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Exploring the association between women's access to economic resources and intimate partner violence in Dar es Salaam and Mbeya, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between women's access to economic resources, e.g. employment or access to micro-credit, and experience of intimate partner violence is complex. Empirical evidence documents that in some settings women's employment is associated with higher risk of partner violence but in other settings with lower risk. Evidence also shows that these conflicting associations exist not only between countries but also within different country settings. Using two population-based data sets gathered in 2002 in contrasting Tanzania settings—Dar es Salaam and Mbeya—, we used multivariate logistic regression to examine the relationship between women's access to economic resources and partner violence. Two indicators of economic resources were examined: whether women earned money and whether women owned a business either with someone or exclusively. In Dar es Salaam we found evidence of a higher risk association among women who earned money and who owned a business exclusively by themselves and a lower risk association among women who owned a business with someone. We found no relationship between either indicator of economic resources and partner violence in Mbeya. Other factors were similarly associated with partner violence in both settings and the strongest associations found were related to the respondents' partners: refusal to give money; alcohol use and relationships with other women. The findings support the assertion that women's access to economic resources operate differently in different country settings, thus highlighting the need for targeted prevention efforts that are relevant for the context.

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1. Introduction

Violence by an intimate partner is one of the most common forms of violence against women. The World Health Organization's (WHO) multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women (WHO study)—a 15 site, ten country population-based survey conducted in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America—found between 15% and 71% of ever-partnered women aged 15–49 years had experienced physical or sexual

violence by a male partner in their lives (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006).

Various social and economic theories have been advanced to explain how women's risk of partner violence may be affected by the level of economic resources within a household. One view suggests that partner violence is higher within households that are at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale and that men who have low educational attainment, income or occupational status are more likely to perpetrate violence (Gelles, 1987; Goode, 1971; Straus, 1990). Either the stress of poverty leads to arguments over money if, e.g., women berate their husbands for being poor providers, or men feel frustrated by their economic vulnerability and become increasingly hostile towards their wives (Conger et al., 1990; Gelles, 1987; Straus, 1990).

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An alternative view argues that economic differentials that favour women (i.e. women who are employed when their partner is not, have a higher income than their partner, or who have a higher educational level than their partner), increases women's risk of partner violence because of challenges to established gender norms (Anderson, 1997; Atkinson et al., 2005; Macmillan and Gartner, 1999). Men who hold traditional values and ideologies that emphasise male power use violence to compensate for their threatened sense of masculinity and attempt to re-establish their power at home (Anderson, 1997; Atkinson et al., 2005; Kaukinen, 2004).

In contrast, other family violence theorists argue that domestic violence is particularly acute among poor women who are economically dependent on their partner. Economic dependency traps women in marriage, especially when traditional values place the burden of family harmony on them, forcing women to tolerate abuse (Kalmuss and Straus, 1982; Pagelow, 1981; Rusbult and Martz, 1995; Strube and Barbour, 1983; Yount, 2005). This view is corroborated by economists who argue that women who earn an independent income or who have higher educational attainment are at lower risk of partner violence (Tauchen and Witte, 1995; Tauchen et al., 1991). Women are either more valued by their partner, or the exposure to a wider social network enable them to negotiate for change in their relationship, or to seek outside help or to leave an abusive partner (Brandwein, 1999; Davis, 1999; Gelles, 1976).

A systematic review of published studies from low and middle income countries (LMIC) found consistent support for some of these views (Vyas and Watts, 2009). For example, supporting the assertion that poverty stress increases risk of partner violence against women, higher household asset wealth (a measure of household socioeconomic status (SES)) was found to be significantly associated with lower past year partner violence in eight, of sixteen, sites; and men's higher educational attainment (secondary or more) was found to be significantly associated with lower past year violence in six, of thirteen, sites (all other associations were non significant). There was also evidence to support the view that status inconsistencies that favour women serve to challenge gender norms and increases risk of partner violence, as women's higher educational attainment, relative to their partners, was associated with higher past year partner violence in five, of eleven, sites (all other associations were non significant) (Vyas and Watts, 2009).

