

Nonviolent husbands in a violent setting: An exploration of “positive deviants” in Bihar (India)

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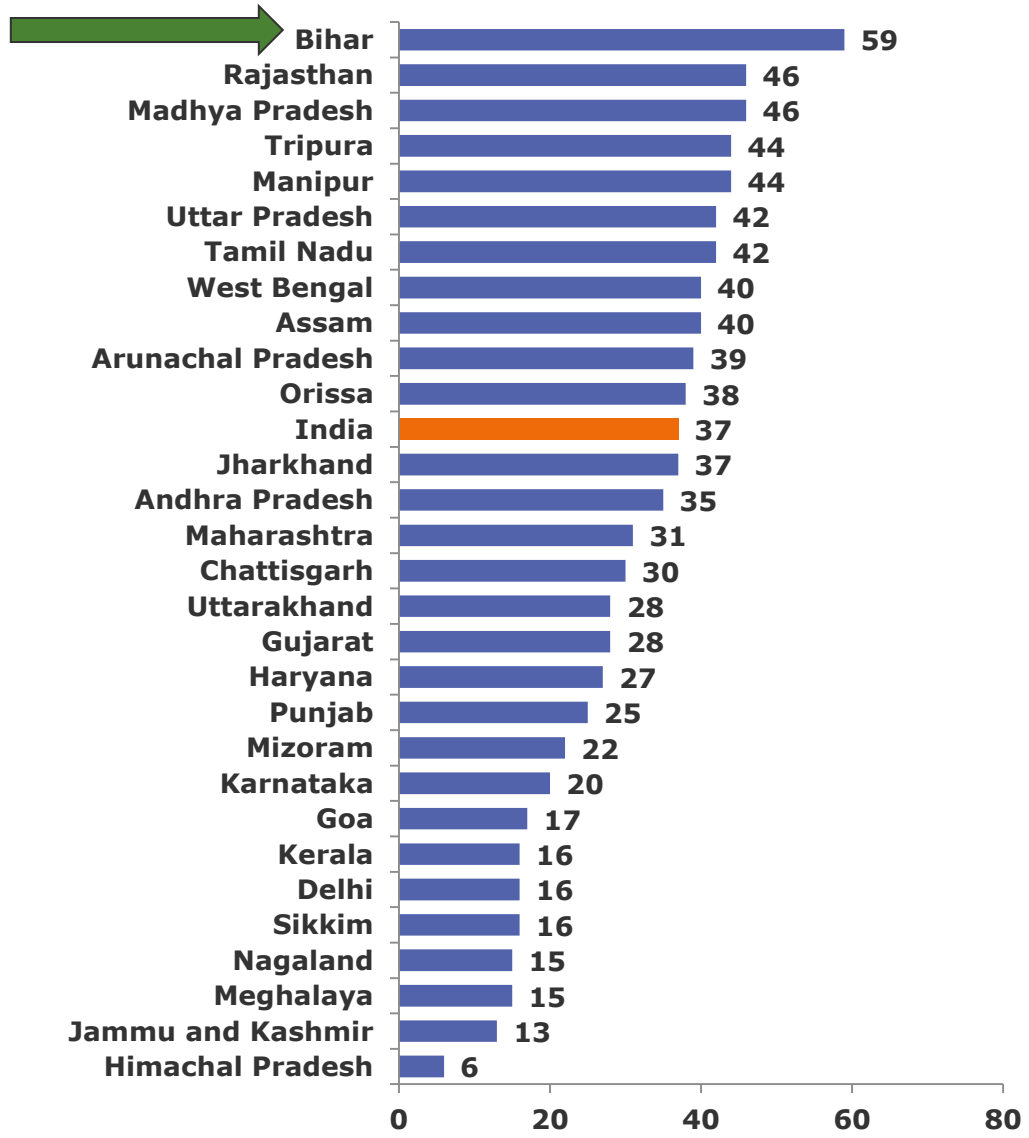
Context

Marital violence is widespread and widely justified in India, experienced by 37% of all women

Marital violence is most widely experienced in the state of Bihar where:

- 59% of women aged 15-49 had experienced any emotional, physical or sexual violence in marriage, and 57% had physical or sexual violence
- Almost three in five women and men alike held attitudes justifying marital violence

Reference: IIPS and Macro International (2007)



Context

- Few studies in India that focus on men's perspectives; available studies suggest broad structural or sociodemographic risk factors (poverty, limited education, early marriage, large family size, witnessing or experiencing violence while growing up, notions of masculinity)
- Gaps remain in understanding the characteristics and motivations of “positive deviants”

References: Martin, Tsui, Maitra et al., 1999; Verma and Collumbien, 2003; Verma, Pulerwitx, Mahendra et al., 2008

Objective

Drawing on data obtained from a small in-depth qualitative study in a setting that is highly gender-stratified and in which marital violence is widespread, our objective is to:

- **Better understand the factors associated with positive deviance, by comparing violent and nonviolent husbands, and assessing influences at multiple levels—individual, family, peer and community -- that set nonviolent men apart from their violent counterparts**

