Cyber Harassment and Women of Pakistan: Analysis of Female Victimization

¹Shahzadah Fahed Qureshi, ²Maria Abbasi, ³Muhammad Shahzad

¹Institute of Social Sciences, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan Pakistan,

fahadqureshi@bzu.edu.pk

²M. Phil Scholar, Public Administration, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan Pakistan,

mariaabbasi16@yahoo.com

³Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan, mshahzad061@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Cyber harassment refers to an unwanted aggressive behavior by misusing Information Communication Technology (ICT). Cyber harassment is a grave problem all over the world, and is growing fast with the increased use of ICTs. Women are considered the core victims of cyber harassment, although men are also not exception to it. The study analyses the situation of Pakistan regarding cyber harassment of women. To probe the situation related to cyber harassment, we analyzed 68 available cases from different sources during 2012-2018. We then matched those cases with the data of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). The results showed that comparatively a small number of cases of cyber harassment got registered and prosecuted. Out of registered cases, most of the cases were registered in the Punjab Province. Most of the victims were between the ages of 21-30 years and were well educated. Pictures sent through Facebook and cell phones were the primary source of blackmailing and harassment. The purpose of harassment is heterogeneous which is comprised of monetary benefits, revenge, and exploitation. The study suggests awareness campaigns regarding cyber harassment among women belonging to different trades and social groups. The research also suggests campaigns in society at a massive scale to create sensitization about these issues. The study further suggests training of law enforcement agencies to make them more effective in this scenario.

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Corresponding author's email address: fahadqureshi@bzu.edu.pk

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1. Introduction

Intensity and magnitude of crime may vary but it is part of every society. We cannot separate crime from any society or a group of people. The causes of crimes are seen as having links to various factors

including psychological, behavioral, and socioeconomic. The advancement in technology, especially Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the last few decades, has led to an entirely new situation regarding crimes for modern societies. ICTs have brought a massive cultural change by enormous online consumption of time by the people. Apart from being a source of information and persistent connectivity, ICTs are creating some hazards for the users in the form of certain cyber-crimes as well as challenges for the authorities regarding crime prevention in cyberspace.

Cyber harassment, commonly referred to as cyber-stalking or cyber-bullying, is repeated or continuing unwanted conduct in cyberspace. Like other conventional crimes it is also critical which can be very dangerous most of the times. Online stalking can be irritating, intimidating, dishonoring, and discomforting for others. Cyber harassment can be of various types such as insult, threat, deceit, or leakage of personal data in the form of pictures, videos, text messages or calls. Generally, social media is the primary source of online stalking which is likely to spoil others (Ashiq et al., 2016).

Pakistan is a traditional Muslim country where Islamic traditions are seen opposing cyber space in many ways. However, it is the country that has accepted ICT at a remarkable speed. According to the database of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), the number of mobile phone users in Pakistan crossed 150 million in May 2018, which is almost 70% of the whole population. Due to the availability of 4G Technology in Pakistan, apart from internet usage through computers and laptops, most of the mobile phone users also use internet from their phones.

Incidents of cyber harassment are obvious in Pakistan as they are in many other countries. It exists at almost every level and strata of the society. Dealing with cyber harassment has become more challenging for the law enforcement agencies. Applying the perspective of gender in cyber harassment, women turn out to be victimized more as compared to men. Although, men are also harassed, especially resourceful men who can give some benefit if blackmailed. However, the study is focused toward women because of two reasons: First, cyber-harassment cases against men are not generally reported; second, more vivid data of cyber harassment against women regarding Pakistan was available online for analysis.

The phenomenon of Youth regarding cyber-harassment is important to discuss here. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, cyber-stalking is a dilemma for youth. The consequences of online cyber-stalking are so severe that many times these incidents lead to suicide by the young girls and boys (Das & Nayak, 2013). The issues are reported in national and local newspapers and magazines repeatedly. Shahid, J. (2014, January 5) in Dawn News stated that Most of the victims of cyber-stalking are young women facing blackmailing, harassment, and extortion.

In The Diplomat, Mohsin (2016, April 16) disclosed the situation of cyber harassment for women and children in Pakistan. He stated that:

People in Pakistan do not have basic understanding and information about cyber harassment. Victims are unaware of how to ask for help and where to report the problem. Due to lack of awareness regarding legal rights, victims do not report such cases most of the time. School and college students in Pakistan must be well-informed concerning internet security, freedom of expression, their rights to privacy and, where to report such issues.

2. Problem statement

With the increased use of ICT, cyber harassment is becoming a more significant problem in Pakistani society rapidly. Cyber-stalking of women is emerging as a more reported crime in Pakistan, and it has become the need of the time to introduce an efficient system to deal with such issues. The study highlights its nature and indicates that to which extent such types of problems prevail in Pakistani society. The study primarily measures and analyze the reported cases of cyber harassment and estimates

the impacts of online harassment on women in Pakistan. By analyzing the cyber harassment cases reported in media, the study offers guidelines for legislatures and policymakers for the prevention of cyber harassment.

