

Attitudes Toward Violence Against Women: A Cross-Nation Study

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An understanding of attitudes toward violence against women is vital for effective prevention strategies. In this study we examined attitudes regarding violence against women in samples of undergraduate women and men students from four countries: India, Japan, Kuwait, and the United States. Attitudes toward sexual assault and spousal physical violence differed between men and women and across the four countries. Variations in gender differences across countries indicated that, for attitudes regarding sexual assault of women in particular, sociocultural factors may be a stronger influence than gender. Findings suggest the importance of examining differences within the larger sociocultural context of political, historical, religious, and economic influences on attitudes toward gender roles and violence against women.

KEY WORDS: violence; attitudes; gender; culture.

Violence against women has been well established as a universal phenomenon. Recent reports (Garcia-Moreno, 2000; World Health Organization, 1997) estimate that one of every three women around the globe has experienced violence in an intimate relationship at some point in her life. A significant impetus for international initiatives to prevent violence against women is provided by reports on the economic costs of violence. The World Bank (1993) estimated that in developing countries rape and domestic violence reduce the healthy years of life for reproductive age women by 5%. With the recognition of violence against women as a public health and human rights issue worldwide, international conventions, such as the Vienna Accord of 1993 and the Beijing Platform of 1995 (United Nations, 1993, 1996), urged all governments to prioritize the elimination of violence against women. The need for studies that can help to inform

global efforts to prevent violence against women is clear.

In order for prevention strategies to be effective, it is essential to have systematic information on factors that cut across national boundaries as well as on nation-specific factors that increase risk for violence against women. Knowledge about common factors can help in the design of prevention and intervention programs for worldwide implementation. Data on common factors in violence issues will help prevent duplication of efforts to address victims' needs. Indeed, some reports indicate that across the world issues that confront professionals working with women who have experienced violence have significant similarities (Walker, 1999).

A large body of literature documents variations in the incidence of violence against women, which suggests that there are culturally unique factors. Thus differences in culture, whether based on geographical region, national boundaries, religion, or ethnic origin, are expected to accompany differences in attitudes toward violence against women. Increased migration, globalization of economies, and the rapid cultural diversification of nations have made understanding sociocultural differences even more imperative. This is

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particularly true because both governmental and non-governmental initiatives (such as those of the World Bank, United Nations, and World Health Organization) often simultaneously involve several countries or heterogeneous sociocultural groups within one nation.

Violence prevention and intervention strategies must address culture-specific factors that support continued violence against women. A property of culture often endorsed in anthropology is a "consensus on a wide variety of meanings among members of an interacting community" (Levine, 1985, p. 68). The term "culture" is often used to describe patterns of beliefs and behaviors shared by a social group (Heath, 2001). Sociocultural theories of violence focus on social structures including systems and institutions and on shared beliefs and behaviors in these social systems (Gelles & Straus, 1979). For instance, the culture of violence theory (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967) proposed that beliefs that legitimize the use of aggression support the use of violence in relationships. Gelles and Straus (1979) extended this theory to violence in the family and focused on beliefs that legitimize the use of violence with family members as factors that help maintain violence in the home.

Specific work on beliefs regarding sexual violence has been conducted within the framework of the culture of violence theory. Burt (1980) described the "rape myth" as a set of attitudes that legitimizes use of sexual violence. Individuals who endorse the rape myth downplay the seriousness of rape as a violent crime and attribute blame to victims of rape. Burt underscored this orientation toward rape as a serious impediment to violence prevention efforts.

Overall sociocultural theories of violence suggest that violence against women is a reflection of attitudes shared by a group that govern interpersonal interactions and permeate all spheres of activity (e.g., games, politics, community actions). Hence sociocultural groups that differ in incidence of violence also differ in basic values or attitudes (such as those related to gender inequities) that extend to acceptance of violence in relationships between women and men. Indeed, research indicates specific differences both in attitudes toward women and toward violence against women among societies that differ in levels of interpersonal violence. Those with lower occurrence of violence are characterized by attitudes and behavior that reflect greater gender equality and lack of community support for violence (Levinson, 1989). Cross-cultural analyses also indicate differences in attitudes toward victims and perpetrators of

spousal violence and in the actual societal response toward violence against women (Yllo, 1984). Attitudes held by societies at large can influence responses to violence, such as availability of refuge for victims, criminalization of violence, and victims' interpretations of and recovery from their experience (e.g., shame and guilt experienced).

