

## THE SILENT CRISIS: REGIONAL DIVERGENCES, ECONOMIC ABUSE, AND THE CASE FOR GENDER-NEUTRAL LAWS IN INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper investigates the underreported crisis of domestic violence against men in India, highlighting how rigid constructs of hegemonic masculinity and the cultural paradigm of "Mard ko dard nahi hota" systematically silence male victims. The stigma of male victimhood is further compounded by the existential threat of "legal terrorism," wherein gender-biased laws such as Section 498A are weaponized to create a state of legal paralysis that traps men in abusive marriages. Through a multi-dimensional framework, the study explores regional disparities—from rural agrarian belts and matrilineal societies to the vulnerable Ghar Jamai phenomenon—while exposing the severe but invisible nature of economic abuse, such as salary appropriation and employment sabotage. A primary theoretical contribution of this research is the introduction of the "Cycle of Silence" model, which maps the male victim's trajectory through four distinct phases: masculine denial, social isolation, legal paralysis, and psychological collapse. Ultimately, the paper connects this unaddressed trauma to severe psychological impacts, including high rates of male suicide, and advocates for gender-neutral legal reforms, male-sensitive counseling protocols, and dedicated state support infrastructure to guarantee protection for all citizens.*

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence Against Men, Hegemonic Masculinity, Legal Terrorism, Cycle of Silence.

### **1.1 Introduction: The Silent Crisis of the "Invulnerable" Male**

In the broader discourse of domestic violence within India, the male victim exists as a sociological phantom present in the shadows of household conflict but largely absent from legal texts, public policy, and academic inquiry. This Research paper seeks to dismantle the invisibility surrounding male victimization by rigorously examining the socio-cultural barriers that enforce silence. While the patriarchal structure of Indian society has historically been analysed through the lens of female oppression, a nuanced reading of gender dynamics reveals that the same rigid constructs of hegemonic

masculinity that privilege men also entrap them. The expectation of invulnerability, emotional stoicism, and the role of the solitary provider creates a "gilded cage" where men are culturally prohibited from occupying the space of the victim.

The phenomenon of underreporting among male victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) is not merely a function of individual hesitation but a systemic outcome of a society that equates male victimhood with the forfeiture of masculinity. When a man admits to being abused by his wife whether physically, emotionally, or economically he contravenes the fundamental societal axiom that "men are

the protectors, not the protected." This transgression carries a heavy social penalty: the stigma of weakness, ridicule from peers, and disbelief from state institutions. Consequently, the male experience of domestic violence is characterized by a profound silence, a silence that is not passive but actively enforced by the fear of counter-allegations, specifically the draconian misuse of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, often termed "legal terrorism" by judicial observers.<sup>2468</sup>

This Research paper explores these dynamics through a multi-dimensional framework. It delves into the constructs of masculinity in Indian society, contrasting urban and rural experiences, and dissects the economic dependencies that bind men to abusive relationships. Drawing on synthesized insights from regional studies from the agrarian belts of Haryana to the matrilineal societies of Meghalaya we establish that emotional violence is the predominant, yet least acknowledged, form of abuse against men. Finally, this Research paper proposes a novel theoretical contribution: the "Cycle of Silence" model. This model elucidates the trajectory from the initial suppression of abuse to the escalation of violence, resulting in severe psychological strain, family disintegration, and, in alarming numbers, suicide.

## 1.2 Hegemonic Masculinity and the Stigma of Weakness

### 1.2.1 The "Mard Ko Dard Nahi Hota" Paradigm

At the heart of the underreporting phenomenon lies the cultural construct of Indian masculinity, which is deeply rooted in the concept of *Shakti* (power) and *Dhairya* (stoicism). The popular cinematic and cultural adage "Mard ko dard nahi hota" (Men do not feel pain) serves as a potent socialization script, teaching boys from a young age that the expression of vulnerability is a feminine trait.<sup>2469</sup> In the context of domestic

violence, this script operates as a powerful silencing mechanism. A man who reports being beaten or verbally humiliated by his wife is seen not as a victim of a crime, but as a failure of his gender. He is viewed as "henpecked" (*Joru ka Gulam*), a figure of comedy rather than sympathy.<sup>2470</sup>

