

# Perceptions of Nigerian Women on Domestic Violence: Evidence from 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey

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## ABSTRACT

To facilitate the design of effective programmes to eliminate violence against women in Nigeria, this paper examined women's perceptions of wife beating. The data were derived from the 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS). Both descriptive and analytical methods were used to assess the net effects of socio-demographic factors on women's perceptions of domestic violence. The study demonstrates that a large percentage of Nigerian women agreed that a man is justified in beating or hitting his wife; 66.4% and 50.4% of ever-married and unmarried women respectively expressed consent for wife beating. Respondents' approval of wife beating or abuse varied by personal attributes. Ethnic affiliation, level of education, place of residence, wealth index and frequency of listening to radio were significantly related to concurrence with wife beating. This paper highlights the cultural factors responsible for, and negative effects of, domestic violence against women in Nigeria and makes a case for raising public consciousness against it. (Afr J Reprod Health 2005; 9[2]: 38-53)

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans le but de rendre plus facile la formulation des programmes efficaces pour l'élimination de la violence contre la femme au Nigéria, cet article a étudié la perception des femmes à l'égard de la violence contre la femme. Les données ont été recueillies à partir de l'édition de 2003 de l'Enquête sur la Santé et la Démographie au Nigéria (ESDN). Les méthodes descriptives et analytiques ont été employées à la fois pour évaluer les effets nets des facteurs socio-démographiques sur les perceptions qu'ont les femmes par rapport à la violence domestique. L'étude a démontré qu'un grand pourcentage de femmes nigérianes étaient d'accord que l'homme est justifié de battre ou de frapper sa femme; 66,4% et 50,4% des femmes qui ont jamais été mariées et les femmes non-mariées respectivement, avaient exprimé leur accord sur la nécessité de battre ou de frapper la femme. L'approbation des interviewées sur la violence contre la femme variaient selon les attributs personnels. L'affiliation ethnique, le niveau d'instruction, le lieu de domicile, l'indice de la richesse et la fréquence de l'écoute radiophonique, étaient liés de manière significative à l'approbation de la violence contre la femme. Par exemple, l'indice de la richesse avait un rapport négatif en ce qui concerne la violence faite à la femme par son mari. L'article met en valeur les facteurs culturels qui sont responsables de la violence domestique contre la femme au Nigéria et ses effets négatifs; il propose aussi des arguments pour éveiller la conscience du public contre elle. (Rev Afr Santé Reprod 2005; 9[2]: 38-53)

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KEY WORDS: Women, violence, husband, wife, perception

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## Introduction

One of the key issues addressed at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was the elimination of violence against women.<sup>1</sup> Violence affects the lives of millions of women worldwide, irrespective of their socio-economic status. It cuts across ethnic, cultural and religious barriers, impeding the rights of women to participate fully in the society.<sup>2</sup> The urgency of addressing this global problem is tragically illustrated by the treatment of women in conflict or crisis situations, where various forms of harassment, intimidation, rape and forced pregnancies are being used as instruments of war, especially by the opposing forces or the supposed peacekeepers.<sup>3-7</sup> The recent incident in the Darfur region of Sudan, where women were violently abused both physically and sexually and some killed, is typical.<sup>8</sup> However, it is not only in times of war that women are vulnerable to abuse. Throughout the world, women suffer untold violence in the family, at work and in the wider community, while the perpetrators include individuals and the state apparatus. Women worldwide remain vulnerable to life-threatening conditions and abuse of physical and psychological integrity.<sup>9</sup> Although violence against women is highly under-reported, its prevalence is high in many cultural settings both in the developed and developing countries.<sup>10-11</sup> For instance, studies indicate that 10–58% of women have experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, cross-sectional studies show that 40% of women in South Africa, 28% in Tanzania and 7% in New Zealand reported that their first sexual intercourse was forced.<sup>13</sup>

Violence against women is evident in many forms, including domestic, verbal and physical abuse, rape and sexual assault, early and forced marriages, incest and female genital cutting. In most societies, physical abuse is often considered an acceptable behaviour, and where it is frowned at, women are often blamed for inciting men to

engage in it.<sup>10,14-16</sup> For example, among the Luhya community in western Kenya and Tiv-speaking people of Nigeria, wife beating is even regarded as a sign of love, which women have been socialised to accept and sometimes encourage it.<sup>10-11</sup> Violence against women by male partners is widely condoned by many Nigerian societies, where the belief that a husband may chastise his wife by beating her is deeply embedded in the culture.<sup>17-19</sup> Traditional attitudes regarding the subordination of women exacerbate problems of sexual and domestic violence.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, violence against women provides one of the most obvious illustrations of the low position and status that women are accorded in many cultures.

