

Prevalence and Risk factors for Intimate Partner Sexual Violence: New Evidence from Rural India

Rajib Acharya¹, Michael Koenig¹, and R.K. Sinha²

¹Department of Population and Family Health Sciences, Bloomberg School of Public Health,
The Johns Hopkins University, 615 N. Wolfe Street, Baltimore, MD 21205, USA

²International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, India

Over the last decade, there has been a growing recognition of violence against women as a major public health problem globally. The most common form of violence against women is domestic violence, which the World Health Organization has defined as: “the range of sexually, psychologically and physically coercive acts against women by intimate male partners.” While a growing number of studies from developing countries have explored the issue of physical violence, data on sexual violence within marriage remains limited, given the extremely sensitive nature of this issue. This is also the case in South Asia, and in India specifically, where little evidence on sexual violence and coercion within marriage exists. This study presents new findings from a large-scale representative population-based survey of women in four Indian states, on the prevalence, patterns, and risk factors for sexual violence and coercion experienced by young married women.

Data, models and methods:

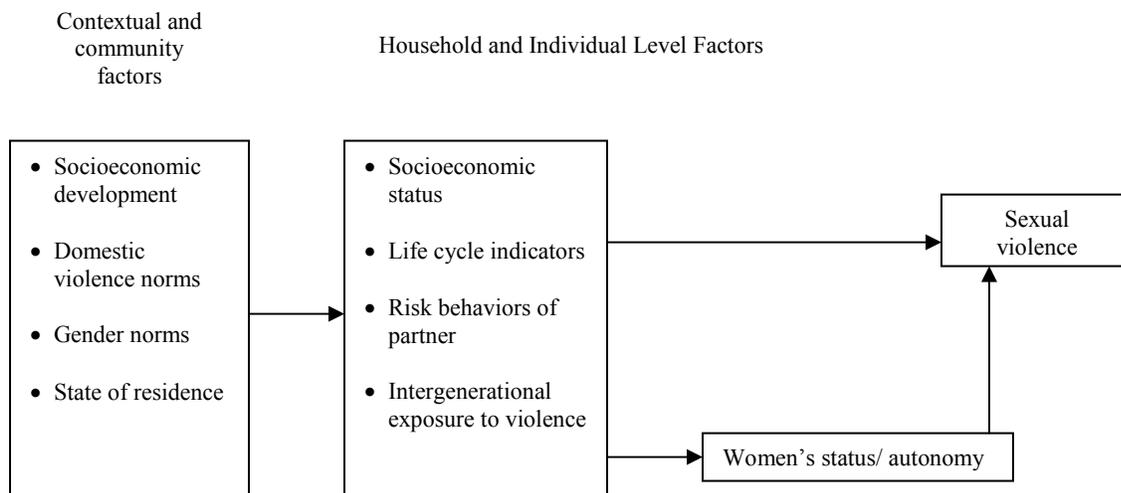
The data on sexual violence have been collected as a part of a larger study in rural areas of four states of India-- Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. Currently married women in these areas who had been interviewed by National Family Health Survey-2 (NFHS-2) in 1998-99 and were age 15-39 at that time were reinterviewed in a followed-up survey carried out in 2003. A total of 6303 married women aged 19-43 years were reinterviewed in the 2003 follow-up survey. This included a subsample of 1108 women aged <25 years of age.

As part of this survey, women were asked a detailed module of questions on attitudes toward and experience with physical and sexual violence within marriage. The module used modified Conflict and Tactics Scale-2 questions on lifetime and recent sexual violence. The specific questions on sexual violence were:

- 1) Thinking of your marriage, has your husband used verbal threats to force you to have sex when you did not want to – ever, last 12 months, and frequency in last 12 months? ,
- 2) Thinking of your marriage, has your husband used physical force to force you to have sex when you did not want to – ever, last 12 months, and frequency in last 12 months?

In addition to exploring the prevalence and patterns of lifetime and recent sexual violence, a central component of our study will consist of the analysis of risk factors for recent sexual violence within marriage. The conceptual framework which will guide our analysis is shown in Figure 1. Building upon recent literature, we plan to investigate the roles of both contextual and household and individual-level factors in predicting the risk of recent sexual violence to individual women. Contextual and community factors considered include socioeconomic development levels (levels of female literacy), norms regarding domestic violence (percentage of women in the community who feel that husbands are justified in beating wife if she refuses sex), community women's status (overall status/autonomy of women in the community), and state of residence. Household and individual level variables considered will include socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (education of husband and wife, current work status, marital duration, media exposure and household standard of living), life cycle indicators (age, parity, family structure), husband's risk behavior (consumption of alcohol), intergenerational exposure to violence (witnessing father beat mother as a child), and woman's status and autonomy (mobility, control of resources, decision-making power).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Determinants of Sexual Violence



Community level variables will be constructed through the aggregation of individual responses at the community level. To remove individual effect on community measure we use Jackknife method i.e., we remove the index women's response while aggregating responses at the community (here cluster) level.

Since the dependent variable (sexual violence) is dichotomous, the data is structured in a hierarchical manner, and we assume that the error term in the model is not fixed over community but is randomly distributed, we use multilevel random effects logit models to investigate the respective and joint roles of different variables discussed above in predicting individual women's risk of recent coercive sex.

Preliminary results:

While the detail analysis of data is still on progress, we present here some of the preliminary findings. The overall lifetime violence for women in reproductive ages (ie., all types of physical and sexual threats and violence minus verbal abuse) reported in these states runs in the range of 24-70 percent (Bihar – 50, Jharkhand – 53, Maharashtra – 24, and Tamil Nadu – 70). Prevalence of domestic violence within the preceding year however ranges from 13 percent in Maharashtra to 33 percent in Jharkhand. Similar estimates for young women age 19-24 are higher than all women together, especially for Maharashtra (23 percent) and Tamil Nadu (39 percent). When it comes to sexual violence, the lifetime prevalence for all women varies between 8 (Maharashtra) and 30 (Jharkhand) percent. At 23 percent, Bihar lies closer to its neighbour Jharkhand, while Tamil Nadu at 9 percent is slightly higher than its western counterpart Maharashtra. The prevalence estimates of recent sexual violence are 17, 14, 6 and 5 percents for Jharkhand, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. In case of younger women estimates of lifetime experience of sexual violence for Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu are 28, 29, 15 and 5 percents, respectively, clearly indicating the vulnerability of young women to sexual violence in at least 3 of 4 states. Similarly, estimates of recent sexual violence to young women hover consistently higher than overall estimates.

The two constituents of sexual violence – verbal threat to coerce into sex and physically forcing into sex are not equally prevalent. The prevalence of physical force is 2-3 times the verbal threat in high prevalent states ie., in Bihar and Jharkhand. 25-30 percent of women who were subject to physically forced sexual intercourse by their husbands reported that this act was forced upon them in innumerable occasions in last 12 months. This gives a somber estimate for the depth of the problem.

It is hypothesized that younger women are much more vulnerable to sexual violence than their older counterparts. The data in our study confirms this hypothesis. While 14 percent of older women (age 35+) reported having been ever coerced into sex by their husbands, about 23 percent younger women (age <25) reported so. The prevalence is much higher in Bihar and Jharkhand than in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Prevalence estimates of past year for older women are 8 percent versus 15 percent for younger women. About 11 percent of young women face verbal threats to force to have sex comparing to 21 percent experienced physical force by their husbands.