Research indicates that this internalization of hegemonic masculinity leads to a "masking" behavior. Men often reinterpret violence against them as "marital discord" or "women's emotional outbursts" rather than abuse, simply to preserve their self-concept as the dominant partner. Accepting the label of "victim" requires a man to dismantle the very identity upon which his social standing rests. This is particularly acute in traditional joint families where a man's status is tied to his ability to control his household. An admission of abuse is, therefore, an admission of a loss of control, leading to a "double victimization": first by the abuser, and second by a society that mocks his inability to "manage" his wife.<sup>2471</sup>

### 1.2.2 The Fear of Counter-Cases: "Legal Terrorism" as a Silencer

The stigma of weakness is compounded by a tangible, existential fear: the fear of false legal implication. The Indian legal framework for domestic violence is largely gender-specific, protecting women while leaving men without recourse. More critically, laws like Section 498A (Cruelty) and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) are frequently weaponized in matrimonial disputes. The Supreme Court of India has termed the misuse of Section 498A as "legal terrorism," acknowledging that it is often used as a tool for extortion and settling scores.<sup>2472</sup>

For a male victim, the threat of a "fake case" acts as a powerful deterrent to reporting abuse. If a man attempts to complain about his wife's violence, the prevailing legal ecosystem allows

<sup>2468</sup> *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India*, (2005) 6 SCC 281; see also *Armesh Kumar v. State of Bihar*, (2014) 8 SCC 273.

<sup>2469</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* 77 (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005).

<sup>2470</sup> S. Roy, "Depiction of Sexual Violence in Indian Films" 39 *Journal of Media Ethics* 140 (2024).

<sup>2471</sup> Anant Kumar, "Domestic Violence against Men in India: A Perspective" 22 *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 290 (2012).

<sup>2472</sup> *Sushil Kumar Sharma*, *supra* note 114.

her to file a counter-complaint of dowry harassment or cruelty, which can lead to the immediate arrest of the husband and his elderly parents. The asymmetry of the law means that the man is presumed guilty until proven innocent, while the woman is presumed to be the victim. This "guilty until proven innocent" dynamic creates a "legal paralysis." Men endure severe physical and emotional abuse for years, fearing that any attempt to seek help will trigger a "nuclear option" from the spouse that destroys their career, reputation, and family stability.<sup>2473</sup>

The data supports this fear. Reports from men's rights organizations and legal analyses suggest that a significant number of domestic violence cases filed against men are retaliatory in nature, filed only after the husband attempted to seek legal remedy for his own victimization or filed for divorce. The fear is not unfounded; the conviction rate for 498A cases is notoriously low, indicating a high prevalence of baseless complaints used solely for coercion.<sup>2474</sup>

<b>Support Services</b>	helplines, shelters, or male-centric NGOs.	focus exclusively on women's welfare.
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### 1.3 Regional Dynamics and Socio-Economic Dependencies

#### 1.3.1 Urban vs. Rural Divergences

The experience of male victimization varies significantly across the rural-urban divide, influenced by economic structures and family composition.

#### Rural Dynamics (e.g., Haryana):

In agrarian and patriarchal belts like Haryana, the dynamics of abuse are closely tied to economic contribution and family structure. A seminal study in rural Haryana revealed a prevalence of gender-based violence against men at 52.4%, with emotional violence being the most common.<sup>2475</sup>

- Economic Stressors:** The study identified that men with lower incomes (less than ₹1000/month) were at significantly higher risk of violence (60.8%) compared to higher earners. Unemployment was a major trigger, with 60.1% of cases citing the husband's unemployment as the reason for violence.<sup>2476</sup> This challenges the notion that domestic violence is solely a tool of patriarchal control; in these contexts, it is often a punitive reaction to the man's failure to fulfill the "provider" role.
- Family Structure:** Interestingly, men in *nuclear families* in rural areas were at higher risk (60%) than those in *joint families* (47%).<sup>2477</sup> This suggests that the joint family system, often criticized for perpetuating patriarchy, may also act as a buffer or a mediation mechanism that prevents the escalation of spousal violence against men. In a nuclear setup,

