Research Article

Determinants of Women's Tolerant Attitudes toward Gender-Based Violence against Women in Kosovo

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Abstract

Gender-based violence against women is still one of the most worrying facts in Kosovo. This paper examines determinants of women's tolerant attitudes toward gender-based violence against women in Kosovo. An empirical assessment of determinants of tolerance towards domestic violence was conducted by utilizing data from the Kosovo Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) carried out in 2019–2020. The survey was carried out with 5,124 households, drawn from a sample representative of the whole population of Kosovo. The national representative sampling by the MICS survey allows for generalized findings. Economic conditions, lower education level, residence, marital status, and marrying age are important predictors of a higher rate of women's tolerant attitudes toward gender-based violence among women in Kosovo. The study's important findings open new pathways for multi-level design studies including more variables such as social support, family finances management, gender roles in parenting, health situation, institutional responsiveness, and efficacy of institutional interventions to reduce gender-based violence.

Keywords: Attitudes; gender-based; violence; MICS; Kosovo.

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Gender-based violence against women is still one of the most worrying facts in Kosovo. Even though Kosovo has adopted an adequate legal framework to fight gender-based violence (Agency for Gender Equality [AGE], 2019), an email (Shala, A., personal communication, August 31, 2022) reports approximately 1,000 victims of domestic violence per year; 1,137 reported cases of gender-based violence were reported for the period January – June 2021, 878 of which were women, while from 2016 to 2021, 30 women lost their lives as a consequence of domestic violence.

According to the traditional understanding the phenomenon domestic violence is regarded as a private issue among partners and within families. This cultural norm challenges the responsibility, and efficacy of the public institutions in providing prevention, protection, and safety for the victims. Procrastination of the procedures in general in giving the verdict in court cases, low rate of executing the verdicts, as well as poor legal knowledge of the domestic violence victims are also factors influencing the current domestic violence situation (AGE, 2020).

The cultural norm continues to keep the Kosovar women "hostage" of family obligations, carrying the burden of most of the caring family responsibilities (AGE, 2020). Women also hesitate to exercise their right to inheritance from their families of origin (AGE, 2019) and the right to joint property ownership, which leaves women with no choice but to live with the perpetrator. Furthermore, only 21% of women are active in the job market, which creates economic insecurity, and, consequently, keeps total financial dependency on the perpetrator.

> Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power, and harmful norms. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious violation of human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue. Gender-based violence can include

sexual, physical, mental, and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. It also includes threats of violence, coercion, and manipulation. This can take many forms such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and so-called honor crimes. The consequences of gender-based violence are devastating and can have life-long repercussions for survivors. It can even lead to death (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022).

Tolerant attitudes are an important determinant of gender-based violence prevalence. Reducing the acceptability of all forms of domestic violence against women is one of the public health approach's fundamental goals to prevent domestic violence (Gracia & Herrero, 2006). Vandello & Cohen (2003) recognize other factors such as temperament, personal experience, or others that fall under the category of individual differences. When talking about honor, they point out significant social and structural factors within a culture, influencing the specific importance given to the concept by different segments of society. According to Decker et al. (2015), there may be some clarification of the patterns of cross-national variation that are observed both for intimate partner violence and forced sexual debut as forms of gender-based violence if the multilevel analysis is conducted based on indicators of gender equity, social context gender norms and attitudes of tolerance for abuse, violence-related policies, practices that enable women to be economically and socially dependent on male partners, and indicators of political conflict and disruption. Research on factors determining tolerant attitudes toward gender-based violence reveals interesting results in terms of socioeconomic status, education, age, and marital status (Bornstein, 2006; Carlson & Worden, 2005; Eze-Ajoku et al., 2022; Jewkes et al., 2002; Vandello & Cohen, 2003).

Economic conditions are one of the main determinants leading to tolerance toward domestic violence. Economically dependent women are more tolerant of domestic violence, while this dependency may contribute to the increase of the latter (Bornstein, 2006). The results of a study by Carlson & Worden (2005) suggest that socioeconomic status is not a factor in determining beliefs when other characteristics of respondents' backgrounds are controlled. Agarwal & Panda (2007) found that women owning a house and land report a lower incidence of domestic violence. Additionally, Yount (2005)'s findings may help us to understand why married women are abused physically in settings with similar inequalities in socioeconomic assets.