In sub-Saharan Africa, a number of socio-economic and demographic factors are significant correlates of violence against women.<sup>17-19,21</sup> The social context of violence against women in Nigeria is related to the traditional African patriarchal society that defines the gender power structure. For instance, upon marriage a woman surrenders to her husband exclusive sexual rights and obedience. This invariably gives her husband the liberty to violate and batter her if he feels that she has not adequately fulfilled her obligations, or for any other reason.<sup>10</sup> Where the socio-cultural context of domestic violence is largely dependent on the gender power relation, men are always right; they always win in any case against their wives; the female relatives of a man are usually the first to accuse the woman and find her guilty irrespective of obvious signs of physical abuse.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the fact that violence against women is a daily occurrence both in the public and private spheres, it is often rendered invisible, unrecognised and at best trivialised.<sup>10,20</sup> For many years in Nigeria, violence against women received very little or no attention, with the silence engulfing it being used as a weapon in further perpetrating the act. However, since the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEDAW),<sup>23</sup> attempts have been made by government, non-governmental organisations and other

stakeholders in Nigeria to address the powerful cultural, traditional and religious forces that have hitherto hindered the elimination of domestic and sexual violence. However, these programmes may be hampered without a good understanding of people's attitudes and perceptions toward violence against women, and the underlying cultural underpinning of the practice.

Most of the studies reviewed focus on prevalence, patterns, causes and consequences of domestic violence. There is virtually no published work on perceptions of domestic violence in Nigeria, and in so far as changing people's perception is a major step toward behavioural change, this paper is of utmost importance for the efforts to eliminate violence against women in Nigeria. Since men and the community in general see violence against women as normal, it is instructive to find out what women – who are at the receiving end – think about it. The first step to combating the problem of violence against women in Nigeria, or any subculture for that matter, is documentation of women's perceptions or opinions about it. This is a prelude to any attempt at effecting a serious change in societal attitude. Hence, to facilitate the design of effective programmes to reduce domestic violence, this paper examines women's perception of domestic violence against women under various scenarios.

## Data and Methods

This paper used data from the 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS). The DHS model questionnaire used for Nigeria in 2003 has a number of questions about the background characteristics of the woman and perception of domestic violence that can be used to underscore the perceived and plausible extent of domestic violence in Nigeria. It was a nationally representative survey covering both urban and rural households. Details of the research design are available in the 2003 NDHS report.<sup>24</sup>

A total of 9,810 women aged 10–49 years and 3,082 men age 15–64 years were interviewed. Among the female respondents, 7,620 were in the reproductive age group (15–49 years), either married or never married. The analysis here is restricted to this sub-sample of female respondents.

In order to assess the perception of women on domestic violence, respondents were asked whether a husband is justified for 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; and (5) if she burns the food. This paper considers only these five of the six attitudinal questions on women's perception of wife beating. Demographic characteristics of respondents and other covariates were included in the analysis to identify factors for possible intervention and to act as control variables in the analytical models. The covariates considered included age, highest level of education completed, place and region of residence, religious affiliation, ethnic affiliation, poverty measure, spousal age difference, exposure to the media and type of marital union.

Both bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted to ascertain the association and net effects of the key independent variables on the dependent variable when the selected background characteristics were controlled. Bivariate analyses were used for identifying patterns of associations and levels of significance ( $p = 0.05$ ) of such associations. Logistic regression was used to assess the predictors of the binary outcome (whether or not respondents agreed that a husband or a man is justified for beating his wife/partner). A background variable was considered to be significantly associated with a measure of perception of domestic violence if the values of that measure at different levels of the background variable were not all equal. An asterisk was used for indicating that a significant association exists between a background variable and a study

variable in Table 4. Logistic regression models were used for determining the net effect of the background variables on the probability that a woman would agree that a husband is justified for hitting or beating his wife under any of the circumstances already mentioned. A value of one was ascribed to a situation where the respondent agreed that a husband is justified for beating his wife and zero if it is otherwise. The reference categories for the categorical measured independent variables were as shown in Table 4.

The logistic regression model also offers ease of interpretation through the use of odds ratios. It has the form  $\ln(p/q) = B_0 + B_1X_1 + \dots + B_kX_k$ , where  $p$  is the probability that a respondent would agree that a husband is justified for beating his wife;  $q$  (or  $1-p$ ) is the probability that the respondent would not agree with wife beating.  $B_0, B_1, \dots, B_k$  are regression coefficients, and  $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_k$  are factors. The exponential of the regression coefficients of the estimated parameter gives the odds ratios in the logistic regression models, which is interpreted as the likelihood of supporting wife battering under the given scenario.

### Variable Definition and Relations

The operational variables included age, ethnicity, religion, place of residence, type of marital union, wealth index (poverty proxy), media exposure, education and spousal age gap. The socio-cultural and demographic variables were recorded either into categorical and dichotomous variables in the multivariate analysis.

