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Cyber Crimes Against Women in Tamil Nadu: Examining Legal Safeguards and Challenges Faced by Women

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ABSTRACT

The advancement of digital technology has significantly changed how people communicate, learn, work and obtain information. That advancement has also produced unequal opportunity, a gender divide and continuing barriers to women's participation. Women who use online platforms are increasingly targeted by cyber offences such as online harassment, cyberstalking, identity offences, cyberbullying and financial fraud, and these offences threaten women's privacy, freedom and safety in the digital sphere. This study examines the relationship between the digital gender divide and cybercrime against women in Tamil Nadu. It analyses the legal provisions and institutional mechanisms designed to address cyber offences and to promote digital equality, and it draws on a small self-selected online survey of 48 respondents. The study considers the place of cyber law, digital education, awareness and gender-focused cyber security measures, and it examines social restrictions, limited digital awareness and unequal access to technology. It concludes that stronger legal safeguards and wider awareness are needed if women are to participate safely and confidently in the digital world without fear of discrimination or cyber abuse.

Keywords: Cyber crimes against women, Digital gender divide, Tamil Nadu, Online harassment, Digital literacy, Cyber law

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital technology now shapes daily life and has transformed the way people communicate, learn, work and obtain public services. The spread of smartphones, internet connectivity, social media platforms and online government services has widened access to information, to new skills and to social participation. For women in particular, digital access has opened routes to education, to employment and to public life.

The benefits of digitalisation are not, however, distributed equally. Many women continue to face difficulty in obtaining digital devices and in acquiring the connectivity and training needed

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to use them. That inequality is described as the digital gender divide, and it marks the gap between men and women in access to, and confident use of, digital technology. In Tamil Nadu, economic circumstances, social norms and restrictions imposed within the family continue to shape women's access to technology.

The same expansion of digital platforms has been accompanied by a rise in offences directed at women. Online harassment, cyberstalking, cyberbullying, identity theft, impersonation, financial fraud and the non-consensual circulation of intimate images or personal information have become common. These offences cause emotional distress, loss of privacy, financial harm and damage to reputation. Fear of such incidents leads some women to withdraw from digital spaces or to limit their use of technology.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has introduced a number of measures directed at women's safety and digital participation. The Kaaval Uthavi application provides emergency police assistance and a route for reporting complaints (Vikaspedia, n.d.), and the Agal Vilakku scheme of the TAMIL NADU SCHOOL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT addresses cyber threats to girl students (Tiwari, 2025). Cyber crime police stations and the state Cyber Crime Wing, an online complaint system and public awareness programmes together allow citizens to report cyber offences and to learn safer online practices. The Information Technology Act, 2000, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Woman (Amendment) Act, 2025 supply the legal framework for addressing cyber offences and for protecting women from digital abuse.

Although these initiatives have improved digital safety, several difficulties remain. Many women in Tamil Nadu are unaware of basic cyber security practices and of the legal remedies open to them, and a significant number of cyber offences go unreported because of fear, lack of awareness or social stigma. Differences in digital literacy, unequal access to technology and limitations in the enforcement of cyber law further reduce the effectiveness of the existing legal measures.

This study examines the relationship between the digital gender divide and cybercrime against women in Tamil Nadu. It analyses the difficulties women face in obtaining and using digital technology, considers the forms of cyber offence to which women are exposed and assesses the effectiveness of the existing legal safeguards. It also considers the case for strengthening digital literacy, raising public awareness, improving cyber security measures and promoting equal digital access, all of which are necessary if women are to participate in digital life safely and without fear.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study addresses three questions. First, what are the major forms of cybercrime experienced by women in Tamil Nadu? Second, what obstacles do women encounter when reporting cybercrime? Third, what measures has the state taken to prevent cybercrime against women in Tamil Nadu?

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are to examine the nature and forms of cybercrime affecting women; to analyse the legal safeguards available to them; to consider the relationship between the digital gender divide and cyber victimisation; to identify the obstacles women encounter in reporting cyber offences; and to suggest measures for strengthening digital safety and digital awareness among women.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a doctrinal and empirical method. The doctrinal component examines the relevant provisions of the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Woman (Amendment) Act, 2025, together with the decided cases that interpret them.

The empirical component consists of a short structured questionnaire administered online. Forty-eight responses were received to four of the five items; the item on reasons for not reporting drew 46 responses.

