

## AWARENESS ON ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN – A SURVEY

By

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### Abstract

*The study aims to explore the awareness on four types of abuse, Physical, Sexual, Verbal and Economic, among people between the ages 20-60 years, with diverse educational qualifications, and Socio-economic status. Abuse involves interactions in cruel, violent, demeaning, or invasive manner. Survey method was adopted, with 823 participants. Analysis included estimating the frequency and percentage of people having high, moderate and low awareness across the different dimensions of abuse. 65.5%, 65.5%, 52.6%, 67.6% of participants had awareness on physical, sexual, verbal and economic abuse respectively. The awareness on the four types of abuse is considerably low among those having low educational qualification, and those belonging to a rural background. Higher level of awareness was also seen in people from upper class and middle class, compared to people from lower class. There was higher percentage of people having low awareness on economic abuse (2.2%), when compared to those in other types of abuse. The percentage of people having awareness was the least for verbal abuse (52%), compared to physical (64%), and sexual (65.5%) forms of abuse.*

**Keywords:** *awareness, physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal/emotional abuse, economic/financial abuse.*

### Introduction

Various types of abuse exist ranging from very subtle to extreme by value of impact over mental health, with the most common forms against women being physical and sexual. Most prevalent form in India is domestic violence including dowry demands,

which has become a public health concern. Four types of violence against women in domestic relationships are recognized under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005: Physical, sexual abuse, emotional or verbal abuse, and economic violence. This categorization

is also applicable for violence against women in other settings. Due to the pressure from home and society, many such instances are silenced and hence become the norm in a household, and therefore of the society. This creates a void in the awareness, that it is abuse that they are suffering from. Being aware of such instances is the first step to recognize an issue and tackle it.

There has been an average of 50% increase in helpline calls related to domestic violence across the world during the lockdown period of COVID-19 (Vora et al. 2020). Extended lockdown and other social distancing measures imposed to curb the pandemic made women more vulnerable to domestic violence. National Commission for Women's (NCW) data showed that domestic violence complaints doubled after the nationwide lockdown were imposed in India.

Reported studies on emotional and financial types of abuse in our context are scarce; hence one does not know the importance and the existence of it in our society. Due to these circumstances, it becomes even more

important to create awareness of various assaults, physically and mentally, that may be happening around us. There is no much knowledge on the types of abuse among the general public. Only when one is aware of a situation, can they react and act accordingly. Only if we know the lack of awareness, can we teach and bring up a generation by instilling such values and helping them differentiate right and wrong.

The present study attempts to assess the "Awareness on Abuse against Women", through a survey method of investigation. Since such studies are not usually done that extensively in our culture, this study could prove beneficial to analyse the need of it.

### **Objective**

To assess the awareness of general population, between the age group 20-60 years, on the various forms of abuse against women, such as Physical abuse, Sexual abuse, Verbal abuse and Economic abuse, among people having different educational qualifications, diverse backgrounds and socio-economic status.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants included individuals in the age group of 20-60 years, of male and female genders, having different educational qualifications, diverse residential backgrounds and socio-economic status.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

- Gender – males and females.
- Educational qualification – 12th pass, undergraduate, post graduate, others including diplomas, doctorates and other vocational courses.
- Residential backgrounds – rural, semi-urban and urban
- Socio-economic status – lower, middle and upper class.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

- Individuals with intellectual disability.
- Any 3rd gender group.

There were 823 participants in the present survey who were divided based on different parameters such as Gender, Age, Educational qualification, Background and Socio-economic

status. According to gender, there were 372 males and 451 females. Based on educational qualification, there were 90 people who have studied till 12th standard, 505 have completed their undergraduate degree, 217 have completed their post graduate degree and 11 have done other qualifications such as diploma, doctorate and vocational courses. Based on the background of their geographical area, 74 people belong to rural area, 495 come from semi urban background and 254 from an urban setting. The population is also divided based on socio-economic status in the form of lower class, to which 9 people belong to, 641 from the middle class and 173 from the upper class.

