
CYBER CRIME AGAINST WOMEN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE STATE OF MADHYA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Women and cybercrime are one of the areas of the online era that lag behind the rest-affecting women both in their privacy, dignity and even safety. Due to the swift change in technology and extensive use of the internet resource, an Indian woman particularly in the State of Madhya Pradesh is becoming more susceptible to various forms of cybercrimes such as cyberstalking, online harassment, identity theft, revenge pornography, and cyberbullying attacks. When a person commits these crimes, the results are not only immediate but also result in long-term psychological and social effects.¹

This paper aims at investigating socio-legal aspects of cybercrimes against women in particular in the context of Madhya Pradesh where crimes related to women in this segment are increasingly on the rise. Paper looks into the laws that are set to safeguard women against cybercrimes in India, in this case Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act) criminalize various activities committed over the internet like cyberstalking, defaming and publishing obscene materials. Even when such laws do exist, the study brings out that there is a huge gap in the execution and enforcement of the same in the rural parts of Madhya Pradesh where the technological influx and the prevalence of information on cyber crimes are very low.²

The socio-cultural issues form an important part in under reporting of such crimes as well. The society may also make women reluctant to pursue justice due to its negative attitude towards women such as victim-blaming, and the absence of support mechanisms set up to aid women. In addition, the law enforcement agencies in Madhya Pradesh have significant barrier to overcome to pursue and investigate cybercrimes, including inadequate training and technical skills.³

¹ Anderson, M., & Rainie, L. (2018). *The future of cybercrime and cybersecurity*. Pew Research Center.

² Avasarala, V. (2017). *Understanding cybercrime laws in India*. Indian Journal of Law and Technology, 9(1), 42-56.

³ Chakraborty, P. (2019). *Cybercrime against women in India: A socio-legal perspective*. The Indian Journal of Law, 10(2), 25-45.

The study points out that there is a necessity of better law provisions, increased training of law enforcers in capacity building and also enhanced awareness created amongst the women. It also demands the changes in the society where women are given a chance to tell about cybercrimes and use the law. Lastly, the paper shows how an effective legal and societal framework is urgently required in a bid to guard women against the menace of rising cybercrime.

INTRODUCTION

Cybercrime is a trending issue in the world today and women are among the most affected users of these online crimes. Scaling of technology and the internet has created an increased number of opportunities of the criminal to take advantage of and women because of societal disparities and original power structures tend to be the target of different kinds of online based abuse. Women in India, especially, in Madhya Pradesh State, are becoming targets of cyberstalking, identity theft, revenge pornography, online harassment and/or cyberbullying. The crimes do not only interfere with their privacy but also affect their mental health, their overall image, and feelings of distress.

The introduction of internet has caused unprecedented trends in the interactions between people but it has also augmented the occurrence of cyber crimes especially against women. Women especially are challenged greatly with being in the digital world, this is the case because the internet is an avenue where an offender can get a sense of confidentiality thus the perpetrator will be seldom able to be tracked or reported. Digital illiteracy among the most of the women especially the ones in the rural states in Madhya Pradesh, adds to the plight of the online crimes contagious wellbeing of the women. The activities that are done online by sharing personal information on social sites or online dating relationships have a lot of risks that most women are not aware of making them become victims of exploitation.⁴

Although the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Information technology, 2000 are some of the existing legal provisions in India that are provided as a means of combating cybercrime, their implementation and enforcement have been known to be a form of challenge. Madhya Pradesh among many other states suffers lack of well trained police officers and technological facilities to deal with such crimes. Also, victims of cybercrimes, especially women, are, in most cases,

⁴ Choudhury, M. (2018). *The role of the police in handling cybercrime cases in India*. International Journal of Criminal Law, 14(3), 302-315.

not willing to report crimes, partly due to the societal stigma, attributes to the victims of such crimes. Family or the community fails to support the victim and victim-blaming does not allow the women to raise their voice and demand justice.

