

The Rural-Urban Gap in Domestic Violence and Women's Economic Empowerment

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Received 07-03-2024

Revised 09-03-2024

Accepted 29-03-2024

Published 31-03-2024



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Abstract:

Rural and urban regions have different social structures and norms and therefore, women's condition also considerably varies. In this paper, the rural-urban gap in domestic violence and women's economic empowerment is analyzed. The study is conducted on NFHS-5 (2020=21) data. The result shows that women from rural areas experience higher domestic violence than women from urban areas. Women from rural areas are also found to be less empowered than women from urban areas. The study further shows that women's economic empowerment is significant in reducing domestic violence. If women are working, then domestic violence is less likely to occur. Factors that increase the likelihood of domestic violence are women's higher education and earnings than men's, age differences, controlling issues, and alcohol drinking by husbands.

Keywords: Domestic violence, women's economic empowerment, Rural-urban gap, exploitation, employment

Introduction:

Domestic violence refers to abusive behaviours that occur within intimate relationships or households, often involving physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, or financial abuse. It can affect individuals of any gender, age, race, or socioeconomic background. Domestic violence can take various forms, including (i) Physical abuse, (ii) Emotional abuse, and (iii) Sexual abuse (Ackerson and Subramanian, 2008). Physical abuse involves physical harm or injury inflicted upon a partner or family member, such as hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, or using weapons (Chang et al. 2022). Emotional/Psychological abuse includes behaviours aimed at undermining

an individual's self-esteem, confidence, and mental well-being, such as verbal threats, intimidation, manipulation, humiliation, and isolation from friends and family (Aizer, 2010). Sexual abuse involves coercing or forcing someone into sexual acts without their consent, including rape, sexual assault, unwanted touching, or engaging in sexual activities against their will (Bonnes, 2016). Domestic violence can have severe and long-lasting effects on victims, including physical injuries, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, substance abuse, and even death in extreme cases. It also impacts children who witness or experience violence in their homes, leading to emotional trauma and developmental difficulties.

Domestic violence is a significant issue in India, affecting individuals across various socioeconomic backgrounds, regions, and cultural groups. While efforts have been made to address it, domestic violence continues to be prevalent due to factors such as traditional gender norms, economic dependence, lack of awareness, and insufficient legal enforcement. In India, domestic violence is primarily governed by the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) enacted in 2005. This law provides protection and relief to women who are victims of domestic violence, including physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. However, despite legal provisions, challenges remain in effectively implementing the law and ensuring access to justice for survivors. According to the NFHS-4 (2015-2016), conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, around 30% of ever-married women aged 15-49 have experienced spousal violence (physical, sexual, or emotional) at some point in their lives. The NCRB collects data on reported cases of domestic violence. According to the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) reports, there has been an increasing trend in the number of reported cases over the years. However, it's important to note that many cases of domestic violence go unreported due to various factors, including fear, stigma, and lack of awareness about legal remedies.

Some key aspects of domestic violence in India include

- (i) **Cultural and Social Norms:** Traditional patriarchal attitudes and gender roles contribute to the perpetuation of domestic violence (Chandra et al. 2023). Women are often expected to be subservient to men, leading to unequal power dynamics within relationships.
- (ii) **Economic Dependence:** Many women in India are financially dependent on their spouses or families, which can make it difficult for them to leave abusive situations or seek help (Chowdhry, 2014).
- (iii) **Underreporting:** Domestic violence is often underreported in India due to factors

such as fear of stigma, social pressure, economic repercussions, and lack of faith in the justice system (Chowdhury et al. 2022).

- (iv) **Legal Challenges:** Despite legal provisions, there are challenges in effectively implementing laws related to domestic violence. Issues such as delays in legal proceedings, lack of support services, and inadequate training of law enforcement officials hinder access to justice for survivors (Jewkes, 2002).
- (v) **Intersectional Factors:** Marginalized groups, including women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, rural areas, tribal communities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, face additional barriers in accessing support and resources to address domestic violence (Jeyaseelan et al. 2007).

