

Exploring Women's Experiences with Domestic Violence in Shelter Homes in Selangor

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Abstract: *Violence against women encompasses any form of violence that causes sexual, emotional, or bodily pain or suffering to women, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary denial of liberty, and occurs in their life. Domestic violence remains a widespread and frequently under-reported issue in Malaysia, despite legal and community attempts to eradicate it. This study seeks to investigate the meaning of domestic violence and its causes via the experiences of female victims who are safeguarded in shelter houses. To analyse the data, the study used a qualitative technique, namely thematic analysis. There were five participants who were battered women who received protection from a shelter house registered with Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat in Selangor. This study defined domestic violence based on the women's experiences, which included physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, and denial of freedom. This study also discovered that four major causes of domestic violence, including economic status, the husband's negative attitude, poor communication skills, and husband infidelity, all contributed to the problem. This study suggests that society be educated to combat domestic violence, that the government and non-governmental organizations collaborate, and that marital education be mandated in order to reduce domestic violence against women.*

Keywords: Domestic violence, Physical violence, Women, Shelter homes, Experiences

1. Introduction

Domestic violence is a global concern because of its frequency and the related mortality, morbidity, and psychological and physical consequences. More than 25% of women aged 15 to 49 reported experiencing physical or sexual abuse at least once from their intimate partner while in a relationship (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Furthermore, the WHO reports that intimate partners are responsible for 38% of female killings. Violence against women includes a variety of destructive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, as defined by the United Nations (1993) and exemplified by Cleak et al. (2018).

In Malaysia, domestic violence cases persistently rise each year, prompting legislative and societal responses to address the issue (Kadir Shahar, 2020; Bernama, 2023). The Domestic Violence Act of 1994 (Act 521) is a crucial legal measure aimed at protecting people within domestic settings, while NGOs such as Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), All Woman Action Society (AWAM), Pink Triangle (PT), and Women Centre for Change offer support and empowerment programs for victims (WAO, 2022). Despite these efforts, many women victims hesitate to report abuse due to various reasons, including fear of repercussions, lack of support systems, and societal stigma (Prochuck, 2018; Amir-ud-Din, 2021; Walker et al., 2020). Addressing domestic violence is critical for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG-5, which focuses on gender equality, women's empowerment, and peaceful societies by striving to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

2. Problem Statement

Domestic violence is a pervasive problem that has serious physical and psychological consequences, particularly for women, and affects people, families, and communities worldwide. Domestic abuse persists in Malaysia, despite legal and community efforts to combat it. It frequently goes undetected. Police statistics from 2008 to 2021 show a constant increase in instances, with 2021 being the highest number in consecutive years (WAO, 2023).

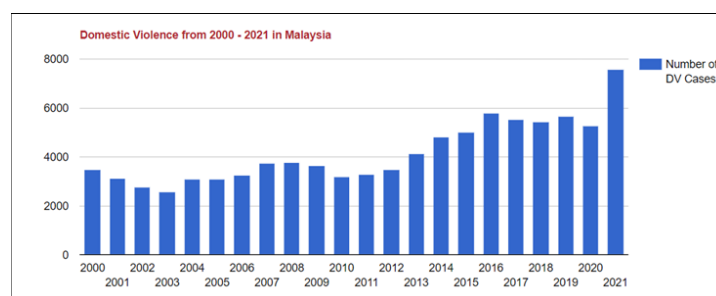


Figure 1: Number of Domestic Violence Cases from 2000-2021 in Malaysia
Source: Women's Aid Organisation (2023)

Figure 1 presents a trend in reported domestic violence cases from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development. In 2019, there were 5,657 cases, indicating an increase from the previous year. Although there was a slight decrease to 5,260 cases in 2020, numbers rose again post-2020 due to Covid-19 movement restrictions, exacerbating situations where couples spent extended periods together at home. In 2021, reported cases surged to 7,568, marking a significant 42% increase from 2020. Selangor consistently recorded the highest number of cases since 2017, with 14.1% of reported cases in 2017. According to Bernama (2021), a yearly increase in Selangor cases from 2018 to October 2021, with 951 cases in 2018, 1,159 cases in 2019, 1,349 cases in 2020, and 1,519 cases in 2021.

