

Chapter 3: Religion, Intimate Partner Violence, and Infidelity



Chapter 3: Religion, Intimate Partner Violence, and Infidelity

Laurie F. DeRose, *Georgetown University*

Byron R. Johnson, *Baylor University*

Wendy Wang, *Institute for Family Studies*

Abstract: *In this essay, we examine intimate partner violence (IPV) and infidelity among cohabiting and married couples with different levels of religious commitment and different beliefs about male headship. Although religious couples may face unique challenges in dealing with IPV after it happens, our evidence from an 11-country sample suggests women in highly religious couples are neither more nor less likely to be victims of IPV, and men in highly religious couples are neither more nor less likely to be perpetrators of IPV. Men and women in highly religious couples who believe in male headship are also similar to other couples when it comes to women's victimization and men's perpetration. These findings suggest that recent reports and scholarship about IPV in religious contexts are important to consider; IPV is just as prevalent in these settings as it is elsewhere, even though religious contexts do not seem to heighten the incidence of IPV. With respect to infidelity, we find that both men and women in highly religious couples are less likely to have cheated on their cohabiting partner or spouse than are those in less/mixed religious couples. Men in shared secular couples are also less likely to cheat than those in less/mixed religious couples. Joint religious commitment and a joint lack of religious commitment are associated with less cheating, suggesting that a clear, shared belief about the importance of religion—whether in favor of religion or against it—bolsters commitment to intimate relationships.*

Intimate relationships can be sources of joy and fulfillment. But they can also be the source of considerable suffering. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 30% of ever-partnered women around the world have experienced intimate partner violence (hereafter, IPV).¹ And although global numbers on infidelity are hard to come by, many couples deal with a cheating partner: even in the United States, where most adults disapprove of extramarital sex, about 15% of ever-married adults say they have cheated on their spouse.² In this essay, we explore whether and how religion is associated with these sources of pain within intimate partnerships.³

Religion and Intimate Partner Violence

Public discourse about religion and IPV often highlights the ways that religion justifies abuse or encourages women to stay in abusive relationships. By proof-texting (i.e., selectively using scripture) from “patriarchal passages” of their scriptures, religions can provide frames that lead men to see IPV as a divinely-sanctioned expression of their patriarchal authority and women to accept abusive relationships as divinely-ordained trials to be endured rather than problematic situations from which to flee.⁴ The idea that religion can legitimate abuse was spotlighted in a recent series of stories edited by Haley Gleeson and Julia Baird for the Australian

¹ World Health Organization, “Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence,” WHO, 2013.

² Authors' analysis of the 2018 General Social Survey.

³ Infidelity may not be a source of pain in all relationship contexts, but vast majorities of adults around the world and in the United States believe infidelity is “almost always” or “always” wrong, as we discuss below. See: E. Widmer, J. Treas, and R. Newcomb, “Attitudes Toward Nonmarital Sex in 24 Countries,” *Journal of Sex Research*, 35, no. 4 (1998): 349-358; Pew Research Center, “Morality Interactive Topline Results,” *Pew Global*, 2014; and D. Carr, “Cheating Hearts,” *Contexts*, 9, no. 3: (August 2010).

⁴ L. Ross, “Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: A Double-Edge Sword,” *Catalyst: A Social Justice Forum*, 2, no. 3, Article 1 (2012).

Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).⁵ These pieces illustrate in poignant fashion how scriptural passages and religious doctrine are sometimes used in relationships and religious bodies to foster and perpetuate abusive partnerships. The scope of the ABC investigative journalism was wide; Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Sikh communities in Australia were all implicated.

These concerns about IPV among religious couples are not new. In 1998, after the Southern Baptist Convention released a statement calling on wives to submit to their husbands, journalists Steve and Cokie Roberts raised alarm bells, arguing that this kind of religious rhetoric “can clearly lead to abuse, both physical and emotional.”⁶ Others have noted the potential for Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to serve as “roadblocks” for victims when IPV does occur.⁷ Sociologist Nancy Nason-Clark and her colleagues have maintained a 25-year research program detailing, in part, the many unique issues facing religious women who are abused, religious men who abuse, and the religious leaders and communities who respond to these individuals.⁸

