

PERCEPTIONS OF MALAYSIAN INDIAN WOMEN ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MALAYSIA: A PEEK INTO THE INDIAN HOUSEHOLDS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Malaysian Indian women perceived and internalised domestic violence in Malaysia. Domestic violence is linked to gender issues that have disproportionately affected women compared to men in society. In traditional societies, women were frequently socialised to be subordinate to men in terms of roles, responsibilities and positions. These setbacks have contributed to the domestic violence issue among women. Domestic violence is a prime example of exploitation and discrimination against women in various aspects of their lives. Women have typically been passive and resisting domestic violence experiences to protect their household, male partners, children and society. The data for this study were gathered through in-depth interviews with 24 Malaysian Indian women, who were recruited through the purposive sampling technique. The qualitative data was analysed with Nvivo11 software. Three themes were identified that reflect participants' perceptions of domestic violence in Malaysia. First, participants saw domestic violence as a normalising aspect of marital life. Second, participants saw domestic violence as a serious problem that affects women and their rights. Third, participants saw domestic violence as a sign of male identity to protect women. This study offers gender perspectives, such as the impact of masculinities,

the patriarchal system and unequal power relationships in the household. It also explains the complexities of women's socialisation in traditional households, as well as enlightening various stakeholders in Malaysia on the perceptions of Malaysian Indian women on domestic violence.

Keywords: Malaysian Indian women, domestic violence, gender roles, patriarchy

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a significant issue that affects women worldwide (Aihie 2010; Lubker 2004). It has a significant public health impact and is a gross violation of women's human rights (World Health Organization 2021). Domestic violence can be traced back to historical and cultural perceptions of marriage and family. In some parts of the world, patriarchal views of heterosexual relationships have historically influenced familial constructs. Patriarchy is generally defined as a society in which men hold power and women are largely excluded. Domestic violence against women is rooted in a global discriminatory culture that denies women equal rights with men, legitimising the misappropriation of women's bodies for personal gain (Amnesty International n.d.).

In Malaysia, domestic violence is a serious issue of public concern (Randawar and Jayabalan 2018). According to the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act 2017, domestic violence is defined as an attempt to cause fear and physical injuries intentionally and unintentionally, causing physical injuries fully aware of the fact that it will cause physical injuries to the victim, forcing through coercion or threats or any other acts that the victim has a right to refuse and which cause sexual abuse, detaining and confining a person against his or her will, causing distress and anxiety to the victim by imposing the harassments as well destruction or damage of the property intentionally or unintentionally, removing or withholding the victim's property with the sole intention of causing distress and monetary loss to the victim, threatening the victim with the intent of causing the victim to fear for his or her safety or the safety of a third person as well as distress, and communicating with the victim (not limited to electronic communications only) or third party with the intention to malign or slander the victim's honour and good name by any means (Laws of Malaysia 2017). This act protects women and all family members against violence committed within the domestic sphere.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) and the Women Centre for Change (WCC) make significant contributions to the fight against domestic violence in Malaysia. These NGOs are well-known

organisations that provide various assistance services to victims of domestic violence in Malaysia. WAO services include a 24-hour hotline, WhatsApp/SMS assistance, and a programme called TINA (Think I Need Aid), whereas WCC provides free and confidential services such as counselling, temporary shelter, legal advice, victim support, and hospital support for victims of domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault. Both advocates' efforts have been a great backbone in taking the edge off domestic violence cases in Malaysia. According to the WAO Annual Report for the Year 2020, calls to TINA and 24-hour hotline inquiries increased from 250 in February 2020 to 361 in March 2020 and 898 in April 2020 (Women Aid Organization 2020). Aside from WAO and WCC, One Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC) operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week in Malaysian government hospitals. The primary goal of OSCC is to provide a safe place for victims to be protected from further harm, to examine their injuries and treat them appropriately, to assist in police investigations, and to safely locate victims until they receive assistance from the social welfare department (Marimuthu 2013). This indicates a growing awareness of domestic violence and the availability of helplines in Malaysia.

