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Domestic Violence against Women in Ghana: The Attitudes of Men toward Wife-Beating

By Ellen Mabel Osei-Tutu¹ and Ernest Ampadu²

Abstract

This study examines the issue of domestic violence against women; specifically, men's attitudes toward wife beating. The data used was obtained from the 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). The results presented in this study come from a total 3,052 males from across all the 10 regions in Ghana. It is interesting to note that, although majority of the participants do not endorse wife beating, there was a significant number of these men who thought wife beating was justified for various reasons. That is, the attitude of men toward wife beating is complex to explain as the participants had divergent views regarding the issue. For example, while some were of the opinion that wife beating is justified, others thought otherwise.

The results also established that there is a direct relationship between men's level of education and their attitudes toward wife beating. That is, those who were highly educated did not endorse wife beating as compared to those who were not highly educated. Furthermore, men who were in consensual unions or customary marriages were found to be in favour of wife-beating as compared to their counterparts in other types of marriage. It is therefore recommended that institutions that could help reduce domestic violence particularly wife beating in Ghana such as, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, and the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) will need to focus their attention on men with relatively low education as well as those in consensual and customary marriages.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Wife beating, Human rights, Development, Education.

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Domestic violence can be defined as an abuse (psychological/emotional, physical, sexual, and financial) between family members irrespective of sex (Sudbury-Wayland-Lincoln Domestic Violence Roundtable, 2008). Psychological/emotional violence involves being criticized and publicly embarrassed, verbally insulted, verbally threatened or experiencing demeaning remarks. Physical violence involves being pushed or shoved, slapped or having objects thrown at the victim, being kicked, beaten or dragged. Sexual violence includes unwelcome sexual touch, escape from attempted rape, being raped and embarrassed by unwanted sexual jokes or comments. Financial violence includes being economically/financially dependent on the perpetrator such that one can be denied food or money.

Domestic violence also encompasses acts or threats of physical, sexual, economic or psychological abuse, when such acts or threats occur within the context of a previous or existing relationship (Cantalupo et al, 2006). Victims may suffer from one of these or a combination of them. WHO (2005) measured violence by asking women questions on physical and sexual violence. On physical violence, among other questions, the following were also asked: whether the victim was hit, kicked, choked or threatened. For sexual violence, victims were asked if they were forced to have sex or had sex because they were afraid of what the partner might do or were forced to do something sexual that they found degrading.

Act 732 (2007), the domestic violence law in Ghana defines domestic violence to include engaging in physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse, emotional abuse and any behaviour that harms another person. It goes further to explain domestic relationship as a family relationship, a relationship akin to a family relationship or a relationship in a domestic situation that exists or has existed between a complainant and a respondent.

The issue of domestic violence is not peculiar to any particular part of the world. It occurs in both developed and developing countries. It also cuts across societies, regardless of age, wealth, geographical location among others. Domestic violence is usually not a one-off event, but a pattern of abuse over a period of time. The abuse can take place at any time in a relationship. It could start at the beginning or later on in life. It could also start on a small note and escalate in the future (Sudbury-Wayland-Lincoln Domestic Violence Roundtable, 2008).

The mention of domestic violence immediately brings to mind, women as victims. There is evidence however, that both men and women have been and are victims of domestic violence, although that of women is said to be so pervasive that it is sometimes seen as normal. There are male victims from all walks of life. In a study in Ireland for instance, it was found that 29% of women and 26% of males suffered domestic abuse (O'Sullivan, 2010). The partial explanation was that while one in three women reported domestic violence, only one in 20 men does report issues of domestic violence.

In Africa, one of the many social dimensions arising from this gendered culture includes an acceptance of domestic violence. In some cultures, husbands have exclusive rights to the wife and condone domestic violence. (Alhmadi 2016). Women's subordinate status to men in many societies, coupled with the general acceptance of interpersonal violence as a means of resolving conflict, renders women disproportionately vulnerable to violence from all levels of society. The stigma attached to female victims of violence results in very low rates of reporting and often if women report violence against them they are either turned away because the authority sees violence against women as a matter to be dealt with privately within the family. When they struggle to access justice in a criminal justice system they are met with personnel who are not sensitive to their needs (UNECA, 2010).

