Mobile Phones: New Venue of Victimisation - A Study among Young Girls in Chennai, India

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Abstract— Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has grown in an unprecedented way, particularly the use of mobile has become rampant in the Indian society. About 73 percent of the population according to the Indian Telecom News now has access to cellular phones. This new and emerging 'mobile culture' among the people in general and among the youth in particular has both positive and adverse effects on their life style and behaviour. They are addicted to this culture. This new culture gives a way to new forms of harassment. This shift of physical venue to the 'mobile' venue of harassment throws newer challenges to the present society in India. This study would reveal how, significantly and particularly the young girls are more likely to be more harassed through mobile use. This study also explores various aspects of mobile harassment meted out on the young girls and the ways, the harassed girls deal with it and finally suggests ways and means to counter the emerging culture of youth. The structured questionnaire, particularly designed for the purpose of the present research in view of getting insights into the quantity, experience and intensity of mobile harassment was used to collect data from a sample of 200 young women in Chennai below the age of 30. Further this study discusses view points on victimisation and its link with the socio-economic status of the respondents and their reporting behaviour.

Keywords— *Mobile, Harassment, victimization, young girls*

1. Background of the Study

The new media has unprecedented growth in leaps and bounds in the last few years. As the Internet and new media become ever more ubiquitous in our world, such technologies begin to look less like revolutionary phenomena and more a familiar aspect of everyday life (Win van de 2004).Communication is an essential element in the human being inside a community since always one tends to go from an individual communication to a social communication (Micaela& Neil,2011), particularly this is true in the era of newer technologies. Mobile phones share an important space in the process of socialization. In fact, first, it was the audio in the radio, then the radio was joined to the image with television, until the appearance of interactive communication with the Internet in the mid 90s and then the multimedia mobile phones (Micaela & Neil, 2011). This evolution has done wonders in the society not only in the field of communication but also in all the fields of development in daily life such as education, tourism, health care and e-commerce. Mobile telephony is becoming increasingly integrated into everyday life. BristiG (2000) states, "The new communication technology has fused and confused the realms of the local and the global". It has created 'virtual domain of globality' in which sovereignty and the nation-state has become meaningless. Such is the power of the new technology particularly the mobile technology. Mushrooming of mobile technology companies is a sign that the extent of the power of this technology. Right from the time of its inception for about a decade, we find that 'the great majority of them currently possess a set of functions, similar or superior even to a Pocket PC of the early millennium (Micaela& Neil, 2011). As with any technological product, mobile phones too have positive and negative uses.

2. Review of Literature

Though not many studies have been done in the past, as the problem itself popped up only in the recent times, limited research is available for literature on this subject, and they too are at the exploratory level and mostly in western countries trying to theorize adapting western thinking and philosophies. Goggin (2006) questions this aspect, how far theories about cell phones largely developed in Europe, the UK and the USA, with their theoretical and geopolitical bearings in these societies are adequate in comprehending the take-up and use of these technologies in Asia, Africa, Latin America and elsewhere. The research into harassment through mobile phones is yet to be studied largely at the global level.

However, in 2009, Researchers for Working to Halt Online Abuse, an all-volunteer safety organization

conducted as informal survey of cyber stalking victims. Among 220 respondents, they found that more than one third of the initial harassment started by e-mail or phone (Lee, 2009).

Short and McMurray(2009) found in their studies among 152 pre-undergraduates and undergraduates students in England that harassment by text is more prevalent than other forms of online stalking. Their study is based on texting harassment about which the present study also makes a direction. Their study also indicated that 52% of students have experienced unwanted texts from someone they have ended a relationship with. And 35.4% of the whole sample had experienced intrusive texts, 44% were worried by this behaviour and 21% had a feeling of fear.

Long(2010) of Chesapeake Fire Department, Virginia undertook an Applied Research Project among the employees, supervisors and customers of the department on the impact of cell phone in workplace and to create a cell phone use policy in January, 2010. The results indicated that the cell phones do have a profound impact in the workplace that affects the employees, supervisors and the customers alike. Two surveys were conducted by him one to determine how the employees perceive the use of cell phone in the workplace and the second was to determine what disruptive and legal consequences bahaviours the supervisors face among 260 and 97 persons respectively. He claimed that vast majority of employees acknowledged that the cell phone was disruptive. Four behaviours were noticed: annoying ringtones, talking too loudly, interrupting meetings, and inappropriate conversations in public. Texting and cell phone conversations have been most annoying disruption in the trainings and meetings, an overwhelming majority of supervisors agreed.

Pew Research Center in collaboration with the University of Michigan (2010) undertook a study on Teens and Mobile Phones in April 2010 among 800 teens, nationally represented. The study brought out that over a quarter (26%) of teen cell phone users reported having been harassed by someone else through their cell phone, Girls are significantly more likely to experience this (30%) than boys (22%) and This trend is more common for those teens whose parents are under 40 and low in educational attainment.

