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## **Cyber Sexual Victimization of Female College Students and its Impacts: A study in Rajasthan**

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### **Abstract**

The growing technology has given enormous comfort and has broken the ties of distance, but at the same time, it has posed several challenges to be dealt with. The criminological perspective dealing with increasing cyber crime & criminals has posed difficulties in front of law enforcement agencies and society. One of the common forms of crime documented in several pieces of literature is the Cyber Sexual Victimization of females. Though the aspects and forms addressed are different in different kinds of literature. Cybersexual victimization leaves a victim with several adverse impacts; it snatches the rights and freedom of the victim to use cyberspace. Many victims face severe adverse and irreversible effects that need intensive care and Counseling. The research article is made from the victims chosen from five districts of Rajasthan, selecting four colleges from each district. The article has tried to disseminate the forms and impacts of cyber sexual victimization. Additionally, it will suggest specific measures that may contribute to preventing cyber sexual victimization.

**Keywords:** Cyberspace, Impacts, Sexual, Victim, Victimization

### **Introduction**

The cyber-world, though, seems to be a virtual space but holds a cluster of numerous crimes that affect the victim holistically. The virtual world encloses in its development and also a crime. Countless pieces of literature have documented varied forms of violence against females. They are exposed to offenses that severely violate their rights and freedom, making their stake silent. The rapid growth of technology has introduced the occurrence of cyber sexual victimization. Cyberspace or the cyber medium is used for committing the offense.

The form of victimization in an online environment may include cyber harassment, cyber stalking, revenge porn, doxing, morphing, etc.. The perpetrator in these cases may be a known or unknown person; he may be near or very far from the victim. A perpetrator is always in quest of a suitable victim; here, suitable indicates a person who can be easily victimized.

### **Legal aspects of Sexual Cyber Crime in India**

#### **The IT Act, 2000**

**Section 66A in The Information Technology Act, 2000:** 66A Punishment for sending offensive messages through communication service, etc. -Any person who sends, using a computer resource or a communication device,-

- (a) any information that is grossly offensive or has menacing character; or
- (b) any information which he knows to be false, but to cause annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred or ill will, persistently by making use of such computer resource or a communication device; or
- (c) any electronic mail or electronic mail message for the purpose of causing annoyance or inconvenience or to deceive or to mislead the addressee or recipient about the origin of such messages, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and with fine.

**67A Punishment for publishing or transmitting of material containing sexually explicit act, etc., in electronic form:** Whoever publishes or transmits or causes to be published or transmitted in the electronic form any material which contains sexually explicit act or conduct.

#### **The Indian Penal Code**

**Section 354A ii, iii:** and explicit sexual overtures; or a demand or request for sexual favors; or showing pornography against the will of a woman; or making sexually colored remarks shall be guilty of the offense of sexual harassment.

**Section 354 C: Voyeurism:** Any man who watches or captures the image of a woman engaging in a private act in circumstances where she would usually expect not to be observed by the perpetrator or by any other person at the behest of the perpetrator or disseminates such image.

**Section 354 D: Stalking:** Any man who Follows a woman and contacts, or attempts to contact such woman to foster personal interaction repeatedly despite a clear indication of disinterest by such woman; or monitors the use by a woman of the internet, email or any other form of electronic communication, commits the offence of stalking; Provided that such conduct shall not amount to stalking if the man who pursued it proves that—it was pursued for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime and the man accused of stalking had been entrusted with the responsibility of prevention and detection of crime by the State; or it was pursued under any law or to comply with any condition or requirement imposed by any person under any law; or in the particular circumstances such conduct was reasonable and justified.

### Review of literature

Cybercrime is a technology-based crime in which technology plays a role across a broad spectrum of activities (Quayle, 2020). Internet technology has paved new diversion to crime and different forms of victimization (Akther, 2020). Fatima & Husain (2020) in their article mentioned cybercrime as an entity after the internet was introduced. The internet has changed the form of sexual crime, and cybersexual crime is a variant of cybercrime.

Reed, Wong & Raj (2019) have described Cyber Sexual harassment as the sexual deliverance of sexually aggressive and harassing photos or text using the digital medium. Cripps & Stermac (2018) described cyber sexual violence as a form of sexually aggressive behavior that is committed using digital mode. These behaviors include image-based exploitation, non-consensual pornography, cyberstalking, and gender-based hate speech.

