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Mass media exposure and attitude towards spousal violence in India

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the correlates of attitude towards spousal violence using nationally representative data from India's National Family Health Survey of 2005–2006. Amongst the socio-economic correlates, the focus of the analysis is on exposure to mass media. The results show that the association between attitude towards spousal violence and regular exposure to mass media varies across different media forms. Regular exposure to newspaper or magazines is associated with lower likelihood of women and men justifying wife-beating. Regular exposure to radio has statistically weak association with the attitude of women and men, and has mixed qualitative evidence for men. Regular exposure to television, the most popular amongst the three forms of mass media, does not have any significant association with women's attitude, and has some undesirable results for men. These findings indicate the desirability of enhancing access to print media, which is a challenging objective due to the fact that substantive proportion of women and men have no education. These results also highlight a need for comparative analysis of the qualitative contents of different forms of mass media in India.

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1. Introduction

There is a growing consensus that intimate partner violence against women is a serious challenge for human development. Intimate partner violence not only violates the basic human right of freedom from violence, it is also a serious public health problem due to its adverse effects on the physical and mental well-being of women and children (Ahmed, Koenig, & Stephenson, 2006; Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Carrillo, 1992; Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000; Heise, Pitangy, & Germain, 1994; Heise, Raikes, Watts, & Zwi, 1994; Jejeebhoy, 1998a; Martin et al., 1999; Morrison & Orlando, 1999; Nussbaum, 2005; Sen, 2001; Thomas & Beasley, 1993; UNICEF, 2000; World

Health Organization, 1997, 2013). Despite the growing international concerns, the proportion of men and women who justify intimate partner violence against women for various reasons remains substantive (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006; Jejeebhoy, 1998b; Kishor & Johnson, 2004; Waltermaurer, 2012). This attitude of individuals towards intimate partner violence is one of the most challenging hurdles, as attitude towards violence against women influences the perpetration of violence as well as the responses to the violence (Flood & Pease, 2009; Waltermaurer, 2012). Hence enhancing our understanding of the correlates of attitude towards intimate partner violence can provide vital input for redressing this issue.

This study analyzes the correlates of individual attitude towards spousal violence in India utilizing data from National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted in 2005–2006. Due to the cultural traditions of India, cohabitation of couples take place predominantly after marriage.

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Hence, spousal violence is representative of intimate partner violence in India and is often used interchangeably. According to NFHS 2005–2006, approximately 36% married women in India experienced spousal violence, and approximately 51% married women and 42% married men justified wife beating for at least one reason. These basic statistics indicate that spousal violence against women is quite prevalent in India, and attitude of individuals towards spousal violence needs to be addressed.

Amongst the socio-economic correlates of individual attitude towards spousal violence against women, this study focuses on mass media exposure. Mass media reaches substantive proportion of the population in India. According to NFHS 2005–2006, approximately 64% of the married women and 78% of married men had regular exposure to at least one of the three forms of mass media – newspaper/magazines, radio, and television. Thus, mass media can potentially play an important role in influencing attitude towards spousal violence. An empirical analysis of whether and how mass media exposure is associated with individual attitude towards spousal violence against women can provide important insights.

2. Literature review

Studies show that mass media can influence people's perception and behavior in several important contexts and may serve as a potent policy instrument with its potential of spreading information and awareness. For example, the literature depicts that television influences attitude towards the West in the Muslim world (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2004), voting patterns in USA (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007), fertility in Brazil (La Ferrara, Chong, & Duryea, 2012); and movie violence influences violent crimes (Dahl & DellaVigna, 2009). In the growing empirical literature analyzing the correlates of individual attitude towards intimate partner violence (see Waltermaurer, 2012, for a literature review), Uthman, Lawok, and Moradi (2009) find significant association between mass media exposure and attitude towards intimate partner violence.

Uthman et al. (2009) analyze the correlates of attitude towards intimate partner violence using data from nationally representative Demographic Health Survey (DHS) of seventeen sub-Saharan African countries. Their study shows that reading newspaper is significantly associated with lower odds of justifying intimate partner violence in eleven out of the seventeen countries included in their study and higher odds of justifying intimate partner violence in one country; listening to radio is significantly associated with lower odds of justifying intimate partner violence in two out of the seventeen countries and higher odds of justifying intimate partner violence in one country; watching television is significantly associated with lower odds of justifying intimate partner violence in three out of the seventeen countries and higher odds of justifying intimate partner violence in three countries.¹ Thus there is

significant evidence that attitude towards intimate partner violence against women in sub-Saharan African countries is associated with mass media exposure; however, the association is not unambiguously positive. Although Uthman et al. (2009) do not provide explanation for the varied association of attitude towards intimate partner violence with different forms of mass media, one can conjecture that these varied associations can emerge either due to qualitatively different contents across different forms of media, or due to the diverse ways mass media consumers engage with different forms of media with similar contents.

To the best of our knowledge, for India, Jensen and Oster (2009) is the only empirical study that has analyzed the influence of a mass media (cable television), on various indicators of women's well being, including their attitude towards intimate partner violence. Using evidence from rural areas of selected states in India, Jensen and Oster (2009) find that introduction of cable television reduces the likelihood of women justifying wife beating. They rationalize this relationship based on the argument that cable television provides women exposure to ways of life of others outside their own local peripheries, which can influence their perception about how women ought to be treated. The argument and evidence from their study can be generalized to hypothesize that exposure to mass media is associated with lower likelihood of individuals justifying intimate partner violence against women. This study aims to put this general hypothesis to empirical test.

There are several features of this study that distinguish it from Jensen and Oster's (2009) study. First, Jensen and Oster (2009) analyze only women's attitude towards intimate partner violence. This study analyzes the attitudes of both women and men, as it is important to understand the correlates of the attitudes of the victim (or potential victim) as well as the perpetrator (or potential perpetrator) of violence. Second, Jensen and Oster (2009) analyze only one specific form of media, cable television. This study analyzes three different forms of mass media – print (newspaper or magazine), audio (radio), and audio-visual (television) media. Third, while Jensen and Oster (2009) use evidence from rural areas of five selected states in India, this study is based on a nationally representative dataset of India.

Rani and Bonu (2009) is the only existing study that has used nationally representative data for analyzing attitude towards intimate partner violence in India. Rani and Bonu (2009) conduct a comparative analysis of attitude of women and men towards intimate partner violence in seven Asian countries using data from Demographic Health Surveys conducted between 1998 and 2001. However, they do not include mass media exposure in their study. Hence, this empirical analysis of the association between attitude

Uganda and Zimbabwe. An individual's attitude towards intimate partner violence against women is based on whether (s)he justifies wife beating for at least one of the following reasons: if wife burns the food, if wife argues with the husband, if wife goes out without informing the husband, if wife neglects the children, if the wife refuses to have sexual relations with the husband. They compare the attitude of women with that of men in a given country using a gender indicator in the regressions. They find that in 13 out of these 17 countries women are more likely to justify wife beating.

¹ Uthman et al. (2009) analyze data from 17 African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania,

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