

An analytical report on Domestic Violence Data of Equidiversity Foundation, West Bengal

Organisation Background & Context

Equidiversity Foundation (EDF) is a feminist, civil society organization working in the rural areas of three districts of South 24 Parganas, Birbhum, Purulia since 2016 (6 GPs) and urban area of Kolkata since 2021 on leadership, decision making and political participation of women. We envision a society where there is gender equality, co-sharing of power and freedom from gender-based violence. We are committed to create an environment that promotes gender equality through political, social and financial empowerment of women with active informed participation of individuals, the community and the state.

In the process of creating a gender sensitive community and gender responsive system in the rural areas we worked deeply with the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), Block & District Administration and local community people including men, women, children and youth creating awareness and deepening their understanding on gender and patriarchy. In all our works the objective remains the same; to bring down violence against women and help grow the women's agency through social, political and financial empowerment.

Casework, though started much later, is becoming embedded in our community interventions work. The need to intervene in the cases of domestic violence (marital & natal), forced child marriage, child trafficking was emerging from the community women much longer but the approach was to strengthen the system first as *we see domestic violence as systemic failure* not as any individual case. Once the staff (mostly community members), the PRIs, administration and the community was ready with awareness and sensitivity towards women, Women's Collective named Nari Jagaran Committees (NJC) was formed in each samsad where we work. The committees currently with 931 women mobilized via NJC, creating 200+ active grassroot leaders and

trying to stand in solidarity with one another in face of patriarchal control and gender-based violence. create a local resistance within the community. EDF's role is to build on their lived experiences and enhance their capacities and knowledge on patriarchy and social and citizens issues. We can say these women of NJC was our first level caseworkers.

With strong foothold within the community the deeper issues emerged. Patriarchal burden on both men & women, poor socio-economic conditions of the families, gender discrimination, lack of proper education, very low linkage with govt. schemes, lack of awareness on support systems available, lack of opportunity and limited aspiration etc. came up as factors influencing gender inequality and violence against women in all areas. The political will was also lacking. The individual survivor's fight was becoming harder. With volumes pent up grief, anger, helplessness and hopelessness over the years, their mental & emotional health was suffering. At this point we took decisive steps towards casework as a strategy for social change.

Our strategic 'casework documentation and learning' journey started from January 2024 from South 24 Pgs. and gradually introduced in other fields. Till October 2025 we have seen total 163 reported cases across all districts. Capacity building of the staffs, linkage with police and other administration, exposure visits for our staffs and NJC was started before that. Senior leadership have always brought in casework experience into case handling strategy and intervention support. But it was need based and hence ad hoc. Need was felt to make these support strategic, intuitional and operational. The caseworkers were also taken through the feminist principles of casework counselling, mental health impacts and received training for casework communication and legal know how. Presently we have strong team of 16 community caseworkers across the districts who is carrying the organisations vision and mission in their fields through casework. Apart from the caseworkers we

have a strong data entry team who has complete understanding of our work and the process of casework. The case registration sheets were reviewed and improved periodically. Specific guidelines of casework were provided to the casework team with ethical importance of following child safeguarding & POSH policies.

Casework will not be complete without taking steps towards empowerment for self-sufficiency. We further strengthened the survivors' journey to livelihood skills development programmes where 333 families supported, 44 women entrepreneurs launched businesses, 5 production units operational, and established a grassroot production unit "Metho" as a women-owned collective brand.

Purpose of the study

The study was principally done to consolidate our learnings from domestic violence data of almost 2 years and to understand what the data was telling about the direction and depth of our work. We were also curious to know about any new socio-demographic co-relation which might have emerged from our work. Understanding the patterns of help seeking behaviours of survivors was also another focus.

Understanding Domestic Violence: Prevalence and Impact

Domestic violence against women is widely recognized as a pervasive global problem, affecting nearly one in three women during their lifetime. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 30% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner at some point in their lives (WHO, 2021). A substantial proportion of this violence occurs within domestic settings and is perpetrated by intimate partners.