Two limitations follow, and the findings reported below should be read subject to them. A base of 48 responses is too small to support any estimate of prevalence, and the percentages reported here describe only the respondents themselves. The instrument did not record the gender, age or district of respondents, so its results speak to general awareness of cybercrime reporting rather than to the experience of women in particular. The survey is accordingly used in this study as illustrative material bearing on awareness and reporting, and not as evidence of the incidence of cybercrime against women in the state.

V. CYBERCRIME AGAINST WOMEN

Cybercrime refers to an unlawful act committed in cyberspace through digital technologies, computer devices or the internet, and cybercrime against women denotes those offences that specifically target or disproportionately affect women. Such acts can be committed anonymously and the offending material can be replicated across many accounts at once. They

cause psychological harm, generate fear, disrupt ordinary daily activity and can exclude the victim from social participation.

The judicial response has begun to reflect this. In *R. Ramesh Kumar v. Superintendent of Police, Dindigul District* (W.P.(CrI.)(MD) No. 2027 of 2026, decided on 1 July 2026), the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court held that a morphed obscene image of a woman is not a harmless digital prank but a calculated assault on privacy, reputation and emotional security, and that online sexual humiliation, morphing, the creation of fake profiles, the threat of further circulation and a demand for money to remove such content amount to a serious intrusion into privacy, dignity and reputation protected by Article 21 of the Constitution. The Court directed the police to register a first information report under the Information Technology Act, 2000 and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, to preserve the offending URLs, account details, subscriber information and internet protocol logs held by the intermediaries concerned, and to take steps to have the material removed or blocked. The order is significant for its insistence that investigation move quickly, because electronic traces are easily deleted or lost.

VI. TYPES OF CYBERCRIME AGAINST WOMEN

Cyberstalking. Cyberstalking is the continuous monitoring, following, tracking or contacting of a woman through online platforms without her consent or knowledge. It commonly produces anxiety, insecurity and psychological distress. An example is the repeated monitoring of a woman's social media activity, or the sending of unwanted and threatening messages.

Cyberbullying and online harassment. Cyberbullying is the use of digital platforms to insult, threaten, humiliate or emotionally abuse a woman, and it can damage mental health and confidence. Examples include posting offensive comments, spreading rumours and circulating embarrassing content about a woman on social media.

Non-consensual sharing of intimate images. This offence involves circulating a woman's private images or videos without her knowledge or consent, and it is a serious violation of her privacy, dignity and bodily autonomy. An example is a former partner uploading private pictures of a woman after the end of a relationship.

Sextortion. Sextortion occurs where a person threatens to release private or intimate images or videos of a woman unless she pays money, sends further images or complies with some other unlawful demand.

Online sexual harassment. Online sexual harassment covers unwanted sexual messages, obscene comments and the sending of sexually explicit material through digital platforms.

Identity theft. Identity theft occurs where a person unlawfully obtains and misuses a woman's personal information, whether for gain or in order to commit a further offence, for instance by using her name, photograph or personal details to open or access accounts.

Cyber defamation. Cyber defamation is the publication over the internet of false and injurious statements about a woman with the intention of damaging her reputation, such as spreading a false accusation or a rumour on a social media platform.

Deepfakes and artificial intelligence based abuse. Artificial intelligence can be misused to generate fake images, video or audio that portray a woman in an offensive situation, and such material can then be circulated without her permission.

Morphing. Morphing is the digital alteration of a woman's photograph by the addition of obscene or otherwise inappropriate content, followed by its circulation without her consent.

Doxxing. Doxxing is the unauthorised disclosure of a person's private information online, for example the publication of a woman's home address or personal telephone number without her consent.

Cyber grooming. Cyber grooming occurs where an offender builds an online relationship in order to gain the trust of a woman or a girl and then manipulates or exploits her, for instance by pressing her to share private images.

Phishing. Phishing occurs where a person uses fraudulent emails, messages or websites to deceive a woman into disclosing confidential information, such as a fake banking link designed to capture her login or financial details.

VII. LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AVAILABLE TO WOMEN

The Information Technology Act, 2000, read with its allied rules and with the relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, constitutes the principal framework governing cyber offences in India (Kumar & Kaur, 2024). In Tamil Nadu these are supplemented by the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Woman (Amendment) Act, 2025.

