

Socio-Economic and Cultural Dimensions of Domestic Violence Against Women: Evidence from Rural and Urban Areas of Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

Domestic violence against women constitutes a grave violation of human rights and remains a persistent social problem cutting across socio-economic, cultural, and regional boundaries. In India, despite progressive constitutional guarantees and the enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, violence within the domestic sphere continues largely unabated. The present study seeks to examine the nature, causes, and consequences of domestic violence against married women in selected rural and urban mandals of YSR Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh.

The study is based on primary data collected from 385 married women using a stratified random sampling technique and a structured interview schedule. Multiple forms of violence—physical, psychological, verbal, economic, and technological—are analyzed in relation to socio-demographic variables such as age, education, income, type of marriage, family structure, occupation, and place of residence. Statistical tools including descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and chi-square tests were employed for data analysis.

The findings indicate that domestic violence is more prevalent in rural areas due to economic dependency, patriarchal family norms, and limited access to institutional support. However, urban women reported relatively higher levels of psychological, verbal, and technological abuse, reflecting changing forms of control in urban households. The study highlights the need for context-specific interventions, enhanced legal awareness, women's economic empowerment, and community-based support mechanisms to effectively address domestic violence and promote gender equality.

Keywords: Domestic Violence; Women; Rural–Urban Differences; Socio-Economic Factors; Patriarchal Norms; Psychological and Technological Abuse; Legal Awareness; Women's Empowerment; Andhra Pradesh

Introduction

Domestic violence against women is one of the most widespread yet least acknowledged forms of gender-based violence. It occurs within the private sphere of the family, making it difficult to detect, report, and address. Domestic violence encompasses physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse inflicted by intimate partners or family members, often justified by entrenched social norms and power relations.

According to the World Health Organization, nearly one-third of women worldwide experience physical

or sexual violence at some point in their lives. In the Indian context, data from the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) reveal that about 33 per cent of ever-married women aged 15–49 years have experienced spousal violence. The prevalence is notably higher in rural areas, reflecting the persistence of traditional gender roles, economic dependency, and limited awareness of legal rights.

Domestic violence is deeply embedded in patriarchal social structures that legitimize male dominance and female subordination. Cultural practices such as dowry, early marriage, son preference, and rigid gender expectations reinforce women's vulnerability. While urbanization and modernization have expanded women's access to education and employment, they have not eliminated domestic violence. Instead, violence in urban settings often takes subtler forms, including psychological manipulation, financial control, and technological surveillance.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was undertaken with the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the **socio-demographic and economic profile** of women experiencing domestic violence in rural and urban areas.
2. To analyze the **nature and forms of domestic violence** (physical, psychological, verbal, economic, and technological) faced by women.
3. To assess the **relationship between socio-economic factors** such as age, education, income, type of marriage, and domestic violence.
4. To compare **rural–urban variations** in the prevalence and intensity of domestic violence.
5. To study women's **awareness and utilization of legal provisions**, particularly the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.
6. To suggest **policy-oriented and community-based interventions** for the prevention of domestic violence.

Forms of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence manifests in multiple and interrelated forms, each having serious implications for women's physical and mental well-being:

1. **Physical Violence:** This includes acts such as hitting, slapping, kicking, pushing, choking, burning, or causing bodily injury. Physical violence often leaves visible injuries and may result in long-term health complications.
2. **Psychological Violence:** Psychological abuse involves intimidation, threats, isolation, controlling behaviour, constant monitoring, and mental harassment. Though invisible, its impact on women's mental health is profound and enduring.
3. **Verbal and Emotional Abuse:** Verbal abuse includes insults, humiliation, ridicule, name-calling, and constant criticism. Emotional abuse erodes self-esteem and reinforces women's sense of powerlessness.
4. **Sexual Violence:** Sexual violence refers to forced sexual acts, marital rape, coercion, and denial of reproductive autonomy. It violates women's bodily integrity and personal dignity.
5. **Economic Violence:** Economic abuse involves controlling access to money, denial of financial resources, preventing employment, and depriving women of property or inheritance rights.
6. **Technological Violence:** With the spread of digital technology, new forms of abuse have emerged, including monitoring phone usage, tracking social media activity, online harassment, and digital thre-

ats.

Legal Framework in India

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 represents a significant milestone in addressing domestic violence in India. The Act adopts a broad definition of domestic violence, recognizing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse. It provides civil remedies such as protection orders, residence orders, custody orders, and monetary relief.

Despite its progressive provisions, the implementation of the Act remains weak. Social stigma, fear of retaliation, lack of legal awareness, patriarchal attitudes among enforcement agencies, and inadequate support infrastructure often discourage women from seeking legal recourse. Consequently, domestic violence continues to be underreported and inadequately addressed.

Statement of the Problem

Domestic violence remains one of the most common yet underreported forms of violence against women in India. Women in both rural and urban areas experience abuse within their households due to socio-economic dependency, cultural norms, and unequal power relations. Rural women face constraints such as traditional gender roles, economic dependence, and social stigma, while urban women often experience isolation, work-family stress, and pressure to maintain family honour. These contrasting realities necessitate a comparative analysis to understand the differential patterns, determinants, and consequences of domestic violence.

Research Gap

Although a substantial body of literature exists on domestic violence, limited studies focus on rural–urban differences in the nature, intensity, and forms of abuse. Emerging forms of violence such as technological and financial abuse remain underexplored. Moreover, there is inadequate emphasis on women’s coping mechanisms, awareness and utilisation of legal provisions, and the role of economic empowerment programmes. Addressing these gaps is essential for designing inclusive and context-specific interventions.

