

OXFAM
RESEARCH BACKGROUNDER

Risk Factors for Gender-based Violence: The Case of Indian Agriculture

Isadora Frankenthal and Diya Dutta



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OXFAM'S RESEARCH BACKGROUNDS

Series editor: Kimberly Pfeifer

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DV	Domestic violence
GBV	Gender-based violence
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PLA	Plantations Labour Act
PO	Protection Officer
PWDVA	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread in India and has a meaningful effect on women's physical and mental wellbeing. There is reason to believe that female agricultural workers are particularly susceptible to GBV. The aim of this backgrounder is to investigate the factors that put women who work in the Indian agricultural sector, particularly the tea sector, at risk of both domestic violence and workplace violence. This research is further motivated by the fact that a large share of female Indian employment is concentrated in the agricultural sector, most prominently tea cultivation, and the fact that those employed in the tea sector live and work on plantations, blurring the lines that usually separate domestic and workplace violence.

Within the tea sector, it has been documented that the vast majority of women are employed as tea pluckers, at the bottom of the power hierarchy within tea estates. As a consequence, women have little say in their working conditions and wages. Several reports have found that tea plantations fall short of providing basic living conditions, and that women often face abuse from managers and other men in positions of power within the plantations. Moreover, domestic violence is a pervasive problem for Indian women, affecting around 40 percent of the female population.¹ The prevalence of domestic violence is especially worrisome for women who are less connected to resources and have fewer outside options that would allow them to escape an abusive relationship, as is often the case with agricultural workers, and especially plantation laborers.

The present study documents the incidence of domestic and workplace violence among Indian female agricultural workers, and the factors that put these women at risk of violence. Multiple years of nationally representative domestic violence data are analyzed, for the first time focusing on agricultural laborers. This analysis is supplemented by a summary of case studies on working conditions for female tea plantation workers, who form the bulk of hired female agricultural labor in India, focusing on factors that enable workplace violence in this setting. Taken together, the results suggest that, in the case of female agricultural laborers in India, there is significant overlap in the factors that put women at risk of domestic violence and the factors that seem to facilitate workplace violence.

Among the most important findings, we observe that women whose families have a history of domestic violence, and women whose partners drink frequently, are about 20 percent more likely to be survivors of domestic violence themselves. Importantly, women who are employed are more likely to be survivors of domestic violence, especially women who are employed in commercial plantations, which further confirms the need to look at domestic and workplace

¹ According to the nationally representative data (National Family Health Service (NFHS)-4) analyzed by this research.

violence in connection with each other. The review of existing evidence on workplace violence on tea plantations reveals that the extreme and unequal plantation hierarchies, migrant status of the workers, and lack of other job opportunities for female tea pluckers all contribute to a setting where workplace violence is normalized. As with domestic violence, accounts suggest that alcohol consumption aggravates the problem.

This research is novel in that it makes the connection between domestic and workplace violence explicit. It argues that, in this setting, these issues should be studied in tandem. We also hope to raise broader awareness about the key link between workplace and domestic violence, and the prevalence of abuse within the household. We hope to reach all players who have the power to influence the treatment of female agricultural laborers in India. These players include, but are not limited to, government, the private sector, human rights organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and law enforcement. In addition, this study puts into stark relief the lack of systematic data on gender-based violence in this setting, particularly workplace violence. We hope this backgrounder inspires the relevant players in this context to document and research these issues in more depth, including but not limited to collecting systematic and accurate data on violence against women in the workplace. A greater understanding of the causes of gender-based violence on tea plantations and in Indian agriculture more broadly is needed to craft efficient policy that can bring about change.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to shed light on the prevalence and causes of GBV, particularly domestic violence, for female agricultural workers in India, particularly women who are laborers on tea plantations. There is reason to believe female agricultural workers in India are especially exposed to GBV, including domestic violence and workplace-related violence. It has been documented that women in vulnerable positions within agricultural supply chains are often the survivors of sexual harassment and GBV.² The patriarchal culture that sustains other kinds of gender inequality related to labor, such as very low female labor participation rates and the gendered division of labor, both domestic and professional,³ also condones sexual harassment and abuse, among other types of violence.⁴ Although domestic violence is the unfortunate reality of women across India, agricultural workers are often poorer, less educated, and more isolated from protection than their urban worker counterparts, all of which are factors that put many women at greater risk of suffering violence within the home.⁵

A couple of factors motivate the focus on women who are tea plantation laborers. First, the tea sector is one of the main employers of female labor in India. A large share of women who are employed within the agricultural sector are tea pickers.⁶ Second, these women are in especially vulnerable positions given that they are required to live on the plantations where they work, so employers have particular power over them. Women are almost always at the very bottom of the power hierarchy inside plantations. Moreover, tea plantations have been linked to several human rights violations. There is evidence that employers do not ensure that workers have adequate living conditions, which is a sign of favoring profit maximization at other stages of the value chain at the expense of worker wellbeing. Because tea plantation laborers are required to live where they work, there is an added element of risk. The lines between domestic and workplace violence are blurred, as women are never away from home or from work and therefore cannot avoid either completely.⁷ In fact, Assam, a state that produces

² C. Henry and J. Adams, "Spotlight on Sexual Violence and Harassment in Commercial Agriculture: Lower and Middle Income Countries" (International Labour Organization (ILO) Working Paper No. 31, ILO, Geneva, 2018).

³ I. Diwan and I. Vartanova, "The Effect of Patriarchal Culture on Women's Labor Force Participation" (Economic Research Forum (ERF) Working Papers 1110, 2017).

⁴ A. M. Sharma, "Gender, Power and Violence: Intimate Partner Violence among Married Women in India" (American Public Health Association 138th Annual Meeting and Expo, Denver, CO, November 6–10, 2010).

⁵ B. V. Babu and S. K. Kar, "Domestic Violence against Women in Eastern India: A Population-based Study on Prevalence and Related Issues," *BMC Public Health* 9, no. 1 (2009): 1–15.

⁶ E. K. Fletcher, R. Pande, and C. T. Moore, "Women and Work in India: Descriptive Evidence and a Review of Potential Policies" (Faculty Research Working Paper RWP18-004, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 2018).

⁷ B. Choudhury, "Addressing Gender-based Violence in Tea Gardens in Assam, India," Sustainable Trade Initiative, November 25, 2020, <https://www.idhsustainabletrade.com/publication/addressing-gender-based-violence-in-tea-gardens-in-india/> (accessed March 23, 2021).

over half of India's tea, ranked fourth-highest for crimes against women in 2018 in India.⁸ In addition, a study by United Nations (UN) Women found that women experience physical, sexual, and verbal abuse on and off the plantations in Assam, as well as sexual harassment and other forms of GBV in workplace settings.⁹ Another study, "Stories behind a Hot Cup of Assam Tea,"¹⁰ reported that 39 percent of female tea plantation laborers confirmed the presence of violence in the private sphere.

Understanding and documenting the extent to which these women are at risk of GBV is important to foster change. The main objective of this research is therefore to investigate the factors that make female agricultural workers more prone to domestic violence, highlighting the importance and pervasiveness of the issue. Moreover, this research summarizes secondary evidence on the extent to which tea plantation laborers are subjected to workplace violence. Hopefully, this research will draw the attention of both local and national governments and the private sector, which is a part of the agricultural supply chains that employ these women, to work towards ameliorating the issue.

The study first focuses on understanding the relationship between various household and individual characteristics and the likelihood that the woman is a survivor of domestic violence. The most recent and comprehensive nationally representative source of data on domestic violence in India—the domestic violence module of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) (NFHS-4, 2015–2016)—is analyzed. This analysis is enriched by combining NFHS-4 data with geographical data on tea plantations, which enables the construction of a proxy for whether the respondent in question is a tea plantation laborer or a different kind of agricultural worker. The second part of the research is a discussion of literature on the prevalence of—and the factors that enable—workplace-related violence at tea plantations in India.¹¹

For the purposes of this study, domestic violence is defined as any physical, sexual, or psychological violence against the woman perpetrated by a partner, which is the definition used by NFHS. Violence should be understood as "a continuum of unacceptable behaviors and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, having the aim or effect of causing physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm," which is the definition set forth by the

⁸ National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), "Crime in India Table 3A.1," 2018, https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/crime_in_india_table_additional_table_chapter_reports/Table_percent203A.1_0.pdf (accessed March 12, 2021).

⁹ Hindustan Unilever Limited, "Women Safety Programme in Tea Estates," 2020, <https://www.hul.co.in/news/news-and-features/2020/women-safety-programme-in-tea-estates.html> (accessed March 31, 2021).

¹⁰ J. P. Saikia, "Stories behind a Hot Cup of Assam Tea," Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2017, https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/stories_percent20behind_percent20a_percent20hot_percent20cup_percent20of_percent20Assam_percent20Tea1_n.pdf (accessed March 23, 2021).

¹¹ This research tried to find data on workplace violence in India, but to our best knowledge no such data exist. There is one question in the NFHS-4 that asks about employer violence, but only 11 women answered that question, out of a sample of 13,000.

International Labour Organization (ILO).¹² This definition includes sexual violence or harassment, and gender-based violence. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, quid-pro-quo harassment and hostility in the working environment. GBV also includes other forms of physical and psychological violence, such as mocking, verbal insults, and underreporting of the amount of work a woman has done.¹³ Even though anyone can be the survivor of violence, in agricultural contexts it is disproportionately perpetrated by males, with women being the survivors. In this report, “agriculture” should be understood as both commercial agriculture—production operations whose output is intended to be sold for profit, and that hire workers and pay them wages—and unpaid workers in family farms.

This report is organized as follows. The next section, Background, describes the context of India, discusses the differences between agricultural laborers and tea plantation laborers, and briefly outlines the history of tea plantations and the labor relations within them. The following section, Methodology, explains more about the sources of data and how the data will be analyzed. Next, Domestic violence: Findings presents the results of the data analysis and discusses their implications. This section is followed by Workplace violence, which discusses literature on the evidence of the prevalence and factors facilitating workplace violence in tea plantations in India. The last section discusses conclusions from the research for this report.

¹² J. Pillinger, “Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work: Trade Union Perspectives and Action” (International Labor Office, Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV), ILO, Geneva, 2017), 5.

¹³ N. Mena and S. Proano, “Acoso Sexual Laboral en la Floricultura: Estudio de Caso Sierra Norte de Ecuador,” International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF), 2005.