There are some studies conducted on domestic violence in Malaysia. Hayati et al. (2020) used the quantitative approach to study intimate partner violence in Malaysia where lower education background, lower socioeconomic status, history/current substance abuse, exposure to prior abuse or violence, violence-condoning attitude, husbands' or partners' controlling behaviour, substance abuse and involvement in fights and lack of social support are associated with intimate partner violence. Relatedly, Siti Hajar and Nuruaslizawati (2020) employed the quantitative approach to investigate the various types of domestic violence prevalent in Malaysian society. According to their findings, there were significant differences in the types of domestic violence (economic, sexual, physical and emotional violence) experienced by male and female respondents. Aside from that, women were more likely to be victims of domestic violence due to men's power and control over women. In terms of experience, economic violence is the most prevalent form of violence in a household. Gianesan and Chethiyar (2021) examined domestic violence from counsellors' perspectives during the COVID-19 pandemic. A quantitative approach was employed where they obtained pertinent data on the issue of domestic violence that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers interviewed four registered counsellors from Malaysia's National Population and Family Development Board and the Social Welfare Department. The findings revealed that some of the causes of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic were financial responsibility burden, failing to manage time properly, family, environmental, drug and alcohol intake.

Halimah and Hariharan (2011) investigated how demographic and marital capital factors influence domestic violence in Malaysia. Secondary data were obtained from case files at the WAO from 2002 to 2005. It included open-ended interviews conducted by WAO social workers when the women first arrived at the shelter. A quantitative data analysis was performed and according to the findings, the perpetrators' age, the survivors' income status, and the number of children have a significant relationship with the level of violence in a household. The findings showed that women with income are more likely to be abused more frequently compared to those without income which is contrary to the Feminist resource theory deployed in the study that predicts that as women's income increases, violence towards them decreases. Contrary, Noor Shakirah et al. (2022) explored the perspectives of some selected Islamic academics in order to address issues of violence from the standpoint of Islamic scholars. A qualitative approach was employed where interviews were conducted with five respondents. The findings revealed that religious ignorance and internal factors played a significant role in domestic violence. This provides an alternative perspective because it includes insights from the Islamic scholars in probing into the issues of domestic violence. Nuruaslizawati, Siti Hajar and Azlini (2021) studied economic, emotional, sexual and physical domestic violence in Malaysia's East Coast states of Terengganu, Kelantan and Pahang. To collect data, a qualitative approach using a survey method was used. Data from 390 respondents were collected using a multistage sampling technique. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used to analyse the data, which included descriptive and inferential analysis (ANOVA). According to the findings, Malaysian respondents have a high level of knowledge about various types of domestic violence, including economic, emotional, sexual and physical violence. The findings also revealed that education level has a relationship with the types of violence that exist, including sexual, emotional and physical violence.

Mariny (2014) examined abused women's accounts in addition to the impact, barriers to violence disclosure, and useful resources for women victims dealing with domestic violence. A qualitative approach was employed where semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 women who identified as victims or survivors of domestic violence perpetrated by their husbands or ex-husbands. The impacts include physical injuries, mental health problems, social isolation, a growing faith, and negative effects on children and women's self-worth. The study also discovered that many of these abused women were hesitant to disclose abuse because they wanted to conceal those violent experiences from others due to Malaysian perceptions on disclosing marital affairs, contrary to the feminist perspective deployed in this study which focuses on the equality in gender roles

within a marriage. It proscribes male power and control over females and condemns the subordinate position of women in society. Women are also concerned about the children's well-being, they felt partially responsible for provoking the violence, and they could not avoid negative labels for being disrespectful to their men, which is in line with the psychological perspective deployed in this study. According to this perspective, women generally are the ones who provoke the men (usually in verbal form), and the situation becomes worse since the husband acts violently as a consequence of the provocation.

Aside from that, some respondents admitted to being unaware of the support provisions available in the country for domestic violence victims, while others revealed four issues affecting their ability to seek for support. They include unpleasant experiences when seeking services, issues with procedures for disclosing and seeking assistance, the usefulness of services, and women's needs and support mechanisms. This demonstrates the presence of domestic violence in Malaysian families, with the interference of cultural values and religious beliefs held by the Malaysian community being strongly linked to its occurrence. In Malaysia, cultural and religious beliefs play an important role in shaping its people. This suggests that battered Muslim women in Malaysia see their violent experiences as a motivation to surrender to God and seek spiritual help. Furthermore, women's misunderstanding of Islamic concepts such as disobeying their male partner has made disclosing violent experiences difficult. The findings also reveal both helpful and unhelpful provision of services identified by abused women, particularly in relation to national institutions.

One of the most recent studies on domestic violence against Malaysian Indian women was conducted by Karupiah and Gopal (2017). They examined the intimate partner violence among Malaysian Indian women living in poverty in Pulau Pinang. A qualitative approach was employed, where in-depth interviews with 12 women from the vulnerable poor, hard-core poor and ordinary poor categories were conducted. The findings revealed that most participants had experienced some form of violence from their husbands; some had experienced physical, emotional and verbal abuse, while others experienced only verbal abuse. Aside from that, low income was the primary cause of material deprivation in these households, which was exacerbated by substance abuse and extramarital affairs by male partners. This suggests that violence and poverty are intertwined and that some male children are following in their father's footsteps. Violence in family relationships is closely linked to patriarchal values and gender relations, demonstrating how concepts of male dominance manifest themselves in everyday life. The findings are in line with the hegemonic masculinity perspective which is based on cultural ideals

that emphasised the dominant position of men, their interest and desire and the subordination of women (Connell 1995). This causes strife at home, exacerbating the problem of domestic violence against women.

