

Female Domestic Violence Survivors' Perceptions of Protection Orders in the Maldives



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INTRODUCTION

Family Legal Clinic (FLC) is a registered association in the Maldives, providing pro bono legal services in areas falling under the Family Act, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, and the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Act. Legal services include consultations, filling court forms, and representing clients at court. FLC also runs advocacy programs under the aforementioned laws, as well as gender equality and child rights.

In 2023, FLC and UNDP Maldives signed an agreement to carry out a grant aid project to provide pro bono legal aid services for the public and vulnerable groups including women and persons with disabilities in cases related to domestic violence, sexual violence, gender-based violence and sexual harassment. Part of providing legal aid includes strengthening FLC's own service provision and working with institutions within the national social service framework to fortify their services as well.

In 2020, the Maldivian court system moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Online hearings have since continued,

allowing people to access justice more broadly than before, as lawyers no longer have to be based in the island that the court is based in.

This virtual expansion of the court system has allowed FLC's legal staff to represent clients from outside the Greater Male' Area. Given the organisation's limited capacity however, this has not allowed for a significant impact for those that require legal aid. However, the success of FLC's court representation outside of Male' indicates increasing room to dismantle the barrier of limited legal aid in the outer islands. The state does not provide legal aid for civil cases except for domestic violence cases, and there is a great need for more pro bono legal aid service providers to enter the sphere.

This study was conducted with the aim to understand gaps in service provision from a service seeker's perspective. FLC aims to put forth its recommendations to the relevant institutions to assist with system strengthening across the nation.

OVERVIEW

In 2011, the first nationwide study on women's health and life experiences in the Maldives revealed that 1 in 3 Maldivian women aged between 15-49 had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence at some point in their lifetimes^[1]. Though over a decade has passed since then, domestic violence remains a prevalent issue in the country, though the issue now contends with the existence of institutions, campaigns, and determined individuals working to combat the situation.

The 1 in 3 statistic was instrumental in lobbying efforts that led to the passing of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (Law No: 3/2012) in 2012. The purview of the Act extends beyond intimate partner violence, offering protection to survivors who experience violence and abuse from other members of the family and/or the household unit. Key stakeholders within the social protection system include the Family Protection Authority (FPA), the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services (MoGFSS)^[2] and the Maldives Police Service (MPS). These three institutions form the principal trifecta within the system and are

the main points of contact for survivors and other stakeholders to handle cases of domestic violence. Undergirding these institutions are the health sector, civil society, community groups, and individual advocates who have also been instrumental in working with the state to establish the wider protection framework across the country.

Among the legal remedies offered to survivors, the protection order is the main legal instrument used to combat domestic violence in the country, and it is granted by the Family Court or a Magistrate Court. However, its efficacy is impacted by several issues. There are heavy evidentiary requirements to establish a breach of a protection order, a burden that often falls on the survivor to prove in order to secure their safety. Administrative delays, a lack of stakeholder coordination, personal biases of law enforcement and judicial officials, influence of perpetrators on the court system, and small community sizes are amongst the obstacles that hinder survivors from accessing their legally entitled justice and protection.

^[1] Emma Fulu, *Ministry of Gender and Family, The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences: Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses to violence.* (Male', 2011), vi.

^[2] This was the name of the Ministry at the time of writing this report in 2023. At time of publication, it is now the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

AIMS & SCOPE OF STUDY

The study aims to explore how female domestic violence survivors in the Maldives perceive the efficacy of the domestic violence protection order (PO). To identify and unpack the existing challenges of enforcement and the impact on the survivor, the project will explore the following areas:

1. How well the order was enforced;
2. What issues the survivor faced due to the lack of enforcement;
3. The systematic remedies the survivor sought regarding the issue; and
4. The losses borne by the survivor with regards to time, health, money, and any other factors.

The desk review was conducted from June – September 2023, and the survey was designed in October 2023.

As the court system expanded online in 2020, it was decided that the study would focus on those who had obtained a protection order in 2020 or afterwards. FLC also collaborated with Family Protection

Authority and the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services^[3] to recruit participants, but were unable to receive a participant list that matched the criteria of clients who have had their protection orders for a minimum of three months.

Convenience sampling was used to select participants for the study, based on the criteria below:

- Obtaining a domestic violence protection order during or after 2020
- Having had the protection order for a minimum of three months
- Being a client that FLC had represented in court between 2020-2023^[4]

15 participants from the FLC client roster agreed to participate in the survey, which was conducted during November 2023.

^[3] See note 2 on previous page

^[4] Some domestic violence cases FLC receives do not go beyond the consultation stage, or stop after the forms are filled for various reasons; thus, only those that had requested court representation to obtain the order were selected.

LIMITATIONS

IMPACT OF TRUST ON SAMPLING

At the outset, the study aimed to sample participants both internally from FLC's client base, and externally. Recruitment posts were shared on Instagram, X, and Facebook. FLC was also assisted by MOMS NGO, who forwarded the call for participants within their closed community. Unfortunately, neither of these strategies yielded participants. It is possible that the sensitive nature of the study made it difficult to recruit participants with whom trust had not been established.

All the participants that agreed to do the survey were those that already had a working relationship with FLC's legal team. This pre-established trust and ongoing relationship likely enabled them to be more willing to speak about their experiences.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

With only 15 participants, this is a very small investigation that is not nationally representative. Nonetheless, it highlights certain patterns and issues that require further investigation. Additionally, as these participants were all FLC's clients, their perceptions of the ease of obtaining the order may not reflect the challenges undergone by those without legal assistance.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Only women were consulted in this study, as men who experience domestic violence and seek legal aid are likely to have significantly different experiences of the framework as a whole and require a separate study.

The participants were also concentrated in the Greater Male' Area, with only a few being located in the outer islands. Thus, the study results are more focused on the efficacy of enforcing protection orders in the Greater Male' Area as opposed to the outer islands. There is a need for regional studies to better understand the system of enforcement in different parts of the country.

OTHER STATISTICS

Initially, statistics for domestic violence protection order breaches between 2020-2023 were requested from the Family Court and the Maldives Police Service, in order to illustrate the general prevalence of the issue. However, this information was not received and was not included in the study. Further studies should include these statistics in order to ascertain prevalence and form better mitigation strategies.

DEMOGRAPHICS

15 participants were surveyed for this report. The tables below show their age ranges, locations (when they obtained their

protection order and at the time of the study), and the year the protection order was obtained.

Age range	18-24	25-30	31-40	41-50	51-59	60-65	66
No. of participants	0	2	4	2	3	2	2

Atoll where participant was based	H.Dh	Male'	Hulhumale'	Dh.	Addu City
When PO was granted	1	8	2	1	2
At time of study	1	7	4	1	2

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. of clients*	0	4	7	6

* 1 participant obtained her initial order in 2021 and renewed it in 2022 and 2023.

