

# Domestic Violence Against Rural Women in Sri Lanka: A Mixed-Methods Approach

Mahakachchakodiye Panggasekara<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The family is the fundamental unit of society, playing a critical role in shaping social cohesion and individual roles within the household. In contemporary technological societies, family dynamics can become complex, leading to negative interactions and emotional disruptions among its members. Domestic violence against women is a prevalent issue in Sri Lankan society, often stemming from inherent role differentiations within husband-wife relationships. This research aims to address the specific objectives of identifying the nature of violence against rural women in the Medavachchiya police area, Sri Lanka, studying the impact of status and role on violence while recommending measures for prevention. Primary methods, including questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, were used to collect data from 282 husband-wife participants. A mixed-methods approach involving quantitative and qualitative data analysis was utilized.

Results revealed that 62.5% of the sample had experienced violence from an intimate partner. The study focused on identifying verbal, physical, and psychological forms of violence while excluding sexual violence from its scope. It was found that instances of abuse often stem from conflicts related to economic problems, alcohol use by spouses, children's issues as well as weaknesses in family relationships and emotional connections among members. Consequently, a trend towards divorces and separations between spouses was noted. Based on these findings, the study recommends raising social awareness concerning women's rights and legal protections, focusing on increased educational opportunities for women, economic empowerment through self-employment initiatives, and strengthening government policies to combat acts of violence against women.

**Keywords:** Rural Woman, Role Dynamics, Domestic Violence, Sri Lanka

<sup>1</sup> Senior Lecturer, Social Sciences and Comparative Studies, Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka.

E-mail: [mpannasekara@busl.ac.lk](mailto:mpannasekara@busl.ac.lk)  <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8371-5551>

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## Introduction

Intimate partner violence against women is a grave infringement of human rights, leading to both short-term and long-term physical and psychological repercussions for family members (Devries et al., 2013). Traditionally, women have been assigned a specific role within the family structure, with Parsons (1951) highlighting the husband's position as the supportive leader and the wife's role as the expressive leader. However, in modern times, there has been a noticeable shift in these roles due to factors such as increased levels of education and employment among women, migration for work opportunities, and rising living costs. As a result, women now actively contribute to the economic well-being of their families while continuing to fulfill their traditional household responsibilities.

The complex dual role that women undertake within modern families has sparked discourse on whether such multifaceted responsibilities make them vulnerable to DV. The United Nations Universal Declaration on Violence against Women defines gender-based violence as any act causing or likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women. This encompasses threats of such acts and coercive deprivation of liberty in public or private life. Globally recognized statistics on violence against women indicate that approximately 30% of women have experienced violence from their partners at least once; shockingly around 55% of these cases occur in Asia (Rai et al., 2021).

In Sri Lanka specifically, the Women's Wellbeing Survey (2019) reported that 20.4% of married women have been subjected to physical, mental and sexual abuse. This illustrates that DV against women is not only a global issue but also an alarming reality within Sri Lankan society where it significantly contributes to familial breakdowns. Therefore, this research aims to identify instances of DV experienced by rural women within households - along with factors influencing these occurrences and ultimately provide recommendations for preventing and addressing such forms of abuse.

## Literature Review

The literature review provides valuable insights into the occurrence of DV against women in different cultural and social contexts. Aghakhani et al. (2015) conducted a study in Iran and identified various types of violence, including psychological, sexual, economic, and physical violence. The research highlighted the high prevalence of psychological violence, such as verbal abuse, humiliation, and threats by husbands towards their wives. Similarly, Kaur & Garg (201) examined DV in rural India and found that women experienced physical, psychological, and sexual abuse not only from their husbands but also from other family members.

