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Influence of Gender Roles on Intimate Partner Violence among Undergraduate Students in the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among university students has emerged as a critical public health and social issue. This phenomenon is highly influenced by ingrained gender norms. Hence, this study investigated the influence of gender roles on intimate partner violence among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Two objectives were formulated to guide the study. A correlational design was adopted. The Population of the study consisted of all the undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in this study to select 200 participants (undergraduate students). The instrument that was used for data collection is a questionnaire titled: "Gender Roles Questionnaire (GRQ)" and Intimate Partner Violence Questionnaire (IPVQ)". Frequency, percentage and Spearman Rank Order Correlation were used in analyzing the objectives. The findings revealed that a substantial proportion of respondents reject the notion that a man should be the dominant partner in a relationship. Also, respondents believe that gender roles contribute significantly to IPV. The study concluded that although there is evidence of increasing awareness and partial rejection of overt patriarchal dominance, underlying belief systems that sustain gender inequality and IPV tolerance remain deeply embedded. The study recommends that universities should integrate comprehensive gender equality and relationship education into their curricula and student development programs.

Keywords: Gender, Intimate Partner Violence, Undergraduate, Students, University

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Introduction

Traditionally, gender has been characterized as a social and cultural construct that establishes expectations, attitudes, and values that are seen suitable for men and women (Jewkes et al., 2015; Witte & Mulla, 2013). Gender is now regarded as a continuum construct that is subject to change over time, representing the self-concept that each individual develops during personal maturation (Thande et al., 2019). Boys and girls are socialized and educated differently from an early age, forming gender roles (GRs). This occurs in the family setting, among friends and classmates, and is propagated by cultural ideas in the media, the arts, and religion (Amin & Chandra-Mouli, 2014; Kelly & Payton, 2019).

A patriarchal system of political, social, and economic organization is predicated on male domination (Sanjel, 2013). In a patriarchal society, GR configuration typically entails a number of pressures to adjust to the expected role. In this sense, there is pressure to uphold a system in which women are usually restricted to lower-level or less prominent roles while men continue to hold the reins of power in the most important areas of life (Jewkes et al., 2015; Sanjel, 2013). It is clear that GRs have a significant influence on how intimate partner relationships are developed (Yago, & Tomas, 2013). In order to satisfy the expectations of patriarchal society, girls and young women are supposed to adjust their attitudes and individual roles within the partnership, according to traditional GRs (Yago, & Tomas, 2013).



Traditional GRs have been linked to health and social issues, including as unwanted pregnancies and STDs (Yago-Simó'n & Toma's-Aznar, 2015). Improving our existing understanding of how GRs affect intimate partner violence (IPV) is crucial, though. Previous research has shown that social norms regarding women can contribute to the silence of certain female victims of intimate partner violence, their reluctance to disclose their experiences of violence, and their inability to identify warning signs of IPV (Pokharel *et al.*, 2020). This makes it more difficult for society to recognize abuse, favors the aggressor's actions, and increases the likelihood that the victim will continue to live in a violent relationship (Ferragut *et al.*, 2014; Garcí'a-Dí'az *et al.*, 2018). For instance, women who are insecure, subservient, or have low self-esteem are more likely to remain in violent relationships than powerful women (Pereira *et al.*, 2020). However, as IPV in early adulthood has distinct characteristics from partnerships in adults, the relationship between traditional GRs and IPV in romantic relationships among young people may be different.

First of all, despite the fact that dating violence is quite common even two to three times more often than it is in adulthood (Shen *et al.*, 2012) young people frequently struggle to identify themselves as abuse victims (Shen *et al.*, 2012; Garcí'a-Dí'az *et al.*, 2017; Rodríguez-Franco *et al.*, 2012). Certain forms of psychological violence, like coercion or humiliation, for instance, typically go unrecognized by victims until their symptoms are quite obvious (Nardi-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2017; Ruiz-Pé'rez *et al.*, 2017). It is also typical for young adults to believe in some romantic love myths, such as the idea that suffering for love is normal (Garcí'a-Dí'az *et al.*, 2017) or that jealousy and controlling behaviors are a normal aspect of being in love (Kisa, & Zeyneloğlu, 2019; Perles *et al.*, 2019). Second, IPV tends to be bidirectional, meaning that an individual can be both the victim and the aggressor, which makes it more difficult to identify abuse (Witte & Mulla, 2013). This is another distinctive feature of IPV in young dating relationships.

