teacher by profession who is a native resident of the study area.

²Literate herein refers to one's ability to speak fluently and write good English-attaining educational level of secondary school, tertiary or above whereas illiterate here refers to anyone who has not attained any form of formal education and cannot speak nor write in English.

Merriam (1998) buttresses the flexibility and usefulness of semi-structured interviews by arguing that this interviewing format “either all the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions” (p. 74). All participants were asked the same set of questions, intermittently probing for details and clarifications when necessary. This was motivated by the rationale of giving each participant the opportunity of answering the same set of questions in order to enable triangulation and an accurate comparison of responses. In semi-structured interviews, researchers must develop, adapt and generate questions and follow-up probes appropriate to the central purpose of the study (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

With the permission of all participants, interviews were auto-recorded and later transcribed verbatim in order to minimise distortion and the possibility of misunderstanding (see Fontana and Frey, 1994). Recording interviews electronically is quite convenient and obviates the necessity of writing during the interview which may be stressful and time consuming to both the interviewer and interviewee. It is important to note that audio-recorded interviews can be played, listened to later as many times as necessary to gain complete, un-judgemental and objective analysis. The interview started by using a protocol of interview topics as a guide for the conversation between the participants and the researchers. The interview schedule was the main instrument of the data collection from participants. Informants were interviewed individually and separately. Each interview lasted slightly more than thirty minutes, and covered topics including biographical data of the respondents, conventions regarding key terminologies used to describe issues surrounding domestic violence, and their opinion. According to Clark (2000), “the power dynamics of the interview situation is critical..The generation of an environment in which respondents feel relaxed and able to speak at length is therefore of fundamental importance to the qualitative interview” (p. 84). Interviews were conducted at a location convenient to both the participant and the researchers and in English or Dagari³ as some informants could not speak English. It has been argued that (Grewal and Ritchie, 2006: p. 65) a shared dialect could facilitate communication between researchers and the researched. The ability of a researcher to conduct interviews on one’s own, and sharing the same language with informants adds texture and depth to the data collected and also foster rapport and smooth social conversation with the local people (Devereux, 1993). We were comfortable with both English and Dagari. Who is asking the questions may influence answers to these questions. The shared dialect coupled with the fact that the researchers also hail from the study region facilitated the communication between the researchers and the informants as there was no need for a translator.

Our very initial interview schedules ran into difficulties because, informants either forgot about the scheduled time for the interviews, or had gone to the market, farm, or to a funeral. This led to re-scheduling of the interviews. Each interviewee was exceptionally cooperative and informative during the interview process except that there was ‘feet-dragging’ when it came to perpetrators of domestic violence.

The data analysis was guided by the identification of key themes that emerged from the interview responses.

2.5 Ethical Consideration

Although there is no identifiable risk for participating in this study, some considerations were kept in mind in dealing with issues of sensitivity such as male participant(s) revealing previously perpetrated domestic violence, issues of marriage not discussed openly and confidentiality. Participants were reminded that they could take a break if the need be. Importantly, respondents were informed that as a measure of protecting their identities, pseudonyms were used. Verbal consent was obtained from the participants. Participants who did not give their consent opted out from participating in the study. Every participant was allowed to withdraw from the study at any point as far as he/she felt like doing so without any associated sanction.

3.0 Findings and Discussion

3.1.0 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The data relating to the educational level of respondents were collected to assess the association, if any, between the levels of one’s education and the quality of inter-personal relations in relation to domestic violence. In all, 10 participants had no education, 6 were secondary school leavers, and 4 were College graduates. The religious and occupational background of respondents was captured to determine whether there is any impact of religion on the nature, extent, and likelihood of domestic violence exerted on women of different religious faiths.

³ Dagari is the local dialect spoken by the people of the UWR which we are native speakers

Eight Christians, 10 Muslims, and 2 traditional believers were sampled. Four teachers, 6 self-employed, and 10 smallholder farmers were sampled and interviewed.

3.2.0 Participants' Perspectives on Domestic Violence

It is imperative to define domestic violence from the perspectives of the research participants. The common understanding of domestic violence is often limited to physical harm perpetrated on adult women within a marital relationship. However, this is based on the assumption that all women live in nuclear families. However, there are varieties of living arrangements in Ghana's Upper West Region including extended and nuclear families. Women may also be divorced, single parenting, or in an established relationship. It is therefore apt that domestic violence is not limited to the current husband, but includes former husbands, boyfriends, and other members of their extended families.