It was hypothesised that the higher the age of respondents, the greater the likelihood that their view of patriarchy would affect their responses to the issue of wife abuse especially domestic violence. That is, older women are more likely to give a positive response or support that a woman should be beaten under any circumstance than younger ones. Age was sub-grouped into three categories in the bivariate analysis and measured as continuous at the multivariate level. Religion is believed to have a profound impact

on individual behaviour and view. Even in the face of modernisation and its consequences on cultural practices, religion seems to still hold a firm grip on moral values relating to power relation between the wife and her husband. Therefore, women who are more religious are more likely to hold strong, rigid and fundamentalist types of belief that may encourage abuse. However, the relationship between religious affiliation and domestic violence, particularly wife beating, is likely to be mediated by social and demographic factors such as education of the respondent. The religious affiliation sub-groups used were Christian, Islam and others.

Ethnicity is an important proxy of cultural factors affecting domestic violence, since it encompasses values and norms that govern the behavioural and psychological levels of women's participation in decision-making and power relation within households and at community levels. It may also reflect openness to the influences and/or adherence to other cultures due to interactions from different areas and/or regions. Culture can also affect domestic violence indirectly through education and modernisation. With more than 389 ethnic groups<sup>25</sup> in Nigeria, ethnic differentials are critical in explaining cultural differences, interpersonal relationship, communication and conflict resolution mechanism. The heterogeneity of ethnic groups in Nigeria also implies that social change takes place at different pace and in a non-uniform manner. For this paper, ethnic affiliation of the respondents will serve as a proxy for culture and the ethnic groups will be regrouped into six categories based on the numerical strength and affinity. The ethnic sub-divisions used were Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, northern minorities, southern minorities and others (which include nationals of other countries). The northern and southern minorities comprise numerous smaller ethnic groups in the north and south respectively, whose sample size was too small to stand alone in the analysis. It was assumed that ethnic affiliation would reflect fundamental beliefs in religion or customs of the

people, though it is difficult to measure.

Past studies indicate that education is negatively related to domestic violence.<sup>17-18</sup> Thus, educated women are more likely to interact with people of varied experiences than those who are not educated. On violence against women, therefore, they were expected to be less supportive and to have negative attitudes or views towards wife battering. Since female education appears to be the most influential factor affecting attitudes, it is relevant to understand how it interacts with other covariates, and its effects on women's perception of domestic violence. The educational categories used include non-schooling, primary, secondary and post-secondary education, representing the respondents' highest level of education attained. In view of the paucity of research on regional differential in family violence, it is imperative in this paper to explore the phenomenon with data from the 2003 NDHS, which contain comparable and representative regional information. Apart from identifying the structural patterns within the Nigerian community, region is appropriate in understanding the socio-economic and cultural influence on respondents' view of domestic violence. It is important also to note that regions constitute a proxy of social change or development. In this paper the six regions were sub-divided into two, namely, northern and southern regions.

It was assumed that women at the lower quintile of the wealth index are more likely to justify a husband for beating his wife or condone domestic violence. However, this relationship would depend on the interplay of several other confounding factors such as age of respondent, educational level of both partners, marital status and length of relationships. Since women's economic status or poverty level has been found to be one of the key correlates of domestic violence, it is important to understand how it interplays with women's perception of domestic violence. Wealth index, constructed from the household facilities, is used as a proxy for

availability of economic status. Asset information was collected in the 2003 NDHS on household ownership of a number of consumer items, ranging from a television to a bicycle or car, as well as dwelling characteristics such as source of drinking water, type of sanitation facilities and type of material used in flooring. Each household was assigned a score from each asset, and the scores were summed for each household; individuals were ranked according to the total score of the household in which they resided. The sample was then divided into quintiles, from one to five. The level of wealth index ranges from the first to the fifth quintile, corresponding to the least and most well-off respectively.

## Results

### Respondents' Profile

The basic socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1, which shows that 42.2% were aged less than 25 years, 30.1% were aged 25–34 years, and 27.7% were aged 35 years or older. The mean age of the respondents at the time of interviews was 28.0 years. About three fifths of the respondents (60.6%) had attended school. Almost one third and 6.4% of women included in the sample had secondary and post-secondary education respectively. It should be emphasised that female educational levels were low relative to men's, and this affected their positions and status within the household.<sup>26</sup>

Between the two dominant religions, Christians constituted 51.0% of the entire sample, whereas Muslims formed 47.3%. The distribution of respondents by place of residence indicated that 59.9% resided in rural areas, while 40.1% were urban dwellers. Approximately three fifths of respondents were from the northern region, while 41.5% were from the southern region. About seven in ten respondents were either currently or previously married, whereas about 27% had never married. The mean age at first

marriage was 16.9 years among ever-married women. The majority of previously or currently married women were in monogamous union, while 35.9% were married to a husband who had two or more wives.

The distribution of respondents by ethnic affiliation showed that 29.2% were Hausa/Fulani, 18.3% were Igbo, 13.7% were Yoruba; minority ethnic groups constituted 38.8%. The minority ethnic groups were further regrouped into three categories: northern minorities, southern minorities and others. Northern minorities constituted 20.2% of the respondents, while southern minorities comprised 7.8%. The remaining 10.8% comprised the "other" category, made up of ethnic groups that could not be unambiguously categorised among the northern and southern minorities, including non-Nigerians.

