

Gender Differences in Instances of Online Abuse and Perceived Online Security

Oshin Dixit¹, Ananta Chaudhary²

Available online at: www.xournals.com

Received 16th August 2021 | Revised 09th September 2021 | Accepted 24th September 2021

Abstract:

In today's era, the internet is omnipresent and plays indispensable part in nature and can be accessed through numerous mediums; a few of them being smart phones, tablets, mobile phones, computer systems, televisions and laptops. Constantly developing technology led to competitive market prices, making mobile phones affordable and not as big of a luxury they were once considered. To prevent Cyber Abuse, it is crucial to understand why it happens and what its causes are. In researches it is found that women are more likely to receive some form of cyber abuse when compared to men. Furthermore, it was seen that women were also more likely to receive abuse of a sexual nature, in comparison to men. It can be inferred that most forms of harassment that female users faced were non-violent yet sexual in nature. As the Victims of abuse have legal options available to them, there is still a large scope of improvement. Law enforcement agencies are not aware of the sensitivity they must show to different victims of Cyber Abuse. Training programs inculcating the importance of soft skills in the police force is necessary. Secondly, in cases of revenge porn specifically a female police officer may be more capable of communicating with the victim. Furthermore, the results of the research indicated the cyber world as being safer for men in comparison to women, but considered the identical threat sent to gender counterparts of the same industry as more severe for men, but not for women.

Keywords: Cyber bullying, Harassment, Victimization, Trolling, Hacking.

Authors:

1. Ph.D. Scholar, Galgotias University, Greater Noida, INDIA.
2. IGNOU, New Delhi, INDIA

Introduction

The internet is omnipresent in nature and can be accessed through numerous mediums; few of them being smart phones, tablets, mobile phones, computer systems, televisions and laptops. Change in attitude towards technology has made social media websites like Facebook a household name. Other sites such as Twitter, Instagram has gained popularity for voicing opinion and for uploading photos/videos. For now, men dominate India's total Internet usage with 71%, with women contributing to a mere 29%. As per Crime in India (NCRB, 2016), there has been a 6% rise in reported cases of Cyber Crime in the year 2015-2016. It is also seen that female face more harassment online as compared to men (Foody *et al.*, 2015). During 2016, 8.6% of the cyber-crimes were motivated by revenge, whereas 5.6% were an insult to modesty of a woman (Kowalski and Limber, 2013).

The conviction rate was at 16.7%, and the pendency rate at 94.2%. These are a summary of reported crimes only. The Cyber World was first made open to the public in India in on 15th of August 1995 by Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (VSNL), now Tata Communication Ltd. By March 1998, their users reached 90,000. In October 2017, India boasted of 471 million Internet users and is predicted to reach 500 million in June of 2018 which would indicate a growth of 6.15% in seven months. According to the ASSOCHAM Resurgent Study (2017), the year 2016 saw nearly 69 million online consumers, a number which is predicted to hit 100 million by 2017 (Banerjee, 2018). With the updating technology and the rise in cyber-crime as well. Cyber-crime is an online behavior which is reasonably likely to have a seriously threatening, intimidating, harassing or humiliating effect on a person. It is behavior that threatens to hurt a person socially, psychologically or even physically." In our country though there are many laws regarding cybercrime. But still researches have reflected that the cases of cyber abuses are increasing (Kovacs *et al.*, 2010).

Research was conducted in attempted to understand whether increased usage of social media led to increase in cyber abuse. However, their findings predicted that certain personality characteristics are more likely to influence cyber victimization than social media usage (Sengupta and Chaudhuri, 2011). Another research, tested the effect of anonymity on cyber aggression and found that participants who remained anonymous were more likely to react aggressively against others, and even more in the presence of other aggressive models (Zimmerman and Ybarra, 2016) Studies did

conclude that women were more prone to being addicted to their smartphones than men. It was further noted that men were likely to check their phones only during breaks and for making calls or texts (Lee, 2016).

It has been reported that a large proportion of India's new internet users is likely to be female who are in rural, regional language speakers, compared with existing users who are mostly young, urban and professional (www.techtimes.com, 2016). These further stresses the need to protect women from abuse in the cyber world.

Method and Methodology

Hypothesis:

- To identify whether there is a gender difference in cyber abuse faced by men and women.
- To identify whether the type of abuse differs between men and women.
- To understand what acts as a trigger to cyber abuse. What are the factors that encourage violent behavior in the cyber world?
- To identify which gender feels more secure in the cyber world.

