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Digital Crimes on Indian Online Dating Platforms during Covid-19: Impact on Women

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ABSTRACT

Over the years specifically in the year 2020, the Information and Communication Technology has touched the entire spectrum of our life as everything has started to see its course online. From the work culture to online shopping and offline meetings to online and physical dating to online dating, everything is now just a click away or must the authors say swipe away. Online dating has seen rapid growth in the past few years. The numbers have specifically increased a lot during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper focuses firstly on the increase in the number of women using online dating websites during this lockdown and how most of these women fall prey to scams or cyber-crimes on the said platforms. Secondly, it throws lights on particular dating websites and why specifically women are being targeted. The latter half of the paper highlights the existing laws that are put in place in India and how the general public must be made aware of the same to know their rights. In the end, this research paper throws light on several cases related to online dating in the past few years in India and their analysis.

Keywords: *Online Dating, Identity Thefts, Frauds, Cyber-Crimes, Women, Lockdown, COVID-19 Pandemic*

I. INTRODUCTION

Man is a social being.[3] Even during a time of government-mandated isolation[4] (Mark A. Rothstein, 2007) due to the COVID-19 pandemic man's mind wanders out of isolation and quarantine. The pandemic is not only affecting the lungs of patients but also the minds of the people locked up at home and unable to live freely. The main issues concerning mental health that have arisen during this lockdown and quarantine are due to the stress of living a onotonous

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[3] W. F. WHYTE ET. AL, *MAN AS A SOCIAL ANIMAL,* SOCIAL SCIENCES FOUNDATION COURSE TEAM (EDS) UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY. PG 80-106 (1970) HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1007/978-1-349-15392-3_5.
[4] Mark A. Rothstein, Meghna K. Talbott, *Encouraging Compliance With Quarantine: A Proposal to Provide Job Security and Income Replacement,* American Public Health Association (2007) https://dx.doi.org/10.2105%2FAJPH.2006.097303

and mundane life with no physical interaction[5]. The simplest way out is to interact with people online and make a few new friends. This is why the use of social media has increased so much during these trying times.[6] The loneliness factor has also increased due to which people are not happy with just making new friends on social media.[7] They began to find someone to vent to or to discuss their hardships with. Some special someone who would not only always be there for them but only be there for particularly them. This marked the rise in the percentage of people using online dating websites.

As the Times of India reported on 15th November 2020, the use of these online dating websites has seen a new turn. The article reported that with no chance of physical dates during the pandemic most people have begun lying on their dating profiles, in turn, making identity theft or building fake profiles very easy.[8] Usually, whether there is a pandemic or not, most people like to dress up more presentably for their social media and as we all know the phrase "love is blind", the phrase for online dating more aptly goes as, "love is blind, deaf and dumb" as people just don't seem to see, hear or talk about the red flags visible in their matches. The rise in crime on online dating websites is so high that studies state that 63% of social media users and 3% of the general population have been a victim of an online dating crime or scam at least once in their lifetime.[9] Another source reports that these numbers could be significantly higher than what has been found through studies stated above.[10] These numbers are very high for crimes that have proliferated on platforms that have developed only around 25 years ago.

The first dating site ever known to be made was said to be developed by a few graduate students of Stanford. Andrew Conru came up with the idea to build such a website only to mend his own broken heart.[11] Back then no one would have thought about how such websites could be used so dangerously or how they would become so integral in one's life- people have lost all

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[5] BETTY PFEFFERBAUM, M.D., J.D., and Carol S. North, *Mental Health and COVID-19 Pandemic,* 383(6), New England Journal of Medicine, Pg 508–510, (2020), https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmp2013466.

[6] SAHNI, H., & SHARMA, H. *Role of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic: Beneficial, destructive, or reconstructive?* 6(2), International Journal of Academic Medicine, Pg 70–75. (2020). https://doi/10.4103/IJAM.IJ AM_50_20

[7] Heidinger, T., & Richter, L. *The Effect of COVID-19 on Loneliness in the Elderly. An Empirical Comparison of Pre-and Peri-Pandemic Loneliness in Community-Dwelling Elderly,* Frontiers in Psychology, Pg 1–5 (2020) https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.585308

[8] Online dating: How the world of online dating transformed during the pandemic, THE TIMES OF INDIA, 15th November 2020, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/love-sex/online-dating-how-the-wor ld-of-online-dating-transformed-during-the-pandemic/articleshow/79189120.cms?

[9] Online romance scams on the rise as dating apps proliferate, NATIONAL HERALD, IANS Science Tech (2020) https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/science-tech/online-romance-scams-on-the-rise-as-dating-apps-proliferate.

