

# **Spousal Concordance and Discordance in Justifying Wife Beating and Wife's Experience of Physical Violence in India**

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## **Extended Abstract**

### **Background**

Wife beating is widespread across Asia (Rani & Bonu, 2009) and is frequently viewed as physical chastisement, i.e., the husband's right to correct an erring wife (Jejeebhoy, 1998; Straus, 1976). Indian society, stemming from patriarchal norms and a conservative social structure (Pradhan & De, 2024), has culturally sanctioned the use of physical violence by men against women (Boyle et al., 2009) as a means of exerting control and resolving conflicts between couples (Segal, 1999). In India, 32% of ever-married women experienced violence from their husbands at some point in their lives, and the highest proportion reported physical violence (Chandra et al., 2023). Existing literature on the wife's experience of physical violence mainly reveals the husband and wife's characteristics independently and misses the crucial dimension of spousal concordance and discordance in attitudes toward justifying wife beating.

### **Methods**

#### ***Data***

The study used data from National Family Health Survey-5 (2019/21), a large-scale nationally representative survey that gathered information on various health indicators, including experience of spousal violence and attitudes towards wife-beating from women aged 15-49 and men aged 15-54 years. Specifically, the data from the couple's file of NFHS-5 was analyzed. After considering the sample to whom the domestic violence module was administered and eliminating the missing values and the 'do not know' cases of key variables for analysis, the study analyzed a sample of 44,933 couples.

#### ***Outcome variable***

The primary outcome variable was the experience of physical violence. It was assessed through the wives' response to the following that their husbands have ever done to them: (a) push them, shake them, or throw something at them, (b) slap them (c) punch them with his fist or with something that could hurt you (d) kick you, drag you or beat you up (e) try to choke you or burn you on purpose (f) threaten or attack you with a knife, gun, or any other weapon and (g) twist your arm or pull your hair. Physical violence was considered as yes (coded 1) if the response to any of the above questions was affirmative; otherwise, no (coded 0).

#### ***Explanatory variables***

The spousal attitude toward justification of wife-beating was the principal predictor variable. It was assessed through the husbands' and wives' responses to the following seven circumstances of justifying wife-beating: (a) if she goes out without telling, (b) neglects house or children, (c) argues with him, (d) refuses to have sex, (e) does not cook food properly, (f) suspected of being unfaithful, and (g) is disrespectful to in-laws. While clubbing them, a value of 1 was assigned to men and women who justified wife-beating for any mentioned reasons nested within the category; otherwise, they were assigned 0. Spousal justification to wife beating was recoded as 0 ("None") when both do not justify wife-beating, 1 ("wife yes husband no") when wife justified wife-beating for any reason and husband does not justify wife-beating, 2 ("husband yes wife no") when husband justified wife-beating for any reason and wife does not justify wife-beating and 3 ("both yes") when both husband and wife justified wife-beating

for any of the reasons. Additionally, spousal characteristics (spousal age gap, educational gap, children ever born, wife's involvement in decision-making, husband's alcohol drinking, childhood exposure to parental violence behavior, controlling behavior of the husband) and household-level covariates (wealth quintile, social group, place of residence and region) that could be associated with the outcome variables have also been included in the analysis.

### ***Analytical approach***

Descriptive statistics were done to estimate the spousal concordance-discordance in attitude towards wife-beating and physical violence faced by the wife. Cross-tabulation was used to assess the bivariate percentage (weighted), and Pearson's chi-square statistic was applied to test the differences in physical violence by the predictor variables. Further, binary logistic regression was conducted to evaluate the effects of the predictor variables on physical violence, using two models that present the unadjusted and adjusted odds ratio. All the statistical analyses were performed on weighted data using Stata version 17.0.

## **Results**

### ***Socio-demographic profile of the study population***

Among the couples, 35.3% did not justify wife beating under any circumstances. In comparison, 24.3% had only the wife justifying it, 17.1% had only the husband justifying it, and 23.4% had both partners justifying the wife's beating (Table not shown)

### ***Differentials in experiencing physical violence by wives***

Thirty-nine percent of the wives experienced physical violence if both spouses justified the wife beating, 35% experienced physical violence if only the wife justified it, but the husband did not, 22.8% experienced it if only the husband justified it, but the wife did not, and 17.5% experienced physical violence when neither of them justifies wife-beating (Table not shown).

