

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATES OF PERCEIVED PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG WOMEN IN DISTRICT CHINIOT

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Abstract

This study explored how women themselves perceive domestic violence (DV) in their community, as such perceptions are crucial for awareness and protection programs but vary across social groups. Using a cross-sectional design, 120 women in District Chiniot, Punjab, Pakistan were interviewed with a structured schedule. Seven socio-demographic factors - age, marital status, education, employment, income, residence, and family type - were tested against perceived prevalence, measured by a 7-item, 5-point Likert scale covering community prevalence, physical abuse, emotional/verbal abuse, economic control, under-reporting, discouragement from speaking out, and tolerance to protect honor. The scale was reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .734$). Women perceived DV as highly prevalent ($M = 30.09$, $SD = 4.35$, range 7-35), with emotional/verbal abuse ($M = 4.52$) and social discouragement ($M = 4.48$) rated highest. Family type was significant on both tests, $\chi^2(4) = 11.857$, $p = .018$, $\text{Gamma} = 0.460$, $p = .022$. Age, employment, and income were significant on chi-square only, indicating non-monotonic patterns, while marital status, education, and residence were not significant. Homemakers, younger women, and those in nuclear/joint families perceived the highest prevalence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reliable figures on how common domestic violence (DV) actually is are hard to come by in most developing-country settings, since much of it goes unreported (Zwenal et al., 2026). In the absence of complete official statistics, women's own sense of how common domestic violence is in their community offers a valuable, complementary source of evidence capturing not just their direct experiences but also what they see, hear, and come to regard as normal among peers, neighbours, and relatives (Abobaker et al., 2026). The World Health Organization estimates according to Galle et al., (2026) that roughly one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner, and Pakistani studies as in Khan & Bt Madihie, (2026) using nationally representative data report comparably high rates of spousal violence.

District Chiniot, a largely rural and semi-urban part of Punjab marked by conservative social norms, limited mobility for women, and weak access to legal and institutional support has been flagged as a particular concern for gender-based violence: a recent report by the National Commission on the Status

of Women ranked it among the province's highest-incidence districts (Sheikh et al., 2025). Roughly a third of women naturally have experienced physical abuse, with both prevalence and under-reporting markedly higher in rural, tradition-bound settings such as Chiniot (LaBore et al., 2021). What remains unclear, though, is whether all women in such settings perceive domestic violence as equally prevalent, or whether this perception shifts with a woman's own socio-demographic positionsuch as with her age, education, income, employment, marital status, place of residence, and family structure.

This study takes up that question directly. Rather than measuring personal victimization, it asks how prevalent women consider domestic violence and the social conditions surrounding it, such as under-reporting, social discouragement, and the protection of family honor to be within their community, and whether these perceptions vary significantly across socio-demographic subgroups.

Purpose of the Study:

This study sets out to examine how women from different demographic backgrounds in District Chiniot perceive the extent to which domestic violence affects their psychological health, with the aim of identifying which subgroups feel most psychologically affected and therefore most in need of targeted support.

Significance of the Study:

These findings speak to several audiences. For community-based organizations and local government, knowing which demographic subgroups perceive domestic violence as most prevalent can help sharpen the targeting of awareness campaigns and reporting mechanisms. For policymakers, the results show whether perceived prevalence clusters around particular socio-demographic profiles such as younger, lower-income, or economically dependent women, for instance which has direct bearing on how protective and legal-awareness programmes are designed. Academically, this study complements a companion analysis of the psychological impact of domestic violence drawn from the same broader dataset shifting the focus from the consequences of violence to how prevalent it is perceived to be in the first place.

Objectives of the Study

1. To describe the socio-demographic profile of women respondents and how they perceive the prevalence of domestic violence in District Chiniot.
2. To examine whether women's perceptions of the prevalence of domestic violence differ significantly by age, marital status, education, employment status, income, area of residence, and family type.

Literature Review

International and regional research consistently shows that domestic violence is both widespread and substantially under-reported which is why perceived prevalence, rather than officially recorded incidence, is often the most realistic indicator available to researchers (Hasan et al., 2023; Wheeler & Nye, 2025; Wood et al., 2025). The World Health Organization put the global figure for intimate partner violence at roughly one in three women, an estimate echoed in Pakistan by Hassan et al., (2020), who drew on Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey data to document high rates of spousal violence, particularly among economically dependent and rural women. Barakati et al., (2026) drawing on a national household survey and focus-group discussions in Pakistan, found that fear of stigma, concerns about family honor, and distrust of formal institutions substantially suppress the disclosure and reporting of violence meaning actual prevalence is very likely higher than official channels capture, a dynamic directly relevant to the scale items here addressing under-reporting and social discouragement from speaking out.

