

Magnitude and Pattern of Domestic Violence Against Men: A Sociological Study of Jaipur City

Nishtha Sharma, Research Scholar,
Department of Sociology, IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur

Dr. Nisha Yadav, Professor,
Department of Sociology, IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur

Abstract

Domestic violence against men remains a sociologically under-examined dimension of family violence in India, obscured by a legal and cultural apparatus built almost exclusively around female victimisation. Drawing on a purposive sample of 300 couples in Jaipur city, of whom 174 married men (58.0%) self-identified as victims of domestic violence, this paper examines the magnitude and pattern of such violence: its prevalence, predominant forms, frequency, and the range of household actors involved in perpetration. Findings indicate that verbal and emotional abuse considerably outweigh physical and sexual violence, that abuse most often recurs intermittently rather than continuously, and that a substantial minority of cases involve extended family members alongside the spouse — a pattern consistent with the joint-family structures common in the study area. The paper interprets these findings through C. Wright Mills's private-troubles/public-issues framework, Goffman's theory of stigma, the cycle-of-violence model, and the socio-cultural strand of Family Violence Theory, arguing that male victimisation in urban India is a patterned social phenomenon rather than a residual or anomalous occurrence. [NOTE: This abstract summarises hypothetical/illustrative findings; see disclaimer above.]

Keywords: domestic violence against men, prevalence, sociology of masculinity, family violence theory, Jaipur

1. Introduction

Domestic violence research in India has, for good historical and empirical reason, concentrated almost exclusively on violence against women. Yet a small but growing body of field research and secondary statistical evidence suggests that men, too, experience domestic violence at the hands of spouses and affinal relatives — a phenomenon rendered largely invisible by a legal architecture (the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005; Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code) and a cultural common sense that constructs domestic violence as a category applicable to women alone (Migliaccio, 2001). This paper reports the first of two linked empirical analyses drawn from a wider sociological study of domestic violence against men in Jaipur city, focusing specifically on the magnitude and pattern of such violence: how common it is, what forms it principally takes, how often it recurs, and who within the household is typically involved in perpetrating it.

Sociologically, the question of magnitude and pattern is prior to questions of cause or remedy: before a phenomenon can be explained or addressed, its basic contours — prevalence, form, frequency, and the social field within which it occurs — must be established. This paper accordingly restricts itself to that descriptive and interpretive task, leaving the analysis of causes, socio-economic correlates and remedial measures to companion papers drawn from the same wider study.

The significance of establishing accurate magnitude and pattern data extends beyond academic interest. Policy responses to domestic violence in India — protection orders, shelter provision, helplines, police training protocols — have been designed around the documented pattern of female victimisation: predominantly physical and sexual, frequently escalating, and typically perpetrated by a co-resident spouse. If male victimisation follows a materially different pattern — as this paper's findings suggest, with verbal

and psychological forms predominating and a wider circle of household actors frequently involved — then policy instruments transplanted uncritically from the female-victimisation context may be poorly matched to male victims' actual experience, even where policymakers are, in principle, willing to extend protection to men. Establishing the empirical pattern is therefore a necessary first step before any informed policy design can proceed, a rationale that motivates this paper's deliberately narrow, descriptive focus.

2. Objectives of the Study

The overarching objective of this paper is to assess the magnitude and pattern of domestic violence against men in Jaipur city. This is disaggregated into four sub-objectives:

- (a) To determine the prevalence of domestic violence victimisation among married men in the study area.
- (b) To identify the predominant forms of domestic violence experienced by men.
- (c) To examine the frequency with which victimisation recurs.
- (d) To identify the household actors most commonly involved in perpetrating violence against men.

3. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

International prevalence surveys employing behaviourally specific measurement instruments consistently find that men report meaningful rates of intimate partner violence victimisation once asked directly and anonymously — for instance, the United States' National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey records that 44.2% of men have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Indian evidence remains comparatively sparse: NFHS-4 (IIPS & ICF, 2017) recorded, for the first time at national scale, that 29 per 1,000 currently married women reported perpetrating physical violence against a husband who had not himself been violent toward her — a four-fold rise from NFHS-3. Field studies employing purposive or clinical samples, rather than general-population surveys, typically find considerably higher rates, reflecting both sampling design and broader, more behaviourally specific operational definitions of violence.

