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Justification of Intimate Partner Violence in Rural Bangladesh: What Survey Questions Fail to Capture

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Abstract

This article presents qualitative findings from a project designed to develop better methodological tools for clarifying women's and men's attitudes about intimate partner violence (IPV) in rural Bangladesh and their perceptions of norms about IPV in their communities. Cognitive interviews and focus-group discussions were used to explore respondents' subjective understanding of standard survey questions meant to elicit attitudes about IPV. We find that the proportion of participants who justified IPV under some circumstances increased when additional context was provided, suggesting that the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) questions may underrepresent the proportions of people who condone IPV. Moreover, most people in this social context also believed that IPV often goes beyond socially sanctioned limits and that something should be done to stop it—an important caveat that the DHS questions are not designed to capture. These findings suggest that incorporation of additional context into questions on IPV attitudes would make responses to these questions more meaningful.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence and controlling behavior that men perpetrate against their wives or sex partners. Surveys such as the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) increasingly include questions intended to capture individuals' attitudes about IPV and its prevalence and forms in poor settings. Questions about attitudes regarding wife beating were added to the DHS core module in the late 1990s as part of three modules designed to capture evidence of women's empowerment over time. (The other two modules were women's participation in household decisionmaking and refusing to have sex.) The assumption behind the questions is that truly empowered women would not agree with any justification for wife beating (Kishor and Subaiya 2008). The questions were intended to be implementable in all DHS countries with little or no change. To date, DHSs have collected data concerning IPV in more than 25 countries and on attitudes about IPV against women in more than 50 countries. The questions concerning attitudes about IPV ask women and men of reproductive age (15–49 years) to report whether they agree or disagree that wife abuse is justified in any of a prespecified list of scenarios. An analysis of surveys conducted in 23 poor countries reveals high, albeit variable, proportions of women who believe that such violence is justifiable. Seventeen percent of currently married women aged 15–49 in Nicaragua and 90 percent in

Mali report that they agree with at least one of five reasons used to justify wife beating (Kishor and Subaiya 2008). In the 2007 Bangladesh DHS (NIPORT et al. 2009), 36 percent of married women of reproductive age said that a man would be justified in beating his wife for at least one of the five reasons listed (Kishor and Subaiya 2008). A study conducted in Bangladesh using DHS data from urban men found a correlation between men's holding attitudes supportive of wife beating and the likelihood of their perpetrating IPV (Sambisa et al. 2010). A multicountry study using DHS data found that women's justification of wife beating is associated with an increased risk of their experiencing IPV (Kishor and Johnson 2004); the causal direction is not clear, however (Koenig et al. 2003b).

Although individual and community perceptions of IPV are potentially important correlates for changing this practice, our cross-cultural understanding of these attitudes and norms may be limited by weaknesses in the commonly used attitudinal survey questions about IPV. Such questions may, for example, conflate women's own attitudes about IPV with their perceptions of norms about IPV in their communities (Schuler and Islam 2008). In light of the high prevalence of IPV perpetrated against women, the high reported levels of agreement with IPV, and the potential significance of anti-IPV attitudes for reducing women's risk of experiencing this sort of violence, understanding the meanings and interpretations that respondents attach to attitudinal questions on gender-based violence is important.

This study presents qualitative findings from a project designed to generate a more subtle understanding of what survey respondents mean when they say that men's violence against their wives is justified, and to develop improved methodological tools to understand women's and men's attitudes about IPV from surveys. Two research questions are addressed here: (1) What sociocultural frames of reference influence the ways in which common survey questions regarding individual attitudes about IPV are understood and answered? and (2) How consistent are responses to these questions when study participants are given the opportunity to discuss their answers and when additional details are added to the questions?

