

# Determinants of a Woman's Attitude in Justifying Wife-Beating: A Nationwide Study in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

**OBJECTIVE:** This study aims to analyze women's attitudes toward wife-beating.

**METHODOLOGY:** This cross-sectional study was conducted in Indonesia. The sample included 20,658 married women of reproductive age (15 to 49 years), selected through a two-stage stratified sampling method to ensure national representativeness. Population determination relied on the 2010 census, which stratified households by urban and rural areas. In each census block, 25 households were randomly selected for the study, and data were collected using a questionnaire. The data were analyzed using Stata.

**RESULTS:** The study found that age, education, and marital status significantly influenced women's attitudes toward justifying their husbands' violence.

**CONCLUSION:** Increased awareness of women regarding violent behavior needs to be carried out thoroughly at the individual and community levels so that women's mindsets, attitudes and beliefs about wife beating can be changed for the better.

**KEYWORDS:** Intimate Partner Violence; Gender equality; Gender violence; Mental health; Wife-Beating.

## INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a form of discrimination against women. It involves a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, which can include physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion. Adults or adolescents perpetrate this type of violence against their intimate partners<sup>1</sup>. IPV is acknowledged as a grave violation of human rights and is increasingly being understood as a significant global public health concern, with far-reaching implications for women's physical, psychological, sexual, and reproductive well-being.

Indonesia, with the fourth largest population in the world, is known for its rich cultural diversity. It comprises numerous distinct islands and 88% of its population practices Islam<sup>2</sup>. During five years (2016-2021), there were 36.367 domestic violence cases reported to the Indonesian National Women Commission, where violence to the wife accounted for more than 70% of all cases. The Human Development Index (HDI) of Indonesian women (69.18) in 2019 was still below that of men (75.96); this data shows the reality that there are still many inequalities faced by women today, ranging from the economy to cases of violence against women<sup>3,4</sup>. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on gender equality.

Indonesia aims to eliminate discrimination against women and girls by promoting equality, improving access to education and healthcare, and empowering women. However, domestic violence poses a significant challenge to achieving these goals.

The factors associated with the incidence of intimate partner violence among women in Indonesia are as follows: husband's age, wife's age, education level<sup>5</sup>, whether the woman is working<sup>6</sup>, pregnant mother<sup>4</sup>, family history of violence, place of residence, and involvement in decision-making<sup>7</sup>. A study has shown that the risk of intimate partner violence was higher for women with housewife status<sup>4</sup>. Women face a risk of assault from men. A 2018 study found that similar percentages of both genders experienced intimate partner violence, with 36.4% of women and 33.6% of men affected<sup>8-10</sup>. Employed women were considered to be detached from violence<sup>11</sup>. However, this working status did not ensure that women were not at risk of being victims<sup>12</sup>. Although many studies on risk factors for intimate partner violence have been carried out, some research results are still contradictory.

In Indonesian society, patriarchal norms remain strong, with men in dominant roles and women expected to be submissive. A study in a province revealed that most respondents believed men should hold public leadership positions, married women should prioritize family over career, women should be more abstinent than men before marriage, and women should have less mobility than men<sup>13</sup>. The patriarchal culture in Indonesia affects the violence experienced by women due to the gender equality of the social system<sup>14</sup>. There are various risk factors of IPV, such as women with more children, husbands of older age, financially dependent women, smoker husbands,

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alcohol users<sup>15</sup>, the experience of abusive family during childhood, and women with tolerant attitudes toward IPV<sup>16,17</sup>. Women's positive attitude toward IPV might increase their risk of becoming a victim of IPV. The objective of this study was to evaluate women's perspectives on the issue of wife-beating through an analysis of the 2017 Indonesian Demographic and Health Survey (IDHS) data.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was a cross-sectional study conducted in Indonesia. The IDHS sample data were collected nationally representative by employing province and random households. The IDHS data used in this study were collected 2017 from January to December 2017. The total sample of women in this study was 20,658, and it was chosen using two-stage-stratified sampling. Specifically, the inclusion criteria for this study were married women of reproductive age, defined as 15 to 49 years old.

