



## Beliefs about Violence against Women in Intimate Relationships: Demographic Differences among Respondents in Ghana

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The present study explores the intricate dynamics of beliefs regarding violence against women in intimate relationships, specifically focusing on physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological manipulation and control. Recognizing the influence of socialization into gender norms in a patriarchal society as a risk factor for violence-supportive beliefs, we investigated the impact of gender and educational background disparities on these beliefs.

**Methods:** The sample consisted of 333 respondents from two regions in Ghana, recruited through both online and paper-and-pencil surveys, with a link to the online version shared among students at two universities. Utilizing a 3 (educational background: lower than a bachelor's degree, bachelor's degree, post-graduate degree) x 2 (gender: male, female) between-subjects two-way multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA), we analyzed respondents' beliefs concerning physical violence, psychological manipulation and control, and sexual violence against women.

**Results:** Results indicated significant variations in beliefs based on educational background and gender. Respondents with an educational background lower than a bachelor's degree were notably more likely to endorse beliefs about physical violence against women, while those with a post-graduate degree were less likely to support beliefs related to psychological manipulation and control and sexual violence against women compared to those with lower educational qualifications. Additionally, male respondents were more prone to endorsing beliefs across all three categories of violence against women compared to female respondents.

**Conclusion:** This study underscores the significance of educational and gender disparities in comprehending the endorsement of violence-supportive beliefs against women. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing targeted interventions and educational initiatives to combat gender-based violence.

**Keywords:** *Gender-based Violence; Physical Violence; Psychological Manipulation and Control; Sexual Violence*

## **Introduction**

Attitudes and beliefs supportive of gender-based violence remain a pervasive issue that has attracted the attention of researchers across the world. Beliefs about violence against women shape individuals' behaviors and contribute immensely to victimization and perpetration of violence in intimate relationships (Gilbert et al, 2022; Sunmola et al, 2020). Many studies have described the underlying gender norms and roles propelling the proviolence attitudes and beliefs against women and the mechanisms by which their endorsement translates into victimization of physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women in intimate relationships (Fakunmoju & Bammeke, 2017; Fakunmoju & Rasool, 2018; Heise and Kotsadam, 2015; Lomazzi, 2023; Mshweshwe, 2020; Nguyen et al, 2013). However, there remains more to be learned about the effects of demographic variations, primarily gender and education, on the endorsement of gender-based violence beliefs. The present study explores the nuanced dynamics of beliefs about physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological manipulation and control against women in intimate relationships, with a particular emphasis on educational background and gender differences among respondents in Ghana.

While extensive research has been conducted on the prevalence, causes, consequences, and effects of gender-based violence, there remains a noticeable gap in research that systematically examines the demographic differences in the endorsement of different forms of violence against women within the Ghanaian context. This study aims to bridge this gap by addressing the gender and educational background differences in the endorsement of physical and sexual violence and psychological manipulation. The study aims to provide valuable insights into the demographic differences and contribute to the development and implementation of targeted interventions for mitigating the negative effects of such beliefs in the Ghanaian context.

## **Gender Norms and Stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence**

Across societies, men and women subscribe to gender norms and stereotypes that influence how they act or respond to each other in intimate relationships (Aston and Vasquez, 2013; Fakunmoju et al., 2019; Fakunmoju & Bammeke, 2017). Endorsement of these inequitable gender norms and behaviors has been associated with victimization, perpetration, and engagement in risky sexual behaviors (Gilbert et al, 2022). From analyzing data collected from different countries, it was noted that "norms related to male authority over female behavior...", "norms justifying wife beating...", and "the extent to which law and practice disadvantage women compared with men in access to land, property, and other productive resources" are determinants of partner violence (Heise and Kotsadam, 2015, p. e332). Similarly, when exploring the cultural origins of gender-based violence in 12 countries, it was asserted that patriarchy, inflexible traditional gender roles, and penalties for questioning these roles persist as formidable obstacles to eliminating gender-based violence globally (Lomazzi, 2023).