Setting

Bangladesh is notable for its high reported levels of IPV, with estimates of lifetime IPV from six rural surveys ranging from 32 percent to 72 percent of married women (Schuler et al. 1996; Steele et al. 1998; Khan et al. 2000; Koenig et al. 2003a; Bates et al. 2004; BIDS 2004). The research site for this project was four of the six villages where members of the study team have been collecting data since 1991. Although not randomly selected, the villages and the districts in which they are located are not exceptional within the context of rural Bangladesh in terms of residents' socioeconomic and demographic characteristics and access to health services (Bates et al. 2004). They are poor and socially conservative, but not unusually so. Like most of the country, the four villages have a relatively homogeneous ethnic and religious composition; approximately 96 percent of respondents identify themselves as Muslim. At the time of this study (in 2009), some women (40 percent in one village but 2 to 5 percent in the others) were working on farms or at rice-processing centers, as vendors, or in small rural factories near their home villages. Prior to the study, some women (1 to 15 percent) also had migrated to Dhaka, the capital, or to district headquarters to work in garment factories or as cooks for factory workers. A few men had migrated to Dhaka or to Middle Eastern countries for work. According to prior research conducted in these villages, 67 percent of currently married women younger than 50 had experienced physical violence perpetrated by their husbands.

Methods

The results presented here are based on 108 cognitive interviews (CIs) and eight focus-group discussions (FGDs) conducted from May–August 2009. Cognitive interviewing is a technique for understanding the thought processes that underlie survey report errors (Ericsson and Simon 1980 and 1984; Willis 1999). CIs are most often used as a diagnostic tool for pretesting survey instruments. They are qualitative and flexible in nature and can be used to identify covert as well as overt problems with survey questions (Collins 2003). Cognitive interviewing typically involves asking survey respondents to “think aloud” while formulating their responses to questions and may probe to elicit the cognitive contexts of the responses. In this study, we conducted CIs with married women aged 18 to 48 and married men aged 22 to 75 to examine the cognitive processes underlying their responses to DHS questions about their attitudes toward wife beating, and to guide the formulation of questions for our subsequent survey in these villages. We did not specifically ask respondents to “think aloud” but we recorded statements that they offered spontaneously to explain the answers they gave to survey questions. We also used intensive probing techniques. The CIs were conducted privately by same-sex interviewers.

Study participants were asked to verbalize their understandings of the overall question and words within the question, as well as the reasons for their response. They were asked about their own perceptions of prevailing attitudes in their community and whether they would agree if others, such as elders or religious leaders, said that wife beating was right or wrong. Male participants were also asked how they would feel if they had beaten their wife (or, for female study participants, how they personally would feel about being beaten) in a particular situation. The interviewers also asked spontaneous and previously prepared questions to probe these attitudes further. Near the end of each interview, the initial question was repeated and the participant was asked to repeat it in his or her own words.

The DHS questions about attitudes toward IPV perpetrated against women have varied across survey years in Bangladesh. In the first set of CIs (with 27 women and 25 men), we used the questions from the 2004 Bangladesh DHS (NIPORT et al. 2005) (see Table 1). Based on findings from the first set of interviews, pairs of questions were added in the second set of CIs (with 20 women and 24 men) to explore how the responses might change when additional contextual details were included. We also added two scenarios (“refuses to have sex with her husband” and “does not obey elders in the family”) from the 2007 Bangladesh DHS (NIPORT et al. 2009). In addition to the respondent’s own attitudes and the community’s attitudes, we asked about the attitudes of family members. At the end of the interview, we asked whether the respondent thought that anything should be done to stop husbands’ violence against their wives and, if so, what should be done. In the third set of CIs (with 12 women), we asked the same questions as in the second set and also determined to whom study participants referred when they spoke about community attitudes and who pays attention to and gossips about what others do. Here we used the questions from the 2007 Bangladesh DHS.

