Development Ideas and Practices Working Paper **DIP-08-03**
Copyright © 2008, John Simister.

Domestic violence in India: effects of child socialisation

John Simister
London South Bank University: SimistJG@lsbu.ac.uk

This paper studies domestic violence between husband and wife in India, and acceptance of domestic violence. It investigates the effects of childhood socialisation on attitudes towards domestic violence against women. It reports associations between women in powerful political roles, and suggests evidence that children are socialised at about 5 years old in their attitudes to Gender-Based Violence.

KEYWORDS: domestic violence; attitudes; child socialisation.

Introduction

This paper addresses domestic violence between husband and wife, which is a major problem in India (Martin et al, 2002) and elsewhere. The term 'Intimate Partner Violence' is often used to refer to such violence (Jewkes, 2002); other authors use the term 'Gender-Based Violence' (GBV), because some husbands are thought to use violence to control wives (Bott, Morrison & Ellsberg, 2005: p. 3).

It is difficult to study all of the factors that influence whether or not Gender-Based Violence occurs in one paper. This paper focuses on one possible factor: child socialisation. The Indian subcontinent is a fascinating place to study, when considering possible effects of female role models. The world's first woman Prime Minister was Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Ceylon; other pioneers included Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India; Benazir Bhutto, President of Pakistan; and two women prime ministers of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. Other women who might be role models for children include Mother Theresa of Calcutta (a Christian well-known for her acts of charity).

This paper uses data from the 'Demographic and Household Survey' of India, 2005-6, to examine links between education and Gender-Based Violence – considering both attitudes to violence, and prevalence of violence.

Literature review

Domestic violence is common in India. In a study of rural women, 37% of women in Tamil Nadu had been beaten by their husband, and 45% of women in Uttar Pradesh (Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997: sI11). Visaria (1999: 10) reports that two-thirds of women surveyed in rural Gujarat had experienced some form of psychological, physical, or sexual abuse. Domestic violence "is prevalent and [a] largely accepted part of family life in India" (Satish Kumar, Gupta & Abraham, 2002: 12). Perpetrators of domestic violence can be prosecuted under section 498a of the India Penal Code – but violence is defined narrowly (Burton et al, 1999: 5), and conviction rates low (ICRW, 2001: 2).

Referring to India in general, Bhattacharya (2000: 22) wrote "Socialization ensures that women accept their subservient roles in the household and perpetuate the discrimination against their

female offspring [..] patrilineal ideology stresses male superiority within the household and places the women under the control of men throughout her life. On the other hand the ideology of *pativrata* ordains women to treat their husband like deities". Similarly, IIPS and ORC Macro (2000: 71) wrote "In patriarchal societies such as India, women are not only socialized into being silent about their experience of violence but traditional norms teach them to accept, tolerate, and even rationalize domestic violence".

Domestic violence can be understood better if seen in the context of local culture. Several writers have discussed cultural variations within India; we might expect domestic violence to occur more often in areas where violence is considered culturally acceptable. Delsol et al (2003: 637) claim husband-to-wife aggression is associated with attitudes condoning violence against a spouse. Rao (1997) studied a southern India community, and found the risk of wife abuse increases when the cause of the abuse is seen as 'legitimate' by the community. Women have higher status in Kerala than in the rest of India (Irudaya Rajan, Sudha & Mohanachandran, 2000: 1087); this may be due to the beneficial effects of education (Lieten, 2002: 51). Jeffery, Jeffery & Lyon (1989: 30) report, "in Dharmnagri and Jhakri, wife-beating was regularly mentioned, by women and men alike. Men regard it as their prerogative, an appropriate way to deal with insubordination, and an important buttress of a husband's rule." Dutt & Noble (1982: 6) report a culture of violence in north-central India: their Figure 1-2 suggests this region covers approximately Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Sikkim. In Rajasthan, "Men feel that a woman has to be controlled and kept at home so that society does not say that women in the household are undisciplined" (Satish Kumar, Gupta & Abraham, 2002: 9); they report (page 8) that in Rajasthan, masculinity is associated with a man being "provider; protector; and procreator"; other admired qualities for Rajasthani men include courage; violence (e.g. killing other men); having children, and ability to afford to bring them up. I think these attributes are comparable with 'machismo' or "macho" values (the term 'machismo' is usually associated with Latin America). Some writers use 'machismo' to refer to men who try to be aggressive and virile (ICRW, 2002: 2); women are expected to follow 'Marianismo' (like the mother of Christ), and 'hembrismo' (strong and persevering), behaviour (Aranda, Castaneda, Lee & Sobel, 2001: 44).