Given the preceding discussion, the main point of this study is the perception of Malaysian Indian women on domestic violence in Malaysia, which is contrary to Karupiah and Gopal's (2017) study that focused on domestic violence victims. Despite the fact that both studies were based on qualitative data, there are some differences between them. In terms of sample, Karupiah and Gopal (2017) focused on victims, specifically poor Indian women, whereas this study focuses on non-victims of domestic violence in the household. Theoretically, Karupiah and Gopal (2017) focused on Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity, which emphasised male dominance and female subordination, whereas this article focused on Sylvia Walby's (1989) "private patriarchy" concept, in which men as "patriarchs" subordinate and exploit women through male violence, and how this was reflected in women's perceptions of the issue. According to Walby (1989), men frequently resort to domestic violence to control women, which is expected to result in rape, wife beating, father/daughter incest, flashing, sexual harassment at work and sexual assault.

According to Walby (1989), male violence is associated with private patriarchy that occurs in the household and is one method of controlling women within the household. The patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in sexuality, patriarchal culture and the patriarchal state all interact with male violence in the household (Walby 1989). Walby (1989) goes on to say that, from a patriarchal standpoint, male violence is significant in shaping women's actions and, as such, may be considered to have causal power. This theoretical framework was used to examine women's perceptions of domestic violence in Indian households in Malaysia.

Considering the conservative and traditional nature of Malaysian society, the study of domestic violence is both appropriate and significant. People regard themselves as brothers' keepers, keeping their secrets and family issues private to protect their image and reputation and the reputations of their family and society in general. According to Aihie (2010), domestic violence is viewed as a personal issue between the husband and wife, and thus outside intervention is strongly discouraged. This indicates that perception plays a significant role in addressing challenges associated with domestic violence. It tends to define how women perceive domestic violence in society and influence their response towards it in general.

There are many ethnic groups in Malaysia, with the three main ones being Malay, Chinese and Indian. Each group works hard to portray itself as the most united and integrated community and thus conceals its affairs in any way possible. This situation in Malaysia puts women who have been victims of domestic violence in a difficult position. It creates a problem in which victims must think twice before reporting domestic violence allegations against them. This trend places them at a disadvantage when distributing resources and opportunities in society. At the same time, it affects women seeking employment and confines them to be a housewife. This situation puts Indian women in Malaysia at risk of domestic violence. Domestic violence makes women feel disadvantaged in many aspects such as health, education, employment and further deepens their vulnerability in the community. As a result, it is critical to investigate the perception of Malaysian Indian women on domestic violence in Malaysia.

MALAYSIAN INDIAN WOMEN

Malaysian nationals of Indian ancestry are called Malaysian Indians (Karupiah 2016). Malaysian Indians have been present for the fifth and sixth generations. Most Malaysian Indians are descended from migrants hired by British administrators to work on Malaysian plantations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Sandhu and Mani 2006). However, Indians' ties to Malaya (now Malaysia) can be traced back to the 18th century, when they arrived as traders (Gopal and Karupiah 2013). Malaysian Indians, like their Malay and Chinese counterparts, are currently one of Malaysia's ethnic groups. Malaysian Indians are heterogeneous in structure and classified according to their origin, religion and language (Chakraborti 2021). According to Joseph (2014), Malaysian Indians, like the Chinese, are also classified based on dialect groups and religion in Malaysia. The majority of Malaysian Indians brought to Malaya to work as plantation labourers were Tamils, with small segments of other South Indian clans such as Telugus, Malayalees, Ceylonese, Chettiars as well as Punjabis, Sikhs, Hindustanis, Gujeratis and Bengalis (Manickam 2010; Sandhu and Mani 2006). Sandhu and Mani (2006) explain that historical texts revealed that Indian males outnumbered Indian females in the early migration to Malaya.

