

Wife-Beating in Rural India: A Husband's Right? Evidence from Survey Data" by Shireen J. Jejeebhoy *Economic and Political Weekly*. 33(15). April 11, 1998. p.855-862.

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## **Wife-Beating in Rural India: A Husband's Right? Evidence from Survey Data**

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*Drawing from the data collected in the course of a study on women's autonomy in two culturally distinct sites, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, this paper sheds light on the prevalence and patterns of a specified aspect of domestic violence, wife-beating and intimidation, and the ways in which women interpret this violence. It attempts to provide a backdrop against which the government can be held accountable for failure in respect of its obligation to take appropriate step to prevent such abuse of women.*

### **I Introduction and Objectives**

THE United Nations Commission on the Status of Women defines violence against women to include "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women..." [Economic and Social Council 1992]. The definition is understood to encompass, but not be limited to, physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family and outside it. Gender-based violence, including wife-beating, rape, sexual abuse, and dowry-related murder is widely prevalent in India. Of these, wife-beating and intimidation are the most endemic and widespread forms of violence. Despite its prevalence, it is only recently as a result of relentless efforts by women's organisations, that violence against women in the home has received any public attention. Information, thus far, has come largely from mass media reports, and, to a lesser extent, from grossly under-reported crime data. Community-based research on the prevalence and patterns of gender-based violence is sparse, but urgently needed if political action is to be spurred [Heise, Pitanguay and Germain .1994].

The objective of this paper is to shed light, through community-based data from women, in rural India, on the prevalence and patterns of a specific aspect of domestic violence - wife-beating and intimidation - and the ways in which women interpret this violence. More generally, it is an attempt to provide the backdrop against which the government can be held accountable for failure in respect to its obligations under, the women's convention to take all -appropriate steps to prevent and investigate wife-beating, to punish perpetrators, and provide effective remedies for victims [see, for example, Jejeebhoy and Cook 1997]. The paper draws upon data collected in the course of a study -on' women's

autonomy in two culturally distinct sites: Uttar Pradesh in the north in which the situation of women is particularly poor, and Tamil Nadu in the south, in which women are relatively better off.

## II Background

In most of India, both north and south, and among both Hindus and Muslims, the family is mainly patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal and the region is well known for the kinds of inegalitarian gender relations that are related with gender violence. Women are defined as inferior; husbands are assumed to 'own' women, and to have the right to dominate them, including through the use of force. Domestic violence is thus deeply embedded in patriarchal norms and attitudes about gender relations in India. These attitudes are reinforced by the lack of government attention, either directly through the protection of victims of domestic violence and prosecution of violent husbands, or indirectly, by upholding laws on minimum age at marriage and inheritance. This combination of factors serve to both legitimise and perpetuate violence.

While data on domestic violence against women are limited, two recent studies in India, one in the north and the other in the south, suggest its widespread prevalence. One study, conducted among women and men in Jullunder district, Punjab in north India reports that about 75 per cent of scheduled caste women reported being beaten frequently by their husbands; and likewise, about 75 per cent men reported beating their wives. Far fewer (22 per cent) higher caste men admitted wife beating [Mahajan 1990]. In a study of women in rural Karnataka, south India, 22 per cent reported being beaten by their husbands, 12 per cent within the last month. However, qualitative data, also collected in this study, suggests that these figures are underestimates [Rao and Bloch 1993]. And a recent study in Bangladesh observes that while 47 per cent of all women reported ever being beaten by their husbands, 19 per cent reported being beaten in the 12 months preceding the survey [Schuler et al 1996].

Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu lie at two extremes of the social and cultural spectrum in India, although economically they are relatively similar. Both states are poor, with about 37 per cent in Uttar Pradesh and 40 per cent in Tamil Nadu (and 33 per cent in India) living below the poverty line, and both states are largely agricultural (Uttar Pradesh, 72 per cent; Tamil Nadu, 61 per cent; India, 70 per cent). Yet there are huge differences in social development levels. For example, literacy rates are much higher in Tamil Nadu (63 per cent) than in Uttar Pradesh (42 per cent), and fertility and mortality are much lower - for example, the infant mortality rate is 98 per 1,000 live births in Uttar Pradesh to 58 in Tamil Nadu, and the total fertility rate is 5.1 in Uttar Pradesh compared to 2.2 in Tamil Nadu.

Although both states are typically patriarchal and patrilocal, beyond these gross generalisations, kinship structures and the ways in which kinship norms affect women's lives vary widely. Female powerlessness is much more acute in north India than in south. There is considerable ethnographic evidence, for example, of regional differences in the situation of women [Karve 1965; Altekar 1962]. Women in the north have relatively little autonomy or freedom of movement, limited inheritance rights in practice, limited support from their natal family after marriage (since girls are married at a young age, in distant families), and limited opportunities for control over economic resources. In contrast, women in south India have relatively more autonomy in all these areas—they have closer natal family ties, and greater decision-making authority; they are less secluded, and more likely to work and control resources. The few available social indicators reflecting these gender disparities make these regional differences clear. For example, in Uttar Pradesh life expectancy is about five years higher for males than for females (54 and 49, respectively); in Tamil Nadu, life expectancy for both females and males is 61 years. Moreover, the maternal mortality ratio ranges from 931 in Uttar Pradesh to 319 in Tamil Nadu. And gender disparities in literacy are far wider in Uttar Pradesh (25 per cent for females compared to 56 per cent for males) than, in Tamil Nadu (51 per cent for females compared to 74 per cent for males). Clearly then, women in Uttar Pradesh are more vulnerable and powerless, and thus more likely to be expected to suffer violence from their husbands than women from Tamil Nadu.

