

## **Factors Influencing Women's Attitude towards Wife Beating in Ethiopia**

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### **Abstract**

This study used data for a total of 45,054 women (15 to 49 years) from the 2011 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey to identify the socio-economic and demographic factors influencing women's attitude towards wife beating. Accordingly, 51.8 % and 58.1 % of the whole women support a husband to beat his wife if she goes out without telling a husband and if a wife neglects her children, respectively. Moreover, about 53.4 %, 47.9 % and 53.3 % of women don't oppose wife beating if a wife argues with a husband, if a wife refuses to have sex with a husband and if a wife burns food while preparing meals, respectively. The empirical results shows that respondent's age, women's level of education, husband's level of education, employment status of a woman, access to media, marital status, place of residence (urban vs. rural), and women's awareness about the law against wife beating in Ethiopia have been identified as the significant socioeconomic and demographic factors influencing women's attitude towards wife beating. The way forward will require the empowerment of women through education and an increase in women's access to resources, since educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them.

### **Introduction**

Wife abuse, defined as physical and/or sexual violence against women by their male partners, is a very common problem around the globe involving severe consequences for victims, their families and society as a whole. Violence against women is considered to be one of the world's most pervasive human rights violations, and domestic violence, is by far its most important component (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006; Heise & Kotsadam, 2015). Cross-country evidence from WHO suggests that lifetime prevalence rates of various forms of

intimate partner violence (including sexual abuse) range from 15 to 71 percent across countries (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006, p. 1937).

Worldwide, almost one third (30%) of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner. In sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalence of intimate partner violence ranks particularly high, even compared to other developing regions (McCloskey, Williams, & Larsen, 2005). Many scholars have pointed out that wife beating has existed in every known culture and throughout history and that women have actively sought help (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Schechter, 1982; Schneider, 2000; Tierney, 2005). Similar studies conducted in ten countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand and the United Republic of Tanzania) estimated that lifetime prevalence rates of physical or/and sexual partner violence varied from 15% to 71% (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006). Other studies estimated such rates as varying between 17.4% and 25.5% in the USA (Malley-Morrison & Hines, 2004), and between 10% and 50% in Europe (Machado & Dias, 2008).

Although official prevalence rates of domestic violence in the Arab countries are scarce, some findings suggest that it is a widespread problem. For instance, in Egypt, in a nationally representative sample of 14,779 women, 1 out of 3 Egyptian women ever married reported having been beaten at least once since marriage (El-Zanaty, Hussein, Shawky, Way, & Kishor, 1996). Surprisingly, even in the developed world such as in the United States, about 1.3 million women are physically assaulted annually by an intimate partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), and in Europe, 1 in 4 women experience domestic violence over their lifetimes and between 6% and 10% of women a year report being physically abused by their partners (Council of Europe, 2002). In France, nearly 225,000 women were physically or sexually abused by their spouses, but fewer than one in five filed a complaint about it (BBC, 25 Nov 2017).

A study based on 23 developing countries (13 in Sub-Saharan Africa, three in North Africa/West Asia/Europe, four in Asia, and three in Latin America and the Caribbean) by Kishor and Subaiya (2008) about women empowerment as measured vis-à-vis opposition to beating showed that, in most of those countries, wife beating is justified if the wife goes out without telling her husband, neglects her children, argues with her husband, refuses to have sex with her husband, or burns food. According to Rani, Bonu, and Diop-Sidibe (2004), the acceptance of wife beating for transgressing certain gender roles was widespread in the seven countries (Benin, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) they studied. In the Ethiopian context, community-based studies indicated that 50% to 60% of women experience domestic violence in their lifetime (Berhane, 2010). The attitude is also held by

large shares of women in countries across the religious and cultural spectra — China, Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Peru, the Philippines and Uzbekistan, to cite a few

As a result of wife beatings, the woman's integrity deteriorates, giving rise to deficient health, family and social group disorder. Among consequences for women's health, physical and psychological complications stand out, which produce important disabilities in women, without forgetting about the social consequences that sometimes make it impossible for her to leave this violent home where her individual guarantees are violated and her individuality is denigrated (Casique and Furegato, 2006). Although in many countries wife abuse is considered as a crime, the victims usually get unsupportive reactions from the formal or informal systems that are supposed to help them, for instance their families, the clergy, the police, the welfare, the shelters, the justice system, the courts, the helping professionals, medical doctors and nurses, and even other women (Machado, Dias, & Coelho, 2010). Many types of innocent victims face negative reactions from other people as if their suffering is fair and therefore legitimate (e.g., Lerner & Simmons, 1966).

