

Who Should Versus Who Does: Couple Disagreement in Decision-Making and Domestic Violence in Ghana

Abstract

Using an index of agreement and disagreement between husbands and wives about who should, and who actually does make the final decision in five decision-making areas as a measure of power in marriage; this paper uses data from the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey of 2008 to investigate whether gender equitable attitudes lead to gender equitable behaviours, and whether these behaviours have an effect on domestic control and violence issues in Ghana. Preliminary findings indicate that there are marked discrepancies between husbands' statement of who should have final say and wives account of who does have final say in all the decisions considered. Further, all but one of the decisions is strongly associated with domestic violence. Further analysis will employ various regression models to tease out the details of the relationships between decision-making in the various spheres considered and different aspects of domestic violence.

Background

Studies of attitudes towards equity in a marriage have indicated that men who have more egalitarian views give more gender equitable answers when studied. It has been found in several studies that partners of such men who have egalitarian attitudes are much less likely to suffer from violence in these relationships e.g. Koenig *et al.*, 2003; Sugarman & Frankel (1996). Thus, it is often assumed that once a man claims to have gender equitable attitudes he will actually put those into practice. However, this may not be true. For instance, several studies have recorded discrepancies in husbands and wives answers to what happens in their households with respect to gender equitable actions even when the men had gender equitable attitudes (e.g. Allendorf, 2007; Ghuman *et al.*, 2006). If even in asking couples about what does happen, there are discrepancies; the question arises as to whether what men say they (will) do in situations is what they actually end up doing.

Couples make many decisions together in the course of their lives. Some of these may be on mundane issues, others deal with issues that are important and significantly affect one partner but not the other, whilst others deal with issues that are important to both partners. It is particularly in decisions in the second and third categories (important to just one or to both partners) that evidence of power differences, dominance and oppression may be seen. Dobash *et al.* (1992) argue that violence against wives usually occurs in a context of power asymmetry, amongst other enabling conditions (See also Daly and Wilson, 1990; Goetting 1988; Wilson and Daly 1985, 1991). Thus, using an index of disagreement in responses constructed from answers couples gave about who should, and who actually does have final say in making decisions in various scenarios, this paper draws on the principles of power differences and imbalances to investigate whether gender equitable attitudes lead to gender equitable behaviours, and whether these behaviours have an effect on domestic control and violence issues in Ghana.

Specifically, the questions that this paper seeks to answer are two: First, how much disagreement is there between who should have final say (from the man) and who does have final say (from the woman) in various decisions? Second, what are the consequences of

disagreement in the various areas of decision-making with respect to different aspects of spousal violence?

Data and Methods

Data used in this paper are from the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey of 2008. The survey was nationally representative, interviewing a total of 4,916 women aged 15-49 and 4,658 men aged 15-59 in 6,141 households. Of these men and women, 1,883 couples were included (i.e. either currently married or cohabiting at the time of the survey). Further, a sub-sample of 1,041 couples was selected to answer questions on domestic violence, namely; physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence and issues of control. The sample for this paper is those 1,041 couples.

In the survey, men were asked questions about *who should* have the final say in making certain decisions in the household. Women, on the other hand, were asked *who does* have final say in making some of those decisions. The decisions that both men and women were asked about are as follows:

the wife's earnings, the making of large household purchases, how many children to have, visits to the wife's family and friends and making household purchases for daily needs. For each decision, possible responses were:

the 'respondent only', 'respondent and partner', 'partner alone' and 'someone else, don't know or it depends'. For both men and women, less than 1.5% of responses for each question was a 'don't know/it depends/someone else'. The main independent variable for this paper is constructed from a combination of these questions asked of husbands and wives. This variable was created by putting respondents in nine different groups depending on whom the husband said should make the final decision on each decision considered, and who the wife said does make the final decision on that item. Thus the categories are:

1. Husband should and he does,
2. Wife should and she does,
3. Both should and both do,
4. Husband should and both do,
5. Wife should and both do,
6. Husband should and wife does,
7. Wife should and husband does,
8. Both should and husband does,
9. Both should and wife does.

