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RESEARCH NOTE

Couple Religiosity, Male Headship, Intimate Partner Violence, and Infidelity

Laurie F. DeRose, et al. ***[full author details at the end of the article]***

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Abstract

Background The research literature finds a positive relationship between couple religiosity and relationship quality, but because public discourse highlights religious victims of domestic violence, we questioned whether couple religiosity prevents negative relationship outcomes as well as it promotes positive ones.

Purpose This article compares rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) and infidelity among couples with different levels of religious commitment. We further interrogated whether the belief that the man is the head of the household increased couples' risk of IPV or infidelity.

Methods We used Global Family and Gender Survey data from eleven countries. This was an online survey of adults ages 18 to 50 that used a representative panel for the United States, but used opt-in panels in Australia, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. We limited our analytic sample to the 9920 men and women in heterosexual relationships (6791 married and 3128 cohabiting). We also analyzed the United States probability sample separately from our pooled sample.

Results Couples with nominal or unequal religiosity (*less/mixed religious couples*) had higher rates of infidelity than either *highly religious couples* or couples in which neither partner exhibited much religiosity (*shared secular couples*). Infidelity was generally similar between highly religious couples and shared secular couples, but in the US women in highly religious couples did cheat less. We found no differences in IPV—measured by both women's reports of victimization and men's reports of perpetration—according to couple religiosity. Further, the belief that the man is the head of the household did not influence couples' risk of either IPV or infidelity across the entire sample. In Latin America, however, patriarchal men in shared secular couples perpetrated IPV significantly more often than their egalitarian or more religious counterparts.

Conclusions and Implications Our Latin American evidence hints that patriarchy may be a more dangerous ideology for secular couples than for religious couples.

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Our more general conclusion is that even though negative relationship outcomes are not more common among religious couples, the resources religious traditions have at their disposal to discourage violence within intimate partnerships seem tragically underutilized.

Keywords Religiosity · Infidelity · Intimate partner violence · Male headship · Gender

Introduction

Intimate relationships can be sources of joy and fulfillment. But they can also be the source of considerable suffering. The World Health Organization (WHO 2013) estimates that about 30% of ever-partnered women around the world have experienced intimate partner violence (hereafter, IPV). 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.[1] We explored whether and how couple religiosity is associated with these sources of pain within intimate partnerships.[2]

Background

Religion and Male Headship

Formal religious institutions shape cultural norms, social rules, and behavior in ways that promote rigidity of gender roles and attitudes (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Even though there are select contexts where religiosity does not contribute to gender traditionalism (Goldscheider et al. 2014), the unaffiliated have been shown to be more gender progressive than religious people across multiple countries (Zuckerman 2009). No world religion stands out as being particularly traditional or egalitarian with respect to its effect on gender attitudes (Seguino 2011, see also Reitz et al. 2015). This is somewhat surprising given the very wide variety of religious teaching regarding gender and, in particular, the Pauline (Christian) doctrine that husbands are heads of their wives.

Religious people, both with and without particular doctrine, may then be susceptible to the "pathology of patriarchy." Patriarchy is associated with both IPV (e.g., Kishor and Johnson 2004) and sexual double standards (e.g., Rudman et al. 2013).

[1] Authors' analysis of the 2018 General Social Survey.

[2] 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 Carr (2010), Pew Research Center (2014), Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb (1998).

Religion and Intimate Partner Violence

Public Discourse

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 (Ross 2012). The idea that religion can legitimate abuse was spotlighted in a series of stories edited by Haley Gleeson and Julia Baird for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC: Baird and Gleeson 2017; Gleeson 2018a, 2018b; Gleeson with Baird 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Jopson 2017). These media accounts 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 (cited in Wilcox 2006) raised alarm bells, arguing that this kind of religious rhetoric "can clearly lead to abuse, both physical and emotional." Others have noted the potential for Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to serve as "roadblocks" for victims when IPV does occur (Fortune and Enger 2005).

