Digital Trafficking of Women and Girls in Bangladesh: Legal and Policy Imperatives

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Abstract
The rise of digital technology has transformed the landscape of human trafficking, enabling traffickers to exploit online platforms for the recruitment, manipulation, and coercion of vulnerable populations. In Bangladesh, women and girls have emerged as primary targets of this evolving form of exploitation, facilitated by social media, messaging apps, and digital grooming tactics. This study investigates the phenomenon of digital trafficking in Bangladesh with a specific focus on the legal and policy responses to these emerging threats. Drawing on secondary data, legal analysis, and documented case studies, the article critically examines the extent to which current laws, such as the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 and the Cyber Security Act, 2023 adequately address online-facilitated trafficking. Findings reveal substantial limitations in existing legal frameworks, institutional coordination, and digital enforcement capacities. The research argues for urgent legal reform, enhanced digital forensic capabilities, and structured partnerships with technology platforms to combat trafficking in the digital realm. The article concludes with actionable policy recommendations aimed at strengthening the protection of women and girls in cyberspace and ensuring accountability for digital perpetrators.

Keywords: Digital Trafficking, Female Trafficking, Bangladesh, Legal Framework, Policy Reform

1. Introduction

Human trafficking has long been recognized as a serious violation of human rights. The crime remains unchanged, although the methods employed have markedly advanced. In recent years, digital technology has provided traffickers with novel means to find, recruit, and exploit vulnerable persons, particularly women and girls. The internet is widely utilized as a mechanism for exploitation, ranging from fraudulent job postings to online marriage solicitations and grooming via social media. The transition from conventional trafficking tactics to internet platforms has rendered the crime more challenging to identify, avert, and punish.

Bangladesh has witnessed a significant increase in this type of trafficking. As internet access expands, smartphone usage proliferates, and a significant population of unemployed youth particularly in rural regions exists, traffickers have discovered novel methods to exploit victims.

Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp are frequently utilized to engage with women and girls, deceive them with fraudulent assurances, and subsequently coerce them into sexual exploitation or labor. The issue is especially critical for at-risk populations, including economically disadvantaged women and individuals from the Rohingya refugee community. These individuals frequently possess inadequate education and legal safeguards, rendering them more susceptible to cyber traffickers.

At the same time, Bangladesh's legal and institutional responses have struggled to keep up with these changes. The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 (hereafter, PSHTA, 2012), was a major step forward in addressing trafficking, but it focuses largely on physical, cross-border crimes. The law does not fully address how digital platforms are used in the recruitment and exploitation process. Other laws, such as Cyber Security Act, 2023 (afterward CSA, 2023), are more focused on cybercrime in general and are not clearly designed to deal with trafficking-related offenses. As a result, law enforcement agencies often lack the tools, training, and coordination needed to address digital trafficking effectively.

This study examines how traffickers are using online platforms to exploit women and girls in Bangladesh. It explores the methods used to recruit victims, the types of exploitation they face, and the legal and policy challenges that hinder effective response. The focus on women and girls is important, as they represent a significant majority of trafficking victims in the country. Gender-based discrimination, poverty, and harmful social practices such as child marriage increase their vulnerability. When combined with the risks created by online spaces, these factors form a dangerous environment where trafficking can flourish.

The research is based on a review of existing literature, official reports, media investigations, and relevant legal documents. It aims to fill a gap in the current understanding of human trafficking in Bangladesh by paying specific attention to its digital dimension. While there is growing awareness of human trafficking in general, far less attention has been paid to how technology is changing the way traffickers operate. This research argues that tackling online trafficking requires a new set of tools both legal and technological as well as stronger cooperation between government bodies, civil society, and digital platforms.

This research is guided by three central research questions. First, how are digital technologies being used to recruit and exploit women and girls in Bangladesh? Understanding the methods traffickers use such as social media, messaging apps, and online job scams is essential to identifying points of intervention. Second, what laws and policies exist to address this issue, and where do these frameworks fall short in the context of digital trafficking? While existing laws may cover certain aspects of human trafficking or cybercrime, they often lack specific provisions for crimes that occur entirely or partially online. Third, what kinds of reforms or interventions legal, institutional, and technological could help protect victims and prevent exploitation in digital

spaces? These questions shape the structure of the article and provide a roadmap for analyzing the issue and proposing practical, rights-based solutions.

By addressing these questions, this article aims to contribute to the wider conversation about human trafficking in the digital age. It also seeks to provide clear, evidence-based recommendations for improving policy and legal responses in Bangladesh, with a focus on protecting the rights and safety of women and girls.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, desk-based research methodology centered on secondary data analysis. It draws upon a wide array of sources including academic literature, legal documents, policy papers, international organization reports, and media investigations related to human trafficking and digital exploitation in Bangladesh. The research involved a purposive sampling of sources published between 2010 and 2024, with a specific emphasis on materials addressing the intersection of gender, trafficking, and technology. Special attention was given to identifying documented case studies of digital trafficking from reputable national newspapers (e.g., The Daily Star, The Business Standard), investigative NGO reports (e.g., BRAC, Justice Care, IOM), and peer-reviewed journals. Legal instruments such as the PSHTA, 2012, the CSA, 2023, and relevant sections of the Penal Code (1860) were also examined to assess the scope and limitations of current legal frameworks.

