The Relationship between Female Deity Temple Exposure and Intimate Partner Violence

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1 Introduction

Understanding the historical roots of attitudes towards women can provide valuable insights into addressing and mitigating harmful behaviors directed towards women. Intimate partner violence (IPV), one such behavior, is a public health issue around the world. According to the World Health Organizationâs handbook on IPV, of all women in various parts of the developing world who have ever been in a relationship, 13-61% reported ever having experienced physical violence by a partner, and 40-70% of female murder victims were killed by their husband or boyfriend.[1] IPV, therefore, is a public health crisis for many women in the developing world.

In India, according to data from the National Family and Health Surveys, 30% of women who have ever been in a relationship have endured intimate partner violence at some time in their lives. For the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, this same statistic much higher, at 42%.[2] In many parts of India, there is high acceptability of intimate partner violence; IPV

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[1]"Understanding and Addressing Violence against Women" 2012, World Health Organization. These numbers are from a study of 10 developing countries.

[2]International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2017. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015- 16: India. Mumbai: IIPS.

is vastly underreported, and while IPV is illegal, it is poorly enforced.[3] Moreover, there is a dearth of services such as domestic violence shelters (ICRW, 2000). It is important to find a viable solution to this high incidence of IPV in such parts of India as Tamil Nadu.

In fact, efforts are made to appeal to historical, cultural goddess-worship as a way to decrease gender-based violence; an NGO sponsored billboard campaign in 2012 depicted goddesses bearing physical signs of intimate partner victimization, urging the public to reflect on the inherent contradiction of venerating female deities while tolerating widespread abuse against women.[4] In order for this approach to be effective, it is important to understand the relationship between the perception of female goddesses and intimate partner violence.

In this paper, I present a descriptive analysis of the relationship between the incidence of intimate partner violence and the historic exposure to female deity temples. I use hand-collected data on historical temples, constructed 1500-500 years ago by kings with idiosyncratic preferences for deities, along with information on which temples are devoted to female deities, in order to construct a measure of exposure to goddesses at the district level. I focus on the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu due to the significant resources required for the hand-collection of data.[5] Specifically, I find the share of total temples in each district which are goddess-temples. For IPV data, I use individual-level data from the National Family and Health Survey (maintained by the Demographic and Health Surveys) Section on Domestic Violence, which questions women who were ever married on whether they've been physically, sexually, or emotionally abused. If a woman reports being physically or sexually abused, for purposes of my analysis, I consider it to be an incidence of intimate partner violence. I employ an ordinary least squares methodology to study the relationship between the treatment, exposure to goddesses, on the incidence of intimate partner violence, the outcome variable.

If female-deity exposure is associated with a lower incidence of IPV, it is consistent with the hypothesis that the exposure to goddesses engenders a culture of respect towards women

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[3]ICRW, 2000.
[4]Source: Abused Goddesses Campaign
[5]I discuss issues of external validity in a later section.

and lower acceptability of IPV. If exposure is associated with higher incidence of IPV, it may suggest a more complicated interpretation of the goddesses. There is documented evidence that aspects of religion are sometimes weaponized against women[6]. If women are told to endure hardships as a virtue, as the goddesses are sometimes represented as enduring[7], they may view abuse and self-sacrifice as one such hardship and forego seeking help, reducing the risk of consequences of IPV for abusive husbands.

Preliminary results show evidence that female-deity exposure is associated with a higher incidence of IPV.

In economics literature, it is documented that historical events and interventions affect outcomes in the modern-day[8]; we further understand the impact of historical events and family structure on outcomes for women (Tur-Prats, 2015; Alesina, Giuliano, and Nunn, 2013). A strand of the intimate partner violence literature investigates the determinants of IPV; short term determinants of IPV associated with the bargaining power distribution in the household (Tauchen, Witte, and Long, 1991; Farmer and Tiefenthalter, 1996; Aizer, 2000), while Tur-Prats investigates a long-term (historical) determinant of IPV â historic roots of family types and how they affect intimate partner violence outcomes. My paper dovetails two primary areas of literature: the impact of historical influences on contemporary behavior and the potential causal relationships between perceptions of women and women's outcomes. It delves into the intersection of these fields by examining how historical events or beliefs shape current gender-related outcomes.