In their study on wife beating in South Africa, Choi and Ting (2008) proposed four typologies of physical violence – dependence, compensation, submission and transgression. Using the 1998 South African Demographic and Health Survey, the finding of dependency theory were mixed. The hypothesis of compensation was not supported by the data. The hypothesis of submission and transgression related to power imbalance were both supported by the analysis. The dependence hypothesis suggests that economic dependence of the wife will lead to more violence. The compensation hypothesis argues that husband will use force to compensate for his inability to live up to the male-provider norm. The submission hypothesis suggests that violence will increase due to the submission of women in male-dominated families. Finally, the transgression hypothesis argues that men in female-dominated families will use force to punish their wives for supposedly transgressing the gender norm of male dominance.

In a similar vein, Oladepo et al (2011) observed that both men and women in Nigeria suffer sexual violence. Married female respondents were more likely to suffer physical violence than their single counterparts. They also established that of the 806 reported cases of domestic violence, 353 representing 11.8% were males and 453 representing 15.1% were females. They concluded that gender-based violence affects more women than men.

Some authors are of the view that an emphasis on female victimisation results in an incomplete understanding of men's experiences as victims of violence (Conroy, 2014). Conroy's (2014) study focuses on three domains of power relationship: power resources, process and outcomes. It was observed that male dominance influenced young peoples' risk of sexual intimate partner violence. Educational level protected intimate partner violence for both males and females. Male-dominated relationship increased the violence for men but not for women.

Another research that has been undertaken to close the gap between men and women is that of Kāklina (2015). This study attributes male attitude towards domestic violence to the upbringing of children. According to Kāklina, men were more likely than women to take part in household chores other than food preparation. In a study among male adolescents in Ghana, she found that more than half of the respondents rejected violence against women while only one percent supported violence against women. In a review of the effects of domestic violence on women, children, families and communities, Colluci and Hassan, (2014) focused on low and middle-income countries since most of the literature available were mainly from developed countries. For these authors, preventing domestic violence against women and children requires an understanding of the socio-political, economic and cultural settings of the various stakeholders.

Female victims of domestic violence have been found to be associated with certain backgrounds. One particular issue of interest is that their perpetrators tend to have been victims themselves during childhood. These husbands either witnessed it or suffered from it. For instance, Dery and Diedon (2014) found that males tend to be perpetrators of violence if they were beaten when they were children or witnessed their mothers being beaten by their fathers. Perpetrators believed that their anger should be unleashed on their wife and children.

Other researchers (Cantalupo et al, 2006) have also observed factors such as failure to perform household chores, not being sexually available to the husband, and not asking permission to undertake certain activities to be associated with violence against women. Furthermore, economic issues have been identified to complicate domestic violence (Cantalupo et al, 2006). This has been explained in different ways: women are abused when they complain that money for maintenance is not enough, they could also be deprived of food and money. Also, when women are financially dependent on their husbands, they find it difficult to leave an abusive relationship.

However, there are situations where the contrary occurs: women with some income rather tend to be victims of domestic violence (Oladepo, 2011).

When women face injuries from domestic violence, they tend to visit traditional healers who tend to be traditional custodians of cultural beliefs. Although doctors may testify in trial cases, the cost of the medical documentation is so high that it prevents many victims from receiving this report. It is therefore cheaper to see the traditional healers. (Cantalupo et al, 2006).

In terms of data on domestic violence, while it is available in developed countries, there is a scarcity in developing countries (WHO, 2005). Furthermore, the methods used to investigate violence differ from one country to the other (WHO, 2005). There are differences in what constitutes violence and how they are measured. This may make it difficult to compare the incidence across countries, cultures and people from different backgrounds. It may also make it difficult to study trends because what may constitute violence now may not have been considered violence in the past.

However, factors such as urbanisation, rising education and access to media have contributed to global norms regarding violence. Using data from 52 demographic and health surveys, two from each of the 26 countries, Pierroti (2014) finds that violence against women was reaching citizens worldwide even less privileged parts of the world.

Several world conferences have been held to address the issue of domestic violence. In 1993 for instance, a conference took place in Vienna on human rights. In the same year, there was a declaration on the elimination of violence against women. In 1995, the United Nations Conference on Women identified domestic violence against women as one of the areas needing attention. Among other things, the platform for action recommends “research and data collection on the prevalence of different forms of violence against women, especially domestic violence...” (UN, 1995 cited in WHO, 2005). In 2000, 149 Heads of State met in New York and declared the millennium development goals. Goal number three aimed at promoting gender equity and empowering women. To be able to deal with the issue of domestic violence, certain conditions ought to be in place. These include support in various forms i.e. emotional, spiritual, therapeutic and moral. There have been a number of international conventions to protect human lives, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW), the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment or Treatment (the “Convention against Torture”) and Ghana has been a signatory in these and many more.

