

Culture, Stigma, and Cyber-Victimisation: Psychological Consequences for Women in Rajasthan

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Abstract—The internet and social media have transformed the way people connect, communicate, and express themselves. In India, particularly in states like Rajasthan, the rapid proliferation of mobile phones and digital platforms has created new opportunities for education, employment, and social interaction. However, alongside these opportunities, serious risks have emerged. One of the most pressing concerns is cyber-victimisation, which includes online harassment, bullying, stalking, threatening messages, trolling, and the non-consensual sharing of private images or videos. While cyber abuse is a growing issue worldwide, its effects are particularly severe for women in culturally conservative regions such as Rajasthan, where traditional norms and values still strongly influence daily life.

This paper explores how culture and stigma interact with the experiences of women who become victims of cyber abuse in Rajasthan. In many cases, instead of receiving empathy and support, victims face blame, judgment, and social isolation. Family honor, community reputation, and patriarchal attitudes often silence women, making them hesitant to report incidents to the police or even to speak openly within their own families. The stigma surrounding online harassment not only protects the perpetrators but also deepens the suffering of the victims.

The psychological impact of such experiences is profound. Many women report symptoms of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and trauma. In severe cases, the continuous harassment combined with societal pressure can lead to suicidal thoughts or attempts. The lack of awareness about legal rights, weak law enforcement, and limited access to mental health care further worsens the situation. Women in rural areas, where cultural restrictions are stricter and resources scarcer, face even greater challenges in seeking justice or emotional support.

By examining these issues through cultural and psychological lenses, this paper highlights the urgent need to view cyber-victimisation not just as a technological crime but as a social and cultural problem. The findings suggest that any meaningful intervention

must address both the psychological needs of women and the cultural stigma that silences them. Awareness campaigns, better enforcement of cybercrime laws, accessible mental health support, and community engagement are necessary steps.

In conclusion, cyber-victimisation in Rajasthan demonstrates how the digital world is deeply connected to cultural realities. Without tackling stigma and changing attitudes, women will continue to suffer in silence. Therefore, solutions must combine legal, psychological, and cultural strategies to ensure that women can navigate the digital world safely and with dignity.

Index Terms—Cyber-victimisation; Women; Rajasthan; Stigma; Psychological Consequences

I. INTRODUCTION

The growth of digital technology has reshaped everyday life across the world. In India, the last decade has seen an extraordinary rise in the use of mobile phones, affordable internet, and social media platforms. Young people, including women, are using the internet for education, jobs, networking, and entertainment. Rajasthan, a state often associated with its cultural traditions, heritage, and social structures, is no exception. From large cities like Jaipur and Jodhpur to smaller towns and rural villages, internet access has become increasingly common. While this digital expansion has created many opportunities, it has also opened the door to new risks, one of the most concerning being the Sufferer.

Cyber-victimisation refers to acts of online abuse such as harassment, stalking, trolling, spreading rumors, or sharing private photos and videos without consent. These actions can happen through social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, or even through emails and text messages. Unlike face-to-face harassment, cyber abuse is often invisible to others but

can reach a much wider audience within seconds. This makes it more damaging and harder to control. For women, the experience is particularly harmful because it is not just an attack on their personal space but also on their reputation and dignity, both of which hold significant weight in societies like Rajasthan.

The cultural context of Rajasthan makes this issue especially complex. In many families, women are expected to follow strict codes of behavior, often linked to ideas of honor and respect. A woman's image, both online and offline, is seen as a reflection of her family's reputation. If she becomes a victim of cyber harassment, instead of receiving support, she may face questions, blame, or even punishment from her own relatives. Communities sometimes treat the victim as responsible, asking why she was active on social media, why she posted certain pictures, or why she interacted with strangers online. This victim-blaming culture creates stigma that silences women and prevents them from seeking help.

The psychological effects of cyber-victimisation are severe. Women who face online abuse often struggle with anxiety, depression, fear, and social withdrawal. Some may stop using the internet altogether, affecting their education or career opportunities. Others may internalize the blame, leading to low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness. In extreme cases, the pressure of both the abuse and the surrounding stigma can drive women toward self-harm or suicidal thoughts. What makes the situation worse is the lack of awareness about legal rights, limited trust in law enforcement, and the shortage of mental health resources, especially in rural areas.

This paper aims to explore the issue of cyber-victimisation in Rajasthan by focusing on how culture and stigma shape women's experiences and psychological consequences. It asks key questions: How does culture influence the way women respond to cyber abuse? What role does stigma play in silencing them? And what psychological effects does this combination of abuse and stigma create? By examining these questions, the paper hopes to shed light on the hidden struggles women face and suggest ways to build safer digital spaces for them.