Research on attitudes toward violence against women is extensive and derived from various countries, including both economically developed and developing countries. However, there are several gaps in this research that are specific to our understanding of sociocultural influences on attitudes toward violence against women. First, while researchers have devoted considerable attention to the associations among attitudes, gender, and victim characteristics, relatively less attention has been given to the systematic study of differences across countries or other sociocultural groups in these attitudes. Anderson, Cooper, and Okamura (1997) noted a need for research that clarifies the link between ethnic minority status and rape-supportive attitudes.

Second, studies of culture and attitudes have either focused on one sociocultural group, examined differences among different sociocultural groups within one nation (e.g., ethnic groups within the United States), or examined nations that share certain social-economic or historical traditions (e.g., industrialized European nations or East Asian nations). Other limitations of cross-cultural studies on attitudes toward violence against women include the use of very small samples (e.g., Gabler, Stern, & Miserandino, 1998), comparison of only two sociocultural groups (e.g., L'Armand, Pepitone, & Shamugan, 1981), and erroneous grouping together of nations with heterogeneous historical, religious, and sociopolitical systems (e.g., Costin & Schwarz, 1987; Reichert, 1991).

Third, although researchers have sometimes examined the impact of multiple factors (e.g., gender and ethnicity) on attitudes, they have not examined variations in the influence of these factors across sociocultural groups. Attitudes toward violence against women may differ across and within sociocultural groups because of differential influences of structural factors, such as gender and nationality. Comprehensive information on interactions among structural and cultural factors across different sociocultural groups will help to increase our understanding of factors that support the use of violence against women (Walker, 1999).

Finally, most researchers have examined either attitudes toward sexual assault or toward domestic

violence and have rarely looked at both types of violence together. Previous research suggests the importance of examining multiple dimensions of attitudes toward violence against women, in terms of both victim blame and perpetrator blame for the violence (Johnson, Kuck, & Schnader, 1997).

Clearly, there is a need for research that examines attitudes toward sexual and physical assault of women across countries that are diverse in terms of both economic and sociopolitical development. In the present study, we examined women's and men's attitudes toward physical and sexual violence against women in samples from India, Japan, Kuwait, and the United States, four nations that differ in economic development as well as in political, social, historical, and religious traditions. We expected to find differences in attitudes by gender and across nations.

METHOD

Participants

Undergraduate students from mid-sized to large suburban and urban universities in four different countries were recruited for participation in this study. College students are often the target population for violence prevention programs. They also represent a significant portion of the future professional workforce most likely to interact with victims of violence, such as doctors, lawyers, mental health professionals, and social workers. Understanding of students' attitudes is also important for the integration of interpersonal violence in the college curriculum.

The initial sample consisted of 1,207 students; however, students who did not provide information about their gender were dropped from the sample. This resulted in a sample of 1,182 students (696 women, 486 men). One hundred fifteen participants were removed from the sample because of missing responses, which resulted in a final sample size of 1,067. Students were in either their 1st or 2nd year of college, and they ranged in age from 17 to 24 years ($M = 18.9$, $SD = 0.92$). Differences in mean age across countries were not statistically significant.

India Sample

Participants were 189 students (100 women, 89 men) from undergraduate programs of various majors from colleges of a large, urban university.

Students were recruited from five campuses of both mixed gender and women's colleges. Students were all Indian citizens, and their mean age was 19.1 years ($SD = 1.1$).

Japan Sample

Participants were 235 students (120 women, 115 men) from undergraduate programs of various majors at a suburban university. Students were recruited from English language classes at the university. Students were all Japanese citizens, and their mean age was 18.7 years ($SD = 0.8$).