Domestic violence in Malaysia has significant consequences, particularly for women, affecting them physically and mentally. It deprives them of their right to live peacefully and impacts their quality of life. Common effects include physical injuries such as bruises, head injuries, and fractures, as well as reproductive health issues like STDs and miscarriages (WHO, 2012). Therefore, this article aims to explore the main causes that contribute to the behavior of domestic violence among women. This disclosure is expected to provide ideas and inspiration to policy makers and the community to make the best decisions in minimize the issue of domestic violence which has many negative impacts on the lives of the victims involved.

Research Objectives

- a) To explore the meaning of domestic violence according to the view of women victims in shelter
- b) To discuss the causes that lead to domestic violence among women victims in shelter
- c) To understand the role of NGOs in dealing with the issue of domestic violence

3. Literature Review

Domestic Violence: The Definition

The Domestic Violence Act of 1994 defined domestic violence as a range of behaviours, including intentionally putting the victim in harm's way, causing bodily harm, coercing the victim into unwanted behaviours, restraining them against their will, damaging property to upset or annoy the victim, inflicting emotional harm through psychological abuse, and inducing delusions using drugs or alcohol without consent. (Domestic Violence Act, 1994). Domestic violence is recognised internationally as a violation of human rights for victims, as evidenced by various global agreements. These include the Convention Against Torture, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Isa, 2022; Reddock, 2022; Stoianova et al., 2020).

Domestic violence refers to abusive conduct in a close relationship, whether a couple is dating, married, or living together, and it can be said to be a situation in which one tries to dominate the other person in the relationship (Chalfin et al., 2021; Cleak et al., 2018; Mshweshwe, 2020). According to feminist studies, the patriarchal system, which gives men the ability to dominate and control, is the one that leads towards domestic violence (Quek, 2019). Moreover, the perpetrator used violence in their marriage to maintain their power and to threaten the wife to follow their desires (Myhill & Hohl, 2016). It includes intentional intimidation, physical assault, battering, sexual assault, and other abusive behaviours, which incorporate emotional abuse, psychological abuse, sexual assault, economic abuse, spiritual abuse, and physical assault (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Emmanuel et al., 2022).

The term "physical abuse" describes aggressive behaviours that frequently stem from a recurrent pattern of dominance and control (Harrison, 2021). Physical aggression is commonly motivated by a power dynamic in which the abuser wants to take control of the victim while retaining their dominance (Both et al., 2019). Therefore, physical abuse includes physically harmful actions such as slapping (Chalfin et al., 2021; Edegbe et al., 2020; Linus & Eremie, 2020), kicking (Chalfin et al., 2021; Faizah & Susanti, 2020; Menon & Allen, 2020), stabbing (Edegbe et al., 2020), hitting with a blunt object (Galovski et al., 2021), arm twisting (Abu-Elenin et al. 2022; Pundkar, 2020), and choking (Bettinson, 2022; Harrison, 2021).

Another abuse is called psychological abuse. Psychological abuse encompasses acts of intimidation and threat, which can induce feelings of guilt and insecurity (Dokkedahl, 2019). In addition, Dye (2019) goes into detail about psychological abuse, emphasising how humiliation and isolation are likely examples of this abuse, which results in the victim's mental health issues. Victims of psychological abuse often endure excessive control from their partners (Aizpurua et al., 2021; Dokkedahl et al., 2019). Furthermore, the abuse of the emotions of the spouse is also considered domestic abuse (Pereira et al., 2020). According to Naik & Naik (2016), emotional abuse comprises undermining a person's self-confidence and forcing them

to confront anxieties, constantly criticising, insulting and degrading the spouse, which will have an impact on their feelings.

Moreover, sexual abuse is an extreme breach of personal boundaries in the context of marriage and is a disturbing and frequent type of intimate partner violence (Ahmed et al., 2021; Banerjee & Rao, 2022). According to Deosthali et al. (2022) and Jaffe et al. (2021), sexual abuse in the context of intimate partner violence takes the form of forceful and non-consensual acts, such as rape, unwelcome sexual advances, or the imposition of abusive sexual behaviours. Also, financial or economic abuse is a common type of abuse that goes unreported or is perceived as "invisible" in a marriage (Postmus, 2018). Two indications were used to evaluate financial abuse of domestic violence: first, by making it impossible for the victims to know about or access the family income, even when they ask for it, and second, by pressuring the victims to give them their money, belongings, or property (Fitzgerald et al., 2020).