These same scholars, however, have also documented how religion *helps* IPV victims and perpetrators.⁹ Religion is a “double-edged sword” when it comes to IPV.¹⁰ Indeed, religion provides resources that might discourage IPV in the first place.¹¹ Scholars of religion and family life often note the “norms, networks, and nomos” religious communities provide that encourage positive family functioning.¹² That is, religious organizations provide messages and understanding about the importance of good marriages and families, and how to achieve them. They surround their adherents with like-minded people who can offer emotional support and accountability should husbands or wives start to deviate from the straight and narrow. And they may engender what psychologist Annette Mahoney and colleagues referred to as the sanctification of marriage,¹³ where marriages are imbued with spiritual character and significance. The norms, networks, and nomos associated with religious communities may be especially influential when both partners in the relationship are committed to their religious communities, privy to the same messaging, and embedded in the same social networks (i.e., shared religion has more potential to be protective than individual religion).

⁵ See for example: H. Gleeson and J. Baird, “Exposing the Darkness Within: Domestic Violence and Islam,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 4/23/17; J. Baird and H. Gleeson, “‘Submit to Your Husbands’: Women Told to Endure Domestic Violence in the Name of God,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 7/17/17; H. Gleeson and J. Baird, “‘Their Cross to Bear’: The Catholic Women Told to Forgive Domestic Violence,” 11/3/17, Australian Broadcasting Corporation; D. Jopson, “The Secret Scourge of Family Violence and Murder in Australian Hindu and Sikh Communities,” 12/17/17, Australian Broadcasting Corporation; H. Gleeson, “Chained Women: The Jewish Wives Being Held Hostage in Abusive Marriages,” 2/26/18, Australian Broadcasting Corporation; H. Gleeson with J. Baird, “‘I’m Not His Property’: Abused Muslim Women Denied Right to Divorce,” 4/17/18, Australian Broadcasting Corporation; H. Gleeson, “The Koran Verse Splitting Imams on Domestic Violence,” 8/28/18, Australian Broadcasting Corporation. There are numerous follow-up and related stories as well.

⁶ Steve and Cokie Roberts, Rocky Mountain News, cited in W. B. Wilcox, “Religion and the Domestication of Men,” *Contexts*, 5, no. 4 (2004): 42-46.

⁷ M. Fortune and C. Enger, “Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion,” National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, March 2005, www.vawnet.org.

⁸ N. Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing the Solutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁹ Fortune and Enger, “Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion,” 2005; Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing the Solutions*, 2017.

¹⁰ Ross, “Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: A Double-Edge Sword,” 2012.

¹¹ It is important to separate religion’s role in relationships after IPV occurs and its role in fostering or protecting against IPV. These are separate issues. Our analysis focuses on the latter.

¹² J. Bartkowski, X. Xu, and M. Levin, “Religion and Child Development: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study,” *Social Science Research*, 37, no. 1 (2008): 18-36; W. B. Wilcox and N. Wolfinger, “Living and Loving ‘Decent’: Religion and Relationship Quality among Urban Parents,” *Social Science Research*, 37, no. 3 (2008): 828-843; C. Ellison and X. Xu, “Religion and Families,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*, edited by Judith Treas, Jacqueline Scott, and Martin Richards (John Wiley and Sons, 2014).

¹³ A. Mahoney et al., “Religion and the Sanctification of Family Relationships,” *Review of Religious Research*, 44, no. 3 (2003): 220-236.

Research using nationally-representative samples of U.S. adults generally finds that—within married couples—more religious men are less likely to be perpetrators of IPV, and religious women are marginally less likely to be victims of IPV.¹⁴ Globally, higher religiosity is associated with being less likely to believe that wife beating is acceptable.¹⁵ Religiosity, or religious commitment, seems to be the determining factor, not religious tradition, and it seems that nominal religiosity may present the most risk, with both the nonreligious and the religiously devout being less likely to perpetrate IPV than are those who attend religious services infrequently. For example, sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox has noted that conservative Protestant men in the U.S. who are active in a religious community are among the least likely to physically hurt their spouses, while conservative Protestant men who are not active in a religious community are the *most* likely to be abusive.¹⁶ Sociologists Christopher Ellison, John Bartkowski, and Kristin Anderson similarly found that perpetration of IPV was lower only among men who attended religious services weekly or more.¹⁷ Evidence from Canada suggests a similar pattern, with those who are infrequent attenders of religious services being the most likely to be abusive.¹⁸

These studies of religion and IPV are mostly limited to North America, and they make use of data that is now at least 25 years old. Furthermore, they focus on physical abuse, ignoring other aspects of IPV, particularly sexual violence, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviors. Only one of these studies¹⁹ considers religiosity as a couple-level variable—that is, taking into account how *shared* religious participation is associated with IPV.

