Reading and Understanding DHS Tables

Statistical tables of domestic violence data can look intimidating at first glance. These examples highlight ways to read and understand tables.

Example 1: Experience of sexual violence

Step 1: Read the title and subtitle. They tell you the topic and the specific population group being described. In this case, the table is about women age 15-49 in India. This represents the entire female survey population in most DHS surveys.

Step 2: Scan the column headings (the top horizontal row). They describe how the information is categorized. In this case, there is only one variable, the percentage of women who have ever experienced sexual violence. Note that the last column lists the (weighted) number of women in each group.

Step 3: Scan the row headings (the first vertical column). These show the different categories the data are divided into based on the population characteristics. In this case, the table presents experience of sexual violence by age, urban/rural residence, marital status, religion, caste/tribe, and wealth. Most of the tables in DHS reports will be divided up in similar categories.

Step 4: Look at the very last row at the bottom of the table. These percentages represent the totals of all women age 15-49 who have ever experienced sexual violence. In this case, 8.5% of women age 15-49 have ever experienced sexual violence. This row also shows you the total number of women who were asked this question. In this case, 83,703 women were included in the survey.

Step 5: To find out what percentage of urban women have ever experienced sexual violence, draw 2 imaginary lines, as shown on the table. 5.9% of women age 15-49 in urban areas have ever experienced sexual violence.

Step 6: It is always important to pay attention to any additional notes or footnotes that may be provided at the bottom of the table. These notes provide further information that may help explain or clarify various points in the table.

Table 15.3 Experience of sexual violence

Percentage of women age 15-49 who have ever experienced sexual violence, by background characteristics, India, 2005-06

Background characteristic	Percentage who have ever experienced sexual violence	Number of women
Age		
15-19	4.5	16,617
20-24	8.6	15,427
25-29	10.2	13,832
30-39	10.2	22,542
40-49	8.5	15,286
Residence		
Urban	5.9	27,371
Rural	9.7	56,332
Marital status		
Never married	1.1	16,477
Currently married	10.1	62,652
Married, *gauna* not performed	1.8	568
Widowed	9.7	2,692
Divorced/separated/deserted	24.6	1,314
Religion		
Hindu	8.3	67,426
Muslim	10.9	11,396
Christian	5.8	2,039
Sikh	4.6	1,492
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	2.8	681
Jain	3.9	264
Other	9.3	333
Caste/tribe		
Scheduled caste	11.0	15,609
Scheduled tribe	10.2	6,866
Other backward class	7.4	32,938
Other	7.8	27,582
Don't know	8.7	466
Wealth index		
Lowest	13.2	14,763
Second	11.1	15,997
Middle	8.8	16,790
Fourth	6.8	17,499
Highest	3.7	18,654
Total	8.5	83,703

Note: Total includes women with missing information on education, employment (past 12 months), religion, and caste/tribe, who are not shown separately.

Practice: Use this table to answer the following questions (answers are upside down, below):

a) Who is the population in this table? What is the age group?

b) What percentage of women age 20-24 have ever experienced sexual violence?

c) Among which religion is experience of sexual violence lowest?

d) What percentage of widowed women have ever experienced sexual violence?

e) What general trend do we observe in experience of sexual violence and wealth?

Example 2: Spousal violence by background characteristics

Step 1: Read the title and subtitle. In this case, the table is about ever-married women age 15-49 who have experienced spousal violence, that is emotional, physical, or sexual violence committed by a husband or partner. It is important to always note when reading a DHS table what population and age group the table is presenting, as these often change in DHS tables. Again, see the note at the bottom of the table for more information on the definition of "husband/partner."

Step 2: Identify the columns. In this case, each column represents a different type of spousal violence that a woman could have experienced. Take some time to carefully read through each column. Women who have experienced physical or sexual violence can include women who experienced either type of violence. Whereas women who experienced emotional, physical, AND sexual violence, reported all three types of violence.