II. CULTURE, STIGMA, AND CYBER ABUSE

In Rajasthan, culture has a strong influence on how women are treated and how problems like cyber abuse

are understood. Society places a great deal of importance on family honour and reputation, and women are often viewed as the primary guardians of it. Their behavior, the way they dress, and even the way they use social media are closely watched. Because of this, when a woman faces harassment online, people often ask what *she* did wrong instead of questioning the abuser. For example, they may blame her for posting a picture, talking to strangers, or being active online at night. This mindset shifts the responsibility away from the offender and unfairly places it on the victim.

Stigma makes the situation even harder. Stigma means shame or judgment that comes from both outside and inside. From the outside, neighbors, relatives, or even friends may gossip or criticize a woman who has been harassed online. Inside, the woman herself may start feeling guilty, ashamed, or at fault, even though she is not. In Rajasthan, where traditional values are strong, women who become victims of cyber abuse may be labeled as "too modern" or "careless." Families sometimes discourage women from speaking out because they fear damage to their reputation or future marriage prospects.

As a result, many women suffer in silence. They avoid reporting the crime, delete their social media accounts, or withdraw from their normal activities. This silence not only protects the abusers but also increases the pain of the victims. The cultural pressure to stay quiet and the stigma attached to being a victim make the psychological effects much heavier. To truly understand cyber-victimisation in Rajasthan, it is important to see how culture and stigma shape women's experiences and responses.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Women in Rajasthan who face cyber-victimisation often report a range of psychological problems. These include:

- 3.1 Anxiety and Fear – Constant worry that the harassment will continue, fear of being watched, or fear of private photos being leaked.
- 3.2 Depression – Feelings of sadness, helplessness, and worthlessness. Some victims lose interest in daily life.
- 3.3 Low Self-Esteem – Many women blame themselves and feel ashamed, even though they did nothing wrong.

- 3.4 Trauma – Repeated harassment or leaked images can cause deep emotional scars, sometimes leading to symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Suicidal Thoughts – In severe cases, women may feel trapped with no way out, leading to dangerous thoughts of ending their lives. Because of stigma, women rarely seek professional help. Many suffer silently, isolating themselves from friends and reducing their use of technology, which in turn affects their education, work, and social lives.

IV. BARRIERS TO REPORTING AND SEEKING HELP

For many women in Rajasthan, speaking out about cyber abuse is not easy. Even though laws exist to protect victims, social and cultural pressures often stop women from reporting what happened or asking for help.

The first and biggest barrier is the fear of being blamed. Instead of asking “Who committed the crime?” people often ask “What was the woman doing online?” Families may question why she was using social media, why she posted her photo, or why she replied to a message. This shifts the blame onto the victim rather than the offender. For many women, it feels safer to remain silent than to be accused of causing their own suffering.

The second barrier is pressure from the community. Rajasthan has close-knit societies where neighbors and relatives watch each other closely. If a woman reports cyber harassment, people may gossip about her character, damaging her and her family’s reputation. Families sometimes discourage reporting to avoid shame or to protect marriage prospects. As a result, many cases stay hidden, and women suffer quietly.

Another important barrier is the lack of faith in the legal system. While there are cybercrime laws in India, many women are unaware of their rights. Even when they know, they hesitate to approach the police because they fear being treated insensitively or asked uncomfortable questions. In rural areas, the situation is harder because police stations may not have trained staff or cybercrime units to handle such cases properly. Finally, there is a shortage of emotional and mental health support. Counseling services and support groups are rare, especially outside the cities. Women

who feel depressed, anxious, or traumatized often have no safe place to turn for help.

Together, these barriers create a cycle of silence. Victims remain quiet, perpetrators face no consequences, and women continue to suffer in isolation. Breaking this cycle requires not only stronger laws but also cultural change, awareness campaigns, and accessible support systems that encourage women to seek help without fear.

V. CASE EXAMPLES (ILLUSTRATIVE)

To better understand the real-life impact of cyber-victimisation on women in Rajasthan, it is important to look at actual experiences. These examples highlight how cultural expectations, family pressure, and social stigma can make the psychological effects of online abuse even worse.

In Jaipur, a young college student began receiving abusive messages and threatening comments on her Instagram account. The messages included insults about her character, personal attacks, and demands to remove certain photos. She felt scared and overwhelmed, so she confided in her parents, hoping for support. Instead of helping her or contacting authorities, her parents asked her to delete her accounts immediately. They were concerned about what relatives, neighbors, or the wider community might think. Feeling unsupported and silenced at home, the student started withdrawing socially. She avoided friends, stopped participating in group activities, and became quieter in class. Over time, her focus on studies declined, and she experienced symptoms of anxiety and low self-esteem. This case shows how family concerns about reputation can unintentionally worsen a victim’s suffering, leaving her isolated and unsure where to turn for help.

