

Deconstructing the Structural Failure of the Male Provider Ideal: A Sociological Investigation of Job Insecurity and Shattered Hegemony Among Working-Class Indian Youth

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Abstract:

The male provider ideal remains central to the social construction of masculinity in India, linking financial provision with masculine respectability, adulthood and familial responsibility. However, employment insecurity and labour-market precarity create tensions between these expectations and the economic realities of working-class young men. This paper examines how insecure employment challenges masculine identity, social recognition, marriage expectations and family relationships. Drawing on R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory, it explores the contradictions between socially prescribed breadwinner responsibilities and unequal access to secure livelihoods. The paper introduces shattered hegemony as an analytical concept describing the persistence of the male provider ideal despite the unstable material conditions required to fulfil it. Rather than interpreting masculine insecurity as individual inadequacy, the discussion situates it within class inequality, precarious employment and patriarchal socialisation. It also considers how working-class young men negotiate these pressures through conventional masculine expectations and changing understandings of economic and familial responsibility. The paper argues that the crisis of the male provider ideal offers a sociological perspective on transformations in masculinity, labour and family relations in India, challenging the assumption that masculine worth should depend primarily on financial provision.

Keywords: Male Provider Ideal; Working-Class Masculinities; Employment Insecurity; Hegemonic Masculinity

1. Framing the Crisis through Labour Precarity and Patriarchal Expectations

1.1 The Political Economy of Employment Insecurity and the Erosion of the Male Breadwinner Norm

The male provider ideal in India functions as a socially reproduced institution linking masculinity, economic productivity, household responsibility and social respectability. However, the labour-market structure complicates its fulfilment: the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023–24 recorded 58.40% of workers as self-employed, 21.70% in regular wage or salaried employment and 19.80% in casual labour. Although the youth worker population ratio increased from 31.40% in 2017–18 to 41.70% in 2023–24, youth unemployment declined from 17.80% to 10.20%, while the India Employment Report 2024 found that young people constituted 82.90% of India's unemployed population in 2022. These indicators demonstrate the importance of distinguishing employment participation from secure, adequately remunerated work. Through Marx's political-economic perspective, this contradiction reflects unequal access to economic resources; Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity explains why financial provision remains a culturally privileged measure of masculine competence despite these structural constraints.

Earnings disparities further expose the material limitations of the provider ideal. According to the Economic Survey 2024–25, average monthly earnings in 2023–24 were ₹20,702 for regular wage or salaried workers and ₹13,279 for self-employed workers, a difference of ₹7,423, while average daily casual earnings were ₹418. Regular wage or salaried earnings averaged ₹16,626 in rural areas compared with ₹23,974 in urban areas, illustrating geographical inequalities in earning capacity. These national averages do not directly measure working-class youth, masculine identity or household security, and nominal income does not establish purchasing power or employment stability. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8, particularly Targets 8.3, 8.5 and 8.8, accordingly emphasises productive employment, decent work and labour protection. Shattered hegemony thus describes the tension between the continuing authority of the male provider ideal and the unequal economic conditions required to sustain it—not the disappearance of patriarchy. Establishing its consequences for masculine identity, marriage and household authority requires examining how working-class young men interpret and negotiate these pressures in everyday life.

Table 1.1. Earnings Inequality and the Material Foundations of the Male Provider Ideal in India

Empirical indicator	Official data and timeframe	Numerical analysis	Structural interpretation	Sociological implication for the male provider ideal
1. Earnings differences by employment status	2023–24 average monthly earnings: regular wage/salaried ₹20,702; self-	The monthly gap is ₹7,423. Self-employed earnings are 35.86% lower than regular	Employment categories provide unequal earning returns. Self-employment earnings may	Lower or unpredictable earnings may constrain household contributions,

	employed ₹13,279.	earnings; regular earnings are approximately 1.56 times self- employed earnings.	also fluctuate, although these averages do not directly measure income stability.	savings and marriage-related expenses, intensifying the tension between provider expectations and actual financial capacity.
2. Gender earnings gap in regular employment	2023–24 monthly earnings: men ₹22,092; women ₹16,498.	The monthly gap is ₹5,594. Women earn 25.32% less than men, while men's average earnings are approximately 1.34 times women's.	Gender inequality persists within regular wage/salaried employment, indicating that participation in relatively structured employment does not ensure equivalent earnings.	The male provider norm may be reinforced by men's higher average earnings, while the expectation that men should shoulder a larger share of household provision can increase their economic burden.
3. Gender earnings gap in self- employment	2023–24 monthly earnings: self- employed men ₹16,007; women ₹5,497.	The gap is ₹10,510 per month. Women earn 65.66% less than men; men's average earnings are approximately 2.91 times women's.	The gender earnings disparity is substantially wider in self- employment than in regular employment, reflecting unequal economic outcomes across work arrangements	Unequal earning opportunities may preserve men's expected role as primary providers, even when their own earnings are inadequate or uncertain, reproducing gendered responsibilities within households.
4. Rural–urban earnings gap in	2023–24 monthly	The difference is ₹7,348 per	Employment rewards vary	Rural working- class men may

