CHILDHOODS WITHIN DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENTS OF GENDER/ SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

A QUANTITATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

// 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SHAKTI SHALINI

CHILDHOODS WITHIN DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENTS OF GENDER/SEXUAL VIOLENCE: A QUANTITATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood environments of violence, abuse, inequality, or discrimination, whether present in domestic spaces, educational institutions, care facilities, neighborhoods, and peer groups, are undoubtedly traumatizing for children. Such experiences of violence in domestic spaces have a far-reaching impact on the emotional and mental health of children. Growing up in this manner, children are either direct or indirect victims of violence and they are likely to learn to normalize violence, thus, leading them to commit and/ or tolerate or permit violence. In effect, gender and sexual violence can get normalized inter-generationally forming a loop and a cycle of violence that is extremely difficult to break as it is rooted in repeated trauma, memory, and experience.

This survey was conducted with the intent to identify the children in households where domestic violence is prevalent, to understand the forms of violence (direct and indirect), and its impact on the children.

Shakti Shalini works with five socially and economically marginalized communities namely, Srinivaspuri, Jal Vihar, Adivasi Camp, Block 7, and Block 10 (Nehru Nagar). The communities are urban settlements mostly constituted by migrant labourers, daily wage earners, and domestic workers. The residents of the communities have migrated from areas like West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan in order to earn a better living. The sample constitutes families battling domestic violence within these specified five communities. The survey focused only on those families facing domestic violence that had children. The respondents were the adult survivors of violence in the family, responding to a survey questionnaire about the oldest child's experiences of facing and/ or witnessing violence in the households. The experience of the oldest child was chosen as the focal point of inquiry as the oldest child is likely to have been subject to maximum duration and intensity of violence.

TERMS IN THIS STUDY:

- **Adult Survivors:** Adult survivors in this report are defined as anyone over the age of 18 who has children and has experienced any type of gender/ sexual violence.

- **Children:** The term "children" in this report refers to anyone under the age of 18 who's at least one caregiver has experienced gender and/or sexual violence.

- **Child Protection Unit:** The term Child Protection Unit here stands for a project in Shakti Shalini that will provide specialized support to children of survivors of gender/sexual violence.

- **Survivors of Violence:** The term survivors of violence here refers to any individual having directly or indirectly faced any form of violence based on their gender and/ or sexuality.

- **Gender and sexual violence:** Gender and sexual violence refer to any act committed against a person's will, which violates their rights and freedoms and is motivated by gender norms and uneven power relationships. Gender/ sexual violence takes various forms such as physical, sexual, psycho-emotional, financial, verbal, linguistic, and socio-cultural.

CHILDREN OF ADULT SURVIVORS: WHY WE SHOULD CARE

Researches conducted on children in families where domestic violence happens have emphasized the fact that this bracket of children has generally gone unnoticed as victims of violence and they may carry on the trauma into their adolescence as well as adulthood. It's necessary to remember that the most important aspect of raising an emotionally and developmentally healthy child is to further the wellbeing of both the child and the primary caregiver leading to a harmonious society. [3]

Children who witness domestic violence in their own homes might experience violence in indirect forms, like the abuser threatening the adult victim and other instances of hostility. Even if they don't see the actual physical assault, they are often exposed to the repercussions - broken furniture, smashed pictures, etc. Such children often become isolated, fearful, guilty, and vulnerable. They might feel abandoned and defenseless. [3]

Children witnessing their caregiver being abused often suffer from psychological trauma. This can even affect their physical health. The behavioral responses might include acting out, withdrawal, exhibiting violent or risky behavior incompatible with healthy social interaction in adolescence and adulthood. Some studies have also suggested that social development is also adversely affected. Children may struggle to empathize with others and may feel socially isolated. Violence impacts the child's development in all areas- speech, motor, cognition, and social development. [3]

Childhood encompasses early adolescence, adolescence, and late adolescence as well. At this developmental stage of childhood, children experience various psycho-emotional, physical, sexual, and social changes that they require non-judgmental support and care to navigate. This bracket of children, mostly in their adolescence, growing up in complex domestic and social environments, may experience various repercussions of witnessing/ experiencing violence and they often go unheard and unseen. It is crucial to create psycho-social environments and spaces that approach adolescents through the prism of nurture, restoration, and supportive caregiving.

Another adverse impact is that children who are raised in abusive homes may tend to believe that violence is the primary way to settle any disagreement as well as to dominate one's partner. Within a heteronormative dynamic, boys who are eyewitnesses of their mothers' abuse are found to exhibit similar abusive behavior toward their female partners as adult men, than the boys brought up in healthy and safe environments. Conversely, girls who witnessed their mother's abuse are more likely to believe that threats and violence are acceptable and "normal" in relationships. [3]

The research literature has shown that in families with adult survivors of gender and sexual violence, children are also vulnerable to direct or indirect forms of violence. Once we are able to identify this, we would enable us to plan interventions that would contribute to breaking the cycle and chain of inter-generational violence by focusing on parenting skills, as well as counseling children, and providing them psycho-social and legal support.

SHAKTI SHALINI

CHILDHOODS WITHIN DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENTS OF GENDER/SEXUAL VIOLENCE: A QUANTITATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

THE QUANTITATIVE STUDY: WHY, WHERE, AND HOW

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:
- To Identify the children in houses where violence is prevalent from the five communities that Shakti Shalini works with
- To understand the manner of violence (direct or indirect) the children face

Geographical location

The research was carried out in Nehru Nagar block 7, 10, Adivasi camp, Jal Vihar, and Sriniwaspuri, all of which are socially and economically marginalized communities in Delhi's South East district.

Sampling

This study used a purposely selected sample of 271 homes, all of which included children and were living in homes where violence was widespread. Initially, 271 houses were surveyed via random sampling, however data from 231 households was evaluated during the data cleaning process because it was up to respondents to continue to participate or not reply to questions they didn't want to.

