

Associations between Endorsement of Inequitable Gender Norms, Justification of Intimate Partner Violence and Violence Victimization and Perpetration in Childhood in Uganda's Refugee Settlements

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Introduction

There is wide endorsement of inequitable gender norms and a justification of physical intimate partner violence (IPV) in several sub-Saharan African countries, with women more likely than men to justify partner violence in response to women's transgressing gender norms (Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi 2009; Darteh, Dickson, Rominski *et al.* 2021). In their study of male and female participants aged 15 years and older, Bukuluki and colleagues (2021) found that a higher proportion of females than males agreed that men's power is the reason for violence against women. They also found that several socioeconomic and demographic factors such as being married (as opposed to single), having any education (as opposed to no education), and being employed (as opposed to not being in employment) were associated with a reduced likelihood of justifying violence against women; and, that endorsement of negative gender attitudes and beliefs was positively associated with the justification of physical violence against women in Uganda (Bukuluki, Kisaakye, Wandiembe *et al.* 2021). Gilbert, Annor and Kress (2014) found that among Nigerian youth aged 13–24 years, significantly more females (62%) than males (48%) endorsed at least one inequitable gender norm about intimate partner violence against women (IPVAW). They also found that endorsing three or more inequitable gender norms about IPVAW was significantly associated with IPV perpetration among males and IPV victimization among females (Gilbert, Annor and Kress 2022). In Ethiopia, Murphy *et al.* (2021) found that community-level (in rural areas) and individual-level (in urban areas) gender norms that condone violent discipline, promote masculinities focused on violence, and support gender inequality were associated with experiences of household (physical or emotional/psychological) violence among young adolescents (aged 10–12) (Murphy, Jones, Yadete *et al.* 2021). High levels of social and individual acceptance and justification of IPV were also found among couples (18 years and older) in northern Tanzania, with 72% of men justifying a husband's perpetration of IPV, and 54% of men and 76% of women saying that a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together (Messersmith, Halim, Steven Mzilangwe *et al.* 2021). Younger men and those who reported gender inequitable attitudes or having experienced childhood trauma were significantly more likely to report recent IPV perpetration, while younger women and those with low levels of education were more likely to report experiencing recent IPV (Messersmith, Halim, Steven Mzilangwe *et al.* 2021).

Associations between inequitable gender norms and sexual violence victimisation and perpetration have also been investigated albeit primarily in the global North. Available literature on the relationships between inequitable gender norms and violence victimization and perpetration has excluded humanitarian populations, and more specifically, left out children and youth in refugee settings. Data from children and young people in refugee settings is valuable for informing the design of interventions to prevent and respond to violence in humanitarian settings. In this paper, we sought to determine if endorsement of inequitable gender norms and justification of IPV are associated with childhood experiences of any violence (including physical, sexual, and emotional victimisation) and perpetration of violence (including physical and sexual violence perpetration) in humanitarian settings and among children and youth living in Uganda's refugee settlements.

Methods

Study design and sample

We used data from the Uganda HVACS, the first-ever Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS) conducted exclusively in humanitarian settings in Uganda. Conducted between March and April 2022, the Uganda HVACS replicated the standard VACS methodology and was a representative, multistage, cross-sectional household survey of children and youth aged 13–24 years in all 13 refugee settlements in Uganda, excluding urban refugees living in Kampala and other urban areas that do not live in settlements.

Sampling

A three-stage cluster and split sampling design was used. In the first stage, 56 zones were randomly sampled from a list of 109 zones covering all 13 refugee settlements. A split sampling design was applied to the 56 zones, resulting in 28 zones for female only and 28 zones for male only interviews, to build in participant safeguards and eliminate the possibility of both a perpetrator and a survivor from the same community being interviewed (Chiang, Kress, Sumner *et al.* 2016). In the second stage, a fixed number of households (193 for female zones and 134 for male zones) were randomly sampled from each of the selected zones. In the third stage, one eligible 13- to 24-year-old participant (for a total of 2,265) was randomly selected from each sampled household to participate in the survey. Inclusion criteria were understanding and speaking one of the study languages (English, Kiswahili, Kinyabwisha, Acholi, or Juba Arabic), not having a disability that prevented the participant from understanding or hearing the questions and living in or having access to a space that allowed them to be interviewed in private.

