

The impact of household form and marital residence on the economic dimensions of women's vulnerability to domestic violence: The case of Tibetan communities

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a serious public health problem affecting women's health and well-being. Globally, the World Health Organization (2013) estimates approximately 1 in 3 women have suffered either intimate partner violence (IPV) or sexual violence at the hands of a non-partner. IPV has been recognized by governments around the world, the United Nations, women's advocacy groups, and public health and social welfare organizations as a major social problem causing serious harms to women, their children, and their families. In a number of countries societal and official responses to IPV have undergone a transformation, such that what was once deemed a taken-for-granted part of life that did not warrant intervention from outsiders is now viewed as a social problem requiring the extension of support and protection to victims (Pleck, 1987; Walker, 1990; Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999; Yoshihama, 2002; Zhang, 2009; Heo, 2010).

Theories of IPV have varied and evolved over time, and factors such as genetic predisposition to aggression; antisocial and deviant personalities of perpetrators; social learning stemming in part from witnessing violence; or aggression as a reaction to couple distress have been proposed as the causative mechanisms behind IPV (Michalski, 2004; Saudino and Hines, 2007; Gordon, 2008). However, many of these theories can lead the analyst to sidestep or minimise a crucial factor in domestic violence (DV) – its gendered nature in heterosexual partnerships, consisting primarily of female victims and male perpetrators (Cascardi and Vivian, 1995; Swan and Snow, 2002; Dobash and Dobash, 2008;

Freeman, 2008; LanghinrichsenRohling, 2010), as well as gendered structural and normative barriers that increase the likelihood of victimisation.

Feminist theories argue that the underlying mechanism driving IPV is perpetrators' motive to obtain power and control over their female partners, a motive that is supported by broader notions of normative male dominance that exist within society. IPV has been characterized as a pattern of behaviours in which the abuser uses not only physical violence but a broad range of tactics to enact fear in his partner, and to obtain power and control over her (Stark, 2007; Humphreys and Campbell, 2010). IPV has been described as similar in nature to capture crimes such as kidnapping, the taking of hostages, or the internment of prisoners of war (Stark, 2007).

In a number of settings, to understand IPV as simply a matter of the dynamic between two intimate partners is woefully narrow in scope. Studies conducted in Jordan (Clark et al., 2010), India (Rew et al., 2013), and among South Asians in the United States (Raj et al., 2006) reveal in-law abuse to be at least as significant a problem as abuse from intimate partners.

In extended family living arrangements, in-laws become another group of potential abusers, in addition to intimate partners. In areas where living with extended family is the norm, the question of whether a woman lives with her own parents after marriage or with her husband and in-laws is crucial. The available literature suggests patrilocal marriage, in which a woman marries into her husband's family, can increase vulnerability to DV by isolating a woman from networks of support located in her natal village and home. By contrast, matrilocal marriage, in which men marry into women's families, should offer some protection to women, as women live in familiar territory, among their childhood support networks, and are in a position of greater respect and bargaining power than the status often accorded to brides in patrilocal arrangements (Hyde, 1999; Michalski, 2004). As Michalski's (2004) review

indicates, however, the protection offered by matrilocal marriage is likely to be mediated by the willingness of a woman's parents and relatives to intervene in DV.

Researchers working in South Asia have supported bargaining models of the household, which argue that if a woman's extra-household resources and options would allow her to live independently from the household unit, her bargaining power within the household is relatively strong. That is, a woman's options to exit a marriage and the strength of a woman's extra-household options, termed her 'fall-back position', can affect the extent to which other household members will acknowledge and defer to her needs, opinions, and interests. Moreover, a woman's capacity to speak up against arrangements she deems against her interests is affected by both this fall-back position as well as norms around when and from whom assertiveness is deemed acceptable. Agarwal (1997), for example, notes that mothers-in-law and daughters are often in a better position of bargaining power within South Asian households than are daughters-in-law, in part because of norms allowing older women and daughters to be more assertive than daughters-in-law. Finally, the perceived importance of a woman's resource and labour contributions to the household affects her bargaining power, while cultural notions around the normative rights and obligations of household members affects the control and allocation of resources within the household (Kabeer, 1994; Agarwal, 1997).

Theorists have argued that when women are economically dependent on male partners, they are at higher risk for DV, because of a lack of ability to leave the relationship or gain redress. A number of studies suggest financial dependence on men or lack of control over household resources is a risk factor for IPV. Some argue men with financially dependent wives are more likely to engage in abusive behaviours because they know their partners' financial dependence prevents separation (Michalski, 2004; Villarreal, 2007; Choi and Ting, 2008;

Wright and Benson, 2010). As Yount and Li (2009) point out, financial dependence may compel women to view IPV with tolerance, and even to justify IPV when it occurs.

However, while a number of studies reveal that a financial position or educational achievement lower than one's husband is a risk factor for IPV, many studies also reveal the opposite – that when women have significantly higher education than their husbands, earn an income, or earn an income when their husbands are unemployed, they are at higher risk of IPV (Koenig et al., 2003; Choi and Ting, 2008; Yount and Li, 2010; Mogford, 2011; Fisher, 2013). Choi and Ting (2008) therefore propose an “imbalance theory of spousal violence,” within which women's economic dependence on men makes them vulnerable to DV, while on the other hand when women are earning and achieving more than their male partners, men respond to their sense of emasculation by becoming violent or abusive. Choi and Ting propose the same pattern holds for imbalances in household decision-making power between men and their female partners as well. It is argued men compensate for decreased income, achievement, or household decision-making power relative to female partners by becoming abusive. The reason men try to compensate in this way is that they feel a loss of self-esteem when their sense of acceptable masculine dominance relative to their wives is lost. Researchers working in several non-Western settings have likewise argued that in cases where women are undertaking traditionally male gender roles or refusing to enter into relationships with men in such a way as to reinforce men's sense of their own masculine dominance, men use violence both to reverse a sense of emasculation and to punish women for transgressing normative gender roles (Kandirikirira, 2002; Choi and Ting, 2008). Under the imbalance theory, the primary arena of analysis is relative income and power differences between two partners. Within this theory, when women are equal to their partners in income, education, and household decision-making power, they are at relatively low risk for IPV.

