

# Community Prevalence and Risk Factors for Psychological Abuse in India

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## ABSTRACT

Violence against women has been recognized by the United Nations as a fundamental violation of women's human rights. Although there is a good amount of research on physical violence, very little on psychological abuse from Indian researchers. In India too, domestic violence is prevalent in all sections of the community. The objectives of the study are to find the prevalence of psychological abuse in different stratum in India and the risk factors of psychological violence. A cross-sectional study based on 9938 women in rural, urban, and urban non-slum sites across India was conducted in 1998–1999. Logistic regression was done to find the risk factors of psychological violence. Despite the limitations of the 9426 women responded psychological violence, 3306 (35.1%) (95%CI: 23.1, 47.0) reported any psychological abuse in the past 1 year. The women who had lower education, from lower socioeconomic status (SES) and whose mothers-in-law not satisfied with dowry had higher risk for psychological abuse. There was a synergistic effect in psychological abuse if the woman is from low SES and the husband is an alcoholic and the risk is 7.4 times higher as compared to women who did not have both. However, alcoholism had significant independent effect when this was interacted with satisfaction of dowry. We suggest that the families should avoid asking and giving dowries. Besides these, the newly married women should be counseled to handle the conflicts at the family level so that the physical and psychological abuses can be avoided.

**Keywords:** Alcoholism, Culture, Dowry, Education, Psychological violence

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## INTRODUCTION

Violence against women has been recognized by the United Nations as a fundamental violation of women's human rights. However, little attention has been given to domestic violence. The sensitivities and stigma associated with domestic violence have been hampered by a lack of conceptualization of it as a judicial issue and inadequate data on the dimensions of abuse.<sup>[1]</sup> Violence against women is also related to adverse outcomes such as physical trauma, mental illness, psychosomatic illness, suicide, and even homicide.<sup>[2,3]</sup> Broadly, the prevalence of this phenomenon inclusive of both physical and psychological violence varies from region to region and from culture to culture.<sup>[4]</sup> While there is considerable research on physical violence from India, research on psychological violence has been quite inadequate, perhaps because physical and sexual violence are easier to quantify unlike psychological abuse. Findings from qualitative research have demonstrated that emotionally abusive acts perpetrated by an intimate partner might be more devastating than physically abusive acts.<sup>[5]</sup> The prevalence of controlling behavior in Asian countries was 75%, 74%, and 43% in Bangladesh, Thailand, and Japan, respectively.<sup>[5]</sup> A 12-month prevalence of partner violence varied from 4% in countries such as Denmark, the UK, Ireland, and the USA to almost 40% in low-income countries such as Ethiopia.<sup>[6]</sup>

In India, where family structure is patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal, women are particularly vulnerable to both physical and psychological violence.<sup>[7]</sup> Ubiquitous in occurrence, it is prevalent across all castes, socioeconomic classes, religious groups, and regions.<sup>[8]</sup> A study carried out by the National Family Health Survey III 2005–2006 (NFHS-3), which included nearly 67,000 married, separated, or divorced women,<sup>[9]</sup> concluded that 16% of the women had experienced emotional abuse. Other community-based studies have reported varied ranges in the presence of

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psychological abuse, from 23% to 72%.<sup>[10-13]</sup> Again, these differences in levels of abuse might be attributable to methodological differences in the definition of psychological abuse. In another study from East India, 52% of women reported experiencing psychological abuse.<sup>[14]</sup> The prevalence of emotional violence (EV) was 13.8%. Of this, "Said or did something to humiliate her in front of others" was 9.6%, threatened to hurt or harass her or someone close to her was 5.6%, and insulted her or made her feel bad about herself was 8.1%. If the woman was non-literate or studied <5<sup>th</sup> standard, then the EV was 15% and 13.1% in India.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Risk Factors

