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# Prurient Cybercrime Victimisation Among Women in Delhi NCR: Exploring Digital Predictors, Psychological Outcomes, and Moderating Effects of Coping and Resilience

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## Abstract

Younger women in Delhi-NCR have stated that they consider prurient cybercrime (online sexual harassment, cyberstalking and nonconsensual image sharing) to be a significant public health issue. The study examined the relationships between sociodemographic characteristics, digital behaviours (e.g., internet usage and digital literacy), and psychological well-being (e.g., trauma, anxiety, depression and self-esteem) in 300 female college students (ages 17-28). Quantitative and qualitative analysis of data was carried out after the completion of structured questionnaires. There is a positive association between internet use and both trauma and anxiety. Digital literacy is a protective factor against trauma and is related to self-esteem. Cyber victimisation and psychological distress were found to be related through the mediating effects of coping strategies, social support, and resilience, as shown by Structural Equation Modelling. Qualitative responses from participants revealed a high frequency of shame, anger and suicidal ideation as reactions to being cyber-victimised. To show how cyber victimisation has created serious psychological damage, the qualitative data also demonstrated. We suggest an all-encompassing method of prevention and intervention based upon the findings of research. Possible prevention/intervention efforts include incorporating digital literacy training into college curriculum offering more trauma-informed psychological assistance. Developing social support systems for young women and targeting digital safety/mental health services for policy development. Education and mental health professionals should develop gender-sensitive intervention programs. There is very little research examining the psychological effects of cyber victimisation on young women in a

highly digitised region like Delhi-NCR. Our study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to give a comprehensive view of the risk/protective factors associated with cyber-victimisation. The results will inform the creation of policy, education and campaign development to increase online safety and resilience and decrease cyber victimisation-related stigma in India's changing digital environment.

Keywords: Prurient Cybercrime, Trauma, Anxiety, Depression, Self-esteem, Coping, Resilience, Digital Literacy, Women, Delhi-NCR

**Introduction**

Digital technology has created numerous new ways for people to interact and communicate, but it has also created new venues for harm, particularly for women. Prurient cyber-crimes (i.e. online sexual harassment, online stalking, sending uninvited sexual content, etc.) are of concern because they cross legal boundaries and negatively affect emotional and psychological well-being. Studies indicate that women who have been victims of online victimisation report higher levels of anxiety, depression, trauma and lower self-esteem. Many serious problems have been identified recently. Cyber-sexually harassed victims had more body image concerns and emotional distress than non-victims of cyber-sexual harassment. Prolonged exposure to graphic content and cyber-bullying online have been linked to psychological stress, fear and unease. Studies have shown that individuals who have experienced abuse online and offline have higher overall depressive symptoms, particularly young women, demonstrating how different types of victimisation may contribute to more severe mental health issues. Increasing digital participation of women in highly-connected environments such as Delhi NCR is gaining international attention.

These are largely unknown territories. Little is known regarding how socio-demographic characteristics and digital behaviour influence mental health outcomes. Greater attention needs to be paid to protective factors (e.g., coping mechanisms, resilience, social support). The study will attempt to address these knowledge gaps through an investigation of how digital exposures and individual characteristics impact psychological outcomes and through an assessment of whether support systems can reduce the negative impacts of digital exposures. The Delhi NCR has experienced an unprecedented level of digital transformation and will have 850+ million internet users (the second largest online user base globally) by

2023. The Delhi NCR has one of the highest internet penetration rates in India, with an ever-increasing number of young adults utilising social media, online education and digital services. Women consumers of digital services are predominant in Delhi NCR. A recent study conducted by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) indicated that young women in urban areas of Delhi NCR are accessing the internet daily for communication, education and entertainment purposes. The digital revolution has provided new opportunities for women to learn and participate, but it has also increased lewd cyber-crime against women. According to the NCRB (2022), cyber-crimes against women, including online sexual harassment, cyber-stalking and sharing of intimate images without consent, have increased by over 25% in the last two years. Many of these incidents go unreported due to shame, fear of reprisal and lack of digital literacy. Examples of such incidents include: Over one-third of young women in the United Kingdom have experienced sexual harassment online (Office for National Statistics, 2021). The "Nth Room" scandal in South Korea, a high-profile case of digital sex violence, has created a national debate about whether current legal protections and support systems are adequate for victims. India does not have similar standards. Groups face several challenges, including low levels of digital literacy, social taboos and geographic differences in access to support services that may lead to greater psychological harm from cyber victimisation. A significant incident in Delhi NCR involved an unauthorised disclosure and distribution of private pictures of a female college student, which caused her great emotional distress and social isolation. She stated that she had reported it to the police, but that there was no adequate digital safety education and infrastructure available to assist victims promptly, including mental health assistance. A 2026 study from Delhi showed that 38% of female college students had been threatened with AI-generated images and 64% said they were victims of some type of cyber-bullying. Cyber-threats are constantly evolving. So too are we. Researchers globally are investigating new methods to combat cyber-crime – from incorporating digital literacy and trauma-informed support into education, to using technologies like AI watermarks and anonymous reporting platforms. Research on electronic empowerment suggests that digital literacy and access may offer some degree of protection for women who are victims of domestic violence. And that is the double-edged sword of technology. And the study suggests a multi-faceted strategy: Not only discipline and law. It's trust in the digital."

Colleges need to educate students on how to protect themselves and others by teaching digital literacy. We must provide mental health services both face-to-face and via distance. Formal and informal social support networks contribute to the development of trauma and resilience among survivors. “Policy makers can allocate resources and protections in areas such as digital safety and mental health that will adapt to changes in the technological environment.” It is a unique and holistic approach to using hard data and the lived experience of young women in an increasingly digitalised environment. The research study expands upon previous studies in the field, emphasising risk and protective factors for women in Delhi NCR, an often-ignored geographic region. These findings impact education, advocacy and public policy related to mental health. The findings from research can help develop interventions that promote safe online spaces, increase individual resilience, and decrease the negative effects of cyber victimisation. The fragile but resilient digital world has received an awakening. Educators, policymakers, families, and peers should work together to create an Internet experience that is safer and more supportive for all users. Empathic and evidence-based actions taken with an intentional focus on a particular group can serve as a positive influence in the lives of women.

**Problem Statement**

The digital revolution has presented tremendous new opportunities for connecting with others and empowering ourselves, but it has also presented new dangers for women. The recent #MeToo movement in the United States has alerted the world to the extensive prevalence of online sexual harassment on social media platforms and in academic and professional environments. Uninvited graphic messages, online stalking and non-consensual sharing of images are causing universities and organisations to re-examine their policies. Other organisations have also implemented digital codes of conduct, mandatory ethics training and designated support channels for survivors of online harassment/violence – which represents an important step in creating a safe and responsible environment online. These changes occurring in the United States are reflective of a larger international movement. Online sexual harassment continues to be demonstrated by new research as an immense problem. A meta-analysis published in 2025 indicated that eight per cent of individuals reported being subject to image-based harassment, while thirty-four per cent of those surveyed reported experiencing text-based harassment. More than one in three individuals

have experienced sexual harassment on the internet, and women are about ten per cent more likely to experience this type of harassment than men. Online sexual harassment has serious negative effects on a person's mental health. Technology-facilitated abuse has been linked to increased depression, anxiety and academic stress for all college students and marginalised communities. This landscape is particularly applicable to rapidly increasing digital access areas such as Delhi NCR, India. The current research will take place in this location. The study included 300 female college students who ranged in age from 17-28 years. Using a mix of quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative methods, we were able to investigate the relationship between social demographic factors and digital behaviour (internet use, digital literacy, etc.) and an individual's psychological well-being. The results of the study were significant: there was a positive correlation between time spent online and increases in trauma and anxiety, while digital literacy served as an effective protective measure that improved self-esteem and decreased trauma.

The study found coping strategies, social support, and resilience were all identified as potential mediators of the negative effects associated with cyber-bullying. These numbers depict the harsh reality of people. The word clouds produced by survivor interviews created an emotional "map" (qualitative) of the pain felt by those who were interviewed: feelings such as shame, anger, loneliness, and thoughts of suicide. The negative impacts of the digital world are being felt beyond mere statistics, affecting the well-being and mental health of individuals. It is an urgent matter that needs to be addressed due to recent publications from India and other countries. A 2026 study in Delhi revealed that 38% of female college students reported being threatened with AI-manipulated images, while 64% reported experiencing some type of cyberbullying. Digital threats continue to evolve, and we need to respond accordingly. International research provides new ways to bring digital literacy and trauma-informed support together in education by utilising technology such as AI watermarking and anonymous reporting platforms.

