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Intimate Partner Violence Experienced by Middle-Aged Married Women in India: A Study Based on Husband Educational Attainment

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ABSTRACT

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) continues to pose a major public health and social challenge in India, yet evidence regarding its association with husbands' educational attainment among middle-aged married women remains limited. The present study assesses differences in negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury experienced by middle-aged married women based on their husbands' educational level. A cross-sectional comparative design was adopted, and 36 women aged 40-55 years were recruited through a snowball sampling from different states of India. Data were collected using the Revised Conflict Tactics – 2 (CTS-2) and analyzed through descriptive statistics and One-Way ANOVA. Although descriptive findings revealed minor variations in IPV dimensions across educational categories, none of the observed differences were statistically significant. The analysis further revealed small effect sizes, suggesting that husbands' educational attainment explained only a negligible amount of variation across different dimensions of IPV. The findings of the study indicated that formal education alone does not substantially influence the occurrence of IPV among middle-aged married women. Instead, the persistence of gender norms, unequal power relations between husband and wife, and socioeconomic adversity play a more decisive role in shaping women's experience of violence in India.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence, Negotiation, Sexual Coercion, Husband Educational Attainment, Physical Assault, Psychological Aggression, Injury & India.

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INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a predominant form of violence against women and is widely acknowledged as a significant global public health and human rights issue (1-3). IPV encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse by a current or former intimate partner, impacts women across all countries, cultures, and social strata, significantly affecting both individual and public health (2,3). A growing body of epidemiological evidence indicates that exposure to IPV positively correlates with higher risks of physical injury, mental disorders, adverse reproductive outcomes, chronic illness, and premature mortality, with a significant burden on healthcare systems and social welfare (4,5). Consequently, IPV has become a significant barrier to attaining gender equality and improving women's health. Along with remaining one of the most prevalent forms of abuse against women worldwide, it significantly affects their physical, psychological, and sexual health. The recent global estimates indicate that around 27% of women aged 15-49 years have experienced physical or sexual abuse by their partners at least once in their lifetime, impacting over 640 million women worldwide (2). The burden is especially significant in low and middle-income nations, where structural inequalities and restricted access to support services exacerbate women's vulnerability (2,6). Studies indicate that women exposed to IPV face increased risk of physical injury, chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, sexually transmitted infections, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders, suicidal behaviour, and reduced quality of life (7-9). Additionally, estimates from UN Women suggest that around 51,100 women and girls were killed by intimate partners or family

members in 2023, underscoring that IPV remains a widespread infringement of women's human rights and a major global public health concern requiring coordinated prevention (6).

IPV is still a major social and public health issue in India, despite legislative measures like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and continuous programs for women's empowerment (10-12). IPV persists across a variety of demographic groups in India due to deep-rooted patriarchal norms, gender inequality, restricted decision-making autonomy, and socioeconomic disparities (12-14). According to the data of the 5th National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-21), roughly 29.3% of women who have ever been married and are between the ages of 18 and 49 report that their husbands have physically, sexually, or emotionally abused them. This shows that IPV still affects almost one in three married women despite advancements in female education and policy interventions (15). The need for targeted, context-specific prevention strategies that address both structural and behavioural risk factors is demonstrated by recent analyses using NFHS-5 data, which further show that educational attainment, household wealth, alcohol consumption, and women's empowerment continue to be significant determinants of IPV (10,14,16).

The majority of studies focused on women of reproductive age (15-49 years), even though IPV has been extensively investigated in India. This is primarily because the NFHS gather data on domestic violence for the specific age group (17,13,18). Consequently, the experiences of middle-aged married women remain insufficiently explored despite their potential prolonged exposure to abusive relationships. The cumulative physical and psychological effects of long-term abuse may be experienced by middle-aged women who are facing multiple caregiving responsibilities for children, ageing parents, and other family members (7,2). Furthermore, menopausal transition, financial dependency, decline in physical health, and social norms may make people more vulnerable and deter them from disclosing or seeking assistance, which could result in a significant underreporting of abuse behavior experienced by them in society (19,20). Addressing this evidence gap is essential for understanding the life-course dynamic of IPV and developing age-responsive prevention and supporting policies. Husbands' education is widely regarded as a major socioeconomic factor that influences attitudes toward gender roles, interpersonal communication, dispute resolution, and household decision-making, jointly influencing the dynamics of intimate relationships (21,22). However, empirical evidence is still inconsistent across nations and sociocultural contexts, with several studies indicating that education alone is not sufficient to eliminate IPV because its impact is mediated by factors like women's empowerment, economic status, alcohol consumption, and cultural norms (17,21,23). Understanding the relationship between husbands' education and IPV is crucial in India, where substantial disparities in educational attainment coincide with strongly ingrained patriarchal traditions and religion socioeconomic inequalities. Despite numerous investigations of IPV determinants, relatively few studies have specifically examined how husbands' educational attainment influences IPV among middle-aged married women in India, highlighting the need for further evidence to inform targeted interventions and policy formulation (24).

