

# Spousal violence in India with special reference to North Eastern states

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## Abstract

*According to NFHS-5 (2019-21), One in every three ever-married women in India is a victim of spousal violence. In eight sister Northeast (NE) states, around a quarter of married women have ever experienced spousal violence. Manipur and Assam have persistently reported higher incidences of spousal violence in different rounds of NFHS. The present study investigates the influencing factors for spousal violence in NE, along with the level, trend, and pattern by background characteristics. The study finds that the most common type of spousal violence is physical violence, followed by emotional and sexual violence. Slapping, pushing/something throwing, kicking/dragging, and emotional violence, like insulting or making to feel bad, and physically forced for unwanted sex are pervasive forms of spousal violence in NE. Highly predictive determinants are the alcohol consumption of husbands, women's level of education, and work and marital status. The social determinant- religion, also considerably influence the likelihood of spousal violence.*

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, spousal violence, physical violence, alcohol consumption, Northeast India

## Introduction

About one in every three women worldwide has been subjected to physical or sexual violence by intimate or non-partners or both in their lifetime (WHO, 2024). United Nations (1993) defines violence against women as any act that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether occurring in public or private life or private place. There are various forms of domestic violence; among these, physical, sexual, and emotional violence perpetrated by the spouse or intimate partner is the most common and major public health issue and breaches women's human rights (WHO,

2024). Intimate partner violence results in not only the direct health effects of injury and fatality but also indirectly influences other health outcomes, which adds to the burden of disease (Garcia-Moreno *et al.*, 2006). WHO's study in 2013 on the prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence revealed that the women who had been abused by intimate partners were estimated 1.5 times more likely to have an STI and HIV, twice as likely to have an abortion, 16 percent more likely to suffer a miscarriage, 41 percent more likely to have a pre-term birth, and almost twice likely to experience depression and drinking

compared to women who had not experienced the same (WHO, 2013). Spousal violence also affects their children's health and well-being and leads to higher infant and child mortality and morbidity (WHO, 2024).

Globally, around 27 percent of ever-married women of reproductive age (15–49) were estimated in 2018 to have experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence at least once in their lifetime (WHO, 2021). The lifetime prevalence of domestic violence among ever-married women (aged 15–49) is the highest in the least developed countries (37 percent), and Oceania (Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia), followed by southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, 35 and 33 percent respectively in 2018 (WHO, 2021). Spousal violence is widespread in India. According to the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS)-5, around 32 percent of ever-married women aged 18–49 experienced spousal violence in 2019–21.

Indian society is deeply rooted in patriarchal form, cultural norms, and conservative social structure. Various factors, from household, individual, and community levels to institutional policies and regulations, are associated with domestic violence in India. Contrary to common belief, studies reveal that employed women are subjected to greater spousal violence. Based on NFHS-3 (2005–06) data Bhattacharya (2015) found employed women experiencing more spousal violence than their unemployed counterparts. Biswas' (2017) study was even more astonishing in that showed even the higher-category jobs hardly protected women from spousal violence or for that matter women with higher levels of education. Spousal violence has been witnessed more among women of younger age, poor economic status,

from among marginalised communities, and those who live in a social ecology with unfavourable social norms, higher domestic crimes, and a higher prevalence of underage marriage (Ahmad *et al.*, 2021). Apart from individual and household characteristics, husbands' backgrounds, such as alcohol and drug addiction, suspicion, jealousy, and emotionally and sexually abusive behaviours, significantly influence intimate partner violence in India (Sabri *et al.*, 2014). A study (Krishnan *et al.*, 2010) on spousal employment status and domestic violence in Bengaluru shows that spousal violence is highly reported when husbands face difficulties in keeping or finding a job and decreases when husbands have stable employment. In the context of the tribes in Meghalaya and neighbouring areas, Pal's (2018) study found that social norms such as marriage payments, marital patterns, post-marital residency patterns, separation norms, and lineage norms play a significant role in determining the incidence and women's attitudes towards acceptance of violence.