Women's dependence on partners need not be only financial in nature, and financial barriers need not be the only barriers to divorce and separation. Legal norms, social services, and community and societal sanction can all affect women's vulnerability to DV, through affecting the pressures upon women to stay within abusive marriages and the opportunities available to them to exit these partnerships or obtain redress and support (Yount and Li, 2009). In her description of the case of African refugees living in Australia, for example, Fisher (2013) notes the refugees were surprised to find they were living in a setting in which IPV was taken seriously and was treated as a matter warranting external intervention by social services. As a result of their changed circumstances, many women reacted to IPV with less tolerance of it. States Fisher, "There was a sense that women were becoming stronger, felt more able to speak up about the violence in their lives, and seek support for it because they know that violence is unacceptable, that it will be taken seriously and there are options for them" (p. 843).

In some developing country settings, material resources are often obtained via one's position in social and political networks, and through one's social and family-based connections (Kabeer, 1994). Since marriage and ties to a husband can bring crucial social status and social resources to women, women may be tied to and dependent on marriage for both social and financial reasons (Kabeer, 1994; Yount and Li, 2009). In some settings marriage and association with a husband and his household are not so much a choice as a virtual requirement, supported by "normative pressures backed up by the threat of social sanctions" (Kabeer, 1994, p. 109).

Finally, it must be noted that fear of gender-based violence outside the home may contribute to women's sense of a lack of an exit option from heterosexual partnerships. Explains Stark (2007), there is "a pervasive sense that women are vulnerable to male violence in any public setting...This fear leads many women to look to heterosexual relationships for protection and to exaggerate the dangers of living on their own" (p. 249). Fear of gender-based

violence at the hands of men who are not intimate partners could, then, contribute to a situation in which women tolerate or remain in abusive relationships.

Interactions between household form, marital arrangements, and DV is an under-researched phenomenon. This article looks at the case of the north-eastern edge of the Tibetan plateau and shows that in a setting in which economic production is often primarily land-based, women's access to the prized and valuable asset of land is essential to their options. Women's material and familial circumstances offer more or less constrained exit options in the event of marital breakdown or abuse. Tibetan communities of the study area present a fascinating case study because these communities display a wide variation in marital arrangements and in practices of household monetary and decision-making control. All of this variation, however, occurs within a cultural context in which the most patriarchal arrangements are considered to be ideal and most normative, and in which men are considered to be both naturally and normatively stronger and more powerful than women.

Drawing on interviews and participant observation conducted in a number of villages and towns on the northeastern edge of the Tibetan plateau, this article argues that typical matrilineal arrangements offer the best DV protection while typical patrilineal arrangements put women in a position of greatest vulnerability. However, various sites of vulnerability exist in all marital forms, including a third arrangement, here termed marrying 'in the middle.' These additional sites of vulnerability include cultural constraints, such as the perceived necessity for remarriage following divorce and post-divorce child custody practices that can place children in particularly difficult circumstances. Patriarchal and inegalitarian gender norms that affect individuals' assessment of each other and of the various household forms has the potential to affect women's vulnerability in all marital arrangements, as we shall see. This study reveals several cases of DV that are largely in line with the imbalance theory. Corresponding with theories of household bargaining power, this study additionally confirms

the importance of women's fall-back position, that is, women's options for exiting the marital and household unit.

METHODS

This article is based on fifteen months of fieldwork conducted between May of 2012 and August of 2013 in a number of villages, towns, county seats, and township seats on the northeastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau in Qinghai province of the People's Republic of China. The research looked at DV dynamics within Tibetan households, and involved in-depth, unstructured interviews with seventy-six women and twenty-four men. Interviewees were purposively sampled for a range of age and education levels as well as for both rural and urban residence. As organizations providing services to Tibetan victims of DV were nonexistent or difficult to access in the study sites, this research employed interviews with women and men in the general population. Therefore, it was impossible to identify interviewees as victims or perpetrators of IPV prior to interview. Thus, not all interviewees were victims or perpetrators of DV, but a significant minority of interviewees were. For ethical reasons, research activities did not focus on one particular village or township. Rather, numerous villages, nomadic settlements, and towns were visited, and a small number of women or men interviewed in each site.

While in-depth, unstructured interviews were the core of this research, this project is also informed by the author's many years of personal experience and interaction with the study region, as well as by participant observation. Two periods of participant observation, one in a farming village and one in a nomadic settlement, were built into the research, in order to gain an understanding of gender divisions of labour within households and day-to-day household activities and relations. In addition to this, the fifteen months of fieldwork included numerous shorter stays with Tibetan families in Tibetan towns, villages, and nomadic settlements. An endless number of valuable conversations between the author and Tibetan friends and

acquaintances, recorded in the author's fieldwork journal, have also informed the author's understanding of Tibetan women's social status, household gender roles, and DV in this region. Tibetan language articles and books on women's status or women's history have further informed the author's understanding and analysis of the data presented here.

Stringent ethical precautions were undertaken during the course of this research, in order to protect the women interviewed. These precautions were adapted and expanded from the World Health Organization's ethical guidelines on researching violence against women, which stipulate that only one woman in each household should be interviewed, an interviewee's community of residence should not be informed the survey is looking into violence, and researchers should refrain from researching men in the same groups from which female respondents are drawn (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). Ethical clearance for this project was provided by the ethics review board of the University of Oxford.

