

Violence Against Women in South Asia: A Study of Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract—Violence against women is a significant violation of women’s human rights. It continues to affect women all around the world in nuanced ways. For my project, I aim to study the prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in South Asia. I used data from The World Bank Gender Data Portal to inform and educate my viewers about IPV in select countries namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Through a visual exploration of the data set, along with an integration of supplementary data published by the UNFPA and UN Women, I elaborate on the nuances of IPV, and define the prevalence/magnitude of the different forms of violence against married women between the ages 15-49. For the scope of the project, I consider IPV as any kind of reported experience of physical, sexual and psychological violence by a current or former spouse, significant other, husband, or partner. My goal is to use the data to support potential conclusions we draw on why such violence continues to exist. Pre-existing notions include the idea of widespread acceptance, shame, fear and self-blame. I hope to discover correlations between IPV and (1) Legislation around Domestic Violence, (2) Female Labor Force Participation rates, and (3) Financial Freedom.

Keywords—*Intimate Partner Violence, Gender Based Violence, Gender Equality, Mental Health, Physical Trauma, Autonomy, Unwanted Pregnancy, STD, Fear, Control.*

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The term “violence against women” includes many form of violence, including violence by an intimate partner and rape/sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence by someone other than a partner. I want to emphasize that within the scope of my project, I am only focusing on data that encompasses intimate partner violence where the violence perpetrated has been against a woman by a man. I would like to acknowledge that my research topic does not currently look into same-sex intimate partner violence or violence between the spectrum of queer relationships that exist. I do not wish to leave out the victims of abuse in homosexual relationships and hope to highlight those instances when I am able to acquire a reliable body of evidence in the future. I want to preface the study by stating that the few studies I found on Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence have been able to highlight that the phenomenon occurs at a rate that is comparable or even higher than that of heterosexual Intimate Partner Violence.

Due to the growing recognition of the mental, physical, and reproductive health issues caused by Intimate Partner Violence, I have been able to gain access to data that measures women’s exposure to it.

National governments are increasingly incorporating questions on women’s exposure to partnered violence in their national health surveys. The attributes are derived from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and UNICEF Data found on the World Bank Data website. I used the UNFPA’s Asia and Pacific Region IPV Data to provide supplementary data necessary for my project.

Within the context of IPV, the features in my dataset identify:

- Physical Violence as being slapped, having something thrown at you that could hurt you, being pushed or shoved, being hit with a fist, being kicked, dragged or beaten up, being choked or burnt on purpose and/or being threatened with a weapon.
- Sexual Violence is defined as being physically forced to have sexual intercourse when you do not want to, having sexual intercourse because you were afraid of what your partner might do, and/or being forced to do something that you found humiliating or degrading.
- Psychological Violence is defined as the regular and deliberate use of a range of words and non-physical actions used with the purpose to manipulate, hurt, weaken or frighten a person mentally and emotionally; and/or distort, confuse or influence a person’s thoughts and actions within their everyday lives, changing their sense of self and harming their wellbeing.

Although my dataset does not help us identify individual cases and report incidents, the DHS methodology utilizes standardized questionnaire modules for each country and the questionnaire includes any woman above the age of 15 years. I use aggregate values to display the percentage of women who have experienced any violence as a ratio of the female population within those countries.

II. DATASET AND PREPROCESSING

A. Basis

I derived my dataset from The World Bank's Gender Data Portal, below is a list of all the features used to conduct my study:

- Country Names (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan)
- Income Groups (Q1 - Q5, lowest 20% through highest 20%)
- Year (2012-2021)
- Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)
- Proportion of women who have ever experienced intimate partner violence (% of ever-married women ages 15-49)
- Proportion of women who have sought help to stop physical or sexual violence (% of ever-married women ages 15-49)
- Women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife when she argues with him (%)
- Women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife when she burns the food (%)
- Women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife when she goes out without telling him (%)
- Women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife when she neglects the children (%)
- Women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife when she refuses sex with him (%)
- Women who believe a wife is justified refusing sex with her husband if she knows he has sex with other women (%)
- Women who believe a wife is justified refusing sex with her husband if she knows he has sexually transmitted disease (%)
- Labor Force, Female (% of the labor force)
- Saved any money in the past year, female (% age 15+)
- Coming up with emergency funds: possible, female (% age 15+)
- There is legislation specifically addressing domestic violence (1=yes; 0=no)

