

The relationship between economic engagement and violence: current knowledge

Economic engagement (income generation) has a complex and often thorny relationship with VAW. Women's experiences of violence often increase when they have jobs because they face sexual discrimination, intimidation and violence at the workplace, as well as in public spaces during their commute. For some women, the violence experienced at home may also increase due to male backlash, discussed further below. Current research results are highly conflictive, however, serving to underscore the need for context-specific understandings gained through standardised methods. Although not related directly to our research, it is worth noting here that VAW is also linked to inheritance rights to property and maintenance - which may make little difference to their economic engagement in terms of employment as often the property may be land they have been working on or housing that they have been living in, but it does give them economic strength and is seen as threatening. Violence may be used by kin to make women forgo these rights, for instance.

Violence at work

Violence at work includes the psychological distress caused by discrimination and bullying as well as physically harmful acts. MDG3 was certainly unresponsive to this in its call for women's empowerment: the indicators proposed in 2000 to measure women's progress (one of which was women's share of non-agricultural employment) did not take into account, for example, that traditional forms of subjugation can easily be reproduced through workplace divisions, that the only jobs available to many women may be unskilled and low paid, uncovered by labour legislation (Chowdhry 1994), or that patriarchal norms tend to shape women's access to support from trade unions (Fernandes 1997). Thus, vertical segregation (in which men dominate the workplace hierarchy) means that women are concentrated in low-status jobs without decision-making power or influence, leaving them vulnerable.

Negative masculinities structure workplace culture in many contexts (Taylor 2015a). Generally speaking, men aim (either purposely or subconsciously) to conform to the masculinity norms of their culture. These norms almost always promote men's power over women and they often accept violence as a means of maintaining that power. Negative masculinities in the workplace 'are reinforced by organisational norms, the behaviour of managers and leaders, a lack of codes of conduct and workplaces dominated by men' (Taylor 2015a: 13). Taylor goes on to note that even in workplaces dominated by women (such as the Bangladeshi garment industry), male dominance of management levels means that a negative culture of masculinity is maintained.

So-called "female" job sectors also subject women to higher levels of risk. Patterns of horizontal segregation (job roles/sectors in which women dominate) ensure that women are often confined to specific sectors with higher violence exposure (e.g. domestic work, teaching, nursing) (Cruz & Klinger 2011). Domestic service is often the easiest type of work to procure, but in India, for example, it has been shown that domestic workers are frequently subjected to cruelty, violence and even sexual abuse at the hands of their employers. As an occupation, domestic work is not recognised by Indian labour laws, and thus women are left without rights to holidays, fair pay or workers' compensation. In addition, contracts with 'placement agencies' prevent workers leaving abusive households, yet they can be dismissed at any time (Barat 2004). Migrant workers, sex workers and workers in conflict areas are also unlikely to report violence for fear of losing their incomes (Cruz & Klinger 2011).

The 'world of work' (Cruz & Klinger 2011) also encompasses women's experiences on their way to and from work, and therefore incorporates the harassment women face in public spaces, including on public

transport. The ILO Pakistan Country Office has had to make 'decent transport for working women' a priority (ILO 2011), and a recent news article about Pakistan reports:

'Even with more modern transportation networks like the metro in place, the harassment women face is still an unsolved part of the problem – almost all have been groped, rubbed against, gotten stare-downs, have been subjected to sexual innuendos and overall manhandling during rush hours' (Sarwari 2015: n.p.).

Another article (Reuters 2015) reports that Nepal has introduced women-only buses to try to make women feel safer, and women-only carriages have long been the norm on Indian inner-city trains. This is a problem throughout the developed and developing world (Graham 2015) – Jeremy Corbyn's discussion of women-only carriages is a recent case in point. Of course, such measures, while they may improve women's immediate situation, do not address the underlying problem that leads men to abuse women in the first place.

Violence at home

Violence in the world of work therefore needs more critical attention, but this does not detract from the fact that intimate partner violence (IPV) **is the most common form of VAW. Again, economic engagement is not necessarily empowering (so is not useful in challenging IPV) unless it is part of a holistic approach that addresses discriminatory cultural beliefs and practices.** As critics of the WID movement explained many years ago, simple engagement in the labour market does not automatically result in women's increased status in the society or household.

In fact, the transgression of traditional gender norms (e.g. through employment and earning) may actually lead to increased oppression at home: to violent 'backlash' that seeks to redress the power balance. **Relative resource theory suggests that men may be more likely to use violence as a control mechanism when women start to acquire economic bargaining power.**¹ Thus, this theory suggests an inverse relationship between men's economic resources and VAW (Goode 1971), and even more importantly, an inverse relationship between spousal economic disparities and IPV (the greater the difference between a husband and wife's material resources, in other words, the greater the chance of IPV) (McCloskey, 1996; Macmillan and Gartner, 1999. In India, for example, one study finds that 'where wives are better employed than their husbands, physical violence is higher' (Panda & Agarwal 2005: 834), and another highlights the 'frustrations that men felt at their inability to fulfil the socially expected sole breadwinner role...[and] the frustration felt by many men was magnified when they perceived women to be 'getting ahead' or doing well' (Neville 2014: 16).

As Jewkes (2002) notes, moreover, **a consistent cross-cultural indicator for VAW is the contravention of local gender norms**, and the failure to maintain cultural expectations of masculinity/femininity. Naturally, what constitute gender norms differs according to cultural setting, and so risk factors will also vary (Kabeer 2014). In cultures where men are expected to be the primary or sole breadwinners women's increased earning capacity can be a significant risk factor, especially in cultures that also traditionally value male physical dominance. Therefore, when women earn a substantial percentage of household income in cultures that define masculinity in terms of economic/physical dominance, men

¹ Such as in property rights - cultural contexts of extended family and rights vis-à-vis natal family changing, a change resisted with violence if 'honeyed' words do not succeed in persuading a woman to give up her land rights.

are more likely to use violence as an adjustive response to their perceived loss of masculinity.

