

## Empowering Women

### Evaluation of *Jana Sanskriti*, a socio-cultural intervention in South 24 Parganas *A Report by Centre for Training and Research in Public Finance and Policy*

Social networks and social groups play an important role in our individual lives and individual decision making. What we do is often contingent on what others do. However, some social norms may perpetuate collective behaviour such as domination over women, segregation among groups, that does not benefit anyone and is detrimental in the achievement of certain developmental goals.

Changing these social norms and hence individual behavior is difficult because they are a result of historical circumstances and are self-reinforcing regardless of whether they promote individual welfare or not. While law can be an effective tool in bringing about changes in social behaviour like desirability of wearing seat belts, helmets, it faces limits while trying to change existing social norms like the practice of dowry, domestic violence against women, segregation among social groups etc.. Sometimes laws maybe totally in contrary to existing social norms that make them unlikely to induce desired changes.

Yet, to bring about changes in such social norms, interventions keeping in mind the local socio-cultural fabric may have large, long-lasting impacts on the community that improves everybody's well-being. Strategies like use of mass media, peer groups, specific individuals or organizations leading a charge to change social behavior may actually work better.

In this study, we examine the impact of a socio-cultural intervention - theatre for development or participatory theatre - in improving women's empowerment in society. This form of theatre is practiced "by, about, and for the oppressed people, to help them fight against these oppressions and to transform the society that engenders these oppressions". Because of their interactive nature, these theatre programs (unlike information campaigns) can have a psychological impact in addition to an informational one. They may evoke critical thinking by enabling their viewers to engage in role-playing in which they tackle social problems in an interactive environment.

Despite its long history and widespread presence, there has been little systematic evaluation of the impact of participatory theatre on social change and development. Our methods incorporate tools that allow us to go beneath the surface of conscious mental processing to evaluate changes in implicit (subconscious) attitudes together with changes in self-reported social norms.

*Jana Sanskriti*, a non-governmental organization, has been engaged in Theatre for Development since 1985 in West Bengal in Eastern India. The organisation uses participatory plays to encourage viewers to "think about, re-imagine, and reconstruct 'development' and 'democracy' in India" (Ganguly, 2009). Today, with the spread of the *Jana Sanskriti* network throughout India, it is one of "the largest and the longest lasting Forum Theatre operations in the world". The vision of *Jana Sanskriti* is to encourage viewers to protest against social ills. It aims to engage viewers to think critically and collectively about representations within plays, to re-script these plays to represent reality on their own terms, and to rehearse social change collectively. Its theatre performances cover social issues of patriarchy, domestic violence, alcoholism, dowry, exploitation of workers and problems in local governance.

Prime areas where *Jana Sanskriti* (JS) operate are in the districts of South and North 24 Parganas in rural West Bengal, a state in eastern India sharing borders with Bangladesh. In South 24 Parganas, they have worked in Patharpratima, Kulpi and Kakadweep blocks covering approximately 123

villages across 11 *gram panchayats*. Their foray into North 24 Parganas has been more recent and is in fewer blocks and villages. Hence, our focus area is the district of South 24 Parganas in West Bengal.

Our research enables us to compare villages in which JS has been active for more than two decades (treatment villages) with villages in which JS (or any other theatre group) has not been active (control villages). Thus it permits us to assess the possible effects on a long-run change.

A random sample of treatment villages and households have been chosen from the 123 villages where JS performances have been held in South 24 Parganas. For the control group, we survey villages from the northern blocks of Basanti, Joynagar II, Mathurapur I and Mathurapur II in South 24 Parganas.

Our respondents are married men and women between the ages of 21 and 49 years. In a household, we interview a female respondent and a male respondent, preferably the husband of the female respondent, separately. Our sample size is approximately 4,000 households (approximately 8000 individuals).

We use two different instruments to evaluate the impact of *Jana Sanskriti* on women's empowerment.