Thematic analysis was used to categorize the data into key patterns, including recruitment mechanisms, victim profiles, forms of exploitation, and gaps in enforcement. Although the study did not conduct fieldwork or interviews due to ethical and logistical constraints, triangulation was ensured by cross-referencing information across different types of sources. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how digital technologies are enabling new forms of trafficking and where policy and institutional responses are failing. However, the absence of primary data and survivor narratives is acknowledged as a limitation, which future empirical studies could address.

3. Literature Review

Human trafficking has long been studied through legal, sociological, and gender-based frameworks, often focusing on poverty, migration, and systemic inequality as root causes. More recently, researchers have begun to explore how digital technologies have reshaped the trafficking landscape. With increasing access to mobile phones and internet services, traffickers are now using online platforms to recruit, manipulate, and exploit victims, especially women and girls. This growing trend of "digital trafficking" is a major concern in both global and South Asian contexts.

Numerous global studies have investigated how social media and messaging platforms facilitate the more efficient and covert operations of traffickers. Latonero (2011) was one of the initial scholars to highlight the role of online classifieds and social media in enabling human

trafficking. Latonero's subsequent research highlighted how mobile technology exacerbates these dangers, particularly for economically disadvantaged groups. Europol (2020) and UNODC (2023) have recognized the digital dimension as an escalating threat, cautioning that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok are being exploited to entice young victims through fraudulent job offers, romantic relationships, or modeling prospects. These platforms provide traffickers with anonymity, rapidity, and extensive reach, hence complicating prevention and identification efforts for law enforcement. From a gendered viewpoint, researchers have consistently contended that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by trafficking due to prevailing power disparities and patriarchal conventions (Balch, 2019; O'Connell Davidson, 2016) Cultural traditions in South Asia, including underage marriage and dowry, compounded by poverty and inadequate education, heighten girls' susceptibility to exploitation. Studies from Bangladesh, India, and Nepal have shown that traffickers often pose as marriage brokers or recruiters, preying on families in financial distress (Huda et al., 2022; Joarder & Miller, 2014). Once trafficked, victims are often isolated, physically and sexually abused, and left with limited options for recovery or reintegration.

In the case of Bangladesh, the majority of academic studies on trafficking have focused on labor exploitation, sexual trafficking, and irregular migration. Azad (2019) documented the deception involved in the recruitment of Bangladeshi women for domestic work in the Gulf, often leading to conditions akin to forced labor. Khan et al. (2024) explored the psychological and social consequences of trafficking on returnee victims, especially women. While these studies highlight the severe effects of trafficking, they pay limited attention to how digital platforms are transforming the methods of recruitment and control. This gap in the literature is significant, especially given the rapid rise in smartphone usage and internet access in Bangladesh.

Recent events and journalistic investigations have revealed alarming patterns of online-facilitated trafficking. A prominent example is the 2021 case of a trafficking network that used TikTok to lure Bangladeshi girls with promises of fame, only to smuggle them across the border to India for sexual exploitation (Anam, 2021). A similar trend was reported by TBS (2024), which highlighted how platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are being used to target vulnerable women and girls through fake job offers and online grooming. These cases demonstrate the real-world consequences of digital trafficking and the need for more academic work to analyze and address this issue.

In terms of policy response, Bangladesh has made efforts to combat trafficking through laws such as the PSHTA, 2012. While this law includes broad definitions of trafficking and provides penalties for offenders, it does not explicitly cover online forms of recruitment and exploitation. CSA, 2023, intended to address cybercrimes, also lacks specific clauses on digital trafficking. Reza and Sadat (2024) argue that these gaps leave law enforcement with limited tools to prosecute traffickers who operate online. As a result, many cases involving digital abuse are either underreported or misclassified.

This concern is substantiated by international evaluations. State (2023) said that Bangladesh was taking too long to investigate and prosecute trafficking instances, especially those that used the internet. It also talked about the low incidence of convictions and the lack of integrated digital monitoring systems. Groups like IOM and UNODC have said similar things and asked for increased focus on the digital side of trafficking. In a 2024 briefing, IOM stressed how important it is for digital service providers, law enforcement, and civil society to work together to stop the online abuse of women and girls (IOM, 2024).

The fact that displaced people are vulnerable, especially the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar, makes things much more complicated. Alam et al. (2023) and Aiyub Kadir et al. (2024) say that traffickers often utilize mobile apps and messaging platforms to get in touch with refugee women and give them false hope of marriage or moving to a new country. Refugee women are especially easy targets for internet scams and exploitation because they don't have legal status, aren't good with technology, and don't have access to safe spaces.

Even though more people are becoming aware of internet trafficking, scholarly writing about Bangladesh is still behind the times. Even if official data, media reports, and NGO publications are helpful, there is still not enough academic work that combines gender analysis, digital technologies, and trafficking law. But there aren't many of these studies yet. The goal of this paper is to help fill this gap. It integrates ideas about trafficking and gender-based violence with the real-life problems of online exploitation by looking at how traffickers utilize digital platforms to target women and girls in Bangladesh. It also gives us a starting point for talking about how laws and policies can change to deal with this new and risky area.