There is a wide variation in the prevalence of spousal violence among Indian states, ranging from 48 percent in Karnataka to 10 percent in Goa in 2019–21. Of the eight northeast (NE) Indian states, Manipur (41.6 percent), Assam (34.3 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (26.6 percent), and Tripura (23.2 percent) witnessed higher spousal violence as reported from NFHS-5 data consistent with previous years round-3 (2005–05) and 4 (2015–16) of NFHS. These four states find a place among the top five Indian States/UTs as regards the spousal violence prevalence. NE states exhibit a distinct socio-cultural and ethnopolitical identity of their own. The multi-ethnic composition of the indigenous

peoples manifests a unique culture, language, and religious profile, which makes the region different from the rest. In addition, NE states perform splendidly well and rank among the Indian States/UTs in the conventional parameters measuring women empowerment, such as sex ratio, female work participation, household decision-making, and autonomy (NSSO, 2024; IIPS & ICF, 2021). On the other hand, these states share common problems ranging from ethnic conflict, insurgency, extortion, and drug trafficking to poor transportation, communication, and migration issues (Mistri, 2022; Upadhyay, 2006). The higher prevalence of spousal violence in the region and its associated factors are hardly comparable to the rest of India. Moreover, detailed studies related to trends, patterns, and factors affecting spousal violence are sparse in the context of the region.

### **Objectives, data sources and methods**

The study presents the level and trends of spousal violence in India and NE states since the NFHS-3 (2005-06). It also discusses the micro-patterns by background characteristics of spousal violence in the region in NFHS-5 (2019-21). Finally, it examines the determinants of spousal violence in NE. The study has consulted published reports and unit-level data of the NFHS, rounds 3 to 5. The domestic violence module was first introduced in NFHS-3. In NFHS-5, 72,056 women aged 18-49 completed the domestic violence module, of which 63,851 were ever-married women, which includes currently- and formerly- married women. Spousal violence is related to ever-married women who have ever experienced any form of physical, sexual, or emotional violence committed by their current husband, if currently married, or their most recent husband if formerly married.

Around 13 predictors are identified within the limitation of unit-level data of NFHS-5. These predictors are broadly classified into four categories- women's characteristics, household characteristics, husbands' characteristics, and socio-cultural factors. Binary Logistic Regression (BLR) model is constructed to predict the likelihood of spousal violence over the non-probability of the same under the above-mentioned predictors. The model controls the 'state effect', i.e., time-variant aspects of NE states' policies/structure/development initiatives.

### **Result**

#### ***Spousal violence in India and NE states***

At the national level, spousal violence has substantially declined (Fig. 1) from 40 to 32 percent between 2005-06 and 2019-21. The trend of decline is evident in NE states too, from 32 to 24 percent in the same period, though the extent of decline varied widely across the NE states. Spousal violence in Tripura, Manipur and Assam, with a greater proportion of non-tribal populations, and tribal-dominated Arunachal Pradesh have all reported higher prevalence. Significantly, Tripura and Manipur in 2005-06 were in the top five in terms of spousal violence among Indian States/UTs. Tripura recorded the highest, around 47 percent spousal violence, followed by Manipur (46.2%), Arunachal Pradesh (43.0) and Assam (42.1%). Over the period, spousal violence has declined in Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh, but not so much in Manipur and Assam. In fact, Manipur has remained one of the top five states in spousal violence since 2005-06 and ranked the highest in terms of spousal violence with a prevalence rate of 54.7 percent in 2015-16. In 2019-21, one in every two ever-married women was a victim of spousal violence in the

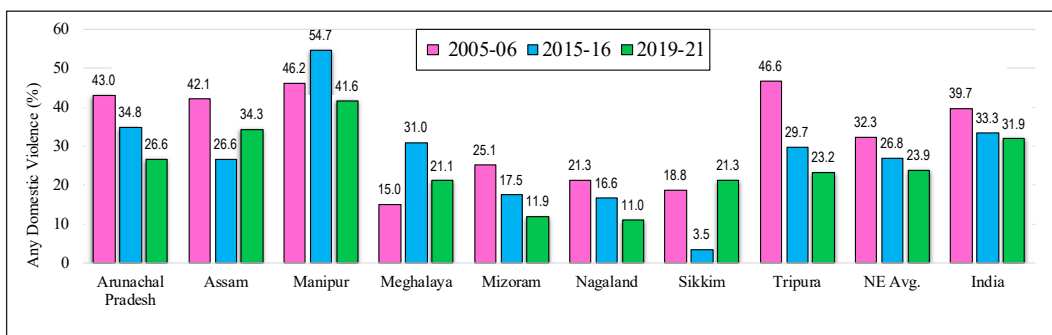


Fig. 1: Any spousal (physical, sexual, or emotional) violence in NE states, NFHS-3 to 5

Source: IIPS & Macro International, 2007; IIPS & ICF, 2017; 2021.

