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Male Victimhood Ideology Among Korean Men: Is It Economic Hardship or Perceived Status Decline?

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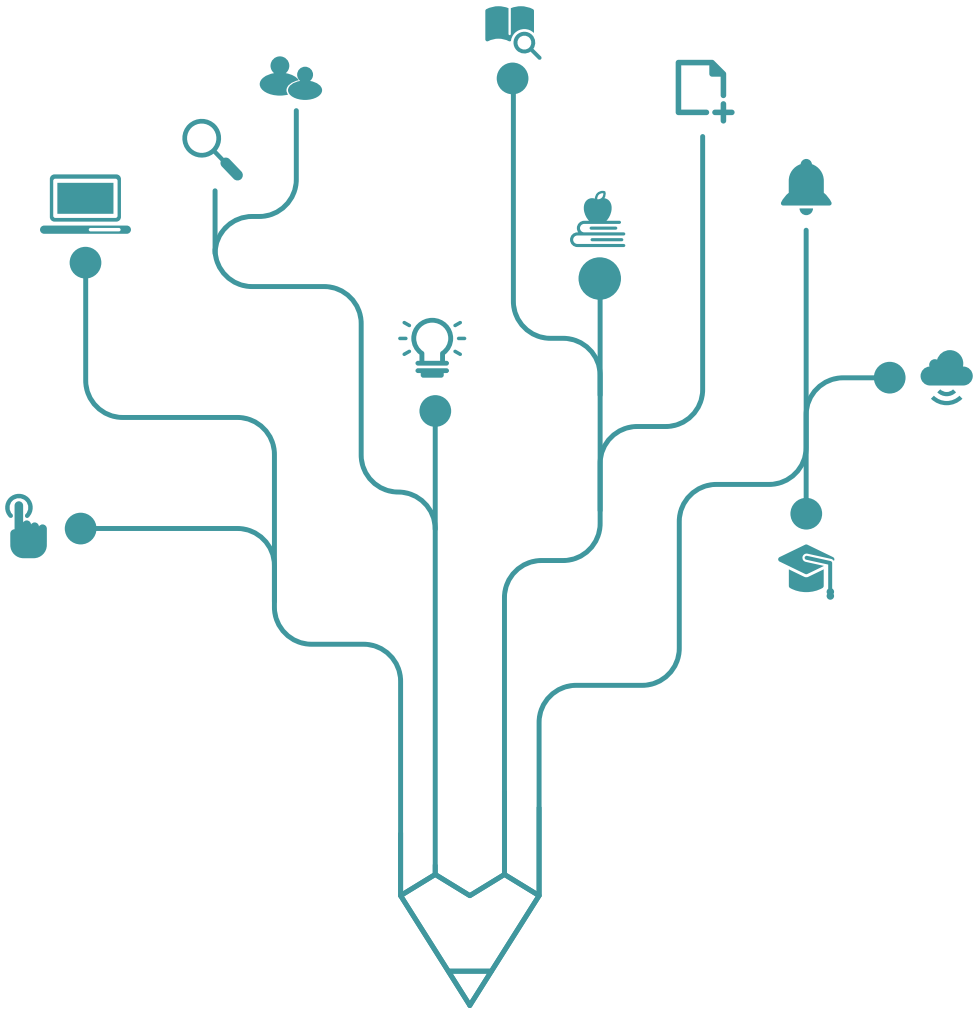

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Abstract

Male victimhood ideology, the belief that men are the primary targets of gender discrimination, has gained traction among young men in recent years, but the underlying sources of these sentiments remain understudied. Utilizing four different datasets, collected in 2015, 2018, 2020, and 2023 from representative samples of Korean men, this study investigates whether identification with male victimhood ideology is explained by objective economic hardships faced by men or by their perceptions of a status loss. The economic hardship perspective finds little support, as men who were less educated, had lower incomes, were unemployed, or had non-regular employment were no more likely to identify with male victimhood than their more economically stable counterparts. Instead, a perceived decline in socioeconomic status relative to one's parents emerged as a significant predictor of male victimhood ideology, particularly among men from middle to upper class backgrounds. Additional analyses show that this pattern is not observed among Korean women of the same age group. Overall, the analysis of the four datasets consistently shows that male victimhood discourse is embraced most by those who perceive a loss of privilege, rather than by those who are marginalized.

Count: 189

Keywords: Male Victimhood Ideology; Aggrieved Entitlement: Status Threat; Antifeminism

Introduction

In recent years, high-income countries have witnessed a significant rise in male victimhood ideology, or the belief that men have become the primary targets of gender discrimination. Its proponents argue that feminism has gone too far and that it now restricts men's social, political, and economic opportunities (Cabezas, 2022; Green & Shorrocks, 2023; Ipsos, 2024; H. W. Jung, 2023; Kim, 2023b; Off et al., 2022). This belief in male victimhood is not limited to the extremist fringe but is becoming increasingly prevalent among young men around the world. A recent global survey revealed that a majority (60%) of Generation Z[1] men believe that "we have gone so far in promoting women's equality that we are discriminating against men" (Ipsos, 2024). Surprisingly, this belief is more common among young men than their older counterparts, such as Baby Boomers (43%) (Ipsos, 2024; Off et al., 2022) who have traditionally been perceived as more conservative on gender issues.

Male victimhood ideologies are not new. Yet they are increasingly recognized as a key predictor of recent social and political trends, including the proliferation of misogynistic online communities like incels (involuntary celibates), whose misogynistic ideals have often spurred actual violence against women (Ging, 2019; Halpin, 2022; Menzie, 2022), and men's support for populist political candidates or parties (Al-Ghazzi, 2021; Armaly & Enders, 2022; Gerodimos, 2015; Homolar & Löfflmann, 2022; Isom et al., 2022; Mandy Mun Yee CHAN, 2023). Despite the growing visibility of male victimhood ideologies and their impact on social and political outcomes, there has been relatively little empirical research on the underlying sources of these ideologies.

A few studies have sought to explore the socioeconomic foundations of male victimhood ideologies, but these have been inconclusive. Some suggest that such ideologies are fundamentally linked to economic grievances experienced by working class men, who have been hit hardest by declining manufacturing jobs and structural unemployment (Off, 2023; Off et al., 2022). Others argue that perceived socioeconomic decline, particularly among men from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds who were raised with a sense of entitlement, trigger and generate claims of victimhood (M. Kimmel, 2017; M. S. Kimmel & Coston, 2017; Nadler & Bauer, 2019). For these men, the feeling that one has lost ground breeds an “aggrieved entitlement”—a belief that their rightful privileges have been unjustly stripped away (Kimmel, 2017). This motivates them to appropriate narratives of victimhood, justifying their reclamation of their allegedly lost power.

To test these ideas, I examine the connections among men’s economic conditions, their perceptions of socioeconomic decline, and their support for victimhood ideologies. I use four datasets consisting of representative samples of Korean men collected in 2015 (N=1,200), 2018 (N=3,000), 2020 (N=8,917), and 2023 (N=2,028). South Korea provides an illuminating context in which to examine male victimhood and its

[1] In Ipsos’ ‘International Women’s Day 2024’ report, Generation Z was defined as those aged 18 to 28 in 2024, while Baby Boomers were defined as those aged 59 to 79 in 2024.

relationship with structural conditions. Despite the country's high level of education, a growing number of young men have faced a decline in the kinds of employment opportunities that were easily accessible to previous generations. Moreover, a series of online and offline feminist movements since 2015 have successfully fostered a socioeconomic environment that is intolerant of misogynistic violence against women (Kim, 2023b). The confluence of rising feminist awareness and economic frustrations has created fertile ground for young men to embrace male victimhood ideology. Among men in their 20s and 30s, 50% believe that "society discriminates against men [more than women]," and 69.5% believe that "feminism derogates men" (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2020). In stark contrast, young women report significantly lower levels of such beliefs: only 7.7% agree that "society discriminates against men [more than women]," and 30% support the notion that "feminism derogates men" (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2020).

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature on male victimhood sentiments. Despite growing interest in this phenomenon, no systematic studies, that I know of, have attempted to identify the source of these sentiments among the general population. Previous research on the topic has largely relied on anecdotal evidence or analyses of fringe groups, and few studies have focused exclusively on male victimhood sentiments. To the best of my knowledge, this research represents the first comprehensive attempt to connect potential socioeconomic factors to these sentiments. Notably, this study utilizes four different large-scale datasets to examine two non–mutually exclusive explanations for male victimhood sentiments among a sample of the general population. In doing so, it not only contributes to the growing debate on the root causes of antifeminism but also offers valuable insights for policymakers seeking to promote social cohesion.

