

Invisible Victims: Rethinking Sexual Offences Against Men Beyond Alpha Masculinity in India's Gendered Legal Framework

Manas K Iyer¹, Desapriyan P²

¹BBA., LLB., (Hons.), Sastra Deemed to be University, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

²BCOM., LLB., (Hons.), Sastra Deemed to be University, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

ABSTRACT:

Sexual violence is widely acknowledged as a serious social and legal issue; however, discussions on sexual offences have traditionally focused on women as victims while overlooking the experiences of male victims. This research examines the issue of sexual offences against men within the Indian context, highlighting the social, cultural, and legal factors that contribute to the invisibility of male victimisation. Despite increasing academic attention, incidents involving male victims remain significantly underreported due to social stigma, rigid gender stereotypes, and cultural expectations surrounding masculinity. Men are often portrayed as strong, dominant, and emotionally resilient, which discourages acknowledgement of their vulnerability and discourages victims from reporting offences. The study analyses the historical development of gender roles, the influence of contemporary masculinity narratives such as “alpha” and “sigma” masculinity, and the impact of digital environments where harassment may occur. It also examines the existing legal framework, particularly the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the implications of the Supreme Court's decision in Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India, which expanded discussions on sexual rights and dignity. Through a review of existing literature and legal analysis, the study identifies key gaps in recognition, reporting, and legal protection for male victims. It further proposes solutions, including gender-neutral legal provisions, increased awareness, improved institutional support systems, and expanded academic research to promote a more inclusive approach to addressing sexual violence.

KEYWORDS: Sexual Violence, Gender stereotypes, Masculinity narratives, Male victimisation

INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is widely acknowledged as a severe social, legal, and public health concern around the world. In the past, conversations about sexual offences have mostly concentrated on men as offenders and women as victims. The experiences of male victims have frequently been obscured by this prevailing narrative, despite the fact that sexual assault against women is still a huge global phenomenon. Researchers and academics have emphasised more and more in recent years that men can also become victims of sexual assault and harassment, which can be committed by both men and women. Despite this fact, sexual offences against males continue to be substantially underreported, understudied, and not sufficiently handled by legal and policy frameworks.

Coercion, forced sexual activity, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation are only a few of the many non-consensual sexual behaviours that fall under the category of sexual assault against men. These behaviours can take place in a variety of settings, such as public areas, workplaces, educational institutions, fitness centres, jails, and even intimate and personal relationships. Even while the experiences of male victims are starting to be acknowledged in scholarly debate, social attitudes and cultural conventions still substantially obscure the problem.

The persistence of strongly ingrained gender norms is one of the main causes of the lack of visibility. Physical prowess, domination, and emotional fortitude are frequently linked to masculinity in various countries, including India. Men are seldom seen as possible victims of sexual violence due to these beliefs. As a result, rather than being acknowledged as grave abuses of physical autonomy and human dignity, instances are frequently written off, trivialised, or addressed with amusement. These beliefs make it difficult for victims to obtain justice or psychological support and deter them from reporting incidents.

Sexual harassment and violence against men can happen in regular public places in India. For instance, men may experience improper touching, groping, or other forms of sexual harassment from other passengers on packed public transportation systems like buses or trains. Such instances are rarely reported and are frequently written off as unimportant or unpleasant due to the stigma attached to male victims. Male sexual harassment in public places is still invisible due in part to the absence of public conversation about these encounters.

In India, sexual harassment of men is also becoming more prevalent in the digital sphere, especially on social media. Many male content creators frequently publish exercise videos and other fitness content, which frequently involve shirtless photos or videos highlighting their bodies, as a result of the growth of gym culture and fitness influencers. Many influencers report receiving unsolicited direct messages with offensive remarks, sexual proposals, and requests for specific favours from followers, even though the content is meant to inspire fitness or promote their careers. These messages may occasionally originate from both male and female users, indicating that sexual harassment perpetrators are not exclusive to one gender. Even while this type of online harassment is becoming more common, it is rarely recognised as a type of sexual harassment directed at men.