Tools & Approaches

A survey method was used for data collection. The survey questionnaire was prepared after going through the research literature to assess the effects of violence on children, and the experiences of the team working in the communities with the families. There were 3 themes within the questionnaire, and 31 questions in total. The 3 themes were-

- **Information of the Participant and Child**- This section had questions to gain information about the participant (Adult survivor of Violence) and the child. The questions aimed at understanding their basic characteristics like age, gender, number of children, etc. The questions for the child along with these basic characteristics also focused on understanding their behavioral characteristics, and their academic performance, as literature, has shown a strong correlation between these two factors.
- **Direct Violence**- Questions in this section were aimed to assess how the child was facing direct violence at home- verbally, physically, or emotionally.
- **Indirect Violence**- Questions in this section were aimed to assess how the child was facing indirect violence at home- verbally, physically, or emotionally.

MAJOR FINDINGS:
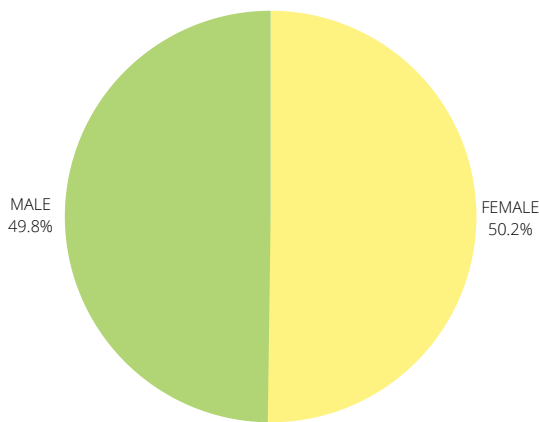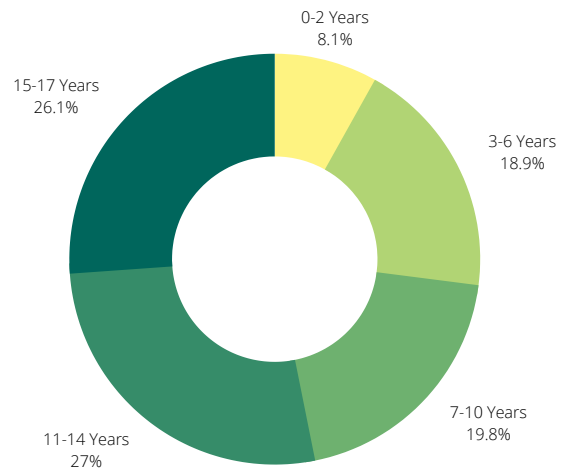
Chart 1

GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN

MALE
49.8%

FEMALE
50.2%

Chart 2

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN

0-2 Years
8.1%

15-17 Years
26.1%

3-6 Years
18.9%

7-10 Years
19.8%

11-14 Years
27%

From chart 1 it can be seen that there is an almost equal distribution between male and female children in the households surveyed. This means that there is an almost equal number of male and female children who might be affected by the violence at home.

Chart 2 represents the age distribution of the children surveyed. From the data, it can be seen that majority of the children were in the age groups of 11-14 years, and 15-17 years, respectively.

Therefore, if we look from the perspective of Erik Erikson's "Psychosocial Development Theory" then the majority of the children surveyed are in the school-age and adolescence stage of development. During the school-age (11-14yrs) children learn to apply themselves to tasks which helps them to answer questions like, "Can I master the skills necessary to survive and adapt?". Being able to finish a task builds confidence whereas not being able to apply and enjoy the pleasure of completing a task contributes to building inferiority in the child. Further, several studies found that children who have been exposed to abuse and Intimate Partners Violence or Domestic Violence had lower levels of social competence than their peers of the same age group. It is undeniable that exposure to violence has a significant influence on children at all stages of development. [4]

The children face challenges in maintaining normative functioning, such as in cognitive functioning the child might face difficulty in organizing, prioritizing, and task completion. This may make them vulnerable to building inferiority and low confidence which would be a barrier in actualizing one's full potential. [2]

The age group of 15-17yrs is the adolescence stage of development. In this stage children strive to get answers about who they are, what their beliefs are, about their feelings, roles, and attitudes, thus the formation of self takes place at this stage. Drawing our analysis from the "Social Learning Theory" of Albert Bandura, observing, modeling, and communicating (verbal and non-verbal) plays an important role in children forming their selves. Within environments of violence, abuse, and unequal power relations, children observe, learn, and model the gendered behavior of same-sex caregiver. This, in turn, can contribute to the behavior of enduring violence and/ or perpetrating it during, both, adolescence and adulthood. Thus, the children in the households of violence are at high risk of cycles of inter-generational violence. [5]
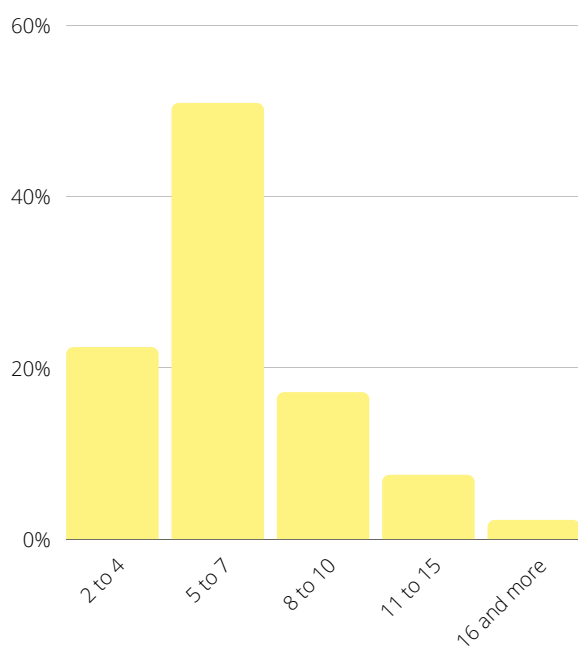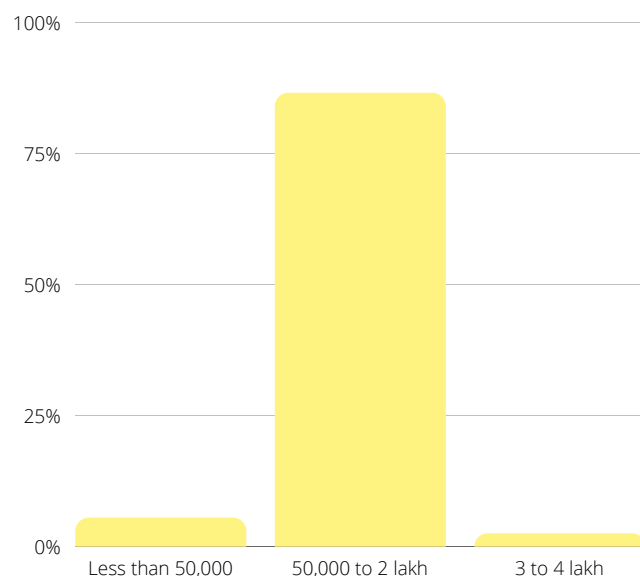
Chart 3