Sociological Research

Sociologist Nancy Nason-Clark and her colleagues have maintained a 25-year research program detailing, in part, the many unique issues facing religious women and men who are abused, religious men and women who abuse, and the religious leaders and communities who respond to these individuals (Nason-Clark et al. 2018). They have shown that religious communities have a mixed track record in responding to IPV after it occurs, but have also documented how religion has *helped* IPV victims and perpetrators (Fortune and Enger 2005; Nason-Clark et al. 2018). Religion is a "double-edged sword" when it comes to IPV (Ross 2012).

We focus here on how religion might be double-edged in its ability to discourage IPV in the first place.[3] On the positive side, scholars of religion and family life often note the "norms, networks, and nomos" religious communities provide that encourage positive family functioning (Bartkowski et al. 2008; Ellison and Xu 2014; Wilcox and Wolfinger 2008). That is, religious organizations provide messages and understanding about the importance of good marriages

[3] 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.

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 et al. (2003) referred to as the sanctification of marriage, 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). On the negative side, the belief that the husband is the head of the household might be used to justify IPV.

Research using nationally-representative samples of US 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 (Cunradi et al. 2002; Ellison and Anderson 2001; Ellison et al. 1999, 2007). Globally, higher religiosity is associated with being less likely to believe that wife beating is acceptable (Jung and Olson 2017). 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 US 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 (Wilcox 2004). Sociologists Christopher Ellison et al. (1999) similarly found that perpetration of IPV was lower only among men who attended religious services weekly or more. Evidence from Canada suggests a similar pattern, with those who are infrequent attenders of religious services being the most likely to be abusive (Brinkerhoff et al. 1992).

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 studies (Ellison et al. 1999) 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 specifically in the US as well as Latin America.

Religion and Infidelity

Religion's role in infidelity is not often the subject of public discussion in the US, 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), 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 (Pew Research Center 2014; Widmer et al. 1998), and, at least in the US, that number has been growing over time: As marriages have become increasingly about intimacy, infidelity has become increasingly problematic (Carr 2010).

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 (Atkins and Kessel 2008; Burdette et al. 2007; Potter 2011; Tuttle and Davis 2015), though that association may not extend to infidelity in nonmarital relationships (Shaw et al. 2013). 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 US, 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.

Methods

We used 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. The 2018 GFGS was conducted September 13–25, 2018, by Ipsos Public Affairs (formerly GfK) on behalf of The Wheatley Institution and the Institute for Family Studies. The survey used samples of adults ages 18 to 50 from KnowledgePanel® in the United States and Toluna (opt-in panels) in Australia, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. Ipsos randomly recruited KnowledgePanel® members through probability-based sampling, and households were provided with access to the Internet and hardware if needed. Toluna is one of the largest and most diverse qualified online panels in the world. Individuals were recruited in real-time from a network of websites with which Toluna had developed referral relationships. This combination of sampling strategies means that, after weighting, the GFGS data from the United States are nationally representative of the 18–50 population, but that the GFGS data from other countries are not. Samples for other countries were weighted to match the distributions of age, gender, education, and region of the national population ages 18 to 50. We refer to levels of statistical significance in our description

of the results to highlight effects of meaningful size throughout. This is technically correct for the United States sample, but only descriptive for the other countries that did not have probability samples.

Survey interviews were conducted online in English, Spanish, and French languages (depending on the languages used in each country). A total of 16,474 interviews were completed. Sample sizes for each country are as follows: Argentina—668, Australia—2420, Canada—2200, Chile—1240, Colombia—620, France—1215, Ireland—2420, Mexico—677, Peru—645, United Kingdom—2344, and United States of America—2025. Our pooled regressions are most heavily influenced by Mexico and the United States because we weight countries according to their relative population sizes.

We limited our analytic sample to the 9920 men and women in heterosexual relationships (6791 married and 3128 cohabiting). Men and women in non-heterosexual relationships ($n = 589$) were not included in the analyses. Processes of selection into and out of religious participation are likely to vary greatly with sexual orientation, and patterns of religiously assortative mating may also vary with sexual orientation. The non-heterosexual sample was not large enough to support meaningful statistical analysis, even before distinguishing gay and lesbian couples.