The prevalence of EV was 16% and 13.7% among people belonging to the lowest wealth index and the second lowest wealth index,

respectively. However, if the husband was non-literate or had completed <5 years of schooling, then EV was 2.5 times more as compared to those husbands who were well educated. Similarly, if the husband used alcohol, then EV was 4 times higher as compared to those who did not.<sup>[14]</sup> The woman's education was more strongly associated with reduced risk of partner violence in countries where wife abuse is normative than where it is not. Partner violence was less prevalent in countries with a high proportion of women in the formal workforce, but working for cash increased a woman's risk in countries where few women work.<sup>[5]</sup>

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE IN INDIA

#### Culture of Marriage

In India, the marriages are arranged through family members, well-wishers, and recently through online match making sites.<sup>[16]</sup> The role of decision-making by the bride or by the groom is non-existent in orthodox families. The conceptual framework of psychological abuse is presented in Figure 1.

For women particularly, the social status is decided by her wedding status. An unmarried woman is a mockery in the community. The bride after marriage is expected to be very responsible in looking after her household members and bear children to the family.<sup>[17]</sup> She is obligated to devote her life to her marital family. As a consequence, her relationship with the natal family is weakened.<sup>[18]</sup> Thus, women are restricted to their household duties and totally submissive to the will of their husbands and in-laws.<sup>[19]</sup> Over the years, and with globalization, many young people in India are deciding to choose their own marriage partners and live life on their own terms.<sup>[16]</sup> Despite the gradual liberalization that is taking place, the male dominance of

women and the restriction of their roles in families continues to be widely prevalent. Hence, the main aim of the present study is to estimate the prevalence of psychological abuse across different socioeconomic strata and study the factors associated with psychological abuse.

#### Setting

The IndiaSAFE study was conducted during the period April 1998–September 1999 by the Indian Clinical Epidemiology Network (IndiaCLEN) in collaboration with the International Clinical Epidemiology Network (INCLIN) as part of the World Studies of Abuse in the Family Environment (WorldSAFE) study.<sup>[20]</sup> The study was based in seven medical schools located in New Delhi, Lucknow, Bhopal, Nagpur, Chennai, Trivandrum, and Vellore. Using population proportionate to size sampling, data were collected from rural, urban slum, and urban non-slum strata in the seven sites. Slums were defined as residential areas where the dwellings were unfit for human habitation by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities, or a combination of these factors.<sup>[21]</sup> Rural areas (countryside and villages) were predominantly defined by the agrarian nature of their economy and their low population density, while urban non-slum areas were defined as areas inhabited by people of middle and higher socioeconomic status (SES).<sup>[22]</sup>

#### Sample Selection

The previous studies have estimated the prevalence of intimate partner violence against women in India at 20–50%.<sup>[23,24]</sup> Assuming a prevalence of 40%, at a precision of 2% with a 95% confidence interval and a 15% drop-out rate, the sample size in each stratum was estimated at a minimum of 3200 respondents. At each of the seven sites in the study, only two of three different strata (rural, urban slum, ad urban non-slum) were selected based

