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CRIMINOLOGICAL BLIND SPOTS: THE UNDERSTUDIED NEXUS OF FEMALE PERPETRATED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MALE VICTIMISATION

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Abstract

"Violence knows no gender, but justice often does". Despite the recognition of Domestic Violence as an issue of public health and the judicial system, male victims of this crime remain highly underrepresented in the academic research, policy formation and legal framework. Data from national surveys suggest that approximately one in every four cases of domestic violence involves male victims, although this varies by country (CDC, 2010; ONS, 2020). However, social expectations around masculinity, fear of being labelled as frail and institutional neglect often prevent men from reporting abuse or accessing legal services (Forsberg, 2014). This paper inspects the criminological blind spots in domestic violence, focusing on the dual phenomena of female-perpetrated abuse and male victimisation.

Concurrently, this study explores the neglected criminological aspect of female offenders, who have been traditionally represented as the weak gendered victims of dominant males. This gender exclusion extends to the legal settings, where statutes such as Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, Dowry Prohibition Act,1961 and other similar laws have been enacted whose focus is primarily on female victimhood, excluding men from equal legal recourse (Rani & Meenakshi, 2023; Andrusiak, 2024).

The review further critiques traditional criminological theories such as feminist criminology which fails to address male victims, though perspectives like critical victimology offers a more balanced framework but remains unutilized in policy formation (Beel, 2013).

This paper concludes by advocating a paradigm shift toward gender-neutral justice, incorporating both male victimisation and female offending within criminological theory, domestic violence legislation, and victim service delivery.

Keywords: *domestic violence, male victimization, female offending, gender exclusive laws, , gender-neutral justice.*

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence has historically been viewed by a gendered lens, often casting men as perpetrators and women as victims of their violent crimes. While this concept emerged as a response to the legitimate historical abuse and inequalities faced by females by male perpetrators, it has unwittingly created blind spots in both law and policy especially regarding male victims and female offenders. Over the past decade, significant legal reform and policies have focused around the protection of women creating an institutional asymmetry that has left males unacknowledged and underserved in the context of domestic violence (Peraica et al., 2017).

This gender exclusion is not limited to social perception but also extends to the legal framework. Legal systems in many countries including India legislate domestic violence frameworks that exclude male victims, offering no protection to the male who face emotional, physical or legal abuse from their female partners. For instance, the *Protection of Women from Domestic violence Act (2005)* (The Protection of

Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005) recognizes and protects only female victims, despite the mounting evidence of male victims who also suffer from intimate partner violence (Singh & Rani, 2023). Furthermore, In the court of law and policing, female perpetrators are seen through a lenient lens either seen as acting in self-defence or excused due to gender norms that denies women with criminal intent (Takamatsu, 2004). This gender exclusion is reinforced by cultural stereotypes and gender role expectations, where it is hard to believe that a woman can commit heinous offences and men can become victims of female perpetrators, which is why when males report abuse, they are ridiculed, disbelieved or blamed that further discourages them to seek help (Bray, 2011; Forsberg, 2014).

Despite the growing academic progress, mainstream criminological theories fall short to include male victimization. Feminist criminology, while instrumental in highlighting structural violence against women, portrays men mostly as aggressors and as dominant perpetrators leaving no space for male victims (Graham-Kevan, 2007). Similarly, labelling theory rarely explores how male victims are disbelieved due to their hegemonic masculinity (Connel, 1995).
The power control theory emphasises on male dominance in family structures, reinforcing the assumption that men cannot be vulnerable. More inclusive theories such as critical victimology, argue that victimhood transcends over all the genders, but these remain underutilized in both research and policy (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005).

This paper seeks -:

1) To examine the gaps in criminological theories advocating to male victimization.
2) To explore the typology and underlying causes of female criminality.
3) To examine the causes of male victimization.
4) To examine the institutional and legal bias in domestic violence laws.
5) Advocate gender inclusive reforms in theories, laws and victim services.