Beyond these instances, male victimisation can also take place in other social contexts where power disparities exist, such as workplaces, educational institutions, dorms, or training facilities. Inappropriate sexual remarks, humiliating behaviours during hazing or ragging rituals, and instances of coercive behaviour are occasionally accepted as harmless jokes or initiation customs. However, such actions may constitute sexual harassment or assault and can result in severe psychological suffering.

Sexual violence against men can have serious and enduring psychological repercussions. Victims may feel helpless, angry, ashamed, and humiliated. Anxiety, despair, and trouble sustaining interpersonal connections are common among male survivors. The emotional pain connected to the act is sometimes exacerbated by victims' reluctance to seek assistance due to fear of societal ridicule or scepticism.

The gender-specific nature of many laws about sexual offences presents another significant obstacle in the Indian setting. Criminal laws about sexual violence have historically been designed with the presumption that women are the main victims of these crimes. Because of this, male victims of sexual assault or harassment may have few legal options for pursuing justice. The need for a more comprehensive understanding of sexual victimisation that acknowledges the experiences of all victims, regardless of gender, is highlighted by this legal gap.

The need to reevaluate conventional beliefs about victims and gender roles is highlighted by the expanding conversation regarding sexual offences against men. To develop an inclusive legal and social framework that can handle the reality of contemporary society, it is imperative to acknowledge that sexual violence can impact people of all genders. In this regard, it is especially crucial to look at sexual offences against males in India to pinpoint the institutional, legal, and social obstacles that support the ongoing disregard of male victims.

SCOPE OF THE PAPER

This study investigates sexual assaults against males in India by examining the social, legal, and institutional dimensions of male victimisation. It focuses on comprehending how society and the legal system view, report, and deal with such offences. The study also assesses how well current rules and regulations identify and safeguard male victims. It also examines how cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and society's views affect the reporting and recognition of sexual offences against men. The purpose of this analysis is to draw attention to the need for more acknowledgement and inclusive legal strategies to combat male victimisation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Social structures, cultural norms, and traditional gender roles have historically had a significant impact on how sexual offences are seen. Men were frequently portrayed as warriors, guardians, and providers within the social order in numerous countries, including India. Physical prowess, courage, and the capacity to protect oneself and others were all considered aspects of masculinity. The idea that men were inherently dominating and incapable of experiencing sexual aggression was strengthened by these cultural portrayals. Because of this, it was rarely acknowledged in societal discourse that men may be the victims of sexual assault or harassment.

Traditional communities often used representations of bravery, heroism, and resiliency to celebrate male identity. Men were frequently portrayed as warriors who defended families, communities, and countries in historical accounts, folklore, and cultural traditions. The idea that males could not be sexually abused was influenced by the representation of men as powerful and invulnerable. As a result, any events that went against this perception were frequently disregarded or repressed. Because they were afraid of being seen as weak or losing their social standing, men who experienced sexual assault were less inclined to talk about it.

These cultural assumptions also influenced the development of legal frameworks. "During the colonial period, when the Indian Penal Code was introduced in 1860, laws addressing sexual offences were framed based on prevailing social attitudes. The offence of rape was defined in a gender-specific manner, recognising women as victims and men as perpetrators."¹ This was a reflection of the larger cultural perception that women needed protection from sexual assault, while males were seen to have the social and physical strength to protect themselves.

The judicial system did not specifically acknowledge circumstances in which males could become victims of sexual assault because of these presumptions. Rather, rules about sexual offences were largely concerned with protecting women's modesty and dignity. While other clauses targeted behaviours deemed

¹ *Law Commission of India, 172nd Report on Review of Rape Laws (March 2000)*

unnatural offences, their purpose was to control specific types of sexual behaviour rather than to recognise male victimisation.

The taboo around male victimisation was also influenced by social norms surrounding masculinity. Men were discouraged from expressing weakness or asking for assistance because they were frequently required to exhibit emotional toughness and self-control. Many times, acknowledging victimhood was seen as a challenge to conventional ideas of masculinity. Because of this, occurrences involving male victims of sexual abuse were mainly kept under wraps in society.