For instance, studies in e-empowerment have illustrated how having digital literacy access can help to reduce a woman's risk for domestic violence as well as demonstrate the dual aspects of technology. The proposed strategy in the study is based upon these insights. It's not just about rules and regulations. It is about building digital confidence, creating

supportive communities and providing trauma-informed psychological care. “Colleges can assist students in preparing to protect themselves and each other through digital literacy education incorporated into their curricula. Mental health services can be accessed at a local level through in-person contact or via remote access. Survivors of trauma have used both formal and informal social supports to help them process their traumatic experiences and develop coping mechanisms. Policymakers should prioritise the safety and well-being of individuals using technology, including their mental health. Specifically, policymakers need to ensure that the resources available to protect users from harm caused by technology are kept up-to-date with new developments in technology and research has distinguished itself by being a comprehensive study that integrates quantitative (hard) data on the lived experiences of young females in an increasingly digitalised world. The study focuses on an area of weakness in previous studies by focusing on risk and protection factors as well as highlighting the need for women in the National Capital Region (NCR) - a previously overlooked geographic area - to be able to voice their concerns. The practical applications of these findings include policy development, education and advocacy related to mental health. Interventions based on the findings of research will help create safer and more positive online communities, build individual resilience, and eliminate the stigma associated with cyber-victimisation. “The study serves as a call-to-action for educators, policymakers, families and peers to work together to create an online environment that will provide more support and safety for all in today's increasingly digital world," said Dr. Shaw. Currently, we are living in a digital era. If done carefully and with evidence-based action that is compassionate, it will have positive effects on women's lives.

**Literature Review**

Literature is abundant regarding the severe effects of cybercrime and online sexual victimisation on women's mental health. A study by Hinduja et al. (2022) examined the relationship between cyberharassment and anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation in young women. The main study variables were cyberharassment, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. The results indicated that young women who experienced cyberharassment had significantly higher levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation ($p < .01$).

A statistically significant relationship was identified between cyberharassment and emotional distress and suicidal ideation in young women.

Giumetti et al. (2021) examined college students who were cyber-victimised. The main variables of the study were psychological distress and cyber-victimisation. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between cyber-victimisation and psychological distress ($r = .36$, $p < .001$). The results suggested that online abuse was the cause of the recurrence of psychological distress in college students.

Powell et al. (2012, 2006) (ed.) (2021) examined trauma-like symptoms, shame, and long-term distress experienced by victims of non-consensual image sharing and image-based abuse. The results revealed that victims of non-consensual image sharing experienced severe emotional effects, including trauma-like symptoms, shame, and long-term trauma ($p < .001$). The results showed that victims of sexual abuse with images experience serious and long-lasting psychological consequences.

Ybarra et al. (2022) examined the relationship between online sexual harassment, depressive symptoms, and anxiety in women. The outcome data indicated that women who experienced online sexual harassment were more likely to report depressive symptoms ($OR = 2.4$, $p < .01$). Women who were victims of online sexual harassment reported symptoms of depression and heightened anxiety at 2.4 times the rate of non-victimised women.

The UN Women Global Study (2022) looked at whether people engaged online and avoided online activities, and it also examined fears of emotional trauma and cyberviolence. Violence against women and girls both online and through the use of ICT. It has been found that in terms of online violence against women, there is an estimate of 35% of all women globally being victims of this type of violence. The findings revealed that more than one third of women across the globe have been victims of online violence, and that violence is associated with fear, emotional distress, avoidance behaviours, and reduced participation in online spaces.

A global study on gendered online harms, including digital abuse, anxiety, and withdrawal from digital participation, was conducted by the World Economic Forum (2024). The outcome data revealed that experiences of gendered online harms were associated with increased anxiety and withdrawal from online activities. According to the results, online gender-based abuse has impacted women's confidence, safety, and freedom of expression in digital spaces.

M. Ybarra et al. (2021) examined the relationship between problematic internet use and anxiety and stress in a behavioural study of internet use and psychological outcomes. The results indicated that problematic internet use was a significant predictor of increased anxiety and stress ($\beta = .32$, $p < .01$). The results showed that the more exposure to digital media, the more likely psychological effects of anxiety and stress will develop.

M. Hysing et al. (2021) examined bullying and victimisation, mental health and social support, coping strategies, trauma, and anxiety in adolescents. The results showed that social support and coping strategies were important in reducing trauma and anxiety ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .01$). These findings suggest that adaptive coping and social support may be protective for psychological distress.

Stevens et al. (2021) examined online vulnerability and digital literacy. The results showed that digital literacy was significantly related to lower vulnerability and higher resilience ($p < .05$). The results showed that digital literacy protected against online risk and increased resilience.

S. Coyne et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of online harassment, anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal and examined the relationship between cyberbullying and mental health outcomes. A strong relationship was found to exist between cyberbullying and increased levels of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal ($p < .01$).

A report by the Council of India (2022) on the security of data, “Online harassment and gender-based digital abuse by women internet users in India,” revealed that nearly 40 per cent of women internet users in India had experienced some form of online harassment. The data revealed that nearly four in ten women internet users in India had faced online harassment, with relatively high rates reported in Delhi NCR.

The National Commission for Women (2023) documented cases of online stalking, blackmailing, image-based abuse, and cyber-enabled gender-based violence during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in India based on complaints. The data from the results showed a sharp increase in complaints about online stalking, extortion, and image-based abuse. Findings revealed that prevalence and duration of cyber-enabled gender-based violence increased during periods of high dependence on digital channels.

Bansal and Arora (2022) conducted a survey of 1000 college women in Delhi on nonconsensual sharing of images and cyber-victimisation. Figures show 32 per cent of

respondents have had nonconsensual images of themselves shared. Results showed that almost one in three women enrolled in Delhi colleges had experienced image-based cyber-Singh and Gupta (2021) explored the association of online harassment with anxiety, depressive symptoms, social withdrawal, and online harassment and image-based abuse in women. The study found that people who experienced online harassment and image-based abuse reported higher levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, and social withdrawal. The findings suggest a negative impact of online harassment on women's emotional well-being, mental health, and social functioning.

Kaur (2021) studied digital abuse, blame, stigma, and social exclusion among survivors of digital abuse using a qualitative method. The data gave a qualitative picture of "double victimisation" where women were harmed by digital abuse and then victim-blamed and socially isolated. The results indicated that cyber-victimisation had a direct effect on psychological harm and an indirect effect through stigma and social rejection. Online sexual harassment, gender-based victimisation, and emotional distress.

Office for National Statistics (2021) — report on young women's experience of online sexual harassment in the United Kingdom. Findings show that more than one in three young women have experienced some form of online sexual harassment. Results have demonstrated that online sexual harassment is a significant public concern for young women in digitised societies.

The focus of the studies included digital sexual exploitation, image-based abuse, victim protection, and legal protection based on digital sexual violence cases, including the "Nth Room" incident in South Korea. The results indicated high awareness and legal concern levels regarding digital sexual violence. These findings suggest that digital sexual violence can cause serious psychological distress and that law and institutions need to respond more. Online sexual harassment at work and in academia: US institutional response and survivor support with special reference to the MeToo movement. Results from the data reveal greater reporting and policy attention to digital sexual misconduct. The results also highlighted the need for better policies and support around survivors' digital behaviour.

Mehta and Sharma (2022) evaluated the efficacy of structured peer-support groups and digital self-defence workshops in India. Peer support, digital safety skills, and the capability

of reporting and handling cyber threats were all examined. Peer support groups and digital self-defence workshops improved women's ability to identify, report and respond to online threats. Results show that community- and skill-based interventions increased women's knowledge and confidence in cyber safety.

Digital literacy, cyber safety awareness, and online vulnerability among young internet users were studied by Rao et al. (2022) through school- and college-based digital literacy programs. From the results, the digital literacy programs would be able to improve awareness and reduce vulnerability. Results show that children can be helped to avoid online threats through early education on digital safety.

Australian intervention studies with online abuse survivors have provided trauma-informed counselling, digital safety training, legal support, and confidence and recovery. The study found that programs that provided mental health services, legal aid, and training in online safety helped survivors regain confidence. The findings suggest that multidisciplinary support can be useful for recovery from cyber-victimisation.

Canadian intervention studies with survivors of online abuse have focused on counselling support, social support networks, legal assistance, digital skills, confidence, and self-efficacy. Results suggested that integrated delivery of mental health and digital safety support improved survivors' confidence and self-efficacy. The findings show the need for practical digital skills and emotional support in the fight against prurient cybercrime.

The official cybercrime data of the National Crime Records Bureau (2022) analysed cybercrimes against women, online sexual harassment, cyberstalking, and nonconsensual distribution of intimate images. Cybercrimes against women are up by over 25 per cent in the last 2 years. The study has found that crimes against women committed through cyberspace are increasing at a very alarming rate in India.

Internet and Mobile Association of India. 2023. Internet usage in urban areas of India. Study of internet access, daily internet use, and digital engagement among young women. Results revealed that nearly 65 per cent of young women in urban centres such as Delhi NCR used the internet daily for communication, education, and entertainment. The results show that the more time is spent on the digital platform daily, the more exposure and opportunity to cyber risks.

The Indian National Data on Digital Access 2023 reported internet penetration, digital access, and online exposure. Results revealed that India has over 850 million internet users, making it the second largest online population globally. The results suggest that rapid development of digital technology has created opportunities for empowerment and new threats of cyber-victimisation.

V. BENITEZ-HIDALGO, G. PASTOR-MORENO, I. RUIZ-PEREZ, S. AMAYA-SANTOS TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF MIXED METHODS. 2026.