Kuwait Sample

Participants were 236 students (125 women, 111 men) from undergraduate programs of various majors at an urban university. Students were recruited from English language classes at the university. Students were all Kuwaiti citizens, and their mean age was 18.2 years ($SD = 0.7$).

U.S. Sample

Participants were 407 students (293 women, 114 men) from undergraduate programs of various majors at a semiurban university. Students were recruited from the undergraduate psychology research pool and received research credit in their psychology classes for their participation. A large proportion (86%) of participants were European American. Seven percent reported their ethnicity as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 7% either as African American, Hispanic, Native American, or "other." Most students were U.S. citizens (97%), and their mean age was 19.3 years ($SD = 0.7$).

Materials

A questionnaire was designed for the study. A pilot study was carried out in Kuwait (where the first author was based and developed the questionnaire) at the request of the research review committee. In this pilot study we assessed feasibility of the use of the measure in terms of time and ease of completion. The pilot study also helped to ensure that the measure was culturally sensitive. This was particularly important given the focus on the sensitive issue of violence

against women. In the pretest stage, 10 randomly selected 1st- and 2nd-year students from Kuwait University agreed on the cultural appropriateness of the language and content of the measure.

The questionnaire comprised three sections. The first section included questions about demographic variables, such as gender, age, and educational status. Following this were two measures of attitudes adapted from previously developed measures (Burt, 1980; Harway & Hansen, 1993; Ward, 1988). The first measure focused on attitudes toward sexual assault (13 items); the second measure focused on attitudes toward spousal physical violence (12 items). Items on both measures used a 4-point Likert-type scale with options that ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Some items were reverse-scored (e.g., "Healthy women can resist rape"; "Many battered women do things that cause husbands to hit them") such that higher scores reflected greater endorsement of victim blaming beliefs related to rape or domestic violence.

The entire questionnaire was first constructed in English and used in its original form for data collection in the United States and in India, as the medium of formal instruction for all participants from India had been English. For the Japan and Kuwait samples, Japanese and Arabic versions were used. To ensure semantic equivalence of all versions of the survey, recommendations for the translation of psychological measures were followed (Bracken & Barona, 1991). Specifically, the survey was first translated into Arabic and Japanese by bilingual social scientists and then independently back-translated into English.

Analyses of item responses to both attitude measures were conducted on a larger data set of

undergraduate students' responses including those in this study ($N = 1400$). This sample had an oversample of students from the United States and included 18–24-year-old students (843 women, 557 men) with an average age of 19.5 ($SD = 2.7$). Item analyses indicated that the attitude section of the survey had adequate internal consistency (sexual assault measure: Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$, $n = 1288$; spousal physical violence measure: Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$, $n = 1323$).

The items from both measures were subjected to factor analyses. Factor analyses for each measure were conducted separately for each gender within each country for the 1,067 participants in our study. Principal axis factoring of the initial 13 sexual assault items and 12 spousal physical violence items yielded one primary factor for each of the two sets of items (see Tables I and II for more detailed notes). For the final attitude measures, we first removed items with low loadings ($< .10$) across gender and country from each measure. We then computed reliability coefficients for each of the two sets of remaining items. Items with acceptable coefficients were retained for the final measures.

Removal of items with low factor loadings on the sexual assault measure resulted in 10 items. Item loadings of these remaining items are presented in Table I. Because reliability coefficients for the new set of sexual assault items were generally acceptable (with the exception of responses by Kuwaiti women and men), we used these 10 items to form the new sexual assault scale. Item loadings of the spousal physical violence items are presented in Table II. Unlike the remaining sexual assault items, the initial set of seven spousal physical violence items that remained after