In another example from a rural district of Rajasthan, a young woman’s private photos were leaked online without her consent. Instead of receiving understanding and protection from her family or community, villagers openly blamed her, accusing her of “losing dignity” and questioning her behavior. The social judgment was harsh and pervasive, and she felt embarrassed, humiliated, and unsafe. Fearful of further gossip and criticism, she stopped attending college and withdrew from her social circles. Over time, she displayed clear signs of severe depression, including persistent sadness, loss of interest in

everyday activities, disturbed sleep, and feelings of worthlessness. This example highlights how community stigma and social judgment can intensify the psychological impact of cyber abuse, making victims feel trapped and powerless.

These examples illustrate that cyber-victimisation is not only about online harassment—it is also deeply connected to social and cultural realities. When families, communities, or society at large respond with blame instead of support, the emotional and psychological toll on women becomes even heavier. The cases underscore the urgent need for family awareness, community education, and accessible mental health services. Creating safe, supportive environments where women can speak out without fear of shame is essential for reducing the negative effects of cyber-victimisation and helping victims regain confidence and security.

These examples show how cultural stigma magnifies the harm caused by cyber-victimisation.

VI. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing cyber-victimisation in Rajasthan requires a combination of legal, social, and educational interventions. The goal is to create an environment where women feel safe online and supported if they face harassment.

6.1 Awareness Campaigns are essential. Families, schools, and communities need to be educated about the nature of cybercrime and the rights of victims. Many people still blame the victim instead of understanding that harassment is the fault of the abuser. Awareness programs can help change this mindset, encouraging families and communities to support women rather than shame them. Schools and colleges can organize workshops and seminars to teach students about responsible online behavior and how to respond to cyber abuse.

6.2 Stronger Law Enforcement is also critical. Police and other authorities must be trained to handle cybercrime cases with sensitivity and professionalism. Many women hesitate to report harassment because they fear being treated insensitively or facing judgment. Ensuring that law enforcement is approachable, knowledgeable, and supportive can encourage more victims to come forward. Existing laws on online harassment, stalking, and non-

consensual sharing of private images must be enforced strictly to hold perpetrators accountable.

6.3 Mental Health Support should be made widely available, especially in rural areas. Counseling centers, helplines, and support groups can provide victims with safe spaces to share their experiences, receive guidance, and recover emotionally. Access to mental health professionals can help women manage anxiety, depression, and trauma caused by cyber-victimisation. 6.4 Digital Literacy programs are important for prevention. Women should be trained in online safety measures, including privacy settings, recognizing suspicious messages, and reporting abuse effectively. Teaching women how to protect themselves online empowers them to navigate digital spaces safely.

Finally, Community Engagement is key. Local leaders, cultural influencers, and religious figures can play an important role in spreading the message that victims are not to blame for harassment. When communities actively support women rather than stigmatize them, it reduces the fear of reporting and encourages social change.

Together, these measures can create a safer and more supportive environment for women in Rajasthan, helping them cope with cyber-victimisation and regain confidence in online and offline spaces.

VII. CONCLUSION

Cyber-victimisation is more than just a technological problem; it is deeply connected to culture, society, and the way women are perceived. In Rajasthan, women often face what can be described as a “double burden.” The first comes from the cyber abuse itself—harassing messages, threats, trolling, or the non-consensual sharing of private images. These experiences can cause fear, anxiety, depression, and long-lasting trauma. The second burden comes from the social stigma attached to being a victim. Cultural norms, concerns about family honor, and community judgment often lead to blame, gossip, and isolation. This stigma forces many women to stay silent, prevents them from seeking help, and intensifies the emotional and psychological harm caused by the abuse.

The combination of cyber-victimisation and societal stigma creates a challenging environment where victims feel trapped. They may stop attending school or college, withdraw from social activities, or limit

their use of digital tools, which can negatively impact their education, work, and social life. The lack of awareness about legal rights, limited access to mental health services, and fear of family or community backlash further exacerbate the problem. Women's silence not only protects the perpetrators but also allows the cycle of abuse and stigma to continue.

To address this issue, Rajasthan must focus on both legal reforms and cultural change. Laws on cyber harassment, stalking, and non-consensual sharing of private images should be strictly enforced, and law enforcement officials must be trained to handle cases with sensitivity and understanding. At the same time, families, communities, and cultural leaders need to challenge the traditional mindset that blames victims. Awareness campaigns, educational programs, and public discussions can help reduce stigma and encourage women to speak out without fear.

Furthermore, access to mental health support is critical. Counseling services, helplines, and safe spaces can provide emotional support and guidance to women who have experienced cyber abuse. Digital literacy programs can empower women to protect themselves online, report harassment, and navigate the internet safely.

In conclusion, creating a safe online environment for women in Rajasthan requires a combined approach that addresses legal, psychological, and cultural factors. Only when families, communities, institutions, and policymakers work together to reduce stigma, provide support, and hold perpetrators accountable can women use the internet freely and confidently. A safe digital space is not just a technical issue—it is a social responsibility that ensures dignity, equality, and empowerment for all women.

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