

## CHAPTER 3

### BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Women's demographic and health-seeking behaviour is associated with several characteristics including their age, marital status, religion, and caste. Modernizing influences such as education and exposure to mass media are also important catalysts for demographic and socioeconomic change. In addition, women's status and autonomy are critical in promoting change in reproductive attitudes and behaviour, especially in patriarchal societies (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Das Gupta, 1987; Jeffery and Basu, 1996). The National Population Policy, 2000, of the Government of India identifies the low status of women in India, typified by factors such as discrimination against the girl child and female adolescents, early age at marriage, and high rates of maternal mortality, as an important barrier to the achievement of population and maternal and child welfare goals (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2000).

This chapter presents a profile of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of ever-married women age 15–49 who were identified by the NFHS-2 Household Questionnaire as eligible respondents for the Woman's Questionnaire. In addition, data are presented on the extent to which women in India enjoy autonomy as measured by their participation in household decisionmaking, freedom of movement, and access to money they can spend as they wish. Finally, data on women's attitudes towards the acceptance of spousal violence under specific circumstances and their experience of physical violence are discussed.

#### 3.1 Background Characteristics

Table 3.1 presents the percentage distribution of ever-married women age 15–49 by age, marital status, coresidence with husband, education, religion, caste/tribe, work status, and husband's education. In India, the proportion of respondents in five-year age groups increases from 9 percent in the age group 15–19 years to 20 percent in the age group 25–29 years, and then falls steadily to 9 percent in the age group 45–49 years. The initial increase reflects the increasing share of ever-married women in each of these age groups. The decline after age 25–29 (an age by which most women have been married) reflects the normal pyramid shape of the population's age distribution. The age distribution of rural and urban respondents is similar with the notable exception that the proportion of rural respondents who are age 15–19 (11 percent) is more than twice as high as the proportion of urban respondents in this age group (5 percent). The proportion of rural respondents age 20–24 years is also somewhat higher than the proportion of urban respondents in this age group. Thus, the average rural respondent is somewhat younger than the average urban respondent. The higher share of younger respondents, especially respondents age 15–19, among rural women than among urban women is largely a consequence of the lower age at marriage in rural areas.

Ninety-four percent of respondents are currently married, 4 percent are widowed, and 2 percent are divorced, separated, or deserted. The proportion of respondents living with their husbands is 89 percent, indicating that an overwhelming majority of all currently married women were coresident with their husbands at the time of the survey. Women in rural areas are slightly more likely than women in urban areas to be living apart from their husbands.

Table 3.1 Background characteristics of respondents

Percent distribution of ever-married women age 15–49 by selected background characteristics, according to residence, India, 1998–99

Background characteristic	Residence			Number of women	
	Urban	Rural	Total	Weighted	Unweighted
<b>Age</b>					
15–19	5.1	10.6	9.2	8,182	6,962
20–24	16.2	19.2	18.4	16,389	15,787
25–29	19.8	19.9	19.9	17,745	17,941
30–34	18.3	16.4	16.9	15,094	15,612
35–39	16.6	14.0	14.7	13,089	13,603
40–44	13.4	11.2	11.8	10,521	10,839
45–49	10.6	8.7	9.2	8,179	8,455
<b>Marital status</b>					
Currently married	93.7	93.8	93.8	83,649	83,832
Widowed	4.3	4.2	4.2	3,749	3,598
Divorced	0.4	0.4	0.4	344	373
Separated	0.9	1.0	1.0	860	828
Deserted	0.7	0.7	0.7	599	568
<b>Coresidence with husband</b>					
Living with husband	90.7	88.5	89.0	79,424	79,515
Not living with husband	3.0	5.4	4.7	4,225	4,317
Not currently married	6.3	6.2	6.2	5,550	5,367
<b>Education</b>					
Illiterate	33.2	67.0	58.2	51,871	48,410
Literate, < primary school complete	5.5	6.1	5.9	5,284	5,377
Primary school complete	16.4	12.4	13.4	11,986	12,256
Middle school complete	12.2	6.8	8.2	7,328	8,300
High school complete	14.5	4.9	7.4	6,627	7,527
Higher secondary complete and above	18.3	2.8	6.8	6,092	7,317
Missing	0.0	0.0	0.0	11	12
<b>Religion</b>					
Hindu	76.0	83.8	81.7	72,903	69,234
Muslim	16.5	11.1	12.5	11,190	10,668
Christian	3.3	2.3	2.5	2,263	4,987
Sikh	1.5	1.6	1.6	1,427	2,084
Jain	0.9	0.2	0.4	331	358
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	1.5	0.5	0.8	676	922
Jewish	0.0	0.0	0.0	1	4
Zoroastrian/Parsi	0.0	0.0	0.0	8	7
Doni-polo	0.0	0.0	0.0	29	361
Sanamahi	0.0	0.0	0.0	16	142
Other	0.1	0.3	0.3	231	197
No religion	0.0	0.1	0.0	44	154
Missing	0.1	0.1	0.1	79	81
<b>Caste/tribe</b>					
Scheduled caste	14.7	19.5	18.3	16,301	15,000
Scheduled tribe	3.6	10.5	8.7	7,750	10,740
Other backward class	30.1	33.9	32.9	29,383	25,751
Other	51.1	34.9	39.1	34,904	37,062
Missing	0.5	1.1	1.0	862	646

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For India as a whole, 82 percent of all respondents are Hindu, 13 percent are Muslim, 3 percent are Christian, 2 percent are Sikh, and 1 percent are Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist. The remaining religions together account for only 1 percent of all respondents. The proportion of respondents who are Hindu is lower in urban areas (76 percent) than in rural areas (84 percent), whereas the proportion who are Muslim is higher in urban areas (17 percent) than in rural areas

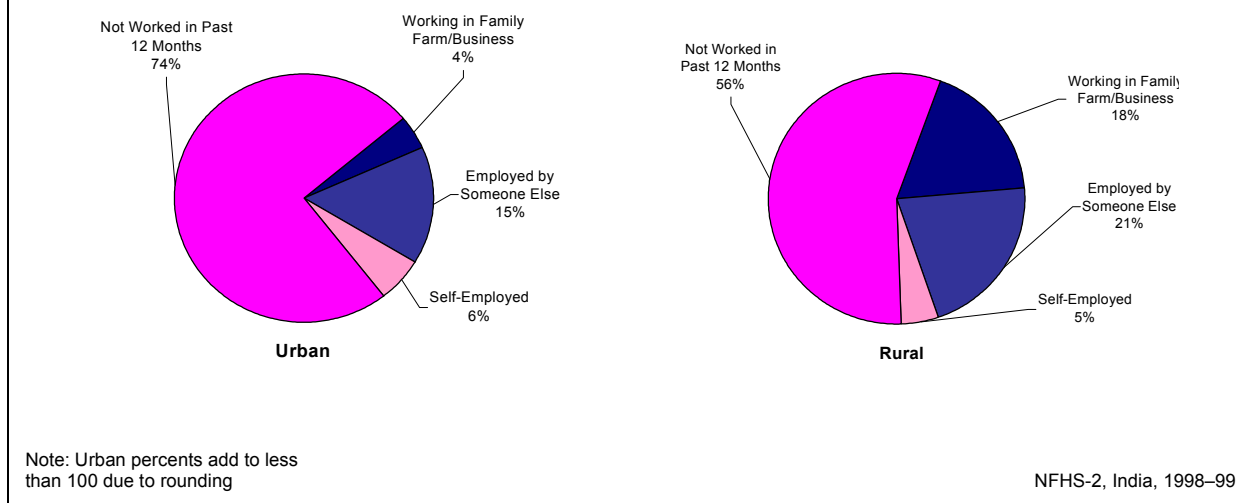
Table 3.1 Background characteristics of respondents (contd.)					
Percent distribution of ever-married women age 15–49 by selected background characteristics, according to residence, India, 1998–99					
Background characteristic	Residence			Number of women	
	Urban	Rural	Total	Weighted	Unweighted
<b>Work status</b>					
Working in family farm/business	4.4	18.0	14.4	12,849	12,987
Employed by someone else	15.3	21.3	19.7	17,571	15,449
Self-employed	5.9	4.7	5.0	4,483	4,727
Not worked in past 12 months	74.4	56.0	60.8	54,271	56,016
Missing	0.0	0.0	0.0	25	20
<b>Husband's education</b>					
Illiterate	14.9	36.4	30.8	27,449	24,953
Literate, < primary school complete	6.4	9.9	9.0	7,991	7,675
Primary school complete	14.8	16.9	16.4	14,614	14,282
Middle school complete	13.6	13.3	13.3	11,907	12,815
High school complete	19.4	12.8	14.5	12,936	14,039
Higher secondary complete and above	30.6	10.4	15.7	14,037	15,183
Don't know/missing	0.3	0.3	0.3	266	252
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	NA	NA
<b>Number of women</b>					
Weighted	23,370	65,829	89,199	89,199	NA
Unweighted	27,862	61,337	89,199	NA	89,199
NA: Not applicable					

(11 percent). Also, a higher proportion of urban respondents than rural respondents are Christian, Jain, or Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist. One-third of all respondents belong to other backward classes, about one-fifth (18 percent) belong to scheduled castes, and about one-tenth (9 percent) belong to scheduled tribes. The largest proportion (39 percent), however, are respondents who do not belong to any scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, or other backward class, and this proportion is much higher in urban areas (51 percent) than in rural areas (35 percent). Women belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, or other backward classes constitute a higher proportion of rural than urban respondents.

The educational levels of respondents and their husbands have an important influence on demographic and health-seeking behaviour. Fifty-eight percent of ever-married women age 15–49 in India are illiterate, down from 63 percent at the time of NFHS-1. This decline is due to declines in illiteracy for both rural and urban women. Between NFHS-1 and NFHS-2, the proportion illiterate declined from 72 percent to 67 percent in rural areas and from 37 percent to 33 percent in urban areas. Notably, however, the urban-rural difference in illiteracy remains high. Only 14 percent of all respondents have completed at least high school, slightly higher than at the time of NFHS-1 when this proportion was 11 percent. Thirty-three percent of urban respondents have attained this educational level compared with 8 percent of rural respondents. Among respondents who are literate, the largest proportion are those who have completed primary school (but not middle school). Sixteen percent of women in urban areas have completed primary school (but not middle school) compared with 12 percent in rural areas.

Thirty-one percent of respondents have illiterate husbands, down from 35 percent in NFHS-1. The proportion of respondents with illiterate husbands is more than twice as high in rural areas (36 percent) as in urban areas (15 percent). In both rural and urban areas, the

**Figure 3.1**  
**Employment Status of Women by Residence**



proportion of women with illiterate husbands has declined since NFHS-1 (when the percentages were 41 and 17 in rural and urban areas, respectively). At the other educational extreme, 30 percent of women have husbands who have completed at least high school (up from 27 percent in NFHS-1), and the percentage in urban areas (50 percent) is more than twice that in rural areas (23 percent). By contrast, there are only small differences by residence in the proportion of women with husbands who have completed primary or middle school.

Sixty-one percent of respondents in India did not participate in work other than their regular housework during the 12 months preceding the NFHS-2 survey. More than half (56 percent) of rural respondents and almost three-quarters (74 percent) of urban respondents fall into this category. The highest proportions of working women in both urban and rural areas were employed by someone else (21 percent of all rural women and 15 percent of all urban women). Eighteen percent of rural women worked on their own family farm or in a family business compared with only 4 percent of urban women (Figure 3.1). The proportion of women who were self-employed is about the same in rural and urban areas (5-6 percent).