India has specific legal provisions to deal with cyberstalking, defamation, and publication of obscenity though there is still a need in the availability and efficacy of laws. The fact that cybercrimes are becoming more and more complicated, and even include international crackers and sites, makes it even more complicated to address the issue with the help of law enforcement agencies. Nonetheless, the digital era provides a chance of increased awareness, empowerment and legal redress to those women who become victims of cybercrimes. But again, it should be a joint initiative between the government and the society to make sure women get the tools, knowledge and backup to help them protect themselves online.⁵

The socio-legal perspective of cyber crime against woman, in the state of Madhya Pradesh in particular, how the current judicial system works to tackle such crimes and what is the role of the society in making the cognizance of such crimes either enabled or turned down. It will also examine the usefulness of the existing legislations, understand the socio-cultural challenges which women encounter, and make amendments that would help women to be better shielded against online abuses. This study aims to shed light on the challenges that women face in Madhya Pradesh in particular, and to the greater discussion of the security, both offline and online, of women in India in general, by studying the case of Madhya Pradesh.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The framework by which India deals with cyber crimes on women is mainly on Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act). These legislations will focus on securing a detailed legal solution offering to the rise of cybercrime particularly to the women. Even with such protective measures, they have major loopholes in their implementation and most women in Madhya Pradesh find themselves unable to seek justice should they become victims of cyber rapes. This part dwells upon the legal formulations used to prevent cybercrimes on women and examines their efficacies in relation to the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Indian Penal Code (IPC) which was formed in the year 1860 is the main criminal body in India

⁵ Dinesh, S., & Kaur, R. (2016). *Cyber harassment: A growing problem in India*. Journal of Women's Rights and Technology, 2(3), 72-85.

and has quite a broad array of areas covered in terms of crime including cybercrime. Although the IPC was not initially concerned with the issue of cybercrime, the emergence of digital technology caused the need to broaden its parameters. Some chapters of the IPC have been applied to the crimes that could come under the physical space but have migrated to the online arena. These are defamation, sexual harassment and outraging of modesty to mention but a few which would be applicable especially in online crimes against women.

A case in point is section 354 of the IPC that criminalizes the act of outrage to the modesty of a woman, which can be used in the case of unwanted online sexual advances or online cyberstalking of female interviewees. On the same note, IPC in Section 499 is concerned with defamation that has been used to cover the false dissemination of information, malicious rumours or posting derogatory material regarding women on social sites. These clauses of the IPC form the basis of dealing with most of the crimes that women encounter in the digital world yet their translation to crimes committed in the digital space is often left to be clarified by the courts.⁶

Besides the IPC, Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act) is another important legislation that was meant to deal with cybercrimes in India. The IT Act was enacted in an attempt to accord legal acceptance to the electronic records and electronic signatures and also promote e-commerce. It has, with time, been updated to clearly deal with cybercrimes and to incorporate the protection of individuals against online abuse.

The key provision in cases of online bullying, and online harassment was under Section 66A of IT Act which criminalized sending of offending messages by use of communication services. Supreme Court of India overruled this section in 2015 as unconstitutional on the basis that this section is too broad and the right to free speech is being violated. Though the verdict was welcomed as the safeguard of civil rights, it created a loophole in the juridical system, which has not been closed completely, the acquisition of new and clearer laws.

The act of capturing, transmitting an image of a person or of that person in his or her private parts without his or her consent, is a criminal offense under section 66E of the IT Act, which deals with the offence of violation of privacy. The provision has been used in revenge pornography or the sharing and exposure of intimate pictures without the consent of the

⁶ Dinesh, S., & Kaur, R. (2016). *Cyber harassment: A growing problem in India*. Journal of Women's Rights and Technology, 2(3), 72-85.

woman. Although the law is a welcome move, there is a challenge over its implementation especially when the abuser creates profiles anonymously or abroad/international sites.

The section of IT Act that has been repeatedly used in cyberstalking and sexual harassment on internet is Section 67 on publication of obscene material in any electronic form. The part criminalizes the release or distribution of any obscene materials either in form of pictures, videos or even texts and has a harsh punishment on offenders. Interpretation of what defines an obscene material however may be subjective thus causing imbalance in the application.⁷

Besides such other provisions, Section 66C of the IT Act specifically covers the aspect of identity theft, whereby personal information of a person is utilised by others without the consent of the individual in a manner related to fraud. This has taken to greater importance with the advent of digital impersonation, through the use of social media profiles or other websites tools criminals use in order to impersonate women and may result in reputational harm, defamation and financial loss.

