

Comparative Study

A Comparative Study on Verbal Abuse of Women by in-Laws in Urban Indian Households

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ABSTRACT

Women in India have long been victims of verbal abuse, although very few cases have been reported. Only a small percentage of women are aware of the meaning and nature of verbal abuse. As a result, the present study aims to determine the prevalence and risk factors of verbal abuse of women by in-laws in urban Indian households. The sample included 52 married women from the joint (n = 30) and nuclear (n = 22) homes. Purposive sampling was used to choose participants. Each participant was subjected to a semi-structured interview. The following themes (risk factors) were identified using thematic analysis: communication gap, husband's position in the family, generation gap, lack of empathy, and loss of privacy and understanding. It was also discovered that the husband's support and the assertiveness of the daughter-in-law can operate as protective factors that safeguard women from verbal abuse in Indian households.

Keywords: *Verbal Abuse, Daughter-In-Law, In-Laws, Joint Family, Nuclear Family, Risk Factors, Indian Households*

According to the APA, very critical, threatening, or offensive remarks spoken or written with the intent to denigrate, belittle, or terrify the target are considered verbal abuse. Sometimes, emotional abuse is used to describe verbal abuse. Verbal abuse is often done deliberately to make the recipient feel embarrassed, frightened, or insulted, or to cause the recipient psychological distress and harm. The National Centre on Elder Abuse (NCEA), however, asserts that emotional abuse is not just confined to a person's communication style. Verbal abuse may be extremely destructive, especially when it occurs in the early stages of development, according to Melissa Barsotti, a licensed clinical social worker from Carlsbad, California. She claims that verbal abuse is intended to degrade, humiliate, and hurt someone psychologically. Derogatory language, the use of swear words or threats, and the use of a harsh tone or voice are common manifestations of verbal abuse.

Verbal abuse takes place when one person uses any form of derogatory or demeaning language and makes comments to cause harm to another person. Verbal abuse can turn into physical abuse and often it is a result of concealed aggression. Verbal abuse can take many forms, and it is highly manipulative. Many times, victims of verbal abuse are unaware of

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how they are falling prey to this kind of abuse. However, it is not always covert. Sometimes people want to openly show their disliking towards a person, or when they wish to control another person, they make negative or insulting remarks about them. Since people have very little to no knowledge of verbal abuse, their lack of awareness makes the perpetrators of such abuse not guilty, and the victims are then found guilty of the abuser's behavior. Verbal abuse can be manifested by yelling, insulting, intimidating, threatening, demeaning, shaming, giving the silent treatment, or name-calling other people. Since verbal abuse is so confusing and nuanced, it can be difficult to recognize it and take necessary action. If it is not specified properly, the victim may believe she is dreaming of it or in the worst cases that she is responsible for it (Bosch & Kathy, 2004).

When someone wants to exercise authority or influence over the recipients, verbal abuse occurs. It is a kind of interpersonal violence. Verbal abuse uses derogatory and demeaning language, words, negative comments, and insulting remarks which are made by a person to humiliate, threaten, control, or hurt the other person and this causes distress, anger, suffering, and misery for the victim. It can be openly communicated by anger outbursts or it can be subtle and communicated in a way that can leave the recipient of the abuse in a confused state. Always the purpose of verbal abuse is to harm and upset the target.

The use of abusive language, its frequency, and its variety increase with time, and it often escalates into physical abuse. Gradually, victims begin to blame and hold themselves guilty for such abuse. Those who were manipulated or gas lighted, feel guilty about not being able to keep up with the other person and the relationship, and those who can identify the abuse might feel that it is too late to stand up for themselves or to take the necessary steps. Perpetrators of verbal abuse become successful at absolutely destroying the victim's self-respect and confidence. These offenders view the victims as their opponents and accuse them of mistakes that were not even committed by them. They also make comments which can be hurtful to the victims while claiming it is a joke. Questioning the decisions and opinions, interrupting them while talking, and ignoring their input are some ways of verbally abusing people.

