



# Cybercrime against women in India: causes, patterns, and emerging forms in the digital age

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## Abstract

The swift growth of digital technologies, social media sites, and the availability of the internet has revolutionized the social interaction and communication in the world as well as the economic operations. Although it has resulted in unprecedented opportunities to empower and be connected, it has also resulted in new expressions of criminal behavior. Cybercrime against women has become one of the most worrying tendencies. In India, gender inequality, digital growth, and lack of awareness on cybersecurity has exposed a weak background where women are commonly victims of online harassment, cyberstalking, identity theft, image-based abuse, and other digital victimization. Cybercrime against women is described as crime perpetrated by digital technologies in the attempt to exploit women either psychologically, socially, economically or reputationally. These offenses encompass cyberstalking, cyberbullying, revenge porn, morphing of pictures, online sexual harassment, impersonation, as well as monetary exploitation. The ever-increasing availability of smartphones and social media platforms has played a major role in the increase of such crimes. Recent national statistics indicate that in India, cases of cybercrimes have been on the rise with over 86,000 reported cases of cybercrime in the year 2023 alone, which demonstrates a rising digital threat environment (Imam, 2023). Also, the general prevalence of crime against women is terrifying, as in 2022, more than 445,000 cases were registered, indicating an unceasing influx of gender-based violence in the real world and online. Other forms of harassment, including trolling, doxing, sextortion, and online defamation, have become possible in the digital environment. Gender-based internet abuse is especially susceptible to women in the public life like journalists, activists and politicians. Research shows that cyber violence normally reflects preexisting gender disparities and patriarchal tendencies in the real world that condone misogyny and harassment. The selected topic of this research paper is cybercrime against women in India, discussing three essential points: the factors behind such offenses, the trends and changes in online victimization pattern, and developing types of cybercrime that new technologies and social media services can support. The research approach is doctrinal and analytical research method where secondary data, including academic literature, government reports, and legal acts, and crime statistics are used. It also examines the legal framework of cybercrime in India and provides provisions in the Information Technology Act, 2000, as well as in the Indian Penal Code by corresponding sections. The study accentuates that cybercrime against women does not only represent a technological issue but also socio-legal issue which is based on structural inequalities, digital illiteracy, imperfect enforcement systems and attitudes of the society towards women. The legal response gets complicated by other emerging types of cybercrimes including deepfake pornography, sextortion networks, and mass identity fraud. At the end of the paper, it is concluded that the solution to cybercrime against women should be multi-dimensional as it should be strengthened by law enforcement and improved digital literacy, enhanced reporting systems and gender-aware policing, and the cooperation between the state institutions, technological corporations, and non-governmental organizations. Ensuring that digital spaces are secure so that women are practicing gender equality and that their fundamental rights are safeguarded in the digital world is an important move that is achieved by intensifying cybersecurity awareness to improve safe digital environments.

**Keywords:** Cybercrime, Women, Cyberstalking, Online harassment, Digital violence, Gender-based cybercrime, India, Cyber law, Information technology act, Digital safety

## Introduction

The development of the digital world has redefined the contemporary societies, changing the nature of communication, trade, government and socialization. The internet, smartphones, and the social networking sites have made information and social and economic empowerment available in ways never experienced before. Nevertheless, this technological development has also provided new opportunities to the criminal world. These emerging challenges include the increase in cybercrime which is now one of the major issues of concern among governments, law enforcement bodies, and the society. Cybercrime is a broad term that is used

to refer to criminal activities that are performed using computers, digital devices, or internet. These offences consist of hacking, identity theft, Internet fraud, cyberstalking, Internet harassment, and online exploitation. Although cybercrime is experienced by both the individual and the institution in different fields, women have proved to be one of the most susceptible groups in the virtual world. Online harassment of women has now become a significant international issue that compromises the security of women, their respect and their involvement in the virtual world.

In India, the digital infrastructure has grown at a tremendous rate, which has greatly enhanced the internet penetration in the

last ten years. The social media, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter, are now used by millions of people when communicating, learning, and networking. Although this digital transformation has led to new opportunities among the women, it has also subjected them to some cases of online violence and abuse. Cyber harassment, cyberstalking, revenge porn and online defamation have become very prevalent ways of victimizing women.

