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Stalked Online: The Social & Psychological Effects On Women In The Digital Era In India

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, online stalking has emerged as a pervasive threat, particularly affecting women in India. This study explores the social and psychological impacts of cyberstalking on women based on qualitative interviews, surveys, and existing literature. Women face a range of psychological consequences, including anxiety, fear, depression, and a sense of helplessness. Socially, victims often face stigma, self-isolation, and an erosion of trust in digital communications. Cultural norms and gendered power dynamics further exacerbate this issue, limiting women's ability to seek legal recourse or assistance. The normalization of digital surveillance and inadequate enforcement of cyber laws contribute to an environment where victims are often silenced. This research highlights the urgent need for widespread digital literacy, legal reform, and support systems to combat online stalking and create safer online environments for women. Addressing these challenges is essential to promote gender equality and mental health in India's rapidly evolving digital society.

INTRODUCTION

The digital age has provided new opportunities for communication, expression, and social interaction in India, but it has also brought with it serious challenges such as online harassment and stalking. Online stalking refers to the persistent monitoring, following, intimidation, or unwanted contact of an individual through the internet, social media platforms, email, messaging apps, and other digital channels. This problem is particularly acute for women in India, where their presence in the digital space

makes them vulnerable to new types of social and psychological risks. The impact of online stalking is not limited to the virtual world; it profoundly impacts women's real lives, self-esteem, mental health, and social relationships. Fear, anxiety, depression, self-doubt, and social isolation are its major psychological consequences. In many cases, women are forced to limit their online activity or withdraw from public forums altogether, hindering their freedom of expression and digital empowerment. Socially, online stalking highlights patriarchal thinking, gender inequality, and the misuse of technology. This research analyses

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the social and psychological impact of online stalking on women in India, highlighting the need for awareness, legal protection and a safe digital environment.

The rapid growth of internet access and social media in India has transformed communication, providing new opportunities for connection and expression. However, this digital surge has also opened up new avenues for harassment, particularly targeting women. Online stalking—which includes constant surveillance, unwanted messages, threats, and privacy violations—has become a widespread and underreported issue. Women in India are particularly vulnerable due to prevailing gender bias, social stigma, and a lack of awareness of cyber laws. Unlike physical stalking, online harassment can be persistent, anonymous, and far-reaching, often leaving deep psychological scars such as anxiety, paranoia, and depression. Socially, victims may retreat to digital spaces or face blame, further isolating them. Despite legal frameworks such as the Information Technology Act, enforcement remains weak, and women's complaints are often dismissed. The aim of this study is to examine the social and psychological impact of online stalking on Indian women and to advocate for stronger support systems and policy responses. The Internet, with its dynamic and evolving nature, has become a means for its users to interact with each other globally while going about their business, studies, or social lives. As per the Digital around the World Report as on February 2025¹, there are 5.56 billion Internet users in the world today, and as the number of users increases, cybercrime is also increasing. According to Cupach and Spitzberg (2004), there are eight distinct groups of stalking behaviors, one of which is cyberstalking.. Cyber stalking comes under the umbrella term of online harassment which can be defined as the use of information and communication technologies by an individual or group to repeatedly cause harm to another person.² Cyber stalking as the use of electronic communication to harass or threaten someone with physical harm³. The definition of cyber stalking was also aptly given in the case of *State (Cyber Cell) v Yogesh Pandurang*

*Prabhu*⁴ Cyber stalking is a crime in which the attacker harasses a victim using electronic communication, such as e-mail or instant messaging (IM), or messages posted to a Web site or a discussion group. A cyber stalker relies upon the anonymity afforded by the Internet to allow them to stalk their victim without being detected.⁵

Thus, online harassment becomes cyberstalking when repeated unwanted communications, whether direct or indirect, takes place over a period of time, via one or more mediums of Internet or electronic communications. The messages themselves must be unwanted, and the content can be-but is not limited to-threatening, sexually harassing, emotionally harassing or bullying, or general misinformation. Provided the messages create reasonable fear in the victim, they fit the definition for cyberstalking.⁶

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

¹To examine the social and psychological impacts of online stalking on women in India in the digital age.