Within Pakistan specifically, Khan & Bt Madihie, (2026) found that around a third of women nationally have experienced physical abuse, with the problem especially pronounced in rural areas where traditional beliefs hold sway areas such as Chiniot and where almost 40% of victims do not seek formal or informal help because of stigma and guilt. Gul et al., (2026) in a qualitative study of women in Karachi, likewise found that psychological and economic forms of abuse were widely seen as common

and normalized within households, even where physical violence was less visible. Mahmood et al., (2023) documented that economic control over women one of the constructs measured in the present scale is common in Southern Punjab and can intensify when women gain or seek economic independence, as husbands try to reassert authority.

The demographic patterning of perceived prevalence has received less direct attention, though related findings offer some guidance. Gulesci et al., (2026) found that husbands' low education and women's young age at marriage were strong predictors of domestic violence in Central Punjab, suggesting younger women may be both more exposed to, and more attuned to, its prevalence within their immediate social circle. Siddiqi., (2016) reported that weak enforcement of protective legislation such as the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act is especially pronounced in rural districts, which may shape how prevalent violence is perceived to be across different residential settings. Moreover, various studies linked economic hardship in agricultural households directly to family conflict, implying that women in lower-income households may see domestic violence as more prevalent simply because they witness or experience it more directly as financial stress builds (Hasan et al., 2023; Wheeler & Nye, 2025; Wood et al., 2025).

Taken together, this body of work suggests that perceived prevalence of domestic violence is unlikely to be the same for all women, and that socio-demographic characteristics tied to economic vulnerability, life stage, and family structure are the most plausible drivers of how widespread women perceive it to be. Based on this, the following hypotheses were formulated for the present study:

- H1: Women's perceived prevalence of domestic violence differs significantly by age.
- H2: Women's perceived prevalence of domestic violence differs significantly by marital status.
- H3: Women's perceived prevalence of domestic violence differs significantly by education.
- H4: Women's perceived prevalence of domestic violence differs significantly by employment status.
- H5: Women's perceived prevalence of domestic violence differs significantly by household income.
- H6: Women's perceived prevalence of domestic violence differs significantly by area of residence.
- H7: Women's perceived prevalence of domestic violence differs significantly by family type.

Methodology

This study used a cross-sectional, quantitative design to examine the socio-demographic correlates of perceived prevalence of domestic violence among women in District Chiniot, Punjab, Pakistan. The data form part of a broader dataset on the prevalence, determinants, and psychological impact of domestic violence, collected for an M.Phil thesis in Rural Sociology at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, using a multistage sampling technique across the district's rural and urban union councils. A total of 120 ever-married women aged 18 and above were surveyed with a structured interview schedule; the sample profile is identical to that reported in the companion analysis of psychological impact drawn from the same broader survey.

Seven socio-demographic characteristics served as independent variables: age, marital status, education, employment status, household income, area of residence, and family type. The dependent variable, perceived prevalence of domestic violence was measured with a seven-item, five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) covering the perceived commonness of domestic violence in the community, physical abuse, emotional and verbal abuse, economic control, under-reporting, social discouragement from speaking out, and tolerance of violence to protect family honor. A composite score was computed for each respondent as the sum of the seven items (possible range 7–35) and used as the outcome measure in the inferential analysis; item-level responses appear separately in Table 2.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations), Cronbach's alpha to check the internal consistency of the perceived-prevalence scale, Pearson correlations among the seven scale items, and cross-tabulation, Chi-square and Gamma whichever suited the number of categories in each demographic variable to test whether the composite score differed significantly across demographic subgroups. All analyses used a .05 significance level.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 sets out the socio-demographic profile of the 120 women who took part in the study. Nearly half the respondents (46.7%) were aged 18–25, and a further 30.0% were 26–35. The large majority were currently married (87.5%). On education, 38.3% held a graduate qualification or above, while 14.2% had no formal schooling. Unemployment (41.7%) and homemaker status (35.0%) together accounted for over three-quarters of respondents, with only 15.8% in formal employment. Most households (62.5%) reported a monthly income of PKR 50,000 or below. Three-quarters of respondents (75.0%) lived in rural areas, and 65.8% were part of joint family systems.

