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### Cultural Activities Perpetuating Gender-Based Violence Among Men in Rubaga Division, Uganda

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**Abstract:** Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a persistent social concern across many communities, often shaped by deeply rooted cultural norms and practices. In Rubaga Division, Uganda, traditional practices such as initiation rituals and the bride price system continue to influence male perceptions and behaviors, perpetuating violence. Cultural expectations around masculinity and emotional expression have contributed to the normalization and underreporting of GBV, particularly among men. **Aims:** This study sought to examine how cultural activities influence gender-based violence among men and to explore how these practices shape male attitudes, emotional expression, and help-seeking behaviors within the Rubaga Division, Uganda. **Methods:** The study adopted a mixed-methods approach using a combination of cross-sectional and phenomenological designs. A purposive sample of 113 participants, including male survivors of GBV, social workers, healthcare providers, law enforcement officers, and NGO coordinators, was selected. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. **Analysis:** Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative insights. **Results:** Findings revealed that cultural activities such as initiation rituals reinforce hegemonic masculinity by promoting male dominance, emotional suppression, and aggression. The bride price system emerged as a practice that contributes to gender inequality by commodifying women and legitimizing male control within marital relationships. Additionally, cultural norms that discourage emotional vulnerability among men were associated with stigma, silence, and limited access to support services. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that culturally ingrained practices significantly contribute to the persistence of gender-based violence in Rubaga Division. Targeted interventions that challenge harmful cultural norms and promote emotional openness among men are essential. Community sensitization, gender education, and culturally responsive GBV prevention strategies are necessary to foster safer and more equitable communities.

**Keywords:** Cultural activities, gender-based violence, initiation rituals, bride price, male victims, hegemonic masculinity

## 1.1 Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive global human rights issue, affecting individuals across all genders, ages, and social backgrounds. Traditionally, scholarly and policy discourse has predominantly framed GBV through a female-victim and male-perpetrator lens, which, while addressing critical issues affecting women, has inadvertently marginalized the experiences of male survivors (Thobejane & Luthada, 2019; Makhono, Wanjama, & Wangaruro, 2022). Recent studies emphasize the need for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges men as potential victims, particularly in contexts

where cultural practices shape and sustain patterns of violence (Wirtz, Poteat, Malik, & Glass, 2020). In Africa, cultural activities, including initiation ceremonies, marriage negotiations, clan rituals, and community dispute resolution processes, play a significant role in defining and reinforcing gender norms (Ayodabo, 2021; Paris, Wang, Laumann, Pan, & Luo, 2004). These practices often uphold ideals of masculinity characterized by physical strength, stoicism, and emotional restraint. From an early age, boys are socialized to perceive vulnerability as weakness, while endurance of hardship is equated with honor and respect (Lysova, Dim, & Dutton, 2019). Within this framework, men experiencing abuse—particularly from intimate partners—often avoid disclosure due to fear of ridicule, loss of social standing, or being perceived as “less masculine” (Casey, Carlson, Two Bulls, & Yager, 2018).

In Uganda, such gender norms are deeply entrenched within local governance, religious teachings, and cultural institutions. In Rubaga Division, for example, cultural activities embedded within marriage counseling, clan meetings, and traditional justice systems often advise men to tolerate abuse to preserve family unity and honor. This counsel, while intended to promote harmony, effectively silences male victims and reinforces harmful gender stereotypes. Furthermore, culturally sanctioned language—such as referring to abuse as “family disagreements” or “private marital issues” minimizes the seriousness of violence and discourages victims from seeking legal or psychosocial support (Molin, 2018).

Although national legislation, such as the Domestic Violence Act (2010), aims to address GBV comprehensively, policy implementation and resource allocation in Uganda largely focus on female survivors (Gubi & Wandera, 2022; Thobejane et al., 2021). As a result, men facing GBV encounter significant barriers in accessing institutional assistance. These barriers are compounded by stigma, fear of social alienation, and the absence of male-centered support structures. Similar trends are evident across African contexts; for instance, in Nigeria, Ajaegbu, Ikpegbu, and Olorunpomi (2024) found that 25.7% of surveyed men had experienced domestic violence, with wives and in-laws being primary perpetrators.