Domestic violence refers to behaviours within an intimate or family relationship that cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, emotional abuse, controlling behaviours, and economic deprivation (WHO, 2013). The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-

based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (United Nations, 1993).

The issue of addressing domestic violence is central to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, which calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in both public and private spheres (UN, 2015). The WHO further identifies intimate partner violence as a significant public health concern and a violation of women's human rights (WHO, 2021).

The consequences of domestic violence are profound and long-lasting. Women who experience abuse are at increased risk of physical injuries, chronic health conditions, depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Domestic violence also adversely affects sexual and reproductive health outcomes and can increase the risk of maternal and neonatal complications. In extreme cases, it can lead to femicide. Additionally, children who witness domestic violence may experience emotional, behavioural, and developmental challenges. Beyond individual suffering, domestic violence imposes substantial social and economic costs on families, communities, and health systems (WHO, 2013; WHO, 2021).

The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare-led National Family Health Survey 5 (2019–21)** provides self-reported data on **domestic violence** among women aged 18–49 across India. NFHS-5 found that around three in ten married women (approximately 30%) report experiencing some form of **spousal or partner violence** (physical, emotional, or sexual) at least once since age 15. This includes violence by husbands or in-laws, highlighting how domestic abuse cuts across households and contexts. Rural women consistently reported higher experiences of spousal violence than urban women, reflecting entrenched social norms, economic dependency, and limited access to services in rural settings. This survey highlights a **significant gap between lived experience and official reporting** — many women do not formally report violence to authorities due to stigma, fear of retaliation, or lack of awareness of their rights.

The **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India** annually publishes crime statistics based on police records. The latest available detailed data for 2023 (reported in 2025) shows domestic violence as a major category of crimes against women. In 2023, India recorded 4,48,211 total crimes against women — a slight increase from previous years. Among these, “Cruelty by husband or relatives” under Section 498A of the IPC — which includes many forms of domestic violence — was the largest single category of reported crimes, making up over 30% of all cases and accounting for approximately 1,33,676 incidents. The national crime rate against women was 66.2 incidents per lakh female population. In terms of absolute numbers, large states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh reported the highest total crimes against women.

NFHS reports that nearly one in three married women (29.3%) aged 18–49 have experienced spousal violence, a figure far exceeding what NCRB records under domestic cruelty cases. This divergence demonstrates how cultural stigma, familial pressures, and fear of reprisal suppress formal complaints, particularly in rural communities where law enforcement institutions may be less accessible.

Methodology

This is an analysis of quantitative data based on service records, case registrations forms filled by the casework team of Equidiversity Foundation.

Sample

Total 163 cases were registered with us formally across districts from January 2024 to October 2025. Among which 108 cases (N) of women survivors of domestic violence (marital and natal family) were considered for analysis. Cases of elopement, child marriage and human trafficking (55) were removed for purpose of this analysis. The entry of data was done by trained data entry staffs and the case workers.

Analysis

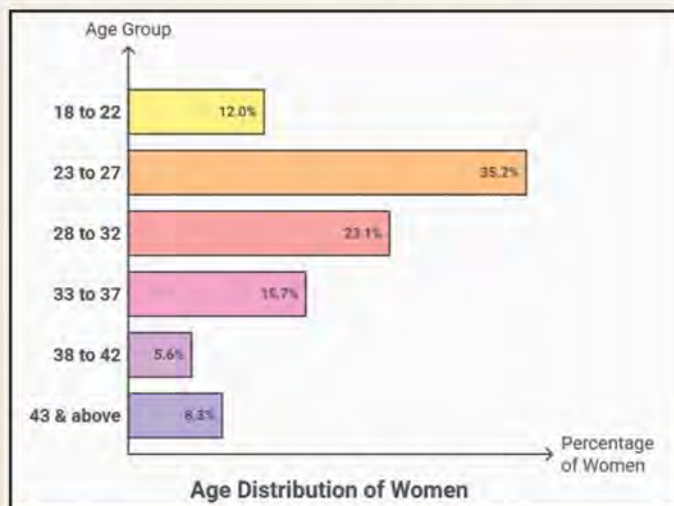
The analysis covers 108 cases of women survivors of domestic violence who approached EDF. The findings highlight patterns related to women’s socio-

demographic profile, marriage characteristics, forms of violence, and support-seeking behaviour.