More broadly, this research question focuses on women's outcomes in a developing country, exploring the origins of behavior patterns concerning women. This can inform policy interventions to improve these outcomes in developing countries, thereby contributing to the extensive literature on reducing intimate partner violence, increasing women's literacy, improving women's health, and enhancing resource allocation toward women.

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[6]Levitt (2006)

[7]Jayasundara et al. (2017)

[8]See Lowes, Nunn, Robinson, et al., 2017; Dell and Olken, 2020; Dell, Lane, and Querubin, 2018; Caicedo, 2019

In the next section, I provide background on the historical temples as a treatment.

2 Background and History

2.1 The Three Kingdoms: History and Temple Construction

The first historic temple complexes in Tamil Nadu appeared around the year 500. These were very expensive projects that only kings could afford to construct. For the next thousand years, three kingdoms in Tamil Nadu constructed almost all of the historic temples in Tamil Nadu. These three dynasties, Pandyas, Cholas, and Cheras, maintained relevance and power for a millennium. Even before the year 500, each of the dynasties maintained some regional stronghold in the southern-most part of the Indian peninsula, but they were also each a dominant power of the region at some point during the thousand-year period of 500 â 1500 AD.[9] During this time, as a matter of legacy, the reigning kings of each dynasty had a practice of constructing temples in honor of a deity that they favor. These favored deities could be quite idiosyncratic, as sons of kings who favored a particular deity were known to construct temples dedicated to different deities than their fathers, once they were king.[10] Between the change of dynasties and the construction of temples based on a king's preference, I propose that the "gender assignment" of deities across these historic temples is random.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

A district with a high level of exposure to female deities via goddess temples, may offer a chance for individuals in that district to engage more often and deeply with their level of regard for women. In turn, status of women in these districts – including incidence of

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[9]Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, A History of India, 3rd Edition, Routledge, 1998, ISBN 0-415-15482- 0, Maps 4-8. These dynasties mainly gained power over the other two through being the main âuniting forceâ of tribes at various times rather than fighting wars. Other than these territorial disputes, the kingdoms coexisted for much of history.

[10]V. N. Hari Rao. KÅil OlÌ¤ugu: The Chronicle of the Srirangam Temple with Historical Notes. Rochouse, 1961. p. 87.

intimate partner violence – may be improved relative to that of women in low-exposure districts. In this case, initiatives like the Abused Goddesses Campaign may successfully leverage religion to ameliorate IPV outcomes for women.

However, it may be possible that high exposure to female deities can engender a worse culture for the status of women. Research has documented that religion, in general, can act as an obstacle to seeking help for abuse (Beaulaurier, Seff, Newman, and Dunlop, 2007), and that certain religious elements may be used to oppress women (Levitt and Ware, 2006). If female deities are emphasized as symbols of sacrifice (Jayasundara, Nedegaard, Flanagan, Phillips, and Weeks, 2016), women in high-exposure districts may be held to a high standard of self-sacrifice by society and themselves, making avenues of redress scarce and potentially increasing the incidence of intimate partner violence.

In the next section, I discuss the data used in this paper.

3   Data

3.1   Temples Data

I have hand-collected data on historical Hindu temples.[11] Overall, I obtain a list of 558 temples. I then categorize the temples as male or female-deity based on the main deity shrine in that temple. In Figure 2, I present a map of districts with the number of total temples in each district, and in Figure 3, I present a similar map with the number of female deity temples in each district.

I construct the exposure or treatment variable by dividing female deity temples by the number of total temples in each district. In Table 1, I report the exposure measure for each district. As documented in the table, there is a lot of variance in the exposure variable.