### 3.2 Educational Level

Table 3.2 presents the percent distribution of ever-married women age 15-49 by the highest level of education attained, according to age, religion, caste/tribe, and husband's education. The educational distribution of women in different age groups illustrates the progress in the spread of education over a period of about three decades. Illiteracy declines with declining age from 65 percent for women age 45-49 to 52 percent for women age 20-24, but rises to 59 percent for women age 15-19 (undoubtedly because illiterate women are more likely than literate women to marry at a young age). Thus, even though illiteracy is declining, more than half of even the youngest cohorts of ever-married women continue to be illiterate. At the other end of the educational spectrum, the proportion of respondents who have completed at least high school, although still very low, is almost 50 percent higher for women age 20-24 (17 percent) than for

Table 3.2 Respondent's level of education by background characteristics

Percent distribution of ever-married women age 15–49 by highest level of education attained, according to selected background characteristics, India, 1998–99

Background characteristic	Respondent's level of education						Missing	Total percent	Number of women
	Illiterate	Literate, < primary school complete	Primary school complete	Middle school complete	High school complete	Higher secondary complete and above			
<b>Age</b>									
15–19	59.0	6.1	16.8	11.1	5.2	1.8	0.0	100.0	8,182
20–24	52.1	5.3	14.0	11.6	9.3	7.7	0.0	100.0	16,389
25–29	55.2	5.3	13.0	8.8	8.4	9.3	0.0	100.0	17,745
30–34	58.1	5.7	13.3	7.5	7.3	8.1	0.0	100.0	15,094
35–39	60.9	6.3	13.1	6.3	6.8	6.6	0.0	100.0	13,089
40–44	62.8	6.8	12.6	5.6	6.5	5.7	0.0	100.0	10,521
45–49	65.4	7.1	11.7	5.1	6.2	4.5	0.0	100.0	8,179
<b>Religion</b>									
Hindu	59.3	5.4	13.0	8.3	7.2	6.8	0.0	100.0	72,903
Muslim	60.5	9.5	14.8	6.1	5.6	3.5	0.1	100.0	11,190
Christian	32.9	7.3	15.4	13.1	14.6	16.7	0.0	100.0	2,263
Sikh	38.9	3.0	18.1	9.8	16.4	13.8	0.0	100.0	1,427
Jain	6.8	2.5	22.6	14.3	23.4	30.4	0.0	100.0	331
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	44.7	10.8	14.6	13.2	8.7	7.9	0.0	100.0	676
Other	70.3	6.2	8.5	8.8	4.0	2.1	0.0	100.0	285
No religion	51.2	17.7	5.3	12.3	5.5	8.0	0.0	100.0	44
<b>Caste/tribe</b>									
Scheduled caste	73.0	5.1	9.8	6.2	3.6	2.4	0.0	100.0	16,301
Scheduled tribe	79.0	5.3	7.1	4.7	2.2	1.6	0.0	100.0	7,750
Other backward class	60.9	5.3	13.8	8.3	6.9	4.8	0.0	100.0	29,383
Other	43.8	7.0	16.3	10.0	10.9	11.9	0.0	100.0	34,904
<b>Husband's education</b>									
Illiterate	90.0	3.4	4.8	1.3	0.4	0.1	0.0	100.0	27,449
Literate, < primary school complete	70.0	14.0	10.6	3.5	1.6	0.3	0.1	100.0	7,991
Primary school complete	60.7	8.5	20.2	6.4	3.5	0.8	0.0	100.0	14,614
Middle school complete	48.1	8.0	21.2	14.7	6.2	1.9	0.0	100.0	11,907
High school complete	34.9	4.9	19.8	16.1	17.9	6.3	0.0	100.0	12,936
Higher secondary complete and above	16.2	2.7	12.6	13.7	20.0	34.7	0.0	100.0	14,037
Total	58.2	5.9	13.4	8.2	7.4	6.8	0.0	100.0	89,199

Note: Total includes 79, 862, and 266 women with missing information on religion, caste/tribe, and husband's education, respectively, who are not shown separately.

women age 40–49 (11–12 percent). The proportions of respondents who have completed primary school or middle school also tend to increase with decreasing age.

A similar proportion of Hindu (59 percent) and Muslim (61 percent) women are illiterate but illiteracy is very low among Jain women (only 7 percent). Jain women are also much more likely to have completed at least high school (54 percent) than other women. Christian and Sikh women also have substantially higher literacy and educational attainment than Hindu and Muslim women. Women's educational attainment varies widely by their caste/tribe. While 44 percent of women not belonging to any scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, or other backward class are illiterate, much larger proportions are illiterate among women belonging to scheduled tribes (79 percent), scheduled castes (73 percent), and other backward classes (61 percent). Scheduled-

tribe women, followed by scheduled-caste women, are less likely than other women to have completed primary school, middle school, or high school.

Ninety percent of women with illiterate husbands are themselves illiterate. Notably, 35 percent of women whose husbands have completed high school (but not higher secondary school) and 16 percent of women whose husbands have completed higher secondary school are illiterate. These results show that husbands at each level of education are more likely to have wives with a lower level of education than an equal or a higher level of education. Specifically, the proportion of women who have lower education than their husbands is 70 percent for women whose husbands are literate but have not completed primary school, 69 percent for women whose husbands have completed primary school, 77 percent for women whose husbands have completed middle school, 76 percent for women whose husbands have completed high school, and 65 percent for women whose husbands have completed higher secondary school. Among women with literate husbands, women whose husbands have completed higher secondary school are most likely to have equal or higher education than their husbands (35 percent).

Table 3.3 shows state differentials in literacy and educational attainment for ever-married women age 15–49. The literacy rate for ever-married women is highest in Mizoram (90 percent), closely followed by Kerala (87 percent), and is lowest in Bihar (23 percent), Rajasthan (25 percent), and Uttar Pradesh (30 percent). The percentage of respondents who have completed high school ranges from only 7 percent in Rajasthan to 44 percent in Delhi. Other states where the percentage of respondents who have completed high school is relatively high (30 percent or higher) are Kerala, Goa, and Punjab. States other than Rajasthan where less than 10 percent of women have completed high school are Orissa, Bihar, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam. A comparison between NFHS-1 and NFHS-2 by state shows that literacy rates of ever-married women have increased in 22 out of 23 states where comparable data are available from both surveys. The literacy rate increased most rapidly in the northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya and in the northern states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. Bihar and Rajasthan continue to have very low literacy among ever-married women; these states were the last-ranked states in India in female literacy in both NFHS-1 and NFHS-2.

### **3.3 Age at First Marriage**

Table 3.4 gives information on age at first marriage. The table shows the percentage of all women (ever-married and never-married) who first married by specified exact ages, and the median age at first marriage and first cohabitation by current age and residence. The median age at first marriage and median age at first cohabitation with husband for a cohort of women is the age by which 50 percent of the cohort marries and cohabits, respectively. The table provides evidence of a steady rise in the age at first marriage in India. The proportion married by exact age 15 falls steadily from the oldest to the youngest age group, but even more remarkable is the fact that the proportion falls from 24 percent for women age 20–24 to 14 percent for women age 15–19 who are only five years younger, on average. In rural areas, the proportion of women married by age 15 declines from 29 percent among women age 20–24 to 18 percent among women age 15–19; the corresponding decline in urban areas is from 9 percent to 5 percent. The practice of very early marriage (before age 13) has virtually disappeared in urban areas and has become quite rare in rural areas as well.

**Table 3.3 Respondent's level of education by state**

Percent distribution of ever-married women age 15–49 by highest level of education attained, according to state, India, 1998–99

State	Respondent's level of education						Missing	Total percent
	Illiterate	Literate, < primary school complete	Primary school complete	Middle school complete	High school complete	Higher secondary complete and above		
<b>India</b>	58.2	5.9	13.4	8.2	7.4	6.8	0.0	100.0
<b>North</b>								
Delhi	29.1	2.7	12.5	11.5	15.4	28.7	0.0	100.0
Haryana	55.2	2.4	14.3	8.1	10.8	9.2	0.0	100.0
Himachal Pradesh	36.3	4.3	23.6	12.6	15.6	7.6	0.0	100.0
Jammu & Kashmir	69.8	1.5	7.9	8.9	6.5	5.4	0.0	100.0
Punjab	38.8	2.9	18.3	10.5	16.8	12.7	0.0	100.0
Rajasthan	75.5	2.8	8.6	5.9	3.7	3.5	0.0	100.0
<b>Central</b>								
Madhya Pradesh	68.5	5.3	11.0	5.7	3.5	5.9	0.0	100.0
Uttar Pradesh	70.2	2.7	9.1	6.8	4.3	6.9	0.0	100.0
<b>East</b>								
Bihar	76.6	3.0	8.1	3.8	5.7	2.7	0.0	100.0
Orissa	59.5	9.6	16.5	6.9	4.4	3.1	0.0	100.0
West Bengal	50.0	14.4	14.9	10.1	5.1	5.5	0.1	100.0
<b>Northeast</b>								
Arunachal Pradesh	52.7	9.4	14.5	13.8	5.5	4.1	0.0	100.0
Assam	53.9	11.9	10.5	14.1	5.4	4.2	0.0	100.0
Manipur	42.9	7.6	9.3	17.1	8.6	14.5	0.0	100.0
Meghalaya	38.1	28.4	12.6	11.6	4.6	4.6	0.0	100.0
Mizoram	10.0	25.7	25.4	22.8	10.3	5.8	0.0	100.0
Nagaland	39.8	11.3	22.2	15.1	6.8	4.7	0.1	100.0
Sikkim	49.4	11.8	15.8	11.2	6.5	5.2	0.1	100.0
<b>West</b>								
Goa	28.6	10.9	16.3	12.5	15.4	16.3	0.0	100.0
Gujarat	50.3	6.1	14.7	8.7	9.2	11.0	0.0	100.0
Maharashtra	44.6	8.8	18.1	10.8	9.8	7.9	0.0	100.0
<b>South</b>								
Andhra Pradesh	63.8	5.2	15.4	4.8	6.8	4.0	0.0	100.0
Karnataka	55.2	4.4	14.3	6.6	11.0	8.5	0.0	100.0
Kerala	12.6	9.3	20.9	17.1	24.6	15.6	0.0	100.0
Tamil Nadu	47.5	4.5	18.7	13.4	8.2	7.6	0.0	100.0

The median age at first marriage has also risen over the past three decades. In rural areas, the median age at first marriage is more than one and one-half years higher for women age 20–24 than for women age 45–49, and in urban areas it is also more than one and one-half years higher for women age 25–29 than for women age 45–49. (The median age at first marriage could not be calculated for women age 15–19 and 20–24 in urban areas and for women age 15–19 in rural areas as more than half of the women in these age groups were not married at the time of the survey).

Despite this evidence of a rising age at marriage, the table shows that the majority of women age 20–49 in India married before they reached the legal minimum age at marriage of 18 years, as set by the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1978. Specifically, 61 percent of all women, 69 percent of rural women, and 41 percent of urban women age 20–49 married before age 18. The median age at first marriage for women age 20–49 in rural areas is only 16 years, well below

Table 3.4 Age at first marriage								
Percentage of women married by specific exact ages, median age at first marriage, and median age at first cohabitation with husband, according to current age and residence, India, 1998–99								
Current age <sup>1</sup>	Percentage ever married by exact age						Median age at first marriage	Median age at first cohabitation with husband
	13	15	18	20	22	25		
<b>URBAN</b>								
15–19	1.1	4.8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NC	NC
20–24	2.8	9.0	27.9	47.0	NA	NA	NC	NC
25–29	4.4	13.9	36.6	57.2	71.0	83.9	19.1	19.3
30–34	6.2	16.9	43.3	63.4	76.6	88.3	18.5	18.7
35–39	8.3	21.4	49.4	67.2	79.3	89.5	18.1	18.3
40–44	7.9	20.2	51.2	69.9	82.0	91.0	17.9	18.2
45–49	9.4	23.3	54.4	71.1	83.2	92.8	17.5	18.0
20–49	5.9	16.2	41.3	60.4	NA	NA	18.7	18.9
25–49	6.8	18.4	45.5	64.6	77.4	88.4	18.4	18.6
<b>RURAL</b>								
15–19	6.0	17.8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NC	NC
20–24	11.4	29.1	58.6	74.8	NA	NA	16.9	17.6
25–29	15.0	35.0	67.4	81.8	89.2	93.9	16.1	16.9
30–34	17.5	38.0	73.0	85.6	92.6	96.2	15.8	16.6
35–39	19.2	39.7	73.9	87.1	93.3	96.7	15.7	16.5
40–44	22.8	44.1	76.0	88.4	94.7	97.6	15.4	16.4
45–49	25.6	45.9	77.3	88.0	94.3	97.2	15.3	16.3
20–49	17.1	36.9	69.2	82.9	NA	NA	16.0	16.8
25–49	19.0	39.4	72.5	85.5	92.3	96.0	15.8	16.6
<b>TOTAL</b>								
15–19	4.7	14.3	NA	NA	NA	NA	NC	NC
20–24	8.9	23.5	50.0	67.1	NA	NA	18.0	18.3
25–29	12.1	29.2	58.9	74.9	84.1	91.0	16.9	17.5
30–34	14.2	31.9	64.3	79.1	87.8	93.8	16.4	17.1
35–39	15.9	34.1	66.5	81.0	89.0	94.4	16.2	16.9
40–44	18.4	37.0	68.7	83.0	91.1	95.8	16.0	16.8
45–49	20.7	39.0	70.4	82.9	91.0	95.9	15.8	16.7
20–49	13.9	30.9	61.1	76.4	NA	NA	16.7	17.4
25–49	15.4	33.3	64.6	79.4	87.9	93.7	16.4	17.0
NA: Not applicable								
NC: Not calculated because less than 50 percent of women in the age group have married or started living with their husband by the start of the five-year age group								
<sup>1</sup> The current age group includes both never-married and ever-married women.								

the legal minimum. The median age at first marriage is 2–3 years higher for urban women than for rural women in all age groups for which a comparison is possible. The difference between the median age at first marriage and the median age at first cohabitation is no more than one year among women in any age group, even in rural areas. In addition, the difference between these two medians has been decreasing over time. This suggests that *gauna* or similar cultural practices that introduce a lag between marriage and cohabitation are no longer widely observed in India.

