

## Religion and Relationship Power: Implications for Domestic Violence Prevention

Given the pervasive crisis of domestic violence in Ghana, an understanding of the interpersonal interactions that appropriate differential access to power to men and women is essential. The first to examine relationship power in West Africa, this study identifies patterns of communication and sociocultural justifications for decision-making among married couples. The study explores how partners initiate and make final decisions regarding finances, childcare, and family planning; whose opinions are considered in discussions of these different issues and how husbands and wives' religious beliefs influence their decision-making approaches.

Fifteen husband and wife dyads from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and 15 from the Church of Pentecost were interviewed separately (60 participants) using IRB-approved consent forms and interview guides. Three leaders from each congregation were also interviewed to better understand the radically divergent institutional stances towards women. The researcher spent 20 hours a week at both churches' functions (bible studies, Sunday services, special programs) to become integrated into the church communities. The hour-long interviews were transcribed and analyzed using open coding and emerging themes were organized into grounded theory.

The study concludes that in a Christian nation, in which faith communities provide important social messages, support systems and interpersonal guidance to the majority of the country, initiatives to advance women's status must include faith communities. Men generally had more power in decisions pertaining to finances, women had more authority in decisions regarding the home, and decisions surrounding family planning were jointly shared. Another finding is that women often stress that for the sake of harmony, they let their husbands have the final say in decisions or during conflict. The vast majority of women and men asserted that men are the head of the house and that women have a duty to submit to their husbands. The interpretation of scripture played a crucial role in how husbands and wives determined their decision-making approaches.