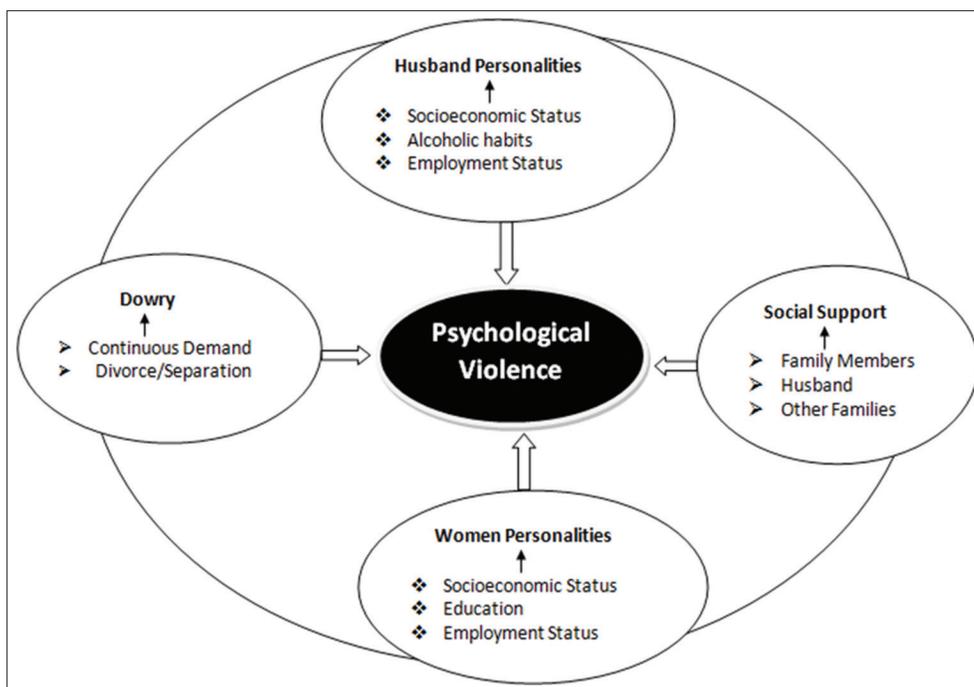


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of psychological abuse

on the availability of these strata and also to have a balance in numbers. The detailed selection of households from each stratum is presented elsewhere.<sup>[22]</sup> Women aged 15–49 years and whose marriages had been arranged by their families were eligible for inclusion in the analysis. Women aged 50 years and above and those not residing with their husbands for the past 12 months were excluded. The interviews were conducted in privacy after obtaining informed consent. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of xxxxxxxx.

## Study Instrument

A structured interview plan was developed to measure domestic violence. One section specifically focused on psychological abuse. There were a total of seven questions under this section. These seven items were devised following a review of the literature for a better understanding of the phenomena and following interviews with women to obtain first-hand experiences. To ensure comparability between the different study regions, the instrument was translated into the local language of the sites (i.e., Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, and Malayalam) and then back-translated into English. All the back-translations were thoroughly checked to ensure that the meaning of the original English language version was retained. An intensive joint training session was conducted for the research staff from all sites. An inter-rater reliability exercise revealed an ICC of 0.75.

## Outcome Variables

Current psychological abuse had seven components that were considered which were insulting, belittling, threatening the woman, threatening someone whom the woman cared, an act that scared the woman without any physical contact, abandoning the woman, and being unfaithful to the woman in the past 1 year. We have defined 'any psychological abuse' as perpetration of any one of the above seven behaviors. The presence of two or more behaviors of psychological abuse was labeled as multiple psychological abuses and presence of all above behaviors defined as "all psychological abuse." Each of the psychological abuse was measured on a three-point continuum ranging from 1 "never," 2 "once or twice," to 3 "three or more." For ease of interpretation and analysis, it was categorized into two categories as "yes" which included response "once or twice" and "three or more" and "no" which had the response "never." This study deals with any psychological abuse as outcome.

## SES

Possession of a greater number of household appliances, such as a refrigerator, gas or electric stove, television and air conditioner, and ownership of a vehicle, was considered indicative of higher SES. It was classified into three categories, namely, low, moderate, and high socioeconomic groups. Based on the normal distribution concept, cutoff scores were identified that corresponded to the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> percentiles. Subjects whose scores were less than the 33<sup>rd</sup> percentile cutoff value were categorized as belonging to a low socioeconomic group. Those who fell between the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> percentile cutoff values were categorized as belonging to a moderate socioeconomic group and those who obtained scores above the 66<sup>th</sup> percentile were classified as belonging to a high socioeconomic group.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Social Support

Three domains of social support were assessed, namely, natal, neighbors, coworkers, and others. The type of social support measured primarily focused on emotional rather than physical or marital support. For hypothesis testing, a composite score from these three scores was used. For each domain, two scores were possible: 0 if woman reported no support and 1 if she reported any support. Thus, "no social support" was given a score of 0, "low social support" was given a score of 1 or 2, and "high social support" was given a score of 3 or 4.

