Outright brutality or a sign of love? the concept and practice of wife beating among the Kuria of east Africa

The Kuria, a poor mainly agricultural community is found in Kenya and Tanzania in East Africa. They inhabit Kuria district in Kenya and Mara province in Tanzania, the majority being in Tanzania. Though they are separated by the country borders established during the colonial times, the Kuria remain the same in all cultural respects. Indeed, they still maintain very close family ties across the borders. It is common to find a Kenyan Kuria whose all uncles and grandparents are Tanzanians and vice versa.

One area of cultural practice that they have maintained all along is the discriminative nature of their gender relations. There is widespread violence against women in this community, with the cruelest form being wife beating. Women were largely meant to be seen and not to be heard. Unfortunately, despite changes over time, wife beating is still practiced among the Kuria community. It used to be argued that, it is an accepted way of showing ones love and care for the wife. It was so deeply entrenched that the wives readily accepted and learnt to live with it. Those who did not get a battering for long even doubted the love of their husbands. The objective of this paper is to take a look at this practice by attempting to make a deep cultural explanation for its prevalence. I will strive to show whether changes over time in society due to education, rural urban migration, cross cultural interactions, and exposure to anti-violence literature has led to significant changes over time. We shall also offer intervention measures as solutions on the way forward for the Kuria and other communities with similar tendencies.