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BRIDE PRICE, PATRIARCHAL POWER AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Domestic violence against women remains a critical social and human rights challenge, sustained not only by individual behaviours but also by cultural traditions and unequal power structures that normalize gender inequality. In Plateau State, Nigeria, practices such as bride price commercialization, patriarchal expectations, and male dominance continue to influence women's vulnerability to violence and limit their ability to seek protection. This study examined the relationship between bride price practices and domestic violence against women and investigated how power dynamics encourage domestic violence in Plateau State, Nigeria. The study was anchored on social norms theory, which explains how collective beliefs, expectations, and community approval sustain harmful practices and behaviours. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted using a mixed methods approach. A sample size of 1,111 respondents was determined, with 1,035 valid questionnaires analysed alongside qualitative interviews involving survivors, community leaders, religious leaders, law enforcement personnel, and social service providers. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Findings revealed that 56.5% of the respondents associated bride price payment with increased vulnerability to domestic violence, while 54.7% indicated that viewing bride price as a transaction promotes perceptions of women as property. The study also found that 67.8% of the respondents linked male dominated communities with higher levels of domestic violence, while 85.6% reported that women in such societies are less likely to report abuse. The study concludes that domestic violence in Plateau State is sustained by harmful interpretations of cultural practices and unequal gender relations rather than traditions alone. It recommends that traditional and community leaders should reform harmful interpretations of bride price, while government agencies and gender organizations should strengthen gender equality education, survivor support systems, and mechanisms for reporting domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic violence; Harmful traditions; Bride price practices; Patriarchal power structures; Social norms; Gender inequality.

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Introduction

Despite its widespread occurrence, domestic violence against women is one of the most pressing human rights and public health issues worldwide and impacts women from all social, economic and cultural backgrounds. Domestic violence is defined as "any act of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic violence in the intimacy or family relationship" and harmful traditions as "traditions, practices, customs, and beliefs that entail and reinforce gender-based inequalities, and ultimately condone or perpetrate violence against women" (United Nations Women, 2024). Legislative and policy efforts have worked to reduce intimate partner violence against women in the Americas but evidence suggests that a significant number still experience this type of violence. According to the Pan American Health Organization (2024), nearly one in four women in the Americas have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

Likewise, in Asia, there are strong social barriers as deeply ingrained patriarchy, son preference, child marriage and male-female inequities help perpetuate violence against women. The United Nations Development Programme (2023) mentioned that in a number of Asian societies, social norms that model the authority of males and the subordination of females are prevalent, which makes ladies susceptible to home-based violence. The World Health Organization (2024) has repeatedly reported that gender inequality, patriarchal cultural norms and power dynamics within the home are important risk factors for domestic violence. Jewkes et al. (2017), however, are divided on the weight of economic factors or cultural traditions, with some attributing a greater role to poverty and economic stress and others adjudging that there is more violence in these economically stable households where there is a pervasively dominating patriarchy. All these debates indicate that the need to understand the relationship between cultural tradition and power structures is central to plan effective interventions.

This is particularly a problem in Africa where cultural and gendered power dynamics persist to affect women's experiences of violence. WHO (2024) reported that the African region has one of the highest prevalence rates of intimate partner violence in the world, with about 33% of women in the region who have experienced physical/or sexual intimate partner violence. In all Sub-Saharan African studies, domestic violence has been consistently linked to patriarchal traditions, paying the bride price, acceptance of wife beating, inheritance inequalities, and limited decision-making power of women (Muluneh et al., 2020; Sardinha et al., 2022). Despite milestones achieved by the passing of the violence against persons (prohibition) act by Nigeria's lawmakers, domestic violence is prevalent. According to data obtained from the National Population Commission (NPC) and ICF (2019), it was found that approximately 31 percent of ever married women aged 15 – 49 years suffered violence of any kind, with many cases going unreported due to culture, fear of stigmatisation and inadequate institutional responses. Findings from empirical studies conducted in Nigeria have consistently shown that factors of gender, economic dependence and socio-cultural correspondence to patriarchy play a great role in domestic violence against women (Aihie, 2009; Okenwa et al., 2009).