Not only has couples' shared religiosity often been overlooked, but so, too, have beliefs about male headship in the family, despite the fact that this is often what people consider to be the belief used to justify IPV. These beliefs are often inferred (with, we suspect, a healthy dose of measurement error) from measures of religious affiliation. We consider both shared religiosity and beliefs about male headship as correlates of IPV in our 11-country sample, and briefly discuss their role among couples in the U.S. as well.

Religion and Infidelity

Religion's role in infidelity is not often the subject of public discussion in the U.S., except, perhaps, when it comes to revelations of extramarital affairs among religious leaders. This lack of attention may be due to the fact that there are clear Judeo-Christian proscriptions against cheating on one's spouse (most prominently, the seventh of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not commit adultery"²⁰), which make proof-texting justifications for infidelity nearly impossible.

Mainstream religious messages about sexual fidelity are very much in step with other mainstream messages. Indeed, the vast majority of people around the world believe infidelity is morally unacceptable,²¹ and, at least in the U.S., that

¹⁴ C. Ellison, J. Bartkowski, and K. Anderson, "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?," *Journal of Family Issues*, 20, no. 1 (1999): 87-113; C. Ellison and K. Anderson, "Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence Among U.S. Couples," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40, no. 2 (June 2001): 269-286; C. Cunradi, R. Caetano, and J. Schafer, "Religious Affiliation, Denominational Homogamy, and Intimate Partner Violence Among U.S. Couples," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41, no. 1 (2002) 139-151; C. Ellison et al., "Race/Ethnicity, Religious Involvement, and Domestic Violence," *Violence Against Women*, 13, no. 11 (2007): 1094-1112.

¹⁵ J. H. Jung and D. Olson, "Where Does Religion Matter Most? Personal Religiosity and the Acceptability of Wife-beating in Cross-National Perspective," *Sociological Inquiry*, 87, no. 4 (2017): 608-633.

¹⁶ W. B. Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Ellison et al., "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?" 1999.

¹⁸ M. Brinkerhoff, E. Grandin, and E. Lupri, "Religious Involvement and Spousal Violence: The Canadian Case," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 31, no. 1 (1992): 14-31.

¹⁹ Ellison et al., "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?" 1999.

²⁰ Exodus 20:14, *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*.

²¹ E. Widmer, J. Treas, and R. Newcomb, "Attitudes Toward Nonmarital Sex in 24 Countries," *Journal of Sex Research*, 35, no. 4 (1998): 349-358; Pew Research Center, "Morality Interactive Topline Results," 2014.

number has been growing over time.²² As marriages have become increasingly about intimacy, infidelity has become increasingly problematic.²³

Even so, research on religion and infidelity typically finds that higher levels of religiosity are associated with a lower likelihood of cheating on one's spouse,²⁴ though that association may not extend to infidelity in nonmarital relationships.²⁵ Religious norms, networks, and nomos may heighten the importance of fidelity among religious adherents. As with research on religion and IPV, however, most of the research on religion and infidelity is limited to the U.S., and it also focuses on individual—not couple—religiosity. Beliefs about male headship have also not been considered as a source of infidelity. Patriarchal beliefs, however, could be used by some men as a license to cheat on their spouse.

Data and Methods

We use data from the 11-country Global Family and Gender Survey (GFGS) to examine how couples' religiosity (in terms of their religious commitment) and beliefs about male headship are related to experiences of IPV and infidelity in ongoing married and cohabiting relationships. We examine two measures of IPV based on the World Health Organization (WHO) definition, which includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviors.²⁶ The first, which we refer to as victimization, is based on responses to four questions:

1. "How often does your partner physically hurt you?"
2. "How often does your partner threaten you with harm?"
3. "How often does your partner force you to have sex?"
4. "How often does your partner withhold money from you?"

We consider those whose partner has never abused them versus those whose partner has rarely, sometimes, fairly often, or frequently abused them.