Less can be said about Hindu-Muslim differences. On the one hand, Muslim women are more likely than Hindu women to be denied work opportunities, a secular education, control over economic resources, and recourse in case of abandonment or divorce, and hence may be more vulnerable to violence than Hindu women. On the other hand, their marriage patterns, at least in north India, are less alienating from natal kin than those of 'Hindus, a factor that may reduce chances of domestic Violence.

### **III The Data**

The data set employed in this study represents one of the first to examine regional differences in autonomy among rural Indian women - both Hindu and Muslim. The main objective of the survey was to operationalise the concept of autonomy or empowerment, and assess its relationships to reproductive, behaviour.<sup>1</sup> The study also inquired, the whether measures of autonomy do in fact differ among north and south Indian women, and among Hindu and Muslim women. While the survey was not explicitly designed than to focus on domestic violence, a few questions on the issue were included in order to assess power relations within the home. Given the sensitivity of the topic, a decision

was made against exploring the incidence and patterns of violence at length, and as a result of limited data, results tend to be suggestive and exploratory.

The survey of women's status and fertility,<sup>2</sup> from which data are drawn, interviewed a total of 1,842 women aged 15-39, drawn purposively from two blocks in two districts each of Tamil Nadu in the south and Uttar Pradesh in the north; and among both Hindus and Muslims in each setting. The survey, conducted in 1993-94 was designed explicitly to measure women's autonomy. Thus, in the course of interviews with women, respondents were asked not only about their education and their work status but also a variety of questions about practices relating to their marriages on the one hand and several dimensions of autonomy within their married lives on the other, including their decision-making authority, their personal freedom of, movement, wife-husband power relations, including wife-beating, and other attitudes.

Specific data in this study on domestic violence are limited. Questions were phrased as follows: "Sometimes men beat their wives. Has your husband ever beaten up [up]?" and "Are you afraid to your husband ?" A problem with such structured questions is that women are very likely to under-report actual experience of violence when asked by an unfamiliar person in a structured interview; moreover, in some cases, beating might be interpreted to include only very severe abuse. No probes or supplementary questions were asked. Hence results are indicative rather than conclusive and must be interpreted cautiously. In addition to questions on actual experience, data on attitudes were elicited, specifically on whether wife-beating can be justified on a variety of grounds, asked of both women and their husbands. A final, rich source of information was a series of 25 focus group discussions that included a discussion of norms and attitudes to wife- beating, drawn from women, and in one case, their husbands.

This paper proceeds as follows: (a) it describes the prevalence of wife-beating among the four groups, and assessing the extent to which these are influenced by regional and communal differentials; (b) it examines common situations in which violence occurs, followed by a look at the extent to which women justify wife-beating as a husband's right; and (c) it explores some correlates of gender violence, and asks whether education, marital age, economic activity and control over economic resources, other measures of autonomy (decision-making authority, freedom of movement) do in fact serve to reduce a women's chances of suffering violence at the hands of her husband, reduce a women's chances of accepting wife-beating as a justifiable from a behaviour, or increase a women's chances of accepting excessive violence as a justifiable reason for a woman to leave her husband. The paper concludes with some implications for programmes and research.

## IV Wife-beating: Prevalence and Regional Disparities

The profiles of respondents (Table 1) reflect the distinct differences in the situation of women in south and north India. South Indian women are better educated, and more likely to work for wages than are north Indian women. Within the household, they have greater decision-making authority, both in terms of household purchases and in terms of child-rearing; they have more freedom of movement, and greater access to, and control over, economic resources than north Indian women do. What is note-worthy for their consistency and magnitude are the wide regional disparities in every aspect of women's lives; and the relatively mild disparities, within each region, by religion.

**Table 1:** Profile of Respondents

	Average	Uttar Pradesh			Tamil Nadu		
		Total	Muslim	Hindu	Total	Muslims	Hindu
Number	1842	859	421	438	983	547	436
<b>1. Woman's Characteristics</b>							
<i>a. Education</i>							
percent with any education	47.4	28.8	18.8	38.8	62.2	70.4*	53.9
Schooled 1-6	32.8	16.2	15.4	16.9	46.2	55.9*	36.5*
Schooled 7 or more years	14.6	13.0	4.0	21.9*	15.9	14.4*	17.4*
<i>b. Education gap: Level of education attained compared to husband (percent)</i>							
Attaining a considerably low level	20.4	34.7	24.0	45.0*	7.9	7.5*	8.5*
Attaining a moderately lower level	36.	428.8	26.6	30.8	43.1	46.8*	38.5*
Attaining the same or higher level	43.2	36.6	49.4	24.2*	48.9	45.7	53.0
<i>c. Economic activity: engaged in (percent)</i>							
Any work in last year	63.0	68.5	63.9	73.1	57.6	39.9*	75.2
Any wage work in last year	27.1	15.7	18.1	13.2	38.6	21.2*	56.0*
Any wage work for 6m/+ in last year	11.4	4.2	2.4	5.9	18.7	12.1*	25.2*
d. Mean age at effective marriage	17.1	16.5	16.3	16.6	17.8	17.4*	18.2*
e. Current age	28.3	27.6	27.5	27.6	29.0	29.0	29.0
<b>2. Kinship factors</b>							
a. Percent to residing with mother-in-law	38.9	49.5	40.2	58.8*	28.2	31.9*	24.5*
b. Dowry in Rs.	31200	25777	21196	30257*	36624	39921*	33324*
Index of say in use of dowry (0-2)	1.08	0.62	0.64	0.60	1.53	1.52*	1.54*
<b>3. Autonomy indices</b>							
a. Decision-making authority (0-5)	1.76	0.76	0.74	0.73	2.79	2.67*	2.90*
b. Mobility: no. of 5 places that ER can visit unescorted	1.93	1.43	1.38	1.47	2.44	2.00*	2.88*
c. Access to resources	2.02	1.81	1.86	1.75	2.24	2.21*	2.27*