Design:

An Exploratory research design was adopted in order to analyze gender differences in cyber abuse and perceived online security. The different types of abuse measured were:

1. Threats of physical Violence
2. Cyber Stalking
3. Harassment
4. Name Calling / using offensive language

Sample:

The sample of the study was below the age of 35 years who had been a victim of any form of Cyber Abuse.

Sampling:

Stratified Random Sampling was used to collect the desired sample of 60 responses. An attempt was made to receive responses from both male as well as female social media users.

Tool Used:

The research tool used was an online questionnaire consisting of 17 close ended questions and 2 open ended questions. A Google Form was created. The 17 close ended questions were mandatory in nature and

the 2 open ended questions were not mandatory. The first 15 questions were all related to the incident of cyber abuse. They ranged from questions regarding the nature, type, medium, trigger, duration, direction and the remedy taken by the victim. The following three questions were regarding security in the cyber world and had to be rated on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very secure and 10 being extremely secure.

Analysis

Data was analysed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A Chi Test was used to understand the relationship between the different variables.

Result & Discussion

The total sample consisted of 60 respondents. Out of the total sample, 70% (42) were female and 30% (18) were male respondents who had faced some form of cyber abuse.

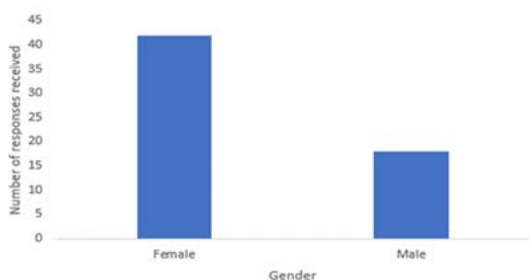


Figure No. 1: Graph of Comparison of Gender with Number of responses received

In comparison to the gender of the abuser, 71% (43) were males, 8% (5) were females and the remaining were unknown.

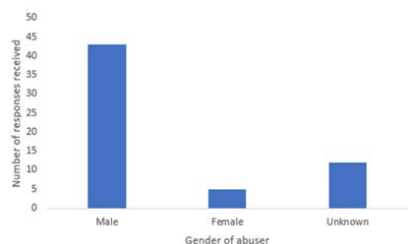


Figure No. 2: Graph of Comparison of Gender of Abuser with Number of responses received

Most respondents, 86.6% (52), were in the age bracket of "less than 25 years", whereas 1.7% of respondents were in the age group of "less than 18 years" and the

remaining 11.7% (7) were in the age group of "less than 35 years".

Table No. 1: Age of participants and their Percentage

Age Bracket	Participants (N=60)	Percentage
Less than 18 years	1	1.7%
Less than 25 years	52	86.6%
Less than 35 years	7	11.7%

All respondents had been victim of at least some form of Cyber Abuse. 1.7% reported having received threats of physical violence; 15% reported having dealt with a Cyber Stalker; 40% dealt with some form of harassment; 8.3% had been called names or had offensive language used against them online and 35% had been victim of more than one of the above forms of Cyber Abuse.

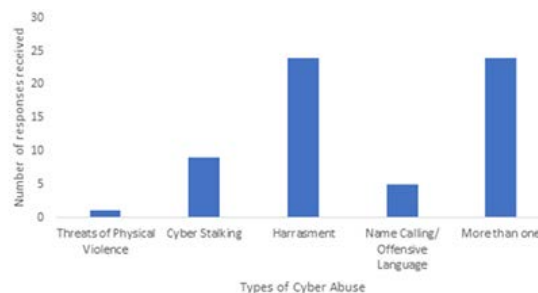


Figure No. 3: Graph of Comparison of Types of Abuser with Number of responses received

As is evident from the above graph, harassment was the most common form of Cyber Abuse that the victims had faced. Nearly 40% of both Male and Female users faced some form of harassment and also rated this form of abuse as less severe. Their reaction to this form of abuse consisted of majorly reporting the account or blocking the user which was a remedy adopted by 50% of victims.

This seems to imply that both genders are desensitized to this form of abuse. Harassment in the real world would have higher risks, yet the inability to physically see the harasser seems to increase the sense of safety. This would also suggest why both male and female respondents also rate it as less severe abuse.

On comparing the device used to browse their Social Media (SM) account, it was seen that the device that most respondents, a total of 93% (56) used to browse

their Social Media accounts was their Smartphone, further stressing on how mobile most people are today and instances of cyber abuse become viral so easily.

