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Tortured men team up in cyberia

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TORTURED HUSBANDS, brothers-in-law, fathers-in-law have just found a common platform in cyberspace. Their agenda: to campaign against the misuse of section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

This section, which was inserted into the penal code in 1983 reads: "Whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine." The section is non-bailable, non-compoundable (complaint cannot be quashed) and cognisable (arrests without investigation or warrants) on a report from a woman or close relative. There is no penalty (even a fine) for filing a false case.

Since most of these cases are registered against non-resident Indians (NRIs), Indians from all across the

globe are joining in to form dedicated websites, blogs, web-groups and message boards for offering legal, emotional and psychological support to men who are at the 'receiving end'.

After the suicide of Rajesh Has-mukh Deshmukh in Ahmedabad this month, the movement has gained momentum. Rajesh allegedly committed suicide on November 19 after his wife filed for a divorce to dissolve their 10-year-old marriage. "The rate of conviction is also poor, only 2 per cent in Delhi among 70,000 odd cases lodged annually. There has to be a realistic assessment of the situation. Complaints under 498A often costs the accused person his job, apart from social stigma," said J.K. Davar, convener of the site, www.498a.org. The website's office has already come up in many Indian cities and has spread to even the US, UK, Canada, West Asia and Africa.

Leading lawyers also agree that the misuse of the law was increasing. "Not much can be done except taking some

legal steps in anticipation. Men are on the receiving end because they cannot even go to anyone for relief," said leading family court lawyer in Mumbai, Nilofer Khatun.

Sites like Save Indian Family Foundation (www.saveindianfamily.org) have state-specific Yahoo groups for tortured men. "We want as many groups and sites. We have offices in all major Indian cities and have a lady president," said Anil Kumar a founder member of the foundation.

There were some cases of abuse seen in the complaints filed at Maharashtra Women's Commission but they were exceptions. "Every law is abused... But the tortures against women are much worse and higher in number. They are much more menacing. In some cases, after counselling, it was found that both were equally responsible for the relationship going sour," said member-secretary Sanjivani Kutti.

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