A Study on the Impact of Media on Gender Neutrality and Domestic Violence and the Legal Awareness

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to understand the status and perception of domestic violence with regards to the steep increase in the number of complaints received by the National Commission for Women (NCW) from 2019 which was the head start of lockdown. Latest report shows a drastic increase in the number of domestic violence in general especially during complete lockdown. This paper attempts to uncover the perception of people on the idea of what is domestic violence and gender equality and the legal awareness on the same. In India, with its diverse population, the lack of awareness, social pressure, indifference in ideas, and insufficient knowledge about gender equality–attitude–related to help-seeking lead to underreporting and negligence of domestic violence, which can propagate the cycle during the on-going crisis. This paper also substantiates the role of media exposure on awareness in the attitude of people towards identifying gender based domestic violence, and the literacy on legal consciousness through qualitative and quantitative methods such as a wide array survey and structured interviews.

Key Words: Domestic Violence, Legal Awareness, Gender Equality, Legal Literacy, Media

Introduction

Over the past decades, Domestic violence in all over the world is an ongoing problem considered after all these years, many variables tend to aid the stereotypes against several discrimination factors. Domestic violence in India, according to the 2020 report by the National Commission for Women is that there is a steep increase in the number of complaints related to domestic violence. This paper is an attempt to study the corelation between the perception towards gender neutrality, media exposure and domestic violence. Evolution in these days in considered to be aware of human rights and identification of differences. Greig (2000) in his study state that, men's violence is a key parameterof gender inequity, which reduces and sustains women from participating in development. But in this paper, it is not about which gender is dominant. It is more about identifying the perception of people in

general on the discussing issue of domestic violence and its source with respect to legal awareness

Domestic Violence in India

According to the data by the National Commission for Women received a total of 19,730 complaints of crimes against women in 2019 as compared to23,722 in 2020, according to official update. A national wide lockdown was carried out on March 25, 2019, to control the spread of the pandemic disease, but it also paved way trap many domestic violence victims with their abusers. The WhatsApp helpline activated specially for domestic abuse cases during lockdown received numerous complaints according to the NCW. Also, the NCW received thehighest number of complaints against women in six years in 2020 at 23,722 with nearly one-fourth ofthem of domestic violence(Nata Duvury & Madhabika B. Nayak,, 2003).

Domestic Violence and Law

According to the Indian Constitution and Penal code, aside from the human rights laws and fundamental rights laws, there are three majorcontributions with respect to domestic violence. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is a law that helps women to file cases against domestic violence. Members in the family and even live in relationships can be benefitted from this law.

Dowry Prohibition Act, as the name suggests it's a criminal law that prevents taking and giving dowry under the name of marriage and other unions. Indian Penal Code 498A is a criminal law that exists to help women who are facing domestic violence including mental and financial violence. It is also acknowledged thatdomestic violence is associated with education, employment status, caste, and religion of women (Garget, 2019)

National Commission for Women's (NCW) data showed that domestic violence complaints doubledafter the nationwide lockdown was imposed in India (Vora, 2020). According to research by Kannan (2020), Tamil Nadu police marked an increase in the domestic violence because they received around 25 calls per day during the period of lockdown. Similarly, Bangalore Police received around 10 to 15 calls every day during lockdown. These data from different sources indicate that domestic violence incidentsincreased across the country during the lockdown.

Intimate partner violence: Any behaviour by a man or a woman within an intimate relationship thatcauses physical, sexual, or psychological harm in the relationship.

Gender Neutrality

In Indian Context with respect to Domestic Violence prevention, majority of the laws aid to women and children leaving out men to be the perpetrators.Gender Understanding is a common space to understand despite of gender laws,policies and practices have equal access to resources and services within families and communities. Social constructionism provides an idea to explore pressing social problems as violence. Peoplehave an interest in defining violence in ways that excludetheir own behaviour (Baumeister, 1996).

Impact of Media on Domestic Violence and Gender

Intimate partner violence usually happens when the perp is in proximity with the victim. Violence is often instigated by the gender who holds more power and a position of trust towards proximity. Media and the upliftment of digital technologies have expanded informational and other capabilities of dissecting issues like domestic violence. What media does more than this is that it shapes the idea and lures the perception through content using various outputs. Several studies show that greater access towards media may influence the norms on domestic violence. That it may lead to a greater acceptance towards normality and a lesser awareness on gender neutrality.

