Introduction: Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a significant public health problem with harmful consequences for affected individuals. We report the prevalence of physical and sexual violence and justification of this violence by ever-married women. Methodology: We conducted this cross-sectional study on 500 women in an urban area of a metropolitan city of North India. We used a validated questionnaire to estimate the prevalence and forms of IPV and proportion of women who justify the violence they face. We used logistic regression to determine the association of violence with certain sociodemographic factors. We also studied the association of justification of violence with these sociodemographic factors.

Results: Ninety-one (18.2%) women had “ever” experienced physical violence. Alcohol consumption by the husband, initial place of residence, and controlling behavior by the husband were significantly associated with physical violence. Fifty two (10.4%) had “ever” experienced sexual violence. Higher education status of the women, justification of violence by the women, controlling behaviour and alcohol consumption by the husbands was significantly associated with sexual violence. Women who had faced any one form of violence (physical or sexual) were at higher risk of facing the other form as well. One hundred and eight two women (36.2%) justified violence by husbands. Women who faced controlling behavior, experienced sexual violence, were poorly educated, or were married for more than 10 years were more likely to justify any form of IPV they faced.

Conclusion: Alcohol consumption, controlling behavior, and justification of violence are important behavioral predictors for physical or sexual violence. We recommend behavioral change communication strategies targeted at male partners and also the families to curb the menace of IPV.

Keywords: Justification, physical, sexual, violence, women

Original Article

Do Women Justify the Violence They Face? Intimate Partner Violence among Married Women

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Introduction: Violence against women is a global public health problem and negatively impacts women, families, and communities. Worldwide, almost one-third (30%) of all women who have been in a heterosexual relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner. The prevalence is highest in the WHO African, Eastern Mediterranean, and South-East Asia Regions, where approximately 37% of ever-partnered women reported having experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) at some point in their lives.[1] According to a systematic review on domestic violence in India, the median and range of lifetime estimates of physical and sexual abuse were 29% (2%–99%) and 12% (0%–75%).[2]

Women who have experienced partner violence have higher rates of several important health problems and risk behaviors, compared to women who have not experienced partner violence. They are 16% more likely...
to have a low-birth-weight baby; more than twice as likely to have an abortion; twice as likely to experience depression; and 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV, compared to women who do not suffer partner violence.\[1\]

In India, although data on the prevalence of IPV and its and associated factors are widely available, fewer studies have explored the association of IPV with justification of violence.\[3,4\] This study was planned in an urban area of a metropolitan city of North India to assess the prevalence and sociodemographic determinants of physical and sexual violence faced by married women and its association with justification of violence by the wives.

**METHODOLOGY**

We carried out this cross-sectional study among married women in Delhi in 2014. Five hundred women were included in this study and we used the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-3 questionnaire to study physical and sexual violence in the study population.\[5\] Ethics approval for the study was obtained from Institutional Ethical Committee. Details about the study settings, sample size, and data collection have been reported previously.\[6\]

There were seven questions on physical violence and two questions on sexual violence. Questions related to physical violence were being slapped or having something thrown at you that could hurt you; being pushed or shoved; being hit with a fist or something else that could hurt; being kicked; being dragged or beaten up; being choked or burnt on purpose; and/or being threatened with, or actually, having a gun, knife, or other weapon used on you.\[1\]

Questions related to sexual violence were being physically forced to have sexual intercourse when you did not want to and/or being forced to do something sexual that you found humiliating or degrading.\[1\] An affirmative response to any of these questions was considered an indication of physical/sexual violence. Seven questions were asked to assess justification of partner violence, and an affirmative response to anyone was considered an indication of justification of violence.

Proportion of women experiencing physical or sexual violence and justifying violence was calculated. Logistic regression was used to assess association of physical/sexual violence and justification of violence by women with various sociodemographic factors. Those sociodemographic variables which were found to have significant association with the outcome variable in bivariable analysis \((P < 0.1)\) were included in multivariable analysis. Adjusted odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence interval (CI) were calculated. Data were analyzed using R software version 3.5.1 (R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria).