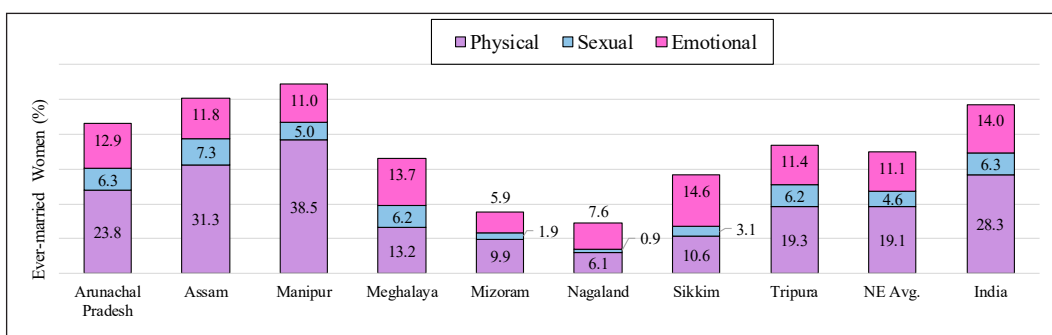


Fig. 2: Forms of spousal violence in NE States, 2019-21

Source: NFHS-5 unit-level data, DHS, 2021

state compared to one in every three at the all-India level. Significantly, Assam and Sikkim are the only two states which have witnessed higher incidences of spousal violence during 2015-16 and 2019-21. The lowest spousal violence was recorded in tribal-dominated Nagaland and Mizoram in 2019-21.

### Forms of spousal violence

The most common form of spousal violence in India is physical assault, with 28.3 percent of victims in 2019-21 (Fig. 2). In the NE region, physical violence was reportedly less, i.e. 19.1 percent, followed by emotional violence (11.1%) and sexual violence (4.6 percent). Significantly, however, in Manipur,

Assam and Arunachal, physical violence is much higher at 38.5, 31.3 and 23.8 percent respectively. Interestingly emotional violence surpasses physical violence in Sikkim, Meghalaya and Nagaland, (Fig. 2). The highest proportion of sexual violence was reported from Assam (7.3%), followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya.

It is hard to distinguish- physical and sexual violence occurrence in isolation; women may experience a combination of different types of violence. However, slapping, pushing, shaking, or throwing are the most common forms of physical violence in NE India (Fig. 3). Slapping by husbands/partners is very conspicuous, reported by