However, evolving attitudes on gender roles and human rights have begun to call into question these long-held preconceptions. Social movements, media debates, and scholarly studies have progressively brought attention to the fact that sexual assault can impact people of any gender. These advancements have prompted academics and decision-makers to reevaluate long-held notions about victimisation and masculinity and to acknowledge that males can be sexually abused and exploited just like women.

CURRENT SCENARIO

Legal reforms, academic studies, media conversations, and public debates have all contributed to increasing awareness of sexual offences and gender justice in India in recent years. However, both legal systems and public discourse continue to largely ignore the problem of sexual offences against men. Due to strongly ingrained societal assumptions about masculinity and victimhood, the experiences of male victims of sexual violence frequently receive little attention, even though sexual violence against women is extensively recognised and addressed through a variety of legal safeguards and legislative measures.

“A significant development in the legal landscape occurred with the judgment in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, where the Supreme Court decriminalised consensual same-sex relations between adults by partially striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The Court emphasised the constitutional principles of dignity, equality, and personal autonomy, recognising the importance of protecting individual rights irrespective of sexual orientation. While consensual same-sex relations were decriminalised, the Court clarified that non-consensual sexual acts would continue to remain punishable under criminal law. This judgment played an important role in expanding discussions about sexuality, consent, and the broader understanding of sexual rights in India.”²

The Indian Penal Code was superseded by the *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita* as the primary criminal law controlling offences in India after these changes. Nonetheless, the *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita*'s rape laws still include a gender-specific framework, identifying men as the perpetrators and women as the victims. As a result, there is a substantial legal gap as the primary rape rules do not specifically address situations in which men are sexually assaulted. Because of this, male victims of sexual violence may find it challenging to pursue appropriate legal remedies.

“Another important feature of the current scenario relates to changing cultural narratives surrounding masculinity, particularly among younger generations influenced by social media and internet culture. Concepts such as the “alpha male,” “sigma male,” and similar labels have become widely discussed online and are often used to describe ideal forms of masculine behaviour. These ideas frequently portray men as confident, dominant, emotionally resilient, and capable of maintaining control in all situations. While such

² *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, (2018) 10 SCC 1, Supreme Court of India

portrayals are sometimes promoted as motivational or aspirational models of self-confidence, they can also reinforce unrealistic expectations regarding male strength and invulnerability.”³

Men who experience sexual harassment or assault are frequently hesitant to disclose such instances due to these societal expectations. They might face mockery, scepticism, or unfavourable social labels if they report. When victims acknowledge their vulnerability, they may be labelled as weak, unmanly, or even feminine. People who share such experiences may occasionally encounter social stigma or ridicule from friends, family, or the larger community. These responses contribute to a culture of silence surrounding male victimisation and deter victims from talking candidly about their experiences.

Additionally, reporting systems and institutional procedures are frequently created under the presumption that women are the main victims of sexual offences. Male victims may therefore be unsure of whether authorities will take their complaints seriously or whether there are suitable legal remedies available for their circumstances. Victims are further deterred from seeking help through institutional or legal avenues by this uncertainty.

The existing situation, therefore, shows a complex convergence of legislative limits, societal norms, and cultural expectations around masculinity. The experiences of male victims of sexual offences are still mainly ignored in public discourse, even though conversations on gender equality and sexual rights have grown in recent years. Legal changes are necessary to address this problem, but so is increased public awareness that aims to dispel myths and advance a more inclusive view of sexual assault and victimisation.

KEY CHALLENGES

The Social Invisibility of Male Victims: The continuation of social stigma and conventional assumptions surrounding masculinity is one of the main obstacles to resolving sexual offences against males. Men are frequently portrayed as physically powerful, domineering, and capable of defending themselves in various countries, including India. The potential that men may become victims of sexual violence is frequently disregarded or not taken seriously due to these strongly ingrained views. It is challenging for victims to publicly disclose their experiences or ask for help because of this social attitude, which fosters an atmosphere where male victimisation is disregarded.

The Fear of Social Labelling and Ridicule: The fear of unfavourable labels and societal scorn is another significant obstacle that male victims must overcome. Men may be branded as weak, unmanly, or even feminine if they disclose instances of sexual harassment or assault. Their sense of social identity and dignity may be compromised by such responses. Many victims are deterred from reporting crimes by the fear of being made fun of by their friends, questioned by authorities, or stigmatised in their social circles. As a result, many cases go unreported, keeping the issue mostly undetected.

