



Perceptions of Domestic Violence and Some Contextual Correlates: The Case of Uganda

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Abstract

Domestic violence (DV) in any form permeates cultures and geographic regions. Research on this phenomenon is abundant, but results remain incomplete due to its multidimensional nature. This paper examines contextual factors (i.e., social, economic, and demographic factors) that shape perceptions of DV toward women and children in Uganda. The data source was the 2022 Uganda Round 9 Afrobarometer dataset, which comprises 2,400 respondents. A multivariate analysis indicated that DV remains common in Uganda. Significant factors associated with perceptions of DV were age, place of residence, gender, and education. Most Ugandans perceived violence against women as a private matter rather than a criminal matter. Physical discipline of children and child neglect were common, but little or no help was available to abused children. The policy implications of these findings are 1) raising awareness of the effects of physical discipline on women and children and 2) improving law enforcement through sensitivity and gender-equality training. It is suggested that policy measures to address DV in the country should consider the influences of the significant social factors discussed in this study.

Keywords: *Domestic Violence; Perception; Gender-Based; Physical Discipline; Sociodemographic Factors; Uganda*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's rights have been formally recognized in Uganda as central to the country's sustainable development. As in other sub-Saharan African countries, mechanisms and policy frameworks have been put in place to address gender inequality and violations of women's rights. Despite progress in the political and decision-making arena, gender-based disparities persist in the country (Women Count Data Hub, 2022). This paper was informed and motivated by the prevalence of cultural and gender-based discrimination across Africa. For example, previous literature has shown that African women can endorse gender-based abuse by men under certain circumstances (Klomegah, 2019; Uthman, Lawoko, and Moradi, 2009). The first-ever stand-alone national survey on violence against women and

girls (VAWG) conducted in Uganda in 2020 also revealed that a stunning 95% of Ugandan females had experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, from partners or non-partners since age 15 (Ross, 2022). The survey also found that violence against women was not restricted to the family or partners but was also common in the workplace (86% in the year preceding the survey).

Notably, there is a paucity of data on child abuse and maltreatment in African contexts. Generally, discussions of domestic violence in African societies focus almost exclusively on violence against women, not children. Naudin et al. (2023) have noted that violence against children and adolescents was commonplace, yet most studies in this area were conducted in Western countries. Thus, studies are needed in non-Western countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. These observations served as the impetus for this study, which aimed to examine the prevalence, beliefs, and attitudes toward violence against women and children in Uganda.

Domestic violence in any form is a pervasive social problem that spans cultures and geographic regions and requires research-driven preventive measures. Although numerous studies and data exist on this topic, knowledge remains incomplete because of the practice's multidimensional nature. For example, Waltermaurer's (2022) systematic review of the literature across 61 countries shows the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) worldwide, with cross-cultural variations in the justifications for such acts within and between countries. Moreover, most survey studies exclude respondents' direct or personal opinions. As such, the current research examines specific social, economic, and demographic factors associated with individuals' perceptions and experiences of domestic violence, including gender-based violence (GBV) and child abuse. The choice of this relational study is driven by the fact that people's attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and values can be shaped by their social environment and by factors such as friends, culture, education, religion, community, and media (Dhiman, 2023). It was anticipated that the current study's findings would have implications for ongoing efforts at domestic violence prevention, as suggested by the recommendations in the 2020 National Survey on Violence in Uganda.

Against this backdrop, this study focused on contextual factors (i.e., social, economic, and demographic factors) that shape people's perceptions of domestic violence in Uganda. We highlighted sociodemographic factors that may influence how people perceive violence within the family. The study served as a barometer of opinions on domestic violence in the country. In the paper, the following concepts were used interchangeably: gender-based violence (GBV), family violence (FV), and domestic violence (DV). To be sure, the study's focus is public opinion on aggressive behavior within the home. Aggressive behavior is used to gain or maintain power or control over the partner and children. It may involve violent abuse of a spouse, partner, and immediate family members, such as children and other relatives. DV is defined as the combined pattern of physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence against family members, and IPV remains a major contributor to DV. Child abuse, elder abuse, and other violent acts within the family are also common (Draginja et al., 2023).

Based on the previous literature and theoretical considerations, the following research questions were addressed:

- 1) What sociodemographic characteristics influence perceptions of violence toward children?
- 2) What sociodemographic characteristics influence perceptions of violence against women?
- 3) What sociodemographic characteristics are associated with the belief that domestic violence is either a private matter or a criminal matter?

2. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Module 1 of the National Survey on Violence in Uganda (Uganda Bureau of Statistics – UBOS, 2021), which focused on violence against women and girls (VAWG), provided a comprehensive and useful context for this paper. The VAWG survey revealed significant correlations between physical and sexual violence and several indicators of women's sexual and reproductive health, including induced abortions, miscarriages, parity, and certain STI and HIV risk behaviors. Generally, women who have

experienced violence are more likely to have had abortions than those who have not experienced violence. The study also found that violence is prevalent during pregnancy and suggested that pregnancy may be a period of relative protection from physical violence; therefore, it was suggested that further research would help understand patterns of violence during and after pregnancy and the influence of cultural norms on these issues. Based on this suggestion, the current paper reviews theoretical literature on cultural correlates of intimate partner violence to serve as an explanatory framework. High parity or coequality was found to be associated with violence, even though some other studies found otherwise. Because these relationships are unclear, the VAWG study recommended further inquiry. Therefore, this study was formulated to elaborate and provide additional information.

A study by Migadde (2022) found a high prevalence of IPV among female undergraduate students in Kampala, Uganda. Her survey included a sample of 62 final-year undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Social Work and Social Administration programs. Emotional violence was reported by all respondents as the most prevalent type of IPV, followed by sexual violence (47.5%) and physical violence (27.5%). Migadde's findings illuminate the reality of patriarchal society and its normalization of degrading behavior among young people. They also underscore the need to consider and include broader social environmental factors (e.g., patriarchal values that perpetuate gender-based violence) in problem-solving strategies, even within student populations. Building on this observation, the theoretical literature below highlights patriarchal values, and the sample in this study included youth aged 18 to 34.

In a study conducted in China, Xiao et al. (2005) estimated the prevalence of and risk factors for intimate partner violence (IPV) using a sample of 600 women interviewees. The study found that IPV occurs across age, race/ethnicity, and country. This suggests that IPV is a universal social problem. In that study, IPV was defined as "any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship" (p 89), and such behavior includes physical aggression, psychological abuse, forced intercourse, and other forms of sexual coercion, as well as other controlling behaviors (Xiao Hu et al. 2005). Risk factors associated with IPV within the context of cultural traditions were young age, low education, low socioeconomic status, marital conflicts, a history of childhood abuse, and alcohol and drug abuse. The study also revealed that, despite the prevalence of violence against women in the country, it is generally concealed and largely ignored or overlooked. The study's results are relevant to the current paper on risk factors in the African region. Moreover, the role of traditional cultural factors in China appears to align with what has been observed in most studies from different African countries. In addition, their study suggested further investigation of the problem.

Findings from the World Health Organization's (WHO) multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence show that, despite variations in IPV, there are common factors that appear to influence IPV risk similarly. On the one hand, secondary education, high socioeconomic status (SES), and formal marriage offer protection against IPV. On the other hand, alcohol abuse, cohabitation, young age, attitudes supporting wife beating, outside sexual relationships, experiencing childhood abuse, growing up with domestic violence, and perpetrating or experiencing other forms of violence in adulthood increase the risk of IPV. The study also found that the strength of association was greater when both partners had the risk or protective factor. This observation suggests that targeting partners or couples most at risk may yield greater prevention impact (Abramsky et al. 2011). In our study, SES and cultural attitudes were examined.

Gubi and Wandera (2022) noted that IPV among men has been prevalent in Uganda for a long time, yet little attention has been paid to it. Possible reasons for under-studying this aspect of IPV perpetrated by females include social stigma (fear of losing social respect and position), not being believed, fearing shame from being beaten by a woman, having one's masculinity questioned, and being perceived as exhibiting feminine behavior. In other words, male victims may be reluctant to participate in such a study. The global prevalence of IPV among men is estimated at 17%, and in Uganda, it is 44%, compared with 56% for women. However, most studies outside Uganda have focused on women in unions. On a positive note, the Ugandan government has put in place certain policies, laws, and guidelines that provide a legal context for programs on the prevention and response to IPV. Such legislative

instruments include the Domestic Violence Act of 2020, the National Policy on Elimination of Gender-Based Violence, and the Uganda Gender Policy of 2007. The policies highlight IPV as a national concern that impedes development. Despite these efforts, IPV remains persistent in Uganda (Gubi and Wandera 2022). Therefore, the present paper revisits the subject matter with a focus on the social correlates of male IPV in Uganda. Reports from other relevant studies found that, among other factors, female partners' controlling behaviors, alcohol consumption, men's wealth status, and witnessing parental violence are indicators of violence toward men in unions (Gubi and Wandera 2022).

As noted in a local Ugandan paper, The Daily Monitor, in March 2022, even though statistics compiled by different organizations and the police show that women bear the brunt of domestic violence in the country, men also face domestic violence in their homes. According to the Police Annual Report of 2020, of the 18,872 victims of domestic violence, 1,133 were male juveniles. The reasons given for these cases of violence are disputes over family property, failure to provide for the family, drug and alcohol abuse, and infidelity. The Daily Monitor speculates that there may be more men who are abused or mistreated by their family members but do not speak up because, culturally, they are expected to keep the burden to themselves. Being seen as beaten is seen as effeminate. As such, many men experiencing violence are ashamed to report to the police for fear of stigma and being laughed at.

3. THEORETICAL LITERATURE

Overview of Theories of Domestic Violence in the African Context.