The findings revealed high level exposure to the electronic media. Most respondents listened to the radio at least once in a while, and about 36.0% of women reported listening to the radio everyday. About a quarter (26.4%) had never listened to the radio; 21.8% watched television everyday. The age difference between spouses is a particularly important variable in most male-dominated cultures where most relationships are defined by the age gap, especially in marital union. The larger the age difference between spouses, the more difficult it may be for wives to express views that are contrary to their husbands' even when they feel strongly about those views. Table 1 shows that 14.7% of the wives were four years or less younger than their husbands, while 32.6% and 26.1% respectively were younger than their husbands by 5–9 years and 10 years or more. The study further indicated that 26.6% of the wives were 15 years or more older than their male partners. The mean spousal age difference was about 11 years; and it was likely to be inimical to a more desirable egalitarian relationship between spouses.

## Perceptions of Domestic Violence

Studies on domestic violence in Nigeria have not examined perceptions explicitly or quantitatively. In fact, only two available studies<sup>10,18</sup> asked some questions on perceptions using qualitative tools. These largely small and qualitative studies concluded that domestic violence, especially wife battering, is perceived as an acceptable way of life. The explanation of its acceptance is based on the existing power imbalances within the home and the society at large. One such study conducted among the Tiv-speaking people of Benue State highlighted this perception with a profound statement, which was commonly expressed:

If you are not yet beaten by your husband  
then you do not know the joy of marriage  
and that means you are not yet married<sup>10</sup>

The results from this study provide quantitative corroboration of this perception. In this study, perception of domestic violence by women was measured from their responses to questions on whether women agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife when she: burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, and refuses to have sex with him. The results revealed that roughly three fifths (62.4%) of women agreed that a husband is justified for beating his wife for at least one of the mentioned circumstances. One half of the respondents agreed that a husband is correct in beating his wife if she goes out without telling him, and about half (48.5%) agreed that she should be beaten if she neglects the children. However, smaller percentages supported wife beating if a woman argues with her husband (42.9%) or refuses to have sex with him (36.7%). Three out of 10 women felt that a husband is right in beating his wife if she burns the food (Figure 1).

Table 1 Percentage Distribution of Study Population according to Selected Socio-economic Characteristics, 2003 NDHS (N = 7,620)

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Ethnic affiliation		
Hausa/Fulani	2,219	29.2
Igbo	1,390	18.3
Yoruba	1,042	13.7
Northern minorities	1,535	20.2
Southern minorities	593	7.8
Others	819	10.8
Region of residence		
Southern	3,160	41.5
Northern	4,460	58.5
Type of union		
Monogamy	3,291	64.1
Polygamy	1,840	35.9
Marital status		
Ever-married	5,533	72.6
Single	2,087	27.4
Wealth index (low to high)		
First quintile	1,479	19.4
Second quintile	1,399	18.4
Third quintile	1,510	19.8
Fourth quintile	1,544	20.3
Fifth quintile	1,688	22.2
Spousal age gap (years)		
< 5	748	14.7
5–9	1,661	32.6
10–14	1,328	26.1
> 15	1,355	26.6
Mean spousal age difference (years)	11.3	
Religious affiliation		
Christian	3,884	51.0
Islam	3,601	47.3
Others	127	1.7
Frequency of watching television		
Never	4,231	55.6
Less than once a week	768	10.1
At least once a week	955	12.5
Daily	1,660	21.8
Frequency of listening to radio		
Never	1,989	26.2
Less than once a week	1,218	16.0
At least once a week	1,665	21.9
Daily	2,733	35.9
Educational attainment		
None	3,005	39.4
Primary	1,666	21.9
Secondary	2,462	32.3
Post-secondary	487	6.4
Place of residence		
Urban	3,057	40.1
Rural	4,563	59.9
Age group (years)		
15–24	3,213	42.2
25–34	2,296	30.1
> 35	2,111	27.7
Mean age	28.02	

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Using dichotomous responses on these five