The judicial acknowledgment of battered housewives as a matter of grave public concern was made in the case of *Chan Ah Moi v Phang Wai Ann* [1995] 3 MLJ 130. The court further stated: "In an apparent attempt to appease battered housewives, the Government recently legislated the Domestic Violence Act 1994 ('the DVA') on 24 June 1994. The DVA was subsequently gazetted on 7 July 1994, and it became law on 8 July 1994." In 2017, an amendment was made by the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act 2017 which came into force on 1st January 2018. The "desired and much welcomed" amendment has addressed many outcries for DVA 1994 including the meaning of the term "domestic violent." (Randawar, 2018). The term "domestic violence" has been expanded where the definition has compressive coverage of the commission of a variety of acts which include causing physical injury, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse as well as abuse of victim's modesty by a person against someone who has either intimate or familial relationship with the person. (Paragraphs (a) to (h) of section 2 of the DVA 1994.) (Na'aim, M. S. M., Rajamanickam, R., & Nordin, R. (2019). What is important now is to define and give meaning to the simple mentioning of the abuses. By identifying and addressing the actual and broader definition of violence, many violent incidents can be avoided, and their impact can be minimized (Randawar, 2018).

Causes That Lead to Domestic Violence

Domestic violence affects women across all social and economic classes, but it is more prevalent among those with lower educational attainment, income, and employment status. Studies by Chata et al. (2014), Kocacik et al. (2007), and Haque et al. (2020) indicate a positive correlation between family income and violence against women, while unemployment among husbands can escalate aggression. This is because limited resources can lead to frustration and abusive behaviours, but findings from Wallace et al. (2019) suggest no direct link between economic scenarios and spousal abuse. Urban areas, with higher household incomes compared to rural areas, may experience lower rates of domestic violence (Potter et al., 2020; Rayhan & Akter, 2021). Low levels of education often coincide with financial strain and unemployment, contributing to an increased risk of domestic violence due to frustration, power struggles, and feelings of inadequacy (Yitbarek et al., 2019). Research has shown that an individual's educational level significantly influences their attitudes towards social issues, with higher educational attainment associated with decreased acceptance of domestic violence (Akram, 2021; Deo et al., 2019).

A lot of past research found that one of the determinants of domestic violence was alcohol intake (Abdo et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2023; Hing et al., 2022). Alcohol consumption is closely

linked to aggressive behaviour and domestic violence, as highlighted by various studies (Mbah & Njoku, 2021; Bhatta et al., 2021). The intoxicating effects of alcohol can impair judgement and self-control, increasing the likelihood of abusive behaviour towards spouses (Seeprasert, 2021). Studies by Curtis et al. (2019) confirm the association between alcohol use and domestic violence, with a significant proportion of violent incidents involving alcohol consumption by either the victim or the offender. Conversely, aggression and abuse may also stem from demands for alcohol satisfaction, even if consumption has not occurred (Vora et al., 2020).

While drug usage is also associated with domestic violence, individuals may attribute their actions to intoxication or other factors (Yates, 2019). High impulsivity and substance abuse are linked to psychological and physical intimate partner violence (Coomber et al., 2019). However, it's important to note that not all substance users exhibit violent behaviour, and violence isn't solely attributable to drug or alcohol use (Yates, 2019). Furthermore, husbands' involvement in gambling activities is a significant social issue linked to domestic violence, as noted by various studies (Hing et al., 2022; Banks & Waters, 2023). Research indicates that gambling problems not only affect the individuals involved but also have detrimental effects on the health and well-being of their spouses and household members (Tulloch et al., 2021). Studies reveal a strong correlation between gambling problems and physical IPV, with gamblers exhibiting higher rates of anger management issues and aggression (Hing et al., 2022; Roberts et al., 2018).

Moreover, childhood exposure to violence, whether as victims or witnesses, is linked to future abusive behaviour, as children raised in violent households may replicate such behaviour later in life (Mojahed et al., 2020; Shields et al., 2020). While not all children exposed to domestic abuse become violent, prolonged exposure to violent situations can shape attitudes endorsing violence, potentially leading to a cycle of violence perpetuation (Yule et al., 2019; Pereda et al., 2020; Hardesty and Ogolsky, 2020). Next, communication plays a crucial role in relationships and marriages, influencing marital satisfaction and overall well-being (Nyarks & Hope, 2023; Amoah et al., 2020). Effective communication involves understanding emotions, needs, desires, and opinions, facilitating conflict resolution and intimacy (Kirca & Bademli, 2019). Conversely, communication difficulties can contribute to marital disputes and even domestic violence (Emmanuel et al., 2022; Owu-Ewie, 2019).

