

Bullies find a hiding place on social media

CYBERBULLYING Many victims choose not to file complaints against a crime that is on the rise and not marked as a separate offence, say cops

Jayprakash S Naidu

jayprakash.naidu@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: While even a celebrity cannot escape trolls on social media for an off-hand comment, police say platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have also become a happy hunting ground and hiding place for bullies, who feel empowered by the audience.

According to the Mumbai police, in many cyberbullying cases, some that involved prominent personalities, the victims chose not to register an FIR. The low detection and conviction rate has only made anyone with a social media account vulnerable to messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.

The Mumbai police do not maintain a separate record for cases of cyberbullying, an official said, thus making it difficult to gauge the extent of it at present.

A senior police official said such cases are on the rise. Cyberbullying cases are currently maintained under the head 'other cybercrimes'. According to the police, of the 904 cybercrimes registered in 2016, 326 cases were registered under 'other cybercrimes'. This year, 80 cases were under this head, of the 216 cybercrimes registered till March 12, 2017.

According to an official, the scary part is that barely anyone is convicted. Even more worrying is that, of the 326 cases last year, only 90 were solved, while of the 80 cases this year, only 9 were solved.

Vijay Mukhi, cybercrime expert, said, "Such cases are increasing every day. You can't have a case worse than that of Delhi University student Gurmehar Kaur. They said all kinds of bad things to her and the problem is that none of the bullies were arrested and we don't even know who some of them are. It is very difficult to track these people. We don't even know if they posted from a fake account."

Kaur shot to limelight post her criticism of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) for the violence in Delhi University last month.

After Kaur, daughter of a soldier killed by militants in Kashmir, criticised the "brutal attack on innocent students by ABVP", she was labelled by many as an "anti-national" who should be "ashamed" considering her father's martyrdom.

Others, including a minister

BEWARE, DON'T FALL PREY TO THE WEB OF CRIME

CASES IN POINT

March 2017: Singer Abhijeet was chargesheeted by the Mumbai Police for making obscene comments about a woman associated with the Aam Admi Party on social networking site Twitter.

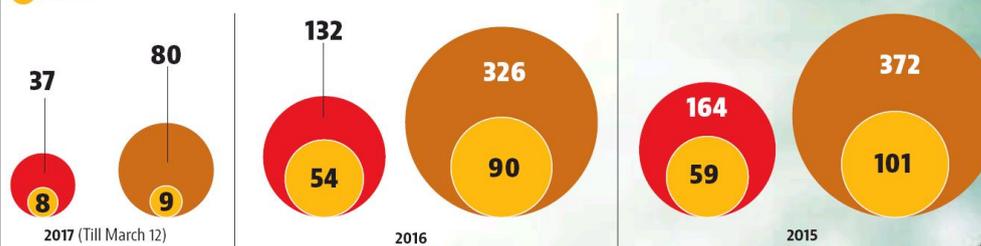
February 2017: A FIR was filed against a few people who trolled, abused and made rape threats to Delhi university student Gurmehar Kaur. No arrest has been made so far.

March 2017: A BJP worker from Varanasi was arrested for sending obscene messages to BJP's national spokesperson Shaina NC. A man from Jalgaon was arrested for sending obscene texts to two MLAs from the Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party.

March 2016: A 26-year-old man from Pune was arrested for allegedly posting obscene comments on the Facebook page of an 18-year-old student

BEWARE, DON'T OPEN THAT EMAIL

● Cases of obscene emails/SMS/MMS ● Other cybercrimes
● Arrests



PRECAUTIONS WHILE USING MATRIMONIAL WEBSITES



Do not give any money to the person you meet on matrimonial website even if you get to know each other personally. Fraudsters win your trust by concocting an emotional story and plead for money.



Do not blindly believe that everything written on the person's profile is true including his/her photograph.



Meet the person and his family personally and conduct a thorough check of the facts mentioned by the person as matrimonial websites do not do this.