The effects of gender norms on relationship violence pertain to both men and women. Although women do perpetrate violence as men do, inequity in victimization and perpetration of violence persists

between men and women. Despite gender symmetry in partner violence, studies indicate that men disproportionately perpetrate violence in intimate relationships than women: the frequency, severity, intensity, and consequences of violence by men are greater than those by women (Dobash et al, 1992). Despite attributing the disproportionate perpetration of partner violence by men against women to gender norms, it has been stated that gender norms do not predispose men to perpetrating physical violence against women alone, but also against men as well: gender norms are at the root of the perpetration of physical violence against men and women (Fleming et al, 2015; Fulu et al., 2013).

Victimization has effects on perceptions of violence due to the possibility of predisposing the victim to view violence as an integral part of the relationship, especially when the victim subscribes to traditional gender norms about the relationship between men and women. Gender norms and the hierarchy and subjugation of women embedded in patriarchal beliefs and masculinity have serious implications for partner violence (Mshweshwe, 2020). In a study by Sunmola et al (2020), it was revealed that women who condoned "wife beating experienced more physical, sexual, and emotional violence" (p. 85). A similar study also indicates that endorsement of myths about partner violence among female participants with a victimization history of psychological abuse influenced their inclination to view psychological aggression and its approval as untroubling (Cinquegrana et al, 2023). Thus, endorsement of gender norms and victimization may predispose the victim to psychologically assimilate the violence as an integral part of an intimate relationship.

Variations of traditional gender norms, roles, or stereotypes may be drawn upon to describe how they shape attitudes and behaviors that often translate into pro-violent beliefs and violence against women, how they are evoked to rationalize men's violent behaviors against women, and how they are evoked to justify women's acceptance of violence against them. For example, individuals who endorse the stereotype that men should be strong and dominant may believe that it is the right of men to control and dominate women in intimate relationships. Similarly, individuals who endorse the belief that men should not show vulnerability or weakness may resort to violence when the internalized masculinity is perceived to be threatened, instead of utilizing non-violent alternative means to address the perceived threat to their masculinity. Gender norms and stereotypes that restrict, stigmatize, and judge the sexual behaviors of women and glorify those of men may not only influence sexual violence against women but also contribute to perceiving sexual violence against women as the punishment for non-conformity with stereotypical sexual norms.

Overall, traditional gender norms and stereotypes also operate in ways that lead to psychological violence against women. The norms of expecting women to suffer in silence and not bring shame to their marriage and family by speaking out may predispose women to endure marital pains, discomfort, and psychological damage. Similarly, the gender norms and roles of ascribing the breadwinner status to men and giving men the economic advantage over women through unequal access to job opportunities create power imbalances that enhance the vulnerability of women to economic and financial abuse within intimate relationships. Thus, traditional gender norms and stereotypes operate in subtle ways to influence the holding of pro-violence attitudes and beliefs against women or the propensity for endorsing gender-based violence attitudes and beliefs.

### **The Influence of Gender and Education on Gender-Based Violence Beliefs**

Among the demographic variables, studies have noted that gender shapes gender-based violence beliefs, encompassing victimization, perpetration, and perceptions of gender-based violence. Studies on risk factors for victimization and perpetration of partner violence indicate that women are disproportionately victimized than men and that men disproportionately perpetrate violence against women than women do against men (Ahmadabadi et al, 2021; Caldwell et al, 2012; Cho et al, 2020;

Nadeem and Shahed, 2017; Murray et al, 2023; Olszewska et al, 2023; Simon et al, 2001). However, other studies reported similar rates or did not identify gender differences in the victimization of partner violence (Dardis et al, 2017; Fass et al, 2008; Gover et al, 2008).

Studies describing gender differences in the endorsement of gender-based violence beliefs and stereotypes suggest that men are more likely than women to endorse violence-supportive stereotypes and beliefs against women (Fakunmoju, 2022; Fakunmoju & Bammeké, 2017; Fakunmoju et al., 2016a, b; Fakunmoju & Rasool, 2018). While men have a higher propensity to endorse gender-based violence than women, the propensity of women for endorsing conservative sexual beliefs has been reported as well (Abdolmanaf et al, 2021; Muwonwa, 2021). A literature review of 23 studies indicates that females and younger respondents justified partner violence at a higher rate than males and older respondents, respectively (Waltermaurer, 2012). Similarly, a study in Ethiopia revealed that women endorsed violence against women for various reasons (Mengistu, 2019).