Thirdly, their impact on IPV may differ from that of adults since young individuals have had less exposure to traditional GRs. Furthermore, younger individuals may be less rigid in their expectations of what it means to be a man or a woman (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017; Dernberger & Pepin, 2020). Additionally, it should be mentioned that partner relationships in adolescence typically differ from those in adulthood. This implies that younger individuals are more likely to be financially dependent on others or not live together (González-Ortega *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, the most common forms of abuse vary by age group since young people are more likely to experience covert and subtle forms of violence (Vives-Cases *et al.*, 2019; Pe'rez-Marco *et al.*, 2020).

Further, since people are developing their own identities during their youth, dating expectations around partnerships and partner attachment patterns are established (González-Ortega *et al.*, 2008; Paradis *et al.*, 2017). As a result, certain characteristics that arise in early dating relationships like communication styles, conflict emergence and resolution, or sexuality exploration have an impact on how people relate to one another as adults (Shen, Chiu & Gao, 2012; Shen & Kusunoki, 2019). As a result, young people who engage in violent dating relationships run the danger of accepting violence as a typical aspect of a partnership (Garcí'a-Dí'az *et al.*, 2017; Shen & Kusunoki, 2019).

Finding the variables that raise the likelihood of IPV against women, particularly in connection with overt physical aggression such as homicides and attempted homicides, has been the main focus of research in recent decades (Matias *et al.*, 2020; Spencer & Stith, 2020; Expósito-Álvarez *et al.*, 2021). Various IPV explanatory models have been created that take into account the sociocultural components of both victim and offender traits. According to Ferrer-Pé'rez and Bosch-Fiol (2014), some of these theoretical models emphasize the significance of unequal socialization and the allocation of roles according to male and female stereotypes. Numerous studies have examined the existence of attitudes and ideas that may occasionally be connected to a lack of education (Guerrero-Molina *et al.*, 2021), as well as cognitive distortions about women and the use of violence against them (Loinaz, 2014; Echeburúa *et al.*, 2016).

Thus, preventing IPV requires addressing issues of social acceptance and education. Any sort of IPV is associated with gender inequality (Willie & Kershaw, 2019), and IPV against women is more common in nations where gender norms are not as critically examined (Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero, 2021, 2022). Perceptions of IPV are influenced by personal views on masculinity and gender roles (Stanziani *et al.*, 2020).

Men generally displayed lower levels of perceived severity than women, according to recent studies examining how society views the seriousness of IPV against women. Participants who reported higher perceived severity also reported lower levels of acceptability, victim-blaming attitudes, and hostile sexism, as well as higher levels of willingness to step in if they witnessed an assault (Martín-Fernández *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that less initiatives to prevent and intervene against intimate partner violence against women are implemented in nations where conventional gender norms and duties are more widely accepted (Lowe *et al.*, 2022).

However, the majority of studies examining the potential link between IPV against women and the acceptance of gender roles and stereotypes have concentrated on the

distortions perpetrators present, with the evaluation of the general public remaining in the background. IPV acceptance is greatly influenced by the cultural factors that are now prevalent in society, and the presence of strict gender stereotypes may be a risk factor for the normalization and practice of the phenomena (Bucheli & Rossi, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the values and ideas that are prevalent in society in order to build more effective preventative and intervention programs as well as to have a better overall understanding of the phenomena. The present research aims to fill this gap in the literature analyzing gender roles and religious belief as it relates to intimate partner violence among undergraduate students.

Therefore, the study's main goal is to investigate how gender roles are related to intimate partner violence among undergraduate students in University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives were to:

- i Examine perception of gender roles among the respondents in University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
- ii Analyze the relationship between gender roles perception and IPV perception among respondents in University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Literature Review

Concept of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

There is some misunderstanding regarding the idea of IPV. This is due to the fact that a number of writers interchange it with other terms, like "spousal violence" and "domestic violence." As long as there is violence between spouses in close relationships, IPV includes both. The term "intimate partner violence" (IPV) describes violence or abuse committed by one spouse against the other in romantic relationships, whether they are current or past (Ochuko & Edet, 2024). Marriages, concubinage, dating, and other male-female conjugal friendships are a few examples of these kinds of partnerships. Intimate relationship violence is known to lead to dominating behavior and physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of the victim (WHO, 2013). Since women are the worst victims of IPV, the issue is typically seen as a female one.