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[11]I used the Google Maps API to find temples that are also "tourist attractions" in order to identify temples that were built by kings from the three kingdoms.

3.2 National Family and Health Surveys and IPV Data

To measure the attitudes toward intimate-partner violence (IPV), I will use individual- level data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), a repository of demographic and health-related surveys from around the world. The DHS maintains the full collection of National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) of India, conducted by the International Institute for Population Sciences. The NFHS was initiated in the early 1990s and has been conducted exactly four times in irregularly spaced waves. I will use the fourth of these four cross-sectional surveys in my analysis, from 2015-16 (NFHS-4), the one wave of survey data that includes questions for women about their personal experience with IPV and their general attitudes towards IPV, which I will henceforth refer to as the âdomestic violence section.â NFHS-4 importantly tabulates the domestic violence section at the district level, which is important for my analysis.

The NFHS is conducted in person by sending field workers to interview selected households at their homes. Interviews are conducted only if a member of the household answers the door. If a household is part of the sample, one eligible woman in the household aged 15-49 is asked the questions in the domestic violence section of the Womenâs Questionnaire.[12]

The respondents in the Womenâs Questionnaire gives a reasonably representative sample of women in Tamil Nadu in the 2015-16 wave of the NFHS (sample size of 3,550 for ever-married women).

The domestic violence section's questions are focused on spousal violence and aim to capture the extent of physical, sexual, and emotional violence inflicted upon an ever-married woman by her current husband or previous husband(s). These questions are listed in Table 1. If a respondent answers "yes" to any of the questions about physical or sexual violence, they are counted as a victim of IPV in my analysis. In table [], I present a table which partitions

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[12]International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2017. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16: India. Mumbai: IIPS. (https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR339/FR339.pdf). Only one woman per household is surveyed for the domestic violence section. This is in accordance with the World Health Organizationâs guidelines on ethics regarding collection of information on domestic violence (WHO 2013).

the districts into quartiles by exposure measure and reports the share of individuals who answered "yes" to each question.

3.3 Covariates

The NFHS Section on Domestic Violence includes a wealth of information on women and their husbands including age, educational attainment, employment status, and religion. In addition, the NFHS includes a âwealth index.â I use information from the 2011 Census of India on district-level population and share of female population.

4 Methodology

I hypothesize that there is a relationship between exposure to female deity (temples) and incidence of intimate partner violence. I make use of a basic OLS effects methodology, modeling the outcome IPV_{id} (intimate partner violence) for person i in district d, as follows:

$$IPV_{id} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FemDeity_d + \beta_2 X_i + \beta_3 W_d + \epsilon_{id}$$

IPV_{id} is defined to indicate whether an individual has been subjected to intimate partner violence. $FemDeity_d$ is the treatment variable, which measures each district's level of exposure to female deities on a continuous scale from 0 to 1. To control for individual-level characteristics, specifically age and wealth index, I include a vector of individual controls represented by X_i. To control for district-level characteristics, district population and proportion of women, I include a vector of these controls represented by W_d. Finally, I use ϵ_{id} to represent the error term.

Included in the vector X_i are age dummy variables and a set of five categorical controls for the wealth index, representing the categories of poorest, poorer, middle, richer, and richest. The district-level controls, given in the vector W_d are two continuous controls for population and proportion of females in each district.

β_1 is the main coefficient of interest, representing the effect of an increase in female deity exposure on intimate partner violence. Given the anticipated ambiguity of the effect, as previously discussed in Section 2.2, I empirically test the relationship between female deity exposure and intimate partner violence. I discuss estimates of β_1 in the next section.