[10] The Rise of Crime in the World of Online Dating, REDBRICK, Rhiannon (2019). https://www.redbrick.me/the-rise-of-crime-in-the-world-of-online-dating/

[11] Sayej, N. The Creator of the First Online Dating Site Is Still Dating Online, VICE, (2016). https://www.vice.com/en/article/nz7e87/the-creator-of-the-first-online-dating-site-is-still-dating-online

forms of self-validation without it. It is observed that women chiefly fall prey to such online dating scams and it is ripe time to spread awareness of such frauds so that the general public can be protected not only from fraud but also from being killed or being victims to severe crimes such as assault, rape and murder etc.

(A) Literature Review

COVID-19 has immensely affected the mental health of many individuals. As per the research paper titled, "The psychological impact of COVID-19 on the mental health in the general population", one of the many factors of such degradation in mental health is boredom and frustration. This research also concluded that anger, frustration and other sufferings that were being felt by the population was directly linked to the quarantine restrictions.[12] This research inspired us to dig deeper and conduct our research based on this conclusion with our main focus on women. The effect of the lockdown has increased the burden on the life of women because they have to look after their families and also their work (Power, 2020). Another important article published in Pluto Journals highlights how the legislations lack the protection of women resulting in a lesser number of women outrightly filing complaints of the same.[13]

Another research paper titled, "From Online Dating to Online Divorce: An Overview of Couple and Family Relationships Shaped Through Digital Media" discusses something called the "Disinhibition Effect" that shows how online dating can bring out a different side of a person. This different side of the person can be rather honest.[14] This honesty as seen in most social engineering attacks makes the person more vulnerable to financial frauds, cyber-crimes, cyberstalking and so on. The research paper helps us conclude women's mindsets and mental health conditions when they fall prey to online dating scams and other related cyber-crimes. To highlight the risks of online dating a research paper titled "Online dating and mating: Perceptions of risk and health among online users" helps us understand the risks involved in online dating, including murder, blackmail, sexual exploitation, etc.[15]

There are many more papers such as Naomi Gertstel's "Divorce and Stigma"[16] and Ruth A.

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[12] Serafini, G., Parmigiani, B., Amerio, A., Aguglia, A., Sher, L., & Amore, M. *The psychological impact of COVID-19 on the mental health in the general population,* 113(8), QJM: An International Journal of Medicine, Pg 531–537, (2020) https://doi.org/10.1093/qjmed/hcaa201

[13] European Environment Agency (EEA). *Domestic Violence*, 53(9), Pg 1689–1699, (2019). https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004

[14] Eichenberg, C., Huss, J., & Küsel, C., *From Online Dating to Online Divorce: An Overview of Couple and Family Relationships Shaped Through Digital Media,* 39(4), Contemporary Family Therapy, Pg 249–260, (2017). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-017-9434-x

[15] Couch, D., & Liamputtong, P. (2007). *Online dating and mating: Perceptions of risk and health among online users*, 9(3), Health, Risk and Society, Pg 275–294 https://doi.org/10.1080/13698570701488936

[16] Gerstel, N., *Divorce and Stigma*, Social Problems, 34(2), Pg 172–186, (1987). https://doi.org/10.2307/800714

Brandwein, Carol A. Brown and Elizabeth Maury Fox's Women and Children Last: The Social Situation of Divorced Mothers and their Families.[17] These papers highlight how a woman disassociating with her family is always taken negatively. There exists so much social stigma towards women who are divorced. These factors play a very major role in our research as the right to be disconnected is trying to remove such stigmas by providing protection and help to women who are being subjected to violence to disassociate from their families.

In the research paper, "Positives and negatives of online dating according to women 50+", a detailed analysis of all the risks that women face has been discussed. This research is very important concerning ours as the data collected is from women who have been through and experienced all these incidents first hand.[18]

Therefore, all the research papers mentioned have streamlined and laid a base for the authors' research. The data in these research papers is accurate but not updated which is the biggest gap that is filled by this research paper. The online dating frauds and standards during the pandemic have caused a huge difference and hence, this paper can help fill the gaps of the previous papers for the current situation.

