

# PSEUDO-FEMINISM AND THE STIGMATIZATION OF MALE VICTIMS

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## Abstract

The stigmatization of male victims of abuse and violence has been a persistent issue influenced by societal perceptions and the presence of pseudo-feminist ideologies. This research paper aims to explore the phenomenon of pseudo-feminism and its role in perpetuating the stigmatization of male victims. Through an analysis of case studies, media representations, and intersectional dynamics, this study sheds light on the challenges faced by male victims and advocates for a more inclusive approach to gender equality.

The introduction highlights how gender stereotypes and pseudo-feminist narratives contribute to the marginalization of male victims. Pseudo-feminism, often characterized by a distorted understanding of power dynamics, dismisses or downplays male victimization, reinforcing the notion that men are invulnerable to abuse. Media representations influenced by pseudo-feminist ideologies further perpetuate harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming, hindering the recognition of male victimization.

The concept of intersectionality is introduced as an additional layer of complexity in understanding the stigmatization of male victims. Men from marginalized communities face unique challenges, and the influence of pseudo-feminism overlooks their experiences, compounding their marginalization.

## INTRODUCTION

Various factors, such as cultural attitudes and pseudo-feminist ideas, contribute to the stigmatisation of male victims of abuse and assault. The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the concept of pseudo-feminism and how it contributes to the stigmatisation of male victims. This study aims to argue for a more inclusive approach to gender equality by researching case studies, analysing cultural narratives, and interacting with feminist discourse to shed light on the obstacles experienced by male victims.

There is a compelling need to investigate the pervasive bias towards male victims of abuse and violence. Even if there has been progress in talking about gender equality, male victims are still often ignored or marginalised due to popular pseudo-feminist ideals. When feminist ideals are misunderstood or misused,

it results in negative gender stereotypes that invalidate the experiences of male victims and uphold outdated ideas about what it means to be a man. The purpose of this study is to investigate the topic of pseudo-feminism and how it contributes to the unfair shaming of male victims.<sup>1</sup>

Stereotypes about men and women have shaped ideas about what it means to be either for decades. It might be difficult for men to seek assistance or come out about being victims because of the stereotype that they should be able to "take care of themselves." Pseudo-feminism, with its flawed view of gender relations, just makes matters worse. Pseudo-feminism, which upholds a simplistic narrative of power dynamics entirely favouring males, trivialises or ignores male victimisation and perpetuates the idea that men are immune to abuse and violence.

Media portrayals have a major impact on how people feel and think. Harmful depictions of male victims are perpetuated through pseudo-feminist narratives that are affected by gender norms and cultural expectations. Male victims are typically portrayed in the media as being weak, emasculated, or even karma-worthy. Not only do these depictions make it more difficult to identify male victimisation, but they also aid in victim shaming, undermine credibility and spread damaging stereotypes.<sup>2</sup>

The stigmatisation of male victims is complicated by intersectionality. When it comes to discrimination and societal pressures, men from marginalised groups, such as those who identify as racial or sexual minorities, may be subjected to higher levels of stress. Pseudo-feminism, by ignoring the particular difficulties encountered by these people, further marginalises their experiences, hindering a full appreciation of male victimisation.

Promoting gender equality and acceptance requires actively working against pseudo-feminism. Understanding the intricacies of gender-based violence is facilitated by recognising and respecting male victimisation, which does not negate the experiences of female victims. We can build a society that cares for victims of any gender by challenging damaging gender stereotypes and encouraging compassion and diversity within the feminist movement.

In this article, we will examine case studies, media portrayals, and intersectional dynamics to critically analyse the impact of pseudo-feminism on the stigmatisation of male victims. With more information at

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<sup>1</sup> Yang, Wei, Jingxuan Guo, and Inge Arteel. "What Is "Rural Feminism"? A Computer-Assisted Analysis of Popular Antifeminist Discourses in Chinese Social Media." *Social Media+ Society* 9.2 (2023): 20563051231177952.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

hand, we can promote a more holistic strategy that includes acknowledging and aiding male victims, as well as contributing to continuing dialogues on gender equality.<sup>3</sup>