- We use structured survey questionnaires to assess **explicit effectiveness** of the treatment on knowledge and biases: are there differences in responses to questions pertaining to justified causes for a husband to fight with his wife or beat his wife; actual triggers of fights and violence; husband's belief that wife can complain if she is beaten; division of decision-making between spouses; if a woman participates in the labour market does she have any control over her own earnings?
- Respondents may be unwilling or unable to report what they think or feel when responding to structured questionnaires regarding their preferences and beliefs. To get to the subconscious, we use one such measure typically used by social psychologists - Implicit Association Test (IAT) - that requires respondents to rapidly sort items from different categories into groups. A gender IAT would for example, provide a measure of relative strength with which *female* and *male* are associated with *family* versus *career* concepts. Sorting *family* with *female* and *career* with *male* would be easier than sorting *female* with *career* and *male* with *family*. This IAT proxies a measure of implicit stereotype. It measures the strength of association between category and attribute by using the time it takes to make the pairings and the number of errors in classifying while respondents are trying to respond rapidly. In our research, we develop an IAT to assess **implicit effectiveness** of treatment on the empowerment of women. We use an IAT which examines the strength of association between *husband* and *wife* (categories) and *influential* and *weak* (evaluative attributes).

Can participatory theatre change individual thinking? To answer this question, we solicit opinions from male and female respondents about the circumstances under which the husband is justified (or not) to abuse his wife. We ask both respondents whether the husband is justified in verbally and/or physically abusing his wife if she goes out of her house without the husband's permission; if she neglects her children; if she contradicts her husband on various issues; if she refuses physical intimacy with her husband; if the husband thinks that she disrespects her in-laws; and if the husband suspects his wife of cheating.

Figures 1 (verbal abuse) and 2 (physical abuse) report the statistics from the data. Both male and female respondents in treatment areas are less likely to think that the husband is justifiable in verbally or physically abusing his wife under any circumstances. The graphs show that the differences in opinions is much greater for male respondents among treatment and control areas. The

interesting and the most significant result from the responses of the females is that those residing in treatment areas are of the opinion that the husband should not abuse the wife if she contradicts him in different issues. This is indicative of a changing social norm that husband and wife are equal partners in a relationship. Each has the right to verbally discuss issues even if their views are contrary.

Is a wife considered a partner in the true sense? Figure 3 reports the statistics on joint decision-making in the household. Again we observe that many more respondents in treatment areas report that decisions are taken jointly with their spouses for different things when compared to respondents in control areas. Again the differences in the responses among males across the treatment and control areas is far greater when compared to the responses of the women.

While opinions are important because it can be indicative of change in thinking by the respondents, actual incidents of abuse reflect how the changed thinking is translated into changed actions. Figure 4, reports the actual instances of verbal abuse of the wife by the husband under different circumstances. The interesting pattern that emerges from this Figure is that women report greater verbal abuse in treatment areas as compared to the control areas. This is not indicative of a failure of the treatment. rather it shows that women in treatment areas have changed from being passive absorbers of violence to being more vocal about different issues.

In Figure 5, we ask only the female respondents in the treatment and control areas about the nature of relationship that they share with their husbands. The most significant fact that emerges from this Figure is the reported lower physical violence in the treatment areas.