Depending on the indicator of women's economic status measure, evidence to support dependency or bargaining theories was mixed. While women's higher educational attainment (secondary or more) was generally found to be protective against partner violence—eight, of fourteen, sites documented a significant lower risk association and one a significant higher risk association—, findings on women's employment and participation in microcredit schemes yielded conflicting evidence and not only between countries but also within different country settings. Women's employment was found to be associated with lower past year partner violence in Egypt and Haiti and with higher violence in India, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua (Gage, 2005; Kishor and Johnson, 2004; Naved and Persson, 2005). A study from ten districts (undefined) in Bangladesh documented a lower risk association between women's employment and past year partner violence, a separate study, however, found a higher risk association in Matlab, rural Bangladesh (Hadi, 2005; Naved and Persson, 2005). Women's participation in micro-credit was associated with lower past year partner violence in South Africa (Limpopo) and Bangladesh (urban and rural mixed), and higher violence in two other Bangladesh settings (Dhaka and Sirajgonj) (Koenig et al.,

2003; Pronyk et al., 2006; Schuler et al., 1996).

Given that economically empowering women is a mainstay of many development programmes, and that this strategy can impact on partner violence differently in different settings, it is important to understand the relationship in different contexts; not only between countries but also within a country.

In Tanzania high gender inequality exists in women's employment opportunities and prevalence of partner violence is high. The vast majority of women in Tanzania are economically active outside of the household, predominantly within the agricultural sector. Since 2000, an increasing proportion of women have been seeking paid work. Women are, however, under-represented in the formal workforce (29% compared with 71% of men) and are more likely to engage in informal sector trading activities where their participation has steadily increased from 35% (in 2000) to 40% (in 2006) (Ellis et al., 2007; National Bureau of Statistics Tanzania, 2001, 2007).

The 2010 Tanzania DHS estimates nationally 44% of ever-married (includes cohabiting) women (aged 15–49) have ever experienced physical or sexual violence by their current or most recent partner; 37% in the past 12 months (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) [Tanzania] and ICF Macro, 2011).

Three studies have explored the correlates of past year partner violence in four Tanzanian settings [see Box 1 for study details and list of correlates]. Abramsky and colleagues used data from the WHO multi-country study to examine the association between various factors and a woman's risk of partner violence depending on whether the woman only, the partner only, or both members of the couple displayed the characteristic in Dar es Salaam (DSM) and Mbeya (Abramsky et al., 2011). Factors relating to relationship power were explored in Moshi, and socio-demographic characteristics were explored in Meatu (Gonzalez-Brenes, 2003; McCloskey et al., 2005).

These studies did not reveal evidence to support the theory that poverty stress within households increases women's risk of partner violence as measured by household SES (in DSM, Mbeya or Meatu) and men's schooling (in Meatu). Also, there was no evidence to support the view that status inconsistency that favour women challenges household gender relations and increases women's risk of partner violence. The Abramsky study explored women's primary school completion in relation to their partners. While the results were not statistically significant in either setting, compared to women with no education, risk of past year violence was lower in Mbeya if the woman only, her partner only or both had completed primary schooling, but completing primary school (either woman only or both) increased risk in DSM. Status inconsistency in employment (where one partner is employed and the other is not) was not associated with violence in either setting. The relationship between women's educational attainment and partner violence, however, lends support to the assertion that women's low educational attainment forces them to tolerate abuse and/or hampers their ability to negotiate violence free lives. In Moshi women who had primary schooling or less (compared to at least some secondary schooling) and in Meatu women who had no schooling (compared to at least some schooling) were at significantly higher risk of partner violence.

Thus, the most compelling evidence found in the three previous studies from Tanzania relate to women's status as measured by their educational attainment. Using the WHO study data collected in DSM and Mbeya, this study aims to further explore how women's current access to economic resources (employment and ownership of a business) are associated with the occurrence of past 12 month physical or sexual partner violence; and to assess the extent to which the findings are similar or different between the two

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