Population determination was done using the number of households in the 2010 census, stratified by urban and rural areas. In each census block, 25 ordinary houses were selected. Data collection using a questionnaire.

This study used a questionnaire of women's socio-demographics (age, education level, employment status, earnings, and wealth quintile) and husband's age. The research centred on women's susceptibility to intimate partner violence, as indicated by their tolerance of intimate partner violence perpetrated by their husbands.

Data were analyzed with Stata. The study utilized both univariate and multivariable statistical analysis. Participants' Demographic characteristics and attitudes towards wife-beating were estimated using descriptive statistics.

The 2017 IDHS survey indicated that the Institutional Review Board of ICF International had approved the ethics of the study (ICF IRB FWA00000845). Informed consent was obtained from all participants during the data collection process. Furthermore, authorization was secured from the DHS Program to utilize the data for this study.

## RESULTS

**Women's age:** The study sampled 20,658 women, over half (59.76%) aged 35 to 49. A significant correlation was found between age and the justification for wife-beating (Table II).

**Women's education level:** About 47.71% of respondents have completed a secondary education (Table 1). There was a statistically significant association between education level and the justifying wife-beating on some indicators; for example, the wife refuses to have sex with her husband ( $\chi^2=70.38$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) (Table II).

**Women's job:** Almost 10% of the respondents do not

have a job (Table I). Respondents who have jobs have a lower probability of justifying wife-beating, for example, on the indicators of neglected children (aOR: 0.883 [95% CI 0.798-0.977]) (Table II).

**Women's earnings:** almost 80% of the total respondents have an unpaid source of income (Table 1). The respondent's earnings had a significant relationship with the justifying wife-beating on the indicator; for example, the wife refuses to have sex with her husband ( $\chi^2=15.12$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). (Table II).

**Wealth index:** All responders had a nearly even wealth distribution (Table I). The wealth index correlates with the justification of wife-beating based on several indicators. Higher confidence in responses is associated with a lower likelihood of justifying wife-beating. (Table II).

**Husband's age:** Over one-third of respondents have husbands aged 31 to 50 (Table I). As husbands age, the likelihood of justifying wife-beating decreases (Table II).

**Women's justification of wife-beating:** Almost a third of women stated justifying wife beating at the indicator when the wife neglects children (29,47%) and if the wife goes out without telling her husband (21,98%) (Table I).

**Table I: Respondents Characteristics (n = 20,658)**

Characteristics	n (%)
<b>Age</b>	
35-49 years	12,345 (59.76)
25-34 years	6,730 (32.58)
15-24 years	1,583 (7.66)
<b>Education level</b>	
High	3,912 (18.94)
Secondary	9,856 (47.71)
Primary	6,396 (30.96)
No	494 (2.39)
<b>Currently working</b>	
No	1,941 (9.4)
Yes	18,717 (90.6)
<b>Respondent's earning</b>	
Paid	4,835 (23.4)
Not Paid	15,823 (76.6)
<b>Wealth index</b>	
Poorest	4,558 (22.06)
Poorer	3,838 (18.58)
Middle	3,884 (18.80)
Richer	4,097 (19.83)
Richest	4,281 (20.72)
<b>Husband's age</b>	
11-20	84 (0.41)
21-30	3,021 (14.62)
31-40	7,223 (34.96)
41-50	7,513 (36.37)
51-60	2,530 (12.25)
> 60	287 (1.39)