Setting, study design, and key variables

Setting and study design

- Study conducted in 2012
- 6 randomly selected villages of Patna district (one of 32 districts of Bihar and housing the state capital), two sub-districts
- FGDs, short questionnaire for FGD participants (married women), IDIs with selected husbands



Study design

- FGDs with unmarried girls and boys (N=5), married young women and men (age 15-24, N=8), adult young women and men (age 25-50) (N=8)
- Screening form administered to married women in FGDs (N=82) to identify those experiencing marital violence and consent for approaching the husband
- If consent provided, husbands were approached, and IDIs conducted with selected available and consenting husbands (N=21) of women reporting violence (N=11) and no violence (N=10)

IDI Guide: themes covered

- **At individual level: decision-making role in the family, household division of labour, alcohol consumption (before marriage and now), perceptions about women's rights, qualities of a 'real' man and women, and attitudes about the acceptability of marital violence**
- **At family level: growing up experiences and role of parents; parental expectations for their son; nature of socialisation, witnessing or experiencing parental violence**
- **At peer level: size of peer network while growing up and now; experience of peer pressure; activities with peers**
- **At community-level: pervasiveness of community violence while the respondent was growing up and now; participation in community violence; perceptions about the prestige derived from the community because of his violent or nonviolent practices**

Reference: Heise 1998

Findings

Profile

- While most husbands had been to school and about half had completed high school, 33 of 82 women screened had never been to school
- Most husbands engaged in cultivation, agricultural or non-agricultural wage work; women mostly in unpaid work
- Marriages of all were arranged by parents and family elders
- Almost all met their wife for the first time at the wedding
- All reported similar parental expectations (career, education...)
- Both groups about as likely to have witnessed parental violence (but a few NV husbands expressed distress when they so witnessed)
- 63 of 82 women screened reported physical or sexual violence; 24 of 36 husbands contacted reported perpetration of physical or sexual violence

A. Individual level: attitudes and practices

Authority and rights of men and women

NV husbands far more likely than V husbands to believe in equal rights:

Yes, he has more authority. The man is the head of the house. The woman is brought in at the second position. She has to stay under his control for it is because of him that she gets all the three things, namely, respect, safety and good treatment. The man also has more authority because he belongs to that village and the woman is brought from another (her natal) village. Besides, the man earns and fulfils all the household requirements. Because of these reasons, he has more authority.... I feel it is right for the man to exercise greater authority because he earns and feeds everyone. (Violent, aged 19, no schooling, husband of young woman)

Yes, it is so that a man has more rights in the family than a woman, but it is not right; no matter where it happens—whether in a village or in a particular house—because both men and women should have equal rights. If the man goes out to earn money, the woman does all the household work and takes care of the family. So, both of them should have equal rights. (Nonviolent, aged 34, completed Class 10, husband of adult woman, Village 13, Block B)

A 'real' man

NV husbands equated a 'real' man with equal rights in marriage and responsible behaviour in the community; V husbands defined a 'real' man more in terms of his earning power and control over his family:

A man who feeds and controls his family is a 'real' man..... If he does so, everyone will know about him, and he and his family will be respected in the village because he controls his family (Violent, aged 19, no schooling, husband of young woman)

A 'real' man is one who gives equal rights to his wife; he takes care of his wife and her happiness. He should fulfil the needs of his wife. He should have good thoughts and deeds. If there is a fight in the neighbourhood, he should intervene and try to stop the fight and pacify the concerned persons. (Nonviolent, aged 24, no schooling, husband of young woman)

Attitudes toward marital violence

All 11 V husbands justified violence, and most narrated situations in which violence was justified -- if a woman is disobedient, does not give her husband his food on time, speaks rudely to her husband, shows disrespect for her in-laws, displays any sign of unfaithfulness; 8 of 10 NV husbands believed there were no circumstances in which a wife should be beaten:

If the wife does not obey her husband, he will get angry and it will lead to hitting. She should be beaten because the husband hits his wife only when she makes a mistake such as not obeying (his instructions) or not giving him food etc on time. (Violent, aged 24, completed Class 8, husband of young woman)

Sometimes, there are certain situations in which a husband has to beat his wife. If I am living with my parents and my wife abuses my mother, and I slap her twice or thrice for doing so, there is nothing wrong in it. (Violent, aged 32, completed Class 9, husband of adult woman)

Beating her will weaken the bonds of love. She will not trust me. If the bond is weakened, then she will not have interest in looking after the home (Nonviolent, aged 32, completed Class 12, husband of adult woman).

Violence in marriage

V husbands described recent incidents that provoked violence; NV husbands discuss a more egalitarian spousal relationship

I had asked my wife to give me water, and she didn't, so I hit her. She cried but I didn't say anything. (Violent, aged 19, no schooling, husband of young woman).

R: I told her to feed the children, but she didn't (Violent, aged 26, completed Class 4, husband of young woman).