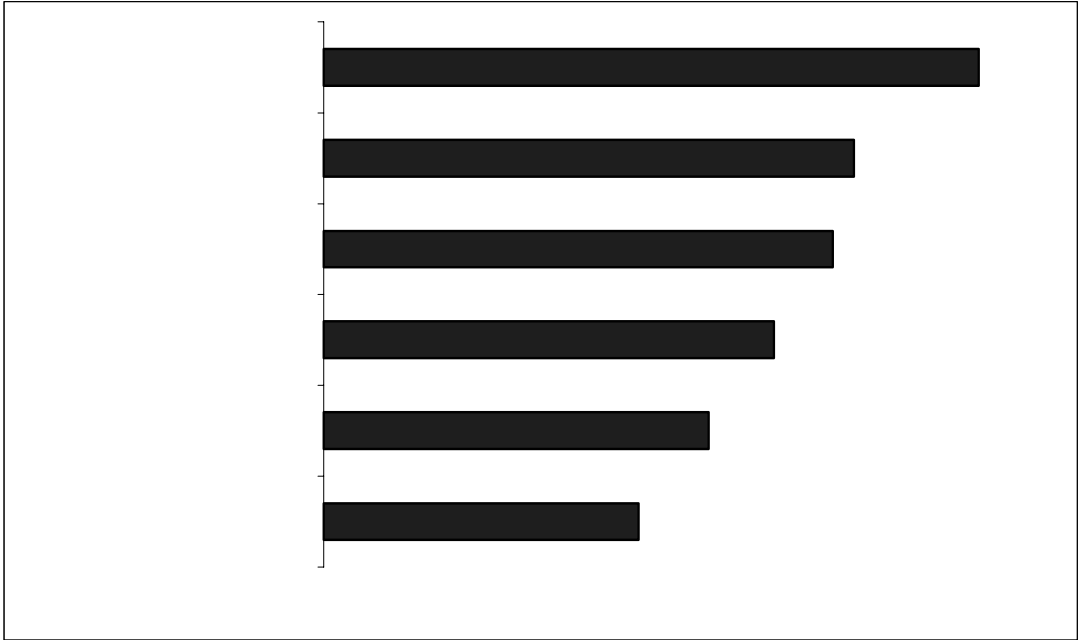


Figure 1 Percentage of Women who Agreed that a Husband is Justified for Beating His Wife for Specific Reasons

questions, the index of wife abuse was created, which ranged from zero, if the woman believed that a husband is not justified under any circumstances for hitting or beating his wife, to five, if she believed that a husband is justified for hitting or beating his wife in all the five mentioned circumstances. The index of violence formed by these five circumstances gave an average score of 2.09.

Table 2 presents the mean values of the index of wife abuse by selected background variables. The results point to a strong ethnic and regional differential in women's perception of wife abuse. The findings revealed that Hausa/Fulani women had a "higher score" on the index of domestic violence than other ethnic groups (i.e., agreeing that a husband is right in hitting or beating his wife), while Igbo women were least likely to agree that a man should beat his wife (index of 2.8 vs. 0.9). Whereas northern women agreed that a husband is justified for beating his wife for an

average of 2.67 out of the five circumstances included in the domestic violence index, respondents from the southern part had wife abuse index of only 1.24, probably a function of different levels of education, rationality and exposure to forces of modernity. The table further indicates that older women, those with no formal education, rural dwellers, women who were low on the wealth index, those less exposed to the media, those with large spousal age difference, and those in polygamous union were more likely to justify wife beating relative to their respective counterparts.

Past studies have observed some variation in the level and type of violence experienced by married and unmarried women.<sup>10,17-18</sup> It is therefore instructive to further examine the perceptions of Nigerian women on domestic violence with respect to their marital status. Marriage in the African context confers additional status and burden on women. In most cultures,



Table 2 Mean Index of Wife Abuse: Female Rating of Justification of Wife Beating by Husbands, 2003 NDHS (N = 7,620)

Characteristic	Mean	Standard deviation
Total	2.09	2.02
Ethnic affiliation		
Hausa/Fulani	2.81	2.00
Igbo	0.93	1.48
Yoruba	1.10	1.51
Northern minorities	2.72	2.08
Southern minorities	1.71	1.79
Others	2.33	2.02
Region of residence		
Southern	1.24	1.63
Northern	2.67	2.05
Type of union		
Monogamy	2.10	2.01
Polygamy	2.64	2.05
Wealth index (low to high)		
First quintile	2.74	2.05
Second quintile	2.60	2.06
Third quintile	2.20	2.04
Fourth quintile	1.92	1.93
Fifth quintile	1.14	1.60
Marital status		
Ever married	2.28	2.04
Single	1.51	1.83
Spousal age gap (years)		
< 5	1.98	2.00
5–9	2.23	2.05
10–14	2.36	2.02
> 15	2.52	2.04
Religious affiliation		
Christians	1.54	1.84
Islam	2.66	2.04
Others	2.15	1.99
Frequency of watching television		
Never	2.51	2.07
Less than once a week	1.71	1.93
At least once a week	1.71	1.85
Daily	1.42	1.75
Frequency of listening to radio		
Never	2.80	2.10
Less than once a week	1.96	2.02
At least once a week	2.05	1.96
Daily	1.65	1.85
Educational attainment		
None	2.77	2.04
Primary	2.11	1.99
Secondary	4.48	1.78
Post-secondary	0.71	1.32
Place of residence		
Urban	1.78	1.94
Rural	2.29	2.05
Age group (years)		
15–24	2.04	2.00
25–34	2.08	2.01
> 35	2.17	2.05

Table 3 Percentage of Females who Agreed that a Husband is Justified for Beating his Wife by Marital Status, 2003 NDHS