Table I. Sexual Assault Item Loadings

	India		Japan		Kuwait		United States	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
2. Many women falsely report a rape for attention	—	.22	.36	.42	.18	-.22	.38	.58
4. Women who are physically attractive are more likely to be raped	.46	.37	.46	.19	.14	.74	.53	.39
5. Almost half of all women invent a rape to protect their reputation	.11	.54	.52	.37	.26	—	.49	.65
6. Many women who are raped are flirtatious	.49	.73	.48	.67	.37	—	.60	.60
7. If a woman dresses in indecent clothes, she is to blame if raped	.81	.51	.74	.53	.58	.87	.47	.45
8. Men who rape are denied sex by their wives	.59	.13	.36	.54	.37	—	.49	.44
9. Rape is a crime of passion	.43	.44	.44	.35	—	.19	.31	.57
10. Most rapes are spontaneous	.47	.20	.38	.37	—	—	.18	.26
12. Alcohol causes a man to rape	.54	.25	.23	.32	.29	.13	.32	.34
13. Rapists are very aggressive in most of their relationships	.46	.15	.13	.42	.25	.15	.33	.21

Note. Loadings less than .10 are not reported. Eigen values: India: Women (3.08), Men (2.38); Japan: Women (2.80), Men (2.89); Kuwait: Women (2.04), Men (1.95); United States: Women (2.81), Men (3.15). Percentage variance explained: India: Women (23.7%), Men (18.3%); Japan: Women (21.6%), Men (22.3%); Kuwait: Women (15.7%), Men (15.0%); United States: Women (21.6%), Men (24.2%). Reliability coefficients: India: Women ($\alpha = .72$), Men ($\alpha = .60$); Japan: Women ($\alpha = .66$), Men ($\alpha = .69$); Kuwait: Women ($\alpha = .41$), Men ($\alpha = .34$); United States: Women ($\alpha = .66$), Men ($\alpha = .72$).

Table II. Spousal Physical Violence Item Loadings

	India		Japan		Kuwait		United States	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
14. A woman's nagging is a major cause of violence in the home	.49	.57	.42	.77	.38	.61	.66	.63
15. Some women deserve to be beaten	.65	.61	.44	.40	.68	.52	.44	.57
17. Many battered women do things that cause their husbands to hit them	.84	.67	.45	.61	.57	.28	.55	.57
18. A man is justified in beating his wife if she is unfaithful to him	.75	.55	.55	.34	.42	.45	.51	.62
20. Women who are obedient and take care of their husbands are never beaten	.57	.44	.42	.50	.40	.37	.53	.63

Note. Eigen values: India: Women (2.96), Men (2.81); Japan: Women (2.33), Men (2.86); Kuwait: Women (2.31), Men (2.04); United States: Women (2.78), Men (3.24). Percentage of variance explained: India: Women (23.4%), Men (24.7%); Japan: Women (19.4%), Men (23.8%); Kuwait: Women (19.3%), Men (17.0%); United States: Women (23.1%), Men (27.0%). Reliability coefficients: India: Women ($\alpha = .79$), Men ($\alpha = .69$); Japan: Women ($\alpha = .60$), Men ($\alpha = .64$); Kuwait: Women ($\alpha = .62$), Men ($\alpha = .56$); United States: Women ($\alpha = .66$), Men ($\alpha = .74$).

we dropped items with low loadings did not generate acceptable reliability coefficients. Thus, we dropped two additional items that resulted in a new spousal physical violence scale with acceptable reliability for each gender within each country. The final spousal physical violence measure consisted of five items.

To ensure equivalence of the measures across groups, we also examined the degree of similarity in factor loadings across gender and country using coefficients of congruence (Harman, 1976). These coefficients were very high (0.80–0.99) for most gender and country combinations, with the exception of those for sexual assault for Kuwaiti men, both when compared to Kuwaiti women (0.54) and to men from the other countries (0.41–0.54). This suggested that the attitude measures performed equivalently across all groups except for the sample of Kuwaiti men who appeared to respond to the sexual assault measure in a unique manner.

Responses to items on each final attitude measure were summed to provide two attitude scores. As stated previously, 115 participants in the initial sample did not answer all the attitude items and hence did not receive at least one attitude score. To ensure that excluding these cases did not result in a biased sample, we conducted analyses to compare the scores of the excluded group with those of the final sample. These analyses used prorated scores for cases with missing data on either measure and indicated no significant differences between groups.