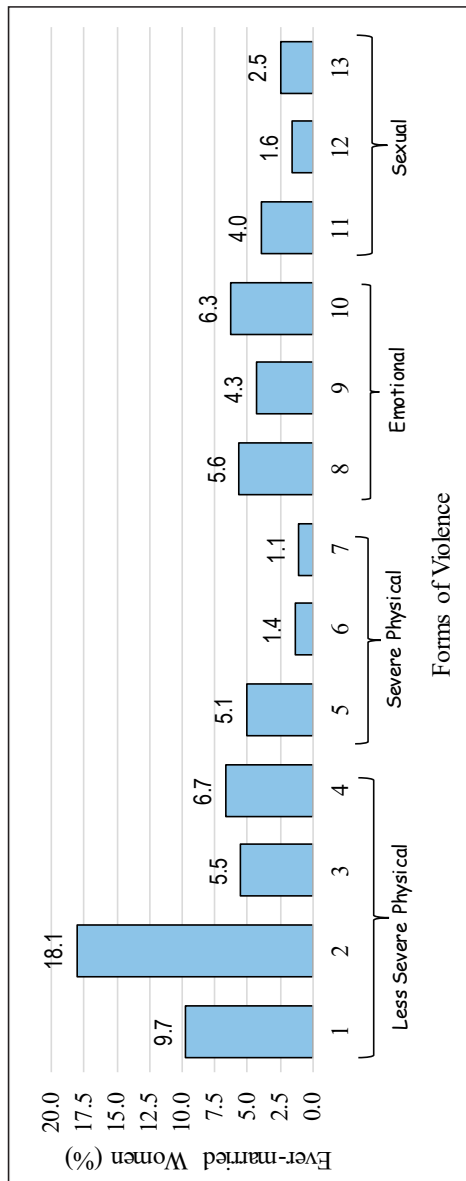


Fig. 3: Spousal violence by sub-types in NE India, 2019-21

**Abbreviations-** Physical violence- Less severe (1-4): 1-pushed, shook or something thrown, 2-slapped, 3-punched with fist or hit by something, 4-arm twisted or hair pulled; Physical violence- Severe (5-7:): 5-kicked or dragged, 6-strangled or burnt, 7-threatened with knife/gun/other weapon; Emotional violence (8-10): 8-humiliated, 9- threatened, 10-insulted or made to feel bad. Sexual violence (11-13): 11-physically forced into unwanted sex, 12-forced into unwanted sexual acts, 13- forced to perform sexual acts respondent didn't want.

Source: NFHS-5 unit-level data, DHS, 2021.

Table 1: Spousal violence by women's characteristics in NE states, 2019-21

| Characteristics             | Any spousal (physical, sexual, or emotional) violence |      |                                   |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|
|                             | No                                                    | Yes  | Chi-square                        |
| Age                         |                                                       |      |                                   |
| 18-24                       | 75.8                                                  | 24.2 | $\chi^2=7.12^*$<br>$n=9582$       |
| 25-29                       | 74.8                                                  | 25.2 |                                   |
| 30-39                       | 72.5                                                  | 27.5 |                                   |
| 40-49                       | 74.6                                                  | 25.4 |                                   |
| Years of Schooling          |                                                       |      |                                   |
| No schooling                | 67.3                                                  | 32.7 | $\chi^2=117.91^{***}$<br>$n=9582$ |
| <7 years                    | 72.1                                                  | 27.9 |                                   |
| 8-9 years                   | 75.1                                                  | 24.9 |                                   |
| 10-11 years                 | 75.8                                                  | 24.2 |                                   |
| ≥12 years                   | 83.2                                                  | 16.8 |                                   |
| Occupation                  |                                                       |      |                                   |
| Not working                 | 77.4                                                  | 22.6 | $\chi^2=98.65^{***}$<br>$n=9582$  |
| Working                     | 68.3                                                  | 31.7 |                                   |
| Marital Status              |                                                       |      |                                   |
| Currently married           | 74.3                                                  | 25.7 | $\chi^2=9.88^{***}$<br>$n=9582$   |
| Formerly married            | 68.3                                                  | 31.7 |                                   |
| Media Exposure: watching TV |                                                       |      |                                   |
| Not at all                  | 72.2                                                  | 27.8 | $\chi^2=46.19^{***}$<br>$n=9582$  |
| Less than once a week       | 70.8                                                  | 29.2 |                                   |
| At least once a week        | 77.7                                                  | 26.0 |                                   |

\*\*\*1%, \*\*5% and \*10% level of significance.

Source: NFHS-5 unit-level data, DHS, 2021

18 percent of women in NE India, and 9.7 percent reported being pushed, shaken, or had something thrown by their partner. Among the severe physical violence, kicking or dragging by husband/partner is predominant in NE India. Four percent of women in NE India said that their husbands physically forced them to have sexual intercourse. Emotional violence perpetrated by their husband consisted of insults or made them feel bad (6.3 percent), followed by humiliation in front of others (5.6 percent).

