

Effects of Domestic Violence against Men on Their Perceived Masculinity

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Abstract

This paper examined how masculinity is constructed, how men view it, and how it is affected by domestic violence perpetrated against them by their wives in Bunyala Sub-County, Busia County Kenya. The paper is based on a study conducted in Bunyala Sub-County, Busia County, Kenya, on domestic violence against men and its implications on their perceived masculinity. It focuses on male victims of domestic violence within the Bunyala Sub-County. This paper attempts to answer whether domestic violence against men exists in Bunyala Sub-County, how masculinity is constructed in Bunyala Sub-County, what defines a man in Bunyala Sub-County and what are the implications of domestic violence against men (DVAM) on their perceived masculinity in Bunyala Sub-County. The paper employed mixed methods to gather quantitative and qualitative data through an exploratory research design. This study was guided by family conflict theory. Simple random sampling was utilized to come up with the study area. Gatekeepers, the village

elders and assistant chiefs were nominated using purposive sampling while snowballing sampling was utilized to identify one hundred and one (101) men and women who were survivors or perpetrators of domestic abuse to participate in the study. The paper focused on men and women who had been in marriages for at least five years and had or were experiencing domestic violence for at least one year. Information was gathered through interviews and focus group discussions using in-depth semi-structured interview schedules, focus group discussions and key-informant interview tools. The findings revealed diverse experiences of the effect of domestic violence against men, including stigmatization, discrimination, constant ridicule, denial of conjugal rights, and disrespect, among others. These findings provide important insights to stakeholders in helping to fight incidences of domestic violence in the community.

Keywords: Stigmatization, Discrimination, Bunyala Sub-County, Busia County, Masculinity

Introduction

This paper examined domestic violence against men and its implications on their perceived masculinity. Domestic abuse comes in various types, such as bodily abuse, psychological torture, and sexual abuse. It is a global issue with no race, religion, economic status, or cultural or geographical boundaries. It negatively affects families, the government, the community and society. Albeit world outcry is primarily concerned with domestic abuse against women, domestic violence against men (DVAM) is not a new occurrence. It is a reality that has been neglected thanks to a quantity of fear and shame resulting from the stigma hooked up to men as more robust and in control and conjointly cultural patriarchal expectations of women to be submissive and weak (Thobejane & Luthada, 2019).

The study findings indeed confirm that DVAM is rampant in the area even though cases are hardly reported due to stigma, and lack of support, among other reasons. The study established that Bunyala is a patriarchal community where men are supposed to dominate over women. Wife beating is celebrated, and in such homes, men are seen as *Iguruhi*, meaning “a bull”. Masculinity is a critical discourse, and it is constructed from a tender age. Men are encouraged to be hardworking, providers and courageous. Despite all these, the study confirms that DVAM is expected in the area, and battered men are adversely affected.

Theoretic perspective

This paper used the family conflict theory by Gelles & Straus (1990) as the lens of analysis. According to this theory, family plays a significant function in forming a person’s practices. It also states that conflict is inherent in all human gatherings, including families. This is because a group of individuals, accomplices, or couples, while sharing numerous interests, likewise have differences. This theory further assumes that the behavior of one member (for example, a violent husband) is affected by the responses and feedback of the other family members (for example, the wife). In this theory, control and economic resource inequalities are important but non-gendered variables. Those with more financial resources (primarily men) hold more power within the family. Violence in the household is understood as a way of correcting behaviors and thus enabling the family to function according to appropriate behaviors/roles. Conflicts mainly emerge due to misunderstandings, financial strains, disobedience and high expectations. In this paper, the theory assumes that women are equally likely to initiate violence and with equal motivations as men.

This could be due to unmet gender roles, revenge due to long-term abuse by men or misuse of power when a woman in the marriage relationship is more powerful than the man.