This study is divided into 4 main sections. Firstly, gaps in the existing traditional criminological theories, Secondly, female criminality followed by male victimization and Lastly implications for research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, crime has been viewed as an act that is primarily committed by males and has been conceptualized through a male- centric lens. This perspective emerged from the traditional criminological theories that focused mostly on female victimhood and that crime is a product of masculine traits such as aggression and dominance. Female criminality, when acknowledged, is viewed as a deviation from feminine roles but not as a societal issue that needs theoretical explanation (Gwynn, 2009). As a result, traditional criminological theories failed to address both male victimization and female victimization therefore solidifying gender exclusion in the theoretical frameworks.
Conventional criminological theories such as strain theory, social control theory and labelling theory have historically marginalized gender dynamics. When these theories were included in the criminological jurisprudence, the main objective of the pioneers was to draw a comparison between males and females on the intent of committing crime. These perspectives while being androcentric, also greatly neglect the male experience of violence, particularly in domestic context. For instance, labelling theory has been rarely applied to understand how male victims of domestic violence are delegitimized or dismissed due to cultural norms of the society (Whiteley, 2014).
One of the most glaring omissions in both the fields of criminology as well as law is the lack of inclusivity for male victims of domestic abuse, emotional abuse, sexual coercion and false allegations. These limitations show a broader societal reluctance to accept male vulnerability which in turn influence both policy inaction and service inadequacy. Feminist theories have played an important role in recognizing institutional exclusions but it has not covered aspects of how patriarchal expectations also harm men, particularly framing them as inherently aggressive or incapable of vulnerability (Ugwudike, 2021).
Additionally, empirical studies have shown that along with female victimization in the public setting, men also experience higher rates of violence especially in public by strangers. These patterns are often overlooked or under theorized in mainstream criminological models, revealing a gender ratio problem (Lin, 2015).
Modern criminological models are beginning to recognize the need for a more inclusive,

intersectional framework that not only considers female victimization but also male suffering, LGBTQ+ experiences and non-binary identities. Scholars increasingly argue for a more gender-neutral approach in both criminological and legal fields, this includes calls for the revision of outdated legal definitions, broaden victim services and incorporate studies of masculine behaviours into criminological discourse (Belknap, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a narrative literature review methodology to critically examine the underrepresented domains of female criminality and male victimization in the criminological discourse and legal frameworks. A narrative review approach is adopted for a broad, interpretive synthesis of existing theoretical, legal and empirical research across disciplines including criminology, sociology, law, psychology and gender studies.

Search Strategy & Sources: relevant literature was gathered through searches on academic databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, SSRN, PubMed, SCC Online and Manu Patra. Search term included combinations of:

- "Female criminality", "male victims of domestic violence", "gender exclusion in criminology", feminist criminology", "gender-neutral laws", "masculinity and victimization", "false allegations", and "comparative domestic violence law".

Additionally, statutory legal frameworks and government reports were reviewed including-

- The Protection of Women from. Domestic Violence Act (2005).
- Section 85 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023).
- Comparative legal frameworks such as the Violence Against Women Act (U.S.) and the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (UK)
- Reports from organisations such as WHO, NCRB and the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW).

Inclusion Criteria:

- Scholarly articles and reports published between 1990 and 2024.
- Literature focused on female offending, male victimization and gender exclusion in law and criminology.
- Theoretical, empirical and legal analyses. Exclusion Criteria:
- Non-peer reviewed blog posts or opinion articles.
- Literature focused only on female victimization without gender comparison.
- Studying lacking relevance to the Indian context or comparative international insights. The selected data was analysed using a thematic synthesis approach and based on which the information was categorized into different sections.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

As this review is based solely on secondary data, no human participants were involved, as thus no formal ethical approval was required. All the data sources were publicly available and ethically cited and reviewed with sensitivity to topics involving abusee, victimization and gender identity.

LIMITATIONS:

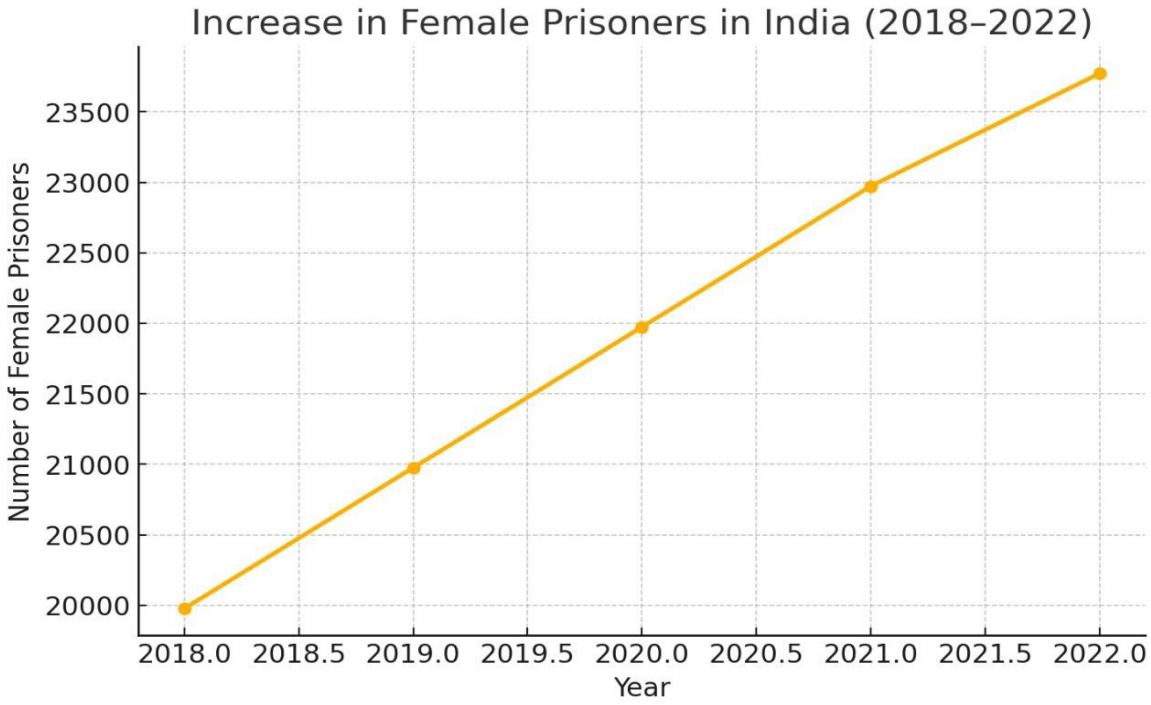
The review is limited by the scarcity of empirical research on male victimization in India and the underreporting of cases due to social stigma.

RETHINKING FEMALE CRIMINALITY: PATTERNS, PERCEPTIONS & REALITIES

For much of criminological history, studies of crime have been overwhelmingly centred on male offenders, with female criminality regarded as an exceptional deviation. Women were long viewed as morally superior and inherently less capable of criminal behaviour, an assumption reinforced by cultural stereotypes and traditional theories (Heidenson, 1991). However, as women's socio-economic roles evolve, so too does their participation in both public and domestic spheres of crime.

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The *National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)* data reveals that while women constitute a small fraction of India's total prison population, their numbers are steadily rising. According to Prison Statistics India, 2022, out of 5,54,034 inmates, 23,772 were women, representing 4.3% of the total prison population. A significant majority of these women, over 77% are undertrials. As per the Prison Satistics India (2022), since 2018, there has been an increase of 19% in the female prisoners lodged in Indian jails. It indicates delayed justice and socio-economic vulnerabilities that drive women into conflict with the law. These figures dispel the myth that women rarely engage in serious offences and underscore the importance of understanding female offending as distinct criminological phenomenon, not merely a derivative of male criminality.
The data also highlights how domestic and relational contexts female offending patterns. Many women are implicated in offences arising from interpersonal conflicts or socio-economic distress rather than organised or premediated crime (Tabassum & Chakrabarty, 2024).



- Types of Crimes Committed by Females

1) Property & Economic Crimes: Women are excessively involved in economic and property related crimes. These offences are often linked to poverty, single motherhood or economic marginalization. Studies show that females involved in such crimes often
seek financial survival or independence from their spouse (Janeksela, 1997; McCarthy, 1980).

2) Drug Related Crimes: Female offenders are also highly represented in drug related crimes such as trafficking, possession and other crimes to sustain addiction. Studies show that female criminality is deeply related to their substance abuse addiction, reliability or psychological vulnerability (Byqvist, 1999; Weissman & File, 1976).

3) Violent Crimes: Though less frequent when compared to males, females do commit violent crimes such as assault, domestic violence and child abuse. These acts are often reactive and rarely premeditated and can often root from mental illness, self-defence or prior experience to abuse (Heidensohn, 1991). However, the changing patterns and numbers of female offenders for committing violent crimes are increasing (Tabassum
& Chakrabarty, 2024).

4) Sex Work & Exploitation Related Crimes: In some studies, especially in drug consuming female populations, they are often seen to engage in prostitution or transactional sex in order to support

themselves or their addiction. This is sometimes accompanied by minor thefts or frauds, which leads to a dual pattern of survival-based criminality (Weissman & File, 1976).

5) Domestic & Family-Linked Offences: Women also commit in the domestic context, including child abuse, parental abuse or violence against spouse and in laws. These offences are often underreported or are related to emotional breakdowns, yet research shows that these crimes are not that rare as commonly believed (D'Orbàn, 1971).

- **Psychological & Sociological Factors Influencing Female Criminality:** These perspectives emphasize that female criminality is not an isolated incident but one that is deeply rooted into the complex interplay of internal mental states and external social norms.

