The Southern Paradox: Neighbourhood Level Norms and the Justification of Intimate Partner Violence in India

Abstract

Conventional empowerment theories suggest that women in more developed regions should be less likely to justify Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). In India, however, a stark paradox emerges. Our analytical sample reveals that women in the more developed Southern states are dramatically more likely to justify IPV (77.4%) compared to women in the rest of India (37.6%). This study investigates the drivers of this "*Southern Paradox*" using nonlinear decomposition methods on a national sample of 56,421 currently married women. The analysis quantifies how much of the regional gap is explained by differences in observed characteristics (endowments) versus differences in the returns to those characteristics (coefficients). The decomposition analysis shows a striking finding: differences in individual empowerment indicators like education and wealth explain very little of the gap. Instead, the vast majority of the explained regional difference is attributable to a single factor: *higher average IPV justification at the neighbourhood level* (62.6%). These findings demonstrate that powerful neighbourhood-level norms can override the protective effects of individual empowerment, suggesting that policy interventions must directly target collective attitudes to successfully combat the normalization of violence.

JEL Classification numbers: J11, J12, J16, O12

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence; Southern Paradox; Social Norms; Women Empowerment; NFHS-5; India.

1. Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), rooted in entrenched gender inequities, is a global phenomenon that undermines women's fundamental rights, health, and dignity worldwide (WHO, 2021). It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, inflicting lasting physical and psychological harm (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006; Devries et al., 2013), while curtailing women's health, autonomy, and life opportunities (Campbell, 2002). In India, the scale of problem is stark: nearly one-third (32%) of ever-married women aged 18-49 have experienced violence from an intimate partner (IIPS & ICF, 2022).

While structural factors like economic insecurity and educational disadvantage are critical drivers of IPV (Bloch & Rao, 2002; Eswaran & Malhotra, 2011; Koenig et al., 2006), the justification of violence by women themselves is a complex element within this cycle of abuse. The attitudinal acceptance, the internalized belief that spousal violence is legitimate under certain circumstances, is one of the strongest predictors of IPV experience, at times proving more influential than structural factors like education or employment (Aboagye et al., 2021; Luke et al., 2007). Such beliefs both reflect and reinforce patriarchal ideologies, acting as both a cause and consequence of violence (Jewkes, 2002; Kandiyoti, 1988). As recent work using Indian data shows, this normalization of violence significantly deters resistance and reporting, creating a feedback loop where women who justify IPV are more likely to become its victims (Dasgupta, 2019; Mookerjee et al., 2021).

However, a striking paradox emerges when examining the regional distribution of these attitudes in India, challenging conventional narratives about empowerment. According to analytical sample of currently married women, a staggering 77.4% of women in Southern India justify IPV, a figure dramatically higher than in the West (41%), East (39.9%), Central (39.9%), Northeast (35.4%), and North (33%) regions. This "Southern Paradox" is deeply counter-intuitive. Southern India has long been recognized for its relative gender egalitarianism, higher female literacy, and proactive state policies promoting women's empowerment (Dyson & Moore, 1983; Rahman & Rao, 2004). Yet, despite these advantages and ostensibly weaker patriarchal constraints (Singh et al., 2021), women in the South exhibit a higher acceptance of IPV.

This contradiction suggests that conventional, individual-level indicators of empowerment are insufficient to shift deeply entrenched social norms. Instead, local cultural practices and community-level beliefs may play a more powerful role in shaping women's attitudes than previously acknowledged. Existing research has noted this anomaly: termed as "*southern puzzle*" by Chattopadhyay and Sidharth (2022), and presented state-level trends (Shreemoyee et al., 2025) but stops short of empirically explaining the drivers of these stark regional disparities. This leaves a critical question unanswered: *why* does IPV justification remain highest in India's most socially advanced regions?

To empirically disentangle the drivers of this "Southern Paradox," this study employs non-linear Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition using nationally representative data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5). This method allows us to distinguish between the two key components: the endowment effect (differences in observed characteristics, such as education, wealth) and the coefficient effect (differences in how these characteristics are valued or penalized across regions). By decomposing the sources of this regional heterogeneity, our study moves

beyond identifying correlates to explain the mechanisms sustaining the Southern Paradox, ultimately highlighting the pivotal role of community context in shaping gender attitudes.

2. Literature Review

A foundational lens for understanding the multi-level nature of IPV is the Ecological Framework (Heise, 1998). This framework posits that violence and its justification are shaped by a nested set of influences operating at the individual, relationship (or spousal), community, and broader societal levels. It provides a robust structure for integrating other theoretical perspectives. For instance, feminist and resource-based theories help explain dynamics at the relationship and societal levels, while Social Learning Theory clarifies how norms are transmitted within families and communities. Our study adopts this multi-level approach to structure its analysis of IPV justification.

Theoretical explanations for why women might justify IPV converge on the interplay between structural constraints and cultural conditioning. Feminist theories, such as Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of "*bargaining with patriarchy*," posit that women in patriarchal societies may strategically comply with oppressive norms to secure economic stability, social acceptance, or physical safety. Justifying IPV can become a rationalized survival strategy, particularly in contexts of early marriage, patrilocal residence, and limited autonomy. Building on this, resource-based theories argue that women's economic dependency weakens their bargaining power and fallback position, making them more likely to tolerate or rationalize abuse as a trade-off for security (Eswaran & Malhotra, 2011; Goode, 1971). Separately, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1963) and the concept of Normalization (Lundgren, 1993) emphasize how attitudes are environmentally conditioned. When individuals are repeatedly exposed to violence in their families or communities, they may come to perceive it as normal, inevitable, or even legitimate expression of authority or discipline. Through observation and intergenerational transmission, IPV-justifying attitudes become deeply embedded in the local culture. Taken together, these frameworks suggest that IPV justification is not a product of ignorance, but a complex outcome of structural dependency and cultural immersion.

