
CYBERBULLYING OF WOMEN IN INDIA: ISSUES, LAWS, AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of internet services and social media platforms has transformed communication and public participation in India. Women increasingly use digital platforms for education, employment, journalism, business, and social interaction.³ However, the expansion of digital technology has also led to rising incidents of cyberbullying and online harassment against women. Cyberbullying includes online threats, cyberstalking, abusive messages, fake social media profiles, circulation of private photographs, trolling, and publication of obscene content without consent.⁴ Such acts seriously affect the dignity, privacy, reputation, and mental health of women.⁵

This research paper examines the issue of cyberbullying against women in India and analyses the legal framework available to address such offences. The paper discusses constitutional protections, provisions under the Information Technology Act, 2000, and important judicial decisions of the Supreme Court.⁶ It also analyses practical challenges such as lack of awareness, underreporting of cases, weak cyber enforcement, and misuse of technology.⁷ Finally, the paper suggests reforms including stronger legislation, digital awareness programs, effective cyber policing, and accountability of social media platforms.⁸

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³ NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU, CRIME IN INDIA 2023, Vol. II, ch. 9, Cyber Crimes Against Women and Children (2024).

⁴ Danielle Citron & Mary Anne Franks, Criminalizing Revenge Porn, 49 Wake Forest L. Rev. 345, 350–358 (2014).

⁵ Monika Jain, Psychological Impact of Cyberbullying on Women, 8 Nat'l J. Cyber Security L. 66, 70–73 (2024).

⁶ Information Technology Act, 2000, section 66C, 66D, 66E, 67 & 67A, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India); Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, (2017) 10 SCC 1.

⁷ Samina Khan, Technology Facilitated Gender Harassment Against Women in India, 31 IIUM L.J. 145, 150–158 (2023).

⁸ Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology, Action Taken Report on Social Media Regulation and Online Safety, Lok Sabha Secretariat (2025).

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I. Introduction

The internet has become an important part of modern life. Social media platforms, online communication tools, and digital applications are widely used for education, employment, entertainment, and communication. Women in India are actively participating in digital spaces through online learning, journalism, activism, and professional work.⁹ However, digital technology has also created new forms of harassment and abuse against women. Cyberbullying is one of the fastest-growing cybercrimes in the modern era. It refers to repeated use of electronic communication to threaten, insult, humiliate, or emotionally harm another person. Women are often targeted through abusive comments, online threats, fake social media profiles, cyberstalking, circulation of private photographs, and trolling campaigns.¹⁰

Unlike traditional forms of harassment, cyberbullying can continue twenty-four hours a day and can rapidly spread to a large audience through digital platforms. Victims often suffer emotional trauma, fear, stress, depression, and reputational harm.¹¹ Many women avoid public participation on social media because of fear of online abuse.¹² The problem becomes more serious because offenders can hide behind anonymous identities and fake online accounts. In many cases, women hesitate to report cyber offences due to fear of social stigma and victim-blaming.¹³ Although India has laws dealing with cyber offences, there is still no separate legislation specifically addressing cyberbullying against women.

II. Meaning and Forms of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying means repeated use of digital communication to harass, threaten, abuse, or humiliate another person. It commonly takes place through social media platforms, messaging applications, emails, websites, and online forums.¹⁴ Women in India face different forms of cyberbullying. One common form is cyberstalking, where offenders repeatedly

⁹ DEBARATI HALDER & K. JAISHANKAR, CYBER CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA 43–48 (2016).

¹⁰ Danielle Citron, Cyber Civil Rights, 89 B.U. L. Rev. 61, 65–68 (2009).

¹¹ Monika Jain, Psychological Impact of Cyberbullying on Women, 8 Nat'l J. Cyber Security L. 66, 70–73 (2024).

¹² Amnesty International, Toxic Twitter: Violence and Abuse Against Women Online (2018).

¹³ Amanda Lenhart, Cyberbullying and Online Harassment Among Women, Pew Research Center Report (2017).

¹⁴ BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY 428 (11th ed. 2019).

contact or monitor women online and send threatening or unwanted messages. Another major form is impersonation, where fake social media accounts are created using a woman's identity to damage her reputation.¹⁵ Women are also subjected to trolling and abusive comments on social media. In many cases, private photographs and videos are shared online without consent for revenge, blackmail, or public humiliation. Technological developments such as morphing and deepfake editing have increased misuse of women's images and videos.¹⁶

Cyberbullying not only harms the personal dignity of women but also discourages them from participating freely in digital spaces. Women journalists, activists, and public figures are frequently targeted for expressing opinions online.¹⁷

