

**“DOES OUR CULTURE PROMOTE ABUSE?” BRIDEWEALTH AND
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN GHANA**

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Abstract

Most of what is known on the relationship between bridewealth and domestic violence is in the realm of reproduction. However, there are other aspects of a woman's life. This study investigates the differential effect of bridewealth on approval of domestic violence in two domains of a woman's life (reproduction and woman's personal economic activity). This study sets up an experiment in “real life” to examine the different levels of bridewealth status (no bridewealth paid, some bridewealth paid and full bridewealth paid) of a woman and its effect on domestic violence against her was going to be very difficult. Therefore the “vignette experimental method” is used to investigate this relationship. The presentation will first describe the randomisation procedure across nine villages in a “controlled experimental” setting. Basic descriptive analyses are used to describe the characteristics the experimental groups as well as the general linear model and multiple linear regression to compare the groups. A methodology widely used by psychologists in controlled laboratory experiments is adapted into population research.

Keywords: Bridewealth, Women's Behaviour, Fertility, Domestic Violence, Ghana

Introduction

Bridewealth is the most common form of marriage payment across Africa (Radcliff-Brown, 1950: 46). Bridewealth refers to the property or wealth the bridegrooms' family (and kin) transfers to the bride's family (and kin), in return, certain rights the woman's family had over the woman are transferred to the bridegroom (and kin) at the inception of the marriage (Goody and Tambiah, 1973; Mizinga, 2000). The custom of bridewealth payment is at the heart of the marriage process, deeply rooted in African cultural values (Maitra, 2007) and its payment legitimises marriage (Goody and Tambiah, 1973; Meekers, 1992; Davies, 1999). The norms associated with bridewealth payment is very complex, however, they vary largely across cultures and within societies (Bishai et al., 2009). The norms governing bridewealth payment and its functions transcend individuals (Bawah et al., 1999; Maitra, 2007). Irrespective of the context, bridewealth serves a variety of purposes within African societies: functions relating to the distribution of material resources; the establishment of relationships within and between lineages; the maintenance of social control; and the construction of social identity (Ansell, 2001).

Contrary to marriage ceremonies in Western societies that are more of discrete events, in Africa, marriage is a process with each stage characterized by the performance of prescribed rites (Meekers, 1992; Mwamwenda and Monyooe, 1997). Bridewealth in some cultures can either be fully paid before marriage or sometimes because of the "substantial" amounts of goods that are to be transferred as bridewealth, in some societies the goods are transferred by instalment over a period of time (Meekers, 1992). The Payment of bridewealth secures rights over the woman to the man and his family with respect to her domestic services, sexual and reproductive rights (Goody and Tambiah, 1973). In some cases, it also gives men rights to the children as seen in some patrilineal cultures in Ghana (Nukunya, 1999; Dodoo, 1998). Evidence from the reproductive health literature indicates that the authority of men within marriage especially related to sex and reproduction is largely as a result of the marriage process and bridewealth payment (Dodoo and Frost, 2008).

In Ghana and other parts of the world, a number of studies have directly and indirectly linked bridewealth to violence against women especially related to sex and reproduction (Bawah et al., 1999; Wakabi, 2002; Kaye et al., 2005). Very often in the literature, the occurrence of domestic violence have been attributed to failures in especially a woman's performance of household duties, sex, reproduction and obedience (Frost and Dodoo, 2010; Wilson-Williams et al., 2008; Bawah et al., 1999). The literature also suggest that, in patrilineal societies, patriarchal norms supports' a man's right to beat his wife under certain circumstances (Koenig et al., 2006). In essence the rights secured by husbands as a result of bridewealth, undermines women's decision-making power critical to various aspects of their lives including family/child spacing, matters related to their health and investment of family resources (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001). The fact that bridewealth gives men these rights, any abrogation of such obligation can lead to violence (Bawah et al., 1999).

The United Nations General Assembly's declaration in 1993 on the elimination of violence against women defined violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (United Nations, 1993). It includes, but not limited to physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs in the family, including battering; sexual abuse of female children in the household; dowry-related violence; marital rape; female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women (United Nations, 1993).