Objectives of the Study:

1. To compare the negotiation proficiency of middle-aged married women in their daily lives in relation to their husbands' education level.
2. To compare the level of psychological aggression experienced by middle-aged married women in relation to their husbands' education level.
3. To compare the level of physical assault experienced by middle-aged married women in their day-to-day lives in relation to their husbands' education level.
4. To compare the extent of sexual coercion experienced by middle-aged married women in relation to their husbands' educational level.
5. To compare middle-aged married women's daily injuries from their husbands based on their education level

Significance of the Study:

Focusing on middle-aged married women, a population that has received comparatively less scholarly attention despite their prolonged exposure to abusive relationships, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on intimate partner violence (IPV). The findings of this study will help us understand how husbands' different educational attainments influence power dynamics, conflict resolution, and the occurrence of violence within their marriages. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide information on socioeconomic determinants of IPV in India, where patriarchal norms and educational disparities between husband and wife still have an impact on marriage.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Research Design: The study used a cross-sectional comparative design to examine the level of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, along with other variables experienced by middle-aged married women

in India. The comparison among married women was done based on their husbands' education level, which is further classified into a. Matriculation (10th Grade Pass), Secondary Education (12th Grade Pass), Higher Secondary Education (Graduation), and Post-Graduation (Master's in any discipline).

Participants: 36 middle-aged married women from different states of India, aged between 40 and 55 years, were selected for the study through a snowball sampling method. The subjects were included considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria as shown in Table No. 1.

Table No. 1: Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria of Subjects

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Middle-aged married women aged 40 to 55 years	Married women who were self-employed or working in any public or private sector
Participants in the study include housewives engaged in domestic roles	Widowed women were not represented in the study population
Participants must have achieved a formal education up to the 6th grade	Participants struggling with any kind of psychological disorder which inhibit then to successfully filling out the questionnaire
Married women who have been married for a minimum of three years	Those women whose husbands completed a minimum of secondary schooling (10th Grade)

Variable:

- **Negotiation:** As per Straus et al., (25) negotiation is defined as an action taken to settle disagreement between husband and wife through discussion.
- **Psychological Aggression:** The scientific definition of psychological aggression is not clear in several studies, although it is termed "Verbal/symbolic aggression in a communication intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or a communication perceived as having that intent." (25,26).
- **Sexual Coercion:** Defined as behaviour that is intended to compel the partner to engage in unwanted sexual activity (25).
- **Injury:** Partner-influenced physical injury, as indicated by bone or tissue damage, needs medical attention, or pain continuing for a day or more (25).
- **Physiological Assault:** "The intentional use of physical force against another person in a manner that causes, or risk causing, bodily injury, pain or impairment, including acts such as hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, and restraining" (27).

Questionnaire: The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (CTS2) was used to measure the data from subjects on different selected variables (25). The scale was used to measure the extent to which a partner, either male or female, in dating or in marital relations involve in physical or psychological abuse and later uses the skills of reasoning and conflicts to solve these problems. The internal consistency reliability of CTS-2 ranges from 0.79 to 0.95.

Collection of Data: The CTS-2 questionnaire consists of 78 questions, out of which 12 questions measure the proficiency of negotiation, 16 questions measure exposure to psychological aggression, 24 questions measure the extent of physical assault experienced, 14 questions measure the level of sexual coercion, and 12 questions measure injury of subjects. The subjects were required to have a 6th-grade reading ability to fill out the CTS-2 Questionnaire, as concluded by Flesh, (1949) (28).