regular employment	earnings: rural ₹16,626; urban ₹23,974.	month. Rural earnings are 30.65% lower than urban earnings; urban earnings are approximately 1.44 times rural earnings.	geographically, reflecting unequal economic opportunities and labour-market conditions across rural and urban locations.	face narrower income opportunities while remaining subject to similar expectations of household provision, potentially increasing pressure to migrate or seek better-paid employment.
5. Rural–urban earnings gap in self-employment	2023–24 monthly earnings: rural ₹11,422; urban ₹20,055.	The difference is ₹8,633 per month. Rural earnings are 43.05% lower than urban earnings; urban earnings are approximately 1.76 times rural earnings.	The pronounced gap indicates that self-employment yields unequal returns across locations, potentially reflecting differences in markets, resources and economic opportunities.	Men relying on rural self-employment may struggle to translate their labour into sufficient household income, exposing the contradiction between socially prescribed provision and unequal economic opportunities.
6. Daily earnings among casual labourers	2023–24 daily earnings: rural ₹402; urban ₹506; national ₹418.	Urban earnings exceed rural earnings by ₹104 per day, or 25.87%. At ₹418 for 26 paid days, illustrative monthly earnings would be ₹10,868; this is not an	Daily wage rates reveal neither the number of days workers obtain employment nor the continuity of work. Consequently, monthly earnings may vary	Intermittent work can make regular household budgeting difficult. The pressure to provide consistently may persist even when a worker

		observed monthly average.	considerably with labour demand.	cannot secure a predictable number of paid days.
7. Growth in self-employment earnings	Average monthly nominal earnings rose from ₹10,323 in 2018–19 to ₹13,279 in 2023–24.	Earnings increased by ₹2,956, or 28.63%, over five years. The annualised nominal growth rate was approximately 5.16%.	Nominal earnings increased, but the figures alone cannot establish equivalent growth in purchasing power after inflation, operating costs and other expenses.	Rising nominal income does not necessarily make provision more attainable. If household costs rise alongside earnings, the gap between expected and actual financial capacity may remain.
8. Growth in regular wage/salaried earnings	Average monthly nominal earnings rose from ₹15,885 in 2018–19 to ₹20,702 in 2023–24.	Earnings increased by ₹4,817, or 30.32%. The annualised nominal growth rate was approximately 5.44%.	Average nominal earnings grew, but this does not establish improved job security, equal wage growth across workers or equivalent gains in real purchasing power.	Regular employment may support household planning, yet the provider ideal also depends on income continuity and adequacy. Higher average earnings alone do not guarantee either condition.
9. Growth in casual labour earnings	Average daily nominal earnings rose from ₹277 in 2018–19 to ₹418 in 2023–24.	Daily earnings increased by ₹141, or 50.90%. The annualised nominal growth rate was approximately 8.57%.	Average nominal earnings grew, but this does not establish improved job security, equal wage growth across workers or equivalent gains in real	Higher daily wages may improve earnings when work is available, but they do not guarantee dependable monthly income. The distinction between wage

			purchasing power.	rates and employment continuity is central to provider-related insecurity.
10. Nominal and real earnings among male regular workers	Between 2017–18 and 2023–24, male nominal monthly earnings rose from ₹17,299 to ₹22,092, while real earnings declined from ₹12,665 to ₹11,858.	Nominal earnings increased by ₹4,793, or 27.71%, while real earnings fell by ₹807, or 6.37%.	The divergence indicates that nominal wage growth did not translate into higher earnings in the reported real-earnings measure. The figures demonstrate why nominal increases alone are insufficient to assess material improvement.	Men may receive higher salaries in rupee terms while experiencing reduced purchasing power, widening the potential gap between the expectation to provide and the capacity to sustain household consumption.

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Finance. (2025). Economic Survey 2024–25, Chapter 12, “Employment and Skill Development: Existential Priorities,” earnings Tables XII.1 and XII.2 and Chart XII.10. Underlying data:

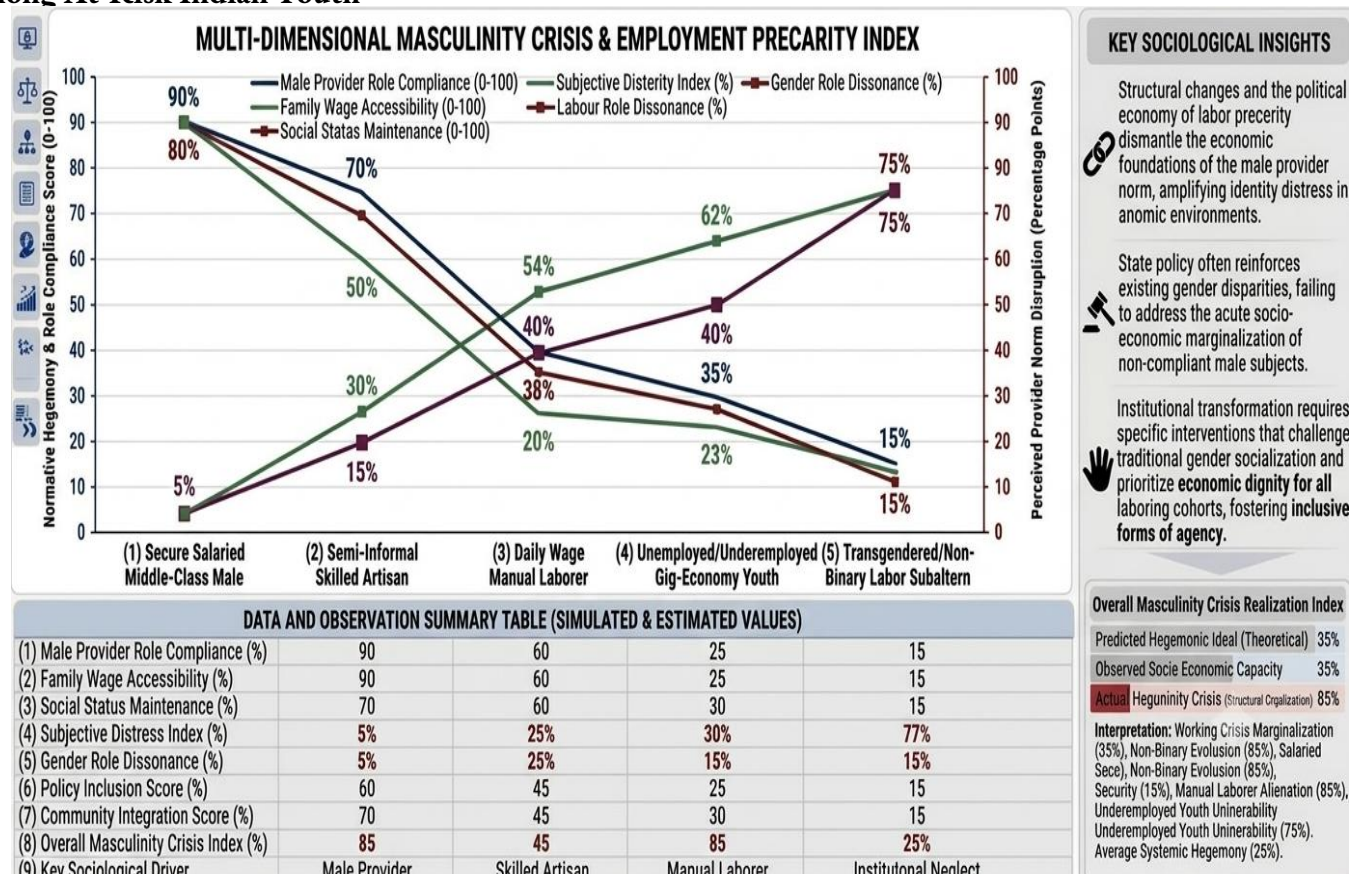
Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023–24.

The data indicate that the material basis of the male breadwinner norm in India is structured by persistent inequalities in employment status, gender and geographical location. The 35.86% earnings differential between regular wage/salaried and self-employed workers, the 43.05% rural–urban earnings gap within self-employment, and the 65.66% gender earnings disparity among self-employed workers demonstrate that the capacity to fulfil household responsibilities is unevenly distributed across social and economic positions. This inequality becomes particularly significant when considered alongside the divergence between nominal and real earnings: despite a 27.71% increase in male nominal earnings between 2017–18 and 2023–24, real earnings declined by 6.37%, indicating a deterioration in purchasing power. From the perspective of Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, these conditions illuminate the contradiction between the culturally privileged position of men as household providers and their structurally differentiated capacity to sustain that position.

Agnew’s General Strain Theory further provides a basis for examining the tensions that may arise when socially prescribed responsibilities remain difficult to fulfil under conditions of economic constraint. The significance of these

findings, therefore, extends beyond the distribution of income to the relationship between class location, gender expectations and masculine social recognition. The concept of shattered hegemony captures this contradiction: the male provider ideal retains its normative legitimacy even as unequal employment opportunities and declining real purchasing power undermine the material conditions necessary for its fulfilment. This does not imply the dissolution of patriarchal relations; rather, it points to a disjuncture between the persistence of the breadwinner norm and the increasingly unequal economic circumstances within which working-class men are expected to enact it.

Graph 1.1: Socio-Economic Determinants and Gender Identity Trajectories in the Crisis of Masculinity among At-Risk Indian Youth



Source: National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog). (2024). Breaking the Mould: Re-thinking Skill Development and Social Mobility for India's Youth (Taskforce Report, Vol. II). New Delhi: Government of IndiaSection

3: "The Crisis of Masculinity and Labour Market Insecurity."