Dependent Variables

We examined two measures of IPV based on the World Health Organization definition, which includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviors (WHO 2012). The first, which we refer to as victimization, is based on responses to four questions:

- "How often does your partner physically hurt you?"
- "How often does your partner threaten you with harm?"
- "How often does your partner force you to have sex?"
- "How often does your partner withhold money from you?"

We considered those whose partner has never abused them versus those whose partner has rarely, sometimes, fairly often, or frequently abused them (a dummy variable indicating abused at all by current partner).

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

- "How often do you physically hurt your partner?"
- "How often do you threaten your partner with harm?"
- "How often do you force your partner to have sex?"
- "How often do you withhold money from your partner?"

We again created a dummy variable, this time for ever perpetrated abuse upon the current partner.

We limited 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 (2012) puts it—"the overwhelming global burden of IPV is borne by women."

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.

Key Independent Variables: Couple Religiosity and Male Headship

In order to measure how *shared* religious participation is associated with IPV, we created a couple-level variable for religiosity. *Shared secular couples* are married or cohabiting men and women who report they "never" attend religious services and that their partner or spouse is "as religious" or "less religious" than they are. *Less/mixed religious couples* are defined as those who report that both they and their partner engage in fairly minimal religious service attendance (once a month or less), plus respondents who attend religious services regularly themselves, but report having partners who are less religious than they are. Of these *less/mixed religious* couples, 87% reported shared minimal religious attendance, while 13% were couples where the respondent was a regular attender partnered with a less devout spouse or partner. Although the two types of couples comprising this middle category are quite different, we were able to combine them because our preliminary analysis confirmed that they were not different across any of the three dependent variables. *Highly religious couples* are respondents who attend religious services regularly (2–3 times a month or more) and who reported their spouse or partner was as religious or more religious than they are.

To consider how *beliefs about male headship* in conjunction with couple religiosity predict of IPV and infidelity, we used a 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."

Control Variables

We controlled for several individual characteristics at interview. *Gender* is self-reported and included as a dummy variable. *Age* is measured in continuous years, 18–50. *Education* uses four categories: less than high school; high school graduate; some tertiary education (whether college/university or vocational); and a completed degree (bachelor's or higher). *Race/ethnicity* is controlled only in the United States sample using five categories: Hispanics and four categories of Non-Hispanics (White, Black, Other, and two or more races).

We further controlled for three aspects of individual history: *Native-born status*, *Parental relationship* (whether or not the respondent lived with both biological parents at age 16), and *Ever divorced* (whether the respondent had personally experienced divorce in a past relationship).

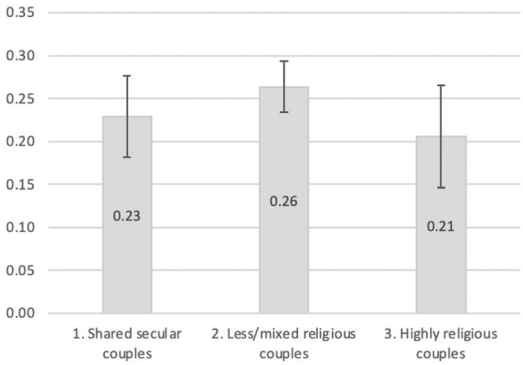

Fig. 1 Victimization: probability woman has suffered IPV in current relationship by couple religiosity

Finally, we controlled for couple, household, and area characteristics. *Legal status of current union* is married or cohabiting. *Relationship duration* is how long the couple has been together in months (with durations of longer than 12 months reported in years and converted to months). *Presence of children* means that a child under age 18 lives with the couple, regardless of that child's relationship to either of them. *Financial circumstances* were measured by the respondent's subjective report using four categories: Don't have enough to meet basic expenses; Just meeting basic expenses; Living comfortably; and Living very comfortably. Area characteristics were *Country of residence* and *Place of residence* (rural or urban).

Given the binary nature of all three dependent variables, we used logistic regression. Statistical significance was estimated by the *p*-values ($p < 0.05$, two-tailed tests) of the logistic regression coefficients.

Results

Intimate Partner Violence

Victims

We began 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. Figure 1 reports predicted probabilities of victimization among women from shared secular couples, less/mixed religious couples, and highly religious couples in the 11-country sample (full regression results in Table 1, Model 1). 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.