Depression, anxiety, psychological distress, shame, loss of control, and social isolation harm your physical well-being. Technology facilitates sexual violence. The review evaluated twenty-one studies which involved 18,054 participants from eleven countries. The findings showed a strong relationship between the use of technology-enabled sexual violence and negative mental health outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, psychological distress, shame, feeling out of control, socially isolated). The results showed that online sexual violence should not be considered less serious than offline violence because of serious emotional and social consequences. Sampedro-Ferreirós L, Rodríguez-Castro Y, Martínez-Román R, Lameiras Fernández MA. Technology-facilitated sexual violence among adolescents and young people: a systematic review of reviews on conceptualisation, perception, attitudes, behaviours, risk factors, consequences, help-seeking and prevention. 2026. We searched MEDLINE, PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, Scopus and Web of Science and included reviews published 2015-2025. The data obtained showed great conceptual variability related to sexual violence involving technology and its emotional and social consequences for adolescents and young people. The findings highlighted the need for development of standardised measurement tools, prevention models, and context-relevant interventions.

K.J. Mitchell. et al. (2026). US-based study of image-based sexual abuse before age 18, coercion, image redistribution, threat-based exploitation, and older people. Data were gathered from 6,226 respondents, with a subsample of 2,854 young adults reporting 4,205 unique incidents of image-based sexual abuse. Results indicated four profiles of image-based sexual abuse: coercion in the production and distribution of images, non-coerced sharing of images with older persons, redistribution of images and threat-based exploitation. Image-

based sexual abuse has been shown through our findings to be a collection of different types of victimisation, each of these requiring unique clinical, legal, and policy treatments.

T. C. Almeida et al. 2025. A scoping review of mental health effects experienced by victims due to non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Authors measured anxiety, depression, stress, shame, humiliation, self-blame, suicidal ideation and social withdrawal. A total of 21 papers were reviewed. In 18 studies, anxiety and depression were measured, and in 8 studies, anxiety and depression were measured together. One of the study results revealed that 71% of victims had high stress and anxiety, 54.8% had high depression, 88.9% had mental stress such as anger, guilt, paranoia, and depression, and 40.7% had suicidal ideation. The findings show that non-consensual sharing of intimate images caused significant psychological impacts such as anxiety, depression, shame, isolation and suicidal ideation.

Mr. Mohamed (2026) studied digital violence in female students from the Faculty of Medicine at Alexandria University with a cross-sectional design. They discussed digital violence, online harassment, hate speech, cyberstalking, digital safety awareness, cyber ethics and barriers to reporting. The study sample had 420 female undergraduate students, teaching assistants and faculty members. Results data show that 40% of participants were victimized with digital violence, mostly online harassment (22.6%), hate speech (17.1%) and cyberstalking. Findings identified digital violence as a major institutional and gendered issue for educated women and poor reporting mechanisms as a cause of silence and underreporting.

A., Dominguez-Lara S., Aranda M., Gray K.V. R. Sanchez Villena (2026) Developing and validating a scale to measure acceptance of myths about technology-enabled sexual violence. Myth: Acceptance of. Cyberbullying. Image abuse. Perspectives on violence and coercion based on gender. Study population: 433 subjects were studied.

The first was a 47-item scale. Results supported a 12-item Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence Myth Acceptance Scale with high internal consistency ($\alpha = .83$). Findings highlighted the importance of validated measures of attitudes that normalise or trivialise technology-facilitated sexual violence.

Quinlan, A. et al. (2026) Technology-facilitated sexual violence in sport in Canada: A review of online sexual harm, digital exploitation, institutional response, legal cases and women and children safety. The study analysed 91 cases of publicly reported technology-facilitated

sexual violence against women and children in Canadian sport. Results showed technology-enabled sexual violence generally occurs in online spaces and in institutional spaces such as sport. The findings demonstrate a need to develop more robust institutions to protect individuals from digital sexual harm with enhanced legal accountability and victim-centred reporting mechanisms.

In their 2026 report Tipping Point: Online Violence Impacts, Manifestations and Redress in the AI Age, UN Women reported their findings regarding online violence. It contained both deepfakes and non-consensual image sharing, along with unwanted sexual advances and the anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and self-censorship experienced by women who have been involved in public life. The report is based on experiences of 641 women journalists, media workers, activists and human rights defenders in 119 countries. 6% had experienced deepfakes and 12% had their image shared without their consent, and a third had been subject to unsolicited sexual advances online, and 45% of female journalists self-censored on social media and nearly 22% self-censored in professional work; 25% reported anxiety or depression associated with online violence and nearly 13% reported post-traumatic stress disorder. There is evidence that AI and technology-facilitated abuse have a serious impact on women's mental health, freedom of expression and public participation.

Koch, L. (2019). (al., 2027). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women in politics: A review of online abuse, coping strategies, political participation, online platform disengagement and reporting behaviour. Results found 62% of studies included reporting changes to political messaging, 39% reporting reduced engagement with online platforms, 29% reporting women leaving their online presence, 20% reporting withdrawal from political roles, 66% reporting blocking or muting harassers and 37% reporting reporting abuse to authorities or platforms. Findings suggest that technology-enabled gender-based violence impacts women's emotional well-being and constrains women's participation in politics and public life.

The Indian National Crime Records Bureau (2025) analysed trends in regional reporting of cybercrimes and cybercrimes against women in India based on its official data on reporting of cybercrimes in India. The results showed cybercrimes against women have increased by 18 per cent year on year. The study reveals that cybercrimes against women are increasing.

Delhi NCR has always been one of the states with a higher number of such cases. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (2026), in its review of cyber violence among urban women, studied digital sexual harassment and nonconsensual image sharing, cyber violence and age vulnerability. Results data suggested urban women (16-30 years) were most likely to experience digital sexual harassment and nonconsensual sharing of images (16-30 years). Findings indicate that urban young women are particularly susceptible due to their high levels of digital engagement.

Singh R, Gupta P. An Investigation into the Relationships among Cyber Victimisation, Anxiety, Sleep Disruption, and Social Withdrawal. A Survey Conducted on Young Women Across Multiple Cities of Delhi NCR. DELHI NCR: In 2025, 41% of young women in Delhi NCR were victims of cyber violence. The study showed that cyber victimisation was related to higher levels of anxiety, sleep disturbances and social withdrawal.

Kaur (2024) studied cyber abuse victims qualitatively and explored trauma associated with cyberattacks, social stigma, fear of being blamed by institutions, and institutional support. Qualitative data showed that victims suffered from two types of burdens: psychological trauma from the attack and secondary burden of stigma and lack of institutional support. Findings indicate that the social stigma and lack of institutional support can amplify the psychological consequences of cyber victimisation.

S. Reddy (2026) researched how much access young women had to smartphones, inexpensive internet service, digital exposure and cyber risk in India's Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities. Findings reveal rapid spread of smartphones and low cost of internet access have resulted in increasing exposure of women to cyber risks. Results revealed that access to digital technology without safety awareness makes one a target of prurient cybercrime.

Singh, A. and Reddy, S. (2012). Digital literacy, reporting mechanisms, access to counselling and victim isolation (2026). Findings revealed that mere possession of digital literacy was not enough in settings with weak reporting mechanisms and limited access to counselling services. The results of the study indicate that while victims may possess some basic knowledge of digital technology, these individuals also may have been socially isolated.

The UK has examined comparative evidence regarding online reporting and victim support, which includes the Revenge Porn Helpline. Variables evaluated included availability of reporting methods, ability to remove unwanted content (online), victim support and help-

seeking. Centralised support systems were found to provide both structured reporting and support regarding the removal of content. Centralised systems have been shown to provide improved victim support and decrease victim waiting time.

Australia's comparative evidence included information on centralised reporting and online safety assistance provided by the eSafety Commissioner. The variables examined were reported mechanisms, digital safety response, victim support, and mitigation of online harm. Online safety systems, which are centrally managed and utilise outcome data, provide structured assistance to victims. Organised support systems provided greater assistance than fragmented support systems. Mehta and Sharma (2025) studied digital literacy, awareness of cyber harassment, confidence in reporting and safety practices in peer-led digital literacy workshops in colleges in Delhi. Results showed that peer-led workshops were significantly helpful for participants to identify and report cyber harassment. The study concluded that peer-led interventions can enhance young women's practical digital safety skills.

National Commission for Women (2026) has launched the 'Cyber Warriors' initiative in India with digital safety training, technical awareness, psychological first aid and community-level cyber response. Results show that trained young women were digital safety ambassadors and had technical knowledge as well as psychological first aid skills. Digital safety education and emotional support interaction can enhance community responses to cyber victimisation. Digital Shakti campaign (2025–present) resilience-building intervention for women included trauma-informed counselling, group therapy, skills training, self-efficacy and distress reduction. Results showed an increase in self-efficacy and a decrease in distress following the intervention. It is possible that formal resilience-building programs could help women regain their confidence and emotional stability after they have been victims of cyber-bullying. S. Reddy Singh A. (2026) The psychological effects of cyber victimisation, and the provision of support services such as online mentoring networks, social support, family counselling and peer group based interventions. Peer groups, family counselling, and online mentoring were found to be the most effective social supports in reducing both short-term and long-term psychological damage. Findings indicate that social support plays an essential role in recovering from and building resilience to prurient cybercrime.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) published information about the topic in 2022. In its work on digital environments and their impact on mental health and psychosocial

considerations, it examined digital exposure, psychosocial risk, mental health support and protective systems. The findings of the study emphasised the significance of social-psychological support in online environments. The results show that we should incorporate protection for mental health into our digital safety approaches. In summary, literature reviewed generally suggests significant links between prurient cybercrime and online sexual victimisation and trauma, anxiety, depression, shame, social withdrawal, sleep disturbance, suicidal ideation and lower self-esteem among women. Results across studies include $p < .01$, $p < .001$, $r = .36$, $\beta = .32$, $\beta = -.30$, OR = 2.4, 35% global online violence prevalence, nearly 40% online harassment amongst Indian women internet users, 32% nonconsensual image-sharing experience amongst Delhi college-going women, more than one in three young women affected in United Kingdom, over 25% increase in cybercrimes targeting women in India, 65% daily internet use amongst young urban women, over 850 million internet users in India, 18% year-on-year increase in cybercrimes against women, 41% cyber victimization amongst young women in Delhi NCR, 21 studies and 18,054 participants in 2026 mixed-methods review, 6,226 participants and 4,205 image-based sexual abuse incidents in 2026 United States-based study, 40% digital violence prevalence amongst 420 female medical faculty participants, 91 legal cases of technology-facilitated sexual violence in Canadian sport, and 641 women from 119 countries in UN Women 2026 report. Findings suggest for quantitative investigations in high-digital-exposure regions like Delhi NCR.