3. Brief Review of Literature

The issue of cyber harassment started with the increased use of ICT in the twenty-first century. Bocij and McFarlane (2003), studied the issue by analyzing a web-based questionnaire filled by sampled respondents searched through snowball sampling via email. He identified 82% of respondents experienced harassment in any form while one-third of respondents as victims of cyber-stalking. Most of these victims were educated females belonging to the age group of 30 years or older. The threat was the most common behavior experienced by the respondents instead of commonly perceived incidents of theft and fraud. Most of the victims identified suffering a high level of distress with a mean score of 7.16 on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 as the lowest level and 10 as the highest level). However, this level of distress had a negative relationship with the knowledge and experience of ICT.

Although anyone can be a victim of cyber-stalking, according to Hutton & Haantz (2003), some demographic groups like women, newcomers in the world of connectivity, and juveniles are more vulnerable to cyber-stalking. For example, Hutton & Haantz (2003) discussed a study conducted by the online victim advocacy group in 2002, identifying 71% of women as the victims of cyber-stalking. Bocij and McFarlane (2003), discussed a research study of 2001, concluding 61% of the cyber-stalking victims as Caucasian, followed by 3.9% Asians and 1.6% African Americans (Bocij & McFarlane, 2003).

Tettegah et al. (2006), disclosed that as more children connect online, their capacity to bully their peers grow. They suggest that school authorities should be aware of the danger and psychological effects of cyber-bullying. Hoff and Mitchell (2009), identified a vast difference in the victimization of males and females. According to the study, 72.1% of the females were harassed online compared to only 27.9% males. The study also identifies that 91% of online harassment is due to the relationship issue.

Mishna et al. (2012), examined the involvement of youth in cyber-bullying by distributing them into three categories based on their engagement: victims, bullies, and bully-victims. He identified the bully-victim category as more common in case of cyber-bullying. He also identified that females were more likely than males to be bully-victims. Sinclair (2012), studied harassment among student groups. He analyzed two types of cyber harassment: cyber and bias-based harassment, and explained that how these two forms are linked with academic and mental health problems. The study further revealed that students experiencing this sort of harassment were at the highest risk of adjustment issues in their student life as well in their careers ahead. The results revealed that non-stalked youngsters were 7.85 times less likely than harassed ones to have attempted to commit suicide.

Notar et al. (2013), found in a study that 90% of the youth participants experienced cyber-stalking either as victims or as eyewitnesses. Moreover, the victims who have been harassed more than once within a month are 70% and 50% of the total victims were familiar with the accused while the other 50% were not familiar. Cohen-Almagor (2018), discussed cyber-bullying with a particular focus on young people. The discussion, based on an interdisciplinary study, probes the troubling phenomenon of cyber-bullying which may result in suicide. The study argued that young people are more vulnerable to cyber-bullying than adults because they are less mature. The article further suggests remedies to counter cyber social problems and argues for reasonable and mature cooperation on part of the parents, schools, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), governments, and the society at large. By thematically analyzing one hundred victim narratives, Worsley et al. (2017), concluded that cyber-stalking impacts every sphere of life, including psychological, social, economic, and interpersonal. Their study identified anxiety and depression as the dominant emotional impacts of the cyber-stalking. The study further

identifies the coping strategies adopted by victims which are: avoiding the stalker, ignoring, confrontational strategy, support seeking, and cognitive reframing.

Studies on cyber-stalking in Pakistan started almost a decade after the developed world have done it as cyber culture appeared a lot later than it was prevalent in the west. Hafeez (2014), analyzed the consequences of cyber harassment on the youth of Pakistan. The study revealed that 36 percent of the respondents suffered from online harassment at some point in their lives. The percentage of female victims, out of the total respondents, were higher than those of male victims: 61% vs. 39%. Social networking sites and messaging applications were the primary sites of cyber-harassment. About 36% of the victims experienced desperation, 30.5 % of the victims confessed that they changed their online schedule. According to the study, the majority of the victims of online harassment never reported it.

Ashiq et al. (2016), explored the predictors of cyber-bullying in early adulthood in Pakistan. Results identified a significant positive relationship between cyber-bullying and emotional-behavioral problem. However, the study found an opposite relationship between cyber-bullying and empathy. Multiple Hierarchical regression analysis revealed that a lack of empathy and emotional problems were significant predictors of cyber-bullying. Magsi et al. (2017), specifically focused on cyber-bullying faced by Pakistani female students on university campuses. The sample consisted of 120 female students from four public sector universities in the Sindh province of Pakistan. The results revealed that female students were frequently blackmailed and threatened on university campuses. Almost 45% of those female students did not share such incidents to their families which rather encouraged cyber-bullies. The underlying reason behind this silence is the fear of being considered immoral by the society. Some of the other reasons of not reporting such incidents were that the female students were not aware of the laws related to cyber harassment and they also lacked trust in law enforcement agencies.