### Patterns by background characteristics

Tables 1, 2 and 3 highlight spousal violence patterns by background characteristics in NE India in 2019-21. The chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test suggests that around 12 such characteristics are significantly associated with spousal violence against ever-married women by their current or most recent husbands. In the study, women's experience of violence declines sharply with women's level of schooling (Table 1). The percentage of women who reported spousal violence declined from

Table 2: Spousal Violence by Household and Socio-Cultural Characteristics in NE, 2019-21

| Characteristics                | Any spousal (physical, sexual, or emotional) violence |      |                                   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|
|                                | No                                                    | Yes  | Chi-square                        |
| Household characteristics      |                                                       |      |                                   |
| Number of living children      |                                                       |      | $\chi^2=36.59^{***}$<br>$n=9582$  |
| 0                              | 80.8                                                  | 19.2 |                                   |
| 1-2                            | 75.0                                                  | 25.0 |                                   |
| 3-4                            | 70.6                                                  | 29.4 |                                   |
| ≥5                             | 72.3                                                  | 27.7 |                                   |
| Residence                      |                                                       |      | $\chi^2=15.39^{**}$<br>$n=9582$   |
| Urban                          | 77.7                                                  | 22.3 |                                   |
| Rural                          | 73.1                                                  | 26.9 |                                   |
| Wealth Index                   |                                                       |      | $\chi^2=133.90^{***}$<br>$n=9582$ |
| Poorest                        | 67.8                                                  | 32.2 |                                   |
| Poorer                         | 72.7                                                  | 27.3 |                                   |
| Middle                         | 79.2                                                  | 20.8 |                                   |
| Rich                           | 81.6                                                  | 18.4 |                                   |
| Socio-Cultural characteristics |                                                       |      |                                   |
| Caste/tribe                    |                                                       |      | $\chi^2=65.49^{***}$<br>$n=8201$  |
| Scheduled castes(SCs)          | 72.2                                                  | 27.8 |                                   |
| Scheduled tribes(STs)          | 77.6                                                  | 22.4 |                                   |
| Other backward class(OBCs)     | 69.3                                                  | 30.7 |                                   |
| Other                          | 68.4                                                  | 31.6 |                                   |
| Religion                       |                                                       |      | $\chi^2=145.69^{***}$<br>$n=9582$ |
| Hindu                          | 71.4                                                  | 28.6 |                                   |
| Muslim                         | 63.4                                                  | 36.6 |                                   |
| Christian                      | 79.5                                                  | 20.5 |                                   |
| Other                          | 77.3                                                  | 22.7 |                                   |

\*\*\*1%, \*\*5% and \*10% level of significance.

Source: NFHS-5 unit-level data, DHS, 2021

one-third of women with no schooling to a quarter of women with 12 or more years of schooling in NFHS-5. Data shows working women face more spousal violence (23%) than non-working women. Compared to currently married, more of formerly married women, such as separated or divorced, experienced spousal violence. Those women

who had watched TV at least once a week reported the lowest experience of spousal violence, which was recorded at 26 percent, in NE India.

Household characteristics such as number of children, residence (rural/urban) and economic status play an important role in the variation of spousal violence among

Table 3: Spousal violence by husbands' characteristics in NE states, 2019-21

| Characteristics                            | Any spousal (physical, sexual, or emotional) violence |      |                                   |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|
|                                            | No                                                    | Yes  | Chi-square                        |
| Education                                  |                                                       |      |                                   |
| No education                               | 68.9                                                  | 31.1 | $\chi^2=86.17^{***}$<br>$n=9582$  |
| Primary                                    | 69.8                                                  | 30.2 |                                   |
| Secondary                                  | 75.2                                                  | 24.8 |                                   |
| ≥ Higher Secondary                         | 83.3                                                  | 16.7 |                                   |
| Occupation                                 |                                                       |      |                                   |
| Professional/technical/managerial/Clerical | 81.5                                                  | 18.5 | $\chi^2=114.09^{***}$<br>$n=9582$ |
| Sales                                      | 77.6                                                  | 22.4 |                                   |
| Services/household and domestic            | 81.3                                                  | 18.7 |                                   |
| Agricultural                               | 72.0                                                  | 28.0 |                                   |
| Skilled and unskilled manual               | 67.9                                                  | 32.1 |                                   |
| Other                                      | 77.9                                                  | 22.1 |                                   |
| Alcohol Consumption                        | 62.7                                                  | 37.3 | $\chi^2=368.65^{***}$<br>$n=9582$ |

\*\*\* 1%, \*\* 5% and \* 10% level of significance.

