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Experiences of childhood violence and violence perpetration and the association with inequitable gender norms and violence justification in humanitarian settings in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Experiences of childhood violence and violence perpetration and the association with inequitable gender norms and violence justification have been extensively studied in non-humanitarian settings, and among older populations. However, there is a gap in understanding these associations within humanitarian contexts, particularly from the perspective of children and youth. We used data from the Uganda Humanitarian Violence Against Children and Youth Survey, a representative, cross-sectional household survey of 2,265 children and youth aged 13–24 years living in refugee settlements in Uganda. We explored associations between endorsement of inequitable gender norms, intimate partner violence (IPV) justification, and experiences of violence and/or perpetration of violence in childhood. Experience of any childhood violence was significantly associated with an increase in endorsement of inequitable gender norms among females and IPV justification among males. This pattern was similar for 18-24-year-olds. Among 13-17-year-olds, IPV justification was significantly associated with experience of any childhood violence among females and perpetration of violence among males. Our findings suggest the need for gender-transformative violence prevention interventions that start early in the life course, and that address inequitable gender socialisation and power relations. School-based violence prevention interventions, community-based approaches to form gender equitable attitudes among adolescents, parenting interventions, and interventions with children and adolescents that had experienced childhood violence have shown considerable success in other settings, and could be adapted to humanitarian settlements.

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Introduction

Findings from the Uganda Humanitarian Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (HVACS), a representative cross-sectional household survey of refugee settlements in the country, showed that violence against children is pervasive in these settings. Nearly half of respondents reported experiencing any violence (sexual, physical, emotional) in childhood (Obare et al., 2024). In a large majority of the cases of childhood violence experienced, the perpetrators were commonly known to child survivors, and primarily included intimate partners, classmates/schoolmates or peers, parents or adult caregivers, and adult members of their community. Despite this, levels of disclosure and help-seeking were very low (Obare et al., 2024).

Childhood violence may be reinforced by inequitable gender norms and attitudes. Associations between gender inequity indices and child abuse or maltreatment (severe physical punishment) across several countries has been well established (Klevens & Ports, 2017). Gender is a complex social construct that shapes the life experiences of all human beings (L. Heise et al., 2019). Gender inequality and restrictive gender norms have serious implications for health through their influence on health-related behaviours,

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access to care, and health functionality systems (L. Heise et al., 2019). Typically passed down intergenerationally, gender norms are collective views regarding how people should behave, including within the context of intimate relationships (L. Heise, 2011; Pulerwitz & Barker, 2008). Measuring attitudes towards gender norms can reveal the extent of a shared acceptance of gender inequity and associated partner violence (L. L. Heise & Kotsadam, 2015).

There is wide endorsement of inequitable gender norms and justification of IPV in several sub-Saharan African countries, with women being more likely than men to justify partner violence in cases where women are presumed to transgress gender norms (Darteh et al., 2021; Uthman et al., 2009). Bukuluki and colleagues (2021) found that a higher proportion of females than males agreed that men's power is the reason for violence against women (Bukuluki et al., 2021). Gilbert et al. (2022) found that among Nigerian youth, significantly more females than males endorsed at least one inequitable gender norm about intimate partner violence against women (IPVAW) (Gilbert et al., 2022). In Ethiopia, Murphy et al. (2021) found that community-level (in rural areas) and individual-level (in urban areas) gender norms that condone violent discipline, promote masculinities focused on violence, and support gender inequality were associated with experiences of household (physical or emotional/psychological) violence among young adolescents (Murphy et al., 2021). High levels of social and individual acceptance and IPV justification were also found among couples in northern Tanzania, with seven out of ten men justifying a husband's perpetration of IPV, and more than half of men and women reporting that a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together (Messersmith et al., 2021).