Although various views about domestic violence were given by respondents, for the purpose of this study, respondents' definitions capture domestic violence as: "*Any act-physical, mental, financial, and sexual assault inflicted upon a woman/man by any member of the family directly or indirectly*". According to the respondents, although both men and women can be victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, women are the majority of victims of domestic violence. The feminisation of domestic violence was linked to the vulnerability of women in the Upper West Region. According to the participants, women's vulnerability could be due mainly to gender inequality such as lack of access to cash and credit, lack of power in decision making, and economic dependence on men.

Domestic violence was linked to power relations where the powerful in society (men) deny the powerless (women) any right and power because women are not in a position to challenge men as a result of cultural construction of masculinity and femininity: it emerged that women who attained higher status in education and are economically independent are the minority of victims of domestic violence.

Respondents identified the followings as violent acts: beating, sexual abuse/coercion, insults/using abusive words, withdrawal, and quarrels. Both educated and non-educated informants expressed similar views regarding beating as the most common form of violence exerted against women. It was observed that lower class and families living below the poverty line (\$ 1.25 per day) were more likely to experience this form of domestic violence. Also, participants identified repeated insults as violence especially insulting women in the presence of other family members. Sexual coercion generated a heated argument as there was mixed responses on whether sexual abuse is Domestic Violence or not.

Withdrawal as a form of domestic violence is expressed in withdrawing from normal interaction with the victim. It is often intended to make the victim uneasy. It could be stopping normal communication, going out and coming home at odd hours, refusing to eat food served him by the victim without any clue on what the problem is. According to the participants, ordinarily, quarrels take place in all families irrespective of their socio-economic status and educational attainment. This was summarised by a female respondent who said: "*The teeth and tongue in our mouth sometimes disagree, but they will re-union later to chew food together, so it is usual of we human beings too*".

However, when quarrels between the husband and wife take place on a frequent basis and in particular, when there is no significant cause for such quarrels, they are perceived as violence against women as was agreed by all the participants. Some respondents alleged that women are less intelligent and therefore not fit to take part in the decision making process, arguing that it is more appropriate to include younger sons in the decision-making process than women. This was summarised by a male respondent who said: "*Men are the heads of the household and it is the heads of the household that decide who to include or not. Why a woman from a different family should come to dictate to me? Why should she complain of inclusion in decision making?*"

It was also observed from the participants that someone in the family plays the role of instigator of violence either directly or indirectly: it could be the husband, father-in-law, brother-in-law, and other relatives of the husband. On a whole, 18 respondents identified the husband as the primary instigator of domestic violence. However, two respondents had a different opinion, and the identified some women as instigators of domestic violence. Mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law were also identified as provokers of domestic violence.

While 60% of participants were of the opinion that domestic violence may not be justified in some circumstances, the opinion of the other 40% of participants is of enormous concern to women.

Participants noted the following as grounds under which domestic violence might be justified: arguing with the husband; the wife refusing to have sex; the wife neglecting the children; and the wife going out without telling the husband. About two-thirds of informants who thought domestic violence was justified in at least one of the aforementioned areas had little or no education, and were of Muslim and Traditionalist faith. As the Theory of Reasoned Action (Bosompra, 2001) posits, behaviour is influenced by intentions which are also influenced by attitudes and subjective norms. In a study by Bosompra (2001), it was observed that attitudes on condom use and the subjective norms and approval were significantly related. Similarly, a respondent's attitude towards domestic violence and the idea that society approves it, may eventually influence one's justification and intention to abuse his/her partner under certain circumstances. Thus, the literature suggests that patriarchal societies hold more onto traditional views on gender roles and transgressing such gender norms or roles are punishable and permissible (Haj-Yahia, 1998). In the Upper West Region, which is largely patriarchal, men are regarded as owners of the family, and their actions or behaviours are deemed to be right. As such, it may be unsurprising to see women who are fatally assaulted taking the blame for their assault since men's behaviours are deemed apt and should-not be questioned. A woman respondent in a study by Luginaah (2008) is quoted as "it is still culturally unacceptable and disrespectful for a wife to question her husband's habits..." (p. 811). This quotation implies that if violent or aggressive behaviour is the habit of the man, then, invariably it is the woman's lot.

3.3.0 Classification of Domestic Violence

Examining the characteristics of participants, men in the Upper West Region are not a homogenous group. They are of diverse backgrounds and differ in terms of the type of marriage, type of occupation, religious affiliation, and different behaviours towards alcohol use. However, there are some similarities among them. Participants identified the following as the various classifications of domestic violence:

3.3.1 Physical Violence

Physical violence was defined by participants as any act or behaviour of a perpetrator which aims at causing physical injury to the victim. Physical violence and especially physical assaults of wives was ranked lower than psychological or sexual violence in the Upper West Region by the participants. The most common forms of physical violence identified include: beating, slapping, pushing/punching, and kicking. However, Participants expressed the view that these forms of domestic violence were more likely to be experienced by women of lower socio-economic and educational status. Participants also revealed that perpetrators of such violence are culturally backward, unemployed, and lack education. *"Some of us are inseparable from tradition and therefore, see nothing good about modern values and practices. If tradition was not good, our grandparents would have stopped it. We continue from where our grandparents left it"*(Male respondent). Participants especially female participants thought that women who have attained higher education or social status were less likely to experience physical violence compared to those of no education. Participants identified that physical violence rarely occurs during a year hence was considered less severe. Thirty per cent of respondents indicated that punitive laws and policies and gender advocacy on gender equality made physical violence less likely to occur; for instance, the Domestic Violence Act 732 and DOVVSU. All the respondents suggested that physical violence is on the decrease compared to previous decades.

In the Upper West Region, men by tradition are allowed to chastise and discipline their wives; however, this discipline should be reasonable in magnitude such that it does not cause awful physical injuries or death. Further, participants thought that women are considered too vulnerable and weak to confront men's generally superior physical strength. The concept of masculinity was linked to male toughness, honour, and dominance. Therefore, 'lesser' physical violence such as slaps, kicks, and hits are more likely to be used to punish women, even though these can endanger the lives of women. According to participants, out of a sample of 20 married women, 7 are likely to experience physical violence. Inferring from the above discussion and in line with the statement above, one could argue that majority of married women are not put in the position of physical harms by their partners. However, it is still of enormous concern to women since a good number (7) of them are likely to suffer kicking, slaps, pushes, and beating.

3.3.2 Emotional Violence

Domestic violence was defined to include placing women in fear of imminent bodily harm by the threat of force. This included any conduct that would cause women to suffer substantial emotional and psychological distress. Psychologists and feminists have identified that the emotional form of violence is more harmful and has longer-lasting consequences than physical violence (Bandura, 1997; Marshall, 1999).

Emotional violence was the most cited or frequently occurring form of domestic violence in the opinion of female informants. Due to the many punitive policies on domestic violence and the legal sanctions attached to physical or sexual violence, participants argued that psychological violence is more commonly used, since this is difficult to prove. As a woman informant recounted her tale: *"You can imagine the trauma and shame that will engulf you when your husband refuses to eat your food and still insults you in front of your children. Hmm.....it is not fair sometimes. Although he has not laid his bare hands on you, you burn internally and the children will not respect you again"*. This finding lends support to the Ghana Statistical Service (2009) study which reported a higher rate of psychological violence than sexual or physical violence. A good number of respondents (18) revealed that the use of insulting words, cessation of communication/withdrawing, belittling/humiliation, threat of divorce and refusal to eat food served by wives are likely to be substituted for sexual/physical violence in order not to face the rigor of the law. It was therefore unsurprising that psychological violence emerged as the likely form of domestic violence in the study sample.

Since psychological violence do not leave visible marks on the victim, men may regard it as a less dangerous form of domestic violence, or as not violence at all. Nonetheless, this has some negative impacts on victims. Psychological violence may be seen as the most blatant and problematic form of domestic violence in the lives of women as it has some potentially damaging psychosocial effects which may, in some cases be life-long and result in suicide cases. As the women's leader (Magazia) recounted; *"No one enjoys insults and no one feels safe under threats to hurt"*. Another female respondent narrated that: *"when your husband no longer shares the same sleeping bed with you without really telling you your fault, I feel like causing suicide such that I will no longer annoy him"*. This means that, we cannot underestimate the far-reaching impact of husbands' communication blackout on the lives of women. Sleeplessness, depression, feelings of loneliness, thought of suicide, and sometimes confusion are all possible consequences of psychological violence and these have enormously negative impact on the lives of women.

In the same way, a husband's refusal to eat his wife's food has serious traditional implications and consequences; it is a sign of indignity and social ridicule if a husband refuses to eat his wife's food in the Upper West Region. A woman is not only obliged to satisfy her husband sexually, but she is expected to ensure that he is well-fed. It is often said among women of the Upper West Region that 'the only way to a man's heart is through his stomach' and this is very relevant here. A woman's inability to meet this, and a husband's continuous refusal to eat her food, could result in divorce.

According to the respondents, emotional violence is likely to be found among educated people, especially the threat of divorce and calling women all sorts of names. It was also clear that women in lower-middle and middle-class families are more likely to experience psychological violence compared to lower-class families. Majority of the male participants (7) reported that some women also use emotional violence on their husbands when the latter are unable to provide for the up-keep of the family. For instance, by saying to the husband "You are useless", "a drunkard", "a roaming ambassador"⁴, and so forth. Some respondents said that women who are better off than their husbands also threaten their husbands of divorce, or threaten to report them to the police, DOVVSU, or other social advocate NGOs for negligible issues. Respondents agreed, however, that men are more likely to use psychological form of domestic violence than women and that women suffer much of the effects of emotional violence.

