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# Suicide Rates among Men: Correlating Male Suicide Rates with Legal and Social Discrimination

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## ABSTRACT

*Violation of socio-legal promises was introduced as a significant factor affecting male suicide, as the abated suicide rates, which were higher for men than women, never went down across the world and persisted. Men die by suicide 3–4 times more than women (World Health Organization; WHO, 2023), and recently released National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2023) data also show that more than 70% of all suicides in India are made by men, especially in the age category of 30–50 years. A study linking the criminalization and societal derision of men to escalating suicide figures — particularly about family relations, fictitious criminal allegations, workplace pressure, and social marginalization. Thus, judicial notice regarding Friday’s abuse of Sec 84a and its mental ramifications on men have been witnessed in many sycophantic gleanings of “Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014)” and “Rajesh Sharma v. State of UP (2017)”. In addition, by utilizing survey-based reports from mental health organizations, the study indicates that financial stress, loss of custody of their children, and fear of wrongful allegations are profound contributors to male distress. The study calls for a gender-neutral law, male-focused mental health services, and protection from false allegations by the courts. However, even with this growing awareness, policy change has never been sufficient, and population-level longitudinal data on the why of male suicide remains limited. Therefore, male suicide will be prevented only when this holistic approach includes legal justice, mental health assistance, and a greater awareness in society. It ends with a call to address male suicides as a human rights issue, requiring legal, institutional, and social reforms to avoid losing more lives.*

**Keywords:** Male Suicide, Legal Discrimination, Mental Health, False Allegations, Gender-Neutral Laws, Family Law, Social Stigma.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Suicide is one of the leading public health challenges facing the world today, and one of the most disproportionate aspects of the crisis is its toll on men. The WHO Suicide Report 2023<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, Suicide Worldwide in 2023: Global Health Estimates, WHO (2023).

It lists global statistics on suicide and mentions that men are almost three to four times more likely to die by suicide than women in the world. The same pattern holds for India as well, with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report 2023<sup>3</sup> Pointing to men as the perpetrators of more than 70% of the recorded suicides. Economic strain, mental health struggles, societal pressures, and myriad other factors contribute to this crisis and these alarming statistics. However, what no one mentions and is the most important, yet neglected dimension of male suicides is legal and social discrimination. Legislation in India is accused, particularly in the areas of family laws, workplace harassment laws, and criminal laws relating to dowry and domestic violence, of being gendered and biased against men. Benefits: The wrongful use of the IPC Section 498A, making false allegations of sexual harassment cases, and blowing gender-based legal provisions on the guilt of human beings before proven guilt have placed numerous human beings in severe psychological torture, social exile, and suicide with falsely implicated guys. This research seeks to examine the law and social discrimination related to legal and social discrimination corresponding to the increasing suicide rates and rates of depression among men, evaluating case laws, statistical reports, and survey data to provide a detailed, balanced, evidential discussion on the prevalence of the issue.

The paper seeks to answer these questions — how do legal and social crimes lead to male suicides? How much more do legal cases that are not valid, separation at the workplace from women working together, and a sense that you have to behave like a man increase mental stress for men? This interdisciplinary project will answer these questions with legal analysis, empirical research, and sociological perspectives. An important dimension of this study is exploring if the absence of gender-neutral laws in India contributes towards legal insecurity for men, eventually resulting in suicide in the worst-case scenario.

Methodology: The methodology employed for this research is based on primary and secondary assessments of the most available aspects, such as NCRB suicide figures, WHO global data, and first survey observations from mental health organizations. It also analyses various case laws from “the Supreme Court and the High Court where they proactively interpreted gendered laws to avoid misuse.” This study is predominantly India-centric, using global trends and principles to make comparative points related to the object of the study. This study seeks to inform the broader legal reforms and male mental health debate by integrating quantitative data with qualitative legal analysis to effectively resolve disputes and promote balanced gender-neutral justice and mental health interventions.

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<sup>3</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India, 2023*, NCRB (2023)

## II. UNDERSTANDING MALE SUICIDE: CAUSES & TRENDS

Suicide continues to be one of the top two or three leading causes of preventable death globally, and men are disproportionately affected. The content for this image is a statistical overview that states, "Globally, male suicide rates are three to four times higher than those of women, WHO Suicide Report 2023<sup>4</sup>." We see a similar pattern in India, too, as report 2023 of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)<sup>5</sup> Mentions that 70% of the recorded suicides were committed by men of the 30–50 age group. There are many complicated psychological, social, economic, and legal reasons why this disparity exists. After all, a 2022 survey by the “National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)” in India suggested that about 85% of males who kill themselves had never proactively sought mental health in the past leading up to their attempt.<sup>6</sup> Financial stress was a major driver, with 65% of male respondents in the same survey reporting it as a reason for suicidal distress. Moreover, these statistics illustrate just how necessary it is to take account of the particular issues affecting men, which may lead to them taking their own lives in greater numbers.