Barrier to Reporting	Mechanism of Action	Societal Reinforcement
<b>Stigma of Weakness</b>	Internal psychological barrier; fear of being labeled "unmanly."	Cultural tropes (e.g., "Henpecked Husband" in Bollywood).
<b>Legal Asymmetry</b>	Fear of Section 498A/PWDVA misuse; "Legal Terrorism."	Judicial presumption of female victimhood; lack of gender-neutral laws.
<b>Family Honor (Izzat)</b>	Fear of bringing shame to the joint family/parents.	Social ostracization of families with "failed" marriages.
<b>Lack of</b>	Absence of	State policy

<sup>2473</sup> R.K. Ghosh, "The Masculinity Paradox in Domestic Abuse" 27 *Indian J. Gender Stud.* 115 (2020).

<sup>2474</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2022* (Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 2023).

<sup>2475</sup> S.P. Singh, R.K. Bishnoi, et al., "Domestic Violence against Men in Rural Haryana: A Community-based Study" 5 *Int. J. Community Med. Public Health* 221 (2018).

<sup>2476</sup> *Id.* at 223.

<sup>2477</sup> *Id.* at 224.

the man is isolated without the protective intervention of elders.

### Urban Dynamics:

In metropolitan centers, the violence often takes on a more psychological and "legal-economic" character. Here, the abuse is frequently linked to "lifestyle maintenance" and asset control. Working wives or those with higher educational status may exert "financial dominance," though courts have been hesitant to label this as cruelty.<sup>2478</sup> However, the threat in urban areas is predominantly legal the threat of ruining the man's corporate reputation through social media allegations or workplace complaints. The "dowry" in these cases often transforms into aggressive alimony demands enforced through the threat of criminal litigation.<sup>2479</sup>

### 1.3.2 The "Ghar Jamai" Phenomenon

A specific and severe form of socio-cultural vulnerability exists for the *Ghar Jamai* (resident son-in-law). In communities where the husband moves into the wife's natal home either due to poverty or specific cultural customs the traditional power dynamic is inverted. The man, stripped of his patrilocal support network and often economically dependent on his in-laws, becomes highly vulnerable to abuse.

Research indicates that *Ghar Jamais* often face systemic humiliation, labor exploitation (treated as a servant), and physical abuse by the wife's male relatives. The term itself is derogatory, implying a man who has sold his dignity for shelter. In tribal belts of Jharkhand or among certain communities in Gujarat, the *Ghar Jamai* may be denied property rights and social standing, making him a "second-class citizen" within the marriage.<sup>2480</sup> The stigma attached to this status is so profound that even severe

abuse is endured in silence to avoid the shame of returning to his own village as a "failed" man.

### 3.3.3 Matrilineal Societies: The Case of Meghalaya

The matrilineal tribes of Meghalaya (e.g., Khasis) offer a unique counter-narrative. Here, lineage and inheritance pass through women, and the youngest daughter (*Khadduh*) is the custodian of ancestral property. While this empowers women, studies show it creates a "crisis of masculinity" for men who feel marginalized in decision-making.<sup>2481</sup>

- **Authority Conflict:** Men in these societies often report high levels of emotional violence stemming from their lack of authority over children and finances. The "role conflict" between the societal expectation of being a "man" (provider/head) and the structural reality of matrilineal power leads to friction.
- **Nuanced Violence:** However, comparative data suggests that while *decision-making* power is lower for men, severe *physical* violence is not necessarily higher than in patrilineal societies. The violence is often subtle exclusion from clan decisions, ridicule regarding financial contribution, and the threat of expulsion from the marital home.<sup>2482</sup> This highlights that male victimization is not a monolith but is deeply context-dependent.