(B) Research Methods

This methodology involved to write this research paper contains a detailed analysis of the various research papers and case laws within the jurisdiction of India. To examine the increase in online dating during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown analysis of the legal framework has been combined with the information provided by newspapers and relevant reports. documents. Data about cyber crimes are still not very readily available as we would find in the cases of other crimes against women and children. Keeping this in mind, the approach we have taken for this research is document analysis. The researchers have found this method to be most appropriate as the laws and remedies available for such scams can only be understood better through document analysis. Document analysis fits nicely with the exploratory nature of this research. Documents assist in discovering "why or how an event occurred and whether such an event could happen again".[19] Documents also enable us to analyse distinctions between regular crimes and the ones committed to online dating websites and also understand the aspects of criminology. This method involves analysis and information gathering about existing

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[17] Brandwein, R. A., Brown, C. A., & Fox, E. M. *Women and Children Last: The Social Situation of Divorced Mothers and Their Families*, Journal of Marriage and the Family, 36(3), Pg 498. (1974). https://doi.org/10.2307/350721

[18] Vandeweerd, C., Myers, J., Coulter, M., Yalcin, A., & Corvin, J., *Positives and negatives of online dating according to women 50+*, Journal of Women and Aging, 28(3), Pg 259–270, (2016). https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2015.1137435

[19] Joensen, H., *What ' S Love Got To Do With It ?* 20096164, (2013).

documents, texts, literary works, cases and so on to answer our research questions. Regardless of the context and content of earlier documents, data can be reorganized and analyzed to specifically address the goals of this paper.

Second, data on the phenomenon of cybercrime and online dating is not easily available through other methods. To interview victims or criminals of such online dating scams is rather impossible as they generally try to stay hidden in society due to shame or lack of knowledge concerning reporting. Third, acquiring access to online deviant interaction requires intervention concerning forensic tools, legal permissions and so on, which the researchers in their capacity do not have the right to do. Finally, interviewing law enforcement personnel and dating industry representatives is equally challenging. Law enforcement personnel believe that all their work is extremely confidential and that they cannot disclose any information that is too confidential or might include strategies they use to catch criminals, digital evidence or implementation of social control efforts.

Most dating industry representatives are reluctant to disclose scam cases for two reasons: (i) fear of being perceived as either vulnerable to scams, which, in turn, spoils the name or reputation of their dating applications (ii) public knowledge of scam activities creates market credibility issues and drives customers away from established services. There has not been a limit for the time frame for the analysis of the documents. The time frame ranges right from the late 1990s to the present, more light and focus has been thrown on more recent scams as the research lays its foundation on the increase of such scams during the pandemic period.

II. INCREASING LONELINESS: EXPONENTIAL RISE IN NUMBERS OVER TIME

Overtime man has become highly dependent on other beings. It may be merely for the company or to fulfil his or her sexual desires. Online dating has made it rather convenient for any person to just login, make a profile and match with others who fit their type or criteria. This like most technology has made life "convenient" without considering much. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the government-mandated lockdown, dating applications have reached their peak in usage. According to a report by Match which controls the business of the dating applications with 45 such applications within its ambit, most popular ones being Tinder, Hinge and Match, there has been a 15% rise in the number of people using dating platforms from February 2020 to July 2020.[20] In such a short amount of time the numbers have increased so much, clearly depicting the demand and popularity these websites have, now. Loneliness has

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[20] MARY MEISENZAHL, *These charts from Match Group show more people are turning to online dating during the pandemic*, Business Insider, (2020). https://www.businessinsider.in/tech/news/these-charts-from-match-group-show-more-people-are-turning-to-online-dating-during-the-pandemic/articleshow/77382961.cms

various effects on mental health and the same quotient results in an exponential increase in the numbers.[21] Therefore, through this paper, the authors want to highlight that online dating may almost always be put in a negative light but it merely depends on the *men's rea* of the users. Rather than succumbing to loneliness, it is better to involve yourself in something that makes you feel good. Thereby, making loneliness the top reason for the growth in online dating numbers. Further, in a report by the Indian Express on 1st June 2020 a spokesperson of Tinder said that the lockdown and pandemic have led to loneliness, anxiety and uncertainty.[22] He further also said that most people who started using Tinder during the lockdown wanted to ensure they have some kind of conversation with people that they missed having physically. They did not want to be lonely. Even though Omegle does not find itself directly within the ambit of a dating application, it is also an online chatting platform that generally involves cyber sex or sexting. The lockdown has even brought people back to using Omegle as a way to relieve stress. Further, as per a news article published by the Times of India in May 2020, it was reported that due to the stressful situations of the lockdown married couples are also resorting to extramarital affairs through online dating sites.[23] This clearly shows that the pandemic has resulted in married couples also feel lonely without actually being lonely. The numbers of increased online dating during a pandemic can easily help us infer that there may be quite a few married couples or individuals who are already in relationships to resort to online dating. In the next part the authors have tried to explain the different kinds of cyber-crimes and how they have been greatly facilitated due to the increase in numbers as explained in this chapter.