Profile of women survivors

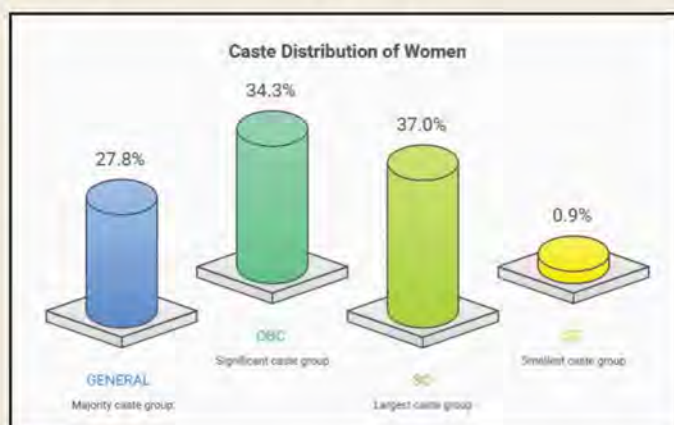
Age distribution

Most survivors were young women, with nearly 60% between 23–32 years of age. This suggests that domestic violence is particularly prevalent during early adulthood and the initial years of married life.



Caste Distribution

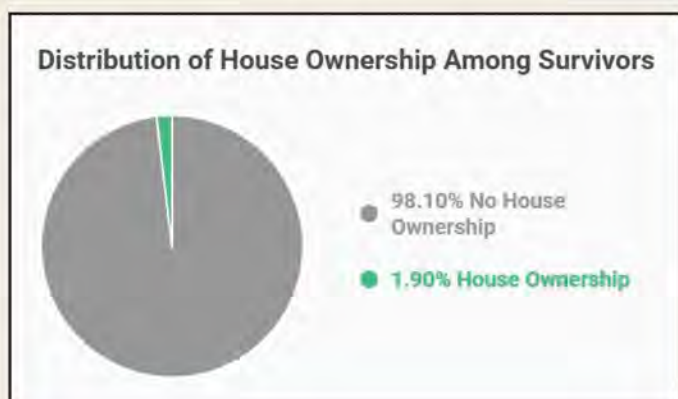
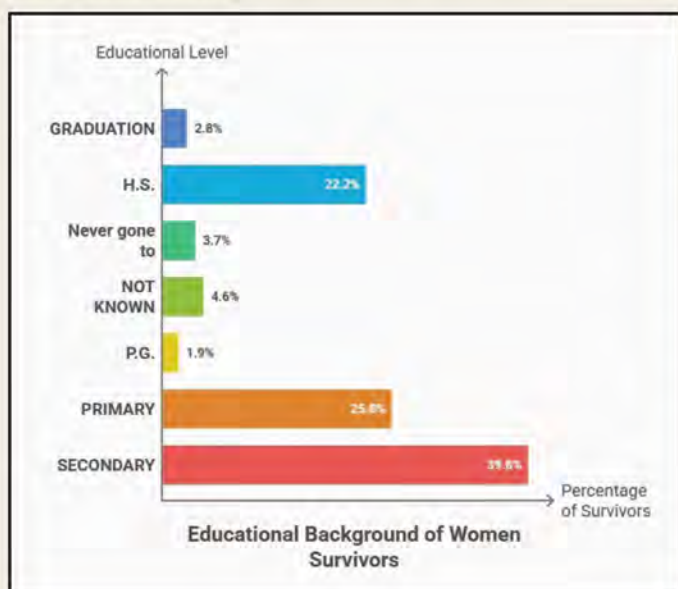
Women from socially marginalised groups formed a significant proportion of survivors. About 37% belonged to Scheduled Castes and 34% to OBC communities, while only 28% were from the General category. This points towards EDFs work focus on intersecting vulnerabilities linked to caste, social position, and access to support systems.