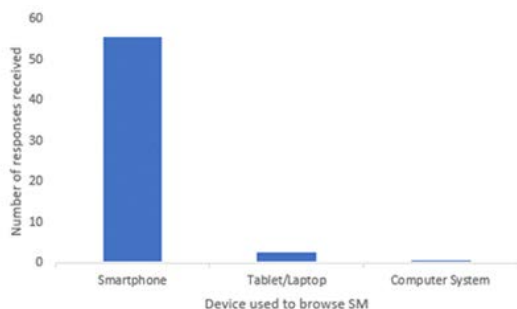


Figure No. 4: Graph of Comparison of Device used to browse SM with Number of responses received

In order to assess the relationship between Genders and Abuse, a Chi Square Analysis was carried out. The relation between Gender and Abuse was not significant, $\chi^2(4) = 2.86, p > 0.05$. This implies that both male and female users are both likely to face any form of cyber abuse, and no gender is more likely to fall victim to one more than the other. A Chi Square Analysis was done in order to assess the relationship between Gender and Nature of Abuse. It was found that 45% (19/42) of female respondents received abuse of a sexual nature, while a mere 16% (3/18) received abuse of a sexual nature. A χ^2 analysis of the difference between nature and gender was significant, $\chi^2(1) = 4.43, p < 0.05$; the effect size was small with $\phi = -.272$. The above analysis suggests that women on the cyber world are more likely than men to receive abuse of a sexual nature.

On analyzing the different triggers of cyber abuse, it was seen that 40% of the abuse was directed towards a personal photograph/video, 35% were a result of voicing one's opinion and 13% was due to other reasons. A majority of the abuse would seem personal in nature. While none of the abuse can be classified as violent cyber behavior, most of the abuse was related to comments on physical appearance.

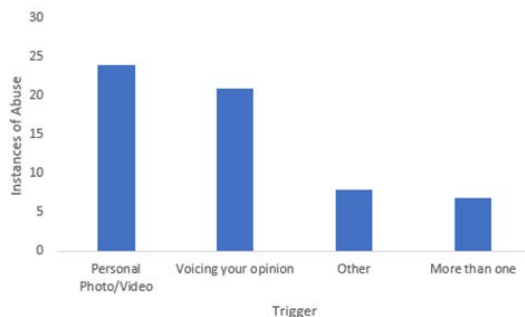


Figure No. 5: Graph of Comparison of triggers with Instances of Abuse

The following graph depicts a comparison between how secure respondents believe the cyber world is for both men and women. A total of 18 respondents scored 4 for women, and a total of 17 respondents scored 8 for men.

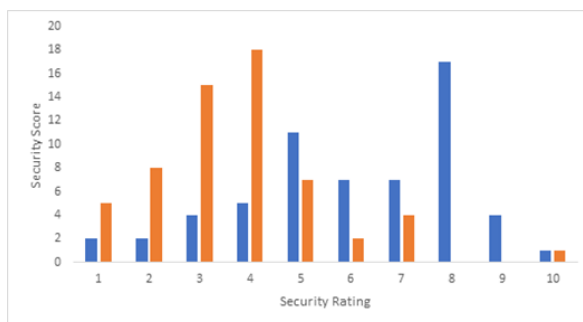


Figure No. 6: Graph of Comparison of Security Rating with Security Score

Both men and women are implied to believe that the cyber world is much safer for men in comparison to women. It was seen that women considered themselves to feel less safe in comparison to how men perceived them to feel. While this may be true in instances of online abuse, or revenge porn statistically; there is no evidence to believe that either gender is less likely to fall victim to scams and/or have their data stolen.

When asked to rate the safety of their own Social Media Account, a maximum number of respondents (16) rated 4 on a scale of 10.



Figure No. 7: Graph of Comparison of Security of own SM Account with Number of responses received

This would suggest that while people continue to use their Social Media sites regularly, they are aware that their data is not as safe. However, it still doesn't seem to hinder usage.

Conclusion

To summarize it was found that women are more likely to receive some form of cyber abuse when compared to men. Furthermore, it was seen that women were also more likely to receive abuse of a sexual nature, in comparison to men. Harassment was the most common form of abuse faced, and it was rated as "less severe". Majority of the respondents rated "Personal photograph/Video" as the most common trigger of abuse. It can be inferred that most forms of harassment that female users faced were non-violent yet sexual in nature. Furthermore, respondents indicated the cyber world as being safer for men in comparison to women, but considered the identical threat sent to gender counterparts of the same industry as more severe for men, but not for women.



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