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344**

**RIGHTS-BASED STRATEGIES IN  
THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE**

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## **RIGHTS-BASED STRATEGIES IN THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

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## ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to broaden the discussion about the prevention of domestic violence against women informed by a rights-based strategy. Specifically, the study discusses the critical elements of a human rights framework to reduce domestic violence, present research findings on the prevalence and correlates of domestic violence in intimate relationships in Kerala, and explore strategies for the prevention of domestic violence on the basis of research and analysis.

The study suggests that domestic violence needs to be resituated in the broader social transformation of society and that domestic violence should be conceptualized as violation of a woman's most basic right. The strength of a rights-based strategy is that it meshes formal treaty doctrines with grassroots activism and critiques of power. While the right to make the claim is global, the specific and useful strategies to prevent domestic violence must be developed locally.

Research and analysis in this study in the context of Kerala clearly suggests that domestic violence against women (physical and psychological) is pervasive in terms of wide prevalence, multiple forms and high frequency of occurrence. Moreover forced sex and physical violence during pregnancy are also not uncommon. The study suggests that "right to housing" and "right to property and inheritance" are critical and most fundamental for any strategy in the prevention of domestic violence. Four points need to be emphasized here:

- (a) Importance of immovable assets and social support is significant in making a difference to the incidence of violence.
- (b) Changing norms of acceptability of violence in the family is critical to reduce inter-generational transmission of violence.

- (c) Male attitudes and society's attitudes also need to be changed in this regard. Since prevention of domestic violence requires fundamental changes in attitudes and behavior, it confronts societal and individual resistance to change.
- (d) Support structures could be both within the family and from NGOs, women's self-help groups etc., who can both help in changing attitudes and in helping women acquire immovable assets. This calls for creative community involvement, shared responsibilities, and collective action with the goals to challenge the patriarchal assumptions of power and control and entitlement to women.

**Key words:** domestic violence, women, human rights, development, property ownership, Kerala

**JEL Classification:** D 2, I 3, J 1, O 1, K 0



## **Introduction**

Within the burgeoning discourse on human rights, domestic violence against women is increasingly viewed as a serious violation of human rights subject to legal intervention. The societal responses to domestic violence have focused, to date, primarily on crisis intervention after the harm has occurred. While crisis intervention is a necessary response to domestic violence, it alone cannot address the complex dynamics of domestic violence. What is needed is a comprehensive strategy that addresses the prevention of domestic violence. However, few such strategies have been developed, and even fewer have been evaluated. Little is known about the best practices: what works in a given context, and why? This study is an attempt to provide a framework for the prevention of domestic violence informed by a rights-based strategy.

The study is divided into seven sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the evolution of the international human rights system. The second section clarifies the concept and value-added of a rights-based approach to development. The third section examines the scope of the international human rights law to prevent violence against women. The fourth section examines the links between domestic violence and women's social and economic rights. The fifth section provides the background and contemporary context of Kerala, a southern state in India. The sixth section examines the underlying causes and correlates of domestic violence against women in Kerala, based on the analysis of household survey data. The concluding section provides a rights-based strategy in the prevention of domestic violence in Kerala.

## **I. Evolving International Human Rights System**

Human rights have made a great deal of progress as moral and legal force since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations (UN) on December 10, 1948. The Declaration, which was written by Eleanor Roosevelt, chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights, and 17 other international delegates, is the primary international articulation of the fundamental and inalienable rights of all human beings. The Declaration is not only the point of departure for all human rights treaties that followed; it has truly become the singly most meaningful human rights document around the globe. The Declaration consists of 30 different articles that enumerate a wide range of fundamental and inalienable rights to which all human beings are entitled. The Declaration states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”, and it declares that everyone is entitled, without distinction of any kind, to the various rights articulated in the Declaration. The Declaration was not intended to be a legally binding document. The first step toward implementation of the Declaration was the creation of specific treaties to deal with some of the main principles outlined in the Declaration. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), for example, were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966, and they were drafted and adopted as legally binding international treaties meant to ensure protection of the rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration. These two treaties are broad in scope. Others are more specific, such as convention on the elimination of discrimination on the basis of race or gender, and on the right of the child. Six of the UN human rights treaties are considered to be core treaties (see Box 1). The standard method of enforcing human rights treaties is a reporting system. Governments are obliged to report periodically on their human rights practices and then must defend their records in front of an international body that can put diplomatic pressure on them to comply.



Box 1: The Core UN Human Rights Treaties

Core Treaties	Year (adopted)	Year (entered into force)	Monitoring Committee	Any Optional Protocol	Number of countries that ratified (as of August 2002)
International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	1966	1976	Human Rights Committee	Individual Complaint; Death Penalty	148
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1966	1976	Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights	-	145
International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	1965	1969	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	-	162

Cont'd

Core Treaties	Year (adopted)	Year (entered into force)	Monitoring Committee	Any Optional Protocol	Number of countries that ratified (as of August 2002)
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	1979	1981	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	Individual Complaint	170
Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	1984	1987	Convention Against Torture	-	130
Convention on the Rights of the Child	1989	1990	Committee On the Rights Of Child	Children in armed conflict; Sale of children, Child prostitution and Child pornography	191

A major international treaty on women's rights was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW, in fact, is the first comprehensive human rights treaty to address women's rights. CEDAW comprises of 30 articles, and provides a universal definition of discrimination against women. The treaty covers a wide range of issues, including maternity leave, pregnancy-related health care, property rights, and affirmative action for women in education and employment. The treaty also provides a legal framework for nations to eliminate gender discrimination. Till today, 170 countries have ratified CEDAW.

In the 1990s, women's rights have been further defined and expanded through negotiations at six major world conferences. The recognition of the fact that human rights are crucial for women's well-being, women's organizations continued to focus on the global stage some of women's most basic rights, including freedom of movement, freedom to work outside of the home, right to bodily integrity and freedom from violence. It was the violence against women issue, especially domestic violence, which finally drew wide international attention to the idea that women's rights are human rights. In fact, women's human rights became the most dramatic agenda item at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, Austria. The 1995 UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, reaffirmed the conclusions of the Vienna Conference and put women's human rights even more firmly on the world agenda.

In June 2000, the UN General Assembly reviewed the implementation of the Beijing Platform (Beijing +5) and reaffirmed government's commitment to work for the realization of women's rights. The new document (Women 2000/Beijing +5 Outcome Document) reaffirms the 150-page Platform for Action at the landmark 1995 UN

Women's Conference and moves forward with tougher measures to combat domestic violence and trafficking of women. The Outcome Document calls for prosecution of all forms of domestic violence, now including marital rape. The traditional practices of forced marriage and honor killings are addressed for the first time in an international document.

Although these documents and programs of action do not have the status of international law, they carry political and moral weight as policy guidelines for the UN, governments, and other international organizations. Women's organizations can use these documents to hold governments and the UN accountable.

All these conferences provided opportunity and space for public assessment and discussion of the critical areas of concern. They reaffirm the commitments of women's movements that have placed women's empowerment and rights on the international agenda. There is now a clear recognition that women will never gain dignity until their human rights are respected and protected. Strengthening families and societies by empowering women to take greater control over their own destinies cannot be fully achieved unless all governments around the globe accept their responsibility to protect and promote internationally recognized human rights. Empowering women is also critical to promoting democracy. The challenge, however, is to develop strategies to grant basic rights to women and enable them to choose how to exercise those rights. This is especially important because the gap between principles and practices defines the central dilemma of human rights (Steiner and Alston, 2000).

In order to improve institutional effectiveness, the international human rights system has been rapidly evolving. In recent years new roles have evolved for the UN, especially through the creation of the

office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. Within the Human Rights Commission, new thematic mechanisms (such as special rapporteurs and working groups) have emerged. New avenues have opened for individual communications, as reflected in the recently adopted Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). New forms of redress are being developed – including international prosecution against individuals and against corporations.

There is clearly room for additional reform of the UN mechanisms to ensure effective institutions and stronger means of enforcement. However, the international human rights norms have had, in fact, a demonstrable and positive effect on the behaviour of states toward their citizens (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999). Thus, significant strides have been made; both on a global scale through the United Nations and its agencies and on a regional level through the proliferation of human rights interest groups and non-governmental organizations around the globe.

There has been a paradigm shift in the vision of human rights discourse. Now, the scope of the human rights vision has been broadened to include non-state actors (e.g., individuals, corporations, financial institutions and third-party states), in addition to the traditional state-centric paradigm. In an era of globalization where the world economy is increasingly being integrated, moving beyond a state-centered view of human rights to include non-state actors has a potential to hold non-state actors accountable for violations of social and economic rights. However effective implementation still rests with states, who as signatories to international conventions are duty bound to protect, fulfill and promote rights. Though for some states human rights are still contentious, there has been a dramatic progression in the acceptability

of rights with the number of states ratifying core conventions rising from 10 percent to more than half in the last decade. This increasing acceptability of all rights including political, civil, cultural, social and economic has made inroads into current thinking on development policy and practice.

## **II. Rights-based Approach to Development**

There has been a paradigm shift in the development discourse, from a welfare-based approach to development to a rights-based approach to development. Unlike the centrality of 'economic efficiency' in the welfare-based approach, the rights-based approach reflects a global consensus on the centrality of human dignity and equality in social and economic life and the non-negotiable accountability of states for fulfilling their obligations.

The Human Development Report 2000 shows that human rights and human development are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. They take root and grow in diverse societies. They expand capabilities by protecting rights (UNDP, 2000). This understanding has contributed to the development of people centered sustainable development.

This revolution in the discourse of development is strongly influenced by the writings of Amartya Sen, the winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in economics. First, Sen illustrates that human values are not always analogous to preference-satisfaction, and provides a critique of utility/welfarism (Sen, 1982). Second, Sen has had a long-held conviction that violation of rights and freedom is inimical to socio-economic development (Dreze and Sen, 1989, 1995). Finally, Sen has combined these two strands effectively in his recent book, *Development as Freedom* (Sen, 1999). Sen argues that freedom properly understood is the

appropriate normative framework by which to understand global issues of development. At the heart of Sen's extensive writing in moral philosophy and development economics is the idea that the ability to survive is a substantive freedom. He focuses on a person's "capabilities" or substantive freedom of people 'to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have'. These freedoms include the ability to acquire sufficient food, freedom from disease and ill treatment, access to education, freedom from social exclusion, freedom to participate in the life of the community, and freedom from unemployment. According to Sen, the success of development must be assessed by the achievement of such freedoms. In fact, development is the result of the exercise of these freedoms (Sen, 1999).