Four focus-group discussions were conducted with separate groups of men and women who were not included in the CIs, using the same interview guide that was used for individuals in the second set of CIs. The objective of the discussions was to explore whether people were more likely to speak out against IPV when they were in a group. The FGDs ranged in size from five to eight participants, and consisted of either men aged 32–66 or women aged 16–45. To avoid contaminating a subsequent survey experiment, participants for both the CIs and the FGDs were recruited from the women remaining after a random sample was drawn for the survey. (No survey was conducted with men.) The women participating in the CIs were selected randomly from two of the six villages in which the survey took place. To

minimize the chances that men who were interviewed would suspect their wives of revealing their use of violence and perhaps retaliate with further violence, the male study participants were randomly selected from two villages where women were not interviewed. Those in the FGDs were selected from the same two villages, based on their availability to participate. To maximize diversity, one of the villages for each sex was in the northern district of Rangpur and one in Magura in western Bangladesh.

The interviews were conducted face to face by experienced, well-trained interviewers of the same sex as the study participant, usually in the participant's home but outside if necessary to ensure privacy. The interviewers followed WHO guidelines for the conduct of research on IPV (WHO 2001) and were trained to change the subject or terminate the interview if another person appeared during the interview. The interviewers were careful not to seem judgmental. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and only one person was interviewed per household to ensure confidentiality and the safety of the participants. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. Coding was performed using the MAXQDA software program to organize data by themes such as misunderstandings of questions, reasons given to explain why men do or do not have the right to beat their wives, perceptions of blame, and other topics addressed in the study. Transcripts also were examined to look for patterns within individual interviews. Responses to some of the questions were tabulated to explore patterns across interviews and differences in men's and women's response patterns.

All but one of the quotations in this study come from the cognitive interviews. Information about the respondent's level of education is provided when available.

Findings

Cultural Ideology Supporting IPV

Consistent with prior qualitative research in these villages, men and women articulated various cultural justifications for IPV. As context, a few quotations from the transcripts follow that illustrate common justifications given for wife beating. The first quote illustrates how marriage is customarily construed: the wife being considered equivalent to property over which the husband is free to exercise his will.

You cannot go anywhere without asking your husband's permission. He is my owner in all aspects. He supports me ... My life depends on him, so it is right for him to beat me. He is the owner of all of me, and he can do anything he wants. [40-year-old woman, fourth-grade education]

The second quote illustrates how some men, even those with a moderately high level of education, believe it is natural and necessary for their wives to fear them. This middle-aged man had a tenth-grade education, and his wife had completed nine grades.

Every decision in the family should be taken by both the husband and the wife. If a hawker comes to my home to sell a sari, my wife cannot buy one without my permission. She may have the money, but still she cannot buy it. Why? Because, without my permission she cannot do it. Because she is afraid of me. She thinks I am superior.

The third quote is from a woman of about 30 and illustrates how religious doctrine is interpreted to justify gender inequality and violence against women.

People in this community say that a husband can beat his wife and that the wife who takes her husband's beating will go to heaven.

The fourth quote shows how men's violence toward their wives is bound up with local concepts of masculinity. This young married man had completed ten years of schooling and his wife had completed eleven years.

Interviewer: What do you think about a man who does not beat his wife in any circumstances?

Young man: I think he is a *maira* [a cowardly, spineless person]. This man fears his wife. His wife does not show him any respect. She thinks she can do whatever she wants. This husband cannot establish control over his wife. Sometimes the wife scolds her husband and the husband is afraid. Here, the wife is superior to the husband. Every decision in that family is taken by the wife. The husband has no position in household decisionmaking. So he is a *maira*. He has to obey what his wife says. It is very sad.

The quotations clearly reveal that the cultural environment provides ample support for wife beating.

Simple Misunderstandings of Survey Questions

In the first set of CIs, one item in the list of scenarios that might provoke a husband's beating was misunderstood by substantial numbers of study participants. When asked, "In your opinion, do you think a man would be justified in beating his wife if she neglects their children," 6 of 27 women and 1 of 25 men among the initial study participants misinterpreted the question as asking about child beating rather than wife beating. For example, one of the men replied, "You have to make the kids understand. My wife and I, we do not beat our kids. They obey us. They listen to us." A woman responded, "Children can make mistakes. But do you have to beat them for that? No, it would not be right to beat them." Apparently, some individuals did not always listen carefully to every word in the question. Rather, when they heard certain words they jumped to conclusions about what we were asking. After the question was clarified, the respondents appeared to understand its meaning.