Gaps within the Existing Legal Framework: Male victims face considerable obstacles due to India's current judicial system. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita's rape laws still take a gender-specific stance, identifying males as the perpetrators and women as the victims. Therefore, the primary rape rules do not immediately encompass situations in which men are exposed to non-consensual sexual actions. Male victims find it challenging to seek justice through the proper legal channels due to this legal restriction, which leaves a protection vacuum.

Limited Institutional Recognition and Support Systems: Women are frequently the primary focus of institutional procedures intended to support victims of sexual abuse. Although these programs are essential

³ Mateo Valdivia, *Alpha, Beta, Sigma: A Critical Analysis of Sigma Male Ideology (MA Major Research Paper, University of Windsor 2023)*

for safeguarding female victims, there aren't many comparable support networks for male victims. Male survivors' concerns are not expressly addressed by many counselling facilities, hotlines, and awareness campaigns. Male victims may not have access to sufficient psychological help, legal counsel, or safe locations for reporting their experiences due to this lack of institutional recognition.

The Hidden Nature of the Problem: Underreporting and Data Gaps: The lack of thorough data on sexual offences against men is another major obstacle. Many male victims decide not to disclose instances because of social shame, fear of humiliation, and uncertainty about legal options. Because of this, official crime statistics frequently don't accurately represent the frequency of these crimes. Researchers, legislators, and legal authorities find it challenging to properly comprehend the scope of the issue and develop suitable solutions due to the absence of trustworthy data.

The Pressure of Modern Masculinity Narratives: Social media and internet culture have also had a role in moulding current notions of masculinity. Men are frequently portrayed as domineering, emotionally strong, and in control by terms like "alpha male," "sigma male," and others. These concepts can promote incorrect expectations about masculine behaviour, even if they are commonly offered as inspirational or aspirational models. To uphold the socially acceptable image of strength and independence, men who are harassed or assaulted may feel under pressure to conceal their experiences. The silence around male victimisation is further exacerbated by this cultural pressure.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Indian government has strengthened victim protection and addressed sexual offences through several legal and policy initiatives. The goal of criminal law amendments over the years has been to increase the number of sexual violence-related offences and provide offenders with harsher penalties. However, the experiences of male victims have received relatively less attention within the legal system, with many of these improvements largely concentrating on safeguarding women as victims.

The legal structure governing sexual offences in India has evolved as a result of a mix of legislative enactments, judicial interpretations, and policy reforms aimed at protecting individuals from sexual assault. These laws aim to define sexual offences, specify penalties for violators, and set up protocols for inquiries and trials. However, established gender stereotypes have historically influenced the formulation of numerous rules about sexual offences, frequently recognising men as perpetrators and women as victims. Because of this, the judicial system has come under fire for failing to adequately address circumstances in which men may also become victims of sexual assault.

“At present, the primary legislation governing criminal offences in India is the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which replaced the Indian Penal Code. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita contains several provisions dealing with offences such as rape, sexual harassment, assault with intent to outrage modesty, voyeurism, and stalking. These provisions were introduced or strengthened through earlier criminal law amendments in response to growing concerns about sexual violence. “However, the definition of rape under the current law continues to be gender-specific, recognising women as victims and men as perpetrators.”⁴ Consequently, cases in which men are subjected to non-consensual sexual acts may not fall directly within the scope of the primary rape provisions. In such circumstances, victims may have to rely on other provisions relating to assault or criminal intimidation, which may not fully capture the seriousness of the offence.”⁵

⁴ *The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, s. 63.*

⁵ *The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, ss. 63–74.*

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act is another significant piece of legislation that addresses sexual offences in India. To give children complete protection from sexual abuse and exploitation, this Act was passed. “Unlike many other laws dealing with sexual offences, the POCSO Act adopts a gender-neutral approach and recognises that both boys and girls can be victims of sexual abuse. The Act defines various forms of sexual offences against children, including penetrative sexual assault, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and the use of children for pornographic purposes. It also establishes child-friendly procedures for recording statements, conducting investigations, and carrying out trials in special courts to minimise the trauma experienced by victims.”⁶