Domestic violence and Women's economic empowerment:

Women's economic empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to participate fully in economic activities, have control over resources, and enjoy equal opportunities for economic advancement (Mahapatro, 2018). Women's economic empowerment plays a crucial role in addressing and preventing domestic violence. Here's how empowerment initiatives can intersect with efforts to combat domestic violence:

- (i) **Education:** Education is one of the most powerful tools for women's empowerment. Educated women are more likely to be aware of their rights, have access to resources, and be better equipped to challenge traditional gender norms that perpetuate domestic violence. Education also increases economic opportunities, reducing women's dependence on abusive partners.
- (ii) **Economic Empowerment:** Economic independence can empower women to leave abusive relationships and seek support. Programs that provide vocational training, microfinance, entrepreneurship

opportunities, and access to employment can enhance women's financial autonomy, reducing their vulnerability to domestic violence (Kabeer, 1997; Malhotra et al. 2002)

- (iii) **Legal Awareness and Access to Justice:** Empowering women with knowledge about their legal rights and avenues for seeking redressal is essential for combating domestic violence. Legal literacy programs, legal aid services, and support in navigating the legal system can empower survivors to pursue legal recourse and hold perpetrators accountable.
- (iv) **Healthcare and Support Services:** Access to healthcare, counselling, and support services is crucial for survivors of domestic violence (Kamimura et al. 2017). Empowering women to seek medical and psychological assistance without fear of judgment or stigma can facilitate their recovery and enable them to break the cycle of violence.
- (v) **Community Mobilization and Advocacy:** Empowering women to participate in community decision-making and advocacy efforts can challenge social norms that condone domestic violence (Khosla, 2022). Engaging men and boys as allies in promoting gender equality and non-violent behaviour is also essential for preventing domestic violence.
- (vi) **Media and Awareness Campaigns:** Empowering women to share their stories and raise awareness about domestic violence can help break the silence surrounding the issue (Koenig et al. 2006). Media campaigns, public awareness initiatives, and social media activism can challenge stereotypes, educate the public, and mobilize support for survivors.

Overall, women's empowerment is intertwined with efforts to prevent and address domestic violence. By promoting gender equality, increasing access to resources and opportunities, and fostering

supportive environments, empowerment initiatives can empower women to assert their rights, challenge violence, and build safer, more equitable communities.

Objective of the study:

A large gap is observed between rural and urban setups in India and therefore, the incidence of domestic violence and women's economic empowerment also differs significantly. Hence, it is interesting to investigate them and therefore, the objective of the study is to analyse the rural-urban gap in domestic violence and women's economic empowerment.

Hypothesis:

Based on objectives, the following hypotheses are set:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in domestic violence and women's economic empowerment in rural and urban areas,

Hypothesis 2: Women's economic empowerment significantly reduces domestic violence

Data and Methods:

The study is based on secondary data and the individual-level data is taken from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Round 5 (2020-21). The total sample size of data is 63,851 of which, 30.4% of women have ever experienced domestic violence. The dataset has also a sufficient number of variables on women's empowerment along with the socioeconomic and demographic of respondents.

The 'z test for the difference of proportion' test is used to analyze the difference in the proportion of rural and urban women across different indicators of their economic empowerment. The z-statistic is defined as:

$$Z = \frac{\hat{p}_1 - \hat{p}_2}{\sqrt{\hat{p}(1 - \hat{p}) \left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2} \right)}}$$

Here, \hat{P}_1 and \hat{P}_2 are the proportions of women in rural and urban areas who have ever experienced domestic violence and give responses in 'yes' for

different indicators of women’s economic empowerment. As per the significance of z, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between women from rural and urban areas across different indicators of economic empowerment.

Further, to analyse the association between domestic violence and women’s economic empowerment, a logit regression model is run as follows:

$$Physical\ violence = \alpha + \beta (Age\ difference) + \beta (Women's\ working) + \beta (Husband's\ working) + \beta (Women's\ education\ level\ higher\ than\ their\ spouses) + \beta (Women's\ earnings\ more\ than\ their\ spouses) + \beta (Does\ husband\ drink\ alcohol?) + \beta (Control\ issue) + \beta (Women's\ economic\ empowerment\ Index) + \epsilon_0$$

Here, the physical violence is taken as a dependent variable which is a binary variable with outcomes – Yes and No. Several independent variables are taken in the model which affects physical violence.

