

# Prevalence and Risk Factors of Intimate Partner Violence among Indian Women: A Secondary Data Analysis of NFHS-4

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## Abstract

**Background:** During the last few decades, violence towards women in general, and intimate partner violence (IPV) in particular, is increasingly being acknowledged as a violation of basic human rights and it is recognized as the consequential barricade of the empowerment of women. **Objectives:** To determine the prevalence and risk factors associated with IPV. **Methodology:** This study used a nationally representative data collected through NFHS-4 (2015-2016). In total 66013 ever married women aged 15-49 were analysed. Multiple logistic regression model was used to quantify the factors associated with IPV. **Result:** The prevalence of women ever confronting IPV in India was 29.5 per cent. It was also found that less severe violence was most prevalent accounting for 27.5% whereas severe violence was 8.2 percent. Prevalence of IPV was higher among women who were uneducated, in the middle age group, who had older partners, from rural background; those with uneducated partners, who themselves and their partners drink alcohol, who are unemployed themselves and have unemployed partners, poorest compared to richest, who justify wife beating compared to who do not, who had witnessed their father beating their mother compared to who did not and all these factors were found to be statistically significant. **Conclusion:** Prevalence of IPV in India is considerably lower compared to other developing countries. Factors like alcohol consumption of partner, education level of respondents as well as partners, past exposure to violence, justified wife beating and wealth index which are linked to IPV which need to be tackled to bring down the prevalence of IPV.

**Key-words:** Intimate partner violence, NFHS, India, risk factor, women

## Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence, commonly known as Domestic Violence or Spousal Abuse, knows no geographical, ethnic or cultural boundaries.<sup>[1]</sup> Intimate partner violence has not only been seen as an infringement of basic human rights, but it also accounts for the health burdens, intergenerational effects, and

demographic consequences of such violence.<sup>[2]</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Intimate partner violence (IPV) as “behaviours within an intimate relationship that cause physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours”.<sup>[3]</sup> It can also be found in same-sex partnerships even when women can be the perpetrators, but women are the most common victims of such male perpetuated IPV.<sup>[4]</sup> The Intimate partner violence focused in this study will be on the abuse against women by males, which is common incident nowadays. Gender inequality is another issue existing in the society and violence against women can be considered as a consequence as well as a cause of it.

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Worldwide 35% of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.<sup>[4]</sup> In addition, there may be other forms of violence to which they are vulnerable to. Out of this, intimate partner violence is the most common. Globally, about 1 in 3 women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.<sup>[4]</sup> Across the globe, 34% of all female homicides are committed by male intimate partners.<sup>[4]</sup> Violence against women has also been recognized as an important health problem publicly, outstanding to its substantial outcome for women's physical, mental and reproductive health.<sup>[4-7, 9, 10]</sup> It is also known from the studies that detrimental effects of abuse continue long after violence has stopped.<sup>[8]</sup> More importantly, it affects country's economy through medical cost, loss of labor hours and increased disability.<sup>[2]</sup>

There are many risk factors that are consistently identified across many regions for IPV. Factors like young age, low level of education, personality disorders, sexual abuse during childhood, harmful use of alcohol and drug increased the man's likelihood of committing violence against his partner.<sup>[3,5,7,12]</sup> On the other hand, there are also many context specific factors; for instance, some of the factors identified in the rural settings may not be factor in the urban settings.<sup>[12]</sup> Additionally, relationship factors like male dominance in the family, age at marriage, man having multiple partners and spousal education gap are also associated with IPV.<sup>[8,11,13]</sup> Poverty, low social and economic status of women, lack of legal sanctions against IPV within marriage is also associated with IPV.<sup>[6, 7, 14, 15]</sup>

Hence, in this background the present study was undertaken to find out the prevalence of Intimate partner violence in India and the socio demographic and lifestyle factors associated with it. By providing an insight about the risk factors associated with IPV, it can help the policy makers, researchers and NGO's in solving the global issue.

## Subjects and Method

Secondary analysis of existing data was done in this study using the data obtained from National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4 2015-16). Government of India has proposed the NFHS to maintain a dependable quality data on inhabitants and their well-being. It

is a nationwide, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India. A total of 6,99,686 ever-married women (age group 15 -49) were considered for the interview from 29 states of India.<sup>[2]</sup> Apart from the demographic and various health related topics, NFHS -4 also addressed the issue of domestic violence against women. As a part of it, a module of questions was included in women's questionnaire related to domestic violence. Information on various forms of violence viz., physical violence, sexual violence was included. Because of security issues only one woman from a household was considered. With all restrictions 66,103 was the resulting sample for the domestic violence module. Domestic violence module obtained information about various forms of violence.<sup>[2]</sup>

This study focuses only on two forms of violence: physical violence and sexual violence.

