



Domestic Violence In Telugu-Speaking States: Investigating Root Causes And The Impact Of Grassroots Activism In Andhra Pradesh And Telangana

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Abstract

This study investigates the root causes of domestic violence in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Such causes mainly comprise cultural norms, caste structures, and systemic failures. It showcases how pativrata (fidelity to husband), kanyadaan (giving away of the bride), and izzat/paruvu (honour) have justified the traditional endurance by women and kept the victims silent. Through interviews with an NGO founder, a government minister and a survivor, the research identifies critical gaps in legal access, digital literacy, and rural support systems. Therefore, this paper argues that grassroots NGOs, along with community networks, are critically important conduits to bridging this policy-practice chasm as well. Other sources that contributed to the secondary findings, aiding broader regional alignment, include academic articles, news reporting, and policy documents. The paper concludes with actionable, multi-tiered recommendations at the government level, NGOs, and community level aimed at structural reform, cultural change, and survivor-centric interventions.

Keywords: domestic violence, patriarchal norms, grassroots activism, NGOs, survivors, Telugu-speaking states.

I. Introduction

Domestic violence remains one of the most underreported human rights violations in India, affecting women across all socio-cultural and economic strata. Constitutional provisions, along with legal frameworks like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA 2005) in India, have not been able to ensure that millions of women do not continue to face physical, emotional, sexual, and economic violence in their own homes. This issue takes root in normative social values, which perpetuates gender-based power dynamics and systemic barriers silence the victims and allow perpetrators impunity. The Telugu states comprise Andhra Pradesh and Telangana; their combined population reflects the dynamism of nearly 145 million people. According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), 35% of women in Andhra Pradesh and 33% in Telangana reported experiencing domestic violence, compared to the national average of 29%. The state average being greater than the national average showcases high levels of domestic violence in comparison to other Indian states.

Percentage of violence rates in Telugu-Speaking States

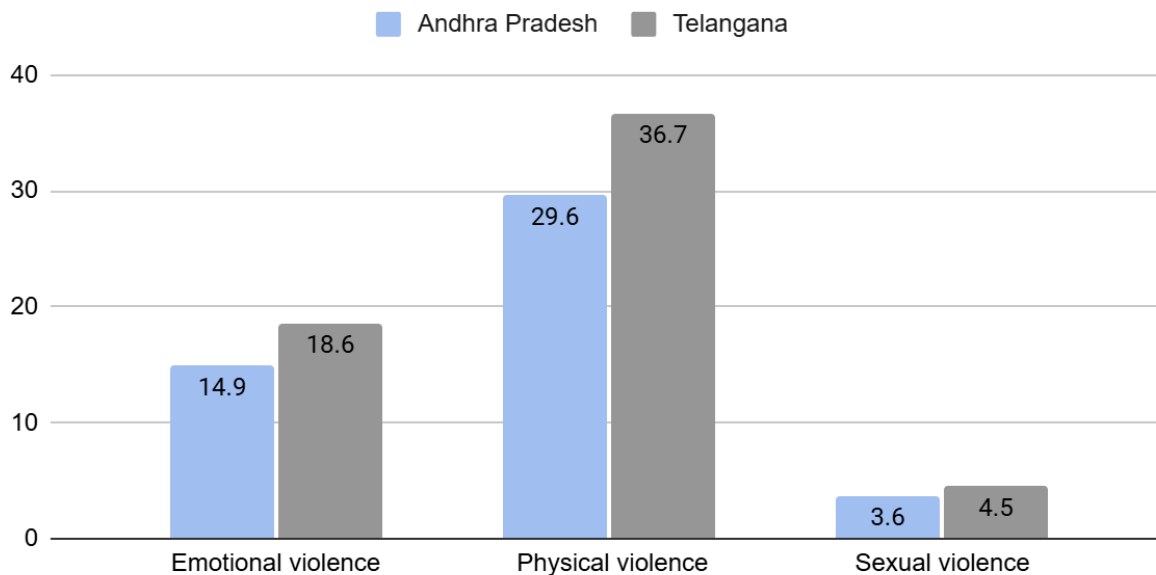


Figure 1: Source - National Family Health Survey-5, 2019-21 INDIA REPORT

Despite passing the PWDVA 2005, the levels of violence against women remain high, as shown in Figure 1, which reflects a wide gap between formal legal structures and socio-cultural realities. This law has not ensured that women get effective protection, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas where patriarchal attitudes are prevalent and access to legal aid is limited (Satyogi, 2024). The statistics, divided into forms of domestic violence, showcase this discrepancy. Physical violence is the most prominent, at 29.6% in Andhra Pradesh and 36.7% in Telangana. Emotional Violence is the second most prominent in both states, followed by sexual violence. It is perceivable that although the states are separated by borders, the social and domestic spheres remain similar, shown by the ranking and prominence of the different forms of violence being the same. This may be due to the fact that both states were one until 2014. Domestic violence is still perceived by society as an issue within the household and not the intervention of the law or human rights violation (Bharani, 2013). This could be due to the concept of ‘pativrata (fidelity to husband)’ and the privacy implied by the sacred bond between a woman and her husband, as well as her dedication to him. Additionally, social stigma associated with legal complications, thereby affecting ‘izzat/paruvu (honour)’ confines this issue to one's household.

Grassroots activism includes local NGOs, women's self-help groups and community-based organisations, a combination of different actors who now more urgently fill this gap left by state mechanisms in providing legal and emotional support to survivors of domestic violence, including awareness campaigns directed toward them. These actors play an important role in challenging the patriarchal norm within the community (Nagar 2000; Majety, Appendix B).

There are two main goals of this study. The first is to delve into the root cause of domestic violence in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, while the second is to assess the impact of grassroots activism in reducing violence, supporting survivors, and changing societal attitudes towards gender and justice. This research seeks to understand how, through community-led movements, survivors can be empowered, patriarchal norms can be challenged, and long-term resilience against domestic abuse can be built. By focusing on the Telugu-speaking socio-cultural landscape, the study also attempts to include region-specific literature offering insights that are often lost in generalised national discourse. Through a combination of case studies and stakeholder interviews, this research aims to uncover the multifaceted dimensions of domestic violence

against women as spouses and how the community is shaping both the problem and the solution. The study also attempts to present actionable recommendations that can amplify the impact of grassroots efforts with more equitable communities in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

The researcher holds the topic of domestic violence in high regard, being a founder of a registered NGO called ‘Ame’, which deals with domestic violence and awareness among the citizens through campaigns by de-generalising the abuse at domestic levels. This field of study is deeply personal to the researcher, whose work is motivated by a sustained dedication to gender equity and the empowerment of marginalised women, and is involved in both scholarly and grassroots initiatives with an aim to affect policy, change cultural narratives, and increase safe spaces for survivors within her hometown.

II. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and analyse the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological root causes of domestic violence in the Telugu-speaking states - Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
2. To document the lived experiences of survivors and frontline activists, with attention to caste, class, rural-urban contexts, and access to justice.
3. To assess how grassroots organisations and local community-based initiatives adapt their strategies to region-specific challenges in prevention, protection, and survivor support.
4. To evaluate the implementation and limitations of existing legal frameworks, government schemes, and police interventions.

III. Literature Review

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) defines domestic violence as any act or conduct which harms the physical, mental, or sexual health, or economic or social well-being of a woman. It is a power and control-related pattern of abuse that has connotations of dependency. In India, domestic violence acts as a gender-powered structure; it has positioned women as subordinate to men, therefore amounting to abuse (Indian Journal of Psychiatry, 2022). Scholars such as Heise (1999) highlight domestic violence as a multilayered issue that individual, relational, communal, and societal factors shape. The legal shift of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) recognised varied forms of abuse and provided civil remedies such as protection orders, right of residence and maintenance. However, multiple studies point to gaps in implementation, including poor awareness, lack of training among law enforcement and limited accessibility in rural areas (Legal Service India - Law Articles n.d.).

3.1 Indian Culture - ‘Pativrata’, ‘Kanyadaan’ and ‘Izzat/Paruvu’.

The concepts of ‘Pativrata’ and ‘Kanyadaan’ have deep roots in Hindu scriptures and cultural narratives. In the Indian tradition, ‘Pativrata’, translating to “fidelity to husband”, is usually treated as a means whereby women can be controlled and made subordinate to men. In this, a woman’s ideal has been defined: as steadfast devotion, chastity, and obedience to her husband. A woman of such qualities assumes the title of the pativrata—the ideal wife within a patriarchal framework (Thakur, 2012). ‘Kanyaadan’, on the other hand, is a symbolic tradition where the daughter is “given away” by the father to her husband. This act defines the woman as property, which is transferred from one person to another, and also posits that female identity is linked to men. After being ‘given’, most of the time her natal family withdraws responsibility, creating cultural silence on issues such as domestic violence (Ravi, 2021).

In India, traditional ideals such as ‘Pativrata’ and ‘Kanyadaan’ continue to shape expectations around women’s obedience and submission within marriage. These cultural norms perpetuate the belief that a woman must endure suffering for the

sake of family honour, framing domestic abuse as a private matter rather than a legal or moral violation. This ideological foundation has contributed to the normalisation of violence within households.

Cultural pressure through notions of family honour (*izzat/paruvu*) and the social image of the ‘ideal’ daughter-in-law does not allow women to speak about domestic violence. These norms raise the fear of shaming the family; thus, women are not likely to seek external or legal help (Gangoli & Rew, 2011; Mahapatra & Rai, 2019; Ragavan & Iyengar, 2020).

3.2 The Interplay of Caste, Gender and Domestic Violence in India

The Indian Constitution believes in equality and provides fundamental rights that forbid discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, caste, or gender (Beteille, 1991, p. 5). Despite this, inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression are still prevalent. Gender-based disparities are stark, with women more prone to exploitation, discrimination, and physical and sexual violence most often (Rustagi, 2000, p. 4278). The caste system works as an infrastructure of domination and subjugation where people are separated and categorised into specified social groups based on purity, often seen as discriminatory. (Investopedia, n.d.).

The Indian caste system is an essential framework for understanding not just the occurrence of domestic violence but its very magnitude within the country. Lower-caste status, therefore, implies greater victimisation by violence. Studies have proven that women from Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are more at risk of Domestic Violence (DV) than their upper-caste counterparts. For example, in a certain study, 40% of SC women disclosed experience with DV compared to only 24.9% among General or upper-caste category women (Anand & Sharma, 2022). At the national level, 48% of SC women aged between 15 and 49 years experienced domestic violence compared to 36.6% of non-SC/ST women (Verma & Singh, 2022). Despite the scale of the issue, domestic violence among SC women remains severely under-researched. Structural inequalities—such as lack of access to education, healthcare, and legal recourse—compound their vulnerability, while caste-based stigma often silences victims and prevents reporting.

Gender and caste together produce a compound form of oppression. When overlaid with patriarchy—a social and cultural construct that subordinates and subdues the fair sex—the oppression faced by women becomes multilayered (Ahmed, 2023). As Ahmed explains, “The caste system is the hidden apartheid of ancient India which continues even in contemporary times.” This, in tandem with its connection to other identities like religion, class, and geography, gives a combined experience of unfair treatment. In India, therefore, the joining of caste and gender does not simply add up but creates a distinct form of violence, leading to human rights discrimination.

3.3 Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities:

Dowry-related abuse continues to be one of the leading causes of domestic violence in India. Though it has already been made a punishable offence under Section 498A of the IPC and the Dowry Prohibition Act, in most cases, dowry demands become a common ground for physical, emotional, and financial abuse. Dowry occurs typically within rural settings, wherein victims are prohibited from reporting due to social stigma, often exacerbating domestic violence within the family setting. New crime statistics highlight how brutal dowry-related violence remains in southern India. In Telangana, for example, the number of cases reported under the category of dowry harassment rose from 8,337 in 2019 to 9,458 in 2023 and then dipped a little to 8,973 in 2024. Though dowry deaths are going down: from 159 in 2019 to 132 as of now, with an all-time low of 126 in 2022, they are still shockingly high. For example, Andhra Pradesh recorded a total of 100 dowry death cases and another 358 abetment to suicide by women cases during the year 2022. It is these figures that articulate how pervasive illegalised dowries are as one of the leading begetting factors to domestic violence.