The second measure of IPV, which we call perpetration, is similar and based on responses to the questions:

1. "How often do you physically hurt your partner?"
2. "How often do you threaten your partner with harm?"
3. "How often do you force your partner to have sex?"
4. "How often do you withhold money from your partner?"

We examine those who never abuse their partner versus those who rarely, sometimes, fairly often, or frequently abuse their partner.

We limit our analysis to women's victimization and men's perpetration. We do this to be consistent with prior research, because the conceptual relationship between religion and IPV is gendered, and because—as the WHO puts it—"the overwhelming global burden of IPV is borne by women."²⁷

²² Carr, "Cheating Hearts," 2010.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ A. Burdette et al., "Are There Religious Variations in Marital Infidelity?," *Journal of Family Issues*, 28, no. 12 (2007): 1553-1581; D. Atkins and D. Kessel, "Religiousness and Infidelity: Attendance, But Not Faith and Prayer, Predict Marital Fidelity," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70, no. 2 (2008): 407-418; J. Potter, "Reexamining the Economics of Marital Fidelity," *Economics Bulletin*, 31, no. 1 (2011): 41-52; J. Tuttle and S. Davis, "Religion, Infidelity, and Divorce: Reexamining the Effect of Religious Behavior on Divorce Among Long-Married Couples," *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 56, no. 6 (2015): 475-489.

²⁵ A. Maddox-Shaw et al., "Predictors of Extradyadic Sexual Involvement in Unmarried Opposite-Sex Relationships," *Journal of Sex Research*, 50, no. 6 (Aug-Sept. 2013): 598-610.

²⁶ World Health Organization, "Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women," *WHO Information Sheets*, 2012.

²⁷ Ibid.

Respondents who answered “yes” to the question, “Have you ever had sex with someone other than your [spouse/partner] while you were [married/living with your partner]?” are considered to have cheated on their spouse or partner.

Our measure of couple religiosity is consistent with the measure used in the previous essay (see Chapter 2). We adopt their language as well, referring to couples where both respondents are not religious as “shared secular couples;” couples where one partner is highly committed and the other is less so, or where both are only moderately religious, as “less/mixed religious couples;” and couples where both are highly committed as “highly religious couples.”²⁸

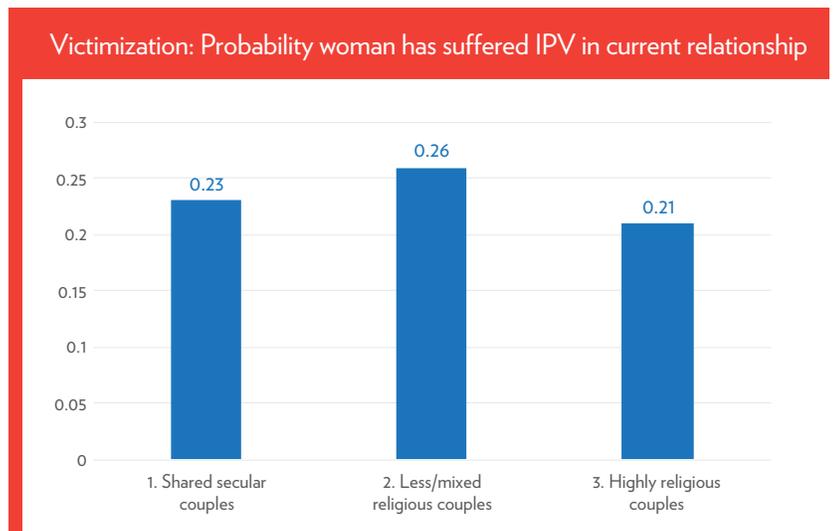
In Chapter 2, Carroll et al., examined how *separate spheres ideology* and couple religiosity predict relationship quality; here, we consider how *beliefs about male headship* in conjunction with couple religiosity predict IPV and infidelity. The male headship item asked the yes/no question, “Some people believe that the man is head of the family. Others may disagree. Do you believe that the man is head of the family, or not?” We refer to those who believe in male headship as, “patriarchal,” and to those who do not as, “egalitarian.”

We present findings as predicted probabilities, setting all control variables equal to their mean.²⁹

Results from the 11-Country Survey

Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

We begin by looking at reports of ever having been the victim of IPV at the hands of one’s current partner—either a spouse or cohabiting partner—by the couple’s religious commitment. The figure to the right reports predicted probabilities that women who are from shared secular couples, less/mixed religious couples, or highly religious couples have ever been victimized by their partner in the 11-country sample. Although women in less/mixed religious couples have a 26% probability of ever having been the victim of violence in their relationship, compared to a 21% probability for women in highly religious couples, and a 23% probability for women in shared secular couples, none of these differences are statistically significant.

