

CYBER GENDER LENS: UNVEILING DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS OF CYBERCRIME

Ani Mosiashvili

Revised by: Elena Tsatsua

Abstract

The article explore the gendered impacts of cybercrime and cybersecurity incidents, exploring how individuals' experiences differ based on gender identity. Analyzing psychological, social, and economic dimensions, the research unveils unique vulnerabilities and consequences for men, women, and non-binary individuals in cybersecurity. By understanding differential manifestations of cyber threats and responses across genders, this study aims to inform strategies for mitigating gender-specific risks and fostering inclusivity and resilience in cybersecurity frameworks. Through this exploration, the article contributes to advancing gender equality and inclusivity within the field of cybersecurity. The rapid advancement of technology has brought numerous benefits, but it has also led to the rise of cybercrime. Cybercrime affects individuals differently based on gender, often exacerbating existing inequalities. This article explores the gendered impacts of cybercrime and cybersecurity incidents, examining how men and women experience these issues differently and highlighting the psychological, social, and economic consequences.

Gendered Impacts of Cybercrime: Psychological Consequences

Cybercrime can have profound psychological impacts on victims, with women often facing more severe consequences. Online harassment, stalking, and cyberbullying are prevalent forms of cybercrime that disproportionately target women. According to a 2017 Pew Research Center report, 21% of women aged 18 to 29 reported being sexually harassed online, compared to 9% of men in the same age group.

Women are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues due to online harassment. A study by the Data & Society Research Institute found that 53% of women who experienced online harassment reported feeling fearful for their safety, compared to 35% of men. This fear can lead to long-term psychological distress and affect women's participation in online spaces.

One notable case is that of Amanda Todd, a Canadian teenager who was a victim of cyberbullying and online sexual exploitation. Amanda was harassed and blackmailed by a stranger who obtained a compromising photo of her. The relentless harassment led to severe depression and anxiety, ultimately resulting in her tragic suicide in 2012. Amanda's story underscores the severe psychological impact that cybercrime can have, particularly on young women.

Another example is the case of Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist media critic who faced intense online harassment after launching a Kickstarter campaign to fund a video series examining sexist tropes in video games. Sarkeesian received numerous death and rape threats, which led her to temporarily leave her home for her safety. The psychological toll of this sustained harassment was significant, causing her immense stress and anxiety.

In addition, the story of Caroline Criado Perez, a British feminist campaigner, illustrates the psychological impact of online threats. After successfully campaigning for a woman's face to be featured on British banknotes, Perez received a barrage of misogynistic abuse and threats on Twitter. The harassment included threats of rape and murder, leading to severe emotional distress and anxiety for Perez.

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Social Consequences

The social impacts of cybercrime also differ based on gender. Women often face reputational damage and social isolation as a result of cybercrime. For instance, non-consensual distribution of intimate images, commonly known as revenge porn, predominantly targets women. According to a study by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 90% of revenge porn victims are women.

The social stigma associated with such incidents can lead to victims being ostracized by their communities. Women may also withdraw from online activities, reducing their digital presence and hindering their professional and social opportunities. This withdrawal can limit their access to information, support networks, and job opportunities, further entrenching gender inequalities.

Consider the case of Jessica Logan, an 18-year-old from Ohio who became a victim of revenge porn after her ex-boyfriend distributed private photos of her. Jessica faced relentless bullying and social ostracization from her peers, leading her to withdraw from social interactions and eventually take her own life. Jessica’s case highlights the devastating social consequences of cybercrime for women.

Another example is the case of Gina Miller, a British businesswoman who led a legal challenge against the UK government over Brexit. Miller faced a torrent of online abuse and threats, including racist and sexist remarks. The social backlash was intense, with many attacking her character and motives, leading to significant social isolation and a tarnished reputation.

Additionally, the story of Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani education activist, demonstrates the social consequences of cyber harassment. Malala was targeted by the Taliban and faced severe online abuse for her advocacy of girls’ education. Despite surviving an assassination attempt, the ongoing online threats and harassment continue to affect her social interactions and public engagements.