Five categories of theories of domestic violence from Bowman's (2003) writings were presented as a frame of reference for this paper. These theories are classic, relevant, and important explanatory frameworks for understanding the traditional social structure within which African men and women operate cognitively and behaviorally regarding IPV. The first theory, *rights theories*, stipulates that most African countries are signatories to international treaties that consider domestic violence a violation of individual human rights. However, African literary works on domestic violence do not portray it as such. Some writers have noted that until domestic violence is explicitly spelled out in a language that depicts it as a violation of individual human rights and a function of gender inequality, effective remedies will not be achieved (Bowman 2003).

The second theory frequently discussed in African literature is *feminist explanations* of domestic violence. This framework views domestic violence as an offshoot of a broader context of gender inequality within a patriarchal society, where a woman's place is decidedly subordinate. This subordination of women remains commonplace in African customary law. Therefore, feminist writers conclude that unless systemic gender inequality is addressed, gender-based violence will persist.

The third theory category is *cultural explanations* of domestic violence, emphasizing the power of tradition and norms within the African context. These traditions and norms allow for an unequal distribution of power in traditional African marriages, polygyny, male promiscuity, the power of the extended family over the nuclear family, and widespread abuse of wives by their husbands. For example, spousal arguments and disputes, or a wife's "talking back" to her husband, can escalate to violence. That is, the wife's failure to conform to her expected submissive behavior, not to question or argue with her husband, and to ask permission for all her activities can escalate violence. In such situations, domestic violence is viewed as enforcing the wife's conformity to the traditional role she is supposed to play, not as a violation of her rights. This theory, therefore, suggests that, in the African context, culture is often an excuse for male violence against women, not the cause of it. On a comparative level, what is considered cultural in Africa may be interpreted differently in Europe or America; for example, issues of control and abuse could be related to the batterer's psychological condition rather than to cultural factors.

Society in transition explanations is another theory of domestic violence that appears in African literature. This theory holds that violence emerges as traditional cultures transition to modern, urbanized societies, driven by men's sense of social change and the associated threat and loss of power.

The fifth theory is the culture-of-violence explanation. Some observers link gender-based violence to an alleged “culture of violence” in modern Africa, in which violence is an acceptable mode of dispute resolution, a legacy of colonial days – an era marked by the mistreatment of Africans by their colonial masters. Thus, gender-based violence is a remnant of the repressive practices of colonial powers, as seen in Apartheid South Africa, where violence is directed against women, including both rape and domestic violence. Therefore, the preceding review of Bowman’s theoretical considerations serves as an etiological and explanatory framework for understanding the social phenomenon under discussion.

4. METHOD

Data Source¹, Variables, and Measures

The paper utilized the 2022 Uganda Round 9 Afrobarometer dataset. Afrobarometer is a non-profit, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on African societies to inform development and policy decision-making. Afrobarometer measures the social, political, and economic atmosphere in more than 30 African countries by conducting face-to-face interviews with a randomly selected, nationally representative sample of either 1,200 or 2,400 adult citizens in each country. The survey uses national probability samples designed to generate a sample that is a representative cross-section of all citizens of voting age in a given country. The goal is to give each adult citizen an equal chance of being selected for an interview. This is done by using a random selection method at every sampling stage with a probability proportionate to population size to ensure that more populated geographic units have a proportionately greater chance of being selected into the sample. The sampling universe usually includes adults 18 years old and older.

The sample design is a clustered, stratified, multi-stage, area probability sample. Samples are drawn in either four or five stages: 1) sampling in rural areas only (secondary sampling units), 2) sampling in urban areas (primary sampling units), 3) selection of sampling start points, 4) random selection of households, and 5) random selection of individual respondents for interviewing, in which the interviewer alternates between male and female (in each household) to ensure gender balance in the sample.

The surveys cover democracy and citizen engagement, economy and development, energy and infrastructure, environment and climate, health and social services, identity and gender, institutions and governance, regional and global relations, and safety and security.

Outcome variables were the perceptions of respondents on family violence. In the paper, perceptions were measured by three survey items that elicited respondents’ levels of agreement on 1) justification of the physical discipline of children, 2) justification of the husband's use of physical discipline on the wife, and 3) belief that DV is a private versus criminal matter. The contextual explanatory variables were the following sociodemographic factors: place of residence (measured by urban and rural), gender (categorized as male and female), age (recoded into 4 groups – 18-34, 35-54, 55-74, and 75 or above), education (no education vs some education), and employment status (measured as not working and working). Other relevant domestic violence variables included in the descriptive analysis were 1) belief that violence was common against women, 2) belief that women who reported DV were taken seriously or not, 3) belief that women who reported DV were criticized and harassed, 4) opinions on the government’s handling of domestic violence, 5) how often children are neglected or abused, and 6) how often adults use physical discipline on children. These factors were added for descriptive and elaborate purposes.

