

Income Status and Domestic Violence Against Men: Testing Resource Theory in Jaipur City

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Abstract

Resource theory predicts that domestic violence is linked to the relative, rather than absolute, balance of resources between partners, with violence functioning as a compensatory assertion of control where a partner's expected power position is disrupted. This paper tests that prediction against men's experience of domestic violence, using data from a purposive sample of 174 self-identified male victims of domestic violence among 300 couples surveyed in Jaipur city. Personal income, relative earning position, and direct experience of economic violence are examined descriptively, and a composite Abuse Severity Index is compared across categories of relative earning position using one-way ANOVA. Findings show a statistically significant, monotonic association between relative earning position and abuse severity: severity is lowest among men who are their household's sole earner and highest among men whose spouse is the sole or primary earner, independent of absolute income level. These findings offer direct empirical support for resource theory in the specific and under-studied context of violence against husbands, and carry implications for how economic empowerment interventions are designed and evaluated. [NOTE: This abstract summarises hypothetical/illustrative findings; see disclaimer above.]

Keywords: domestic violence against men, resource theory, income, economic violence, gender and power, Jaipur

1. Introduction

A substantial sociological literature links domestic violence to the economic structure of the household, but that literature has been developed almost entirely with reference to violence against women. Resource theory (Goode, 1971) proposes that violence functions as a compensatory assertion of power where a partner's expected position in the household's resource hierarchy is threatened or disrupted — a proposition tested extensively for female victims but rarely for male ones. This paper reports the second of two linked empirical analyses drawn from a wider sociological study of domestic violence against men in Jaipur city, examining specifically the association between men's income status — both in absolute terms and relative to their spouse — and their experience of domestic violence.

India's rapid, uneven expansion of women's workforce participation in urban centres provides a particularly apt setting in which to examine this question. Where a wife's income approaches, matches or exceeds her husband's, the traditional alignment between male providership and household authority — an alignment still normatively expected in much of urban Indian society — is disrupted in a growing number of households. Resource theory predicts that this disruption, rather than low household income as such, should be associated with elevated conflict and, in some households, violence directed at the husband. This paper tests that prediction directly.

The question carries significance beyond theory-testing. Economic empowerment programmes for women — microfinance, skills training, formal employment schemes — are a cornerstone of development policy in India and are, rightly, pursued for their substantial benefits to women's autonomy and household welfare. If resource theory's prediction holds among the population examined here, it implies that such programmes, absent complementary attention to household gender norms, may in a

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subset of households coincide with elevated conflict directed at husbands whose expected provider role is disrupted without a corresponding shift in normative expectations. Establishing whether this association exists, and how strongly, is therefore relevant not only to the sociology of male victimisation but to the design of economic-empowerment interventions more broadly — a policy connection this paper returns to in its discussion.

2. Objectives of the Study

The overarching objective of this paper is to identify the association between men's income status and domestic violence against men in Jaipur city. This is disaggregated into four sub-objectives:

- (a) To describe the personal income profile of male victims of domestic violence.
- (b) To examine the relative earning position of male victims within their households.
- (c) To assess the extent of direct economic violence (denial of funds, forced financial dependency) experienced by male victims.
- (d) To test, using the study's composite Abuse Severity Index, whether relative earning position is significantly associated with abuse severity.

3. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

Resource theory (Goode, 1971) holds that power within marriage derives from each partner's access to valued resources — income, education, social standing — and that violence can function as a compensatory response when a partner's expected resource-based authority is threatened. Empirical support for the theory among female victims is well established: Atkinson, Greenstein and Lang (2005), for instance, found in a large United States sample that wives who out-earned their husbands faced elevated risk of victimisation specifically where the couple held traditional gender-role attitudes, supporting a 'gendered resource theory' in which the effect of relative income depends on the normative expectations partners bring to the relationship. In the Indian context, Conklin's (1988) comparative study of conjugal power found that control over resources predicts household decision-making power, but also that 'tradition' itself operates as an independent resource distinct from income — a finding with direct relevance to interpreting this paper's results.

