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Still Accountable Alleged Misuse of Gender-Protective Laws in India: Media Trial, Psychological Trauma and Male Victimization

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ABSTRACT
Gender-protective laws play an essential role in addressing gender-based violence. The protective matrimonial provisions, namely, Sections 85 and 86 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS, 2023) and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA, 2005) are in accordance with the fundamental rights provided in the Constitution of India (1950). However, decades of judicial practice and National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics suggest a structurally notable trend of abuse, in which these provisions are being used as tools of adversarial matrimonial litigation, and not as instruments of real protection. This alleged misuse raises concerns about legal accountability and psychological consequences of false allegations on male accused persons. Further, media trial exacerbates the situation and contribute to harassment of men. Furthermore, the gender-based structure of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, (PWDVA, 2005) excludes men who face similar domestic abuse, which contributes to male victimization. The Article analyses the intersection of gender specific laws in India, male victimization and psychological harm to the victim. It also examines how prolonged legal uncertainty, media trial (including social media), reputational damage and financial strain contributes to mental health issues including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance and suicidal thoughts. By integrating legislative analysis with evidence-based studies, this article contributes to interdisciplinary discussion on gender justice, psychological well being and legal reforms in India.
Keywords: domestic violence, male victimization, matrimonial laws, media trial, misuse.

1. INTRODUCTION

The law structure that protects women against domestic violence in India is a landmark success of post-independence legal reforms. Its development is characterized by three stages. The initial stage (1970s-1980s), which was marked by the reactive legislation in response to the dowry death crisis, this resulted in the creation of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (now Section 85 and 86 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023) by the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act (1983), making matrimonial cruelty a criminal offense and a state-enforced matter for the first time (Agnes, 2011). The law was deliberately designed to have cognizability, non-bailable character and non-compoundability, so that victims would not face familial pressure to withdraw. The second stage (1990s-2005) was motivated by civil society pressure to have a comprehensive civil protective framework, producing the PWDVA (2005), which established protection orders, residence orders, and monetary relief delivered by special Protection Officers and Magistrates (Lawyers Collective, 2009). The third step, which saw the adoption of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023), did not substantively alter the content of Section 498A in Sections 85 and 86, thus, carrying forward both its protective design and its structurally pre-determined misuse vulnerabilities.

These safeguarding tools are constitutionally based on Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution of India (1950). Article 15(3) specifically permits special protection of women and children. Article 21, as interpreted in Francis Coralie Mullin v. Union Territory of Delhi (1981), includes the right to live with dignity and freedom against domestic violence. However, forty years of operational experience have created a disputed socio-legal environment. In a long series of cases, since Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India (2005) to Achin Gupta v. State of Haryana (2024), the Supreme Court has repeatedly admitted that protective matrimonial provisions are prone to strategic misuse in adversarial matrimonial disputes, and that arrest mechanisms have become instruments of matrimonial litigation, as opposed to being instruments of genuine protection.

The legal system confronting domestic violence must address two things, providing effective protection to victims of abuse and ensuring allegations are adjudicated fairly. Although the gender protective provisions were enacted with intention to address gender harm, they have now become a tool of mental harassment to male accused persons. Various studies have suggested that fake allegations can have serious consequences for the male accused. It may include damage to the reputation, financial strain, psychological disorder and occupational difficulty.

Another significant emerging issue is domestic violence against men. By statutory definition, the PWDVA (2005) confines the status of aggrieved persons to women only, and male victims of domestic abuse, whether

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psychological, economic, physical, or by false criminal complaint filing, have no statutory civil remedy of their own. This legislative gap poses constitutional concerns in Article 14 that the courts and the BNS (2023) re-enactment have not addressed. These two dimensions- the reported abuse of gender-specific protective legislation and the legal exclusion of male domestic violence victims- constitute the main concerns of this article, and have direct implication on the psychological well-being of men.

1.1. Research Questions

1. What is the nature and typology of alleged misuse of gender-protective matrimonial laws in Delhi NCR courts?
2. What is the perception of residents of Delhi-NCR regarding alleged misuse of gender specific statutory provisions?
3. What are the psychological effects of prolonged legal proceedings and media trial on male accused persons?

