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Strategies for Mitigating Technology facilitated Gender Based Violence.

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ABSTRACT

The research paper examined the impact of Technology - Facilitates Gender Based Violence also known as TGBV on the women and girls of India. The paper also explores the dual role of technology as a tool of empowerment as well as a means of sustaining/perpetuating Gender-based Violence. The paper also explores the challenges in addressing TGBV, the roles of laws and policies, and the crucial role of intersectionality not only in comprehending and resolving Gender-based violence. In addition, the paper also explores societal norms, and gender differences i.e. digital divide in digital access. Finally, the paper presents the recommendation focussed on prevention, and protection and suggests comprehensive strategies to create a safe and more inclusive digital space empowering women in India.

Key Words: Gender based Violence , Technology facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV), Gender Equality, digital divide, Digital Safety, online harassment, media literacy

Love has no gender - compassion has no religion - character has no race.”

“Self-respect by definition is confidence and pride in knowing that your behavior is both honorable and dignified. When you harass or vilify someone, you disrespect them and yourself. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030.

In the 21st century, digital technology mediates every aspect of our daily lives. Technology is a double-edged sword, providing new ways to answer to Gender Based Violence and concurrently creating new forms of harm toward people. On one hand, technology-enabled devices, social media pages, APPS, and the internet have changed how we communicate and interact and how these gadgets have become handy for women and girls to be safe and secure. On the other hand, it is to be observed that technology and online spaces are misused and weaponized against women. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence is amplified using information and communication technologies and the impact of these kinds of violence goes beyond the digital sphere and is a significant threat to the exercise of women’s rights.

Gender Based Violence (GBV): Gender-based violence can be defined as the abuse or use of power or control over another individual and is perpetrated against any individual based on:

1. Gender expression: Gender expression can be defined as how an individual expresses publicly their gender. Gender expression includes an individual's behaviour and appearance -make-up, dress, body language, and voice. The name of a person and pronoun are also ways of expressing gender.
2. Gender identity is the personal sense of one's gender.
3. Perceived gender: It is the perspective or the way others view an individual like Masculine/ feminine. Perceived gender plays a key role in experiences of gender and stigmatizes people.

It is very important to know that all the genders together can assist each other not only to respect each other but also to stand up for individual rights and help them to become the best version of themselves. Gender-based violence is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world.

Gender-based violence does not know national, economic, or social boundaries. The statistics reveal that one in three women are prone to sexual or physical abuse in their lifetime. Gender-based violence impacts the health, security, dignity, and autonomy of women and gender-based violence is always covered in a culture of silence.

Factors causing gender-based violence:

- Social / Cultural factors.
- Economic factors.
- Legal factors.
- Political factors



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Source:<https://www.torontomu.ca/sexualviolence/education/understandingsexualviolencegenderbasedviolence/#!accordion-1629338123088-gender-based-violence-pyramid-infographic>

Technology Facilitated GBV

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV) can be defined as any act or action carried out with the assistance of mobile and information communication technology and the internet that hurts/harms another gender based on one's gender / sexual identity. It can also be based on enforcing harmful gender norms. TFGBV results in psychological, physical, sexual, political social, and economic harm or other violations of rights and freedoms.