Figure 2 reports predicted probabilities of women's victimization by couple religiosity and belief about male headship (Table 1, Model 2). Popular accounts suggest the idea that wifely submission to husbands provides theological cover

Table 1 Intimate partner violence

	Women's victimization		Men's perpetration	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Shared-secular couple	0.135		−0.087	
	(0.237)		(0.272)	
Religiously-nominal/mixed couple	0.323		−0.184	
	(0.206)		(0.203)	
Egalitarian, shared-secular couple		0.037		−0.462
		(0.261)		(0.354)
Patriarchal, shared-secular couple		0.288		0.089
		(0.366)		(0.323)
Egalitarian, religiously-nominal/mixed couple		0.199		−0.331
		(0.248)		(0.266)
Patriarchal, religiously-nominal/mixed couple		0.451		−0.349
		(0.254)		(0.232)
Egalitarian, shared-religious couple		−0.114		−0.597
		(0.386)		(0.356)
Native born	−0.414*	−0.421*	−0.502*	−0.554*
	(0.196)	(0.199)	(0.236)	(0.238)
High school graduate	−0.561	−0.549	−0.590	−0.609
	(0.287)	(0.288)	(0.351)	(0.346)
Some college	−0.342	−0.339	−0.652*	−0.645*
	(0.284)	(0.286)	(0.331)	(0.326)
Bachelor's degree or higher	−0.571*	−0.534	−0.839**	−0.843**
	(0.277)	(0.280)	(0.320)	(0.316)
Age	−0.022	−0.019	−0.037**	−0.038**
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Just meet your basic expenses	−0.332	−0.330	0.083	0.062
	(0.240)	(0.238)	(0.258)	(0.260)
Live comfortably	−1.026***	−1.038***	−0.230	−0.246
	(0.249)	(0.247)	(0.270)	(0.272)
Live very comfortably	−1.270***	−1.277***	−0.248	−0.239
	(0.373)	(0.369)	(0.371)	(0.376)
Live in urban area	−0.216	−0.225	0.286	0.281
	(0.156)	(0.156)	(0.184)	(0.184)
Cohabiting	−0.234	−0.190	0.103	0.095
	(0.161)	(0.160)	(0.195)	(0.196)
Relationship duration (in months)	0.002	0.002	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Lived with two biological parents at age 16	−0.091	−0.103	−0.276	−0.277
	(0.149)	(0.151)	(0.165)	(0.165)
Has child younger than 18 in home	0.113	0.121	0.249	0.223
	(0.148)	(0.146)	(0.175)	(0.176)
Ever divorced	0.000	0.012	−0.048	−0.046

Table 1 (continued)

	Women's victimization		Men's perpetration	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	(0.250)	(0.249)	(0.283)	(0.290)
Australia	1.113***	1.059***	0.642	0.608
	(0.261)	(0.263)	(0.377)	(0.367)
Canada	0.938***	0.902***	0.984**	0.967**
	(0.260)	(0.261)	(0.376)	(0.364)
Chile	0.648*	0.653*	0.287	0.283
	(0.264)	(0.265)	(0.377)	(0.366)
Colombia	1.142***	1.115***	0.312	0.347
	(0.292)	(0.292)	(0.398)	(0.391)
France	0.408	0.377	0.204	0.226
	(0.284)	(0.285)	(0.452)	(0.434)
Ireland	0.871**	0.849**	0.810*	0.824*
	(0.268)	(0.268)	(0.368)	(0.356)
Mexico	1.548***	1.517***	0.884*	0.895*
	(0.299)	(0.301)	(0.420)	(0.412)
Peru	1.741***	1.729***	0.777*	0.768*
	(0.289)	(0.291)	(0.384)	(0.379)
United Kingdom	1.049***	1.001***	0.795*	0.775*
	(0.259)	(0.260)	(0.379)	(0.368)
United States of America	0.627*	0.572	0.488	0.500
	(0.294)	(0.295)	(0.400)	(0.391)
Constant	−0.003	−0.041	0.623	0.917
	(0.603)	(0.626)	(0.733)	(0.731)
Observations	5459	5445	4100	4091

