

A Study of Cyber Stalking in India

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Abstract: *This research paper involves the prevalence, effects, and issues of cyberstalking in India. This study illuminates the numerous facets of cyber stalking and its ramifications for individuals and society by conducting a thorough analysis of existing literature, regulation, and empirical evidence. This paper involves the survey, cyber stalking instances in India have increased significantly, owing to the growing adoption of internet and social media platforms. Victims, especially women and teenagers, experience severe psychological and emotional anguish, such as fear, worry, and depression. Furthermore, cyber stalking undermines personal privacy, internet safety, and societal well-being. This study will provide detail information about cyber staking in India.*

Keywords: Cyberstalking, India, Prevalence, Impact, Legislation, Challenges, Awareness, Support Services, Digital Safety.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cyber stalking¹, a form of harassment and intimidation conducted through electronic communication platforms, has become increasingly prevalent in India, raising concerns about individuals' safety and privacy in the digital age. With the proliferation of social media, messaging apps, and online forums, perpetrators exploit these platforms to target their victims, often causing psychological distress and emotional harm. In response to this growing threat, legislative measures have been enacted to address cyber stalking and provide legal recourse to victims. The Information Technology Act, 2000², along with IPC Section 354D of the Indian Penal Code, constitute the primary legal framework governing cyber stalking offenses in India. These statutes define cyber stalking, establish penalties for perpetrators, and outline procedures for investigation and prosecution. However, despite the existence of these legal provisions, challenges persist in effectively combating cyber stalking and ensuring justice for victims. This research paper seeks to explore the legal framework and challenges³ associated with combatting cyber stalking in India under the Information Technology Act and IPC Section 354D. By examining relevant laws, analysing case studies, and reviewing existing literature, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of current legal measures and identify obstacles to their implementation⁴. Furthermore, this paper aims to propose recommendations and strategies to strengthen the legal framework, enhance law enforcement efforts, and improve support mechanisms for victims of cyber stalking. By addressing these issues, policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and advocacy groups can work towards creating a safer digital environment and safeguarding the rights and well-being of individuals in India.

II. METHODS

This research paper purely based on secondary sources. This is done in order to comprehend the idea of cyber staling in India. The research makes use of secondary sources of data including journals, newspapers, websites and so forth.

¹Agarwal, A., & Agarwal, A. (2018). Cyber stalking in India: Issues and Perspectives. International Journal of Cyber Criminology, 12(1), 106-123.

²Chawla, N., & Sabharwal, M. (2020). Cyber stalking: A Review of Literature in Indian Context.

³Government of India. (2000). the Information Technology Act, 2000

⁴Kumar, A., & Pant, N. (2019). Cyber Stalking in India: A Review. International Journal of Scientific Research and Review, 8(3), 1907-1915.

III. DISCUSSION

Cyberstalking cases in India have increased over the years, owing to reasons such as easy access to the internet and the growing popularity of social media platforms. To gain an improved understanding of the scale of the problem, debate specific figures or patterns found in research studies or official reports. Victims of cyberstalking, particularly women and teenagers, experience a variety of negative impacts such as psychological discomfort, anxiety, sadness, and terror. Furthermore, cyberstalking may affect victims' personal and professional lives, resulting in social isolation and decreased well-being. Discussing real-life case studies or victim accounts might assist show the gravity of the situation⁵.

India has legislation in place to fight cyberstalking, including the IT Act of 2000 and related parts of the IPC. However, challenges in enforcement and gaps in awareness frequently limit the effective application of these statutes. It would be beneficial to investigate specific issues encountered while enforcing cyberstalking regulations and consider potential methods for solving them.

Laws against Cyber stalking:

Stalking is defined by the British Crime Survey⁶ as two or more incidents that cause distress, fear, or alarm, such as receiving indecent or threatening unwanted letters or phone calls, waiting or loitering around the home or workplace, or following or watching, interfering with, or damaging personal property carried out by any person. Cyberstalking is a criminal crime in which someone stalks another person using the internet, a cell phone, or any other electronic communication device.

The perpetrators are responsible for the destruction of data or equipment, the solicitation of minors for sexual purposes, threats, or any other type of repeated abusive behaviour.

The offenders use email, social media, chat rooms, instant messaging, and other online media to harass the victim.

Punishment for cyberstalking and online harassment under the Indian Penal Code

Section 354 D of the Indian Penal Code which was added by the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013 specifically proscribes the act of stalking as Whoever follows a person and contacts, or attempts to contact such person to foster personal interaction repeatedly, despite a clear indication of disinterest by such person, or whoever, monitors the use by a person of the Internet, email or any other form of electronic communication, or watches or spies on a person in a manner that results in a fear of violence or serious alarm or distress in the mind of such person, or interferes with the mental peace of such person, commits the offence of stalking.

The victim can also additionally file a case of defamation (Section 499, IPC) against the offender. The section has bailed out those acts of stalking which are performed for the purpose of preventing and detecting crime by a person who has been entrusted with such responsibility by the state. Also, instances where pursuing such conduct was reasonable or where the person was authorised under any act cannot allude to the offence of stalking⁷.

Section 354A of IPC punishes offence of sexual harassment with 3 years of imprisonment and/or fine.