DEPENDENTS

Participants were asked how many dependents they had during the time the protection order was obtained, and afterwards. The majority reported having

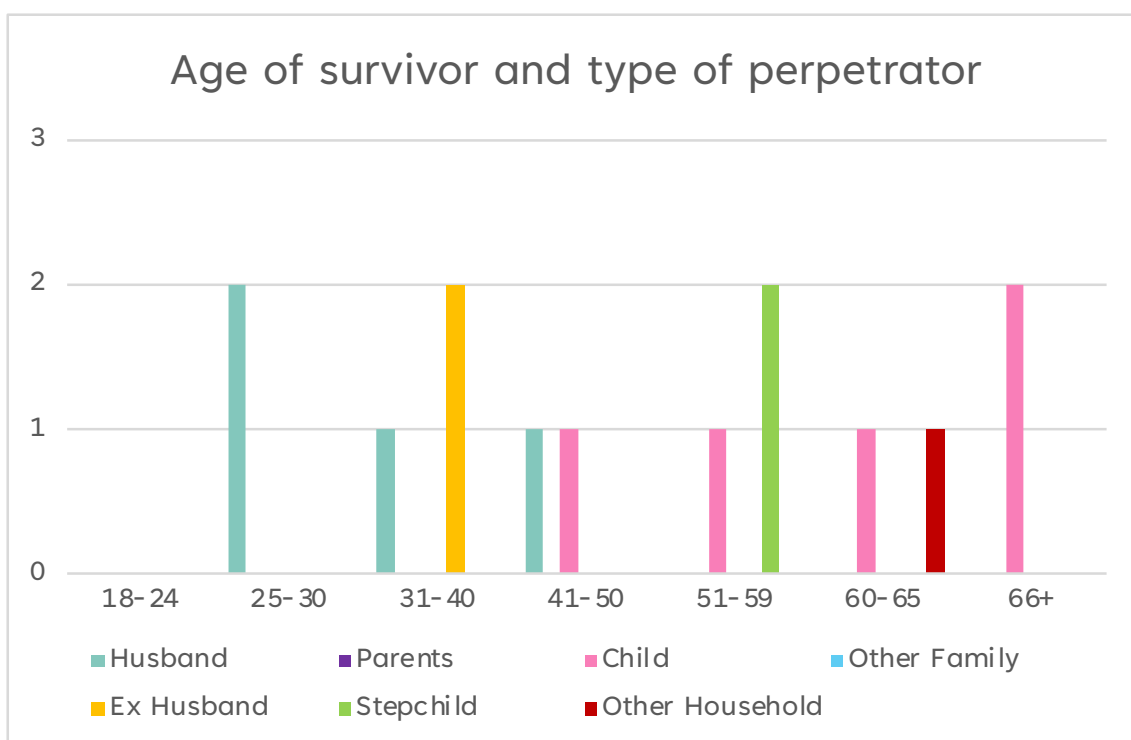
either no dependents, or 2 each. While not explicitly recorded, the majority of the participants indicated that their dependents were their own children.

No. of dependents	Zero	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
When PO was obtained	5	2	5	2	1	0	1
At time of study	5	2	5	1	1	0	1

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN AGE OF PARTICIPANT AND TYPE OF PERPETRATOR

Participants below the age of 50 appeared to need protection orders against husbands or ex-husbands, and those above the age of 50 had to take orders against their children

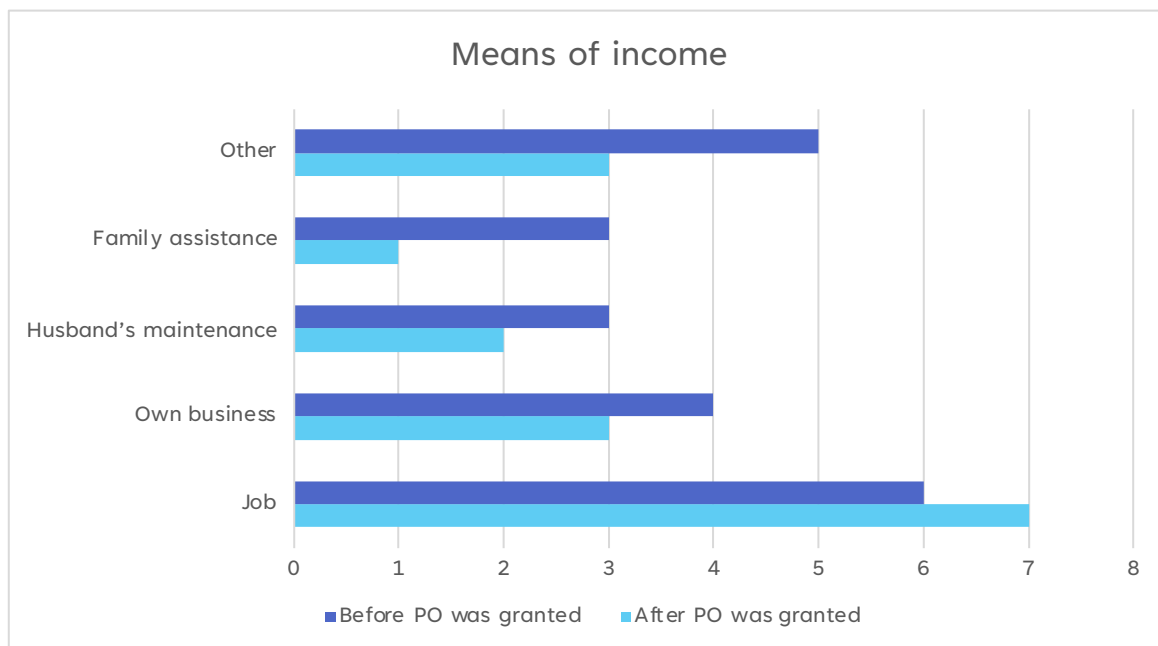
or step-children. This raises concerns about the prevalence of elder abuse in the Maldives, indicating a need to investigate the causes and frequency of the issue.



MEANS OF INCOME

Participants were asked what means of income they had before and after obtaining the protection order. The following categories were recorded.

- Job (formal employment)
- Own business
- Husband's maintenance payments
- Family assistance
- Other



6 out of 15 participants had a formal job before the order was granted, with the number increasing to 7 after the order. The additional participant indicated that the stability in her life following the protection order enabled her to maintain a job and earn her own income instead of relying on maintenance payments and other means.

Though only 1 participant out of 15 reported this reason for her transition to formal employment, it would be valuable to explore whether or not this is common amongst the larger population of women experiencing domestic violence.

4 out of 15 participants derived their living from multiple means prior to obtaining the order, though only one participant later indicated that she still relied on multiple means after the order was granted. Out of

the 3 participants that did not need to rely on multiple means after the order was granted, two had transitioned to formal employment (from an own business and husband's maintenance, and family assistance respectively), with one other stating that formal employment was now her sole means of earning an income.

Though these are low figures, it opens the opportunity to investigate the degree to which proper enforcement of a protection order can allow women to focus on formal employment and career progression.

OBTAINING THE PROTECTION ORDER

Participants were asked how they found out that they could obtain a protection order against the perpetrator of domestic violence in their lives.