In the early 2000s research and increased entertainment in Television, there were many soap operas and films that divulged on family, gender, social values where women protagonist were created in a way to maintain the values and practices by the said gender values. Now, media has evolved from radio to social media, giving an opportunity to widen the scope of understanding, there also lies the issue of the very core of gender neutrality and domestic violence may spiral into a normalising concept. This research has reviews which are decades old along with recent studies on the ongoing issue of domestic violence and impact of media towards understanding gender which says a lot about the lack of development in the concerned issue.

Objectives Of The Study

- To study the literacy on legal awareness towards domestic violence among people
- To study about the correlation of understanding gender neutrality and domestic violence in general
- To understand the impact of media on gender neutrality and domestic violence

Review Of Literature

In the research on *Understanding Domestic Violence in India During COVID-19: a Routine Activity Approach* by Krishnakumar and Verma (2021), due to the increased number of cases the research considered a wide range of samples from news paper articles that covered these cases and was content analysed. A Routine Activity theory was applied using three major components to address domestic violence was motivated offender, suitable target and absence of a capable guardian. They identified the abusers relied on or grew more abusive due to alcohol and unemployment. Low inertia and easy access made women to be of easy targets. RAT stresses on the importance of understanding and examining the social conditions that encourage violence against women and that this routine activity analysis helped to identify the element of motivated offenders.

In the research '*Desensitization and Resensitization to Violence Against Women: Effects of Exposure to Sexually Violent Films on Judgments of Domestic Violence Victims*' by Charles R. Mullin and Daniel Linz (1995), an experiment was conducted to understand the exposure of films towards violence on women. Five days into the experiment, half of the participants showed remorse and the other half started to adapt certain tolerance quality on seeing the violence-based films. The researchers looked out for negative arousal to satisfy the need of

inflicting violence and concluded that amount of time to desensitize the idea of violence differs among individuals and periods.

In the research by Loseke (1989) examined how wife abuse was projected in popular magazines. The issue of wife abuse/violence was first mentioned in magazines in 1974 according to the research. Many magazines describing the abuse was through personal reasons. Violence including choking, beating, threatening with objects, inducing fear, etc, occurred on a continuing basis which grew within time results in physical and emotional trauma. The victims according to this research is not women, but also children who might be a witness and the future generations may repeat the same cycle even after decades after this experiment by Loseke. According to Loseke (1989), limiting wife abuse to extreme violence ignores the "normal" violence in American homes: the pushing, shoving, and slapping those leaves few, if any, injuries, and that is regarded as normal or at least tolerable.

In Jensen and Oster's(2009) research on the impact of cable television on women's status in Indian state of Tamil Nadu, they summarised various ideas from the attitude towards addressing gender-based violence and the cognitive issue of accepting domestic violence showed a decrease due to the television shows that broadcasted urban attitudes, but greater outlook for the autonomy for women and younger children in terms of literacy and decision making

In a recent study by Samantha M. Gavin & Nathan E. Kruis on the Media Violence projection on the inmates in 2021, it was found that the relationship between exposure to violent media is complex and that exposure towards media violence and projection, the perps seem to victimise in prior with gender as a factor as well.

In the research by Kuhuk Bhushan and Prakarsh Singh (on the effect of media on domestic violence norms: Evidence from India, it concentrated on whether effect of media reduced the idea of accepting domestic violence as an everyday practise by women who have regular access to television and radio including awareness towards promoting education using the data from National Family Health Survey, India (1998-99 and 2005-06)

Mediated representations of violence against women in the mainstream of Australia by Georgina Sutherland, PatriciaEasteal, Kate Holland & Cathy Vaughan (2019)describes on how the mainstream news media report violence against women or whether these reports have reduced domestic violence cases. This was based on Australian mainstream media to measure the social and cultural norms that may have a source towards violence against women. It was indeed a descriptive and content analysis format on several media reports.