The Index of women’s economic empowerment is formed by ‘Principal Component Analysis (PCA)’ by considering the following variables on economic empowerment.

Variables	Coding
Allowed to spend own money	Yes = 1; No = 0
Allowed to go to the market	Yes = 1; No = 0
Allowed to go to health facilities	Yes = 1; No = 0
Allowed to go to the place outside the village	Yes = 1; No = 0
Usually self-decide on own healthcare	Yes = 1; No = 0
Usually self-decide on large household purchase	Yes = 1; No = 0
Usually self-decide on a visit to relatives	Yes = 1; No = 0
Usually self-decide what to do with money the husband earns	Yes = 1; No = 0

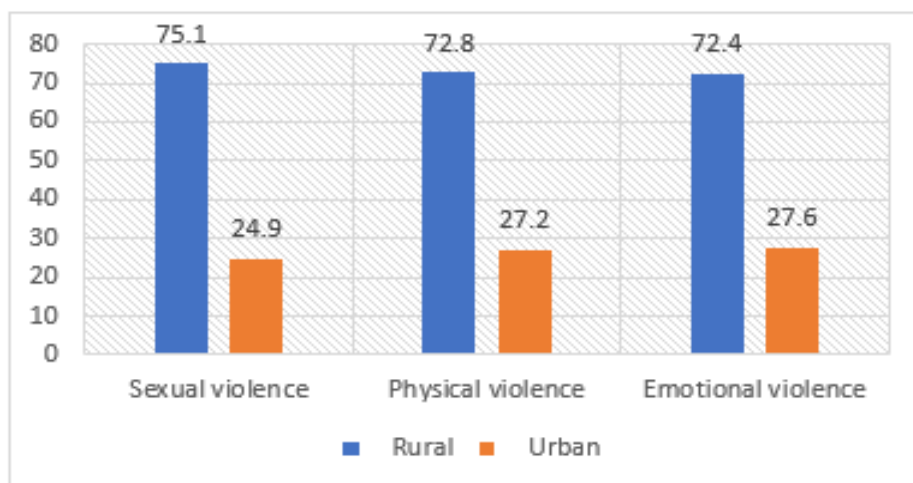
All the analyses are conducted in SPSS Ver. 20. The results are presented by graphs and charts followed by a brief discussion.

Graph 1 shows the rural-urban gap in women who have ever experienced all three kinds of domestic violence – (i) physical violence, (ii) sexual violence, and (iii) emotional violence.

Results and Analysis:

Graph 1: Rural-urban gap of Domestic violence

Distribution of cases of domestic violence



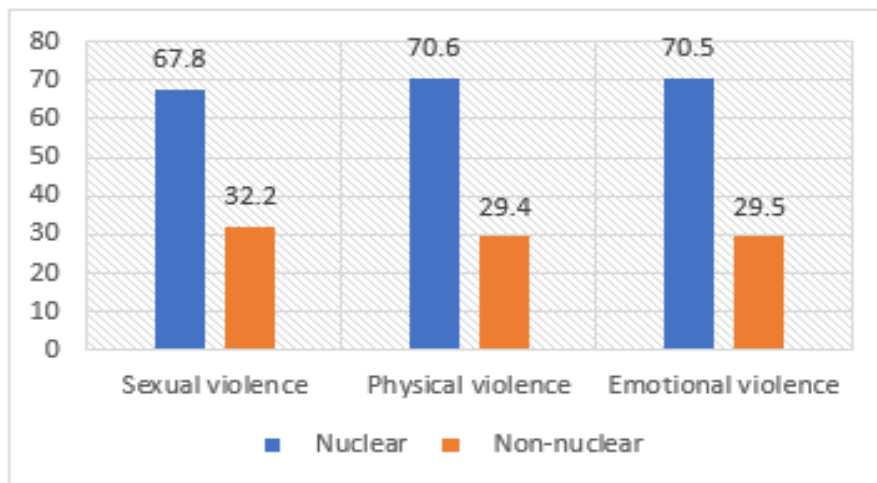
Source: NFHS, round 5 (2020-21)

The cases of domestic violence in rural India are found to be higher than in urban areas. Around 75% of women from rural India have ever experienced sexual violence while this percentage is only 24.9% in urban areas. Similarly, in rural India, 72.8% of women have confirmed physical violence with them and this percentage is only 27.2% in urban areas. Finally, 72.4% of women from rural India

have experienced emotional violence while in urban areas, such women are only 27.6%.

