SUICIDE AND MENTAL HEALTH: THE SILENT CRISIS AMONG MEN

PRIYA BENIWAL[1]

AMARDEEP[2]

Abstract

Suicide among men is not merely the termination of life—it is a profound reflection of unaddressed emotional turmoil, systemic shortcomings, and, in many cases, institutional injustice. In India, men account for an alarmingly disproportionate share of suicide cases, yet the societal, legal, and academic discourse on men's mental health remains largely neglected. This paper critically examines the silent epidemic of male suicide, identifying key catalysts such as legal harassment, gender-biased laws, prolonged marital disputes, workplace exploitation, false allegations, and relentless court proceedings that often erode an individual's psychological resilience. Recent high-profile cases, including the tragic suicide of Bengaluru IT professional Atul Subhash, highlight how alleged spousal harassment combined with protracted legal battles can push men towards extreme despair, underscoring significant gaps in our judicial and support systems. By adopting a multidisciplinary approach—encompassing legal, psychological, and sociological dimensions—this study sheds light on the intersection of mental health and systemic injustice faced by men in India. The paper argues for immediate structural reforms, including the implementation of gender-neutral legislation, workplace mental health programs, and culturally sensitive awareness campaigns aimed at destigmatising men's emotional struggles.

Keywords: (male suicide, men's mental health, legal harassment, gender-neutral laws, marital disputes, false allegations, judicial reforms)

1. Introduction

Suicide among men has become a dark undercurrent running through the modern Indian social fabric. Behind every statistic is a story—a story of a man who bore the weight of expectations, fought silent battles, and ultimately found no escape but to end his life. The **National Crime**

[1] Priya Beniwal, Tutor at Mundlia Law Classes, Hisar
[2] *Amardeep, Tutor at Mundlia Law Classes, Hisar*

Records Bureau (NCRB)[3] data for 2022 reported over 1.2 lakh male suicides, accounting for nearly three-quarters of all suicides in India. This is not merely a personal or familial loss—it is a societal failure.

Consider the case of **Atul Subhash**, a Bengaluru-based artificial intelligence professional, who in December 2024 ended his life after being embroiled in what he described as "unending legal harassment." His death is one among many that are increasingly drawing attention to a disturbing pattern: men being driven to suicide due to relentless matrimonial litigation, false allegations, financial extortion, and the absence of empathetic legal or mental health support.

This paper examines the phenomenon through a legal and human rights lens, aiming not to undermine the legitimate struggles of women but to highlight an overlooked crisis that calls for equal compassion and structural change.

2. The Gendered Reality of Suicide

2.1 Statistical Overview

According to the National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) *Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India 2022* report, a staggering **72.5% of all recorded suicides in the country were by men**, underscoring a gendered mental health crisis that often goes unnoticed. The majority of these cases were concentrated in the 30–45-year age group, a critical period when men typically shoulder the heaviest professional, familial, and financial burdens. This stage of life is marked by career pressures, responsibilities of raising a family, managing debts or loans, and societal expectations of being the primary breadwinner, which together create an intense psychological strain.

The report identifies several primary causes behind these suicides: **family disputes (32%)**, **marital conflicts (25%)**, **financial distress (23%)**, and notably, **legal harassment or fear of litigation (10%)**. The latter category, though numerically smaller, is increasingly significant, especially with the growing number of cases where men face prolonged legal battles in matrimonial, domestic violence, dowry-related, or workplace harassment matters. These legal

[3] National Crime Records Bureau, *Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India 2022: Annual Report*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India (2023).

entanglements often result in social stigma, economic drain, and emotional exhaustion, leaving the affected individuals with a sense of helplessness and alienation.

Such statistics not only reveal the disproportionate vulnerability of men to suicidal tendencies but also call attention to the systemic and cultural gaps in mental health interventions, legal safeguards, and societal support structures that fail to address men's distress in a holistic manner.

2.2 Societal Pressures and Masculine Stereotypes

From a young age, men are conditioned to equate masculinity with silence and resilience—told to "man up," suppress tears, and shoulder burdens without complaint. Society often praises this stoicism, but it leaves men ill-equipped to express pain or vulnerability. Seeking therapy or admitting emotional distress is frequently misinterpreted as weakness, discouraging many from accessing mental health support. Celebrities like *Sushant Singh Rajput* and sports figures like *Virat Kohli*, who openly discussed their mental health struggles, reveal how even successful men face crushing societal expectations. This culture of suppressed suffering fuels untreated depression, relationship breakdowns, and tragically, male suicides.