In a conference organised by Australian and New Zealand Communication Association on Media, Democracy and Change on 7-9, July 2010, Albury, K., Funnel, N., & Noonan, E. (2010) have presented a paper on 'The politics of Sexting: young people, self-representation and citizenship. Their paper deals with the meaning and understanding on the term 'sexting'. They noted that initially the term referred to people using mobile phones to organize a sex-date. Over time the term evolved to refer to sending sexually explicit or sexually suggestive text messages. With the unprecedented growth in technology, the term includes any electronic transfer of nude and semi-

nude images via mobile phone. Daily papers report stray incidents of suicides due to this electronic onslaught.

In Times of India, Ponnusamy(2011) reported that cybercrime through mobile phones were on increase in the suburban areas of Chennai, India. He reported that the suburban police claimed that every day they received four complaints of cybercrime cases out of which two are related to SMS. While there were only 5 crimes registered in 2009, it is said that in 2010, it increased to 42, all related to abusive SMS and call.

There have been considerable amount of studies on 'sexting', done in various parts of the globe, mostly in the schools and universities in the western countries, which were culturally and geographically specific. UK Safer Internet Center in collaboration with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to the Children(NSPCC), a not-for-profit organization in London(Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012) had conducted focus group interviews with 35 young people of years 8 and 10. Their findings suggest that the peer pressure on sexting is high and sexting is coercive. In all this, girls are most adversely affected and sexting reveals wider sexual pressures, the study revealed.

However, Zaru(2013) in her paper presented at the International meeting of American Sociological Association, argues that disconnect between what the media was saying about sexting and what was really going on. In her study among the 294 students from McDaniel College, she had noticed that sexting is far less prevalent than the media attention suggests. About half of men and women don't send or receive sexually suggestive texts. However, women are more likely than men to send nude photos and sexually suggestive texts even though a majority of women report being more uncomfortable with doing so and concerned about the implications, such as negative effects on their reputations.

The matter is in contention. The studies have been geographically and culturally specific, so such findings only would open up directions. In general, the studies divulge that harassment through mobile phones happens via sexting, unwanted SMS and calls, and that girls are the most affected people.

3. Research Objectives

The main objective of this research was to expose the extent of harassment and victimization and over-all awareness of it. To guide the study, four objectives were identified:

1. To know the extent of victimization and harassment through mobile phones.
2. To identify the forms and nature of victimization through mobile phones.
3. To learn about the reporting behaviour of those who felt harassed through mobiles.

4. To bring out the awareness level of both victims and non-victims regarding the cyber laws and cyber police.

4. Research Methodology

A survey was conducted among 200 girl students pursuing their UG (172) and PG(28), living in and around Chennai city, India. In this study, the extent of overall victimization and harassment experienced through mobile phones and the level their awareness both on harassment and the victimization, and the reporting behaviour were the main focus of this study. The respondents were asked about some personal information, forms and nature of victimization and perpetrators, reporting behaviour of those who felt victimized and awareness of the seriousness and laws related to harassment and the cyber crime branch police.

4.1 Research Finding

The vast majority of respondents belonged to the age group of 21-26 years. Similarly the vast majority of respondents (86%) belonged to UG. Almost all of the respondents belonged to middle class. And a significant percentage (65%) have income below Rs.25,000/- per month. More than half of the respondents have city as their location. About 86% of the respondents have only one mobile and it will also be good to know whether number of mobiles/sim cards has any significant association with the intensity of harassment. The study also renders an understanding to the readers whether the overall victimisation is high and whether over all awareness among girls related to the reporting behaviour and legal awareness is enough.

Table 2 presents the forms and the nature of victimisation. It is noted that significant percentage of the

Table 1: Personal Information

Variables	Frequency (N = 200)	Percentage
Age:		
16-20	47	23.5
21-25	116	58.0
Above 25	37	18.5
Educational Qualification:		
UG	172	86.0
PG	28	14.0
Monthly income of the family:		
<10,000	57	28.5
10000 – 25000	74	37.0
>25000	69	34.5
Locality		
Village	40	20.0
Town	50	25.0
City	110	55.0
Religion		
Hindu	80	40.0
Christian	109	54.5
Muslim	11	5.5

Table 2: Forms and Nature of Harassment (N=200)

Forms and Nature	Never	Sometimes	Often	V. Often	Weighted means
How often are you harassed thro' your mobile?	79 (39.5%)	86 (43.0%)	19 (9.5%)	16 (8.0%)	1.86
Receiving 'Unwanted SMS'	74 (37%)	92 (46%)	23 (115%)	11 (5.5%)	1.86
Number been hacked	142 (71%)	41 (20.5%)	15 (7.5%)	2 (1%)	1.36
Calls from unknown persons	62 (31%)	111 (55.5%)	18 (9%)	9 (4.5%)	1.39
Receiving obscene MMS	178 (89%)	13 (6.5%)	5 (2.5%)	4 (2%)	1.87
Receiving obscene photo	189 (94.5%)	7 (3.5%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)	1.18
Advertisement Calls	80 (40%)	48 (24%)	42 (21%)	30 (15%)	2.11