Empirical literature has identified multi-level correlates of IPV justification, ranging from individual attributes to broader community norms. At the individual and spousal level, education stands out as the most consistent protective factor, with justification being highest among women with little or no schooling (Dasgupta, 2019; Rani & Bonu, 2009; Sardinha & Catalán, 2018; Shreemoyee et al., 2025). Other personal characteristics show ambiguous effects; the role of age is debated (Bhowmik et al., 2022; Yount & Li, 2009), and women's employment yields mixed results, where high-status jobs can be protective (Antai & Antai, 2009; Hindin, 2003), but low-paying work may increase IPV justification (Lawoko, 2006; Rani & Bonu, 2009). Other empowerment indicators show more complex relationships. For example, while general decision-making autonomy over household matters is often protective, empowerment in one domain does not guarantee a shift in attitudes toward IPV; recent work shows that even women with greater say in contraceptive use can face a higher risk of domestic violence, highlighting the non-linear nature of empowerment (Ojha & Babbar, 2024). Characteristics of the marital union are also critical. Early marriage, longer marital duration, and consanguineous unions all tend to correlate with higher justification, as does a husband's alcohol consumption, which is one of the strongest predictors (Field et al., 2004; Malik et al., 2024; Rahaman et al., 2022; Raj et al., 2010).

Beyond the couple, factors at the household and societal level also shape these attitudes. Household wealth is generally inversely related to IPV justification, while in the Indian context, social identity is a key mediator, with women from marginalized castes (SC/ST/OBC) often reporting higher justification (Jesmin, 2017; Shreemoyee et al., 2025). External influences such as media exposure, particularly to print media, have been shown to correlate with lower tolerance for violence (Bhattacharya, 2016; Bhowmik & Biswas, 2022).

A growing body of literature demonstrates that norms at the contextual level can override many of these individual- or household-level factors. Studies by Jesmin (2015, 2017) show that residing in a community with a higher prevalence of IPV significantly increases an individual woman's likelihood of justifying violence herself, even after controlling for her personal education, wealth, and autonomy. This highlights the powerful socializing effect of the immediate environment and provides a key lens for understanding regional disparities. However, this body of work leaves two questions unanswered: why might the influence of community norms differ so starkly by region, and precisely how much do these norms contribute to the gap relative to individual-level factors? Our analysis is designed to directly address these questions.

3 Data

3.1 Data Source

This study utilizes data from the fifth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), a nationally representative, cross-sectional survey conducted between 2019 and 2021 by the International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS), in collaboration with ICF (IIPS & ICF, 2021). The NFHS-5 covers all 28 states and 8 union territories of India, gathering extensive information on population health, fertility, and gender-based indicators.

Our analysis relies on a specific subset of the full NFHS-5 sample. Questions on attitudes toward IPV are part of the "State Module," which was administered to a sub-sample of households, yielding responses from 108,785 women. From this, we selected currently married women aged 15-49 from the couples' data file, resulting in a sample of 57,693 women. We focus on this group as our research question centers on attitudes toward violence within an existing intimate partnership. After excluding observations with missing values on key analytical variables, our final sample comprises 56,421 women. A detailed schematic of this sample selection process is provided in Figure 1.

For our regional analysis, we define "Southern India" as comprising Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep, and Puducherry. All other states and union territories are grouped into the "Rest of India" category.

3.2. Variable

The outcome variable is a binary indicator for the justification of IPV. It is derived from a series of questions asking whether a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances: if she (a) does not cook properly; (b) neglects children; (c) disrespects her in-laws; (d) refuses to have sex with him; (e) is suspected of being unfaithful; (f) argues with him; or (g) goes out without telling him. Following common practice, a respondent is coded as 1 ("*Justifies IPV*") if she answers "yes" to at least one of these seven conditions, and 0 ("*Does not justify IPV*") otherwise.

Guided by the Ecological Framework (Heise, 1998) and the existing literature, we selected a comprehensive set of explanatory variables organized across multiple levels: individual, spousal, marital, household, neighbourhood, and district.

A key variable of interest is the neighbourhood level justification of IPV. Following Dhamija et al. (2024), neighbourhood level IPV justification is measured as the average justification rate among all *other* women (inclusive of never-married and ever-married women) in the respondent's survey cluster (Primary Sampling Unit), excluding the respondent herself. Clusters with fewer than two respondents were excluded from this calculation. Specifically, we use the Individual Recode file with a sample size of 724,115, to compute the "leave-one-out" mean based on the responses of all never-married and ever-married women residing in the respondent's survey cluster. This measure captures the prevailing social norm regarding the acceptability of IPV within the respondent's immediate social environment. Subsequently, we merge this information with the couple's recode file, as our analytical sample is restricted to currently married women.

