

DIGITAL AGE AND SILENCE OF YOUTHS: A STUDY OF UN-REPORTED CYBERCRIME VICTIMIZATION

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Abstract— Recent advancements in the realm of cyberspace have profoundly transformed the fabric of society in the 21st century, weaving new threads of connectivity and opportunity. Yet, alongside these innovations lies a darker reality: a significant surge in cybercrime victimization that looms over individuals, particularly the youth. Alarming, even as the specter of cybercrime grows, many victims choose to remain silent, opting not to report their distressing encounters. This study delves deep into the issue of unreported cybercrime victimization among the vibrant youth of Belagavi City. With a carefully selected sample of 100 participants, the research aims to uncover the complex and often hidden reasons behind the reluctance to report these crimes.

The findings reveal a troubling picture. Many victims grapple with feelings of self-blame, wrestling with the notion that they somehow invited the invasion of their digital sanctuaries. Compounding this issue are the stringent restrictions imposed by parents on device usage, which create a stifling atmosphere of secrecy and shame. Additionally, a pervasive lack of trust in legal agencies casts a shadow over the victims' willingness to seek help, leaving them feeling isolated and vulnerable. To unravel the intricate web of unreported cybercrime victimization further, it is essential to conduct comprehensive surveys, ideally in collaboration with seasoned criminologists. Such efforts could illuminate the underlying factors at play and pave the way for a more effective response to this modern menace.

Keywords: Cybercrime, Youths, Victimization, Unreported, Self-blame

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the World Wide Web changed the dynamics of society, as it revolutionized communication in the 21st century (James Hawdon 2021), in October 2024 the active Internet users stood at 5.52 billion which is (67.5%) of the global population, out of this 5.52 billion are social media users which (63.8%) of the world's population (Ani Petrosyan 2024), in India internet usage as of January 2025 is 771.50 million accounting for (67.03%) of India's total population, and it is expected that India's active internet users will cross 1 billion by the end of 2025 (Tushar Behra 2025), in the year 2023 globally internet usage was highest among the youths at (79%)

between the age of 15-24 years (Ani Petrosyan 2024). As per a report by Devdiscourse, a government survey finds that (92%) of Urban and (82%) of Rural youths between the age of 15-24 have access to the internet or engagement in India.

As the accessibility of access to the internet is growing, cybercrimes are also growing, upon analyzing the National Crime Records Bureau's Crime in India Report, it is evident that a significant number of cybercrimes have been reported over the years. In 2016, 12317 cybercrime cases were recorded under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Information Technology (IT) Act. The numbers for subsequent years are as follows: 21796 in 2017,

27248 in 2018, 44546 in 2019, 50035 in 2020, 52974 in 2021, and in 2022 65893. The reports for 2023 and 2024 have not yet been released. Additionally, a report by Bharti Jain in the Times of India on January 4, 2024, states that India lost 10,319 crores of rupees to cybercrime between April 2021 and December 2023. Rajesh Kumar, the CEO of the Indian Cyber Coordination Center (14C), mentioned that the national cybercrime reporting portal receives an average of 5,000 cases daily, although not all of these are converted into First Information Reports (FIRs).

In an article by the consultancy firm Consultancy.eu, a survey was conducted across seven European countries, gathering insights from 5,500 leaders and IT experts to analyze the cybersecurity landscape, including threats and damages faced by companies. The findings revealed that the average cost of cybercrime in Europe has significantly increased to \$57,000 (€50,000) per incident, according to a new analysis by Forrester Consulting and Hiscox. This figure represents a sixfold increase compared to previous years. Additionally, Martin Bosshardt highlighted that a cybercrime is committed every 44 seconds, and 60% of small businesses close within six months of experiencing such an attack.

A report from AAG Technologies, based in the UK, released in January 2025, reveals that 50% of UK businesses experienced some form of cyberattack in 2023. Nearly one billion emails were exposed in a single year, impacting one in five internet users. Data breaches cost businesses an average of \$4.88 million in 2024. In the United States, one in two internet users had their accounts breached in 2021. Additionally, 53.35 million US citizens were affected by cybercrime in the first half of 2022. Cybercrime cost UK businesses an average of £4,200 in 2022, with phishing being the most common cyber threat facing both businesses and individuals. In 2021, 323,972 internet users reported falling victim to phishing attacks, meaning that half of those who suffered a data breach were targeted through phishing.