## **DEFINING PSEUDO-FEMINISM AND GENDER STEREOTYPES:**

Feminism, in its most basic form, is the ideology that advocates for the equating of the sexes. They deserve equal treatment. However, a new strain of feminism that is better labelled as pseudo-feminist has evolved in recent years. Pseudo-feminists claim they are fighting for women's rights but really target and demean men in order to achieve their goals. They don't understand that promoting gender parity is central to the feminist cause. Another kind of pseudo-feminism is the feminist ideology of comfort. The pseudo-feminism that passes itself off as the real thing is all around us. Despite the fact that feminists are screaming from the rooftops, you should not waste your time telling a man to leave a Ladies' Reserved seat.<sup>4</sup>

As another egregious example of pseudo-feminism, the income tax bracket for women is greater than that for men. There is no tax on a woman's salary between \$3,000 and \$3,50,000. If men and women earn the same amount of money, then men shouldn't be expected to pay more in taxes. A very significant problem has arisen. Men in India are often the family's main providers. They'll have just enough after paying a little wage tax to live by. If feminism is to retain its true worth, however, it is necessary to recognise the limits of the principle of equality. If a guy pays taxes on his wage, then a woman should as well. Even though they make up a small percentage, male victims of sexual assault do exist. The vast majority of victims of such crimes never go to the police because they fear being mocked, disbelieved, and held responsible for the incident themselves. For questionable reasons including prostitution, forced marriages, and other sexual exploitation, men are often abducted. Although there are relatively few victims, we cannot deny that they exist. It's important to remember that men are still victims of violence in certain areas of the globe even as we highlight the shockingly high incidence of violence against women. In 2012, the National Crime Reporting Bureau found that 175 guys had been kidnapped for sexual exploitation in 2009. The Indian Penal Code sections 363–369 and 371–373 were cited in the filings. Despite the existence of laws intended to protect victims, these situations are rarely given the

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<sup>3</sup> Yang, Xinying, Hongfeng Qiu, and Ranran Zhu. "Bargaining with patriarchy or converting men into pro-feminists: social-mediated frame alignment in feminist connective activism." *Feminist Media Studies* (2022): 1-19.

<sup>4</sup> Peng, Altman Yuzhu, and Altman Yuzhu Peng. "Debates between Women and Men on Gender Issues." *A Feminist Reading of China's Digital Public Sphere* (2020): 83-103.

same priority as cases of violence against women. There has been no conclusive study conducted as of yet.<sup>5</sup>

True feminists believe that all victims deserve the same level of compassion. Victims of abuse would no longer be assigned a gender. The reverse is true, unfortunately. Pseudo-feminism shouts that men cannot be raped or tortured and that men who claim to have experienced such things are liars. A man's experience of being stoned on the street, raped, accused of a fake rape, or doubted because he is a man requires an outcry, as does a woman's experience of being brutalised, stripped naked in public, forced to abandon her education to marry a man three times her age, or subjected to repeated beatings for refusing to give in to such demands. Gloria Steinem beautifully defined a feminist as someone who recognises the dignity and equality of both sexes.

## FEMINISM

Gender, political, cultural, personal, and social equality are only some of the goals of the many feminists' social movements, political movements, and ideologies. Women are treated unequally in civilizations that prioritise the male perspective, a viewpoint that is reflected in feminism. Change initiatives that aim to break down gender norms and provide women with the same access to training and employment as men. Feminist movements have and continue to fight for women's rights, such as the right to vote, serve in public office, work, earn a living wage, close the wage gap between men and women, own property, negotiate contracts, participate equally in marriage, and take advantage of maternity benefits. Protecting women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic abuse is another priority for feminist activists.<sup>6</sup>

There have been many distinct feminist groups and philosophies with varying aims and perspectives throughout the years. Some kinds of feminism have been criticised for focusing exclusively on the experiences of white, middle-class, college-educated women. As a result of this criticism, many culturally or ethnically specific feminisms emerged, such as black feminism and intersectional feminism. Feminist theory is the application of feminism to academic disciplines like philosophy and theory. Studies from several disciplines, such as Anthropology, Sociology, Economics, Women's Studies, Art History, Psychoanalysis, and Philosophy, are included. Feminist philosophy examines gender roles, power relations, and sexuality to shed light on the gender gap. Feminist philosophy, while its opposition to these social and political relations, is frequently centred on advancing women's rights and interests.