According to Dodoo (1998) culturally, in Africa, marriage confers onto men the power to dominate sex and reproduction. Owing to the custom of bridewealth, in some societies many men may view their wives in the manner of property (Navrongo Health Research Centre, 2001; Kambarami, 2006). Kambarami (2006) also argued that bridewealth gives a man all rights whilst the woman is stripped of all freedom and rights. Bridewealth payment emerging as one of the factors associated with men's authority and domestic violence against women, does not only give men the authority to dominate and abuse women but also justifies the use of violence against women (Bawah et al., 1999; Frost and Dodoo, 2010).

Despite mounting evidence that bridewealth payment influences domestic violence against women; little efforts have been made to experimentally examine bridewealth payment and domestic violence against women. The present study therefore seeks not only to evaluate the theoretical prediction that bridewealth payment influences domestic violence against women but also seeks to explore its influence beyond the child bearing sphere as well as at different levels of bridewealth payment using an experimental design.

Methodology

The hypotheses were tested using the "vignette experimental" method. The vignette of this study was based on the theoretical prediction of the relationship between bridewealth, woman's behaviour and domestic violence. The experiment had a 3×2 between subjects design. It crossed bridewealth status (no bridewealth paid, some bridewealth paid and full bridewealth paid) and woman's behaviour (reproduction and personal business) to get six (6) conditions which measures acceptance of domestic violence.

Sample Size Estimation and Sampling Procedure

The study used a sample size of 46 subjects per experimental condition expected to be sufficient to detect a medium size effect (Keppel, 1991). The study was conducted in February 2010 in nine villages conveniently sampled (Avakpedome, Tsetsekpo, Dekpoe, Tsawla, Mawoekpor, Kpedzeglo, Wute, Anfoe and New Bakpa). These villages were clustered around Adidome in the North Tongu District in the Volta region of Ghana and all the communities were patrilineal societies. With forty six (46) subjects per condition a total of two hundred and seven six (276) subjects were randomly selected and interviewed. Eligible participants were women aged 18 years and above. Participants were randomly selected. In each village, the centre of the village was located and the geographic north identified. The six interviewers randomly selected from sixteen cardinal point directions and moved along that direction. Each interviewer interviewed women in the houses along the direction she selected.

Experimental Manipulation

There were 12 packets (questionnaires) in total with different combinations of two "vignette experiments" of which this study analysed one. The packets were pre-randomly stacked before given to the interviewer who upon encountering a woman 18 years and above, the packet at the top was administered to her. One of the 12 packets randomly assigned to the participant is read to her followed by questions about the vignette. Respondents were not informed about the experimental condition of the other vignettes. They were also asked questions about their demographic characteristics, socio-economic as well as those of their partners.

Dependent Measure

To measure perceptions of domestic violence, subjects were asked about their perceptions on the experimental conditions. The subjects were asked what they think about the vignette (experimental condition) read to them. For each question, participants were asked to score the man in the vignettes’ behaviour of either beating his wife/partner over using contraception (reproduction) or giving earnings from her shop to a friend without telling him (personal economic activity) by a certain level of bridewealth payment (no bridewealth paid, some bridewealth paid or full bridewealth paid). The scoring was done using a ladder which was scaled from 1 (the man in the vignettes’ behaviour was very wrong) to 10 (the man in the vignettes’ behaviour was very right).

Results

In all, 276 participants were selected for the experiment. The mean age of the participants was 41 years. One in ten (10.1%) of the participants were between the ages of 18 to 24 and almost a third (26.1 %) were between the ages of 25 to 34, which is the highest percentage among the age groups. A little over a third (37.3%) of the participants had no education. One in twenty (5.1%) of the respondents had secondary or higher education. About five per cent (4.3%) of the participants had never been married and almost three quarters (72.1%) of the participants were married or living together with their partners.

From Table 1, a comparison of the mean perceptions of domestic violence across bridewealth status (no bridewealth paid, some bridewealth paid and full bridewealth paid) with respect to contraception suggest that, the participants believed that a woman whose bridewealth has been fully paid (mean score: 3.78) was more likely to abused than a woman whose bridewealth has been partially paid (mean score: 2.72) and she was also more likely to be beaten by the man than a woman whose bridewealth has not been paid (mean score: 2.52). A comparison of the mean perceptions of domestic violence across no bridewealth paid, some bridewealth paid and full bridewealth paid, show that as the proportion of bridewealth that has been paid increases, approval of domestic violence against women increases.