During the peak of the pandemic, phishing incidents rose by 220%, with average losses from these attacks amounting to \$136. In 2022, investment fraud became the costliest form of cybercrime, with victims losing an average of \$70,811 each. On average, there are 97 cybercrime victimizations every hour, equating to a new victim every 37 seconds. The pandemic had a significant impact on cybersecurity as businesses were compelled to quickly transition to remote work environments. Cybercriminals exploited network misalignments and security vulnerabilities that arose during this shift. In 2020, malware attacks surged by

358% compared to 2019. Additionally, COVID-19 influenced the number of hourly cybercrime victims; in 2019, there were an average of 53 victims per hour, while in 2020, this number increased to 90, marking a rise of 69%.

The world lost 1% of its GDP, amounting to 574 billion Euros, due to cybercrime in the last year. The World Economic Forum estimates that shortly, cybercrime could account for 2-5% of global GDP. Despite this significant economic impact, many cases of cybercrime go unreported. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, only one in seven cybercrimes is reported, meaning 85% remain unreported. An article in the Indian Express from June 2023 claims that official statistics on cybercrime victimization do not accurately reflect the true scope of the problem due to this underreporting.

Richard Hall, Senior Associate in the Data Protection and Cyber Security team at DWF, highlights a significant discrepancy between reported cybercrime victimization and the actual instances of cybercrime. In a telephonic survey conducted in England and Wales, they discovered that approximately 1.7 million computer-related crimes were committed; however, only 29,094 individuals reported their victimization. This indicates a clear trend of underreporting such crimes. A column by Ervin Zubic discusses the FBI's 2022 data, which reports that Florida had 42,792 victims of cybercrime. However, an internal study revealed some shocking findings: a staggering 56% of victims never report their experiences. The economic impact of these crimes is also concerning. While official data estimates losses at \$845 million, the study suggests that the actual figure is closer to \$1.457 billion.

Even though all the above studies talk about financial loss due to cybercrimes, there are non-financial impacts also, such as cyber harassment, bullying stalking, and extremism (James Hawdon 2020) and the effects of such cybercrime victimization have rarely been studied. Specifically, the reasons for the non-reporting of cybercrime victimization are less focused areas. Cybercrime has emerged as an increasingly prevalent issue in our digital age, impacting individuals, businesses, and institutions alike. Concerningly, a significant trend has arisen where victims of cybercrime choose to remain silent and do not report their experiences to authorities. This widespread underreporting creates a multitude of challenges for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and cybersecurity professionals. It hampers their ability to accurately assess the magnitude and nature of cybercrime, which is essential for

developing effective prevention strategies and responsive measures. When incidents of victimization go unreported, it not only skews the available data but also has the potential to embolden offenders. With little fear of apprehension or penalties, cybercriminals may feel encouraged to persist in their illicit activities, fully aware that many victims will opt to suffer in silence rather than seek help. This cycle of underreporting not only impacts statistical analysis but also complicates law enforcement's efforts to identify patterns, track criminal behavior, and allocate resources effectively.

Research Gap: After conducting a thorough review of existing studies and available literature, it was found that no previous research has specifically focused on the reasons why cyber victimization among youths goes unreported. As a result, the current research aims to address this gap and provide insights into these issues.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study follows a quantitative research approach and aims to explore and understand the factors contributing to the non-reporting of cybercrime victimization among youths, with particular attention to the challenges and gaps in the reporting process. The main research question of the study is whether there are specific reasons for the non-reporting of cybercrime victimization by youths, and the core objective is to examine the causes of unreported cybercrime victimization among this population. The universe of the study consists of youths in Belagavi city, and a sample of 100 respondents was selected for the study. Non-probability sampling techniques, namely snowball sampling, were adopted for the selection of respondents. The inclusion criteria included youths between the ages of 16 to 25 years. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire

consisting of closed-ended questions, and the survey method was employed for data collection. The data obtained were nominal in nature and numerical, and therefore, the study adopted a quantitative design. The study tested null and alternative hypotheses to examine the relationship between self-blame and non-reporting, fear of restriction of access to digital devices by parents and non-reporting, and individual prejudices towards law enforcement agencies and non-reporting of cybercrime victimisation. For data analysis, non-parametric statistical techniques were used, including descriptive and inferential statistics. The median was used as the measure of central tendency, and the Chi-square test was applied to examine the association between categorical variables.