d. Control over resources	0.56	0.44	0.42	0.45	0.68	.70*	0.65*
<b>4. Household characteristics</b>							
a. Ownership of consumer goods: no. owned	1.7	1.5	2.3	2.1	2.0	2.1	1.9
b. Husband's education in years	5.6	6.3	4.4	8.2	5.0	5.3	4.6

Note: \*Differences between means compared to Muslim in Uttar Pradesh are significant (0.2)

A somewhat different picture emerges when we consider domestic violence. Overall, about two in five women report that they suffer beating at the hands of their husband. Wife-beating is widely prevalent in all settings, irrespective of region, religion, and even age, as seen in **Table 2**. Even so, the familiar north-south dichotomy is apparent, if somewhat muted: proportions of women who ever suffered beating by their husband range from 36-38 per cent in Tamil Nadu, to 42-48 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. Disparities by religion within each setting are narrow, although in both states, notably, it is Muslims who have a slight advantage. Focus group discussions in both settings, and among a variety of caste groups reiterate the point that wife-beating is widespread.

**Table 2.** Domestic Violence: Prevalence and Regional Disparities

Per Cent of Respondents	Beaten by Husband	Intimidated by Husband	Beaten and Intimidated By Husband	Number
Average	40.9	47.5	26.8	1842
Uttar Pradesh Total	44.7	58.9	36.9	859
Muslims	41.6	58.6	35.6	421
Hindus	47.7	59.1	38.1	438
Tamil Nadu Total	37.2	36.2	16.7	983
Muslims	35.8**	35.6*	14.8*	547
Hindus	38.5**	36.8*	18.6*	436

\* Differences in means compared to Muslim in Uttar Pradesh significant ( $t > 2.0$ )

\*\* Differences in means compared to Hindus of Uttar Pradesh significant ( $t > 2.0$ )

Disparities are wider when we consider proportions of women who fear their husbands. Among Tamilian women, about as many fear (36-37 per cent), as suffer beating at the hands of their husbands (36-38 per cent). In Uttar Pradesh, in contrast, a considerably larger proportion of women fears their husbands (59 per cent in both cases), than admitted to suffering domestic violence (42-48 per cent). The most vulnerable group are women who are both beaten and

intimidated by their husbands. A total of 27 per cent are in the most vulnerable group, so defined, ranging from 36-38 per cent in Uttar Pradesh to 15-19 per cent in Tamil Nadu. Of interest, once again is the fact that region and not religion marks the major point of separation in domestic power relations.

Also interesting is the finding (not shown here) that lifetime experiences of domestic violence remains fairly steady over three age cohorts aged 15-24, 25-30 and 31-39. Unfortunately, this study did not inquire about recent experiences. Studies that have examined recent experiences, however, commonly find that older women experience less violence, since age confers a certain amount of power that allows women to protect themselves against spousal violence. For example, a study in Bangladesh observes that married women aged 30-39 and 40-49 are only about half and one-third as likely to have been beaten in the previous years, compared to women aged 20-29 [Schuler et al 1996].

### **V Common Situations Evoking Violence**

The evidence suggests that beating occurs in a range of situations. The most often stated cause of beating, and the one most likely to be justified by women, is 'disobedience' to the husband's order, or failing to meet her husband's expectations. Disobedience ranges from failure to serve a hot meal, to quarelling with the mother-in-law to drinking or behaving improperly with outside men. There was considerable agreement, in focus group discussions, that this was a common motive for violence. For example, views from Uttar Pradesh included: If there is some mistake that the woman has committed, then also he beats her; if the woman hits her children, then also the man may beat her (Brahmin, Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh).

It is rare for a husband to beat his wife. But if his wife drinks, fights with his mother, disobeys her husband's words, or misbehaves, he has to beat her (Jat, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh).

And similar views are expressed in Tamil Nadu:

If a woman is disobedient to the husband or the husband's family, she gets beaten for it (Muslim, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu).

Women get beaten if their behaviour is not good, or if they don't care for his family (Gounder, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu).

A second common event precipitating domestic violence is drunkenness on the part of the husband. Women are more likely to recognise the unfairness of this, but few express this sentiment. In Uttar Pradesh, women indicated:

When a man drinks, then he beats; he also beats for no fault of the woman (Brahmin, Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh).

They drink, gamble, and beat. These things go together (Jat, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh)

It is worst when the husband is drunk (Brahmin, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh).

If the husband has an affair with someone else, then he comes home drunk and beats his wife. Everyone thinks he is wrong but, no one can say anything to him (Brahmin, Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh).

And in Tamil Nadu, similar views were expressed:

Wife-beating happens. It is especially bad when the man has been drinking. But that is wrong. I'm against that (Muslim, Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu).

Many of these situations were also described in the study in Bangladesh [Schuler et al 1996]. Other situations that precipitate violence that were mentioned during focus group discussions included failure to bring a sufficient dowry, and asking husbands for money.