These categories are further grouped for some of the analyses into four, namely:

"Truthful couples" – comprising groups 1, 2, and 3 above;

"Tolerant couples" – comprising groups 4 and 5 above;

Couples with a "dominant wife" – comprising groups 6 and 9 above; and,

Couples with a "dominant husband" – comprising groups 7 and 8 above.

Other analyses will use different combinations of the 9 main groups to test effects on the dependent variables.

The dependent variables are measures of four different groups of violence and control issues asked of wives only. They were asked various questions about whether they had ever experience certain instances of controlling or violent behaviour in their present union. These

are then grouped into control issues (9 questions), physical violence (7 questions), sexual violence (2 questions) and emotional violence (3 questions).

The first part of the analyses will look at associations between agreement of who should, versus who does have the final say for each decision considered and each of the four groups of violence/control issues. It will also examine associations between the main independent variables and a composite of all the violence and control issues (i.e., whether a woman has experienced any violence or control issue in her marriage). Further, several regression models will be run to ascertain the strength of the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent ones. The independent variables will first be run separately against each of the dependent variables. Further, the independent variables will all be used as predictors in one model with each dependent variable. Finally the independent variables will also be run against the composite of the violence variable (i.e. any domestic violence suffered). Binary logistic and ordinal logistic regression models will be used for these depending on whether the dependent variable is binary or polytomous. For the different stages of modelling two groups of control variables will be used. The first group will consist of gender attitudes and experiences; for example, attitudes towards wife beating of both men and women, whether there was domestic violence in respondents' childhood homes (whether fathers beat mother or vice versa, for both men and women), couples' agreement on fertility preferences, decision maker for contraceptive usage, etc. The second group of control variables which will be added on to the first are demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the couples for example; the age of each partner, age difference of the couple, ethnicity, religion, type of union (married or cohabiting), polygyny, educational attainment of each partner and earning differences between the man and the woman.

Preliminary Results and Expected Findings

From frequencies of the independent variable (agreement or disagreement in who the man says should make the decision versus who the woman says does make it), in four of the five decisions considered, the percentage of cases in which the person who the man says should make the decision actually ends up making it is less than 50%. It is only for decisions on how many children to have that that 54.4% of couples agree on who should and who does make the final decision. For the other four, agreement is between 37.8% and 44.9%.

With regards to the dependent variables, 35.9% of women have experienced some form of domestic violence (with some experiencing more than one of the forms) whilst in total, 71.8% of women have experienced some form of violence or control issue with their spouse. Chi-square statistics from crosstabulations of the dependent variables on the independent variables show that apart from the decision on wife's earnings which has no significant association with any of the dependent variables the other four independent variables have significant associations (at the 95% level of significance) with control issues, emotional violence and physical violence, and agreement on the decision on how many children to have also has a significant association with sexual violence.

It is expected that after controlling for the factors previously mentioned (attitudes and experiences, and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics) there will be clarity on what aspects of disagreement in decision-making have an influence on domestic violence. For example, in consonance with the findings of Kilson (1967), Oppong (1974) and other research conducted in Ghana that women seem to have quite a lot of autonomy in dealing with their own finances; disagreement on that decision is not significantly associated with

domestic violence. In addition only disagreement on the decision on the number of children to have is significantly associated with sexual violence. I hypothesize that given the nature of African society disagreement on fertility related decisions (number of children to have) and decisions that involve large sums of money (large household purchases) will be quite strong predictors of violence whilst more mundane issues (daily needs) may not be a strong predictor of domestic violence. Also, the decision on visits to the wife's family and friends may be a strong predictor of emotional violence and control issues since that is one area in which the husband may punish the wife on issues that are primarily important to her and her psychological well-being.

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