8 participants indicated that they learned this from the Ministry (at the time, the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services) (MoGFSS). 5 noted that they learned so from the Maldives Police Service (MPS), 2 from family or friends, 1 from a domestic violence awareness campaign. 1 participant noted that she learned about the order from Family Legal Clinic.

3 participants also indicated that they learned this information from both MoGFSS and MPS, suggesting that these two institutions are the first places approached by survivors for assistance

5 participants took out a PO against their child, and 5 took it out against another household member^[5]. 4 took it out against their then-husbands, and 1 against another family member.

Where participants learned about the PO	No. of participants
Ministry of Gender	8
Police	5
Family or friends	2
DV Awareness campaign /programme	1
Other	1 (learned from FLC)

EASE OF OBTAINING THE PROTECTION ORDER

12 out of 15 participants noted that they did not have trouble getting the order, with the majority of the answers focusing on the

ease brought on by the presence of a lawyer and having the procedures explained to them.

^[5] 2 of these were against step-children, 3 against ex-husbands.

1 of the 3 participants that found it difficult noted that the process was extremely troublesome to navigate alone until she was able to utilise FLC's services. The 3 that found it difficult spoke of the following (translated from Dhivehi):

"When I submitted the case at first it was very difficult, but after connecting with FLC it was very easy."

"...it was very difficult actually. Everything only happened with your help. At the time, the family court judge would include my husband in all the hearings. At the first hearing, my husband said he wanted a lawyer and he didn't want to continue without one, so the hearing was cancelled. This should not have happened. [The case] dragged on for a long time. The [emergency order] was released after 4-5 months. My husband submitted an appeal to the High Court and the High Court said this case was not done how an emergency order should be done, so it was remitted to family court again."

"It's been a very long time since I've been trying to get the order. Whenever I call [Ministry of] Gender they say to get an order but that's not an easy thing to do. [...] Dealing with the legal part and filling the forms while the incident is going on makes it difficult to focus. But after FLC took the case (to represent at court) it was very easy."

11 participants noted that they received an explanation on steps to take in case of a breach of the order once it was granted, though 4 reported that they did not receive this information. 1 that did not receive it stated the following (translated from Dhivehi):

"It wasn't so clear. In the first week when he started doing things, [I] called [Ministry of] Gender, but Gender said that a caseworker would call, but they didn't call. After a week, [I] reported to police. The police said that some protection orders have instructions for the police to do (in case of breach) but this PO did not have it so there wasn't anything they could do. However, they are investigating."

The responses above indicate the various hoops women have to jump through as laypeople navigating the court and law enforcement systems. There is limited data that explores these difficulties in detail, but research indicates that issues such as the requirement of personal documentation (that could be in the perpetrator's possession), the lack of legal assistance for civil crimes, the lack of information on procedures, etc. are all obstacles that prevent women from being able to seek assistance from the system at large.

FLC's general legal aid findings have also gleaned that women who take their domestic violence cases forward without legal aid find it arduous to navigate the

system by themselves. The primary challenges include a lack of understanding their rights under the law, a lack of

understanding of the correct procedures during hearings, and correctly filling out administrative paperwork.

SIMULTANEOUS SUBMISSION OF OTHER CASES

A submission of a protection order can sometimes result in the necessity of submitting other cases, such as divorce from the perpetrator, custody, and child maintenance. Thus, participants were asked whether or not they had submitted additional cases alongside their protection order.

4 clients had submitted a protection order against their husbands; 3 of them also submitted a divorce form simultaneously.

Amongst the participant base as a whole, 2 submitted custody cases concurrently, and 1 submitted a case of visitation.

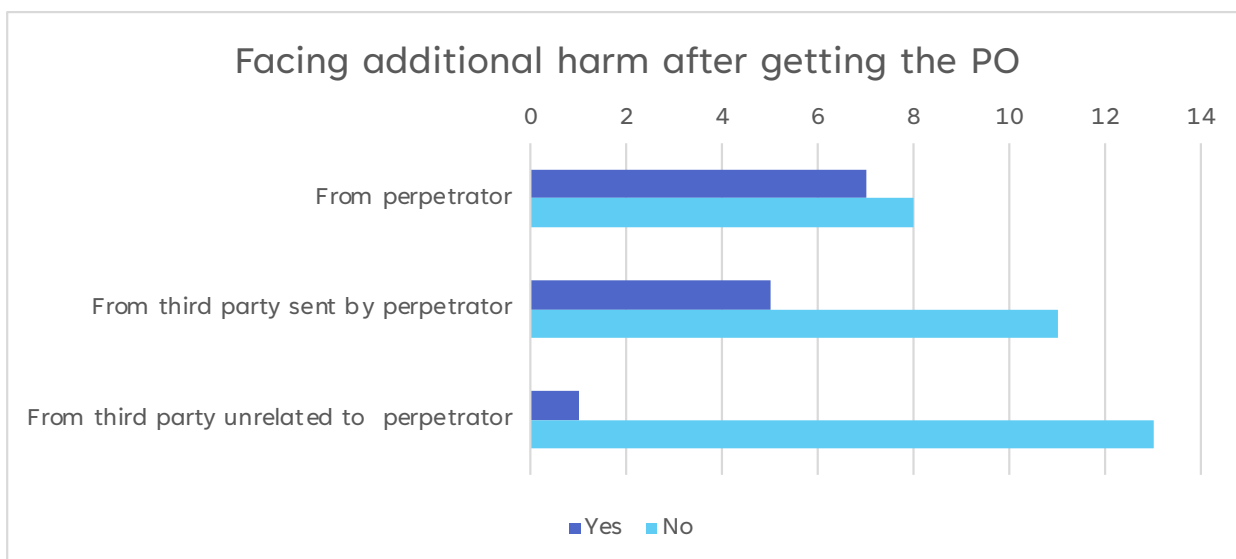
2 participants also submitted cases after obtaining the order: 1 filed for custody while the other submitted a case to change the terms of visitation as her ex-husband was saying inappropriate things around their child.

AFTER THE PROTECTION ORDER

FACING ADDITIONAL HARM

Participants were asked whether they faced additional disruptions to and/or harm in their lives as a result of obtaining the protection order. They were asked if they had to shift their place of residence after obtaining the order, or if they faced additional harm from the perpetrator, a third party sent by the perpetrator, or an unrelated third party. The graph below shows the results.

Only 1 participant in this study had to shift her residence as a result of obtaining the order; however, there is a need to ascertain this pattern over a larger national sample, given that many women who face domestic violence also reside in their husband's home.



7 participants faced additional harm from the perpetrator after obtaining the order. 5 faced additional harm by a third party sent by the perpetrator. 1 faced harm from an unrelated third party (translated from Dhivehi):

“They didn’t say it directly to me, but I was told that they came near my workplace and shouted things. They also said things to others.”

7 participants spoke about facing additional harm from the perpetrator after obtaining their protection orders. They shared the following (translated from Dhivehi):

“DV Acts did not stop, had to call the police many times because of the difficulty.”