Multivariate analyses were conducted on the attitude scores of the final sample. Given that the attitude scores had a negatively skewed distribution, we computed nonparametric correlations to test the degree of relatedness between the spousal physical violence and sexual assault attitude scores. As expected, scores for

attitudes toward spousal physical violence and those toward sexual assault were significantly correlated, $r = 0.67$, $n = 1067$, $p < .001$. This provided support for the use of Multivariate Analyses of Variance to examine differences in attitude scores by gender and country.

Procedure

Students were recruited in classrooms. Research assistants provided information about the study at the end of a scheduled class and invited students to participate. Interested volunteers were provided the opportunity to approach the research assistant at their convenience. In India and the United States, volunteers completed the questionnaire in private. In Japan and Kuwait, at the request of both school administrative staff and the volunteers themselves, participants completed the questionnaire in classrooms with adequate spacing between desks to maximize privacy.

RESULTS

A 4 (country) \times 2 (gender) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted using the sexual assault and spousal physical violence attitude scores as dependent variables. Tests of homogeneity of variance were not significant, which suggested that the assumptions underlying the use of MANOVA were met. The overall MANOVA using a country by gender design was significant (see Table III) and indicated that 29 and 51% of the variance in attitude scores was accounted for by gender and country, η^2 (sexual assault) = 0.29; η^2 (spousal physical violence) = 0.51. Tests of between-subjects effects

Table III. Sexual Assault and Spousal Physical Violence Attitude Scores by Country and Gender

	India <i>M (SD)</i>	Japan <i>M (SD)</i>	Kuwait <i>M (SD)</i>	United States <i>M (SD)</i>	MANOVA		
					Main effects		
					Gender <i>F(1, 1059)</i>	Country <i>F(3, 1059)</i>	Interaction <i>F(3, 1059)</i>
Sexual assault attitude scores							
Women	20.73 (3.74) (<i>n</i> = 100)	21.67 (3.43) (<i>n</i> = 120)	25.36 (3.12) (<i>n</i> = 125)	19.42 (3.50) (<i>n</i> = 293)	79.05*	79.72*	13.59*
Men	24.92 (3.64) (<i>n</i> = 89)	23.20 (3.83) (<i>n</i> = 115)	25.29 (3.36) (<i>n</i> = 111)	21.92 (3.85) (<i>n</i> = 114)			
Spousal physical violence attitude scores							
Women	8.95 (2.61) (<i>n</i> = 100)	10.02 (2.07) (<i>n</i> = 120)	11.60 (2.59) (<i>n</i> = 125)	6.35 (1.56) (<i>n</i> = 293)	240.04*	134.42*	8.31*
Men	11.84 (2.67) (<i>n</i> = 89)	11.35 (2.38) (<i>n</i> = 115)	12.38 (2.49) (<i>n</i> = 111)	8.07(2.27) (<i>n</i> = 114)			

* $p < .0001$.

revealed significant main effects for country and for gender as well as a significant country by gender interaction for sexual assault and spousal physical violence attitude scores. Effect sizes suggested that country accounted for roughly 18 and 40% and gender for roughly 7 and 11% of the variance in sexual assault and spousal physical violence attitude scores respectively.

To further explore differences by country, we used follow-up MANOVAs with post hoc pairwise comparisons including a Bonferroni correction. MANOVAs were used because univariate analyses of variance do not account for correlations between dependent variables (Weiner, 1996). First, we compared scores by country controlling for gender (see Figs. 1 and 2). These analyses revealed significant differences among men from all four countries on both the sexual assault attitude score, $F(3, 425) = 20.06$, $p < .001$, and the spousal physical violence attitude score, $F(3, 425) = 70.15$, $p < .001$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences among men. Men from the United States reported the most positive attitudes toward victims, followed by men from Japan and India; men from Kuwait reported the least positive attitudes. Men from Japan and Kuwait differed significantly on both attitude scores. Men from India and Japan differed on sexual assault attitude scores but not on spousal physical violence attitude scores. Further, men from India and Kuwait did not differ significantly on either attitude scores.

