

Is couple heterogamy associated with intimate partner violence against women? Evidence from the Generations and Gender Survey

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Abstract

The study of intimate partner violence against women is of paramount importance as it has devastating consequences for the physical and mental health of the victims, as well as for society as a whole. Using the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGG-I), the aim of this study is to shed light on the link between differences in resources between partners and couple violence. The research questions that will guide our approach are: 1) Is educational heterogamy in a couple associated with intimate partner violence against women? 2) Is the accumulation of forms of heterogamy even more strongly associated with intimate partner violence against women? 3) Do gender attitudes have a moderating role? The aim of this study is thus to examine whether, within heterosexual couples, disparities in resources translate into varying probabilities of violent acts committed by men. Although some studies have addressed this phenomenon, they have mainly focused on income disparities. Moreover, to our knowledge, no quantitative study has attempted to analyze the interactive effect of several types of heterogamy in explaining domestic violence, or considered the moderating role of gender attitudes.

1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV), also known as domestic violence, is defined by the World Health Organization as "any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to people in the relationship" (WHO, 2002). It is estimated that over 75% of violence against women is perpetrated by their male intimate partners (WHO, 20005) and that the proportion of women who have experienced partner violence is as high as 45% (FRA, 2014). The study of IPV is of paramount importance as it has devastating consequences for the physical and mental health of the victims, as well as for society as a whole. Identifying the underlying causes of this violence, understanding how it is perpetuated and examining the impact on individuals and communities enables us to formulate more effective policies and interventions to prevent and combat it.

Taking power inequalities into account proves crucial to a better understanding of the mechanisms of violence (Fleming et al., 2015a). With this in mind, some theories have focused on the resources of each partner and the disparities that may exist between them. However, while social exchange theory suggests that women's empowerment can protect them from domestic violence (Gelles, 1983; Fleming et al., 2015b), masculinity theory argues the opposite, asserting that such empowerment can increase the risk of violence by fostering relationships where men feel threatened by evolving traditional norms (Connell, 1995).

The aim of this study is therefore to shed light on the link between differences in resources between partners and couple violence. The research questions that will guide our approach are: 1) Is educational heterogamy in a couple associated with IPV against women? 2) Is the accumulation of forms of heterogamy even more strongly associated with IPV against women? 3) Do gender attitudes have a moderating effect on IPV? The aim of this study is thus to examine whether, within heterosexual couples, disparities in resources translate into varying probabilities of violent acts committed by men. Although some studies have addressed this phenomenon, they have mainly focused on income

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disparities. Moreover, to our knowledge, no quantitative study has attempted to analyze the interactive effect of several types of heterogamy in explaining domestic violence. Finally, given that gender role norms and attitudes appear to play a crucial role in the perpetration of violence (Fleming et al., 2015b), we will also include these aspects in our analysis. This study will use data of European countries from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGI).

2. Literature review

2.1 Theory of masculinities

In the literature devoted to violence in marital relationships, the fundamental theory of masculinities suggests that the existence of cultural norms linked to masculinity can lead some men to resort to violent acts against others (Connell, 1995). Men who seek to conform to gender role expectations, but find that there is a gap between these ideals and their ability to achieve them, experience what Pleck (1995) has termed a "gender role gap". To overcome this gap, some individuals may opt for violence as a means of regaining or attaining a "masculine status", which encourages them to value hierarchy, and which has been socially inculcated in them (Bosson, 2009; Fleming et al., 2015b).

The gender reversal in education has brought about changes in the dynamics of heterosexual couples. We're seeing more and more hypogamous couples, in which women have more advanced education or higher incomes than their partners (Esteve et al., 2012). This hypogamy could then be one of the sources of "gender role gaps" since the pattern of these couples runs counter to traditional gender role expectations that men should have a higher income or level of education.

This gender role gap can be seen as a "stress factor" for men, as their status does not correspond to the social norms they have been inculcated with. They then have two ways of reacting (Glanz and Schwartz, 2008): either by changing their thinking and questioning gender norms, or by managing the problem of being perceived as unmasculine by adopting behaviors that reinforce their masculinity, such as violence or aggression (Fleming et al., 2015b).

Empirically, conflicts related to transgressions of gender norms and the inability to satisfy cultural stereotypes are among the most important variables in the risk of domestic violence and sexual violence by men (Dardis et al., 2014; Jewkes, 2002). Consistently, a recent study by Barbier et al (2022) showed that domestic violence is more frequent in couples where the man earns a lower income than the woman.

2.2 Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory suggests that violence occurs when the benefits associated with violent acts outweigh the costs incurred (Lawson, 2012). In particular, the costs of violence (such as the loss of the relationship, economic and social sanctions or a negative perception of masculinity) decreases when the couple's relationship presents inequalities in terms of economic resources or physical resources (Gelles, 1983): in case of imbalance in these resources, victims would have fewer means of reacting to or denouncing the violence and those with more power within the couple can afford to be violent (Riger et al., 2000). With educational gender reversal, this theory would predict that violence would decrease as women's resources increased: as women gained greater resources, they also gained power.