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Attitudes**

Most researchers agree that unequal power relationship between men and women is the main cause of domestic violence among intimate partners (UN, 2006). Intimate partner violence is reinforced by gender norms and values that put women in subordinate position relative to men (Garcia-Moreno, 2002). The following three major theories are thoroughly discussed to better understand the main causes and consequences of intimate partner violence mainly in developing countries such as Ethiopia. These are feminist theory, resource based power theory and exchange theory.

#### **Feminist Theory**

The “feminist theory” explains that wife beating originates from the unequal distribution of gender power in a patriarchal society (Dalal, 2008). Rigid social norms and cultural practices are the major instruments of patriarchal societies that perpetuate and maintain the myths of male superiority (Rani et al., 2004). These patriarchal norms justify the use of violence to protect men's ability to control women (Arthur and Clark, 2009). Wife beating is, thus, the central theme of a patriarchal ideology or a myth that perpetuates male authority through the use of force. For feminists, wife beating is considered as a function of gender inequality which mainly has been associated with a culture of violating women's right to subjugate their position (Levinson, 1989). Feminists believe that violence in heterosexual relations is always

perpetuated by men in an attempt to control their women partners, and research findings of symmetry in the perpetuation of violence by men and women are erroneous.

The feminist theory, on the other hand, recognizes the improvements in the protection of women's right in modern societies where women's active participation in the socio-economic system is increasing as a result of the changes in their educational, occupational, and political status. The theory claimed that improvements in the status of women diminish the rate of physical and sexual violence against women (Yodanis, 2004). Unlike this claim, in traditional societies and low-income countries, the status of women is low and wife beating is still high. A study conducted in India, for instance, revealed that husbands who had lower-income, less-educated, and were engaged in relatively low-status jobs were more likely to have beaten their wives than were more advantaged husbands (Madan, 2013).

### **Resource-based power theory**

The resource-power interrelationship theory states that power within a family is a function of the ownership of resources within which members have access and decision making autonomy (Goode, 1971). The theory further states that a person who brings more resources to the relationship possesses more power, and the opposite is true (Jasinski, 2001). Since these means are mostly supplied by man, they consequently give him additional power over family members. In traditional societies like Ethiopia, wife beating is also manifested as a mechanism of showing supremacy together with taking the full control of resources owned at the household level (Levinson, 1989).

A study conducted among seven Asian countries, for instance, showed that women in the poorest economic quintile were more likely to justify wife beating than those living in the richest quintile (Rani and Bonu, 2009). Consistent results were also obtained in studies conducted among 17 sub-Saharan African countries using the demographic and health survey data (Uthman et al., 2009).

### **Exchange theory**

The basic premise of exchange theory is based on behavioral changes that are driven by rewards or punishments (Homans, 1967). According to this theory, domestic violence including wife beating is very high in societies where the benefit to perpetrators is immense, but is very low where the penalties is high (Kacen, 2006). In traditional societies like Ethiopia where domestic violence is very common, charges for wife's beatings is almost nonexistent. As Gelles (1983)

noted, by taking domestic violence as a private matter, lack of interest in social institutions and agencies to intervene and little attention paid to the matter have made the occurrences of intimate partner violence a perpetuating mystification.

Thus, the attitude of intimate partner violence including wife beating is a function of rewards and punishments practiced in a given society as well. Hence, to reduce wife beating, rewards must be reduced by ending the social adoration of violence, and costs must be increased by setting strong legal and social sanctions against wife beaters (Gelles, 1983; Lawson, 2012).

### **Availability of Data and Materials**

The study considered a total of 45,054 women in the reproductive age group (i.e. 15–49 years) that have complete information on the variables of interest. The survey asked respondents whether a husband is justified in beating his wife under a series of possible circumstances which included (1) wife burning the food; (2) wife arguing with husband; (3) wife going out without telling husband; (4) wife neglecting the children; and (5) wife refusing sexual relations. Each question has a response of 'Yes' and 'No', and a value of '1' is given if the woman accepts but '0' otherwise. For each of five questions asked, available responses were coded to two mutually exclusive categories: "Yes" (coded as 1) and "No" (coded as 0). The response "Yes" that justified the beating of wives by husbands indicates lack of women's empowerment.

