

# Post-Separation Attitude Towards Domestic Abuses: A study of Domestic Violence Victims in Tinsukia District, Assam

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## Abstract

Victims of domestic violence perceive different perspectives on the abuses they experience in their marital relationships. It is also seen that despite reporting a case, a victim may want to go back to the abuser or may suffer from post-separation abuses. This paper simply tries to explore the attitude of victims after reporting the crime towards domestic violence. We address two issues to analyze the post-separation attitude of the victims. First, to trace out the factors that motivates a domestic violence victim to report the crime. Secondly, even after reporting, why do they want to go back to the abuser? The study found that some of the victims still need their marital families back and want just minimal punishment for their abusers. Apart from that some of them are facing post-separation abuses. These all together represent a victim's attitude towards the domestic abuse they encountered during their stay in the marital home. A narrative approach has been adopted to analyze these issues.

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence, Marital Relationships, Narrative Approach, Post-Separation Abuse.

## Introduction

It is a well-known fact that women kept their abusive stories behind the doors due to several factors. This is highly risky and often prolonged. Some victim goes for formal support services while some shut their mouth for different reasons like financial dependence, fear of losing their children, their home, employment or family, fear of further abuse, etc. (1). Victims' thought processes about their marital status, how they felt about punishment issues, motivating factors behind such bold step of leaving their abusive conjugal life, their desire to go back to their husband even after case filing, ownership of assets for financial security, support of maternal family, etc. give an idea about their attitude towards domestic violence. Apart from that what they have to convey to the victims hidden in the curtains is also important to trace out their beliefs and suggestions to mitigate this social evil. Generally, women of India are under the pressure of the *culture of silence* due to different reasons like family honor, economic dependency on husband, emotional dependency, financial security of children, etc. They bear or avoid all the torture of husband and in-laws silently for the sake of their married life. Previous research provides evidence that victims who took legal actions or other measures to punish

the abusers are at the risk of re-victimization. It is also found that victims' perception of safety largely depends on the risk of re-victimization and experience of post-separation abuse. Post separation abuse among domestic violence victims is a growing research issue among the scholarly community. A few came up and stood for their rights, in which these informal sources are great help for them. Post-separation abuses are very commonly found among the victims, sometimes it is higher for separated or divorced women than those who are still in marriage. After reporting the incidences or after separating from the marital family, sometimes victims become more vulnerable to further abuses. Victims of our study report that they still face abuses post separation and due to reporting of crime. However, some of them are less or not at all worried about these facts. Those who return or want to go back to abusive partners often give reasons that their partners' have promised to change, apologizing for their mistake, financial dependence, lack of wealth and residence, etc. (2-3). Apart from that fear of living alone and hope that situations will alter in the future also restrict a woman from leaving abusive relations (4). This piece of work is an attempt to analyze the attitude of victims towards

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(Received 12<sup>th</sup> January 2025; Accepted 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2025; Published 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025)

the abuses they experienced in their married life, after separating from their perpetrators or husbands. This study is very important from the perspective of analysis of the attitude victims have towards the abuses they experienced in marriage. Attitude of victims towards getting punished the abuser and leaving the toxic relation depends on many factors. Here, we have put forward some issues to the victims, so that we can have an idea about their attitude towards the abuses they face. The attitude of victims towards the punishment of the abuser and leaving the toxic relationship depends on many factors, which is the prime concern of this study.

## Methodology

The study is based on primary data. To collect information on domestic violence, victims have been identified for three categories of crime heads- Section 498(A) of Indian Penal Code, 1983; Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA, 2005). As the study is delicate in nature, we have first approached district administration to get permission to access the details of the victim. The study was sanctioned by the office of the district commissioner (then deputy commissioner), Tinsukia district, Government of Assam by strictly maintaining confidentiality of the victims. The authors have strictly maintained the confidentiality of the victims by not keeping their names in study, not taking any photographs etc. The study has considered those victims of domestic violence who have registered their cases. The cases are either pending or dissolved in nature. It authenticates the fact that the victims are separated from their partner either legally or socially.