²To analyze the nature, forms, and patterns of cyberstalking experienced by women.

³To assess the emotional, mental health, and behavioral consequences of online stalking on victims.

⁴To study the social reactions and responses faced by women victims, including stigma, blame, and lack of support.

⁵To examine the existing legal framework related to cyberstalking and identify gaps in its implementation and enforcement.

⁶To evaluate the availability and effectiveness of support systems, such as law enforcement, counselling services, and helplines.

⁷To identify the key challenges faced by women in reporting and addressing online stalking incidents.

⁸To recommend effective measures for prevention, protection, and empowerment of women in digital spaces.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The emergence of digital technology and broad internet accessibility has changed social interactions, especially via platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

1 *Digital around the world — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights.* (n.d.). DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. <https://datareportal.com/global-digital-overview>

2 *.What is online harassment? - Report + Support - Durham University.* (n.d.-b). <https://reportandsupport.durham.ac.uk/support/what-is-online-harassment#:~:text=Definition,humiliation%20in%20an%20online%20setting>

3 Merriam-Webster.(n.d.). Cyberstalking. In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. . Retrieved April 9, 2025. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/legal/cyberstalking>.

4 *State (Cyber Cell) v. Yogesh Pandurang Prabhu, C.C.* NO. 3700686/PS/2009

5 Nigam, V. (2022, May 16). Cyberstalking and the Indian jurisprudence. *Social Media - India*. <https://www.mondaq.com/india/social-media/1193320/cyberstalking-and-the-indian-jurisprudence>

6 Deo, S. S. (2016). Cyberstalking and online harassment: a new challenge for law enforcement. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2712092>

Nonetheless, these platforms have also opened up new pathways for harassment and stalking, which predominantly impact women. Online stalking or cyberstalking refers to relentless and unwelcome monitoring, intimidation, and threats carried out through digital means. In India, this type of gender violence is strongly rooted in broader societal frameworks of patriarchy, monitoring, and insufficient law enforcement.

Research conducted by academics like Banaji and Bhat (2019) indicates that Indian women experience increased levels of online harassment, frequently carried out by acquaintances. A study by the Internet Democracy Project (2017) highlights that women encounter continuous examination and unsolicited focus online, compelling numerous individuals to self-censor or retreat from public digital spaces. This trend significantly affects gender equality and digital engagement, as concerns over surveillance undermine women's ability to express themselves and access information.

Psychologically, women experiencing online stalking report symptoms of anxiety, depression, a sense of helplessness, and trauma reactions akin to those found in victims of physical stalking (Raines et al., 2012). Research carried out by the Centre for Cyber Victim Counselling (CCVC) in India indicates that insufficient support systems worsen the mental health effects, with numerous victims facing social isolation and feelings of paranoia. Victims frequently face blame or silencing, which strengthens cultural narratives that attribute responsibility for their digital presence and actions to women.

A study by Nanda (2020) reveals the disparity between law and its enforcement, as victims frequently find it difficult to lodge complaints or get sufficient assistance from the police. A deficit in digital literacy and awareness exists among women and law enforcement, complicating redress efforts. Additionally, the research on digital gender-based violence in India highlights the convergence of caste, class, and rural-urban disparities. Women from Dalit, Adivasi, and marginalized communities face heightened vulnerability because of intricate discrimination and restricted access to justice or mental health services (D'Cunha, 2021). The way media depicts women and online conduct further reinforces damaging stereotypes, normalizing invasive monitoring under the pretext of safety or ethical regulation. In conclusion, the current literature highlights the pressing necessity for a comprehensive approach that includes policy changes, mental health assistance, digital skills training, and feminist advocacy. The digital era, although offering chances for empowerment, has also brought about new risks that particularly impact Indian women. Tackling