III. Causes and Impact of Cyberbullying

One major reason behind cyberbullying against women is the patriarchal mindset existing in society. Women expressing opinions on politics, gender equality, or social issues are often criticised and harassed online.¹⁸ Another important factor is anonymity on the internet. Offenders can hide their identities through fake accounts and anonymous profiles, making investigation difficult. Lack of awareness regarding cyber laws and online privacy settings also increases the vulnerability of women to digital abuse.¹⁹

Cyberbullying has severe psychological and emotional consequences. Victims often suffer anxiety, depression, stress, fear, and emotional trauma. Some women withdraw completely from social media platforms because of continuous harassment.²⁰ Online abuse also damages the professional and social reputation of women. Circulation of fake photographs, false allegations, and private content may affect employment opportunities and social relationships. Cyberbullying therefore becomes a violation of dignity, privacy, and freedom of expression guaranteed under the Constitution of India.²¹

¹⁵ Sakshi Kaushik, *Cyberstalking and Online Abuse Against Women in India*, 22 *Lex Localis* 401, 408–412 (2025).

¹⁶ Clare McGlynn & Erika Rackley, *Image-Based Sexual Abuse*, 37 *Oxford J. Legal Stud.* 534, 538–542 (2017).

¹⁷ Danielle Citron & Mary Anne Franks, *Criminalizing Revenge Porn*, 49 *Wake Forest L. Rev.* 345, 350–358 (2014).

¹⁸ Monika Jain, *Psychological Impact of Cyberbullying on Women*, 8 *Nat'l J. Cyber Security L.* 66, 70–73 (2024).

¹⁹ INDIA CONSTITUTION ARTICLE 14, 19(1)(a), 21; Upendra Baxi, *Human Dignity in Constitutional Jurisprudence*, 44 *J. Indian L. Inst.* 223, 228–231 (2002).

²⁰ Danielle Keats Citron, *HATE CRIMES IN CYBERSPACE* 19–24 (Harvard Univ. Press, 2014).

²¹ Samina Khan, *Technology Facilitated Gender Harassment Against Women in India*, 31 *IJUM L.J.* 145, 150–158 (2023).

IV. Constitutional Protection

The Constitution of India guarantees several fundamental rights which protect women from online harassment and cyberbullying. Article 14 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws to every person.²² Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.²³ Article 19(1)(a) guarantees freedom of speech and expression. Women have the constitutional right to express their opinions freely in digital spaces without fear of threats or harassment.²⁴ Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. The Supreme Court has interpreted Article 21 to include the rights to privacy, dignity, reputation, and mental well-being. Cyberbullying directly violates these rights by targeting the personal dignity and safety of women.²⁵ The constitutional framework therefore creates an obligation upon the State to protect women from digital abuse and ensure safe participation in online spaces.

V. Information Technology Act, 2000

The Information Technology Act, 2000 is the primary legislation dealing with cyber offences in India. Several provisions of the Act are used in cases involving cyberbullying and online harassment against women.²⁶ Section 66C punishes identity theft involving misuse of passwords, electronic signatures, or digital identities.²⁷ Section 66D punishes cheating by personation using computer resources.²⁸ These provisions are commonly applied in cases involving fake social media profiles and impersonation. Section 66E deals with violation of privacy and punishes capturing or transmitting private images without consent.²⁹ Sections 67 and 67A punish publication and transmission of obscene and sexually explicit material in electronic form.³⁰ Although these provisions provide legal protection against online abuse, India still lacks a specific law exclusively addressing cyberbullying and gender-based online harassment.³¹

²²THE INDIA CONSTITUTION ARTICLE 14.

²³THE INDIA CONSTITUTION ARTICLE 15.

²⁴ THE INDIA CONSTITUTION ARTICLE 19(1)(a); Gautam Bhatia, Freedom of Speech in the Digital Era, 3 Indian L. Rev. 115, 120–126 (2019).

²⁵ THE INDIA CONSTITUTION ARTICLE 21; Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, (2017) 10 SCC 1; Shubhankar Dam, Privacy and the Indian Constitution After Puttaswamy, 10 NUJS L. Rev. 1, 5–9 (2018).

²⁶ PAVAN DUGGAL, CYBER LAW IN INDIA 201–209 (LexisNexis, 7th ed. 2020).

²⁷ Information Technology Act, 2000, section 66C, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India).

²⁸ Information Technology Act, 2000, section 66D, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India).

²⁹ Information Technology Act, 2000, section 66E, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India).

³⁰ Information Technology Act, 2000, section 67 & 67A, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India).

³¹ Apar Gupta & Udbhav Tiwari, Online Harassment and Free Speech in India, 5 Indian J. L. & Tech. 77, 81–85 (2019).

