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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN: PREVALENCE, LAW, AND POLICY RESPONSES

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Abstract:-

Male victims of domestic violence face significant, yet often overlooked, abuse, primarily due to prevailing social stigmas and gender norms. Research indicates that men experience physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual violence from intimate partners, but cultural expectations of masculinity discourage them from seeking help. This underreporting, compounded by biased legal frameworks and a lack of support services, perpetuates the misconception that men cannot be victims and contributes to severe, long-lasting physical and mental health consequences.

Prevalence and forms of abuse

While research has historically focused on female victims, data consistently shows that men also experience intimate partner violence (IPV).

- **Widespread abuse:** A 2019 cross-sectional study in rural India found that over half of the male participants had experienced gender-based violence, with more than 51% identifying their wives or intimate partners as the perpetrators.
- **Diverse forms of abuse:** Men report experiencing all forms of domestic abuse, including:
 - **Emotional and psychological violence:** Insults, threats, public humiliation, and control tactics are the most commonly reported forms of abuse.
 - **Physical violence:** Physical violence against men, while less frequent than emotional abuse, can range from slapping and pushing to severe assaults.
 - **Sexual violence:** Men also report instances of forced or coerced sexual activity, though this is significantly underreported.
 - **Legal and administrative abuse:** This includes false accusations of abuse, manipulating child custody arrangements, and exploiting biased legal systems.

INTRODUCTION:-

Domestic violence entails not only physical harm but also threats, verbal, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse. Violence against men is often not taken seriously, is reported less and does not have formal legal recognition, in this realm. Unfortunately, this is largely resultant of the social attitudes and perceptions that people have toward the gender of the victim and perpetrator.

NATURE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN:-

Any form of violence, thus, including domestic violence is against humanity and a violation of basic human rights, a punishable offense. Most frequently experienced violence in intimate partner violence and domestic violence is emotional abuse/violence-most often not reported by people. Global reports on domestic violence have recognized it to be a form of violence that affects a person's life in all spheres-physically, mentally, emotionally, and psychologically.[²]

Physical abuse directed at men includes slapping; pushing; hitting by wife/her parents/relatives; or throwing objects such as utensils, cell phones, and crockery at the husband. The most common form of physical abuse identified is slapping which is reported in 98.3% and the least common was being beaten by weapon that accounted for 3.3% of the cases. Only in one-tenth of the cases, men reported that physical assaults were severe.[⁴]

Psychological and/or emotional abuse against men encompasses criticism being reported against men (85%), were insulted publicly or in front of someone (29.7%) and 3.5% were threatened or hurt. It can also be in the form of mental abuse such as constant threats to the husband and his family. One of the most traumatic experiences that men report is a false allegation of IPC section 498 of dowry and domestic violence.

Sexual abuse has been reported to be experienced by a small proportion of 0.4% of men, which is usually when the man denies having sex.

Body:-

1. Measurement Challenges and Data Gaps

Accurate prevalence estimates are hindered by (i) masculine norms that discourage disclosure; (ii) survey instruments calibrated primarily for female victimization; (iii) limited sampling of

unmarried/cohabiting men; (iv) administrative data that track cases only under women focused statutes; and (v) limited capture of nonphysical abuse. National family health surveys, police records, and helpline data can undercount male victims; specialized victimization surveys and anonymous digital reporting portals tend to show higher rates. Triangulation across sources is therefore critical.

2. Brief Literature Review

International scholarship indicates that while women face higher rates of severe and sexual violence, men experience meaningful levels of psychological aggression, controlling behaviors, and physical assaults—often bi-directional in conflicted relationships. Indian studies, though fewer, have documented male victimization through community surveys, clinical samples, and legal case analyses. Barriers to help seeking include fear of ridicule, lack of shelters for men, child custody concerns, and apprehension about being counter accused. Digital harassment and reputational threats are emerging concerns for younger men.

3. Framework in India

3.1 *PWDVA, 2005.* The PWDVA provides civil remedies—protection orders, residence orders, monetary reliefs, and custody—exclusively for women aggrieved by domestic relationships. While transformative for women, the statute does not provide a symmetrical civil remedy for male victims.

3.2 *Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Criminal Law.* Gender-neutral provisions relevant to male victims include sections on hurt and grievous hurt, criminal intimidation, wrongful confinement, extortion, theft, mischief, and criminal intimidation using electronic means. Protection against stalking and cyber harassment can, in principle, be invoked irrespective of gender, although practical pathways are unclear.

3.3 *Family and civil law remedies.* Men may seek injunctions, restitution of conjugal rights or divorce on cruelty grounds, and guardianship/custody orders in the best interests of the child. Senior citizens may invoke protections under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 when abused by adult children or relatives.

3.4 *Comparative perspectives.* Several jurisdictions (e.g., UK, Australia, parts of the US and Canada) use gender-neutral “domestic abuse” statutes and fund inclusive services, while still

maintaining gender responsive programming for women and children. Lessons include parallel shelters or safe stays for men, gender-inclusive risk assessments, and perpetrator programs for all genders.