1.2 Research Methodology

This study uses an integrated research design, which carries out both doctrinal legal analysis and primary empirical investigation simultaneously, according to the concurrent mixed-method model of Creswell and Plano Clark (2018).

1. Doctrinal Analysis

The doctrinal element includes the statutory interpretation of BNS Sections 85 and 86 (2023), the PWDVA (2005), and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (2023). The gender-specific legislative design and the constitutional case for gender-neutral reform are assessed by constitutional analysis under Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution of India (1950). Judicial pronouncements of the Supreme Court, the Delhi, Allahabad and Punjab and Haryana High Courts are examined in a chronological order to determine the doctrinal trend of misuse of jurisprudence. Crime in India data (2018-2022) by Secondary NCRB (2021) offers the statistical background of national and Delhi-specific data.

2. Empirical Study

The study sites were five districts of Delhi NCR, namely Delhi, Gurugram (Haryana), Faridabad (Haryana), Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh) and Greater-Noida (Uttar Pradesh). The quantitative data for present study is collected from 518 responses through a structured questionnaire designed and distributed using Google Forms. The questionnaire was administered to a diverse group of respondents including law students, academicians, advocates and the general public. This study employed purposive and snowball sampling methods to identify and reach respondents relevant to research objectives. Various questions regarding alleged misuse of law were asked.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ALLEGED MISUSE

In this article, we analyzed the law governing domestic violence in India along with relevant judicial pronouncements to examine how the judiciary has addressed claims of misuse of law.

2.1 The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

This law is a gender-specific tool, which by its design is explicit. Section 2(a) refers to the injured person "as any woman who is, or has been, in a domestic relationship with the respondent", while Section 2(q) refers to the defendant as "any adult male person who is, or has been, in a domestic relationship with the aggrieved person". This defining architecture structurally locks out male victims of domestic abuse from protection under the Act. This design is constitutionalized by Article 15(3) of the Constitution of India (1950), which specifically empowers special protection of women and children - a provision which the Supreme Court has always maintained to give valid constitutional authority for gender-specific protective legislations.

The Supreme Court in Hiral P. Harsora v. Kusum Narottamdas Harsora (2016), 10 SCC 165, partially overruled the gender-specific definition of the respondent. It stated that the words "adult male" in Section 2(q) must be read down to allow the filing of complaints against female relatives as well. This ruling partially added to the jurisdiction of the Act, but failed to resolve the underlying limitation of aggrieved person status to women. There is no specific civil protection measure of PWDVA (2005) for men who have been subjected to spousal abuse, psychological cruelty, economic domination, or physical violence in domestic relationships. They can only resort to the general criminal law provisions under the BNS (2023), which do not offer specific protective infrastructure and bear no emergency relief mechanisms, like interim protection orders, emergency monetary relief, or right of residence, that the PWDVA (2005) exclusively offers to women. V. D. Bhanot v. Savita Bhanot (2012), 3 SCC 183, and K. Srinivas Rao v. D. A. Deepa (2013), 5 SCC 226, acknowledged the devastating effects of adversarial matrimonial litigation on all parties but went nowhere near admitting any statutory foundation to the protection of male victims. The ex parte character of the PWDVA (2005) interim orders, which is a strategic design element, also establishes the structural circumstances of tactical application as a residence-protecting measure, a typology supported by nine interview participants in the current study.

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2.2 Misuse of Sections 85 and 86 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023

Sections 85 and 86 of the BNS (2023), which are operationally continuous with Section 498A IPC (1860) from 1 July 2024, have both the protective effectiveness and the structural misuse vulnerabilities of their predecessor. The law still has its three defining characteristics: cognizability, non-bailable character and non-compoundablility, and its coercive architecture has not changed. The misuse of such provisions by women or by legal representatives who advise women in disputed marriage cases does not portray the general population of true domestic violence victims. The article identifies a particular and structurally facilitated group of complaint submissions where the non-bailable nature of the provision is instrumentalized to serve tactical purposes that are not necessarily protectionist. The research suggests following typologies:

The FIR as a settlement instrument is the first and most regularly reported typology. Making a BNS Section 85 complaint in a temporal proximity to disputed civil matrimonial litigation, usually within weeks of a divorce petition or custody application, creates coercive effects, such as possible arrest and stigma. This serves as settlement leverage in parallel civil proceedings disproportionate to the strength of the criminal allegation. Various research suggests that in at least four out of ten cases on the respondent side, the FIR has been registered within two or three weeks of the husband seeking divorce. It is important to note that the timing is not coincidental. The judicial concern in Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India (2005) and Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014). directly deals with this typology.

