



Online Lures, Offline Nightmares: India’s Case Study on Social Media–Facilitated Human Trafficking

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ABSTRACT

This research study explores how traffickers use social media to target and lure people—mainly from tribal communities in India—into human trafficking, often by pretending to offer marriage or jobs. The researcher, based on various newspaper reports and field-based case studies, has tried to identify high-risk regions to support targeted prevention measures such as awareness camps. Through a qualitative case study approach, analyses have been done to find the traffickers’ methods, focusing on how trust, anonymity, and digital platforms are exploited to deceive economically vulnerable populations. The study pays particular attention to fake marriages that result in forced prostitution and abuse. The victimization pattern and the role of social media in facilitating exploitation have been studied and discussed here. It also examines the social and legal consequences of these crimes, the challenges in detection and prosecution, and gaps in existing legal frameworks and concludes with recommendations.

Keywords: Exploitation, Flesh Trade, Forced Marriage, Prostitute, Social Media, Trafficking

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, cases of human trafficking have increased significantly and mostly from tribal states of India, especially Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana & Odisha (Srinivas, 2020). The reason for such an increase in human trafficking from tribal states of India is linked with deep rooted poverty, limited access to education, job opportunities and pervasive socio-cultural discrimination. These systemic vulnerabilities make individuals, particularly women and children, easy targets for traffickers who promise a better life (Aziz, 2023). Thus, people from rural communities are more prone to human trafficking (Wahab, 2025). While the crime itself is not new, the widespread use of technology has changed the patterns and methods used to commit it. Especially with the growing use of social media, traffickers can easily target the victims. Social media platforms have become one of the favourite platforms among young generations, making them particularly vulnerable to human trafficking (Cotterill, 2023). However, it is not only the youth—many cases have shown that even well-educated and established women have fallen victim to trafficking. As per a recent report published by DataReportal (Kemp, 2024), India has a total of 42.6 crore people using social media, and 32.2 percent of the Indian population is using social media. In 2024, the cases of cybercrime have increased in comparison to 2023 in India. An average of 7000 cases are reported in India related to cybercrime. By May 2024, 7,40,000 cases were registered by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (Basuroy, 2025), which was increased to twelve lakhs by September 2024. Recently, many cases of human trafficking have been reported in India, where the accused used social media platforms to lure the victim. Currently, data on the total number of such cases is not available in India.

In one of the reports published in the US, from 2000 to 2020, 30 percent of sex trafficking survivors in US federal cases were recruited by their traffickers on social media, and by 2021, the number had increased to 41 percent and is still increasing (Nikkel, 2024). In another study, it was found that out of 133 sex trafficking cases in 2020, 59 percent were recruited on Facebook and 1 percent on Instagram (Nikkel, 2024).

A research study conducted by The Exodus Road (Nikkel, 2024) found that social media is one of the top five methods used by human traffickers to recruit victims. While most people use social media for entertainment or as a pastime, criminals have a far more sinister agenda. They actively browse social media platforms to identify and target potential victims.

Based on research studies conducted on this issue (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020), traffickers often select victims based on some common factors such as: Financial instability or unemployment of the victim or victim's family members, a desire for romantic relationships, emotionally weak person, lack of stable housing and seeking physical safety (from domestic abuse, local unrest, or war).

Once traffickers confirm a victim's vulnerability, they manipulate them using various tactics, such as "boyfriending" or "Romeo pimp" schemes (Nikkel, 2024), as well as "Active Recruitment" (Hook Fishing) and "Passive Recruitment" (Net Fishing) (NHRC, India in Collaboration with the Hidayatullah National Law University, Raipur Organised a National Conference on Combating Human Trafficking in the Digital Era, 2025)—both of which involve the use of digital technology to lure unsuspecting individuals.

In the boyfriending or Romeo pimp scheme, the trafficker pretends to be a caring and affectionate romantic partner, gradually gaining the victim's trust before exploiting them. In Hook Fishing (NHRC, India in Collaboration with the Hidayatullah National Law University, Raipur Organised a National Conference on Combating Human Trafficking in the Digital Era, 2025), the traffickers pretend to be a job recruiter. This remains one of the most common methods used to trap victims.

