

Extended Abstract

Spousal Violence in Indian Context: Acceptance and Conflict

Background: There has been increasing concern about violence against women in general and domestic violence in particular, in both developed and developing countries. Not only has domestic violence been acknowledged world wide as a violation of basic human rights, but an increasing amount of research highlights the health burdens, intergenerational effects, and demographic consequences of such violence. Domestic violence occurs in all socioeconomic and cultural population sub groups; and in many societies, including India. Women are socialized to accept, tolerate and even rationalize domestic violence and to remain silent about such experience. Violence of any kind has a detrimental impact on the economy of a country through increased disability, medical costs, and loss of labour hours; however, because women bear the brunt of domestic violence, they disproportionately bear the health and physiological burden as well. Victims of domestic violence are abused inside what should be the most secure environment – their own homes – and usually by the persons they trust most. Domestic violence was recognized as a criminal offence in India in 1983. The offence chargeable under section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code that relates to domestic violence is any act of cruelty by a husband (or his family) towards his wife. Therefore, India provides an apt environment to examine the prevalence of violence against women.

Objectives: To examine the regional differences in prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women, emotional violence by husbands, forms and frequency of physical or sexual violence, timing of onset of physical violence, physical consequence of spousal violence, violence initiated by women against husband, sources of help sought during violence, gender attitude towards violence, and the role of female autonomy factors in its prevalence rate and to suggest a much needed ambience for mitigating the problem.

Materials and Methods:

Data base or source: The primary data source of this study is “National Family Health Survey 3 (Nation Wide Survey)” conducted in 2005-2006 in India. This national wide survey has a population based representative sample of respondents from various states in India.

Measurement of domestic violence

NFHS III used a module of questions known to increase the validity of domestic violence data. In NFHS 3, domestic violence is defined to include violence by spouses as well as by other household members. Thus, information was obtained from ever-married

women on violence by husbands and by others, and from never married women on violence by anyone, including boyfriends.

It is known that spousal violence is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women. Hence, violence perpetrated by the husband is measured in more detail than violence by other perpetrators. Specifically, violence by husbands is measured by using a greatly shortened and modified Conflict Tactics Scale.

The questions were asked with reference to the current husband for some currently married and with reference to the most recent husband for women formerly but not currently married. Women could respond 'yes' or 'no' to each item. In each instance of a 'yes' response, women were asked about the frequency of the act in the 12 months preceding the survey. A 'yes' response to one or more of items given in the schedule constitutes evidence of physical violence, while a yes response to some other items specified in the schedule constitutes evidences of sexual violence. Note that widowed women, like other ever married women were asked the questions related to the ever experience of spousal; violence; however, unlike other ever married women, they were excluded from the questions on violence in the past 12 months. Asking widows questions about recent experience of violence was thought to be unnecessary, since most current widows would not have had a living husband for some or all of the 12 month period preceding the survey.

In addition to the questions asked only of ever married women, all women, regardless of marital status, were asked about physical violence from persons other than thy current or the most recent husband with the question. Finally, ever married women were asked whether they had ever hit, slapped, kicked, or done anything else to physically hurt their husband at any time when he was not already beating or physically hurting them. This information allows an estimate of violence and their relationship initiated by women against their husbands. Although the use of CTS-type approach in the measurement of domestic violence is generally considered to be optimal, the possibility of underreporting of violence, particularly of sexual violence, cannot be entirely ruled out in any survey. Special training was given to the interviewers for implementing the domestic violence module:

SPSS was used in the processing of data and applying statistical techniques. Chi-square and statistical techniques like logit regression, principle component analysis, factor analysis , path analysis, etc. have been used to test the results statistically.

Results and Discussion: Data show that 34 percent of all women age 15-49 experienced physical violence at any time since age 15. 19 percent of all women age 15-49 experienced at any time since the last 12 months preceding the survey. It is observed that once in five reported having experienced physical violence very often and the remainder said it has happened sometimes during reference period. The percentage physically ill-treated is comparatively high in the late reproductive ages (30-45), among Muslim women, schedule caste and schedule tribe women, women in nuclear families, widowed/divorced, illiterates and those with less years of schooling, employed women and women in low wealth index category. A linkage between the report of physical violence against women and women's background variables has been clearly established. Logistic regression analysis has confirmed this observation statistically. The persons committing physical violence was mostly current husbands (85.3 percent), followed by step mother, former husband, sister/brother, father or step father.