B. Design and Assumptions

The reason I narrowed down the research to 5 countries from the South Asian Diaspora was missing data. I found that Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan often had missing values within these features and concluded that it was best I did not study them as I anticipated, frequently comparing one country to the other. A major drawback of the dataset was that I did not have data through the time series period selected, hence, I reported the most recent values I could find within the last decade. An assumption I continued to work within in this case is that no major changes have occurred since that data was reported. This certainly cannot be certified, considering cases around Intimate Partner Violence only escalated during the recent COVID-19 Pandemic, however, I continued to work with this dataset to inform my viewers of the prevalence of IPV in South Asia within the last decade.

I chose data around legislations and female labor force participation as supplementary data with the hopes to find certain correlations, within existing legislations and female financial autonomy. This is an assumption I walked in with which led me to choosing the attributes listed above to further investigate.

C. Process and Structure

The raw data I initially derived from the source listed each feature in rows instead of columns, some of the features and listed attributes were not accessible to use and got aggregated due to the restrictions of the format. I had to reshape the data for analysis by making the data more granular. The first step was to make each one of the features a column instead of row, that way, Tableau recognized them as measuring values and dimensions.

- *Pivot Data in a Crosstab Format*

Before:

1	Series Name	Country Name
90	Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)	Afghanistan
91	Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)	Bangladesh
92	Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)	Bhutan
93	Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)	India
94	Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)	Maldives
95	Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)	Nepal
96	Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)	Pakistan
97	Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)	Sri Lanka

After:

Country Name	Income Group	Proportion of women who have ever experienced any form of sexual violence (% of women ages 15-49)
Afghanistan		7.5
Bangladesh		3
Bhutan		5.8
India		6
Maldives		
Nepal		10.8
Pakistan		5.7
Sri Lanka		24.9

In the case above, the data was overly granulated and pivoting the data helped organize each feature into individual columns instead of having a dataset with hundreds of rows. In this kind of row-oriented table the variables are stored in the row values instead of the feature names.

- *Averages*

Another major transformation I had to make to the data was to average the data over the 10 year period, since I did not have consistency for each attribute per country, I decided to average out the data and work with one aggregated value instead of an incomplete time series data. For example, if I had a value for Bangladesh for the feature "Women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife when she argues with him (%)" as 24.2% for the year 2014 and 17.7% for the year 2018, I took the average of the two resulting in 20.95%. This is an important thing to note, as this data is an average of the reported data available between the time period 2012-2021. I recognize that I missed out on time series information which is an important variable in the dataset but wanted to provide visual insights that are able to put South Asian countries at the center of the study and report the data available in the most viewer friendly way possible.

The binary data, i.e. : “There is legislation specifically addressing domestic violence (1=yes; 0=no)” also needed to be pivoted into columns. I replaced the numerical values with “Yes” and “No” for comprehension.

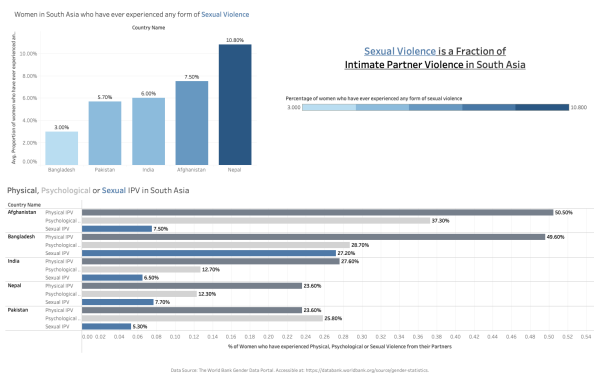
III. RESULTS AND VISUALS

This is where I will introduce my visualizations and discuss my findings. There are a total of 5 dashboards created,

1. Proportion of IPV that is Sexually Motivated.
2. Statistics on the mindset of women who experience IPV, i.e. their tendency to seek help vs deny abuse.
3. Statistics on how often women feel comfortable refusing sex with their partners, as a determinant and representative of some level of personal autonomy possessed by subjects of the study.
4. Existence of Legislations around Domestic Violence in South Asian countries.
5. Statistics on Financial Autonomy amongst participants.

