

A critical study on wife beating and determinants of domestic violence among Indian women

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Abstract

Problem: Men and women are equally responsible for running a social system and a family set up. In no context, the role of either should be taken as inferior or should be undermined. However, the attitude of men towards controlling behavior of women counterparts and use of power in case of objection by partner leads to create violence within households. **Approach:** This study examines the acceptance of wife-beating and prevalence of domestic violence in India from National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) conducted in 2015 to 2016. Women's place of residence, household wealth quintiles, educational levels, marital status, and husband/partner's employment status have shown significant association with women's attitude towards wife-beating. **Findings:** The current study brings out the various dimensions of domestic violence (like economic, demographic, physical as well as culture driven) typically against the women in India. The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that the very intrinsic factors behind an unwanted yet prominent phenomenon like domestic violence leading to wife beating has been explored and investigated empirically and illustratively with special focus on emerging economies like India. **Conclusion:** The findings and insights from this study can help the readers, researchers and policy makers alike to identify more critical areas for in depth understanding of the same and subsequently creating a healthy environment by changing attitudes towards wife-beating and violence against women from other similar situations and places.

Keywords: Domestic Abuse, Family Health, Family Violence, Gender & Family, Economic Issues

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Introduction

Men and women play equal role for development of any society and are considered as two parts of the same coin. In a traditional Indian domestic set up, men are considered to provide financial stability whereas the female counterpart needs to perform the household activities like cooking, taking care of the children and so

on (Killsback, 2019). People believe that a man has the right to assert power to correct the behavior of partner using physical force, emotional or verbal abuse (Morrison et al., 2021). In many developing countries including India, there is a general acceptance of wife beating and prevalence of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and dowry-related murder. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence against women as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviors by an intimate partner (WHO, 2012). Opposition to partner physical violence has been linked to gender empowerment reflecting the status of women in the society (Gautam and Jeong, 2019). On the other hand, the acceptance of wife beating by spouse is considered as proxy for her perception towards empowerment. The tolerant attitude towards wife beating indicates a lower sense of self-esteem and high risk of violence (Dasgupta, 2019). Therefore, it is hypothesized that women with tolerant attitude towards wife beating may face high risk of violence. Also an intolerance attitude of women towards wife beating leads less prevalence of violence within the households. There is high correlation existing between acceptance of wife beating and intimate partner violence of developing countries. This study examined the extent of acceptance of wife-beating and prevalence of domestic violence in India from nationally representative sample of 83397 in National Family Health Survey (NFHS), 2015-16. Different factors associated with domestic violence have been verified to examine the nature of violence in Indian context.

Review of Past Studies

Intimate partner violence (IPV) against women violates the basic human rights of women (Burton, et al. 2000). Different earlier studies highlight that such abuse has intergenerational (Erten and Keskin, 2020) and socioeconomic impacts as well as effects on fetal and infant mortality (Jejeebhoy, 1998) and on health burdens of affected women (Heise et al., 1994; World Health Organization, 1999). The Wife beating—one of the specific aspects of IPV—is frequently viewed as physical chastisement: the husband’s right to “correct” an erring wife (Wilchins, 2019). The prevalence of wife beating is believed to be widespread across Asia despite substantial inter country differences in economic development and in the female literacy and labor force participation rates. For example, estimates of ever experiencing IPV by women in Bangladesh varied from 35% to 42% (Bates et al., 2004). Almost 11% and 19% of ever-married women in India and Bangladesh, respectively, in South Asia reported wife beating in the past 12 months (Esiet et al., 2021). In Indian context, due to the rich diversity of this region in terms of socio-economic as well as cultural aspects, the IPV can have a greater degree of heterogeneity (Mahapatro et al., 2012). For instance, marriages at an early age, women can have higher chances of experiencing IPV, which may persist throughout her life cycle (Aziziet. al, 2021). Disparities between husband and wife in age, education, occupation, income, and socioeconomic status are significantly associated with IPV (Ackerson et al., 2008; Dalal & Lindqvist, 2012; Fulu, et. al, 2013; Kabeer, 2005). Some of these factors work as protective buffers against spousal physical violence; women who are more empowered educationally, economically, and socially are most protected (Jeyaseelan et al., 2007). In the NFHS-3 report, it is found that more than a third (35 percent) of women age 15-49 has experienced physical violence or sexual violence in India. Similarly, more than half of women in India (54 percent) believe that it is justifiable for a husband to beat his wife. Women are most likely to say wife-beating is justified if the woman shows disrespect for her in-laws (41 percent) followed by if she neglects the house or children (35 percent) (NFHS-3, 2006). It is also observed that wife beating left unreported due to the family status as well as high education level of wives (Ahmad et al., 2021).