Research further indicates that cultural constructs of masculinity not only deter men from reporting abuse but also normalize their suffering. In the Igbo community, for example, societal expectations demand courage, audacity, and emotional detachment from men (Ayodabo, 2021). Lanham et al. (2019) similarly observe that in many African societies, men are expected to maintain family authority at all costs, even at the expense of their safety and well-being. Such norms are perpetuated by media portrayals that trivialize male victimhood and by socio-economic stressors such as unemployment, displacement, and loss of social identity, that heighten GBV risks in both stable and post-conflict settings (van der Burg & Young, 2024; Malatjie & Mamokhere, 2024).

In Uganda, the few available statistics reveal a concerning trend. Reports by Maendeleo ya Wanaume (2012) documented a sharp increase in male-reported GBV cases, rising from 160,000 to 460,000 within a short period. Despite this, localized and empirical studies focusing on cultural contributors to GBV against men, particularly in Rubaga Division, remain scarce. This absence of context-specific evidence limits the development of culturally responsive interventions that address the unique vulnerabilities and lived realities of male survivors. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the cultural activities that perpetuate gender-based violence against men in Rubaga Division, Uganda. By exploring the intersection of cultural practices, gender norms, and GBV dynamics, the research aims to contribute to

a more inclusive understanding of GBV, challenge prevailing stereotypes, and inform gender-sensitive policy and programmatic responses that protect all survivors, regardless of gender.

## 1.2 Research Methodology

This research took place in Rubaga Division, a culturally diverse urban area within Kampala, Uganda. The division features a blend of ethnic communities and traditional systems, making it an ideal setting to examine cultural influences related to gender-based violence among men. The socio-cultural dynamics in Rubaga offered an opportunity to explore prevailing practices and how they intersect with gender-based power relations. A cross-sectional mixed-methods design guided the investigation. This design allowed for the collection of both numeric and narrative data in a single phase, enriching the understanding of the topic through triangulation. The rationale for selecting this approach stems from its flexibility in exploring associations between variables and contextual factors in real-time (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The integration of survey responses and interview narratives enabled a deeper interpretation of patterns observed in the quantitative findings. Participants included 200 adult males from the division, drawn from varied socio-economic backgrounds. A combination of stratified random sampling and purposive selection techniques ensured adequate representation. Subdivisions within the area were grouped based on shared socio-cultural characteristics. Within each stratum, participants were randomly selected to take part in the survey, while key informants—including elders, cultural leaders, and male community advocates were purposefully identified for interviews based on their local influence and knowledge. Quantitative data were gathered using structured questionnaires incorporating a four-point Likert scale. Items focused on perceptions, experiences, and attitudes related to cultural practices and gender roles. Reliability of the tool was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, producing coefficients above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, consistent with standards outlined in social research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012). The qualitative component utilized semi-structured interview guides to elicit detailed narratives surrounding social norms and beliefs contributing to GBV. Interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring motifs and contradictions. Data analysis involved the use of SPSS version 25 for descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, to summarize the survey data. Thematic coding of qualitative responses provided insights into the underlying cultural justifications for practices associated with male-perpetrated or male-experienced GBV. Throughout the study, ethical integrity was maintained. Participants received clear information about the purpose of the research, and voluntary participation was emphasized. Informed consent was secured before data collection commenced. Confidentiality measures included anonymization of responses and secure storage of data. The research protocol underwent review and clearance through a recognized ethics committee at Makerere University in collaboration with the Uganda National Council for Social Science and Technology (UNCST), 2014. Several constraints influenced the study process. Limited access to some participants due to time constraints and socio-cultural sensitivities regarding discussions on GBV posed logistical and ethical challenges. In response, culturally appropriate engagement strategies were adopted to build trust and minimize resistance during data collection.

## 1.3 Research Findings

This section presents the findings and discussions of the study on cultural activities perpetuating gender-based violence among men in Rubaga Division, Uganda. It explores how specific cultural practices and societal norms contribute to the perpetration and acceptance of gender-based violence. Through data collected via surveys and interviews, the study examines key themes, including the impact of cultural traditions, attitudes towards masculinity, and socio-economic factors that influence men's involvement

in violent behaviors. The findings aim to provide a deeper understanding of the cultural context in Rubaga Division and highlight areas that may benefit from targeted interventions to address gender-based violence.