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has continuously shown an increase of cyber crimes and crimes against women in India. As of 2022, over 445,000 instances of crimes against women have been registered, which suggests that the trend of gender-based violence in the Indian society does not seem to wane [1]. Additionally, cybercrime cases in India have witnessed a sharp increase, with over 86,000 cybercrime incidents recorded in 2023. These numbers demonstrate the increasing digital threat environment and the necessity of a more powerful regulatory framework to safeguard the most vulnerable populations, especially women.

Women are not the victims of cybercrime in solitary cases of harassment but it is a larger phenomenon referred to as technology-facilitated gender-based violence. This type of violence involves various activities which include online stalking, sexual harassment, image-based abuse, impersonation, blackmail and threats. Studies indicate that these types of crimes usually have their roots in the social disparities that are available, as well as the attitudes of patriarchy that continue to discriminate against women [2].

The effects of cybercrime on women can be considered to be one of the most disturbing aspects of this issue. Cybercrime, unlike the ancient ones, can be carried out anonymously and beyond geographical boundaries, it is hard to establish the culprits and hold them legally accountable. In most cases, victims are affected psyche-wise, have destroyed reputations, and are socially isolated. Most women also avoid online platforms as they fear being harassed and, thus, restrict their use of online platforms. Online abuse has been an issue that has greatly spread due to the creation of social media. Media through which information can be shared and exchanged in real time have as well contributed to the fast spread of any harmful or defamatory content. Cybercriminals often use these sites to make false profiles, spread morphed photographs or send threatening messages. These activities may have a serious negative impact on the reputation and mental condition of the victim.

Underreporting is also another major issue in dealing with cybercrime against women. Lack of awareness of available legal redress or fear of retaliation is one of the reasons why many victims hesitate to report incidences of cybercrime. This is especially acute in the societies, in which the gender discrimination and attitudes toward victims have not vanished yet. Lawwise, there are various laws and organizational frameworks in India that have been instituted to fight cybercrime. The supreme legislation that deals with cyber offences in the country is the Information Technology Act, 2000. The Act has several provisions that make the activities of identity theft, hacking, and publication of obscene material

in electronic form criminal. There are also corresponding sections of Indian Penal Code dealing with such offences as criminal intimidation, defamation and harassment.

Even though there are legal provisions, there are still challenges of enforcement. Cybercrime involves special technical skills and liaison with several agencies in investigation. The law enforcers frequently encounter complications in tracking the culprits because of the anonymity, utilization of encrypted sites, and the complexity of jurisdictions. Cybercrime against women is also becoming an increasingly popular topic of scholarly research and societal discourse on the issue. Researchers have focused on the connection between digital technologies and gender-based violence, and there is a necessity to implement gender-sensitive cybersecurity policies. Research indicates that the solution to cybercrime is to not only reform the laws but also involve more social and education interventions.

Moreover, new technologies including artificial intelligence, the use of deepfakes, and encrypted communication tools have resulted in a new layer of cybercrime. In particular, deepfake pornography has proven to be a significant violation of the privacy and dignity of women allowing the offender to produce manipulated images or videos without permission. Considering such complexities, it is important to know the causes, patterns, and new manifestations of cybercrime against women in India. An in-depth study of these elements can assist policymakers, practitioners in law, and researchers to come up with strategies that would help in curbing cybercrime and safeguarding the right of women in the digital era.

This research paper aims at discussing cybercrime against women in India in terms of socio-legal aspects that culminate cybercrime, the frequent patterns of victimization, and analyzing the emerging trends in technology enabled gender-based violence. The paper also analyzes the efficacy of the current legal frameworks, and provides the policy advocacy towards enhancing digital security of women.

### Literature review

The recent academic literature has started paying more and more attention to cybercrime against women becoming a significant problem in the context of the overall discussion of gender-based violence and online control.

Saroj and Nayak (2024) discussed the issue of cyber violence victimization of women in the digital age and emphasized the increase in the prevalence of online harassment, cyberstalking, and digital blackmail. Their research highlighted the fact that technological anonymity in many cases emboldens the offenders and makes it difficult to respond to the offenders by law enforcement. The authors believe that cyber violence is directly associated with gender discrimination in society and needs greater institutional reactions [3].