Section 354C criminalises the offence of Voyeurism. It is defined as the act of capturing the image of a woman engaging in a private act, and/or disseminating said image, without her consent. The section prescribes 3 years of imprisonment for the first conviction and 7 years of imprisonment on second conviction along with fine.

Section 503 punishes criminal intimidation as threats made to any person with injury to her reputation, either in order to cause alarm to her, or to make her change her course of action regarding anything she would otherwise do/not do. The offences under S. 499 and S. 503 are punishable with imprisonment which may extend to two years, and/or fine.

Section 509 of IPC comes to your rescue if someone is constantly bugging you with derogatory verbal abuse because of your gender. The section provides that any person who utters any word or makes any sound or gesture, intending that

⁵National Crime Records Bureau. (2021). Crime in India 2020: Statistics. Ministry of Home Affairs

⁶Sharma, R., & Gupta, P. (2017). Cyber stalking in India: A Comparative Analysis with Other Nations

⁷Singh, S., & Mahajan, V. (2018). Cyber stalking: A Threat to Indian Society. International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering

such word, sound or gesture be heard or seen by a woman and insult her modesty, shall be punished with one-year imprisonment and/or fine⁸.

The Information Technology Act, 2008

The IT Act of 2008 does not directly deal with the offence of stalking. Section 72 of the Act is used to deal with the offence of stalking which reads as follows: Any person who, in pursuant of any of the powers conferred under this Act, rules or regulations made there under, has secured access to any electronic record, book, register, correspondence, information, document or other material without the consent of the person concerned discloses such electronic record, book, register, correspondence, information, document or other material to any other person shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees, or with both⁹.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau's most current data

Maharashtra has reported the most cases of cyberstalking/bullying of women for the third year in a row, with 1,126. Maharashtra also accounted for one-third of the 2,051 cyber stalking/bullying cases reported in India between 2020 and 2023. With 184 cases, Andhra Pradesh came in second, followed by Haryana with 97. Maharashtra ranked second among states in terms of cybercrime against women, with 1,503 cases registered in 2022 versus 1,262 in 2020, representing a 19% rise. Karnataka topped the list, with a 50% increase in instances (2,698 in 2023 compared 1,374 in 2022). In Maharashtra, the conviction rate for cybercrime has been exceptionally low in the recent three years, with only 56 of the 4,500 plus detained offenders being imprisoned.

IV. FINDINGS

The study identifies ambiguities in legal definitions as a significant challenge in combatting cyber stalking. Lack of clarity in defining cyber stalking may lead to inconsistencies in identifying and prosecuting offenders. Findings indicate that jurisdictional complexities hinder effective enforcement of cyber stalking laws. The global nature of the internet complicates investigations and coordination between law enforcement agencies, particularly in cases involving perpetrators and victims located in different jurisdictions. The research reveals that underreporting of cyber stalking incidents persists due to various factors, including victim reluctance, fear of retaliation, and lack of awareness about available legal remedies. This underreporting inhibits effective intervention and enforcement efforts. Resource constraints faced by law enforcement agencies, including limited technological capabilities, specialized training, and dedicated personnel, which impede their ability to effectively investigate and address cyber stalking cases. Shortcomings in victim support mechanisms, including challenges in accessing support services, obtaining protective measures, and navigating the legal system. Inadequate victim support exacerbates the trauma and harm experienced by victims of cyber stalking.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research paper has explored the multifaceted issue of combatting cyber stalking in India within the framework of the Information Technology Act and IPC Section 354D. Through a comprehensive analysis of the legal provisions, case studies, literature review, stakeholder perspectives, and data analysis, several key findings have emerged. The study identified significant challenges, including ambiguities in legal definitions, jurisdictional complexities, underreporting and awareness issues, resource constraints faced by law enforcement agencies, shortcomings in victim support mechanisms¹⁰, and emerging threats posed by evolving technologies. These challenges collectively impede effective combat against cyber stalking, jeopardizing individuals' safety, privacy, and well-being in

⁸Srinivas, T. N. (2019). Cyber Stalking in India: A Socio-Legal Analysis. *Journal of Legal Studies and Research*

⁹United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2014). *Cyber stalking: A Global Review of Empirical Research*.

the digital age. However, the research also highlighted opportunities for improvement. By addressing these challenges through targeted reforms, capacity building initiatives, awareness campaigns, and enhanced victim support services, it is possible to strengthen the legal framework and improve efforts to combat cyber stalking in India. Recommendations include clarifying legal definitions, enhancing coordination between law enforcement agencies, promoting victim empowerment and support, and leveraging technological innovations to enhance detection and prevention efforts.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Strengthening the enforcement of existing laws related to cyberstalking and exploring avenues for legal reforms to address emerging challenges in cyberspace. This may involve increasing resources and training for law enforcement agencies to effectively investigate and prosecute cyberstalking cases. Launching targeted awareness campaigns to educate the public about the risks of cyberstalking, safe online behaviour, and available support services. These campaigns can be conducted through various channels, including social media, schools, workplaces, and community organizations. Providing training and capacity building programs for law enforcement officials, legal professionals, educators, and other relevant stakeholders to enhance their understanding of cyberstalking laws, investigative techniques, and victim support services. Collaborating with technology companies to develop and implement technological solutions to combat cyberstalking, such as improved reporting mechanisms, enhanced privacy settings, and advanced security features on online platforms.

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