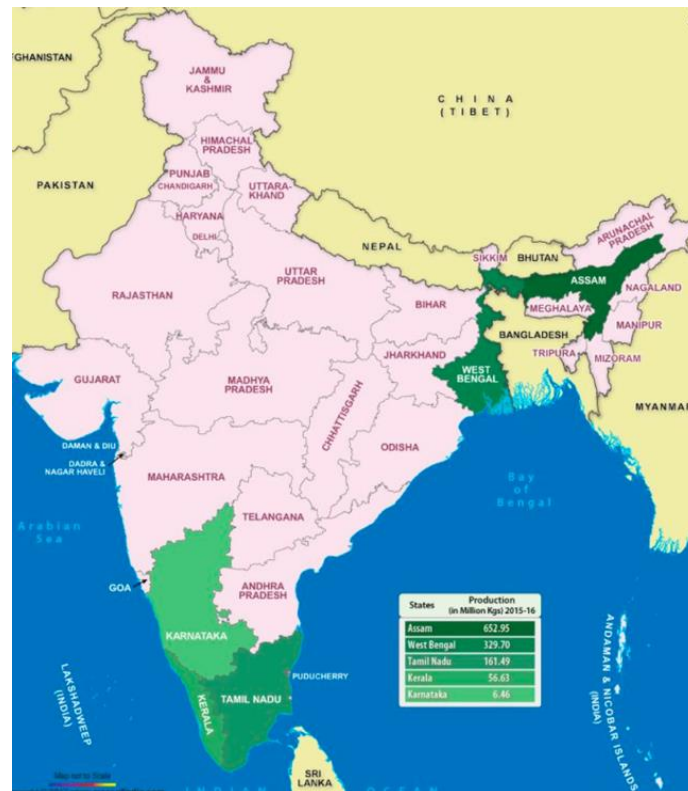
BACKGROUND

INDIAN CONTEXT

Evidence

GBV is a widespread problem in India that stems from the patriarchal culture and norms, which sustain gender inequality more broadly.¹⁴ In Assam, a state that accounts for around 50 percent of tea production (see Figure 1), it is estimated that existing gender disparity is the cause for a loss of 37 percent of potential human development.¹⁵

Figure 1. Map of India and the most important tea-producing states.



Source: mapsofindia.com

¹⁴ Sharma, "Gender, Power and Violence."

¹⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India, "Assam Human Development Report," Planning and Development Department, Government of Assam, 2014, <https://sita.assam.gov.in/portlets/assam-human-development-report-0> (accessed March 23, 2021).

This loss stems from social and economic costs such as adverse sex ratio, high maternal and infant mortality rates, increased health problems, and unemployment, among others. Despite the economic advancement of the country, crimes against women and other gender-related violence have been increasing since 2010, according to the National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB).¹⁶ Moreover, there is reason to believe that agricultural workers are more exposed to both domestic violence and workplace violence. Women make up a large share of agricultural labor in India, as stated above.

Investigations into the factors that put women at risk of domestic violence have documented that they operate simultaneously on the personal, community, social, and cultural levels.¹⁷ Importantly, at the social and cultural levels, the setting in India tends to support the subordinate status of the woman, normalizing intimate partner violence. The result is that around 40 percent of Indian women have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime.¹⁸ In the nationally representative sample of women in the NFHS-4 (analyzed by this research), 27 percent of women who are not agricultural workers and 40 percent of women who are agricultural workers report they are survivors of domestic violence. There are other reasons to believe female agricultural workers are more vulnerable to domestic violence: compared to non-agricultural workers in the NFHS-4 data, they are more likely to report that their father beat their mother and that they were themselves beaten by either parent, compared to non-agricultural workers ($p\text{-value} < 0.00$). Moreover, a study conducted by the North East Network (NEN) in 2015 among the districts where the tea estates are located demonstrated that different forms of domestic violence were relatively high in these regions.¹⁹

Legislation

Despite the persistence of strong patriarchal norms and high rates of violence against women and girls, India has some of the most progressive laws to protect women. It is also progressive in its long history of women's rights activities working on bringing such progressive laws into the context of South Asia. Notable among these laws is the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 (the PWDVA). The PWDVA is a civil law applicable to the whole of India except the states of Jammu and Kashmir. According to the PWDVA, domestic violence "is any form of abuse causing harm or injury to the physical

¹⁶ NCRB, "Crime in India."

¹⁷ Sharma, "Gender, Power and Violence."

¹⁸ S. L. Kumar et al., "Domestic Violence and Its Mental Health Correlates in Indian Women," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 187, no. 1 (2005): 62–67.

¹⁹ A. Hazarika and S. Sharma, "Unheard. Domestic Violence in Rural Assam," North East Network (NEN), 2015.

and/or mental health, of the threat of it, and it also takes into account economics and sexual violence committed on women.”^{20, 21}

The PWDVA provides for many alternative ways to register or report a case. An aggrieved woman or her legal heir or representative can approach a Protection Officer (PO) who is the face of this Act and acts as a “go-between” between the aggrieved woman and the court. The PO will receive complaints directly or even over the telephone and will make applications on behalf of the woman. They will ensure that the woman is provided legal aid, safe shelter, monetary relief, and information on service providers. In Assam, all 26 District Social Welfare Officers have been notified as POs.²²

The state nodal agency, as per the provisions of the PWDVA, would nominate service providers, such as organizations working on women’s rights issues, and those offering free legal aid, counselling, and shelter. A woman or her representative could also approach a magistrate or the police directly. The police in turn will help to forward the case, either to a PO or a magistrate to make an application, which is called a DIR (domestic incident report). If there is any breach of court order for the person who has committed the violence, there is provision for penalty for contempt of court. Inaction on the part of personnel mandated to facilitate cases invites penalty.²³ In reality, much of this process does not happen.

All women’s police stations are meant to tackle crimes against women. In Assam, there is only one such station located in the state headquarters in Guwahati. Women’s cells are affiliated to the district police stations and the deputy commissioner’s office at the district level to handle cases related to violence against women. A special force of women police, Veerangana, is deployed in Guwahati and across the state. Their main objective is to check crimes against women. The police helpline 100 responds to women’s emergency situations. The Chief Minister’s Vision Document for Women and Children (2016) emphasizes the creation of a women’s cell with adequate women staff in every police station of the state.²⁴

Support services

In terms of institutional support services, the government has instituted Swadhar (now called Swadhar Greh) homes or shelter homes in the state to respond to women in difficult circumstances through home-based care and rehabilitation.

²⁰ The difference between the PWDVA definition and the NFHS-4 definition (used in the data used in this study) is that the former includes threats of violence in the definition, while the latter does not explicitly include threats of violence but includes psychological violence explicitly.

²¹ Hazarika and Sharma, “Unheard. Domestic Violence,” 11.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 7.

Assam has 16 Swadhar homes across 27 districts.²⁵ Yet accessibility of services is limited for women—for example, regions beset with decades of conflict have no institutional support centers. Further, most of these services are plagued by understaffing, lack of professional training, and inadequate gender sensitivity of support personnel. They are most often overwhelmed with calls on the helpline number and requests for help. They are usually ineffective in responding.²⁶

In this study conducted by NEN, it was reported that around 64.4 percent of women approached some agency for help when facing domestic violence, while 35.6 percent of respondents had no agency accessible to redress their grievance, or they preferred to remain silent.²⁷ The reasons cited for not asking for help included women's economic dependency (13.8 percent), thoughts of family honor (13.6 percent), fear of further discrimination (11.5 percent), the idea that nothing could be done (7.2 percent), and fear of rejection/desertion by family (6.1 percent), among many others.

Among those who had sought help, the majority approached individuals rather than any organization; the dependency on or reliability of informal institutions was more than that of formal ones. The study revealed that women overall tried to avoid formal institutions of redressal and turned to immediate family members, or relatives (38.4 percent) the most, followed by *mahila samitis* (women's groups) (17.3 percent), village headmen/students' union/tribal bodies (16.3 percent), and neighbors (13.7 percent). Multiple stakeholders were often approached by the aggrieved woman.

The percentage of women seeking redress from the police was relatively very low (11.3 percent) for various reasons. The majority of the respondents expressed reluctance to approach the police. On being asked the reasons behind this disinclination, quite a large percentage of women (39.2 percent) felt that violence was a part of their everyday life and was seen as something normal by them. Other reasons revealed by the women included fear of approaching the police (18.4 percent), expensive proceedings (22.4 percent), family honor (9.1 percent), and lack of trust in the police (7.2 percent).

The nature of help-seeking by women is mostly informal. Women feel or are made to feel disgrace in reporting cases of domestic violence against their husbands by the families and communities. Such cultural norms are often a deterrent against women reporting cases of domestic violence (DV) (key informant interview with Rupali S. (name changed) on March 25, 2021). Also, the lack of accessibility and information about district-level POs provided by the PWDVA is a major reason for seeking informal help. In general, levels of awareness about legal redressal mechanisms and services are very low. Hence

²⁵ Ibid., 12.

²⁶ Ibid., 8.

²⁷ Ibid., 26.

formal institutional provisions, which are supposed to be provided by the PWDVA, are ineffective. State-specific mechanisms exist but, as mentioned earlier, they are understaffed and do not prove to be effective redressal mechanisms for the aggrieved women. Local women's organizations working in these areas say that when they reported a case of domestic violence in the tea estate to the PO, the PO refused to register a case, saying that it was an internal matter of the husband and wife and that she would not interfere in the matter (key informant interview with Rupali S. on March 25, 2021). POs are located in the state welfare departments in the district headquarters. Some tea estates are in remote locations and are not accessible for the district headquarters. In such cases, POs may be located closer to the tea estates, or women can approach local police stations. But the police usually discourage the women from registering cases, saying it is a very costly and time-consuming process.

Factors correlated with domestic violence incidence

Previous research has highlighted factors that are correlated with the incidence of domestic violence, but the correlation has not been investigated in the context of a nationally representative sample of female agricultural workers in India. Previous research finds that having witnessed domestic violence as a child, and having a lower education level and lower household wealth significantly increase the probability the woman reports being a survivor of GBV herself.²⁸ Women whose partner drinks alcohol are also more likely to be survivors. Sharma (2010)²⁹ finds that the relative age between partners is associated with the incidence of domestic violence. The larger the age difference between the couple, the higher the incidence of domestic violence (in this setting, the man is usually older than the woman). While Sharma (2010)³⁰ finds that the relative education level is not associated with domestic violence, Ackerson (2008)³¹ documents that several measures of educational attainment are negatively correlated with the incidence of domestic violence in India.

The relationship between various factors and domestic violence for all women in India is reported in Table 1 below, using the same NFHS-4 data that are used throughout this research. Figure 2 (also below) summarizes the main findings. Panel A, on the top, plots the correlation between several factors and the incidence of domestic violence (this information is in Column 1 of Table 1). The results are mostly the same as the results found by past research, described above (except for the relative age of the partners, which does not significantly change the likelihood of reported domestic violence). Columns 4 to 6 in Table 1

²⁸ B. Sabri et al., "Risk Factors for Severe Intimate Partner Violence and Violence-related Injuries among Women in India," *Women & Health* 54, no. 4 (2014): 281–300; Sharma, "Gender, Power and Violence."