This article is based on a reading of a subset of the interview data gathered. Information from forty-five interviews with women, and seven interviews with men was drawn upon for this article, in addition to field notes regarding all of the participant observation interactions, including periods of stay in a number of farming villages and nomadic settlements, and also including numerous conversations conducted with Tibetans occupying a range of positions in society. A previous research project conducted by the author in 2009, in which nine health workers and non-governmental organization staff members residing in the study area were interviewed regarding their work with Tibetan women's health, Tibetan women's empowerment, or DV, has also been drawn upon for supplementary information.

HOUSEHOLD ORGANIZATION ON THE NORTHEASTERN EDGE OF THE TIBETAN PLATEAU AND EXTENDED FAMILY CO-LIVING

Traditionally, Tibetans in the study region maintain their livelihood either by farming or by living in nomadic settlements and engaging in animal husbandry. Many villages are also

farming-cum-nomadic (རོང་མ་འབྲོག) in which case families engage in a combination of farming and animal husbandry. Households in the study region are typically extended family households, as it is considered incumbent upon the younger generation to live with and care for the older generation. It is usually only one child who will take up the task of living with and caring for his or her parents throughout their old age. This leaves additional siblings to set up separate residences for themselves and their partners and children when they get married.

In the study area, marital arrangements tend to be either patrilocal or matrilocal in nature. A third form of marriage is marrying ‘in the middle’ (བར་འདུག). Patrilocal marriages are considered to be the most common and normative, as revealed by common Tibetan sayings and traditions. For example, one Tibetan proverb states, ‘A woman’s place is in her husband’s home, and a monk’s place is in the monastery’ (བུ་མོ་འབྲོ་ས་གནས། ཇམ་བླ་འབྲོ་ས་དགོན།). That patrilocal marriage is the primary form of marriage is also attested to by the Tibetan tradition of wedding songs which comfort brides who are feeling sad on their wedding day, on account of the fact that they are leaving their family and parents behind (Thalo Thar [ཏྲ་ལོ་ཐར།] 2011). This theme has been taken up by famous singers in Tibetan language pop songs as well (Dronbe [བློན་པོ།]).

Matrilocal marriages appear most likely to occur when a couple has no sons, or if they have a son who for some reason cannot marry and live with his parents. In this case, in order to ensure that parents with no sons have a child to live with them and care for them in their old age, the couple will keep their daughter at home, and a groom is brought into the daughter’s household. In this way, a family’s land is passed on to the younger generation, and parents are cared for by their own children in comfortable and familiar surroundings. Alternatively, even when parents have a son, they may prefer matrilocal marriages if they wish to keep both their sons and daughters at home.

In patrilocal marriage, the *naamaa* (གནའ་མ་) or patrilocally-married bride, becomes part of her husband's household and family. Likewise, in matrilocal marriage, the *makpa* (མག་པ་) or matrilocally-married husband, becomes part of his wife's household.¹ Marrying 'in the middle', however, means that neither does the groom become a part of the bride's household nor does the bride become a part of the groom's household. Rather the couple's household and family is considered separate, not completely belonging to or forming a part of either the groom's or bride's family. Couples married 'in the middle' are likely to live in a manner similar to a nuclear family, in their own residence separate from both the husband's parents and the wife's parents.

The type of marital arrangement is very much an economic arrangement because, traditionally, it is about maintaining land and property within a family. Land is traditionally the primary unit of economic production, as it is the resource most required for growing crops and for herding animals and allowing them to graze.

For clarity, let us note that when a couple lives separately from either the wife's or husband's parents and additional relatives, this is by no means necessarily indicative of an 'in the middle' marriage. Often couples live away from their parents either because their work brings them to a town or city, away from their natal village or nomadic settlement, or because their parents are already living with and cared for by a sibling. When a couple lives apart from the elder generation, however, the couple's marriage is often still designated as patrilocal or matrilocal in nature. If such a patrilocal or matrilocal arrangement is negotiated by the bride's and groom's families, the repercussions are such that the extended family in question is considered to ultimately own the couple's property and any children that are produced by the

¹ The term *makpa* is also at times used more generally to mean 'husband', without reference to the type of marriage which the man in question has entered into.

marriage. In the case of a patrilocal marriage, then, the couple's property and children are considered to belong to the husband's extended family. Moreover, the primary responsibility for elder care resides with the household to which the couple belongs. Thus, if a woman lives in a nuclear arrangement but has married into her husband's family as a *naamaa*, she and her husband are primarily responsible to care for his parents, as opposed to hers. Finally, in the case that a marriage is patrilocal or matrilocal in nature but the couple lives separately from the elder generation, the groom's parents or bride's parents, respectively, may have provided the couple with the land or house or furniture, etc. which they use to set up their separate residence upon marriage.

Please note that within this article, when I refer to 'matrilocal' or 'patrilocal' marriages, I am generally referring to those arrangements in which couples co-reside with the elder generation. Thus I will use these terms with reference to their most typical connotation. The case of couples living in more nuclear-type arrangements is also addressed below.

Let us look in greater detail at the three main marital arrangements found in the study area.

Patrilocal Marriage

Interviews and participant observation revealed that when a woman marries patrilocally, especially at the beginning of her marriage, she is expected to work hard and prove herself. One of the main reasons she has been brought into her husband's household is for her labour power, and so she is expected to slowly take over from her mother-in-law, to become the primary labourer of women's tasks, so that her mother-in-law will be allowed to rest in her old age. Often, the pressure on a woman to work very hard is much reduced in her own parents' home, where she has grown up and lives prior to marriage. In her own parents' home, she appears to have a higher status and is more of a valued and cherished family member than an individual brought into the household for a practical purpose. For example, the Tibetan proverb 'don't say a bag is not heavy when you've only just started carrying it; don't say your

daughter-in-law is good when she has only just arrived [to your household]' indicates that a naamaa is under pressure to prove herself when she first gets married. She often is under pressure to serve the household members well and act obedient. Later on, however, after the new bride has given birth to children and has lived in her husband's household for many years, her status appears to often improve, such that family members listen to her more and pay more attention to her needs. Several years into her marriage, the naamaa may have proven that she cares for her husband's household and is loyal and committed to it. She is, moreover, the mother of her husband's children, and her husband's family typically would not want to see the children separated from their mother.