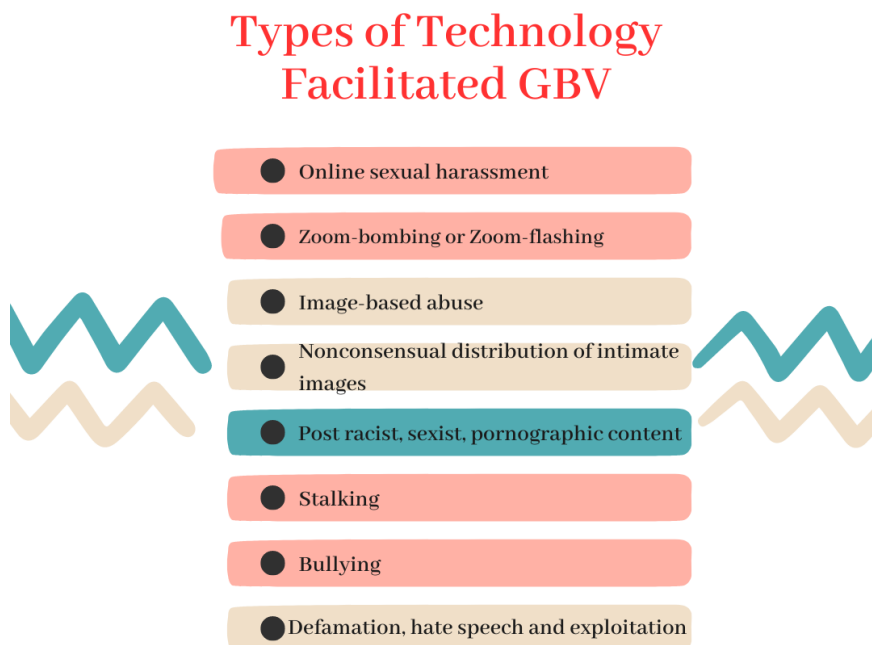
Researchers and Academicians address this form of Gender-Based Violence as online GBV, cyber violence, cybercrime or online harassment. Inequalities contribute significantly to gender-based violence (GBV), creating conditions that make women and girls particularly vulnerable to violence. Offline violence has penetrated and will penetrate the online domain. It can be noted that the increase in the digital divide between gender, and class is directly proportional to the vulnerabilities of girls and women in the online sphere in the name of online harassment.

It is evident that in a country like India where several laws, and policies work to address various aspects of the issue but the awareness regarding the laws and initiatives never reaches the grass root level which acts as a barrier for implementation.

To address the challenges of technology-facilitated GBV in India, policy enforcement has to comprehend and explore the intersectional lens of caste, class, sexuality, gender, and religion.

Violence of any kind against girls and women is targeted specifically because of their gender and discrimination reflecting the deep-rooted gender inequalities and discrimination that is pervasive across the world and affects women in different formats.

Types of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence:



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Online gender and sexual harassment: The harassment or abuse targeting girls and women based on their sexuality or gender in online spaces. This includes offensive comments, the use of derogatory language, and threats.

Cyberstalking: The staking and surveillance of individuals using digital means. Perpetrators use online platforms and tools to harass the victims.

Image-based abuse: The non-consensual creation and dissemination of intimate images without consent.

Zoom-bombing or Zoom-flashing: The disruption of online meetings by Perpetrators who shock the participants by posting racist, sexist, pornographic, or anti-Semitic content.

Doxing: The act of sharing personal information in public spaces leading to harassment or potential harm. Example: Personal address, contact numbers, or workplace details.

Hacking: Unauthorized access to victim's online accounts, devices, or networks causing harm, and invading privacy.

