

# Key Triggers of domestic violence in Ghana: A victim centered analysis

Lady Adaina Ajayi<sup>1</sup> & Peyi Soyinka-Airewele<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science and International Relations,  
Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Politics, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York.

Email: adaina.yartey@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

## Abstract

**Background:** Prominent among the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the determination to put an end to all forms of discrimination against women and girls. Unfortunately, domestic and intimate partner violence constitute enduring and particularly traumatizing forms of gendered violence.

**Objective:** In order to effectively address this crisis, it is important that this study investigates and identifies some key triggers of domestic violence in Accra, Ghana through the situational perspective of female victims.

**Methods:** Using a survey research design, 385 questionnaires were administered with a 64.7 percent return rate, and in-depth interviews were conducted with willing female victims of domestic abuse.

**Results:** The study identified alcoholism, patriarchal social structures, financial subjugation and male response to women's growing economic independence as key triggers of domestic violence.

**Conclusion:** It suggests the need for a focused interrogation of the changing causes, impact and policy implications of intimate partner and domestic violence.

**Keywords:** Domestic abuse, gendered violence, Ghana, patriarchy, triggers, women

## Introduction

Domestic violence is prevalent in societies around the world, affecting individuals across class, race, age, cultural, religious and national boundaries. It is one of the most pervasive of human rights violations, denying women equity, security, dignity, equality, their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms and self-worth (Solanke, Amoo, & Idowu, 2018; Olawole-Isaac, Oladosun, Oni & Adeleke, 2017; Pesob, 2010; UNICEF, 2000). As Mahserjian (2016) opines, domestic violence affects women of all races and income levels worldwide. In the United States, 28% of women reported at least one episode of physical violence, in the United Kingdom, 44% of women reported physical or sexual violence, in New Zealand, 20% of 314 women surveyed had either been hit or physically abused by a male partner, in Mexico, 30% of 650 women surveyed reported at least one episode of physical violence, in Canada, 29% of women in a national research reported a form of assault or another, every fourth Nigerian woman is estimated to suffer domestic violence in her lifetime, and in Uganda, 51% of women are believed to have been physically abused by their partner in their

lifetime (Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016; Solanke, 2014; Ghani, 2014; Cusack and Manuh, 2009; Matud, 2005).

Ghana is not exempt from this global crisis of intimate violence. Scholars and victim advocates indicate that one in every three women in Ghana is a victim of domestic violence, including physical, economic, emotional and sexual violence (Ajayi & Soyinka-Airewele, 2018). Large numbers of women have also indicated experiences of psychological abuse, including threats, insults and destruction of property, all possibly linked to structures of domination and exploitation exacerbated by the strong presence of patriarchal norms (Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016; Cusack, 2009). A 2008 Domestic and Health Survey conducted in Ghana revealed that 38.7 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 years reported experiences of psychological, physical and sexual violence by a male spouse at some point in their lives. Although not the focus of this paper, it is equally worthy of note that over a quarter of men in Ghana also reported experiencing psychological or physical violence from their partner or wife (GSS, 2009 cited in IDS, 2016:22). However, a common

challenge facing studies of domestic violence is the difficulty of differentiating between three categories in reports of domestic violence: common couple violence, defensive violence, and intimate terror and abuse. It is unclear what category of violence the male victims were reporting.

Domestic violence in marriage is a critical problem partly because marriage continues to be viewed as a desirable and necessary societal status in Ghana (Ampofo Adomako, 2008: 404). Most often, practices and views about marriage that make women subservient to men go unchallenged such that the physical or sexual abuses of women within conjugal relations are not regarded as unusual. As a result, many women simply endure abusive relationships. In fact, it has been found out that some women do not even recognise certain abusive behaviours of their companions as abusive (Adomako Ampofo & Prah, 2009). Furthermore, women who do acknowledge that they are being abused rarely complain publicly about their ordeal because such issues are considered "private", although they may complain to family members, friends or religious leaders (Adekeye, Abimbola & Adeusi, 2013; Adomako Ampofo, Awotwi & Dwamena-Aboagye, 2005). Studies in every global region indicate that women tend to fear further retribution and even death from reporting acts of domestic abuse (Mahserijian, 2016).

Marriage, in general, gives particular obligations and rights to spouses but is also characterized by a certain level of ambiguity. Despite the cultural position that male and female roles are designed to complement each other in marriage, the various customary law systems in Ghana do not view men and women as equal partners. Yet a majority of marriages are contracted under these laws. While the 1992 constitution guarantees equality and contains clauses on the non-discrimination of persons, these statutory laws have not succeeded in transforming embedded cultural views on marriage (Adomako Ampofo & Prah, 2009). An interesting example of a cultural marital provision is the perceived right of husbands to correct the actual or presumed offenses and indiscretions of their wives and this could take the form of beating. Customary law, however, stipulates that the correction or chastisement should not be excessive and the bruises should not be visible. Another example involves the right to sexual pleasure and satisfaction by both parties in a relationship. Refusal to engage in sexual relations if deemed unreasonable can be a legitimate reason for divorce among ethnic groups such as the Akan.