Male Victimhood Ideology

Recent scholarly work has identified male victimhood ideology as a distinct ideological construct that differs from traditional forms of sexism such as hostile sexism (Kim, 2023a; Zehnter et al., 2021). While male victimhood ideologies and hostile sexism share some ideological roots and both work to oppose feminist movements (Kim, 2023a; Zehnter et al., 2021), there are key differences between them. Male victimhood ideology does not openly posit male superiority or female inferiority like hostile sexism does (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Instead, it argues that men do not hold power in society, and that men are even oppressed by a gynocentric social order. Studies also distinguish male victimhood from postfeminism, or the assumption that gender equality has already been achieved, which explains the decline in public support for feminism (Hall & Rodriguez, 2003; Jordan, 2016; Zehnter et al., 2021). Male victimhood ideology instead posits that gender discrimination is an ongoing social issue, with men now the primary victims, and that widespread support for feminism is a critical source of male suffering (Zehnter et al., 2021). Various terms have been used to describe this phenomenon, including male victimhood (García Mingo & Díaz Fernández, 2023; Kim, 2023a); weaponized subordination, masculinity, or victimhood (Chouliaraki, 2024; Halpin, 2022; Homolar & Löfflmann, 2022; Nadler & Bauer, 2019); and belief in a sexism-shift (Zehnter et al., 2021).

Claims of male victimhood have been documented as a fraction of antifeminist movements since the 1960s (Coston & Kimmel, 2012; M. S. Kimmel, 1987; M. S. Kimmel & Coston, 2017; Messner, 2016). However, in

recent years, they have become the dominant rhetoric within antifeminist movements, marking a clear departure from traditional antifeminism. Interestingly, the majority of young men in high-income countries now hold egalitarian gender role attitudes (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017), while simultaneously expressing hostility toward feminists or feminism (Green & Shorrocks, 2023; Jordan, 2016; Kim, 2023a; Off et al., 2022). These seeming contradictions can be explained by male victimhood ideology. Its proponents argue that feminism actually discriminates against men and undermines genuine equality between the genders, thus allowing the reconciliation of its adherents' belief in gender equality with their antifeminist sentiments. Claiming male victimhood thus can be an effective antifeminist strategy, especially in the current sociopolitical context where open condemnation of women's rights and women's qualities is no longer tolerated.

Sources of Support for Male Victimhood Sentiment: Economic Hardship or Perceived Status Decline?

The scholarly discourse surrounding men's rights activists (MRAs) and the politics of victimhood posits that claims of victimhood by the socially and politically dominant group is a rhetorical tactic in response to perceived threats to their dominant status in society (Chouliaraki, 2021; Chouliaraki & Banet-Weiser, 2021; Danbold et al., 2022; M. S. Kimmel & Coston, 2017). The perceived threat to their social and economic standing can fuel resentment toward feminism and a desire to reassert traditional gender hierarchies. Although it remains unclear whether male victimhood is truly felt or strategically expressed, the rhetoric works to entrench patriarchal gender relations by redefining what it means to be disempowered, vulnerable, and violated. By framing themselves as victims of feminism and gender equality efforts, these men can gain moral standing and legitimacy to undermine the women's rights movement and regain their position of power (Chouliaraki, 2021, 2024; Nadler & Bauer, 2019).

When faced with a perceived threat to their status, men often adopt strategies to reassert their dominance (Willer et al., 2013). While male victimhood narratives were initially identified as one of several antifeminist strategies employed by Men's Rights Activist (MRA) groups, the reach of these narratives has extended far beyond these fringe groups, and they are now embraced by a majority of the young male population in high-income countries. This widespread adoption of male victimhood ideology can be attributed to recent structural changes to the social environment that have allowed these ideas to proliferate beyond their original niche contexts. Two key factors have played a significant role in this expansion: growing economic instability and evolving gender dynamics. Economic instability, characterized by job market precarity, wage stagnation, and increased income inequality, has eroded the traditional economic foundations upon which many men have historically built their identities and social status. Simultaneously, evolving gender dynamics, including the ongoing push for gender equality and women's increasing participation in traditionally male-dominated fields, have challenged long-standing notions of masculinity and male privilege. The combination of economic uncertainty and changing gender roles has fostered a sense of status loss among many men, thereby creating fertile ground for male victimhood narratives to take root. Furthermore, the proliferation of online subcultures has increased the accessibility and appeal of these ideas to a broader audience (Ging, 2019), potentially mobilizing young men who might not have initially identified as victims, and thus amplifying the reach and

impact of male victimhood sentiments in mainstream society.

While male victimhood has emerged as a widespread public phenomenon, its socioeconomic foundations remain a subject of ongoing debate and research. On the one hand, economic instability and shifting work practices have disproportionately affected young working-class men (McDowell, 2011; Standing, 2018). These economic challenges, coupled with the perception that women are making advancements in education and the workplace, may exacerbate a sense of relative deprivation among working-class men, leading to resentment of feminism. Recent studies from 27 European countries have shown that male victimhood ideology is more prevalent in regions with high unemployment rates (Off, 2023; Off et al., 2022), although it remains unclear whether feelings of victimhood are generally more common among economically disadvantaged individuals.

Furthermore, men's economic instability may be closely linked to their difficulties accessing heterosexual relationships. Men's failure to achieve romantic success with women has been found to be a key predictor of their hostility toward women and feminism (Dancygier et al., 2022; Fox & DeLateur, 2014; Fox & Fridel, 2017). The incel movement is a prime example of this phenomenon, as its members blame their sexual and economic predicaments on women and feminism (Menzie, 2022). Quantitative studies on incels generally find that members of this group are more likely to be NEET (not in education, employment, or training), less educated, and still living with their parents (Costello et al., 2022). In summary, it is possible that men facing economic difficulties would be especially attracted to anti-feminist rhetoric that portrays men as victims of gender-based discrimination.

Hypothesis 1: Male victimhood ideology is more prevalent among men who are less educated, have lower incomes, are unemployed, or are temporary workers.

Alternatively, other scholars attribute resentment of feminism to a perceived decline in socioeconomic status, rather than actual economic hardships (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012; M. Kimmel, 2017; Madfis, 2014; Newman, 1988). Shifts in the labor market have not only impacted working class men, but have also generated a growing share of middle class men who face diminishing chances of maintaining that class status despite their efforts to succeed through legitimate means such as education and hard work (Coston & Kimmel, 2012; M. Kimmel, 2017, p. 20). These shrinking opportunities for a middle class lifestyle fuel 'aggrieved entitlement'—the "sense that those benefits to which you believed yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by unseen forces larger and more powerful" (Kimmel 2013, p. 18).

Men's aggrieved entitlement could surface in the form of victimhood that serves to justify their efforts to reassert male dominance and privilege. This perspective, which I refer to as the status decline perspective, expects that it is men experiencing downward social and economic mobility compared with their parents, rather than those who simply lack economic resources, who are more likely to endorse male victimhood ideology as a strategy to correct this perceived loss. This perspective also suggests that a sense of socioeconomic decline motivates victimhood sentiments, particularly among men from middle- to upper-class backgrounds, as they are the group most likely to have become accustomed to power, status, and resources (M. Kimmel, 2017; Madfis,

2014).

Hypothesis 2: Male victimhood ideology is more prevalent among men who perceive themselves as downwardly mobile.

Hypothesis 3: The association between downward mobility and victimhood ideology is more salient among men from higher social classes than men from lower social classes.

The South Korean Context

South Korea provides a compelling context in which to explore the socioeconomic conditions underlying male victimhood ideologies among young men. Despite young South Korean adults being the most highly educated group in the world, for many, this educational achievement has not translated into good jobs or financial stability (Park & Woo, 2020). Since the 1997 Financial Crisis, the South Korean labor market has become less stable, and secure employment in good-quality jobs has declined (Shin, 2013). According to the OECD (2022), South Korea's youth unemployment rate has consistently been higher than the overall unemployment rate, highlighting the difficulties young people face in securing stable and well-paying jobs. This economic landscape leaves many young adults feeling frustrated and downwardly mobile compared with their parents' generation, despite their objective economic conditions having improved (Hwang, 2024).

While unfavorable labor market conditions affect both young men and women in Korea, frustration may be more prevalent among young men due to the relatively better economic status of men in previous generations. In contrast, Korean women have made significant gains in the public sphere, including education and labor force participation, compared to their predecessors. Female labor force participation rates have increased consistently from 44.6% in 1980 to 62.5% in 2023 (KOSIS 2022), narrowing the gender gap in employment. Meanwhile, male labor force participation plateaued around 70% in the 1980s and has not increased further (KOSIS 2022). Notably, women in their 20s now attain higher levels of education and demonstrate greater labor force participation than their male counterparts (KOSIS 2022). However, it is crucial to recognize that women's advancements in the public sphere do not translate into gender equality across all spheres of Korean society. Despite the perception of a new gender imbalance that favors young women, persistent institutional and cultural challenges remain. South Korea continues to have the widest gender wage gap among high-income OECD countries (OECD 2022) and low female representation in parliament. In addition, gender role attitudes remain rigid, particularly when it comes to women's caregiving and domestic responsibilities, leading to one of the largest gender gaps in unpaid labor hours in OECD countries (OECD 2017).

Since 2015, a series of notable feminist movements have emerged in South Korea in response to both misogynistic killings and harassment of women in male-dominated online communities (Kim, 2023b). The popularity of these movements has significantly changed the political landscape with regard to gender attitudes. Studies have identified an increase in egalitarian gender role attitudes in Korea since 2015 (Kim, 2023b), indicating a sociopolitical context that is no longer tolerant of overt misogynistic attacks against women. This feminist movement has also been fueled by wide support for the #MeToo movement since 2019.