In his study about online harassment that India women face on online platforms, Rajan (2024) discovered that there are new forms of cyber abuse, such as image-based abuse, doxing, as well as gender-based trolling. A psychological effect of this type of harassment, such as anxiety and depression as well as withdrawal to online activities was also noted in the study [4].

In a study of gender-based abuse on the Indian social media platforms, Dehingia (2023) revealed that women have often experienced misogynistic trolling, the threat of sexual violence, and organized harassment campaigns. The paper has observed that this abuse usually prevents women to engage in online civic discussion, thus restricting their freedom of expression and Internet communication [5].

Kaur, (2021) developed a systematic review of the existing literature on cyberstalking and found out that cyberstalking is one of the most common types of cybercrime against women. As highlighted in the review, cyberstalking can be recurrent and unwanted messages, harassment by monitoring, plus threats using online channels [6].

In another research on cybercrime against women, it was established that the most recurrent types of cyber crimes against women are cyber harassment, invasion of privacy, and defamation through the internet. These offenses are constantly executed with the use of social media, messaging apps, and online forums [7].

The empirical studies of the subject of online violence by young women found that many of them had suffered some type of cyber harassment, such as cyberstalking, trolling, and the sharing of explicit photographs, among other things, without their permission [8].

It is also noted by scholars that cybercrime against women is an indication of certain structural inequalities within the society. Gender stereotypes, misogynistic attitudes, and patriarch norms are some of the reasons why online abuse is normalized. The only solutions to cyber violence are therefore social change and technological regulation. In general, the literature shows that cybercrime against women is a developing phenomenon that is predetermined by the technology, social inequalities, and the lack of prosecution. Nevertheless, additional studies are required to understand new trends in cybercrime and discuss the efficiency of the current jurisprudence.

### Objectives

- To examine the concept and nature of cybercrime against women in India.
- To analyze the major causes contributing to cybercrime against women.
- To identify patterns and trends in digital victimization of women.

- To explore emerging forms of cybercrime in the digital age.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of legal frameworks and policy responses in addressing cybercrime against women.

### Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is a doctrinal and analytical method research with secondary sources of information being used mainly. The research is based on scholarly articles in the journals, books, governmental reports and legal documents on cybercrime and female rights. To examine the trends in cybercrime against women in India, statistical data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and other sources are analyzed. Also, the provisions of the Information Technology Act, 2000 and the Indian Penal Code that are pertinent to the subject are also analyzed to gain an insight into the legal framework in addressing cyber offences. The paper also looks at the literature of scholars to determine key themes and research studies in regard to cyber violence and digital harassment. The assessment of patterns and the emergent forms of cybercrime that affect women are analyzed and interpreted comparatively and descriptively.

### Discussion

With the growth in digital technologies and the use of the internet in India, cybercrime against women has grown rapidly. The increasing reliance on social media sites, internet communication devices and digital transactions has given rise to new avenues of exploiting technological weaknesses by the criminals. The females are especially susceptible to these types of crimes as the cyber harassment is merely the reflection of the social imbalances and gender discrimination formed in the real life.

The digital platforms have emerged as the arenas of manifestation of misogyny, harassment, as well as exploitation in new technological forms. Cyberstalking, revenge porning, image morphing, identity theft, and sextortion are some of the crimes that have become increasingly prevalent. These crimes lead to mental suffering, negative publicity and even loss of money to the victims. Social stigma also faces victims in most instances, a factor that does not motivate them to report such cases.

**Table 1:** Major forms of cybercrime against women

Type of cybercrime	Description
Cyberstalking	Persistent monitoring or harassment through emails, messages, or social media
Cyberbullying	Online threats, humiliation, or abusive communication
Revenge Pornography	Sharing intimate images without consent
Identity Theft	Misuse of personal information or fake profiles
Image Morphing	Manipulation of photographs to create obscene content
Sextortion	Blackmail using sexually explicit images

Other studies have shown that cyber harassment, stalking, and image-based abuse are some of the most prevalent cybercrimes against women. These offences have been enabled by the easy

accessibility to smart phones and social media whereby offenders can access their victims anonymously and repeatedly.

## 1. Patterns of cybercrime victimization

Women victims of cybercrime often have patterns. Most typical trends include offenders who are personally acquainted with the victim, including former partners or other people they know, or people they share their workplace. When it comes to revenge pornography and sextortion, the criminals frequently use the personal information or intimate photograph taken in the course of relationships.