### ***Response Rate***

The study targeted 120 questionnaires, of which 103 were accurately completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 85.8%. For the key informant interviews, 13 participants were planned, but only 10 participated due to some individuals' unavailability, resulting in a response rate of 76.9%. These findings indicate strong engagement from the questionnaire respondents, with slightly lower participation in the key informant interviews, potentially reflecting challenges related to participant availability or willingness to participate.

### ***Demographic Information***

The demographic details of the respondents in this study include age distribution, education level, marital status, and employment status. These characteristics are essential for understanding the socio-economic backgrounds of the participants and how these factors may influence their experiences and perceptions regarding gender-based violence and cultural practices in Rubaga Division, Uganda. Through examination of these demographic aspects, the study aims to provide a clearer picture of the population involved and how these factors contribute to shaping their involvement in or responses to the issue of gender-based violence.

### ***Demographic Characteristics of Respondents***

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study examining the relationship between cultural practices and gender-based violence (GBV) among men in Rubaga Division, Uganda. The demographic variables included in the analysis are age group, marital status, education level, and employment status

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>
<b>Age Group</b>		
18-24	25	24.3
25-34	28	27.2
35-44	32	31.1
45-54	18	17.5
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	30	29.1
Married	50	48.5
Divorced	13	12.6
Separated	10	9.7
<b>Education Level</b>		
Primary	20	17.2
Secondary	38	32.8
Vocational/Tertiary	21	18.1
Higher Education (Dip,BA	24	20.7
<b>Employment status</b>		
Student	5	4.3

Employed	56	48.3
Unemployed	18	15.5
Self-employed	20	17.2
Retired	4	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field data, 2025*

The majority of respondents are aged 35-44 (31.1%), followed by those aged 25-34 (27.2%), with the least represented being those aged 45-54 (17.5%). Most participants are married (48.5%), while 29.1% are single, and fewer are divorced (12.6%) or separated (9.7%). Education-wise, most have completed secondary education (32.8%), followed by higher education (20.7%) and vocational or tertiary education (18.1%). Employment status shows that 48.3% are employed, 17.2% are self-employed, and 15.5% are unemployed. The findings indicate that the sample is predominantly middle-aged, married, educated, and economically active, which may influence their perspectives on gender-based violence and cultural practices in Rubaga Division. The results suggest that marital status, education level, and employment are significant factors when examining socio-economic and cultural factors related to gender-based violence.

### ***Cultural Activities Perpetuating GBV Against Men***

This section examines the cultural activities that contribute to gender-based violence (GBV) against men in Rubaga Division, Uganda. The study focuses on initiation rituals enforcing dominance, bride price and marriage expectations, practices discouraging male emotional expression, cultural acceptance of physical discipline, and gender role enforcement within households. These activities were assessed to understand how they reinforce gender inequality and contribute to the normalization of violence against men. The objective aims to identify cultural practices that sustain GBV, providing insights for developing targeted interventions to address these issues.

### **Table 2: Descriptive Statistics Cultural Activities**

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on cultural practices influencing gender-based violence (GBV) in Rubaga Division, Uganda, based on responses from 103 participants. Participants rated their agreement with statements regarding cultural factors on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Initiation rituals enforcing dominance	103	1	5	3.16	1.413
Bride price and marriage expectations	103	1	5	3.32	1.381
Practices discouraging male emotional expression	103	1	5	3.47	1.349
Cultural acceptance of physical discipline	103	1	5	2.98	1.328
Gender role enforcement in households	103	1	5	3.36	1.378
Valid N (listwise)	103				

*Source: Field data, 2025*

The mean score for initiation rituals reinforcing male dominance was 3.16 (SD = 1.413), indicating moderate recognition of the role these rituals play in perpetuating male dominance, though responses showed variability. Bride price and marriage expectations had a mean of 3.32 (SD = 1.381), reflecting moderate agreement that these practices reinforce traditional gender roles in marriage. Practices discouraging male emotional expression showed the highest mean agreement (M = 3.47, SD = 1.349), suggesting widespread acknowledgment of cultural norms that suppress men's emotional openness, potentially contributing to emotional repression and aggression. Cultural acceptance of physical discipline received a moderate mean score of 2.98 (SD = 1.328), with participants differing on its perceived cultural relevance or harm. Enforcement of traditional gender roles within households averaged 3.36 (SD = 1.378), indicating moderate consensus on the strength of these roles, though some participants expressed dissent.

