

## Exploring Domestic Violence among Women in India: Prevalence, Correlates, and Implications

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### ABSTRACT

This article assesses the frequency of domestic violence in India and investigates the demographic and socioeconomic condition of domestic abuse victims. The Indian National Family Health Survey 3, a cross-sectional survey of ever-married women of reproductive age, was employed in the study. Respondents' lifetime experiences with violence were as follows: emotional violence (14%), less severe physical violence (31%), severe physical violence (10%), and sexual violence (8%). Domestic abuse was particularly common among women of scheduled castes and Muslims. Women's lower socioeconomic position, employment status, and their husband's controlling conduct appeared as important predictors of domestic violence in India. Domestic violence may be avoided if the indigenous coercive institutions of religion, caste, and the traditional male hierarchy in society were abolished.

**Keywords:** *Controlling Behavior, India, Physical Violence, Representative Sample, Sexual Abuse, Verbal Abuse*

Violence against women is increasingly recognised as a severe worldwide public health and human rights issue with several health, familial, social, and economic consequences. Every day, violence against women occurs in all regions of the world, regardless of age, religion, society, ethnicity, or geographic borders. Regardless of its manifestations and forms, the majority of domestic violence against women occurs within the family and in close relationships where the women are meant to be protected. Domestic abuse, or violence against women by their husbands or other intimate partners, is the most prevalent and widespread kind of violence against women. Numerous studies have been undertaken in developed nations to better understand the scope and nature of the problem of violence against women.

According to the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women, the prevalence of lifetime physical and sexual assault by intimate partners ranges from 15% (Japan) to 71% (Ethiopia). The lifetime frequency of physical domestic abuse among ever-married women in South America ranged from 40% to 52%, and from 17% to 48% in Africa. Unfortunately, there are few national-level reports from emerging nations on the prevalence of domestic violence. Numerous experts have pushed for nationwide representative studies to help researchers and policymakers better analyse the

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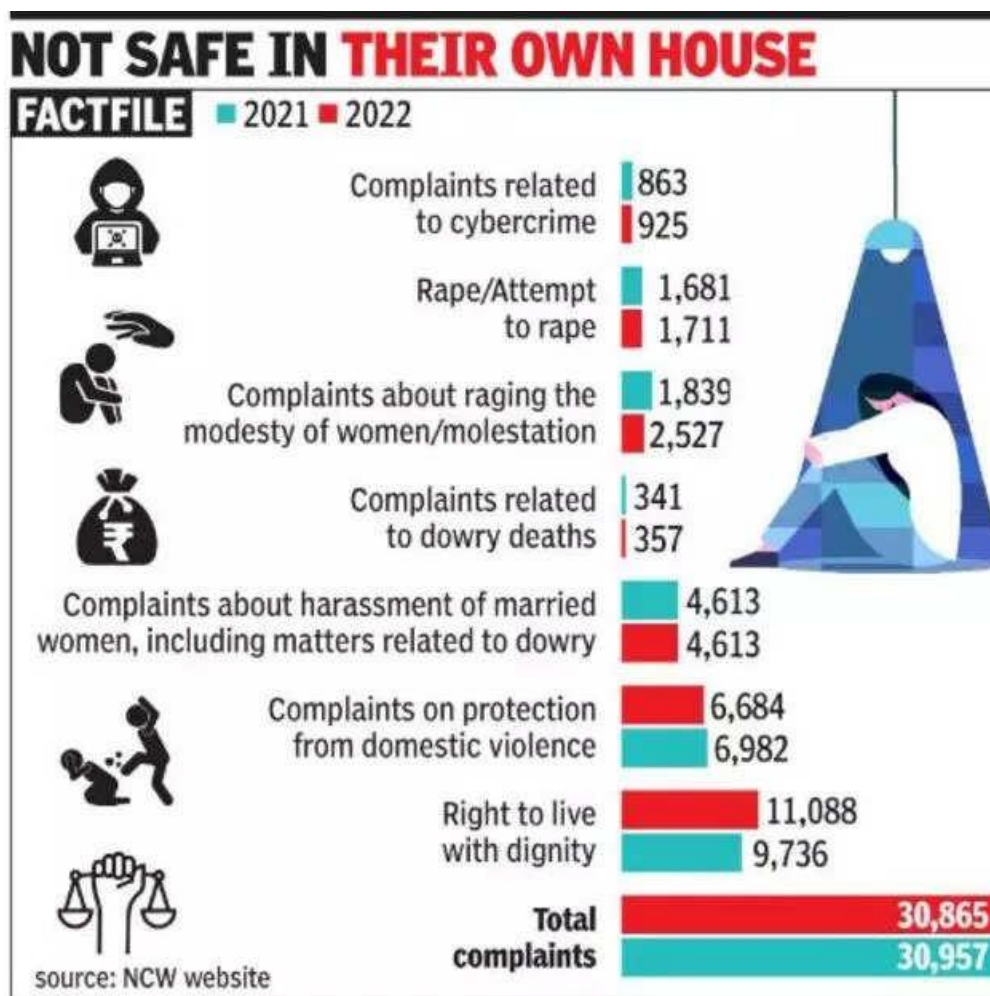
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issue. This study evaluates the prevalence of domestic violence in India at the national level. Prevalence rates were discovered to be substantially related to socioeconomic characteristics rather than other methodological elements such as response rate or sample methodologies. Coupled with socioeconomic status, controlling conduct by a husband has been recognised as a risk factor for violence against women.