At district-level, we include the India Patriarchy Index (IPI), a composite measure of patriarchal norms related to son preference, female subordination and gender inequality (Singh et al., 2021). It is important to note that Singh et al. (2021) construct the district-level Indian Patriarchy Index (IPI) using data from NFHS-1 to NFHS-4. However, the authors shared an updated version of the district-level IPI constructed using NFHS-5.

Detailed descriptions of these variables appear in Table 1.

4. Methodology

Our analysis proceeds in three stages. First, we conduct a descriptive analysis to establish the baseline differences in characteristics between women in Southern India and the rest of the country. Second, we use multivariable logistic regression to assess whether the raw regional gap in IPV justification persists after accounting for a comprehensive set of controls. Finally, and central to our study, we employ non-linear decomposition to quantify the specific factors contributing to this gap.

Stage 1: Descriptive Analysis

We begin by comparing the weighted sample means of all explanatory variables between our two primary groups: women residing in **Southern India** and women in the **Rest of India** (all other regions combined). This initial comparison (presented in Table 2) helps characterize the observable differences between the populations. All calculations are adjusted using the survey's sampling weights to ensure national representativeness.

Stage 2: Multivariable Logistic Regression

Next, to test the robustness of the regional effect, we estimate a series of logistic regression models. The dependent variable, Y_i, is the binary indicator for whether woman *i* justifies IPV. The general model is specified as:

$$ln\frac{p_i}{1-p_i} = \alpha + \beta_1.South_i + \gamma X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where $South_i$ is a binary indicator for residence in Southern India; X_i is a vector of covariates and γ is the corresponding vector of coefficients. ε_i is the error term. We present three models in Table 3. The first is an unadjusted model that includes only the $South_i$ indicator to show the raw bivariate association. The second, referred to as the adjusted model, adds individual, spousal, marital, and household-level controls. The final specification, referred to as extended adjusted model, includes neighbourhood and district-level controls, including neighbourhood-level IPV justification and the Indian Patriarchy Index, respectively.

By comparing the odds ratio for $South_i$ across these models, we can assess the extent to which the regional gap is explained by observable characteristics. Results are reported as odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals, using cluster-adjusted standard errors to account for the complex survey design.

Stage 3: Non-linear Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition

The main objective of our study is to explain the sources of the regional gap. To do this, we employ a non-linear Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition technique for binary outcomes, implemented using the mvdcmp command in Stata (Powers et al., 2011). This method decomposes the total mean difference in the probability of justifying IPV between Southern India (Group S) and the Rest of India (Group R) into two core components:

$$\overline{Y_S} - \overline{Y_R} = [\overline{F(X_S\beta_S)} - \overline{F(X_R\beta_S)}] + [\overline{F(X_R\beta_S)} - \overline{F(X_R\beta_R)}]$$

where $\bar{Y}$ is the mean probability of justifying IPV for each group, $\bar{X}$ is the vector of mean characteristics, β represents the estimated coefficients, and F is the cumulative logistic distribution function.

The two components are interpreted as follows:

The Endowment (or Explained) Component: The first bracket, $[\overline{F(X_S\beta_S)} - \overline{F(X_R\beta_S)}]$, represents the portion of the gap attributable to differences in observable characteristics (the *endowments*). It answers the question: "How much of the gap is due to the fact that women in the South and the Rest of India have different average levels of education, wealth, media exposure, etc.?"

The Coefficient (or Unexplained) Component: The second bracket, $[\overline{F(X_R\beta_S)} - \overline{F(X_R\beta_R)}]$, represents the portion of the gap due to differences in the *returns* to those characteristics. This structural component is often interpreted as capturing the effects of unobserved factors, such as differing social norms, cultural practices, or gender ideologies that shape how characteristics like education or autonomy translate into attitudes. It answers the question: "How much of the gap exists because the same characteristic has a different effect on IPV justification in the South compared to elsewhere?"

5. Results

Our analysis begins by confirming the stark regional disparity in IPV justification. As shown in Figure 2, the prevalence of IPV justification among currently married women in Southern India is

77.4%, more than double the average of 37.6% across the rest of the country. This gap holds when comparing the South to each individual region separately.

Table 2 deepens this puzzle by showing that, on most conventional measures of empowerment, Southern women appear more advantaged than their counterparts in other regions. They have on average, more years of education (7.7 vs. 6.4), greater asset ownership (60.3% vs. 48.4%), higher media exposure (92% vs. 71.6%), and better access to banking (88.0% vs. 78.3%). They are also less likely to be unemployed and live in households that are significantly wealthier (79% non-poor vs. 53%).

However, Table 2 also reveals several countervailing factors. Pre-marital kinship marriages are far more prevalent in the South (24.8% vs. 9.4%). Critically, husbands in the South are much more likely to justify IPV themselves (67.5% vs. 33.7%). The two most striking findings relate to the contextual variables: despite having a *lower* district-level Patriarchy Index score (suggesting weaker patriarchal structures), Southern communities exhibit a dramatically *higher* average justification of IPV at the neighbourhood level (0.76 vs. 0.38). This descriptive evidence establishes a clear paradox: *women in the South are more likely to justify IPV despite being, on average, more educated, wealthier, and living in districts with less patriarchal norms.*

5.1. Robustness of the Regional Gap: Logistics Regression Analysis

The results from our logistic regression models (Table 3) systematically unpack the Southern Paradox. In the unadjusted model, the raw descriptive gap is stark: women in the South have nearly six times the odds of justifying IPV compared to women elsewhere (OR = 5.94, 95% CI [5.53, 6.39]). Strikingly, this gap is not explained by differences in individual or household characteristics. After controlling for a full suite of demographic and socioeconomic factors in Model 2, the odds ratio for residing in the South remains robust and statistically significant (OR = 6.1, 95% CI [5.23, 7.12]). This is a crucial finding, as it suggests that the regional gap cannot be attributed to standard empowerment indicators like education or wealth.