To make a representative sample size we have first taken the time frame from 2018 to 2021, when the state Assam has ranked topped in India and Tinsukia has growth of domestic violence above national average. Secondly to know the total population specially related to the crime heads related to domestic violence we have considered three crime categories that directly related to domestic violence-Cruelty by husband and his relatives (IPC section 498A), Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. As we have taken only surviving victims, we omitted the cases registered under Dowry Prohibition Act. Moreover, negligible

number of cases is registered under dowry Prohibition Act in Tinsukia. After that district-wise tables are accessed from National Crime Records Bureau to know the total number of registered cases, which comes out as 1193 as total population. Thirdly the author visited One stop solution center (SAKHI) registered under Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), to access the information of registered victims. They have provided some information about the registered victims and allowed the authors to meet them. Moreover, to find out the details registered victims they also suggested visiting e-courts.in. The authors collected the information of 1196 victims by the type of case and year. Finally random number table is applied under random sampling technique to get 342 samples from the total population. Bartlett's method of sample calculation has been applied to know the required sample size (5).

However, due to non-responses, the sample size became 327. Data collection has been commenced by the end of December 2022 and came to an end in August 2023. A pilot survey has been undertaken in the first half of December 2022. As a disadvantageous group, to prevent re-traumatization during interviews the authors took the help of local mahila samitis to reach the victim and consent was taken from the victim to participate in the study. While interviewing the victim, always a member of local mahila samiti and close friend(s) of the victims present as per the victim's suggestion to make her comfortable to participate in the interview. If the victim doesn't want to answer any question(s), the authors immediately skipped those. Moreover, during the interview if she feels uncomfortable, the authors immediately stopped it. If the victim again wanted to resume the interview, the authors also visited two or three times as per her convenience. Moreover, the authors did not encounter any legal, social or ethnic obstacles in the region. This is because the authors have involved local mahila samitis and women centric organizations in the study for smooth collection of information

In this study, the authors have formed one structured questionnaire consisting questions specially related to the theme of the study. The questions are related to nature of violence the victims faced when they are at husband's home; the abuser; their belief that they are still in

marriage or not; re-victimization after case registration and the nature of such victimizations; their views about abuser punishment; going back to their husbands; support from their maternal family; torture they face, if any when they visit their maternal parents. The respondents are made free to give any other narratives from their experiences post separation to get more insights about the issue. In a nutshell, these questions will answer the main investigating issue of the study that how the victims after separating from the abusive husbands perceive the situation and how their attitude got affected? This study has adopted a narrative approach to get an insight into how victims are motivated to break their silence and what factors are responsible for the attitude they perceive, post-separation from their husbands or abusers. Narrative thematic analysis, through five stages has been applied in this study (6). These are-organization and preparation of data; obtaining a general sense of information; the coding process; categories or themes; and interpretation of the data. For data organization and preparation, we have transcribed the information immediately after the interview which is recorded in the form of audio tapes or noted down. All casual conversations between the authors and respondents have been deleted. Graphs and tables are used to analyze the gathered information. Verbal informed consent was

obtained with assurance of anonymity and confidentiality from the respondents before conducting the interview.

## Results and Discussion

In India, the earliest understanding of domestic violence is associated with the dowry system, hence the first legislation initiated to curb this evil in the country is the Dowry Prohibition Act, and 1961. Over the years, domestic violence continues to be one of the greatest threats to women's lives. In India, 32 percent of ever-married women reported having experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence by their husbands in their lifetime. The most common type of spousal or domestic violence, in India, is physical followed by emotional and sexual (7). In this study Table 1 shows the kind of violence faced by the victims. Victims reported that faced physical abuse (34.6 percent) followed by all types, i.e., physical, verbal, emotional, and mental abuse (26.3 percent). Another type of violence faced mostly is physical accompanied by verbal abuse (19.9 percent). Physical abuse along with mental as well as emotional abuse also haunted the victims in their married life (12.5 percent). The most common forms of physical abuse reported are beating, slapping, kicking, throwing items, dragging, punching, sexual harassment, burning some body parts with a lighter, etc.