“Judicial decisions have also played an important role in shaping the legal understanding of sexuality, consent, and personal autonomy in India. A landmark development occurred in the case of *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, where the Supreme Court decriminalised consensual same-sex relations between adults by partially striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The Court emphasised constitutional values such as dignity, equality, privacy, and individual autonomy, affirming that the law should respect the personal choices and identities of individuals. Although the judgment primarily addressed the rights of individuals belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community, it also contributed to broader discussions regarding sexual rights, consent, and bodily autonomy.”⁷

The Indian Constitution offers significant principles that impact the legal framework governing sexual offences, in addition to statutory provisions and judicial interpretations. The interpretation of legislation about sexual violence is significantly influenced by fundamental rights, including equality before the law, protection of life and personal liberty, and the right to dignity. When resolving matters about individual rights and gender equality, courts have increasingly relied on these basic principles.

Despite the prevalence of these statutory and constitutional safeguards, the legal apparatus continues to face difficulties in appropriately handling sexual offences against men. Male victims are less able to pursue justice using provisions intended for sexual offences due to the gender-specific construction of several statutes. Legal experts and policymakers are debating the necessity for more inclusive legal systems in light of the growing public awareness of gender diversity and victim rights. These conversations emphasise how crucial it is to consider whether current legislation should change to create frameworks that are gender-neutral and offer equal protection to all victims of sexual assault.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The subject of sexual offences against men has steadily acquired attention in academic research, albeit it is still notably underexplored in comparison to studies focusing on female victims. The frequency, causes, and effects of sexual violence against men have been studied by academics from a variety of fields, including criminology, psychology, public health, and law. The literature that is now available repeatedly emphasises how deeply ingrained societal preconceptions, gender norms, and legal framework constraints frequently cause male sexual victimisation to go unnoticed.

Sexual assault against males is a common but mostly unreported problem, according to a thorough analysis of the literature on male sexual victimisation. According to the study, the belief that sexual assault primarily affects women has historically hindered research on male victims. However, new research indicates that men are also sexually abused in a variety of settings, including intimate relationships, workplaces, educational institutions, and jails. The study also highlights how traditional ideas of

⁶ *The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012*, ss 3–13

⁷ *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, (2018) 10 SCC 1, Supreme Court of India

masculinity and societal shame frequently deter male victims from reporting sexual abuse or getting professional assistance. As a result, many incidents remain unrecorded, contributing to the invisibility of the issue in both academic research and policy discussions.⁸

The popular belief that male rape is uncommon or unimportant is contested by another academic study that focuses on male sexual assault. The author contends that although male sexual victimisation is more widespread than is generally believed, it is mainly concealed because of the social taboo around the subject. The study also emphasises that psychological trauma experienced by male victims is similar to that of female victims. Victims frequently experience emotional pain, self-blame, guilt, and confusion about their manhood and identity. The research further suggests that the reluctance of institutions and societies to acknowledge male victimisation contributes to the continued neglect of the issue.⁹

The psychological effects of sexual assault on male victims have been the subject of numerous scientific studies that have shown serious negative effects on mental health. According to research, long-term psychological impacts like sadness, anxiety, rage, post-traumatic stress disorder, and trouble establishing interpersonal relationships are common among male survivors. After the attack, victims frequently report feeling ashamed, powerless, and afraid of being judged by others. Additionally, some victims suffer from identity crises and confusion regarding their masculinity, especially in civilisations that place a strong emphasis on masculine authority and strength. These psychological consequences highlight that sexual violence against men is a serious public health concern that requires greater institutional recognition and support services.¹⁰

Another important dimension explored within the literature relates to societal perceptions of male sexual victimisation. Studies examining public attitudes toward male victims suggest that cultural stereotypes often prevent individuals from recognising men as legitimate victims of sexual assault. Traditional gender norms portray men as physically strong and emotionally resilient, leading to the assumption that men are incapable of being sexually victimised. Such stereotypes frequently result in victim-blaming, ridicule, or disbelief when male victims disclose their experiences. These social attitudes significantly contribute to the underreporting of male sexual assault and create barriers for victims seeking legal or psychological support.¹¹