Life time sexual violence:

Sexual violence here includes being forced to have sexual intercourse or perform any other sexual acts against one's own will. NFHS 3 included two sets of questions on sexual violence. The first set asked only ever married women about sexual violence by the current husband if currently married and the most recent husband if currently divorced or separated or widowed. The second asked all women, regardless of marital status, whether they had ever, as a child or as an adult, experienced sexual violence.

9 percent of all women age 15-49 report having experienced sexual violence at sometimes during their life time. Compared with other women in sub groups, it is divorced, separated, or deserted women have the highest prevalence of sexual violence (25 percent). The prevalence rate is relatively high in the late reproductive age groups, rural areas, Muslim religion, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe, divorced, illiterates and women with less years of schooling, employed women, category of low wealth index (verify this statement). Though there are empirical supports to establish the relationship between the report of sexual violence and socio-economic background of women, the linkage is not very stronger as observed in the case physical mistreatment experienced by women. In some cases, even a considerable proportion of women in high social and economic categories reported having sexually assaulted by men. The persons performing sexual violence are current husband and former husband. Data also show that majority women reported having experienced sexual violence for the first time at the ages 15-24. Therefore, many women were forced by their husbands to have sexual act regardless of their wives willingness.

Physical or Sexual Violence

Those who reported having experienced physical violence only constitute 27 percent and those reported sexual violence only account for 2 percent – very less compared to physical violence. Women reported experience of both physical and sexual violence

constitute 7 percent of the total. The percentage with experience of either physical or sexual violence was 35. This was 40 percent for ever married women and 17 percent for never married women. There are clear evidences to prove regional variations with regard to physical or sexual violence against women. India is a union of states and Union It is interesting to observe that even women in better socio-economic ladder have sexual violence experience and the husbands in the higher socio-economic category committed such violence. Territories. The prevalence of physical or sexual violence is very high in Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Tripura and low in Himachal Pradesh. These are the central or eastern states in India which are different from southern states in terms of socio-cultural, economic and demographic conditions of the population.

Marital Control

Certain male behaviours meant to keep tight control over women, particularly wives, have been identified in the literature as risk factors for violence. Socio-economic factors of wives and also husbands are found to have influence on the incidence of violence against women. The result of logit regression has strongly established this linkage. The most common behaviour of all the behaviours as reasons for violence is jealousy or anger if the wife talks to other men. Other important reasons include (a) wife is not being trusted with money and (2) wife not being allowed to see female friends.

Spousal violence

It is known that spousal violence is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women. Hence, violence perpetrated by the husband is measured in more detail than violence by other perpetrators. This study attempts to analyse (a) Physical, Sexual and emotional spousal violence, Forms and frequency, timing of onset of spousal violence, physical consequences of spousal violence, source of help sought during violence, and socio-economic and demographic factors' influence on above said dimensions with reference to regional variations. It is to note that socio-economic factors of either wives or husbands are not found to have a strong influence on emotional violence by husband against wives. This is mostly contextual type which stands distinctly compared to other types of domestic violence.

Many attempts have been made to focus on spousal violence as violence against women. The study brings about another interesting dimension of violence initiated by women against husbands. About 2 percents of husbands experienced violence initiated by women. This prevalence is comparative high in North Indian States and the population in the low socio-economic strata and in the group of women retaliating what they received from their husbands.

Surprisingly, though domestic violence is a world-wide concern, a considerable proportion of women tolerated or rationalized even violence against women. This might be culturally prescribed low status of women in the society. Women first must have attitude change to correct this social bias. An attempt has also been made to study the

autonomy in terms of decision making role and the influence of autonomy factors in variations relating to domestic violence against women.

Conclusion and policy suggestion: The findings drawn from the study clearly indicate that the prevalence of domestic violence especially against women is a note worthy phenomena in India. The proportion of physical violence is more considerable compared the proportion of sexual violence. The proportion of emotional violence by husband is distinct phenomena. Socio-economic and demographic background of the husband and wives are found to have exercised an influence over an incidence of valance. Of course, empowering women in terms certain social and economic indicators is supposed to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence. But the emotional violence is a contextual phenomenon and socio-economic factors are less likely to have influence on it. Considering culturally prescribed norms for women, even women themselves rationalize the incidence of violence against women. In this case, attitude change could be a powerful corrective measure. In conclusion, there should a strong strive on a new methodology for women empowerment at least in terms of education and economic participation and participation in decision making. Considering the time for onset of violence, either husband or wife has to be tactful to avoid the environment leading to domestic violence. Conflict in the family is the most common occurrence in the wake a new socio-economic order in any society. Both husband and wife have to negotiate themselves to avoid the chance for occurring family conflict. Cultural based community orientation to the spouses particularly in rural areas will the most effective measure to correct this social anomaly.