Community-level Correlates of Physical Violence Against Unmarried Female Adolescents in Bangladesh

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Introduction

In Bangladesh, *violence against women and girls* is common and has serious health consequences. While the majority of research on violence against women and girls in Bangladesh has focused on intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced by married women, there is a growing recognition of the problem of violence experienced by unmarried adolescent girls .

Objectives

In this analysis, we assessed *community-level variability* in physical violence and explored the role of *community-level characteristics* in explaining this variability.

In Bangladesh, adolescents between the ages of 10 – 19 compose one-fourth of the total population, and physical punishment of adolescents is common and acceptable.
It is important to identify geographic variation in this violence and the community-level characteristics that place adolescent girls at increased risk. Once high-risk communities and community-characteristics are identified, interventions can be targeted specifically to focus on areas with the greatest need.

Data and Methods

The data for this secondary analysis were taken from a 2005 nationally representative survey of *adolescents*, both unmarried and married, between the ages of *10* and *24* living in Bangladesh. The study, which surveyed approximately 20,000 homes, was conducted in the same 361 Primary Sampling Units (PSU) as the 2003-4 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (DHS).

Analysis — **Three-level logistic regression models**

Following the survey design, in which communities were clustered within districts, we accounted for variation between districts in our analysis, although we did not include any predictors at the district level. We employed three-level logistic models predicting an adolescent's likelihood of experiencing prior-year physical violence.

Results

Table 1. Selected *Characteristics* of the Sample

Table1. Characteristics of the Sample

	Unmarried Females	Unmarried Males	Married Females
	n = 4377	n = 5205	n = 3710
Any past year physical violence			
Yes	1661 (37.9%)	2700 (51.9%)	590 (15.9%)
Missing	7 (0.2%)	8 (0.2%)	--
Age in years, mean (SD)	13.3 (2.5)	13.8 (2.8)	20.4 (2.4)
Household wealth			
Poor (lowest 40%)	1698 (38.8%)	2001 (38.4%)	1593 (42.9%)
Religion			
Muslim	3770 (86.1%)	4546 (87.3%)	3307 (89.1%)
NGO membership			
Yes	1445 (33.0%)	1820 (35.0%)	1435 (38.7%)

Photo by SFTHQ

adolescent girls violence communities women Bangladesh

Results (Cont.)

Table 2. Selected *Characteristics* of Communities

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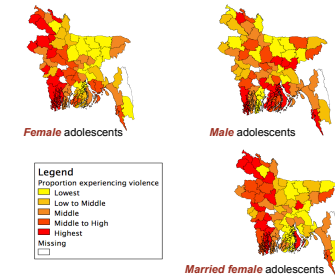|	Communities n = 361	
	Mean (SD)	Range
Any past year physical violence (%)		
Unmarried female adolescents	38.5 (22.4)	0 - 100
Unmarried male adolescents	52.0 (19.4)	0 - 100
Spousal physical violence (%) - (among married women)	14.2 (14.8)	0 - 71
% literate (adult females)	36.6 (17.7)	5 - 92
% accepting of physical punishment of adolescents	50.6 (17.5)	9 – 95
% households belonging to NGO	32.1 (16.0)	0 -78
Wealth ranking (n, %)	n	%
Poor (bottom 40%)	144	39.9%
Non-poor (top 60%)	217	60.1%
Area (n, %)		
Rural	227	76.7%
Thana sadar	13	3.6%
Pourashava	47	13.0%
Metropolitan city	24	6.6%

Table 3. Multi-level Logistic Models for any *Physical Violence* Against Adolescents

Table 3. Multilevel Logistic Models for any Physical Violence Against Adolescents in Bangladesh	Est. β (SE) Unmarried female adolescents (Model 1)	Est. β (SE) Unmarried male adolescents (Model 2)	Est. β (SE) Married female adolescents (Model 3)
	n=4370	n=5197	n=3710
Intercept	-0.69 (0.10)**	0.09 (0.08)	-2.05 (0.10)**
Community-level variables			
Community wealth (poor ref)			
Non-poor	0.25 (0.15)	0.13 (0.13)	0.09 (0.16)
% literate (female)	-0.38 (0.49)	-0.27 (0.43)	-1.14 (0.56)*
% accepting of physical punishment of adolescents	1.69 (0.39)**	0.18 (0.33)	0.56 (0.43)
% households belonging to NGO	0.69 (0.42)	0.80 (0.36)*	0.59 (0.44)
Area (rural ref)			
Urban	-0.02 (0.18)	0.06 (0.16)	-0.05 (0.20)
Individual-, family-, and household variables			
Age	-0.43 (0.02) **	-0.47 (0.02)**	0.05 (0.02)*
Religion (non-Muslim ref)			
Muslim	0.18 (0.14)	0.47 (0.13)**	0.55 (0.19)**
Household wealth (poor ref)			
Non-poor	-0.00 (0.09)	0.17 (0.08)*	-0.92 (0.11)**
NGO membership (non-membership ref)			
Household member of NGO	0.05 (0.09)	-0.12 (0.08)	0.08 (0.11)
Random effects tau (SE)			
Community level	0.53 (0.10)	0.41 (0.07)	0.32 (0.10)
District level	0.43 (0.12)	0.21 (0.07)	0.28 (0.11)

* p <0.05, **p <0.01

Results (Cont.)

Figure 1. Comparison of *Adolescents* Experiencing Violence by District

Female adolescents

Male adolescents

Married female adolescents

Legend
Proportion experiencing violence
Lowest
Low to Middle
Middle
Middle to High
Highest
Missing

Conclusions

These findings highlight the importance of community context, particularly *community norms accepting of violence*, in regards to physical violence against women and girls. Due to overall high levels of physical violence against unmarried adolescent girls, and variation in these levels across communities, it is important to find and target communities in which adolescent girls are at higher risk.

Acknowledgements