Aldine de Gruyter, (2004) did a review paper on the book by Nancy Berns called Framing the Victim: Domestic Violence, Media and Social problems which concentrated on social problems theory and how media shaped various perception towards understanding policy to domestic violence. Berns further instigated the study by studying several articles on domestic violence in popular women's magazines from 1970 to 1998 which was also a part of talk in men's magazine by undertaking content analysis. The review deconstructs how Berns categorised domestic abuse addressing as occasional integration and portrayal of domestic violence in media. Media constructs the concept of 'official reality' of domestic violence for

majority of the people and that the victim gets framed into a circle of blame where suppression of ideas and humanity happens.

According to the study called 'The Role of Men in Addressing Domestic

Violence: Insights from India' by Nata Duvvury and Madhabika B. Nayak (2003), in India Domestic violence has received little attention as an issue that needs to be addressed. They stress on the point of people's perception on domestic violence being the 'other' problem outside their community. Since domestic violence happens usually at home or at a close proximity it is views as a private matter among the family and the community should not be involved. This paper stands out since it concentrates on the role of men towards addressing the issue and how the components of masculinity including sexuality, appearance and other factors aid to glorify one gender while suppress the other.

Theoretical framework:

In earlier times, media theories focus on usage of media in political propaganda and manipulation. However, increased interest in research and technology has paved way for evolution and diffusion of several theories. Such one theory is Cultivation Theory or Analysis initiated by George Gerbner but later got criticised due to the lack of support in its place in other medium. In this theory, people who get exposed to media constantly or consistently tend to cultivate ideas or develop perception based on the repetitive messages from the medium which in this study, supports the effects of media on the portrayal and structuring of perception on gender neutrality and addressing domestic violence along with literacy towards legal aspects of the same.

Another theory which aids to this particular issue is Media Logic s it stated that the style of the message serves as a major contribution towards perception. The universality is the formats to render a message which uses cultural and other factors to interpret reality. For example, the media consumers need only a limited time to understand the output since the typical formats have been set by the media agenda.

Problem

• Drastic increase in the number of domestic violence cases since COVID19 lockdown in India

• Lack of literacy towards legal awareness on gender neutrality to address domestic violence

• Stereotypes constructed by media to project, perceive and address domestic violence

Research Methodology

India shares a significant global rise of domestic violence. Data from the National Family Health Survey 2015-16 shows that 31.1% of the ever-married Indian women aged between 15 and 49 years experienced spousal violence and almost 4% experienced violence during any pregnancy (International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF 2017).

Social upbringing, media exposure, traditions, peer pressure, early trauma are some of the factors that affect understanding gender and violence.

This study is specific to a particular demographics to understand the perception and awareness. It also focuseson the factor to keep gender neutrality and media projection as correlational parameters to perception on domestic violence irrespective of occupation, age and other factors. The responses obtained are primarily from random sampling, heterogeneous population between 18-45 age group because they have a mix of all socio-cultural groups. The method adopted for data collection were –

Scheduled Questionnaire: To investigate further we carried out research by scheduling a questionnaire and collected their feedback on the perception towards addressing domestic violence and gender neutrality. The researchers focussed on the awareness on legal perspectives and the literacy towards understanding gender with a 50:50 ratio.

Personal Interview: To understand the perspective of victims, who have the awareness on legal aspects towards domestic violence and how it was addressed further, personal interview was conducted with 10 victims, 5 male samples, 5 female samples.