A frequency distribution table was created to describe the characteristics of respondents. To examine the association between the outcome and explanatory variables, contingency tables were drawn with a chi-square test of independence. Next, multivariate logistic regressions were conducted to further investigate the association between the significant explanatory variables (place of residence, gender, age, education, and employment status) and the outcome variables (respondents’ perceptions of the three items

of the dependent variables). The results are presented as Odds Ratios and their p -values, set at $p < 0.05$ level of statistical significance.

5. RESULTS

Sample Description

As depicted in Table 1, the sample size (n) was 2400, comprising adults aged 18 - 75 or over who were selected nationwide. Both genders were almost equally represented in the sample (50.1% male and 49.9% female, respectively). Also, 73.3% of respondents resided in rural areas and 26.7% lived in urban areas. Most respondents were youthful and middle-aged (18-34 and 35-54 groups). Over 89% of the sample had some formal education, but 10.9% were not formally educated. Less than half of the respondents (42.2%) had a job, and the rest (57.8%) were unemployed at the time of the survey.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of Respondents (n=2400)

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Residence		
Urban	640	26.7
Rural	1760	73.3
Gender		
Male	1202	50.1
Female	1198	49.9
Age group		
18-34	1297	54.0
35-54	765	31.9
55-74	289	12.0
75 or over	49	2.0
Education		
No education	261	10.9
Formal education	2235	89.1
Employment Status		
Unemployed	1387	57.8
Employed	1013	42.2

Table 2 summarizes the public's views on the prevalence of domestic violence and women's and children's rights issues in the country. Close to a third of the respondents (28.8%) believed husbands were justified in using physical discipline on their wives, whereas the majority (71.2%) did not think so. Quite a substantial number of respondents (48.3%) observed that violence against women was common in the country, and only 14% believed that when women reported incidents of violence to the police, the police did not take them seriously. In addition, many respondents (55.2%) thought women who reported such violent cases were more likely than not to be criticized and harassed. Many of the respondents (64.3%) believed domestic violence was a private matter rather than a criminal matter, and a great proportion of respondents (81%) thought the government was doing something about women's rights and equality, but 18.3% of them believed the government was doing less.

Regarding violence toward children, almost half of the respondents (49.6%) believed that parents were justified in using physical discipline on their children. About half of the respondents (47.1%) thought physical discipline was frequently used on children, and 45% of them thought children were often

neglected or abused in the country. Almost 52% of respondents also agreed that there was little or no help available for neglected and abused children, whereas 48.3% of them disagreed.

Table 2. Distribution of DV-Related Characteristics (N=2400)

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Physical discipline of children		
Not justified	1208	50.4
Justified	1187	49.6
Physical discipline of the wife		
Not justified	1706	71.2
Justified	691	28.8
Violence is common against women		
Violence not common	1231	51.7
Violence common	1150	48.3
Women report GBV to police, taken seriously		
Unlikely	333	14.0
Likely	2042	86.0
Women report GBV criticized/harassed.		
Unlikely	1062	44.8
Likely	1306	55.2
DV is a private vs. criminal matter		
Private matter	1506	64.3
Criminal matter	835	35.7
How often do adults use physical discipline on children		
Not often	1266	52.9
Often	1127	47.1
How often are children neglected or abused		
Not often	1313	55.0
Often	1074	45.0
Help available for abused/neglected children		
Disagree	1171	51.7
Agree	1093	48.3
Govt. doing more or less about Women's rights/equality		
Doing less	436	18.3
Doing about right	624	26.2
Doing more	1321	55.5

Table 3 shows the rank order of the most important women's rights issues in Uganda as reported by respondents. At the top rank is gender-based violence (40.8%), followed by unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (17%), unequal access to education (15.1%), too few women in government

positions (11.9%), unequal opportunities and salaries (10.3%), and other unspecified issues (4.9%), bringing up the rear.

Table 3. Most Important Women’s Rights Issue (N=2400)

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender-based violence	979	40.8
Unequal rights of property Ownership and inheritance	409	17.0
Unequal access to education	362	15.1
Too few women in positions in government	286	11.9
Unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace	246	10.3
None of the above/ other issues	118	4.9

Physical discipline of children

Table 4 summarizes the associations between respondents' sociodemographic characteristics and their attitudes toward DV. Over 53% of respondents in urban areas believed that parents were not justified in using physical discipline on their children, whereas 46.6% believed parents were justified. Respondents in rural areas were split almost equally in their opinions about the physical discipline of children (49.3% not justified vs. 50.7% justified). The Chi-square test of independence indicated no association between place of residence and perceptions of DV ($p > .05$).

