

Exploring Empowerment and Domestic Violence among Women: A Comparative Study of Northern and Southern Indian States

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Received: 25 September 2023 Accepted and Reviewed: 30 September 2023, Published : 01 Nov 2023

Abstract

Taking a dive into the realms of women's lives, we explore empowerment and the shadows of domestic violence. North and South Indian states are at the center of this research, where stories of courage and challenge unfold. Based on data from NFHS-5 and NCRB data from 2019 to 2021, we examine how empowerment shapes lives while domestic violence remains a painful reality. Throughout these pages, we discover patterns that reveal the varying shades of empowerment. There is a complex interplay between cultural dynamics and empowerment initiatives in northern states, which often results in higher instances of domestic violence. There's more to numbers than meets the eye as dowry deaths and suicide abatement cast their haunting shadows.

This comparative journey reminds us that data is more than statistics; it's a reflection of lives touched by empowerment and violence. It is through understanding these stories that we can build a future where empowerment triumphs and violence is eradicated.

Keywords- Domestic Violence, Empowerment, Northern, Southern, Dowry, Suicide.

Introduction

According to the World Economic Forum's recent report on gender gap (2022), among 146 countries, India ranks 135. There are several limitations to a metric like this. Basically, it measures a country's performance on four indicators: educational attainment, economic growth, and health care. In addition to health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment are also important (Chattopadhyay, 2022). The poor performance of India in the Global Gender Gap Index is

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a reflection of deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and misogyny resulting in poor health outcomes for girls, women, and babies.

Although the Global Gender Gap report does not explicitly include domestic violence in its estimation, domestic violence is a common form of gender-based violence. Globally, one in three women has experienced abuse from a current or former partner at some point in their lives (In Focus: 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, 2021) Domestic violence does not only violate women's human rights, but it also affects their physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health in the long run, as well as their ability to find meaningful work and opportunities. Patriarchal control over women is manifested in the infliction of violence against women in their intimate relationships and in their marital homes (Chattopadhyay, 2022). Empowerment has been conceptualised in a variety of ways to include elements of decision-making autonomy, choice, agency, and status in a number of situations, including the home, marriage, and political representation, among others (Paul & karmakar, 2022). For instance, Kabeer's definition of empowerment starts with the idea of choice and defines power as the ability to make decisions with favourable outcomes (Kabeer, 2021). Women's economic empowerment is frequently mentioned in previous study on domestic violence in India as a significant deterrent to domestic violence. In recent decades, India has concentrated on empowering women to reduce domestic abuse and gender violence (Nayak et al., 2012).

Domestic abuse or domestic violence (DV) against women represents a major violation of human rights and is a result of women's inferior position in society (Heise, 1998). World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified it as a "hidden global pandemic" due to the catastrophic impact it has on women's life, not only in terms of physical abuse but also psychological and sexual assault (Ellsberg et al., 2001; WHO, 2006, 2019). The shadow of domestic violence continues to haunt the lives of countless women in a world where empowerment is paving the way for progress. This juxtaposition emphasizes the crucial intersection between empowerment and the challenges that persist. When we examine this complex relationship, we can see how empowerment can serve as a beacon of hope, offering strength and resilience to those who have experienced domestic violence. Domestic violence became a punishable offence in India in 2005 when the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) was passed. Dowry-related harassment has been a major focus of domestic violence against women in India. Traditionally, dowry was meant to provide funds to women who were unable to inherit family property from the bride's family to the groom's family. As a result of the prevalence of dowry in India, domestic violence has been propagated as a means of extracting money or property from the bride (Dandona, 2022). In this study, we examine this complex interplay in more detail, focusing on the North and South Indian states. There are distinct socio-cultural landscapes in these regions, which may influence the manifestation of empowerment initiatives and the prevalence of domestic violence (NHFS, 2021) a comparative analysis reveals the varying degrees of progress, challenges, and opportunities in empowering women and addressing domestic violence across these regions. This exploration aims to inform targeted interventions for a more just and equitable society and contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding gender equality.

Methodology- Based on data obtained from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) this research employs a comprehensive analysis. NCRB data are primarily based on the First

Information Reports (FIR) completed by police officers for domestic violence incidents, which are compiled at the state level and sent to NCRB. The police prepare an FIR when they receive information about the commission of a cognizable offence, either by the victim or someone on their behalf (Dandona, 2022). NFHS-5 (2019-2021) and NCRB reports data (2019-2021) has been used and these data are available in public domain for analysis. Using a comparative approach, the study examines the relationship between women's empowerment and domestic violence in North and South Indian states. Women's empowerment levels and domestic violence prevalence can be examined based on regional variations using this approach. As a result, it facilitates the identification of factors contributing to the differences in outcomes between the two regions.