1) Psychological Factors- Studies suggest that female criminality is often rooted from history of emotional trauma, low self-esteem, depression and stress related disorders. These internal experiences often arise from sustained victimization, including childhood abuse or neglect, domestic violence or sexual assault. Emotional disbalance or post traumatic symptoms can contribute towards impulsive violence particularly in intimate or familial settings (Serkevych & Bronevytska, 2020).
Additionally, female inmates are reported to portray higher levels of guilt, shame or regret which suggests that the emotional consequences of crime are more deeply embedded in females when compared to males. These psychological states can create cycles of recidivism and reintegration in the society can become difficult for the female offender.

2) Sociological Factors- From a sociological perspective, factors such as poverty, lack of education, family dysfunction, unemployment and social or economic marginalization are dominant contributors to female criminality. Many females come from disadvantaged or low economic backgrounds where crime becomes a mode of survival and emotional expression (Mihaiu, 2013). Structural inequalities often limit women to avail opportunities and restraint from crime. Traditional gender roles may ironically contribute to crime, where women are expected to be caregivers and emotional anchors of the family, they may respond to extreme stress or exploitation by committing crimes such as domestic violence or child related offences (Kunts, 2023). The marginalization theory supports the view that as women are pushed to the periphery of social and economic systems, their likelihood in committing crime increases (Banarjee et al., 2015).

Female criminality is not only limited to these two factors but also extends to economic deprivation, substance abuse or traumatic histories.

- Media Portrayal of Female perpetrators

Despite the growing involvement of females in different ranges of crime, they are still underrepresented in mainstream media coverage. News reporting, crime documentaries, television portrayals overwhelmingly represent only male offenders are rarely focused on
female offenders, perpetuating the stereotype that crime is a male domain. When women are involved, their actions are often sensationalized, minimized or reframed.
Studies suggest that female offenders are less represented in the media when compared to their male counterparts, especially when it comes to violent or heinous crimes. This lack of visibility in the media leads to the social invisibility of female offenders, reinforcing the stereotype that women are less dangerous or less capable of committing crime (King, 2015). When women do appear in crime news, they are often represented through a reductive lens, such as being emotionally unstable, sexually deviant or manipulated by their male partners.
The media often portrays women by the triple stereotype framework, which is, they are either represented as "mad" (mentally unstable), "bad" (morally corrupt) or "sad" (emotionally broken). These portrayals reflect not just the nature of the crime but also the perceived violation of gender roles. Women are considered as "double deviants", because alongside violating laws they are also violating the feminine expectations of the society. Their actions are considered as a shocking betrayal of societal norms (Collins, 2016).

Furthermore, there is a clear racial bias in how female perpetrators are framed in media, where a white female offender is portrayed through a sympathetic lens, offering a narrative of acting in self-defence or with psychological justifications, in contrast a female offender of colour is portrayed more harshly with

fewer mitigating powers and more emphasis on criminal responsibility (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2016). Some portrayals also feminize female perpetrators by emphasizing on their motherhood or relationships, rather than on their criminal acts. This reduces the perception of their guilt and sustains the perception that female offenders commit crime as a result of an emotional outburst or a means of retaliation against the deviation caused by a man. Females are often represented as being driven by love, jealousy or maternal instincts which contrasts the calculative motives of crime attributed to men (Cecil, 2007).

Ultimately, the media's treatment of female offenders is marked by both underrepresentation and distortion. The low frequency of representation of female perpetrators and their invisibility in the public is becoming one of the major reasons for increased male victims and lack of gender-neutral laws.

Gender Exclusive Laws in India

India's legal framework for addressing domestic violence, family disputes, and sexual offences has undergone extensive reform to safeguard women from patriarchal oppression. However, this well-intentioned evolution has created gender-exclusive protections, where men, despite being victims of domestic or familial abuse are left outside the ambit of legal redress. This exclusion perpetuates the stereotype that only women can be victims and men must always be aggressors.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act [PWDVA], 2005) stands as a landmark in expanding the definition of domestic abuse to include physical, verbal, emotional, and economic harm. Yet, its statutory language protects only *"aggrieved women"* leaving male and transgender victims without any legal standing to seek protection orders, residence orders, or maintenance (Law Commission of India, Report No. 243, 2012). The absence of a gender-neutral equivalent means that male victims, even when facing sustained abuse, lack of shelters, helplines, and counselling mechanisms available to their female counterparts (Christaki et al., 2024; Ghumare, 2021).