**RESULTS**

Table 1 depicts the baseline characteristics of the participants. Majority of women were <40 years of age (76%), with minimum 10 years of education (73.8%), and married for more than 10 years (60.2%). Only 6.8% of the women were employed. All women were presently residing in an urban area of a metropolitan city; however, on questioning about where they originally resided and received education, 230 (46%)

### Table 1: Baseline characteristics of the participants \((n=500)\)

| Characteristic                        | \(n\) (%) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| **Age**                               |           |
| 15-19                                 | 5 (1)     |
| 20-29                                 | 158 (31.6)|
| 30-39                                 | 217 (43.4)|
| 40-49                                 | 98 (19.6) |
| No response                           | 22 (4.4)  |
| **Education**                         |           |
| Illiterate                            | 15 (3)    |
| <5 years                              | 22 (4.4)  |
| 5-7 years                             | 20 (4)    |
| 8-9 years                             | 39 (7.8)  |
| 10-11 years                           | 123 (24.6)|
| 12 and above                          | 246 (49.2)|
| No response                           | 35 (7)    |
| **Residence**                         |           |
| Rural                                 | 230 (46)  |
| Urban                                 | 221 (44.2)|
| No response                           | 49 (9.8)  |
| **Duration of marriage**              |           |
| 0-4 years                             | 40 (8)    |
| 5-9 years                             | 85 (17)   |
| 10 or more years                      | 301 (60.2)|
| No response                           | 74 (14.8) |
| **Working status**                    |           |
| Yes                                   | 34 (6.8)  |
| No                                    | 369 (73.8)|
| No response                           | 97 (19.4) |
| **Alcohol consumption by husband**    |           |
| Regularly                             | 11 (2.2)  |
| Sometimes                             | 123 (24.6)|
| No                                    | 266 (53.2)|
| No response                           | 100 (20.0)|
| **Controlling behavior**              |           |
| Yes                                   | 216 (43.2)|
| No                                    | 260 (52)  |
| No response                           | 24 (4.8)  |
were from a rural background and 221 (44.2%) were from an urban background. Among factors related to husband/partner, 134 (26.8%) husbands consumed alcohol and 216 (43.2%) exerted controlling behavior on their spouses.

Physical violence
In our study 18.2% of women had “ever” experienced physical violence. Of these, 93.4% experienced it “sometimes” and 6.6% experienced it “often.” Most frequently reported type of physical violence was slap (13.6%), followed by push/throwing something at the partner (8.2%). Extreme violence such as choking or attacking with a weapon was reported by only 1% women [Table 2]. Women experiencing sexual violence were more likely to experience physical violence (adjusted OR [aOR] = 4.97 [2.4–10.28]). Furthermore, originally being from an urban area (aOR = 1.97 [1.07–3.63]), alcohol consumption by husbands (aOR = 3.20 [1.73–5.92]) and controlling behavior in the husband (aOR = 2.75 [1.46–5.79]) were found to be significantly associated with physical violence [Table 3].

Sexual violence
10.4% had “ever” experienced sexual violence. Of these, 92.3% experienced it “sometimes” and 7.7% experienced it “often.” Among the study participants 9% were forced into sexual intercourse by the spouses. Women experiencing physical violence were more likely to experience sexual violence (aOR = 4.53 [2.12–9.69]). Higher education status of women (aOR = 3.46 [1.51–7.93]), alcohol consumption by husband (aOR = 4.7 [2.16–10.21]), and controlling behavior by husband (aOR = 4.42 [1.84–10.62]) were also found to be significantly associated with sexual violence [Table 4].