VI. Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Other Laws

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 contains provisions relating to stalking, sexual harassment, voyeurism, criminal intimidation, and insulting the modesty of women. These provisions are relevant in cases involving online harassment and cyberbullying.³² The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 prohibits indecent representation of women through publications and electronic media.³³ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 is also important in cases involving online harassment in professional and virtual workplaces.³⁴

The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 impose obligations on social media platforms to remove unlawful content and establish grievance redressal mechanisms.³⁵ These rules aim to increase accountability of digital platforms.

VII. Important Supreme Court Cases

The judiciary has played an important role in protecting women's dignity and digital rights. In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, the Supreme Court held that sexual harassment violates the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, and 21 of The Indian Constitution.³⁶

In *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act because it violated freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a).³⁷

In Justice *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India*, the Court recognised privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21.³⁸ This judgment strengthened protection against misuse of personal data and private images online.

³² Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, section 74, 75, 78, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 2023 (India).

³³ Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, No. 60, Acts of Parliament, 1986 (India).

³⁴ Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, No. 14, Acts of Parliament, 2013 (India).

³⁵ Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part II, sec. 3(ii), Feb. 25, 2021.

³⁶ *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, (1997) 6 SCC 241.

³⁷ *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*, (2015) 5 SCC 1.

³⁸ *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India*, (2017) 10 SCC 1.

The Supreme Court in *Aveek Sarkar v. State of West Bengal* clarified legal principles relating to obscenity and publication.³⁹ These judgments collectively contribute towards protection of women from cyber abuse and online harassment.

VIII. Challenges and Suggestions

India continues to face several challenges in controlling cyberbullying against women. Many women do not report online harassment because of fear of public humiliation and social stigma.⁴⁰ Law enforcement agencies also face difficulties due to lack of cyber forensic training and technical resources.⁴¹ Cybercrimes frequently involve offenders operating from different jurisdictions or countries, making investigation difficult. Misuse of artificial intelligence and deepfake technology has further complicated the problem of digital abuse.⁴²

India should introduce comprehensive legislation specifically dealing with cyberbullying against women. Cyber cells should be strengthened through technical training and improved cyber forensic infrastructure. Awareness programs regarding online safety and legal remedies should also be conducted at schools, colleges, and workplaces.⁴³ Social media platforms should be made more accountable for removing harmful content within a reasonable time. A safe digital environment is necessary to ensure equal participation of women in online spaces.

IX. Conclusion

Cyberbullying against women has emerged as a serious challenge in the digital age. Although technological development and social media platforms have increased opportunities for communication, education, employment, and participation, they have also exposed women to new forms of online harassment and abuse. Cyberbullying affects the dignity, privacy, mental health, reputation, and freedom of women and discourages their active participation in digital spaces.⁴⁴ India has constitutional protections and several legal provisions under the Information Technology Act, 2000, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and related laws dealing

³⁹ *Aveek Sarkar v. State of West Bengal*, (2014) 4 SCC 257.

⁴⁰ Amnesty International, *Toxic Twitter: Violence and Abuse Against Women Online* (2018).

⁴¹ AVTAR SINGH, *INTRODUCTION TO CYBER LAWS* 92–98 (Eastern Book Company, 5th ed. 2021).

⁴² Oxford Internet Institute, *Online Violence Against Women in South Asia Report* (2022).

⁴³ Ministry of Home Affairs, National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, <https://cybercrime.gov.in>, visited on May 15, 2026 at 4:15 PM.

⁴⁴ NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU, *CRIME IN INDIA 2023*, Vol. II, ch. 9, *Cyber Crimes Against Women and Children* (2024).

with cyber offences. The judiciary has also played an important role in protecting privacy, dignity, and freedom of expression through various landmark judgments.⁴⁵ However, lack of awareness, weak enforcement mechanisms, underreporting of cases, social stigma, and absence of a specific anti-cyberbullying law continue to create serious challenges in addressing online abuse effectively.⁴⁶ The increasing misuse of artificial intelligence, deepfake technology, fake profiles, and anonymous communication further highlights the urgent need for stronger legal and institutional mechanisms. Social media companies must also take greater responsibility for removing harmful content and ensuring safer digital environments for women users.⁴⁷

Therefore, India requires comprehensive legal reforms, efficient cyber policing, digital literacy programs, awareness campaigns, and effective cooperation between the government, judiciary, educational institutions, and technology companies. A safe and inclusive digital environment is necessary to ensure equality, dignity, and meaningful participation of women in the digital society.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, (2017) 10 SCC 1; Shreya Singhal v. Union of India, (2015) 5 SCC 1.

⁴⁶ LAW COMMISSION OF INDIA, 267TH REPORT ON HATE SPEECH 34–39 (2017).

⁴⁷ Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology, Action Taken Report on Social Media Regulation and Online Safety, Lok Sabha Secretariat (2025).

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