Conflict may also arise when traditional family structures change; for example, more women enter the labor market and become more conscious of their rights and thus retaliate to the men's abuse. Modernization and women empowerment campaigns have also seen a change in wives' status in society, where more women struggle for power and resources within their families. This has equally seen increasing conflicts in families.

Methodology

This study used an exploratory research design. This area being less researched on the exploratory design, was ideal as it helps lay the ground for future similar studies. The study targeted men who are, or had been, in abusive marriages and women who are or had been perpetrators of domestic violence within Bunyala Sub-County. The eligible respondents were those who had been or were in weddings for a minimum of five years and had or were experiencing domestic violence for at least one year, as partners know each other well at this stage. The gatekeepers were used to identify a few abused men in each location who volunteered to participate in the study. These men were then used to recognise other respondents through snowballing.

Stat Trek random number generator was used to come up with the random number table then the number to be used was randomly selected. Bunyala Sub-County was picked in the process. Since there was no known number of the study population, as most cases of DVAM go unreported, non-probability sampling was utilized to arrive at the sample size. The study used snowballing to identify the respondents. The study identified a few respondents willing to participate through the area assistant chiefs, which were used to recruit other participants. Since the study population was unknown, the study worked with the minimum recommended number, which according to Ghahari (2018), is 100 respondents. There were 30 gatekeepers in the sub-

county. The study selected 10% of this population to take part in the study. This gave a sum of three gatekeepers from each location, giving a total of eighteen gatekeepers.

Results

Domestic Violence against Men in Bunyala Sub-County

Domestic abuse is a significant societal and economic burden across the world. However, the most familiar type is women abuse, with men being the perpetrators. Most men suffer in silence from violence perpetrated by their intimate partners. This is mainly due to the masculinity norms that pressure men to restrain their emotions and be seen as strong and masculine, especially in their homes. In the study carried out in Bunyala Sub-County, the findings revealed diverse experiences of the effect of domestic violence against men. These include stigmatization, discrimination, constant ridicule, denial of conjugal rights, and disrespect, among other products. The study findings confirm that DVAM is rampant in Bunyala Sub-County even though cases are rarely reported. Men in Bunyala suffer from verbal abuse and are physically assaulted by their wives. This agrees with a study by Reddy et al. (2013), who found that out of male study respondents, 22.8% experienced physical violence.

The most common types of DVAM include physical, emotional, and psychological assault; financial torment; denial of food; incessant quarrels; lack of respect from wives; sexual violence; and being forced to perform household chores. Sexual abuse does not only include denial of conjugal rights, but it is also manifested in traditional form, for example, as noted by a male respondent in the study: A male grandchild spending a night in his grandparents' matrimonial bed is regarded as wife inheritance, and once this happens, the man of the house is not allowed to spend in the same bed anymore. There were also cases of forced sex which men regarded as rape. However, due to fear that no one would believe that rape happens to men in a

marriage context, they could not report such occurrences. This brutally warped men's masculinity as most felt they should control their sexuality. Petersson and Plantin (2019) note that a male being sexually assaulted is contrary to hegemonic masculinity or conformist masculinity norms. This agrees with a study by Dobash and Dobash (2004), who noted that people are violent and hostile and that women are not exempted. These findings corroborate what was observed in the United Kingdom by YouGov. (2018) survey indicating that men experience violence, and some of them include physical violence, stalking and sexual violence.

The findings also agree with an empirical survey in Haryana, India, by Malik and Nadda (2019), whose results revealed that men also experience emotional and physical violence.

Bunyala community feels that modernization and the emergence of feminism have changed the beliefs and practices in gender relationships. Women's shifting places in society and what is seen as men's slipping hold on patriarchal power relations contribute to the vagueness in shaping masculine identity in the Bunyala community. This further agrees with the family conflict theory by Gelles and Straus (1990), who argue that modernization and women empowerment campaigns have seen a change in wives' status in a society where more women struggle for power and resources within their families. This has equally seen increasing conflicts in families.