In some cases study participants initially thought a question asked about whether the wife's behavior was acceptable rather than whether the beating was acceptable, until the misunderstanding was cleared up. Except for such cases, the other items seem to have been understood, at least on a superficial level. Moreover, when asked at the end of the interview whether answering the questions had been easy or difficult, almost all participants said it had been easy because the questions were about everyday situations that they knew.¹

Simple misunderstandings of questions have the potential to compromise the validity of survey findings, but if they are detected by the interviewer, they can be remedied by repeating questions and emphasizing key words or by explaining the misunderstanding. DHS interviewers are instructed to provide clarification when they become aware that a respondent has misunderstood a question (Kishor 2010).

¹The one request that almost all respondents found difficult was to repeat a question to the interviewer when asked to do so. Most respondents seemed to think they were being asked to restate their views, or to give a "correct" answer. Some seemed particularly uneasy, as if this request were some kind of trick. Even when the interviewer repeated the request a second or third time, attempting to clarify what was wanted, most study participants could not or would not repeat the question, probably because they had never been asked to do such a thing before. From the way they had responded to the questions earlier in the interview, most study participants clearly understood most of the original questions; but, evidently, asking them to repeat questions is not a good way to verify their comprehension. This problem should be investigated in other contexts, because study participants are often asked to repeat questions in the process of obtaining their informed consent.

Variability in the Implied Context of the Question

When study participants elaborated on their responses, they clearly visualized particular situations that influenced their responses to the questions about wife beating. Many who said beating was acceptable described a situation in which they considered the wife to be at fault. Many, especially women, who said that wife beating is wrong described extenuating circumstances. For example, when they thought about a woman who neglects the children or fails to serve a meal on time, women often assumed that the wife was experiencing unusual pressure of work on that day, or imagined that she might suddenly have had to visit a relative's house without informing her husband because of an emergency or because the man was not available to be asked.

No, beating is not a justified action. It is not like a man is always available at home to ask his permission, so how would his wife ask his permission if she needs to go out? [Woman in her early 30s, ninth-grade education]

No woman ever neglects her children; it is rather the father who neglects his children. ... A mother remains too busy doing household chores. Moreover, in the village, when a woman gives a bit more attention and love to her children, her *sasuri* [mother-in-law] and *nanod* [husband's younger brother's wife] would say such abominable things that it would make her feel like jumping in a pond to commit suicide! Sometimes, a mother cannot take proper care of her children because of the troubles her *sasuri* and *nanod* make. So the husband is not justified in beating her. [40-year-old female focus-group participant, high-school education]

Asked whether he might change his mind if another person said such beating would not be justified, a 30-year-old man whose wife was 18 said:

I cannot agree with him when it is the wife who is guilty! If she disobeys me or goes somewhere without asking my permission, then how would I agree with that person? I am the guardian of my wife. Or, say I bring her all the ingredients to cook, and still she fails to cook and serve my meal on time, then how can I agree with that person? ... Would not I beat her if she does not do the things that she is supposed to do while I provide her with clothes and food and maintain her living?

Clearly, not all respondents understood the questions in the same way. Moreover, the wording of the questions did not provide the respondents with all the information they might have needed to be able to answer them in a way that would distinguish people who were more or less likely to condone men's violence against their wives. Such problems can be difficult to detect when respondents provide what appear to be legitimate answers to survey questions (Collins 2003).

The "Unthinkability" of Some Scenarios

Fifteen women and nine men first replied to one of the initial questions as if they thought the question was nonsensical. Most commonly, this was the question about neglecting the children, but for each of the four initial scenarios there was at least one person who found it unthinkable. A common reply was that a woman would never neglect her children.