Limitations of the study: The study is conducted in a single city of the Karnataka state, with very limited sample. A larger study with different demographics and longitudinal research would be more helpful in understanding the exact cause of the non-reporting. Further, fewer components for identifying reasons for unreported cybercrime victimisation were considered. There are probabilities of sampling and non-sampling errors due to non-probability sampling. There might be researcher and respondent bias. It was difficult to represent the whole population as initially, respondents were reluctant to cooperate during the study, which might have led to sampling error.

Future scope for the study: A comprehensive study on unreported cybercrime victimisation needs to be conducted, incorporating various demographics, a larger dataset, and additional factors that contribute to the lack of reporting. Longitudinal research would be beneficial for a deeper understanding, especially given the rapid and continuous changes in the digital landscape. Furthermore, future research should also take into account other psychological factors

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table No 1

Sr No	Gender	
1	Male	62
2	Female	38

In the course of conducting the current survey, the researcher sought to analyze the gender distribution of

the participants. The results indicated that a significant majority, precisely 62%, identified as male, whereas

38% identified as female. Despite efforts to balance the gender representation, it proved difficult to achieve an equal distribution due to a noticeable reluctance among female potential respondents to engage with the survey. This hesitation impacted the

overall sample composition. Furthermore, throughout the survey process, no individuals identified as third-gender were recorded, highlighting a limitation in the diversity of the respondent pool.

Table No 2

Sr No	Education Level	
1	PUC (11 th & 12 th)	44
2	Graduation	27
3	Post-Graduation	11
4	Diploma	18

When asked about their enrolled courses, it was found that 44% of respondents were in pre-university college, 27% were in graduation, 11% were pursuing post-graduation, and 18% were enrolled in diploma courses.

Table No 3

Personal causes of non-reporting by youths

Sl No	Question	Yes	No
1	I have received information about reporting cybercrime and the authorities or channels to report it.	39	61
2	Refrain from reporting because you felt it was minor and not serious enough?	74	26
3	Didn't think reporting would make a difference.	94	06
4	Fear to report cybercrime due to embarrassment, Stigma, and reputational damage.	81	19
5	Self-blame or precipitation influenced non-reporting.	57	43
6	Felt reporting would lead to revealing personal information.	63	37
7	Fear of retaliation from attackers discouraged reporting cybercrime	59	41

When enquired about whether the respondents knew about whom to report cybercrime victimization or they know which authorities handle the cybercrime victimization it was found that out of 100 respondents 39% knew whom to report and 61% were not knowing. It indicates that youths have very less awareness regarding the agency which handles the cybercrime and also face problem in finding appropriate authority to report the cybercrime victimization, because of which most of them might have not reported. Even though 39% of the people were aware about the authority to report cybercrime

victimization, by looking at the larger interest of the youths an extensive awareness program by both law enforcement agencies and respective government must take initiative for creating awareness about cybercrime reporting portal and Cybercrime police stations especially at the colleges and universities.

When enquired regarding whether respondents have felt that their cybercrime victimization was minor and not serious enough it was found that most youths, that is 74% % have agreed while 26% of them said it was not the reason for non-reporting. This result clearly

indicates that victims of cybercrime have illusion that cybercrimes are minor, it might be because respondents have thought of some abuses, stalking or small financial loss which might have not affected them the most. But the ultimate truth is that the cybercriminals have all our data at their fingertips which is usually people are ignorant of. In the digital world data plays a vital role, if respondents felt that their victimization was minor and have not taken any preventive measures, then there will be probability of repeat victimization and also it hinders the work of criminal justice system agencies in proper prevention and investigation of cybercrime victimization due to lack of information.

When asked whether respondents felt that reporting would make no difference, to this 94% of the respondents said yes while 06% of the respondents have said no. it shows that respondents doesn't take serious about the cybercrime victimization or the losses that have occurred might be less for such as reasons, they might have not reported it. A detailed study must be carried out on focusing the aspects that why respondents felt reporting doesn't make any difference in their lives and society. Because if most the respondents don't report then most important information relating to cybercrime victimization would be not known and that will hamper the legal process in dealing with cybercrime victimization.

When enquired with the respondents regarding whether they have refrained from reporting due embarrassment, stigma and reputational damage, it was found that 81% of the respondents have agreed with this while 19% of them have said it was not the reason for not reporting it, this kind of factor was one of the phenomena in the conventional crimes as well to not report the victimization. If we observe closely, we may find that almost every youth victim of the cybercrime victimization have fear of stigma embarrassment, this factor is worrying phenomenon because cybercriminals may target any individual irrespective of their age and status, and if the victims feel in such a manner, then it will further allow cybercrime criminals to target such more individuals with the close study of their data and profiles. Youths shouldn't be worried of embarrassment or stigma as it

will further affect them and also others in the society and will lead to future victimization.

