

Psychological and Socio-Cultural Predictors of Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration Among Albanian Men: A Comparative Study of Perpetrators and University Students.

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the factors associated with intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration is essential for developing effective prevention strategies and evidence-informed intervention programmes. Although substantial research has examined the consequences of IPV for victims, comparatively less attention has been devoted to identifying the psychological and socio-cultural characteristics associated with violent behaviour among men, particularly within transitional societies such as Albania. This study investigates the psychological and socio-cultural predictors of intimate partner violence perpetration among Albanian men through a comparative analysis of perpetrators and university students. A quantitative, descriptive-comparative research design was employed using the Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) Scale to assess attitudes, beliefs, and gender-related norms associated with violent behaviour. The study included a total sample of 100 male participants, comprising 50 perpetrators enrolled in rehabilitation programmes and 50 male university students. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, independent-samples t-tests, Pearson correlation analysis, and one-way ANOVA. The findings indicate that psychological factors represent the strongest predictors associated with IPV perpetration, while socio-cultural factors, particularly inequitable gender norms and traditional beliefs regarding male authority, also contribute significantly to violent behaviour. Perpetrators demonstrated significantly more traditional gender attitudes than university students across several dimensions measured by the GEM Scale. Educational attainment was associated with more equitable gender attitudes and appeared to reduce the influence of psychological and socio-cultural risk factors related to violence. These findings contribute to the limited empirical literature on perpetrator characteristics in Albania and highlight the importance of integrating psychological assessment with gender-transformative approaches in perpetrator intervention programmes. The study offers practical implications for psychologists, social workers, justice institutions, and policymakers seeking to strengthen evidence-based strategies for the prevention of intimate partner violence.

Keywords: intimate partner violence; perpetrators; psychological predictors; socio-cultural factors

INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) remains one of the most widespread forms of violence against women and represents a major public health, social, and human rights challenge worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), nearly one in three women globally has experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner during her lifetime, with profound consequences for physical health, mental wellbeing, family functioning, and community development (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Beyond its direct impact on victims, IPV contributes to adverse childhood experiences, intergenerational transmission of violence, increased healthcare costs, reduced workplace productivity, and substantial burdens on criminal justice and social protection systems (Sardinha et al., 2022).

In response to this global challenge, international frameworks increasingly advocate for comprehensive approaches that integrate victim protection with evidence-based interventions targeting men who perpetrate violence. While protecting victims remains the primary priority, research has consistently demonstrated that sustainable violence prevention also requires understanding the individual, psychological, and socio-cultural mechanisms associated with violent behaviour (United Nations Women, 2023; Work With Perpetrators European Network [WWP EN], 2018). Consequently, perpetrator-focused interventions have become an increasingly important component of coordinated community responses aimed at reducing recidivism, promoting accountability, and enhancing the long-term safety of women and children (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015).

The scientific literature recognises that intimate partner violence is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be explained by a single cause. Instead, violent behaviour emerges through the interaction of psychological characteristics, interpersonal relationships, socio-cultural norms, and broader structural influences. Heise's Ecological Framework (1998) remains one of the most influential theoretical models for explaining this complexity, proposing that violence develops through dynamic interactions across four interconnected levels: individual, relationship, community, and societal. Within this framework, individual characteristics—including emotional regulation, impulsivity, cognitive distortions, exposure to childhood violence, and personality traits—interact with environmental influences such as gender inequality, patriarchal norms, economic stress, and cultural acceptance of male dominance (Heise, 1998; Jewkes et al., 2015).

Among the numerous determinants identified in previous research, psychological and socio-cultural factors consistently emerge as two of the strongest predictors of intimate partner violence perpetration. Psychological factors include difficulties in emotional regulation, low empathy, hostile attribution biases, poor conflict-resolution skills, traumatic childhood experiences, and attitudes supportive of violence. Socio-cultural influences encompass traditional gender norms, patriarchal beliefs, rigid constructions of masculinity, unequal power relations, and the social acceptance of male authority within intimate relationships (Flood, 2019; Jewkes et al., 2015). These factors rarely operate independently; rather, they reinforce one another and contribute to the development and maintenance of abusive behaviours.

