EXPOSED: THE DARKER SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS DEVASTATING EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

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Abstract **:** The social media in this digital era has multifaceted effects on the children's privacy. This study analyzes the complicated relation between children's online exercises, the content they share, the friendship they make and also other activities they undertake in the social media. By analyzing its effects, the researcher explains the different measures for protecting the children from the cybercrimes that happens through social media platforms. Besides, the study assesses the potential long-term effects on children's mental well-being, social development, and independence within the digital domain.

Index Terms: **Social Media, Children, Privacy, Mental well-being.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is computerized technology that permits the sharing of thoughts, ideas, text and visuals, through a virtual system. Social media ordinarily highlights user-generated substance that lends itself to engagement by means of likes, shares, comments, and discussions. More than 4.7 billion individuals around the world utilize social media. Social media is additionally a progressively vital portion of numerous companies showcasing campaigns. The biggest social media platforms around the world are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and WeChat.[1] Children's privacy has been affected due to harassment, sharing of personal data, or exposure to inappropriate content on social media platforms. This has a number of negative effects on kids' mental health, such as anxiety, depression, and other conditions, and it will eventually have an impact on their social and academic lives as well. In India, there is a deficiency of appropriate and strict cyber laws to deal with or punish the offenders. Further, due to the technological advancements the law enforcement officers are not in position to detect the cybercrimes and to take timely action.

The research objectives for this paper are diverse and include:
 i. To understand the history of social media.
 ii. To identify different types of impacts that affects the children due to the usage of the social media.
 iii. To examine the relation between social media usage and mental health issues outcomes in children, including factors such as depression, anxiety, and self-esteem.
 iv. To analyze the impact of social media on the social skills and interpersonal relationships of children, including both online and offline interactions.
 v. To assess the role of parents in mediation and supervising the social media of children, including strategies for promoting responsible usage.

2.1. EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

2.1.1. HISTORY OF INTERNET

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[1] By Maya Dollarhide, Social Media: Definition, Importance, Top Websites & App Updated February 23, 2024, *available at* - https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp (Last visited on March 29, 2024).

In the 1950s

- The origin of Internet.

In the 1960s

- The internet was only used for the government purposes.
- Because computer was huge at that time, accessing the imfornatiion stored in one computer made it difficult for other. so they made ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), which later advanced to be called as Internet.

In the 1970

- By the development Transfer Control Protocol (TCP/IP) , now diifferent computerconnected with in different network can communivatye with easch other.

In the 1983

- The internet was born.

In the 1995

- By this year internet has now established with more than 10 million users around the world.

In the 2000s

- There was a huge change in the field of internet, as the boradband was invented to make internet more dependable and faster.
- And also there was a rise the number of social media platforms.

So let's take a look at how the internet was created before discussing the development of social media. The origin of internet was in 1950s in USA. At that time there were huge tensions between North America and the Soviet Union, the two superpowers, who were also in possession of deadly nuclear weapons, and people lived in fear for the surprise attacks, the US then realized how important it was to have a communications system that was impervious to a surprise nuclear attack by the Soviet Union.[2]

Earlier in 1960s internet was used for the government purposes, during that time computer were huge and was difficult to move. It became hard when they have to access the information stored in one computer, they have to travel a long distance for the information. This made for the development of ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), which later formed to be internet that we have today. Earlier it was only accessible for academic purposes and for research institutions. Then in the year 1970 Transfer Control Protocol (TCP/IP) was developed, by this technology different computer connected with different networks can communicate with each other and by this process the Internet was born on January 1, 1983. Slowly slowly the users of the internet began to expand and in the year 1995 internet has established with more than 10 million global users.[3]

2.1.2. HISTORY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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[2]   A   SHORT   HISTORY   OF   THE   INTERNET,   Published: 3   December   2020,   *available   at*   -https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/short-history-internet (Last visited on April 1, 2024).

[3] History Of Internet *available at* - https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/history-of-internet/ (Last visited on April 1, 2024).