The mean perceptions of domestic violence against a woman for conditions related to contraception are higher than the means for conditions related to a woman’s personal economic activity with the exception of some bridewealth paid where the means are the same for contraception and a woman’s personal economic activity. This shows to a large extent that there is more approval of domestic violence against a woman when her behaviour involves contraception than when her behaviour involves her personal economic activity.

Table 1: Mean Perceptions of Domestic Violence across Experimental Conditions

Bridewealth Status	Contraception		Personal	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Subjects perception				
No Bridewealth Paid	2.52	2.248	2.04	1.953
Some Bridewealth Paid	2.72	2.605	2.72	2.419
Full Bridewealth Paid	3.78	3.306	3.33	3.063
Field work, 2011 condition			N= 46 in each	

The Effect of Bridewealth on Domestic Violence

There are two different explanatory variables in the model and for that matter the effect on the outcome of a change in one explanatory variable may either depend on the level of the other explanatory variable (interaction model) or not (additive model). To test the hypothesis, whether the outcome effect of bridewealth on a woman’s behaviours (contraception and personal economic activity) is different, an interaction model was first performed (using the General Linear Model). However, the interaction effect is not significant.

Table 2 shows the main effects of bridewealth and woman’s behaviour on the outcome variable (perceptions of domestic violence). Only bridewealth status had a significant effect on perceptions of domestic violence against a woman indicating that at least one level of bridewealth status was significantly different when it comes to domestic violence against women.

Table 2: The effect of bridewealth status and woman’s behaviour on domestic violence

Source	Type I Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	82.865 ^a	3	27.622	3.979	0.008
Bridewealth Status	76.230	2	38.115	5.490	0.005
Woman’s Behaviour	6.635	1	6.635	0.956	0.329
Error	1881.317	271	6.942		
Corrected Total	1964.182	274			

Field work, 2011 R squared = 0.042 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.032)

Post Hoc Analysis

From the post hoc analysis, the p-value (0.005) for bridewealth status shows that at least one level of bridewealth status is significantly different from the other two levels of bridewealth status. The Tukey HSD test shows that, there is no statistically significant difference between no bridewealth paid and some bridewealth paid. There is equally no statistically significant difference between some bridewealth paid and full bridewealth paid. This is an indication that with respect to domestic violence there is no difference between a woman whose bridewealth has not been paid and a woman whose bridewealth has been partially paid and there is equally no difference between some bridewealth paid and full bridewealth paid. There is however a statistical significant difference between no bridewealth and full bridewealth which indicates that, when bridewealth has been fully paid a woman is more likely to be beaten (by about 1.27) than a woman whose bridewealth has not been paid.

A woman’s behaviour is not statistically related to perceptions of domestic violence against women, which is an indication that domestic violence against women does not differ whether a woman’s behaviour is related to contraception or her personal economic activity. Despite the fact that a woman’s behaviour is not significant the estimated means is still examined to get more insights into the relationship between woman’s behaviour and domestic violence and since post hoc analysis for a variable with two categories the estimated means are used to determine which category is high. Table 6 shows the estimated means for categories of bridewealth status and woman’s behaviour. The mean for contraception (mean 3.007) is higher than that of a woman’s personal economic activity (mean 2.697); this is an indication that domestic violence is associated with contraception than a woman’s personal economic activity.

Experimental and Non-Experimental Determinants of Domestic Violence

The experimental and non-experimental predictors of perceptions of domestic violence are examined using multiple linear regression models. In model 1 only the experimental variables (bridewealth status and women’s autonomy) are examined while in model 2 the experimental and non-experimental variables are examined. Table 3 displays the results of a multiple linear regression model. Using the enter method, significant models emerged (Model 1: $F_{3, 271} = 3.979$, $p < 0.01$ and Model 2: $F_{18, 242} = 1.817$, $p < 0.05$). The adjusted R squared values for Models 1 and 2 of 0.032 and 0.054 respectively, shows that just about 3 and 5 per cent of the variations in the response variable are explained by the predictor variables. This is an indication that a large proportion of the variation in the response variable in both models is explained by variables that have not been controlled for.

