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Women's workforce participation and spousal violence: Insights from India

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Women's Workforce Participation and Spousal Violence: Insights from India

Arpita Biswas and Anjana Thampi

ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence is a serious form of unfreedom inflicted on women across the world. How does the incidence of such violence vary with women's workforce participation – a factor that is supposed to enhance their economic well-being? Our study examines this relationship using a nationally representative dataset from India. Given vast heterogeneity among Indian women, we investigate how this link varies by their class and socio-religious identities. Treating women's employment as endogenous, we find that it is associated with a significantly higher probability of reported spousal violence for women from all wealth quintiles except the topmost and across all social groups. Moreover, the reported risks are found to be relatively higher for disadvantaged groups. We hypothesize that these findings could be explained through the backlash effect arising from two sources: the perceived violation of socio-cultural norms by employed women and the double burden of reproductive and market work on them.

KEYWORDS

Spousal violence, women's employment, reproductive labor, India, inequalities, intersectionality

JEL Codes: B54, J12, J16

INTRODUCTION

Globally, 35 percent of women have reported experiencing sexual and/or physical violence, and in most cases by their partners (World Health Organization [WHO] 2013). The south-east Asian region has the highest prevalence of intimate partner violence, and this region includes India as classified by the WHO (2013). In India, the number of women who experienced sexual violence by their husbands in 2005 has been estimated to be forty times the number of women who experienced such violence from non-intimate perpetrators, though only about 1–2 percent of the acts of physical or sexual violence by the husband were reported to the police (Gupta 2014). Our paper contributes to the existing literature on intimate partner violence by analyzing the effect of married women's employment status on spousal violence in the Indian context.[1] We examine this relationship within and across different socio-religious and economic groups. The study suggests that such intersectional analyses can further our understanding of the potential reasons as to why women's employment lowers or further aggravates the risks of intimate partner violence.

According to mainstream economic models on intra-household bargaining, women's economic activity could be a deterrent to spousal violence (Tauchen, Witte, and Long 1991; Lundberg and Pollak 1994; Farmer and Tiefenthaler 1997). An employed woman may be less reliant on the spouse and her improved economic fallback position could enhance her bargaining power within the household.

However, the nature and quality of employment play a key role in deciding the fallback position of women, and not just whether they are employed or not (Panda and Agarwal 2005;

[1] In India, intimate partner violence can be well represented by spousal violence, for couples live together predominantly after marriage. So, this paper uses the phrases interchangeably.

Bhattacharyya, Bedi, and Chhachhi 2011). Women who are employed on an occasional or seasonal basis and/or are unpaid or paid meagre wages or only in kind can hardly gain economic security. Even in the cases when they do, there are chances that – owing to the prevalent cultural norms and gender ideology – an enhanced fallback position may not translate into improved bargaining power at home (Katz 1991; Agarwal 1997). For instance, in societies where separation or divorce is stigmatized, women would find it onerous to exit an abusive marriage even if they are financially capable of taking care of themselves, in turn affecting their ability to negotiate favorable changes in their male partners' behavior. Bloch and Rao (2002: 1030) characterize a bride as a "potential hostage" as divorce is near-impossible in their region of study in the south Indian state of Karnataka.

Bloch and Rao (2002) model intimate partner violence as an instrument used by the husband to bargain with the wife's family for economic resources. In their model, the husband bargains by using the threat of separation as the abandoned wife would bear heavier costs. Their results suggest that spousal violence is linked to low dowry payments and that women from wealthy families are more likely to face spousal violence as their husbands attempt to extort additional payments even after marriage. If we were to extend their analysis to include the employment status of women, the findings could suggest that employed women who have access to economic resources may face higher spousal abuse as a bargaining tool used by the husband.

Sociologists have indeed argued that, instead of being a deterrent, women's economic independence may aggravate violence against them. In analyzing the etiology of intimate partner abuse, they emphasize the "symbolic" importance of women's employment as signifying a challenge to the cultural norms of male dominance and female dependence which can have strong effects on the self-esteem and mental health of the male partners (Kessler and McRae 1982; Thoits

1992; Macmillan and Gartner 1999). Perceiving women's employment as a threat to their traditional gender role and masculinity, men may resort to violence to reinstate control in the domestic sphere. This may be particularly true of men belonging to poorer and marginalized communities who use violence in response to their inability to control their wives through seclusion as well as to extract material resources from them (Anandhi and Jeyaranjan 2002; Still 2017). Moreover, the backlash effect can be especially critical in marital relations, for marriage in most societies is argued to operate as a hierarchical institution sustained through socially sanctioned authority and covert force (Goode 1971; Macmillan and Gartner 1999).

We locate ourselves in this debate by positing that the actual effect of women's workforce participation on spousal violence against them is context dependent. The theoretical models and empirical evidence pertaining to this link in one setting may not adequately reflect its state in a different context. The central question of this paper is whether and how being employed affects an average married Indian woman's intimate life. In this case, the context is one of a country where the female labor force participation rate is appallingly low and declining in spite of higher educational enrollment and economic growth over time (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2007; Himanshu 2011; Naidu 2016). Moreover, given that the specification "Indian woman" does not reveal much about one's immediate reality, we ask how the effect varies by her class and socio-religious identities. Thus, we focus on analyzing how married women with similar socio-economic attributes fare in terms of the risks of facing spousal violence when they are employed vis-à-vis when they are not. And how do such risks faced by employed women from a certain economic or social group compare with the risks faced by employed women from other groups? This intersectional analysis will enable us to understand if – in a vastly heterogenous country such as

India – the employment status of women from diverse social and economic backgrounds affects their chances of facing spousal violence differently, and why.

BARGAINING THEORY VS MALE BACKLASH HYPOTHESIS

The findings of studies examining the effect of women's employment on the likelihood of intimate partner violence are mixed. Kalmuss and Straus (1990) find that unemployed married women in the US are exposed to significantly higher risks of severe spousal violence. Villarreal (2007) reports that employment significantly lowers women's risk of violence in Mexico. These studies suggest that being economically independent makes employed women less tolerant of abuse and more capable of negotiating changes in their partners' behavior. Thus, they lend support to the household bargaining models in underscoring employment as an empowerment tool for women (see also Hadi 2005 [Bangladesh]; Gage 2005 [Haiti]).