“[The perpetrator] continued to do things that were prohibited in the PO, and did not do what the PO said [handing over the certificate]. Held my passport too and only gave it very recently. Child’s vaccine card was also given very recently.”

“He harassed me over the phone, and said all kinds of things to the child and showed fake photos to the others in the island.”

“Came while I was at work a few days and left quickly when the police were called.”

“Compared to prior to the PO, it [the harm he causes] is a lot less. But the PO is for me and my child, so the harm that comes to my child is greater now. It happens even in the little time he spends with my child. He made things very difficult after the PO was granted.”

“Perpetrator breached the order before. There was also a jail sentence.”

“Harassed me in a way that others wouldn’t know, tried to blow up the place, cut off the water, threw things on the roof and made things difficult.”

Some participants faced additional life disruptions by a third party sent by the perpetrator to harass or intimidate them.

“Had someone tell the participant that once his dad [the participant’s husband] died, he would throw out the stepmother [the participant].”

“Gave money to a third party and tried to get me fired from my job, attempted to damage my motorcycle, sent someone to harass me at work.”

“A friend [of the perpetrator] made things difficult and mocked and harassed me.”

There was also an incident of third-party harm to a person related to a participant. This participant’s friend had recorded the perpetrator snatching the child and taking them away – this video was instrumental evidence in obtaining the PO. The friend was subsequently harassed and intimidated by third parties sent by the perpetrator, and felt too intimidated to follow through with a police report.

Nearly half of the participants faced additional harm after obtaining the order, indicating that the protection order by itself is not enough to stop the violence, and that enforcement of the order is a vital component of DV prevention.

The intensity of the violence and harassment the participants faced illustrates how a lack of enforcement can not only render the order useless, but in some cases, cause an escalation of violence that spills over to others in the survivor's life. This can impact the efficacy of community support systems; others may not wish to experience violence and harassment in their own lives and may pull away from

survivors as a result. As seen in the case where a survivor's friend assisted her in procuring evidence for the protection order, those that help survivors are not immune to the abuse and harm that a perpetrator can cause. Alongside this, the lack of effective monitoring mechanisms still places the burden of seeking additional assistance for enforcement onto the survivor.

It is important for further studies to explore which proportion of DV survivors continue to face violence after obtaining a protection order, to better explore the gaps in enforcement and the harm it causes.

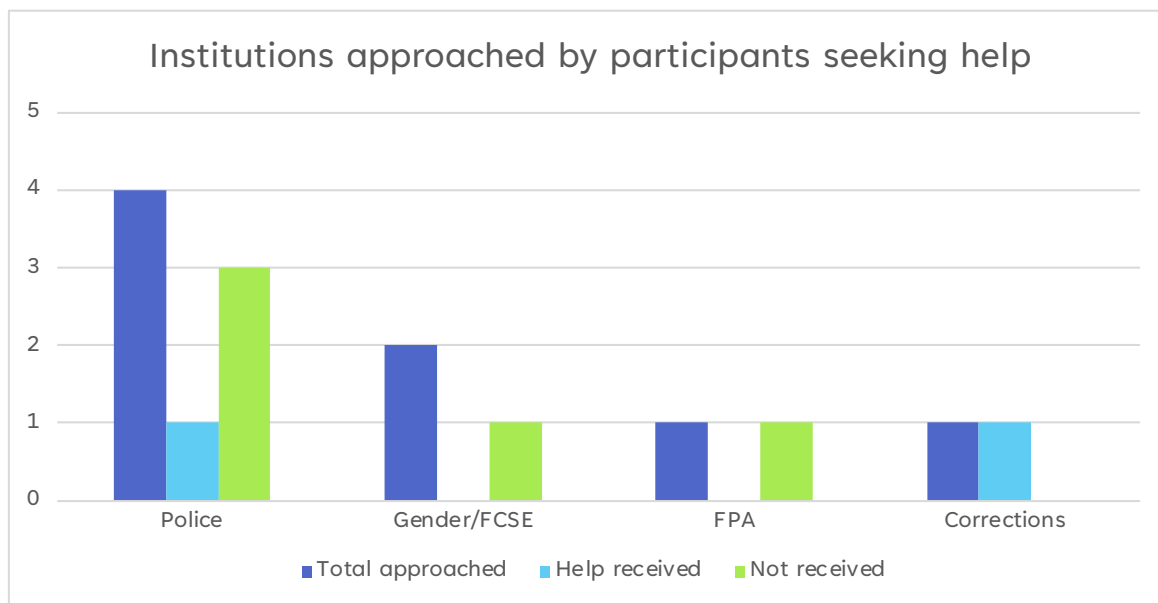
SEEKING ASSISTANCE TO ENFORCE THE PROTECTION ORDER

Out of those that faced additional harm after obtaining the order, 7 requested help to stop the harm, and 3 did not. Only 4 recorded receiving any help after requesting it.

One participant who received help from the police noted that she did not receive help from the Addu City police, but received assistance from the Male' City police.

Though only one participant reported this sort of disparity, it is in line with other findings that indicate the general disparity in quality of services between the Greater Male' Area and the outer islands.

The graph on the following page illustrates the institutions participants approached, and how successful they were in receiving assistance.



*The participant that approached the Maldives Corrections Authority was referred by the Ministry