### **Measures**

The survey questionnaire on Awareness of Abuse against Women was self-prepared by the investigator. It consists of around 43 statements, which are based on 4 areas of abuse - Physical, Sexual, Verbal/Emotional, and Financial/Economic. There were 9 statements each, aimed to assess awareness, for Physical abuse and

Economic abuse, 8 for Sexual abuse, and, 17 for Verbal abuse. These are general statements, which needs honest opinions on how one feel about them by choosing between 'yes', 'no' and 'not sure'. If one agrees, they must answer with yes and if they disagree, one must choose no. Here, 'not sure' and 'no' clearly indicates a lack of awareness.

### **Analysis**

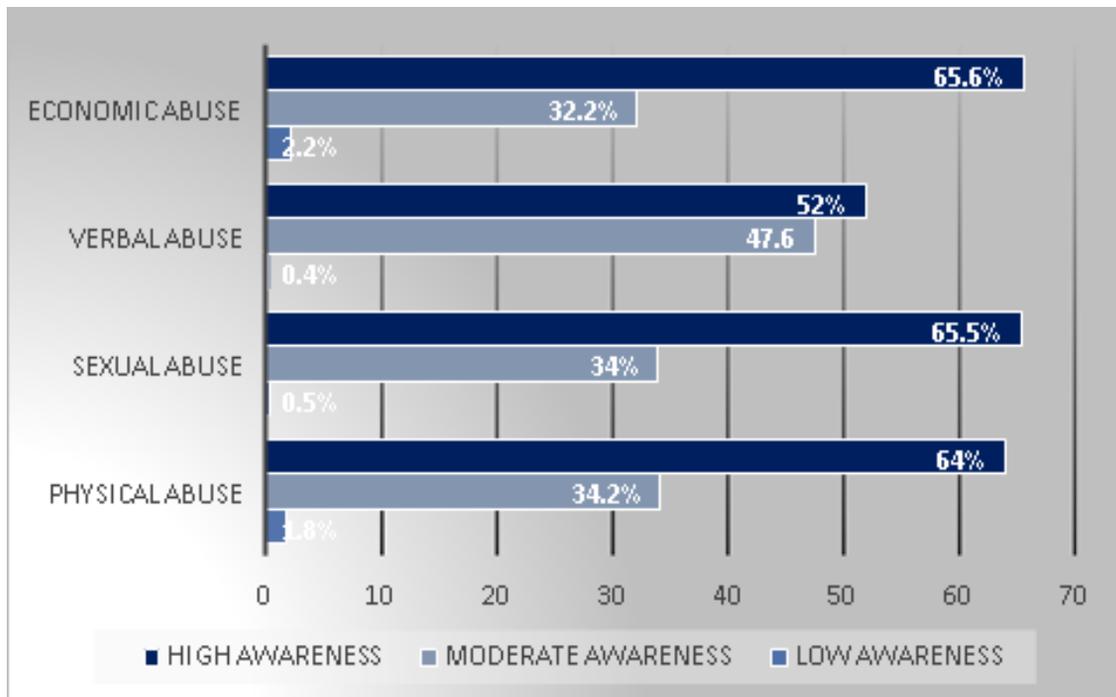
A comprehensive analysis of the data collected was done. Awareness of abuse against women were calculated in terms of percentage. This was computed, even in terms of the four types of abuse mentioned, gender, socio-economic status, residential background and educational qualification.

### **Results & Discussion**

From the whole sample of 823 participants, 64% are highly aware of physical abuse, 34.2% are moderately aware and 1.8% have low awareness of physical abuse. Regarding sexual

abuse, 65.5% have high awareness, 34% have moderate awareness and 0.5% have low awareness. About verbal abuse, 52% are highly aware, 47.6% are moderately aware and only 0.4% have low awareness. In economic awareness, 65.6% of the population have high awareness, 32.2% have moderate awareness and 2.2% have low awareness. On comparing the awareness across the four dimensions, it is evident that verbal abuse has the least awareness among the total research population. Economic abuse has the greater percentage of people who has low awareness. The higher percentage of low awareness in economic abuse could also indicate the financial dependency of women to be taken for granted, in this patriarchal society. The perpetrator has control over the other person's access to economic resources, which diminishes the victim's capacity to support themselves and forces them to depend on the perpetrator financially. These results indicate the lack of awareness in verbal and economic abuse, among the whole research population.