**Table 1:** Number of Victims by the type of Violence

Type of Violence	Total Number of Victims (In %)
Physical	113 (34.6)
Mental	7 (2.1)
Emotional	9 (2.8)
Physical and verbal	65 (19.9)
Verbal, mental, and emotional	6 (1.8)
Physical, mental, and emotional	41 (12.5)
All types	86 (26.3)
Total	327

It is also found that victims have considered some type of violence in a minimal manner. Six of total victims reported that they suffer only from verbal, mental and emotional violence in their marital life (1.8 percent). While only 2.1 percent said that they

experience only mental violence. Similarly, 2.8 percent victims expressed of having emotional abuses in their marital house. When it comes to the abuser(s), Table 2 shows the responses of the victims.

**Table 2:** Number of Abusers

Abuser Number	(In %)
Husband 181	(55.4)
Mother-in-law 6	(1.8)
Husband and MIL 99	(30.3)

Husband and FIL3	(0.9)
Father-in-law0	(0.0)
All of the above38	(11.6)

Husbands are the major contributor to domestic violence (55.4%) followed by both mother-in-law and husband (30.3%). Studies found a resemblance with husbands as the major abusers in domestic violence cases (8-10). Father-in-law is not reported as the sole abuser by the victims. However, 1.8 percent of respondents revealed that they are abused only by their mother-in-law. It is also found that husband along with his mother and father also abuse his wife in a considerable extent (11.6 percent). When a victim reports such abuses, she has to break the silence over all the abuses she experienced over time. This attitude towards such survivors depends on different factors. Even after reporting the crime, she may stand strong or may deviate from her decision. This section has been categorized into six sub-heads depending on the narrations provided by the respondents. The authors tried to trace out the attitude of the victims towards domestic violence after filing the case or separating from the abuser.

### Motivation behind Filing the Case and Leaving the Abusive Relation

Generally, women of India in a marriage are under the pressure of a *culture of silence* due to reasons like family honor, economic dependency on the husband, emotional dependency, financial security of children, etc. They bear or avoid all the torture of husbands and in-laws silently for the sake of their married life (11). A few came up and stood up for their rights. A research work has proposed a four-stage process of 'Reclaiming Self' which follows the woman leaving her abusive partner: counteracting abuse, breaking free, not going back, and moving on (12). To reclaim self-identity, a victim must have some strong motivation which leads to leaving the abusive relationship and taking action against the partner. From the narratives of the victims, we have identified the following themes shown in Table 3 as motivating factors behind filling the case and leaving the abusive relationship.

**Table 3:** Motivating Factors behind Filing a Case

Motivating Factors	Number (In %)
Emotionless people deserve punishment for ruining someone's life	27 (8.3)
I don't want that in the future if I have kids, they should not face the same thing I faced	17 (5.2)
I don't want my kids to face the same thing I faced	120 (36.7)
I fear if again I give birth to a baby girl, they will torture me again, and the kid	39 (11.9)
They are so cruel to the victim that I don't even think to be with them.	28 (8.6)
The victim's marital family considers her children not their blood	3(0.92)
They only want money; they are not any human being.	34(10.4)
Where there is no love and respect, children are also feeling scared of their father.	46(14.1)
Filing a case would threaten the abuser and compel him/them to realize the mistake	6 (1.8)
My friend and MahilaSamiti members advise me to proceed with filing case	2(0.6)
My maternal family motivates me to file case	5(1.5)