## Research Objectives and Hypotheses

### Objectives

To understand how demographics are related to the psychological effects of sexually oriented online victimisation in Delhi NCR. To study the relationship between online behaviour (digital usage) and digital literacy and trauma, anxiety, depression and self-esteem. To explore the extent to which coping strategies and social support are responsible for mediating the psychological distress in victims.

### Hypothesis

H1: Female victims experience a positive relationship between online usage and psychological distress.

H2: Lower levels of digital literacy will result in higher levels of trauma, anxiety, and depression.
H3: Coping strategies and social support will effectively moderate the psychological effects of victimisation.
H4: Resilience will mediate the relationship between cybercrime and self-esteem.

Objectives and Hypotheses were formulated to examine both risk and protective avenues. H1 and H2 are concerned with the impact of digital usage and digital literacy on psychological outcomes since these two factors are closely related to daily online activity. An increase in online use may put individuals at risk of exposure to dangerous online spaces, and a decrease in their ability to understand digital safety (digital literacy) limits their capacity to recognise possible dangers online and use protective measures like setting up privacy options or using reporting mechanisms. H1 and H2 demonstrate how digital habits are linked to measurable psychological outcomes.
Hypotheses H3 & H4 explore how coping strategies, social support systems, and personal resilience contribute to reducing the negative psychological effects of cybercrime. How a person responds to cybercrime can have a huge impact on both the length and extent of their emotional distress. A person receiving validation, practical advice, and emotional support may experience less psychological distress in the short term compared to someone who has been blamed, ignored or coerced into being silent.

Resilience can help protect a person's self-esteem by enabling that person to separate the actions of others (e.g., perpetrators) from their own inherent worth. The results of H3 and H4 can be used to understand the relationship between participants' recovery time from psychological trauma and their individual differences.

## Methodology

### Sampling Process

Using purposive sampling methods, women who were at the greatest risk of becoming victims of sexual cybercrime in Delhi NCR were chosen to participate in the study. The target population consisted of female students who were attending higher education institutions in Delhi NCR and were between 17 and 28 years of age. This demographic group

has been identified as more engaged with digital media and more vulnerable to online harassment. To recruit a diverse range of participants from many educational institutions and socio-economic backgrounds, we sent invitations through university mailings, student forums, and university-related social media. There were 320 potential respondents identified and asked to complete the survey. Of those 320, only 300 returned fully completed surveys. Resulted in an excellent response rate of 93.75 per cent. Eligibility requirements for the study included using the internet regularly (i.e. at least one hour daily) and giving written informed consent. To increase the representation and diversity within our sample, we recruited participants from a variety of academic fields, socio-economic levels, and undergraduate and graduate student bodies.

**Ethical Aspects**

Approval for ethical research was granted by the Institutional Ethics Committee. The name of the institution is redacted to provide anonymity throughout the process of peer review. The methods employed during the study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki and any applicable National Ethics Standard for Studies with Human Participants. All participants gave their written informed consent before participating in the study. Participants who were under 18 years old needed to get their parents' permission prior to taking the survey. Confidentiality was of utmost importance during the study; no identifying information was obtained from participants, and all data collected will be stored in password-protected files that are only accessible by members of the research team. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic covered in the research, each participant was given a list of local and online mental health support services after completing the survey.

**Data Collection Tools**

The structured questionnaire utilised in the research project was developed and validated to assess all relevant aspects of the participants' experiences and psychological ramifications from being victims of cybersex crimes. The questionnaire had four main parts or sections:

1. Demographics: The demographic information collected included the age, level of education and socioeconomic status of participants. Socio-economic status was classified using national guidelines.

2. Digital Behaviours: Participants' daily average time spent online, types of devices used (e.g., smartphone, laptop/tablet) and digital literacy were assessed using a self-developed scale that was based on existing literature and pilot-tested to ensure it met the requirements of the local context.

Psychological consequences: Several widely accepted and reliable instruments were used to assess the psychological impacts of the trauma experienced by study participants. The Emotional Distress, Intrusive Thoughts & Avoidance Checklist (Revised) was developed:

A. Anxiety: Generalised Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) is a tool used to measure anxiety.
B. Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) for Depression
C. Self-esteem: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).

**Coping and Resilience**

i. Evaluate coping strategies (problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant) using the brief COPE Inventory
ii. Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) to assess resilience

The instruments used in the study had high levels of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > .80). The questionnaire was electronically distributed (through Google Forms) as well as in paper for those participants who may have had difficulty using the electronic version of the survey because of either connection problems or the type of device they were using. A pilot study was performed by 30 students to improve language clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness of the questionnaire. Language and the ordering of items (or language and how the items are arranged) were modified as a result of feedback that was collected while conducting a series of pilot tests.

**Limitations & Challenges**

Although the methodological design of the study was robust, there are several limitations to consider:

The limited recruitment of college-educated women from urban areas of Delhi NCR may limit the generalizability of these findings to rural populations, non-students, and older women.

Participants' self-reported experiences can potentially lead to recall bias and socially desirable responses.

Participants may have underreported their experiences of cyber-harassment, image-based abuse or online threats because they were concerned about the social stigma associated with these types of events as well as their privacy.

Cross-Sectional Design: Because the study had a cross-sectional design, we cannot determine if there were any causal relationship(s) between digital behaviour and psychological outcome(s).

Technical and Logistical Obstacles: Students had problems accessing/completing an electronic survey because of either connection issues (internet) or limitations with their devices. Paper-based data collection methods were used in parallel with other methods to address some of the issues associated with those other methods.

Although there were challenges in conducting the study, it followed strict ethical guidelines and used reliable methods of data collection (measurement tools) as well as an effective recruitment process to produce meaningful results. The methodology forms a strong foundation for both longitudinal and interventional research in an important domain.

A structured questionnaire provided a suitable method of obtaining comparable data from a large number of participants in an anonymous manner. Anonymity is especially important in sensitive research studies, as many participants would not be willing to discuss instances of cyber harassment, image-based abuse, and/or online threats if they were concerned about being identified. The use of a structured questionnaire helped to ensure consistency among participants, as all participants answered the same fundamental questions about their psychology and digital behaviour. Numerical data provides quantitative evidence of patterns, correlations and predictive relationships. Numerical data does not fully convey emotional language (i.e., shame, fear, helplessness, anger and isolation) associated with victimisation. Open-ended responses provided qualitative data that helped personalise quantitative data without affecting statistical analyses. Open-ended responses also allowed authors to include participant descriptions of their experiences in their own words. The selected psychological measures were suitable for assessing outcome variables associated with prurient cybercrime victimisation. There are conceptual relationships between measures of anxiety, depression, self-esteem, PTSD symptoms, coping mechanisms and resilience and being a victim of prurient cybercrime. Standardised scales and reliability assessments contributed to the increased credibility of the findings, whereas pilot testing ensured that all questions were

clearly understood by the respondents and were culturally appropriate for those residing in Delhi NCR. When researching a sensitive topic, it's essential to combine both standardisation (methodological consistency) and local contextualization (methodological adaptation to the local environment). Ethics are also integral to the design of methodologically sound research into cyber victimisation. Asking participants to recall painful experiences can create discomfort for them.

The informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and availability of support services were not simply procedural requirements but rather represented essential protections for participants. These protections helped decrease risk to research participants while also promoting an ethical research process that is consistent with what is expected when conducting research with human participants or using sensitive psychological information.

A mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) enhances interpretation. The quantitative analysis will produce measurable evidence of both association and moderation, whereas the qualitative analysis (through participant narratives) can help interpret the associations' meaning in terms of the participants' personal experiences. Because of fear, shame, family pressures and societal judgments — all factors that cannot be assessed through numerical data alone — women's responses to cyber victimisation may influence their experiences of cyber victimisation. By using both quantitative and qualitative evidence, manuscripts can be grounded in data (empirical), but also demonstrate the serious nature of the problems at hand. The researchers made a deliberate effort not to represent the participants in the study as only victims.