Source: NFHS-5 unit-level data, DHS, 2021

married women. In NE, spousal violence increased from 19 percent for no children to 28 percent for five or more children (Table 2). Rural women (27%) experienced more spousal violence than urban women (22%). The wealth index in NFHS measures the standards of living in households. Married women in the poorest (32%) and poorer families (27%) in the NE face higher spousal violence than middle-class (21%) and wealthy families (18%).

NE India is a large habitat of indigenous people. Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh are dominated by tribal peoples. Unsurprisingly, the prevalence of spousal violence is the lowest among the STs (22%), followed by the SCs and highest among the non-SC/ST/OBC segment of the population. Married women in the Muslim community reported the highest (37%)

marital violence, followed by the Hindus (29%) and the Christians (21%). Spousal violence in NE declines as the husband's level of education increases (Table 3). Experience of spousal violence ranges from 17 percent among women with higher education of their husbands compared to 31 percent of women with illiterate husbands (NFHS-5). Husbands engaged in skilled and unskilled manual work (32%) and farming (28%) commit more spousal violence than husbands in tertiary or service sectors. Alcohol addiction of husbands is a significant factor in spousal violence in NE. Over one-third (37%) of ever-married women reported that their husbands committed violence, especially physical violence, after drinking alcohol.

### Determinants of spousal violence

The Binary Logistic Regression (BLR) model reveals that women's characteristics,

Table 4: Influencing factors for spousal violence in NE states, 2019-21.

| <i>Dependent variable: any of spousal (physical, sexual, or emotional) violence: No-0 and Yes-1</i> |          |                                          |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------------|----------|
| Characteristics                                                                                     | OR       | Characteristics                          | OR       |
| A. Women                                                                                            |          | C. Husband                               |          |
| 1. Age (Yrs.)                                                                                       |          | 9. Level of Education                    |          |
| 18-24                                                                                               | 1.026    | No education                             | 1.138    |
| 25-29                                                                                               | 1.047    | Primary                                  | 1.303*   |
| 30-39                                                                                               | 1.182**  | Secondary                                | 1.188    |
| 40-49®                                                                                              |          | ≥Higher Secondary®                       |          |
| 2. Years of Schooling                                                                               |          | 10. Occupation                           |          |
| No schooling                                                                                        | 1.866*** | Professional/Technical/Managerial        | 1.266    |
| <7 years                                                                                            | 1.653*** | Sales                                    | 1.025    |
| 8-9 years                                                                                           | 1.522*** | Services/household and domestic          | 0.987    |
| 10-11 years                                                                                         | 1.586*** | Agriculture                              | 1.182    |
| ≥12 years®                                                                                          |          | Skilled and unskilled manual             | 1.329**  |
| 3. Occupational Status                                                                              |          | Other®                                   |          |
| Not working                                                                                         | 0.600*** | 11. Alcohol Consumption                  |          |
| working®                                                                                            |          | No                                       | 0.375*** |
| 4. Marital Status                                                                                   |          | Yes®                                     |          |
| Currently married                                                                                   | 0.798**  | D. Socio-Cultural Factors                |          |
| Formerly married®                                                                                   |          | 12. Caste/Tribe                          |          |
| 5. Media Exposure: Watching TV                                                                      |          | SCs                                      | 1.148    |
| Not at all                                                                                          | 0.980    | STs                                      | 0.983    |
| Less than once a week                                                                               | 1.122*   | OBCs                                     | 1.135    |
| At least once a week®                                                                               |          | Other®                                   |          |
| B. Household                                                                                        |          | 13. Religion                             |          |
| 6. Number of Living Children                                                                        |          | Hindu®                                   |          |
| 0                                                                                                   | 0.8      | Muslim                                   | 3.119*** |
| 1-2                                                                                                 | 1.036    | Christian                                | 0.985    |
| 3-4                                                                                                 | 1.136    | Other                                    | 0.791**  |
| ≥5®                                                                                                 |          | E. Policies/Time-Varying Factors (proxy) |          |
| 7. Type of Residence                                                                                |          | 14. State                                |          |
| Urban                                                                                               | 1.095    | Sikkim                                   | 0.472*** |
| Rural®                                                                                              |          | Arunachal Pradesh                        | 0.810*** |
| 8. Wealth Quintiles                                                                                 |          | Nagaland                                 | 0.305*** |
| Poorest                                                                                             | 1.126    | Manipur                                  | 1.576*** |
| Poorer                                                                                              | 1.045    | Mizoram                                  | 0.323*** |
| Middle                                                                                              | 0.896    | Tripura                                  | 0.733*** |
| Rich®                                                                                               |          | Meghalaya                                | 0.538*** |
|                                                                                                     |          | Assam®                                   |          |