Table 3.5 presents information on age at first marriage for women age 25–49 by state. There are considerable differences across states in the age at first marriage of women. About half of women age 25–49 married before age 15 in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan, and about four-fifths of women in these states married before reaching the legal minimum age at marriage of 18 years. By contrast, the median age at first marriage is



Table 3.5 Age at first marriage by state								
Percentage of women age 25–49 married by specific exact ages, median age at first marriage, and median age at first cohabitation with husband, according to state, India, 1998–99								
State	Percentage ever married by exact age						Median age at first marriage	Median age at first cohabitation with husband
	13	15	18	20	22	25		
<b>India</b>	15.4	33.3	64.6	79.4	87.9	93.7	16.4	17.0
<b>North</b>								
Delhi	4.7	13.3	37.6	57.7	75.5	90.3	19.0	19.3
Haryana	10.1	18.3	59.9	78.3	89.8	96.2	16.9	17.9
Himachal Pradesh	2.1	6.7	38.2	67.1	83.3	93.3	18.6	18.8
Jammu & Kashmir	6.0	17.3	47.5	64.9	78.0	88.2	18.2	18.4
Punjab	1.2	2.5	22.7	49.4	74.6	90.5	20.0	20.1
Rajasthan	30.1	47.8	81.5	91.0	96.3	98.5	15.1	16.4
<b>Central</b>								
Madhya Pradesh	30.8	52.6	78.5	87.4	92.3	95.5	14.7	16.0
Uttar Pradesh	27.7	49.7	79.6	89.9	94.7	97.3	15.0	16.3
<b>East</b>								
Bihar	23.0	51.0	83.9	93.6	96.7	97.9	14.9	16.6
Orissa	2.8	15.2	58.2	78.5	88.8	93.8	17.5	17.6
West Bengal	9.0	24.9	62.1	78.2	86.3	92.2	16.8	16.9
<b>Northeast</b>								
Arunachal Pradesh	3.7	11.1	39.7	64.0	77.7	86.4	18.7	18.8
Assam	3.4	14.1	49.1	66.4	77.4	85.9	18.1	18.2
Manipur	0.3	3.1	20.6	37.8	51.6	67.2	21.7	21.8
Meghalaya	1.1	7.0	34.8	58.0	72.5	81.7	19.1	19.3
Mizoram	0.1	0.8	13.0	32.5	50.0	68.7	22.0	22.0
Nagaland	0.6	4.2	24.4	48.2	64.1	77.9	20.1	20.2
Sikkim	2.4	9.5	35.5	51.7	65.1	78.4	19.8	19.8
<b>West</b>								
Goa	1.7	4.2	15.3	28.2	42.3	61.7	23.2	23.2
Gujarat	8.4	21.0	54.1	73.2	86.4	94.2	17.6	18.2
Maharashtra	11.3	33.5	65.1	80.4	88.2	93.9	16.4	16.7
<b>South</b>								
Andhra Pradesh	22.1	48.9	79.8	89.8	94.5	96.8	15.1	15.4
Karnataka	9.1	27.5	60.6	76.3	84.6	91.7	16.8	17.0
Kerala	0.9	5.1	27.1	48.4	64.5	82.0	20.2	20.3
Tamil Nadu	2.6	11.6	41.6	64.7	79.6	90.3	18.7	18.8

22–23 years in Goa, Mizoram, and Manipur, and 20 years in Kerala, Nagaland, Punjab, and Sikkim. Notably, however, in Kerala, Nagaland, Punjab, and Manipur at least one out of five women were already married by age 18. The difference between the median age at marriage and the median age at cohabitation with the husband is at least one year in Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana, indicating that in these states *gauna* is still followed, albeit on a limited scale. In other states, however, this practice is followed to only a negligible extent, if at all.

### 3.4 Exposure to Mass Media

In a country like India where a large majority of women are illiterate or have little formal education, informal channels such as the mass media can play an important role in bringing about modernization. In NFHS-2, women were asked questions about whether they read a newspaper or magazine, watch television, or listen to the radio at least once a week, and whether

Table 3.6 Exposure to mass media

Percentage of ever-married women age 15–49 who usually read a newspaper or magazine, watch television, or listen to the radio at least once a week, who usually visit a cinema/theatre at least once a month, or who are not regularly exposed to any of these media by selected background characteristics, India, 1998–99

Background characteristic	Exposure to mass media					Number of women
	Reads a newspaper or magazine at least once a week	Watches television at least once a week	Listens to the radio at least once a week	Visits the cinema/theatre at least once a month	Not regularly exposed to any media	
<b>Age</b>						
15–19	14.6	38.0	33.3	14.3	45.0	8,182
20–24	21.7	45.2	37.0	14.5	39.1	16,389
25–29	22.5	46.7	37.3	12.1	39.3	17,745
30–34	21.9	46.5	36.4	10.0	40.0	15,094
35–39	21.1	46.7	36.2	8.2	40.7	13,089
40–44	20.5	47.5	37.6	6.6	39.7	10,521
45–49	19.5	47.0	36.3	6.0	41.2	8,179
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	43.4	80.6	46.3	18.1	12.9	23,370
Rural	12.8	33.4	33.0	7.9	50.1	65,829
<b>Education</b>						
Illiterate	0.0	27.2	23.5	6.5	59.8	51,871
Literate, < middle school complete	29.9	59.2	47.8	11.8	21.5	17,270
Middle school complete	49.2	71.9	54.7	15.1	11.0	7,328
High school complete and above	77.0	88.1	63.7	23.0	3.5	12,719
<b>Religion</b>						
Hindu	20.2	45.4	36.4	11.2	40.9	72,903
Muslim	17.2	39.6	32.8	6.2	44.8	11,190
Christian	43.7	57.6	54.0	14.2	20.4	2,263
Sikh	30.9	75.5	34.9	5.7	19.4	1,427
Jain	69.5	88.4	48.6	15.0	7.3	331
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	32.7	67.8	42.6	14.1	23.0	676
Other	10.2	23.5	32.4	5.3	57.9	285
No religion	26.5	37.1	30.3	13.6	48.9	44
<b>Caste/tribe</b>						
Scheduled caste	11.0	36.9	31.1	10.3	48.3	16,301
Scheduled tribe	8.5	22.7	25.1	5.4	61.8	7,750
Other backward class	18.8	45.1	36.3	12.5	40.7	29,383
Other	30.2	56.1	42.0	10.5	31.0	34,904
<b>Standard of living index</b>						
Low	4.1	18.5	20.3	8.2	66.9	29,033
Medium	17.4	46.5	38.9	9.5	36.2	41,289
High	55.5	88.2	57.2	17.0	6.8	17,845
Total	20.8	45.7	36.5	10.6	40.3	89,199

Note: Total includes 11, 79, 862, and 1,032 women with missing information on education, religion, caste/tribe, and the standard of living index, respectively, who are not shown separately.

they visit the cinema or theatre at least once a month. Table 3.6 gives information on women's exposure to these forms of mass media by selected background characteristics.

In India two-fifths of women are not regularly exposed to any mass media. As expected, regular exposure to any media is much more widespread among urban women (87 percent) than among rural women (50 percent). Media exposure varies even more widely by education and standard of living. A negligible proportion (4 percent) of women who have completed at least

high school are not regularly exposed to any media compared with 60 percent of illiterate women. Sixty-seven percent of women in households with a low standard of living are not exposed to any media compared with 36 percent of women in households with a medium standard of living and 7 percent of women in households with a high standard of living. Regular exposure to media is highest for Jain women (93 percent), followed by Sikh (81 percent) and Christian (80 percent) women, and it is slightly higher for Hindu women (59 percent) than for Muslim women (55 percent). Scheduled-tribe women are much less likely (38 percent) to be regularly exposed to media than scheduled-caste women (52 percent) or women belonging to other backward classes (59 percent). More than two-thirds (69 percent) of women who do not belong to any scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, or other backward class are regularly exposed to any form of mass media. Exposure to mass media varies little by age although the youngest women (age 15–19) are somewhat less likely than older women to be regularly exposed to any media.

Among the different types of mass media, television has the greatest reach across almost all categories of women. Overall, 46 percent of respondents watch television at least once a week, 37 percent listen to the radio at least once a week, 21 percent read a newspaper or magazine at least once a week, and 11 percent visit the cinema or theatre at least once a month. The proportion of women who watch television at least once a week has increased sharply since the time of NFHS-1, when it was 32 percent. There has, however, been a decline in exposure to the radio and cinema/theatre in the six and one-half years between the two surveys. The proportion of women listening to the radio at least once a week declined from 44 percent in NFHS-1 to 37 percent in NFHS-2 and the proportion who visit the cinema or theatre at least once a month declined from 15 percent to 11 percent over the same period.

Exposure to the cinema or theatre decreases with age, whereas the youngest women are less likely than older women to be exposed to the other forms of media. Exposure to each of the different forms of media increases sharply with urban residence, education, and standard of living. Jain women are more likely than women of any other religion or no religion to be exposed to each of the different forms of media. Urban women are much more likely to watch television (81 percent) than to listen to the radio at least once a week (46 percent), whereas rural women are equally likely to be regularly exposed to television and radio (both 33 percent). Notably, women who have completed at least high school are more likely to be regularly exposed to the print media than to the radio or cinema.

Interstate variations in media exposure are presented in Table 3.7. The proportion of ever-married women age 15–49 not regularly exposed to any form of media varies from a low of 7 percent in Delhi to a high of 73 percent in Bihar. More than three-quarters of women are regularly exposed to at least one form of media in Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, and Punjab in the north, Manipur, Mizoram, and Sikkim in the northeast, Goa in the west, and all four of the southern states. By contrast, less than half of women are regularly exposed to any form of mass media in Bihar, Rajasthan, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh (Figure 3.2).

