

## **Gender-Based Violence through the Eyes of Media: A Comparative Study with Special Reference to India**

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### **Abstract**

Gender-based violence is a pervasive issue that affects people across all aspects. Media greatly influences the public perception of these situations, which both exacerbate and lessens the problem. Portraying cases of violence against women becomes sensational whereas, cases of outbreaks of violence against men didn't get much representation through the media. The situation of women remains awful, even though, in contrast to males, situations involving women are given substantial public attention and serve as justification for resolving such occurrences. From this perspective, the study looks at how gender-based violence is portrayed in Indian media, with a particular emphasis on the differences in coverage between violence against women and violence against males. The study evaluates the media coverage dynamics across print, broadcast, and digital platforms of past years, explaining how gender, societal norms, and cultural bias tend to influence practices of reporting through quantitative broadcasting content analysis and qualitative study of media narratives. The research caters to the understanding of the role of impartial media reporting in addressing gender-based violence in a balanced manner by addressing the challenges in covering gender-based violence.

**Keywords-** *Gender, media, sensationalism, representation, women, men, India*

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### **Introduction**

Gender based violence refers to any type of violence including physical, sexual and psychological inflicted on males and females in workplace, home and in open spaces. The term gender-based violence was earlier limited to the women and girls but it has now extended to other genders also. Gender based violence is considered as the greatest barrier in achieving gender equality; the lack of which leads to increased risk of violence against women and reduces the ability to seek protection. According to feminists, reducing gender-based violence helps in eradication of patriarchy, decreasing gender inequality and financial autonomy of women (Sharma, 2015). Despite the best effort from the government by introducing Article 15 prohibiting discrimination on the ground of sex, enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) 2006, which expanded the definition of gender based violence by encompassing physical,

sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse, as well as extends and ensures protection to wife not only from husband but also from female family members, and former partners. In India, the reporting rates in the category of gender based violence are very low. The third part of National Family Health survey revealed that only 5% victims of violence sought legal assistance from law enforcement agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations, medical personnel, legal professionals and social activists. This data suggests a significant gap between legislation and its practical application in addressing gender-based violence (Joy, 2022).

Visual media serves as a potential transmitter of ideas, opinions, and image construction also generating a constructed reality so convincing that audience might become confused between mediated representation and reality. This media background tends to provide simple solutions to complex problems, potentially discouraging sustainable and comprehensive resolutions. In the globalized environment commodification of news has intensified overcoming the regulatory and ethical principles established in twentieth century. The media's increasing focus on "Hard news" emphasizing violence as primary news is driven by audience engagement metrics and public outrage. The coverage of these incidents is not focused on right to privacy of the victims and encompasses broader social implications (Klugman, 2017) Morgan and Politoff's (2012) analysis of Australian press contents and coverage of gender based crimes presented the elements of sensationalism, showing a tendency of declining trajectory over the years. However in India, the elements of sensationalism, hasty discussions and debate are on an upward trajectory in disregard with journalistic ethics and standards. In many situations, media outlets have violated the right to privacy of victims as well as the accused in gender based violence, disseminating a parochial culture in society. The editorial principles of news reporting often have underlying implicit motivations driven by commercial interests, such as leadership in Television Rating Points, to attract advertisements, which act as the prime source of income for news channels.

## **A Deep dive into suicides in India.**

According to the report from the National Crime Record Bureau, 2022, India experienced the highest number of suicides. Over 1.7 lakh people died by suicide in one year, marking the highest record ever in India. Health experts say that depression is the primary cause leading to suicides, followed by excessive workload, unemployment, health issues, financial instability, relationship problems, family conflicts, and marital issues. Suicide is one of the biggest health crises facing India today, and most of the victims are young people.

### **Suicide Death Rate among Women in India.**

According to the study reports on the suicide death rate among Indian women, there was a significant increase in the suicide rate among married women from 2014 to 2020, and it continues. Hanging to death was one of the common means of suicide across all genders. The usage of hanging as a method of suicide has risen from 49.8% in 2017 to 58.2% in 2022. Poison consumption is yet another source. According to the

NCRB reports, the number of suicides among women is also increasing. It also shows that the suicide rate in developed states is consistently higher than that of marginalized states in India (Dandona, George, Kumar, 2023)

### Why Housewives?

Out of 45,026 female victims who died by suicide in 2021, around 50% were married women. As per the NCRB data, there were a total of 23,178 housewives, followed by students, which is 5693. The majority of the housewives who committed suicide were reported in Tamil Nadu (3221), followed by Madhya Pradesh (3,055) and Maharashtra (2861) of total suicides during 2021. The share of female victims in suicides related to marital issues, especially dowry-related problems, impotency and infertility, is significantly higher compared to their male counterparts, and most suicides occur in the age group of 18-30 years (NCRB, 2022).