Types of Data

In this study, we examined four key indicators of women's empowerment using NFHS-5 data. Indicators included access to financial resources, participation in decision-making processes, employment opportunities, and asset ownership. We also narrowed our scope to three categories of domestic violence crimes against women. We identified these categories as a result of an in-depth analysis of existing research and included acts such as cruelty by husbands or wives, dowry-related deaths, and suicide abetment. When there is evidence of violence causing grave injury or harassment to fulfill an unlawful demand for property, a cruelty complaint is filed under (Section 498A of the IPC). Women who die within 7 years of marriage as a result of dowry harassment are charged under (section 304B of the IPC), which deals with dowry death. As domestic violence is known to increase the risk of suicide among married women, we also considered cases reported under abetment of suicide of women (section 305/306 of the IPC) (Dandona, 2022).

Data Analysis

To identify correlations among the collected data, descriptive and inferential statistical techniques are applied. We use regression analysis to determine the relationship between empowerment indicators and domestic violence prevalence across the selected states. Statistical analysis was done using MS Excel 2010 and maps are prepared by Arc Gis.

Results and Discussion

Women Empowerment: Across the two regions, there were differing trends in women's access to money, participation in decision-making, employment, and assets ownership.

- **Women Access to Money-** Women access to money include 2 sub indicators, % of women who have money that they can use and % of women who have a bank account to themselves. J&K and Ladakh (72.4% and 73.2% on average) have the highest percentage of access to money and Andhra Pradesh in south has the lowest (55.6% on average). North India showed higher levels of women access to money (on average 67.9%) than South India (on average 64.4%).

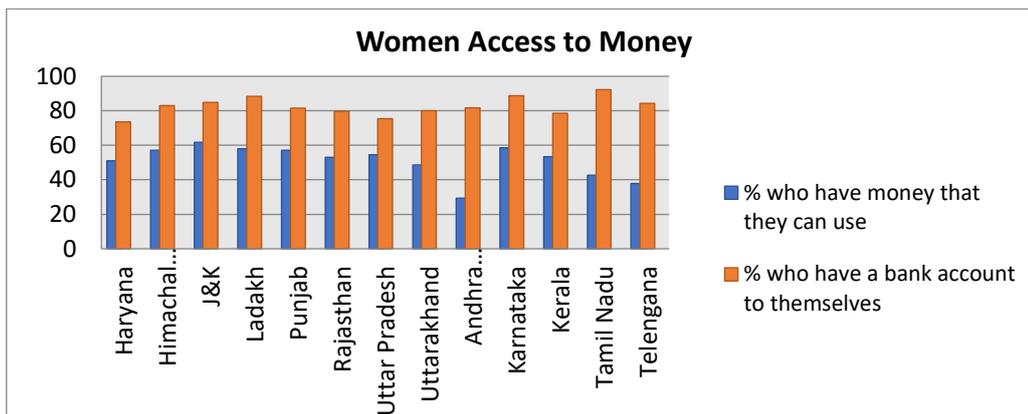


Fig. 1: Graph prepared by authors using NFHS-5 data

- Women’s Participation in Decision Making-** Women’s participation in decision making include three sub indicators, i.e. own health care, making major household purchases and visit to her family or relatives. In North Indian states, women participated in decision-making processes at a higher rate (69.1% on average) than in South Indian states (65.4% on average).

