



# Marital Violence, Human Development and Women's Property Status in India

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**Summary.** — If development means the expansion of human capabilities, then freedom from domestic violence should be an integral part of any exercise for evaluating developmental progress. This paper focuses on a hitherto unexplored factor underlying women's risk of marital violence, namely, women's property status. Many studies have examined the scale and correlates of marital violence, but neglected this dimension. Based on a household survey in Kerala (India), the authors assess the prevalence and correlates of both physical and psychological violence—long term and current. Women owning immovable property (land or a house) are found to face a significantly lower risk of marital violence than propertyless women. This has implications for development policy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Development can be seen... as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. ... Viewing development in terms of expanding substantive freedoms directs attention to the ends that make development important, rather than merely to some of the means that, *inter alia*, play a prominent part in the process. Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom. (Sen, A. K. 1999, p. 3)

There is widespread acceptance today that development needs to be evaluated not just in terms of economic growth but also in terms of the advancement of human capabilities, and that enhancing human well-being is not just a means but also an end in itself. The writings of Amartya Sen, in particular, have been key in turning the debate, and his capability approach provides the theoretical underpinnings of UNDP's Human Development Reports (HDRs) and Human Development Indices (HDIs). Yet actual evaluative exercises—of which UNDP's HDIs are the best known—while based on Sen's capability approach, fail

to capture the breath of that approach. They remain largely confined to conventional measures of well-being, such as income, education, and health (longevity). Even the occasional broadening, such as attempted in the formulation of the Gender Empowerment Measure (which seeks to capture women's participation in public institutions; UNDP, 1995), do not take into account some central aspects of

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human well-being, such as freedom from physical and mental abuse, and its implications for a country's overall development.<sup>1</sup> This paper argues that the issue of marital violence needs critical attention within the development debate and focuses on some hitherto unexplored aspects underlying women's risk of such violence, in particular women's property status.

Interpersonal violence, especially spousal violence, remains hidden and underreported not least because it occurs within the family—precisely the institution that is conventionally assumed to be driven by altruism, and instrumental in enhancing rather than diminishing human well-being. Yet although spousal violence is less visible, it is by no means invisible, and there appears little justification for the failure of much of the standard development literature to give it its due place, since there is a very substantial body of global research on the subject. This shows that marital violence against women is widespread and cuts across countries and class groups. World wide, physical violence by husbands against wives is estimated to range between 10% and 50% (*Population Reports, 1999*). Psychological abuse is even more common, and often, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse overlap.

Marital violence against women ruptures the myth of the home as a protective space, exposing it as a chamber of terror for many.<sup>2</sup> It is found to devastate the women who suffer it, scar the children who witness it, and dehumanize the men who perpetrate it. It has negative consequences for individuals, their families, as well as the wider society. As existing research shows, it can cause serious physical and mental injury to women,<sup>3</sup> and negatively affect their employment situation, their overall productivity, and their participation in public life.<sup>4</sup> Violence during pregnancy is associated with miscarriages, low birth weight infants, maternal morbidity, and even fetal and maternal deaths.<sup>5</sup> Children witnessing domestic violence tend to suffer from higher emotional and behavioral problems than do other children.<sup>6</sup> Overall, marital violence has high human, social, and economic costs.<sup>7</sup>

The widespread presence of marital violence thus indicates that a notable proportion of the human population is deprived of both a very important component of well-being and the freedom to enhance even conventional aspects of well-being linked with income and health. If development is to be seen as the expansion of human capabilities—the real freedoms that peo-

ple can enjoy, to achieve what they have reason to value<sup>8</sup>—then clearly freedom from domestic violence needs to be a significant part of any exercise for evaluating development. In so framing it, we hope to bring the issue of marital violence more centrally into the debate on development. In specific terms, we seek to better illuminate the factors that affect women's risk of violence by exploring, in particular, the importance of a hitherto neglected factor, namely, women's property status.

## 2. THE QUESTION OF PROPERTY STATUS

There are no simple answers as to why men abuse their wives, and why more in some societies than in others. Some scholars have attributed the occurrence and persistence of marital violence to a mix of individual and community factors, as well as wider societal attitudes.<sup>9</sup> And indeed causes are likely to be multilayered and often difficult to identify empirically. However, several studies in India and elsewhere have sought to empirically identify the correlates of marital violence, namely, the factors which might affect women's risk of marital abuse.<sup>10</sup>

In all existing research, however, a significant unexplored factor is the impact of women's property status on the likelihood of violence. In fact, we came across no study either for India or elsewhere where this had been studied empirically. It is of course widely recognized that women need some form of independent economic support to escape violent marriages and that economic independence can also deter violence. However, studies examining the link between marital violence and women's economic situation have focused basically on women's employment, with ambiguous results—some show a lower incidence of violence against employed women, others a higher incidence, or no difference.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from its uncertain impact, there are several reasons why, when examining the effect of women's economic status, we need to go beyond employment and probe the effect of women's property status, in particular their owning land or a house. For a start, the security provided by property is relatively certain, unlike employment, which is subject to the vagaries of the labor market. A house or land also visibly signals the strength of a woman's fall-back position and her tangible exit option

(Agarwal, 1997), and can thus act as a deterrent to marital violence. And should she face violence, owning (or otherwise having access to) a house or land can give a woman an immediate escape option. A house would be especially important in this respect since it can provide a ready roof over the head. But even with land, a shelter can be built or microenterprise established. Employment alone does not give the same protection: Many women are unpaid workers on family farms, or have insufficient earnings to rent a place. Rented accommodation is also often difficult to get, due not only to women's financial constraints but also social barriers—landlords in many cultures are suspicious of single women tenants. A woman owning a home or land would not face the same problems. Also, land access enhances women's livelihood options and overall sense of empowerment (Agarwal, 1994). These in turn would reduce her risk of violence by increasing her economic security and reducing her tolerance to violence.

The important point, however, is not whether a woman actually uses the exit option that immovable property provides, but that the very existence of that option could deter the husband's violence. If violence does take place, she can better escape further abuse, without having to choose between homelessness and injury. It is notable that many women's groups in Europe dealing with domestic violence in the 1970s strongly lobbied for housing legislation to enable battered women to set up homes separately from their violent spouses (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Women's shelters can only provide temporary relief.

There are thus compelling reasons to examine what difference women's property ownership makes to the incidence of marital violence. The present study seeks to fill a critical gap in the existing analysis as well as policy formulation on this issue. The empirical basis of the analysis is Kerala (India), although the findings would have a wider relevance.

As in other countries, in India too marital violence has long been recognized as a major problem and is estimated to range between 20% and 50%.<sup>12</sup> Even these figures are likely to be underestimates since many women do not report marital violence for fear of social stigma.

Given, however, that few women in India own or control property (Agarwal, 1994), it was important to locate this study where we would expect to find a sufficient sample of

property-owning women. Pradeep Panda's survey of marital violence, in the Indian state of Kerala, provided an opportunity to analyze this. A number of communities in Kerala traditionally practiced matrilineal inheritance, with property passing through the female line (Agarwal, 1994). A survey of rural widows in several Indian states undertaken in 1991, by development sociologist Martha Chen, also found that 24% of the women with landowning fathers in the Kerala sample inherited land as daughters, as compared to only 13% for all of India (cited in Agarwal, 1998).

Kerala is also well suited for this analysis in two other respects: One, it provides an appropriate location for testing the impact of social support on domestic violence. Unlike say in North India where post-marital residence is almost entirely outside the village, and the woman's contact with her natal kin is limited; in Kerala (and more generally in south India), women can also marry within the village. This provides an interesting range of postmarital residence locations and so of potential familial and neighborly support for women. Two, Kerala, compared with the rest of India, has often been depicted as a "model" in terms of its human development indicators, especially in education (very high female literacy) and health (Dreze & Sen, 1989). But some feminist scholars have maintained that the positive education and health indicators cloak the many social disadvantages that the women of Kerala continue to face (Devika & Kodath, 2001; Eapen & Kodath, 2002). Domestic violence would provide a useful mirror for judging whether we need a corrective to the somewhat idealized image of women's position in Kerala, as also of the level of human development here.

Of course, in some respects, Kerala does have unusual features, in that a fair proportion of its population was traditionally matrilineal (most estimates put the percentage somewhere between 20% and 30%). This not only gives the daughter's claims to property legitimacy within these communities, it also creates a wider climate of social legitimacy that extends to communities that were not traditionally matrilineal. In other respects, however, Kerala merely extends the more general south Indian pattern. Other south Indian states too have social norms that allow marriages within the village and with crosscousins; have no bar on women seeking jobs outside their homes; have no female seclusion (except among some pockets of Muslims); and have better social indicators in terms of female literacy,

low fertility, etc., than do most north Indian states (Agarwal, 1994). So we expect the Kerala results to have a wider relevance beyond the state.

In the sections below, the paper will outline the characteristics of the data used, the sample profile, the incidence of violence, our hypotheses regarding the correlates of violence, and finally the results.