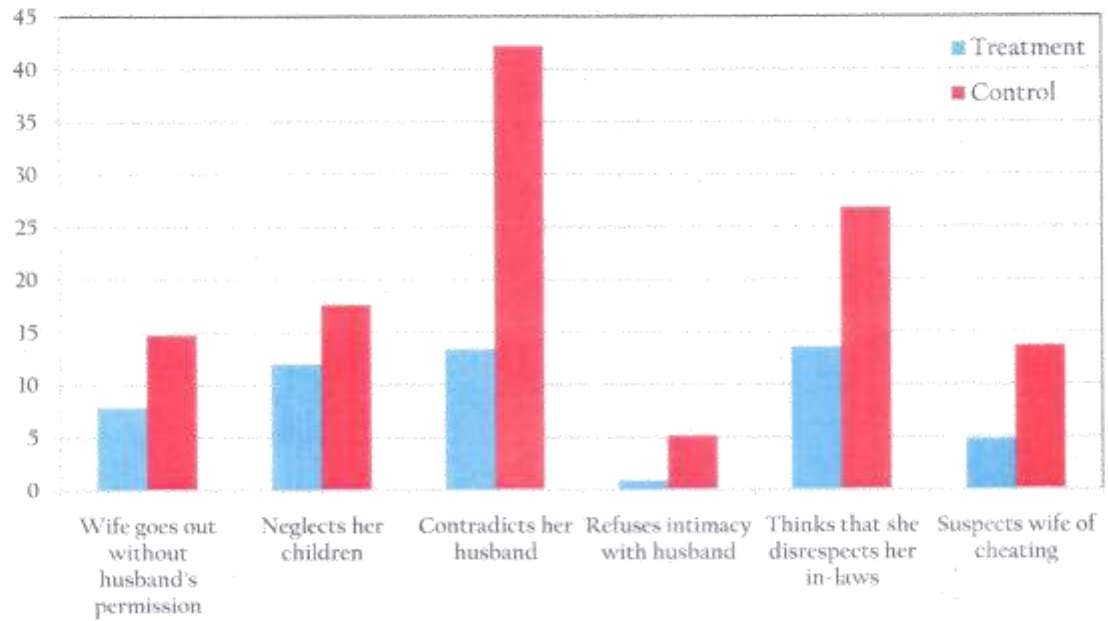
Finally, in Figure 6, we report the statistics on the knowledge that female and male respondents have regarding the laws that exist to protect women against domestic violence. This graph overwhelmingly shows that both respondents - male and female - are more knowledgeable about the existing laws as compared to their counterparts in control areas.

#### **Conclusion:**

The above analysis clearly shows that *Jana Sanskriti* has not only been able to give voice to the voiceless oppressed women but has also changed the mindset of their male counterparts. The latter is essential to increase women's empowerment and give voice to them in their homes and in their social network. Our analysis also shows that *JS* has been instrumental in raising awareness among the population regarding the existing laws that protect women against violence.

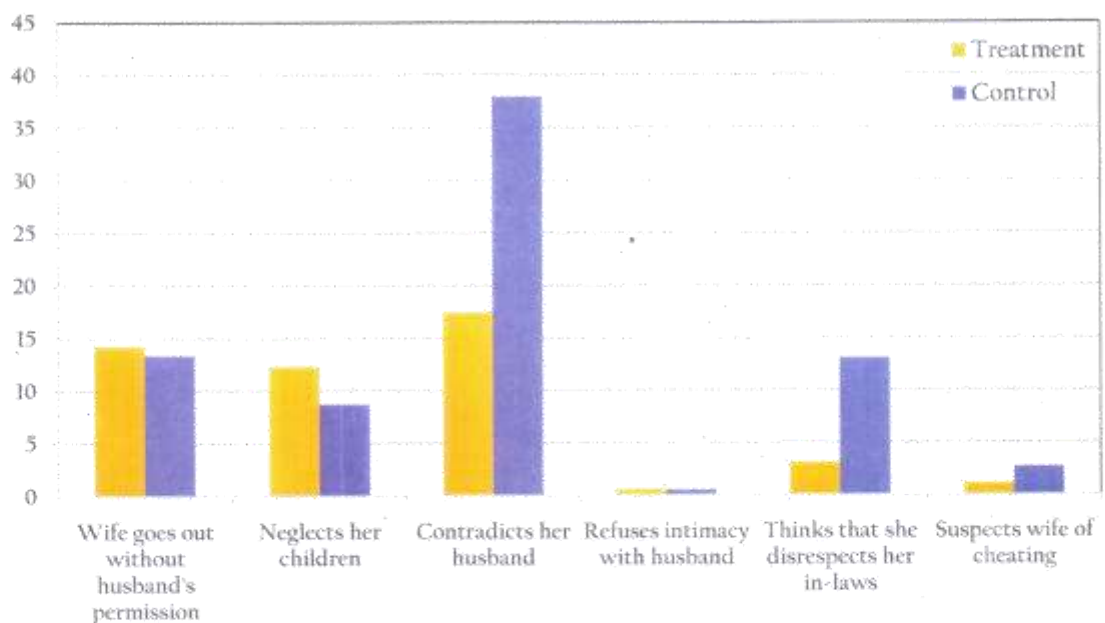
## Husband's Opinion

Husband is justified in verbally abusing his wife if.....



