

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET ON CHILDREN EDUCATION WITH RISING CYBERCRIMES: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

With the advent of technology and increasing demands of time, internet and computer literacy has become an integral part of everyone's life. If we look around in today's time a child is born with the technological know-how and knows to operate almost every electronic device available, especially devices connected to internet. Mentoring child for the correct use of internet is a must. Technology carries more number of disadvantages over its advantages. Negative use of internet can easily lead to diverting a child's mind in the wrong direction. Children, due to their tender years of age misuse the information communication technology (ICT). Trend to be popular on social media has taken a speed and toll on the mental health of teenagers. It is commonly observed that children create accounts on social media faking the age brackets set by the companies. They try to portray a trendy image on social media which has led the students to live a faking life and this is also pulling them away from their studies. Children have become prone to expose their personal lives on social media and in turn fall prey to wrong friendships, leading them nowhere. Bios Lockeroom from Instagram, is a very recent example for the same. Parents as well portray a wrong example by keeping themselves updated with the new versions of gadgets available in the market always. In some families parents must not be computer literates but their kids are exposed to computers, smart phones and internet as it has become need of the hour. Due to increase in disposable incomes, access to internet and smart phones with the updated technology are available and easily affordable to the people.

Child is automatically trained by the artificial intelligence and technological updates to get trapped into cybercrimes like child pornography and distractive gaming technology, phishing and easily catch habits of hacking. Through this paper the researcher aims to analyse the role of media, technology in misleading children through various cybercrimes and show them the path where they tend to deviate. In these crimes the culprits can be children themselves and the adults as well. Also the paper will analyse the reasons for happening of such crimes and will offer solutions that can be adopted by various educational institutions and parents as well to mentor the children in right direction.

Keywords: social media, child sexual abuse, cybercrimes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cybercrimes

Covid 19 has devastated the world in an extremely bitter manner. The second wave has created havoc in the entire country and has led to question the resource availability and allocation for the people in the country. This situation has impacted the adults, youth (adolescents), children and every other person directly or indirectly not only in the terms of health but in terms of socio economic conditions too. The disparity has affected the poor and the minorities, and therefore has brought forth the face of income imbalance in the limelight.^[1]

With the advent of this global pandemic the youth has been surrounded by a new risk altogether including exposure to internet, cyberbullying, child pornography, social media chat rooms. With this paper the researcher aims to analyse the undulate effect on children, their families and the service and the value system altogether. Earlier it just seemed to be a loss of the economy or the income losses on personal level but now, it has taken a toll of mental health of many people around. Initially it seemed to be like the healthcare workers have to look after the gravely ill people and severely affected by the virus but now, it seems that there is a dire need of psychologists and psychiatrists in the country because the pandemic has affected the health of people not only physically but also mentally, especially children. Future of children has been put at stake by socializing negatively, and has also exposed them to an easily accessible and available bullying platform in the face of social media, developing a risk of psychological problems for them^[2].

With the schools being closed, nobody is able to move around places, and so are children, as complying with the guidelines to contain the spread is necessary. The system of online education has made the students expose to the horrifying world of internet, where they are not only exposed to restricted content, along with this exposure they have also got tangled in the loop of artificial intelligence. Where they search one thing, it automatically

leads them to another. The ghost of social media has eaten children up in many ways. And this has turned up to be a big concern having long term effect on mental health of children and their families.^[3]

This exposure of children to internet and social media has been criticised for past recent years because the graph for violence against children has been continuously rising with technological advancement. It has been both global and widespread. The loss caused is irrespective of social status, wealth; family background does not matter in the loss that has been done to children due to internet. (UNICEF 2014)

Majority of the children face violence from the most trusted people, some of them are their family members, teachers or someone whom they interact with on daily basis. (UNICEF, 2017). It is extremely disheartening that many children do not unveil the horrific experiences of their violence to anyone due to lack of faith and fear of getting scolded. Many researchers globally are working to find out how the coronavirus crises have exposed the children to violence.^[4]

Research Methodology

The research methodology used in the paper is doctrinal, descriptive in nature. Secondary resources such as E-resources, articles, and news reports have been studied. For the legal regimes and solutions bare acts such as POCSO Act, Information Technology Act, 2000 and Indian Penal Code, 1860 have been studied.

