"In old times, we used to be happy with whatever was our fate…"

Coping strategies of Indian women experiencing violence

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INTRODUCTION

Most stories of domestic violence in India usually contain only one of these two themes: (1) a patriarchal husband beats his wife and she is a helpless victim at his mercy, and (2) a patriarchal husband beats his wife, but she triumphs over him and is liberated from the shackles of patriarchal control. The reality of domestic violence in India, however, lies in the middle. While the above themes are based, to a large degree, on the reality of domestic violence in India, they do not capture the diversity of domestic violence, the importance of women's actions in dealing with domestic violence, as well as the influence of socio-cultural factors. Without examining these three factors in tandem, only a partial picture about the dynamics of domestic emerges. Thus, to fully understand the use of domestic violence in India, I examine the relationship among patriarchal ideology, domestic violence, and women's agency/actions through the prism of culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing coping

Historically, in the realm of domestic violence, definitions of coping have focused on behaviors oriented toward leaving the relationship. However, Goodman et al. (2003) have recently developed an index of coping to more broadly define women's coping responses to violence. The index contains six categories of coping:

- **Formal network**: this includes getting help from clergy, employers, and doctors, talking to people in institutions such as domestic violence shelters and the police, and trying to get her husband or herself to private counseling or addiction centers;
- **Legal network**: this includes filing formal petitions for Protection from Abuse (PFA), criminal charges, and formal petitions for restitution for violence, divorce, or child support;
- **Safety planning**: this includes hiding money, saving money to be used later, developing a code to warn neighbors if she was in danger, changing locks to improve safety;

- **Informal networks**: this includes talking to family, neighbors and friends to protect children or themselves, staying with family or friends, sending children to family to ensure their safety;
- **Resistance**: this includes fighting physically, shouting back, refusing to do anything her husband tells her to do, leaving home, and fighting back verbally; and
- **Placating**: this includes trying to keep quiet and doing whatever he wants, trying to avoid him or any argument with him.

These categorizations are merely for purposes of simplicity. Because research has indicated that women use a combination of coping mechanisms uniquely fitted to their particular situation (Dasgupta & Warrier 1996, Dunn & Powell 2005), the index is primarily used as a template to identify women's actions against violence.

Coping research in India

While earlier research tended to create a model of 'learned helplessness', more research on the subject has demonstrated active participation on the part of the women to seek help, usually progressing from informal resources such as friends, neighbors and employers to more formal institutions such as domestic violence shelters, police, and the courts (Goodman et al. 2003). Women had often initially hoped that the violence would stop, but when the hope was gone, they tended to take active steps to leave the relationship. This shift in theoretical perspective reframed women from victims of domestic violence to survivors of domestic violence to indicate the struggle, active participation, and agency exerted by women when dealing with a violent partner.

We find very similar patterns of coping in India as well. Much of this research has been done on help-seeking behavior from formal agencies such as the government, the police, or women's groups. One of the primary ways of examining help-seeking behavior comes from the formal ways in which women have sought help or relief from the legislation that has criminalized violence in the home, namely, the Dowry Death Law (Section 498a) and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005. Usually, there are two things Indian women can do if they have to respond to violence in the judicial system: (1) file a criminal case to get their husbands into jail, or (2) file a civil case to get alimony, child support, and protection from continued harassment (Ahmed-Ghosh 2004).

Most women choose the latter. But Indian court systems are not known for their speedy trials, and so women sometimes have to wait 10 years or more to get their demands

met, if they are met at all. Therefore, women who have decided to leave the relationship and want to undertake legal action against their husband usually use this option. One of the problems with the assumption of a linear pattern of coping is that the emphasis continues to be on leaving behavior of women. Even while organizations and researchers understand the constraints within which Indian women operate, women who stay are often seen as victims, and women who leave as survivors. This dichotomy of choices is often applied to Indian women, especially when they insist on going back into the household even after their abandonment by their violent husbands

Because violence within the home is often concerned with identifying the enemy (invariably the man), social service agencies find it especially hard to provide services to differently constituted women whose experiences of abuse are simplified into easy 'cultural' explanations of patriarchal oppression (Abraham 1999, Abraham 2002, Grewal 1998). Most violence in the patriarchal Indian home is attributed to patriarchal beliefs and the manifestations of a culture that is tolerant of violence. But we cannot fully understand the influence of social structures (such as the nation-state, religion, work force, family structure) on domestic violence unless we take into consideration the interactions that individuals have with these social structures.