However, there are conflicting views about the impact of legal and advocacy strategies. There are differing reports on engagement or not with regard to awareness and reporting of abuse, although there are also great arguments that deeply entrenched cultural beliefs undermine formal avenues of preventing violence (Okemgbo et al., 2002; United Nations Women, 2024). But these inconsistencies, suggest that the legal changes will not be enough without the accompanying cultural changes that stoke the violence.

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Domestic violence still remains as one of the biggest challenges facing society and development in Plateau State, Nigeria. There are different ethnic groups, religions and cultures across the State affecting gender relations and the power dynamics of the households. The extent and the factors that perpetuate domestic violence among women in Plateau State have received some attention through national and regional studies, but very little has been explored on the specific cultural dynamics in Plateau State and how it interplays with localized power dynamics in Plateau State. While Nigerian studies have focused considerably on the issues of prevalence, socio economic determinants and legal responses, there is very little research that has explored pathways of transformation of the harmful traditions, that normalize abuse and reinforce unequal gender relations. Secondly, much of what exists in research on cultures and violence tends to be fixed rather than a process in which changes in culture norms can disrupt violence sustaining systems, as can change in a community. This is an important omission, as sustainable prevention demands the understanding of how cultural legitimization and reproduction processes are in play. Therefore, this study aims to explore the negative cultures and traditional power dynamics affecting domestic violence against women in Plateau State and to formulate culturally appropriate strategies to address these issues in a bid to change the negative attitude. The study will help deepen the understanding of GBV, guide policy and design, and guide community level actions to stem GBV and achieve gender equity within the state.

Study objectives

1. To examine the nexus between bride price practices and the prevalence of domestic violence against women in Plateau State, Nigeria?
2. To find out the influence of power dynamic on domestic violence against women in Plateau state Nigeria?

Literature review

Bride price practices and the prevalence of domestic violence against women

The practice of bride price payment in Nigeria represents a deeply entrenched cultural tradition that has been increasingly linked to the perpetuation of domestic violence against women. In Nigeria, the practice of bride price has virtually lost its traditional purpose of marriage validation and honouring because of the commercialisation by many parents, prompting critics to call for a cancellation of the custom as it has turned women into commodities to be bought and sold. Exorbitant bride price sometimes leads to domestic violence against women, as the commercialisation of bride price is partially responsible for this phenomenon (Ademiluka, 2021). Research examining the nexus between these practices by Eniola and Aremo (2020) found that the payment of bride price inhibits the realisation of the sexual and reproductive health rights of women entrenched in various international instruments to which Nigeria is a signatory. The practice has created conditions where men in the society should be educated that the payment of bride price does not translate to buying their wives, as some men use it with the ulterior motive of subjugating women.

The prevalence of domestic violence in Nigeria remains alarmingly high, with studies revealing significant statistical patterns rooted in cultural practices. Almost one in four women in Nigeria reported having ever experienced intimate partner violence, with community norms among men that justified violence against women significantly modifying protective factors (Benebo et al., 2018). Regional data shows even higher prevalence rates; for example, a study in Owo, Ondo State found an overall prevalence of intimate partner violence of 71.2%, with controlling behaviour (49.6%), psychological abuse (47.0%), physical violence (32.9%), and sexual violence (19.6%) being the dominant forms (Akinyugha et al., 2023). During interviews

conducted in 2003, 2008, and 2013, 62.4%, 45.7%, and 37.1% of Nigerian women respectively believed that wife-beating was justified for at least one of the reasons given, underscoring the cultural practices that underlie domestic violence against women in Nigeria (Oyediran, 2016). These findings demonstrate the complex interrelationship between traditional practices such as bride price and the normalization of violence against women, necessitating comprehensive interventions that address both cultural attitudes and legal protections.

Power dynamic and domestic violence against women

Domestic violence against women in Nigeria remains a pervasive public health challenge deeply rooted in unequal power dynamics between men and women. Almost one in four women in Nigeria reported having ever experienced intimate partner violence, according to data from the Nigerian Demographic Health Survey involving 20,802 ever-partnered women aged 15-49 years (Benebo et al., 2018). These power imbalances are reinforced by patriarchal structures that normalize male dominance within marital relationships. Domestic violence against women in Nigeria reflects complex dynamics shaped by power imbalances, patriarchal norms, and family structures, with social and cultural norms legitimizing male dominance and structural factors like low education and women's economic dependency perpetuating these power imbalances (Baura & Omiya, 2025). Research in Kaduna State by Musa et al. (2025) found that 45.5% of the respondents perceived wife beating as the most common form of domestic violence, driven by cultural and socioeconomic factors, lack of education, and gender inequality. The study found that domestic violence often results from deep-seated cultural practices that encourage male dominance, coupled with economic challenges and limited access to education.