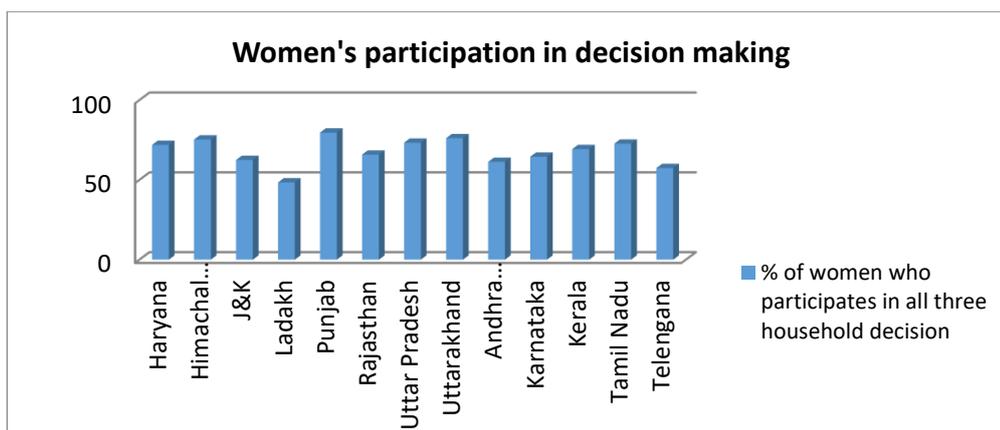


Fig. 2: Graph prepared by authors using NFHS-5 data

- Employment-** Women participation in paid works includes two sub indicators, which are % of women who are employed and % of women who are paid in cash. In south Indian states women are more employed and are paid more in cash (68.72% on average) with Telangana being the best performing state (73.05% on average) than in north Indian states (50.56% on average) with Uttar Pradesh being the lowest performing state (43% on average).

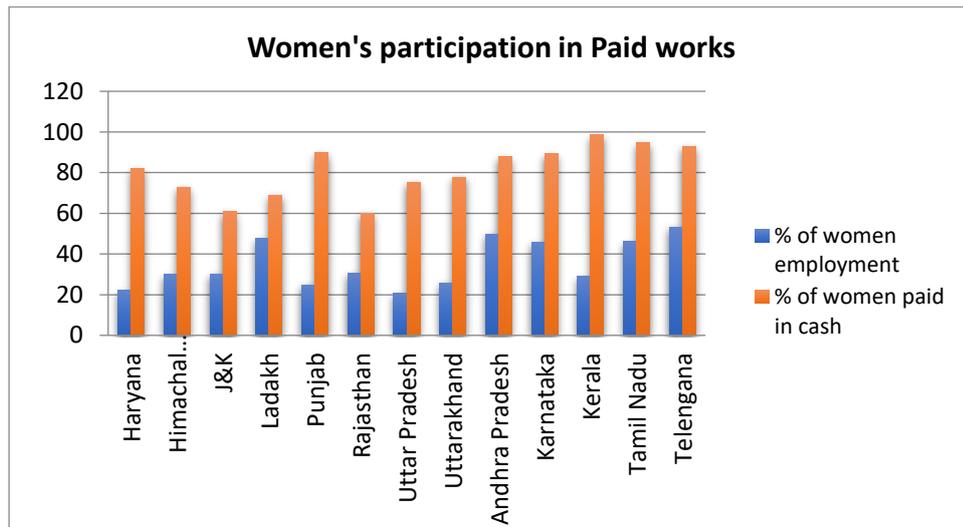


Fig.3: Prepared by authors using NFHS5 data

- Ownership of Assets-** Women's ownership of assets includes two indicators, which are owning of house (alone or jointly) and owning of land (alone or jointly). South Indian states had a higher rate of women owning assets (41.3% on average) than their northern counterparts (32.8% on average). Karnataka performing the best (60% on average) women ownership of assets and Uttarakhand the least performing state (20% on average).

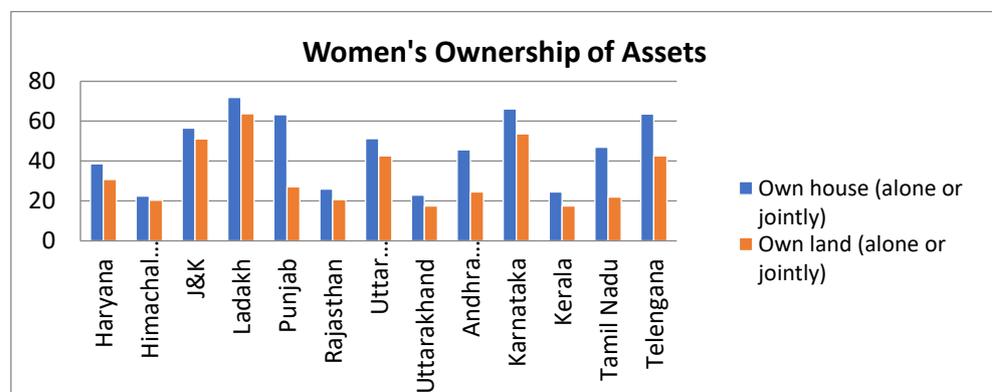


Fig.4: Prepared by authors using NFHS 5 data

Domestic Violence: A NCRB data set is passive surveillance that is based on the FIR filed by family members, kin, or community members for crimes, and is therefore dependent on community reporting. As women report less domestic violence to the police for a variety of reasons, such as a lack of social support, shame, and stigma, it is known that reporting is selective.