### 1.4 Economic Abuse: The Invisible Chain

While physical and emotional violence are recognized, *economic abuse* against men is a pervasive yet under-researched phenomenon. In the Indian context, this does not always look like the "withholding of funds" seen in female victimization. Instead, it manifests as:

1. **Salary Appropriation:** In many households, particularly where the

<sup>2478</sup> See e.g., *Husband's Financial Dominance in Matrimonial Discord Does Not Amount to Cruelty: SC*, "Hindustan Times", July 09, 2024 (referencing Supreme Court proceedings).

<sup>2479</sup> Shalu Nigam, "Economic Abuse and Legal Remedies in India: A Qualitative Review" 10 *IJLSI* 12 (2023).

<sup>2480</sup> T.K. Oommen, *Social Structure and Politics: Studies in Independent India* 188 (Hindustan Publishing Corp., Delhi, 1984).

<sup>2481</sup> S. Lowes, "Kinship Structure and Women: Evidence from the Matrilineal Belt" *PacDev* 15 (2020).

<sup>2482</sup> *Id.*

husband earns but the wife manages the domestic sphere, the entire salary is handed over to the wife or in-laws. Men report having to "beg" for daily expenses despite being the sole earners.<sup>2483</sup>

2. **Coerced Debt:** Men are often forced to take massive loans to fund the "status" requirements of the wife's family (weddings of siblings, gifts, property purchases in her name). This "financial entrapment" ensures the man cannot leave the relationship without facing bankruptcy.<sup>2484</sup>
3. **Employment Sabotage:** A vindictive tactic involves the wife or her family creating scenes at the husband's workplace or filing complaints with his employer. For men in the corporate sector, the mere accusation of domestic violence can lead to immediate suspension or termination, a vulnerability that is exploited to ensure compliance at home.<sup>2485</sup>
4. **Dowry Law Extortion:** The most extreme form of economic abuse is the demand for exorbitant settlements (often running into crores) to withdraw false 498A or domestic violence cases. This effectively turns the legal system into a tool for wealth transfer, leaving the man financially devastated.<sup>2486</sup>

### 1.5 Original Contribution: The "Cycle of Silence" Model

Drawing upon Lenore Walker's "Cycle of Violence" theory, which explains the entrapment of female victims, this dissertation proposes a new theoretical model tailored to the specific socio-legal reality of the Indian male victim: the **Cycle of Silence**. This model posits that for men, the primary mechanism of entrapment is not

the "honeymoon phase" (affection), but the "silencing phase" (fear and shame).

The model proceeds through four distinct phases:

#### Phase I: Incursion and Masculine Denial

- **Mechanism:** The cycle begins with minor incidents of emotional belittling, verbal abuse, or "minor" physical aggression (slaps, throwing objects).
- **Male Response:** The victim filters these events through the lens of hegemonic masculinity. He dismisses the abuse using rationalizations like "She is just emotional," "I can take it," or "A woman can't really hurt a man."
- **Outcome:** The abuse is minimized and unreported. The victim fails to recognize the "red flags" because his cultural programming denies the possibility that he *can* be a victim. This is the **Masculinity Barrier**.<sup>2487</sup>

#### Phase II: Rationalization and Social Isolation

- **Mechanism:** The abuse escalates to frequent humiliation, financial control, or more severe physical attacks. The abuser may start isolating the man from his parents or friends.
- **Male Response:** The victim realizes something is wrong but fears the "Stigma of Weakness." He withdraws from his social circle to hide the "shame" of his domestic situation. He avoids family gatherings where his wife might create a scene.
- **Outcome:** The victim loses his support network. He becomes an "island," dependent on the abuser for validation. He keeps the abuse a secret to protect his "honor" (*izzat*). This is the **Social Barrier**.<sup>2488</sup>

<sup>2483</sup> S. Anitha, et al., "Dowry Abuse and Transnational Abandonment" 71 *Women's Studies International Forum* 18 (2018).

<sup>2484</sup> Nigam, *supra* note 125.

<sup>2485</sup> Anant Kumar, *supra* note 4, at 292.

