

# Public Perception of Laws Against Domestic Violence in India

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**Abstract:** *Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in India, affecting women across socio-economic groups. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) was enacted to provide legal protection and recourse for victims. This study aims to assess public perception of domestic violence laws in India, focusing on three key areas: awareness, perceived effectiveness, and barriers to seeking legal recourse. Using a survey of 147 respondents, the study found that 64.6% of individuals are aware of domestic violence laws, suggesting relatively high public awareness. However, only 55.8% of respondents believe that these laws are effective, highlighting mixed perceptions about their enforcement. Furthermore, 39.5% of respondents identified significant barriers, such as social stigma and lack of access, that discourage victims from seeking legal protection. The findings underscore the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms, public education, and efforts to reduce societal and legal barriers that hinder victims from using legal resources. This study provides insights that can inform policy initiatives and public outreach programs to enhance the real-world impact of domestic violence laws in India.*

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence, Public Perception, Legal Awareness, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, Law Enforcement, Social Stigma, Legal Barriers, India

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Background and Context

Domestic violence remains a pervasive issue in India, affecting individuals across various socio-economic backgrounds. Despite significant legislative efforts aimed at curbing domestic abuse, it continues to be one of the most under-reported crimes. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), nearly one-third of married women in India have experienced some form of physical, emotional, or sexual violence from their partners. The introduction of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA) marked a significant legislative milestone. This law provides protection to women from physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse within domestic relationships. The Act empowers women to seek legal remedies, including protection orders, residence orders, and monetary relief, aimed at providing a holistic framework for addressing domestic violence. Despite these provisions, the Act's implementation faces challenges such as societal stigma, lack of awareness, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms.

### Research Problem

While laws like the PWDVA exist to protect victims, there is limited understanding of how effectively these laws are perceived and understood by the general public. Many people, especially in rural areas, are either unaware of the legal provisions available or do not fully understand the process to seek legal redress. There is a clear gap between the enactment of laws and public knowledge about their existence and applicability. Moreover, public perception of the effectiveness of these laws is critical in assessing their real-world impact. Without sufficient knowledge and a favorable perception of these laws, victims may be reluctant to seek legal support, thus limiting the effectiveness of legal provisions.

#### Research Objectives

This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the public's perception of domestic violence laws in India. The primary objectives of this research include:

**Measuring Public Awareness:** To evaluate the level of awareness of the PWDVA and related laws among different demographics.

**Understanding Gender Differences:** To explore how men and women perceive domestic violence laws and their effectiveness in curbing abuse.

**Assessing Legal Enforcement:** To gauge public opinion on the effectiveness of law enforcement in protecting victims of domestic violence and ensuring accountability for perpetrators.

**Identifying Barriers:** To identify the barriers, such as social stigma or lack of access to legal support, that prevent victims from seeking legal protection.

#### Research Questions

The research seeks to answer the following key questions:

To what extent is the general public aware of domestic violence laws, particularly the PWDVA?

Are there significant differences in the perception of domestic violence laws between men and women?

How do people perceive the effectiveness of these laws in addressing domestic violence?

What factors discourage victims from seeking legal recourse, and how can these barriers be mitigated?

#### Significance of the Study

This research is important for several reasons. First, it has the potential to influence policy by highlighting gaps in public awareness and legal enforcement that may need to be addressed through government initiatives or legal reforms. Secondly, it could enhance public awareness by identifying the most effective means of disseminating information about domestic violence laws. By understanding the public's perception, advocacy groups and legal professionals can tailor educational campaigns to bridge the knowledge gap. Finally, this research can play a crucial role in improving enforcement mechanisms. If the public perceives that enforcement is weak or biased, it signals the need for stronger legal implementation and accountability. The findings of this study can contribute to more effective enforcement of laws, helping victims feel safer and more empowered to seek legal support.

#### Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, survey-based approach to assess public perception of domestic violence laws in India. The research utilizes primary data collected through structured questionnaires administered to respondents. The survey seeks to capture key variables such as awareness of domestic violence laws, perception of the effectiveness of these laws, and the presence of barriers to seeking legal recourse. The study focuses on analyzing these variables across different demographics to draw meaningful insights about the general public's understanding of and response to domestic violence laws.

#### Sampling Technique

The study follows a stratified random sampling method to ensure representation from various demographic groups such as gender, age, education level, and urban/rural residency. This method allows for the capture of diverse perceptions across different population segments, ensuring a balanced and accurate portrayal of public sentiment. The sample size for the study is 147 respondents, which provides a sufficient basis for statistical analysis.