3. Legal and Structural Factors Leading to Male Suicide

3.1 The Atul Subhash Case: A Wake-Up Call from Bengaluru

In December 2024, 34-year-old Atul Subhash, an IT professional, was found dead by suicide in his Bengaluru apartment.[4] Alongside him were a 24-page note and an 81-minute recording, documenting his prolonged struggle—120 court appearances over two years, allegations under *Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code*[5] concerning matrimonial cruelty, and repeated negotiations over financial settlement in exchange for visitation with his child.

He described the legal process as *"a slow poison"*—one that eroded his self-respect, destabilised his livelihood, and diminished his hope for reconciliation or fair treatment. Following his death, protests emerged across several cities, prompting the Supreme Court to reiterate a vital caution:

[4] "Bengaluru IT Professional Dies by Suicide Alleging Legal Harassment," *The Hindu*, December 2024.
[5] Indian Penal Code, § 498A, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India).

laws intended to protect must be applied judiciously, lest they become tools of undue pressure or harassment**.**

FIRs were later registered against certain individuals related to the case, yet the incident left a broader societal question unanswered: How many individuals, caught in prolonged legal and emotional turmoil, go unheard until it is too late?

3.2 Misuse of Dowry and Domestic Violence Laws

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961[6], and Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)[7] were landmark legal provisions aimed at curbing dowry harassment and protecting women from cruelty within marital homes. However, over the years, multiple judgments—such as *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India (2005)*[8] and *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P. (2017)*[9]—have acknowledged instances where these laws have been misused. False complaints can lead to immediate arrest of the husband and his family without thorough preliminary investigation, resulting in humiliation, social ostracism, and career setbacks. For many men, this prolonged legal ordeal becomes not just a financial strain but an emotional crucible, pushing them toward severe anxiety, depression, and, in tragic cases, suicidal tendencies.

3.3 Maintenance and Alimony Battles

Maintenance and alimony provisions were enacted to ensure that financially dependent spouses, primarily women, are not left destitute after separation or divorce. However, there have been growing instances where these provisions are leveraged punitively against men. Courts may sometimes award maintenance that is disproportionate to the man's actual earnings, disregarding his existing debts, loans, or familial responsibilities. This leads to crushing financial burdens, repeated court appearances, and mounting legal expenses. Men in such situations often report feelings of helplessness, entrapment, and humiliation—psychological conditions that, when prolonged, can contribute to self-harm or suicidal ideation.

[6] *Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961*, No. 28, Acts of Parliament, 1961 (India);
[7] *Indian Penal Code*, § 498A, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India);
[8] *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India*, (2005) 6 SCC 281 (India).
[9] *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P.*, (2017) 8 SCC 746 (India).

3.4 Workplace Harassment and False Allegations

The Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act[10] has been instrumental in creating safer workplaces for women by providing them a structured mechanism to report sexual harassment. However, there is a rising trend where men allege false accusations, often arising in contexts of personal vendetta, workplace rivalry, or strained professional relations. The consequences for the accused can be immediate and devastating—suspension from work, reputational damage, loss of livelihood, and isolation from peers. The absence of swift mechanisms for clearing one's name exacerbates the mental trauma, leading to chronic stress, insomnia, and in some cases, self-destructive outcomes.

4. Societal Expectations and Emotional Isolation

4.1 The "Stoic Male" Dilemma

From childhood, men are often socialised under the weight of rigid masculine stereotypes—being told to "man up," "real men don't cry," or to suppress any expression of emotional vulnerability. This cultural conditioning equates masculinity with strength, silence, and emotional endurance, leaving little room for fear, sadness, or breakdowns. Unlike women, who more commonly find empathetic networks to express distress, men frequently lack such safe spaces. Their struggles—whether financial, familial, or psychological—are often dismissed as weakness or incompetence when voiced. This forced stoicism not only isolates them emotionally but also delays or prevents them from seeking timely mental health support, allowing stress and trauma to accumulate until it becomes unbearable.

4.2 Recent Illustrations of Isolation

The tragic suicides of men across India underline how isolation and institutional neglect can push them to fatal extremes.