3.3.3 Sexual Violence

The extent of sexual violence within marriage has only recently been recognised in feminist research, which shows that an intimate partner is the most common perpetrator of sexual abuse (Walby and Allen, 2004). Kelly (1988) in particular explored the continuum of sexual violence within a dynamic power imbalance in intimate relationship. In the context of gendered and cultural norms underpinning sexuality and the wide-spread perception that marriage creates a permanent and irrevocable consent to sex by women, Ghanaian women's vulnerability is even greater due to the sanctity attach to the family, the notions of shame in discussion marital issues especially sexual assault, women's isolation from sources of support, and perhaps perpetrators awareness of the minimal options available to victims (Abraham, 1999; Wilson, 2006).

⁴ 'Roaming ambassador' here means moving aimlessly in town and engaging in fruitless endeavours. (e.g. moving from one drinking spot to another)

Responses from informants pointed out that sexual violence is a serious problem. The traditional practice of dowry payment, where a man pays a huge sum of money (for instance, ₵1,500= £330) and gifts (for instance, 3-4 cows) to the wife's family before marrying her have created the grounds for husbands to exploit their wives sexually. In the Upper West Region, tradition and patriarchy grant men access to women's bodies and labour in the conjugal homes without women's objection, hence sexual violence is deemed to be justified when a woman refuses her husband free access (Nukunya, 2003). It was clear from the responses that few numbers of women would like to be branded 'failed feminine' by refusing their husbands access to what is traditionally perceived to be the property of men.

In conclusion, the findings from this study add to the growing body of literature on the magnitude of domestic violence in the global context (Garcio-Mareno *et al.*, 2006; Kishor & Johnson, 2004; Straus, 2005; Abraham *et al.*, 2006). It is, however, important to note that although domestic violence is normally categorised into psychological, physical, and sexual on the ground of gaining depth of data, on a conceptual basis and for practical purposes, this categorisation may not be that important. Domestic violence should be conceptualised and understood as a unified social ill, engendering the lives of women and men regardless of the form it takes. On this basis, the following section highlights the discussion on the factors of domestic violence in the Upper West Region of Ghana as identified by respondents.

3.4.0 Socio-Demographic Factors of Domestic Violence in the Upper West Region

A good number of socio-demographic characteristics of married couples emerged as significant predictors of domestic violence against women. Significant among these are: employment status, rural residence, religious affiliation, alcohol use, and educational attainment.

Participants thought that the type of religion one belongs to was an important factor associated with the risk of domestic violence, particularly sexual violence. Participants thought that women who were perceived to be at a significant risk of experiencing domestic violence were found in polygamous families. Being a Muslim and perhaps because of polygamous marriages indicated a positive but not hugely significant relationship with the risk of experiencing physical and sexual violence. Other studies (Koenig, 2003a; Russell, 1990) also reported similar findings on the impact of religion on domestic violence. *"Religion plays a role in marriage in the Upper West Region. In Islam, as I am not a learned person in the Qur'an, some verses in the Qur'an promote human rights. People misuse Islam in a way that it makes Islam looks bad. It is due to ignorance and illiteracy; people are abusing the rights of women. So, I do not think Islam promotes the abuse of women, but it is rather our attitude towards women. People go behind the Qur'an to marry more wives. Marrying many wives goes with a responsibility. But because of our personal interest, we will interpret it to suit ourselves"* (Male Interviewee).

Further, respondents thought that belonging to traditional religions were also identified as more likely to experience domestic violence. It is believed that (see Doi, 2006) traditional African religion and Orthodox religions are more patriarchal, and places authority in the hands of men over women. Islam, it is argued, does not only place authority in the hands of men, but also to sanction wife battery and sexual compulsion (Awde, 2000; Ahmad, 2003). The Islamic religion was first established in Northern Ghana, and has been blended with traditional religious practices and norms to create a syncretic faith (Mahama, 2004). Therefore, the findings of this study on the impacts of traditional African religion and Islam on domestic violence were unsurprising. These religions also permit the practice of polygyny whose inherent impact on domestic violence this study has already observed. A male participant (community chief) suggested that: *"Community customs should be documented since most people use the norms as 'care-off' to cause violence. The key problem is that our customs are oral, not documented and so people choose what best suit their behaviour. If the customs are documented, they can be referred to appropriately."*

Participants thought that women living in rural localities are more likely to experience domestic violence compared to their urban areas. This finding is similar to findings in Faramarzi *et al.* (2005) and Haj-Yahia (2000), and is supported by the fact that women in rural areas are more likely to be isolated than those in urban locations. However, this finding revealed a different observation from a study carried out by Kishor and Johnson (2004) where urban dwellers experience higher risk of domestic violence. Some sociologists have researched the influence of supportive networks such as: good family and friendship networks on the well-being of women in rural communities and indicate that these are significant in countering isolation (Taylor *et al.*, 1997), as these can lessen the experience of depression, stress, and other combined consequences of emotional violence. In the Upper West Region, most social and recreational centres and services are almost entirely absent.

