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# Trends in Men's Gender Attitudes: Progress, Backsliding, or Stagnation? (CR52)

*An Analysis Brief from The DHS Program*

## Why study gender norms and attitudes?

Gender norms have been shown to have profound influences on a variety of behaviors and outcomes for men and women. Gender norms typically establish and reinforce greater power for men than women, meaning that men's attitudes on gender norms can affect their communities, households, and families.

A global shift toward more equal gender attitudes and norms may be underway, but not much is understood yet about men's attitudes specifically. This study uses DHS data to examine how men's gendered attitudes have changed over time and how they compare to those of women.



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## Which countries were included in the study?

This analysis uses data from 26 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, West Asia, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean that conducted at least three DHS surveys between 2000 and 2022.

## What methods were used in this analysis?

The analysis examined changes in men's attitudes on the following topics related to gender norms:

- Whether intimate partner violence (IPV) is justified in certain situations (if a man's wife goes out without telling him, neglects the children, argues with him, refuses to have sex with him, or burns the food)
- Women's involvement in decisions on major household purchases
- Women's sexual autonomy (measured by acceptance of IPV when a woman refuses to have sex with her husband)
- Whether family planning is a 'woman's issue'

**Gender norms:** The unwritten rules that define appropriate masculine and feminine behavior and the relative roles of men, women, boys and girls in society.

**Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):** In this report, IPV is defined as any form of violence perpetrated by or toward someone with whom the respondent has had or is having a romantic relationship that involves or involved physical and/or emotional intimacy, regardless of formal marital status. Many domestic violence indicators in DHS surveys are concerned with violence committed by a spouse or intimate partner. The justification for IPV indicator in this report is based on the survey question "In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations?"

Changes in men's attitudes over time on each of these topics are assessed by observing the differences in indicator levels between the three surveys for each country. Then, men's attitudes are compared with women's attitudes for six countries for each topic except men's involvement in decision making about family planning use, because women were not asked this question. Ethiopia and Uganda represent countries with high initial levels of gender inequality, Ghana and Zambia have moderate gender inequality, and Indonesia and Rwanda had low gender inequality in the first survey. Changes in men's attitudes are compared to changes in women's attitudes, and attitude changes are compared across countries with different initial levels of gender inequality.

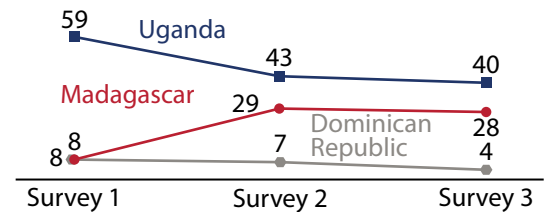
## What are the key results?

### Changes in Men's Attitudes over Time

- Across nearly all of the study countries, men's attitudes trend toward greater gender equality over time.** The largest changes in attitudes toward improved gender equality are observed in countries with the highest levels of inequal attitudes to start.
- Men's justification of IPV has declined over time in 18 of 26 study countries,** though an increase was observed in Madagascar (see Figure 1). Data from the most recent surveys show that men who justify IPV varies widely by country, from 4% in the Dominican Republic to 40% in Uganda. On average, 24% of men in study countries agree with at least one justification for IPV in the most recent survey.
- Most countries see a decline in men who say only they make decisions about major household purchases.** The size of this change varies by country but is generally large. The greatest declines were in Tanzania (51 percentage points), Nigeria (50 percentage points), and Uganda (48 percentage points). Only one country (Indonesia) has a statistically significant increase of 3 percentage points (see Figure 2). Among all study countries, an average of 18% of men still report making decisions about major household purchases alone in the most recent survey.
- In general, there is a decrease over time in men who think IPV is justified if a woman refuses sex with her husband.** However, this trend is less consistent and generally smaller than declines seen for justification of IPV overall and decisions about major household purchases. The largest decline is observed in Sierra Leone (14 percentage points). In the most recent surveys, an average of 7% of men still agree that IPV is justified if a wife refuses sex with her husband.

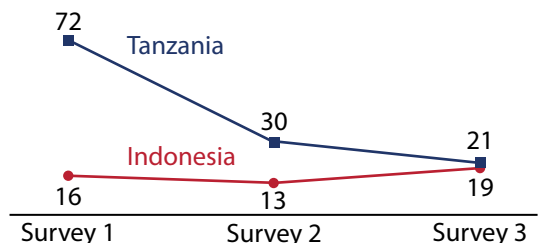
**Figure 1. Levels and trends of men's justification for IPV.**

Percent of adult men who agree that it is justified for a husband to beat his wife in at least one situation.



**Figure 2. Levels and trends of men's reports of women's involvement in household decisions.**

Percent of adult men who report that decisions about major household purchases are made by them alone (neither jointly nor by wife/partner).



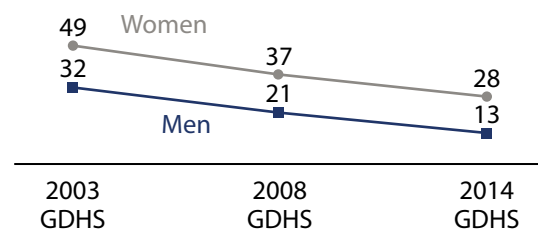
- **There is less evidence of a consistent pattern of change in men’s belief that decision making about family planning use does not concern men.** In some countries, such as Armenia and Ghana, men who agree that women alone should make decisions about family planning use decreased over time. In other countries, such as Tanzania and Nepal, men who think family planning decisions do not concern them has increased.
- **Changes in men’s son preference over time are inconsistent, with 13 countries seeing declines in son preference, and other countries seeing an increase or no change over time.** Overall, results suggest a small decline in son preference across all study countries, from an average of 0.54 more sons than daughters preferred in the first survey to an average of 0.49 more sons preferred in the most recent survey.

#### Men’s Attitudes Compared to Women’s Attitudes

- **Women are more accepting of IPV than men.** Across all 6 countries and all time points, women have higher levels of acceptance of at least one justification for wife-beating, including refusal of sex. Among both women and men, justification of IPV has generally declined over time and at about the same rate (see Figure 3).
- Generally, a smaller proportion of women than men report that the husband makes sole decisions about major household purchases. **There is some evidence of convergence in women’s and men’s reports of household decision making over time due to rapid declines in men’s reports of sole decision making,** except in Indonesia and Rwanda where levels of sole decision making by men were initially low.
- Though both men and women tend to prefer sons to daughters to some degree, **men prefer sons more strongly than women.** Preference for sons has generally stayed constant over time.

**Figure 3. Levels and trends of men’s and women’s justification for IPV in Ghana.**

Percent of adult men and women who agree that it is justified for a husband to beat his wife in at least one situation.



### What does this mean?

Though there is a lot of variation by country, there is a general trend toward more gender equitable views among men over time. However, the most recent surveys indicate that there is still room for improvement. Women tend to have more equitable views than men except for women’s attitudes toward IPV. Understanding how men’s gender attitudes are changing can help inform policy, programming, and further research. Policies and programs targeted specifically at men could help close the gap between men’s and women’s attitudes, and interventions to address women’s acceptance of IPV are needed.

The code to construct the different indicators in this study can be found on [The DHS Program Code Share Library on GitHub](#).

This brief summarizes The DHS Program’s Comparative Reports 52, by Rebecca Rosenberg and Jeffrey D. Edmeades with funding from The United States Agency for International Development through The DHS Program implemented by ICF. For the full report or more information about The DHS Program, please visit: <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-cr52-comparative-reports.cfm>.