



Impact of the spread of mass education on married women's experience with domestic violence



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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the association between mass education and married women's experience with domestic violence in rural Nepal. Previous research on domestic violence in South Asian societies emphasizes patriarchal ideology and the widespread subordinate status of women within their communities and families. The recent spread of mass education is likely to shift these gendered dynamics, thereby lowering women's likelihood of experiencing domestic violence. Using data from 1775 currently married women from the Chitwan Valley Family Study in Nepal, we provide a thorough analysis of how the spread of mass education is associated with domestic violence among married women. The results show that women's childhood access to school, their parents' schooling, their own schooling, and their husbands' schooling are each associated with their lower likelihood of experiencing domestic violence. Indeed, husbands' education has a particularly strong, inverse association with women's likelihood of experiencing domestic violence. These associations suggest that the proliferation of mass education will lead to a marked decline in women's experience with domestic violence in Nepal.

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1. Introduction

Extensive research confirms that domestic violence has significant social, physical, and mental health consequences for victims (Devries et al., 2011; Ellsberg et al., 2008; Naved and Akhtar, 2008; Stephenson et al., 2006). Although domestic violence against women remains high in many world regions (Diop-Sidibe et al., 2006; Naved et al., 2006; Kishor and Johnson, 2004; WHO, 2001), South Asian women continue to face the highest levels and most severe forms of domestic violence in the world (Carvalho, 2007; Naved et al., 2006; Panday et al., 2008). Despite the severity of domestic violence against women in South Asia, most empirical evidence on domestic violence comes from Western, industrialized societies; thus, little is known about the factors that can decrease women's likelihood of experiencing domestic violence in South Asia (Koenig et al., 2006; Naved et al., 2006; Panday et al., 2008).

Building on extensive evidence that mass education profoundly shapes the organization of societies and families, theory suggests that mass education may significantly pattern women's exposure to domestic violence. A thorough investigation of

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mass education and domestic violence, however, requires data that are representative of the female population, particularly those who are married, and also track the expansion of mass education both across communities and families and women's experience with domestic violence. In this paper, we leverage such unique data from rural Nepal in order to investigate the association between Western-oriented mass education and women's experience with domestic violence in marriage.

The results from this study will advance our knowledge of married women's experience with domestic violence in two important ways. First, we provide a new theoretical framework for the study of variation in domestic violence that focuses on education. This theoretical framework identifies multidimensional connections between the spread of Western-oriented mass education and women's experience with domestic violence. Our multilevel framework recognizes that changes in the community educational context restructure individual-level opportunities and constraints, which in turn affect individual behavior (Alexander, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Durkheim, 1984 [1893]). Building on the life course perspective, this framework acknowledges the importance of changes in the educational context over time as well as the sequencing of these changes (Axinn and Barber, 2001; Elder, 1985). Our framework is also intergenerational and identifies how the educational experiences of multiple generations can protect women against domestic violence. More specifically, in addition to considering women's own and their husband's education, we also consider the educational experiences of their parents and parent-in-laws to provide a thorough understanding of how educational opportunity influences women's individual-level experiences of domestic violence.

Second, we use unusually detailed data from a contemporary, large-scale South Asian panel study—the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS) in rural Nepal—to conduct empirical tests of our framework. Because most studies of the spread of mass education are historical, empirical limitations preclude the exploration of important theoretical issues regarding the consequences of mass education (Barber and Axinn, 2004; Caldwell et al., 1988; Khaniya and Kiernan, 1994). In a setting where the spread of mass education occurred recently, however, we have direct information about its spread, consequences, and the individual-level behaviors that produced those consequences. With measures of childhood exposure to education at the community level and variation in parents' (and parent-in-laws'), husbands', and women's own educational experiences, we are able to provide comprehensive empirical estimates of the multidimensional, educational factors producing variation in women's experience with domestic violence.

2. Theoretical framework

Scholars argue that patriarchal ideology, a significant component of the South Asian cultural configuration, is responsible for the high prevalence of domestic violence in South Asia (Ahmad et al., 2004; Cain et al., 1979; Johnson, 1995; Srinivas, 1952). This cultural configuration evolved through Hindu religious doctrines that emphasize strong hierarchal relations based on gender (male supremacy), caste, and seniority (Carvalho, 2007; Majumdar, 2003; Naved et al., 2006; Panday et al., 2008). For example, according to *Manusmriti* (9.3), one of the most regarded Hindu religious scripts, a woman is protected by her father in childhood, by her husband in youth, and by her sons in old age, and is never fit for independence. Married women are seen as their husbands' property and responsibility, and are expected to devote their life to servicing his and his children's needs.

Although Hindu ideology was originally associated with a single ethnic group (i.e., high caste Hindus of the Indo-Aryan origin), over time, Hindu principles spread as other groups began to adopt its practices and customs (Adhikari, 1998; Regmi, 1999). In many parts of South Asia this ideology continues to be pervasive, even among non-Indo-Aryan groups. This cultural process is often referred as “sanskritization,” referencing the Sanskrit scholarship that guides high-caste Hindus. As a result, both as an ideological and normative force, Hindu religious doctrine strongly influences marital practices and relationships in Nepal, including the acceptability of domestic violence (Acharya and Bennett, 1981).

In Nepal, because of social, political, and economic isolation from other countries, exposure to foreign cultures and ideologies remained uncommon until the mid-1950s (Berreman, 1972; Bista, 1972). Nepalese families had little exposure to different views and beliefs about social and gender relationships, such as those emphasizing independence and personal freedom, gender equality, and marital relationships based on individual choice (Macfarlane, 1986; Smith, 1973). The dramatic social and economic changes in Nepal in more recent decades, however, has afforded greater exposure to other cultures and, in turn, has led to ideological shifts (English, 1985; Panday, 1999). In the mid-1970s, Nepal began receiving a large portion of foreign aid in order to support the public education system and increase infrastructure to improve the living conditions among the rural poor (Panday, 1999). As a result, there has been a dramatic increase in primary and secondary schools, wage work, transportation and communication infrastructure, and mass media (Beutel and Axinn, 2002; Jamison and Lockheed, 1987). Extensive research shows that, among other aspects of social change, exposure to community educational context and educational experiences have particularly dramatic consequences for many dimensions of family change, including the entry into marriage, marital arrangements, childbearing, and the nature of marital relationships (Allendorf and Ghimire, 2013; Ghimire et al., 2006; Hoelter et al., 2004).

2.1. Spread of mass education and domestic violence

Because Nepal was kept in complete isolation from the rest of the world with a ban on the general public attending school, formal schooling was a privilege for the elite. After the ruling class—The Rana Family regime—was overthrown in

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