Furthermore, due to traditional norms, women may not be allowed to visit few friends or relatives without the explicit permission of her husband. Women in urban places also have easy access to official assistance in situation of domestic violence compared to their rural counterparts. Thus, proximity to the police, DOVVSU, and other social advocate NGOs helps lessen Domestic Violence in urban areas. Moreover, women in the Upper West Region tend to be less socially empowered (Pruitt, 2008), due to low levels of education enabling women to notice and formally report abuse.

In addition, domestic violence is more prevalent in the rural areas than the urban ones due mainly to the lack of contact with modern values and, egalitarian norms in the countryside, and the entrenchment of traditional patriarchal values systems that often support and condone violence against women. Hence couples in urban places are more likely to be exposed to modern discourses of human rights which have deconstructed the ideological justification for Domestic Violence, have made a public-political issue out of what was hitherto seen as solely a private matter (Grewal, 2005; Okin, 1998). These discourses have likewise criminalised violent practices by men that were perceived as being normal masculine behaviour (Buzawa and Buzawa, 2003). Pulling all the above points together, participants indicate that domestic violence as a social problem is likely to be less pandemic among women in urban areas. This concurs with the argument presented by Van de Hoven (2001), who posits that women in traditionally conservative and Afrikaans communities are likely to experience domestic violence as they tend to agree that wives should be submissive and assume traditionally passive roles as good wives and mothers.

The concept of patriarchy and traditional gender roles differentiation which create the platform for most of the violence cases may lose their value to urban couples, as a result of the increasing displacement of these cultural norms by the socio-economic exigencies of global industrialisation and urbanisation (Amoakohene, 2004; Nukunya, 2003).

The employment status of one's partner also emerged as a significant factor of domestic violence against women in the view of respondents. Men who were identified as culpable of putting women at a significant risk of experiencing domestic violence were typically unemployed and culturally backward, and did not appreciate the contributions of women, blaming women for negligible issues. These husbands' lack of appreciation of their wives may stem from their attitudes towards societal norms of gender roles. For other men, non-appreciation of their wives could be based on the ill-founded perception that my wife is my property by virtue of the fact that I have paid for her bride price. It is most likely that in societies where there is a wide-spread acceptance among both women and men of gender roles and the perception that wife beating is justified, there is high probability of women experiencing domestic violence, and these are consistent with high association between wife-beating and economic and social subordination of women (Barker *et al.*, 2011; Kishor and Subaiya, 2008). *"You know..... some of us are poor and we could not afford formal education. We cannot read the 'white paper' (book) to know what is happening and we try to stick to what we are born to meet, so we see nothing wrong with wife beating"* (Male Interviewee).

Participants who were not employed in the formal sector but engaged in subsistence farming were identified as being at a greater risk of exerting domestic violence. This corroborates similar findings on partner victimisation in a US report (Macmillan and Kruttschnitt, 2005). The theory of 'male identity crisis' (Jewkes *et al.*, 2002; Brandley, 1999) suggests a relation between male unemployment status and the risk of showing aggressive behaviours towards their partners in the domestic sphere. Characteristically, this theory emphasises men's feelings of vulnerability, loss of meaning to their lives, loss of control, and loss of status emanating from an imminent inability to live up-to and fulfil the role as a family provider (Mohammed, 2004). It is also argued that poor men who experience higher levels of stress and social powerlessness would be more likely to affirm their male identity by displaying violence against their partners (Mankowski and Maton, 2010; Peralta *et al.*, 2010). It has been suggested that men beat their wives when the former lacks other resources to call upon to control the latter (Goode, 1970), alternatively that the relationship between poverty and Domestic Violence is mediated through stress (see Straus, 1974). However, an empirical study of men in Thailand (Hoffman *et al.*, 1994), failed to confirm the stress hypothesis. In a study by Bourgois (1996), it is argued that poverty and unemployment reduce the ability of men to attain certain ideals of 'successful manhood', especially those premised on ideas of men as breadwinners of the family. As a result, new ideas of masculinity, which then are attainable, but emphasise misogyny is utilise.

Domestic Violence is normalised as men lash out at their wives they can no longer patriarchally control or economically support. These findings are consistent with the expression that domestic violence is associated with male identity and the expression of power (Vyas and Watts, 2008).