Associations between inequitable gender norms and experience of sexual violence and perpetration have also been investigated, albeit not critically examined in humanitarian settings. A longitudinal study of rural Indonesian women found a high degree of gender-based subordination within their marital relationships, maintained and reinforced through physical and sexual violence that was related to traditional gender norms (Hayati et al., 2011). Women who did not support the right of women to refuse sex were more likely to experience physical violence, and those who justified being beaten were more likely to experience sexual violence (Hayati et al., 2011). Findings from a study of Peruvian male adolescents showed that a third of them reported sexual aggression towards a partner (sexual contact with an unwilling partner, sexual coercion, attempted rape, and rape), with having been a survivor of sexual abuse themselves and being supportive of rape being the strongest predictors of sexual aggression (Moyano et al., 2017). In South Africa, a country with the highest prevalence of gender-based violence for a country not at war (Moffett, 2008), nearly a third of men had raped a woman and slightly more than half of them had perpetrated rape on multiple occasions (Jewkes et al., 2011). Perpetrating rape was associated with experiencing higher adversity in childhood, having been raped by a man, and gender inequitable views and practices including physical partner violence (Jewkes et al., 2011).

Available literature on the relationships between inequitable gender norms and experience of any violence and perpetration has excluded humanitarian populations, and more specifically, children and youth in refugee settings. Data from children and young people in refugee settings is valuable for informing the design of interventions to prevent and respond to violence in such settings. In this paper, we examined if endorsement of inequitable gender norms and IPV justification are associated with childhood experiences of any violence (including physical, sexual, and emotional) and perpetration of violence (including physical and sexual violence perpetration) in humanitarian settings and among children and youth living in refugee settlements in Uganda.

Methods

Study design and sample

The Uganda HVACS study design has been published and the methodology described in detail elsewhere (Kisaakye et al., 2024; Obare et al., 2024; Odwe et al., 2024). Briefly, we used data from the Uganda HVACS, the first-ever Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS) conducted exclusively in a humanitarian setting, and specifically, in refugee settlements in Uganda. Conducted between March and April 2022, the Uganda HVACS replicated the standard VACS methodology (Chiang et al., 2016; Nace et al., 2022). It was a representative, cross-sectional household survey of female and male children and youth aged 13–24 years in all 13 refugee settlements in Uganda. The survey did not include urban refugees living in Kampala and other urban areas as well as children and youth in refugee reception centres or rescue homes.

Sampling, training and data collection

As with typical VACS, we employed a three-stage cluster and split sampling design (Chiang et al., 2016). The sampling design, training and data collection procedures are described in detail elsewhere (Obare et al., 2024). The response rate for females was 46.6% (53.3% household response rate and 87.5% individual response rate) while that for males was 50.6% (56.2% household response rate and 90.1% individual response rate). Data collection was completed by extensively trained field teams. Each of these data collection teams were accompanied by a qualified psychosocial counsellor to provide first-line counselling and/or referral to participants who needed such support.

Measures

Experience of any childhood violence was defined as self-reported experiences of sexual, physical, and emotional violence in childhood. To capture experience of any childhood violence, we used a composite score for any positive responses to questions administered to children aged 13–17 years about ever experiencing sexual, physical, and/or emotional violence (lifetime exposure), and used any positive responses to questions about experiencing sexual, physical, and/or emotional violence before the age of 18 years for youth aged 18–24 years.

Sexual violence was defined as having experienced one or more incidents of unwanted sexual touching; attempted forced sex; pressured or coerced sex; or, physically forced sex, perpetrated by any person.

Physical violence was defined as having experienced one or more incidents of slapping, pushing, shoving, shaking, or of having something thrown at the respondent to intentionally hurt them; punching, kicking, whipping, or being beaten with an object; choking, smothering, trying to drown them, or burning them intentionally; or, using or threatening them with a knife, gun or other weapon, perpetrated by an intimate partner, peer, parent or adult caregiver or other adult relative, and/or other adults in the community.

Emotional violence was defined as having experienced one or more incidents of being told that they were not loved or did not deserve to be loved; being told that they should never have been born or should have died; or, being ridiculed or put down, perpetrated by a parent or adult caregiver or other adult relative, an intimate partner, or peer.

