

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Empirical Investigation of Attitudes towards Wife-Beating among Men and Women in Seven Sub-Saharan African Countries

Manju Rani^{1*}, Sekhar Bonu¹ and Nafissatou Diop-Sidibé²

2509 Glenallen Avenue, Apartment 204, Silver Spring¹; Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Centre for Communication Programs, Baltimore, MD, USA²

*For Correspondence: E-mail: mrani@jhsph.edu and Phone: +1 301 962 8979

Abstract

This study used data from the demographic and health surveys (DHS) conducted between 1999 and 2001 in Benin, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe, to examine the magnitude and correlates of conditional acceptance of wife-beating among both men and women. Multivariate logistic regression models were fitted to investigate the independent association between different socio-demographic characteristics and acceptance of wife-beating. The acceptance of wife-beating for transgressing certain gender roles was widespread in all the countries. Men were consistently less likely to justify wife-beating than women. Household wealth and education emerged as strongest and most consistent negative predictors of acceptance of wife-beating among both men and women. Older men and women were less likely to justify wife-beating. Men and women in the polygamous union were more likely to accept wife-beating, though the association was not always significant. With the exception of Uganda, women working for pay were more likely to justify wife-beating than non-working women were. The results indicate that dominant social and cultural norms create images of "ideal" women among both men and women that include definition and widespread acceptance of gender roles as well as sanction use of force to enforce these gender roles. The State and its different institutions may fail to mitigate wife-beating, as sensitivity to objectively address wife-beating may be tellingly lacking. Though education, economic growth, etc. can reduce acceptance of wife-beating, the process may be too slow and too late to make a substantial difference in the near future. Proactive measures may be required to change attitudes towards wife-beating among both men and women. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2004; 8[3]:116-136)

Key Words: Wife-beating, Benin, Mali, Rwanda, Malawi, Uganda, Zimbabwe, sub-Saharan Africa, attitudes, conceptual framework

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