Sethi & Ghatak (2018) has described cyber sexual harassment as a crime committed through the internet involving uninvited advances & communications. These advances and communications may be in the form of unsolicited posts, social media comments, emails, images, instant unwelcomed messaging, etc., all directed towards the victim. Additionally, Williams (2013) mentioned sexual victimization as a continuous and ongoing event, not an isolated event. Schenk (2008) mentioned that the perpetrators use the cyber medium to connect with the victim and their acquaintances from online & offline modes to commit the crime.

### Forms of cyber sexual victimization

Cybercrime generally commences through online fake IDs created on different online platforms causing severe victimization. These victimizations include blackmailing, threatening, cyberbullying, with the intention of revenge, and cyber defamation (Kumar & Priyanka, 2019). Females have confronted privacy invasion, being stalked, sexual bullying, morphing, the transmission of private photos, and sexual defamation (Verma, Verma, Pal, & Verma, 2022). Beliraya & Abhilasha(2020). Women are easy targets of cyber crimes and are easily victimized. Some forms of cybersexual victimization include cyberbullying, sextortion, stalking, etc. Cybersex, bullying, non-consensual pornography, transmission & publication of obscene material were mentioned as forms of cybersexual victimization (Bhongale, 2021).

### Impacts of Cyber Sexual Victimization

Nixon (2014); Wright(2015) identified anxiety, depression, loneliness, and suicidal tendencies as post-victimization impacts. Stevens, Nurse, and Arief (2021) mentioned the effects of adding panic attacks as the impact of cyber sexual victimization. A study by Peled (2019) among undergraduates pointed out that cyber sexual victimization affects emotional, academic, and social development.

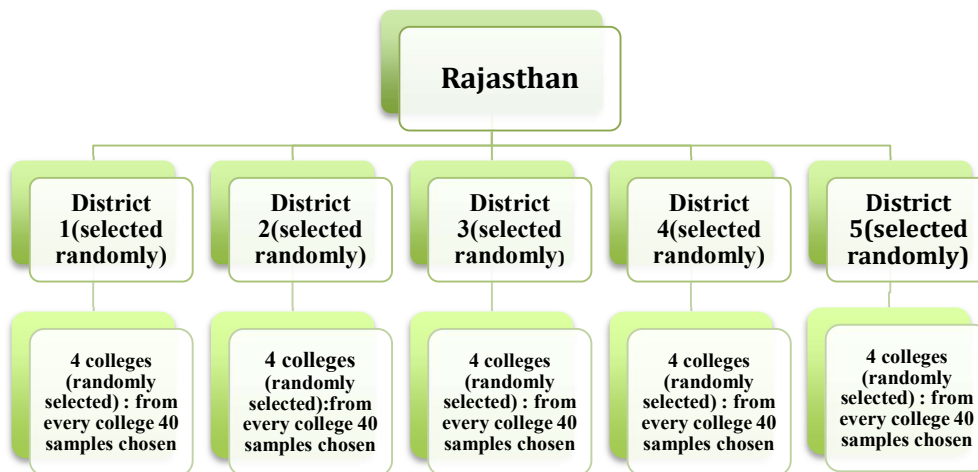
Beran & Li (2005) studied cyber harassment and identified that victims had experienced anger, sadness, and additional forms of harassment post-cyber harassment. Aune (2009) identified that the victim feels inadequate and overly self-conscious and sometimes may develop suicidal thoughts. Gordon(2022) categorized the impacts as Emotional: stress, humiliation, isolation, anger, and powerlessness; Mental effects: Depression, anxiety, low-self esteem, academic issues, self-harm, and suicidal tendencies; behavioral: keeping weapons, drug abuse, skipping the institution hours; Physical: Gastrointestinal disease, eating disorder and sleep disturbances. Cyber victimization has emotional dysregulation, psychosomatic problems, and problems in social life (Shoib, Philip, Bista, Saeed, Javed, Ori, Bashir & Chandradasa, 2022). In Audrin & Blaya (2020) study, cyber sexual victimization was associated with lower well-being, social competence, impulsivity, and low self-esteem. In some situations, it was also found to be associated with deviant behaviors. It was also found by Choudhary & Rufus (2019) that when victims neglect the victimization, it may lead to severe negative impacts in future.

### Objectives

- To enlist forms of Cyber Sexual Victimization experienced by the victims
- Mention the adverse impacts of Cyber Sexual Victimization under four categories.
- To suggest certain measures that may contribute to preventing cyber sexual victimization.