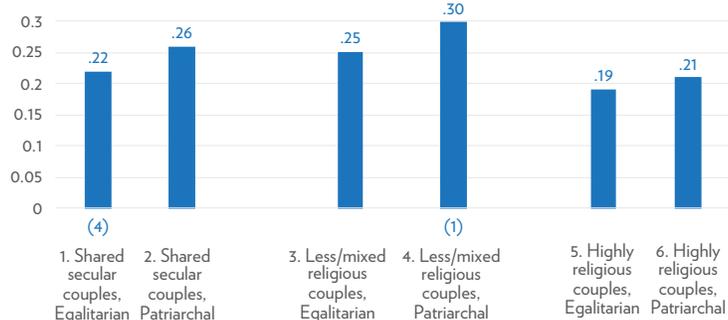


The figure below reports predicted probabilities of women’s victimization by couple religiosity and belief about male headship. Popular accounts suggest the idea that wifely submission to husbands provides theological cover for abusive relationships—or at least for men to abuse women. We see little evidence of this here, though. Women in highly religious couples, be they patriarchal or egalitarian, are not statistically different from any other group of women. The only significant difference is that egalitarian women in shared secular relationships are less likely to be victims of IPV (22%) than patriarchal women in less/mixed religious relationships (30%). Headship beliefs themselves

²⁸ The “less/mixed couples” category is quite diverse, but we did not find couples with mixed religious views and those with two, nominally religious partners to be statistically distinct.

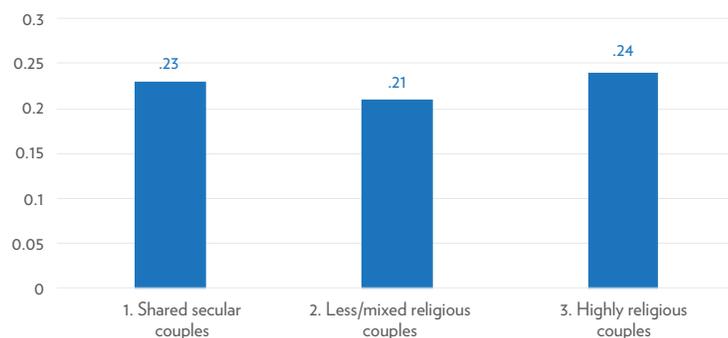
²⁹ See “Data & Methods” section for more details.

Victimization: Probability woman has suffered IPV in current relationship

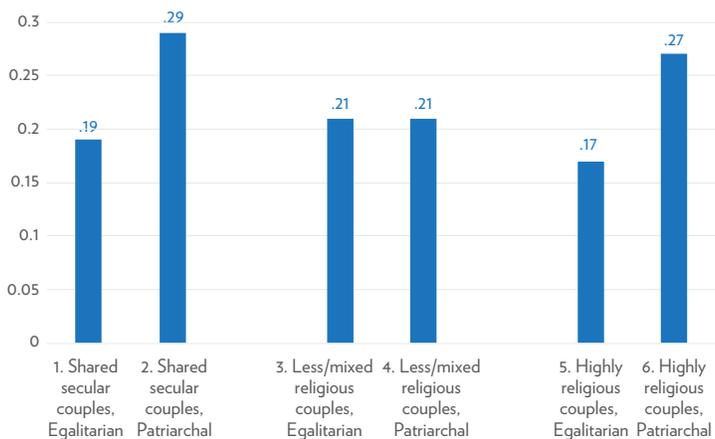


Note: Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at $p \leq 0.05$

Perpetration: Probability man has perpetrated IPV in current relationship



Perpetration: Probability man has perpetrated IPV in current relationship



(i.e., not in combination with couple religiosity) are not associated with women’s victimization (results not shown).

Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence

The figure below reports predicted probabilities of men being a perpetrator of IPV in the global sample by couple religiosity. Findings for perpetration of IPV—whether the respondent has ever abused their current partner—also suggest no influence of couples’ religious characteristics. Men are nearly equally likely to report being perpetrators of IPV across the three categories, with predicted probabilities ranging from 21% to 24%.