Fake job offers are the common practice which the traffickers used to attract the victims. They advertise various job opportunities related to different industries, and many young ladies are recruited into sex trafficking under the guise of modelling jobs. An infamous example is the Girls Do Porn (Limehouse, 2024) case, which involved serious allegations of sex trafficking, fraud, and coercion. Michael Pratt, the owner of the site, along with his associates, was accused of deceiving and coercing young women into filming pornographic videos under deceit.

It has been seen that in countries with high social media usage, the number of false modelling promises is particularly common. For instance, The Exodus Road has encountered numerous cases in Latin America, including the story of Daniela (Nikkel, 2021), a 14-year-old girl from Venezuela who fell victim to human trafficking after being deceived by the false promise of a modelling job. In December 2021, after two years of exploitation, Daniela was rescued during Operation Escondida—a coordinated effort led by The Exodus Road's Charlie Team and local law enforcement. As a result, the operation led to the rescue of 20 women and children and the arrest of 15 traffickers.

A similar study conducted in India has highlighted the increasing role of social media and online advertisements in facilitating sex trafficking in Goa (Chadha, 2024). The study, conducted by Anyay Rahit Zindagi, an NGO working in collaboration with the Goa Police, analyzed 75 rescue operations between June 2019 and July 2024. It revealed that traffickers are exploiting social media platforms to recruit victims under deceit, offering jobs in clubs, bars, hotels, and casinos, where they are later coerced into commercial sex work.

In a similar incident from Nepal (Rachel, 2021), 45% of women who were rescued from traffickers had met their traffickers through social media. This highlights the growing role of digital platforms in human trafficking, where perpetrators use online spaces to lure and exploit vulnerable individuals. Methods of trafficking may be different from case to case, but all such stories ended in human trafficking.

RESEARCH METHOD

Both empirical and non-empirical methods have been used for this research study. For non-empirical methodology, researchers have used various secondary sources available relating to this study, like academic journals, books, acts, research reports, policy documents, and newspaper articles.

For empirical methods, the researcher has used a qualitative case study approach, employing purposive sampling to select data. The researcher has taken interviews with victims of fake marriages. The researcher used the open interview method with unstructured questions for these methods.

The combination of these methods allows the study to integrate both theoretical and practical perspectives, resulting in deeper and more credible research findings.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS ROLE IN FACILITATING FAKE MARRIAGES

From the introductory part, it is clear that social media has become one of the primary platforms for trapping victims of human trafficking (Moore, 2024). In almost every case, the traffickers use the same common factors to target the victims. Based on various cases before the court worldwide, it has been noticed that traffickers generally use two kinds of strategies (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020) to target the victims. The first is Hunting strategies and the second is Fishing strategies.

Hunting strategies (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020): It is a “hunt” where traffickers spend considerable time building a

relationship with potential victims, often posing as friends, romantic partners, or mentors. They use social media, gaming platforms, and chat rooms to create quick intimacy and make lofty promises of a better life, education, or employment opportunities. Traffickers actively look for public displays of vulnerability online, such as oversharing personal information, expressing loneliness, or revealing financial difficulties. The term hunting itself signifies the trap set by traffickers to target victims.

In these strategies, the traffickers choose their victims strategically. The targets of the traffickers are not random, but are chosen based on specific characteristics, such as economic, emotional, or other vulnerabilities, which consequently make them more susceptible to exploitation or abuse. In this strategy, traffickers mostly trap the victims emotionally by making themselves emotionally dependent, like a lover.

Fishing strategies (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020): The term “fishing” in human trafficking refers to an online recruitment tactic in which traffickers create fake advertisements or profiles and wait for potential victims to respond. Perpetrators typically post enticing yet fraudulent advertisements for high-paying jobs, educational opportunities, or romantic relationships to initiate communication with potential victims. They deliberately target individuals who are marginalized, experiencing hardship, or belong to vulnerable populations, as these individuals are more likely to respond to offers that appear “too good to be true”. Fishing tactics entail traffickers publishing online ads and watching for responses from prospective customers or victims. This strategy is mostly followed by the traffickers who pose themselves as job recruiters, etc.

Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp are some of the social media platforms that traffickers use to trap victims (Human Trafficking Front, 2023). To better understand the patterns of these crimes and the strategies involved, let us examine how traffickers deceive innocent victims under the pretext of marriage and a job through social media through the following reported case studies:

Case 1: From Chattisgarh, India

A 17-year-old girl from Chhattisgarh (Drolia, 2024) was rescued from Rajasthan, where she was sold to a person and forced into marriage, leading to rape and sexual assault. She was initially lured through social media, where the main accused pretended to be an army personnel and promised her a job in the armed forces. The accused convinced the girl that she could earn a livelihood for her family if she joined the army. Thus, she fled with him to Bhopal. The accused then established a physical relationship

with her under the pretext of a job and later introduced one of his friends to her as a recruiter of the armed forces, unknown to her that she had been sold to this person for three lakhs. She was trafficked to Rajasthan and forced into marriage. She was later rescued, and the accused person was arrested and charged with various criminal offences. This case is an example of fishing strategies.

Case 2: From West Bengal, India

In another incident, two teenagers from West Bengal were enticed by traffickers online through social media platforms. Online, they chatted for a year, and after gaining the trust of the girls under the false pretext of a better life, love, and marriage, the girls agreed to meet the traffickers in person. That's when everything fell apart. The traffickers took them to New Delhi. Thankfully, an NGO called Shakti Vahini found them and brought them back. This case is an example of hunting strategies.

In another similar case from West Bengal, the victim, a minor girl, was forced to discontinue her studies due to financial issues of her family. It was during this time that she met the accused through social media, and they started chatting with each other. The accused developed an emotional relationship with her by taking advantage of her poor background and promised her that if she married him, then he would provide her with a better life and also an opportunity to pursue her education. The accused convinced her to run away with him. But when he came to her village to take her away, representatives from the Village Child Protection Committee alerted a social worker, who intervened in time and saved her life (PTI, 2021). This case is an example of hunting strategies.

Case 3: From Nagaland, India

In another case from North East India, a minor girl aged 17 years from Nagaland (Shekhar, 2017) was rescued just before she was about to board a flight to Delhi from a neighbouring airport. When the police questioned her, she said that she met a man online who said he was a businessman from Delhi. He'd reached out to her on social media, gained her trust, and even sent her a flight ticket. The police later said he intended to traffic her into the sex trade. Stories like this really show how dangerous online trafficking is—and why it's so important to stay alert and protect people who might be at risk. This case is an example of hunting strategies.

Case 4: From Bihar, India

In this case, three people were arrested as members of a trafficking racket while rescuing a minor girl from Bihar (Kumari, 2024). The team leader of the gang was Nandkishore Kumar. He used to search for victims on social media, from where he picked his targets and tricked them into dangerous situations. He then kidnapped them and trafficked them to different parts of India. This case is an example of hunting strategies.

REAL CASE STUDY OF FAKE MARRIAGES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Nazia (name changed for the victim's protection), a 24-year-old woman, was working at a reputed company in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, and belonged to a well-settled Muslim family. She met a man named Saiyed (name changed) through Facebook. Initially, they chatted for a few months before exchanging phone numbers and continuing their conversations on WhatsApp and video calls. During their interactions, Nazia disclosed details about her family background and personal life to Saiyed. Saiyed, who was from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, also shared information about his education and family, but deliberately concealed the fact that he was already married with children. He even lied about his family background to Nazia. He was not from a well-to-do family, nor was he as literate as he pretended.

As their relationship deepened, they fell in love and decided to marry. However, when Nazia informed her family about Saiyed, they opposed the marriage, citing concerns about his background. Saiyed never made an effort to speak with her family to address their concerns. Instead, he assured Nazia that he would move to Raipur and settle there, believing that her family would eventually accept their relationship. He manipulated her into trusting that he would handle everything. From the very beginning, he also convinced Nazia not to disclose their relationship to anyone until he was financially settled in Raipur. He claimed that he did not want anyone to speak ill of him to her, further isolating her from seeking guidance or support.

With an ill motive in mind, Saiyed arrived in Raipur, pretending to establish himself there. He rented a house and convinced Nazia that they should get married first, as her family would accept their relationship after their marriage. Nazia, believing him, left her home after a heated argument with her family. Saiyed arranged witnesses and a Maulana for their Nikah ceremony. However, he restricted Nazia from taking any pictures, claiming that his phone had a better camera. He also kept the Nikahnama (marriage document) with him.

After their Nikah, he took her to an unknown house, where they stayed for 5–6 days. During this time, Nazia had no contact with her family, nor did they reach out to her. When she questioned why they were staying there instead of their rented house, Saiyed claimed that he did not have enough money, thus he was staying in this house, which belonged to his friend, and would arrange proper accommodation once he secured a job.