Musharraf and Anis-ul-Haque (2018a), conducted a study to investigate the impact of cyber aggression and cyber victimization on the mental health and well-being of Pakistani young adults. The results showed a significant effect of cyber victimization on mental health and well-being, while the effect of cyber aggression was non-significant. Applying the perspective of gender, the findings suggest that females are more vulnerable to develop anxiety due to cyber victimization as compared to their male counterparts. Musharraf and Anis-ul-Haque (2018b), also studied the issue of cyber-bullying in university students from the psychopathological viewpoint. Their analysis identified a higher prevalence rate of cyber-bullying among university students: 67% of university students had some role in cyber-bullying. The students involved in cyber-bullying have a higher level of psychopathology and poor well-being in comparison with those not involved. The level of psychopathology was highest in cyber-bullies, followed by cyber-bully victims and cyber victims.

The literature reveals that work on the effects of cyber-stalking is at the initial stage in Pakistan. Moreover, none of the studies highlight the extreme consequences of online harassment. One suitable way to study the drastic effects of cyber harassment is to analyze the reported cases which the present study is using as units of analysis.

4. Research Methodology

The design of the study is a blend of qualitative and quantitative approaches. To assess the impact of cyber harassment on Pakistani women, we collected data on incidents related to cyber harassment. The collection of such data was a great challenge because of its confidential nature. We collected data for analysis from different sources: First; Official website of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), second; media reports of harassment on a televised program (Sar e Aam), third; databases of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) working on cyber harassment issues where, specifically, Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) was very helpful for data gathering. An interesting thing which we found during gathering of data was that most of the cases reported on media or to NGOs were not actually reported to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) which gave the impression that most cases didn't get

registered with government agencies due to different socio-cultural reasons. After we collected data, it was double checked to maintain authenticity. Total 68 reports are found and used in the study for analysis. Frequency and percentage analysis was applied to show the clear picture about the situation.

5. Results and Discussions

The results extracted through the study are discussed in this section. Table 1, shows the demographic statistics. According to demographic statistics regarding the age group of victims, the majority belong to age group between 21-25 years having a frequency of 28 (41.17%). Contrary to this, the age group between 16-20 years are lesser victimized with a frequency of 3 (4.41%). While the age of victims in 10 out of 68 (14.7%) cases remained unidentified. Results showed that the majority of offenders were men. As for as Education segment of victims is concerned, it reveals that the majority of them are highly qualified with the qualification of master (45.58%) and bachelor (33.82%). Even in one case (1.47%), the victim has a doctorate. Educational qualification of 9 (13.23%) victims remained unidentified. Province of Punjab with 47 (69.11%) cases is in the leading position. Sindh with 16 (23.52%) cases is on the second number. While there were only 4 (5.88%) cases in KPK and one (1.47%) case of cyber harassment in Baluchistan.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Demographics

Age of the victims			
Sr. #	Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	(16-20) Years	3	4.41
2	(21-25) Years	28	41.17
3	(26-30) Years	22	32.35
4	(31-35) Years	5	7.35
5	Unidentified	10	14.7
Total		68	100
Gender of the victims			
Gender		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female		68	100
Education of victims			
Sr. #	Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	12 Years	4	5.88
2	14 Years	23	33.82
3	16 Years	31	45.58
4	18 Years and Above	1	1.47
5	Unidentified	9	13.23
Total		68	100
Province			
Sr. #	Province	Frequency	Percentage
1	Punjab	47	69.11
2	Sind	16	23.52
3	KPK	4	5.88
4	Baluchistan	1	1.47
Total		68	100

Sources: FIA, Sar-e-Aam, ARY News, DRF

Year-wise comparison revealed that the majority of the cyber-harassment cases were reported in 2018, as shown in Table 2. The number of reported cases in 2018 were 28 (41.17%) out of a total of 68 cases reported from 2012-2018. On the other hand, only 2 (2.94%) cases were reported in 2012. The results of the study show that no single case was recorded in 2013. Out of 68 cases, only 6 (8.82%) cases were recorded in 2014. The number of cases recorded were 3 (4.41%) in 2015, which increased to 17 (25%) in 2016. The Government of Pakistan passed cyber-harassment bill in 2016. In 2017, 12 (17.64%) cases were reported. Surprisingly, the rate of cyber harassment increased dramatically in 2018, where 28 (41.17%) cases were reported in one year.