Graph 2 shows the cases of domestic violence between nuclear and large households.

Graph 2: Domestic violence between nuclear and large households



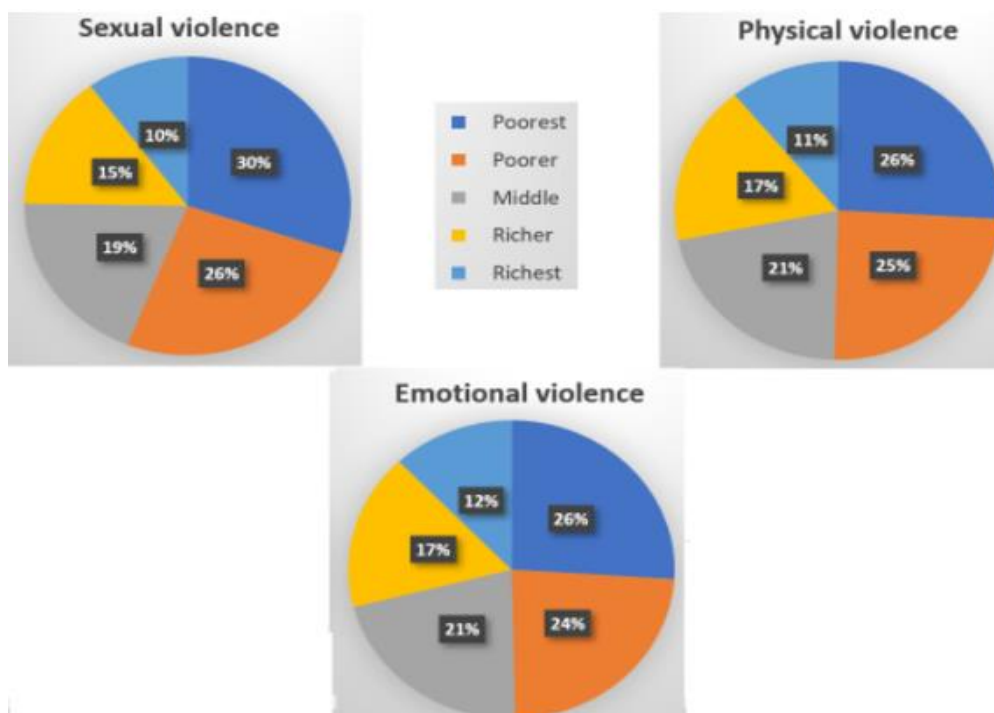
Source: NFHS, round 5 (2020-21)

Nuclear families witness higher domestic violence against women than non-nuclear families. The cases of sexual violence, physical violence, and emotional violence are 67.8%, 70.6%, and 70.5% respectively in nuclear families. Due to the absence of other elder members, the chances of conflict between husband and wife escalate. The early

resolution to any conflict is also difficult to arrive. Therefore, domestic violence against women increases in nuclear families.

Graph 3 shows the cases of domestic violence across income class

Graph 3: Domestic violence across income class

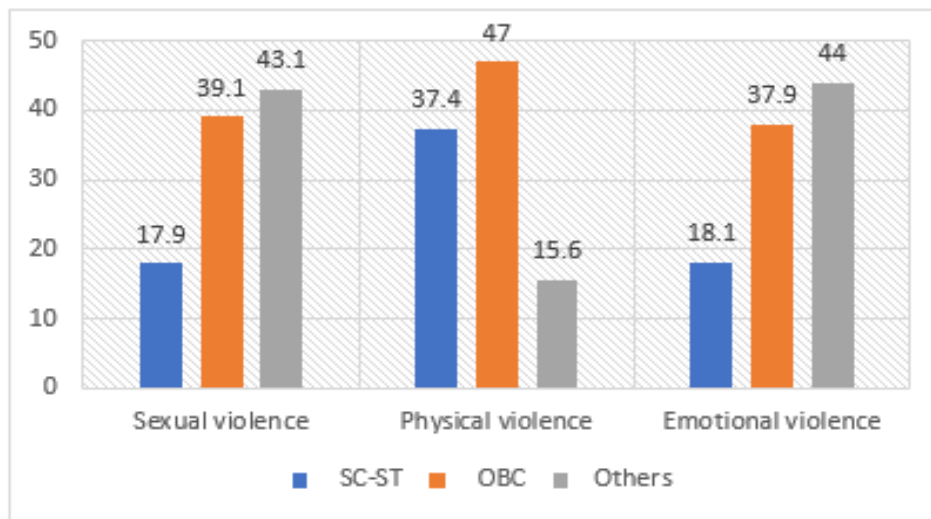


Source: NFHS, round 5 (2020-21)

