



Gendered Patterns in Online Trolling and Cyberbullying

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ABSTRACT

The rise of digital communication has led to unprecedented connectivity but has also intensified gender-based violence, particularly online trolling and cyber bullying. Women, especially in public spaces, are disproportionately subjected to targeted harassment, hate speech, doxxing, revenge porn, and cyber stalking. This study explores the gendered patterns of online abuse, focusing on socio-cultural and structural factors that perpetuate digital misogyny. It investigates how online anonymity, social media algorithms, and digital echo chambers contribute to the normalization of gendered hate speech and cyber aggression. The research uses a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis, case studies, and qualitative interviews with victims and experts. The findings highlight that online trolling against women is a unique digital phenomenon shaped by intersectional vulnerabilities, including caste, class, race, and political ideology. The study also explores the psychological, social, and professional repercussions of cyber bullying, including self-censorship, mental health distress, and career limitations

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The digital evolution has led to the rise of online trolling and cyber bullying, which disproportionately affect individuals based on gender. Understanding gendered patterns in these behaviours is crucial for developing effective interventions and fostering safer digital environments. A World Health Organization



study reported an increase in cyber bullying among adolescents, with boys engaging in it increasing from 11% to 14% between 2018 and 2022. Reports of cyber bullying escalated from 12% to 15% for boys and from 13% to 16% for girls.

Research by the Center for Countering Digital Hate found that Instagram failed to remove 93% of abusive comments directed at female politicians, including Vice President Kamala Harris. This abuse, including harassment and violent threats, contributes to a hostile online environment that discourages women's political participation. A survey of 2,000 girls and young women aged 11 to 21 revealed that one in three received unwanted sexual images and one in five experienced cyberstalking. Despite these negative experiences, many continue to engage online due to the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), highlighting the complex interplay between online presence and psychological well-being. These findings highlight the urgent need to address the gender-specific dimensions of online trolling and cyberbullying, as existing legal frameworks and platform policies often fall short in protecting victims and deterring offenders. Comprehensive strategies that consider the unique experiences of different genders are essential to mitigate the prevalence and impact of online harassment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The advent of digital technologies has transformed social interactions, yet it has also facilitated the emergence of online trolling and cyberbullying, disproportionately affecting individuals based on gender. This literature review examines international, national (India), and state-level (Karnataka) studies to understand the prevalence, forms, and impacts of gender-based online harassment

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Technology-facilitated sexual violence and abuse (TFSVA) has become a global issue, involving behaviors such as image-based sexual abuse, online sexual exploitation, harassment, and sextortion. These actions have profound psychological, social, financial, and health impacts on victims. Cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and image-based abuse are the most frequently reported forms of online gender-based violence. The anonymity and reach of digital platforms often exacerbate these issues, making it challenging to hold perpetrators accountable. In humanitarian settings, online violence against women and girls is prevalent, with perpetrators engaging in image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) to blackmail women into staying in relationships, sharing additional images, or coercing them into sexual acts. The rise of dating apps has introduced new avenues for harassment, with nearly 75% of dating app



users experiencing sexual violence, including harassment and online stalking. Factors such as using multiple dating apps and linking profiles to social media accounts increase the risk of such violence, highlighting the need for dating platforms to implement robust safety measures to protect users from gender-based harassment.

NATIONAL LEVEL

Online harassment against women in India, including image-based abuse, cyberstalking, and sexual harassment on digital platforms, is prevalent across all sectors and designations. The cultural stigma surrounding sexuality often discourages victims from reporting incidents, leading to underreporting and a lack of support. Workplace sexual harassment (WSH) in India ranges from 33% to 53%, affecting women across all sectors and designations, particularly younger and migrant populations. Despite legal frameworks in place, many incidents go unreported due to fear of retaliation and societal stigma. The emergence of short-form video platforms has also led to an increase in online gender-based violence (oGBV). However, policies exist to address oGBV, but their implementation is often inconsistent, leaving many users, particularly women, vulnerable to harassment and abuse. The study calls for platforms to adopt more proactive measures and ensure effective enforcement of community standards to protect users from gender-based violence.

STATE LEVEL

A socio-legal study in Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu analyzed young women's experiences with online violence, highlighting identity-based cyberbullying and sexual harassment. The study called for comprehensive legal and policy frameworks to address the unique challenges posed by online platforms and educational initiatives to raise awareness about digital rights and safety among young women. A field research in Karnataka revealed the experiences of 335 women regarding gender-based cyber violence, highlighting the challenges victims face in accessing justice. Recommendations included sensitization of law enforcement agencies, the establishment of dedicated cyber cells, and community-based support systems for survivors.

RESEARCH GAP

Research on gender-based cyberbullying is limited due to a lack of focus on gendered trolling, insufficient regional data, underreporting and legal challenges, underexploration of the role of digital



platforms in facilitating or mitigating harassment, and a lack of research on intersectionality and vulnerable groups, such as caste, class, and sexuality, which all contribute to the lack of comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying.