Ghana’s constitution also upholds the rights of women (Ghana, 1992). Furthermore, after so many debates on the domestic violence bill in Ghana, the bill was finally passed on 27th February 2007 (Manuh, n.d). The domestic violence bill was laid before Parliament in 2003. Certain sections of the bill especially that of ‘marital rape’ became a subject of heated debates among various groups in Ghana. The bill became an act (ACT 732) in 2007. In Ghana, everyone in three women has suffered some form of physical violence either from a current or a past partner (Cantalupo et al, 2006). This could be attributed to more and more women reporting these cases to the police than in the past. This has been made possible by the establishment of the unit referred to as the Domestic Violence and Victim Support unit (DOVVSU) formerly Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU) of the Ghana Police Service. This name change came about as a result of the fact that domestic violence is not only against women, but other people in the domestic setting, even though women have been perceived as the main victims. According to Bokoe, (2014) the name was changed in line with the Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (ACT 732).

Significance of the Study

Studies on the causes of domestic violence have mainly focussed on the perspectives of females who have usually been the victims. It has been suggested that it would be appropriate to study this phenomenon also from the angle of the perpetrator (Oronzo et al, 2012) who have usually been men. In 2014, as many as 18,000 cases of domestic violence were reported to DOVVSU. This consisted of non-maintenance, wife battery, assault, rape and defilement (Graphic online, 2015). These definitely were not all the cases of domestic violence as not all cases are reported since some of these issues are seen as family matters and so should be settled at home. This indicates that there are many domestic violence cases than what we hear of like a lot of them go unreported. It is, therefore, important that the issue of domestic violence is given all the attention that it deserves. The relatively little account has been given to male perpetrators, giving their own account on why they mete out violence against women.

The reportage could be attributed to increased sensitivity in what constitutes violence as indicated by Kivivouri (2014). There is the need to make information on domestic violence, especially from the point of view of men available. This will help in understanding the issues better. In stemming the tide of domestic violence, men should be made to tell their side of the story. Men are key stakeholders in reducing if not totally eliminating domestic violence. The Gender Centre (a Non-governmental organization in Ghana) in 2010 started a three-year anti-violence project in the Ashanti Region and this has yielded some results (Gender Centre, 2010). Male power brokers such as chiefs and religious bodies have helped community members to appreciate the project as men are taking more responsibility of taking care of their children. This project took place in two communities in one district in only one region in Ghana. There is a lot more work to be done to improve domestic violence in other parts of the country.

This study focuses on all the ten regions of the country and thus, would provide information on the whole country. Although men in different parts of the country may have different characteristics, a holistic picture of the country will be provided. For the purpose of this study domestic violence is limited to wife beating as used in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS4).

Research Questions

1. What are men's attitudes towards wife beating?
2. What is the relationship between men's level of education and their attitudes towards wife beating?
3. Does the type of marriage influence men's attitudes towards against wife beating?

Methodology

Instruments and Data Collection Process

The data for this study was obtained from the 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 4). This survey was a cross-sectional population-based survey undertaken by the Ghana Statistical Service in collaboration with the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) and the Navrongo Health Research Centre of the Ghana Health Service. The data collection was carried out over a period of three months with enumeration areas selected in some towns and communities within various districts. The MICS survey instrument consisted of four main questionnaires: a household questionnaire, a woman's questionnaire for women aged 15-49 years, a man's

questionnaire for men aged 15-59 and a child’s questionnaire for children under five. For the purpose of this study, the results from the man’s questionnaire were used. Data available in this questionnaire include reproduction, marriage, sexual behaviour, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections and attitudes towards domestic violence.

Sampling and Sampling Procedure

As highlighted above, the data presented in this current study are part of a bigger study involving all the 10 regions of the country. The sample included 10,963 women aged 15-49 of which 10,627 were interviewed. For the male survey, 3,511 men were identified and 3,321 were successfully interviewed. After the cleaning, a total of 269 of the 3,321 data were deleted as these cases were missing. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22) was used for generating descriptive (frequencies, means and Standard deviation) and inferential (chi-square) statistics.

