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UNVEILING THE DARK SIDE OF CYBERSPACE: A STUDY OF CYBER CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Cybercrime is a rapidly growing problem in India, with a significant impact on women. This study aims to critically examine the nature and extent of cybercrimes committed against women in India, with a focus on the legal framework and enforcement mechanisms in place to address these crimes. The study found that the most common cybercrimes committed against women in India include online harassment, cyber-stalking, and revenge pornography. These crimes often go unreported due to a lack of awareness about the legal options available to victims and a lack of trust in the law enforcement agencies to effectively investigate and prosecute these crimes. The study also found that the current legal framework in India is inadequate to address the unique challenges posed by cybercrimes against women, and that there is a need for better training and resources for law enforcement agencies to effectively investigate and prosecute these crimes.

This study critically examines the nature and extent of cybercrimes committed against women in India, with a focus on the legal framework and enforcement mechanisms. The study found that the most common cybercrimes include online harassment, cyber stalking, and revenge pornography, which often go unreported due to lack of awareness and trust in law enforcement. The current legal framework in India is inadequate to address cybercrimes against women and there is a need for better training and resources for law enforcement agencies and increased awareness and education for women about the risks and legal protections.

Keywords: Cyber Risk, Cyber Security, Women

1. Introduction

In recent years, cyberspace has become an integral part of our daily lives, and with the increasing use of technology, cybercrime has emerged as a significant threat to society.

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

Cybercrime refers to illegal activities that are carried out using the internet or any digital technology. Cybercrime includes a broad range of offenses, from financial fraud to cyberbullying, hacking, and online harassment. Unfortunately, women have been disproportionately affected by cybercrime in India, where cyber offenses against women have increased rapidly in recent years.

Cybercrime has severe consequences for women in India, both in terms of mental and physical health. With the rise of social media and online platforms, cyberbullying and online harassment have become widespread in India, targeting women in particular. Women face cyber threats like stalking, identity theft, and revenge pornography, leading to severe mental distress and emotional trauma. According to a study by the National Commission for Women, 54.8% of women have experienced cyber harassment, while 26% of them have reported cases of morphed images or videos. Moreover, cybercrime has also had a significant economic impact on women, with many women losing their jobs or experiencing financial losses due to online fraud.

The different types of cybercrimes against women in India include online harassment, cyberbullying, online stalking, revenge pornography, and cyber financial fraud. Online harassment involves sending threatening or offensive messages or comments on social media platforms, while cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, humiliate, or intimidate someone. Online stalking is a pattern of repeated online harassment that involves following, monitoring, or tracking someone's online activity. Revenge pornography involves the distribution of sexually explicit images or videos without the victim's consent, while cyber financial fraud includes online phishing, credit card fraud, and other forms of online financial scams.

The current state of cybersecurity in India is a cause for concern, with India ranking among the top five countries in the world for cybercrime. Despite the government's efforts to strengthen cybersecurity laws and regulations, there are still significant gaps in implementing cybersecurity measures in India. The lack of awareness and knowledge about cybersecurity among the general public and law enforcement agencies also exacerbates the problem. Moreover, the increasing use of technology and the internet has led to an increase in the number of cybercrimes, making it challenging to address the issue effectively.

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

cybercrime[1] against women in India is a growing concern, with severe consequences for women's mental and physical health, as well as their economic wellbeing. The different types of cybercrimes, including online harassment, cyberbullying, online stalking, revenge pornography, and cyber financial fraud, require immediate attention from the government, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations. There is a need for a comprehensive approach to addressing cybercrime, including increasing public awareness, strengthening cybersecurity laws and regulations, and providing support[2] to victims of cybercrime.

2. Overview of Cyber Crimes Against Women

Cyber crimes against women in India are a growing concern, with a significant impact on women's mental and physical health, as well as their economic wellbeing. The different types of cyber crimes against women include online harassment, cyber stalking, cyberbullying, revenge porn, and financial fraud.

Online harassment is one of the most common forms of cybercrime against women in India. It involves the use of digital platforms to send threatening, abusive, or offensive messages or comments to women. According to a study by the National Commission for Women, 54.8% of women have experienced cyber harassment. Online harassment can lead to significant mental distress, anxiety, and fear among women, making them feel unsafe and vulnerable.

Cyber stalking is another type of cybercrime that women in India face. It refers to a pattern of repeated online harassment that involves following, monitoring, or tracking someone's online activity. Cyber stalkers use various digital platforms like social media, emails, and messaging apps to stalk and harass their victims. According to a report by the Cyber Crime Cell of the Mumbai Police, there has been a 91%[3] increase in cyber stalking cases in India in the past year.