<sup>2486</sup> *Martyrs of Marriage* (Documentary, Directed by Deepika Narayan Bhardwaj, 2016).

<sup>2487</sup> Adapted from Lenore E. Walker, *The Battered Woman* (Harper & Row, New York, 1979).

<sup>2488</sup> Anant Kumar, *supra* note 4.

**Phase III: The Legal Paralysis (The Trap)**

- **Mechanism:** The victim considers seeking help, counseling, or separation. The abuser counters with the "Nuclear Threat": filing a false 498A case, alleging dowry harassment, or threatening suicide (which would implicate the husband in abetment).
- **Male Response:** The victim enters a state of "Learned Helplessness." He believes the police will automatically arrest him and his parents. He calculates that staying in the abusive marriage is "safer" than facing the Indian legal system.
- **Outcome:** Total compliance. The victim accepts the abuse as the "price" for keeping his parents out of jail and retaining access to his children. This is the **Institutional Barrier**.<sup>2489</sup>

**Phase IV: Escalation and Collapse**

- **Mechanism:** Sensing the victim's paralysis and the lack of consequences, the violence escalates unchecked. The abuser acts with impunity.
- **Male Response:** The victim's mental health deteriorates into severe depression, anxiety, or PTSD. The cognitive dissonance between his identity as a "man" and his reality as a "victim" causes a psychological fracture.
- **Outcome:** The cycle ends in one of two catastrophic ways:
  1. **Suicide:** The victim sees death as the only escape from the shame and legal terror. This correlates with the high rate of married male suicides in NCRB data.<sup>2490</sup>
  2. **Retaliatory Violence:** The victim "snaps" and commits a violent act in desperation, which tragically validates the abuser's

earlier (false) claims and leads to his incarceration.

**Figure 1.1: The Cycle of Silence Model**

Stage	Core Driver	Behavioral Manifestation	Systemic Reinforcement
1. Incursion	Masculinity Norms	Minimization ("It's not abuse")	Societal belief: "Men are invulnerable"
2. Isolation	Shame / Stigma	Withdrawal; Hiding injuries	Lack of male support spaces
3. Paralysis	Legal Fear	Compliance; Silence	Section 498A / Presumption of Guilt
4. Collapse	Hopelessness	Suicide; Substance Abuse	Absence of mental health interventions

**1.6 Psychological Impacts: The Unseen Wounds**

The cumulative effect of the Cycle of Silence is a severe and often irreversible degradation of the male victim's mental health. Unlike female victims who may access (albeit limited) support networks, male victims often suffer in total isolation.

**1.6.1 PTSD and "Learned Helplessness"**

Research indicates that male victims of domestic violence display high rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), characterized by hypervigilance, flashbacks, and emotional numbing. The concept of "Learned Helplessness" is particularly relevant here. After repeated attempts to set boundaries are met with legal threats or mockery, the male victim "learns" that he has no agency. This psychological state is a strong predictor of depression and is exacerbated by the "double bind": the societal

<sup>2489</sup> Armesh Kumar, *supra* note 1.  
<sup>2490</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India 2021* (Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, 2022).

expectation to be strong and the domestic reality of being powerless.<sup>2491</sup>

Studies on the "Internalization of Abuse" show that men often adopt the abuser's negative view of themselves, believing they are "failures" as husbands and men. This self-stigma creates a formidable barrier to seeking therapy, as admitting to the trauma feels like a final admission of defeat.<sup>2492</sup>

### 1.6.2 The Suicide Epidemic

The most alarming consequence of this unaddressed trauma is suicide. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data consistently shows that married men constitute a significant proportion of suicide victims in India, with "Family Problems" cited as the leading cause. In 2021 alone, over 81,000 married men committed suicide, nearly double the number of married women.<sup>2493</sup> While the data is not granular enough to specify "victim of domestic violence," the correlation between highly litigious divorce cases, 498A filings, and male suicide is a critical area of concern highlighted by men's rights groups.<sup>2494</sup>