### Dependent variables

**Intimate partner violence:** experiencing any form of less severe violence, severe violence or sexual violence from their partner/husband in their lifetime.

**Less Severe Violence:** being slapped or having something thrown at you that could hurt you, being pushed or shoved, twisted your arm or pulled your hair, being kicked, punched or dragged.

**Severe violence:** being beaten up, choked or burnt on purpose, or being threatened or having a weapon used against you.

**Sexual violence:** Physically force you to have sexual intercourse with him even when you did not want to; physically force you to perform any other sexual acts you did not want to; force you with threats or in any other way to perform sexual acts you did not want to.

### Independent variables

The questionnaire had questions pertaining to various risk factors of IPV viz., Demographic characteristics, lifestyle factors and variables of economic empowerment. Respondents were asked as to whether violence by husband is justified in each of these cases; she goes out without telling him, she neglects the children, she argues with him, she refuses to have sex with him, she burns the food. The responses for each of these questions were merged and was dichotomized into 'do not justify wife beating' and 'wife beating is

justified’.

### Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was done by using SPSS version 16.0 and EZR software. Prevalence and 95% Confidence

interval was obtained. To identify risk factors associated with intimate partner violence, multiple logistic regression was performed. Enter method was used for variable selection.

### Results

#### Prevalence of Intimate partner violence (IPV):

**Table 1: Life time prevalence of IPV**

Form of violence	Prevalence n (%)	95% CI for prevalence
Less severe violence	18,434(27.9)	(27.6 ,28.3)
Severe violence	5,386(8.2)	(8.0,8.4)
Sexual violence	4,372(6.0)	(6.4,6.8)
Intimate partner violence	19,459(29.5)	(29.1,29.8)

\*More than one form violence is experienced by a person as prevalence of overall IPV is higher

Less severe violence is the most prevalent type of violence among Indian women and sexual violence the least prevalent one (table 1)

It was observed that prevalence of IPV was higher among women who were from rural area (13703, 30.9%) compared to urban (4502, 24.5%), women in the middle age group (11612, 30%) compared to younger age group (6593,27.5%) , women who drink alcohol (776,44.1%) compared to who do not drink (17429,28.6%), women whose partners drink alcohol (9160,47.2%) compared to who do not (9045,20.9%) and all these associations were found to be statistically significant ( $P<0.001$  for all) Also, IPV was highest among women with partner aged between 40-49 years (5363,29.8%) and lowest among partners aged less than 29 years , highest in no education group (7845,38.2%)and lowest in higher education group ( $>10^{\text{th}}$  standard) (767,12.9%), highest

among women with uneducated partners (4587,39.6%) and least among those with highly educated partners (1342,16.1%), highest among women with more number of children( $>3$ ) (9146,35.4%) and least among those with no children (1025,19%), highest among Hindus(14444 ,30.7%) and lowest among Christians (1039 ,24.2%) and all these associations were found to be statistically significant ( $P<0.001$  for all) . However, rural area (odds ratio =0.8,  $P$  value  $<0.001$ ), partners age greater than 30 (30-39 years, odds ratio= 0.91,  $P$  value  $<0.001$ ; 40-49 years ,odds ratio =0.82,  $P$  value  $<0.001$ ; above 50years, odds ratio =0.76,  $P$  value  $<0.001$  )and respondents’ age( middle age, odds ratio =0.99,  $P$  value  $<0.001$ ), alcohol consumption (odds ratio=0.93,  $P$  value  $<0.001$  ) turned out to be protective factors in the presence of other regressor variables in multiple logistic regression.