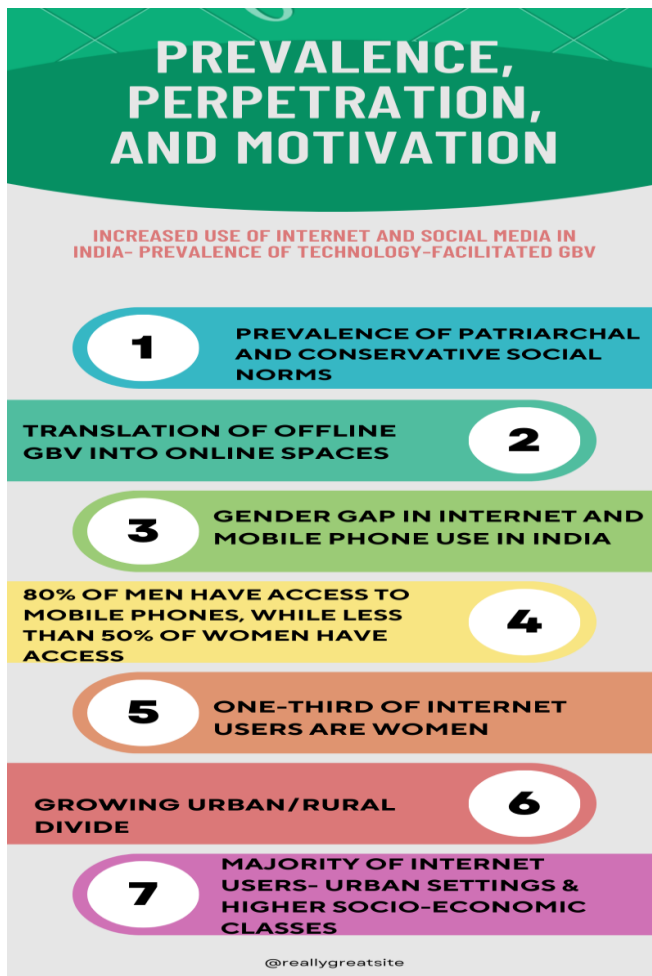
Impersonation: To Assume someone's identity online to deceive, or harm them or others. Example: Fake social media accounts

Targeted location and violence: The use of technology by perpetrators to identify and locate the victims to perpetrate violence against them.

Hate speech: The use of technology to spread hateful messages targeting individuals on the basis of gender, race, or religion.

Defamation: Spreading false information about individuals on online platforms harms their reputation.

Causes:



A significant contributing element to TGBV in India is the gender disparity in internet and mobile phone usage. With over 50% of women and 80% of males having access to mobile phones, South Asia has one of the biggest disparities in the world. The increasing gap between India's urban and rural areas

exacerbates the GBV that technology enables. Additionally, it is noteworthy that a mere 12% of the nation's population enjoys consistent internet connectivity, with the bulk of these users hailing from urban areas, notably the upper socioeconomic strata.

Moreover, societal norms, caste, and class distinctions prevalent in society, and the gap in digital access, restrict the usage of mobile phones. From the statistics, it can be comprehended that men, especially fathers and husbands, control household technology and monitor its usage. As a result, this norm limits mobile phone ownership and utilization, thereby diminishing reporting rates.

Gender Norms deeply rooted in Indian culture along with the preponderance of male chauvinism in online environments create an unwelcoming atmosphere for women and girls. The disproportionate levels of online abuse particularly towards politicians, and advocates are more compared to other groups. This kind of non-conducive atmosphere encourages women to opt for selective posting and curtailing their ability to exercise their right to freedom in the digital realm. This prevailing situation provides testimony to the perception that women are not welcome in public internet spaces. In addition, the empirical evidence reflects that women in politics, female journalists, and women rights activists face higher levels of online abuse when compared to their female counterparts. This phenomenon has to be addressed as the self-censorship by women and girls in online space restrict not only growth of women but also the nation.

Two distinct tiers of challenges faced by survivors:

- Incidents of violence instigated by an individual, occurring either in public or private settings.
- Instances of violence propagated by a collective, typically unfolding within public spaces.

Instances of targeted aggression directed at women and girls often stem from men, whether they are unfamiliar individuals or current/ex-partners. Coordinated assaults orchestrated by collectives, often referred to as "cyber troops" or "troll armies," entail the systematic issuance of harassing remarks or menacing threats aimed at individuals. These campaigns are frequently spearheaded by male figures.