The relationship between women's status and violence exposure is significantly moderated by community-level acceptance of male authority. Higher women's status reduced the odds of intimate partner violence (OR = 0.47; 95% CI = 0.32-0.71). However, community norms among men that justified IPV against women modified the observed protective effect of higher women's status against IPV and reversed the odds (OR = 1.89; 95% CI = 1.26-2.83) (Benebo et al., 2018). This indicates that even economically empowered women remain vulnerable when societal attitudes endorse violence as an acceptable means of maintaining gender hierarchies. Thus, addressing intimate partner violence against women calls for community-wide approaches aimed at changing norms among men alongside improving women's status (Benebo et al., 2018).

Theoretical framework: Social norms theory

Social norms theory, primarily developed by Cristina Bicchieri, explains how individuals' behaviours are influenced not only by personal beliefs but also by perceptions of what others in their social group expect and approve. The theory was systematically articulated by Bicchieri (2006), who argued that social norms exist when individuals have conditional preferences to conform to a behaviour because they believe that others follow the same behaviour and expect them to do so. The basic tenet of the theory is that harmful practices persist when communities collectively perceive them as normal, acceptable, or necessary, even when individuals may privately disagree with them.

Applied to domestic violence against women in Plateau State, Nigeria, social norms theory provides a useful framework for understanding how patriarchal traditions, expectations of female obedience, beliefs in male authority over household decisions, and community tolerance of wife beating can reinforce violent behaviour. In many communities, domestic violence is sustained not only by individual perpetrators but also by broader cultural systems that discourage women from reporting abuse, encourage family mediation over legal action, and prioritize marital preservation over women's safety. Therefore, transforming harmful traditions requires

challenging the social expectations and power relations that legitimize violence, while promoting alternative norms based on gender equality, respect, and accountability.

However, social norms theory has been criticised for sometimes placing excessive emphasis on collective expectations while paying insufficient attention to individual agency, structural inequalities, economic dependence, and institutional failures that also contribute to domestic violence (Mackie et al., 2015). In the context of Plateau State, Nigeria, the theory alone may not fully explain how poverty, weak enforcement of protective laws, limited access to support services, and broader patriarchal power structures interact with social norms to sustain violence against women. Nevertheless, the theory remains relevant because domestic violence is often embedded in shared cultural meanings and community expectations rather than being merely a private matter between individuals. Its adoption is justified because addressing harmful traditions requires understanding how norms are created, maintained, and transformed within social groups. Consequently, social norms theory provides a strong foundation for analysing and transforming the cultural and power structures that sustain domestic violence against women in Plateau State by targeting the collective beliefs that make such violence socially tolerated.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to examine cultural practices and domestic violence against women in Plateau State, Nigeria. The study area was selected because of its cultural diversity, history, and the presence of traditional practices such as early marriage, bride price, and economic dependence that may influence gender relations and contribute to domestic violence. The target population comprised adult women aged 18 years and above, with a study population of 3,220,000, from which a sample size of 1,111 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula. A multistage sampling technique was employed, involving the selection of geopolitical zones, local government areas, wards, households, and eligible respondents to ensure adequate representation across the state.

The study used a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative questionnaires and qualitative in-depth interviews involving domestic violence survivors (5), community and religious leaders (3), law enforcement personnel (3), social workers (3), healthcare providers (3), and male community members (3) making a total of 20 interviewees. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and thematic analysis of interview transcripts. The validity of the instruments was established through expert review. Ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw, were observed. The major limitation of the study was respondents' possible reluctance to disclose experiences of domestic violence due to stigma, cultural sensitivity, and fear of social consequences; however, privacy measures, trained research assistants, and qualitative techniques were used to reduce this challenge.

