

CAN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT REDUCE VIOLENCE FROM INTIMATE PARTNERS? A CASE OF URBAN AND RURAL INDIA

Sondes Mbarek, Université Paris-Saclay, Univ Evry, IMT-BS, LITEM, Evry-Courcouronnes, France

Cristiane Benetti, ICN Artem Business School, NANCY, Centre Européen de Recherche en Economie Financière et Gestion- Le Laboratoire de recherche en gestion et économie (CEREFIGE), France

Nirjhar NIGAM, ICN Artem Business School, NANCY, Centre Européen de Recherche en Economie Financière et Gestion- Le Laboratoire de recherche en gestion et économie (CEREFIGE), France

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ABSTRACT

Programs and policies addressing domestic violence have been running for decades, yet the targets have not been reached by far. Further, gendered violence and gender inequality are much more severe in rural areas, where a high rate of IPV has been recorded compared to urban counterparts. From this perspective, in this paper, we aim to shed light on the relationship between women's empowerment and domestic violence by rurality and analyze what dimensions of women's empowerment increase or decrease domestic violence for both urban and rural women. We take advantage of a rich dataset (Demographic Health Survey (DHS)) for India for 2015-2016. We include six dimensions of women's empowerment: economic empowerment, human capital, decision-making power, physical mobility, media and technological empowerment, and self-esteem. We obtain very interesting yet rather puzzling results, as the relationship between women's empowerment and IPV can go in both directions both for urban and rural women. The most intriguing results come from variables related to media and technological empowerment. Exposure to media (television, magazines, newspapers) and use of technology (having mobile phones and the ability to send messages) result in decreased DV both for urban and rural women. Women's participation in microcredit programs increases the likelihood of IPV, while decision-making variables show mixed effects both for urban and rural women. Lastly, exposure to media and technological empowerment seems to reduce IPV both for urban and rural women. The paper concludes with possible policy implications.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Intimate partner violence, women's empowerment; Multivariate Regression

1. INTRODUCTION

IPV¹ is an emerging problem both in developed and developing countries and has been declared a "public health epidemic" by the World Health Organization (WHO). Globally, more than one-third of women suffer from this phenomenon, although it is much more acute in societies subject to extreme inequality (Levinson 1989; Yllo et al. 1990). Women living in rural areas face added discrimination and gender inequality compared to urban women due to extreme poverty, a severe patriarchal culture, gendered social norms, aggravated social hierarchy (caste system), their low level of literacy, limited access to employment, lack of awareness, and media exposure (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006; Naved and Persson, 2005; Schuler et al. 2008). From a feminist perspective, feminist scholars (Jasinski 2001) believe that violence against women is perpetuated mainly due to an unequal power balance wherein men hold the dominant position in society. This is further aggravated by the presence of patriarchal social structures and the gendered distribution of power, control, and resources (Fregoso and Bejarano, 2010; Price 2012), which allow and justify men's aggressive control over women to maintain their supremacy (Giddens 2004). This is manifested on a day-to-day basis in the lives of rural women who feel disempowered (fear of losing their livelihood, losing custody of their children, social stigma, and lack of trust in the criminal justice system) and dissuades them from reporting such acts of violence (Sagot 2005; Ruiz 1999; Salazar et al. 2012; Schuler et al. 2008). Being a victim of domestic violence can have