Gender Inequality and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among Students

Llano-Sua' rez et al. (2021) investigated gender roles and intimate partner violence among female university students in Spain. The relationship between traditional GRs and various IPV indicators was investigated in this study using a sample of Spanish female university students who were in heterosexual dating relationships. In a cross-

sectional study, 1,005 female university students pursuing ten degrees six in the social sciences and four in health sciences were involved.

Two validated scales were used to collect data: 1) the Dating Violence Questionnaire-R (DVQ-R) scale, which measures five types of IPV behaviors (coercion, detachment, humiliation, sexual violence, and physical violence), as well as perceived fear, entrapment, and abuse. 2) the Questionnaire on the Gender Determinants of Contraception (COGANT), which examines four traditional GRs (male dominance, submissive, blind, and passive attitudes of female students). Logistic and linear regressions were conducted to study the association between GR and a series of IPV indicators in dating relationships.

The analysis' finding showed that classic GRs were very common (57.0% subservient, 52.0% blind attitude, 75.7% passive, and 31.7% boyfriends who were perceived as dominant). A whopping 66.3% reported having been the victim of aggressive behavior. Indicators of IPV were substantially correlated with all GRs. In female students, the GR most strongly linked to overall IPV-behavior was a submissive attitude (adjusted odd ratio [OR] = 3.18; 95% CI: 2.29–4.42), which was followed by male dominance (OR = 2.79; 95% CI: 1.71: 4.54). Both GRs were also strongly linked to feelings of maltreatment, entrapment, and terror.

However, the study indicated a substantial correlation between IPV indicators and the high prevalence of traditional GRs in female university students' relationships. Adopting gender equality policies and increasing awareness of dating violence are imperative for universities.

Kagwiria (2020) examined relationship between gender role, attitudes and perceptions to intimate partner violence among students. This study sought to determine whether attitudes on gender roles and views of intimate partner violence (IPV) were related. According to research methodology, the current study used a mixed research design that combined descriptive and correlational design elements. The study included 71 students from United States International University-Africa who were selected using convenience sampling methods. The sample size was determined using the Cochran formula. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 20, which produced the following findings. The average age of the participants was 28 years old (SD=1.22). There was a very weak negative association between gender role views and intimate partner violence ($r=-0.10$, $P<0.05$), but the relationship was not significant, according to the analysis of the relationship between gender role and perception of IPV.

The study's results also showed that participants' perceptions of intimate partner violence were moderate

($M=57.97$, $SD=4.48$) and their gender role attitudes were moderate ($M=58.01$, $SD=7.02$). According to the findings, there were no appreciable gender differences in how men and women perceived IPV ($M = 58.79$, $SD = 2.64$ and $M = 57.55$, $SD = 5.15$, respectively), with $t(69) = 1.11$ and $P = 0.27$. The findings unmistakably suggested that attitudes regarding intimate relationship abuse were similar for men and women. Working with potential offenders and educating parents about IPV were the most popular ways to help reduce IPV, while sensitization, psycho-education, mentorship programs, and hosting seminars and workshops on relationship issues were the most recommended preventive interventions to IPV, according to the findings.

Based on the results, the study suggested that universities and other higher education institutions provide ongoing training, workshops, or awareness campaigns about gender roles, attitudes, and IPV to all students; community sensitization forums should be held in different targeted communities to inform parents about the impact of these issues on society. To promote healthy relationships and offer a chance to raise awareness of IPV and gender norms, free couple counseling and psycho education sessions should be offered at universities. One of the biggest obstacles to this investigation was the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shakiera (2017) examined intimate partner violence among male and female U.S. community college students. Using the intersectionality theory this quantitative correlational study investigated the associations between intimate partner violence and community college students' gender, race, age, class, marital status, and history of abuse. Utilizing a convenience sample of the target population, which consisted of 220 men and 330 women enrolled in community college or recent graduates, the researcher employed the Abusive Behavior Inventory and a demographic survey to gather data.

While there was no correlation between any demographic variables and the frequency of psychological violence, multiple linear regression analysis revealed that higher socioeconomic position and younger age were associated with a higher frequency of physical violence. Physical violence was more likely to occur among those aged 18 to 24 than among those in other categories ($t = -2.73$, $p = .008$), and among those with higher incomes (above \$50,000) than among those in other socioeconomic groups ($t = 1.99$, $p = .049$).

In order to help professionals finish interventions that address intimate partner violence among community college students, data about the possible predictive demographic characteristics that influence intimate partner violence may be generated. This is one of the implications for positive social development. According to

the study, more focused interventions could lower the prevalence of intimate partner violence and its long-term impacts, especially among the marginalized groups that are impacted by it.

