

Marital Violence and Women's Employment and Property Status: Evidence from North Indian Villages

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Summary. — Dominant development policy approaches recommend women's employment on the grounds that it facilitates their well-being. However, empirical work on the relationship between women's employment status and well-being as measured by freedom from marital violence yields ambiguous results. Motivated by the ambiguity, this paper uses data from Uttar Pradesh, to examine the effect of women's employment and asset status as measured by their participation in paid work and house ownership, respectively, on spousal violence. Unlike the existing literature, we treat women's work status as endogenous and find that engagement in paid work and house ownership, are associated with reductions in violence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Historical organization of public and private spaces naturally associates women with private sphere and domesticity, and thus home is perceived as a woman's domain. However, home is not a safe abode and around the world, women are subjected to spousal violence. Based on survey data, a recent multi-country study (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006) pegs the incidence of intimate partner inflicted physical violence at between 15% and 71%.

Domestic violence is recognized as a violation of the basic rights of women, and freedom from such violence is an important aspect of women's welfare. Domestic violence has severe health and social consequences for women (WHO, 2002). Various studies have shown (Carrillo, 1992; Heise, Pitanguy, & Germain, 1994; Menon-Sen & Shiva Kumar, 2001; Morrison & Orlando, 1999; UNICEF, 2000) the large economic and social costs of domestic violence. Violence or even the threat of violence constrains the choices women make and restricts their participation in development, thus, preventing them from realizing their full potential (ICRW, 1999, 2000, 2002).

Empirical evidence on violence against women in India is available from various sources. For instance, the National Family Health Survey III (NFHS III) conducted in 2005–06 (IIPS and Macro International, 2007) reveals that 37% of married women in India have experienced physical or sexual violence. According to a multi-site household survey conducted by the International Center for Research on Women, 52% of women have suffered at least one incident of physical or psychological violence in their lifetime (ICRW, 2000).

Beyond the incidence of violence, there is a small but growing body of literature which uses information from various parts of India and elsewhere to examine the empirical link between domestic violence and various socio-economic attributes. One strand of the literature focuses on the link between domestic violence (women's welfare) and dowry.

Examples include, Bloch and Rao (2002) and Srinivasan and Bedi (2007) for India, Naved and Persson (2005) for Bangladesh and Zhang and Chan (1999) for Taiwan.

A second strand examines the links between domestic violence and women's involvement in income generating activities as captured by a woman's earnings and participation in paid employment, and between violence and women's ownership of economic assets (gold and property). Theoretically, the effect of a woman's intra-household economic status on violence is ambiguous. While an increase in household economic resources attributable to a woman may reduce economic stress and spousal violence, it may also introduce additional tension and struggle within a household. In an effort to maintain the *status quo*, the increased economic strength of a woman may be countered by an increase in violence. Consistent with this ambiguity, the existing empirical evidence on the link between a woman's involvement in income generating activities and violence is not clear-cut.¹ In the Indian context, Rao's (1997) study on a community in Karnataka shows that a wife's income is associated with reduced lifetime violence. With regard to women's employment, Jejeebhoy (1998) finds that a woman's employment in wage work has no statistically significant impact on the probability of experiencing violence in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, while based on NFHS II, Kishor and Johnson (2004) report that, as compared to non-working women, women being paid in cash were more likely to have experienced lifetime physical violence. In contrast, Panda and Agarwal (2005) report that in Kerala, women with regular employment as compared to unemployed women, were far less likely to have ever experienced violence. Beyond employment status, Panda and Agarwal's (2005) innovative study uses women's ownership of property (land and house)

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to capture economic status and finds that women's ownership of property is associated with a sharp reduction in domestic violence.

An empirical concern which has rarely been addressed in the literature is the endogeneity between a woman's economic status (employment and income) and violence.² For instance, as is the key concern in the developed country literature (see [Staggs & Riger, 2005](#); [Tolman & Wang, 2005](#)), violence may inhibit women's participation in employment or women who experience violence may be more likely to seek paid employment. If women who experience violence are more likely to seek paid employment, then estimates that do not account for this possibility are likely to draw the misleading conclusion that women with higher earnings or those engaged in paid work are more likely to experience violence.