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 120)

Demographic Characteristic	Category	f	%
Age	18-25	56	46.7
	26-35	36	30.0
	36-45	21	17.5
	46-55	4	3.3
	>55	3	2.5
Marital status	Married	105	87.5
	Unmarried	12	10.0
	Divorced	2	1.7
	Widowed	0	0.0
	Separated	1	0.8
Education	No formal education	17	14.2
	Primary	20	16.7
	Secondary	12	10.0
	Higher secondary	25	20.8
	Graduate and above	46	38.3
Employment status	Employed	19	15.8
	Unemployed	50	41.7
	Self-employed	9	7.5
	Homemaker	42	35.0

Note. f = frequency; % = percentage of total sample.

Perceived Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Table 2 shows respondents' item-level perceptions of the prevalence of domestic violence. All seven items were rated, on average, well above the scale midpoint of 3.0, indicating that domestic violence and the social dynamics around it are seen as highly prevalent. The item “emotional and verbal abuse is prevalent in households” received the highest mean rating ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.71$), followed by “society discourages women from speaking out against abuse” ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.89$) and “women tolerate violence to protect family honor” ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.79$). “Domestic violence is common in my community” received the lowest, though still high, mean rating ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.21$) and showed the greatest variability in responses. Overall, the composite score averaged 30.09 ($SD = 4.35$) out of a possible 7–35, confirming that respondents saw domestic violence as widespread in their community.

Table 2 Respondents' Perceptions of the Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Sr	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Domestic violence is common in my community.	5.8	10.0	10.0	30.8	43.3
2	Women frequently experience physical abuse.	10.0	5.8	9.2	22.5	52.5
3	Emotional/verbal abuse is prevalent.	0.8	1.7	2.5	35.0	60.0
4	Economic control over women is common.	8.3	1.7	2.5	29.2	58.3
5	Domestic violence often goes unreported.	0.8	0.0	8.3	42.5	48.3
6	Society discourages speaking out.	0.8	6.7	1.7	25.0	65.8
7	Women tolerate violence to protect honor.	1.7	2.5	0.8	37.5	57.5
Sr	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Domestic violence is common in my community.	5.8	10.0	10.0	30.8	43.3
2	Women frequently experience physical abuse.	10.0	5.8	9.2	22.5	52.5

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree. f = frequency; % = percentage of total sample ($N = 120$).

Reliability of the Perceived Prevalence Scale

The seven-item Perceived Prevalence scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .734 (Table 3), exceeding the conventionally accepted threshold of .70 for acceptable reliability in social science research (Kopalle & Lehmann, 2026; Nunnally, 1978).

Table 3 Reliability Statistics for the Perceived Prevalence Scale

Scale	No. of Items	N	Cronbach's α
Perceived Prevalence of Domestic Violence	7	120	0.734

Inter-Item Correlations

Table 4 presents the inter-item Pearson correlation matrix for the seven perceived-prevalence items. Most items correlated positively with one another, with coefficients ranging from $r = -.07$ to $r = .68$, a somewhat wider and more modest range than observed for the psychological-impact scale in the companion analysis, consistent with the seven items here tapping distinct facets of prevalence (direct abuse, under-reporting, and social norms) rather than a single tightly unified construct.

Table 4 Inter-Item Correlation Matrix for the Perceived Prevalence Scale (Pearson r)

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. D8	—	0.63	0.06	0.44	0.26	-0.07	0.15
2. D9		—	0.26	0.38	0.13	0.17	0.15
3. D10			—	0.36	0.40	0.33	0.21
4. D11				—	0.42	0.32	0.29
5. D12					—	0.48	0.68
6. D13						—	0.28
7. D14							—

Note. 1 = Depression, 2 = Anxiety/fear, 3 = Low self-esteem, 4 = Stress/trauma, 5 = Social isolation, 6 = Sleep disturbance, 7 = Decision-making impairment, 8 = Helplessness, 9 = Overall mental health. With $N = 120$, $|r| \geq .18$ is significant at $p < .05$ and $|r| \geq .23$ at $p < .01$ (two-tailed); all but three of the 36 item pairs met the $p < .01$ threshold.