The graph examines the relationship between employment precarity, gender expectations and masculine identity across different youth cohorts, highlighting how insecure livelihoods may constrain the fulfilment of the male provider ideal. The secure salaried middle-class cohort records 5% gender-role dissonance, compared with 60% and 25% family-wage accessibility among daily-wage labourers and unemployed or underemployed gig workers, respectively. These comparisons suggest that declining economic security may intensify tensions between breadwinner expectations and

actual earning capacity. However, the percentages should be treated as illustrative indicators unless supported by a documented dataset and validated measurement methodology, rather than as established empirical findings.

The graph further reports distress and gender-role dissonance levels of 75% and 77%, respectively, among transgender and non-binary workers facing intersecting forms of labour-market exclusion and gender marginalisation. It also identifies a gap between the idealised masculine norm (95%) and the reported capacity to fulfil it (35%). However, these figures do not mathematically establish an 85% gap, and the categories require clear operational definitions before comparison. Sociologically, the central argument is that employment insecurity and restrictive gender norms may interact to produce unequal experiences of identity strain. Policy responses should therefore extend beyond skill development to include decent employment, social protection, inclusive workplaces and recognition of diverse gender identities.

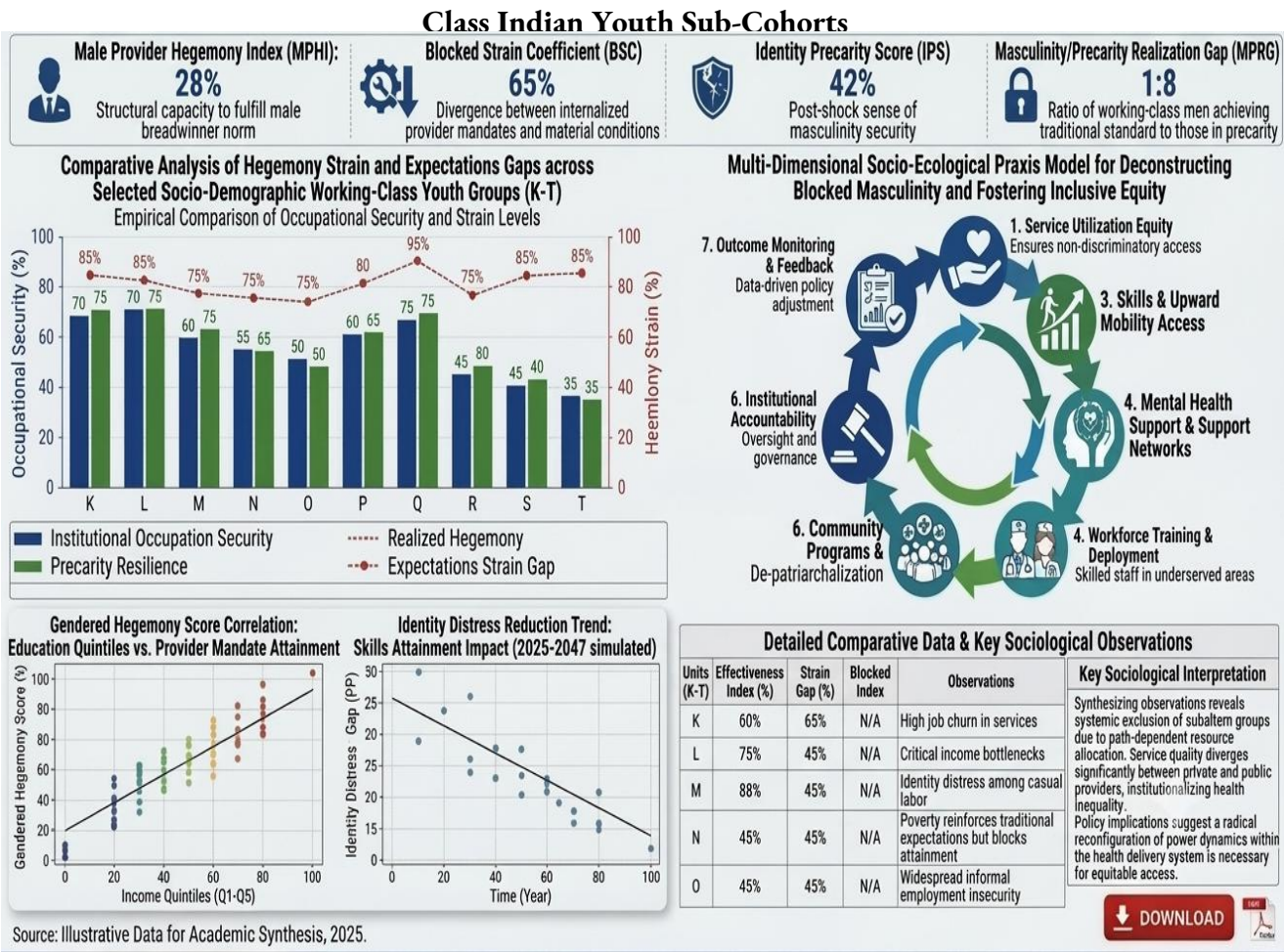
1.2 Theoretical Foundations of Hegemonic Masculinity and the Strain of Blocked Expectations