A mother always loves her children and takes proper care of them. Does any mother intentionally neglect her children? [42-year-old woman]

In one case, an elderly husband made a similar comment about cooking:

Well, that does not happen in a household. It never happens that a wife does not cook for her husband and children. It only happens when there is no food to cook in the household.

In the majority of cases, nonetheless, the study participants went on to say that wife beating would be justified or not justified, but three men and five women required additional prompting to produce a response. (One of the men never answered the question despite prompting, and one of the women failed to give a yes or no answer and was not prompted further.) Although the men were evenly split in their follow-up answers (five of ten said that wife beating would be justified after initially remarking that the scenario was unthinkable), the large majority of women responded that beating would not be justified (only 3 in 18 said it would be justified). The logic in many of these cases seemed to be that a woman would never do the thing described in the question and, therefore, if she were beaten, some misunderstanding must have occurred about the situation or an extenuating circumstance must have arisen.

Responses Reflecting Perceived Norms

When asked whether wife beating was justified in a particular circumstance, instead of answering that it was right or wrong, 30 women answered initially that of course a man would beat his wife in such a situation, as if the relevant point were what men would do, not whether doing it was right. A few of the women said, in effect, that their own opinions about the moral significance of IPV were meaningless in light of the realities of gender inequality in their communities and their marriages. Apparently, these women believe that society rather than the individual's moral sense determines what is right. For example:

Illiterate woman in her late 30s What should I tell you about my own opinions? If I make a mistake and my husband beats me, can I do anything about that?

40-year-old woman: Husbands cannot stand nagging and replying to every word they say. When that happens they start beating. But if a woman is not at fault and her husband beats her, then it is not right. It is wrong.

Interviewer: So your opinion is that if a woman is at fault, then it is right for her husband to beat her, correct?

Woman: Yes, that is the way it is in our village. Our society has set it up like this. It doesn't matter whether it is right or wrong—a husband can beat his wife. That is the way it is here.

Interviewer: I understand that the society has set it up like this, but what is your opinion—is it right for a husband to beat his wife?

Woman: No, it is not right.

Thus, some women who may have given the impression in answering questions about their own attitudes that they condoned IPV in fact did not, at some deeper level. This dichotomy could reflect a tendency for women to give what they feel are socially desirable responses. Responses reflecting such apparent contradictions were uncommon among the men.

Violence and Blame

The responses to the pairs of contextualized questions in the second and third sets of interviews clarified that most participants in this study condoned wife beating under some circumstances. As shown in Table 2, when the pairs of more specific scenarios designed to tap into prevailing ideas of acceptable and unacceptable behavior for women were added in the second and third sets of CIs, most study participants indicated that whether a man was justified in beating his wife in the initial DHS scenarios depended on specific circumstances. The addition of at-fault and not-at-fault variations to the four wife-beating questions revealed that 63 percent (130 out of 208) of the responses differed—with a “yes” given to

one variation and a “no” given to another—depending upon the degree of fault attributable to the woman, suggesting that the perceived justifiability of wife beating is highly contingent upon the perception of the context in which the woman’s precipitating actions occurred. Additionally, of the 182 “yes” or “no” responses to the DHS-worded version of the question (rows 1 through 5 in Table 2), 109 (60 percent) answered differently to one or both of the detailed-scenario versions of that question, suggesting a considerable lack of reliability in the responses to the DHS-worded versions of the four wife-beating questions.

Whether they initially said “yes,” “no,” or “it depends” to the DHS questions, when presented with the contrasting pairs of questions tapping into gender norms, most answered “no” in response to the first question in the pair (where the woman is portrayed as blameless) and “yes” in response to the second (where the woman is portrayed as at fault). For example, no women and only one man² said that wife beating would be justified under the following circumstances:

Interviewer: What if a man stays home out of laziness for several days, refusing to go out and work. His wife tells him they are running out of food and there is not enough money to buy food and she asks him to please go out and work. He tells her to shut up. She argues with him.