Alcoholism by husbands is a strong multiplier of violence: 71% of women whose husbands regularly drink and get themselves drunk reported experiencing physical or sexual spousal violence; in contrast, only 23% of women whose husbands do not consume alcohol reported such experiences (NFHS-5, Figure 15.4)

FIGURE 2. SPOUSAL VIOLENCE BY HUSBANDS ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Percentage of ever-married women who have ever experienced spousal physical or sexual violence

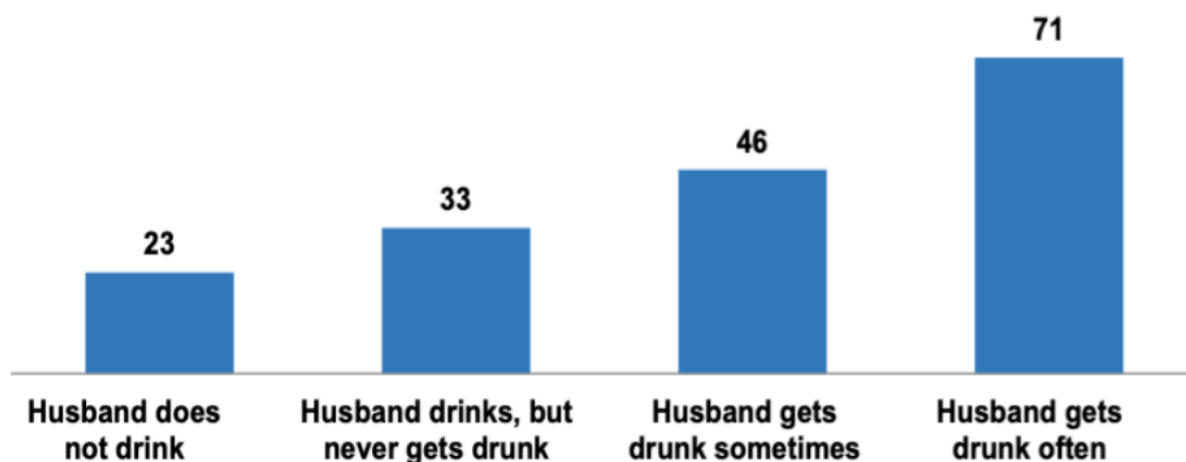


Figure 2: Source - National Family Health Survey-5, 2019-21 INDIA REPORT

Statistics like these show how much greater the risk of violence becomes when there is coercive control and substance use in intimate relationships and thus underscore the priority need for interventions that address both factors at once.

Financial dependence continues to be a large factor in India, as NFHS-5 data shows that the poorest women report the highest levels of violence. 38.4% of women in the lowest wealth quintile have experienced physical or sexual violence; 41.2% have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual violence combined. Only 16.9% of women from the highest wealth quintile reported physical or sexual violence; 19.7% reported other forms of abuse. Economic insecurity not only limits a woman's ability to leave abusive environments but also increases the risk for coercive control and violence within the household. Higher education and wealth do provide some cushioning; however, about 1 in 5 women with husbands who have more than 12 years of schooling or in the group of wealthiest still report ever experiencing domestic violence (NFHS-5, Table 15.11).

Thus, economic dependence plays a large role; this disparity restricts victims from leaving abusive situations and thus makes them more vulnerable. In the absence of viable alternatives due to a lack of independent economic empowerment, survivors are compelled to endure the violence, weighing it against issues like housing, children, and survival. At the same time, generational and social norms on female obedience have made violence an internal matter and not a legal violation that exacerbates the issue.

Wounds of intergenerational trauma are carried by those who saw or felt the violence against women in their childhood. They learned the behaviours, and in turn, perpetuate abuse as a 'normal' pattern in their adult life. NFHS-5 data states that 57.7% of women whose fathers beat their mothers ever experienced spousal violence, more than double the rate of those whose fathers did not beat their mothers (25.3%). It is this stark difference that illustrates how conditioning at such a tender age primes one to accept violence as part and parcel of relationships; hence, breaking the silence with which it is encapsulated causes the internalisation of patriarchal norms.

3.4 Domestic Violence Statistics and Legal Framework in India

Domestic violence is an issue in Telangana, as well as Andhra Pradesh. In 2019, the domestic violence cases registered by Telangana were 8,541 under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, which is the highest among all Southern states. At least 1,568 of those cases were from Hyderabad; that makes it the city with the second-highest rate of domestic violence in India after Delhi (The New Indian Express, 2020). Over one year across Telangana, a total of 6,829 women sought help; 3,742 calls were received by Women Helpline(181), and consequently, about 3,087 cases were formally registered at Sakhi Centres (Times of India,2019). Most victims were in the age group of 18 to 35 years; younger women tend more towards reconciliation, whereas older women prefer separation.

In Andhra Pradesh, the COVID-19 lockdown led to a sharp rise in reported cases, as 2,494 complaints of domestic violence were recorded between April 2020 and April 2021 against a pre-pandemic average of 62.4 per month over five years (Deccan Chronicle, 2021). The highest numbers were reported in Krishna, Guntur & Chittoor. While interventions, particularly counselling and protection orders, were implemented, many victims still did not have timely access to justice. Though tech-driven tools like Shakti App and awareness programs that made reporting mechanisms better, both states continue to struggle with delayed investigations and social stigma inhibiting victim-led reporting, a pattern common throughout the nation.

India provides a civil and criminal remedy mix under its legal framework for protecting the victims of domestic violence. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 by enshrining in Section 18 protection orders, residence orders under Section 19, monetary relief as expenses or loss of earnings related to the incident (Section 20), custody orders for children (Section 21), compensation for physical and mental injuries (Section 22) makes the court competent to issue such orders. Besides this, the Act provides for the appointment of Protection Officers to facilitate access to legal aid, shelter, counselling, and medical assistance, but implementation delays, staffing shortages, and low awareness (particularly in rural areas) prevent many states from realising these mandates. The complementary protection on the criminal side is provided under the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Cruelty by husbands or relatives falls under Section 498A; Dowry deaths are encoded in Section 304B — a woman who dies within seven years of marriage from unnatural causes will come under this provision if she had suffered cruelty or harassment for dowry-related demands, with a minimum sentencing of seven years up to life imprisonment. The same provision applies where suicide is abetted: under this provision, abetment of suicide shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to ten years and a fine (Drishti Judiciary, 2023).

Community participation has a large and very significant role in the complexity of domestic violence issues in India. Normative values indicate that the community in silence accepts and allows such violence, hence letting the women not open up about the abuse due to social stigma and shame towards the family (Bhattacharyya, 2011). Scholars further note that besides a legal and health response, effective interventions comprise coordinated community engagement toward patriarchal norm challenges as well as survivor empowerment at the grassroots level (Heise, 1998). The dual role of the

community, both as an enabler of violence and a potential disruptor, makes it central to any holistic approach to violence prevention. Additionally, SHE Teams, an initiative by Telangana Police in 2014 and later adopted by Andhra Pradesh, are community-policing pursuits which, in their nascent stages, were focused on preventing harassment through quick response mechanisms and circulating awareness (Telangana State Police, 2022). More grassroots activism and localised support systems will be needed to further integrate state-led services with survivor-centred justice.