In contrast, John (2020) finds that, in the traditional setting of Nepal, married women engaged in paid employment face a significantly higher risk of intimate partner violence as compared to their unpaid or non-working counterparts. Assessing the association between relative spousal employment status and violence, Macmillan and Gartner (1999) show that the effect of Canadian women's employment on IPV is inverse when their partners are also employed but adverse and substantial when they are not. These works validate the male backlash theory which argues that women's employment provokes their partners to coercively control them so as to prevent any perceived threat to prevalent gendered norms and hierarchy (see also Oduro, Deere, and Catanzarite 2015 [Ecuador]; Owoo 2020 [Nigeria]).

We expect these differences to have resulted from methodological and contextual variations in the studies. With regard to the former, differences in the reference period of the study (past twelve

months before survey or long-term), the group of women examined (currently or ever partnered/married), and the set of control variables may have mattered. In addition, the treatment of potential endogeneity between women's employment and intimate partner violence could have been particularly important. The two main sources of such endogeneity are simultaneous causality and omitted variables. Researchers analyzing the other direction of the relationship have suggested that spousal violence can have an adverse influence on women's likelihood of being employed, their work hours and employment stability (Tolman and Wang 2005; Kimerling, Alvarez, Pavao, Mack, Smith, and Baumrind 2009; Crowne, Juon, Ensminger, Burrell, McFarlane, and Duggan 2011) or have a positive association with their paid and year-round employment (Bhattacharya 2015). Furthermore, spousal abuse and women's workforce participation may both be affected by unobserved factors – for instance, presence of a controlling male partner or of orthodox in-laws, and that can bias the findings of the effect of abuse on women's employment.[2] However, much of the literature – with the notable exceptions of some studies by Gibson-Davis, Magnuson, Gennetian, and Duncan (2005), Villarreal (2007), Bhattacharyya *et al.* (2011), and Lenze and Klasen (2017) – does not control for endogeneity. While this may not be a relevant critique against studies that treat women's employment status only as a control variable, given the aim of our analysis, we recognize and tackle the issue by implementing a suitable instrumental variable logit model.

With respect to the other major source of wide variations in findings from the literature, contextual factors specific to the region under study may have counted. Oduro *et al.* (2015) indicate

[2] Both examples we mention are likely to have adverse effects on women's employment decision and spousal abuse against them, and hence, can lead to a downward bias in the findings.

the relevance of cultural norms around women's workforce participation in Ecuador and Ghana, countries where the shares of employed men are high and very close (93 percent in Ecuador and 94 percent in Ghana). They find women's employment to increase spousal violence in Ecuador where only 60 percent of women are economically active, and to cause no significant effect for those living in Ghana where 90 percent of women are in the workforce. Bhattacharyya *et al.* (2011) show how norms and labor market patterns around women's occupational engagement also matter. They find employment in agricultural wage work to shield women of Kaushambi district of Uttar Pradesh [India] from spousal abuse whereas this is not the case with non-agricultural activities where women are minimally present. Panda and Agarwal (2005) – by giving evidence of a protective effect of a regular job as against no significant effect of a seasonal one in Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala [India] – highlight the role of quality of women's employment in improving their bargaining power and escaping physical abuse from male partners.

These studies offer a meaningful framework that can help us analyze and understand the association between women's employment and risks of spousal violence against them in varied contexts. To reiterate, the framework conceptualizes women's employment as an indicator of access to economic resources with the potential to increase their bargaining power (depending on the quality of employment) vis-à-vis a symbolic/cultural resource with the potential to attract male backlash when men perceive employed spouses as transgressing the norms around gender division of labor and identity.

Nonetheless, to the best of our knowledge, none of the earlier studies recognize women's employment as a signifier of compromised "reproductive" resources.[3] With women being the primary (if not the sole) caregiver, their participation in the workforce can constrain the energy, time or other resources that they have available for reproductive labor. In societies where household work is perceived to be their principal responsibility, falling short of their male partner's or his family's expectations can trigger violence against women. Field research by Bhattacharyya *et al.* (2011) indeed reveals that a significant share of both married men and women (46 percent) consider women's "negligence" of housework (for instance, food not cooked properly or on time, children not taken care of, clothes not washed) as one of the most common reasons for their physical abuse.[4] Moreover, with neoliberal capitalism continually dislocating the burden of reproduction onto families and deepening the crisis of social reproduction (Bhattacharya 2013;

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[3] Here, the word "reproductive" follows social reproduction theory which recognizes reproductive labor as all activities relating to the processes of reproducing and maintaining life (Bhattacharya 2017). It can be further sub-divided into direct and indirect care work, with the former involving a process of personal and emotional care, and the latter comprising activities that provide support for direct care (Folbre 2006; Mukherjee 2012). The present study concerns with daily care work in the households and also terms it as reproductive labor or housework.

[4] While the domestic violence schedule of our dataset (the National Family Health Survey) does not directly ask respondents about the reasons behind spousal violence, it does ask "yes" or "no" questions as to if they think the man is justified in beating his wife should she neglect the children or not cook food properly. 37 percent of currently married women and 19 percent of currently married men report these as valid reasons for physical abuse against the wife.

Note that a significantly smaller proportion of men as compared to women report any of the reasons given in the survey (viz., neglecting children, not cooking properly, going out without telling husband, arguing with him, and refusing to have sex with him) to be a justified one for beating one's wife, indicating a good chance of under-reporting from the men's end.

Fraser 2016), we expect this additional channel of male backlash to have become particularly relevant in recent decades. Thus, we hypothesize that, by bolstering the possibilities of the backlash effect, intensive care burden can increase employed women's risks of witnessing intimate partner violence over those who are not employed. Also, as the intensification of reproductive labor appears to have been especially severe for households from socially and economically deprived sections (Bhattacharya 2013; Naidu 2016; Rao 2018), we imagine this source of the backlash effect to be particularly strong for employed women from such households. By incorporating these socio-economic undercurrents of the contemporary system, our intersectional study aims to contribute to feminist political economic analyses of domestic violence in India.

DATA

This study uses unit-level data from the 2015–6 National Family Health Survey 4 [NFHS-4], the latest in the series of Demographic and Health Surveys in India at the time of writing. Among a variety of questionnaires that the NFHS employs, our present analysis primarily concerns itself with the domestic violence module while supplementing it with relevant data collected on the spouse of the sampled woman through the men's questionnaire.