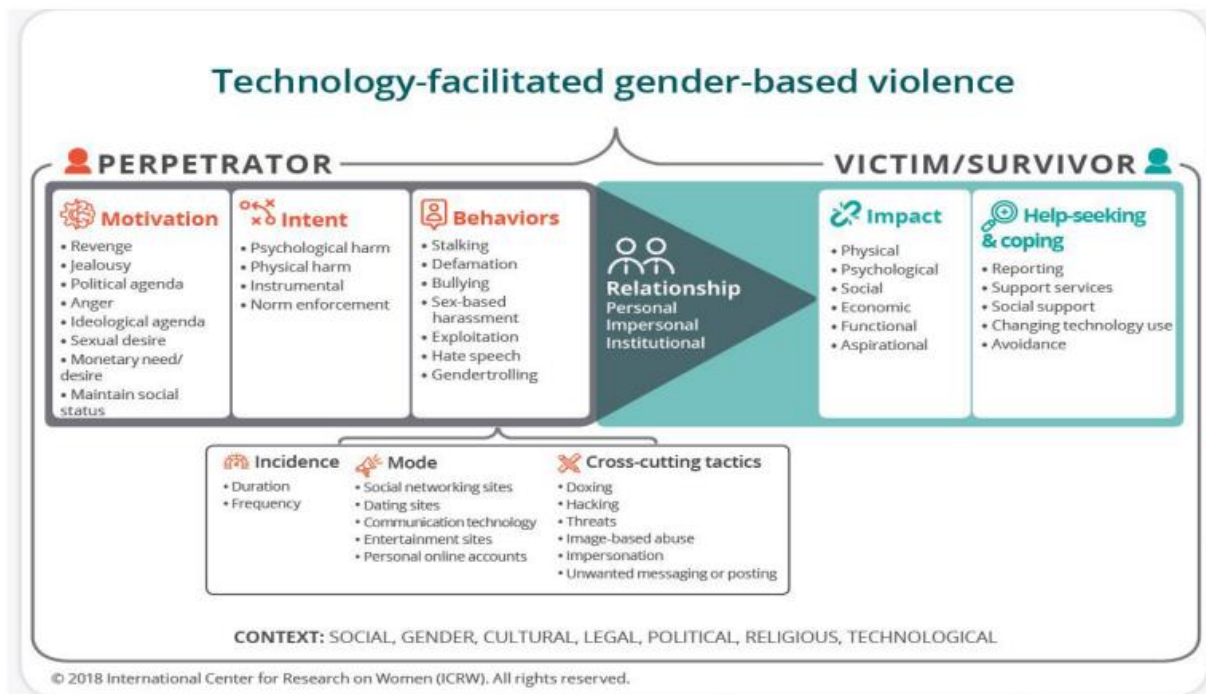
Two levels of harassment faced by survivors

1. Violence perpetrated by another individual in a public or private manner: Men are typically the ones that assault women and girls on an individual basis; these attacks might come from strangers, intimate partners, or former lovers. The most frequent instances of individual technology-facilitated GBV are online sexual harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate photographs, and harassing phone calls from unknown numbers.

2. Violence committed by a group, typically in a visible way: Violence committed by a group, typically in a visible way: Groups that go by the names "cyber troops" or "troll armies" frequently target specific people with persistent threats or derogatory remarks, and they are mostly led by men. Anyone may easily participate in these attacks covertly by creating a false profile on the internet thanks to its anonymity.

Women are still at risk of these kinds of attacks, even though research and experts indicate that marginalized communities—such as the LGBTI+ community and those who face additional discrimination due to their caste, class, religion, or political beliefs—also suffer high rates of group attacks.

The covid-19 epidemic has led to an increase in the frequency of gender-based violence (GBV) that is enabled by technology. Because more women are interacting online, there has been a discernible increase in the prevalence of technology-facilitated GBV, which includes brand-new kinds of violence like "Zoom flashing" and "Zoom bombing" in virtual conferences and classes. Other violent forms have also become more well-known, such as "shock content," a word used to describe videos that mix comedic elements with violent crimes against women and



The Due Diligence Project assessed State adherence in five essential domains, known as the "5Ps," encompassing:

(a) Prevention

Prevention refers to taking action to stop violence against women from happening. Educating people about online violence against women, as well as the resources for support services and legal options in the event of an occurrence, are all important components of effective preventative methods. States and internet service providers ought to acknowledge online violence as discriminatory violence that prevents women from exercising their right to freedom, rather than just as a separate type of harm.