Subjects were given 10 to 15 minutes each to fill in the questionnaire in a 7-point frequency-type Likert scale for each question, divided into 8 categories, i.e., Category 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Later, for scoring, the midpoint of each category was added; for categories 0, 1, and 2, the midpoints were the same as the responses of the subjects. For category 3, the midpoint is 4, for category 4, the midpoint is 8, and for categories 5 and 6, it is 15 and 25, respectively. The category 7 is an exception; one can go through Straus et al., (1996) (25) for further information on CTS-2.

Statistical Test: The SPSS-27 Edition was used to analyze the data of the subjects. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to describe the nature of the data of selected variables across different educational attainments of husbands. Later, to analyze whether the difference in mean value was statistically significant at a 0.05 significance level, One-Way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was used. Since the *p-value* of all the One-Way ANOVA is more than 0.05 significance, no post-hoc test was used for further analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table No. 2: Descriptive Statistics (Mean ± Std. dev) of Selected Variables across Different Husbands' Education Attainment

Variables	N	Negotiation	Psychological Aggression	Physical Assault	Sexual Coercion	Injury
Matriculation	9	37.44 ± 9.79	44.00 ± 15.67	74.55 ±29.29	40.77 ± 20.73	36.22 ± 16.29
Secondary Education	9	37.77 ± 5.69	51.00 ± 19.77	74.11 ±33.99	44.44 ±16.55	41.88 ± 13.76
Higher Secondary Education	9	41.44 ± 15.05	52.55 ± 21.84	82.00 ± 27.34	48.66 ±20.00	43.11 ± 16.04
Post-Graduation	9	40.00 ± 11.29	50.88 ± 19.43	83.11 ± 31.97	42.66 ± 21.40	39.88 ± 16.12

Overall, noticeable variations were observed in women's experiences across variables throughout their married lives, as shown in Table 1, with respect to their husbands' educational attainment. The Women whose husbands had higher secondary education experience the highest psychological aggression (52.55 ± 21.84), engage in unwilling sexual activities (48.66 ± 20.00), and frequently encounter negotiation (41.44 ± 15.05) in their daily lives. Suggesting comparatively greater engagement in both constructive conflict resolution and experiences of non-physical forms of intimate partner violence (IPV). In contrast, the highest mean score of physical assault was observed among women's whose husbands have completed their master's degree or post-graduation (83.11 ± 31.97), closely after those women whose husbands had attained secondary education (82.00 ± 27.34). Similarly, a husband having a secondary education creates harm, often resulting in injury to their wives, with a mean value of (41.88 ± 13.76) as compared to the husbands with matriculation, who reported the lowest among all groups (36.22 ± 16.29).

Across all educational groups, physical assault consistently exhibited the highest mean values compared with the other dimensions of IPV, indicating that physical violence constituted the most prominent form of abuse reported by the participants in this sample. The relatively higher standard deviation for sexual coercion, psychological aggression, and physical assault demonstrates a significant variation in women's experiences within each group. The pattern of IPV does not seem to follow a simple linear relationship with husbands' educational attainment, as per table no. 1. This highlights the need for inferential analyses to assess whether the observed mean differences are statistically significant for a better understanding of the influence of education alongside other socioeconomic and cultural factors on IPV.

Negotiation

Table No. 3: One-Way ANOVA Table for Negotiation Experienced by Middle-Aged Married Women across Husband Education Attainment

Group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta-squared
Between Groups	97.00	3	32.33	.268	.848	.025
Within Groups	3862.00	32	120.68			
Total	3959.00	35				

The result of the One-Way ANOVA is shown in Table 3, further demonstrating that the observed differences in negotiation reported by middle-aged married women were not statistically significant (F = 0.286, p = .848). The effect size was also very small (η^2 = .025), indicating that husband's educational attainment explained only 2.5% of the variance. These findings suggest that the occurrence of negotiation behaviours among middle-aged married women was largely similar regardless of their husbands' educational level.