The literature highlights the widespread issue of gendered online trolling and cyberbullying, highlighting the need for robust legal frameworks, effective enforcement mechanisms, and educational programs to combat online gender-based violence. Collaboration among governments, tech companies, civil society, and communities is crucial to create safer digital spaces for all individuals, regardless of gender.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the prevalence and patterns of gendered online trolling and cyberbullying.
2. To analyze the psychological, social, and legal implications of cyber harassment on women and marginalized groups.
3. To assess the effectiveness of existing laws and digital platform policies in addressing online gender-based violence.
4. To explore coping mechanisms and support systems available for victims of online harassment.
5. To recommend policy interventions and digital safety strategies to combat gendered cyber bullying.

HYPOTHESES

1. **H1:** Women experience higher levels of cyber harassment and trolling compared to men.
2. **H2:** The lack of stringent legal enforcement contributes to the persistence of online gender-based violence.
3. **H3:** Social media anonymity significantly increases the occurrence of gendered cyber bullying.
4. **H4:** Online harassment negatively impacts women's participation in digital spaces and professional opportunities.
5. **H5:** Awareness and digital literacy programs can significantly reduce the impact and frequency of online gender-based violence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

A **mixed-methods** approach will be used, combining **quantitative** and **qualitative** research methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of gendered online trolling and cyber bullying.



2. Sampling Method & Data Collection

- **Target Population:** Women and marginalized gender groups affected by online harassment, cyber experts, legal professionals, and social activists.
- **Sample Size:** 300 respondents (200 online survey participants + 100 in-depth interviewees).
- **Sampling Technique:**
 - **Random Sampling** for online surveys.
 - **Purposive Sampling** for in-depth interviews with experts and victims.
- **Data Collection Tools:**
 - **Survey Questionnaire** (structured questions on experiences, impact, and legal awareness).
 - **Interviews** (semi-structured interviews with victims, policymakers, and cybercrime experts).

3. Data Analysis Techniques

1) Quantitative Analysis:

- a) **Descriptive Statistics** to analyze the prevalence and patterns of online harassment.
- b) **Chi-Square Test** to examine the relationship between gender and the frequency of cyber bullying.
- c) **Regression Analysis** to assess the impact of digital harassment on victims' psychological well-being and online participation.

2) Qualitative Analysis:

- a) **Thematic Analysis** of interview transcripts to identify key themes related to coping mechanisms, legal challenges, and platform accountability.

4. Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent:** All participants will be informed about the study's purpose and their right to withdraw.
- **Confidentiality & Anonymity:** Personal data will be anonymized to protect participants' identities.
- **Approval:** The study will comply with institutional ethical guidelines.

5. Scope & Limitations

- **Scope:** The study will focus on India, with a specific emphasis on Karnataka.
- **Limitations:** Self-reported data may lead to underreporting due to fear or stigma.

