

Researchers link technologies and rejection of wife-beating justifications

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Women with technologies like computers and mobile phones in their homes are more likely to reject justifications for wife beating, according to new findings from Susan B. Sorenson and Lauren Ferreira Cardoso of the University of Pennsylvania. What's more, the greater the number of these technologies in the household, the increased likelihood of this being true.

The researchers published their findings in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

Sorenson, director of the Evelyn Jacobs Ortner Center on Family Violence and a professor of [social policy](#) in the School of Social Policy & Practice, said the motivating factor behind this work came from a desire to focus on contributions to social welfare from the [private sector](#), something often overlooked by the field.

"It's really important that we take seriously these changes being driven largely by the private sector," she said. "To a large extent, people are looking for direct interventions," for example, solving a problem like intimate-partner violence by educating school children to treat women better, "but these direct interventions might not have the same impact or power as broader initiatives."

A UNICEF dataset gave Sorenson and Cardoso, a fifth-year Penn Ph.D. candidate and Ortner Center fellow, a way into the research. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, or MICS, delve into the well-being

of women and children in more than 100 countries. Narrowing that list to those whose data represented the whole population and included information about relevant technology, wife beating and key demographics, left 20 developing countries from four continents.

From there, the researchers looked at how more than 130,000 15- to 49-year-old females answered two sets of questions: Is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife if she goes out without telling him, neglects the children, argues with him, refuses to have sex or burns the food? And does a household own information and [communication technologies](#)? To even the starting point, the researchers also controlled for the wealth of each woman's household and each country's level of development.

Analysis of the data showed that women in homes with a radio, computer, cell phone or telephone landline were less likely to accept justifications for wife beating. In addition, the more technologies present, the greater the chance for rejecting such justifications.

"We went in thinking that this relationship might exist," Cardoso said. "We were pleasantly surprised that it was true."

These findings add to the understanding of the association between technology and norms around violence against women, she said. They also reinforce the need to continue prioritizing women's contact with and ownership of technology.

However, more work is needed to complete the picture. Recent and upcoming administrations of the MICS that ask women and men about justifications for wife beating will allow researchers to fill a gap in the knowledge about the views of men, the most common perpetrators of such violence. Beyond that, technology in a household doesn't automatically mean it's available to everyone who lives there so that

correlation will need to be better studied.

"Just because there's a [cell phone](#) or a computer in the household doesn't mean the woman has access to it," Cardoso said. "Because of this positive association, it's likely women are accessing it, but we can't presume that to necessarily be true."

As technology spreads to more places worldwide, better understanding its link to attitudes about gender norms could help drive policy and has the potential to reduce violence against [women](#).

"The private sector is putting a lot of effort into making sure information and communication technologies are available globally," Sorenson said. "They're changing lives in ways that were not anticipated."

More information: Lauren F. Cardoso et al. Violence Against Women and Household Ownership of Radios, Computers, and Phones in 20 Countries, *American Journal of Public Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2017.303808](#)

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