Instead of using coercive or violence, negotiation is seen as a positive aspect of an intimate partner relationship that reflects communication, respect for each other, and cooperative conflict resolution (25). By improving communication skills, raising awareness of gender equality, and encouraging more egalitarian decision-making within homes, higher educational attainments are frequently seen to create healthier interpersonal relationships (21,22). However, recent studies suggest that married couples' negotiating strategies may not be significantly impacted by educational attainment alone. The lack of a significant difference aligns with the broader literature, suggesting that educational attainments do not automatically translate into fair marriage. Heise & Kotsadam (2015) (29) argued that while education may lead to more progressive gender attitudes, contextual factors like prevailing social norms, economic stress, power dynamics in the house, and deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs often moderate its impact on relationship dynamics. The results are also in line with previous studies reporting that there is a complex and non-linear relation between husband education and IPV in India. After controlling socioeconomical and contextual factors, Koening et al., (2006) (13) found that while lower educational attainment was associated with an increased risk of domestic violence in some settings, educational status was insufficient

to explain variations in marital relationships. Ackerson & Subramanian (2016) (30) highlight how educational attainment interacts with broader structural inequalities, including gender norms and women's social position, to influence relationship dynamics and household decision-making.

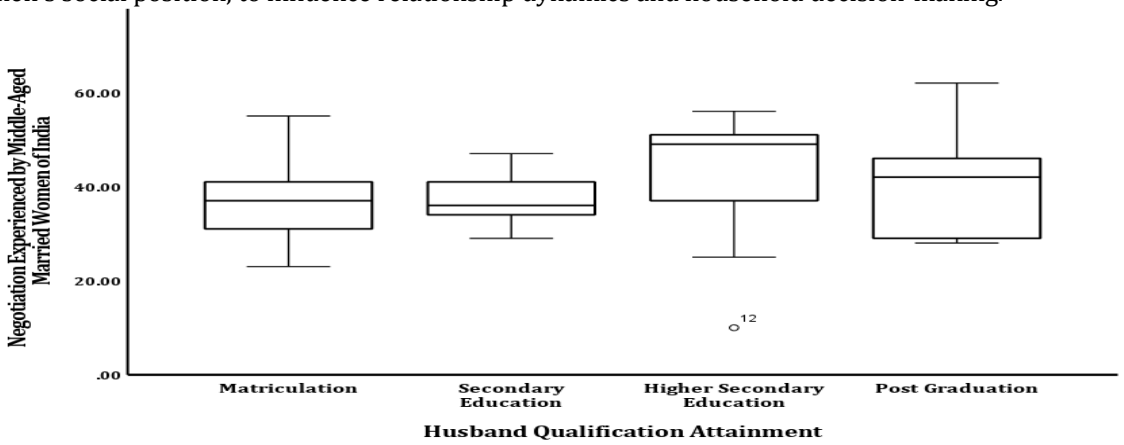

Figure No. 1: Comparison of Negotiable Scores Among Middle-Aged Married Women Based on Husband's Educational Attainment

Psychological Aggression

Table No. 4: One-Way ANOVA Table for Psychological Aggression Experienced by Middle-Aged Married Women across Husband Education Attainment

Group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta-squared
Between Groups	393.44	3	131.14	.352	.788	.032
Within Groups	11935.11	32	372.97			
Total	12328.55	35				

The One-Way ANOVA results presented in Table 4 indicate that the mean difference of psychological aggression across husband education attainment shown in Table 2 was not statistically significant ($F = 0.352$, $p = .788$). Furthermore, the effect size ($\eta^2 = .032$) indicates that husbands' educational level accounted for only 3.2% of the variance in psychological aggression experienced by their wives. Psychological aggression is a common but often overlooked form of IPV, including verbal abuse, humiliation, intimidation, and threats that can significantly damage women's emotional well-being and mental health (30). Unlike physical violence, psychological aggression often endures for a prolonged duration and may remain unnoticed due to the absence of visible injuries, despite its significant psychological consequences (31). While higher educational attainments are associated with better interpersonal communication and more equitable gender perspectives, education alone may not be sufficient to prevent abusive behaviours within marriage partners.

The current finding aligns with prior research showing that multiple interacting factors beyond formal education shape psychological aggression. White et al., (2023) (32) found in systematic review that emotional and psychological abuse occurs across all educational and socioeconomic groups, highlighting the greater influence of relationship dynamics, stress, power imbalance, and cultural norms over educational attainment alone. Capaldi et al., (2012) (30) emphasised that intimate partner violence, including psychological aggression, results from a complex interplay of individual, relational, and environmental factors rather than a single socioeconomic determinant. The result also shows that the continuation of patriarchal gender norms in India may go beyond academic success. Regardless of educational attainment, deep-rooted views about male dominance and marital hierarchy may continue to influence patterns of psychological aggressiveness even when education can increase awareness and socioeconomic opportunities.