## Statistical Analysis

A data entry system was developed using Visual Basic as the front end and Visual Foxpro as the back end. The Biostatistics Research and Training Centre (BRTC) at the Christian Medical College, Vellore, was responsible for data management. As the primary outcome, "any psychological abuse" was binary (yes or no), Chi-square test was performed to assess the relationship of the categorical explanatory variables with outcome. Variables with a  $P < 0.05$  were considered for the multivariate logistic regression analysis. The Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit statistic was used to assess the model fit. Interaction of some relevant risk factors with alcohol, SES, and dowry satisfied was also considered to address psychological abuse.

## RESULTS

A total of 11,845 women (rural 3969, urban slum 3756, and urban non-slum 4120) were contacted, of whom 9938 agreed to participate (rural 3611, urban slum 3155, and urban non-slum 3172). Of these, 9347 (94.1%) were stayed in husband resident families. Overall participation rates were 91% for rural, 84% for urban slum, and 77% for urban non-slum. Participation rates in the urban non-slum were thus the lowest, indicating that women in urban areas were less willing to participate in such a sensitive survey than their rural and urban slum counterparts.

## Sociodemographic Characteristics

The mean  $\pm$  SD age of the women was  $31 \pm 7$  years. There were 44.7% of women who had <5 years of education and about 43% had undergone 10–12 years of education. The remaining 12% had undergone more than 13 years of education. Approximately 39%, 27%, and 33% of the women belonged to low, middle, and high SES groups, respectively. About 30% of the women's husbands had undergone <5 years of education, while about 17% of the husbands had undergone 12 years of education. Of the 9426 women responded psychological abuse, 3306 (35.1%) (95%CI: 23.1, 47.0) reported any psychological abuse in the past 1 year.

## Current Prevalence of Psychological Violence

The distribution of overall, any, and each aspect of psychological violence by stratum is provided in Table 1. The current prevalence of any psychological abuse was 35.1% (95%CI: 23.1, 47.0), multiple psychological abuse was 29.4% (95%CI: 18.4%, 40.3%) reported in the past 1 year. Women experiencing all psychological abuse defined as those women who had experienced every one of the seven psychological abuse behaviors were found to be 0.7% (0.0, 2.3%). The most common form of psychological abuse was