Although the study documents distress among participants, it also emphasises agency through coping mechanisms, resilience, social support and digital literacy. This difference is important for both ethical and academic writing. A manuscript with a humanised tone would admit the harm that has been done to women, but it would not portray women as helpless. Illustrating protective factors demonstrates how appropriate institutional responses can lead to women's recovery and empowerment.

## Results

### Demographic Profile

We have completed analyses to determine how different subgroups of our sample differ in their psychological outcomes based upon various factors. Age: The results of our study suggest that individuals who fall into the age group of 17-22 years old experience higher levels of trauma and anxiety than the individuals who fall into the age group of 23-28 years old, so we can conclude that younger females may be more susceptible to the psychological ramifications of prurient cybercrime. There are several reasons why this might be true, including less life experience, increased digital involvement, etc., in younger populations. Education: Undergraduate students experienced greater levels of anxiety and lower levels of self-esteem than graduate students in our study. One possible reason is that graduate students may possess greater degrees of digital maturity, may face less peer pressure, and may also possess a greater number of support systems available to assist them with dealing with the effects of cybercrime. Socio-Economic Status (SES): Individuals with a middle SES reported experiencing more distress (trauma, anxiety, depression) than individuals with an upper SES. Possible explanations include access to digital literacy programs, availability of social support networks, and availability of mental health services. (Table 1). Figure 1 illustrates the demographic profile of the respondents.

**Figure 1. Demographic profile of respondents**

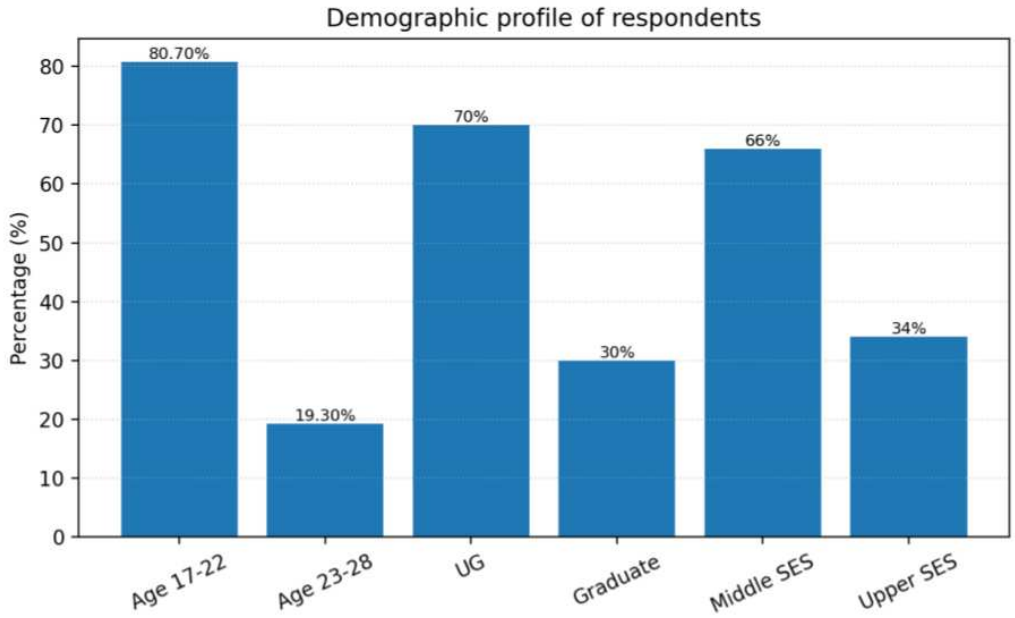



Figure 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

## Qualitative Feedback

Open-ended survey questions and a word cloud analysis revealed that participants experienced many emotional effects as a result of their experiences with cybercrime. The following quotes are provided as examples of some of the emotional effects experienced by participants:

- “After my photos were posted online without my permission, I felt completely helpless and embarrassed. I couldn't trust anyone after that.”
- “After rumours began circulating on social media regarding me, my friends began pulling away from me. I was so anxious I didn't attend school for weeks."
- “I blocked the harasser, and he continued to send me threat messages using new accounts. I was terrified at all times and starting to question my self-esteem."
- "It was hard for me to tell the police about what happened. I was worried my family would not believe me and would blame me. The stories provided above illustrate the extreme embarrassment, isolation and stigmatisation experienced by victims of cybercrime and the barriers to getting help from systems that are meant to protect them.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

**Demographic Profile of Respondents**

| **Variable** | **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 17–22 | 242 | 80.7 |
| | 23–28 | 58 | 19.3 |
| Education | Undergraduate | 210 | 70 |
| | Graduate | 90 | 30 |
| SES | Middle | 198 | 66 |
| | Upper | 102 | 34 |

**Digital Behavior**

In terms of internet usage, on average, the participants used the Internet for 3.93 hours per day. All participants use digital platforms moderately. As far as device ownership goes, 61% of participants owned a computer (laptop or desktop), and 54% owned a smartphone. Our results indicate that there is a high degree of digital access among the participants. Digital access increases the potential for exposure to prurient cybercrime. These findings support the Lifestyle Exposure Theory that the greater the number of hours an individual spends online, the greater the risk of being exposed to cybercrimes. (Table 2). Device ownership is illustrated in Figure 2.

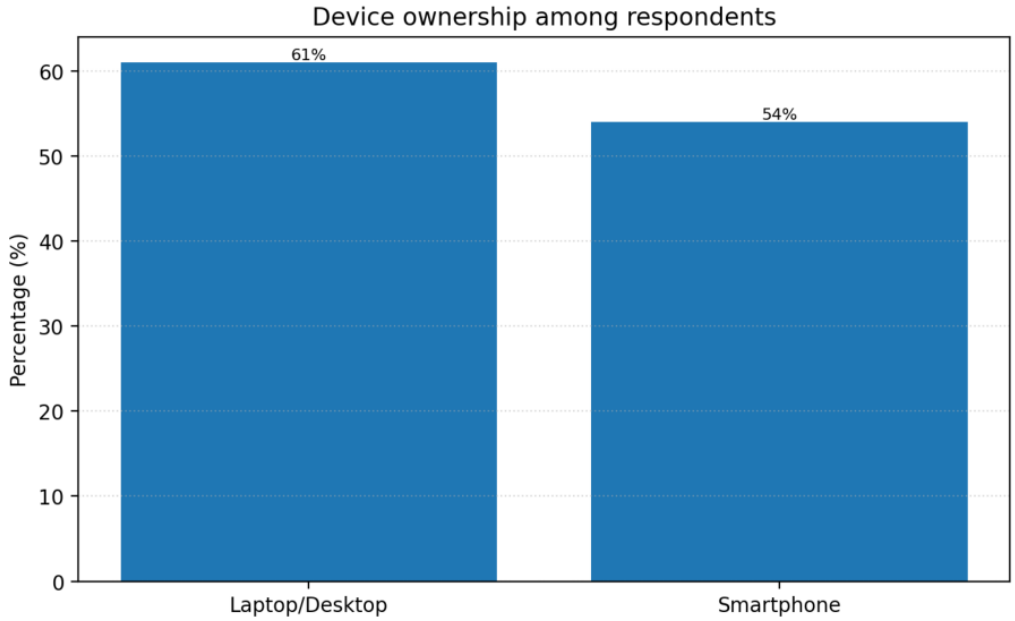



Figure 2. Device Ownership Among Respondents

Table 2. Digital Behaviour of Respondents

**Digital Behaviour of Respondents**

| Variable | Category | Value | Unit | Graph Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internet Usage | Mean hours per day | 3.93 | Hours/day | Internet Usage<br>Mean hours per day<br>3.93 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Device Ownership | Laptop/Desktop | 61 | Percentage | Device Ownership Laptop/Desktop 61% |
| Device Ownership | Smartphone | 54 | Percentage | Device Ownership Smartphone 54% |

**Digital Behaviour of Respondents**

**Psychological Outcomes**

A review of the results of the mental health assessments indicated that a large percentage of those surveyed (respondents) experienced significant mental health issues. The trauma scale score for participants was at a moderate to high level, and participants' scores on the scales measuring anxiety and depression were also at a moderate level. Participants who reported being victims of cyber exposure also had lower self-esteem scores than other groups, resulting in decreased psychological well-being. (Table 3). The psychological outcome scores are illustrated in Figure 3.