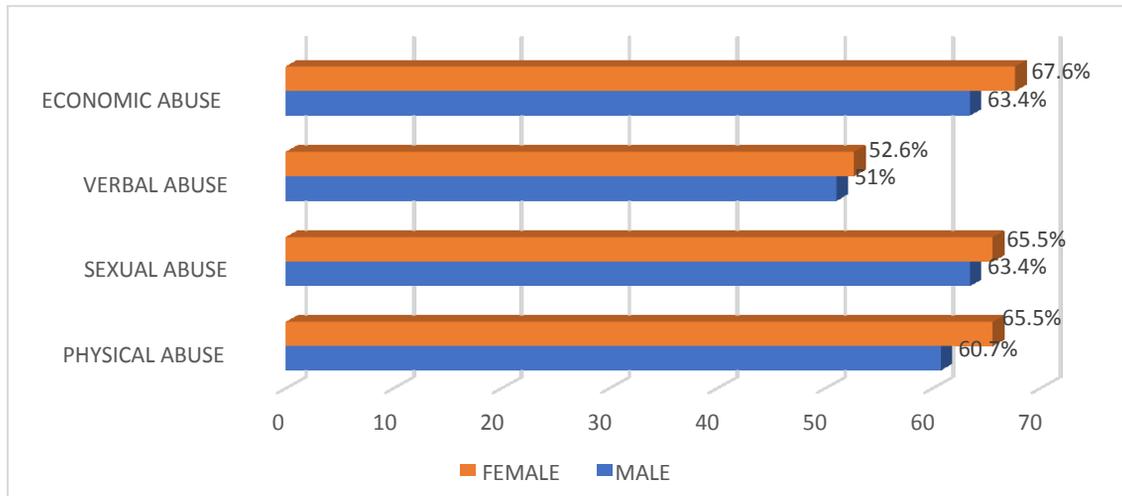
Fig.1 Percentage of awareness on the four areas of abuse



From figure 1, it is evident that the percentage of participants having low economic abuse awareness is high, compared to other forms of abuse. Overall, awareness is the least in verbal abuse. In our community, name-calling has become very common and is practiced from young children in school and among peers. Verbal abuse often involves yelling, put-downs, name-calling, and belittling behaviours. But there is so much more to verbal abuse than people realize. In

fact, some people are verbally abused on a regular basis without even recognizing that it's happening, as it is not clear-cut as other forms of abuse. It has been a fashion to use pet-names and call by the family or parent's name, that paves way for the unknown. Even when this escalates, people find it difficult to acknowledge these as forms of abuse, as it has become a trend of the society. Thus, the lack of awareness on verbal abuse could be a culturally imparted phenomenon.

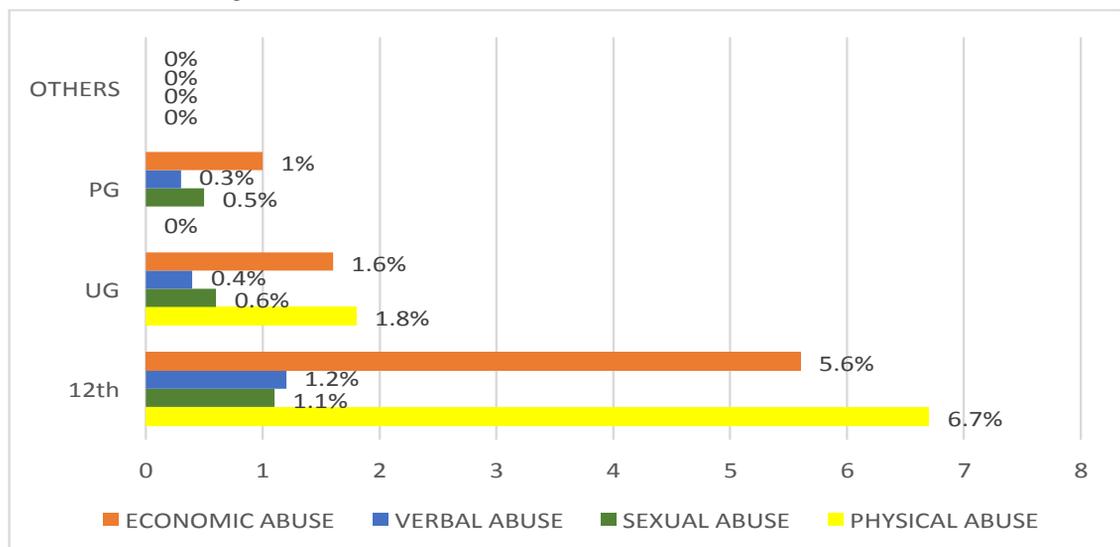
**Fig. 2 Percentage of awareness in males and females on the four forms of abuse**



