

Online Harassment: Psychological Impact, Use of AI and Legal Remedies

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Abstract

Online harassment means unwanted behaviour like abusive, humiliating, harmful through online platforms and digital devices, different applications, websites. It refers to threatening, abusive, humiliating. It can be with an individual or more than one person. Sometimes only once happens or sometimes repeated over time. The survey opens the window of people's mindset while suffering from online harassment. 190 respondents responded to this study. This survey includes questions based on online harassment, psychological impact, use of AI and legal provisions. Different age groups are considered but mainly youngsters are responded and main problems addressed. To creating awareness of ethical use of online platforms and use of AI is important. It provides a way how AI will prevent users from harassment. This study gives information on legal remedies available. It focuses on the IT ACT 2000, BNS and amendments of act. Here are some challenges and limitations discussed at the end of study.

Keywords: Online Harassment, Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, Psychological Impact, Legal Remedies, Social Media, BNS(Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita)

1. Introduction

The use of digital devices to harm, abuse, humiliating individuals or groups of people with the help of technology[w1]. Online harassment is also known as cyber harassment. IT may be by using social platforms like facebook, instagram, tik tok, snapchat etc. or by using whatsapp messages, email, apps and other messengers.

Doxxing, Cyberstalking, pornography, Online impersonation, Trolling are the some different forms of online harassment. Generative AI is the main reason behind the online harassment, Deepfake allowing to create content without the concern and legal framework. It supporting to make videos and photos of anyone with fake content. Fake accounts on different social media, no specific policies and strict implementation of rules. No quick legal actions, all these are the reasons of increasing the online harassment.

Social media contributes in both ways to prevent the attack and creating awareness also, but this is a big door to attackers to come and attack[Sonali 2025]. Online harassment first creates the impact on psychology and people depressed when someone is harassing them. People are getting disturbed because of frequent messages from attackers and content spread by attackers like images and videos. Psychological impact shapes the person's strength, handling stress, body health and decision making power. We can use AI as a defence tool to filter content, deep fake to check originality of videos and AI assistance about the process to do after any attacks.

Legal remedies will play an important role in stopping online harassment. IT act sections are there, FIR is available, Civil defamation suits, BNS provisions are there to give protection.

The idea behind this topic is to study in detail about online harassment, how to prevent it, how to use AI based detection and study legal remedies .

2. Objectives of the Study

- To understand online harassment.
- To check the psychological impact of online harassment.
- To Check AI Role in Detecting Online Harassment.
- To study and examine awareness of legal remedies.
- To study how to control online harassment.

3. Literature Review

Odeh(2026) : Study focuses on cyberbullying as compared to traditional bullying. Cyberbullying is wider than traditional. The role of social media is an important part here. This study focused on cyberbullying detection, prevention strategies, AI approaches and policy frameworks. This study covers challenges, limitations and also says to improve legal structure.

Chandrashekharan(2022): DBN (Deep belief network) is used to detect Cyberbullying in conjunction with SSA. So SSA-DBN is used to detect cyberbullying on social media platforms. SSA-DBA algorithm giving 99.983% accuracy as compared to other available models.

Şengül, H. (2024): According to study, students are using social media platforms like instagram, titok and facebook and they are facing the problem of cyberbullying. Offensive speech, different emojis used as comments to reply to posts. Study suggests that people need to be aware of online harassment and need to give training in school only about the behaviour on social media and the responsibility of everyone.

IT Act 2000: This act and some amendments are playing importance role in cyberactivities including the cyber bullying. Section 66A, 66C, Section 67 are providing the legal actions on offensive speech/ messages or comments, identity theft, publishing obscene material respectively.

Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023: focusses on Speedy justice, Victim-centric approach, Digital criminal justice, Scientific investigation, Transparency and accountability[MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE]

Research Gap: Previous studies providing the solutions on cyberbullying. But it's necessary to educate all youngsters about ethical use of social media and AI. We need to provide some compulsory education before using any type of online platform. Need to guide people about the use of AI to prevent attacks. Need to change and make strict laws against the criminals. Integration of different factors is necessary to achieve the goal.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study considers descriptive research design to study what is online harassment, impact, legal framework available and Use of AI. Here survey methods are used to collect data from the people. Study examines which AI techniques are used to prevent bullying, IT act 2000 and psychological impact.

4.2. Data Collection

Primary data collected through a questionnaire of 10 questions using data survey tool- Google forms.

4.3. Respondents

- Total participants:190
- Age groups: 18-46
- Target population: **students, public**
- Survey period: 1 week

4.4. Data Analysis

Data collected through google form and all questions are compulsory in that so no data missing. 190 Participants responded 100% questions.

Demographic Variable	Dominant Category (n)	% of Sample
Age Group	18-25 years (179)	94.2%
Gender	Female (128) / Male (62)	67.4% / 32.6%
Occupation	Student (176)	92.6%

Most of the youngsters responded. In respondents 67.4% female participants are there. ,ost of the students only.