The narrative changes dramatically, however, once contextual factors are introduced in the fully adjusted model (Model 3). The inclusion of neighbourhood- and district-level controls causes the odds ratio for the South to drop to 1.84 (95% CI [1.67, 2.03]). While still highly significant, this substantial reduction indicates that the regional disparity is overwhelmingly mediated by the social environment. Indeed, the model reveals that neighbourhood-level justification of IPV is the single most powerful predictor of a woman's own attitude. A one-unit increase in the community's average justification level is associated with a more than 31-fold increase in the odds of an individual woman justifying IPV herself (OR = 31.08, 95% CI [27.52, 35.12]), an effect that dwarfs all other variables.

5.3 Decomposing the Southern Paradox

To quantify the sources of the 39.7-point gap in IPV justification, we performed a non-linear Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, as presented in Table 4. The results show that differences in observable characteristics (the endowment component) account for 67.85% of the gap, while differences in the returns to those characteristics (the coefficient component) accounting for the remaining 32.15%.

The detailed decomposition of the endowment component reveals the core finding of our study (see Table 5). Neighbourhood-level justification of IPV alone accounts for 62.6 percentage points of the gap. This means that nearly the entire explained portion of the South-Other gap is due to the simple fact that women in the South live in communities where justifying IPV is far more common.

In stark contrast, individual-level empowerment variables contribute minimally or even negatively to the gap. For instance, education contributes -2.88%. This negative sign is highly informative: it means Southern women's higher educational attainment actually supresses the regional gap. In other words, if Southern women had the same lower levels of education as women elsewhere, the observed gap in IPV justification would be even *larger*. Similarly, factors like spousal characteristics (3.6%) and marital characteristics (1.28%) explain very little of the overall difference. The dominant role of neighbourhood norms overwhelms all other factors combined.

6. Additional Analysis

To ensure the validity and consistency of our core findings, we conducted two further analyses: a heterogeneity analysis across different regional comparisons (Table 6) and a robustness check incorporating women's prior experience with IPV (Table 7).

6.1. Heterogeneity Analysis

First, to explore whether our results were driven by the aggregation of diverse regions into a single "Rest of India" category, we performed five separate decomposition analyses, comparing Southern India individually against the North, Central, East, Northeast, and West regions, as shown in Table 6. The results show consistency in the explanatory power of community norms. Across all five comparisons, differences in community-level IPV justification accounted for the largest share of the explained gap, contributing between 65.36% (vs. West) and 71.64% (vs. Central) of the total difference. This confirms that our main finding is not an artifact of aggregation; the dominant role of local social context is a robust pattern across the country.

6.2. Robustness Check with Prior IPV Exposure

Second, we conducted a sensitivity analysis to account for the potential confounding effect of a woman's own experience with violence, as women who have experienced IPV may be more likely to justify it as a coping mechanism. We re-estimated our main decomposition model (South vs. Rest of India) including a binary indicator for whether the respondent had previously experienced any form of physical, sexual or emotional IPV, as shown in Table 7. Although this important control variable reduces the analytical sample due to non-response on sensitive questions, the results confirm the robustness of our primary conclusion. Even after accounting for prior IPV exposure, community-level norms remained the single largest contributor to the explained gap, accounting for 62.6% of the total difference. The fundamental finding—that neighbourhood context overwhelmingly explains the Southern Paradox—holds firm.

7. Discussion

This study set out to explain a striking paradox: why do women in Southern India, a region historically associated with higher female empowerment, exhibit significantly greater justification of IPV. Our decomposition analysis provided a clear answer. The vast majority of the regional gap

is explained by one factor i.e., neighbourhood-level justification of IPV. Individual empowerment indicators like education and wealth, while important, contribute minimally. This finding aligns with social-ecological models (Heise, 1998; Ahmad et al., 2019) and further signifies that to understand attitudes toward violence, we must look beyond the individual to the power of the social context (Jesmin, 2017).

Our results point to a self-reinforcing peer effects loop as the primary mechanism sustaining these high levels of IPV justification in the South. Drawing on social learning and normalization theories (Bandura, 1963; Waltermaurer, 2012), when IPV justification is a dominant community norm, it creates an environment where violence is seen as legitimate. Individuals internalize these public attitudes, and bystanders remain passive, which in turn reinforces the community norm. This dynamic, where collective attitudes shape individual beliefs and vice-versa, helps explain why IPV justification has remained stubbornly high in the South despite decades of progress on individual empowerment indicators.