Consequently, a woman's refusal to submit to her husband's demands can lead to beating and even emotional abuse (Kutosati and Morck, 2012 & Adomako Ampofo and Prah, 2009). Experts on the Ghanaian customary law system argue that while sanctions and punishments, including physical punishments, are permissible within the social system, there are clear lines drawn between punishment and abuse (Coker-Appiah, 2016; Adomako Ampofo & Prah, 2009). Such lines are rapidly disappearing as extreme forms of violence against women and girls have become normalized, especially in the context of intimate relationships.

Several studies have indicated that the economic dependency generated by poverty is a significant factor for understanding gendered violence, and "designing policy and practical responses" (Katembo, 2015:59; Makama, 2013:117; Kutosati & Morck, 2012:50; Cusack, 2009:3). Such an economic indicator is also complicated by the impact of cultural norms and value systems in constructing domestic roles and expectations. However, while each ethnic group in the country is distinct in terms of language and certain customs, this paper reveals remarkable commonalities in the patterns of patriarchal hierarchy and the socialization of men and women into structures of domestic power and authority. While the survey's female respondents utilize alternative language to identify significant triggers of violence in their homes, it seems apparent that among other factors, violence is used as a mode of control and restoration of a domestic hierarchy seemingly threatened by women's growing economic independence.

### **Literature review and theoretical framework**

It has taken many years for domestic violence to be recognized as a violation of fundamental human rights and not a private matter outside the domain of the state. The extensive impact of domestic abuse reaches into all aspects of the societal landscape where victims have to function and seek remedies, including the legal and healthcare sector, housing, law enforcement, religious institutions, schools and social services, as well as the victim's workplace and finances (Soyinka-Airewele, 2016). For these reasons and more, to address domestic violence and understand its causes and consequences would, therefore, require not just a sociological or psychological approach but a multi-disciplinary study (Tuncay-Senlet, 2012).

However, as Ghani (2014) has noted, a central dilemma facing such an endeavour is that there is no simple or universally acceptable

definition of domestic abuse. The many labels for the concept include terms such as wife abuse, intimate partner violence, family violence, wife assault and the like. The terms attempt to highlight diverse dimensions of a shared reality. Intimate partner violence, for instance, focuses on the more restricted violence between partners in a sexual, marital or romantic relationship, while the more expansive notion of domestic violence can extend to children and non-kin individuals dwelling in a shared private space.

Due to the existence of varying definitions and the call for a universally accepted operational definition, international organisations, as well as researchers, have attempted to give clarifying definitions of domestic violence. UNICEF (2000) conceptualizes domestic violence as involving acts of “physical abuse such as beating, slapping, arm twisting, strangling, stabbing, burning, kicking, choking, murder, and threats with a weapon or object. It also includes traditional practices harmful to women such as female genital mutilation and wife inheritance (the practice of passing a widow, and her property, to her dead husband’s brother)”.

Furthermore, UNICEF includes psychological, sexual and economic violence as aspects of the broad spectrum of domestic violence, describing them as follows: “Psychological abuse includes behaviour that is intended to intimidate and persecute, and takes the form of threats of abandonment or abuse, confinement to the home, surveillance, threats to take away custody of the children, destruction of objects, isolation, verbal aggression and constant humiliation. Sexual abuse includes coerced sex through threats, forcing unwanted sexual acts or forcing sex with others, intimidation or physical force. Economic abuse includes acts such as the refusal to contribute financially, denial of funds, controlling access to health care, employment and denial of food and basic needs etc.” It should, however, be noted that studies have shown that the existence of one form of violence in a family is an indication that other forms are likely to occur (Fareo, 2015; Tuncay-Senlet, 2012; Severson, Postmus & Berry, 2009; UNICEF, 2000).

This study adopts a feminist theorization of gendered violence, and thereby draws on critical socio-political frameworks and tools for explicating commonalities in the violence that occurs in private spaces. More precisely, radical feminist theorizing has identified patriarchy within the family structure as a key instrument for understanding the socio-political oppression

of women. This root cause of gendered violence resonates in the arguments of Tuncay-Senlet (2012) and Anderson (1997), who argue that in line with resource theory, violence is ultimately a resource to gain power in a relationship and that individuals who lack legitimate means of power such as income, education and social status are more likely to fall back on violence for compensation. Feminist theory, according to Tuncay-Senlet (2012) corroborates the position that gendered violence at the domestic level is deeply rooted in power struggles where men attempt to maintain control over women both in the home and in the larger society.

In the Ghanaian context, patriarchy is clearly visible as an underlying factor encoded in the various ways in which female victims of domestic violence have sought to explain the abuse they have endured. Patriarchy prescribes roles and power within the domestic setting and authorizes and legitimizes the use of violence. It is embedded in the nature of societal culture and well understood as those “structural relations and cultural constructs that opportune the initiative of the masculine gender in regulating the existence of others” (Rydström, 2010:79). The system of male dominance creates an avenue to bestow power to them and further entails the disempowerment and subordination of women (Kakar & Poggendorf-Kakar, 2009; Parpart et al, 2014:207). Galtung (1996:40) describes patriarchy as: an institutionalisation of male dominance in vertical structures, with very high correlations between position and gender, legitimised by the culture and often emerging as direct violence with males as subjects and females as objects.