Risk factors that predispose people to become victims of verbal abuse include lower socioeconomic status, low literacy level, insecurity, dependence, low self-esteem, physical or mental instability, conflicts at home or work, isolation, and selflessness. Sometimes higher educational and occupational levels can also serve as a risk factor for verbal abuse. According to a study conducted by Catherine Kaukinen (2004), although affluence and educational attainment lessen women's risk of physical and emotional abuse, she discovered that status discrepancies that favor women enhance the probability of emotional or verbal abuse. That is, if women outperform their husbands in terms of occupational wages and growth, they are far more likely to be the targets of verbal abuse (Kaukinen, 2004). Apart from these risk factors, among women, verbal abuse is often accompanied by physical abuse and limited education, early first sexual encounter, early motherhood and not using contraceptives also serve as risk factors of verbal abuse.

As per a paper presented by J.P. Singh (2010) on "Problems of India's Changing Family and State Intervention", women's position in Indian households was largely depending on the position of their spouses. Usually, the wife of the head of the family, in most cases mother-in-law, oversaw the household and her decisions had the same force as the decisions of the household head. Young women in Indian households were expected to fulfill their duties towards others in the house, they were expected to be responsible and compliant. In

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contemporary times, parents support their children and daughters-in-law to make family decisions (joint and extended family). As opposed to the old practice, parental decisions in the household are not ultimate. According to some reports, about 40% of women have been victims of abuse perpetrated by their intimate partners. Abuse in the family is chiefly done by males. Women and children mostly become the victims of such abuse.

Numerous changes have been observed in the traditional roles that were assigned to women. Earlier, women gave priority to their husbands, however, these days more priority is given to their careers and many women have also rejected the traditional role of a homemaker. A greater number of participations has been observed from the side of women not only because they want to pursue a career but many women also want to come up to share the household expenses. This gives women much more freedom to exercise authority. Many women have also been seen performing double shifts. That is, they go outside of their homes for work and perform household chores.

In recent decades, a shift has been observed from joint to nuclear families. Due to modernization, family violence has also been on the increase. In urban cities in India, the number of nuclear families exceeds the number of joint families. The disintegration of the joint family system is also the result of younger people heading the families, people moving out of their hometowns to settle, financial independence, and a sense of personal independence and decision-making capacity.

Research Objective

- To investigate the frequency of in-law verbal assault of women in urban Indian households.
- To identify the risk factors that play a role in the verbal abuse of women by in-laws in urban Indian households.
- To compare the magnitude of verbal abuse between women who live with the in-laws and who do not live with the in-laws.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The current study intends to investigate the incidence and risk factors of in-law verbal abuse of women in urban Indian households.

Participant details

A total of 51 people participated in the interview. All the participants were married women, who were literate (that is they could read and write in any language while also understanding the content), belonged to well-to-do families, and were living in urban areas in India. Out of 52 women, 30 were living in joint families with in-laws and 22 were living in nuclear families without in-laws.

Inclusion-exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria entailed 52 married women (both working women and homemakers) who were literate and belonged to well-to-do families, living in urban areas in India. 30 of these women were living in joint families with their in-laws and 22 of them were living in nuclear families without their in-laws. Women whose in-laws had deceased were excluded from being a part of the interview. Exclusion criteria also entailed women who were unmarried, illiterate, belonged to poor families and were living in the rural area.

Sampling procedure

The sampling method used was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to the intentional selection of the participants depending on their ability to explain a particular phenomenon or concept. Purposive sampling, also called judgment sampling focuses on specific aspects of a population that are of interest to the researcher. This will help the researcher to get the most appropriate people to respond to his or her research questions. This sample which is then chosen represents the population that the researcher wants to study and it is also characteristic of the topic of the study. In the current research, married women who are literate and belong to a well-to-do family (with or without their in-laws) were selected for the interview.

Measures

Semi-structured interviews or qualitative research methods provide the benefits of unstructured and structured interviews. Here, the questions are predetermined however, they are not written or stated in a defined manner. In semi-structured interviews, the questioning process is guided by the informant's responses. It is an adaptable interview format.

The questions in the current study are both open-ended and close-ended. This mixed method provides the benefit of completing the interview on time and allows the interviewee to direct the interviewer's attention to specific topics. It also helps maintain the sensitivity of the study by skipping and/or reframing the questions that are too sensitive to answer. It offers the researcher the liberty to question the subject to learn more or to pursue a different path of inquiry that is suggested by what they are saying. Semi-structured interviews also give participants the flexibility to express themselves openly and honestly on their own grounds.