All three kinds of domestic violence are largely observed in the poorest income class and as we move from low income to higher income class, the cases of domestic violence decrease. Therefore, the income class of households plays a major role in the incidence of domestic violence against women.

Graph 4 shows the cases of domestic violence across caste

Graph 4: Domestic violence across caste



Source: NFHS, round 5 (2020-21)

Castewise, an interesting pattern of domestic violence is observed. Sexual violence is least observed among the SC-ST group where only 17.9% of women have reported such violence. In contrast, sexual violence is highly observed among others (43.1%) followed by the OBC group (39.1%).

Physical violence is mostly observed among the OBC group where 47% of women have reported such violence followed by the SC-ST group (37.4%) and others (15.6%).

Emotional violence is mostly observed by women from other groups where their percentage is 44%

followed by OBC (37.9%) and SC-ST group (18.1%).

Overall, it is concluded that women from the SC-ST and OBC groups largely experience physical violence while women from other groups largely experience both emotional and sexual violence.

Rural-urban gap in the cases of women’s economic empowerment

Table 1 shows the percentage of women who have agreed to a few indicators of women’s economic empowerment.

Table 1: Women’s economic empowerment between rural and urban region

Indicators of women's economic empowerment	Percentage of women who have agreed to the given statements		
	Urban	Rural	Difference
Allowed to spend own money	55.0	48.4	6.6
Allowed to go to the market	64.7	54.8	9.9**
Allowed to go to health facilities	57.9	48.9	9.0**
Allowed to go to the place outside the village	53.4	49.0	4.4
Usually self decide on their own healthcare	11.0	9.2	1.8**
Usually self decide on large household purchase	8.5	6.6	1.9*
Usually self decide on visit to relatives	9.3	7.3	2.0*
Usually self decide what to do with money husband earns	6.4	5.6	0.8

Source: NFHS, round 5 (2020-21)

Across all the indicators of women's economic empowerment, urban women seem more empowered than rural women. The difference between them is more than 9% in the case of "allowed to go to market" and "allowed to go to health facilities" and the differences are also significant. The difference in the percentage of urban and rural women for their self-recession on their healthcare, purchase of large household items, and visiting relative houses are also significant are significant and 1.8%, 1.9%, and 2.0% respectively.

On the women's decision on their husband's money, the difference is the least at only 0.8% and insignificant.

Association between domestic violence and women's economic empowerment

Table 2 shows the regression results for the association between domestic violence and women's economic empowerment along with a few major factors of domestic violence.

Table 2: Association between domestic violence and women's economic empowerment

	Odd ratio
Age difference between men and women	1.02***
Do women work? (Ref: No)	0.60***
Does the husband work? (Ref: No)	1.30
Is woman's education higher than her husband's? (Ref: No)	1.60**
Is woman's earnings higher than her husbands' (Ref: No)	1.90***
Does the husband drink alcohol? (Ref: No)	1.47***
Controlling issues	1.92***
Index on women's economic empowerment	0.88**
Constant	3.72***
*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$	

There is a significant negative association between domestic violence and women's economic empowerment. The odd ratio of the 'index of women's economic empowerment' is 0.89 which shows by increasing economic empowerment, the likelihood of domestic violence reduces.