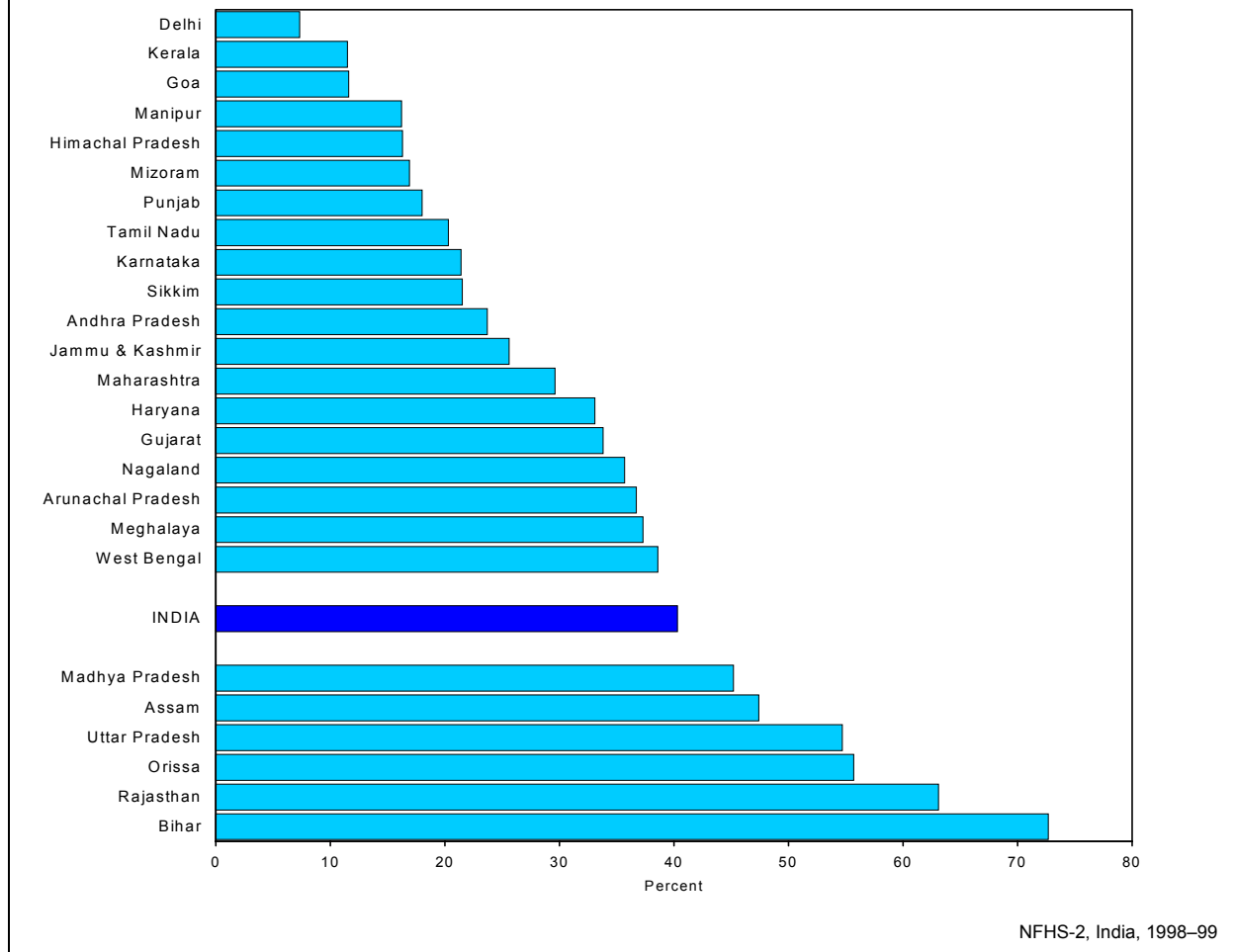
The pattern of exposure to each of the different forms of media also varies greatly by state. Regular exposure to television is highest in Delhi where 90 percent of women watch television at least once a week and lowest in Bihar where only 17 percent of women do so. The proportion listening to the radio at least once a week varies from a high of 71 percent in Kerala to 17 percent in Rajasthan. In 16 of the 25 states, women are more likely to be regularly exposed

Table 3.7 Exposure to mass media by state					
Percentage of ever-married women age 15–49 who usually read a newspaper or magazine, watch television, or listen to the radio at least once a week, who usually visit a cinema/theatre at least once a month, or who are not regularly exposed to any of these media according to state, India, 1998–99					
State	Exposure to mass media				
	Reads a newspaper or magazine at least once a week	Watches television at least once a week	Listens to the radio at least once a week	Visits the cinema/theatre at least once a month	Not regularly exposed to any media
<b>India</b>	20.8	45.7	36.5	10.6	40.3
<b>North</b>					
Delhi	50.1	90.1	54.1	14.5	7.3
Haryana	21.7	60.9	31.4	4.0	33.1
Himachal Pradesh	27.5	73.9	56.5	2.0	16.3
Jammu & Kashmir	12.7	54.6	57.6	2.5	25.6
Punjab	31.4	77.3	35.4	5.7	18.0
Rajasthan	12.4	30.2	16.7	2.9	63.1
<b>Central</b>					
Madhya Pradesh	16.4	44.5	28.2	7.4	45.2
Uttar Pradesh	12.6	32.1	29.5	3.5	54.7
<b>East</b>					
Bihar	9.3	16.8	20.3	4.4	72.7
Orissa	10.7	27.7	33.1	4.6	55.7
West Bengal	15.0	40.8	41.6	9.7	38.6
<b>Northeast</b>					
Arunachal Pradesh	10.5	47.5	41.5	10.6	36.7
Assam	16.5	28.8	40.8	5.6	47.4
Manipur	39.3	61.2	72.6	13.0	16.2
Meghalaya	31.9	39.7	39.0	4.1	37.3
Mizoram	65.1	44.1	66.7	1.1	16.9
Nagaland	26.9	46.0	44.4	1.4	35.7
Sikkim	19.1	56.1	54.0	19.0	21.5
<b>West</b>					
Goa	48.4	80.8	52.0	4.3	11.6
Gujarat	29.7	55.9	30.5	7.5	33.8
Maharashtra	32.2	61.8	36.1	8.3	29.6
<b>South</b>					
Andhra Pradesh	19.5	58.2	39.2	35.1	23.7
Karnataka	27.9	58.4	60.9	19.7	21.4
Kerala	64.2	62.4	70.9	12.1	11.5
Tamil Nadu	23.1	63.0	51.7	21.9	20.3

to television than to any other form of media. The exposure to print media, which is dependent on literacy, varies from a high of 64–65 percent in Mizoram and Kerala (the two Indian states where literacy is highest) to a low of 9 percent in Bihar and 11 percent in Arunachal Pradesh and Orissa. Cinema or theatre is most popular in Andhra Pradesh where 35 percent of women visit a cinema or theatre at least once a month and least popular in Mizoram and Nagaland where only 1 percent of women do so. Cinema or theatre is also popular in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Sikkim, where 19–22 percent of women visit the cinema/theatre regularly. The proportion of women regularly exposed to the cinema or theatre is less than the proportion exposed to each of the other forms of media in every state except Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh.

During the six and one-half years between NFHS-1 and NFHS-2, every state registered an increase in the proportion of women who watch television, with increases of 20 percentage

**Figure 3.2**  
**Percentage of Women Not Regularly Exposed to Any Mass Media by State**



points or more in Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Kerala, and Punjab . Regular exposure to radio increased in all of the northeastern states and slightly in Himachal Pradesh, but declined elsewhere. Regular visits to the cinema/theatre declined in 17 of the 23 states for which comparisons can be made and the decline was largest in the states where such visits were most common at the time of NFHS-1. The decrease was especially pronounced in Tamil Nadu where the percentage of women visiting the cinema/theatre at least once a month declined from 43 percent to 22 percent.

### 3.5 Women’s Employment

Labor force participation not only gives women an opportunity to earn income, but also exposes them to the outside world and to authority structures and networks other than kin-based ones (Dixon-Mueller, 1993). In a developing country such as India, however, where women's workforce participation is often motivated by poverty, these benefits are likely to be mediated by the social context of women's work and their total work burden (Bardhan, 1985; Desai and Jain, 1994). In addition, the empowering effects of employment for women are likely to depend on their occupation, the continuity of their workforce participation, and whether they earn and

control income. It is generally expected that women who work at a regular job, who earn money, and who perceive that their contribution is a substantial part of total family earnings are more likely to be empowered than other employed and unemployed women (Youssef, 1982; Sen, 1990; Mahmud and Johnston, 1994). The National Population Policy adopted by the Government of India in 2000 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2000) explicitly recognizes the importance of women's paid employment in achieving the goal of population stabilization in India and also specifies measures that will encourage paid employment and self-employment of women.

Table 3.8 provides information on women's employment status for ever-married women age 15–49 by residence. For the country as a whole, 39 percent of ever-married women age 15–49 were either currently employed at the time of NFHS-2 or were employed during the 12 months preceding the survey. Current employment of ever-married women increased from 32 percent in NFHS-1 to 37 percent in NFHS-2. Forty-four percent of rural respondents but only 26 percent of urban respondents worked at any time during the year preceding the survey. The majority of women who worked during the 12 months before the survey worked throughout the year in both urban areas (77 percent) and rural areas (63 percent). A large majority of urban women (89 percent) and more than half of rural women (62 percent) who worked during the year before the survey earned money for their work. Three in 10 working women in rural areas and 1 in 10 working women in urban areas were unpaid workers. Two-thirds of women who work in India work on farms. Agricultural workers (including farmers, farm workers, and women in other agricultural occupations) account for more than three-quarters (76 percent) of women who work in rural areas. In urban areas, by contrast, there is greater occupational diversity. Twenty-seven percent of urban women who work are production workers, 17 percent are professionals, 15 percent are agricultural workers, and 13 percent are in sales and service occupations.

A significant feature of women's work participation in India is their substantial contribution to family earnings. Nearly one in five (17–18 percent) urban as well as rural women who worked for money at any time in the 12 months preceding the survey report that the family is entirely dependent on their earnings. Another 30 percent in urban areas and 24 percent in rural areas report that they contribute half or more (but not all) of the total family earnings. Only 12 percent of women in urban areas and 9 percent in rural areas report that they contribute almost nothing to total family earnings.

Women who worked away from home and had a child under age three living at home were asked who took care of the child while they worked. Overall, 40 percent of the women said that they took their youngest child with them to work; this proportion was higher in urban areas (53 percent) than in rural areas (39 percent). Fifty-nine percent of women who did not take their child with them to work left the child with relatives other than their husband or older children, and 23 percent left the child with an older girl. Rural working women were more likely than urban working women to leave their child with an older girl. Less than 10 percent left the child with their husband or an older boy.

<b>Table 3.8 Employment</b>			
Percent distribution of ever-married women age 15–49 by employment characteristics, according to residence, India, 1998–99			
Employment characteristic	Urban	Rural	Total
<b>Employment status</b>			
Currently working	24.2	42.1	37.4
Worked in past 12 months (not currently working)	1.4	1.9	1.7
Not worked in past 12 months	74.4	56.0	60.8
<b>Continuity of employment<sup>1</sup></b>			
Throughout the year	76.8	63.4	65.7
Seasonally/part of the year	16.6	31.8	29.2
Once in a while	6.5	4.7	5.0
Missing	0.1	0.1	0.1
<b>Type of earning<sup>1</sup></b>			
Cash only	85.9	50.9	56.9
Cash and kind	3.0	11.5	10.0
Kind only	1.2	7.4	6.3
Not paid	9.8	30.1	26.6
Missing	0.1	0.0	0.1
<b>Occupation<sup>1</sup></b>			
Professional	17.0	2.5	5.0
Sales worker	9.2	2.4	3.6
Service worker	4.0	0.4	1.0
Production worker	27.2	8.6	11.8
Agricultural worker	15.0	76.1	65.6
Other worker	26.1	9.2	12.1
Missing	1.5	0.8	0.9
<b>Earnings contribution to total family earnings<sup>2</sup></b>			
Almost none	12.0	9.3	9.9
Less than half	41.0	48.2	46.6
About half	20.6	17.5	18.2
More than half	9.5	6.7	7.3
All	16.8	18.2	17.9
Missing	0.1	0.1	0.1
<b>Person caring for youngest child while woman works<sup>3</sup></b>			
Child usually taken to work	52.5	38.8	40.4
Husband	1.7	1.7	1.7
Older boys	2.4	4.2	4.0
Older girls	6.2	14.8	13.8
Other relatives	28.4	35.9	35.0
Neighbours/friends	1.9	2.0	2.0
Servants/hired help	2.5	0.2	0.5
Child is in school	0.6	0.1	0.2
Institutional child care	1.5	0.4	0.5
Other	1.9	1.7	1.7
Missing	0.4	0.3	0.3
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of women	23,370	65,829	89,199
Number of employed women <sup>1</sup>	5,979	28,949	34,928
Number of women earning cash	5,316	18,075	23,391
Number of women with a child under age three <sup>3</sup>	935	7,025	7,960
<sup>1</sup> For currently working women and women who have worked in the past 12 months			
<sup>2</sup> For women earning cash			
<sup>3</sup> For women who work away from home and have a child under age three who is living at home			

Table 3.9 shows interstate variations in the work status of ever-married women age 15–49. As noted above, the majority of women in India (61 percent) were not working at the time of the survey and had not worked in the 12 months preceding the survey. Twenty percent were employed by someone else, 14 percent worked on a family farm or in a family business, and 5 percent were self-employed. Significant statewise differences exist in the work patterns of ever-married women. The highest percentages of women who work are in the northeastern states of Manipur (70 percent), Nagaland (64 percent), and Arunachal Pradesh (60 percent), and lowest are in Punjab (9 percent) and Haryana (13 percent). Women’s work participation is also relatively low (25 percent or less) in Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, and Kerala. Work participation of women is relatively high in all the southern states except Kerala, all the western states, some northeastern states, and Madhya Pradesh.