The analysis of recent statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) highlights gender imbalances in suicide mortality rates in India from 2014 to 2021. The male-to-female suicide death ratio has increased from 2:1 in 2014 to 2.5:1 in 2021, meaning male suicides are twice as high as female suicides; this indicates a concerning trend in male suicide mortality. The age-wise analysis shows that male suicides were concentrated mostly in three age groups: 18-29, 30-44, and 45-59, while female suicides were primarily limited to the 18-29 age group. Social and economic factors played a significant role in suicide mortality rates in India. The mortality rate among daily wage earners showed an alarming 170.7% increase in male suicide deaths from 2014 to 2021, with the male suicide death rate (SDR) reaching 34.6 compared to 13.1 for females in 2021. Unemployment accounted for 27.8 percent of female suicides and 48.2 percent of male suicides during this period. Regarding educational status, female suicide deaths are comparatively lower among educated women; however, male suicides increased across all educational levels, rising by 66.4% during the period.

Year	Total number of suicides	Males	Females	Age (18-29)	Age (30-44)	Age (45-60)
2014	131,666	89,129	42,521	50,797	45,135	23,358
2015	133,623	91,528	42,088	43,847	44,592	25,376
2016	131,008	88,997	41,997	43,201	42,969	25,684
2017	129,887					
2018	134,516	91,528	42,988			
2019	139,123	97,613	41,493	48,763	44,283	25,436
2020	153,052	1,085,32	44,498	52,702	47,992	27,814
2021	164,033	1,18,979	45,026	56,529	52,044	30,161
2022	170,924	122,724	48,172	59,087	54,346	31920

Source: Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India report by NCRB 2014-22

### Causes of suicides

Year	Gender	Family Issues	Marital Issues	Health issues	Economic Issues
2014	Males (89,129)	18,623	2362	16,078	5482
	Females (42,521)	9977	4411	7663	588
2015	Males (91,528)	24,043	2497	14,232	7985
	Females (42,088)	12,885	3915	6944	794
2016	Males (88,997)	24,994	2512	15,032	6,377
	Females (41,997)	13,271	4368	7376	802
2017	Males	25,233	2953	15,510	9123
	Females	13,803	4243	7508	1014
2018	Males	24,012	2738	15,510	
	Females	15,272	4660	7,508	
2019	Males (97,613)	30,110	3382	16,807	8831
	Females (41,493)	15,025	4213	7016	1050
2020	Males (1,085,32)	35,333	3484	18,886	9561
	Females (44,498)	16,140	4152	8750	1098
2021	Males (1,18,979)	38,634	3833	21,014	10617
	Females (45,026)	15,769	4069	9426	1063
2022	Males	37,587	4237	21,949	10,502
	Females	16,530	3926	9527	1154

Source: Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India report by NCRB 2014-22

Family problems and health issues were the primary precipitating factors, with the male-female suicide ratio increasing from 1.9 in 2014 to 2.5 to 2.4, and 2.4 in 2014 to 3.2 in 2021, respectively. Remarkably, there has been a 107% increase in male suicides attributed to family problems during 2014-2021, almost double the increase compared to females. The analysis of marital status reveals that married men are thrice more vulnerable to suicide than married women (24 percent of total suicides in 2014 were

among married men, compared to 8% in females). Additionally, both married and never-married men showed increases in suicide mortality significantly exceeding women in the observations. The projected surge in suicide deaths among married men and daily wage labourers is primarily caused by family problems and health issues that need urgent attention.