III. CYBER CRIME AT FIRST SIGHT

The increase in online dating has also in turn led to an increase in the number of cyber-crimes committed on these platforms. A total of over 3,000 cyber-crime cases per month have been reported ever since the lockdown began.[24] Such cyber-crimes not only include identity thefts and financial frauds but cases have also been reported of deaths, murders and assaults due to online dating platforms. There are various types of theories that revolve around why criminals

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[21] Lee, E. E., Depp, C., Palmer, B. W., Glorioso, D., Daly, R., Liu, J., Tu, X. M., Kim, H. C., Tarr, P., Yamada, Y., & Jeste, D. V.. *High prevalence and adverse health effects of loneliness in community-dwelling adults across the lifespan: role of wisdom as a protective factor*, International Psychogeriatrics, 31(10), Pg 1447–1462, (2019) https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610218002120

[22] Virtual dating apps sees spike in users amid coronavirus lockdown. *The Indian Express*, (2020). https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2020/jun/01/virtual-dating-apps-sees-spike-in-users-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-2150485.html

[23] Will COVID-19 lockdown change our concept of dating and relationships? *The Times of India*, (2020) https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/love-sex/will-covid-19-lockdown-change-our-concept-of-dating-and-relationships/photostory/75734281.cms

[24] Virus of cybercrime: Over 3,000 cases every month, The Times of India. (2020) https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/virus-of-cybercrime-over-3000-cases-every-month/articleshow/77967994.cms

commit crimes. Out of all such theories, the space transition theory by Prof. Karuppannan Jaishankar is the most appropriate concerning cyber-crimes.[25] This theory helps us understand that any human being suppressed in their real-time environment, feels a kind of power or strength to vent or remove such anger from behind a screen. The person feels confident that his or her actions will remain anonymous. They live guilt-free as they are not able to see the consequences of their actions.[26] This theory has been practically proved multiple times through cases in real life. Another reason why the criminal is interested in committing cyber-crimes is that they think that it is an easy way to earn money without much effort. They also believe that most people in India would not report such scams as Indian society believes online dating is taboo.[27]

This boosts the criminal's morale even more and the criminal dwells deeper into the crime. The author believes that matrimonial sites also fall within the ambit of dating websites.[28] The author does not want to say that online dating sites and matrimonial sites are the same, they are different but also very similar at the same time. Both such sites technically work in the same manner. The kinds of crimes committed on both are also the same and so, for this chapter, the author has considered both under the same category of dating applications. As per a news article published by the Times of India in October 2019, a woman working in an IT Sector in Pune lost 10 lakh rupees due to matrimonial fraud.[29] This case involves the cyber-crime of online financial fraud as well as identity theft. The incident occurred, in the beginning, two weeks of September 2019. The conman claimed to have sent the techie gifts from the Netherlands which were seized by New Delhi custom officials. These gifts included a ring, perfumes, a high-end laptop and many more gifts. She then got a phone call from the customs office asking her to send him money to free the above-mentioned gifts. He also mentioned that this amount was 'refundable 'and she was made to send money to 8 different bank accounts. After the techie, a resident of Bavdhan transferred the money she realised she had been duped as the conman who claimed to be an NRI stopped responding to her calls and messages. She even confirmed that there was no seizure of goods at the New Delhi customs office and the call she got from the custom's officer' was fake. She complained to the Hadapsar police station on December 28,

[25] Dr. K. Jaishankar, *Space Transition© Theory of Cyber Crimes*. (2018) http://jaishankar.org/theory.html

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] Keating, J., *Finding love online- still a taboo?,* Independent. (2013). https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/dating/advice/finding-love-online-it-still-taboo-8951732.html

[28] Keating, J., *Finding love online- still a taboo?,* Independent. (2013). https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/dating/advice/finding-love-online-it-still-taboo-8951732.html

[29] Mihir Tanksale. *Pune: Techie loses Rs 10 lakh to fraud on matrimony web portal.* Times of India. (2019). https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/techie-loses-rs-10l-to-fraud-on-matrimony-web-portal/articleshow/71787565.cms

2019. The account holders of the bank accounts were revealed during the investigation. This is a very common kind of cyber-crime and there are several cases to prove its extent and frequency.