## **VI Justifying Wife-Beating: A Woman's Due**

The survey also inquired of women whether they considered it right that a man beats his wife in a variety of situations. Unfortunately, questions were phrased somewhat differently in each state. In Uttar Pradesh, attitudinal questions were phrased without qualification (is it right for a man to beat his wife if...). In Tamil Nadu, since women frequently asked for clarification ("you mean even after he has explained to her?"), the question was rephrased to refer to beating "as a last resort" (is it all right for a man to beat his wife if she continues to do .... even after her husband has explained to/ warned /advised her...). As a result of this difference in wording, comparisons of rates is not advisable.

In each state, nevertheless, it is evident that violence against women is a widely accepted form of behaviour, viewed as a woman's due, and her husband's right. Table 3 shows that well over three in four women consider wife-beating a justifiable form of behaviour. Wife-beating is not only considered an acceptable, but a 'right' form of behaviour in a variety of conditions, including the neglect of household chores, and failure to obey her husband. The fact that Tamilian women report more conservative attitudes than women from Uttar Pradesh may well reflect the difference in wording discussed above.



Focus group discussions underscore the extent to which women accept domestic violence as an undisputed aspect of marriage. Women in both Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu recognise and, accept beating as the right of the husband; the general impression is that women who 'misbehave' deserve an occasional show of force. The consensus among women from Tamil Nadu was:

If it is a great mistake, then the husband is justified in beating his wife. Why not? A cow will not be obedient without beatings (Muslim, Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu).

When the wife disobeys, the husband has the right to beat her for it (Gounder, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu).

Men should not beat their wives. But being born as females, we should listen to what our husbands say (scheduled caste Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu).

A similar view was expressed among women from, Uttar Pradesh:

Beating is for the woman's own good, to make her understand when she misbehaves (Brahmin, Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh).

Beating is for the woman's own good. If: she does something wrong, loses something or hits children in anger, the husband must show her (by beating) (Brahmin, Rajapur, Uttar Pradesh).

One focus group discussion held with Jat men in Uttar Pradesh makes the male perspective very clear:

You should not beat your wife, but if the food is not ready, if the rotis are not hot, what choice do you have? (Male, Jat, Uttar Pradesh).

Although wife-beating is justified in every setting, there is some suggestion of a subtle difference between Tamilian women and women from Uttar Pradesh. In focus group discussions, Tamilian women seemed more likely to, qualify their support for wife-beating with such terms as "if it is a great mistake", "if she doesn't listen to her husband", "if she continues even after her husband has explained to her". They argue for greater understanding and less force:

The husband should not beat his wife. He should advise her. It is better to advise than to beat (Muslim, Tamil Nadu).

In contrast, this kind of qualification was almost never made by women from Uttar Pradesh, where, instead, there was a tendency among women to justify it as an expression of the husband's affection.

It is a way man shows his love for his wife. If he doesn't correct her, who else is there ? (Brahmin, Uttar Pradesh).

## VII Perceptions of Wife-beating as a Cause for Leaving Husband

Table 3 also indicates that severe and frequent beating is rarely viewed as a reason for leaving the husband. No more than 6 per cent from each setting express the view that a woman should leave her husband if she is beaten excessively. For one, wife-beating is perceived so strongly as a women's due and husband's right that it is seen as no more than a normal part of womanhood, and rarely as a cause for separation. And second and more realistically, women are acutely aware of the socio-economic realities that offer them few alternatives to the life of violence.

**Table 3:** Attitudines to Wife-Beating: Per Cent Agreeing that Wife-Beating is Justifiable in Selected Situations

	Uttar Pradesh			Tamil Nadu		
	Total	Muslims	Hindus	Total	Muslims	Hindus
Number	859	421	438	983	547	436
<b>A. Percent of of women agreeing that husband is justified in beating his wife if she: *</b>						
1. Beats children (ever)	10.5	10.0	11.0	--	--	--
<i>Even after husand has advised/warned against it</i>	--	--	--	28.3	28.7	28.0
2. Is disrespectful (ever)	25.2	24.7	25.6	--	--	--
<i>Even after husand has advised/warned against it</i>	--	--	--	58.7	62.3	55.1
3. Neglects household chores (ever)	43.9	44.2	43.6	--	--	--
<i>Even after husand has advised/warned against it</i>	--	--	--	56.8	64.5	49.1
4. Is disobedient (ever)	58.0	58.9	57.1	--	--	--
<i>Even after husand has advised/warned against it</i>	--	--	--	69.8	74.9	64.7
5. Drinks alcohol, uses drugs (ever)	68.2	70.1	66.2	--	--	--
<i>Even after husand has advised/warned against it</i>	--	--	--	88.2	88.7	87.6
6. Per cent women agreeing that husband is justified in beating his wife in at least on of the above conditions (ever)	73.8	73.9	73.7	--	--	--

<i>Even after husband has advised/warned against it</i>	--	--	--	92.9	94.0	91.7
7. Mean number of conditions under which violence is approved (ever)	2.1	2.1	2.0	--	--	--
<i>Even after husband has advised/warned against it</i>	--	--	--	3.0	3.2	2.7
<b>B. Per cent women agreeing that woman is justified in abandoning her husband if husband beats wife frequently</b>	5.7	5.0	6.4	5.9	4.8	6.9

\* In Tamil Nadu, it was necessary to qualify the question to: 'is it right for a man to beat his wife if she...even after he has explained to/advised/ warned her...'

### VIII Correlates of Wife-Beating

Although few studies have examined determinants of domestic violence empirically, experience -clearly points to women's lack of autonomy as a major determinant of violence against them. One study has noted, for example, that prominent among predictors of the prevalence of violence against women in a society are economic inequality between men and- women, a pattern of using force to resolve conflict, male authority and control of decision-making in the home, and divorce restrictions for women [Levinson 1989]. In the Indian context, a recently study has observed that high dowries lower the probability that the wife will be beaten [Bloch and Rao 1995].

