Cyber Harassment and Women of Pakistan: Analysis of Female Victimization

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

1Institute of Social Sciences, Bahauddin Zakariya Univeristy, Multan Pakistan, fahadqureshi@bzu.edu.pk
2M. Phil Scholar, Public Administration, Bahauddin Zakariya Univeristy, Multan Pakistan, mariaabbasi16@yahoo.com
3Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya Univeristy, Multan, Pakistan, mshahzad061@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT
Cyber harassment refers to unwanted aggressive behavior through the misuse of information communication technology (ICT). The impetuous speed of information communication technology makes it easier to harass a person in the virtual world. Cyber harassment is a big problem all over the world, and it is growing fast with the increased use of ICT. Women are the core victims of cyber harassment. The situation for women is very prone to cyber harassment in the traditional society of Pakistan, where users of information technology are increasing briskly. To probe the situation related to impacts of cyber harassment on women of Pakistan, we analyzed all 68 media reports available on the internet till 2018. The results show that very few cases of cyber harassment get registered and prosecuted in Pakistan. However, the trend of registration increased from 2016. Most of the cases registered in Punjab province. Most of the victims were between the ages of 21-30 years and well educated. Pictures sent through Facebook and cell phones were the primary types of harassment. The purpose of harassment was heterogeneous, comprises of monetary benefits, revenge for marriage, and of course, exploitation. The study suggests awareness campaigns regarding cyber harassment among women belonging to different trades, social groups, and female students. The research also suggests campaigns in society at large to change the traditional behavior of society related to harassment. The study further suggests training of law enforcement agencies to make them more effective. The findings of the study may help policymakers and law enforcement agencies in dealing with cyber harassment.

© 2020 The authors, under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0

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

Recommended citation: Qureshi S.F., Abbasi, M., and Shahzad, M. (2020). Cyber Harassment and Women of Pakistan: Analysis of Female Victimization. Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies, 6(2), 557-563
1. Introduction
Crime as “an act punishable by a state or authority” is an understandable universal phenomenon. Intensity and magnitude may vary, but crime is part of every society, and we cannot separate society and crime. The causes of crime have been seen as having links to various factors, including biological, psychological, behavioral, and socioeconomic. By understanding these reasons, societies are continuing to control crime. The advancement in technology, especially information communication technology (ICT) in the last few decades, led to an entirely new situation for modern societies. ICT is consuming most of the time of modern people and at the same time, creating a challenge for the authorities regarding crime prevention in cyberspace. Cybercrime has many forms, such as hacking, scamming, virus attack, and online harassment, etc.

Cyber harassment, commonly referred to as cyberstalking and cyberbullying, is repeated or continuing unwanted conduct in cyberspace. Like other conventional crimes, it is critical, which can be dangerous. Chitchat, spreading rude texts, and intimidating are various types of cyberstalking. According to the national crime prevention council, online stalking is irritating, intimidating, dishonoring, and discomforting others by the use of modern tools. There exist various types of online harassment, including harassing, roaring, insulting, deception, and threatening, etc. Generally, communication tools like e-mail, instant messages, cell phones, and the internet are the primary source of online stalking to replicate the hostile behavior which is likely to spoil others. (A希q et al., 2016). Pakistan is a traditional Muslim eastern country, and most of the females in the Pakistani middle class happily veil. It is the country that accepted ICT at a remarkable speed. According to the database of Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA), the ratio of mobile phone users in Pakistan reached to the 70% of the whole population in May 2018. Due to the availability of 4G Technology in Pakistan, apart from internet usage through computers and laptops, most of the mobile phone users also use the internet from their phones.

Pakistan is well known for the issue of online harassment. It exists at each level of society from domestic to government. The situation is so severe that even the top-level government officers of law enforcement organizations of Pakistan are online harassment victims. A survey among the 25 countries depicts that Pakistan has the twenty-second highest rate of cyber harassment. Online harassment has become more challenging in the modern world of technology, particularly in the perspective of gender. The women are especially being affected negatively by online stalking. Online social sites are playing a vital role in spreading deception, rumor, among cyberstalking victims. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, cyberstalking is a dilemma for youth. The consequences of online cyberstalking are so severe that many times, these lead to the committing of suicides by the girls and boys (Das & Nayak, 2013). The issue was reported in national magazines repeatedly. For example, Shahid, J. (2014) on January 05, 2014 in “Dawn” stated that Most of the victims of cyberstalking are young women facing blackmail, harassment, and extortion. On April 16, 2016 in “The Diplomat”, Mohsin (2016) disclosed the situation of cyber harassment for women and children in Pakistan. He stated that people in Pakistan do not have basic understanding and information about cyber harassment. Victims are unaware of how to ask for help and where to report the problem? According to him, lack of awareness regarding legal rights, victims do not report such cases most of the time. School and college students in Pakistan must be well-informed concerning internet security, freedom of expression, their rights to privacy and, where to report such issues.