For many young men in South Korea, women's rights and standing have expanded at the same time that their own chances of living up to class expectations have contracted, leaving them feeling displaced and frustrated. They direct their anger toward feminism, claiming that women now have an unfair advantage in the labor market due to feminist policies. This belief has been bolstered by the requirement that men complete mandatory military service, which can interrupt critical stages of their education, career, or entry into the labor market (Choo, 2020). While feminism is not the direct source of men's declining employment opportunities or the military conscription system, this context provides fertile ground for anti-feminism to take root among young adults.

Some political parties and candidates have exploited men's sense of frustration with feminism (K. Jung, 2024). In the 2022 presidential election, candidate Yoon Seok-yeol capitalized on anti-feminist sentiment by promising to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. Established in 2001, this ministry is a cornerstone of feminist policy in South Korea, addressing gender disparities. However, many young men see it as a symbol of reverse discrimination against them. Surveys have indicated that a significant majority of young men support its abolition, as they view feminist policies as contributing to their economic and social struggles (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2020). Yoon's victory highlighted the polarization within South Korean society over gender issues and signaled a shift in the political landscape in which addressing male grievances became a key electoral strategy.

Current Research

The main aim of this study is to test the applicability of two potential explanations for male victimhood ideology in the context of South Korea. The first explanation focuses on economic grievance theory, hypothesizing that male victimhood ideology is more prevalent among men in economically disadvantaged positions (H1). The second explanation hypothesizes that male victimhood ideology is more prevalent among men who perceive a decline in their socioeconomic status (H2), especially men from privileged backgrounds (H3).

To test these hypotheses, this study employs four distinct datasets collected from 2015 to 2023. Study 1, conducted in 2015, tests Hypothesis 1 using a sample of men aged 15 to 34 (N = 1,200). Study 2, from 2018, examines Hypotheses 1 and 2 with a sample of men aged 19 to 59 (N = 3,000). In Study 3, carried out in 2020, Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 are tested using a sample of men aged 25 to 49 (N = 4,604). Lastly, Study 4, conducted in 2023, uses a sample of men aged 19 to 44 (N = 1,041) to corroborate findings from Study 3 (thus testing all three hypotheses). Despite differences in the sample characteristics across the four datasets, they encompass a representative sample of Korean men, allowing us to draw generalizable findings. Moreover, as these studies were conducted in four different years spanning nearly a decade, they offer a unique opportunity to test the consistency of the findings over time.

Study 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study utilizes data from the "Survey on Perceptions of Gender Relations Among Young Korean Men," conducted in 2015. The study surveyed 1,200 Korean males between the ages of 15 and 34, thus encompassing adolescents and young adults. The age distribution was relatively even: 25.3% were 15–19 years old, 22.5% were 20–24, 26.5% were 25–29, and 26.5% were 30–34. The current status of respondents was as follows: 14.3% were middle or high school students, 31.7% were college students, 12.3% were job seekers or unemployed, and 41.7% were employed. Nearly half of the participants (49%, n = 587) were still pursuing their education at the time of the survey. This educational breakdown included 31 in their third year of middle school, 153 in high school, and 403 in college or university. Regarding subjective economic classes, 8.7% identified as upper class, 35.3% as middle class, 41.5% as lower-middle class, and 14.5% as lower class. The sample was overwhelmingly unmarried (87.3%) as opposed to married (12.3%), which is expected given the young age range of the survey. Political orientation was also examined: 18.1% identified as "very conservative" or "somewhat conservative," 57.5% as "moderate," and 24.4% as "somewhat progressive" or "very progressive."

The Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI, https://eng.kwdi.re.kr/) commissioned this survey to measure young men's attitudes toward feminism and women, with a focus on antifeminist sentiments. The survey was conducted by EMBRAIN (https://www.panel.co.kr/user/), a subsidiary of the Macromill Group and a leading survey firm in Korea. EMBRAIN maintains the largest online panel in Korea, with 1,652,020 participants as of the survey date.

The data collection took place from October 1 to October 20, 2015, just three months after the initiation of the online feminist movement Megalia. The timing of the survey provides a valuable opportunity to assess the prevalence and dimensionality of antifeminist sentiments among young Korean men in the wake of a major development in Korea's feminist landscape.

The choice of an online survey method was driven by several key factors. Firstly, online surveys are generally more resource-effective, offering cost and time efficiencies compared with traditional survey methods. Secondly, this approach helps to reduce social desirability bias, which is particularly crucial given the sensitive nature of the survey topics. These topics include hostile sexism toward women, attitudes about feminism, and political opinions—all areas where respondents might be inclined to give socially acceptable rather than honest answers in a face-to-face setting. Lastly, the online format is especially appropriate for the study's target age group of young adults, who are typically active internet users.

This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive examination of antifeminist sentiments among young Korean men, capturing attitudes shortly after a significant event in Korea's feminist landscape. By leveraging the benefits of an online survey, the study may be able to provide honest and representative data on these sensitive topics, providing valuable insights into young Korean men’s attitudes toward feminism and women in general.

Measures

Male Victimhood Sentiment: The study assessed perceptions of male victimhood by asking all respondents to rate their agreement with the statement: "Men experience reverse discrimination due to excessive feminist policies." Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale (1. Strongly disagree 2. Somewhat disagree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Somewhat agree and 5. Strongly agree).

Men's economic conditions: Men's economic conditions were assessed using four key variables. Education level was categorized into four groups: high school degree or less, 2- or 3-year college degree, 4-year university degree, and graduate-level degree. Personal monthly income was measured on an eight-point ordinal scale. Employment status (unemployed or employed) and work type (regular or non-regular employment) were also recorded. For respondents who were not working and had no income, the lowest value on the income scale was assigned. These individuals were also coded as not unemployed and not non-regular workers to distinguish them from those actively in the workforce.

Sociodemographic controls: The study incorporated several sociodemographic factors as control variables. Age was included as a continuous value. Marital status was represented by a 'never married' category, capturing a significant demographic among young Korean men. Additionally, place of residence was categorized according to South Korea's seven major administrative divisions.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 reports findings on the association between individual economic conditions and identification with male victimhood ideology among young Korean men aged 15 to 34 in 2015. The findings offer little support for the 'economic hardships' explanation (H1). Men's level of education, unemployment status, and engagement in non-regular work showed no significant association with the endorsement of victimhood sentiments. Interestingly, and in contrast to the prediction of Hypothesis 1, the data reveal that men with higher incomes were more likely to endorse male victimhood ideology.

The results presented in Table 1 offer limited support for Hypothesis 1. However, it is essential to interpret these findings within the context of the survey sample's composition. A notable majority of the respondents were not currently active in the workforce: 49% were still pursuing their education, 12% were actively seeking employment, and only 39% were employed at the time of the survey. Given that more than half of the sample was not economically active, the economic variables may not accurately capture the economic circumstances or prospects of the entire sample.

Table 1. Ordered Logistic Regression Predicting Male Victimhood Sentiment Among Korean Men Aged 15 to 34 in 2015 (N=1,200)

	"Men experience reverse discrimination due to excessive feminist policies" [a]	
	OR	se
Economic characteristics		

Educational level			
(ref. high school degree or less)			
2- or 3-year college	0.750		0.204
College or university degree	0.749		0.180
Graduate study degree	0.757		0.269
Personal income	1.183	*	0.097
Unemployed	1.591		0.511
Non-regular work	1.052		0.259
Sociodemographic controls			
Age	0.993		0.025
Never married	1.426	†	0.296
Place of residence (ref. Seoul)			
Kyungki	0.848		0.187
Youngnam	1.088		0.245
Honam	0.729		0.222
Chungcheong	0.937		0.267
Gangwon	0.850		0.407
Jeju	1.058		0.917

Source: "Survey on Perceptions of Gender Relations among Young Korean Men."
Note: [a]This item was measured using a five-point Likert scale for responses to the question, "To what extent do you agree that men experience reverse discrimination due to excessive feminist policies?"

Study 2

To overcome the limited age scope of Study 1, Study 2 encompasses a wider age range of men, predominantly those active in the workforce. This broader demographic allows for a more accurate assessment of the association between men's economic circumstances and male victimhood sentiments. Furthermore, Study 2 extends the analysis by examining whether men's anxiety regarding a decline in social status is associated with male victimhood ideals. This additional dimension is explored while controlling for objective economic indicators and sociodemographic variables, allowing a test of Hypothesis 2, which expects that men's frustration over their status is the key source of male victimhood claims.

Method

Participants and Procedure

I use data from "A Survey on Men's Perceptions of Gender Equality and Quality of Life." This broader survey sampled 3,000 Korean men in 2018. The target population for this survey was men aged 19 to 59 residing in South Korea.

As in Study 1, this survey was collected by EMBRAIN on behalf of the Korean Women's Development

Institute and was carried out online from October 30 to November 8, 2018. The sampling procedure followed the same methods as Study 1. First, out of their 129 million panel, they randomly selected men aged 19 to 59 years old. As a second step, they stratified the randomly selected male sample by region and age. Respondents were invited by an email with a link to a structured questionnaire, and received additional text message reminders sent at least once each morning and afternoon up to a maximum of 3 times.