The sample size of the survey is 100 and the interview is 10

Data Analysis

Table 1: Awareness on types of domestic abuse
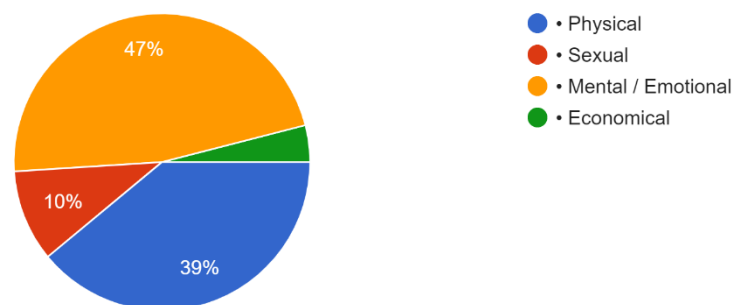
Table 1 shows that among the major types of domestic abuse categorised by the welfare institutions such as Physical, Sexual, Mental and Economical, the most common type which aids to 47% in the data is Mental or emotional abuse which also includes verbal abuse. Next to that is Physical abuse such as slapping, kicking, shoving, dragging, etc. With respect to Mental/Emotional abuse, the percentage is equally shared by the respective given genders.
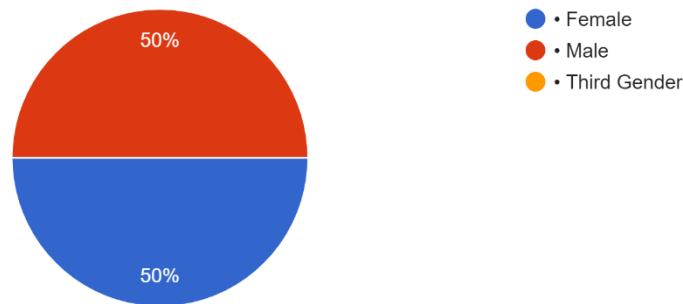
Table 2 - Gender

Table 2 shows the data has been collected equally between the gender perspective as to 50% Male and 50% Female with 75% being Working professionals equally divided.

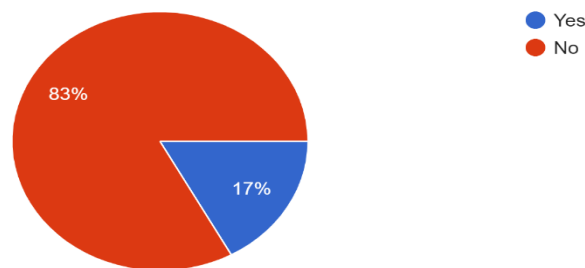**Table 3 – Perspective on being in a Gender-Neutral Country**

Table 3 supports one of the objectives to understand the awareness on gender neutrality as to whether do they think whether they live in gender neutral country in terms of law, policies, and practice. 83% of the samples conclude that they do not feel that the country supports gender neutral practices. In a correlational analysis between gender and this particular clause, out of 17% who agreed that they do live in a gender neutral country, 58.8% percentage were women (10 Women) and 41.1% were men (7 Men)

Table 4: Awareness on being victims of Domestic Violence
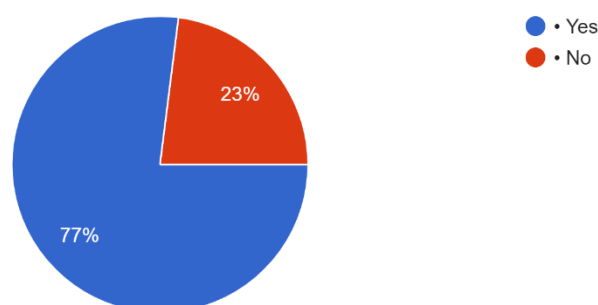
Table 4 shows suggests that according to the collected data, 77% has either been a victim of domestic violence or have had a close person who suffered due to domestic violence.

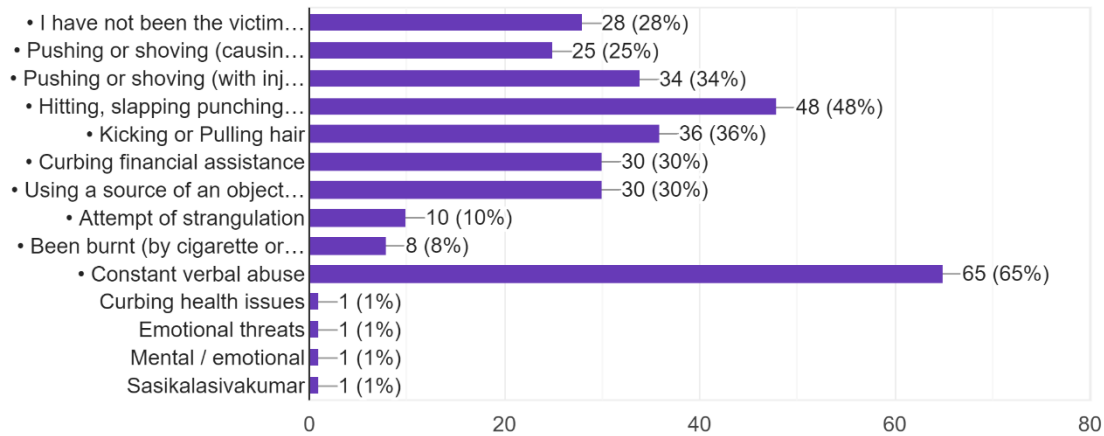**Table 5: Experience/Awareness on different types of domestic violence**

