

Unit 5: Virtual Crimes and Tangible Harms

Welcome to Week 5.

This week's learning explores issues concerning victims and the different harms suffered from a cybercrime. The reading will introduce you to the limitations of some legal jurisdictions in addressing vulnerabilities and victims' suffering. You will evaluate the feasibility of legal systems of protecting the public from cyber-harms that it does not necessarily recognise in legislation. You will also consider whether certain cyber harms should be and can be criminalised.

On completion of this unit you will be able to:

- Explore issues concerning cyber-victims and cyber-harms.
- Identify and evaluate information to build up a case analysis.
- Practice research skills.
- Apply critical assessment.

Reflection:

Cyberattacks and the Psychological Toll Taken on Individuals

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reports that the number of cybercrimes reported during the first five months of 2020 was quite close to the total number of cybercrimes recorded in 2019 (Monteith et al., 2021). Cybersecurity may be improved by investing in the right network security technology, but human aspects are also important.

Several variables, such as those mentioned below, might affect how vulnerable prospective victims are.

- Online activities
- Differences between people
- Behavior and reactions that are unique to everyone
- Viewpoints on various forms of technology

Therefore, it is vital for psychiatrists to be informed of the potential outcomes of cyberattacks and patient dangers. This scenario may combine the effects of employing online mental health therapy with the coronavirus epidemic. The likelihood that people with mental health disorders may become victims of cybercrime is higher (Perrin, A. and Atske, S., 2021).

As cybercrime spreads throughout the world at an alarming pace, people with mental health issues may find it more challenging to use their usual coping mechanisms. The psychological impacts of cybercrime and online fraud are becoming more prevalent today. About a third of all American adults, according to a 2021 study by Pew Research, are online virtually all the time (Perrin, A. and Atske, S., 2021).

Some of the most devastating emotional effects of being a victim of cybercrime include:

1. Psychological Abusive Treatment

Hacking and other forms of computer crime may not only be financially devastating but can also be very stressful for victims. Victims may find it difficult to trust others on the internet after being victimized.

It's not simply the data theft itself that might be unsettling, but also the cybercriminal's plan for exploiting the stolen information. The cybercriminals may send the victim a threatening email. Cybercrime victims may suffer "shell shock" for a variety of reasons. The phenomenon of cybercrime is just a few decades old (American Psychiatric Association, 2020). Many individuals are afflicted by this illness, the roots of which may be traced back to the First World War.

The effects of a horrific event, like a cyberattack, may linger for a long time in the minds of those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Negative feelings, such as anger, fear, and despair, as well as bad dreams and recollections, are all possible side effects of trauma.

2. Guilt and shame

Many times, criminals on the internet hide their identities. The flip side of this is that victims of cybercrimes like phishing and email viruses can decide not to come forward. It's likely that they'll shoulder the blame for problems like inadequate cybersecurity on their own.

Victim-blaming, in which the victim accepts responsibility for the offender's unlawful actions, may contribute to this feeling of shame and guilt. As a result of these occurrences, victims may decide to stop using the internet.

3. A sense of hopelessness or despondence

Symantec Corporation, a cybersecurity business, surveyed victims of cybercrime in 2010 and found that eighty percent of them had faith in the judicial system to punish those responsible (Roberts, 2010). In addition, they could be worried about a potential hacking assault.

When a victim feels powerless, they may withdraw from society. To prevent more digital crimes, they may opt to stop using social media or perhaps disconnect from the internet completely.

"Learned helplessness" is a condition that may develop in persons who have experienced a string of terrible and out-of-their-control events (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2014). This means that individuals don't make advantage of accessible control mechanisms, even if doing so may help prevent intrusions.

4. Digestive Disturbances

It's not only the victim's body that suffers when they're victimized online; the psychological effects may be just as devastating.

A person who has trouble coping with the stress of, say, online fraud, may resort to binge eating. Emotional eating refers to the practice of using food to cope with or avoid uncomfortable feelings, such as (Mayo Clinic, 2018):

- Stress

- Anger
- Fear
- Sadness
- Loneliness

It's possible that the trauma of falling victim to cybercrime might lead to binge drinking or drug usage as a means of coping with the overwhelming feelings of helplessness and isolation that follow. Several studies have shown that those who are under a great deal of stress are more prone to get addicted to drugs (Guarnotta, 2021).

5. Problems Falling Asleep

Cybercriminal activity often has unintended consequences, such as sleeplessness from victims worrying about their stolen information or finances. Stressful circumstances, such as money problems, might disrupt your sleep (Foley, 2020).

In the year 2020, many individuals saw a major rise in their stress levels due to worldwide lockdowns and quarantines, which made it difficult for them to go about their normal daily routines such as going to work, school, or the grocery store. Numerous sleep disorders, the most common of which is insomnia, have been linked to stress.

Victimization by cybercriminals has the potential to become a never-ending cycle. Stress about your current circumstances is likely preventing you from getting enough rest. The stress chemicals cortisol and adrenaline may be to blame for your inability to fall asleep.

Cyber Harms:

The 2016 essay "Cyber Harms: Concepts, Taxonomy, and Measurement" addresses the need for a unique framework to grasp the damage caused by cyber events. According to the authors' definition, "cyber harm" refers to "damaging consequences resulting from cyber events, which may originate from malicious, unintentional, or natural sources and manifest themselves either inside or beyond the internet." The authors conclude that there are six main types of cyber damage, each of which may occur either directly or indirectly because of a cyber event, and each of which can have an impact on an individual, an organization, or a country (Nurko, 2020). They are listed below:

- **Damage to physical property** or individuals might fall under the concept of "physical harm" (hardware, infrastructure, etc). States of depression or anxiety are indications of psychological harm. It may become obvious immediately after a cyber incident, or it may take some time. As an example, because of cyberbullying or cyberstalking.
- The most visible indicator of **economic harm** is a loss of funds, which may be the result of a data breach or another kind of cybercrime. The monetary loss sustained by South African firms as a direct consequence of data breaches is an example of economic harm.
- **Reputational harm** may manifest itself in several ways, depending on the stakeholder. At the business level, for example, a cyber assault might reduce the number of consumers provided. On a smaller scale, a cyber incident might cause

one's personal life to become disorganized. It might result in less favourable trade negotiations at the national level.

- It is notoriously difficult to measure the **harm to culture**, which is often attributable to growing levels of social instability. As was the case in India, this is shown by the way the spread of incorrect information on the internet may lead to real physical violence. Both Sri Lanka and Myanmar have been hit by similar situations.
- **Political damage** is the stoppage of a political process or the supply of government services. Election interference is an outstanding example of this. This might be the consequence of a deliberate shutdown of the internet, as was recently the case in Togo, or it could be the product of botnets aiming to sway public opinion before to a major national vote, as was the case with Brexit.

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