Relationship with Culture

Mohanty (2003) has argued that Indian women are not merely located within the patriarchal family structure as wives, daughters, or mother-in-laws; it is within these patriarchal structures that women as Indian wives, Indian daughters, and Indian mother-in-laws are constructed, often being defined within and by the patriarchal structure. For example, the desired characteristics of an Indian woman as self-sacrificing, gentle, patient, caring, or homely are not created in a vacuum. These desired characteristics are often designed to serve a specific purpose in the Indian family household, and are closely aligned to the roles to the woman play in the household. Thus, the construction of an Indian woman cannot necessarily be dissociated from the context of the Indian family. The violence experienced by Indian women must be situated in a specific familial context, so as to clearly detail the influences that families have on the identities of women.

The only problem with this concentration on the specificity of contexts is that it disintegrates into conversations of difference usually based on 'culture', without paying attention to socio-historical processes that 'produce' these differences (Mani 1998, Narayan 1997). For example, many women living in immigrant communities are automatically

categorized into an oppressed subject by social service agencies and the judicial system in the host country. This simplified explanation of patriarchal-husband-as-tyrant and woman-as-submissive-wife does not take into consideration the variation of domestic violence, socioeconomic factors in the marital home, the racist climate in a foreign country, and patriarchal narratives that are prevalent in both host and home countries.

In order to study violence in the family context, simultaneous attention must be paid not only to the specific contexts within which violence takes place, but also to the 'cultural' explanations that are often applied to violence against Indian woman. Thus, to get an accurate picture of the nature of domestic violence in India, simplistic relationships among patriarchal structures, agency, and violence must be re-examined to include other interpersonal elements such as marital roles or expectations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The original research dealt with two central concerns: the relationship between patriarchal control and domestic violence, and the primary means by which women cope with violence from their husbands. In addition, I also examined the influence of education, religion, labor force participation, financial independence, and socioeconomic status on patriarchal control, domestic violence, and women's coping in the Indian family. But for this paper, I will only examine the following questions:

1. What are the different coping strategies that are used by women to deal with violence in these differing contexts?
2. How are these coping strategies influenced by the interaction of particular cultural, social, and economic contexts?

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

For the original research, I employed a blended methodology of qualitative and quantitative research to identify different types of control contexts in familial violence and the differential effects of these types of domestic violence. I used a combination of primary and secondary data. The secondary data for the project came from the Demographic Health Survey of India, conducted in 1999. Since the main objective of the DHS India was to obtain state-level and national-level information on various aspects of women's health, and included a number of questions on domestic violence experienced by women, DHS India is extremely useful in understanding and analyzing the macro-sociological context of domestic violence in

India. These large-scale survey data were used in conjunction with primary data to create a unique dataset that enabled me to better understand the micro- and macro-structures of domestic violence in India.

For primary data collection, a sample of 80 women was selected with the help of two organizations, Maval Mahila Vikas Sanstha (MMVS) and Shramik Mahila Morcha (SMM), who work with survivors of domestic abuse in Pune. Interviews were conducted over a period of six months from January to May, 2006. The data collection process consisted of two-part personal interviews. The first interview is a structured questionnaire of about 80 short questions. It records basic demographic information and assessments of marital quality, decision-making, experience with domestic violence, and coping strategies. These questions are modeled wherever possible on the DHS-India questions for comparability purposes. The second interview is a semi-structured interview that allowed for more open-ended questions about the patterns of control and violence experienced by women.

With the information obtained from this combined dataset, I examine the types of coping strategies women use in response to the types of violence. I also investigated the influence of structural contexts, family context, and personal context on coping mechanisms. Along with this analysis, the efficacy of these coping mechanisms and the interaction amongst the different coping mechanisms were also scrutinized. Taken together, these analyses helped me to get a clear understanding of the specific patriarchal contexts in which domestic violence in India takes place.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Brief Summary of Control Tactics in Domestic Violence

One of the most important findings of the original study is the documentation of the two different types of domestic violence prevalent in India: Intimate Terrorism and Situational Couple Violence (as evidenced in the US, Johnson, 1995[1]). Additionally, while some control tactics such as intimidation, using male privilege, and economic abuse transcend cultural boundaries, others like the use of children are inflected by the particular cultural context of India. For example, we find that ensuring that women do not have access to monetary resources is a common control tactic that is both found in the U.S. (Pence &

[1]For easier reference, Intimate Terrorism refers to violence with a high degree of controlling behaviors by the husband, and Situational Couple Violence refers to violence with a fairly low degree of controlling behaviors by the husband.

Paymar 1993) and in India (ICRW 1998). In India, however, because of the cultural practice and structure of son preference (Clark 2000), sons and daughters are valued differently and therefore, used differently. Using of sons as a control tactic is quite particular to the Indian context, and is not likely to be transferable to societies where cultural norms of son-preference do not exist.

In addition, the structure of the family is quite influential in the way women experienced situational couple violence and intimate terrorism. Women experiencing intimate terrorism are more likely to have experienced higher controlling contexts from extended family members, and virtually no support from them during the violence. For women experiencing situational couple violence, most of the violence was restricted to the husband, and on many occasions, women were able to solicit help from the marital family to stop the violence.