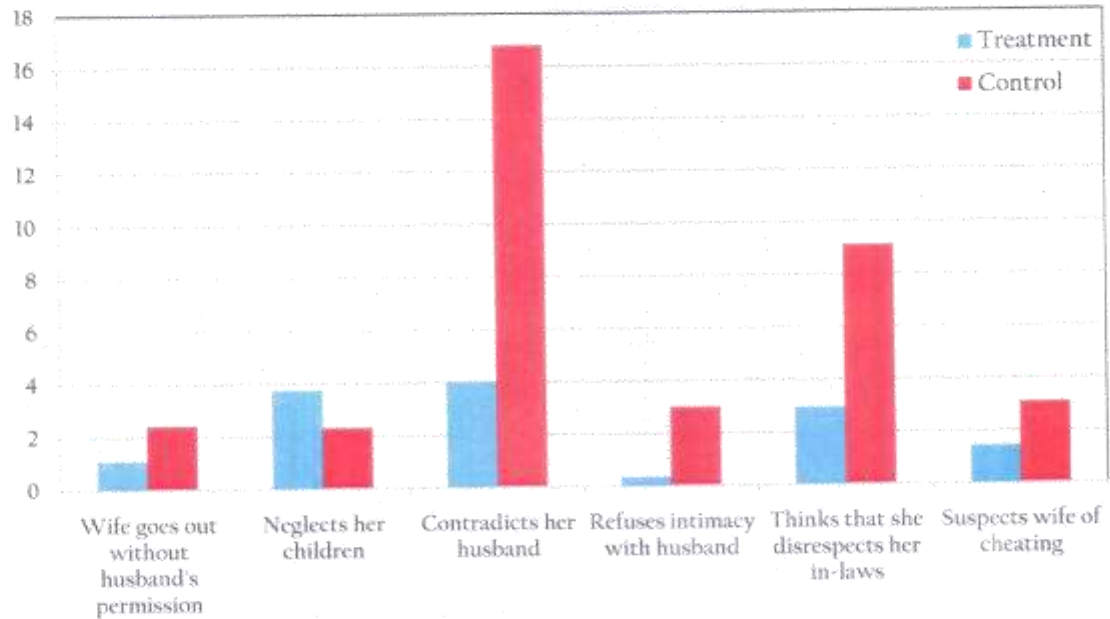
## Wife's Opinion

Husband is justified in verbally abusing his wife if.....