Table 3: Multiple linear regression coefficients and standard errors for the relationship between domestic violence and the independent variables

	Model 1	Model 2
Independent Variables	Coefficient	Coefficient
Constant	2.129***	2.234
Bridewealth Status		
No Bridewealth paid (R)		
Some Bridewealth Paid	0.433	0.415
Full Bridewealth Paid	1.27***	1.241***
Woman’s Behaviour		
Personal (R)		
Contraception	0.311	0.225
(N=276)	Adjusted R ² = 0.032	Adjusted R ² = 0.054

(R) Reference Category, Std. Error - Standard Error, * Significant at α level =0.1, ** Significant at α level =0.05, *** Significant at α level=0.01

Model 1 on Table 3 shows that, full bridewealth is related to women’s perceptions of domestic violence. When some bridewealth (0.433 – not significant) has been paid the women believed the man’s behaviour of beating the woman over her taking decisions without telling him was right as compared to a woman on whom no bridewealth has been paid. When bridewealth has been fully paid (1.27 – significant) the women believed the man’s behaviour was more right as compared to a woman whose bridewealth has not been paid. This implies that a woman whose bridewealth has been fully paid is more likely to be abused than a woman whose bridewealth has been partially paid. A woman whose bridewealth has been partially paid is also more likely to be abused than a woman whose bridewealth has not been paid at all.

Model 1 on Table 4 again shows that, women are more likely to be abused in the domain of contraception than in the domain of a woman’s personal economic activity. However, the relationship was not significant. Contraception had no significant relationship with women’s perception of domestic violence. That notwithstanding the coefficient of 0.311 indicates that, the participants perceived the woman’s behaviour regarding contraception to warrant beating as compared to the behaviour related to her personal economic activity. This shows that men have more authority to beat women in the domain of contraception than in the domain of their personal economic business.

Full bridewealth paid was significantly related to women's perception of domestic violence against the woman but some bridewealth paid was not statistically significant. Despite the fact that some bridewealth paid was not significantly related to domestic violence, there was a pattern in the effect of bridewealth on women's perception of domestic violence. Again, the fact that some bridewealth paid was not significant. With regard to taking decisions autonomously, women whose bridewealth had been fully paid (1.241) were more exposed to domestic violence than those whose bridewealth had been paid partially (0.415) and they were also more exposed to abuse when they take decisions autonomously than those whose bridewealth had not been paid at all. It can be seen from model 2 on Table 4 that woman's behaviour, age of the participant, highest level of education, religion, number of children ever born, current marital status and ever observed violence were not significantly related to domestic violence.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study sought to examine the effect of bridewealth on domestic violence in two domains of women's lives in Ghana. This study shows that bridewealth payment has an effect on domestic violence against women. However the findings of this study are inconsistent with the existing literature on the relationship between bridewealth and domestic violence which seems to suggest that bridewealth affects domestic violence in the domain of issues that are related to the man and/or his "lineage". The findings show that bridewealth influences domestic violence beyond that to women's personal economic activities which they started with their own funds. This may be due to the fact that men after paying bridewealth feel they have "bought" their partners and for that matter they "own" (Chireshe and Chireshe, 2010).

The results also indicate that there was a significant difference in the effect of bridewealth status on domestic violence. The results suggest that a woman whose bridewealth has been fully paid is more likely to be abused than a woman whose bridewealth has been partially paid and she is also more likely to be abused than a woman whose bridewealth has not been paid at all, consistent with the argument that as the proportion of bridewealth that has been paid increases, women are more likely to be beaten. Even though in casual relationships men usually have some level of authority, it is not as exerting as when they have paid some bridewealth or when full bridewealth has been paid. This finding lends credence to the findings of Bawah et al., 1999, Davies, 1999, Kaye et al., 2005 and Chireshe and Chireshe, 2010 who all found that bridewealth payment has an effect on domestic violence against women.

On the other hand the results of the experiment were also inconsistent with the argument that women are more likely to be abused in the domain of contraception than in the domain of their personal economic activities. Even though African societies are mostly pro-natal and thus place so much value on child bearing than other aspects of a woman's life. The finding of this study showed no difference in violence against women whether a woman's behaviour was related to reproduction or her personal economic activity.

In conclusion the experiment has demonstrated the effect of bridewealth on domestic violence against women in two different domains, and for that in future female empowerment research the cultural norms associated with bridewealth payment and domestic violence against women may be an area to explore further and not only the public sphere measures (e.g. education).

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