The patriarchal system trains women and men from birth on how to behave and it socializes women into clichéd roles of submissiveness. The more the gendered role of masculinity is incorporated by the man, the more likely the woman is to experience violence by default. Thus Qayum and Ray (2010), speak of patriarchy as a vital task that identifies the prevalent domination of men in society through the various forms and loci of masculinity. Masculinity is sometimes used as the direct opposite of femininity. The relationship between such constructs and the normalization of domestic violence is quite obvious. Masculinity is often used to refer to features that are ascribed to being a man, such as assertiveness, aggressiveness, authority and leadership. Therefore, whereas an ideal woman in the Ghanaian context is socialised to be respectful, subservient, empathetic, sympathetic and caring, the Ghanaian man, (and this could be

applicable in other societies) is deemed to possess qualities that describe his maleness: he is classified as being brave, adventurous and pugnacious; able to control and protect his family; he does not cry, he is a born leader rather than a subject or a follower; he is the one that makes known his intentions of marrying rather than being married and he is a sexual conqueror (Cusack, 2009).

In the same vein, Roger (2001:45) captures the popular notion of an underlying gendering of violence thus: "the major stereotype that arguably forms the basis of the abuse is one in which male individuals dominate, control, and use power whereas women do the opposite". Ellsberg and Heise (2005) have also argued that domestic violence tends to be tolerated in societies where gender roles are harshly imposed and accepted, and where masculinity is conceptualised as dominance, honour and toughness.

To appreciate and adequately conceptualise the phenomenon of domestic violence and its many supposed triggers, the distinctions of the numerous complex identities of women should be considered within the context of the larger patriarchal nature of society, including its varied social, political, economic and religious structures. Discussions on violence against women would be incomplete without situating male and female roles, victims and perpetrators, practices and values in context.

## **Data and methods**

### **Study design**

The survey research design was adopted for this study and questionnaires administered in Accra-Ghana elicited significant information from working women. In-depth interviews were conducted with female survivors of domestic abuse who were willing to share their experiences. A total of 385 questionnaires were administered among working married women with a 64.9 percent return rate through the direct intervention of trained survey assistants. However, 104 or 41.6 percent of the returned questionnaires were discarded for one or more of the following reasons: some respondents skipped significant portions of the instrument making them irrelevant for the purpose intended, while others were clearly reluctant to comment due to the sensitivity of the issue, or anxiety about re-traumatization and/or retribution. The

sample frame comprised working women from ages 25 to 64 years. Furthermore, based on this sample frame a total of 8,322,462 women were eligible for the study in Ghana. Therefore, using the Raosoft online sample size calculator with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%; the sample size derived was 385.

### **Study location**

This study is a part of an unpublished doctoral thesis. The study was conducted in two locations, Ghana and the United States. However for the purpose of this paper only data from Accra-Ghana was used. Accra was selected because it is the capital of Ghana, a booming metropolitan centre with a significant international presence. Accra is home to women of diverse cultural backgrounds, which enriched the responses received.

### **Method of analysis**

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, mean, percentages and graphs from the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The qualitative data gathered through interviews were further subjected to thematic content analysis, which according to Ghani (2014) is best used for qualitative data as regards domestic violence.

### **Ethical considerations**

Among the most important considerations affirmed by Ghani (2014), confidentiality and anonymity are very crucial. Participation was entirely voluntary. All respondents were clearly assured of the confidentiality of their participation and the female victims who were interviewed were assured of the possibility withdrawing of withdrawing at any point during the interview process if they felt uncomfortable. On the issue of privacy, interviews were conducted in safe places and some via telephone. Consent was also obtained from participants to permit inclusion of their quotes in the paper. Furthermore, as suggested by Ghani (2014) and Ellsberg & Heise (2002), prior to the interviews, the researcher tried to ensure that appropriate support systems, for instance, counseling services were made available to those who might suffer retraumatization as they revisit experiences of violence. During the interview process, the researcher remained neutral and non-judgemental.

## Results

**Table 1: Background characteristics of survey participants**

<b>Marital Status and Experience of Domestic Violence</b>	<b>All Women</b>		<b>Victim of Abuse</b>		<b>Knows an Abuse Victim</b>	
	<b>Description</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Married	122 (100%)	59	48.4	63	51.6	
Widowed	5 (100%)	2	40.0	3	60.0	
Separated	5 (100%)	4	80	1	20.0	
Living with a Partner	4 (100%)	3	75	1	25	
Divorced	5 (100%)	4	80	1	20	
None	5 (100%)	3	60	2	40	
Total	146 (100%)	75	51.4	71	48.6	

Source: Survey administered in Accra, Ghana (2017)

From a pool of 146 analysed questionnaires, 75 female respondents (51.4%) self-identified as victims of domestic violence. While 48.3% of women who were still married indicated that they were victims of domestic abuse, it is instructive that 80 percent of women who were either divorced or separated from their partners identified as victims of abuse. While the overall number of divorced and separated women are not adequately statistically significant to arrive at

a conclusion, the figures (almost twice the numbers for married women) suggest that divorce and separation are not popular social choices for women and that women contemplating marital dissolution have a high likelihood of having been victims of severe violence. The social pressure for women to be married is quite apparent in the low percentage (4%) of women living with a partner or admitting to cohabiting.

