



## **A Comparative Study of Women’s Perceptions towards Wife Beating in Bangladesh: Based on Two Cross-Sectional Studies**

**Research Article**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The key indicator of declining domestic abuse is the opinion of women toward wife beating. The goal of this study was to compare women's attitudes toward being beaten by their husbands based on data from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) conducted in 2014 and 2017–18. The outcome variable was the opinion of women on wife beating. Covariates included in the study were based on literature reviews. A chi-square test was conducted to assess the association between outcome variables and selected covariates. Concurrently, two distinct multivariate binary logistic regression models (for 2014 and 2017–18, respectively) were employed to identify the variables connected to having this opinion of women. The most significant factors affecting women's views towards wife beating were women's education, age at marriage, place of residence, southern region, religion, employment status, and partner's educational background. This study also revealed that these factors remained significant in both years, despite the fact that the OR (odds ratio) varied widely. The odds of justifying wife beating among higher-educated women were 0.78 times lower than those of uneducated women in 2014, which was 0.67 times lower in 2017–18. Urban women were 18% less likely from 2014 to 2018 to agree with wife beating. Interestingly, Eastern Bengal was statistically significant in 2014, it was not in 2017–2018. The likelihood of accepting wife beating among Muslim women rose from 35% to 69% during the given period. In 2014, the wealth index was significantly associated with women's attitudes toward wife beating and showed that middle-class and rich women were 16% and 23% less likely to support wife beating, respectively, than poor women. However, this variable was not significant in 2017–18. Employed women are less likely to support wife beating than unemployed women in both years. Early married women are more likely to

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accept wife beatings than those of elderly married women (OR 1.22 in 2014 and OR 1.16 in 2017–18, respectively). The odds of justifying wife beating among women with a higher-educated partner decreased by 14% between 2014 and 2017–2018. Furthermore, social awareness campaigns should continue to alter women's attitudes regarding wife beating and should be updated in light of the significant factors identified in this study.

**Keywords:** *Women's attitudes, Wife beating, Domestic violence, BDHS, Outcome variable, Covariates, Odds Ratio, Social awareness campaigns*

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## 1. Introduction

Spousal violence against women is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. Despite the fact that the rate is reducing, it remains one of the major challenges. Spousal violence is often believed to be a form of domestic violence. Domestic violence is considered as a pattern of coercive behaviors employed by one person against another, including but not limited to psychological, physical, social, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse, usually in an effort to acquire and maintain control (Siemieniuk et al., 2010). An intimate partner's physical, sexual, or psychological injury causes domestic violence, including physical assault, sexual harassment, psychological abuse, and perceived behavioural abuse (WHO, 2021). Violence against women has risen considerably over the last few decades (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu et al., 2012 and Bengesai et al., 2020). According to the BBS report (2013) on violence against women (VAW) survey, 85 percent of Bangladeshi women do not have the flexibility to generate money on their own. The majority of women are subjected to domestic violence by an intimate partner or family member. It is estimated that 30% of women worldwide and 37% of women in the East Mediterranean Region, which includes our country, are subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by their husbands or partners at some point in their life (Khan et al., 2017). In Bangladesh, arguing with her husband is the most common cause of wife abuse. Women who come from lower socioeconomic status, have less education, have other difficulties, and live in rural regions are more vulnerable than women who live in urban areas (Hossain et al., 2022). The likelihood of intimate partner violence was enhanced by low levels of economic autonomy and favorable attitudes regarding wife-beating (Bengesai et al., 2020). According to a research, women who were given

the freedom to make their own decisions about household purchases, their own health, and visits to family and friends were less likely to experience physical abuse from their spouses (Phiri et al., 2023). Women's autonomy in making decisions, residence, sex of household head, current pregnancy, and women's education were all strongly linked to intimate partner violence (Kebede et al., 2022). It has been reported that wife-beating is associated with patriarchal institutional domination, unequal gender power distribution, household resource control, sociodemographic characteristics and other household activities (Alam et al., 2018). One study demonstrates that intimate partner violence was highly influenced by individual, relationships, and community-level factors (Seid et al., 2021). Moreover, domestic violence is linked to a woman's age, educational level, and economic position (Chatha et al., 2014). According to newspaper reports in Bangladesh, the rate of spousal violence against women is extremely high. Women's participation in education may create a less violent environment.