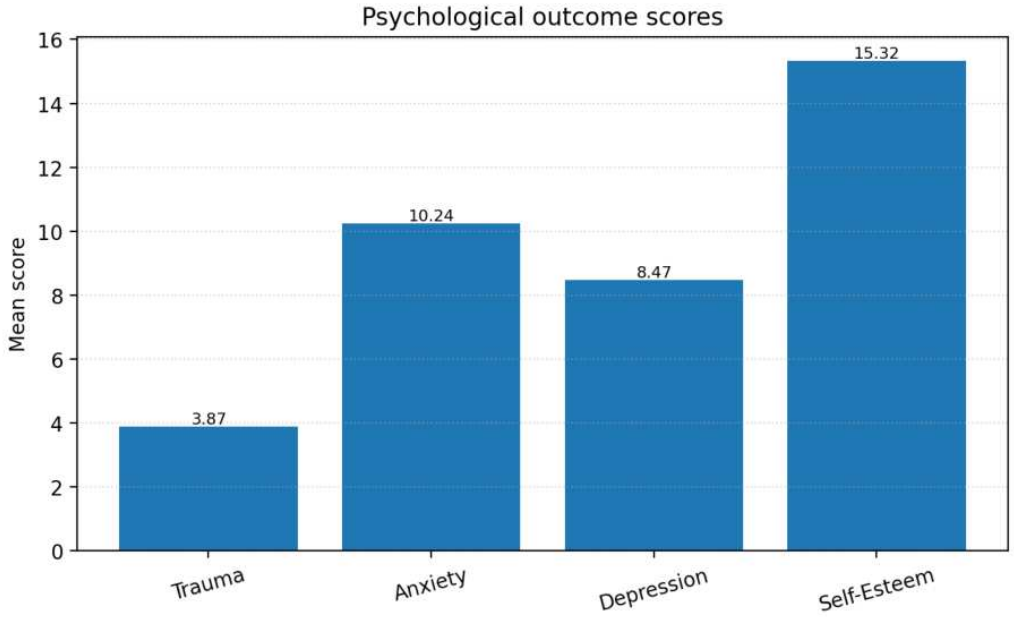



Figure 3. Psychological Outcome Scores

Table 3. Psychological Outcome Scores

**Psychological Outcome Scores**

| Measure | Mean | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Trauma | 3.87 | Moderate–High Trauma |
| Anxiety (GAD-7) | 10.24 | Moderate Anxiety |
| Depression (PHQ-9) | 8.47 | Mild–Moderate Depression |
| Self-Esteem (RSES) | 15.32 | Lower to Moderate |

The graphic illustrates the average scores for the psychological outcomes of the participants. The highest average score was recorded on self-esteem (15.32), followed by anxiety (10.24), depression (8.47), and trauma (3.87). As such, the data suggest moderate anxiety, mild-to-moderate depression, moderate-to-high trauma, and low-to-moderate self-esteem. Due to variations in the scoring scale of each measure utilised, it is recommended that the graphic be viewed as a descriptive comparison of reported scores rather than a direct clinical severity ranking.

**Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation)**

Figure 4 presents the descriptive statistics for psychological outcomes.
In addition to computing means for each measure, we calculated the standard deviations of those means to provide further insight into variability among psychological outcomes. (Table 4).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation)

**Descriptive Statistics (Mean & SD)**

| Variable | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Trauma | 3.87 | 0.76 |
| Anxiety | 10.24 | 3.21 |
| Depression | 8.47 | 2.98 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Self-Esteem | 15.32 | 4.12 |

The cyber-victimised female university students' mean scores and standard deviations on relevant psychological measures are shown here. Anxiety (M = 10.24, SD = 3.21) and Self-esteem (M = 15.32, SD = 4.12) were also highly varied. The study demonstrates that there are significant variations among students regarding how they emotionally react to cyberbullying. Aligns with previous research, which indicates a wide range of victim psychological resilience and vulnerability (Buchanan & Mahoney, 2025). Results indicated moderate levels of psychological variable dispersion, with anxiety and self-esteem having somewhat greater dispersion than other variables. The fact that there are individual differences in psychological responses to cyber victimisation is suggested. The means and standard deviations are illustrated in Figure 4.

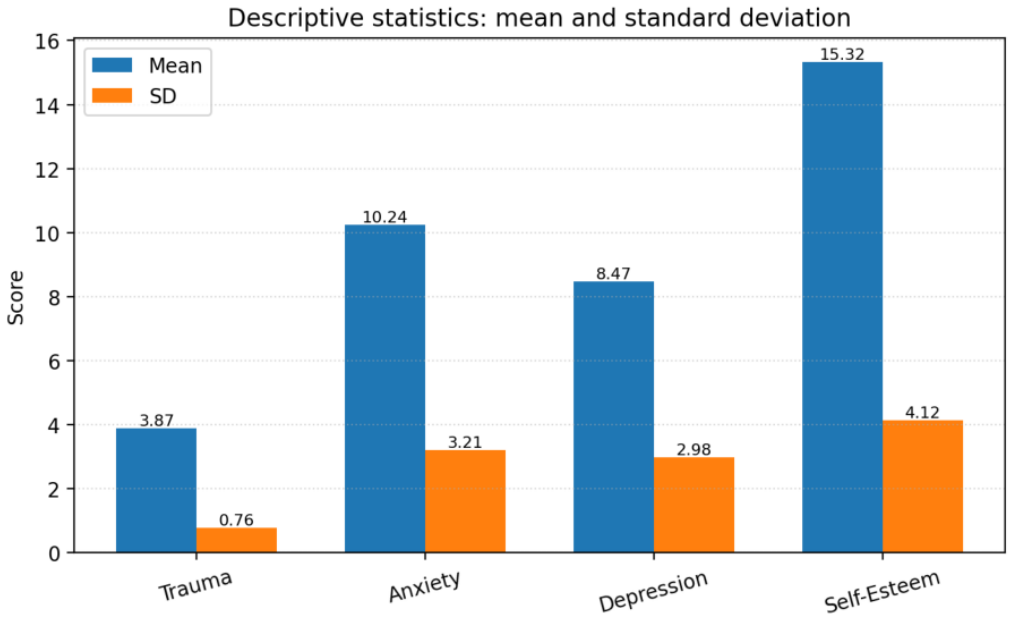



Figure 4. Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Outcomes (Mean and Standard Deviation)

**Descriptive Statistics (Mean & SD)**

The bar chart shows the average score of each psychological outcome (i.e., trauma, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem), and the error bars show the standard deviation and it is easy to see the central tendencies and variability of each outcome. The relatively large error bars for

anxiety and self-esteem confirm that individual differences in emotional response to cyber victimisation exist, as some students experience substantially more or less severe emotional reactions than other students.

**Correlation Analysis**

Figure 5 presents the correlations among psychological variables.
Psychological variables were examined for association using Pearson correlation analysis. (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlation Matrix of Psychological Variables

**Correlation Matrix**

| **Variable** | **Trauma** | **Anxiety** | **Depression** | **Self-Esteem** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trauma | 1 | .62** | .58** | -.45** |
| Anxiety | .62** | 1 | .65** | -.41** |
| Depression | .58** | .65** | 1 | -.48** |
| Self-Esteem | -.45** | -.41** | -.48** | 1 |

**($p < .01$)

As indicated by the correlation matrix, there are strong positive associations among trauma, anxiety and depression, and it can be concluded that these conditions are frequently co-occurring, which has been demonstrated in global research (McMillan et al., 2025). The correlations among the psychological variables are illustrated in Figure 5.

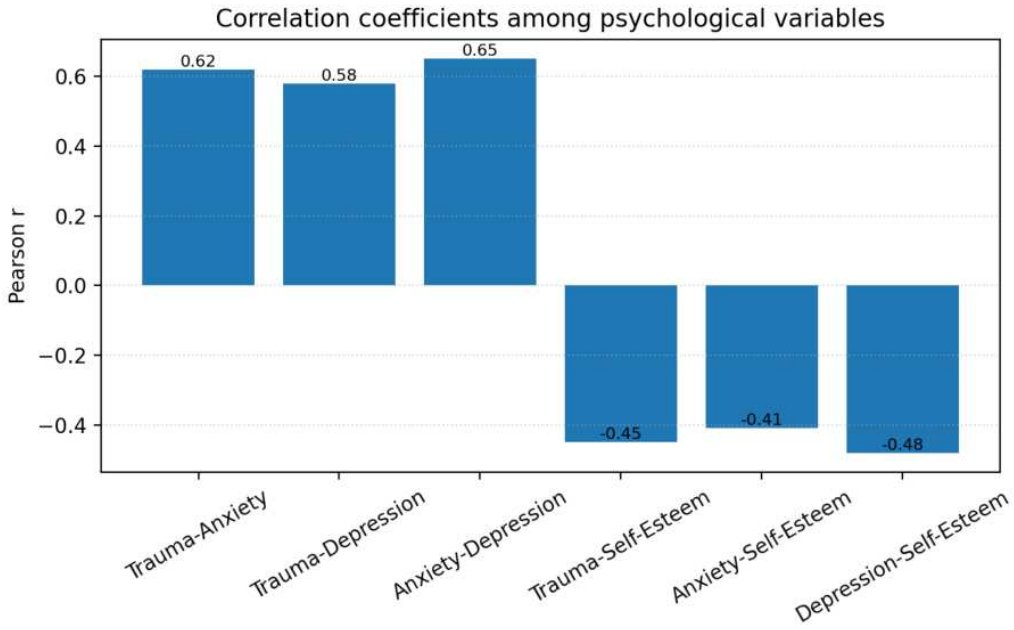



Figure 5. Correlations Among Psychological Variables

All of the distress variables were negatively associated with self-esteem. Thus, the greater the level of distress experienced by participants, the less they rated themselves as worthy.

A significant positive relationship was found for trauma, anxiety and depression, and it can be assumed that they are interrelated. Self-esteem has a negative relationship with each of the distress variables. In other words, as a person's distress levels increase, so does their self-esteem.

**Inferential Statistics (Regression Analysis)**

Figure 6 presents the regression coefficients for the key predictive paths.
Regression analysis showed a strong relationship between the digital behaviour and the psychological outcome:

- There is an association between internet use and trauma ($\beta = .45$, $p < .01$).
- The use of the internet led to an increase in anxiety ($\beta = .38$, $p < .01$).
- Digital Literacy harms Trauma ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < 0.05$).
- Digital literacy leads to increased self-esteem (with a beta of .35 and p value less than .01).

