

HEN-PECKED

Men new 'victims' of domestic violence

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LOOKS LIKE the tables have been turned — for a change, the men are running scared.

The helpline at the Save Indian Family Foundation (SIFF) has not stopped ringing in the 10 days that the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act came into force. The male callers fear "harassment" — from women — under the new law that can put a man behind bars, simply on the basis of a complaint from a woman living under the same roof. Counsellors taking the helpline calls for SIFF and My Nation are now talking about

cases where the male callers are the victims, and the women the perpetrators of violence — psychological, emotional or verbal.

"Men are now being harassed by their wives with this new weapon," says Swarup Sarkar of SIFF. Supreme Court lawyer Ram Prakash Chugh of the All India Front Against Persecution by Wives corroborates: "All our five helplines are clogged with calls from men being blackmailed



Illustration: JAYANTO

with the threat of this new law. Software professionals, doctors, service-class men — everyone is calling," he says.

The most common complaint? The men say that their wives are demanding that they abandon their parents and start living separately. "Domestic violence should be dealt with, but this Act is bound to be misused," says Sarkar, adding that the Act, strangely, does not account for vio-

lence by a woman against a woman. He seeks a "domestic harmony act" where both genders are accountable for violence at home.

"An equal gender law would be ideal," agrees Renuka Chowdhury, minister for women and child development. "But there is simply too much physical evidence to prove that it is mainly the woman who suffers at the hands of man."

The misuse of the anti-dowry law made SIFF set up a website (www.498a.org) to counsel and give legal advice to men and their families who have been implicated falsely; it plans to set up a similar website relating to the new Act.

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