A. The Information Technology Act, 2000

Several provisions of the Act bear directly on offences committed against women. Section 66C penalises identity theft through the fraudulent or dishonest use of another person's electronic signature, password or other unique identification feature. Section 66D penalises cheating by personation using a computer resource, which is the provision most often engaged by fake profiles and phishing. Section 66E penalises the intentional capture, publication or transmission of the image of a person's private area without consent in circumstances violating that person's

privacy. Section 67 penalises the publication or transmission of obscene material in electronic form, section 67A the publication or transmission of material containing a sexually explicit act, and section 67B the publication or transmission of material depicting children in a sexually explicit act.

The first conviction in India for the publication of obscene material online was recorded in *State of Tamil Nadu v. Suhas Katti* (C.C. No. 4680 of 2004), decided by the Court of the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Egmore, Chennai, on 5 November 2004. The accused had posted obscene and defamatory messages about a woman in an online message group and had forwarded emails from an account opened in her name. He was convicted under sections 469 and 509 of the Indian Penal Code and section 67 of the Information Technology Act, 2000, and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for two years with a fine under section 469, simple imprisonment for one year with a fine under section 509, and rigorous imprisonment for two years with a fine of Rs. 4,000 under section 67, the sentences to run concurrently. The case was decided within about seven months of the first information report.

B. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 came into force on 1 July 2024 and carries forward, with renumbering, the provisions of the Indian Penal Code that are most often engaged by cyber offences against women. Section 75 deals with sexual harassment and replaces section 354A of the Penal Code. Section 77 deals with voyeurism, replacing section 354C, and covers the watching or capturing of the image of a woman engaged in a private act where she would not expect to be observed, as well as the dissemination of such an image. Section 78 deals with stalking, replacing section 354D, and expressly extends to monitoring a woman's use of the internet, email or any other form of electronic communication. Section 79, replacing section 509, penalises a word, sound, gesture or object intended to insult the modesty of a woman or to intrude upon her privacy.

C. The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Woman (Amendment) Act, 2025

The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Woman (Amendment) Act, 2025, which took effect on 25 January 2025, amends the principal Act of 1998 in order to bring the harassment of women by digital and electronic means within its scope. The amended definition of harassment covers indecent conduct or behaviour that is physical, verbal, non-verbal, digital or electronic and that instils intimidation, fear, embarrassment or shame, so that conduct such as cyberstalking and online harassment now falls within the state Act. The punishment has been

enhanced, and a first conviction may attract imprisonment of up to five years, with imprisonment of five to ten years for a second or subsequent conviction.

A significant feature of the amendment is the protection order. A woman who apprehends continued harassment may approach an Executive Magistrate, who may pass an order restraining the person concerned from making contact with her by any means, whether personal, oral, written, electronic or through a third party. Breach of a protection order is itself punishable with imprisonment of up to three years and a fine. The mechanism strengthens the protection available to women by addressing repeated harassment rather than only individual incidents.

VIII. STATE INITIATIVES IN TAMIL NADU

The Government of Tamil Nadu has introduced several measures directed at protecting women from cyber offences.

A. The Kaaval Uthavi application

The Kaaval Uthavi application was launched in April 2022 to improve public access to police assistance, with particular attention to women in distress. It combines an emergency alert that shares the user's location with the police control room, a dialling facility for the 112, 100 and 101 numbers, a facility for lodging complaints from a mobile telephone, a police station locator and a control room directory, and it carries roughly sixty features in all (Vikaspedia, n.d.).

B. The Cyber Crime Wing and the cyber crime police stations

The Cyber Crime Wing is a specialised unit of the state police established to prevent and investigate cyber offences such as cyberstalking, morphing and online fraud. It is headed by an officer of the rank of Additional Director General of Police and it supervises the cyber crime police stations, of which the state had established forty-seven across all districts, cities and special police units (The420.in, 2022). The Wing also conducts public awareness work. Complainants may in addition file a complaint through the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, the online platform maintained by the INDIAN CYBER CRIME COORDINATION CENTRE under the MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, which gives special attention to cyber offences against women and children (Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, n.d.).

C. The Agal Vilakku scheme

The Agal Vilakku scheme is an initiative of the TAMIL NADU SCHOOL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT intended to protect girl students from cyber threats such as cyberbullying, grooming, stalking and morphing. It is built around a booklet that uses real examples to help students recognise warning signs, sets out rules for safe internet use and explains how to complain through the

National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal and the 1930 helpline; it also addresses screen time and mobile telephone dependence, and is supported by counselling and by teacher training (Tiwari, 2025).