Results

Attitudes Regarding the Causes of Domestic Violence against Women

To find answers to the first research question, ‘What are men’s attitude regarding wife beating?’ the responses from the participants are presented in Figure 1. There were three responses to each question namely, ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘don’t know’. For the purpose of this analysis, the response ‘don’t know’ was excluded.

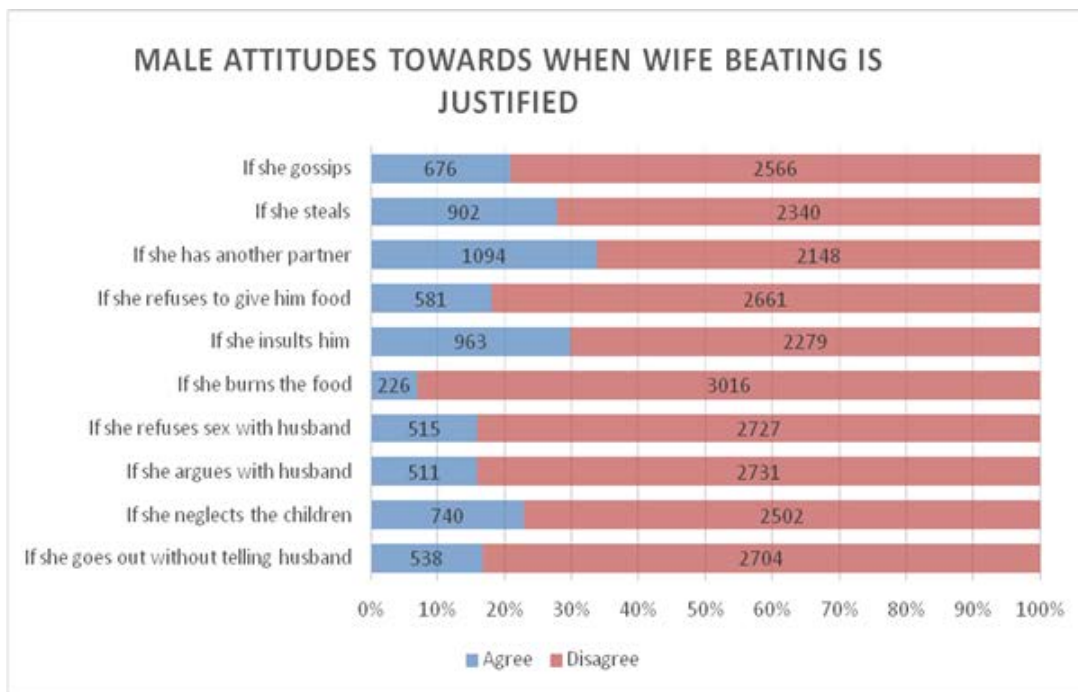


Figure 1: Men’s Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence against Women

From Figure 1, it is clear that that Ghanaian men’s attitude towards wife beating is very complex as it contains both positive and negative responses. In most situations, the majority of the respondents were not in favour of wife-beating, except in the statement ‘if she burns the food: wife-beating justified’ where only seven percent were in favour. All the other statements have

more than 15% of the respondents being in favour of wife-beating. However, the figure shows that of all the conditions under which husbands felt wives deserved to be beaten, the one that had higher proportions of husbands agreeing to wife beating was when the wife had another partner. From Figure 1, more than a third (34%) of the participants indicated that wife beating was justified in such a situation.

Level of Education and Attitude towards Wife Beating

In answering the second research question, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to measure the relationship between men's level of education and their attitudes towards wife beating and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Men's Level of Education and their Attitudes towards Wife Beating

Level of Education	Number (N)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Chi-Square
No Education	789	1.71	0.45	p=0.0001
Primary Education	534	1.74	0.42	
Junior High/Middle School	1198	1.81	0.38	
Senior High School and above	721	1.90	0.36	

To understand the relationship between men's level of education and their attitudes towards wife-beating, the respondents were asked to indicate their agreement to the items in Figure 1. The result from Table 1 shows that there is a direct relationship between the participants' level of education and their attitudes towards wife beating. It is clear from the table that highly educated people have a negative attitude towards wife beating as compared to their colleagues who have had no formal education or just educated up to the primary level.

