

STUDY OF IMS AND SSH STAFF REGARDING THEIR ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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INTRODUCTION: Domestic violence (DV) refers to any form of abuse, whether physical or mental suffered by a person from a relative or member of their domestic circle. Any incident of threatening behavior, violence or abuse which could be psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender is included in the term DV. DV is a cause of admission to hospital however hospital staff may not be comfortable in dealing with this problem. The objective of this study was to obtain social and clinical information from the staff members of the Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS) & Sir Sunderlal Hospital (SSH) regarding their attitude and experiences of DV.

MATERIALS & METHODS: The study was conducted in the Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology at SSH & IMS, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi over a period of 2 years. It was a cross sectional, observational study. A validated and piloted questionnaire concerning aspects of DV was made on the program "Google Forms" was distributed via email and WhatsApp sent to all members of staff/students. To maintain the anonymous and confidential status analysis of the responses via Microsoft Excel and SPSS (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA) was performed & only group statistics were presented.

RESULTS: The questionnaire was completed by a total of 380 individuals associated with SS hospital and IMS BHU out of which 223 were qualified health care professional(HCP) including doctors and nurses and 157 were students including medical students and nursing students. Of the whole group 42% of respondents had encountered victims of DV (52% of them were qualified while 28% were students). 47% of respondents (46% qualified and 49% students) were in favor of seeking help from friends and family rather than going to police & government authorities (Fig.1). The majority of the qualified professionals(43%) thought that the government approach towards DV is inadequate in contrast about 59% of the students thought that the approach of the government towards DV is adequate with some betterment (Fig.2). Only 42% qualified professionals found that coronavirus period has made the situation of DV worse in contrast majority students (61%) found that the situation of DV has become worse (Fig.3). In response to the hospital and the role of the staff for the cases of DV only 30% were in favor of providing dedicated services.