For the module on domestic violence, the NFHS randomly selected one woman between 15 and 49 years per household. The selected women can be classified into two broad categories: never married and ever married women. The latter consists of currently married women and women who were married earlier but are now separated, divorced, widowed or have been deserted. To minimize underestimation bias, we only consider the sub-sample of currently married women who were cohabiting with their husband during the reference period. The surveyed women responded to questions on different forms of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse caused by their partners. As

classified by the survey, physical violence includes cases where the respondent reported that her husband pushed, shook or threw something at her; twisted her arm or pulled her hair; slapped her; punched her; kicked, dragged, or beat her up; tried to choke or burn her; or threatened or attacked her with a weapon. Sexual violence refers to the respondent reporting that the husband forced her to have sexual intercourse with him or forced her to perform sexual acts. In cases of emotional violence, the respondent reported that the husband humiliated her in front of others, threatened to hurt or harm her or others close to her, or insulted her. To each of these questions, women reported whether their spouse inflicted the form of abuse "often in the past twelve months", "sometimes in the past twelve months", "yes, but not in the past twelve months", or "never".

In our selected sample, we consider a woman to have suffered spousal violence if she reported facing at least one form of violence – physical, sexual, or emotional – either often or sometimes in the last twelve months at the time of survey. This is because our focus is on the effect of women's employment status on the probability of spousal violence, and data on the former is available for the past twelve months alone, making that the reference period for our analysis.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

Tables 1 and 2 present survey weight-adjusted summary statistics of the variables that we use in this study. Table 1 depicts the statistics for the indicators of different kinds of spousal violence. It suggests that one out of every four married women in India reported facing some form of abuse from their husband sometimes or frequently over the twelve months prior to survey. More specifically, 22.5 percent of women in our sample reported encountering physical abuse, 5.4 percent reported sexual violence, and 10.6 percent reported facing emotional violence. We use "any spousal violence" as the dependent variable in our analysis. It is represented as a binary

variable that takes the value of 1 if a woman did experience spousal violence in any form, and 0 otherwise.

<Insert Table 2 about here>

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the explanatory variables and the instrumental variable (IV) that we use in the study. The employment status of the woman during the year before the survey is the explanatory variable of primary interest, and 32 percent of the women in our sample were ever employed during that period. The control variables include attributes of the woman and her spouse, and their household characteristics. The average age of women respondents is close to 33 years. 88 percent of them are younger than their husbands by 10 years or less, with the mean spousal age gap being slightly below five years. About one-fifth of both women and men report that their father physically abused their mother. However, there are vast differences between them in other variables: an overwhelming 96 percent of men were ever employed in the past 1 year as against a mere 32 percent of women; property ownership among men (80 percent) is twice as common as it is among women; and 66 percent of men have secondary education or higher as against 54 percent of women. Furthermore, 28 percent of men are reported by their wives to drink alcohol, and slightly over 1 percent have more than one wife.

In terms of household characteristics, only 35 percent of the couples were located in urban areas at the time of data collection. An average couple seems to have two children living with them. Almost half of the sample's households represent a nuclear family structure, and a majority of the remaining 50 percent represent small joint families. 13 percent of the respondents are married to Muslim men while 20, 9, 40, and 18 percent are wedded to men from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), other "backward" classes (OBC) and a residual "others" category,

respectively.[5] Finally, 16 percent of the households are in the poorest quintile and 22 percent in the richest. The relevance and validity of the IV that we use is discussed in the following section.

A caveat is in order here. Data on spousal violence can suffer from under-reporting due to respectability politics or fear of social stigma, particularly among women from richer and forward caste households (Deshpande 2002; Panda and Agarwal 2005). While we cannot comment on the extent of this flaw in our sample without supporting qualitative data, we expect our intra-group analysis to be free from it. However, our inter-group examination may suffer from such data limitations and the corresponding results need to be treated with caution.

METHODOLOGY

To empirically examine the effect of women's employment status on spousal violence against them, we use the following linear regression:

$$V = \beta_0 + \beta_1 E + \beta_2 W + \beta_3 H + \beta_4 F + \varepsilon$$

where V is the indicator of spousal violence against a married woman, E stands for her employment status, W represents the other attributes of the woman, H represents the set of her husband's characteristics, F stands for the set of household characteristics, and ε represents unobserved factors. V is the outcome variable and E is the key regressor. As mentioned earlier, V takes the

[5] We use the husband's religion and caste in our analysis because we expect the household's social status as well as its members' everyday life – factors that may influence the incidence of spousal violence – to be determined by his social identity.

Note that even though OBCs is expanded as other backward *classes*, the Government of India uses the term to classify *castes* which are educationally or socially disadvantaged.

value of 1 if the woman reported encountering spousal violence in any form in the twelve months before the survey and 0 otherwise, and *E* takes the value of 1 if the woman reported herself to be employed in any capacity (in any occupation for any duration under any employer or as self-employed with or without pay) over the same period of twelve months and 0 otherwise.

The set of control variables represented by *W*, *H*, and *F* captures different socioeconomic factors operating at the micro and macro levels that affect the incidence of spousal abuse against women. Our choice of these variables is based on the existing literature on intimate partner violence. While we do not present a detailed discussion of these in the interest of space, it is pertinent to elaborate on the variable "social identity" that we have constructed combining caste and religion – two of the most crucial historical markers of deprivation in India besides gender and class.

In India, the historically disadvantaged groups of the SCs (also known as *Dalits*) and STs (also called *Adivasis*) continue to face disparities and discrimination in socio-economic indicators (Borooah 2005; Zacharias and Vakulabharanam 2011; Thorat and Dubey 2012). Among different religious communities that cohabit the country, Muslims have been systematically marginalized along several dimensions of life and livelihood (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Shaban 2018). Since men from these caste and religious groups may more actively resort to spousal abuse so as to reassert control in the domestic sphere (Anandhi and Jeyaranjan 2002; Anandhi 2017; Still 2017), we include the variable on social identity in our study. Our study treats social identity as a qualitative explanatory variable with five categories as depicted in table 2. This includes four deprived socio-religious categories: Muslims, and the SCs, STs, and OBCs belonging to all religious groups except Muslim. The rationale behind clubbing Muslims from various caste backgrounds under one category is twofold: one, given the continuing opposition to their inclusion

in affirmative action policies, they are vastly under-represented in the official SC/ST/OBC categories; and two, the considerable shift of national and global politics to the right in recent times has made practically every Muslim susceptible to everyday discrimination in India (Hasan 2011; Shaban 2018). The fifth socio-religious group is a residual one comprising all those who are not covered under the deprived categories, with a majority of them expected to belong to the so-called "forward" castes (from all religious groups except Muslim).