Perpetration of violence was defined as having perpetrated any acts of physical or sexual violence to a current, ex-partner or non-partner. We created a composite score for any positive responses about ever having perpetrated any acts of physical violence on a current or ex-partner (partner violence) or to someone who was not a current or ex-partner (non-partner violence), as well as any positive responses about ever having perpetrated any acts of sexual violence on a current or ex-partner (partner violence) or someone who was not a current or ex-partner (non-partner violence). Questions on perpetration of emotional violence were not included in the survey.

Endorsement of inequitable gender norms: To explore gendered attitudes, we considered questions about (a) participants' beliefs on whether only men and not women should decide when to have sex; (b) whether they agreed that if someone insulted a boy or man that he should defend his reputation with force if he needed to; (c) whether they believed that there are times when a woman should be beaten; (d) if they agreed that women who carry condoms have sex with a lot of men; (e) their views on whether a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together; (f) whether women and men should share authority in the family; and (g) if they believed that a woman should be able to spend her money according to her own will. A response of 'yes' to the first five questions (a–e) was coded as 1, and a response of 'no' was coded as 0. We reverse-scored responses to questions f and g ('yes' coded as 0, and 'no' coded as 1). We then created a continuous scale by summing up responses to the seven questions, with a total possible score of between 0 and 7 points. Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability test of 0.89 indicated that the gender inequitable norms scale is a reliable representation of the individual indicators.

IPV Justification We considered questions about participants' opinions as to whether husbands would be justified in hitting or beating their wives in situations including her (a) going out without informing him; (b) neglecting the children; (c) arguing with him; (d) refusing to have sex with him; and (e) burning the food. A response of 'yes' to all the five questions (a–e) was coded as 1, and a response of 'no' coded as 0. We then created a continuous scale by summing up responses to the five questions, with a total

possible score of between 0 and 5 points. Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability test of 0.87 indicated that IPV justification scale is a reliable representation of the individual indicators.

Analysis

We generated descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to show the distribution of study respondents by selected demographic characteristics for females and males. We used bivariate chi-square tests to examine whether experience of any childhood violence and perpetration were associated with inequitable gender norms and IPV justification. We then estimated multivariable logistic regression models to examine whether the experience of any childhood violence and perpetration of violence were associated with inequitable gender norms and IPV justification while controlling for background factors (age, education, country of origin, working for pay in the past year, and marital status). The multivariable logistic regression model is defined as below:

$$y = B_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + B_kX_k + \zeta_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where y is the dependent variable, B_0 is the intercept, B_1, B_2, B_k are coefficients for having inequitable gender norms and justifying IPV, (respectively, X_1, X_2, X_k is the vector of estimates for other covariates included in the model), and ζ_{ij} is the residual that accounts for clustering of individuals sampled from the same zone.

Results from the multivariable logistic regression models are presented as adjusted odds ratios (aOR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI). All estimates with $p < 0.05$ were considered statistically significant. All estimates were weighted to account for the complex survey design and representativeness using the `svy` command. Data were analyzed using STATA Version 15.1 (Stata Corp., College Station, TX) (StataCorp, 2017).

Results

Prevalence of childhood violence and perpetration

The results in Table 1 show the prevalence of experiencing violence and perpetration by socio-demographic characteristics. Among females and males aged 13–17 years, 37.7% and 61.7% respectively, reported ever experiencing any childhood violence, and 2.6% of both females and males reported perpetrating violence. Among females and males aged 18–24 years, 44.1% and 49.9% respectively, reported experiencing any

Table 1. Prevalence of childhood violence and perpetration by sociodemographic characteristics, Uganda HVACS 2022.

