"Who's going to believe me?"

HELP-SEEKING THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVES OF MALAYSIAN SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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OUTLINE

- Introduction to WAO
- The Study: Overview
- The Study: Survivors' Voices
ABOUT WOMEN'S AID ORGANISATION (WAO)

Three key areas:
- Services
- Capacity building
- Advocacy
AN OVERVIEW

Public Attitudes and Perceptions towards Violence Against Women in Malaysia

Large-scale nation-wide survey, nationally representative sample

Modelled from Australian NCAS
+ self-designed measures on attitudes towards rape, child marriage, and availability of services for survivors

Findings

Only about half of Malaysians are likely to oppose violence-endorsing attitudes and support gender equality.

Malaysians had concerning responses towards attitudes and perceptions in many issues, including:

• Excusing the perpetrator and holding women accountable for the violence perpetrated against them
• Mistrusting women’s reports of VAW
AN OVERVIEW

Survivors' help-seeking behaviours are impacted by community attitudes

Questions we sought to answer:

How do survivors perceive their help-seeking journeys?

How do they perceive the help they received from both formal and informal sources of support?

How do these perceptions differ between formal and informal support?

Which attitudes helped or hindered their journeys?
WHO DID SURVIVORS CHOSE TO SEEK HELP FROM?

All 16 of the survivors we interviewed went to the following:
- Friends, family or community
- The police
- NGO

We also had survivors who went to:
- Healthcare professionals
- Mental healthcare professionals
- The Social Welfare Department
- Legal professionals

We contact WAO, contact Legal Aid, the police. I talked to my dad. My family.

The hospital in Kuala Lumpur come and take us to WAO, me and my kid.

I had my neighbours who helped me.
What kind of attitudes are survivors mostly likely to encounter?

- Encouraging Responses
- Discouraging Responses

- DV
- IPV
- Rape and SA
- SH
- Stalking

110
197
My neighbours really supported me. They would always ask me how I was doing; how my kids were - whether they were alright.

So every two weeks, my brother went back, my parents buy a lot of things for me, for my kids like fruits.

I got a [lawyer friend involved]. He was guiding me okay what to do because I don't know what will happen in court.

The female officer read [my report and said], “This is a stalker. This is a psycho stalker.”

So the Deputy Superintendent had called and I didn’t know they had actually arrested [the perpetrator] in the evening.

Help-seeking through the perspectives of Malaysian survivors of VAW
MISTRUSTING WOMEN'S REPORTS OF VIOLENCE

The study

Survivor's reports of violence was mistrusted by a person she sought help from

Survivor's internal recognition that women's reports of violence are mistrusted
Actually, after I lodged police report, there’s a few women approached me. From Instagram, Facebook - they have been through the same thing but they don’t want to come out because of his background. “Who’s gonna trust me?” Who’s gonna trust them? Is it them or is it this [politician]? And I said I know because it’s very difficult. I’ve been through the same thing. I’ve been questioning myself - “Who [is] going to trust me?”

- Siti, 31, SH survivor
THE LARGER IMPACT OF BEING MISTRUSTED

197 responses coded as "discouraging"
26 "mistrusting women’s reports of violence"
93 issue with service delivery or provision
20 transgressions or violations of survivor’s rights

• In conjunction with high prevalence of violence-endorsing attitudes, we see a correlation with high likelihood of experiencing issues with service delivery or provision.
**THE STUDY**

**AN OVERVIEW**

Help-seeking through the perspectives of Malaysian survivors of VAW

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**Society**

**Community**

**Interpersonal**

**Within the individual**

- **Structural distrust of survivors,** measured by prevalence of these attitudes in a society
- **Unresponsive, ineffective** formal systems of support
- Individuals around survivor offer **discouraging responses**
- Survivors **distrust** help is possible
- Survivors fear being mistrusted → **Underreporting** of violence experienced
- Within the individual
THE MENTAL HEALTH TOLL

Is [my experience] worthy enough of this devastation that I'm feeling? I doubt that all the time. Is it horrible enough to warrant such a reaction as this? Sometimes I control it, I try not to feel anything when sometimes all you want to do is cry.

- Nisa, 32, stalking survivor

I have these trust issues since that incident. Even it takes me time to approach WAO to get help. You know - this kind of feelings that who's gonna help you - who's gonna trust you?

- Siti, 31, SH survivor

Each time I approach the officers, there'll be breakdown in me. Emotionally and mentally. People don't understand - people don't help.

- Sofia, 38, DV survivor
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR WORK?

WAO Hotline Statistics (2019-2021)

- 2019
- 2020
- 2021

SVRI Forum
Cancun, MX

Help-seeking through the perspectives of Malaysian survivors of VAW
WHAT DO SURVIVORS WANT TO SEE FROM FRONTLINE RESPONDERS?

The family court system should change - people shouldn’t just say, “It’s family matter so you settle it by yourself.”
- Sofia, 38, DV survivor

Police, first thing - for any complaint actually, I think they should just take it seriously first.
- Fatima, 43, IPV survivor

Advise the victim accordingly. We as a victim we didn’t know what we should do.
- Anna, 39, DV survivor

They have kind of set in their mind that assault happens because the victim does this, this, this, this, this. I think the focus should really be on the perpetrator.
- Ashley, 32, SA survivor

Make us feel safe first.
- Priscilla, 35, DV survivor

Help-seeking through the perspectives of Malaysian survivors of VAW
I think it’s better if they had a kind of understanding, if they kind of had a more well-rounded understanding of how these kinds of assaults happen is because you have someone who is in a situation of power, imbalance of power, and that’s why it’s hard for survivors to speak out. And sometimes they do do things that they’re not proud of or doesn’t help them in court, you know, and this is just normal humans just behave this way, we’re not perfect survivors, we’re not here to be perfect survivors.

- Ashley, 32, SA survivor
ATTITUDES TO ADDRESS

**Rape myths**
Malaysian endorsement of rape myths are rampant

**Violence often seen as emotional and caused by the victim**

**Excusing the perpetrator**

- Most domestic violence cases are actually just a normal reaction from everyday stress and frustration
- Sometimes a woman can make a man so angry that he hits her when he didn’t mean to

**Low awareness**

- Female victims who stay with their abusive partners are also responsible for the ongoing abuse
- I don’t believe it’s as hard as people say it is for women to leave an abusive relationship

**A more nuanced understanding of violence must be cultivated**
Power imbalances lead to the mistrust of women's reports of violence. Mistrusting women's reports of violence fundamentally perpetuates violence against women. These attitudes and myths must be identified and addressed.
THANK YOU

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GRACIAS

END NOTES

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