Step 3: Identify the rows (first vertical column). The domestic violence data in the DHS provide a wide variety of background characteristics to help compare experience of spousal violence among different groups of women.

Table 17.10 Spousal violence by background characteristics **1**

Percentage of ever-married women age 15-49 by whether they have ever experienced emotional, physical, or sexual violence committed by their husband/partner, according to background characteristics, Zambia 2007

Background characteristic	Emotional violence	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Physical or sexual violence	Emotional, physical or sexual violence	Emotional, physical and sexual violence	Number of women
Current age							
15-19	17.6	34.9	11.4	37.8	43.3	5.4	226
20-24	24.3	47.4	17.5	50.0	54.2	9.0	762
25-29	28.6	51.9	19.2	55.8	59.2	10.6	901
30-39	26.1	46.9	17.8	49.7	54.0	9.5	1,261
40-49	24.9	43.9	13.9	46.5	51.8	6.4	759
Residence							
Urban	32.0	52.3	21.1	55.5	61.0	11.6	1,449
Rural	21.9	43.7	14.5	46.5	50.2	7.2	2,461
Province							
Central	29.7	42.5	12.6	45.9	51.5	6.5	359
Copperbelt	34.7	60.3	26.1	63.6	69.0	13.8	656
Eastern	16.4	37.6	8.9	39.6	43.5	4.4	586
Luapula	16.5	53.9	9.7	55.9	58.6	4.1	309
Lusaka	30.9	46.7	17.9	49.1	54.6	11.2	589
Northern	25.2	45.5	15.5	47.9	51.6	6.8	563
North-Western	29.7	42.5	23.6	48.3	53.6	14.7	211
Southern	19.0	41.5	20.4	47.0	49.8	8.4	401
Western	24.0	46.9	16.9	48.4	51.0	10.5	236
Wealth quintile							
Lowest	20.6	40.0	12.9	43.6	47.1	6.5	757
Second	22.3	46.1	14.7	48.0	51.3	8.3	771
Middle	22.8	45.7	16.4	48.4	52.9	8.0	764
Fourth	31.6	54.8	20.7	57.9	63.6	10.5	860
Highest	30.0	46.6	19.5	50.2	54.9	10.7	757
Respondent's father beat her mother							
Yes	30.8	54.6	22.1	57.6	61.4	12.6	1,421
No	21.6	40.9	13.4	44.1	48.6	6.2	2,120
Don't know	28.5	51.0	17.1	53.0	58.2	9.3	363
Total	25.6	46.9	16.9	49.9	54.2	8.8	3,910

Note: Husband/partner refers to the current husband/partner for currently married women and the most recent husband/partner for divorced, separated or widowed women. The total includes women with information missing on employment status, number of unions and father beating mother, who are not shown separately.

Answer the following questions to better understand spousal violence in Zambia:

- In which province is physical violence the highest?

- Are there differences by residence for women's experiences with spousal violence?

- Look for patterns among the different types of violence: do results go up or down? Does prevalence vary within specific populations? For example, is there a clear pattern by wealth? by age?

Step 4: What does all this mean? Once you see that urban woman and women in Copperbelt have the highest percentages of experience of physical or sexual violence, how can this knowledge affect your work? Program planners and policymakers can use this detailed information to inform their activities. Perhaps they should focus prevention campaigns in these areas or do further analysis to understand the factors putting women in these areas at a greater risk.

Practice: Use this table to answer the following questions (answers are upside down, below):

a) Who is the population in this table? What is the age group?

b) What percentage of ever-married women in North-Western Province have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual violence committed by their husband/partner?

c) What percentage of ever-married women in the lowest wealth quintile have experienced physical or sexual violence?

d) What trend do we see for women who know that their father beat their mother?

a) ever-married women, age 15-49; b) 53.6%; c) 43.6%; d) Women who's father beat their mother are more likely than women who's father did not beat their mother to experience spousal violence themselves.