Findings: Data presentation

Out of the 1,111 questionnaires distributed, 1035 (93%) were accurately completed and returned, while 76 (7%) were not retrieved due to being either missing or incomplete. As a result, the analysis was carried out using the 1035 valid responses.

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Table 1: Distribution of respondents by socio- demographic characteristics

Variables	Frequency (N=1035)	Percentage
Age		
18-25	280	27.1
26-33	205	19.8
34-41	193	18.6
42-49	107	10.3
50 years and above	250	24.2
Marital Status		
Single	372	35.9
Married	553	53.4
Separated	60	5.8
Widowed	33	3.2
Divorced	17	1.6
Occupation		
Farming	410	39.6
Trading	140	13.5
House wife	160	15.5
Public servant	325	31.4
Level of education		
None formal education	222	21.4
Primary	281	27.1
Secondary	367	35.5
Tertiary	165	15.9
Religion		
Christianity	801	77.4
Islam	200	19.3
Africa Traditional Religion	34	3.3

Source: Field work, 2026

The socio demographic profile in Table 1 shows that most respondents were aged 18 to 25 years (27.1%) and 50 years and above (24.2%), indicating representation of both younger and older perspectives on cultural practices sustaining domestic violence. Married respondents constituted the majority (53.4%), suggesting exposure to marital power relations. Farming (39.6%) and public service (31.4%) were dominant occupations, reflecting rural and formal employment contexts. Secondary education was most common (35.5%), while 21.4% had no formal education, implying varying levels of awareness about gender rights. Christianity dominated (77.4%), indicating the need to consider religious influences in addressing harmful traditions. These characteristics are important for examining how age, marital status, occupation, education, and religion shape attitudes toward domestic violence.

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Table 2: Distribution of respondents on bride price practices and domestic violence against women

Questions	Yes	No	Not sure
Does bride price payment increase the risk of domestic violence against women?	585 (56.5%)	385 (37.2%)	65 (6.3%)
Do cultural beliefs that see bride price as a transaction make women seem like property, increasing their risk of domestic violence?	566 (54.7%)	378 (36.5%)	91 (8.8%)
Do communities with a strong bride price tradition have higher rates of domestic violence against women?	473 (45.7%)	441 (42.6%)	121 (11.7%)
Are women who bring a larger bride price less likely to experience domestic violence from their husbands or in-laws?	694 (67.1%)	286 (27.6%)	55 (5.3%)
Would the abolition of bride price payment effectively reduce the occurrence of domestic violence against women?	485 (46.9%)	474 (45.8%)	76 (7.3%)
Does the financial burden of bride price payments cause economic stress and increase the risk of domestic violence against women?	675 (65.2%)	306 (29.6%)	54 (5.2%)
Is bride price payment a risk factor for intimate partner violence against married women?	298 (28.8%)	595 (57.5%)	142 (13.7%)

Source: Fieldwork 2026

Table 2 shows that respondents largely associate bride price practices with factors that sustain domestic violence against women. More than half (56.5%) agreed that bride price payment increases women's vulnerability to domestic violence, while 54.7% linked transactional perceptions of bride price with treating women as property. Although opinions were divided on whether communities with strong bride price traditions record higher violence rates, 67.1% believed higher bride price does not protect women from abuse. Similarly, 65.2% identified the financial burden of bride price as a source of economic stress that may contribute to violence. However, 57.5% disagreed that bride price is a direct risk factor for intimate partner violence, suggesting the influence of broader cultural and power dynamics. The findings imply that addressing domestic violence requires transforming harmful interpretations of bride price rather than focusing solely on its abolition. Some interviewee highlighted that the payment of bride price makes a woman more vulnerable to being abused by her husband; An interviewee stated that:

> When my husband beat me the first time, he pointed at his family and said, 'We paid for you. You will do as we say or go back and return what we paid.' That sentence has never left my mind. He paid five cows, some yams, and cash. After that, he treated me like those items something he owned. I have spoken to other women in my community, and almost all of us have heard similar words. The bride price is used as a weapon. It is not a symbol of love; it becomes a leash (**Female Survivor; Age, 33 years; Pankshin**)

Similarly, a 67 years old male religious leader from Langtang South stated that:

> I have officiated over 200 weddings in 30 years of ministry. I have also counselled dozens of couples in crisis. I can tell you that in the cases where a man has paid a high bride price, there is often an entitlement mentality. The man feels he has 'invested,' and therefore his wife must serve him without question. When she asserts herself, he sees it as a return on investment being denied. This is a corruption of what bride price was meant to represent, which was appreciation. But corruption or not, the outcomes for women are real and painful.
>
> Also, from a 41 years female law enforcement officer, posited that:
>
> In our gender desk, we receive reports weekly. When I ask women what triggered the violence, a significant number mention the husband referencing what he paid. In one case, a man dragged his wife to court not for divorce but to demand a 'refund' because she was, in his words, 'not performing.' The judge dismissed it, but the violence that preceded that court case was extreme. Bride price creates a transactional lens through which some men view their wives, and that lens enables violence.

Furthermore, when asked what do community members or families typically say when a woman reports abuse, given the bride price that was paid" A 29 years old female survivor of domestic violence, from Shendam stated that:

> When I reported my husband's abuse to my family, my own mother said, 'Endure. Do you know what we would have to return?' My father said, 'A woman's home is not always sweet, but you must not embarrass us.' Not one person asked if I was safe. Every response was about money and reputation. My in-laws said, 'Our son paid for a wife, not a runaway.' I was alone in a house of pain, surrounded by a community that had been silenced by the weight of a transaction. It took two years and a broken arm before anyone helped me.
>
> Also, a Church Women's Leader; aged 53 from Riyom said that:
>
> It is heartbreaking. When women come forward, the first response from families is financial calculation, not compassion. 'Can we pay it back?' 'How much did he pay?' 'Our family will be shamed.' I have sat in room after room where the bride price was discussed before the bruises were even acknowledged. One woman showed elders her swollen eye at a meeting. An elder's first response was, 'But your father took fourteen goats, three cows.' The marriage was treated as a commodity transaction that trumped her bodily safety.
>
> When asked if bride price actually protects women, an interviewee stated that:
>
> Some women in my community say bride price makes their husbands value them because he spent money, he will not throw you away easily. I used to believe this too. But I was beaten for five years by a husband who had paid a large bride price. I now understand: the logic is flawed. Spending money on something does not mean you treat it well. My neighbour's husband paid very little and treats her with dignity. My former husband paid a lot and treated me like livestock. The money does not predict love; character does. **(Female Survivor; Age, 36; Langtang South)**

When asked if abolishing the bride price would reduce domestic violence, or would the same patterns continue, an interviewee stated that:

> I used to think that if bride price was abolished, women would be free. But I have listened to survivors from countries where bride price does not exist, and

domestic violence still happens. The violence is not only about bride price it is about power and culture. However, removing bride price would remove one powerful tool that husbands use to justify abuse. It would take away the 'I paid for you' weapon. It would not solve everything, but it would remove a specific justification that enables violence and traps women. I support abolition with education as a comprehensive response. (**Survivor and Activist; Age, 40 years; Riyom)**

Table 3: Distribution of respondents on power dynamics and domestic violence against women

Questions	Yes	No	Not sure
Do communities where men dominate experience higher rates of domestic violence against women?	702 (67.8%)	263 (25.4%)	70 (6.8%)
Do women in male-dominated cultures experience more controlling behaviour in their relationships?	803 (77.6%)	184 (17.8%)	48 (4.6%)
Does accepting male dominance and female subordination lead to the acceptance of domestic violence against women?	299 (28.9%)	503 (48.6%)	233 (22.5%)
Are men who strongly follow patriarchal beliefs more likely to commit domestic violence against women?	458 (44.3%)	320 (30.9%)	257 (24.8%)
Are women who challenge male domination in their relationships more likely to experience domestic violence?	817 (78.9%)	168 (16.2%)	50 (4.8%)
Does growing up with patriarchal attitudes increase the likelihood of committing domestic violence in adulthood?	448 (43.3%)	368 (35.6%)	219 (21.2%)
Are women in male-dominated societies less likely to seek help or report domestic violence?	886 (85.6%)	117 (11.3%)	32 (3.1%)