Sen further argues that substantive freedoms are supported by instrumental freedoms, such as economic opportunities to use resources, political choices about laws, social questions about arrangements of health care, the security of a social safety net, etc. The effectiveness of freedom interrelates with one another, and freedom of one type may greatly help in advancing freedom of other types. More importantly, Sen argues that individual freedom is a social commitment: that substantive freedom is extremely contingent on personal, social and environmental circumstances; and that the exercise of such freedom is inseparably linked to social, economic and political institutions.

According to Sen, expansion of freedoms is both the definition of development and the means to achieve it. The ultimate aim of development is enlarging the capabilities of all human beings. What are really important for people are the freedoms associated with human rights, he argues. In May 2001, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reaffirmed this view in a forceful statement arguing for a better integration of human rights in development

strategies. The Millennium Development Goals calls for the adoption of policies, programmes and strategies informed by a rights-based approach. The Millenium Declaration requires answers to pertinent questions relating to how targets are achieved, and who are affected by improvements. The UN organizations such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) are increasingly becoming committed to follow a rights-based approach. The international bilateral and multilateral non-government organizations such as OXFAM, CARE, and DFID have come out with plans and strategies with a rights-based approach in their development work. The international financial organizations like International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have some commitments to adopt a rights-based approach. For instance, poverty, according to the World Bank's World Development Report 2000/2001, is "more than inadequate income or human development – it is also vulnerability and lack of voice, power, and representation" (World Bank, 2001a). Also, World Bank's "Voice of the Poor", which is based on extensive consultations with thousands of poor people around the world, concludes that dependency, lack of power and voice are the core elements of poor people's definition of poverty (Narayana, et al., 2000). The Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers (PRSPs) include human rights issues for some countries like Nicaragua, Rwanda, Bolivia, Cambodia, Camaroon, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam. According to some critiques, the approaches of the IMF and the World Bank are not strictly in line with a rights-based approach (Sengupta, 2002; Vizard, 2001).

All these developments indicate that a new dialogue is taking place between development and human rights experts. Today, it is widely recognized that the path of human dignity runs not through imposed technocratic solutions or imported foreign models or assumed tradeoff



between development and rights. Health, education, housing, fair justice and free political participation are not matters of charity but rather matters of right. This is what is meant by “Rights-based Approach”. This refers to a participatory, empowering, transparent, accountable and non-discriminatory development paradigm that is based on universal, inalienable human rights and freedoms.

The rights-based approach to development provides both challenges and opportunities. What is a rights-based approach to development? What is new in it?

The rights-based approach to development is based on the central premise that development policies and programmes should be based on norms and values enshrined in the international human rights law. As compared to other development approaches, the idea of legitimacy in international law, with the principles of equity and justice, provides an added value to a rights-based approach.

The essence of rights is that they are empowering. Rights are transformatory: people are able to take their own decisions as actors or rights-holders by transforming rights to entitlements. And it is the obligations of the state and non-state duty-bearers to respect, protect and fulfill all human rights. The duty to respect requires the duty-bearer not to breach directly or indirectly the enjoyment of any human right. The duty to protect requires the duty bearer to take measures that prevent third parties from abusing the right. The duty to fulfill requires the duty-bearer to adopt appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the full realization of human rights.

The rights-based approach to development is based on the international principles of non-discrimination and equality, and participation. The principle of non-discrimination requires that laws

and institutions, at local, national and international levels, that foster discrimination against specific individuals and groups (e.g., vulnerable, marginal, and disadvantaged or socially excluded) be eliminated. It calls for a broader strategy that addresses socio-cultural and political-legal institutions. The principle of participation requires active and informed participation by the people, including the socially excluded, in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of development policies and programmes. Participation is recognized not just as a means to other ends but also as fundamental human rights that should be realized for its own sake. The rights based approach places equal emphasis on accountability on part of the duty holders (state and inter-governmental organizations).

The rights-based approach also recognizes the interdependence or complementarity of rights. For instance, right to participation may depend on right to association, right to assembly, freedom of expression, right to information, right to education and right to employment. Since all rights are equally important, the rights-based approach recognizes the crucial interdependence of economic, social and cultural rights, on the one hand, and civil and political rights, on the other.

Keeping in mind the resource and other constraints in many developing countries, the rights-based approach allows for progressive realization and prioritization of rights over a period of time. In other words, governments can set benchmarks and priorities in participatory consultation with citizens. At the same time, it emphasizes that all countries have to provide a 'minimum core obligation' of all human rights to protect socially excluded people against retrogression and non-fulfillment of this minimum core obligation.

In the new millennium, human rights issues are taking on a new focus. First, economic and social rights are becoming of paramount

concern as the link between an adequate standard of living and the enjoyment of other basic rights becomes more apparent. Second, there is an increasing realization that many groups in society require a higher level of protection than society as a whole. These groups are children, women, and indigenous groups, among others.

The rights-based approach can be conceived as a pre-condition for women's empowerment.

To re-iterate the essence of rights is that they are empowering. Rights are legally-binding entitlements, not charity. Rights are legitimate claims. The rights perspective is transformatory as it transforms needs into rights and responsibilities. The state and non-state actors have legal obligation to respect, protect and fulfill those rights. So, rights empower women. Empowerment promotes the exercise of meaningful choice by enhancing capabilities. It recognizes that women are active agents in solving their problems. It is also important to realize the interdependent nature of rights. For example, enacting and implementing equal opportunity laws will help empower women to gain equitable access to resources, liberating individual initiative and creating economic opportunities. Legislating against gender discrimination will enhance the capabilities of women by giving them better access to credit and productive resources, property and inheritance rights and improved political participation and representation. In other words, supporting and enacting a rights-based approach to the needs of women can not only end discrimination against them but also empower them. Women's empowerment, in turn, is linked to the well-being of children, family and society.

A recent study has found that countries that promote women's rights and increase women's access to resources and education have lower poverty rates, lower child and infant mortality, improved nutrition,

lower fertility rates, lower AIDS prevalence, less corruption, higher economic productivity and faster economic growth than countries who do not (World Bank, 2001b).

Most of the principles of a rights-based approach to development mentioned above are vital for protecting women from violence. For instance, the critical elements of a rights-based strategy in the prevention of domestic violence are the following: non-discrimination and equality; dignity of the person; the understanding that all rights are interconnected and interdependent in their realization; the participation of women in the determination of issues affecting them.

### **III. Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue**

Violence against women, including domestic violence, is a human rights abuse. It exists in every country and culture in epidemic proportion, and is disproportionately committed against women. The irony is that international human rights instruments and many domestic laws prohibit and condemn such violence. And still, it occurs.

Violence against women is experienced in myriad forms from restrictions to discrimination to physical, sexual and mental abuse. United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women as "... any form of gender based violence, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." This encompasses, inter alia, "..... Physical, sexual, or psychological violence occurring in the family and in the general community, including battering, sexual abuse of children, dowry-related violence, rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, nonspousal violence, violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment, and intimidation at work, in educational

institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state.”

Women experience violence in both conflict and non-conflict areas. In civil conflict areas like Kosovo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and East Timor, sexual violence has been used as a means of domination and control over ethnic populations by military and paramilitary forces. Women in refugee camps also suffer from rape and sexual violence. Further in conflict and post-conflict societies domestic violence is widely prevalent.

In non-conflict areas there is an epidemic of violence against women. Population-based surveys from a range of countries indicate that 10 to over 50 per cent women report physical assault in intimate relationship. Of these women 33 to 50 per cent also report sexual abuse or coercion (Heise, Ellsberg, et.al, 1999). Moreover, discrimination in the enforcement of law, denial of equal opportunity in education and employment, exclusion of women from political representation, and the use of physical and psychological violence to intimidate and subordinate women in public spheres all constitute violations of the right to gender equality.

The effect of such violence is devastating. It not only harms the woman, it destroys the family, limits a community's workforce, and perpetuates an atmosphere of fear, insecurity, and impunity. It also is connected to other devastating human rights abuses such the suppression of the right of speech, association and more importantly liberty. Violence against women has also significant impact on health of the woman and community. For example, violence against women is now recognized as a lead factor in the spread of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which invariably results in the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Progress against HIV requires that women are able to protect

themselves against all forms of violence, including domestic violence, rape, and sexual abuse. The disease has also placed many women at greater risk of further violence.

The roots of violence against women are located in the unequal balance of power between men and women. The low value some cultures assign to women and girls and the norms that discriminate against women contribute to violence and prevent women from defending themselves. Unequal access by women and girls to education, economic resources, and decision making authority are the central outcomes of gender inequality and this limited access undermine the ability of women to negotiate both public and private acts of violence. Overall the denial of equal rights to women through cultural and social norms and practices in fact perpetuates and reinforces violence against women.

The recognition of violence against women, and specifically domestic violence, as a human rights violation is first articulated in Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the 1993 United Nations World Conference on Human Rights. Although CEDAW does not explicitly address violence against women, it recognizes that discrimination is a root cause of violence against women and that the denial of equal rights to women reinforces and perpetuates violence against women. The UN Convention to Eliminate Violence Against Women is the first protocol to specifically focus on the full continuum of violence experienced by women.

Fundamentally the human rights approach focuses on those whose rights are being violated, allowing developing solutions that keep victims experiences and needs at the forefront. International standard continue to evolve in recognition of the pervasive nature of violence against women under circumstances ranging, for example, from domestic violence, to coercive sex work, to rape as a weapon of war. There are

three critical approaches within the rights framework that have contributed enormously to facilitate the placing of domestic violence on the international and national agendas – namely due diligence, equal protection and domestic violence as torture. These three distinct legal approaches are discussed below.

### **Legal Approaches to Domestic Violence**

Under international human rights law, the concept of state responsibility has been enormously expanded. The state now has a dual role to play. First, the state should not indulge in human rights violations. Second, more importantly, if violations occur in the private spheres, the state has a clear obligation to prevent those violations and protect the victims. Currently, there are three approaches of state responsibility for dealing with the issue of violence against women by private actors.

#### **1. Due diligence**

The legal concept of “due diligence” describes the minimum effort a state must undertake in order to fulfill its responsibility to protect individuals from abuses of their rights.

The committee charged with overseeing implementation of CEDAW in 1992 adopted General Recommendation 19 which emphasizes that “States may also be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation”.

In 1993, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) also calls on States to “pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating violence against women” and further to “exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national

legislation, punish acts of violence against women, and whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private actors”.

## **2. Equal protection of the law**

This approach is based on the principle of the equal protection of law. If discrimination in law enforcement is demonstrated in case of violence against women, then the State may be held liable for violating international human rights standard of equality (Thomas and Beasley, 1993; O’Hare, 1999).

For instance, Article 26 of the ICCPR provides that “all persons are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law”. This has then led the basis for states addressing victims of domestic violence, a group usually outside law enforcement.

Here lies the significance of the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW which was adopted in 1999. The proposed inquiry procedure under that protocol can be approached, following complaints from individuals or groups. Individual women can bring claims against a government, which fails to take measures to punish or prevent domestic violence. There is provision for international prosecution against individuals who perpetrate domestic violence.