When women have a better economic status increases the possibility of a lower risk of domestic violence. A study by Jewkes et al. (2002) showed that no independent relationship existed between domestic violence and unemployment, status, or resource differences indicated by income, employment, and age disparities. According to Kocacık et al. (2007), women with incomes of their own are less likely to be victims of domestic violence. In his study, Yount (2005) found that, while wealth may have a net negative effect on a married woman's chances of experiencing physical abuse, women may be most protected from physical abuse when they have access to economic and social resources outside of marriage. According to Yount & Carrera (2006), women in lower-income households are more likely to encounter physical domestic violence. Furthermore, women's experiences of domestic violence were affected substantially by their spouses' relative resources. Compared with married women, income differences between spouses were consistently associated with greater tolerance for physical violence, while married men reported higher tolerance in such situations (Eze-Ajoku et. al., 2022).

Education is another important variable related to gender-based violence. The investigation of the impact of relationship characteristics on the tolerance for spousal physical violence revealed that formal education was only effective at preventing this tolerance at the postsecondary level (Eze-Ajoku et al., 2022). According to Carlson and Worden (2005), respondents with higher levels of education were more inclined to propose or support social learning theories regarding violence and to disagree with the idea that women may avoid violent relationships and that violence is common. Contrary to expectations, a different study (Carlson & Worden, 2005) revealed that respondents with less education gave lower estimations of the occurrence of violence, which suggests that education is a key factor in the explanation of people's tolerance for domestic abuse. Women with lower levels of education are more tolerant of violence against women, and because these women lack the resources, support, and ability to build their own lives, they are powerless to change their circumstances, lacking also the motivation to fight for their rights, which leads them to normalize the violence in their relationships (Arënliu et al, 2021). Another study found that women who had lower possibilities than their husbands due to having 8-13 fewer years of schooling had more physical and psychological domestic violence (Yount & Carrera, 2006).

In terms of the interaction between economic and educational factors, Eze-Ajoku et al. (2022) offer an interesting finding. Economic empowerment achieved solely through financial means

may prove detrimental because it increases tolerance for spousal physical violence, increasing the likelihood of experiencing it, while economic empowerment achieved solely through increasing educational opportunities alone is beneficial because it increases educational opportunities. The normalization of domestic violence may also result from cultural norms that take hold when economic empowerment is attained solely through financial means, which may outweigh the protective impact of a woman's education on tolerance for spousal physical violence. It is crucial to monitor societal attitudes regarding the acceptability of spousal abuse even as opportunities for women to advance their education around the world increase.

Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates culturally sensitive interventions, addresses underlying practices around power-sharing between couples, and is tailored to the various contexts and relationship modalities will aid in the reduction of domestic violence. This strategy is crucial in situations where the power balance deviates from the expected cultural norm (Eze-Ajoku et al., 2022). Women who had fewer years of schooling than their husbands, and therefore fewer economic alternatives to marriage, were more likely to report that their husbands were justified in beating them, according to Yount's (2005) findings.

The education of women was dichotomized for the creation of the model since no linear connection could be found between different educational qualifications and the risk of domestic violence. Some form of after-school education was found to offer protections against abuse, as did the option of not having one, although these protections were less substantive. For example, poverty is referred to as a factor at the community level, but in the discussion above it was mentioned that it can have an impact at an individual level through its impact on male identity as experienced by a single man, and at a relationship level through its impact on the conflict over resources and at the community level through its impact on shared notions of successful masculinity. In fact, societal poverty, living in a low-income country, is likely to have a lower level of education, lower household income, etc., all of which can affect the risk of domestic violence (Jeykess et al., 2002).

Yount and Li (2009) emphasize the various and multifaceted justifications that women may use to defend their husbands' physical abuse. However, investing in women's social and economic capital may help lower the risk that they will use such violence as justification in the current society.

For example, Li et al. (2020) found a strong association between perceptions of male dominance and tolerance for intimate partner violence, which is consistent with results from previous studies. In an intimate relationship, making decisions democratically reduces the risk of partner assault towards women, compared to the situation where women violence victims were excluded from family decision-making (Kocacık et al., 2007). Furthermore, women needing permission from their husbands to conduct different activities are more likely to experience abuse. Shopping is singled out among these activities as an example of the predominance of male control over economic resources. These conclusions provide useful resources for comprehending the prevailing cultural viewpoints and attitudes in society. In this context, it is important to note that neglecting domestic responsibilities is regarded as one of the major triggers for experiencing violence (Kocack et al., 2007).