5   Results

5.1   Main Results: Female Deity Exposure and Intimate Partner Violence

My main results are summarized in Table 5. The baseline specification regresses intimate partner violence on the share of female deities in each district. The estimate of β_1, 0.0942, suggests that a 1 percentage point increase in the percent of female deity temples is associated with a 0.000942 percentage point increase in the likelihood of IPV incidence. This is a statistically significant result, with 95% confidence interval of (0.03600,0.1524), allowing us to rule out the probability that the true association is zero with 95% certainty. Adding age dummy variables attenuates the result slightly, but adding Wealth Index controls and district level controls (population and share of female population) diminish the point estimate's value while increasing the standard errors.

With the full set of baseline controls, the effect of interest is 0.0462, representing that a 1 percentage point increase in the percent of female deity temples is associated with a 0.000462 percentage point increase in the likelihood of IPV incidence. The 95 percent confidence interval of (-0.0202,0.1126) does not rule out the possibility that the true estimate might be zero.

To provide context for the magnitude of this effect, I consider a change between the quartiles based on share of female deities (see Table 1). The median of the second quartile is 0.111 and the median of the third quartile is 0.1455. Using the estimate of β_1, 0.0462, the difference of estimated IPV incidence likelihood between these districts is 0.33 percentage

points, a decrease of 32%.

The specification in Column (4), with the full set of baseline controls, is my preferred specification.

Thus far, these results suggest that districts with greater exposure to female deities may have higher incidence of IPV. This is consistent with the theory that Hindu goddesses may be associated with interpreting female deities as figures of self-sacrifice and rendering women unlikely to seek support for abuse. If women are less likely to seek support for abuse, husbands face lower risk of consequences for their abuse, and IPV becomes prevalent.

In the next section, I explore controls that may be potential mechanisms for the main effect.

5.2 Main Results: Education, Husband's Education, Employment, and Religion

In Table 6, I include controls for Education, Husband's Education, Employment, and Religion, in addition to the controls in my preferred specification.

Education of an individual can influence the way an individual engages with their level of exposure with female deities. A woman with a high level of education may reject the interpretation of female deities as representation of self-sacrifice relative to a woman with a low level of education attainment. Similarly, if a woman's spouse is highly educated, he may also dismiss the self-sacrifice symbolism of goddesses. Thus, it is possible that including these controls will result in "overcontrolling." In Columns (1) - (2) of the Table 6, I report estimates of β_1 with controls for education and husband's education. The effect is slightly attenuated in both specifications, but the estimates for both the effect and the standard error are very similar to the estimates in the absence of these controls.

Employment is another potential mediator; a woman who is employed may have greater financial independence than someone who is not working, empowering them to reject any self-sacrifice symbolism of female deities and seek remedies for any abuse at home. In columns

(3) - (4), I present estimates of β_1 and the standard error with controls for employment (Column (4) includes controls for both educational attainment and employment). Again, the effect is only slightly attenuated, and the confidence interval remains mostly the same.

Religion, finally, is another potential confounder; female deities are likely most salient for people who identify as Hindu. I include controls for religion in the specifications reported in Columns (5) and (6). In all specifications, including the full set of controls in Column (6), the effect magnitude and standard errors are largely the same.

[[There is a large potential for omitted variable bias in this analysis. I will apply Oster method in future drafts.]]

6   Conclusion

Intimate partner violence, one aspect of women's well-being, is multifaceted. The way individuals engage with religion, including symbolism, belief systems, and its interaction with society, can vary from person to person. Initiatives like the Abused Goddesses Campaign attempt to leverage religion to mitigate abuses toward women. However, if people do not engage with this imagery in the intended manner, such a campaign may be rendered ineffective or worse.

In this paper, I attempt to establish a descriptive relationship between female deity exposure and the incidence of intimate partner violence using a cross-sectional, ordinary least squares analysis. I find, consistently across all specifications, that more exposure to female deities – through exogenous placement of historical temples – is associated with more intimate partner violence.