**Table 1:** Current prevalence of psychological abuse toward women by stratum

| Types of violence                     | Total 9426 |        | Rural 3400 |        | Urban slum 2990 |        | Urban non-slum 3036 |        |
|---------------------------------------|------------|--------|------------|--------|-----------------|--------|---------------------|--------|
|                                       | n          | (%)    | n          | (%)    | n               | (%)    | n                   | (%)    |
| Behaviors of husband toward wife:     |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| Insult*                               |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| 0                                     | 6390       | (67.8) | 2171       | (63.9) | 1979            | (66.2) | 2240                | (73.8) |
| 1-2                                   | 1390       | (14.7) | 571        | (16.8) | 496             | (16.6) | 323                 | (10.6) |
| ≥3                                    | 1646       | (17.5) | 658        | (19.4) | 515             | (17.2) | 473                 | (15.6) |
| Demean*                               |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| 0                                     | 6722       | (71.3) | 2293       | (67.5) | 2112            | (70.6) | 2317                | (76.3) |
| 1-2                                   | 1116       | (11.8) | 479        | (14.1) | 380             | (12.7) | 257                 | (8.5)  |
| ≥3                                    | 1587       | (16.8) | 627        | (18.4) | 498             | (16.7) | 462                 | (15.2) |
| Threaten you*                         |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| 0                                     | 7867       | (83.5) | 2730       | (80.3) | 2471            | (82.6) | 2666                | (87.8) |
| 1-2                                   | 585        | (6.2)  | 244        | (7.2)  | 184             | (6.2)  | 157                 | (5.2)  |
| ≥3                                    | 973        | (10.3) | 425        | (12.5) | 335             | (11.2) | 213                 | (7.0)  |
| Threaten someone else*                |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| 0                                     | 8801       | (93.4) | 3146       | (92.6) | 2757            | (92.2) | 2898                | (95.5) |
| 1-2                                   | 202        | (2.1)  | 93         | (2.7)  | 61              | (2.0)  | 48                  | (1.6)  |
| ≥3                                    | 422        | (4.5)  | 160        | (4.7)  | 172             | (5.8)  | 90                  | (3.0)  |
| Made you feel afraid*                 |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| 0                                     | 8115       | (86.1) | 2879       | (84.7) | 2536            | (84.8) | 2700                | (88.9) |
| 1-2                                   | 545        | (5.8)  | 232        | (6.8)  | 190             | (6.4)  | 123                 | (4.1)  |
| ≥3                                    | 766        | (8.1)  | 289        | (8.5)  | 264             | (8.8)  | 213                 | (7.0)  |
| Abandoned you**                       |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| 0                                     | 9241       | (98.0) | 3332       | (98.0) | 2921            | (97.7) | 2988                | (98.4) |
| 1-2                                   | 103        | (1.1)  | 41         | (1.2)  | 34              | (1.1)  | 28                  | (0.9)  |
| ≥3                                    | 82         | (0.9)  | 27         | (0.8)  | 35              | (1.2)  | 20                  | (0.7)  |
| Was unfaithful***                     |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| 0                                     | 8971       | (95.2) | 3198       | (94.1) | 2865            | (95.9) | 2908                | (95.8) |
| 1-2                                   | 195        | (2.1)  | 94         | (2.8)  | 53              | (1.8)  | 48                  | (1.6)  |
| ≥3                                    | 259        | (2.7)  | 108        | (3.2)  | 71              | (2.4)  | 80                  | (2.6)  |
| Any psychological violence*           |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| Yes                                   | 3306       | (35.1) | 1327       | (39.0) | 1090            | (36.5) | 889                 | (29.3) |
| No                                    | 6120       | (64.9) | 2073       | (61.0) | 1900            | (63.5) | 2147                | (70.7) |
| ≥2 psychological violence* (multiple) |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| Yes                                   | 2774       | (29.4) | 1126       | (33.1) | 919             | (30.7) | 729                 | (24.0) |
| No                                    | 6652       | (70.6) | 2274       | (66.9) | 2071            | (69.3) | 2307                | (76.0) |
| Psychological all****                 |            |        |            |        |                 |        |                     |        |
| Yes                                   | 63         | (0.7)  | 18         | (0.5)  | 32              | (1.1)  | 13                  | (0.4)  |
| No                                    | 9363       | (99.3) | 3382       | (99.5) | 2958            | (98.9) | 3023                | (99.6) |

\* $P \leq 0.001$ , \*\* $P = 0.183$ , \*\*\* $P = 0.002$ , \*\*\*\* $P = 0.004$ 

husband insulting wife which was about 32%, while the least common form of psychological abuse related to being abandoned by the husband which was about 2%. Husbands insulting wives (19.4%) were 3 times more in rural areas as compared to urban slums (17.2%) and urban non-slums (15.6%), respectively. Similarly, being insulted by the husband was reported by nearly 17% of the women in rural and urban slums areas as compared to those in urban non-slums (10.6%). Being demeaned was also more in rural areas (18%) as compared to the urban slums (17%) and non-slums (15%). Women who experienced being demeaned once or twice by their husbands were 14% in the rural areas followed by 13% in urban slums and 8.5% in urban non-slums. Threatening someone else, toward wife was reported in rural areas by 4.7%, whereas urban slum and urban non-slums were 6% and 3%, respectively. Being made wives feel afraid were reported by rural and urban areas which were 9% and in urban non-slums which were reported as 7%. Made feel afraid by one or two in rural, urban slum, and urban non-slum areas were 6.8%, 6.4%, and 4.1%, respectively. Unfaithful by 1 or 2 times were reported in rural areas by 2.8% that followed by urban slum and urban non-slum by 1.8% and 1.6%. Any of these psychological abuse experienced by wives were reported in rural areas as 39% whereas in urban slum 36.5% and followed by urban non-slum were 29.3%. Any of these two bad situations faced

by wives were high in rural areas by 33.1% and next experienced by urban slum with 30.7% followed by urban non-slum by 24%. Few women experienced all the above psychological abuses were reported in rural areas with 0.5% and urban slum and urban non-slums were reported 1.1% and 0.4%, respectively.