Regression analyses indicated that the amount of time spent on the Internet was positively associated with both trauma and anxiety. Supports the idea that greater exposure to

technology can lead to increased risk for mental health issues. Conversely, greater digital literacy provides a buffering effect by increasing an individual's self-esteem and decreasing their level of trauma (Dalal et al., 2022). These findings indicate that the amount of time individuals spend on the Internet is associated with greater levels of psychological distress, but digital literacy serves as a protective factor. The regression coefficients for the predictive paths are illustrated in Figure 6.

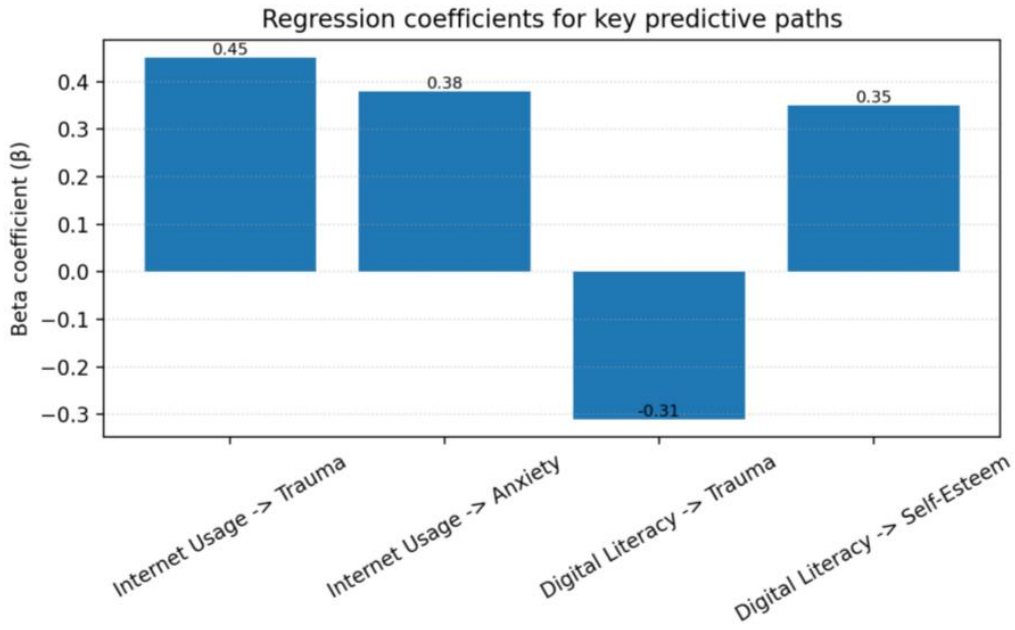



Figure 6. Regression Coefficients for Key Predictive Paths

**Structural Equation Modeling**

Figure 7 presents the structural equation model fit indices.

The structural model had a good fit, suggesting that the theoretical model developed in the research adequately represents the relationships between the variables examined in the study. The SEM fit indices indicate that the theoretical framework used in the study has a strong representation of the empirical data collected, and the structural model provides a robust and credible representation of how various technologies impact an individual's mental health.

**Model Fit Indices (SEM)**

The structural model demonstrated a good fit, indicating that the theoretical model used in the study adequately represents the relationships between the variables examined in the study. The SEM fit indices confirm that the theoretical framework used in the study has a strong representation of the empirical data collected, and the structural model provides a

robust and credible representation of how various technologies impact an individual's mental health. (Table 6). The SEM model fit indices are illustrated in Figure 7.

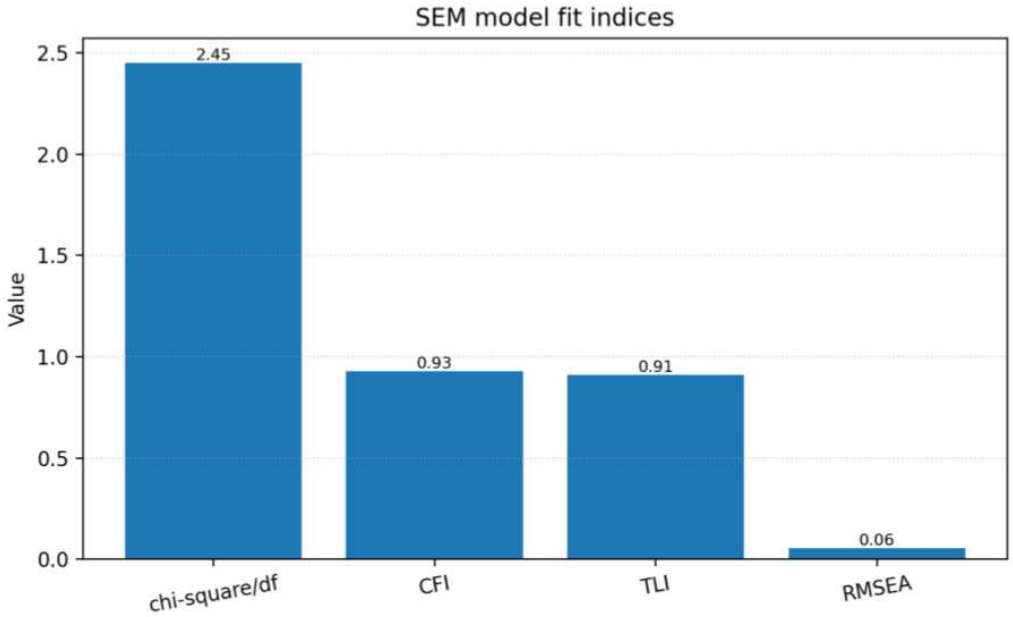



Figure 7. Structural Equation Model Fit Indices

Table 6. Structural Equation Model Fit Indices

**Model Fit Indices**

| **Fit Index** | **Value** | **Recommended** |
|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2/df$ | 2.45 | < 3 |
| CFI | 0.93 | > 0.90 |
| TLI | 0.91 | > 0.90 |
| RMSEA | 0.056 | < 0.08 |

**Emotional Reaction (Word Cloud Analysis)**

Word cloud analysis indicates that the emotional intensity of the participants was very high. The use of "suicide" and "shame" as keywords to represent the level of psychic harm, i.e.,

suicidal ideation and public shame, is consistent with research conducted in India indicating severe emotional consequences of cyber victimisation (Verma, 2026, Parekh et al., 2026).
The participant's emotional reactions were clearly visible in the text analysed:

1. Suicide (79 mentions)
2. 2. Shame (71 mentions)
3. 3. Anger (56 mentions)
4. 4. Disgrace (43 mentions)

The above statement implies that prurient cybercrime is linked to observable signs of emotional distress such as suicidal thoughts and feelings of shame.

**Social, Cultural, and Policy Implications**

The findings of the study have several implications for social, cultural, and policy issues:

1. Individuals, families, and communities experience psychological consequences of prurient cybercrime. Victims of online harassment are frequently blamed and shamed for being targeted. Internet bullying is a widespread issue. Because of this, victims do not want to go forward with reporting incidents or seeking help. This act will perpetuate a cycle of silence.
2. Indian tradition has viewed sexuality as taboo and placed great value on honour. Victims of trauma will suffer more damage from their initial trauma, as well as often experiencing secondary trauma. We must have open dialogues with one another. We must have digital awareness campaigns, and we must start now to challenge these norms.
3. The data indicates that there is an urgent need to establish gender-sensitive legislation concerning cybercrime, provide victims with simpler means of reporting such crimes, and fund government-sponsored digital literacy initiatives. Colleges and Universities should provide students with educational resources regarding digital safety and offer students who have experienced cyber-victimisation confidential counselling services. Policymakers need to create and/or provide services (e.g., health care, education, etc.) that are easily available to all young women.

**Summary**

The findings conclusively show that:

1. Digital exposure at higher levels is highly correlated with trauma and anxiety.

2. The measurements of psychological distress are highly correlated.
3. Digital literacy, coping mechanisms, and resilience are protective factors.
4. Emotional reactions show a large level of psychosocial influence.

The findings of the study provide strong evidence for the Lifestyle Exposure Theory and the Routine Activity Theory. The findings also indicate that an individual's behaviour patterns in digital environments directly affect his/her psychological state. The results are a pattern of results and not just individual statistical results.

For example, the study indicated that the greater the amount of trauma experienced, the greater the anxiety; the greater the amount of trauma experienced, the greater the digital literacy; the greater the amount of trauma experienced, the greater the self-esteem; the more time an individual spent using the Internet. Collectively, these and other factors suggest that exposure to digital media itself does not cause psychological harm. Rather, the more you expose yourself, the more likely you are to be exposed to others.The more knowledgeable you are about how to react and how to manage digital risks, the less vulnerable you will be.

In terms of prevention, it is important to view prevention not as restricting access to technology but as facilitating safe and informed participation. The close association between trauma, anxiety, and depression suggests that distress may be a clustering phenomenon. Those experiencing persistent fear or shame may avoid social or academic activities due to concerns over future victimisation. Withdrawal from social or academic activities can lead to decreased self-esteem and depression. Moreover, the inverse relationship between self-esteem and the distress variables suggests an internalising mechanism through which victims process the emotional impact of cyber victimisation.