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<sup>5</sup> Wang, Yayun, and Jiang Chang. "Why do some women hate feminists? Social media and the structural limitation of Chinese digital feminism." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* (2023): 1-22.

<sup>6</sup> Zhang, Jinyang. "May-Fourth Feminism and Consumerist Pseudo-Feminism: Subjects and Comparison." *2022 8th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2022)*. Atlantis Press, 2022.

Sexism, stereotyping, objectification, inequality, and patriarchy are all explored from a feminist theoretical perspective. In her discussion of the development of feminist theory in the context of literary criticism, Elaine Showalter distinguishes between three distinct periods. The first is what she terms "feminist criticism," an examination of literary phenomena through the lens of feminist ideology. Second is gynocriticism, in which "the woman is the creator of textual significance," as described by Showalter. Last, she examines "ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/gender system" in what she terms "gender theory."<sup>7</sup>

## PSEUDO FEMINISM

Feminists are a minority in comparison to pseudo-feminists. Pseudo-feminism advocates for the elitism of women or the denigration of men. The hardest part of being born into a society where women face several obstacles daily is that some individuals denigrate the concept of feminism. Few people on social media understand feminism, leading many to adopt a false identity. Is it true that so-called "synthetic feminists" want parity? Not at all; rather, they want to establish a global suffragette society. Is there a chance that a woman might be exonerated of wrongdoing? Women who call themselves feminists online advocate for greater gender parity and public acknowledgement. They will criticise a man's female relative, such as a politician's wife or sister, but will back another woman who criticises the same politician. Here, hypocrisy and faux feminism come together.

Feminism is not a value judgement movement; it is a movement about liberation. Those that are aware of feminism don't label themselves as such. These are the parents that value education highly and would encourage their girlfriend to pursue a career in her chosen profession. Some wives prefer staying at home to provide for their families, while others prefer providing for their husbands financially. That doesn't make them slaves; they still get to make their own choices.

In the 21st century, the globe has made enormous strides forward. Invention, technology, and science are being placed in their proper position by human beings. The whole meaning of humanity is shifting, and this time it's all about equal rights for women and men and fairness for everyone. Some recent events and situations have vitiated the environment, adding fuel to the age-old argument and ongoing conflict over male and female dominance. The current discussion and the topic of feminism fascinate me. By all accounts, every decent guy is familiar with feminism and embraces its ideals entirely. We are seeing a sea shift right before our eyes as a result of a generation that is well-informed and steadfast in its belief

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<sup>7</sup> Majdizade, Zahra, Mansoureh Hajjari, and Abdollah Bicharanlou. "The emergence of neoliberal pseudo-feminism on Iranian women's Instagram." (2022).

that women are just as good as men, if not better. The glass barrier was broken, and women took over as president, prime minister, and chief executive positions throughout the globe.

The advancement of the noble cause championed by influential individuals has been hindered by figures such as Harvey Weinstein and Donald John Trump. Their abuse of power and bullying behaviour, stemming from their positions of authority, have contributed to the profound emotional and psychological harm inflicted upon women, effectively eroding their sense of self and vitality. Nevertheless, amidst prominent figures like Harvey Weinstein or Donald Trump, it is important to acknowledge the existence of countless men globally who are highly respected, admired, and committed to upholding principles of justice and equality. Men who don't go about shouting their support for the #MeToo movement aren't necessarily sickos. We still have hope for humanity, and many selfless men are willing to lay down their lives to defend the dignity of women and fight for equal rights for everyone. These days, it's commonplace to criticise men and paint them all with the same broad brush as predators out to strip women of their honour. We are all aware that our society has never been completely fair and balanced, and that it has always been biased in favour of one sex over the other.<sup>8</sup>

## THE CONCEPT OF PSEUDO-FEMINISM AND ITS IMPACT ON PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER ROLES AND POWER DYNAMICS