D. Cyber safety awareness programmes

The Cyber Crime Wing and district police units conduct cyber safety awareness programmes in schools and colleges across the state. These programmes publicise the 1930 cybercrime helpline and explain the common patterns of online fraud, impersonation and social media offences.

IX. FINDINGS OF THE CYBERCRIME AWARENESS SURVEY

The survey put five items to respondents, four of which drew 48 responses. The findings are reported below and, for the reasons given in the discussion of methodology, describe the respondents alone.

A. Awareness of reporting channels

Only a third of respondents correctly identified 1930 as the national cybercrime helpline number, while the remaining two thirds selected one of the incorrect options. Half the respondents selected 1920.

Response option	Responses (n)	Percentage
1930 (correct)	16	33.3
1920	24	50.0
1960	4	8.3
1990	4	8.3
Total	48	100.0

Table 1: Identification of the national cybercrime helpline number (n = 48). Counts derived from the reported percentages; percentages are as generated by the survey instrument and may not total 100 owing to rounding.

Awareness of the complaint procedure was similarly limited. Just under two thirds of respondents said they did not know how to file a cybercrime complaint.

Response	Responses (n)	Percentage
Yes	17	35.4
No	31	64.6
Total	48	100.0

Table 2: Knowledge of how to file a cybercrime complaint (n = 48). Counts derived from the reported percentages.

B. Experience of cyber victimisation

Almost three quarters of respondents reported some direct or indirect experience of cybercrime, whether their own, that of someone known to them, or both.

Response	Responses (n)	Percentage
Yes, I have	7	14.6
Yes, someone I know has	20	41.7
Yes, both	8	16.7
No	13	27.1
Total	48	100.0

Table 3: Reported experience of cybercrime, directly or through an acquaintance (n = 48). Counts derived from the reported percentages; percentages may not total 100 owing to rounding.

C. Reporting behaviour and the reasons for silence

Reporting was the exception rather than the rule. More than two thirds of respondents said that the incident known to them had not been reported to the authorities.

Response	Responses (n)	Percentage
Yes, I reported it	4	8.3
Yes, someone I know reported it	11	22.9
No, it was not reported	33	68.8
Total	48	100.0

Table 4: Whether a cybercrime incident was reported to the authorities (n = 48). Counts derived from the reported percentages.

Asked why the incident had not been reported, the largest group of respondents said they did not know the procedure. Concern about privacy or confidentiality and fear of victim blaming followed. This item drew 46 responses rather than 48.

Reason	Responses (n)	Percentage
Did not know the procedure	19	41.3
Concern about privacy or confidentiality	12	26.1
Fear of victim blaming	10	21.7
Other, including respondents who had not faced a cybercrime and unlabelled free-text entries	5	10.9
Total	46	100.0

Table 5: Primary reason given for not reporting a cybercrime incident (n = 46). Counts derived from the reported percentages; the residual category aggregates three small options, one of which the instrument left unlabelled.

Read together, the responses suggest that experience of cybercrime is widely shared among this group but that reporting is rare, and that the obstacle most often cited is procedural ignorance rather than indifference. Fear of victim blaming and concern for confidentiality account for a further substantial share. These patterns are consistent with the wider literature on under-reporting, but the sample is too small and too unrepresentative to establish them.

X. CYBERCRIME AGAINST WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu is among the most digitally developed states in India, with widespread use of smartphones, internet services, online banking and electronic governance. These developments have widened women's access to education, employment, entrepreneurship and public services. The same expansion has been accompanied by an increase in offences directed at women, including cyberstalking, online harassment, identity theft, financial fraud, sextortion, morphing and deepfake abuse.

The national trend is clear. According to *Crime in India 2024*, cybercrime cases registered across India rose from 65,893 in 2022 to 86,420 in 2023 and to 1,01,928 in 2024, the first year in which the figure passed one lakh, with fraud accounting for roughly seventy-three per cent of the total (NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU, 2026). Recorded cybercrime is accordingly the fastest growing category of crime in the country, which indicates both a growing misuse of digital technologies and a pressing need for stronger safeguards and preventive measures.

Women who are active online, including students, journalists, social media users with a public profile and those working in the film and entertainment industries, are particularly exposed. Many incidents nevertheless go unreported, because victims fear social stigma, damage to reputation and victim blaming, or because they are unaware of the remedies open to them.