When we add beliefs about male headship to the picture, there are still no significant differences in men’s likelihood of perpetrating IPV across these groups. The largest gap—between patriarchal men in shared secular couples and egalitarian men in highly religious couples—is not statistically significant. Headship beliefs do not predict IPV perpetration, neither by themselves nor in combination with couple religiosity.

Infidelity

Religious commitment has consistently been found to reduce the incidence of infidelity in the U.S., but little research has been done on this topic outside the U.S. We examined the role of religious commitment in couples from 11 countries in the figure below. Among men, those in less/mixed religious couples have an 18% probability of ever cheating on their spouse or partner,

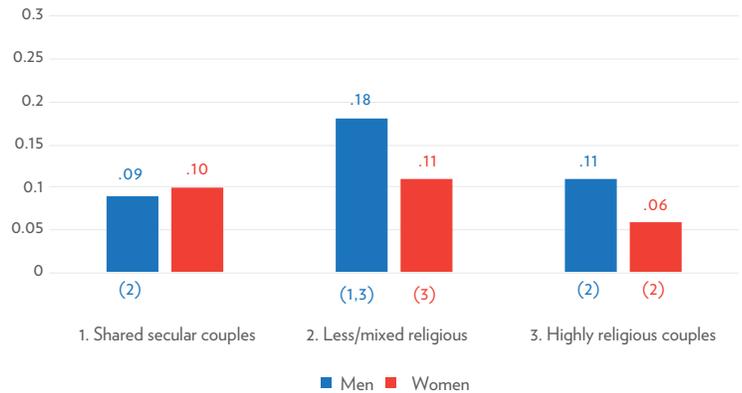
compared to probabilities of 9% for men in shared-secular couples and 11% for men in highly religious couples. Women in highly religious couples are also significantly less likely to have cheated on their partner than their less/mixed counterparts, with probabilities of 6% and 11%, respectively.

We then consider couple religiosity and beliefs about male headship jointly. Egalitarian men in shared secular relationships have the lowest probability of having cheated on their partner at 8%. This is significantly lower than men in less/mixed religious couples, whether egalitarian or patriarchal. Other differences among men, and all the differences among women, are not statistically significant. Headship beliefs by themselves (results not shown) do not predict infidelity among either men or women.

A Note on the United States

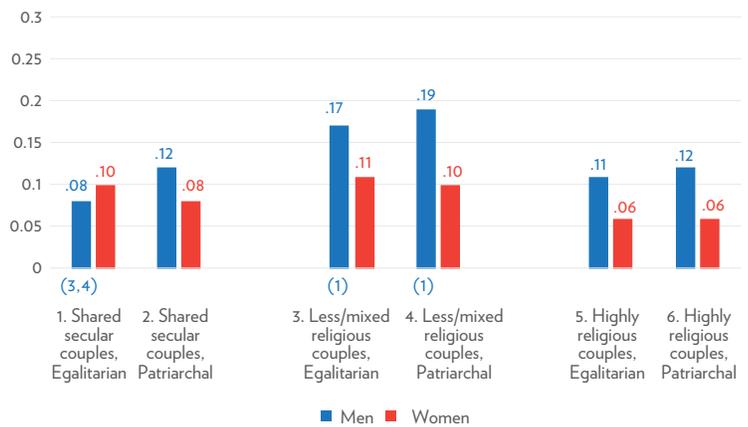
The findings from the U.S. indicate no differences in IPV with respect to couple religiosity, but when it comes to women's infidelity, religious commitment within the couple seems to matter. Women in highly religious couples have just a 2% probability of having cheated on their spouse, compared to a probability of 10% for women in less/mixed religious couples and 13% for women in shared secular couples.

Infidelity: Probability of having cheated on current partner



Note: Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at $p \leq 0.05$

Infidelity: Probability of having cheated on current partner



Note: Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at $p \leq 0.05$

Conclusion

The evidence presented here from 11 countries suggests that highly religious couples, secular couples, and those in between are similar in terms of the violence occurring within their intimate partnerships. These similarities across couples with different levels of religious commitment are notable in light of recent media reports about IPV within religious couples.³⁰ On one hand, these findings validate the stories: religious couples experience and commit IPV just as nonreligious couples do. Religious participation itself does not safeguard against IPV.