3.5 Initiatives by the government to stop/reduce Domestic Violence

The Government of India adopts a multi-pronged strategy to address domestic violence and assist survivors. Civil legislation is embodied in The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which entitles women to rights to residence, protection, and maintenance (PIB, 2008;; WCD Delhi, n.d.; ClearIAS, 2024). Its implementation is ensured by Protection Officers in every district who assist the survivor in the process of law relating to shelter and safety planning (WCD Delhi, n.d.). Other parallel criminal provisions are present under Section 498A IPC to punish cruelty from the husband or his relatives (PIB, 2008). One-Stop Centres (Sakhi) and Swadhar Greh emergency support legal aid rehabilitation, and have been granted for women in distress by these programs (ClearIAS, 2024). Stree Manoraksha program, run jointly with NIMHANS, trains frontline workers regarding handling the psychological needs of women facing abuse. Administrative support is provided through women police cells, legal literacy camps, and the Chief Protection Officer proposed to augment inter-agency coordination and service delivery (PIB, 2008; WCD Delhi, n.d.). The domestic violence cases are monitored by the National Commission for Women (NCW), which ensures their follow-up and legal redressal (PIB, 2008). Besides this, the Nirbhaya Fund offers financial resources on safety infrastructure, plus survivor assistance services in the entire country (ClearIAS, 2024).

At the national level, there are ample studies and legal analyses on domestic violence. However, the regional literature on issues related to domestic violence and grassroots activism in Telugu-speaking states is limited. Few works take an intersectional view that integrates caste and class in the shaping of women's experiences. There is also a lack of rigorous documentation and evaluation of how grassroots initiatives impact both the reduction of violence and the effectiveness of support systems for survivors.

Given these gaps, this research seeks to contribute a regionally grounded, community-focused perspective on domestic violence in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. It aims to blend sociological inquiry with practical evaluation of activism and intervention, offering nuanced insights into how domestic violence can be tackled not just by law, but by local leadership, solidarity, and social transformation.

By investigating the root causes and assessing the effectiveness of grassroots responses, this study aspires to inform both policy and practice, adding value to academic literature and social action.

IV. Research Methodology

This research attempts to explore the root causes of domestic violence, along with the socio-cultural, economic and psychological factors of domestic violence in Telugu-speaking states. For the primary study, three sets of research instruments (questionnaires) were created. One consisted of a set of 16 questions, which revolved around understanding the lives of survivors and frontline activists, to understand how grassroots organisations adapt their strategies in the prevention and protection of survivors, thereby evaluating the limitations of existing legal frameworks. This was circulated to Ms. Surekha (the founder of the NGO - name changed to maintain anonymity). The NGO is a women's shelter and orphanage in Hyderabad, Telangana, serving as a home for many destitute and helpless women who have been harassed and ill-treated by men and relatives. It provides food, shelter and protection for a specific period to the survivors

of domestic violence, along with counselling which helps them to restructure their individual life, post-trauma. Ms. Surekha has over 35 years of experience at the grassroots level, with extensive knowledge and comprehension in the area of abuse and domestic violence.

For the first research instrument, the questions encompass 3 subsections. The first subsection highlights cultural and social factors faced by the survivors of domestic violence. The second subsection focuses on the support received by the survivors of domestic violence. The third subsection speaks about the government bodies along with the legal, social and institutional framework set by policymakers.

For the second research instrument, responses were received from Ms. Sandhya Rani, Minister of Child and Women Welfare, Andhra Pradesh. The exchange consisted of 5 questions regarding the government implementation of policies and the gaps faced by officials in implementing these policies. This was done to gain insight into the legal and institutional practices aimed at combating domestic violence, and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation of domestic violence within Telugu-speaking states.

The third instrument took the form of a detailed case talk with a domestic violence survivor (name changed to Priya), aiming to capture the emotional, mental, and practical challenges women face at the personal level. This firsthand account helped close the gap between what is said in policy circles and actual lived experience; it provides an unvarnished look at the battles, choices, and resources that define a survivor's path. It served to humanise bigger patterns mentioned in the research and underline how important community and institutional reactions are.

Each question was open-ended, allowing the respondent to provide detailed responses that reveal complex, context-specific realities often missed in structured surveys. This allowed the respondent to articulate nuanced experiences by conveying the emotional and psychological context of their experiences with domestic violence. The credible data received effectively contributed towards the primary study. A multitude of online sources, including articles, research papers, and web pages, have been analysed for the secondary study.

V. Data Analysis

For the data analysis, the researcher has had a detailed telephonic interview with Ms. Surekha wherein topics such as cultural norms, generational change, barriers to justice, rural disadvantages, limited technology and helplines to rural areas, role of community networks and awareness drives, survivor needs and first points of contact, long-term impact and recovery, along with legal remedies and systemic challenges, and gaps in governmental support. The telephonic conversation was spoken in the local language, Telugu, due to Ms. Surekha being confident in the local language, as a grassroots-level worker. Thus, the discussion was later translated into English for the benefit of this research article.

5.1 Set I - NGO Founder Ms. Surekha (Name changed to maintain anonymity)

Ms. Surekha, founder of the NGO, noted that deep cultural factors contribute to domestic violence in Telugu-speaking states. Apart from alcohol and dowry-related violence, she believes that violence occurs out of male insecurity, particularly when women are educated, earning money, or asserting themselves. Defaults on loans, infertility, or even the birth of girl children serve as triggers for abuse, while, secondarily, blame for this is also attributed to astrology or family pressure. The cultural ideals of pativrata (devout wife), kanyadaan, and izzat/paruvu (honour) condition the women not to speak out. Even educated survivors have internalised the duty of adjustment expected of a "good wife"; hence, leaving an abusive marriage is considered unacceptable to them.

5.1.1 Changing Views and New Generations

Ms. Surekha observes a gradual yet perceptible change in the manner in which younger women are responding to violence. Though the household and societal pressure from the in-laws and neighbours still restrains them from speaking up, these younger women, more adept with smartphones, are becoming more knowledgeable that abuse should not be tolerated. Some of them do verbally express emotional exhaustion, saying, for example, “I can’t take it anymore”; however, decisions to pursue legal action are still largely contingent upon support from the family or encouragement from peers.

5.1.2 Challenges in Getting Justice: Issues Faced by Rural Areas and Caste Differences

Access to justice is not easy in rural and semi-urban areas. The police normally ask the victims with complaints to consult or bring an elderly male family member, which, most of the time, discourages them from filing complaints. They do not want societal backlash and the ‘talk’ that exists when a woman is seen at the police station. This is much worse for SC/ST women and those from economically weaker sections. Not only are their complaints ignored, but they also fear leaving an abusive household due to concerns about raising their children alone or facing retaliation from caste-based panchayats or extended families.