7   Figures and Tables

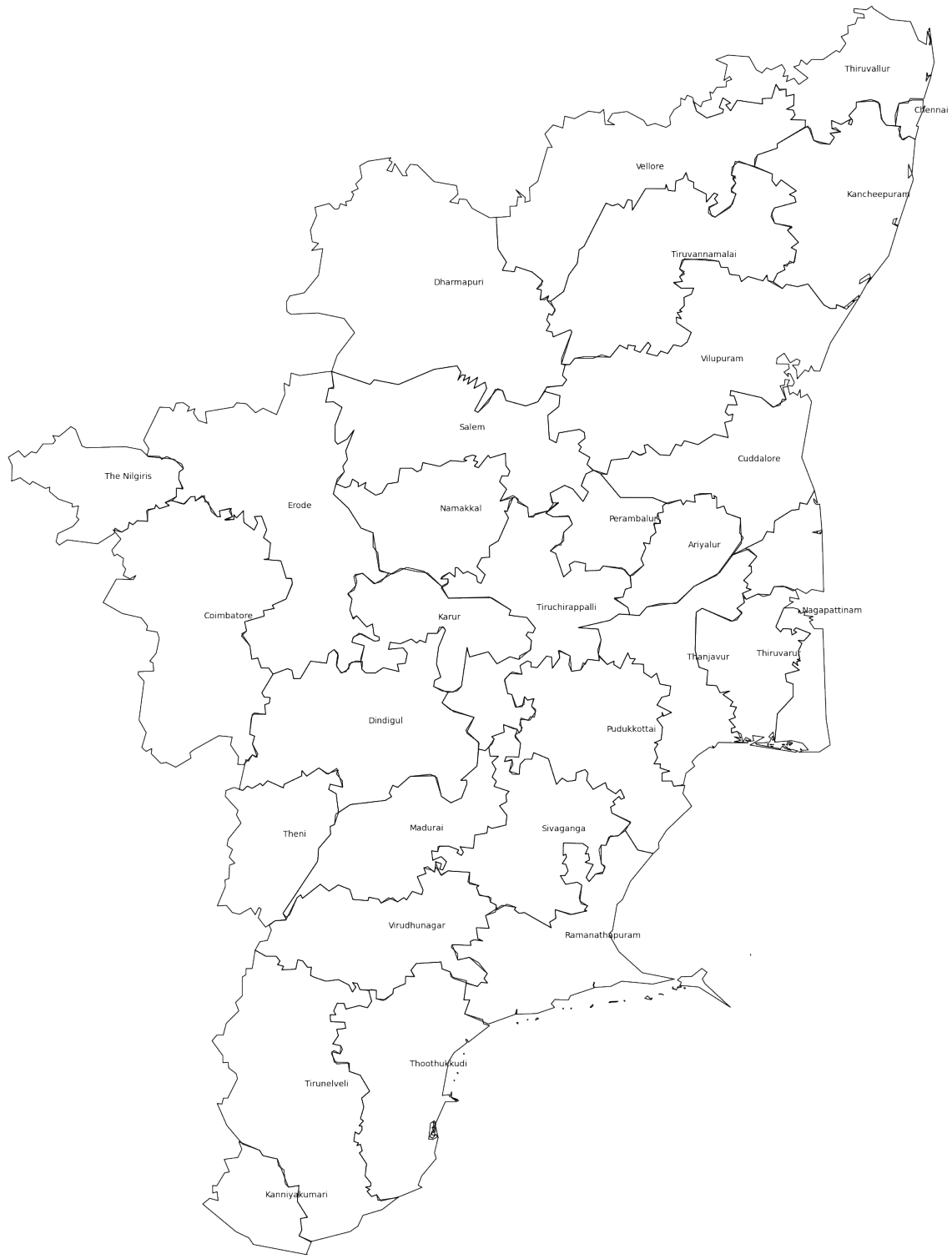