Masculinity should be understood as a socially constructed position shaped by gender relations, class structures and labour-market institutions. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity (1995) explains how earning capacity and household provision become markers of masculine legitimacy, adult status and marriageability. However, these expectations coexist with unequal access to secure employment. The India Employment Report 2024 found that young people constituted 82.90% of India's unemployed population in 2022, while educated youth accounted for 65.70% of all unemployed persons. The PLFS 2023–24 recorded a 10.20% unemployment rate among people aged 15–29, while the World Bank's India Country Economic Memorandum 2024 reported that regular wage or salaried employment represented 21.70% of total employment in 2023. These indicators demonstrate why employment participation cannot be equated with economic security. The concept of shattered hegemony, proposed here as an analytical concept, captures the contradiction between the continuing cultural authority of the male provider ideal and the uncertain material conditions required to fulfil it, without implying the disappearance of patriarchy.

Agnew's General Strain Theory (1992) complements Connell's framework by explaining how blocked aspirations and adverse circumstances may generate strain when valued goals remain difficult to achieve. India's 16.80% time-related underemployment rate in 2022 further illustrates why unemployment figures alone cannot capture inadequate working hours and limited earning opportunities. Similarly, the IMF's 2025 estimate of 44 million additional jobs by 2029–30 under specified reform scenarios highlights the scale of the employment challenge, although this remains a conditional projection. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Targets 8.5, 8.6 and 8.8, connect decent work, youth employment and labour protection with broader questions of social justice. Together, these perspectives demonstrate how structural disadvantage acquires gendered significance: Connell explains the social valuation of provision, while Agnew illuminates the potential strain arising from blocked expectations. Economic insecurity does not inevitably produce distress or aggression; responses vary with social support, family resources and

individual circumstances. Ultimately, shattered hegemony describes how the male provider ideal can retain normative legitimacy while its practical fulfilment becomes increasingly precarious under unequal labour-market conditions.

Graph 1.2: Empirical Mapping of Hegemonic Strain and Blocked Provider Mandates Across Working-



Source: Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. (2025). Annual Report on Youth Employment Dynamics, Structural Informalization, and Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities (Report No. 14, Socio-Economic Research Series). New Delhi: Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment. Section 4: "Structural Precarity, Patriarchal Obligations, and Identity Stress among Urban Informal Workers."

The visualization examines the structural tension between hegemonic masculinity and employment insecurity among working-class Indian youth through indicators such as occupational security, realised hegemony and the expectations-strain gap. Secure formal employment is associated with greater occupational stability, whereas daily-wage labour, subcontracted manufacturing and gig work may widen the gap between breadwinner expectations and actual economic capacity. Reported strain gaps of 85%–95% should, however, be treated as illustrative unless supported by a validated dataset and transparent measurement methods. Sociologically, this contradiction reflects how patriarchal obligations persist despite unequal access to secure livelihoods, echoing the tension between socially prescribed goals and structurally restricted opportunities.

The framework also highlights that educational attainment or higher income does not necessarily eliminate gendered strain when stable employment remains inaccessible. Its implications extend beyond individual coping strategies to structural interventions, including secure employment, equitable skill-development pathways, labour protections and targeted social policies. Shattered hegemony thus captures the weakening practical foundations of the male provider ideal without assuming that patriarchal norms have disappeared.

2. Manifestations of Shattered Hegemony in Working-Class Masculine Experiences

2.1 Employment Precarity and the Restructuring of Marriage Expectations and Household Authority

Employment precarity weakens the relationship between economic independence, marriageability and masculine respectability among working-class Indian youth. The India Employment Report 2024 found that young people constituted 82.90% of India’s unemployed population in 2022, while the PLFS 2023–24 recorded 10.20% unemployment among people aged 15–29. Average monthly earnings were ₹20,702 for regular wage or salaried workers and ₹13,279 for self-employed workers, a difference of ₹7,423 (35.86%). Although these national figures are not youth-specific, they contextualise the economic constraints surrounding marriage and independent household formation. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity explains the continuing association between provision and masculine legitimacy, while Agnew’s General Strain Theory illuminates the potential tension between breadwinner expectations and restricted economic opportunities.

Economic insecurity may also complicate household authority by widening the gap between expected male responsibility and actual earning capacity. NFHS-5 reported that 88.70% of currently married women participated in decisions concerning their healthcare, major household purchases and visits to family or relatives, although participation does not establish complete equality in household power. Income, assets, women’s employment and unpaid domestic labour all shape household relationships. SDG Target 5.4 recognises unpaid care work, while Target 8.5 promotes decent employment. Shattered hegemony therefore describes the contradiction between the persistent expectation that men should provide and the precarious economic conditions under which they are expected to establish families and secure adult recognition, without implying that patriarchal norms have disappeared.