A binary probit regression model was fitted to identify variables that significantly predict respondents' refusal of wife beating in Ethiopia having controlled other confounding variables.

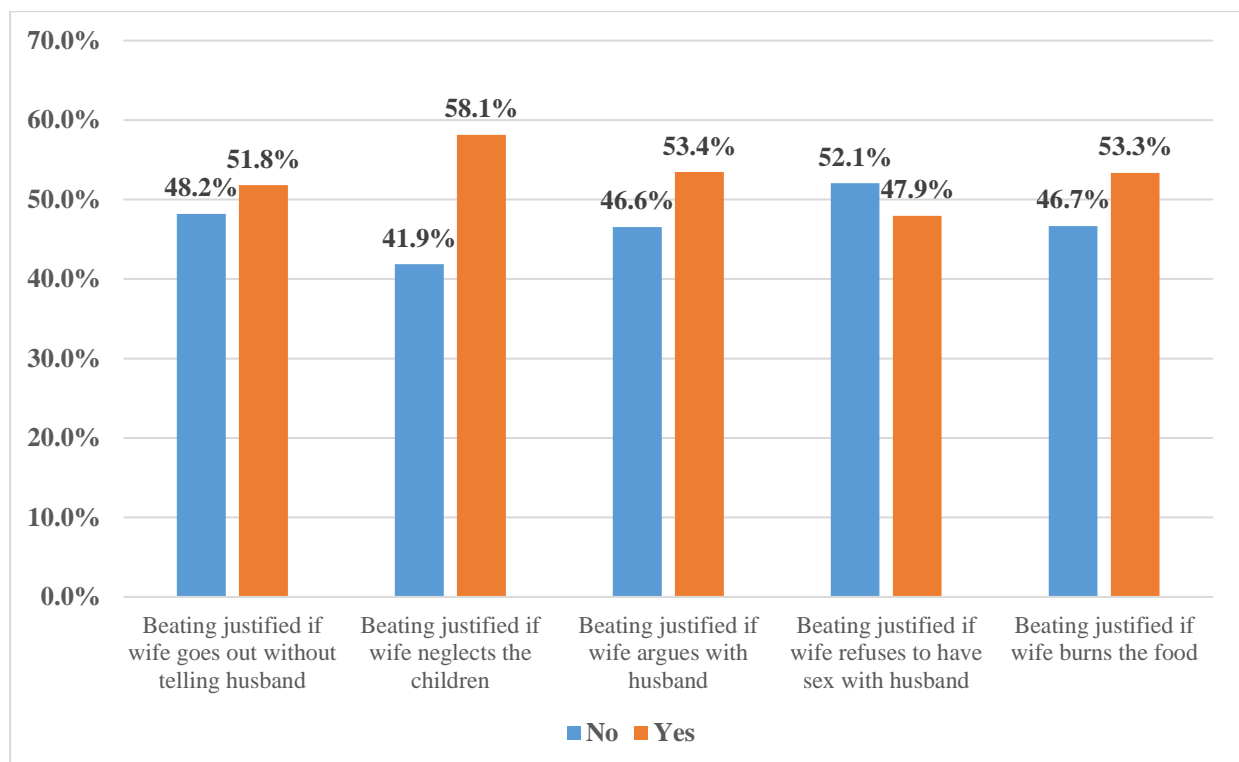
### **Women's attitude towards wife beatings in Ethiopia**

The survey asked about 42,054 women respondents whether a husband is justified in beating his wife under a series of possible circumstances which included: if wife goes out without telling husband, if wife neglects the children, if wife argues with husband, if wife refuses to have sex with husband and if wife burns food while preparing meals. For each of the above five questions, available responses were coded to two mutually exclusive categories: "Yes" (coded as 1) and "No" (coded as 0). Accordingly, as shown in Figure 1, out of the 42,054 women included in this study, 51.8 % of them agree that it is justifiable for a husband to beat his wife if she goes out without telling him. Similarly, about 58.1 % of the whole women respondents support that it is justifiable for a husband to beat his wife if she neglects the children. Moreover, about 53.4 % of the whole women respondents support that it is justifiable

for a husband to beat his wife if she argues with husband. Furthermore, of the 42,054 women surveyed in this study, about 47.9% of them agree that it is justifiable for a husband to beat his wife if she refuses to have sex with him. Last but not least, of all the women respondents, about 53.3% of them agree that it is justifiable for a husband to beat his wife if she burns food while preparing meals.