Construction of Masculinity in Bunyala Sub-County

Globally, relationships between females and males have been entrenched in patriarchal family structures and reinforced by institutions such as religion, political institutions, and schools. They seem natural, morally acceptable, and sacred. From childhood onwards, boys and girls are socialized into cis-gender roles (to fit into gender identities that match the sex assigned to them at birth). Men are often put under pressure to achieve and continually prove their male identity (masculinity). Gender socialization on how children turn out as adults greatly influences

behaviors to a great extent. Masculinity entails men's behaviors, social roles and relations within a given society. These vary from time to time and from culture to culture. Most writers, for example, Connell (2002) and Whitehead (2002), refer to it as “masculinities” to acknowledge the fact that there is more than one way to be a man. According to Kimmel (2002), hegemonic masculinity is the form that is more dominant than other masculinities. The state has fashioned rigid boundaries of what it entails to be a real man. According to Connell (2002), the hegemonic construction of masculinity portrays men as resilient, strong and invulnerable and promotes risk-taking behaviors that harm individuals and those they interact with.

According to Wall and Kristjanson (2005), the construction of masculinity starts in childhood and defines ideal masculinity as stoic, rugged, self-sufficient, heterosexual, and emotionally strong. The thematic analysis of the statements given by the respondents regarding (DVAM) in Bunyala reveals that the construction of masculinity starts from a tender age and continues through adulthood. Information gathered from the respondents, and key informants suggest that between the ages of 3-6, boys are still too young to grasp the concept of masculinity. During the interviews, the respondents noted that masculinity construction starts between 7-12. Boys are taught their roles which are different from girls'. Learning gender roles is critical in this community. The issues of sexuality were important among boys between the age of 7 to 12 years in the Bunyala community. Boys are taught about sex and encouraged to associate with the same sex. Between the age of 13-19 years, the issue of sexuality is also emphasized for boys, as reflected in the remarks that were captured during interviews, such as:

“They are taught how to relate with the opposite sex”. (Male Respondent in Bunyala Sub-County).

Moreover, boys in early adulthood at 20 years and above need to understand how to engage in income-generating activities to feed their families. The findings, therefore, exhibit a picture of boys being taught how to behave like men and be decisive to display typical masculinity.

The community sets out clear gender roles from 7 years onwards. Boys are not allowed to perform functions society perceives as feminine, such as cooking. These findings complement observations by Wimer and Levant (2011), whose reflections on harmful masculinity pointed out how patriarchal tendencies encouraged men to be dominant and aggressive. However, despite this dominance, men still experience domestic violence in Bunyala Sub- County. This experience contradicts a study by Onyango (2008) on *Masculinity Discursive Construction of Rape in the Kenyan Press* who observed that among the Luhya of Western Kenya, a man was known as *esurusi* (the bull), which had a symbol of virility and thus could not be challenged or be battered by a woman.

What defines a Man in Bunyala Sub-County

According to Barker and Heilman (2018), masculinity status is not automatic for every adult male in society but must be earned by meeting specific societal standards. In the Bunyala community, men must possess some qualities to be regarded as ideal. These are reflected in the comments: hardworking, provider, strong and energetic, respectable, assertive/protector/ courageous, loving/family man, among others. These allude to the fact that the hegemonic form of masculinity is celebrated in the Bunyala community, and therefore one would not expect DVAM to be rampant in this community. According to Kimmel (2002), hegemonic masculinity is the form that is more dominant than other masculinities. According to Connell, the term “marginalized masculinity” is used to bring out the masculinity seen as inferior by the hegemonic category. He argues that men who fall under marginalized masculinity profit less

from the hegemonic model because of characters besides their gender. He further notes that hegemonic masculinities tend to conquer a reigning place in society or cluster, whereas other masculinities occupy a complicit or secondary locus. This is the kind of masculinity that men in Bunyala Sub-County celebrate. Because of these beliefs, men and their wives abuse remain silent to avoid stigma and separation from the larger community. This agrees with a study by Eckstein (2010) on the *Masculinity of Men Communicating Abuse Victimization*, who observed that all males in his study mentioned feeling loss or waning sense of identity from the abuse and trying to redeem their masculinity; they chose not to blame the female perpetrators but instead blamed themselves and the society.