FAMILY MEMBERS

Chart 4

ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME

Chart 3 — Family Members

60% · 40% · 20% · 0%

2 to 4 · 5 to 7 · 8 to 10 · 11 to 15 · 16 and more

Chart 4 — Annual Family Income

100% · 75% · 50% · 25% · 0%

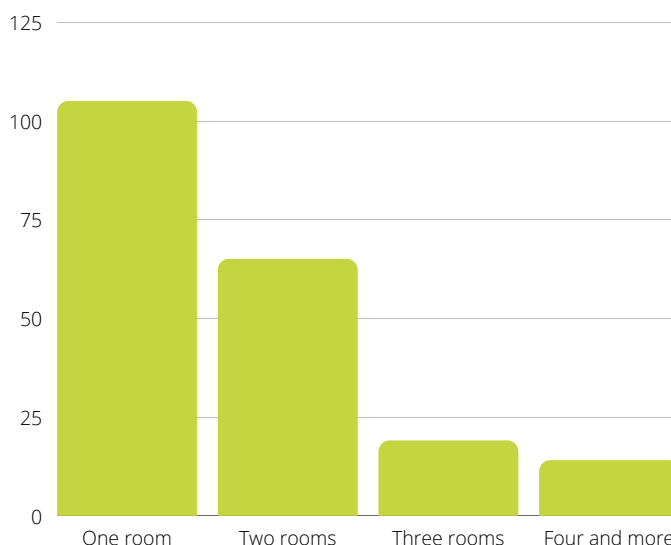Less than 50,000 · 50,000 to 2 lakh · 3 to 4 lakh

When we look at chart 3, we can see that the majority of the questioned households had between 5 and 7 family members. If we look at the annual family income in chart 4 in relation to the number of family members, we can see that the majority of the households' yearly income is in the range of Rs. 50,000 to 2 lakh, with the remaining in the range of less than 50,000.

Assuming a person earns Rs. 50,000 per year, their monthly income is Rs. 4166, and their daily earnings are Rs. 138, which is slightly above the national poverty threshold in India but below the World Bank's global poverty limit of Rs. 142. As a result, it is clear that family income may be insufficient in relation to the number of family members, and that the households are economically marginalized.

Drawing from research done in Tripura by Sibnath Deb and Subhasis Modak to study the prevalence of Violence against Children in Families in Tripura and, its relationship with socio-economic Factors, the socio-economic factors can contribute to family violence as they are directly related to stress, poverty, living conditions, marital discord, psychiatric and/or psychological concerns. The research also stated that intra-parental violence has a tremendous negative effect on children. [1]
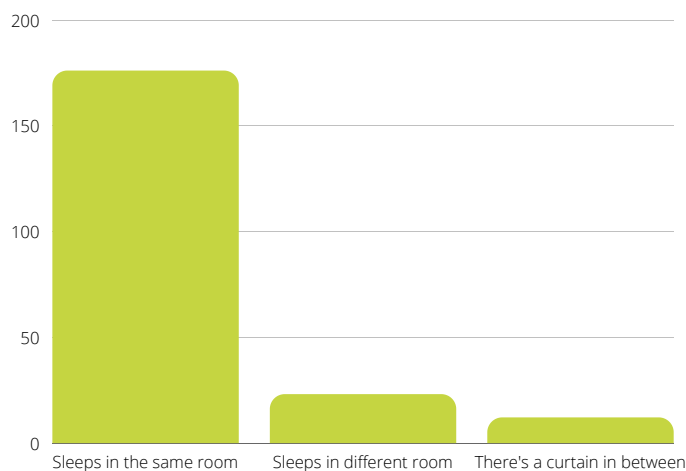
Chart 5

NUMBER OF ROOMS IN THE

HOUSEHOLD

One room | Two rooms | Three rooms | Four and more

Sleeps in the same room | Sleeps in different room | There's a curtain in between

The number of rooms in each home is depicted in Chart 5. Only one room is available for all family members in 105 houses, followed by 65 families with two rooms, 19 and 14 households with three and four rooms, respectively. When we compare the number of rooms that the majority of the homes have to the number of members (5 to 7) that the majority of the households have (see chart 3), we can see that there is a significant difference, indicating a lack of space.

The number of households where children and adults share a room is depicted in Chart 6. Because there is just one room that accommodates 5 to 7 family members, thus in 176 households children sleep in the same room as adults.

Children sleep in different rooms in 23 houses, while in 12 households, one room is split by a curtain, and sleeping arrangements are separated, as is the common practice in the communities.