2. CYBERBULLYING: THE NEXT GENERATION HAZARD

Bullying in schools and colleges has been an age old tradition, but now technology has been added to the tradition of bullying. As the schools have to turn online due to the recent pandemic, the use of internet among school students has become extremely widespread; this is leading to inculcation of harmful behaviours.^[5]

This term cyberbullying has been coined by Canadian Bill Belsey, has grown rapidly and parents and teachers are concerned about their ability to respond efficiently and effectively to this problem. Cyber bullying is basically harassment or insulting psychologically through verbal or written messages over electronic devices. Defamatory messages over texts, instant messages, websites, personal messages etc. intended to harm the other person.^[6]

2.1 CYBER ENVIROMENTS

Instant Messages (IM) and Chat rooms

Instant messaging (IM) is as equal to an email, the only difference is that both the persons are online at the same time and can send messages instantly. There are many online platforms which are available free of cost and approve chats with several people at the same time. Also the shocking fact is that children are defying all the age rules created by the companies. Children are creating ids faking their age. A drawback with IM is that the message can be copied without sender's knowledge and can be forwarded to others who are not a part of the chat. Children share the passwords amongst each other and then their friends using the account masquerade and send offensive messages from each other's ids. Similarly children have formed chat rooms, the content in the chat room is not public to everyone in the chat at a given time.^[7]

A recent example of chat room in India is Boislockeroom. This chat group became a great controversy in India recently in 2020 and probably the first case from India to a popular social media platform, Instagram. The group comprised of teenage school boys who posted restricted images of underage girls and commented jokes ranging from body shaming to sexual assaults. The whistle blower was from the group itself, a teenaged girl who leaked the screenshots of the chat room and immediately as it went viral. Delhi Women Commission took a suo-motu cognizance of the matter alongwith issuing a notice to Instagram to reveal the IP address details.^[8]

The pressure increased so much that a boy of the same group could not tolerate the pressure and committed suicide.

3. ROOT CAUSES

With the spread of corona virus, lockdown and elongated cessation of schools, children have confined themselves to home; there has been a substantial increase in the number of children visiting pornography websites and becoming more acquainted to restricted content.^[9] The basic reason for this familiarity can also be related to artificial intelligence for once, because the moment there's a particular click, it will lead you to another link and this is an extremely large web where once the child enters, it's probably not possible for the child to come back easily. It simply turns to be addictive! The online sexual raiders can easily entice children to involve in sexual exploitation. In the garb of online classes, children do not prefer to share any online activity with parents neither they like themselves to be monitored. This non- monitoring makes the mental health and their direction more vulnerable.^[10]

The problem nowadays is that children think straight forward and manner less behaviour, watching content which is not normally not acceptable by the elders is all level headed. As per them the world has gone way too forward and nobody around minds the content they watch. Children like being involved in violent games that make abusive language sound trendy, therefore other children, adolescents and adults involved in such games befriend each other and drag innocent ones in a wrong direction with the intention sexual abuse.^[11]

As per the data published by press information bureau in September 2020, the number of child pornography and child rape complaints lodged in national crime reporting portal (NCRP) from March 2020 to September 2020 is 13,244.420 cases of child sexual abuse had been received from 1st March, 2020 till 31st August, 2020 via online portals, helplines and other media, reports National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). 3941 calls have been received by Childline India Foundation (CIF) regarding child sexual cases from 1st March, 2020 to 15th September, 2020. As per NCRB report number of crimes against children in 2019 were 1,48,185 which showed an increase by 4.5% as compared to 2018. The POCSO Act witnessed an increase in registration of cases by 18.9%. The irony is in majority of the cases the accused were known to survivors or was either of the family members. Rape charges under POCSO Act were almost upto 26,192 in which 25,934 were girls and 258 were boys. Uttar Pradesh tops the ladder in POCSO Act for crime against girls followed by Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.^[12]

All the above cases have been somewhere or the other linked with watching pornography or being involved with social media. Loneliness amongst teenagers tends to make them a cyber-victim. Studies show that being addicted to internet friendships and connecting to friends electronically is at peak in middle school. Teenage girls create accounts and get trapped with unknown boys in the name of friendship and due to lack of decision making power, take extreme steps falling prey to rapes.^[13]