**Table 2. Background characteristics of survey participants**

<b>Educational Status</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
No formal Schooling	7	4.8
Primary School	12	8.2
Secondary/High School	18	12.3
University/College	104	71.2
None	5	3.4
Total	<b>146</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Employed	124	84.9
Unemployed	21	14.4
None	1	.7
Total	<b>146</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age Distribution</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
≤30	33	22.6
31-45	92	63.1
46-60	19	13
≥61	2	1.4
Total	<b>146</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Annual Income Distribution</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Cedi ₵		
0-10000 (\$0-2,116.15)	49	33.5

10,001-20,000(\$2,116.36-4232.30)	16	11
20,001-30,000 (\$4, 232.51-6,348.45)	8	5.5
30,001-40,000 (\$6,348.66-8464.60)	9	6.2
40,001-50,000 (\$8,464.81-10,580.75)	7	4.8
50,001-Above (\$10,580.96-Above)	35	24
None	22	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Authors' computation, 2017

As evident in Table 2 above, 104 or 71.2 percent of the women had university degrees and only 7 or 4.8 percent lacked formal schooling. Clearly, the women represent a fairly highly educated and younger generation. Furthermore, 124 of the respondents were employed in some income generating occupation representing 84.9 percent, while 21 were unemployed representing 14.4 percent. It is important to note that of our 146 respondents, most were between the ages

of 30-45 (63.1%), while 22.6 percent were under 30, 13 percent were between 46-60, and only 1.4 percent was above 60 years of age. From the data presented in Table 2 above, over a quarter of the women (28.8%) could be described as living a fairly comfortable middle and upper middle class life earning at least 40,000 Ghana Cedi or over 8,464.81 USD annually, while over 44 percent of the respondents make an extremely low annual income of between 0-20,000 Cedi (indigent or dependent status).

**Table 3: Female Victims' Identification of Triggers of Domestic Violence- Accra, Ghana**

Trigger	Yes	%	No	%	Total Number of Women
Alcoholism	68	54.40	57	45.60	125(100%)
Financial dependence and/or independence	62	48.82	65	51.18	127(100%)
"Disobedience"	55	42.97	73	57.03	128(100%)
Denial of sexual / conjugal rights	40	33.06	81	66.94	121(100%)
On the discipline of children	24	19.05	102	80.95	126(100%)
Male Promiscuity	19	54.29	16	45.71	35(100%)
Female accused of having extra-marital Affairs	17	13.60	108	86.40	125(100%)
Beating is culturally permissible or right.	17	13.60	108	86.40	125(100%)
Conflicts related to Polygamy	15	44.12	19	55.88	34(100%)
Payment of Bride Price and concept of ownership of the wife	15	35.71	27	64.29	42(100%)

Source: Survey administered in Accra, Ghana (2017)

Table 3 above highlights some of the highest ranked triggers of violence at the domestic level, as identified by female victims of intimate violence in Ghana. The findings show that the three of the factors selected by the most numbers of respondents include: Alcoholism indicated by 68 responses or 54.4 percent of the women surveyed, followed by issues related to financial income identified by 62 respondents or 48.8 percent of those polled. The widespread notion of spousal disobedience as an affront to the authority of the male is well demonstrated by 55 affirmative responses (42.9 percent of the

female respondents). In contrast to the triggers identified above, the discipline of children, payment of bride price and conflicts over polygamy and extramarital affairs were selected as significant triggers only by about 13.6 percent or less of the respondents. It is however particularly interesting to note that while only 17 respondents or 13.6 percent believed that their experience of violence was primarily an outcome of the man's perception that it was culturally permissible or right, the responses collectively signify a normalization of spousal violence in the sociocultural context.

### Survivor narratives

As an outcome of the survey and in order to further substantiate its findings, in-depth interviews were conducted with female victims/survivors of domestic abuse who were willing to share their experiences (Ajayi, 2018). There were four respondents, three of whom identified ethnically as Akan, while one self-identified as Ga. Two of them were unemployed outside the home, while the other two clearly stipulated that they were not “allowed” to work by their spouses.

All four interviewees indicated that they had suffered emotional, verbal and economic abuse within the home setting. The following are excerpts from the survivors on the forms of abuse they experienced from their spouses and the triggers.

### Verbal/emotional abuse and deprivation from economic empowerment

In terms of the economic dimensions of their abuse, two of the survivors (Survivor A who is an Akan and B who is Ga) were highly educated but not allowed to work.

*“I am a graduate but he refused me from using my certificate to look for a proper job rather he opened a kiosk in front of the compound where I sell provisions. He said that will avail me much time to take care of the kids because he doesn’t want wayward children and that all I need he will provide” (Survivor A, Akan).*

*“He always told me I will never amount to anything good and on one occasion when my neighbours wanted me to cook for their wedding my husband told the couple that I wasn’t into catering services and have no specialty in cooking but if they wanted their refreshment to be a failure, they could go ahead and use me” (Survivor B, Ga).*

*“I am a graduate but anytime I brought up the issue of working or starting a business of my own my husband yells at me and tells me I cannot make it. Just sit at home and do only that which is culturally expected in the home from a wife” (Survivor B, Ga).*

*“I couldn’t complete junior secondary school because of finances but this didn’t stop my hands from being productive. I am a very industrious woman. My baking business was booming and I was supplying eateries around where we lived at the time so with money in my hands I wasn’t bothered if my husband*