The most common form of employment in the majority of states is work that is done for someone else. More than one-third of ever-married women were employed by someone else in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, and less than 10 percent were employed by someone else in Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, and all of the northern states except Delhi. Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur are the only states where working for someone else is the least important form of employment among ever-married women. Working on a family farm or in a family business is the most common type of employment in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland where it accounts for 37–38 percent of women, in Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan where it accounts for 30 percent of women, and in four other states. Self-employment is the most important form of employment in Manipur (28 percent) and more than 10 percent of women are also self-employed in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

### **3.6 Women’s Autonomy**

Education, work participation, and exposure to mass media are some of the means by which women gain status and autonomy, both important aspects of their empowerment. To measure women’s autonomy and empowerment more directly, NFHS-2 asked about women’s participation in household decisionmaking, their freedom of movement, and access to money that they can spend as they wish. Women’s autonomy is likely to have a significant impact on the demographic and health-seeking behaviour of couples by altering women’s relative control over fertility and contraceptive use, and by influencing their attitudes (for example, attitudes towards the sex composition of children) and abilities (for example, the ability to obtain health services for themselves and their children) (Sen and Batliwala, 1997).

In order to measure women’s participation in household decisionmaking, NFHS-2 asked women to report who in their households makes decisions about the following: what items to cook, obtaining health care for herself, purchasing jewellery or other major household items, and her going and staying with parents or siblings. The survey also asked women who earn money who decides how the money they earn is spent. Table 3.10 gives the percent distribution of the person (or persons) who makes each of the specified household decisions, according to residence.

As expected, ever-married women in India are most likely to participate in decisions about what to cook: 71 percent make these decisions on their own and another 14 percent make them jointly with their husbands or someone else in the household. Fifteen percent of ever-married women, however, are not involved at all in decisions regarding what to cook. About half



Table 3.9 Work status of respondents by state						
Percent distribution of ever-married women age 15–49 by work status, according to state, India, 1998–99						
State	Working in family farm/business	Employed by someone else	Self-employed	Not worked in the past 12 months	Missing	Total percent
<b>India</b>	14.4	19.7	5.0	60.8	0.0	100.0
<b>North</b>						
Delhi	3.5	13.4	3.9	79.1	0.0	100.0
Haryana	3.3	8.5	0.8	87.4	0.0	100.0
Himachal Pradesh	11.8	8.6	0.4	79.2	0.0	100.0
Jammu & Kashmir	30.1	7.8	4.6	57.6	0.0	100.0
Punjab	0.4	8.0	1.0	90.6	0.0	100.0
Rajasthan	30.3	8.9	4.4	56.5	0.0	100.0
<b>Central</b>						
Madhya Pradesh	26.2	27.4	3.6	42.8	0.0	100.0
Uttar Pradesh	12.5	7.2	3.5	76.6	0.1	100.0
<b>East</b>						
Bihar	9.1	11.6	5.7	73.6	0.0	100.0
Orissa	7.2	15.9	7.5	69.4	0.0	100.0
West Bengal	5.5	14.9	8.1	71.5	0.0	100.0
<b>Northeast</b>						
Arunachal Pradesh	37.7	7.9	13.9	40.4	0.1	100.0
Assam	4.8	10.8	4.5	79.8	0.0	100.0
Manipur	22.9	18.6	28.4	30.1	0.0	100.0
Meghalaya	18.6	20.1	8.8	52.4	0.1	100.0
Mizoram	23.5	19.2	7.2	50.1	0.0	100.0
Nagaland	37.3	14.8	11.7	36.1	0.1	100.0
Sikkim	4.2	14.0	3.9	77.9	0.0	100.0
<b>West</b>						
Goa	12.0	28.1	7.3	52.6	0.1	100.0
Gujarat	23.4	22.8	4.6	49.2	0.0	100.0
Maharashtra	20.7	28.7	6.3	44.3	0.0	100.0
<b>South</b>						
Andhra Pradesh	17.9	35.6	5.2	41.3	0.0	100.0
Karnataka	16.6	29.6	5.8	47.9	0.0	100.0
Kerala	2.4	16.9	5.7	75.0	0.0	100.0
Tamil Nadu	10.4	39.2	4.2	46.2	0.0	100.0

of women are not involved at all in decisions about seeking health care for themselves (49 percent), purchasing jewellery or other major household items (47 percent), and going and staying with parents or siblings (52 percent). Among these three types of decisions, the decision that women are most likely to take on their own is the one about their own health care (28 percent), and the decision that they are least likely to take on their own is about the purchase of jewellery or other major household items (11 percent). Urban women are more likely than rural women to make all these four types of decisions on their own.

Thirty percent of women who earn money report that only their husbands or only others in the household make the decision on how the money they earn will be used, 41 percent report that they make the decision on their own, and 28 percent report that they make the decision together with their husbands or someone else in their household. The proportion of women who do not participate in the decision about how the money they earn should be used is higher in rural areas (35 percent) than in urban areas (16 percent), and the proportion who make this decision alone is higher in urban areas (57 percent) than in rural areas (37 percent).

**Table 3.10 Household decisionmaking**

Percent distribution of ever-married women by person who makes specific household decisions, according to residence, India, 1998–99

Household decision	Respondent only	Husband only	Respondent with husband	Others in household only	Respondent with others in household	Missing	Total percent
<b>URBAN</b>							
What items to cook	71.2	3.5	4.7	10.2	10.5	0.0	100.0
Obtaining health care for herself	35.0	34.2	17.7	7.0	6.2	0.0	100.0
Purchasing jewellery or other major household items	13.3	28.5	35.7	11.1	11.4	0.0	100.0
Going and staying with her parents or siblings	18.0	36.3	28.4	9.0	8.2	0.0	100.0
How the money she earns will be used <sup>1</sup>	57.0	14.2	24.0	1.9	2.8	0.1	100.0
<b>RURAL</b>							
What items to cook	71.1	3.7	4.3	11.6	9.3	0.0	100.0
Obtaining health care for herself	25.7	41.1	16.7	10.0	6.6	0.0	100.0
Purchasing jewellery or other major household items	9.7	35.7	29.2	14.4	11.0	0.0	100.0
Going and staying with her parents or siblings	12.4	41.2	23.9	13.0	9.4	0.1	100.0
How the money she earns will be used <sup>1</sup>	36.5	31.0	25.3	3.5	3.6	0.2	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>							
What items to cook	71.2	3.6	4.4	11.2	9.6	0.0	100.0
Obtaining health care for herself	28.1	39.3	16.9	9.2	6.5	0.0	100.0
Purchasing jewellery or other major household items	10.7	33.8	30.9	13.5	11.1	0.0	100.0
Going and staying with her parents or siblings	13.9	39.9	25.1	12.0	9.1	0.1	100.0
How the money she earns will be used <sup>1</sup>	41.1	27.2	25.0	3.1	3.4	0.1	100.0
<sup>1</sup> For women earning cash							

Women’s participation in household decisionmaking, alone or jointly with others in the household, increases with age, suggesting that autonomy also increases with age (Table 3.11). Specifically, among women age 30 and over, only 4–6 percent in each five-year age group do not participate in any decisionmaking compared with 24 percent of women age 15–19 and 15 percent of women age 20–24. Participation in each of the four specified decisions increases more or less steadily with age.

**Table 3.11 Women's autonomy**

Percentage of ever-married women involved in household decisionmaking, percentage with freedom of movement, and percentage with access to money by selected background characteristics, India, 1998–99

Background characteristic	Percentage not involved in any decision-making	Percentage involved in decisionmaking on:				Percentage who do not need permission to:		Percentage with access to money	Number of women
		What to cook	Own health care	Purchasing jewellery, etc.	Staying with her parents/siblings	Go to the market	Visit friends/relatives		
<b>Age</b>									
15–19	24.4	66.6	38.6	39.8	37.4	13.8	10.2	45.5	8,182
20–24	15.4	77.3	45.0	46.1	43.1	22.0	16.6	54.1	16,389
25–29	9.4	84.9	49.7	51.5	46.2	28.8	21.1	58.8	17,745
30–34	6.1	89.4	53.6	54.8	49.3	34.0	25.1	61.1	15,094
35–39	4.8	91.9	56.5	57.7	52.7	37.9	29.8	64.3	13,089
40–44	3.7	92.6	59.3	59.3	53.6	43.0	35.1	65.9	10,521
45–49	3.8	91.6	60.1	60.3	56.1	45.4	37.5	67.6	8,179
<b>Residence</b>									
Urban	7.1	86.3	58.9	60.4	54.6	46.9	35.0	73.6	23,370
Rural	10.3	84.7	49.0	49.9	45.7	26.1	20.6	54.6	65,829
<b>Education</b>									
Illiterate	9.6	86.1	48.6	49.6	45.1	27.0	21.6	52.8	51,871
Literate, < middle school complete	9.1	85.2	52.5	54.0	49.2	32.6	24.3	61.3	17,270
Middle school complete	11.3	81.6	53.5	54.3	49.7	35.9	25.6	66.6	7,328
High school complete and above	8.1	83.3	61.2	62.0	57.6	46.2	35.0	81.0	12,719
<b>Religion</b>									
Hindu	9.6	85.2	50.8	52.4	48.0	31.8	24.6	59.4	72,903
Muslim	10.7	82.8	50.5	48.1	43.4	23.4	19.0	56.0	11,190
Christian	5.8	88.0	63.0	65.6	61.7	44.6	35.6	68.5	2,263
Sikh	2.4	93.6	74.6	72.5	64.6	46.2	25.6	74.0	1,427
Jain	9.8	84.3	54.7	55.9	47.0	50.9	39.8	74.0	331
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	4.6	89.7	57.0	58.7	52.7	56.3	38.7	72.2	676
Other	4.9	89.1	52.8	61.7	58.4	33.3	31.0	60.6	285
No religion	4.2	91.2	64.6	65.4	71.9	41.5	33.8	72.3	44
<b>Caste/tribe</b>									
Scheduled caste	9.1	86.2	49.7	51.8	47.4	31.3	23.7	56.0	16,301
Scheduled tribe	7.6	87.6	49.8	52.9	48.8	30.7	26.2	50.7	7,750
Other backward class	10.2	84.4	51.3	52.5	48.4	34.7	26.6	62.4	29,383
Other	9.3	84.7	53.3	53.3	48.2	29.6	22.7	61.0	34,904
<b>Cash employment</b>									
Working for cash	5.7	89.8	57.0	59.6	54.6	41.4	33.2	64.7	23,391
Working but not for cash	10.2	85.1	46.5	47.1	43.1	26.4	21.4	50.6	11,519
Not worked in past 12 months	10.9	83.1	50.3	50.8	46.3	28.5	21.2	59.3	54,271
<b>Standard of living index</b>									
Low	8.5	87.7	48.5	49.9	45.5	28.5	23.0	52.1	29,033
Medium	10.2	84.3	50.8	51.6	47.2	30.0	22.8	58.1	41,289
High	9.3	82.9	58.4	59.6	54.5	40.1	30.2	75.1	17,845
Total	9.4	85.1	51.6	52.6	48.1	31.6	24.4	59.6	89,199

Note: Total includes 11, 79, 862, 18, and 1,032 women with missing information on education, religion, caste/tribe, cash employment, and the standard of living index, respectively, who are not shown separately.

The proportion of women not involved in any decisionmaking varies little by education, caste/tribe, or standard of living. Participation in decisions about women's own health care, about purchasing jewellery and other major household items, and about staying with parents or siblings, increases with education and with the household standard of living, but participation in decisions about what to cook is somewhat higher among less educated women than among more educated women, and this participation declines with the standard of living. Muslim women, closely followed by Hindu women, are less likely than women belonging to other religions to be involved in decisions about purchasing jewellery or other major household items and about staying with parents or siblings. About half of both Hindu and Muslim women do not participate in decisions about their own health care. Women working for money are more likely than women in other employment categories to participate in each of the four types of decisions and women who work without earning money are least likely to participate in all the decisions with the exception of the decision about what to cook. These results suggest that decisionmaking autonomy is not greater for all employed women; greater decisionmaking autonomy is associated with employment for women only if they are working for money.

Table 3.11 also gives information on two other dimensions of women's autonomy measured in NFHS-2, namely, women's freedom of movement and their access to money that they can spend as they wish. With regard to freedom of movement, respondents were asked whether they need permission to go to the market or to visit friends or relatives. Women's access to spending money was measured by asking respondents, 'Are you allowed to have some money set aside that you can use as you wish?'