This mechanism also helps explain the widening regional gap observed in successive rounds of the NFHS (IIPS & ICF, 2007; IIPS & ICF, 2017; IIPS & ICF, 2021). Specifically, the gap in the justification of IPV between the southern region and the rest of India was 16 percentage points (p.p.) in 2005-06 (IIPS & Macro International, 2007), it grew substantially to 23 p.p. in 2015-16 (IIPS & ICF, 2017) and further increased to 30 p.p. in 2019-21 (IIPS & ICF, 2021). While IPV justification has declined sharply in Northern and other regions over the last 15 years, it has stagnated in the South. This suggests that in the other parts of India, empowerment gains may have been accompanied by a parallel shift in community norms, creating a virtuous cycle of positive change. In contrast, the South appears to be caught in a feedback loop where high ambient justification levels mute the progressive effects of individual empowerment, creating an "*empowered but abused*" paradox where improved resources do not translate into more progressive attitudes (Singh & Babbar, 2022). This finding is consistent with a growing body of work showing that in contexts where community norms strongly favour male dominance, individual empowerment gains are insufficient to shift entrenched attitudes (Boyle et al., 2009; Weitzman, 2014).

This raises an important question: why did the South get "*stuck*" in this loop, while other regions progressed? We proposed a potential explanation centered on the concept of a "*scarcity premium*" for empowerment. When an attribute like higher education is rare, it carries a scarcity premium, not just economically, but also in its power to shape social attitudes. In regions where few women were educated, those who were may have been better equipped to challenge traditional norms, giving them a disproportionate influence. However, as empowerment becomes more widespread- as it did in the South relatively early- its marginal impact on deeply entrenched cultural attitudes may diminish.

Data from past NFHS rounds support this hypothesis. In the early 1990s (NFHS-1), 31.3% of women in the South had completed secondary or higher education, compared to 24.5% in the rest of India. Similarly, women's workforce participation was already higher in the South, 44%, compared to 32% in other regions (IIPS & ICF, 1995). While these early gains were crucial, they occurred in a social context where IPV was not yet framed as a major rights violation. By the time national conversations and legal frameworks like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) gained traction, IPV justification was already a deeply embedded norm in Southern communities. Thus, while individual empowerment advanced, the collective attitude

plateaued. In the rest of India, where empowerment gains occurred later, the "*scarcity premium*" of education may have coincided more directly with a national shift in anti-IPV narratives, allowing individual and normative change to progress in tandem. In essence, the South's early lead in empowerment may have paradoxically uncoupled it from the normative shifts that later took hold elsewhere, leaving it stuck in a high-justification equilibrium.

Our study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data means our findings show strong associations, not causal relationships. Second, self-reported attitudes on a sensitive topic like IPV may be subject to social desirability bias. Third, due to data constraints, we could not control for potentially important unobserved factors like childhood exposure to violence (Copp et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2016) or specific psychological traits (Pena et al., 2012). Finally, while our heterogeneity analysis confirmed the main finding across different regional comparisons, the broad "South vs. Rest of India" grouping inevitably masks significant intra-regional diversity.

8. Conclusion

The paradox of high IPV justification in India's more developed southern states challenges the linear assumption that individual empowerment automatically leads to progressive gender attitudes. Our findings show that community-level norms are not just another variable but are, in fact, the dominant force explaining this regional disparity. The outsized influence of the immediate social environment suggests that interventions focused solely on empowering individual women through education or economic means will be insufficient to dismantle the cultural scaffolding that supports violence.

To break the self-reinforcing loop of IPV justification, particularly in regions like Southern India, policy must adopt a dual approach. It must continue to promote individual empowerment while simultaneously launching targeted, community-level interventions aimed at shifting collective norms. Strategies could include community-based dialogues, engaging local leaders, and media campaigns that explicitly challenge the legitimacy of violence and promote new, non-violent social norms. Without tackling the social context head-on, the benefits of individual empowerment will continue to be blunted, and the attitudes that perpetuate violence against women will remain stubbornly in place.

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Tables & Figures

Table 1

Description of Independent Variables

Variable Category	Independent Variables	Description
Individual Level	Women's Age	Age in completed years.
	Women's Education	Years of completed schooling.
	Asset Ownership	Binary: 1 = Owns house or land (alone or jointly); 0 = No.
	Working status	Categorical: Not working (Ref.), White-collar, Manual/Service, Agriculture.
	Autonomy in Mobility	Binary: 1 = Can go to market, health facility, or visit family/relatives alone; 0 = No.
	Decision-making Power	Binary: 1 = Participates in decisions on own health, major purchases, or family visits; 0 = No.
	Access to banking	Binary: 1 = Owns or uses a bank/savings account; 0 = No.
	Media Exposure	Binary: 1 = Reads newspaper, listens to radio, or watches TV at least once a week; 0 = No.
Marital Level	Age at marriage	Respondent's age at first marriage
	Marriage Duration	Years since marriage
	Educational Assortative Mating	Categorical: 0: Homogamy (Same education level, Ref.), 1: Hypogamy (Woman > Husband), 2: Hypergamy (Husband > Woman).
	Pre-Marital Kinship	Binary: 1 = Husband was a relative before marriage; 0 = No.
	Number of living children	Number of living children
Spousal Level	Husband's Alcohol Use	Binary: 1 = Husband drinks alcohol; 0 = No.
	Husband's working status	Binary: 1 = Currently employed; 0 = No.
	Husband's attitudes towards IPV	Binary 1=Justifies, 0= Does not justify
Household Level	Household Size	Number of usual household members
	Sex of household head	Binary: 1 = Male; 0 = Female.
	Household wealth	Binary, based on wealth index quintiles: 1 = Poor (Quintiles 1-2); 0 = Non-Poor (Quintiles 3-5).
	Religion	Categorical: Hindu (Ref.), Muslim, Other.
	Social Group	Categorical: General (Ref.), Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Class (OBC).