Our paper belongs to the genre of work that examines the link between women's employment status and ownership of economic assets on domestic violence. In particular, based on qualitative and quantitative primary data collected from eight villages of Kaushambi district in Uttar Pradesh, a northern Indian state, this paper examines the link between women's participation in paid work and women's ownership of a house on domestic violence. While there are other papers that have examined such links, this paper offers several relatively novel features. First, unlike other papers which are usually based only on responses from females, this paper draws its insights from the testimonies of women *and* men. Information from both women and men allows us to compare the reasons both sexes provide for the use of violence and allows us to gauge the extent to which violence may be under-reported. Second, we attempt to control for the potentially endogenous relationship between women's engagement in paid work and spousal violence. Third, while there are a number of papers that have examined the link between women's income/employment and violence, the link between women's property ownership and violence is restricted to [Panda and Agarwal \(2005\)](#). Their paper on the effect of women's ownership of property on violence is based on Kerala, a south Indian state where a substantial proportion of the population follows a matrilineal system and where women enjoy relatively more autonomy and freedom of movement, as compared to the north. In contrast, this paper examines whether the violence-reducing effects of house ownership also prevail in a north Indian state which has a strong patrilineal system and where women enjoy relatively less autonomy.

The following section of the paper provides a brief description of the study area and the data. Section 3 discusses female employment patterns and spousal violence in the study area. Section 4 outlines the empirical specification. Section 5 discusses the econometric estimates and Section 6 concludes.

2. THE CONTEXT AND THE DATA

The paper is based on information from Kaushambi, a relatively less developed district in Uttar Pradesh (henceforth UP), a northern Indian state. According to Census 2001 data, Kaushambi has a high degree of illiteracy (70% among women and 38% among men, as compared to corresponding state-level averages of 58% and 31%, respectively), and a high infant mortality rate (94 per 1000 live births as compared to 84 per 1000 for the state).³

Hindus constitute the majority of the state's population (about 85%) and the social order in the state is based on the caste system among the Hindus. As in other North Indian states, gender relations are driven by patriarchal socio-cultural

norms which are, as noted by [Agarwal \(1988, p. 92\)](#), "characterized by lower female labor participation (and higher gender disparities in participation), a higher incidence of dowry, greater intra-household discrimination against female children, and lower female (to male) survival chances than the southern states."

Empirical confirmation of the nature of gender disparities comes from various sources. For instance, 2001 census figures show that female labor force participation rate is 29% in Uttar Pradesh as compared to 45% in the Southern states ([Planning Commission, 2002](#)). Dowry differences across regions also reflect the asymmetric gender relations and a recent study by [Dalmia and Lawrence \(2005\)](#) reports that dowries are about thirty five% higher in Uttar Pradesh (north India) than in Karnataka (south India).⁴ The lower chances of female survival are reflected in the state's female life expectancy of 59.3, over the period (2001–05) which may be compared to the average female life-expectancy of 66.3 in the four southern states.⁵

The data used in this paper were collected in 2006 and the data collection process was designed to deal with two issues. First, to examine the role of women's economic status (as captured by their participation in paid employment and house ownership) on domestic violence and the effect of women's work participation on the health of their children (in the age group zero to five). Given these aims, Kaushambi district was chosen as it has a relatively high rate of female work participation as compared to the rest of the state.⁶ In order to explore caste and class variations within Kaushambi district, data were gathered from eight multi-religious and multi-caste villages.

A variety of data collection methods was used. In terms of sequencing, after village selection, an entry meeting in the form of an interview was undertaken with the village *Pradhan* (head). Thereafter, eight focus group discussions were conducted. To encourage open discussion the groups were segregated along gender lines and there were four all male and four all female groups. Among other topics, these discussions dealt with attitudes toward women's work participation. On the basis of these discussions the semi-structured survey instrument was amended and a pilot survey was conducted, after which the survey was canvassed.

The survey was fielded in 155 households, that is, about 20 households from each of the eight villages. Before each individual interview, respondents were informed that the instrument was designed to collect the perspectives of husbands and wives on several topics and that some of the topics would be of a personal nature. Only if respondents agreed did the interview proceed. Thus, informed consent was obtained. Second, husbands and wives living in the same household were interviewed separately and confidentially by same sex interviewers. Given the aims of the study, the target population was defined as complete pair households, that is, both husband and wife are alive and living in the same physical space, with at least one child in the age group zero to five.⁷ Households satisfying these criteria were further sub-divided into those in which women participated regularly in paid work (that is, women who worked more than six months during the year) and those in which women did not engage regularly in paid work. About half the respondents were randomly chosen from each of these two groups. At the household level both husbands and wives were canvassed. The survey gathered a wide range of information on issues such as educational and employment status, economic status and ownership of assets, intra-household allocation of resources and violence against women.

Given the purposive manner in which the sample data have been gathered, focusing on complete pair households, and the

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