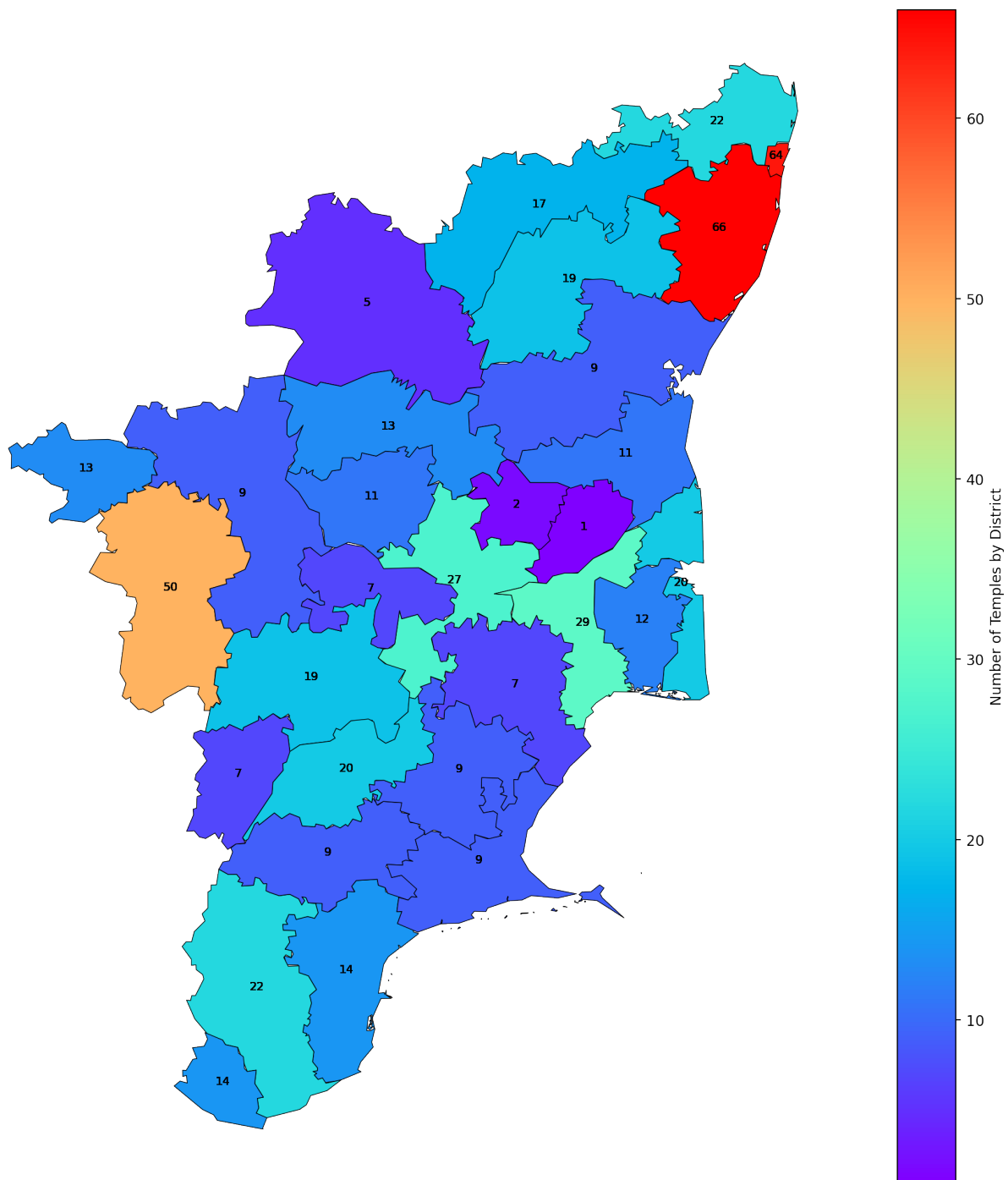Figure 1: Tamil Nadu Map of Districts