A. Dashboard 1

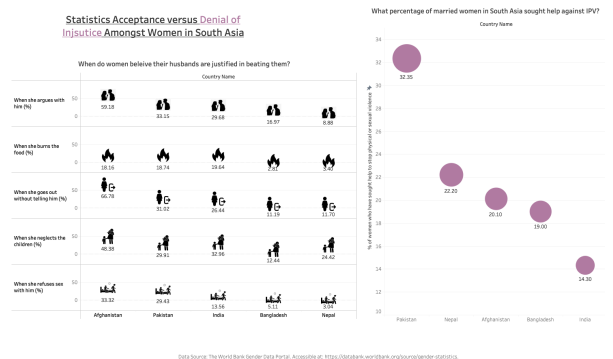
This introductory dashboard is meant to educate viewers on the types of Intimate Partner Violence that can take place in domestic partnerships. We can see that a vast percentage of IPV in all 5 countries is psychological in nature - this is harder to identify, challenging to display in court, nearly impossible to provide proof of or defend against. We can learn to empathize with those who do experience such violence and continue to stay in such harmful dynamics.



B. Dashboard 2

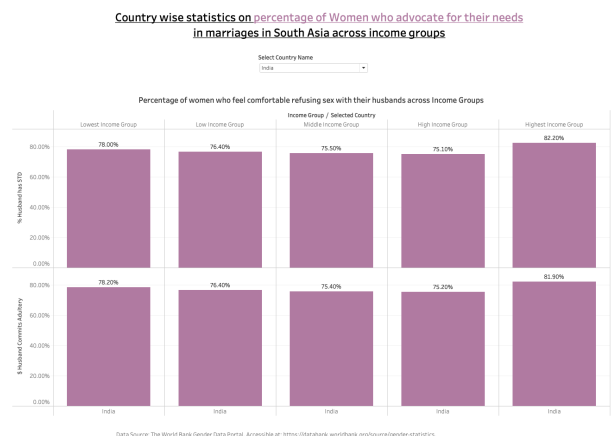
This dashboard provides statistics on how women who experience violence perceive the injustice, although we may never have clear explanations as to why, this data can help us understand the mindset of the participants of the study. We can see that 59.18% of women in Afghanistan believe their husbands are justified in beating them if they argue with them. The statistics on

Nepal report that only 8% of women believe their husbands are justified in beating them. The visual is sorted in ascending order, Afghanistan rating the highest, followed by Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and then Nepal. The graph on the left shows that 32.35% of women in Pakistan seek help against IPV.



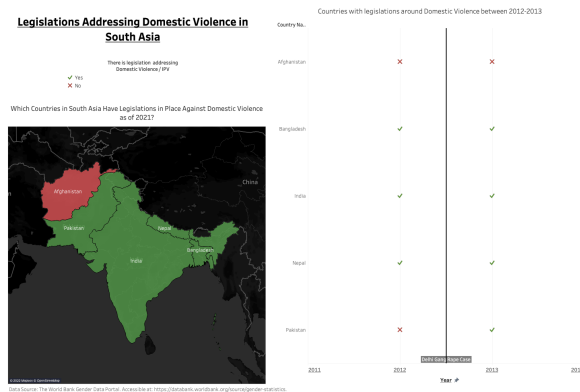
C. Dashboard 3

The visual namely, “Percentage of Women Who Feel Comfortable Refusing Sex With Their Husbands” is an interactive dashboard that consists of country name, two scenarios in which women find it worthy to refuse sexual activity with their partners, and income groups from poorest to richest in each household. Once we choose a country name from the drop down menu, it is observable that women in rich households in Afghanistan are able to speak up more in such scenarios, compared with those in relatively poorer households. In another example, there are no significant patterns found amongst income groups in India, income seems to have no impact on women and their ability to advocate for their needs and display personal autonomy.