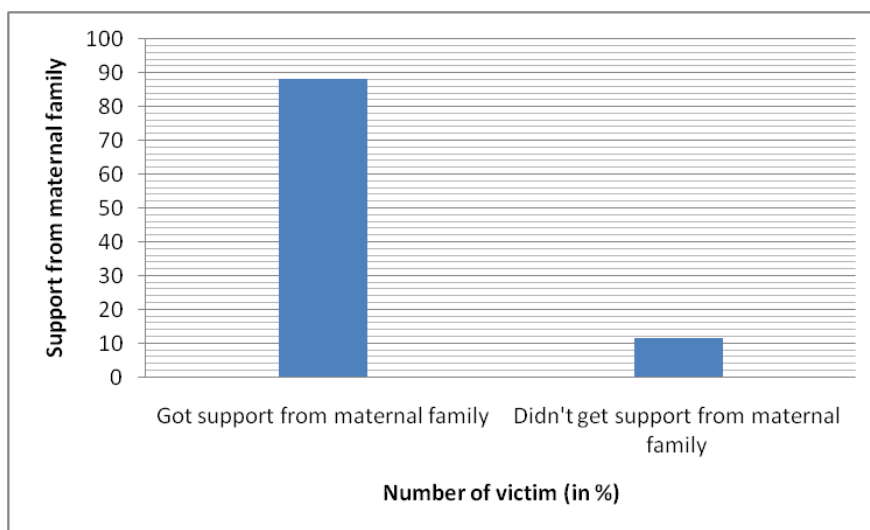
Majority of the victims revealed the mothers love behind filing the case. They don't want ruin the future of their children by living with such toxic marital relations, as it will adversely hamper the development of their child (36.7 percent). Second important factor came up as self-honor along with fear and anxiety of victims child (14.1 percent). While son preference by the abuser becomes the third most important reason behind filing the case by the victims (11.9 percent).

### Support from Maternal Family When Living with Marital Abuses

Research in domestic violence suggests that some survivors actively seek assistance from informal social networks like friends and family, neighbors to help or bring out themselves from the abusive environment, before seeking formal sources of help like shelter home, police, etc. (13-16). It is found that 68 to 70 percent of victims seek informal support when they try to come out from a violent marriage (17). In general victims of domestic abuse reported receiving emotional

support like listening to their abusive incidents, and validating feelings from family and friends this can act as a preventive factor against stress or depression (18, 19). In our study also 88 Percent of victims who got positive responses from their maternal family informed emotional support at first instance. Family and friends are the primary

sources of informal support for a domestic violence victim. However, the retaliation from these supporters is not positive for the victims all the time (20, 21). An eye-catching number (11.6 percent) of victims didn't get initial support from their own families while in trouble, shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Percentage of Victims Getting Support from Maternal Family While Facing Domestic Abuses

In Indian society, it is not uncommon for a married daughter sometimes, to not get support from her maternal parents, when there are problems in her marriage. The first reason revealed by the victims is that there are problems in every marriage, in summations man is becoming angry, which is his nature, and beats her wife. It is quite normal. Secondly, the victims who have children, are often given reminders of their children's future, when they are informed about her decision to leave her toxic husband by her parents. Thirdly, she has constantly gotten emotional blackmails from them regarding losing social status if she comes back to her maternal home. Fourthly she made her realize that if she came back to her parents, then the neighbors and another man would have an eye on her, after the demise of her parents how can she live or who will protect her from stalkers? Such an attitude of maternal parents forces them to keep silent and bear the abuses by a victim. They also reported that they got support from local mahila samiti and OSC workers to come out from their past and fight for justice. Research found those who return to violent partners or abusers, the

reasons often involve partners promising to change or apologizing, lack of money or assets and nowhere to go or live. Moreover, a fear of a lonely life shortly and a hope that situations will change eventually can prevent a victim from leaving a violent marital relationship.

### **Post-Separation Abuse: Repercussions of Reporting the Crime and Retaliation**

After reporting the incidences or after separating from their marital family, sometimes victims become more vulnerable to further abuse. Victims of our study report that, they still face abuses post-separation and due to reporting of crime. However, some of them are less or not at all worried about these facts. 38.8 percent of victims still face abuse from their husbands or ex-husbands due to crime reporting in Table 4. However, it is also found that among those who still have abuses from their partner or in-laws, re-reported or lodged FIRs (43.3 percent). While majority of them did not approach police again (56.7 percent) due to reasons unknown. Table 5 depicts the scenario.