(b) Protection

The main goal of protection is to stop more acts of violence from happening, which is especially important when the offender is known. It entails providing first responders with full training and sensitization as well as easily available services. Because information can spread quickly and widely because to technology, the negative effects of online aggression can intensify quickly. In addition to dealing with the original content, the duty to protect extends to controlling its uploading and dissemination, as these actions contribute to the continuation of the violent content. States and internet service providers must act quickly to ensure effective protection, which may even cross international borders.

(c) Prosecution

Investigating and launching legal action against wrongdoers is known as prosecution. Such proceedings may involve probes in cases involving internet intermediaries. Considering how quickly and widely information may be shared online, States and internet service providers need to act quickly and decisively when they learn of a violent act.

(d) Punishment

Imposing penalties or dire repercussions on offenders constitutes punishment. Making sure the right punishment is meted out creates consistency and sends a clear message that harassment of women online won't be accepted.

(e) Provision of Redress and Reparation

Redress and reparations for victims of violence typically include meeting non-quantifiable harm, reimbursing quantifiable losses (such as medical costs, lost wages, and property damage), and supporting survivors' short-, medium-, and long-term needs as they move from violence to a life free from it. Redress in the context of online abuse must include the right for victims and survivors to request the removal of content from search results or, in some cases, its disassociation.

Prevention & Mitigation

Technology-facilitated Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a relatively recent concept gaining recognition in India. As society becomes increasingly interconnected, addressing this issue requires multifaceted initiatives that encompass various interrelated themes:

Technology and Gender:

Initiatives to understand and challenge gender biases within technology development and use are crucial. The inclusivity of gender-inclusive design principles in digital services and goods motivate women and girls' to pursue career in technology related domains and support equitable growth in STEM fields.

Digital Rights:

The government and organization have to ensure digital rights by strengthening advocacy and awareness. Efforts are required to ensure freedom of expression, privacy, and accessibility to information both online and offline. It is imperative to roll out activities to guarantee and at the same time educate the citizens about digital rights and engage them in policy discussions to safeguard the digital rights of the people and promote responsible digital citizenship

Digital Safety in India:

Developing a culture of safety in India is of paramount importance. Awareness programs related to Cyber security, Cyber hygiene, netiquette, dangers of the internet, and safe practices are to be conducted. To enable the citizens to traverse the online environment, it is crucial to organize workshops, and awareness campaigns and devise instructional materials.

Awareness and Education:

Awareness about types of GBV fostered by technology must be carried out. Many initiatives has to be deployed in schools, colleges, universities and local communities to equip people with necessary skills to understand, identify, articulate and stop online abuse.

Accessibility and Support:

Ensuring accessible support mechanisms for the victim helplines, crisis centers and specially tailored counseling programs have to be implemented to address the issues related to TGBVs of Technology facilitated Gender-based violence has to be addressed. The government should establish online violence is crucial. This involves establishing helplines, crisis centers, and counseling services specifically tailored to address technology-facilitated GBV for providing practical guidance and emotional support.

Reporting Mechanisms:

Establishing user-friendly reporting tools and mechanisms and platforms is essential to countering TGBV. Furthermore, social media platforms and online forums must be implemented by the government and Non-Governmental Agencies in collaboration with Technology corporations and law enforcement agencies to mitigate TGBV.

Cyber Courts and Cyber Cells:

It is vital to reinforce the legal framework to address the issues related to technology-facilitated GBV. To guarantee justice for victims and speed up legal proceedings, fast-track courts and cyber cells armed with the required skills to address digital crimes must be established.