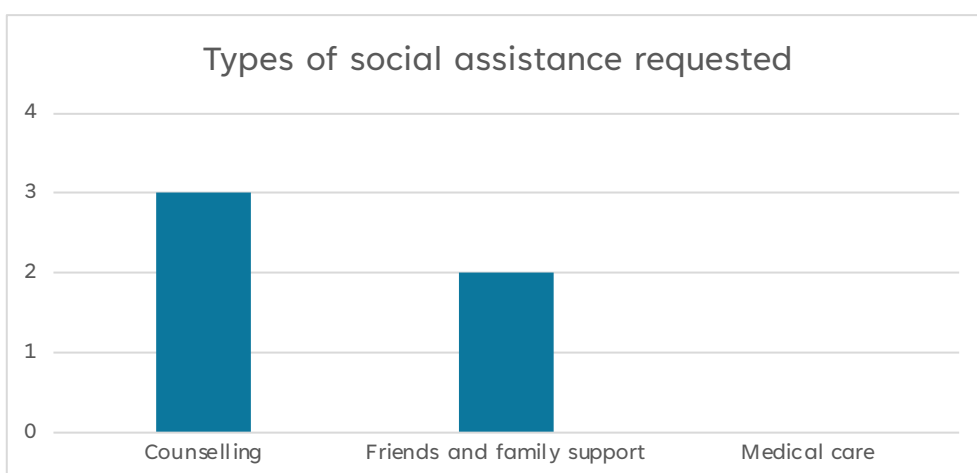
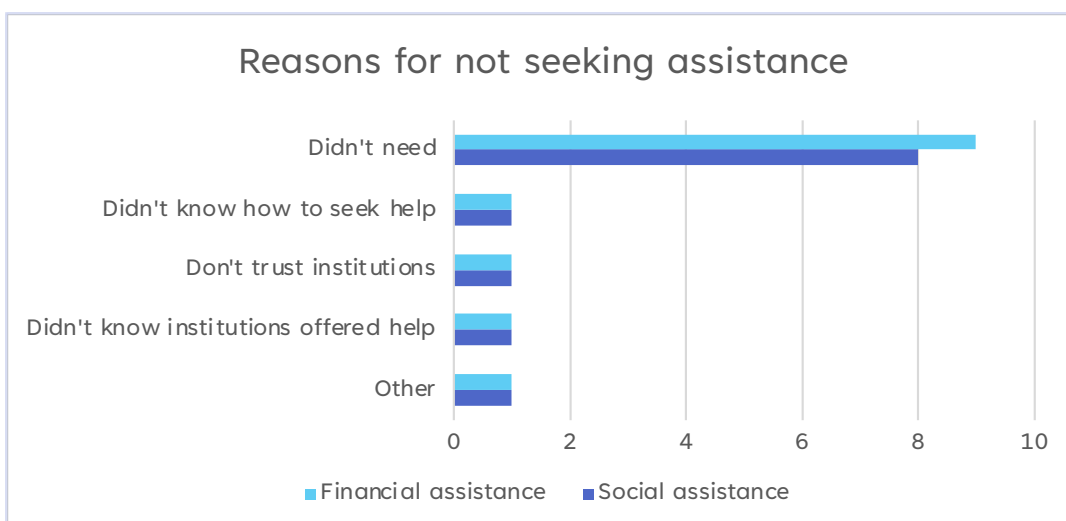
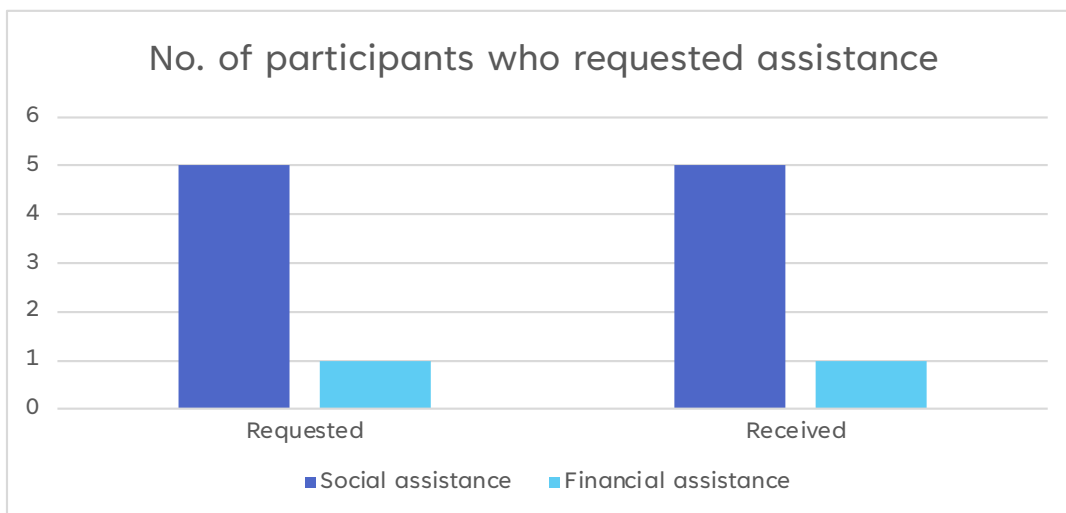
In one case, police presence was enough for the order to be properly enforced after the breach. Nonetheless in most cases, there was limited assistance from the police or the Ministry to stop additional harm from happening.

Participants noted that it took several attempts to receive any real assistance, with the graph above indicating that most institutions were not able to offer the necessary assistance for enforcing the order.

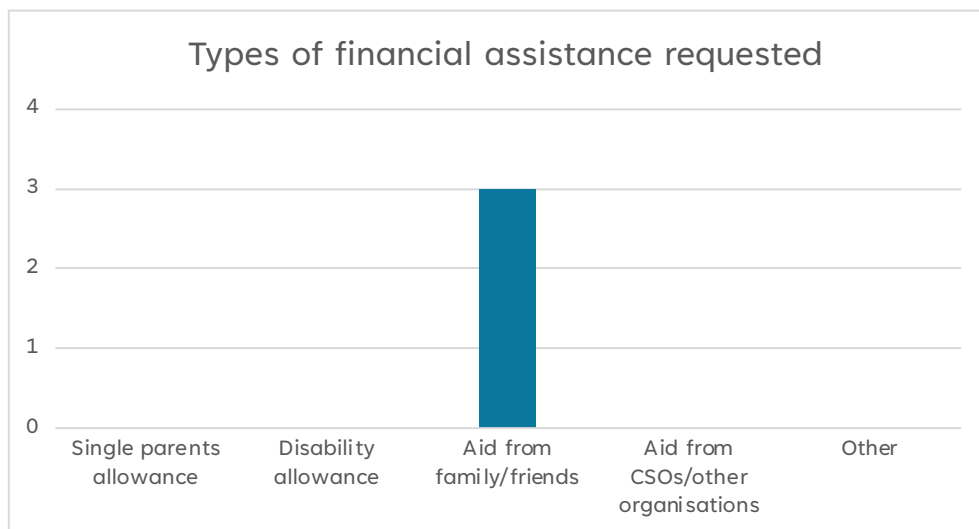
HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOURS

As domestic violence can disrupt several areas of a survivor’s life, participants were asked if they sought social and financial assistance after obtaining the protection order. Most did not request assistance in these areas, with the majority reporting that they did not need this type of help. However, there were a few participants that did not know how or where to seek help from.

The graphs on the next page illustrate whether or not participants sought help, whether they received it or not, what kind of help they sought if they did, and their reasons for seeking or not seeking help. It also breaks down the types of financial and social assistance that participants requested.



*One participant noted: "I didn't ask for help but I got my entire family's support."



*some participants reported receiving financial support from friends and family even though they did not request it.

Most of the 15 participants were able to support themselves, or had existing community support to assist them. However, a small number of participants indicated that they did not know how to ask for help, or did not know where to go or what institutions offered assistance.

Understanding help-seeking behaviours in domestic violence survivors and whether or not they receive adequate support is necessary to strengthen existing support frameworks for survivors, making this a vital facet to include in broader studies.