Taking into account all forms of abuse, awareness was greater among females than males (Figure 2). This finding is similar to the results of a study on Awareness about different Acts related to Gender Based Violence (GBV)

among Group -D workers of government hospitals in Delhi, where awareness among females was higher than males regarding physical, emotional and sexual types of GBV (Singh et al, 2016).

**Fig. 3 Percentage of low awareness among different Educational Qualifications across the four areas of abuse**



From Figure 3, it is inferred that the awareness of abuse varies across different educational qualifications. The percentage of people aware of the four areas of abuse, increases as their educational status improves, i.e., awareness is the least in those who have completed their 12th, and is high when they are highly qualified. The percentage of people having low

awareness also decreases to zero, with an increase in their qualifications. Therefore, this can indicate the value of education that influences the knowledge and acts of abuse, among people. This could be related to another survey conducted by Visaria and Ahuja (1999), that states that illiterate women face more violence than literate individuals.

**Fig. 4 Percentage of awareness on different types of abuse based on an individual’s residential background**

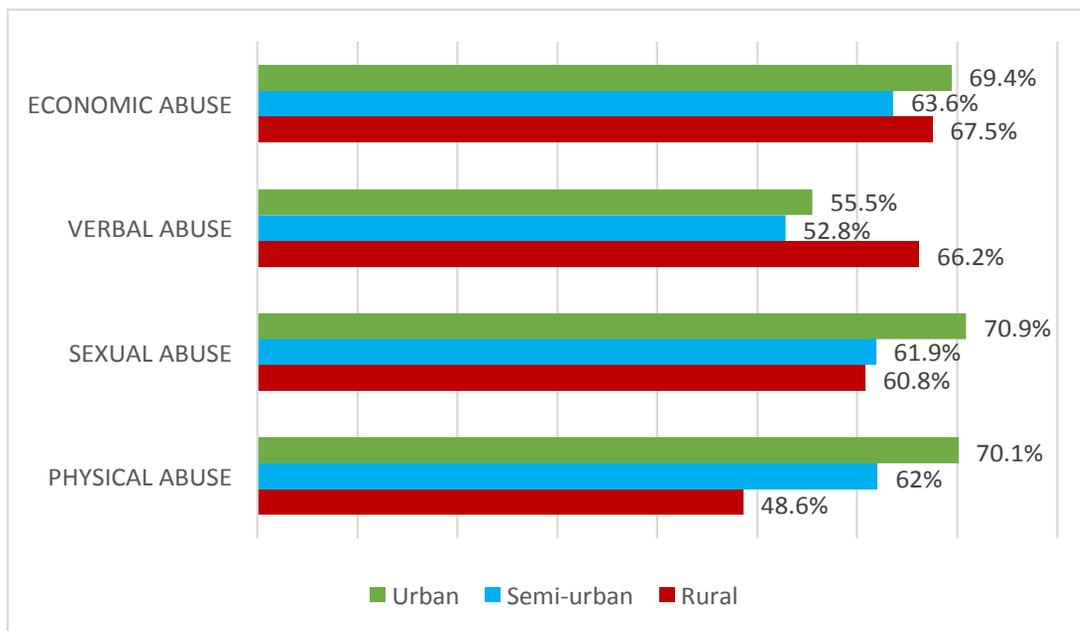


Figure 4 shows the influence of geographical location in the awareness of abuse. For example, in the area of physical abuse, percentage of

awareness varies increasingly from rural to semi-urban to urban backgrounds. This marks the upbringing, area of residence and

other facilities the person can have cultural responsiveness and one's access to in these settings. Here, social norms come into effect.