In contrast, most people, especially women, saw beating as justified when they considered the woman to be at fault. Twenty women and 11 men said beating would be justified if a woman often contradicts what her husband says and argues with him.

Although their assessments of the wife’s culpability in a particular situation might differ, most men and women thought that a man was justified in beating his wife when she was at fault. A woman in her 30s, when asked what the word “justified” meant to her, responded:

For example, if someone beats his wife, then the reason for the beating should be pointed out. It should be explained whether the husband had a good reason to beat his wife. If he had a good reason to beat her, then he is right to do it.

Although most respondents approved of wife beating under some circumstances, most indicated, without being asked directly, that women are often beaten for the wrong the reasons—for what the respondents saw as trivial reasons or when the man was in a bad mood. Asked why men often hit or beat their wives for small matters or minor mistakes, a young wife said:

Well, a man may hear a trivial complaint against his wife. He would not verify it; he would rather beat his wife. But that is not right. ... Only one thing buzzes inside men’s heads, and that is that their wives have done [something wrong]. They do not care to know the truth or details. First they beat their wives. Should they not first verify what actually happened? But no, they are in such a hurry to beat their wives! It is as if they are released from some burden by beating their wives as soon as they can.

The distinction most study participants made between justified and unjustified IPV may explain why many of the people who condoned IPV in some situations agreed that something should be done to stop wife beating and suggested ways to stop it. For example, the woman quoted above who said a man would be justified in beating his wife if he had a

²Neither these tallies (0 women and 1 man) nor those in the paragraphs that follow are shown in Table 2, because the table presents only the pooled response combinations for the three formulations of each question, rather than the breakdowns of responses per question formulation.

good reason also said that something should be done to stop men from beating their wives. When asked to be more specific, she said:

[The] government could put a new law or legal step into effect. It would make men afraid, so they would not beat their wives so often. ... It would make men understand that if they continue to torture their wives like this, there would be a strict punishment waiting for them. There should be a strict punishment for men who torture their wives.

In response to three of five DHS questions, a married woman in her early 20s initially said beating was justified. At the end of the interview, she said that life imprisonment for wife beaters would be an appropriate measure to stop IPV. Asked how a wife would survive with her husband in prison, she said:

As long as she has hands and legs, she can do some work to maintain her living. Some men are so bad that it is better for their wives to not have them in their lives. ... It is better to live without such a husband. ... With a few men in jail like this, other men would not dare to beat their wives.

Qualifying What Men Mean by “Not Justified”

Although some of the men who said that wife beating is not justifiable under any circumstances may have been trying to please the interviewer by articulating antiviolence messages that they had been exposed to from television or by NGOs, the degree and nature of the elaboration in interviews with other men suggests that they were answering truthfully. As the following three examples suggest, however, among some men, “not justifiable” might be better characterized as “permissible but not advisable.”

A man in his early 20s with ten years of education with a wife of similar age who has nine years of education acknowledged that marriage was based on gender inequality.

Young man: It is out of question. I have never beaten my wife. Never. A wife is like a banana tree. There is no benefit in beating her.

Interviewer: Banana tree?

Young man: Banana tree ... it means ... I can beat her whenever I want. But what is the benefit in beating her? There is no benefit. She is helpless. She is a woman. Women are helpless. She cannot do without a husband. Nobody can stop you from beating her if you want to. She has to do whatever I say. But there is no logical reason for beating her.

Interviewer: Is it justifiable for a man to hit or beat his wife if she argues with him? What do other people think?

42-year-old man, sixth-grade education: People of the community do not think it is right for a woman to argue with her husband, but they do not support the husband in beating his wife for this either. Actually, anybody can beat his wife if he wants and when he wants—there is no big deal about that. No one would complain if you beat your wife. But is there any good in beating your wife? In my opinion, there is no good in beating one’s wife. All intelligent persons realize that. I think only the people who have no intelligence beat their wives.