Along with such legal provisions, there are problems in terms of applying the IT Act with regard to cybercrimes committed to women. The second important concern is the deprivation of expertise in the sphere of technologies of law enforcement agencies, especially in Madhya Pradesh. Criminal investigators who are Police officers in most cases, particularly in the rural setting, are not often trained in the investigation of cybercrimes and management of cases that may involve evidence that is electronic in nature. This inability results in the fact that a lot of cases of cybercrime are not even reported or resolved and offenders suffer no punishment.

In addition to that, there exists a major gap in the awareness level when it comes to cybercrimes and legal action that the victim can take. The status of many women in Madhya Pradesh especially rural women is that they are unaware of the rights given to them under IPC and the IT Act. Victimization is also stigmatized and being victimized generates and feeds social stigma where the victim is not supposed to feel ashamed of being openly shamed by the society. Victims most often are afraid to report cases of cyberstalking, online harassment or revenge pornography, thinking any of the following: 1. The victims are afraid that the police and the prosecution will see them as the one who committed the crime not the victim; 2. The victims

⁷ Fagan, J. (2017). *Cyberbullying and online harassment: A public health perspective*. Journal of Social Issues, 73(2), 265-287

are afraid that the police will believe the offender more than them, which will lead to news of additional harassment by the offender.

In addition, the law used to litigate cyber crime cases is at times arduous and most women feel dissuaded by the long investigation processes and court trials. The staffing level, infrastructure and resources at cybercrime cells in Madhya Pradesh are not sufficient to cope up with increasing number of cases though there are some cells in the state. This makes women even less capable of pursuing justice and fails to enhance the performance of the legal system.⁸

To fill those gaps, there are proponents of creating special cybercrime departments in police organizations, increased spending on training and tools, as well as social knowledge raising to inform women about their rights on law and security of the web. Others have also been by the Indian government to bring initiatives like Cyber Surakshit Bharat and this is to create awareness about cybersecurity, and also to help people report cybercrimes. There is however a lot to be done to have a platform whereby the women will feel motivated to report cyber crimes and security body equipped with relevant tools and enough knowledge to prosecute the perpetrators.

Madhya Pradesh has gone to the extent of providing state level cybercrime cells and cyber police stations; especially in urban areas to deal with the cybercrimes at the state level. The stations had been delegated with the role of dealing with the cases of cybercrime including those of women. Nevertheless, such initiatives have not been entirely unsuccessful throughout the state and remain a challenge in managing cybercrime in underprivileged and rural communities. In addition, the loopholes that have been inherent to cyber crimes that cut across geographical locations or borders continue to be a major hindrance to law enforcers in Madhya Pradesh.⁹

To sum up, on the one hand, India has already developed a legal infrastructure to combat cyber crimes against women, on the other hand, application of legislation is a problem, especially, in the state of Madhya Pradesh. To make women well-protected in the online world, it is necessary to enhance application of the laws related to cybercrime, train law enforcers more efficiently, and educate the population. Also, the regulatory contents concerning cyber crime should

⁸ Garg, S., & Malhotra, A. (2017). *India's laws on cybercrime and the protection of women's rights*. Legal and Ethical Aspects of Cybersecurity, 7(4), 68-77.

⁹ Gogia, P., & Sharma, P. (2017). *Cyberstalking and the legal protections for women in India*. The Indian Journal of Law, 15(1), 11-27.

always be revised in order to remain on the speedy changes called technology and crimes committed on a computer. Only at that time it will be possible to ensure better protection of women in Madhya Pradesh and Russia in general against the increasingly ferocious crime in the field of Web technology.