According to NCRB, India recorded 1,205,642 cases of domestic violence against women between 2019 and 2021, painting a somber picture of countless people's struggles. In spite of this disheartening statistic, the majority of the 366,076 cases involved husbands or relatives inflicting cruelty on their

wives. This distressing reality is exacerbated by the fact that 20,834 dowry deaths were recorded, each of which represents a profound loss and a reminder of the struggles women face. Furthermore, 15,292 cases were classified as abetment to suicide, revealing the troubling emotional impact domestic violence can have.

More than mere figures, these figures tell stories of pain, resilience, and the urgent need for a society where violence no longer shadows women. It has become increasingly evident that collective efforts, awareness, and meaningful action are essential to fostering a safer, more compassionate world for women in India amidst these disheartening statistics.

- **Cruelty by Husband or his relatives-** The majority of reported cases involved cruelty by husbands or their relatives and the rate of reporting were higher in northern states over the study period. According to previous research using field notes from police reports, victims often live in an environment where violence is encouraged or tacitly approved by their husband's family members; many women experience violence from multiple perpetrators at home, resulting in a lack of social support for them.

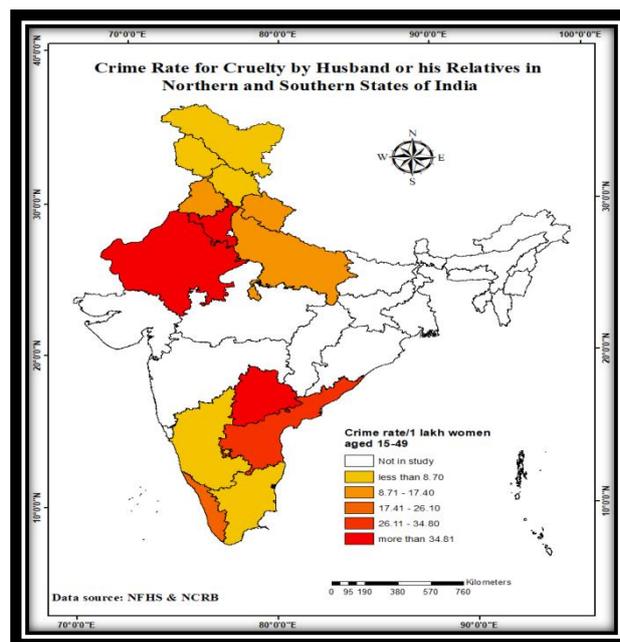


Fig.5: Map prepared by authors using NCRB and NFHS data

The crime rate of cruelty by husband or his relatives is higher in northern states of India than southern states of India. Due to dowry being viewed as an easy path to greater wealth and social status among the Indian middle class, this rate may be higher in northern states. More domestic violence may result from higher dowry demands, and dissatisfaction from not being able to meet them. There is also the possibility that women's increasing literacy may be perceived as a threat to power

structures in these states, leading to violence against women as a means of regaining control (Dandona, 2022).

- **Dowry Deaths-** The dowry death rate remained relatively stable from 2019 to 2021, showing minimal variation. There was, however, one noteworthy pattern in the data: North Indian states consistently reported higher average rates than their southern counterparts. Accordingly, dowry-related deaths might be linked to spousal violence, which may be a plausible explanation for this disparity. The distressing occurrences of these tragic deaths might be attributable to an alarming combination of increasing dowry demands.