*dropped money for feeding or not. Even with my level of education I wanted to go further. This was a major problem for him because whenever I mentioned schooling his response is usually schooling isn’t meant for your type” (Survivor C, Akan).*

*“My husband was expecting some certain amount of money as incentive for his hardwork this was delightful news so I suggested that he invested in my business. He told me without missing word, have you seen basket hold water? He finished up that statement by saying; I will invest the money in more profitable ventures (Survivor C, Akan).*

*“Whenever my husband sees that my business is making progress he would do all in his power to wreck it by borrowing money from me with the promise that he will pay back. He never did for once and when I ask for the money he would insult me to the extent that I won’t be able to ask again” (Survivor C, Akan).*

*“My husband use to drink and I realised that whenever he has taken alcohol, no matter how little, he talks me down and reminds me of how useless I am” (Survivor C, Akan).*

Furthermore, it was upon the demise of her husband, that Survivor A realised she had contracted HIV/AIDS from her spouse’s extra-marital affairs.

*“Before we got married, my husband had a lot of girlfriends. He was a womaniser but he promised me that once we got married he would stop. He actually did for only two years and picked up this old habit again. It was not until he died when his family members were accusing me of his death and the doctor at the hospital called me that it was necessary that they carried out some tests on me then I found out I was HIV positive and that was the cause of my husband’s death” (Survivor A, Akan).*

### Isolation and intimidation

Survivor B from the Ga ethnic group was gradually and systemically isolated from her friends and family and at the peak of the abuse was threatened with a loaded gun for attempting a small act of economic independence when she accepted a paid catering opportunity for a neighbour’s wedding ceremonies. Also, Survivor A from the Akan ethnic group had experiences of being isolated and intimidated.

*“At first, anytime I wanted to go visit my friends or parents he would look for one excuse or the other why it won’t be possible and anytime they try visiting he would instruct me to tell them we will be travelling that period. Before later he came out rightly to say my family members and friends have been banned from visiting. And any time he was away from home he would lock the house and instruct that before I leave for anywhere I took permission. He always told people he married me to keep me within the confines of the home which he often referred to as his territory” (Survivor B, Ga)*

*“On a particular outing where I was hired by a couple to cook for their wedding in another region I had spent four days as against the three days agreed upon with my husband and the couple. Upon my arrival, I met my fuming husband in front of our apartment with my boxes thrown out and a gun in his hand. I approached him without fear as I gathered my boxes that had been carelessly thrown out. Approaching our apartment, my husband began to rain abuses on me, called me a prostitute and that I could never amount to anything good in life. The couple stood afar off and watched in shock at the drama between my husband and me. After a while he pointed the gun at me. I didn’t tremble rather I approached him in a calm voice asking why he had to throw my things out. The couple saw the gun and ran for help in the Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU)” (Survivor B, Ga).*

*“Whenever he wants to beat me he will lock the doors so I don’t get rescued from his grip by neighbours” . He said “as soon as possible I will get us another accommodation. I am the man of this home no one can dictate to me how I handle my subjects” (Survivor A, Akan).*

*“I couldn’t talk to anyone about it because of the fear of what he might do to me and my children” (Survivor A, Akan).*

### **Physical abuse**

Survivor A noticed that the physical abuse she experienced from her husband which sometimes includes him raping her was extreme whenever he was under the influence of alcohol.

*“He had grabbed me and heavily landed slaps on my face. He beat me to the extent*

*that my red eye had blood clot” (Survivor A, Akan).*

*“He will beat me and neighbours will come banging our door but whenever he wants to beat me he will lock the doors so I don’t get rescued” (Survivor A, Akan)*

*“He faced me and slapped me and said I know you have a hand in the landlord coming to give me that threat message” (Survivor A, Akan).*

*“I cannot count the number of times he had his way forcefully unprotected. Even when I give him the condom it will only cause me more beatings” (Survivor A, Akan).*

### **Discussion**

A primary concern of this study was to see how respondents (particularly the highly educated but economically strapped women) identified and interpreted the factors triggering intimate partner violence in their experiences. Victim-centred analysis and understanding is critical in finding points of intersection and communication for advocates. It is also a vital element that allows scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to develop policies that are responsive to the situational perspective of victims, even when their perspective differs from the other causative factors objectively identified by external parties. Victims will generally reject well-intentioned approaches that fail to resonate with their perspective of the problem since they may suffer increased layers of violence if they follow misplaced recommendations from external parties. The findings of the study were quite revealing as it discovered that most respondents did not identify the payment of bride price, polygamy or obvious cultural norms as significant triggers of domestic abuse in their experiences. This study further added to existing literature on the economic triggers of domestic abuse amongst married working women in Ghana. The disturbingly high number of victims of domestic abuse is certainly shocking when we consider the educational accomplishments of the women polled. This finding is consistent with studies by Shiraz (2016) and Marium (2014).