One of the more unanticipated findings in this research is the importance of social, familial, and marital roles that affect domestic violence in the household. For many women, especially in intimate terrorism, the reasons and justifications for the existence of the violence hinged on their understanding and expectation of what a 'good' wife should be. While I found evidence that the patriarchal roles of a good wife often trap women in controlling contexts, these very social roles also help women cope with the violence. Given this complicated relationship between patriarchal structure, domestic violence and coping, we will now examine the different ways in which Indian women cope, paying close attention to the familial and marital contexts that aid and abate coping, as well as the factors that inform the efficacy of these coping strategies.

COPING AND TYPES OF VIOLENCE

The number of respondents available to investigate the types of coping used in response to different kinds of violence is small. However, it is important to examine the results as indicative of trends and can act as the foundation for our qualitative analyses. In general, we do find differences between the two forms of violence in coping (see Table **1**).

In women's immediate responses to violence such as being silent, trying to stay out of his way, complying with his wishes, or apologizing, we find that there are no differences amongst the types of violence. At least half of the women experiencing situational couple violence as well as intimate terrorism appeared to use these coping mechanisms. A higher

percentage of women experiencing intimate terrorism say that they wanted to leave the relationship (43%) as opposed to women experiencing situational couple violence (27%). When we examine help-seeking behavior, we see that while the differences between the two groups are not statistically significant, women experiencing intimate terrorism seem more likely to rely emotionally on someone else as compared to women experiencing situational couple violence (59% in IT compared to 40% in SCV). But other than these 'trends', there are practically no discernable differences between the two groups with regard to asking someone for help, relying on someone for help, or someone intervening of their own volition. As for leaving behaviors, more women experiencing intimate terrorism try to leave the relationship (29%), when compared to women experiencing situational couple violence (13%).

There are small, but statistically insignificant, distinctions between the two groups with regard to resistance behaviors. For example, women experiencing intimate terrorism are more likely to shout or fight back (23% and 27%, respectively) than are women experiencing situational couple violence (7% and 7%, respectively). Being silent in response to violence seems to be used by women experiencing situational couple violence as well as intimate terrorism. Women experiencing intimate terrorism employ talking to their husbands in higher percentages than women experiencing situational couple violence (68% compared to 40%).

CHARACTERISTICS OF COPING

While Goodman et al. (2003) and others give us a good framework, I found that most of the coping strategies that women used in India fell outside the framework. Therefore, a full listing of all the coping mechanisms that women typically used would be a useful place to start before examining the ways in which they were used. In addition, I categorized each of the tactics into groups that I found to be useful (see Table **2**). The problem with classifying coping strategies into categories is that it obfuscates the circumstances under which women use them, and the factors that become primary in deciding which strategy is likely to reduce or eliminate violence from their lives. In order to get a more holistic picture about the manner in which these coping strategies are used, I examined the structural, familial, and marital context of coping as well as the restrictions women have when using various coping techniques. However, in the interests of this paper,

I will be examining only the family context as well as the relevant constraints that women experience while choosing coping systems.

Family structure

Examining family structure is critical to our understanding of women's coping skills and strategies. Similar to the influence of family structure on controlling contexts, the diverse family forms come with unique features that both help and hinder women's efforts to cope with the violence. If women are dealing with intimate terrorism, being situated in a joint family system does not help, especially if the marital family is part of the controlling context. Also, because such women are living with other individuals in the same household, there is very little they can do to get help from outside the household, especially if other members of the household are heavily supervising them.

> **DV003 (IT[2]): Right in the beginning, it was made clear that I could not see anyone. So, the question [of going out for help] did not arise. All this could be done only when I visited my parents, and not here. They always tried to find out who was with me. They had this suspicious attitude.**

For many women like DV003, the only relief that they could find from the confines of a controlling joint family system was the occasional visit from or to the natal family. Visits to natal families gave women more freedom and space away from their marital homes to talk to their family members and strategize about coping. However, for many women (n = 10), these visits were completely forbidden.

> **I: If you wanted to visit your parents?**
>
> **DV021 (IT): They didn't send me. 'Once a girl is married, there is no question of going back to parents' – that was my mother-in-law's opinion.**

In these situations, women made use of the limited time they had with their natal family members who came to visit them in their marital home. Even though these visits were most likely to be supervised, women slipped notes to their family members, and used small windows of opportunity to convey messages. These coping techniques did have consequences. In one case, when a woman was caught slipping something to her brother who had come to see her, she was severely beaten after her brother left. Women had to be very careful when accessing these forms of help.

[2] Each of the respondents is identified either as IT indicating her experience of intimate terrorism or as SCV indicating her experience of situational couple violence.