5.1.3 Survivor Needs and First Points of Contact

When women reach out to the NGO, their most immediate needs are not legal, but emotional. They typically seek shelter and someone to listen. “Just give me a place to breathe,” is a common request. Legal help follows later. Many survivors are emotionally drained and seeking even one night of safety in sleep without fear.

5.1.4 Legal Remedies and Systemic Challenges

Legal tools such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) or IPC Section 498A can be invoked, but typically these are the last resort when family counselling fails. However, the system does not respond quickly. The police will act only under pressure or scrutiny by the media. Survivors lose hope because judicial processes have become very lengthy, and the abuser has still not been punished. “The system is slow, and the abuser is fast,” Surekha reflects.

5.1.5 Technology and Helplines: Limited Reach in Rural Areas

The 181 helpline and Shakti App have little practical impact in rural areas. The majority of survivors don’t know how to access or use such platforms and, in a crisis, will tell someone they know—an NGO worker, neighbour, or the like. For any tech-based solution to work, there first has to be access, literacy and trust, after which it can function as a reliable tool.

5.1.6 Role of Community Networks and Awareness Drives

SHGs, local volunteers, and peer networks form the first line of community support. Members of these groups normally alert the NGO to the existence of any abuse. They are also responsible for arranging shelters or mediating with the police. Other factors that have contributed to this change are community awareness programs such as street plays, workshops led by experts. For example, in one locality, repeated awareness about abuse and its repercussions led to the social ostracism of a known abuser who eventually was forced to stop. Younger girls are more assertive in avoiding or preventing abuse; they are determined not to repeat their mothers' suffering.

5.1.7 Dependence and Emotional Traps

A woman who has survived violence may be dependent on her abuser, not just financially, but also emotionally and socially. Many women do not have ₹10 without asking. This dependence has been engineered through the years of

isolation from friends and family. Some return to abusive homes simply because they have children preparing for exams or they have no clear place to go.

5.1.8 Long-Term Impact and Recovery

Though challenges exist, survivors who get sustained support prove to be long-term resilient. For example, this is evidenced by the fact that one woman who came into the shelter with a broken arm is now an outreach worker working in two villages. Another survivor has started a tiffin service and is now an employer to others. Change is possible, though it takes time, care, and consistent support.

5.1.9 Gaps in Governmental Support and Recommendations

The NGO is still facing erratic funding and coordination with hospitals. Against legal rules, some doctors have set a condition that unless there is a police report (FIR), they would not treat the injuries. Thus, legal aid desks are only in bigger towns and are inaccessible to many. Real policy attention has to start at the grassroots level. This could involve establishing mobile legal clinics, training male police officers in gender sensitivity, and speeding up court processes.

Ultimately, Surekha insists that any new system must work at the panchayat level, not just in cities. She urges researchers and policymakers to go beyond data and visit shelters. “Talk to a woman who left with just ₹5 and her baby,” she says. “That’s where real policy should start.”

Drawing from her experience on the ground, Majety conveys that grassroots NGOs like hers do far more than offer immediate safety. They do so not just by providing prompt safety and help, but also by building long-term resilience. Many NGOs offer emotional advice and organised healing, along with access to education, job training, and important life skills. These services are meant to help survivors rebuild their lives with confidence, dignity, and self-reliance; in turn, reducing the chance of more violence happening again. For this reason, NGOs must be seen as essential agents of change rather than marginal actors, rooted in communities, trusted by survivors, and able to bridge this huge gap between policy and practice.

5.2 Set II - Ms. Sandhya Rani, Minister of Child and Women Welfare

In conversation with Ms. Sandhya Rani, Minister of Child and Women Welfare, Andhra Pradesh, questions were designed within the context of Andhra Pradesh’s political landscape to gain deeper insights on policy evolution, implementation and its challenges. The minister drew attention to the urban-rural gap, mainly stressing that stringent laws are in place, but practical enforcement difficulties exist due to logistics challenges and awareness in patriarchal rural settings. It was pointed out that one of the biggest hurdles faced by the government is that there is no penetration of policies and legal aid in the rural areas, which is very different from the urban scenario. Fewer police stations, less access to legal aid and lack of infrastructure in terms of logistical challenges has had a significant role in creating social barriers in rural communities. Domestic violence is often perceived by women themselves as private, family matters restricted to the boundaries of one’s own home, and domestic violence is not considered a legal issue.

In the second part of the interview, it was also emphasised that community-level change needs continuous awareness supported by interventions that address cultural sensibilities. She highlighted the importance of NGOs as bridges between the government and the people. Top-down approaches in such settings would be less effective, due to cultural nuances specific to regions and societies, which NGOs can adapt to. While the government has to function within a budget that is funded by taxes, NGOs can often more quickly adapt to the needs of survivors, providing shelter and support at a local level. She also iterated that backing grassroots activism requires much more than just money; it needs a place in the

institution and policy framework. Though there is progress in making such collaboration better, she acknowledged it is slow and depends on wider government interest.

5.3 Set III Priya, Survivor of Domestic Violence (Name changed)

The barriers of those who have experienced abuse are well demonstrated by the case of Priya. She did not acknowledge her experience as abuse, but rather a normal part of marriage, due to social silence and taboos around speaking out. The transition occurred when a neighbour introduced her to a local women's collective. She decided not to seek help immediately due to economic dependence and fear for the future of her children, particularly surrounding their education, daily needs, and safety concerns for her daughter. With the NGO's help, Priya was able to find both legal support and a safe place to stay. The process was especially complicated when the in-laws demanded another dowry for her to 'leave' the marriage, since they claimed that she was a failure in her wifely duties. The NGO intervened and discussed the matter directly with her family, explaining to them that leaving wasn't taboo. They helped ease the situation by telling her parents that they wouldn't leave her in isolation; she could build a life again, overcoming complicated familial, legal, and logistical challenges. She found strength in the 'local women's group,' acceptance by people who made neither moral judgment for either staying or leaving, yet felt the pain of facing similar fears. A number of the others who had felt the same fears and had shown her how to live with and cope with the pain.

This case thus underscores how effective peer-led community groups and localised support mechanisms can be in enabling survivors to exercise agency and make transitions. The emotional support Priya got from women who had gone through similar experiences, without judging her and with understanding, helped her rebuild her sense of self. When this is combined with practical NGO help in dealing with family opposition and legal steps, it becomes clear that recovery is about more than just getting away; it's also about community, dignity, and imagining a future without violence.