Table 3: Perpetrators (N=200)

Perpetrators	Classmates	Friends	Teachers	Family members	Others	Not answered
Who harassed through mobile	8	31 (15.5%)	5	27 (13.5%)	50 (25)	79
Who sent 'Unwanted SMS'	12	21	-	4	89	74
Who hacked your phone numbers	7	17	1	8	25	142
Who sent the MMS clip	2	11	1	8	-	178
Who sent obscene photo	2	7	-	2	-	189
Who sent unwanted calls	5	5	2	2	124	62
Have you sent sexually suggestive text	1	4	-	-	181	14

respondents have undergone one or other victimisation through the use of mobile. About only 39.5% felt that they have never been harassed through mobile. Rest of the 60.5% had experienced one or other exploitation through mobile. About 63% have received 'unwanted SMS'. About 69% have received calls from unknown number, while receiving obscene photo remains low among the respondents. However, 11% to receive an obscene MMS is not totally negligible. Advertising calls have been in general, a nuisance to the respondents as 60% of the

respondents some way or other has been disturbed.

Table 3 renders an understanding on the perpetrators of the harassment. A significant percentage of people (15.5%) are friends who have harassed the respondents through mobile. This can be taken for further in depth study in this field. Whatever be the intention, about 13.5% of the respondents felt that their own family members have indulged in harassment through mobile. In general, classmates and friends have been common perpetrators who had been sending 'unwanted SMS', hacking phone

number, sending obscene photos and MMS, and making unwanted calls.

4.1 Reporting behaviour

While 98 respondents out of 200 reported the harassment by someone, it is disheartening to learn that 102(>50%) did not at all report. Another important finding of this study is that none of the respondents resorted to legal support from the police. It seems that only proximity settles in to solve harassment in a non-legal way. While there is awareness on harassment using information communication technologies in a high level, seeking for solutions in a proper legal way is minimal.

Table 4: Whether Reported

Reported?	Frequency (*n*= 200)	Percent (%)
Yes	98	49.0
No	102	51.0
Total	200	100

Table 5: To whom reported

Persons	Frequency	Percent
Parents	51	52.0
Friends	47	48.0
Police	0	0
Others	0	0

Table 6: Reasons for not Reporting

Reasons for not reporting	Frequency (*n*= 200)	Percent (%)
Fear of offender	6	3.0
Future of life	27	13.5
Not bothered	59	29.5
Liked it	4	2.0
Discouraged by parents	6	3.0
Total	102	51.0

Table7: Response of parents when reported

Response of Parents	Frequency (*n*= 200)	Percent (%)
Shocked	5	2.5
Confronted the offender	5	2.5
Doubted you	4	2
Sought a solution	37	18.5
Missing answer	149	74.5
Total	200	100

Table 8: Response of friends when reported

Response of Friends	Frequency (*n*= 200)	Percent (%)
Advised to change the number	40	20.0
Confronted the offender	4	2
Supported you	3	1.5
Missing answer	153	76.5
Total	200	100

Table 9: Happy about reporting

Happy about reporting	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	81	40.5
No	17	8.5
Total	98	49

In a close-ended objective type of the question, fear of offender, future of life, not bothered, liked it and discouraged by parents were set as reasons for not reporting the harassment to anyone. Out of 102 respondents who did not report, about 59 of them were 'not bothered' and about 27 of them were afraid of 'future of their life'. Why they were not bothered, because they were afraid of future of their life. Reporting has a follow-up. It needs to be closely followed up. Yet another area of further study could be made up from here.

The study shows that only parents and friends have been confided in reporting of harassment. Significantly

'sought solution' (72.5% out of 51%) seems high as the response from the parents. But solutions might have been internal as none of the respondents sought legal solution to this harassment.

The response of the friends too is an ad-hoc solution as 'advised to change the mobile number'. This might propose only a temporary solution rather than a long-term one. Out of 47 respondents, 40 have advised to change the mobile number. And after all these ad-hoc solutions sought, about 82.7% seems to be happy about reporting as found in Table 9. About 40% of those who reported to someone feel happy about it. And only a very few feel that they are not happy about the reporting. About 40% of the respondents consider their experience of harassment as serious one. Only 29% have knowledge and awareness about the Chennai City Central Crime branch and only 32.5% knew the laws related to this sort of harassment.