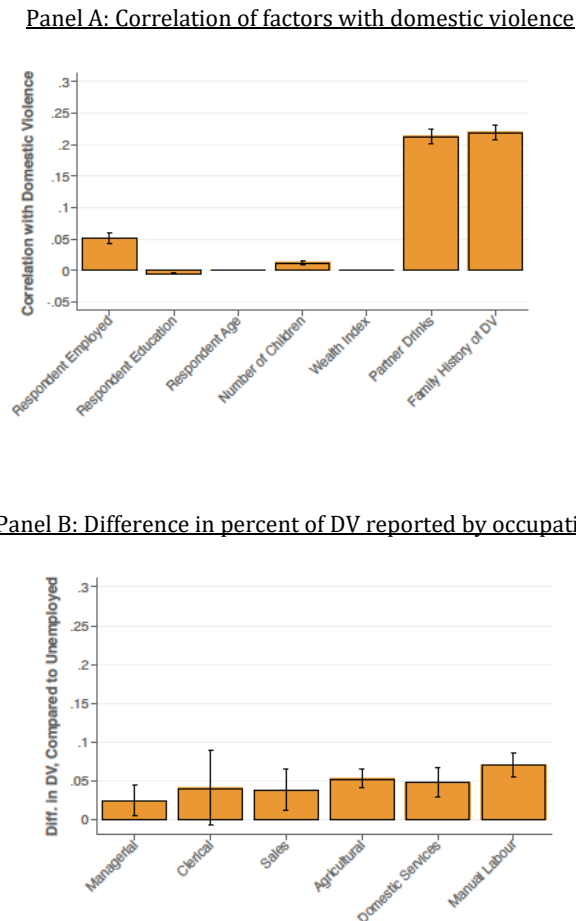
²⁹ Sharma, "Gender, Power and Violence."

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ L. K. Ackerson et al., "Effects of Individual and Proximate Educational Context on Intimate Partner Violence: A Population-based Study of Women in India," *American Journal of Public Health* 98, no. 3 (2008): 507–514.

also separate these results by the type of violence and document that these relationships hold regardless of the type of violence in question.

Figure 2. Factors correlated with domestic violence for all women in India.



Source: Based on data from the Demographic Health Survey, authors' calculations using STATA MP 16.

Panel B of Figure 2 investigates the difference between the percentage of women in each employment sector that report being survivors of DV and the percentage of unemployed women who report being survivors of DV (this information comes from Column 3 in Table 1). In all cases, regardless of the type of employment, employed women are more likely to claim they are survivors of DV (all correlation coefficients are positive and significant). However, if women were reporting more violence depending on their access to information and resources, we might expect women in managerial, clerical, or sales sectors to report the highest levels. In reality, it is women working in manual labor who report the highest levels of DV, followed by those working in the agricultural sector—the subject of this research.

Table 1. Relationship between respondent characteristics and domestic violence

	Any Violence (= 1)			Dependent Variable is:		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	Physical Violence (= 1)	Severe Violence (= 1)	Sexual Violence (= 1)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Respondent Education (in years)	-0.00582*** (0.000468)	-0.00664*** (0.000497)	-0.00547*** (0.000473)	-0.00554*** (0.000465)	-0.00246*** (0.000304)	-0.000849*** (0.000263)
Respondent Age (in years)	0.000809*** (0.000231)	0.000950*** (0.000240)	0.000836*** (0.000233)	0.00104*** (0.000229)	0.000713*** (0.000133)	-0.000352** (0.000141)
Respondent's Partner Drinks Alcohol (= 1)	0.213*** (0.00546)	0.203*** (0.00560)	0.212*** (0.00549)	0.210*** (0.00538)	0.101*** (0.00359)	0.0744*** (0.00327)
Number of Children	0.0122*** (0.00145)	0.0141*** (0.00152)	0.0121*** (0.00145)	0.0120*** (0.00143)	0.00161* (0.000942)	0.00265*** (0.000910)
Wealth Index	-3.69e-07*** (2.90e-08)	-3.52e-07*** (3.03e-08)	-3.50e-07*** (2.91e-08)	-3.68e-07*** (2.84e-08)	-2.11e-07*** (1.78e-08)	-1.00e-07*** (1.58e-08)
Respondent's Father Beat Mother (= 1)	0.220*** (0.00625)	0.225*** (0.00645)	0.219*** (0.00625)	0.217*** (0.00627)	0.0684*** (0.00448)	0.0613*** (0.00409)
Respondent Employed (= 1)	0.0516*** (0.00428)	0.0430*** (0.00453)		0.0485*** (0.00431)	0.0251*** (0.00283)	0.0216*** (0.00290)
Respondent Earns More than Partner (= 1)		0.0331*** (0.00983)				
Age Difference (Partner - Respondent)		-0.000333 (0.000377)				
Education Difference (Partner - Respondent)		-0.00112*** (0.000325)				
Occupation: Managerial (= 1)			0.0245** (0.00990)			
Occupation: Clerical (= 1)			0.0406 (0.0246)			
Occupation: Sales (= 1)			0.0383*** (0.0133)			
Occupation: Agricultural (= 1)			0.0527*** (0.00595)			
Occupation: Domestic Services (= 1)			0.0482*** (0.00977)			
Occupation: Manual Labour (= 1)			0.0704*** (0.00774)			
Observations	62,633	59,532	62,633	62,633	62,633	62,633

Notes: Standard errors, clustered by district, are reported in parentheses. ***, **, and * represent significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.
Source: Based on data from the Demographic Health Survey, authors' calculations using STATA MP 16.

AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

The agricultural sector in India is the most common employer of working women. Approximately 55.6 million women work in agriculture within rural areas.³² Within the agricultural sector, more than 97 percent of employment is considered informal labor.³³ In general, all workers in the agricultural sector, except those on plantations, are regarded as informal sector workers in agriculture. This approximation is based on the facts that (i) plantations are generally large, and the workers are protected by the Plantations Labour Act of 1951 (PLA); and (ii) organized farming is very rare in India, and crop cultivation and agricultural activities are usually carried out by private households with small land holdings.³⁴ It is important to make this distinction salient: women engaged in formal labor might enjoy very different working arrangements compared to informal women workers, and this difference has implications for labor relations and therefore for workplace violence.

The Plantations Labour Act of 1951 stipulates that the tea estate is responsible for ensuring adequate living conditions for workers, schooling for children, and health care.³⁵ In practice, employers pay workers less than the minimum wage by claiming they receive part of their pay in kind through these amenities, when in reality living conditions are far from suitable. The wage is also well below the living wage level when in-kind benefits are not included.³⁶

It is also important, within the context of tea plantations, to distinguish between temporary and permanent laborers. On average, around 30–40 percent of workers are permanent, while the rest are hired during the peak plucking season. Although both types of laborers essentially perform the same tasks, temporary laborers are paid smaller piece rates and are not entitled to the benefits provided to permanent workers, such as housing, medical facilities, schools, and childcare facilities.³⁷ If workplace violence is facilitated by unequal power relations, temporary workers have even fewer rights and less power within plantations than do permanent workers.

³² Fletcher et al., "Women and Work in India."

³³ A. Srida and S. V. Shirke, "An Analysis of the Informal Labor Market in India," *Economy Matters* 45, no. 12 (2014): 28–29.

³⁴ A. K. Naik, "Informal Sector in India" (PowerPoint presentation, IARIW 2009 Special Conference on Measuring the Informal Economy in Developing Countries, Kathmandu, Nepal, September 23–26, 2009).

³⁵ D. Saha, C. Bhue, and R. Singha, "Decent Work for Tea Plantation Workers in Assam: Constraints, Challenges and Prospects" (project report, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2019).

³⁶ See <http://globalbusinessofforcedlabour.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Report-of-Findings-Global-Business-of-Forced-Labour.pdf>.

³⁷ N. Katakee and R. Das, "Marginal among the Marginalized," *EastMojo*, October 2, 2020, <https://www.eastmojo.com/assam/2020/10/02/marginal-among-the-marginalised-faltu-workers-of-assams-tea-gardens/> (accessed July 25, 2021).

TEA SECTOR

Due to specific soil and climatic advantages, tea is traditionally grown in four states in India: Assam and West Bengal in the east and northeast, and Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the south. Assam is the largest tea-growing area, producing over half of India's tea.³⁸ The tea estate sector is one of the oldest and largest formal private employers in India and was started by the British during colonial rule. The North-Eastern provinces of British India were left free until the latter half of the nineteenth century when the Burmese empire tried to annex them. While the boundaries of British power in the northeast was constantly in flux until the last days of the Raj, the British province of Assam had more or less taken shape by 1873.³⁹ According to Guha (2014),⁴⁰ Assam turned into the agricultural estate of the tea-drinking British population who transformed the local traditional institutions into a capitalist colonial pattern of extreme exploitation.

The Assam Tea Company, the first joint stock company of India, was started in 1839 and remained the sole planter company in the field until 1850.⁴¹ Assam was a labor-short, land-abundant province; immigration was viewed as a welcome phenomenon from an economic point of view.⁴² The tea estates were located in the remote interior parts of the province. The conditions of work were so deplorable that the local population in the adjoining areas refused to work on the tea estates.⁴³ The plantation management, therefore, sourced their labor from the local Kachari tribe of the Darrang District⁴⁴ and mostly from other provinces of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and later from the Chhota Nagpur regions. The tribals from the latter were lured by the tea plantation proprietors of Assam, on false promises of better wages and better working conditions than those in their source states. In reality, the conditions of work and living were deplorable. The worst forms of indentured labor were established by the colonizers in the plantations. Labor recruitment, organization, and management was founded on indigenous forms of inequality, discrimination, and unfreedom, including the caste system. The result was that colonial planters controlled the social and economic lives of the laborers, often in violent ways.⁴⁵

³⁸ Saha et al., "Decent Work for Tea Plantation Workers."

³⁹ A. Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826–1947* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2014), 2.

⁴⁰ Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴³ V. Xaxa, "Need for Restructuring the Tea Plantation System in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 54, no. 45 (November 2019).

⁴⁴ Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*.

⁴⁵ R. Reddock, "South Asian Plantation Histories and Their Enduring Legacies: Indian and Atlantic Ocean Connections," *Development and Change* 48, no. 1 (2017): 189–200.