The financial issue centers on women who blamed their vulnerability on their economic dependence as well as women who were subjected to violence because of their growing economic independence. This finding is in tandem with studies by Cools and Kotsadam (2017); True (2012); Tuncay-Senlet (2012); Vyas and Watts (2009) and Anderson (1997) that

identified women's economic empowerment as well as their disempowerment as causes of domestic abuse. While these choices would be often identified separately, it is interesting to note that women often cycled between contexts of financial dependence and independence. When they suffered violence as a result of seeking some economic autonomy, the experience of abuse often made them quickly revert back to subordinate economic postures. That position did not save them from violence, however, as they subsequently suffered psychological abuse, economic violence and withholding, isolation and new forms of physical violence when they dared to request or contend for needed funds. These fluctuating postures make it important for many women to describe both economic dependence and independence as distinct but inseparable triggers of violence. It was also discovered that the high level of acceptance of alcoholism and the violence it triggers is fast becoming part of popular culture. Respondents in this survey identified alcoholism as the highest indicated trigger of domestic violence. This finding of a strong relationship between alcoholism and domestic violence is in tandem with other studies that have been able to link the roles of these two variables as both casual and excusing behaviour for domestic violence (Javaid, 2015; Wekwete, Sanhokwe, Murenjekwa, Takavarasha and Madzingira, 2014; Galvani, 2006; O'Leary and Schumacher, 2003).

In like manner, women identify violent subjugation as the response from their male partners when they are faced with a denial of sexual access by their female partners. There are religious and cultural undertones to the language of male outrage expressed frequently in the phrase that the men have been denied of their conjugal rights. Soyinka-Airewele (2016) has argued in her analysis of terrorism and the abduction of females in Nigeria that the notion of the male as a victim of the denial of certain rights is a commonplace discourse that may silence and subvert the reality of abuse and violence unjustly experienced by the woman. The concept of the "denial of conjugal rights" is framed around the idea that the domestic setting and marriage, in particular, constitute a space of unfettered and divinely sanctioned and privileged male access to their female partners. While this is explained in religious settings as constituting mutual access to each other, there is little evidence that women are equally authorized to beat their partners into submission to gain such sexual access (Soyinka-Airewele, 2016). Yet 27.4 percent of the female

respondents in this survey have faced such experiences of sexual violence and rape in the home. Furthermore this study discovered that, marriage rites endow men with a range of choices, including determining the kind of woman they wish to marry, approaching her family to seek her hand in marriage, and paying her bride price or dowry. The interpretation given to the payment of the bride price by some Ghanaian men is that the man has absolute control over the woman and in turn she is expected to give him maximum respect. In the event that she is "disobedient", he is granted every right to discipline his wife (Adomako Ampofo & Prah, 2009; Cusack, 2009).

This study also identified men's perception that wife beating and 'discipline' was culturally acceptable as an important factor that encourages experiences of domestic violence. The terms used signify a troubling cultural and social normalization of intimate partner violence and are obviously linked to other triggers rooted in patriarchal norms and power relations, such as financial income and disobedience by the wife. This finding agrees with Adomako Ampofo and Prah (2009) and Tamale (2003) who averred that men jealously and consciously guard those cultural and patriarchal structures that entrench their control over women. It is quite clear that although cultural indicators are a significant trigger of domestic violence, there is a significant level of obliviousness of how cultural values shape perceptions of women's economic independence, conjugal rights issues and so on.

In the survey and in the women's detailed narratives of abuse, it became clear that there was a common thread. Not only did they suffer domestic violence, but much of that violence involved issues of economic vulnerability. This finding corroborates studies by Adomako Ampofo & Prah, (2009); Adjah & Agbemafle (2016); and Cusack (2009) that financial dependence is a major cause of domestic abuse. However, this study went further to indicate that not only does financial dependence spur domestic violence; financial independence is an equally critical trigger of violence. While only one of the four interviewees reported physical abuse, they all referenced economic violence as a primary mode of domination and control in the private space. Invariably, such domestic abuse has wide-ranging public ramifications including the disempowerment of women and girls in the educational and professional arena. Abused women also suffer the debilitating emotional and psychological ramifications of violence-induced trauma, and its transgenerational impact on children.

### Limitation of the study

This study encountered some encumbrances as a result of the high sensitivity of issues regarding domestic abuse which led to other constraints during the course of the entire research. Indeed, Mahserjian (2016), Katembo (2015), Ghani (2014), Adomako Ampofo (2009), and Cusack (2009) agree that this is a particularly private and sensitive issue that remains difficult to penetrate. Issues such as the retraumatisation of survivors during the course of the interviews and ongoing litigation processes were some of the reasons some female survivors were unable to grant interviews. A vivid illustration of retraumatisation occurred during the interview of three of the survivors who broke down in tears while narrating some of the ordeals they went through in their relationships. These issues do not in any way undermine the substance of the research. Rather, they reveal the extent to which women's wellbeing is held hostage to the sacredness ascribed to the institution of marriage and prevailing cultural norms.

### Conclusion and recommendations

This study finds that women in Ghana continue to suffer high rates of domestic abuse, which is a form of gendered discrimination, largely due to the entrenchment of patriarchal structures within the domestic and public arenas. Yet the Ghanaian women surveyed or interviewed for this research highlight the transition of certain cultural norms and traditions and their reinstitution in new forms. While their male partners may abstain from using the language of rights granted by payment of the bride price to compel domestic subservience, they continue to reference the power of patriarchy through various measures of economic control and dominance over the female body. Consequently, women are disciplined with violence for daring to gain economic independence, for being "disobedient" or not complying, for refusing sexual advances and thus denying men of their "conjugal rights" and so on. Most unexpectedly, however, women ranked alcoholism as the highest common trigger of violence by their male partners. This foregrounds alcoholism itself as a possible critical indicator of increased social, economic and cultural pressures in Ghana. It is pertinent to note that over time the media has been a great promoter of alcohol in social settings despite its injunctions to 'drink responsibly'. It is about time the media begins to sensitize the populace about the negative influence of alcoholism on domestic violence. On this note, this study therefore suggests the need

for a focused interrogation of the changing causes, impact and policy implications of intimate partner and domestic violence.