The sample in Study 2 had an average age of 38 years (SD = 11.5), reflecting the different age range than in Study 1. Unlike the previous study where most participants were not in the workforce, 78.3% of this sample were employed, with 15.9% being students and 5.6% unemployed. Approximately half (49%) of the respondents were married. When asked about anxiety regarding socioeconomic decline, their responses were varied: 15.5% reported no anxiety at all, 39.8% were not very anxious, 38.63% were a bit anxious, and 6.03% reported being very anxious. Overall, these figures indicate that a slight majority of the sample (55.3%) expressed little to no anxiety about social status decline, while a substantial minority (44.7%) reported some level of concern.

Measure

Male Victimhood Sentiment: Study 2 employed three distinct indicators to measure male victimhood sentiment: "I am willing to participate in the men's rights movement to fight discrimination against men," "Feminism derogates men," and "Korea is a country where it is better to live as a woman than as a man." While these items differ from those in Study 1, the statements reflect perceptions of male oppression, negative views of feminism, and beliefs about societal advantages for women. This multifaceted approach, applied to a broader age range, enables a more nuanced analysis of male victimhood sentiment.

Economic characteristics: Consistent with Study 1, Study 2 incorporates key economic indicators including men's education level, personal income, unemployment status, and non-regular work status. The education level variable in Study 2 was measured as a trichotomous variable: 1) High school degree or less, 2) Currently university students or degree holders, and 3) Graduate-level degree. The data used in Study 2 did not distinguish between 2- and 3-year college and 4-year university graduates, which were collectively measured as college/university degree holders. Personal income, which was collected as a continuous variable, was transformed using a logarithmic scale for analysis.

Anxious about Social Status Decline: The survey assessed participants' concern over potential social status decline using a single, focused question: "To what extent do you feel anxious about a 'social status decline' that may occur now or in the near future?" Responses were collected on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A lot). This measure did not necessarily capture perceptions of downward mobility, but rather gauged men's apprehension about a potential future decline in their social status. This variable is used to explore whether these status anxieties are associated with male victimhood sentiments.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 reports findings on the association between Korean men's economic conditions, anxiety regarding

potential status decline, and male victimhood sentiments among men aged 19–59 in 2018. Consistent with Study 1, the results provide little support for the 'economic hardship' hypothesis. In fact, in contrast to the prediction of H1, men with a university degree or higher were more likely to support that “I am willing to participate in the men’s rights movement to fight discrimination against men,” (Model 1) and “Feminism derogates men” (Model 3) than men with only a high school degree. Additionally, as shown in Model 1, men's higher incomes were positively associated with their willingness to engage in the men's rights movement. The coefficient directions were similar for the relationship between income and the other male victimhood items, although these findings did not reach statistical significance.

While the results for the association between men’s objective economic conditions and male victimhood were not consistent, Models 2, 4 and 6 consistently showed that men who were anxious about a status decline were more likely to embrace male victimhood ideals. Men who felt more anxious about a potential decline in their social status expressed more willingness to join the men’s rights movement, were more likely to believe that feminists hate men, and were more likely to express that Korea is a country where it is better to live as a woman than a man.

Overall, the results in Table 2 broadly corroborate the findings from Study 1, providing limited support for the hypothesis that men's economic hardship drives male victimhood sentiments. The findings somewhat tend to support the notion that economically advantaged men are more likely to identify with male victimhood. For two of the items—expressing willingness to participate in the men's rights movement and believing "feminism derogates men"—men with a university degree or higher were more likely to express support compared with those with only a high school education. This finding can be interpreted in two ways: First, men with higher degrees may be more hostile toward feminism, perceiving it as a threat to their social and political dominance, particularly as they compete with middle-to-upper class women who have benefited from feminist progress. Alternatively, highly educated men may be more politically engaged and aware of issues regarding feminism, compared with less educated individuals who may remain indifferent to these debates. In this view, the positive association between education and men's willingness to engage with men's rights activism or negative evaluations of feminism reflects their political interest rather than outright hostility toward feminism.

Despite these unexpected findings on the association men’s education and male victimhood ideals, the results consistently support the hypothesis that men's status anxiety, rather than their objective economic conditions, is a key predictor of male victimhood sentiments.

Table 2. Ordered Logistic Regression Predicting Male Victimhood Sentiment Among Korean Men Aged 19 to 59 in 2018 (N=3,000)

	“I am willing to participate in the men’s rights movement to fight discrimination against men” [a]		“Feminism derogates men” [b]		“Korea is a country where it is better to live as a woman than as a man” [c]	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6

	OR (se)	OR (se)	OR (se)	OR (se)	OR (se)	OR (se)
Economic characteristics						
Educational level (ref. high school degree or less)						
College or university degree/currently university student	1.253† (.150)	1.257† (.150)	1.220† (.141)	1.229† (.142)	0.826 (.098)	0.840 (.099)
Graduate degree	1.612** (.243)	1.651** (.249)	1.286† (.188)	1.338* (.195)	.756† (.112)	.791 (.117)
Logged personal income	1.061** (.032)	1.064** (.032)	1.028 (.03)	1.034 (.03)	1.001 (.028)	1.003 (.028)
Unemployed	1.109 (.195)	1.108 (.195)	1.068 (.183)	1.07 (.184)	.777 (.129)	.775 (.129)
Non-regular work	0.951 (.104)	.919 (.101)	0.925 (.099)	0.861 (.092)	1.021 (.111)	0.962 (.105)
Anxious about social status decline		1.153*** (.052)		1.324*** (.057)		1.261*** (.055)
Sociodemographic controls						
Age	0.996 (.004)	0.993 (.005)	0.960*** (.004)	.955*** (.004)	.972*** (.004)	.969*** (.004)
Never-married	1.083 (.105)	1.072 (.104)	1.504*** (.142)	1.479*** (.14)	1.152 (.109)	1.137 (.108)
Place of residence (ref. Seoul)						
Kyungki	0.995 (.099)	0.992 (.099)	.91 (.088)	.918 (.089)	.947 (.092)	.95 (.092)
Youngnam	1.196* (.126)	1.197* (.126)	.895 (.091)	.903 (.092)	1.072 (.11)	1.077 (.11)
Honam	1.238 (.17)	1.263* (.174)	.904 (.121)	.942 (.126)	.958 (.128)	.986 (.132)
Chungcheong	0.942 (.124)	0.950 (.125)	.946 (.122)	.973 (.126)	1.059 (.137)	1.08 (.14)
Gangwon	1.196 (.251)	1.213 (.255)	.905 (.189)	.929 (.194)	1.058 (.223)	1.081 (.227)
Jeju	1.662* (.489)	1.683* (.5)	.706 (.221)	.758 (.237)	.67 (.196)	.697 (.206)
Mother with university degree	1.007 (.115)	1.004 (.115)	1.003 (.112)	.999 (.111)	.978 (.109)	.975 (.108)
Father with university degree	1.117 (.1)	1.122 (.101)	1.046 (.091)	1.056 (.092)	1.012 (.088)	1.018 (.088)

Source: "Survey on Men's Perceptions of Gender Equality and Quality of Life."

Note: [a]This item was measured using a four-point Likert scale for responses to the question, "To what extent are you willing to participate in the 'men's rights movement' that fights discrimination against men?" [b]This item was measured using a four-point Likert scale for responses to the question, "To what extent do you agree that 'feminism is about hating men'?" [c]This item was measured using a four-point Likert scale for responses to the question, "To what extent do you agree that 'All things considered, Korea is a country where it is better to live as a woman than as a man.'?"

Study 3

Study 3 tests all three hypotheses using more recent and large-scale data from 2020. This dataset includes measures that consist of men's evaluation of both their current socioeconomic conditions and their socioeconomic conditions at age 15, enabling us to measure changes in socioeconomic conditions. Additionally, the 2020 data incorporates measures of male victimhood sentiment, namely the belief that "feminism derogates men," an item that was also present in the 2018 data. This allows for a test of the robustness of the earlier findings and to explore potential changes in attitudes over time.

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study utilizes data from the "Gender-Sensitive Analysis of Young Adults' Life Course and Future Prospects" survey, which targeted young adults and adolescents aged 19 to 39 residing in the Republic of Korea. The sample was drawn using proportional allocation stratified by gender, age, and region (17 divisions) to ensure representation of specific subgroups within the population. While the original target sample was 8,817, the survey oversampled to 8,917 to balance the educational distribution, accounting for the tendency of online panels to be more educated than the general population. For the purposes of this study, the sample is narrowed to the 4,604 male respondents.

The average age of the sample was 29.4 years (SD=6.08), with 56.8% of respondents having graduated from college/university or higher, and 18.4% still pursuing (or on temporary leave from pursuing) a higher degree at the time of the interview. Regarding employment status, 60% were working, 11.7% were preparing for jobs, 15% were students, and 7.4% were unemployed. Most respondents reported a current socioeconomic position lower than the scale's midpoint (M=3.31, SD=1.08 on a 1–7 scale), and 28.4% reported downward mobility compared with their socioeconomic standing at age 15. Unsurprisingly given the relatively young sample, 76% of the male respondents had never been married. (The average age of first marriage for men in Korea was 34 as of 2020.)

The survey was conducted online between October 17 and November 4, 2020, using Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). Respondents were invited via email to visit a website where they could answer a structured questionnaire. Hankook Research, a leading survey firm in South Korea with a high-quality panel of nearly 450,621 participants as of 2019, conducted the survey on behalf of the Korea Women's Development Institute. KWDI, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, commissioned the survey specifically to analyze the life course of young men and women from a gender perspective. It assessed a wide range of attitudes related to gender, including attitudes toward feminism, traditional gender role expectations, experiences with feminist movements, and other relevant topics.