Justification of violence
36.2% of women justified violence by husbands/partners and 57.6% of women believed violence was never justified, while there was no response from 31 (6.2%) women. As shown in Table 5, major reasons where the women believed that violence was justified were “if he suspects her of being unfaithful” (22.6%), “if she neglects the house or children” (13.6%), and “if she shows disrespect for her in‑laws” (13.6%). Bivariable analysis revealed that women with higher education were less likely to justify violence (OR = 0.6 [0.41–0.88]), while women married for a longer time (OR = 1.76 [1.12–2.77]), women with controlling husbands (OR = 3.11 [2.1–4.6]), and women experiencing sexual violence (OR = 2.2 [1.21–3.98]) were more likely to justify violence. Controlling husbands (OR = 2.74 [1.71–4.37]) was the only factor significantly associated with justification of violence in multivariable analysis [Table 6].

Discussion
In our study, 18.2% of women experienced physical violence and 10.4% experienced sexual violence. Studies carried out in India in different states have reported varying prevalence of physical or sexual violence by intimate partner. In a study conducted among educated women in urban Karnataka state, physical violence and sexual violence by intimate partner were reported to be 22% and 11.5%. A study from an urban locality of Pune reported spousal physical and sexual violence to be 30.4% and 8.1%, respectively. Another study on spousal domestic violence from urban slums of Mumbai reported a much higher prevalence of physical violence (63.4%) and sexual violence (23.8%). According to the NFHS-4 survey, 30% of ever-married women have experienced spousal physical violence and 6.6% sexual violence. Studies have reported “slap” as the commonest physical violence women face and being forced to have sex by the husbands as the commonest sexual violence faced. We report similar findings in our study too.

As education is widely believed to be a female empowerment tool, it was interesting to note that sexual

| Type of violence used | Yes, n (%) | No, n (%) | Not answered, n (%) |
|-----------------------|------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Physical violence     |            |           |                     |
| Slap                  | 68 (13.6)  | 377 (75.4)| 55 (11)             |
| Twist your arm        | 30 (6)     | 399 (79.8)| 71 (14.2)           |
| Push you shake or throw something at you | 41 (8.2) | 379 (75.8) | 80 (16) |
| Punch you with his fist or with something that could hurt you | 28 (5.6) | 392 (78.4) | 80 (16) |
| Kick you, drag you or beat you up | 27 (5.4) | 389 (77.8) | 84 (16.8) |
| Try to choke you or burn you on purpose | 11 (2.2) | 402 (80.4) | 87 (17.4) |
| Threaten or attack you with a knife, gun, or any other weapon | 5 (1) | 401 (80.2) | 94 (18.8) |
| Sexual violence       |            |           |                     |
| Physically force you to have sexual intercourse with him even when you did not want to | 45 (9) | 356 (71.2) | 99 (18) |
| Force you to perform any sexual acts you did not want to | 18 (3.6) | 367 (73.4) | 115 (23) |
violence was found significantly higher among more educated women in our study. A study on the role of women’s education and proximate educational context on IPV[11] observed that women with more education than their husbands were more likely than those with educational parity to report recent IPV. In a national survey in South Africa,[12] women with no education were found to be much less likely to experience sexual violence than those with higher level of education. A possible explanation would be men trying to exert their supremacy and control over women in these ways. It is also possible that the more educated women in our study sample reported sexual violence which the lesser-educated women accepted as a part of a normal marital relationship.

Age of women and duration of marriage were not associated with either physical or sexual violence in our study. This is contrary to the findings in the Karnataka study[6] where physical assault was high in 30–50 years and both physical and sexual assault increased with duration of marriage. However, in a study from Central India,[13] longer marital duration (15 or more years) was significantly negatively associated with risk of recent sexual coercion.

A common predictor for both physical and sexual violence found in our study was alcohol consumption by husbands. This is consistent with the findings from previous literature on intimate partner physical or sexual violence.[14‑16] Woman with a controlling partner was another common predictor to physical and sexual violence in our study. Similar findings have been reported in studies from different regions.[17,18]