Timeline of Social Media

YEAR	SOCIAL MEDIA
• 1997	• SIX DEGREE
• 2002	• FRIENDSTER
• 2003	• MY SPACE
• 2003	• LINKEDIN
• 2004	• ORKUT
• 2004	• FACEBOOK
• 2005	• YOUTUBE
• 2006	• TWITTER
• 2009	• WHATSAPP
• 2010	• INSTAGRAM
• 2011	• SNAPCHAT
• 2020	• CLUBHOUSE

Six degree

From there, the introduction of first social media started. In the year 1997 **'six degree'** was introduced, it was for communicating with the people by adding them as friend to their profile. It helps to connect with the people. This site was popular and it has over 3.5 million users but was later sold to other company because of the limited access to the internet.[4]

Friendster

In the year 2002 **'Friendster'** which is much more similar to the current platforms, but this was found to be slow as users find it difficult to use.

MySpace

Another social media was **'MySpace'** introduced in the year 2003, it was different from other social media platforms as it focused more on music. Artists upload their music on this platform and user can search the music from this platform.

LinkedIn

'LinkedIn' was introduced in the year 2003, as this platform, which connects people in similar careers or professions, is primarily for career-oriented individuals. For instance, your profile turns into a resume with your work history, achievements, references from coworkers, and recommendations.

Orkut

Then **'Orkut'** was another popular social media platform which was introduced in the year 2004. It became quite popular in India were everyone was actively using it and people loved making friends and texting through this social media, but it began to fall after the Facebook gaining its popularity in India.

Facebook

In the year 2010, it was the time of **'Facebook'**. In Facebook we can post picture, update status, make new friends and also text with them. It helps to connect with the people across the country It is having more than 300 million users.[5]

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[4]   By Adeola Adeyemo History & Importance Of The First Social Media Site – Six Degrees, Published on 2018, *available at* - https://adeolawrites.com/history-importance-of-the-first-social-media-site-six-degrees/ (Last visited on April 1, 2024).

YouTube

In 2005 **'YouTube'** was introduced; this is used for watching videos and also to post videos for those who has an account. It has more than 2.70 million users daily.[6]

Twitter'

In the year 2006 **'Twitter'** was introduced, it is not similar to rest of the other social media platform, you can follow anyone and anyone can see the tweets in their profile and also you can sent private message and the main feature of this social media is that, it will keeps you update on the ongoing trends in the world, this social media have more than 350 million users worldwide.[7]

Whatsapp

In the year 2009, **'Whatsapp'** was introduced; it is voice-over-IP (VoIP) and instant messaging (IM) service. It enables users to share photos, documents, user locations, and other content in addition to sending text, voice, and video messages and making voice and video calls.

Instagram

Then another social media that is currently popular is **'Instagram'** which was introduced in the year 2010, with more than 500 million users .This social media is used for posting pictures and texting with friends, in this also we can make new friend from all around the world. [8]
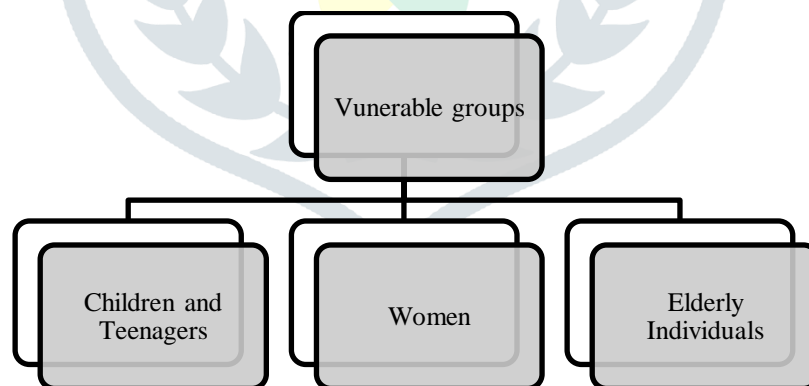
SnapChat

In 2011, **'SnapChat'** has been a social media platform that is primarily used for taking and sharing photos. It also has the feature to share stories and offers a variety of filters.

Clubhouse

Additionally, a totally new social media platform called **'Clubhouse'** was launched in 2020. On this platform, users communicate with one another via voice calls in a chat room. They talk about any subject, including politics and current global issues.

3.1. VULNERABLE GROUPS FOR CYBER CRIMES

Due to their unique circumstances, some groups are more susceptible to social media crimes. These groups include marginalized communities, which frequently experience harassment and discrimination online, and scammers who may target them with false information. In order to create a safer digital environment, it is essential to protect these vulnerable groups.