Behal (2010)⁴⁶ argues that the structure of power hierarchy based on labor coercion and extra-legal authority developed during the 1860s with the introduction of the indenture system by the British. This period shaped the attitudes of European planters towards their labor. A huge demographic gap emerged between the planters and their migrant labor. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were approximately 1,000 planters among a population of over half a million laborers. The indenture regime was thus devised to preserve the planters' authority, keeping the workforce disciplined and intimidated. It was enforced by legislation from the colonial state, which provided the legitimacy. To give one particularly grim example, in 1888 a Bengal Government official found a planter organizing a polyandrous marital union between five time-expired male laborers and a single woman; in return, each man had agreed to re-engage in the same garden for an additional five years. According to that official, "The disposal of marriage of all imported female coolies (unskilled migrant laborers) is regarded as a matter entirely within the jurisdiction of the manager."⁴⁷

The conditions of the tea plantation workers of Assam did not improve even after independence was attained. The major changes post-independence were the enactment of the Plantations Labour Act of 1951, which made provisions for housing, medical facilities, minimum wages, and water and sanitation, among other provisions. The benefits provided by the PLA were turned into instruments that retain employers' power over the workers through enforced dependence. It is also the cause (along with low green leaf tea prices) of excessive financial pressure on tea companies, making it challenging for them to meet their legal obligations to provide benefits to the required standard. Besides, several labor laws passed over time were extended to the plantation estates. A third development was the introduction of trade unions affiliated with different political parties.⁴⁸ Since they were affiliated with political parties, their allegiance remained with the parties rather than with supporting the cause of workers. While the ownership and management of the tea estates moved from the British to the Indian owners, there was a tendency among the trade unions (who were mainly from the tea estate planter class and not the worker class) to compromise with the PLA enacted by the Government of India.⁴⁹

The PLA legitimized a key exploitative feature of plantations in the colonial era: wages remained low, because in-kind benefits (housing and social welfare) are provided to workers.⁵⁰ The conditions of the workers continued to be deplorable, with wages paid to them far below the minimum wages stipulated by the

⁴⁶ R. P. Behal, "Coolie Drivers or Benevolent Paternalists? British Tea Planters in Assam and the Indentured Labor System," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2010): 29–51.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁸ Xaxa, "Need for Restructuring the Tea Plantation System," 32.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁰ P. R. Rajbangshi and D. Nambiar, "'Who Will Stand Up for Us?' The Social Determinants of Health of Women Tea Plantation Workers in India," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 19, no. 1 (2020): 1–10.

Government of India. Illiterate women rely on their managers to weigh their harvest, an additional source of powerlessness over the fruits of their labor. Currently, workers in tea plantations still suffer from work controls on multiple fronts: wage cut mechanisms, deplorable housing and living conditions, calorie deficits, work security deficits that are economic, social, and representative, and the non-availability of basic facilities.⁵¹ This situation has been shaped by the historical practice of bringing low caste, poor, and tribal (Adivasi or Indigenous) populations to work at tea estates, a practice started by British companies, as described above.⁵²

Particularly, the tribal women of the tea estates live under the following socio-economic conditions: while they enjoy fewer restrictions than women from other communities, they are not equal to the men in social and economic spheres of their community's lives. Women from tea tribal communities are treated as a "commodity"—the wives are often referred to as "kept" by their husbands. The overall occupational status of women workers is comparatively lower than that of men. Women are never promoted to higher positions and always work as daily wagers. They have little-to-no say in the tribal community *panchayat* (village-level governing body). Despite being part of the trade unions, no tribal woman has emerged as a trade union leader, and they barely take part in union activities. Finally, the literacy levels of tea tribal women are extremely low, contributing to their low status in society and the economy.⁵³

Within this context, the unions have little power to increase wages or improve living conditions and often do not take action if the problem involves abuses of power, for example in sexual harassment cases.⁵⁴ A strike organized by low-caste plantation workers in the Munnar tea belt in Kerala in September 2015 is evidence of the unions' ineffectiveness. Workers were demanding increases in their daily wages, annual bonuses, and proper implementation of the welfare measures that they should receive as per the PLA. The women on strike were Dalits, whose ancestors had been brought as indentured labor in the nineteenth century. Remarkably, the women went on strike not only outside of the unions but directly against their ineffectiveness and corruption, challenging the unequal relations that result from capitalist exploitation and gender oppression.⁵⁵ As a result, the government appointed a special committee of tea plantation workers and a new monitoring system for the conditions on plantations. In addition, the government announced a relief fund for the improvement of labor lines.

⁵¹ Saha et al., "Decent Work for Tea Plantation Workers."

⁵² Rajbangshi and Nambiar, "'Who Will Stand Up for Us?'"

⁵³ S. Mazumdar, "Sexual Harassment of Women Tea Garden Workers: Case Study in Barpani Tea Estate, Assam" (Martha Farrell Foundation, 2018), 2.

⁵⁴ M. Duara and S. Mallick, "Tea Industry in Assam (India): Issues of Migration and Gender Discrimination," *International Proceedings of Economics Development and Research* 54, no. 35 (2012).

⁵⁵ J. Raj, "Beyond the Unions: The Pembillai Orumai Women's Strike in the South Indian Tea Belt," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 19, no. 4 (2019): 671–689.

Moreover, there was a general tendency towards disdain for and neglect of the tea tribes, as they came to be called, of Assam's tea plantations. While these tribal groups from the present-day state of Jharkhand are classified as Scheduled Tribes (STs) in their source states, in Assam, they were considered outsiders and have not been accorded ST status, thus depriving them of basic Constitutional rights.⁵⁶ Over decades, an ethnic conflict has emerged from this sentiment. Modern-day politics have prevented successive governments from granting them ST status because of the resistance from existing ST groups. The local population, the peasantry, and the ruling political elite all treat the tea estate workers as pariahs. Despite the abolition of bonded labor in independent India, the tea estate workers have remained in conditions of bondage for centuries.⁵⁷

Women have faced various kinds of harassment and gender discrimination on the tea plantations since colonial times. During British rule, tea estates practiced and maintained sexual division of labor in which women were considered most suited for the plucking of tea leaves, believed to be the quintessential feminine task. Yet plucking is the most backbreaking work on the tea estates. When the first batches of immigrant tribals arrived from Chhota Nagpur and Jharkhand, the local and Chinese workers were surprised to find that women would also work on the tea plantations. The tea estate proprietors saw these women as slaves—a source of cheap labor and sexually exploitable. Single men and women were forcibly paired and made to procreate and thus expand the population of the tea workers in the estates.⁵⁸ This strategy was the one used by the British to cut down on the expense of providing basic facilities to the migrant laborers and create generations of workers. The interest of male workers and employees in maintaining superiority over women, in a system where they are already subjected to domination by the estate owners, has persisted. It is significant that there are no female employees at the management level.⁵⁹ Another indicator of the plight of women tea workers is that their maternal mortality rate (MMR) is as high as 404 (per 100,000 births), which is comparable to sub-Saharan Africa.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Xaxa, "Need for Restructuring the Tea Plantation System."

⁵⁷ Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*; Xaxa, "Need for Restructuring the Tea Plantation System."

⁵⁸ Duara and Mallick, "Tea Industry in Assam."

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ SAHAJ and IDeA, "Monitoring the Progress of Sustainable Development Goals in Assam. Situation Analysis for Selected Targets from SDG3 and SDG5" (SAHAJ, Vadodara, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This section described the data and methods used in the first part of this research, which investigates to what extent and how individual and household characteristics predict the likelihood that women who are agricultural workers suffer domestic violence in India.

DATA

Domestic violence data

Nationally representative domestic violence data are obtained from the 2015–2016 round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) for India.⁶¹ The NFHS is a large-scale household survey that provides state and national information on fertility, child mortality, maternal and child health, and other health outcomes. The International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) Mumbai is responsible for providing coordination and technical guidance for the survey. Different rounds of the NFHS have been funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department for International Development (DFID), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), Government of India (GOI). The NFHS’s domestic violence module, collected in some rounds of the survey, offers nationally representative data on domestic violence.

Apart from the standard best-practice data quality assurance,⁶² the domestic violence module is designed especially for collecting sensitive information. For example, interviewers are extensively trained to make sure the woman is comfortable and has privacy while answering the questions. Interviewers record whether the interview was interrupted and by whom, so the researcher can determine if the information was compromised. The researcher can decide to consider the information accordingly. In addition, the questions asked are straightforward, yes-or-no questions, which are easy to answer and less subject to individual interpretation.⁶³

⁶¹ NFHS 2015-2016 is the fourth wave of the survey. While more recent data exist (NFHS-5), unit-level data and state-wise breakup of data are not yet available. Hence, we use NFHS-4 data. Note that this survey is also known as the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and is available at <https://dhsprogram.com/>.

⁶² For more information, see the DHS Domestic Violence Module Methodology Report at https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/DHSQMP/DHS6_Module_Domestic_Violence_6Aug2014_DHSQMP.pdf.

⁶³ Ibid.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic and taboo around reporting domestic violence, collecting reliable data on the subject is very difficult. Therefore, there are important limitations of the NFHS that should be acknowledged here. First, while the NFHS explicitly asks yes-or-no questions to avoid issues of interpretation, other research suggests that open-ended questions would be preferable.⁷ The idea behind asking open-ended questions is that they might feel less interrogative and ensure the survivor is sharing only what they feel comfortable with. With that being said, NFHS interviewers are trained to ensure the respondent understands that the purpose of these questions is to collect data on women's health, that her identity will be protected, that she has privacy to answer the questions, and that she understands and agrees to the nature of the interview. The straightforward yes-or-no questions have the advantage of facilitating the comparison of different forms of domestic violence across different women, since by construction the data have an answer to each of the specific questions from each of the 70,000 Indian women interviewed.⁶⁴

A second limitation of these data (and of data on GBV in general) is that they are likely to suffer from underreporting. They are, nonetheless, the most comprehensive source of nationally representative information on domestic violence.⁶⁵ There are two potential issues with underreporting. The first is that, to the extent that they are present, any prevalence measures are underestimated. Therefore, this research will not emphasize measures of prevalence derived from the data. Second, if underreporting is systematically correlated with survivors' characteristics, this correlation would bias the relationship between those characteristics and the incidence of domestic violence. Previous research has found that underreporting does seem to be correlated with whether the husband drinks, marriage status, and education.⁶⁶ To limit the bias introduced by underreporting, all regressions reported here account for whether the respondent's husband drinks and the education level of both the respondent and her partner. In addition, the NFHS only interviews ever-married women, focusing on the period when they were married, so there should not be systematic bias introduced by respondents' marriage status.

Below are the questions about domestic violence perpetrated by a partner, sorted into categories.

⁶⁴ This number represents the full sample of Indian women interviewed by the DHS. Only agricultural workers (around 13,000 women) are used in the data analysis.

⁶⁵ While National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) crime data exist, the data are not fine-grained enough to make it possible to distinguish women based on the sector they work in.

⁶⁶ D. A. Heckert and E. W. Gondolf, "Predictors of Underreporting of Male Violence by Batterer Program Participants and Their Partners," *Journal of Family Violence* 15, no. 4 (2000): 423–443.

Physical violence

1. Does your husband/partner ever push you, shake you, or throw something at you?
2. Does your husband/partner ever slap you?
3. Does your husband/partner ever twist your arm or pull your hair?