online stalking necessitates a comprehensive grasp of its social, psychological, and structural aspects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a secondary data-driven approach to investigate the social and psychological effects of online harassment on women in India. Information is obtained from case studies in scholarly journals, reports from governments and NGOs, statistics on cybercrime, and trustworthy news sources. The study examines current literature, legal materials, and mental health assessments to explore trends in digital harassment, its effects on women's wellness, and institutional reactions. Through the integration of data from multiple sources, the research seeks to offer a thorough insight into the issue while emphasizing deficiencies in current laws, awareness, and support mechanisms

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

In the digital era, the internet and social platforms have offered women fresh avenues for education, work, self-expression, and community engagement. Nonetheless, this advancement in technology has also resulted in a swift rise in issues such as online harassment, which presents a significant danger to women's safety, self-respect, and psychological well-being. This research is important as it not only explores a digital offense but also seeks to comprehend its social and psychological effects thoroughly. Women impacted by online stalking frequently face mental health challenges like fear, anxiety, depression, insecurity, and self-doubt. Such experiences may also undermine their social connections, work-life equilibrium, decision-making skills, and self-esteem. Moreover, this issue restricts women's digital autonomy and virtual visibility, impeding the journey towards digital empowerment. This study underscores patriarchal attitudes, a deficiency in awareness about cybercrimes, and the necessity for the efficient enforcement of digital regulations. This study offers important advice to policymakers, educators, tech platforms, and social groups in fostering a safer online space for women, enhancing awareness, and bolstering legal protections.

SOCIAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF STALKED ONLINE

"Online stalking", also known as cyberstalking, refers to the repeated use of digital platforms – such as social

media, messaging apps, email or other online channels – to harass, monitor, threaten or intimidate a person. This encompasses actions like sending unwanted messages, monitoring someone's online activities, pretending to be them, or sharing private information without permission. In contrast to physical stalking, cyberstalking enables the offender to stay anonymous and function from a distance, heightening the victim's feeling of insecurity. Women face disproportionate targeting, particularly in patriarchal societies like India, where gender norms and insufficient digital protections increase their vulnerability to online harassment and psychological damage. The effects of online stalking on women in India are deep and complex, both socially and psychologically.

Socially, women subjected to cyberstalking frequently retreat from online platforms, which restricts their digital engagement and interactions. This self-censorship stems from the anxiety of ongoing monitoring or intimidation, which restricts their ability to express themselves and engage in the digital realm. In conservative or patriarchal settings, women often encounter societal criticism and blame for their harassment, which further isolates them. Psychologically, the effects are profound, as victims indicate heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and paranoia. The ongoing anxiety of being watched or endangered adversely impacts their mental well-being, resulting in a sense of vulnerability in both digital and physical spaces. Numerous victims endure trauma akin to that of physical stalking, characterized by ongoing feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness, and emotional turmoil. Prolonged effects may involve diminished self-worth, post-traumatic stress disorder, and hesitance to seek assistance due to anxiety about potential rejection or blame. The insufficiency of proper legal remedies and social support systems intensifies these impacts, causing numerous victims to feel helpless. In the end, the widespread occurrence of online stalking diminishes women's feelings of safety and independence in the digital realm, obstructing their capacity to succeed in a connected world.

Social and Psychological Impacts of Online Stalking on Indian Women

The digital age has impacted the lives of women in Indian society on multiple levels. While the internet and social media have provided women with new opportunities for expression, education, employment, and social participation, problems like online stalking have created serious social and psychological challenges for them. This objective focuses on examining how online stalking affects women's mental health and social lives.