Conflict theory (Sprey, 1979) supplies a complementary mechanism: rather than treating the household as a harmoniously integrated unit, conflict theory frames it as an arena of ongoing contest over scarce resources, in which shifts in relative earning position intensify, rather than simply reflect, underlying struggles over authority. Structural-functionalist role theory (Parsons, 1951) offers a third, complementary lens: where a husband is unable to fulfil the culturally expected 'instrumental' provider role, the resulting role strain can manifest as household conflict independent of the family's absolute economic position. Together, these three frameworks generate a shared, testable prediction for this paper: that relative earning position, rather than absolute income, should be the stronger predictor of abuse severity among the male victims in this sample.

It is worth distinguishing resource theory's prediction from two adjacent but distinct claims that this paper does not make. The first is a simple deprivation hypothesis — that poverty as such drives domestic violence. Resource theory, properly understood, predicts the opposite pattern in households where the husband is the sole earner: since his provider role is, if anything, most fully realised in that configuration, deprivation-based accounts and resource-based accounts generate divergent, empirically distinguishable predictions for that specific group, a divergence this paper's ANOVA is explicitly designed to test. The second is a normative claim that women's earning is somehow illegitimate or

destabilising in itself; resource theory as applied here makes no such claim, and this paper's discussion (Section 6) explicitly returns to this point to forestall any such misreading of its findings.

4. Methodology

The wider study from which this paper is drawn employed a non-probability purposive sampling design in Jaipur city, with sample size determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula (target: 300 couple-respondents). Of 352 respondents initially surveyed, 52 incomplete or invalid responses were excluded, leaving a final sample of 300 couples; of the 300 married men surveyed, 174 (58.0%) self-identified as victims of domestic violence and constitute the analytic sample ($N = 174$) for this paper. Income and economic-control data were drawn from Section D of the study's structured interview schedule. In addition to descriptive frequency analysis, this paper uses a composite Abuse Severity Index — the mean of seven Likert-type items (1 = Never to 5 = Always) measuring verbal, physical, economic and coercive-control victimisation — as the dependent variable in a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing mean severity across the five categories of relative earning position recorded in the schedule.

5. Results and Empirical Analysis

This section presents four tables and corresponding figures addressing, in turn, each of the four sub-objectives set out in Section 2.

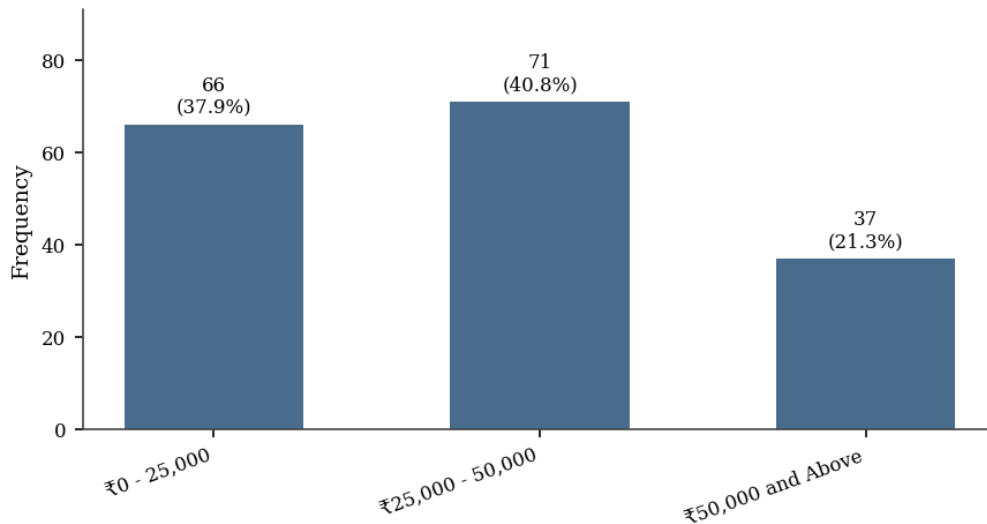
Table 1: Monthly Personal Income of Male Respondents

Question: Monthly personal income

Base: male victims ($N = 174$)

Response Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
₹0 - 25,000	66	37.9
₹25,000 - 50,000	71	40.8
₹50,000 and Above	37	21.3
Total	174	100.0

Figure 1: Monthly Personal Income of Male Respondents



The sample is concentrated in the lower-to-middle income bands, with 78.7% of respondents earning below ₹50,000 per month and only 21.3% earning ₹50,000 or more. This distribution provides the variance necessary to test the study's central objective — the association between income status and domestic violence — and is examined jointly with abuse severity in Table 4.