### Acknowledgements

This study is partly sponsored by the Covenant University Centre for Research, Innovation and Development (CUCRID), Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria and the Office of the Provost, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York, USA.

### References

- Abdou, L. B. (2013). Women self-affirmation in Ama Ata Aidoo's changes. *Case Studies Journal*, 2 (4), 23-30.
- Adekeye, O.A., Abimbola, O.H., and Adeusi, S.O. (2013). Domestic violence in a semi-urban neighbourhood. *Gender and Behaviour*, (9)2, 4247-4261.
- Adjah, E. S., & Agbemafle, I. (2016). Determinants of domestic violence against women in Ghana. *BMC Public Health*, 16(1), 2-9. doi:10.1186/s12889-016-3041-x
- Adomako Ampofo, A. (2008). Collective activism: The Domestic Violence Bill becoming Law in Ghana. *African and Asian Studies*, 7(4), 395-421. doi:10.1163/156921008x359597
- Adomako Ampofo, A., & Prah, M. (2009). You may beat your wife, but not too much: The cultural context of violence against women in Ghana. In Cusack, K and Manuh, T (eds) *The architecture for violence against women in Ghana* (pp. 93-105). Accra, Ghana: Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre.
- Adomako Ampofo, A., Esi, A. and Dwamena-Aboagye, A.,(2005). How the perpetrators of violence against women and children escape – A study of "escapes" from the time of the violent act, through a formal complaint, to prosecution, In *Violence Against Women in Africa*. Dakar: AAWORD: 43-56.
- Ajayi, L. A. (2018). *International Regimes and Local Realities: Addressing Gendered Violence in Ghana and the United States* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.
- Ajayi, L.A. & Soyinka-Airewele, P. (2018). *Narratives of domestic violence survivors in Ghana and the United States*. Forthcoming
- Amoo, E.O. (2017). Trends and determinants of female age at first marriage in sub-saharan Africa(1990-2014): what has changed? *African Population Studies*, 31(1), 3564-3576.
- Anderson, K. L. (1997). Gender, status, and domestic violence: An integration of feminist and family violence approaches. *Journal of*

- Marriage and the Family, 59(3), 655-669. doi:10.2307/353952
- Bumiller, K. (2013). Feminist collaboration with the state in response to sexual violence: Lessons from the American experience. In Tripp A. M., Ferree M., and Ewig, C., (eds) Gender, Violence and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives (pp. 191-213). New York: New York University Press.
- Coker-Appiah, D. (2016, November 9). Former member of the CEDAW Committee and the current Executive Director of the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre [Personal interview].
- Cools, S. and Kotsadam, A., (2017). Resources and intimate partner violence in sub-saharan Africa. *World Development*, 95, 211-230.
- Cusack, K. (2009). Our house: Ghana's architecture for gender based violence. In Cusack, K and Manuh, T (eds) *The architecture for violence against women in Ghana*. Accra, Ghana: Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre.
- Dery, I., & Diedong, A. L. (2014). Domestic violence against women in Ghana: An exploratory study in Upper West Region, Ghana. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(12), 228-244.
- Domestic violence: Working with men: Phase 1 meta-evaluation report. (2003). Barton, A.C.T.: Office of the Status of Women.
- Ellsberg, M., & Heise, L. (2005). *Researching violence against women: A practical guide for researchers and activists*. Geneva: World Health Organization and Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH).
- Fareo, D. O. (2015). Domestic violence against women in Nigeria. *European Journal of Psychological Research*, 2(1), 24-33.
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute. 40-50.
- Galvani, S. (2006). Alcohol and domestic violence: women's views. *Violence against women*, 12 (7), 641-662.
- Gberebie, D.E., and Oviasogie, F.O. (2012). Women in governance and sustainable democracy in Nigeria, 1999-2012. *Economics & Sociology*, 6(1). pp. 89-107.
- Ghana Statistical Service (2009). *Ghana Population and Housing Census Provisional Results 2009*.
- Ghana Statistical Service (2013). *Ghana Population and Housing Census Provisional Results 2010*.
- Ghani, M. A. (2014). Exploring domestic violence experiences from the perspective of abused women in Malaysia (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Loughborough University, England.
- Institute of Development Studies, & Ghana Statistical Services and Associates. (2016). *Domestic Violence in Ghana: Prevalence, Incidence and Causes*. Retrieved December 5, 2016, from <http://www.ids.ac.uk/project/domestic-violence-in-ghana-prevalence-incidence-and-causes>
- Javaid, A. (2015). The role of alcohol and intimate partner violence: casual behaviour or excusing behaviour? *British Journal of Community Justice*, 13(1), 75-92.
- Kakar, S., & Poggendorf-Kakar, K. (2009). *The Indians: Portrait of a people*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Katambo, A. (2015). Reducing cases of gender based violence in Mashonaland Central province: Zimbabwe (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Durban University of Technology, Durban.
- Kutsoati, E., & Morck, R. (2012). *Family Ties, Inheritance Rights, and Successful Poverty Alleviation: Evidence from Ghana*. NBER Working Paper. doi:10.3386/w18080
- Mahserjian, C. (2016). We are all in this together: a global comparison on domestic violence and the means necessary to combat it. *Albany Law Review*, 79 (1), 294-324.
- Makama, G. A. (2013). Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria: The way forward'. *European Scientific Journal*, 99 (17), 115-144.
- Mama, A. (2000). Transformation thwarted: Gender-based violence in Africa's new democracies. *African Gender Institute Newsletter*, University of Capetown, 6.
- Manuh, T. (2009). Understanding the Ghanaian context for gender-based violence. In *The architecture for violence against women in Ghana* (pp. 35-67). Accra, Ghana: Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre.
- Marium, S. (2014). Women's level of education and its effect on domestic violence in rural Bangladesh. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(5), 40-45.
- Matud, M. P. (2005). The psychological impact of domestic violence on Spanish women. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 35 (11), 2310-2322. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.2005.tb02104.x
- O'Leary, D. K. and Schumacher, J. A. (2003). The association between Alcohol Use and Intimate Partner Violence: Linear Effect, Threshold Effect, or Both? *Addictive Behaviours*, 28(9): 1575-1585.