4. Research Methodology

This study applied a qualitative approach to explore the meaning and the causes that contributed to the domestic violence issue among selected women participants who were willingly to participate. In this study, women who had experienced domestic violence and are residing in a shelter home in Selangor were chosen using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Crouch & McKenzie (2006) explained that better data can be reached using the qualitative method when using a sample size of fewer than 20 participants. Therefore, in this study, a sample size of 5 women has been gathered based on their willingness to participate in the study. Redundancy in the data begins when it reaches the necessary saturation level, which was accomplished by the acquired data.

This study used the semi-structured questions during the in-depth interview to gather the data. Before the interview session starts, each of the participants needs to sign the consent form to make sure they give their consent for the study to use the data. However, throughout the data collection process, the participants can withdraw from continuing the session as it is understandable that the questions might trigger their trauma in which they need some time to

cooperate. The interview had been conducted face-to-face. The interview sessions had been recorded. The duration of the in-depth interview is according to the participants' time. This is because the questions that will be asked are questions related to their painful experiences as victims of domestic violence. So, freedom is given to the participants only if they are ready to answer the relevant questions.

Thematic analysis is a technique used for analysing qualitative data that involves searching through a data collection to identify, investigate, and present recurring patterns, according to Braun & Clarke (2006). They continue to note that while it is a technique for summarising data when selecting codes and creating themes, it also entails interpretation. This strategy offers strategies to effectively synthesise or depict qualitative data. For this study, the researcher had generated a few initial codes regarding the data collected and found the pattern or themes from it. Coding helps the researcher to organise and categorise the data easily. It is also an important step because it ensures that there will be less possibility for the data to be lost or not be analysed. Following the generation and analysis of the theme, the report will be prepared.

5. Findings

This study interviewed five domestic violence victims from three shelter homes. The respondents' ages ranged from 27 to 45 years old, with marriages lasting from 6 to 24 years. Abuse duration varied from 4 to 20 years, indicating prolonged victimization. Then, educational backgrounds varied among the victims and their spouses, ranging from SPM to degree levels. Therefore, the respondents were coded as V1 to V5 for identification.

Research Objective 1: To Explore the Meaning of Domestic Violence Based on the Experiences of Women Victims in Shelter Homes

There were five main themes about the meaning of domestic violence as shared by participants, which were physical violence, emotional abuse, forced sex, denial of freedom, and psychological abuse. The experiences were described by the participants as follows:

Domestic violence is when you are being abused regularly by your husband, which leads to bruises or wounds [...] Like me, it is normal for him to slap, kick, and do all of the actions that are considered as violence to me [...] The usual physical violence that he did is kicking, slapping, and throwing things at me when he is mad [...] (Respondent V2)

Domestic violence can be defined as violence used by the husband to make sure you follow what he says or want [...] My husband made me do something that I don't want which is having sex with his brother every time his brother come to our house [...] he will start to use violence like choking or threatening me when I don't want to do what he asked [...]. (Respondent V3)

Physical violence, as mentioned by the participants, included coercion, kicking, slapping, and throwing objects, while emotional abuse involved insults, criticism, and accusations. While forced sex refers to situations where wives are coerced into sexual acts, including threats and marital rape, denial of freedom encompasses excessive control over social interactions, finances, and mobility. Most of the victims will also face psychological abuse, which involved manipulation and gaslighting, impacting wives' mental well-being. These findings highlighted the multifaceted nature of domestic violence beyond just physical harm.

Research Objective 2: To Discuss the Causes that Lead to Domestic Violence among Women Victims in the Shelter Homes

This study identified five main causes of domestic violence as experienced by the participants, which were economic stress, poor communication skills, husband's negative attitude, husband infidelity, and partner's low educational background. These causes were explained by the participants as follows:

My husband has a very bad attitude that justifies why I am the victim [...] he always gambles and plays online games with his friends [...] sometimes his friends come over and bring alcohol and gamble until late at night [...] our new home was actually a place where men gamble and do drugs [...] he is an alcoholic person, take drugs and gamble [...] (Respondent V5)

His struggle with his finances increases his stress levels [...], contributing to a bad temper and frustration [...] (Respondent V3)

Economic stress, particularly exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, was linked to financial pressures and unemployment, leading to increased violence. Poor communication between spouses resulted in mistrust, and unresolved conflicts, escalating to violence in some cases. Negative attitudes of husbands, including alcoholism, drug use, gambling, and a hot temper, contributed to abusive behaviours. Husband infidelity emerged as a cause, with violence used to silence suspicions and maintain secrecy. Additionally, low educational backgrounds were associated with higher rates of domestic violence.