In the present study, 36% of the women justified spousal violence. From nationwide surveys in a neighboring country, Bangladesh,[16] 31.3%, 31.9%, and 28.7% of women justified the physical violence they face when surveyed in 2007, 2011, and 2014, respectively. In a country-wide survey held in Zimbabwe,[19] more than half of the women justified wife-beating. In our study, those who suffered physical or sexual violence were more likely to justify violence, with sexual violence being significantly associated with justification of violence. According to the NHFS-4 survey, more than 40% of the women who agree with 3–7 of the specified reasons for wife-beating have experienced spousal violence, compared with 23% of women who agree with no

| Variable                          | n   | Physical violence, n (%) | OR (95% CI) | P   | aOR (95% CI) | P   |
|-----------------------------------|-----|--------------------------|-------------|-----|-------------|-----|
| Age (years)                       |     |                          |             |     |             |     |
| <30                               | 153 | 28 (18.30)               | Reference   | 0.516 |
| ≥30                               | 287 | 60 (20.90)               | 1.18 (0.72-1.94) |     |
| Residence                         |     |                          |             |     |             |     |
| Rural                             | 207 | 34 (16.43)               | Reference   | 0.087 |
| Urban                             | 212 | 49 (23.11)               | 1.53 (0.94-2.49) | 1.97 (1.07-3.63) |
| Education                         |     |                          |             |     |             |     |
| <12                               | 195 | 38 (19.49)               | Reference   | 0.793 |
| ≥12                               | 239 | 49 (20.50)               | 1.07 (0.66-1.71) |     |
| Duration of marriage (years)      |     |                          |             |     |             |     |
| <10                               | 118 | 29 (24.58)               | Reference   | 0.181 |
| ≥10                               | 284 | 53 (18.66)               | 0.7 (0.42-1.18) |     |
| Working status                    |     |                          |             |     |             |     |
| No                                | 347 | 67 (19.31)               | Reference   | 0.995 |
| Yes                               | 31  | 6 (19.35)                | 1.003 (0.40-2.54) |     |
| Alcohol                           |     |                          |             |     |             |     |
| No                                | 263 | 32 (12.17)               | Reference   | <0.001 |
| Yes                               | 131 | 46 (35.11)               | 3.91 (2.33-6.54) | 3.20 (1.73-5.92) |
| Controlling behavior              |     |                          |             |     |             |     |
| No                                | 238 | 33 (13.87)               | Reference   | <0.001 |
| Yes                               | 210 | 56 (26.67)               | 2.26 (1.4-3.64) | 2.75 (1.46-5.19) |
| Violence justified                |     |                          |             |     |             |     |
| No                                | 273 | 49 (17.95)               | Reference   | 0.257 |
| Yes                               | 170 | 38 (22.35)               | 1.32 (0.82-2.12) |     |
| Sexual violence                   |     |                          |             |     |             |     |
| No                                | 349 | 48 (13.75)               | Reference   | Reference |
| Yes                               | 51  | 30 (58.82)               | 8.96 (4.75-16.91) | <0.001 |

OR: Odds ratio, aOR: Adjusted OR, CI: Confidence interval

[11] Joshi, et al.: Intimate partner violence among married women
reason for wife-beating. Similarly, a study from the Republic of Georgia\textsuperscript{[20]} reported a low (4\%) lifetime prevalence of IPV; however, these women were two to four times more likely to justify IPV.

Most frequent reason reported in our study for justification of violence was “suspecting spouse to be unfaithful.” This is comparable to the findings from a study conducted among married women in Himachal Pradesh,\textsuperscript{[21]} where most women were likely to agree with this reason for justification of violence. In the study from Zimbabwe,\textsuperscript{[17]} reasons for justification were if a wife argued with her spouse (36\%), neglected her children (33\%), or went out without telling her spouse (30\%). In a study from Nigeria\textsuperscript{[22]} on domestic violence, significantly higher proportion of rural women believed that going out without telling their partners or neglecting to care for their children could justify violence, while a significantly higher proportion of urban women believed that refusing sex could justify domestic violence. “Neglecting children” was a common reason for justification in our study too as was “disrespect toward in-laws.”