Table 5 categorised different types of internal domestic violence where Constant verbal abuse was ranked to be the most common with 65% next to physical violence including hitting, slapping, punching, etc with both male and female with 48%. Again, if a simple comparison between Gender and this clause, around 25 out of 35 were women who agreed the most common is hitting and slapping.

**Table 5: Relationship and Domestic Violence**
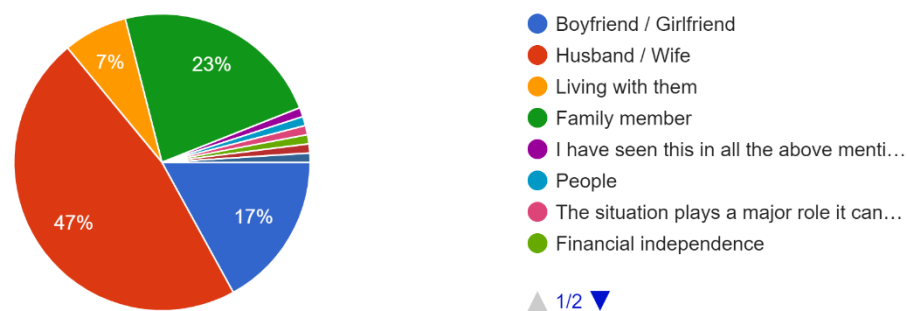
As given in the Table 5, to identify which is the most common relationship where domestic violence is found consistently, 47% agreed it is Husband and Wife relationship.

Table 6: Seeking help against Domestic Violence
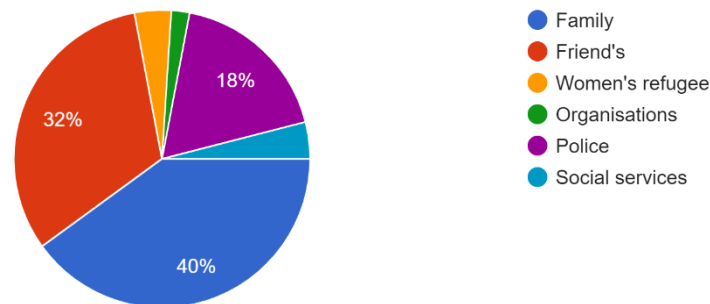
As the objective aids to identify the help seeking attitude against domestic violence, Table 6 shows 40% chose to go with Family to address the issue of abuse followed by friends and close allies with 32%

Table 7&8: Awareness on Covert signals and Helpline numbers against Domestic Violence
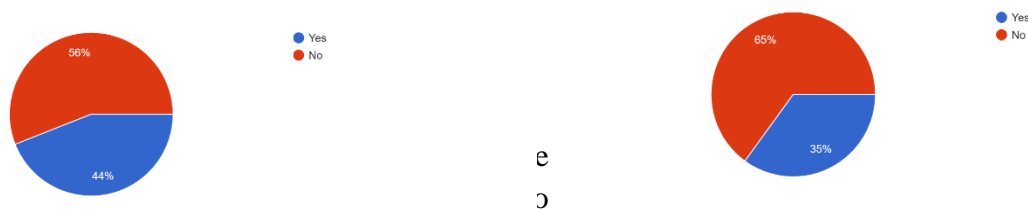
identify or to get identified as a domestic violence victim and awareness on the helpline numbers issued by the NCW. 56% were not aware of covert signals and 90% were not aware of the helpline numbers according to this data which tries to dissect the level of awareness on identifying victims during hardships.