Judicial interpretations further expose this imbalance. Under *Section 498A* of the *Indian Penal Code*, (Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 498A) a husband or his relatives can be arrested for alleged cruelty towards the wife, often based solely on the wife's statement. While this provision was designed to curb dowry harassment, courts have acknowledged its misuse. In *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India* (2005) 6 SCC 281, the Supreme Court observed that "legislative protection for women should not become a tool for harassment for the innocent." Later, in *Rajesh Sharma v. Sate of Uttar Pradesh* (2017) 8 SCC 746, the Court directed the formation of Family Welfare Committees to screen complaints before arrests, aiming to prevent arbitrary detentions and misuse. Reinforcing this, *Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar* (2014) 8 SCC 273, emphasized that arrests under *Section 498A* must follow due process, rejecting automatic presumption of guilt. These judicial safeguards underscore the need for structural balance in gendered legal frameworks. The *Law Commission of India* in multiple reports such as the Report No. 146 and 243, (Law Commission of India, 1993) also recognize the tendency of gender specific statutes to be applied indiscriminately and recommended mechanisms to prevent wrongful implications and ensure procedural fairness.

Family law too exhibits gendered presumptions. In *Gaurav Nagpal v. Sumedha Nagpal* (2009) 1 SCC 42, even though the Supreme Court reiterated that *"the welfare of the child is paramount,"* custody is routinely awarded to mothers, marginalising father's caregiving rights (Patel, 2022). This practice reflects the societal belief that caregiving is inherently feminine, a stereotype that overlooks the emotional and psychological capability of fathers to serve as primary caregivers.

Workplace protection lews mirror this asymmetry. *The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition & Redressal) Act, 2013* (The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace [Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal] Act, 2013) provides comprehensive protection for female employees but excludes males and LGBTQ+ victims from its ambit. This gender-exclusive framing leaves men vulnerable to workplace harassment without institutional safeguards or redressal mechanisms (Thakur, 2020).

The combined effects of these laws, judicial patterns, and institutional practices demonstrates how gender-exclusive legal structures reinforce patriarchal stereotypes under the guise of gender sensitivity.

MALE VICTIMIZATION: THE OVERLOOKED REALITY IN CRIMINOLOGY

In criminological frameworks and from a public point of view crime has always been a gendered aspect which sees men as perpetrators and women as victims. This binary model has helped to recognize

the underlying problems faced by women and the crimes committed against them but simultaneously, it has also created a blind spot in the systems that fails to recognize the male victims. Empirical evidence suggests that male victimisation remains an under- theorised and under-reported aspect of violence studies. NCRB's *Crime in India Report (2022)* notes that men constitute a significant proportion of homicide and assault victims, yet intimate partner violence against men rarely appears in official data. This underreporting results not from absence of abuse, but from cultural expectations of hegemonic masculinity that equate endurance with strength (Connell, 1995; Martin, 2016).

This is the fact that legal systems, public policy and victim services have historically been made around the assumption that females are victims and males are the offenders. In jurisdictions like India, and many other countries, domestic violence statutes and shelters often do not formally accommodate male victims, and police responses may lack gender neutrality or sensitivity. Male victims of domestic violence who do approach the legal system find their claims dismissed, minimized or turned against them (Barkhuizen, 2015).

- Types Of Crimes in which Males become Victims

Male victimization is a multidimensional issue that spans across both private and public settingsSome common types of crimes of which males are seen to become victims of are –

1) Violent Assault by Strangers:

Men are more likely to become victims of non-domestic violent assaults that take place in public settings such as streets, bars or during robberies. A study from Australia for instance shows that men face higher rates of physical assault in all categories except sexual assault and abduction (Bricknell et al., 2014).

2) Sexual Violence:

Although rarely acknowledged but males also become victims of sexual assault, as study from U.S. shows that only 16% male victims of sexual assault report the heinous crime to the law enforcement agencies due to the stigma, disbelief and lack of appropriate services (Walfield et al., 2024).

3) Emotional & Psychological Abuse:

Men in emotional abusive relationships often experience gaslighting, control over the partner, isolation and degradation. These forms of abuse are difficult to see and quantify but result in long term mental health problems such as depression, anxiety or substance abuse issues (Dubrow-Marshall & Dubrow-Marshall, 2018).

4) Domestic Violence:

Domestic violence among males is the most socially invisible yet deeply damaging form of male victimization that occurs with intimate partnership often involving physical harm, control and coercion.

- Male Victims of Domestic Violence

While the majority of reported cases are of female victimhood in domestic settings, a growing body of literature and data shows that men can and do suffer from intimate partner abuse, often at similar levels of psychological trauma as women. However, these cases are rarely recognized and reported due to disbelief, shame and institutional failure to seek justice.