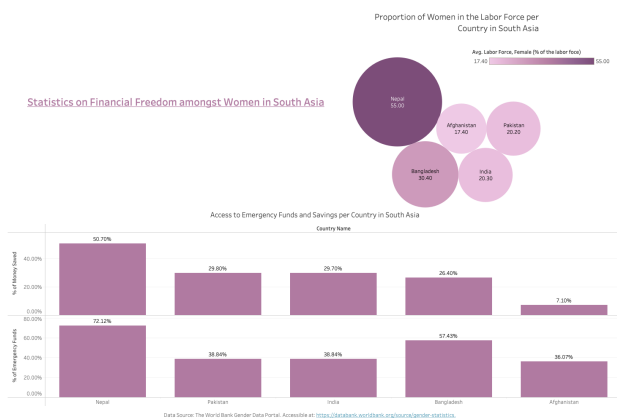
D. Dashboard 4

Studying the existence of legislations across each country, the map showcases that every country except for Afghanistan has laws dedicated to Domestic Violence during contemporary times. The red and green colors denote whether the legislation is in place or not, in a similar fashion the “cross” and “tickmark” on the time series also help assess if the country is focused to mitigate violence against women.



E. Dashboard 5

This dashboard presents the female labor force participation rate in South Asian countries. This chart can help us draw correlations on financial autonomy and its ability to help women fight against IPV. Nepal, in both charts ranks highest. It is a country with the highest female labor force, and women in Nepal are shown to have more money in their emergency ang savings funds. Nepal is also a country with the second highest case reporting, creating a correlation with the fact that financial freedom may motivate women to report their experiences.



IV. CONCLUSIONS AND INSIGHT

I used this dataset to explore possible relationships between Intimate Partner Violence with Legislations in each country, Female Labor Force Participation Rates and Financial Autonomy.

A. Sexual Violence is only a fraction of Intimate Partner Violence

The dataset was able to reveal that far fewer women report Sexual Violence as opposed to Intimate Partner

Violence. We cannot draw conclusions on why this might be the reason, but possibly added shame around experiencing any form of gendered violence by a non-partner or stranger. I learnt that amongst all countries in South Asia, sexual violence comprised of only a fraction of the gendered intimate partner violence that takes place. It is possible that societal norms and complex power dynamics between man and woman contributed to excessive gendered violence that appears through other types of violence.

B. Existence of Legislations show no impact on reporting IPV

Since I am working with data between the years 2012-2021, my initial impulse was to study the existence of legislation during that time period. Through looking at the binary data for this topic, I learnt that 3 out of five countries had legislations in place during those years but that didn't quite reflect in the levels of reporting in those countries. I discovered that Pakistan implemented some changes in their legislations and included legislations against domestic violence between the years 2012 and 2013. My theory from research shows that this may have been due to the huge uprising against gendered violence in South Asia due to a violent gang rape case that took place in 2012.

C. Income Group effects Woman's Ability to Speak up in Afghanistan

Through this data, I learnt that women from richer households feel slightly more comfortable refusing sexual interaction with their husbands in Afghanistan. However this change isn't quite drastic, in general, nearly 50-70% of women do feel comfortable refusing sex in extreme cases such as when the husband commits adultery or the husband has an STD. Surprisingly however, women in Afghanistan tend to believe beating is justified in scenarios that seem untoward.

D. Finances

I was hoping to discover a positive correlation between countries where women have greater financial freedom and reporting of cases. This wasn't entirely true, the data for Nepal reveals that, although it is the country with the highest female labor force participation rate and ranks highest amongst all five countries in matters of emergency funds and savings, the cases of reporting were still pretty low. Women comprise 55% of the labor force, which is more than men, and is actually a fantastically high number, only 22% of women seek help against domestic violence. However, I found that only between 3-24% of women believed that their husbands were justified in beating them, which is the lowest compared to any other South Asian country. In general, women in Nepal seem to have a strong opinion on the injustice of beatings, tend to have more financial freedom, however, reporting of cases are still low, possibly due to the social, emotional, logistical issues that go hand in hand with going public about Intimate Partner Violence.

The findings have deepened my insights of the prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence in South Asia.

V. REFERENCES

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