Gender norms have become a central focus of contemporary violence prevention research. Social expectations concerning masculinity, authority, and control influence how men perceive relationships, conflict resolution, and power dynamics within families. Men who endorse inequitable gender attitudes are consistently more likely to justify controlling behaviours, accept violence as a legitimate conflict-management strategy, and perpetrate intimate partner violence (Levtov et al., 2022). Consequently, many contemporary intervention programmes incorporate gender-transformative approaches designed to challenge harmful masculine norms while promoting respectful, equitable relationships.

The Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) Scale has become one of the most widely used instruments for assessing gender-related attitudes associated with violence. Originally developed by Pulerwitz and Barker (2008), the GEM Scale measures beliefs concerning gender roles, sexuality, intimate relationships, decision-making, and violence against women. The instrument has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties across diverse cultural settings and has been widely employed to evaluate interventions promoting gender equality and violence prevention (Pulerwitz & Barker, 2008; Singh et al., 2023). Because gender attitudes represent modifiable risk factors, understanding how they differ between perpetrators and non-perpetrators is particularly relevant for developing effective prevention strategies.

Despite substantial international research, empirical evidence concerning perpetrators of intimate partner violence remains limited within Albania. Previous studies have primarily focused on the prevalence of domestic violence, victim experiences, institutional responses, and legal reforms, while comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding the psychological and socio-cultural characteristics of men who perpetrate violence. Albania has strengthened its legislative and institutional framework through the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), amendments to domestic violence legislation, and the expansion of specialised support

services. Nevertheless, limited empirical evidence is available regarding the factors that distinguish perpetrators from other men and how these factors may inform perpetrator rehabilitation programmes.

Addressing this knowledge gap is particularly important in transitional societies where traditional patriarchal values coexist with rapid social, economic, and cultural transformation. Albania continues to experience changing gender roles, increasing educational opportunities, migration, urbanisation, and evolving family structures, all of which may influence attitudes toward masculinity and intimate relationships. Understanding the relative contribution of psychological and socio-cultural predictors within this context may facilitate the development of culturally responsive intervention programmes and strengthen evidence-based policy development.

The present study aims to investigate the psychological and socio-cultural predictors of intimate partner violence perpetration among Albanian men through a comparative analysis of perpetrators and university students. Using the Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) Scale, the study examines differences in gender attitudes, beliefs, and values between the two groups while exploring the relative influence of psychological and socio-cultural factors associated with violent behaviour. By identifying the factors that most strongly differentiate perpetrators from non-perpetrators, this study seeks to contribute to the limited empirical literature on perpetrator characteristics in Albania and provide evidence that may support psychologists, social workers, justice institutions, educators, and policymakers in developing more effective violence prevention and perpetrator rehabilitation strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive-comparative research design to investigate the psychological and socio-cultural predictors of intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration among Albanian men. The study compared two groups of male participants to identify differences in gender-related attitudes, beliefs, and values associated with violent behaviour. In addition to group comparisons, the study explored the relationships among psychological and socio-cultural factors through correlational and multivariate statistical analyses.

A cross-sectional design was adopted, allowing the examination of differences between perpetrators of intimate partner violence and male university students at a single point in time. Although this design does not permit causal inferences, it provides valuable evidence regarding the factors associated with violent behaviour within the Albanian context.

Participants

The study included 100 male participants, divided equally into two groups.

The first group consisted of 50 perpetrators of intimate partner violence who were enrolled in counselling and rehabilitation programmes for domestic violence perpetrators. These participants represented the study population of men who had engaged in violent behaviour toward their intimate partners.

The comparison group consisted of 50 male university students attending the Faculty of Education Sciences at the University "Luigj Gurakuqi" in Shkodër. This group was selected to provide a comparison with young men from the general population who had no documented history of intimate partner violence.

Participants represented different age categories and places of residence. Regarding residential distribution, 52% of participants lived in rural areas, whereas 48% resided in urban areas, allowing further comparisons based on residential background.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using the Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) Scale, an internationally recognised instrument

designed to assess attitudes toward gender norms, masculinity, intimate relationships, violence, and gender equality (Pulerwitz & Barker, 2008).

The questionnaire consisted of 46 items covering multiple domains related to gender-role attitudes, decision-making, power relations within intimate relationships, acceptance of violence, and traditional beliefs concerning masculinity.

Prior to conducting the statistical analyses, the reliability of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was found to be $\alpha = .858$ across the 46 items, indicating high reliability and confirming that the instrument was appropriate for assessing psychological and socio-cultural attitudes within the study population.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted in accordance with standard ethical procedures for psychological research.