Indian women migrated to Malaysia in small numbers because they were primarily expected to care for their spouses' families at home while their male partners were away working as labourers in Malaysia (Lee 1989). Those Indian women who could migrate to Malaysia were hired as low-skilled labourers in plantation farms, where they cleared, cut grass and cleaned the jungle (Sandhu and Mani 2006). Indians who migrated to Malaysia were granted citizenship after several generations of

living there and are now considered members of Malaysia's multiethnic society. Despite achieving citizenship, Indian women continue to face challenges with employment and the patriarchal structure of their family system. The patriarchal structure continues to govern and determine the status of every member of the Indian household; as a result, Malaysian Indian women struggle to advance in their careers because they are primarily concerned with their household (Hirschman 2016). Malaysian Indian women in households are considered to play secondary roles compared to their male partners, who are regarded as having primary roles in the household. Chowdhury and Patnaik (2013) assert that the gender system plays a significant role in limiting and impeding the development of Indian women.

Gender roles are taught within the confines of society and have an impact on socialisation beginning at birth (Chowdhury and Patnaik 2013). Malaysian Indian women mainly are associated with the traditional cultures of East and South Asia, which are more patriarchal than those of Southeast Asia (Hirschman 2016). Indian women are expected to demonstrate ideas, norms and values that shape them into nurturers, caretakers, and subordinates, obeying the power, authority, and supremacy of Indian men in the household (Chowdhury and Patnaik 2013). This situation continues to dominate the lives and advancements of Indian women in society, preventing them from realising their goals and objectives and rendering their lives obsolete. This trend causes Indian women to become housewives in a household where they have no opportunity to work, causing frustration and agony and depriving them of the opportunity to realise their dreams. This issue prompted the research on the perception of Malaysian Indian women on domestic violence in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative approach to learn about the perceptions of Malaysian Indian women regarding domestic violence. The qualitative method was used for this study because it is effective for researchers who want to explore the perceptions of the participants without knowing how likely they will respond to the interview questions in advance. As the in-depth interview reveals different perspectives and perceptions of participants, a wide range of insights about an issue can be generated through perceptions (Hashmi et al. 2017). This study used a non-probability sampling method by utilising the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is defined as the random selection of sampling units from the population segment that contains most information on the characteristic of interest (Guarte and Barrios 2006). For this study, qualitative samples of 24 were recruited through the purposive sampling technique from Malaysian Indian women of Tamil

ethnicity who are married. They were between the ages of 35 and 46 years old. In terms of education, six of the participants had dropped out from primary school, while another six had dropped out from lower secondary school. In addition, six of the participants received diploma certificates, while another six received degree certificates. The inclusion criteria for the participants are having Tamil as their mother tongue, aged 18 years and above (minimum age for marriage in Malaysia for non-Muslims), being married for less than ten years, and being married and staying in the Kulim locality, Malaysia. The researcher recruited participants by personally visiting Indian households and explaining the study's objectives. The researcher also questions the participants about the inclusion criteria (have they ever experienced domestic violence?). If they are not, the researcher will inquire about their willingness to take part in the study. If they are interested, the researcher make appointment with the participants for the interview session at the time and place convenient to them. The study focuses on the perceptions of Malaysian Indian women who have not personally experienced domestic violence. Previous literature frequently revolves around the issues and perspectives surrounding domestic violence victims. However, people's perceptions of domestic violence were frequently unexplored. This is critical because it will shed light on how and why domestic violence issues have been tolerated.

Data was gathered using semi-structured interview techniques. Before conducting the interview, informed consent was obtained. The researcher explained the research background and objectives to the participants to prepare them for participation in the study. The interviews were conducted in Tamil, which was the participants' mother tongue. Individual interviews were conducted with the participants at their preferred locations, most of them conducted in their homes.

The interviews began with some basic demographic questions:

Could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

What is your level of education?

How old are you?

Where do you work?

How many years have you been married?

Second phase interviews were designed to elicit their perspectives on domestic violence incidents:

What are your thoughts on domestic violence?

Why do you believe some women choose to remain silent about domestic violence?

Can you describe any instances of domestic violence that you are aware of?

How did you feel about it?

What reaction do you think women should take when faced with domestic violence?

The length of each participant's interview was increased from 45 minutes to one hour, and it was recorded with a voice recorder. The recorded audios were transcribed in Tamil before being translated into English. The English transcripts were checked with a back translation method to ensure accuracy and minimise errors during the translation process. These Malaysian Indian women were portrayed as narrators who shared their perspectives on domestic violence in the households. The researcher had gone through the transcripts to become acquainted with the content before identifying common initial codes. For the initial coding, NVivo11 qualitative software was used. The researcher reread the transcripts, identifying and highlighting the codes that described the perception of Malaysian Indian women on domestic violence. During the process, words such as "normal marital issues", "violate human rights", "personal issues", and "men's aspect" were identified.

