

# Indian women with more resources than their husbands face heightened risk of violence

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A new study has found that women in India who have more education than their husbands, who earn more, or who are the sole earners in their families have a higher likelihood of experiencing frequent and severe intimate partner violence (IPV) than women who are not employed or who are less educated than their spouse.

There are two existing theories that aim to predict what happens when a woman has status and resources that are equal to or greater than her husband's. One theory, called bargaining theory, posits that a woman who has more relative resources in a relationship should be at a lower risk for IPV. A man in such a relationship would worry that his wife would withhold resources if he behaved violently toward her. The other theory, known as gender deviance neutralization, suggests that a woman's superior resources would be viewed as gender deviant and a man would use [violence](#) to gain power or maintain control in the relationship. This study supports the latter theory.

Abigail Weitzman, a graduate student at New York University, looked at data from the female-only module of India's National Family Health Survey (NFHS) collected between 2005 and 2006. This module contains data from a nationally representative sample of [women](#) aged 15 to 49 and includes nine variables pertaining to IPV. It also asks a number of questions about women's current employment, relative earnings, and access to other money. Weitzman looked only at data from [married women](#) and explored the occurrence, frequency, and severity of violence.

Weitzman found that compared to women with less education than their [husbands](#), women with more education face 1.4 times the risk of IPV, 1.54 times the risk of frequent violence, and 1.36 times the risk of severe violence. She found a similar pattern for women who were better employed than their spouse. And women who were the sole breadwinners in their family faced 2.44 times the risk of frequent violence and 1.51 times the risk of severe violence as unemployed women whose husbands were employed.

"In global development efforts, there is a large emphasis on women's employment and education. My research suggests that there can be a backlash, including violence, toward women who attain greater education or earnings than their husbands," says Weitzman. "Finding a solution will be tricky. Our response should not be to stop educating and employing women, but nor should we plow ahead without recognizing this may put them at greater risk, and making changes to help protect them."

Divorce is extremely rare in India; therefore Weitzman recommends that policies aimed at addressing IPV should focus on alternatives to divorce, such as shelters and support groups. Additionally, this research suggests that programs that aim to improve women's financial resources or employment opportunities may inadvertently increase their risk of IPV. Microfinance and vocational programs for women should consider making legal and psychological counseling available to participants.

**More information:** This article is available free of charge for a limited time at [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 ... 457.2014.00650.x/pdf](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ajim.2457)

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