Table 4. Perceptions of physical discipline on children (N=2400)

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Parents justified to use of physical discipline of children	
	Not justified	Justified
Residence		
Urban	53.4%	46.6%
Rural	49.3	50.7%
$\chi^2 (1, N = 2395) = 2.98, p > .05$		
Gender		
Male	51.0%	49.0%
Female	49.9%	50.1%
$\chi^2 (1, N = 2395) = .26, p > .05$		
Age group		
18-34	52.3%	47.7%
35-54	46.5%	53.5%

55-74	50.9%	49.1%
75 or over	61.2%	38.8%

$\chi^2 (3, N = 2395) = 8.87, p < .05$

Education

No education	49.8%	50.2%
Formal education	50.4%	49.6%

$\chi^2 (1, N = 2395) = .02, p > .05$

Employment Status

Unemployed	51.0%	49.0%
Employed	49.6%	50.4%

$\chi^2 (1, N = 2395) = .43, p > .05$

Males and females were almost equally divided in their perceptions of physical discipline in children. Fifty-one percent of males thought it was unjustified to physically discipline children, in contrast to 49% of males who opined otherwise. The figures were similar for the female respondents. Almost 50% of respondents believed it was not justified to discipline children physically, as against 50.1% who support physical discipline for children. Nonetheless, being a male or a female has no statistical relationship with the perceptions of physical use of discipline on children ($p > .05$). Opinions on physical discipline for children were also almost split 50/50 based on educational level. Whether a respondent was educated or uneducated had no statistically significant association with what they think about physical discipline for children ($p > .05$). A similar observation applies to the respondent's employment status and its relationship to opinions on physical discipline in children. Almost 50% of the unemployed perceived the practice as unjustified, on par with those who believed the practice to be justified. Also, a little over 50% of employed respondents see physical discipline for children as unjustified. There is no statistically significant relationship between employment status and perception of physical discipline for children ($p > .05$).

About age categories, more respondents in every age group except the 35-54 age group perceive physical discipline for children as not justified. Almost 54% of those in that age group believed that the use of physical discipline on children is justified. A chunk of respondents in the age group 75 or over (61.2%) did not perceive using physical discipline on children as justified. Statistically, there is a significant association between age and perceptions of physical discipline for children ($p < .05$).

Physical discipline of wives

Table 5 summarizes responses on the justification of husbands using physical discipline on their wives. Generally, most urban (80%) and rural residents (68%) perceived the physical discipline of wives as unjustified. As shown by the chi-square statistic [$\chi^2 (1, N = 2397) = 29.18, p < .05$], there is a significant association between place of residence and opinions on the physical discipline of wives by husbands.

Table 5. Perceptions about the use of physical discipline on wives (N=2400)

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Husbands are justified in using physical discipline on wife	
	<i>Not justified</i>	<i>Justified</i>
Residence		
Urban	79.5%	20.5%
Rural	68.1%	31.9%
$\chi^2 (1, N = 2397) = 29.18, p <.05$		
Gender		
Male	69.1%	30.9%
Female	73.3%	26.7%
$\chi^2 (1, N = 2397) = 5.08, p <.05$		
Age group		
18-34	72.9%	27.1%
35-54	67.8%	32.2%
55-74	71.5%	28.5%
75 or over	75.5%	24.5%
$\chi^2 (3, N = 2397) = 6.47, p >.05$		
Education		
No education	64.6%	35.4%
Formal education	72.0%	28.0%
$\chi^2 (1, N = 2393) = 5.74, p <.05$		
Employment Status		
Unemployed	51.0%	49.0%
Employed	49.6%	50.4%
$\chi^2 (1, N = 2397) = 2.48, p >.05$		

Over 73% of females and 69% of males did not think a man is justified in using physical discipline on his wife, but a smaller proportion of each gender (27% female, 31% male) thought otherwise. Statistically, there is a relationship between gender and perception of the use of physical discipline on the wife ($p < .05$). Concerning the educational background of respondents, about 65% of those who had no formal education and 72% of those who had formal education did not perceive physical discipline on wives as justified. More than 35% of uneducated and 28% of educated respondents perceived the physical discipline of wives as justified. Statistically, a significant association between education and perception of the physical discipline of a wife was observed ($p < .05$).

Next, age group and perceptions of the physical discipline of a wife were statistically independent of each other ($p > .05$). Nonetheless, it appears most respondents in each age category see the physical discipline of wives as unjustified, as against the lesser proportions of the four age groups. Regarding employment status and opinions on the physical discipline of wives, no association was observed between the two variables ($p > .05$). The unemployed and the employed respondents seemed equally divided in opposite directions regarding the physical discipline of wives by their husbands.

Domestic violence as a private matter versus a criminal matter

Responses to the question as to whether domestic violence is a private matter or a criminal matter are reported in Table 6. Almost 60% of people residing in urban areas perceive DV as a private matter, as against a little over 40% in that demographic location. Sixty-six percent of respondents in rural areas perceived DV as a private matter, whereas 34% perceived it as a criminal matter. The chi-square test of independence showed that there was a significant association between place of residence and perception of domestic violence ($p < .05$). Regarding gender, over 70% of male respondents believed DV is a private matter, but a little over 29% perceived DV as a criminal matter. On the other hand, almost 58% of female respondents perceived DV as a private matter, and a little more than 42% of them perceived DV as a criminal matter. Statistically, there is a relationship between gender and the perception of DV as a private or criminal matter ($p < .05$).