She did not cook on time.... There was beating a month ago. Sometimes when I am drunk and I feel angry about something she has said or if she hasn't done some work properly, then I hit her.....I told her to have sex, she didn't want to and she refused, but I did make her have sex and she did not say anything more. (Violent, aged 28, completed Class 10, husband of adult woman)

We both have a very good understanding. We listen, understand and agree with each other. All these are the reasons for why I have never beaten my wife. (Nonviolent, aged 27, no schooling, husband of young woman).

R: She listens to me and I also listen to her.... If she is busy, I do my own work (Nonviolent, aged 26, completed Class 9, husband of young woman).

Alcohol consumption

2 of the 10 nonviolent husbands, and 8 of 11 violent husbands reported alcohol consumption

Yes I drink.....I consume it daily. But I don't behave differently after I drink
(Violent, aged 28, completed Class 10, husband of adult woman)

I have never consumed alcohol in my life. (Nonviolent, aged 24, no schooling, husband of young woman)

B. Family level: gendered socialisation

Gendered socialisation

- Egalitarian in terms of distribution of food (8 of 9 V, 9 of 10 NV husbands); less so in terms of money for spending (4 of 7 V husbands, 8 of 9 NV husbands) and attention to education (4 of 10 V, 6 of 9 NV husbands)
- Wide disparities in freedom of speech and ability to express themselves to parents: 8 of 11 V husbands reported sisters were more constrained; 7 of 10 NV husbands suggested that sisters were as likely as they were to express themselves to both parents and to participate in household decision-making, and three others reported that their sisters were free to talk to their mother but not their father

Gendered socialisation

If I said something on family matters, my parents would listen to me. My sister would not say anything because (it is assumed that) when there is a boy (in the family), there is no need for the girl to say anything (Violent, aged 26, completed Class 3, husband of adult woman)

Freedom to talk to friends was given to me and my sister equally. Nor was there any discrimination between us regarding participation in household decision-making; as much as I was asked about any matter, she too was asked. My sister also had the same right to express her views as I had. (Non-violent, aged 26, completed Class 9, husband of young woman)

C. Peer level: peer networks and activities

Peer networks and activities

6 of 11 V and 2 of 10 NV husbands reported peer pressure with regard to alcohol consumption or smoking while growing up.

Friendship networks smaller and activities more likely to include alcohol and gambling among V than NV husbands

Yes, I have one friend. We chat, we play cricket, we play cards, I sit with him and have alcohol, smoke cigarettes and eat food. (Violent, aged 19, no schooling, husband of young woman)

I have many friends... I talk with my friends and discuss all that happens in my life, good or bad. They too share such matters with me. I do not know how to gamble and I have never consumed alcohol in my life. (Nonviolent, aged 24, husband of young woman)

**D. Community level:
Involvement in community violence and
perceptions about community reaction
to marital violence**

Involvement in community violence

V husbands more likely than NV husbands to have participated in community fights and mixed about whether it brought them respect from the community

Somebody had borrowed certain things from my house and after six months when I went to his house to ask for those items to be returned, his family members refused to talk to me..... This resulted in a fight. This happened ... about four to five times (Violent, aged 29, completed Class 9, husband of adult woman)

They consider me to be a calm person and they see me as their idol as I don't fight with anyone (Nonviolent, aged 32, completed Class 12, husband of adult woman)

How the community perceives them

Both V and NV husbands perceived that their V or NV status brought them respect from the community

Neighbours and other men think well of me. People say that I am right, that I keep my wife under control. (Violent, aged 19, no schooling, husband of young woman)

They think that we both (husband and wife) are very good because we do not fight with each other and have a very good life....Some men do make fun of me and call me a slave of my wife. (Nonviolent, aged 28, completed Class 12, husband of young woman)

Summary and implications

Key findings of qualitative study: Positive deviant husbands

Indicator	Differences: Nonviolent husbands
Individual level: Gender roles and attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More likely than violent husbands to perceive that a woman should have equal rights as a man• Less likely to equate a 'real' man with aggression and control• Less likely to perceive a 'real' woman as one who stays faithful to her husband• Less likely to perceive marital violence as acceptable e.g. if wife disobeyed her husband or made a 'mistake.'• No circumstances in which a wife deserves to be hit
Alcohol consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less likely to consume alcohol
Family level Socialisation experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More likely to report that their sisters had as much freedom as they did to express themselves and participate in household matters; somewhat less likely to report disparities in education and money for spending.
Peer level Social networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a larger peer network than violent husbands• Less likely to consume alcohol or gamble with their peers
Community level and participation in community violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less likely to be involved in physical fights in their communities than were violent husbands• Value their NV status, peace and marital harmony as opposed to control over wife• Expressed self-confidence about respect from their communities; accept that sometimes, men mock them for their NV status, call them the "slave" of their wife

Implications

Narratives of positive deviants call for activities that:

- Enable men to challenge traditional gender norms;
- Engage men in nonviolent conflict resolution techniques that enable them to negotiate better or resolve 'provocation' verbally;
- Provide opportunities to men to recognise the importance of close bonds with their wife for family life;
- Sensitise men about the egalitarian socialisation of girls and boys; and
- Identify nonviolent men who command respect in their community and project them as role models in their community