All the previous studies analyzed the factors associated with prevalence of domestic violence and ignored about the relationship between acceptance of wife beating and domestic violence. More empirical evidence is required on the extent of acceptance of wife beating attitudes and domestic violence in Asia. This article explores the picture of acceptance of wife beating and prevalence of domestic violence in India. We argue that

a mother's attitude toward wife beating is an indication of her perception of her own agency and is therefore linked to the well-being outcomes of other members of the household within a complex web of power relationships. Using data from NFHS-4, we seek to empirically understand whether the domestic violence in India is closely associated with acceptance of wife beating and jealousy of husband towards her.

Objectives

Keeping the above issues and challenges as due considerations, the study examined the following objectives.

- The relationship between acceptance of wife beating and prevalence of domestic violence against women.
- Analyzing the determinants of experience in domestic violence of women in India.
- To investigate the prevalence of domestic violence with respect to different states in India.

Methodology

The study used data from the latest round of National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) conducted in 2019 to 2021. The NFHS is India's Demographic Health Survey (DHS), a periodic cross-sectional survey and includes a nationally representative sample of 6,99,686 women of reproductive age (15-49 years) using multistage stratified sampling. The study design, sampling strategy, and other details of the NFHS can be found in the national report (IIPS & ICF International, 2017). NFHS-4 selected 83,397 women to collect data on domestic violence, and 79,729 women completed the module in the survey data schedule. From each household, only one woman was selected to complete the domestic violence module, and sample weights, specific to the estimation of domestic violence, were calculated to adjust for the selection and to ensure that the domestic violence subsample was nationally representative. The participation of decision making by women has collected from 86811 respondents and 120876 respondents opined about acceptance of wife beating. We hypothesize that the experience of violence from the husband is an outcome of interactions between individual characteristics and influenced by socio-economic factors of household.

Dependent Variables

In the NFHS-4, every woman aged 15-49 who was interviewed for the domestic violence module reported her experience of seven types of physical violence, three types of emotional violence, and three types of sexual violence. Binary variables (1 and 0) were used for coding purpose. For example, if a woman reported that she experienced any of the seven types of physical violence from her husband in the last 12 months, we coded it as '1', and '0' is coded in case her non-experience of the same. Emotional and sexual violence related experience was also experimented. Another binary variable was created to record whether a woman experienced any of the three forms of violence, i.e. physical, emotional, or sexual—from her husband, and coded similarly, as mentioned above. The major dependent variables for this analysis are the experience of different forms of violence: physical, emotional, and sexual violence were scored as 1 (any experience of violence ever) and 0 (no experience of violence ever) from husband to the ever-married women aged 15 to 49 years in the last 12 months. Logistic regression models were calculated where women's experience of physical violence was the dependent variable in models.

Outcome variable

Seven types of physical violence were considered, e.g. 1) slap or twist, 2) punch or hit, 3) push, shake or throw, 4) kick or drag, 5) strangle or burn, 6) threaten and 7) attack. Violence related to sex were considered as the

forced and undesired sexual acts. For any of these experience, if exposed, was coded as '1' and the absence of experience was coded as '0'.