Implications of domestic violence against men on their perceived masculinity

Social implications of domestic violence against men

The study sought to find out some of the social impacts of DVAM, and the results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Social implications of domestic violence against men

What are the social implications of domestic violence against men in Bunyala Community?					
Treatment by the community	Male		Female		Total
	Frequenc y	%	Frequency	%	%
Disrespected/ Looked down upon	20	19.8	8	7.9	27.7
Laughed at	15	14.9	4	4.0	18.8
Gossiped	12	11.9	7	6.9	18.8
Ridiculed/ Shamed	10	9.9	6	5.9	15.8
Alienated/ignored	10	9.9	2	2.0	11.9
Abused	6	5.9	1		6.9

Source: Author

Results show that respect is an essential aspect of masculinity. Both female perpetrators and male victims affirmed this. Men lose respect whenever they do not act according to masculinity expectations. This was evidenced in a comment made by a key informant in an interview. He informed:

“Wife is more respected than such a man”. (Key informant 10 in Bunyala Sub-county).

Various other forms of discrimination were meted out to men who did not act as per the community's expectations. For example, a respondent in an interview said:

“If a man did not act as per masculinity expectations, he was warned if no chance he would be ignored and stigmatized.” (Male Respondent 29 in Bunyala Sub-county).

Analysis of the findings in FGD also revealed that such men are disrespected and disregarded, as shown in the following comments by the key informants:

“Abused men are seen as worthless and cannot make a decision” (Key informants 3 in FGD in Bunyala sub-county)

“The society despises a man whom a woman has overpowered. He will not have a voice before his peers” (Key informants 5 in FGD in Bunyala sub-county)

“Abused man is there to be seen and not to be heard” (Key informants 10 in FGD in Bunyala sub-county)

“He is seen as having been bewitched by a woman,”. (Key informants 13 in FGD in Bunyala sub-county).

Ideally, men in Bunyala are socialized to exhibit hyper-masculinity and are expected to dominate over women. This narrative, however, seems to be changing, as noted in the study findings that men are also victims of domestic violence in the Bunyala community. This agrees with family conflict theory by Gelles and Straus (1990), which assumes that conflict may arise

when traditional family structures change, for example, more women entering the labor market and becoming more conscious of their rights and thus retaliate to the men's abuse. Despite modernization and changing gender dynamics, the Bunyala community still takes collective responsibility regarding gender socialization. Men are expected to be in control, and if this does not happen and their wives batter them, the community imposes sanctions. According to the study findings, this includes the following: society, despises a man whom a woman has overpowered. He will not have a voice before his peers; an abused man is there to be seen and not to be heard; he is seen as having been bewitched by a woman, he is warned against being weak as a man, and if no change, ignored and stigmatized among others.

This indicates that respect is essential for men in the Bunyala sub-county and that not being respected makes one feel less of a man. The results are consistent with observations in an empirical study by Eckstein (2010), who established that men who failed to live up to set masculinity standards experienced separation, limited resources and belittling from the community. It also agrees with a study by Dolan (2003, as cited by Barker & Ricardo, 2005, pg 42), who reported lost manhood by men in conflict areas even though this study mainly looked at sexual violence against men.

Furthermore, men in this community are perceived to be strong, and they are the ones that are supposed to discipline their wives and not them being beaten. This was noted through comments made by various respondents during separate interviews, such as:

“Male victims are dismissed because it is assumed they are strong”. (Male Respondent in Bunyala Sub- County).

