There has been a growing recognition of involving men to address the issue of domestic violence. While feminist interventions focus on responding to survivors of violence primarily working towards empowering women for decision-making and enhancing their safety, the interventions involving men are aimed at confronting them for their abusive behaviour and are based on the assumption that men need to take accountability for their actions, have agency and hence, the choice to change their behaviour.

Joint meetings between women and their husbands to negotiate for non-violence, considering the needs of women is currently regarded as an important strategy to engage with men. Despite concerns about the safety of women and the risks of reinforcing gender stereotyping, patriarchal norms and victim-blaming, a joint meeting with the husband is considered an important intervention by feminist organisations. These organisations are guided by feminist principles of belief in the survivor, keeping her interests at the centre, empowering her to take the decision and at the same time questioning the abusive behaviour of the perpetrator.

There is limited information available on the process and the outcomes of the joint meeting. There is a need to fill the gap in information about feminist principles to be followed for women-centred joint meetings and the common outcomes and effectiveness of such joint meetings in fulfilling the needs of survivors.

Through this fact sheet, we would like to present the context in which joint meetings are conducted, how are they conducted and what are the common outcomes. For this purpose, a total of 239 service records of women who sought domestic violence services from a Family Counselling Center in 2018–19 were analysed by entering information in Microsoft Excel. Follow-up documentation of these cases was also analysed.

---

The Family Counselling Centre (FCC) provides crisis counselling services, referral and rehabilitative services to survivors of domestic violence and was established by Stree Mukti Sanghatana (SMS) in 1992. The FCC is located in one of the eastern suburbs of Mumbai.

SMS operates nine counselling centres in Maharashtra and has been working towards women’s empowerment for over four decades. It was formed with the clear objectives of spreading awareness about gender equality, the rights of women, and the prevention of violence. The Sanghatana focuses on creating a gender-just world through awareness, education, healthcare, family counselling, environmental programs, and sustainable livelihood.

This fact sheet provides a brief about the socio-demographic profile of survivors seeking services from the FCC, history of violence, expectations of survivors, the process of joint meeting and its outcomes.

A. Demographic and socio-economic profile of survivors

More than half of the survivors (67.2%) were in the age group 18 to 32. Around 18% of survivors were of age 38 and above. About 56% of the women were married when they came to FCC for seeking services. Nearly 31% of the women were staying separately from their husbands. And 9% of women were deserted by their husbands.

![Figure 1. Age of survivors](image1)

![Figure 2. Marital status of survivors](image2)

The education and employment data indicate the socio-economic vulnerabilities of the population where the FCC is located. More than half of the women were educated till the secondary school level, while only 13% of women had attained a graduate or above level of education. Only 41% of women were involved in any kind of paid work at the time of seeking services.

B. History of violence

*Husband was perpetrator in majority of cases*

*70% of women faced physical violence*

*31% of women faced sexual violence in marital relationship*
**Relationship with the perpetrator:** The majority of women (60.3%) reported facing violence from their husbands. There were about 32% of women who faced violence from both their husbands and marital family. Children including sons and daughters-in-law were also perpetrators in about 3% of cases.

![Figure 3. Relationship with perpetrator](image)

**Forms of violence:** All women reported facing emotional violence from the perpetrators in the form of verbal abuse, criticism, threats and so on. Physical violence was reported by almost 70% of the women while financial and sexual violence in a marital relationship was reported by 69% and 31% of women respectively.

**Reported causes of violence:** Survivors attributed the violence they faced to various causes. About 69% of women said that there is a “conflict due to differences in interests and opinions” between husband and wife due to which there are fights at home. Women reported different aspects of personality differences like opinions about wives working outside the home (doing a job), aggressive behaviour of husbands, differences in views about the spending of money and so on. Husbands not providing money to women or taking the financial responsibility of the household and economic crisis in the household were other aspects. Nearly 45% of women reported that their husbands suspected and abused them.

![Figure 4. Perceived causes of violence by survivors](image)
Years of abuse: About one-third of women came to seek services from FCC within two years of abuse while 47% came after experiencing violence for more than five years. For about 78% of the survivors, FCC was the first form of formal support sought by survivors to address their issues of violence.

Figure 5. Years of violence faced by survivors

The fact that young women in early years of abuse are approaching FCC indicates that it is an accessible source of formal support for survivors of violence.

C. Expectations of women

Survivors expected various support services from FCC. About 93% of women wanted a joint meeting with their husbands to negotiate for non-violence. Almost in three fourth cases, the woman wanted her husband to change his behaviour by not suspecting her, respecting her and her natal family, allowing her to meet her parents, and taking household responsibility. Contrary to the belief that women misuse the laws against the husband, only 16% of women wanted to take advice for legal action against the husband and marital family.