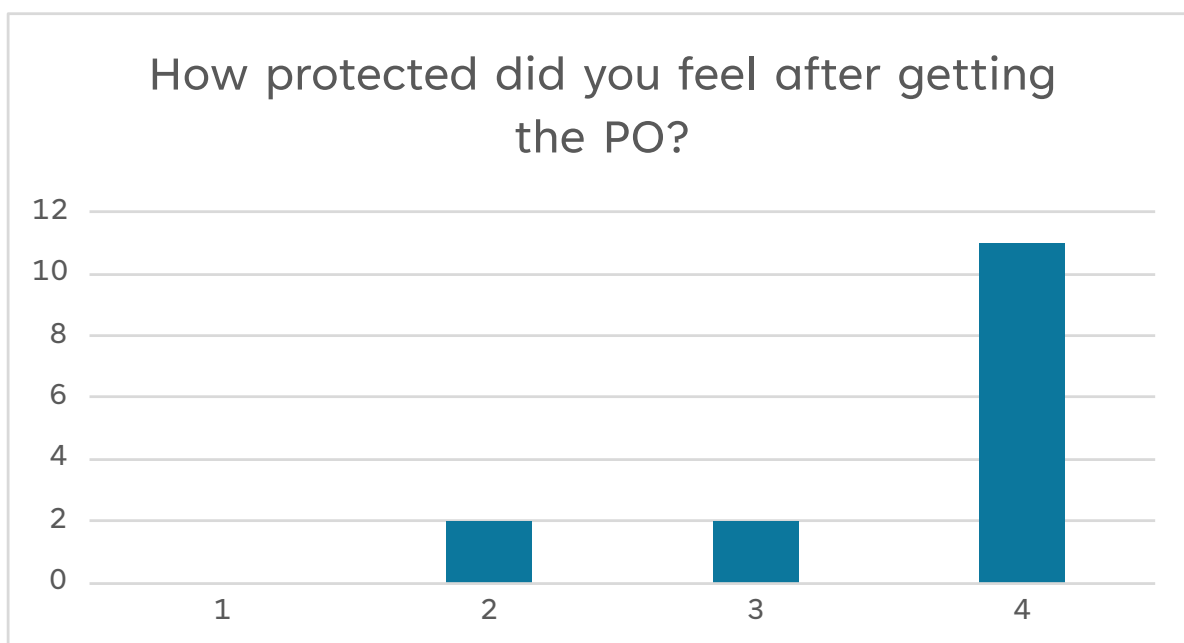
PERCEPTIONS OF PROTECTION

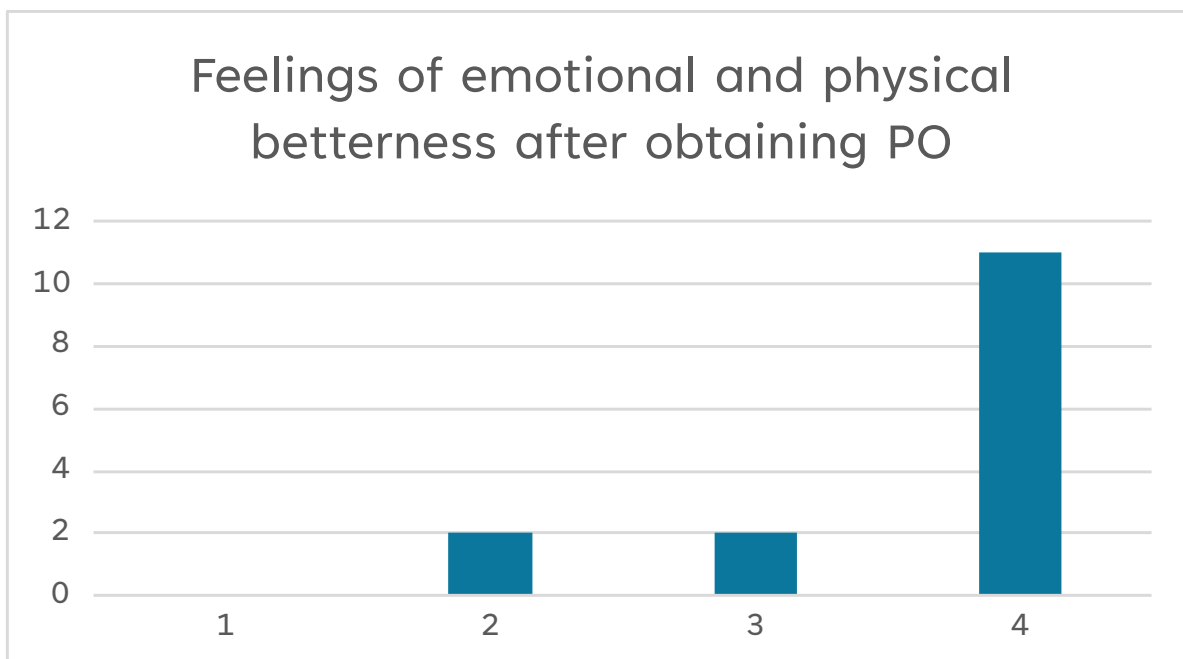
POST-ORDER FEELINGS OF SECURITY

Participants were asked to rate their feelings of security after obtaining their order. They were given a scale of 1-4, with 1 being the least secure and 4 being the most. The graph below illustrates how secure and/or protected participants felt after obtaining the order. Most noted that they felt very protected in the immediate aftermath of receiving it.

Participants were also asked whether or not they felt emotionally and physically better

after getting the protection order. Most noted that they felt very much better. One participant even noted that she could sleep and eat better, and their family and friends could visit the home and have fun. Those that rated lower were those that had experienced additional harm from the perpetrators and others after the protection order.





Participants were then asked to elaborate on their feelings of protection and safety. Those that felt the safest reported experiencing the following feelings after obtaining the protection order.

“Felt safe, was free of tension and felt like I got freedom.”

“Experienced great happiness. Was happy to a level I never had been before. I even did sujood to thank Allah.”

“I was no longer afraid. Felt like I got freedom. Felt safe from harm and it was easier to live.”

“Was very happy. Suddenly after living in fear, I felt safe. I felt very safe.”

“Now I have some power. Even if he does something, I can report it.”

“Was very happy, felt very safe.”

Participants that felt positively also carried a note of confidence and euphoria when reporting the experience. This was indicative of the magnitude of the impact of the protection order on their lives. Though the above statements are the consolidated (and translated) responses of a few of the participants that responded here, it emphasises the necessity of such a protective measure for survivors.

Participants that reported facing additional harm after the order expressed more mixed feelings. Some did not feel strongly protected, while others expressed confidence at having obtained the order at all. Their responses illustrate how a protection order can also increase faith in the wider protection framework, while good enforcement is necessary to maintain that faith.

"[After getting the PO] Felt a great lightness in my head. However, when I continued to face harm after the PO, I felt like it was useless because the PO didn't work."

"I felt safe, but later when he appealed (and did everything)... it was very difficult to maintain the PO."

"Even if anything happened, I knew he knew that I had some power. My stress went and I could live without fear. I think about how easy it is, it feels like a big weight has been lifted off my head. I got the independence to work and live my life, and can now earn more of an income."

"In that moment I thought and believed that from [FLC's lawyer]'s help, I got justice. It made me respect [FLC's lawyer] and the court. That day I felt like there was hope for justice."

IMPACT OF THE PROTECTION ORDER ON OTHER AREAS OF LIFE

"I used to be scared to go outside and go places, but now I am not scared."