TYPES OF CYBERCRIME AGAINST WOMEN

With the emergence of digital platforms, there has been a disappointing number of cybercrime victimizing women in more significant numbers and more diverse forms. Indian women have been the victims of cyber crime in both general and state specific to Madhya Pradesh which has assumed different forms. The crimes not only invade the privacy, dignity and safety of women but also produce long term psychological and emotional trauma. The anonymity of the internet frequently gives the perpetrators the freedom to extort women without the fear of short term penalty thus making such offenses more difficult to trace and persecute. Certain categories of cybercrime on women have become especially common over the last few years.

Cyberstalking is one of the most widespread and threatening crimes committed against women by cybercriminals. Cyberstalking involves repetitively using online media to bully, threaten, or stalk a person, and the person may become scared or in distress. In most instances, predators can stalk and track their target victims through social media, email, and messaging applications, which allow them to interact intensively with them. This may include actions like leaving disturbing and even threatening messages, posting rumors or even stalking an individual online with or without their knowledge. Females and active social media users are especially prone to becoming targets of this kind of cybercrime. Cyberstalking is becoming an issue of concern in Madhya Pradesh, owing to the rising popularity of smartphones and social media sites, and perpetrators can more readily engage in attacks without identity or facing penalties.¹⁰

Online harassment is another common device of cybercrime against women that encompasses diverse acts of digital perceptions aimed at offending, insulting, or hurting women. Cyberbullying is a branch of online bullying and consists of the intentional and repeated destruction of another person, often with the aim of humiliation or harm. This can manifest itself as derogatory or threatening remarks on social media, rumor-mongering or lies, or malicious information posted simply to make the victim look bad. Online harassment in

¹⁰ Gupta, R. (2016). *Legal protection for women against cybercrimes in India*. The Journal of Criminal Law, 22(1), 88-97.

Madhya Pradesh occurs regularly in the cultural context and women can come under public scrutiny either due to their involvement in an online discussion or when they express an opinion on a topic considered to be controversial. Social stigma and fear of punishment discourage many women to report such cases or protect themselves, and they become a target of constant punishment.

Revenge pornography, also known as non-consensual pornography, is an especially malicious and intrusive type of cyber-criminal offense. Revenge pornography This offense is committed when explicit or sensual pictures or videos of a woman are posted online, without her permission, usually by an ex-lover or a man or woman with whom she had been intimate. Such actions are usually performed in revenge, anger or out of spite and are meant to bring emotional distress and humiliation. Females who share their intimate content with others against their will face serious consequences such as facing permanent reputation loss, emotional distress, and being ostracized by society. The problem of social stigma and victim blaming is especially serious in Madhya Pradesh, where traditional values tend to place a strong focus on the reputation of a woman.

Another major cybercrime with disproportionately high impact on women is identity theft. Here, hackers take away personal details like photos, email addresses, or social media accounts and use them to portray the victim online. This may be done either due to fraudulent financial activities, defamation, or access to confidential accounts. Women become vulnerable to identity theft, particularly those who post their individual information on social sites or for online shopping. The possibility of being attacked by identity thieves is more pronounced in Madhya Pradesh where digital literacy among women is limited. When identity theft occurs to a woman, cybercriminals can apply it to unethical activities, culminating in heavy economic, emotional, and reputational losses.

Besides these crimes, cyber harassment involving sexual exploitation has been increasingly on the rise. The internet has been seen to present space through which sexual predators have used to prey on women through unsolicited sexual offerings where sordid messages or explicit rape photos are sent or tried to be extorted to get cash so that his/her sexual contents are not published. THE WOMEN Who Use Dating Apps On the Dating App, especially on social networking sites like Facebook, women are the ones who are the most likely to fall prey to such forms of exploitation since predators commonly employ trickery to influence or blackmail

victims into sending explicit content or divulging personal information. A good example of this can be seen in cases in Madhya Pradesh in which women have been blackmailed or threatened to distribute photographs or other private content relevant unless the victim acts upon demands of the perpetrator making it a highly unpleasant experience faced by the victim.¹¹

Phishing is another type of cybercrime where fraudsters impersonate official organizations, including those related to finances or government, to persuade women to share intimate personal data, such as banking credentials, passcodes, or social security numbers. Cybercriminals use phishing emails, fraudulent sites, or accounts on social media that seem similar to trusted entities and target women especially those that have lesser experience in digital security measures. When this information is acquired, offenders are able to do financial fraud, identity theft or any illegal actions. The absence of knowledge on phishing scams has exposed most women in Madhya Pradesh to these attacks as this state has not yet made significant gains in cyber literacy.