Table 4 presents the multivariate relationship observed in logistic regression models predicting the probability of a woman reporting being beaten and intimidated by her husband as odds ratios, Controlling for a variety of correlates. Odds ratios are presented for all women, that is, in the ages 15 to 39 (models 1 and 2), and for women married for five or fewer years (models 3 and 4), for whom the violent experience is more recent, enabling us to explore better the extent to which Wife-beating is affected by women's personal autonomy. Odds ratios, greater than one indicate a positive relationship between the independent variable and the probability of being beaten, and odds ratios less than one indicate a negative relationship. Models 1 and 3 include: (a) usually used indicators of women's situation (education, work status, marital and current ages) and the gap between the woman's educational attainment level and that of her husband; (b) kinship indicators (co-residence with mother-in-law, dowry, and women's say in its use, parity and number of sons compared to daughters), and (e) household and community characteristics (region, religion, and economic status, measured in terms of the number of consumer goods owned). Models 2

and 4 add to these four Indians of autonomy, that is, control over and access to resources; decision-making; and mobility.

**Table 4:** Logistic Regression Results Predicting the Probability of Having Been Beaten and Intimidated<sup>1</sup> by Husband, Odds, Ratio: Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

	Uttar Pradesh				Tamil Nadu			
	All Women		Women married up to 5 years		All Women		Women married up to 5 years	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Number	859	859	229	229	983	983	238	238
1. Women's education (R=no education)								
Primary education	0.88	0.94	0.65	0.63	0.54**	0.54**	0.47	0.50
Secondary education	0.53*	0.58 <sup>s</sup>	0.47	0.47	0.49*	0.55 <sup>s</sup>	0.62	0.84
2. Any wage worked last year more than 6 months, out of home								
	1.55	1.71	0.89	1.02	1.25	1.27	1.84	1.93
3. Marriage at 18 or more								
	0.95	0.91	0.60	0.57	0.91	0.89	0.53	0.59
4. Age								
	1.00	10.01	1.21 <sup>s</sup>	1.24 <sup>s</sup>	0.96*	0.96*	0.96	0.93
5. Spousal education								
gap h-w gap huge h-w gap moderate	1.01	1.03	0.62	0.95	1.20	1.13	0.62	0.59
No gap or wife better educated	0.92	0.96	0.45 <sup>s</sup>	0.44*	1.45	1.37	0.47	0.34
6. Autonomy indicators								
Control over economic resources	--	1.42**	--	0.81	--	0.72*	--	0.48**
Access to economic resources	--	0.92	--	0.93	--	0.68**	--	0.58**
Decision-making index	--	0.97	--	1.26	--	1.12	--	1.35
Mobility	--	0.86**	--	0.85	--	1.07	--	1.24
7. Kinship factors								
Co-residence with mother-in-law	0.94	0.87	1.12	1.22	0.89	0.88	0.76	0.87
Number of surviving children	0.94	0.95	0.78	0.75	1.13 <sup>s</sup>	1.12	1.87 <sup>s</sup>	1.85 <sup>s</sup>
More sons than daughters	0.84	0.89	0.91	0.96	0.95	0.99	0.61	0.46
Dowry (rupees in 000s)	0.994 0	0.994 4	1.008 6	1.010 3	1.002 8	1.003 9	1.002 4	0.999 6
Say in sue of dowry	0.84 <sup>s</sup>	0.79*	0.82	0.85	0.68**	0.75*	0.73	0.91
8. Household characteristics								
Number of consumer goods owned	0.85**	0.83**	0.80 <sup>s</sup>	0.80*	0.89 <sup>s</sup>	0.90	0.80	0.78
9. Religion								
District	1.43*	1.47*	0.98	0.92	1.14	1.08	0.95	0.76
	1.83**	1.87**	1.82	1.99 <sup>s</sup>	1.46*	1.45 <sup>s</sup>	1.09	1.16
Log likelihood	524.9 5	514.3 2	133.2 6	131.3 0	415.9 8	408.3 9	80.68	74.74

Pseudo R Squared	0.70	0.09	0.09	0.11	0.06	0.07	0.12	0.19
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\*\* Significant at 01 level or better;

\* Significant at the 0.5 level or better;

\$ Significant at the .10 level or better.

1. Wife-beating and intimidation 1 if both, 0 if not.

What is striking is that (a) only a few variables do in fact exert relatively strong influence on wife-beating and intimidation; and (b) patterns of the relationship are quite different across the two states. Among the correlates of wife-beating and intimidation:

**Education:** It plays a significant role in enabling women to protect themselves from violence and intimidation in both states. This effect is particularly strong in bivariate relationships (not shown here), but although weaker, persists even after controls applied - supporting the hypothesis that education strengthens women's ability to assert themselves. However, patterns are somewhat different in the two states. The influence of education is much stronger in Tamil Nadu than in Uttar Pradesh (notably in the case of all women irrespective of marital duration, models 1 and 2), implying - the extent to which cultural factors have conditioned the relationships. In the relatively more egalitarian setting of Tamil Nadu, the effect of education is strong and consistent, and both primary, and secondary education enables women to protect themselves from physical violence and intimidation. In the highly patriarchal setting of Uttar Pradesh, in contrast, primary education offers little protection -to women. Here it takes the attainment of a secondary education to afford this protection to women.