In India, as in other countries, Gender-Based Violence is seen as normal. For example, police are unwilling to help victims: "In spite of the provisions of the IPC, the police, being a part of the value system which condones wife beating, would not register a complaint against a husband for assaulting the wife even when it had resulted in serious injury which was punishable u/s 324 or 326, i.e. causing grievous hurt with or without weapons. It is generally assumed that a man has a right to beat his wife/ward. At the same time, a wife who actually mustered enough courage to approach a police station would be viewed as brazen and deviant. The police would counsel the woman about her duty to please and obey her husband, and send her back without even registering a complaint" (Kosambi, 1993: p. 42).

Several previous researchers found domestic violence is associated with lack of education (Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997: sI11; Martin et al, 2002: 569; Bott, Morrison & Ellsberg, 2005: p. 5). Indian men are less likely to consider domestic violence acceptable if educated (Martin et al, 2002: 569). "Reported violence declined with the increasing education of both men and women" (Visaria, 1999: 12). Research by the Gujarat Institute of Development Studies found 60% of women with no education had been assaulted by their husband, compared with 10% of women with secondary or higher education, and a study by INCLEN confirmed that education appears to reduce violence; "In both studies, the reported violence did not decline incrementally with each added year of schooling, but was most apparent after women had attained relatively high levels of education" (CEDPA, 2000: p. 14).

Lack of education is not easy to improve, because cultural barriers prevent female access to education: in India, "Boys are educated because they must fulfil their role as providers, but girls will do household work and thus do not need advanced schooling" (Satish Kumar, Gupta & Abraham, 2002: 8). More education is necessary, but not sufficient: the Indian women's movement must play a central role (Jeffrey, 1989: 32).

India is changing, but slowly. Kosambi (1993: p. 3) wrote “Until recently, domestic violence was not regarded as a crime, and women victims had no legal redress except through divorce proceedings. It is only recently that amendments to the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) made the requisite provisions, but these were mainly applied in cases treated as dowry deaths”.

Data and methods

The ‘Demographic & Health Surveys’ are a series of a large, nationally-representative, household surveys; I use what ORC Macro call their ‘2005’ India survey, and refer to it as DHS 2005 (fieldwork was carried out in 2005 and 2006). Respondents were women aged 15 to 49, who when interviewed were married or had formerly been married. DHS covers rural and urban households, and covers most Indian states – giving a sample that is representative of India as a whole. In DHS 2005, 124,385 women and 64,369 men were interviewed (IIPS and ORC Macro, 2000); it is one of the biggest social science surveys ever carried out.

In this paper, domestic violence is defined as the respondent answering ‘yes’ to: “Since you completed 15 years of age, have you been beaten or mistreated physically by any person?”, and when asked “Who has beaten you or mistreated you physically?”, replied ‘boyfriend’ or ‘husband’ or ‘ex-husband’ (IIPS and ORC Macro, 2000: 420-1). 19% of respondents reported they had been beaten by at least one person since age 15; of these victims, most (17% of respondents) had been beaten by their boyfriend/husband. These figures may underestimate the problem: prevalence rates should “be viewed with caution, as a sizable number of crimes against women go unreported due to social stigma attached to them” (NCRB, 2001 chapter 5: 3; see also Kosambi, 1993: p. 92). Jejeebhoy & Cook (1997: sl10) comment that “women are liable to under-report actual experiences of violence”; IIPS and ORC Macro (2000: 78) make a similar warning about DHS data. Quantitative data from DHS could be complemented by qualitative research, in future research, to give researchers a better understanding of the problem of GBV.