Female victims are also susceptible to fraud through cyber espionage, especially on internet shops and employment websites. Women are particularly at risk of being defrauded because fraudsters frequently present themselves as a possible employers or buyers who offer a working place or a great business agreement and deceive their victims into revealing personal data or transferring funds. This form of fraud may result in loss of money and may pose substantial emotional effects on the victims. Another widespread problem is online matrimonial fraud, when women become the victims of false marriage propositions. Such criminals tend to make false identities on matrimonial sites and trap women in relationships where they are exploited either economically or emotionally.¹²

One more aspect of digital risks besides those of cybercriminals is the absence of digital privacy, which can affect women as a particularly susceptible group to cybercrimes. Personal information like photos, conversations, messages are hacked and distributed continually, in most cases without the consent of the individuals. Data leaks have been on the rise, and women personal data are commonly being sold or even used maliciously when they are not aware of

¹¹ Hans, A. (2019). *Cybercrime laws and their challenges in India*. International Journal of Legal Studies, 8(1), 101-114.

¹² Jain, R. (2020). *Cyberbullying in India: A need for more stringent laws*. Indian Journal of Cyber Law, 5(2), 45-59.

it. Such leaks put women at risk of identity theft, harassment as well as financial crime. The problem of data privacy has become even more severe in the wake of the rollout of apps and websites that digitally collect data rapidly.¹³

The situation is compounded by the digital divide and gender disparity of access to technology. Not all women in Madhya Pradesh, especially those living in rural Uttar Pradesh, are digitally literate and lack access to new cybersecurity tools and information on ways to protect themselves. This ignorance to the danger of digital spaces and legal defenses that they have against it makes women especially vulnerable to these different kinds of cybercrime.

In summary, cyber crimes against women are numerous and multifaceted including cyberstalking and revenge pornography to identity thefts and sexual exploitations. Not only do these acts contravene the privacy and dignity of women but they also result in social rejection and mental disorders. These are especially devastating in Madhya Pradesh where cyber awareness is not very high, and a victim of such crimes is often blamed on the conventional societal norms of society. To deal with these problems, a comprehensive strategy involving legal reform, education of the population, and enhanced law enforcement activity is needed so that women cannot become victims of cybercrime, and the perpetrators of such crimes will be punished.

SOCIO-CULTURAL CHALLENGES

Women cybercrimes are not only about the challenges encountered in the area of law and technical issues, but also placed on socio-cultural issues. As is the case in large parts of India, societal norms, attitudes, and cultural beliefs play a great role in influencing the nature in which the women experience, report, and respond to cyber-crimes in Madhya Pradesh. Such socio-cultural issues serve as obstacles that discourage women to find solutions in obtaining justice, and in most situations these issues increase the circle of victimization. The comprehension of these socio-cultural mechanisms is essential to eliminating the causes of cybercrime and creating protection mechanisms to prevent digital abuse of women.¹⁴

¹³ Joseph, M. (2018). *Role of technology in addressing online crimes against women*. Cyber Security Review, 10(3), 134-142.

¹⁴ Kumar, A., & Kumar, R. (2017). *Cybercrime in India: An overview of women's vulnerability*. Journal of Cyber Security and Privacy, 6(3), 72-84.

Victim-blaming is one of the most wide-spread socio-cultural issues that plague women in Madhya Pradesh. This culture presumes the norm on trying to place the blame of a crime on the victim instead of the one to commit the crime. When it comes to cybercrime, it implies that women who are victims of online harassment, cyberstalking, or revenge pornography tend to be blamed that they have been victimized. They can be blamed of inciting the crime through their actions, i.e., sharing photos, using social media, and participating in online forums. Such strongly vested culture of victim-blaming makes women hesitant to report cyber crimes because they are afraid of it resulting in them being treated differently by their families and communities. Many women will be too ashamed to report their abuse because of feeling like a victim and instead they meet in the silence.

