

**COUPLES LIFE STYLE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA:
A MICRO LEVEL INVESTIGATION FROM NATIONAL FAMILY HEALTH
SURVEY II - 1999.**

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Abstract

Background: Violence against women takes many forms. Domestic violence, particularly wife beating or physical mistreatment is a very common phenomenon in many Indian homes. Studies have highlighted the reasons for wife beating, varying from not cooking food properly to often arguing with the husband. Background conditions of women are found to play a significant role in domestic violence, as demonstrated by various studies. The role of the life style of the couples in domestic violence is an interesting dimension. It can be argued that couples with varying life styles would to an extent influence their mental health and thereby their behaviour with their life partners. The life style indicators can vary from the liquor consumption, smoking habits to their time spend with their peer group etc.. A strong association has been documented between alcohol use and family violence. The assumption is that it is the ill effects of alcohol that precipitates violence that would not otherwise occur. In general, there is a strong impression that alcoholism has a highly disruptive impact on family life. Hence, an effort to examine relationship between the life style of the couples (indicators) and domestic violence against women is a quite interesting and innovative (it becomes a potential research issue) dimension.

Objective: This paper tries to examine the relationship between the couple's life style indicators and the domestic violence against women in India.

Methods and Materials: The data were drawn from the " National Family Health Survey II – India" undertaken in 1998-99. In total, out of 79,500 women who are usual

residents and currently married interviewed in the survey, 74,500 women were analysed for the study purpose. Alcohol consumption, smoking and chewing tobacco are the three life style indicators, for which the particulars were collected during NFHS – II, are considered in this study. Family has been taken as one unit and the above said variables are grouped as none in the family drinks/smokes/chews tobacco; wife alone drinks/smokes/chews tobacco; husband alone drinks/smokes/chews tobacco; both (husband and wife) drinks/smokes/chews tobacco. Regarding domestic violence; women are grouped as those never beaten by husbands or others and those beaten by husbands or others in their family. Logistic regression analysis is used to assess the effect of the life style variables on the incidence of domestic violence against women.

Results and Discussions: Basic information on couple's life style indicators reveals that majority of the Indian husband and wife do not drink or smoke or chew tobacco. However, as compared to wives, husbands to a greater extent drink, smoke and chews tobacco. For instance; while only 3.9% of the Indian wives chew tobacco, the corresponding percentage is 27.3% with their husbands. Background conditions of women are found to play a significant role in the incidence of domestic violence against women. Results reveal that rural residents compared to their urban counterparts drink, smoke and chew tobacco to a significant extent. For instance, while 56.6 % of those in the rural family do not smoke, the percentage in an urban family is found to be 69.2 %. The difference between rural and urban couples is found to be less with the drinking habit, as compared to smoking and chewing tobacco. Similarly other background variables have a strong bearing on life style indicators.

To examine the above relationship; the life style indicators of the couples individually are cross tabulated with the domestic violence for India. Empirically proved the life style indicators like alcohol consumption, smoking and chewing tobacco have a substantial relationship with the domestic violence. For instance, for those couples who never

consume alcohol, the percentage of wife being never beaten is 86.3 per cent as compared to 68.2 per cent in case both husband and wife consume alcohol. This is the observation similar to both smoking and chewing tobacco. However, the difference in wife being beaten is more prominent among those who consume alcohol and who do not; compared to smoking and chewing.

Logistic regression analysis revealed that all the three life style indicators do reveal a significant impact on the domestic violence in India. For instance, in case of alcohol, those who consumed it physically mistreated their wives by 1.697 times higher than those who were teetotalers.

Conclusion: As the new generation Indians feel drinking alcohol as a matter of prestige; special campaigns should be sorted out at the college itself to tackle the ill effects of alcoholism. Is that occasional drinking for pleasure, would influence their life style? would be an important issue to be probed. In addition to alcohol, ban on smoking in public places and ban on certain chewing tobacco like Gutka; would be strictly enforced. Among the world's 25 highest cigarette consumers, Indians accounted for one-fifth of the four million people who died last year due to tobacco related diseases (The Hindu, May 31, 2004). Another issue which needs attention is the violent act of the couples mainly husbands at time of confrontations. Husband beating his wife is perceived to be a normal happening between couples in India. Husbands justify this act that they have all rights to beat his wife. And, it is told to the girl before marriage that whatever happens after marriage; she should adjust. This mind set needs to be changed and needs to be emphasised more by the parents rather than projecting husbands as the sole authority of the household. Until and unless this happens; domestic violence would be a normal phenomenon in Indian families. And as this paper reveals, by improving the life style of the couples the domestic violence could be gradually reduced.