It should be highlighted that the families surveyed are those where there is a high level of gender and/or sexual violence. As a result, the children are at significant risk of witnessing violence due to lack of space and their socio-economic background (physical, verbal, emotional, and sexual)
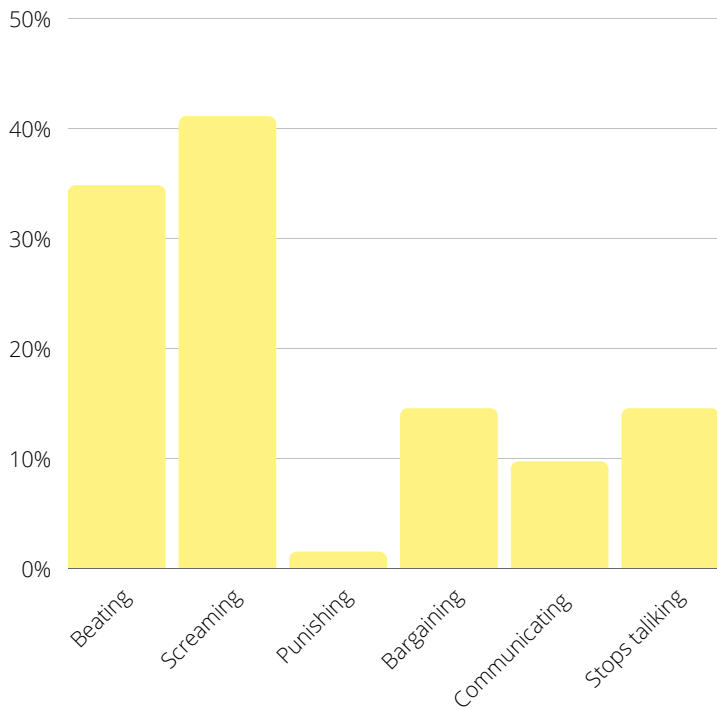
Chart 7

WAYS OF DISCIPLINING THE CHILD

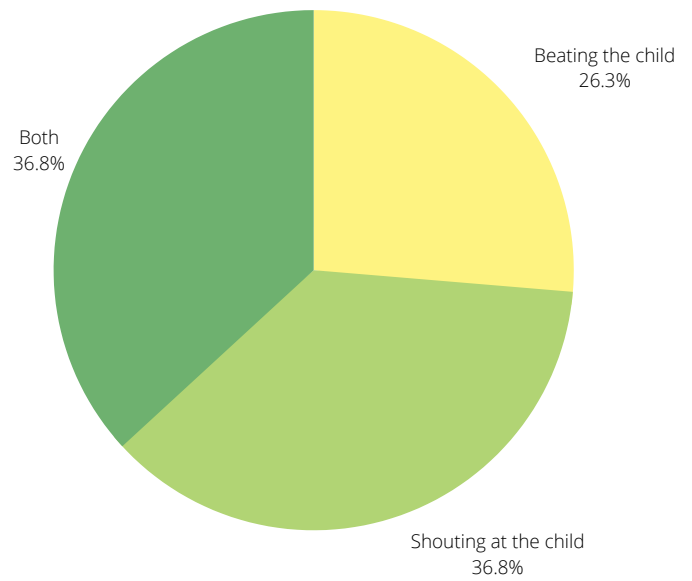**Chart 8**

PROJECTING ANGER & FRUSTRATION ON CHILD

Chart 7 represents the various ways that are being adopted by the households surveyed in disciplining a child. Majority of them (41.06%) resort to screaming followed by beating (34.78%), bargaining, such as promises to provide a materialistic thing, refusal to speak to the child amounts to 14.49%, and communicating or making them understand amounts to only 9.66%.

Given the finding, it can be understood that the ways being adopted to discipline a child are inclined towards an unhealthy approach and can leave deep impacts on a child's holistic development. Findings from national and international studies have also indicated that corporal punishment is a predictor of depression, unhappiness, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness in children and youth. Along with this, various researches also clearly indicate that the academic performance of violence-experienced children, irrespective of the nature of violence and socio-economic groups, was poor compared to the academic performance of non-violence-experienced children.

Chart 8 makes it evident that children are the victims, not the reason, of anger and frustration projected by adults in the form of shouting (36.8%), beating (26.3%), and both (36.8%).

Chart 9
REASONS FOR FIGHTS AT HOME
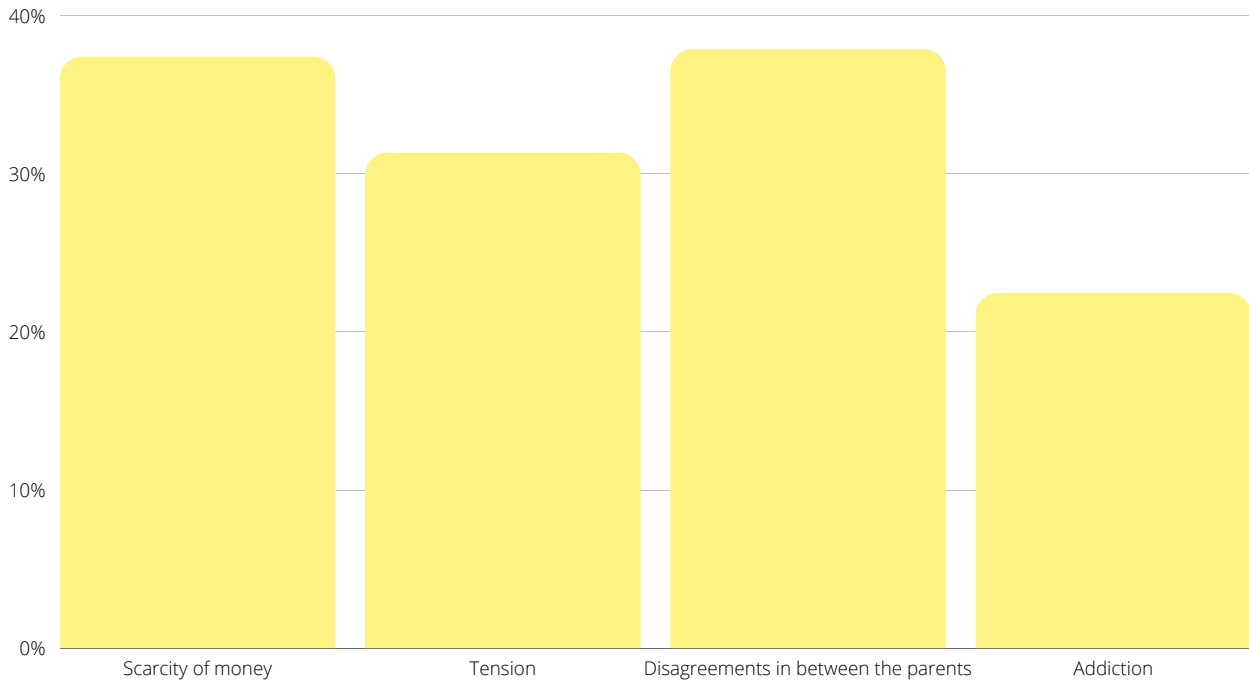
When asked about the common reasons for clashes or fights at home, the responses that were recorded varied from addiction, tension, and arguments between parents.