### 3. DATA

This study is based on a household survey undertaken in 2001 in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala. Ten wards (six rural and four urban) were first selected, and from each, 50 households were randomly selected, making a total of 500 households (300 rural and 200 urban).<sup>13</sup> The respondents were ever-married women in the age group 15–49. The final survey included 502 women (302 rural and 200 urban).<sup>14</sup>

Prior to the interview, the respondents were informed about the sensitive nature of the survey and their consent obtained. They were also informed that should they feel uncomfortable, they could terminate the interview at any time. Interviews were held in a place that would ensure maximum privacy and the information was kept confidential.

Data were collected for a range of household-level and individual-level variables, including the household's consumption expenditure; the education and employment status of the respondent and her spouse; the woman's ownership of land or house; her access to social support, such as from her natal family and neighbors; her witnessing her father beat her mother in childhood; some sociodemographic characteristics of the couple; and the husband's specific characteristics such as alcohol consumption and witnessing his father beat his mother in childhood.<sup>15</sup> All the information was obtained from the woman respondent by female investigators, except that on annual consumption expenditure, which was obtained from the typically male household head by a trained male investigator.<sup>16</sup>

Physical and psychological violence were measured as discrete behavior. Both long-term violence (that is violence which occurred at least once in the woman's married life) and current violence (that is violence which occurred within the last 12 months) were measured. We use the term long-term violence instead of the

commonly used term lifetime violence, since it appears inaccurate to call women's experiences of violence during a specified period as covering their lifetime. Four types of behavior were considered for long-term physical violence: slapping, hitting, kicking, and beating, and six types for current physical violence: slapping, hitting, kicking, beating, threats or use of a weapon, and forced sex. Long-term and current psychological violence were measured in terms of six types of behavior: insults, belittlement, threats to the woman respondent or to someone she cared about, or that made her afraid, and threat of abandonment.

### 4. SAMPLE PROFILE AND INCIDENCE OF VIOLENCE

#### (a) *Sample profile*

Table 1 presents the sample profile. The households are spread across all income categories, with a concentration in the middle-income group for rural areas and the upper income group for urban areas. The average age of women respondents was 33 years, the majority being in the age group of 25–34 years. The spousal age difference was less than 9 years in 73% of the cases (rural and urban combined), but the differences were greater in the urban sample. The average marriage duration was 12 years. Seventy-eight percent of the women had had arranged marriages, but two-thirds of these were with the woman's consent. Nearly half the women reported that dowry was demanded by their in-laws either at the time of marriage or afterwards. Demands were higher among rural women, 58% of whom reported such demands compared with 33% of the urban women.

About 43% of all households belonged to traditionally matrilineal castes. However, our division between matrilineal and nonmatrilineal households was very broad and may not be entirely accurate, since the survey did not directly ask whether a household had actually practiced matriliney. We inferred this from the caste names. Given that among castes typically associated with matriliney, such as the Nayers, historically there was regional variation, with matriliney being observed more in northern and central Kerala than in southern Kerala (Agarwal, 1994), where Thiruvananthapuram district (the site of our study) is located, some of those classified as matrilineal castes may well not have practiced matriliney.

Table 1. *Sample profile (percentages)*<sup>a</sup>

Characteristics	Total (N = 502)	Rural (N = 302)	Urban (N = 200)
<i>Per capita expenditure (Rs.lyr)</i>			
<6,000	26.1 (131)	35.4 (107)	12.0 (24)
6,000–11,999	47.0 (236)	57.6 (174)	31.0 (62)
12000 & above	26.9 (135)	7.0 (21)	57.0 (114)
<i>Sociodemographic features</i>			
Average age (yrs)			
Woman respondent	32.7 (502)	32.3 (302)	33.2 (200)
Husband	39.4 (502)	38.5 (302)	40.7 (200)
Age of woman respondent (yrs)			
15–24	14.5 (73)	16.9 (51)	11.0 (22)
25–34	49.8 (250)	47.4 (143)	53.5 (107)
35–49	35.7 (179)	35.8 (108)	35.5 (71)
Spousal age difference (yrs)			
<5	27.3 (137)	32.1 (97)	20.0 (40)
5–8	46.0 (231)	47.0 (142)	44.5 (89)
9 & above	26.7 (134)	20.9 (63)	35.5 (71)
Duration of marriage (yrs)			
<7	30.1 (151)	29.5 (89)	31.0 (62)
7–14	36.7 (184)	38.1 (115)	34.5 (69)
15 & above	33.3 (167)	32.5 (98)	34.5 (69)
Number of children			
0	9.8 (49)	10.3 (31)	9.0 (18)
1–2	73.5 (369)	74.8 (226)	71.5 (143)
3 & above	16.7 (84)	14.9 (45)	19.5 (39)
Arranged marriage			
With woman's consent	78.1 (392)	78.5 (237)	77.5 (155)
	64.5 (253)	50.6 (120)	66.5 (133)
Dowry demand at marriage or after			
	47.8 (240)	57.6 (174)	33.0 (66)
Matrilineal caste status			
Matrilineal households	43.0 (216)	34.4 (104)	56.0 (112)
Nonmatrilineal households	57.0 (286)	65.6 (198)	44.0 (88)
<i>Education (yrs)</i>			
Woman respondent			
Illiterate	4.2 (21)	5.3 (16)	2.5 (5)
1–5	11.4 (57)	14.6 (44)	6.5 (13)
6–12 (secondary)	62.5 (314)	70.9 (214)	50.0 (100)
>12	21.9 (110)	9.3 (28)	41.0 (82)
Husband			
Illiterate	4.0 (20)	3.3 (10)	5.0 (10)
1–5	14.5 (73)	21.2 (64)	4.5 (9)
6–12 (secondary)	60.8 (305)	67.5 (204)	50.5 (101)
>12	20.7 (104)	7.9 (24)	40.0 (80)
Spousal educational difference			
Wife = husband (No difference)	30.5 (153)	28.1 (85)	34.0 (68)
Wife < husband	29.3 (147)	29.1 (88)	29.5 (59)
Wife > husband	40.2 (202)	42.7 (129)	36.5 (73)

(continued next page)

Table 1—*continued*

Characteristics	Total (N = 502)	Rural (N = 302)	Urban (N = 200)
<i>Employment</i>			
Woman respondent			
Unemployed	68.1 (342)	66.2 (200)	71.0 (142)
Employed (total)	31.9 (160)	33.8 (102)	29.0 (58)
<i>Of which:</i>			
Regular	58.1 (93)	42.2 (43)	86.2 (50)
Seasonal/irregular	41.9 (67)	57.8 (59)	13.8 (8)
Husband			
Unemployed	6.8 (34)	4.3 (13)	10.5 (21)
Employed (total)	93.2 (468)	95.7 (289)	89.5 (179)
<i>Of which:</i>			
Regular	86.8 (406)	80.6 (233)	96.6 (173)
Seasonal/Irregular	13.2 (62)	19.4 (56)	3.4 (6)
Spousal employment difference <sup>b</sup>			
Wife = husband (No difference)	25.1 (126)	20.9 (63)	31.5 (63)
Wife < husband	75.5 (360)	75.5 (228)	66.0 (132)
Wife > husband	3.6 (16)	3.6 (11)	2.5 (5)
<i>Ownership of property by women</i>			
None	65.7 (330)	74.5 (225)	52.5 (105)
Land only	5.6 (28)	6.6 (20)	4.0 (8)
House only	14.1 (71)	15.9 (48)	11.5 (23)
House & land	14.5 (73)	3.0 (9)	32.0 (64)
<i>Woman's social support</i>			
None	45.6 (229)	45.0 (136)	46.5 (93)
Natal family	30.9 (155)	35.4 (107)	24.0 (48)
Natal family & neighbors	23.5 (118)	19.5 (59)	29.5 (59)
<i>Women who witnessed father beating mother in childhood (rest did not witness)</i>	35.1 (176)	47.0 (142)	17.0 (34)
<i>Specific characteristics of husband</i>			
Alcohol consumers (the rest were teetotalers)	51.6 (259)	54.3 (164)	47.5 (95)
Witnessed father beating mother in childhood (the rest did not report this)	29.7 (149)	39.7 (120)	14.5 (29)

<sup>a</sup> Figures in brackets give the absolute numbers.

<sup>b</sup> *On spousal employment difference:* (1) Wife = husband: wife and husband have similar type of employment {Wife(u), H(u); W(r), H(r); W(s/i), H(s/i)} (2) Wife < husband: wife's employment status is lower than husband's {Wife(u), H(r); W(u), H(s/i); W(s/i), H(r)} (3) Wife > husband: wife's employment status is better than husband's {Wife(r), H(u); W(r), H(s/i); W(s/i), H(u)}.

u (unemployed), r (regular), s/i (seasonal or irregular).