Covariates	Ever-married		Single		All women	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	5,402	66.4	1,827	50.4	7,229	62.4
Ethnic affiliation						
Hausa/Fulani	2,033	79.6	104	66.3	2,137	78.9
Igbo	728	35.2	563	37.7	1,291	36.3
Yoruba	626	43.8	373	43.4	999	43.6
Northern minorities	1,144	74.0	309	62.8	1,453	71.6
Southern minorities	321	63.6	237	57.4	558	60.9
Others	532	70.7	239	61.5	771	67.8
Region of residence						
Southern	1,728	47.0	1,241	45.3	2,968	46.3
Northern	3,674	75.6	587	61.2	4,261	73.6
Type of union						
Monogamy	3,213	63.1	NA		3,213	63.1
Polygamy	1,802	73.4			1,802	73.4
Wealth index (low to high)						
First quintile	1,197	75.4	208	57.7	1,405	72.8
Second quintile	1,093	74.7	227	55.9	1,320	71.5
Third quintile	1,073	67.8	354	55.1	1,427	64.7
Fourth quintile	1,038	65.3	431	52.9	1,469	61.7
Fifth quintile	1,001	46.3	607	41.4	1,608	44.4
Spousal age gap (years)						
< 5	723	60.9			723	60.9
5–9	1,634	65.2	NA		1,634	65.2
10–14	1,301	69.2			1,301	69.2
> 15	1,324	70.7			1,324	70.7
Religious affiliation						
Christians	2,213	53.8	1,426	47.9	3,639	51.5
Islam	3,079	75.6	388	60.1	3,467	73.8
Others	106	66.0	10	40.0	116	63.8
Frequency of watching television						
Never	3,438	72.0	588	54.4	4,026	69.4
Less than once a week	456	59.0	263	47.5	719	54.8
At least once a week	541	62.5	357	52.9	898	58.7
Daily	963	52.8	617	46.4	1,580	50.3
Frequency of listening to radio						
Never	1,548	74.0	321	61.7	1,869	71.9
Less than once a week	822	62.7	331	49.8	1,153	59.0
At least once a week	1,121	68.9	462	52.4	1,583	64.1
Daily	1,902	60.5	708	44.2	2,610	56.1
Educational attainment						
None	2,803	76.0	108	58.3	2,911	75.4
Primary	1,232	65.3	322	57.1	1,554	63.6
Secondary	1,091	51.6	1,207	51.5	2,298	51.6
Post-secondary	276	33.0	190	27.4	466	30.7
Place of residence						
Urban	2,009	60.3	889	49.7	2,898	57.1
Rural	3,393	70.1	938	51.1	4,331	65.9
Age group (years)						
15–24	1,346	73.1	1,588	52.6	2,934	62.0
25–34	2,020	65.3	218	36.7	2,238	62.6
> 35	2,036	63.1	21	28.6	2,057	62.8

however, a married woman is expected to be submissive not only to her husband but also to the man's relatives, whether males or females. It is believed that focusing on all women would conceal major differences in the perception of domestic violence between those who were married (currently or previously) and their single or never married counterparts. Hence, the subsequent analysis was disaggregated by the marital status of respondents. It was hypothesised here that married women are more likely to agree that a husband is justified for beating his wife than those who were single. Thus, perceptions on wife beating are examined with respect to marital status under varying social environments, economic circumstances, cultural and religious affiliation.

Table 3 presents the percentage distribution of women; who justified by their wife beating by their marital status. The table indicates that approval of wife beating varied considerably according to respondents' characteristics. First, the table reveals that married women are more likely to agree that a husband has a right to hit or beat his wife for any of the five reasons included in the analysis than their counterparts who are single. For instance, approximately two thirds (66.4%) of ever-married women believed that a husband is justified for beating his wife for any reasons, whereas one half (50.5%) of their never married counterparts expressed similar view. The proportions of respondents who agreed that a husband is right for beating his wife for any reasons decreased with age. For instance, 73% of ever-married female respondents aged 15–24 years supported wife beating, relative to 63% of those aged 35 and above. The corresponding figures for their never-married counterparts were 52.6% and 28.6% respectively. The table reveals a large regional difference in women's perception of wife abuse, with respondents in the northern region manifesting higher level of support for wife beating for any reasons than those in the south.

Rural residents tended to agree that a husband is justified for beating his wife more than those in urban areas. Similarly, increased educational attainment was associated with a lower likelihood of supporting wife abuse. About three quarters of respondents who had no formal education reported that a husband is justified for beating his spouse, compared with 30.7% of those who had post-secondary education. An educated woman is more likely to be respected by her husband, and female education tends to expose women to egalitarian dispositions that create an enabling environment for equality and equity in power relation.