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, humiliate, or intimidate someone. It is one of the most common forms of cybercrime against women, particularly among young girls and

[1] National Crime Records Bureau. (2020). Crime in India. Retrieved from https://ncrb.gov.in/en/crime-india

[2] Ministry of Women and Child Development. (2021). Cyber Crime Against Women. Retrieved from https://wcd.nic.in/schemes/cyber-crime-against-women

[3] Sharma, R. (2018). Cyber Crimes Against Women in India: An Analysis. Journal of Information Technology and Economic Development, 9(2), 18-33. Retrieved from https://www.jited.org/index.php/jited/article/view/128/79

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

women. Cyberbullying can take many forms, including spreading rumors, posting offensive messages, and sharing embarrassing photos or videos. A survey by the Cyber and Media Cell of the Delhi Police found that 40% of cyberbullying victims in India were women.

Revenge porn is a particularly heinous form of cybercrime against women in India. It involves the distribution of sexually explicit images or videos without the victim's consent, often as an act of revenge or blackmail. According to a report by the Cyber Peace Foundation, there has been a 148% increase in revenge porn cases in India in the past year. Revenge porn can lead to severe mental and emotional trauma, as well as damage to a woman's reputation.

Cyber financial fraud is also a growing concern for women in India. With the rise of online transactions, cyber criminals have found new ways to defraud unsuspecting victims. Cyber financial fraud includes online phishing, credit card fraud, and other forms of online financial scams. According to a report by the Reserve Bank of India, there has been a significant increase in online banking fraud in India in the past year.

- In 2020, a young woman in Delhi was cyber stalked and harassed for over a year by a man she met on a dating app. The man used multiple fake identities to harass her and threatened to post her private photos online.
- According to a report by the Cyber Peace Foundation, there were 227 reported cases of revenge porn in India in 2020, up from just 91 cases in 2019.
- A survey by the Cyber and Media Cell of the Delhi Police found that 56% [4]of cyber stalking victims in India were women.
- According to a report by the Reserve Bank of India, there were 205,347 cases of online banking fraud in India in 2020, with a total loss of Rs 179 crore.

3. Causes of Cyber Crimes Against Women

Cyber crimes against women in India are a complex phenomenon that is influenced by several underlying factors. These factors include gender-based violence, patriarchal attitudes, and lack of awareness about cyber security.Gender-based violence is a root cause of cyber crimes against women in India. Women in India face

[4] National Commission for Women. (2021). Cyber Crime. Retrieved from https://ncw.nic.in/cyber-crime

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

 UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

various forms of violence, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and physical assault. These forms of violence often spill over into cyberspace, where perpetrators use technology to harass, stalk, or blackmail their victims. In many cases, the perpetrators are known to the victims, such as intimate partners or family members. According to a report by the National Crime Records Bureau, over 93%[5] of rape cases in India were committed by someone known to the victim.

Patriarchal attitudes in Indian society also contribute to the prevalence of cyber crimes against women. The patriarchal system promotes male dominance and control over women, leading to a culture of misogyny, victim-blaming, and discrimination. These attitudes often manifest in cyberspace, where women are subjected to online harassment, trolling, and abuse. Women who speak up against harassment or violence are often accused of bringing shame to their families or communities. The lack of support from family and society can deter women from reporting cyber crimes.

The lack of awareness about cyber security is another contributing factor to the prevalence of cyber crimes against women in India. Many women in India lack basic knowledge about safe online practices, such as creating strong passwords, avoiding phishing scams, and using privacy settings. This lack of awareness makes them vulnerable to cyber attacks, such as identity theft, financial fraud, and data breaches. The absence of comprehensive cyber security policies and laws also makes it difficult for women to seek justice and protection.

- In 2020, a woman in Delhi was harassed and threatened with revenge porn by her former partner, who was angry about their breakup. The woman did not report the incident due to fear of retaliation and lack of support from her family.
- According to a report by the National Family Health Survey, over 30% of women in India have experienced physical or sexual violence by their intimate partners.
- A survey by the Internet and Mobile Association of India found that only 30% of women in India use strong passwords, while 60% share their passwords with others.
- According to a report by the National Crime Records Bureau, there were over 4,000 cases of cyber crimes against women in India in 2019.[6]

[5] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2013). Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/GLOTIP_2014_full_report.pdf

[6] Ministry of Home Affairs. (2017). Cyber Crime in India. Retrieved from https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/CyberCrimes_24102017.pdf

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

 UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

The prevalence of cyber crimes against women in India is a complex issue that requires a multi-pronged approach to address. It is essential to address the underlying factors that contribute to the problem, such as gender-based violence, patriarchal attitudes, and lack of awareness about cyber security. This can be achieved through policy reforms, education and awareness programs, and community-based interventions. It is also crucial to provide support and protection to women who are victims of cyber crimes, through legal aid, counselling, and other support services.