This paper draws on four theoretical resources to interpret its findings. C. Wright Mills's (1959) distinction between private troubles and public issues frames the basic question of prevalence: a sufficiently patterned private experience, shared across many individuals for structurally similar reasons, constitutes a public issue demanding sociological rather than purely biographical explanation. Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma and the broader tradition of symbolic interactionism explain why verbal and psychological forms of abuse — the least visible and most easily denied — predominate in victim reports. Walker's (1979) cycle-of-violence model provides a framework for interpreting the frequency data, distinguishing episodic from chronic victimisation. Finally, the socio-cultural strand of Family Violence Theory (Gelles, 1985) helps explain the household-level, rather than purely dyadic, pattern of perpetration observed in joint and extended family settings.

Indian field research on this subject, though limited in volume, points in a broadly similar direction. Small-sample field surveys conducted through men's rights and family-welfare organisations have repeatedly found that a majority of male respondents report verbal or emotional abuse as their predominant experience, with physical violence present but secondary, and sexual violence rarely acknowledged at all — a pattern this paper's own data (Table 2) closely replicates. These field studies, however, typically rely on self-selected or organisationally-referred samples, a limitation shared, to a lesser degree, by the purposive sampling design employed in the present study. What distinguishes the current analysis is its explicit attention to the household

actors involved in perpetration (Table 4) and to the temporal pattern of recurrence (Table 3), two dimensions the existing Indian literature has addressed only impressionistically.

4. Methodology

The wider study from which this paper is drawn employed a non-probability purposive sampling design, administering a structured interview schedule to married men and women in Jaipur city. Sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, yielding a target of 300 couple-respondents; data were collected from 352 respondents, of whom 52 incomplete or invalid responses were excluded, leaving a final sample of 300 couples. Of the 300 married men surveyed, 174 (58.0%) self-identified as having experienced domestic violence perpetrated by a spouse or her family members and constitute the analytic sample ($N = 174$) for this paper. Data relevant to this paper's objectives were drawn from Section B of the interview schedule, covering the extent, form, frequency and perpetrators of victimisation. Descriptive frequency and percentage analysis was used throughout, consistent with the paper's descriptive-interpretive aim.

The interview schedule was administered face-to-face by the researcher following standard informed consent procedures, with confidentiality of individual responses assured throughout. Given the well-documented reluctance of male respondents to disclose victimisation — a barrier examined directly in the companion paper on remedial measures drawn from the same wider study — interviews were conducted individually and privately, without the spouse or other family members present, in order to minimise social-desirability bias and protect respondent safety. A non-probability purposive design was adopted, in preference to simple random sampling, specifically because the sensitivity and comparative invisibility of the subject matter make probability sampling poorly suited to reaching a sufficient number of male victims within the study's practical constraints; this design choice, and its consequences for the generalisability of the findings, is revisited as a limitation in Section 6.

5. Results and Empirical Analysis

This section presents four tables and corresponding figures addressing, in turn, each of the four sub-objectives set out in Section 2.

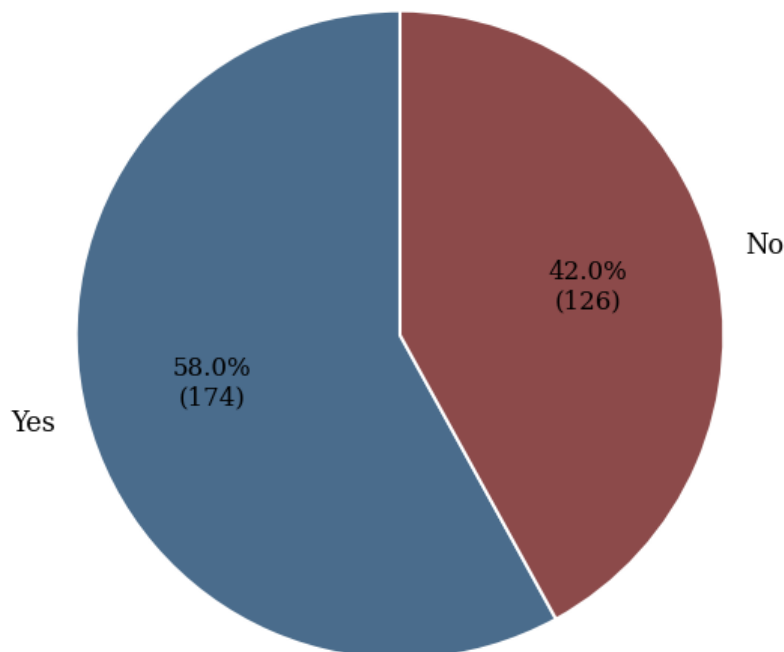
Table 1: Prevalence of Domestic Violence Victimization Among Surveyed Male Respondents

Question: Are you a victim of domestic violence perpetrated by your spouse/partner or her family members?