In a cross-sectional study it was found that in the state of Haryana 52.4% of the men surveyed suffered from gender-based violence. These figures significantly challenge the assumption that domestic violence is only a female issue (Malik & Nadda, 2019). The types of abuse suffered by men are often similar to the abuse suffered by females including physical harm, emotional degradation through insults or humiliation, and economic control (Chattopadhyay, 2019). Despite these forms of abuse, their plight is constantly dismissed, reinforcing the myth that men cannot be victims.

K. Richardson (2016) notes that family courts and legal systems often marginalize male victims of domestic violence who want to seek protection under the legal statutes. Men are frequently presumed to be aggressors even when evidence of their victimhood is clearly visible (Richardson, 2016). This gendered presumption not only harms individual victims but also creates a bias in the justice providing legal institutions and reinforces to silence men.

In qualitative interviews with male victims in South Africa, Barkhuizen (2015) reported that police

officers testified with ridicule or scepticism when a male victim reported domestic violence by female partners. Some officers even refused to file a report, citing that the victim deserved the violence or did not believe that any such thing happened (Barkhuizen, 2015).

Moreover, men internalize a sense of failure or for not being 'man enough' to stop the abuse, leading to emotional isolation, mental health issues, reluctance to seek therapy or legal redressal. Men may perceive acknowledgement of abuse as a threat to their masculinity, resulting in feelings of shame, fear of ridicule and reluctance to seek help (ICRW, 2024). In a thematic analysis of online male victims, it was found that men reported severe emotional trauma including suicidal thoughts which was a result of both the abuse and the denial faced by them from the society as well as the legal institutes (Hall, 2016).

What complicates this issue further is that male victims cannot access shelter, hotlines or protective orders that are made for and solely accessible by female victims. This lack of institutional support forces the victims to stay in the abusive relationship, undermining the principle of gender equality in victim protection frameworks.

- Root Causes & Contributing Factors of Domestic Violence Against Men

In order to protect male victims of domestic violence and to make protective laws and policies for them, it is necessary to understand the root causes and the contributing factors that lead males to become victims of this crime at the hands of their female partners. Below are some of the most prominent contributing factors that help to explain the persistence of silence and stigma surrounding male victimization.

1. Cultural Stigma & Underreporting- cultural expectations of masculinity is one of the major causes behind the underreporting of the violence. Men in Indian culture is wired to be emotionally resilient, authoritative and providers of security which leaves no space for vulnerability. Admitting victimization not only portrays those males as weak but is also considered as betrayal to their traditional masculine roles. Consequently, male survivors of domestic violence live the rest of their lives with the shame of being abused by their female partners which damages their identity. This underreporting turns into a vicious cycle, the fewer cases reported the less awareness generated and subsequently leads to lack of policy formation and support services. This societal framework effectively mutes male suffering and ensures that domestic violence against men remains invisible in both policy and in society (Chauhan & Deol, 2023)

2. Gender Biased Legal Frameworks- India's domestic violence framework is highly efficient in providing justice to female victims and for providing them support but it suffers from gender exclusivity. *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005* (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act [PWDVA], 2005) was enacted to provide justice to the female victims who are suffering from intimate partner violence. However, this act does not include the protection of male victims from physical, psychological and economic suffering. Further, the sections like Section 498A of IPC (Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 498A) become a major reason behind the false accusations and long legal battles suffered by men. The absence of gender- neutral legal avenues not only places male victims at a disadvantage but also erodes public confidence in the impartiality of justice (Chauhan & Deol, 2023).

3. Psychological Manipulation & Emotional Abuse- domestic abuse is not only limited to physical harm but also includes psychological tactics such as emotional degradation, manipulation and intimidation. Many male victims also report being subjected to verbal insults, threats, isolation from friends or family and economic control by their female partner. These types of non-physical abuse often become difficult to prove or document which becomes particularly dangerous in a society where laws for male victims are traditionally weak. Psychological abuse can lead to long term mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. Men are pushed to emotional breaking points with any support or a pathway to justice, increasing their risk of mental health deterioration and social withdrawal (D'Souza, 2020).

4. Alcohol Abuse & Economic Stress- contrary to the common stereotype that violence originates only from male aggression under the influence of alcohol abuse or poverty. Emerging studies have shown that men too can become victims of domestic violence exacerbated due to the same reasons. A study demonstrates that economic hardship, unemployment and alcoholism within the household often correlate with the increased risk of domestic abuse in a domestic setting. In many Indian families when men fail to meet the expectations that are tied to their gender roles and are not able to fulfil the family financially, they become the target of frustration, resentment and emotional abuse by their partners.