As expected, most couples (83%) had two children or fewer, given Kerala's low fertility rates;<sup>17</sup> over 95% of both men and women were literate, and there was little sex-differential in education. Within the limited range of differ-

ence, a larger proportion of wives were better educated than their husbands, than the other way around. There were, however, notable rural-urban differences: Only 9% of the rural women compared with 41% of the urban ones

had studied beyond secondary school. There were similar rural–urban differences in the husband's education levels.

Only one-third of the women were employed compared with over 93% of the men. Also, rural women, to a much greater extent than rural men were in irregular or seasonal work. In the urban sample, however, most women and their spouses who were employed were in regular jobs. In one-fourth of the cases, there were no gender differences in the type of employment, and in virtually all the remaining cases, the woman's employment status was below her husband's.

Overall, some 34% of the women owned immovable property (either land or a house or both), the proportion being much higher in urban households (48%) than in the rural (26%) ones. Also, overall, the proportion of those owning only a house (14%) or owning both a house and land (14%) was much greater than those owning only land (6%). The majority of those owning property, perhaps not surprisingly, belonged to Kerala's traditionally matrilineal castes.<sup>18</sup> But a substantial percentage—35%—of the women from matrilineal groups did not own any property, either because they belonged to propertyless families, or they did not receive any property from their families nor were they able to procure it in other ways.<sup>19</sup>

Over half the women reported some social support—people they could turn to if they had a problem. This support was mainly from natal families in the rural sample, and from both natal families and neighbors in the urban sample.<sup>20</sup> About a third of the women reported witnessing their fathers beat their mothers in childhood, the percentage being much higher in the rural than in the urban areas. In a little over half the households, the husbands drank occasionally or regularly. Finally, some 30% of the husbands had seen their fathers beat their mothers during childhood, the percentage being as high as 40 in the rural areas.

(b) *The incidence of physical and psychological violence*

(i) *Long-term prevalence*

Taking a long-term profile, the substantial percentage of women (41% rural and 27% urban) reported at least one incident of physical violence by their husbands after marriage (Table 2). Psychological violence was even more common: some 65% had experienced it.

Again, the rural incidence was higher than the urban one.

Of the women reporting long-term physical violence, most had experienced various forms in combination: Sixty-one percent of the 179 women who reported being hit, kicked, slapped, or beaten by their spouses, had experienced all four types of violence, and 90% had suffered at least three types. Women had also experienced such violence several times in their marital lives: Sixty-eight percent reported three or more incidents. Again in terms of long-term psychological violence, nearly a fifth had experienced all six forms. Insults and being demeaned were especially common.

As with physical violence, so with psychological violence, a large proportion (77%) reported three or more incidents during their married lives. There were some notable rural–urban differences however: The frequency of physical violence was higher in the rural areas than in the urban ones, and that of psychological abuse was higher among urban families, than among the rural ones.

Physical violence during pregnancy was also found to be high, especially in rural areas. While some 38% of all women reported being slapped, kicked, hit, or beaten, the incidence among rural women was as high as 56%. Although among urban women the figure was substantially lower (18%), it was still far from trivial. Violence against pregnant women, as noted earlier, can seriously injure the mother and fetus and even prove fatal.

(ii) *Current violence*

What about current violence? Since this is defined here as either physical or psychological abuse occurring in the last 12 months, the 59 women who were widowed, divorced, separated, or whose husbands have migrated out for over a year, were excluded. Analysis for the remaining 443 women showed that 29% had experienced some form of physical violence, and 49% had experienced some form of psychological violence (Table 3). The incidence of physical violence was again much greater in the rural than in the urban areas, with the exception of one form of violence—forced sex. Urban women faced forced sex several times more than rural women did. In psychological violence, however, the rural/urban difference was slight.

As with long-term violence, for current violence, women reported being subjected to physically violent behavior in several forms and

Table 2. *Long-term physical and psychological violence (percentages)*

Forms of violence by husband	Total (N = 502)	Rural (N = 302)	Urban (N = 200)
<i>Physical violence</i>			
No physical violence	64.3	58.6	73.0
Hit her			
None	67.3	61.6	76.0
1-2	16.3	16.2	16.5
$\geq 3$	16.3	22.2	7.5
Kicked her			
None	76.7	70.5	86.0
1-2	8.8	8.9	8.5
$\geq 3$	14.5	20.5	5.5
Beat her			
None	67.1	60.9	76.5
1-2	12.5	13.2	11.5
$\geq 3$	20.3	25.8	12.0
Slapped her			
None	65.3	59.6	74.0
1-2	16.7	16.2	17.5
$\geq 3$	17.9	24.2	8.5
<i>Psychological violence</i>			
No psychological violence	35.1	29.8	43.0
Insulted her			
None	37.1	31.8	45.0
1-2	15.9	14.2	18.5
$\geq 3$	47.0	54.0	36.5
Demeaned her			
None	53.0	45.7	64.0
1-2	14.3	14.6	14.0
$\geq 3$	32.7	39.7	22.0
Threatened her			
None	66.9	58.9	79.0
1-2	3.6	3.6	3.5
$\geq 3$	29.5	37.4	17.5
Threatened someone she cared about			
None	79.5	74.2	87.5
1-2	1.6	1.7	1.5
$\geq 3$	18.9	24.2	11.0
Made her afraid			
None	84.1	78.1	93.0
1-2	0.8	1.0	0.5
$\geq 3$	15.1	20.9	6.5
Abandoned her			
None	84.5	78.8	93.0
1-2	14.7	20.5	6.0
$\geq 3$	0.8	0.7	1.0

multiple frequencies. Of the 127 women who had been hit, kicked, slapped, or beaten or had been forced to have sex in the previous one year, 80% had experienced more than one



Table 3. *Current physical and psychological violence (percentages)*

Forms of violence by husband	Total (N = 443)	Rural (N = 272)	Urban (N = 171)
<i>Physical violence</i>			
No physical violence	71.3	69.1	74.9
Hit her			
None	83.5	79.8	89.5
1-2	5.9	5.9	5.8
$\geq 3$	10.6	14.3	4.7
Kicked her			
None	87.1	83.1	93.6
1-2	3.2	3.3	2.9
$\geq 3$	9.7	13.6	3.5
Beat her			
None	77.0	74.3	81.3
1-2	12.9	11.8	14.6
$\geq 3$	10.2	14.0	4.1
Slapped her			
None	78.1	74.6	83.6
1-2	11.5	10.7	12.9
$\geq 3$	10.4	14.7	3.5
Used or threatened to use a weapon			
None	99.8	99.6	100.0
1-2	0.2	0.4	0.0
$\geq 3$	0.0	0.0	0.0
Forced sex			
None	85.3	86.0	84.2
1-2	9.3	13.2	2.9
$\geq 3$	5.4	0.7	12.9
<i>Psychological violence</i>			
No psychological violence	50.8	49.6	52.6
Insulted her			
0	55.3	54.4	56.7
1-2	20.3	18.0	24.0
$\geq 3$	24.4	27.6	19.3
Demeaned her			
0	80.6	77.6	85.4
1-2	9.0	8.1	10.5
$\geq 3$	10.4	14.3	4.1
Threatened her			
0	88.7	84.9	94.7
1-2	1.6	1.5	1.8
$\geq 3$	9.7	13.6	3.5
Threatened someone she cared about			
0	89.2	84.9	95.9
1-2	1.6	1.8	1.2
$\geq 3$	9.3	13.2	2.9
Made her afraid			
0	89.8	85.7	96.5
1-2	0.9	1.1	0.6
$\geq 3$	9.3	13.2	2.9

(continued next page)

Table 3—*continued*

Forms of violence by husband	Total ( <i>N</i> = 443)	Rural ( <i>N</i> = 272)	Urban ( <i>N</i> = 171)
Abandoned her			
0	88.9	84.9	95.3
1–2	10.6	14.7	4.1
≥3	0.5	0.4	0.6

form, and 54% had experienced at least three of these forms. Also, 57% had faced physical violence three times or more during the past year.

Of the 218 women experiencing current psychological abuse, 40% had experienced two or more forms over the past year, and 19% had experienced five forms. In terms of frequency, 53% reported being abused three or more times in the current period.

On the whole, the results given in the above tables indicate that violence against women, while not universal, is pervasive, frequent, and takes multiple forms, and (as noted earlier) even these reported rates are likely to be underestimates, since women typically under-report domestic violence because of social status and social stigma considerations.

#### (c) *Triggering factors*

Quite simple issues appear to trigger violence (physical or psychological) by husbands. Women—rural and urban—reported being abused if the husband felt she had not looked after the children properly (77%), or had not attended to the household (72%), or had not cooked properly (46%)—basically if she had not fulfilled some expected role. Somewhat less common, but still fairly important, were factors relating to women's interactions with the outside world—such as talking with neighbors or with other men, or suspicion that she was being unfaithful (31%). Another trigger was her voicing suspicions about her husband's fidelity and the latter responding by abusing her (27%). Dissatisfaction with dowry was another notable cause of husbands physically or psychologically abusing their wives.