Although in the United States women are likely to suffer severe levels of violence when they leave the relationship, this danger is taken to new heights in the Indian context. This is primarily because when women experiencing intimate terrorism leave their husbands, they are breaking ties with their husband *and* the entire marital family. So, the honor of the marital family, and sometimes the natal family, is often at stake. This is true especially if the woman has decided to take legal recourse against the husband, and by extension, the entire family.

At the same time, one of the most prominent sources of help for the woman experiencing situational couple violence, and occasionally intimate terrorism, is the marital family. In fact, one of the prominent coping strategies that most women use, regardless of the controlling context, is to talk to their marital family about ending the violence. In many instances, extended family members were able to stop particular instances of violence. This was true especially when women were experiencing violence (regardless of controlling context) that was not supported by the extended marital family.

> **DV074 (SCV): Then I tell his brother to bring him inside and explain things to him. Then his brother gets mad at him and asks him why he behaves in this manner. Then [my husband] starts swearing at me, creates a scene and asks why I informed his brother.**

In this particular case, the internal dynamics of the family household helped the woman immensely. The husband, by DV074's admission, was the black sheep of the family. He was a drug addict, alcoholic, and unemployed. He often stole from the family and was generally a disruptive force in the family. Therefore, when he was violent towards DV074, the entire family was supportive of her, and the elder brother was able to use his power and authority as the head of the household to restrict the violence to a large degree. But even these forms of intervention are often seen as interference, and women are not always free of violence, even if they have the support of their marital homes.

> **DV070 (IT): Yes. I did [tell my mother-in-law]. But my husband neglected her totally. He does not fear anyone in the house. His elder brother or his mother. He is not afraid of them.**

This is true especially in the case of intimate terrorism. In these cases, where the husband is highly controlling of the wife and the larger family structure is not supportive, the violence is only reduced, but not eliminated. In the following example, even though there was strong social and familial disapproval of the husband's violence, he continued to beat her.

> **I: But didn't your brother-in-law support you?**

DV006 (IT): Never. My husband didn't allow anyone to speak at all.

Family support

Support from natal and marital families is more likely to be based on a combination of family structure and individual family factors. One of the considerations is the woman's financial resources and that of her natal family. Many women were reluctant to ask help from their natal families because of the financial burden that this would invariably place on the natal families.

DV064 (IT): If I had money I would have left home on my own. I would have gone to any relative who stayed close by. My maternal uncle stays here, I would have gone to him. But I could not even do that - so got beatings at home.

Women experiencing intimate terrorism who considered leaving also needed to think of the financial viability of staying with their natal families for a longer period. Husbands, especially in high control violence, were all too aware of the limited options that were available to the women, as is evident in the case below.

DV005 (IT): Yes, Uncle was poor. Once when my husband had beaten me, my uncle came to ask my husband – 'why he did it?' So my husband said that he couldn't control his anger and so he beat me. Then my husband said to him 'don't act smart. What have you given your niece?'

If staying with the natal family was not financially viable, most women opted to come back to the marital household, fully aware that they were likely to experience violence in their marital homes. I found that women, especially if they were experiencing intimate terrorism, considered long-term solutions rather than short-term ones. For many women, tolerating the violence was acceptable as long as it ensured a steady income for herself and her children. Therefore, I found that many women experiencing intimate partner violence stayed in their marital homes, despite horrific conditions.

In addition to financial considerations, women were often dependent on their natal family for emotional support. I found that while women didn't necessarily leave the relationship, they often went to the natal families for brief visits, usually after an episode of violence. This practice of going to natal families for weddings, small functions, or religious holidays seems to sustain women in their violent relationships.

DV080 (SCV): No. No. Sometimes I used to think that I married this man unnecessarily…We have never gone to see a movie together,

never gone for a walk together. Then I used to enjoy with my friends and the people at my mother's place.

Marital expectations

As evidenced in the case of DV080, women's sense of the marriage and subsequently the violence is intimately tied to their marital expectations. In the particular cultural context of Pune, women are often trained to view their husbands as 'God', and an occasional act of violence by their husband as normal. Indian feminists have critiqued the judicial system for this patriarchal attitude that justifies some forms of violence as 'normal' if used to 'chasten' the woman. Given these beliefs, it is not surprising to see women sometimes justifying the violence perpetrated against them and sometimes complying with their husband's requests.

Some women did not accept justifications for the violence; instead, they often had very clear expectations on how their husband should act. Not only should he stop being violent, he should also live up to being a good husband. In addition to the reduction in the violence, women (especially those who were experiencing intimate terrorism) wanted to be part of their husband's life, or at least of the marital household. This usually translated to a share in the financial resources that husbands often denied them.