Experience of violence

= $\begin{cases} 0, & \text{if women has no experience in any violence} \\ 1, & \text{if woman reported that she experienced any physical, emotional or sexual violence in last 12 months,} \end{cases}$

The logistic regression model is given by

$$\text{Logit}(P) = \log\left(\frac{P_i}{1-P_i}\right) = \sum_{i=0}^n \beta_i X_i$$

Where

$$P_i = P(Y_i = 1) = \frac{\exp(\sum_i \beta_i X_i)}{1 + \exp(\sum_i \beta_i X_i)}$$

Probability that the i^{th} women reported any physical, emotional or sexual violence from husband

Y_i = Experience of violence in last 12 month

$Y_i = 1$ if women reported any violence

X_i = i^{th} predictor variable; and β_i = i^{th} Parameter associated with X_i

Explanatory Variables

In concordance with the ecological framework of spousal violence described before, the analyses included several variables (i.e. individual characteristics and demographic characteristics) and were considered as explanatory variables. Demographic and socioeconomic variables included were: i) women's age ii) women's education and iii) partner's education iv) women's occupation v) own bank account vi) place of residence vii) caste viii) religion ix) age gap between husband -wife x) number of children.

Results and Discussion

Women's Acceptance of Wife beating

A fundamental element of empowerment is the rejection of the ascription of seemingly immutable and essentially unequal rights and privileges based on the sex of an individual. One such 'right' often negatively ascribed to men, is the right of husbands to regulate and control 'their' women's behavior, and if that necessitates the use of force, then. Women who justify let it be beating of wives by husbands are less empowered than women who think otherwise (Kishor and Gupta, 2004). In order to assess the attitudes related to acceptance of normative gender roles, NFHS-4 asked women (15-49 years) about their opinion regarding whether a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife on account of five situations: if she goes out without telling him, if she neglects the house or children, if she argues with him. Women who agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for any of the specified reasons are less empowered than those who protest or reject beating of wife. Table 1 shows percentage of women who agree with the specific justification for wife beating, as well as percentage of women who agree with at least one of the justifications.

Table 1: Women’s support on wife beating in percent age		India
Items	Attitude of women who agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife if:	N=120876
1	She Neglects the house or children	30
2	She Argues with husband	27
3	She goes out Without telling him	24
4	She doesn’t cook properly	18
5	She refuses to have sexual intercourse with him	13
6	Agree with at least one specified reason of husband Beating	11

Source: analyzed by authors

The proportions of women agreeing to wife beating on account of varied reasons are brought out for India. For example, one third (30%) of women in India has agreed to the statement that the husband has the right to beat if she neglect children or house, followed by 27 percent who support on wife beating if she argue with husband. One in every four women agreed on wife beating if she goes outside without telling to him (24 percent), doesn’t cook food properly (18%) and refusal of sex with husband (13%) in India. In this sequel, one in every 10 women (11%) support to beating at least one of the specified reasons by husbands. The acceptance of beating of wife does not vary much with their age, number of children and household structure but declines sharply with rise in their education and wealth quintile. Women’s acceptance of beating of wife is lower in urban than in rural areas. It is also low among women who were not employed during the last 12 months as compared to employed, and among never married women as compared to married women (NFHS, 2015).

Degree of Martial Control by Husband

The marital control activities exercised by husbands on different activities of wife makes them disempowered at household levels and obstruct her personnel development. Accordingly, NFHS-4 survey sought information on six controlling behaviors that may be manifested by husbands, by asking each ever-married respondent in the study area. Because the concentration of behavior is more significant than the display of any single behavior, the proportion of women whose husbands display six types of the specified behaviors is also discussed in Table 2.

Table 2: Degree of Martial Control in Percentage		India
Husband/Partner of respondent is:		N=65652
Jealous if Respondent talks with other men		23
Doesn’t trust respondent with money		23
Insist on knowing where respondent		20
Doesn’t permit respondent to meet female friends		19
Limit to respondents contact with family		14
Accuses Respondent for unfaithfulness		8
Agree with at least one reason		18

Source: analyzed by authors

As shown 23 percent of ever-married women report that their husband is jealous or angry if they talk to other men and he does not trust them with any money, 20 percent report that he insists on knowing where they are at all times, 19 percent report that he does not permit them to meet their female friends, 14 percent report that he tries to limit their contact with their families, and 8 percent report that he frequently accuses them of being unfaithful. Overall, 18 percent of ever-married women report that their husband displays three or more of the specified behaviors and 50 percent report that he displays none of them.