Vidyasinghe et al. (2017) conducted a study in Sri Lanka's Central Province on DV against women and identified behaviors such as sexual abuse, verbal abuse, mental abuse, deprivation of basic needs, physical abuse, and property

damage as prevalent forms of DV. These studies shed light on factors contributing to DV against women such as poverty levels within families or communities (Kaur & Garg 201; Jayasuriya et al., 2011), low educational levels (Vidyasinghe et al., 2017; Wijayatilake 1995), substance use by perpetrators (Vidyasinghe et al., 2017), unemployment (Kaur & Garg 201), societal norms rooted in traditional beliefs about gender roles and power dynamics within relationships.

However, it is important to critically analyze these findings from a broader perspective. The studies mainly focus on the experiences of women as victims rather than exploring the underlying causes or dynamics that perpetuate DV against them. Furthermore, the research primarily relies on self-reported data which might be subjected to biases or underreporting due to fear or stigma associated with disclosing instances of intimate partner violence.

In addition, the reviewed studies predominantly focused on individual-level factors contributing to DV without delving into broader structural issues like gender inequality, misogyny, and patriarchal systems which contribute significantly to the perpetration of such acts. The impact of cultural norms, beliefs, social support systems, and legal frameworks was not fully explored. This suggests that future research should consider including multidimensional perspectives considering both individual-level factors alongside larger social structures while examining this issue. Overall, this literature review highlights the need for

more comprehensive approaches when studying DV against women. They should include multiple dimensions, critical analysis, and exploration beyond individual experiences, to gain a deeper understanding. In doing so policy-makers can develop effective prevention strategies addressing systemic issues related to gender-based inequalities while providing support for survivors.

### **Research Methodology**

The study was conducted within the Medavachchiya police jurisdiction of the Anuradhapura district in Sri Lanka, focusing on rural families. A sample size of 282 husband-wife pairs was selected as data contributors for the research. Data collection methods included questionnaires, observations, formal and informal interviews, as well as targeted group discussions. The data obtained were then subjected to analysis through a mixed-method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Quantitative analysis involved testing the correlation between independent and dependent variables by constructing a binary regression model using appropriate statistical software. This method allowed for an examination of relationships between different factors related to DV within husband-wife dynamics.

Qualitative data analysis involved an in-depth analytical interpretation of the collected information to address the research objectives effectively. The qualitative component aimed to provide nuanced insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of participants regarding DV within marital relationships.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout this study, leading to a deliberate exclusion of examinations concerning sex roles' effects on DV in husband-wife dynamics due to ethical limitations associated with this particular subject matter. Through these rigorous research methodologies and ethical considerations, this study sought to contribute valuable insights into DV within rural family settings in Sri Lanka's Anuradhapura district while upholding standards of academic integrity and ethical practice.

## Results

Based on the data collected from husband-wife participants, it was found that DV is a prevalent issue within rural households in Sri Lanka. According to the responses, 61.7% of men and 83.7% of women reported experiencing DV within their households.

These findings highlight the significant presence of DV in rural communities and emphasize the urgent need for intervention and prevention strategies. The high percentages reported by both men and women indicate that this issue affects individuals from various gender perspectives.

Table No - 01 : Descriptive examination of DV among husband-wife data contributors

Gender	DV Yes	DV Yes	Total
Male	87(61.7)	54(38.3)	141(100)
Female	118(83.7)	23(16.3)	141(100)
Total	205(72.7)	77(27.3)	282(100)

The findings from Table No. 1 reveal a

concerning prevalence of DV among rural husband-wife pairs in Sri Lanka. The data shows that a majority of the female respondents, with a high proportion of 83.7%, reported experiencing DV in their households. In contrast, only 16.3% of male respondents reported such experiences.

These results highlight the disproportionate impact of DV on women within rural communities. The significant disparity between male and female responses indicates that women are more vulnerable to abuse within intimate partner relationships.