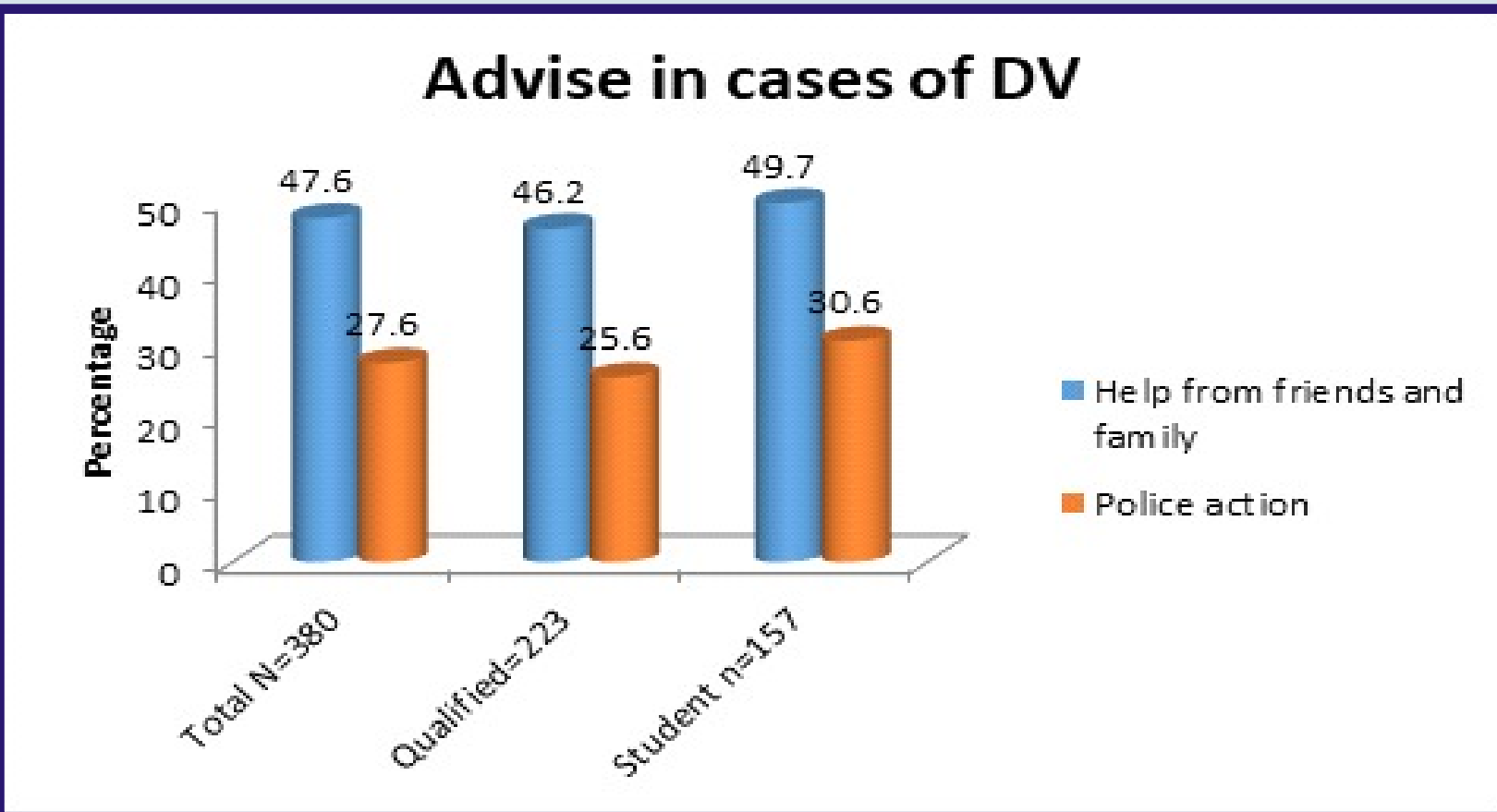


Fig.1

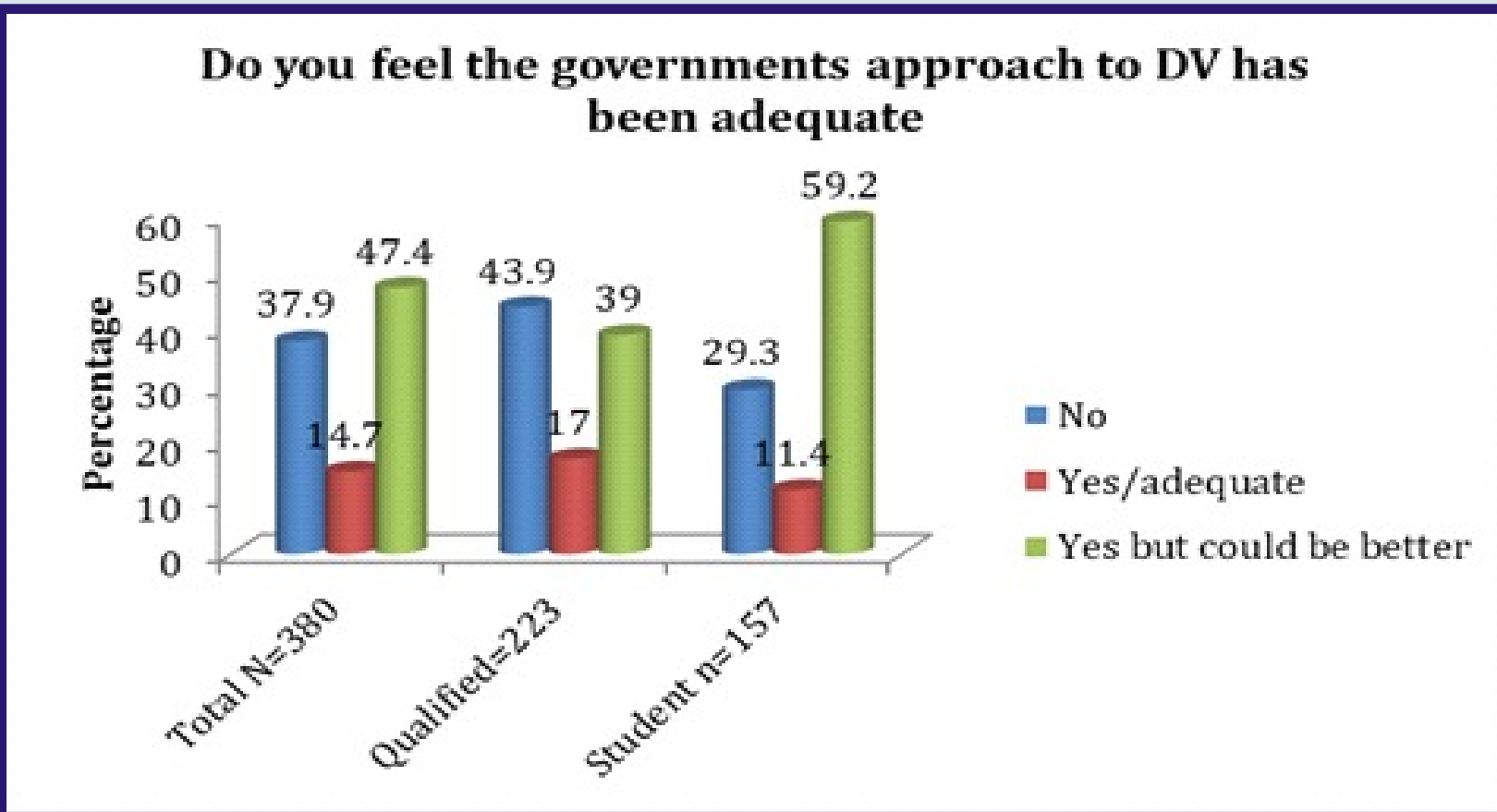


Fig.2

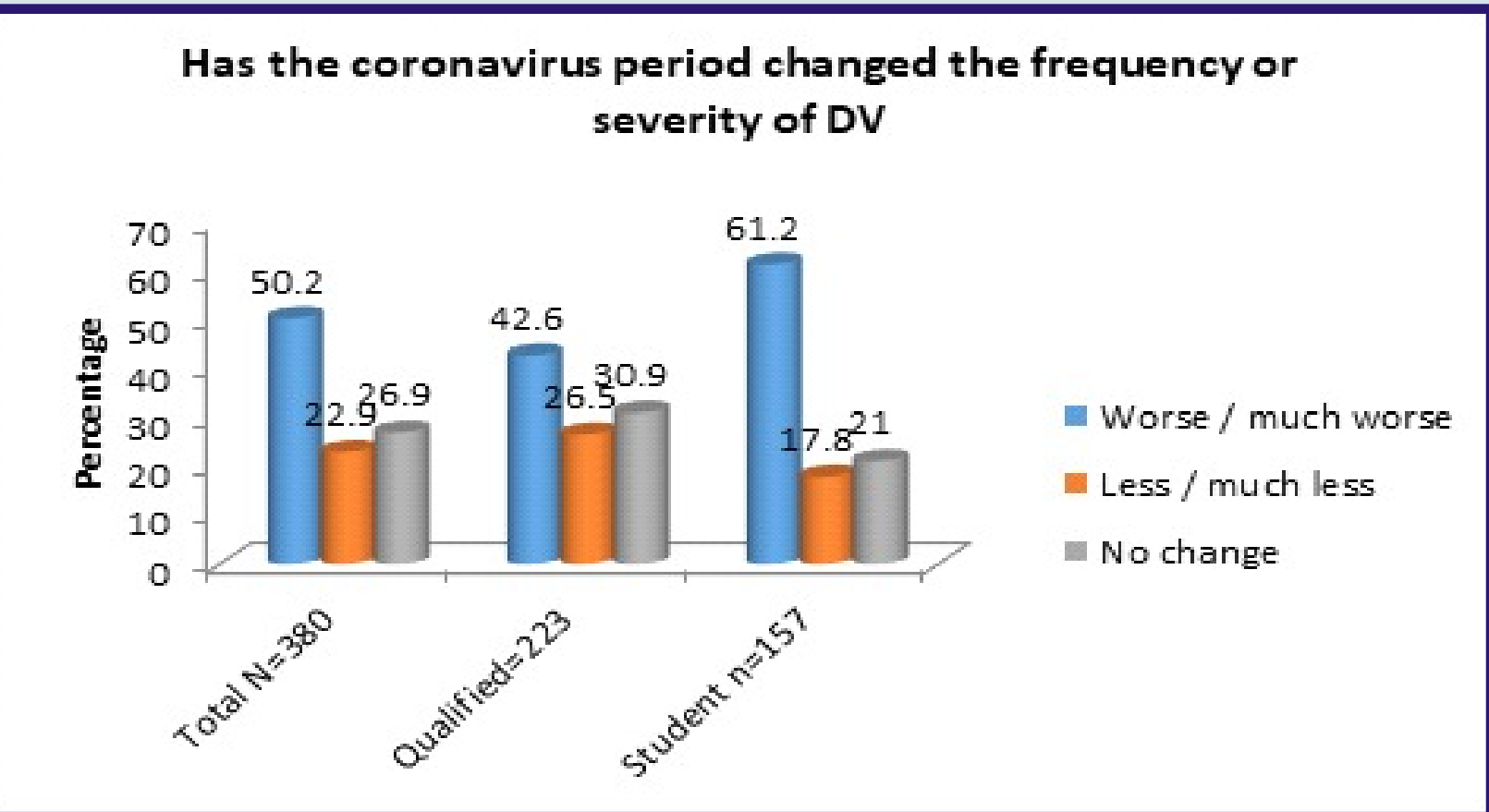


Fig.3

DISCUSSION. The students were more comfortable in asking about DV to female patients which could be attributed to increased awareness about DV in younger generations through their educational curriculum & they being more open to talking about social issues & questioning the established patriarchal societal norms. Many a times despite suspecting a woman to be victim of DV, the HCP fail to enquire about it properly or arrange referrals to the victim. Thus adequate training is required for better management of DV victims when they come across any health care professional. In our study around 50% of the students and HCP were unaware of their responsibility of asking about DV to the patient. However, compared to students professional HCP were more aware about their responsibility about DV. This could be attributed to their greater years of experience