Prevalence of Domestic Violence in India

Even after enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, over the last 17 years, the rate of decline of prevalence of spousal violence against women has remained low in India. It persists globally with variations in magnitude and affecting the lives of millions of women, with serious consequences for health and well-being. In NFHS-4, information was obtained from never-married women on their experience of violence committed by anyone and from ever-married women on their experience of violence committed by their current and former husbands and by others. More specifically, violence committed by the current husband for currently married women and by the most recent husband for formerly married women was measured by asking all ever-married women if their husband ever did the following to them. Table 3 analyses the prevalence of domestic violence in form of different action performed by husband.

Table 3: Form of Violence by Husband in Percentage	India
Husband/Partner has	N=66103
Slapped her	25
Pushed her, shook her, or threw something at her	12
Twisted her arm or pulled her hair	11
Punched her with his fist or with something that could hurt her	8
Kicked her, dragged her, or beat her up	8
Tried to choke her or burn her on purpose	2
Threatened her or attacked her with a knife, gun, or any other weapon	1
Physically forced her to have sexual intercourse with him even when she did not want to	4
Forced her to perform any sexual acts she did not want to	3
Hurt with at least one above reason	12

Source: analyzed by authors

One in every four women (25 percent) agreed on violence in form of slapped by husband followed by 12 percent pushed her, shook her, or threw something at her. Almost one per ten respondents (11%) agreed on husband twisted her arm or pulled her hair during the domestic conflict. Very few proportions (4 percent) opined the sexual violence by partner in the households. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India tracks crime against women and publishes annual crime rates on reported cases of cruelty against women by the husband and his relatives, which significantly increased from 8% in 2010 to 18% in 2016 per 100,000 female populations (NCRB, 2010, 2016). Table 4 provides information about different types of violence experienced by respondent from husband in percentage. For example, nearly one in every four (28%) have experience in less severe violence in India. Very few proportions of women have experience in emotional

violence (13%), followed by severe violence (8%) and sexual violence (7%). Overall, one third of total women (32%) in India have agreed on experience of any one type (i.e. physical, emotional and sexual) violence.

There is positive correlation exists between the acceptance of wife beating by respondent and jealousy of husband towards them. For example, we assume that those respondents who supports justification of wife beating is more likely experience of jealousy by husband on different occasion. It is also found that two in every five (41 percent) women who supports wife beating also face jealousy of husband on different occasion (i.e. trust money, does not permit them to meet their female friends, insists on knowing where they are at all times, limit their contact with their families, frequently accuses them of being unfaithful etc.). Similarly, one in every three (34 percent) of respondent whose husband is jealous on different marital control activities also experience in any one type of domestic violence (i.e. physical, emotional and sexual) in India.

Table 4: Type of Violence by husband in Percentage	India
Percentage of women who have experienced violence	N=66103
Less Severe Violence	28
Emotional Violence	13
Severe Violence	8
Sexual Violence	7
Any One type of Violence	32
Percentage of respondent who support of wife beat and have experience in jealous by Husband	41 (37513)
Percentage of respondent whose husband is jealous and have experience in any type of domestic Violence	34 (42121)

Source: analyzed by authors

Determinants of Domestic Violence

Table 5 presents the results of logistic regression conducted to understand the relationship pattern of spousal violence with all individual- and household-level characteristics. Dependent variable is '1' if Respondent has experience of any type (i.e. physical, emotional or sexual violence), otherwise '0'. The head of the house influenced the prevalence of domestic violence at household level. For example, female headed households are less likely, i.e. 0.85 times in odds has experience in domestic violence as compared to male headed house. In India, women being the head of the house might have more right to control the husband which reflects on the lower rate of an experience of domestic violence. An increase in the age of respondent raises their confidence, which leads to less experience of domestic violence in India. The odds ratio indicates that respondents within 30-49 years are 0.93 times less likely agreed on any type of domestic violence as against reference category (16-29 years). The increases in age might raise the power of women reflected with less prevalence in violence. Result of logit analysis shows that the respondents completed primary and secondary education were less experience of violence (OR=.93 times and OR=.72 times). An increase in number of children shows rise in domestic violence within households. The respondent with one child is 1.32 times in odds more likely face violence as against their counterparts (no child). The prevalence of violence increases in number of children as respondents with two children is more likely risk towards same (OR=1.70). The Non-Hindu people are less likely has experience in violence as against Hindu. Similarly, household belongs in general category are 0.72