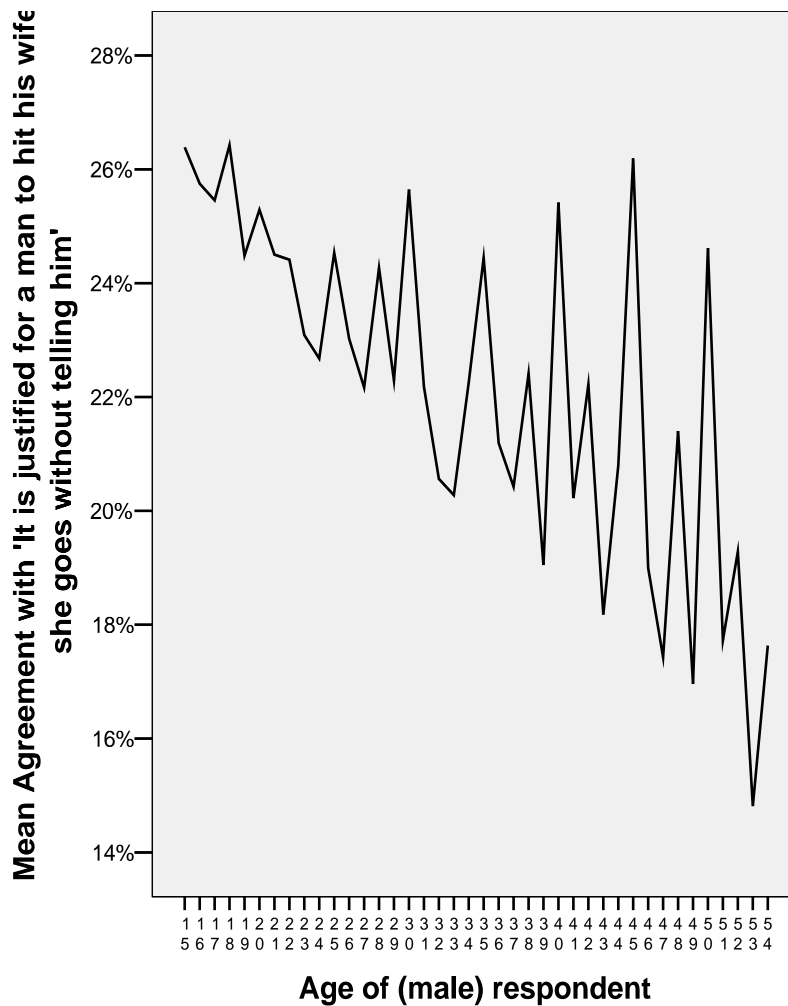
This paper also considers respondents’ attitudes to domestic violence. Accepting domestic violence is defined as agreeing with the DHS question: “Sometimes a wife can do things that bother her husband. Please tell me if you think that a husband is justified in beating his wife in each of the following situations: [...] If she goes out without telling him”, or “[…] if she argues with him” (IIPS and ORC Macro, 2000: 420-1).

To assess how much Indira Gandhi was in the news in each year, I searched ‘Google News’ (2007) for newspaper articles mentioning ‘Indira Gandhi’, and counted the number of relevant newspaper articles each year. This is a proxy for the strength of Mrs Gandhi’s effect on public opinion, and hence on childhood socialisation, in each year. Information on the years Indira Gandhi was in power was obtained from Wikipedia (2008).

RESULTS

The following charts and tables are based on household surveys in India, described above. Note that some charts refer to President Bandaranaike of Ceylon (the country now called Sri Lanka), because women in positions of power in a neighbouring country may affect the attitudes of people in India.

Chart 1: male attitudes towards Gender-Based Violence, by age.



Source: DHS 2005.

Chart 1 indicates a downward trend, in which older men are less likely to think GBV is acceptable. This might be due to one or more factors such as adult socialisation (in which adults are discouraged from accepting violence, by other people they meet); or by childhood socialisation (in which children absorb ideas current at the time of their childhood); or by other factors, such as watching television or cinema. If child socialisation is important, we might want to consider the vertical 'spikes' in Chart 1 – such as the spike at age 45 years. Most DHS fieldwork took place in 2006; a person age 45 in 2006 would have been born in 1961, and would have been about 5 years old when Indira Gandhi became India's first woman Prime Minister on 19th January 1966. Could the spike in Chart 1 at age 45 be due to the effects of Mrs Gandhi? If so, the effect seems harmful: men seem more likely to consider GBV acceptable if they were 5 years old in 1966.