However, it will not solve the problem. The justification for wife-beating demonstrates that women typically recognize a man's power over their desires, including violence. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the extent and reasons for wife-beating's acceptance in Bangladesh. It is necessary to examine the specific factors associated with the acceptance of wife-beating and the perceptions of women's regarding such violence in Bangladesh. Few research examines perceptions of spousal abuse (i.e., wife beating) in Bangladesh in terms of five fictitious situations. Therefore, this study compared the opinions of women against wife beating and also identified the reasons that led to women supporting wife beating.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1 Study Population

The data were extracted from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), a nationally representative cross-sectional study. Two sets of data were used in this research. The first data set was taken from the 2014 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS). A total of 17,883 married women between the ages of 15 and 49 were interviewed with in this survey. After adjusting the missing values from the data, a total of 17863 women were included in this study. The second data set came from the BDHS 2017–18. A total of 20,100 ever-married women were interviewed in this survey. The data was also adjusted for missing observations. Finally, 17422 women were taken as a sample for the data analysis.

### 2.2 Outcome Measures

The study's outcome variable was the women's perceptions of wife beatings. For determining women's perceptions toward wife beatings, the following five scenarios were considered: (1) she burns the food (2) she argues with him (3) she goes out without telling him (4) she neglects the children and (5) she refuses to have sex with him. The women were questioned as to whether any of them supported a husband hitting his wife. If the woman's answer is "yes" in at least one circumstance, the wife's beating is justified. Therefore, it was coded as 1 if the respondent agreed to wife beating for at least one of five reasons and coded as 0 if the respondent disagreed with wife beating in this situation.

### 2.3 Covariates

All of the covariates in this study were derived from BDHS data. This data included demographic and socio-economic information of the respondents. The independent variables were women's education (no education, primary, secondary and above), place of residence (urban, rural), region (north Bengal, south Bengal, central Bengal, eastern Bengal), religion (Muslim, non-Muslim), partner education (no education, primary, secondary and above), Partner occupation (unemployed, agriculture-based worker, professional worker,

business, other), wealth index (poor, middle, rich), women working status (yes, no), and age at first marriage (<18 years, ≥18 years). Household socioeconomic status was determined using a validated assessment of a household's ownership of selected specific assets, for example, radio, bicycles, television, materials used for construction of their house, household electrification, type of drinking water, and toilet facilities. Depending on whether the household possessed the asset or not, each asset was given a standard score that was assigned to every household. The score for a household's wealth index was calculated as the total of the scores for all of its assets. These scores were then divided into the poorest, poorer, middle, rich, and richer socioeconomic quartiles. In order to simplify the analysis, this study condensed this variable's classification into three categories: poor, middle, and rich. The poorest and poorest categories were combined to form the poor category. Similarly, the rich category was created by merging the rich and richest categories.

### 2.4 Statistical Analyses

This study used descriptive analysis to gain a general understanding of the sample's characteristics. The chi-square test was employed to assess the relationship between women's views toward wife beatings and selected covariates. The significant factors were identified using multivariate logistic regression. In this study, two distinct binary logistic regression models were fitted for the data in 2014 and 2017–18. The relationship between the covariates and the response variable was measured by the odds ratio (OR). The Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS), version 21.0 (IBM SPSS Inc., Somers, NY), was used for analysis.

## 3. Results

**Table 1** shows the overall 28.5% of women who accepted women's abuse for at least one of the five reasons, including burning the food, arguing with him, leaving without notifying him, neglecting the kids, and refusing to have sex with him, based on the BDHS data from 2014. However, this percentage dropped to 20.4% in 2018.

**Table 1. Women's acceptance of wife beating for any of the five causes**

Year	Yes (%)	No (%)
2014	28.5	71.5
2018	20.4	79.6

The frequency distribution of each of the background characteristics is shown in **Table 2**. It reveals that the majority of women who accepted wife beating were uneducated, lived in rural

regions, were from southern Bengal, were Muslim, poor, early married (less than 18 years old), had uneducated husbands, and had husbands who worked as agricultural workers in both years. In 2014, the highest percentage of unemployed women supported wife beating. However, in 2017–2018, working women made up the majority. From **Table 2**, it was also found that all the covariates included in this study were significantly associated with women's views towards wife beating.