Measures

Any childhood violence: This paper includes measures of self-reported experiences of sexual, physical, and emotional violence – **victimisation** – in childhood among 13–24-year-olds. To capture any childhood violence, we used a composite score for any positive responses to questions administered to children aged 13–17 years about ever experiencing sexual, physical, and/or emotional violence (lifetime exposure), and used any positive responses to questions about experiencing sexual, physical, and/or emotional violence before the age of 18 years for youth aged 18–24 years.

Sexual violence was described as having experienced one or more incidents of unwanted sexual touching; attempted forced sex; pressured or coerced sex; and, physically forced sex, perpetrated by any person. **Physical violence** was described as having experienced one or more incidents of slapping, pushing, shoving, shaking, or of having something thrown at the respondent to intentionally hurt them; punching, kicking, whipping, or being beaten with an object; choking, smothering, trying to drown them, or burning them intentionally; and, using or threatening them with a knife, gun or other weapon, perpetrated by an intimate partner, peer, parent or adult caregiver or other adult relative, and/or other adults in the community.

Emotional violence was described as having experienced one or more incidents of being told that they were not loved or did not deserve to be loved; being told that they should never have been born or should have died; and, being ridiculed or put down, for example, being told that they were stupid or useless, perpetrated by a parent or adult caregiver or other adult relative, an intimate partner, or peer.

Perpetration of violence: We similarly created a composite score for any positive responses to questions administered to 13-24-year-olds about ever having perpetrated any acts of physical violence (as described above) to a current or ex-partner (partner violence) or to someone who was not a current or ex-partner (non-partner violence), as well as any positive responses to questions administered to 13-24-year-olds about ever having perpetrated any acts of sexual violence (as described above) to a current or ex-partner (partner violence) or to someone who was not a current or ex-partner (non-partner violence). There were no questions on perpetration of emotional violence included in the survey tool.

Endorsement of inequitable gender norms: To explore gendered attitudes, we considered questions administered to 13-24-year-olds about (a) their beliefs on whether only men and not women should decide when to have sex; (b) whether they agreed that if someone insulted a boy or man that he should then defend his reputation with force if he needed to; (c) whether they believed that there are times when a woman should be beaten; (d) if they agreed that women who carry condoms have sex with a lot of men; (e) their views on whether a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together; (f) whether women and men should share authority in the family; and (g) if they believed that a woman should be able to spend her money according to her own will. A response of “yes” to the first five questions (a-e) was coded as 1, and a response of “no” coded as 0. We reverse-scored responses to questions f and g (“yes” coded as 0, and “no” coded as 1). We then created a composite index by summing up responses to the seven questions, with a total possible score of between 0 and 7 points. The resulting scores were then categorized into ‘no’ for scores of 0, and ‘yes’ for scores of 1 or more. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient reliability test of 0.89 indicated that the gender inequitable norms index is a reliable representative of the individual indicators.

Justification of intimate partner violence: We considered questions administered to 13-24-year-olds about their opinions as to whether husbands would be justified in hitting or beating their wives in situations including her (a) going out without informing him; (b) neglecting the children; (c) arguing with him; (d) refusing to have sex with him; and (e) burning the food. A response of “yes” to all the five questions (a-e) was coded as 1, and a response of “no” coded as 0. We then created a composite index by summing up responses to the five questions, with a total possible score of between 0 and 5 points. The resulting scores were categorized into ‘no’ for scores of 0, and ‘yes’ for scores of 1 or more. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient reliability test of 0.87 indicated that the justification of IPV index is a reliable representative of the individual indicators.