- Olawole-Isaac, A., Oladosun, M., and Oni, G. (2017). Gender-based violence and pregnancy outcomes among couples and cohabiting partners in Nigeria. *Covenant International Journal of Psychology (CIJP)*, 2(1), 25-34.
- Parpart, J. L., Connelly, M. P., & Barribeau, V. E. (2014). *Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development*. Ottawa: IDRC Books / Les éditions du CRDI.
- Pesoob, T., (2010). Threatening peace: violence against women: a universal phenomenon. *Osaka University Knowledge Archive*. 14(2), 141-151.
- Qayum, S., & Ray, R. (2010). Male servants and the failure of patriarchy in Kolkata (Calcutta). *Men and Masculinities*, 13 (1), 111-125. doi:10.1177/1097184x10382883
- Roger, J. R. L. (2001). Culture and family violence: fostering change through human rights law. Washington DC: American Psychological Association. 40-66.
- Rydström, H. (2010). Gendered inequalities in Asia: Configuring, contesting and recognizing women and men. Copenhagen: NIAS.
- Severson, M., Postmus, J. L., & Berry, M. (2009). Women's experiences of victimization and survival. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 36 (2), 145-167.
- Shiraz, M.S. (2016). The impact of education and occupation on domestic violence in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 25(4), 339-346.
- Solanke, B.L. (2014). Association between intimate partner violence and utilisation of maternal health services in Nigeria, *African Population Journal*, 28(2), 933-945.
- Solanke, B. L., Amoo, E. O., & Idowu, A. E. (2018). Improving postnatal checkups for mothers in West Africa: A multilevel analysis. *Women & health*, 58(2), 221-245.
- Soyinka-Airewele, P. (2016, May 17). Chibok Syndrome and beyond: Necropolitics, Biopower and the pathologies of weaponized faith in Nigeria. Text of University Lecture delivered at the University of California, Riverside.
- Soyinka-Airewele, P. and Yartey-Ajayi, L., (2016). "Bring back our girls': reframing human security, borders and gendered violence in the shadows of Chibok." Paper presented at the 2016 International conference of the Association of Third World Studies Inc., New Albany, Indiana. USA.
- Tamale, S. (2003). Virgin brides are dinosaurs from a dead culture. *The Monitor*. October 16.
- Tripp, A. M. (2013). Toward a gender perspective on human security. In Tripp A. M., Ferree M., and Ewig, C., (eds) *Gender, Violence and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives* (pp. 3-32). New York: New York University Press.
- True, J. (2012). *The political economy of violence against women*. Oxford University Press
- Tuncay-Senlet, E. (2012). Domestic violence against women in relations to marital adjustment and psychological well-being, with effects of attachment, marital coping, and social support. (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Middle East Technical University, Turkey.
- UNICEF. (2000). Domestic Violence - Innocenti. Retrieved November 16, 2015, from <https://www.bing.com/cr?IG=2E74E418A4FB40BAB291F962FEB51686&CID=2F6D20F9E0986A3307442B1CE1376B8F&rd=1&h=fd1iiPtYiPO45zZUNo-9wE3GbnG3PS6GC1b1XDuiVY&v=1&r=https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest6e.pdf&p=DevEx.LB.1,5520.1>
- Vyas, S. and Watts, C., (2009). How does economic empowerment affect women's risk of intimate partner violence in low and middle income countries: A systematic review of published evidence. *Journal of International Development*, 21(5), 577-602.
- Wekwete N.N, Sanhokwe H., Murenjekwa W., Takavarasha F., and Madzingira, N. (2014) The association between spousal gender based violence and women's empowerment among currently married women aged 15-49 in Zimbabwe: Evidence from the 2010-11 Zimbabwe demographic and health survey. *African Population Studies*, 28(3), 1413-1423.