

Does Women's Empowerment Promote Help-Seeking for Spousal Violence in India? *Findings from a National Survey*

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Objectives

- The majority of women who experience spousal violence do not seek help.
- Research suggests that aspects of empowerment have a positive influence on a women's well-being and healthcare-seeking behaviors. But little is known about the influence of empowerment on help-seeking for spousal violence.
- Spousal violence and empowerment are shaped by local norms and customs. Examining the role of empowerment is particularly relevant in societies with strong patriarchal traditions and where spousal violence may be culturally sanctioned (Sharma, 2010; Goel, 2005).
- Guided by an empowerment framework and influenced by the social ecological model, we examined the role and interaction of individual and contextual empowerment for help-seeking from partner violence among married women in India.

Data and Measures

Data:

National Family Health Survey, 2005/2006 (International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ORC Macro, 2007) and the Gender-Empowerment Index and the Gender Development Index (GDI) (India Ministry of Women & Child Development, 2009).

Measures:

Help-seeking: two mutually exclusive sources: from family/friends or from an institution (police, lawyer, religious leader or medical person). Women who sought help from both were included in the institutional category.

Violence: pushed, shook or had an object thrown at; severe= slapped, hit with a fist or something harmful; kicked or dragged, strangled or burned; threatened with a knife; forced sex or other sexual acts.

Covariates: demographic variables included individual and household characteristics: age, total number of children, urban residence, average household educational attainment, religion, employment status, daughter-in-law status, and whether she saw her father beat her mother.

Results

Table 1: Percent of Currently Married Women Age 15-49 Who Sought, by Source and Selected Characteristics, India, 2005-06 (N=22, 033)

	Family or Friends (6,079)		Institutions (299)	
	Mean or %	SE	Mean or %	SE
Relationship Empowerment Measures				
No. of decisions she participates	3.9	0.05	3.4	0.24
Financial Autonomy				
Does not have money for own use	22.0%	0.62	1.0%	0.13
Has money for own use	24.0%	0.83	1.0%	0.12
No. of ways move freely (4 = max)	2.3	0.04	2.9	0.13
Acceptability of IPV				
Some reason	23.4%	0.66	0.9%	0.11
No reason	22.2%	0.75	1.2%	0.16
No. of reasons	2.4	0.05	2.2	0.23
Partner education level (years)	5.0	0.10	5.7	0.47
Partner education difference				
Has more education	21.7%	0.71	0.9%	0.15
Has the same or less education	23.8%	0.64	1.1%	0.11
No. of control issues	1.8	0.04	3.0	0.18
Partner alcohol use				
Does not drink alcohol	18.1%	0.61	0.6%	0.11
Drinks alcohol	28.8%	0.77	1.4%	0.15
Experienced severe violence	30.9%	0.76	1.7%	0.02
Experienced an injury				
No	14.5%	0.01	0.3%	0.00
Yes	38.6%	0.01	2.2%	0.00
State Empowerment Measures				
Mean no. of accepted reasons for IPV	1.7	0.01	1.8	0.05
Proportion with loan	7.2%	0.14	7.8%	0.51
Proportion of women experiencing IPV	39.7%	0.31	36.3%	1.11
Gender Development Index (std)	0.57	0.00	0.60	0.01
Gender Empowerment Measure (std)	0.46	0.00	0.46	0.00

std = standardized; IPV = intimate partner violence

Table 2: Odds Ratios for Help-Seeking for Spousal Violence, Among Currently Married Women Age 15 to 49 in India, 2005/2006

	Family or OR SE		Institutions OR SE	
Individual & Household characteristics				
Age	1.00	0.01	1.04**	0.015
Total no. of children	0.99	0.02	0.88*	0.05
Empowerment characteristics				
Educational attainment	1.04**	0.02	1.04	0.05
Wealth	1.01	0.04	0.97	0.11
Relationship-level				
Husband's education	0.99	0.01	1.03	0.05
Husband has more education	0.99	0.01	1.06	0.37
No. of husband's control issues	1.16***	0.02	1.43***	0.08
Drinks alcohol	1.37***	0.09	1.74	0.50
Justifies wife-beating	0.95	0.07	0.71	0.16
No. of ways she can move freely	1.09**	0.03	1.30**	0.13
Participates in decision-making	0.99	0.01	0.95	0.04
Has her own money	0.90	0.07	1.03	0.23
Severity of violence	1.11	0.12	na	na
Injury	3.10***	0.21	4.82***	1.49
State-level				
Average no. of reasons justified for IPV	1.26***	0.08	1.00	0.18
Prevalence of IPV	1.12	0.07	0.74*	0.11
Percent of women w/loan	0.97***	0.01	1.05	0.03
Gender Development	0.90	0.05	1.44*	0.21
Gender Empowerment	1.48***	0.11	0.52***	0.08

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. OR = odds ratio; SE = standard error. IPV= intimate partner violence. Also adjusted for religion, urban residence, daughter-in-law status and household education, which were all not significant at p<.05. na: not estimated due to collinearity with the outcome.

Interactions between state & relationship-level characteristics were not significant.

Empowerment Framework

Individual empowerment: a measure of years of education and a measure of wealth quintile.

Relationship empowerment:

Any participation in decision-making: a binary measure from six questions on whether the woman participates in decision-making for household spending, deciding to obtain health care for herself and visiting her family.

Attitude towards wife beating: a binary measure from seven questions on whether a man is ever justified in beating his wife.

Freedom of movement: a continuous measure from four questions on whether she was allowed to go alone to four places.

Has her own money: a dichotomous measure of access to her own money.

Husband's controlling behaviors: a continuous measure from six questions on the husband restrictions and trustfulness.

Educational difference: whether her husband has more years of education than herself.

Severity of violence and injury: whether the woman experienced severe violence or an injury from the violence.

State-level empowerment:

Proportion of women who experience violence, proportion of women who justify wife-beating for any reason; proportion of women with a loan; the Gender-Empowerment Index and the Gender Development Index (GDI) (Ministry of Women & Child Development, 2009).

Factor analysis was to verify construct validity of empowerment measures. We estimated odds ratios for each form of help-seeking: 1) individual, & household characteristics, 2) + individual & state-level empowerment measures; 3) + interaction of empowerment measures.

Summary

- The strongest indicators that a women would seek help were the severity of violence, the husband's controlling behaviors and the state-level norms around gender empowerment.
- Individual measures of empowerment are not related to seeking help. Among relationship measures of empowerment, freedom of movement and husband's behaviors were predictive of help-seeking.
- Few women seek help from institutions. Whether the woman justified wife-beating was unrelated to whether she sought help.
- Further research is needed to understand how social network influences, rather than social status measures, may improve help-seeking.

Implications

- Findings point to the pervasive reluctance and obstinate social barriers women face in response to violence, despite advances in women's education, autonomy and wealth.
- Institutional recourse for abuse is rare. Reforms in the last 10 years, such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in 2005, and local and international non-governmental organizations, have increased institutional attention to domestic violence. However, a review of the effects of the 2005 law indicated positive changes but many challenges (Bhatia, 2012).
- Governments must allocate resources and pursue reforms in traditional and legal systems to alter social norms around wife-beating.

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