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ABSTRACT

Violence against women is an age old issue which refuses to die down. Rather with the development of technology it has been observed that the ways and means of perpetuating violence have evolved. Unfortunately the position of women, all over the world, has always been weak and women are considered vulnerable. Even though much attention has been given to propagate equality of women in almost every aspect of life, there still exists various ways and means to suppress women from realising her full potential.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as

"any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

In the present era of technology, women are not safe even in the online world and are continuously targeted in the virtual world. The use of cyberspace and its unique features of easy access and anonymity have created an adverse influence on the socio-cultural development of society. On one hand the cyberspace has provided a platform where women along with men, can enjoy the freedom of expression, access to infinite information and privacy of communication, while on the other hand the same benefits of anonymity and privacy are also exploited by those who perpetrate violence against women.

Cyber Victimization of women or cyber crime against women tends to involve additional characteristics that distinguish it in from the generic cyber crimes. Cyber crime against women not only stigmatizes and traumatizes the victim by ways of online harassment, cyber stalking, online bullying, morphing of images and misuse of social networking sites but also goes on to create a sense of fear, embarrassment and shame in the victim. Many a time online crime drives women away from the use of technology and leads to psychological, social, economic and in extreme cases even physical harm.

In an attempt to understand the issue of cyber victimization of women, the research design of the present study is divided into two parts which is both doctrinal and empirical in nature. The

doctrinal part has stated the existing international and national legal framework relating to cyber crime against women. The challenges and issue of the Indian legal regime, with reference to the present study, is further substantiated through an intensive empirical research work.

For the empirical study, data from women resident of NCT of Delhi, Legal experts and officials of cyber cells in Delhi was collected using the questionnaire and interview method. The study covers the female residents of NCT of Delhi so as to understand the prevalence of victimization, its impact and the outcomes of respondent's interactions with law enforcement agencies. The study also covers legal experts and officials of cyber cells so as to develop a deeper understanding on the problem of cyber crimes against women and the efficacy of the legal system and the areas which require further improvements.

Ultimately on the basis of doctrinal and empirical study it was concluded that in the present legal regime in India is insufficient to effectively deal with the issue of cyber victimization of women. Also there is a lack of awareness among women as the various kinds of cyber crime and the reporting mechanism available to deal with cyber crimes. It was also found that the law enforcement agencies need better coordination and infrastructure to respond to issues of cyber victimization of women in a swift manner.

Lately, the issue of cyber victimization of women has caught the attention at national as well as international level. Yet, a lot needs to be done to safeguard women. The unstructured development of laws regulating cyber crimes in India often leads to confusions as to the application of the law. India must enact rigid and stringent laws for addressing the issue of cyber victimization of women. Awareness campaign must also be set up at the grass root level to educate people about cyber crimes and ways to protect oneself.

The study concludes that law alone cannot ensure the protection of women from cyber victimization and the issue at hand needs a multifaceted approach from various stakeholders. The study gives suggestions to control the rising cases of cyber crime against women by highlighting the ways and means to tackle the legal and social challenges. Awareness creation and sensitization of the society has also been emphasized along with the need for enactment of strong laws.