DV009 (IT): I used to tell [him] now our girls are grown up. Don't fight. I used to explain in many ways, but he was not accepting. He was beyond any logical thing. Since there were 2 houses, I asked him to give me one. He said that if you are not coming to this home, I will not give you the other house.

In fact, most of the legal actions that women took against their husbands were regarding return to the marital home, alimony, or child support. Even when women realized that their petitions were likely to take a lot of time, and there was little chance of immediate gratification, they persisted in filing the suits. Part of the reason was that they wanted their rights asserted. The second reason was that women experiencing violence (regardless of controlling contexts) didn't lose hope or the expectation that their husbands would accept them as their wives, and be good husbands. For example, DV008 was being bribed by her husband to drop her lawsuit regarding the right to return to the marital home, and was offering her a lot of money (given her current finances) to drop the lawsuit

AshaTai: Are you going to be quiet if he pays you Rs. 1.5 to 2 lakh?

DV008 (IT): No. I don't want his money. We will stay anywhere else. We will beg and feed ourselves. But his family should leave him alone.

As she asserts here, it is not necessarily for the monetary gain that women take legal action. Most women who were filing legal suits did not want to leave their households. In many cases, they were abandoned by their husbands, or had left their husbands because they were unable to bear the violence. Most of the time, they told us that they wanted their husbands to actually act like their husbands. And these marital expectations were based on fairly stereotypical notions of what a husband should be. For example, if men fulfilled the basics of their patriarchal duties – earn money, take care of the family, and be stable – women were quite happy.

> **DV071 (IT): I don't think that I will be happy if I go back to him. And I am so disillusioned within that I don't have the slightest desire to go back to him. I didn't want money, gold or silver from him. All I wanted was loving and caring husband. He couldn't give that to me. And then how is he going to take care of me throughout my life?**

For women like DV071 experiencing intimate terrorism, these basic expectations were often not met. Because women were unable to control their husbands, they tried to change their own behavior to accommodate their husband's needs. As in the United States, Indian women experiencing intimate terrorism start to see that no amount of behavior modification is going to change their husbands or the marital relationship.

> **DV005 (IT): Not only when I make a mistake…he beats me whenever he feels like it.**

Many of the women experiencing intimate terrorism told us that the violence was quite bearable and that they would understand the violence if they had committed a mistake. But they were unable to accept the frequency, the severity, and the reasons for the beatings, when there seemed no 'valid' reason to beat.

> **DV009 (IT): No specific reason! If I came late from work, then he used to quarrel. He didn't allow me inside the house. He used to go to stay at my workplace. He would chase me on various pretexts like – this lunch was not good, salt was more, spice was more etc – and started fighting.**

For women who were dealing with violence they didn't understand, and who had financial resources from their natal families, leaving became an option. Women who didn't have the financial resources opted to comply with their husband's demands. This was often true for women experiencing situational couple violence, where women often complied with their husband's wishes to keep the peace. Marital expectations, thus, were not only critical in

evaluating their husband's behavior, but also were used to monitor their own behavior. In addition, women were also given incentives from their husbands to behave 'well'.

> **I: Is he a very calm person?**
>
> **DV057 (SCV): Very calm person. Cool headed. I do everything according to his thinking. He is very calm. If he says this is not to be done then I don't do it.**
>
> **I: Is that why you don't have any fights?**
>
> **DV057 (SCV): Yes.**

In this case, his good behavior is contingent upon hers. However, compliance is not the only coping technique that women experiencing intimate terrorism used. Along with conciliatory behaviors, women experiencing intimate terrorism also used confrontational techniques.

> **DV014: Yes, even I have beaten him. Once when I was pregnant, he came home completely drunk and vomited in the house. So I beat him saying that I have been waiting for you to come home so we can have dinner.**

While not very prevalent, women did hit back in frustration (n = 7). This was true especially for women dealing with drunken husbands. In these cases, women experiencing intimate terrorism (and occasionally, situational couple violence) were usually acting out of frustration. However, these acts of violence usually proved to be fairly fruitless. To understand the efficacy of these coping strategies, it is important to understand the restrictions that women often faced, with each of these coping strategies.

COPING EFFICACY AND RESTRICTIONS

Although there were several considerations that inhibited or promoted the use of some coping strategies than others, I will primarily focus on the familial and emotional considerations of the women that impact their choice of coping behaviors.

Familial considerations

A critical element of coping was using familial networks, and often the success of any coping strategy, whether conciliatory, resistant, or negotiating, depended on the women's access to or possession of familial resources. Before women reached out to the family networks, they often weighed the utility of these networks. For example, in this case, we see that DV009 didn't take any help from her natal or marital family, because she didn't think the solution was financially viable.

DV009 (IT): I complained to police. He was not listening to anyone else.

I: Did you ever tell this to your mother?

DV009(IT): My mother was poor.

I: Told your in-laws?