Measures

Male Victimhood Sentiment: Respondents were asked, "Do you think gender relations in Korean society are fair or unfair?" The response options included: 1. Society is very unfair for women, 2. Society is somewhat unfair

for women, 3. Society is fair for both genders, 4. Society is somewhat unfair for men, and 5. Society is very unfair for men. In addition, the survey asked whether respondent agree with “Feminism is about hating men” on a four-point Likert scale (1. Strongly disagree to 4. Strongly agree).

Socioeconomic Characteristics: The study includes variables for highest education achieved (1. High school, 2. 2- or 3-year college, 3. 4-year university, and 4. Postgraduate study), personal income (as a continuous logged variable), unemployment, and non-regular employment.

Perceived Downward Mobility: Respondents were asked to evaluate their current socioeconomic standing in Korean society on a seven-point scale (ranging from 1 for the low end to 7 at the top). They were also asked to indicate their socioeconomic standing at age 15 using the same scale. A dichotomous variable was created, indicating perceived downward mobility if respondents reported a lower current socioeconomic status than they had had at age 15. Responses that reported the same or a higher socioeconomic standing were coded as zero.

Sociodemographic Controls: The study controlled for respondents' age (a continuous variable), marital status (a dichotomous variable with never married as the reference), place of residence (as a 7-point categorical variable), mother's education (a dichotomous variable indicating whether their mother had a university degree), father's education (a dichotomous variable indicating whether their father had a university degree), and perceived parental socioeconomic status.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 presents the ordered logistic regression results predicting associations between men's economic conditions, perceived downward mobility, and male victimhood ideology among Korean men aged 19 to 39 in 2020, controlling for sociodemographic factors. Models 1–3 illustrate men's support for the statement "Society is unfair for men [more than for women].” Model 1 reveals that men with a university degree or higher were less likely to claim societal discrimination against men compared with those who had only a high school degree. Interestingly, while education negatively correlates with male victimhood ideals, personal income shows a positive association with this ideology. Consistent with previous studies, men's labor market conditions, such as being unemployed or working as a non-regular worker, were not associated with male victimhood sentiments. Model 2 supports Hypothesis 2, which predicts that men who perceive themselves as downwardly mobile are more likely to identify with male victimhood claims. Model 3 supports Hypothesis 3, showing that the association between men’s perceptions of downward mobility and their identification with male victimhood sentiments is stronger for men from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Models 4–6 in Table 3 report men’s support for the statement “feminism derogates men.” Again, the results from Table 3 provide limited evidence of an association between men's economic characteristics and support for the statement "Feminism derogates men." Unlike Models 1–3, men with university degrees are more likely than those with high school degrees to endorse this view. Income levels were not statistically associated with this aspect of male victimhood ideology. However, Models 5 and 6 both show that perceived downward mobility predicts greater support for male victimhood sentiments (H2). Additionally, the interaction between perceived

downward mobility and prior socioeconomic class was positive and statistically significant, lending support to H3. Other findings from Table 3 include the following. Older men were less likely to express male victimhood ideology; never-married men were more likely to express male victimhood ideology; and residents of Kyungki, Youngnam, and Chungcheong were more likely than residents of Seoul to endorse male victimhood ideology.

Table 3. Ordered Logistic Regression Predicting Male Victimhood Sentiment Among Korean Men Aged 19 to 39 in 2020 (N=4,604)

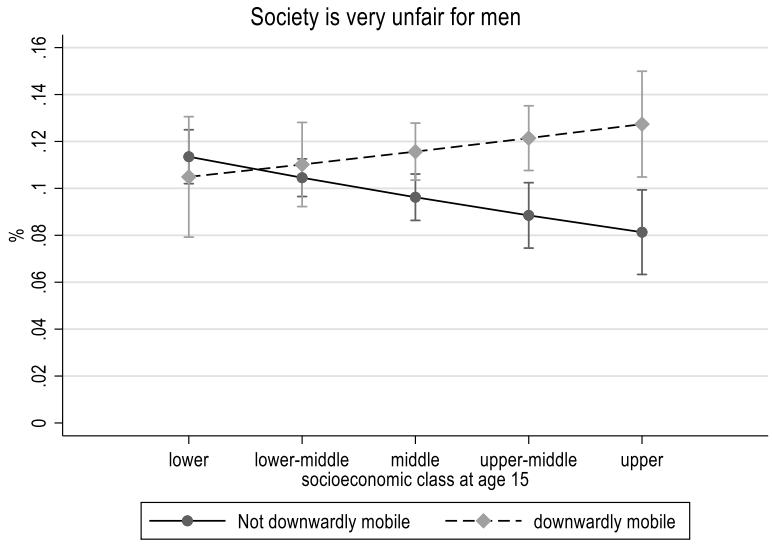
	"*Korean society is unfair for men*" [a]			*"Feminism derogates men"* [b]		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	OR (se)	OR (se)	OR (se)	OR (se)	OR (se)	OR (se)
Economic characteristics						
Education (ref. high school degree or less)						
2- or 3-yr college	.898 (.084)	.900 (.084)	.899 (.084)	0.980 (0.092)	0.984 (0.093)	0.985 (0.093)
4-yr university	.865* (.066)	.886 (.067)	.886 (.067)	1.127 (0.086)	1.157† (0.088)	1.159† (0.089)
Graduate-level	.694*** (.087)	.719*** (.091)	.722** (.091)	1.165 (0.147)	1.211 (0.153)	1.218 (0.154)
Logged personal income	1.037** (.018)	1.044** (.019)	1.042** (.019)	0.993 (0.018)	0.999 (0.018)	0.998 (0.018)
Unemployed	1.181 (.146)	1.165 (.144)	1.177 (.145)	1.068 (0.134)	1.045 (0.132)	1.059 (0.133)
Non-regular work	.979 (.08)	.959 (.078)	.958 (.078)	0.983 (0.080)	0.963 (0.079)	0.962 (0.079)
Perceived downward mobility		1.256*** (.085)	.717 (.185)		1.276*** (0.086)	0.804 (0.206)
Socioeconomic status at age 15	.965 (.024)	.928*** (.026)	.903*** (.027)	0.948* (0.023)	0.909*** (0.025)	0.889*** (0.027)
Interaction						
Perceived downward mobility* Socioeconomic status at age 15			1.149** (.071)			1.121* (0.069)
Sociodemographic controls						
Age	.974*** (.006)	.971*** (.006)	.971*** (.006)	0.977*** (0.006)	0.973*** (0.006)	0.974*** (.0.006)
Never married	1.261*** (.096)	1.239*** (.095)	1.24*** (.095)	1.143† (0.087)	1.121 (0.085)	1.121 (0.085)
Place of residence (ref. Seoul)						
Kyungki	1.248*** (.096)	1.247*** (.096)	1.249*** (.096)	1.140† (0.087)	1.137† (0.087)	1.140† (0.087)
Youngnam	1.379*** (.114)	1.38*** (.114)	1.379*** (.114)	1.182* (0.097)	1.178* (0.097)	1.180* (0.097)
Honam	1.109 (.122)	1.11 (.122)	1.103 (.121)	1.029 (0.113)	1.029 (0.113)	1.024 (0.112)
Chungcheong	1.304*** (.133)	1.312*** (.133)	1.312*** (.133)	1.311** (0.135)	1.318** (0.135)	1.319** (0.136)
Gangwon	.952	.958	.954	0.852	0.858	0.861

	(.163)	(.164)	(.164)	(0.143)	(0.144)	(0.145)
Jeju	.903	.889	.896	1.057	1.036	1.046
	(.229)	(.225)	(.227)	(0.286)	(0.279)	(0.282)
Mother with university degree	.994	1.003	1.004	1.052	1.063	1.065
	(.074)	(.075)	(.075)	(0.079)	(0.080)	(0.079)
Father with university degree	.997	1.002	.999	1.051	1.056	1.053
	(.07)	(.071)	(.071)	(0.074)	(0.074)	(0.074)

Source: Data is from 'Gender-Sensitive Analysis of Young Adults' collected in 2020 (N=4,604). *Note*: [a]This item was measured using a five-point Likert scale in response to the question, "Do you think gender relations in Korean society are fair or unfair?" [b]This item was measured using a four-point Likert scale in response to the question, "To what extent do you agree that 'feminism derogates men'?"

Figure 1 illustrates the findings from Table 3 (Model 3), illustrating the predicted probabilities of men reporting that "society is *very* unfair for men." Support for male victimhood is highest (13%) among men from upper-class backgrounds who perceive themselves as downwardly mobile. Conversely, support for this statement is lowest (8%) among upper-class men who did not perceive a decline in their socioeconomic status. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in support for this statement between men from lower than middle-class backgrounds who perceived a status decline and men from lower than middle-class backgrounds who did not perceive such a decline. While a 5 percentage point difference might seem small, it is substantial when one considers that men who supported the strongest statement ("society is very unfair for men") only constituted 10% of the overall sample. This finding underscores the importance of perceived socioeconomic mobility, particularly among those from more privileged backgrounds, in shaping attitudes towards male victimhood.