Table No. 02 : Nature of DV (N=282)

Violence Action	Gender	Strongly Agree	Agree	Median	Not Agree	Strongly not Agree
Spouse scolding	Male	67(45.6)	51(56.0)	16(53.3)	4(80)	3(42.9)
	Female	80(54.4)	40(44.0)	14(46.7)	1(20.0)	4(57.1)
spouse battering	Male	0(0.0)	2(16.7)	9(16.4)	90(65.2)	40(58.8)
	Female	7(100)	10(83.3)	46(34.8)	48(34.8)	28(41.2)
Injuring	Male	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	68(45.3)	73(68.2)
	Female	5(100)	3(100)	15(100)	82(54.7)	34(31.8)
Ignore	Male	14(41.2)	7(31.8)	60(46.9)	39(68.4)	21(53.8)
	Female	20(58.8)	15(68.2)	68(53.1)	18(31.6)	18(46.2)
Eviction from home	Male	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	69(46.9)	72(60.0)
	Female	7(100)	4(100)	2(100)	78(53.1)	48(40.0)

Source - Field data, 2021-2023

The analysis of Table No. 2 provides valuable insights into the nature of DV experienced by husband-wife data contributors in this study. The table presents various actions or behaviors related to DV, including scolding, battering, injuring, ignoring, and eviction from home. The responses are categorized based on the level of agreement with each action, ranging from strongly agree to strongly not agree.

When examining scolding as a form of verbal abuse, it was found that both male and female respondents reported experiencing this type of violence within their households. However, a slightly higher percentage of females (54.4%) reported being subjected to scolding compared to males (45.6%).

In terms of physical abuse in the form of battering, only a small proportion (16.7%) of male respondents reported

experiencing it from their intimate partners. However, a considerably higher percentage (83.3%) of female respondents stated that they had been subjected to battering. Interestingly, enough, injuring as an act of violence was absent among male respondents, but it was reported by 100% of female respondents. This suggests that women are more likely to experience physical harm within intimate partner relationships.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed similar patterns for both genders when it comes to psychological abuse in the form of neglect or ignoring one spouse. However, a slightly higher percentage among female indicated experiencing this type of abuse. This highlights the emotional toll and disregard for spousal well-being within these relationships.

Lastly, the threat or act leading to eviction from home was also more likely agreed upon by female respondents compared to males. This indicates that women may

face a higher risk of displacement and homelessness due to domestic conflict.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that DV takes various forms within rural households in Sri Lanka. Verbal abuse is prevalent among both genders, but females tend to experience physical violence at higher rates.

Table No. 03: Correlation between Independent Variable and Dependent Variable (N=282)

Variables in the Equation					
Independent Variable	B	(Exp(B)	(Wald)	(df)	(Sig.)
Economic Problems	2.310	.103	31.412	1	.000
Alcoholism	1.102	.329	16.303	1	.000
Using Drugs	.803	.451	5.274	1	.022
Children Behavior	.885	.423	8.026	1	.005
Casual relationships	.721	2.192	8.076	1	.004
Not helping with homework	-.588	.559	6.149	1	.013
Healthy Problems	-.337	.716	1.935	1	.164
Dowry Dowry	-.882	2.212	2.463	1	.117
Dirtiness	-.489	.555	2.565	1	.109

Table No. 3 presents the correlation between independent variables, including economic problems, and DV as the dependent variable. The analysis indicates that economic problems have a significant influence on DV within households.

Based on the results of the binary logistic regression model, it was found that economic problems are positively associated with DV (B = 2.310). This suggests that households experiencing

Source - Field data, 2021-2023

### Economic Problems

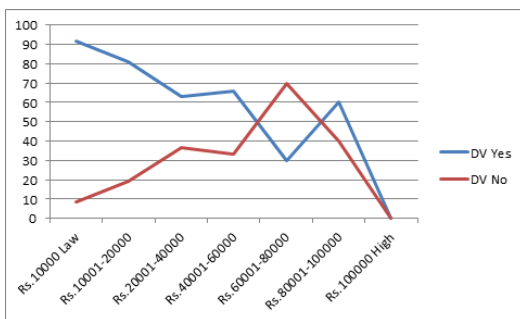


Figure No. 01: Relationship between conflict with spouse and income (N=282)

Source: Field data, 2021-2023

economic difficulties are more likely to have higher levels of conflict and an increased occurrence of DV.