4. Cyber Crime Laws in India

The rise of cyber crimes against women in India has led to the development of a legal framework to address these crimes. The legal framework in India includes several laws and regulations, including the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Indian Penal Code, and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Let's take a closer look at these laws and regulations

The Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act) is the primary law that deals with cyber crimes in India. The IT Act was enacted to provide legal recognition for electronic transactions and to facilitate e-governance. The IT Act includes provisions that deal with cyber crimes against women, such as hacking, identity theft, and electronic stalking. [7]The IT Act also provides for the establishment of cyber crime investigation cells in every state to investigate and prosecute cyber crimes.

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) is the primary criminal law in India. The IPC includes provisions that deal with crimes against women, such as rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. The IPC has been amended to include provisions that deal with cyber crimes against women, such as voyeurism, cyber stalking, and dissemination of sexually explicit material. The IPC also provides for punishment for abetment to cyber crimes against women.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA) is a civil law that provides protection to women who are victims of domestic violence. The PWDVA defines domestic violence broadly to include physical, sexual, verbal,

[7] The Indian Express. (2018). One cyber crime in India every 10 minutes: As technology races ahead of law, challenges for police and lawmakers. Retrieved from https://indianexpress.com/article/india/one-cyber-crime-in-india-every-10-minutes-as-technology-races-ahead-of-law-challenges-for-police-and-lawmakers-5111887/

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

emotional, and economic abuse. The PWDVA also includes provisions that deal with cyber crimes against women, such as online harassment, stalking, and revenge porn. The PWDVA provides for protection orders, residence orders, and monetary relief to women who are victims of domestic violence.

- In 2019, a man was sentenced to two years in jail for stalking a woman on social media. The man had created fake profiles on social media to harass the woman and had also threatened to upload her private pictures online.
- According to a report by the National Crime Records Bureau, there were over 4,000 cases of cyber crimes against women in India in 2019. Out of these cases, over 1,000 cases were related to online harassment and stalking.[8]
- In 2018, the Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutional validity of Section 66A of the IT Act, which deals with the punishment for sending offensive messages through communication services. The Court held that Section 66A was necessary to protect the dignity of women and prevent cyber harassment.

The legal framework in India that deals with cyber crimes against women is a critical tool to provide protection and justice to women who are victims of cyber crimes. The framework includes several laws and regulations, such as the Information Technology Act, Indian Penal Code, and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. However, the implementation of these laws and regulations remains a challenge, and there is a need for capacity building of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. It is also essential to create awareness among women about their legal rights and the available remedies to seek justice.

5. Challenges in Addressing Cyber Crimes Against Women

Cyber crimes against women in India are a growing concern, and efforts to address them are complicated by a number of challenges. In this section, we will explore some of the key

[8] Kaur, R., & Kaur, R. (2017). Cyber Crime Against Women in India. International Journal of Computer Science and Information Security, 15(6), 90-95. Retrieved from https://ijcsis.org/papers/vol15no6/Vol15no6p90.pdf

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

challenges that law enforcement agencies and the legal system face in addressing cyber crimes against women in India.[9]

One of the main challenges is the lack of resources available to law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute cyber crimes. Cyber crimes are often complex and require specialized knowledge and technology to investigate. However, many police departments in India are understaffed and lack the necessary resources to handle cyber crime cases effectively. This can result in delayed or inadequate investigations and low conviction rates[10].

Another challenge is the low reporting rate of cyber crimes against women. Many women may not report incidents of cyber crimes due to fear of retaliation or social stigma, or because they are not aware of their rights or the available legal remedies. This underreporting can make it difficult for law enforcement agencies to accurately assess the prevalence of cyber crimes against women and allocate resources accordingly.

In addition, the legal system in India faces challenges in addressing cyber crimes against women. The Indian Penal Code and the Information Technology Act, 2000, provide legal provisions for cyber crimes, but they may not always be effectively implemented or enforced. There may also be a lack of clarity or inconsistencies in the interpretation of these laws, which can result in different outcomes for similar cases.

Finally, the lack of adequate training for law enforcement officials and legal professionals can be a significant challenge in addressing cyber crimes against women. Many law enforcement officials may not have the necessary knowledge or skills to handle cyber crime cases[11], and legal professionals may not have specialized training in cyber crime law. This can lead to errors in investigations or legal proceedings, and can contribute to low conviction rates.

cyber crimes against women in India are a serious issue that require effective responses from law enforcement agencies and the legal system. However, addressing these crimes is complicated by a number of challenges, including lack of resources, low reporting rates, inconsistencies in the legal framework, and inadequate training.