The second typology is mass implication of extended family members - naming elderly parents, adult siblings and relatives who are geographically distant without specific individual accusations, which are recorded in 63% of sampled Section 498A files. This typology is directly dealt with in Preeti Gupta v. State of Jharkhand (2010), Geeta Mehrotra v. State of UP (2012) and Kahkashan Kausar v. State of Bihar (2022).

The third typology is retaliatory cross-filing. Here, the complaint of one party leads to a counter-complaint, creating bilateral criminal proceedings that cannot be unilaterally disengaged by either party. The fourth is the PWDVA application as a residence-securing device. In this, ex parte interim residence orders are applied mainly to secure occupation of the matrimonial home in property-contested separations rather than addressing current violence, which is a collateral misuse of the protective design of the Act.

2.3 National Crime Records Bureau Data:

National Crime Records Bureau data offers the most detailed national-level empirical image of the operational course of Section 498A IPC (1860). In 2021, 111,549 cases were registered in NCRB under cruelty by husbands and relatives under Section 498A IPC, with a charge-sheeting rate of 78.8%. But the conviction rate was about 15.3% of trials concluded, with an overwhelming majority of trials concluded by acquittal and discharge (NCRB, 2021). From 2018 to 2022, the national acquittal rates were 68% to 74%. In 2021, the pendency rate was 94.5%, which indicates that criminal proceedings are still pending several years after registration. The 2021 Delhi-specific data indicate that 4,882 cases were registered under this provision, with charge-sheeting rates above the national average at 82.3%, but the conviction rates were below the national average at about 14.1% of the concluded trials. The chronic gap between a high charge-sheeting rate and a low conviction rate is a very serious pointer to strategic misuse. With a truly victim-based prosecution system, the charge-sheeting and conviction rates would be anticipated to follow each other more closely. The fact that almost 70-74 % of persons charged are acquitted or discharged at the end of trial is a strong indication that a significant percentage of complaints lack the evidentiary basis to support a criminal charge. This is in line with complaints being filed with the primary motive of coercive leverage in a matrimonial conflict, not necessarily as a means of actual protective relief. Although prosecutor incompetence and institutional constraints on complainant testimony at trial are also factors that lead to acquittals, the fact that this trend has been repeated over five years and exists in both national and Delhi-specific data leads to a solely institutional explanation being insufficient.

Table 1 National Section 498A IPC Case Statistics, 2018-2022

Year	Cases Registered	Charge-Sheet Rate (%)	Conviction Rate (%)	Acquittal Rate (%)
2018	1,03,272	77.9	15.8	69.4
2019	1,25,298	78.2	15.1	70.1
2020	1,11,549	77.5	14.8	71.2
2021	1,11,549	78.8	15.3	70.6
2022	1,13,632	79.1	14.9	72.3

Note. Conviction and acquittal rates are calculated from trials concluded in the respective year. Source: NCRB (2021).

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The data presented in Table 1 indicate a structurally anomalous trend: charge-sheeting rates are always higher than 77%, and the conviction rates are always lower than 16% in all five years. This continued deviation means that a large percentage of complaints registered are not indicative of actual prosecutable conduct. Courts are increasingly issuing not guilty verdicts or dismissing suspected criminals after trial, which suggests that complaints are being filed without sufficient evidence - a characteristic of strategic or retaliatory filing, as opposed to actual reporting of domestic abuse.

2.4 Judicial Pronouncements

The intervention of the Supreme Court in the abuse of Section 498A IPC (1860), now re-enacted as BNS (2023), is an emerging and an old jurisprudential doctrine. In Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India (2005), 6 SCC 281, the Court declared that Section 498A was constitutional, although it stated that the section was being utilized as a "tool for personal vendetta and to harass the husband and his family members", which the Court termed as "legal terrorism". Although the Court did not strike down the provision, it encouraged the legislature and the courts to devise ways of curbing harassment by enacting protective legislation and to recognize misuse as a judicially recognized systemic phenomenon, not merely an argument advanced by the accused parties.