\*\*\* 1%, \*\* 5% and \* 10% level of significance.

Source: NFHS-5 unit-level data, DHS, 2021

such as age, years of schooling, occupational status, marital status, and media exposure; socio-cultural factors, such as religion, and husband's characteristics such as occupation, level of education, and alcohol consumption, significantly influence the likelihood of spousal violence. Among these, the husband's alcohol drinking, women's years of schooling, work and marital status, and religious beliefs are highly predictive determinants for spousal violence in NE states.

Women in the age group of 30-39 years have 1.2 times higher chances of facing spousal violence than those in 40-49 years of age. Women with no or fewer years of schooling are more likely to be victimised than their counterparts who attained 12 or more years of school. The log of odds ( $\beta$ ) for years of schooling in the model declines from 0.624 for no schooling to 0.420 for 8-9 years. Compared with working women, non-working women ( $OR=0.600$ ) are around 40 percent ( $0.600 - 1.0 = -0.40$ ) less likely to experience spousal violence in NE states. Compared to formerly married women, currently married women ( $OR=0.798$ ) are 20 percent less likely to experience domestic violence. Regarding media exposure, women who watch TV less than once a week experience violence 1.1 times more than women who watch it at least once a week. None of the regressors under household characteristics in the model significantly predicts the likelihood of spousal violence for NE states. Under socio-cultural characteristics, social group is not a significant predictor, but religious backgrounds significantly predict the likelihood of violence. Muslim women are 3.1 times more likely to be victimised by husbands than their Hindu counterparts.

Women whose husbands' educational level are up to the primary level have a 1.3 times higher chance of experiencing spousal violence than women whose husbands are higher secondary and above level of education. Women whose husbands engaged in skilled and unskilled manual work have ( $OR=1.329$ ) a significantly higher probability of experiencing spousal violence. Husband's habit of alcohol consumption is a significant predictor for spousal violence in the NE states. Women whose husbands do not drink alcohol are around 63 percent less likely to face spousal violence compared to husbands with alcohol addiction.

## Discussion

Younger women in NE states face higher spousal violence than older ones. This is consistent with an understanding that a limited understanding of the complexities of domestic violence by young women, such as recognition of the range and severity of behaviours, increases their risk of violence (Cohen & Maclean, 2002). Compared to women who are currently married, women who are separated or divorced are more likely to experience domestic violence in the NE region. Women's separation/divorced status may be a reaction to their spouses' potentially fatal maltreatment. In India, divorce/separation occurs in circumstances of severe or life-threatening violence; women are more likely to stay with their spouse because of socio-cultural norms (Sabri *et al.*, 2014). Drug and alcohol addiction are common problems in all over NE states. Being a frontier region close to the Golden Triangle, drug trafficking- largely opium cultivation and illegal trade, is a chronic issue and outsourcing of the insurgency

economy (Upadhyay, 2006). Moreover, brewing liquor is a traditional practice among many indigenous communities in NE. On the one hand, traditional practices as a part of food habits, and on the other hand, curtailing the social problem related to that habit- is a tough trade-off from the policy perspective. NE states do not have a concerted policy against alcohol and drugs. Only Mizoram and Nagaland strictly prohibit alcohol by law. Comparatively lower levels of domestic violence in Mizoram and Nagaland in NFHS-5 can be correlated to their stringent regulations. The Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Act of 2019 was passed replacing the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition and Control) Act of 2014. Nagaland has been a dry state since 1989, banning the trade and consumption of alcohol under the Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act. Till now, Assam has no specific plan for the alcohol prohibition act. Manipur enacted the Manipur Liquor Prohibition Act of 1991, which had been practiced for over three decades, but in 2022, the Manipur government partially revoked the ban. When Manipur has already been suffering a higher level of domestic violence, revoking the alcohol prohibition may place women in a more precarious situation. Moreover, Manipur is often disturbed by ethnic conflicts and insurgency; still, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) of 1958 is operational. Maintaining law and order may be the top priority for the Manipur government rather than dealing with social issues like domestic violence.