Sexual violence

1. Does your husband/partner ever physically force you to have sexual intercourse with him when you did not want to?
2. Does your husband/partner ever physically force you to perform any other sexual acts you did not want to?
3. Does your husband/partner ever force you with threats or in any other way to perform sexual acts you did not want to?

Severe violence

1. Does your husband/partner ever attack you with a knife, gun, or other weapon?
2. Does your husband/partner ever kick you, drag you, or beat you up?
3. Does your husband/partner ever try to choke you or burn you on purpose?

In this study, the answers to these questions are used to create binary variables that equal one if the respondent answered in the affirmative, and zero otherwise. The main analysis is done grouping all kinds of domestic violence, so that the main dependent variable equals one if the respondent answered “yes” to any of the questions above. We also separate the different types of domestic violence (physical, sexual, and severe), creating a dependent variable for each, to investigate whether the relationship between different factors and domestic violence differs depending on the type of violence in question.

Apart from domestic violence measures, all sociodemographic (household and individual) information used in the analysis comes from the NFHS-4. This information includes respondent age, respondent education (in years), number of children at home, household wealth index, whether the respondent is employed (and in what sector), whether the respondent earns more than her partner, whether she owns a house or land plot, and partner’s age and education (in years). We also extract information on whether the respondent’s partner drinks

frequently and whether the respondent's father beat her mother. In addition, we use information on the respondent's decision-making power within the household to try to understand the relationship between social norms, which partly dictate whether the woman has a say in household matters, and the incidence of domestic violence. Furthermore, to understand the relationship between the nature of the respondent's labor and domestic violence, we include information on whether the respondent works for the family, how she receives her pay, and whether she works on a plantation.

There is one question regarding workplace violence in the NFHS-4, but unfortunately very few women answer it, so that information cannot be used in the analysis.

Tea cropland data

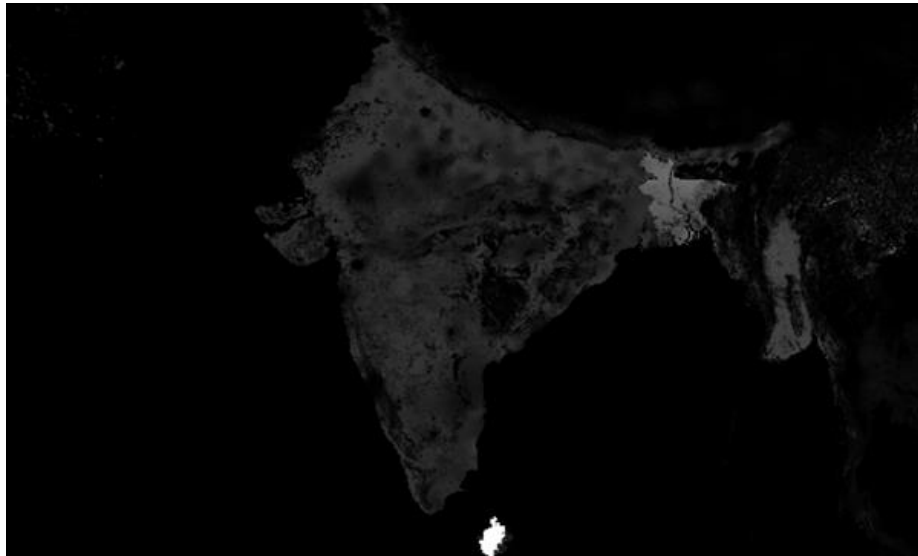
Using Q-GIS,⁶⁷ the NFHS data are merged with crop geography information obtained from Earthstat.⁶⁸ Earthstat is a collaborative project between the Global Landscapes Initiative at the University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment and the Land Use and Global Environment lab at the University of British Columbia. They share cutting-edge geographic data on the global food system for scientific purposes. Earthstat has information on the share of the land in each district in India that is used to plant tea, allowing this research to estimate the geographic and economic (compared to other crops) importance of tea plantations in the district where each respondent lives.

This research allows for the investigation of the relationship between the importance of tea in a district and the incidence of domestic violence, this analysis is supplemented by a summary of case studies on working conditions for female tea plantation workers. Below is a map illustrating the share of tea land by district used in the analysis (Figure 3), followed by a map which overlays the geographical position of each NFHS-4 household and the share of tea land (Figure 4).

⁶⁷ QGIS is an open-source desktop geographic information system application that supports viewing, editing, and analysis of geospatial data. For more information, see <https://www.qgis.org/en/site>.

⁶⁸ See www.earthstat.org.

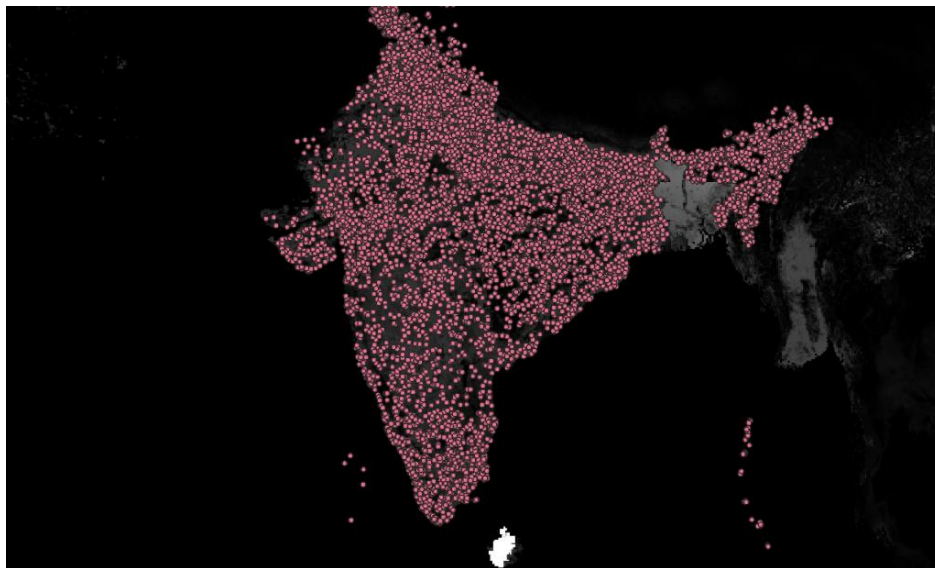
Figure 3. Share of land used for tea.



Source: Authors' elaboration.

This figure shows the share of land devoted to tea plantation in India. The whiter the region, the greater the share of land devoted to tea plantation.

Figure 4. NFHS-4 households and share of land used for tea.



Source: Authors' elaboration.

This figure is the same as Figure 3 but with the NFHS-4 geographic household data overlaid. Each red dot maps a household and therefore one of the 13,000 women who answered the domestic violence module of the NFHS-4 and are agricultural workers. By juxtaposing the location of the household with the share of land devoted to tea plantation, we can assign, to each household, the respective share of land devoted to tea in their district.

DATA ANALYSIS: METHODS

The data outlined above is analyzed to try to understand the correlation between various respondent characteristics and the incidence of domestic violence. This analysis uses a multivariate regression framework. The main regression specification is:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot X'_i + \beta_2 \cdot \eta_i + \boldsymbol{\varphi}'_i + \varepsilon_i$$

In the equation, i indexes the respondent, and Y_i is a binary variable equal to one if the respondent answers affirmatively to any of the domestic violence questions (physical, sexual, or severe) and zero otherwise. X'_i is a vector of variables that capture the characteristics of the respondent. These include her education in years, whether she is employed, the number of children in the household, household wealth, her age, and whether her father ever beat her mother. η_i is a binary variable equal to one if the respondent's partner drinks. $\boldsymbol{\varphi}'_i$ is a vector of fixed effects, including religion, caste, and district, and interviewer identification. β_0 is the constant, and ε_i is the error term. Standard errors are clustered at the district level.

For each respondent characteristic, the coefficient of interest is represented by β_1 in the equation above. Each β_1 is the correlation between that respondent's characteristic and the incidence of domestic violence. As stated above, we should not interpret the value of the coefficient, as the data likely suffer from underreporting and other measurement issues. Rather, we are interested in the sign of the β_1 , which tells us whether increasing the value of the respective characteristic increases or decreases the incidence of domestic violence. We can also compare the order of magnitude of the coefficients, in an attempt to determine which characteristic has the largest impact on domestic violence.

This main specification will be modified to further investigate the relationship between the relative partner characteristics, instead of the respondent characteristics, and the incidence of domestic violence. In addition, this relationship will also be investigated for other variables, namely the respondent's decision-making power, whether the respondent believes beatings are justified, and whether the respondent owns land or a house. Furthermore, the final specifications will be augmented to include variables related to tea plantation. These variables are whether the respondent works for her family, whether the respondent works on a plantation, and the share of land used to plant tea in the respondent's district. An interaction term between the share of tea land and whether the respondent works on a plantation is used as the best approximation of whether the respondent is a tea plantation laborer.

The report also undertook a secondary literature review to supplement the above data analysis. A detailed literature review was undertaken on Assam tea estate

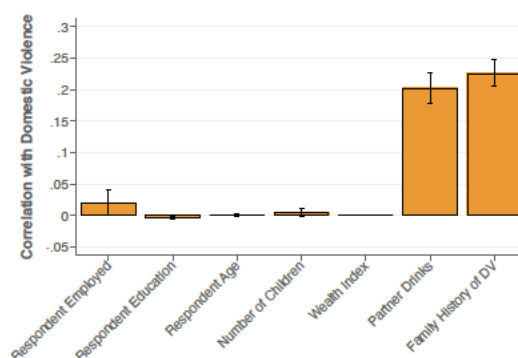
workers, workers' living conditions, history of tea plantation in India and Assam, condition of women tea estate workers in Assam, and violence faced by women in Assam tea estates. Since literature on violence against women in Assam tea plantations is scanty, we decided to supplement the secondary literature with one key informant interview with an expert from a grassroots organization (name withheld for sensitivity issues in the region). This interview provided key information about the situation on the ground of women tea estate workers in Assam.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: FINDINGS

The sample of roughly 13,000 women who are agricultural workers used in the analysis have the following characteristics. Seventy-two percent of them are currently employed, suggesting a significant portion of women surveyed are temporary workers. They are, on average, 33 years old, have 2 children living at home, and have 3.6 years of education. Around 25 percent of them report a history of domestic violence within their family, and 41 percent of them report that their husband or partner consumes alcohol frequently. Eight percent of them report that they earn more than their partner, 42 percent and 33 percent report they own a house or land (respectively), either solely or jointly. Forty percent report being survivors of at least one kind of domestic violence (physical, sexual, and/or severe).