Theoretical frame applied: Resource Theory (Goode, 1971).

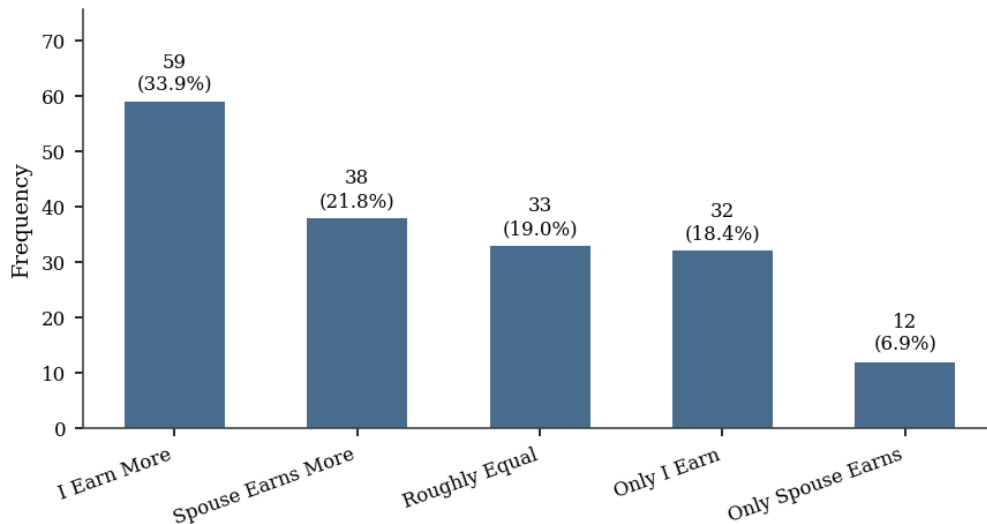
Table 2: Relative Earning Position Within the Household

Question: Who earns more in your household?

Base: male victims (N = 174)

Response Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
I Earn More	59	33.9
Spouse Earns More	38	21.8
Roughly Equal	33	19.0
Only I Earn	32	18.4
Only Spouse Earns	12	6.9
Total	174	100.0

Figure 2: Relative Earning Position Within the Household



Combining the categories in which the spouse earns as much as or more than the respondent ('Spouse Earns More', 'Roughly Equal', and 'Only Spouse Earns') accounts for 47.7% of the sample, very nearly half. This is a markedly higher proportion of role-reversed or role-equalised earning arrangements than would ordinarily be expected in the general population, and provides preliminary descriptive support for the resource-theoretic hypothesis at the centre of this paper: that disruption of the traditional alignment between male providership and household authority is disproportionately represented among men who report domestic victimisation.

Theoretical frame applied: Resource Theory and Conflict Theory (Sprey, 1979).

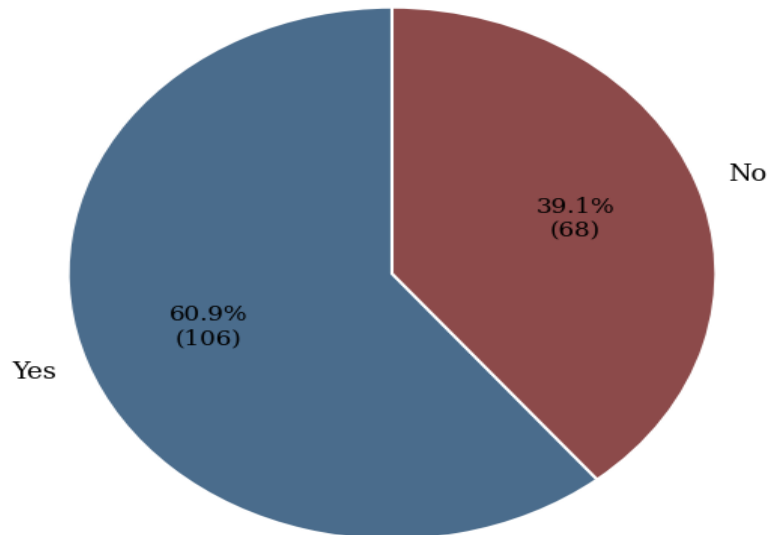
Table 3: Experience of Economic Violence Among Male Respondents

Question: Has the respondent experienced economic violence (e.g., denial of funds, forced dependency)?