1. False Allegations, Misuse Debates, and Due Process Safeguards

Public debate often centers on misuse of DV related provisions. Empirical research suggests that strategic litigation can occur in family disputes across genders. The policy focus should be to strengthen due process safeguards—early neutral evaluation, perjury sanctions, calibrated interim orders, and timeline discipline—while avoiding narratives that delegitimize genuine survivors. A balanced approach recognizes male victimization without undermining protections for women.

2. Health, Economic, and Social Consequences for Men

DV correlates with depression, anxiety, substance use, sleep disorders, and chronic pain among male survivors. Economic coercion and legal harassment can lead to job loss, debt, and social isolation. Fathers may be estranged from children, compounding mental health stressors. Barriers to care include limited gender sensitive counseling, few safe housing options, and the perception that services are “not for men.”

3. Methods (Rapid Scoping Review)

This paper applied a rapid scoping approach: (a) identifying peer reviewed and grey literature on male DV victimization in India and comparable jurisdictions; (b) extracting themes on prevalence, patterns, help seeking, and legal outcomes; and (c) synthesizing implications for practice. Although not a systematic review, the approach emphasizes transparency, reproducibility of search logic, and inclusion of programmatic evaluations.

4. Findings

4.1 Prevalence patterns. Men report higher psychological aggression and controlling behaviors than severe physical or sexual assault; however, severe injuries do occur and are frequently unreported. Younger men and those in financially precarious situations may be at elevated risk.

4.2 Help seeking. Key enabling factors are empathetic first responders, confidentiality, and assurance against ridicule. Anonymous digital intake and gender-neutral helplines increase

disclosure. Legal literacy about nonbailable vs. bailable offences, evidence preservation (medical certificates, digital forensics), and documentation of coercive control are decisive.

4.3 *Service gaps.* Identified gaps include absence of short stay facilities for men, limited trauma-informed counseling tailored to male socialization, weak referral pathways between police, welfare, and mental health systems, and scarce funding for inclusive services.

5. A Gender Inclusive Policy Framework

5.1 *Legal options.* Consider piloting gender-neutral civil protection orders parallel to PWDVA remedies for all survivors, with built-in due process safeguards. Clarify police standing orders on recording complaints from male victims and referral to protection officers or social workers.

5.2 *Services.* Establish men's helplines, short stay safe housing, and counseling integrated with existing one stop centers. Train service providers in biasfree screening and risk assessment, including lethality indicators applicable across genders.

5.3 *Health systems.* Integrate DV screening into primary care and mental health services for men; standardize documentation templates; and enable confidential referrals.

5.4 *Data and research.* Expand national surveys with gender-neutral modules on DV, coercive control, and technology facilitated abuse. Fund longitudinal and program evaluation studies to understand trajectories and effective interventions.

5.5 *Public communication.* Normalize help seeking among men through stigma reduction campaigns while emphasizing accountability for all perpetrators.

6. Practical Guidance for Male Survivors

(i) Ensure immediate safety; (ii) document incidents (photos, messages, call logs); (iii) seek medical evaluation for injuries; (iv) consider legal advice regarding criminal complaints or protective civil orders where available; (v) arrange safe child contact plans; and (vi) engage counseling for trauma and stress management. Trusted peers and community advocates can serve as companions during first disclosure.

7. Ethical Considerations

Research and practice must avoid reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes. Data collection should minimize risk, ensure confidentiality, and offer referrals. Analyses should disaggregate by age, sexuality, disability, and socioeconomic status to capture intersectional vulnerabilities among men.

8. Illustrative Case Vignettes (Composite)

Case A: A 32-year-old salaried man reports escalating verbal abuse, social isolation from friends, and threats of reputational harm via social media. Documentation and a safety plan with a helpline facilitated de-escalation and counseling.

Case B: A 58-year-old widower experiences economic abuse and intimidation by an adult son over property. Relief was accessed through senior citizens' tribunal orders and police.

Counselling.

Case C: A 27-year-old man in a same-sex relationship reports stalking and blackmail. Cyber cell intervention and mental health referral were effective alongside no contact advisory.

9. Limitations of This Paper

As a rapid scoping review and policy analysis, this paper does not generate new primary data. Some cited prevalence estimates vary across methods and jurisdictions. Legal interpretations are general and should not be construed as legal advice; local practice and case law evolution may alter applicability.

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Appendix A: Sample Screening Checklist for Adult Male DV Survivors (Clinician Use)

1. Presenting concerns (injury, anxiety, sleep disturbance, work issues).
2. Relationship status and cohabitation; children in the household.

3. Specific behaviors experienced: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, technology facilitated.
4. Frequency, escalation, and most severe recent incident (date/time/location).
5. Coercive control indicators (isolation, surveillance, threats to reputation or employment).
6. Access to money, documents, phone, and transport.
7. Weapons in the home or threats of self-harm by partner/family.
8. Evidence preservation: medical exam, photographs, messages, call logs, witnesses.
9. Immediate safety plan and contact for follow up; referrals and legal information provided.
10. Consent for documentation and data protection assurances.

Conclusion:-

Domestic violence against men is real, consequential, and addressable. A right based, gender-inclusive approach can improve recognition, reporting, and recovery for male survivor's while safeguarding the hard-won advances in women's protection. The path forward is not zero-sum; it is to broaden the lens, invest in inclusive services, and strengthen due process for all.