If Indira Gandhi affected attitudes, as Chart 1 might suggest, we might want to assess at what age a child is socialised, in this particular respect – note that other types of socialisation might occur at different ages. One approach is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: correlations between whether or not Indira Gandhi or Sirimavo Bandaranaike was PM or president at the time the respondent reached a particular age, and attitude to GBV

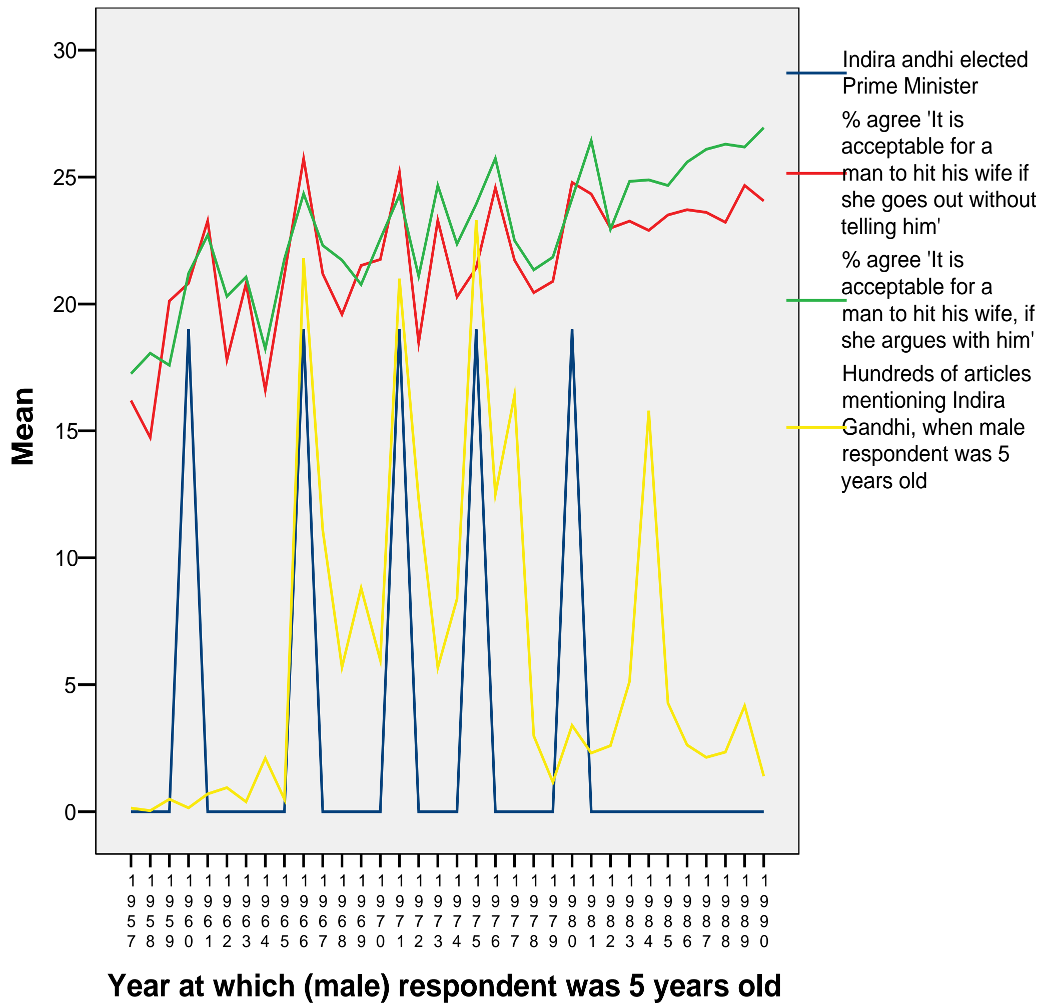
age	Girls' attitudes		Boys' attitudes	
0	0.008**	(122,712)	0.005	(73,601)
1	0.005	(122,712)	-0.012**	(73,601)
2	0.002	(122,712)	0.001	(73,601)
3	0.001	(122,712)	-0.007	(73,601)
4	0.001	(122,712)	-0.003	(73,601)
5	0.009**	(122,712)	0.010**	(73,601)
6	0.006*	(122,712)	-0.013**	(73,601)
7	0.005	(122,712)	-0.010**	(73,601)
8	0.005	(122,712)	-0.008*	(73,601)
9	0.007*	(122,712)	0.000	(73,601)
10	0.006*	(122,712)	-0.001	(73,601)