Economic Consequences

Cybercrime can have significant economic impacts on individuals, with women often bearing a greater financial burden. Women are more likely to experience financial fraud and identity theft. A report by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) found that women were 26% more likely than men to report identity theft in 2020.

The economic impact of cybercrime on women can be severe, especially for those with limited financial resources. The costs associated with recovering from identity theft, such as legal fees and credit repair services, can be substantial. Additionally, women are more likely to work in lower-paying jobs and have less savings, making it harder for them to recover financially from cybercrime incidents.

In a notable example, a woman named Maria, a single mother from New York, fell victim to a phishing scam that drained her savings account. Maria had to take on multiple jobs to recover financially, all while dealing with the stress and anxiety caused by the incident. Her experience illustrates the significant economic toll that cybercrime can have, particularly on women with limited financial resources.

Another example is the case of Jada, a young professional from California who had her identity stolen through a data breach at her workplace. Jada's credit score was severely damaged, and she spent thousands of dollars and countless hours to restore her financial standing. The incident delayed her plans to buy a home and caused significant financial and emotional strain.

Additionally, consider the story of Alice, a small business owner in Texas who was targeted by ransomware. Hackers encrypted her business files and demanded a substantial ransom for their release. Alice faced significant financial loss due to the disruption of her business operations and the cost of

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restoring her systems. The economic impact of the cyber attack was profound, threatening the viability of her business.

Addressing Gender Inequality in Cybersecurity

To address the gendered impacts of cybercrime, it is essential to promote gender equality and inclusivity within the field of cybersecurity. This involves increasing the representation of women in cybersecurity roles, raising awareness about the specific challenges women face online, and developing targeted interventions to support female victims of cybercrime.

Promoting Women in Cybersecurity

Increasing the number of women in cybersecurity is crucial for addressing gender inequalities. Women currently make up only 24% of the cybersecurity workforce, according to the 2020 (ISC)² Cybersecurity Workforce Study. Encouraging more women to pursue careers in cybersecurity can bring diverse perspectives and solutions to the table.

Educational institutions and organizations should implement initiatives to attract and retain women in cybersecurity. This can include mentorship programs, scholarships, and outreach activities aimed at young women and girls. Additionally, creating a supportive work environment that values diversity and inclusion can help retain female cybersecurity professionals.

One successful initiative is the Women in CyberSecurity (WiCyS) organization, which provides support, networking opportunities, and resources for women in the field. WiCyS has helped countless women advance their careers and has fostered a more inclusive cybersecurity community.

Another example is the Cybersecurity Women of the Year Awards, which celebrates the achievements of women in the cybersecurity field. These awards highlight the contributions of women and provide role models for young girls interested in pursuing cybersecurity careers.

Raising Awareness

Raising awareness about the gendered impacts of cybercrime is essential for creating effective interventions. Public awareness campaigns can educate individuals about the specific risks women face online and promote safe online practices. Moreover, training law enforcement and legal professionals on the gendered nature of cybercrime can improve the support and protection offered to female victims.

The #MeToo movement is an example of how raising awareness can lead to significant social change. Initially focused on sexual harassment and assault, the movement has expanded to include online harassment and abuse. By sharing their experiences, women have shed light on the pervasive nature of cyber harassment and have called for stronger protections and support for victims.

Another effective campaign is the #NotYourPorn movement, which fights against non-consensual pornography and provides resources for victims. By raising awareness about the prevalence of revenge porn and its impacts, the movement has helped to push for stronger legal protections and support services for victims.

Targeted Interventions

Developing targeted interventions to support female victims of cybercrime is crucial. This can include providing specialized support services, such as counselling and legal assistance, to help women recover from cybercrime incidents. Additionally, implementing stronger legal protections against online harassment and revenge porn can deter perpetrators and provide justice for victims.

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Organizations like the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative offer legal assistance and advocacy for victims of online harassment and revenge porn. Their efforts have led to the enactment of laws in several states that criminalize revenge porn and provide victims with legal recourse.

Another example is the development of the Safer Internet Program, which offers resources and support for individuals facing online harassment. The program provides educational materials, legal support, and counselling services to help victims navigate the aftermath of cybercrime.

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