| Characteristics | Experience of any childhood violence ^a | | | | Perpetration of violence ^b | | | | Overall | |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------------|-------------|------------|
| | Females | | Males | | Females | | Males | | Females % | Males % |
| | Weighted % [95% CI] | <i>p</i> -value | Weighted % [95% CI] | <i>p</i> -value | Weighted % [95% CI] | <i>p</i> -value | Weighted % [95% CI] | <i>p</i> -value | (n) | (n) |
| Age in years | | 0.242 | | 0.021 | | 0.074 | | 0.005 | | |
| 13–17 | 37.7 [32.7–43.1] | | 61.7 [51.7–70.8] | | 2.6 [1.0–6.7] | | 2.6 [1.2–5.3] | | 51.4 (716) | 48.5 (532) |
| 18–24 | 44.1 [32.3–56.6] | | 49.9 [43.2–56.7] | | 6.7 [3.6–12.1] | | 13.3 [6.1–26.6] | | 48.6 (622) | 51.5 (395) |
| Ever attended school | | 0.904 | | 0.928 | | 0.002 | | 0.096 | | |
| Yes | 41.0 [33.8–48.7] | | 57.2 [50.8–63.3] | | 4.0 [2.2–7.4] | | 7.9 [3.9–15.3] | | 93.4 (1202) | 97.1 (870) |
| No | 41.9 [26.9–58.5] | | 58.2 [32.7–79.9] | | 12.7 [6.6–23.1] | | 23.9 [7.0–56.6] | | 6.6 (129) | 2.9 (45) |
| Country of origin | | 0.040 | | 0.850 | | 0.057 | | 0.368 | | |
| South Sudan | 36.0 [30.3–42.1] | | 55.9 [48.3–63.2] | | 3.5 [1.6–7.4] | | 8.7 [3.6–19.4] | | 66.0 (658) | 66.9 (458) |
| DRC | 47.9 [33.7–62.5] | | 55.9 [40.7–70.0] | | 5.7 [3.2–10.0] | | 8.9 [3.9–19.0] | | 28.2 (606) | 25.0 (418) |
| Others* | 61.6 [56.9–66.0] | | 52.9 [45.9–59.7] | | 11.7 [8.7–15.6] | | 0.9 [0.1–8.0] | | 5.7 (74) | 8.1 (51) |
| Worked in past 12 months for pay | | 0.681 | | 0.049 | | 0.147 | | <0.001 | | |
| Yes | 39.6 [30.1–50.0] | | 61.8 [52.7–70.2] | | 5.6 [2.9–10.5] | | 15.4 [8.8–25.5] | | 30.7 (423) | 47.2 (390) |
| No | 41.4 [33.8–49.3] | | 50.1 [42.9–57.2] | | 4.1 [2.4–7.0] | | 1.6 [0.6–4.2] | | 69.3 (915) | 52.8 (537) |
| Ever married | | 0.095 | | 0.559 | | 0.002 | | <0.001 | | |
| Yes | 45.4 [35.4–55.8] | | 57.2 [49.6–64.4] | | 7.9 [4.1–14.7] | | 19.3 [10.7–32.2] | | 45.0 (582) | 38.1 (335) |
| No | 37.1 [30.0–44.9] | | 54.7 [46.6–62.5] | | 1.9 [0.9–4.1] | | 1.2 [0.6–2.3] | | 55.0 (756) | 61.9 (592) |

Note: *Others include Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan; DRC – Democratic Republic of Congo. *p*-values are from Chi-square tests of differences by the characteristics considered. ($n = 1338$ for females, $n = 927$ for males). All bold values statistically significant associations with $p < 0.05$.

^aSelf-reported experiences of sexual, physical, and emotional violence in childhood among 13–24-year-olds.