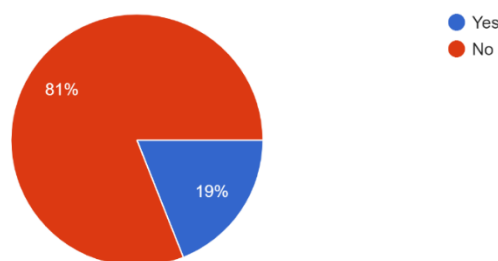**Table 9: Awareness on Laws against Domestic Violence**

Table 9 suggests on the data that supports the awareness of domestic abuse laws according to Indian Constitution where 81% agree that people are not aware of the laws and its consequences on domestic violence and discrimination.

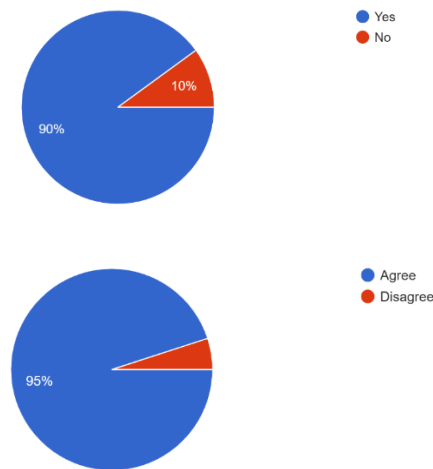**Table 10 & 11: Co relation between Gender Neutrality and Domestic Violence**

Table 10 is to understand directly on understanding towards the corelation between gender neutrality and domestic violence. 90% agree that it is due to the lack of understanding and awareness, the key idea of domestic violence is rooted to showcase the power struggle of one gender and the other gender goes into spiral of silence. Many factors are involved into this lack of understanding or deep-rooted stereotypical understanding includes societal pressure and media exposure.

Table 11 deduces the above finding on corelation between gender and abuse, with 95% agree on the statement that stereotypes on gender instability in understanding gender neutrality which is a source for domestic violence against the said weaker gender according to the abusers.

Table 12, 13& 14: Awareness on the legal laws against Domestic violence
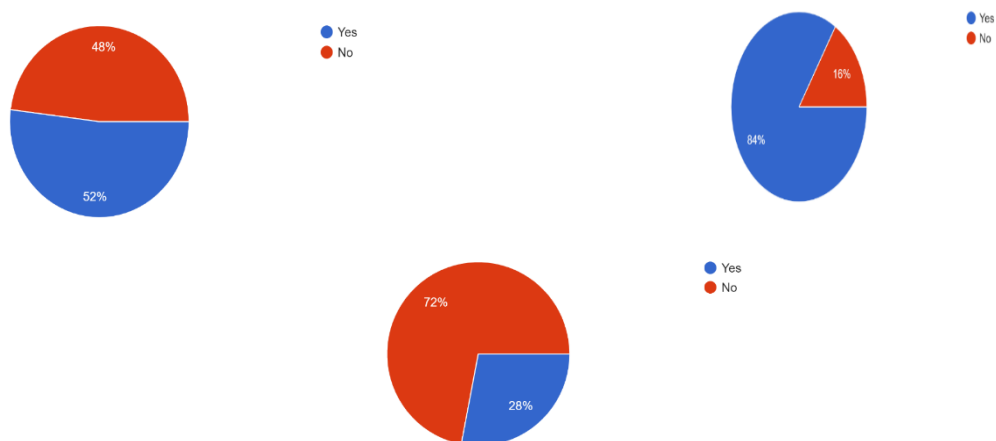
Tables 12, 13 and 14 shows that among between Protection of Women from Domestic Violence act, 2005, Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and IPC 498A which aids against domestic violence of any kind, people are more aware of Dowry Protection Act with 84% since the word Dowry is self-explanatory. Followed by Protection of Women act with 52% and the least with IPC sections.