In the study, the initial codes were rearranged to create themes related to the objective of the study. Each code was examined to see if it described the perception of Malaysian Indian women on domestic violence and the meaning of domestic violence to them. Three themes emerged from the investigation, which is presented in the article below. For this study, code and theme creation occurred in two stages, and they were checked for consistency during the data analysis process. To maintain the authentic style produced by the participants, narration quotes from the interviews were ensured.

FINDINGS

The demographic profile of the participants revealed that they ranged in age from 35 to 46 years old. Six of the participants had dropped out of primary school, and another six had dropped out of lower secondary school. In addition, six participants received diplomas, while the remaining six received degree certificates (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic profile of the participants in this study

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Marital years	Education level
1.	Anasuya	35	Four years	Primary school (dropout)
2.	Shailaja	46	Nine years	Primary school (dropout)
3.	Swarupini	37	Six years	Primary school (dropout)
4.	Iniya	35	Nine years	Primary school (dropout)
5.	Yuvika	36	Three years	Primary school (dropout)
6.	Maniammah	46	Six years	Primary school (dropout)
7.	Gaya	39	Ten years	Lower secondary school (dropout)
8.	Aarthi	45	Five years	Lower secondary school (dropout)
9.	Thevagamamah	42	Two years	Lower secondary school (dropout)
10.	Triveni	41	Seven years	Lower secondary school (dropout)
11.	Isai	39	Three years	Lower secondary school (dropout)
12.	Upasana	40	Four years	Lower secondary school (dropout)
13.	Visha	41	Eight years	Diploma
14.	Sania	38	Nine years	Diploma
15.	Harshini	47	Ten years	Diploma
16.	Arunagi	42	Eight years	Diploma
17.	Divya	45	Two years	Diploma
18.	Renu	44	Eight years	Diploma
19.	Suvalakshmi	45	Seven years	Degree
20.	Gangammah	46	Five years	Degree
21.	Buvanapriya	42	Two years	Degree
22.	Sershini	40	Five years	Degree
23.	Sindhuja	41	Five years	Degree
24.	Vamini	35	Ten years	Degree

Note: Data derived from personal interviews of researcher with participants.

Table 2 shows the number of participants and the codes used to identify the main themes in the data analysis. The first theme, “domestic violence as a normalising aspect of marital life”, was identified by respondents using codes such as tolerate, adapt, thinking as a common problem and keep private. Respondents identified the second theme, “domestic violence affects women and their rights”, using codes such as violate, wrong, and trauma, and the third theme, “domestic violence as a sign of male identity to protect women”, using codes such as male identity, natural, and temper. The themes mentioned above, as well as the participant narratives, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of participants for each theme

Main theme	Domestic violence as a normalising aspect of marital life (14)			
Codes	Tolerate	Adapt	Common problem	Keep private
Number of participants	11	8	10	8
Main theme	Domestic violence affect women and their rights (12)			
Codes	Violate	Wrong	Trauma	
Number of participants	7	8	5	
Main theme	Domestic violence as a sign of male identity to protect women (14)			
Codes	Male's identity	Natural	Temper	
Number of participants	9	12	8	

Note: () Total number of participants for each theme

Domestic Violence as a Normalising Aspect of Marital Life

In this study, 14 participants regarded domestic violence as part and parcel of marital relationships. Marriage for Indian women is often not considered an equal partnership, especially in traditional households. It is usually a one-way relationship with women constantly expected to be an instrumental tool, whose activities, services, tasks are created to benefit the men. Thus, all aspects of the marital relationship exist to protect and expand the patriarchal system of the Indian household. Women in the marriage relationship often require approval, permission and confirmation from the male partners. Marriage has been regarded as sacred for these women as it provides a sense of identity, protection and dependence for them, particularly for Indian women. The interdependent identity of women forces them to conceptualise and normalise domestic violence in the family. Male violence takes on societal form and has ramifications for women's behaviour (Walby 1989). Speaking against the household system makes them face threats to their marital relationship, including separation, divorce or being isolated by the household. One of the participations, Gaya, aged 39 years, a lower secondary school dropout, married for 10 years, expressed her view about domestic violence by saying that:

I think it just happens in every family, nothing serious about it. Every married woman somehow would have faced this (domestic violence). It might happen due to misunderstanding, and after a few days, it will be okay, the woman's life is always about how to tolerate and adapt to her husband's attitudes.

Visha, aged 41 years, a diploma holder, married for eight years, explained her view that:

Women have fewer options to leave abusive relationships. I think it is better to tolerate an abusive relationship because someone can have nothing if they walk out of the relationship. I think that is why most often women stay in an abusive relationship. Even when they decide to walk out most often their parents would ask them to stay in marriage to save the honour of their family.