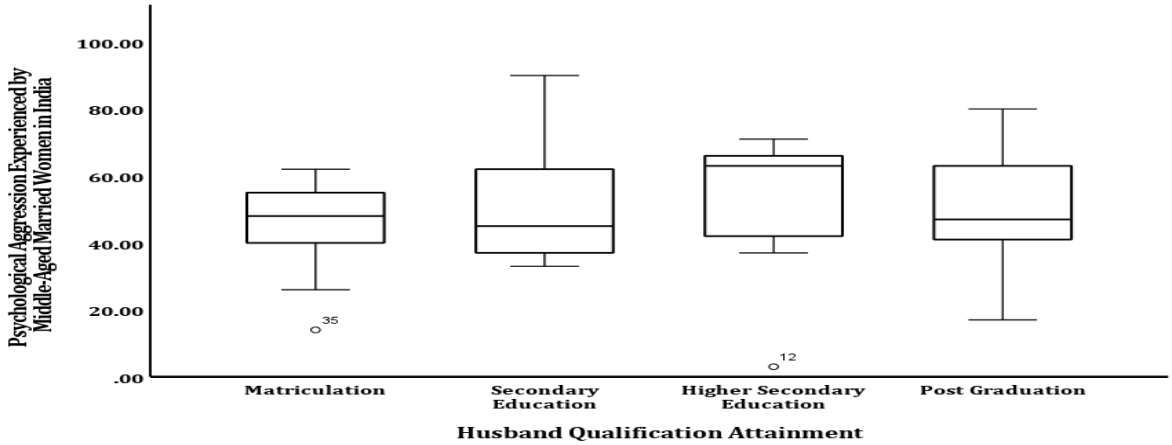

Figure No. 2: Comparison of Psychological Aggression Scores Among Middle-Aged Married Women Based on Husband's Educational Attainment

Physical Assault

Table No. 5: One-Way ANOVA Table for Physical Assault Experienced by Middle-Aged Married Women across Husband Education Attainment

Group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta-squared
Between Groups	614.88	3	204.96	.217	.884	.020
Within Groups	30272.00	32	946.00			
Total	30886.88	35				

Table 5 demonstrates that the difference in physical assault scores across husbands' educational attainment was not statistically significant (F = 0.217, p = .884), along with a small effect size (η^2 = .020). These suggest that the level of formal education attained by husbands was not a meaningful predictor of physical assault experienced by middle-aged married women in the present sample.

Physical assault represents a grave expression of intimate partner violence due to its immediate and long-term consequences on women's physical health, psychological well-being, and overall quality of life (9). While educational attainment is typically regarded as a protective socioeconomic factor that promotes healthy relationships, improves conflict resolution, and mitigates the acceptance of violent behaviour, evidence suggests that education alone does not consistently protect against physical assault within marriage (33). The findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that the relationship between educational attainment and physical intimate partner violence is intrinsic and shaped by situational factors rather than adhering to a simple linear model. Abramsky et al., (2011) (33) reported that the correlation between education and IPV varies among sociocultural situations and is influenced by societal norms, economic conditions, and household power relations. Similarly, Gibbs et al., (2020) (34) emphasised that structural inequalities, alcohol use, financial stress, and inequitable gender norms often have a more significant impact on physical violence than educational attainment alone, particularly in patriarchal norms like India.