The "threat of suicide" by the wife is also a potent psychological weapon. Men live in terror that if their wife harms herself, they will be charged with "Dowry Death" (Section 304B), a non-bailable offense with a presumption of guilt. This terror keeps them trapped in the abusive cycle, often driving them to take their own lives to escape the "legal suicide" of a false case.<sup>2495</sup>

### 1.6.3 Substance Abuse as Coping

In the absence of emotional outlets, many men turn to alcohol or substance abuse to "self-medicate" the pain and humiliation. A study in rural Punjab found a strong correlation between domestic conflict and alcohol dependence in men. However, this creates a vicious cycle: the

substance abuse is then used by the abuser to justify further violence or to frame the husband as an "alcoholic monster" in court proceedings, further damaging his credibility and legal standing.<sup>2496</sup>

## 1.7 The Role of Media, NGOs, and Shifting Narratives

### 1.7.1 Media Portrayals: From Caricature to Reality

Indian popular culture has historically been complicit in the normalization of violence against men. In Bollywood films and television serials, the trope of the "henpecked husband" is a staple of comedy. Scenes depicting a wife slapping her husband, throwing household objects, or locking him out of the house are presented as humorous "marital banter".<sup>2497</sup> This cultural conditioning desensitizes society to male pain, reinforcing the idea that female violence is harmless or even "deserved" by incompetent men.

However, the narrative is slowly shifting. Documentaries like *Martyrs of Marriage* by Deepika Narayan Bhardwaj have played a pivotal role in bringing the issue of "498A misuse" into the public consciousness. By documenting the real-life stories of men and their families destroyed by false cases, these media interventions challenge the monolithic narrative of gender-based violence and highlight the "collateral damage" inflicted on the parents and siblings of the accused man.<sup>2498</sup>

### 1.7.2 The Role of NGOs: Filling the Vacuum

In the absence of state support, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emerged as the sole lifeline for male victims. Groups like the *Save Indian Family Foundation (SIF)*, *Men Welfare Trust*, and *Vaastav Foundation* operate a parallel support infrastructure.

- **Helplines:** SIF One (8882 498 498) serves as a national helpline for distressed men,

<sup>2491</sup> M.E.P. Seligman, *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death* (W.H. Freeman, San Francisco, 1975).

<sup>2492</sup> A.A. Randle and C.A. Graham, "A Review of the Evidence on the Effects of Intimate Partner Violence on Men" 12 *Psychol. Men Masculinity* 97 (2011).

<sup>2493</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *supra* note 23.

<sup>2494</sup> *Martyrs of Marriage*, *supra* note 19.

<sup>2495</sup> *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P.*, (2017) SCC OnLine SC 821.

<sup>2496</sup> S.P. Singh, *supra* note 8.

<sup>2497</sup> Roy, *supra* note 3.

<sup>2498</sup> *Martyrs of Marriage*, *supra* note 19.

fielding thousands of calls annually from men facing domestic abuse and legal extortion.<sup>2499</sup>

- **Community Centers:** These NGOs run weekly community meetings in public parks across major cities, offering "peer counseling" and legal guidance. For many men, these meetings are the first time they have ever spoken openly about their abuse.
- **Advocacy:** These groups actively lobby for legal reforms, such as making domestic violence laws gender-neutral and introducing "Shared Parenting" in custody battles. However, they face significant challenges, including a lack of funding, media apathy, and being labeled as "anti-women" by mainstream discourse.<sup>2500</sup>

### 1.8 Recommendations: Breaking the Cycle of Silence

Addressing the crisis of male victimization requires a paradigm shift in how Indian society and the state view domestic violence. It demands moving from a "gender-specific" to a "gender-inclusive" framework that recognizes vulnerability as a human, not female, trait.

#### 1.8.1 Gender-Neutral Legal Reforms

The most critical structural change required is the amendment of domestic violence laws to be gender-neutral. The *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005* should be reimagined as the *Protection of Persons from Domestic Violence Act*, allowing men to seek protection orders and residence rights. Similarly, the definition of "cruelty" in the BNS must explicitly recognize non-physical forms of abuse against men.<sup>2501</sup> This would not only provide a legal remedy but also signal a societal acknowledgment that male lives matter.