As shown in the Table, more than 60% of the age group 18-34 regard DV as a private affair, whereas almost 40% of the same age group thought it was a criminal matter. More than 68% of respondents in the age group 35-54 perceived DV as a private matter, but almost 32% of the same group believed DV was a criminal matter. In the age group 55-74, about 69% of them perceived DV to be a private matter, unlike 31% of that group who thought DV was a criminal matter. Over 77% of respondents in the oldest age group (75 or over) perceive DV as a private matter, whereas 23% of respondents in that age group thought DV was a criminal matter. The age category seems to be inversely related to the perception of DV as a private or criminal matter. That is, the response pattern depicts an increasing perception of DV as a private matter with increasing age groups and a decreasing perception of DV as a criminal matter with increasing age groups. Statistically, there is a significant association between age group and perception of DV as a private or criminal matter ($p < .05$).

Almost 70% of uneducated respondents view DV as a private matter, whereas 31% of the uneducated respondents view DV as a criminal matter. For the educated respondents, 64% believed DV is a private matter, and a little over 36% of the same category of respondents believed that DV was a criminal matter. There is no association between education and the perception of DV as a private or criminal matter ($p > .05$).

Table 6. Perceptions about DV as a private or criminal matter (N=2400)

Sociodemographic Characteristics	<i>Domestic violence is a private versus criminal matter</i>	
	<i>Private matter</i>	<i>Criminal matter</i>
Residence		
Urban	59.6%	40.4%
Rural	66.0%	34.0%
$\chi^2 (1, N = 2341) = 7.83, p < .05$		
Gender		
Male	70.7%	29.3%
Female	57.8%	42.2%
$\chi^2 (1, N = 2397) = 42.0, p < .05$		
Age group		
18-34	60.6%	39.4%
35-54	68.2%	31.8%
55-74	68.8%	31.2%
75 or over	77.1%	22.9%

$\chi^2 (3, N = 2341) = 18.66, p < .05$

Education

No education	69.6%	30.4%
Formal education	63.7%	36.3%

$\chi^2 (1, N = 2337) = 3.11, p > .05$

Employment Status

Unemployed	65.4%	34.6%
Employed	62.8%	37.2%

$\chi^2 (1, N = 2341) = 1.61, p > .05$

Regarding employment status, over 65% of unemployed respondents perceived DV as a private matter. In contrast, over 34% of the unemployed respondents perceived DV as a criminal matter. About 63% of employed respondents thought DV was a private matter, but a little over 37% of respondents in that group believed DV was a criminal matter. Nonetheless, no statistically significant association exists between employment status and perceptions of DV as a private or criminal matter ($p > .05$).

Multivariate Analysis

Three separate logistic regression analyses were conducted to predict the perception of justification of the physical discipline of children (Model 1), the justification of the physical discipline of wives (Model 2), and the perception of domestic violence (DV) as a private or criminal matter (Model 3). Not justified was coded 0, and Justified was coded 1. Private matter was coded 0, and Criminal matter was coded 1. Only significant predictor variables from the preceding bivariate analysis were included. The results are summarized in Table 7.

In Model 1, the predictor variables were age group and education, and the outcome variable was the justification for physical discipline of children. The B coefficient for the age group 35-54 was positive (.227) and had a corresponding significant influence on the outcome variable ($p < .05$) with an odds ratio of 1.25, meaning that that age group would be 1.3 times more likely than the younger age group (18-34) to justify using physical discipline on children. Even though the age group 55-74 had some influence on the outcome variable, the relationship was not significant ($p = .719$). The B coefficient for the age group 75 or over was negative (-.341), indicating their likelihood of not justifying child physical discipline. However, that group also had no significant predictive power ($p = .261$). Similarly, those with formal education were also less likely to perceive the physical discipline of children ($B = -.016$) as justified, but that category also was not a statistically significant predictor.

Model 2's predictor variables were residence (rural vs. urban), gender, and education (uneducated vs. educated). The outcome variable was the perception of using physical discipline on wives. The variable rural residence had a positive B coefficient (.583) with a corresponding p-value of less than .001, indicating that it was a significant predictor of those who perceive physical discipline of wives as a justified practice. The odds ratio of 1.791 also showed that rural folks were 1.8 times more likely than urban folks to consider the physical discipline of wives as justified. Regarding gender, the B coefficient for females was -.242 with a p-value of .009. Females were less likely than males to perceive the physical discipline of wives as justified. Gender was also a statistically significant predictor of the outcome variable. A similar pattern was observed with education. The B coefficient for the educated respondents was -.345. Respondents with formal education were less likely than the uneducated to perceive the physical discipline of wives as justified. Education was also an important predictor of respondents' perception of the physical discipline of wives ($p = .015$). The variable with the strongest predictive value in this model was residence (.001), followed by gender (.009), and education (.015).