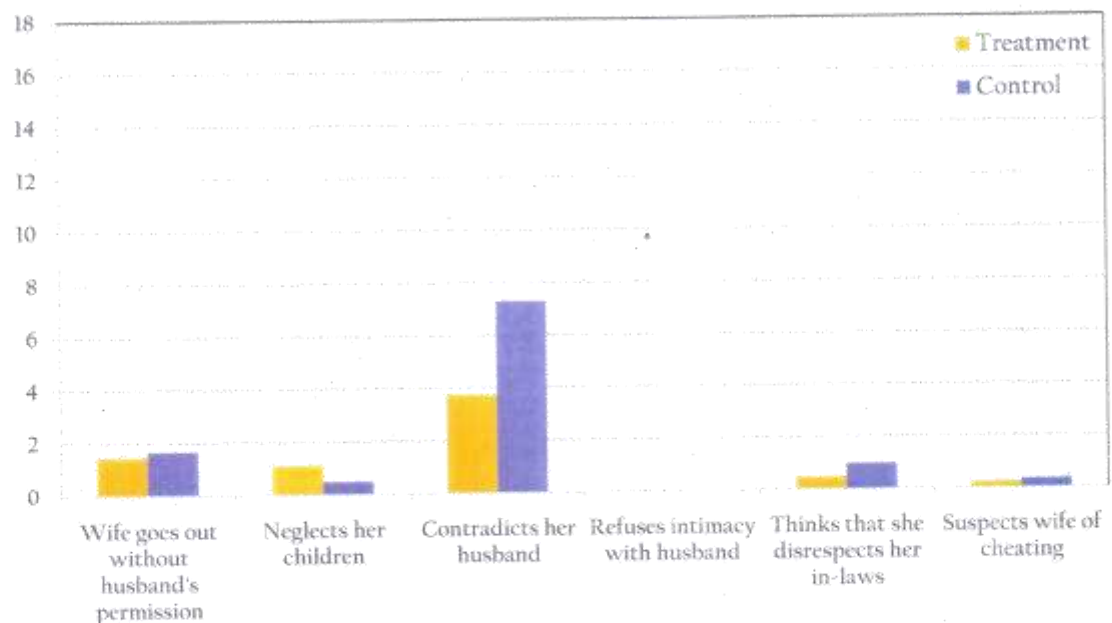
## Husband's Opinion

Husband is justified in physically abusing his wife if.....

