

MEASUREMENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NFHS SURVEYS AND SOME EVIDENCE

Successive rounds of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) surveys create space for deeper understanding of various aspects of domestic violence and for evidence based policy recommendations. Researchers, policy makers, NGOs should make the best use of it for policy level interventions as well as working with grass root stakeholders in pursuit of reducing domestic violence.

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During the last couple of decades, in both developed and developing countries, violence against women in general, and domestic violence in particular, is increasingly being acknowledged as a violation of basic human rights. Legal as well as policy interventions in this regard got impetus after the General Assembly of the United Nations passed the 'Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women' in 1993 and called for urgent actions against domestic violence. In the same Assembly, officially, for the first time, the definition of domestic violence (or, gender-based violence) was also presented.

Later, in the visionary agenda for the empowerment of women of the 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action' of 1995, the issue of domestic violence was also reiterated. In the aftermath, a lot of research has also been carried out on the health burdens, intergenerational effects, and demographic consequences of such violence (United Nations, 1997; Heise et al., 1999; Jewkes, 2002; Campbell, 2002; Kishor and Johnson, 2004; 2006).¹ It is now well documented that domestic violence occurs in all socioeconomic and cultural subgroups of population across various societies², and everywhere women not only disproportionately³ bear the health and psychological burdens of violence; but also they are socialised to accept, tolerate, and even rationalise domestic violence and to remain silent about such experiences. It is quite shocking that victims of domestic violence are abused inside the most secure environment - their own homes - and usually by the persons they trust most.

Despite the recognition of domestic violence as a criminal offence which is chargeable under the section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code since 1983, until recently, there was no separate civil law addressing the specific complexities associated with domestic violence. The enactment of the 'Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act' (PWDVA) 2005⁴ now fulfills the need for protection and maintenance of abused women. The law also recognises the fact that punishment and imprisonment for the husband may not be the best resolution in every case.⁵ The PWDVA provides a legal recourse to women (wives and live in partners) facing domestic violence be it physical, mental, sexual, emotional or economical. The law covers violence against both married women (by husbands and others), and unmarried women by anyone (including boyfriends). Although

various experts have raised questions about the implementation status of the PWDVA so far and its success for reducing domestic violence, the actual situation could be assessed from the last two rounds of National Family Health Surveys (NFHS), which were conducted in 2005-06 (NFHS-3) and 2015-16 (NFHS-4).

METHODOLOGY OF MEASURING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NFHS-3 (2005-06) AND NFHS-4 (2015-16):

For addressing any social problem like domestic violence through specific legal and policy interventions or community mobilisation, accurate assessment and understanding of the situation is the prerequisite. But, collecting valid, reliable and ethical data on domestic violence poses serious challenges due to the sensitivity of the issue and the consequent difficulties in collecting correct and complete information; maintaining ethical concerns; ensuring safety of the respondent and interviewer, as well as protecting the women who disclose violence. However, all these issues are well addressed in the NFHS surveys.

It follows both Indian and international guideline, viz. WHO ethical guidance for research on domestic violence against women, 2001, for the ethical collection of data on violence. In the NFHS-3, all 28 states and Delhi were covered.

However, in addition to all 29 states, NFHS-4 also includes all the union territories for the first time and also provide estimates of most of the indicators at the district level for all 640 districts in the country. NFHS-4 sample size is approximately 568,200 households, up from about 109,000 households in NFHS-3. This yields a total sample of 625,014 women and 93,065 men eligible for the interview. In these households, information on 265,653 children below age 5 has been collected in the survey. It should be noted that for assessing domestic violence, total 83,703 women (never-married 13,999 and ever-married 69,704) were interviewed during NFHS-3 survey, whereas this type of disaggregated information regarding NFHS-4 is yet to be put in the public domain. Although the initiative to measure domestic violence was taken since the NFHS-2 (in 1998-99), the approach adopted in the NFHS-3 is sufficiently different from the earlier survey; making these two rounds of survey data incomparable. However, the methodology adopted in the NFHS-3 is more comprehensive.

For measuring domestic violence, the NFHS-4 (in 2015-16) follows the same methodology as the NFHS-3 (in 2005-06), apart from a new dimension of domestic violence, that is, “violence during any pregnancy” has been added in the NFHS-4.

In both the NFHS-3 and NFHS-4, domestic violence is defined to include ⁶ violence by spouses as well as by other household members. However, it should be noted here that it is well documented that spousal violence is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women. For instance, NFHS-3 shows that more than 37.2 per cent of the ever-married women in the age group of 15-49 experienced spousal violence. Out of this ever-married women, who have experienced violence, it is committed by their husbands in 85.3 per cent of cases of physical violence and in 87.5 per cent cases of sexual violence. Hence, NFHS surveys aptly emphasises on violence perpetrated by the husband than by other perpetrators and collects more detailed information on spousal violence.