Education, employment and economic vulnerability

Nearly two-thirds had education only up to secondary level or below, and very few had completed graduation or post-graduation. Employment levels were extremely low, with over 91% of women not engaged in paid work.

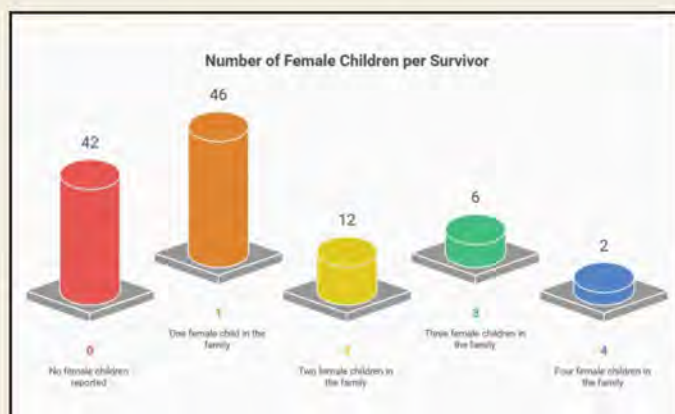
Economic dependency was further evident in house and land ownership, where almost none of the women owned land or a house in their own name. This lack of financial independence and property rights likely limits women's ability to leave abusive relationships or negotiate safety.



Education, children and experience of violence

Violence was reported across all education levels, suggesting that education alone does not protect women from abuse. While women with lower education showed higher proportions of physical (<80%) and emotional violence (>70%), even women with higher education were not immune.

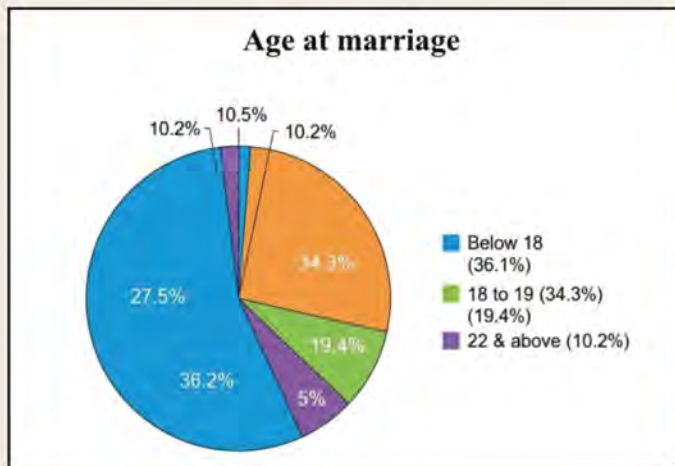
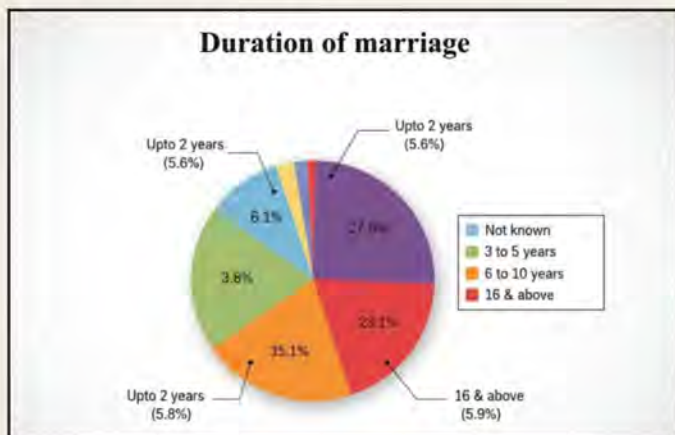
High levels of physical (>77%) and emotional violence (>70%) were reported in cases of multiple daughters. This reflects deep-rooted gender norms and son preference, where the presence of female children may further increase women's vulnerability.