Unfortunately, the resources religious traditions have at their disposal to discourage violence within intimate partnerships may not be tapped very often. The subject of IPV may not be frequently addressed in public religious settings. Congregational religious leaders would do well to change this and to confront the issue head-on in their sermons and programming. A significant minority of their congregants have experienced violence within their marriages and cohabiting unions, and many of them are likely suffering in silence. A significant minority have likely also *perpetrated* IPV and may pose a continued risk to their families and fellow congregants. Carroll et al.'s essay in this report shows the positive effects religion can have on relationship functioning; if these findings were to be made a point of emphasis, these positive effects might potentially be extended to IPV as well.

At the same time, it is important to note that congregational leaders often do not have the training, skills, or desire to navigate these conversations effectively or to provide appropriate help for those seeking it.³¹ Denominational leaders, boards of religious organizations, and others in charge of hiring and overseeing the leaders of local congregations should address this issue in earnest. Victims and perpetrators of IPV often seek help from their clergy, and those clergy need to be ready to handle these situations in ways that not only protect victims and bring perpetrators to justice, but also tend to the spiritual health of all involved.³² At the very minimum, religious leaders should be knowledgeable about the appropriate authorities or services available to assist them in dealing with dangerous situations. Sadly, many religious leaders remain woefully unprepared to deal with IPV.³³ Their congregants' safety is at stake, and so, too, is their spiritual well-being.³⁴

Even though religion does not insulate people from abusive partnerships, highly religious couples in general are not *more* violent than other couples. Patriarchal ideas rooted in religious understandings do lead to abusive relationships in some instances, but couples in these relationships do not have elevated rates of IPV compared to other couples. Given the fact that we have measured IPV in *ongoing* relationships, if religious couples are more likely to remain together after their relationships become violent, we could very well be understating religion's protective influence on the incidence of IPV. So, while attention to IPV within religious couples is legitimate and important, these settings should also not be

³⁰ The country-level reports show that Australian men in highly religious couples are more likely to be perpetrators of IPV than those in shared-secular couples, suggesting the ABC stories were especially relevant for the Australian context. If such a pattern were to hold in nationally representative data for Australia (or any other country), the research imperative would be to identify the elements of context that condition the relationship between religion and IPV.

³¹ A. Wood and M. McHugh, "Woman Battering: The Response of the Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology*, 42, no. 3 (1994): 185-196; N. Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); C. Shannon-Lewy and V. Dull, "The Response of Christian Clergy to Domestic Violence: Help or Hindrance?," *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 10, no. 6 (Sept.-Oct. 2005): 637-760; N. Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³² Best practices dictate that clergy themselves do not assist both the victim and perpetrator in these circumstances, but they can assist in helping both parties obtain the help they need.

³³ Shannon-Lewy and Dull, "The Response of Christian Clergy to Domestic Violence: Help or Hindrance?"; Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence*, 2017.

³⁴ For a detailed discussion of dealing with IPV in religious contexts, we highly recommend Nancy Nason-Clark and colleagues' book, *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions*. The online resources mentioned therein may also be helpful for religious leaders. See for example: www.theraveproject.org, and www.faithtrustinstitute.org.

considered *especially* problematic, though IPV among religious couples does present some unique challenges. Violence against intimate partners is found within all types of couples, including religious ones.

With respect to infidelity, patriarchal religious couples also do not stand out from other couples. Across the 11 countries we surveyed, both highly religious and shared secular couples have lower rates of infidelity compared to their less/mixed religious counterparts. In the U.S., there is also a difference between highly religious and shared secular women, with the highly religious being the least likely to cheat. Given the focus of religious institutions (especially in the U.S.) on the importance of reserving sex for marriage, as well as the generally salutary influence of religion on relationships, it is a bit surprising that highly religious couples and shared secular couples behave similarly around the world. But cultural messages about the inappropriateness of extramarital sex are widespread, so secular couples have plenty of motivation to avoid infidelity as well.

Our data suggest religion's global influence on problematic aspects of relationships—violence against an intimate partner and infidelity—is perhaps more muted than it is for more positive relationship outcomes (Chapter 2). Especially in the case of IPV, these findings should serve as a(nother) wake-up call to religious institutions to take seriously the prevalence of relationship violence in their midst. But they should also serve as a useful corrective to those who might take reports of violence in religious couples to mean that religious couples are more violent than other couples.