Robust standard errors in parentheses

Reference categories are shared-religious couple; patriarchal, shared-religious couple; less than high school degree; don't have enough to meet basic expenses; and Argentina

***$p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

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

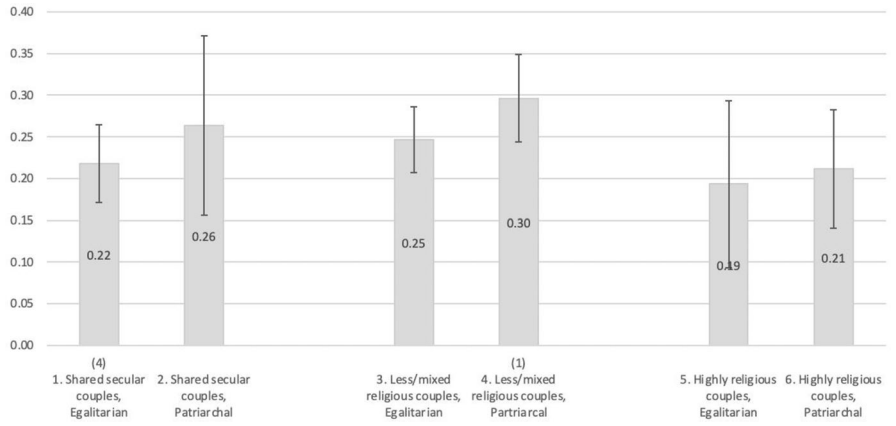

Fig. 2 Victimization: probability woman has suffered IPV in current relationship by couple religiosity and belief about male headship. Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at $p \leq 0.05$

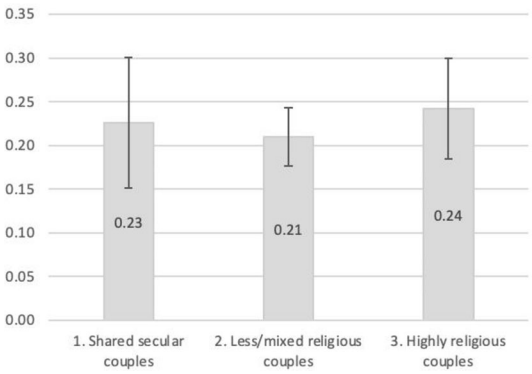

Fig. 3 Perpetration: probability man has perpetrated IPV in current relationship by couple religiosity

Perpetrators

Figure 3 reports predicted probabilities of men being a perpetrator of IPV in the global sample by couple religiosity (Table 1, Model 3). Findings for perpetration of IPV—whether the respondent has 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 in the figure above, there are still no significant differences in men's likelihood of perpetrating IPV across these groups (Table 1, Model 4). 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 (Fig. 4).

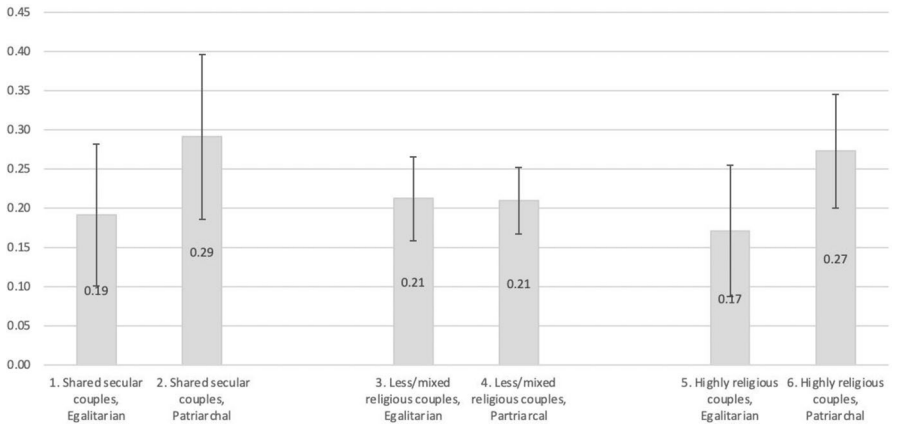

Fig. 4 Perpetration: probability man has perpetrated IPV in current relationship by couple religiosity and belief about male headship