	Place of residence	Binary: 1 = Rural; 0 = Urban.
Contextual level	Neighbourhood PV Justification	Continuous: Mean IPV justification rate in the PSU (leave-one-out).
	Indian Patriarchy Index (IPI)	Continuous: District-level composite score of patriarchal norms.

Table 2. Weighted Mean Characteristics of Currently Married Women (15-49), by Region

	South Mean	Other Mean	Difference (Sou Other)
IPV Justification			
Yes	77.36	37.63	39.7***
No	22.64	62.37	-39.7***
Individual Level Characteristics			
Women's Age	34.00	33.49	0.5***
Women's Education	7.68	6.36	1.3***
Asset Ownership			
Don't Own	39.73	51.57	-11.8***
Own: Alone or jointly	60.27	48.43	11.8***
Working Status			
Not working	50.67	66.81	-16.1***
Professional/technical/managerial/clerical/sales	8.71	4.20	4.5***
Services/household and domestic/skilled and unski manual/other	13.57	10.27	3.3***
Agriculture and allied	27.05	18.72	8.3***
Autonomy in Mobility			
Yes	62.61	64.86	-2.3***
No	37.39	35.14	2.3***
Decision Making Power			
Yes	88.99	90.83	-1.8***
No	11.02	9.17	1.8***
Access to Banking			
Yes	88.00	78.33	9.7***
No	12.00	21.67	-9.7***
Media Exposure			
Yes	92.04	71.63	20.4***
No	7.96	28.37	-20.4***
Marital Level Characteristics			
Age at Marriage	18.97	18.91	0.1
Marriage Duration	14.59	14.09	0.5***
Educational Assortative Mating			
Homogamy	26.22	25.57	0.6
Hypogamy	35.66	23.28	12.4***
Hypergamy	38.12	51.15	-13.0***
Pre-Marital Kinship			
Yes	24.78	9.41	15.4***
No	75.22	90.59	-15.4***
Number of Living Children	1.94	2.30	-0.4***
Spousal Level Characteristics			
Husband's Alcohol Use			
Yes	41.47	30.64	10.8***

No	58.53	69.36	-10.8***
Husbands Working Status			
Currently not working	6.74	9.67	-2.9***
Currently Working	93.26	90.33	2.9***
Husband's Attitude towards IPV			
Does not justify	32.47	66.31	-33.8***
Justifies	67.53	33.69	33.8***
Household Level Characteristics			
Household Size	4.75	5.50	-0.8***
Sex of Household head			
Male	91.36	93.19	-1.8***
Female	8.64	6.81	1.8***
Household Wealth			
Poor	20.98	46.62	-25.6***
Non-Poor	79.02	53.38	25.6***
Religion			
Hindu	84.18	75.16	9.0***
Muslim	9.73	12.19	-2.5***
Other	6.10	12.65	-6.6***
Social Group			
General	9.13	19.23	-10.1***
SC	20.98	18.52	2.5***
ST	7.78	21.52	-13.7***
OBC	60.19	34.54	25.6***
Don't Know/ Missing	1.92	6.19	-4.3***
Place of Residence			
Urban	33.33	22.90	10.4***
Rural	66.67	77.10	-10.4***
Contextual Level Characteristics			
Neighbourhood IPV justification	0.76	0.37	0.4***
Indian Patriarchy Index	27.65	32.09	-4.4***

**** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

Note: Sample weights were used to compute the summary statistics The sample includes currently-married women aged 15–49.

Table 3

Results from Logistic Regression Analysis: Determinants of Justification of IPV

	Unadjusted	Adjusted	Extended Adjusted
Region: Other (Ref)			
South	5.94***	6.10***	1.84***
	(5.53 - 6.39)	(5.23 - 7.12)	(1.67 - 2.03)
Individual Level Characteristics			
Women's Age		0.97	1.00
		(0.92 - 1.02)	(0.94 - 1.06)
Women's Education		0.97***	0.96***
		(0.96 - 0.97)	(0.96 - 0.97)
Asset Ownership: Don't own (Ref)			
Own: Either alone or jointly		1.12**	1.06**
		(1.03 - 1.21)	(0.99 - 1.14)
Working Status: Not working (Ref)			
Professional/technical/managerial/clerical/sales		0.88*	0.85**
		(0.77 - 1.01)	(0.73 - 0.98)
Services/household and domestic/skilled and unskilled manual/other		1.14**	1.12**
		(1.01 - 1.29)	(1.01 - 1.24)
Agriculture and allied		1.17***	1.13***
		(1.07 - 1.29)	(1.04 - 1.23)
Autonomy in Mobility: No (ref)			
Yes		1.01	1.03
		(0.93 - 1.09)	(0.96 - 1.11)
Decision-Making Power			
Yes		0.80***	0.86***
		(0.72 - 0.88)	(0.78 - 0.95)
Access to Banking: No (Ref)			
Yes		0.91**	0.94
		(0.84 – 1.00)	(0.87 - 1.02)
Media Exposure: No (Ref)			
Yes		1.00	0.98
		(0.92 - 1.08)	(0.90 - 1.07)
Marital Level Characteristics			
Age at Marriage		1.01	1.00
		(0.96 - 1.07)	(0.94 - 1.06)
Marriage Duration		1.03	1.00
		(0.97 - 1.08)	(0.94 - 1.07)
Educational Assortative Mating: Homogamy (Ref)			
Hypogamy		1.08**	1.04
		(1.01 - 1.17)	(0.96 - 1.13)
Hypergamy		0.97	0.96
		(0.91 - 1.04)	(0.90 - 1.03)