### **Methodology of the Study**

- **Locale of the Study:** The locale of the present study includes five districts of Rajasthan, namely Bharatpur, Jodhpur, Nagaur, Udaipur, and Bikaner.
- **Sample for the Study:** Female students of College who have faced cyber sexual victimization.
- **Sampling Procedure:** Systematic sampling was adopted for selecting the samples for doctoral research of this article's first author under the second author's supervision.
- **Sample Size :**
  - ❖ A total of 800 samples were selected for the study.
  - ❖ The samples were chosen from 5 different districts of Rajasthan by simple random sampling.
  - ❖ From a single district, 4 Colleges were chosen randomly.
  - ❖ From one College, 40 samples were chosen by systematic sampling.
  - ❖ Hence, the total sample size from 1 district is 160.
  - ❖ Since five districts were chosen, the total sample size became  $160 \times 5 = 800$ .



**Picture:1**

- **Research Tool used for the Data Collection:** The tool used for data collection was a semi-structured interview schedule to elicit victims' responses. The interview schedule comprises questions related to forms of cyber sexual victimization (CSV) and the impacts of cyber sexual victimization on the victims.

### *Operational Definitions*

- **Female College students:** For this study, the term "Female College Students" means those females are pursuing their education from the colleges of Rajasthan state.
- **Cyberspace:** It refers to the virtual space in which the electronic medium is used for communication
- **Victim:** For this study, "victim" means a female student of College who has experienced Cyber Sexual Victimization.
- **Sexual victimization:** The term 'sexual victimization' used in this study includes cybersexual victimization due to different forms of cyber sexual crimes mentioned in the Indian Laws.
- **Presentation & Analysis of data:** The data was presented & analyzed using tables and mathematical calculations.

- **Ethical Issues:** At every stage of the study, the ethics of social research were maintained. Informed consent was obtained from the participants after properly explaining the pertinent objectives, minimum risk of participation in the study, etc. Confidentiality was maintained considering the privacy and anonymity of the study participants. All these concerns contributed to building rapport with the participants. The participants were informed to withdraw if they assumed the presence of an element of harm during the study.

### Result and Findings

A total of 376 out of 800 female participants were sexually victimized in cyberspace, constituting 47% of the total participants. The forms of victimization faced are presented in a tabular form with a numerical representation. The impacts of cyber sexual victimization are classified into four types: 1) Physical; 2) Emotional; 3) Social, and; 4) Academic

**Forms of Cyber Sexual Victimization(N=376)**

S.No.	Forms of Cyber Sexual Victimization	Experienced (In numbers)	Not Experienced (In numbers)
1.	Forced invitation for dates/sex /affection and attentions	348	28
2.	Instant unwelcomed messaging	359	17
3.	Showing indecent material on phone	238	138
4.	Email-bombing	16	360
5.	Morphing	2	374
6.	Doxing	11	365
7.	Voyeurism	1	375
8.	Cyber Stalking	322	54
9.	Cyber Bullying	196	180

**Table:1**

**Analysis:** Majority (359) of the victims experienced instant unwelcomed messaging followed by forced invitations for dates/sex/affection, and attention (348). 322 victims were being cyber stalked by the perpetrator, and 238 were shown indecent material on phones. Though, voyeurism was the least (1) form of cyber sexual victimization



experienced by the victim. These forms of cyber sexual victimization made the victim uncomfortable and posed the victim with an awkward situation.

### **Impacts of Cyber Sexual Victimization (N=376)**

#### **Physical Impacts**

S.No.	Impacts	Experienced (In numbers)	Not Experienced (In numbers)
1.	Headache	354	22
2.	Nightmares	110	266
3.	Nausea	13	363
4.	Muscle pain	41	335
5.	Frequent illness	162	214
6.	Frequent Shivering	192	184
7.	Continuous body weakness	222	154
8.	Improper food behavior	341	35
9.	Involvement in drug use	14	362
10.	Rapid Weight changes	274	102
11.	Changed sleep patterns (either desire for more sleep or sleeplessness)	310	66

**Table:2**

**Analysis:** Out of the Physical impacts, the prevalent impact among the victims was headache (354), followed by improper food behavior (341), changed sleep patterns (310), rapid weight changes (274), and continuous body weakness(222). The least faced impacts were nausea & involvement in drug use.