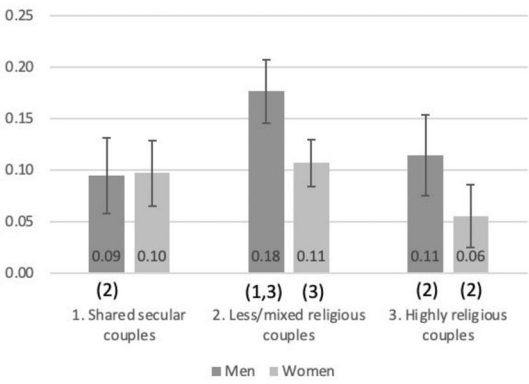

Fig. 5 Infidelity: probability of having cheated on current partner by couple religiosity. Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at $p \leq 0.05$

In contrast to previous research (Kenney and McLanahan 2006), cohabiting couples in our sample did not have higher rates of IPV than married couples. Couples with higher socioeconomic status generally had lower rates, especially those where the respondent had a college degree and where the couple reported living comfortably or very comfortably. Native born respondents reported less IPV than immigrants in the pooled sample (Table 1), but that effect was driven absent in Latin America (not shown).

Infidelity

Religious commitment has consistently been found to reduce the incidence of infidelity in the US, but little research has been done on this topic outside the US. We examined the role of religious commitment *in couples* from 11 countries in Fig. 5 (Table 2, Model 1). Among men, those in less/mixed religious couples have an 18%

Table 2 Infidelity

	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2
Female	−0.791*	−0.815
	(0.368)	(0.495)
Shared-secular couple	−0.208	
	(0.296)	
Religiously-nominal/mixed couple	0.507*	
	(0.227)	
Female X shared-secular couple	0.814	
	(0.456)	
Female X religiously-nominal/mixed couple	0.208	
	(0.401)	
Egalitarian, shared-secular couple		−0.482
		(0.363)
Patriarchal, shared-secular couple		0.065
		(0.428)
Egalitarian, religiously-nominal/mixed couple		0.443
		(0.300)
Patriarchal, religiously-nominal/mixed couple		0.549
		(0.280)
Egalitarian, shared-religious couple		−0.042
		(0.412)
Female X egalitarian, shared-secular couple		1.145
		(0.594)
Female X patriarchal, shared-secular couple		0.396
		(0.721)
Female X egalitarian, religiously-nominal/mixed couple		0.288
		(0.550)
Female X patriarchal, religiously-nominal/mixed couple		0.143
		(0.556)
Female X egalitarian, shared-religious couple		0.089
		(0.715)
Native born	−0.278	−0.274
	(0.189)	(0.190)
High school graduate	−0.295	−0.295
	(0.317)	(0.322)
Some college	−0.115	−0.117
	(0.298)	(0.301)
Bachelor's degree or higher	0.067	0.052
	(0.288)	(0.293)
Age	−0.014	−0.015
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Just meet your basic expenses	0.063	0.061

Table 2 (continued)

	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2
	(0.223)	(0.223)
Live comfortably	−0.208	−0.205
	(0.221)	(0.222)
Live very comfortably	0.102	0.109
	(0.317)	(0.318)
Live in urban area	−0.072	−0.066
	(0.168)	(0.169)
Cohabiting	0.228	0.223
	(0.170)	(0.170)
Relationship duration (in months)	0.005***	0.005***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Lived with two biological parents at age 16	−0.453**	−0.458**
	(0.141)	(0.142)
Has child younger than 18 in home	0.292*	0.284*
	(0.132)	(0.135)
Ever divorced	0.717**	0.725**
	(0.225)	(0.224)
Australia	−0.634**	−0.634**
	(0.218)	(0.221)
Canada	−0.408	−0.403
	(0.215)	(0.217)
Chile	−0.065	−0.064
	(0.206)	(0.207)
Colombia	0.344	0.342
	(0.223)	(0.226)
France	−0.683**	−0.671**
	(0.243)	(0.245)
Ireland	−0.608**	−0.598**
	(0.227)	(0.230)
Mexico	0.407	0.406
	(0.258)	(0.263)
Peru	0.263	0.256
	(0.229)	(0.231)
United Kingdom	−0.300	−0.300
	(0.210)	(0.212)
United States of America	−0.585*	−0.574*
	(0.251)	(0.255)
Constant	−1.416*	−1.381*
	(0.676)	(0.686)
Observations	9551	9528