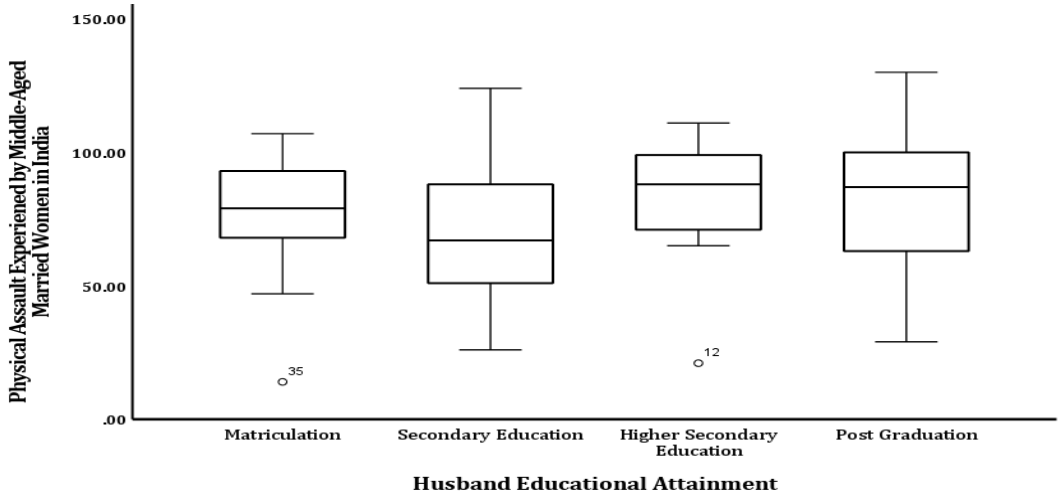

Figure No. 3: Comparison of Physical Assault Scores Among Middle-Aged Married Women Based on Husband's Educational Attainment

Sexual Coercion

Table No. 6: One-Way ANOVA Table for Sexual Coercion Experienced by Middle-Aged Married Women across Husband Education Attainment

Group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta-squared
Between Groups	306.52	3	102.17	.262	.852	.024
Within Groups	12497.77	32	390.55			
Total	12804.30	35				

As per Table 6, the difference in the mean value of sexual coercion shown in Table 2 is not statistically significant (F = 0.262, p = .852). The effect size was very small (η^2 = .024), indicating husbands' educational attainment accounted for 2.4% of the variance in the practice of unwilling sexual relations with their wives. Sexual coercion constitutes a serious form of IPV that compromises women's bodily autonomy, sexual and reproductive health, and psychological well-being (35). Jewkes et al., (2017) (36) observed that sexual violence is influenced by various interrelated factors, including unequal gender norms, power imbalance, and cultural acceptance of male dominance, rather than educational attainment. Similarly, McCloskey et al., (2007) (19) showed that sexual abuse and coercive control occur in all educational groups and are heavily influenced by relationship power dynamics and women's limited autonomy. The protective effect of education may be undermined by deeply ingrained sociocultural attitudes in the Indian context, where patriarchal norms frequently enhance men's dominance over marital sexual decision-making. Therefore, in addition to enhancing educational possibilities, comprehensive interventions that address gender inequality, relationship power, and societal attitudes are necessary to reduce sexual coercion.

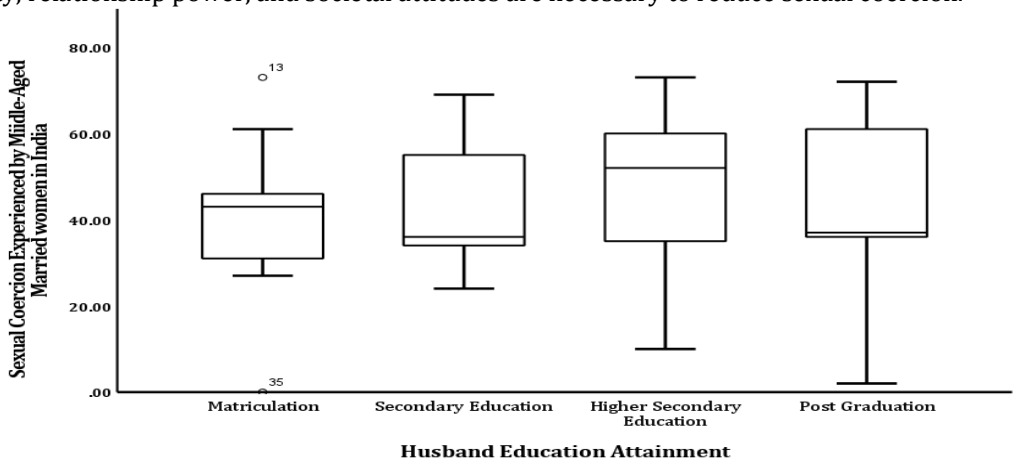

Figure No. 4: Comparison of Sexual Coercion Scores Among Middle-Aged Married Women Based on Husband's Educational Attainment

Injury

Table No. 7: One-Way ANOVA Table for Injury Experienced by Middle-Aged Married Women across Husband Education Attainment

Group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta-squared
Between Groups	245.00	3	81.66	.336	.799	.031
Within Groups	7776.22	32	243.00			
Total	8021.22	35				