Differences among women were also found to be significant for both the sexual assault attitude score,

$F(3, 634) = 87.78$, $p < .001$, and the spousal physical violence attitude score, $F(3, 634) = 221.15$, $p < .001$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons between women from different countries indicated that women from the United States reported the most positive attitudes, followed by women from India and Japan. Women from Kuwait reported the least positive attitudes toward victims. Differences between women from India and Japan in sexual assault attitude scores were not significant.

Second, follow-up MANOVAs were used to examine gender differences across the four countries. These analyses revealed significant gender differences on sexual assault attitudes for all the countries except for Kuwait, where men and women students did not differ on their scores; India: $F(1, 187) = 60.61$, $p < .001$; Japan: $F(1, 233) = 10.46$, $p < .01$; Kuwait:

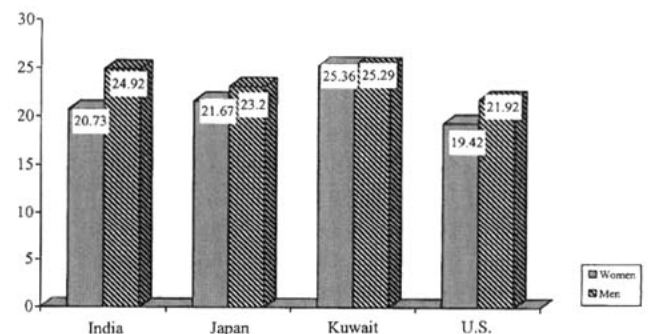


Fig. 1. Mean sexual assault attitude scores of women and men grouped by country. (Note: 1. Gender differences are significant for all countries except Kuwait; 2. Within gender, differences across countries are significant *except* for women: between India and Japan; for men between India and Kuwait).

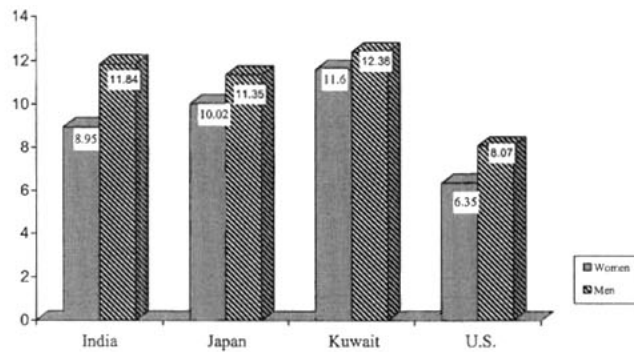


Fig. 2. Mean spousal physical violence scores of women and men grouped by country. (Note: 1. Gender differences are significant for all countries; 2. Differences across countries are significant for women; 3. Differences across countries are significant for men, except for that between India and Kuwait).

$F(1, 234) = 0.23, p = .8$; United States: $F(1, 405) = 39.74, p < .001$. Significant gender differences were found for all countries on spousal physical violence attitudes scores; India: $F(1, 187) = 56.4, p < .001$; Japan: $F(1, 233) = 20.73, p < .001$; Kuwait: $F(1, 234) = 5.51, p < .05$; United States: $F(1, 405) = 76.18, p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine attitudes of women and men toward violence against women across four different nations. Our findings demonstrate that both gender and nationality are important influences on an individual's attitudes toward violence against women. Consistent with previous research, men in this study were more likely than women to endorse beliefs regarding both rape and spousal physical violence that blame the victim. Gender differences in attitudes toward rape have been widely documented (e.g., Anderson et al., 1997). Evidence that men are more approving of violence against domestic partners also comes from studies conducted in different countries (Kalof & Wade, 1995; Markowitz, 2001).