Robust standard errors in parentheses

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

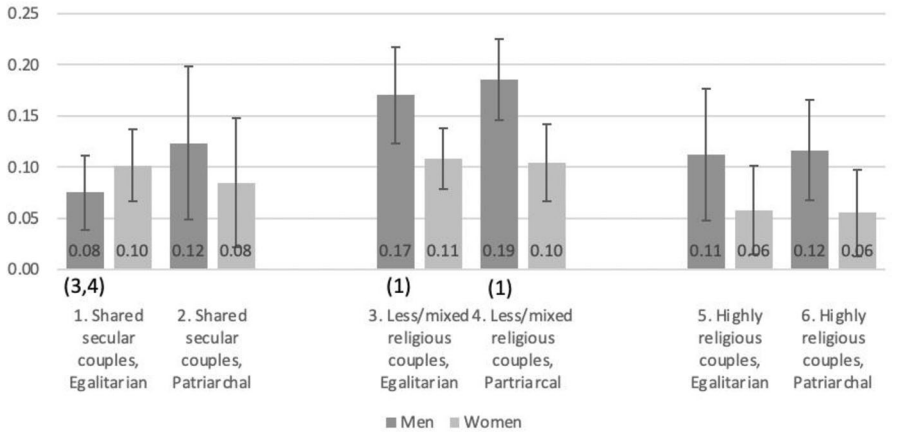

Fig. 6 Infidelity: probability of having cheated on current partner by couple religiosity and belief about male headship. Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at $p \leq 0.05$

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 (Fig. 6; Table 2, Model 2). 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 (17%) or patriarchal (19%). 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.

Couples that had lived together longer were more likely to have cheated during their relationship. There was also more cheating among respondents who had previously been divorced (the relationship in the pooled sample is driven by Argentina and the United Kingdom), and less among those who had still been living with both parents at age 16 (mostly due to strong effects in the United Kingdom and the United States). Couples of higher socioeconomic status were no less likely to cheat on each other, even though they had lower rates of IPV.

Regional Results

United States

Like in the full sample, findings from the United States indicate no differences in IPV with respect to couple religiosity. When it comes to women's infidelity, however, religious commitment within the couple seems to matter. Women in highly

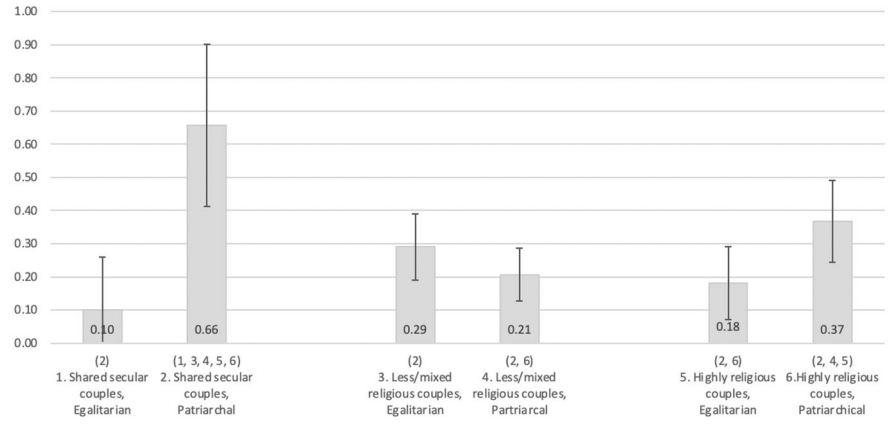

Fig. 7 Victimization in Latin America: probability woman has suffered IPV in current relationship by couple religiosity and belief about male headship. Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at $p \leq 0.05$

religious couples in the United States 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.