Testing of Hypotheses: Demographic Correlates of Perceived Prevalence

Table 5 cross-tabulates the seven socio-demographic variables with respondents' overall perceived prevalence of domestic violence (categorised as low, medium, or high based on tertile splits of the composite score), and reports the chi-square and Gamma statistics used to test each hypothesis. Age showed a statistically significant association on the chi-square test, $\chi^2(8) = 23.619$, $p = .003$, but the ordinal Gamma statistic did not reach significance (Gamma = 0.263, $p = .155$), so H1 receives only partial support: the overall relationship is significant, but a clean monotonic ordinal trend is not confirmed. Marital status showed no significant association with perceived prevalence on either test, $\chi^2(6) = 7.560$, $p = .272$; Gamma = -0.348 , $p = .266$, and H2 is therefore not supported. Education likewise showed no significant association on either test, $\chi^2(8) = 9.574$, $p = .296$; Gamma = 0.016, $p = .928$, so H3 is not supported in clear contrast to the companion analysis of perceived psychological impact, in which education was one of the strongest correlates.

Employment status was significantly associated with perceived prevalence on the chi-square test, $\chi^2(6) = 18.654$, $p = .005$, but the Gamma statistic did not confirm a monotonic ordinal trend (Gamma = 0.257, $p = .162$); H4 therefore receives only partial support, mirroring the pattern observed for age. Household income showed the same partial-support pattern, $\chi^2(8) = 23.402$, $p = .003$; Gamma = -0.115 , $p = .526$, indicating a significant but non-monotonic relationship between income and perceived prevalence, so H5 is only partially supported. Family type was the only demographic variable to show a significant, fully confirmed ordinal association with perceived prevalence, $\chi^2(4) = 11.857$, $p = .018$; Gamma = -0.460 , $p = .022$, providing strong support for H7 and indicating that women in nuclear and joint families show a genuinely graded tendency toward perceiving higher prevalence than women in extended families. By contrast, area of residence showed no significant association on either test, $\chi^2(2) = 0.049$, $p = .976$; Gamma = 0.034, $p = .895$, so H6 is not supported, indicating that as in the companion analysis of perceived psychological impact women's assessment of how widespread domestic violence is does not differ between urban and rural settings in this sample.

Table 5 Testing of Hypotheses: Demographic Characteristics and Perceived Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Variable	Chi-square	p	Gamma	Decision
Age	23.619	.003*	0.263	Supported
Marital Status	7.560	.272	-0.348	Not Supported
Education	9.574	.296	0.016	Not Supported
Employment Status	18.654	.005*	0.257	Supported
Income	23.402	.003*	-0.115	Supported
Area of Residence	0.049	.976	0.034	Not Supported
Family Type	11.857	.018*	-0.460	Supported

Note. * $p < .05$ (chi-square test of association). Gamma (λ) is the Goodman-Kruskal measure of ordinal association, tested against the null of no association; its p value is reported in the final column. Psychological impact is categorised into Low, Medium, and High tertiles of the composite score ($N = 120$).

Discussion

This study examined whether socio-demographic characteristics are linked to women's perceptions of how prevalent domestic violence is in District Chiniot, using chi-square tests of association and Gamma statistics of ordinal association. The results show perceived prevalence was significantly associated with age, employment status, household income, and family type on the chi-square test; family type alone was confirmed by the ordinal Gamma statistic; and no significant association emerged for marital status, education, or area of residence on either test. This pattern both echoes and departs, in instructive ways, from the companion analysis of perceived psychological impact drawn from the same dataset, a comparison threaded through the discussion below.

Family type was the only demographic variable in this analysis to show a fully confirmed, genuinely ordinal association with perceived prevalence, $\chi^2(4) = 11.857$, $p = .018$, Gamma = -0.460 , $p = .022$, with women in nuclear and joint families showing a consistently graded tendency to perceive higher prevalence than women in extended families. This fits broadly with Sattar et al., (2022) observation that wider family and community networks shape how violence is witnessed, discussed, and normalized: women in extended families may have more diffuse, second-hand exposure to domestic violence across a wider kinship network, whereas women in nuclear and joint households may be exposed more directly to a single household's dynamics.

Employment status showed a significant chi-square association, $\chi^2(6) = 18.654$, $p = .005$, echoing the strong employment-status correlate found in the companion psychological-impact analysis and reinforcing Jabeen et al., (2025) finding that economic dependency is a central axis of vulnerability to domestic violence in Pakistan. Unlike in the psychological-impact analysis, though, the Gamma statistic here did not reach significance (Gamma = 0.257 , $p = .162$), suggesting that while homemakers and unemployed women are more likely than employed or self-employed women to perceive high prevalence, the relationship is not a clean, monotonic one across every category in line with Sattar et al., (2022) observation that women's economic position shapes exposure to violence in complex, non-linear ways. Household income followed the same partial-support pattern, $\chi^2(8) = 23.402$, $p = .003$, Gamma = -0.115 , $p = .526$, echoing Mahmood et al., (2023) finding that economic hardship drives family conflict in rural Punjab, while showing that the income-prevalence relationship, though significant overall, is not a strict monotonic gradient.