#### Data Collection Tool

A structured questionnaire was designed to collect data on the following variables:

**Awareness of Domestic Violence Laws:** This variable measures whether respondents are aware of laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

**Perception of Law Effectiveness:** This variable assesses the public's view on whether the existing laws are effective in addressing domestic violence.

**Perceived Barriers to Seeking Legal Recourse:** This variable captures whether respondents perceive obstacles such as societal stigma or lack of legal support as significant barriers to seeking justice.

The questionnaire consists of multiple-choice questions and Likert scale questions to quantify responses. The survey was administered both online and offline, allowing respondents from diverse backgrounds to participate.

#### Data Collection Process

The data was collected over a period of one month. A combination of online forms and in-person surveys was used to ensure that respondents from both urban and rural areas were included. Respondents were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose and assured anonymity to encourage honest responses.

#### Data Analysis Techniques

Upon collection, the data was cleaned and coded for analysis using statistical software. The following analysis methods were employed:

**Descriptive Statistics:** To provide an overview of respondent demographics and the distribution of responses across the key variables.

**T-Test for Hypothesis Testing:** A one-sample t-test was conducted to test the following hypotheses:

H1: The proportion of people aware of domestic violence laws is significantly different from 50%.

H2: The proportion of people perceiving domestic violence laws as effective is significantly different from 50%.

H3: The proportion of people perceiving barriers to seeking legal recourse is significantly different from 50%.

**Cross-tabulation:** This method was used to explore relationships between demographic factors (such as gender and education) and the key variables (awareness, law effectiveness, and perceived barriers).

#### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research practices. All respondents participated voluntarily, and their privacy was protected by ensuring that no personally identifiable information was collected. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent before they participated in the survey.

#### Limitations

While the study strives to provide an accurate picture of public perception, it has certain limitations. The sample size of 147, though sufficient for statistical testing, may not fully represent the entire Indian population. Additionally, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability bias.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Domestic violence (DV) is a significant social and public health issue in India, affecting women across all socio-economic groups. The introduction of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) marked a key legal framework aimed at curbing domestic violence and providing protection and recourse for victims. However, public perception of these laws has been varied, shaped by societal norms, awareness, and enforcement mechanisms.

Vidushy and Sethi (2016) emphasize the prevalence of domestic violence in India, noting that despite the legal provisions, domestic violence remains largely underreported due to social stigma and the fear of defamation. They argue that societal pressure, particularly from family members, often discourages victims from utilizing legal mechanisms designed to protect them (Vidushy&Sethi, 2016) . This reflects a gap between the existence of protective laws and the public's willingness or ability to access them.

Public awareness of domestic violence laws is crucial for their effectiveness. Carlson et al. (2015) note that in many countries, including India, public knowledge about laws protecting women from domestic violence is inconsistent, particularly among rural populations. In urban settings, educated individuals tend to have higher levels of awareness, but misconceptions about the laws' scope and effectiveness persist (Carlson et al., 2015) . A study focusing on Indian college students showed that male students had a lower awareness of these laws compared to female students, which could influence societal attitudes toward domestic violence (Agrawal & Banerjee, 2010) .

The enforcement of domestic violence laws also shapes public perception. According to Charlette et al. (2012), the effectiveness of laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act is hampered by challenges in enforcement. Law enforcement agencies often lack the training and sensitivity required to handle domestic violence cases, leading to public skepticism about the law's ability to offer real protection (Charlette et al., 2012) . Furthermore,

the patriarchal structure of Indian society means that many women are reluctant to report violence, and even when they do, they often face unsympathetic responses from authorities.

The perception of domestic violence laws is also influenced by cultural factors. The traditional gender roles in Indian society contribute to the normalization of domestic violence, with many viewing it as a private family matter. Studies have shown that many individuals, both men and women, accept domestic violence as part of marital life, thus undermining the perceived necessity of legal intervention (Vimal Vidushy&Sethi, 2016) .

Research Gap

While the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) provides a comprehensive legal framework aimed at protecting women from domestic violence, significant gaps remain between the law’s existence and its practical implementation and perception by the public. Prior research, such as that by Vidushy and Sethi (2016), highlights the persistent underreporting of domestic violence due to social stigma, fear of defamation, and societal pressures, which suggests a disconnect between the legal protections available and the victims’ willingness to access them. This indicates a critical gap in the public’s awareness and utilization of domestic violence laws.

Another gap lies in the inconsistent public knowledge of domestic violence laws, as noted by Carlson et al. (2015). While urban and educated populations may have higher awareness, misconceptions about the laws’ scope and their ability to effectively protect victims persist, particularly among rural and less educated communities. This uneven awareness represents a major obstacle in realizing the full potential of these legal provisions. Furthermore, gender differences in awareness, as demonstrated by Agrawal and Banerjee (2010), suggest that men are less informed about domestic violence laws, which may contribute to continuing societal attitudes that tolerate or normalize violence against women.