Latin America

In contrast, couple religiosity did not significantly predict women's infidelity in Latin America. Men's infidelity followed the same pattern as in the full sample, with men in less/mixed religious couples have a 28% probability of cheating, significantly more than men in either shared secular (10%) or highly religious couples (15%).

Belief that men are the heads of their households mattered for perpetration of IPV in Latin America (Fig. 7), while it did not in the full sample (Fig. 2). Couple religiosity was unrelated to IPV among egalitarian couples (62% in Latin America), but perpetration of IPV is significantly lower among patriarchal men in less/mixed religious couples (21%) than patriarchal men in highly religious couples (37%) who, in turn, perpetrate IPV significantly less often than patriarchal men in shared secular couples (66%). This highest probability of perpetration is based on 49 patriarchal shared secular men: not a tiny subsample, but not a large one either.[4]

Moreover, belief in male headship predicts more perpetration of IPV in both shared secular and highly religious couples, but not less/mixed religious couples. We note, however, that the increased risk of IPV among highly religious couples associated with endorsement of male headship is driven by the most populous country in our weighted sample, Mexico. In the rest of our Latin American countries, patriarchal attitudes only increase risk among shared secular couples—not among

[4] The subsamples in the other five categories are at least 200, with less/mixed religious egalitarian being the most common (1100 or 45% of the Latin America observations).

highly religious couples. Thus the combination of patriarchy and secularism is associated with negative relationship outcomes more generally than is the combination of patriarchy and religiosity.

Discussion

The evidence presented here from 11 majority Christian 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 media reports about IPV within religious couples.[5] 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, however, 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. Religion has been shown to have positive effects on relationship functioning in these same countries (Carroll et al. 2019); 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 (Nason-Clark 1997; Nason-Clark et al. 2018; Shannon-Lewy and Dull 2005; Wood and McHugh 1994). 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.[6] 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

[5] 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.

[6] 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 (Nason-Clark 1997).

(Nason-Clark 1997; Shannon-Lewy and Dull 2005). This is unfortunate, since their congregants' safety is at stake, and so, too, is their spiritual well-being.

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 (except in Mexico). In contrast, patriarchal ideas when detached from religion contributed to IPV throughout Latin America. We also found that women in less and mixed religious couples across all 11 countries were more likely to be victimized only if they believed that the man was head of the household. Previous research had suggested that religiously heterogeneity within couples and nominal religiousness were a particular risk factors for IPV, and we suggest that this elevated risk may come from a small dose of religiousness that includes a belief in male headship.

Given 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 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 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 US, 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 US) 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.

Limitations

Two important limitations of our data should be kept in mind when assessing the generalizability of our findings. First, while the GFGS followed accepted survey practices for minimizing underreporting of IPV, underreporting could be more common among religious couples than others. Visschers et al. (2017) presented evidence that social desirability bias in fact does little to distort self-reported IPV. Nonetheless, individuals' reports of perpetration and victimization from the GFGS were not checked against any other data sources. We can thus not assess either the degree of underreporting, nor whether there is a correlation between couple religiosity and underreporting. Second, only the data from the United States are nationally

representative as non-representative data from opt-in panels were utilized in the other ten countries.

Furthermore, our patriarchy-inspired choice to focus on women's victimization and men's perpetration means that our findings do not describe IPV more generally. We recommended further work interrogating religious influences on men's victimization and women's perpetration.

Conclusion

It is nonetheless safe to conclude that 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 (Carroll et al. 2019). 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.

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Authors and Affiliations

Laurie F. DeRose[1] · Byron R. Johnson[2] · Wendy Wang[3] · Andrés Salazar-Arango[4]

✉ Laurie F. DeRose
deroseL@cua.edu

[1] Department of Sociology, Catholic University of America, 103A Aquinas Hall, 620 Michigan Avenue, N.E., Washington, DC 20064, USA

[2] Baylor University and the Sagamore Institute, Indianapolis, IN, USA

[3] Institute for Family Studies, Charlottesville, VA, USA

[4] Universidad de La Sabana, Chía, Cundinamarca, Colombia