Pre-Marital Kinship: No (Ref)		
Yes	1.29***	1.15***
	(1.18 - 1.41)	(1.05 - 1.25)
Number of Living Children	0.99	1.00
	(0.97 - 1.02)	(0.98 - 1.03)
Spousal Level Characteristics		
Husbands' Alcohol Use: No (Ref)		
Yes	0.99	1.02
	(0.92 - 1.06)	(0.95 - 1.09)
Husbands' Working Status: Not working (Ref)		
Currently Working	0.85***	0.92*
	(0.77 - 0.94)	(0.85 - 1.01)
Husband's Attitude towards IPV: Does not justify (Ref)		
Justifies	1.33***	1.19***
	(1.25 - 1.42)	(1.13 - 1.25)
Household Level Characteristics		
Household Size	1.00	0.99
	(0.98 - 1.01)	(0.98 - 1.01)
Sex of Household head: Male (Ref)		
Female	0.91**	0.93
	(0.83 - 1.00)	(0.84 - 1.03)
Household Wealth: Non Poor (Ref)		
Poor	1.10***	0.99
	(1.02 - 1.18)	(0.93 - 1.06)
Religion: Hindu (Ref)		
Muslim	1.11	1.02
	(0.98 - 1.25)	(0.94 - 1.12)
Other	0.79***	0.90
	(0.69 - 0.92)	(0.80 – 1.02)
Social Group: General (Ref)		
SC	1.04	1.00
	(0.93 - 1.15)	(0.90 - 1.11)
ST	0.97	0.96
	(0.85 - 1.12)	(0.86 - 1.07)
OBC	0.92*	0.95
	(0.84 - 1.01)	(0.88 - 1.02)
Don't Know/ Missing	0.86	0.91
	(0.71 - 1.06)	(0.78 - 1.05)
Place of Residence: Urban (Ref)		
Rural	1.28***	0.98
	(1.17 - 1.40)	(0.93 – 1.05)
Contextual Level Characteristics		
Neighbourhood justification of IPV		31.08***

			(27.52- 35.12)
Indian Patriarchy Index			0.99
			(0.98 - 1.00)
Observations	56421	56421	56421

**** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

Note: Sampling weights were used. Confidence intervals in brackets were adjusted for the cluster survey design. The outcome variable is women's justification of IPV. Column 1, unadjusted models show bivariate associations. Column 2 adjusted model controls for individual, marital, spousal, and household characteristics. Column 3, extended-adjusted model control for individual, marital, spousal, household, community, and district characteristics.

Table 4. Non-linear Decomposition of the South vs. Rest of India Gap in IPV Justification

Total Difference = 39.73 p.p.		
	Contribution to Gap (p.p.)	% of Total Gap
Aggregate Explained (Endowments)	26.96	67.85%
Aggregate Unexplained (Coefficients)	12.77	32.15%
Detailed Decomposition of Endowments:		
Neighbourhood IPV Justification (Contextual Level)	24.87	62.6%
Spousal-Level Characteristics	1.44	3.62%
Individual-Level Characteristics	0.84	2.12%
Marital-Level Characteristics	0.5	1.28%
Household-Level Characteristics	-0.47	-1.18%
Indian Patriarchy Index (Contextual Level)	-0.24	-0.61%

Notes: The table shows how much of the 39.73 percentage point gap is explained by differences in characteristics (endowments) between the two regions.

Table 5

Nonlinear decomposition of South-Other gap in justification of IPV

	Covariate Share Pct.	Coefficient Share Pct.
Aggregate Effect	**67.85*** **	**32.15*** **
Individual Level Characteristics	**2.12**	**51.57**
Women's Age	0.81	50.2
Women's Education	-2.88***	-2.97
Asset Ownership		
Don't Know	-0.07	1.37
Own: Alone or jointly	-0.07	-1.04
Working Status		
Not working	0.6	-2.51
Professional/technical/managerial/clerical/sales	-0.63**	-0.18
Services/household and domestic/skilled and unskilled manual/other	0.56**	0.83
Agriculture and allied	0.36	-0.04
Autonomy in Mobility		
No	-0.09***	-2.85***
Yes	-0.09***	5.18***
Decision-Making Power		
No	0.1**	0.39
Yes	0.1**	-3.8
Access to Banking		
No	0.45*	-1.59**
Yes	0.45*	5.47**
Media Exposure		
No	1.26*	-1.97**
Yes	1.26*	5.08**
Marital Level Characteristics	**1.28**	**-58.7**
Age at Marriage	-0.72	-26.33
Marriage Duration	-0.26	-28.29
Educational Assortative Mating		
Homogamy	0	-0.48
Hypogamy	0.42	0.53
Hypergamy	0.25	-0.12
Pre-Marital Kinship		
No	0.58*	-0.9
Yes	0.58*	0.1
Number of Living Children	0.43	-3.21
Spousal Level Characteristics	**3.62**	**2.03**
Husband's Alcohol Use		
No	0.09	-0.23
Yes	0.09	0.08