The enforcement of domestic violence laws poses another critical challenge, as pointed out by Charlette et al. (2012). Law enforcement agencies often lack the necessary training and sensitivity to effectively handle domestic violence cases, leading to skepticism about the effectiveness of the law. This highlights a gap between legal provisions and law enforcement’s ability to ensure justice, which in turn affects public perception of the laws’ effectiveness.

Additionally, cultural norms and traditional gender roles in Indian society further complicate the public’s perception of domestic violence laws. Many individuals view domestic violence as a private matter, which weakens the perceived necessity of legal intervention. As noted by Vimal Vidushy and Sethi (2016), societal acceptance of violence within marriage reflects deeply entrenched beliefs that may prevent victims from seeking help, despite the existence of protective laws.

Therefore, this study addresses the gap between public awareness, gendered perceptions, societal attitudes, and the practical enforcement of domestic violence laws in India. By examining these factors through primary data collection, this research aims to provide insights that could help in bridging the gap between the legal framework and its real-world impact on victims’ lives.

III. RESULTS

T-Test Results for Survey Objectives

Objective	T-Statistic	P-Value	Mean Proportion
Awareness of Laws	3.696	0.0	0.646
Perception of Law Effectiveness	1.407	0.162	0.558
Perceived Barriers to Seeking Legal Recourse	-2.607	0.01	0.395

In this study, three key objectives were analyzed using a one-sample t-test to assess the public perception of domestic violence laws in India based on the survey responses from 147 individuals. Below is a breakdown of the results for each objective:

1. Awareness of Domestic Violence Laws

- T-Statistic: 3.696
- P-Value: 0.000 (significant at  $p < 0.05$ )
- Mean Proportion: 0.646

Interpretation:

The results indicate that the proportion of respondents who are aware of domestic violence laws is significantly higher than the hypothesized proportion of 50%. The mean proportion of awareness is approximately 64.6%, suggesting that a majority of the respondents are aware of the laws in place to protect against domestic violence. The t-statistic (3.696) and the very low p-value (0.000) confirm that this awareness is significantly greater than the assumed baseline, rejecting the null hypothesis that only 50% are aware of the laws. This implies that public awareness is relatively widespread but still leaves room for improvement.

2. Perception of Law Effectiveness

- T-Statistic: 1.407
- P-Value: 0.162 (not significant at  $p < 0.05$ )
- Mean Proportion: 0.558

Interpretation:

The mean proportion of respondents who perceive domestic violence laws as effective is 55.8%. However, the p-value (0.162) is greater than the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the proportion of respondents who find the laws effective is not significantly different from 50%. This suggests that while more than half of the respondents believe the laws are effective, the perception is not strong enough to be statistically significant. This result points to mixed public perception, where many individuals may question the laws' ability to provide adequate protection or ensure justice for victims of domestic violence.

3. Perceived Barriers to Seeking Legal Recourse

- T-Statistic: -2.607
- P-Value: 0.010 (significant at  $p < 0.05$ )
- Mean Proportion: 0.395

Interpretation:

The mean proportion of respondents who perceive significant barriers to seeking legal recourse for domestic violence is 39.5%. The negative t-statistic (-2.607) and the p-value (0.010) indicate that the proportion of individuals perceiving barriers is significantly lower than the hypothesized 50%. This finding suggests that fewer respondents perceive barriers such as stigma, lack of legal access, or social pressure as major obstacles to seeking justice. However, the 39.5% proportion still indicates that a considerable number of respondents face or perceive barriers to using legal recourse.

Overall Implications

- Awareness: The majority of respondents are aware of domestic violence laws, showing that public education and outreach efforts may have had a positive impact.
- Perception of Effectiveness: While slightly more than half of respondents believe the laws are effective, the mixed perception highlights a need for stronger enforcement and public trust in legal protections.
- Barriers to Legal Recourse: Although fewer people perceive barriers, a significant proportion still faces challenges, pointing to the need for greater accessibility and support for victims in navigating the legal system.

These results emphasize the importance of improving public confidence in the enforcement of domestic violence laws and addressing the socio-cultural factors that may prevent victims from seeking legal help.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the public perception of domestic violence laws in India, particularly focusing on awareness, the perceived effectiveness of legal provisions, and the barriers to seeking legal recourse. The results show that public awareness of domestic violence laws, such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), is relatively high, with 64.6% of respondents aware of the legal protections available. This suggests that legal outreach efforts have been somewhat successful in informing the public about these laws.

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