**Headline: Over 6,900 domestic violence complaints filed by women in 2022**

Because the repercussions of domestic violence are generally unknown in these nations, emerging countries require considerably more context-dependent research on domestic violence against women. As a result, it is necessary to investigate the socioeconomic background of female victims of domestic abuse. The current study assesses the nationwide prevalence rate of violence against women and investigates the socioeconomic features of female violence victims in India. Family violence has been established as a risk factor for wife abuse and is thus taken into account in the current study. Small research (6902 males) in northern India found that a husband's dominating conduct towards his wife is substantially related with wife abuse. Using national representative samples from Gujarat state in India, the current study additionally investigates women's exposure to domestic violence in connection to their husband's controlling behaviour.

### **Questionnaire**

The NFHS-3 questionnaires collect detailed information on women's backgrounds, reproductive histories, use of family planning methods, fertility preferences, antenatal and delivery care, child care and nutrition, child mortality, adult mortality, sexually transmitted disease awareness and precautions, marriage and sexual behaviour, empowerment and social indicators, and domestic violence. The domestic violence module and socioeconomic characteristics were the key foci of this work.

### **Dependent Variables**

Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, was defined as the woman being exposed to one or several of the following experiences:

#### **Emotional abuse**

(1) Her husband has ever humiliated her; (2) threatened her with danger; or (3) insulted or made her feel awful.

#### **Physical violence that is less extreme**

(1) shoved, shook, or thrown anything at her; (2) slapped her; (3) hit her with his fist or something dangerous; and (4) kicked or pulled her.

#### **Extreme violence**

(1) Has her spouse ever tried to strangle or burn her, and (2) has she ever been threatened or attacked with a knife, gun, or other weapon?

Sexual violence occurs when a spouse physically forces sex when it is not desired and (2) forces other sexual behaviours when it is not desired.

Hence, the current study's questions addressed emotional abuse, less severe physical violence, severe physical violence, and sexual abuse.

### **VARIABLES THAT ARE NOT RELIANT ON ONE ANOTHER**

The demographic parameters were age, urban/rural residence, educational level, religion, and caste. Certain ethnic groups are socially and economically disadvantaged and live in poverty. A wealth index for assessing economic situation, present job status, sex of head of family, history of family violence (among parents), and spouse dwelling with respondent were among the socioeconomic variables (husband lives with the respondent or lives elsewhere). Control of women by husbands is a prominent social norm in the Asian subcontinent. The current study includes the following six characteristics to analyse the association between a husband's controlling conduct and violence against his wife: If wife (respondent of the study) talks to other men, husband becomes jealous, husband accuses wife of unfaithfulness, husband does not allow his wife to meet her girl friends, husband tries to limit wife's contact with her family, husband insists on knowing where wife is, and husband does not trust his wife with monetary affairs. The following four questions were asked to assess violence-related injuries: ever had bruises; ever had injury, sprain, or dislocations; ever had wounds, broken bones, broken teeth, or other significant injuries; and ever had severe burns due of husband's aggressive behaviour.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The  $\chi^2$  test was used to investigate variations in exposure to domestic abuse based on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. To investigate the independent impact of these factors in predicting exposure to domestic violence, logistic regression was conducted with all variables included in the model. The size and direction of the link were described as