The most important procedural intervention by the Court was made in the case of Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014), 8 SCC 273, where it noted that Section 498A had been transformed into a mechanism of settling matrimonial disputes and personal scores and provided binding principles that police must make a documented preliminary inquiry before launching an FIR, and magistrates should make certain reasons before authorizing arrest or remand. The Court held that arrest was not the default to a complaint under a cognizable provision and directed that these principles should be applied equally to Section 4 of the PWDVA (2005). In Rajesh Sharma v. State of UP (2017), 10 SCC 72, a two-judge bench directed the constitution of district-level Family Welfare Committees to inquire into complaints before the police could act. This direction was later overruled by a five-judge constitution bench in Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar v. Union of India (2018), 10 SCC 443, which stated that the statutory scheme was unacceptably supplemented by judicially constituted committees. This ruling brought out the constitutional limits of judicial remedies to legislative design issues.

The case of Preeti Gupta v. State of Jharkhand (2010), 7 SCC 667, was the one where the mass implication of extended family members was taken into consideration, specifically by the court. It observed that it had become customary to convict entire families without necessarily having alleged individual conduct, and recommended that Parliament revisit the provision. This matter was restated in Geeta Mehrotra v. State of UP (2012), 10 SCC 741, in which the case against the siblings and relatives without any individual charges was thrown out. The most recent and emphatic statement of the Court was in Kahkashan Kausar v. State of Bihar (2022), 6 SCC 599, which invalidated proceedings under Section 498A against in-laws on omnibus allegations, authorizing that such proceedings would in themselves amount to the abuse of the process of the court. In Achin Gupta v. State of Haryana (2024), SCC OnLine SC 377, the first major decision under BNS Section 85, affirmed the continuity of judicial interest in the statutory change in the IPC (1860) to the BNS (2023) by saying that strict magistrate scrutiny was necessary before cognizance.

3. MEDIA TRIAL AND MALE VICTIMIZATION:

Media trial refers to the process through which news channels, television debates and social media platforms form and circulate public opinion about an accused person even before the judicial process has established guilt or innocence. It occurs when coverage goes beyond reporting the incident and begins to present interpretations of the case as established facts.

In matrimonial cases especially those involving domestic violence, allegations are circulated without proper verification on social media platforms which can strongly influence how society perceives the accused. People may form opinions without knowing the complete facts of the case. Various incidents suggest the fact that even after years, old videos and photos involving the accused person remain accessible. The original allegation continues to shape public opinion while the final outcome of the case receives very little attention.

The consequences of media trial extend beyond public perception. Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of R.K. Anand v. Delhi High Court (2009) condemned media trials by quoting that "excessive publicity and biased reporting could violate an accused person's right to fair trial." It may affect how accused persons are treated by their families, colleagues, friends and society. Some men find themselves excluded from social gatherings and official discussions. They may also experience struggle to maintain their professional standing and face strained personal relationship. Even when the legal proceeding concludes in their favor, the allegations may continue to follow them and make it difficult to restore their reputation. Such experiences may violate the fundamental rights of accused person including Article 21 which guarantees right to life and dignity of individual. By subjecting these persons to continuous social judgments and public trial, media trial affects their personal and professional life which further contributes to male victimization.

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4. PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF PROLONGED LITIGATIONS AND MEDIA TRIAL

The family court litigation in India is notoriously prolonged. It is distinctive feature of matrimonial conflicts in India to deploy multiple legal instruments beyond divorce petition. The prolonged delay may also fuel media trial which allows public speculation to continue even before the court reaches its decision. There are several psychological dimensions of prolonged matrimonial litigations and media trials.

The first major impact is constant fear and uncertainty attached to the ongoing proceeding. When a person is involved in criminal proceedings, the fear of arrest and damage to reputation can become a constant source of stress. Here the media trail plays and important role and further exacerbates the issue. In today's digital world, information spreads quickly and is rarely forgotten. Content shared on social media, including news reports, photographs, comments can remain accessible for years. Even when the case eventually ends in acquittal or charges are withdrawn, the person may not be able to recover from social stigma and emotional distress.

The second important dimension is anxiety caused due to constant fear of losing a job and damaging professional reputation, even after being proven innocent. Unlike other stressful events, media trial has tendency to keep the person in constant state of worry. Constant media scrutiny and circulation of allegations contribute to severe health issues such as sleep disturbance, depressive symptoms, anxiety and panic attacks, and feeling of helplessness.