The findings described here are documented in Table 2. The dependent variable for all columns is a binary variable that is equal to one if the woman has ever suffered any domestic violence (or if the woman answered "yes" to any of the questions in the Methodology section above). The coefficients of the independent variables represent the increase (or decrease) in the likelihood that a woman has experienced domestic violence given her characteristics, in the data. Due to underreporting, the coefficients should not be interpreted literally; rather, we are interested in their sign and their order of magnitude. In this way, the coefficients represent the correlations between certain individual and household characteristics, and the incidence of domestic violence. Each subsection first describes the findings and then discusses the reasons why we might observe these patterns in the data.

Figure 5. Correlation of factor characteristics and incidence of DV for agricultural workers.



Source: Based on data from the Demographic Health Survey, authors' calculations using STATA MP 16.

Table 2. Relationship between respondent characteristics and DV for agricultural workers

	Dependent Variable is Any Violence (= 1)							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Respondent Employed (= 1)	0.0196*	0.0176	0.0185*	0.0194*	0.0193*	0.0181*	0.0202**	0.0180*
	(0.0102)	(0.0108)	(0.0102)	(0.0102)	(0.0102)	(0.0102)	(0.0102)	(0.0102)
Respondent Education (in years)	-0.00404***	-0.00468***	-0.00365**	-0.00406***	-0.00404***	-0.00395***	-0.00392***	-0.00397***
	(0.00142)	(0.00155)	(0.00142)	(0.00142)	(0.00142)	(0.00143)	(0.00143)	(0.00143)
Respondent Age (in years)	0.000406	0.000812	0.000376	0.000439	0.000454	0.000388	0.000398	0.000388
	(0.000655)	(0.000679)	(0.000652)	(0.000658)	(0.000657)	(0.000655)	(0.000655)	(0.000655)
Respondent Earns More than Partner (= 1)		0.00797						
		(0.0178)						
Age Difference (Partner - Respondent)		-0.000284						
		(0.00111)						
Education Difference (Partner - Respondent)		-0.00123*						
		(0.000725)						
Number of Children	0.00444	0.00638*	0.00416	0.00450	0.00455	0.00437	0.00471	0.00431
	(0.00343)	(0.00362)	(0.00343)	(0.00343)	(0.00342)	(0.00343)	(0.00343)	(0.00344)
Wealth Index	-2.75e-07***	-2.80e-07***	-2.68e-07***	-2.74e-07***	-2.71e-07***	-2.90e-07***	-2.64e-07***	-2.94e-07***
	(7.98e-08)	(8.67e-08)	(8.03e-08)	(7.99e-08)	(7.99e-08)	(7.95e-08)	(7.97e-08)	(8.00e-08)
Respondent's Partner Drinks Alcohol (= 1)	0.226***	0.215***	0.223***	0.226***	0.226***	0.225***	0.226***	0.225***
	(0.0107)	(0.0114)	(0.0106)	(0.0106)	(0.0106)	(0.0106)	(0.0107)	(0.0107)
Respondent's Father Beat Mother (= 1)	0.203***	0.205***	0.197***	0.203***	0.203***	0.203***	0.202***	0.203***
	(0.0124)	(0.0129)	(0.0123)	(0.0124)	(0.0124)	(0.0124)	(0.0124)	(0.0124)
Respondent Believes Beating is Justified (= 1)			0.0246***					
			(0.00307)					
Respondent Owns House (= 1)				-0.00723				
				(0.0112)				
Respondent Owns Land (= 1)					-0.0125			
					(0.0109)			
Mean Tea Cropland in District						91.00*		84.07*
						(48.20)		(48.84)
Respondent Works for her Family (= 1)							-0.0508***	
							(0.0177)	
Respondent is Plantation Worker (= 1)								-0.0237
								(0.0225)
Mean Tea Cropland*Plantation Worker								11.33
								(14.58)
Observations	10,595	9,828	10,595	10,595	10,595	10,55	10,595	10,55

Notes: Standard errors, clustered by district, are reported in parentheses. ***, **, and * represent significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Main characteristics

Column 1 documents the relationship between domestic violence and characteristics that might influence domestic violence. These relationships are also plotted in Figure 5. According to the results, the respondent's age is not significantly correlated with the incidence of domestic violence. Interestingly, if the respondent is employed, the likelihood that she will report being a survivor of domestic violence increases by almost 2 percent. Moreover, the wealthier the household, the smaller the incidence of (reported) domestic violence. Contrary to the findings in Table 1, which included all women, for agricultural workers only the positive correlation of the number of children and the incidence of DV is no longer significant. Whether the respondent's partner drinks alcohol or the respondent's father ever beat her mother are the best predictors of domestic violence. If they are true for a respondent, each of them increases the chance the woman reports being a survivor by about 20 percent. Finally, the respondent's education in years has a negative and significant relationship with domestic violence, indicating that more educated women are less vulnerable.

The positive relationship between women's employment and the likelihood she will report being a survivor of domestic violence could be driven by two main underlying reasons. It could be that employed women do suffer more violence due to jealousy or the threat to male control.⁶⁹ If the woman is employed, she is also 4 percent more likely to report that her partner has some control issue (p -value < 0.00), compared to women who are not employed. Another possibility is that women who are employed are more likely to report domestic violence, if being employed has an empowering effect on her.⁷⁰ Given the large number of women in the data, any one explanation for this finding is unlikely to be the only reason we observe a positive correlation between employment and domestic violence.

The results also show that women who live in wealthier households are less likely to report being survivors of domestic violence. This finding could mean that women living in wealthier households are less vulnerable, but this conclusion is not necessarily true. For example, one potential reason for low reporting of violence in wealthier households is the desire to protect family honor and the fact that men in wealthier households usually have greater control over the women in the family.⁷¹ According to the data, the higher the number of children in the household, the more likely the woman is to report being a survivor of domestic violence, probably because women who have more children have less control

⁶⁹ S. Amaral, S. Bandyopadhyay, and R. Sensarma, "Employment Programmes for the Poor and Female Empowerment: The Effect of NREGS on Gender-based Violence in India," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 27, no. 2 (2015): 199–218.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ U. Chakravarti, "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 14 (1993): 579–585.

over their reproductive rights and access to family planning services, so are likely to have little bargaining power in the relationship as a result.⁷²

Finally, the fact that there is such a strong positive correlation between the partner's alcohol consumption and domestic violence is in line with the descriptions in "Stories behind a Hot Cup of Assam Tea."⁷³ According to the report, addiction to alcohol and drugs is one of the foremost problems haunting women workers on the tea plantations. Drinks known as *sulai* (made from sandal, batteries, and jaggery which is a concentrated product of cane juice), and *haria* (made from rice) are illegally prepared and traded inside the plantations. The habit is so widespread it is the main driver of instances of domestic violence and other problems. Women spend a significant portion of their (insufficient) income on the purchase of liquor, to the detriment of their health and economies.

Relative characteristics

Economic models of the household would predict that relative, rather than absolute, characteristics affect household outcomes.⁷⁴ According to these models, intra-household outcomes depend on each partner's relative bargaining power, which in turn depends on the relative attractiveness of their outside option (in case the partnership were to dissolve). Column 2 of Table 2 describes the regression of domestic violence on the relative variables that could be constructed from the data: the difference in age and education between partners, and whether the respondent earns more than her partner.

Interestingly, the three relative characteristics tested do not have relationships with domestic violence that are statistically distinguishable from zero. In other words, there is no observed correlation between the relative characteristics and the incidence of domestic violence in the data. There are plausible reasons why, in this context, the relative characteristics don't matter. Models that back their importance rely on the outside option, or relationship dissolution, being a realistic alternative to the partnership at hand. Due to characteristics of the remarriage market in India,⁷⁵ it is possible that relationship dissolution is not feasible and therefore that relative characteristics are less important in determining intra-household outcomes. Indeed, only 74 women (around 0.5 percent of the sample of agricultural workers) are divorced.

⁷² S. Kosgi et al., "Women Reproductive Rights in India: Prospective Future," *Online Journal of Health and Allied Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2011).

⁷³ Saikia, "Stories behind a Hot Cup."

⁷⁴ A. Farmer and J. Tiefenthaler, "An Economic Analysis of Domestic Violence," *Review of Social Economy* 55, no. 3 (1997): 337–358.

⁷⁵ Attitudes towards remarriage in India have been characterized by skepticism and suspicion, especially in the case of women. There are fears and concerns associated with divorce and remarriage, which are especially pronounced for women, that stem from the patriarchal culture. See S. Mishra and K. Jayakar, "Remarriage in India: Online Presentation Strategies of Men and Women on an Indian Remarriage Website," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 26, no. 3 (2019): 309–335.

Other characteristics

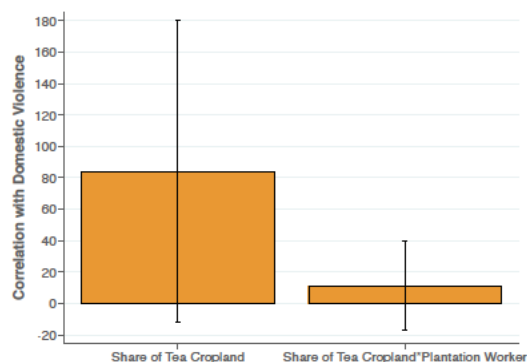
Columns 3 to 5 (Table 2) investigate the relationship between a number of other characteristics and the incidence of domestic violence. These include the respondent's attitudes towards violence and whether the respondent owns land or a house. Attitudes towards violence are uncovered from five questions that ask under what circumstances a respondent believes violence against her is justified. The variable that represents these attitudes is a binary variable that equals one if the respondent believes beating is justified under any circumstance, and zero otherwise. The respondent is said to own land or a house (binary variable equals one) if she reports sole or joint ownership.

Women who believe beating is sometimes justified have a higher chance of reporting that they are survivors of domestic violence. Attitudes towards domestic violence are therefore correlated with the incidence of domestic violence. More specifically, the more the respondent indicates violence is normalized, the greater the likelihood she reports that she is a survivor of violence herself. Moreover, respondents who say their father beat their mother are 17 percent more likely to believe beating is justified ($p\text{-value} < 0.00$), indicating the inter-generational perseverance of the normalization of violence against women. Additionally, both ownership of land and of a house decrease the likelihood a woman reports being a survivor, but neither effect is significant. This finding may also be a result of the infeasibility of remarriage and the consequent unimportance of relative bargaining power in determining partnership outcomes. If exiting the relationship is not a possibility because of the infeasibility of remarriage, a woman owning a house or land would improve her outside option, but it would not improve her ability to bargain for more favorable outcomes, because the “outside option” of leaving the marriage cannot be realized in practice.