We also use the wealth quintiles available in NFHS data – generated from households' housing characteristics and their ownership of consumer goods – to indicate economic standing of households.

With respect to the estimation approach, given our regressand is a binary categorical variable, we use binary logit regression models in our study. We employ survey-weight adjusted logit estimations to account for the structure of the survey design. Controlling for *W*, *M*, and *H*, the marginal effect of a woman being employed from the logit estimations allows us to examine whether and how it is associated with the likelihood of her husband inflicting violence on her.

As discussed earlier, women's employment status is an endogenous explanatory variable. Following Lenze and Klasen (2017), we instrument it by women's workforce participation rate (WPR) per cluster, where cluster represents a Census enumeration block in urban areas and a

village in rural areas consisting of 100–50 households (IIPS and ICF 2017).[6] [7] This variable is used as a proxy measure for employment opportunities for married women in an area (including network efforts enabling them to find jobs) as well as for norms and attitudes that influence their decision to join the workforce. Based on the assumption that the probability of a woman being employed is positively correlated with favorable labor demand and supply conditions in her vicinity, we expect the average WPR of women per cluster to be a relevant IV. Diagnostic tests for the instrument from the first stage of IV estimation (presented in tables 3, 4, and 5) confirm our expectation.[8] As the average WPR of women in a cluster goes up, the likelihood that a given woman from that cluster is employed increases significantly. Also, the magnitude of the F-test statistic for the significance of the IV in the first stage is much higher than 10 – the benchmark for assessing the strength of an IV in an exact identification logistic model. These suggest that the variable is a suitable instrument for a married woman's employment status in India.

Given that the endogenous regressor is exactly identified in our case, we cannot conduct an empirical test for checking the validity of the IV. Nevertheless, there is no reason to assume that the cluster average of women's WPR ought to directly impinge on a man's violent behavior, other

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[6] Note that we use cluster average of *married* women's WPR as our instrument, where married refers to currently married women who are cohabiting with their husbands. As respectability norms associated with one's employment status and care work burden would vary between married and non-married women in India, the cluster average of married women's WPR serves as a suitable IV in our context. Thus, in the paper, women's WPR refers to married women's WPR and women's employment status refers to married women's employment status.

[7] As in Lenze and Klasen (2017), we construct the instrument in a way that excludes the woman being considered in each observation to avoid an in-built correlation.

[8] As can be seen from tables 3, 4, and 5, diagnostic tests for all the regressions—that for the whole sample population and for different economic and socio-religious groups—confirm the relevance and strength of the instrument.

than through its impact on his wife's employment status and other control variables. Thus, we expect the instrument to be a valid one for our purpose.

Since both our regressand and endogenous regressor are categorical variables, we use the two-stage residual inclusion (2SRI) estimation approach to account for endogeneity. For this, we follow Terza, Basu, and Rathouz (2008) who show the 2SRI approach to provide consistent estimates in case of such models, unlike the usual two-stage predictor substitution (2SPS) estimation approach. The first-stage regression of the 2SRI approach uses the IV and all control variables of the model to predict the endogenous explanatory variable, and the second-stage regression uses the original explanatory variable and the residual from the first stage along with all control variables.[9] We use binary logit models for both stages.[10]

RESULTS

Tables 3, 4, and 5 present the estimated effects of women's employment status on the incidence of spousal violence. Table 3 shows the results for all women in our sample whereas tables 4 and 5

[9] In the 2SPS approach, the first stage remains the same whereas the second-stage regression uses the predicted values of the endogenous regressor and all control variables.

[10] To check for robustness, we use different combinations of regression models in the two stages of 2SRI estimation: linear probability model in both stages, linear probability model in the first stage and binary logit model in the second stage, and binary logit model in the first stage and linear probability model in the second stage. These models provide similar results as those obtained from our main 2SRI model with binary logit model in both stages. The results are available on request.

record the estimated effects for women married into households from different economic statuses and different socio-religious communities, respectively.[11]

<Insert Table 3 about here>

The 2SRI estimates in table 3 show that, all else being equal, employed women are 3.5 percent more likely to face spousal abuse as compared to non-employed women.[12] This implies that being employed makes married women more susceptible to male aggression rather than enhance their intra-household bargaining power. Table 4 depicts that this association between women's workforce participation and the likelihood of spousal violence against them holds true in case of all economic sections barring the richest 20 percent. While the employment status of women belonging to households from the wealthiest quintile does not seem to influence their chances of facing spousal abuse, employed women from all other quintiles report encountering a significantly higher probability of violence than women who were not employed.[13] Furthermore, table 5 shows

[11] Due to space considerations, only table 3 presents the estimated marginal effects of the control variables on the risks of spousal violence against women. The complete sets of results for women from different economic and socio-religious groups are available on request.

[12] Note that the qualitative result holds for the logistic model as well (i.e., when women's employment status is treated as exogenous), also shown in table 3.

[13] It is possible that employed women from the wealthiest quintile are not exposed to significantly higher risks of spousal violence than their non-employed counterparts because of the kind of employment they engage in. Figure A1 in the Appendix suggests that a majority of them (73 percent) have regular paid jobs which may enhance their bargaining power just enough to counter any backlash emanating specifically from their workforce participation. This figure (and figure A2) can also be taken to indicate that the nature of employment may be a reason why employed women from lower wealth quintiles (and varied social groups) cannot gain substantial economic security to protect themselves against spousal abuse.

that employed women across socio-religious groups report facing significantly higher risks of spousal abuse than women who did not participate in the workforce.

<Insert Table 4 about here>

<Insert Table 5 about here>

The estimates in these tables also indicate that the adverse effect of employment on spousal violence tends to be stronger for women who belong to deprived communities – economically or socially. The incidence of such violence seems to be progressively lower for employed women from higher wealth quintiles as compared to those from relatively poorer ones (table 4). Employed women from Muslim, Dalit and Adivasi communities – the sections that are documented to have been the most marginalized in India – report greater risks of spousal abuse than employed women from other groups (table 5).

Our finding that married women's workforce participation is associated with a significantly higher incidence of spousal abuse supports the male backlash theory. We proceed to discuss some plausible explanations for such backlash effect in the specific context of our study.