In addition to gender, educational background has been noted to influence beliefs about gender-based violence, encompassing victimization, perpetration, and perceptions of gender-based violence as well. In their study, Wagers and Wareham (2019) noted that prior education contributed to significant differences in the classification of sexual aggression as domestic violence among the participants, and differences in education majors also contributed to differences in the classification of verbal/emotional aggression as domestic violence. A similar study found higher levels of education to be associated with the rejection of violence-supportive attitudes against women (Rabie, 2018), and a lower educational level to be associated with the victimization of gender-based violence (Workye et al, 2023). In Ethiopia, in a household where both husband and wife are relatively educated, the wife is less likely to endorse physical violence against women (Mengistu, 2019). A similar study in Asia found that women who are more educated compared to the less educated were more likely to reject physical violence against wives (Rani and Bonu, 2009). Justifications for partner violence were pervasive among respondents from less educated and poor economic backgrounds (Waltermaurer, 2012). Overall, gender and education are strong determinants of the endorsement of violence-supportive beliefs and stereotypes against women.

### **Theoretical Framework: Social Learning and Feminist Theory**

A combination of social learning and feminist theory may help explain how gender norms, roles, and stereotypes, through socialization in patriarchal societies, contribute to differences in gender-based violence beliefs among respondents with varying educational backgrounds and genders. Social learning theory describes how gender norms and roles are learned and transmitted intergenerationally through socialization (Bandura, 1977; Mcleod, 2023). Individuals learn the norms and roles from home and their environment (including educational settings) and internalize related beliefs, develop attitudes, and perpetuate behaviors associated with them (Bandura and Walters, 1963; Mcleod, 2023; Nabavi, 2012). Socialization thus influences the construction and transmission of gender norms and roles in patriarchal societies; exposure to gender norms and roles through socialization, therefore, contributes to the formation of violence-supportive beliefs against women.

Gender norms and roles are embedded in patriarchal structures and are an integral part of institutionalized systems of beliefs (Hunnicut, 2009). Individuals do not learn and assimilate them in a vacuum; they (especially women) become victims of the oppressive behaviors engendered by them, and they derive (especially men) power and privileges for conforming to them (Hunnicut, 2009; Vagianos, 2017). This is one of the unequal consequences of socialization into gender norms and roles that feminist theory strives to highlight. Feminist theory thus emphasizes how socialization in patriarchal societies transcends the learning and imitation of gender norms and roles; it creates conditions for power imbalances and gender inequalities, contributing to the domination by men and the subjugation of women

(Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Hunnicutt, 2009; Vagianos, 2017). Gender norms and roles contribute to power imbalances, positioning men in dominant roles and women in submissive roles (Hunnicutt, 2009).

In summation, social learning and feminist theory contribute to the understanding of the complexities of violence-supportive beliefs against women derived from patriarchal structures and its gender norms and roles. To address these complexities, empowerment has been deemed effective (Quattrochi et al, 2019). Empowerment through education remains one of the catalysts for challenging the patriarchal structures and combating the vestiges of internalized gender norms and roles. Through exposure to education, it is expected that individuals with varying levels of education and gender will have differential endorsement of violence against women originating from gender norms and roles.

### ***Present Study***

Based on the above review, the present study examined gender and educational background differences in gender-based violence beliefs in Ghana to examine the following research questions:

Research question 1: Does endorsement of beliefs about physical violence against women differ by educational background?

Research question 2: Does endorsement of beliefs about psychological manipulation and control of women differ by educational background?

Research question 3: Does endorsement of beliefs about sexual violence against women differ by educational background?

Research question 4: Do beliefs about physical violence against women, beliefs about psychological manipulation and control of women, and beliefs about sexual violence against women differ by gender?

