

When “Honour” Goes Viral: Social Media, Masculinity and the Hidden Male Victims of Honour-Based Abuse

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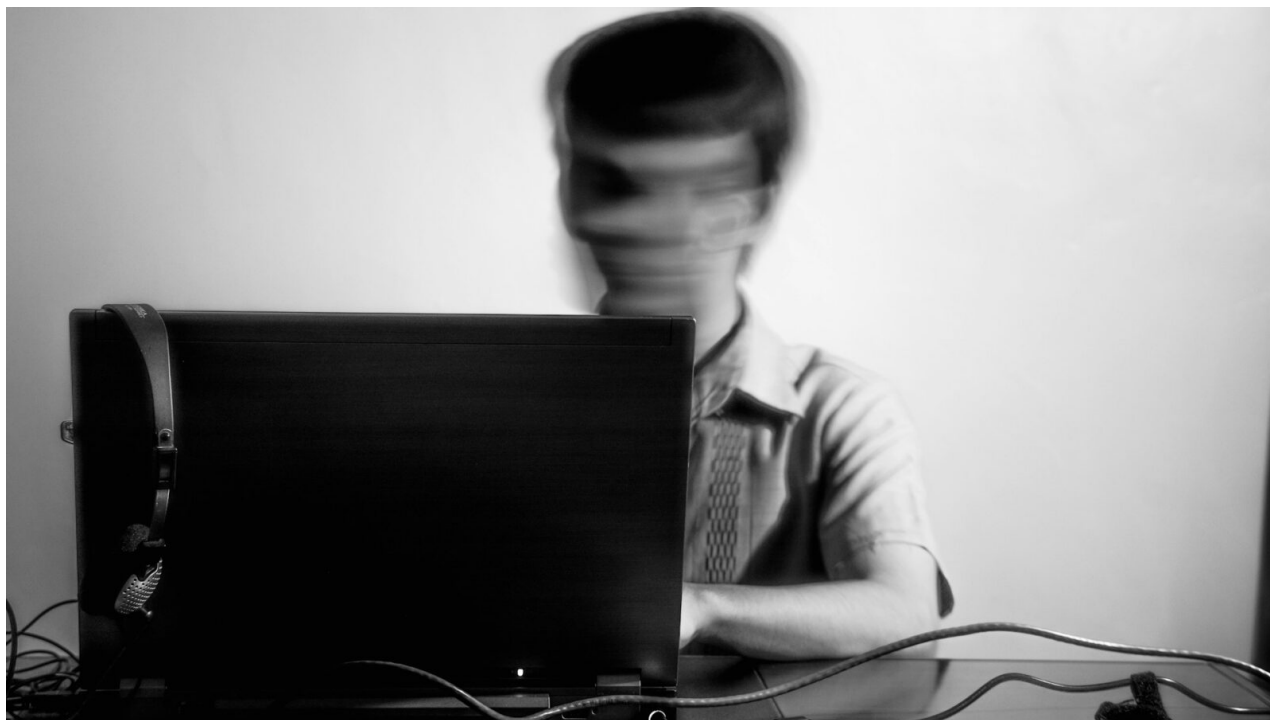


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man with blurred face using laptop

[India](#)

by | Sep 11, 2025



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Refuge's recent [report](#) focuses upon technology-facilitated perpetration of Honour Based Abuse (HBA). However, many of its policy responses still exclusively concern the female victims. [The report](#) discusses the use of digital surveillance, online shaming, and economic and tech-enabled coercion to perpetrate HBA upon women. We argue that while most studies regarding digitalisation and HBA primarily focus on women, it is important to resolve an evidentiary blind spot created regarding male victims by the veil of secrecy and masculine taboo.

Silence, owing to social stigma is a crucial roadblock for the [recognition](#) of male victims. Admitting to being victimised goes against accepted gender norms of masculinity, leading to mockery or loss of status. This culture of silence not only deters reporting but also creates data and policy skew. Our fieldwork reveals that other reasons for secrecy among male HBA victims include: fear of public shame, no support from the police, further abuse from their immediate and extended families, etc.

For instance, Aamir (pseudonym) narrated that he was beaten and held captive for marrying a Hindu woman against the families' consent. He also narrated instances of custodial abuse by the police, after a false report of kidnapping was filed against him: *"They beat me up... they said I 'lured' a Hindu woman... The police were not on my side...."*

Such moral policing started undergoing a parallel extension via different social media apps with activities such as Facebook/WhatsApp monitoring, people creating fake profiles for issuing online threats, GPS/spyware placed in phones, and online outing/public shaming of individuals that can be used for extortion. The [United Nations](#) has recognised that technology tends to amplify the traditional gendered modes of control while creating new avenues for harm. Disclosure of personal information by men regarding their sexuality, relationships, etc., even in their own social media accounts, can cost them a job and instigate family-perpetrated violence, including forced marriages or even extortion in the name of "family/community honour".

Ankit in Delhi (2018) [was stabbed to death](#) by his girlfriend's relatives for an interfaith relationship, in a so-called honour killing. It was disclosed that the perpetrators came to know about the relationship from the woman's Facebook posts. [Extensive press coverages](#) highlight how family vengeance is justified as "honour", where social media played a crucial part.

Similarly, in Pune ([in 2024–25](#)), several queer men were lured through dating apps, assaulted, filmed and blackmailed with threats of being exposed to their family/employers. Most victims paid to hide their sexual identities from their families for the sake of family honour. These reports establish a particular interface of digital vendetta with cultural stigmatisation, which compels male victims to hang at the brink of silence.

[Under-reporting](#) of cases of male/queer victims due to afore-mentioned reasons serves as mechanisms of violent honour-based abuses. HBA responses (helplines) and several judicial and policy initiatives are focused primarily on protecting women or couples, whereas these mechanisms do not explicitly [provide](#) for gender-neutral outreach, training, or shelters, or for gender disaggregated data collection. The [Supreme Court](#) in *Shakti Vahini* (2018) gave an [affirmation](#) of the protections, but in implementation, it remains largely women-centric. HBA data with gender disaggregation needs to come forward and give voice to male victims' accounts for the "exceptional" to be recognised as "mainstream".

There is also an urgent requirement of imparting awareness among the enforcement authorities to treat complaints from male victims with utmost sensitivity, as legitimate complainants ([CPS guidance](#) on recognising male victims provides a useful model).

[Safety by design approaches](#) should be implemented by establishing adequate channels for reporting. Reactive takedown and/or tracing of content used for outing/blackmail must be applied wherever required. Collaborations with NGOs such as Refuge can equip the enforcement authorities with the necessary expertise in the field of online HBA. Additionally, there is an urgency to enact gender-neutral legislation on HBA, which must encompass the use of digital platforms by perpetrators of the offences. It is equally important to maintain a gender-sensitive database on HBA in the National Crime Records Bureau to realistically depict the gravity of the offences irrespective of the victims' gender.

Refuge's diagnosis of tech-enabled control is accurate, but its ambit must be expanded. Where HBA is enforced online, rendering justice requires visibility, tailored digital protections, and gender inclusive mechanisms whereby every victim is heard and protected.

[Gender Based Violence](#) [Honour Based Abuse](#) [Male victim](#) [Online abuse](#) [Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination](#) [Sexual Harassment](#)