2. Problem Statement
With the increased use of ICT, cyber harassment is becoming a gradually more significant problem in Pakistani society. Cyberstalking of women is emerging as a more reported crime in Pakistan, and it has become the need of the day to introduce an efficient system to deal with such issues. The study highlights the nature and indicates that to which extent such types of problems prevail in Pakistani society. The study aims to measure and analyze the rate of cyber harassment in Pakistani society. The study primarily estimates the impacts of online harassment on women in Pakistan. By analyzing the cyber harassment cases reported in media, the study offers guidelines for legislatures and policymakers
for the prevention of cyber harassment.

2. Literature Review

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

Although anyone can be a victim of cyberstalking, according to Hutton & Haantz (2003), some demographic groups like women, newcomers, and juveniles, etc. are more vulnerable to cyberstalking. For example, Hutton & Haantz (2003) discussed a study conducted by the online victim advocacy group in 2002, identifying 71% of women as the victims of cyberstalking. Bocij and McFarlane (2003) discussed a research study of 2001, concluding 61% of the cyberstalking victims as Caucasian, followed by 3.9% Asians and 1.6% African Americans (Bocij & McFarlane, 2003). Tettegah et al. (2006) disclosed that as more children connect online, their capacity to bully their peers is growing. They suggest that school authorities should be aware of the danger and psychological effects of cyberbullying. Hoff and Mitchell (2009) identified a vast difference in the victimization of males and females. According to the study, 72.1% of the females were harassed online compared to only 27.9% males. The study also identifies that 91% of online harassment is due to the relationship issue.

Mishna et al. (2012) examined the involvement of youth in cyberbullying. He distributed the students among three categories based on their engagement, i.e., victims, bullies, and bully-victims. Compared to the smallest group of children as bully-victims in traditional bullying, he identified the bully-victim category as more common in case of cyberbullying. Interestingly he identified females were more likely than males to be bully-victims. Sinclair et al. (2012) studied inter-student harassment. They examined how two forms of inter-student harassment, cyber and bias-based harassment, are associated with academic, substance use, and mental health problems. The study disclosed that students experiencing both cyber and bias-based harassment were at the highest risk for adjustment problems across all indicators and at the highest risk of attempting suicide.

Notar et al. (2013) recognized that 90% of the youth participants experienced cyberstalking either as victims or as an eyewitness. Cohen-Almagor (2018) discussed cyberbullying with a particular focus on young people. The discussion, based on an interdisciplinary study, probes the troubling phenomenon of cyberbullying, which may result in suicide. The study argued that young people are more vulnerable to cyberbullying than adults because they lack maturity. The article suggests remedies to counter online social ills and argues for responsible cooperation among parents, schools, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), governments, and social networking sites. By thematically analyzing one hundred victim narratives, Worsley et al. (2017) concluded that cyberstalking impacts every sphere of life, including psychological, social, economic, and interpersonal. Their study identified anxiety and depression as the dominant emotional impacts of the cyberstalking. Coping strategies adopted by victims include avoidant coping, ignoring the perpetrator, confrontational coping, support seeking, and cognitive reframing.

Studies on cyberstalking in Pakistan started almost a decade after the developed world. Hafeez (2014)
studied cyber harassment in the youth of Pakistan. The study revealed that 36 percent of the respondents suffered from online harassment at some point in their lives, and found the higher ratio of female victims than their male counterparts. The harassment led to desperation by 36% victims and change of online time table by 30.5% victims. However, the majority of the victims of online harassment never reported it.

Ashiq et al. (2016) explored the predictors of cyberbullying in early adulthood in Pakistan. Results identified a significant positive relationship between emotional-behavioral problems and cyberbullying. However, there was the presence of a significant inverse relationship between empathy and cyberbullying. Multiple Hierarchical regression analysis revealed that a lack of empathy and emotional problems were significant predictors of cyberbullying. Magsi et al. (2017) specifically focused on cyberbullying faced by Pakistani female students on university campuses. The results, drawn from a survey of 120 female students in Sindh province, declared frequent threatening and blackmailing of female students on university campuses. However, the majority of those female students do not share such incidents to their families, which encourages cyberbullies. The underlying reason behind this silence is the fear of being considered immoral. The female students were not aware of the laws related to cyber harassment, and they also lacked trust in law enforcement agencies. Musharraf and Anis-ul-Haque (2018a) conducted a study to investigate the impact of cyber aggression and cyber victimization on the mental health and well-being of Pakistani young adults. The results showed a significant effect of cyber victimization on mental health and well-being, while the effect of cyber aggression was non-significant. Regarding the moderating role of gender, the findings suggest that females are more vulnerable to develop anxiety due to cyber victimization as compared to their male counterparts. Musharraf and Anis-ul-Haque (2018b) studied the issue of cyberbullying in university students from the psychopathological viewpoint. Their analysis identified a higher prevalence rate of cyberbullying among university students i.e., 67% of university students were involved in cyberbullying. The students involved in cyberbullying have a higher level of psychopathology and poor well-being in comparison to those not involved. The level of psychopathology was highest in cyberbullies, followed by cyberbully/victim, cyber victim, and not involved in cyberbullying, respectively.