Figure 2: Tamil Nadu Map of Districts: Historic Temples Per District

Figure 3: Tamil Nadu Map of Districts: Historic Female Deity Temples Per District

Table 1: Exposure/Treatment Variable: Share Female Deities

Quartile of Share Female Deities	District	Share Female Deities (Treatment Var)
1	Dharmapuri	0.000
	Erode	0.000
	Krishnagiri	0.000
	Namakkal	0.000
	Sivaganga	0.000
	Dindigul	0.045
	Tirunelveli	0.053
	Tiruppur	0.067
2	The Nilgiris	0.077
	Nagapattinam	0.100
	Ramanathapuram	0.111
	Viluppuram	0.111
	Virudhunagar	0.111
	Thiruvallur	0.136
	Thanjavur	0.138
	Coimbatore	0.140
3	Kanniyakumari	0.143
	Karur	0.143
	Pudukkottai	0.143
	Theni	0.143
	Tiruchirappalli	0.148
	Kancheepuram	0.152
	Tiruvannamalai	0.158
	Cuddalore	0.182
4	Chennai	0.188
	Madurai	0.200
	Thoothukkudi	0.214
	Salem	0.231
	Vellore	0.235
	Thiruvarur	0.417
	Ariyalur	1.000
	Perambalur	1.000

Source: Hand-collected data from Google Maps API
Notes: Using hand-collected data, I obtained the number of total historical temple complexes in each district. I then identified the temples that are devoted to female deities. Share Female Deities (Treatment Variable), Female Deity Exposure, is the share of temples in each district that is devoted to female deities; this is presented in column 3 of the above table. The quartiles in column 1 are based on the Treatment Variable.

Table 2: Intimate Partner Violence: Survey Questions

National Family and Health Survey: Women's Questionnaire
Domestic Violence Section

Panel A: Questions for Ever-Married Women Selected for the Domestic Violence Section
"Did your current or former husband ever...."

Physical Violence Questions	...push you, shake you, or throw something at you?"
	...slap you?"
	...twist your arm or pull your hair?"
	...punch you with his fist or with something that could hurt you?"
	...kick you, drag you, or beat you up?"
	...try to choke you or burn you on purpose?"
	...threaten or attack you with a knife, gun, or any other weapon?"
Sexual Violence Questions	...physically force you to have sexual intercourse with him even when you did not want to?"
	...physically force you to perform any other sexual acts you did not want to?"
	...force you with threats or in any other way to perform sexual acts you did not want to?"
Emotional Violence Questions	...say or do something to humiliate you in front of others?"
	...threaten to hurt or harm you or someone close to you?"
	...insult you or make you feel bad about yourself?"

Panel B: Questions for All Women Selected for the Domestic Violence Section
"Has anyone ever..."

Physical	...hit, slapped, kicked, or done something else to hurt you physically?"
Sexual	...at any time in their life, as a child or as an adult, forced you in any way to have sexual intercourse or to perform any other sexual acts when you did not want to do?"

Source: International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2017. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16: India. Mumbai: IIPS

Table 3: Outcome Variable: Intimate Partner Violence Incidence

		Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	Question 10	IPV (outcome)
Quartile of Share Female Deity	1	0.319	0.712	0.220	0.233	0.050	0.029	0.090	0.064	0.296	0.068	0.388
	2	0.343	0.769	0.198	0.231	0.028	0.016	0.122	0.047	0.343	0.058	0.437
	3	0.314	0.714	0.210	0.283	0.027	0.018	0.124	0.053	0.285	0.056	0.420
	4	0.364	0.768	0.248	0.289	0.034	0.019	0.157	0.073	0.341	0.081	0.438
	Total	0.335	0.740	0.219	0.258	0.035	0.021	0.122	0.059	0.315	0.066	0.420