## **3. Domestic violence as torture**

Convention against Torture defines torture as “an act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person” for a purpose such as obtaining information or a confession, punishment, intimidation, or coercion, “or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind”.



Domestic violence is a violation of a woman's rights to bodily integrity, to liberty, and often right to life itself. Therefore, this approach argues that domestic violence is a form of torture, and should be dealt in line with other human rights instruments.

Article 7 of the ICCPR states that "no one should be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". When states fail to provide protections through legislation and other measures, they hold responsibility for the abuse.

The failure of a government to prohibit acts of violence against women when they are of the nature and severity envisaged by the accepted definitions of torture constitutes a failure of state protection. Proponents of this approach believe that application of a human rights framework by recognizing domestic violence as torture and by insisting states to fulfill their responsibility to protect women, can be a powerful tool in eliminating violence against women.

These three approaches to address domestic violence suggest that women's rights groups have been successful in deconstructing the false dichotomy between public-private divide which has so long restricted efforts to put domestic violence in the national agenda.

Marcus (1994) makes a strong legal case for the reconceptualization of domestic violence as a human rights issue, given the similarity and close parallel between abuse and terrorism. She contends that people or group wishing to terrorize others use three basic tactics: (a) surprise and seemingly random (but actually well-planned) acts of violence, (b) psychological and physical warfare to silence protest and minimize opposition, and (c) the creation of an atmosphere of intimidation in which there is no way to escape. In the similar manner as terror can be directed at a community, it can also take the form of violence

perpetrated in a women's home by her partner. In similar ways to terror, violence is designed to maintain domination and control, to increase advantages, and to defend privileges. She argues that the term terrorism as an alternative to domestic violence carries a connotation of privacy and thus minimizes or diminishes its importance and seriousness.

Thus, significant language now exists to advance the status of women, and it is critical to capitalize on these advances. In recent years, women's human rights groups are pressurizing governments to implement CEDAW, and take positive measures to end legal, social and economic gender inequality.

#### **IV. Links between Domestic Violence and Social and Economic Rights**

Domestic violence is rooted in gender power balance, gender identity, and gender-specific roles and responsibilities.

First, since women and men often have different roles and responsibilities, they have different needs and priorities. For instance, women tend to carry the primary responsibility for maintaining household, like collecting water, fuel wood, preparation of food, care for children and elderly. These activities not only increase women's daily burden of work (time poverty), they also restrict women's participation in community activities and decision-making processes, employment, physical mobility etc. Further the perceived non-fulfillment of these responsibilities is often a precipitating trigger for domestic violence.

Second, women tend to have limited access to and control over productive resources such as land, house, credit, agricultural extension, water etc. Women's limited access to land means less access to agricultural extension services, credit and water. Women are particularly threatened

by loss of land, house and other property, and ownership rights because of the prevalence of statutory law and other forms of discrimination. This inhibits women's rights within marriage, leading to threat of divorce and violence against them. Women also face additional obstacles to develop coping strategies.

Third, the pervasive nature of gender-specific violence not only affects the individual victims directly, it also indirectly limits women's mobility and participation in social, economic and political activities. Women in many societies are afforded little recourse against domestic violence.

Finally, women are far less likely to participate in formal decision-making processes. Unequal control over economic resources not only inhibits women's autonomy in household decision-making; it also inhibits participation in public institutions and to break the shackles of poverty and deprivation. Gender inequality is the most pervasive manifestation of inequality of all kinds in any society because it typically affects half of the population.

Moreover, women more than men in most countries face structural barriers that impede women from having rights, capabilities and capacity to choose. Women also face institutional barriers and discrimination in law. Women's participation in decision-making are low at all levels. As a result they lack power and voice. Therefore an enabling environment is necessary to remove the structural and institutional obstacles.

### *Domestic Violence and Health*

Women who have experienced physical, psychological and sexual violence are at higher risk of unwanted pregnancy, high risk pregnancy, and adverse pregnancy outcomes and of contacting sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS (Maman et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1999a).

In fact, there is a strong link between domestic violence and HIV prevention strategies. Public health practitioners may educate women about the risks of sex and drug abuse, or, they may even distribute the means for behavioral changes (e.g., condoms and sterile injection equipment). But, if women are physically and psychologically abused by their husbands, they remain powerless to reduce their risk of HIV (Mann et al., 2000).

Physical violence leads to injuries, fatal outcomes (less common) and functional disorders (most common) such as chronic pain syndrome, gastro-intestinal disorders etc. Domestic violence leads to stress and stress-related mental illnesses among women such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression and low self-esteem. These mental health problems have a higher risk for suicide and suicide attempts (Astbury, 2000, INCLLEN 2000).

Violence during pregnancy is an important cause of maternal deaths in India (Ganatra et al., 1998), Bangladesh (Fauveau et al., 1988), and the US (Dennenberg et al., 1995; Harper and Parsons, 1997). Recent evidence from Nicaragua and India suggests that violence may also directly or indirectly affect child mortality (Asling-Monemi et al, 2002; Jejeebhoy, 1998a).

Numerous studies have revealed how a woman's sexual and reproductive autonomy may be compromised by her fear or experiences of violence (Heise et al., 1999; Petchesky and Judd, 1998).

All these short-term and long-term health consequences of violence across the countries clearly indicate that "right to health" cannot be fully realized without providing adequate protection against domestic violence.

*Domestic Violence and Education:*

Children who witness violence are at a higher risk not only for a range of emotional and behavioral problems, they also exhibit poor performance in schools (Ellsberg et al, 2000; McCloskey et al., 1995; Edleson, 1999; Jaffe et al., 1990).

Researchers have shown that violence is now established as an influential factor inhibiting the access of girls to education in both South Africa and Jamaica (Chisholm and Malange, 1999; Kurz and Johnson-Welch, 1994). It is not surprising to argue that if women are routinely being harassed by their husbands, they cannot properly look after themselves and their children, including attending to children's education and care.

Domestic violence is a factor in limiting the realization of right to education for young girls and boys. This is absolutely critical as education is also a protective factor for domestic violence. Increased education of men and women leads to less likelihood of perpetrating and experiencing violence.

*Domestic Violence and Participation:*

Living in a violent relationships affects a women's sense of self-esteem and her ability to participate in the decision-making processes, both within the households and outside in informal (family and neighbor) and formal social networks (community organization, women's self-help groups or affiliation with political parties) (Heise et al., 1999; Sen, 1998). Violence against women also inhibits political participation (Heise et al., 1994).

Violence or the threat of violence often hinders women's ability to use contraception, to answer personal interview questions directly or honestly, or to leave the house long enough to participate in community projects (Rao Gupta and Weiss, 1998).

Domestic violence sometimes may act as a hindrance to the momentum of community projects. For instance, evidence from micro credit activities in Bangladesh suggests that violence occurs at home due to conflicts in the division of labor and also distribution of money earned by the women participants and their husbands (Kabeer, 1998; Schuler, Hashemi, and Bada, 1998). Due to domestic violence, women stopped participating in a revolving fund of the Working Women's Forum in India and the project almost collapsed (Carrillo, 1992).

Women's participation in formal and informal social networks has been identified as critical factor in lessening their vulnerability to violence and in their ability to resolve domestic conflicts (Sen, 1999).

Overall, domestic violence impacts self-esteem of women and limits their ability to be conscious agents of change.

### **Domestic Violence and Employment:**

Domestic violence may prohibit women to be engaged in gainful outside employment (IndiaSAFE, 1999). Domestic violence increases women's risk of unemployment, affects job performance, and reduces earnings (Morrison et al., 1999; Browne et al., 1999; Lyord and Taluc, 1999). Low education, low skills combined with restricted mobility will affect the quality of women's employment.

There is some evidence that abused women are more likely to seek work because of the need to secure resources and independent networks. While women's limited economic independence may inhibit them to escape from an abusive relationship, it is also true that women's economic activities and independence may be a threat to increased domestic violence.

In the context of domestic violence, Burton, Duvvury and Varia (2000) argue rightly that domestic violence against women prevents

and inhibits women's ability to realize other rights. For instance, a woman cannot exercise her rights to livelihood, education, mobility, health or participation in governance, if she is prevented from leaving her home under threat of violence or death. Similarly, a woman cannot fulfill her right to choose whether, when or how often she will have children, if she is routinely denied the opportunity to consent to sexual relations, or to choose whether and whom she marries. Clearly, gender violence is a barrier to equality (Cook, 1994; Peters and Wolper, 1995).

Women's entitlement to economic rights like employment, ownership of assets like land and house, and access to credit will provide women power to exercise their rights. This will change the existing structure and distribution of power. These changes will enhance women's autonomy in household decision-making, and participation in community activities. The idea is that empowerment attends to power, and power difference is the basis of unequal gender relations. Women's empowerment could be achieved by enacting and enforcing anti-discrimination laws, providing genuine protection against domestic violence, reducing socio-economic and gender disparities, and altering divorce, property, and estate regulations.

Women's economic vulnerability is a crucial factor of their powerlessness and voicelessness. Therefore, women's access to and control over economic resources are believed to be necessary condition to attain social power, autonomy and empowerment. In this context, women's access to financial services like micro-finance credit schemes is an important factor in enhancing income. Researchers around the globe have demonstrated that women's ability to control income enhances their empowerment through increased self-confidence, greater power in marital relationships and increased decision-making in the household (Blumberg, 1988, 1991; Rao, 1993). Moreover, women use the resources

more efficiently than men. Also, women devote a higher proportion of income to family well-being, especially children's nutrition (Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Blumberg, 1988). Blumberg (1991) in her general theory of gender stratification posits that relative economic power, specified as control of strategic resources such as income and property, is the key factor affecting gender stratification at a variety of "nested levels" ranging from the household to the state level.

Women's ownership of productive assets, especially land, is a very crucial determinant of women's well-being and empowerment in agrarian societies (Agarwal, 1994). Women's ownership of productive assets can provide them protection against economic shocks and social risks (Agarwal, 2000). She also shows that women's access to social support from the state, kin network and women's organizations also enhances their bargaining power. Moreover, control over productive assets, social support and control over income are the critical factors for women's participation in political activities.

Therefore, promotion and protection of these critical rights can not only prevent violence against women, they will also empower women. In the long run, the realization of these economic rights along with reduced violence will help advance for overall empowerment.