### **Cause of Suicides - Marriage-related issues – Males and Females**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Non Settlement of Marriage</b>	<b>Dowry Related Issues</b>	<b>Extra Marital Affair</b>	<b>Divorce</b>	<b>Impotency /Infertility</b>	<b>Others</b>
2014	Males	490	39	227	150	127	1456
	Females	606	2222	249	183	205	1151
2015	Males	654	73	398	192	243	1180
	Females	524	1801	387	199	205	1004
2016	Males	750	142	558	241	162	821
	Females	709	2044	425	232	154	958
2017	Males	1080	181	583	247	145	862
	Females	892	1925	434	231	218	761
2018	Males						
	Females						
2019	Males	1294	141	674	262	191	1011
	Females	1037	1815	440	278	237	643
2020	Males	1372	269	724	287	125	832
	Females	865	1749	636	264	165	638
2021	Males	1616	220	855	349	185	793
	Females	1031	1503	593	217	222	725
2022	Males	1808	213	872	385	169	959
	Females	992	1561	545	197	205	631

Source: Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India report by NCRB 2014-22

The numbers from these statistics indicate a significant increase in male suicide death rates across all domains related to marriage from 2014 to 2022. The most notable increase is measured in the non-settlement of marriage cases, where male suicides multiplied from 490 in 2014 to 1508 in 2022, with a 208% increase. In this period, a 276% increase was witnessed in suicides related to extra-marital affairs, from 227 cases in 2014 to 855 cases in 2021. Divorce-related suicides also witnessed a surge,

increasing from 150 cases in 2014 to 385 cases in 2022, marking a 156% rise, indicating the increasing social pressure and complexities in relationships significantly affecting the mental health of males. The data in the factor of impotency and infertility related to male suicides rose from 127 cases in 2014 to 169 cases in 2022, a marginal 33% increase. The sudden increase suggests increasing psychological distress among men facing marriage settlement challenges.

### **Cases of Female suicides that became sensationalized by the media**

Many factors contribute to the suicide of women in India after marriage. Domestic violence, dowry harassment, lack of education, poverty, social isolation, and even body shaming, etc. become the reasons that lead women to commit suicide.

**Women end their lives over their husband's joblessness** – A 25-year-old woman, Jayshree. Joshi was found dead by hanging at her husband's house in Premjinagar, Morbi, on February 7, 2025, stemming from her husband's joblessness. The physical and psychological abuse faced by the victim forced her to end his life (Times of India, 2025). A youngster aged 19 allegedly committed suicide due to domestic violence by her husband and in-laws over her skin tone and poor knowledge of the English language. (India Today, 2025) Instead of giving importance to love, care, and human consideration, one can see more suicides like this because more importance is given to dowry and beauty.

**Married woman found dead at her husband's house in Bangalore**- A 34-year-old woman was found dead by hanging at an apartment because of her husband's dowry harassment in Bangalore in November 2024 (TOI, 2024)

**A woman died after marital disputes**- a woman aged 34, committed suicide by consuming poison over marital disagreements in Jamui, Patna, on February 10, 2025. It happened when the husband of the victim married another woman over the infertility problems faced by the victim. She accused her husband and her second wife of attempting to murder her by forcing her to consume poison (TOI, 2025).

**Dowry death case filed after woman's suicide in Bhopal**- a 27-year-old married woman was found dead by hanging in her home at Barkhendi, Bhopal, due to dowry harassment in December 2024. All these cases are information of women, especially married women, who committed suicide in recent periods due to various reasons, especially dowry-related harassment. This shows that most of the women committed suicide due to dowry-related issues. These cases highlight the importance of mental health support and the need for awareness about domestic abuse. (TOI, 2024)

**Increasing suicide rates in Kerala** - In Kerala, suicide rates are increasing frequently, and statistics show that around 70% of suicide victims are married (Narayan, 2019). In the last few months, there has been an increased incidence of suicide among women in Kerala, the top-ranked literate state in India. Married women committed suicide as a chain of incidents because of the humiliation suffered by the husband's family in terms of dowry. A 25-year-old woman was found dead by hanging at her husband's house in Malappuram on January 30, 2025. She ended her life because

of the severe mental and physical harassment by her husband (TOI, 2025).