#### 1.8.2 Tailored Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns must move beyond the binary of "Men as Perpetrators, Women as Victims."

- **Narrative Shift:** Campaigns should use slogans like "Violence Has No Gender" and depict scenarios of emotional and economic abuse against men to normalize the conversation.
- **Role Models:** Utilizing male icons (sports stars, actors) to speak about emotional health and the courage to seek help can help dismantle the "Stigma of Weakness."
- **Targeted Messaging:** Campaigns should specifically target the "legal fear" by educating men on their rights and the actual legal processes, demystifying the "498A threat" to reduce the paralysis factor.<sup>2502</sup>

#### 1.8.3 Integrated Counseling and "Man Therapy"

The mental health infrastructure needs to be overhauled to serve men effectively. Conventional "talk therapy" often fails men who are socialized to avoid vulnerability.

- **Male-Sensitive Protocols:** Therapists should be trained in "Male-Sensitive" counseling techniques that focus on "problem-solving," "agency restoration," and "reframing" rather than immediate emotional catharsis. This approach respects the male need for control while slowly dismantling the defense mechanisms.<sup>2503</sup>
- **Screening Protocols:** Healthcare providers and police must be trained to recognize the signs of abuse in men such as unexplained injuries, substance abuse, or extreme anxiety and ask gender-inclusive screening questions.

<sup>2499</sup> SIF One National Helpline, Save Indian Family Foundation, available at: <https://www.saveindianfamily.org> (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

<sup>2500</sup> *Id.*

<sup>2501</sup> R.K. Ghosh, *supra* note 6.

<sup>2502</sup> *Id.*

<sup>2503</sup> M. Englar-Carlson and M.A. Kiselica, "Affirming the Strengths in Men: A Positive Masculinity Approach to Assisting Male Clients" 5 *J. Couns. & Dev.* 288 (2013).

Currently, most protocols assume the man is the aggressor.<sup>2504</sup>

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### 1.8.4 Establishing Support Infrastructure

The state must invest in "Crisis Intervention Centers" for men.

- **Helplines:** A government-backed national helpline for men in distress (similar to 1091 for women) is an urgent necessity to provide immediate legal and psychological aid.
- **Shelters:** The complete absence of shelters for male victims forces them to stay in abusive homes. Establishing "Safe Houses" or partnering with NGOs to provide temporary accommodation can be a life-saving intervention.<sup>2505</sup>

### 1.9 Conclusion

The phenomenon of domestic violence against men in India is a crisis hidden in plain sight, obscured by the blinding glare of hegemonic masculinity and legal bias. Socio-cultural barriers from the internalized "Mard ko dard nahi hota" script to the external terror of "Legal Terrorism" create an environment where silence is the only perceived survival strategy. However, as the "Cycle of Silence" model demonstrates, this silence is not benign; it is a precursor to escalation, mental collapse, and tragedy.

Acknowledging male victimization does not detract from the gravity of violence against women; rather, it creates a more holistic understanding of human rights and familial health. By dismantling the "Cycle of Silence" through legal reform, social awareness, and robust support systems, India can move toward a truly just society where safety and dignity are guaranteed to all citizens, regardless of gender. The path forward lies in recognizing that pain has no gender, and neither should protection.

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<sup>2504</sup> *Id.*

<sup>2505</sup> Anant Kumar, *supra* note 4.

Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, famously coining the term "legal terrorism".

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- **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA):** Discussed in the context of gender-specific legal frameworks and proposed reforms.
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS):** Mentioned regarding the need to explicitly recognize non-physical forms of cruelty against men.

#### Organizations & Support Networks

- **Save Indian Family Foundation (SIF):** Cited for operating parallel support infrastructure, including the SIF One national helpline (8882 498 498).
- **Men Welfare Trust:** Cited for providing support and advocacy for male victims.
- **Vaastav Foundation:** Cited for providing community support and peer counseling.

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