Table 7. Adjusted Odds Ratios from Three Logistic Regression Models of Respondents who Accept Physical Discipline of Children, Physical Discipline of Wives, and their Perceptions of Domestic Violence as a Private or Criminal Matter (n = 2400)

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>Physical discipline of Children justified</i>			<i>Physical discipline of wife justified</i>			<i>DV is a private vs. Criminal matter</i>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>p*</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>p*</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>p*</i>
<u>Model 1</u>									
Age group									
18-34 (R)									
35-54	.227	1.255	.014						
55-74	.048	1.049	.719						
75 or over	-.341	.711	.261						
Education									
Uneducated (R)									
Educated	-.016	.985	.909						
<u>Model 2</u>									
Residence									
Urban (R)									
Rural				.583	1.791	<.001			
Gender									
Male (R)									
Female					-.242	.785	.009		
Education									
Uneducated (R)									
Educated				-.345	.708	.015			
<u>Model 3</u>									
Residence									
Urban (R)									
Rural							-.265	.767	.007
Gender									
Male (R)									
Female							.551	1.736	<.001
Age group									
18-34 (R)									
35-54							-.308	.735	.002
55-74							-.290	.748	.043
75 or over							-.723	.486	.040

Note:
*P < .05

The predictor variables in Model 3 were residence, gender, and age group, and the outcome variable was the perception of DV as a private versus criminal matter. All three predictors made uniquely statistically significant contributions to the model. The B coefficient of rural was -.265, meaning that respondents who resided in rural areas were less likely than the reference group (urban residents) to perceive DV as a criminal matter (p=.007). Regarding gender, the B coefficient was positive (.551) with a corresponding odds ratio of 1.736, indicating that females were 1.7 times more likely than males to

consider DV as a criminal matter. All attributes of the age group were also important in the model. Their B coefficients indicated a negative association with the outcome variable. Thus, members of each group were less likely than members of the reference group (age 18-34) to perceive DV as a criminal matter. The strongest predictor in this model was gender ($p < .001$), followed by residence ($p = .007$), and then the age group with p values less than .05 (.002, .043, .040, respectively).

6. DISCUSSION

To recap, the study was necessitated by the prevalence of family violence in African societies as evidenced in the literature (Klomegah, 2023; Gubi et al., 2022; Migadde, 2022; Waltermaurer, 2022; Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2021; Tumwesigye et al., 2012; Abramsky et al., 2011; Bowman, 2003; Jewkes, 2002). We examined the attitudes of Ugandan adults toward domestic violence in Uganda. Specifically, we looked at the influence of people's demographic characteristics on their opinions on 1) using physical discipline on children in the home, 2) the use of physical discipline on wives by their husbands, and 3) domestic violence as a private matter or as a criminal matter. These sociodemographic factors are important and useful in understanding domestic violence because human characteristics and social-environmental factors influence people's behavior (Dhiman, 2023).

The current analysis has indicated that generally, domestic violence remains typical in Uganda. A substantial percentage of the population (48%) observed that violence against women was rampant in the country, and almost a third of the population (29%) believed that husbands were justified in physically abusing their wives. These findings are in sync with earlier studies of other African countries where even women thought that a husband was justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances such as, if the wife went out without telling the husband, if she neglected the children, if she argued with the husband, if she refused sex with him, and if she burnt the food when cooking (Paintsil et al., 2023; Klomegah, 2023; and Hindin, 2003).

It appeared that in Uganda, women's civil right was not observed as they should be by law enforcement or necessary authorities because over 55% of people observed that women who reported abusive incidents would be criticized and harassed. Also, more than 64% of people did not see violence towards women as a criminal matter. Rather, they believed it was a private matter. Regarding violence toward children, half the population (50%) perceived physical discipline of children as appropriate. In the same vein, they stated that physical discipline of children and child neglect were common and that little or no help was available to abused children.

The multivariate analysis also indicated that people aged between 35 and 54 were more likely than others to support physical discipline for children. Nonetheless, other age groups did not significantly predict children's physical discipline and therefore were unimportant when dealing with factors associated with child abuse in the home. Elsewhere in an earlier publication, the level of education was mentioned as a determinant of child abuse (Antai et al., 2016). The current analysis contradicts that of Antai et al. (2016) and shows no statistically significant relationship between education and physical abuse of children, even though education negatively influences attitudes toward child physical discipline. Perhaps the observed discrepancy lies in the fact that Antai et al.'s study focused on only females, whereas the current study included both males and females. This discrepancy may be a reason for further investigation into this relationship. To address our research question one, age was an important influence on domestic violence, and younger and middle-aged people were more likely than the elderly to condone violence toward children in the form of physical discipline.

About our second research question, place of residence, gender, and education have significant predictive values for attitudes toward the physical discipline of wives. The data revealed that rural residents were more likely to endorse wife abuse than urban residents. This finding supports earlier findings of higher occurrence of IPV in rural areas than in urban areas (Perez-Patron et al., 2020; Peek-

Asa et al., 2011; Kozhimannil et al., 2023). In addition, females and people with formal education were less likely to approve of violence toward women, whereas males and the uneducated were more likely to endorse violence toward women. The findings corroborate a recent study from Benin, which shows that in rural areas, formal education decreased the probability that women would perceive domestic violence as justified (Deschenes & Hotte, 2024). Also, recent studies found that in most countries, education reduces the risk of violence, particularly gender-based violence (Simister, 2013).