There is already an existing underlying gender power relation in the households being surveyed, as the respondents themselves are survivors of gender and/or sexual violence. If we look at the chart we can see that the arguments between parents and the scarcity of money amount to 38% each which implies that the women of the households are marginalized along the lines of both patriarchal and economic norms.

In the five communities, it was observed that 'addiction' and 'tension' are interrelated. It has been seen that suppression/repression of emotions in men and pressures of masculinity, such as providing for the family, are the primary causes of alcoholism and substance abuse. Thus, the underlying patriarchal customs and gender roles are paving the way for the transference of inter-generational violence in the family by exposing children to constant clashes and fights at home.
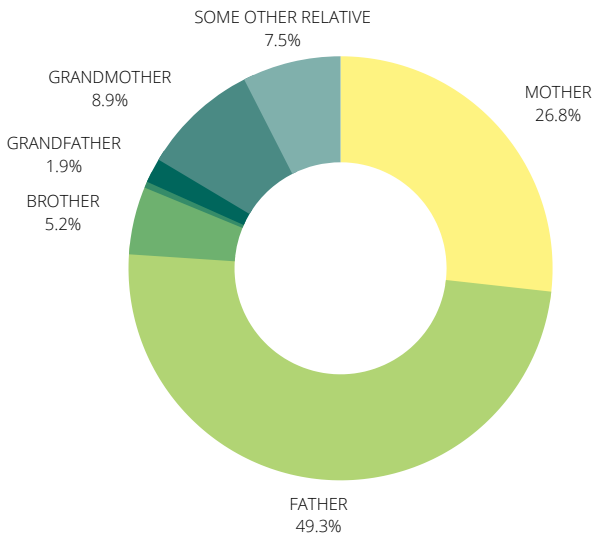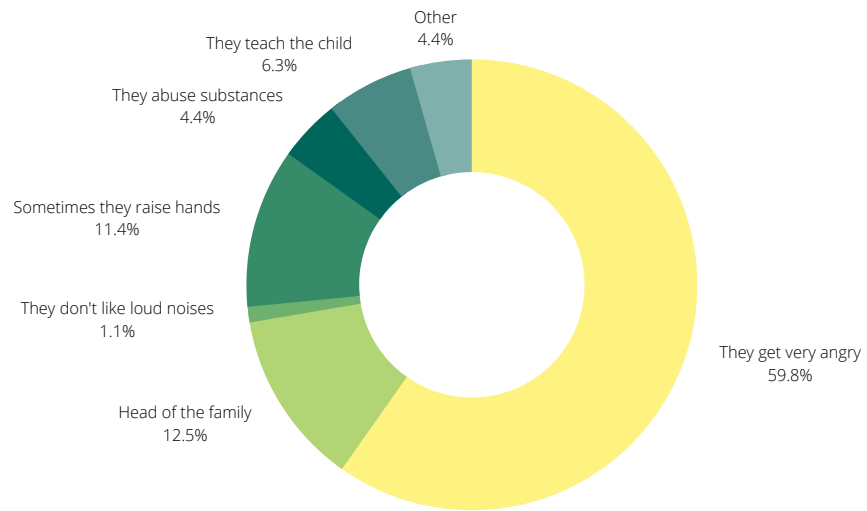
Chart 10
THE CHILD IS MOST SCARED OF

SOME OTHER RELATIVE
7.5%

GRANDMOTHER
8.9%

GRANDFATHER
1.9%

BROTHER
5.2%

MOTHER
26.8%

FATHER
49.3%

Chart 11
REASON OF BEING SCARED

They teach the child
6.3%

Other
4.4%

They abuse substances
4.4%

Sometimes they raise hands
11.4%

They don't like loud noises
1.1%

Head of the family
12.5%

They get very angry
59.8%

Majority of the respondents have reported that the child is most scared of the father (49.3%) in the house indicating a clear gender hierarchy in the household. Chart 10 communicates that after the father the child fears the mother (26.8%), followed by the grandmother (8.9%).

Interestingly, the data indicates that it is the women who are tasked with gatekeeping and upholding patriarchal norms. This is further illustrated by the fact that children fear grandmother more than the grandfather as somewhere she might have been given the task of being the gatekeeper as it is a common trend which is been seen in the communities among older women.

Chart 11 represents the distribution of reasons behind the child's fear of a particular member in the house. Within the distribution of reasons, anger is the most outstanding variable, followed by 'being the head of the family'.

Historically, while men have occupied the position of the patriarch and head of the house, masculine aggression and anger on children are often perpetrated by senior female members of the household as well. In effect, children are exposed to a domestic environment wherein only men occupy the position of the patriarch. There is a strict gendering of roles and behavior, and aggression and anger are normalized forms of emotional expression.

