

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA KILLS THOUSANDS OF INFANTS

Reducing domestic violence against Indian mothers could save the lives of thousands of young babies. That is the central finding of research by **Seetha Menon**, to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association in Mannheim in August 2015. Analysing data from India's National Crime Record Bureau over ten years, the study finds that:

- Nearly one in ten children who die before their first birthday died as a result of domestic violence.
- This link is stronger in households that are rural, low-income or belong to marginalised castes.
- There is a stronger effect for baby girls than for baby boys.

The author comments:

'Given that domestic violence has risen by around 135% over the last ten years, my study shows how urgently the problem needs to be dealt with. These results also have global ramifications, as 30% of women worldwide report experiencing violence from their partner. Putting a stop to domestic abuse would have major benefits not just for mothers but for children, families and wider society.'

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The debate about violence against women in India has been pushed to the forefront in recent years. Reducing domestic violence against mothers in India could save the lives of thousands of young babies according to an innovative study.

The research being carried out at the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex shows that nearly one in ten child deaths under the age of one in India are the result of domestic violence and the researchers believe a focus on making women more equal could be indispensable. Researcher Seetha Menon says:

'According to the latest figures from India's National Crime Record Bureau, there has been an increase of 134% in the number of domestic violence reports over a period of ten years. That is a terrible enough statistic in itself, but when you look at how closely that is linked with the deaths of small babies, it becomes even more shocking and it's clear that action to address this is even more urgent.'

The study also finds that the link between domestic violence and child mortality is stronger in rural households, households belonging to other backward castes and for households with lower wealth. It also finds a stronger effect for baby girls than for baby boys. So improving absolute levels of gender equality could save young girls and be the key to improving India's appalling sex ratio.

Given that recent figures indicate that 30% of women worldwide report experiencing violence from their partner, these results have global ramifications. Putting a stop to domestic abuse would have major benefits not just for mothers, but children, families and wider society. Government initiatives aimed at improving gender equality could be pivotal to achieving that.

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