Within the Indian legal context, scholars have increasingly criticised the gender-specific nature of sexual offence laws. Research examining gender equality and sexual offences against men in India highlights that existing legal provisions largely recognise women as victims and men as perpetrators. As a result, male victims often find themselves excluded from the protection of key criminal law provisions dealing with sexual violence. The study argues that such gender-specific legal frameworks fail to acknowledge the reality that men can also be victims of sexual assault. The author emphasises that the principle of equality before the law requires the development of gender-neutral legal provisions that provide protection to all victims regardless of gender.¹²

⁸ John C Thomas and Jonathan Kopel, "Male Victims of Sexual Assault: A Review of the Literature" (2023) 13(4) *Behavioral Sciences* 304

⁹ David DiMarco, John Mizzoni and Ryan Savitz, "On the Sexual Assault of Men" (2022) *Sexuality & Culture*

¹⁰ Michelle Lowe and Philip Rogers, "The Scope of Male Rape: A Selective Review of Research, Policy and Practice" (2017) 35 *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 38–43

¹¹ Frida M Larsson, Anna Nielsen, Zangin Zeebari and others, "Sexual Violence Against Men: A Retrospective Study on Victim Characteristics, Violence Severity, and Occurrence of Injuries Among Male Victims Attending a Sexual Assault Center Between 2015 and 2022 in Stockholm, Sweden" (2025) *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*

¹² Dexin Joyan, "Gender Equality and Sexual Offences Against Men in India" (2022) *Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research*

Studies focusing on child sexual abuse in India further demonstrate that boys are frequently victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. Reports discussing the sexual abuse of boys highlight that such incidents often remain hidden due to cultural taboos and social stigma. In many communities, discussions about sexual violence involving male victims are avoided due to embarrassment or fear of social judgment. Consequently, victims may suffer in silence without receiving adequate legal or psychological support. These studies emphasise the importance of recognising that sexual abuse is not limited to female victims and that boys also require effective protection mechanisms.¹³

Policy analyses and legal commentaries have also drawn attention to the limitations of the current legal framework in addressing male victimisation. Scholars have argued that earlier legal provisions historically addressed certain non-consensual sexual acts regardless of gender. However, contemporary legal reforms have not adequately addressed the issue of sexual violence against men. As a result, male victims often face difficulties in pursuing justice through existing legal provisions. The absence of gender-neutral rape laws has therefore become a significant topic of debate among legal scholars and policymakers.¹⁴

Recent public health research has also examined the broader consequences of male sexual victimisation. Studies exploring the health and social outcomes of sexual violence against men suggest that victims may experience long-term psychological and social challenges. These include mental health disorders, substance abuse, difficulties in maintaining personal relationships, and social isolation. Such findings indicate that sexual violence against men should not be viewed solely as a criminal justice issue but also as a major public health concern requiring comprehensive support systems and rehabilitation programs.¹⁵

Media commentaries and opinion pieces have also contributed to raising awareness about the issue of sexual harassment and assault against men. Commentators emphasise that while such incidents occur in various settings, including workplaces, educational institutions, and personal relationships, they remain largely unreported and socially taboo. Male victims often fear ridicule or disbelief from society, which discourages them from reporting the incident or seeking help. This silence further reinforces the misconception that men cannot be victims of sexual violence.¹⁶

Similarly, journalistic reports examining cases of sexual harassment against men in India highlight that male victimisation is a reality that remains insufficiently discussed within mainstream discourse. These reports note that traditional gender roles and cultural attitudes continue to shape perceptions of sexual violence, often preventing open conversations about male victimhood. The persistence of such attitudes contributes to the lack of policy initiatives and legal reforms addressing the issue.¹⁷

Overall, the existing body of literature clearly demonstrates that sexual offences against men represent a serious yet neglected social and legal problem. Scholars consistently identify three major barriers contributing to the invisibility of male victimisation: societal stigma surrounding male vulnerability, inadequate legal recognition within existing criminal laws, and limited empirical research on the subject. Consequently, many researchers emphasise the need for greater academic attention, legal reform, and policy initiatives aimed at recognising and addressing sexual violence against men. Expanding research in this area is essential to ensure that all victims of sexual violence receive equal protection, support, and access to justice.