However, the situation is not just about economic difficulties; there are psychological and social needs that compel men to commit suicide. As per the *"Men and Suicide: Breaking the Silence" Report* (2021)<sup>7</sup>, traditional gender norms associated with masculinity deter males from demonstrating perceived weakness or requesting help when needed, resulting in poor phenomenon reporting on men who have a mental illness. Men are pressured by society to be emotionally potent, financially stable, and independent, restricting their outlets for emotional support. This forces a large number of men to keep their distress in check, which has dire mental health implications. This also increases suicide vulnerability as the stigma against men suffering from emotional illness drives men away from seeking professional help.

Besides social and psychological, there are also concrete legal and institutional barriers to achieving a higher number of male suicides. UNDP Report 2022<sup>8</sup> Explains that biased legal frameworks in numerous countries, including India, are leading to increased male distress. Laws against domestic violence, sexual harassment, and dowry-related crimes in India are mainly unisex by written law, yet they provide men with limited avenues of relief. High-profile male suicides have drawn attention to what some see as abuse of laws, including “Section 84

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<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization, *Suicide Worldwide in 2023: Global Health Estimates*, WHO (2023).

<sup>5</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India, 2023*, NCRB (2023)

<sup>6</sup> National Institute of Mental Health, *"Suicide Trends Among Indian Men: A 2022 Survey Report"*, NIMH (2022).

<sup>7</sup> *Men and Suicide: Breaking the Silence, A Global Perspective on Male Mental Health*, WHO (2021).

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Gender Bias in Legal Frameworks and Its Impact on Male Well-being*, UNDP (2022).

of *Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS)*, "which deals with (dowry harassment) and workplace harassment laws. Not being protected by law against false accusations, combined with the threat of losing everything socially and professionally, may not be suitable for his mental health. The same applies to workplace laws but also to workplace-related terms such as "harassment" or "domestic abuse/domestic violence"; all look at women as the natural victims and men as the natural aggressors, with virtually no institutional support mechanisms for the actual male victims left in the hands of classic repressive state machinery often expressing its power in rigid (thus, inflexible by design) legal frameworks. Alongside social stigmatization, these legal vulnerabilities forge a high-pressure environment in which many men perceive death as the only way out.

| Category                              | Men                     | Women                | Total   | Primary Causes (Priority to Women-Related Issues) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Total Suicides</b>                 | 118,979<br>(72.5%)      | 45,026<br>(27.5%)    | 164,033 | -                                                 |
| <b>Marriage Related Issues</b>        | 10,024                  | 7,405                | 17,429  | Dowry, marital discord, separation                |
| <b>Dowry Related</b>                  | 1,094                   | 1,712                | 2,806   | Mainly women affected                             |
| <b>Family Problems (Non-Marriage)</b> | 34,517                  | 15,815               | 50,332  | Pressure from spouse/in-laws, household conflict  |
| <b>Love Affairs</b>                   | 3,231                   | 2,200                | 5,431   | Relationship failure, breakup                     |
| <b>Impotence/Infertility</b>          | 189                     | 342                  | 531     | Pressure from spouse/family                       |
| <b>Domestic Violence / Abuse</b>      | Not specifically listed | Indirectly reflected | -       | Seen in marriage/family issues                    |
| <b>Professional/Career Problems</b>   | 4,246                   | 897                  | 5,143   | Financial pressure from spouse/family             |
| <b>Education-Related Stress</b>       | 2,098                   | 1,364                | 3,462   | Often includes pressure from parents/spouse       |

| Category                              | Men     | Women                   | Total   | Primary Causes (Priority to Women-Related Issues)                   |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Housewives (Specific Category)</b> | -       | 23,179<br>(51.5% women) | 23,179  | Family issues, abuse, dowry, lack of autonomy                       |
| <b>Others / Unknown Causes</b>        | 25,000+ | 10,000+                 | 35,000+ | Often underreported reasons like emotional abuse, societal pressure |

To combat this rising epidemic, society must reconsider its framework of laws, support mental health options devoid of gender, and remove stigmas around men being vulnerable. Failure to effect these systemic changes will leave the high male suicide rates an ongoing public health and criminal justice challenge.

