

**Press Statement – For Immediate Publication**  
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**Launch of a Study by Women's Aid Organisation (WAO):  
Malaysian Public Attitudes and Perceptions towards Violence against Women (VAW)**

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) launches initial findings and recommendations from its report, "*A Study on Malaysian Public Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Violence Against Women (VAW)*", revealing that **only half of Malaysians support gender equality (46.3%) and oppose violence-endorsing attitudes (52.7%)**, demonstrating that more must be done to strengthen prevention initiatives against VAW in Malaysia.

A survey involving 1,000 Malaysian respondents, this is the first large scale, nationally-representative study of attitudes and perceptions towards violence against women in Malaysia. The study explores the prevalence of violence-endorsing attitudes, namely towards domestic violence, sexual harassment and assault, rape, and child marriage, as well as gender inequality. Violence-endorsing attitudes, are loosely defined as attitudes that justify, excuse, minimise VAW, or blame survivors for the violence perpetrated against them.

Premised on the idea that violence against women is rooted in patriarchal attitudes and social norms, the study highlights specific attitudes that are concerning - including those that excuse perpetrators and hold women accountable for violence, disregard women's right to consent, mistrust women's reports of VAW, undermine women's independence and decision-making in public and private spheres of life, and deny that gender inequality is a problem.

Although survey results demonstrate that **overall, Malaysians hold a good understanding of VAW** in terms of what constitutes physical and non-physical forms of violence, it also finds that:

- More than half of Malaysians (53.3%) believe that domestic violence is a normal reaction of stress or frustration.
- 43.0% of respondents believe that a woman can make a man so angry that he hits her when he does not mean to.
- One third (30.0%) believe that women who flirt often are to blame for causing their partners to hit them out of jealousy.
- 26.5% of Malaysians believe that domestic violence is forgivable, if the perpetrator is so angry that they lose control.

These suggest that there are still circumstances for which VAW is acceptable - such as when perceived as an emotional gesture, or in the event the victim has behaved in a way that triggers

the abuse. Malaysians also tend to underestimate the complexity of abuse, with 37.1% of the survey population believing that it is not as hard to leave an abusive relationship, and 44.9% who believe that women who stay with their abusive partners, are also responsible for the ongoing abuse.

Rape myths were also highly endorsed by the survey population - a worrying finding, as these can be understood as a reflection for support towards violent behaviours and victim-blaming practices.

- 83.4% believe that rape happens because of men's uncontrollable sexual desires.
- 51.3% believe that rape happens of how women dress.

Additionally, while Malaysians were generally well-equipped to recognise non-physical forms of domestic violence when described clearly and explicitly, **respondents demonstrated slightly lower knowledge towards cyber-harassment, stalking, and controlling behaviour:**

- For example, approximately 11% of Malaysians do not consider controlling behaviour, such as preventing a partner from seeing their family or friends, and denying a woman access to finances, as a form of domestic violence.
- Respondents' lower levels of awareness towards non-physical violence may be due to pre-existing ideas of violence, which is more often related to physical harm (such as bruises, visible injuries, etc.).

On a more positive note, **Malaysians strongly oppose child marriage**, with survey results indicating that 70.3% of respondents broadly oppose child marriage under any and all circumstances. Only approximately one tenth of Malaysians explicitly support child marriage, with the greatest support coming from older men above aged 55 years and above.

## **Conclusion**

This study identifies several problematic attitudes and perspectives that are likely to be prevalent within Malaysian society, highlighted through thirteen initial findings. It also makes nine key recommendations to the government in order to strengthen prevention programming and initiatives for VAW in Malaysia.

Specifically, this study highlights the value of conducting attitudinal surveys towards violence against women and gender equality and calls on the government to take lead in carrying out similar surveys as a part of the larger national initiative against VAW.

Firstly, such attitudinal surveys can be used as a 'proxy indicator' of the level of tolerance for the use of VAW within a community. Secondly, when carried every few years as a longitudinal survey, it enables the monitoring of attitudinal progression (increasing opposition to VAW and gender inequality) or regression over time, to identify the most pressing attitudes that underlie

violence, and use this information to design prevention campaigns to effectively address these and build a safer Malaysia for all.

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*About Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)*

*Since 1982, Women's Aid Organisation has provided free shelter, counselling, and crisis support to women and children who experience abuse. We help women and their children rebuild their lives, after surviving domestic violence, rape, trafficking, and other atrocities. Learning from women's experiences, we advocate to improve public policies and shift public mindsets. Together, we change lives.*

*Call the WAO Hotline at 03 3000 8858 or SMS/WhatsApp TINA at 018 988 8058 if you or someone you know is experiencing abuse. For more information, visit [wao.org.my](http://wao.org.my).*

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