PRECAUTIONS WHILE USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES



Do not accept all friend requests: Not every friend request is legitimate. Private investigators and sex offenders often create fake accounts to gain access to profiles. If you do not know the person, don't add them to your friends list. They will be able to search your personal information, your postings and have access to all your photos



Lock your photos and restrict access of unknown people on your profile. Allow access only to your friends. Do not place personal information on social networking sites: Information such as your residential address, phone number, cellphone number, place of work, qualification, profession and date of birth can become public instantly and can be misused



Do not leave your computer unattended with your Facebook account open: Leaving access to your Facebook account is not safe. Be sure to sign out. Do not use passwords, which can be cracked easily like your name or parents' names



Install anti-virus software: Several viruses can attack your email address book. The viruses then send out posts to everyone on your list asking them to become your friend on Facebook, while transferring the same virus.

and an actor, were patronising towards the young woman in their comments, implying she can't think for herself.

Cyber expert Ritesh Bhatia said, "Such incidents have increased massively. After the removal of 66 A of IT Act (Punishment for sending offensive messages through communication service, etc.), there is a very thin line between freedom of expression and cyberharassment. Also, everyone has access to social media with cheap smartphones and easily-available Internet connections."

Mukhi added, "These people who troll, abuse and post obscene comments know that the owners of Facebook, Twitter and Google do not give the IP address to the police easily. For cases of online harassment, they do not co-operate with police. So you see very few people get arrested. So such culprits know they are protected or are hard to track. Also it is very easy to make fake accounts."

A senior officer said people must be more empathic before hitting the like button or commenting. Bullies get empowered by an audience, the officer said.

Report incidents without fear: Cops

Jayprakash S Naidu
jayprakash.naidu@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: Along with taking the necessary precautions, it is also important for people to report cybercrimes, say Mumbai police.

"The certainty of punishment is very important to curb cybercrimes," said KMM Prasanna, additional commissioner of

police, crime, at a recent discussion on women's access to police, organized by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). "It is important to report such cases. If a police officer is not registering your complaint, you must approach the senior police inspector, ACP or DCP to ensure an FIR is registered. You can also

approach us at the cyber police station in BKC or write to us on the Mumbai police website. We are also on Twitter."

Akhileshkumar Singh, deputy commissioner of police, cybercrime, said, "Victims of online harassment and bullying should report such matters."

Former IPS turned lawyer and activist YP Singh told HT, "Section 67 of the Information

Technology Act makes cybercrime a cognizable offence, for which an FIR can be registered. Under section 149 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, it is the duty of the police department to prevent commission of a cognizable offence, keep an eye on crimes. They need to either file a complaint of the victim or take suo motu cognizance of serious crimes."

'PEOPLE NEED TO BE EMOTIONALLY STRONG TO DEAL WITH BULLYING'

Jayprakash S Naidu

jayprakash.naidu@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: According to psychologists in the city, there have been several instances where victims of cyberbullying went into depression and had to be put on medication.

Nirali Bhatia, a psychologist told HT, "People need to be emotionally strong to deal with cyberbullying and harassment on social media. The recent incident of Gurmehar Kaur's trolling and abusing was the worst she has seen in recent times, she added.

"She did the right thing by withdrawing from social media. Withdrawing does not mean you are being weak," Bhatia said.

According to her, one-on-one bullying is limited till the time you are in contact with the person, but in the cyber world the bullying is magnified as it is round-the-clock and anonymity gives a lot of power to bullies.

Bhatia said one needs to gauge how much harassment, bullying and trolling he or she can tolerate and should withdraw before it starts affecting you. "The impact of such bullying is dreadful. In the past few years, I have handled many cases of cyberbullying where the victims have faced social anxiety and depression. They come to us so we can empower them to learn to be indifferent as on the outside, the situation is never in our control. We first start by asking them to withdraw from social media, so that it can be a statement of indifference to her bullies. What I found is that not everyone is emotionally strong to deal with online harassment and bullying."

According to Bhatia, women are more vulnerable than men on social media, but women are more outspoken as well. Bhatia spoke about a case involving a 20-year-old student. The boy was a favourite of his teachers as he was a bright student. However, some students started bullying him on Facebook and WhatsApp. "He slipped into depression and dropped out of college. We had to put him on anti-depressants for a year," said Bhatia.