The significant chi-square association for age, $\chi^2(8) = 23.619$, $p = .003$, unconfirmed by Gamma (Gamma = 0.263 , $p = .155$), broadly fits Gulesci et al., (2026) observation that youth carries heightened risk, but points to a more nuanced, non-linear pattern: women in their late twenties, thirties, and forties

more likely to be established within extended family and community networks may simply have had more years to witness and observe domestic violence among peers and relatives than the youngest respondents, without this exposure necessarily rising in a straight line across the full age range.

In marked contrast to the companion psychological-impact analysis, where education and area of residence were both important correlates, neither showed any association with perceived prevalence here (education: $\chi^2(8) = 9.574$, $p = .296$, Gamma = 0.016, $p = .928$; area of residence: $\chi^2(2) = 0.049$, $p = .976$, Gamma = 0.034, $p = .895$). This divergence is telling: it suggests that more educated and urban women are not necessarily less aware that domestic violence is common in their community awareness of its prevalence seems to be shared fairly evenly across educational and residential lines but may differ, as the companion analysis suggests, in how personally or psychologically affected they, or women like them, feel by it. In other words, awareness that a problem exists and internalizing its personal toll appear to be distinct, with socio-demographic factors operating differently across the two.

The consistently high endorsement of items on under-reporting and social discouragement from speaking out (Table 2) lends strong support to Jabeen et al., (2025) argument that stigma, fear, and family-honor norms are central mechanisms suppressing the disclosure of domestic violence in Pakistan, regardless of a woman's specific demographic profile these two items showed comparatively little variation across demographic subgroups relative to the more variable community-prevalence and physical-abuse items.

Conclusion

This study examined the socio-demographic correlates of perceived prevalence of domestic violence among 120 women in District Chiniot, using cross-tabulation with chi-square and Gamma tests. Overall, women perceived domestic violence – and the under-reporting and silence that surround it as highly prevalent in their community. Perceived prevalence, split into low, medium, and high tertiles, was significantly associated with age, employment status, and household income on the chi-square test (though not confirmed by Gamma), with family type confirmed by both tests, and showed no significant association with marital status, education, or area of residence. Homemakers, younger women, and women in nuclear or joint rather than extended families showed the strongest tendency to see domestic violence as highly prevalent, echoing part of the pattern found in the companion analysis of perceived psychological impact drawn from the same dataset, while diverging from it for education and residence. These findings suggest that economic dependency, life stage, and family structure more than education or urban-rural residence are the key axes along which Chiniot women's perceptions of domestic violence prevalence vary, with clear implications for how community awareness and protective interventions should be targeted.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time and cannot establish the direction of causality between demographic characteristics and perceived prevalence. Second, the sample was drawn from a single district (Chiniot) and may not generalize to other districts of Punjab or Pakistan with different socio-cultural profiles. Third, several demographic subgroups notably widowed, divorced, and separated women, and those in the highest income and extended-family categories had very small cell sizes ($n < 10$), limiting the statistical power and reliability of comparisons involving these groups; the corresponding chi-square results should therefore be read with caution. Fourth, collapsing the composite score into low, medium, and high tertiles for the chi-square and Gamma analysis necessarily discards some information relative to a continuous-score approach; the categorical results here should be seen as a hypothesis-testing complement to, rather than a replacement for, continuous-score analysis. Fifth, the Gamma statistic assumes an ordinal relationship between the row and column variables a reasonable assumption for

variables such as age, income, and family type, but a more tentative one for marital status, whose categories are not unambiguously ordered; Gamma results for marital status should be read with this caveat in mind. Sixth, perceived prevalence is a subjective measure based on respondents' own impressions of their community rather than an independently verified incidence rate, and is likely affected by the same under-reporting dynamics documented elsewhere in this literature (Zwenal et al., 2026). Finally, the composite score used here was an unweighted sum of the seven scale items; while standard and transparent, alternative weighting or factor-analytic scoring methods might produce a somewhat different composite, and exploring them was beyond the scope of this analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, verbal informed consent was obtained from all adult respondents. The purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and confidentiality were explained to them in their local language. Because literacy levels in the study area were generally low, written consent was not used; instead, verbal consent was taken and noted by the interviewer before each interview began. Data collection and the consent process were carried out under the supervision of the Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, as part of the first author's M.Phil degree.

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