Level of access to media information was inversely related to agreement that beating one's wife is justified in certain circumstances. Respondents with low access to media information were more supportive of wife beating than their counterparts with greater access to media information. For example, about one half (50.3%) of those who reported watching television daily felt that a husband is right in beating his wife for any reason, relative to 69.4% of those who had never watched television. Listening to the radio revealed the same pattern. Table 3 also shows that wealth index was inversely associated with approval of beating for any reason. First, those in the first quintile supported wife beating by nearly twice as much as their counterparts in the fifth quintile. This finding could be attributed to the fact that women in the fifth quintile were more likely to be contributing significantly to the financial fortunes of the home, which changes the power relations in terms of decision-making and the respondent's status.

We examined the effect of ethnic affiliation on the perception of women of domestic violence. Ethnic effect occurs through the levels of resources that women control, which influences relationships between husband and wife as well as the prevailing power relations. In Nigeria, all ethnic groups have a strong patriarchal

structure, but the Hausa/Fulani and northern minorities are more gender restrictive.<sup>27</sup> The results show that respondents of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group and other northern minority ethnic groups were more supportive of wife beating than their counterparts of Igbo or Yoruba origin and southern minority ethnic groups. For instance, about 80% of Hausa/Fulani respondents affirmed that a husband is justified for beating his wife, compared to 36.3% among Igbo women. Furthermore, Table 3 shows that Muslim women were more supportive of wife beating for any reason than their Christian counterparts. For instance, about 74% of Muslim women in Nigeria supported wife beating, relative to 51.5% of Christians. Other factors considered in the table, such as type of union and spousal age difference, confirmed the expected directions of relationship with domestic violence.

Table 4 presents the odd ratios for three logistics regression models for predicting the likelihood that female respondents would agree that husbands are justified for beating their wife under at least one circumstance. The three modes represented married women, single women and all women respectively. The logistic regression odds ratios showed the net effect of personal attributes on women's perception of domestic violence. Among married women, the likelihood of supporting wife beating decreased with age ( $p < 0.05$ ). Ethnic affiliation, wealth index, frequency of listening to radio, education and place of residence were significant predictors of women's support for wife beating. The analysis showed that women's support for wife beating varied significantly among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. For instance, compared to married women from the "other" ethnic group, the Hausa/Fulani were about 1.3 times more likely to support wife beating for any reason ( $p < 0.05$ ). Conversely, married Igbo and Yoruba women were respectively 73% and 58% less likely to justify wife beating, relative to women in the "other" category ( $p < 0.01$ ).

The relationship between wealth index and women's perception of wife abuse was in the expected direction. Married women in the medium or high wealth index category (third to fifth quintiles) were less likely to support wife abuse or justify a husband beating his wife for any reason relative to their counterparts in the low wealth index group. The analysis indicated that those married women in the third quintile were 29% less likely to justify wife beating relative to those in the first quintile ( $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, those in the fifth quintile of wealth index were 48% less likely to justify wife beating compared to the reference category ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Married women who listened to radio daily were less likely to justify wife beating compared to those who had never listened to radio. For instance, compared to the married women who had never listened to the radio, respondents who listened to radio daily were 8% less likely to justify wife beating under any circumstances. Married women with secondary and higher education were respectively 70% and 39% less likely to justify wife beating relative to those with no formal education ( $p < 0.01$ ). Place of residence was found to have some rather unexpected relation with perceptions about wife beating. Married women who lived in urban areas were 16% more likely to justify wife beating relative to their counterparts in the rural areas. The logistic regression indicated that religious affiliation, region of residence, household size and frequency of watching television were not significantly related to women's approval of wife abuse.

The results for single women showed similarities with those of married women, although the number of significant relationships was reduced. Household size was positively related to women's agreement that husbands are justified for beating their wives. Single women who were of Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups were less likely to justify wife beating, compared to those who belonged to other ethnic groups ( $p < 0.01$ ). Those in the fifth quintile of the wealth

Table 4 Odds Ratios of Women's Agreement to Wife Beating by Husbands according to Selected Background Characteristics, 2003 NDHS

Characteristics	Ever married	Single	All women
Current age	0.99**	0.97**	1.00*
Ethnic affiliation			
Hausa/Fulani	1.30**	0.88	1.32**
Igbo	0.27***	0.46***	0.33***
Yoruba	0.42***	0.54***	0.46***
Northern minorities	1.06	0.90	1.03
Southern minorities	0.90	1.10	0.95
Others (RC)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Region of residence			
Southern (RC)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Northern	1.05	1.12	1.09
Wealth index (low to high)			
First quintile (RC)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Second quintile	0.93	1.01	0.95
Third quintile	0.71**	0.92	0.76***
Fourth quintile	0.71***	0.78	0.71***
Fifth quintile	0.52***	0.59**	0.54***
Religious affiliation			
Christian	0.78	1.69	0.88
Islam	0.85	2.23	1.03
Others (RC)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Frequency of watching television			
Never	0.90	0.79	0.87
Less than once a week	1.05	0.85	0.96
At least once a week	1.08	1.02	1.05
Daily (RC)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Frequency of listening to radio			
Never (RC)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Less than once a week	0.83*	0.78	0.84**
At least once a week	1.07	0.81	1.02
Daily	0.92	0.70**	0.88*
Educational attainment			
None (RC)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Primary	0.99	1.47	0.97
Secondary	0.70***	1.50*	0.76***
Post-secondary	0.39***	0.66	0.36***
Place of residence			
Urban	1.16*	1.25**	1.15**
Rural (RC)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Household Size	1.01	1.03*	1.01
-2 Log likelihood	6,072.32	2,348.13	8,469.13
N	5,367	1,817	7,184