Table No. 2: Cyber harassment cases registered in different years

Sr. #	Year	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	2012	2	2.94
2	2013	0	0
3	2014	6	8.82
4	2015	3	4.41
5	2016	17	25
6	2017	12	17.64
7	2018	28	41.17
Total		68	100

Sources: FIA, Media (Sar e Aam), DRF

We collected a major part of data from FIA, as shown in Table 3, as FIA data is most authentic. However, to make our research sample rich, we also collected data from other sources. We adjusted similar cases by giving priority to FIA data. We gathered the data of 55 (80.88%) cases from the website of FIA, data of 8 (11.76%) cases from Media (television program Sar-e-Aam), and data of the remaining 5 (7.35%) from the website of DRF.

Table 3: Reporting Organization of cyber harassment

Sr. #	Agency name	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)	55	80.88
2	Sar-e-Aam	8	11.76
3	Digital rights Foundation (DRF)	5	7.35
Total		68	100

Source internet

The type of cyber harassment is shown in Table 4. Among various kinds of cyber harassment, harassment through pictures (visual images) is the most common. 44 (64.70%) cases verify that the majority of victims were harassed through the pictures posted in various communication technologies. Video is the second most common type of harassment and used in 13 (19.11%) cases. Calls are the third most common type of cyber harassment, which found in 7 (10.29%) cases. Vulgar texts were involved in 3 (4.41%) cases. In one (1.47%) case, the victim was blackmailed through a fake marriage certificate.

Table 4: Type of cyber harassment

Sr. #	Harassment type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Pictures	44	64.70
2	Videos	13	19.11
3	Call	7	10.29
4	Vulgar texts	3	4.41
5	Fake Marriage certificate	1	01.47
Total		68	100

Sources: FIA, Sar-e-Aam ARY News, DRF

Table 5 shows the medium of cyber harassment. Facebook is not only providing a platform of entertainment but also a source of demolishing the lives and dignity of others through blackmailing by making fake IDs and uploading pictures. With the highest rate of cases among all, Facebook remained the main medium of harassment and blackmailing. The medium of harassment was Facebook in 30 (44.11%) cases, cell phone text messages and calls in 23 (33.82%) cases, and hidden camera in 7 (10.29%) cases. Contrary to the general perception, whatsapp was medium of harassment in only 3 (4.41%) cases, and YouTube was medium in 2 (2.94%) cases while Email and Twitter were the medium in 1 (1.47%) case each.

Table 5: Media of cyber harassment

Sr. #	Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
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1	Facebook	30	44.11
2	Cell phone text messages and calls	23	33.82
3	Hidden Camera	7	10.29
4	Whatsapp	3	4.41
5	YouTube	2	2.94
6	Email	1	01.47
7	Twitter	1	01.47
Total		68	100

Sources: FIA, Sar-e-Aam ARY News, DRF

Results show that accused in different cases harassed victims for various reasons, as shown in Table 6. The demands for money and to meet physically were the core purposes of harassment. The purpose of the accused in 19 (27.94%) cases was the demand for money, 16 (23.52%) cases to meet physically, 9 (13.23%) cases to take revenge, 8 (11.76) cases to do marriage, and in 5 (7.35%) cases damaging victims' dignity was the aim. The accused wanted to get European nationality in one (1.47%) case. Honor killing was the aim of one (1.47%) accused. In 9 (13.23) cases, the purpose of the accused remained unidentified.

Table 6: Purpose of Accused

Sr. #	Purpose	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Money demand	19	27.94
2	To meet physically	16	23.52
3	Revenge	9	13.23
4	Marriage	8	11.76
5	Damaging dignity	5	7.35
6	European nationality	1	01.47
7	Honor killing	1	01.47
8	Unidentified	9	13.23
Total		68	100

Sources: FIA, Sar-e-Aam ARY News, DRF

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that women in Pakistan face cyber-bullying at considerably high intensity. Very few women report cases, and the majority of such cases are not reported and registered because of various reasons, including lack of awareness and the fear of damage of dignity. The victim females are mostly educated and belong to the age group of 21-30. Placing pictures and videos at various online forums are the core types of cyber harassment. Facebook and cell phones are the main medium of harassment. Demand for money and physical meetings are the primary objectives of harassment.

Although, avoiding online harassment is challenging; however, we can reduce it to a greater extent. It can only be possible with the mutual effort of individuals, law enforcement agencies, and the government. As prevention is always better than the cure, and it is possible only with little care to make incidents exceptional. The best way for the prevention of cyber harassment is to give its awareness on a massive scale. No execution of laws means providing a platform for offenders to commit offenses concerning online harassment. If the execution of the law is guaranteed, it can be very effective in reducing the rate of cyber harassment. Cyber harassment is a social issue all over the world. To fight successfully against online harassment, society must play its role by discouraging offenders and avoiding stereotypes which hinders the victim to report the case. The adoption of upcoming advances in ICT can make it difficult for the offender to hide and can contribute towards the prevention of cyber-bullying.

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