Similarly, when examining figure No. 1, which depicts the relationship between conflict with a spouse and income among husband-wife data contributors, it becomes evident that lower monthly incomes are associated with higher levels of conflicts within households. This mixed-method approach involving both qualitative and quantitative analysis provides valuable insights into the correlation between economic problems

and DV against rural women in Sri Lanka. The qualitative component allows for an in-depth understanding of how economic difficulties contribute to marital conflicts and subsequent acts of violence, while quantitative analysis further supports these findings by highlighting statistical significance.

Therefore, these findings underscore the importance of addressing socio-economic disparities within households as part of efforts to prevent and mitigate instances of DV among rural women in Sri Lanka.

### Using Substances

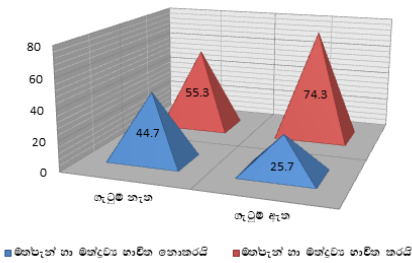


Figure No. 02 : Relationship between conflict with spouse and alcohol and drug use (N=282)

Source: Field data, 2021-2023

figure No. 2 illustrates the relationship between conflict with a spouse and alcohol and drug use among husband-wife data contributors (N=282). The chart shows that households where alcohol and drugs are used have a higher likelihood of experiencing conflicts within the family.

The analysis reveals that in families where alcohol or drugs are used, conflicts arise at a significantly higher percentage of 74.3% compared to families where substances are not used. This suggests that substance use by either spouse

contributes to increased spousal conflicts and, subsequently, DV incidents within these households.

When examining the exponential coefficient related to Table No. 3, it becomes evident that conflicts in families with substance use increase by 32.9%, indicating a strong positive association between substance use and DV.

These findings highlight the significance of addressing substance abuse issues as part of efforts to prevent DV against rural women in Sri Lanka. Implementing interventions such as addiction treatment programs, counseling services, and awareness campaigns can help reduce substance abuse-related conflicts within households, thereby mitigating instances of DV.

By including both qualitative insights from interviews and quantitative analysis through statistical models, this mixed-method approach provides comprehensive evidence for understanding the impact of alcoholism on spousal conflicts and subsequent occurrences of DV among rural women in Sri Lanka.

### Children Behaviors

When examining the relationship between conflict with a spouse and children (39%) problems in the study area, it was found that neutral responses accounted for 37.1% of the participants (39%) answers, while agreement responses accounted for 23.4%. Qualitative interviews conducted with data contributors revealed that spouses often blame each other for not effectively addressing their children deviant behaviors. Deviant behaviors

among children, such as ganging up with peers, engaging in violent behavior, using alcohol or drugs, smoking, or experiencing abuse, were identified as factors influencing conflicts between spouses.

The qualitative data further highlighted that women tend to bear the brunt of these conflicts caused by their children problematic behaviors. According to the exponential coefficient from Table No. 3 analysis (Exp(B) value), conflicts with a spouse increase by 42.3% due to issues related to children behavior. This finding emphasizes how conflicts arising from children problems can significantly impact marital relationships and potentially lead to DV incidents.

It underscores the importance of addressing and effectively managing children behavioral issues within families to prevent escalating tensions and protect women from becoming victims of DV. Incorporating both qualitative insights gathered through interviews and quantitative analysis using regression models strengthens the research methodology by providing robust evidence on how conflicts related to children problems contribute to DV against rural women in Sri Lanka. It presents a comprehensive understanding of this complex issue and offers valuable guidance for developing targeted interventions aimed at addressing these challenges within families.