<Insert Figures 1 & 2 about here>

First, as feminist scholarship on the backlash theory postulates, the observed association may be a testament of the symbolic role that women's employment plays in challenging the socio-cultural norms of male supremacy and female dependency. This is especially true of India where gender hierarchy has been a fundamental organizing principle of the caste-based social order, and marriage a primary institution to enforce such hierarchy through stringently defined gender roles

and obligations (Chakravarti 1993; Eswaran, Ramaswami, and Wadhwa 2013).[14] Among those are the husband's masculine role of a provider/protector and the wife's feminine role of a homemaker/recipient, which have together come to stigmatize the employment of married women in the Indian society. A low incidence of workforce participation among the women in our dataset is partly a reflection of this cultural tradition (see figures 1 and 2).[15] In this context, it is highly probable for the women who do not adhere to such norms to be subjected to male aggression and abuse, which are non-material means used by men to compensate for their diminished or failed economic power and to re-establish control within the domestic space.

This "disciplining" mechanism is expected to affect employed women across social and economic groups in India, for married women's workforce participation rate is low throughout. As figures 1 and 2 respectively show, the rate ranges from 21 percent in the wealthiest quintile to 41 percent in the poorest one, and from 17 percent in Muslim households to 49 percent in *Adivasi* families. These indicate how not taking part in the labor market is the dominant norm among Indian women from varied backgrounds, challenging which – as tables 4 and 5 show – comes at the cost

[14] Postcolonial theorists also attribute this strict division of gender roles in modern India to the nationalist response to (and struggle against) colonialism and, more generally, to the dominance of western culture. According to them, the discourse on nationalism has reinvented and reinforced the "new" Indian woman's primary responsibility of maintaining the home – the principal site for protecting and nurturing the sanctity of indigenous social life – as a significant marker of superior national culture. See Chatterjee 1989.

[15] We say partly as recent literature on the low and falling female labor force participation rate in India underscores the deterioration of labor market conditions for women (consisting of reduction of employment opportunities as well as worsening quality of work for female workers) and implementation of neoliberal policies (curtailing social provisioning of essential goods and services) as other important factors. See Colatei and Harris-White 2004; Ghosh 2009; Naidu 2016; Rao 2018.

of heightened risk of domestic violence. However, a cross-sectional comparison of the employment rates and the corresponding incidence of spousal abuse highlights a puzzle: the probability of abuse is lower for employed women from groups that have historically discouraged and denounced women's employment most severely, namely, the upper-caste and wealthier sections (Liddle and Joshi 1989; Eswaran *et al.* 2013). While attributable to under-reporting errors (that are expected to be more serious for women from relatively privileged groups) to some extent, are there additional factors that can possibly explain the observed tendency?

As Naidu (2016), Rao (2018), and Rao and Vakulabharanam (2018) argue, the Indian society has been facing an intensification of social reproduction crisis since the late 1980s. This has been a repercussion of a variety of neoliberal processes such as large-scale privatization of rural and urban common property resources, displacement of marginalized populations from public lands and commons that they had inhabited for generations, and under-provisioning of essential facilities like water, electricity, and sanitation by the state in informal settlements.[16] Deepening the exigencies of reproduction at the household level, this crisis has mired large sections of Indian women in an ever-accelerating burden of everyday care activities. It is against this backdrop that we propose it important to construe their employment as not only an indicator of economic means and symbolic value but also that of compromised reproductive resources. This proposition leads us to hypothesize that the double burden of reproductive and market work may spur an additional source of backlash against employed women. To test this hypothesis, we use two proxy measures of care activities: having a very young child (i.e., less than or equal to 5 years) represents direct

[16] See Roy 2007; Gidwani and Baviskar 2011; Coelho, Chandrika, and Venkat 2013 for elaborate discussion on how these processes – vital for capitalist accumulation under the current regime – have caused a massive depletion of traditional sources, means, and mechanisms of social reproduction.

care responsibilities, and the need to go fetch drinking water from an outside source constitutes indirect care burden.[17] We adjust the proxy variables for the presence of another woman or teenage girl (between 15 and 49 years) at home to capture intensive work burden, meeting which may become particularly difficult for a woman who is also employed. Thus, we consider a woman to be dealing with intensive care burden if she has a very young child and if drinking water needs to be fetched from outside with no other female at home to share the workload, and not-so-intensive work burden otherwise.

<Insert Table 6 about here>

Tables 6 and 7 present descriptive statistics on the incidence of spousal abuse among employed and non-employed women facing intensive and not-so-intensive care burden across economic and socio-religious groups. An intra-group comparison of the numbers offers two preliminary findings: one, irrespective of the intensity of care burden, employed women report facing greater risks of spousal violence than those who are not employed, and two, employed women report encountering a much greater likelihood of violence than non-employed women when they deal with intensive care burden vis-à-vis when they do not. For instance, being employed increases *Dalit* households' women's risks of spousal abuse by 11 percentage points when they deal with intensive care burden as compared to a 7-percentage point rise when they do not. These findings indicate that the double burden of reproductive and market work could contribute to a backlash effect against employed

[17] While our dataset provides information on time taken to fetch drinking water – which could potentially make a better proxy for the intensity of indirect care work, it does not specify the number of trips one needs to make in a day. To avoid estimation biases, we use the variable on time taken as binary: 0 if the water source is on the household premises or if water is delivered at home, and 1 otherwise.

women. This could be due to the difficulties they face in handling care work or in meeting their husbands' expectations from them as caregivers, or due to conflicts over division of such work.

<Insert Table 7 about here>

The incidence of spousal violence reported by employed women facing intensive care responsibilities decreases as we move up along the economic and social hierarchies (tables 6 and 7). This may be because households from disadvantaged sections face greater limitations in substituting housework with paid domestic help. Additionally, reproductive burdens – direct, indirect, and both direct and indirect – appear to have been more intense for employed women from poorer and marginalized groups (figures 3 and 4).[18] This could be because these communities have been more severely affected by the state's withdrawal from public provisioning and declining access to commons. Together, these observations offer a probable explanation as to why employed women from disadvantaged groups may be facing higher risks of spousal violence, and in the process, lends support to our hypothesis that employment – by jeopardizing women's capacity to perform intensified care labor and/or meet their spouses' expectations around it – acts as an additional cause of male backlash against them.

<Insert Figures 3 & 4 about here>

Our findings on the effect of women's employment on spousal violence from the cross-sectional examination reinforce Anandhi and Jeyaranjan (2002), Anandhi (2017), and Still's (2017) thesis that men from socio-economically disadvantaged groups tend to be more prone to

[18] Naidu (2016) suggests that a similar tendency exists for women from different economic groups in both rural and urban India.

retaliate against their wives' economic independence through violence. This implies that when historically entrenched patterns of deprivation and discrimination in the public space interact with their "failed masculinity" – in terms of exerting control over their spouses and the family economy – even within the private sphere, they feel especially provoked to display "manliness" through violence against their wives.