When a naamaa's husband or his family treat her abusively, they sometimes appear motivated by a desire to make her contribute materially to the household through her labour while minimizing depletion of household resources, such as food. Thus, abusers sometimes make the victim work incredibly hard, all day long from early in the morning to late at night, responding with intimidation and excessive anger when the burden of work becomes too difficult for the victim to bear or when some aspect of the work is not performed perfectly. Calling a victim lazy and gluttonous for eating a normal human amount of food is also a manifestation of abuse that is particular to this region.

Just as mothers-in-law were identified as common perpetrators of abuse in a study from India (Rew et al., 2013), while fathers-in-law and sister-in-law were cited in addition to mothers-in-law in a study of South Asians living in the United States (Raj et al., 2006), the current study reveals mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and fathers-in-law to be implicated in physical, emotional, or economic abuse of brides. Abuse of naamaa perpetrated by female inlaws emerges as a phenomenon at least as common as abuse by husbands. At times, husbands helped to shield their wives from the worst of their sister-in-law's or mother-in-law's abuse.

The gender division of labour in households, such that women's work is the sphere of women's attention, control, and organization, is likely one factor fuelling woman-perpetrated abuse, manifested as chronic criticism of the way a naamaa has performed her tasks or enforcement of an excessive burden of labour on a naamaa. Analysts of the Indian context have argued mothers-in-law may have been socialized into believing the system in which they themselves were reared is correct, leading them to treat daughters-in-law in the way they themselves were once treated (Rew et al., 2013). By treating daughters-in-law harshly, mothers-in-law may believe they are teaching obedience, hard work, and proper roles to be carried out within the household.

My data reveals that in some cases living with in-laws is protective, while in others living with in-laws tends to increase the severity or possibility of abuse. Thus, in some cases in-laws intervened when violence was occurring in order to stop it. This protective force was, however, mediated by the fact that, in some cases, the spatial arrangements of family members' dwellings meant that parents and other household members did not always discover violence was occurring, a point Michalski (2004) notes in his review of the literature as well. Some women additionally told me the actions of their abusive husbands increased in severity when their husbands' parents either died or stopped living with the couple. Living with parents-in-law, in these cases, did not prevent abuse altogether but served to restrict its severity.

On the other hand, abuse was in some cases perpetrated by fathers-in-law, sisters-in-law, or mothers-in-law. In some cases, a woman's mother-in-law and husband both acted abusively towards her. In other cases, however, husbands acted as a protective force shielding women from the worst of in-law abuse. In some of these latter cases, abuse from in-laws prompted the couple to move away and set up a more nuclear-style household, at which point the abuse either ended or reduced in severity. In some cases, then, living with in-laws was not protective at all, but gave rise to abuse.

Neglect emerged as a common form of abuse in this region, and was felt by many study participants to be one of the most severe forms of marital mistreatment that exists. When a man decides he is in love with another woman, leaves his wife and children to live with his lover, and simply does not return home, his wife can be left with an unbearable burden of work, left to do all the men's and the women's tasks in the household on her own. In some of the cases I encountered, this neglect was compounded by a husband gambling away much of the household wealth or hoarding the household finances for use by himself and his lover.

A less severe form of neglect occurs when a man stays in his marriage, wanting the marriage to continue, but simply refuses to do much of the household work. In these cases, while a man is spending his days playing basketball or hanging around the nearest county town or township seat, his wife is left with a superhuman workload, as she struggles to make up for her husband's negligence.

The fact that men are able to abandon their wives and still appropriate the majority of household finances for themselves and their extramarital lover, or alternatively to appropriate the household wealth for their gambling addiction, reveals the restricted options and low bargaining power available to patrilocally married wives. In cases of neglect, women sometimes wait in agony, hoping their husbands will eventually forget about their lovers or their gambling and return home to their wife and children. Women in these cases likely wait for their husbands' return because their prospects for remarriage are difficult, because the prospects their children are likely to face following divorce are dire, and because they do not have land and a house in their natal household to which they feel able to permanently return. The difficulties women face in exiting patrilocal marriages is discussed in further detail below.

Matrilocal Marriage

In the study region, when a Tibetan man marries matrilocally, he is likely to find his father-in-law holds primary control over household decisions and finances. Alternatively, his

father-in-law may have passed away and decision-making may be controlled by his mother-in-law, and perhaps by certain male in-laws, such as his wife's uncles. Later on, however, he may eventually attain the post of household head and decision-maker, once he is the father of the household's children and has been married for a number of years, and his parents-in-law are very old or have passed away.

In patrilocal marriage, death of a father often means his son takes over the father's role. In matrilocal marriage, death of a father may mean his wife takes over decision-making, rather than allowing that decision-making to be transferred to a newly married man who has not yet established his place within the household. Note that typically in either case, power does not devolve to younger women, though exceptions to this trend do exist.

According to study informants, matrilocally married women are under far less pressure than patrilocally married women to labour from dawn to dusk. Within my data, a woman's mother in particular appears as both typically more willing to help her daughter with the household tasks and less interested in ensuring her daughter proves her material and labour-based usefulness to the household than is a naamaa's mother-in-law. In matrilocal marriage, a woman is surrounded by her native family, village, and social support network. When she has conflicts or arguments with her husband, she may be surrounded by family and community members who are more likely to support her or may be less willing to judge her harshly than if she were a naamaa from another village. We must note, however, that many patrilocally married brides marry into households within their own natal village. In these cases, their physical proximity to their parents and relatives may be supportive.