Significance of the Study

The study provides empirical insights into how socio-economic factors, cultural values, and patriarchal attitudes shape women’s experiences of domestic violence. It contributes to the academic discourse on gender-based violence and offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, social workers, NGOs, and legal practitioners. The findings aim to strengthen legal implementation, improve service delivery, and promote gender-sensitive social reforms.

Methodology

The study was conducted in YSR Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh using a stratified random sampling technique. A total of 385 married women from selected rural and urban mandals were interviewed using a pre-tested structured interview schedule. Both primary and secondary data sources were utilised. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and chi-square tests to examine relationships between domestic violence and socio-demographic variables.

Table 1: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age Group (Years)	Number	Percentage
22–25	68	17.7 %
26–30	140	36.4 %
31–35	102	26.5 %
36–40	75	19.4 %
Total	385	100

Interpretation:

The majority of respondents (36.4%) belonged to the age group of 26–30 years, followed by 31–35 years (26.5%). This indicates that women in the **early years of marriage are more vulnerable** to domestic violence due to adjustment problems, economic dependency, and lack of bargaining power within the family.

Table 2: Mean Differences Between Age and Forms of Domestic Violence

Age Group	Physical	Psychological	Verbal	Technological	Financial
22–25	22.10	13.82	15.77	12.40	13.65
26–30	22.45	13.96	15.20	11.85	14.20
31–35	22.86	13.05	14.98	12.88	13.40
36–40	21.24	14.19	14.80	12.10	12.70

Interpretation:

Physical violence was highest among women aged **31–35 years**, while psychological violence was more pronounced among women aged **36–40 years**. Younger women (22–25 years) reported comparatively higher levels of **verbal abuse**, indicating emotional domination during the initial phase of marriage.

Table 3: Type of Marriage and Domestic Violence

Type of Marriage	Physical	Psychological	Verbal	Technological	Financial
Arranged	21.55	13.44	14.71	12.38	14.21
Love	23.88	14.20	15.63	11.79	12.95

Interpretation:

Women in **love marriages experienced higher physical, psychological, and verbal violence**, whereas women in **arranged marriages reported greater economic and technological control**. This reflects social resistance, lack of family support, and power struggles in love marriages.

Table 4: Rural–Urban Differences in Domestic Violence

Area	Physical	Psychological	Verbal	Technological	Financial
Rural	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
Urban	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	Moderate

Interpretation:

Domestic violence was **more severe in rural areas**, particularly physical and economic violence. However, **urban women experienced higher psychological, verbal, and technological abuse**, indicating changing forms of control linked to modern lifestyles and digital surveillance.

Table 5: Awareness of Domestic Violence Act, 2005

Area	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)
Rural	81.8	18.2
Urban	18.2	81.8

Interpretation:

Awareness of the Domestic Violence Act was **surprisingly higher in rural areas**, mainly due to SHGs, Anganwadi workers, and NGO interventions. However, **actual utilisation of legal remedies remained low** in both rural and urban areas.

Major Findings of the Study

- **36.4%** of women aged **26–30 years** were the most affected group.
 - **Over 60%** of rural women reported **physical and economic violence**.
 - **More than 55%** of urban women experienced **psychological and verbal abuse**.
 - **Love marriages recorded nearly 20–25% higher physical violence** than arranged marriages.
 - **Only about 25%** of women who were aware of the law actually approached formal legal institutions.
- Domestic violence is **more prevalent in rural areas**, particularly physical and financial abuse.
1. Patriarchal norms and **economic dependency** significantly increase women’s vulnerability.
 2. Urbanization has not reduced domestic violence but has **transformed it into psychological and technological abuse**.
 3. Women in love marriages face **greater social isolation and violence** compared to arranged marriages.
 4. Awareness of legal provisions does not necessarily lead to utilization due to **fear, stigma, and lack of institutional support**.
 5. Informal coping mechanisms such as family mediation are preferred over legal remedies.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Legal Awareness Programmes

Continuous awareness campaigns on the Domestic Violence Act should be organized through SHGs, educational institutions, and local governance bodies.

1. **Economic Empowerment of Women:** Skill development programmes, employment opportunities, and access to credit must be strengthened to reduce women’s economic dependency.
2. **Strengthening Support Systems:** One-stop crisis centres, counselling services, helplines, and shelter homes should be expanded, especially in rural areas.
3. **Capacity Building of Institutions:** Police personnel, healthcare workers, and judiciary must be sensitised to handle domestic violence cases with empathy and efficiency.
4. **Community-Based Interventions:** Involving community leaders, men, and youth in gender sensitisation programmes can challenge patriarchal attitudes.
5. **Educational Reforms:** Gender equality and human rights education should be integrated into school and college curricula.

Results and Discussion

The findings reveal that women aged 26–30 years reported higher vulnerability to domestic violence, particularly during the early years of marriage. Rural women experienced higher levels of physical and economic violence, while urban women reported greater psychological, verbal, and technological abuse.

Love marriages showed higher levels of physical and psychological violence, whereas arranged marriages were associated with greater economic and technological control.

Awareness of the Domestic Violence Act was higher among rural women; however, utilisation of legal remedies remained limited in both settings. Informal coping mechanisms such as family mediation and community intervention were preferred over formal legal channels.

Conclusion

Domestic violence against women is a multidimensional and deeply rooted social problem arising from socio-economic inequality and patriarchal cultural norms. The rural–urban comparison highlights distinct patterns of abuse, underscoring the need for differentiated and context-specific strategies. Strengthening legal implementation, enhancing awareness, promoting women’s education and economic independence, and fostering community-level interventions are crucial for reducing domestic violence and achieving gender equality.

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