Methods

Survey instrument

An empirical assessment of determinants of tolerance towards domestic violence was conducted by utilizing data from the Kosovo Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) carried out in 2019–2020 by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) as part of the UNICEF Global MICS Program. The survey was carried out with 5,124 households, drawn from a sample representative of the whole population of Kosovo, providing several indicators of the situation of children and women at the national level, and in urban and rural areas (KAS, 2020). The main sampling strata were identified as urban and rural areas within each of the seven regions, and the sample of households was selected in two stages. A predetermined number of census enumeration areas (EAs) were arbitrarily chosen within each stratum with a probability proportional to size. In the initial sampling stage, 324 EAs were chosen nationally as a sample. A systematic sample of 20 households was drawn in each sample EA after a household listing was completed within the chosen EAs. For this paper, data are extracted from the dataset which contains information from a questionnaire administered to 5,275 women in each household to all women aged 15–49 years.

Variables

The 2019–2020 Kosovo MICS assessed the attitudes of women and men aged 15–49 years towards wife/partner beating by asking the respondents whether they think that husbands/partners are justified to hit or beat their wives/partners in five specific situations, namely: 1) if she goes out without telling him; 2) if she neglects the children; 3) if she argues

with him; 4) if she refuses sex with him, and 5) if she burns the food. These questions were designed to capture the social justification for using violence (in situations where women have less status in society) as a form of punishment when a woman deviates from expected gender roles. This question is used as the dependent variable in this article, measuring justification and hence tolerance of women to violence from husbands/partners. A dummy variable is created equal to 1 if women justify physical violence/beating towards women in any of these 5 situations and zero if they do not justify violence in any of these situations. Data shown in Table 1, show that 11.4% of women justified violence if women go out without telling their husband/partner, 19.3% justified it with she neglects children, 9% if a woman argues with her husband/partner, 5.8% of surveyed women justify the violence if she refuses sex with him and 3.1% justify violence if a woman burns the food. About a quarter of women justified physical violence in at least one of the above-listed situations. An interesting observation from Table 1 is that justification of exercise of violence towards women is more prevalent in rural areas: 29.9% of women in rural areas justified physical violence to women as opposed to 17.7% of those in urban areas.

Table 1.
Justification of domestic violence/beating.

Situations	Share of women justifying physical violence	Urban/rural
if she goes out without telling him	11.4%	7.5%/14.3%
if she neglects the children	19.3%	14.2%/23.1%
if she argues with him	9.0%	5.6%/11.5%
if she refuses sex with him	5.8%	3.7%/7.3%
if she burns the food	3.1%	1.5%/4.3%
Any of the above situations	24.7%	17.7%/29.9%

Source: MICS 2019-2020

Explanatory variables are divided into two main categories – individual-related variables and household-related variables – to examine the factors that justify physical violence against women.

Individual-level independent variables:

✓ *Age* is included in the model and to test for non-linearity the model includes also an age square;

✓ *Education*: two dummies are included, one for tertiary education equalling 1 for those that have completed tertiary education; and one for secondary education equal to 1 for those

that have completed secondary education. The benchmark category is individuals with less than secondary education, as their highest level of education;

✓ *Civil status*: a dichotomous variable set at 1 for individuals that are married and zero for single, widowed or divorced women;

✓ *Age of marriage*: To examine whether the age when married influences the tolerance towards domestic violence, a variable measuring the age when sampled women were married is included;

✓ *Ethnicity*: A dummy variable equal to 1 for Albanian (who represent the majority population in Kosovo) and 0 for non-Albanians.

Household-level independent variables:

✓ *Residence:* a dummy variable equal to 1 for individuals living in urban areas and 0 in rural areas.

✓ *Economic conditions:* To estimate the influence of economic circumstances on tolerance towards domestic violence the MICS score of wealth is included in the model. To construct the wealth index for the 2019–2020 Kosovo MICS, principal components analysis was performed by using the information on the ownership of consumer goods, dwelling characteristics, water and sanitation, and other characteristics that are related to the household's wealth, to generate weights (factor scores) for each of the items used. First, initial factor scores are calculated for the total sample. Then, separate factor scores are calculated for households in urban and rural areas. Finally, the urban and rural factor scores are regressed on the initial factor scores to obtain the combined, final factor scores for the total sample. This is carried out to minimize the urban bias in the wealth index values. Each household in the total sample was then assigned a wealth score based on the assets owned by that household and on the final factor scores obtained as described above. The survey household population is then ranked according to the wealth score of the household they are living in and is finally divided into 5 equal parts (quintiles) from lowest (poorest) to highest (richest).