**Table 4:** Number of Victims Who Face Abuses Post-Separation and Post-Reporting the Crime

Facing abuses post-separation and post-reporting	Number (in %)
Yes	127 (38.8)
No	200 (61.2)

**Table 5:** Number of Victims Rereported Due to Recurrent Abuses Post-Separation and Post-Reporting Reporting the Crime

Re-Reported Due to Recurrent Abuses Post-Separation and Post-Reporting	Number (in %)
Yes	55 (43.3)
No	72 (56.7)

Three victims informed that they were threatened for their lives and they filed a first Information report (FIR) for those reasons. 30.9 percent of them revealed that they were threatened with physical harm over the phone for filing the case. However, 63.6 percent of victims got verbal abuse over the phone and in person frequently due to opening up the real face of the abusers depicted by Table 5).

Victims of our study expressed with a heavy heart that it is very tough for them to live with the fear of being attacked by their ex-partners or in-laws for seeking justice. Therefore, they informed Police stations in their locality about the frequent threats they got over the phone or in person from the perpetrators.

Post-separation abuses are very commonly found among the victims, sometimes it is higher for separated or divorced women than those who are still in marriage (22). When abuses are continued post-separation, it can be termed as 'victim re-victimization', it is more traumatic than being in a relationship as per the statements of victims (23). In the year 1999, a study conducted by the Canadian General Social Survey showed that women who had former marital abuses, experienced violence post-separation by their ex-husband (24). The figure constitutes 39 percent for such a category. Leaving an ex-partner or ex-husband led to victimization for several reasons. First and foremost, the reason for such instances is

losing control over their partners, which they exercised over a long period during marital life. Secondly, the perpetrators considered such bold steps by their wives as an insult to them. It hurts their so-called male ego, which instigates them to continue the abuse even after separation. It is found that, even when abusers are not able to contact the victim physically, as the victim has moved to a safer location or continues to stay with her parents, they continue to abuse them emotionally, verbally, psychologically, or even economically through different ways to control the victims like, by threatening of physical harm, abducting children, etc. (25). Through these techniques, an abuser is likely to continue abusing the victims for a longer period post-separation.

### Perception about the Status of Marriage

The cultural perspective of marriage in India is somewhat different from that of other countries. In Indian societies marriage doesn't mean only conjugal between two people, it is a tie between two families (26). When there is toxicity and abuse involved in a marriage, it often seems that women live in the hope everything will get better in no time. However, even after leaving a marriage some women still think that they are still in marriage as they promised to be with their husband in every life. Although it appears impractical, some women rear such type of perception (Table 6).

**Table 6:** Perception of Victims Regarding Their Marriage

Perception	Number (in %)
Still in marriage	179 (54.7)
Not in Marriage	148 (45.3)

**Table 7:** Reasons of Believing Still in Marriage by the Victims

Perceptions/Reasons	Number (in %)
Divorce has not been granted yet, socially still married	95 (53.1)
Can't forget the memories of good times even if the crime has been reported	5 (2.8)

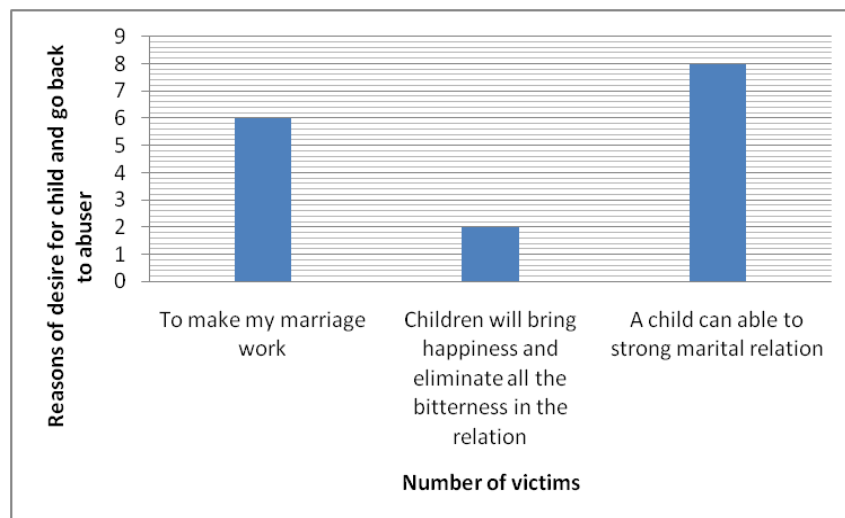
Respect the nuptial relation even today	7 (3.9)
Alumni amount still not received for the future security of children	64 (35.8)
The case is pending and I am not still getting over my love for him.	6 (3.4)
No comment	2 (1.1)