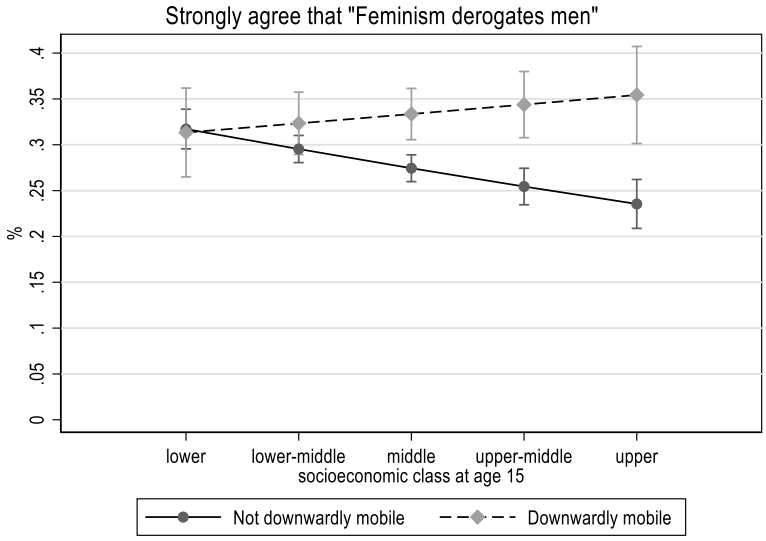
Figure 1. Predicted Probabilities of Agreeing that "Society is *Very* Unfair for Men" by Perceived Downward Mobility and Parental Social Class



Note: The first and last values on the y-axis (lowest and highest) have been omitted from this graph due to limited data points at these extremes and to avoid potential extrapolation issues. The presented range focuses on data points that include at least 50 cases, ensuring more reliable predictions.

The results from Model 6 in Table 3, using ordered logistic regression, are illustrated in Figure 2. This figure depicts the predicted probabilities of men *strongly* agreeing with the statement "feminism derogates men," revealing trends similar to those observed in Figure 1. Again, support for this anti-feminist sentiment is highest among men from upper-class backgrounds who perceive a decline in their socioeconomic status relative to their parents (35%). Conversely, support for the same statement is lowest among men from upper-class backgrounds who have either maintained or exceeded their parents' socioeconomic conditions (24%). This pattern is consistent with the findings from Figure 1; both show that men's support for male victimhood statements is shaped by the combination of a privileged background and a perceived decline in status.

Figure 2. Predicted Probabilities of *Strongly* Agreeing that "Feminism Derogates Men" by Perceived Downward Mobility and Parental Social Class



Note: The first and last values on the y-axis have been omitted from this graph due to limited data points at these extremes and to avoid potential extrapolation issues. The presented range focuses on data points that include at least 50 cases, ensuring more reliable predictions.

Overall, there is little evidence of an association between men's economic conditions and their identification with male victimhood ideology. Education level showed varying effects on embrace of male victimhood ideology: university-educated men were less likely to perceive societal discrimination against men, but more likely to view feminism as man-hating. These findings, along with the findings from Study 2, suggest that men's socioeconomic conditions have varying influences on different aspects of male victimhood ideology (e.g., perceptions of feminism versus beliefs about structural discrimination). The results in Table 3 support Hypotheses 2 and 3, highlighting the importance of perceived socioeconomic decline and prior socioeconomic status in shaping male victimhood sentiments.

Study 4

In Study 4, I replicate the analyses from Study 3 using a more recent survey of men collected in 2023. This study aims to test Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 to examine whether the findings from the previous three studies still hold in the most recent data. The 2023 data include male victimhood items, including "men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies," an item that was also included in Study 1, allowing for a direct comparison with the 2015 findings. This comparison provides insight into the potential stability or variability of male victimhood sentiments over time. Additionally, Study 4 tests whether Hypotheses 2 and 3, which were supported in Study 3 (using 2020 data), are also relevant when applied to different measures of male victimhood. By focusing on these specific items related to perceived discrimination due to feminist policies, we can assess the generalizability of our findings across various operationalizations of male victimhood and determine if the relationships between socioeconomic factors and these sentiments remain consistent across different measures and time periods.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 4 utilizes data from the "Survey on Social Perception of Young Adults in Korea" conducted in 2023. The target population for this research was adults residing in South Korea, with a particular focus on young adults aged 19 to 44. The total sample size was 2,028 respondents. To ensure a representative distribution, the sampling method employed proportional allocation stratified by gender, age, and region.

For the purposes of the current analysis, the sample was limited to male respondents only (N=1,041). The sample comprised young men aged 19 to 44, with an average age of 30.7 years (SD = 7.07). Notably, this age distribution is similar to that of Study 3, facilitating meaningful comparisons between the two studies. The educational attainment of the sample is slightly higher than the national representative distribution, with nearly 80% of participants having graduated from a 2- or 3-year college or holding a university degree. In terms of employment status, 10.85% of the sample were working as non-regular workers, while 8.14% were unemployed. A significant portion of the population (33.4%) reported having experienced downward mobility, with no notable gender differences in this perception. The sample was well-distributed across different regions of South Korea, closely mirroring the national population distribution. The regional breakdown was as follows: Seoul (21.5%), Kyungki (33.9%), Youngnam (22%), Chungcheong (10%), Junnam (9%), Gangwon (2.5%), and Jeju (0.94%).

Study 4 was conducted using Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) by Hankook Research, the same research company that conducted the survey used in Study 3. This continuity in methodology and panel selection facilitates comparison between the two datasets. The current study was commissioned by the Presidential Committee on Social Cohesion and carried out in February 2023.The primary objective of this

survey was to understand the social perceptions of young adults and to explore the socioeconomic foundations of gender conflict in South Korea. To this end, the study collected a wide range of information on participants' attitudes toward feminism and gender issues, as well as various socioeconomic factors. This comprehensive dataset provides a solid foundation for examining the complex interplay between socioeconomic factors, perceptions of mobility, and attitudes toward gender issues among young men in South Korea, while also allowing for meaningful comparisons with the findings from Study 3.

Measures

Male Victimhood Sentiment: Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, "Men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies" on a four-point Likert scale (1. Completely disagree, 2. Somewhat disagree, 3. Somewhat agree, and 4. Totally agree).

Socioeconomic Characteristics: To ensure the consistency of the two analyses, the study includes variables for highest education achieved (1. High school, 2. 2- or 3-year college, 3. 4-year university, and 4. Postgraduate study), personal income (11-point categorical variable), unemployment, and non-regular employment.

Perceived Downward Mobility: Respondents were asked to evaluate their current socioeconomic standing in Korean society on a nine-point scale (from 1 at the low end to 9 at the top). They were also asked to indicate their parents' socioeconomic standing when their parents were the respondent's current age, using the same nine-point scale. A dichotomous variable was created, indicating perceived downward mobility if the respondents reported a lower current socioeconomic status than their parents had had at the same age. Responses that reported the same or a higher socioeconomic standing were coded as zero.

Sociodemographic Controls: The study controlled for respondents' age (a continuous variable), marital status (a dichotomous variable with never married as the reference), place of residence (as a seven-point categorical variable), mother's education (a dichotomous variable indicating whether their mother had a university degree), father's education (a dichotomous variable indicating whether their father had a university degree), and perceived parental socioeconomic status.

Results and Discussion

Consistent with the previous studies, the ordered logistic regression was conducted to test Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Consistent with Study 3, the variables were entered in three steps. In Model 1, objective economic conditions were the key independent variables used to test Hypothesis 1. In Model 2, men's perceived downward mobility was the main independent variable used to test Hypothesis 2. In Model 3, the interactions between men's perceived downward mobility and their previous socioeconomic conditions were the key independent variable.

Models 1–3 show that men with graduate degrees are more likely to support the idea that "*Men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies*." Similarly, the results from Table 4 show that men's economic conditions, such as personal income, unemployment, and non-regular work, are not associated with

endorsement of the belief that "men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies." Overall, the results from Table 1 provide little evidence to support the "economic hardship" hypothesis, my Hypothesis 1. Table 4 includes men's perceptions of downward mobility—whether they perceive their current socioeconomic status to be lower than their parents' had been at the same age—to predict men's support for victimhood ideology. Men who perceived that their socioeconomic status had declined were significantly more likely to express agreement with male victimhood ideology (OR=1.44, p<0.01). When men's current economic conditions were controlled, men who perceived themselves as downwardly mobile were 44 percent more likely to endorse the belief that "men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies." Overall, the results in Table 4 support the "status decline" hypothesis, my Hypothesis 2, which predicts that male victimhood ideology is prevalent among men who view themselves as downwardly mobile, independent of their current socioeconomic conditions.

Model 3 in Table 4 presents the ordered logistic regression results examining the interaction between perceived downward mobility and parental socioeconomic status in predicting male victimhood ideology. The interaction term is positive and significant (OR=1.20, p<0.01), suggesting that the association between perceived downward mobility and male victimhood ideology varies by parental class. To be specific, the positive association between perceived downward mobility and male victimhood ideology is stronger among men who reported that their parents had had a higher socioeconomic status than the men had at the time of the survey. Again, findings from Table 4 support the "status decline" hypothesis, my Hypothesis 3, which predicts that male victimhood sentiments are particularly salient among middle to upper-middle class men who have experienced a status decline.