A similar result was demonstrated in Table 7, which reveals that the differences in mean score of injury across husbands' educational attainment were not statistically significant (F = 0.336, p = .799), along with the effect size of .031, indicating only 3.1% of the variance. Injuries resulting from IPV represent one of the most visible and severe consequences of abuse, often leading to both acute physical harm and long-term health concerns (37). While educational attainment is often seen as a protective socioeconomic factor, previous studies reveal that it does not consistently reduce the incidence of harm associated with IPV. Ellsberg et al., (2008) (37) concluded that women from different educational backgrounds continue to experience IPV-related injuries, highlighting the fact that education is insufficient to offset the impact of unequal gender norms and power imbalance in relationships. Similarly, Black et al. (2011) (38) showed that several interrelated factors, such as the frequency of violence, coercive control, substance abuse, and access to support services, influence the severity of IPV-related injuries. In the Indian context, entrenched patriarchal norms, women's restricted autonomy, and hurdles to reporting abuse may further weaken the protective role of education in reducing IPV-related injuries.

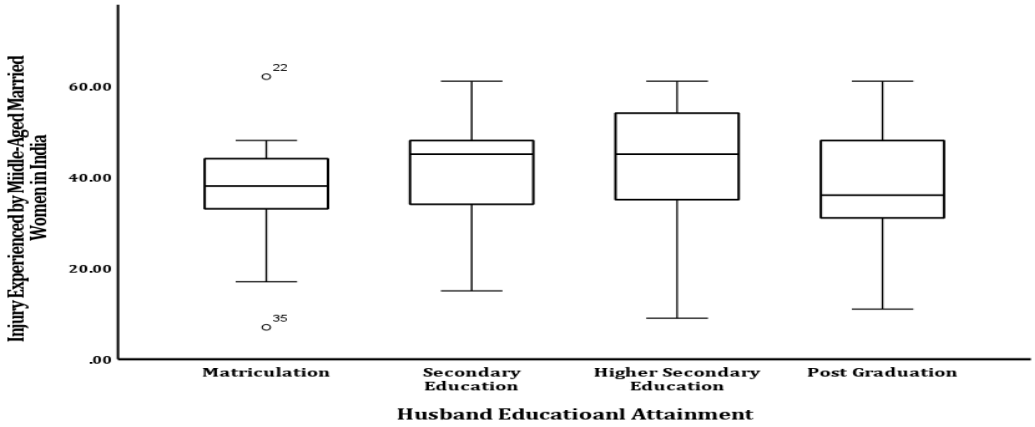

Figure No. 5: Comparison of Injury Scores Among Middle-Aged Married Women Based on Husband's Educational Attainment

CONCLUSION

The present study assesses whether middle-aged married women's experiences of intimate relationship violence are influenced by their husbands' educational attainment. Descriptive results showed minor differences across husbands' education categories in terms of negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury, but these differences were not statistically significant. These findings suggest that while formal education is socially advantageous, it does not always result in respectful marriages or less violence. Rather, a wider range of factors, including economic status, drug abuse, unequal power relations, patriarchal attitudes, and sociocultural norms, may persist irrespective of educational status. Therefore, policies should extend beyond promoting education and incorporate gender-transformative approaches and community awareness that address the underlying structural and cultural determinants of violence against women.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The present study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the relatively small sample size (N = 36) limits the statistical power and generalizability of findings. Second, the use of the snowball sampling technique may have selection bias, as participants were recruited through social networks rather than probability sampling. Third, data were collected through self-reported responses, making the findings susceptible to recall bias and social desirability bias. Finally, the study examines only husbands' educational attainment without considering other influential factors, such as alcohol consumption, employment status, and prevailing cultural norms.

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author's Contribution: Manish Acharjee designed the study and performed the statistical analysis. Dr. Om Prakash Mishra drafted the initial manuscript, prepared the methodological framework and contributed to the interpretation of the data. Kanishk Goel, Avinash Kumar, Himanshi Jain, and Adhishree Pandit jointly identified the subjects, assisted in participant coordination, collected the data and helped in data entry. Dr. Om Prakash Mishra reviewed the results and later contributed to manuscript revision. All the authors approved the final version of the submission.

Informed Consent: Before collecting the data from subjects. All the participants were informed about the purpose, objectives, and procedure of the study in advance. They were informed that participation in entirely voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any stage without providing any reason.

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