Procedure

- **Data collection**

The participants were chosen using purposive sampling. The participants were made comfortable and a general conversation was carried out with each of the participants to help them overcome their nervousness and apprehensions and to make them feel comfortable. They were handed the consent form and all the instructions were laid out aloud. They were informed that they would be required to answer a few questions, the answers to which shall be recorded. The participants were asked to answer honestly and frankly and were told that there are no right or wrong answers. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that their consent will be taken if they had to be used anywhere. They were also informed that their comfort is of utmost importance therefore, if at any point during the interview, they feel uncomfortable with a question, they can choose to skip it. They were then asked to clarify if they had any doubts. Once it was made sure that they were ready to proceed, they were asked a certain set of questions. Once their responses were recorded, a general conversation was later carried out to lighten the atmosphere. It was made sure that the participants were feeling fine. Lastly, all the attendees were thanked for their time and effort, and the meeting was adjourned. The interview lasted from three minutes to thirteen minutes, where three minutes was the minimum time taken by a participant to respond to all the questions to thirteen minutes was the maximum time taken by a participant.

- **Ethical considerations**

Consent was taken from all the participants through a consent form and voluntary participation was ensured. The participants were told about the purpose of the research, the time duration that it would take, and that their responses will be recorded. Confidentiality was also ensured for all the participants. The participants were told that they had the liberty

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to write only the initials on the consent form to maintain confidentiality. All the participants were informed about their rights of leaving the interview or refusing to answer a certain question in case they feel uncomfortable. A safe space was created by informing the participants that their opinions would be respected and that it was a non-judgmental space for expressions of ideas and views. This was effectively followed throughout the interview.

Data analysis

According to Braun and Clarke's (2006) description of thematic analysis, there are six phases of data analysis:

Familiarizing yourself with the data: It is critical to comprehend the material in such a way that you are acquainted with it thoroughly, meaning you know every aspect of the data. To involve or immerse oneself in the data is to repeat the data to oneself or read and re-read it. It is not only reading what is written but also understanding the context and searching for any hidden meaning in the content or the formation of a novel pattern that can go unnoticed if the researcher was merely reading the data without understanding it. If the researcher reads the entire data set before commencing with the coding, it will be beneficial for the research. This will also enable the researcher to identify any possible patterns or ideas that could be existing in the data set. In case the researcher has been working with interviews or television programs or any other verbal data, the data will have to be transcribed first in a written format. Transcribing becomes important if the researcher wants to familiarize himself with the data (Riessman, 1993). A rigorous transcription takes place when the researcher quotes the exact verbatim of the respondent and includes nonverbal expressions (like smiling, coughing, etc.). In cases where the transcript has already been documented, it becomes even more important for the researcher to familiarize themselves with the data and compare the transcribed data with the original audio file for accuracy.

Generating initial codes: this is the phase of the data analysis where initial codes are produced. Codes are associated with an aspect of the data set (overtly visible or latent) which are of interest and unique to the researcher. Codes are raw data set pieces that can be evaluated in an effective manner (Boyatzis, 1998). However, codes differ from themes as themes are often broader. The researcher must ensure that all genuine data extracts are coded first and then categorized within each code.

Searching for themes: the researcher here focuses on the formation of themes and sorts out each of the similar codes to list under one theme. The researcher searches for similar data extracts or codes which convey similar meanings to write under one broad theme. There can be codes that do not seem to belong anywhere and can be quoted under a miscellaneous theme. This phase ends with the formation of themes, sub-themes, and coded data extracts.

Reviewing themes: this phase of data analysis begins when candidate themes have been formulated. These candidate teams are further refined by the researcher. This refinement of themes will help the researcher identify those candidate themes which are not themes and those themes which can merge into one another. All the sub-themes under one candidate theme should share the same central concept and should also focus on one specific notable aspect. In this stage of reviewing themes, a researcher re-reads the entire data set to focus on those themes which he could have missed earlier and to ensure that all the stated themes are fitting properly into the data set.

Defining and naming themes: In this phase of data analysis, each theme is established and developed once more in order to comprehend the meaning and essence of each topic about

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the data set, as well as to determine which component or components of the data set each theme is concentrating on. The researcher needs to understand and state the interesting elements of the data set and what makes those elements interesting. Merely paraphrasing the content will not produce desired results. Understanding each theme individually and about other themes becomes significant. Identification of the sub-themes also happens at this stage. Sub-themes will not only help strengthen the candidate theme but will also help in exhibiting the hierarchy of meaning in the data. In this stage, the researcher decides on a name for each of these themes. The names should be precise, and concise and should instantly provide the viewer with an overview of the topic.