times less in odds have experience in violence as compared to SCs and STs. Similarly, rural households are at an advantageous position in terms of domestic violence in the households. Holding other factors constant, domestic violence from the rural areas was about 0.91 less in odds in magnitude than those in the urban areas. The odds ratio indicates that the presence of bank account in the name of respondent helps in less experience of domestic violence. The women owing a bank account in her name 0.94 times in odds less likely agreed on any type of violence as against their counterparts. The working women have more prevalence of violence in the households. For example, respondents employed for cash are 1.40 times more likely to have any type of violence as against reference category (i.e. unemployed). The women who oppose wife beating are 0.71 times less likely to be experience on any type of domestic violence as compared to reference category (women support wife beating).

Table 5: Factors influencing domestic violence in Odds ratio:
Respondent have experience of any type (i.e. physical, emotional or sexual violence)=1 Otherwise=0^A

Independent Variables ¹		Odds Ratio ²
Male headed house	R	
Female headed house		.855
Respondent Age in years (16-29)	R	
30-49		.931
Respondent education (Illiterate)	R	
Primary or more		.938
Secondary		.729
No child	R	
One child		1.32
Two Child		1.70
Caste of Households (Scheduled Castes - SCs/Scheduled Tribes - STs)	R	
Other Backward Classes - OBCs		1.03*
General		.721
Religion of Households (Hindu)	R	
Muslim and Others		.768
Place of Households (Urban)	R	
Rural		.911
Own Bank Account (No)	R	
Yes		.947
Respondent Working (No)	R	
Yes		1.40
Respondent support wife beating	R	
Oppose wife beating		.711
Education of Husband (Primary)	R	
Secondary		.843
Higher Secondary		.619
Age gap of husband (less than 2 years)	R	
3-5 Years		1.08
6-10 Years		1.02

^A Dependent variable, ^R -Reference category *>.05

Source: analyzed by authors

Result of logit analysis shows that the increase in education of husband leads to decline in prevalence of violence towards women. For example, respondent with 0.84 times less likely have any experience any violence, if husband completed secondary education as compared to reference category (i.e. primary). An increase in the age gap between husband and wife leads to more experience of violence. Husband and wife with age gap more than 3 to 5 years were more likely (OR= 1.08) times, $p < 0.05$) to have prevalence of domestic violence as against their counterparts (less than 02 years). The low age gap might help to increase in the understanding capacity of women with husband and have less experience in violence.

Limitation and Future Scope of Research

The major limitation was in terms of non-disclosure by women about the physical or sexual abuse because this is generally considered as an embarrassing private matter in India, especially in rural areas. However, use of large and diversified data base can overcome this limitation. Hence, this will be an important venue for future research. Another limitation of this study was related to the fact that it used five possible specific circumstances to capture women's attitude toward wife beating instead of using a single composite measure that represents all the five possible outcome variables. Of course, composite indicators have not always been so popular, and there was a time when considerable criticism surrounded their use. For instance, the five measures of the outcome variables used in this study to capture women's attitude toward wife beating are related to different kinds of dimensions that are particularly difficult to determine whether each dimensions should have the same weight or different weights and ultimately to capture with only a single indicator. Thus, it will be another important area of future research.

Conclusion

The study uses large population-based sample data with national coverage as well as multilevel analysis to demonstrate the association between female participation in household decision making and experience of violence. The study demonstrates results that are significant for policy makers aiming to reduce domestic violence in India. An increase in age and education of respondents, education of husband, access of bank, female headed house, and wealth status are less likely to influence the domestic violence. On the other, increases in number of children, age gap between husband and wife, women employed for cash are more likely leads to increase the prevalence of domestic violence in India. Policy makers should also consider the findings on age at first marriage, females' and their husbands' education, religion and socioeconomic status, including divisional differences at the time of formulating policies and programs. Further study is needed to identify the causal link between the justification of wife beating and domestic violence suggesting policy interventions.

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