

Exposition of Intimate Partner Violence in India: Evidences from the National Family Health Surveys

Abstract: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) has a severe implication on health of women and family. Study aims to understand the changing determinants of IPV in India. We have analysed three consecutive National Family Health Survey (NFHS) rounds conducted during 2005-06 and 2019-21 in India. Women in reproductive aged 15-49 years interviewed for IPV with sample of 64,607 of NFHS-3 followed by 62,716 in NFHS-4 and 60,289 of NFHS-5. Findings exhibited significant decline in prevalence of IPV from 38.9% in NFHS-3 to 32.8% (NFHS-4) and 28.2% in NFHS-5 in India. Education plays an important role in determining the IPV in developing countries. Women with higher education have lower likelihood of experiencing any form of violence (OR: 0.8; 95% CI: 0.7-0.8). Similarly, the likelihood is lower among the richest women compared to the poorest (OR: 0.5, 95% CI: 0.5-0.6). Women with parity of three or more children are more likely to experience IPV compared to women with no children. Alcohol consumption has been a constant determinant of IPV in India. Partners consume alcohol are 2.5 times more likely to perpetrate any form of violence (OR: 2.5, 95% CI: 2.4-2.6). The Bihar has highest prevalence of IPV in three rounds of NFHS in India.

Keywords: Physical, sexual, emotional violence, marital status, India, NFHS

Introduction: Intimate partner violence (IPV) against women is a significant global public health issue and a violation of human rights, adversely affecting women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health. Globally, approximately 27% of women aged 15-49 who have been in a relationship experienced IPV. The prevalence of IPV transcends geographic, social, cultural and religious boundaries but is generally more severe and reported more frequently in low and middle-income countries. Therefore, identifying the changing determinants of IPV is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies to address this complex issue. Women who have experienced violence from intimate partners more likely to have low birth weight children and face higher rates of depression, HIV, injury, and death (García-Moreno et al., 2013). This paper examines the changing determinants of IPV in India, aiming to provide a thorough theoretical understanding of the relationship between IPV across different periods and contexts. This comprehensive approach is crucial to advancing research topics and improving policy and intervention measures to reduce the burden of IPV. India has seen an increase in the prevalence of IPV in recent decades. Despite policy and programme efforts, the prevalence of violence persists across the socioeconomic spectrum, especially in patriarchal cultures such as India, where women often face emotional, sexual, and physical abuse. This study seeks to understand how partner behaviour and shifting socioeconomic conditions contribute to IPV in India. The findings can help shape laws designed to protect women in the home and end all types of abuse. To address this issue we have used data from three rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted between 2005–06, 2015–16, and 2019–21. This cross-sectional data provides valuable insights into the changing determinants of IPV in India and informs policies and interventions to safeguard women and reduce IPV prevalence.

Data and Methods: The NFHS collects information from ever married women of reproductive age 15-49 years, however the analysis in this study was restricted to currently married women only. Never-married, widowed, divorced and separated women were excluded from the analysis. The domestic violence (DV) module collects detailed information on physical, sexual and emotional violence perpetrated by husbands against their wives. All ever-married women were included, resulting in 64,607 respondents in NFHS-3, 62,716 in NFHS-4, and 60,289 in NFHS-5 being included in the final analysis. The main dependent variables for this analysis are the experience of different types of IPV: physical, sexual and emotional violence by a partner of currently married women aged 15 to 49 years. In all the rounds of the survey, IPV is defined to include violence by spouses as well as by other household members (IIPS, 2010, 2017). Information is obtained from currently married women on violence by

husbands and by others and from never-married women on violence by anyone, including boyfriends. Physical violence includes: (a) ever having been slapped; (b) ever having had arm twisted or hair pulled; (c) ever having been pushed, shaken or had something thrown at them; (d) ever having been punched with fist or hit by something harmful; (e) ever having been kicked or dragged; (f) ever having been strangled or brunt; (g) ever having been threatened with knife/gun or other weapon. Sexual Violence captured a) ever having been physically forced you to have sexual intercourse with him even when you did not want to; b) ever having been physically forced you to perform any other sexual acts you did not want to; c) ever having been forced you with threats or in any other way to perform sexual acts you did not want to. Emotional Violence defined as (a) ever having been said or done something to humiliate you in front of others; b) ever having been threatened to hurt or harm you or someone close to you; c) ever having been insulted you or made you feel bad about yourself. Multivariable logistic regressions were used to estimate the adjusted odds ratio (OR) and 95% confidence interval (95% CI) of the association of ever experience of different types of IPV by the respondent with the different socio-demographic variables that were included as key independent variables at the individual and household levels.