Participants were also asked about the effects of the protection order on various areas of their life, namely their finances, impact on their dependents, and impact on friends and family relations. The tables below indicate the results, with elaboration by some participants:

"I have certainty. Because I have that (the order), that my brother will be afraid to come into my house and do anything, so I am happy."

"[My] child became good." (her child was the perpetrator)

	Yes	No
Did your life change after obtaining the PO?	13	2
	Good	Bad
Was it a good change or a bad change?	12	0

	Yes	No
Were your finances affected after obtaining the protection order?	7	8
	Positive	Negative
Was it a positive or a negative effect?	5	2

A positive effect

“After the perpetrator left, (I) have been able to build the ceilings and tile the rooms in the house. It is a very good change.”

A negative effect

“He said that if he can’t meet his kid, he doesn’t want to give financial support.” (Her ex-husband has since stopped child maintenance payments)

	Yes	No
Were your dependents affected after getting the protection order?	7	4

Most participants noted positive effects on their dependents, particularly their children, who they reported as being happier in general. One participant stated that her children were “very happy, we can spend time together without tension. Before they would only see me sitting alone and crying.”

Feelings of fear also diminished in the case of one participant’s dependents, when she stated that they are “no longer scared of

Dhombe,” (the perpetrator, whose behaviour changed for the better after the order was obtained).

However, one participant noted that the order had impacted one of her dependents negatively. This dependent is a child with disabilities, who the perpetrator has since intimidated and tried to extort money from.

Participants were also asked about the impact of the protection order on their relationships with friends and family. 7 participants reported that the protection order did affect these relationships. Obtaining the order put one participant's parents at ease, while another reported that her family's behaviour changed for the better.

Some other positive changes included:

"Have established better relations with family and friends, and we have gotten closer and friendlier."

"I didn't go out with friends before but now I spend time with them."

"A good change. I feel we are closer than before."

One other participant explained that her situation was a little more complicated:

"Prior to getting the PO, my friends were afraid to maintain relations with me. Afterwards, I have not yet attempted to get back in touch with those friends who drew away."

The results indicate that having the protection order, and having it enforced has allowed greater freedom and psychological relief. It has enabled them to seek formal employment, establish (or re-establish) better ties with friends and family, and made their children happier.

However, a lack of enforcement only allows the harm to escalate and continue. Friends and family that assist the survivor can find themselves becoming targets of the perpetrator, and relations that fracture during the period of abuse can be difficult to repair.

Obtaining a protection order can also cause perpetrators to retaliate through other means, as indicated by the participant whose former husband no longer supports the child financially, after his inappropriate behaviour around the child caused the scope of the order to be extended.

While enforced protection orders are vital in stopping immediate harm and bringing a measure of stability to survivors' lives, the insidious nature of domestic violence can fracture community and familial bonds. The unintended consequences of obtaining a protection order can also prevent some survivors from risking getting one. Much more needs to be done at a community level to ensure harm reduction from the outset.

PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFICACY

POST-ORDER FEELINGS OF SECURITY

At the end of the survey, participants were asked to rate their perceived efficacy of institutions within the social support framework. 5 factors were assessed: speed, level of confidentiality, provision of victim support, ease of process, and ease of access to information.

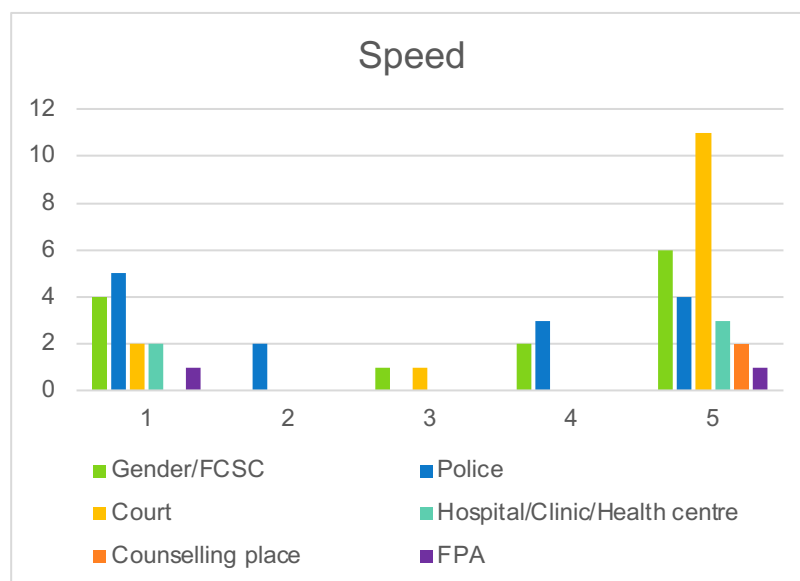
A five-point scale was used to assess satisfaction:

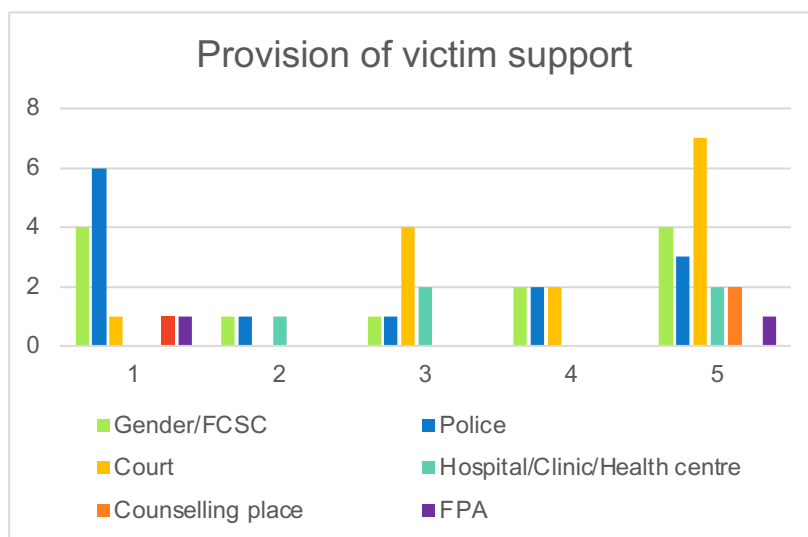
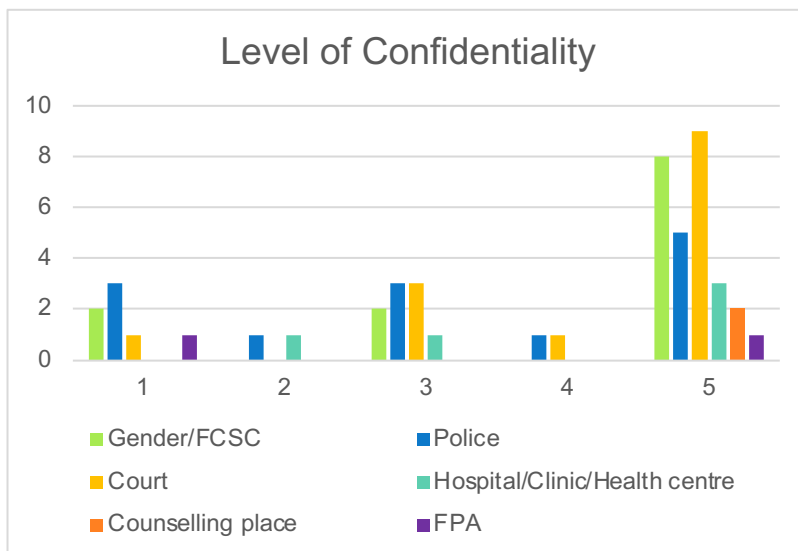
1. not at all satisfied
2. needs improvement
3. neutral
4. satisfied
5. very satisfied