Production of the report: This is the last step of thematic analysis and it begins when a researcher has a fully worked out set of themes, sub-themes, and codes and is ready to write the report. Write-ups are important to inform the reader that you have presented your extensive research in a way that makes your data valid. With the help of themes, the researcher can provide a concise, precise, varied, and logical account of the data. Write-ups become extremely important as within them codes and extracts are presented with an analytic portrayal that elucidates the data and not just describes it but also makes an argument concerning the research question.

RESULTS

Table 1 Risk factors identified for verbal abuse of women in Indian families

Themes	Codes	Verbatim
Communication gap	Silent treatment, Unnecessary blaming, Improper communication, Wrong interpretation of a message, Submissiveness of daughter-in-law, Misunderstandings	“Opinion rakhne ki isliye koshish nhi kri kiyuki vo sunne ko kabhi bhi taiyar nahi hote,” “mahina 15-15 20-20 din bolna band kar dete the jisse ghar mein rehna bada mushkil ho jata tha aur bohot suffocation feel hoti tha”, “I have had my share of verbal communication problems with my mother-in-law, merely because our opinions do not match,” “My in-law family has always acted to create misunderstandings between me, my husband and children,” “Improper communications is the biggest risk factor of all”, “Miscommunication ho jati hai uski wajah se hota hai yeh sab,” “Actual mein samne wala kehta kuch hai aur jo sunne wala hai vo usse kuch aur tareeke se observe kr leta hai uski wajah se hota hai yeh sab kuch”
Husband’s position in the family	Excessive mother-son attachment, In law’s insecurity regarding their son, In law’s disinclination towards the husband	“Ek unka apne hi bete ke sath do bet ek andar se apne hi bete ke sath kam lagav tha uski wajah se bhi mujhe isa lagta hai ki mere sath iss tarah ka vyavhar kiya jata tha,” “They acted like they were so nice in front of my parents but they didn't even love their own son,” “My mother-in-law is of the view

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Themes	Codes	Verbatim
Generation gap	Ego issues of in laws, Conservative and conventional mentality, Constantly questioning daughter-in-law's decisions	that I am taking her son away from her," "vo kahi na kahi bete ko peeche kheenchte hain ki yeh iski taraf zyada na jae," "apne husband ke sath privacy mein rehna vo bhi shayad ho sakta hai ek insecurity jo ek in laws ko hoti hai ke isne mera beta sheen liya type" "They have ego problems," "No matter how modern your in laws are, there is a tiny bit of patriarchy still left inside of everyone," "Yeah, sometimes may be because of generation gap," "I feel I might hurt their conservative and conventional way of thinking," "They think mujhe kuch nahi aata," "vo kahi na kahi hume apne se superior batate hain ki hum toh aisa karte the tumhe yeh nahi aata vo nahi aata,"
Lack of empathy	Comments on appearance, Making hurtful jokes, Aggressive outbursts, Excessive criticisms and comparisons, Lack of appreciation, Verbal insults	"vo toh hai hi ki agar humne point out kiya toh unki ego hurt ho jaegi jse mother-in-law ki nahi hai lekin father-in-law ki ho sakti hai" "a few times I have heard my in-laws say some pretty bad stuff about me behind my back," "I feel like they never appreciate me or the work that I do for them and the family every day," "They also used to comment how I wasn't pretty and they just chose me because of my qualifications," "Even though they chose me for their son, they still manage to find faults," "They never joked, they insulted on face," "They can't talk normally without being rude to me," "I can never escape their criticism no matter how much I avoid them," "thoda bohot compare hua hai," "shuru mein karte the bhyi kali ko gori mili gori ko kali yeh line kai baar suni hai meine," "Yahi ki tumhare pet pe jo yeh rashes ho gae haina hamara pet dekho bilkul saaf hai tumhara dekho kaise ho gaya hai even husbands ke samne hi ke iske yeh
Lack of privacy and understanding	Unrealistic expectations from daughter-in-law, Unnecessary complaints, In law's excessive involvement in	that I am taking her son away from her," "vo kahi na kahi bete ko peeche kheenchte hain ki yeh iski taraf zyada na jae," "apne husband ke sath privacy mein rehna vo bhi shayad ho sakta hai ek insecurity jo ek in laws ko hoti hai ke isne mera beta sheen liya type" "They have ego problems," "No matter how modern your in laws are, there is a tiny bit of patriarchy still left inside of everyone," "Yeah, sometimes may be because of generation gap," "I feel I might hurt their conservative and conventional way of thinking," "They think mujhe kuch nahi aata," "vo kahi na kahi hume apne se superior batate hain ki hum toh aisa karte the tumhe yeh nahi aata vo nahi aata," "vo toh hai hi ki agar humne point out kiya toh unki ego hurt ho jaegi jse mother-in-law ki nahi hai lekin father-in-law ki ho sakti hai" "a few times I have heard my in-laws say some pretty bad stuff about me behind my back," "I feel like they never appreciate me or the work that I do for them and the family every day," "They also used to comment how I wasn't pretty and they just chose me because of my qualifications," "Even though they chose me for their son, they still manage to find faults," "They never joked, they insulted on face," "They can't talk normally without being rude to me," "I can never escape their criticism no matter how much I avoid them," "thoda bohot compare hua hai," "shuru mein karte the bhyi kali ko gori mili gori ko kali yeh line kai baar suni hai meine," "Yahi ki tumhare pet pe jo yeh rashes ho gae haina hamara pet dekho bilkul saaf hai tumhara dekho kaise ho gaya hai even husbands ke samne hi ke iske yeh