In another case reported by the Times of India in June 2020 a 33-year-old, Software Engineer in Hyderabad was duped of Rs 1 crore allegedly by a woman he met online through a matrimonial site in 2018.[30] The fraudster introduced herself as a doctor of Indian origin who was residing in Baltimore in the US. The software professional was so smitten by the women's love chats on Telegram and WhatsApp that he was ready to pay any amount of money she asked for. The IT professional said that his monthly salary was about Rs 80,000 and he had to dig into savings and borrow to send money. A case was registered under Sections 420, 406 of the IPC, Section 66 of the IT Act, 2000 at KPHB police station. The police arrested a woman named Malavika and her 22-year-old son Pranav Lalith Gopal Devati for the same. This has become a common *modus operandi* for criminals to state their professions to be doctors, lawyers or any such professions that are well accepted and looked up to in society, it helps to make them more believable to their victims.[31] A more recent case occurred in Goa where a woman was duped on a matrimonial site and the imposter extorted Rs 35 lakh from her. The incident was similar to the case cited above from Pune; the amount had been asked from her on the pretext of "customs clearance".[32] It very pertinent to note that these criminals are so invested in committing the crime that they do not flinch to form relationships for months together, just to make the story as believable as possible. Another extremely famous fraud on matrimonial sites involves, a Nigerian national and three nationals from Nepal. These fraudsters had duped multiple people and each had Rs 3 lakh in their bank accounts collected from their cyber-crimes. The website in use was Bharat Matrimony and they duped a doctor into depositing Rs 7 lakh rupees into their accounts on the pretext of GST and custom clearance for the gifts and jewellery being sent to her.[33]

These scams are common on famous websites like Tinder, Hinge, etc. as well. In another case namely, Vaibhav Anilkumar Verma v. State of Maharashtra[34] the complainant and the respondent met virtually through Tinder, an online dating website and started meeting

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[30] *Hyderabad: Conwoman's second strike, techie finds no love but loses Rs 1 crore*, Times of India, (2020). https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/hyderabad-conwomans-second-strike-techie-finds-no-love-but-loses-rs-1-crore/articleshow/76146452.cms

[31] Ravi Shankar Palani Samy vs State of Telangana CRIMINAL PETITION No.5165 of 2019.

[32] Goa: Imposter on matrimonial site dupes woman of Rs 35 lakh, *Times of India*, (2020). https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/imposter-on-matrimonial-site-dupes-woman-of-rs-35l/articleshow/77027973.cms

[33] Matrimony fraud: Four arrested, *The Times of India*, (12th March, 2020). https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/matrimony-fraud-four-arrested/articleshow/74584881.cms

[34] Vaibhav Anilkumar Verma v. State of Maharashtra 2019 SCC OnLine Bom 8615.

physically soon after. After a few meetings, they decided to get married and the boy's mother began harassing the girl for dowry soon after. After a while, it was found that this is not the first time the boy and his mother have done this. They have duped multiple girls online and harassed them to pay large sums of money as dowry. Irrespective of the jurisdiction Tinder has also led to murder. It may be turning down of sexual advance with Tinder date leading to intentions to kill[35] or maybe killing of a spouse to move on with Tinder date[36], both these situations have been seen previously. The main reason why these still fall within the ambit of cybercrimes is that the trust and the *malafide* intentions to deceive all begin through online dating websites and meeting each other virtually. It has become a common trend now for online dates to ask their partners to video call them. What people are not aware of is that they indulge in flashing or stripping and knowing or unknowingly their "date" records them naked or in the act. These videos are then used later to blackmail their dates into sending them money or worse, indulging in sexual activities with them.[37] Further, in the UK and online romance scam had seen a large rise in the years 2007-2008. These scams not only involved identity theft but also and mass marketing fraud. The intention to make profiles on dating websites is to defraud and pictures and videos are stolen from other sources and then used on such platforms.

These crimes are getting graver and more serious over the years. Now that the author has already shed light on cybercrimes the next chapter discusses how particularly women are made victims of such crimes. This will help establish the objective of this research which is the impact of women due to the increased online dating scams during the lockdown.

IV. THE TRUSTING GENDER: COMPLACENCY & BLIND BELIEF

Women are time and again portrayed as vulnerable and dependent. Their image as per what media seems them to gravely affect situations they need to go through in real life.[38] Time and again many newspapers and other web sources have reported about how women are more likely to fall prey to online dating scams. They are not only targeted for financial scams but often sexualised and harassed sexually through such sites.[39] As per CNN, it has been reported that

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[35] Man guilty of murdering girlfriend Xixi Bi in Llandaff, *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-38995461

[36] Parachute trial hears soldier Emile Cilliers texted lover as wife in hospital, *Yahoo News*. (2017) https://uk.news.yahoo.com/parachute-trial-hears-soldier-emile-cilliers-texted-lover-212800067.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cucmФua2VyLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAMaRe5wuKjzdILfG124x-JF-O-oqQSu4_f0cmv4yy22BW8eSR0gG7Isg614GQGKTRlJJpx6b2uT

[37] Thomas, B, Stripped of his clothes, and then of his money, *Bangalore Mirror*. (2020). https://bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com/bangalore/crime/stripped-of-his-clothes-and-then-of-his-money-almost/articleshow/77553297.cms

[38] Himashree, P. , *Portrayal of Women in Indian Mass Media: An Investigation*, Journal of Education & Social Policy, 1(1), Pg 84–92. (2014).