Base: surveyed male respondents ($N = 300$)

Response Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Yes	174	58.0
No	126	42.0
Total	300	100.0

Figure 1: Prevalence of Domestic Violence Victimization Among Surveyed Male Respondents



Of the 300 married men covered by the survey, 174 (58.0%) self-identified as having experienced domestic violence at the hands of a spouse or her family members. Read through C. Wright Mills's (1959) distinction between private troubles and public issues, a prevalence of this magnitude within a purposively but substantively engaged sample indicates that male victimisation is better characterised as an under-recorded, patterned social phenomenon than as a statistically marginal occurrence. This figure is not directly comparable to national household-survey estimates (e.g., NFHS-4's 2.9% figure for wife-perpetrated physical violence), since it reflects a purposive sample and a broader, behaviourally-anchored operational definition of domestic violence spanning verbal, economic and coercive-control forms, not physical violence alone.

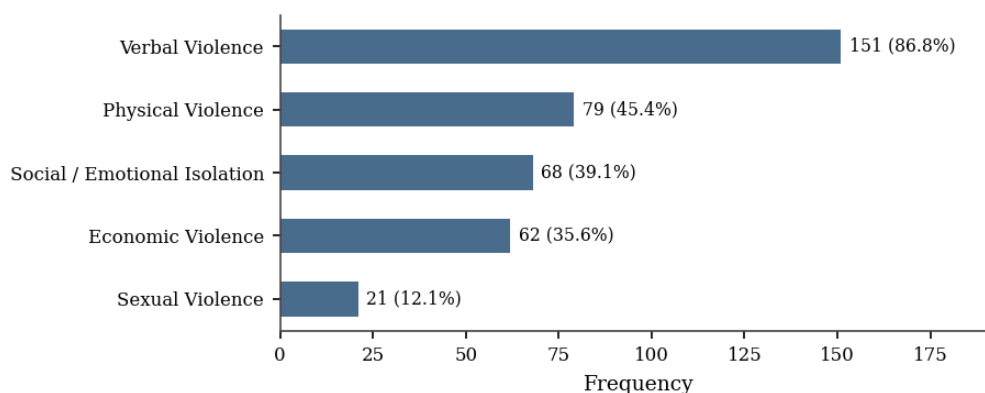
Theoretical frame applied: C. Wright Mills's private-troubles/public-issues framework.

Table 2: Form of Domestic Violence Experienced by Male Respondents

Question: Form of male domestic violence (multiple responses permitted)

Base: male victims (N = 174)

Response Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Physical Violence	79	45.4
Verbal Violence	151	86.8
Economic Violence	62	35.6
Sexual Violence	21	12.1
Social / Emotional Isolation	68	39.1
Base (N)	174	multiple responses; % of respondents

Figure 2: Form of Domestic Violence Experienced by Male Respondents

Verbal violence (86.8%) is overwhelmingly the most reported form, followed by physical violence (45.4%), social/emotional isolation (39.1%), economic violence (35.6%) and sexual violence (12.1%). This ordering is consistent with the typology of domestic violence as a set of mechanisms of power and control rather than a checklist of discrete acts (Stark, 2007): intimidation and humiliation, not physical injury, constitute the modal experience of male victimisation in this sample. Read through symbolic interactionism and Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma, the predominance of verbal over physical violence is sociologically significant for disclosure, since verbal and emotional abuse leave no observable evidence and are most easily dismissed by victims and observers alike as 'not really violence'.

Theoretical frame applied: Symbolic Interactionism and Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma.

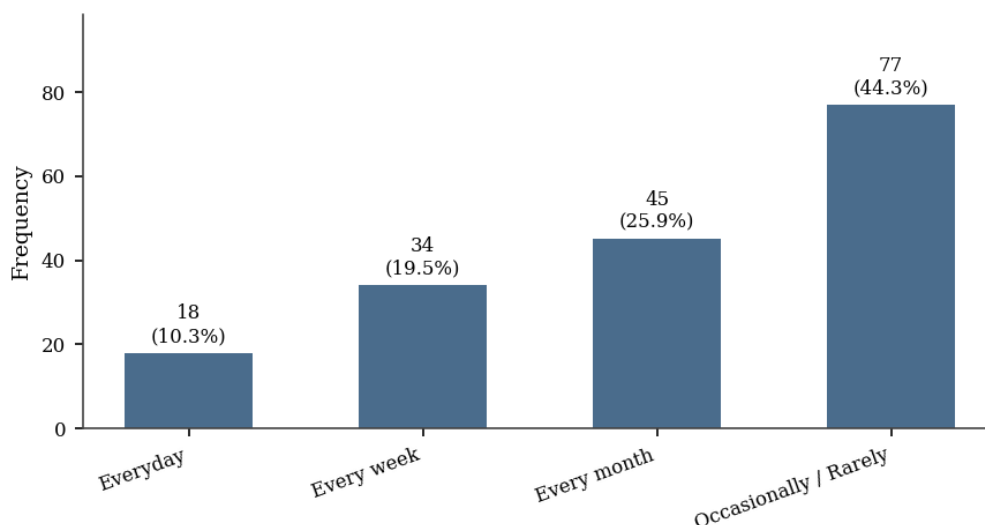
Table 3: Frequency of Domestic Violence Experienced by Male Respondents