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Themes	Codes	Verbatim
	the decisions, Imposing restrictions on socializing	nishan haina kabhi nahi jaenge tu kya soch raha hai,” “kabhi unke gusse ki wajah se darr jati hu mein” “I find myself constantly working without any significant help from them,” “If my husband does something against their wish then they often blame me as the reason behind it,” “My mother-in-law makes it seem like I am supposed to be there for everybody day and night,” “Sometimes, they try too much to involve themselves in everything I do,” “There is no privacy when it comes to this house,” “bahar aana jana pasand nhi,” “She complains a lot about everything I do,” “Mother-in-law would always complain about the food,” “Jab ap zyada ghumne chale jate ho ya bohot zyada outings ho jati hai tab bhi vo log naraz ho jate hain” “jaise kabhi dinner pe ya kahi bahar ghumne gae toh unko mood off ho gaya”

DISCUSSION

The current study intends to investigate the incidence and risk factors of in-law verbal abuse of women in urban Indian households.

To attain the objective, 52 married women were chosen using purposive sampling. Out of those 52 women, 30 were living in joint families with in-laws and 22 were living in nuclear families without their in-laws. A semi-structured interview was carried out where the participants were asked questions regarding the prevalence of verbal abuse in their homes and what risk factors could play a role in the same. The consent, comfort, and confidentiality of the respondents were especially taken care of due to the sensitivity of the topic.

The results of the study clearly stated that more incidents of verbal abuse were observed in nuclear families as compared to joint families. Out of 30 women, 25 shared good relations with their in-laws, 4 shared average relations, and 1 shared bad relation with her in-laws in joint families. Out of 22 women in nuclear families, 14 shared good relations with their in-laws, 4 shared average relations, and 4 shared bad relations with their in-laws as stated by the participants. However, the deeper analysis revealed that women from both, the joint and nuclear families had been victims of unnecessary commons and occasional comparisons. Constant questioning regarding the daughter-in-law's decisions was also observed and most of the participants attributed the generation gap as a cause of it. For many women, public display of affection was more than in-laws showed more affection in social situations than in private. Simultaneously, more women reported lesser incidents of name-calling and aggressive outbursts. Most participants also stated that their relations with their in-laws got

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better with time. Women comparatively spent more time with their mothers-in-law in comparison to other relatives hence, it was important for women to form healthy relations with their mothers-in-law. Protective factors that protect women from becoming victims of verbal abuse include the husband's support and assertiveness of the daughter-in-law. That is, when the husband takes a stand for his wife and when a woman openly confronts her in-laws, voices her opinions, and needs without being submissive, and maintains boundaries, she is less likely to become a victim of verbal abuse.

Thematic analysis was used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting risk factors (themes) within the data. Major themes that were generated using thematic analysis included: (i) communication gap (ii) husband's position in the family (iii) generation gap (iv) lack of empathy (v) lack of privacy and understanding, within these, major themes, several sub-themes were also generated.

Communication gap

This theme included several sub-themes like "silent treatment," "unnecessary blaming," "submissiveness of daughter-in-law," "improper communication," and "misunderstandings and wrong interpretation of a message."