### III. LEGAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MEN & ITS IMPACT ON SUICIDE RATES

Indu Malhotra: Legal frameworks in India, even if framed to protect vulnerable groups, are often gendered and asymmetrical, which results in men occupying precarious legal positions. Family law is one topic that involves legal discrimination against men — especially in the context of marriage breakdowns and child custody battles. According to the NCRB Report 2023<sup>9</sup> 15–20 percent of suicides in the country are due to family disputes and marital issues. It is a much more drastic situation with child custody battles, where the courts almost always favour the mother, and many fathers are left distraught as a result. According to a 2022 survey conducted by the Save Indian Family Foundation, 60% of divorced fathers experience clinical depression over the loss of post-divorce custody rights, and 30% report suicidal tendencies after their marriage and divorce. Judicial recognition of the adverse effects of prejudiced family laws can be found in the Supreme Court ruling of “Rajesh Sharma v. State of UP” (2017)<sup>10</sup>, where the judiciary observed the misuse of dowry laws (viz. Section 498A IPC) having a role to play in the suicides of men. While these kinds of judicial comments have been made, legislative change remains painfully slow, and many men are left open to legal harassment and emotional distress.

<sup>9</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India, 2023, NCRB (2023).

<sup>10</sup> Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P., (2017) 8 SCC 79.

One more thing we should discuss is that there are no rights for males who face domestic violence. Men facing domestic abuse have no legal protection under the existing framework such as “The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005”. According to a 2021 study carried out by the Centre for Men's Rights, 75% of men who face domestic abuse do not report it because they fear the legal system will favour society's bias against men and are even afraid to talk about their plight with a friend due to social stigma. One of the landmark judgments that provide this kind of respite is the “*Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar*” (2014)<sup>11</sup>, where the Supreme Court of India came forth to prevent the needless arrests under Section 498A IPC due to its misapplication. However, despite few judiciaries' safeguards, a large segment of men accused in false cases are battered by societal pressure and even by their own families to take extreme steps like suicide.

Workplace harassment laws, for example, have been criticized for their non-gender-neutral implications in the professional space. “The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013” gives female employees necessary protection but no such protection for male employees, who may be accused of a false accusation of sexual harassment. As highlighted in the 2022 Harvard Gender Studies Report, 1 in 5 men worry that they will be falsely accused of harassment in the workplace.<sup>12</sup>, which significantly impacts their mental health, career stability, and social reputation. Many men have committed suicide due to false accusations and stigma. The above two cases show the need for a more gender-neutral set of workplace harassment statutes.

However, the issue is not only in family and workplace disputes but also in criminal law when the wrongly accused person is charged with sexual offenses. According to this Report (NCRB, 2023)<sup>13</sup>, about 30% of men who are falsely accused of sexual harassment cases develop depression or a tendency towards suicide. The nature of the problem can be illustrated through instances of suicide, like that of Rohith Vemula, as well as the ramifications of framing and using passed laws like the anti-lynching legislation against women, both of which highlight the burden of male mental health in light of legal and institutional neglect.<sup>14</sup>. In such situations, men seem to suffer from very little legal support, massive reputational damage, and financial hardship that drives them into the ground. Although the courts do sometimes recognize the

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<sup>11</sup> *Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar*, (2014) 8 SCC 273.

<sup>12</sup> Harvard Gender Studies, “*Fear of False Allegations in the Workplace: A 2022 Report*”, Harvard University (2022)

<sup>13</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *False Allegations and Male Mental Health: Suicide Statistics*, 2023, NCRB (2023).

<sup>14</sup> *Suicide of Rohith Vemula: The Intersection of Law, Caste, and Mental Health*, Government Inquiry Report (2016).

abuse of gender-based laws, legislative fixes are lacking, leaving a massive gap in the protection of male mental health and men's legal protection.

Instead of such problems, it would be vital to repeal gender-discriminatory legal provisions and introduce male-oriented mental health solutions as well as legal protection from false rape allegations. Where the complexity of male psychology, their social isolation, and increasing suicide rates are ignored by a balanced legal system, this ill-working or non-working framework will continue to create more of the same.