Every country has gender disparity, anti-women attitudes, IPV, and acceptance of IPV. There is a lot of diversity, though. According to United Nations publications, there is significant variation in gender inequality among nations based on a number of metrics (U. N. Development Programme, 2016). Norway, Switzerland, and Denmark were among the nations with the highest levels of equality, while the Arab states and nations in sub-Saharan Africa had the lowest. There are significant differences in women's political empowerment, educational attainment, and economic standing among Central American nations (Gibbons & Luna, 2015).

On these metrics, the Northern Triangle nations which have high asylum-seeking rates in the United States generally fall short of other Central American nations. In a wide measure of equality, Guatemala demonstrated the least equality and Costa Rica the highest. Employment was where the gender difference was most noticeable across all nations (Gibbons & Luna, 2015). In Central America, "life is hard for men; life is harder for women," according to Gibbons and Luna (2015). Due to intersecting identities, men and women occupy rather distinct social positions depending on a variety of factors, including race, ethnicity, economic status, and whether they live in an urban or rural area.

Studies conducted in numerous nations have similarly connected the acceptance of IPV to negative perceptions of women (Herrero *et al.*, 2017). According to Bott Guedes, Goodwin and Adams Mendoz (2012), 17% to 53% of women in all 12 Latin American nations surveyed reported having experienced IPV at some point in their lives. With rates of 24%, Guatemala and Honduras fell in the middle of this range and were among the top five nations for partner sexual violence.

They might become irate and resort to violence if these expectations are not met (Perales & Bouma, 2019). Thus, it stands to reason that those who have more egalitarian views on gender would be less tolerant of IPV (Perales & Bouma, 2019). Additionally, researchers have discovered that persons who believe that IPV is justifiable are more likely to commit the crime themselves than those who do not (United Nations, 2015). Finding out whether socio-demographic traits encourage or inhibit more egalitarian gender attitudes is therefore essential to advancing gender equality and lowering the prevalence of IPV so that steps can be done to lessen public acceptability of IPV.

Furthermore, when taking into account the impact of intimate partner violence on both sexes, a recent study carried out across a number of African nations revealed

that women were accountable for 4.4% of homicides committed by wives or women intimate partners, while men or husbands were responsible for 44.8% of all deaths committed against women (Stöckl *et al.*, 2013). It is nonetheless clear that both sexes are vulnerable to IPV in spite of these variations in the severity of the abuse. The majority of these killings should ideally be justified in the African context. For instance, Uthman *et al.* (2009) conducted a study in 17 Sub-Saharan countries and discovered that men justified violence against women when a wife argued or disagreed with the husband, went out without telling the husband, and both men and women in Uganda and Kenya accepted physical punishment against a perceived misbehaving or rebellious wife. However, physical abuse was more common in Zambia (71%), and Kenya (68%), according to McCloskey *et al.* (2016). In addition, a median of 22% (8%–34% across countries) reported having sexually coerced a romantic partner in the past 12 months, while a median of 24% (9%–46% across countries) reported having been sexually coerced by a romantic partner. Since IPV is so common in this demographic, a lot of IPV prevention programming and research on IPV and its contributing variables has focused on tertiary students.

Materials and Method

This study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study comprised of all undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt, who are above 15,000 in number (Registry Department, University of Port Harcourt, 2025). Purposive sampling technique was adopted in this study to select 200 participants (undergraduate students). The sampling procedure involved stratifying the students into different faculties (Mogaji, 2019). The instrument that was used for data collection is a two set of questionnaires titled: "Gender Roles Questionnaire (GRQ)" and Intimate Partner Violence Questionnaire (IPVQ)".

There was a two part, A and B, for the instruments. Section B covered matters pertaining to the objectives of the study. Section A was used to collect demographic information from the respondents. A five-point Likert scale with the ratings of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 for Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Not Sure (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) was used to model the replies on section B. The reliability indices of the instruments were established using the test retest. It yielded 0.91 and 0.88 showing that the instruments were strongly reliable. Data obtained from the administered instrument were analyzed using SPSS. Frequency, percentage and Spearman Rank Order Correlation were used at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Socio-demographic Characteristics

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents reveals a sample that is moderately diverse but with some clear dominant characteristics (Table 1). In terms of gender distribution, males constitute a larger proportion of the respondents, accounting for 62% (124), while females make up 38% (76). This indicates a male-dominated sample, which may influence the overall perspectives captured in the study, particularly on issues related to gender roles and intimate relationships.