## **Prominent Male suicide cases due to marital disputes in India during 2014-2024**

**Atul Subash Case** – On December 9, 2024, Atul Subash, a 34-year-old artificial software engineer, committed suicide and left substantial documents including a 24-page suicide note, a Google Drive link dealing with details of his divorce petition, personal pictures, and 81-minute video on the allegations of harassment faced by him from wife Nikita Singhania and her family. Atul Subash alleged the misuse of the law for extortion of 30 million rupees to withdraw legal cases, 3 million for child visitation rights, and monthly maintenance. Conversely, Nikatha accused Atul Subash of dowry harassment, domestic violence, and unnatural sex in her statement recorded by the police. Following the public outrage, the police arrested all the accused and released them on bail after a 14-day remand by the court. Among print media, The Deccan Chronicle published 16 reports, followed by Hindustan Times, The Hindu, and Indian Express, each publishing 14 reports, and The Times of India contributed 11 reports to the coverage. Television media has covered the issue aggressively, with Republic TV bringing the issue to the limelight with the highest number of debates, discussions, and feeds with 9 prime-time debates and 22 reports. News channels like NDTV, India Today, Aaj Tak, Indian TV, etc. also covered the news with more than 20 reports and an average of 5 debates.

**Akhil Chauhan Case** – Akhil Chauhan, a 23-year-old postgraduate student, entered into marriage with a female classmate, pursuing a final year degree, belonging to a different caste. After marriage, the couple sought the intervention of the Punjab and Haryana High Court for protection, citing an existential threat, but later the situation was diffused after the wife's family accepted the union and offered to arrange a reception. The story took a harsh turn when the wife filed a complaint against Akhil Chauhan for alleged sexual harassment and fabrication of a marriage document from the Uchana temple. Meanwhile, Akhil's family sought intervention from senior law enforcement officers regarding the alleged police harassment; however, these attempts to seek an administrative remedy proved futile. In February 2014, Chauhan was found unconscious and was swiftly transported to Amritdhara Hospital, where he succumbed the following morning. A two-page suicide note was also recovered from his body, alleging multiple persons for his death, including the bride, her family members, legal counsel Sumer Chand Verma, and several law enforcement officials. The case was reported in prominent news outlets like the Times of India (4 news items and 1 news feature), Hindustan Times (6 news items, 2 featured stories), The Tribune (2 news items),

**Lovepreet Singh Case** – Lovepreet Singh, 24 24-year-old, succumbed to death after consuming chemical fertilizer. His death was followed by a breakdown of a marriage agreement with Beant Kaur in August 2019, where Lovepreet's family sponsored Kaur's education and other expenses in Canada (reportedly Rs 37 lakh) with the agreement that she would facilitate his Immigration through a spouse visa. The

situation became tense when Kaur moved to Canada and cut off all communication with Lovepreet. Lovepreet Singh's case was widely covered by local media in Punjab, with dozens of prime-time debates on news channels and 24 reports on various national news and television channels.

**Akhilesh Kumar case** – Akhilesh Kumar, a school security supervisor, was found hanging at the iron grill of a classroom at Lotus Valley School in Sector 50. Akhilesh Kumar, who hails from Panna district of Madhya Pradesh, has alleged the illicit relations of his wife and vested interest of in-laws as the reason for his suicide in his note. Law enforcement has registered an FIR against the wife and in-laws of the deceased under charges of abetment to suicide. The case did not gather much attention and was reported by limited channels in India, with Hindustan Times and Times of India in the prime spot.

**Nikunj Sutariya case** – Nikunj Sutariya, a 25-year-old man, was found dead at his residence in Patelnagar. He was hanged to death in his private room. The recovered suicide note details the prolonged depression he was suffering for some time due to his separation from his wife reportedly now living with her parents. The Times of India was the only newspaper that reported this case with 1 news item.

### **Role of media in addressing women's suicide**

The ability of the media to provide immediate information on instances to the public is a tremendous asset. The media has the power to significantly alter public opinion. With information on a wide range of topics, including politics, the economy, health, homicide, etc., they attempt to adequately reach people. The most significant consequence is that they will portray each case in a way that will grab people's interest. To increase public awareness of the gravity of suicide, particularly among married women, the media may be quite helpful. By offering accurate information and essential mental health services, the media may also motivate individuals to get support. The role of media can also help to empower women and advocate for policy changes that support the interests of women in India (Springer, 2023)

The role of the media in representing suicide cases among women in India is quite significant and complex. It has several negative impacts at the same time. The negative impact that the media creates is that they focus more on promoting sensational news, always, detracting attention from the complex issue of suicide. The media does not cover any stories of hope; instead, they are going to catch the next sensational case that will help increase their rating. India's National Suicide Prevention Strategy, a program initiated by the government to prevent increasing suicide rates by 2023, released in November 2022, prioritizes media advocacy for responsible reporting of suicide and strict implementation of Press Council guidelines. Only responsible media reports can contribute to the prevention of suicide and mental health awareness (GOI, 2023)