Aarathi, aged 45, a lower secondary school dropout, married for five years, viewed domestic violence as:

You know it is a common problem in Indian households. Marriage is like that, now they might fight and yell, the husband might beat the wife and scold the wife and the wife forgives. It is happening in all the families, but you and I are unaware since the women decide to keep it private. It is a married person's thing, after a fight, they might not speak for a few days, and later when the husband persuades the wife with gifts and speaks nice words, the wife will be okay and start to live with the husband as usual.

Marriage is frequently becoming a less advantageous sphere for women because it imposes limitations on them in a variety of ways (Walby 1989). Participants' explanation reflected the mindset of the majority of victims who tolerate and normalise domestic violence. Marital relationships in Malaysian Indian women's households frequently construct a hierarchical power relationship. As a result, these women are socialised to believe that they are under the authority of their male counterparts. Thus, participants express that women tend to adapt and adjust their lives to any action, even violent and abusive action. The longer women are in a marital relationship, the more committed they are to their partners. Muñoz-Rivas et al. (2021) argue that victims tend to maintain higher levels of commitment towards their partners based on the length of the relationship. Women always enter marriage believing that they will benefit from the relationship, but this is not always the case (Walby 1989). Women's vulnerability to domestic violence has mirrored their disempowered relationships with their male partners. Their economic, social and marital dependency prevents them from leaving a violent situation. In another case, a few women claim that their male partners might use violent aggression to signify "love" towards their family, particularly their female partners. Besides that, domestic violence incidents are frequently regarded as a private matter within the family. As a result, others should not intervene in the domestic violence between married couples.

Participants like Sania, Suvalakshmi and Buvanapriya agree that domestic violence is a widespread problem that affects all families. This indicates that the victims frequently begin to feel normalised with their husbands' attitudes and adapt themselves to these confusions, even though the effects are deteriorating on all levels. Liang et al. (2005) assert that the actual nature, severity and presence of violence in an intimate relationship could change at any time, with abusers switching between violence and loving repentance, defining the relationship as abusive, possibly challenging, and perplexing. Relatedly, Pun et al. (2020) confirm that social and cultural norms are among the most important contextual factors that contribute to the escalation of domestic violence incidents.

The act of normalising domestic violence varies according to their education and employment. Visha, who has a higher education and a high-paying job, was able to critically analyse and differentiate why the normalisation of interdependence among Indian women occur, i.e., the negative consequences they may face in the future if they defy the household's patriarchal system, which requires ardent subordination. However, Aarthi and Gaya's narration reveal that women with lower education and employment backgrounds are more likely to surrender and accept domestic violence as a part of their marital lives.

Domestic Violence Affects Women and Their Rights

In this study, 12 out of the total participants acknowledged that domestic violence incidents affect women and their rights in society. Participants of the study often express domestic violence as an incidence that affects women physically, mentally, and also violates their rights as individuals. Most of the well-educated women interviewed expressed that domestic violence reflects the gender complexities that happen in the household. When a woman experiences domestic violence, her rights, autonomy, freedom and body autonomy are exploited. Afrouz, Crisp and Taket (2021) assert that highly educated women perceive domestic violence as an issue that reflects gender inequality and unequal power relations in the households. One of the participants, Sania, aged 38, a diploma holder who was married for nine years, registered her thought about domestic violence.

I think that when one violates another, it is like you have crossed other boundaries. Because, due to your exercise of power, other people face pain. Either emotional or physical pain can stop them from enjoying their life. So, it should not be done like that, and it is totally wrong in any sense.

Suvalakshmi, aged 45, a degree holder who has been married for seven years, said she recalled one of the incidents that happened to one of her friends.

You think it is easy to live after experiencing those incidents? Certainly not, I know one friend who had to battle with the beating, slapping from the husband for so long. I was not so sure about the actual reason, she was always off topic when I asked about it. She was also abused with words, after seven years of marriage, her brother found out about the domestic violence and as a result, they forced her to file for divorce. The police report was done, now she is free from the abuse. But the trauma is still there, it has been 10 years, she has changed from a jovial person to an introvert person, does not like people touching her in any form like shaking hands, hugging or standing close to her. She is now a bit better after doctor consultations and counselling sessions.

Buvanapriya, aged 42, a degree holder who has been married for two years, indicated that:

Domestic violence is altogether wrong. It cannot be justified, women need to speak for themselves when this happens, I personally think, no one will come and save you like in movies you know. When this incident happens, they need to know what they should do. They need to report to authorities or seeking help from the helpline like we have Nur helpline right, so they should go for it. It is about themselves being hurt.

