Violence Against Women and Girls: Executive Summary

Analyst: *Buhle Damane*

Analysis Period: Survey data from 2000-2017

Contact: *ziziphodamane@gmail.com* | <u>LinkedIn</u> | <u>Portfolio</u>

What This Analysis Is About

I analyzed a dataset covering 70 countries and 12,600 responses to understand attitudes toward domestic violence. The data isn't tracking actual violence rates: it's tracking whether people believe violence can be justified. That distinction matters because attitudes shape culture, and culture shapes behaviour.

Most of the countries in this dataset are African (about 56%), with Asian countries making up another 27%. Western/European countries are mostly absent, which honestly makes me curious about why they weren't included or whether data just wasn't available.

One thing that really caught my attention early on: the dataset is titled "Violence Against Women and Girls," but men are also included as respondents. So this isn't about men being victims, it's about surveying both genders on their attitudes toward violence against women.

The Big Picture Findings

The most shocking finding across this entire analysis? **Women justify violence more than men.** And it's not close. The average justification rate for women sits at 22.36%, while men are at 12.73%. That's almost double. In some countries like Eritrea, Morocco, and Tajikistan, the gender gap goes as wide as 45 percentage points.

This isn't about women being "worse", it's about internalized norms. When you grow up in an environment where violence is normalized, you start to believe it's acceptable. Women in these contexts have been conditioned to accept violence as part of life, and that's heartbreaking.

When it comes to **specific justifications**, about 30% of people believe violence can be justified for at least one reason. The most accepted reason? "If she neglects the children" at 21%. After that, "going out without permission" sits at 18%, and "arguing with him" is at 16.5%. Even "burning the food" has 8% acceptance, which is wild because we're talking about a simple kitchen mistake.

What this tells me is that justifications are tied to gender roles, childcare, obedience, household duties. Violence is being framed as a response to women not meeting expectations.

Education Makes a Massive Difference

One of the clearest patterns I found is that **education protects against justifying violence.** People with no education have a 21% justification rate, primary education drops it slightly to 20%, secondary education brings it down to 16%, and higher education cuts it almost in half to 8%.

The gap between higher education and the rest is huge. In countries like Kenya and Tanzania, the difference between no education and higher education is over 30 percentage points. In most countries, education has a strong or moderate impact, meaning it genuinely changes how people view violence.

But here's the thing: even with education, **women still justify violence more than men at every single level.** Women with no education justify at 28%, men at 14%. Women with higher education justify at 9%, men at 7%. So education helps, but it doesn't close the gender gap.

Other Demographics That Matter

Age: Younger people (15-24) justify violence slightly more than older groups, but the differences aren't dramatic. The 15-24 group sits at 19%, while the 35-49 group is at 17.5%. Not a huge drop, but still noticeable.

Employment: People who are "employed for kind" (paid in goods/services instead of cash) have the highest justification rate at 21.5%. Those employed for cash sit at 17%, and unemployed people are at 18%. This suggests economic vulnerability plays a role.

Urban vs Rural: Rural populations justify violence way more than urban ones—21% compared to 14%. That 7-point gap is significant and probably reflects access to education, media, and social programs.

Marital Status: People who are widowed, divorced, or separated justify violence at 18.5%, married people at 18%, and never-married people at 16%. The differences are small, but people with relationship experience justify violence more than those without.

The Worst Combinations

When I looked at the highest-risk profiles, the pattern was clear: **rural women with low education and informal employment** are the most likely to justify violence. The top 20 worst demographic combinations were all women, mostly from Morocco, Mali, Chad, and Timor-Leste. Employment

status seemed to be the biggest driver, women who work informally or get paid in-kind had justification rates above 60%, sometimes as high as 72%.

This isn't just about one factor. These issues stack. A woman who lives in a rural area, has no formal education, works for goods instead of cash, and is married is sitting at the intersection of every risk factor we identified.

Country Rankings

No country hit the "critical" 50%+ threshold when you average everything out, but several came very close. **Timor-Leste** leads with 46%, followed by Chad, Congo DRC, Guinea, Afghanistan, and Mali, all above 39%. These countries fall into the "Severe - High Priority" category and need urgent attention.

Most countries sit in the "Moderate" range (20-35%), including places like Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Niger, Uganda, Zambia, and Senegal. Even though their averages are lower, the gender gaps are still massive, meaning women in these countries are carrying a disproportionate burden of normalized violence.

On the positive side, countries like Moldova, Armenia, Maldives, South Africa, Ukraine, and the Philippines show averages under 10%, which is genuinely encouraging. These places prove that change is possible.

What This All Means

The data makes it clear: **attitudes toward violence are shaped by education, geography, economic status, and deeply ingrained gender norms.** Education is the strongest protective factor, but it's not enough on its own. Rural communities, informal workers, and women across almost every demographic need targeted interventions.

The fact that women justify violence more than men tells me this isn't just about individual attitudes, it's systemic. Women have internalized the belief that violence is acceptable because that's what their environment has taught them. Changing that requires more than just schooling. It requires shifting entire cultures.

This analysis isn't about shaming countries or communities. It's about identifying where help is needed most. The countries and demographics flagged here aren't "bad", they're struggling with issues rooted in poverty, lack of access to education, and historical inequalities. If we want to reduce violence against women, we need to start by addressing those root causes.