

The Effects of Differential Spousal Earnings on Domestic Work and Intimate Partner Abuse in Ghana

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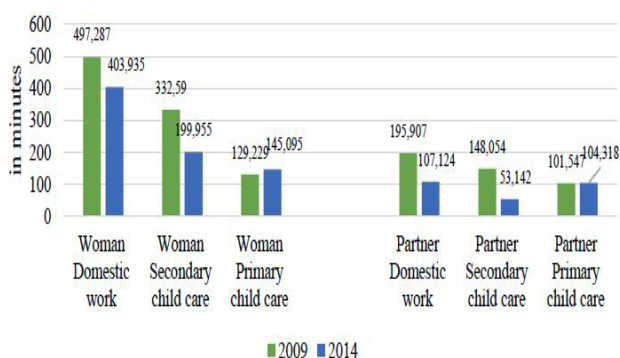
Higher spousal earnings by Ghanaian women reduces domestic work burdens and protects against intimate partner abuse.

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Topic at a Glance

In almost all countries around the world, women and girls spend more time on domestic work and childcare than do men and boys. The situation is worse in developing countries like Ghana. A consequence of these increased domestic care burdens is that women have limited opportunities to engage in paid work and earn incomes, a situation which can limit their bargaining and decision-making power within the household. Furthermore, when women are fully engaged in the business of domestic and care work, they also experience reduced opportunities for training and educational pursuits. Besides, heavy domestic and childcare burdens can put women's health at risk. Linked to this is also the increasing incidence of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Ghana with noted deleterious effects on women's physical and mental welfare. In this paper, we explore whether women's earnings improve their bargaining position and reduce their domestic and childcare burdens, as well as their experience of physical and/or emotional violence.

Average Time Spent in Domestic and Childcare work by Women and Partners, GSEPS, 2009-2014



New Insights

Very little research has been done on the factors that contribute to the division of domestic work among spouses in a developing country context, and how differences in spousal earnings can affect the division of work and childcare within the home. Most available studies on IPV are limited to developed countries, with limited evidence focused on sub-Saharan African countries, including Ghana.

During the course of a marriage or a consensual union women perform more domestic work and childcare tasks than do their partners

- This is explained by the presence of children and other adult household members. As children grow older, male partners withdraw their participation in housework such as sweeping, scrubbing and doing laundry. The presence of older women in the household also relieves men (and in some cases, women as well) from carrying out much domestic work.

- Cultural norms and expectations also play a significant role in the distribution of domestic and care work within the household. In qualitative interviews conducted among couples in various parts of the country, women reported that they c/would not ask their male partners to carry out housework for fear of societal backlash, given socially accepted gendered roles. It is important to note that with the increase in education and westernization, there is some evidence of a growing acceptance of men's participation in housework.

Women reduce the amount of time spent in domestic work and taking care of children while performing other tasks as their earnings increase.

- A likely explanation for this is that the increased earnings may allow women to outsource domestic chores to domestic workers or purchase more domestic technology. Interestingly, as women's absolute earnings increase, men spend more time exclusively on childcare. A couple of reasons may explain this. First, women's high earnings may necessitate longer hours spent at their workplaces so

that men spend more time looking after children at home. Second, higher earnings by women may lead to them socializing more and spending more time away from the home so that childcare responsibilities are taken up by men.

Women who have larger shares of spousal income appear to spend less time exclusively on childcare.

- Higher relative earnings by women may not necessarily imply that men are carrying out more housework. Indeed, we find no evidence of this. Rather, higher earning women may be able to afford more domestic technology and domestic hired workers to help with childcare.

Higher earnings serve as a protective factor against violence towards women in Ghana.

- Existing research suggests that in situations where women earn more than their partners, (a perceived deviation from the status quo), men will exhibit greater aggression towards their wives as women's relative earnings increase. Our results for Ghana are not consistent with these expectations and women's higher relative earnings are found to be a protective shield against spousal abuse. In Ghana, there is the expectation that women work and contribute towards household resources. It is, therefore, no surprise that Ghana has 72% of females engaged in its labour force. In the face of social expectations which are positively inclined to women's employment, men are more likely to recognize the benefits of an additional household income and place increased "value" on their wives, leading to a lower likelihood of IPV. A woman who fulfils her obligations with regards to her contributions to the household may also enjoy greater confidence, allowing her to negotiate positive outcomes in her relationship. Another reason why increasing relative earnings may be protective against IPV is that it likely provides a woman with the monetary ability to exit an abusive relationship.

In summary, Ghanaian women spend more time on domestic and childcare work, compared to their male partners. The presence of older children and other adult women in the household may partially contribute to this phenomenon. Although its effect appears to be decreasing over time, cultural and societal expectations also contribute to gendered roles that allocate a higher proportion of housework to women. Using quantitative data from the Ghana Socioeconomic Panel Survey (GSEPS) for 2009 and 2014, we found that the time that women spent on domestic and childcare work reduced as their absolute and relative spousal incomes increased. We also found that higher relative spousal earnings are protective against intimate partner abuse experienced by women.

Policy Recommendations

- Improve the opportunities for decent employment for women

There are indications that higher earnings are important for re-

ducing women's domestic work and childcare burdens and for protecting women against intimate partner violence. Women should also acquire greater skills training, particularly in digital skills, financial and business literacy.

- Increased education to change social and cultural expectations, and early socialisation of children to carry out domestic work equally within Ghanaian households.

Men and women should be socialized to appreciate the need for cooperation in carrying out domestic and childcare responsibilities within the household. Traditionally gendered roles which place a heavy domestic work burden on women, combined with women's increased roles in the labour market, have adverse implications for their health and economic wellbeing.

Limitations

The following limitations are noted:

The issue of missing data plagues earnings and time use variables in the GSEPS data. We therefore employed a multiple imputation technique as a solution to this. It is important to mention that although the research establishes that increases in wives' earnings reduce their housework time, we acknowledge that it is not possible for us to determine the causal mechanism that is responsible for this relationship. Wives may decrease their time in housework as their earnings rise either because they are out-sourcing domestic labor to hired helps or because they are foregoing housework without purchasing a substitute for their own time. The presence of panel data is, however, a major strength of this research as previous evaluations of these theories have not used longitudinal data that can control for the fact that the case of couples in which the wife out-earns the husband may differ in systematic ways from other couples, thus affecting their housework time. Data concerning domestic violence tend to suffer from underreporting and may therefore cause measurement errors. Data limitations also do not allow to take into account factors at the community level, such as weak community sanctions against domestic violence. Additionally, future research may explore religious and cultural factors as potential moderators to the earnings-IPV relationship.

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