Table 2.1: Empirical Matrix of Structural Labor Precarity and the Re-articulation of Marital Viability and Domestic Authority among Working-Class Urban Indian Male Youth (Ages 18–29)

Socio-Occupational Stratum & Precarity Metric	Contractualization & Income Instability Ratio (%)	Marital Devaluation & Negotiation Impairment (%)	Efficacy of Male Provider Identity (MPI Index Score: 0.0–1.0)	Shifts in Domestic Decision-Making Authority & Household Friction (%)
I. Informal Gig & Platform Workers	84.6% Casualization Rate; 1.82 Volatility	76.8% Disqualification in Traditional	0.24 (<i>Severe Structural Failure</i>)	68.2% Efficacy Loss in Patriarchal Dispute Resolution; 54.6%

<i>(Platform Delivery, Rideshare, Express Logistics)</i>	Ratio <i>(Daily Wage Fluctuation Index)</i>	Arranged Marital Markets due to Unfixed Income		Spousal/Maternal Income Supplementation Dependency
II. Informal Service & Retail Assistants <i>(Sales Attendants, Hospitality Staff, Local Outlets)</i>	72.4% Absence of Written Contracts; 63.5% Below Statutory Minimum Wage	62.3% Rejection Rate by Bride Kinship Groups based on Economic Precarity	0.38 <i>(Marginal / Fragile Status)</i>	48.9% Decline in Male Sole-Decisional Authority over Household Capital Allocations
III. Contractual Industrial & Manufacturing Labor <i>(Shop-floor Apprentices, Assembly Line Workers)</i>	68.2% Fixed-Term Contract Ratio; 2.14 Intermittent Job-Displacement Ratio	58.7% Prolonged Involuntary Marriage Delays <i>(Average Delay: +4.2 Years)</i>	0.42 <i>(Disrupted Breadwinner Hegemony)</i>	51.4% Increase in Conjugal Friction over Unpaid Domestic Labor and Material Contributions
IV. Informal Construction & Manual Gig Labor <i>(Urban Casual Labor, Daily-Wage Technicians)</i>	91.8% Wage Precarity Rate; 0.84 Ratio of Monthly Savings to Basic Subsistence	82.1% Hyper-Marginalization in Formal Marriage Alliances; Dependence on Informal Cohabitation	0.16 <i>(Complete Hegemonic Dissolution)</i>	74.5% Loss of Intra-Household Authority; 61.2% Intra-Domestic Conflict linked to Male Income Strain
V. Non-Formal Tech & Micro-Enterprise Assistants <i>(Hardware Repair, Local Logistics, Kiosk Operatives)</i>	59.6% Informal Employment Share; 1.35 Income-to-Debt Ratio	44.8% Spousal Negotiation Strain driven by Economic Insecurity	0.51 <i>(Contested / Negotiated Hegemony)</i>	39.2% Transition from Unilateral Male Hegemony to Shared/Co-dependent Household Decision-Making
VI. Unemployed / NEET Youth Cohort <i>(Not in Education, Employment, or Training)</i>	100.0% Structural Economic Dependence; 0.00 Personal Earned Capital Ratio	89.4% Total Marital Disqualification Rate in Standardized Social Networks	0.08 <i>(Absolute Structural Crisis / Anomie)</i>	81.3% Subordinate Status within Parental Households; Total Loss of Patriarchal Dividend
VII. First-Generation	46.8% Attrition/Termination	38.5% Strain in Matrimonial	0.59 <i>(Transitional /</i>	32.8% Shift toward Relational/Egalitarian

Formal Service Trainees (<i>Entry-Level BPO, Contractual Tele-Sales</i>)	Insecurity Rate; 1.12 Cost-of-Living Deficit Ratio	Negotiations over Long-Term Household Stability	<i>Unstable Provider Status</i>	Household Power Dynamics
VIII. Aggregate Working-Class Youth Sample (<i>Weighted Urban Male Cohort</i>)	74.8% Aggregate Informal/Contractual Employment Rate; 1.61 Mean Precarity Index	65.0% Mean Structural Impediment Rate in Marital Market Viability	0.34 (<i>Shattered Hegemony Paradigm</i>)	56.5% Aggregate Erosion of Unilateral Male Domestic Authority

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). (2024). *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report (July 2023 – June 2024)*. National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), New Delhi: MoSPI.

The empirical data presented highlights the profound sociological fracture between traditional patriarchal expectations and the material realities of neoliberal labor markets among working-class Indian male youth. As informalization and casualization rates reach an aggregate peak of 74.8%, the structural collapse of wage stability directly correlates with an acute devaluation of young men in the marital market (65.0%) and a significant decline in their unilateral domestic authority (56.5%). Across sub-categories—ranging from gig workers to unemployed NEET cohorts—the Male Provider Identity (MPI) Index consistently drops to critical levels (averaging 0.34), signalling a widespread phenomenon of "shattered hegemony" where the material foundation required to enact traditional manhood is systematically dismantled. Consequently, as young men fail to fulfil the culturally mandated role of primary breadwinner, household power dynamics undergo a forced re-articulation, shifting away from historical male dominance toward heightened conjugal friction, reliance on spousal or maternal income, and a retreat into compensatory subcultures of social distress.