Interviewer: What if the wife had a very busy morning doing the housework and tending to the children, and she is a little late in serving her husband’s meal. Normally she serves his meal on time. Would he be justified in beating her for being late? What is your opinion?

30-year-old man, tenth-grade education: No, beating would not be a justified action in that case either. Because I have to realize that she was busy. Listen, you can beat your wife if you want. If I want, I can beat my wife 24 hours, day or night. Nobody would come to protest. But that does not mean I can beat her. I have my own conscience, no?

Conclusions

Questions about attitudes regarding wife beating have been included in surveys conducted in poorer countries around the world since the late 1990s. This study presents qualitative findings from a project designed to clarify what survey respondents mean when they say that men's violence against their wives is justified.

The findings suggest that, when they hear the questions, respondents tend to visualize a situation in which they consider the wife either to be at fault or to be blameless, basing their answers on information that is not included in the question, and respondents vary as to which of these two situations they envision.

The DHS, even in a context such as Bangladesh where IPV rates are high, may underestimate the extent to which people believe there are some circumstances in which women should be beaten, because some respondents imagine a scenario in which the woman is not "at fault" by their own definition. In the second and third sets of CIs, study participants were presented with two contrasting scenarios for each question, one intended to tap into cultural notions of what women were not allowed to do. When presented with these questions, a considerably higher proportion of respondents, both male and female, said that wife beating would be justified. When presented with a version of the question describing a situation in which the woman was not to blame (according to cultural norms), the proportion who said beating would not be justified increased. Clearly, the responses could have gone either way, depending on details that were not stated in the original formulation of the question. This finding suggests that the DHS questions could generate more accurate information if they included specific details related to gender norms of the survey setting. In Bangladesh, questions laying out pairs of specific scenarios portraying female behavior that most rural Bangladeshis would sanction and behavior that goes against current gender norms were effective in eliciting responses that, the qualitative data suggest, more accurately reflect attitudes regarding IPV than those elicited by the DHS questions currently in use.

Moreover, the DHS may overestimate the extent to which women condone the violence that affects them and other women in their communities. In this study, even women who condoned IPV under some circumstances expressed their belief that much or most of men's violence was not justified—information that the DHS is not designed to elicit but that is important for the development of strategies to address the problem of IPV. An additional question such as "When men beat their wives, do they usually have a good reason for doing so?" might be added to elicit this information. Strategies making use of this finding might include a concerted social- and behavior-change-communication effort emphasizing human rights and employing multiple communication channels. This effort could be addressed to abused women, husbands, and other members of their communities. Such an effort, together with more extensive implementation of local alternative dispute resolution (ADR) programs designed to support women's human rights, which have shown some promise in Bangladesh, could, over time, change attitudes and behavior regarding the spousal abuse of women.

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Table 1

Variations in question formulation across the three sets of cognitive interviews (CIs), Bangladesh, 2009