CONCLUSION

This paper studies the incidence of spousal violence against women with reference to their employment status in the Indian context. Given the presence of vast socio-economic disparities in the country, it is important to examine how the association between a woman's workforce participation and the likelihood of violence is conditioned by her (marital) family's economic and social standing. We use nationally representative household survey data and a context-driven econometric model to investigate this link. Taking into account the potential endogeneity of this relationship, we instrument women's employment status by the cluster average of married women's workforce participation rate in our model.

Our findings show that women's employment in India is indeed associated with a significantly higher probability of spousal violence. We find this association to hold true for employed women across all wealth quintiles except the topmost and across all socio-religious communities. Engaging with insights from feminist scholarship, we argue that these could be explained through the backlash by men due to the perceived violation of socio-cultural norms by their wives. Moreover, the risks of spousal abuse are reported to be relatively higher for employed women from economically and socially disadvantaged sections. Our analysis indicates that such a pattern can be explained by recognizing the double burden of reproductive and market work on employed women as another source of the backlash effect. Employed women – especially those with

intensive reproductive burden – may witness an aggravated risk of backlash by their husbands due to difficulties in meeting the traditionally-assigned responsibilities. We hypothesize that employed women from deprived communities witness greater risks of spousal abuse vis-à-vis employed women from relatively privileged backgrounds because they face higher incidence of intense care work resulting from the privatization of common property resources and under-investment by the state in social welfare.

The exacerbation of the crisis of social reproduction is a critical feature of the contemporary regime that is founded on exclusionary processes of accumulation. The relationship between women's market work and the incidence of spousal violence is thereby mediated by the intensified care burden for which they are held responsible. Further feminist political economic analyses of the role of the reproductive burden of employed women in instigating spousal violence could strengthen the demand for renewal of reproductive responsibilities of the state in social movements and policy circles.

Finally, a discussion of the limitations of our study and the implications for future research is in order. First, our quantitative analyses use women's employment status as an explanatory variable for spousal abuse, which limits our understanding as to how differences in the kind of occupation or quality of employment affect the risks of such violence. An extension of the present models that incorporate more fine-grained classifications of women's employment can offer crucial insights in this regard. Additionally, it would be worthwhile to examine the association between relative spousal occupational prestige and intimate partner violence within and across socio-economic groups. Lastly, given the drawbacks of large surveys in capturing the intricacies of couple's intimate relations and the etiology of violence, we would like to emphasize the importance of complementing quantitative studies with ethnographic research. Such exploration

can also capture the political-economic complexities of the regional context more closely and help us better understand their implications for women's experience of violence.

Violence against women has been characterized as "a global public health problem of epidemic proportions" (WHO 2013: 3). In the wake of another global public health crisis through the COVID-19 pandemic, reports suggest an increase in intimate partner violence across countries, including India. Action based on informed theory and evidence is all the more urgent at this juncture.

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TABLES

Table 1: Incidence of spousal violence against currently married and cohabiting women during the previous twelve months

Variable	Percent
Physical violence	22.54
Sexual violence	5.38
Emotional violence	10.56
Any spousal violence	26.47

Notes: Survey weight-adjusted percentages reported here.
Sample size: 41,928.

Table 2: Summary statistics of the explanatory variables and the instrumental variable

Variable	Percent	Mean	SD
EXPLANATORY VARIABLES			
Wife and Husband's Characteristics			
Wife's age (15 - 49 years):		32.71	8.07
15 – 24 years	17.90		
25 – 34 years	39.68		
35 – 49 years	42.42		
Spousal age difference (in years):		4.83	3.85
Husband's age = Wife's age	3.29		
Wife's age > Husband's age	2.22		
Husband's age > Wife's age by <= 10 years	87.72		
Husband's age > Wife's age by > 10 years	6.77		
Wife's Family history of violence:			
Her father ever beat her mother	21.69		
Husband's Family history of violence:			
His father ever beat his mother	20.97		
Wife owns assets (house and/or land, solely or jointly)	40.43		
Husband owns assets (house and/or land, solely or jointly)	80.62		
Wife's Education Status:			
No education	31.63		
Primary education	14.42		
Secondary education	43.95		
Higher education	10.00		
Husband's Education Status:			
No education	18.13		
Primary education	15.64		
Secondary education	52.22		
Higher education	14.00		
Wife's Employment Status: Employed[a]	32.01		
Husband's Employment Status: Employed	96.01		
Husband drinks alcohol	27.82		
Husband has more than one wife	1.27		
Household Characteristics			
Social identity:			
OBC	39.97		
SC	19.79		
ST	9.41		
Other	18.21		
Muslim	12.62		

Household wealth category:			
Poorest	16.32		
Poorer	19.29		
Medium	20.85		
Wealthier	21.52		
Wealthiest	22.02		
Region:			
Rural	65.16		
Urban	34.84		
Number of couple's children living at home		1.97	1.29
Number of other HH members:			
2	47.62		
3 to 5	36.70		
6 or more	15.68		
INSTRUMENTAL VARIABLE			
Women's work participation rate per cluster		31.94	28.61

Notes: [a] denotes the explanatory variable that is of primary interest for our analysis.

Most of the explanatory variables are categorical variables, so we report their survey weight-adjusted percentages. For the variables that are quantitative (viz., number of couple's children residing with them and the instrumental variable), we report survey weight-adjusted mean and standard deviation. For wife's age and spousal age difference, we report percentages as well as mean and standard deviation, but we treat them as categorical variables (with 4 and 5 categories, respectively).

Our regression analyses also control for the state where a household is located. However, we do not present the summary statistics for states in the interest of space.

Sample size: 41,928.