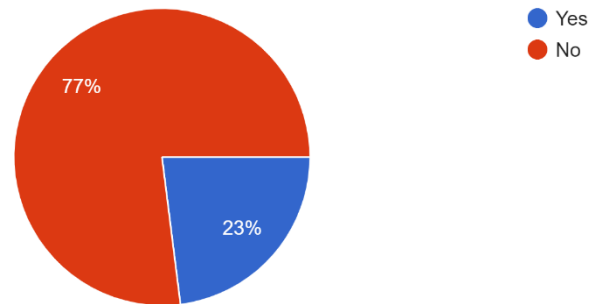**Table 15: Indian law as gender neutral against domestic abuse**

Table 15 shows that according to the data, 77% of the respondents think that the laws and policies against domestic violence are not gender neutral and are biased. There were issues raised on the loopholes in the constitution where with regards to sexual domestic abuse, a man can be the abuser and the women can be the victim and the vice versa is not much of a concentration.

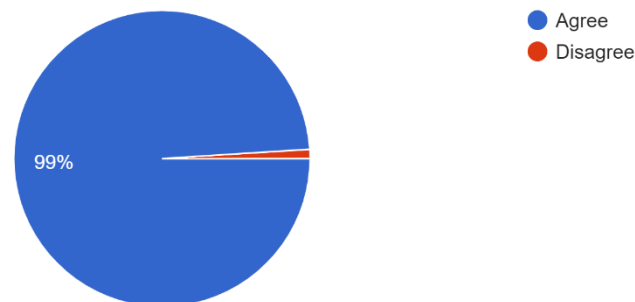**Table 16: Statement on unreported cases due to the society**

Table 16 supposes to aid that 99% people think that the domestic abuse cases go unreported or misunderstood or suppressed when the society normalises these abuses with respect to gender and other cultural values

Table 17: Statement on Domestic abuse not confined to a particular gender
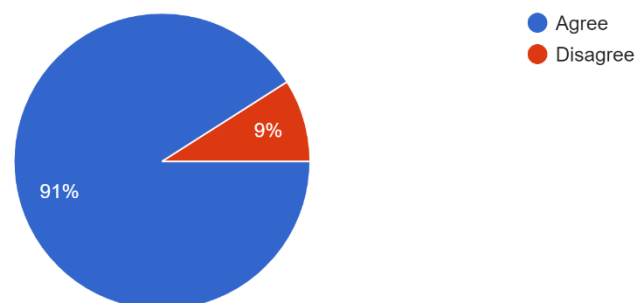
Table 17 explains that 91% of the people according to the data agree on the statement that domestic abuse should not be confined to a particular gender and that it should be views from a legal perspective using neutral laws.

Tables 18 & 19: Statement on Media distort domestic violence

Tables 18 and 19 explains a mild comparative analysis between statements such as Media often distorts domestic violence and Media reporting most of the salacious aspects of domestic violence against women provides the public with a perspective that is provocative rather than representative. In both 91% and 97% people agree to the statements aiding to the media projection part of gender and sourcing towards agenda setters of stereotypes based on gender neutrality and discrimination.

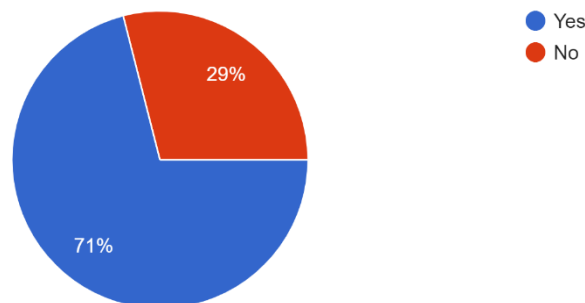**Table 20: Film/Soap Opera normalising Domestic abuse**

Table 20 explains on people's perception towards film and soap operas being a major source of entertainment and constant media exposure normalises domestic abuse in the content. For which 71% agree on that it does normalise the issue of abuse aiding to a power struggle between the genders. There is also a wide notion that films and soap operas are completely fictional but the people in the data supports the statement towards frame by frame constant normalising act of domestic abuse and that it has an effect over changing perspectives to address the opposite gender on this.