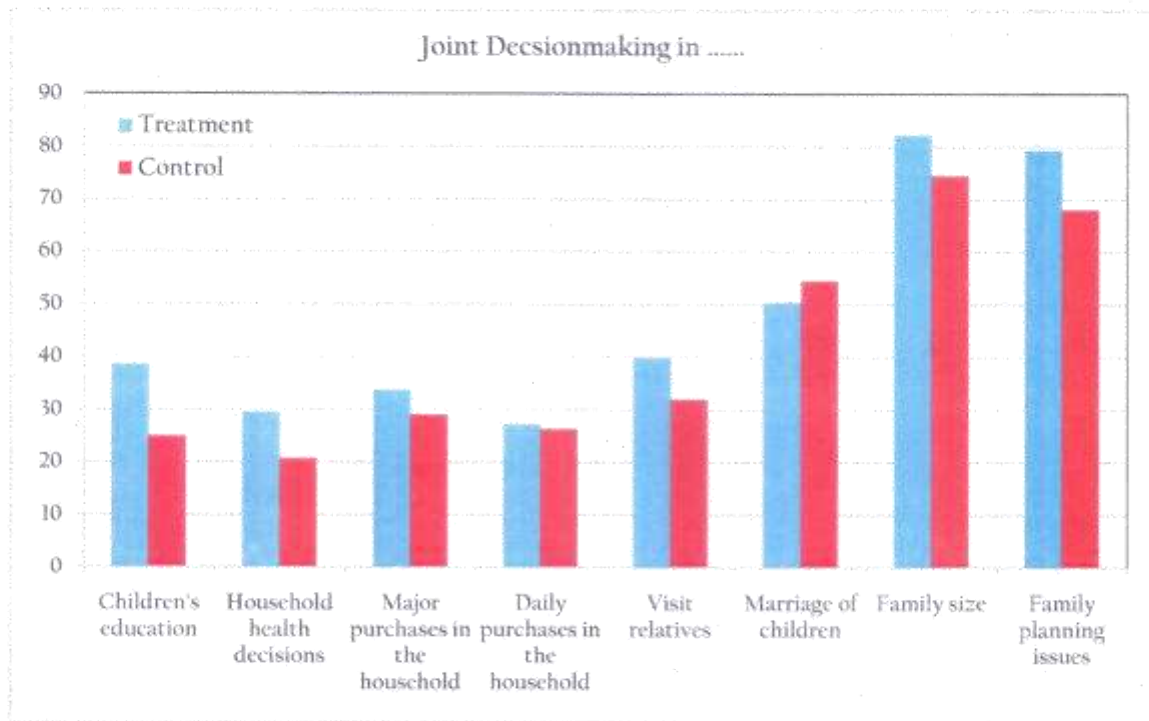


## Wife's Opinion

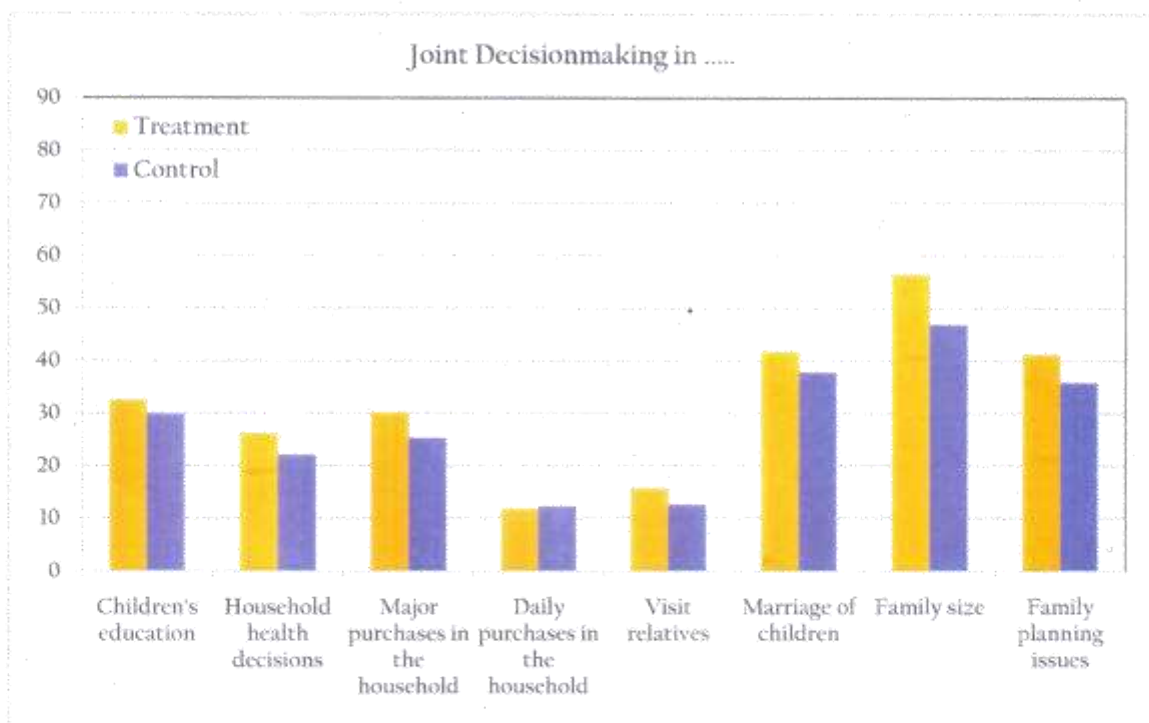
Husband is justified in physically abusing his wife if.....