Freedom of movement is limited for the majority of ever-married women in India. Only 32 percent of women say that they do not need permission to go to the market, and only 24 percent say that they do not need permission to visit friends or relatives. Freedom of movement increases rapidly with age. For example, only 14 percent of women age 15–19 do not need permission to go to the market compared with 45 percent of women age 45–49. Urban women have much more freedom of movement than rural women and freedom of movement increases with education. Muslim women have much less freedom of movement than women of other religions, especially Buddhists/Neo-Buddhists and Jain women. As expected, women who earn money have much more freedom of movement than other women. What is most remarkable, however, is how limited the freedom of movement is for all categories of women. The proportion of women who do not need permission to go to the market is never greater than 56 percent for any category, and the proportion who do not need permission to go to visit friends and relatives is never greater than 40 percent.

There is substantial variation in women's access to money by background characteristics. Overall, 60 percent of women say that they are allowed to have some money set aside that they can spend as they wish, but this proportion varies widely by age, residence, education, religion, caste/tribe, employment status, and household standard of living. Specifically, access to money increases with age, education, and the standard of living, and it is much greater for urban women than for rural women. Muslim and Hindu women are less likely to have access to money than women belonging to other religions. Women from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are less likely than other women to have access to money. As expected, women who worked during the year and earned money are more likely than women in other employment categories to have access to money; however, women who did not work at all are more likely to have access to money (59 percent) than women who worked but did not earn money (51 percent).

Table 3.12 shows the interstate variation in all three indicators of women's autonomy—women's decisionmaking, freedom of movement, and access to money. In all states except Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Orissa, more than 90 percent of women are involved in at least one household decision. In each state women are most likely to be involved in decisions about what to cook (78–97 percent). There are only seven states in which more than 70 percent of women participate in decisions about their own health care (Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Punjab, Mizoram, Kerala, Gujarat, and Arunachal Pradesh). By contrast, in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa only 37–39 percent of women participate in such decisions (Figure 3.3). More than 9 out of 10 women in Himachal Pradesh (93 percent) are involved in decisions about purchasing jewellery or other major household items compared with only 4 out of 10 women in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. Participation in decisions about the purchase of jewellery or other major items is also high in Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, and most of the northeastern states. In about half of the states, women are least likely to be involved in decisions about going to stay with their parents or siblings.

A much higher proportion of women reported that they do not need permission to go to the market in Tamil Nadu (79 percent), Goa (67 percent), and Mizoram (64 percent) than in the rest of the states. Only 8 percent of women do not need permission to visit friends or relatives in Jammu and Kashmir compared with 59–60 percent of women in Mizoram and Goa. Overall, women's freedom of movement is most restricted in Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam. At least 80 percent of women have access to money that they can spend as they wish in Goa, Delhi, Meghalaya, and Himachal Pradesh, but only 28 percent have access to money in Nagaland and 35 percent in Assam. A few states perform relatively well on all of the autonomy indicators: Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Punjab, Sikkim, and Tamil Nadu. Most other states have a mixed record on women's autonomy except for Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, which have a consistently poor record on all of the indicators.

### **3.7 Women's Educational Aspirations for Their Children**

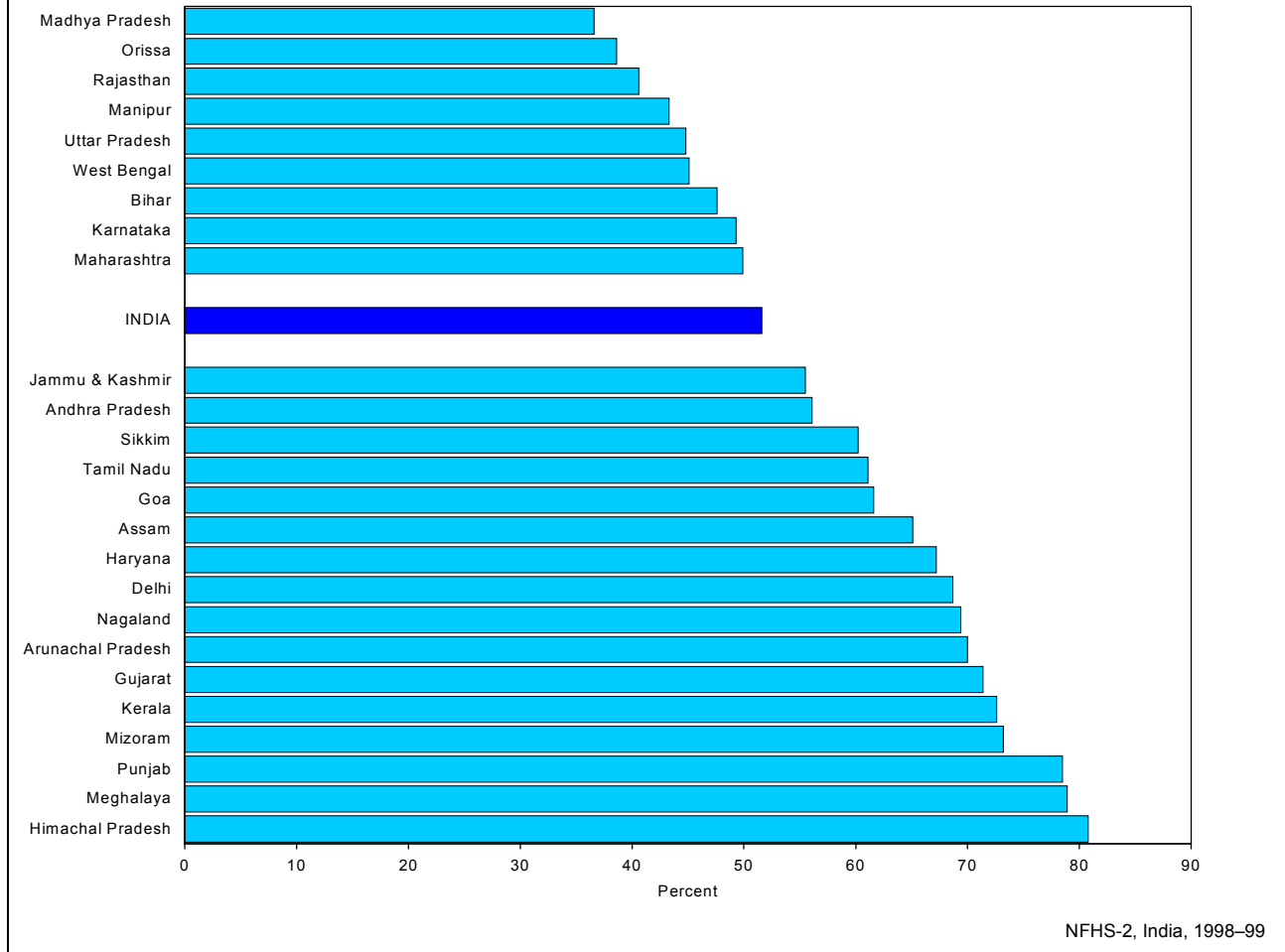
The desire to invest in improving the quality of children, including investing in their education, is important for bringing about transition from uncontrolled to controlled fertility. In order to obtain information on this subject, NFHS-2 asked ever-married women for their opinion about how much education should be given to a girl or a boy. Women's responses to these questions also provide an indication of the degree of son preference prevailing at the time of the survey.

As shown in Table 3.13, 43 percent of women believe that a boy should be given as much education as he desires compared with only 31 percent who believe that a girl should be given as much education as she desires. Twenty-eight percent of women believe that an education above high school (higher secondary school, graduate and above, or professional degree) is appropriate for boys whereas 20 percent feel that it is appropriate for girls. Notably, only 1 percent of women feel that girls should not be given any education, and 16 percent feel that girls should be given an education but not beyond middle school. The corresponding proportions for boys are negligible.

Table 3.12 Women's autonomy by state								
Percentage of ever-married women involved in household decisionmaking, percentage with freedom of movement, and percentage with access to money by state, India, 1998–99								
State	Percentage not involved in any decision-making	Percentage involved in decisionmaking on:				Percentage who do not need permission to:		
		What to cook	Own health care	Purchasing jewellery, etc.	Staying with her parents/siblings	Go to the market	Visit friends/relatives	Percentage with access to money
<b>India</b>	9.4	85.1	51.6	52.6	48.1	31.6	24.4	59.6
<b>North</b>								
Delhi	5.3	83.0	68.7	58.5	46.5	51.7	33.9	82.3
Haryana	3.4	93.5	67.2	77.8	64.5	36.7	20.8	70.8
Himachal Pradesh	0.8	95.1	80.8	93.4	91.4	32.5	31.1	80.1
Jammu & Kashmir	12.4	80.0	55.5	58.2	48.9	12.0	7.8	58.1
Punjab	1.0	96.7	78.5	75.3	67.6	50.1	28.0	78.3
Rajasthan	13.3	82.3	40.6	42.7	39.3	19.0	17.0	40.5
<b>Central</b>								
Madhya Pradesh	12.5	81.7	36.6	44.3	38.1	21.0	19.5	49.3
Uttar Pradesh	16.4	77.8	44.8	41.4	36.1	17.4	12.4	52.3
<b>East</b>								
Bihar	13.5	82.4	47.6	42.9	44.0	21.7	20.5	66.7
Orissa	10.6	86.3	38.6	54.8	48.3	18.2	15.4	46.3
West Bengal	8.0	87.4	45.1	48.4	46.7	17.8	14.1	51.4
<b>Northeast</b>								
Arunachal Pradesh	1.4	93.6	70.0	76.5	74.8	46.8	53.7	78.6
Assam	4.6	88.4	65.1	54.3	45.4	13.2	13.9	35.0
Manipur	3.3	87.4	43.3	66.3	63.2	28.6	28.3	76.8
Meghalaya	2.6	91.7	78.9	70.6	78.4	46.5	48.5	81.5
Mizoram	5.8	88.2	73.2	77.8	77.0	64.2	59.5	55.0
Nagaland	0.4	97.4	69.4	77.3	80.0	17.3	20.1	27.9
Sikkim	2.7	92.1	60.2	57.9	56.7	38.2	41.6	78.9
<b>West</b>								
Goa	3.6	89.9	61.6	62.5	72.4	66.7	58.7	82.4
Gujarat	4.1	90.4	71.4	73.6	65.1	55.1	50.6	73.6
Maharashtra	7.2	87.5	49.9	50.3	44.4	48.5	32.1	64.2
<b>South</b>								
Andhra Pradesh	7.4	86.2	56.1	61.4	57.7	20.1	14.6	57.7
Karnataka	8.1	88.4	49.3	47.3	44.5	43.0	34.3	67.0
Kerala	7.2	80.9	72.6	63.4	59.7	47.7	37.9	66.2
Tamil Nadu	2.4	92.1	61.1	67.4	62.4	78.5	55.9	79.0

Table 3.13 indicates that there are sharp urban-rural differences in women's educational aspirations for girls and boys. Rural respondents have lower educational aspirations than urban respondents, particularly for girls. Rural respondents are also much less likely than urban respondents to say that girls and boys should be given as much education as they desire. It is notable, however, that even in rural areas more than two-thirds of women say that girls should be given at least a high school education or as much education as they desire.

**Figure 3.3**  
**Percentage of Women Participating in Decisions About Their Own Health Care by State**



### 3.8 Domestic Violence: Attitudes and Experience

In recent years, there has been increasing concern about violence against women in general, and domestic violence in particular, in both developed and developing countries (United Nations General Assembly, 1991). Not only has domestic violence against women been acknowledged worldwide as a violation of the basic human rights of women, but an increasing amount of research highlights the health burdens, intergenerational effects, and demographic consequences of such violence (Heise et al., 1998; 1994; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Ramasubban and Singh, 1998; Rao and Bloch, 1993). In patriarchal societies such as India, women are not only socialized into being silent about their experience of violence but traditional norms teach them to accept, tolerate, and even rationalize domestic violence (Jaisingh, 1995; Hegde, 1996; Prasad, 1999). Both tolerance of and experience of domestic violence are significant barriers to the empowerment of women, with consequences for women's health, their health-seeking behaviour, their adoption of a small family norm, and the health of their children. In NFHS-2 an attempt was made to assess whether women view wife-beating as justified and to measure the prevalence of violence against women including, but not limited to, violence committed by a woman's husband.