Marriage-related factors

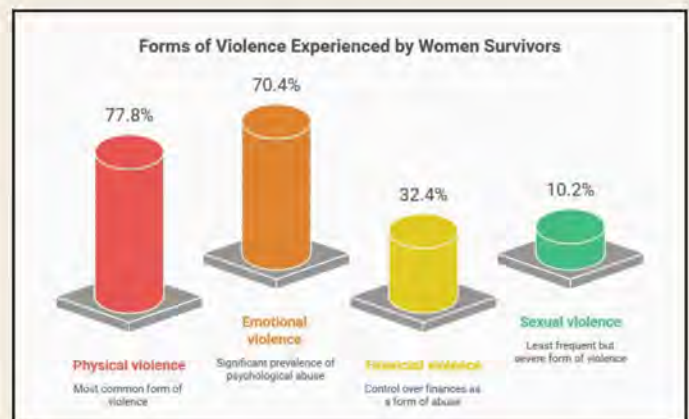
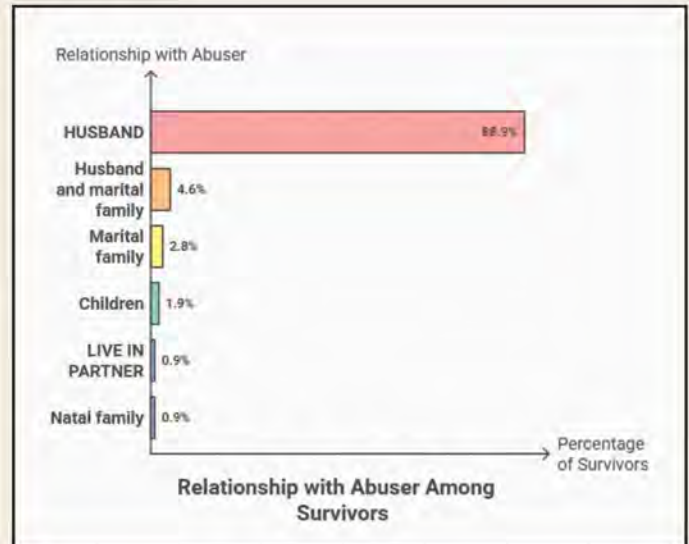
Early marriage emerged as a major concern. More than 70% of women were married before the age of 20, and over one-third were married before 18 years. In the NFHS 5 (2019-21) West Bengal stands at the top of the table in child marriage. Also, the data of teenage pregnancy from health department portal is manifold higher underlying huge under reporting.

Many women had remained in marriages for long durations despite abuse, with more than half reporting marriage durations of over 10 years.



Nature and perpetrators of violence

In nearly 89% of cases, the husband was the primary perpetrator of violence, either alone or along with the marital family.

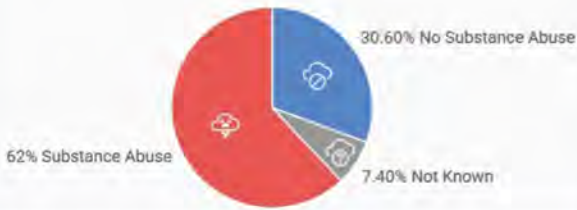


Physical violence (78%) and emotional violence (70%) were the most commonly reported forms, followed by financial violence (32%). Sexual violence was reported by about 10% of women, which is likely an underestimate given stigma.

Substance abuse and violence

Strong association between substance abuse and physical violence. Among cases where the abuser consumed alcohol or substances, more than 83% of women reported physical violence, compared to about 70% where substance abuse was not reported. This clearly indicates that substance use significantly intensifies the risk and severity of domestic violence.