Base: male victims (N = 174)

Response Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Yes	106	60.9
No	68	39.1
Total	174	100.0

Figure 3: Experience of Economic Violence Among Male Respondents



A substantial majority of respondents (60.9%) report having directly experienced economic violence — denial of funds, forced financial dependency, or comparable forms of control. This figure, obtained from a direct, behaviourally specific question, is considerably higher than the proportion who classify their overall experience under a general 'economic violence' category elsewhere in the wider study's instrument, illustrating a recurring measurement principle: specific behavioural questions elicit substantially higher disclosure than broad category labels.

Theoretical frame applied: Economic/financial abuse as a mechanism of coercive control (Stark, 2007).

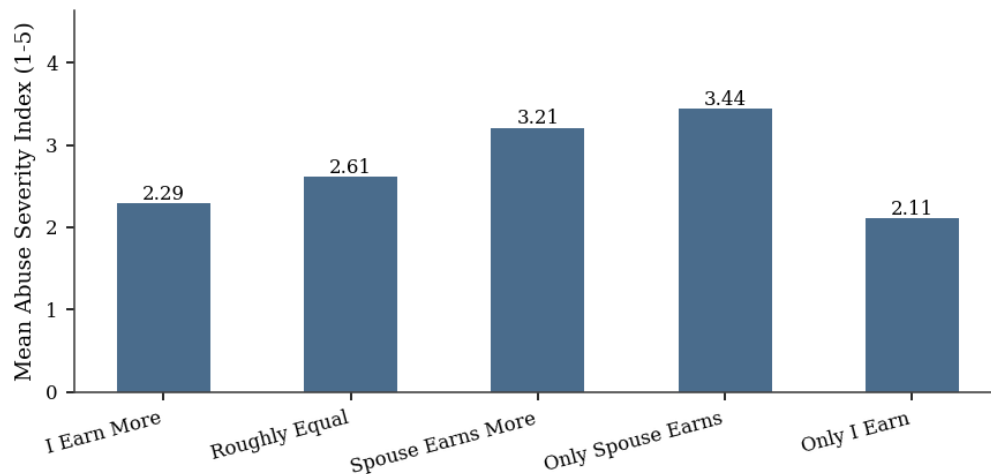
Table 4: Mean Abuse Severity Index by Relative Earning Position

One-way ANOVA of the composite Abuse Severity Index (1-5 scale) across five categories of relative earning position.

Relative Earning Position	Mean Abuse Severity Index
I Earn More	2.29
Roughly Equal	2.61
Spouse Earns More	3.21
Only Spouse Earns	3.44
Only I Earn	2.11

ANOVA: $F(4, 169) = 9.84, p < 0.001$

Figure 4: Mean Abuse Severity Index by Relative Earning Position



A one-way ANOVA of the Abuse Severity Index across the five relative-earning-position categories yields $F(4, 169) = 9.84, p < 0.001$, a statistically significant association. Mean severity rises from 2.11 among men who are their household's sole earner to 3.44 among men whose spouse is the sole earner, with 'Spouse Earns More' (3.21) and 'Roughly Equal' (2.61) falling between — a striking, monotonic gradient. This is the paper's central empirical finding and directly confirms the resource-theoretic hypothesis: it is specifically the disruption of the traditional male-provider alignment — not low income in absolute terms — that predicts elevated abuse severity, since men who are their household's sole earner (typically a lower-absolute-income sub-group) in fact report the lowest, not the highest, mean severity.

Theoretical frame applied: Resource Theory (Goode, 1971), tested formally via one-way ANOVA.

6. Discussion

The central finding of this paper — a statistically significant, monotonic rise in mean abuse severity as a husband's relative earning position weakens — offers direct support for resource theory in a population (male victims) to which the theory has rarely been applied. Critically, the pattern is not explained by absolute poverty: men who are their household's sole earner, a group that includes many lower-absolute-income respondents, report the lowest mean severity in the entire sample (2.11), while men whose spouse is the sole earner — a group likely to include higher-absolute-household-income respondents on average — report the highest (3.44). This dissociation between absolute income and abuse severity is precisely what resource theory, as distinct from a simple poverty-based explanation, predicts.