DV009(IT): My in-laws were poor. There was no use in telling them these facts.

In addition, women had to contend with the familial roles that often interacted with justifications for the violence. For example, families were very cognizant about ensuring that private matters such as violence were not made public. But the boundaries for what is considered private and public may be blurred in a joint family system.

DV076 (IT): Then I used to tell my mother-in-law. She used to try to tell him not to beat. But he used to say "She is my wife. I will beat her. It is none of your business."

Since the violence is still situated within the marital home, it is considered private. But as with the husband of DV076, there are some boundaries around the marital relationship that also seem to fall into public and private space. While the violence might happen within the physical space of a household, it can often be treated as private matter between the two spouses within that relationship. And as witnessed in the example, DV076's husband was able to use this characteristic of the division of public and private space of a family structure to his advantage. This separation of private and public space even within the household drastically inhibits women's use of familial social networks as well as any negotiating techniques that she could use to control the violence.

Emotional considerations

It should not come as a surprise that women's reactions to the violence were very emotional, and therefore, it is likely that the coping strategies that they chose were also grounded in these emotions. The most evocative stories of survivors were the ones where women showed absolutely no emotion. Usually, women who were experiencing intimate terrorism were very sad, angry, and at the same time, accepting of their fate. But there were a few women who didn't register any emotion.

I: What reasons does your husband tell you for beating you?

DV030 (IT): No reasons.

I: What do think may be the reasons?

DV030: What am I going to think? I don't feel anything.

Women experiencing intimate terrorism who blamed themselves for the violence did not feel angry at their situation, their husband, or at their family. They usually registered frustration or impatience. But for women who did know that the violence had no purpose, anger was the first reaction.

> **DV005 (IT): I used to get real mad at him. I felt that I should not live …I come from good family, so I must behave well.**

This invocation of being from a good family is not a coincidence. Many women felt conflicted about wanting to leave, knowing that leaving would involve the loss of the good name of the family. The institution of marriage in India is often considered inviolable. It would not be an overstatement to say that women have no primary identity outside of marriage. In addition, this identity is not only tied with their individual self, but also their families and communities. When women experience the trauma and betrayal of domestic violence, they have to reconceptualize their life, not only in terms of their own selves, but also the possible impact that their decisions might have on their families and communities.

Women are socialized to be dependent either on their natal or marital families, and any act of independence can be met with retaliation through violence. Even if the act of independence is in self-preservation, women face strong pull *and* push factors for staying within the marriage.

> **DV071 (IT): What are these girls supposed to do? How is one supposed to trust 'the men?' Do you keep leaving one man and then another and then still another? And if you do such a thing, then a woman becomes a target of ridicule in the society. What are these girls supposed to do then? If they decide to end their lives and don't succeed in their attempt, then should they continue with the remaining half of their life in the same misery? Since they don't have sufficient educational qualification, they don't get a good job. You get either Rs.40 or 50 or at the most 60 per day. How does one survive in this world within that kind of income? How do we face these difficulties?**

As DV071 puts it so eloquently, women dealing with violence are often put between a rock and a hard place. Any action they take against the violence is rife with problems. But most women who become pragmatic about an emotional relationship acknowledge that the costs of leaving a relationship are much greater than the costs of staying in a relationship.

Thus, women are much more likely to stay in the relationship and use strategies that help them to cope with the violence within the family structure. This, however, does not mean that the women are blindly accepting of the diminished choices in dealing with the violence.

> **DV071 (IT): Yes, because there is no point in trusting this man. I go back to him and he repeats the same story again. Now I work and live happily. I won't get that happiness there. I have given him 500 opportunities in 5 years to change for better. But he didn't.**

For women who are ready to leave and have gathered the financial, mental, and emotional resources to leave the relationship, formal institutions are essential, because they provide a source of validation and direction for women's coping.

> **DV001 (IT): Then when I came here [to the organization], I started understanding that there are many people like me. Then, one also has to understand oneself and realize that nothing can be done at this point. All these people supported me and that's why I came up here.**

While this source of support is essential for women, the more pertinent of the resources that are likely to be useful to women when coping with violence (either by staying or leaving) are the informal networks. These informal networks are the most accessible and are likely to provide solutions that cater not only to women's financial needs, but also emotional ones. Some women (n = 8), despite their experience of horrific violence were attached to their husbands and they wanted to stay with their husbands not because they were forced to, but because they wanted to. For example, after DV009 legally separated from her husband and set up an independent household, she had four more children with her ex-husband. Part of the ambiguity was guided by hope that the men would turn out to be good husbands.