#### **Emotional impact**

S.No.	Emotional Impacts	Experienced (In numbers)	Not Experienced (In numbers)
1.	Anxiety	331	45
2.	Guilt	303	73
3.	Angry	354	22
4.	Mood swings	362	14



5.	Self blaming	279	97
6.	Low self esteem	211	165
7.	Suicidal tendencies	4	372
8.	Feeling of Insecurity	319	57
9.	Increased Dependency	237	139
10.	Tendency of self harm	41	335
11.	Lack of Confidence	348	28
12.	Feeling of Confusion	322	54
13.	Feel like crying	366	10
14.	Changed lifestyle	318	58
15.	Flashback of victimization incident	360	16

**Table:3**

**Analysis:** The sequence of the emotional impacts faced by the victims follows: feeling of crying (366)> mood swing(362)> Flashback of victimization incident (360)> being angry majority of the time(354)> lack of confidence (348)>anxiety(331)> feeling of confusion(322)> feeling of insecurity(319)>changed lifestyle(318). The least observed impacts were a tendency to self-harm (41) and a suicidal tendency (4). The other impacts faced by the victims were: self-blaming, low self-esteem, and increased dependency. Lack of confidence and low self-esteem were mentioned as ill effects of cyber sexual victimization on the website of the Council of Europe under Cyber Violence ([www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)).

#### Social impacts

S.No.	Social Impacts	Experienced (In numbers)	Not Experienced (In numbers)
1.	Immediate marriage	6	370
2.	Shrinking social interactions	132	244
3.	Limited or Reduced social mobility	247	129
4.	Increasing friendship with boys	9	367
5.	Blamed by family members	299	77
6.	Hatred towards society	81	295
7.	Lack of trust by parents	209	167

8.	Fear to use social media	369	7
9.	Avoiding making new social relationships	315	61

Table:4

**Analysis:** The most common social impact observed was fear of using social media (369), followed by avoidance of new relationships (315), being blamed by the family for the victimization (299), and the reduction in social mobility (247). Few victims (9) felt that increasing friendships with boys might protect them from future cyber sexual victimization. However, the immediate marriage of the victim was conducted in very few cases (6).

**Academic impacts**

S.No.	Academic Impacts	Experienced (In numbers)	Not Experienced (In numbers)
1.	Disinterest in hobbies	313	63
2.	Felt abandoned by friends	65	311
3.	Poor academic performance	348	28
4.	Changed academic institution	11	365
5.	Lack of interest in academic work	363	13
6.	Frequent Absenteeism from Institution	44	332
7.	Attended only few classes due to fear of Victimization	33	343

Table:5

**Analysis:** From the academic impacts majority (363) of the victims have faced disinterest in academic work, followed by the poor academic performance (348) and disinterest in hobbies (313). Sixty-five of the victims felt abandoned by their friends, 44 frequently did not attend College due to fear of victimization, and 33 did not attend the classroom due to fear of victimization.

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***Need for Counseling to the victims of Cyber Sexual Victimization***

The study's findings reveal that any form of cyber sexual victimization deteriorates the victim's well-being. It poses several challenges to the victim and their practical living. Persistent suppression of the victimization pulls back the victim and reduces her growth in every sphere of life. Counseling the victim may be one of the efficient ways of tackling sexual victimization and finding a way through it. A victim feels free after expressing problems in front of the counselor that she could not have expressed in front of any other person, not even the family. Counseling is not always a specific solution. Instead, it supports an individual in dealing with problems of life.

## **Conclusion and Suggestions**

### **Conclusion**

The prevalence of cybersexual victimization is an area of concern. A perpetrator is always in quest of a suitable victim. Detection of the cyber perpetrator is challenging as a perpetrator may commit a crime far away from the victim. Handling the victim and her stage post-victimization situation is the need of the hour. Victims reporting and reaction behavior should be enhanced to identify and prevent victimization. Cybersexual victimization is an obstacle in the growth of every female and is a severe form of rights violation; hence, it needs to be prevented if not prevented, then it needs to be cured.

### **Suggestions**

- **Being alert while using Social Media:** Alertness while using social media may reduce the risk of being sexually victimized in cyberspace. A person should be aware of the usage of any particular application on the internet.
- **Beware of strangers in cyberspace:** quick contact with strangers in cyberspace can be extremely harmful. It may pose an individual at risk of being victimized.
- **Transparency of online life:** It has become a trend to post every second of life on the internet. This transparency of life in cyberspace develops a high risk of cyber sexual victimization.
- **Reporting of the victimization:** if any females have been victimized, they must report the crime. Hiding the victimization may lead to further victimization. If required, take the support of Counseling.

- **If the victim then faces it:** In case any female has fallen into the trap of cyber sexual victimization, denial of victimization would worsen the impacts. Accepting victimization and facing it is the solution to victimization.

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