Participants reported that they received the silent treatment from their in-laws for days and months and this led to women feeling suffocated in their homes, "Mahina 15-15 20-20 din bolna band kar dete the jisse ghar mein rehna bada mushkil ho jata tha aur bohot suffocation feel hoti tha". For some, it resulted when the in-law's boundaries were violated by a daughter-in-law and when in-laws felt disrespected. Many women also reported that their in-laws have blamed them for mistakes that were not committed by them. In extreme cases, women are also blamed for mistakes committed by their spouses as stated by a participant. Submissiveness on the part of the daughter-in-law lead to a communication gap as they never confronted their in-laws and seldom voiced out their feelings. Participants stated that they feared hurting their in-law's sentiments and conventional views. Misunderstandings were created because of a lack of confrontation and silent treatment. In many homes, wrong interpretation of a message also leads to verbal comments directed at the daughter in laws, "Actual mein samne wala kehta kuch hai aur jo sunne wala hai vo usse kuch aur tareeke se observe kr leta hai uski wajah se hota hai yeh sab kuch."

These findings have been validated by other researchers. In an article presented in the Journal of Aggression and Violent Behaviour, Schumacher, Slep and Heyman (2001) examined the risk and protective factors to understand why male companions commit psychological abuse towards women. They concluded that it was difficult to spot male-to-female psychological abuse in comparison to physical abuse. For psychological abuse they found, socio-economic factors do not play a significant role however, relationship factors like communication in a relationship, marital adjustment, and attachment were related to psychological abuse.

Husband's position in the family

This theme included several sub-themes like "excessive mother-son attachment," "mother-in-law's insecurities" and "in-laws' disinclination towards their son."

As per most participants, mother in law's excessive attachment to their son leads to feelings of insecurity where they feel that their daughter-in-law is pulling her son away from her, "my mother-in-law is of the view that I am taking her son away from her," "vo kahi na kahi

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bete ko peeche kheenchte hain ki yeh iski taraf zyada na jae." Any changes made in the house are also looked upon as daughter in law's fault and her intentions of taking control over the house. In some cases, participants also reported her in-law's disinclination towards her husband led to her becoming a victim of verbal abuse. As the husband and in-laws did not get along well, they had their share of disagreements which led to lesser affection with one's son, "ek unka apne hi bete ke sath do bet ek andar se apne hi bete ke sath kam lagav tha uski wajah se bhi mujhe isa lagta hai ki mere sath iss tarah ka vyavhar kiya jata tha."

These findings have been validated by many other researchers. In a study published in The Journal of International Women's Studies, Rew, Gangoli and Gill (2013) studied family violence between a lady and her female in-laws. The study was conducted in middle-class Indian households and found that mothers-in-law share close bonds with their sons and this causes problems with the daughters-in-law once their son gets married. This is elevated by the fact that most men prefer to stay with their parents after marriage and this gives the mother-in-laws the power and position in the family which will enable them to exert power, force, and control over their daughters-in-law.

In another study, Fashiya and Shari (2018) analyzed the communication between a daughter-in-law and the husband's mother to explore the tensions in their relationships from a psychoanalytic point of view. Semi-structured interviews and personal information schedules were conducted with 35 daughters-in-law and 45 mothers-in-law in a district in Kerala. The researchers concluded that the tensions in the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law connection are the Oedipus complex from the mother's side. The results indicated that even in middle age, limerence from the mother's side towards her son causes tensions between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law.

Generation gap

This theme included several sub-themes like "ego issues of in-laws," "conservative and conventional mentality" and "constantly questioning daughter-in-law's decisions."

Many participants in the study have reported ego problems on part of their in-laws, especially on the part of the father-in-law, vo toh hi ki agar humne point out kiya toh unki ego hurt ho jaegi jse mother-in-law ki nahi hai lekin father-in-law ki ho sakti gai." For most women, pointing out their in-law's behavior can hurt their ego however it would not necessarily provoke them to act aggressively, "yes I do feel that I might hurt my in-laws if I call out their behavior but I am sure this wouldn't provoke them to act aggressively." Most women feel that their in-laws have a conservative mindset which leads to differences in opinions. If these differences are not resolved, they can act as a catalyst for verbal abuse. Women have also tried keeping their views to themselves as they feared hurting their in-law's ego, "Nahi, who mera khud ka hi who hai ki matlab mujhe nhi karna chaiye, toh us wajah se main kaafi baate nahi karti. Aisa nahi hai ki main unke darr ki wajah se nahi karti, sense of respect kehlo uski wajah se nhi karti vo kaam." The generation gap between the in-laws has also resulted in constant questioning of the daughter-in-law's decisions. In-laws might feel that they are more experienced than their children and so their decisions will be better than the ones taken by their daughter in laws, "Yes mostly because they believe I am kiddish," "Haan they think mujhe kuch nahi aata," "vo kahi na kahi hume apne se superior batate hain ki hum toh aisa karte the tumhe yeh nahi aata vo nahi aata."