Research Objective 3: To Understand the Role of NGOs in Dealing with the Issue of Domestic Violence in Malaysia

This study has revealed that three out of five participants eventually sought help after enduring abusive marriages for an extended period. They had reached a point where they could no longer tolerate violence and decided to seek assistance. Typically, this support includes sharing the victims' story over NGO hotlines, getting counselling, and being put in safe havens. Still, several participants reported obstacles to getting treatment, with the most common being that they wanted to give their partners more time to change, were unaware of the services that were out there, or were ashamed or afraid of what other people might think. Despite these challenges, the role of NGOs, such as providing counselling, shelter, and assistance with legal processes like divorce, is crucial in helping victims break free from abusive situations.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the NGOs, according to the participants, NGOs play four main roles in assisting victims of domestic violence. Firstly, they assist victims in legal matters such as getting divorced and obtaining control orders from the court. Secondly, they help victims find employment when they are ready. Thirdly, NGOs provide counselling services to victims to address their emotional and mental well-being. Additionally, they establish hotlines to offer moral support to victims and suggest appropriate actions. Lastly, NGOs provide shelter homes to victims who need protection and have nowhere else to go, ensuring confidentiality and offering activities such as self-defence classes and counselling sessions to support victims and their children.

Main Themes and Sub-themes

Table 1 shows a summary of the main themes and sub-themes that have been produced through in-depth interview sessions with participants. Themes are divided according to the objectives of the study that have been outlined. For the first objective, which is to explore the meaning of

domestic violence based on the experience of female victims, five main themes have been successfully developed, namely physical violence, denial of freedom, emotional abuse, forced sex, and psychological violence. Most participants had encountered more than one sort of domestic violence, as shown in the major themes. Based on the main themes, several sub-themes have been found. This referred to every violent act experienced by the victim; they also detail the violent acts committed by their partner against them. For example, being forced, kicked, slapped, and a few other types of abusive actions.

Table 1: Main Themes and Sub-Themes According to Research Objectives

Research Objectives	Main Themes	Sub-Themes
RO1: To explore the meaning of domestic violence based on the experiences of women victims in shelter homes	Physical violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coercion • Kicking • Slapping • Throwing things
	Deny of freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlling financial • Controlling friends • Restricting access to money and transportation
	Emotional abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accusation • Criticism • Insult
	Forced sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marital rape • Threats
	Psychological violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulation • Doubting
RO2: To discuss the causes that lead to domestic violence among women victims in shelter homes	Economic stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing jobs effect of Pandemic Covid-19 • Unstable income due to Pandemic Covid-19 • Financial stress • Unemployment
	Husband attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol consumption • Drugs • Gambling • Hot temper • Past trauma • Psychotic behaviour
	Poor communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accusation • Mistrust • Misunderstanding
	Scandal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jealousy • Secretive
RO3: To understand the role of NGOs in dealing with the issue of domestic violence	NGO' s Perspective:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divorce • Getting job • Police report
	Assistances	
	Counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Monthly counselling Psychiatrist
	Hotline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action that should be taken Support
	Shelter homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling • Protection • Self-defence class • Taking care of the children

	Victims' Perspective: Counselling	
	Hotline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing stories Talian Kasih
	Shelter homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WAO JKM
	Reasons for not getting assistance: Giving chances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking of children • Believe he can change
	No knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of exposure
	Shame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Friends • Society

Second research objective in Table 1, which is to discuss the causes that lead to domestic violence, 4 main themes and a few subthemes have been identified. As for the main themes, there were economic stress, husband attitude, poor communication, and scandal. These main themes, however, have produced several sub-themes related to the causes of domestic violence. For example, for the main theme of economic pressure, one of the sub-themes produced was the effect of the pandemic Covid-19 that led to losing jobs and unstable income in the household. This situation invites violence against the partner.