On the sixth day, Saiyed suddenly told Nazia that she should move into a paying guest (PG) accommodation because he had to return to his hometown due to his mother's illness. He assured her that once he returned, he would rent a house for them. Nazia, still trusting him completely, agreed. He also convinced her not to inform his family about their marriage, citing his mother's health concerns. He promised that once everything was settled, he would formally announce their marriage and host a celebration in Raipur. He then made Nazia swear not to disclose their marriage to anyone. He even told her that he would take her to his home once everything was settled and would inform his family members and relatives about their marriage.

After Saiyed left for Lucknow, Nazia moved into a PG and continued her job. However, days passed, and Saiyed stopped responding to her calls and messages. Initially, she thought he might be facing a family emergency. But one day, when she called again, a woman answered the phone. Upon questioning, the woman revealed that she was Saiyed's wife.

Shocked, Nazia told her that she was married to Saiyed. The woman demanded proof, which Nazia did not have. Instead of listening, the woman verbally abused Nazia, accusing her of trying to trap her legally married husband, who was also the father of her child.

Nazia's world was shattered. Her entire life had suddenly turned upside down. In an attempt to verify the truth, she tried to contact the people who had conducted her Nikah and the witnesses present at the ceremony, only to discover that none of them existed. The entire marriage had been a fraud.

Summoning the courage to confront Saiyed, she travelled to Lucknow without informing Saiyed or any of her family members. Even when she left Raipur for Lucknow at that time, she was not sure about the address that Saiyed had sent to her. But surprisingly, the address was correctly given by Saiyed. However, upon reaching his house, she was shocked to see his family's conditions. She was physically assaulted by his family members, including his mother. Saiyed denied their marriage and accused Nazia of forcing him into it. He refuted all her claims. She even met his wife and children. It was during that time that Nazia came to know that Saiyed was not a good person; rather, he was associated with many criminals from his neighbourhood.

Nazia then approached the local police station and provided a video recording of the abuse she had suffered at Saiyed's home. However, the local police advised her to return to Raipur for safety reasons and file a complaint there as the offense was committed in Raipur. Upon returning, she was first counselled at Mahila Thana, Raipur, where she was advised to contact a criminal lawyer and lodge an FIR against Saiyed. Nazia's case is an example of a fake marriage, where she became a victim of social media, from where she met a man who falsely claimed to be unmarried and from a well-settled family.

Despite being an educated woman from a well-established family, Nazia became a victim of fraud and deception. In reality, she was raped under the false pretext of marriage for 5–6 days. At the Raipur police station, she was counselled to share everything that she had gone through with her family to gain their support. Saiyed had taken advantage of the fact that she was reluctant to inform her family, assuming they would not stand by her.

Nazia's biggest mistake was not verifying Saiyed's background before trusting him. She ignored her family's advice to investigate his family and invite them for a formal marriage discussion. Now, the police are conducting an inquiry.

Cases like Nazia's are not uncommon. Many women remain silent out of fear, societal judgment, or shame. Some incidents are reported, while many go unreported. Nazia is now back with her family, struggling to overcome the trauma she endured.

In this particular case, the positive aspect was that Nazia remained in her hometown and did not move to another place with Saiyed. Even when she visited Lucknow, it was a shocking moment for Saiyed as he didn't expect Nazia to visit his hometown. Maybe because of that, only he didn't get any time to react or take Nazia from his place. If anything happens to Nazia, then the blame will be on him, as his neighbor has seen everything that has happened there. In many similar cases, families lose track of their daughters entirely. Generally, when a girl leaves her home, the first step is losing contact with her family. Soon after, she may be trafficked into the sex trade, with no time to comprehend what is happening to her. By the time she realizes the truth, it is often too late. Only a few victims are ever rescued from such horrific situations.

Nazia was fortunate that she was not sold into trafficking. However, what happened to her was still legally and morally wrong. No girl should have to suffer such deceit and betrayal. Marriage is not just a union between two individuals—it is a bond between two families.

HOW TRAFFICKERS TARGET VICTIMS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA?