## **V. The Context of Kerala**

From a social and human development perspective, the state of Kerala is held up as an example for other regions to emulate, as to what a comparatively high quality of life can be achieved with a comparatively low income level. Kerala has done exceptionally well in terms of all human development indicators: very low level of infant mortality rate (less than 15 per 1000 live births); high longevity of males and females (69 years for males and 75 years for females); below replacement level



of fertility (1.7 children per woman); near universal literacy rates of males and females (94 percent for males and 88 percent for females); and high levels of health and nutritional status of women and children. Researchers and policy makers have been engaged in gauging these remarkable achievements, the so-called Kerala model of development (Dreze and Sen, 1995; Heller, 1995; Kannan, 1998; Lieten, 2002).

The reasons for this enormous human development in Kerala are many. The implementation of comprehensive redistributive land reforms in early 1970s transformed the agrarian relations and facilitated social change in Kerala. The ownership of land titles by hutment dwellers, small artisans and agricultural laborers liberated them from feudal subservience and enhanced their bargaining power and human dignity. Local level struggles and broad-based social mobilization from below provided the excluded people institutionalized bargaining power to claim their rights for minimum wages, better working conditions, social protection and other welfare entitlements including food subsidies. Legislative and institutional changes in labor market through responsive government interventions paved the way for wage increase and employment security. In fact, Kerala has a comprehensive pension and social security measures, especially in the informal or unorganized sectors, which include agricultural laborers and head load workers, among many others.

Political mobilization and collective action around educational reforms played a major role in creating an enabling environment for mass literacy. The liberal policies are also linked to the advancement in the status of women especially the socially and economically deprived groups.

The social movements of yesteryears were also found to play significant roles in enhancing and creating a liberal attitude towards

girls' and womens' education. And the system of matriliney in powerful and influential communities such as the Nairs where women controlled the property and other important duties of the household had an influence on the society in their appreciation for women's higher status. The educational policies pursued in erstwhile Travancore and Cochin, however, are extremely significant in history. In fact, the public policy of enlightenment and diffusion of education was articulated by the Queen of Travancore, Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai way back in 1817. This progressive policy contributed in many ways to the development of the health sector as well as the health care in terms of more people demanding health services and also utilization of existing health services.

The twentieth century witnessed many social movements although not fighting exclusively for women's rights but that benefitted women in myriad ways such as information and education on the various oppressive tactics being used by upper caste and elite in society against the poor, landless and lower caste people. The radical political traditions in Kerala and the mass mobilization of the backward castes for affirmative action also had their influence on the overall creation of the stage for voicing rights. Women's status in the process had been enhanced with participation in these movements, exposure to education and also liberal ideas that were floating freely and recognition of their own rights.

The question here is "are these tendencies and the struggle for rights and pictures of emancipated women true?". "Are they visible today?" Women's rights in the context of today's Kerala are a different story.

The facets of poverty and unemployment that have risen sharply in the face of economic reforms have rendered poor women much poorer with the menfolk indulging in alcoholism and violence. The commercialization of agriculture has reduced female labour and many

women are left out of the labour force. Even those who are employed are paid a paltry sum compared with male labour. The government cuts in social spending are also found to affect women. The gender relations have not changed despite all the progress in the education and health sectors.

### **Overview of status of women in Kerala**

There is much rhetoric on women's human rights and empowerment. A number of international agreements have been made to ensure positive action in this direction. Governments and non-governmental organizations have been quick to assert themselves and vow to work towards the goals set for betterment of women. This is true of Kerala as the rest of the developing world as well. An overview of the situation of women in Kerala presents a paradoxical picture. Laudable achievements notwithstanding in the socio-demographic realms, such as favorable sex ratio, high levels of literacy that are unseen in other parts of the country, the issues of economic impoverishment, little participation of women in political activity, malnourishment of adolescent girls and young women, and lower female labor force participation rates have placed Kerala in focus. More importantly, harassment of women in the domestic sphere and the work place has brought issues of violence against women to the forefront of research, advocacy and policy.

Some of the highlights of Kerala's socio-demographic scenario are literacy, sex ratio, infant and child mortality. Other important features that are in a state of crisis and need attention, and yet are often overshadowed by the achievements, are low female labor force participation, high levels of unemployment, economic stagnation both in industry and agriculture, malnourishment of girls and young women, and violence against women. What are the causes for this malady and

what has happened to the Kerala model of development? Why are women conspicuously absent at the centre-stage of development, in spite of high social development? The current concerns are definitely being voiced by a few critiques.

Let us look at the positive aspects first and then the crises.

The sex ratio of Kerala according to the census of 2001 is 1058 females per 1000 males, which is the highest in the country. It is considered to be an indicator of the status of women.

It is well known that female education has been a hallmark achievement in the state. The latest census data (2001) shows 87.8 per cent female literacy that is the highest in the country. It may be noted from the NFHS II (National Family Health Surveys, 1998-99) data that 31 per cent of females have high school level of education. About 94.5 per cent of female of household population aged 6-17 years in the urban areas are attending school while 90 per cent are attending school in the rural areas.

Infant and child mortality rates are the lowest in Kerala amongst the Indian states at 16.3 and 2.6, which are found to be coinciding with expected trends where women have higher literacy levels; there is less of infant and child mortality.

The overall health scenario in Kerala is quite encouraging with very low levels of anemia and higher body mass index compared with other states. About 22.7 per cent of ever-married women in Kerala are found to have any anemia as compared to 51.8 per cent in India as a whole. Also the percentages of women suffering from mild (19.5%), moderate (2.7%), and severe anemia (0.5%) are the lowest in the country.

The nutritional status of women is assessed by mean height and mean body mass index. It is found from the NFHS data that women in

Kerala are having a mean height of 152.6 cms, slightly higher than the national average. The mean body mass index is 22, which is also higher than the national average.

The paradox of social development and economic backwardness has been documented about two decades ago. What is not often discussed is the “gender paradox”, where women have high levels of education but very few women participate in the labor force and the political realms as well. For example, women’s work participation is lower than other south Indian states with less than 25 per cent of women in the work force. Researchers from cross-cutting disciplines have put forth that women’s education, access to resources, health care and food, late age at marriage, lower fertility, are requisites for high status of women. Yet what is evident in Kerala is that overcoming these constraints has not necessarily led to women controlling “space” or challenging patriarchal attitudes. There is obviously an “invisible” crust within the public domain that operate in an obnoxious manner to keep women from bargaining (in terms of power and influence) and also avoiding confrontation between men and women, for another “kind” of development. Therefore to enable and to create an identity amongst women and for recognition of their rights, several women’s organizations took birth and are actively addressing the issues of gender imbalances in Kerala society (Devika and Kodoth, 2001).

Especially in the context of the domestic violence and the rising cases of women’s harassment at workplace and in public spaces, there has been renewed vigor in attempts to understand and foreground “gender subordinations” (of all hues) alongside caste and class. The movements of yesteryears were based on caste and class and redefined power relations on those terms. Gender perspective was not on the agenda of the movements. The gains that accrued to women were the indirect fallout of the movements against oppression.

Some critics point out that the so-called Kerala Model of Development has comparatively ignored the gender dimension (Saradmoni, 1994). The fact that women's health and education indicators in Kerala are good has led to a certain complacency, blinding scholars and activists alike to increasing marginalization from traditional sources of employment, the disappearance of matrilineal family forms that buttressed the status of women in the household, the steep rise of dowry practices, and decline of other forms of women's inheritance. Thus, in some domains, there is ambiguity regarding the status of women in Kerala. We argue that considering the possibility of violence against women in Kerala from such perspectives might cast light on a little explored but very important dimension of women's status.

## **VI. Domestic Violence in Kerala: Prevalence and Correlates**

Domestic violence is being recognized globally as a major issue for women's human rights. In recent years, domestic violence is being increasingly recognized also as a social and public health concern. Although the estimates of prevalence of domestic violence vary widely, prevalence rates generally range from 20 percent to 50 percent (Heise et al., 1999). In the current literature on domestic violence, different explanations have been given for its occurrence: (i) cultural systems legitimize violence, legal authorities fail to protect women, economic structures subordinate women, and political systems marginalize women's needs (Heise et al., 1994); (ii) marital violence was more prevalent in those societies where patriarchal systems were strong, where women have few options outside of marriage (eg., divorce restrictions and low access to economic resources), and where violence is an accepted means for conflict-resolution (Levinson, 1989); (iii) violence against women is a reflection of the power relationships between spouses (Strauss, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980); (iv) violence against women is linked to a woman's lower self-esteem, severe depressive symptoms with minimal

personal resources, and little institutional support (Strauss, 1980); (v) society encourages husbands to exercise their rights to dominate and control wives (Dobash and Dobash, 1992).

In India, domestic violence is emerging as a major social problem. However, until recently, the documentation on the prevalence and correlates of domestic violence against women has remained scant. In a landmark study, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in partnership with the International Clinical Epidemiologists Network (INCLLEN), have provided reliable estimates on the prevalence of domestic violence as well as its correlates (INCLLEN, 2000). The study is based on 10,000 households across seven sites in India, encompassing rural, urban slum and urban non-slum areas. Respondents were women 15-49 years of age with at least one child 18 years old currently living with them. The measured violence outcomes were discrete physical behaviors (such as being slapped, kicked, hit, or beaten) and psychological abusive behaviors (such as being demeaned, threatened, abandoned, insulted or having the husband be unfaithful). The data were collected for two time periods, lifetime and current. Lifetime violence includes behaviors which women experienced throughout their married life. Current violence includes behaviors which women experienced in the last twelve months.

The results suggest that about 50 percent of women reported experiencing at least one of the behaviors outlined above at least once in their married life; 43.5 percent reported at least one psychologically abusive behavior and 40.3 percent reported experiencing at least one form of violent physical behavior. The study also documents the multiple forms and frequency of occurrence of violence (INCLLEN, 2000). As regards the correlates of domestic violence, the study found that the lifetime experience of both physical and psychological violence was

negatively associated with socio-economic status of the household, education and employment levels of the women and their husbands and social support. However, gender gap in education (wife more educated than husband) and better type of employment is positively associated with the lifetime experience of both physical and psychological violence (Duvvury and Varia, 2000; Duvvury and Allendorf, 2001). Domestic violence was positively associated with women's childhood experience of family violence and alcohol consumption of husband.

Against this backdrop, understanding not only the prevalence of domestic violence, more pertinently, the reasons why such violence is being perpetrated is extremely important. The identification of factors that put individuals at a greater risk of experiencing or perpetuating violence is critical to suggest appropriate interventions, not only to respond to violence, but also to prevent it.

This study, therefore, examines the prevalence and correlates of domestic violence in intimate relationships in the context of Kerala.

### **Data and method:**

Data for this study come from a household survey in three rural and three urban settings in Trivandrum district of Kerala state. These settings represent different geographical areas in the district. A total of 10 wards (6 rural and 4 urban) were selected from these six settings. From each ward 50 households were selected at random. Thus, a total of 500 household (300 rural and 200 urban) were selected. The study participants were ever-married women aged 15-49 years. The survey included 502 women (302 rural and 200 urban). The participation rate was 92 percent, similar across the rural and urban areas.