Other underlying factors of domestic violence are also significantly associated with the incidence of domestic violence. The difference in age between men and women leads to an increase the domestic violence with an odd ratio of 1.02. If women are working, then the likelihood of domestic violence reduces by 0.6 times. If a woman's education is higher than her husband's education, domestic violence is 1.6 times more likely to occur. If a woman is working and her income is higher than her husband's income, domestic violence is 1.90 times more likely to occur. Further, if the husband is drinking alcohol, the odd ratio of domestic

violence is 1.47 while the odd ratio of controlling issues is as high as 1.92. Here, controlling issues refer to husbands' objections and restrictions on their wives' activities and attitudes such as the husband's jealousy if his wife talks to others; lack of trust in their wives; limiting the wives' contact with their families and friends; and others. The controlling issues are found to be the most significant factor of domestic violence.

Discussion:

Higher cases of domestic violence in rural households have certain fundamental reasons. Rural households are characterized by low education levels, low income levels, strict family and social norms, and low autonomy of women (Singh, 2001). It is also observed that women from rural India exhibit poor confidence levels and usually follow social and family norms. Therefore, women become more exposed to domestic

violence. Further, nuclear families lack elders and other senior members and therefore, settlement of conflict between husband and wife takes longer time (Lohia, 1998). Most of the time, such settlement ends with domestic violence against women.

Women have always been kept subordinate to women and husbands seldom accept the superiority of their wives in terms of income, position, and education (Koenig et al. 2006). Patriarchal societal norms and men's attitude of superiority find women's higher acts than men as an attack on men's sovereignty which culminates in domestic violence as an attempt to prevent. The result also shows that women's higher education and earnings than men lead to higher domestic violence (Malhotra, et al. 2002). However, women's work reduces the chances of domestic violence. This is due to the fact that women's work economically supports the family but the earnings of women should be lower than men otherwise, the likelihood of domestic violence will increase. Second, working women spend a large number of hours out of their home and therefore, due to low time spent together by husband and wife, domestic violence is less likely to occur (Rawat, 2014).

Drunken men lose their control over their acts and attitudes and hence, they are highly vulnerable to harming others either physically or emotionally (Chermack et al. 2009). The result shows that if the husband drinks alcohol, the likelihood of domestic violence gets higher. Drinking alcohol not only physically harms and abuses women but also leads to the breakdown of the family both socially and economically. Children's cognitive development, education, and mental growth are also severely affected (Bonnes, 2016). Perhaps, that is the reason a few of the states such as Bihar and Gujrat have banned alcohol in the public interest. However, the earlier studies do not find any significant relationship between 'no alcohol' and 'family's growth and prosperity'.

Women's economic empowerment makes them self-reliant on several counts such as making decisions for their own health, children's education and health, purchasing household items, control

over money, and employment (Ikuomola, 2015; Schafer, 2000). However, in the context of domestic violence, the studies show a mix of results. A few of the studies confirm that women's economic empowerment makes the women economically independent and resilient and therefore, their decision-making autonomy increases. They are more aware of preventive laws and regulations, and they are less fear of any negative consequence of domestic violence. They also retaliate against their husbands effectively in the case of any abuse and exploitation without any stigma or threat. Hence, they are less vulnerable to domestic violence and therefore, they experience domestic violence less than other women (Krishnan et al. 2010; Raj et al. 2018).

Other studies confirm higher domestic violence in the case of higher women's economic empowerment. They argue that women's raising their voices and acting against domestic violence are considered to be a threat to men's perception of their superiority and hegemony (Shakya et al, 2017). The prevalence of patriarchal culture in society and family also supports and justifies men in the case of domestic violence and makes the women accused if they stand against abuse and harmful acts of their husbands. The controlling issue also becomes more ardent and stronger in the case of women's equal argument and resistance because of their empowerment. Thus, the men's dominant attitude becomes more stronger which leads to severe forms of domestic violence (Safitlas et al. 2014).

Conclusion:

The study shows that cases of domestic violence largely prevail against women from rural India. Women from rural India are largely exposed to all three kinds of domestic violence such as physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional violence. Poor economic conditions, low education levels, and the large prevalence of patriarchal mindsets in rural societies and families are some of the major reasons. On the whole, domestic violence is significantly caused by higher education and earnings of women, the age difference between husbands and wives, controlling issues, and

drinking alcohol by husbands are some of the prominent reasons for domestic violence against women. However, if women are working then domestic violence is less likely to occur but the earnings of women should be lesser than their husbands. Further, if women are economically empowered, the likelihood of domestic violence is low. Hence, women's economic empowerment significantly reduces domestic violence.

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