**Table II: Bivariate analysis of domestic violence (n = 20,658)**

Characteristics	Refuse to have sex with husband		Wife neglects the children		Wife burns the food		Wife argues with husband		Wife goes out without telling husband	
	No n(%)	Yes n(%)	No n(%)	Yes n(%)	No n(%)	Yes n(%)	No n(%)	Yes n(%)	No n(%)	Yes n(%)
Age										
35-49 years	11,491 (55.62)	854 (4.13)	8,936 (43.26)	3,409 (16.50)	12,044 (58.30)	301 (1.46)	11,548 (55.90)	797 (3.86)	9,691 (46.91)	2,654 (12.85)
25-34 years	6,262 (30.31)	468 (2.27)	4,625 (22.39)	2,105 (10.19)	6,380 (31.85)	150 (0.73)	6,345 (30.71)	385 (1.86)	5,237 (25.35)	1,493 (7.23)
15-24 years	1,682 (7.17)	101 (0.49)	1,008 (4.88)	575 (2.78)	1,542 (7.46)	41 (0.20)	1,484 (7.18)	99 (0.48)	1,191 (5.77)	392 (1.90)
Education level										
High	3,749 (18.15)	163 (0.79)	2,996 (14.50)	916 (4.43)	3,885 (18.81)	27 (0.13)	3,802 (18.40)	110 (0.53)	3,288 (15.92)	624 (3.02)
Secondary	9,176 (44.42)	680 (3.29)	6,823 (33.03)	3,033 (14.86)	9,663 (46.78)	193 (0.93)	9,293 (44.98)	563 (2.73)	7,686 (37.21)	2,170 (10.50)
Primary	5,859 (28.36)	537 (2.60)	4,404 (21.32)	1,992 (9.64)	6,165 (29.84)	231 (1.12)	5,859 (28.36)	537 (2.60)	4,771 (23.10)	1,625 (7.87)
No	451 (2.18)	43 (0.21)	346 (1.67)	148 (0.72)	453 (2.19)	41 (0.20)	423 (2.05)	71 (0.34)	374 (1.81)	120 (0.58)
Currently working										
No	1,779 (8.61)	162 (0.78)	1,276 (6.18)	665 (3.22)	1,891 (9.15)	50 (0.24)	1,789 (8.66)	152 (0.74)	1,427 (6.91)	514 (2.49)
Yes	17,458 (84.50)	1,261 (6.10)	13,293 (64.35)	5,424 (26.26)	18,275 (88.46)	442 (2.14)	17,588 (85.14)	1,129 (5.47)	14,692 (71.12)	4,025 (19.48)
Respondent's earning										
Not paid	4,442 (21.50)	393 (1.90)	3,250 (15.73)	1,385 (6.67)	4,631 (22.42)	204 (0.99)	4,430 (21.44)	405 (1.96)	3,626 (17.55)	1,209 (5.85)
Paid	14,793 (71.61)	1,030 (4.99)	11,319 (54.79)	4,504 (21.80)	15,555 (75.20)	288 (1.39)	14,947 (72.35)	876 (4.24)	12,493 (60.48)	3,330 (16.12)
Wealth index										
Poorest	4,121 (19.95)	437 (2.12)	2,942 (14.24)	1,616 (7.82)	4,272 (20.68)	286 (1.38)	3,991 (19.32)	567 (2.74)	3,225 (15.61)	1,333 (6.45)
Poorer	3,321 (17.04)	317 (1.53)	2,580 (12.49)	1,258 (6.09)	3,744 (18.12)	94 (0.46)	3,560 (17.23)	278 (1.35)	2,895 (14.01)	943 (4.56)
Middle	3,806 (17.46)	278 (1.35)	2,681 (12.98)	1,205 (5.82)	3,823 (18.51)	61 (0.30)	3,684 (17.83)	200 (0.97)	3,003 (14.54)	881 (4.26)
Richer	3,884 (18.80)	213 (1.03)	3,002 (14.53)	1,095 (5.30)	4,067 (19.69)	30 (0.15)	3,954 (19.14)	143 (0.69)	3,327 (16.11)	770 (3.73)
Richest	4,103 (19.86)	178 (0.86)	3,364 (16.28)	917 (4.44)	4,260 (20.62)	21 (0.10)	4,188 (20.27)	93 (0.45)	3,669 (17.76)	612 (2.96)
Husband's age										
11-20	79 (0.38)	5 (0.02)	45 (0.22)	39 (0.19)	81 (0.39)	3 (0.01)	78 (0.38)	6 (0.03)	54 (0.26)	30 (0.15)
21-30	2,829 (13.69)	192 (0.93)	2,015 (9.75)	1,006 (4.87)	2,956 (14.31)	65 (0.31)	2,840 (13.75)	181 (0.88)	2,317 (11.22)	704 (3.41)
31-40	6,732 (32.59)	491 (2.38)	5,079 (24.59)	2,144 (10.38)	7,057 (34.16)	166 (0.80)	6,817 (33.00)	406 (1.97)	5,681 (27.50)	1,542 (7.46)
41-50	6,984 (33.81)	529 (2.56)	5,340 (25.85)	2,173 (10.52)	7,329 (35.48)	184 (0.89)	7,023 (34.00)	490 (2.37)	5,848 (28.31)	1,665 (8.06)
51-60	2,354 (11.40)	176 (0.85)	1,883 (9.12)	647 (3.13)	2,466 (11.94)	64 (0.31)	2,356 (11.40)	174 (0.84)	1,992 (9.64)	538 (2.60)
> 60	257 (1.24)	30 (0.15)	207 (1.00)	80 (0.39)	277 (1.34)	10 (0.05)	263 (1.27)	24 (0.12)	227 (1.10)	60 (0.29)