The set of questionnaire in NFHS survey attempts to capture detailed information on physical, sexual and emotional violence pertaining to the women in the age group 15 to 49. Information is obtained from ever-married women on violence by husbands and by others, and from never married women on violence by anyone, including boyfriends.

In NFHS-3 & 4 surveys, spousal physical, sexual and emotional violence for ever-married women is measured using the following module of questions⁷:

Physical & Sexual Violence: (Does/did) your (last) husband ever do any of the following things to you -

- (a) Slap you?
- (b) Twist your arm or pull your hair?
- (c) Push you, shake you, or throw something at you?
- (d) Punch you with his fist or with something that could hurt you?
- (e) Kick you, drag you or beat you up?
- (f) Try to choke you or burn you on purpose?
- (g) Threaten or attack you with a knife, gun, or any other weapon?
- (h) Physically force you to have sexual intercourse with him even when you did not want to?

- (i) Force you to perform any sexual acts you did not want to?

Emotional Violence: (Does/did) your (last) husband ever -

- (a) Say or do something to humiliate you in front of others?
- (b) Threaten to hurt or harm you or someone close to you?
- (c) Insult you or make you feel bad about yourself?

The questions were asked in different stages of survey. It is noticeable that each of these questions could be answered as “YES” or “NO”. If answer is yes, then the next set of questions are asked for collecting more detailed information on those specific issues.

In addition to the questions asked only of ever-married women, all women, regardless of marital status, were asked about physical violence or sexual violence from persons other than the current or most recent husband any time since the age of 15 years. Finally, information is also collected from ever-married women, whether they had ever hit, slapped, kicked, or done anything else to physically hurt their husband at any time when he was not already beating or physically hurting them; to estimate of violence initiated by women against their husbands.

Although NFHS-3 and NFHS-4 adopts the same methodology for collecting information on domestic violence, in NFHS-4, a couple of questions related to violence during pregnancy are asked to the respondents, viz.,

- a) Has anyone ever hit, slapped, kicked, or done anything else to hurt you physically while you were pregnant?
- b) Who has done any of these things to physically hurt you while you were pregnant?

COMPARATIVE FINDINGS OF NFHS-3 AND NFHS-4:

As the basic methodology of data collection is same in the NFHS-3 & 4, data from these two surveys can be used to draw some trends in violence against women. But, as far as the NFHS-4 is concerned, at present only the fact sheets, which gives aggregate scenario of two indicators for the selected states, are available in the public domain. Those fact sheets contain only the aggregate picture of the states about the ‘ever-married

women who have ever experienced spousal violence', and 'experience of violence during pregnancy.' So, we can draw some trends, at least for spousal violence comparing these two rounds of survey.

Based on the scant information in NFHS-4 fact sheets, available in the public domain, a comparative picture of NFHS-3 and NFHS-4 could be drawn. Some trends that emerges from the two rounds of survey are (see table 1)

- At present, factsheets of 16 states are available in the public domain; of which segregated data for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are not available. Out of the remaining 14 states, in 10 states, there has been a fall in proportion of married women who experienced spousal violence in the period during 2005-06 to 2015-16. It is definitely a positive development.

- At the same time, it is also very encouraging that, among the larger states, Bihar, which had the highest prevalence (59.0 per cent) of spousal violence in NFHS-3 survey, has reduced this substantially during the last 10 years and in 2015-16 as per the NFHS-4 survey, this figure stood at 43.2 percent. This implies a 15.8 percentage point decline in spousal violence

in Bihar during this period. Along with Bihar, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra has also reduced domestic violence substantially in the same period. Domestic violence in Assam has declined by 14.9 percentage points followed by Madhya Pradesh (12.7 point) and Maharashtra (9.3 point). The factors behind the significant reduction of spousal violence in these states could worth to be scrutinized further.

- Among the North Eastern and Hilly states, Tripura registers 16.2 percentage point decline in spousal violence, which is the highest decline among the states mentioned in Table 1. Perceptible decline is also registered in Uttarakhand (15.1 point) and Sikkim (13.7 point). With the prevalence of only 2.6 per cent spousal violence in 2015-16, Sikkim could be considered as the safest for married women.