In some of the cases I encountered, mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law spread rumours about their household's naamaa, by telling others she is lazy and does not work, even when this was untrue. Sometimes outrageous and untruthful claims were made by sisters-in-law or mothers-in-law, such as asserting the naamaa forces her mother-in-law to wait upon and serve her. In

a context in which the younger generation, and daughters-in-law especially, are meant to serve and be obedient to the elder generation, these rumours are likely to arouse derision and stigma for the naamaa. In patrilocal marriage, in-laws have the power to lie and spread rumours because they are in familiar territory, near friends and relatives, while the new bride is often, at least at first, a relative stranger unfamiliar to community members.

Furthermore, in comparison to patrilocally married brides, a matrilocally married bride's bargaining power is significantly enhanced by the fact that, were divorce to occur, it is her husband who would leave the family and property and return to his native home and village, as opposed to she. Several informants told me matrilocally married husbands do not conflict with their male in-laws (that is, their father-in-law and brothers-in-law) nearly as often as patrilocally married wives conflict with their female in-laws (that is, their mother-in-law and sisters-in-law). According to one informant, this is because, as a man, a matrilocally married husband is simply respected more by his wife's family. My data suggests that a woman's conflicts with her in-laws appear most often to stem from the in-laws' mistreatment of her. Common gender norms emphasizing hard work and obedience for women may, then, result in a situation in which abuse and mistreatment by in-laws is gender-based and primarily directed at women.

Marrying 'In the Middle'

In some cases, the bride's family pushes for a matrilocal arrangement, while the groom's family, feeling matrilocal marriage is a shameful position for men, is loath to marry matrilocally. In these cases, 'in the middle' marriages may be negotiated. Marrying 'in the middle' (བར་འདྲུག) was touted by some of the study informants for its benefits to women, since 'in the middle' arrangements, as compared to patrilocal marriage, are seen to allow women more access to their parents. 'In the middle' marriages also entail more responsibility for daughters to take care of their parents in old age. Marrying 'in the middle' appears to offer

many of the same benefits to women that matrilocal marriage offers. This is because, unlike patrilocal marriage, once married 'in the middle', brides need not be too separated from their parents, natal family, and childhood support networks, and they do not need to be under pressure, and under the watch of in-laws, to work extremely hard at the household labour. I was told parents negotiate this type of marriage arrangement for the benefit of their daughters.

Divorce, Financial Status, and Household Marital Arrangements

In the event of DV, a patrilocally married woman's primary option is usually escaping temporarily to her parents' home. My data suggests that beating must generally be rather severe in order to be considered extraordinary or remarkable, as well as severe enough to warrant the victim escaping to her natal home. After a woman escapes to her natal home, a woman's family often scolds a husband for his violence. In one case, the parents of a woman I spoke to compelled her abusive husband to take a vow that he would no longer drink alcohol.

It is also very common for families to insist their daughters work hard to reconcile with their husbands and in-laws, and to encourage daughters to return to their husbands' home. The notion that victims are partially to blame for DV appears pervasive.

My data suggests that in the case of women both suffering DV and desiring to divorce, the most common reaction is to discourage divorce and encourage reconciliation with abusive partners. However, families appear more likely to support their daughters to divorce if the woman has suffered prolonged and severe abuse, or if her husband has abandoned her altogether and refuses to return home. A woman's age and whether or not she has children also appear to be important factors in her family's support for divorce. A common line of thinking appears to be that if a woman is young, she may still be able to get remarried, while a marriage that has not produced children leaves women and their families free at least of the worry of children's plight post-divorce. Two issues that impact upon willingness to support

divorce, namely the perceived necessity of remarriage and the potentially severe impact of divorce on children, is described in further detail below.

Informants spoke about the bad reputation divorce can bring to both individuals and their families. In fact, women's families at times appear to push for reconciliation with abusive partners out of concern for the family's reputation. An anonymous Tibetan language online post, for example, described just such a situation in the particular case of one victim of DV (Nyukchu Len [ལྷུ་ཅུ་ལེན་] 2012).

Several interviewees described the stigma women can face following divorce. As implied by some interviewees, women who get divorced without getting remarried can be particularly stigmatized. As one informant told me, a man or woman who divorces but cannot get remarried is considered particularly contemptible. Remaining at all times in a state of marriage, as opposed to singlehood, was also deemed by several informants as necessary from a material perspective. In the study region, household labour is clearly divided into the sphere of activities considered to be men's work and the sphere considered to be women's work, though there is some overlap between the two. It was considered by informants to be undesirable for a woman to live alone with her children because every time her household requires labour to be conducted by a man, she would need to impose upon the kindness of a male relative or fellow villager to undertake the task in question for her. Logistically and materially, this is a difficult position. While 'men's' tasks do not appear to be tasks that women are physically incapable of undertaking, the fact that certain tasks are not typically conducted by one or the other sex means that men or women typically never learn how to perform certain tasks.

Typically after a divorce, the parent who no longer lives with his or her child virtually never sees or speaks to the child again. Thus, to divorce can often mean losing all contact with one's children forever.

My data indicates that when a patrilocally married woman keeps custody of her children after a divorce, she still often remarries patrilocally into a second husband's household, most likely because of a lack of an adequate permanent residence in her natal home and the perceived necessity of remarriage. In this case, when getting remarried, she commonly must leave her children in her natal household, as her second husband and his family are not likely to want to take care of children that are not biologically theirs. In some cases, therefore, divorce leaves children in a state of near orphanhood, taken care of by grandparents or extended relatives, with the children no longer in contact with their father, and with the children's mother married into another family and village. As study participants indicated, common post-divorce child custody practices in this region push many women to choose to stay in abusive relationships for the sake of their children.