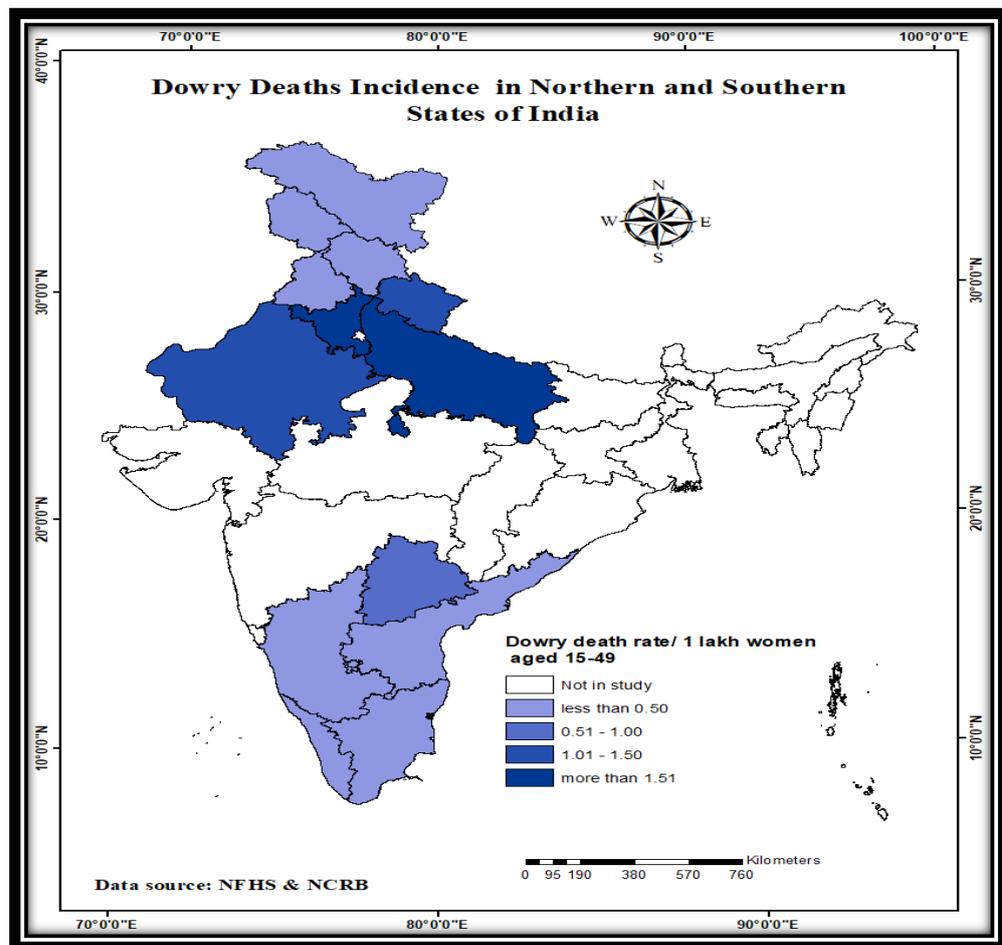


Fig.6: Map prepared by authors using NFHS and NCRB data

- **Abetment to suicide-** The rate of abetment to suicide cases remained fairly consistent during the period from 2019 to 2021. While fluctuations were minimal, these instances continued to cast a shadow on our society. It's important to recognize that every case represents a deeply distressing circumstance where emotional turmoil has reached a breaking point. By acknowledging these occurrences, we underscore the urgency of addressing the complex factors that contribute to such

tragic outcomes. According to fig.7 Telengana showed the highest rate of suicide of women(2.13) and Kerala (0.2) being the lowest among southern states and in northern states of India, Himachal Pradesh has the highest rate(1.56) and Uttar Pradesh has the lowest (0.3).