Husbands Working Status		
Currently not working	0.02	-0.29
Currently Working	0.02	2.98
Husband's Attitude towards IPV		
Does not justify	1.7***	-1.04
Justifies	1.7***	0.53
Household Level Characteristics	**-1.18**	**-3.14**
Household Size	0.59	-2.49
Sex of Household head		
Male	-0.06	2.88
Female	-0.06	-0.2
Household Wealth		
Non-Poor	0.4	0.76
Poor	0.4	-0.58
Religion		
Hindu	0.05	0.83
Muslim	0.03	-0.64*
Other	-0.01	0.17
Social Group		
General	-0.93	1.55
SC	0	-1.06
ST	-0.54	1.26
OBC	-2.03**	-3.8**
Don't Know/ Missing	0.36	-0.26
Place of Residence		
Urban	0.31	1.17
Rural	0.31	-2.73
Contextual Level Characteristics	**61.99**	**22.27**
Neighbourhood IPV Justification	62.6***	-2.14
Indian Patriarchy Index	-0.61	24.41
Constant		18

**** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

Note: Contribution of explanatory variables to the gap in justification of IPV between currently married women in Southern India and other regions.

Table 6. Heterogeneity Analysis: Decomposition of the South vs. Other Regions Gap in IPV Justification

	South vs. Other Regions				
Variable Category	North	Central	East	Northeast	West
Total Explained (Endowment) Effect	67.13%	71.64%	66.03%	69.14%	65.36%
Total Unexplained (Coefficient) Effect	32.87%	28.36%	33.97%	30.86%	34.64%
Breakdown of Explained Effect (%)					
Individual-Level Characteristics	0.61%	2.59%	2.48%	3.67%	2.22%
Marital-Level Characteristics	1.69%	2.26%	0.41%	-0.29%	1.13%
Spousal-Level Characteristics	3.86%	3.66%	3.22%	3.00%	4.06%
Household-Level Characteristics	-2.58%	0.87%	-0.24%	-0.10%	-4.16%
Neighbourhood IPV Justification (Contextual Level)	64.27%	62.99%	60.68%	63.23%	62.7%
Indian Patriarchy Index (Contextual Level)	-0.68%	-0.71%	-0.5%	-0.39%	-0.61%
Observations (N)	20,233	21,607	17,768	17,183	15,650

Note: Covariates are grouped into their respective categories, and the total contribution of each category is reported as the sum of its constituent variables.

Table 7. Robustness Check: Decomposition of South vs. Rest of India Gap, with Control for Prior IPV Exposure

Variable Category	% Contribution to Explained Gap
Total Explained (Endowment) Effect	67.04%
Total Unexplained (Coefficient) Effect	32.96%
Breakdown of Explained Effect (%):	
Individual-Level Characteristics	-0.11%
Marital-Level Characteristics	2.45%
Spousal-Level Characteristics	4.88%
Household-Level Characteristics	-2.52%
Neighbourhood-IPV Justification (Contextual Level)	62.62%
Indian Patriarchy Index (Contextual Level)	-0.38%
Prior Exposure to IPV	0.1%
Observations (N)	33,801

Note: Covariates are grouped into their respective categories, and the total contribution of each category is reported as the sum of its constituent variables.

Figure 1

Schematic representation of the final analytical sample

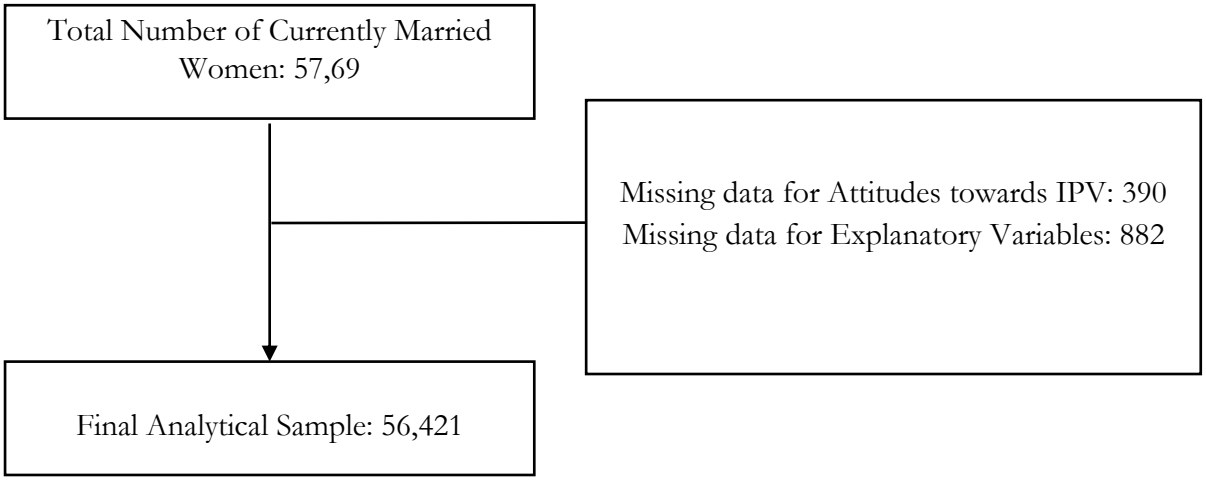

Figure 2

Justification of IPV – Region-wise