4.1. CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN ON THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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[5] Written by Brian Dean , Facebook User & Growth Statistics. Last updated Feb. 23, 2024 , *available at-* https://backlinko.com/facebook-users (Last visited on April 2, 2024).

[6] By Rohit Shewale / YouTube Statistics For 2024 (Users, Facts & More), January 10, 2024, *available at -* https://www.demandsage.com/youtube-stats/ (Last visited on April 2, 2024).

[7] By GilPress, Twitter Statistics For 2024: Users, Demographics, Trends, November 25th, 2023, *available at -* https://whatsthebigdata.com/twitter-statistics/ (Last visited on April 2, 2024).

[8] By Brian Dean, Instagram Statistics: Key Demographic and User Numbers Last updated Mar. 25, 2024 *available at -* https://backlinko.com/instagram-users (Last visited on April 2, 2024).

In today's interconnected world, the rise of social media has brought with it exceptional openings for communication, collaboration, and connection. However, nearby these benefits hide deceptive dangers focusing on our most vulnerable group: children. From cyber bullying to online predation, children face a heap of threats within the digital realm. As parents, teachers, and guardians, it is necessary that we study about these crimes and address these dangers head-on to guarantee the security and well-being of our children. This requires not only to proactive measures to teach children about advanced security but for the strong systems for checking and controlling their online exercises. By recognizing the different forms of computer threats were children are facing and actualizing comprehensive strategies to mitigate them, we are able make a more secure online environment where our children can flourish and develop without fear of misuse or hurt.
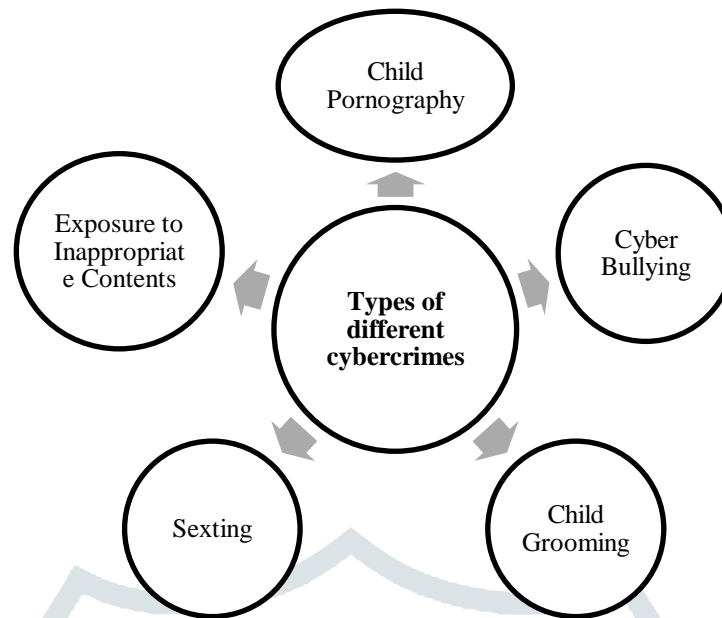
There are many reports and data published in various articles relating to the increase in the crimes against the children and also the harmful effects these crimes have on children. According of NCRB (National crime Records Bureau) 2022, in that it is said that a 32 % of cybercrimes has been increased from the year 2021.Total number crimes in 2022 was 1,62,449; while in 2021, the number was 1,49,404.[9]

When we look in the year 2020, it is said that more than 400% of rise in cybercrimes were reported. If we compare with 2019, only had 164 cases of cyber crimes against children were reported, in 2018, 117 cases of cyber crimes were committed against children and in 2017, 79 cybercrimes were registered. The reason for this increase is that during the Covid-19 pandemic period, to reduce the spread of the pandemic the schools were closed and movements were reduced. As a result the virtual learning environments were introduced. This gave chances to children to spend more time on online for entertainment, social and educational purposes, not necessarily being aware of any risks associated with it.