Chart 12
IF THE CHILD IS PRESENT DURING A FIGHT OR CLASH IN THE HOUSE

100%

75%

50%

25%

0%

YES   NO
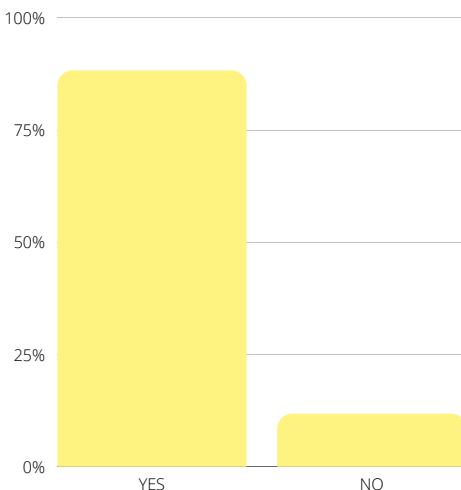
Almost 89% of children are found to be present during arguments between parents or fights and clashes in the house. Witnessing violence and children being exposed to violent environments is an indirect form of violence being experienced by children and can lead to a long-term traumatic impact.

Chart 13
GENDERED APRROACHES OF CHILDREN'S
AUTONOMY AT HOME
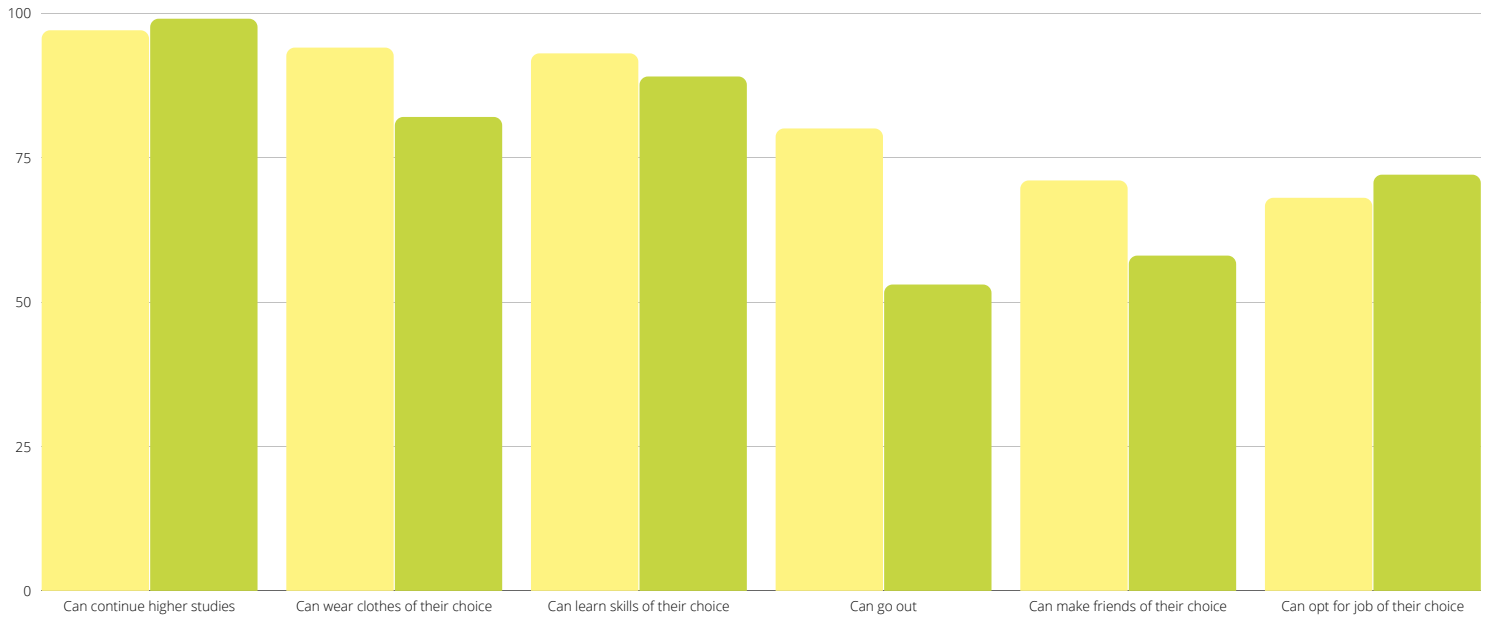
The above chart represents whether the child is able to exercise choice in relation to the mentioned variables either in the present or in the future. Similar choices were kept with regards to both boys and girls in order to gauge the existing gender discrimination in the households surveyed. The yellow bars refer to boys and the green bars to girls respectively. The chart reflects the responses and points of view of the caregivers cum adult survivors of gender sexual violence in relation to the experience of the child.

The first variable in the chart reflects that caregivers are inclined to permit more girls to pursue higher education than boys in the five socially and economically marginalized communities. It has been seen that young boys drop out more during the shift from secondary to higher secondary education as they start looking for jobs with local vendors, shops, or labor work to support families. This trend is indicative of a strict gender role division wherein boys and men are expected to focus on providing economically for the family. Therefore, it is evident how norms of masculinity are affecting the aspirations of young boys.

The second variable in the chart reflects that caregivers are permitting boys greater choice in personal attire and clothing than the girls. Girls' and women's choices of clothing, their body's autonomy have long been controlled by patriarchal standards of living. The attachment of shame, the honor of the family with women's bodies is one of the underlined reasons for such gender-based discrimination.

Similarly, the third variable in the chart indicates that caregivers are more open to promoting and investing financially in the skill-building and extracurricular activities of boys than that of girls. The fourth variable shows a vast variation in freedom of mobility i.e., boys are able to go out more than girls which is a manifestation of a deeply rooted patriarchal mindset of controlling women's mobility and access in every sphere under the garb of protecting them. The fifth variable demonstrates that girls enjoy less freedom to select and make friends than the boys.