Male violence has a significant casual power in constructing and depriving women's actions (Walby 1989). According to the participants in this study, victims of domestic violence often lose not only their voices to express their dissatisfaction with the situation they are in, but they also lose their freedom entirely. Some participants reflect on how much the perpetrator takes control of the victim and violates the victim's rights. Macaulay (2022) argues that domestic violence includes all abusive behaviours that impede the victim's autonomy, safety and dignity. The violation degrades the women as individuals and traps them in a long-term mental health issue that could potentially impose various psychological and physical barriers, further putting the women in the weakest position. This suggests that victims of domestic violence face long-term mental and physical difficulties. A participant's narration about her friend explains how much the victim's internalisation of the consequences affect her and jeopardise her life in so many ways. Her communication skills, mental health, thinking, thought process and personality are all affected. It also depicts her friend's struggle to reclaim her character, including forming relationships with those around her. Other participants demonstrate that domestic violence victimisation has been exacerbated by lack of awareness about domestic violence assistance and helplines. They share their

thoughts on the steps or actions women take to protect themselves from domestic violence incidents. Their explanation exemplifies the dilemma of many victims who hope someone would save them from the abuse they are subjected to but fail to stand up for them. In addition, some participants confirm that women are unaware of the helplines available to them to assist them in escaping a dangerous situation. Haque et al. (2022) assert that domestic violence may have decreased over time due to increased societal awareness and the level of women's educational progress.

Domestic Violence as a Sign of Male Identity to Protect Women

Fourteen of the participants in this study assert that domestic violence is a sign of masculinity in their male counterparts. Domestic violence is gendered due to social and cultural practices that favour men in violent conflicts with women (Anderson and Umberson 2001). Masculinity refers to gendered behaviours assigned to men in the household and other sectors. The stereotypical attitude is regarded as the foundation of domestic violence, which frequently victimises women. The household's patriarchal system creates a supportive environment by giving the men unanimous control and power. Men's violence, which reflects men's authority and power, is frequently associated with men's identity. One of the participants, Anasuya, aged 35, a primary school dropout married for four years, expressed her view:

Men often have temper issues, you know they are dealing with so many things outside, in a workplace like that, women are at home only, they have to somehow need to be patient. When men are in anger mode, they might vent to their wives, men are like that.

Gangammah, aged 46, a degree holder married for five years, asserted that:

You know men often do not have patience to explain or express themselves with words to people around them, especially when they are angry, they often behave aggressively or scolding women with words or gestures, you know men, they are not women who use emotions to express themselves.

Harshini, aged 47, a diploma holder married for 10 years, indicated that:

Men always have a hot temper. I think it is associated with male identity. When they see their father's behaviour to their mother and other females in the household, they tend to learn about it and eventually they practice it after they get married.

Thevagamamah, aged 42, a lower secondary school dropout married for two years, explained that:

You know men often beat the women or scold or speak bad words to control the women. When the wife does not listen to the husband, the only way to make them listen is to use the physical violence. I know my cousin; she often gets slapped when she speaks against the husband's words. The husband gets triggered every time when the wife wants to give an opinion or instruct him on something.

Shailaja, aged 46, a primary school dropout married for nine years, expressed that:

Sometimes it is just tension they experience in the workplace and outside the world that they do not have control over. They need to earn income, take care of the household in terms of maintenance, children and wife and other dependencies. This sometimes puts pressure on some husbands and stops them from thinking rationally.

Men use violence to gain control and govern women for patriarchal reasons (Walby 1989). Participants demonstrate that domestic violence occur due to masculine stereotypes such as men being responsible for the private sphere, having power and being angry. Gayen (2022) indicates that domestic violence by men against women is another manifestation of the patriarchal system. Participants view domestic violence as a widespread issue that has arisen as a result of masculine characteristics. Domestic violence against women is covered up and concealed by glorifying masculine traits. Other participants state that the woman's constant patching back to her husband and reconciliation is proof that she does not take the occurrence of domestic violence seriously. The justification and minimisation of the attacks, most likely due to the lack of serious injuries, could be why the individuals stay and continue to live in the abusive relationship. Another group of participants state that gendered stereotypes frequently depict unequally shaped women and men with different characteristics and personalities. Women are built with sensitive characteristics, whereas men are created with strong characters such as being bold, aggressive, active and keeping their emotions inside. Furthermore, some participants state that the parents are the primary role models for the children in the household. The masculine identity is learned directly from the role models in the household. The father serves as a model for men to learn how to treat their wives and other women in the household.