Table 4. Ordered Logistic Regression Predicting Male Victimhood Sentiment Among Korean Men Aged 19 to 44 in 2023 (N=1,041)

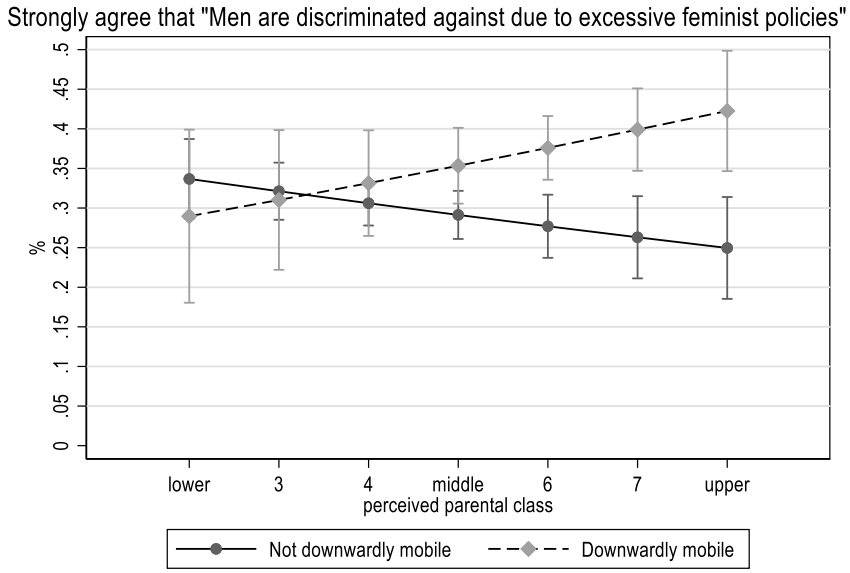
	"*Men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies*"[a]		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	OR (se)	OR (se)	OR (se)
Economic characteristics			
Education (ref. high school degree or less)			
2/3 year college	1.689** (.374)	1.684** (.373)	1.663** (.369)
4 yr university	1.49** (.285)	1.516** (.291)	1.499** (.287)
Graduate-level	1.361 (.394)	1.408 (.409)	1.393 (.405)
Personal income	.991 (.027)	1.001 (.028)	1.00 (.028)
Unemployed	1.05 (.235)	.961 (.218)	1.002 (.229)
Non-regular work	1.073 (.228)	1.029 (.219)	1.012 (.216)
Perceived downward mobility		1.441**	.527

		(.215)	(.277)
Parental class	1.032	.975	.925
	(.039)	(.043)	(.048)
Interaction			
Perceived downward mobility* Parental class			1.202**
			(.111)
Sociodemographic controls			
Age	.958***	.957***	.957***
	(.011)	(.011)	(.011)
Never married	.931	.909	.916
	(.162)	(.158)	(.16)
Place of residence (re.f Seoul)			
Kyungki	1.46**	1.415**	1.413**
	(.245)	(.239)	(.239)
Youngnam	1.322	1.288	1.282
	(.241)	(.235)	(.234)
Honam	1.621**	1.56*	1.542*
	(.368)	(.355)	(.352)
Chungcheong	.958	.918	.915
	(.225)	(.217)	(.216)
Gangwon	1.477	1.342	1.386
	(.571)	(.518)	(.536)
Jeju	1.113	1.159	1.11
	(.649)	(.677)	(.649)
Mother with university degree	.828	.835	.839
	(.118)	(.119)	(.119)
Father with university degree	.996	.997	.997
	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)

Source: Data is from Survey on Social Perception of Young Adults in Korea collected in 2023 (N=872). Note: "
[a]This item was measured using a four-point Likert scale for responses to the question, "To what extent do you agree that 'men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies?"

Figure 3 illustrates the results from Table 4 (Model 3), the ordered logistic regression, and represents the predicted probabilities of *strongly* agreeing with the statement "men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies." The patterns from Figure 3 are similar to those in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 3 shows that men from a higher class background are particularly likely to endorse male victimhood ideology if they perceive a decline in their social status. Nearly 45% of men in the highest class who experienced downward mobility endorsed male victimhood ideology, whereas less than 25% of men with the highest class background who did not experience downward mobility expressed male victimhood ideology. While there is also a divergence in male victimhood ideology among men from lower social classes according to their sense of downward mobility, these are not statistically significant because so few men from lower social classes reported downward mobility.

Figure 3. Predicted Probabilities of *Strongly* Agreeing with the Statement, "Men Are Discriminated Against Due to Excessive Feminist Policies" by Perceived Downward Mobility and Previous Social Class



Note: The first and last values on the y-axis have been omitted from this graph due to limited data points at these extremes and to avoid potential extrapolation issues. The presented range focuses on data points that include at least 30 cases, ensuring more reliable predictions.

Additional Analyses

1) Descriptive Trends in Male Victimhood

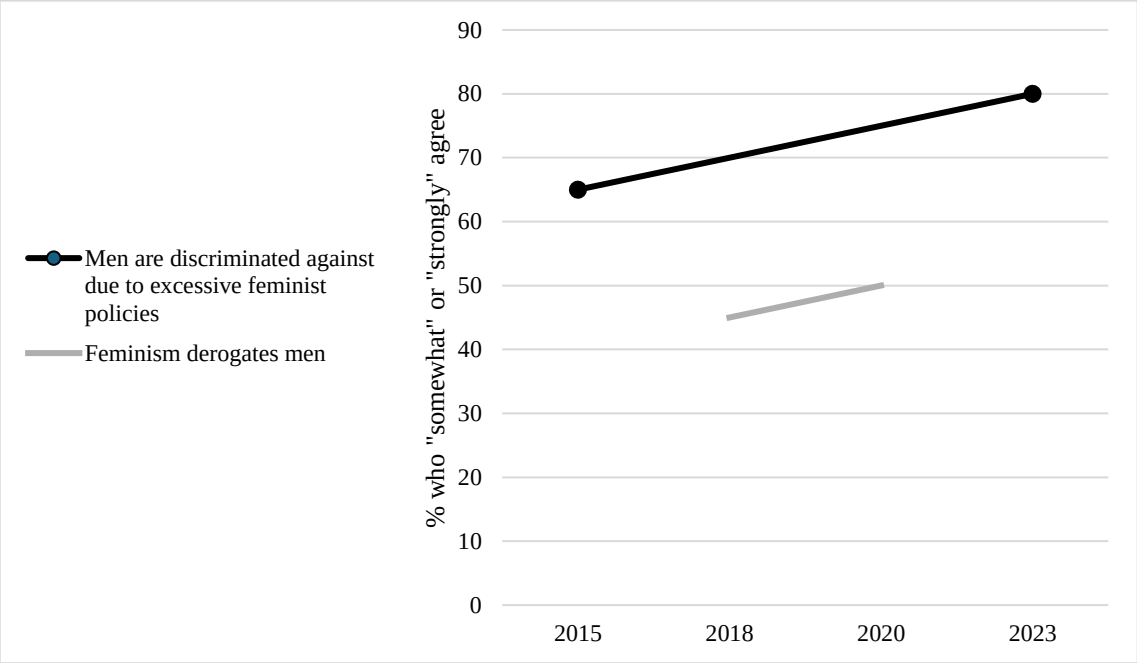
Figure 4 illustrates trends in men's support for male victimhood sentiments between 2015 to 2023 across three key statements: "Men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies," "Feminism derogates men," and "Korean society discriminates against men [more than women]." To ensure comparability, the descriptive results focus on men aged 19 to 39 at the time of each survey.

The data reveal that male victimhood sentiments are widely shared among Korean men, with a notable increase in these perceptions from 2015 to 2023. Agreement with the statement, "Men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies" rose from about 65% in 2015 to 80% in 2023. While starting from a lower base, the belief that "Feminism is about hating men" also gained traction, climbing from 45% to over 50% in just two years (from 2018 to 2020). These trends collectively suggest a growing backlash against feminism in South Korean society over this period.

It is important to note that the response scales varied across the survey years, a change that may have influenced the observed trends. For instance, the 2015 survey used a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree, including a neutral option), while the 2023 survey employed a four-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree, without a neutral option). Consequently, the apparent increase in support for statements like "men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies" in 2023 compared with 2015 might be partially attributed to these scale differences. This methodological consideration should be kept in mind when

interpreting the trends.

Figure 4. Trends in Male Victimhood Ideals (2015–2023)



2) Varying specifications of downward mobility

For the purpose of a robustness check, I analyzed models using varying specifications for perceived downward mobility. First, I created a continuous variable indicating the degree of economic mobility (ranging from -6 for a high degree of upward mobility to 6 for a high degree of downward mobility). Second, I created a trichotomous variable that captured static mobility, downward mobility, and upward mobility, and gauged interactions with the previous socioeconomic conditions. The results, which are presented in Tables 5 and 6 in the Appendix, remain substantively similar to those of the initial specification.

3) Socioeconomic conditions, perceived downward mobility, and support for male victimhood among female respondents

This study used two datasets from the main analyses (the "Gender-Sensitive Analysis of Young Adults' Life Course and Future Prospects" survey in 2018 and the "Survey on Social Perception of Young Adults in Korea" in 2023) to examine the association between socioeconomic conditions, perceived downward mobility, and male victimhood ideology among women. The results for women are reported in Table 7 and 8 in the Appendix. The main findings from men were not observed among women.