The other big socio-cultural obstacle in dealing with cyber offence against women in Madhya Pradesh is the stigma attached to the women who become victims of internet abuse. Any type of abuse, whether physical, emotional, or digital, once revealed in a society where a reputation of a woman is viewed as part of the family honor, will result in humiliation. Female victims of online harassment or without consent photos/images have been known to be accused of being promiscuous or morally corrupt when most times they are on the receiving end. In rural settings, adherence to traditional beliefs and patriarchy are more inflexible thus making this stigma more pronounced. Women are more hesitant to report cases of cybercrimes due to the fear of being denied social status and even ostracization. They might end up facing more judgment and blame on the part of their families, friends and communities instead of finding support.¹⁵

Besides victim-blaming and social stigma, another major issue in Madhya Pradesh is the absence of knowledge about cybercrimes and the legal possibilities offered to women. Most women, especially those in rural settings have no idea of the dangers they expose themselves to online or even the law with which they can defend themselves. This is further compounded by the digital divide in the state where women in the rural areas do not have access to technology and the internet. Women are also ill equipped to deter cyber crimes including cyberstalking, identity theft and cyberbullying even in instances when they have access to digital platforms. Such ignorance of cybersecurity measures implies that most women unconsciously put themselves at risk, including exchanging or sharing their sensitive data or

¹⁵ Langton, L., & Salter, M. (2019). *Cyberstalking: A public menace to women in the digital age*. Social Issues and Technology, 18(2), 45-58.

accepting friend requests by unknown people without being aware of the danger of these actions. Women have no safety nets against exploitation and abuse in digital world without education and awareness program.

Further, the issue of gender inequality tends to be social problem in Madhya Pradesh at the time, where women have been marginalised in a significant ground of social interactions. The gender aspect of technology application also makes women susceptible to cybercrimes. Most of the households are based on the female gender abiding by the common culture whereas men have ready access to technology and the services of internet. Their internet usage may also be restricted; so, women may not have possibilities to get access to educational resources, finding a job online, or even taking an equal part in online discussions. This only means that women in Madhya Pradesh are not only digitally isolated but also increasingly vulnerable to cybercrimes which may not be noticed or reported as they lack independence in the cyber world. In that regard, the widespread gender inequality in technology use contributes to the further amplification of the socio-cultural and technological obstacles that women encounter with regard to access to protection as well as justice

There are also cultural norms that determine how the police respond to cyber crimes against women. Madhya Pradesh police officers are, in most instances, not equipped in order to deal with cybercrimes related crimes and more specifically gender-based violence related cases. This is because the police department tends to brush aside the crimes or dismiss them because of the patriarchal approach. Women can discover that their protests are not accepted or they are not encouraged to go to law courts. Cops may be more interested in solving rather than investigating the family conflict so the scope of the digital abuse women go through is not considered as seriously as it should, and the culture of dismissiveness towards the experiences of women in a public setting, be it a street or a digital space, is a factor.¹⁶

Another important problem of Madhya Pradesh is the unavailability of support systems available to women who are victims of cybercrimes. The women who still choose to report acts of online abuse might discover that they have a paucity of institutional support and psychological care that could help them get over the emotional and psychological damage wreaked by online crimes. In a lot of situations, the individuals who are attacked with revenge

¹⁶ Law Commission of India. (2017). *Report on cybercrime and its legal implications in India*. Law Commission Report No. 267.

pornography or online harassment are broken by the emotional weight of such an attack, which may result in lasting mental diseases like nervousness, depression, and post-traumatic anxiety conditions. Nevertheless, there is a lack of counseling services and victim support programs culture to the cybercrime victims in Madhya Pradesh as in many other regions of India. It dumps many women to face the legal and emotional aftermath of cybercrimes almost alone (with little or no professional help or assistance).¹⁷

There is also the inter generational impact of the traditional gender roles in contributing to the social-cultural issues surrounding cybercrimes against women. This is the case in most families especially those in the rural set up because the seniors do not have the knowledge to fully know what cybercrimes are or worst still they may do away with such knowledge and term it as of no importance. This does not conceive an understanding and inculcation of ancient concepts of what women were expected to do and behave, and this practice might result in a silence of the problem of cybercrime. Women can be discouraged to talk due to the fear that the family members will not understand or will support their acting against them through legal proceedings. This particularly applies to young women, who are generally shy of having brought shame or dishonor to their families by involving their governments in reporting such crimes.

