

Study reveals dramatic changes in global attitudes toward domestic violence

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Global attitudes about domestic violence changed dramatically during the first decade of the 2000s, according to a new University of Michigan study that analyzes data from 26 low- and middle-income countries.

Nigeria had the largest change, with 65 percent of men and 52 percent of women rejecting domestic violence in 2008, compared with 48 percent and 33 percent, respectively, in 2003.

In the study, which appears in the April issue of the *American Sociological Review*, University of Michigan researcher Rachael Pierotti analyzes data on hundreds of thousands of people collected in Demographic and Health Surveys funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Half of the countries surveyed are in sub-Saharan Africa.

"In many countries, men were even more likely to reject violence than women were," says Pierotti, a [graduate student](#) in sociology.

Data on male [attitudes](#) was available in 15 of the countries Pierotti studied. Men were more likely than women to reject domestic violence in Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria, [Rwanda](#), Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

The survey questions about attitudes toward domestic violence differed slightly from one country to another. But the most common form was as follows:

Sometimes a husband is annoyed or angered by things which his [wife](#) does. In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations?

1. if she goes out without telling him
2. if she neglects the children
3. if she argues with him
4. if she refuses to have sex with him
5. if she burns the food

In general, Pierotti found that people were most likely to say that violence was justified if a wife neglected the children and least likely to consider it justifiable if a wife burned the food.

In two countries—Madagascar and Indonesia—attitudes among both men and women changed in the wrong direction. During the period studied, the percentage of men and women rejecting domestic violence decreased in those countries.

Pierotti found that attitudes about the use of domestic violence changed significantly among all age groups. "Often it's the case that social change starts with younger people," she says. "But in this case, people of all ages became more rejecting of [domestic violence](#)."

She found that those who lived in urban areas, and who had more education, were more likely to reject wife beating than those who lived in rural areas and who had relatively less education. She also found that in many of the countries, those with access to newspapers, radio, and television were more likely to reject wife beating.

"The global spread of ideas about women's rights and the increasing international attention to the problem of violence against [women](#) may be

contributing to the striking change in attitudes about this issue," says Pierotti. "But more research will be needed in order to confirm if this is really the reason."

Pierotti is the winner of a Marshall Weinberg Research Fellowship at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research (ISR) Population Studies Center and this work was supported by a National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship.

More information: Download Excel files detailing changing attitudes in all the nations studied at bit.ly/YRFDSM (men's attitudes) and bit.ly/15HF2ur (women's attitudes).

Provided by American Sociological Association

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