**Table 2. The proportion of women who agreed to partner abuse for any of the five listed reasons by their background characteristics**

Background characteristics	2014				2017-18			
	Women's acceptance of partner abuse		Chi-square value	P-value	Women's acceptance of partner abuse		Chi-square value	P-value
	No	Yes			No	Yes		
<b>Respondent education</b>								
No education	66.7	33.3	174.239	0.000*	73.3	26.7	219.5	0.000*
Primary	68.0	32.0			75.6	24.4		
Secondary and above	76.4	23.6			83.8	16.2		
<b>Place of residence</b>								
Urban	75.0	25.0	42.295	0.000*	83.5	16.52	63.97	0.000*
Rural	70.2	29.8			78.1	21.9		
<b>Region</b>								
Northern Bengal	71.0	29.0	38.167	0.000*	78.9	21.1	29.37	0.000*
Southern Bengal	68.0	32.0			76.7	23.3		
Central	73.6	26.4			81.4	18.6		
Eastern Bengal	70.2	29.8			80.0	20.0		
<b>Religion</b>								
Non-Muslim	75.9	24.1	18.317	0.000*	86.6	13.4	55.031	0.000*
Muslim	71.1	28.9			78.9	21.1		
<b>Partner occupation</b>								
Unemployed	70.4	29.6	96.153	0.000*	90.0	10.0	20.601	0.000*
Agriculture-based	66.1	33.9			77.5	22.5		
Professional	75.1	24.9			81.3	18.7		
Business	73.8	26.2			80.1	19.9		
Other	68.6	31.4			78.5	21.5		

Background characteristics	2014				2017-18			
	Women's acceptance of partner abuse		Chi-square value	P-value	Women's acceptance of partner abuse		Chi-square value	P-value
	No	Yes			No	Yes		
<b>Wealth index</b>								
Poor	66.1	33.9	182.414	0.000*	76.1	23.9	108.418	0.000*
Middle	71.7	28.3			78.8	21.2		
Rich	76.3	23.7			83.2	16.8		
<b>Respondent currently working</b>								
No	71.4	28.6	0.505	0.080**	80.1	19.9	3.18	0.074**
Yes	71.9	28.1			79.0	21.0		
<b>Age at first marriage</b>								
>=18 years	76.9	23.1	76.776	0.000*	84.0	16.0	68.063	0.000*
< 18 years	69.9	30.1			78.2	21.8		
<b>Partner education</b>								
No education	66.6	33.4	188.616	0.000*	73.8	26.2	238.242	0.000*
Primary	68.4	31.6			76.3	23.7		
Secondary	76.8	23.2			84.6	15.4		

**Table 3. Determining the risk factors associated with women's views on accepting wife beating in Bangladesh by using Logistic Regression**

Variables	BDHS 2014		BDHS 2017-18	
	Coefficient	Odds ratio	Coefficient	Odds ratio
<b>Respondent education</b>				
No education	Ref		Ref	
Primary	-0.026	0.954	-0.092	0.912
Secondary and above	-0.243	0.784*	-0.400	0.670*
<b>Place of residence</b>				
Rural	Ref		Ref	
Urban	-0.010	0.990*	0.208	0.812*
<b>Region</b>				
Northern Bengal	Ref		Ref	
Southern Bengal	0.223	1.250*	0.213	1.237*
Central	-0.045	0.956	-0.075	0.928
Eastern Bengal	0.195	1.215*	0.033	1.034
<b>Religion</b>				
Non-Muslim	Ref		Ref	
Muslim	0.310	1.318*	0.524	1.689*
<b>Partner occupation</b>				
Unemployed	Ref		Ref	
Agriculture based worker	0.017	1.017	1.239	3.451