Table 21: Awareness on the increasing Domestic Violence cases during lockdown
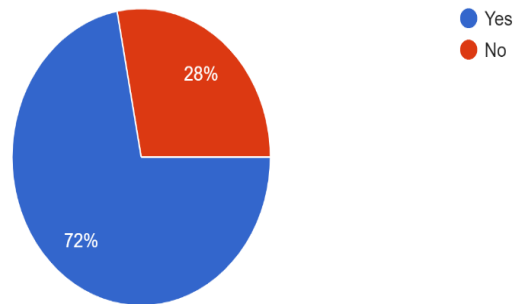

Table 21 summarises and supports the wide data by the NCW and Human rights violation data that there was a drastic increase in the number of domestic violence cases around the Nation. Table 21 shows that the people were aware of this increase which happened during the lockdown period of 2019-2020 which had a majority of women and children as victims.

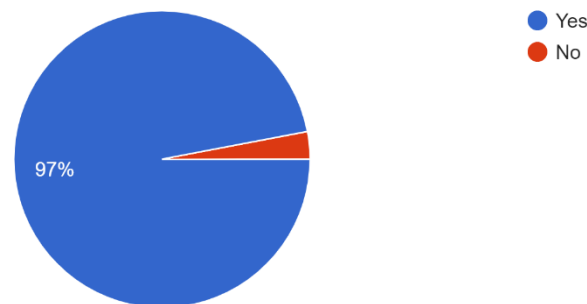**Table 22: Perception on needing more legal awareness**

Table 22 summarises on people's perception whether do they need more awareness towards gender neutrality, educating them about the consequences and values against domestic violence for which 97% agree to this literacy-based query.

Outcome Of The Interview Done With Victims Of Domestic Abuse

The study aimed to focus on people's perception on understanding the legal awareness towards domestic abuse and a corelation towards gender neutrality. Scheduled Questionnaire was administered for collecting Data across Tamil Nadu. To substantiate the study further, a few interviews were conducted with 10 victims of domestic abuse (5 Men & 5 Women). It was found substantiating the quantitative data which supports the objectives given earlier. Key take aways from the structured interview are:

- Women are still in the highest ratio of being victims of domestic abuse
- Men's ratio is seemingly increase with a steady number as well
- Gender Neutral laws should be implemented like western countries
- Domestic abuse should be addressed as an issue irrespective of gender
- Children should be educated along with their curriculum to understand the concept of gender

and neutrality
- Law and judicial enforcements should aid service equally to all the genders
- Awareness should be made against domestic violence instead of normalizing the issue.
  Ethical Considerations: Personal interview with the victims were done after consent about this study and usage to prevent biased content and revictimization. Their identities were asked to keep confidential at any cost.

Findings, Conclusion& Suggestions
- It was evident that almost and above 90% of the respondents agree to the statements on media structuring stereotypes on gender, distort domestic violence, biased in the reporting style and that media outputs normalises the issue of domestic violence
- 97% of the respondents agree that more literacy is required with regards to legal awareness on domestic violence and need understanding of gender neutrality
- 77% of the respondents think that the laws and policies against domestic violence are not gender neutral and are biased
- 95% agree on the statement that stereotypes on gender instability in understanding gender neutrality which is a source for domestic violence
- 81% agree that people are not aware of the laws and its consequences on domestic violence and discrimination.
- 90% were not aware of the helpline numbers against domestic violence
- The most common type which aids to 47% in the data is Mental or emotional abuse which also includes verbal abuse
- Constant verbal abuse was ranked to be the most common with 65% next to physical violence including hitting, slapping, punching, etc with both male and female with 48%.
- 77% has either been a victim of domestic violence or have had a close person who suffered due to domestic violence.
- 83% of the samples conclude that they do not feel that the country supports gender neutral practices

   We would like to conclude that the awareness on gender neutrality and domestic violence should considered as a priority irrespective of the gender. With respect to media content, the content generators or the creators can concentrate on levelling the gap between stereotypes on gender to create ore gender neutral messages for the consumers. Like Bhutan, Kazakhstan,and South Korea and almost all of Europe and North America law and policy makers can concentrate on creating legal awareness as well as gender neutral laws. Educating children and the forthcoming generation on the harmful effects of being a passive audience to media, domestic violence and understanding gender differences might be a possible key to initiate gender neutrality. Government can initiate and propagate proper channel of helpline numbers, apps, or websites to record and monitor domestic violence. Understanding all of this requires a shift in ideology, cognitive understanding, and behavioural development.

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