VI. Discussion and Interpretation

1. The study finds that domestic violence is not regarded as a violation of legal or moral principles, but rather it is seen as a private matter in the patriarchal cultural constructs of pativrata, kanyadaan, and izzat/paruvu. This ideological foundation has deep roots within the Telugu-speaking societies; women have internalised suffering as a virtue and therefore do not feel encouraged to seek help.
2. The women of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Economic Weaker Sections have little or no access to justice due to many added barriers. These barriers comprise social stigma, the pressure of the caste panchayat upon them, and even fear of economic insecurity. That is, lower-caste women experience a distinct form of violence different from upper-caste women because of an intersection between caste and gender.
3. Increased emotional resilience is noted among younger women, particularly those with basic education and access to smartphones. However, their share of pursuing legal remedies still hinges upon family support, local norms, and levels of awareness.
4. The major limitation is that despite stringent laws, there is very little implementation in rural Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, with slow judicial responses. The police often turn the women away by telling them to bring male relatives along to file a complaint or receive advice. They may simply tell them not to file complaints. In such tightly-knit rural communities, there is also fear of gossip and retaliation.
5. Tools such as the 181 helpline or the Shakti App are not used enough in rural and semi-urban areas because of low digital literacy, mistrust, and unavailability. Survivors usually opt for personal contacts rather than digital solutions, which indicates the existence of a digital divide in accessing services.

6. Most women approaching grassroots NGOs are not looking for legal action at the outset. Their primary needs are safe shelter, emotional support, and someone willing to listen to legal assistance usually comes after the survivor is emotionally stabilised.
7. The study shows that violence is usually caused by factors not much talked about, like male worry when females earn or show independence, doubt about phone use, and tension connected to childbirth (mainly of girl children) or not being able to have children. Loan non-payments and family blaming situations, at times related to astrology, also act as triggers.

VII. Recommendations of the Study

The study has shown that to address domestic violence in Telugu-speaking states, the state mechanisms, civil society, and community structures must adopt a multi-tiered strategy. Sustainable change requires action at all three domains. The following recommendations are structured accordingly to guide policy, practice, and participation.

7.1 To the Government

1. The government should prioritise the decentralisation of legal and medical support by establishing mobile aid clinics and permanent legal desks at mandals (rural administrative units) and panchayats, to counteract rural inaccessibility.
2. At the same time, sensitisation towards gender issues should become mandatory for police officers, particularly males, given that neglect occurs on the part of police stations and secondary victimisation is a matter of widespread experience.
3. Investment in rural infrastructure is equally necessary; the deficits in police stations, shelter homes, and Protection Officers outside urban districts have systematically denied women timely access to justice.
4. The state should acknowledge NGOs as implementation partners and not marginal actors, capable of contextualising policy in ways that bureaucratic machinery often cannot.
5. Hospitals must be guided to follow survivor-sensitive protocols that ensure access to medical care is not delayed or denied due to procedural hurdles like the absence of an FIR.
6. Campaigns for digital empowerment targeted at rural women, along with the rollout of any app or helpline, so that technological solutions do not turn out to be merely symbolic because of the strong presence of the digital divide.
7. The government should invest in long-term attitudinal change by including structured modules of moral science or gender sensitisation in the curricula of schools. To break intergenerational trauma and the internalisation of harmful gender norms, early intervention is critical. Policies should make it mandatory to build awareness among students on consent, respect for each other, and non-violence in relationships so that cultural narratives that normalise abuse can be unlearned by future generations. In this respect, work would have to be integrated with teacher training and backed up by campaigns that move public opinion on gender roles and domestic violence.

7.2 To the NGOs

Grassroots NGOs continue to be the primary actors in addressing both immediate and long-term needs of the survivors. They not only provide critical services such as shelter, food, and crisis counselling but also guide the survivors through every stage of their recovery. These organisations have strong cultural knowledge regarding family dynamics and local power structures because of their proximity to the communities they serve. This enables them to act quickly on a personal level in ways that large institutions cannot.

1. Cognitive counselling proves to be very important by allowing survivors to process trauma, rebuild confidence and develop emotional resilience.

2. Vocational training and life-skills education further prove useful in the process of making a shift from being victims of violence to becoming independent agents of change, and thus, widespread implementation, though often expensive, is recommended within NGOs.
3. An awareness agenda that deeply aligns with local contexts, using tools such as village-level workshops and more, is necessary for breaking strong cultural norm barricades, such as “pativrata”, “kanyadaan” and “izzat/paruvu”.
4. In addition, caste- and class-sensitivity must be heavily considered. For instance, women from SC/ST and economically marginalised communities face multiple forms of exclusion and oppression by the caste panchayats; community surveillance requires interventions specific to that context.
5. NGOs are better positioned to improve coordination with healthcare institutions so that survivors receive medical treatment without procedural delays. Strengthened documentation and data collection will also strengthen NGO advocacy for systemic reforms based on case evidence.

7.3 To the Community

The findings of this study affirm that without the involvement of the community, active and sustainable change cannot occur. SHGs, local peer networks, and village volunteers bear the responsibility of first detecting signs, thereby necessitating their empowerment to function as grassroots responders through formal training and recognition.

1. Cultural transformation must begin in the community together with breaking the silence, dismantling victim-blaming narratives, and providing informal “listening spaces” where women can access abuse-disclosure spaces free from legal or social pressure.
2. Local influencers such as teachers, religious leaders, and elders need to be actively involved in rejecting traditional beliefs that valorise female suffering in the name of honour.
3. Male allyship, in particular, must be fostered not as tokenism, but rather conscious recalibration of gender roles.
4. Community-level awareness camps, particularly those involving adolescents and school-aged children, should be encouraged to build early understanding of consent, respect, and gender equality.

Thus, the community, as both a site of complicity and resistance, should be reconceptualised as a co-sharer in producing safety, dignity, and justice.

VIII. Limitations of the Study

This research study offers valuable insights toward investigating the primary reasons for domestic violence and evaluating the effectiveness of grassroots activism in addressing domestic violence in Telugu-speaking communities. However, it is important to recognise some limitations, which include challenges related to the scope and methodology of the study. Understanding these limitations would help by providing context for future research and development of these findings.

1. The study focuses only on the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. This regional focus is because the researcher lives in Visakhapatnam and is a founder of the NGO - AME that deals with the grassroots realities of domestic violence in the area. While this allows for more depth, the findings may not fully apply to other regions with different socio-economic, legal, or cultural aspects. The autho’s’ close involvement may have influenced the framing in this research article, although efforts were made to remain objective in the findings by employing standardised data collection methods and relying on credible secondary sources to mitigate potential bias.
2. Though the study mentions abuse in many forms: physical, emotional, financial, and psychological, it does not separately explore physical, sexual or emotional violence as a category but considers all kinds of domestic violence as a whole. This is also due in part to the sensitive nature of the topic and limitations on respondent comfort in discussing such experiences. Future studies can adopt more trauma-informed tools to address this gap with nuance and care.