Table 3.13 Perceived educational needs of girls and boys			
Percent distribution of ever-married women by their opinion on how much education should be given to girls and boys, according to residence, India, 1998–99			
Educational level	Urban	Rural	Total
<b>Education for girls</b>			
No education	0.2	1.3	1.0
Less than primary school	0.2	1.1	0.9
Primary school	1.7	7.0	5.6
Middle school	3.9	11.2	9.2
High school	13.7	24.1	21.4
Higher secondary school	7.9	9.6	9.2
Graduate and above	11.8	5.6	7.2
Professional degree	7.0	2.5	3.7
As much as she desires	44.1	26.0	30.8
Depends	8.7	9.2	9.0
Don't know	0.8	2.4	2.0
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Education for boys</b>			
No education	0.1	0.3	0.2
Less than primary school	0.0	0.2	0.2
Primary school	0.3	1.3	1.1
Middle school	1.1	3.5	2.9
High school	5.8	13.0	11.1
Higher secondary school	6.3	11.5	10.1
Graduate and above	11.6	10.6	10.9
Professional degree	10.6	5.4	6.8
As much as he desires	53.1	39.5	43.0
Depends	10.4	12.6	12.0
Don't know	0.7	2.0	1.7
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0

In order to assess women's attitudes towards wife-beating, the survey asked whether respondents thought that a husband is justified in beating his wife for each of the following reasons: if he suspects her of being unfaithful; if her natal family does not give expected money, jewellery, or other items; if she shows disrespect for her in-laws; if she goes out without telling him; if she neglects the house or children; or if she does not cook food properly. These reasons, which range from reasons that involve suspicions about a wife's moral character to those that may be considered more trivial, such as not cooking properly, were chosen to provide variation in the perceived seriousness of violations of behavioural norms. Table 3.14 gives the percentages of ever-married women who agree with various reasons for wife-beating by background characteristics.

Almost three out of five women (56 percent) in India accept at least one reason as a justification for wife-beating. Women are most likely to agree that neglecting the house or children (40 percent) justifies wife-beating and least likely to agree that wife-beating is justified if the woman's natal family does not give expected money, jewellery, or other items (7 percent). Each of the remaining reasons is given as a justification of wife-beating by 25–37 percent of women.

Table 3.14 indicates that there are no sharp differences by age or marital duration in women's attitudes towards wife-beating, but it is notable that the youngest women (age 15–19) are consistently most likely to agree with each of the different reasons justifying wife-beating. There are large urban-rural differences in these attitudes. Not only do a higher proportion of rural



**Table 3.14 Reasons given for justifying a husband beating his wife**

Percentage of ever-married women who agree with specific reasons for justifying a husband beating his wife by selected background characteristics, India, 1998–99

Background characteristic	Percentage who agree with specific reasons							Number of women
	Percentage who agree with at least one reason	Husband suspects wife is unfaithful	Natal family does not give money or other items	Wife shows disrespect for in-laws	Wife goes out without telling husband	Wife neglects house or children	Wife does not cook food properly	
<b>Age</b>								
15–19	61.1	37.2	8.6	38.7	41.7	43.1	28.8	8,182
20–29	56.3	32.6	6.8	34.0	36.6	40.4	24.9	34,134
30–39	56.3	32.8	6.5	33.6	36.1	40.0	24.1	28,183
40–49	54.1	31.1	6.5	32.1	35.0	38.0	22.9	18,701
<b>Marital duration (in years)</b>								
< 5	54.2	31.0	6.2	33.1	35.3	38.0	23.0	20,268
5–9	56.1	32.9	6.6	33.2	35.6	40.1	24.9	13,002
10 or more	57.2	33.7	6.8	34.2	37.1	40.6	25.1	50,377
Not currently married	55.3	30.9	8.6	35.1	38.1	42.0	24.9	5,550
<b>Residence</b>								
Urban	47.1	24.7	3.9	28.2	29.0	34.1	17.7	23,370
Rural	59.5	35.6	7.8	35.9	39.2	42.1	27.0	65,829
<b>Education</b>								
Illiterate	61.6	38.6	9.0	37.3	41.3	43.7	29.1	51,871
Literate, < middle school complete	56.4	29.8	5.0	34.4	36.6	41.8	23.6	17,270
Middle school complete	51.2	25.3	3.3	30.9	32.0	36.3	18.6	7,328
High school complete and above	37.1	17.3	2.1	21.1	19.6	24.9	11.1	12,719
<b>Religion</b>								
Hindu	56.5	32.8	7.0	34.1	36.7	40.3	25.2	72,903
Muslim	56.5	34.8	5.9	33.6	38.1	38.7	23.2	11,190
Christian	65.2	34.0	9.4	41.9	42.8	52.4	20.7	2,263
Sikh	27.0	18.8	0.2	8.2	6.9	8.2	3.9	1,427
Jain	38.8	14.0	0.7	24.3	20.5	27.8	16.9	331
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	73.7	36.3	7.7	54.0	48.8	63.0	47.9	676
Other	44.0	16.6	5.8	26.3	31.8	34.0	18.5	285
No religion	75.4	36.0	13.1	35.4	51.6	66.7	27.2	44
<b>Caste/tribe</b>								
Scheduled caste	57.9	34.6	7.3	34.6	38.4	41.1	26.0	16,301
Scheduled tribe	62.8	40.2	11.2	40.1	41.4	45.9	28.7	7,750
Other backward class	61.7	34.0	7.6	36.8	40.3	44.8	26.7	29,383
Other	49.1	28.8	4.9	29.3	31.1	33.9	20.8	34,904
<b>Household composition</b>								
Nuclear household	57.1	32.8	6.8	33.9	37.2	41.1	24.7	41,114
Non-nuclear household	55.5	32.8	6.8	33.8	36.0	39.1	24.5	48,069
<b>Cash employment</b>								
Working for cash	62.2	34.5	9.7	39.2	42.3	48.1	28.9	23,391
Working but not for cash	67.5	41.2	10.3	42.9	46.9	50.9	35.4	11,519
Not worked in past 12 months	51.3	30.3	4.7	29.7	31.9	34.3	20.5	54,271
<b>Standard of living index</b>								
Low	62.0	36.9	9.1	38.1	42.3	45.1	29.1	29,033
Medium	58.8	34.4	6.8	35.5	38.3	42.0	26.0	41,289
High	40.9	22.3	3.0	23.3	23.1	27.3	14.2	17,845
Total	56.3	32.8	6.8	33.9	36.6	40.0	24.6	89,199

Note: Total includes 16 women from households with no usual residents, and 2, 11, 79, 862, 18, and 1,032 women with missing information on marital duration, education, religion, caste/tribe, cash employment, and the standard of living index, respectively, who are not shown separately.

women (60 percent) than urban women (47 percent) agree with at least one reason justifying wife-beating, but rural women are also more likely than urban women to agree with each specific reason. Agreement with at least one reason and with each of the different reasons for wife-beating declines sharply with education. Sixty-two percent of illiterate women agree with at least one reason justifying wife-beating compared with 51–56 percent of literate women who have not completed high school and 37 percent of women who have completed at least high school (Figure 3.4).

Sikh and Jain women (27–39 percent) are less likely to agree with any reason justifying wife-beating than Hindu or Muslim women (both 57 percent), Christian women (65 percent), or Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist women (74 percent). Sikh and Jain women are also least likely to agree with each specific reason justifying wife-beating. One possible explanation for this difference may be that Sikh and Jain women in India are more likely than other women to be educated. Jain women are also more likely to be living in urban areas than are women in any other religious group (Tables 3.1 and 3.2). Table 3.14 also shows that women belonging to scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, or other backward classes (58–63 percent) are more tolerant of wife-beating than are women not belonging to a scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, or other backward class (49 percent).

As expected, the proportion of women who agree that wife-beating is justified declines as the standard of living rises. The difference is greatest between women with a low or medium standard of living (59–62 percent) and women with a high standard of living (41 percent). However, the expectation that women who work, especially those who work for money, would be less likely than other women to justify wife-beating is not borne out for India (Figure 3.4). Women who have not worked in the past 12 months are less likely than women who have worked to justify wife-beating for each reason given in Table 3.14. This finding can be partly explained by the fact that the majority of working women in India are agricultural workers, who are likely to have relatively low educational attainment. Overall, with a few notable exceptions, the majority of women in almost all groups agree with at least one reason for wife-beating. This finding attests to the widespread socialization of women in norms that give husbands the right to use force to discipline wives who are perceived to be violating traditional gender norms.

In order to assess the prevalence of domestic violence, NFHS-2 asked women if they had been beaten or mistreated physically since age 15<sup>1</sup>. Women who reported being beaten or physically mistreated were asked who beat or physically mistreated them. Interviewers recorded all the persons mentioned by the respondent. As mentioned earlier, there is a culture of silence around the topic of domestic violence that makes the collection of data on this sensitive topic particularly difficult. Even women who want to speak about their experience with domestic violence may find it difficult because of feelings of shame or fear. This may be more true if violence occurred recently (for example, in the preceding 12 months) than in the more distant past. In addition, depending on the varied cultural meanings ascribed to different acts, there may be women who do not report their experience of domestic violence because they do not view it as violence or physical mistreatment. For these reasons, NFHS-2 results on the prevalence of domestic violence need to be interpreted with caution.

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<sup>1</sup>The question does not limit women to reporting only domestic violence. Nonetheless, almost all women who report any violence report beatings or physical mistreatment only by husbands or relatives.

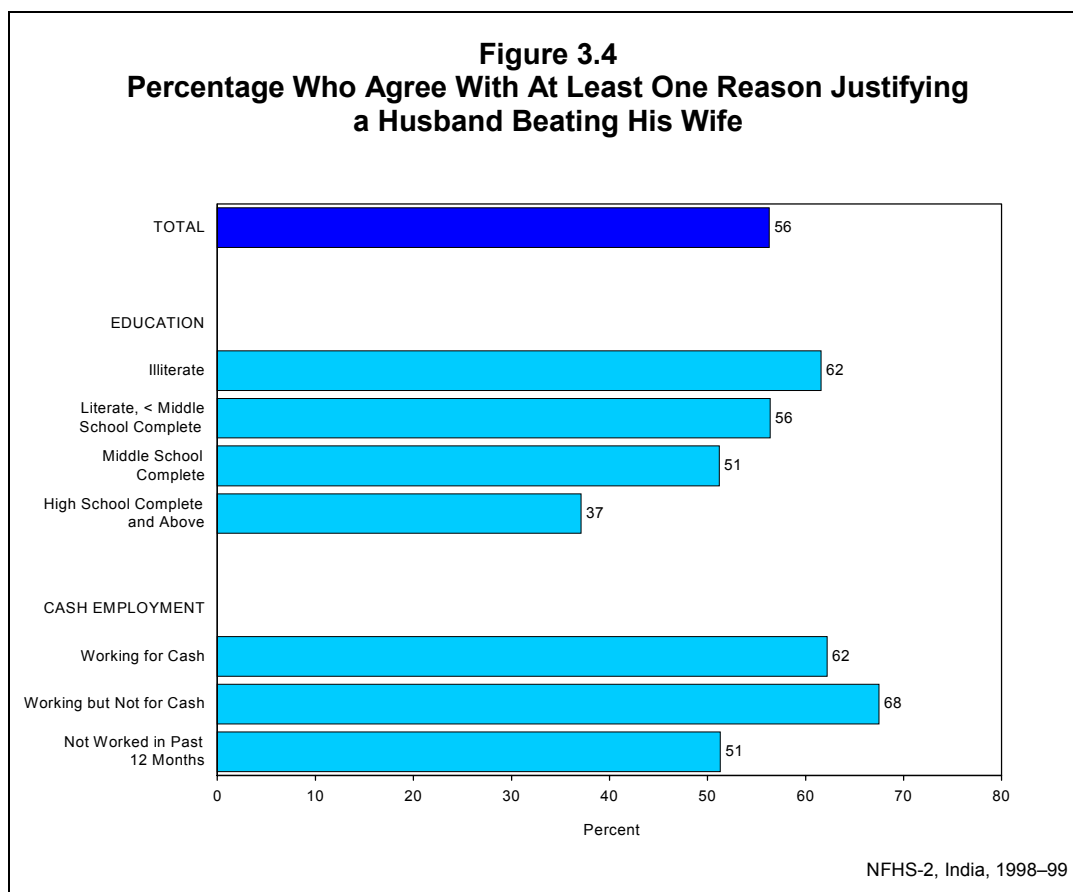


Table 3.15 presents results on the prevalence of beatings or physical mistreatment since age 15 by women's background characteristics. Prevalence is also shown according to the person(s) who beat or physically mistreated them—their husbands, their in-laws, or other persons. According to the reports of respondents, 21 percent of women in India have experienced violence since age 15, and 19 percent have been beaten or physically mistreated by their husbands. Two percent have been beaten or physically mistreated by in-laws and 3 percent by other persons. This implies that among women who report beatings, 9 out of 10 have been beaten by their husbands, 1 out of 7 have been beaten by other persons, and 1 out of 12 have been beaten by their in-laws.