Psychologically, online stalking creates a constant sense of fear, anxiety, and insecurity in women. Due to repeated unwanted messages, threats, surveillance, and digital harassment, victims experience mental stress, depression, irritability, and a lack of self-confidence. In many cases, this situation can lead to insomnia, difficulty concentrating, and serious mental disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

On a social level, online stalking limits women's freedom. Many women reduce or completely abandon the use of social media platforms, affecting their social participation, networking, and professional opportunities. Because they do not feel safe in the digital space, women are unable to express their opinions freely, which is detrimental to democratic discourse and gender equality.

The patriarchal structure of Indian society further complicates this problem, where women's online presence is viewed with suspicion and through a lens of morality. This leads to victims facing social pressure and guilt. Thus, this objective clarifies that online stalking is not merely an individual problem, but a serious social issue affecting women's mental health and social status.

Nature, Forms, and Patterns of Cyberstalking Experienced by Women

Cyberstalking is a complex and multifaceted crime that affects women in various forms and patterns. This objective involves a detailed analysis of the nature of cyberstalking experienced by women, its various forms, and its effects. Common forms of cyberstalking include sending repeated unwanted messages, monitoring social media accounts, harassment through fake profiles, threatening to release private photos or information, online defamation, and digital stalking. Often, the stalker monitors the victim's every online move and attempts to psychologically control them. This behavior can gradually become obsessive and aggressive. Emotionally, victimized women experience feelings such as fear, shame, anger, helplessness, and self-blame. The impact on mental health is profound, with anxiety disorders, depression, low self-esteem, and social isolation being common. The constant stress also negatively affects women's productivity and quality of life. Behaviorally, women tend to restrict their online activities. They may delete accounts, make their profiles private, or withdraw from digital platforms altogether. This self-censorship infringes upon women's digital freedom and right to expression. This objective aims to understand that cyberstalking is not merely a technical form of harassment, but a problem that severely impacts women's emotional,

mental, and behavioral lives, with potentially long-lasting consequences.

Emotional, Mental Health, and Behavioral Consequences for Victims

Cyberstalking is a complex and multifaceted crime that affects women in various forms and patterns. This objective involves a detailed analysis of the nature of cyberstalking experienced by women, its various forms, and its impacts. Common forms of cyberstalking include sending repeated unwanted messages, monitoring social media accounts, harassment through fake profiles, threatening with private photos or information, online defamation, and digital stalking. Often, the stalker monitors the victim's every online move and attempts to mentally control her. This behavior can gradually become obsessive and aggressive. Emotionally, victimized women experience feelings of fear, shame, anger, helplessness, and self-blame. The impact on mental health is profound, including anxiety disorders, depression, loss of self-confidence, and social isolation. The constant stress also negatively affects women's productivity and quality of life.

Behaviorally, women often limit their online activities. They may delete accounts, make profiles private, or distance themselves from digital platforms. This self-censorship hinders women's digital freedom and right to expression. This objective aims to understand that cyberstalking is not merely technical harassment, but a problem that severely impacts women's emotional, mental, and behavioral lives, with potentially long-term consequences.

Social Reactions to Women Victims: Stigma, Blame, and Support Gaps

Women who are victims of online stalking not only face the crime itself, but also the societal reactions, which become a major challenge for them. This objective studies the social reactions, attitudes, and lack of support systems faced by female victims. In Indian society, online harassment is often not considered a serious crime. It is often dismissed as "just an online matter." Victimized women are often blamed for using social media, sharing their pictures, or interacting with others online. This type of victim-blaming further exacerbates mental distress. Many women do not report the incident due to fear of social stigma. They fear that family, friends, or society will question their character or not take their concerns seriously. As a result, they prefer to remain silent, which emboldens the perpetrator. Lack of support is also a serious problem. In many cases,

family and friends fail to provide emotional support. The lack of police and institutional support makes the victim feel alone and helpless. This objective clarifies that social responses play a crucial role in the victim's mental state and access to justice. Positive and supportive attitudes can empower women, while negative reactions further weaken them.