The perpetrator is responsible for causing the victimisation, and victims may feel judged or devalued.

Social support, coping mechanisms, and resilience are critical moderating variables when planning interventions. Promptly providing support and fostering a non-blaming belief system, along with guiding how to cope effectively, can help minimise psychological harm to victims. Support does not eliminate the event, but support can alter victims' perception of what occurred and reduce feelings of isolation.

**Limitations**

In addition to the previously discussed limitations of methodologies employed in the study:

- Results cannot be extrapolated to other populations of college-aged women living in urban areas.
- The study is a cross-sectional study; thus, it cannot measure changes over time or potential for recovery and development of resilience.
- While qualitative data were abundant, they were collected solely from individuals who were willing to discuss sensitive experiences in survey formats

Thus, some of the most severe experiences may not be represented.

What is next?

- Longitudinal studies: Longitudinal studies examining psychological outcomes associated with cyber victimisation will further our understanding of long-term effects of cyber victimisation and the efficacy of various coping mechanisms.
- Diverse Populations: The study must include women in rural areas, older adults, and non-students to gain a broader perspective of prurient cybercrime in India.
- Interventions Evaluation: Formal evaluations of digital literacy education and support networks/counseling will provide an understanding of which strategies are most effective at preventing or recovering from the type of issue.
- Policy Implementation: More research is needed to assess the effectiveness of government/educational policies regarding cyber safety and mental health.

**Discussion**

Research evaluated how cyber-stalking/prurient cybercrimes affected female residents of Delhi NCR (National Capital Region), specifically focusing on their psychological response in terms of trauma, anxiety, depression and/or self-esteem. Results showed that a greater level of Internet usage predicted a greater level of trauma ($\beta = .45$, $p < .01$) and anxiety ($\beta = .38$, $p < .01$), in agreement with previous studies (Kumar & Singh, 2021; Lee et al., 2022). Spending more time online could lead to an increased likelihood of having negative experiences. Furthermore, results indicate that trauma is strongly correlated with anxiety/depression, thereby suggesting that emotional distress resulting from cyber victimisation may lead to long-term depressive symptomatology (Patel et al., 2022). Digital literacy was protective against victimisation and positively influenced self-esteem ($\beta = .35$, $p < .01$).

Furthermore, digital literacy among women was also associated with better online risk management in previous studies (Chen & Li, 2021; Sultana, 2020).

Moreover, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis indicated that coping mechanisms/social support/resilience were significant moderators of the relationship between victimisation and reduction in psychological distress. These results are consistent with the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2021), which emphasised the importance of support systems in protecting mental health. Word cloud analysis indicated high emotional responses, including shame/anger/suicidal ideation; these results illustrate the magnitude of psychological trauma experienced by victims (Rahman et al., 2022; Garcia et al., 2023).

Overall, these findings illustrate serious psychological impacts associated with prurient cybercrime; thus emphasising the importance of digital literacy education/support/network/counseling services in protecting/empowering women. Based on these findings so far, we propose several possible solutions to alleviate psychological impacts associated with prurient cybercrime on women in Delhi NCR/other high digital exposure environments:

**Recommendations on Stakeholder Action**

Develop an accessible, transparent, and multilingual online reporting/support system for victims. Expand existing digital literacy/safety education programs for young women in higher education and/or community centres. Encourage collaboration among various stakeholders (e.g., law enforcement agencies, digital platforms, mental health support services) to offer complete assistance to victims. Educators should consider: Incorporating digital security/cyber ethics/emotional resilience modules into college/university curriculum. Organising peer-led workshops/groups for experience sharing/practical coping strategies. Having counsellors on campus trained to assist students who have been victims of cyber victimization/provide confidential space free from stigma for reporting/discussion. Mental Health Professionals should provide trauma-informed, culturally relevant interventions and/or counselling that is sensitive to the unique challenges faced by victims of cybercrime. Develop support resources (helplines, online chat support and self-help guides) that are readily available to young women who are experiencing distress. Support peer groups/families and create support networks for survivors.

**Knowledge Gaps/Future Directions**

Expand research to women in rural areas, working professionals and marginalised communities. The limitations of the

research include only being able to examine urban college students. Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of coping strategies/resilience building interventions over time. The effectiveness of digital literacy education, peer support programs and mental health services in reducing psychological harm needs to be evaluated through conducting formal intervention trials. Monitor how new government policies/community-based initiatives promote cyber safety through their implementation and/or outcomes.

**Raise Awareness and Implement Prevention Strategies**

Awareness campaigns targeting victim-blaming attitudes/cybercrime myths and promoting open dialogue about digital safety. Work with NGOs, community leaders and media outlets to raise awareness and promote positive digital behaviours. Educate everyone in society about cyber safety/mental health issues in schools, at work, and throughout public areas. These recommendations/continuing efforts to address research gaps can aid policy-makers/educators/counselors in creating a safer/more inclusive online environment for women to engage confidently/resiliently in online spaces.

**Personal Experiences/Case Studies:**

**Case 1: "I began questioning my worth."** A 20-year-old undergraduate student from Delhi NCR whose private photographs were uploaded online without her permission stated that she experienced shame/disgrace/wanting to isolate herself socially: I was so ashamed that my photographs were uploaded online. I isolated myself from my friends; I missed several weeks of college. I lost confidence in myself; I was constantly afraid of being judged.

**Case 2: "I felt too anxious;** I could no longer attend classes due to my excessive anxiety." A 21-year-old participant claimed to have been subjected to consistent harassment/threatening behaviour through anonymous online accounts. She blocked the harasser, but the threats she continued to receive had a severe impact on her mental health (every day I would get messages from fake accounts). I withdrew from classes because anxiety had become so severe that I stayed at home by myself. I thought there were no other options for me, and I did consider suicide at times.

**Case 3: "My family will get angry at me."** A 23-year-old graduate student was cyber-stalked/subjected to malicious gossip via social media platforms. She feared

stigmatization/had little faith in institutional support, and she did not initially report incidents: I feared my family would become angry with me. I attempted reporting incidents, but the authorities dismissed my complaints. I felt helpless, and it required me significant time before seeking counselling. These lived experiences of the young women who were victims of prurient cybercrime in the study provide evidence that the cybercrimes they experienced caused them to suffer from severe mental health issues, including trauma, anxiety, shame, social isolation and suicidal thoughts. Barriers to seeking help (such as stigma/lack of institutional support/reporting mechanisms) will lead to an increase in psychological harm caused by cyber victimisation. The purely quantitative depiction of cyber victimisation is insufficient, as demonstrated by the use of these vignette examples. Quantitative data informs us about patterns; qualitative data informs us how patterns manifest in daily existence. Trauma/anxiety scores represent emotional realities of humiliation/fear/isolation/self-doubt.

Furthermore, these case vignettes also demonstrate how victims can be impacted on multiple levels (i.e., cyber incident itself/fear of exposure/response from friends/family/difficulty following up with formal support). The necessity of developing and implementing pragmatic/compassionate prevention/intervention approaches is highlighted by these cases. Victims need immediate digital assistance, emotional validation and a safe space to share fears and shame. Instead of responding to mental health concerns through an increase in disciplinary action/technology-based solutions, institutions should avoid these approaches. The response plan will involve preventative measures, reporting mechanisms, psychological support, and ongoing follow-up. A more encompassing view of the study supports similar important results, which show that prurient cybercrime causes serious psychological consequences for females, and that these consequences are moderated by their level of digital exposure/digital literacy/coping mechanisms/social support/resilience. It provides an initial basis for creating gender-sensitive digital safety programs and mental health services in colleges located in Delhi NCR.

**Conclusion:**

The study represented an attempt to assess the psychological effects of cybercrime on women residing in Delhi NCR, and assessments were based on trauma/anxiety/depression/self-esteem. Findings indicated that socio-demographic characteristics/digital behaviours were

predictive of risk for victimization/mental health outcomes. Higher levels of Internet usage were positively associated with higher levels of trauma/anxiety ($\beta = .45$; $\beta = .38$; $p < .01$); these findings align with findings from previous studies (Kumar & Singh, 2021; Lee et al., 2022). Findings suggest that individuals who spend greater amounts of time online are more susceptible to experiencing negative events. Trauma has been significantly linked to anxiety or depression. Linkage suggests that the emotional stress caused by cyber-victimisation may result in chronic depressive symptomatology (Patel et al., 2022). Digital literacy was found to serve as a protective factor against victimisation and also had a positive relationship with self-esteem ($\beta = .35$; $p < .01$). Women's increased digital literacy has been shown to improve their ability to manage online risks in earlier research (Chen & Li, 2021; Sultana, 2020). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) showed that coping mechanisms, social support, and resilience were all mediating factors in the relationship between victimisation and psychological distress. These findings are consistent with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) 2021 emphasis on the importance of support systems for maintaining mental health. Word cloud analysis revealed strong emotions such as shame/anger/suicidal ideation, which shows how much psychological harm victims experience (Rahman et al., 2022; Garcia et al., 2023).

Overall, these findings underscore serious psychological consequences associated with prurient cybercrime; they also highlight the significance of digital literacy education, support, networking and counselling services in protecting and empowering women.

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