However, amidst the apparent successes in reducing violence, it is also quite alarming that the trend has been reversed for few states. Four out of 14 states (excluding Andhra Pradesh & Telangana) have shown a rise in spousal violence in the last 10 years. The biggest jump has been in Meghalaya where the percentage of abused women became more than doubled from 12.8% to 28.7%, i.e., an increase of 15.9

Table: 1

	NFHS-3 (2005-06)	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	Change
	Ever-married women who have ever experienced spousal violence (%)	Ever-married women who have ever experienced spousal violence (%)	Percentage Point Change during NFHS-3 & NFHS-4 (%)
	A	B	C = [B-A]
Andhra Pradesh	NA	43.2	8.0
Assam	39.4	24.5	-14.9
Bihar	59.0	43.2	-15.8
Goa	16.8	12.9	-3.9
Haryana	27.3	32.0	4.7
Karnataka	20.0	20.5	0.5
Maharashtra	30.7	21.4	-9.3
Manipur	43.8	53.1	9.3
Meghalaya	12.8	28.7	15.9
Madhya Pradesh	45.7	33.0	-12.7
Sikkim	16.3	2.6	-13.7
Telangana	NA	43.0	NA
Tamil Nadu	41.9	40.6	-1.3
Tripura	44.1	27.9	-16.2
Uttarakhand	27.8	12.7	-15.1
West Bengal	40.1	32.8	-7.3
All India	37.2		

All three types of violence, i.e., physical, sexual and emotional violence are captured in NFHS surveys for measuring spousal violence. However, data presented in the NFHS fact sheets are of the estimates of spousal violence excluding emotional violence.

Source: Compiled from NFHS-3 & NFHS-4 factsheets. *NA: Segregated data for Andhra Pradesh & Telangana for NFHS-3 survey is not available.

percentage point. Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Karnataka witnessed increase of spousal violence by 9.3, 8.0, 4.7 and 0.5 percentage points respectively. This increasing trend of spousal violence is an area of serious concern and these states must be studied further to intervene in appropriate areas to contain or reduce spousal violence. In the NFHS-4 fact sheets published so far, spousal violence data is also available with rural urban segregation.

Table 2 highlights some rural urban differences in domestic violence across states as follows:

- Stark differences in spousal violence (for ever-married women) between rural and urban areas are visible in several states, with the general trend of higher prevalence in rural areas, both in NFHS-3 and NFHS-4. If all India average is considered, spousal violence in rural areas was higher by 9.8 percentage point than urban areas as per the NFHS-3 survey.
- In Assam there has been significant reduction in gap between spousal violence in rural and urban areas during this period. In 2005-06 (NFHS-3), rural urban gap was 17.5 percentage point, which has declined to

10.3 in 2015-16 (NFHS-4).

- In Bihar, the rural urban gap is not much significant, but, the situation has been interchanged in this two surveys. In 2005-06, prevalence of violence in urban areas was higher by 3.7 percentage points; but in 2015-16 survey, violence in rural areas was higher by 3.5 percentage points.

- As per the most recent data, i.e., NFHS-4, rural urban difference is the highest in Tripura with 15.7 percentage point and then come West Bengal (13.2), Haryana (12.0), Telangana (10.7), Assam (10.3), Maharashtra (9.8), Meghalaya (8.4) and Manipur (8.0).

Due to non-availability of adequate information on NFHS-4 at present, any other comparative analysis of NFHS-3 and NFHS-4 could not be possible at this juncture. However, a lot of information on various dimensions of domestic violence, drawn from NFHS-3, are available in the public domain. It would be worthwhile to have a quick glance on some national level findings from the NFHS-3 survey, as described below:

Table 2:

	NFHS-3 (2005-06)			NFHS-4 (2015-16)		
	Ever-married women who have ever experienced spousal violence (%)			Ever-married women who have ever experienced spousal violence (%)		
	Rural	Urban	Difference [Rural – Urban]	Rural	Urban	Difference [Rural – Urban]
Andhra Pradesh	37.1	31.3	5.8	43.6	42.4	1.2
Assam	42.6	24.9	17.7	26.2	15.9	10.3
Bihar	58.5	62.2	-3.7	43.7	40.2	3.5
Goa	17.2	16.4	0.8	8.7	15.3	-6.6
Haryana	28.8	23.9	4.9	37.1	25.1	12.0
Karnataka	23.2	15	8.2	20.4	20.6	-0.2
Maharashtra	34.9	26.2	8.7	26.2	16.4	9.8
Manipur	43.5	44.4	-0.9	56.1	48.1	8.0
Meghalaya	13.4	10.8	2.6	30.4	22	8.4
Madhya Pradesh	46.4	43.7	2.7	35.4	27.3	8.1
Sikkim	17.7	10.7	7.0	4.2	0.4	3.8
Telangana	NA	NA	NA	47.6	36.9	10.7
Tamil Nadu	44.4	39	5.4	44.2	37.2	7.0
Tripura	46.5	32.2	14.3	32.4	16.7	15.7
Uttarakhand	29.6	22.8	6.8	13.1	12.1	1.0
West Bengal	44.1	30.4	13.7	36.9	23.7	13.2
All India	40.2	30.4	9.8			