With research question three, the influences of place of residence, gender, and age group were significant in determining whether DV is a private or criminal matter. Gender was the most influential factor in determining the nature of DV. Generally, females are more likely than males to perceive DV as a criminal matter rather than a private matter. Rural residents were more likely to consider DV a private matter than urban residents. Also, all age groups except the age 18-34 group would consider DV as a private matter.

The preceding observations indicate the endorsement of domestic abuse in Uganda, generally. These observations can be evaluated within the context of the cultural theory of domestic violence, which emphasizes the power of tradition and norms that allow for unequal distribution of power in African societies. Such power allows domestic violence to be perceived as an enforcement of the wife's conformity to the conventional role she is supposed to play and not as a violation of her rights. Considering this, culture is often an excuse for male violence against women in the family. Some African cultures consider physical punishment as a legitimate and necessary mode of discipline for children, many times with the religious belief that you "spare the rod and spoil the child." Social norms and social learning theories explain this endorsement and persistence of the physical discipline of children. Social learning theories stipulate that people learn behaviors directly through social interaction with significant others or indirectly by observing behaviors in the media. Actions or behaviors that are rewarded are likely to be imitated, and those that are punished are likely to be avoided (Cherry, 2024). The analysis has also shown that physical discipline of children is common in the country since half of the respondents consider it a justified form of discipline. Thus, cultural and patriarchal reasons can be assigned to these observations, as noted in Migadde's (2022) study, which showed that patriarchal values perpetuate DV. Theoretically, it must be noted that what is considered cultural in African societies may be interpreted differently in European, American, or other cultures.

Study Limitations

A noticeable limitation of the study was the lack of direct measures of domestic violence or abuse in the Afrobarometer dataset. Thus, proxy attitudinal measures were used to determine the outcome variables – perceptions of physical discipline on children and women (wives), and opinions on DV as a private versus criminal matter. This means that direct information on individuals' first-hand experiences as perpetrators or victims of domestic violence was missing. As such, the accuracy of respondents' responses is not verifiable. However, these proxy measures have real-life behavioral implications and thus might interfere with respondents' behavioral preferences. The second limitation is the nature of the Afrobarometer data. That is, being a cross-sectional survey, it did not adequately capture the various factors relating to domestic violence. In contrast, there are myriad factors associated with DV reported in the literature. Much as we would have liked to include more explanatory factors in this work than we did, we were inhibited by the nature and content of the dataset. Thus, the scope of the discussion of the current topic was constrained. For this reason, an in-depth qualitative design is suggested for future research on this phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

The major takeaways from this study are that DV is commonplace in Uganda, and the result is in agreement with Nakayiza's (2024) report that GBV is a critical problem in the country. Notwithstanding, the practice has been underreported due to social stigma and shame, fear of reprisal, confidentiality

concerns, and fear of not being believed. Secondly, physical punishment for children is also a typical practice. Half the population would endorse physical punishment for children, and a third would also endorse physical punishment for their wives. Some adults (47%) reported that there was frequent use of physical punishment on children, and at times, adults neglect children or even abuse them. Also, it seems that inadequate help was available to these abused children, according to 48% of those polled. Generally, women were criticized and harassed for reporting domestic abuse to law enforcement. Thirdly, citizens also identified gender-based violence as the most important women's rights issue facing the country. Other issues mentioned in the survey were unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance, unequal access to education, too few women in government positions, and unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace. Usually, these issues are not obscure in Africa; they are noticeable and therefore call for further empirical investigation. In addition, the physical discipline of children both at home and in school needs further investigation to discover and understand better the dynamics and unexplored factors that necessitate such actions, aside from being a cultural and societal practice. A suitable approach would be to utilize qualitative non-numerical data to gain contextual insights that shape people's motivation for violence towards women and children in the family.

The findings highlight some vital policy implications, mainly a call for raising awareness about the effects of physical discipline on women and children and promoting normative and cultural changes in disciplinary approaches that may harm them. Secondly, the findings call for improving law enforcement through sensitivity training for police officers and other law enforcers to treat abuse cases with seriousness and have respect for victims of violence in the family. Also, the findings call for gender-equality training or orientations in addressing and modifying sociocultural norms that perpetuate gender-based violence. Finally, it is suggested that any policy measures geared toward addressing DV should consider the influences of the significant predictive factors discussed in this study and the overall influences of patriarchal culture on perceptions, habits, and people's behaviors. Most importantly, efforts at curbing DV and GBV require collective investment by the government, moral entrepreneurs, and communities in feasible strategies to address these problems.

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ⁱ This description is taken verbatim from the following source: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/surveys-and-methods/sampling/>