

# Rapists in India shame victims with online videos

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Reuters

**FAMILIES SUFFER:** The veiled mother of one of the two teenage girls, who were raped and hanged from a tree in Uttar Pradesh earlier in the year.

For six days, the frail 16-year old high school student did not tell anyone about how she was raped last month by two men in an abandoned home far away from her neighbourhood in New Delhi.

"I was afraid. While I was being raped, another man pointed a gun and recorded me with his cellphone camera," the teenager recalled, sitting crouched in her New Delhi home and running her finger over the tiny "Om" tattooed on her hand. "He said he will upload the film on the net if I tell my family or the police."

In the days after the rape, she grew very quiet, refused food and kept sleeping, worrying her family. Finally, on the sixth day, her aunt pried the truth out of her. The family took her to the hospital, which confirmed she had been sexually assaulted. The family filed a police complaint.

Women's welfare officials say that intimidating victims with a video recording is on the rise in incidents of gang rapes in India. These recordings complicate the government's efforts to encourage women to report the crimes and hinder police efforts to check the explosion of "obscene" online content targeting women.

"More and more women are reporting that men are recording the act of rape with their smartphones, and they are using these recordings to threaten women into silence," said Shamina Shafiq, a member of the state-run National Commission for Women. "In many cases, they actually upload the rape video or circulate it among friends on Whatsapp. The woman is raped not just once, but again and again when people view the video."

India's government has begun preliminary work to introduce amendments to India's 14-year-old information technology law to focus it more specifically on addressing cybercrimes against women, Shafiq said. The women's commission has called for extensive police training, more accountability for social media companies, "right to be forgotten" policies and separate courts to try cybercrimes against women.

Police say other cybercrimes against women are also growing. They include online stalking, morphing pictures and creating sexually explicit Facebook accounts of women and uploading sex videos without consent. (Publication and circulation of pornography are illegal in India, although creating and viewing pornography - with the exception of child pornography - for personal use is not illegal.)

Last year, 1203 cases of publication and transmission of obscene content online were reported, up from 589 in 2012, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

"So many people now have a phone with a camera, but very few understand the laws," said Rakshit Tandon, cybercrime advisor to the police department in Gurgaon, a prosperous suburb of New Delhi. Tandon conducts workshops in schools to train students about how they can protect themselves in the digital world. "Ninety-five percent of the calls I get are from young women who say their photographs and videos have been posted online without their consent. This is now emerging as a new way of harassing women."

Tandon said that many police stations in India lack the expertise to deal with cybercrime. In fact, many stations in rural areas don't even have computers.

One disturbing trend, experts say, is the sudden growth of "revenge porn," in which a video of a consensual sexual encounter is put online by a disgruntled partner.

Shafiq likened revenge porn as "a newer form of acid attacks," in which men throw acid on women's faces as punishment for not responding favourably to their advances or for breaking up with them.

"There is a lot of homegrown revenge porn in our small towns, and we are seeing a revenge-porn economy emerging in India," said Pavan Duggal, a lawyer who specialises in cyber-law and pornography. "But many police officers do not consider it serious enough to even register a complaint. Both parents and the police blame the women: 'Why did she get close to a man in the first place?' they ask. A lot of it goes unreported because there are issues of social honour and shame."

The day after the 16-year old girl in New Delhi summoned the courage to file a police complaint, a hand-written sign saying "gang rape" appeared on her door. The police have arrested four men, but the man with the cellphone is still at large.

Meanwhile, the teen has stopped going to school. She has not stepped out of her home for days.

"Everybody's eyes are glued on our family these days," said her mother, Manju Balram, 45. "We have lost all honour in society. Only God knows if her rape video is being watched by the world."

**- Washington Post**