\*p < 0.10; \*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01; RC = Reference category

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index were twice less likely to be supportive of wife abuse relative to those in the first quintile ( $p < 0.05$ ). Education tends to positively correlate with perception of domestic violence among single women up to the tertiary level, where the odds ratio significantly diminished. Rather surprisingly, as was observed for married women, the analysis revealed that single women who lived in urban areas were more likely to justify wife beating than their rural counterparts ( $p < 0.05$ ). Again, religious affiliation, region of residence and frequency of watching television did not significantly affect the likelihood that single women would support wife beating.

## Discussion

Domestic violence is deep-rooted in many African societies, including Nigeria, where wife beating is considered a prerogative of men<sup>10,18,28</sup> and a purely domestic matter by the society.<sup>15,29</sup> Domestic violence is one of the greatest barriers to ending the subordination of women. Women, for fear of violence, are unable to refuse sex or negotiate safer sexual practices, thus increasing their vulnerability to HIV if their husbands are unfaithful.<sup>30</sup> This paper examined the attitude and opinion of Nigerian women on the issue of wife abuse, particularly wife beating. It is believed that this effort will facilitate the design of effective programmes to reduce violence against women both within and outside the home. Regrettably, societal perception of violence against women has led to crass abuse of women physically, emotionally and sexually in the process of performing their multiple roles as mothers, wives, workers and even lawmakers.<sup>10,17-19</sup>

This study has revealed that a large percentage of Nigerian women support wife beating, as evident from 66.4% and 50.4% of ever-married and unmarried women respectively who agreed that a husband is justified for hitting or beating his wife under the conditions examined in the paper. The 2003 NDHS revealed that more than 61% of males also supported wife beating.<sup>24</sup> The

high level of support expressed for wife beating by both males and females confirms that violence against women is accepted as a cultural norm among Nigerians. Clearly, the strong support expressed for wife beating among respondents is in consonance with the belief of female weakness, which makes them more susceptible to domestic violence. The weakness results from, and reinforces, the broader societal structures of sexual and economic inequality that place women in a position of inferiority relative to men.

It is evident from the study that approval of wife abuse varies according to the personal attributes of respondents, which suggests that designing an effective intervention to eliminate violence against women would require culturally acceptable programmes. For instance, the study revealed that women from the northern region are more likely to consent to or justify the right of a husband to beat his wife as compared to their southern counterparts. This high level of agreement for wife beating manifested among the northern women could be a function of their socio-cultural and economic circumstances, which are substantially different from those of southern Nigeria. The southern environment and cultures permit closer conjugal interaction and concede more freedom to women. The ethnic differences observed in women's agreement of wife abuse could be explained in terms of the social institutions of gender and women's autonomy. The current data support the notion that an ethnic group that is more gender restrictive is more likely to condition women to agree or consent to wife beating. All the ethnic groups had a strong patriarchal structure, but the Hausa/Fulani and northern minority ethnic groups were more gender restrictive<sup>27</sup> and women from these ethnic groups concurred with wife beating more than their Igbo and Yoruba counterparts, who were also better educated and had more egalitarian conjugal relationship.

That support for wife beating was negatively associated with education is worth noting. Although higher education was not the only factor

found in this study to discourage domestic wife beating, it is the only variable that policymakers could easily manipulate to ensure close conjugal relationship that would help minimise domestic violence. Clearly, the major obstacles to the elimination of violence against women are cultural opposition and ignorance about modern norms and values. Efforts should be made to raise public consciousness of domestic violence and its attendant consequences. The criminal code also needs to give it the priority attention it deserves.

Domestic violence should be recognised as a criminal issue through the amendment of existing legal instruments and domestication of international treaties that deal with women violence. Such amendment should mandate the police to intervene in domestic quarrels, particularly between spouses. Other stakeholders should also be sensitised on the need to eliminate violence against women. For example, interest groups (religious, social, etc) should be educated, through their leaders, to appreciate the need for close conjugal relationship rather than the familiar male-dominant culture. Educational programmes should show, through research and training, that religious doctrines do not support violence against women and they are not at variance with the principle of egalitarian societies.

To be sure, the high prevalence of violence against women remains a direct obstacle to women's participation in development projects. Even as women's involvement in development continues, as it is bound to happen, concern about problems caused by violence against them often diverts their energy from pursuing and achieving their goals. Hence, the success of efforts in integrating women in development depends in part on addressing the issue of violence against women. Countering violence against women does not only eliminate a major obstacle to the development of women, it also actively addresses women's realisation of their full potential.

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