### ***Materials and Methods***

#### **Design**

A convenience sample of 333 respondents from two regions in Ghana participated in the survey that was completed online using SurveyMonkey.com™ and in paper and pencil format. At two universities in Ghana the link to the survey was shared with students who were encouraged to complete it online. The link was equally shared with nonstudent respondents who agreed to participate in the study and who were equally encouraged to share with others in their address list. To reach participants that did not have access to the internet, a paper and pencil version was distributed to respondents in another region of the country. Respondents with access to the internet in the region also completed the online version of the survey. The Institutional Review Board of Westfield State University, Massachusetts approved the study.

#### **Participants**

Respondents (N = 322) included males (n = 162, 50.3%) and females (n = 160, 49.7%) with an average age of 31.24 years (SD = 10.57 years, range 19–61) (Table 1). Slightly over half were single (n = 164, 50.9%) compared to those who were married, separated, divorced, or widowed (n = 158, 49.1%).

The majority were nonstudents ( $n = 196, 60.9\%$ ) with an educational background lower than a bachelor's degree ( $n = 164, 50.9\%$ ) compared to those who reported having a bachelor's degree ( $n = 68, 21.1\%$ ) and post-graduate degree and above ( $n = 90, 28\%$ ) as their educational background. Further information about the survey may be obtained from a previous publication (Fakunmoju et al., 2021).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Sample characteristics	n	%
Age		
Mean = 31.24 years, $SD = 10.57$ , range 19-61		
Gender		
Female	160	49.7
Male	162	50.3
Marital Status		
Single (never married)	164	50.9
Married and others <sup>a</sup>	158	49.1
Education background completed		
Lower than bachelor	164	50.9
Bachelor	68	21.1
Post-graduate degree and above	90	28
Student status		
Student	126	39.1
Nonstudent	196	60.9

<sup>a</sup>Married and separated, divorced and widowed

## Measures

Gender-based violence beliefs were operationalized using Beliefs About Relationship Violence Against Women Scale (BEREVIWOS) (Fakunmoju et al., 2016a, 2016b). BEREVIWOS consists of 13 items measuring beliefs about physical violence (4 items), psychological manipulation and control (5 items), and sexual violence against women (4 items).

**The Physical Violence against Women** subscale measures the extent to which respondents endorse physically abusive behaviors against women. It is operationalized with four questions, such as “Because a man is the head of his household, he has a right to hit his woman” and “A woman who provokes her man into punching her deserves the punching.” Cronbach’s alpha of .76 and .79 was recently reported (Fakunmoju et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2017). In the present study Cronbach’s alpha was approximately .76.

**The Psychological Manipulation and Control of Women** subscale measures the extent to which respondents endorse manipulative and controlling behaviors that support men’s power and control over women in intimate relationships. It is operationalized with five questions, such as “A man should do everything within his power to make his woman obey him” and “Sometimes, a man should bring his woman to her knees for her mistakes by withholding his love and affection from her.” Cronbach’s alpha of .82 and .84 was recently reported (Fakunmoju et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2017). In the present study Cronbach’s alpha was approximately .89.

**The Sexual Violence against Women** subscale measures the extent to which respondents endorse sexually coercive behaviors against women in intimate relationships. It is operationalized with

four questions, such as “A woman should expect her man to force her for sex because it’s hard for men to control their sexual urges sometimes” and “Any woman in a committed relationship should expect her man to force her for sex.” Cronbach’s alpha of .82 and .87 was recently reported (Fakunmoju et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2017). In the present study Cronbach’s alpha was .83.

For each item, respondents were asked, “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?” Participants responded by rating each item using a Likert-type scale of *Strongly Disagree* = 1, *Disagree* = 2, *Neither Disagree Nor Agree* = 3, *Agree* = 4, or *Strongly Agree* = 5. Lower scores in the form of *Strongly Disagree* indicated greater disapproval of gender-based violence beliefs and higher scores in the form of *Strongly Agree* indicated greater endorsement of gender-based violence beliefs.