The third important dimension is emotional disconnection caused due to separation from children. In India, custody of a child is often granted to the mother, especially in cases involving younger children. In such cases due to limited contact with children, fathers may experience loneliness and intense grief. When such experience combines with false allegations, social pressure and limited emotional support, it may increase the risk of suicidal thoughts.

The fourth dimension is stress arising from financial insecurity during litigation. Studies revealed that constant worry about debt, legal expenses, family responsibilities and change in economic circumstances can affect the work performance and personal relationship and overall well-being of a person. When financial pressure continues for years, it may cause irreparable psychological consequences such as anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and feeling of worthlessness.

These difficulties become even more challenging when men feel emotionally neglected. They may feel that their sufferings may not be taken seriously. This may further escalate the problem and stop them from seeking help.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis was used to analyze interview data, based on the iterative six-phase process designed by Braun and Clarke (2006), where codes were inductively generated, and the themes were built by using repeated review. NCRB (2021) data was examined to contextualize the findings. Systematic triangulation of the data collected through questionnaire, judicial pronouncements, and NCRB (2021) statistics was done to determine convergence and divergence. The empirical data was analysed using IBM SPSS statistics. The empirical data was collected from 518 respondents comprising 324 males and 194 females.

6. DISCUSSION

Answering research question 1, the research suggests that the strategic use of gender-protective matrimonial provisions is an ordinary, structural characteristic of matrimonial litigation in Delhi NCR. The 75% acquittal and discharge rate in closed Section 498A cases is in line with the national trends in NCRB (2021) and cannot be interpreted as direct evidence of falsified complaints. Nevertheless, the structurally specific result that concurrent civil proceedings occurred in 87% of sampled criminal files is a result that cannot be represented by national aggregate data. The almost ubiquitous co-occurrence of criminal and civil cases gives the settlement-tool deployment typology a powerful circumstantial corroboration. This places criminal complaint filing not as a single act of protection but as a component in a multi-forum litigation approach. The structural asymmetry can be explained by the repeat-player framework by Galanter (1974). Well-resourced parties having repeated experience of the litigation system know how to tune their strategic use of protective provisions in a manner that cannot be effectively countered or detected by one-shot parties entering the legal system for the first time.

Answering to research question 2, the empirical evidence suggests following:-

1. Regarding the perception about alleged misuse, the statement received the strongest agreement in the survey (Table 2, Figure 1). Nearly all respondents agreed that protective laws for women are sometimes misused (93.4%; M = 4.27), that false complaints of cruelty are sometimes filed by wives against their husbands (89.8%; M = 4.15), and that legal advice sometimes contributes to the filing of false complaints (86.5%; M = 4.03). Disagreement with these statements was very low (between 1.5% and 3.1%).

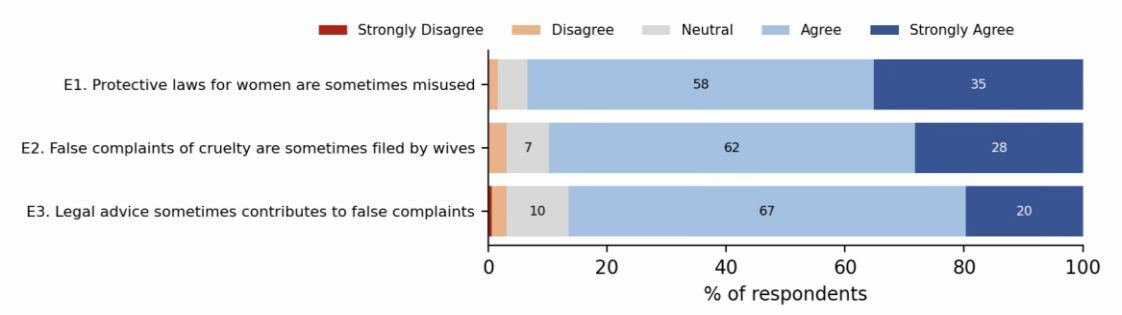
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Table 2 Perceptions of Misuse of Protective Provisions

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD	t(517)	p
Protective laws for women are sometimes misused	0.0	1.5	5.0	58.3	35.1	4.27	0.63	46.23	< .001
False complaints of cruelty are sometimes filed by wives	0.0	3.1	7.1	61.6	28.2	4.15	0.67	38.73	< .001
Legal advice sometimes contributes to false complaints	0.6	2.5	10.4	66.8	19.7	4.03	0.67	34.63	< .001

Note. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree. t compares the item mean with the neutral value of 3; positive values indicate agreement and negative values disagreement.