> **I: When you were staying with your husband, then did you feel that beatings would stop one day?**
>
> **DV005: Oh! Yes! I did feel that sometime or the other, there would be peaceful atmosphere; my husband would talk to me nicely. I keep on tolerating things because I felt so. But later, this went on increasing.**

This feeling of longing is especially present in interviews for women who did not leave their homes voluntarily. In other cases, women kept waiting for some resolution, because they were still reluctant to divorce their husbands (although they were separated). In one poignant case:

> **I: Now you have left home and not returned, so what was your husband's reaction?**

DV005 (IT): I thought he might come to take me back today or tomorrow, but he never came.

I: Do you still feel that he might come?

DV005 (IT): No, now I don't think so…

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

One of the main findings of these analyses is the documentation of various coping strategies that are used by Indian women in response to situational couple violence and intimate terrorism. For example, in addition to the help-seeking, conciliatory, resistance, and leaving behaviors (that have already been documented in the U.S. and India), I found that negotiating and independent behaviors were also used by women experiencing intimate terrorism and situational couple violence. Women experiencing situational couple violence didn't use a wide range of coping strategies, probably because the violence was usually sporadic, and long-term coping strategies were unnecessary. For women experiencing intimate terrorism, I found that most used a wide range of tactics and they often employed them strategically, based on familial, cultural, and personal constraints.

One of the major factors that determined women's coping strategies is their access to financial and familial resources. If women had one of the two resources (familial or financial), they were more likely to take proactive steps to either end the relationship or to end the violence within the relationship. All of these strategies were weighed against the particular social context. For example, rural women were not very likely to leave the marital relationship, because the social networks are not usually supportive of unattached women. Women used resistance behaviors sparingly, not only because of social stigma of hitting their husband, but also because they were beaten more severely when they resisted.

Leaving and compliance behaviors were more popular coping strategies, especially for women experiencing intimate terrorism. Women who left the relationship usually approached the police or women's groups for help. Mediation or legal action were the most frequently used techniques employed by these formal networks. Both of these actions had mixed results. While mediation is probably a good technique for women experiencing situational couple violence, women experiencing intimate terrorism found that it was not very helpful. In addition, the paternalistic and patriarchal attitudes of the judicial system often dissuaded women from pursuing any legal action against their husbands. Despite these limitations, many women in my study pursued these options. Lastly, women's emotional

responses to the marital relationship and to their husband played a critical role in their choice and strategies of coping.

DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

It is clear from these analyses that agency exercised by a woman is rarely independent of the socio-cultural and familial restrictions. These acts of agency are often supported and based on the actions of her immediate family members, her friends, her neighbors, as well as her socioeconomic status, her labor force participation, and a plethora of such influences. Thus, grouping all coping strategies that women adopt to combat violence into a singular narrative of agency does them injustice. Instead of conceptualizing a survivor as a strong rebellious woman who is constantly fighting with patriarchy, I would argue that a survivor is most likely to be someone who accepts patriarchal norms *and* rejects them, depending on the context. Therefore, instead of examining coping strategies as discrete categories, we should start examining coping behaviors as a wide range of interactive elements that include women's acceptance and rejection of patriarchal norms.

In addition, these coping behaviors come with specific costs that the women weigh to choose the most appropriate response. However, it must be stressed here that this weighing of choices is shaped by women's particular circumstances, and that these choices are not equally available to everyone. For example, when women stay in marriages, it is not because they have no options, but rather because they have no viable options. The support network around women (including familial and financial) can sometimes increase the options, but that is not always the case.

Education and labor force participation is often seen as the first step towards 'liberation'. However, the assumption that this is always the case ignores the fact that family ties tend to be very strong. Despite the liberating effects of education, social practices that are entrenched in family life adapt themselves to the changes that education brings. For example, many families educate their daughters, not necessarily to make them independent, but because they become more attractive in the marriage market.

Thus, there needs to be a distinction between women's capabilities and women's opportunities (Mehra, 1997). Women's opportunities might stem from the socio-psychological, economic, and familial structure and support. However, women's responses have to do with women's capabilities as much as the opportunities that they possess. Thus, just like the interaction between patriarchy and violence, the interaction between agency and

consent (to patriarchal structure) must be recognized. Women function in the realm of constraint and autonomy, simultaneously.

When examining the bulk of research , we find that apart from the depiction of the dominant male-protector-provider-aggressor abusing a submissive-helpless-silent victim, the realities of the interaction among patriarchy, violence, and agency are rarely seen (Sangari 2002).[3] Domestic violence is invariably seen as an endless system of systematic violence against a hapless woman. I do not dispute the severity and urgency of this claim. However, I contest that this is the *only* form and type of domestic violence that is present in India. In addition, I also contend that this depiction does not pay enough attention to the actions of women who cope with the violence. By fixing a "victim of patriarchy" status on Indian women, we are only capturing a partial picture of domestic violence in India, ignoring the socio-demographic, familial, marital, and personal contexts that equally influence women's experience of violence.