## Data Analysis

To examine gender and educational background differences in gender-based violence beliefs, a 3 (educational background: lower than a bachelor's degree, bachelor's degree, post-graduate degree) x 2 (gender: male, female) between-subjects two-way multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) with three independent variables (i.e., physical violence against women, psychological manipulation and control of women, sexual violence against women) was used (hypotheses 1 through 4). Beliefs about physical violence and sexual violence against women were positively skewed, and the base-10 logarithm transformation (log transformation) technique was used to improve normalization. The Scheffe method was used to control for Type I error for the multiple ANOVAs, with the alpha level set at .0166 (.05 divided by three dependent variables). The same method was used to control for Type 1 error in the examined pairwise comparisons in follow-up analyses, with the alpha level set at .008 (.0166 divided by 2 – the number of comparisons). Ipsative mean imputation (Schafer and Graham, 2002) was used to address missing data. Thereafter, listwise deletion was applied to the remaining data, resulting in 322 cases for data analysis. Data were analyzed using SPSS 25™ (IBM Corp., 2017).

## Results

The correlation analysis suggested that beliefs about physical violence, psychological manipulation and control, and sexual violence against women were significantly positively associated. Beliefs about physical violence correlated with psychological manipulation and control ( $r = .263, p < .0005$ ) and beliefs about sexual violence ( $r = .384, p < .0005$ ). Psychological manipulation and control correlated with beliefs about sexual violence ( $r = .419, p < .0005$ ).

Using Pillai’s Trace, there was a statistically significant multivariate main effect of physical violence against women, psychological manipulation and control of women, and sexual violence against women for educational background  $V = .273, F(6, 630) = 16.57, p < .0005$ , partial eta squared = .136 and gender,  $V = .168, F(3, 314) = 21.09, p < .0005$ , partial eta squared = .168. The interaction effects of educational background and gender were nonsignificant. Results of univariate ANOVA using Scheffe correction suggested that educational background had an effect on physical violence against women ( $F[2] = 7.43, p = .001$ ), psychological manipulation and control of women ( $F[2] = 43.37, p < .0005$ ), and sexual violence against women ( $F[2] = 5.64, p = .004$ ). Results also suggest that gender had a similar effect on physical violence against women ( $F[1] = 19.43, p < .0005$ ), psychological manipulation and control of women ( $F[1] = 49.68, p < .0005$ ), and sexual violence against women ( $F[1] = 27.30, p < .0005$ ).

## Effects of Educational Background and Gender on Beliefs about Relationship Violence against Women

In response to research question 1, the average scores of respondents with an educational background lower than a bachelor's degree were significantly higher for beliefs about physical violence against women than the average scores of respondents with a bachelor's degree ( $p = .001$ ) (Table 2). Similarly, the average scores of respondents with a post-graduate educational background are significantly lower for beliefs about psychological manipulation and control of women than the average scores of respondents with lower than a bachelor's degree and respondents with a bachelor's degree ( $p < .0005$ ) (Research Question 2). Also, the average scores of respondents with a post-graduate educational background were significantly lower for beliefs about sexual violence against women than the average scores of respondents with an educational background lower than a bachelor's degree ( $p = .003$ ) (Research Question 3).

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Gender-based Violence Beliefs by Gender and Educational Background

Variable	Physical violence		Psychological manipulation and control		Sexual violence	
	M	(SD)	M	(SD) <sup>a</sup>	M	(SD) <sup>a</sup>
Gender						
Male	1.48	.47	3.15	1.18	1.72	.65
Female	1.25	.45	2.26	1.89	1.37	.57
Educational background						
Lower than bachelor	1.45	.56	2.89	1.05	1.53	.47
Bachelor	1.23	.36	3.44	1.33	1.62	.67
Post-graduate degree	1.31	.56	1.81	1.04	1.41	.76

<sup>a</sup>Nontransformed means reported.

In response to research question 4, the average scores of male respondents were significantly higher for beliefs about physical violence against women, beliefs about psychological manipulation and control of women, and beliefs about sexual violence against women than the average scores of female respondents. Specifically, women were less likely to endorse beliefs about physical violence, psychological manipulation and control, and sexual violence against women than men ( $p < .0005$ ).

