

Women's Status, Attitude to Gender Based Violence and Fertility Behaviour among Currently Married Women in Nigeria.

By

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BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally, women's status has been identified as an important determinant of fertility levels across different cultures and societies. Researchers have viewed women's status in different ways, which have resulted to different conceptualization and measurement of the concept. Despite that most of these studies have succeeded in explaining the concept of 'women's status' cross-culturally and cross-nationally (Bradley & Khor, 1993; Mason, 1986; Mukhopadhyay & Higgins, 1988); attitude to Gender Based Violence (GBV) among other components of women's status as it influences fertility behaviour has received little research attention in recent times. The present study therefore seeks to examine attitude to GBV as a component of women's status and the resulting effects on fertility behaviour among currently married women in Nigeria.

Attitudes to gender based violence in most sub-Saharan African countries originate from the traditional gender role which is firmly rooted in the customs and tradition of the people. This traditional gender role is entrenched in the patriarchal and hierarchical nature of most marriage institutions which emphasizes a dichotomy between the husband (as being superior) and the wife, who is expected to have a subordinate role (Amato & Booth, 1995; Makinwa-Adebusoye, 2007). Women are expected to perform a common set of laid down roles, which results to discipline, especially beating, from the husband once such roles are been transgressed (Jewkes, 2002; Visaria, 2000). Such laid down roles include among others; preparation of food, seeking husband's permission to go out, caring for the children, not arguing with the husband and consenting to husband's demand for sex at all times. Studies have shown that although fertility decline has started in some sub-Saharan African countries, the region has the highest fertility rates compared with other developing regions of the world (Bongaarts & Casterline, 2013; Caldwell & Caldwell, 2002; Shapiro & Gebreselassie, 2008). The subordinate roles of women in many African households have largely been responsible for making them voiceless and powerless; and preventing them from taking deliberate and reasonable steps in controlling their fertility (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 2007).

Studies on gender based violence in SSA and Nigeria in particular often relate to domestic or intimate partner's violence and socio-economic characteristics (Bamiwuye & Odimegwu, 2014;

Bazargan-Hejazi, Medeiros, Mohammadi, Lin, & Dalal, 2013; Okenwa, Lawoko, & Jansson, 2009). Other studies on attitude to intimate partner violence only relate to men and women's attitude to domestic or intimate partner violence (Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005; Rani, Bonu, & Diop-Sidibe, 2004; Speizer, 2010; Uthman, Lawoko, & Moradi, 2009, 2010). Yet, studies that relate gender based violence to reproductive behaviour rarely exist. The aim of this study however is not only to only examine women's attitude to gender based violence, but to further examine attitude to GBV in relation to fertility behaviour among currently married women in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) constitute the data for this study. Demographic and Health Surveys are cross-sectional, nationally representative, household sample surveys with large sample sizes. Data for currently married women were extracted from the data of all women aged 15-49. Thus, from the data of 38,948 women, data for 27, 274 currently married women were analyzed using STATA 12 – which constitutes 70.3% of the total.

The Outcomes Variables (OV) for this study is Children Ever Born (CEB). CEB as captured by DHS is the total number of children ever born to a woman in the reproductive age 15-49. Since CEB is a count variable, the variable was measured as captured by the Demographic and Health Survey datasets. The principal explanatory variable is “Attitude to gender based violence”, which is captured by reasons why a woman feels a man is justified for beating his wife. Women were asked if a man is justified to beat his wife, if (i) she goes out without telling him (ii) if she neglects the children (iii) if she burns the food (iv) if she argues with him or (v) she refuses to have sex with him. On a scale of 0-5, a woman is assessed on the number of reasons why she feels a man is justified to beat his wife; with “0” standing for “no reason” and “5” stands for the five reasons. Thus, a woman is of low status if she justifies her husband for beating her for at least one of the five reasons; while a woman is regarded as being of high status if she does not justify her husband for beating her for any of the stated reasons. A value of “0” therefore means that a wife does not justify her husband at all for beating/hitting her for any of the stated reasons. A value of 1-5 is further summed up to mean “1”, which makes a woman of low status for justifying her husband for beating/hitting her for at least one of the stated reasons. Other explanatory variables include the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of married women – age, age at marriage, religion, wealth status, age at first birth, place of residence, educational status, occupational status and employment status. Appropriate weighting were applied to the variables.

RESULTS

With respect to answers to questions on whether or not they justify their husbands for beating/hitting them for any of the stated reasons; generally, majority of the women have a negative attitude to being beaten by their husbands for any of the stated reasons (see figure 1). For a woman going out without telling the husband, 72% of the women did not justify a husband beating the wife. For a woman neglecting the children, 74% of the women did not justify a husband beating the wife. For a woman arguing with the husband, 79% of the women were not in support of the husband beating the wife. For refusing sex with the husband, 78% of the women did not justify a man beating his wife. For a woman burning the food, 84% of currently married women did not justify a man beating his wife.