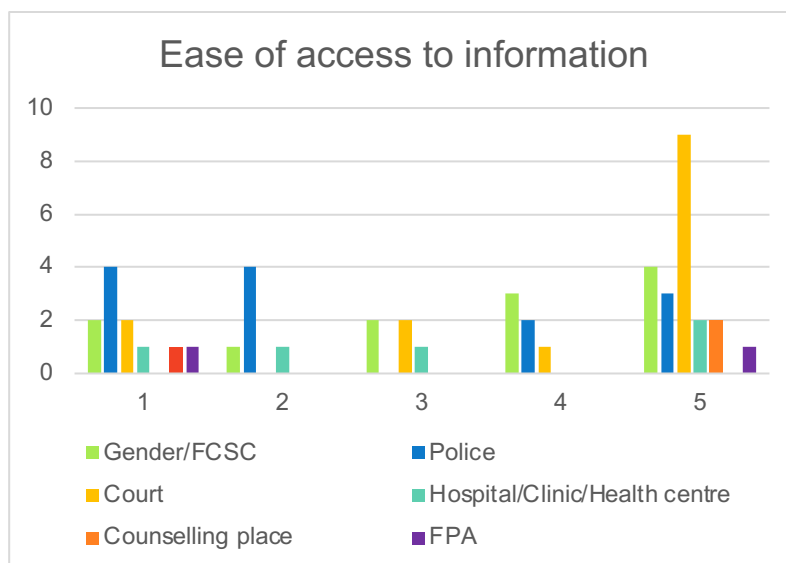
The following institutions were included in the survey:

- Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services (and Family and Children Service Centers)
- Maldives Police Service
- Courts
- Hospitals/Clinics/Health Centers
- Counselling institution or practice
- National Social Protection Agency (NSPA)
- Prosecutor General’s Office
- Family Protection Authority (FPA)

Given that none of the participants approached NSPA or the Prosecutor General’s Office for assistance, these institutions have been left out of the graphs below.







Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services (and Family and Children Service Centers)

Opinions on the efficacy of the Ministry were generally divided, though 8 out of 12 participants noted the highest level of satisfaction for the level of confidentiality upheld by them. 6 out of 12 participants felt highly satisfied about the speed, with 4 being highly dissatisfied. Similar results were recorded for the level of victim support provided; 4 participants were highly satisfied, 4 were highly dissatisfied. With regards to access to information, only 4 participants felt highly satisfied about how easily they were able to access the required information from the Ministry.

Maldives Police Service

Opinions on the efficacy of MPS were also mixed. However, unlike the responses for MoGFSS, it was observed during the survey period that participants that rated MPS lower did so with an expression of distaste and frustration, indicating that this may have been a more difficult experience for them.

4 out of 12 participants were highly satisfied with the speed of the MPS, and 5 were highly dissatisfied. 5 were highly satisfied with the level of confidentiality, with highly dissatisfied and neutral receiving 3 responses each. Most participants expressed a perception of a

lack ease of process and access to information, with highly dissatisfied and dissatisfied receiving 4 responses each for both indicators, with 3 for highly satisfied and 2 for satisfied.

Efficacy of victim support scored the lowest, with 6 out of 12 participants being highly dissatisfied with the victim support offered by MPS. Only 3 were highly satisfied, 2 satisfied, and 1 neutral for the same indicator.

Court

Nearly all the participants rated the court very highly on all aspects, which is contrary to existing reports that note that the court system is difficult for women to navigate when they require legal assistance. In this case, **it is very likely that the participants found the process easy due to their access to FLC's lawyers.** This meant that there was no need for them to take on the burdensome administrative tasks or deal with challenges presented by the court processes, as these tasks were taken on by the lawyers with any other issues clarified and explained to them.

Though it was hoped that participants without legal representation could have been recruited to make a comparative analysis for this facet of the study, the

sampling limitations mean this could not be done. Thus, it would be valuable to conduct further investigations to ascertain how far experiences with the court system vary between those that have access to legal aid and those who do not.

Hospital/Clinic/Health Centre

Only 5 participants sought assistance at a healthcare provider. Most were highly satisfied or satisfied with the speed and ease of process, but some expressed dissatisfaction or neutrality for access to information, level of victim support, and level of confidentiality. The issue of the last one in particular is one that can impact help seeking behaviours for any institution, and it is necessary that workers across all sectors adhere to strict ethical codes of conduct during service provision.

Counselling place

Only two participants rated their experiences with counselling providers, both at private practices. Both rated their experience very satisfactory on all counts. Though this does not indicate that counselling services in the Maldives are adequate as a whole, it is heartening to see that both participants were able to receive the help they required in this situation. Nonetheless, it must be noted that survivor

empowerment is dependent on ease of access to mental health resources, as well as community support.

Family Protection Authority (FPA)

FPA functions primarily as a monitoring body for domestic violence cases. However, one participant with a particularly severe case approached multiple institutions for assistance, including FPA. This participant

was highly dissatisfied with her experience on all five indicators, likely due to the fact that she did not receive adequate assistance with her case until she approached FLC.

FPA was included in the list of institutions as they are also a point of reporting, after which they make referrals to the relevant institutions.

RECCOMENDATIONS

1. There is a need to consider better strategies for state led monitoring of the enforcement of the protection order. The current system places the onus on the survivor to report breaches of the protection order, resulting in extreme stress and difficulty. It also does not aid in effective enforcement, as there is no way of knowing if the order is breached unless a breach has been reported.
2. The disparities in enforcement of the order between the Greater Male Area and the outer islands need to be swiftly addressed, whether through small scale projects in targeted communities, or a wider rollout.
3. Perpetrator rehabilitation as envisaged under the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act is urgently needed to reduce the harm caused after a domestic violence protection order is obtained.
4. More work also needs to be done within the police to establish strong protocols for responding to domestic violence and breaches of the order.
5. Institutions within the social support framework need to uphold better ethical standards in service provision to encourage help seeking.
6. The burden on survivors to heal and move forward is immense. Aside from state institutions, there is an urgent necessity for communities to bind closer together to support survivors of domestic violence despite the myriad difficulties this brings. Advocacy programmes on domestic violence prevention need to include community support methodologies as part of their programming to emphasise the need for this.
7. The prevalence and causes of elder abuse need to be studied and targeted policies be made for prevention. Existing data on the issue should also be publicised for research and advocacy purposes.