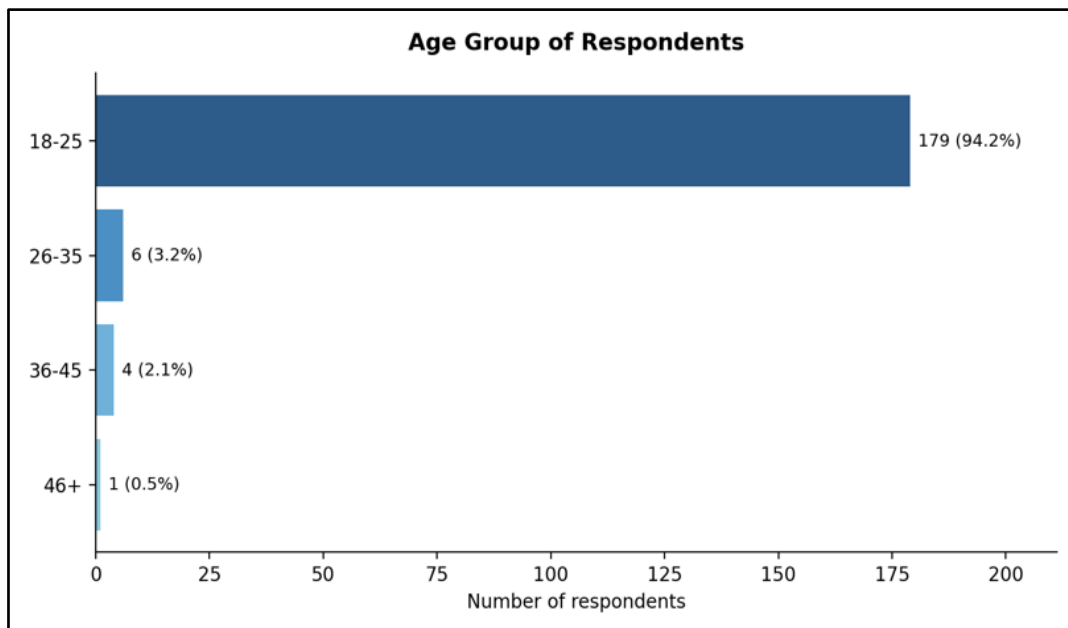


Figure 1: Age distribution of respondents (N = 190)

4.5. Descriptive Analysis

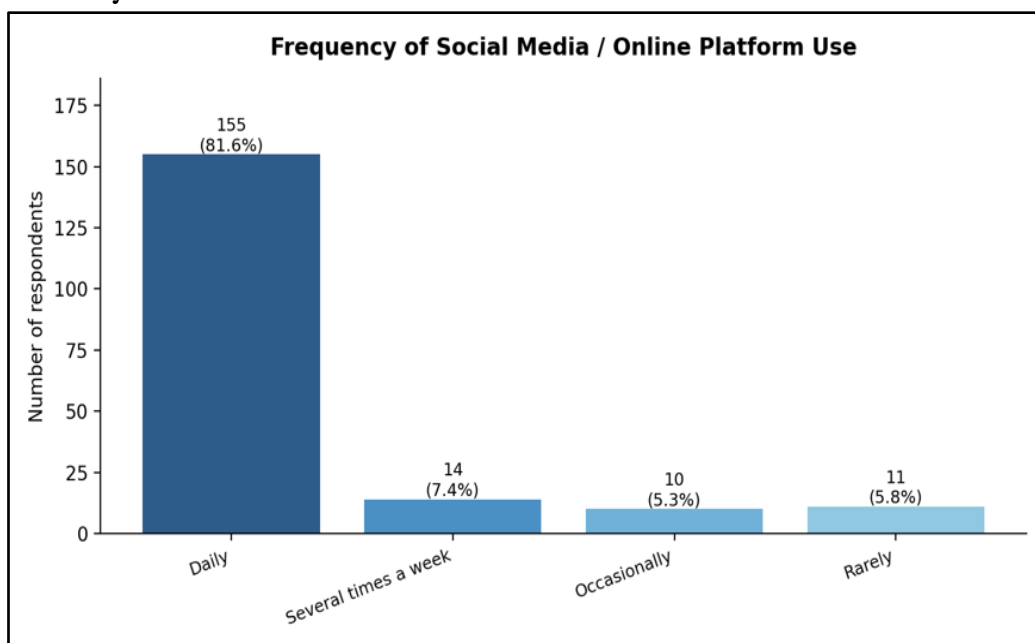


Figure 2: Frequency of social media / online platform use

Most Of The Participants I.E 81.6% Are Using The Social Media Daily. So There Is More Probability Of Online Harassment Or Cyberbullying. Only 14 (7.4%) Are Used Social Media Several Times A week. 5.3% Are Using Occasionally, 5.8% Are Using Online Platforms And Social Media Rarely.

