



What is Online Harassment?

Definition

Online harassment refers to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by an individual or group to repeatedly cause harm to another person. This includes actions like threats, embarrassment, humiliation, and the expression of discriminatory attitudes such as sexism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism. It also encompasses online sexual harassment, cyberstalking, image-based sexual abuse (e.g., "revenge porn"), and other unwelcome online conduct of a sexual nature.

In India, online harassment is covered under various provisions, including the **Information Technology Act, 2000** (IT Act), which addresses cybercrimes and electronic communication. Sections like **66A (repealed but still applicable to harassment laws)**, **66C**, **66E**, and **67** address cyberbullying, the sharing of explicit content without consent, and online defamation. Additionally, **Section 354D of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)** addresses stalking and harassment in the digital realm.

Types of Online Harassment

Online harassment can occur in various forms, including:

- **Cyberstalking:** Repeatedly following or monitoring someone online with the intention to harm or intimidate.
- **Cyberbullying:** The use of digital platforms to bully, ridicule, or spread harmful content.
- **Online Sexual Harassment:** Engaging in unwanted online sexual conduct, including sending explicit images or messages.
- **Image-Based Abuse:** Sharing intimate images or videos without consent (often referred to as "revenge porn").
- **Impersonation:** Pretending to be someone else online, either by hacking their account or creating fake profiles to defame or harass.
- **Hate Speech:** Spreading hate online targeting specific groups based on race, religion, caste, gender, etc.
- **Spreading False Information:** Deliberately spreading rumours or defaming someone on social media or other online platforms.
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Examples of Online Harassment

Here are some common examples of online harassment:

- **Spreading Rumours:** Ridiculing or demeaning others by spreading false or harmful information.
- **Discriminatory Harassment:** Harassing someone based on their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or gender identity.
- **Revenge or Humiliation:** Deliberately embarrassing a person online, often as a form of retribution or humiliation.
- **Unwanted Sexual Behaviour:** Sending sexually explicit text messages, emails, or images, or sharing intimate content without consent.
- **Impersonation with Malicious Intent:** Pretending to be someone else to cause harm or defame them.
- **Provocative Messages:** Sending inflammatory, rude, or violent comments with the intent to provoke others online.
- **Exposing Offensive Content:** Sharing inappropriate or offensive content in digital meetings or groups, often without consent.

Effects of Online Harassment

The effects of online harassment can be devastating, leading to various psychological, emotional, and physical consequences, including:

- **Stress and Anxiety:** Victims may experience ongoing stress, panic attacks, and heightened anxiety due to constant online harassment.
- **Loss of Self-Esteem:** The emotional toll can lead to a loss of self-confidence and feelings of worthlessness.
- **Feelings of Powerlessness:** Victims may feel they have little control over the situation, especially in the face of constant online attacks.
- **Changes in Sleep and Eating Patterns:** Psychological strain can lead to disrupted sleep or eating habits.
- **Hypervigilance:** Victims may become overly cautious and anxious, particularly about their online presence and safety.
- **Fear for Personal Safety:** Threats or stalking can lead to a genuine fear for personal safety.
- **Reduced Academic or Professional Performance:** The emotional and psychological toll of online harassment can adversely impact work or studies.

Legal Protections in India

Under Indian law, several provisions offer protection against online harassment, including the **Information Technology Act, 2000**, and the **Indian Penal Code**. Relevant sections include:

- **Section 66E** (Violation of Privacy): Punishes the sharing of images or videos without consent.
- **Section 67** (Punishment for Publishing or Transmitting Obscene Material): Addresses the online publication of obscene material.
- **Section 354D IPC** (Stalking): Criminalizes online stalking, including unwanted monitoring or tracking of individuals.
- **Section 503 IPC** (Criminal Intimidation): Covers threats made through electronic communication.

Victims of online harassment in India are encouraged to file complaints with law enforcement or cybercrime authorities, who can investigate and take appropriate action.