Source: International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2017. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16: India. Mumbai: IIPS
Notes: Quartile of Share Female Deity is obtained by arranging each District in ascending order by Exposure/Treatment Variable, Share Female Deity, then partitioning them by quartile based on Share Female Deity (See Table 1).
The questions used in determining whether a respondent (woman) has been subjected to IPV are the ten questions in the NFHS Domestic Violence Section that pertain to Physical Violence and Sexual Violence. Each respondent is asked whether their current or former husband does the following:
(Question 1)   pushes you, shakes you, or throws something at you (Physical Violence)
(Question 2)   slaps you (Physical Violence)
(Question 3)   twists your arm or pulls your hair (Physical Violence)
(Question 4)   punches you with his fist or with something that could hurt you (Physical Violence)
(Question 5)   kicks you, drags you, or beats you up (Physical Violence)
(Question 6)   tries to choke you or burns you on purpose (Physical Violence)
(Question 7)   threatens or attacks you with a knife, gun, or any other weapon (Physical Violence)
(Question 8)   physically forces you to have sexual intercourse with him even when you did not want to (Sexual Violence)
(Question 9)   physically forces you to perform any other sexual acts you did not want to (Sexual Violence)
(Question 10) forces you with threats or in any other way to perform sexual acts you did not want to (Sexual Violence)
The outcome variable in my analysis, IPV, indicates whether an individual has responded "yes" to any of the above questions.

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Table 4: Balance Table

		Quartile 1	Quartile 2	Quartile 3	Quartile 4
Individual Level Variables					
	Age	33.969	33.660	34.165	34.215
Wealth Index: Distribution	Poorest	0.165	0.204	0.192	0.226
	Poorer	0.243	0.218	0.198	0.205
	Middle	0.230	0.216	0.193	0.181
	Richer	0.229	0.200	0.240	0.196
	Richest	0.132	0.162	0.177	0.193
	Employed	0.328	0.301	0.328	0.313
Religion Distribution	Hindu	0.924	0.901	0.866	0.923
	Muslim	0.035	0.054	0.038	0.039
	Christian	0.041	0.044	0.096	0.037
	Other	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000
Education Distribution	No Education	0.193	0.168	0.182	0.195
	Incomplete Primary	0.054	0.042	0.039	0.048
	Complete Primary	0.101	0.085	0.082	0.097
	Incomplete Secondary	0.417	0.450	0.430	0.425
	Complete Secondary	0.106	0.104	0.123	0.110
	Higher	0.130	0.152	0.145	0.126
Husband's Education Distribution	No Education	0.168	0.142	0.136	0.175
	Incomplete Primary	0.068	0.048	0.045	0.041
	Complete Primary	0.099	0.094	0.077	0.092
	Incomplete Secondary	0.456	0.483	0.501	0.471
	Complete Secondary	0.078	0.082	0.074	0.083
	Higher	0.132	0.152	0.166	0.139
District Level Variables					
	Population	1,268,887.00	1,373,340.00	1,211,011.00	1,312,637.00
	Share Female Population	0.498	0.502	0.502	0.500

Source: International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2017. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16: India. Mumbai: IIPS

Table 5: The Relationship between Female Deity Exposure and Intimate Partner Violence

	(1) IPV	(2) IPV	(3) IPV	(4) IPV
Share Female Deities	0.0942**	0.0914**	0.0643*	0.0462
	(0.0297)	(0.0307)	(0.0251)	(0.0339)
Observations	3492	3492	3492	3408
Age Controls	no	yes	yes	yes
Wealth Index Controls	no	no	yes	yes
District Level Controls	no	no	no	yes

Standard errors in parentheses. All Standard errors are clustered at the district level.
$+ p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6: The Relationship between Female Deity Exposure and Intimate Partner Violence

	(1) IPV	(2) IPV	(3) IPV	(4) IPV	(5) IPV	(6) IPV
Share Female Deities	0.0393	0.0418	0.0448	0.0403	0.0461	0.0399
	(0.0350)	(0.0343)	(0.0338)	(0.0342)	(0.0338)	(0.0341)
Observations	3408	3408	3408	3408	3408	3408
Education Controls	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Husband's Education Controls	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Employment Controls	no	no	yes	yes	no	yes
Religion Controls	no	no	no	no	yes	yes

Standard errors in parentheses. All standard errors are clustered at the district level.

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

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