### Discussions

The present study highlighted the impacts of gender and educational background on the endorsement of violence-supportive beliefs against women. Findings suggest that men and women with varying educational backgrounds rated their beliefs about physical and sexual violence and psychological manipulation and control of women differently. The findings portray gender and education as potent factors to consider in understanding differences in proviolence beliefs held about women.

### Educational Background and Endorsement of Gender-Based Violence Beliefs

The results indicate that individuals with lower than a bachelor's degree were more likely to endorse beliefs about physical violence against women than individuals with a bachelor's degree. The results also indicate that individuals with a post-graduate degree were less likely to endorse beliefs about sexual violence and psychological manipulation and control of women than individuals with lower levels of education. Similar results describing the influence of varying levels of education on gender-based



violence beliefs and stereotypes, attitudes toward partner violence, and victimization of partner violence has been reported in previous studies (Mengistu, 2019; Rabie, 2018; Rani and Bonu, 2009; Waltermaurer, 2012; Workye et al, 2023). Educational differences in attitudes and perceptions of relationship violence have been noted in past studies (Simon et al, 2001), suggesting that education has neutralizing effects on beliefs about violence against women.

Although the educational majors of respondents in this study were not measured, a previous study indicates that educational majors have impacts on perceptions and classification of aggressive behaviors in intimate relationships (Wagers and Wareham, 2019). Higher education provides exposure to courses and relationships that may improve knowledge about gender equality and women's rights, and consequently on perceptions and endorsement of gender-based violence beliefs. Similarly, people are naturally inclined toward educational majors or professions that resonate with their values and interests. Such choices provide avenues to meet personal expectations and fulfill aspirations. The norms and interactions prevalent in educational settings play a crucial role in shaping individuals' values. Studying certain majors may lead to the internalization of new values or prompt a reevaluation of previously internalized stereotypical values. These influences, in turn, impact perceptions and the extent to which individuals endorse ideologies that support violence against women.

The protective and preventive role of education in curbing violence against women has been described (Akram et al, 2023; Fergus and van't Rood, 2013). Education has multifaceted impacts on the perspectives and values held by individuals, which, in turn, may enable them to critically appraise prevailing beliefs about gender-based violence. Higher education exposes individuals to diverse perspectives, engaging them in critical thinking that enables them to question internalized traditional gender norms, roles, and stereotypes. Through education, individuals may gain insight and a broader understanding of the sources, causes, and consequences of violent behaviors against women, thereby leading to a decreased likelihood of endorsing proviolence beliefs and behaviors.

Higher institutions organize programs that promote cultural awareness and sensitivity, exposing students to diverse perspectives. Such exposure has positive implications for individuals who spend more years in higher institutions, as they are more likely to develop the understanding and empowerment necessary for reducing the endorsement of proviolence beliefs and behaviors against women. The exposure is also likely to engender sensitivity and enlightenment about human rights aspects of gender-based violence and the legal implications of their violations. Nevertheless, despite the significant positive impacts of educational institutions in curbing gender-based violence, it has been noted that violence against women does occur in such institutions, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Belay et al, 2021). In addition, higher education enables interaction with colleagues in ways that help foster respectful relationships that may reduce beliefs supportive of gender-based violence.

### **Gender and Endorsement of Gender-Based Violence Beliefs**

Similar to education, gender shapes individuals' attitudes and beliefs in different ways, influencing differences in the endorsement of beliefs about violence against women. The propensity of male respondents, compared to female respondents, to endorse beliefs about physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological manipulation and control of women is consistent with findings in previous studies regarding the effects of gender on violence-supportive beliefs and attitudes toward women (Abdolmanaf et al, 2021; Fakunmoju & Bammeké, 2017; Fakunmoju & Rasool, 2018; Muwonwa, 2021). The gender differences draw attention to prevailing attitudes and perceptions about women in Ghana. In Ghana, men are socialized into the dominant role of power and control over women, whereas women are socialized into the submissive and supportive role in a relationship with men. Socialization into gender roles that glorify the dominance of men and celebrate the submissiveness and subjugation of women may

contribute not only to gender differences in beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions but also to gender differences in the endorsement of gender-based violence beliefs.