Informed consent was taken from the women respondents prior to interview. Respondents were informed of the sensitive nature of the interview content and told that they could stop at any time. To ensure



safety, the members of the local panchayats (in case of rural areas) and municipality/corporation (in case of urban areas) were consulted and informed about the nature of the survey. If the woman respondent was not available during the first attempt, the household was visited second time. Interviews were undertaken in such a place to ensure maximum privacy. Confidentiality of information was strictly followed.

The interviews were conducted in 2001 by a team of six local female investigators. The investigators were given extensive training for a comprehensive understanding of each survey instrument item. The data collection instruments were field tested. All questionnaires were reviewed for completeness and correctness of recording after the interview.

Information was collected on demographic variables such as age, duration of marriage and number of children as well as socio-economic variables such as consumption expenditures (food and non-food), possession of consumer durables, ownership of assets (title to land and house) by the women, education and employment. Information was also collected on social support received from natal family and neighbors, women's childhood experience of family violence, and alcohol consumption and substance abuse by husband. The index woman was the respondent for the above mentioned information excluding information on consumption expenditures. For consumption expenditures, the head of the household was the respondent. A trained male investigator collected information on consumption expenditures from household head in each sites.

The operational definitions of prevalence rates and of physical and psychological violence in this study are similar as the INCLEN study mentioned above. Accordingly, physical and psychological violence were measured with specific discrete behaviors. These behavior-

based outcomes measured both lifetime prevalence (violence which occurred at least once in the woman's married life) and current prevalence (violence which occurred within the last twelve months).

For lifetime prevalence of physical violence, four behaviors were considered: slaps, hits, kicks and beatings. For current prevalence of physical violence, six behaviors were considered: slaps, hits, kicks, beatings, threats or use of weapon, and forced sex.

Lifetime and current prevalence of psychological violence were measured with seven behaviors: insults, belittlements or demeaning, threats to the woman respondent, threats to someone the respondent cares about, made her feel afraid, threats of abandonment, and husband's unfaithfulness.

It is important to note that the reported rates of violence may be underestimates, often due to sensitivity and stigma surrounding domestic violence.

## **Results:**

### *Socio-demographic profile:*

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of sample. The average age of the women respondents is 33 years and the average duration of marriage is 12 years. More than 95 percent of the men and women are literates in both rural and urban areas. There is no sex-differential in the levels of education. Less than 10 percent of rural women and men have more than 12 years of education as compared to 40 percent of men and women in urban areas, showing rural-urban differentials in the levels of education.

More than two-thirds of the women in rural and urban areas do not engage in outside employment compared to seven percent of the men.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Sample**

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Total (N= 502)	Rural (N= 302)	Urban (N= 200)
<b>Age (Years)</b>			
Index Woman	32.7	32.3	33.2
Husband	39.4	38.5	40.7
<b>Education (%)</b>			
<i>Index Woman</i>			
Illiterate	4.2	5.3	2.5
Primary (1-5)	11.4	14.6	6.5
Secondary (6-12)	62.5	70.9	50.0
>12	21.9	9.3	41.0
<i>Husband</i>			
Illiterate	4.0	3.3	5.0
Primary (1-5)	14.5	21.2	4.5
Secondary (6-12)	60.8	67.5	50.5
> 12	20.7	7.9	40.0
<b>Employment (%)</b>			
<i>Index Woman</i>			
Unemployed	68.1	66.2	71.0
Employed (total)			
Of which:	31.9	33.8	29.0
Regular	58.1	42.2	86.2
Seasonal	15.0	20.6	5.2
Irregular	26.9	37.3	8.6
<i>Husband</i>			
Unemployed	6.8	4.3	10.5
Employed (total)			
Of which:	93.2	95.7	89.5
Regular	86.8	80.6	96.6
Seasonal	5.1	6.9	2.2
Irregular	8.1	12.5	1.1

When employed, women in rural areas are more likely to be engaged in seasonal and irregular employment (58 percent) whereas women in urban areas are more likely to be employed in regular employment (86 percent). As one would expect, men are more likely to be employed in both rural and urban areas. A substantially higher proportion of men are likely to be engaged in regular employment, in both rural and urban areas.

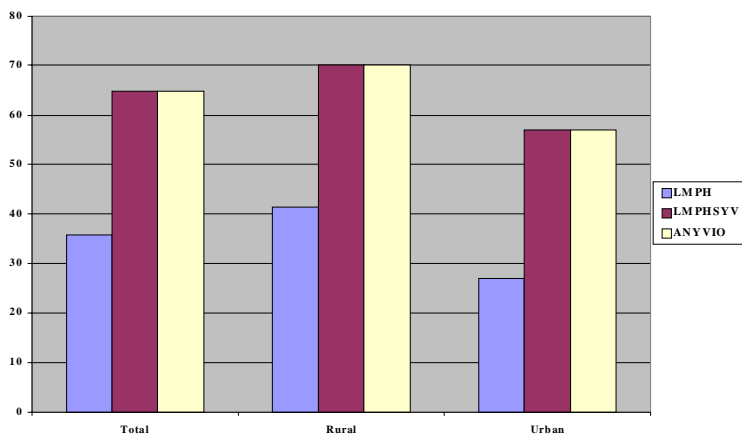
Marriage is predominantly arranged (78 percent). Women reported agreement in about two-third of the marriages. Nearly half of all women (48 percent) reported that dowry was demanded by their in-laws at the time of marriage. Women in rural areas are more likely to report dowry demand compared to women in urban areas (57 and 33 percent respectively). A similar pattern is reported for new demands for dowry: 37 percent women in rural areas as compared to 11 percent women in urban areas reported new dowry demands since the time of marriage.

*Women's experience of physical and psychological violence:*

Overall, 35.7 percent of women reported experiencing at least one of the physical behaviors at least once in their married life, and 64.9 percent reported experiencing at least one form of violent psychological behavior at least once in their married life (Figure 1). At least one of the physical or psychological behaviors in lifetime is reported by 64.9 percent of the women – the same level as lifetime psychological violence. Both physical and psychological violence were relatively higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.

Women reported that they experienced violence in combination. Of the 179 women who reported that they were being hit, kicked, slapped, or beaten in their marital life, three-fifths (109 women) experienced all the four behaviors and nine out of ten (161 women) suffered from at least three behaviors. As regards psychological abusive behaviors, nearly

**Figure 1: Overall Prevalence of Violence**  
(Percentage of women reporting violence)



Notes:

LMPH – Any Marital Physical Violence

LMPHSYV – Any Marital Psychological Violence

ANYVIO – Any Marital Violence (Physical or Psychological)

one out of four (74 out of 326 women) experienced all the seven psychological behaviors, and four out of ten women at least four of these behaviors.

In addition to multiple forms, women also reported that they experienced violence several times in their marital life (Tables 2 and 3). More women reported that they experienced violent physical behavior across all behaviors in rural areas. The psychological behaviors, however, occurred more than three times in both rural and urban areas, except the behavior ‘abandoned’. Of the women reporting physical violence (179 women), 68 percent (122 women) reported a frequency of three or more times, and of the women reporting psychological violence (326 women), 76 percent (248 women) reported a frequency of three or more times.

Both multiple forms and frequency of physical as well as psychological violence were reported comparatively less by urban women.

**Table 2: Lifetime Marital Physical Violence (percent)**

Behaviours of Husband toward woman respondent	Total (N= 502)	Rural (N= 302)	Urban (N= 200)
<b>Hit you</b>			
None	67.3	61.6	76.0
1-2	16.3	16.2	16.5
≥ 3	16.3	22.2	7.5
<b>Kicked you</b>			
None	76.7	70.5	86.0
1-2	8.8	8.9	8.5
≥ 3	14.5	20.5	5.5
<b>Beat you</b>			
None	67.1	60.9	76.5
1-2	12.5	13.2	11.5
≥ 3	20.3	25.8	12.0
<b>Slapped you</b>			
None	65.3	59.6	74.0
1-2	16.7	16.2	17.5
≥ 3	17.9	24.2	8.5

The physical violence occurs at a startling rate during pregnancy as well. Of the women who reported physical violence, more than one-third reported that they experienced violence during pregnancy. However, there is a striking rural-urban differential: the rate is more than 40 percent in rural areas compared to less than 20 percent in urban areas (Table 4).

Since current violence is defined as either physical or psychological abuse occurring in the last 12 months, certain categories of women (eg., widowed, divorced, separated, or women whose husbands were absent for more than one year due to out-migration) were obviously excluded (59 women). Of the 443 women in the survey, 29 percent of women (127 women) experienced slapping, kicking, hitting, beatings,

**Table 3: Lifetime Marital Psychological Violence (percent)**

Behaviours of Husband toward woman respondent	Total (N= 502)	Rural (N= 302)	Urban (N= 200)
<b>Insulted you</b>			
None	37.1	31.8	45.0
1-2	15.9	14.2	18.5
≥ 3	47.0	54.0	36.5
<b>Demeaned you</b>			
None	53.0	45.7	64.0
1-2	14.3	14.6	14.0
≥ 3	32.7	39.7	22.0
<b>Threatened you</b>			
None	66.9	58.9	79.0
1-2	3.6	3.6	3.5
≥ 3	29.5	37.4	17.5
<b>Threatened Someone else you care about</b>			
None	79.5	74.2	87.5
1-2	1.6	1.7	1.5
≥ 3	18.9	24.2	11.0
<b>Made you feel afraid</b>			
None	84.1	78.1	93.0
1-2	0.8	1.0	0.5
≥ 3	15.1	20.9	6.5
<b>Abandoned you</b>			
None	84.5	78.8	93.0
1-2	14.7	20.5	6.0
≥ 3	0.8	0.7	1.0
<b>Was unfaithful</b>			
None	72.9	63.6	87.0
1-2	5.0	5.0	5.0
≥ 3	22.1	31.5	8.0

**Table 4: Severe Physical Violence during Pregnancy (percent)**

Characteristic	Total (N= 179)	Rural (N= 125)	Urban (N= 54)
Slapped	35.8	44.8	14.8
Kicked	36.3	46.4	13.0
Hit	33.5	41.6	14.8
Beaten	35.8	43.2	18.5

or forced sex in last twelve months (Table 5). None of the women (excluding one woman in the rural areas) reported experiencing physical abuse due to the behavior ‘used or threatened to use a weapon’. Women living in rural areas have reported higher rates than women living in urban areas.

Nearly 15 percent of the total sample of women reported one or more incidents of forced sex during the previous 12 months. This rate is similar across the rural and urban areas although the frequency (3 or more times) of occurrence of forced sex is substantially higher in urban areas.