Based on the above case studies and other studies conducted in this field, the researcher has identified a common pattern in how traffickers operate online. Their process typically follows these steps:

a. Monitoring Social Media Profiles: The traffickers gather information from the victim's social media activities about their family backgrounds through observation.

b. Establishing Contact: Sending a friend request with the intention to build an emotional connection under the pretense of being a boyfriend or a job recruiter.

c. Gaining Trust Through Conversations: First, they will chat through social media platforms. When the victim becomes content, they request to exchange phone numbers and continue conversations through audio and video calls.

d. Creating Emotional Dependency: Their main focus is to manipulate the victim into trusting them blindly so that they can persuade the victim to comply with their instructions.

e. Arranging a Meeting in Secrecy: After gaining the trust, their next task is to ask the victim to meet in person at a specific location, and that too they insist that the victim keep the meeting secret from family and friends.

f. Exploiting the Victim: Based on different situations, sometimes they force the victim into marriage or lure them away with a fake job offer. Once the victim is alone, they grab their phone, saying it's for their own safety or to stop anyone from tracking them. After that, nobody can figure out where the victim is.

g. Trafficking and Exploitation: First, the traffickers transport the victim to their pre-determined location, and from there, the victim will be trafficked to different locations. In some trafficking cases, they force the victim into marriage, sexually exploit them, and later sell them to another person. This cycle continues unless the victim is rescued. When it comes to cross-border trafficking, traffickers take longer than they do with interstate or intrastate cases. Crossing a border means dealing with more steps and more people, like border agents and middlemen.

h. Victims' Silence and Psychological Manipulation: In almost every case of human trafficking, victims never disclose the trafficker's identity due to fear and psychological manipulation. They are brainwashed to the extent that they don't discuss their experiences with anyone. This tactic of emotional control is a key method traffickers use to trap girls and women.

Generally, in trafficking cases, the modus operandi are the same. Trafficking of girls through social media operates as a nexus, where a group of individuals with their specific designated roles, like targeting the victim on social media, then transporting them to the desired location, were involved in these crimes. Multiple individuals play specific roles in the process. Once a victim is sent to their destination, then again, a new search begins for a prey, a never-ending cycle. This cycle underscores the urgent need for awareness and proactive measures to protect vulnerable individuals from falling victim to trafficking through social media. It would be incorrect to say that social media is used solely by traffickers to target victims. In fact, there have also been cases where trafficking victims were rescued with the help of social media.

In one of the success stories of a positive use of a social media platform, a passenger traveling on a train in a northeastern state of India rescued 26 children by using Twitter (Kalvapalle, 2018). His timely action has saved the lives of these children. He noticed all the children aged between 10 to 14 appeared distressed, and this made him suspicious, and he tweeted the situation to the railway authorities, who promptly took action and rescued the children at the next station. This case shows that social media tools can be used to provide justice if they are used properly. Thus, it will not be wrong to say that social media platforms have both merits and demerits.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND CHALLENGES IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

There is no specific law in India for social media regulation. Generally, any issues related to social media fall under cybercrimes and are dealt with under the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act). However, over time, the Indian judiciary, through landmark judgments such as *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*, AIR 2015 SC 1523, has made significant remarks on the use of social media, particularly concerning freedom of speech, the circulation of fake news, and misinformation.

However, the key question that arises is whether the IT Act, 2000, is sufficient to address the growing issue of trafficking through social media. Recently, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India, in collaboration with Hidayatullah National Law University, Raipur, organized a National Conference on Combating Human Trafficking in the Digital Era (NHRC, India in Collaboration with the Hidayatullah National Law University, Raipur Organised a National Conference on Combating Human Trafficking in the Digital Era, 2025), where several key recommendations were made:

a. Amend the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA) to provide clearer distinctions between child and adult trafficking, with specific provisions to include cyber trafficking within its scope.

b. Establish formal linkages between the ITPA and the IT Act to bridge existing legal gaps and address trafficking in the digital realm.

c. Increase awareness regarding self-reporting portals, such as the Centralized Complaint and Prevention of Women and Children (CCPWC), to encourage public participation in reporting trafficking cases.

d. Equip and train Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) with the necessary skills and resources to combat trafficking in the digital era effectively.

e. Develop a systematic approach for collecting authentic data on human trafficking across different categories to better inform policies and interventions.

f. Promote community engagement as a critical component in combating trafficking by encouraging local communities to actively prevent and report such crimes.

Existing Legal Framework on Human Trafficking:

Although there is no dedicated law addressing cyber trafficking, India has several laws to combat human trafficking, including:

a. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) – A primary law for preventing and penalizing human trafficking.

b. Sections 143 and 144 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) address various aspects of trafficking cases.