and more training that they have received compared to students. In this study both students & professionals (47.6%) were more open to take help from friends and family than from police to support/ rescue victims of DV. The reason behind this is that many of the HCP feel that reporting can damage the relationship between the female and HCP or could put women at greater risk of being hurt, if the abusive partner gets to know about it & many felt that women would change their stand in front of authorities bringing embarrassment to HCP.

CONCLUSION: More than 50% respondents in our study observed that COVID-19 has caused an increase in DV cases, especially during the first week of the COVID-19 lockdown in each country. The students seemed to be more aware of this increased DV than HCP which could again be attributed to students being more aware of the current global situation through social media and internet access. In our study students were more in favor of providing dedicated service and help support and referrals to DV victims (35 and 53% respectively) compared to qualified HCP (29% and 46% respectively). In this study, trained medical workers had a better opportunity of coming into touch with victims of DV and providing support to them as they have more knowledge & access to the services. But they were less sure that it was part of their job to enquire with patients about their personal experiences with the issue. It was found that the HCP had more exposure to the victims of DV and were more aware that enquiring about this is a part of their job, nonetheless they also worried about their relationship with the patient.

LIMITATIONS: As the samples included only the B.H.U. staff and students it might not have reflected the ground reality of the situation. Also the respondents were not the first hand victims of DV that may cause difference in the interpretation of the questionnaire but this is the best we could do and our study reflects DV in part of community of our area.