The age distribution shows that the respondents are largely within the young adult population. The highest proportion falls within the 22–25 age bracket, representing 32.5% (65), closely followed by those aged 26–30 at 31.5% (63). Respondents aged 31 and above account for 20.5% (41), while the youngest group, 18–21 years, represents 15.5% (31). This pattern suggests that the study is predominantly reflective of individuals in their early to late twenties, a demographic that is typically active in forming and maintaining intimate relationships, thereby making their responses particularly relevant to the study focus.

The relationship status of respondents shows that more than half are single, representing 55% (110) of the sample. Married respondents constitute 27.5% (55), while those in a relationship but not married account for 17% (34). A very small fraction (0.5%) falls into other categories. The high proportion of single individuals suggests that many respondents may be reflecting on perceptions or experiences rather than long-term marital dynamics, which could shape the interpretation of relationship-related variables in the study.

Perception of Gender Roles among the respondents in University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State

The findings on respondents' perceptions of gender roles in intimate relationships reveal a complex and, contradictory pattern of beliefs (Table 2). A substantial proportion of respondents reject the notion that a man should be the dominant partner in a relationship. Specifically, 49.5% strongly disagree and 33.5% disagree with this statement, indicating that over four-fifths of the sample does not support male dominance. However, only a small proportion express agreement (9.5%) or strong agreement (5.5%), while very few remain undecided (2%). This suggests a general shift away from traditional patriarchal norms that position men as dominant figures in relationships.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid (%)	Percent
Gender	Female	76	38	38	
	Male	124	62	62	
	Total	200	100	100	
Age Range	18–21	31	15.5	15.5	
	22–25	65	32.5	32.5	
	26–30	63	31.5	31.5	
	31 and above	41	20.5	20.5	
	Total	200	100	100	
Relationship Status	In a Relationship	34	17	17	
	Married	55	27.5	27.5	
	Other	1	0.5	0.5	
	Single	110	55	55	
	Total	200	100	100	

However, this apparent rejection of dominance does not fully translate into support for gender equality. When asked whether a woman should have equal authority as a man in a relationship, most of the respondent's express disagreement. A combined 77% (58.5% disagree and 18.5% strongly disagree) reject the idea of equal authority, while only 14% (11.5% agree and 2.5% strongly agree) support it, and 9% are uncertain. This indicates a notable inconsistency, where respondents may reject overt dominance but are not necessarily in favor of egalitarian power structures within relationships.

A similar pattern is observed regarding the role of men as breadwinners. While a combined 70.5% (36% strongly disagree and 34.5% disagree) do not believe that men should always be the breadwinners, a smaller proportion support this traditional role (15.5% combined agree and strongly agree), and 14% remain unsure. This suggests that economic roles within relationships are becoming more flexible, with many respondents moving away from rigid expectations of male financial responsibility.

In contrast, more traditional and self-sacrificial expectations appear to persist when it comes to women's roles. A significant majority of respondents believe that women should sacrifice their personal wellbeing for the common good of the relationship, with 65% (38.5% agree and 26.5% strongly agree) supporting this view. Only 25.5% disagree or strongly disagree, while 9.5% are undecided. This indicates the persistence of gendered expectations that place a disproportionate emotional and personal burden on women within intimate relationships.

Similarly, the perception that men are primarily responsible for expressing love in relationships is strongly endorsed. A combined 69.5% (39.5% agree and 30% strongly agree) support the idea that men are the ones who should always love their partner, while only 23.5% disagree or strongly disagree, and 7% are unsure. This reflects a gendered framing of emotional roles, where men are expected to take the lead in demonstrating affection and commitment.

Relationship between gender roles perception and IPV perception among respondents in University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State

The Spearman rank correlation results presented in Table 3 reveal consistently positive and statistically significant relationships between gender roles perception and IPV justification among respondents at the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The correlation between gender roles perception is strong ($\rho = 0.634$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals who hold more traditional views about male dominance, female sacrifice, and men as the primary breadwinners. Similarly, gender roles perception shows a moderate positive correlation with IPV justification ($\rho = 0.634$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that the respondent endorses unequal and patriarchal gender norms. Notably, the association in the table between gender roles and IPV justification ($\rho = 0.634$, $p < 0.001$), which moderately have large effect, suggests that respondents believe that gender roles contribute significantly to IPV. Interventions aimed at reducing IPV may therefore need to address gender norms.