[39] Bialik, K, *Young women often face sexual harassment online- including on dating sites and apps.,* Pew Research

women all over the world have fallen prey to online dating cyber-crimes.[40] The lockdown has been more stressful and difficult for women to cope with and maintain a balance between their work from the home office and their work for home schedule.[41] This stress is causing a significant depreciation in the mental health of women and also causing regular heated arguments between husband-wife. During such instances, the husband or the wife may start using online dating as a forum to vent out pent up frustration.[42] This not only leads to disruption in lives of the families but also increase in cyber-crimes such as identity theft, making of fake profiles, financial frauds, catfishing, etc.[43] The depletion in relationships due to disturbed mental health, work-life balance of women and reduced amount of time to put efforts in the family results in making women feel like they are always stuck inside four walls from which they need to escape. In such situations an already vulnerable woman tends to find her solace in online dating. Her mental state and situation make her an easy target for these cyber-crimes.

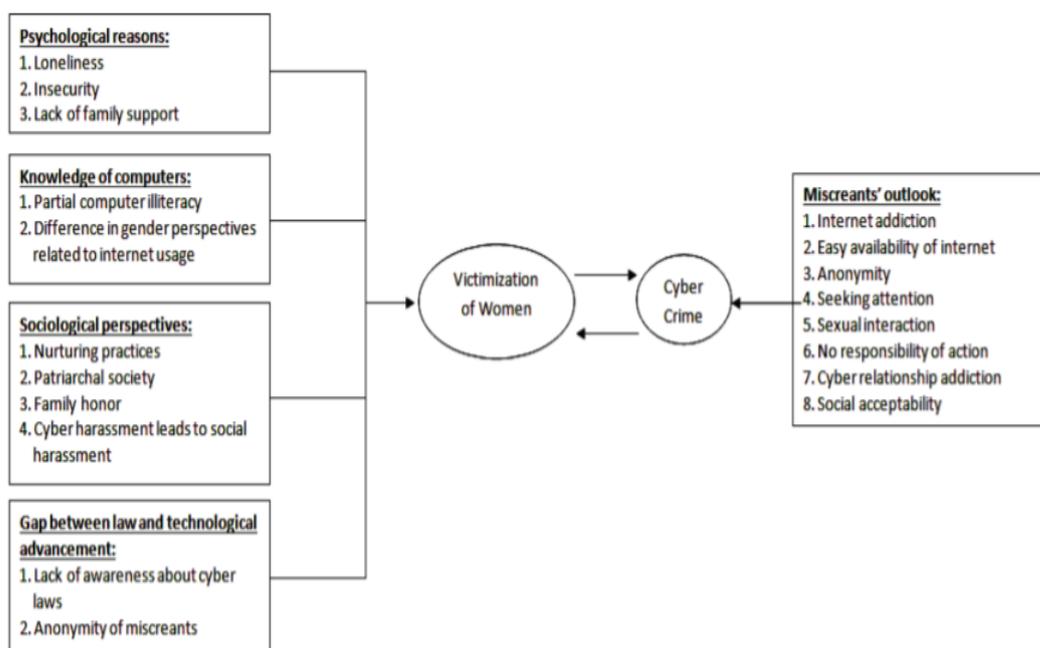Further, the reasons why women are targets of such crimes is explained through the figure below:

Figure 1: Reasons women are targeted[44]

Center, Pg 1–8, (2020). http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/19/5-charts-on-global-views-of-china/

[40] Karimi, F. *Men in California oversaw a romance scam that targeted women worldwide, feds say.* CNN, (2019). https://edition.cnn.com/2019/08/23/us/nigeria-romance-scam-arrests/index.html

[41] Kumar, P. H. Lockdown stress complicates women's work-life balance. *Times of India*, (2020). http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/75399464.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

[42] Prasannata Patwa, Matrimony gets love, dating apps not so lucky, Live Mint. (2019). https://www.livemint.com/technology/tech-news/matrimony-gets-love-dating-apps-not-so-lucky-1548699936666.html

[43] Joensen, H., *What ' S Love Got To Do With It ?* 20096164, (2013).

[44] Saha, T., & Srivastava, A. *Indian women at risk in the cyber space: A conceptual model of reasons of*

Women are often hit with phases of depression and anxiety as even though they may be married they may not feel the attention or required help from their husbands or other male counterparts. Most women especially, homemakers, tend to find support outside their family circle. It is because of this reason that they tend to rely on strangers and make them their confidante. With technology, they easily get the chance to interact with them through chat rooms, video chat, instant messages etc., while sitting at home.[45] This has made them vulnerable to get any kind of support and they are not able to distinguish between any kind of good support or support which includes *malafide* intentions. The next part discusses how women can prevent falling prey to such crimes and the laws involved under which they can report the same.