Figure 6. Expectations of survivors from FCC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advice to take legal action</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to stay separately with husband</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband should Stop use of alcohol</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband should provide money</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband should change behaviour</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want a joint meeting with husband</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D. Joint meeting

*Process of joint meeting:* Once the survivor comes to the FCC, the counsellor takes her history, validates her feelings, provides her emotional support and helps her to articulate her expectations. The counsellor documents the issues and needs that a woman wants to address through the joint meeting. After this, the counsellor takes consent from the survivor for sending a letter to the husband for an individual meeting on a date specified in the letter. The content of the letter mentions that the survivor had come to the FCC with a problem and would appreciate if the husband could come to FCC for a meeting. The counsellor explains at length to the survivor that the purpose of having an individual meeting with the husband is not to verify the information that she has provided but to confront him and to know what is in his mind. In this meeting with the husband, the counsellor intends to convey that whatever the domestic situation may be, violence is not justifiable and that violence affects the health of the survivor and children. Following the individual meeting with the husband, the counsellor calls the survivor to FCC for a meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to brief the survivor about the individual meeting with her husband and also to prepare the survivor for the joint meeting. A survivor-centred approach is used by the counsellor for preparing the survivor to put forth her needs in the joint meeting.

In 223 cases where a joint meeting was expected by women, the husband was contacted by a counsellor through phone or letter for an individual meeting. However, in less than half of the cases (107), the partner came for an individual meeting. The analysis showed that in cases where the survivor was young and abused by the husband and marital family, the husband is more likely to come for the joint meeting.

The documentation of counsellors’ meetings with survivors indicated how individual meetings with the husband helped the counsellor in preparing the survivors for the subsequent joint meeting.

*My husband admitted to madam (counsellor) about his affair and made it very clear to her that he doesn’t want to stay with me. I got clarity and made up my mind to end the marriage and asked for custody of my daughter and maintenance.* *(27-year-old survivor)*

*Counsellor was able to get information from him about his salary. In joint meeting when husband tried to say that he is unable to support family because of low salary, I was able to confront him.* *(32-year-old survivor)*
Before joint meeting counsellor guided me on how to confront my husband about lack of sexual intimacy in our marriage. I was able to question my husband about it in the joint meeting and he agreed on seeing a doctor (22-year-old survivor)

After meeting the husband, a joint meeting was conducted in 90 out of 107 cases. In follow-up, women shared their experience of the joint meeting. Survivors stated how joint meetings provided them with a platform to express their needs for the first time and was an empowering space for them.

A 30-year-old survivor shared “Although there is little change in behavior of husband after joint meeting, I have gained confidence to raise my voice against violence”

As we used to stay in a joint family, I never got a chance to speak to my husband on a one-to-one basis. I was able to speak to him in the joint meeting (23-year-old survivor)

The documentation of joint meetings in service records indicated how counsellors addressed the justification of violence by the husband. For example, there was a case where the husband admitted that he got violent once when the survivor couldn’t reach school on time for picking up the children. Counsellor firmly put forth the example of the husband’s workplace by saying that “if he will do a mistake at his workplace, will it be ok for his seniors to beat him?”

Counsellors made efforts to encourage husbands to take household responsibility by addressing gender role expectations.

In cases of alcohol addiction, counsellors helped husbands to realise its impact on the health and well-being of their wives and children. Referrals to de-addiction centres were also made by the counsellors.

Out of 90 cases, reconciliation on women’s terms happened in 62% of cases (56). In the rest of the cases (34), the husband negated the women’s experience of violence. In such cases, counsellors assisted women to take legal action against their husbands.
My husband wasn’t ready to listen to me. He kept saying that he doesn’t want to stay with me (34-year-old survivor)

Survivors shared that the joint meeting also helped in clarifying many things for them. This helped them to take a stand and decide on their future.

During joint meeting my husband didn’t admit anything. It was clear that he doesn’t have any sensitivity towards (wife) me and doesn’t want to take any responsibility. I became more confident of coming out of this problem (28-year-old survivor)

In the case of reconciliation, the husband agreed on various terms. As a procedure, a written agreement signed by the husband is done in cases where reconciliation results from a joint meeting. Husbands agreed on providing monthly expenditure, seeking treatment for deaddiction, changing behaviour, allowing the woman to meet her parents and divorce through mutual consent. Out of 107, there were only five cases where women reported that violence had stopped completely.

Counsellors do regular follow-ups with women in cases of reconciliation. In the follow-up, although the women reported a reduction in physical violence, little changes were reported in providing maintenance, taking household responsibility and reduction in addiction. In such cases, counsellors inform survivors about the available support services and enable them to make a decision. The intervention is also focused on ensuring the safety of women.

Conclusion and Implications for service provision

Very often, reconciliation with the husband is the most common expectation of the survivors of domestic violence. This is because of the cultural context and economic dependency of a woman on her husband. Thus, a joint meeting with the abuser(s) is the most common expectation of women seeking services from a family counselling centre. The findings show that joint meeting facilitated with a feminist lens enabled women to raise concerns, put forth concerns in a coherent manner and build confidence to question violence when it occurred.
It is important that when such interventions are carried out efforts should be made to uphold the best interests of the survivor. Feminist strategies should be deployed to engage with men to challenge patriarchal norms, gender roles and survivor blaming.

Counsellors should enable survivors to recognise the limitations of joint meetings and should provide them information about alternative options if there is non-adherence to the terms agreed by the husband. A safety plan should also be prepared along with the survivor in case there is an escalation of violence after a joint meeting. A woman-centred joint meeting can contribute to the empowerment of women by providing them space to negotiate for non-violence.