We now consider what factors we might expect to be correlates of marital violence and why.

## 5. HYPOTHESES

We would expect a range of factors to affect the incidence of marital violence, as spelled out below. Among these factors, we are particularly

interested in examining whether women's property ownership makes a difference, after controlling for other possible correlates.

#### (a) *Household economic characteristics*

While marital violence cuts across income classes, there can still be notable differences by class. We would expect that the higher the household's economic status, the lower the likelihood of domestic violence, since several potential elements of friction linked to incomes, such as shortages of consumption goods, constricted physical space, or inadequacies of house care or child care would be less present in better-off households. Such households are also more likely to have domestic help for housework and child care. Of course, measurement problems may also partly lead to a negative relationship between income class and violence, since the likelihood of under-reporting is greater among the better off due to the social stigma attached to marital violence. There is, however, no obvious way of separating the measurement bias from other factors that might lead to lesser domestic violence among the better-off. Also, since our data relate to current expenditure, this variable is perhaps more appropriate for current violence. However, given that the time span covered is not very long, we would not expect vast differences in current and past expenditure levels among households. It thus appears justified to use this as an explanatory variable also for long-term violence.

#### (b) *Socio-demographic characteristics*

We would expect a woman's age and length of marriage to be negatively related to the probability of marital violence. This is because over time a marital relationship can cement and achieve a degree of stability and so reduce the husband's tendency to resort to violence. After long years of marriage, a woman might also learn to guard against contexts that have triggered violence in the past.

Spousal age differences could be associated with either a greater or lower incidence of violence. For example, if the woman is substantially younger than the man, he might be either more impatient and violent with her, given her vulnerability, or he might be more willing to overlook her presumed lapses and be less violent.

The number of children could again have either a negative or a positive impact: More children might offer the mother support and so deter violence; but more children can also constrict space, demand more time and attention, and increase overall household stress levels, leading to greater marital violence. For instance, Martin *et al.* (1999) found a positive relationship between the incidence of violence and the number of children.

(c) *Education*

When both spouses are educated, we would expect lesser violence on the assumption that they would resolve their conflicts more through a discussion-driven approach than a violence-driven approach. But the effect of a spousal educational gap could go either way. An educated woman married to a less-educated man, for instance, might be less subject to violence (see, e.g., Jejeebhoy, 1998a) because he respects her more, or she might be more subject to abuse because he cannot tolerate a "superior" wife. Likewise a well-educated man married to an uneducated or poorly educated woman might tend to be more abusive because he considers her to be beneath him. In our Kerala sample, however, the education factor may not be significant since (as noted earlier) most of the couples are educated, and the gender gap is small.

(d) *Women's economic status—employment and property ownership*

We would expect a woman's risk of domestic violence to be less, the stronger her economic position within the household. This is defined here by two types of variables: her employment status and her property status. A woman would have a stronger fall-back position if she is employed and/or owns property and thus has a means of livelihood independent of her husband's. However, employment carries several complications which can give ambiguous results. For a start, a woman doing unwaged

work on the family farm may be no better off economically than an unemployed woman. Likewise, the earnings of irregular or seasonal work may be too small to make a difference. Regular employment may, however, make a difference. But even here, if the woman is better employed than her husband, it might increase the likelihood of violence if he feels this undermines his authority.<sup>21</sup> The same may happen where she starts working for the first time and transcends traditional gender roles (Schuler *et al.*, 1998).

In general, as noted earlier, employment would not be equivalent to owning immovable property such as land or a house for several reasons: the possible insufficiency of earnings to enable the woman to find an alternative place to stay, social difficulties in renting accommodation, the absence of a visible exit option against violence, and so on. Also, while both land and house are likely to be important in this respect, a house could prove especially critical both as an actual exit option and as a visible indicator of an exit option, which by its very existence could deter violence.

(e) *Husband's employment status*

Unemployment-related stress and frustration is likely to be associated with a higher probability of violence and regular employment with a lower probability. The gender gap in employment could also matter, although this could go either way. A husband might be deterred from violence if the wife had a higher employment status and hence a stronger fall-back position, or (as with the education gap) he might be more prone to violence because her better position shows him in a poor light, especially if he is unemployed.

(f) *Woman's social support*

Social support, such as from the natal family or neighbors, may be expected to reduce the incidence of marital violence. These are people whom the respondent said she could count on, in general, and share her problems with. Such support can help for several reasons: It can provide women-friendly mediators in situations of spousal conflict; it can demonstrate social disapproval of the husband's actions and so serve as a deterrent; and it can give a woman a visible exit option (even if a temporary one), especially if the natal family is located close by.<sup>22</sup>

(g) *Woman witnessing marital violence in childhood*

A woman who sees her mother being beaten by her father is more likely to tolerate her husband's violence, since she would take it as a social norm in gender relations, and see such violence as being part of a "woman's lot." Childhood exposure could also leave her with feelings of low self-esteem, causing her to become passive in the face of violence. All this can perpetuate marital violence.<sup>23</sup>

(h) *Some specific characteristics of the husband*

We would expect husbands who consume alcohol or were exposed to marital violence in childhood to be more likely to resort to marital violence themselves.

We now consider the results.

## 6. RESULTS: CROSSTABULATIONS

This section examines the links between marital violence and some of the hypothesized factors through a set of crosstabulations. The subsequent section presents the multivariate results.

(a) *Long-term violence*

(i) *Household economic characteristics*

Tables 4 and 5 indicate a negative association between the household's economic position and long-term experience of physical and psychological violence.<sup>24</sup> Per capita expenditure is used as an indicator of economic position and, as the tables indicate, a higher economic position is associated with a lower incidence of both physical and psychological violence.

(ii) *Sociodemographic characteristics*

Tables 4 and 5 also crosstabulate the incidence of marital violence and the woman's age, duration of marriage, spousal age difference, and number of children. It is notable that the higher the respondent's age and duration of marriage, the lower the incidence of both physical and psychological violence. This link is especially apparent between women of the 15–24 age group and women over 24, and between women with less than 7 years of marriage and those married for longer. The fall in incidence as age and marriage duration increase is much sharper in the urban than in the rural sample.

The high incidence of violence among young couples could suggest two things: One, an early onset of violence in the marital relationship, and/or two, a generational increase in the incidence of violence—with a higher incidence among the younger generation of couples. However, the incidence of physical violence is lower where the age gap between the spouses is nine years or more. Also, there is no clear pattern between violence and the number of children. Although physical violence is somewhat higher among childless couples, psychological violence shows no such pattern.

(iii) *Education*

Higher educational levels of both spouses are associated with a systematically lower incidence of violence—physical and psychological (Tables 4 and 5).<sup>25</sup> The difference is much greater for physical than for psychological violence and for the rural than for the urban sample. Also, if the wife is less educated than the husband, the incidence of physical violence is notably higher in the rural sample but lower in the urban sample, compared with no gender gap in education. However, for long-term psychological violence, where the wife is less educated than the husband, violence is higher in both rural and urban contexts.

(iv) *Employment*

Both physical and psychological violence falls as we move from unemployed husbands to those who have some form of employment, and further to those with regular employment (Tables 4 and 5).<sup>26</sup> However, there is no clear pattern between women's experience of violence and being employed themselves, except for those with regular jobs—the latter category of women suffer less marital violence than those with only seasonal/irregular work. It is possible that regular employment may be capturing some of the positive effects of a higher class of household, education, and urban location, and seasonal and irregular employment may be capturing poverty, low education, and rural locations. At the same time, where wives are better employed than their husbands, physical violence is higher in both rural and urban contexts. It is likely that this is capturing some of the negative effect of the husband being unemployed while the wife has some work.<sup>27</sup> In any case, the number of such households is small. For psychological violence, there appears to be no clear association between spousal employment difference and violence.