Participants completed the questionnaires voluntarily after receiving information regarding the objectives of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw from participation at any stage without consequences.

Questionnaires administered to perpetrators were completed within counselling settings during programme participation, whereas university students completed the instrument in an academic setting under standardised administration conditions.

All questionnaires were anonymous, and no identifying personal information was collected.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were initially calculated to summarise participants' demographic characteristics and the distribution of responses across study variables.

The psychometric properties of the GEM Scale were examined through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to identify the principal psychological and socio-cultural dimensions underlying participants' attitudes toward gender norms and violence.

Differences between perpetrators and university students were examined using Independent Samples t-tests.

Relationships between educational level and the identified psychological and socio-cultural factors were analysed using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients.

Furthermore, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine differences according to participants' place of residence.

Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical principles governing psychological research, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for participants' dignity.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and assured that all responses would remain confidential and be used exclusively for scientific purposes. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without negative consequences.

Given the sensitive nature of intimate partner violence, particular attention was paid to protecting participants'

privacy and ensuring that findings were reported only in aggregate form.

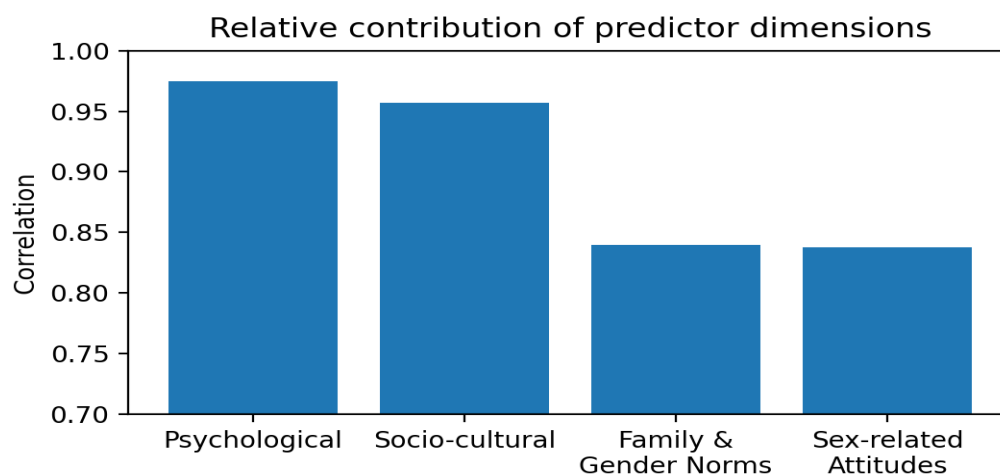
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Sample Characteristics

The study included 100 male participants equally divided between perpetrators of intimate partner violence ($n = 50$) and university students ($n = 50$). Participants represented six age groups. More than half (54%) were younger than 30 years, largely reflecting the university student sample, whereas most perpetrators were concentrated between 31 and 50 years of age. Residential distribution was balanced, with 48% of participants living in urban areas and 52% in rural areas, reducing the likelihood that geographical differences biased the comparisons.