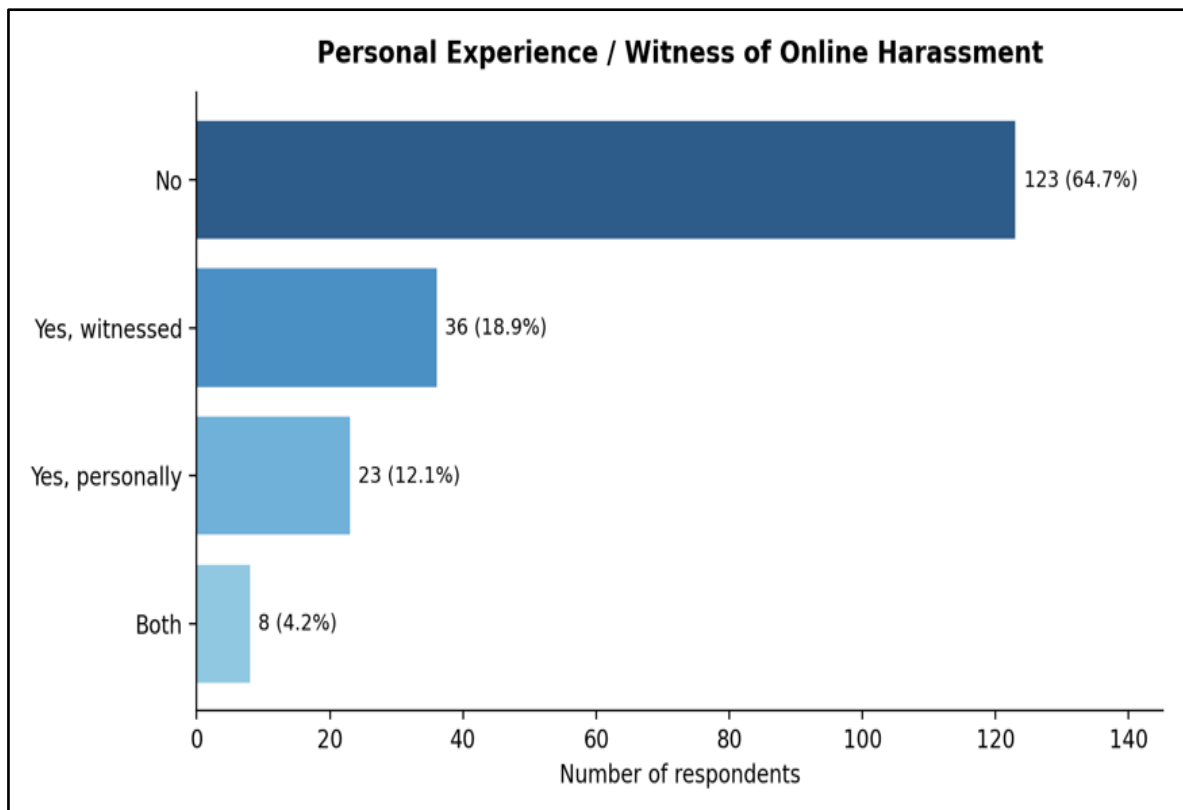


Figure 3: Personal experience or witnessing of online harassment

64.7% not experienced or witness of online harassment. 19.9% witnessed, 12.1% personally observed and 4.2% participants experienced both. Based on the ratio one in 3 people suffer from online harassment.

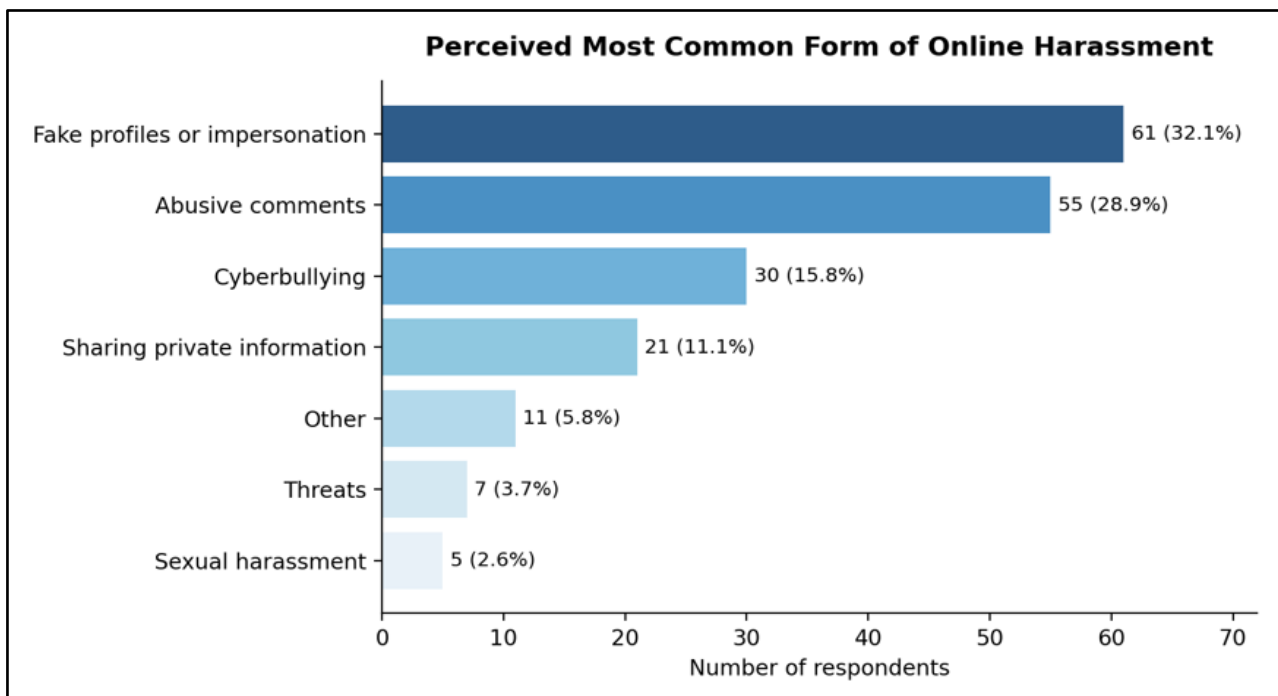


Figure 4: Perceived most common form of online harassment

The above figure shows that Fake profiles and impersonation is the most common form of online harassment. Abusive comments following the fake profile percentage.