Women married patrilocally are unlikely to possess any independently held land of their own. My data suggests that while a patrilocally married woman can stay in her parents' home if she divorces, she will not feel she belongs there on a permanent basis, since her brother has often married and has created his own household unit in her parents' home. As a result, according to many study informants, patrilocally married women feel they would have no adequate permanent residence were they to divorce their husbands. This acts as a significant barrier to exiting abusive marriages.²

A woman with a family that is both particularly supportive of her divorce from a patrilocal husband and in a relatively good position economically may face the following circumstances. Her parents may divide the household property between her brother and herself, giving her

² My interview data reveals that in certain nomadic areas, women may be given animals by their natal family which they take with them to their husband's household. In these areas, in the event of divorce, the woman's animals are typically returned to her. Though women in this case may be said to acquire an inheritance in the form of animals, their lack of land acquisitions leaves them in much the same position as those Tibetan women who do not inherit any animals. Options for divorce remain curtailed because, should the women desire to divorce, they are often left without a permanent residence or land of their own.

land, animals, and a separate house in which she may live on her own. This arrangement would allow her to remarry matrilocally, saving her the risk and potential hardship of another patrilocal marriage. Alternatively, families can support divorce and opt for a patrilocal remarriage.

When a patrilocally married woman gets divorced, her natal family carries the burden of providing the woman, and possibly her children as well, with a place to stay. The men of a woman's natal family are often also the individuals arranging her remarriage. Child custody arrangements and any payments made by the husband's family to the wife's upon divorce are also issues to be negotiated between the husband's natal family and the wife's natal family. Divorce, then, is much aided by the logistical, material, and practical support of women's families. The necessity to provide this logistical and practical support may provide families with an incentive to keep their daughters within their current marriages, so as to avoid the potential outcome of a woman being unable to remarry, and thus permanently provided for by her natal family, to avoid the risks and uncertainties that divorce can bring to children, including the possibility that a woman's natal family must permanently care for her children, and to avoid the impact of divorce on a family's reputation.

The fact that a woman's natal family can offer her a primary source of refuge from abuse gives a woman's family a lot of power when and if they pressure her to reconcile, even though this may be against her wishes. As Michalski (2004) states, in many developing country settings, in the event of DV "the partisan support that a woman receives generally comes in the form of economic support," namely "a willingness to provide a place to live or an 'exit'" (p. 664).

When a woman is working in an office or urban setting, obtaining her own salary and without need to rely on land or livestock for subsistence, she may not be as beholden to family and parental sanction if she desires to divorce. Such a circumstance

would require that women are able to organize their own permanent residence post-divorce, and are capable of caring financially for their children if they obtain custody as well.

As more and more women in the study area become educated and work in urban-based employment, many women are not tied as intimately to the household structure as they once were. Financially independent women may live alone and delay marriage for longer than did previous generations of women, or may be more likely than previous generations to divorce. In some of the study sites, however, living alone can leave women vulnerable to the attentions and advances of men, sometimes in the form of unknown men arriving on women's property in the middle of the night, attempting to gain entry to women's abodes so as to proposition women for sex. The practice of men attempting to gain entry into women's homes at night in order to proposition women for sex is a well-known and common practice in a number of Tibetan areas. Women are less likely to be propositioned, however, if fathers and especially husbands are resident on their property. This practice, which I am calling 'night visits,' is sometimes felt by the women involved to be a threatening, scary, stressful experience.³ Several women described fearful experiences of night visits to me. In one case I encountered, this fear was explicitly tied to a woman's decision to remain with an abusive husband. Fear of being single and therefore harassed by men was additionally listed as one reason a Tibetan woman stayed with her abusive boyfriend, in an anonymous post placed on a Tibetan women's rights website ("The Bad Boyfriend", 2013). A wider societal context that leads women to fear gender-based violence outside the home, then, can restrict women's capacity to exit abusive marriages, because women sometimes feel they require the protection of a male

³ It must be noted, though, that the practice of night visits is not felt to be threatening and scary in every case. In some cases, for example, a boy and girl plan the boy's visit to the girl's house together, in advance of the visit.

partner. As noted previously, this is a pattern very similar to that described by Stark (2007), who conducted his DV research in the United States.

IMBALANCE THEORY AND DV IN THE STUDY AREA

Information gleaned from interviews, participant observation, and Tibetan language editorials, reveals that gender-unequal norms and stereotypes appear common in one or more areas of the study sites. Thus, Tibetan language editorials, books, and comments made by study participants indicate a belief that many women like to gossip and talk too much, do not know how to consider issues properly, or have a tendency to be jealous, petty and get angry too easily (Gyaye Trabo [ཀྱུ་ཡེ་བཀ་རྩོ]; Droma [སྒྲོལ་མ།] 2008; Jamyang Kyi [འཇམ་དབྱངས་རྒྱུད།] 2008; Gonbo Kyi [གོང་པོ་ལྷ་མོ་རྒྱུད།] 2010; Dethong Wangmo [བདེ་སྟོང་དབང་མོ།] 2011; Chi Me [འཆི་མེད།] 2012). Some interviewees told me it is commonly stated that women do not know much and women's words are not worth listening to. Additionally, in ritual and traditional practices women are often meant to show humility, displaying they are more respectful, humble, silent, and deferential than men. By so doing, women show they are good women and are of ritually lower status than men. My interactions with several informants suggests men are often accorded great respect and status within the household, while women are under pressure to be respectful and humble.