#### **IV. SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION & STIGMATIZATION OF MEN**

The contribution of social and gendered views to the mental health crisis in men is a necessary consideration, as male suicide prevalence is significantly greater. Media representation is one of the main areas in which discrimination boils. As noted in the Media Bias Report (2022), media narratives have about 70% moulding them-as-perpetrators versus victim context of males, harping on the 'natural disposition' of male dominance and aggression. This distortion does not allow for a proper exploration of men's vulnerabilities and often leads to male legal cases being thrown out and other men being socially ostracized. Highly sensationalized media trials — especially in instances of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and workplace misconduct — lead to severe psychological harm to wrongfully accused individuals and, in some cases, suicide. Additionally, there is a natural reluctance within society to accept men as victims, which results in even less sympathy for them in the public sector and not much institutional support, either.

One more colossal problem is that there are no support systems for male health concerns as well. There is an over-emphasis in the suicide prevention field on women and youth, and little attention is paid to men-specific problems. According to the WHO Global Mental Health Report (2023) —while suicide rates are significantly higher in men, only 20% of suicide prevention programs worldwide actually focus specifically on targeting men.<sup>15</sup> Without initiatives for men, many are left to struggle silently. As part of the solution to this problem, some dubious NGOs like the Men's Rights Awareness Society have been recently proposing gender-neutral suicide hotlines and gender-sensitive mental health awareness campaigns. Such organizations claim that existing policies do more to burden men than to help them, increasing stigma and closing off access to professional mental health from men who are increasingly unlikely to engage with that service.

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<sup>15</sup> World Health Organization, *Global Mental Health Report 2023: Addressing Suicide Prevention Gaps*, WHO (2023).

Culturally reinforced masculinity norms continue to discourage men from seeking psychological help. According to a 2022 study by the American Psychological Association (APA), men are 50% less likely to seek therapy than women as a result of the stigma of emotional vulnerability.<sup>16</sup> Boys receive early socialization to curtail expressiveness, avoid appearing weak, and conform to standards of independence. Because of this ingrained expectation, they do not find ways to express their emotions, resulting in increased stress, anxiety, and rewards. Even worse, the stigmas against reaching out to men who do talk about feeling bad are labelled "weak" or "unmanly." Under such social norms, it becomes impossible to intervene on time, and extreme psychological suffering becomes an imminent danger.

The judiciary has started to take cognizance of the issue while realizing the urgent need for gender-neutral mental health policies. A Delhi High Court judgment in 2021 sought gender-sensitive mental health policies and pointed out that given the factors that endanger male mental health, the matter needs to be addressed on a war footing. The court noted that the legal and institutional system has been skewed in favour of women and is indifferent even to long running and dreadful legal battles faced by men and the impact critical on their mental well-being.<sup>17</sup> These judicial verdicts are a significant stride towards disrupting the patriarchal narrative around mental health, yet genuine policy shifts are necessary for child mental health conversations to become mainstream.

In order to address this male suicide crisis caused by social discrimination, a more holistic approach is needed. Instead, the media needs to start balancing things out so we can start seeing more vulnerable men, victims, and survivors and less only men as perpetrators. We need to bring the mental health system into the 21st century, expanding to include a myriad of male-focused suicide prevention programs, which can ensure psychological support is accessible and stigma-free for all boys and men. Not only must the legal and judicial system promote gender neutrality, but so must it promote it fair and square from going through emotional and legal turmoil in such affairs. Until these structural shifts occur, male distress will remain socially stigmatized, which will ensure that men continue to face high rates of suicide, undetected and unassisted.

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<sup>16</sup> American Psychological Association, "Masculinity Norms and Therapy Seeking Behaviour: A 2022 Study," APA (2022).

<sup>17</sup> Delhi High Court Judgment, Gender-Neutral Mental Health Policies, W.P. (C) (1245)/2021, Delhi HC (2021).

## V. ADDRESSING THE CRISIS: LEGAL & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A campaign to address alarming rates of male suicide, which cut down seven men every day, will focus on recruiting dedicated professionals and will demand legal policy and institutional reform to meet the challenges unique to men involved in family disputes, raped by women at work, and bullied at the top of their profession. The most prominent among them are Gender-specific Laws, which endanger the lives of enduring men over Domestic violence, Workplace Harassment, Child Custody, etc. Although “the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (POSH) Act, 2013 ”have been lifesaving for women, they ignore male victims of domestic abuse and workplace harassment. Asking men to amend these laws provides no remedy should Qui facit per alium, facit per se (what is done through another is done). Further, the laws related to the custody of children in India are highly biased towards maternal custody, ignoring the pain of fathers and their proper to family life with their children. Legally, we as a society must also promote shared parenting models that ensure more equitable custody arrangements while also considering the negative impact on mental health that fathers lose access to their children.