Finally, when it comes to being able to go for jobs of their choices the boys seem to have less say. The data here implies the role of the gendered expectation on boys and men to provide financially for the family. Boys are always expected to choose a course of life that would make them land a high-paying job as 'income' is a measure of masculinity. Just like a girl would be asked before marriage if she can cook, a boy will be asked how much he earns. The above finding from the point of view of adult survivors indicates how patriarchy impacts all genders across the spectrum, although disproportionately when it comes to women and other marginalized gender.

Chart 14
POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE CHILD TO FEEL UNSAFE AND SCARED

Other (not specified)
33.3%

The child is being beaten
26.7%

Father is always busy to earn and doesn't give time
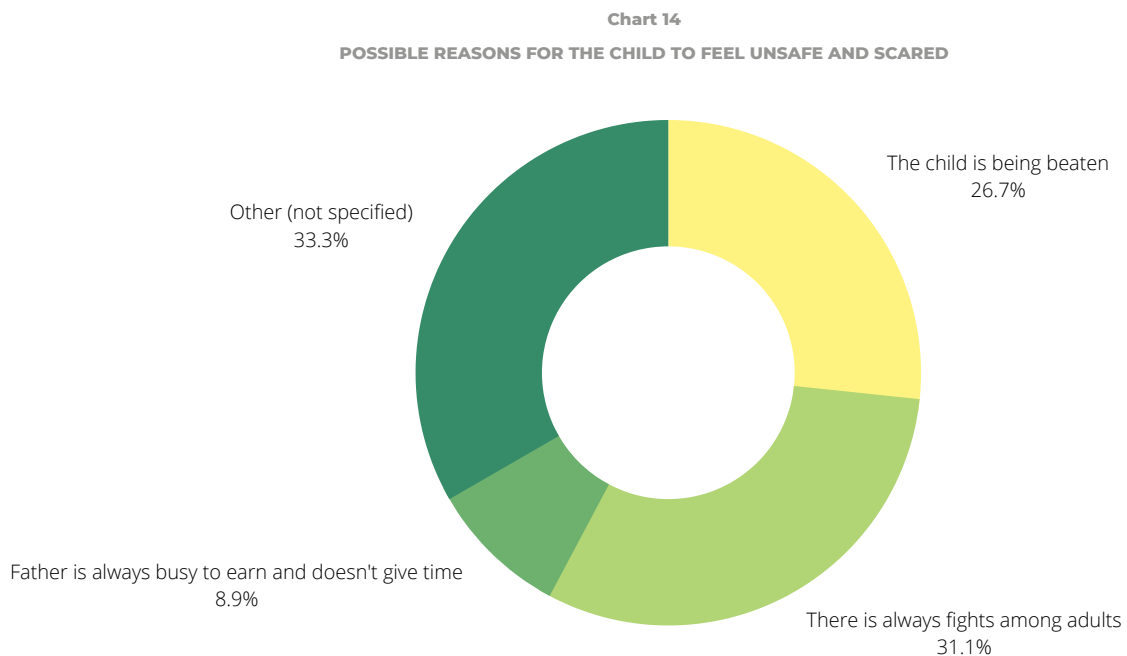8.9%

There is always fights among adults
31.1%

Chart 14 represents possible reasons for children to feel unsafe and scared as per the responses of the caregivers cum adult survivors of gender/sexual violence. The majority of them mentioned that the child feels unsafe or is always scared because of the tension, fights, and clashes in between the adults at home. Another reason that came up quite explicitly from the data was that almost 27% of respondents have reported that the child is often scared and feels unsafe because they are frequently beaten. Almost 8.9% of responses showed that the lack of involvement of the father with the child contributes to the child not feeling safe around their father. 33% have selected other reasons that are not specified and leave room for other possible factors for children to feel unsafe.

Chart 15

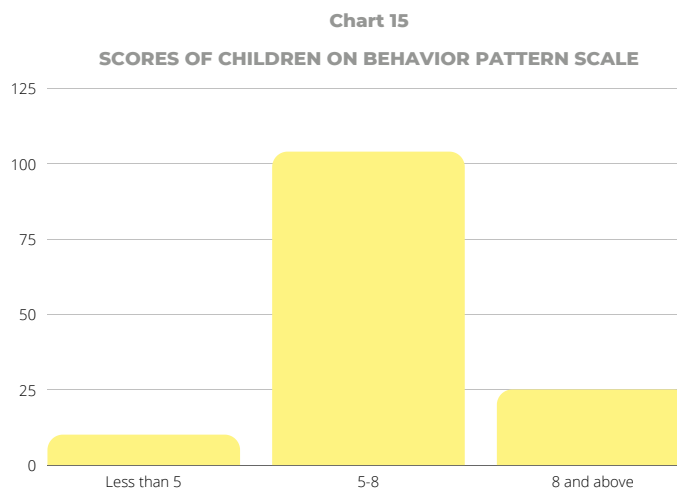**SCORES OF CHILDREN ON BEHAVIOR PATTERN SCALE**

Chart 15 represents the score of 139 children (where sufficient and accurate data was available for questions assessing the behavioral attributes) on a behavior pattern scale between 1 to 10. The behavior pattern scale includes the following descriptive indicators about the child:

- In a happy mood most of the time
- Mingles with people without any challenge
- Is able to take care of their day to day functioning
- Expresses anger frequently
- Jittery or irritated frequently
- Scared and silent most of the time
- Shy most of the time
- Likes to play alone
- Takes interest in activities
- Is able to finish tasks
- Behavior of the child while expressing irritation
- Behavior of the child towards the male figures and female figures of the house when expressing anger.
- Ways through which the child resolves conflict with male peers, cousins or siblings, and female peers, cousins or siblings.

As indicated in the chart:

- 10 children scored lower than 5 on the behavior pattern scale. This means that the 10 children demonstrate unhealthy behavioral patterns in their day-to-day life. Since a child's behavioral patterns are largely influenced by their domestic environment, chart 14 measures the behavior-enabling environment of the households the children are in.