The digital gender divide remains a significant obstacle, particularly for women in rural areas and in poorer households. Many still have limited access to smartphones, to reliable connectivity and to digital education, and limited awareness of cyber security, online privacy and safe internet practice leaves them more exposed to online fraud, identity theft and harassment. Improving digital literacy and building awareness of cyber safety are therefore necessary steps towards narrowing the divide and enabling women to participate more safely online.

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has introduced a further difficulty. Generative tools are increasingly misused to produce deepfake images, manipulated video and synthetic audio without the subject's consent, and such material is then used to blackmail, threaten, harass or defame women, causing serious distress and reputational damage. As these tools become cheaper and more widely available, offences of this kind are likely to become more common.

XI. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN REPORTING CYBERCRIME

Lack of awareness. Many women are unaware of the forms cybercrime can take and of the procedure for reporting it. They may not know of the 1930 helpline, of the National Cyber

Crime Reporting Portal or of the legal protections available to them (Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, n.d.). Offences such as cyberstalking, online harassment and identity theft therefore go unreported.

Lack of technical knowledge. Even where a woman recognises that she has been the victim of a cyber offence, limited digital literacy may prevent her from acting. Many victims do not know how to preserve evidence by taking and dating screenshots or by recording message threads, and the absence of such material makes a complaint harder to pursue.

Victim blaming. Victim blaming is among the greatest obstacles to reporting. Women are questioned about their online behaviour, their use of social media or their appearance, and attention shifts from the offender's conduct to the complainant's. That response makes women feel responsible for what was done to them and discourages them from filing complaints or seeking legal assistance.

Social stigma. Fear of stigma deters many women from reporting. Victims often fear that reporting will damage their reputation and their family's standing, and in some communities they face embarrassment, escalation or pressure from within the family to stay silent rather than seek redress.

Anxiety, depression and emotional distress. Victims of cybercrime frequently experience serious psychological harm, including anxiety, stress, depression and loss of confidence. Sustained online harassment can leave a woman feeling unsafe in both digital and physical space, and the effects reach her education, her work and her ordinary daily activity.

XII. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study support the following recommendations, which are directed at strengthening cyber security practice and at preventing cybercrime against women in Tamil Nadu.

The enforcement of the existing legal provisions should be strengthened, and dedicated or fast track courts for cyber offences should be considered so that investigation and trial are not delayed.

The confidentiality of a victim's identity should be maintained throughout the process, since fear of exposure is among the principal reasons complaints are not made.

Cyber safety should be introduced as a compulsory element of the school curriculum, and digital literacy programmes should be extended to women in rural areas.

Cybercrime awareness campaigns should be conducted in colleges, and government agencies should publish accessible material explaining safety and security measures and the steps involved in making a complaint.

Digital investigation facilities should be improved and police officers should receive regular training in the handling of cybercrime cases, including the preservation of electronic evidence.

Reporting platforms should be available in multiple languages so that language is not itself a barrier to complaint.

The circulation of sexually explicit material generated by artificial intelligence should be subject to stricter control, and intermediaries should be held to clearer obligations of expeditious removal.

XIII. CONCLUSION

Cybercrime against women has emerged as a significant challenge in the digital age. The rapid growth of technology has created opportunities for women and has at the same time exposed them to cyberbullying, online harassment, morphing and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. These offences violate privacy and damage mental well-being. This study has examined the digital gender divide, the obstacles women face in reporting cyber offences and the safeguards available under the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Woman (Amendment) Act, 2025. The recent ruling of the Madras High Court in *R. Ramesh Kumar* reflects a growing legislative and judicial recognition of these offences.

The forms of cybercrime most often described by respondents were cyberstalking, cyberbullying and online harassment, and the rising national figures indicate a growing threat. Many incidents go unreported because of limited digital literacy, unfamiliarity with the reporting procedure, victim blaming and social stigma. The survey conducted for this study points in the same direction: most respondents could not identify the cybercrime helpline number or describe how to make a complaint, and most incidents known to them had not been reported.

The state government has taken a number of steps to address cybercrime against women in Tamil Nadu, among them the Kaaval Uthavi application for emergency assistance, the Agal Vilakku scheme for girl students and the Cyber Crime Wing with its network of cyber crime police stations.

The study concludes that legal safeguards and state initiatives, while necessary, are not by themselves sufficient in practice. Legal reform needs to be accompanied by digital literacy work, by protection of the confidentiality of victims, by sustained awareness campaigns and by stronger accountability on the part of technology platforms. The object is to make digital space safe for everyone.

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