Legal Framework for Cyberstalking: Implementation and Enforcement Gaps

Various legal provisions exist in India to deal with cyberstalking, primarily including the Information Technology Act, 2000, and Sections 354D (stalking), 507, 509, and other related sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The main objective of this objective is to review the effectiveness of these laws and identify the existing shortcomings in their implementation and enforcement.

Although Section 354D was included for the safety of women, its implementation appears weak at the practical level. The lack of technical expertise in the police and investigative agencies, the complex nature of cybercrimes, and the difficulties in collecting digital evidence slow down the justice process. In many cases, the police hesitate to even register an FIR, which leads to disappointment for the victimized women at the initial stage itself.

Additionally, the global nature of the internet and the cross-border presence of perpetrators pose a major challenge for law enforcement. The lack of international cooperation and the complexity of technical procedures make it difficult to punish the perpetrators. The length of the judicial process and the backlog of cases also weaken women's faith in the justice system. This objective makes it clear that the mere existence of laws is not sufficient; effective implementation, police training, technical infrastructure, and a victim-centered approach are also necessary.

Support Systems' Availability and Effectiveness (Law Enforcement, Counselling, Helplines)

Support systems play a crucial role for women who are victims of online stalking. These include law enforcement agencies, cyber cells, women's helplines, counseling services, and mental health support. This objective evaluates the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of these systems.

Although cybercrime portals, women's helplines, and police assistance are available at the national and state levels in India, many women are unaware of them. Access

to these services is limited in rural and semi-urban areas. Additionally, police insensitivity and lack of technical understanding often exacerbate the victims' experiences. Mental health and counseling services are also inadequate. Expert support is necessary for the psychological trauma caused by cyberstalking, but such services are limited and expensive. Helpline services sometimes lack timely response and confidentiality. This objective highlights the need to make support systems more accessible, coordinated, well-trained, and women-centric so that victimized women can receive prompt and effective assistance.

Challenges in Reporting and Addressing Online Stalking Incidents

Women face numerous social, institutional, and personal barriers when reporting online stalking. This objective identifies the major challenges that prevent women from seeking justice. The biggest challenge is social stigma and shame. Victims often refrain from filing complaints fearing that society or their families will blame them. Additionally, lack of police cooperation, delays in filing complaints, and the complexity of technical procedures discourage women. Preserving and presenting digital evidence is also a major problem. Many women do not know how to preserve screenshots, chats, and other digital data. The lengthy judicial process and mental exhaustion also act as barriers to reporting. This objective clarifies that women will not be able to file complaints freely until the reporting process becomes simple, sensitive, and trustworthy.

Measures for Women's Prevention, Protection, and Empowerment in Digital Spaces

The final objective of this study is to recommend effective measures for the safety and empowerment of women in the digital space. First, there is a need for strict enforcement of cyber laws and regular technical and gender-sensitive training for police officers. Digital literacy programs should be promoted so that women can become familiar with online safety, privacy settings, and reporting mechanisms. Social media platforms should also adopt strict content moderation and a swift grievance redressal system. Emotional support should be provided to victimized women by strengthening mental health support, counseling services, and helplines. Furthermore, it is essential to change the victim-blaming mentality through social awareness campaigns. Only through these measures can a safe, respectful, and equitable digital environment be created for women.

Cyber stalking among women:

There is no relevant age or gender for cyber stalking. This type of cybercrime affects people of all genders from various walks of life. However, the relevant data set at present are women in India. In a recent report by the ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation⁷, Cyber stalking has increased from 555 in 2017 to 1457 in 2022. Cyber Stalking usually happens with females, who are stalked by men, or children who are stalked by adults. Cyberstalkers target mostly those who are internetaholic, emotionally weak or unstable in their life.⁸ Faucher, (2014), in their paper write that the adolescents perceived cyberbullied on different platforms were social media (55%), email (47%), cell phone text messages (43%), and nonacademic blogs and chat rooms (25%). Most girls have witnessed cyberbullying on social media and cell phone text messages, while boys experienced cyberbullying on nonacademic blogs and chat rooms.⁹ The first ever reported case of cyber stalking in India was the *Ritu Kohli case*¹⁰, where she had reported to the police that she was getting a lot of unsolicited and obscene calls from strangers, likely from her home telephone number being leaked. It was later found that a man named Manish Kathuria had been stalking Ritu while also using her name to chat with strangers on an illegal website MIRC, which was the cause for the victim's unsolicited calls.