- 1. Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes:** Traditional gender stereotypes might be reinforced by pseudo-feminism due to their skewed beliefs on gender equality. It perpetuates stereotypes, such as the belief that women are superior to males or that women are more suited to specific roles. This hinders the fight against ingrained gender norms that limit individual agency and advancement.
- 2. Backlash and Resistance:** Real efforts to promote gender equality are sometimes met with reaction and opposition fueled by pseudo-feminist ideals. Extreme or controversial pseudo-feminist viewpoints might give the wrong impression of feminism to the general public. This pushback may slow down efforts to achieve gender equality by sowing discord, weakening support, and bolstering entrenched power structures.
- 3. Exclusion of Intersectional Perspectives:** Intersectionality, the idea that gender overlaps with other social identities including race, class, sexual orientation, and disability, is frequently

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<sup>8</sup> Majumdar, Sramana, et al. "You Don't Know Me so Don't Try to Judge Me: Gender and Identity Performance on Social Media Among Young Indian Users." *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022): 855947.

overlooked in pseudo-feminism. Pseudo-feminism perpetuates disparities within the feminist movement by erasing or downplaying the experiences and struggles of marginalised groups.

4. **Reversal of Power Dynamics:** Pseudo-feminism may unintentionally prolong or reverse power relations, while feminism seeks to eliminate power disparities and build a more fair society. For instance, it perpetuates oppressive hierarchies by promoting the superiority of one gender over another and by failing to question existing systems of oppression. This may impede efforts to build a more equitable and welcoming society.
5. **Undermining Solidarity:** Pseudo-feminism can undermine solidarity among different groups working towards gender equality. When some individuals adopt extremist or exclusionary views, it can fracture alliances and hinder collaboration among diverse feminist voices. This fragmentation weakens the movement's collective power and ability to address broader societal issues effectively.

It is important to distinguish between pseudo-feminism and genuine feminism to ensure that efforts to achieve gender equality remain inclusive, intersectional, and focused on challenging and transforming power dynamics. By promoting an understanding of the complexities of gender roles and power structures, we can work towards a more equitable and inclusive society for all genders.

## INVESTIGATING HOW SOCIETAL GENDER STEREOTYPES CONTRIBUTE TO THE STIGMATIZATION OF MALE VICTIMS

Societal gender stereotypes have a significant role in the stigmatisation of male victims, particularly in the context of gender-based violence and abuse. These stereotypes are deeply embedded in our society, and they shape our ideas of what it means to be a man. Discrimination against male victims makes it more difficult for them to seek help and be taken seriously. Traditional gender stereotypes equate masculinity with traits like strength, power, and invulnerability. Always keep your cool and show off your manly strength. Because of cultural standards, male victims of abuse or assault may also be stigmatised as weak or emasculated. Male victims frequently feel uncomfortable coming out and asking for assistance because to the prevailing belief that men should be able to defend themselves and overcome any obstacle.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the widespread assumption that males are more prone than women to engage in aggressive or abusive behaviours is reinforced by gender stereotypes. Although men commit a disproportionate number of crimes, it is a popular misconception that men cannot be victims. Male victims are often regarded with doubt, scepticism, or

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<sup>9</sup> Emezue, Chuka N., and Tipparat Udmuangpia. "Authentic empathy and the role of victim service providers in (de) stigmatizing male sexual victimization." *Journal of interpersonal violence* 37.7-8 (2022): NP3832-NP3855.

blame because of societal stereotypes that characterise men as inherently aggressive or incapable of being victimised. Victimised men are further marginalised and stigmatised as a result of this societal bias.

Reducing or ignoring male victims' experiences contributes to the stigma they face. Men's experiences of violence are often downplayed or ignored in comparison to women's. This dismissive attitude stigmatises male victims, making them less likely to seek help or talk about what happened to them. Lack of recognition and support contributes to the perpetuation of the stigma surrounding male victimisation.

The lack of services geared towards male victims contributes to their social isolation. Existing services and groups reinforce the misconception that male victims do not exist or are not as relevant by only servicing female victims. Male victims are further marginalised and denied access to necessary therapy due to the widespread perception that they should not speak out about their experiences.

Preconceived notions and cultural conventions about the function of free choice may play a part. Manliness entails taking responsibility of one's own life and conducting oneself with self-assurance and authority. Fear of judgement, scorn, or loss of social status is common among those who seek therapy or report victimisation since they go against these standards. The societal expectation that male victims should not exhibit weakness by seeking aid contributes to the stigma they face.

