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IMPACT OF CYBER CRIME ON THE SOCIETY DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD

Deepika Deshwal, Ph.D. (Scholar)

Department of Buddhist Studies, Arts Faculty,
University of Delhi, India.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7007-035X>

Email: deepikadeshwal17@gmail.com

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ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7007-035X>

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to analyse the impact of cyber-crime on the society during the period of lockdown. The concept of cyber-crime and the new hacks to extract money from the citizens and how it has impacted the common people at large is explored. The result from this study shows that computer and internet is a potent platform for the criminals and how it has impacted the lives of the people in a negative way. The discussions are made from the findings and the paper addresses how the internet and computer can be utilised properly in a safe and secured way adopting various precautions and measures to secure the usage and on the other hand increasing the awareness on how not to be trapped in any kind of web by criminals in the cyber world.

Keywords: Cyber-crime, stalking, theft, harassment, exploitation, threat.

Introduction

With the beginning of the usage of computer which brought a revolution across the world coupled with the access of internet, there was a complete transformation in the way people used to communicate, transact, learn and share information etc. Computer with internet has given humans a potent weapon to use through which they can learn different things with the click of a button and can do financial transactions, send and receive messages, letters, documents etc. and hold video conferences and meetings too. The way computer along with internet has on one hand empowered the lives of the people, in the same way it has attracted a lot of cyber criminals who every time innovate and create new ways and methods for stalking people, making financial thefts online, harassing people through different illegal means like morphing their photographs or blackmailing them with something confidential in nature which can cause public shame to the victim of such harassment.¹

With the beginning of a virus in 2019 which is commonly known as “Corona virus or Covid 19” causing a lot of chaos globally, with people not only getting affected by it but also lost their precious lives due to this virus spread across the world. This kind of a global pandemic gave rise to many challenges which were psychological, financial, social, personal etc. faced by people across the globe.

When Lockdown was announced in India by Honourable Prime Minister of India Sh. Narendra Modi due to the rise in number of coronavirus cases in India, there was a high state of confusion, fear and anxiety in people across the nation. The fear was not only for the job loss but the entire nation was under lockdown

¹ Adv. Prahsant Mali: Cyber Infomediavy: Cyber Law & Cyber Simplified

due to which people faced a lot of challenges in their day to day work. Many individuals faced job losses, businesses were closed causing acute financial strain on people who have to pay EMIs on the loan that they had taken in the past, many new rules, guidelines were floated by government, private organisation and banks.

In between all this, there was a tremendous increase in the fake news on social media, people were in a lot of confusion due to this and even Government has to intervene and was made to take some strict action against those who were spreading fake news causing public inconvenience at large. This scenario gave the criminal minds a platform in the field of cyber-crime in order to make money from innocent citizens through illegal means and methods. Online thefts, fake calls to people asking for bank details, online schemes, online employment etc. were the various methods adopted by the fraudsters online in order to extract money from the people.

People who were seeking work from home option online after losing their jobs were targeted more and they lost money to these fraud offers online causing mass chaos, stress and depression amongst many such individuals, there were also reports of suicide of people due to financial stress created due to lockdown.

Various awareness campaigns by Government was also run in order to save and make people aware of these new online methods adopted by scammers online. Organisations like banks and many government and private organisation also run a campaign for awareness amongst the masses so that they do not get trapped into any kind of fake online job offer or any other offer. Even reputed and public figures were targeted like Nidhi Razdan, a renowned journalist who even posted her job offer of assistant professor from Harvard which came out to be a bogus and fake online offer.

The restriction in movement of people outside caused a lot of chaos in day to day lives of the people who were not habitual of using services online and they were the potent victims and target of many kinds of cyber-crimes which happened during the period of lockdown.

The major impacts of cyber-crime on the society during the period of lockdown can be categorised in the following -

1. Financial

the financial impacts were very severe on people during the period of lockdown because on one hand people lost their jobs, were already burdened with monthly installments and expenses were suddenly on their own and were totally dependent on their savings along with any help and support from near and dear ones. This gave rise to online frauds related to financial transactions. People were in their homes, has no work to do which made them to look for opportunities in the online world which were already full with online fake job offers like work from home, earn through investment schemes, job offers which were fake. The lack of information combined with desperation and need to take up a job made many individuals to take a blind risk on such offers causing serious financial thefts which made them suffer tremendously. There were fake calls made to senior citizens claiming that government is providing them with monthly allowances and asked them for their banking details which lead to many old age people lose their savings and pension money. Fake OTP messages, Fake job offers on email, fake job offer calls were the most random and repetitive methods adopted by criminals to do financial thefts.²

² Indian Institute of Banking and Finance: Prevention of Cyber Crimes and Fraud Management, Macmillan Publishers, Edition: 2017.