**DISCUSSION**

This study investigated the socio-demographic factors affecting attitudes toward wife-beating among women in Indonesia, using data from the 2017 Indonesian Demographic Health Survey. It found that younger women, the unemployed, those with lower education levels, individuals without personal income, women in the poorest wealth quintile, and those with younger husbands were more likely to justify wife-beating. Previous research has also indicated that exposure to intimate partner violence decreases with age<sup>18</sup>. Younger women often display submissive behavior, partly due to emotional immaturity and economic dependence on their husbands. Indonesia ranks second in Southeast Asia for child marriages under 18<sup>19</sup>, which leads to lower educational attainment, reduced earnings, and limited decision-making power for both genders<sup>20</sup>. Socio-cultural factors significantly influence early marriages in Indonesia<sup>21</sup>. Collaboration between the government and NGOs is essential to promote education on early marriage and improve economic conditions by creating accessible job opportunities to address this issue.

A low level of education correlates with women's acceptance of wife-beating. The 2010 Population Census indicated that only 6.62% of women achieved higher education, compared to 7.12% of men<sup>22</sup>, highlighting the educational gap in Indonesia. A previous study uncovered that the level of education attained by women has a direct impact on the communication gap within marital relationships, potentially contributing to instances of physical violence<sup>23</sup>. A woman's acquisition of individual education can equip her with the skills and knowledge necessary to enhance her capacity to manage the household<sup>24</sup>. The economic or social position also determines women's bargaining power toward wife-beating acceptance<sup>23</sup>. This study showed that women's bargaining power, as demonstrated by social positions such as economic independence and higher education, are protective factors of wife-beating acceptance.

The findings show that many women in Indonesia accept wife-beating due to socio-demographic factors and cultural influences. A patriarchal system creates gender imbalance, with men dominating women. Additionally, intimate partner violence (IPV) is often seen as a private issue, leading to shame among women who might disclose their experiences of abuse<sup>25</sup>. In Indonesia, women are frequently expected to adhere to societal norms that emphasize obedience to their husbands, leading to an environment where domestic violence, including wife beating, is deemed acceptable. This mindset perpetuates intimate partner violence and increases its likelihood. Promoting a culture of respect and non-violence in relationships is vital to address this issue. Efforts must be made in education, media, and government to raise awareness about gender equality. These efforts include educating