One of the primary features of cross-cultural studies is that it examines the dynamics of a social phenomenon (in this case, domestic violence) in different cultural contexts. Too often, domestic violence in other countries has been associated with the 'culture' of those countries, without taking into consideration the intersectionality of race, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity. By documenting the diversity within this culture, I argue for a greater understanding of the diversity of violent experiences not only within the Indian context, but in all other cultural and national contexts. Thus, the cross-cultural nature of this study places the intersectionality of hierarchies of political, social, and economic power that define women in any relationship at the center of the project.

CONCLUSIONS

"Patriarchy" is an important conceptual tool for understanding women in India. Patriarchal structures often serve an important function in channeling women's action and energies, even as they dominate and exploit these actions and energies. Women in India have been historically and inexorably linked to a social order that ensures that the members in the household are cared for by women in the family with great efficiency, usually by the mechanisms "devotion, silence, subjugation, and tolerance, even at the expense of glorifying

[3]For exceptions, see Abraham (2002), Despande (2001), McLeer (1998), Mitra (1999), Poonacha & Pandey (1999), Purkayastha et al. (2003).

such oppression through religion and mythology…"(Ahmed-Ghosh 2004). While the centrality of this claim is not disputed in this research project, I would argue that, in the context of domestic violence, viewing patriarchy only in this light refuses any agency to the women who participate, negotiate, and resist this system. The lived experiences of women within patriarchal family structures are far ranging and diverse.

They defy any succinct generalizations. For example, the notion of Indian women being oppressed by the Indian family structure is widely acknowledged (Narayan 1997b, Sangari 2002). However, in my own research, I found that while I did encounter women who fit this popular description, I also found women who did not.

> **DV023: I will tell you my own thought. I have guts to do whatever I can for my family. I will not let anything fall short for my son and my husband.**

At the same time, the oppressive elements of the patriarchal family structure should not be de-emphasized. One of the primary concerns of any feminist research is to walk the thin line between representing women as hapless victims to oppressive structures and representing them as fearless heroines who are in charge of their own destiny. Because feminists are, by definition, concerned with changing the status quo that devalues and misrepresents women, emphasizing the narrative of hapless victim over the narrative of fearless heroine (or vice versa) benefits neither the women nor the objective of the research. Thus, the manner in which oppression is articulated becomes critical in understanding the social reality of oppressed groups, in this case, women experiencing violence. In turn, this articulation can afford a means for women to resist their oppression (Thompson 1992).

Finally, any study of patriarchal structure and domestic violence must take into consideration the interactive nature of patriarchal structure, domestic violence, and agency. Thus, we cannot examine patriarchy, domestic violence or agency as separate entities; instead, they must be examined in the ways in which they are reproduced in a set of social relationships. Only by doing so, can we hope to capture the strength, the vulnerability, and the courage that mark the lives of Indian women.

TABLES

Table 1: Coping behaviors by types of violence

	% SCV (n=17)	*% IT (n=23)*
Ever want to leave? (χ^2 = 0.994, *df* = 1, *p*=.319)	26.7	42.9
Ever tried to leave? (χ^2 = 1.17, *df* =1, *p*=.278)	13.3	28.6
Anyone intervene (χ^2 = 0.755, *df* = 1, *p*=.385)	60.0	45.5
Every rely on anyone (χ^2 = 1.30, *df* = 1, *p*=.254)	40.0	59.1
Ever ask anyone for help (χ^2 = 1.713, *df* = 1, *p*=.191)	46.7	68.2
Comply with everything (χ^2 = 0.359, *df* = 1, *p*=.549)	40.0	50.0
Shout back (χ^2 = 2.45, *df* = 1, *p*=.116)	6.7	27.3
Fight back (χ^2 = 1.69, *df* = 1, *p*=.193)	6.7	22.7
Become silent (χ^2 = 0.01, *df* = 1, *p*=.967)	73.3	72.7
Apologize (χ^2 = 0.55, *df* = 1, *p*=.457)	53.3	40.9
Think DV is not important (χ^2 = 3.51, *df* = 1, *p*=.061)	26.7	4.8
Don't do anything (χ^2 = 0.21, *df* = 1, *p*=.64)	33.3	40.9
Try to talk to him (χ^2 = 2.88, *df* = 1, *p*=.09,)	40.0	68.2

Table 2: Types of Coping Behaviors – Indian context

Types	Examples
Help-seeking behaviors	Asking for help, attempting suicide
Conciliatory behaviors	Being silent, apologizing, tolerating, minimizing, compliance
Negotiating behaviors	Talking to husband, reasoning, negotiating
Independent behaviors	Ignoring, asserting, subverting/hiding
Resistance behaviors	Physically attacking, complaining, confronting,
Leaving behaviors	Leaving, wanting to leave

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