### **Causal Relationship of the Husband and Wife**

The study findings indicate that conflicts within the family often arise due to

the presence of casual relationships between husband and wife. Responses from female participants revealed a high incidence of extramarital affairs among men. This behavior was associated with a greater likelihood of physical and mental abuse against women during arguments and fights.

Notably, participants who were legally separated (44.4%) or divorced (42.9%) reported higher levels of agreement regarding their spouse & extramarital affairs during their time together as a couple. The exponential coefficient derived from Table No. 3 analysis highlights the significant impact of casual relationships on family conflicts, indicating that conflicts increase by 219% due to these extramarital involvements.

These findings shed light on the detrimental effects of infidelity on marital relationships, which can lead to increased tensions and potentially violent situations within families. Such behavior undermines trust, emotional security, and overall relationship satisfaction.

Adopting a mixed-method approach combining qualitative interviews with quantitative analysis strengthens the research methodology by offering nuanced insights into participants experiences while statistically examining the impact of extramarital affairs on DV incidents against rural women in Sri Lanka. The integration of both qualitative narratives and quantitative data enhances research validity and provides essential evidence for developing targeted interventions aimed at addressing issues related to infidelity within marital relationships in order to prevent DV occurrences.

## **Weakness of the working together**

One of the weaknesses observed in the study is the lack of effective cooperation and shared responsibilities within husband-wife relationships. The research findings indicate that husbands often have a low assessment of their household responsibilities, as reported by wives during qualitative interviews.

Qualitative data revealed a high probability of conflict between spouses due to the lack of support from husbands in managing children affairs and addressing the needs of the wife, particularly in providing for the basic needs of the family. This lack of collaboration and shared responsibility can contribute to strained relationships and potential DV incidents.

This weakness highlights the importance of promoting equal participation and shared decision-making within marital relationships. Encouraging husbands to take active roles in fulfilling household responsibilities can help reduce conflicts and create a more harmonious family environment. It is crucial to address traditional gender norms that may perpetuate unequal distribution of responsibilities, empowering both partners to actively contribute to fulfilling family needs.

## **Impact of the status for the DV**

The study provided insights into the influence of various factors on DV against rural women in Sri Lanka. Analysis of the quantitative data revealed that 57.9% of rural women between the ages of 36 and 55 participated in the study,

indicating their willingness to share their experiences. This level of participation may be attributed to a lack of respect for women's responsibilities within households, which can contribute to conflicts and instances of DV.

In terms of education, 41.9% had received education up to or below the general level, while only 28.9% had passed the general level examination. Furthermore, according to employment data, a significant proportion (46.1%) reported not being engaged in any work. It is worth noting that approximately 37.5% reported a monthly income below Rs.10,000.

The examination also considered family structure, revealing that 73% represented nuclear families. These findings highlight how age levels, educational attainment, income status, employment status, and family structure changes can contribute to DV incidents against rural women in Sri Lankan society.

These factors collectively create an environment where women are vulnerable to various forms of violence within their homes and communities due to social and cultural norms prevalent in rural areas.

Addressing these structural inequalities requires comprehensive strategies aimed at empowering women economically and socially through improved educational opportunities and economic initiatives such as self-employment programs.

Additionally strengthening policies related to addressing DV is crucial for providing legal protection for victims and

raising awareness about gender equality rights among both men and women in Sri Lankan society.

## Discussion

The discussion section of the article provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing DV in rural Sri Lankan society. The researchers examine various factors such as economic difficulties, alcohol and drug use, extramarital affairs, evasion of marital roles, and children problems. They compare their findings to previous studies and highlight the prevalence of physical, verbal, and psychological abuse within intimate partner relationships.

In terms of physical violence, previous studies (Agnihotri et al., 2006; Aghakhani et al., 2015) have identified acts such as assaults, injuries, and expulsion from the house as forms of abuse. Verbal and mental abuse are also prevalent in husband-wife relationships (De Silva, 1994; Kaur & Garg, 2010; Vidanapathirana, 2014; Aghakhani et al., 2015). Interestingly, these forms of violence were reported at higher levels among legally separated or divorced couples. This suggests that DV can lead to relationship breakdowns.