Poorly educated women, those with longer duration of marriage, and controlling husbands were significantly more likely to justify violence in the present study. Likewise, in nationwide surveys in Bangladesh,\textsuperscript{[16]} the

### Table 4: Sexual violence and associated factors

| Variable                        | n  | Sexual violence, n (%) | OR (95\% CI) | P      | aOR (95\% CI) | P      |
|---------------------------------|----|------------------------|--------------|--------|--------------|--------|
| Age (years)                     |    |                        |              |        |              |        |
| <30                             | 146| 13 (8.90)              | Reference    | 0.097  | Reference    | 0.117  |
| ≥30                             | 252| 37 (14.68)             | 1.76 (0.90-3.43) | 0.099  | 1.92 (0.85-4.35) | 0.176  |
| Residence                       |    |                        |              |        |              |        |
| Rural                           | 183| 22 (12.02)             | Reference    | 0.702  |              |        |
| Urban                           | 195| 26 (13.33)             | 1.13 (0.61-2.07) | 0.919  |              |        |
| Education                       |    |                        |              |        |              |        |
| <12                             | 167| 15 (8.98)              | Reference    | 0.096  | Reference    | 0.003  |
| ≥12                             | 226| 33 (14.60)             | 1.73 (0.91-3.31) | 0.049  | 3.46 (1.51-7.93) | 0.001  |
| Duration of marriage (years)    |    |                        |              |        |              |        |
| <10                             | 114| 13 (11.40)             | Reference    | 0.689  |              |        |
| ≥10                             | 256| 33 (12.89)             | 1.15 (0.58-2.28) | 0.811  |              |        |
| Working status                  |    |                        |              |        |              |        |
| No                              | 318| 41 (12.89)             | Reference    | 0.246  |              |        |
| Yes                             | 29 | 6 (20.69)              | 1.76 (0.68-4.59) | 0.811  |              |        |
| Alcohol                         |    |                        |              |        |              |        |
| No                              | 264| 18 (6.81)              | Reference    | <0.001 | Reference    | <0.001 |
| Yes                             | 125| 32 (25.60)             | 4.7 (2.52-8.78) | 0.388  | 4.7 (2.16-10.21) | 0.006  |
| Controlling behavior            |    |                        |              |        |              |        |
| No                              | 214| 13 (6.07)              | Reference    | <0.001 | Reference    | <0.001 |
| Yes                             | 191| 38 (19.90)             | 3.84 (1.98-7.46) | 0.009  | 4.42 (1.84-10.62) | 0.088  |
| Violence justified              |    |                        |              |        |              |        |
| No                              | 247| 23 (9.31)              | Reference    | 0.009  | Reference    | 0.088  |
| Yes                             | 152| 28 (18.42)             | 2.2 (1.21-3.98) | 0.275  | 1.92 (0.91-4.05) | 0.117  |
| Physical violence               |    |                        |              |        |              |        |
| No                              | 322| 21 (6.52)              | Reference    | <0.001 | Reference    | <0.001 |
| Yes                             | 78 | 30 (38.46)             | 8.96 (4.75-16.91) | 0.001  | 4.53 (2.12-9.69) | 0.001  |

OR: Odds ratio, aOR: Adjusted OR, CI: Confidence interval

### Table 5: Reasons for justification of violence (n=500)

| Reasons                                      | Yes, n (%) | No, n (%) | No response, n (%) |
|----------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|--------------------|
| If the wife goes out without telling him     | 13 (2.6)   | 422 (84.4) | 65 (13)            |
| If she neglects the house or children        | 68 (13.6)  | 330 (66)  | 102 (20.4)         |
| If she argues with him                       | 43 (8.6)   | 342 (68.4) | 115 (23)           |
| If she refuses to have sex with him          | 22 (4.4)   | 354 (70.8) | 124 (24.8)         |
| If she does not cook the food properly       | 30 (6)     | 352 (70.4) | 118 (23.6)         |
| If he suspects her of being unfaithful       | 113 (22.6) | 224 (44.8) | 163 (32.6)         |
| If she shows disrespect for her in-laws      | 68 (13.6)  | 296 (59.2) | 136 (27.2)         |
most vulnerable households were characterized by low income, illiteracy, and child marriage, where women tend to accept their fate of being beaten by their husband/partner. In the study from Zimbabwe,[17] those women who took household decisions jointly with their partners were less likely to say that wife-beating is justified. These findings suggest that the acceptance of spousal abuse is influenced by the notions of traditional gender roles that women are expected to adhere to in a patriarchal society.