### Multivariable Analysis

The adjusted analysis of any psychological violence is presented in Table 2. The women who had <10 years of education had lower odds for psychological violence as compared others who had more than 10 years of education. On an average, they were about 86% less likely to have psychological abuse, if they studied  $\leq 5$  years of education ( $P < 0.05$ ). Women belonging to the lower SES had about 3 (95%CI: 0.91–7.3) times higher odds for psychological abuse as compared to housewives belonging to a higher SES ( $P = 0.074$ ). Women whose husbands used alcohol were 2.7 (95%CI: 1.3–5.28) times at higher odds for experiencing psychological violence as compared to women whose husbands did not use alcohol ( $P < 0.01$ ). Further women, whose in-laws were either “somewhat satisfied” or “not at all satisfied” with the dowry brought during her marriage experienced 4.4 (95%CI: 1.96–10.0) and 5.1 (95%CI: 1.7–15.3) greater odds for

**Table 2:** Adjusted analysis of risk factors for current multiple psychological abuse

| Risk factors                               | Adjusted analysis |            |         |
|--|-------------------|------------|---------|
|  | OR                | 95%CI      | P value |
| After marriage: Years                      |                   |            |         |
| ≤2   | 1.00              |            |         |
| 3–9  | 0.45              | 0.13–1.53  | 0.201   |
| ≥10  | 0.60              | 0.18–2.05  | 0.417   |
| Education – women (years)                  |                   |            |         |
| ≤5   | 0.14              | 0.02–0.87  | 0.034   |
| 6–9  | 0.23              | 0.04–1.25  | 0.088   |
| 10–12                                      | 0.29              | 0.06–1.46  | 0.133   |
| ≥13  | 1.00              |            |         |
| Education – husband (years)                |                   |            |         |
| ≤5   | 2.69              | 0.58–12.6  | 0.208   |
| 6–9  | 2.04              | 0.49–8.47  | 0.327   |
| 10–12                                      | 1.19              | 0.31–4.49  | 0.801   |
| ≥13  | 1.00              |            |         |
| Employment disparity                       |                   |            |         |
| Wife < husband                             | 1.00              |            | 0.004   |
| Wife ≥ husband                             | 4.67              | 1.64–13.28 |         |
| Socioeconomic status                       |                   |            |         |
| Low  | 2.59              | 0.91–7.34  | 0.074   |
| Medium                                     | 2.15              | 0.76–6.07  | 0.148   |
| High                                       | 1.00              |            |         |
| Husband alcoholic                          |                   |            |         |
| Yes  | 2.65              | 1.33–5.28  | 0.006   |
| No   | 1.00              |            |         |
| Dowry satisfied                            |                   |            |         |
| Very much                                  | 1.00              |            |         |
| Somewhat                                   | 4.43              | 1.96–10.01 | <0.001  |
| Not at all                                 | 5.12              | 1.71–15.35 | 0.004   |
| Streedhan satisfied (IW)                   |                   |            |         |
| Very much                                  | 1.29              | 0.06–2.99  | 0.556   |
| Somewhat/not at all                        | 1.00              |            |         |
| Difference in social status from IW family |                   |            |         |
| Very much                                  | 1.00              |            |         |
| Somewhat                                   | 1.59              | 0.49–5.14  | 0.439   |
| Not at all                                 | 0.61              | 0.29–1.32  | 0.210   |
| Control over the Streedhan                 |                   |            |         |
| Complete control                           | 1.00              |            |         |
| Partial/no control                         | 0.99              | 0.47–2.07  | 0.975   |
| Social support                             |                   |            |         |
| None                                       | 1.62              | 0.28–9.53  | 0.594   |
| Some                                       | 1.55              | 0.74–3.26  | 0.247   |
| High                                       | 1.00              |            |         |
| Stratum                                    |                   |            |         |
| Urban slum                                 | 0.58              | 0.18–1.85  | 0.360   |
| Urban non-slum                             | 0.57              | 0.23–1.40  | 0.223   |
| Rural                                      | 1.00              |            |         |