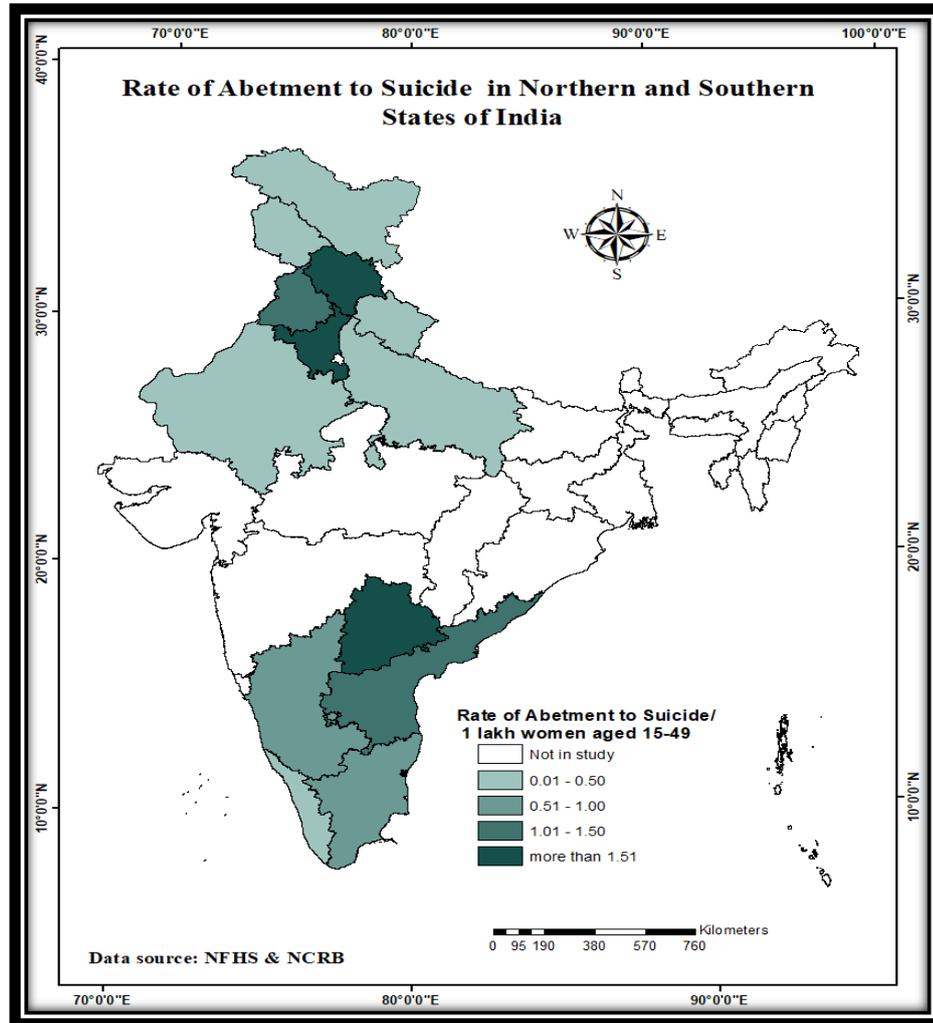


Fig.7: Map prepared by authors using NFHS and NCRB data

S.NO	Variables	Coefficient of Correlation
1	Domestic Violence	1
2	Women's Access to Money	-0.66964
3	Women's Participation in Decision Making	-0.1593
4	Women's Employment	0.0175
5	Women's Ownership of Assets	0.04010

Table.1: Correlation between Empowerment indicators and Domestic Violence on Women (source- Authors Calculation)

From the above correlation matrix we can see that women's access to money has a high negative correlation with domestic violence and women's participation in decision making has a low negative correlation with domestic violence while all other independent variables shares a low positive correlation with domestic violence on women aged 15-49 years.

Variables	Coefficient	P-value
Women's Access to Money	-2.08349	0.036
Women's Participation in Decision Making	-0.48789	0.585
Women's Employment	0.046693	0.964
Women's Ownership of Assets	-0.34170	0.6914
R-Square= 0.51687		

Table.2: Linear Regression (source- Authors calculations)

From the above calculations (table.2) it is clearly observed that none of the values are significant barring women's access to money.

In this study, empowerment indicators are found to be complexly interconnected with domestic violence. Several studies suggest that South Indian states have improved gender equality compared to the rest of the country. In spite of higher empowerment levels, domestic violence persists despite societal attitudes, enforcement mechanisms, and cultural norms being examined. Dowry-related deaths are prevalent in North Indian states, highlighting the deep-rooted problems that persist there. Women's access to money and ownership of assets were both linked to reduced domestic violence, suggesting the importance of economic empowerment.

A deeper understanding of the factors contributing to suicide abetment across the two regions is warranted by the contrasting patterns across the two regions. In order to prevent this crime from manifesting differently in different regions, local prevention measures are necessary. Despite empowerment indicators being crucial for women's well-being, they do not provide a complete shield against domestic violence. Interventions must be multifaceted, addressing cultural, economic, and legal aspects. For fostering safer environments and empowering women to thrive without fear of violence, tailored strategies are necessary, informed by the specific challenges of different regions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, according to the findings, region-specific interventions must take into account cultural norms, economic conditions, and social structures that shape women's experiences. It is commendable that some states have made progress in empowering women and reducing violence, but others need targeted strategies to address deeply entrenched gender disparities. Cooperation between policymakers, activists, and stakeholders is essential to promote education, economic independence, and awareness about domestic violence, while tailoring these efforts to the specific needs of each region. It is imperative that we move forward with a comprehensive approach that empowers women while challenging societal norms that perpetuate violence. In order to create environments in which women can thrive without the threat of domestic violence, we must foster dialogue, implement evidence-based interventions, and promote gender-sensitive policies. Our journey towards true gender equality is ongoing, and this study serves as a reminder that we can create a society that empowers all women and upholds their right to live without violence if we work together.

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