Cyberbullying of 28.9%. Sharing private information 11.1%. Threats with 3.7% and sexual harassment with 2.6%.

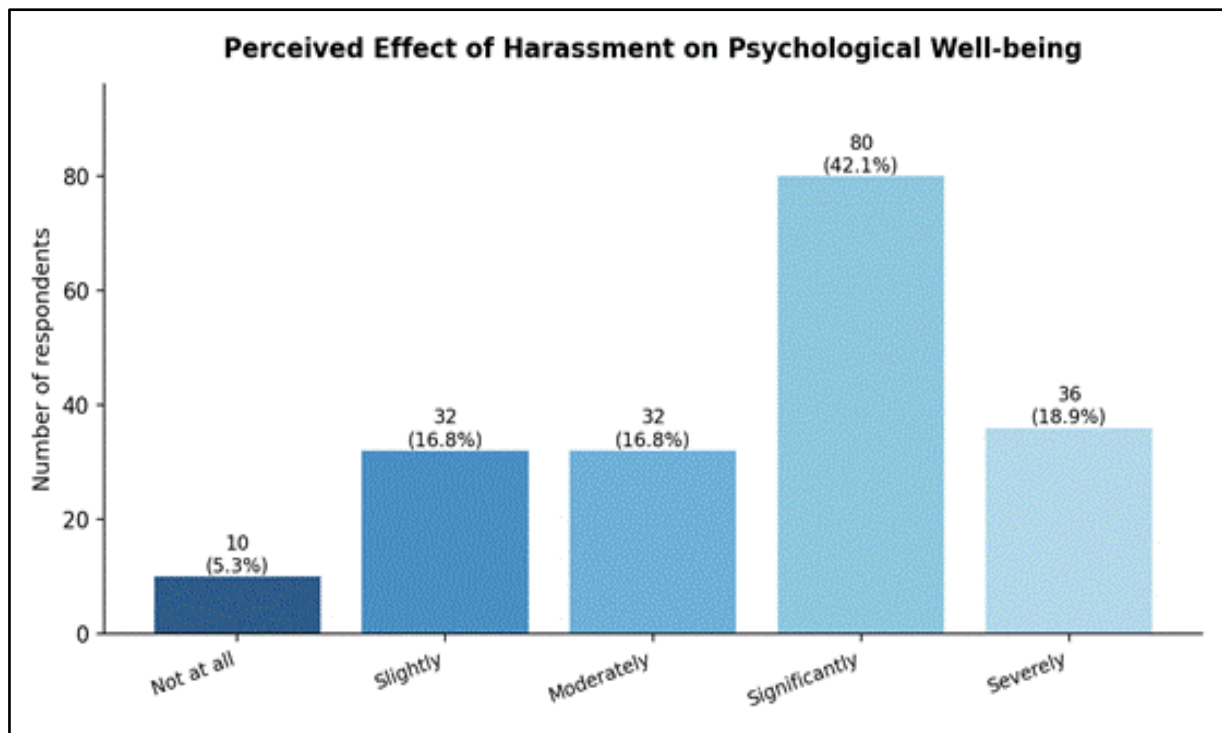


Figure 5: Perceived effect of online harassment on psychological well-being

42.1% i.e 80 respondents are saying that harassment impacts on psychological well being. Large respondents having the same opinion. 36 participants are responding that severe harassment impacting on psychological well being. Only 10 respondents felt its not affecting psychological well being.