Of the 443 women in the survey, half of the women (218 women) had experienced any one of the psychological abuse in the last 12 months. More women in rural areas reported that the psychological abuse occurred at least three times across all five behaviors (Table 6).

Like lifetime violence, women also reported that they experienced violent behavior in combination (multiple forms) and several times (three or more times) in the last one year. Of the 127 women who reported being hit, kicked, slapped, beaten or forced sex in the last one year, 36 percent (46 women) experienced four of these five behaviors, and 58 percent (74 women) experienced at least two of these behaviors. Of the 218 women experiencing psychological abusive behaviors, 19 percent



**Table 5: Current Physical Violence (percent)**

Behaviours of Husband toward woman respondent	Total (N= 443)	Rural (N= 272)	Urban (N= 171)
<b>Hit you</b>			
None	83.5	79.8	89.5
1-2	5.9	5.9	5.8
≥ 3	10.6	14.3	4.7
<b>Kicked you</b>			
None	87.1	83.1	93.6
1-2	3.2	3.3	2.9
≥ 3	9.7	13.6	3.5
<b>Beat you</b>			
None	77.0	74.3	81.3
1-2	12.9	11.8	14.6
≥ 3	10.2	14.0	4.1
<b>Slapped you</b>			
None	78.1	74.6	83.6
1-2	11.5	10.7	12.9
≥ 3	10.4	14.7	3.5
<b>Used or threatened to use a weapon</b>			
None	99.8	99.6	100.0
1-2	0.2	0.4	0.0
≥ 3	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Forced Sex</b>			
None	85.3	86.0	84.2
1-2	9.3	13.2	2.9
≥ 3	5.4	0.7	12.9

(41 women) experienced all behaviors and 44 percent (96 women) experienced at least two of the psychological behaviors in the last year.

Women also reported experiencing violence several times in the last year. Of the 127 women reporting physical violence, 57 percent (72

**Table 6: Current Psychological Violence (percent)**

Behaviours of husband toward woman respondent	Total (N= 443)	Rural (N= 272)	Urban (N= 171)
<b>Insulted you</b>			
0	55.3	54.4	56.7
1-2	20.3	18.0	24.0
≥ 3	24.4	27.6	19.3
<b>Demeaned you</b>			
0	80.6	77.6	85.4
1-2	9.0	8.1	10.5
≥ 3	10.4	14.3	4.1
<b>Threatened you</b>			
0	88.7	84.9	94.7
1-2	1.6	1.5	1.8
≥ 3	9.7	13.6	3.5
<b>Threatened Someone else you care about</b>			
0	89.2	84.9	95.9
1-2	1.6	1.8	1.2
≥ 3	9.3	13.2	2.9
<b>Made you feel afraid</b>			
0	89.8	85.7	96.5
1-2	0.9	1.1	0.6
≥ 3	9.3	13.2	2.9
<b>Abandoned you</b>			
0	88.9	84.9	95.3
1-2	10.6	14.7	4.1
≥ 3	0.5	0.4	0.6
<b>Was unfaithful</b>			
0	88.3	84.6	94.2
1-2	2.0	1.8	2.3
≥ 3	9.7	13.6	3.5

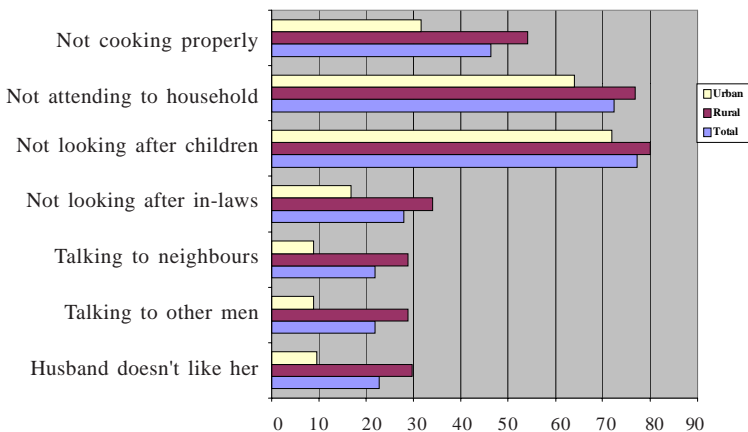
women) reported a frequency of three or more times, and of the 218 women reporting psychological violence, 53 percent (115 women) reported a frequency of three or more times.

On the whole the results indicate that violence against women is pervasive in terms of wide prevalence, multiple forms and higher frequency.

*Reasons for violence:*

Several different types of “reasons” have been reported by women as possible causes or triggers of violence. Women cited typical gender roles and expectations as precipitating factor for violence. These include: ‘not looking after children properly’ (78 percent); ‘not attending to household’ (72 percent); ‘not cooking properly’ (54 percent) etc. (Figure 2). For all the reasons cited by women which triggers violence, rural women are relatively more likely to report. However, the pattern is similar across rural and urban areas.

**Figure 2: Reasons for Violence as Identified by Women**  
(Percent of women citing reasons)



Another area of conflict cited by women is ‘sexual control’. One-fifth (21 percent) of the women each attributed violence due to infidelity: husbands had been sexually involved with other women and husbands accused them of being “unfaithful”. Among the first group of women (104 women), 85 percent reported their husband’s infidelity as the reason they quarreled. Seventy-nine percent reported that their husbands “hit or beat” them because of the wife’s suspicion that the husband was sexually involved with other women. Among women reporting that their husbands accused them of being “unfaithful” (106 women), 96 percent reported this as a reason for quarreling and 66 percent reported this as a reason for their husband hitting or beating them.

The satisfaction or dissatisfaction over ‘dowry’ is another area of conflict. Women who reported having had an arranged marriage were asked about their lifetime experience of harassment due to dowry. Such harassment was reported by 29.7 percent of women (38.7 and 16.0 percent in rural and urban areas respectively) in the total sample. Among women who reported being harassed due to dowry (149 women), women reported being beaten (46 percent), threatened (46 percent), sent back to their natal home (13 percent), and treated like a servant (21 percent).

The family member who most frequently harassed women due to dissatisfaction with dowry was the mother-in-law (95 percent), followed by husband and father-in-law (72 percent each), sister-in-law (49 percent) and brother-in-law (14 percent).

*Correlates of domestic violence:*

In order to find the correlates of domestic violence, we followed an ecological perspective (Heise, 1998). Accordingly, we explore the bivariate relationships between the lifetime experience of physical and psychological violence among women and some of the individual, household and community factors. These factors include:

- (a) Demographic characteristics: age of the woman; duration of marriage; age difference between husband and wife; number of children;
- (b) Socio-economic status: education and employment status of the woman and her husband; per capita expenditures per annum; number of consumer goods owned by the household;
- (c) Social support from the natal family and the neighbors;
- (d) Ownership of property by the woman respondent: title to land or house, or both;
- (e) Husband's risk behaviors: alcohol consumption and substance abuse;
- (f) Woman's childhood experience of family violence: Woman's witnessing father beating mother in childhood; harsh physical discipline experienced by the woman in her childhood.

**Demographic indicators:**

Lower the age of the woman (15-24 years) and lower the duration of marriage (< 7 years), higher is the lifetime experience of physical and psychological violence among women (Tables 7 and 8). This suggests an early onset of violence in the marital relationship, but continues as age progresses. There is no significant association between age difference of husband and wife and psychological violence. As for physical violence, lower the age difference (< 5 years), higher is the physical violence experienced by women. While there is no relationship between number of children and psychological violence, women with no children or women with more children (3 or more) are somewhat more likely to experience physical violence compared with women having one or two children. But the difference is not significant statistically.

**Table 7: Demographic Indicators and Lifetime Physical Violence (percent)**

Demographic Indicators	Slapped	Kicked	Hit	Beaten	Any lifetime Marital Physical Violence
<b>Age of the Index Woman (Years):</b>					
15-24	45.2	35.6	43.8	41.1	46.6
25-34	33.2	21.6	30.8	32.0	34.4
35-49	32.4	20.7	30.7	30.7	33.0
<b>Duration of Marriage (Years):</b>					
< 7	40.4	29.8	39.1	37.7	42.4
7-14	33.7	21.2	30.4	32.6	34.2
15 & Above	30.5	19.8	29.3	28.7	31.1
<b>Age Difference (Years):</b>					
<5	40.1	26.3	35.8	38.0	40.1
5-8	35.5	24.2	34.2	34.6	37.2
9 & Above	27.6	18.7	26.9	24.6	28.4
<b>Number of Children</b>					
0	40.8	28.6	34.7	38.8	42.9
1-2	32.8	22.0	31.4	31.2	33.9
3 & Above	39.3	26.2	36.9	36.9	39.3

Some other studies found a positive association between woman's age and experience of violence, with the interpretation that women gain more control over their decision-making processes when they become older, and that age influences spousal relationship. The results in this study do not support such a relationship between woman's age and violence. Similarly, some studies in India have shown that violence is common among families with more children (Jejeebhoy, 1998b; Martin

**Table 8: Demographic Indicators and Lifetime Psychological Violence (percent)**

Demographic Indicators	Insulted	Demeaned	Threatened	Threatened some one else	Made you feel afraid	Abandoned	Was unfaithful	Any lifetime Marital Psychological Violence
<b>Age of the Index Woman (Years):</b>								
15-24	75.3	58.9	41.1	27.4	21.9	23.3	34.2	76.7
25-34	60.4	44.0	30.0	18.8	14.4	13.2	25.6	62.8
35-49	61.5	46.4	34.1	20.1	15.6	15.6	26.3	63.1
<b>Duration of Marriage (Years):</b>								
< 7	67.5	51.7	37.1	24.5	17.9	18.5	31.1	70.2
7-14	61.4	45.1	31.0	18.5	14.7	13.0	26.6	63.0
15 & Above	60.5	44.9	31.7	19.2	15.6	15.6	24.0	62.3
<b>Age Difference (Years):</b>								
<5	64.2	46.0	33.6	24.1	19.0	18.2	32.8	65.7
5-8	63.2	47.2	32.9	19.9	16.9	16.5	27.3	64.5
9 & Above	61.2	47.8	32.8	17.9	11.2	11.2	20.9	64.9
<b>Number of Children</b>								
0	63.3	34.7	30.6	20.4	14.3	16.3	24.5	65.3
1-2	63.7	48.8	33.3	20.3	16.0	14.9	27.9	66.1
3 & Above	59.5	46.4	33.3	21.4	16.7	17.9	25.0	59.5

et al. 1999b). Again, the results in this study do not show such evidence. The reason for no such association may be due to the fact that there are very few women in our sample with more than three children, confirming the Kerala trend. Similarly some studies use the age difference between husband and wife as a proxy for woman's autonomy, and relate accordingly with violence. As has been said earlier, there is no such positive relationship between age difference and experience of violence in this study.