Factor Analysis

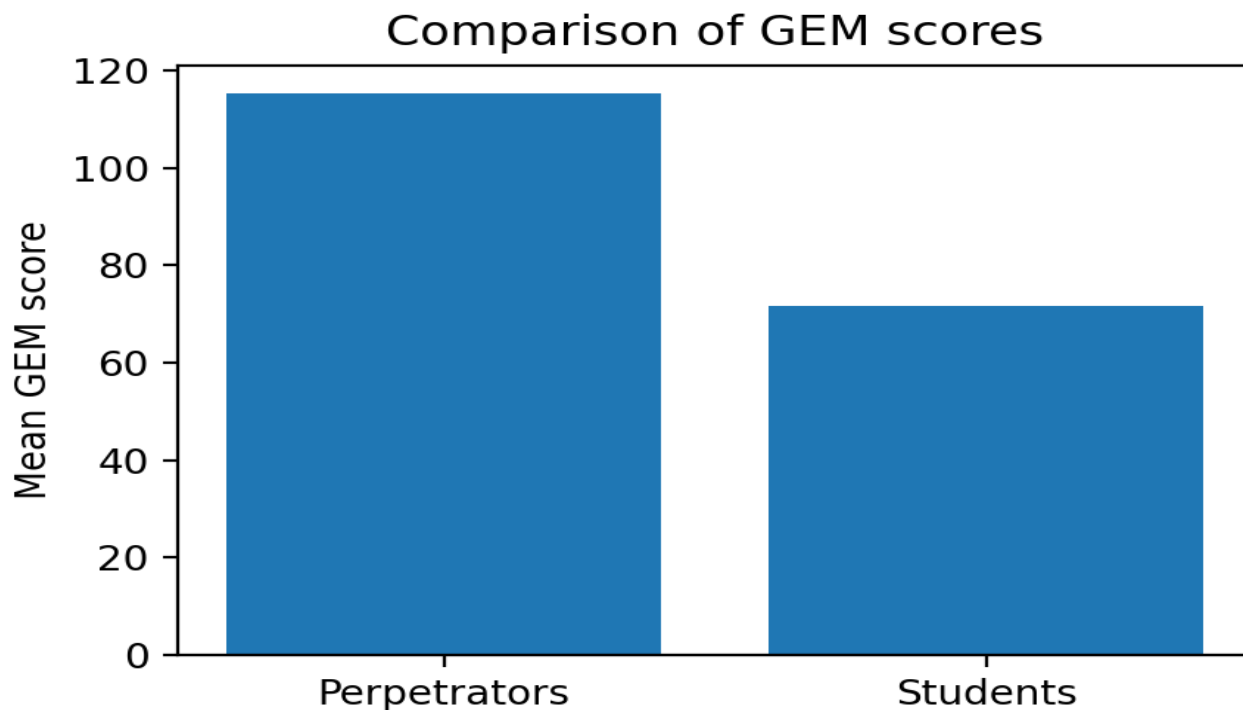
Dimension	Correlation
Psychological factors	.975
Socio-cultural factors	.957
Family & gender norms	.840
Sex-related attitudes	.838



Factor analysis demonstrated that psychological factors were the strongest dimension associated with decision-making related to IPV perpetration ($r = .975$), followed closely by socio-cultural factors ($r = .957$). Family gender norms and sex-related attitudes also showed strong positive associations, although their relative contribution was slightly lower. These findings support ecological perspectives suggesting that violent behaviour results from the interaction between individual psychological characteristics and broader socio-cultural influences.

Comparison Between Perpetrators and University Students

Group	N	Mean	SD
Perpetrators	50	115.42	6.19
University students	50	71.62	7.94



Independent-samples t-test revealed a highly significant difference between perpetrators and university students ($t = 30.759$, $p < .001$), with a mean difference of 43.80 points. Perpetrators scored substantially higher on the GEM Scale, indicating stronger endorsement of inequitable gender norms, traditional masculine beliefs, and attitudes supportive of violence. The magnitude of the difference suggests that psychological and socio-cultural attitudes clearly distinguish the two groups.

Education, Correlations and Residence

A strong inverse relationship was found between educational attainment and IPV-related factors ($r = -.826$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher education is associated with more equitable gender attitudes and lower endorsement of violence-supportive beliefs. Correlation analysis further showed that psychological factors were strongly associated with socio-cultural factors ($r = .894$), while family gender norms were positively related to both psychological ($r = .800$) and socio-cultural dimensions ($r = .784$). The weakest, although still statistically significant, relationship was observed between family gender norms and sex-related attitudes ($r = .588$). Finally, residence did not significantly influence overall GEM scores ($t = -1.534$, $p = .128$), indicating that urban and rural participants held broadly similar attitudes once other factors were considered.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that intimate partner violence perpetration among Albanian men is associated with a combination of psychological and socio-cultural influences rather than a single determinant. The dominant role of psychological factors is consistent with previous research emphasising emotional regulation, cognitive distortions and hostile attitudes as key mechanisms underlying violent behaviour. At the same time, the strong contribution of socio-cultural factors and traditional gender norms supports gender-transformative approaches that challenge beliefs related to male dominance and unequal power relations. The pronounced differences between perpetrators and university students suggest that younger and more educated men endorse significantly more equitable attitudes, reinforcing the potential preventive role of education. Overall, the results highlight the need for perpetrator programmes that combine psychological counselling with interventions addressing gender norms, social attitudes and healthy relationship skills.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study.