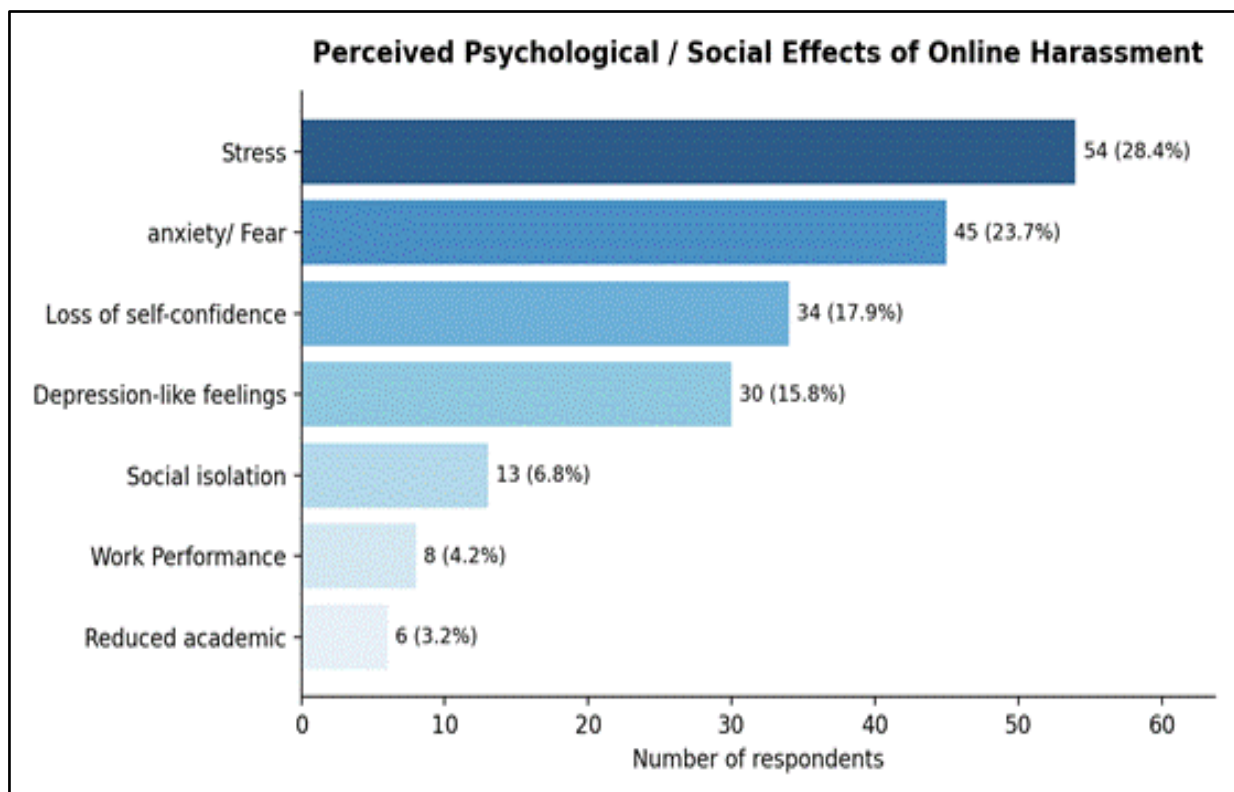


Figure 6: Perceived psychological / social effects of online harassment

Main factors i.e stress(28.4%) and anxiety(23.7%) are main effects of online harassment. 17.9% loss of self confidence, 15.8% depression like feelings, 6.8% social isolation, 4.2 % work performance and 3.2% reduced academics.

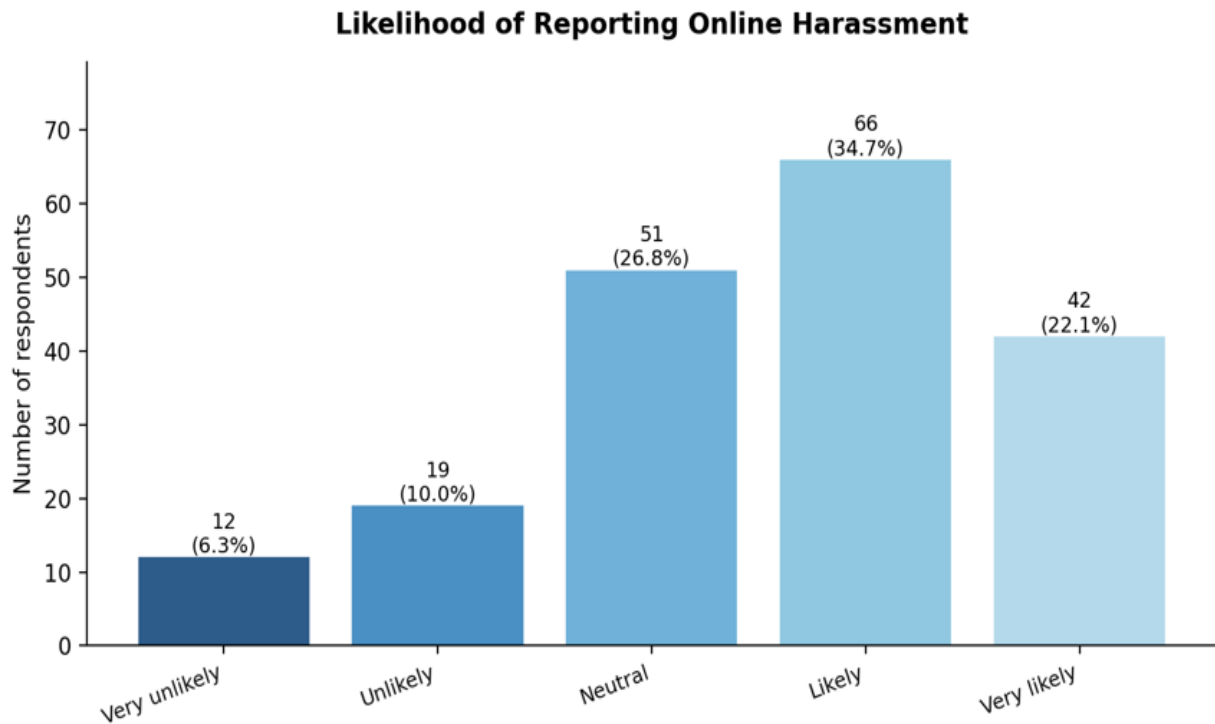


Figure 7: Likelihood of reporting online harassment

Only 56.8 % participants want to report online harassment likely(34.7%) and very likely (22.1%). 26.8% participants are neutral about the reporting and combinedly 16.3% people won't like to report online harassment.