Source: Compiled from NFHS-3 & NFHS-4 Factsheets

SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS FROM NFHS-3 (2005-06):

a) Overall 37.2 per cent of ever-married women (age 15-49) have ever experienced any physical and sexual violence from her husband. 87 per cent of these spousal violence was initiated within 5 years of marriage. Spousal violence ranged from 5.9 per cent in Himachal Pradesh to 59.0 per cent in Bihar.

b) If only physical violence is considered, 35.1 per cent ever-married women experienced this violence ever. Slapping is the most common form of spousal physical violence.

c) Women who make household decisions jointly with their husbands, including decisions about the use of their own earnings, are less likely to experience spousal violence than women who do not have a major say in these decisions or who mainly make the decisions on their own.

d) Higher education consistently lower women's risk of spousal violence. It is found that 10 or more years of education is strongly and negatively associated with all types of violence.

e) Prevalence of spousal violence is higher for women who are employed than women who are not, especially if they want to control the use of their earnings or if they earn more than their husbands. Prevalence of violence is least for women who take decisions about the use of their earnings jointly with their husbands.

f) NFHS-3 reveals that more than half of women (54%) and men (51%) agree that it is justifiable for a husband to beat his wife under some circumstances. Women and men most often agree that wife beating is justified when the wife disrespects her in-laws. Neglect of the house or children is the second most commonly agreed justification for wife beating for both women and men.

Over the years, NFHS captures a sizeable information on domestic violence and each NFHS surveys are being strengthened continuously and scope of the data is broadened adding various new dimension in successive rounds of surveys. For instance, in NFHS-4, a new dimension of domestic violence, viz., 'Violence during pregnancy' has been added. It is now imperative to regularise the initiative, i.e., collecting data on domestic violence must be continued in every NFHS. Scope of the NFHS could be enhanced by adding new dimensions in successive rounds; but the basic data collecting methodology should be kept intact, so that, the trend of domestic violence over

the years could easily be tracked. NFHS data should be used extensively by researchers, experts, policy makers, NGOs as it has huge potential for providing deeper understanding on various aspects of domestic violence and consequently intervening in right areas for addressing domestic violence.

Precisely, we would recommend that data collection on domestic violence in NFHS surveys should be regular keeping the basic methodology intact, so that, progress in domestic violence could be tracked by comparing successive rounds of survey data.

ENDNOTES

1 (a) United Nations (1997), Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995. Beijing, China: United Nations; (b) Heise et al. (1999), Ending violence against women. Population Reports, Series L, No. 11. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Population Information Program; (c) Jewkes, R. (2002), Intimate partner violence: causes and prevention. *Lancet*: 359 (9315): 1423-1429; (d) Campbell, J.C. (2002), Health consequences of intimate partner violence. *The Lancet* 359(9314): 1331-1336; (e) Kishor & Johnson (2004), Profiling domestic violence: A multi-country study. Calverton, Maryland: ORC Macro; (f) Kishor & Johnson (2006), Reproductive health and domestic violence: Are the poorest women uniquely disadvantaged? *Demography* Vol. 43(2):293-307;

2 'Domestic violence against women is a global problem and present in every country cutting across the boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnicity and age. Most of the population based studies in different countries indicate that 10-60% of ever-partnered or ever-married women have experienced at least one incidence of physical violence from a current or former intimate partner.' [Reproduced from: Aswar et al. (2013) Domestic violence against married women in reproductive age group: A community based study, *IOSR Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences (IOSR-JDMS)*, Nov-Dec 2013].

3 Only 1% of married women have ever initiated violence against their husband (Source: NFHS-3 Presentation on Domestic Violence, available on: http://rchiips.org/nfhs/sub_presentation.shtml ; accessed on 14th July 2016).

4 The PWDVA 2005 took effect from October 2006.

5 Domestic Violence, Chapter 15, Report of the NFHS-3, Vol. I.

6 *ibid*

7 Domestic Violence, Chapter 15, Report of the NFHS-3, Vol. I

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