Share of tea land

Column 6 of Table 2 shows the results of including the share of land devoted to tea in the respondent's district to the regression with the main respondent characteristics. The coefficient indicates that there is a positive and (marginally) significant relationship between the share of tea land in the district and the likelihood that the respondent reports being a survivor of domestic violence. This finding is evidence that women who live in districts that more heavily plant tea are more vulnerable. Column 8 repeats this specification, including a term that captures whether the woman is a plantation worker and how important tea plantations are in her district. The results are summarized in Figure 6 below. Whether the woman works at a plantation is not correlated with the likelihood she is a survivor of domestic violence, and there is no additional effect of being a plantation worker on the incidence of DV, after accounting for the share of tea land in the respondent's district.

Figure 6. Correlation between share of land devoted to tea in a district and DV reports.



Source: Based on data from the Demographic Health Survey, authors' calculations using STATA MP 16.

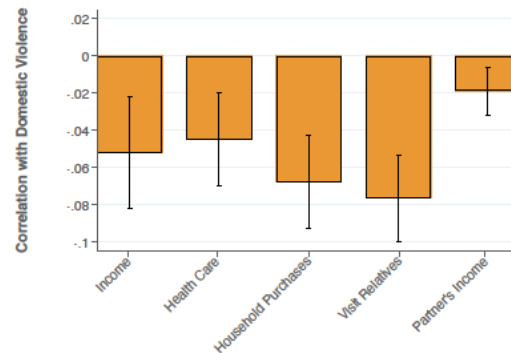
Column 7 instead includes whether the respondent works for the family farm. Interestingly, whether a woman works for her family has a large negative correlation with domestic violence: compared to women who don't work for their family, those who do report being a survivor 5 percent less. This finding might be because a woman's physical integrity is especially important to her partner if she works for the family. It may be because she spends more time in the household, and so the partner has fewer control or jealousy issues as a result.⁷⁶ In support of the former is the fact that, while women who work for the family report being a survivor of any type of physical violence 12 percent less than women who don't, this difference is only 5 percent for emotional abuse. This finding might suggest that, while partners are abusive, they internalize the importance of the woman's capacity for labor.

Decision-making power

Table 3 documents the relationship between the respondent's decision-making power within the household and the incidence of domestic violence. Each decision-making variable equals one if the respondent reports whether she decides alone or jointly about the subject she is being questioned about. These include decisions about her own income and health care, household purchases (HH), when to visit relatives, and her partner's income. The relationship between all the decision-making variables and domestic violence is negative and significant, indicating that women who have more say in household decisions are less likely to be a survivor of domestic violence. See Figure 7 below.

⁷⁶ M. Eswaran and N. Malhotra, "Domestic Violence and Women's Autonomy in Developing Countries: Theory and Evidence," *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d'économie* 44, no. 4 (2011): 1222–1263.

Figure 7. Correlation between women’s decision-making ability in each domain and DV.



Source: based on data from the Demographic Health Survey, authors' calculations using STATA MP 16.

A possible explanation for this finding is that women have more decision-making power when they live in less-patriarchal households, ones that are also less likely to condone violence against women. There is evidence to support this explanation: compared to women who believe beating is justified for whatever reason, women who believe beating is never justified are 5 percent more likely to decide what to do with their own income (this difference is statistically significant, $p\text{-value} < 0.00$).

Table 3. Correlation between decision-making and DV for female agricultural workers

	Dependent Variable is Any Violence (= 1)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Respondent Employed (= 1)	0.0178 (0.0109)	0.0205 (0.0139)	0.0176 (0.0108)	0.0157 (0.0109)	0.0193* (0.0109)
Respondent Education (in years)	-0.00389*** (0.00147)	-0.00305 (0.00204)	-0.00379** (0.00147)	-0.00384*** (0.00148)	-0.00366** (0.00149)
Respondent Age (in years)	0.00105 (0.000678)	0.00156* (0.000861)	0.00122* (0.000680)	0.00122* (0.000678)	0.000788 (0.000685)
Number of Children	0.00669* (0.00360)	0.0108** (0.00468)	0.00679* (0.00360)	0.00671* (0.00359)	0.00622* (0.00368)
Wealth Index	-3.06e-07*** (8.48e-08)	-4.18e-07*** (1.14e-07)	-3.12e-07*** (8.49e-08)	-3.09e-07*** (8.46e-08)	-3.34e-07*** (8.58e-08)
Respondent's Father Beat Mother (= 1)	0.204*** (0.0128)	0.210*** (0.0155)	0.204*** (0.0128)	0.203*** (0.0127)	0.203*** (0.0129)
Respondent's Partner Drinks Alcohol (= 1)	0.215*** (0.0114)	0.220*** (0.0139)	0.215*** (0.0114)	0.215*** (0.0114)	0.213*** (0.0116)
Respondent Decides about Health Care (= 1)	-0.0447*** (0.0127)				
Respondent Decides about Income (= 1)		-0.0519*** (0.0154)			
Respondent Decides about HH Purchases (= 1)			-0.0678*** (0.0127)		
Respondent Decides about Visiting Relatives (= 1)				-0.0763*** (0.0119)	
Respondent Decides about Partner's Income (= 1)					-0.0188*** (0.00650)
Observations	9,828	6,307	9,828	9,828	9,634

Notes: Standard errors, clustered by district, are reported in parentheses. ***, **, and * represent significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.
Source: Authors' elaboration.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Past research suggests that women working in commercial agriculture suffer from sexual violence and sexual harassment on a daily basis, and that the problem is associated with both workplace characteristics and employer practices.⁷⁷ Most agricultural work is carried out in fields, where workers are usually isolated. Many workers, especially women, are hired seasonally without a formal contract. This lack of contract enables men, who hold the permanent, supervisory jobs, to exert coercive power over the women.⁷⁸ GBV conforms to cultural norms that perpetuate the problem by placing the blame on the survivor's behaviors, deterring women from reporting instances of GBV due to shame and stigma.¹⁰ Furthermore, female agricultural workers are frequently in conditions of poverty and vulnerability, making it impossible to change jobs to escape the violence. The women that do report workplace violence have precarious employment conditions: workplaces are poorly regulated, and reporting services, structures, and protections are not in place.

Prominent risk factors for GBV within agricultural work are workplace characteristics, including marked work hierarchies, migrant workers who live on the commercial farm, conditions of poverty, and having few or no other job opportunities.⁷⁹ Tea plantations in India have all these characteristics. As outlined above, the coercion, isolation, and exploitation of workers, common during colonialism, are still relevant today.⁸⁰

Areas suitable for tea plantation, especially in the states of Assam and West Bengal, are remote and sparsely populated, so a large percentage of workers are migrants—both historically from the British era and currently as seasonal migrants. Aside from their economic production function, plantations are legally responsible for housing, nourishing, and guaranteeing the welfare of their workers. Employers discount these “in-kind” payments from the workers' wages. However, workers often struggle to find clean drinking water, enough food, appropriate shelter, clean and accessible toilets, and access to health care. Wages fall short of being enough for basic living costs.⁸¹ In the NFHS sample of female agricultural workers, 14 percent receive a mixture of cash and in-kind earnings, and 6 percent receive earnings only in-kind. Moreover, Indian tea plantations are characterized by a strict hierarchy, and plantation culture has a

⁷⁷ Henry and Adams, “Spotlight on Sexual Violence.”

⁷⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and International Labour Organization (ILO), “Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways Out of Poverty. Status, Trends and Gaps” (FAO, Rome, 2010).

⁷⁹ Henry and Adams, “Spotlight on Sexual Violence;” Mena and Proano, “Acoso Sexual Laboral.”

⁸⁰ K. Sarkar, “Wages, Mobility and Labor Market Institutions in Tea Plantations: The Case of West Bengal and Assam,” in *Globalisation, Development and Plantation Labor in India*, ed. K. J. Joseph and P. K. Viswanathan (Routledge India, 2016), 27–50.

⁸¹ Henry and Adams, “Spotlight on Sexual Violence.”

marked sense of the superiority of managers (almost entirely men) and the inferiority of laborers (often, women).⁸² What is more, female workers are responsible for the most labor-intensive, lowest-paid job: plucking tea. They usually work around 13 hours a day, including unpaid care work they are also responsible for, such as housework and child care.⁸³

According to a recent study by Rajbangshi and Nambiar (2020),⁸⁴ women interviewed on tea plantations in India reported that even though they contributed equally to household earnings, they could not voice their opinions at home or in public spaces. Most women agreed that they could not do anything without their husbands' knowledge and certainly not against their will. Some reported that even decisions about their own labor, for example whether to work or not and where, were decided by their husband. This finding is evidence of the patriarchal culture that sustains male dominance on the societal level, creating an environment that enables sexual violence and harassment. Beliefs about the woman's submissiveness, the tendency to blame the survivor, and the normalization of violence at the societal level all contribute to the pervasiveness of abuse.⁸⁵ There is evidence that these are present in Indian culture, particularly in rural areas. In the NFHS-4 sample of female agricultural workers analyzed in this study, 52 percent claimed that a partner beating them was justified in certain situations. Roughly 22 percent of the women reported they have no say in decisions about their *own* income or their *own* health, and around 60 percent reported that getting money for a medical treatment was a problem.

Women's status within the plantation forbids her from speaking up and denouncing abuses of power to management or unions. According to Rajbangshi and Nambiar (2020),⁸⁶ women described an environment where the collective view is that women's opinions do not matter at the community level, and there is a strong bias in roles and position of men versus women. At work, there is evidence that their wellbeing is neglected by management, and their points of view are not valued. One worker reportedly stated: "We (women) are not valued. We are small people, and they (management and supervisors) are big people, and they will only speak with big people. We would have discussed our problems [with them] if sometimes they would speak with us."⁸⁷ In addition, sometimes women refrain from asking basic questions to management due to fear of physical or psychological violence. One female laborer reported that the temporary workers did not know the precise logic or amount of wage deduction in the case of the daily quota not being achieved, and, according to her,

⁸² Sarkar, "Wages, Mobility and Labor Market Institutions."

⁸³ Oxfam International, "Addressing the Human Cost of Assam Tea: An Agenda for Change to Respect, Protect and Fulfil Human Rights on Assam Tea Plantations" (Oxfam International, 2019), <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620876/bp-human-cost-assam-tea-101019-en.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Rajbangshi and Nambiar, "'Who Will Stand Up for Us?'"

⁸⁵ M. Arellano Gálvez, "Violencia Laboral contra Jornaleras Agrícolas en Tres Comunidades en el Noroeste de México," *Región y sociedad* 26, no. especial 4 (2014): 155–187.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Rajbangshi and Nambiar, "'Who Will Stand Up for Us?'" 3.