Last but not least, the absence of gender-tailored education that deals with legislation on cybercrimes and online safety further potentiates the socio-cultural issues that women experience. Attempts to teach about cybercrime in school and society have already been made, but they are usually not enough and do not take into account the needs of women. Many women are left unprepared to guard themselves against cybercrimes without proper education concerning the rights of users in the digital spaces, precaution practices, and the implications of online abuse. This ignorance of knowledge has created a cycle of helplessness, with women still exposed and mistreated online with absolute ignorance of their protective rights and means of protecting themselves.

In sum, socio-cultural dilemma of women in Madhya pradesh regarding cybercrimes is multifaceted. Underreported and underestimated cybercrimes against women are the results of victim-blaming, social stigma, the absence of awareness, gender inequality, and patriarchal

¹⁷ Mittal, S. (2020). *Cybercrime and the status of women's legal protection in Madhya Pradesh*. Journal of Indian Legal Studies, 7(2), 88-102.

attitudes. To deal with those problems properly, a change of attitude toward women empowerment and digital rights has to take place in society. This should be attained by implementing wholesome sensitisation, gender conscious law changes and support structures that approach women and make them victim of the crime and petitionable without fear of stigmatisations, retribution or victim blaming.

CHALLENGES

The current issues surrounding the response to cybercrimes against women, especially in Madhya Pradesh, are complex and are rooted in the social and cultural and technological issues. These impediments do not only slack correctly enforcing the existing laws but also allow women with no ways to seek justice and defend themselves against digital abuse. To address these problems more comprehensively, it is possible to recommend changes to the legal, social and technological environment.

Among the first problems is the lack of information among women regarding the dangers that they might encounter online and the legal action they can pursue. Women are largely unaware of cybercrimes and how to protect themselves in Madhya Pradesh, especially in most areas of the State. This obliviousness is among the police force too, with various officers ill-prepared to deal with cybercrime cases, especially gender-related crimes. Lack of victim support and victim-blaming also discourage women to report cybercrimes. Also, rural women of Madhya Pradesh are at risk of being exploited by cybercriminals due to the lack of digital literacy.¹⁸

To solve these issues, implementing cybersecurity training initiatives on women, and particularly in rural regions, is essential. The specific areas these programs should address are digital safety, cyber hygiene, and the knowledge of legal rights, and women may thus better defend themselves in the digital realm. The state, as well as civil society orgs must strive to make all underserved regions more digitally literate and help women in particular to be more comfortable in using the internet.

The other major weakness is the limited capability of law enforcement agencies in addressing cybercrimes. In Madhya Pradesh, most police stations do not have the technical expertise to investigate online offenses, so complaints are either not answered well or at all. Law

¹⁸ Mohanty, R. (2018). *Online harassment: A rising threat to women in India*. International Journal of Women's Studies, 4(3), 121-130.

enforcement agencies should also be provided with specialized training in cybercrime so that they can effectively deal with the cases and also it would be very easy to have dedicated cybercrime cells in each and every district so that when the crimes are reported women can be provided with well trained staff.

Further, prosecution of cybercrimes is still cumbersome and slow in a legal process. The convoluted nature of investigating cybercrimes and the absence of technology in collecting and storing digital evidence can result in excessive delays to punish the individuals committing the crimes, especially against women. The solution to this includes the judicial system incorporating more expedited cybercrime justice grading systems, and law enforcement agencies being supplied with forensic technologies to make inquiries and present the digital evidence into the court adequately.¹⁹

In order to minimize the stigma associated with cybercrimes, supportive spaces should be designed to allow women the option of reporting cases without the fear of social reprisal or reproach. To help women recover after committing cybercrimes, it is essential to create victim support networks that provide them with counseling and legal support. Such networks may also offer an avenue to create awareness and combat the structural ways, which support culture of cybercrimes to flourish.