My data suggests the normativity of men's leadership within the household is pervasive, and this leadership position includes the right to discipline wives, including via harsh verbal or physically violent means. A few informants told me that, in certain parts of the study region, men who are considered afraid of their wives are looked down upon in their communities. If you are a husband who cannot slap your wife when she speaks harshly to you, I was told, then you are considered a little incompetent. My interactions with numerous informants suggests, moreover, that it is often more acceptable for men to be unfaithful to

their wives than for women to do the same, and it is more acceptable for men to go out with friends, to drink and to smoke. Women may therefore be beaten by their husbands for transgressing the unequal gender norms allowing certain behaviour for men but proscribing it for women.

My data indicates that in some parts of the study area men tend to consider it shameful to marry matrilocally into a woman's family and either refuse outright or are very reluctant to do so. Some men are not willing to marry matrilocally unless the family they marry into is a family with more wealth, more power, and better connections than their own. It seems, then, that men are patently aware of the loss of power they face when marrying matrilocally and, feeling it is their masculine right or desire to be in control, are relatively unwilling to accept circumstances that do not clearly place them in a position of leadership and authority within their households.

Matrilocal marriage may therefore fuel IPV, if husbands attempt to regain their sense of masculine dominance by becoming abusive towards their wives. More likely, however, is that proximity to the wife's parents, extended family, and childhood support networks may be protective. Other protective factors may include husbands' restricted bargaining power in matrilocal arrangements, manifested in a husband's need to leave his wife's land, household, and village in the event that his relations with his wife's family turn sour. In typical matrilocal arrangements, then, we may surmise the imbalance theory of DV may not be particularly relevant, because although men may feel emasculated by matrilocal arrangements, their residence within wives' households may restrict their ability to become abusive.

Household arrangements, including the distribution of decision-making power and household monetary control, can vary significantly in this region, even within the three forms of marriage (patrilocal, matrilocal, and 'in the middle') described above. In one case I encountered, a nomad woman was patrilocally married to a husband who refused to marry

matrilocally. As the only child of her parents, she was duty-bound to live with her parents and care for them. Thus, for a number of years, the woman raised her son and lived with her parents, managing and controlling her household's finances as de facto household head, on her own, while her husband lived in his own natal household and visited her periodically. The couple's son, it was decided, would belong to his maternal grandparents. Once the woman's son became old enough to take care of his grandparents on his own, the wife moved in with her husband's family. Once she moved in with her husband, she no longer controlled decisions or managed the finances of her household, as she previously had.

Prior to moving in with her husband, this woman was derided by her husband for presenting the picture of an 'inauspicious', woman-headed household. Her husband often repeated a common Tibetan saying: 'when women head their households, it is inauspicious' (ཁྱིམ་བདག་ནག་མོས་བཟུང་ན་བག་མི་ཤེས།).

Her husband wanted to control the money of his wife's household, even though he did not live with her and appears to have taken no part in her household's labour. When she refused to give him control of her household's finances, however, he responded with belittling words, telling her, for example, that she is a woman and therefore does not know anything. Here we see the picture of a man attempting to regain his masculine dominance when faced with a wife who controls her own finances, in a pattern following the imbalance theory of DV.

Male control of household finances is the normative and prototypical scenario in the study sites. However, if a woman proves more capable than her husband in business ventures, practical problem-solving, or organizing and allocating household resources to ensure the highest profit or material benefit, she may obtain more power to control money and make decisions than her husband. Additionally, in cases where the husband has a tendency to whittle away the household finances on drink, he is sometimes deemed an untrustworthy custodian of the household income, and his wife is given control of the household funds. It is possible that

men in these circumstances feel a loss of self-esteem. They could therefore turn to IPV in an attempt to regain their sense of themselves as men. In one case I encountered, a woman managed her household's finances, but was beaten by her husband for her 'disobedience' when she refused to hand over money upon request.

In several of the cases I encountered, men appeared to hit their wives when they felt their wives were talking back to them, thereby refusing to silently accept their husbands' harsh words or criticism. In these cases, it appears women were transgressing a norm that they remain silently accepting, obedient, and of inferior status to their husbands. The immediate trigger to husbands' violence in these cases, then, appears to be the men's belief that their wives were unacceptably acting equal to them. This finding is largely in line with the proposals of the imbalance theory of DV. Moreover, in one case of severe abuse of a study participant, the participant's husband felt threatened by his wife's achievement, education, income, and fame, all of which were superior to his own. He therefore responded with abuse, in an attempt to regain his sense of masculine dominance.

DISCUSSION

The diversity of household forms found in the study region means that various options are available to women, such as matrilocal marriage or women's control of household finances. These options, however, tend to be dependent on a woman's family situation and on the wishes of her parents, parents-in-law, or other elders within her household. Moreover, despite the divergence seen among study participants, the underlying rule of households that nevertheless emerges, regardless of marital form, remains that of a patriarchal model stipulating a male head should manage household finances and make all important household decisions if he is alive and capable of undertaking the role. Others take on the role of controlling finances or making important decisions only in the male head's absence or when a man is deemed less competent than his wife.

Age-based and household-based privilege is evident in all of the marital forms. The elder generation of parents or grandparents is largely both respected and cared for by the younger, with the younger generation deferring and showing some obedience to the elder generation. Household-based privilege is the privilege of those who are more native to a household than the individual newly married into that household. This privilege enhances the power of native household members relative to newly married brides or grooms. This privilege places in-laws of patrilocally married brides in a position to abuse brides if they so desire, and also results in a situation in which matrilocally married husbands do not have much power, at least for a number of years at the start of their marriage.