“I beat him as I scream. That way, people think that I am the one being beaten; thus, they do not come as it is normal for a wife to be beaten by the husband” (Female Respondent in Bunyala Sub-County).

This implies that the wife-beating in Bunyala is seen as usual, and no one would want to interfere when such occurs. For example, a male respondent lamented:

If I fight back, she will turn the story around that I am the one who attacked her, and the community will believe her” (Male responded in Bunyala Sub- County).

This finding concurs with what was observed by Morgan and Wells (2016), that male victims not being supported is mainly due to masculinity expectations and the stigma male victims face in society. These statements indicate that it is unacceptable for a husband to be battered by his wife; if this occurs, the man is blamed for being weak, and because of this, such men will rather keep their battered status a secret than face shame.

It is, therefore, noteworthy that men in the Bunyala community are socialised to dominate and be heard to be regarded as men. When this privilege is taken away from them through DVAM, they would rather suffer in silence than seek help and face the community's wrath. This may further warp their masculinity. Thobejane and Luthada (2019) noted that such men might be labelled as double abuse victims as both victims of domestic aggression and female wrongdoers. They also risk being a community laughingstock and losing respect and dignity when seeking help.

Psychological implications of domestic violence against men on their perceived masculinity

The study sought to determine the effects of domestic violence against men on their perceived masculinity in the Bunyala Sub-County. The study established that DVAM adversely warps men's masculinity when it is known. A simple linear regression analysis was conducted, and the findings were summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Effect of Domestic Violence on Men's Perceived Masculinity

Model Summary:					
"R"	"R Squared"	"Adjusted R Squared"	"Std. Error of the Estimate"		
0.0447	0.0020	-0.0081	.75211		
ANOVA					
Model	SS	df	M	F	Sig
Regression	0.11096	1	0.11096	0.20	0.6588
Residual	56.0016	99	0.56567		
Coefficients					
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.3567	0.3116	10.772	10.77	0.000
Domestic violence	-0.04333	0.0978	-0.4430	-0.44	0.659

Source: Author (2022).

From Table 2, the results of the model summary show that $R^2 = 0.0020$, which implies that variations influenced 0.20% of variations in the dependent variable (perceived masculinity) in the independent variable (domestic violence). In addition, the results of the analysis of variance, ANOVA ($F = 1, 99 = 0.20, p > 0.05$), imply that domestic violence is not a significant

predictor of perceived masculinity. In addition, the results indicate that the regression coefficient for domestic violence was a $\beta_1 = -0.04333$, which implies that an increase in domestic violence is associated with a decrease in the perceived masculinity of men in Bunyala Sub-County by a factor of 0.0433. However, this relationship was not statistically significant at the 5% level since the p-value was more than 0.05.

In African society, a man controlling a family is an essential aspect of masculinity. Unfortunately, male abuse, which is so hidden from view, robs them of this opportunity. Bunyala is a patriarchal community where men are supposed to dominate over women. Wife beating is celebrated. Masculinity is a critical discourse, and it is constructed from a tender age. Men are encouraged to be hardworking, providers and courageous, among other attributes. Despite all these, this study confirmed that DVAM is common in the area, and battered men are adversely affected. They are stigmatized, laughed at, seen as women, uninvolved in decision-making, lack confidence, shied off from interacting with others and lost respect. These observations agree with a study by Munirkazmi and Mohyuddin (2012), who established that intimate partner violence against men by women does not only lead to physical harm but also mental health problems. Petersson and Plantin (2019), in their study on *Breaking with Norms of Masculinity: Men Making Sense of Their Experience of Sexual Assault in Sweden*, affirm that savagery is a weapon utilized by the assailant to set up and control connection of intensity, testing the subjectivity of the person in question. They additionally noticed that as the force and control of the attacker builds, the universe of the casualty, including his/herself worthy, decreases and the reverse is true. Battered men also feel powerless and out of control. A respondent in a private interview commented that:

“A man is expected to be in control of the family, so if his wife controls him, he does not feel complete” (Male Respondent 32 in Bunyala Sub-County).