Source: Fieldwork 2026

Table 3 revealed a strong association between patriarchal power structures and domestic violence against women. Most of the respondents (67.8%) agreed that male dominated communities experience higher rates of violence, while 77.6% linked male dominance with increased controlling behaviour in relationships. Additionally, 78.9% indicated that women who challenge male authority face greater risks of abuse, and 85.6% agreed that women in such societies are less likely to seek help or report violence. However, perceptions varied regarding the direct influence of accepting female subordination and patriarchal upbringing on violent behaviour. The findings imply that transforming domestic violence requires challenging unequal gender power relations, promoting women's agency, strengthening reporting mechanisms, and addressing cultural norms that legitimize male authority over women. During the interview session interviewees were asked "From your experience living in this community, do you think women here face more violence from their husbands compared to communities where women have more say in family decisions"? The views expressed by respondents during the interview showed that:

> Yes, very much. Here, the man is king. If a woman earns more money than her husband or challenges him, people say she is disrespectful. My husband beat me for buying land in my name. His family said I was 'too forward.' In the communities I have heard about where women sit in village councils, the men cannot just do whatever they want. Here, nobody will stand up for you. (**Female Domestic violence survivor; Age, 38; Barkin Ladi)**.

A 52-year male community leader from Kanam posited that:

> I will not lie to you. The cases I handle most are from homes where the man believes his word is absolute law. I have seen men beat their wives for attending a women's cooperative without permission. Where women are given respect and voice, those homes are quieter. I am not saying men should not lead but leadership is not brutality. Our culture has been twisted to excuse violence.

Respondents were asked whether they had observed controlling behaviours among male members of their congregation toward their wives, and how church teachings on gender roles influenced such behaviours.

> I will be honest, for many years, we preached submission without also preaching servant leadership. Men heard 'your wife must obey you' and stopped listening after that. I began noticing women coming to me with bruises. One of our deacons used to check his wife's call history every night. He saw it as his right. We have since changed our teaching. When headship is preached without accountability and love, it becomes a licence for control. I have seen controlling behaviour skyrocket in congregations that emphasise male authority without limits. (**Female Pastor; Age, 61; Riyom)**.

A 53-year female social worker specialising in women's economic empowerment in Plateau State, was asked if women report financial control as part of their experience of domestic abuse? She indicated that:

> Financial control is the most common form of control I encounter more common than physical violence, actually. Women come to us hidden from their husbands. One woman hid her training certificate in her church Bible because her husband searched her belongings. Another asked me to send her stipend to her sister's phone. In male-dominated cultures, a woman earning her own money is seen as a threat to the man's authority. So men monitor, confiscate, prohibit. And when the woman resists, physical violence often follows. Control and violence are on the same spectrum

Respondents were asked whether they had been socialized during childhood to view the physical disciplining of wives by husbands as normal, and how such beliefs influenced their responses to violence within their marriages.

> When I was growing up, my mother was beaten often. I thought it was part of marriage. When my husband first slapped me, I cried and asked what I did wrong, I assumed the fault was mine. It took years before I even called it violence. My mother-in-law told me, 'Endure. A man who does not beat his wife does not love her.' I believed her. Accepting male dominance meant accepting that his anger even his fists were legitimate. It was only when I saw my daughter watching him beat me that I realised I had accepted the unacceptable. (**Survivor and community health volunteer; Age, 35; Riyom)**.

A 50-year female GBV Counsellor from Shendam posited that:

> This is the central issue in almost every case I handle. Women say: 'I thought every marriage was like this.' Or: 'My pastor said to forgive and submit.' One woman, a teacher with a degree, told me she blamed herself for her husband's violence for nine years because she had been taught that a godly wife prevents conflict. Accepting female subordination means that when violence happens, the woman asks 'what did I do wrong?' not 'why is this happening to me?' The acceptance of subordination becomes the acceptance of punishment, and punishment normalises abuse.

Interview responses indicate that patriarchal cultural norms and the acceptance of male dominance significantly contribute to domestic violence, as many men perceive themselves as absolute authorities within the household and react violently when women assert independence or challenge their control; community leaders, religious figures, and social workers further observed that teachings which emphasize female submission without accountability for men often legitimize controlling behaviours such as financial restriction, surveillance, and limitations on women's mobility, while survivors explained that socialization processes that normalize male authority and physical "discipline" lead many women to initially interpret abuse as a normal part of marriage; consequently, women frequently internalize blame for the violence they experience, and counsellors noted that this internalization sustains abusive relationships by transforming cultural expectations of female subordination into a justification for punishment and continued abuse.