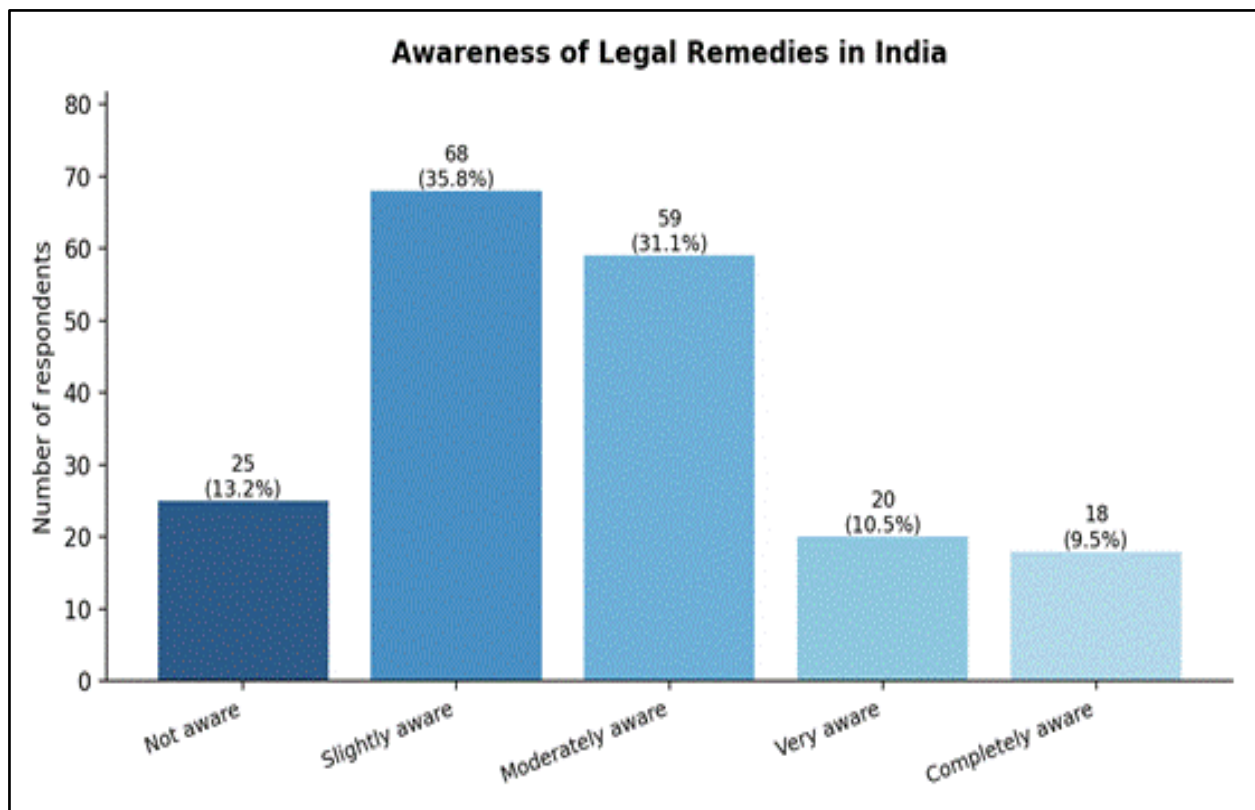


Figure 8: Awareness of legal remedies available in India

Here we have identified a research gap where a legal framework is available but people are not aware about the legal remedies. 66.9% are slightly and moderately aware about the legal remedies. 13.2% not aware about the legal framework. Analysis shows that only 20% of people are aware.