Last, there is a need to reform the law to seal existing loopholes. Indian Penal Code and the Information Technology Act, 2000 require periodic amendments to look into the rising threat of online harassment and revenge porn. Moreover, the idea of international cooperation to address cross-border cybercrimes should be specifically addressed.

To sum up, the issues of cybercrimes against women in Madhya Pradesh must be addressed in a synergistic effort involving the government, police, civil society, and community. It can be achieved by increasing awareness, strengthening law enforcement, providing enabling conditions to victims, and revising legal systems, and in this way a safer digital environment can be established ensuring justice to victims of cybercrime.

¹⁹ Patil, S., & Patel, R. (2019). *Cybercrime against women: Issues and challenges in Indian law*. *Cyber Law Review*, 8(1), 101-112

CONCLUSION

To sum it all up, female cybercrime in Madhya Pradesh is a serious issue of legal, social and technological proportions. The next area of opportunity became the increased opportunities of criminals with the rapid development of digital technology, and women are becoming an increasing target of online abuse, including cyberstalking, revenge pornography, identity theft, and online harassment. Although India has engaged in developing legal institutions like Indian Penal Code and the Information Technology Act, 2000 in order to cover these crimes, there has been a poor implementation of these acts within the state of Madhya Pradesh because of lack of law enforcement capacity, awareness and barriers embedded in the society.

Victim-blaming and the stigmatization of the women that report cases of online abuse are also one of the major problems that are still supporting the occurrences of cybercrimes to the women. Such cultural orientation makes many women not report the crimes often resulting into unreported crime. This stigma is even severe in the rural segments of Madhya Pradesh where the societal expectation and the role of both genders are more conservative and strict and victims cannot find justice. In addition, women are more prone to online exploitation; this is because of their low digital literacy and awareness of the internet, particularly, low awareness levels in rural areas.²⁰

Although the legal system has legal provisions to secure the rights of women, the legal system is however faced by slow court procedures, technological loopholes, lack of uniformity and poor enforcement. In minor districts, law enforcement agencies do not have sufficient skills and equipment to investigate high-tech crimes, and when receiving complaints, they may react to them effectively and promptly. This means that women are left helpless and this leads to silence culture where cybercrimes go on without legal action.

The only way to address these problems is through implementing thorough reforms. It is essential to train women in cybersecurity to create awareness on the dangers of internet exploits and also give them the resources that they can use to uphold their privacy and dignity. The knowledge gap thus can be filled by initiating digital literacy programs which are specific to women in the rural geography and enable them to use the online space safely. In addition,

²⁰ Rao, A. (2021). *Understanding digital privacy and cybercrime laws in India*. Journal of Information Technology Law, 5(3), 153-167.

cybercrime-specific cells in each district as well as training law enforcers in cybercrime are imperative in order to facilitate successful prosecution and investigation of cybercrime.²¹

In addition to this victim support systems should be established to encourage a situation in which women won't be afraid to report cybercrimes. Support groups that provide legal advice, emotional therapy as well as anonymity will be critical in ensuring that women can overcome the traumatic experience of cybercrimes. The legal changes should also aim at making the laws adapt to changing technological menace and give effective resort to the victims that is timely and explicit.

Finally, the multi-dimensional solution, i.e., a combination of legal, social and technological solutions will have paramount importance in making the digital space safer for women in Madhya Pradesh. This takes joint efforts by the government, the civil society and law enforcers to safeguard and preserve the rights of women, deliver justice and guard against future crimes through cyberspace. The only thing we can do is to combat these challenges directly until we achieve a better society where women not only feel safe online; they are also bold enough to navigate the online world comfortably without any form of exploitation.

²¹ Soni, M., & Jindal, R. (2018). *Analyzing the effectiveness of cybercrime laws in India*. Journal of Indian Legal Studies, 6(3), 78-92.

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