✓ *Presence of children*: A dummy variable to distinguish between households with and without children is included, equal to 1 if the household has children and 0 if no children are in the household.

Descriptive statistics outlined in Table 2 show that the average age of surveyed women is 31.3 years with those that justify violence against women are older-average age is 34.6 years.

Among surveyed women, 61.3% were married compared to 75.2% among women that justify the violence. Women that justify violence were married slightly at a younger age when compared to women in the total sample (21.6 and 22 years, respectively). Women that justify violence to women are less educated than average women in the sample: 27.6% of women that justify violence have completed upper secondary education (compared to 34.2% of the overall sample) and 11.2% of women that justify violence have completed tertiary education (compared to 30.5% of all surveyed women). A slightly larger share of women that justify violence is of Albanian ethnicity. A rural residence is a more common location for women that justify the husband/partner's physical violence to women. For the latter group, the wealth score is lower indicating that those with justification live in poorer households. There is no noteworthy difference in household composition (presence of children) between the overall sample and women that justify the violence.

Given that the dependent variable is dichotomous, equaling 1 woman that justifies the husband/partners violence to women and 0 for those that do not justify it, the Probit model is utilized, investigating the probability (Pr) of women justifying the physical violence:

$$\Pr(Y = 1|X_i) = \Phi\left(\beta_i X_i\right)$$

where the dependent variable Y is equal to one if a woman responded yes to the right of a husband to exercise violence towards women to any of the five above enlisted situations and 0 if the women responded no to all five situations; Φ is the Cumulative Distribution Function of the standard normal distribution and β_i are the parameters of the explanatory variables X_i that will be estimated by maximum likelihood.

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics.

Explanatory variables	Mean/% All women	Number of observations	Mean/% Women justifying violence
Individual level characteristics			
Age	31.3 years	5,275	34.6 years
Married: DV	61.3%	5,275	75.2%
Age when married	22 years	3,356	21.6 years
Secondary education completed: DV	34.2%	5,275	27.6%
Tertiary education completed: DV	30.5%	5,275	11.2%
Albanian ethnicity: DV	95.9%	5,275	96.7%
Household level characteristics			
Urban location: DV	46.0%	5,275	33.9%
Wealth score	-0.11	5,275	-0.36
Living with children in the household: DV	98.5%	3,074	98.6%

Source: MICS 2019-2020

Results

Table 3 presents the marginal effects obtained after running the Probit model. Before reporting regression results, it is important to note that according to Wooldridge (2002: 479), heteroskedasticity and normality in the Probit model are not relevant. Wooldridge emphasizes that in response probability, latent error non-normality is a functional form problem and must therefore be treated as such and therefore there is no need to test or correct it. A consistent deduction is made with regard to the presence of heteroscedasticity. Wooldridge states that given that the focus is on probability, since in the probit model the focus is on P(y=1|x), one should not attempt to exploit heteroscedasticity in the latent variable model with the consequences of heteroscedasticity in a standard linear model to compare regression model. He elaborates further, noting that while the statement that Probit will be inconsistent for b when e is heteroscedastic is true since Probit's emphasis is on marginal effects, inconsistent estimation of the coefficients is practically irrelevant, and Probit may be very good estimates of the partial effects provides effects (Wooldridge, 2002, p. 499).

Table 3.
Probit regression results, marginal effects.

Explanatory variables	Coefficient	t-statistic	P-values
Individual characteristics			
Age	0.00	0.01	.971
Age square	0.00	0.00	.667
Married: DV	0.08	0.04	.054
Age when married	0.00	0.00	.066
Upper secondary education completed: DV	-0.15	0.02	.000
Tertiary education completed: DV	-0.24	0.02	.000
Albanian ethnicity: DV	0.00	0.06	.952
Household characteristics			
Urban location: DV	-0.07	0.02	.000
Wealth score	-0.05	0.01	.000
Living with children in the household: DV	0.04	0.07	.545
Number of observations		2,884	
McFadden's R2		0.11	

Notes: *, *** significant at 10 and 1%, respectively; for dummy variables (DV), dy/dx is for the discrete change of DV from 0 to 1.

The marginal effects of the Probit model are shown in Table 3. Results show that their age does not have an impact on their tolerance of domestic violence. Compared to single or widowed and divorced women, married women are more likely to be tolerant of domestic violence, i.e. 8% more likely to justify the exercise of physical violence on women by their husband/partner. An interesting finding is that the older a woman gets married, the more likely she is to justify violence toward women. Education is a significant predictor, and research shows that women with completed upper secondary education and those with tertiary education are respectively 15 and 24% less likely than women with less education to justify physical violence against women by their husbands or partners. With regards to household-level characteristics, compared to women living in rural areas, those living in urban areas are 5% less likely to justify the violence. Economic conditions are also an important factor; justification of violence is lower among women with higher wealth scores. Finally, there is no statistically significant impact on the presence of children in the household, age, and ethnicity of women.