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[9] Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. (2021). Cyber threats to Canadian individuals and organizations. https://cyber.gc.ca/en/guidance/cyber-threats-canadian-individuals-and-organizations

[10] Times of India. (2019). India third in cybercrime, Delhi leads in crimes: NCRB. Retrieved from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-third-in-cybercrime-delhi-leads-in-crimes-ncrb/articleshow/71913252.cms

[11] National Cyber Security Policy 2013. (2013). Retrieved from https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/ncsp_0.pdf

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

6. Government Initiatives and Policies

The National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal was launched in 2018 by the Ministry of Home Affairs to provide a platform for citizens to report cyber crimes. This portal allows citizens to report incidents of cyber crime, including those that target women, and provides them with information about cyber crime prevention and safety measures. The portal also enables law enforcement agencies to take prompt action on reported cases.[12]

The Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) scheme was launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2018 to provide financial assistance to states and union territories to set up specialized cyber crime cells to handle cases related to cyber crimes against women and children. The scheme also provides for the creation of a dedicated cyber forensic laboratory in each state and union territory to assist in the investigation of cyber crime cases.

In addition to these initiatives, the Indian government has also introduced several policies to address cyber crimes against women. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women, launched in 2001, includes provisions for the protection of women's rights in cyberspace. The policy recognizes the need to address gender-based violence in all its forms, including in cyberspace, and calls for the development of gender-sensitive laws and policies to address this issue.

The Digital India initiative, launched in 2015[13], aims to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The initiative includes provisions for the promotion of digital literacy and cyber security awareness among citizens, particularly women and girls. The initiative also includes measures to improve the availability and quality of digital infrastructure and services, which can help to reduce the digital divide and increase access to technology for women.

[12] New Zealand Police. (2021). Cybercrime. https://www.police.govt.nz/advice-services/cybercrime
[13] Economic Times. (2021). India's rank drops to 10th in global cybersecurity index: ITU. Retrieved from https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/indias-rank-drops-to-10th-in-global-cybersecurity-index-itu/articleshow/80121456.cms

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

 UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

The Indian government has also introduced several amendments to the Information Technology Act, 2000, to strengthen the legal framework for addressing cyber crimes against women. These amendments include provisions for the punishment of cyber stalking, voyeurism, and dissemination of sexually explicit material without consent. The amendments also provide for the establishment of a Cyber Appellate Tribunal to hear appeals against decisions of adjudicating officers under the Information Technology Act.

Despite these initiatives and policies, there are still challenges in effectively addressing cyber crimes against women in India. For example, the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal has a low reporting rate, which may be due to lack of awareness among citizens about the portal or fear of retaliation. The CCPWC scheme also faces challenges, such as lack of trained personnel and inadequate infrastructure in some states and union territories.[14]

7. Role of Technology in Combating Cyber Crimes

Technology has revolutionized our lives in many ways, but it has also opened up new avenues for cyber criminals to commit crimes against women. However, technology can also play a crucial role in combating cyber crimes against women in India. In this article, we will discuss the various technological tools and techniques that can be used to prevent and mitigate cyber crimes against women.

Artificial intelligence has the potential to revolutionize the way we deal with cyber crimes. AI can be used to detect and prevent cyber crimes in real-time. AI algorithms can analyze large amounts of data to identify suspicious activities and alert law enforcement agencies to take action. AI can also be used to identify patterns in cyber crimes, which can help in predicting and preventing future cyber crimes.

Machine learning is another technological tool that can be used to combat cyber crimes against women. Machine learning algorithms can analyze data and learn from it to identify patterns and anomalies. This can help in detecting and preventing cyber crimes in real-time.

[14] Law Commission of India. (2021). Consultation Paper on Reform of the Indian Penal Code. Retrieved from http://www.lawcommissionofindia.nic.in/reports/Consultation%20Paper%20on%20Reform%20of%20the%20Indian%20Penal%20Code.pdf

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

Machine learning can also be used to identify and track cyber criminals, which can help in bringing them to justice.[15]

Blockchain technology is a decentralized, secure, and transparent digital ledger that can be used to store and transfer data. Blockchain technology can be used to prevent cyber crimes such as financial fraud and identity theft. Blockchain technology can also be used to store sensitive information securely, which can prevent data breaches.