Results: The majority of respondents were aged 35 and above across all survey rounds, indicating a higher representation of older individuals in the sample over time. A larger proportion of the sample reported secondary and higher education attainment in the most recent rounds. The majority of respondents identified as Hindu across all survey rounds. Most respondents lived in rural households. The majority of the sample reported having 1-2 children. Most respondents reported having no co-wives. The majority of respondents were aged 18 years and above. Most of the sample reported having a husband who consumed alcohol. The results indicate a decrease in the prevalence of physical violence from 34.3% in 2005-06 to 27.3% in 2019-21. When examining age groups, a decrease in prevalence is observed across most age groups, except for the 15-19 age group, where the prevalence remains relatively constant between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5. Regarding women's educational attainment, there is a slight increase in violence among women with secondary education or higher. Analysis by household wealth quantiles reveals a consistent prevalence of violence among the richest households but a decrease among the poorest households. Across different regions of India, the prevalence of domestic violence has not notably decreased in the west and south regions between 2015-16 and 2019-21. Regarding age at marriage, the prevalence remained constant between NFHS-3 and NFHS-4 but slightly decreased in NFHS-5. However, the odds of experiencing physical violence increase with age. For instance, compared to the reference group (15-19 years old), individuals aged 20-24 have 1.25 times higher odds of experiencing physical violence (OR: 1.25, 95% CI: 1.03-1.51). As educational attainment increases, the odds of experiencing physical violence decrease by around 17%. For example, secondary educated women have 17% lower odds of experiencing physical violence (OR: 0.83; 95% CI: 0.78-0.88). Similarly, respondents with partners who have higher educational levels are associated with 20% lower odds of experiencing physical violence (OR: 0.90; 95% CI: 0.85-0.96). The odds of physical violence are lowest among those who are the richest, non-Hindu, reside in rural areas, and marry at an age above 18 years. On the other hand, the odds of physical violence are higher in the southern region among individuals with three or more children, those with a cohabitation duration of 15-19 years or more than 20 years, and those with one or more co-wives. The study observed the decreasing trend in the prevalence of any violence from NFHS-3 (2005-06) to NFHS-5 (2019-21), suggesting a potential improvement in the overall situation of violence against women. Women with secondary or higher education have a 20% lower likelihood of experiencing any violence (OR: 0.8; 95% CI: 0.7-0.8). Similarly, partners with higher education levels are associated with a 10% lower likelihood of any violence (OR: 0.9, 95% CI: 0.8-0.9). The likelihood of any violence is lower among the richest compared to the poorest (OR: 0.5, 95% CI: 0.5-0.6). Any violence is highest in India's south, central, and east regions compared to the reference category, the north region of India. Women with parity of 3 or more children are more likely to experience any violence compared to those with no children. Additionally, partners who drink alcohol are 2.5 times more likely to perpetrate any violence (OR: 2.5, 95% CI: 2.4-2.6) (Table-5). The prevalence of physical violence was higher in northern Indian states, such as Bihar (56%) and Uttar Pradesh (41%) in NFHS-3 (2005-06), but by NFHS-5 (2019-21), it decreased to 39% in Bihar and 34% in Uttar Pradesh. However, in southern states, such as Karnataka, physical violence

increased to 42%. In terms of sexual violence, the highest prevalence was observed in Rajasthan (20%) among the northern states, while in the southern states, Karnataka had the highest rate at 9.8%. For emotional violence, Rajasthan (22%) and Madhya Pradesh (21%) had the highest rates in NFHS-3. However, by NFHS-5, Karnataka saw an increase to 24%, while Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh experienced decreases to 9% and 14%, respectively. In NFHS-3, the prevalence of any form of violence was 61% in Bihar and 50% in Rajasthan. By NFHS-4, any form of violence was highest in Bihar (40%) and Karnataka (43%).

Discussion: Our key findings. Firstly, we found a decline in the incidence of IPV from 2005-06 to 2019–21. For instance, the frequency of physical IPV decreased from 17.5 in 2006–06 to 14.8 in 2019–21 for women who have ever been married. Similarly, there has been a reduction in the frequency of sexual violence from 12.5 in 2005-06 to 5.6 in 2019-21. However, the frequency of emotional violence by spouses varies in different survey rounds. Secondly, we found that women's educational attainment acts as a safeguard against violence against them. Thirdly, the presence of wealth emerged as one of the main contributors to violence against women in households. Fourthly, alcohol use was identified as a primary manifestation of domestic violence. Lastly, our analysis revealed that women's age consistently influences the occurrence of violence across all survey rounds. This study has a significant advantage in that it examines the evolving factors contributing to domestic violence in India. It is noteworthy because the majority of earlier research has solely focused on domestic violence and its causes. Our findings help to clarify the connection between women's domestic abuse and their households. In conclusion findings show that education and socioeconomic status are significant factors in mitigating IPV. However, husband/partner alcohol consumption is the major risk factor for exposure to IPV. Intimate partner violence was found to be primarily caused by an alcoholic husband. Regional differences in the incidence of violence underscore the necessity for context-specific treatments tailored to the social and cultural dynamics of different places.