Collaborative Partnerships:

Collaboration and coordination among governmental agencies, NGOs, local communities, tech companies, and educational institutes can amplify the impact of these initiatives. In addition, comprehensive strategies to address technology-facilitated GBV must be implemented

Media Literacy:

There is an onus on the government to encourage media literacy among the people as it bestows the ability to comprehend and analyze digital content critically. Citizens' understanding of disinformation, manipulation, and cyberbullying can improve their capacity to safeguard themselves and their kin from online crimes.

Research and Data Collection:

Further research is required to address the ever-changing nature of online violence, its prevalence, and the effects of TGBV. Data collection and analysis is very useful for evidence-based initiatives and policies for promoting societal transformation.

Organizations funding the initiatives

The various initiatives for enhancing reporting mechanisms are supported by

- UN Women,
- My Ambar by NASSCOM Foundation
- Sayfty Trust
- TechSakhi by Point of View
- Vodafone Idea Foundation.
- Advancement of gender-inclusive technology, Safety, and Digital rights activities are funded by groups like Women's Fund Asia, Omidyar Network and Amplify Change.
- The Electronic Frontier Foundation, Access Now, Tata Trusts, Mozilla Foundation and Open Tech Foundation advocate a safer Digital world.

The Government of India undertook measures for addressing the challenges of technology-enabled Gender Based violence through awareness, hotlines for reporting and accessibility, reporting systems, and establishment of cyber cells, cyber cells and fast-track courts.

Many states across India are deploying the Safe Cities Initiative through the Nirbhaya Fund to provide aid to victims of TGBV

GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These existing gaps can be addressed by implementing various education initiatives empowering the citizens to employ tools to address or manage online hazards. The collaboration of governmental organizations and tech companies is required to moderate the information to enhance online security and digital literacy. It is also crucial for law enforcement agencies to reinforce special training programs and strong legal protections. In addition, the organization should increase the availability of survivor/victim-focused resources and provide them with easy access for reporting, legal aid and counselling sessions. Awareness campaigns and sessions should be conducted to promote respect,

consent and gender equality to mitigate technology-facilitated GB in both offline and online spheres and address the challenges of cultural practices

Tech as a weapon or force for good?

Amidst the increase in the usage of the Internet from 50% to 70%, girls and women are the targets regarding the non-consensual sharing of images. In this regard, tech-based interventions provide an array of options for awareness and risk mitigation

- Safetipin app is one such tech-driven solution that draws data from users and provides information about safety, safe routes to travel, and fosters safe public spaces.
- Caretas' a Ai powered chatbot in Brazil embodies the survivor's experience and embodies the people about harassment risks and sextortion

Tech for Safe Spaces:

The role of technology in providing safe spaces is of paramount importance, Gender based violence resources are provided through Virtual Safe spaces to girls in crisis zones

Tech as Safeguard:

UNICEF has integrated GBV resources into many online platforms through keyword recognition. In addition, the Medicapt app and GBV pocket guide help survivors and practitioners with forensic evidence and information.

Empowering Through Tech:

Many apps like the Victims Voice help survivors to document abuse incidents. At the time apps like Safetipin's data-driven approach helped to enhance public spaces in Delhi. Victims Voice empowers survivors by securely documenting abuse incidents, while Safetipin's data-driven approach improves safety, exemplified by Delhi's enhanced public spaces.

In addition, innovative solutions are required to tackle the complex challenges of Online Violence. The role of employment of technology to mitigate these challenges, from prevention to empowerment to foster safe digital spaces.

Conclusion

Technology facilitated Gender Based Violence (TGBV) is a serious concern in the digital age posing threats to the rights and safety of women and girls. The misuse of technology increases gender inequalities and makes women more vulnerable to online harassment. The role of citizens, Policies, local communities, and educational institutes are required to address TGBV through awareness, fortifying laws and also increasing digital literacy. Tech companies should play a crucial role in providing tech-driven solutions toward robust reporting mechanisms, and victim support services. Equally important is to address the issues related to the intersectionality of caste, class, and urban and rural divide for addressing the social biases, and to promote digital safety, and ensure accountability for creating a safer and more equitable digital environment.

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