3. Three interviews were conducted: one with an NGO founder, one with a state minister, and last with a domestic violence victim. Though few in number, the participants offered rather detailed, expert-level and self-experienced insights. While the last interview with Priya was brief, it still offered valuable depth to the discussion. Future studies should include a broader spectrum of individuals, such as protection officers, police personnel, and legal professionals, to further diversify perspectives.
4. The secondary literature for this paper was largely available through online access because the data could be obtained in real-time. While these digital sources have enabled a very wide array of scholarly and policy materials, the reliance on available online data may unwittingly exclude region-specific grey literature or oral histories which have not been digitally archived.
5. The interview was conducted in Telugu, which was later translated into English. The effort was made by the researcher to keep the meaning intact so that it does not lose its original essence; however, some cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions may have been diluted in the translation. The gender of the researcher may have facilitated access to the interviews with the minister, the survivor, and the NGO representative, potentially influencing the depth and openness of the conversations.

IX Conclusion

This study has found that domestic violence is an ingrained social phenomenon rooted in patriarchal ideologies, caste-based hierarchies, economic dependence and more, as opposed to an individual act of violence. Even with strong legal provisions, institutional and cultural limitations have significantly restricted women's access to justice.

The study reveals that domestic violence in Telugu-speaking states is often seen as a private issue, rooted in patriarchal values such as pativrata, kanyadaan, izzat/paruvu, thus discouraging women from coming forward. Lower-caste and poorer women face added barriers with stigma and pressure from caste networks, panchayats, in addition to the financial dependence they encounter. Legal mechanisms are still largely ineffective in rural areas since survivors have to turn first for emotional support from grassroots NGOs. Other triggers, not much talked about but equally significant, are male insecurity, outcomes of childbirth, and loan stressors.

Simultaneously, the research paper also brings out how grassroots NGOs are making a mark through community networks and survivors themselves. The voices collected from policymakers to frontline workers and women survivors like Priya indicate that resilience can be built if survivors are believed in, supported and enabled.

The findings of this study carry very urgent implications for policy and practice. They suggest that the cultural perception of domestic violence as a 'private matter' should be overhauled along with legal reform. Campaigns must challenge these internalised norms by engaging community consciousness. The findings also show that the intersection of caste and gender proves that legal provisions are insufficient without social equity; justice delivery has to be caste-sensitive and locally accessible. The findings indicate rising awareness among younger women, therefore an opening for digital educational tools for preventive intervention, with a caveat that it first bridges the digital divide. It further reveals that dependence on NGOs and other grassroots organisations is not supplementary but central actors in this justice ecosystem and must be funded accordingly. Recognising little-talked-about triggers such as male insecurity, loan stress, or the results of childbirth can help change how we look for and deal with abuse in both rules and services, including in healthcare, teaching, and family-help settings.

The study underlines the need to reframe domestic violence from individual tragedy to structural issues requiring systemic reform, community intervention, and state accountability. It suggests a multi-level response involving the government, NGOs, and communities. The government should decentralise legal and medical services, enforce gender-sensitive

policing, improve rural infrastructure, and integrate gender education in schools. NGOs expand trauma counselling, vocational training, and caste-sensitive interventions, together with better coordination with healthcare. For communities to break the silence, they must be empowered through trained local networks, cultural reform, male allyship, and youth awareness programs that will help break the norms by creating survivor-centric, sustainable systems of justice and care.

Change is happening, slowly but tangibly, through locally embedded networks, culturally sensitive awareness efforts, and survivor-led models of support. As such, the way forward must be multipronged: strengthening institutions, resourcing NGOs, transforming mindsets, and ultimately placing survivors at the centre of policy, protection, and justice.

Overall, this shows us that the most important course of action is to empower individuals facing domestic violence to combat these discrepancies in power. As Alice Walker famously said, “The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”

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Appendix A: Interview with Ms. Sandhya Rani, Minister of Child and Women Welfare, Andhra Pradesh

“Could you elaborate on the challenges faced in implementing domestic violence policies in Andhra Pradesh?”

Sandhya Rani: “Absolutely. One of the biggest hurdles we face is the vast urban-rural divide. In cities, there’s more awareness about domestic violence laws, and access to legal aid is better. But in rural areas, that’s not the case.”

“What’s causing that gap? Do you think it is primarily a resource issue? Or are there deeper social barriers at play?”

Sandhya Rani: “It’s both, really. Lack of infrastructure in terms of logistical challenges. Fewer police stations, less access to legal aid. But a huge part of the problem is social barriers because in rural communities, patriarchy is more deeply ingrained.” Many women still have the view “domestic violence is committed in a private home—it’s my personal issue—and it’s not really a legal issue.”

“How do you approach changing that mindset?”

Sandhya Rani: “We acknowledge that at every stage of life and across all sectors of society, you need some amount of basal knowledge regarding domestic violence to create change. We try to create exposure by collaborating with local leadership and NGOs, who know the community. What happens is that the top-down approaches don’t work very well in rural settings. You need an understanding of the cultural nuances and effective communication from people on the ground. But we’re still a long way from where we need to be.”

“What is your opinion on NGOs and their input in today’s society?”

Sandhya Rani: “They’re crucial, honestly. NGOs often act as the bridge between the government and the community. They can provide immediate support, like shelter, and often have private donations, but we (government) are running on tax-payer money.”

“How do you think the government can further support this grassroots activism?”

Sandhya Rani: “We are trying to see how we can fund more of these grassroot initiatives and provide some kind of support infrastructure, especially with awareness campaigns in order to increase their prevalence. But it is not just about the funding, it is also about the policy makers and the whole context within the government to put this as a priority. We are working on it but it’s a slow process.”

Appendix B: Interview with Surekha (Name changed for anonymity), NGO Founder

“What do you think are the most common reasons women face violence at home in the Telugu speaking states? Anything specific to AP/Telangana in terms of local culture, norms, or stressors?”

Ms. Surekha: “Aside from the usual issues like alcohol and dowry, we see a lot of violence triggered by male insecurity—especially when women earn or speak confidently. Phone surveillance is another cause; many husbands beat their wives for talking to male relatives or even watching YouTube. Loan pressures also play a role—men take informal loans, can’t repay, and blame their wives. We’ve also seen abuse start after a woman delivers a girl child or can’t conceive. In some areas, astrology and blame games feed the abuse.”