¹³ Aarambh India, "Sexual Abuse of Boys in India: The Story in Numbers"

¹⁴ Centre for Civil Society, "India's Law Should Recognise That Men Can Be Raped Too"

¹⁵ S. Pal, P. K. Pathak, M. Rahaman and N. Tripathi, "Men at Risk: Correlates of Verbal, Physical and Sexual Violence Against Men Who Have Sex with Men Across Selected Cities in India" (2024) *BMC Public Health*

¹⁶ "It Is Time to Talk About Harassment and the Male Victim", *The Hindu*

¹⁷ *Sexual Harassment of Male a Reality, but Remains a Taboo*, *The Indian Express*

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A comprehensive strategy that incorporates institutional assistance, legal reform, social awareness, and additional scholarly research is needed to address sexual offences against men. The suggested remedies must concentrate on bolstering the legal framework while concurrently tackling the institutional and cultural obstacles that keep male victims from being acknowledged and given justice, because the problem is impacted by both legal loopholes and society's views.

Introducing Gender-Neutral Legal Provisions: The implementation of gender-neutral legislation governing sexual offences is one of the most significant reforms that can be considered. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita now maintains a gender-specific definition of rape, identifying men as the perpetrators and women as the victims. Although this concept was created to address the pervasive victimisation of women, it does not sufficiently take into account the potential that men may also be the victims of non-consensual sexual actions. Gender-neutral legislation would guarantee that everyone is protected by the law, regardless of gender. By guaranteeing that victims receive protection based on the type of offence rather than their gender, such measures would help advance the constitutional concepts of equality and dignity.

Development of Inclusive Support Mechanisms: Enhancing institutional support networks for victims of sexual assault is another crucial suggestion. The majority of crisis intervention techniques, victim aid programs, and counselling services are intended to support female victims. Even though these services are crucial, it's also critical to guarantee that male victims have access to comparable resources. Creating victim aid programs, counselling centres, and helplines that are inclusive of both genders will help provide safe spaces where male victims can seek assistance without fear of discrimination or stigma. Law enforcement officers, medical professionals, and social workers should also participate in training programs to make sure they are aware of the experiences of male victims.

Promoting Social Awareness and Challenging Stereotypes: Campaigns for social awareness are essential in combating the cultural stigma attached to male victimisation. Male victims may unwittingly become less visible as a result of public conversations on sexual abuse, which frequently centre on women. Regardless of the victim's gender, awareness campaigns should emphasise that sexual violence is essentially a violation of human dignity and bodily autonomy. Educational initiatives in schools, colleges, and workplaces can aid in dispelling damaging beliefs that suggest men are immune to or incapable of being sexually assaulted. Changing cultural attitudes can also be facilitated by promoting candid conversations about consent, respect, and personal boundaries.

Encouraging Academic Research and Evidence-Based Policy Making: Promoting scholarly study on sexual offences against males is a crucial step in tackling the problem. Research on male victimisation is still very limited compared to studies on violence against women, especially in the Indian setting. An interdisciplinary study that looks at the social, psychological, and legal dimensions of male victimisation should be supported by academic institutions, research centres, and policy organisations. Policymakers would be better equipped to comprehend the scope of the issue and create evidence-based policy solutions with the help of trustworthy empirical data.

Strengthening Legal Awareness and Reporting Mechanisms: Many victims of sexual offences may be reluctant to disclose instances because they are unsure of the legal process or fear social stigma. People can have a better understanding of their legal rights and remedies by strengthening legal awareness initiatives. Encouraging victims to approach legal authorities without fear of public exposure or humiliation can be achieved by streamlining reporting procedures and guaranteeing confidentiality during

investigations. Male victims may have better access to justice if police stations and courts implement victim-friendly reporting procedures.