Table 3: Estimated marginal effect of women's employment status on spousal violence

Variable	Logistic[a]	2SRI[b]
Main Explanatory Variable		
Wife's Employment Status: Employed	0.028*** (0.007)	0.035*** (0.005)
Control Variables		
Wife's age (15 – 49 years):		
15 – 24 years	ref	ref
25 – 34 years	0.002 (0.010)	-0.017*** (0.007)
35 – 49 years	-0.017* (0.010)	-0.037*** (0.008)
Spousal age difference (in years):		
Husband's age = Wife's age	ref	ref
Wife's age > Husband's age	0.043* (0.024)	0.030* (0.016)
Husband's age > Wife's age by <= 10 years	-0.005 (0.016)	-0.005 (0.010)
Husband's age > Wife's age by > 10 years	-0.004 (0.022)	-0.010 (0.013)
Wife's Family history of violence:		
Her father ever beat her mother	0.195*** (0.009)	0.192*** (0.006)
Husband's Family history of violence:		
His father ever beat his mother	0.044*** (0.008)	0.038*** (0.005)
Wife owns assets (house and/or land, solely or jointly)	0.018*** (0.007)	0.011*** (0.004)
Husband owns assets (house and/or land, solely or jointly)	-0.007 (0.009)	-0.011** (0.005)
Wife's Education Status:		
No education	ref	ref
Primary education	-0.005 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.006)
Secondary education	-0.031*** (0.009)	-0.023*** (0.006)
Higher education	-0.089*** (0.015)	-0.079*** (0.010)
Husband's Education Status:		
No education	ref	ref
Primary education	0.007 (0.010)	0.007 (0.007)
Secondary education	-0.009 (0.009)	-0.009* (0.006)
Higher education	-0.036** (0.014)	-0.031*** (0.009)
Husband's Employment Status: Employed	0.005 (0.016)	0.009 (0.010)
Husband drinks alcohol	0.175*** (0.009)	0.171*** (0.005)
Husband has more than one wife	0.097*** (0.028)	0.072*** (0.018)
Social identity:		
OBC	ref	ref
SC	-0.002 (0.009)	0.007 (0.005)
ST	-0.019* (0.011)	-0.020*** (0.007)
Other	-0.009 (0.010)	-0.001 (0.006)
Muslim	0.029** (0.012)	0.035*** (0.008)

Household wealth category:		
Poorest	ref	ref
Poorer	-0.003 (0.010)	-0.012* (0.006)
Middle	-0.036*** (0.012)	-0.036*** (0.007)
Wealthier	-0.068*** (0.013)	-0.057*** (0.008)
Wealthiest	-0.095*** (0.015)	-0.087*** (0.009)
Region:		
Rural	ref	ref
Urban	0.006 (0.009)	0.013** (0.005)
Number of couple's children living at home	0.014*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.002)
Number of other HH members:		
2	ref	ref
3 to 5	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.010** (0.004)
6 or more	-0.003 (0.011)	-0.019** (0.008)
Number of observations	42,606	42,493
Instrumental Variable (IV)		
First-stage estimate for the IV		0.004*** (0.000)
First-stage F-test for the IV		699.14***

Notes: [a] Standard errors in parentheses.

[b] Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses.

***, **, and * denote statistical significance at 1, 5, and 10 percent levels, respectively.

We also control for the state where a household is located, but do not present the estimated marginal effect of states in the interest of space.

Table 4: 2SRI - Estimated marginal effect of women's employment status on spousal violence across economic groups

Explanatory Variable (Wife employed) ↓	**Poorest**	**Poorer**	**Medium**	**Wealthier**	**Wealthiest**
Marginal effect (S.E.[a])	0.049*** (0.012)	0.045*** (0.011)	0.037*** (0.010)	0.036*** (0.011)	0.004 (0.009)
Number of observations	7,821	8,847	8,928	8,640	8,155
First-stage estimate for the IV (S.E.)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.003*** (0.000)	0.003*** (0.000)
First-stage F-test for the IV	269.86***	199.43***	186.51***	128.46***	77.44***

Notes: [a] Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses.

***, **, and * denote statistical significance at 1, 5, and 10 percent levels, respectively.

Table 5: 2SRI - Estimated marginal effect of women's employment status on spousal violence across socio-religious groups

Explanatory Variable (Wife employed) ↓	**Muslim**	**SC**	**ST**	**OBC**	**Other**
Marginal effect (S.E.[a])	0.057*** (0.015)	0.049*** (0.011)	0.035*** (0.010)	0.025*** (0.008)	0.029*** (0.010)
Number of observations	5,170	7,498	7,479	15,201	7,017
First-stage estimate for the IV (S.E.)	0.003*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.003*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)
First-stage F-test for the IV	73.88***	162.52***	139.26***	261.70***	126.15***

Notes: [a] Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses.

***, **, and * denote statistical significance at 1, 5, and 10 percent levels, respectively.

Table 6: Share of employed and unemployed women with intensive and not-so-intensive care burden reporting spousal violence across economic groups (in %)

Household wealth category (1)	With intensive care burden		With not-so-intensive care burden	
	Employed women (2)	Non-employed women (3)	Employed women (4)	Non-employed women (5)
Poorest	42.72	35.54	40.35	34.87
Poorer	44.62	31.66	36.76	29.13
Middle	38.17	26.50	32.55	25.83
Wealthier	33.04	24.59	27.64	20.37
Wealthiest	17.14	15.75	15.97	14.66
All	40.99	29.75	31.28	23.07

Table 7: Share of employed and unemployed women with intensive and not-so-intensive care burden reporting spousal violence across socio-religious groups (in %)

Household social identity (1)	With intensive care burden		With not-so-intensive care burden	
	Employed women (2)	Non-employed women (3)	Employed women (4)	Non-employed women (5)
Muslim	45.56	32.32	30.16	22.30
SC	40.34	29.24	35.61	28.26
ST	40.54	29.12	34.58	23.01
OBC	41.65	30.47	32.17	25.18
Other	38.26	27.09	20.03	15.24
All	40.99	29.75	31.28	23.07

FIGURES

Figure 1: Share of employed and non-employed women across economic groups (in %)

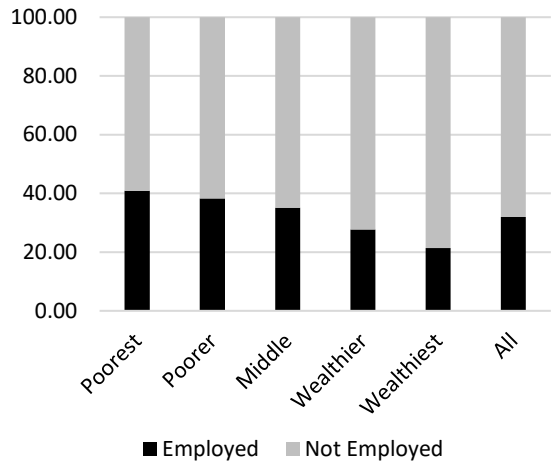


Figure 2: Share of employed and non-employed women across socio-religious groups (in %)