Table 2: Respondents' Perceptions on Gender Roles in Intimate Relationships

S/N	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	Remark
1	A man should be the dominant partner in an intimate relationship	11 (5.5%)	19 (9.5%)	4 (2%)	67 (33.5%)	99 (49.5%)	200	Disagreed
2	A woman should have equal authority as a man in a relationship	5 (2.5%)	23 (11.5%)	18 (9%)	117 (58.5%)	37 (18.7%)	200	Disagreed
3	A man should always be the breadwinner in an intimate relationship	13 (6.5%)	18 (9%)	28 (14%)	69 (34.5%)	72 (36%)	200	Disagreed
4	Women should sacrifice their personal wellbeing for the common good in a relationship	53 (26.5%)	77 (38.5%)	19 (9.5%)	29 (14.5%)	22 (11%)	200	Agreed
5	Men are the ones to always love their partner in an intimate relationship	60 (30%)	79 (39.5%)	14 (7%)	26 (13%)	21 (10.5%)	200	Agreed
	Average	28.4 (14.2%)	43.2 (21.6%)	16.6 (8.3%)	61.6 (30.8%)	50.2 (25.14%)	200	

Table 3: Relationship between gender roles perception and IPV perception among respondents in University of Port Harcourt

		Gender Roles	IPV Perception
Spearman's rho	Gender Roles	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.634**
		N	.000
	IPV Perception	Correlation Coefficient	200
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.634**
		N	.000

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that perceptions of gender roles among students reflect a transitional and somewhat fragmented value system in which elements of both traditional and evolving norms coexist. Although there is a clear rejection of overt male dominance, this does not translate into a consistent endorsement of gender equality. Instead, respondents appear to resist explicit hierarchical control while still maintaining underlying beliefs that preserve gendered asymmetry in relationships. This suggests that the transformation of gender norms among university students is not linear but rather characterized by selective acceptance and rejection of traditional ideas. Such a pattern implies that while overt patriarchy may be losing legitimacy at the surface level, its foundational assumptions continue to shape attitudes in more subtle ways. The observed rejection of rigid male dominance aligns with studies such as Racquel (2014), which reported a decline in support for hierarchical gender roles among young adults. However, the present findings diverge in that

they reveal a simultaneous resistance to full gender equality, suggesting that cultural context plays a significant role in shaping how gender norms evolve. Unlike the relatively lower influence of traditional norms observed in some Western contexts, the Nigerian setting appears to retain stronger cultural and social expectations regarding gender roles, even among educated youth.

Furthermore, the findings support arguments presented in studies such as Sikweyiya *et al.* (2020) and Beebeejaun-Muslum (2024), which highlight how culturally constructed notions of masculinity and femininity influence relationship dynamics and can perpetuate control and inequality. While the respondents in this study may not explicitly endorse control through dominance, the acceptance of gendered expectations reflects a softer form of patriarchal control that operates through social norms rather than overt authority. This underscores the idea that IPV is not only sustained by direct approval of violence but also by the broader cultural framework that defines acceptable roles and behaviors within relationships.

In the Nigerian context, where cultural, religious, and social norms strongly influence behavior, the findings reinforce existing evidence that gender inequality remains a significant factor in the prevalence of IPV. Studies such as Oyediran and Feyisetan (2017) and Gage and Thomas (2017) have shown that communities with stronger male-favoring norms tend to exhibit higher risks of IPV. The present study contributes to this body of knowledge by demonstrating that even among university students who are often assumed to hold more progressive views traditional gender expectations persist in nuanced forms.

Conclusion

The findings of this study present a coherent picture of how gender role perceptions, and attitudes toward intimate partner violence (IPV) interact among undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt, while also revealing important nuances in how these elements operate within a transitioning sociocultural context. Overall, the results indicate that although there is evidence of increasing awareness and partial rejection of overt patriarchal dominance, underlying belief systems that sustain gender inequality and IPV tolerance remain deeply embedded.

This however recommends that, universities should integrate comprehensive gender equality and relationship education into their curricula and student development programs. These initiatives should move beyond general awareness of IPV to critically examine underlying gender norms, power dynamics, and cultural expectations that sustain inequality. Workshops, seminars, and course modules should be designed to challenge subtle patriarchal beliefs such as expectations of female sacrifice and male authority while promoting mutual respect, shared responsibility, and healthy relationship practices.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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