[10] *Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013*, No. 14, Acts of Parliament, 2013 (India).

- **Puneet Khurana**, a café owner in Pune, left behind a one-hour video before ending his life, narrating how crippling maintenance demands and continued humiliation from his in-laws eroded his will to live. His death highlights the intersection of financial exploitation and emotional collapse.
- **Deepak Kumar**, a 26-year-old grocery shopkeeper from Bhagalpur, meticulously documented eight days of abuse in his suicide diary—detailing verbal insults, physical assault, and legal harassment allegedly inflicted by his wife. His case reflects how domestic disputes, when weaponised through legal channels, can devastate ordinary men with limited recourse.
- **Jayesh Panchasara**, a daily-wage labourer from Junagadh, died by suicide after being repeatedly denied access to his daughter and allegedly coerced for money by his spouse's family. His story speaks to the agony of alienation from one's own child, compounded by coercion and helplessness in the face of drawn-out legal and social battles.

Each of these cases represents more than an individual tragedy—they reveal a systemic failure to acknowledge men's vulnerabilities, provide them with institutional protection, or create mechanisms of early intervention before despair becomes irreversible.

5. Constitutional and Human Rights Perspective

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution[11] guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, interpreted by the Supreme Court to mean not merely animal existence but a life with dignity, free from mental torture, arbitrary action, and oppressive legal burdens. In *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of Indi (1978)*[12], the Court expanded Article 21 to include the right to live with dignity, personal security, and mental peace. When a man is forced into extreme psychological despair—due to false criminal allegations, excessive litigation, or prolonged denial of parental rights—this constitutional guarantee is gravely undermined.

The misuse of certain protective laws, including Section 498A IPC and provisions under the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961**,** has been recognised judicially. In *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union*

[11] *INDIA CONST.* art. 21.
[12] *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*, (1978) 1 SCC 248 (India).

of India (2005), the Supreme Court observed that while these laws serve an important purpose, their abuse can lead to legal terrorism. Similarly, in *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P. (2017)*, the Court issued guidelines to curb arbitrary arrests and protect men and their families from frivolous complaints, acknowledging the devastating personal and social consequences of such misuse.

This intersects with the principle of equality under Article 14[13], as the law, when misapplied, ceases to be protective and instead becomes punitive—creating a gendered imbalance. The State's inaction in filtering mala fide prosecutions or providing timely relief contributes to a systemic violation of fundamental rights.

From an international standpoint, Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[14] guarantees every individual the right to life, liberty, and security of person. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[15], to which India is a signatory, obliges states to ensure that legal systems do not inflict disproportionate mental or social harm through misuse or procedural delays.

Thus, when men are driven to suicide under the weight of false cases, extortionate maintenance demands, or alienation from their children, it is not only **a** personal tragedy but a breach of constitutional morality as upheld in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018)*[16], where the Court emphasised that laws must uphold dignity and equality rather than perpetuate discrimination or suffering.

6. International Perspectives and Best Practices

Globally, a growing number of nations have recognized that male mental health requires specialized attention, particularly in contexts involving familial stress, litigation, and societal expectations of masculinity. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia have been at the forefront of implementing proactive measures to address this overlooked issue.

[13] *INDIA CONST.* art. 14.
[14] *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* art. 3, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc. A/810 (Dec. 10, 1948).
[15] *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* art. 6, Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171.
[16] *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, (2018) 10 SCC 1 (India).

One of the most notable examples is the **"Movember" movement**, which originated in Australia and has now gained worldwide recognition. This initiative focuses not only on raising awareness about men's physical health issues, such as prostate and testicular cancer, but also emphasizes mental well-being, early counselling, and suicide prevention. It has successfully mobilized resources for establishing workplace support groups, offering confidential counselling services, and creating dedicated helplines for men at risk of depression or self-harm[17].

In the **United Kingdom**, the government has introduced targeted funding for male suicide prevention programs, recognizing that men are three times more likely to die by suicide compared to women. Campaigns like "CALM" (Campaign Against Living Miserably) specifically aim to provide 24/7 crisis support to men facing emotional or legal turmoil. Similarly, Canada integrates mental health services into its family courts, ensuring that men undergoing contentious divorces or custody battles have access to mental health professionals and mediation facilities, thereby reducing litigation-related distress.[18]

A key legislative trend among several European nations, including **Germany, Sweden, and Norway**, is the adoption of gender-neutral domestic violence and harassment laws. These frameworks move away from treating only women as victims and recognize that abuse, coercive control, or false allegations can affect any gender. This inclusive approach not only enhances the fairness of legal remedies but also reduces the stigma men face when they come forward as victims of harassment or domestic abuse[19].