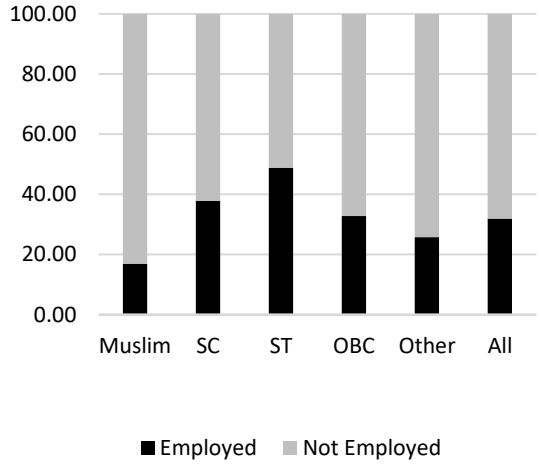


Figure 3: Share of employed women with intensive care burden across economic groups (in %)

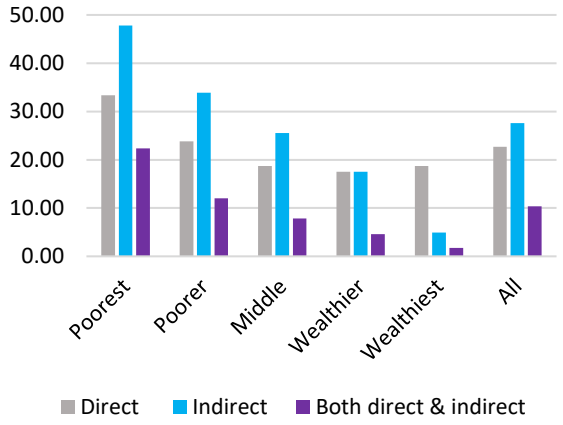
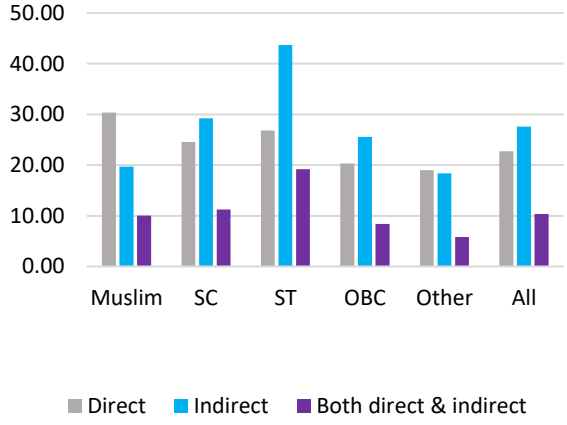


Figure 4: Share of employed women with intensive care burden across socio-religious groups (in %)



APPENDIX

Figure A1: Distribution of employed women as per the kind of work they were engaged in across economic groups (in %)

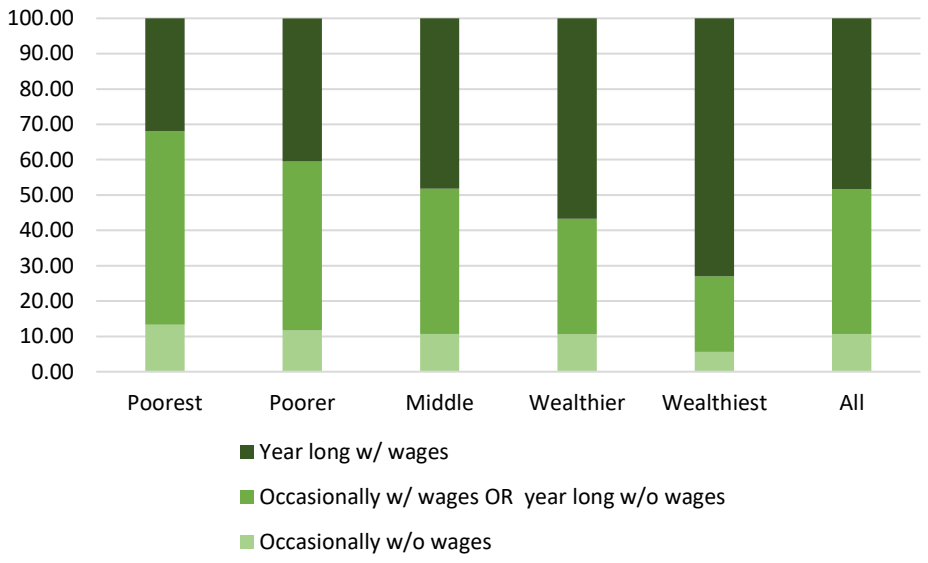
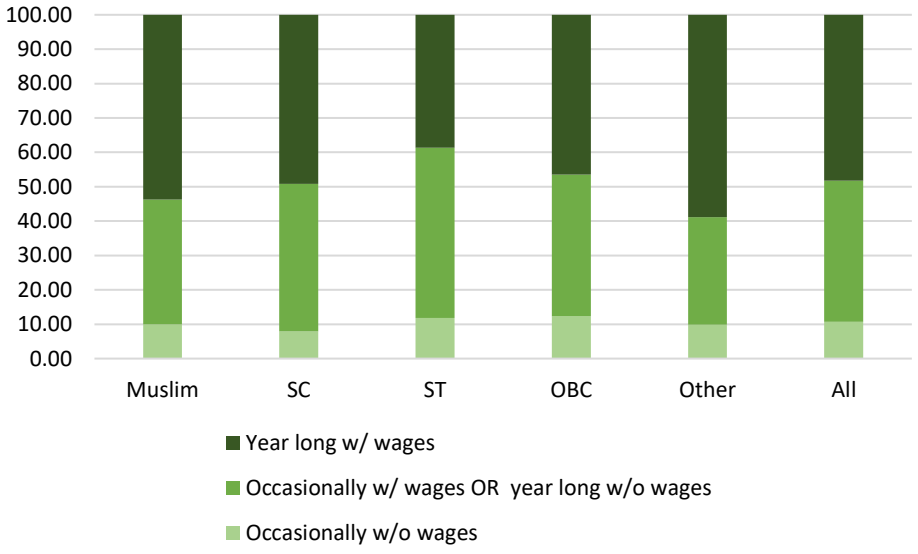



Figure A2: Distribution of employed women as per the kind of work they were engaged in across socio-religious groups (in %)