General Discussion

This study uses four different samples of South Korean men to examine the validity of two prevailing narratives regarding male victimhood sentiments. One common narrative is that disadvantaged men, frustrated by their economic precarity, are more likely to adopt an ideology based on their own victimhood. On the other hand, the status decline narrative, which is not necessarily mutually exclusive with the economic hardship hypothesis, posits that the perception of a decline in status, particularly among men from previously advantaged backgrounds, leads to the endorsement of male victimhood ideology as a strategy to re-establish privilege.

The findings across the four studies challenge the 'economic hardship' explanation of male victimhood ideology. Contrary to popular media portrayals of male victimhood claimants as unemployed, economic losers venting their economic frustrations online, the results of these analyses suggest that male victimhood sentiments transcend employment status. Notably, men's employment status, including unemployment or non-regular work, does not necessarily predict male victimhood claims. In fact, the analyses reveal that individuals with higher personal income tend to support male victimhood sentiments more than those with less income, contradicting the economic hardship narrative. Education levels provide intriguing, albeit mixed, evidence: more educated men were more likely to support certain male victimhood sentiments (e.g., willingness to participate in men's rights movements, agreeing that feminism derogates men, or that men are discriminated against due to excessive feminist policies). Paradoxically, they were less likely than their less educated counterparts to believe that society discriminates against men more than women. This apparent contradiction might be explained by highly educated men being more politically aware of feminist issues than their counterparts who only hold high school degrees, thus endorsing stronger opinions, while simultaneously being more susceptible to social desirability bias. These highly educated men may recognize that explicitly denying structural discrimination against women is politically incorrect, and be less likely to express the idea that "society discriminates against men." These nuanced findings on the association between educational level and male victimhood ideals suggest that male victimhood ideology may be a multidimensional construct worth investigating in future studies. Overall, the findings challenge dominant narratives about the relationship between economic hardship and male victimhood ideology.

In contrast to the limited support for the 'economic hardship' narrative, this study provides robust and consistent evidence for the 'perceived socioeconomic decline' hypothesis across multiple studies. Results from Study 2 demonstrate that men who are anxious about social status decline were more likely to support male victimhood ideology. Studies 3 and 4 corroborate these findings, showing that men who perceived a decline in their socioeconomic status compared with the past were significantly more likely to express male victimhood ideology. Notably, Studies 3 and 4 showed that this positive association between perceived socioeconomic decline and male victimhood ideology was particularly strong among men from middle to upper social class backgrounds. Despite the data being collected at different time points with samples of men from varying age groups, the studies yielded surprisingly consistent results.

These findings corroborate Kimmel's arguments on antifeminism, which posit that male grievances regarding gender equality are particularly concentrated among men experiencing downward mobility—a phenomenon

Kimmel terms "aggrieved entitlement." Interestingly, it was not necessarily working-class men who exhibited these sentiments, but rather those from middle-class or higher backgrounds who sensed a status loss. These men, raised with expectations of stable employment and traditional heterosexual relations, may experience greater frustration and resentment when their actual or perceived status fails to meet these expectations. In contrast, working-class men born without such resources may not feel the same sense of loss. While Kimmel's original study focused on fringe political groups with diverse antifeminist positions in the United States, this study extends the validity of his hypothesis to explain male victimhood sentiments among the general male population of South Korea.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study illuminates the relative value of two perspectives regarding the roots of male victimhood ideology, it has several limitations that warrant consideration. Although our robust findings on perceived downward mobility align with the literature from the United States, their applicability beyond South Korea may be limited due to the country's unique economic and socio-political landscape. First, the limited findings on the economic hardship perspective in Korea do not necessarily indicate that male economic hardship is an unimportant explanation for male victimhood sentiments in other countries. In the Korean context, economic uncertainty and labor market instability is widespread, even for those with university degrees and regular positions, potentially explaining insignificant findings as to the association between labor market status and male victimhood. In labor market contexts where employment prospects are relatively secure for those with university degrees and regular positions, significant correlations between employment status and male victimhood might emerge.

Second, it is important to note that male anxiety about status loss may not be the primary driver of antifeminism in all contexts, particularly where other social issues compete for attention. In South Korea, for instance, the relatively homogeneous population means that issues of multiculturalism and immigration are less prominent, allowing gender issues to remain at the forefront of political discourse. This situation contrasts with many Western countries, where debates around immigration and cultural diversity often overshadow gender-related concerns. In addition, the recent surge in public attention to feminism in South Korea has brought gender issues into sharp focus. This heightened awareness in the country is notably different from in Western countries, where feminism has long been acknowledged as a significant social movement. The timing and intensity of feminist discourse in a society can significantly influence how men's status anxieties manifest in the form of anti-feminism. These limitations underscore the necessity for future research to test these hypotheses beyond the Korean context, examining how diverse economic and cultural landscapes shape the relationship between men's economic status and their propensity to embrace male victimhood ideology.

Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported measures of parental socioeconomic background introduces potential limitations due to recall bias, as men dissatisfied with their current status may idealize their past, overestimating their parents' social status. While subjective measures of both parental and personal socioeconomic status are inherently abstract and can be volatile, they are increasingly recognized as important

and tangible predictors of various political outcomes, and they often carry explanatory power beyond that of objective economic indicators. To fully capture the sources of male victimhood sentiments, future research should delve deeper into the nuances of subjective socioeconomic conditions. This includes exploring the formation and evolution of these perceptions over time and the mechanisms through which subjective evaluations of one's socioeconomic changes shape political attitudes.

Furthermore, the nature of men's endorsement of victimhood ideology remains ambiguous, raising questions about whether it reflects an actual perception of disadvantage or serves as a political strategy to target feminism. This study's findings suggest that male victimhood ideology may be more strategic than reflective of actual experiences, particularly given that men in advantaged positions tend to endorse these ideals when they perceive a decline in their privilege. However, the extent to which these ideals are strategically adopted remains unclear. This ambiguity underscores the need for further research to disentangle genuine beliefs from strategic positioning. Future studies should examine how political rhetoric, social context, and messaging contribute to development of and changes in male victimhood sentiments within individuals over time. Crucially, this research agenda necessitates longitudinal studies tracking individuals' attitudes and experiences, an approach that was not possible in the current study due to its cross-sectional nature.

Lastly, figures from the main analyses have shown that upper-class men who did not experience downward mobility are less likely to support male victimhood ideologies. This observation requires additional explanation. These men, having not experienced significant challenges to their socioeconomic status, may not feel the need to embrace narratives of male victimhood. Their stable or improving social position likely provides them with a sense of security in their masculinity. Additionally, being highly educated and occupying professional positions, they may be more attuned to current social and political discourses, making them more cautious about expressing opinions that could be perceived as regressive in terms of gender equality. Future studies may examine the specific sources that discourage men from adopting male victimhood narratives and theorize this phenomenon further, as it is beyond the scope of this study.

Practice Implications

Despite its limitations, this study sheds light on the structural sources contributing to male victimhood sentiment, providing opportunities for more constructive discussions regarding gender relations. In recent years, some politicians have used male victimhood sentiment to deepen social conflicts between men and women, aiming to mobilize support for radical parties. However, narratives that position men as victims and feminism or women as perpetrators may obscure the structural and systemic factors contributing to male frustration, such as globalization or the erosion of social mobility. This study emphasizes the need for collective action to challenge the structures that perpetuate inequality, rather than scapegoating feminism or women.

In addition to addressing structural problems, our findings underscore the need for cultural changes to combat male victimhood sentiment. The findings of this study suggest that victimhood sentiment among men appears to be shaped by a combination of structural and cultural factors. Economic shifts, such as globalization and the

decline of unions, have led to a decrease in the stable, well-paying jobs traditionally held by men. These labor market transitions make it increasingly difficult for men, even those with advanced degrees, to secure employment that allows them to live up to their middle-class expectations or fulfill their perceived role as providers. Feelings of relative deprivation, independent of objective material conditions, underlie their support for victimhood sentiments and antifeminism. However, this finding was primarily observed among middle to upper class men, who have been raised to feel entitled to certain privileges. When this sense of entitlement is challenged by social and economic changes that disrupt traditional gender roles and hierarchies, these men may feel resentment, leading to a backlash against women's rights and other progressive movements. Identification with male victimhood, therefore, extends beyond mere economic issues and is deeply rooted in a sense of male entitlement, suggesting that addressing it may be a challenging task, as entitlement is a psychological mindset deeply rooted in one's value system, rather than a tangible misfortune.

Conclusion

Changing gender dynamics and heightened concern about discrimination against men have inspired debate about the sources of men’s growing support for antifeminism. This study specifically focuses on male victimhood sentiments, a dominant discourse in recent antifeminist movements among the general male population in South Korea. This finding underscores that male victimhood is driven more by perceived loss of status than by actual marginalization. By recognizing this distinction, we can better address the root causes of antifeminist attitudes and work toward more equitable gender relations. The study's insights offer a foundation for developing targeted interventions that address both the structural inequalities and the cultural narratives perpetuating these sentiments, potentially paving the way for more constructive dialogues on gender dynamics in our changing society.

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