The third research objective in Table 1 was to understand the role of NGO in dealing with domestic violence issues. The main themes have been identified based on the views of the NGO and the victims. As for the NGOs, their roles have been identified to give assistance, provide counselling, and work together with the welfare department to cater to the cases. As for the victims, they agreed that through the NGO they could get the counselling and assisted them through the hotline number and assisted them to get the protection at the shelter homes.

6. Discussion

The meaning of domestic violence in Malaysia, like in many other countries, has expanded to include behaviours beyond physical violence, emphasising dominance and control between partners (Gianesan & Chetiyar, 2021). Domestic violence encompasses physical violence, denial of freedom, psychological abuse, and forced sexual and emotional abuse. Physical violence, such as coercion, kicking, slapping, and throwing objects, leads to bodily harm and is prevalent in domestic abuse cases (Wali et al., 2020; Bhatta et al., 2021). Victims often feel like "punching bags," experiencing fear and diminished self-esteem, which facilitates control by the perpetrator (Mondal & Paul, 2021). Denying freedom in domestic violence extends beyond physical harm to controlling and restricting autonomy and choices within the home, including isolating individuals, monitoring activities, and dictating financial decisions (Postmus et al., 2016). Such control undermines victims' rights and independence, perpetuating dependency and vulnerability, with financial manipulation exacerbating the impact on economic autonomy and social participation.

Psychological abuse within relationships encompasses harmful behaviours targeting individuals' mental and emotional well-being, including intimidation, verbal abuse, manipulation, isolation, and property destruction (Naughton et al., 2020). The victims commonly experienced manipulation tactics by perpetrators who refused to acknowledge their mistakes and shifted blame onto the victims, contributing to emotional distress and diminished self-esteem (Mondal & Paul, 2021). Sexual abuse within domestic violence involves various

non-consensual sexual activities, manipulation, coercion, and threats, with marital rape being a significant aspect where one partner compels the other to engage in sexual acts against their will within the marriage (Bhatta et al., 2021). Many victims in studies experienced sexual violence and marital rape during episodes of domestic violence, with sexual abuse violating individuals' autonomy, dignity, and fundamental human rights (Bhatta et al., 2021). Recognising and addressing sexual abuse within intimate relationships is crucial, warranting comprehensive support and intervention to ensure victims' safety and well-being.

Previously, various causes of domestic violence from the perspective of abused women in Malaysia were highlighted. Primarily, the husband's behaviour emerged as a central factor, exacerbated by external pressures such as economic strain during the Covid-19 pandemic. Enimapopo & Nwamadi (2023) found that domestic violence causative factors encompassed issues like nagging, neglect, substance abuse, child rebellion, disagreements, and continued quarrelling. These factors were further expanded upon in studies by Draginja et al. (2023) and Enimapopo & Nwamadi (2023), which revealed a broad array of determinants, including alcohol consumption, financial instability, psychological issues, women's financial dependence, unemployment, limited education, and jealous personalities. Then, economic stress emerged as a significant factor contributing to domestic violence, with financial instability often exacerbating tensions within marital relationships. Unemployment or income reduction, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, heightened the risk of abuse due to economic pressure, as noted in various studies, including those by Enimapopo & Nwamadi (2023) and Dastjerdehei et al. (2021).

Poor communication between spouses was identified as another prominent cause of domestic violence. Misunderstandings, mistrust, and accusations stemming from ineffective communication often led to unresolved conflicts and emotional abuse within relationships. Mondal and Paul (2021) highlighted the detrimental impact of mistrust, exacerbated by husbands' insecurity, on marital dynamics and the propensity for violence. Husband attitudes, particularly alcohol consumption and bad temper, were strongly associated with domestic violence. Studies by Mondal and Paul (2021) and Enimapopo & Nwamadi (2023) revealed a significant correlation between alcohol consumption and increased aggression, while Enimapopo & Nwamadi (2023) underscored the detrimental effects of a husband's bad temper on marital dynamics and the normalisation of coercive behaviours.