Figure 1 Distribution of Responses on Misuse of Protective Provisions



The findings show that respondents widely believe that protective provisions are sometimes misused.

2. Regarding the causes of misuse, the most frequently cited reasons were divorce-related conflicts (64.7%) and revenge against the husband and in-laws (64.3%), followed by financial gain (57.9%) and misguided legal advice (53.1%). Only 3.3% of respondents selected the option that these laws are not misused.

Table 3 Perceived Reasons for Misuse of Protective Provisions (Multiple Response)

Option	n	% of responses	% of respondents
Divorce-related conflicts	335	22.6	64.7
Revenge against husband and in-laws	333	22.5	64.3
Financial gain	300	20.3	57.9
Misguided legal advice	275	18.6	53.1
Family pressure	189	12.8	36.5
I do not think these laws are misused	17	1.1	3.3
Cannot say	31	2.1	6.0

Note. N = 518. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages of respondents add up to more than 100. Here, eleven respondents selected "I do not think these laws are misused" together with one or more reasons; their answers are reported as given.

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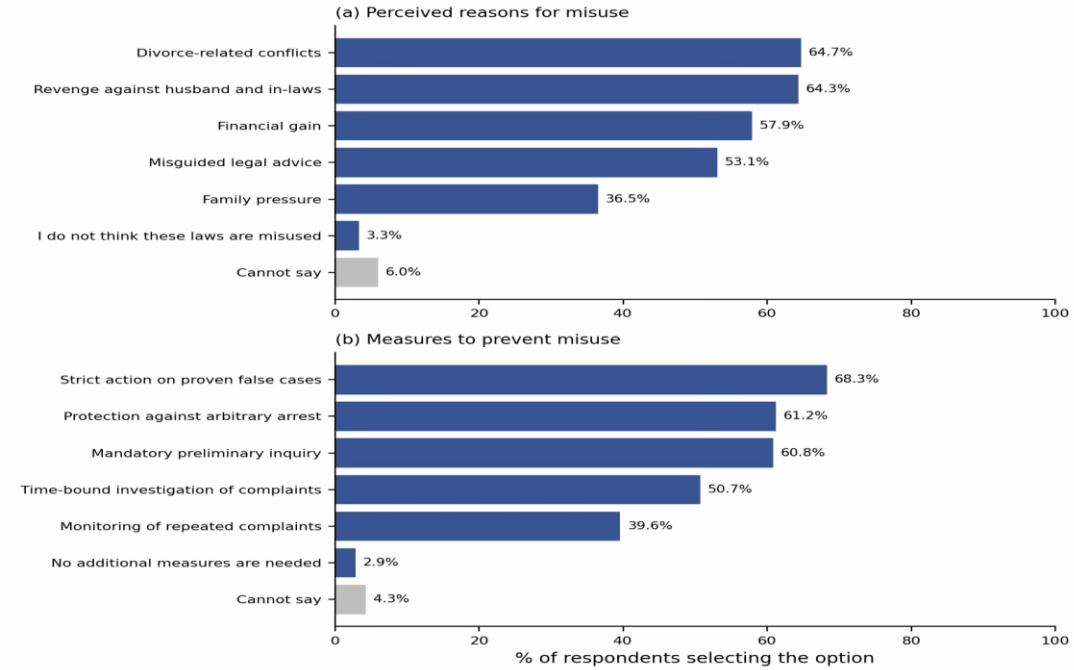
3. Regarding measures to prevent misuse (as shown in Table 4), the respondents most often favored strict action on proven false cases (68.3%), protection against arbitrary arrest (61.2%) and a mandatory preliminary inquiry (60.8%). Only 2.9% felt that no additional measures were needed.