Source: DHS 2005 (author's analysis). Sample sizes are shown in brackets.
** indicates significant at the 5% level; ** indicates significant at the 1% level.*

Table 1 above shows the strongest correlation between age which a child was when a woman was elected president, and attitude to GBV. The strongest correlation, for both boys and girls, is at age 5; it suggests that this particular type of childhood socialisation has the strongest effect at about 5 years of age. There is also a strong negative effect for boys only at age 6 to 7 years, which seems difficult to explain: perhaps parents respond to a woman president or prime minister by becoming more sexist – for example, a father might feel threatened if a woman is elected to a position of power, and respond by criticising women who seek power. It is not clear why this effect is seen among boys but not girls.

Another influence on women's acceptance is her experience of domestic violence. Among married women who had been beaten by their boyfriend/husband, 33% considered violence acceptable if a wife does not cook properly – compared with 20% of women not beaten by boyfriend/husband. Perhaps victims think of domestic violence as normal; but it is difficult to assess how important such adult socialisation is (other factors, such as child socialisation, are also relevant).

Chart 2: male attitudes towards Gender-Based Violence, by age.



-

Source: DHS 2005.

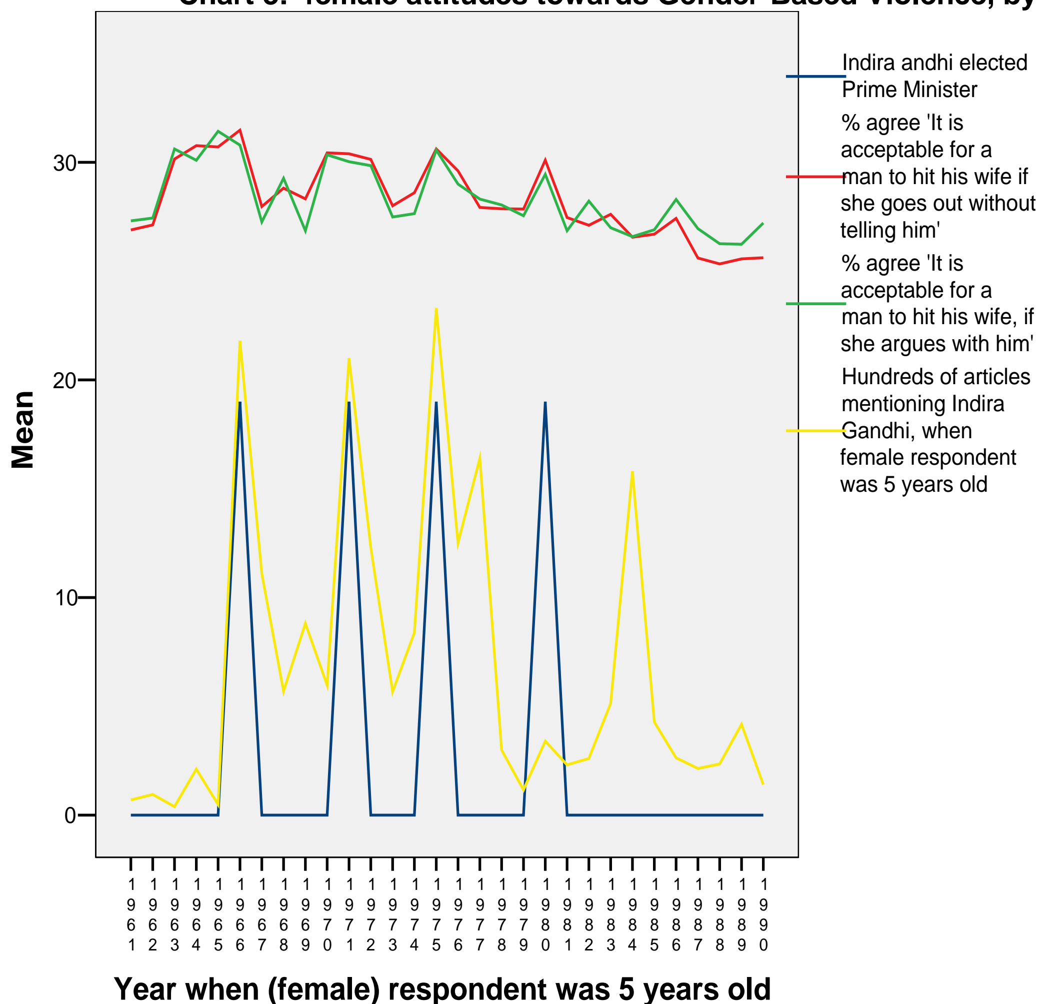
In Chart 2, blue and yellow lines indicate the hypothesized child socialization effect of Indira Gandhi. The blue vertical spikes indicate the year in which Mrs. Gandhi was elected as Prime Minister (the height of the blue spikes is arbitrary, and was chosen to be a similar height to other variables in Chart 2). Yellow vertical spikes represent the number of pages on which Indira Gandhi was mentioned in each year, on the assumption that the childhood socialization – if it occurred – took place at age 5 years. So, for example, the blue spike at 1960 indicates Indira's first election. There is a yellow spike in 1984, the year Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated: Chart 2 shows that there were 1580 newspaper articles about Indira Gandhi in 1984 (in Google News).