V. FALLING OUT OF CRIME: PREVENTION

For this, the authors have bifurcated the crimes into particular categories and then accordingly discussed prevention strategies and the laws applicable to report the same. These laws would also help individuals know where they can seek relief and where they cannot. The most prevalent cyber-crimes on online dating platforms are:

1. Identity theft:

Identity theft has been made punishable as per the amendment of the Information Technology Act, 2008.[46] The definition of identity theft as per the Section 66C[47] includes the following:

"Whoever, fraudulently or dishonestly make use of the electronic signature, password or any other unique identification feature of any other person", will be has said to commit identity theft. However, it is pertinent to note that merely this section is not enough to cover the entire ambit of identity theft. The other sections included may differ from case to case. These sections may include Section 464 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860[48], which talks about forgery, Section 465[49] which talks about making false documents, further, Section 468[50] which discussed forgery for purpose of cheating, Section 469[51] that discusses reputation, Section 471[52] which involved using as genuine a forged document and Section 474[53] possession of a document known to be forged and intending to use it as genuine. The applications of these sections can

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victimization, International Journal of Cyber Criminology, 8(1), Pg 57–67, (2014).

[45] Halder, D., & Jaishankar, K. (2008). *Cyber crimes against women in India: Problems, perspectives and solutions.* TMC ACADEMIC JOURNAL, 3(1), 48-62.

[46] Information Technology (Amendment) Act, 2008

[47] Section 66C IT Act, 2000.

[48] Section 464 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860

[49] Section 465 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860

[50] Section 468 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860

[51] Section 469 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860

[52] Section 471 of the Indian Penal code, 1860

[53] Section 474 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860

time and again be seen along with Section 66C but their application always depends on the facts of the case. The punishment for the same has been defined under the IT Act, 2000 as imprisonment which may extend up to three years and a fine which may extend up to rupees one lakh.

2. Financial Frauds on online dating websites:

Financial frauds on dating websites are punishable by law but do not fall under a particular section of the Information Technology Act, 2000 *per se* but they are still punishable under the law when grouped with other sections. These sections include- Section 420[54], 406[55] of the IPC and Section 66 of the Information Technology Act, 2000.[56] These sections on being coupled together really help define the kind of punishment an accused would get if they commit such financial fraud. The punishment for the same has been defined in the IT Act, 2000 as imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with a fine which may extend to five lakh rupees or with both.

3. Sexual extortion:

In case a crime such as sexual extortion is committed, the Information Technology Act, 2000 does not per se have a particular section to protect the victim from the same but Section 354[57] of the IPC along with Section 354C, Section 354D, Section 405, Section 66E of the Information Technology Act, 2000 are applicable again the same may be applicable as per the facts and circumstances of the particular case.

4. Sexting, Doxxing and Downstream Distribution:

Sexting, a portmanteau that combines the words sex and texting, "is the term coined to describe the activity of sending nude, semi-nude, or sexually explicit depictions in electronic messages, most commonly through cellular phones"[58]. Sexting[59] "usually refers to the use of a mobile/cell phone camera to transmit a sexually suggestive or explicit photograph (or videos)[60]. For sexting, the tools that are used to communicate in the online environment include webcams where they are exposed themselves in front of their webcams (Kopecký & Szotkowski, 2018).

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[54] Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
[55] Section 406 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
[56] Section 66 IT Act, 2000.
[57] Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
[58] Walters, Lawrence G. *How to Fix the Sexting Problem: An Analysis of the Legal and Policy Considerations for Sexting Legislation* 9 FIRST AMEND. L. REV. 2010 (Pg 98,99)
[59] West, J. H., Lister, C. E., Hall, P. C., Crookston, B. T., Snow, P. R., Zvietcovich, M. E., & West, R. P *Sexting among Peruvian adolescents.* BMC Public Health, 14(1), 811 2014 (Pg 811)
[60] Gordon-Messer, D., Bauermeister, J. A., Grodzinski, A., & Zimmerman, M. *Sexting among young adults* Journal of Adolescent Health, 52(3), (2013) doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.05.013

'Doxxing' is the publication of personal information in conjunction with pornographic images. Doxxing is a powerful tool for offenders, combined with the non-consensual dissemination of a pornographic image, as it makes the images easier to identify and easier to assign to the subject/ victim. In addition to this "downstream distribution" has emerged as another challenge. "Downstream distribution" is the reposting of photographs by third parties on the internet/web that were not the original posters of the images. Therefore, although the original post will eventually be deleted, those who caught it before its removal may repost the felonious pornographic image, making it nearly impossible for a subject/victim to completely delete the photos from the internet once and for all. In India cyber law, exact provision to deal with such activities are missing.