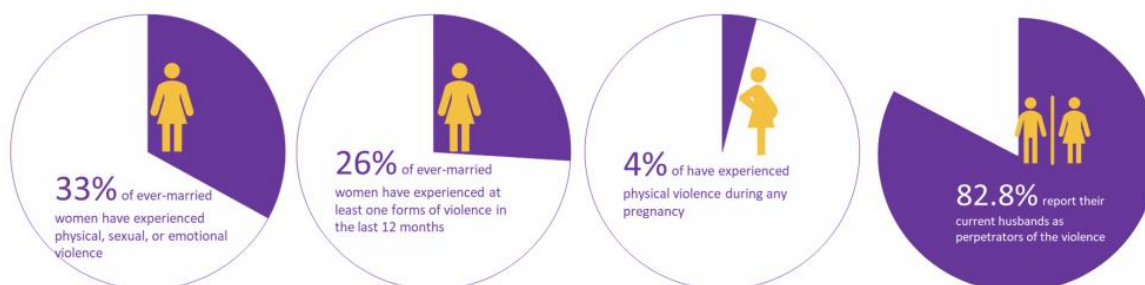
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adjusted odds ratios (ORs), and the degree of significance was stated as P values. The model has been divided into three different tables for presenting purposes. For a large number of observations, statistical significance was assumed at P.01 level.

### RESULTS

Emotional violence was 14%, less severe physical violence was 31%, severe physical violence was 10%, and sexual violence was 8%. The severity of injuries caused by violence.

Figure 1: Prevalence of VAW in India (NFHS 4)



### Demographics

As age, the proportion of women experiencing emotional and physical abuse rose. Conversely, there was an inverse trend in sexual violence, with younger women being sexually abused at a higher rate than their older counterparts. According to the adjusted odds ratios, older women were less likely to be victims of emotional and sexual assault than their adolescent counterparts. Also, the chance of being a victim of violence (both emotional and physical) dropped as a woman's education level increased. Violence was more prevalent among rural women than among metropolitan women. When the odds ratios were corrected for other factors, however, urban living became a risk factor. For all sorts of violence, Muslim women had the greatest proportion. According to the adjusted odds ratios, Muslims were more likely than Hindu women to be victims of all sorts of violence, while Christians were less likely to be victims of less severe physical violence and sexual abuse. Women from the scheduled castes were disproportionately vulnerable to all forms of violence. Women from advanced castes were less likely to be victims of violence than women from scheduled castes, as evidenced by the adjusted ORs.

### Socioeconomic Indicators

In India, women with better socioeconomic standing were less likely to be victims of domestic abuse. According to the adjusted odds ratio (OR), impoverished women are 2 to 3 times more likely than wealthier women to be victims of violence. Working women were subjected to domestic abuse at a higher rate than their nonworking counterparts. According to adjusted odds ratios, nonworking women were less likely to be abused than their working counterparts. Women in families with a female head of household were proportionately more vulnerable to domestic violence than their counterparts in households with a male head of family. Domestic violence exposure was not significantly different for women whose spouse lived with them compared to those whose husband resided elsewhere. Women with a history of familial violence were 2 to 3 times more likely to be victimised than those without such a history, according to adjusted odds ratios.

### Husband's Controlling Behavior

Women whose husbands exhibited greater controlling conduct (jealousy, accusing, allowing, restricting, demanding, and not trusting) were 2 to 5 times more likely to experience domestic

violence than women whose husbands exhibited no such controlling behaviour. The adjusted odds ratios also showed that the husband's controlling conduct was more likely to be very abusive. With the exception of monetary trust, the husband's other four controlling behaviours emerged as substantial predictors of sexual abuse.