It should be noted that of all the situations, the highest proportion of women (58.1%) believed that a husband is justified in beating his wife if she neglects the children (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Women’s attitude towards wife beatings in Ethiopia**



### Regression Results and Discussion

The empirical results shows that “respondent’s age” is strongly and negatively significant and this implies that younger women are more likely than older women to believe that wife beating is justified for any of the five-specified reasons (Table 1). This result is consistent with other studies such as Hindin (2003) that found younger women in Zimbabwe were over two and half times more likely to believe that wife beating was justified when compared to older women. Also, a comparative study from 17 countries in sub-Saharan Africa revealed that wife beating

was widely acceptable under certain circumstances among women at younger than older ages (Uthman, Lawoko & Moradi, 2009).

This study found a mixed result on the relationship between religion and women's attitude towards wife beating. For instance, the empirical results from Reg-1 shows there is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim women in justifying wife beating if a woman goes out without telling husband. Put it in different way, no matter whether they are Christians or Muslims, the majority of Ethiopian women condone wife beating is justified if a wife goes out without telling her husband. However, the findings from Reg-2 strongly support that wife beating is acceptable more among Christian women than Muslim women if a woman neglects her children. Likewise, the findings from Reg-3 and Reg-4 reveal that, others factors being equal, Muslim women have a 1.2 % and 8.3 % higher chance than Christian women to support wife beatings if a woman argues with husband and refuses to have sex with a husband, respectively. On the other hand, the findings from Reg-5 confirm that, others factors being equal, Christian women have a 6.3 % higher chance than Muslim women to support wife beatings if a woman burns food.

By the same token, this study found rural women are more likely to believe that wife beating is justified compared to urban women under all the five scenarios. As hypothesized at the outset, the level of both women's and husband's education are found to be two of the key factors to significantly influence woman's attitude towards wife beating in Ethiopia. The negative coefficients under the five scenarios (Reg-1 to Reg-5) demonstrate that there is strong evidence in households where a woman and her husband are relatively educated, the less likely for the woman to believe that wife beating is justified for all the five reasons mentioned. For instance, the regression results of Reg-1 confirm that each additional year of woman's schooling was associated with a 2.6-percent increase in their ability not to support wife beating if a woman goes out without telling husband.

Also, the findings confirm that a relatively wealthy women are less likely to justify wife beating than poor women in Ethiopia which is consistent with the "resource based power theory" that claims an increase in women's access to resources leads to the ratification of gender equity and equality along with the freedom to withstand any sort of intimate partner violence including wife beating. Furthermore, this study reveals that occupational status is related to attitudes towards wife beating only in two of the five circumstances (if wife neglects children and if wife burns food), with women who have been working believe that wife beating was not justified, compared with unemployed women.

This study confirms that married women are most likely support wife beating than unmarried women under three of the five circumstances (if wife goes out without telling husband, and wife burns food). Nevertheless, there is no significant difference between married and unmarried women in justifying wife beating in two of the five circumstances (if wife argues with husband and if wife refuses to have sex with husband). Interestingly, the findings reveal that women's access to media information such as "reading family planning materials" and "participating in community conversation program" are inversely related to women's attitude towards justifying wife beating for one reason or another.

Last but not least, women's lack of awareness of the existing law in the country has been found to be one of the key factors influencing the tendency of women to believe wife beating is justified. More specifically, the study confirms that women who lack awareness of the existing law that prohibits wife beating in Ethiopia are most likely support wife beating than women who are aware of the existing law (Table 1). Nearly 55% of women in Ethiopia are not aware of there is a law that forbids a husband to beat a wife in Ethiopia. Thus, education is a key part of strategies to improve women's' well-being since educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them.