4. CONSEQUENCES

Involvement with social media, befriending with some and then getting insulted online in a group of friends or publically can leave a great impression on psyche of children. This may lead to anxiety, depression, and academic disorientation, aggression causing to misbehave with parents and teachers or at times classmates too. Severe concentration problems, eating and dissociative disorders and striving to find our one's own worth, shying from peers and adults at various places. The effects tend to be so dangerous at times that it leads the child to take extreme steps and they become a victim to suicides due to burdensome pressure that they feel in their minds.^[14]

The use of unmonitored technology paves way for a lot of spiteful activities. American Academy of Paediatrics said online activities on social media can even land children into specific situations called as "Facebook depression", which means a feeling of being excluded from the events or facing unpopularity.^[15]

Another aspect of online or social media bullying is that comments can be saved for reverting in future. Repeated readings of the comments can make the wounds come alive every time. Children specially when in teenage are very tender on mind and heart and such cyber bullying can lead them to have a permanent impression on mind. If this cyberbullying is done in a chat group, then the psychological impact is an elongated one. It often lands them into a legal battle also.^[13] This cyberbullying can be discussed with classmates too once the school is open and any child can be a target to it, this may in future create fear to attend the school and the child might find it hard to cope with the embarrassment.^[16]

5. PARENTAL MONITORING AND SCHOOL INTERVENTION

Cyberbullying and child sexual abuse can be controlled and observed by parents and school, as they play a significant role in child's life in their tender years.

- Timely interaction with the child of facing any issue of cyberbullying can be discussed. The child can be asked time to time, if he is facing any issues with online classes.
- Being vigilant with the online activities of kids and when they use internet it should be under parents' guidance.
- If a parent or school authorities come to know about any kid as a cyber-bully, should be counselled well and parents should have a regular check on his online activities.^[17]
- If any repetitive behaviours are seen in the child for bullying other children, the child can be punished in a way like parents banning the use of mobile phone for him or computer for some period of time and make him realise his mistake.^[18]
- Making the children aware about the actions to be taken in case if they are bullied or abused online.
- Keeping a track or check on the company of the child.

- Schools should have clearly formulated rules for children who are involved in cyberbullying and these rules should be communicated to parents as well. No compromise policy should be made so that the child learns a lesson in time.^[19]
- In case of any serious crime committed online by a child or group of children it should be brought forth with legal authorities. Proper and necessary action is required in time and it should be the duty of the school to bring things into notice of parents for counselling the child in time.^[20]

6. PRESENT LEGAL REGIMES

There are many laws in India to prevent this horror of child sexual abuse through online mediums.

POCSO Act, 2012

One of the key legal regimes for preventing children from sexual exposure is POCSO Act. Sexual assault, harassment and pornography all have been made punishable offences under this act. Few sections of the act that describe the offence and punishment are as:

- A. **Section 11** of the POCSO Act, lays the provisions that if a person commits sexual harassment upon a child, if such person:
 - a. utters any word or sound, makes any gesture or exhibits any body part intentionally for developing an sexual intent with the child or
 - b. forces a child to exhibit his body part so as it shall be seen by such person or any other person; or
 - c. shows any object or pornographic content to the child purposely or;
 - d. repeatedly or continuously contacts the child through electronic, digital means; or
 - e. threatens to use, any part of the body of the child or the involvement of the child in a sexual act through electronic media or digital media; or
 - f. Lures a child for pornographic purposes or gives gratification.
- B. **Section 12** provides the provision for punishment for the above said offences and such offences are punishable for imprisonment upto three years and fine.
- C. **Section 13**: Using a child for involvement in pornographic contents through electronic, print media, computer or any other upgraded technology, intentionally committing this act for the purpose of providing gratification and then preparing and distributing the pornographic material, irrespective of personal use or distribution, amounts to an offence under Section 13 of this Act. Sexual gratification includes:
 - a) exhibiting sexual organs of a child;
 - b) involving a child in sexual acts (with or without penetration);
 - c) Indecent and obscene representation of a child for pornographic purpose, shall be held guilty.
- D. Under **Section 15**, storing pornographic content involving child for commercial purposes is also termed as an offence and is punishable with imprisonment extending upto three years or with fine or with both.
- E. Under **Section 19**, provisions have been given to report the child sexual abuse cases. Special Juvenile Police Unit or the local police is responsible to record the complaints in such cases and it has to be recorded in the language comprehensible by the child too.
- F. Under **Section 20** POCSO Act describes a duty for media, hotel, hospital, club or studio personnel, irrespective of the number of persons employed to provide to the Special Juvenile Police Unit, or to the local police on coming across any material or object which is sexually exploitative of the child including pornographic, sexually-related or making obscene representation of a child or children) through the use of any medium.