^bPerpetrated any acts of physical or sexual violence to a current, ex-partner or non-partner.

childhood violence, and 6.7% and 13.3% respectively, reported perpetrating violence. Among females, a lower proportion of those originally from South Sudan (36.0%) had experienced any form of childhood violence than those from the DRC (47.9%) or other countries (61.6%). Among males, a higher proportion of 13–17-year-olds (61.7%) had experienced any form of childhood violence compared to 18–24-year-olds (49.9%). In contrast, a higher proportion of 18–24-year-old males (13.3%) had perpetrated violence compared to their younger counterparts (2.6%). Among males, significant differences in the proportions who had experienced childhood violence were observed between those who had worked in the past 12 months (61.8%) and those who had not (50.1%). There were also significant differences in the proportions of females who had perpetrated violence based on schooling status and marital status, and the proportion of males who had perpetrated violence based on work and marital status.

Endorsement of inequitable gender norms and IPV justification

The results in Table 2 present scales created for inequitable gender norms and IPV justification. The results show that inequitable gender norms are prevalent in the study settings. A considerably high proportion of both females and males endorsed inequitable gender norms or justified violence perpetration. Notably,

Table 2. Endorsement of inequitable gender norms and IPV justification, Uganda HVACS 2022.

| Table 2.1. Endorsement of inequitable gender norms and IPV justification, Uganda HIVS 2022. | | | | | | | |
|---|----------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------|----------------|
| Indicator | Response | Females | | Males | | p-value | Cronbach alpha |
| | | Unweighted n | Weighted % [95% CI] | Unweighted n | Weighted % [95% CI] | | |
| Inequitable gender norms ^a | | | | | | | 0.89 |
| Believe that: | | | | | | | |
| a. Only men, not women should decide when to have sex | Yes | 217 | 16.4 [11.2–23.2] | 226 | 21.7 [14.0–32.1] | 0.427 | |
| b. If someone insults a boy or man, he should defend his reputation with force if he needs to | Yes | 199 | 18.9 [12.1–28.2] | 173 | 17.1 [12.9–22.4] | 0.187 | |
| c. There are times when a woman should be beaten | Yes | 259 | 20.3 [14.1–28.4] | 216 | 22.8 [15.7–32.0] | 0.574 | |
| d. Women who carry condoms have sex with a lot of men | Yes | 342 | 28.6 [22.8–35.2] | 383 | 45.7 [33.8–58.1] | 0.089 | |
| e. A woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together | Yes | 344 | 28.0 [20.9–36.5] | 316 | 37.3 [27.7–48.0] | 0.169 | |
| f. Women and men should share authority in the family | No | 443 | 35.6 [30.9–40.5] | 393 | 34.2 [26.9–42.4] | 0.517 | |
| g. A woman should be able to spend her own money according to her own will | No | 640 | 51.8 [43.5–60.0] | 612 | 65.0 [57.3–72.0] | 0.091 | |
| Scale for gender inequitable norms | | | | | | | 0.262 |
| 0 | | 314 | 19.5 [13.8–26.9] | 90 | 12.9 [6.5–23.7] | | |
| 1 | | 238 | 18.6 [13.4–25.3] | 133 | 15.1 [9.6–22.9] | | |
| 2 | | 429 | 31.8 [27.7–36.1] | 316 | 31.5 [26.1–37.4] | | |
| 3 | | 180 | 16.1 [12.6–20.4] | 173 | 18.9 [13.7–25.4] | | |
| 4 | | 99 | 7.2 [4.4–11.5] | 99 | 10.8 [6.7–16.8] | | |
| 5 | | 59 | 5.2 [2.6–9.9] | 72 | 7.9 [4.4–13.9] | | |
| 6 | | 16 | 1.2 [0.6–2.5] | 29 | 2.5 [1.0–6.2] | | |
| 7 | | 3 | 0.4 [0.1–1.2] | 15 | 0.4 [0.2–1.1] | | |
| Mean score | | | 1.8 [1.7–1.9] | | 2.5 [2.4–2.6] | | |
| IPV Justification ^b | | | | | | | 0.87 |
| That a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife if: | | | | | | | |
| a. She goes out without telling him | Yes | 299 | 29.3 [22.5–37.1] | 213 | 24.5 [17.2–33.7] | 0.460 | |
| b. She neglects the children | Yes | 465 | 45.4 [35.0–56.1] | 277 | 34.8 [25.9–44.8] | 0.285 | |
| c. She argues with him | Yes | 357 | 31.9 [25.8–38.7] | 225 | 25.5 [18.7–33.9] | 0.465 | |
| d. She refuses to have sex with him | Yes | 240 | 21.6 [17.0–27.1] | 159 | 15.0 [10.5–20.8] | 0.419 | |
| e. She burns the food | Yes | 188 | 20.2 [13.9–28.5] | 94 | 12.4 [8.7–17.3] | 0.192 | |
| Scale for IPV justification | | | | | | | 0.340 |
| 0 | | 696 | 42.3 [33.6–51.5] | 529 | 53.0 [39.3–66.3] | | |
| 1 | | 207 | 16.7 [13.7–20.1] | 122 | 16.3 [10.7–24.0] | | |
| 2 | | 170 | 16.1 [12.8–20.0] | 95 | 12.0 [7.5–18.5] | | |
| 3 | | 121 | 10.9 [8.2–14.2] | 92 | 10.0 [6.2–15.6] | | |
| 4 | | 81 | 7.1 [5.0–10.0] | 65 | 5.5 [2.9–10.4] | | |
| 5 | | 63 | 7.0 [4.1–11.6] | 24 | 3.2 [1.8–5.7] | | |
| Mean score | | | 1.1 [1.1–1.2] | | 1.0 [0.9–1.1] | | |