In order to reduce the stigma attached to male victims, it is crucial to challenge and eradicate these harmful gender stereotypes. This is why it's so important to raise awareness of male victimisation, foster empathy and understanding, and provide robust support systems tailored to the specific needs of male victims. Educating the public about the varied experiences of victims and fostering an environment that encourages open dialogue and support for all survivors, irrespective of gender, are crucial steps towards removing the barriers that contribute to the stigmatisation of male victims.<sup>10</sup>

Social gender norms have a crucial role in the stigmatisation of male victims of gender-based violence and abuse. Some examples of how gender roles might exacerbate this stigma:

Characteristics of masculinity that have been traditionally stereotyped include strength, power, and invulnerability. Men are supposed to be resolute, unflappable, and in charge. Male victims of abuse or assault may be stigmatised and mocked for not meeting fictitious norms of masculinity that arise as a result of these prejudices. This might dissuade male victims from coming forward because of the risk of stigmatisation and reprisal.

Gender roles perpetuate the false idea that males are more prone to aggressive or violent behaviours. Despite the fact that men account for a larger fraction of perpetrators, they are often unfairly portrayed as being immune to victimisation. When male victims attempt to speak out about their experiences, they may be faced with suspicion, disbelief, or blame because of stereotypes about men being aggressive or incapable of being victims. The stigma

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<sup>10</sup> Mantey, Efua Esaaba. "Domestic violence in Ghana: The attitudes of male victims of Accra." *African Journal of Social Work* 9.1 (2019).

male victims endure is exacerbated when their stories are downplayed or dismissed. Men's experiences of abuse are often less widely discussed or ignored than those of women. This stigma may discourage male victims from reaching out for support and increase their sense of isolation.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of long-standing biases based on gender, male victims may get less attention than their female counterparts. By focusing on assisting female victims, existing agencies and institutions have contributed to the false belief that male victims either do not exist or do not warrant attention. The pervasive assumption that male victims of sexual assault should stay silent is reinforced by the absence of services aimed specifically towards them. Traditionally, our culture places a premium on male leaders and pioneers. It may be especially challenging for male victims to come out and seek help since doing so may be perceived as a challenge to the victim's manhood or a transgression of societal norms. Victims who are men may be hesitant to seek assistance for fear of social stigma.<sup>12</sup>

If we are serious about ending the discrimination against male victims, we must examine and abolish these gender conventions. More specifically, this includes raising awareness about the skewed statistics of male victims, fostering an atmosphere of empathy, and creating systems of assistance that are tailored to the specific needs of male victims. Providing a welcoming environment where survivors of all identities may share their stories and get community support is also crucial.

## **PSEUDO-FEMINIST NARRATIVES AND MALE VICTIMIZATION**

In contemporary society, characterised by a prevailing male-centric framework, it is highly improbable for a woman's accusation of abuse by her male partner to be readily acknowledged or accepted. It is not infrequent for women to exploit the legal system by initiating meritless litigation. In contemporary society, there exist prevalent societal assumptions regarding gender roles, wherein males are often portrayed in a negative light. The presence of unverified assumptions is leading to a proliferation of unnecessary complexity within judicial and legal systems.

The act of women terminating a life, driven by emotions such as anger, envy, or revenge, is a matter of concern that necessitates intervention. It is imperative for males to discontinue engaging in the act of harassing women. However, it is essential to acknowledge and address instances where women's behaviour undermines the credibility of accusations brought forth to legal authorities. The cessation of such practises may be achieved when the court initiates a robust prosecution of spurious cases. Individuals should possess the capacity to discern the authenticity of a given piece of evidence.

The Bombay High Court recently imposed a fine of Rs. 25 lakhs on a female business owner for contravening legislation pertaining to gender equality. Allegations of molestation were levied against the court receiver

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<sup>11</sup> Jovanoski, Aleksandar, and Kire Sharlamanov. "Male as a Victims: Domestic Violence from a Different Perspective." *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research* 12.3 (2021): 903-912.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

subsequent to a trademark infringement dispute between the woman and her spouse and Mumbai's Sapat and Company.