Few studies have validated these findings. Fashiya and Shari (2018) studied the defense mechanism adopted a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law while interacting with each

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other during situations of conflict. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 33 daughters-in-law and 45 mothers-in-law in Kerala. Results indicated that repression, reaction formation, and isolation were defense mechanisms that were mostly used by mothers-in-law, and suppression, denial, and withdrawal were more commonly used by daughters-in-law. They also found that mothers-in-law played a more dominating role when they tried to control their daughter-in-law's decision-making ability and mobility. They were also found taking decisions which were then followed by the daughter-in-law. The researchers also found that mothers-in-law attributed external factors to their son's shortcomings and attributed internal factors to their daughter-in-law's shortcomings.

Bhan, et.al, (2022) examined how mothers-in-law influence daughter-in-law's decision on pregnancy prevention and family planning. The researchers systematically reviewed peer-reviewed journals between 2001 and 2021. They use thematic analysis to analyze their results. The researchers found that mothers-in-law-controlled daughter-in-law's autonomy, fertility, contraceptive and reproductive decisions. They also found that most husbands also tried to reinforce their mother's decisions on their wives.

Lack of empathy

This theme included several sub-themes like "comments on appearance," "making hurtful jokes," "aggressive outbursts," "excessive criticisms and comparisons," "lack of appreciation" and "verbal insults."

Participants in the study have reported that their in-laws have made cruel jokes about them and have made remarks about their looks and other characteristics. As per some respondents, they passed comments unintentionally and without realizing that their words are causing emotional damage to the daughter-in-law while some women claimed that their in-laws made remarks about their appearance and qualities intentionally to humiliate them, "Matlab particular indirect way me woh unko nahi pata, realization is cheez ki unhone matlab mere pe comment pass kar dia, main samajh jati hu ki who mere par hai." In-laws have also unfairly disparaged their daughters-in-law and made comparisons to others. If a family has two daughters-in-law, a similar comparison might also be made, "As an observer, I feel it could be a comparison between two daughters-in-law and between a daughter and a daughter-in-law." Women were also bothered by the lack of appreciation from in-laws. Women felt they deserved more appreciation than they received. For some women, neither in-laws criticize nor did they appreciate her, "Na appreciation milta hai na criticism milta hai." Additionally, verbal abuse and violent outbursts from the in-laws were directed at women.

Rittenour and Kellas (2015) studied daughter-in-law's attribution to hurtful messages from their mothers-in-law. The study was conducted with 132 daughters-in-law. Results indicated that hurtful messages included personal attacks on the daughter-in-law, under and overindulgence, and involvement of a third party in making hurtful comments. Daughters-in-law who were closer to their husband's mother made external attributions of the hurtful comments and those who were less attached made internal attributions of the hurtful comments.

Lack of privacy and understanding

This theme included several sub-themes like "unrealistic expectations from daughter-in-law," "unnecessary complaints," "in-law's excessive involvement in the decisions," and "imposing restrictions with socializing."

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Participants claimed that by limiting their social mobility and outside-the-home movements, their in-laws had tried to breach their privacy. Most women reported that their in-laws disapproved of them inviting friends around or going out to hang out, "jab aap zyada ghumne chale jate ho ya bohot zyada outings ho jati hai tab bhi vo log naraz ho jate hain," "jaise kabhi dinner pe ya kahi bahar ghumne gae toh unko mood off ho gaya." In-laws did not enjoy allowing the couple their privacy. Many unwarranted expectations were placed on the daughter-in-law by the in-laws. According to the participants, the in-laws wanted their daughter-in-law to be available all day, "my mother-in-law makes it seem like I am supposed to be there for everybody day and night." Additionally, the in-laws made excessively many objections and attempted to meddle excessively in the choices their daughter-in-law made, "if you're earning toh issue, if you're not toh issue."

