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Experts urge victims to report cyber abuse

In an increasingly connected world, instances of cyber abuse against women and children are on the rise. However, there is no data on the number of people facing cyber abuse. To mark International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, equity talks on digital safety and online protection of children by UNICEF saw experts urging victims to report cyber abuse and break the silence.

Representative Image

Chennai:
About 400 million people in India have access to internet through laptops and desktops, while 375 million people access the internet through mobile. These numbers are only going to rise as many youngsters have access to smartphones with internet connection. The rise in mobile internet users also means an increase in the number of cybercrimes against women. In a bid to create awareness among women on digital safety, UNICEF's Equity Talks created awareness among college students at Stella Maris College for Women and will also form a peer group to spread the word.

Sugata Roy, Communication Specialist, UNICEF, said that since youth and adolescents have the most access to the internet, there is a need to inform students on social media responsibility. "This knowledge can help them steer clear of being abused. We live in an era of selfies and if a girl loses her phone, these high-resolution photos can be morphed. There are also cases where girls send nude pictures to boys, who they think they can trust.

But if the boy shares the pictures with his friends and is apprehended by the law enforcement agencies, the boy will be punished on two counts (possession and circulation of pornography) while the girl will be punished for three (manufacturing, possession and circulation of pornography). Youngsters need to be responsible for what they do on social media," he said.

Job Zachariah, chief of UNICEF State office for Tamil Nadu and Kerala, said there is no data available on cyber sexual abuse. "Cyber criminals are finding newer and sophisticated ways to attack their victims. In this scenario, we need to create awareness among youngsters to protect themselves in the digital space. Follow basic rules like not sharing private information. More importantly, break the silence. Report the crime to a family member you trust and expose the person," he said.

SP Lavanya, DSP, CB-CID, Cyber Crime Cell, said, "We collect intelligence at all levels and monitor child pornography. We have the TN Police website where complaints can be given. If we receive a complaint regarding obscenity/ nudity/ child pornography, we take immediate action."

Parents too should be included in this conversation, felt experts. Andrew Sesuraj, State convenor, Tamil Nadu Child Rights Observatory (TNCRO), said that parents should be ready to understand their wards.