The observation that a significant element of our legal system has been subject to misuse is a disheartening indication of the broader cultural landscape. The affirmation of one gender's strength is leading males to engage in offensive and derogatory discourse. The blatant violation of our legal statutes necessitates a resolute condemnation from all members of the judiciary across the nation. Instances abound where false allegations are levied against individuals with malicious intent. The helpline managed by Indu Subhash, a proponent of men's rights, has experienced a high volume of calls pertaining to cases where males were identified as the primary victims. The law possesses a dual nature. During the 2008 trial, a Delhi court made an observation that highlighted the potential for misuse of rape allegations as a means to suppress the freedom of adversaries, despite their intended purpose of safeguarding individual rights. According to the survey, the number of pending cases in Indian courts is approximately 3.3 billion. The allocation of time towards the construction of a legal case is being inefficiently utilised within the Indian judicial system.<sup>13</sup>

Pseudo-feminist narratives have the potential to downplay or overlook the distress experienced by male victims, thereby reinforcing the stereotype of male invincibility. The viewpoint often leads to the exclusion of men from discussions on victimisation. The underreporting and marginalisation of male victims can be attributed to the prevalence of certain pseudo-feminist narratives that propagate the notion that men should possess the ability to consistently defend themselves, or that instances of victimisation experienced by men are infrequent or insignificant. Pseudo-feminist narratives have the potential to reinforce detrimental gender stereotypes by depicting males as the predominant perpetrators of violence and women as the sole recipients of victimisation. It is imperative to acknowledge the historical and structural gender inequities that women have endured, as men can also experience discrimination to a similar extent. In the realm of gender discourse, pseudo-feminism may construct a narrative that exclusively focuses on female victimisation, thereby reinforcing detrimental beliefs and perpetuating societal norms that are harmful.

Pseudo-feminist narratives often exhibit a notable emphasis on male privilege and power disparities, potentially creating the perception that men rarely experience victimisation or have their own set of needs. Male victims may refrain from disclosing their experiences and seeking treatment due to concerns about not being believed or facing societal stigma. Male victims may experience feelings of marginalisation or dismissal when pseudo-feminist narratives predominantly concentrate on the victimisation experiences of women.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the presence of pseudo-feminism and its distorted narratives has the potential to foster the stigmatisation of male victims, thereby perpetuating detrimental gender stereotypes and impeding advancements

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<sup>13</sup> Rajeh, Khaled. "The Moral Landscape and Women's Agency: Toward a Feminist Theory of Transnational Responsibilities." *Al-Raida Journal* 43.1 (2019): 66-82.

in achieving gender equality. Pseudo-feminist narratives perpetuate the belief in the inherent strength and invulnerability of men by minimising or disregarding instances of male victimisation, thereby neglecting the fact that men can also experience abuse and violence. The marginalisation of male victimisation, in conjunction with gendered presumptions regarding both perpetrators and victims, fosters an atmosphere wherein male victims experience a sense of suppression, invalidation, and hesitancy in seeking assistance. Moreover, it is possible that pseudo-feminist narratives could potentially weaken the support systems that are specifically established to cater to the distinct requirements of male victims, resulting in a dearth of available resources and initiatives.

To mitigate the stigmatisation experienced by male victims, it is imperative to differentiate authentic feminism, which promotes gender equality and confronts various manifestations of gender-based oppression, from the distorted narratives propagated by pseudo-feminism. By cultivating a heightened sense of inclusivity and empathy towards male victimisation, it is possible to establish a milieu wherein all survivors are duly acknowledged, provided with assistance, and empowered to actively pursue assistance. This entails the promotion of consciousness, the questioning of detrimental gender stereotypes, and the establishment of specialised support systems that cater to the distinct encounters of male victims. By adopting a holistic and inclusive perspective, we can work towards establishing a societal framework that acknowledges and provides assistance to all individuals who have experienced abuse and violence, irrespective of their gender. This research paper seeks to make a scholarly contribution to the ongoing discourse on gender equality by conducting a critical analysis of the impact of pseudo-feminism on the stigmatisation of male victims. Acknowledging the experiences of male victims and questioning detrimental stereotypes can facilitate the progression towards a society that is more inclusive and characterised by fairness.