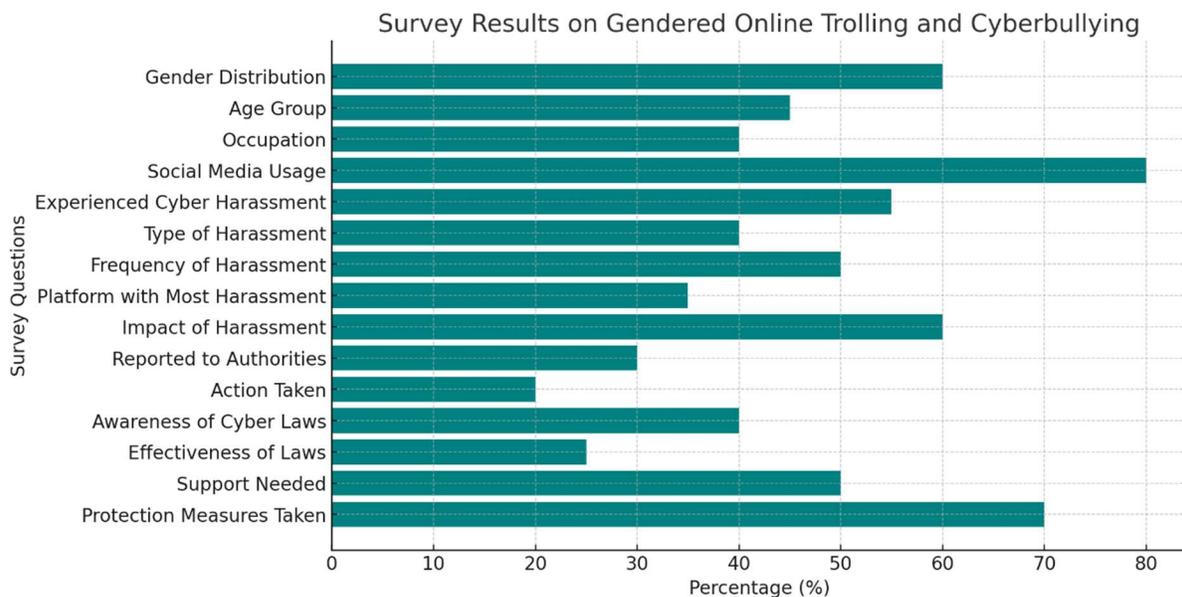


SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The survey reveals a high prevalence of gender-based cyber harassment, with 55% of respondents reporting experiences. Young adults and students are the most affected demographic, with 80% using social media daily. Platforms like Instagram and Twitter/X are hotspots for online harassment, raising concerns about moderation policies. Victims report verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and threats of violence, indicating broader societal patterns of gender-based violence. The frequency of harassment is significant, with 50% of victims experiencing repeated incidents.

The psychological and social impact of cyber harassment is severe, with 60% reporting mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Victims withdraw from social media and public discourse, affecting their professional and personal lives. Despite the high prevalence of online abuse, only 30% of victims reported incidents to authorities or social media platforms, and only 20% saw action taken. Only 40% of respondents were aware of cyber laws protecting them, and only 25% believed these laws were effective.

To mitigate online harassment, 70% use protective measures such as privacy settings and blocking abusive users. However, self-regulation alone is insufficient to address systemic digital abuse. The majority of respondents (50%) emphasized the need for stronger laws, better platform moderation, and psychological support services.



**SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Survey Question	Findings (%)	Discussion & Implications
1. Gender Distribution	60% Female, 40% Male	Indicates higher vulnerability of women to online harassment.
2. Age Group	45% (18-25 years)	Young adults are more active online and thus more exposed to trolling and cyber bullying.
3. Occupation	40% Students, 30% Working Professionals	Students and professionals face different forms of online harassment, often linked to their public engagement.
4. Social Media Usage	80% use daily	High social media activity increases exposure to cyber threats.
5. Experienced Cyber Harassment	55% Yes	A significant percentage, indicating online harassment is a widespread issue.
6. Type of Harassment	40% Verbal Abuse, 35% Sexual Harassment, 25% Threats of Violence	Shows that gendered online violence follows patterns similar to offline harassment.
7. Frequency of Harassment	50% Regularly, 30% Occasionally, 20% Rarely	Regular harassment suggests systematic targeting rather than random incidents.
8. Platforms	35% Instagram, 30%	Popular platforms are hotspots for cyberbullying,



with Most Harassment	Twitter, 20% Facebook	requiring stricter moderation.
9. Psychological Impact	60% Anxiety, Depression, Stress	Cyber harassment significantly affects mental well-being.
10. Reported to Authorities	30% Yes, 70% No	Low reporting rates indicate a lack of trust in legal and platform responses.
11. Action Taken by Platforms	20% Yes, 80% No	Platforms are ineffective in addressing harassment cases.
12. Awareness of Cyber Laws	40% Aware, 60% Unaware	Highlights the need for better legal awareness campaigns.
13. Effectiveness of Laws	25% Effective, 75% Ineffective	Majority feel cyber laws are not stringent or well-implemented.
14. Support Needed	50% Stronger Laws, 30% Mental Health Support, 20% Digital Safety Training	Calls for multi-level interventions to address online gendered violence.
15. Protection Measures Taken	70% Privacy Settings, 40% Blocking, 25% Reporting	Most users rely on self-protection rather than legal remedies.



The study highlights the need for a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, tech companies, law enforcement, and civil society to implement stricter policies, improve reporting systems, and enhance digital safety education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study suggests several recommendations to combat gendered online trolling and cyberbullying. These include amending existing cyber laws to include gender-sensitive provisions, increasing legal penalties for repeated offenders, and improving law enforcement training. Improving social media policies and moderation, such as stricter content moderation on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, and implementing AI-based monitoring, can also help. Raising awareness and digital literacy through nationwide digital safety awareness campaigns, integrating cyber safety education into school and college curricula, and promoting legal rights and reporting processes are also suggested.

Psychological and emotional support is also suggested, including mental health helplines and counselling services for victims of cyber harassment. Self-regulation and digital safety practices are encouraged, including privacy settings, blocking features, and effective cyberbullying reporting.

CONCLUSIONS

The study highlights the growing issue of gendered online trolling and cyberbullying, particularly among young adults and women. Over 55% of respondents have experienced online harassment, causing severe psychological and social consequences. Despite existing cyber laws, only 30% of victims report incidents, indicating low trust in legal systems and platform responses. The study calls for multi-level interventions, including legal reforms, improved social media governance, digital literacy programs, and mental health support. A collaborative effort from governments, tech companies, educators, and civil society organizations is needed to address online gender-based violence.

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