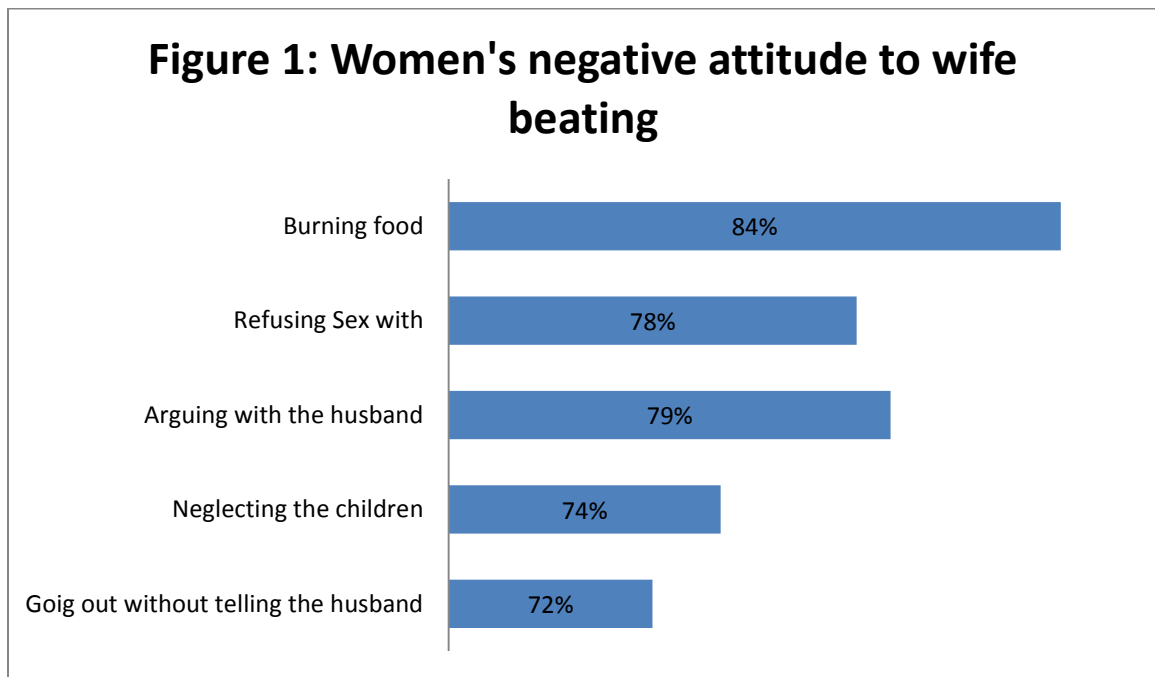


Table 1: Poisson Regression showing the relationship between women’s attitude to gender based violence and fertility behaviour (CEB) in Nigeria.

| VARIABLES | COEFF. | IRR | CONF. INTERVAL |
|------------------------|--------|-------|----------------|
| ATTITUDE TO GBV | | | |
| Low Status | RC | RC | RC |
| High Status | -0.069 | 0.933 | 0.907-0.960*** |

***p<0.001

Table 1 above presents the result of the poisson regression showing the relationship between women's attitude to GBV and fertility behaviour in Nigeria. The table shows that attitude to GBV is a significant predictor of fertility in Nigeria, with women of high status having a lower fertility than women of low status (IRR=0.933; CI=0.907-0.960; $p<0.001$).

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Findings from this study show that women generally have a negative attitude to gender based violence. This is contrary to the findings of other studies, showing wide acceptance of wife beating in SSA and Nigeria in particular. For example, Rani et al. (2004) in their empirical investigation of attitudes towards wife beating among men and women in seven sub-Saharan African countries, found an almost universal acceptance of wife beating across the seven countries been studied. Similarly, Speizer (2010) in a study of the attitudes of men and women to intimate partner violence and experience in Uganda found that wife beating was generally acceptable among men and women in the country. Uthman et al. (2010) also found a wide acceptance of gender based violence among women than men in a study of sex disparities in attitude to intimate partner violence in SSA. Also, Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe (2005) found that more than 65% of ever-married women were in support of wife-beating as evidenced in the 2003 NDHS data. The difference in this study from the previous ones therefore suggests the need to further examine critically attitude to gender based violence across the different regions of Nigeria and SSA generally.

Further findings from this study have also shown that, women of high status have significantly lower fertility than women of low status with respect to their attitude to gender based violence in Nigeria. This result suggests that apart from raising the age at marriage, improving the education of women among other factors, there is the need for a change in women's attitude to gender based violence. These changes should include a re-orientation of women not to see themselves as being subordinate to men, but as partners in achieving a reasonable fertility level. Although fertility has remained consistently high in Nigeria as in many SSA countries, until very recently when a little decline is noticed; if this decline would have to be sustained then, it would be necessary for women to carry the right attitudes, which will further enhance their empowerment and give them a "voice" in achieving their desired fertility, which in most situations may be lower than that of men.