^aA continuous scale was generated by summing up responses to the seven questions, with a total possible score of between 0 and 7 points.

^bA continuous scale was generated by summing up responses to the five questions, with a total possible score of between 0 and 5 points. p-values are from Chi-square tests of differences between females and males.

Table 3. Odds for experiencing any childhood violence and perpetration of violence by endorsement of inequitable gender norms and IPV justification.

| Variable | Experience of any childhood violence | | | | Perpetration of violence | | | |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------|--|---------------------|--|---------------------|--|---------------------|
| | Females | | Males | | Females | | Males | |
| | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | <i>p</i> - value | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | <i>p</i> - value | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | <i>p</i> - value | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | <i>p</i> - value |
| Inequitable gender norms | 1.2 [1.0–1.3] | 0.015 | 0.9 [0.7–1.1] | 0.388 | 1.2 [1.0–1.4] | 0.110 | 1.3 [0.8–2.0] | 0.289 |
| IPV Justification | 1.2 [1.0–1.4] | 0.066 | 1.4 [1.1–1.7] | 0.013 | 1.1 [0.9–1.5] | 0.348 | 1.3 [1.0–1.6] | 0.058 |

Note: All bold values statistically significant associations with $p < 0.05$.

^aaOR-Adjusted for age, education, country of origin, working for pay in the past year, and marital status.

more than half of females (51.8%) and two-thirds of males (65.0%) disagreed with the notion that a woman should be able to spend her money according to her own will. About a third of both females and males endorsed two inequitable gender norms. Males had on average higher agreement with the inequitable gender norms than females (mean score of 2.5 compared to 1.8 for females). In contrast, females had higher agreement with IPV justification than males (mean score of 1.1 compared to 1.0 for males).

Childhood violence and perpetration of violence by endorsement of inequitable gender norms and IPV justification

The results in Table 3 show the odds of experiencing any childhood violence or perpetrating violence among those endorsing inequitable gender norms and justifying IPV, controlling for background characteristics (age, education, country of origin, working for pay in the past year, and marital status). Experience of any childhood violence was significantly associated with an increase in endorsement of inequitable gender norms among females (OR: 1.2; CI: 1.0–1.3) and IPV justification among males (OR: 1.4; CI: 1.1–1.7). There was no statistically significant association between perpetration of violence and inequitable gender norms or IPV justification. Results from further analysis depict a similar pattern among 18–24-year-olds (Table A2). However, among 13–17-year-olds, IPV justification was significantly associated with experience of any childhood violence among females (OR: 1.2; CI: 1.0–1.4) and perpetration of violence among males (OR: 1.6; CI: 1.0–2.5; Table A1).