Discussion

This study used data from a 2019–20 representative Kosovo sample to examine the factors that influence women's tolerance of gender-based domestic violence against women. Economic conditions, lower education level, residence, marital status, and marrying age are important predictors of a higher rate of women's tolerant attitudes toward gender-based violence among women in Kosovo. Rates of women's justification of gender-based domestic violence against women ranged from 19.3 % *(if she neglects the children)*, 11.4 % *(if she goes out without telling him)*, and 9.0 % *(if she argues with him)*, 5.8 % *(if she refuses sex with him)*, and, 3.1 % *(if she burns the food)*. The women's justification rates of gender-based violence remain high, although they are lower compared to the MICS data gathered in 2013 – 2014 in Kosovo (Arënliu, Kelmendi, & Bërxulli, 2021). The lower rates are influenced by the raised awareness of women on sources, types, and consequences of gender-based violence. Moreover, media coverage about the gender-based violence phenomenon has increased during the last few years, which has helped society in general and women in particular in problematizing and prioritizing their fight against it. This finding is encouraging to different actors involved (public institutions, academia, civic society, media, international donors, etc.) for a continuing the efforts against gender-based violence. Literature shows that gender-based violence derives from male predominance embedded in family roles, which in turn are legitimized and supported by various social, economic, legal, and political factors (Li et. al, 2020; Yount & Li, 2009). This finding is in line with exchange theory, which explains domestic violence in society in terms of perpetrators' higher benefits compared to the higher costs in societies, where social control is more adequate (Arthur & Clark, 2009). The lower rates of tolerance of gender-based violence among women are an indicator of an increased level of women's awareness and empowerment on one hand but also show slowly changing social norms on the other one.

Economic conditions are one of the chief factors in maintaining tolerant attitudes toward gender-based violence. This finding is in line with other studies (Arënliu, Kelmendi, & Bërxulli, 2021; Bornstein, 2006; Eze-Ajoku et. al, 2022; Yount, 2005). The limited access of women in the labor market increases their financial dependency on their partners, which mediates forming and maintaining a more tolerant justifying attitude toward gender-based violence.

The findings confirm education is one of the most important factors influencing gender-based attitudes. Women that have completed tertiary education have less tolerant attitudes toward

gender-based violence, a finding which is in line with other studies (Eze-Ajoku et. al, 2022; Yount & Carrera, 2006). Education especially completed at the tertiary level has a positive impact on self-regard, increases the possibilities for better employment opportunities, and increases also the probability of a marriage delay in rural areas. Residence, marital status, and age of marriage are also factors influencing higher approval rates of gender-based violence, which confirm other studies' findings (Eze-Ajoku, 2022; Li et al, 2020).

This paper provides important findings related to forming and maintaining tolerant justifying attitudes toward gender-based violence. The national representative sampling by the MICS survey allows for generalized findings; however, the cross-sectional nature of the study has limitations when it comes to causal conclusions but certainly lays the ground for future multi-level design studies, including other relevant variables such as social support, participation in managing family finances, access to the internet, gender roles in parenting (Arënliu, Kelmendi, & Bërxulli, 2021), health situation, institutional responsiveness, and efficacy of institutional interventions to reduce gender-based violence.

Limitations and future research suggestions

This article analyzed determinants of women justifying gender-based violence. Given its sensitivity, the MICS survey did not ask respondents whether they were subject to violence, which variable could enable them to examine the impact of their own experience on the justification of violence. While employment status is an important measure of economic independence, information on the income of women and husbands/partners would add value to this analysis. The history of domestic violence of respondents would also shed light on the role of family upbringing in their justification of gender-based violence against women. Further studies should take these aspects into consideration and if not asked directly, proxies should be tailored and incorporated in the analysis.

Conclusion

Understanding multi-level surrounding and influencing gender-based violence is of utmost importance. This study's finding confirms the findings of other studies while opening new directions for research by suggesting different variables to be included in the research designs, which in turn will lead to designing adequate tailored interventions. This study's findings can help empower women to better understand the sources of justifying gender-based violence, and instigate an attitude modification process.

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Competing Interests

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