When asked about whether precipitation or self-blame was the reason for the non-reporting of the cybercrime victimization it was found that 57% said yes to this while 43% have said that it was not the reason for it. It shows that self-blame is one of the important factor while non-reporting the cybercrime victimization, it might be because in most the cases when people fell in unnecessary argument or self-providing of information on social networking sites or in social engineering scams and having the perception of fast and easy money and due to other such reasons respondents might have felt are the mistakes of their own because of which they have been victimized hence the self-blame or precipitation might have been the factor for non-reporting.

When enquired whether respondents felt that reporting would lead to further revealing personal information and this has stopped them from reporting, it was found that 63% of the respondents said yes while 37% of them have said no. it shows that youths are not aware about the privacy and confidentiality maintain by the law enforcement if they are willing to do so. Therefore, an awareness campaign must be carried out to control this factor for non-reporting cybercrime victimization

When asked about whether the fear of retaliation from the attacker have demotivated the victims from reporting, it was found that mere 59% of the respondents have said yes, while majority of the respondents, that is 41% of them have said that fear of retaliation from the attacker was not the reason for the not reporting cybercrime victimization. It is be issues of concern as the sample size in the present research is smaller, if we consider large data from the different demography and states, this proportion of fear of retaliation may have larger effect on the society, therefore an independent study must be considered in future to address the aspect of fear of retaliation.

Null Hypothesis H₀: There is no significant relationship between Self-blame resulting in non-reporting of cybercrime victimization

Chi-Square test result

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.248 ^a	1	.618

The first hypothesis of the study dealt with whether self-blame was the reason for not reporting, when the hypothesis was tested in the SPSS, the value of Pearson Chi-Square was .618 which means that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, because if the value is below 0.05 we must accept the null hypothesis and if the

value is more than 0.05 then we must accept the alternative hypothesis, in the present result the value is more than 0.05 hence alternative is accepted. With this result, it is proved that most of the youths do report their cybercrime victimization due to self-blame.

Table No 4

Family-related issues perceived by youths to not report cybercrime victimization

Sl No	Question	Yes	No
1	Fear of restricting Internet access by parents	87	13
2	Fear of restricting the device's access by parents	77	23
3	Fear of not allowing to continue education	42	58
4	Avoided reporting due to pressure and non-compliance by family.	39	61

When asked whether the fear of restriction by parents on access to internet, it was found that 87% of them have agreed for this while 13% said no this, followed with that 77% youths feel their parents will restrict their device usage and 23% doesn't feel such. It clearly shows that youths are more worried about their access to devices and the internet rather than their victimization. It is a worrying factor that youths are ready to tolerate and adjust to the victimization but not to inform their parents or anyone about it. And also, nobody knows whether their parents would have restricted or not but still youths have refrained from reporting due to this factor. Youths must be guided properly in such victimization and asked to report it to law enforcement at least, and also it must be tried that their data or victimization must be kept secret if they report it.

Fear of not allowing to continue their education was one of the important factors in the present survey as 42% of the youths felt that if their parents had known about their victimization then they might have restricted their education, which might be true and

might not be true, but the fear of it led to non-reporting of their victimization.

When enquired regarding whether the respondents have not reported their cybercrime victimization due to non-compliance by family and friends, it was found that 39% of the respondents said yes while 61% of the respondents said No. Even though a mere 39% of the respondents have said that it was the reason for not reporting still the factor is a major cause of worry as non-compliance or co-operation from the family is a serious issue for the respondents. Parents must and should support their children as cybercrime victimization is not always the mistake of youths but it is the work of the cybercriminals to target the victims, and they target anyone without considering youths or old age person.

Null Hypothesis H₀: There is no significant relationship between fear of restricting access to devices by parents resulting in non-reporting of cybercrime victimization.

Chi-Square test result

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.509 ^a	1	.475

The second hypothesis of the study dealt with whether fear of restricting the access to device was the reason for not reporting, when the hypothesis was tested in the SPSS, the value of Pearson Chi-Square was .475, which means that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, because if the value is below 0.05 we must accept the null

hypothesis and if the value is more than 0.05 then we must accept the alternative hypothesis, in the present result the value is more than 0.05 hence alternative is accepted. it is proved that most of the youths do report their cybercrime victimization due to fear of restricting access to devices by their parents.