More nuclear arrangements can give rise to reduced frequency of abuse by in-laws but are also arrangements which can remove the protective power of in-laws to intervene and stop violence as it is occurring. The presence of in-laws can also be protective because husbands appear less likely to become violent when members of the elder generation are present. The question of the impact of marital arrangement on women's DV vulnerability rests in part, then, on the question of who the abuser is. When in-laws are likely to abuse a woman, matrilocal and 'in the middle' arrangements are most protective, with matrilocal marriage being the best option, since a woman's in-laws may be least likely to abuse her in the presence of her parents and natal family. If the abuser is a woman's intimate partner, both patrilocal and matrilocal arrangements can be protective, as both in-laws and a woman's natal family members can intervene to stop violence as it is occurring. If the abuser is the woman's intimate partner, matrilocal marriage is once again the best option, because of women's proximity to their natal families. A woman's in-laws may be more likely to blame her for the abuse she suffers or to support her husband when intimate partner conflicts occur. A woman's natal family, on the other hand, may be more likely to support the woman. In some cases I encountered, both a woman's husband and her in-laws abused

her, with at times husbands and in-laws together criticizing and emotionally attacking a woman. These cases were mostly patrilocal marriage arrangements.

Prevalent beliefs around masculine superiority as well as the justifiability and commonplace nature of DV emerge as factors underlying women's vulnerability in all marital arrangements, as these beliefs mediate families' level of support for abused daughters. While the material, logistical, and practical concerns of families are crucial, the realm of ideas and norms also plays a primary role in the support, or lack thereof, that women receive from their natal families in the event of abuse. It is the ideational realm that leads families to either consider DV a serious problem warranting measures to ensure women's protection, or alternatively to consider the victim blame-worthy and DV to be relatively justifiable. My data reveals that the belief that a woman is partially to blame for DV is a pervasive notion among her friends and family, while at times the assumption that if a man has beaten his wife, he would have had a good reason for doing so was also seen. In one case I encountered, for example, a woman's father repeatedly supported his daughter's husband despite the husband's periodic beatings of his wife, because the husband was adept at convincing his father-in-law that he was both caring towards his parents-in-law and that his beatings were justified.

The familial interventions in DV that I encountered, resting often in a desire to reconcile couples, often did not remove women from abusive situations or aid in ending the abuse women suffered. Rather, temporary mitigation and a relative decrease in DV severity was often all that familial intervention appeared to achieve. Some study participants, noting their mothers had told them to work hard in their marriages, made serious and prolonged efforts to bear their abuse in silence, before ever approaching their natal families for support. One informant told me families believe their daughters simply will suffer a little when they get patrilocally married, and families therefore tolerate what they believe to be the inevitable.

Financial independence or the ability to access an adequate permanent site of residence in the event of divorce can be crucial for women as it provides them with a fall-back position, an exit option, should their marriages become unbearable, a point made by household bargaining theorists, described above. When husbands and in-laws are aware brides have an exit option, moreover, they may treat brides with more respect. Hyde's (1999) study of Irish women, for example, suggests individuals can possess bargaining power and garner respect just by virtue of the fact that they could possibly act in certain ways, even when those possibilities are never carried out. The issue of a lack of an adequate permanent residence post-divorce places patrilocally married women in a particularly disadvantaged position, leading a number of the women I encountered to tolerate abuse and remain in abusive marriages. In a patrilocal marriage, women are also often socially isolated, separated from their family support networks, and under pressure to work hard and produce materially for their husband's household. Importantly, the form of abuse considered to be most severe by many study participants, namely husbands' total neglect of wives, appears unlikely to occur in matrilocal arrangements, as men in matrilocal marriages do not always manage the household's finances, and can be dismissed from the household if they conflict with their wives' families.

Some of the social and cultural restrictions on divorce applying to patrilocally married women apply to matrilocally married women as well. Thus, a matrilocally married woman who is considered too old to easily remarry may have difficulty divorcing her husband even if he becomes abusive. The pervasiveness of victim-blaming attitudes expressed by study participants and informants, moreover, suggests matrilocally married women are likely to face some of these attitudes in the event of DV. These attitudes may affect the level of support these women obtain from family and friends. The fact that divorce often means a child can

lose virtually all contact with one parent forever is a concern faced by both matrilocally and patrilocally married mothers when considering divorce.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on interviews and participant observation conducted in a number of villages and towns on the northeastern edge of the Tibetan plateau, this article looked into various types of Tibetan marital arrangements as well as various arrangements in the study area regarding household decision-making and control of finances. Extended family living arrangements and abuse by women's in-laws emerged as crucial sites of analysis when understanding DV in this region, as has been shown by studies conducted in other non-Western settings as well.

This study adds to the current state of knowledge by discussing the specific impact of household marital form on DV, a topic that is under-addressed within research. This study adds to the available literature by finding that matrilocal arrangements should offer the best DV protection while patrilocal arrangements put women in a position of greatest vulnerability. Women's vulnerability in patrilocal marriage hinges on their land-based material constraints, their social isolation, and women's low status vis-à-vis husbands and in-laws who possess household-based privilege in patrilocal arrangements. However, various sites of vulnerability exist in all marital forms, including within a third arrangement, which has here been termed marrying 'in the middle.' These additional sites of vulnerability include cultural constraints, such as the perceived necessity for marriage, and for remarriage in the event of divorce; post-divorce child custody practices that can place children in particularly difficult circumstances; the general tendency of families to hope for and encourage women's reconciliation with abusive intimate partners; the pervasiveness of victim-blaming attitudes, which may affect the type and level of support women receive from their natal families; and common notions that masculine dominance and household leadership is normative, leading at times to men abusing their partners in an attempt to regain dominance. As such, the study findings largely support

both the emphasis on women's fall-back position found within theories of household bargaining power and the imbalance theory of DV.

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Acknowledgements

This study was supported by generous grants provided by the Association for Asian Studies, the Frederick Williamson Memorial Fund, the University of Oxford China Centre, the Department of Social Policy and Intervention at the University of Oxford, and St. Hilda's College.