Discussion

In this paper, we investigated the experiences of childhood violence and violence perpetration and the association with inequitable gender norms and violence justification among 13- to 24-year-old females and males in refugee settings in Uganda, using data from the first-ever VACS conducted in a humanitarian setting (Uganda HVACS). Endorsement of inequitable gender norms was significantly associated with experience of childhood violence and perpetration among females but not males, while IPV justification was significantly associated with both childhood violence and perpetration among males, and experience of childhood violence among females.

IPV justification was higher for females than males. This finding is consistent with that of Gilbert et al. (2022), which showed that significantly more females than males interviewed in the 2014 Nigeria VACS endorsed at least one inequitable gender norm about IPV against women. Results in the present study also corroborate findings from the 2015 Uganda VACS, which found that a higher proportion of females than males endorsed inequitable gender norms about IPV against women (Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, 2018). High levels of social and individual acceptance and IPV justification have been reported elsewhere (Messersmith et al., 2021), and findings from 31 sub-Saharan countries have shown that women are generally more likely than men to justify partner violence (Darteh et al., 2021; Uthman et al., 2009).

IPV justification has been linked to societal expectations that normalise this form of violence and discourage women from speaking up against it (Wado et al., 2021), while providing support to male partners who are intent on exercising autocratic control and 'correcting' ill-mannered women (Ahinkorah et al., 2018; Rani et al., 2004; Uthman et al., 2009). Tolerance of IPV among females may also be borne from a desire to keep

their families or relationships together (Messersmith et al., 2021). Humanitarian settings, which are characterised by heightened vulnerabilities and a diminished ability to prevent and respond to the occurrence of violence (including addressing inequitable gender norms), may allow for perpetration of violence to continue unabated (Cools & Kotsadam, 2017; Uthman et al., 2010).

Gender inequity indices have been associated with childhood abuse or maltreatment across several countries (Klevens & Ports, 2017). Our results showed that endorsement of inequitable gender norms was significantly associated with experiencing any childhood violence among females but not males. IPV justification was significantly associated with experience of childhood violence among males. Prior work has shown that endorsing inequitable gender norms about IPV against women (IPV justification) was associated with IPV perpetration among males and experience of IPV among females (Gilbert et al., 2022). For both boys and girls, endorsing gender norms that condone violent behaviours and gender inequality was significantly associated with experience of violence among 10- to 12-year-olds in Ethiopia (Murphy et al., 2021), and Tanzanian men who reported gender inequitable attitudes were significantly more likely to report recent IPV perpetration (Messersmith et al., 2021). Taken together, our findings confirm a high level of social acceptability of IPV against women and inequitable gender norms in the study setting, with associated high levels of experiencing childhood violence and violence perpetration.

Our findings suggest that humanitarian contexts are no exception to inequitable gender norms and their implications for experiencing and perpetrating violence and that interventions implemented in the general population to address these norms should be adapted for such settings. For example, in their review of emerging evidence of the effectiveness of programmes and interventions to address IPV and sexual violence among adolescents, Lundgren and Amin (2015) found that school-based dating violence interventions, community-based interventions to form gender equitable attitudes among adolescents, and parenting interventions and interventions with children and adolescents that had experienced childhood violence showed considerable success and particularly when delivered longer-term rather than through a single touch-point (Lundgren & Amin, 2015). Evidence further shows that interventions that start early in the life course, focusing on childhood and adolescence, may be the most promising (Jewkes et al., 2013). Schools offer a great platform to access this demographic. While such interventions have been implemented in non-humanitarian settings, our findings underscore the importance of promoting equitable gender norms among vulnerable populations in refugee settings to mitigate violence.