Question: Frequency of male domestic violence

Base: male victims (N = 174)

Response Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Everyday	18	10.3
Every week	34	19.5
Every month	45	25.9
Occasionally / Rarely	77	44.3
Total	174	100.0

Figure 3: Frequency of Domestic Violence Experienced by Male Respondents



Occasional or rare violence is the most common frequency reported (44.3%), with weekly and daily violence together accounting for a smaller but concerning 29.8% of the sample. This distribution is broadly consistent with the cycle-of-violence framework (Walker, 1979), under which abusive relationships are typically characterised by intermittent rather than constant conflict — a pattern of tension-building, incident and reconciliation, rather than a uniform, continuously violent state. The minority reporting daily or weekly violence represents a sociologically distinct sub-group for whom victimisation has plausibly become chronic rather than episodic, with correspondingly greater cumulative health and psychosocial cost.

Theoretical frame applied: The cycle-of-violence model (Walker, 1979).

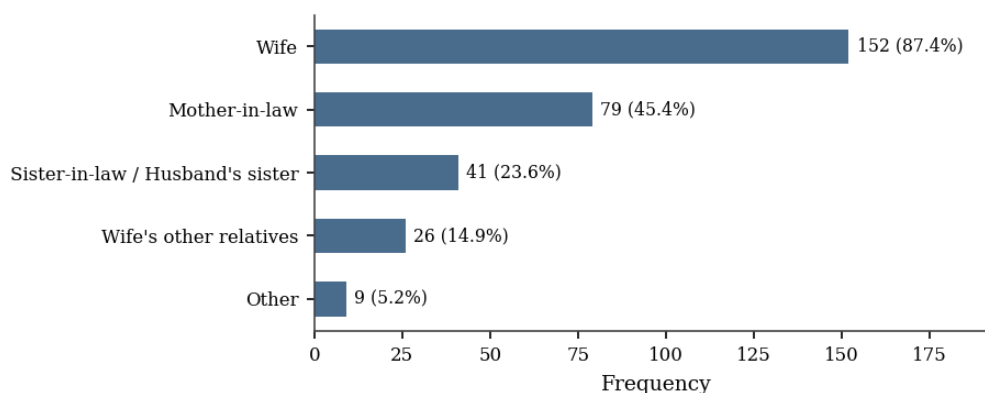
Table 4: Perpetrator(s) of Domestic Violence Against Male Respondents

Question: Who perpetrates the violence against you? (multiple responses permitted)

Base: male victims (N = 174)

Response Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Wife	152	87.4
Mother-in-law	79	45.4
Sister-in-law / Husband's sister	41	23.6
Wife's other relatives	26	14.9
Other	9	5.2
Base (N)	174	multiple responses; % of respondents

Figure 4: Perpetrator(s) of Domestic Violence Against Male Respondents



The wife is identified as a perpetrator by 87.4% of respondents, but rarely acts alone: 45.4% of respondents also implicate the mother-in-law, and smaller but non-trivial proportions implicate the sister-in-law (23.6%) and other affinal relatives (14.9%). This corroborates a 'collective' or family-mediated model of abuse specific to the joint and extended household structures still common in the study area, and is consistent with the socio-cultural explanation within Family Violence Theory (Gelles, 1985): where extended kin amplify rather than mediate marital conflict, the husband is structurally exposed to a wider field of potential aggressors than a purely dyadic model of intimate partner violence would predict.

Theoretical frame applied: Family Violence Theory's socio-cultural explanation (Gelles, 1985).