Furthermore, countries like **New Zealand** have pioneered shared parenting models and fast-tracked family law procedures to minimize prolonged custody battles, which are a major cause of emotional trauma for non-custodial fathers. These systems often mandate joint counselling sessions and parental coordination programs, ensuring that the child's welfare is prioritized without undermining the mental health of either parent.

[17] Movember Foundation, *About Movember*, MOVEMBER, https://us.movember.com/about (last visited Aug. 30, 2025).
[18] UK GOV'T, *National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England* (2023), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-suicide-prevention-strategy
[19] Domestic Violence Act, 1988:137 (Swed.); Domestic Abuse Act, 2021 (Nor.).

Collectively, these best practices demonstrate that a holistic model—combining legal reform, mental health intervention, and public awareness—can significantly reduce male suicide rates linked to familial and legal stressors. India, in its pursuit of a more equitable justice system, can draw upon these experiences to develop gender-neutral laws, establish male mental health hotlines, and introduce mandatory pre-litigation counselling in matrimonial disputes.

7. Recommendations for Reform

7.1 Legal Reforms: Building Fairness and Compassion into the System

Amend Section 498A IPC with Safeguards against Misuse

Section 498A was originally introduced to shield women from cruelty and dowry harassment—a genuine and pressing issue in India. However, over time, courts and commissions have observed instances where this powerful legal provision has been misused as a tool for personal vengeance rather than justice. False, malicious, or exaggerated complaints can destroy not just one man's life but entire families—parents, siblings, even children often get dragged into long, draining legal battles. The law must continue to protect real victims, but it should also have clear safeguards and strict penalties for those who misuse it deliberately, because justice must never come at the cost of someone else's dignity and mental well-being. The Supreme Court in *Rajesh Sharma v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2017)* took note of this reality and called for systemic checks to prevent abuse.

Mandatory Pre-litigation Mediation in Family Disputes

Courtrooms are often battlegrounds where emotions run high, and the scars of litigation can last a lifetime. Imagine a couple already in distress being thrown into years of adversarial proceedings—every hearing a fresh wound, every accusation deepening the rift. Mandatory mediation before filing a case could change this dynamic. It provides a space where both parties can sit down, air their grievances with professional guidance, and possibly resolve the issue without tearing apart the family fabric. Even when reconciliation isn't possible, mediation can at least soften hostility, reduce false accusations born out of anger, and allow for a more humane transition instead of a war of attrition.

Gender-neutral Domestic Violence Laws

Violence within families is not limited by gender. While women have rightly been protected under domestic violence laws, many men silently endure emotional, psychological, and even physical abuse—but rarely speak out for fear of being mocked, dismissed, or labelled weak. This silence leads to suppressed trauma and sometimes tragic consequences. Making domestic violence laws truly gender-neutral would acknowledge that pain knows no gender. It would give every victim—man, woman, or anyone else—the dignity of being heard and the confidence to seek help without shame.

7.2 Policy Measures: Strengthening Support Systems for Men

Dedicated Helplines and Crisis Centres for Men

In India, countless helplines, women's cells, and shelters are available for women in distress—a critical step forward for gender justice. But for men facing false accusations, family breakdown, or mental health crises, such safety nets are almost non-existent. Many suffer in silence, unsure where to turn, often until the pressure becomes unbearable. Establishing a 24/7 national helpline and regional crisis centres for men could become a lifeline—offering immediate legal guidance, confidential counselling, and emotional support when it matters the most. Just as a phone call can save a woman trapped in violence, it could also save a man standing on the edge of despair.

Corporate Mental Health Initiatives

Workplaces today, especially in high-pressure sectors like IT, finance, and start-ups, demand relentless performance. When this stress intersects with personal disputes—divorce, child custody battles, or legal harassment—it can become overwhelming. Men often feel compelled to "tough it out," fearing stigma or appearing weak. Companies should step up by creating male-focused counselling programs, peer-support circles, and periodic mental health check-ins. Catching the early signs of burnout or emotional decline can prevent tragedies—not just saving an employee, but a father, a son, a husband, or a colleague who might otherwise silently collapse under pressure.