**Table 1: Socio-economic & demographic factors influencing women's attitude towards wife beating /Probit Regression/**

Variable	Beating justified if wife:									
	Goes out without telling husband (Reg-1)		Neglects the children (Reg-2)		Argues with husband (Reg-3)		Refuses to have sex with husband (Reg-4)		Burns the food (reg-5)	
	Dy/dx	P-value	Dy/dx	P-value	Dy/dx	P-value	Dy/dx	P-value	Dy/dx	P-value
Respondent current age	-.014 (.003)	0.000***	-.001 (.000)	0.000***	-.001 (.000)	0.000***	-.001 (.000)	0.026**	-.001 (.000)	0.031**
Religion	.007 (.005)	0.204	.032 (.005)	0.000***	-.012 (.005)	0.018**	-.083 (.005)	0.000***	.063 (.005)	0.000***
Urban/Rural	-.017 (.009)	0.072*	-.068 (.035)	0.026**	-.079 (.038)	0.033**	-.032 (.014)	0.000***	-.043 (.019)	0.000***
Women's education in single years	-.026 (.001)	0.000***	-.026 (.001)	0.000***	-.031 (.001)	0.000***	-.029 (.001)	0.000***	-.036 (.001)	0.000***
Husband's level of education	-.029 (.006)	0.000***	-.031 (.006)	0.000***	-.017 (.006)	0.002***	-.018 (.006)	0.002***	-.020 (.006)	0.000***
Wealth index	-.054 (.005)	0.000***	-.060 (.005)	0.000***	-.079 (.005)	0.000***	-.067 (.005)	0.000***	-.058 (.005)	0.000***
Respondent currently working	.007 (.005)	0.179	-.011 (.005)	0.043**	-.001 (.005)	0.856	.006 (.006)	0.256	.021 (.006)	0.000***
Do you have daughter	-.016 (.009)	0.074*	-.039 (.009)	0.000***	-.025 (.009)	0.005***	-.023 (.009)	0.010***	-.040 (.009)	0.000***
Marital status	.012 (.007)	0.090*	.018 (.007)	0.006***	.002 (.007)	0.829	.004 (.007)	0.586	.035 (.007)	0.000***
Read family planning materials	-.159 (.017)	0.000***	-.110 (.015)	0.000***	-.177 (.017)	0.000***	-.163 (.018)	0.000***	-.212 (.018)	0.000***
Community conversation program	-.023 (.006)	0.000***	.022 (.006)	0.000***	-.025 (.006)	0.000***	-.021 (.006)	0.000***	-.043 (.006)	0.000***
Law against wife beating in Ethiopia	-.159 (.005)	0.000***	-.133 (.005)	0.000***	-.135 (.005)	0.000***	-.176 (.005)	0.000***	-.149 (.005)	0.000***
Number of observations	42,054		42,054		42,054		42,054		42,054	
LR chi2 (11)	3178.35		2796.99		3471.09		4212.77		4058.9	
Prob > chi2	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

### Conclusion

This study used data for a total of 45,054 women (15 to 49 years) from the 2011 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey to identify the socio-economic and demographic factors

influencing women's attitude towards wife beating. The survey asked women respondents whether a husband is justified in beating his wife under a series of possible circumstances which included: if wife goes out without telling husband, if wife neglects the children, if wife argues with husband, if wife refuses to have sex with husband and if wife burns food while preparing meals. Accordingly, 51.8 % and 58.1 % of women support a husband to beat his wife if she goes out without telling him and if she neglects her children, respectively. Moreover, about 53.4 % of the whole women, 47.9 % of the whole women and 53.3 % of the whole women don't oppose for a husband to beat his wife if she argues with husband, if she refuses to have sex with him and if she burns food while preparing meals, respectively.

The empirical results shows that respondent's age, women's level of education, husband's level of education, employment status of a woman, having a daughter, access to media, marital status, place of residence (urban vs. rural), and women's awareness about the law against wife beating in Ethiopia have been identified as the significant socioeconomic and demographic factors influencing women's attitude towards wife beating. On the other hand, this study his study found a mixed result on the relationship between religion and women's attitude towards wife beating.

The way forward will require the empowerment of women through education and an increase in women's access to resources in order to reverse the current women's attitude towards wife beating in Ethiopia. In line with this, women's access to media information such as "reading family planning materials" and "participating in community conversation program" are also critical factors to improve women's understanding and attitude so as to oppose wife beating for one reason or another. In general, education is a key part of strategies to improve women's well-being since educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them.

Additionally, under the Ethiopian context, religious and community leaders should play a pivotal role to speak out against wife beating at community level for their followers-with women and men in order to advance the respect for women and changing the mindsets of both women and men towards wife beating.

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