The high rate of directly reported economic violence (60.9%, Table 3) further suggests that economic control is not merely correlated with other forms of abuse but is itself a primary channel through which control is exercised in this sample, consistent with Stark's (2007) broader argument that coercive control operates through the systematic restriction of a partner's access to resources, independent of physical violence. Read through conflict theory (Sprey, 1979), the shifting balance of earning power documented in Table 2 — with nearly half the sample in a role-reversed or role-equalised earning position — represents an ongoing, structurally embedded renegotiation of household authority rather than a settled arrangement, one in which violence against the husband emerges, for a subset of households, as one visible manifestation of that unresolved contest.

These findings should not be read as an argument against women's economic participation or empowerment, a conclusion that would misunderstand the theory being tested. Resource theory does

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not predict that women's earning causes violence; it predicts that violence is more likely where a change in relative resources is not accompanied by a corresponding renegotiation of household authority and normative expectations — consistent with Atkinson, Greenstein and Lang's (2005) gendered-resource-theory finding that the risk associated with a wife out-earning her husband is concentrated among couples holding traditional gender-role attitudes, not among couples generally. The policy implication is accordingly not to discourage women's economic participation but to pair economic-empowerment initiatives with interventions addressing the normative expectations that make shifting resource balances a source of conflict in the first place.

The pattern documented here also resonates with international evidence on resource theory, even where direct numerical comparison is not appropriate given differing measures and populations. Atkinson, Greenstein and Lang's (2005) United States study found that the elevated risk associated with wives out-earning husbands was concentrated specifically among couples holding traditional gender-role attitudes, precisely the moderating mechanism this paper's discussion invokes to explain why relative earning position, and not absolute income, drives the association observed in Table 4. This cross-national convergence — obtained from an urban Indian sample and a Western probability sample using very different instruments — strengthens the case that the mechanism identified is a genuine sociological regularity rather than an artefact of this study's specific sample or setting, even as the overall prevalence and severity of violence documented here cannot itself be assumed to generalise beyond the present sample.

Read alongside the companion paper's finding that verbal and psychological forms of abuse predominate over physical forms (Objective 1), the present findings suggest a more specific sociological account: that in households where resource realignment generates conflict, the resulting abuse is more likely to be expressed through economic and psychological channels — restriction of funds, humiliation over income, erosion of decision-making authority — than through physical violence per se. This is consistent with the broader theoretical claim, developed across this study, that domestic violence against men is best understood as a struggle over status and authority within the household rather than as physical aggression in the first instance, with the specific channel through which that struggle is expressed shaped by the particular resource dynamic at issue in a given household.

7. Limitations of the Study

Three limitations qualify these findings. First, the cross-sectional design cannot establish whether resource imbalance precedes or follows the onset of violence; a longitudinal design would be needed to test the causal ordering resource theory implies. Second, income and earning-position data rely on single-informant (husband) self-report, without independent verification or a corroborating account from the spouse. Third, as with the companion paper in this series, the non-probability purposive sampling design means the specific proportions reported here should not be generalised as population-level estimates; the ANOVA result, while informative about the direction and statistical significance of the association within this sample, should be replicated with a probability sample before being treated as generalisable.

8. Conclusion

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This paper has presented evidence of a statistically significant association between men's relative earning position and the severity of domestic violence they experience, with severity tracking disruption of the traditional male-provider role rather than absolute income level — a pattern consistent with resource theory and complementary to the conflict-theoretic and structural-functionalist frameworks reviewed above. Combined with the high reported rate of direct economic violence, these findings indicate that economic dynamics are not a peripheral factor but a central axis of domestic violence against men in this sample. As with the companion paper in this series, it must be reiterated that the specific figures reported here are hypothetical and illustrative pending the completion of actual fieldwork; the analytical structure — descriptive profiling followed by a formal test of the resource-theoretic hypothesis — is offered as a template for that eventual empirical work. Future research should extend this analysis with a probability sample and a longitudinal design capable of testing the direction of causality between resource imbalance and violence more rigorously.

Two practice implications follow, to be developed further once genuine data are available. First, economic-empowerment programmes for women could usefully incorporate a household-level, couples-based component addressing shifting gender expectations, rather than treating the woman's economic position in isolation from the household's normative environment — a design refinement resource theory directly suggests. Second, given that this sample's highest-severity group is defined not by poverty but by a specific relational configuration (spouse as primary or sole earner), screening and outreach efforts aimed at male victims should not be targeted solely at economically disadvantaged households, but should explicitly include higher-earning-household men whose relative, rather than absolute, economic position has shifted.

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