Variables	BDHS 2014		BDHS 2017-18	
	Coefficient	Odds ratio	Coefficient	Odds ratio
Professional worker	-0.127	0.880	1.100	3.003
Business	-0.109	0.897	1.189	3.283
Other	-0.010	0.990	1.227	3.411
<b>Wealth index</b>				
Poor	Ref		Ref	
Middle	-0.191	0.843*	-0.023	0.977
Rich	-0.314	0.769*	-0.084	0.919
<b>Respondent currently working</b>				
No	Ref		Ref	
Yes	-0.105	0.900*	-0.109	0.897*
<b>Age at first marriage</b>				
$\geq 18$ years	Ref		Ref	
$< 18$ years	0.195	1.215*	-2.839	1.163*
<b>Partner education</b>				
No education	Ref		Ref	
Primary	0.031	1.031	-0.019	0.981
Secondary	-0.188	0.829*	-0.371	0.690*

\*P-value  $\leq 0.05$ , \*\*0.05 < P-value  $\leq 0.10$

**Table 3** shows the variables associated with women's attitudes toward wife beating. Higher education had a significant impact on women's views. This Study found that higher-educated women were less likely to support wife beating than uneducated women in both years. The odds ratio decreased by 11% in 2017–18. Urban women are less likely to accept wife beatings than those in rural areas (OR 0.99 in 2014 and OR 0.81 in 2017–18). The likelihood of accepting wife beatings was higher among Southern Bengal's women, but it declined by 2% in 2017–18. Although the eastern region was significant in 2014, it was insignificant in 2017–18. Compared to non-Muslim women, the odds of supporting wife beatings were higher for Muslim women in both years. This study found no significant relationship between husband occupation and women's views. Interestingly, the wealth index was significant in 2014 but insignificant in 2017–18. Employed women were almost 10% less likely to support wife beatings in two years. Age at marriage is also positively related to women's views. The likelihood of supporting wife beatings among early married women was greater than that of late married women (22% in

2014 and 16% in 2017–18). Additionally, the odds of accepting wife beatings among women with higher-educated husbands decreased by 14% from 2014 to 2017–18.

#### 4. Discussion

The most important factor in determining personal attitudes is education. In Bangladesh, female enrollment in schools has risen significantly during the past few decades. According to this study, women with more education generally disagree with wife abuse in any reasons. This result is consistent with prior studies (Hindin, 2003; Rashid *et al.*, 2014; Bates *et al.*, 2004; Khawaja *et al.*, 2004; Rani and Bonu, 2009)). The opinions of women were influenced by their place of residence. Urban women are less likely to support wife beatings than rural women. It is backed up by the earlier research (Hindin, 2003; Rashid *et al.*, 2014). A previous study showed that urban women were more aware of their rights due to access to resources. (Rashid *et al.*, 2014). However, a study from Egypt produced a conflicting finding. (Diop-Sidibe *et al.*, 2006).

This study found a statistical relationship between women's views on wife beatings and religion.

Compared to the non-Muslim women, Muslim women are more likely to accept wife beating. The similar outcome reported in earlier studies (Rashid *et al.*, 2014; Ammar, 2003; Ammar, 2007)]. Based on data from 2014, the findings of this research suggested that women's perceptions were influenced by their socioeconomic status. This result agrees with research from other studies (Rashid *et al.*, 2014; Hindin, 2003; Bates *et al.*, 2004; Khawaja *et al.*, 2004; Rani and Bonu, 2009). However, a different conclusion was drawn using data from 2017–18. This indicates that women of all socioeconomic strata are aware of their abuse. This study suggested that early married women (those under the age of 18) were more likely to justify wife beatings. Consistent results were found in other studies (Hindin, 2003; Ahmed, 2005; Naved and Persson, 2005). A previous study revealed that husband education affected women's perceptions of wife beatings [Rashid *et al.*, 2014]. The same finding was obtained in this study.

### 5. Conclusion

A significant shift in women's perceptions of wife beatings was seen between 2014 and 2018. The rate of supporting wife beatings among women declined. Women's education, employment level, partner education, and marital age all played a role in shifting women's attitudes toward wife beatings. Although governments have already taken some initiatives to increase female participation in school and work, this is insufficient. It should be updated. Women become aware of their own abuse as a result. Early marriage should be prohibited. The government must take stronger action against those who marry young women. Moreover, policymakers should expand social campaign initiatives to enhance public awareness of domestic abuse.

### Limitations of the Study

The data was gathered at two points in time only. This study's sample was drawn from a particular population and social setting, which is another restriction. As a result, the findings might not apply to other social circumstances.

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