-102 children scored between 5-8. This means that 102 children, as per the data collected, demonstrates ambiguous behavioral patterns in their day-to-day life.

-Only 25 children scored above 8. This means that out of 139 children only 25 children demonstrates healthy behavioral patterns.

Chart 16

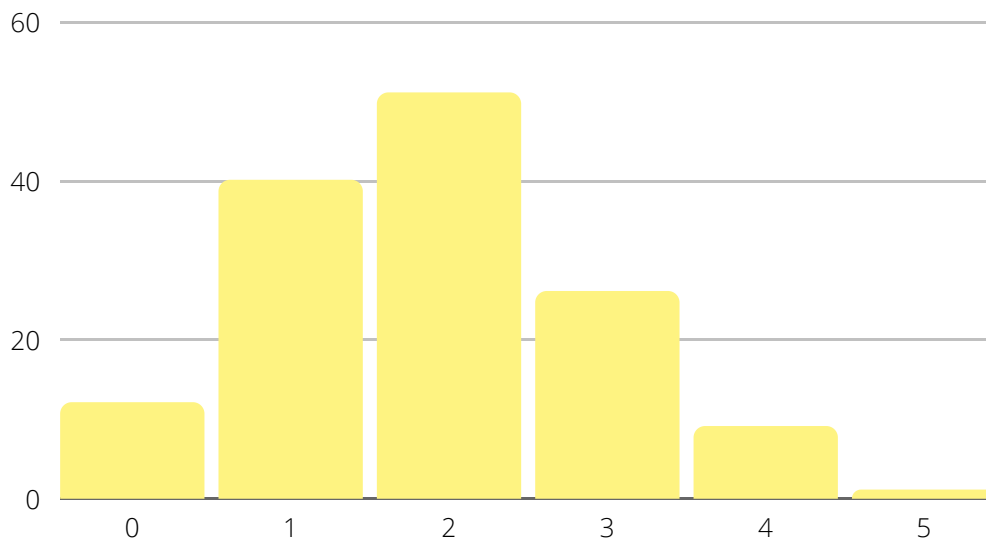**HOUSEHOLD SCORE ON BEHAVIOR**

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Chart 16 represents the score of 139 households on a behavior enabling environment scale of 1 to 5. The score has been calculated on the basis of data gathered from responses by caregivers cum adult survivors to questions on direct and indirect violence experienced and witnessed by children in the household. The indicators are as follows:

- Ways of disciplining the child.
- Projection of anger or frustration on the child
- Behavior of the person the child is most scared of in the house
- Presence of the child during fights and clashes amongst adults
- Inclusion of children in decision making of their life choices
- Freedom to exercise choice based on the gender of the child in the house
- Factors contributing to children feeling unsafe and being scared.

As indicated in the chart:

- 12 households scored 0

- 51 households scored 2

- 40 households scored 1

- 26 households scored 3

- 9 households scored 4, and

-1 household scored 5 out of 5 on the behavior enabling environment scale.

Majority of the households can be seen to lack an enabling environment for children's overall behavior and development. Therefore, the chart indicates the intensity of children at risk of being impacted by the violence in the house.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to identify the children in houses where violence is prevalent and understand the manner of violence (direct/ indirect) they face. In addition, the study unearthed how the environment of violence directly affects behavioral patterns of the children. The research also opens up the possibility of building ecosystems that are holistic and restorative for these groups of children and the immediate caregiver unit.

Due to varied reasons, survivors/ caregivers and other adults in these households have been found to inflict violence upon the children. Economic marginalization is also one of the major factors for children experiencing and witnessing violence. It is to highlight that family members huddled in a small living space expose children to witnessing different forms of violence between adults. Unhealthy ways of disciplining children are also one of the most common factors of violence in these households. An underlying gender power relation has been found existing in the households as these children have been found to be most fearful of the male members. It has also been found that older women have been tasked with gatekeeping and upholding patriarchal norms. There is a strict gendering of roles and behavior in these households where aggression is normalized as an emotional expression. Therefore, the majority of the households can be seen to lack an enabling environment for children's overall behavior and development.

The overall development of children and adolescents experiencing and witnessing gender/sexual is shown to be severely impacted. This can lead to normalizing violence and enduring and/ or perpetrating violence in adolescence and/or adulthood. Thus, the children in the households of violence are at high risk of falling into cycles of intergenerational violence. These brackets of children, mostly in their adolescence, go unnoticed, and therefore it is crucial to create psycho-social and safe environments for them to heal.

The further intent of this research is to build strategies and interventions not only with children but also with parents/ caregivers to raise awareness on trauma-informed parenting and the effect of violence on their behaviors. The two-fold approach to deal with violence, one with children and the other with parents/ caregivers, will help us to approach the situation more holistically which would have a lasting impact on individuals.

RECOMMENDATIONS & WAY FORWARD

A two-fold approach of response and prevention has to be deployed to address inter-generational cycles of gender/sexual violence:

- Prevention would include psycho-emotional education, awareness, and sensitization with adolescents to enhance their socio-emotional development with regard to gender and sexuality.

- Responding to impact of direct and indirect violence on children would include interventions focused on trauma-informed counselling, either one to one and/or in groups, of children who have been direct or indirect victims in the adult survivors' (of gender and sexual violence) families to process trauma, heal from it and lead healthy lives.

- Children who directly contact Shakti Shalini can be guided and referred to relevant organizations and helplines. Shakti Shalini will ensure that timely follow-ups are done.

- Implementing trauma-informed parenting and/or caregiving sessions with the immediate caregiver unit or environment.

The goal is to break generational cycles, create more aware and informed individuals in the process, improve parenting skills and quality of life. We also aim at connecting with other child care organizations and increasing our reach throughout the country to build allies in creating a healthy atmosphere for our children to grow.

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