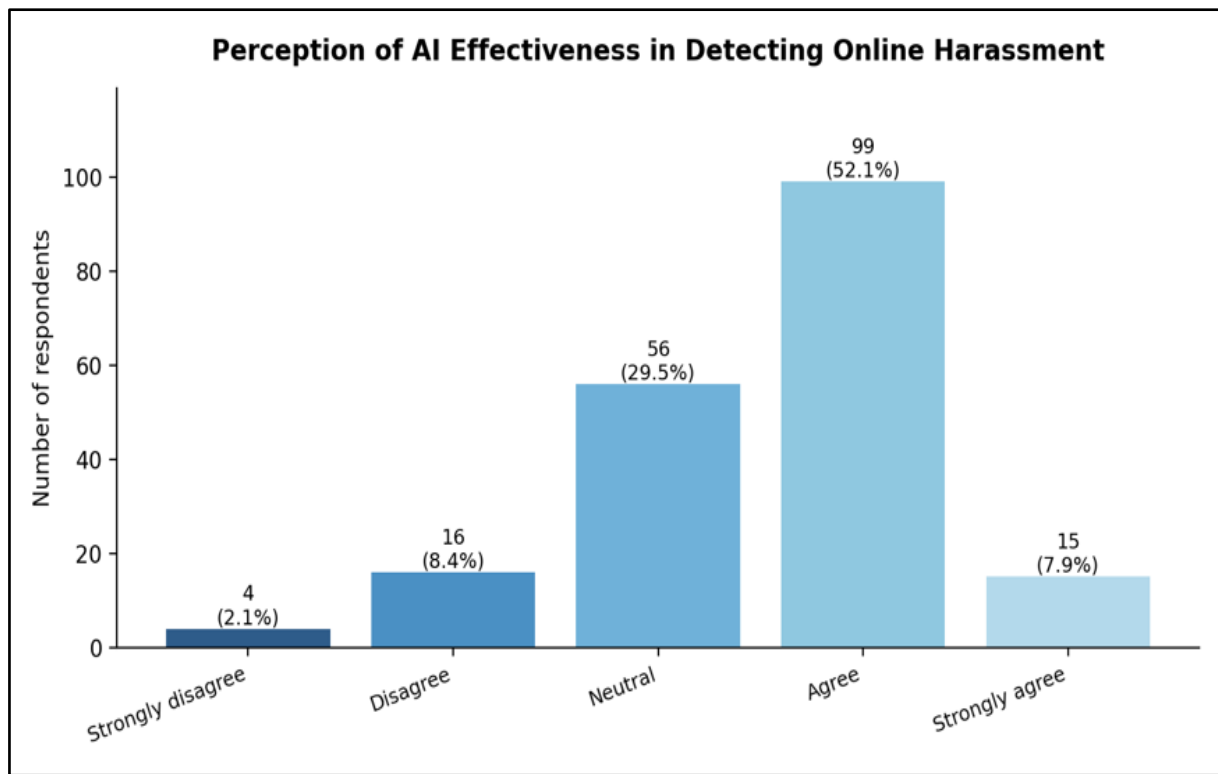


Figure 9: Perceived effectiveness of AI in detecting online harassment

114 respondents (60%) agree that AI will play an important role in detecting online harassment. 29.5% of people are neutral. 10.5% of people do not agree as AI will detect online harassment.

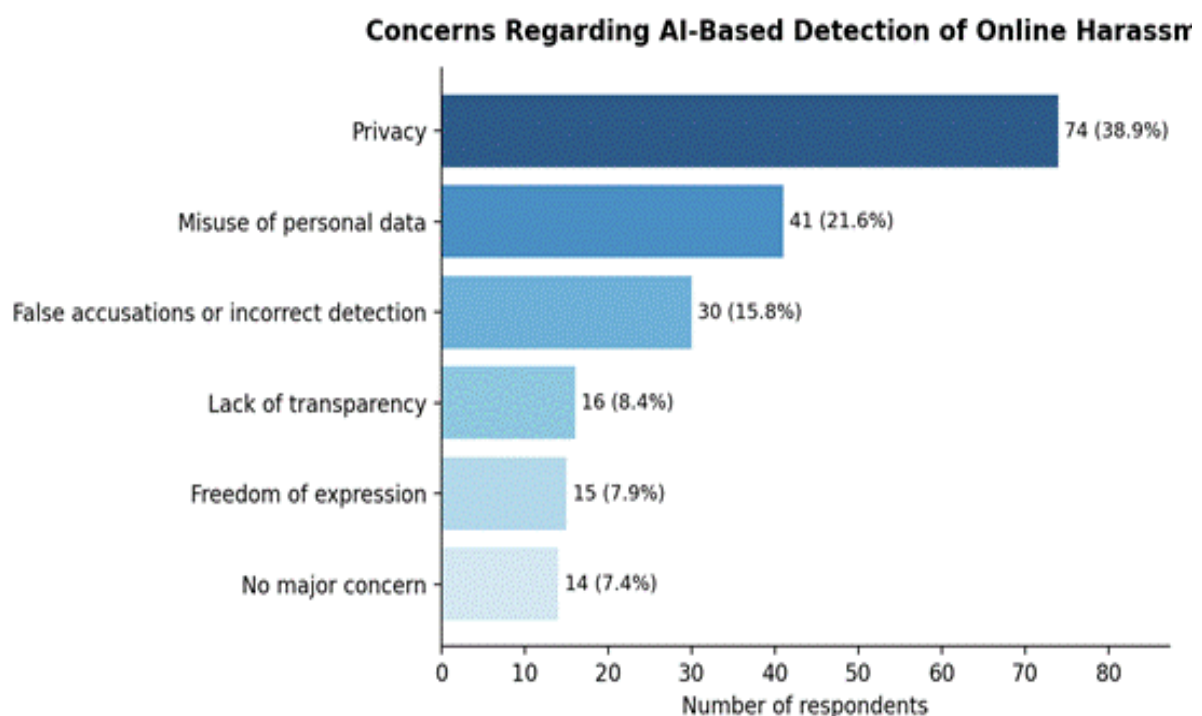


Figure 10: Concerns regarding AI-based detection of online harassment

AI based detection is conditional based on the different factors. People having measure concern with Privacy and leak of personal information. Only 7.4% people having no major concern.