The influence of economic factors on DV is explored through the conflict model (Steinberg, 2001; Smetana, 2005; Collins & Laursen, 2006; Wijewardhana, 2019; Perera & Kailasapathy, 2020). The research confirms a higher level of conflict among lower-income households and those engaged in agriculture. These households tend to have lower earnings, savings, and consumption

levels. Economic cooperation within families plays a crucial role according to functionalist theory (Murdock), but it can sometimes contribute to oppressive dynamics.

Alcohol and drug use by family members directly contribute to increased DV incidents, supporting findings from previous research (Norwood et al., 2002; Amarathunga, 2018). Extramarital affairs are another factor associated with family breakdowns (Silva & Siriwardhane, 2015; Fernando, 2016). Although conflicts arising from casual relationships were minimal in this study, such conflicts have been found to have significant impacts on family breakdowns in other research (Jayathunga, 2010).

Children behavior also influences conflicts between spouses with prolonged time away from home, presence peer groups, and involvement in deviant behaviors contributing significantly (Cross white & Kerpelman). The modernization theory suggests that social modernization has affected familial dynamics leading increased conflicts (Simons et al.).

The status members within families also plays role, suggesting women may be more vulnerable DV (Unaiza, Hassan & Tariq, 2002; Edenborough et al., 2008; Aghakhani et al., 2015). These power imbalances may arise due cultural beliefs, patriarchy, and low levels education about women.

On the other hand, families with high levels interpersonal relationships tend exhibit low-conflict environments (Fulkerson et al., 2008; Schermerhorn, et al., 2010; Ting Fok et al., 2013; Dwyer

et al., 2015; Horstman, Hays & Maliski, 2016). Strong emotional connections between parents and children, involvement shared activities decision-making processes, and engagement religious practices all contribute positive familial dynamics (Pathirana, 2016).

In conclusion, the researchers critically analyze their findings by comparing them with existing literature. They identify several key factors influencing DV against rural women. The discussion section effectively highlights these factors while drawing attention to areas where further research is needed. By incorporating relevant citations, the authors strengthen their arguments and demonstrate an understanding of the broader literature on DV in similar contexts.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The findings of this research highlight the alarming prevalence of DV against rural women in Sri Lanka. The analysis indicates that economic difficulties, alcohol and drug use, casual relationships, and children behaviors contribute to conflicts within intimate partner relationships.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations can be made to address DV and promote healthier family dynamics:

**Awareness Programs:** It is crucial to conduct awareness programs at the village level to educate community members about the characteristics of a model family. These programs should emphasize the importance of maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships and emotional connections within families.

**Law Awareness:** General Law awareness programs should be implemented to educate society about DV as a criminal offense. This will help individuals understand their rights and legal protections against abuse.

**Propaganda Campaigns:** Media platforms, workplaces, and religious institutions can play a significant role in spreading messages that condemn DV and emphasize its inhumanity. Frequent advertisements, discussions, and teachings can help raise public awareness about the negative impact of violence within families.

**Counseling Services:** It is essential to provide counseling services for couples experiencing conflicts in their relationships. By addressing underlying issues and strengthening emotional connections between spouses, these services can reduce conflicts and prevent future instances of abuse.

**Education for Parents:** Parents need to be educated about the risks associated with DV on children development. They should receive guidance on how to create safe environments free from abuse where children can thrive without being exposed to harmful behaviors or witnessing inter-parental conflict.

**Including Sexual Violence:** Future research should explore sexual violence as an integral part of understanding DV against rural women in Sri Lanka. Focus on related variables will help gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue and contribute towards developing effective prevention strategies

By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to combat DV against rural women in Sri Lanka and work towards creating safer, family-focused communities where every individual can thrive in nurturing relationships and live with dignity

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