### **Socio-economic status:**

The results suggest that there is a negative association between socio-economic indicators and reported lifetime experience of physical and psychological violence among women (Tables 9 and 10). Between the two economic status indicators, i.e., per capita expenditure and number of consumer goods, per capita expenditure relatively has a strong and negative association with both measures of violence. The international research shows that although women from all classes experience violence, women at poverty are more likely to experience violence. The educational status of men and women is also negatively associated with both lifetime physical and psychological violence. However, it is unclear whether this relationship is due to actual variations or it simply reflects greater reluctance of women of higher socio-economic status to disclose violence. The employment status of the woman and her husband do not show any clear relationship with violence, except that unemployment status of husband is significantly and positively associated with both measures of violence. In fact women and men who are engaged in irregular/casual employment are more likely to experience violence with regular employment likely to reduce violence.



**Table 9: Socio-Economic Status and Lifetime Physical Violence (percent)**

Socio-Economic Status of Family	Slapped	Kicked	Hit	Beaten	Any lifetime Marital Physical Violence
<b>Per Capita Expenditure (Rs/Yr):</b>					
<6000	71.8	63.4	69.5	70.2	73.3
6000-11999	23.3	10.6	21.6	22.0	24.6
12000 & above	18.5	6.7	16.3	15.6	18.5
<b>Number of consumer goods owned:</b>					
< 4	47.4	40.7	46.9	45.9	48.8
4-6	32.7	15.4	30.2	31.5	34.0
7 & above	16.8	5.3	13.0	13.7	16.8
<b>Education of Index Woman:</b>					
< 6	56.4	47.4	56.4	57.7	57.7
6-12	33.8	21.3	31.2	30.9	34.7
13 & Above	21.8	11.8	20.0	20.9	22.7
<b>Education of Husband:</b>					
< 6	45.2	39.8	44.1	44.1	46.2
6-12	35.4	23.0	33.1	33.4	36.7
13 & Above	23.1	9.6	21.2	21.2	23.1
<b>Employment of Index Woman:</b>					
Unemployed	33.9	21.9	32.2	31.9	35.1
Employed:					
Regular	28.0	18.3	25.8	26.9	28.0
Seasonal	45.8	33.3	37.5	41.7	50.0
Irregular	48.8	39.5	48.8	48.8	48.8
<b>Employment of Husband:</b>					
Unemployed	70.6	61.8	67.6	64.7	70.6
Employed:					
Regular	30.3	18.5	28.1	28.3	31.3
Seasonal	45.8	33.3	45.8	50.0	50.0
Irregular	42.1	34.2	42.1	42.1	42.1

**Table 10: Social-Economic Status and Lifetime Psychological Violence (percent)**

Socio-Economic Status of Family	Insulted	Demeaned	Threatened	Threatened some one else	Made you feel afraid	Abandoned	Was unfaithful	Any lifetime Marital Psychological Violence
<b>Per Capita Expenditure (Rs/Yr):</b>								
<6000	86.3	74.8	62.6	52.7	51.9	53.4	62.6	87.8
6000-11999	58.5	40.3	27.1	10.6	3.8	2.5	18.2	60.6
12000 & above	48.1	31.9	14.8	6.7	2.2	1.5	8.1	50.4
<b>Number of consumer goods owned:</b>								
< 4	70.8	57.9	48.3	36.8	34.4	33.0	44.0	73.7
4-6	67.3	42.6	29.0	9.9	3.7	3.7	18.5	67.3
7 & above	45.0	35.1	13.7	7.6	1.5	2.3	10.7	48.1
<b>Education of Index Woman:</b>								
< 6	71.8	56.4	44.9	38.5	38.5	35.9	44.9	74.4
6-12	65.0	47.8	35.0	19.4	14.0	14.0	26.4	66.6
13 & Above	50.9	38.2	19.1	10.9	5.5	5.5	16.4	53.6

*cont'd....*

**Education of Husband:**

< 6	66.7	59.1	45.2	36.6	35.5	32.3	40.9	72.0
6-12	67.5	47.9	36.4	20.0	14.4	14.8	28.2	68.2
13 & Above	46.2	33.7	12.5	7.7	2.9	2.9	11.5	49.0

**Employment of Index Woman:**

Unemployed	62.0	45.6	31.3	19.3	14.3	13.7	25.1	64.0
Employed:								
Regular	58.1	45.2	31.2	18.3	12.9	12.9	26.9	59.1
Seasonal	70.8	58.3	37.5	25.0	25.0	20.8	33.3	79.2
Irregular	76.7	55.8	48.8	32.6	30.2	32.6	39.5	76.7

**Employment of Husband:**

Unemployed	82.4	67.6	52.9	50.0	50.0	50.0	52.9	85.3
Employed:								
Regular	59.9	44.1	29.8	17.0	11.6	11.3	22.7	62.1
Seasonal	75.0	50.0	37.5	25.0	20.8	20.8	41.7	75.0
Irregular	71.1	57.9	47.4	28.9	28.9	26.3	42.1	71.1

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### Social support:

Two potential sources of support have been considered as important for woman's ability to negotiate conflict in marriage. These sources are natal family and neighbor. In the literature, the number of potential sources is considered to be more important than any individual source. Therefore, we consider three levels of social support: (a) no potential source; (b) natal family as a source of support; and (c) two sources of support (both neighbor and natal family). In the sample, 54.4 percent of women reported at least one of these sources as support, and the remaining 45.6 percent of women reported no social support from any source. Nearly one-fourth (23.5 percent) of women reported social support from both the sources (neighbor and natal family) and 30.9 percent of women reported natal family as a source of support.

Level of social support is negatively associated with the reported experience of physical and psychological violence, more significantly so for the physical violence (Tables 11 and 12).

### Ownership of property by women:

The ownership of property by women is defined by four categories: (i) no title to either land or house; (ii) title to house only; (iii) title to

**Table 11: Social Support and Lifetime Physical Violence (percent)**

Social Support	Slapped	Kicked	Hit	Beaten	Any lifetime Marital Physical Violence
None	47.6	36.2	45.9	45.4	49.8
Natal family	21.3	7.7	18.1	18.7	21.3
Natal family and neighbourhood	27.1	18.6	26.3	27.1	27.1

**Table 12: Social Support and Lifetime Psychological Violence (percent)**

Social Support	Insulted	Demanded	Threatened	Threatened someone else	Made you feel afraid	Abandoned	Was unfaithful	Any lifetime Marital Psychological Violence
None	74.7	57.6	43.7	35.4	27.5	26.2	32.3	77.3
Natal family	58.7	47.7	27.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	27.1	59.4
Natal family and neighbourhood	45.8	25.4	19.5	17.8	13.6	14.4	16.9	48.3

land only; and (iv) title to both land and house. In the sample, six percent of women had title to only land, 14 percent had title to only house, 15 percent had title to both land and house, and nearly two-third of women (66 percent) did not had title to either land or house.

Ownership of property by the woman has a strong negative effect on lifetime physical and psychological violence (Tables 13 and 14). Among those who don't own property, 49 percent experienced physical

**Table 13: Ownership of Property by Woman and Lifetime Physical Violence (percent)**

Ownership of House/Land	Slapped	Kicked	Hit	Beaten	Any lifetime Marital Physical Violence
None	47.9	32.1	44.8	44.8	49.1
Land only	14.3	14.3	14.3	17.9	17.9
House only	9.9	4.2	9.9	9.9	9.9
House & Land	6.8	5.5	6.8	6.8	6.8

**Table 14: Ownership of Property by Woman and Lifetime Psychological Violence (percent)**

Ownership of House/Land	Insulted	Demeaned	Threatened	Threatened some one else	Made you feel afraid	Abandoned	Was unfaithful	Any lifetime Martial Psychological
None	81.8	61.5	44.8	27.3	22.7	22.4	37.6	84.2
Land only	53.6	28.6	25.0	21.4	3.6	3.6	14.3	53.6
House only	28.2	19.7	5.6	1.4	1.4	0.0	4.2	29.6
House & Land	15.1	15.1	9.6	8.2	4.1	4.1	6.8	16.4

violence and 84 percent experienced psychological violence. In contrast, those who own both land and house reported substantially less physical (7 percent) as well as psychological violence (16 percent). Also, this pattern is consistent across any of the violent physical behaviors or psychologically abusive behaviors. It is also important to note that even woman's ownership to either house or land alone also reduces violence substantially.

**Husband's risk behaviors:**

Two measures were considered to assess husband's risk behaviors. The first one is alcohol consumption, measured by three categories: teetotalers (no consumption of alcohol); occasionally drunk (less than once a week); regularly drunk (more than once a week). The second measure of husband's risk behavior is substance abuse, measured as a dichotomous variable (no or yes).

More than half of women (51.6 percent) reported that their husbands drank at least occasionally over the past one year. The remaining 48.4 percent of women reported that their husbands were teetotalers. Nearly one-fourth of women (23.9 percent) reported that their

husbands drank to excess over the past one year and another 28 percent reported their husbands drank occasionally. As regard substance abuse, 12.5 percent of women reported substance abuse by husbands over the past one year.

A positive association was found between husband's risks behaviors and reported violence. More than 61 percent of the women who reported their husbands got drunk at least once a week reported their husbands hit, kicked, slapped or beat them. More than 65 percent of the women who reported substance abuse by husbands reported their husbands hit, kicked or beat them (Table 15). In addition, substance abuse and excess drinking by husbands are very strongly related with women being threatened, threatened someone they care about, made them feel afraid and being abandoned (Table 16).

**Table 15: Alcohol Consumption and Substance Abuse of Husband and Lifetime Physical Violence (percent)**

Characteristics of Husband	Slapped	Kicked	Hit	Beaten	Any lifetime Marital Physical Violence
<b>Alcohol Consumption:</b>					
Teetotaler	24.7	11.1	22.2	23.0	24.7
Occasionally	23.7	11.5	20.9	21.6	26.6
Regular	67.5	61.7	67.5	65.8	68.3
<b>Substance Abuse:</b>					
Yes	66.7	65.1	65.1	65.1	66.7
No	30.1	17.3	28.0	28.2	31.2

**Table 16: Alcohol Consumption and Substance Abuse of Husband and Lifetime Psychological Violence (percent)**

Ownership of House/Land	Insulted	Demeaned	Threatened	Threatened some one else	Made you feel afraid	Abandoned	Was unfaithful	Any lifetime Martial Psychological violence
<b>Alcohol Consumption:</b>								
Teetotaler	47.3	35.4	21.0	2.5	1.2	1.2	20.2	47.3
Occasionally	77.7	48.2	25.9	19.4	5.8	4.3	11.5	84.9
Regular	77.5	69.2	65.8	58.3	57.5	57.5	59.2	77.5
<b>Substance Abuse:</b>								
Yes	85.7	81.0	81.0	71.4	69.8	68.3	66.7	85.7
No	59.7	42.1	26.2	13.2	8.2	8.0	21.4	62.0

### **Women's childhood experience of family violence:**

Nearly 35 percent of women reported witnessing their fathers beating their mothers during their childhood. About 47 percent of women living in rural areas reported witnessing this parental behavior, compared to a relatively smaller proportion of women (17 percent) living in urban areas. A majority of women (56.4 percent) reported harsh physical discipline during childhood. Harsh childhood punishment experienced by women was found to be relatively higher in rural areas compared to urban areas (64.6 and 44.0 percent respectively).