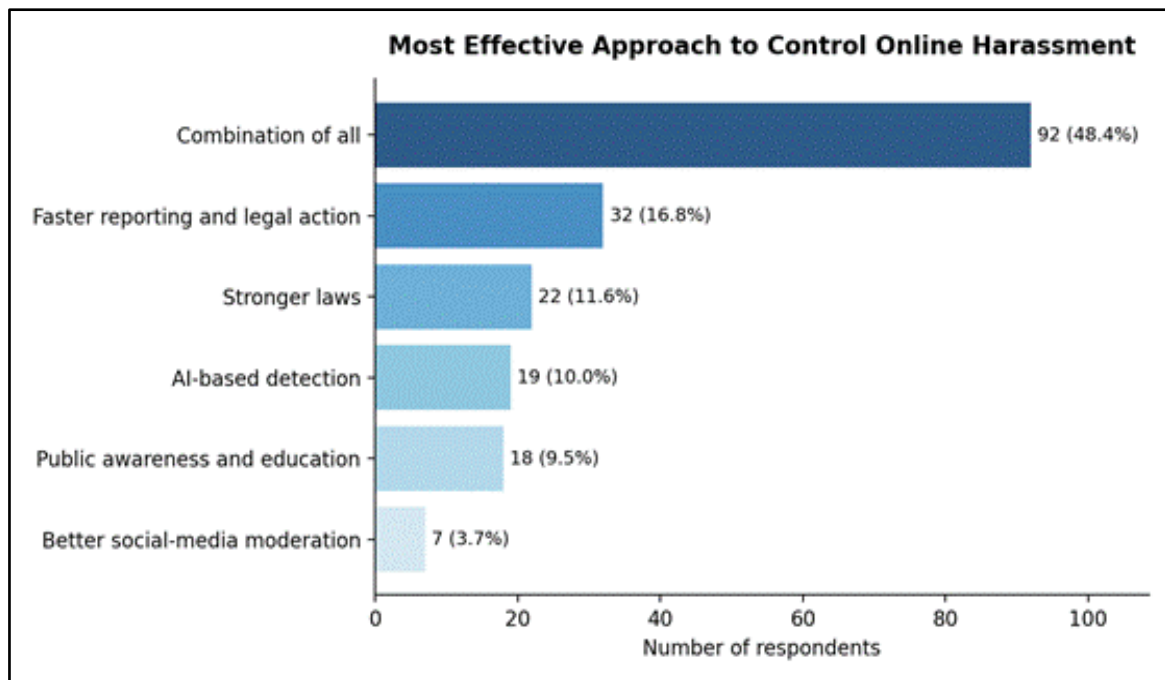


Figure 11: Most effective approach to controlling online harassment

The most effective way to detect online harassment is a combination of different factors like faster reporting and legal action, stronger laws, AI based detection, public awareness and education and better social-media moderation.

5. Results and Discussion

The survey is designed based on the topic keywords, most of the respondents (94.2%) are between the 18-25 and they are daily users of social media or online platforms. 1 out of 3 was directly or indirectly a victim of online harassment. The main form of the same is abusive comments on social media and connections from fake accounts. 61.1% of the population perceives there is a deep impact on the psychology of victims. Stress, anxiety and fear are identified as effects. Need to create awareness of legal framework regarding online harassment as only 20% people are aware about the same and still over 56.8% are not. People know that AI will play an important role in detection of online harassment but on the other side they are using it conditionally because of concerns of privacy and leak of personal data. People favor the combination of legal, technological and educational intervention.

The main findings of the survey are that people are facing online harassment while using social media. Most of the harassment is through fake accounts and comments. Then also people are not registering the complaints because of lack of awareness of the legal framework so we need to develop courses or study material to inform students about the behaviour while using online platforms. People also are not registering because of privacy issues. AI can help but people having fear of lack of privacy need to make strict laws to preserve privacy of users. Needs faster reporting mechanism and strict action. Need to teach ethical use of AI and need to learn how AI will help in detection and prevention from harassment. Need to create strong awareness of the legal framework.

6. Proposed AI-Based Solution

- People can use AI to detect harmful words which can not preserve respect to that content.
- We can use NLP to process the content, we can use AI tools to check video content, we can find threats by following repeated patterns of threat.
- With the help of analysis, you need to check pattern matching to detect messages coming to the same account repeatedly if you block a particular user, and will get messages from other numbers or ID. Need to detect multiple accounts.
- AI is a machine that can make mistakes and we need to make decisions based on human judgement. AI not considering intention or humor/ jokes.

- Need to provide privacy while using any platform.
- AI sometimes can give false acquisition so for that we need to do setup like suspicious behaviour rather than declaring a person guilty.
- It's important to preserve the digital evidence like date and time, screenshot of window, URL of platform, actual conversation etc.

7. Legal Remedies and Challenges

There is no any single law which provides the protection but here set of laws are ther in IT act 2000 and in BNA(Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023)

IT (Information Technology) Act, 2000 : provides the laws regarding the Section Identity theft, – Online impersonation, Privacy violation, Obscene electronic material, Sexually explicit electronic material, Child sexual material, Preservation of information by intermediaries.

BNS(Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023) : section 75, 77, 78,79, 351, 356 are important. This explains laws about sexual harassment, stalking, defamation.

If anyone uses AI for harassment there are laws against the same IT Act, Section 66E , 67, 67A, 66D, BNS section 77,78,79.

In Feb 2026 India amended the rule(IT rules 2021) to use AI for generating video and content to prevent deepfakes.

Our Indian constitution provides freedom of speech but people need to be aware that they are expressing themselves on social media and need to use words properly to respect that content owner.

It's mandatory to platforms to provide data privacy to their users. Strong online support must be there to report loopholes. make privacy laws.

The main challenge of this study is that people are not following privacy policies and sharing data unknowingly.

8. Limitations of the Study

We will make people aware about the legal framework but if attackers are from other countries then we need to study their policy framework also. Cross border issues are there to resolve issues. AI is not directly used to solve problems, it will only support but human actions are important.

9. Conclusion

Cyberbullying, doxing are part of online harassment. Psychological impacts vary person to person based on the type of harassment. The level of anxiety and depression increases because of harassment. People with harassment trying to keep away from social interaction. AI is playing an important role in preventing cyberbullying and harassment. I this study survey of 190 people given the result as many people are suffering from online harassment, they are unaware of laws and not reporting the cases. They are not taking the help of AI because of privacy reasons. But study provides the solution to fill the gap , and we need to make people aware about the IT act, BNS and privacy policies of platforms. How to use AI effectively to prevent online harassment.

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