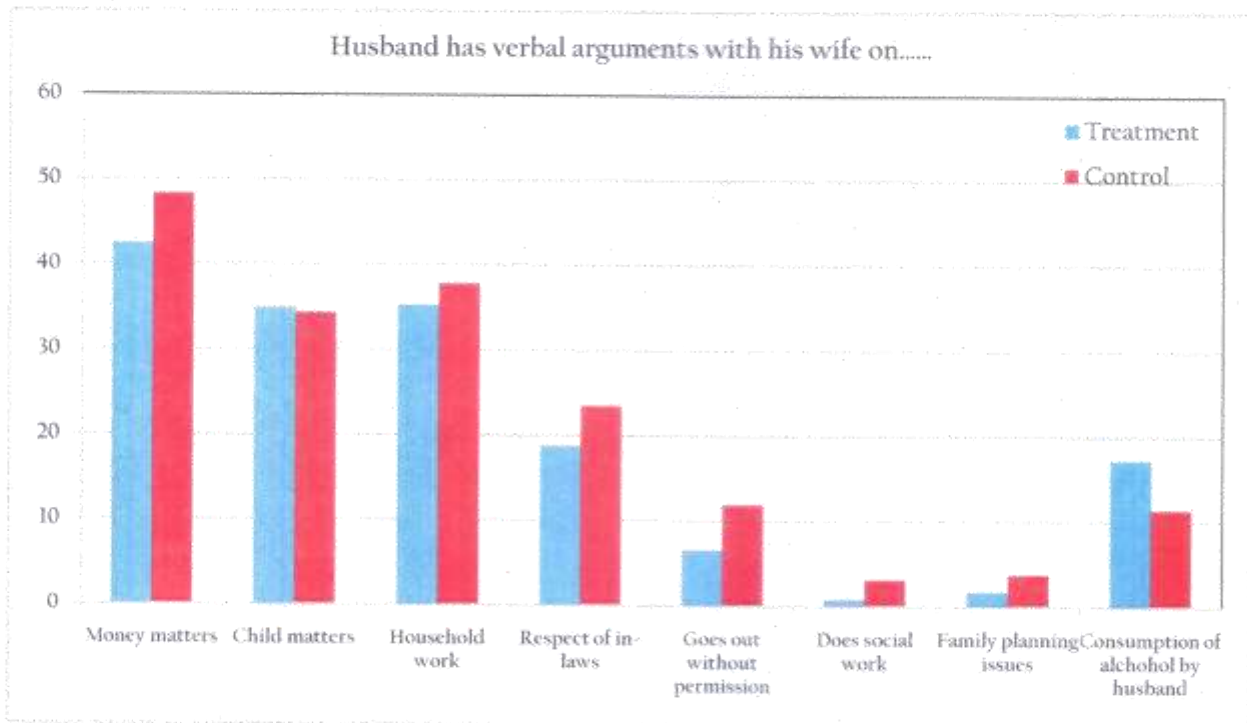
## Husband's Opinion



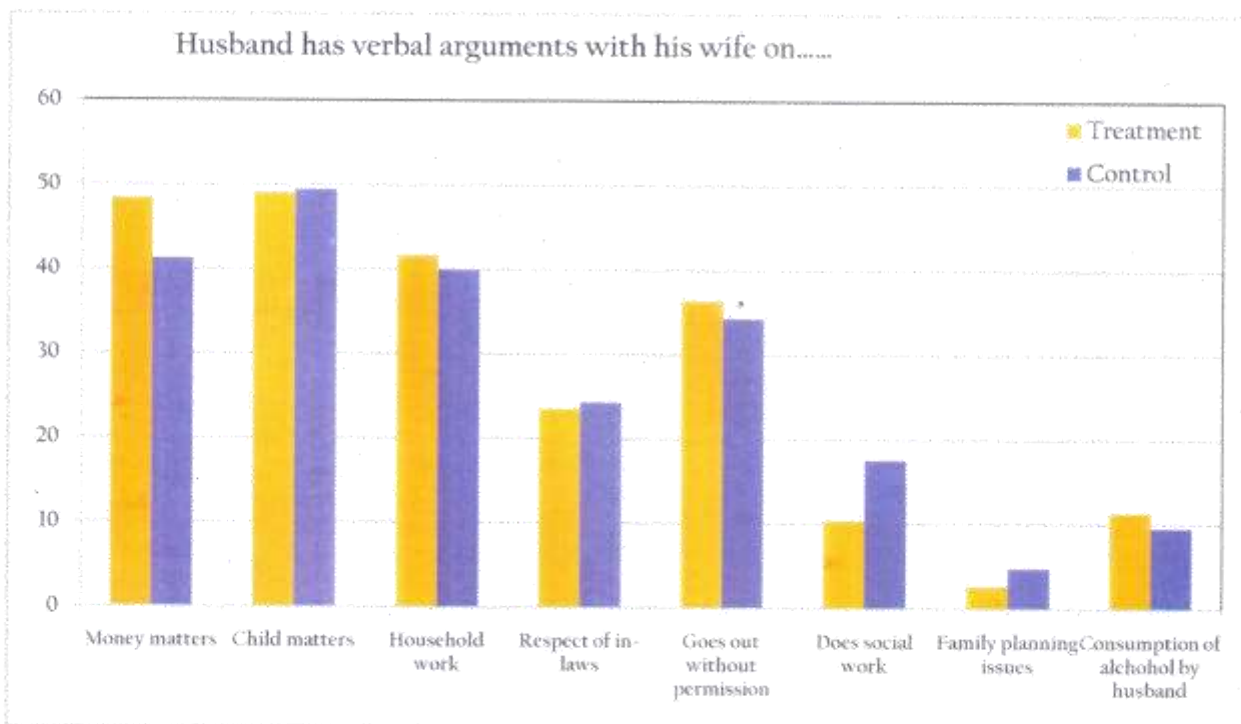
## Wife's Opinion



## Husband's Responses



## Wife's Responses