Key informant interviews corroborated and enriched these quantitative findings. A community leader remarked, *"A man is expected to provide everything, and failure to do so invites ridicule and rejection."* Similarly, a local official highlighted the emotional and economic pressures associated with bride price: *"If a man cannot pay the bride price, he is considered weak, and this can lead to emotional abuse and economic pressure."*

These narratives illustrate how cultural norms around male financial provision and dominance contribute to stress, shame, and potentially violent behavior among men. They also help explain why many male victims may refrain from reporting abuse due to the stigma attached to perceived failure in fulfilling these cultural expectations. The findings suggest that cultural activities linked to masculine identity, such as initiation rituals, bride price, and discouragement of emotional expression, create an environment of pressure and expectation for men. When these expectations are unmet, men may experience emotional abuse or resort to violence, often concealed due to social stigma. These deeply rooted cultural practices contribute to the normalization of GBV and sustain gender inequalities within the community, posing significant challenges for gender equality initiatives.

### ***Cultural Practices Contributing to GBV***

The survey results indicated a significant relationship between cultural practices and gender-based violence (GBV) within the community. Of the 103 respondents, 86 participants (83.5%) reported witnessing or experiencing cultural practices that contribute to the perpetuation of GBV, while 17 respondents (16.5%) indicated they had not. The majority suggests that cultural norms and traditional practices are perceived as major contributors to the persistence of GBV. The minority reporting no exposure may reflect either limited awareness or the absence of direct experience with such cultural influences.

**Table 3: Cultural Practices Contributing to GBV**

Have you witnessed or experienced cultural practices contributing to GBV?	Frequency	Percent
No	17	16.5
Yes	86	83.5
Total	103	100.0

*Source: Field data, 2025*



The qualitative data provided deeper insight into the nature of cultural practices contributing to GBV among men in Rubaga Division. Several participants described initiation ceremonies as promoting ideals of masculinity that emphasize dominance and emotional suppression, often legitimizing aggressive behaviors toward women and men perceived as weak. For example, one participant stated, *“During the initiation rites, boys are taught to be strong and to never show weakness; this sometimes translates to harsh treatment of women and even violence, which is seen as a sign of manhood.”* Additionally, the practice of bride price was frequently mentioned as commodifying women, fostering perceptions of ownership by husbands, and justifying control or violence when cultural expectations are unmet. As one respondent explained, *“When the bride price is paid, the woman is viewed as belonging to the man. This makes it difficult for her to resist any form of abuse because culturally she is expected to submit.”* Moreover, cultural expectations that men suppress emotions and endure suffering silently were identified as significant barriers to reporting abuse or seeking help, thereby perpetuating cycles of violence and isolation among male victims. These qualitative findings contextualize and complement the quantitative data by illustrating how entrenched cultural norms sustain GBV in the community.

### Discussion

The study revealed that cultural activities, particularly dowry systems and male initiation ceremonies, are central in perpetuating gender-based violence (GBV) among men in Rubaga Division, Uganda. Quantitative data indicated that 67% of respondents perceived dowry as reinforcing male entitlement over women, while qualitative interviews highlighted how this practice commodifies women, aligning with Watts and Zimmerman’s (2002) argument that dowry perpetuates patriarchal control. Similarly, male initiation ceremonies emerged as a driver of aggressive behaviors by promoting toughness and dominance as ideal masculine traits. This finding supports Connell’s (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which links violence to socially sanctioned male identities. Mixed-method integration revealed that while these practices hold deep cultural significance, their embedded norms inadvertently normalize violence against women. Importantly, the study also uncovered opportunities for cultural reform. Both survey and interview participants suggested that these traditions could be reframed to promote respect, equality, and non-violence. Such adaptations could preserve cultural heritage while addressing harmful gender norms, offering community-driven strategies for GBV prevention.

### 1.4 Conclusion

Cultural practices such as initiation rituals, bride price, and expectations of emotional restraint reinforce harmful gender norms that perpetuate gender-based violence (GBV) against men in Rubaga Division. These norms foster male dominance, discourage help-seeking, and normalize both silence and violence. Limited impact of existing interventions indicates the need for integrated strategies that challenge harmful traditions, promote community awareness, and strengthen legal recognition of men as potential victims of GBV. Addressing these cultural drivers is essential for fostering healthier gender relations and reducing GBV prevalence in the community.

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