Additionally, trafficking cases may also be prosecuted under other laws, depending on the circumstances and the age of the victims-

i. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act (POCSO), 2012 – Used in cases involving trafficked children for sexual exploitation.

ii. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015- Applicable when trafficking victims are minors.

It is important to mention that a specific mechanism is needed to identify fake accounts on social media. Unless fake profiles are effectively controlled, it will be challenging to curb trafficking-related crimes facilitated through digital platforms. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can play a crucial role in tackling this issue.

Suggested Measures to Address Fake Accounts:

In most of the case studies till now, it has been noticed that traffickers create fake accounts on social media to manipulate the victims. For every new

victim, they create a new profile. In one of the recent studies, it was found that fake accounts are being sold in the underground market (Mazza et al., 2022). Thus, it's very important to track those fake accounts to break the nexus of trafficking. For this, AI can be useful to track those fake accounts. The following are some suggestions to track the fake account in social media through AI: -

1. Machine Learning Algorithms (Jindal, 2024): Machine learning is the most advanced method for detecting fake accounts. Here, the algorithms analyze vast amounts of data, including text, images, and user interactions, to develop predictive models that determine whether an account is fake.

2. Natural Language Processing (NLP) (Development, 2023): Natural Language Processing algorithms help analyze the text and language used by social media users. These algorithms recognize patterns and linguistic characteristics often associated with fake accounts, such as repetitive content, unnatural phrasing, or the frequent use of certain trigger words.

The 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report by the U.S. Department of State addresses several critical issues concerning human trafficking in India (India, 2024):

- In 2022, the government of India investigated 2,250 trafficking cases under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), compared to 2,189 cases in 2021. However, the specific IPC sections included in these statistics were not disclosed.

- Prosecutions increased in 2022, with 676 trafficking cases completed, leading to the conviction of 204 traffickers in 131 cases.

- Acquittals remained high, with 1,134 suspects acquitted in 545 cases, resulting in an 81% acquittal rate. This data report highlights that the Indian government's protective services for trafficking survivors remain inadequate. The absence of a systematic victim and witness assistance program, including legal services, discourages some victims from participating in criminal justice proceedings. Additionally, the government does not cover travel and related expenses for victims and witnesses, further hindering their involvement in trials. While video testimony is permitted, and some videoconferencing facilities exist for child witnesses, these measures are insufficient to address the broader needs of trafficking survivors (India, 2024).

- In 2021, by comparison, 201 cases were prosecuted, leading to 64 convictions in 32 cases, while 520 suspects were acquitted in 169 cases, with an 84% acquittal rate.

- Four of India's 36 states and territories accounted for nearly half of all reported trafficking cases. This was likely due to better reporting mechanisms in those states, rather than a higher prevalence of trafficking.

- The lack of comprehensive, transparent, and reliable data from several states suggested a potential reluctance to record trafficking cases, raising concerns about underreporting.

This data underscores the need for improved law enforcement, better reporting mechanisms, and stronger legal frameworks to combat human trafficking cases in India effectively. Another important point to mention here is that due to a lack of legal regulatory framework for social media platforms, such kinds of issues are increasing worldwide (Social Media-Facilitated Trafficking of Children and Young People, 2023). Thus, an international framework is required to regulate the various social media platforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

Apart from those mentioned above, the following are some of the other recommendations:

1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Regulations:

- a. Enforce strict cyber laws to combat online trafficking, ensuring social media platforms are held accountable for illegal activities.

- b. Develop international cooperation to track and dismantle trafficking networks operating across borders.

- c. Mandate tech companies to implement robust content moderation and AI-based monitoring to detect and remove trafficking-related activities.

2. Enhancing Awareness and Digital Literacy:

- a. Launch nationwide awareness campaigns to educate individuals, especially youth and vulnerable groups, about online trafficking tactics.

- b. Integrate digital safety education into school and college curricula to teach young users how to recognize and report suspicious activities.

- c. Conduct community-based workshops on online safety and trafficking risks, targeting at-risk populations, parents, and educators.

3. Strengthening Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms:

- a. Establish dedicated cyber cells within law enforcement agencies to track, investigate, and shut down trafficking operations on social media.

- b. Collaborate with social media platforms to create real-time reporting mechanisms for users to flag suspicious content.