Table 4. Long-term physical violence by selected characteristics (percentages)

Characteristics	Total	Rural	Urban
<i>Per capita expenditure (Rs.lyr)</i>			
<6,000	73.3	76.6	58.3
6,000–11,999	24.6	21.8	32.3
12,000 & above	18.5	23.8	17.5
<i>Sociodemographic features</i>			
Age of woman respondent (yrs)			
15–24	46.6	49.0	40.9
25–34	34.4	38.5	29.0
35–49	33.0	41.7	19.7
Duration of marriage (yrs)			
<7	42.4	46.1	37.1
7–14	34.2	39.1	26.1
15 & above	31.1	39.8	18.8
Spousal age difference (yrs)			
<5	40.1	32.1	30.0
5–8	37.2	44.4	25.8
9 & above	28.4	30.2	26.8
Number of children			
0	42.9	48.4	33.3
1–2	33.9	38.5	26.6
3 & above	39.3	51.1	25.6
<i>Education (yrs)</i>			
Woman respondent			
<6	57.7	61.7	44.4
6–12 (secondary)	34.7	38.8	26.0
>12	22.7	17.9	24.4
Husband			
<6	46.2	50.0	31.6
6–12 (secondary)	36.7	39.2	31.7
>12	23.1	33.3	20.0
Spousal educational difference			
Wife = husband	33.3	32.9	33.8
Wife < husband	42.9	58.0	20.3
Wife > husband	32.2	35.7	26.0
<i>Employment</i>			
Woman respondent			
Unemployed	35.1	39.0	29.6
Regular employment	28.0	37.2	20.0
Seasonal/irregular employment	49.3	52.5	25.0
Husband			
Unemployed	70.6	92.3	57.1
Regular employment	31.3	36.9	23.7
Seasonal/irregular employment	45.2	48.2	16.7
Spousal employment difference			
Wife = husband	34.9	42.9	27.0
Wife < husband	34.4	39.5	25.8
Wife > husband	68.8	72.7	60.0

(continued next page)

Table 4—continued

Characteristics	Total	Rural	Urban
<i>Ownership of property by women</i>			
None	49.1	51.6	43.8
Land only	17.9	25.0	0.0
House only	9.9	8.3	13.0
House & land	6.8	0.0	7.8
<i>Woman's social support</i>			
None	49.8	58.8	36.6
Natal family	21.3	20.6	22.9
Natal family & neighbors	27.1	39.0	15.3
<i>Woman witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>			
Did not witness	29.1	35.6	22.9
Witnessed	47.7	47.9	47.1
<i>Specific characteristics of husband</i>			
Alcohol consumption			
Teetotaler	24.7	26.8	21.9
Drinker	45.9	53.7	32.6
Witnessing father beating mother in childhood			
Did not witness	26.6	30.8	22.2
Witnessed	57.0	57.5	55.2

*(v) Women's property ownership*

Unlike employment, if a woman owns a property, it is seen to make an unambiguous difference to the incidence of violence. Let us consider long-term physical and psychological violence (Tables 4 and 5). Among the propertyless (owning neither land nor house), 49% experienced physical violence and 84% experienced psychological violence. In contrast, those who owned both land and house reported dramatically less physical as well as psychological violence (7% and 16% respectively). In fact, in the rural context, none of the nine women who owned both land and house reported any physical or psychological violence. But even when the woman owned only a house or only land, the incidence of violence (especially physical violence) was very much lower, than if she owned neither.

Belonging to a matrilineal caste group, however, did not make a difference, over and above owning property. Table 6 cross-tabulates women's property ownership, matriliney, and long-term physical violence. While women's property ownership is linked with a substantially lower incidence of violence among both matrilineal and nonmatrilineal castes, women's propertylessness is in fact linked with greater violence among the matrilineal groups than among the nonmatrilineal groups. This seems

surprising since we would expect matrilineal castes to have more women-friendly families, irrespective of whether the woman herself owned property. It is possible, though, as discussed earlier, that not all those classified as matrilineal in our study area were matrilineal in practice, or the erosion of matriliney over time may have changed attitudes, or other factors might be intervening.

Interestingly also, property ownership is found to serve as a protection against dowry-related harassment. While a fair proportion of women (propertied and propertyless) faced dowry demands, only 3% of the propertied women faced dowry-related beatings by husbands or in-laws, compared with 44% of the propertyless (Table 6). This suggests another dimension of protection that owning personal property provides women.

Also of interest is the finding that of the 179 women experiencing long-term physical violence, 43 left home (Table 6). The percentage leaving home was much greater among the propertied (71%) than among the propertyless (19%). Among the propertied, the proportion leaving home was notably higher in the rural than in the urban context. Moreover, of the 43 women who left home, although 24 returned, 88.0% of the women who returned were propertyless. Few of the propertied women

Table 5. Long-term psychological violence by selected characteristics (percentages)

Characteristics	Total	Rural	Urban
<i>Per capita expenditure (Rs.lyr)</i>			
<6,000	87.8	89.7	79.2
6,000–11,999	60.6	59.8	62.9
12,000 & above	50.4	57.1	49.1
<i>Sociodemographic features</i>			
Age of woman respondent (yrs)			
15–24	76.7	78.4	72.7
25–34	62.8	67.1	57.0
35–49	63.1	70.4	52.1
Duration of marriage (yrs)			
<7	70.2	76.4	61.3
7–14	63.0	67.8	55.1
15 & above	62.3	67.3	55.1
Spousal age difference (yrs)			
<5	65.7	69.1	57.5
5–8	64.5	69.7	56.2
9 & above	64.9	73.0	57.7
Number of children			
0	65.3	67.7	61.1
1–2	66.1	71.2	58.0
3 & above	59.5	66.7	51.3
<i>Education (yrs)</i>			
Woman respondent			
<6	74.4	76.7	66.7
6–12 (secondary)	66.6	69.6	60.0
>12	53.6	60.7	51.2
Husband			
<6	72.0	73.0	68.4
6–12 (secondary)	68.2	71.1	62.4
>12	49.0	54.2	47.5
Spousal educational difference			
Wife = husband	60.8	65.9	54.4
Wife < husband	68.7	72.7	62.7
Wife > husband	65.3	71.3	54.8
<i>Employment</i>			
Woman respondent			
Unemployed	64.0	68.0	58.5
Regular employment	59.1	69.8	50.0
Seasonal/Irregular employment	77.6	78.0	75.0
Husband			
Unemployed	85.3	92.3	81.0
Regular employment	62.1	67.4	54.9
Seasonal/Irregular employment	72.6	76.8	33.3
Spousal employment difference			
Wife = husband	68.3	77.8	58.7
Wife < husband	63.6	68.0	56.1
Wife > husband	68.8	72.7	60.0

(continued next page)

Table 5—continued

Characteristics	Total	Rural	Urban
<i>Ownership of property by women</i>			
None	84.2	82.2	88.6
Land only	53.6	75.0	0.0
House only	29.6	25.0	39.1
House & land	16.4	0.0	18.8
<i>Woman's social support</i>			
None	77.3	80.1	73.1
Natal family	59.4	59.8	58.3
Natal family & neighbors	48.3	66.1	30.5
<i>Woman witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>			
Did not witness	62.0	68.8	55.4
Witnessed	70.5	71.8	64.7
<i>Specific characteristics of husband</i>			
<i>Alcohol consumption</i>			
Teetotaler	47.3	56.5	35.2
Drinker	81.5	81.7	81.1
<i>Witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>			
Did not witness	59.5	64.8	53.8
Witnessed	77.9	78.3	75.9

Table 6. *Women's property ownership, long-term physical violence and various characteristics (percentages)*<sup>a</sup>

Characteristics	All women (502)	Propertyless women (330)	Propertied women (owning land or house or both) (172)
<i>Matrilineal caste status and long-term physical violence</i>			
Matrilineal households (216)	26.4 (57/216)	57.3 (43/75)	9.9 (14/141)
Non-matrilineal households (286)	42.7 (122/286)	46.7 (119/255)	9.7 (3/31)
<i>Women who left home, returned, among those facing long-term physical violence</i>			
Women left home (43)	24.0 (43/179)	19.1 (31/162)	70.6 (12/17)
Women returned home among those who left (24)	55.8 (24/43)	67.7 (21/31)	25.0 (3/12)
<i>Women who faced dowry demands at the time of marriage or after marriage</i>			
	47.8 (240/502)	45.2 (149/330)	52.9 (91/172)
<i>Women beaten by husbands or in-laws for inadequate dowry (among those facing dowry demands)</i>			
	28.8 (69/240)	44.3 (66/149)	3.3 (3/91)

<sup>a</sup> Figures in brackets give the absolute numbers.

returned home. This suggests that not only are propertied women less likely to face marital violence, but they are also more likely to escape further violence. Hence, property ownership can serve both as a deterrent and as an exit option.

#### (vi) *Social support*

Two potential sources of traditional support are the natal family and neighbors. Tables 4 and 5 clearly show that the incidence of both physical and psychological violence is notably less when there is some social support



compared with none, the difference being especially apparent in the rural context. For physical violence, the difference between only natal support and both natal and neighborly support is not high, whereas with psychological violence, having support from both natal family and neighbors appears to make more difference than having only natal family support.

(vii) *Women witnessing violence in childhood*

A substantially larger proportion of women who reported seeing their fathers beat their mothers in childhood also reported facing long-term physical violence in marriage (48%), than women who had not been exposed to such violence (29%). The difference was less marked for psychological violence (Tables 4 and 5).

(viii) *Specific characteristics of the husband*

Women married to men who are drinkers as opposed to the teetotalers are more likely to face physical violence (Tables 4 and 5). About 45% of the women whose husbands drank reported that their husbands had hit, kicked, slapped, or beaten them. Similarly, psychological violence was substantially higher among alcohol consumers. Both physical and psychological violence were also greater where the husband had witnessed his father beat his mother during his childhood.