“How do traditional ideas like pativrata, kanyadaan, family izzat, etc., show up in your work - Do they come up when survivors try to justify staying?”

Ms. Surekha: “Yes, regularly. Women say, “I can’t shame my parents” or “This is my fate.” They truly believe once they’re married, they don’t belong to their birth family anymore. Even women with degrees say things like, “I am supposed to adjust. A good wife tolerates.” These ideas make it harder for them to leave even severe abuse.”

“Would you say survivors today are more likely to resist abuse than say, 10 years ago? Do you see generational shifts in how younger women respond?”

Ms. Surekha: “A bit more now, yes. Young women, especially if they’ve studied or used a smartphone, have a better idea that abuse isn’t normal. But they still hesitate. The pressure from in-laws and neighbours hasn’t changed much. We do see more emotional outbursts, like women coming to us crying and saying, “I can’t take it anymore,” but whether they take legal steps still depends on family and friends support systems, or local communities.”

“Do rural/semi-urban areas face particular problems with accessing justice - What’s the reality when women try to file a complaint specially in rural/semi-urban areas in India?”

Ms. Surekha: Yes, and not just because of distance. In some villages, police say, “Go talk to your elders first.” Or they ask for a male relative to come along. Also, many women don’t want others to see them at the station. In small places, even going to the station can become a topic for gossip, so they drop it. Stigma and Taboo.”

“Is it harder for women from SC/ST and other backward or poor backgrounds to speak up or get help?”

Ms. Surekha: “Yes. First, they’re not taken seriously. Second, many of them have no financial backup. If a woman leaves, she wonders how to eat or send her children to school. Also, in caste-based communities, women fear backlash—not just from the abuser, but from the entire panchayat or extended caste network. It’s a layered fear.”

“When women come to your organisation, what kind of help do they usually ask for first? Is it legal help, emotional support, shelter, something else?”

Ms. Surekha: “They usually say, “Just give me a place to breathe.” Shelter and emotional support come first. Legal help comes later. Many women are so mentally exhausted that they just want to be heard. Sometimes they just want to sleep safely for one night without abuse.”

“On the legal side - how often do women actually use the law (PWDVA, 498A, etc)? How does the system respond - police, courts, etc.? What’s working, and what’s not?”

Ms. Surekha: “Some do, but mostly after counseling and family meetings fail. Police can be helpful—but only if there's pressure or media attention. Otherwise, complaints are delayed or treated casually. Courts take time, and survivors lose hope. Often, the system is slow, and the abuser is fast.”

“Have things like helplines (181), the Shakti App, or tech solutions actually helped survivors in real ways? Or are they more symbolic?”

Ms. Surekha: “They’ve helped a few, but not the majority. Most of our women don’t even know what an app is. In emergencies, they call us or neighbours, not a number. For city-based, literate women, it’s useful. But in rural areas, nothing replaces a trusted person.”

“What is the role of community-based action - SHGs, local volunteers, peer networks - in responding to domestic violence?”

Ms. Surekha: “They are our backbone. If SHG women hadn’t intervened in some villages, we wouldn't even know some cases existed. Local volunteers are always the first listeners. In some places, they help arrange emergency shelters or even mediate between police and survivors.”

“Have any of your campaigns or awareness drives led to clear local changes in how people view or talk about DV? What changes have you witnessed in the society at large?”

Ms. Surekha: “Yes. In one Mandal, after a street play and two workshops, a husband who used to beat his wife publicly stopped—because the community began to whisper and isolate him. Social pressure works, especially when it flips. We’ve had younger girls now say things like, “My mother suffered, I won’t.” That’s new.”

“In what ways are survivors dependent - financially, emotionally, socially? How does this affect their ability to leave or resist abuse?”

Ms. Surekha: “Financially, they may not even have 10 rupees without asking. Emotionally, many are isolated—no friends, no phone. Some say, “Even if I leave, where will I go?” That fear traps them. We've had cases where a woman returned to abuse just because her child had exams and she didn’t want to ‘disturb his studies.’”

“Do you see long-term changes in survivors once they receive help? Any examples you could share (without names, of course)?”

Ms. Surekha: “Yes. One woman who came to us with a broken arm is now an outreach worker in two villages. Another started a tiffin service and now hires others. But it takes time.”

“What kind of support does your organisation need but currently doesn’t get — from the state, donors, public, etc.?”

Ms. Surekha: “Regular funding. We rely on small donors and inconsistent grants. Also, coordination with hospitals is poor. Sometimes doctors ask for police reports before treating abuse injuries. We also need proper legal aid desks in Mandal offices—not just in big towns.”

“If you could change some things in the system — legal, social, institutional — what would it be?”

Ms. Surekha: “Speed up court cases. Create mobile legal clinics for villages. Train male police officers properly.”

“Do you know of any working models elsewhere (in India or abroad) that you’d like to see tried in AP or Telangana?”

Ms. Surekha: “Not really, but I do know that we need something that works even in a small Panchayat—not just cities.”

“Anything else you wish researchers or policymakers would actually pay attention to?”

Ms. Surekha: “Yes. Don’t just talk to senior officials. Come to the shelter. Talk to a woman who left with her baby and just 5 rupees. Listen to what she needs. That’s where real policy should start.”

Appendix C: Interview with Priya, Domestic Violence Survivor

“How did you first look for help and what was the biggest turnaround in your recovery?”

Priya: “At first I didn’t even realise what was happening to me was wrong. It took me years to understand it wasn’t normal. My turning point came when a neighbour introduced me to a women’s group in the village, as she had also faced domestic violence and was also part of the NGO.”

“That sounds comforting, knowing there were options. What was the hardest part for you after that realisation?”

Priya: “The hardest part was the fear of what would happen to my children. I stayed for so long because I didn’t want them to suffer, with education, food, expenses and more. Eventually, I realised staying was making it worse, as my children would not only be a witness to my husband’s actions but I was constantly scared of what would happen to my eldest daughter, who was also a female and may have been hurt by him as well if we did not comply.”

“What role did community and NGO support play in your recovery?”

Priya: “The NGO helped me find my way in the legal system and find a safe place to stay. They also helped me with leaving my husband in terms of negotiating with my in-laws, who were asking for an additional dowry for leaving the husband and not fulfilling my marriage duties, and also speaking with my parents about how important this shift would be for me and convincing them that I will not be isolated from society.”

“How did the involvement of local women’s groups impact your experience?”

Priya: “It made a difference. These women understood the same fears and doubts I had because they had gone through similar situations or knew someone who had. They didn’t judge me for staying, or leaving. Instead, they supported me, and some of them even showed me ways to cope with my pain.”