**Table 2: Prevalence (95% CI) of IPV by Variables of Economic Empowerment**

Variables of Economic Empowerment						
Respondents occupation	Not working	43666	11207(25.7%)	(25.29,26.11)	0.97(0.83,1.13)	<0.001
	Unskilled labor	14253	5711(40.1%)	(39.30,40.90)	1.12(0.97, 1.30)	
	Skilled labor	3001	970(32.3%)	(30.63,33.97)	1.10(0.93, 1.29)	
	White collar	1796	317(17.7%)	(15.93,19.47)	1	
Partners occupation	Not working	3148	932(29.6%)	(28.01,31.19)	1.13(1.01, 1.26)	<0.001
	Unskilled labor	39603	12870(32.5%)	(32.04,32.96)	1.09(1.01, 1.18)	
	Skilled labor	13338	3195(24%)	(23.28,24.72)	1.01(0.93, 1.10)	
	White collar	6627	1208(18.2%)	(17.27,19.13)	1	
Wealth index	Poor and poorest	25314	9607(38%)	(37.40,38.60)	1.45(1.37,1.54)	<0.001
	Middle	13057	3740(28.6%)	(27.82,29.38)	1.18(1.12, 1.25)	
	Rich and Richest	24345	4858(20%)	(19.50,20.50)	1	

\*First two quintiles and last two quintiles of wealth index were combined

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**Table 3: Prevalence of IPV by Attitude towards Violence and their Past Exposure of Violence**

Attitude Towards Violence and their Past Exposure of Violence						
Wife beating justifies	No	35603	7698(21.6%)	(21.17,22.03)	1	<0.001
	Yes	27113	10507(38.8%)	(38.22,39.38)	1.32(1.267,1.36)	
Did her father ever beat her mother	No	48124	10816 (22.5%)	(22.13,22.87)	1	<0.001
	Yes	14592	7389(50.6%)	(49.79,51.41)	2.79 (2.79, 2.93)	

From table 2 and 3, it was also observed that prevalence of IPV was higher among women who were unemployed themselves and had unemployed partners, poor compared to rich, who justified wife beating compared to who do not, who had witnessed their father beating their mother compared to who do not.

### Discussion

The current study, discloses that 29.5% per cent women ever experienced IPV. Chauhan et al. reported prevalence of any form of violence 33.5%.<sup>[16]</sup> The higher prevalence may be due to the fact that they have included emotional violence also in the definition of IPV, which accounted for 12.5%. The WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women shows that prevalence of IPV between 15% in Japan to approximately 70% in Ethiopia and Peru.<sup>[5]</sup> It was observed that prevalence of IPV is more in developing countries than developed countries.

The study clearly brings out that education is a protective factor for women. This is consistent with findings of other studies.<sup>[11]</sup> Education gives women the ability to collect and absorb information, manipulate and control the modern world, secure and protect themselves from any form of violence.<sup>[17]</sup> The present study shows that Prevalence of IPV was associated with number of children in the family. It may be due to the fact that, families with more number of children experience economic insecurity because of insufficient resources to cater for large family which may increase the stress and frustration leading to violence.

It was found that the poor women were facing greater threat of IPV than rich women. This result supports the findings of WHO that the disproportionality in wealth is a major factor for violence against women.<sup>[19]</sup> One of the significant factors associated with IPV was found to be the consumption of alcohol by the husband. Several other studies also support this finding.<sup>[14, 20-22]</sup> It may be due to the fact that excessive alcoholic consumption can reduce the self-control of individuals. From the study it was perceived that women who justified wife beating were more likely to experience IPV than their counterparts who did not. Koenig MA et al., also support this finding.<sup>[23]</sup> The current study reports that women who reported that their mother had been beaten by their mother's partner are more likely to experience IPV compared to their counterparts who did not have such a

history. One of the reasons for this may be that a child witnessing violent behaviour i.e. mother getting beaten by father starts to accept such behaviour and rationalize that it is typical in marital life. This is supported by the study by Makayoto LA et al.<sup>[24]</sup> Religion and partners occupation was also found to be significant in the study consistent with result of other studies.<sup>[11, 18]</sup>

### Limitations

Predominantly, the data used is secondary. Moreover, it is large scale demographic survey which may be prone to some kind of biases at the collection base eg., women who are selected for domestic violence may underreport behaviours that are considered to be socially unacceptable. In addition to that, direction of association is also a problem as nature of the study is cross sectional.

### Conclusion

India has significantly lower prevalence of IPV compared to other developing countries. Factors like alcohol consumption of partners', education level of respondents' as well as partners', past experience of violence at home, justification of wife beating by respondents and wealth index were found to be associated with IPV. These risk factors need to be tackled to bring down the prevalence of IPV.

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**Ethical Clearance:** Consent was obtained from NFHS for the utilization of the data for this study

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