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# Trending but Not Believed: Social Media, Viral Cases, and the Public Perception of Male Victimhood in India

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**Abstract**

Social media has become an important platform where people share their personal experiences and seek support. However, when it comes to domestic disputes and cases of harassment, society does not always look at men as possible victims. Men who speak about facing abuse, threats or mental harassment are often ignored, questioned or made fun of because of the common belief that men are supposed to be strong and handle such situations themselves. This paper attempts to understand how male victims are viewed in Indian society and how social media influences people's opinions about such cases. It also examines the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, Sections 85 and 86 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and relevant judicial decisions to understand the legal protection available to men. The paper does not question the importance of laws protecting women but raises a simple concern: should a person be denied support simply because he is a man? It also highlights how people often form opinions about viral cases without knowing the complete facts. The paper suggests that every genuine victim, irrespective of gender, should be heard, supported and given a fair opportunity to seek justice.

**Keywords:** Male Victims, Domestic Violence, Social Media, Gender Justice, Gender Equality, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Public Perception.

## Introduction

The rise of social media has affected the way people talk about their problems and look for justice. With one post, video or even screenshot people can become known to many others in a matter of minutes. This exposure can help someone open up about their experience that was once kept in private. However, it may make a complex domestic issue public too quickly, without proper investigation. Matrimonial disputes, domestic violence and harassment are especially prone to such quick judgments.

When a man says that he has faced abuse, threats, humiliation or violence in a domestic relationship, he may not always receive the same understanding as other people who report harm. Social expectations often tell men to be strong, self-reliant and able to handle problems without help. As a result, a man who speaks up may be mocked or asked why he did not simply defend himself. Research on male victims has found that ideas about masculinity can discourage disclosure and help-seeking, although research conducted outside India cannot, by itself, establish the scale of the problem in this country. [1] Connell's work on masculinity also helps explain how social expectations shape what people consider "acceptable" behaviour for men. [2]

Acknowledging men as victims does not mean denying the terrible truth about violence against women. The question is whether society is able to accept different types of victims without making justice a fight between genders. A viral post on social networks is no evidence; neither is an allegation – it does not mean that someone is lying. Each victim should have their chance to speak, and conclusions should be drawn after evidence, not gender stereotypes.

The current paper attempts to analyze the problem of being visible in the digital age and being heard fairly. The paper will look into constitutional values, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA), Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), judicial precedents and potential reforms. The author does not assume that all complaints of the women are false or all statements of the men are true. Instead, the author believes that real victims have the right to ask for help while rights of the defendant must be respected as well.

**Constitutional principles**

Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution provide a useful framework for this debate. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws. In practice, this means that a complaint should be assessed on its facts and evidence, not on assumptions that women are always truthful or that men cannot be victims. Equality does not always require identical treatment; the law may recognise particular vulnerabilities. Article 15(3), for example, permits special provisions for women and children. A women-specific protective law is therefore not automatically unconstitutional. [3] At the same time, the wider legal system should consider whether people who fall outside a statute's defined class have suitable remedies.

Article 21 protects life and personal liberty and has been interpreted to include dignity and fair procedure. [4] These values have significance for complainants as well as those who are accused. The person complaining about an abuse cannot be made a mockery of, and the person who has been accused of some misconduct cannot be treated like a guilty individual simply because his case has become viral.

**Domestic violence law and male victims**

The PWDVA was enacted to provide effective protection to women experiencing violence in domestic relationships. It recognises that abuse can be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual or economic. Section 3 defines domestic violence, and the Act provides remedies including protection, residence and monetary orders, custody-related orders and compensation where appropriate. [5] These safeguards are based on the realities where there is private violence and where the victim has emotions or monetary dependency.

Since the Act provides the definition of "aggrieved person" in section 2(a) with respect to a woman who is or has been in domestic relationship with the respondent, thus, a man who alleges abuse by his wife or partner cannot get any relief as an aggrieved person under PWDVA. [5] It does not mean that men don't have any law in their favor. Depending upon the case, criminal laws or some other civil remedy may be applicable. The only problem here is that such a course of action does not ensure a similar level of protection provided by the PWDVA.