### ***Spousal concordance-discordance in justifying wife beating and wife's experience of physical violence***

Adjusting spousal, household and community level characteristics considered in the model, the likelihood of an experience of physical violence by the wife was higher among the couples where both justified wife-beating (UOR= 3.05,  $p<0.001$ ; AOR= 2.02,  $p<0.001$ ), followed by couples where the wife justified wife-beating and husband did not (UOR= 2.56,  $p<0.001$ ; AOR= 1.92,  $p<0.001$ ); and couples where husband justified wife-beating and wife did not (UOR= 1.39,  $p<0.001$ ; AOR= 1.20,  $p<0.001$ ), all compared to the couples where neither justify wife-beating (Table 1).

## **Discussion and conclusion**

This study identified a strong association between the couple's justification of wife-beating and the occurrence of physical violence, with the likelihood of physical violence being higher when both spouses justified wife-beating. Additionally, the likelihood of violence was higher when the wife justified it alone than when the husband justified it. This aligns with findings from previous research that indicated that women who supported their husbands' affirmative attitudes towards violence were more likely to experience various forms of IPV than those who reject such attitudes (Aboagye et al., 2021; Abramsky et al., 2011; Mondal & Paul, 2021). Supportive attitudes toward IPV can also lead to the internalization of such behavior, making it a significant risk factor for future perpetration, as well as relational and overt victimization (Devenish et al., 2019; Foshee et al., 2016). Further, our study also found a predominance of justification for wife-beating among women than among men, consistent with previous

research conducted in other Asian (Krause et al., 2016) and African contexts (Uthman et al., 2011). This difference in the prevalence of justification could be attributed to the gender disparities in education, employment, and access to information.

The study concludes that wives are more likely to experience physical violence when both spouses justify wife-beating, and the risk remains significantly elevated even when only the wife justifies it. Results suggest community-based education and awareness campaigns promoting gender equality, efforts to empower women, and multi-sectoral collaboration to positively change attitudes towards wife-beating and its prevalence, thus ensuring the welfare of women in India.

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Table 1: Odds ratios of spousal physical violence among women, India, 2019-21

Background characteristics	Experienced physical violence	
	Model 1 (UOR)	Model 2 (AOR)
<b>Justification of wife-beating</b>		
None	Ref.	Ref.
Wife yes; husband no	2.56 *** (2.51, 2.61)	1.92 *** (1.88, 1.96)
Husband yes; wife no	1.39 *** (1.36, 1.42)	1.20 *** (1.18, 1.23)
Both yes	3.05 *** (2.99, 3.10)	2.02 *** (1.98, 2.07)
<b>Spousal Age gap</b>		
Same age or wife older than husband		Ref.
Husband older by 1-5 years		1.08 *** (1.04, 1.11)
Husband older by more than five years		0.98 (0.95, 1.02)
<b>Spousal Educational level</b>		
The same level of education		Ref.
Wife more educated		1.02 * (1.00, 1.05)
Husband more educated		1.05 *** (1.03, 1.06)
<b>Total children ever born</b>		
No child		Ref.
1-2 children		1.86 *** (1.81, 1.93)
3+ children		2.75 *** (2.65, 2.84)
<b>Wife involved in household decision-making</b>		
No		Ref.
Yes		0.77 *** (0.76, 0.78)
<b>Husband drinks alcohol</b>		
No		Ref.
Yes		1.79 *** (1.76, 1.81)
<b>Father ever beat mother</b>		
None		Ref.
Wife yes; husband no		3.47 *** (3.40, 3.54)
Husband yes; wife no		1.22 *** (1.19, 1.24)
Both yes		3.44 *** (3.34, 3.54)
<b>Controlling Husband</b>		
No		Ref.
Yes		2.94 *** (2.89, 2.98)
<b>Household Wealth quintile</b>		
Poorest		Ref.
Poorer		0.99 (0.97, 1.02)
Middle		0.83 *** (0.81, 0.85)
Richer		0.75 *** (0.73, 0.77)
Richest		0.59 *** (0.57, 0.61)
<b>Place of residence</b>		
Urban		Ref.
Rural		0.91 *** (0.89, 0.93)
<b>Region</b>		
North		Ref.
Central		1.38 *** (1.35, 1.42)
East		1.37 *** (1.33, 1.41)
Northeast		1.67 *** (1.6, 1.75)
West		1.06 *** (1.03, 1.09)
South		1.29 *** (1.25, 1.32)
<b>_cons</b>	0.21 *** (0.21, 0.22)	0.05 *** (0.04, 0.05)