**Fig. 5 Percentage of awareness on four types of abuse based on Socio-economic status**

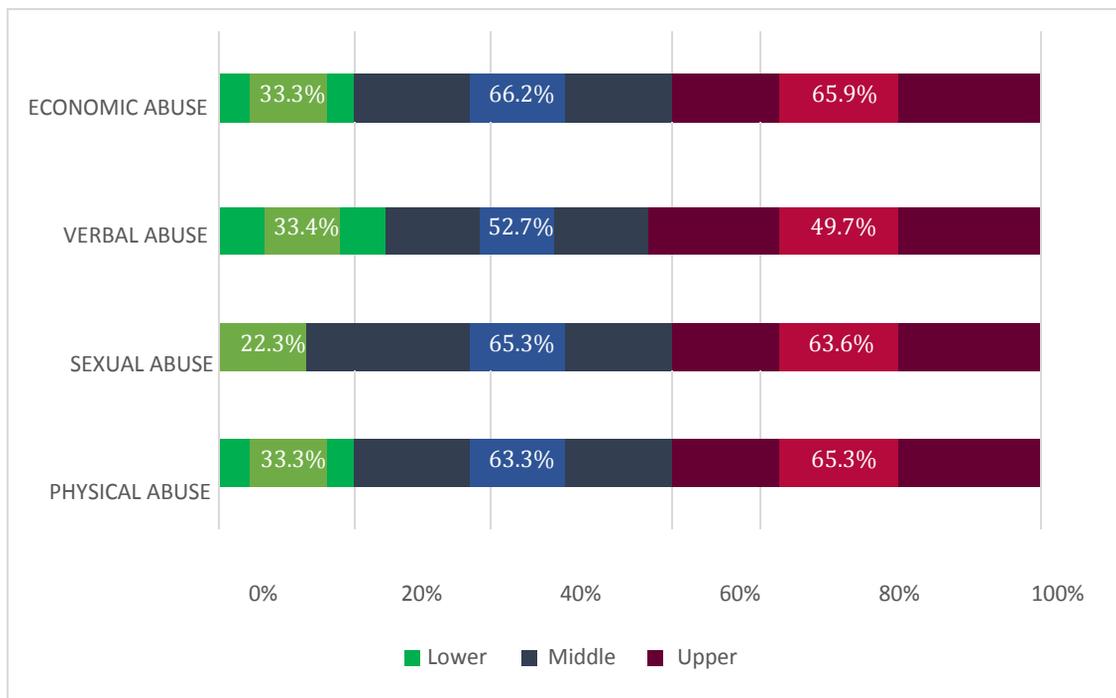


Figure 5 shows the difference in awareness among people from different socio-economic status. Awareness is found to be the least among those belonging to lower class, followed by middle class. These results are similar to the findings of a study conducted by Bontha and Shanthanu (2009).

**Conclusion**

Overall, comparing all the different dimensions of abuse, awareness was the least for verbal form and moderate to high awareness was seen for sexual abuse, across various demographic factors. People have become more aware of the sexual forms of violence in the recent times, as awareness are

raised in society through mass media, social media, and newspapers. From a lot of cases being discussed in public, the society now knows of the rights and privileges of different groups, and there is increased awareness of what comes under abuse and not. Some of these learnings are related to law, which includes POSCO Act, Domestic Violence Act and non-disclosure of the names of victims, which are prohibited by law. In order to increase awareness

and address the issues of the minorities, several NGOs and organizations have initiated awareness campaigns, thereby increasing awareness of the most prevalent form of abuse-sexual, in the past. Therefore, now awareness must be spread for the subtle and unrecognised forms like verbal and economic abuse that has serious adverse effects on women, like the physical and sexual abuse.

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