Women's childhood experience of violence is very strongly associated with both physical and psychological violence (Tables 17 and 18). Women who reported receiving harsh physical discipline as a child were thrice more likely to report being hit, kicked, and beaten by their husbands. Similarly women who reported witnessing their fathers beat their mothers were twice as likely to report being hit, kicked, and beaten by their husbands.



**Table 17: Childhood Experience of Domestic Violence and Lifetime Physical Violence (percent)**

Childhood Experience reported by IW	Slapped	Kicked	Hit	Beaten	Any lifetime Marital Physical Violence
<b>Harsh Physical discipline in childhood:</b>					
Yes	48.1	32.9	46.3	46.3	49.1
No	17.4	11.0	15.1	15.5	18.3
<b>Witnessing father beating mother in childhood:</b>					
Yes	46.6	45.5	46.6	47.7	47.7
No	28.2	11.3	25.2	24.8	29.1

**Table 18: Childhood Experience of Domestic Violence and Lifetime Psychological Violence (percent)**

Childhood experience reported by IW	Insulted	Demeaned	Threatened	Threatened some one else	Made you feel afraid	Abandoned	Was unfaithful	Any lifetime Marital Psychological violence
<b>Harsh Physical discipline in childhood:</b>								
Yes	81.3	62.9	44.5	24.4	21.9	21.2	37.8	81.3
No	39.3	26.5	18.3	15.5	8.2	8.2	13.2	43.8
<b>Witnessing father beating mother in childhood:</b>								
Yes	70.5	62.5	60.2	39.2	39.2	38.6	63.1	70.5
No	58.9	38.7	18.4	10.4	3.4	3.1	7.7	62.0

*Multivariate analysis:*

Due to possible confounding among the independent factors in the bivariate analysis, logistic regression models were used separately for lifetime physical (1 if experienced any physical violence; 0 otherwise) and psychological violence (1 if experienced any psychological violence; 0 otherwise) to assess the effect of each independent factor in the presence

of other variables in the model. The independent factors selected were: (a) education of the woman; (b) level of social support; (iii) per capita expenditure; (iv) ownership of property; (v) alcohol consumption; and (vi) women's witnessing of parental behavior in childhood.

On the basis of international literature on correlates of physical and psychological violence in intimate relationships, we had also considered some other relevant variables such as women's age, duration of marriage, number of children, women's employment status and rural-urban residence. However, none of these variables were statistically significant in the logistic regression analysis at 5 percent level. Therefore, these variables have been excluded from the final logistic regression model (Table 19).

The logistic regression results in terms of odds ratios are presented in Table 19. The odds ratios predict whether a woman experienced any physical or any psychological violence in her marital life. Odds ratios greater than one indicate a positive relationship between the independent variable and the experience of violence, and odds ratios less than one indicate a negative relationship. The multivariate results show almost similar pattern of relationships as was found in the bivariate analysis.

The strongest predictor was found to be ownership of property by a woman that reduces both physical and psychological violence significantly. The strong negative relationships between women's experiences of both physical and psychological violence and women's ownership of property were maintained even after controlling for a host of other well-known correlates including woman's education, per capita income, level of social support, husband's risk behavior and a history of violence in wife's family during her childhood. The most important result is that even some access to ownership of asset (land or house) compared to women without ownership reduces dramatically the risk of both physical and psychological violence.

**Table 19: Logistic Regression Models for predicting Women's Experience of Physical and Psychological Violence (Odds Ratios)**

Variable	Any Physical Violence		Any Psychological Violence	
	Odd Ratio	SE	Odds Ratio	SE
<b>Education</b>				
< 6 years(r)	1.00		1.00	
6-12 years	0.47*	0.34	0.81	0.40
>12 years	0.64	0.43	1.33	0.52
<b>Level of Social Support</b>				
No support(r)	1.00		1.00	
Natal family	0.49*	0.31	1.98	0.37
Natal family & neighbors	0.37 **	0.32	0.37**	0.37
<b>Per Capita Consumption Expenditure(Rs/annum)</b>				
<6000(r)	1.00		1.00	
6000-11999	0.14***	0.31	0.14***	0.41
12000 & above	0.14***	0.40	0.19***	0.50
<b>Ownership of Property by Women</b>				
None(r)	1.00		1.00	
Land	0.23**	0.48	0.04***	0.58
House	0.11***	0.57	0.01***	0.52
Land & house	0.08***	0.56	0.01***	0.58
<b>Alcohol Consumption by Husbands</b>				
Tee-totaller(r)	1.00		1.00	
Occasionally drunk	0.45	0.32	9.19***	0.41
Regularly drunk	2.84**	0.37	2.03	0.45
<b>Woman's Childhood Experience of Family Violence</b>				
Did not witness(r)	1.00		1.00	
Witnessed	4.46***	0.33	9.98***	0.44
Number of casses		502		502
-2 Log L		443.9		357.2
df		12		12

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.001$

'r' reference category

As we have discussed in the previous section, asset ownership by women has many direct and indirect effects not only to the well-being of women but also for the wellbeing of children, family and society. It enhances women's capability in myriad ways. Right to property enhances woman's bargaining power within marriage. It also enhances woman's dignity and self-worth. If co-operative conflicts occur, say, due to severe violence experienced by women, women with independent access to ownership of land and house will have outside options to exit the marriage: a place to stay (house ownership) and various opportunities associated with land ownership.

The results show no significant association between women's education and their experience of violence, excluding a significant negative effect of middle level education (6-12 years) on any physical violence compared to other women. The explanation may be that as everyone is educated in the context of Kerala probably it loses its significance in reducing violence directly in the presence of other important variables.

The per capita expenditure is strongly and negatively associated with women's experience of both physical and psychological violence. This result is consistent with international research although it is not clear whether this relationship reflects a greater reluctance of women of higher socio-economic status to disclose violence.

The levels of social support, especially both the sources together (natal family and neighbors), have a significant negative effect on prevalence of any physical and psychological violence. The natal family as a source of social support has a significant negative effect on the prevalence of any physical violence. However, this source of social support, on the contrary, has a positive effect on the prevalence of any psychological violence, although it is not significant at the five percent level. It is not known how the levels of social support relate to the reduction

of violence. One possibility may be that neighbors and natal family may be a traditional source of conflict resolution in the Indian context.

As one would expect, there is a strong positive association between husband's excessive consumption of alcohol and women's experience of physical violence. However, although a positive association exists between husband's excessive consumption of alcohol and women's experience of psychological violence, the relationship is not significant statistically. Furthermore, husband's occasional drinking of alcohol has a strong positive effect on the risk of any psychological violence. However, its relationship with women's experience of any physical violence, on the contrary, is negative though not significant.

Finally, the significant and positive association between women's experience of violence (both physical and psychological) and a history of violence in woman's family during her childhood (i.e., witnessing father beating mother) is consistent with research in other countries. This association suggests that violent behavior may be learned from childhood experience. It has serious negative effect on the well-being of family due to the intergenerational transmission of violence.

## **VII. Conclusions/Strategies**

For centuries, states have viewed domestic violence against women as a private matter not relevant to state policy. During the past decade, however, the issue of domestic violence against women has become one of the preeminent issues in the women's international human rights movement. A large variety of countries now have accepted some responsibility to help prevent violence in the home and to prosecute offenders. To prevent and reduce domestic violence, government, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations are already working at many levels (Schuler, 1991; UNICEF, 2000; UNIFEM, 2000; WHO, 2002). The strategies that are being adopted include: home visitation, collaborative efforts of domestic violence service providers, prevention

efforts that address violence both in homes and in communities, school-based programs, and public education campaigns.

India, like many other countries, has enacted legislation that codifies domestic violence as a crime along with the creation of national media campaigns designed to raise consciousness about the issue, and establishment of women-only police stations intended to encourage reporting of domestic violence crimes. To respond to the needs of the victims, protection and support systems must be available. Religious and social institutions that could assist victims need to be trained in appropriate responses. Since the existing legal framework is inadequate to fully address women's needs, political advocacy should be mobilized to change particular elements within the laws that continue to be unresponsive to issues of gender-based violence (Singh, 1994; Lawyers Collective Women's Rights Initiative, 2000).

In addition to legal and institutional interventions domestic violence needs to be resituated in social justice and broader social transformation of society. What is needed is a rights-based strategy in the prevention of domestic violence. The strength of a rights-based strategy is that it meshes formal treaty doctrines with grassroots activism and critiques of power. While the right to make the claim is global, the specific and useful strategies to build a non-violent and gender egalitarian society must be developed locally.

If one conceptualizes domestic violence as a violation of a woman's most basic right, the focus becomes an ecological perspective. It is only at this level of analysis and interventions that the problem of domestic violence has the potential to be eradicated. Domestic violence prevention strategies must include a critical understanding of the

underlying causes of domestic violence as well as a vision of what constitutes a healthy, non-violent family.

Research and analysis in this paper in the context of Kerala clearly suggests that “right to housing” and “right to property and inheritance” are critical and most fundamental for any strategy in the prevention of domestic violence. Empowerment of women is the key to prevent gender-based violence. Access to, and control over economic resources, especially immovable assets, is the precondition to women’s empowerment. Social support network, especially natal family and neighbors, is also a crucial factor in reducing domestic violence. Four points need to be emphasized here:

- (a) Importance of immovable assets and social support is significant in making a difference to the incidence of domestic violence.
- (b) Changing norms of acceptability of violence in the family is critical to reduce inter-generational transmission of violence.
- (c) Male attitudes and society’s attitudes also need to be changed in this regard. Since prevention of domestic violence requires fundamental changes in attitudes and behavior, it confronts societal and individual resistance to change.
- (d) Support structures could be both within the family and from NGOs, women’s self-help groups etc., who can both help in changing attitudes and in helping women acquire immovable assets. This calls for creative community involvement, shared responsibilities, and collective action with the goals to challenge patriarchal assumptions of power and control and entitlement to women.

Prevention of domestic violence at the national level depends on the level of public and governmental commitment to making prevention a long-term priority, and to establish a consistent, coordinated, and

integrated approach for each community. Given the pervasiveness and harms of domestic violence, a national policy of zero tolerance for domestic violence is necessary.

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