5. Discussions

• Harassment through mobile phones is on increase day by day. Mobile phones are becoming the tools for harassing others, especially girls. Lee(2010) confirmed this fact, 'with increased reliance on email and cell phones for business and personal use, there is an upswing in harassment and discrimination via email and texting. At the advent of second and third generation digital GSM mobile phones, this problem is going to be acute in the near future. For the past three decades, mobile phone was viewed only as a communication tool but in the recent years, mobile phone is meant far more than connecting one's peers, friends and parents. Japanese youth have been using *keitai,* meaning mobile phone in Japanese, right from 1999 and the cost is cheaper for browsing internet through *keitai*and as 'remote mothering' is common, a big percentage of children at an early age of five have started using mobile phones that at one stage, they would not be able to ride the train or even get up in the morning without it (Matsuda. 2010). It is also noted that in those persons who get into compulsive excessive behavior of depending on the mobile phones, occurrences of both tendency to avoid relationships with others, including peers, and the active formation of relationships with anonymous others (Matsuda. 2010). This makes the previous studies confirmed further.

• While there is actual harassment cases reported, the probability of being harassed could not be taken lightly. Probable victimisation through mobile phones as much as the actual victimisation at present could be a challenge for the future. In fact, the borderline cases need special attention. Specific trainings on phone-etiquette need to become part of the syllabus in the schools and universities. Aelits (2005) rightly put, 'higher-education resources are a bundant within the realm of technology, but law

enforcement agencies fundamentally underuse them. Frequently, these resources are in close proximity to many agencies but simply remain overlooked'. Spry(2010) also noticed that the young mobile phone user is a potential risk to the safety or well being of others. As the mobile phone culture changes the cultural and social fabrics of the society and it is obvious and omnipresent, a new kind of socialization process emerges and a new kind of cyber crime upsurges. Only promulgating bans and laws is not enough as there has been always distance between the legal world and technological world. Benjamin (2007) opines that there has been always a struggle for the policy makers to bridge the gap between these two worlds. Technology does not always partner with law. Law is not able to cope with the exponential growth of technology. There should be structured andformal training at various levels so that borderline cases might be saved.Kim , W., Jeong, O., Kim, C., & Jungmin (2011) had this to say in this regard, 'in the offline world, people have learned not to give out sensitive personal data lightly, not to get into deals that seem to be too good to be true, not to venture into certain parts of large cities after nightfall, not to believe everything they read and hear in the news media, etc. To avoid victimized by the dark side in the online world, people have to learn about the dangers, and exercise caution'.

• Reporting behavior of the victims is yet another concern in this regard. Why the victims do not consider it to be important to report when there is harassment and victimisation? Either 'not bothered' or 'fear of future' prominently appears in the findings of the study. Why are the girls not bothered? Why are they afraid of 'future'? After all, the findings affirm that only known persons are involved in any type of harassment. Either friends or the family members, it is said, who harass through 'unwanted SMS'. Why are they doing it? Was there a causal effect? Though such questions have not been at all addressed, what is clear is that many of the respondents were not bothered about the harassment. There may be several ways of understanding this issue. They did not bother because it was not considered a serious issue. But quite a many have said that they consider it serious from some extent to a large extent. The respondents might know the person involved so they might not want to prolong the problem, which might be part of the 'fear of the future'. One might also explain this fear as part of the existential problem of girls. Fear of the future might relate to the fear of the police or annoyance in the future or even honour of the family. One needs to understand it from the cultural perspective. More studies and researches of this kind would open up vistas to dissect and analyse this issue in a more focused way. But as of now, the educationists, analysts, leaders and policy makers shall put their minds together to remove this unfounded fear in the girls and learn not to allow harassment to spread its thongs everywhere. None of the

scientists could guess what holds for the future in terms of technology. Stephens (2008) heralds that the greatest threat in the future might be the extreme difficulty of separating virtual/cyber reality from physical reality. The future needs a special attention.

6. Limitation of the Study

First of all, the sample size is very small that would not have brought the nuances of the findings from this research. Much larger sample would be better for this purpose. So the accuracy of the findings may vary accordingly. This sample cannot be said to represent the whole of Chennai. Secondly, this study did not take care of the in-depth analysis of the issue. Much at a broader level, this study brings only the understanding of victimisation and awareness. Thirdly, as this is a first kind of study among the girls in Chennai, the validity of the study has to be further studies and verified.

7. Conclusions and Future Directions

The research clearly exposes that harassment through mobile phones is a reality that the present and the future society has and will have to face and pay attention to. Calls and messages from unknown persons continue to galore and disturb the girls. The girls who are affected are able to understand that they are harassed through mobile phone, even consider it a serious issue to a large extent but do not take recourse to legal support. In fact, the awareness level is much low both on cyber crime police and cyber crime related laws. Ad hoc solutions are reached with the help of parents and friends in whom many harassed girls confide.

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