These results were validated in other researches as well. Raj, et.al, (2006) studied the association between emotional abuse by in-laws and intimate partner violence in the US. The study was conducted on 169 South Asians. In-depth, interviews were conducted and it was concluded that in-laws became reinforcers of intimate partner violence and perpetrators of physical and emotional abuse which included isolation, social control, economic control, and domestic slavery.

Osterman, Khan, and Bjorkqvist (2021) studied mental health issues that were related to the controlling behaviors of husbands and mothers-in-law in opposition to wives and daughters-in-law. 569 women from Pakistan filled out a questionnaire and the results indicated that women who frequently experienced controlling behaviors both from husbands and mother-in-laws had higher scores on mental health illnesses like anxiety and depression. Women who infrequently experienced controlling behaviors by both parties scored lesser on the same mental health variables.

In an article published in the Berlin Studies Transnational Journal of Science and Humanities, Mansurovna (2022) articulated the factors and consequences of aggressive behaviors in marital relationships. 300 people filled out a questionnaire and the researcher evaluated 20 factors. Results indicated that the division of household responsibilities between spouses, their failure to act in the best interests of the family, the interference of other people in the couple's relationship, and some cases, momentary bad moods, or other minor factors, were the underlying causes of domestic abuse. Causes of interpersonal violence in the family were also noted. These included jealousy and mistrust in the family, insufficient economic support or lack of budgetary efficiency, disproportionate character characteristics, uncomfortable living conditions, attitude towards parents and relatives, etc.

To sum up, daughters-in-law have endured verbal abuse at the hands of in-laws in Indian households. Because it is subtle, some of this abuse goes undetected. Even if the daughter-in-law can express vocally that their in-laws have made hurtful jokes, said degrading things, or given them the silent treatment, they are unable to claim that they have experienced verbal abuse since there is a lack of understanding of this type of abuse. Research is still needed in the areas of family communication, relational interaction, psychological aspects, consequences of such abuse, and protective variables that shield women from verbal abuse.

CONCLUSION

The current study intends to investigate the incidence and risk factors of in-law verbal abuse of women in urban Indian households. To attain the objective, 52 married women were chosen using purposive sampling. Out of those 52 women, 30 were living in joint families

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with in-laws and 22 were living in nuclear families without their in-laws. A semi-structured interview was carried out where the participants were asked questions regarding the prevalence of verbal abuse in their homes and what risk factors could play a role in the same. Using thematic analysis, the following themes (risk factors) were generated: communication gap, husband's position in the family, generation gap, lack of empathy, and lack of privacy and understanding, within these, major themes, several sub-themes were also generated. It was also found that the husband's support and assertiveness of the daughter-in-law can act as protective factors that guard women against verbal abuse. Amongst joint and nuclear families, more women shared good relations with their in-laws, and with time, these relations grew better.

Although still women experience incidents of verbal abuse, they are unable to claim it due to a lack of awareness of the issue. And although more women are attaining education, they are not able to voice out their feelings and opinions in front of their in-laws. When questioned, most women stated that only if they had confronted their in-laws, they would not be subjected to demeaning comments, comparisons, silent treatment, etc. Future research should especially focus on interventions that can sensitize the in-laws and at the same time empower the daughters-in-law.

Limitations

The results of the study cannot be generalized because of the small sample size. The social context of the respondents in which the interview was being conducted, affected their answers to certain questions.

Implications

The study's major themes will offer insight on the incidence and risk factors of verbal abuse of women in India. The themes will also help in distinguishing if verbal abuse is more prevalent in nuclear families or joint families. This will further help in predicting which households will be most likely to abuse women, and which females can become a victim of such abuse and it can further help researchers to formulate learnings that can be passed on to the females in Indian communities. Results from the study could raise awareness about the issue of verbal abuse by in-laws and the importance of considering family dynamics and relationships when seeking a potential partner. This, in turn, could encourage individuals to be more mindful of the potential risks and challenges associated with joint family structures and to seek out partners who are compatible with their family values and dynamics. This, in turn, could help reduce the incidence of marital conflicts arising from incompatible family structures and values. Government and other non-governmental agencies could also use the study's findings to develop better support services for individuals who are experiencing verbal abuse by their mothers-in-law. For instance, they could partner with organizations that provide counseling and mediation services to help individuals navigate family conflicts and seek legal remedies if necessary.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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