**Spousal disparity in educational attainment level:** In Uttar Pradesh, what appears to be more important than the woman's level of education, particularly for recently married women, is the gap between educational attainment levels of Women and their husbands.<sup>3</sup> Women whose educational attainment level equals or exceeds (very few) that of their husbands are less likely to suffer beating and intimidation than are women whose educational attainment levels are inferior to that of their husbands. In contrast, in Tamil Nadu, effects are erratic and, for the most part, insignificant.

**Marital age:** Many studies have indicated that marriage at a young age makes women particularly vulnerable to abuse in the husband's home. This contention receives considerable support in the bivariate relationship (not shown here), both for fall women aged 15-39 and for recently married women: women married at

18 or older are less likely to suffer beating and intimidation than women married at a younger age, but the influence is far stronger in Tamil Nadu than in Uttar Pradesh. However, this powerful influence of delayed marriage becomes modest and insignificant when other factors are controlled ([Table 4](#)).

*Autonomy:* The hypothesis that enhanced autonomy within the home can protect women from violence receives some support from the data. Given that the four indices of autonomy reflect the current situation, while the wife-beating variable is retrospective since marriage, this relationship is best examined among young women for whom the violent experience would be more recent. Results suggest that not all of these indices influence domestic violence and relationships are quite different across cultures. In Tamil Nadu, access to, and especially, control over resources appears to reduce chances of violence considerably; in Uttar Pradesh, in contrast, where seclusion of women is more strictly practised, mobility appears to have a similar protective influence.

*Dowry amounts:* There is evidence, some from surveys [see, for example, Bloch and Rao 1995], and more from crime data and media coverage of dowry harassment in India, that women whose dowries are perceived to be inadequate suffer considerably more harassment in the husband's home than do women whose dowries are more substantial. There is some suggestion of this relationship in bivariate but not multivariate relationships in both Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. For example, in the bivariate relationships (not shown here) we observe an inverse relationship between the approximate rupee value of the dowry, or proportions whose dowries contained large amounts of jewellery or goods and wife-beating and intimidation. After economic status and other factors have been controlled, large dowries have a modest protective effect on women only in Uttar Pradesh, but more important than the size of the dowry, apparently, is women's say in the use of the cash and jewelry content of their dowry. In both states- women who exercised some control over their dowries were significantly less likely to suffer beating and intimidation than were other women. The influence however is not evident among recently Married women.

*Co-residence with mother-in-law:* Interference from the mother-in-law is occasionally singled out as a factor precipitating violence, but there is no evidence here, to suggest that women who co-reside with their mothers-in-law are any more prone to suffer beating from their husbands than are other women. Again, relationships vary with context. In Tamil Nadu, where large proportions of marriages are conducted within kin groups, and familial ties between natal and marital families tend to be close, co-residence with the mother-in-law actually protects women from violence (particularly significant in the bivariate relationships, not shown here). In contrast, in Uttar Pradesh, where village

exogamy is more prevalent, and ties between families are distant, the presence of the mother-in-law does little either to prevent or encourage violence.

*Parity and sons:* There is no more than mild and insignificant evidence to suggest that women who have sons are any less likely to suffer violence than are other women. However, in Tamil Nadu where fertility levels are relatively low, women with large numbers of children are apparently more vulnerable to violence than are low parity women.

*Household and community level indicators:* Finally, household and community level controls exert considerable influence on domestic violence. By far the most consistent effect is that of household economic status, which is inversely related to the violence measures in every single group, powerfully in Uttar Pradesh, and more modestly in Tamil Nadu. In addition, in Uttar Pradesh (where Muslims are more likely than Hindus to marry within the kin network). Hindus are more prone to experience violence than are Muslims; religion is relatively-insignificant, in contrast, in Tamil Nadu. Also, there is some evidence of more widespread violence in the more developed district of each state.

Other hypothesis receive less support. For example, the hypothesis that wage earning women enjoy protection from violence is not supported in either setting. Relationships are insignificant in both settings, but coefficients suggest that husbands of working women are in fact somewhat more likely to have beaten and intimidated them than are the husbands of non-working women. In both settings, wage work for women tends to be poverty induced, women's wages are significantly lower than their husbands', and wages are often appropriated by husbands and family elders: in other words, women who work tend to be no less vulnerable than those that do not, and this may explain the lack of an inverse relationship between wage work and wife-beating.

In short, results are striking in several ways. For one, they suggest the relatively poor predictive power of this range of usually expected correlates of wife-beating, and underscore the point that violence against women cuts across all groups in both cultures. Second, in each setting, important among the correlates of wife-beating and intimidation are those reflecting some aspect of women's autonomy. Third, however, results suggest again that factors relating to women's situation and autonomy have a far greater protective influence against violence in Tamil Nadu than in Uttar Pradesh.

For example, in Tamil Nadu, education, and access to and control over resources remain significant factors enabling women to avoid beating and intimidation by their husbands in Uttar Pradesh, in contrast, effects are milder: in the multivariate model, mobility, and having a say over the use of dowry appear to have the major protective influence; also secondary schooled (but not primary

schooled) women are significantly less likely to suffer violence than are other women. Among recently- married women, equality in educational attainment levels have a protective influence, especially; in Uttar Pradesh. Other important correlates. are household and community level: economic status, religion' (Uttar Pradesh, where Muslims but never Hindus do engage in kin marriage), and level of development of the district, with the more developed district displaying more violence than, the less developed one.