Free Legal Aid for the Falsely Accused

For a man falsely accused under laws meant to protect women, the financial toll is devastating. Court cases drag on for years, legal fees pile up, and savings meant for children's education or family security often vanish overnight. Free or subsidized legal aid for the falsely accused is not charity—it is justice in action. It ensures that a man's right to defend himself does not depend on his bank balance, and that his family is not punished for a crime never committed. This measure would restore some balance to a system that, in its earnest effort to protect women, often leaves innocent men with nowhere to turn.

7.3 Societal Reorientation: Building a Culture that Heals, Not Hurts

Destigmatising Men's Mental Health

From childhood, boys are often told to "man up," "don't cry like a girl," or "be strong." These phrases, though casually spoken, plant deep roots—teaching men that expressing pain is weakness and seeking help is shameful. As these boys grow into men, they carry unspoken battles within them. Schools, universities, workplaces, and even popular media must actively challenge these damaging stereotypes. Campaigns, workshops, and awareness drives should make it clear: asking for help is not a sign of weakness—it is an act of courage, maturity, and self-respect**.**

Shared Parenting as a Default Approach

In marital disputes, children often become silent victims, used as bargaining chips or leverage to inflict emotional pain. This harms not only the parents but leaves deep scars on the child's emotional well-being. Adopting shared parenting as a standard practice, as seen in many European nations, ensures that children continue to receive love, guidance, and presence from both parents, regardless of the breakdown in their relationship. It shifts the narrative from "winning custody" to "raising children together, even apart."

Celebrating Emotional Strength in Men

Society has long celebrated the stoic man—the one who bears pain in silence, never falters, never cries. But true strength lies not in suppression, but in acknowledging one's emotions and facing

them head-on. Cinema, television, and digital platforms have a powerful role to play in reshaping this narrative. By showcasing men who openly express vulnerability, seek therapy, and support one another without fear of judgment, we can raise a generation of boys who believe that strength and sensitivity can—and should—coexist.

8. Conclusion

The rising number of male suicides in India is neither a statistical aberration nor a mere private tragedy—it is a profound indicator of a structural, cultural, and legal vacuum. Men like Atul Subhash, who was driven to end his life after facing relentless legal harassment and emotional trauma, represent a larger, silenced population. These are men caught in a web of gendered expectations, punitive matrimonial laws, prolonged court proceedings, and a lack of institutional empathy. Their pain is often dismissed, their voices ridiculed, and their mental health struggles rendered invisible under the shadow of stereotypes that glorify stoicism while condemning vulnerability.

Addressing this crisis is not about undermining women's rights or dismissing the genuine cases of domestic abuse they face. Rather, it is about achieving balance—ensuring that justice is not a one-sided sword but a shield that protects all citizens. Legal reforms such as introducing gender-neutral domestic violence laws, enforcing safeguards against the misuse of Section 498A IPC, and adopting shared parenting frameworks can restore fairness. Simultaneously, national helplines, workplace mental health programs, and media campaigns must humanize men's struggles and destigmatize seeking help.

A society that measures its progress only by protecting one gender at the cost of another fails its moral and constitutional promise. If India aspires to uphold the true essence of Article 21 of its Constitution—a life of dignity, equality, and mental peace—it must act now. The silent crisis of male suicide is not a battle men can fight alone; it is a collective responsibility, and every life saved reaffirms the principle that justice, like humanity, must be inclusive.

References (Bluebook 20th Edition)

1. *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India*, (2005) 6 SCC 281 (India).
2. *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P.*, (2017) 8 SCC 746 (India).
3. *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*, (1978) 1 SCC 248 (India).
4. *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, (2018) 10 SCC 1 (India).

5. National Crime Records Bureau, *Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India 2022* (India).
6. World Health Organization, *Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative* (2019).
7. Movember Foundation, *Male Mental Health Campaign Report* (2021).
8. *Indian Express*, Bengaluru Techie Ends Life Over Matrimonial Litigation, Dec. 2024.
9. *Business Standard*, SC Flags Misuse of Cruelty Laws, Dec. 2024.
10. *Times of India*, Junagadh Man Dies by Suicide, In-laws Booked, July 2025.