Oppressive gender norms are pervasive in patriarchal societies, contributing to proviolence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors against women (Fleming et al, 2015; Fulu et al, 2013; Gilbert et al, 2022; Heise and Kotsadam, 2015; Mshweshwe, 2020). In Ghana, traditional views on masculinity and femininity are socially entrenched and reinforced to the extent of distorting the awareness and sensitivity that are necessary for evaluating their negative impacts on violence against women. Oppressive gender norms contribute to power differences and disproportionate ascription of power to men against women, making women vulnerable to partner violence and poor outcomes (Caldwell et al, 2012). They also contribute to differences in the endorsement of values pertinent to interactions between men and women. As indicated by Aelenei et al (2017), the socialization of gender norms may help explain why boys are more likely to endorse "self-enhancement values" (e.g., wanting to be in power), while girls tend to sanction self-transcendence values (e.g., helping others) (Aelenei et al, 2017, p. 1).

Nevertheless, the likelihood of men endorsing violence against women, compared to women, identified in this study does not preclude the fact that women also endorse proviolence attitudes and beliefs against women. As stated by Dahal et al. (2022), "a power play between men and women reinforces inequality and increases the likelihood of violence for women" (p. 1). Copp et al. (2019) also reported greater endorsement of proviolence attitudes among women.

### **The Relevance of Social Learning and Feminist Theory to Disparities in Education and Gender**

Disparities in education and gender in the endorsement of physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological manipulation and control of women in this study are consistent with the expectations of social learning and feminist theory regarding the impacts of socialization on violence-supportive beliefs against women (Bandura and Walters, 1963; Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Hunnicutt, 2009). Education, as an agent of socialization and a mechanism of empowerment, exposes individuals to alternative perspectives and gender-supportive behaviors and beliefs (Abrefa-gyan & Fakunmoju, 2023). The lower likelihood of endorsement among those with post-graduate degrees could be attributed to exposure to critical thinking during higher education compared to individuals with lower levels of education who experience the reinforcement of oppressive gender beliefs and lack the same exposure to alternative perspectives about gender norms and roles.

To be liberated from oppressive beliefs, individuals must be enlightened and empowered, which is primarily gained from education (Abrefa-gyan & Fakunmoju, 2023). The empowerment and enlightenment derived from education may have contributed to the lower likelihood of post-graduate level respondents endorsing violence-supportive beliefs. Education enables individuals to critically appraise oppressive gender norms and power dynamics, become enlightened about human rights issues and their legal consequences for violation, and resist the subjugation of women, particularly as evident in the lower ratings on beliefs about sexual violence and psychological manipulation and control of women by individuals with a post-graduate degree compared to individuals with a lower educational background (Abrefa-gyan & Fakunmoju, 2023).

Similarly, men, by virtue of being ascribed the dominant role, might observe and imitate oppressive behaviors that protect their ability to dominate and control women in society (Abrefa-gyan & Fakunmoju, 2023). Thus, the expectations and approval of oppressive gender norms and roles that favor men may have influenced men's higher ratings on gender-based violence beliefs than ratings by women. Education breeds empowerment and enlightenment for women in ways that are slightly different for men. While enlightened men may momentarily relapse into embracing traditional gender norms and endorse

oppressive beliefs, empowered and enlightened women are less likely to rely on emotions in decision-making. They will utilize facts and reasons to challenge oppressive norms and stereotypes, avoid demeaning relationships and interactions, and resist impulsive choices that contribute to their own subjugation.

Overall, social learning and feminist theories highlight the impacts of socialization on beliefs supportive of violence against women. However, the impacts of socialization into traditional gender norms and roles are minimized through education that helps to challenge and reshape oppressive beliefs. Education empowers men and women to challenge traditional gender norms and roles in ways that minimize the endorsement of gender-based violence beliefs.