First, the study employed a **cross-sectional research design**, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between psychological and socio-cultural factors and intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration. Although significant associations were identified, the findings should be interpreted as correlational rather than causal.

Second, the study included a **relatively small sample of 100 participants**, equally divided between perpetrators and university students. While the balanced sample allowed meaningful comparisons between the two groups, the limited sample size may restrict the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Albanian men.

Third, the study relied on **self-report measures** using the Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) Scale. Given the sensitive nature of intimate partner violence, participants may have underreported or modified their responses due to **social desirability bias**, particularly among perpetrators participating in rehabilitation programmes.

Another limitation concerns the **comparison group**, which consisted exclusively of university students. Although this group provided an appropriate reference population for examining differences in gender attitudes, it may not fully represent the diversity of the general male population in Albania in terms of age, educational attainment, employment status, and socio-economic background.

Furthermore, the study focused primarily on **psychological and socio-cultural factors**, without examining other important determinants of IPV perpetration, such as childhood exposure to violence, alcohol and substance misuse, mental health disorders, economic stress, or relationship characteristics. Future research should adopt more comprehensive models that integrate these additional risk factors.

Finally, although the GEM Scale has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties and showed **high internal consistency in the present study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .858$)**, attitudes toward gender roles are influenced by cultural and contextual factors. Consequently, caution should be exercised when comparing the present findings directly with studies conducted in different cultural settings.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes valuable empirical evidence regarding the psychological and socio-cultural characteristics associated with intimate partner violence perpetration in Albania. The comparative design, the use of a validated instrument, and the inclusion of both perpetrators and university students provide important insights that may support future research, perpetrator intervention programmes, and violence prevention policies.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the psychological and socio-cultural predictors of intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration among Albanian men through a comparative analysis of perpetrators and university students. By applying the Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) Scale, the research provided empirical evidence on the attitudes, beliefs, and social norms associated with violent behaviour toward intimate partners.

The findings indicate that **psychological factors** represent the strongest predictor associated with IPV perpetration, followed closely by **socio-cultural influences**, including traditional gender norms and patriarchal beliefs. Family gender norms and attitudes related to sexuality also contributed to the explanation of violent behaviour, although their relative influence was comparatively lower. These findings support the view that intimate partner violence is a multidimensional phenomenon resulting from the interaction of individual psychological characteristics and broader socio-cultural contexts.

The comparative analysis demonstrated substantial differences between perpetrators and university students.

Perpetrators exhibited significantly higher endorsement of traditional gender norms and violence-supportive attitudes, suggesting that inequitable beliefs regarding masculinity, power, and intimate relationships remain important characteristics associated with violent behaviour. Conversely, university students demonstrated more equitable attitudes, reflecting the potential influence of education and changing social norms among younger generations.

One of the most important findings of the study was the strong negative relationship between educational attainment and violence-supportive attitudes. Higher levels of education were associated with lower endorsement of psychological and socio-cultural factors linked to IPV perpetration, highlighting education as a potential protective factor. These findings reinforce the importance of integrating gender equality, healthy relationships, emotional regulation, and non-violent conflict resolution into educational programmes targeting adolescents and young adults.

The study also demonstrated that psychological and socio-cultural dimensions are closely interconnected. The strong correlations identified among psychological factors, socio-cultural beliefs, and family gender norms suggest that effective perpetrator interventions should adopt a holistic approach rather than addressing individual risk factors in isolation. Programmes focusing exclusively on behavioural change may achieve limited success if they fail to challenge deeply rooted gender norms and beliefs that legitimise violence against women.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide valuable evidence for psychologists, social workers, probation services, justice institutions, educators, and policymakers involved in violence prevention and perpetrator rehabilitation. The results support the development of integrated intervention programmes combining psychological counselling, cognitive-behavioural approaches, and gender-transformative education aimed at promoting accountability, emotional regulation, and equitable relationship practices.

Although the study has several methodological limitations, it contributes to the limited body of empirical research on intimate partner violence perpetrators in Albania. By comparing perpetrators with university students and examining both psychological and socio-cultural dimensions, the study provides important insights into the factors associated with IPV perpetration within the Albanian context. Future research should expand these findings by including larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal research designs, and additional variables such as adverse childhood experiences, mental health, substance misuse, and socio-economic conditions. Such research would further strengthen the evidence base needed to develop effective prevention policies and perpetrator intervention programmes in Albania and comparable socio-cultural settings.

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