On the other hand, it was not mentioned in many studies that husband infidelity can lead to domestic violence. Still, according to this study, the respondents agree that their husband's scandal and secretive behaviour when having a scandal leads to aggressive behaviour in domestic violence. Infidelity on the part of husbands was identified as a triggering factor for domestic violence, often precipitating emotional distress and breakdowns in communication within relationships. The revelation of infidelity frequently led to secrecy, late nights, and aggressive behaviour aimed at silencing enquiries and maintaining control, as observed in the study. Moreover, infidelity often resulted in emotional abuse, with victims subjected to insults and criticism, further exacerbating the cycle of violence within relationships, as highlighted by Conroy (2014).

NGOs in Malaysia, like the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) and the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (JKM), play a crucial role in addressing domestic violence through support services, advocacy, and awareness programs. The study highlights two perspectives on their role, which are from the perspective of the victims who seek help and the perspective of the representatives from the NGOs themselves. NGOs in Malaysia provide critical assistance to

victims of domestic violence through counselling services and hotlines. These services offer victims a safe and confidential space to share their experiences, receive emotional support, and explore coping strategies. Respondents noted that counselling initiatives allowed them to express themselves after abuse, feeling heard without judgement. Hotlines like Talian Kasih offer immediate and accessible support during emergencies. Similar helplines, such as the UK's Domestic Abuse Helpline, experienced increased demand during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, in some regions like Delhi and the UK, helplines have time limits, posing challenges for victims seeking ongoing support (Ghoshal, 2020).

NGOs like the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) establish shelter homes to provide safety and comprehensive support for victims of domestic violence. These shelters offer secure spaces and services such as legal aid, empowerment programs, and assistance to rebuild lives. In India, NGOs like 'Pehchaan' also offer similar safe houses for women and their children. Additionally, NGOs play vital roles in assisting victims with legal processes and court protection. They actively guide victims in making police reports and obtaining legal measures like restraining orders. Collaborating with legal professionals, NGOs ensure victims receive legal support throughout court proceedings. For instance, the Shushilan Organisation in Bangladesh provides emergency care, legal aid, and assistance in prosecuting offenders (Khanam & Meem, 2018).

NGOs provide comprehensive support to victims through initiatives like shelter homes, which offer immediate refuge and platforms for rebuilding lives. Despite challenges like Covid-19 restrictions, efforts to maintain these safe spaces are essential. For instance, Canada kept domestic violence shelters open during the pandemic, and France repurposed hotels as safe places for victims with NGO assistance (Ertan et al., 2020). NGOs also empower victims through self-defence classes, skill-building activities, and holistic programs like those conducted by the Kushalta Vikas Kendra (KVK) organisation in India, offering various courses for skill development (Kumari, 2023). However, in countries like Nigeria, NGOs face obstacles such as religious beliefs and societal pressures, hindering effective solutions to domestic violence. Additionally, the lack of follow-up and evaluation of NGO efforts contributes to ongoing challenges in addressing domestic abuse (Iroque, 2020).

Despite available assistance, victims often hesitate to seek help due to various reasons. Some victims remain in abusive relationships, giving perpetrators multiple chances, believing they can change over time. Concerns about the impact of divorce on children and fear of retaliation from the spouse further deter victims from seeking help (Both et al., 2019; Carneiro et al., 2017). Moreover, victims may lack awareness of NGOs and available support services, especially in rural areas, where education and information on seeking help are limited (Both et al., 2019). These factors contribute to victims' reluctance to report domestic violence and seek assistance.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

This research underscores the pressing issue of domestic violence against women in Malaysia, emphasising the necessity for comprehensive strategies to combat its pervasive presence. Despite existing legal measures and societal initiatives, domestic violence remains significantly underreported and continues to escalate, and it's really necessitating urgent action. Through a focus on women residing in shelter homes, this study identifies critical factors contributing to domestic violence, including economic stress, husband's negative attitude, poor communication, and spouse's low education level.

Additionally, cultural norms and mental health issues emerge as common underlying causes. This study recommends initiatives to enhance societal education towards domestic violence issues, government-NGO partnerships, and mandatory requirements for marriage education, which could be an important step to alleviate domestic violence in Malaysia. This study contributes invaluable insights to the ongoing discourse on domestic violence, urging for the translation of these findings into tangible measures to ensure a safer environment for women in Malaysia, liberated from the grasp of domestic violence. In line with the sustainable development goal (SDG5) of eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private areas, efforts to raise awareness among women, communities, responsible agencies, and NGOs are very important. A continuous combination of efforts from various layers of stakeholders will be able to provide benefits to women from being exposed to the risk of domestic violence.

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