Similarly, Luke *et al* (2007) have also augmented this debate by highlighting the issue of men's low status or resources-poverty in Vietnam. When men are bruised in the public sphere, women in the domestic sphere indirectly will bear the consequences. There is a saying in the Upper West Region that "If a man is unable to defend himself in the public, the wife must take the consequences"

From the foregoing discussion, one can deduce that a husband who is loaded with anger, fear, and hostility can easily explode at the least provocation from his wife.

Taking the discussion further, other studies (Morales and Reichenheim, 2002; Faramarzi *et al.*, 2005; Vakili *et al.*, 2010) reveal that unemployed women are more likely to be exposed to domestic violence compared to their employed colleagues. In the observations of Macmillan and Gartner (1999), women who are employed are nonetheless at the risk of domestic violence when their husbands are unemployed (see Naved and Persson, 2005). Despite the changing economic circumstances, men still want to maintain their dominant position and status in the family as breadwinners (Bradley, 1999). It has been an unwritten convention for both young men and women to migrate to urban cities in Southern Ghana⁵ in search of jobs to supplement families' income and to sustain the smooth running of families. As such, participants argue that women who are unemployed and are putting so much pressure on the income of a husband are likely to be punished as economic conditions are unfavourable in the northern part of Ghana.

It is also observed that alcohol use has a positive relationship in the study sample to domestic violence. It indicated that both men and women who use alcohol stand an increased risk of either being a victim of domestic violence or a perpetrator. Similar findings have been found in other studies (for example, Kiss *et al.*, 2012; Pandey *et al.*, 2009; Oladepo *et al.*, 2011). It has been argued that the use of alcohol precipitates domestic violence due to its disinhibiting effects: alcohol distorts perceptions, lowers inhibitions, and thus results in aggressive behaviours which may create conflict when inebriated result in violence (Dixon and Browne, 2003). Social anthropological study (McDonald, 1994) argues that the connection between alcohol use and domestic violence are socially learned. While the link between alcohol use and domestic violence has been debated variously, Hendershot and George, (2007) and Puri and Cleland, (2006) point out that alcohol use contributes to a lack of appreciation by men for the consequences of domestic violence. Despite the fact that the above arguments are valid and important, this study rather argues that men would normally use the intoxicating effect of alcohol to rejuvenate their masculine activity, and that they can internalise and rationalise, and sometimes blames the victim for allegedly showing transgressive behaviours (Scott and Straus, 2007). In the view of McKenry *et al.* (1995), the relationship between alcohol consumption and domestic violence is far from the hegemonic and simplistic causal assumption. It is often the expectation of the effects of alcohol that influences behaviour, not the actual amount of liquor consumed.

The debate of alcohol use and the 'manliness' of violence has been supported by findings from other empirical studies that argue that men who patronise the services of sex workers are twice as likely to be involved in rape when these men drink before the sexual encounter (Go *et al.*, 2011). Contrary to the findings in this study, other studies (Straus, 1997; Straus and Gelles, 1988) found no association between high levels of alcohol use and high levels of domestic violence, and in particular, physical violence was lower in families where drunkenness occurred. Men take alcohol as a booster⁶ and this adds a different layer and texture to the callousness of their sexual edge. Alcohol consumption by the woman was also identified by participants as an important factor positively associated with domestic violence. Women's alcohol use may be seen as a gender role transgression depending on the level of alcohol use and the circumstances surrounding the alcohol consumption.

⁵Southern Ghana is more developed economically, has more social amenities, and has more job opportunities than Northern Ghana.

⁶Respondents indicated that alcohol is booster and this hinders their level of reasoning at the point of acting violently. When I take alcohol, I act differently from when I'm not drunk. Sometimes, my previous actions are questionable when I gain my conscience (Male Interviewee)

It has been documented that women who use alcohol are at more risk of experiencing domestic violence, especially sexual violence (Graham *et al.*, 2011): women taking excessive alcohol may fall asleep and before they realise, they are sexually assaulted. It is argued that women use alcohol to relax after a hard day's work since the Upper West Region is a farming dominated while men use alcohol to achieve their 'masculine mischief' (Warkentin and Gidyz, 2007). However, participants identified women who use alcohol as being at a risk of some forms of domestic violence, especially physical and sexual violence. As some respondents aptly stated: '*If a woman behaves like a child by becoming intoxicated, she needs to be disciplined like a child*'. This is akin to Gidden's statement (1993) that "A woman, a horse, and a hickory tree, The more you beat 'them the better they be'" (p. 417). On the other hand, men who also use alcohol were identified as at the risk of perpetrating domestic violence as alcohol serves as a pretext for violent acts. "*During the dry season, you will see most men loitering and drinking in town. They drink until they cannot even walk to their places of residence. Due to the alcohol intake, they come home to disturb their wives for sex and food. If you the wife refuses him sexual advances, quarrel will ensure and because of the alcohol, he will beat you very well*" (Female respondent).