Empirical studies converge with this theory. Firstly, hypergamy does seem to reinforce men's power relations within couples. Pyke and colleagues (2010), in their analysis of power dynamics within hypergamous couples, observed that age difference plays a significant role in power relations, particularly when combined with other forms of hypergamy such as professional status, social origin, racial and ethnic status, as well as level of education. Consequently, it would seem that the accumulation of various forms of hypergamy increases the risks of male domination, and potentially, if we stick to social exchange theory, of violence.

Secondly, it would appear that education benefits women by dissolving violent marriages (Kreager et al., 2013), with those with higher levels of education leaving this type of relationship more easily. This would therefore support the theory that women with fewer resources have fewer ways of responding to violence. However, this study did not examine the woman's education relative to that of her partner, so we cannot confirm a potential link between educational heterogamy and violence. To our knowledge, no study has focused on the link between educational heterogamy and violence based on this theory.

3. Research questions and hypotheses

The aim of this study is to establish the link between educational heterogamy and IPV by seeking to elucidate the various mechanisms underlying this relationship. To this end, in addition to the main research question, two sub-questions will be formulated to better understand the complex mechanisms involved in this dynamic.

Is educational heterogamy associated with IPV against women? Alternative hypotheses will be established. Based on the fundamental theory of masculinities, which suggests that the existence of cultural norms linked to masculinity may lead some men to resort to violent acts, we will assume that *the risk of men resorting to violent acts will be greater when the couple is hypogamous compared with other types of couples (H1a)*. Based on exchange theory, which assumes that violence will be used more when the woman has few resources to react, we will assume that *the risk of men resorting to violent acts will be greater when the couple is hypergamous compared with other types of couples (H1b)*.

Is the accumulation of forms of heterogamy even more strongly associated with IPV against women? Following on from the above hypotheses, and based on the empirical findings of Pyke et al. (2010), we assume that violence will increase if the couple accumulates several forms of heterogamy, i.e. if, in addition to one partner having a higher level of education, he or she also has a higher income or is older. In the case of the masculinity hypothesis, *the risk of men resorting to violent acts will be amplified by accumulation of forms of hypogamy (H2a)*, as the couple accumulates experiences of non-conformity to social norms. In the case of exchange theory, we will assume that *the risk of men resorting to violent acts will be amplified by accumulation of forms of hypergamy (H2b)*, as the woman accumulates a lack of resources to act against this violence.

Do gender attitudes have a moderating effect on partner violence? In both theories presented, the perception of traditional gender norms seems to have an impact on men's interest in resorting to violence. We will therefore assume that *the risk of men resorting to violent acts will be moderated by more egalitarian gender opinions (H3)*.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data

Data come from the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGG-I), a panel survey covering topics related to children, partners, parents, work, and daily life. It was conducted from 2004 to 2012 in 19 European countries.

To answer our question about how heterogamy in parenting is linked to IPV we selected people in heterosexual couple relationships. We then removed those countries that did not ask the question of partner violence. We have also dropped those who did not respond to the module for couples, and who gave no indication of their level of education or that of their partner. In the end, our sample comprises 29,449 men aged between 17 and 82 from 10 different European countries: Bulgaria, Russia, Georgia, Germany, France, Romania, Austria, Belgium, Lithuania and the Czech Republic.

4.2 Analytical Strategy

For the first question, "Is educational heterogamy associated with IPV against women?", we will test alternative hypotheses H1a and H1b by running a linear probability model, in which the dependent variable will be the presence of acts of violence perpetrated by the man in the couple (IPV against women) and the main independent variable will be the type of couple (hypergamous - homogamous - hypogamous).

For the second question, "Is the accumulation of forms of heterogamy even more strongly associated with IPV against women?", we will test alternative hypotheses 2a and 2b using a linear probability model for the IPV against women and considering the interaction between different type of couple heterogamy (education, age, etc.).

Finally, for the last question, "Do gender attitudes have a moderating effect on couple violence?", we will test hypothesis 3 using a linear probability model for the IPV against women and considering the interaction between educational heterogamy and gender attitudes.

5. Preliminary results

Bivariate analysis (Table 1) shows that IPV against women is less frequent in hypogamous couples, supporting the exchange theory. This result is confirmed in the linear probability model controlling for men's age and country of residence (Table 2). In the next steps of the study, we will consider further control variables, while addressing the accumulation hypothesis (H2) and the hypothesis on the moderating role of gender attitudes (H3).

Table 1 Association between type of couple in terms of education and violence

	No violence	Violence	Total
Hypogamy	3,448 81.44	786 18.56	4,234 100.00
Homogamy	15,466 78.74	4,175 21.26	19,641 100.00
Hypergamay	4,412 79.15	1,162 20.85	5,574 100.00

Source: data are from GGS-I. Calculations by the authors. $p < 0.001$

Table 2 Linear probability models of violent acts against women

	Model 1	Model 2
Differences in education (<i>ref = homogamy</i>)		
Hypogamy (men education < women education)	-0.027*** [-0.040 - -0.013]	-0.027*** [-0.041 - -0.014]
Hypergamay (men education > women education)	-0.004 [-0.016 - 0.008]	-0.006 [-0.018 - 0.006]
Country of residence		-0.004*** [-0.006 - 0.004]
Men's age		0.001*** [0.000 - 0.001]

Source: data are from GGS-I. Calculations by the authors. (*= $p < 0.1$ **= $p < 0.05$ ***= $p < 0.01$)

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