Analysis

We employed multivariable logistic regression models to examine whether the experience of any childhood violence and perpetration of violence were associated with inequitable gender norms and justification of IPV while controlling for background factors (age, education, country of origin, working for pay in the past year, and marital status). Results from the multivariable logistic regression models are presented as adjusted odds ratios (aOR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI). All estimates with $p < 0.05$ were considered statistically significant. All results are weighted to account for the complex survey design and representativeness using the svy

command. Data were analyzed using STATA Version 15.1 (Stata Corp., College Station, TX) (StataCorp 2017).

Ethical considerations

The Uganda HVACS was approved by the Population Council Institutional Review Board (Protocol 986 on 21 October 2021) and the Mildmay Uganda Research Ethics Committee (MUREC) (REF 0310–2021 on 24 November 2021). The research was also granted regulatory approval by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (REF SS1130ES on 10 January 2022). All participants provided verbal consent or assent to participate in the research.

Results

Results in **Table 1** shows the odds of experiencing any childhood violence (victimization) or perpetrating violence among those endorsing inequitable gender norms and justifying IPV, controlling for background characteristics (age, education, country of origin, working for pay in the past year, and marital status). Females had higher odds of experiencing any childhood violence if they endorsed inequitable gender norms (aOR=2.12; CI=1.21-3.70) or had supportive views of justifiable IPV (aOR=1.93; CI=1.15-3.24) compared to those that did not. Males who had supportive views of justifiable IPV had higher odds of experiencing any childhood violence (aOR=2.18; CI=1.43-3.33) and perpetrating violence (aOR=2.73; CI=1.35-5.53) compared to males who did not justify IPV.

Table 1: The odds for experiencing any childhood violence (victimisation) and perpetration of violence by endorsement of inequitable gender norms and justification of intimate partner violence.

Variable	Any childhood violence victimisation				Perpetration of violence			
	Females		Males		Females		Males	
	Adjusted OR (aOR) † [95% CI]	p-value	Adjusted OR (aOR) † [95% CI]	p-value	Adjusted OR (aOR) † [95% CI]	p-value	Adjusted OR (aOR) † [95% CI]	p-value
Inequitable gender norms	2.120 [1.215-3.698]	0.012	0.429 [0.122-1.516]	0.174	2.246 [0.796-6.337]	0.117	0.334 [0.066-1.692]	0.170
Justification of intimate partner violence	1.926 [1.146-3.237]	0.017	2.182 [1.430-3.330]	0.001	1.127 [0.462-2.750]	0.778	2.730 [1.346-5.535]	0.008

Note: the reference category is 'no' for both inequitable gender norms and justification of intimate partner violence.

†aOR-Adjusted for age, education, country of origin, working for pay in the past year, and marital status

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

Our results showed that endorsement of inequitable gender norms was prevalent and significantly associated with childhood violence victimization and perpetration among females, and that justification of IPV was also prevalent and associated with both childhood violence victimization and perpetration among males, and victimization among females. These results highlight the need to create awareness about and address the challenges associated with inequitable gender norms and acceptability of violence, which are both associated with an increased risk of childhood violence victimization or perpetration. In their review of emerging evidence of the effectiveness of programs and interventions to address IPV and sexual violence among adolescents, Lundgren and Amin (2015) found that school-based dating violence

interventions, community-based interventions to form gender equitable attitudes among adolescents, and that parenting interventions and interventions with children and adolescents that had been victimized showed considerable success and particularly when delivered longer-term rather than through a single touch-point (Lundgren and Amin 2015). While these interventions were implemented in non-humanitarian settings, our findings underscore the importance of promoting equitable gender norms among vulnerable populations in refugee settings to mitigate violence, with interventions adapted to the socioeconomic situation presented in humanitarian environments, while ensuring that approaches are not gender-blind, but rather, capture the different gendered nuisances associated with inequitable gender norms and violence. Interventions that start earlier in the life course, focusing on childhood and adolescence, may be the most promising (Jewkes, Fulu, Roselli *et al.* 2013).

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