The significant association between working women and spousal violence in NE states is a concern as the region records a higher female work participation rate. The

average Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in 2023-24 in NE is estimated at 56.3 percent for women aged 15 and above in contrast to 41.7 percent for the country as a whole (NSSO, 2024). All the NE states, except Mizoram, are far above the Indian average. Unlike women, there is little difference between India and the NE with regard to LFPR for men. In two NE states- Manipur (70.8%), and Mizoram (66.1%), male LFPRs are even lower than the Indian average. Likewise, in the 2011 Census, on average 34 percent of women in NE were engaged in work.

Women's education plays a significant role in domestic violence. The study has found that women who attain no or fewer years of schooling experience high spousal violence. Arunachal Pradesh (59.6%), Assam (67.3%), and Manipur (73.2%), where female literacy rates are lower, report higher spousal violence. Though relatively better, females are poorly represented in higher education in NE states much like the rest of India. In the 2011 census, nearly 74 percent of women in NE reported their education below matric/secondary level, whereas the Indian average is 68.6 percent. On the contrary, a quarter of women completed matric/secondary and above, of which around six percent graduated and above; whereas, all India figure is nearly 30 percent for secondary and above, and eight percent for graduation and above. Only in Manipur, women's presence in higher education is outstanding- around 10.4 percent are graduates and above, and over 38 percent completed secondary and above. But Manipur recorded a higher level of domestic violence. This is ironic and needs to be investigated through the lens of different ethnocultural parameters.

Women whose husbands do heavy physical labour are more likely to have lifetime domestic violence (Ames *et al.*, 2013). Men engaged in heavy manual labour prefer using a simple and arbitrary method to resolve family conflicts than those who perform mental work (Cunradi *et al.*, 2009). Negative emotions caused by job burnout may be brought to the home, including irritability and failure to care about their wives, resulting in the occurrence of domestic violence (Ames *et al.*, 2013). The same pattern has been observed in NE India, where spousal violence is highest against women whose husbands engaged in skilled and unskilled manual work and farming. Experience of spousal violence is lower among women with higher education of husbands in NE. Educated men value and respect their partner more and allow their spouse to provide suggestions for home decision-making (Doku & Asante, 2015).

## Conclusion

Despite stringent laws prohibiting spousal violence, spousal violence is an existential reality for many women in India. The state-specific scenario is widely variant. The prevalence of spousal violence in NE has certainly improved, but around a quarter of women continue to encounter the same. Manipur and Assam, where the tribal population is low, have witnessed persistently high spousal violence in successive rounds of NFHS. Among the three forms- physical, sexual and emotional violence; physical violence is the most common one in the NE states, but these are less severe types. Moreover, a substantial proportion of emotional violence in the region is concerned, which may affect mental health and lead to other serious consequences.

The varying pattern of spousal violence in the NE states is significantly associated with multiple factors; among these, the husband's alcohol drinking, women's years of schooling, work status and marital status are observed as predominant predictors, which need special attention. In the context of alcohol regulation, only Mizoram and Nagaland have strict legal prohibitions. All the NE states need to push a concerted policy against alcohol and drugs to curb the high domestic violence as well as gender well-being. Education, especially the level of education/schooling, not merely increasing the literacy rate, has broader implications; NE states have a wider scope for improvement in this aspect. State-wise development policies widely differ in NE, partially due to cultural diversity, ethnopolitics, and physiographic heterogeneity. However, state-specific suitable policy interventions for curbing domestic violence among a large volume of working women in NE states are the utmost need of the hour.

## Competing interest

The corresponding author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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