2. Psychological

With a sudden lockdown in place where people had no other option but to stay in their homes created a new set of medical challenge in front of the nation and the world and it was psychological and mental health of the people. Many individuals which had financial burdens suffer from psychological problems during this period and many opted for suicide as there were many known public figures too which committed suicide during this period.

Due to job loss, financial burdens, no movement outside home created a lot of disturbances and conflicts in many households causing the rise in the number of cases for domestic violence, suicide, divorces, harassment, exploitation of women for dowry or money etc.³

Some people were also threatened and harassed online during this period when their pictured were morphed and used in an objectionable way which can damage the image of that person, such kind of harassment was also reported where they were asked to give money to the person who was threatening them.

There were also some examples which showed the positive path to the society like a chef in a 5 star cruise started his own food outlet in a local area in Mumbai which earned him lot of praise, media coverage and he started earning more in comparison to his job. But mostly the people's mental health was affected negatively during the lockdown period.

3. Personal

With the lockdown, mostly the majority of economic activity came to a standstill and people along with government were finding ways to restart things in a proper and safe way but by the time the positives can come up many businesses, factories became cash dry triggering closures, sales or shutting up of operations. This created a lot of chaos which affected the persons individually and their relations are it personal or professional got affected negatively to the uncertainty on their lives due to corona virus.

Data showed that there was a sudden and fast rise in the cyber-crime during the period of lockdown the statistics are as follows:-

Cyber-crime cases went up during lockdown, shows Delhi police data-For instance, in January this year, 1,480 cyber-crimes -- or about 48 offences every day -- were reported against 4,188 cases in May. In April, the cases stood at 3,372, in June at 3,239 and in July at 4,103. There was a significant spike in cyber-crimes in Delhi during the Covid-19 induced lockdown with as many as 135 such offences being reported every day on an average in May, the Delhi Police said after analysing nearly 33,000 cases registered until November this year.⁴

Under normal circumstances, the public wouldn't have generally used those sites for shopping, adding that it couldn't be said if street criminals migrated to online frauds. It is rather the existing online fraudsters who scaled up their operations and came up with new ideas of cybercrimes. The cybercrime unit has analysed these offences to conclude that 62% of them were online financial frauds, 24% were social media harassment that included morphing photos of people and sexual harassment, and the rest 14% were other crimes such as hacking, identity theft and data theft.⁵

³ Debarati Halder: Cyber Crimes against Women in India: Sage publications: ISBN- 978-9385985775, Edition -1st, 31st Oct. 2016.

⁴ Shiv Sunny: Hindustan Times, New Delhi 25th Dec. 2020: Cyber crime cases went up during lockdown, shows Delhi police data: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/cyber-crime-cases-went-up-during-lockdown-shows-delhi-police-data/story-syScqUXmhZFBS13Bks51TJ.html> (25.03.2021)

⁵ Ibid.

How to Stay Safe⁶

1. Always cross check the information.
2. Take Help from a learned person who is aware of internet world.
3. Never share your personal details like Adhaar number or bank details with anyone.
4. If required call the organisation directly from whom you have received the information.
5. Never blindly believe in the information available on internet without examining it.
6. In case of fraud do report the incident to your nearest Police station.

Conclusion

Internet is empowering the world but it is also exposing many to such financial frauds and cyber-attacks sometimes as a job offer, harassment or threat, scheme etc. With increasing awareness Government and organisations should come up with a robust mechanism in order to prevent these kinds of cyber-attacks and frauds and there should be a platform where a person can cross check and verify the information so that he or she should not panic and should not get trapped into any kind of trap by the criminals. Special helpline numbers and police stations with cyber experts on job is the need of the hour in order to keep the citizens safe from such cyber-attacks and to create a safe Digital India

⁶ Cybercrime department has 7 basic tips for you to stay safe online: Times of India 6th Oct. 2020
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/gadgets-news/cybercrime-department-has-7-basic-tips-for-you-to-stay-safe-online/articleshow/78510747.cms> (25.03.2021)