Men being in power and control in Bunyala means a lot to them. Being controlled by their wives significantly affects them and makes them feel powerless, which goes against masculinity expectations in the community. Connell (2005) notes that relationships among men or a cluster of men are hierarchical and that hegemonic masculinity characteristics such as strong, dominant, assertive, emotionally restrained and in control define ideal men in the western context. Violence is part of masculinity and a means of maintaining dominance. This is brutally injured in cases of violence, especially by women. Further, another respondent in an interview revealed that battered men are seen as weak and not well brought up. He said:

“They see me as a weak (sic), not in control and not well brought up”. (Male Respondent 35 in Bunyala Sub-County).

This shows that in Bunyala, men are brought up in a tense patriarchal setting with stiff competition between males of different masculinity traits and are expected to strive to achieve standards of masculinity set by the community. However, DVAM denies men this opportunity and alienates them from other men who feel in control of their homes and, by extension, the community. This finding contradicts a study by Barker & Ricardo (2005), who established that young men who do not achieve a sense of socially respected masculinity are likely to engage in violence. Men who are not respected would be expected to be violent, but in the Bunyala community lack of respect for men is seen as a form of violence against them, and most of them tend to prefer silence as opposed to revenge.

In the analysis of the interviews, some themes emerged that suggested that men are affected more psychologically than physically. This is seen in remarks such as:

“I get angry, resentful towards my friend and my wife” (Male Respondent 37 in Bunyala Sub-County).

Another male respondent wondered:

“I wonder why this masculine body cannot protect me against a weaker sex” (Male Respondents 38 in Bunyala Sub-County).

These findings resonate with findings in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, by Munirkazmi & Mohyuddin (2012), whose study revealed that intimate partner violence against men by women does not only lead to physical harm but also psychological harm. These findings show that men in Bunyala Sub-County are more affected by psychological than physical violence. This points to the fact that men hardly share their abused status for fear of how society would see them, and this tortures them psychologically.

Conclusions

The paper examined the load men carry as victims of domestic violence and its effects on their perceived masculinity. The results demystify the assumption that men are majorly the aggressors of domestic violence in their homes but also the victims. Wives in Bunyala perpetrate violence against their husbands with almost the same motive as husbands who commit violence against their wives. However, cases of DVAM are hardly reported, thus giving wrong impressions that men are not victims of domestic violence. Underreporting and men not willing to seek help in cases of abuse are attributed to factors such as masculinity expectations, stereotypes, lack of support, discrimination in society and victimization of abused men. The long and short-term effects of DVAM are physical harm, psychological torment, broken homes and warped masculinity. Therefore, strategies to mitigate DVAM should not just look at the statistics and assume that men do not need help but should also look at ways of encouraging the victims to

come out and seek help. A multi-sectoral approach among the policymakers and civil society organizations will significantly help mitigate DVAM. There is a need to shift from harmful masculinity constructs to positive masculinity right from childhood to help boys grow up into adulthood, knowing the importance of expressing their feelings without fear of losing their masculinity identity in society.

Recommendations

The paper makes the following recommendations to various stakeholders in the fight against domestic violence as follows:

The paper recommends that society, with the help of the County Government of Busia, should start looking at men as not just perpetrators of domestic violence but also victims of domestic abuse.

The paper recommends a shift in how boys are socialised regarding masculinity. The community should encourage transformative masculinity and encourage boys to seek help without feeling lesser than men.

The paper also recommends a review of legal frameworks to hold female perpetrators responsible and encourage male victims to report cases of DVAM to the relevant authorities.

The paper recommends that the County Government of Busia educate the public on the main societal issues that make men prone to domestic violence and sensitise the community on the best strategies for mitigating marital conflicts before they escalate to violence.

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