## Recommendations

**Gender Neutral Laws** - Contemporary discourse on gender-based legal protections has been significantly highlighted by recent cases, including the Atul Subash incident, which highlights the complex dynamics between legislative intent, practical implementation, and grave misuse of laws intended for the protection of women. The violent historical practices that existed in Indian society against women forced the Indian government to enact protective legislation; however, empirical evidence shows us that certain statutory provisions have experienced systematic misuse, creating unintended consequences for male defendants, like mental harassment, damage to reputation, honour, and financial problems. Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (formerly Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code) defines cruelty against women as "any wilful conduct which is of such a nature as is likely to drive the woman to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to life, limb or health (whether mental or physical) of the woman; or harassment of the woman where such harassment is to coerce her or any person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any property or valuable security" (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023). Even though this legislation was destined to address domestic violence and abuse faced by women in the household, but has led to widespread procedural misuse through the filing of exaggerated or fabricated complaints. Presently, it is a strategic weapon used to secure favourable outcomes in matrimonial disputes, including alimony arrangements and child custody determinations. A deep investigation into the allegations reveals that a substantial proportion of initially filed complaints lack an evidentiary foundation, contributing to excessive case backlogs in judicial systems, wastage of court resources, and prolonged resolution timelines for legitimate cases. This pattern suggests the need for enhanced preliminary screening mechanisms and procedural safeguards. Physical and psychological abuse perpetrated against married men is frequently categorized as "marital disputes" rather than criminal offenses, resulting in systematic underreporting of male victimization; thus, male victims of domestic violence face significant legal and social barriers. Current statutory frameworks, including Section 85 of the BNS, maintain gender-specific language that precludes male complainants from accessing equivalent legal protections.

- While governmental initiatives have established extensive outreach programs and helpline services for women's safety (albeit with documented efficacy concerns), comparable institutional support for male victims remains largely absent. Men experiencing mental health challenges, anxiety, or domestic abuse face additional barriers due to prevailing social stigma surrounding male vulnerability and help-seeking behaviours. Non-governmental organizations currently serve as the primary support mechanism for male victims of domestic violence and psychological abuse. This service gap represents a significant policy deficiency in the comprehensive victim support infrastructure.
- Evidence-based analysis suggests the need for: (a) legislative amendments to establish gender-neutral language in domestic violence statutes, ensuring equal

protection under law regardless of victim gender, (b) implementation of dedicated male victim support services, including specialized helplines and counselling centres, (c) establishment of institutional mechanisms for addressing grievances faced by male victims of domestic abuse, and (d) enhanced penalties for individuals who engage in systematic misuse of protective legislation for personal gain.

- The government has implemented several programs for women's safety and well-being up to this point. Regular monitoring is necessary to make sure they are being implemented correctly. This can help people become more powerful, less stressed, and ensure their welfare to a certain degree.
- It is beneficial to guarantee the provision of counselling services and facilities that are accessible to women and that support them in persevering through any crisis.
- Policies that protect women's emotional and physical well-being, financial security, and social engagement must yet be implemented.
- By giving women justice and swiftly punishing offenders in situations involving matters like the preservation of women's dignity, the Indian legal system will gain more trust and respect.

## Conclusion

Intending to prevent the suicide rate in India, the Government of India launched the National Suicide Prevention Strategy in November 2022 to prevent the rising suicide rate by 10 percent by 2023 (GOI, 2022). Even now, the target is not yet achieved. Still, women in India across all states committed suicide for different reasons. It is high time to take the necessary steps from the authorities in such a situation. The authorities must ensure the rights and freedoms of people to live in India. The authorities have to ensure the rights and freedom of people to live in India with dignity. A positive change can only be seen if more humane and acceptable policies are initiated and implemented properly. While women must be empowered in every way in such a situation, it is also urgent that the constraints of old gender norms that deny Indian women their independence and dignity be lifted. At the same time, the suicide rate among men is increasing, comparatively higher than women. Their problems need to be addressed properly. Policymakers should take necessary actions regarding women's and men's suicide cases seriously to implement effective steps to remove dowry harassment, established gender stereotypes, and other forms of physical and psychological torment. By disseminating these study results, strong women and men may take the initiative to strengthen their lives.

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