The literature reveals that work on the effects of cyberstalking is at the initial stage in Pakistan. Moreover, none of the studies highlight the extreme consequences of online harassment. One suitable way to study the drastic effects of cyber harassment is to analyze the reported cases. The present study investigates the cases reported in media reports.

3. Research Methodology
The design of the study is a blend of qualitative and quantitative approaches. To assess the impact of cyber harassment on Pakistani women, we collected data on incidence related to cyber harassment. The collection of such data was a great challenge because of its confidential nature. We primarily collected data from the official website of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). To enrich our database, we also gathered the data from other sources, which was may or may not available on the FIA website. For example, Sar-e-Aam program of ARY News caught offenders involved in harassing women, and the detail of all such cases is not available on the FIA website. Similarly, the Digital rights foundation (DRF) is an NGO that is established to help online victims. Although only a few cases reported to DRF, the detail of these cases is also not available thoroughly on the FIA website. We collected all reports available on the internet from 2012 to 2018. To maintain authenticity, we checked data collected from various sources. As the FIA website is more authentic, we preferred data from FIA in case of similar data from multiple databases.

We faced various complications while conducting the research. Firstly, it was unfeasible to furnish 100
% precise figures due to no direct access to the database of a sensitive organization like FIA, so we gathered data from the available reports of Pakistani media. Secondly, the majority of the population is unaware of their rights related to cyber harassment and hence do not know the process to file a complaint at the relevant forum. It resulted in the non-reporting of most of the cases. Thirdly, many of the victims don't report with the fear of damage of dignity, and the cases remained unregistered. We excluded such unreported cases in the current study. We arrange the data in the database, checked for the accuracy, and used frequency and percentage analysis to analyze the data. The results are available in the next section.

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

| Sr. # | Age         | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1     | (16-20) Years | 3         | 4.41           |
| 2     | (21-25) Years | 28        | 41.17          |
| 3     | (26-30) Years | 22        | 32.35          |
| 4     | (31-35) Years | 5         | 7.35           |
| 5     | Unidentified | 10        | 14.7           |
| Total |             | 68        | 100            |

| Gender of the victims |
|-----------------------|
| Gender    | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Female    | 68        | 100            |

| Sr. # | Education | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| 1     | 12 Years  | 4         | 5.88           |
| 2     | 14 Years  | 23        | 33.82          |
| 3     | 16 Years  | 31        | 45.58          |
| 4     | 18 Years and Above | 1  | 1.47 |
| 5     | Unidentified | 9        | 13.23          |
| Total |           | 68        | 100            |

| Province|
|---------|
| Province | Frequency | Percentage |
| Punjab   | 47        | 69.11      |
| Sind     | 16        | 23.52      |
| KPK      | 4         | 5.88       |
| Baluchistan | 1     | 1.47       |
| Total    | 68        | 100        |

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

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

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

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

We collected the data of most cases from FIA, as shown in Table 3. FIA data is most authentic, but because of the limited number of cases, we also collected data from other organizations. We adjusted similar cases by giving priority to FIA data. We gathered the data of 55 (80.88%) cases from the website of FIA, data of 8 (11.76%) cases from television program Sar-e-Aam, and data of the remaining 5 (7.35%) from the website of DRF.

Table 3: Reporting Organization of cyber harassment

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

Source internet

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

Table 4: Type of cyber harassment

| Sr. # | Harassment type          | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1     | Pictures                 | 44        | 64.70          |
| 2     | Videos                   | 13        | 19.11          |
| 3     | Call                     | 7         | 10.29          |
| 4     | Vulgar texts             | 3         | 4.41           |
| 5     | Fake Marriage certificate| 1         | 0.147          |
| Total |                          | 68        | 100            |

Sources: FIA, Sar-e-Aam ARY News, DRF
Table 5 shows the media of cyber harassment. With the highest rate of cases among all, Facebook remained the main media of harassing and blackmauling. The media of harassment was Facebook in 30 (44.11%) cases, cell phone in 23 (33.82%) cases, and hidden camera in 7 (10.29%) cases. Contrary to the general perception, WhatsApp was media of harassment in only 3 (4.41%) cases, and YouTube was media in 2 (2.94%) cases while Email and Twitter were the media in 1 (1.47%) case each.