Question asked in all 3 sets of CIs	Detailed scenarios offered in second and third sets of CIs	
DHS-worded question ^a	First detailed scenario	Second detailed scenario
Do you think a man would be justified in beating his wife if she neglects their children?	What if a woman is overburdened with work on a particular morning? Normally she keeps the children very clean, gives them lunch on time, and supervises their play. But today, it has been raining, and while she was working very hard to get her housework done, they went out to play in front of the house and got very dirty. She doesn't have time to bathe them. Her husband comes home for lunch and sees how dirty they are. Would he be justified in beating her?	What if the woman regularly lets her children go around looking dirty. The husband has asked her several times before to keep them clean, but she does not pay attention to what he asks. After telling her several times to keep the children clean, is he justified in beating her if she still doesn't pay attention to what he says? What is your opinion?
Do you think a man would be justified in beating his wife if she fails to provide a meal on time? ^b	What if the wife had a very busy morning doing the housework and tending to the children, and she is a little late in serving her husband's meal. Normally she serves his meal on time. Would he be justified in beating her for being late with his meal? What is your opinion?	What if the wife spent much of the morning gossiping with her friends and served her husband's meal late. Would he be justified in beating her for being late with his meal?
Do you think a man would be justified in beating his wife if she argues with him?	What if a man stays home out of laziness for several days, refusing to go out and work? His wife tells him they are running out of food and there is not enough money to buy food—would he please go out and work. He tells her to shut up. She argues with him. Then he beats her. Is the man justified in beating her for arguing with him?	What if a woman often contradicts what her husband says, and argues with him. Would he be justified in beating her?
Do you think a man would be justified in beating his wife if she visits family or friends without his permission? ^c	What if she is home alone? Someone comes to tell her that her mother is very ill. She rushes to her parents' house without asking her husband's permission. Her husband beats her. Would he be justified in beating her?	What if a woman went to her parents' house just for fun without asking her husband's permission and her husband beats her. Would he be justified in beating her?

^a Questions in the first set of CIs were drawn from the 2004 DHS. In accordance with changes to the wording of the module in the 2007 DHS, the following two questions were added to the second and third interview sets (but are not included in this comparison chart because detailed scenarios were not offered): "Do you think a man would be justified in beating his wife if she refuses to have sex with him?" and "Do you think a man would be justified in beating his wife if she does not obey elders in the family?"

^b Although this question was not included in the 2007 DHS, it was used in the second interview set for comparison between the first and second sets. It was excluded from the third set of CIs to match the current DHS more closely.

^c For the third interview set, this question was reworded as follows to match the 2007 DHS wording: "Is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife if she goes out without telling him?" The question order was also changed to match the 2007 DHS, whereby this question was asked immediately following the lead-in question.

Notes: In all three sets of interviews, respondents were asked a lead-in question about their general attitudes toward wife beating. The exact wording of the question changed slightly between interview sets to reflect changes to the wording of the 2007 DHS questions compared with the 2004 DHS questions. In the first and second sets of CIs, respondents were asked the following question: "It is normal for a couple to have quarrels and disagreements. During these quarrels some husbands occasionally severely reprimand or even beat their wives. In your opinion, do you think beating is ever justified?" After this lead-in question, respondents were asked the four questions listed under DHS-worded question in the table above, as well as the detailed scenarios during the second set. In the third set of CIs, respondents were asked: "Sometimes a husband is annoyed or angered by things that his wife does. In your opinion, is a husband ever justified in hitting or beating his wife?" The respondents were then asked the questions listed under DHS-worded question, as well as those in the detailed scenarios.

Frequency of combinations of responses to four wife-beating questions formulated three ways, second and third interview sets, Bangladesh, 2009

Table 2

"Is wife beating justified?"	Response combination ^a	Women (n = 32)	Men (n = 24)	Total (n = 56)
Consistently answered "Yes"	YYY	4	1	5
Consistently answered "No"	NNN	22	46	68
Yes, but not justified for scenarios given	YNN	4	0	4
Yes, unless the woman is faultless	YNY	37	23	60
No, unless the woman is at fault	NNY	36	9	45
It depends on whether the woman is at fault	DNY	13	12	25
It depends, but not justified for scenarios given	DNN	0	1	1
Total number of responses		116	92	208

Y = Yes, N = No, D = Depends.

^aThe response combinations are the combinations of "yes," "no," and "depends" responses to the three variations of any one of the four wife-beating questions presented in the different columns of Table 1. For example, "YNY" denotes that the respondent answered: yes, it would be justified for a man to beat his wife in the initial scenario; no, it would be not justified for him to beat her when the woman is "not at fault"; and yes, it would be justified for him to beat her when the woman is "at fault."

Note: Figures in "total number of responses row" do not equal sum of n's at top of column times 4 because some data are missing.