Alcoholism though largely associated with male perpetration, can also become a trigger for female aggression or conflict escalation especially when the females are dissatisfied by their marriage or are suffering from economic loss (Koenig et al., 2006).

5. Intergenerational Transmission of Violence- Another overlooked cause of domestic violence against men is the normalization of violence through early exposure from their family settings. Men who have grown up witnessing violence in their households whether directed towards their mother or on themselves, they internalize such behaviour as a normal aspect of the domestic setting. In some cases, men may tolerate abuse from their partners due to emotional attachment, helplessness or feelings of guilt. This pattern is known as intergenerational transmission of violence which ensures the perpetuation of dysfunctional relationships throughout generations. Research from north India confirms that people who have been exposed to domestic violence in their childhood have a higher probability of being involved in abusive relationships either as victims or as perpetrators (Koenig et al., 2006).

6. Lack of Institutional support & Safe Spaces- support structures such as shelters, hotlines and counselling centres are only present overwhelmingly for female victims which is useful for the adverse violence faced by the female victims but it leaves no scope for the protection of male victims. Men who report abuse are often disbelieved, ridiculed and hence not provided with any shelter. The absence of even an exclusive framework for males makes it difficult for them to escape abusive environments, access supportive, legal or mental help. This institutional vacuum forces men to suffer in silence, reinforcing the cycle of abuse and isolation (D'Souza, 2020).

7. Media Bias & Social Denial- media plays a major role in shaping public opinion but when it comes to domestic violence, media coverage remains largely focused on female victimhood. Male victims are rarely talked about in the media and when they are talked
about, they are represented as weak, laughable or deserving of the abuse. This one-sided portrayal reinforces the myth that male cannot be victims of domestic violence and resulting in the same vicious cycle of not getting any help. Balanced media portrayal and gender inclusive policy formation can be one of the major steps towards curbing this issue (Chauhan & Deol, 2023).

Global Trends in Gender-Neutral Domestic Violence Legislation: Lessons for India.

In India the legal framework governing domestic violence has been mainly focused on female victims as explained in the *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005.* (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act [PWDVA], 2005) While this act was expedient in advancement of women's rights and in providing justice to the female victims of domestic violence, its gender-exclusive approach ignores the lived experiences of male victims. A comparative study of legal systems across the world showed that gender-neutral laws are not only feasible but are highly essential in curbing the violent problems faced by men.

In the United Kingdom, the *Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004)* (Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act, 2004) serves as a model for inclusivity. It efficiently protects all the victims of domestic violence despite what the victim's gender is. Organizations like the Mankind Initiative further supports male victims by providing helplines, legal guidelines and awareness campaigns. It challenges the stereotype that only females can be the victims of intimate partner violence (Sharon, 2014).

The United States followed a similar pathway of expanding the scope of the Violence Against Women Act (1994) (Violence Against Women Act, 1994) by adding amendments that also acknowledge and take into consideration the male and LGBTQ+ victims. Many U.S. states encourage gender neutral laws that provide justice and support to the male victims such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline which caters to all the victims of different gender (Choudhary, 2019).

In Canada, laws are inherently gender neutral across the entire area, and organizations such as the Canadian Centre for Men and Families provide mental health support and legal aid to male victims. This reflects a broader national movement towards inclusive justice and policy reform (Dubey, 2023).

Australia's approach is similarly progressive. The one in three campaign has played a pivotal role in showing the prevalence of male victims and advocating gender balanced support systems. Male victims are provided with shelter, counselling and redress (Awasthi, 2023).

Countries like Sweden and Norway have gone a step further in including gender neutrality not only in law but also in public discourse. In Sweden, victim support services cater to all the victims of different genders and the media also promotes gender neutral laws and also promotes male help seeking behaviour. Norway's organization Alternative to Violence (ATV) offers victims services such as counselling, shelter and rehabilitation programmes to male victims, recognizing that stigma and silence can have great

psychological consequences (Gupta, 2023). Research from Lithuania and Germany further reinforces the value of gender neutrality. Lithuania's law on protection from domestic violence was revised to align with the International Human Rights framework which promotes non- discriminatory legal access and works on removing the stereotype that believes only in female victimhood (Vaigé, 2013). In Germany gender neutral legal services exist alongside targeted victim support services that show a hybrid model which maintains fairness while addressing diverse victim experiences (Hagemann-White, 2017).

As Indian legal scholar Madhav Sood (2023) notes that India's statutes related to domestic violence no longer reflect contemporary understandings of abuse dynamics. Sood argues that gender-neutral frameworks adopted by different countries can be efficient in reducing stigma, enhancing reporting rates and bring our justice systems closer to the constitutional goal of equality (Sood, 2023).