Influences on Attitudes Regarding Violence Against Women

That attitudes toward violence against women are influenced by nationality is substantiated by the present findings. In particular, the results of this study highlight differences between men and women

across the four countries studied. Other U.S. studies have demonstrated differences in nonstudent samples grouped by ethnicity. For instance, non-European American men have reported more negative attitudes toward victims of sexual assault than have European American men (Anderson et al., 1997).

Several other investigators (Gabler et al., 1998; Yick & Agbayani-Siewert, 1997) who have focused on diverse cultural communities both within the United States and on specific communities outside the United States have concluded that perceptions of spousal abuse are culturally related. Our findings thus extend those of previous research with data on variations in gender differences across countries in attitudes toward physical and sexual violence. While women and men in all four countries differed in their attitudes toward spousal physical violence against women, women and men from Kuwait did not differ from each other in their attitudes toward sexual assault.

Attitudes Toward Violence Against Women and Beliefs Related to Gender

Attitudes toward violence against women may reflect basic values (Levinson, 1989; Yllo, 1984), and they have been hypothesized to reflect differing beliefs about women. Attitudes toward violence against women reflect gender norms and social ideologies about male domination over women. For instance, in their comparison of different countries, Costin and Schwarz (1987) found that victim-blaming beliefs about rape were positively related to beliefs that restrict women's social roles and rights and support male domination. Similarly, belief in more traditional gender roles was associated with greater endorsement of rape myths among both men and women college students in the United States (Anderson & Cummings, 1993; Szymanski, Devlin, Chrisler, & Vyse, 1993). Thus the present findings of more negative beliefs appear to be consistent with more restrictive norms for women in India, Japan, and Kuwait than in the United States, such as those related to physical and social mobility, working outside the home, and negotiation in intimate relationships.

Differences in attitudes toward violence against women in the four countries studied may reflect differences in these countries' beliefs about gender roles. Gender inequity, male dominance, and related restrictive nature of gender expectations have been documented in India and Japan (Campbell, 1993; Kozu, 1999). Although there were differences among

countries we studied, there were no appreciable differences between attitudes of Indian and Japanese men and women. This indicates greater similarities between gender ideologies in these two countries. In both India and Japan, significant changes in women's beliefs regarding gender differences have occurred as political and economic rights have increasingly been legally and social endorsed as shared by men and women. This change in women's beliefs has been documented in women's own expressed attitudes in these countries (e.g., Kozu, 1999).

In contrast, there is little documentation of beliefs about women in Kuwait and very little published research on attitudes toward spousal physical violence in Kuwait aside from two earlier studies (Nayak, 1999, 2000). However, evidence from other Arab societies indicates that restrictive beliefs about women are held by both women and men, and gender-biased social and legal systems that justify inequities between women and men have been documented (Haj-Yahia, 2000).

One reason for the lack of difference in Kuwaiti men's and women's attitudes toward sexual assault may be that gender inequities are particularly evident in sexual interactions between Arab men and women. In an unpublished report, Nayak (2001) commented on the tendency to blame Kuwaiti women for their own sexual assault. She found that one in three adult women stated that a victim of rape has reason to experience shame. The restrictive nature of sexual norms for Kuwaiti women as compared to Kuwaiti men is substantiated by social taboos regarding sexuality, fears about disclosing rape, and the greater sexual freedom permitted to Kuwaiti men. Haj-Yahia (2000) reported that Palestinian Arab men and women agree that a wife's sexual infidelity gives her husband the right to beat her, which also highlights the gender symmetry in attitudes toward sexual relationships in Arab men and women.

Given the relative lack of research on attitudes toward violence in Arab countries, other possible reasons for gender differences in attitudes toward spousal physical violence and the lack of differences in attitudes toward sexual assault found for Kuwaiti men and women are unclear. It is important here to introduce a note of caution regarding the findings of similarity of attitudes toward victims of sexual assault found among Kuwaiti participants. Dissimilarity in factor loadings for Kuwaiti men compared to all other groups suggests that the reasons underlying the seemingly similar negative attitudes may differ by gender. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) noted that different

ethnic groups may hold differing beliefs about sexual assault. Clearly, attitudes toward violence against women in Arab countries warrant further examination with more detailed and in-depth qualitative and quantitative studies on various types of beliefs regarding violence against women, particularly those toward sexual assault.