The other trend is that of strangers that victimize women on social media sites or on online forums. These perpetrators can do harassment, trolling, and identity impersonation. The target of concerted online assaults is especially susceptible to women, who are active in the public discourse - journalists, activists, and politicians. Cybercriminals are also using the weak points in the digital platform to gather personal information. After getting this kind of information, it can be utilized in identity theft, blackmail, or online defamation.

**Table 2:** Causes of cybercrime against women

Cause	Explanation
Patriarchal Social Norms	Gender discrimination and misogyny
Digital Anonymity	Difficulty in identifying perpetrators
Lack of Awareness	Limited knowledge of cybersecurity
Weak Law Enforcement	Challenges in cyber investigations
Rapid Internet Expansion	Increased online presence

According to scholars, cyber violence can be to a large extent an extension of gender discriminatory and inequality tendencies in the real world. Thus, the problem of cybercrime cannot be solved only with the help of technological interventions but it does need more social and legal changes.

**Table 3:** Important legal provisions

Law	Provision	Description
IT Act, 2000	Section 66C	Punishment for identity theft
IT Act, 2000	Section 66D	Cheating by personation using computer resources
IT Act, 2000	Section 67	Publishing obscene material in electronic form
IT Act, 2000	Section 67A	Publishing sexually explicit content online
IPC	Section 354D	Cyberstalking
IPC	Section 499	Online defamation
IPC	Section 509	Insulting the modesty of a woman

All these provisions work together in combating different types of cybercrime against women which are cyberstalking, online harassment, identity theft, and distribution of obscene content. There are however several challenges in its legal enforcement. The investigation of cybercrime involves a technical skill and digital forensic abilities. Most police departments do not have sufficient training and resources required to investigate cybercrimes successfully.

## 5. Judicial interpretation and case laws

Cyber laws and digital rights protection have also been a significant role of Indian courts in the interpretation of laws.

### State of Tamil Nadu v. Suhas Katti (2004)

This case is described as being one of the first successful cybercrime prosecutions in India. The accused developed

[www.dzarc.com/education](http://www.dzarc.com/education)

## 2. Socio-cultural factors

Social relations in most regions of India are still guided by patriarchal ideologies and gender stereotypes. Such attitudes are replicated in the online space whereby the perpetrators have a sense of being empowered to have misogynistic attitudes. Sexist comments, sexual violence threats and character assassination are common in online harassment. Moreover, victim-blaming attitudes affect women not to report cybercrime. Most of the victims are afraid to be stigmatized or their reputation may also be ruined in case they complain. This leaves a huge percentage of cybercrime crimes unreported.

## 3. Role of digital anonymity

One of the greatest causes of cybercrime is the anonymity that the internet offers. Attackers are able to make counterfeit identities, encrypted communication tools, and mask their presence by the use of virtual private networks (VPNs). This anonymity complicates the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect the offenders and store digital evidence. The feeling that one cannot be traced on activities that are done on the Internet promotes people to commit abuses that they would not commit when interacting with others in person.

## 4. Legal framework addressing cybercrime against women in India

India has developed some legalities in order to deal with cybercrime and ensure that people cannot be harassed online. The main law that regulates cyber offending in the country is the Information Technology Act, 2000. Different parts of the Act criminalize any activity like identity theft, hacking and putting obscene materials online.

counterfeit Internet accounts and left obscene messages in a Yahoo message board about a woman. The accused was convicted by the court through the Information Technology Act and the Indian Penal Code, which proved that cyber harassment could be tried according to the current legal regulations.

### Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015)

Even though this was a case that mainly concerned freedom of speech, it had a huge impact on the cyber law in India. Section 66A of the Information Technology Act was declared unconstitutional and vague, and therefore invalid by the Supreme Court. Although the ruling enhanced the right to freedom of speech, it also identified that there should be clear legal provisions to prevent the occurrence of online harassment without limiting the exercise of legal speech.

## Kalandi Charan Lenka v. State of Odisha (2017)

The accused in this case used to make fake Facebook accounts and post obscene pictures of a woman. Cyber harassment and online defamation were felt as grave crimes by the court and the need to defend dignity of women in the cyberspace.