(b) *Current violence*

Current violence follows a pattern broadly similar to long-term violence. Tables 7 and 8 give a consolidated picture of the potential correlates of current violence (physical and psychological). Given the similarity with long-term violence, for the sake of parsimony, only a selected set of the correlates are presented in the tables, but the discussion below covers all the variables.

As noted earlier, for analyzing current violence, the 59 women who were currently not in marital relationships were excluded. As with long-term violence, so with current violence, physical abuse declined with a rise in the following factors (Table 7): the household's economic status; the woman's age from below 24 to above 24; the spousal age difference from below nine to above nine years; the woman's duration of marriage from below seven to above seven years; the woman and her spouse's level of education from less than 6 years to the secondary school level; the husband being employed (as versus being unemployed) and especially his having regular work (with the

woman's own employment status making little difference); and the woman owning immovable property. The incidence of physical violence was higher if the woman had witnessed marital violence in childhood, had a higher employment status than the husband, and if he consumed alcohol as opposed to being a teetotaler, or if he had witnessed marital violence as a child. The incidence of current psychological violence follows a broadly similar pattern as physical violence in terms of the correlates (Table 8).

## 7. RESULTS: MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

To assess the effects of the above-mentioned factors taken together, on the incidence of marital violence, we undertook logistic analyses. This was done separately for long-term physical violence, long-term psychological violence, current physical violence, and current psychological violence, since these are somewhat overlapping categories. The dependent variables were defined as follows:

Long-term physical violence = 1 if violence was experienced; 0 otherwise

Long-term psychological violence = 1 if violence was experienced; 0 otherwise

Current physical violence = 1 if violence was experienced; 0 otherwise

Current psychological violence = 1 if violence was experienced; 0 otherwise

For assessing the correlates of violence, we included the following variables in our analysis: the household's per capita expenditure, rural/urban residence, the woman's age, spousal age difference, number of children, the woman's education, spousal education difference, the employment status of the woman and of her husband, the woman's property ownership, her access to social support,<sup>28</sup> her childhood exposure to marital violence, the husband's alcohol abuse, and his witnessing marital violence in childhood.<sup>29</sup>

The logistic results are presented in Tables 9 and 10. Both beta coefficients and odds ratios are given. The odds ratios have been derived from the logistic model.

As hypothesized, we find that women's ownership of property is significantly and negatively associated with both physical and psychological violence and both long-term

Table 7. *Current physical violence by selected characteristics (percentages)*

Characteristics	Total	Rural	Urban
No current physical violence	71.3	69.1	74.9
<i>Selected characteristics of households with current physical violence:</i>			
<i>Per capita expenditure (Rs./yr)</i>			
<6,000	58.6	62.5	42.1
6,000–11,999	21.8	18.6	31.6
12,000 & above	16.5	10.0	17.9
<i>Education (yrs)</i>			
Woman respondent			
<6	50.0	51.1	46.2
6–12 (secondary)	26.1	27.9	21.8
>12	23.2	17.9	25.4
Husband			
<6	35.6	34.4	41.7
6–12 (secondary)	29.3	30.2	27.6
>12	21.3	27.3	19.4
Spousal educational difference			
Wife = husband (No difference)	24.2	21.8	27.8
Wife < husband	35.9	49.3	17.0
Wife > husband	26.8	25.2	29.7
<i>Employment</i>			
Woman respondent			
Unemployed	29.0	30.3	27.0
Regular employment	26.3	31.6	21.4
Seasonal/Irregular employment	30.2	32.6	14.3
Husband			
Unemployed	64.0	83.3	46.2
Regular employment	25.5	27.1	23.4
Seasonal/Irregular employment	34.0	34.8	25.0
Spousal employment difference			
Wife = husband	27.9	33.3	22.0
Wife < husband	27.5	28.7	25.4
Wife > husband	66.7	66.7	66.7
<i>Ownership of property by women</i>			
None	38.9	39.1	38.6
Land only	20.8	26.3	0.0
House only	8.7	4.3	18.2
House & land	7.7	0.0	8.9
<i>Woman's social support</i>			
None	42.1	48.7	32.5
Natal family	14.9	11.4	23.3
Natal family & neighbors	23.0	30.8	14.6
<i>Woman witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>			
Did not witness	24.0	26.6	21.2
Witnessed	38.8	36.8	48.0

*(continued next page)*

Table 7—continued

Characteristics	Total	Rural	Urban
<i>Specific characteristics of husband</i>			
<i>Alcohol consumption</i>			
Teetotaler	22.5	20.6	25.3
Drinker	35.2	41.2	25.0
<i>Witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>			
Did not witness	22.2	23.3	20.8
Witnessed	46.6	44.8	54.5

Table 8. Current psychological violence by selected characteristics (percentages)

Characteristics	Total	Rural	Urban
No current psychological violence	50.8	49.6	52.6
<i>Selected characteristics of households with current psychological violence:</i>			
<i>Per capita expenditure (Rs./yr)</i>			
<6,000	73.7	76.3	63.2
6,000–11,999	42.4	41.3	45.6
12,000 & above	41.7	25.0	45.3
<i>Education (yrs)</i>			
<i>Woman respondent</i>			
<6	58.3	61.7	46.2
6–12 (secondary)	48.9	48.7	49.4
>12	44.4	42.9	45.1
<i>Husband</i>			
<6	56.2	55.7	58.3
6–12 (secondary)	49.3	50.3	47.1
>12	43.6	36.4	45.8
<i>Spousal educational difference</i>			
Wife = husband	46.2	42.3	51.9
Wife < husband	54.7	58.7	49.1
Wife > husband	47.5	50.4	42.2
<i>Employment</i>			
<i>Woman respondent</i>			
Unemployed	48.7	48.9	48.4
Regular	45.0	44.7	45.2
Seasonal/Irregular	58.5	60.9	42.9
<i>Husband</i>			
Unemployed	88.0	91.7	84.6
Regular	46.5	47.7	44.8
Seasonal/Irregular	50.0	52.2	25.0
<i>Spousal employment difference</i>			
Wife = husband	51.9	51.9	52.0
Wife < husband	47.7	49.3	44.9
Wife > husband	66.7	66.7	66.7
<i>Ownership of property by women</i>			
None	62.1	59.4	68.2
Land only	50.0	63.2	0.0
House only	24.6	17.0	40.9
House & land	18.5	0.0	21.4

(continued next page)

Table 8—*continued*

Characteristics	Total	Rural	Urban
<i>Woman's social support</i>			
None	65.1	68.7	60.0
Natal family	35.1	29.5	48.8
Natal family & neighbors	39.0	51.9	25.0
<i>Woman witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>			
Did not witness	41.4	39.2	43.8
Witnessed	66.2	65.8	68.0
<i>Specific characteristics of husband</i>			
Alcohol consumption by husband			
Teetotaler	30.8	31.6	29.7
Drinker	68.5	69.1	67.5
Witnessing father beating mother in childhood			
Did not witness	44.6	43.2	46.3
Witnessed	61.9	63.5	54.5

and current. This result holds over and above the effect of the other significant variables of note, such as per capita household expenditure, the woman's access to social support, the husband's employment status, and the husband witnessing marital violence in childhood. This means that the woman's independent ownership of an immoveable asset such as land or a house (but especially the latter) can substantially reduce the risk of both physical and psychological violence. The odds ratios also show substantially lower odds of women facing violence if they own a property relative to being propertyless. As discussed earlier, the ownership of immovable assets strengthens a woman's fall-back position and hence her bargaining power within marriage. This is likely to serve as a deterrent to the husband's violence. It is also likely to enhance her sense of self-worth and hence reduce her tolerance to violence. As we had noted, compared with propertyless women, a much larger proportion of propertied women who suffered violence left home, and a much smaller percentage returned.

Another factor that we found has a significant deterrent effect on marital violence is the social support a woman has, especially if it is from both the natal family and neighbors. Such support has a significant negative effect on the likelihood of long-term as well as current violence—both physical and psychological.

A household's *per capita* expenditure (an indicator of the household's income and wealth position) is also strongly and negatively associated with a woman's risk of both physical and

psychological violence—whether long-term or current. In addition, a strong negative relationship is found between violence and the husband's employment status. Any kind of job held by the husband, regular or irregular, compared with being unemployed, is associated with a lower risk of marital violence for the woman—physical and psychological, long-term and current. Presumably, employment enhances the husband's sense of self-worth, reduces his stress, and so reduces his proclivity toward violence. In contrast, the woman's own employment status does not appear to matter, except if she has a regular job: this lowers the risk of long-term physical violence. But seasonal/irregular work makes no significant difference. Also, as hypothesized, we find a positive association between a husband witnessing marital violence in childhood and abusing his wife both physically and psychologically, and both in the long-term and in the current period. These findings are consistent with other research on India and elsewhere, which too shows that the effect of men witnessing marital violence in childhood can carry over into their own married lives.<sup>30</sup>

These five factors—women's property status, her social support, the household's economic status, the husband's employment status, and his witnessing violence in childhood—are all consistently significant in relation to both long-term and current violence and both physical and psychological violence.