Responses revealed that a large proportion of the victims believe that they are still in marriage after leaving their marital house. When asked four major reasons are reported by the victims. Victims have varied reasons to carry the perception that they are still in marriage. In our study, even after reporting the cases, some of the victims have the belief that they are still in marriage socially and one obvious reason is not granting divorce to date. However, 38.4 percent of victims revealed that once the alumni amount is delivered to them especially to look after their kids, they will consider their marriage is over, as shown in table 7. A few victims are still emotionally so weak that they can't erase the memories of their relationship before it becomes abusive (5.8 percent). They further shared that they can't specify why this happens, but their inner voice says so. Not having any assets or wealth may increase the financial

burden in the absence of a job or low-paying occupation. Such economic situation of the victims shortly may compel them to live a miserable life or go back to their husbands. It is even possible that, after going back to the abuser, the victims further face intense abuse. Hence, asset ownership by a woman in any form is much needed to protect her financially and give a source of strength to fight against marital abuses.

### Need for Children and Starting a Family Again with the Abuser

In our society, it is a common belief regarding married people that having a baby/kids can resolve all disputes. Some of the victims, surprisingly in the hope that the reported crime or case filing is to make the abuser realize their mistakes. It may be because of the emotional dependency of the victim on their spouses.



**Figure 2:** Reasons for Desire of Children and Going Back to Husband after Filing the Case by Number of Victims

A total of sixteen victims wanted to reverse the situation by having a child (if not any) or having another child. Although the amount is negligible in our study, the statements of the victims again proved their emotional dependency on abusive partners as depicted in Figure 2. The extent of

emotional trap is reflected by their reasons of case filing. When the victims are requested to reveal of possess such desire even after filing the case shown in Table 8, they reveal mostly emotional reasons.

**Table 8:** Reasons for Registering the Case and Now Going Back after Hearings

Reasons	Number (in %)
The victim wanted to make her husband the mistake	7(43.8)
Want to make a small punishment for him	2(12.5)

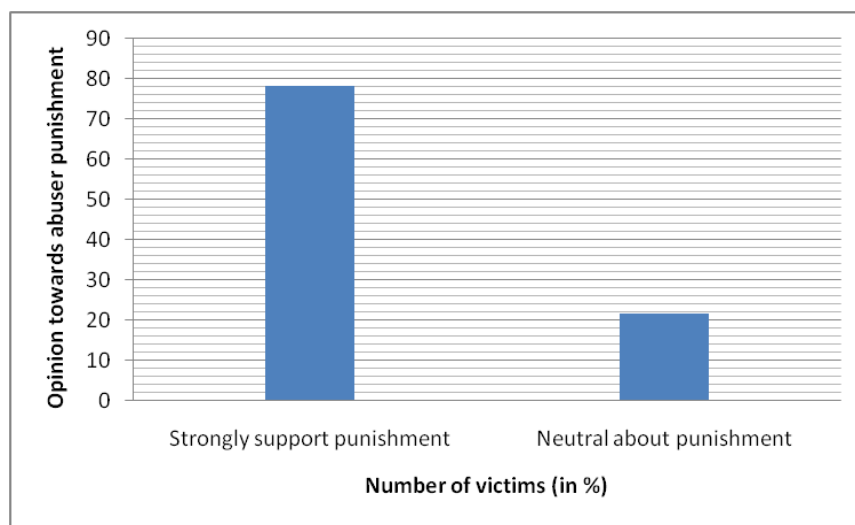
Need public apology from the abuser	3(18.8)
To punish what the abuser did, but don't want severe punishment	4 (25)

Reasons for filling the case despite being abused mostly point towards deeper emotional dependency, which triggers having children so that they can have a happy family. These victims may alter their statements in court as their attitudes towards such incidents are still not clear. They are trapped in the cycle of emotions, which is in line with the emotional dependency theory (27). Mostly victims revealed that they wanted to make the abusers to realize his mistake (43.8 percent); followed by not so severe punishment (25 percent) and need of public apology (18.8 percent).