psychological violence as compared to those in-laws who were satisfied with dowry ( $P < 0.01$ ).

### Enhanced Psychological Violence Due to Interaction between Risk Factors

The finding of interaction between hypothesized risk factors dowry satisfaction, SES, and alcohol use is presented in Table 3. If the women belonged to a lower SES and her husband used alcohol, then the odds of experiencing psychological violence were 7.4 (95%CI: 6.5–8.4) times higher than women belonging to medium or higher SES and whose husbands did not use alcohol ( $P < 0.001$ ). However, if the woman's husband used alcohol and she belonged to a medium or higher SES, then the odds of experiencing abuse were 3.2 times more (95%CI: 2.8–3.6) times higher ( $P < 0.001$ ). Thus, the risk variables of alcohol use and low SES have a synergistic

effect on current psychological violence. Similarly, if the husband used alcohol but her in-laws were somewhat/not at all satisfied with the dowry that she had brought at the time of her marriage then her risk of psychological abuse was 8 (95%CI: 6.0–10.9) times higher as compared to those whose husbands did not use alcohol and whose in-laws were very much satisfied with the dowry she had brought. However, if any one of the risk factors was present, then the odds of experiencing psychological violence were about 2.7 times higher ( $P < 0.001$ ). Thus, the alcohol has had a synergistic effect with other risk variables.

## DISCUSSION

Although psychological violence is a near global phenomenon which threatens the health, well-being, rights, and dignity of women, recently there has been an interest in the past two decades by researchers to study the challenges in this domain. In India, in spite of the tremendous impact, it has on the woman, her family, and society, it continues to be a "crime of silence,"<sup>[6]</sup> largely because of the importance attached to the sanctity of the family. This study reported a current prevalence of spousal psychological violence of 35%, a rate that in all likelihood is an underestimate. The sense of shame and embarrassment, coupled with the need to keep it hidden so as to protect family honor, keeps many women silent. Interestingly, in this study, 58% of women reported that such types of domestic violence are part and parcel of married life, and 16% feared that reporting the violence would hurt family prestige or would result in loss of respect for the family.

Years of exposure to domestic violence, combined with the cultural demands on women to be subservient and accepting of their husbands, could be other reasons why women remain silent.<sup>[22]</sup> It is well acknowledged that psychological violence varies by region and culture (Menon and Kanekar, 1992). Therefore, this study was done in different states across different socioeconomic groups, namely; rural, urban slum, and urban non-slum areas, and therefore, the findings can be seen to be representative of the country as whole. Studies from a range of settings show that while violence against partners cuts across all socioeconomic groups, women living in poverty are disproportionately affected. These studies reported that although spousal abuse was not limited to a particular social class, the highest reported incidence was among the poor, postulated that poverty probably acts as a marker for a variety of social conditions that combine to increase the risk faced by women.<sup>[26]</sup> This does not imply that spousal physical violence does not exist among upper socioeconomic groups, but in relative terms, may be less, considering that the stresses associated with poverty are unlikely to be present in this group.<sup>[1]</sup> What also needs to be highlighted is the lower response rate in the urban non-slum (77%) compared with the rural settings (91%). Education as a protective factor against spousal physical violence emerged to be significant, only when the duration of education in both partners was over 7–8 years. Studies have reported that lower levels of education may be an indicator of poor communication skills, which have been associated with domestic violence.<sup>[9–11,23]</sup> Jejeebhoy (1998) found that the influence of education was far stronger in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, which has a more egalitarian society, compared with that in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. As a result, the effect of education, both primary and secondary, enabled women to protect themselves from violence and intimidation.<sup>[23]</sup> In Uttar Pradesh, however, attainment of secondary education was needed to afford some protection to the women. In other words, education in itself is