Chart 2 shows an apparent link between Indira Gandhi's years of election (blue spikes), and the number of pages on which Indira Gandhi was mentioned in each year (yellow spikes). The red and green lines at the top of Chart 2 represent attitudes among male respondents towards violence against women, as explained in the 'Data and methods' section above. The red line represents agreement that a man is justified in hitting his wife if she goes out without telling him; the green line is agreement that violence is justified if she argues with him. The blue and yellow spikes can be interpreted as the 'cause' of childhood socialization; the fluctuations in the red and green lines can be seen as 'effects' of socialization – when the boy became a man (and was interviewed by DHS), he was more likely to consider violence acceptable if he was about 5 years old when Mrs

Gandhi or Mrs Bandaraike were elected. One possible explanation is that when women were elected, men felt threatened and responded to this by sexist behaviour such as violence towards women; if such sexist behaviour was witnessed by a 5-year-old boy, he was more likely (as an adult) to see such behaviour as 'normal'.

Another issue we could consider is the age of socialisation: can we be confident it is it 5 years old, as Table 1 suggests? There is a fairly good match between the red & green spikes, and the yellow & blue spikes of 1966 and 1971. However, for other spikes (1960, 1975, and 1980), there seems a slight mismatch: perhaps the attitude change was a year later than the yellow & blue spikes would suggest – if so, this suggests boys were socialised at age 6 rather than age 5. The 1966 and 1971 events were early in the year (19th January 1966, and 18th March 1971), whereas two of the other three events were later in the year (21st July 1960 and 1st July 1975), which may indicate that boys are socialised at about 5½ years rather than 5 years of age (the 1980 re-election was on 14th January 1980; this is consistent with socialisation at age 5½ years if we look at the red line on Chart 2, rather than the green line).

Chart 3: female attitudes towards Gender-Based Violence, by age.



Source: DHS 2005.