### IX Correlates of Attitudes to Wife-Beating

What factors might contribute to a change in women's acceptance and justification of wife-beating? Table 5 explores the relationship, through OLS regressions, between an almost identical set of individual and household level factors and the number of situations in which a woman approves of wife-beating (Uttar Pradesh) or approves of wife-beating as a last resort in the same situations (Tamil Nadu). Excluded are those factors that have no effect whatsoever in any of the groups (spousal education difference), or are not expected -to influence attitudes (size of and control over dowry). Again, the most striking conclusion of this table is the consistently weak links of individual level indicators to the number of occasions on which wife-beating is justified, highlighting how deeply entrenched traditional attitudes justifying wife-beating are in both settings. For example, primary schooled women are no less likely to approve of wife-beating than are uneducated women; secondary schooled women are only moderately less likely to approve it. In Uttar Pradesh, women who, co-reside with their mothers-in-law appear to approve of significantly more situations than women who do not; in the more egalitarian Tamil Nadu, however, co- residence patterns do not disturb attitudes. What has a strong independent effect on attitudes are structural factors: in Uttar Pradesh, women from Meerut, the more developed district indicate significantly more conservative attitudes than do women from the less developed districts while attitudes among Hindus, and Muslims are virtually identical. In Tamil Nadu, the reverse is true: Hindus are far less conservative than Muslims, but district wise variation is marginal.

**Table 5:** Correlates of number of situations in which wife-beating is considered justifiable<sup>1</sup>:

OLS regression coefficients, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu

	Uttar Pradesh	Tamil Nadu
Number	859	983
<b>1. Women's education (R=one)</b>		
Primary Education	0.06	0.11
Secondary education	-0.13	-0.18
<b>2. Any wage work last year <sup>2</sup></b>		
	-0.16	0.01



<b>3. Age</b>	0.02*	-0.02
<b>4. Coresidence with mother-in-law</b>	0.23*	0.20 <sup>\$</sup>
<b>5. Age at effective marriage</b>	0.00	-0.28*
<b>6. Autonomy indicators</b>		
Index of control over economic resources	0.11	-0.16*
Index of access to economic resources	-0.03	0.06
Decision-making index (Major purchases)	-0.07	-0.11*
No of places (of 5) woman can visit unescorted	-0.04 <sup>\$</sup>	-0.07*
<b>7. Experience</b>		
Has suffered beating	0.49**	0.334**
Is intimated	0.12	0.08
<b>8. Household and community characteristics</b>		
Number of consumer goods owned	-1.01	-0.01
Religion	-0.12	-0.34**
Distirct	1.74**	-0.12
Constant	0.44 <sup>\$</sup>	3.40**
Adjusted R squared	0.34	0.06

\* Significant at .05 level or better;

\*\* Significant at .01 level or better;

<sup>\$</sup> Significant at .10 level or better.

1. Of a total of situations (beats children, is disrespectful, neglects household chores, is disobedient, drinks alcohol/uses drugs).
2. More than 6 months, out of home.

The divergence in state patterns becomes more evident when we consider the influence of marriage age and female autonomy on attitudes. In Uttar Pradesh, it is mobility that has a strong inverse effect on approval. In Tamil Nadu, delayed marriage, control over resources and mobility are important in changing traditional attitudes to wife- beating (although, surprisingly, women who have decision-making authority appear to be more likely than other women to approve of wife-beating). Finally, in both states, women who have experienced beating appear, paradoxically, to be significantly more likely to justify it as an acceptable behaviour.

In short, relatively few women, irrespective of individual characteristics, question the appropriateness of wife-beating, and irrespective of extent of gender stratification. There is, however, considerable divergence between settings. In Tamil Nadu, it is evident that factors relating to women's autonomy - secondary education, delayed marriage, and control over resources - have a strong bearing on attitudes. In Uttar Pradesh, in contrast, more traditional forces are at work: co-residence patterns, and the cultural differences that are captured by the structural variables.

## **X Conclusions**

Domestic violence against women is a difficult and intractable health and social problem in India. The overwhelming conclusion of this study, drawn from both multivariate analysis-of quantitative data, and qualitative data, is that wife-beating is not only deeply entrenched, but also that attitudes uniformly justify wife-beating, and few women would opt out of an abusive marriage.

While levels of violence are quite similar in both settings, results suggest that patterns and correlates are quite different, suggesting that relationships are powerfully conditioned by the strength of patriarchy. Notably, factors relating to women's situation and autonomy appear to have a far greater protective influence against violence in Tamil Nadu, where gender relations are more egalitarian, than in Uttar Pradesh, where they are more stratified. In Tamil Nadu, education, delayed marriage, and access to and control over resources remain significant factors enabling women to avoid beating and intimidation by their husbands. In Uttar Pradesh, in contrast, these effects are much milder. Generally similar conclusions may be drawn for the correlates of attitudes to wife-beating.

The resounding policy conclusion of this study is that strategies to combat violence are urgently needed, and that these must address not only the immediate needs of battered women, but must also attack the root causes of violence - women's powerlessness. We have seen that secondary schooling, autonomy, and delayed marriage have an important bearing on protecting women, and efforts to enhance these aspects of women's situation must be pursued (Jejeebhoy and Cook 1997). Breaking the cycle of violence will require concerted efforts across several sectors: education, mass media, and credit. It will also require diverse indirect efforts, such as enforcing minimum age at marriage laws, addressing dowry issues and inheritance patterns, and making inheritance laws and practices more equitable.

At the same time, we have seen that relationships are relatively mild in both settings and that these correlates are of particularly relatively modest importance

in changing behaviour and attitudes in the more highly patriarchal context. These conclusions highlight the need to raise Awareness of women's rights in the area of domestic violence. Also important are efforts that directly address social attitudes and beliefs that legitimise male violence and the notion of male superiority, at the family level among women, their husbands, family elders, and society at large.

