

# Impact Of Women Empowerment On Attitudes Towards Intimate Partner Violence

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In any household, couples compete for decision making power. Women may often come out as ‘losers’ with lower or no decision making power. Male partners may use violence as an unfair advantage to reduce the bargaining power of women by instilling fear in them, so that the women do not compete for decision making power.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is often an under reported phenomena, particularly in patriarchal societies where women are more likely to experience it. IPV has both physical as well as psychological damages. It has been linked to poor health outcomes, post-traumatic stress, depression, self-esteem and self-image issues. Victims may often be led to feel they either deserve it or that the nature of its occurrence is trivial. Victims of IPV might even justify it based on reasons given to them by their abusers, leading them to accept the cycle of abuse for future generations. Policy makers often focus on empowering women to reduce their vulnerability in society. But what exactly is empowerment?

In 2015, the 5<sup>th</sup> goal of the Sustainable Development Goals highlights the need to ‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.’ In its true sense, women empowerment means the ability of women to make choices for themselves. In patriarchal societies, the decision for education or labour force participation of women may be taken by men, hence higher levels of both do not necessarily guarantee higher levels of choice or empowerment for women. Unfortunately, these variables are often used to gauge the empowerment level of women and policy makers focus on these. While they are important, we feel they are woefully inadequate. This is portrayed by the fact that IPV exists in all socioeconomic groups, though with differing degrees. To bridge this gap, we construct a novel index using the Pakistan Demographic and Health Surveys 2012-2013 which focuses primarily on the ability of women to make choices and use this as a measure of empowerment. We then use this index to explain the attitudes of women towards IPV. We estimate whether an increased degree of empowerment in women makes it less likely for them to accept IPV.

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