Thus, the important aspect is that whether men suffering from abuse get any practical and accessible help and remedy or not.

**The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023**

The BNS came into force on 1 July 2024, replacing the Indian Penal Code, 1860, subject to applicable tra-

nsitional and savings provisions. [6]. Section 85 and 86 pertain to acts of cruelty committed by a husband or his relatives against the woman. Section 86 describes the particular types of cruelty in which the wilful act may harm the body and/or mind of a woman and includes particular harassment in connection with any demand made for property or valuable securities. [6] These sections still pertain only to one gender; there is no similar general section enacted under the BNS under which a husband could claim cruelty against his wife.

On the other hand, it would be incorrect to state that under the BNS there is no legal relief available to a man in all circumstances. There are other laws that could apply in cases of assault and threat of assault. The most important aspect here is to find the right remedy rather than to equate all cases of domestic abuse.

**Judicial decisions and viral interpretation**

Recent decisions show why judgments must be read carefully. In Dara Lakshmi Narayana v. State of Telangana (2024), the Supreme Court intervened in criminal proceedings arising from a matrimonial dispute, emphasising the need to examine the allegations and the role attributed to each person. [7] In Shobhit Kumar Mittal v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2025), the Court considered proceedings against a relative in a matrimonial dispute, again highlighting the importance of specific allegations rather than guilt by association. [8] Neither decision proves that complaints by women are generally false; each must be understood in its own facts and legal context.

In Janshruti (People's Voice) v. Union of India (2025), the Supreme Court dismissed a petition seeking, among other things, gender-neutral guidelines and legislation concerning domestic violence and harassment. [9] The dismissal did not establish that male victims do not exist, nor did it resolve every concern about their access to assistance. It means that the relief sought in that petition was not granted. Online posts often turn such limited outcomes into sweeping claims. A quashing order, acquittal, dismissal of a petition and a finding that a complaint was knowingly false are different legal outcomes and should not be treated as interchangeable.

**Reducing the gap between visibility and justice**

The answer to male victimization must not be an issue of determining which gender faces greater hardships. Support systems should be available to males and females alike through counseling, legal support and referrals. Professionals should be educated in the possibility of abuse in the form of threats, intimidations, coercion, financial stress or emotional mistreatment, but also in discerning abuse from everyday conflicts between individuals. When a man seeks help, he should be heard without being considered guilty first before the facts are determined.

Legislators and those in authority should examine whether the current system is an effective solution for men experiencing domestic violence. Any legislation should be evidence based and consider the purpose behind protection for women, the dangers to vulnerable individuals and the effects of any changes made.

The social media user and news organization too have a responsibility in this regard. The questions that should be asked before viral claims are made include: Is the information verified? Is there only one side of the story? Are any personal details being shared inappropriately? The reports must differentiate between allegation and finding, and comments must refrain from labeling a person a culprit or a complainant a liar without analyzing the evidence. This can be achieved if law schools and bar associations release judgment summaries in an easily comprehensible manner.

Last but not the least, more research needs to be done regarding the plight of men as victims, seeking help, availability of services, and public perceptions about the same in India. Viral incidents can highlight a situation but can't prove how prevalent it is or whether all the complaints are false.

**Conclusion**

The difference between visibility and belief still matters in debates about male victims of violence in India. Social media provides men a platform but could also compel individuals to form opinions about an intricate case based on snippets. Dignity, justice, and equality in legal proceedings demand that these be addressed with greater seriousness. While PWDVA provides vital protection to women, the gendered language of the legislation and Sections 85 to 86 of BNS raises the issue about the support and redress available to men subjected to violence.

The solution is neither denying women their grievances nor belittling men's allegations. It is ensuring that support is accessible, that investigations are impartial, that judgment is contextual, and that reforms are data driven. Gender norms and social biases cannot determine which victim gets justice or whose rights should be protected.

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