Type of Marriage and Attitude towards Wife Beating

In answering the third research question, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to measure the relationship between the type of marriage and men's attitudes towards wife beating and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Type of Marriage and Attitudes towards Wife Beating

Type of marriage	Number (N)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Chi-Square
Consensual Union	145	1.69	0.31	p=0.09
Customary Marriage	1908	1.72	0.41	
Customary and Religious	1148	1.80	0.35	
Civil Marriage	41	1.83	0.37	

In Ghana, just like most other African countries, men are allowed to have more than one wife i.e. to be in polygynous marriages. From Table 2, it is clear that although there is no significant difference between the type of marriage and men's attitude towards wife beating those in

consensual unions and customary marriages were in favour of wife-beating. The majority (63.3%) of the respondents are either in consensual or customary marriages.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of men towards the causes of domestic violence against women specifically, wife beating as wife beating has been a common practice in Africa (Mann & Takyi, 2009) Overall, the results indicated that the majority of the participants did not endorse wife beating. It was also interesting to note that some of the participants justified the fact that wives should be beaten for different reasons. These results, therefore, suggest that as a country, the issues of security and human rights of women are major issues of concern. It is clear that as a country, we are not doing enough to provide security for the vulnerable in our society especially women. If women are faced with these challenges and human rights abuses then the issue with regard to children is very critical.

Education has been identified to be negatively related to violence against women (Conroy, 2014). It is also interesting to note that there was a direct relationship between men's level of education and their attitude towards wife beating. Those who were well educated had a negative attitude towards wife beating as compared to their counterparts who were not well educated.

This result, therefore, challenges the country's education system and calls for a second look at the education system, making education compulsory up to at least the Senior High School (SHS) level in our quest for achieving our sustainable development goals of reducing poverty through education and gender parity. The potential for individuals and countries to benefit from this globalized and "emerging knowledge economies depends largely on their education, skills, talents and abilities, that is, their human capital" (OECD, 2007:1). The result also affirms the ideas of Wilkinson and Pickett 'people with more education earn more, are more satisfied with their work...are less likely to be unemployed, more likely to be healthy, less likely to be criminal...' (2010, p. 103).

Also, although there was no significant difference between type of marriage and men's attitudes towards wife-beating, the results established that those in marriages which have no legal obligations (consensual and customary marriage) were more in favour of wife-beating as compared to those in marriages with legal obligations (a combination of customary and religious and civil marriages).

The results suggest that educational campaigns by individuals, groups, communities, churches, mosques etc. should be more focused on couples who are either consensually married or in customary marriages. This is expected to help reduce the incidence of domestic violence in general and wife beating in particular among these categories of people. Furthermore institutions mandated by the 1992 constitution of Ghana such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service should be empowered with the requisite human resource and other logistics to help reduce domestic violence and other human rights issues against women and deal with the recalcitrant violators of human rights. The existence and efficiency of these institutions may have helped in reducing the incidence of domestic violence against women but the desired levels may not have been achieved.

In addition, efforts must be made by all institutions such as Ghana Education Service, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection as well as the Department of Social Welfare in educating the general populace on issues relating to domestic violence. Other institutions that

could also help in this education are the Non-Formal Education Division of Ghana Education Service and National Commission for Civic Education for both males and females especially for those whose educational attainment is below the secondary level.

In terms of formal education, it is imperative for all stakeholders in the education sector led by the Ministry of Education in formulating policies geared towards making education compulsory up to the Senior High School level. Opportunities should be created by these institutions for citizens to acquire high levels of education, as citizens became more educated, they are more likely to become healthy, less likely to be criminals or abusive (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). Education helps individuals to trust each other in order to be work and live together which is a social capital especially in developing countries like Ghana where factors such as ethnic conflicts, cultural traditions and gender disparities and domestic violence prevail (Carm, 2002).

With regard to research implications, the researcher argues that there is the need for longitudinal studies in examining the impact of our cultural orientations, religion and education system on peoples' perceptions of the institution of marriage and how the religious, local and family institutions can be strengthened to help overcome some of this domestic violence and human rights abuse issues. In addition to this, there is the need for further research into the common forms of punishment meted out to those engaged in this form of violence against women and the impact on their lives as perpetrators as well examining the willingness of women reporting their spouses to the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police when they are abused. One area that Ghana as a nation will have to pay attention to in our quest for reducing violence against women if not to eliminate it completely is our marriage institutions. Both men and women need a re-orientation not to accept violence against women as a norm. This, it is expected to facilitate the achievement of most of the United Nations sustainable development goals.

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