Information Technology Act 2000

The Act was drafted keeping in mind the growing cyber offences. Though cyberbullying can have a lasting impact on one's mind which can even make a person move on the verge of committing a suicide, keeping this in mind cyber stalking was made a crime by amending the act in 2013 but not cyber bullying. Yet there are some remedies available under section 66 (A) of which makes sending hateful and offensive messages through social media objectionable.

Section 66 (D) makes cheating by personation through a computer resource, an offence. Any person deceiving, cheating anyone on social media or any other online platform, punishment described is upto 3 years of imprisonment and fine upto 1 lakh rupees.

Any person infringing the privacy of another, encroaches someone's privacy digitally through sharing pictures, the person can be held responsible under Section 66 (E) and can be punished for 3 years of imprisonment and fine upto 3 lakh rupees.

For uploading, circulating and rotating any loutish content on internet, imprisonment for 5 years and fine upto 10 lakh rupees has been provided under section 67 of IT Act, 2009.

Indian Penal Code, 1860

This is the official penal code of India, providing punishments for offenders for various crimes, but in this code too there is no specific offence defined as cyberbullying. Some sections though comprehend and are closely related to cyber threats.

Section 354 (C) describes punishment about clicking private pictures of any woman without her consent, or if any woman is involved in any private activity, then keeping an eye on her during her privacy is a crime under this section.

Section 354 (D) describes stalking, any person found guilty of stalking, observing private activities and keeps an update about the daily activities of any person without permission on internet with the intention of hurting that person, can be punished upto 3 years.

Section 499 defines defamation and punishes the offender for sending any offensive or defamatory messages to any person through online platforms. If done through social media, it will be covered under cyberbullying.

Section 507 is related with intimidating some unidentified person, giving threats and forcing them to so any act without their will, the punishment is upto 2 years of imprisonment.

7. CONCLUSION

With the medium of this research paper, the conclusion drawn is that cyberbullying and child sexual abuse over internet have shown a sharp rise in the graph. As internet is easily available to everyone in the country for which all the credit goes to telecom companies providing rapidly advanced and free internet facilities. However this has proved to be the worst case scenario for our country where despite having all the legal regimes in force, it is extremely challenging to control the demons of internet world. All the nasty acts like stalking, defamation, harassment, torture, bullying someone over social media platform can be easily done over internet with its easy access. This nasty act turns into a psychological trauma soon and children due to their tender age do not report all this at times with the fear of being shamed and losing their reputation in front of parents and public. They fear landing up in legal battle which can be mentally tarnishing for the victim and family. To deal with child sexual abuse, online bullying and all the other things the youngsters are facing in this recent pandemic, Indian laws have some loopholes, there are not enough special courts formed to deal with such issues. Information Technology Act 2000 still needs to be modified to make cybercrimes as strict offence.

8. SUGGESTIONS

- Few suggestions can be incorporated with the help of this research paper.
- It is suggested that there needs to be raise in the level of awareness about cybercrimes and cyber laws both amongst people.
- The government needs to adopt such measures and reforms that it makes everyone aware about the web of cyber world.
- Even the authorities who are to look after the cyber cases do not have a full-fledged training for tracing or finding the offender or the source of origin of crime.
- Amendment in the current law is required through which cybercrimes like child sexual abuse, child pornography, and cyberbullying can be dealt strictly.
- The offenders have to be controlled by the authorities through proper vigilance and training before it reaches an uncontrollable juncture.
- Punishments should be made as grave as the crime is, this is the only method through which all the crimes in the cyber world can be meticulously dealt.

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