**Table 3:** Current psychological abuse with mental health and interaction of alcohol with SES and dowry satisfied

| Variables   | Current psychological abuse |             | OR   | 95%CI       | P value |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------|------|-------------|---------|
|   | Yes (n=3306)                | No (n=6120) |      |             |         |
| Mental health   |                             |             |      |             |         |
| Poor  | 1843 (52.9)                 | 1641 (47.1) | 3.44 | 3.15–3.76   | <0.001  |
| Normal  | 1463 (24.6)                 | 4479 (75.4) | 1.00 |             |         |
| Interaction of alcohol with SES                               |                             |             |      |             |         |
| No alcohol+low SES  | 596 (29.4)                  | 1428 (70.6) | 1.71 | 1.51–1.94   | <0.001  |
| Alcohol+low SES   | 1070 (64.3)                 | 594 (35.7)  | 7.39 | 6.49–8.42   | <0.001  |
| Alcohol+medium/high SES                                       | 937 (43.6)                  | 1212 (56.4) | 3.17 | 2.82–3.57   | <0.001  |
| No alcohol+medium/high SES                                    | 703 (19.6)                  | 2886 (80.4) | 1.00 |             |         |
| Interaction of alcohol and dowry satisfied                    |                             |             |      |             |         |
| No alcohol+dowry satisfied others – (somewhat and not at all) | 207 (51.9)                  | 192 (48.1)  | 2.55 | 1.95–3.34   | <0.001  |
| Alcohol+dowry satisfied: Others – (somewhat and not at all)   | 330 (77.5)                  | 96 (22.5)   | 8.14 | 6.08–10.90  | <0.001  |
| Alcohol+dowry satisfied: Very much                            | 218 (52.9)                  | 194 (47.1)  | 2.66 | 2.04 – 3.47 | <0.001  |
| No alcohol+dowry satisfied: Very much                         | 163 (29.7)                  | 386 (70.3)  | 1.00 |             |         |

SES: Socioeconomic status

a slow-acting protective factor in a cultural context of rigid gender norms. Better educational levels of both partners, thus, play a critical role in reducing the risk of violence and, therefore, have important policy implications for controlling the psychological abuse.

Further, the risk of harassment of women in this study increased 5 times if the husband used alcohol. Alcohol has long been associated with domestic violence, with several studies attesting to this association.<sup>[27,28]</sup> The synergistic effect due to alcohol with some other risk factors such as low SES and low literacy has been highlighted in this study. While interventions aimed at regulating alcohol availability and prices and alcohol abuse treatment have been carried out in high-income countries, little is known about their effectiveness in countries like India.<sup>[29]</sup> This was a cross-sectional study and thereby suffers from causal temporality of psychological abuse with the risk factors. Further, only those mothers-in-law whose daughters-in-law gave permission for them to be interviewed were included in the study, implying that the nature of their relationship could have been relatively stable and comfortable. Therefore, the results on psychological abuses are thus likely to be underestimates of the true relationships.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the limitations, of the 9426 women responded psychological violence, 3306 (35.1%) (95%CI: 23.1, 47.0) reported any psychological violence in the past 1 year. The women who had lower education, from lower SES and whose mother in laws not satisfied with dowry had higher risk for psychological abuse. There was a synergistic effect in psychological abuse if the woman is from low SES and the husband is an alcoholic and the risk is 8 times higher as compared to women who did not have both. However, alcoholism had significant independent effect when this was interacted with satisfaction of dowry. We suggest that there is a need for educational interventions involving families to provide their daughters to be independent and self-reliant. The families should avoid asking and giving dowries. Besides these, the newly married women should be counseled to handle the conflicts at the family level so that the physical and psychological abuses can be avoided.

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