Unlike traditional economic theories, therefore, which focus singularly on material resources, the concept of gender deviance neutralisation submits that in cultures where women's economic power is considered threatening to masculinity, traditional patriarchal behaviours (including VAW) are intensified. VAW need not be limited to IPV in this context; when gender roles are challenged, **'gender neutralisation' takes place in the public institutional sphere as well**. In the US, this has manifested in attempts to control women's reproductive rights through public harassment and lobbying, for example (Faludi 1990).

This cultural perspective may help to explain the vastly inconsistent findings of studies that examine the relationship between women's economic engagement and VAW. Vyas & Watts (2009) conducted a survey of these studies; the following summary, which highlights these inconsistencies, is taken from their review:

- No significant associations with women's earning and physical violence found in Haiti, Zambia or Cambodia (Kishor & Johnson 2004) or in the Philippines (Hindin & Adair 2002)
- No association of violence with a woman's level of monthly income in India (Rao 1997)
- No association with violence and women's employment in the Ukraine (Dude 2007)
- No association with women's employment and sexual violence in Lesotho (Brown et al 2006).
- Women's economic earnings associated with higher violence in India, rural Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua (Kishor & Johnson 2004; Naved & Persson 2005)
- In Turkey, housewives experience less violence than other women (Kokacic & Dogan 2006)
- Women's employment associated with lower violence in Albania (Burazeri et al 2005)
- Comparing the violence experienced by women who are paid cash to that experienced by unemployed women: lower for women paid cash in Egypt (Kishor & Johnson 2004), but higher in India, Peru and Iran (Kishor & Johnson 2004, Flake 2005).
- Regular employment associated with reduced violence in India, but not irregular/seasonal work – perhaps because most irregular work is done by the poor? (Panda & Agarwal 2005)
- Microcredit membership associated with lower violence in rural Bangladesh (Schuler et al 2003)
- Microcredit membership of two years or less associated with higher violence in some sites in rural Bangladesh, no association in others (Koenig et al 2003; Naved & Persson 2005)
- Microcredit membership associated with higher violence in one urban Bangladeshi site (Naved & Persson 2005)

The brief outline of results above (Vyas & Watts 2009) suggests that culture may play a role in forming the WEE-VAW relationship, but it must be noted that there are also disparities between studies conducted within one country. In India and Bangladesh, certainly, some studies have found a strong link between women's employment and increased VAW, whereas others have found no link at all. Methodologies alone cannot explain this, as some studies conducted research in several sites in one country with different outcomes. This draws important attention to the multifaceted nature of violence (Bott et al. 2005, WHO 2005); to the complex interactions taking place between different elements of what is often referred to as 'the social ecology.' Here, **gender norms intersect with other issues, including further social divisions, life histories, legal frameworks, religious institutions/ideology, local economic structures, marriage patterns, political and ideological mobilisations, state and corporate practices and so on, creating varied experiences of violence within countries and cultures**. We see this reflected in studies such as Heath (2012), which finds a positive correlation between work and domestic violence in peri-urban Dhaka, but only among women with less education or a younger age at first marriage.

Successful interventions are those that are tailored and based on rigorous analysis of the particular factors affecting violence against women and girls in a given context. These factors include the setting (conflict, humanitarian or more stable situations), the level at which the violence occurs (such as within an intimate relationship or perpetrated by the state), the form of violence (examining type and perpetrator), and the population affected by the violence (such as migrant workers, widows, lesbian women, adolescent girls, women involved in the sex industry, disabled women, displaced women, women living with HIV, etc.) (DFID 2012: 5-6).

This research is focused clearly on filling these gaps in knowledge with obvious impact for new programmes that tackle VAW through women's employment in more far reaching ways. It will also **document evidence of good practice** which may be found in the private sector as businesses acknowledge their responsibilities to create a safe and productive environment for their work forces. The **sharing of policy and practice between the public and private sectors** will be crucial in the quest to end VAW and this study will support this.

What can economic empowerment programmes do to address VAW?

The answer to this depends very much on local context – on the levels and forms of violence that women are exposed to, and on the economic and social capital of the relevant companies/organisations. Later, we will seek to make appropriate recommendations based on the field research conducted in each country.

However, Taylor (2015a) offers useful principles which may guide this process. Apart from stressing the importance of context-specificity, she notes that programmes should:

- **Adopt multi-level approaches**, targeting economic opportunity at the same time as restrictive cultural norms.
- **Work with men and women to challenge negative norms**: partners, families and communities need to be involved in projects that aim to address oppressive beliefs and practices. '[violence] will stop if we become conscious and if our husbands [and brothers, fathers, uncles and friends] become conscious' (Haneef et al. 2014: 14).
- **Work with people at all levels of the workforce**: involve female employees as well as leaders, managers, union reps and male employees in women's empowerment projects
- **Use women-led participatory methods** for design and implementation of projects. Support should be offered to women's organisations, as well as other pro-women collectives.
- **Ensure interventions are age appropriate**, making certain that the needs of girls are catered to as well as those of women leaders, who are likely to be older and facing somewhat different challenges.
- **Partner with experts that can provide services and support**: many organisations do not have the skills or capacity to design gender interventions. A network of local partner organisations with VAW experience can be helpful