SUGGESTIONS

1. Legal Reforms for Gender-Neutral Frameworks

The parliament of India should inculcate gender neutral legislation, similar to the developed countries like UK's Domestic Violence, crime and victim act 2004 (Violence Against Women Act, 1994) or USA's violence against women act. These laws identify victims of all genders and provides legal remedies, counselling to women as well as to men and LGBTQ+ individuals. In India it is very much important to amend the *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005* to include male and transgender victims to ensure their equal protection of law which is guaranteed by *Article 14* of *Constitution of India*. (Constitution of India, 1950, art. 14)

The *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita* has not included the unnatural offence section which was there in *Indian Penal Code of 1860* which has make men more vulnerable to exploitation. There is also a need to revisit the definition of *Rape u/s 63* of *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita* (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, § 63) which includes women only. The gender-neutral definition should be there which should align with global trends in countries like Canada and Sweden.

2. Reforming Criminological Theories

The academicians of criminology should recommend the application of critical victimology, which recognizes victimhood across all genders not concentrated to women only to the legislators for gender neutral laws. Moreover, theories must be evolved which are in tandem with critical victimology to enhance the criminological jurisprudence which will shift the stance of society from women perspective to gender neutrality. Theories like strain and social control should be enlarged to explore how societal expectations of masculinity which are expected from men deter them to report abuse against them. The development in framework which will analyse female criminality as a distinct phenomenon, rather than a deviation from male norms, would provide a balanced perspective. The shift will encourage research into psychological and sociological factors driving female offending, such as economic marginalization or trauma.

3. Enhancing Victim Services

There is a pressing need of institutional support for male victims, such as shelters and helplines. There is an urgent requirement to establish gender inclusive victim services which have a same model as of mankind initiative of UK or Canada's centre for men and families. The services should provide victims with free legal aid, safe shelter for male victims, and providing counselling to male victims to overcome the stigma and ridicule they had faced. It is also very important to give training to law enforcement personnel to handle the male victims with sensitivity and utmost care. These practices have been followed in Norway's Alternative to violence programme, which will improve the reporting of case rate and reduce the dismissal of male claims.

4. Media and Public Awareness

There must be media campaign and public awareness inspired by the Australia's one in three initiative which has raised awareness about male victimization and challenged stereotypes of male invulnerability. A balanced approach should be made by the media which avoids sensationalizing female offenders or trivializing male victims which will foster a cultural shift toward gender neutrality.

5. Policy and Research Integration

It is very important to make laws at par with global trends. India should give funding to organizations which are dealing and researching in male victimization and female offending, integrating the findings obtained by the research conducted into policy. There can be an establishment of task force to research and study on gender neutral frameworks and male victimization as done in the Lithuania. The changes done by the policymakers on the recommendations of the taskforce and organizations will promote equality, reduce stigma and enhanced justice for male victims.

CONCLUSION

There is a pressing need for a paradigm shift in criminological theory, legal frameworks and societal perceptions to address the issue of female criminality and male victimization. Previously criminology and legal system has operated through a gendered coloured lens, casting male as perpetrators of crime and women as victims of the respective crimes. The binary perspective rooted in society that women are victim and male are the aggressors of the crime has put a significant blind spot on the victimization of the male in domestic violence, sexual assault and psychological abuse perspective. There has been under representation of women as offenders in policies and researches.

The analysis of the paper underlines the notion how the social arrangements of the society has viewed strength and stoicism in men and this notion has deterred them to report the atrocities against them and forcing them to be silent. The legal frameworks of India have curtailed the rights of men i.e., the *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005)* (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act [PWDVA], 2005) only protects females and leave no legal recourse for men or any support from legal point of view. The asymmetrical legal policies coupled with neglect from institutions and disbelief followed in the society has made male victimization invisible, denying the male's basic rights such as access to shelter, counselling and legal aid.

It is very important for Indian policymakers, academicians, think tanks and task force to take guidance and lesson from global platform to make laws at par with international standards. Developed countries like United Kingdom, United states of America and Canada has always advocated for gender neutral laws and they are also incorporating special supports system for

male victims by providing training to law enforcement personnel along with special procedures to deal with the complaints of male victims.

The ultimate purpose of the paper is to address the literature gap in criminological jurisprudence related to male victimization. The laws prevailing in the country needs to be revisited to include gender neutral approaches and media needs to spread awareness regarding male victimization in order to change the societal perspective regarding the notion that men can also be the victim. The true spirit of *Article 14 of the Constitution of India* (Constitution of India, 1950, art. 14) should be brought in the legal system so that males and females are treated equally.

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