### **DISCUSSION**

The latest study, which included national data from India's 29 constituent states, found a prevalence of 14% of emotional violence, 31% of less severe physical violence, 10% of severe physical violence, and 8% of sexual violence, as well as several major socioeconomic risk variables. In India, a husband's dominating style has emerged as a significant risk factor for domestic violence against women. Many previous research found a consistent pattern in demographic characteristics such as age, residency, and education. Muslim women fared worse than other sorts of victims of domestic abuse. The Sachar Committee Report, which emphasised the social, economic, and educational deprivation of India's Muslim population and revealed that their position is far lower than that of scheduled castes and tribes when compared to the general average, may provide a plausible reason. Women from reserved castes were the most vulnerable to domestic abuse. In the Indian context, structural disparities of gender, caste, and class may explain this better. They are at the bottom of the caste system and are always under enormous economic stress, which may lead to marital problems and, as a result, domestic violence. Domestic violence was associated with low socioeconomic position. This outcome was consistent with the findings of numerous earlier investigations. Women's employment position has also emerged as a risk factor for domestic violence in India. One possible explanation is the spouses' superiority complex. Previously, the husband was the breadwinner of the family, while the women exclusively worked in the household, according to Indian cultural conventions. Women increasingly work for economic gain, which may contradict the husband's long-nurtured social ideas and the notion of a husband's empowerment in the household, inciting domestic violence against women. Women's empowerment is frequently demonstrated by a combination of education, employment level, and economic independence. As a result, when poor women want empowerment, it clashes with their husband's superiority complex, resulting in domestic violence against women. Therefore, an in-depth investigation on women's economic empowerment and exposure to domestic abuse is necessary in this setting. Domestic violence is handed down from generation to generation, and a history of familial violence is a risk factor for domestic violence. Using nationally representative samples, the latest study supplied more evidence from India. As a result, policymakers should focus more on preventing domestic violence against women in order to safeguard future generations. Controlling conduct by a spouse over his wife has emerged as a key risk factor for violence. This might be explained using the same argument that was used to explain women's employment status. Women in India rely on males for economical support. She is dependent on her father as a girl, her husband as a woman, and her sons or other male relatives as a widow. In a patriarchal culture like this, men may believe that as the breadwinner, they should exert authority over their wife through the conventional gender hierarchy. As a result, controlling conduct by spouses and economic empowerment by women have emerged as important predictors of domestic violence in India. In summary, the findings are explained by feminist theory, which holds that husbands retain authority over their wives. Unlike in affluent nations, lifelong exposure to verbal abuse in India is said to be modest when compared to physical and sexual assault. One possible explanation is that social and cultural acceptability of verbal abuse in the Indian setting lowers the proportion reported. What is considered verbal abuse in Western nations may be a common occurrence in India, and as a result, verbal abuse may go unreported.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of this paper have policy implications for domestic violence prevention in India and other countries with similar socioeconomic factors and cultural norms. Given that society in India is resistant to eliminating domestic violence and that society does not regard domestic violence as a major public health problem, policymakers may now use the present study's countrywide prevalence rate for prevention. According to the intensity of physical abuse, nearly two-thirds of victims had bruises, 18% had sprains and dislocations, 13% had broken limbs, and 4% had burns. These findings should serve as a wake-up call to policymakers that victims of domestic abuse are suffering greatly as a result of physical assault. Early detection through screening is useful in avoiding domestic violence, according to evidence from other developing nations. As a result, Indian policymakers should prepare for early diagnosis and screening at health care institutions and women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs). There are significant disparities in the experiences of violence between educated and illiterate women. As a result, these findings reinforce the need for women to pursue higher education. Girls' education has received enough public health attention. This has frequently concentrated on the provision of elementary school education. According to the present study, greater levels of education are becoming increasingly protective against domestic abuse against women. Policymakers should recognise that in order to prevent violence against women, they must not only educate women, but also encourage female higher education programmes. Because women of certain classes and faiths are at danger, structural reforms in society are also required for successful teaching efforts against domestic violence. Research from South Africa indicates that microfinance-based empowerment initiatives for women help to avoid domestic violence. Instead of focusing on improving individual working conditions, policymakers should promote cooperative working facilities based on a microfinance system where women may benefit from cooperative ways to addressing economic difficulties as well as create and share understanding of domestic abuse.

## **CONCLUSION**

Domestic violence may be prevented by eliminating caste inequities and male supremacy in society. Policymakers must pay special attention to Muslim women. Girls' higher education, rather than literacy or basic education, should be prioritised.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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