**Table III: Multivariate analysis of domestic violence (n = 20,658)**

Variables	Refuse to have sex with husband		Wife neglects the children		Wife burns the food		Wife argues with husband		Wife goes out without telling husband	
	aOR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI
<b>Age</b>										
35-49 years	Ref.	0.928-1.277	Ref.	1.081-1.291	Ref.	0.752-1.283	Ref.	0.791-1.115	Ref.	0.962-1.172
25-34 years	1.089	0.696-1.238	1.181***	1.101-1.495	0.982	0.655-1.658	0.939	0.637-1.162	1.062	0.877-1.234
15-24 years	0.928		1.283***		1.042		0.86		1.041	
<b>Education level</b>										
High education	Ref.	1.158-1.683	Ref.	1.107-1.333	Ref.	1.011-2.368	Ref.	1.105-1.721	Ref.	1.080-1.334
Secondary education	1.396***	1.178-1.783	1.215***	1.026-1.272	1.547**	1.161-2.803	1.379***	1.145-1.839	1.200***	1.111-1.413
Primary education	1.449***	0.912-1.933	1.142***	0.807-1.255	1.804***	1.732-5.133	1.451***	1.413-2.819	1.253***	0.823-1.327
No education	1.328		1.007		2.982***		1.996***		1.045	
<b>Currently working</b>										
No	Ref.	0.714-1.011	Ref.	0.798-0.977	Ref.	0.776-1.421	Ref.	0.695-0.998	Ref.	0.747-0.930
Yes	0.849*		0.883***		1.050		0.833**		0.834***	
<b>Respondents</b>										
earnings									Ref.	
Not paid	Ref.	0.834-1.074	Ref.	0.843-0.976	Ref.	0.571-0.827	Ref.	0.812-1.051	0.942	0.870-1.020
Paid	0.947		0.907**		0.692***		0.923			
<b>Wealth index</b>										
Poorest	Ref.	0.744-1.015	Ref.	0.807-0.972	Ref.	0.337-0.547	Ref.	0.395-0.674	Ref.	0.720-0.879
Poorer	0.869*	0.644-0.893	0.886**	0.747-0.904	0.429***	0.215-0.384	0.577***	0.346-0.490	0.7961***	0.656-0.805
Middle	0.759***	0.467-0.670	0.822***	0.615-0.749	0.287***	0.211-0.211	0.412***	0.234-0.348	0.727***	0.528-0.656
Richer	0.560***	0.396-0.593	0.679***	0.482-0.598	0.143***	0.068-0.176	0.285***	0.150-0.245	0.589***	0.399-0.509
Richest	0.484***		0.537***		0.109***		0.192***		0.451***	
<b>Husband age</b>										
11-20	Ref.	0.471-3.004	Ref.	0.439-1.065	Ref.	0.263-2.946	Ref.	0.441-2.473	Ref.	0.395-1.000
21-30	1.190	0.485-3.151	0.684	0.405-0.995	0.880	0.270-3.162	1.045	0.385-2.212	0.629**	0.356-0.914
31-40	1.236	0.508-3.362	0.635	0.426-1.058	0.924	0.261-3.169	0.923	0.420-2.465	0.571**	0.380-0.987
41-50	1.308	0.484-3.268	0.671	0.356-0.898	0.910	0.230-2.905	1.018	0.405-2.427	0.612**	0.349-0.922
51-60	1.258	0.650-4.959	0.566**	0.357-1.015	0.818	0.214-3.509	0.992	0.375-2.658	0.567***	0.291-1.886
> 60	1.795		0.602		0.867		0.999		0.508***	

aOR: adjusted Odds Ratio; CI: Confidence interval \*\*\* p < 0.001 \*\* p < 0.05 \* p < 0.1

women about their rights, ensuring equal representation in the media, and enacting policies supporting gender equality in homes, workplaces, and society.

**CONCLUSION**

Many women in Indonesia justify and accept wife-beating as a form of intimate partner violence. This belief, rooted in cultural norms, requires change, as it increases the likelihood of future violence. Comprehensive efforts are needed to shift attitudes through education, empower women in work and education, and transform societal perspectives on domestic violence.

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**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION**

Tristiana RD: Concept of the study and paper writing

Wahyuni SD: Data analysis

Nimah L: Data analysis

Yusuf A: Interpretation of analysis and paper writing

Sulistiyono RE: Interpretation of analysis and paper writing

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