Chart 3 is similar to Chart 2, but Chart 3 refers to women respondents – whereas Chart 2 was based on male respondents. The blue and yellow spikes in Chart 3 are identical to those in Chart 2. Chart 3, like Chart 2, suggests that Mrs. Gandhi's election to power had a temporary effect on acceptance of GBV. There is an apparent similarity between Charts 3 and 2, in that the blue &

yellow spikes (election of Mrs. Gandhi to power: presumably the cause) seem to line up vertically with the red & green spikes (acceptance of violence against women: presumably the effect). This suggests that girls are socialised at 5 years old (rather than 5½ years for boys, as Chart 2 implies). There are differences between Charts 2 and 3. Focusing on attitude variables, there is a tendency for the red and green lines to slope downwards in Chart 2: young men (right side of Chart 2) are less likely than old men (left side of Chart 2) to accept GBV. The opposite pattern applies to Chart 3: the upward slope of the red and green lines shows that younger women are more likely than older women to see GBV as acceptable. Young men have similar values to young women: in both genders, about 25% of young people say that GBV acceptable.

This paper attempts to test the idea that when Mrs. Gandhi was elected, it was common for a man to feel threatened, and react by being violence against his wife; five-year-old children saw this violence, and came to think of violence against women as 'normal' and hence acceptable. We cannot easily identify if there was an increase in domestic violence against women in the years Mrs. Gandhi was elected (1960, etc) because such crime data has only been made available by the Indian government in recent years. Indeed, for most of the time-period of Charts 2 and 3 (1956 to 1989), domestic violence was not a crime under Indian law, unless it was extreme violence – such as murder.

Conclusion

IIPS and ORC Macro (2000: 79) wrote "The experience of violence and the silent acceptance of violence by women undermines attempts to empower women and will continue to be a barrier to the achievement of demographic, health, and socioeconomic development goals". The 3 Charts in this paper confirm domestic violence is a major problem in India. Previous research indicates many possible causes of violence (such as alcohol); this paper does not examine them all.

The status of women in Indian society is reported by Kosambi (1993: p. 45) as follows: "The conservative approach to prostitution rests on the premise that society is divided into two sets of women: the good and the bad. The good women are within the homes — the submissive docile wives and daughters who need to be protected from the outside world (though they may be battered, burnt or assaulted within the home). The bad women are out on the streets and deserve to be treated with contempt. And while one set of women needs to be protected from the other, the men can have access to both". India has changed since 1993; but more recent research suggests that women have not yet achieved equality with men. In India, "Not only is wife-beating seen as a normal part of womanhood but also women are acutely aware of their limited options, and that socio-economic factors provide them few alternatives to the life of violence" (Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997: sI11). Indian girls & women, from childhood, "are taught to serve their husband like a deity" (Bhattacharya, 2000: 19). More research is needed; but campaigns to change Indian laws and culture are also required.

Some women in the Indian subcontinent appear to be powerful role models; examples include Indira Gandhi in India; Mrs Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka; and Benezir Bhutto in Pakistan. Men in India appear to react negatively to such changes, turning to violence – perhaps in an effort to retain male power. Boys who were about 5 years at the time of a woman taking power appear more likely to turn to violence against their women; this appears to be a result of childhood socialisation.

Children learn from adults. Be careful what you say to children who are about five years old.

References

Aranda, M.P., Castaneda, I., Lee, P-J & Sobel, E. 2001. 'Stress, social support, and coping as predictors of depressive symptoms: gender differences among Mexican Americans'. Social Work Research, 25 (11): 37-48.

Bhattacharya, M. 2000. ‘Iron bangles to iron shackles: a study of women’s marriage and subordination within poor households in Calcutta’, Man in India 80 (1 & 2): 1-29.

Bott S., Morrison A. & Ellsberg M., 2005. ‘Preventing and responding to gender-based violence in middle and low-income countries: a global review and analysis’, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3618, June 2005. www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2005/06/28/000112742_20050628084339/Rendered/PDF/wps3618.pdf downloaded 31st October 2007.

Burton B., Duwury N., Rajan A. & Varia N. 1999. ‘Introduction’, in ICRC, Domestic violence in India: a summary report of three studies, International Center for Research on Women, Washington, www.icrw.org/docs/DomesticViolence3.pdf downloaded 13th March 2002.

Burton B., Duvvury N. & Varia N. 2000. ‘Justice, Change, and Human Rights: international research and responses to domestic Violence’, International Center for Research on Women and The Centre for Development and Population Activities, Washington, www.icrw.org/docs/domesticviolencesynthesis.pdf downloaded 31st October 2007.