In addition, one factor which is significant for three of the four categories of violence, is

Table 9. Logistic analysis: women's experience of long-term violence

Variable	Any physical violence			Any psychological violence		
	Beta coefficient	Odds ratios	SE	Beta coefficient	Odds ratios	SE
<i>Per capita expenditure (Rs.lyr)</i>						
<6,000 (rc)						
6,000–11,999	–2.40***	0.09	0.34	–1.56***	0.21	0.40
12,000 & above	–2.27***	0.10	0.45	–1.31**	0.27	0.54
<i>Residence</i>						
Rural (rc)						
Urban	–0.06	0.94	0.33	0.13	1.14	0.38
<i>Age of woman respondent (yrs)</i>						
15–24 (rc)						
25–34	0.50	1.66	0.41	–0.17	0.84	0.48
35–49	–0.10	0.91	0.45	–0.23	0.80	0.51
<i>Spousal age difference (yrs)</i>						
<5 (rc)						
5–8	0.04	1.05	0.30	0.20	1.22	0.36
9 & above	–0.65*	0.52	0.36	–0.08	0.93	0.42
<i>Number of children</i>						
0 (rc)						
1–2	–0.86*	0.42	0.46	–0.22	0.81	0.54
3 & above	–0.96*	0.38	0.57	–1.40**	0.25	0.65
<i>Education of woman respondent (yrs)</i>						
<6 (rc)						
6–12	–0.40	0.67	0.38	0.07	1.16	0.46
>12	0.08	1.09	0.54	0.89	2.44	0.62
<i>Spousal educational difference (yrs)</i>						
Wife = husband (no difference) (rc)						
Wife < husband	0.17	1.18	0.33	0.54	1.89	0.38
Wife > husband	–0.48	0.63	0.31	0.29	1.34	0.34
<i>Employment of woman respondent</i>						
Unemployed (rc)						
Regular	–0.90**	0.41	0.39	–0.07	0.93	0.41
Seasonal/irregular	–0.27	0.76	0.39	0.36	1.44	0.48
<i>Employment of husband</i>						
Unemployed (rc)						
Regular	–2.23***	0.11	0.60	–2.02***	0.13	0.75
Seasonal/irregular	–2.24***	0.11	0.71	–1.77**	0.17	0.85
<i>Ownership of property by women</i>						
None (rc)						
Land only	–2.06***	0.13	0.62	–3.57***	0.03	0.62
House only	–2.42***	0.09	0.49	–5.14***	0.01	0.59
House & land	–3.01***	0.05	0.66	–5.47***	0.01	0.66
<i>Woman's social support</i>						
None (rc)						
Natal family	–0.87***	0.41	0.32	0.62	1.74	0.38
Natal family & neighbors	–0.90***	0.41	0.34	–1.60***	0.20	0.40

(continued next page)

Table 9—continued

Variable	Any physical violence			Any psychological violence		
	Beta coefficient	Odds ratios	SE	Beta coefficient	Odds ratios	SE
<i>Woman witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>						
Did not witness (rc)						
Witnessed	1.33***	3.56	0.33	-0.62	0.61	0.47
<i>Husband's alcohol consumption</i>						
Teetotaler (rc)						
Drinker	-0.47	0.62	0.30	1.47***	4.37	0.35
<i>Husband witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>						
Did not witness (rc)						
Witnessed	1.22***	3.39	0.32	0.80**	2.22	0.35
Number of cases		502			502	
-2 log likelihood		415.93			335.26	
Model chi-square		238.10			315.14	
McFadden's pseudo R <sup>2</sup>		0.3641			0.4845	

\* Significant at the 10% level.

\*\* Significant at the 5% level.

\*\*\* Significant at the 1% level. 'rc' reference category.

Table 10. Logistic analysis: women's experience of current violence

Variable	Any physical violence			Any psychological violence		
	Beta coefficient	Odds ratios	SE	Beta coefficient	Odds ratios	SE
<i>Per capita expenditure (Rs/yr)</i>						
<6,000 (rc)						
6,000-11,999	-1.75***	0.17	0.34	-1.70***	0.18	0.37
12,000 & above	-1.89***	0.15	0.48	-1.68***	0.18	0.51
<i>Residence</i>						
Rural (rc)						
Urban	0.38	1.46	0.34	0.19	1.21	0.35
<i>Age of woman respondent (yrs)</i>						
15-24 (rc)						
25-34	0.27	1.30	0.43	-0.18	0.83	0.45
35-49	0.03	1.03	0.47	-0.31	0.74	0.49
<i>Spousal age difference (yrs)</i>						
<5 (rc)						
5-8	-0.01	0.99	0.31	-0.25	0.78	0.32
9 & above	-0.86*	0.42	0.38	-0.70*	0.50	0.39
<i>Number of children</i>						
0 (rc)						
1-2	-0.28	0.76	0.50	-0.08	0.92	0.50
3 & above	-0.29	0.75	0.60	-0.52	0.59	0.62
<i>Education of woman respondent (yrs)</i>						
<6 (rc)						
6-12	-0.59	0.55	0.41	0.17	1.18	0.45
>12	0.36	1.43	0.57	0.79	1.98	0.61

(continued next page)

Table 10—continued

Variable	Any physical violence			Any psychological violence		
	Beta coefficient	Odds ratios	SE	Beta coefficient	Odds ratios	SE
<i>Spousal educational difference (yrs)</i>						
Wife = husband (No difference) (rc)						
Wife < husband	0.31	1.36	0.35	0.42	1.52	0.35
Wife > husband	-0.19	0.83	0.33	-0.08	0.92	0.32
<i>Employment of woman respondent</i>						
Unemployed (rc)						
Regular	-0.46	0.63	0.39	-0.36	0.70	0.40
Seasonal/irregular	-0.60	0.55	0.42	0.14	1.15	0.44
<i>Employment of husband</i>						
Unemployed (rc)						
Regular	-1.81***	0.16	0.61	-2.39***	0.09	0.73
Seasonal/irregular	-1.80**	0.17	0.73	-2.47***	0.08	0.84
<i>Ownership of property by women</i>						
None (rc)						
Land only	-0.94	0.39	0.62	-1.49***	0.23	0.55
House only	-1.87***	0.15	0.51	-2.61***	0.07	0.42
House & land	-2.92***	0.05	0.67	-3.18***	0.04	0.53
<i>Woman's social support</i>						
None (rc)						
Natal family	-1.20***	0.30	0.34	-0.48	0.62	0.34
Natal family & neighbors	-0.83*	0.41	0.35	-0.83***	0.44	0.34
<i>Woman witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>						
Did not witness (rc)						
Witnessed	1.21***	2.99	0.33	-0.47	0.62	0.37
<i>Husband's alcohol consumption</i>						
Teetotaler (rc)						
Drinker	-0.53	0.68	0.30	1.05***	2.87	0.29
<i>Husband witnessing father beating mother in childhood</i>						
Did not witness (rc)						
Witnessed	1.23***	3.43	0.34	1.02***	2.78	0.35
Number of cases	443			443		
-2 log likelihood	379.46			381.16		
Model chi-square	151.40			232.86		
McFadden's pseudo $R^2$	0.2852			0.3792		

\* Significant at the 10% level.

\*\* Significant at the 5% level.

\*\*\* Significant at the 1% level. 'rc' reference category.

when the woman is younger than her spouse by nine years or more. Here we find a significantly lower probability of all types of violence, except long-term psychological violence. As noted, this may be because the man expects less of a much younger wife, and so faults her less.

Other factors that are significant in relation to only one or two forms of violence are the number

of children the couple has and the woman having a regular job—both of which are negatively related to long-term physical violence; the wife witnessing marital violence in childhood which is positively linked with long-term and current physical violence; and the husband's alcohol consumption which is positively linked with long-term and current psychological violence.

Rural/urban residence, which the crosstabulations suggested might make a difference, is not significant in the multivariate analysis, nor is the age of the respondent or her educational level *per se*. In addition, we tested whether having a larger number of sons as opposed to just a larger number of children reduced women's risk of violence (in that sons might be more effective protectors of the mother, or might enhance the woman's worth in the husband's eyes). We found that although having two or more sons reduced the risk of psychological violence, it had no significant effect on physical violence, unlike what Rao (1997) and Bloch and Rao (2002) found, namely, that the presence of sons reduced the incidence of physical violence.<sup>31</sup> We also tested whether in-laws' satisfaction with dowry and the woman belonging to a matrilineal caste made a difference, but found no consistent results for either variable.<sup>32</sup>

## 8. CONCLUSION

Spousal abuse—physical or psychological—seriously undermines women's capability to function and to live the lives they value. Moreover, children witnessing marital violence grow to adulthood with diminished capabilities. Marital violence thus not only reduces well-being in and of itself, but also reduces the possibilities of improved well-being on other counts, as well as transfers the negative effects intergenerationally. This has implications not only for individual families but also for a country's overall development. Reducing the incidence of marital violence thus needs to be an important policy goal.