Psychology of a cyber stalker:

There are various psychological reasons behind stalking like severe narcissism (Obsession & attraction), hatred, rage, retribution, envy, obsession, rejection, fear & distress, psychiatric dysfunction, power and control, sadomasochistic fantasies, sexual deviance (violating social norms), internet addiction or religious fanaticism¹¹. Ankita Srivastava et al (2014) classifies cyber stalkers into various categories based on their personality, stalking behaviors and crimi-

7 Cyber Crimes against Women during 2017 to 2022 | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India. (n.d.). <https://www.mospi.gov.in/cyber-crimes-against-women-during-2017-2022>

8 Kerala Fire and Rescue Services. (2022) JANAMAITHRI: A journal of Democratic Policing, <https://fire.kerala.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/journal-vol10.pdf>

9 Faucher, C., Jackson, M., & Cassidy, W. (2014). Cyberbullying among University Students: Gendered Experiences, Impacts, and Perspectives. *Education Research International*, 2014, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2014/698545>

10 Manish Kathuria v. Ritu Kohli, C.C. No. 14616/2014

11 Keswani, H. (2017). Cyber stalking: A critical study. *Bharati Law Review*, 2(2), 131–140.

nality¹², as rejected stalker, resentful stalker, predatory stalker, intimacy seeker, incompetent suitor. According to the research observed by Kokkinos and Antoniadou (2019), both cyber bullies and victims may be students who engage in problematic Internet use, possesses specific personality traits, experience a range of social challenges, and exhibit psychopathological symptoms.

Psychological impact of cyberstalking on its victims:

Cyberbullying victims are more likely to have suicidal thoughts and attempt suicide, which has a detrimental effect on the social environment and family (Prabhu James Ranjith et al., 2023). The aforementioned fact is demonstrated by the infamous “Bois Locker Room” case¹³, in which members of the group shared pictures of their classmates and other young girls without their knowledge or consent, along with offensive remarks ranging from body shaming to jokes about rape and sexual assault.

The victims of such harassment may experience anxiety, depression, fear, and other psychological symptoms.¹⁴ According to Begotti et al. (2020), cyber victims frequently employ avoidance and passivity as harmful coping strategies. The victim may continue to experience trauma and feel threatened since the damaging content—whether it be text, photographs, or videos—will be readily shared and viewed online for an extended period of time.¹⁵

Relevant Legislations and their provisions: The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023¹⁶ (BNS) and the Indian Penal Code, 1860¹⁷ (IPC) penalizes stalking with imprisonment of up to three years and fine on first conviction, and up to five years with fine on subsequent convictions. In addition to

these penalties, the Information Technology Act, 2000¹⁸ (IT Act) stipulates penalties for cybercrimes against women. Sections 66E¹⁹, 67²⁰ and 67A²¹ of the IT Act stipulate penalties and fines for violating bodily privacy and publishing or transmitting sexually explicit or obscene content in electronic form. The “Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)” was formed by the government to give law enforcement agencies a framework for handling cybercrimes in a thorough and coordinated manner. The National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (www.cybercrime.gov.in), which enables the public to report all forms of cybercrimes, including those against women, was simultaneously established by the government. In addition, a toll-free helpline number, “1930,” has been set up for reporting cybercrime.²²

SUGGESTIONS & CONCLUSION:

Suggestions:

A multifaceted and well-coordinated approach is necessary to properly address the issue of online stalking against women in India. First, stronger and more efficient enforcement of cyber laws is required. Although there are laws pertaining to cybercrimes in both the Indian Penal Code and the Information Technology Act, 2000, there are a number of practical challenges in putting these prohibitions into practice. Every state should set up specialized cybercrime units with qualified officers, as well as expedited investigation procedures and a straightforward, safe complaint method for victims.