| Sr. # | Media      | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1     | Facebook   | 30        | 44.11          |
| 2     | Cell phone | 23        | 33.82          |
| 3     | Hidden Camera | 7     | 10.29          |
| 4     | Whatsapp   | 3         | 4.41           |
| 5     | YouTube    | 2         | 2.94           |
| 6     | Email      | 1         | 0.147          |
| 7     | Twitter    | 1         | 0.147          |
|       | Total      | 68        | 100            |

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

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

| Sr. # | Purpose             | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------|---------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1     | Money demand        | 19        | 27.94          |
| 2     | To meet physically  | 16        | 23.52          |
| 3     | Revenge             | 9         | 13.23          |
| 4     | Marriage            | 8         | 11.76          |
| 5     | Damaging dignity    | 5         | 7.35           |
| 6     | European nationality| 1         | 0.147          |
| 7     | Honor killing       | 1         | 0.147          |
| 8     | Unidentified        | 9         | 13.23          |
|       | Total               | 68        | 100            |

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

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

Although to get rid out of the online harassment is challenging; however, we can reduce it to a greater extent. It can only be possible with the mutual effort of individuals, agencies, and the government. As prevention is always better than the cure, and it is possible only with little care to make incidents exceptional. The best way for the prevention of cyber harassment is to give its awareness at a mass scale. No execution of laws means providing a platform for offenders to commit offenses concerning
Online harassment. If the execution of the law is guaranteed, it can be very effective in reducing the rate of cyber harassment due to fear of certain punishment. Online harassment is a social issue all over the world. To fight successfully against online harassment, it has become the need of the day to connect people with the IT community. The adoption of upcoming advances in ICT can make it difficult to hide for accused and can contribute towards the prevention of cyberbullying.

References
Ashiq, S., Majeed, S., & Malik, F. (2016). Psychological predictors of cyber bullying in early adulthood. *Health Science Journal, 10*(3), 1.
Bocij, P., & McFarlane, L. (2003). Cyberstalking: The technology of hate. *The Police Journal, 76*(3), 204-221.
Cohen-Almagor, R. (2018). Social responsibility on the Internet: Addressing the challenge of cyberbullying. *Aggression and violent behavior, 39*, 42-52.
Das, S., & Nayak, T. (2013). Impact of cyber crime: issues and challenges. *International Journal of Engineering Sciences & Emerging Technologies, 6*(2), 142-153.
Hafeez, E. (2014). Cyber Harassment and Its Implications on. *Horizons, 8*(2), 29-48.
Hoff, D. L., & Mitchell, S. N. (2009). Cyberbullying: Causes, effects, and remedies. *Journal of Educational Administration, 47*(5), 652-665.
Hutton, S., & Haantz, S. (2003). Cyber stalking. *Retrieved Feb, 18, 2006.*
Magsi, H., Agha, N., & Magsi, I. (2017). Understanding cyber bullying in Pakistani context: Causes and effects on young female university students in Sindh province. *New Horizons, 11*(1), 103.
Mishna, F., Khoury-Kassabri, M., Gadalla, T., & Daciuk, J. (2012). Risk factors for involvement in cyber bullying: Victims, bullies and bully–victims. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*(1), 63-70.
Mohsin, M. (2016). The Cyber Harassment of Women in Pakistan, *The Diplomat. Retrieved from https://thediplomat.com/2016/04/the-cyber-harassment-of-pakistans-women/*
Musharraf, S., & Anis-ul-Haque, M. (2018a). Cyberbullying in different participant roles: Exploring differences in psychopathology and well-being in university students. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Research, 57*(1), 33-39.
Musharraf, S., & Anis-ul-Haque, M. (2018b). Impact of cyber aggression and cyber victimization on mental health and well-being of Pakistani young adults: The moderating role of gender. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 27*(9), 942-958.
Notar, C. E., Padgett, S., & Roden, J. (2013). Cyberbullying: A review of the literature. *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 1*(1), 1-9.
Shahid, J. (2014). Cyber Stalking: New Challanges, *Dawn. Retrieved from https://www.dawn.com/news/1078417*
Sinclair, K. O., Bauman, S., Poteat, V. P., Koenig, B., & Russell, S. T. (2012). Cyber and bias-based harassment: Associations with academic, substance use, and mental health problems. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 50*(5), 521-523.
Tettegah, S. Y., Betout, D., & Renee Taylor, K. (2006). Cyber-bullying and schools in an electronic era Technology and Education: Issues in Administration, Policy, and Applications in K12 Schools (pp. 17-28): Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
Worsley, J. D., Wheaterof, J. M., Short, E., & Corcoran, R. (2017). Victims’ Voices: Understanding the Emotional Impact of Cyberstalking and Individuals’ Coping Responses. *Sage open, 7*(2), 2158244017710292.