**CONCLUSION**

In the study, 18.2% of women experienced physical violence and 10.4% sexual violence while 36.2% of women justified violence by husbands. Factors significantly associated with physical violence were being from urban area, alcohol consumption, and controlling behavior by the husband. Factors significantly associated with sexual violence were higher education status, alcohol consumption, and controlling behavior by the husband and justification of violence by women. Lower education status, duration of marriage, controlling husbands, and sexual violence were associated with justification of violence. Women experiencing physical or sexual violence are more likely to experience other forms of violence. Behavioral, change, communication strategies targeted toward partners and the family are necessitated to curb the menace of IPV.

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**Conflicts of interest**
There are no conflicts of interest.

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**Table 6: Justification of violence and associated factors**

| Variable                   | n   | Violence justified, n (%) | OR (95% CI) | P   | aOR (95% CI) | P   |
|-----------------------------|-----|--------------------------|-------------|-----|--------------|-----|
| **Age (years)**             |     |                          |             |     |              |     |
| <30                         | 157 | 54 (34.39)               | Reference   | 0.226 |              |     |
| ≥30                         | 296 | 119 (40.20)              | 1.28 (0.86-1.92) | 0.291 |              |     |
| **Residence**               |     |                          |             |     |              |     |
| Rural                       | 223 | 86 (38.57)               | Reference   | 0.918 |              |     |
| Urban                       | 210 | 82 (39.05)               | 1.02 (0.69-1.5) | 0.023 |              |     |
| **Education**               |     |                          |             |     |              |     |
| <12                         | 208 | 93 (44.71)               | Reference   | 0.267 |              |     |
| ≥12                         | 241 | 79 (32.78)               | 0.6 (0.41-0.88) | 0.01 | 0.76 (0.47-1.23) | 0.38 |
| **Duration of marriage (years)** |     |                          |             |     |              |     |
| <10                         | 122 | 36 (29.51)               | Reference   | 0.015 |              | 0.093 |
| ≥10                         | 290 | 123 (42.41)              | 1.76 (1.12-2.77) | 0.01 | 1.55 (0.93-2.57) | 0.01 |
| **Working status**          |     |                          |             |     |              |     |
| No                          | 357 | 134 (37.53)              | Reference   | 0.1   |              |     |
| Yes                         | 32  | 15 (46.88)               | 1.47 (0.71-3.04) | 0.67 |              |     |
| **Alcohol**                 |     |                          |             |     |              |     |
| No                          | 260 | 102 (39.23)              | Reference   | 0.593 |              |     |
| Yes                         | 129 | 47 (36.43)               | 0.89 (0.57-1.37) | 0.08 |              |     |
| **Controlling behavior**    |     |                          |             |     |              |     |
| No                          | 245 | 64 (26.12)               | Reference   | <0.001 | Reference   | <0.001 |
| Yes                         | 212 | 111 (52.36)              | 3.11 (2.1-4.6) | 2.74 (1.71-4.37) | 0.01 |
| **Physical violence**       |     |                          |             |     |              |     |
| No                          | 356 | 132 (37.08)              | Reference   | 0.257 |              |     |
| Yes                         | 87  | 38 (43.68)               | 1.32 (0.82-2.12) | 0.06 |              |     |
| **Sexual violence**         |     |                          |             |     |              |     |
| No                          | 348 | 124 (35.63)              | Reference   | 0.009 |              | 0.137 |
| Yes                         | 51  | 28 (54.90)               | 2.2 (1.21-3.98) | 1.67 (0.85-3.3) | 0.08 |

OR: Odds ratio, aOR: Adjusted OR, CI: Confidence interval
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