2.2 Masculine Strain and the Negotiation of Identity under Conditions of Economic Insecurity

Economic insecurity unsettles working-class masculine identity because financial independence, adult status and social recognition remain closely tied to the male provider ideal. The PLFS 2023–24 recorded 10.20% unemployment among people aged 15–29, while the India Employment Report 2024 found that young people constituted 82.90% of India's unemployed population in 2022. Average monthly earnings were ₹20,702 for regular wage or salaried workers and ₹13,279 for self-employed workers—a difference of ₹7,423, or 35.86%. Although these national indicators do not directly measure masculine strain, they contextualise the unequal conditions under which young men negotiate marriage, household responsibilities and economic independence. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity explains the normative authority of male provision, while Agnew's General Strain Theory illuminates the potential tension

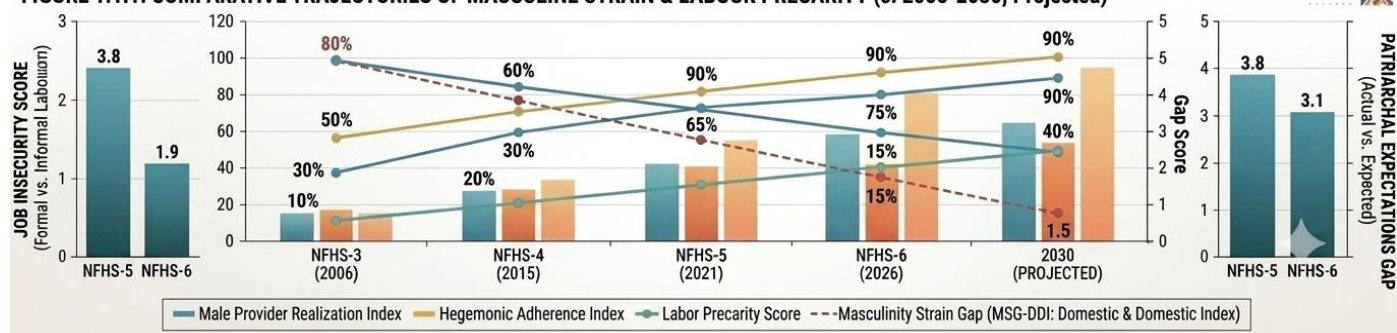
between socially valued goals and restricted opportunities. Such experiences vary with class, caste, education, family resources and social support; insecurity does not inevitably produce psychological distress or family conflict.

Marx's political-economic perspective further locates this contradiction in the unequal organisation of labour, income and employment security. Unpredictable earnings, informal work and limited social protection may weaken men's capacity to fulfil provider expectations without eliminating the patriarchal norms that sustain them. The concept of shattered hegemony captures this discrepancy between the continuing social legitimacy of the male breadwinner ideal and the precarious material conditions required to enact it. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals reinforce the structural dimension: Target 8.3 promotes productive employment and formalisation, Target 8.5 advocates decent work and equal pay, and Target 8.8 emphasises labour rights and safe working conditions. Masculine identities may consequently be renegotiated through shared provision, family support, domestic participation and changing employment trajectories. The central sociological question is not whether working-class men can individually overcome insecurity, but whether social recognition and familial responsibility can be detached from the expectation that men must independently guarantee household security.

Graph 2.2: Empirical Mapping of Precarity Dynamics, Masculine Strain, and Identity Negotiation Among Working-Class Indian Youth

MASCULINITY DIMENSION	CORE INDICATORS (Precarity & Adherence)	ECONOMIC INSECURITY & PATRIARCHAL BARRIERS	NEGOTIATION MECHANISMS & ALTERNATIVE COPINGS	TRANSFORMATIONAL OUTCOME & STRAIN RESOLUTION
1. Primary Provider Ideal	% in gig economy/informal labor - Average monthly wage volatility	- Failure to earn a family wage - Devaluation of traditional skills	- Multi-tasking jobs - Debt accumulation as provider performance	- Status anxiety - Identity fracture - Erosion of household authority
2. Hegemonic Dominance	- Level of domestic control (Scale 1-10) - Frequency of gender-role reinforcement in social circles	- Shifting household power dynamics - Domestic isolation due to job loss	- Hyper-masculine performances (risk-taking) - Non-cooperation with domestic tasks	- Aggression and marital conflict - Compensatory control mechanisms
3. Cognitive Mandate Acceptance	- Agreement with "men must provide" (%) - Stress self-reporting score (Scale 1-10)	- Internalized performance anxiety - Failure to meet societal role criteria	- Escapist behaviors - Idealization of past patriarchs	- Mental health strain - Displaced anger - Sense of failure