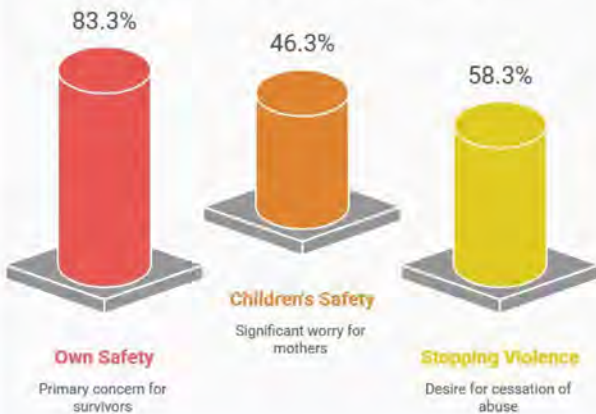
Frequency of Substance Abuse Among Abusers



Expectations and support-seeking behaviour

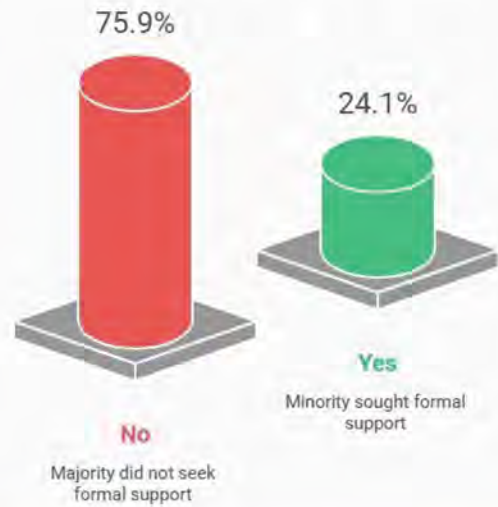
Women primarily approached EDF due to serious safety concerns. More than 80% expressed fear for their own safety, and nearly half were concerned about their children’s safety. Although most women sought some form of support, only about one-fourth approached formal institutions such as the police or courts.

Women Survivors' Expectations from EDF



Caste-wise analysis shows that more than 73% of women from marginalised castes (OBC, SC, ST) seek formal support compared to women from general categories. This focuses on lack of information and access to state run services.

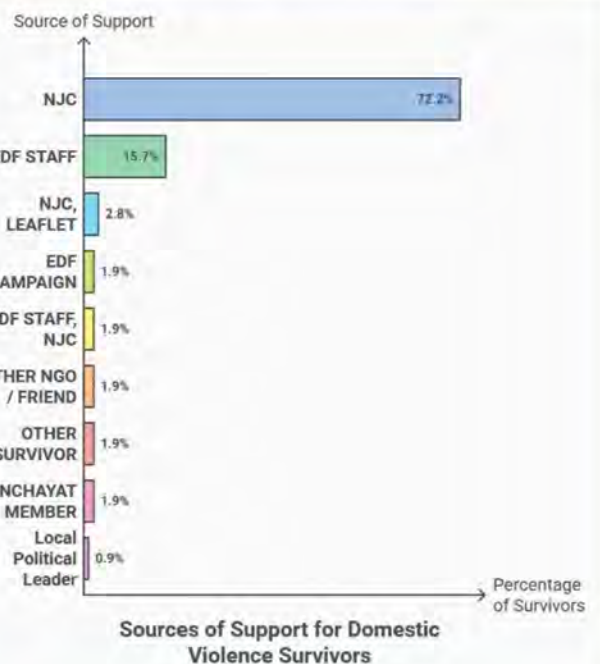
Formal Support Sought by Women Survivors



The reporting of cases was mostly through the women collective named NJC (>72%). This indicates that our plan to mobilise community women to prevent GBV is working. From comparing this data among different fields areas, it is understood the areas with weak NJC is the reason for less reporting of violence.

Presence of a strong team with their campaign, awareness programmes and connection with survivors helped >26% of cases to report.