Attitudes Toward Violence Against Women and Social Ideology

Differences across countries in attitudes toward violence against women may reflect differences in overall ideologies that are influenced by varying historical, social, political, and economic processes. In their meta-analytic review of literature on sexual assault attitudes, Anderson et al. (1997) concluded that more conservative ideology is related to rape myth acceptance. The importance of examining ideology as a broad norm for gender interactions suggests the need to examine various influences on gender norms, such as social, political, economic, and historical influences on the nation in which the individual lives. Such influences may be seen in differences in gender norms in the four nations in our study. Gender equality, although not always enacted fully, is legally endorsed in the United States in most aspects of life. In contrast, women are afforded fewer rights in various aspects of life in India, Japan, and Kuwait.

Further, the hierarchical nature of relationships in collectivistic societies has been implicated in increasing tolerance for violence against women (Campbell, 1993). Unlike the United States, India, Japan, and Kuwait are collectivistic societies, and they have sociopolitical structures that differentiate both between men and women and within each gender between men and women with different socioeconomic, political, and other resources. An illustration of the hierarchical power structure in India, Japan, and Kuwait is seen in the continued social endorsement of royalty and social divides, such as those represented by caste and class. These divides, often accompanied by differences in income, limit access to resources in general and prevent mobility across groups via relationships. Hierarchical power structures persist despite current democratic systems of government in all three countries and the outlawing of the caste system in India.

Participants from Kuwait reported the most negative attitudes. This is consistent with more restrictive beliefs about gender in Kuwaiti women as compared to women of the other countries studied. In contrast

to political and legal rights afforded to women in India and Japan, Kuwaiti women do not share such rights with Kuwaiti men. Social codes for women are also relatively more gender-differentiated in Kuwait than in India, Japan, and the United States. To illustrate, women in Kuwait cannot vote and are increasingly required to conform to restrictive dress codes (such as covering the head with traditional garments).

Together, our findings highlight the importance of a broader understanding of sociocultural influences on attitudes toward violence against women. Structural aspects of groups, such as gender and country, influence beliefs regarding both gender and gender relationships. Beliefs that blame women for their victimization, in turn, provide legitimacy to violence against women. The examination of sociocultural influences on attitudes must go beyond an examination of race, ethnic background, or country of origin to include interactions between factors that provide the *social context* that shapes individual beliefs and behaviors.

Sociopolitical, economic, historical, and religious factors represent various influences on an individual's social context and must be integrated into our understanding of attitudes toward violence against women. Previous researchers (e.g., Reichert, 1991) have grouped countries by economic development and national income data without accounting for differences in sociocultural contexts, and they have concluded that income is associated with abuse (i.e., the highest rates of abuse were related to the highest and the lowest income groupings). Analyses of the influence of political, social, historical, religious, and economic factors on gender ideologies is vital to a more complete understanding of attitudes toward violence against women. Understanding the nuances of various influences on attitudes toward women and violence against women is necessary to change attitudes that support violence and to reduce violence against women.

It is important to note that the findings of the present study may have limited generalizability owing to use of an undergraduate student sample. Rural or semi-urban samples in each of the countries might have yielded a different pattern of findings. Further, the understanding of differences across countries in attitudes toward violence against women would have been strengthened by a detailed assessment of gender beliefs and by providing empirical data to substantiate associations between gender attitudes and those specific to violence against women. The influence of history of personal victimization on attitudes toward violence is also an important influence on attitudes.

However, victimization was not assessed in this study because of concerns that such questions would be seen as culturally insensitive and intrusive, particularly in Kuwait. Despite these limitations, the present findings contribute to our understanding of attitudes toward violence against women by documenting variations in the gender differences across the nations studied. The results may inform the design of more effective intervention and prevention strategies.

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