5.1. TYPES OF DIFFERENT CYBERCRIMES COMMITTED AGAINST THE CHILDREN

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[9] By Sravani Sarkar , Cybercrimes against children records 32 pc increase in 2022: NCRB data , December 06, 2023, *available at -* https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2023/12/06/cybercrimes-against-children-records-32-pc-increase-in-2022-ncrb-data.html (Last visited on April 2, 2024).

i.   **Child Pornography**: In this pornography, children are sexually exploited for creating sexually explicit images and videos. It includes production, distribution and watching the contents on online platforms. These types of activities are punishable under the law.

ii.   **Cyber Bullying**: In this social media platforms are used to harass, intimidate or harm children. This can happen in many forms like sending threatening messages, spreading rumors and lies, manipulating photos and videos are some of the ways in which cyber bulling happens. These activities can later cause mental health problems like anxiety or depression which may end up in self-harm or suicidal.

iii.   **Child Grooming**: In this the person makes a relationship with the children for the purpose of gaining trust. Later they manipulate them to get engage in sexual activities and other form exploitation. They use many tactics to gain the trust of the children like attention, gifts, of affection, were their ultimate goal will be sexual abuse or exploitation. These can have serious and long-lasting effects on child, causing emotional trauma and psychological harm.[10]

iv.   **Sexting**: It means with the help of phone or computer texting in sexy manner to other people is called sexting. It can also include sending photos. Problem is that, these photos or texts might get leaked or there is chance of blackmailing the children with these as a proof and asking them or forcing them for more advancement.[11]

v.   **Exposure to Inappropriate Contents**: Inappropriate contents can be anything that are harmful or not appropriate for their age group. By exposure to that content it can affect their mental capacity, like watching any content of violence in nature then that can influence the mind of the children and also affect their thinking capacity. Not only violence but also anything of sexual content can have same effect on children.[12]

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[10] Cybercrime against women and children : escalation of cybercrime during pandemic and laws to curb it
August 13, 2021, *available at* - https://blog.ipleaders.in/cybercrime-women-children-escalation-cybercrime-pandemic-laws-curb/#Cybercrime_against_children (Last visited on April 15, 2024).

[11] All About Sexting, *available at* - https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/bullying-safety-privacy/all-about-sexting (Last visited on April 15, 2024).

[12] By Nasi Hako ,The psychological impact of exposing children to 'harmful content' and why age restrictions matter
Accreditation, 29 Nov 2021, *available at* - https://www.news24.com/life/archive/the-psychological-impact-of-exposing-children-to-harmful-content-and-why-age-restrictions-matter-20211129 (Last visited on April 15, 2024).
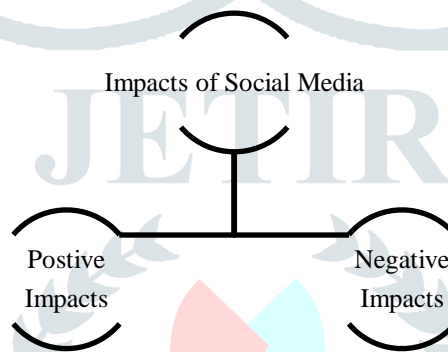
6.1. IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHILDREN

Social media has become a necessarily portion of the day by day lives of children and young people, significantly impacting how they communicate, socialize, and see the world around them. The approach of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok has revolutionized the way young people associated, advertising uncommon openings for network and self-expression. However, there are developing concerns around the hindering impacts over the excessive social media utilization on the well-being and development of children. From cyber bullying and online harassment to unrealistic body picture benchmarks and addictive behaviors, the effect of social media on this helpless is multifaceted and complex.

Firstly, social media helps the children with the access to data and information, empowering them to investigate differing viewpoints, culture, and ideas. It can improve their instructive encounter, giving roads for inquire about, collaboration, and creativity. However, the unlimited nature of online substance postures critical dangers, as children may experience unseemly or destructive materials, counting cyber bullying, explicit contents, and deception. Besides, the consistent exposure to curated pictures and idealized ways of life on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat can contribute to unrealistic standard of beauty and success possibly influencing children's self-esteem and mental well-being. Hence, social media offers various benefits; it too requires cautious consideration on development of social and psychological aspects of children's lives.

6.1.1. TYPES OF IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHILDREN

6.1.1.1. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DAWN OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Social media platforms have completely changed how people connect, communicate, and create communities. These platforms provide never-before-seen chances for expression and connection, but they also bring with them concerns about mental health, privacy, and the dissemination of false information. Navigating the effects of social media on society requires an understanding of both its advantages and disadvantages.