At the same time, immediate needs include the provision of shelter, economic support, and legal assistance for battered women who do opt out, on the one hand, and active prosecution of offending husbands on the other. Efforts to protect women must be strengthened and expanded at local and national government levels. Results argue for the integration of services to identify, refer and prevent domestic violence in the primary or reproductive health programme of the country.

This paper also points to the dearth in research on the correlates, determinants and consequences of domestic violence in India. What is needed on the research front is more work that examines the situations and contexts in which violent incidents occur, women's reactions and attitudes towards violent incidents, and perceptions of options available to protect themselves from violent incidents. Equality important is community-based information on the health consequences of domestic violence. Finally, what is also required is greater insights into the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the perpetrators of domestic violence, that is men.

## **Appendix**

### **Index Construction**

Four indices measuring women's autonomy have been created. Items selected for inclusion in these indices are those that are applicable to all women (e.g. decisions on purchases of goods (a fairly universal decision) rather than on the purchase of animals (only relevant if the households owns animals or "participation in decisions on children's marriages is a highly hypothetical question for the majority of women and has hence been excluded).

#### ***A. Decision-Making Authority***

Respondent were asked "who in your family decides whether to...?" and "who has/ have the major say in this decision?". The index of decision-making authority measures women's participation in economic decisions draws upon information on the participation of women in three economic decisions: the purchase of food, major household goods and jewellery. The index sums the

number of these three purchases in which the woman participate assigning score of 1 if she only participates in the decision 2 if she also has the major say. The index thus ranges from 0 to 6.

### ***B. Mobility***

Respondents were asked whether they “can you go along...?” The mobility index sums the number of five places-the health centre, community centre, the home of a relative of friend, a fair, and the next village-to which the woman can go unescorted. The index thus ranges from 0 if the ER must be escorted to every place, to 5 if she can move about unescorted to every place.

### ***C. Women’s Access to Economic Resources***

The index of access to economic resources sums responses to four questions: (a) having a say in how household income is spent; (b) getting cash to spend; (c) being free to purchase small items of jewellery; and (d) being free to purchase gifts for others. The index ranges from 0 to 4.

### ***D. Women’s Control over Economic Resources***

Fewer questions were asked about women’s actual control over economic resources. The index ranges from 0 to 2, and includes (a) whether any of the family’s valuable (land/ jewellery/ vessels) belong to the woman and are controlled by her; and (b) whether she expects to support herself in the future through her own savings.

### **Notes**

[This study is part of a larger study of five Asian countries (India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand), and was supported by the Mellon Foundation. I am grateful to John Cleland, Gretchen Condran, Deanna Jejeebhoy, Sid Schuler and participants at the session on ‘Violence Against women in the Middle East and Asia’ at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, Washington DC (March 1997) for comments and suggestions; to Shantha Rajgopal for research assistance; and Mahesh Naik for data management and programming].

1. In each selected taluka, village lists were drawn up; these included information on the total number of households in each village by religion and caste. In order to adequately represent Muslims and scheduled caste households, contiguous villages were merged into sampling units of roughly 1,000-2,000 households, in a way that would allow for adequate representation of the

different groups in our design. As a result, in Tamil Nadu, where there are generally few Muslims, clusters of villages were much larger than in Uttar Pradesh where Muslims represent a substantial proportion of the population. The PSU included in the sample was then selected randomly. In Tamil Nadu, the selected PSU contained a total of 12 villages from Pollachi (Coimbatore district) and 15 more Mudukulathur (Ramanathapuram district). The selected PSUs in Uttar Pradesh contained fewer villages: 7 from Kunda (Pratapgarh district) and two large village (with many 'petis' or identifiable clusters) in Baghpat (Meerut district). Each household in the selected cluster of villages was listed and this list constituted the sampling frame. The difference in the number of villages selected in each state is attributed to the following: (1) village sizes tend to be larger in Uttar Pradesh than in Tamil Nadu, and (2) since Muslims constitute less than 10 per cent of the population of Tamil Nadu, a larger number of villages were required in order to reach our target ERs.

A household listing exercise was carried out in each of the selected PSUs prior to data collection. House listing was conducted on every structure in the PUS and comprised: assigning numbers of structures (SWAFNOs) recording the addresses of each structure and listing the names, religion and caste of each household head. Household to be interviewed were selected randomly from the household lists of each religion and caste list.

2. The survey comprised a household questionnaire, an eligible respondent's questionnaire (ER), and a husband's questionnaire (result not reported here). Also fielded were community questionnaires of each village site and a total of 25 focus group discussions, held among women in different sites and different religion and caste groups, and one among men. A total of six focus groups were conducted per site: two among Muslims, two among the dominant Hindu caste and one each among the high and low caste groups. The group was restricted to women aged up to 39 but was not restricted to respondents to the questionnaire (about 75 per cent were respondents). In Meerut district, one FGD was conducted among jat men as well.

3. Education attainment levels are (a) primary; (b) middle; (c) some secondary; (d) completed secondary; (e) junior college: completed class 12; (f) some college: completed 1-3 years of college; (g) college graduate or high. Spousal disparity in educational attainment is measured by difference in above levels attained; women who are at the same level of education as, or, at a higher level than their husbands are defined to have no gap; women whose husbands are 1-2 levels better educated are defined to have moderate educational gap; and woman whose husbands are more than two levels better educated are defined to have a considerable educational gap.

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