Beyond legal reforms, there is an immediate and critical need for mental health and support services underpinned by male suicide prevention. “The World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Mental Health Report (2023) highlights the need to develop suicide prevention programs targeting males; only 20% of current programs worldwide are geared toward male-specific psychological distress”. This leaves a vacuum of outreach to men regarding mental health and makes it incredibly difficult for them to seek help with everyday issues they face, all while feeling the pressure of societal stigma not to express any emotional issues they have at all. Dedicated helplines, counselling services, and community backup groups for men must be priority areas for government investment. Institutional support must also be extended to NGOs focused on mental health awareness, such as the Men's Rights Awareness Society.<sup>18</sup> — to increase the scope of their counselling and other services. Similarly, workplace policies should be reformed to include mental health leave and anonymous harassment reporting processes, and men of all psychological distress are encouraged to access the support they need.

Apart from legal induction and psychological support, judicial changes and awareness programs to countermand false legal cases and stigma against women in the legal system are also stepping stones. It is well admitted by the Supreme Court of India that due to misuse of

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<sup>18</sup> Men's Rights Awareness Society, "Advocacy for Male Suicide Prevention Helplines," 2022, **MRAS (2022)**.

such laws as Section 498A IPC, people (primarily men) are wrongfully arrested and face mental trauma when falsely implicated. The Supreme Court's enunciation of guidelines to prevent the automatic arrest of men in dowry-related cases in cases like “*Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar*<sup>19</sup> (2014)” was based on noting the trauma caused by the legal system to the men subjected to frivolous allegations in such matters, both mentally and emotionally. These protections could be extended to other laws, such as those related to workplace harassment and domestic violence, so that they could be used to keep men safe from false culpability on the very same grounds. Also, there should be national awareness programs to educate them about male issues concerning mental health, social defects that forbid vulnerability in men, and legal protection of all genders.

The malaise of male suicide cannot simply be addressed through gender-neutral law reforms or mental health policy but will also require judicial protection against malicious accusations. Unless such systemic changes are made, the psychological suffering, estrangement, and high rates of suicide, which are already prevalent amongst men as a result of legal and social discrimination against them, are likely to continue. Fairness to all humankind, irrespective of sex, is built on a balanced legal system that creates a more egalitarian society with mentally healthy individuals.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The paper discusses how the legalized oppression of men due to social discrimination draws a parallel to the grotesquely burgeoning rates of male suicide. Global statistics (WHO, 2023) and local records (NCRB, 2023) indicate that a much higher percentage of men complete suicide than women. The mental health crisis among men is primarily attributed to family arguments, custody conflicts over children, defending themselves against wrongful accusations in the legal system, professional pressure, and public disgrace. The lack of gender-neutral laws (and domestic violence, workplace harassment, and family law) compounds psychological distress by reducing legal and institutional support for men. These concerns have been acknowledged by the judiciary in various pronouncements, e.g., “*Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar* (2014) and *Rajesh Sharma v. State of UP* (2017)”, but adequate law and policy reforms have not been undertaken. Tackling the systemic biases at play—through legislative change, judicial protections, and male-focussed mental health support—is vital if we are to stem the tide of male suicide.

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<sup>19</sup> *Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar*, (2014) 8 SCC 273.

Even though awareness is increasing, there are still large research voids regarding the effects of legal distress on the long-term mental well-being of men. The existing studies are mostly short-term and do not take a longitudinal approach, so measuring the long-term psychological burden of false allegations, drawn-out legal disputes, and the fallout from custody battles is difficult. Longitudinal studies are needed on the psychological effects of legal bias across time, including depression, suicide ideation, economic hardship, and social alienation in men subjected to biased legal actions. Consideration should also be given to further research into possible policy solutions for male suicide prevention, including shared parenting frameworks, legal protections from false claims, and workplace mental health programs for men.

The solution, as I have outlined elsewhere (see—*A War on Boys: Or Is It a War on Women*), is that male suicides cannot be fought as a gendered debate, nor can the male suicide epidemic be seen through a lens of gender, or as a battle between men and women—the truth has to be seen in the context of a human rights issue and on that basis, male suicide prevention must be framed and fought as such. Every man, woman, or person with any other gender identity is entitled to equal legal protection, equal access to mental health care, and a fair judicial process. Ending male suicides must be achieved based on equality, justice, and mental health awareness, and no individual must be vulnerable to neglect, either by society or the law. Only integrated legal, policy and social corrective measures can ultimately give us a society where mental health is given adequate importance, just law prevails, and the scourge of sky-high levels of male suicides is effectively countered.

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