Table No 5

Legal issues perceived by the youth for not-reporting

Sl No	Question	Yes	No
1	Avoided reporting due to non-compliance by law enforcement.	19	81
2	Lack of trust in the legal process or lack of confidence in the investigation influenced decision not to report cybercrime.	76	24
3	Refrain from reporting because didn't trust authorities to handle it.	58	42

When enquired about whether the respondents have refrained from reporting due non-compliance from law enforcement agencies, it was found that 19% of the respondents said they were not supported by the law enforcement to file the complaint, while 81% of them said they did not face any such problems from the law enforcement agencies. Even though 19% is smaller number comparing to the respondents who have said no, the number might increase if the detailed study conducted across different demographics, especially in rural areas might provide different outlook of the problem. It is a matter of utmost concern because if law enforcement non-complying with the victims, then they will lose the trust on them and the non-reporting of such crimes may increase further, even though respondents are saying law enforcement have non cooperative, they might have their own prejudices and they might not have provided enough information regarding their victimization as well. There must be detailed study on this factor.

When asked about the lack of trust in the legal process was the cause for non-reporting of cybercrime victimization, it was found that, 76% of the

respondents have said yes to this while 24% of the respondents said no to this. The responses in the query shows that most the respondents don't have trust on the legal process to deal with the victimization, it might be because of their previous experiences with legal process or the negative image created in the society by mass media, social media or rumours spread by the people for self-centred means. Whatever might be the reason for not having trust on the legal machinery but it is the duty of the respective government and legal machinery that these aspects have to be changed with the proper mechanism, neither in future the phenomenon of non-reporting the cybercrime victimization will grow which will be hindrance to the justice delivery.

When asked about whether not having trust on the authorities to handle cybercrime victimization was the reason for not reporting the cybercrime victimization for this 58% of the respondents said yes while 42% respondents said no. this clearly shows that most of the respondents doesn't have the trust on the law enforcement to handle it properly and find some solutions for this. It is might be because of the most of the law enforcement officers who are accessible by

the public are usually constables who are just PUC passed out without any specific knowledge of the cybercrime, if the person sees such an officer, then it would lead to such kind of attitude amongst the public. To improve this phenomenon law enforcement must take the initiative that the person who receives cybercrime cases must be thoroughly trained and well equipped to answer the queries of the respondents and would be better if a Sub-Inspector level officer with

cybercrime expertise or digital forensic expertise is hired in the stations.

Null Hypothesis H₀: There is no significant relationship between individual prejudices towards Law Enforcement Agencies resulting in non-reporting of cybercrime victimization.

Chi-Square test result

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.003 ^a	1	.954

The third hypothesis of the study dealt with whether lack of trust in the judicial process or investigation was the reason for not reporting, when the hypothesis was tested in the SPSS, the value of Pearson Chi-Square was .954, which means that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, because if the value is below 0.05 we must accept the null hypothesis and if the value is more than 0.05 then we must accept the alternative hypothesis, in the present result the value is more than 0.05 hence alternative is accepted. It is proved that most of the youths did not report their cybercrime victimization due lack of trust in the legal system and law enforcement.

issue of studying the causes of non-reporting cybercrime victimization by youths. Results of the study indicate that negative perception towards cybercrime victimization as minor, restriction from family, and negative perception or prior prejudices of youths on law enforcement agencies affect their non-reporting behavior. By considering the severity of this government and law enforcement agencies must carry out a detailed study about why cybercrime victims especially youths not report their cybercrime victimization with larger data and different demographics across India and the globe which will provide an exact understanding of the causes for non-reporting. Even though the government is taking the initiative to create awareness of cybercrime, the same initiative must be taken to improve the reporting of cybercrime victimization as well and must adopt a policy to survey each household to study crime victimization, especially about cybercrime victimization with the assistance of criminologists across India.

4. MAJOR FINDINGS

- 74% of the youths feel cybercrime victimization is minor.
- 94% of them feel it was minor and not worthy of reporting.
- 87% felt internet access would be restricted.
- 77% felt device access would be restricted.
- 81% felt embarrassed and got a stigma or had a reputation will be damaged.
- 76% said they don't trust law enforcement in investigation to solve the crime was the cause of non-reporting

5. CONCLUSION

Studying the cause of unreported cybercrime victimization is one of the major issues in the digital age, where every individual from the young age to adult age holds access to gadgets and the internet. Many of the youths fall victim to cybercrimes without even their awareness, resulting in non-reporting it, by considering this present research tried to address the

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