Although seldom couched in these terms or directly addressed by development policies, many countries have taken a range of measures to deal with marital violence, and no longer view it as a private matter. Women's movements and the international human rights movement have been focusing on this as a central issue, as have many NGOs and intergovernmental organizations.<sup>33</sup> India too has enacted laws which make domestic violence a criminal offence. It has also established All Women Police Stations, family counseling cells, and short-stay homes to help women, and several women's organizations provide shelters and support. But overall, the legal framework is still largely ineffective and the existing support structures insufficient.<sup>34</sup> Marital violence against women remains a substantially under-reported crime. Also women's

groups remain handicapped in the extent of help they can provide when the battered woman has no independent economic means.

Some have suggested a rights-based approach to combat marital violence, one that meshes formal resolutions and campaigns, state intervention, and grassroots activism. However, the specific parameters and effectiveness of any such approach are likely to require much more debate and working out within and across countries. In particular, the issue needs to be brought more centrally into the development debate to broaden the policy framework. Also, strategies need to be developed locally. A crucial element in such strategies would be strengthening women's property status. The analysis in this paper clearly shows that this can play a critical role in reducing women's risk of marital violence. While other factors such as social support and the husband's unemployment, which too we found were significant, have been identified by other studies as well, the link between violence and women's property status is the particular contribution of this paper.

Our findings clearly indicate that measures to improve women's access to immovable property such as housing and land are important not only for the well-recognized reasons of enhancing women's livelihood options and overall empowerment, but also for reducing their risk of marital violence. This adds another argument in support of recent campaigns to establish the "right to housing" and the "right to land" as basic human rights (UNCHR, 2003). In addition, it adds another policy dimension to the larger development concern with enhancing women and children's health and child welfare (see, e.g., Agarwal, 2004).

Moreover, women's property status could prove to be complementary to social support in that the ability of neighbors and gender-progressive groups to help a woman would be greater if she had a property support base of her own. Even owning a one-room tenement would provide her with somewhere to go. There is a case here for providing such purchase options in new housing complexes, whether set up by the government or by private developers. Many middle class women or their families in India, for instance, could better afford these than the larger apartments typically available. Indeed, the virtual absence of such lower cost options even in large Indian cities has received surprisingly little attention.<sup>35</sup>

Also, the larger issue of enhancing women's property status would need to be tackled.



How this might be done and the obstructing factors overcome, is outside the purview of this paper.<sup>36</sup> But what our results clearly establish is that this factor cannot be ignored

in any *effective* strategy for reducing marital violence and so contributing to capability enhancement, as an essential constituent of development.

## NOTES

1. See also, Dijkstra and Hanmer (2000), who point to the need to expand the measures of human development, by including additional indicators such as violence against women and Nussbaum (2003) who lists "bodily integrity" (freedom from assault, domestic violence, etc.) as a central human capability that needs to be counted as a fundamental entitlement.
2. While marital violence is not limited to violence against women, the substantial part of it is violence of husbands against wives: see, e.g., Hasan and Menon (2004).
3. Harper and Parsons (1997), Jaswal (2000), Maman, Campbell, Sweat, and Gielen (2000), Martin, Tsui, Maitra, and Marinshaw (1999), Population Reports (1999), and WHO (2000, 2002).
4. Browne, Salomon, and Bussuk (1999), Lloyd and Taluc (1999), and Dobash and Dobash (1992).
5. Asling-Monemi, Pena, Ellsberg, and Persson (2003), Jejeebhoy (1998a), Dannenberg *et al.* (1995), and Harper and Parsons (1997).
6. Asling-Monemi *et al.* (2003), Edleson (1999), Jaffe, Wolfe, and Wilson (1990), and McCloskey, Figueredo, and Koss (1995).
7. Morrison and Orlando (1999) and Carrillo (1992). Carrillo notes that the Australian Committee on violence calculated that the cost of refuge accommodation for victims of domestic violence in 1986–87 was US\$27.6 million.
8. On capabilities see Sen's many writings, including Sen, A.K. (1999, 2003).
9. For such broad sweep approaches, see Heise (1998), Heise, Raikes, Watts, and Zwi (1994), Levinson (1989), Straus (1980), and Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980).
10. For India, see Bloch and Rao (2002), Duvvury and Allendorf (2001), INCLEN (2000), Jejeebhoy (1998a, 1998b), Kumar, Gupta, and Abraham (2002), Martin *et al.* (1999, 2002), Rao (1997), Sen P. (1999), Verma and Collumbien (2003), and Visaria (1999).
11. Jejeebhoy (1998b), Dave and Solanki (2000), and Schuler, Hashemi, and Badal (1998).
12. INCLEN (2000) reports an incidence of 52% of any kind of lifetime violence (physical or psychological) and 40% for physical violence. Other Indian studies on physical violence report an incidence ranging from 48% (Jejeebhoy, 1998b) to 23% (Bloch & Rao, 2002).
13. The rural–urban distinction is based on standard Indian census definitions.
14. Of the initial 546 eligible women identified, only 8.1% refused to be interviewed (the rural and urban percentage was about the same). Also, in some cases of joint families with more than one couple, more than one woman was interviewed from the same household.
15. There may be some underestimation here, since not all husbands may reveal to their wives that they witnessed their fathers beat their mothers.
16. Consumption expenditure data were obtained from the men, since a fair amount of household expenditure is handled by men, including often paying the children's school fees and undertaking various forms of market purchase. Men do not necessarily inform their wives of all they spend on, or how much, while women's purchases are mostly in the men's knowledge. Male respondents are therefore better placed to give a more complete picture of household expenditure.
17. According to the 1998–99 National Family Health Survey, some 50% of women in Kerala are sterilized. Our data do not have this information.
18. Again, the earlier caveat applies, namely, that some of the households included within the matrilineal grouping may not have been matrilineal in southern Kerala.
19. Unfortunately, we have no information on the source of women's property, or on men's property status. But the household's economic status, which the survey did measure, can be taken as a broad (although admittedly imperfect) proxy for the man's property

status. In an ongoing follow-up survey by us, we are now gathering information on the woman's source of property as well as on the man's property status.

20. Social support was measured by asking the woman whether there were people in her neighborhood or outside whom she could count on and talk to about her problems; and, if yes, to whom? Very few reported support from those other than the natal family or neighbors, and only one reported help from "neighbor only".

21. Jejeebhoy (1998b) found that women's employment status made no significant difference to marital violence, whereas Dave and Solanki (2000) found that women's paid employment increased the likelihood of marital violence, even though it also increased a woman's ability to leave an abusive husband.

22. Several studies find that social support can deter violence, and the natal family can also provide an exit option: see for example, Dave and Solanki (2000) and Ellsberg, Pena, Herrera, Liljestrand, and Winkvist (2000).

23. See, for example, Hilberman and Munson (1977-78) and Groves, Zuckerman, Marans, and Cohen (1993). Groves *et al.* summarize several studies which show that a much higher percentage of battered women report witnessing marital battering in their childhood than do nonbattered women.

24. INCLLEN (2000) and Tauchen, White, and Long (1991) also find a negative relationship between marital violence and the household's economic class.

25. Duvvury and Allendorf (2001) also find this in their bivariate tabulations for all of India.

26. In the urban sample, the link between psychological violence and the type of job the husband holds is difficult to assess since very few hold nonregular jobs.

27. Duvvury and Allendorf (2001) also find greater violence when the woman is employed and the man is unemployed, while Kumar *et al.* (2002) find greater violence linked with male unemployment more generally.

28. The social support questions were not linked specifically to support relating to spousal violence. Hence, social support can be taken as an exogenous variable here.

29. The following variables were excluded due to their close relationship with one or more of the included explanatory variables: number of household consumer goods with the household's *per capita* expenditure; duration of marriage with the woman respondent's age and number of children; the husband's education with the wife's education; spousal difference in employment status with the wife's employment status; and matrilineal caste grouping with women's property ownership (also matriliney, as noted, was not a reliable indicator in and of itself).

30. See INCLLEN (2000), Rao (1997) and Jaffe *et al.* (1990).

31. Jejeebhoy (1998b), however, found that the number of sons made no significant difference.

32. Rao (1997) in contrast found that satisfaction with dowry was significant in explaining the risk of physical violence. The earlier mentioned follow-up survey by us, in which we are gathering information on the source of the woman's property, of which dowry is one, would be able to throw further light on this, in our future analysis.

33. UNICEF (2000), UNIFEM (2000), and UNCHR (2003). See also Panda (2003).

34. Singh (1994), Lawyers Collective Women's Rights Initiative (2000), Agnes (1992), and Misra (1999).

35. We are grateful to Indira Rajaraman for calling our attention to the dearth of such housing options.

36. For leads, see especially, Agarwal (1994).

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