6.1.1.2. POSITIVE IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

Social media has made it possible for people to instantly share information and maintain relationships while greatly improving global communication and connectivity. It has also given companies fresh marketing chances and produced venues for community development and artistic expression. These advantages highlight how social media can revolutionize contemporary society.

i. **Increases connectivity**: Social media makes it easier for people to communicate with each other and with each other globally. It also helps to build stronger connections. A person who lives thousands of miles away from them can communicate with them.

ii. **Gives new knowledge and skills**: You can learn new information and skills via social media. Social media can teach you everything you need to know to advance your career, including python, cooking, knitting, floral design, any subjects and much more. Additionally, acquiring new skills empowers oneself and aids in employment.

iii. **News source**: In today's world, social media is a major news source. People watch more news on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube than on news channels and newspapers. Individuals think that social media news is more dependable and visually appealing than traditional news outlets.[13]

iv. **Prospects for Business and Marketing**: Through engagement and targeted advertising, businesses can reach a larger audience. Small business owners and entrepreneurs can advertise their goods and services for very little money.

v.

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[13] 10 Positive and Negative Effects of Social Media on Society January 20, 2023 by Yachika , *available at* - https://www.sociologygroup.com/pros-cons-social-media/ (Last visited on May 25, 2024).

6.1.1.3. NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

Social media has many positive aspects, but it has also brought about some serious drawbacks, like worries about security and privacy, developing mental health issues with mental health, and the spread of false information. These difficulties may result in polarization in society, emotional distress, and the misuse of personal information. Fostering a more secure and equitable online environment requires addressing these problems.

i. **Addiction to social media**: This is one of the most important impacts on children, that are addiction to these platforms. They constantly checking their accounts and always getting engaged on these platforms are very common nowadays. It is reported student spend more than 2 hours daily on these platforms.

ii. **Effects on academic**: This is another effect by the use of social media, as because of the addiction it can directly effects academic of the children. Not only the academics but also in sports and other productive activities which is helpful for the growth of children.

iii. **Effects on Mental health**: It is also observed that social media have caused many mental health issues in children like feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and anxiety, leading to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety disorders.

iv. **Lack of social skills**: Excess social media utilization can prevent face-to-face communication. It diminishes openings to create vital social skills. Children may battle with communication, sympathy, and conflict resolution. Driving to challenges in shaping and keeping up significant connections. [14]

7.1. ROLE OF PARENTS IN MEDIATING AND MONITORING

Parents play an increasingly important role in mediating and monitoring their children's and teenagers use of social media as a result of their increased engagement with these platforms. It is the responsibility of parents to help their kids navigate the digital world in a safe and responsible manner, weighing the advantages of connectivity and information access against potential hazards like exposure to inappropriate content, cyber bullying, and privacy concerns. This duty entails teaching children digital literacy, establishing limits, keeping an eye on their activities, and encouraging a positive balance between online and offline relationships. Parents can guarantee that their children have positive, safe, and enriching experiences on social media by playing an informed and active role in their lives. But the problem is that not every parents are aware of the emerging technologies. There are some parents that have limited knowledge on how does the internet and social media works and also the risks associated with it. This is the main reason why many children are not aware of the risks and get trapped in these social media crimes. So first there should be awareness class for the parents and teaching them on how to monitor their children's online activities.

8.1. CASE STUDY

8.1.1. Ahamed Mubashir v. The State Of Kerala on 5 April, 2024

The prosecution's case is that on October 4, 2020, the messaging app in accused's mobile phone contained child pornographic images and videos, which were found by the Inspector of Police at Info Park Police Station. The Cyber Cell in Kochi City provided this information. After conducting an investigation, the Police produced a final report in which they charged the accused with breaking several laws, including Sections 15 of the POCSO Act and Sections 67 and 67-B of the IT Act. The petitioner challenges the final report and the order dated 1.11.2022 in CMP.No. 468 of 2022, an application seeking discharge, from the Court of Additional District and Sessions Judge, Ernakulam was filed.