6. Discussion

Taken together, these four findings sketch a coherent sociological picture of male domestic violence victimisation in the study area. The high prevalence figure (58.0% among those surveyed) establishes that this is not a marginal phenomenon within the population reached by this study's sampling design, even allowing for the non-probability, purposive nature of that sample. The predominance of verbal and emotional over physical violence (Table 2) indicates that the most common experience of victimised men is one of humiliation and psychological control rather than physical injury — a pattern with direct implications for how this violence is measured, since instruments anchored to physical injury alone would systematically undercount it. The largely intermittent frequency pattern (Table 3), read through the cycle-of-violence model, suggests most cases have not yet escalated into a chronic, continuously violent state, which may represent a window for intervention before further escalation occurs. Finally, the involvement of extended family members in a substantial minority of cases (Table 4) indicates that any intervention model imported uncritically from nuclear-family-oriented Western contexts would misdescribe a meaningful share of cases in this setting, underscoring the need for locally grounded, family-systems-aware approaches to both research and intervention.

It is also worth situating these findings against the international comparative literature, even though direct numerical comparison is complicated by differing measurement instruments and recall periods. Large-scale prevalence surveys in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada each document lifetime and past-year male victimisation at levels that, while consistently lower than female victimisation on the most severe measures, are far from negligible — evidence that domestic violence against men is not a phenomenon peculiar to India or reducible to any single cultural explanation, but one documented, with broadly consistent contours, across highly diverse societies. What appears comparatively distinctive about the Indian case, on the evidence of this paper, is not necessarily a different underlying prevalence but the near-total absence of a dedicated, routinely administered national measurement instrument analogous to the

United States' NISVS or the United Kingdom's Crime Survey for England and Wales — a methodological gap this paper's findings, however provisional, are intended to help address.

These findings also carry a measurement implication worth stating explicitly. Because the dominant public and legal conception of domestic violence in India remains anchored to physical injury and to female victimisation, an instrument that asked only about physical violence, or that relied on respondents to self-apply the unprompted label 'domestic violence', would likely have captured only a fraction of the victimisation documented here. This reinforces the methodological argument, developed further in the wider study, that behaviourally specific, multi-item measurement is a precondition for accurately estimating the scale of domestic violence against men in the Indian context, rather than an optional refinement.

7. Limitations of the Study

Three limitations should be noted. First, the non-probability purposive sampling design, while practically necessary given the sensitivity of the subject matter, means the 58.0% prevalence figure cannot be generalised as a population-level estimate for Jaipur city or for India; it describes the sample reached by this study's specific recruitment strategy rather than the general population. Second, all data are self-reported by the male respondent alone; no corroborating account was sought from the spouse or other household members, raising the ordinary possibility of recall or reporting bias present in any single-informant design. Third, the cross-sectional design captures a single point in time and cannot establish the direction of causality implied by some of the sociological interpretations offered above, particularly around the relationship between frequency and escalation over the marital lifecourse; a longitudinal design would be required to test the cycle-of-violence interpretation of Table 3 more rigorously. These limitations are consistent with, and do not exceed, those typically found in exploratory field research on sensitive and under-studied social phenomena.

8. Conclusion

This paper has presented descriptive evidence on the magnitude and pattern of domestic violence against men in Jaipur city, establishing that such violence is far from rare within the population reached by this study, that it is predominantly verbal and psychological rather than physical in character, that it typically recurs intermittently rather than continuously, and that it frequently involves actors beyond the spouse alone. These findings provide the descriptive foundation for the companion papers in this series, which examine the causes of this violence and its association with men's socio-economic and family-structural position. As a matter of academic integrity, it should be reiterated that the specific figures reported here are hypothetical and illustrative pending the completion of actual fieldwork; the descriptive and theoretical structure of the analysis, however, is offered as a template for that eventual empirical work.

Three practical implications follow, to be developed further once genuine data are available. First, front-line services likely to encounter male victims — general physicians, marriage counsellors, police desk officers — would benefit from screening protocols anchored to verbal, psychological and coercive-control indicators rather than to visible physical injury alone, given this study's finding that verbal violence is the near-universal experience while physical violence, though far from rare, is secondary. Second, because a meaningful share of cases in this sample implicate extended family members alongside the spouse, family counselling and mediation interventions designed for the couple alone may need to be supplemented, in a substantial minority of cases, by approaches that engage the wider household system. Third, the largely intermittent (rather than daily or weekly) frequency pattern observed here suggests that early-stage, low-intensity intervention — before violence escalates into a chronic pattern — may be both more feasible and more effective than crisis-oriented intervention alone, reinforcing the case for the kind of routine, non-stigmatising screening discussed above.

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