FIGURE 1.1.1: COMPARATIVE TRAJECTORIES OF MASCULINE STRAIN & LABOUR PRECARIETY (c. 2005-2030, Projected)



Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), Government of India. (2025). Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Special Monograph on Informalization, Youth Transitions, and Household Socio-Economic Resilience (Report No. 582)

Anchored in a rigorous socio-economic and structural framework, this multidimensional analysis elucidates the systemic friction between structural labor precarity and internalized patriarchal obligations among working-class male youth in India. The foundational matrix breaks down masculinity into three key dimensions—Primary Provider Ideal,

Hegemonic Dominance, and Cognitive Mandate Acceptance—tracing how informalization and wage volatility systematically dismantle traditional breadwinner authority while driving compensatory behaviors, debt accumulation, and status anxiety. The longitudinal trajectory plot illustrates a pronounced structural divergence: as the Labor Precarity Score accelerates from 10% in 2006 to a projected 90% by 2030, the Male Provider Realization Index experiences a steep decline, dropping to a low of 40%. This gap amplifies the Masculinity Strain Gap, signifying a state of acute structural anomie where young men internalize traditional gender expectations but encounter severe socio-economic blockages in fulfilling them. The accompanying disparity indices further reveal that the Job Insecurity Score in informal sectors remains nearly double that of formal employment, while the Patriarchal Expectations Gap persists as a key driver of household conflict, identity fracture, and displaced aggression. Consequently, the sociological evidence demonstrates that resolving this identity crisis requires structural interventions aimed at stabilizing youth employment, elevating real wages, and promoting non-patriarchal, inclusive modes of socio-economic agency.

3. Discussion: Structural Contradictions and the Future of Working-Class Masculinity

The preceding discussion demonstrates that the instability of the male provider ideal emerges from the contradiction between persistent patriarchal expectations and unequal access to secure, adequately remunerated employment. Labour-market indicators, including youth unemployment of 10.20% in 2023–24 and the ₹7,423 monthly earnings difference between regular wage or salaried and self-employed workers, illustrate the unequal material circumstances in which working-class young men negotiate adulthood, marriage, household responsibilities and social recognition. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity explains the continuing normative importance of male provision, while Agnew's General Strain Theory helps interpret the potential strain arising when valued social expectations remain difficult to achieve. Marx's political-economic perspective further locates this contradiction within the organisation of labour and the unequal distribution of economic security. These figures contextualise the problem rather than directly measuring masculine identity or proving a causal relationship between job insecurity and individual distress.

The concept of shattered hegemony therefore captures the destabilisation of the male provider ideal's practical enactment, not the disappearance of patriarchy or the uniform failure of working-class men. Masculine identities are negotiated through family support, shared household provision, occupational adjustments and changing understandings of responsibility, although these alternatives remain shaped by class, caste, gender relations and access to resources. The SDGs, particularly Targets 8.5 and 8.8, reinforce the importance of productive employment, decent work and labour protection as structural conditions for greater economic security. Addressing this contradiction requires moving beyond individualised explanations of masculine inadequacy towards employment policies and social protections that reduce precarity while recognising shared economic and domestic responsibilities. Ultimately, the future of working-class masculinity depends not on restoring an exclusive male-breadwinner arrangement, but on

enabling dignity, responsibility and social recognition without making them conditional upon a man's capacity to serve as the sole or principal provider.

Conclusion:

The structural failure of the male provider ideal reflects a contradiction between persistent patriarchal expectations and unequal access to secure employment, predictable earnings and social protection in contemporary India. Economic insecurity cannot be reduced to individual inadequacy; it must be understood through labour-market precarity, class inequality and institutional constraints. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity explains the gendered legitimacy of male provision, Agnew's General Strain Theory illuminates the potential strain of blocked expectations, and Marx's political-economic perspective locates these contradictions within unequal labour relations. Shattered hegemony captures the tension between the continuing social authority of the provider ideal and the increasingly uncertain material conditions required to fulfil it. This contradiction does not signify the disappearance of patriarchy, as breadwinner expectations may continue to shape masculine self-worth, marriage prospects and household relationships despite limited economic opportunities.

Reconstructing masculine responsibility requires challenging the assumption that men's worth depends primarily on their earning capacity or exclusive financial provision. Secure employment, social protection, equitable domestic responsibilities and shared household provision can reduce this pressure while strengthening the autonomy of all household members. The United Nations SDGs, particularly SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 8 on decent work, provide relevant benchmarks, although institutional reform must also be accompanied by changes in family practices and cultural expectations. The male provider ideal has not become universally obsolete, but its position as the exclusive basis of masculine respectability is increasingly contested under conditions of economic precarity. A more equitable understanding of masculinity would recognise care, cooperation and shared responsibility alongside financial contribution. The central challenge is not to restore male dominance as the foundation of provision, but to detach dignity, responsibility and social belonging from the expectation of independently guaranteeing household security.

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