The court held that petitioner in this case has violated Sections 15(1) and 15(2) of the POCSO Act as well as Section 67-B(b) of the IT Act, the court said. The prosecution's case is that there were videos and pictures of young girls in their underwear on the accused's phone. The prosecution has made specific allegations that the petitioner intentionally stored child pornographic content. [15]

8.1.2. Ms X v. State & Ors. on 20 October, 2020

When the petitioner enrolled in a prominent school in Delhi at the age of sixteen. She got to know a boy who was taking the same course. She and he quickly became close friends after that. However, he wouldn't allow her to talk to anyone else because he was so protective of her. He had repeatedly taken her phone and read all of her messages. She states that the defendant started emotionally blackmailing her and threatening to commit suicide if she did not give him access to her personal images. Having given in to the above strategies, she started sending him her "intimate pictures". According to the petitioner, she decided in 2019 to pursue her education in Melbourne, Australia. She claims that she learned that the accused had posted her private photos on YouTube, Instagram,

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[14] By Mrunal - Impact of Social Media on Children4 Updated: February 6, 2024 , *available at* - https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/impact-of-social-media-on-children/ (Last visited on April 15, 2024).

[15] Ahamed Mubashir vs The State Of Kerala on 5 April, 2024, *available at* - https://indiankanoon.org/doc/7599146/ (Last visited on May 9 2024).

Twitter, and other platforms in October or November of 2019. She claims that the accused had misused the images by putting them online, and the uploaded pictures were the same ones she had sent to the accused when she was a minor.

This court ordered the respondents, Facebook, Google, and YouTube to ensure that the URLs listed in the petition are removed. The offensive images of a young girl on the webpages were undeniable. This led to the issuance of an order. It appears that a number of users other than the accused have uploaded and shared the offensive photos widely. This highlighted how urgent it is to stop the dissemination of offensive content on internet platforms.[16]

8.1.3. Fathima A.S. v. State of Kerala (2020) 4 KLT 617

The applicant was the mother of two older children, a girl, eight years old, and a boy, fourteen years old. She gave them permission to paint her bare body. The video was captured by the accused, who then shared it on social media. The mother's counsel has argued that her goal was to educate them about body positivity and sex education in India.

However, the court held that the video would violate the POCSO Act 2012 since it employs minors for sexual gratification. They further stated that there would have been no crime committed if the act had taken place inside their home's four partitions. The court said that after hearing both sides has dismissed the application of section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.[17]

9.1. CONCLUSION

In this computerized age, the rise of different social media crimes has cast a shadow over the innocence of childhood. Cyber bullying, online grooming, and exposure to inappropriate content are some example of cases that are targeting children within the virtual world. These crimes not only affects safety and security but also leaves a scars that can ruin their development and improvement. These can affect the academics performance and social development due to the anxiety and depression cause by the after effects of these crimes.

In addition, the predominance of social media crimes underscores the critical need for proactive measures to secure our children from online crimes. Parents, teachers, and policymakers must collaborate to set up strong shields and directions that prioritize the security and well-being of children. This incorporates advancing computerized education, teaching responsible online behavior, and assisting children for help and supports them when they faced cyber dangers. By cultivating a culture of awareness and responsibility, we will engage children to explore the advanced with confidence and strength.

Eventually, addressing to the issue of social media crimes against children requires a multi-faced approach that includes education, legislation, and community involvement. It is necessary that we recognize the seriousness of these violations and take concerted activity to prevent them from happening within the first place. Every child deserves the right to be safe and sustaining online environment, free from the hurts of cyber abuse and exploitation. By working together to combat social media violations, able to endeavor to form a brighter and more secure future for our children, both on and offline.

10.1. RECOMMENDATION

i. Parents should monitor their children's social media usage, teach them about online safety, privacy settings, and personal information risks.
ii. Enforce age restrictions content and provide with appropriate content.
iii. Implement digital literacy programs to teach online privacy, digital citizenship, and critical thinking to the children and also to the parents.
iv. Stakeholders should regularly assess the effectiveness of children's social media privacy protections and make necessary adjustments to address emerging challenges and threats.
v. Collaboration among social media companies, parents, educators, policymakers, and child advocacy groups is crucial for developing comprehensive solutions to safeguard children's online privacy.

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[16] Ms X vs State & Ors. on 20 October, 2020, *available at* - https://indiankanoon.org/doc/46906473/ (Last visited on May 7 2024).

[17]The Cyber Blog India, Fathima A.S. v. State of Kerala, December 13, 2021, *available at* - https://cyberblogindia.in/fathima-a-s-v-state-of-kerala/ (Last visited on April 30 2024).

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