“Management do not tell us how much is deducted [and] we fear to ask because they will scold us.”⁸⁸

A landmark legal provision available to women in the formal employment sector in India is the Prevention of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2013 (POSH). Its significance for women tea estate workers is that, while in general agriculture and especially women’s participation in agriculture in India is part of the informal sector, the tea estate workers fall under the formal employment economy. While there are a lot of informal temporary workers in the tea estates nowadays, there is still a sizeable population of workers who are permanent and have access to institutional services provided by the law (until the recent reclassification of tea garden workers as unskilled by the Government of India).⁸⁹

It is also common knowledge that women workers in tea estates face rampant sexual harassment at the workplace.⁹⁰ Mazumdar’s (2018)⁹¹ study shows that trafficking of women and girls is commonplace in the tea estates of Assam. Little or no education and lack of awareness about their rights make them particularly vulnerable. They are physically and mentally tortured by their husbands, families, and tea estate managers. Women face all forms of sexual harassment at the workplace on the tea estates including non-verbal forms of harassment such as stalking, lewd comments and songs, and repeated requests for sexual favors. These happen on the way to work. Physical forms of sexual harassment occur, such as unwanted physical touching and physical proximity at the workplace, making the worker uncomfortable. Often, on the pretext of helping the worker, the harasser will try to come close to her and touch her “incidentally.” A quid pro quo exists, whereby women’s access to salaries and safeguarding of jobs is repeatedly linked to providing sexual favors to their superiors—the estate managers and the *sardars* (supervisors). They feel extremely pressured to give into such demands on the one hand. On the other hand, if they are forced to give in, then they face ostracization and stigmatization from their communities. Visual forms of sexual harassment such as use of mobile phones to show pornography and blackmail women workers is increasingly gaining currency in the tea estates.

Women tea estate workers are subjected to sexual harassment at all places within the tea estates and not just at the actual worksites. Women are mostly harassed by their workplace superiors such as the *sardars*, and *babus* who supervise the *sardars* and assistant managers of the tea estate. Some influential people from the village are also reported to be the perpetrators. Given the powerful position of the perpetrators, the women find it especially difficult to file a

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Government of India (GOI), “Gazette of India, Notification No. 329” (New Delhi, Tuesday July 7, 2020), [https://labor.gov.in/sites/default/files/gazette percent20notification.pdf](https://labor.gov.in/sites/default/files/gazette%20notification.pdf) (accessed March 15, 2021).

⁹⁰ Mazumdar, “Sexual Harassment of Women Tea Garden Workers.”

⁹¹ Ibid.

complaint against them for fear of losing their jobs and/or being ostracized by their communities.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2013 defines sexual harassment as unwelcome acts or behavior (whether direct or by implication); namely, physical contact and advances, a demand or request for sexual favors, making sexually colored remarks, showing pornography, and any other unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.⁹² The Act is supposed to provide Internal Committees (ICs) in every formal workplace that include women members who hear cases of harassment and take appropriate measures. In reality, in most cases on tea estates in Assam, the ICs are headed by the Estate Managers, usually a male. These Estate Managers most often do not stand in support of the women's cause (key informant interview with Rupali S. on March 25, 2021). On many tea estates, despite the provision by the law, ICs are conspicuous by being missing entirely.⁹³ While district administration is supposed to monitor cases in the tea estates as well, they usually do not engage with the affairs of the tea estates on the pretext that these are internal matters of the tea estate and that the tea estate administration should handle the cases. The other major issue is that, due to high levels of illiteracy, there is a lack of awareness among the women about the legal provision. Therefore, almost no one approaches the appropriate means provided by the law.⁹⁴

As of July 7, 2020, the Government of India has notified via The Gazette of India that tea garden workers are to be reclassified as unskilled workers. This reclassification moves them into the informal economy. They will no longer be under the purview of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act of 2013. They will now have to register complaints under the District Social Welfare Officer. As mentioned earlier, due to a lack of knowledge and awareness about these laws, women do not usually register cases. This reclassification is a major setback for women tea estate workers all over India. While most female tea estate workers did not take recourse to legal services, the issue is one of rights and entitlement. The government should have strengthened these legal provisions and made access to them easier for women, not removed them altogether. While the fallout of the new legal provision is yet to be determined, the expectation is that this move will further disenfranchise women tea estate workers from their rights and worsen their condition. This development should be watched in the future. The other issue is that formal legal procedures are time consuming and expensive. Women tea workers do not have the financial wherewithal to lose daily labor and therefore wages to pursue legal cases. Nor do they have the financial means to pay lawyer fees to pursue a case on their behalf. So even with the existence of the law, women on tea estates are unable

⁹² Section 2(n) of The Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act of 2013.

⁹³ Mazumdar, "Sexual Harassment of Women Tea Garden Workers."

⁹⁴ Ibid.

to take advantage of them. Informal measures such as using One Stop Centers set up by local women's organizations to hear the cases and provide legal support are being tried out. These efforts are in their nascent stages (key informant interview with Rupali S. on March 25, 2021).

Key similarities between the systems of labor recruitment in Sri Lanka and Assam set up by British colonial rule are reason to believe the problems that plague the lives of women on tea plantations in one country likely afflict those in the other. These similarities include the use of recruiting agents (*arakatii* or *arkatia*), limited mobility of indentured laborers on and off the plantation, the requirement of compulsory residence at the tea plantation, and the harsh and brutal punishment of deserters during colonial times.⁹⁵ Another similarity shared by both contexts is the theme of patriarchy inside the plantations, as male domination is sustained by the planters, the state, and the community and society. All authority figures inside the plantation (planters, overseers, recruiters, inspectors, and government bureaucrats) are men.⁹⁶

There are other accounts of sexual harassment and workplace violence on tea plantations. Using focus group interviews on tea and rubber plantations in Sri Lanka, a study by Wijayatilake and Zackariya (2001)⁹⁷ is one of the best-detailed accounts of the different kinds of abuse women face. They report molestation, unwanted touching, sexual advances, attempted rape, being watched while they bathe and a lack of privacy, threats of forthcoming sexual violence, sexist jokes, comments about their body and their personal sex life, and derogatory comments about menstruation. The issue of lack of privacy due to the nonexistence of appropriate bathroom facilities is also raised by the report "A Life without Dignity."⁹⁸ The report suggests that the lack of access to adequate sanitation facilities both at home and at work exacerbates the women's vulnerability to GBV, as women are unable to physically and socially urinate with the ease that men do. Further, Kurian and Jayawardena (2013)⁹⁹ document that on Sri Lankan plantations, domestic violence and sexual harassment are perceived as non-issues and therefore receive little attention from plantation management or trade unions.

⁹⁵ Reddock, "South Asian Plantation Histories."

⁹⁶ R. Kurian and K. Jayawardena, "Plantation Patriarchy and Structural Violence: Women Workers in Sri Lanka" (Legacy of Slavery and Indentured Labour, Conference on Bonded Labour, Migration, Diaspora and Identity Formation in Historical and Contemporary Context, Paramaribo, Suriname, June 6–10, 2013).

⁹⁷ K. Wijayatilake and F. Zackariya, "Sexual Harassment at Work: Plantation Sector" (ILO, Colombo, 2001).

⁹⁸ FIAN International, The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), Right to Food Campaign in India, and Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity (PBKMS), "A Life without Dignity – The Price of Your Cup of Tea" (Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition (GNRTFN), 2016).

⁹⁹ R. Kurian and K. Jayawardena, "Plantation Patriarchy and Structural Violence."

CONCLUSION

This research backgrounder focuses on female agricultural workers in India, and particularly women who work on tea plantations, to document to what extent they are survivors of gender-based violence, and what factors enable this to be the case. Due to the available evidence, the analysis focuses on domestic violence. The findings are then tied to the factors that facilitate workplace-related violence, according to the existing literature.

This research confirms that domestic violence is a pervasive problem in the lives of these women. Factors that notably aggravate the incidence of domestic violence for female agricultural workers are alcohol abuse and whether her own family had a history of domestic violence. Employed women are also more likely to report being survivors of domestic violence, especially women who are employed on commercial plantations as compared to women employed on a family farm. Women who are tea plantation laborers fit these factors. It is reported that alcohol consumption is a widespread problem on tea estates and that it is directly associated with domestic violence. In addition, the fact that families live on the plantations and labor passes from generation to generation makes it more likely that the woman's own family also had a history of domestic violence. Moreover, most other types of agriculture are informal in nature, meaning women work on family farms. It is the tea estate workers, therefore, who constitute the bulk of female agricultural labor that does not work for family. The results indicate that higher education and household wealth reduced the likelihood that the woman would report being a survivor of domestic violence, although this finding should not be interpreted causally.

Previous studies on workplace-related violence on tea plantations and the analysis on the legislation governing plantations indicate that workplace violence is a rampant problem that women face. Many factors come together to create an environment that enables and even normalizes this violence. Permanent tea estate laborers are forced to live on the plantations, and face precarious working and living conditions, which are a testament to their powerlessness. Temporary workers fare even worse, as they are paid even lower wages and do not have access to the (limited) facilities and welfare provided to permanent workers. Women are the bottom of the power hierarchy on the plantation and are afraid to report abuse to management. The historical roots of tea plantations, whereby colonialists brought tribal migrants to provide cheap labor picking tea, were founded on extremely unequal gender relations. That culture and division of labor persists up to today.

Despite there being legal provisions that aim to directly address both domestic violence and workplace violence, the isolated nature of the tea estates, the

power hierarchies within them, and lack of enforcement mean that these laws alone do not suffice to significantly minimize gender-based violence. Female tea plantation laborers, specifically, still face harsh realities in terms of violence, as we have outlined. We believe part of the reason why gender-based violence is a widespread problem is that it is not monitored. This research backgrounder analyzes the only comprehensive source of data on domestic violence in India, and there are limitations to these data, as aforementioned. Crime records are not detailed enough to enable this research, or policy makers, to distinguish between urban and rural workers, formal and informal laborers, temporary and permanent workers. These distinctions are important if policy is to be targeted successfully. Moreover, there is very little evidence on workplace violence on tea plantations, let alone a comprehensive source of data that aims to quantify it. The little evidence we have clearly indicates it is a current and important problem for the millions of women who work on tea estates and other plantations.

Future research, therefore, should directly address both the lack of systematic data and evidence on the extent of workplace-related violence on tea estates, and possible avenues for the alleviation of the problem. Future work should aim to understand how the different players—government, law enforcement, NGOs, human rights organizations, and the private sector—influence the status quo, so that effective policy can be designed to address the issue. Importantly, this research is a first step towards *connecting* the contexts in which women are survivors of domestic violence and contexts in which women are survivors of workplace violence. Future research should seek to further understand the common causes and consequences of both.

In sum, it is the aim of this backgrounder to support the need for further research on both domestic and workplace violence, with a particular focus on tea plantations in India, where our findings suggest gender-based violence is a widespread problem. Additionally, we hope that the evidence outlined here draws the attention not only of government, but of the private sector, who is arguably the most powerful player within the agricultural value chains to which these tea plantations belong, to inspire change.

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