Delsol C., Margolin G. & John R. S. 2003. ‘A typology of maritally violent men and correlates of violence in a community sample’, Journal of Marriage and Family, 65 (3): 635-51.

Dutt A.K. & Noble A.G. 1982. ‘The culture of India in spatial perspective: an introduction’, in Noble A.G. & Dutt A.K. (eds.), *India: cultural patterns and processes*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview.

Google News. 2007. news.google.com/archivesearch?q=%22indira+gandhi%22&btnG=Search+Archives&as_ldate=1959&as_hdate=1959 downloaded 4th November 2007.

ICRW. 2001. ‘Domestic violence in India II: exploring strategies, promoting dialogue’, International Center for Research on Women, Washington DC. www.icrw.org/docs/indiainfobulletin.pdf downloaded 15th August 2006.

ICRW 2002. ‘Introduction’, in ‘Men, masculinity and domestic violence in India: summary report of four studies’, International Center for Research on Women, Washington DC. www.icrw.org/docs/DV_India_Report4_52002.pdf downloaded 12th August 2006.

IIPS and ORC Macro. 2000. ‘National Family Health Survey (NFHS - 2), 1998-99: India’, International Institute for Population Sciences: Mumbai. www.measuredhs.com/countries/download.cfm?ctry_id=57&surv_id=156 downloaded 27th October 2004.

Irudaya Rajan S., Sudha S. & Mohanachandran P. 2000. ‘Fertility decline and worsening gender bias in India: is Kerala no longer an exception?’, Development and change, 31 (5): 1085-92.

Jeffery P., Jeffery R. & Lyon A. 1989. *Labour pains and labour power: women and childbearing in India.* London: Zed books.

Jeffrey, R. 1989. ‘Women and the “Kerala model”: four lives, 1870s-1980s’, South Asia 12 (2): 13-32.

Jejeebhoy, S. J. & Cook, R. J. 1997. ‘State accountability for wife-beating: the India challenge’, The Lancet, 349 (March): SI10-2.

Jewkes, R. 2002. ‘Intimate partner violence: causes and prevention’, The Lancet, 359 (April): 1423-9.

Kosambi, Meera (ed.), 1993. 'Violence against women: reports from India and the republic of Korea', UNESCO: Bangkok, RUSHSAP series of monographs and occasional papers: 37. Downloaded 27th February 2008, from
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000966/096629eo.pdf

Lieten G.K. 2002. 'The human development puzzle in Kerala', Journal of contemporary Asia 32 (1): 47-68.

Martin S.L., Moracco K.E., Garro J., Tsui A.O., Kupper L.L., Chase J.L. & Campbell J.C. 2002. 'Domestic violence across generations: findings from northern India', International Journal of Epidemiology 31: 560-72.

NCERT. 2006. '7th All-India Education Survey', National Council of Educational Research and Training, gov.ua.nic.in/aises/index.htm downloaded 14th August 2006.

NCRB. 2001. 'Crime in India: 1998', Government of India (National Crime Records Bureau), New Delhi, www.ncrbindia.org/bound.htm downloaded 16th November 2001.

NIC. 2006. 'Expenditure budget vol. I 2005-2006', Indiabudget.nic.in/ub2005-06/ed/stat02.pdf downloaded 14th August 2006.

Rao V. 1997. 'Wife-beating in rural south India: a qualitative and econometric analysis', Social Science & Medicine 44 (8): 1169-80.

Satish Kumar C., Gupta S.D. & Abraham, G. 2002. 'Masculinity and violence against women in marriage: an exploratory study in Rajasthan', in 'Men, masculinity and domestic violence in India: summary report of four studies', International Center for Research on Women. www.icrw.org/docs/DV_India_Report4_52002.pdf downloaded 12th August 2006.

Visaria, L. 1999. 'Violence against women in India: evidence from rural Gujarat', in ICRW (ed.), Domestic violence in India: a summary report of three studies, International Center for Research on Women, Washington, www.icrw.org/docs/DomesticViolence3.pdf downloaded 13th March 2002.

Wikipedia. 2008. 'Indira Gandhi', from
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indira_Gandhi downloaded 1st July 2008.