From the responses to this study, it was observed that the men's education was negatively associated to domestic violence. Likewise, a study by Hines and Malley-Morrison (2001) suggests that couples who are educated are less likely to involve in conflictual, negative, and abusive interactions than couples who have no education. This shows that educated couples are at less risk of stress and frustration-the leading precursors of domestic violence than their non-educated counterparts and in particular those with no or low job status and satisfaction. Contrarily, findings from Browning (2002), Vyas and Watts (2008), and Jewkes *et al.* (2002) reveal that no matter the educational attainment and social class of a husband, a gender-conservative partner is still at an increased risk of perpetrating domestic violence. Domestic violence is strongly associated to conservative societal ideas about the position and role of women (Sugarman and Frankel, 1996). In this study, boy-child preference was noted as an indicator of the men's conservatism and this was among the precursors of domestic violence identified by respondents.

Education is also a valuable tool that can enhance the problem-solving skills of educated husbands, hence lessening the likelihood that they will resort to violence to resolve familial problems. Similar findings on the impact of education on domestic violence were revealed in other studies (Ishida *et al.*, 2010; Babu and Kar, 2009; Flood and Pease, 2009). This could be because men who are educated are more exposed to unfolding egalitarian values and human rights discourses, especially women's rights. This study has presumed that educated men are aware that gender inequality and power imbalances are not natural and that women just like men have fundamental rights that need to be respected. Once men are aware of all these, it decreases the tendency to be violent and aggressive to women.

Contrarily, this study observed that a woman's education is of little significance in protecting her against domestic violence in the Upper West Region. In the Upper West Region, there is the assumption that no matter how highly educated a woman is; she is still 'just' a woman and a wife. Educated women may know their human rights and try to assert their individuality, and may challenge any violation of their rights. However, because of the fact that 'women are women and wives no matter their level of education', they will be inviting beatings and verbal assaults when trying to assert their rights and individuality. While education is generally hypothesised to reduce the likelihood of domestic violence against women, other evidence-based studies (Avotri and Walters, 2001; De Rose *et al.*, 2002; Amoakohene, 2004) have shown that education does not necessarily bring women greater control overall, as male dominance still prevails in gender relationship in much of sub-Saharan Africa including Ghana. This study argues that the mechanism of protection is not just through 'economic independence', as significant number of women with less or no education can be economically independent through self-initiated income generating activities, but rather a greater social empowerment –social networks, self-confidence, and/ or the ability to utilise sources of information and resources to one advantage in society. This is supported by ethnographic studies (Counts *et al.*, 1992; Schuler *et al.*, 1996) that suggest that women who are active in community fora may be relatively protected from various forms of violence.

This study lends support to the view that perceptions of domestic violence generally vary according to one's level of education and social class and that while working class women may associate domestic violence with physical force, their middle-class counterparts look at its psychological effects and implications (Vanya, 2001; Casimiro, 2002).

This buttresses feminist argument that the psychological consequences of domestic violence are more devastating and have long-lasting impacts on the victim than sexual or physical violence (Arias and Pape, 1999; Marshall, 1999). Feminist epistemologies postulate that economic independence and women's empowerment are essential; however, these may not directly translate into women avoiding familial conflicts and marital violence. However, life-skills and formal education may significantly help women avoid some degree of domestic violence. For instance, Jewkes (2002) notes that formal education confers on individuals, social empowerment, self-confidence, and the ability to use information and resources to one's advantage. This is relevant to this study as women of higher educational attainment were identified as less likely to experience higher levels of physical and sexual violence compared to women with no education.

3.5.0 Common Problems of Domestic Violence in the Study Area

From the in-depth interviews, respondents thought that these are the most common causes of domestic violence: gender inequality; traditional beliefs including bride price payment; resistance to sexual advances; arguing over "Chop money"⁷; and alcohol use

These views were also consistent with the views of the women's respondents on what usually lead to domestic violence within intimate relations. According to participants, the fundamental cause of domestic violence is gender inequality. Society is structured in such a way that men have more power than their female counterparts. As epitomised by a male interviewee: *"The belief that women must be subordinate and submissive to their husbands and the undue rights of men to hit or chastise their wives when the latter disobeys the former contributes to the episodes of violence in familiar relations"*. The findings indicate that traditional beliefs and gender inequality place women in lower rank in the social ladder or with not rank at all. Thus, women do not take part in decision-making, and are expected to be subservient to their husbands and other male family members. Men's decisions are final and irrevocable, so when a woman argues contrary to the man's view, it can cause domestic violence. This has led to the wrong perception by both men and women of the gender role differentiation at all levels of the society. A male Interviewee says: *"people's misinterpretation of religious and cultural practices as well as the inherent power gap between the sexes in this part of Ghana is the key issue one should look at when trying to explore the causes of domestic violence"*. However, a female participant argued that *"Due to the unequal power relation between men and women, women's views are often disregarded. But I want to believe that it takes the views of both the man and woman to make a good home and family"*.