Table 4 Measures to Prevent Misuse of Domestic Violence Laws (Multiple Response)

Option	n	% of responses	% of respondents
Strict action on proven false cases	352	23.8	68.3
Protection against arbitrary arrest	315	21.3	61.2
Mandatory preliminary inquiry	313	21.1	60.8
Time-bound investigation of complaints	261	17.6	50.7
Monitoring of repeated complaints	204	13.8	39.6
No additional measures are needed	15	1.0	2.9
Cannot say	22	1.5	4.3

Note. N = 515. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages of respondents add up to more than 100.

Figure 2 Perceived Reasons for Misuse and Preferred Safeguards



In simple terms, the empirical evidence shows that the respondents believe that laws meant to protect women are sometimes used against men for other purposes, most often during marital breakdown, divorce or property and money disputes. They do not want these laws to be removed enirely, instead, they want safeguards in the process, such as verifying complaints before arrest and taking action when a complaint is proved to be false.

Answering research question 3, the research suggests that prolonged legal proceedings may expose accused persons to an unrestrained period of uncertainty. The male accused person may worry about the outcome of the case. It reveals that legal proceedings impose financial burden on accused. Sometimes, damage to their reputation leads to dismissal from work, which aggravates their financial difficulties. Such circumstances not only affect the accused person but also their family members. They may suffer from emotional distress and societal stigma. The research suggests that repeated court appearances, uncertainty regarding next hearing date and financial burden leads to various mental health concerns among accused persons such as depression, sleep disturbance, anger, frustration and social isolation. Sometimes to escape such harassment and stress, accused persons may even resort

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to suicide. It further suggests that misuse of matrimonial cruelty laws has become a trend, cases are being filed against husband and in-laws for financial benefit. For people with less resources, the pending cases may create tension on family members financially dependent on the accused person.

The research further suggests that false allegations by the wife may severely affect the mental health of the accused person. When these false allegations are spread through the media (including social media), it not only damages the reputation of a person but also weakens his self-esteem and sense of dignity. Sometimes, accused persons withdraw themselves from the society because of fear of social judgments and humiliation. With technological advancement, accessing an individual's personal information including their address has become easier, this further contributes to their tendency to remain socially reserved. The person may also lose their faith in the institution of marriage.

Separation from their children also causes emotional disconnection and sometimes intense grief may result in suicide attempts by the person. Various researches suggest that in many cases, the accused persons develop apprehension about remarrying due to fear of future relationship disputes. The study also revealed that alleged false accusations cause social rejection and mental harassment to the person even after they have been proven innocent. The stigma attached with allegations persists even after the court declares the accused innocent, as society continues to perceive them guilty. This results in prolonged mental harassment to the person. It is important to create an environment where men can openly share their mental health and seek counselling or other professional support. There are few NGOs and organizations working for men's rights and mental well-being of victims of false allegations. However, due to lack of awareness few people reach them for help. India needs more organizations and healthcare service providers focusing on the mental well-being of men.

7. CONCLUSION

The article has critically examined the abuse of gender-protective matrimonial laws in India, based on the doctrinal analysis of judicial pronouncements, existing research and statutory interpretation. The study suggests that the misuse of law and media trail has adverse impact on psychological well-being of men. Men who face prolonged legal proceedings and false allegations may experience constant emotional stress due to repeated court appearances, harassment by wife and her family members, disputes over custody of children and unwelcoming judgments from society. Living with the uncertainties for years can affect the mental health of a person. It may sometimes lead to depression and social isolation.

The psychological trauma and emotional stress mentioned in the article are real and acknowledged by the Indian judiciary. These psychological dimensions deserve legislative and institutional attention. There should be strict implementation of laws dealing with rights and duties of the media in sensitive cases.

This article does not advocate ignoring the legislative intent behind formation of these protective laws, nor does it argue to form one form of injustice by minimizing another. Rather, it calls for legal reform which ensures that victims of domestic violence are neither ignored nor deprived of protection, and that the law does not become a sword for women to gain financial benefit through alleged misuse.

Ethical statements: This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of research integrity, academic honesty and ethical responsibility. The data was used exclusively for the purpose of research. No personal identification information was collected. This assured anonymity is maintained.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest that would influence the research.

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Authors Contribution: All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. All authors participated in reviewing and revising the manuscript and approved the final version for publication. All authors agree to be accountable for the accuracy and integrity of work.

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