5. Rape Date and Cat Phishing:

Cat Fishing is a fraudulent activity in which a person creates a fictitious person or a false identity on a social network, often identifying a specific victim. This practice may be used to gain financially, to compromise the victim in some way, as a deliberate attempt to provoke the victim or to fulfil a wish. Moreover, where virtual love has flourished, it has also given a boost to the instances of rape date when people started meeting offline. The legal dilemma to prove this rape becomes challenging as the 'consent' of parties generally present.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has explained the increase of online dating websites during this lockdown and the reasons why women fall prey to scams or cyber-crimes on the said platforms. It has further thrown light on the specific crimes that emerged during COVID-19 through online dating websites. It has mentioned the existing laws in India so as general public must be made aware of the same to know their rights. It is observed that woman are time and again harassed sexually, mentally and financially through online dating platforms. As educated fellow Indians we must make the general public aware of the kinds of issues women may face on online dating platforms. Women should not always remain the complacent gender. This research paper aimed to highlight the growth of online dating frauds and scams that women have undergone during this pandemic and the possible steps towards prevention and protection they can be made aware of. The authors would like to conclude this paper with a hopeful thought, if there is always light at the end of the tunnel, could the pandemic have been the reason why women have experienced and emerged so much that they are finally near the end of their tunnel?

VII. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The paper revolves around the increase in online dating scams during the lockdown and

specifically during the pandemic and therefore one of the most relevant future implications is to ensure that the increase in demand should not lead to an increase in crime, instead, it should lead to merely increase in the purpose of the application. The current applications have very limited reporting mechanisms which do not cover half of the crimes that are being seen on the applications these days. To lay down a few examples:
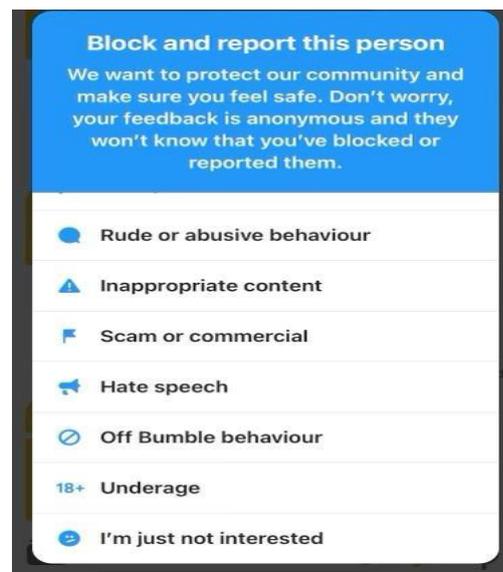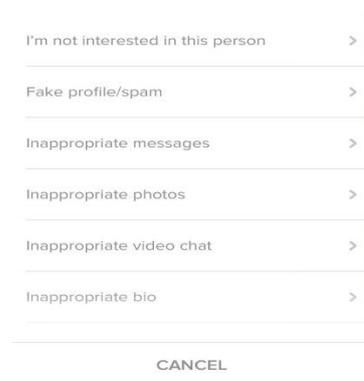
1. **Bumble**

Figure 2: Bumble Reporting Mechanism[61]

It can easily be seen from the screenshot above that the application has very limited options in terms of reporting. The options do not include any serious crimes like revenge pornography, CSAM, identity theft and so on. Further, the procedure after reporting is very unclear, however on Bumble one thing has been made clear that if more than 2 people report the account it is blocked forever, but the other conditions and actions taken are very vague.

2. **Tinder**

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[61] Hayes, R., *Bumble Reporting Mechanisms*. Retrieved April 12, 2021 from https://social.techjunkie.com/some one-unmatched-bumble/

Figure 3: Tinder Reporting mechanism[62]

The same issue persists with Tinder as well, the options for reporting are minimal and further, the actions taken are even more vague as was seen on Bumble. Therefore, in the light of the above reporting mechanisms, the future implication of this paper is to throw light on more reporting mechanisms that are more effective.

Another future implication would be to ensure that measures can be taken against such crimes through the IT Act itself, instead of resorting to the Indian Penal Code. Since, the matter pertains to the internet and the virtual world the laws under the IT Act should be made more effective and specific to the need of the hour instead of time and again having to resort to the Indian Penal Code.

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[62] *Tinder reporting mechanisms*. https://www.reddit.com/r/Tinder/comments/2xs0ht/tinder_now_asking_for_unmatch_reason/