Addressing Online Harassment and Digital Misconduct: Online harassment has become a more significant problem due to the quick growth of social media and digital communication. People may encounter offensive remarks, harassment, or sexually explicit communications in online environments, especially from male influencers and content producers. To combat online sexual harassment that affects users of both genders, policymakers and digital platform authorities should create more robust measures. Safer online environments can be achieved by more stringent moderation rules, clear reporting processes, and digital safety regulations.

Encouraging Inclusive Policy Dialogue: Lastly, inclusive conversations on sexual violence that acknowledge the experiences of all victims should be encouraged by legislators, legal experts, and civil society organisations. Addressing sexual offences against men enhances the general commitment to justice and equality rather than lessening the gravity of abuse against women. A more thorough and equitable system for resolving sexual abuse can be achieved through a balanced approach that recognises the perspectives of many victims.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The subject of sexual offences against men has begun to garner more attention in academic and policy discussions, although considerable gaps remain in the existing body of research. Future research should examine the social, psychological, and legal aspects of sexual violence against males to create a more thorough knowledge of male victimisation. Specifically, there is still a dearth of empirical research in the Indian setting, and more studies are required to record the frequency, types, and trends of these offences. Examining how societal views of masculinity affect the reporting and acknowledgement of sexual violence against males is another crucial area for future research. The "alpha" or "sigma" masculine ideals propagated by social media are examples of contemporary cultural narratives surrounding masculinity that may influence society's expectations of male strength and invulnerability. Future research could examine how these narratives impact victims' willingness to disclose crimes and ask for help.

The relationship between male victimisation and sexual orientation or gender identity has to be further investigated. Sexual violence can happen in a variety of identities and relationships, according to studies looking at violence suffered by members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Future studies may examine how social and legal developments affect the experiences of male victims who identify as sexual minorities in light of the acknowledgement of LGBTQIA+ rights in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*.

Additionally, new fields of study are made possible by technological advancements. Social media and digital platforms have made it possible for harassment and exploitation to take on previously unheard-of levels. Therefore, future studies might look at digital exploitation, online abuse, and the experiences of male victims in virtual environments.

In general, increasing multidisciplinary study in this area can aid in the creation of more inclusive legal and legislative solutions, as well as a deeper knowledge of male victimisation. Future research can significantly contribute to the development of more all-encompassing strategies for combating sexual assault against people of all genders by producing trustworthy data and analysing new societal trends.

CONCLUSION

Sexual offences against men are still largely unacknowledged in Indian society and the legal system. Con-

ventional views of masculinity, which present men as powerful, domineering, and emotionally strong, can hinder the recognition of male victimisation and deter victims from reporting sexual violence events. Consequently, a large number of cases are unreported and untreated. Even if conversations about gender equality, dignity, and individual liberty have grown in recent legal and judicial advances, current laws nevertheless provide male victims of sexual offences little acknowledgement. This leads to inconsistencies in legal protection and access to justice. More scholarly studies, inclusive policy conversations, and increased societal awareness are all necessary to address this problem. To provide justice, dignity, and sufficient protection for every member of society, a more inclusive and balanced approach to sexual violence is necessary, one that acknowledges that victims may be of any gender.

REFERENCES

1. <https://www.commonlii.org/in/other/lawreform/INLC/2000/2.html>
2. <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/168671544/>
3. <https://uwindsor.scholaris.ca/items/c696ff5b-43c9-4443-a100-86682a834965>
4. https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/250883_english_01042024.pdf
5. <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2079/1/AA2012-32.pdf>
6. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10135558/>
7. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353570309_On_the_Sexual_Assault_of_Men
8. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178917301908>
9. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/08862605251361127>
10. <https://www.ijlra.com/details/gender-equality-and-sexual-offences-against-men-in-india-by-dexin-joyan->
11. <https://aarambhindia.org/sexual-abuse-boys-india-story-numbers/>
12. <https://old.ccs.in/indias-law-should-recognise-men-can-be-raped-too>
13. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-024-20493-x>
14. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/it-is-time-to-talk-about-harassment-and-the-male-victim/article69416110.ece>
15. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/sexual-harassment-of-male-a-reality-but-remains-a-taboo/>