- Two-factor authentication: Two-factor authentication can be used to secure online accounts and prevent unauthorized access.
- Encryption: Encryption can be used to protect sensitive information such as passwords and personal data.
- Firewalls: Firewalls can be used to prevent unauthorized access to computer networks and systems.
- Anti-malware software: Anti-malware software can be used to detect and prevent malware infections.[16]

  Technology has the potential to play a crucial role in combating cyber crimes against women in India. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, and blockchain technology are just a few of the technological tools that can be used to prevent and mitigate cyber crimes. However, it is important to note that technology alone cannot solve the problem of cyber crimes against women.

8. Best Practices for Preventing Cyber Crimes Against Women

Cyber crimes against women in India are on the rise, and it is crucial for women to take measures to protect themselves from becoming victims. some best practices that women can follow to prevent cyber crimes against themselves.

- Use Strong Passwords: One of the simplest yet most effective ways to protect yourself from cyber crimes is to use strong passwords. Make sure your

[15] Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. (2017). Cyber Swachhta Kendra. Retrieved from https://www.cyberswachhtakendra.gov.in/

[16] Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. (2021). Cybercrime. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00004-eng.htm

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

passwords are at least 12 characters long and include a mix of upper and lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters. Avoid using easily guessable passwords like your name, birthdate, or pet's name.

- Keep Personal Information Private: Be careful about what personal information you share online, including on social media platforms. Avoid sharing your phone number, home address, or other sensitive information publicly. Also, be wary of phishing emails or phone calls asking for personal information.

- Be Careful with Social Media: Social media can be a double-edged sword. While it can help you stay connected with friends and family, it can also be a breeding ground for cyber crimes. Be cautious of who you add as friends, and avoid sharing personal information or sensitive photos online.[17]

- Use Two-Factor Authentication: Two-factor authentication adds an extra layer of security to your online accounts by requiring a second form of authentication, such as a code sent to your phone, in addition to your password. Many popular online services, including email providers and social media platforms, offer this feature.

- Keep Software Up-to-Date: Make sure to keep your software, including your operating system and antivirus software, up-to-date. Software updates often contain security patches that address vulnerabilities that cyber criminals may exploit.

- Use Antivirus Software: Antivirus software can help detect and prevent malware and other malicious software from infecting your device. Make sure to install reputable antivirus software and keep it up-to-date.[18]

[17] Gupta, S., & Kapoor, M. (2018). Cyber Crime in India: An Empirical Study on Cyber Crime Awareness among Women. International Journal of Management Studies, 5(4), 106-111. Retrieved from http://www.aarf.asia/images/short_pdf/1538513964_12.%20PAPER%203

[18] Australian Institute of Criminology. (2018). Cybercrime against individuals and businesses. https://aic.gov.au/publications/sb/sb13

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

 UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

- Report Incidents: If you become a victim of cyber crime, it is crucial to report the incident to the authorities. Reporting incidents can help prevent future crimes and can also help law enforcement track down and prosecute cyber criminals.[19]

9. Conclusion

cyber crimes against women in India have become increasingly prevalent in recent years, with women being subjected to various forms of harassment and abuse online. The impact of these crimes can be severe, ranging from mental trauma to financial loss and reputational damage. While the legal framework to address cyber crimes against women in India is relatively strong, there are several challenges faced by law enforcement agencies and the legal system in effectively addressing these crimes.

To combat this issue, the Indian government has taken several initiatives and implemented policies to prevent and report cyber crimes against women. However, it is crucial to address the underlying factors contributing to the prevalence of these crimes, such as gender-based violence, patriarchal attitudes, and lack of awareness about cyber security.[20]

Moreover, the role of technology, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and blockchain technology, can be instrumental in combating cyber crimes against women. It can assist in identifying and tracking the perpetrators, preventing attacks, and enabling quick response to incidents[21].

it is essential for women to take preventive measures, such as creating strong passwords, being cautious about sharing personal information online, and reporting incidents to the authorities promptly. Awareness campaigns and education programs can play a vital role in empowering women with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves from cyber crimes.

In conclusion, cyber crimes against women in India is a serious issue that requires collective efforts from the government, law enforcement agencies, technology industry, and society at

[19] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2013). Cybercrime and gender. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Crime-statistics/Cybercrime_and_gender2.pdf
[20] United Kingdom Home Office. (2019). Cyber crime: Understanding the online offender. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/785547/cyber-offender-understanding.pdf
[21] European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA). (2021). Cybersecurity and cybercrime. https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/cybersecurity-and-cybercrime

ISSN PRINT 2319 1775 Online 2320 7876

Research paper UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 10, 2022

large to address effectively. With the right approach and collaboration, we can create a safe and secure cyberspace for women in India.

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