### ***Strengths and Limitations***

The strength of the study lies in its specific focus on gender-based violence beliefs in Ghana, enabling a deeper understanding of how different levels of gender and education impact violence-supportive beliefs against women. This approach provides valuable insights for crafting targeted interventions to address patriarchal norms and beliefs that promote violence against women in the region. Moreover, the study's choice of an online data collection method is noteworthy. By utilizing this approach, the study facilitated anonymous responses and achieved broader coverage, thereby improving the ability to generalize findings.

However, it's important to acknowledge some limitations. While collecting data online enhanced the ability to obtain anonymous responses and expanded the areas of coverage, the study's findings may not be broadly applicable to individuals without internet access, especially those who are less educated and living in rural areas. It is possible that the gender-based violence beliefs of this population of respondents may differ from those of the participants in this study. The gender stereotypes and beliefs of individuals lacking internet access might differ significantly from those presented in this study. This is particularly notable given the realization that close to half of the participants reported having a bachelor's degree or higher in education.

### **Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research**

Several implications may be derived from the findings of the study. To reduce the endorsement of gender-based violence beliefs, interventions that focus on challenging harmful beliefs and promoting gender equality may achieve desirable results by promoting awareness that discourages the endorsement of violence-supportive beliefs against women among the people. Such interventions should instill insights into how gender norms and roles are translated into violence-supportive beliefs and behaviors against women. Effective educational strategies and interventions should be promoted so that they may help challenge and change harmful proviolence attitudes against women. For example, positive impacts of students' participation in training programs on gender-based violence in educational institutions in Ethiopia have been reported (Maquibar et al, 2019). Another study in Pakistan suggests that educational interventions have similar impacts on proviolence attitudes and proviolence beliefs against women (Ali et al, 2017). The importance of education in challenging gender-based violence beliefs, fostering gender sensitivity, and dismantling patriarchal values, norms, and beliefs has been highlighted in previous studies (Kenig, 2021; Lonsway, 1996).

Awareness-raising interventions may minimize toxic masculinity and encourage healthier and more equitable relationships with women. Gender advocacy and public dialogues may be undertaken to challenge patriarchal norms that perpetuate beliefs about violence against women. Such advocacy and

dialogues may extend to legal reforms, combating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and developing, implementing, and enforcing protective and preventive legislation to promote gender equality and justice.

Interventions with high potential for success are school-based interventions. A systematic review of 13 studies lauded the outcomes of such interventions, highlighting their effectiveness in “raising awareness of gender violence, overcoming stereotypes, improving relationships in the classroom and reducing violent behavior, as well as empowering the most vulnerable people” (Villardón-Gallego et al, 2023, p. 1). Similar interventions should be designed in ways that ensure accurate measurement of outcomes. In doing so, considerations for empirically validated instruments are vital, while being mindful of the differential impacts of scales for measuring outcomes of interventions, partner violence, or gender-based violence beliefs. As stated by McCarthy et al (2018), “validated scales that encompass views on the acceptance of violence against women, and scales inclusive of beliefs about men’s sexual entitlement, may be particularly promising for unpacking pathways to IPV perpetration, targeting interventions, and monitoring progress in IPV prevention efforts” (p. 1).

## Conclusion

Education and gender constitute both risk and protective factors for the endorsement of gender-based violence beliefs. An examination of the effects of gender and education on the endorsement of gender-based violence beliefs remains one of the ways to understand how traditional gender norms and roles are translated into perceptions and the endorsement of violence-supportive beliefs against women. Gender norms have different effects on men and women, evoking differing perceptual and behavioral responses from them. To minimize the effects of socialization into gender norms and roles and their attendant effects on beliefs about physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological manipulation and control against women, higher education becomes a relevant mechanism upon which interventions may be focused. Similarly, in societies where violence against women is pervasive, women are disproportionately victimized compared to men, and men disproportionately perpetrate violence against women, multiple intervention strategies may be needed. Gender-specific interventions focusing on advocacy, education, and awareness-raising will go a long way in reducing gender-based violence beliefs in such societies. Similar interventions may be targeted at women with the goal of minimizing victimization and preventing them from improperly assimilating and internalizing the psychological effects of victimization.

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