- c. Ensure swift action and victim protection when cases of trafficking are reported, preventing further harm to victims.

d. Law enforcement agencies should identify areas with a high number of reported trafficking cases and locations where victims are most likely to end up. This will enable them to collaborate with local NGOs and authorities to monitor suspicious activities and dismantle trafficking networks. Identifying these hotspots will be crucial in breaking the chain of trafficking.

Additionally, children from families living below the poverty line and those in areas recently affected by natural disasters are more vulnerable to trafficking. Therefore, a collaborative effort between law enforcement, NGOs, and community organizations is essential to track and eliminate such networks.

4. Providing Support and Rehabilitation for Victims:

a. Establish safe houses and rehabilitation centers for survivors of online trafficking, providing medical, psychological, and legal support.

b. Develop helplines and online reporting portals to allow victims and witnesses to anonymously report trafficking incidents.

c. Offer economic and vocational training programs for survivors to help them reintegrate into society and reduce vulnerability to re-trafficking.

5. Strengthening International and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:

a. Foster partnerships between governments, social media companies, NGOs, and law enforcement agencies to share intelligence and disrupt trafficking networks.

b. Encourage cross-border cooperation to track and prosecute traffickers using online platforms.

c. Develop standardized global guidelines for detecting, reporting, and preventing trafficking through social media.

6. Missing person report:

Parents should immediately report the missing person to the nearest police station without waiting for 24 hours.

7. Parents Duty:

Parents should be cautious about their children's engagement on social media platforms. They should spend quality time with their children to understand their online activities and the kind of friends they interact with on social media. Additionally, parents must remain vigilant and observe any changes in their children's behaviour, as these could be warning signs of potential risks. By implementing these measures, we can create a safer digital

environment and protect individuals from falling victim to trafficking through social media.

DISCUSSION

In the past, and even today, our parents often advise us not to befriend strangers. Before the advent of advanced technology and our fast-paced lifestyles, people spent more quality time with their families, sharing moments of joy and sorrow within their close circle. But with the advent of online spaces and increasing reliance on virtual entertainment, people are becoming increasingly socially isolated.

Emotional isolation from family makes individuals more vulnerable to outside influences, and sadly, traffickers and predators often exploit this emotional emptiness to lure and trap their victims. In today's digital age, social media platforms have dramatically changed how we build and experience relationships, including the sacred bond of marriage. These sites offer unprecedented opportunities for connection, where people can connect and even marry remotely. However, such online unions also present unique problems, ranging from identity theft and emotional exploitation to legal and cultural complexities.

“Social media marriage” – relationships that begin or are sustained through online interaction – illustrates the intersection between technological advancement and the age-old desire for a personal partner, a core aspect of human nature. While these marriages may be legally valid, they raise questions about trust, emotional integrity, and the sustainability of cyber relationships in relation to real-life relationships. For safety, be cautious in online communication, do not share personal details with strangers, and never meet strangers alone. If attending a meeting is necessary, whether for social purposes or work opportunities, a trusted person should be informed or accompany you. A little caution can prevent serious consequences. Ultimately, nothing can replace the genuine love, care, and protection of family. While social media may create new relationships, relying on family for emotional and moral guidance is far safer and more meaningful. As computer-based interactions continue to impact individuals' lives, society needs to prioritize awareness, legal protection, and emotional education to ensure that technology enhances, not diminishes, human relationships.

From the above study, it can be concluded that human trafficking via social media is not just a legal problem, but also a social and legal issue. In many ways, we all in society share a responsibility for this.

CONCLUSION

Like any other technology, social media platforms have their own benefits and drawbacks. It's up to the users how they use it. Like any other technology, social media comes with significant risks, especially when it is used without adequate awareness or legal safeguards. As pointed out in this research, traffickers misused these platforms to exploit vulnerable people under the false pretext of love, marriage, and jobs; thus, there is an urgent need for a proper legal framework to address these issues. Apart from that, we need strong legal frameworks, AI-based surveillance to detect fake accounts, and with that, widespread digital literacy programs are essential to protect individual privacy and security. Social media must be regulated not only to curb its misuse but also to ensure it remains a tool for connection and empowerment, not exploitation. In law, it is said that self-help is the best help. Thus, while using social media, one has to be aware and cautious when making friends with an unknown person through social media for their own safety.

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