Table 5 Percentage changes and correlates of any form of IPV from 2005-2006 to 2019-21, NFHS, India

Background Characteristics	NFHS-3 (2005-06)	NFHS-4(2015-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)	Adjusted OR (95% CI)
INDIA	38.9	32.8	28.2	
Women's age group				
15-19	33.0	23.1	19.4	Ref.
20-24	37.0	28.4	24.8	1.1(0.9-1.3)*
25-34	39.4	32.3	27.3	1.0(0.8-1.2)
35+	40.2	34.6	29.4	0.9(0.8-1.1)
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Women's education				
No education	48.8	43.5	37.5	Ref.
Primary	41.6	39.0	31.8	1(0.9-1.0)
Secondary	25.5	24.8	22.9	0.8(0.7-0.8)***
Higher				
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Husband education				
No education	49.7	45.1	38.7	Ref.
Primary	46.6	40.0	34.2	1(0.9-1.1)
Secondary	31.7	27.7	23.9	0.9(0.8-0.9)***
Higehr				
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Wealth Index				
Poorest	51.8	45.5	37.3	Ref.
Poorer	48.5	40.3	34.4	0.9(0.9-1.0)
Middle	41.9	34.6	28.8	0.8(0.8-0.9)***
Richer	34.2	28.5	23.3	0.7(0.7-0.8)***
Richest	20.2	18.8	16.0	0.5(0.5-0.6)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Caste				
Scheduled caste & Scheduled tribes	47.2	38.8	32.7	Ref.
Other Backward Classes	39.9	34.1	29.4	1.11(1.06-1.16)***
Others	31.2	24.3	21.1	1.00(0.93-1.07)
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	

Religion				
Hindu	38.8	33.7	28.9	Ref.
Others	39.5	30.9	25.1	1(0.9-1.0)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Residence				
Urban	31.4	24.4	23.2	Ref.
Rural	42.3	33.5	30.3	0.9(0.9-0.9)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Region				
North	34.6	23.9	17.3	Ref.
Central	44.3	36.4	31.4	1.3(1.3-1.5)***
East	47.9	38.6	32.7	1.3(1.4-1.6)***
North-east	38.3	27.1	28.3	1.2(1.1-1.2)***
West	32.2	22	20.2	1.1(1.0-1.2)***
South	30.5	32.8	31.6	1.4(1.3-1.5)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Parity				
0 Children	27.6	20.3	16.8	Ref.
01-2 Children	32.6	29.2	24.8	1.4(1.3-1.5)***
3+ Children	46.3	40.4	35.4	1.6(1.5-1.8)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Women's economic empowerment status				
Not empower	-	29.1	22.8	Ref.
Empower	-	35.7	31.7	1.1(1.1-1.1)
Chi2		<0.001	<0.001	
Witnessing parental violence				
No	33.9	26.2	22.3	Ref.
Yes	61.1	57.5	53.5	3.4(3.2-3.5)
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Duration of cohabitation in years				
0-4	27	21.2	18.4	Ref.
05-9	39.1	32.8	27.1	1.4(1.3-1.5)***
10-14	42.8	35.3	29.7	1.5(1.4-1.7)***
15-19	42.2	36.3	30.7	1.5(1.4-1.7)***
20+	42.4	36.6	31.3	1.5(1.3-1.7)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Number of co wives				
None	38.7	32.4	27.9	Ref.
One and more	52.1	55.5	45.6	1.5(1.3-1.8)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Women's age at first marriage				
Below 18	45.0	38.4	33.9	Ref.
More than 18 years	30.1	28.5	23.7	0.9(0.9-0.9)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Partners controlling behaviours				
No	27.8	19.0	16.2	Ref.
Yes	55.7	47.7	44.5	3.2(3.0-3.3)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Partner drink alcohol				
No	32.0	32.4	22.2	Ref.
Yes	53.8	59.8	48.5	2.5(2.4-2.6)***
Chi2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	

Note: Chi2=Chi Square test; Ref=indicates the reference category. Significance levels are denoted as ***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05