Interestingly despite of being abused, 12.5 percent victims only need small punishments for the abusers. When asked they said the punishments may be like fines or penalties, prison but for a very less period of time etc.

### Opinion about Abuser Punishment

Regarding the punishment of abusers, two types of attitudes are possessed by the victims. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the victims based on the attitudes perceived toward abusers' punishment.



**Figure 3:** Percentage of Victims by their Opinion towards Abuser Punishment

**Table 9:** Percentage of Victims by Type of Punishment they needed for the Abusers

Type of punishments	Number (In %)
Social exclusion	99(30.3)
Only Legal Punishment	115(35.2)
Physical punishment	19 (5.8)
Rigorous punishment	2 (0.6)
Monetary punishment like heavy fines or penalties	3 (0.9)
Speedy justice for domestic violence cases	56 (17.1)
Strong law as compared to the present situation	48 (14.7)
Life imprisonment	1(0.3)
The abuse should feel the same as the victim did	32 (9.8)

Victims revealed some categories of punishment for their perpetrators. The narrations on how they want the perpetrators to be punished have been converted to some common themes. Table 9 shows the frequency related to each type of punishment. Narrations of the victims revealed that they wanted several types of punishments for their perpetrators. The majority of the victims wanted only legal punishment for the abuser (35.2

percent) followed by social exclusion (30.0 percent). By social exclusion the victims mean excluding the abusers and their families from participating in social functions, the abuser's families must be rejected by society if the abusers arrange some marriage or other religious activity, etc.

However, 17.1 percent of the victims have the opinion that the punishment whatever be will be



fruitful if there is speedy justice for them. They also informed the authors that, as time passes people also forget about the incidences and live a normal life, but the victims cannot able to move in their lives. Therefore, justice must be served in an expedited manner. Similarly, 14.7 percent of victims need strong legislation as compared to the present ones. They said that present laws only offered punishment of 4 to 5 years, but less than ten. The perpetrators who have ruined someone's life should also be punished for their whole life. Another 9.8 percent of victims are so traumatized and requested to punish their abusers like the sufferings they have gone through. Moreover, 5.8 percent of our study population needs physical punishments like beating their abusers. Apart from 0.9 percent wanting monetary penalty, 0.6 percent is in favor of rigorous punishment and 0.3 percent of the victims argue about life imprisonment.

## Conclusion

The above discussion reveals a mixed picture of victims' post-separation attitudes towards domestic abuse. The study reveals the fact that the victim is the same person who has filed the case against the abuser and also possesses the mindset of starting again a life with him. Several factors were found responsible for expressing the desire to go back to the abuser ranging from financial dependence to emotional dependence. There are some victims also who stand strong in their decision to get justice and to punish the abusers. These victims need to be empowered economically as well as psychologically to cope up with the traumatic situations. Therefore, government may introduce special schemes for domestic violence survivors with direct monetary benefits for starting some economic activities, counseling sessions with the help of NGOs, government hospitals etc. Moreover, more shelter houses with required facilities for such victims along with their child (if any) needed to be provided for their safety or until they earn enough to live.

In a nutshell, it can be concluded that the attitude of domestic violence victims towards the abuses and abusers is influenced by socio-cultural, economic, psychological as well as emotional factors. Research on domestic violence survivors needs more studies to explore such factors, so that these victims can have adequate support services

to escape from toxic emotional or psychological and other factors, and can lead a healthy life.

## Abbreviations

None.

## Acknowledgment

None.

## Author Contributions

Simismita Borah: wrote the original draft; Daisy Das: reviewed, corrected, and edited.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

## Funding

No funding received.

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