These case rulings demonstrate ways in which judges apply the understanding of the cyber laws and strive to compromise the basic rights with the requirement to curb online crimes.

**Table 4:** Cybercrime cases in India (NCRB data)

Year	Total cybercrime cases	Cases targeting women (approx.)
2019	44,735	~10,000
2020	50,035	~11,500
2021	52,974	~13,000
2022	65,893	~16,000

**Source:** National Crime Records Bureau (Crime in India Reports)

The table shows that the cases of cybercrimes are resolutely growing with the past few years. Such tendency can be described not only by the rising popularity of digital technologies but also by the higher rate of cyber offences reporting. The increased number of cases against women demonstrates the necessity of providing more preventive actions and the enforcement of the law.

## 6. Emerging forms of cybercrime

Artificial intelligence and digital image editing are technologies that have brought up novel types of cybercrime.

### Deepfake pornography

Deepfake technology involves artificial intelligence which is used to create realistic yet fake pictures or videos. This technology is frequently used by the perpetrators in the production of explicit content involving women without their consent. This kind of content may go viral and lead to serious reputation losses.

### Online doxing and trolling

Doxing is an act of publicly disclosing personal or private details to anyone like address, phone number and personal data. Women who raise their voices on the internet often have organized trolling attacks on them with threats and harassment.

### Dating-app harassment

In India online dating sites are gaining popularity in the urban centres. Nevertheless, these are the sites that also leave women vulnerable to harassment, manipulation and monetary fraud. Criminals usually resort to false identities, to defraud a victim.

### Sextortion networks

Criminal gangs are waging sextortion scams on people over social media and messaging apps. Intimate photos or video clips collected with the help of deceit blackmail the victims.

### Social media impersonation

Women are often impersonated by using fake social media profiles. Reckless content can be propagated using such accounts, funds raised, or obscene information shared.

Research has shown that one of the most rapidly developing types of online harassment is image-based abuse, cyberstalking, and doxing.

## 7. Challenges in combating cybercrime against women

There are a number of obstacles to fulfilling the effective prevention and prosecution of cybercrime against women:

- Underreporting of cybercrime cases
- Limited digital forensic infrastructure
- Lack of cybercrime awareness among citizens
- Jurisdictional challenges in cross-border crimes
- Slow judicial processes

These issues can only be resolved through a concerted effort by government agencies, technology firms, law enforcement agencies and civil society.

## 8. Policy recommendations

The problem of cybercrime against women can be successfully combated by implementing the following measures:

- Strengthening cybercrime investigation units
- Increasing digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness
- Encouraging reporting through accessible complaint mechanisms
- Implementing stricter regulations for social media platforms
- Providing psychological and legal support for victims

These steps could help to establish safer digital environments of women and achieve gender equality in the digital era.

## Conclusion

Female cybercrime is one of the most urgent issues in online culture. With the ever-changing technology, new online harassment and exploitation have been created and pose a threat to the life, privacy, and dignity of women. The increasing rate of cybercrime in India is not just an aspect of technological weakness, but also more of the social inequalities and gender discrimination which are entrenched. The study within this paper shows that women face cybercrimes due to various factors, among them being the spirit of patriarchy, digital anonymity, insufficient tips towards cybersecurity, and the insufficiency of enforcement systems. The high rate of growth of social media and other online communication tools has provided new avenues through which women become the victims of harassment, stalking, and online exploitation by the perpetrators.

According to statistical evidence, the number of cybercrime cases in India is growing rapidly, and it is evident that the state should respond to the problem with a more appropriate policy and increase the effectiveness of law enforcement. The legal system which regulates cyber offences is in the form of existing laws like the Information Technology Act, but there are obstacles to the enforcement, investigation and support of the victims. Cybercrime against women has to be fought in a comprehensive manner. This will involve tightening legal systems, improving the law enforcement capacity, boosting digital literacy among women and boosting the act of reporting cyber-crimes. The technology companies should also be active

and put up more content moderation policies and offer content abuse reporting mechanisms.

Finally, to achieve gender equality and safeguard basic rights in the digital age, it is important to secure a safe digital space of women. Governments, civil society groups, and technology platforms should work together to establish online safer environments and ensure the abuse of digital technology in gender-based violence is avoided.

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