The dowry payment (bride price) was stressed by majority of respondents as a key issue causing domestic violence. *"When you dowry a woman as if you're purchasing her as your property, and she disobeys you, it is alright to discipline her because she is a bought property (Male interviewee)"*. *"When your wife refuses you sex and/or anytime you come home, there is no food on the table and you remember how much you paid for such treatment, you feel like squeezing or even killing her"* (Male Interviewee).

According to respondents, the drinking of 'pito' and 'akpeteshie'⁸ is a way of life among the people of the Upper West Region, and was identified by respondents as a serious cause of domestic violence. In the Upper West Region, alcohol is known as "jangbalatee" which literally means taking something to energise you, charge you, and let you 'say or do whatever you want to do'. This means, you take alcohol and do anything and behave any way, sometimes without one's conscience. Among the people of the Upper West Region, "pito"⁹ is described as 'you have looked for your problem'. The problem-being not the drinker, but of the victim. Most men take alcohol to charge up and act out. Here too, it is not the quantum or frequency of the drink *per se*, but the intention to act violently under the pretext of alcohol. *"When I take alcohol, I become two-in-one. I act without really knowing what I am doing"* (Male Interviewee). Drinking of alcohol was not associated with a particular sex, but was noted as a habit of both men and women. Some respondents considered it a taboo for a man to come home to meet his wife being drunk.

Domestic violence was found to be generic, which cuts across boundaries of class and age. Also, according to participants, domestic violence is not considered serious until it involves physical injury of the victim. However, from the opinion of participants, domestic violence could be emotional, physical or sexual.

⁷"Chop money" refers to money use for household expenses. For instance, money to be used for the daily activities and expenses of the house such as buying cooking ingredients, utilities bills, among others.

⁸"Akpeteshie" is the local name for alcohol.

⁹"Pito" is a locally brewed gin-alcohol which is a close substitute to the real alcohol.

A critical look at the views of men participants revealed that domestic violence is rampant due to the intergenerational transmission of violence. A common observation among all the male participants pointed out that almost all of them had ever been beaten personally or witnessed their father beating their mother when they were children. As summarised by one male participant: "When I was young and anytime my father beats my mother or had any harsh argument with her, she usually unleashed her anger on we the children. So we grew up to understand that the best way to unleash your anger is to off-load it on your wife or children". Another male participant recounted that: "When I was 10, my father would pack my mother's things and threw them in the court yard and will beat my mother very well in the full glance of our eyes".

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The in-depth nature of the interviews enabled the researchers to explore the perspectives of educated and non-educated, employed and unemployed male and female participants and the findings suggest that men who are not educated and are lower on the socio-economic ladder are more likely to perpetrate domestic violence than their educated and employed colleagues. The findings showed that majority (60%) of the male respondents are less likely to perpetrate violence in the region under some circumstances: the most common types of violence included: psychological, physical, and sexual violence.

Findings from this study hint that in order to understand comprehensively domestic violence against women in Ghana's Upper West Region, we should explore some socio-demographic variables such as: unemployment of couples; alcohol use; Islam or traditional religious affiliation; living in a rural setting; as well as lack of appreciation of a woman by her husband due to the embedded internalisation of gender roles differentiation. It was realised that irrespective of the employment status, education, and professional positions, women in the Upper West Region are likely to suffer domestic violence. What is likely to differ is the type of domestic violence different categories of women might suffer. Women of higher educational attainment and social status were identified as at a lower risk of experiencing physical and sexual violence, although they are not spared psychological violence. Findings from this study cannot be generalised to all men and women in Ghana as it only focused on domestic violence among married couples. The link between these socio-demographic variables and domestic violence stems from the gendered ways in which these find expression in Ghana's Upper West Region. In such a patriarchal society, and by way of gender roles definitions, traditional practices and religious beliefs privilege men with the opportunity to supplant their burdens and pains onto women mainly through violence. More nuanced further research could use more representative sample from all the ten regions of Ghana, employ more feminist ethnographic methodologies, and incorporate longitudinal designs in order to gain more in-depth information-rich perspectives in order to understand the complex dynamics of domestic violence. A more nuanced study could be carried out to investigate the relationship between domestic violence and education, as the present study suggests that education significantly decreases domestic violence.

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