Limitations

We highlight some limitations associated with the present study. Given the self-reported and retrospective nature of the data collected, the estimates may be affected by recall bias due to under-reporting or omissions of certain details. Under-reporting or selective disclosure of participants' experiences may be a result of cultural contexts that promote silence or not speaking up against violence, fear of being stigmatised particularly for sexual violence experience, and/or a lack of clarity as to what would constitute violence (Gilbert et al., 2022; Hayati et al., 2011; Romero-Martínez et al., 2019; Wado et al., 2021). The cross-sectional nature of the study also precludes the determination of causal relationships. The study also excluded urban refugees and those not living within settlements who could have different views about gender and experiences of violence.

Conclusion and implications for practice

Our results showed that endorsement of inequitable gender norms was prevalent and significantly associated with experience of childhood violence and perpetration among females, and that IPV justification was also prevalent and significantly associated with both experiencing childhood violence and perpetration among males, and experience of violence among females. These findings highlight the need to create awareness about and address the challenges associated with inequitable gender norms and acceptability of violence, and the associated risks of experiencing and perpetrating violence. Interventions that promote equitable gender norms can be adapted to humanitarian contexts, while ensuring that the approaches are not gender-blind, but rather, capture the different gendered nuisances associated with inequitable gender norms and violence. These could include implementing school-based programmes that challenge

traditional gender norms and promote gender equality from an early age that have been shown to be effective. Interventions could also include parents being educated on the impact of negative gender norms on violence may provide them with tools to foster non-violent and equitable family environments. It is also very important that rigorous methods be used to ascertain the effectiveness of the adaptations of these interventions for such contexts.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from publications@popcouncil.org

Author contributions

PK, SM, GO, FO, YW and CU conceptualised the study. PK analyzed the data. PK and SM wrote the first draft. CK, FO, CU, DH, GS, BW, GO, YB, and YW reviewed the manuscript for substantial intellectual content. All authors contributed to substantive revisions of the manuscript and read and approved the final manuscript.

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Appendix

Further analysis

Table A1. Odds for experiencing any childhood violence and perpetration of violence by endorsement of inequitable gender norms and IPV justification among 13–17 year olds.

| Variable | Experience of any childhood violence | | | | Perpetration of violence | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--------------|--|---------|--|---------|--|--------------|
| | Females | | Males | | Females | | Males | |
| | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | p-value | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | p-value | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | p-value | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | p-value |
| Inequitable gender norms | 1.1 [1.0–1.3] | 0.104 | 0.8 [0.5–1.1] | 0.139 | 1.4 [0.9–2.1] | 0.156 | 1.2 [0.9–1.6] | 0.229 |
| IPV Justification | 1.2 [1.0–1.4] | 0.031 | 1.3 [0.9–1.9] | 0.179 | 1.4 [0.9–2.3] | 0.162 | 1.6 [1.0–2.5] | 0.046 |

Note: Bold values statistically significant associations with $p < 0.05$.

^aaOR-Adjusted for age, education, country of origin, working for pay in the past year, and marital status.

Table A2. Odds for experiencing any childhood violence and perpetration of violence by endorsement of inequitable gender norms and IPV justification among 18–24 year olds.

| Variable | Experience of any childhood violence | | | | Perpetration of violence | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--------------|--|--------------|--|---------|--|---------|
| | Females | | Males | | Females | | Males | |
| | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | p-value | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | p-value | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | p-value | Adjusted OR (aOR) ^a [95% CI] | p-value |
| Inequitable gender norms | 1.3 [1.1–1.5] | 0.010 | 1.0 [0.8–1.3] | 0.701 | 1.1 [0.9–1.4] | 0.399 | 1.3 [0.7–2.1] | 0.371 |
| IPV Justification | 1.2 [0.9–1.6] | 0.209 | 1.4 [1.0–1.9] | 0.034 | 1.0 [0.8–1.2] | 0.743 | 1.2 [0.9–1.5] | 0.104 |

Note: Bold values statistically significant associations with $p < 0.05$.

^aaOR-Adjusted for age, education, country of origin, working for pay in the past year, and marital status.