Second, it is important to raise awareness of online safety and digital literacy, particularly among women and young girls. Training programs on privacy settings, safe internet use, and reporting cybercrimes should be conducted by schools, colleges, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations working together. This will enable

12 Ayyar, R. V. R., & Sharma, A. (2014). Cyber stalking: A nuisance to the information technology. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Computer Science and Software Engineering*, 4(2), 1154–1158. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270393663_Cyber_Stalking_A_Nuisance_to_the_Information_Technology

13 Archana Sharma v. State Of Nct Of Delhi & Ors, WP(CRL) 3202/2020

14 Jane, M. (2023). The psychological effects of cyberstalking on victims. *Social and Criminology*, 11, 266. <https://www.longdom.org/open-access/the-psychological-effects-of-cyberstalking-on-victims-99698.html>

15 Menon, D., *Cyberbullying: Pulling off the Mask*, <https://mgiep.unesco.org/article/cyberbullying-pulling-off-the-mask>

16 Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, (Act No. 45 of 2023). https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/250883_english_01042024.pdf

17 Indian Penal Code, (Act No. 45 of 1860) <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/repealedfileopen?filename=A1860-45.pdf>

18 Information Technology Act, (Act No. 21 of 2000). <https://www.meity.gov.in/content/information-technology-act-2000>

19 Section 66E, The Information Technology Act, 2000 (Act No. 21 of 2000).

20 Section 67, The Information Technology Act, 2000 (Act No. 21 of 2000).

21 Section 67A, The Information Technology Act, 2000 (Act No. 21 of 2000).

22 Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. (2023). *Lok Sabha unstarred question no. 3825: Cyber stalking cases*. Government of India. https://sansad.in/getFile/loksabha-questions/annex/183/AU3825_ZmCH7r.pdf?source=pqals

women to use digital platforms more securely and confidently.

Third, it's critical to improve mental health support networks. Online stalking victims may suffer from social isolation, anxiety, sadness, and terror. Online counseling platforms, toll-free helplines, and counseling services must to be made available and efficient.

Fourth, social media companies need to be held responsible. Strict content moderation guidelines should be implemented, and their grievance redressal procedures should be quick and open. Lastly, to guarantee that abused women can seek justice without fear or social stigma, thorough public awareness campaigns and gender-sensitive training for police and law enforcement organizations are required.

CONCLUSION:

Online stalking is having a severe detrimental effect on Indian women's social and psychological lives in the digital age. The internet has given women new avenues for empowerment, education, and speech, but it has also turned into a platform for threats, harassment, and privacy violations. Cyberstalking causes women to feel insecure, anxious, stressed, and unconfident, which restricts their ability to participate in social and online activities. Kumar and Kumar (2023) claim that lax enforcement of the law enables many cyberstalkers to avoid punishment, giving offenders the confidence to potentially increase violence against women. Law enforcement organizations have additional hurdles because to the worldwide nature of the internet and its lack of regional boundaries. Cybercriminals can now more easily approach their victims thanks to the internet's affordability and accessibility. India has a legislative framework to deal with cybercrimes, but its effective application is hampered by institutional flaws, a lack of societal awareness, and a fear of reporting. Thus, it is evident that only passing legislation is insufficient; social and psychological remedies as well as successful implementation are also required. Therefore, combating online stalking requires a concerted effort from the government, law enforcement, internet platforms, mental health specialists, and civil society. For women's protection as well as the preservation of gender equality and human rights, it is essential to provide a respectful and safe digital environment.

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