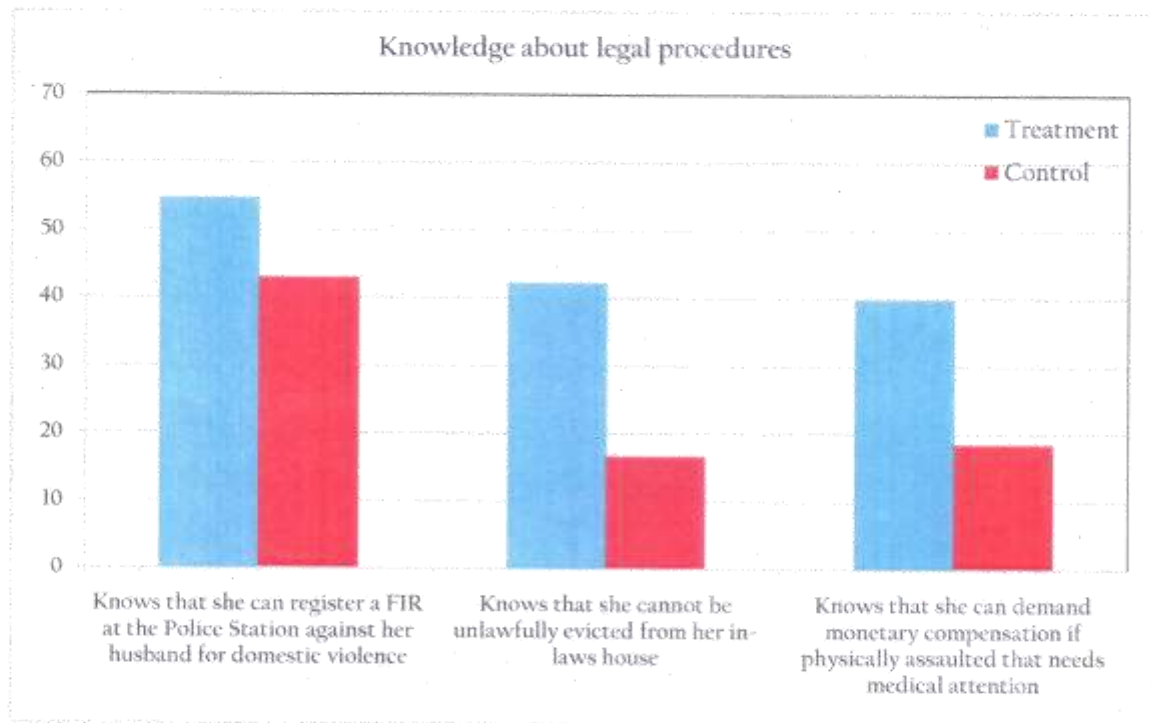


# Wife's Responses

Relevant to her relationship with her husband.....



## Husband's Responses



## Wife's Responses