Men are constantly pressured to prove their masculinity to those around them, just as women are pressured to conform to feminine qualities to follow the patriarchal household system (Walby 1989). The participants' perceptions reveal that the

male expectation towards women is well reflected in the kinship in the patriarchal system. They state that sometimes the expectations placed on men regarding roles and responsibilities pressurise and overload them with mental health issues, which manifests itself as domestic violence. Therefore, in marriage, men regard themselves as the most important partners, and they expect the women in their households to do what they say and want (Pun et al. 2020). Gender performance compels male power and privilege, appearing natural and normal rather than socially produced and structured (Anderson and Umberson 2001). Men are expected to play the roles of “protectors” and “providers of the household” in traditional households (Sivakumar and Manimekalai 2021). Even though it is stated that men benefit from patriarchal benefits, the burden they feel as a result of masculine responsibility is also evident. They are constantly pressed to conform and adhere to their assigned masculinity traits to protect their identity and status in traditional households.

IMPLICATIONS

One intriguing finding reveals that domestic violence is caused by masculine stereotypes such as men being responsible for the private sphere, having power and being angry. Women see domestic violence as a widespread problem that has arisen as a result of masculine characteristics. They anticipate that feminine characteristics will need to be modified to deal with domestic violence. Therefore, glorifying male characteristics covers up and conceals domestic violence against women.

This study offers some insights into domestic violence in Malaysia. It centered on the perception of some Malaysian Indian women. It also targeted women who were not directly involved in domestic violence. Malaysian Indian women who live outside Malaysia were not included in the study. Further research on Malaysian Indian women who are directly involved in domestic violence may be beneficial in gathering first-hand information on the issue.

Given the limitations stated above, this study cannot be generalised to the larger population; however, the perceptions of Malaysian Indian women on domestic violence in Malaysia are essential in developing policies and raising awareness about the impact of domestic violence against women and the need to address this issue holistically. The perception of some Malaysian Indian women on domestic violence reveals the complexities of thought formation, ideas, opinions and the position of women in Indian households. According to their expressions, domestic violence is influenced by a variety of factors, including their culture, patriarchal system, stakeholders and gender socialisation in their household. The study shed

some light on the process of normalising domestic violence in the lives of Malaysian Indian women, particularly those who have had educational and employment setbacks when compared to those who are highly educated and work in higher-paying occupations. The study also considers how Malaysian Indian women are shaped by the patriarchal system, values and norms. Because they construct their femininity in relation to masculinity, they believe that domestic violence is a sign of masculinity to protect women. However, strategies are critical in encouraging victims of domestic violence to speak out about issues that affect them.

Furthermore, there are numerous helplines provided by NGOs such as WAO and WCC, and government agencies like OSCC to increase public awareness of domestic violence. However, there is a need for NGOs and government agencies to implement more training, workshops and seminars to empower women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The interventions should be implemented effectively to change Indian women's perceptions of domestic violence. The existing aids or helplines should be reviewed regularly to ensure no limitations or setbacks prevent victims from reporting abuses both inside and outside the home. The effectiveness of abuse prevention programmes would aid in reining men's excesses at home. It would also help with counselling for couples who are having difficulty keeping the peace at home. This will encourage others to report domestic violence if they witness it, knowing that help is on the way. Awareness of domestic violence among Indian women should be cultivated, particularly among female children during socialisation, to empower them regarding abuses as early as possible, i.e., educate them about their body and their rights to defend themselves.

On the other hand, stakeholders should educate Indian male children about the equality of men and women and the abuse of patriarchal power at home to stimulate attitudinal transformation from "male" or "patriarch" to human. Domestic violence is harmful to a relationship because it creates an emotional burden that is difficult to heal while causing animosity between couples. It can result in long-term physical or mental injuries not only for the individual, but also within families and society which can become an intergenerational issue.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate how Malaysian Indian women perceive and internalise domestic violence in Malaysia. In this article, Malaysian Indian women believe that domestic violence is a normal part of marital life, affects women and their rights, and is also a sign of male identity to protect women. According to some participants in the study, hierarchical power relationships play an important

role in socialising women to believe that they are under the authority of their male counterparts. It also demonstrates that domestic violence traps women in a long-term mental health issue with the potential to impose various psychological and physical barriers, further putting women in the most vulnerable position. Understanding the Malaysian Indian women's perception of domestic violence in Malaysia would educate stakeholders such as policymakers, researchers and NGOs on how education and employment are likely to be critical determinants that can influence women's perceptions of domestic violence. It also stresses the significance of addressing domestic violence in the home through initiatives, policies and programmes.

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