Women age 15–19 are less likely than older women to have been beaten, but because of their young age they have also had less time to be exposed to the risk of being beaten since age 15. Similarly, women who have been married for less than five years are less likely to have been beaten (14 percent) than women who have been married longer (21–23 percent) or who are currently not married (27 percent). Urban women (17 percent) are less likely than rural women (23 percent) to experience violence and illiterate women (26 percent) are three times as likely to experience violence as women who have at least completed high school (9 percent).

Table 3.15 Women's experience with beatings or physical mistreatment

Percentage of ever-married women who have been beaten or physically mistreated by their husband, in-laws, or other persons since age 15 and percentage beaten or physically mistreated in the past 12 months, according to selected background characteristics, India, 1998–99

Background characteristic	Percentage beaten or physically mistreated since age 15	Percentage beaten or physically mistreated since age 15 by:			Percentage beaten or physically mistreated in the past 12 months	Number of women
		Husband	In-laws	Other person		
<b>Age</b>						
15–19	15.4	12.8	1.3	3.1	11.5	8,182
20–29	21.1	18.8	1.8	3.2	12.4	34,134
30–39	23.0	20.9	1.9	3.0	11.3	28,183
40–49	20.3	18.3	1.7	2.9	7.6	18,701
<b>Marital duration (in years)</b>						
< 5	14.4	11.5	1.0	3.9	9.6	20,268
5–9	21.2	19.0	1.5	3.1	12.8	13,002
10 or more	22.9	21.1	1.9	2.6	11.5	50,377
Not currently married	27.4	24.2	4.2	4.1	6.8	5,550
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	16.8	14.3	1.5	3.6	7.7	23,370
Rural	22.5	20.4	1.9	2.9	12.2	65,829
<b>Education</b>						
Illiterate	25.5	23.6	2.1	2.8	14.1	51,871
Literate, < middle school complete	19.2	16.7	1.7	3.5	8.8	17,270
Middle school complete	15.2	12.1	1.4	4.0	7.0	7,328
High school complete and above	8.6	5.9	0.7	3.2	3.6	12,719
<b>Religion</b>						
Hindu	21.2	19.1	1.7	3.0	11.1	72,903
Muslim	21.2	19.1	2.1	2.8	11.4	11,190
Christian	21.8	16.1	2.0	6.8	10.3	2,263
Sikh	13.9	11.6	1.1	4.3	7.1	1,427
Jain	6.8	5.5	0.0	1.4	2.8	331
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	20.8	20.0	2.5	3.0	10.0	676
Other	16.8	13.5	0.7	4.5	11.4	285
No religion	26.1	15.1	1.2	10.4	11.2	44
<b>Caste/tribe</b>						
Scheduled caste	27.4	25.2	2.2	3.3	15.4	16,301
Scheduled tribe	23.0	20.8	1.8	3.0	13.0	7,750
Other backward class	23.0	20.7	1.7	3.6	11.7	29,383
Other	15.7	13.6	1.6	2.6	7.8	34,904
<b>Household composition</b>						
Nuclear household	24.5	22.2	1.9	3.4	12.7	41,114
Non-nuclear household	18.1	15.9	1.7	2.8	9.5	48,069

Contd...

The prevalence of domestic violence decreases substantially as the standard of living increases. Specifically, 29 percent of women with a low standard of living have experienced violence compared with 20 percent of women with a medium standard of living and 10 percent of women with a high standard of living. Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist women are more likely to experience violence (all 21–22 percent) than are Sikh women (14 percent) or Jain women (7 percent). Women from nuclear households are more likely than women from non-nuclear households to experience domestic violence. This result is consistent with the findings of Visaria (1999) among women in rural Gujarat. The prevalence of violence also varies by the caste or tribe status of women. Sixteen percent of women not belonging to a

Table 3.15 Women's experience with beatings or physical mistreatment (contd.)

Percentage of ever-married women who have been beaten or physically mistreated by their husband, in-laws, or other persons since age 15 and percentage beaten or physically mistreated in the past 12 months, according to selected background characteristics, India, 1998–99

Background characteristic	Percentage beaten or physically mistreated since age 15	Percentage beaten or physically mistreated since age 15 by:			Percentage beaten or physically mistreated in the past 12 months	Number of women
		Husband	In-laws	Other person		
<b>Cash employment</b>						
Working for cash	29.0	26.5	2.3	3.8	14.5	23,391
Working but not for cash	24.0	22.2	2.3	2.5	12.1	11,519
Not worked in past 12 months	16.9	14.8	1.4	2.9	9.3	54,271
<b>Standard of living index</b>						
Low	29.2	27.0	2.2	3.3	16.6	29,033
Medium	20.1	18.0	1.8	3.1	10.1	41,289
High	10.1	7.8	1.0	2.7	4.0	17,845
<b>Living children</b>						
No living children	16.3	12.9	1.8	4.1	9.6	10,754
Only daughters	20.3	17.9	1.6	3.5	11.1	12,447
Only sons	20.6	18.2	1.6	3.3	11.4	17,706
Both daughters and sons	22.4	20.6	1.8	2.6	11.2	48,293
Total	21.0	18.8	1.8	3.1	11.0	89,199

Note: Total includes 16 women from households with no usual residents, and 2, 11, 79, 862, 18, and 1,032 women with missing information on marital duration, education, religion, caste/tribe, cash employment, and the standard of living index, respectively, who are not shown separately.

scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, or other backward class have been beaten compared with 23 percent of women belonging to scheduled tribes and other backward classes and 27 percent of women belonging to scheduled castes. Working women, most of whom are agricultural workers, are more likely than non-working women to experience violence. Women who worked for money in the 12 months preceding the survey are much more likely than women who did not work to have been beaten (29 percent compared with 17 percent).

It is generally believed that not bearing children and not bearing a son are important reasons for wife-beating. However, in India women with no living children are somewhat less likely than women with living children to have experienced violence since they were 15 years old (16 percent compared with 20–22 percent). This may be due in part to the fact that childless women tend to be younger women, and younger women have a lower prevalence of domestic violence than do older women. There does not appear to be variation in the prevalence of domestic violence by whether or not women have a son.

The proportions of women who have been beaten or physically mistreated by their husbands according to various background characteristics are similar to the proportions of all women who have experienced domestic violence. This is not surprising since, as already noted, 90 percent of women who report beatings are beaten by their husbands. The proportion of women who have been beaten or physically mistreated by their in-laws or by other persons is too small to allow a meaningful discussion of differentials by women's background characteristics. Nonetheless, it is notable that women who are not currently married (divorced, separated, deserted, or widowed women) are more likely than currently married women to have been beaten

by their in-laws. Christian women and women with no religion are more likely than women in any other religious group to have been beaten by persons other than their husbands and in-laws.

Table 3.15 also shows the percentage of women who experienced beatings or physical mistreatment in the 12 months preceding the survey. More than half of the women (52 percent) who experienced violence were beaten at least once during the 12 months preceding the survey. As mentioned earlier, largely due to the inherent tendency for underreporting of domestic violence, these results need to be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, the NFHS-2 estimates set a lower bound on the proportion of women experiencing domestic violence in India: *at least* 1 in 5 ever-married women in India have experienced domestic violence since age 15, and *at least* 1 in 9 experienced domestic violence in the 12 months preceding the survey. These estimates of the prevalence of physical violence are almost identical to estimates provided by the IndiaSAFE study of family violence in India conducted at about the same time as NFHS-2. According to the IndiaSAFE study, one in five women report ever being hit, kicked, or beaten by husbands and 1 in 10 women report violent physical behaviours by husbands in the past 12 months (International Clinical Epidemiology Network, 2000).

There is relatively little variation in the proportion of women beaten in the 12 months preceding the survey by background characteristics. Nonetheless, illiterate women (14 percent), scheduled-caste women (15 percent), women working for money (15 percent), and women who live in households with a low standard of living (17 percent) are more likely than other women to have been beaten in the past 12 months. By contrast women age 40–49, women who are not currently married, women who live in urban areas, women who have completed at least middle school, Sikh and Jain women, and women who live in households with a high standard of living are least likely to have been beaten in the 12 months preceding the survey.

There are substantial statewide differences in the proportion of ever-married women who have been beaten or physically mistreated since age 15 (Table 3.16). Caution should be exercised in making cross-state comparisons, however, since there are likely to be differences across states in cultural norms about revealing the experience of violence to strangers and the extent to which women perceive the violence they may be experiencing as ‘beatings or physical mistreatment’ (the words used to describe violence in NFHS-2). Even if one of these factors varies across states, the prevalence of violence may be underestimated in some states more than in others. Forty percent of ever-married women in Tamil Nadu and at least one-quarter of ever-married women in Meghalaya, Orissa, Bihar, and Arunachal Pradesh have been physically mistreated since age 15. Himachal Pradesh is the only state where the proportion of ever-married women who have been physically mistreated since age 15 is less than 10 percent. In almost every state except the small northeastern states, at least three-quarters of women who have experienced physical violence were beaten by their husbands. In Meghalaya, by contrast, only 9 percent of women who experienced violence were physically mistreated by their husbands and about 90 percent were physically mistreated by other persons. Beatings by persons other than the husband or in-laws constitute a substantial proportion of beatings in most of the remaining northeastern states, as well as in the northern states of Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab.

Table 3.16 also shows the percentage of women who reported beatings or physical mistreatment in the 12 months preceding the survey by state. The percentage of women beaten in the 12 months preceding the survey varies from less than 5 percent in Himachal Pradesh and Kerala to more than 15 percent in Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Nagaland. In

Table 3.16 Women's experience with beatings or physical mistreatment by state					
Percentage of ever-married women who have been beaten or physically mistreated by their husband, in-laws, or other persons since age 15 and percentage beaten or physically mistreated in the past 12 months, according to state, India, 1998–99					
State	Percentage beaten or physically mistreated since age 15	Percentage beaten or physically mistreated since age 15 by:			Percentage beaten or physically mistreated in the past 12 months
		Husband	In-laws	Other person	
<b>India</b>	21.0	18.8	1.8	3.1	11.0
<b>North</b>					
Delhi	14.1	9.8	1.1	5.1	7.6
Haryana	13.2	10.8	2.3	3.4	5.1
Himachal Pradesh	5.8	3.9	1.2	1.5	2.1
Jammu & Kashmir	22.0	15.4	4.8	7.1	9.3
Punjab	13.7	11.7	1.3	4.4	6.4
Rajasthan	10.9	9.8	1.5	0.9	5.4
<b>Central</b>					
Madhya Pradesh	21.2	19.7	1.9	1.6	11.8
Uttar Pradesh	22.4	20.8	1.9	2.2	13.5
<b>East</b>					
Bihar	26.6	24.9	2.4	3.1	18.5
Orissa	28.9	22.9	3.0	7.9	13.6
West Bengal	17.6	15.7	1.7	2.4	8.7
<b>Northeast</b>					
Arunachal Pradesh	26.4	18.8	1.6	10.1	16.2
Assam	15.5	14.1	0.8	2.3	8.6
Manipur	19.7	8.3	3.7	9.3	5.6
Meghalaya	31.1	2.8	0.9	28.8	9.6
Mizoram	20.1	11.5	0.0	9.5	9.5
Nagaland	19.0	12.8	0.7	7.8	15.2
Sikkim	11.4	6.9	0.5	4.6	7.6
<b>West</b>					
Goa	17.9	13.9	2.4	4.0	6.4
Gujarat	10.1	8.6	0.9	1.6	5.8
Maharashtra	18.1	16.7	2.0	2.1	7.3
<b>South</b>					
Andhra Pradesh	23.2	21.2	2.8	2.0	12.8
Karnataka	21.5	19.7	1.1	2.2	9.9
Kerala	10.2	7.5	0.2	3.2	3.5
Tamil Nadu	40.4	36.0	0.5	9.0	16.1

Nagaland, Bihar, and Sikkim, more than two-thirds of women who experienced violence since age 15 were beaten at least once during the 12 months preceding the survey.

These results underscore the widespread prevalence of domestic violence in India, especially violence perpetrated by husbands against wives. The high level of acceptance of wife-beating also revealed by these data suggests that women may feel powerless against such violence and will tend to accept it without question. The experience of violence and the silent acceptance of violence by women undermines attempts to empower women and will continue to be a barrier to the achievement of demographic, health, and socioeconomic development goals.