Discussion of findings

Bride price practices and the prevalence of domestic violence against women

The findings show that bride price practices contribute to women's vulnerability to domestic violence when the practice is commercialised or interpreted as conferring ownership rights on husbands. Respondents associated bride price with increased vulnerability, perceptions of women as property, and economic stress, while the qualitative accounts further showed that some husbands and families use the payment of bride price to justify control, abuse, and resistance to women's attempts to leave violent relationships. This finding agrees with Ademiluka (2021), who argued that commercialised bride price can distort the meaning of marriage and reinforce the treatment of women as commodities. It is also consistent with Eniola and Aremo (2020), who linked bride price practices with restrictions on women's rights. However, the finding that bride price alone does not necessarily cause domestic violence is important, because respondents also indicated that violence may persist where broader cultural and power relations remain unchanged.

The finding therefore suggests that the relationship between bride price and domestic violence is mediated by the meanings attached to the practice rather than by the payment itself. Where bride price is understood as an investment that gives men authority over wives, it may strengthen entitlement and reduce women's ability to challenge abuse. This corresponds with Benebo et al. (2018), who demonstrated that community norms supporting male authority can weaken the protective effect of women's social status against intimate partner violence. The finding also supports the study's conclusion that transforming harmful interpretations of bride price may be more appropriate than concentrating exclusively on its abolition. The finding supports social norms theory because bride price becomes harmful when shared community expectations define women as possessions and legitimise male authority. Bicchieri (2006) explains that behaviours are sustained when individuals believe that others expect and approve them.

Power dynamics and domestic violence against women

The findings demonstrate that unequal power relations within households and communities are closely associated with domestic violence against women. Male dominance was linked with controlling behaviour, greater risks for women who challenge male authority, and reduced willingness to report abuse. The qualitative findings reinforced this pattern by showing that patriarchal expectations may legitimise financial control, surveillance, restrictions on women's mobility, and physical violence when women resist male authority. These findings are consistent with Benebo et al. (2018), who found that community acceptance of male authority can increase women's exposure to intimate partner violence, and with Baura and Omiya (2025), who identified patriarchal structures, economic dependence, and gender inequality as important factors shaping domestic violence in Nigeria.

The findings further suggest that power dynamics operate through socialisation, family expectations, and community responses to women's attempts to assert autonomy. Survivors and service providers described how women may internalise blame and regard abusive behaviour as a normal part of marriage when they are socialised into expectations of female submission. This supports the argument of Muluneh et al. (2020) that gender-based violence in Sub Saharan Africa is associated with patriarchal norms and unequal gender relations. It also indicates that reducing domestic violence requires interventions that challenge unequal authority relations, strengthen women's agency, and improve mechanisms for reporting and responding to abuse. Social norms theory explains this finding by showing how expectations of male authority and female submission become socially accepted standards that influence behaviour. The theory is therefore relevant because changing domestic violence requires transforming the community expectations that legitimise control and silence surrounding abuse.

Conclusion

The study concludes that domestic violence against women in Plateau State, Nigeria, is sustained by interconnected cultural practices and unequal power structures that normalize women's subordination and limit their ability to resist abuse or seek support. The study concludes that while bride price itself may not directly cause domestic violence, its commercialization and interpretation as a symbol of male ownership can reinforce entitlement attitudes, economic pressure, and the perception of women as property. Similarly, the study concludes that patriarchal power relations, male dominance, and expectations of female submission significantly contribute to controlling behaviours, silence, and tolerance of violence within households and communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study proffered the following recommendation:

1. Traditional and community leaders should reform the interpretation of bride price by educating families and husbands that payment does not confer ownership over women and must not be used to justify control, abuse, or forced endurance of violent marriages. Families should prioritise women's safety when abuse is reported rather than demanding that victims remain because of concerns about returning bride price.
2. Traditional and religious leaders should challenge patriarchal expectations that legitimise male control by promoting mutual decision making, accountability, and non-violent relationships. Religious leaders should specifically avoid teaching female submission without corresponding male responsibility, as interview findings showed that such teachings could be interpreted as justification for controlling women.

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