The connection with political personnel needed to be made strong as it reflects only in 2.8% of cases.



Limitations of Study

This report highlights the pattern of reported cases only. There is a vast number of cases in the regions which remain unreported. Thus, it does not reflect a true picture of the regions. The sample size is modest for a small quantitative study but the information of an individual case collected by the caseworkers had gaps due to the survivor not turning up for subsequent follow ups and many times were not available in the given address. It is mentioned as “no information available” or “not known” in the tables. The follow ups are not recorded in this study so the final outcomes of cases are unknown.

Discussion

Several important findings emerge that deepen our understanding of the nature and patterns of violence in the intervention areas. The data shows that domestic violence is most commonly experienced by young married women, particularly those between 23 and 32 years of age. A large proportion of these women were married before the age of 20, and more than one-third were married before turning 18. This indicates that early marriage continues to be a major structural risk factor, placing young women in vulnerable positions within marital households before they are emotionally, socially, or economically prepared.

Marital violence is perpetrated predominantly by husbands and is observed across caste groups. However, a higher proportion of survivors come from socially disadvantaged communities, largely reflecting EDF's focused engagement and outreach within marginalised populations. In a smaller number of cases, in-laws are either directly involved or act together with the husband. This highlights the intimate partner as the central source of violence within marital relationships.

Employment and financial support are major factors for domestic violence to continue. An overwhelming 91 percent of survivors have no employment or own earning. With no income, house or land they become more vulnerable to domestic violence.

Domestic violence is not confined to the early years of marriage. A significant proportion of survivors have

been married for more than ten years, indicating that abuse can persist over long periods and may begin at different stages of the marital relationship, often in response to changing stresses within families or individual circumstances. This pattern also reflects women's help-seeking trajectories, where many continue to endure violence for years before seeking support.

Education does not automatically prevent violence. Even survivors who have completed graduation reported experiencing both physical and emotional abuse. But incidences of physical and emotional abuse were much higher in lower educational levels. This shows that higher education alone is insufficient to eliminate domestic violence.

Most survivors across caste groups did not seek formal institutional support such as police or legal services. This suggests the presence of barriers such as fear, stigma, lack of awareness, or limited access to support systems. They are more comfortable to share with community women or maybe they are more accessible. But behind the choice of not seeking formal help, it may be very much possible the patriarchal values of marriage and identity keep on influencing the DV survivors.

The findings also draw attention to the influence of gender norms, particularly son preference. Higher levels of violence are observed in families with multiple daughters, indicating that deeply rooted patriarchal expectations around male heirs may increase women's vulnerability within marriage. Safety concerns are a major reason for seeking support, with a large proportion of women reporting fear for their own lives and for their children's well-being. However, only a small proportion approach formal institutions such as the police or courts. Instead, most cases are reported through the Nari Jagaran Committees (NJC), the women's collectives formed by EDF. This demonstrates the critical importance of community-based structures in enabling disclosure and support. Women appear more comfortable approaching trusted community members than formal state systems, which may be perceived as inaccessible, intimidating, or unsupportive.

The analysis also brings attention to violence occurring within the natal family, an often less visible but equally significant dimension of domestic abuse. While marital violence constitutes the majority of reported cases, a proportion of women and girls approached EDF due to abuse within their parental homes. This indicates that domestic violence is not confined to marital households but is rooted in broader patriarchal family structures that shape women's lives from childhood through adulthood.

Overall, the findings suggest that domestic violence in the intervention areas is deeply embedded in

structural inequalities related to early marriage, marginalisation, economic dependency, patriarchal norms, and weak institutional trust. The data reinforces that a uni-dimensional response is insufficient. While legal remedies are necessary, sustainable reduction in violence requires long-term community engagement, economic empowerment initiatives, strengthening of women's collectives, and improved linkages with state institutions. The strong role played by NJC in case reporting demonstrates that grassroots feminist mobilisation is an effective entry point for addressing domestic violence.

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