4. Legal and Policy Framework

The PSHTA, 2012 is the main law that Bangladesh uses to fight human trafficking. This Act gives a comprehensive definition of trafficking in people, including both internal and cross-border trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced labor, and other types of abuse. Section 3 of the Act makes it a crime to traffic people by using threats, lies, fraud, or abuse of power, and it sets fines that range from five years to life in prison. Section 26 of the law also sets up specific anti-trafficking tribunals and offers protections and rehabilitation for victims (Islam, 2024).

The PSHTA has some good points, but it is not ready to deal with the growing use of digital platforms in trafficking activities. There is no mention of the internet, social media, mobile apps, or other digital forms of communication in the law. It doesn't define or make illegal online grooming, digital recruitment, or coercion with technology. As a result, when traffickers use platforms like TikTok, Facebook, or WhatsApp to deceive and recruit women and girls, the conduct may fall outside the operational language of the Act unless it leads directly to a traditional act of transportation or confinement. This creates a definitional gap between how trafficking is practiced today and how it is legally recognized.

Additionally, the PSHTA does not include provisions on handling or preserving digital evidence. There is no explicit procedural guidance on obtaining communications records, geo-location data, or social media content. The Act also lacks clarity on jurisdiction over cross-border digital crimes, particularly in cases where the recruiter operates from another country, but the victim is based in Bangladesh. This creates evidentiary and prosecutorial challenges for law enforcement, as the absence of mutual legal assistance frameworks with social media companies or foreign jurisdictions inhibits timely investigation and prosecution.

To address cybercrime more broadly, Bangladesh enacted the CSA, 2023, which repealed and replaced the earlier Digital Security Act, 2018. The CSA addresses a wide array of offenses, including hacking, data breaches, identity fraud, and cyberterrorism. For instance, Section 17 criminalizes unauthorized access to computers and digital systems, Section 19 penalizes the publication or transmission of false, offensive, or fear-inducing information in digital format, and Section 21 deals with identity-related fraud and misuse of digital identities (Shamsad Binte & Md. Najmus, 2024).

However, the CSA does not explicitly address or criminalize human trafficking in digital contexts. It does not contain any dedicated provisions targeting digital forms of recruitment, online grooming, deceptive employment advertisements, or coercion via social media platforms methods commonly used by traffickers. As a result, offenses involving platforms like Facebook, TikTok, or WhatsApp are not directly addressed under the Act unless they fall within broader and nonspecific cybercrime definitions.

Moreover, while the CSA includes powers for law enforcement to collect digital evidence and investigate cyber offenses, it does not provide specialized legal tools to detect or prosecute human trafficking operations that are facilitated digitally. Consequently, trafficking cases involving the internet are often either misclassified under general cybercrime sections of the CSA or prosecuted using provisions of the Penal Code, such as Section 362 (abduction) or Section 415 (cheating). These legal routes fail to capture the organized, systemic, and often gendered nature of trafficking crimes in the digital age.

The *Penal Code* of 1860 does contain some sections that touch upon trafficking-related offenses. Section 366 criminalizes abduction for the purpose of illicit intercourse or marriage; Sections 372 and 373 prohibit the sale and purchase of minors for prostitution (Chopra & Guharoy, 2024). However, these provisions are limited by outdated terminology and conceptual framing. They do not encompass the complexity of modern trafficking networks, especially those that operate virtually or across borders. Nor do they integrate concepts such as consent invalidated by deception, digital recruitment, or the commodification of victims through social media content.

At the institutional level, the enforcement of anti-trafficking laws suffers from fragmentation. While the PSHTA calls for the establishment of special tribunals and coordination between relevant ministries, implementation has been inconsistent. The tribunals established under Section

26 of the PSHTA remain limited in number and are often overburdened. Case backlog, limited training of judges and investigators, and a lack of standardized procedures for dealing with digital evidence further restrict the law's effectiveness. Investigators at the district and sub-district levels often lack access to digital forensics units or cybercrime specialists. Without formal cooperation protocols between national authorities and global tech companies, requests for account data or content removal are delayed, inconsistent, or ignored altogether.

One of the most pressing legal gaps lies in the absence of binding obligations for online platforms to cooperate with authorities in cases of trafficking. There is currently no national law or regulation in Bangladesh that mandates social media companies to establish trafficking-specific content detection tools, reporting mechanisms, or data-sharing frameworks tailored to local legal needs. As a result, authorities must rely on informal or case-by-case communication with global firms, which limits their ability to prevent digital recruitment and respond to emerging threats.

5. Findings and Analysis: Digital Trafficking of Women and Girls in Bangladesh

5.1 Digital Recruitment: Social Media as the New Trafficking Ground

Thematic analysis of documented cases, legal reports, and investigative journalism confirms that traffickers in Bangladesh increasingly use digital tools to initiate and facilitate trafficking. Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and IMO are frequently used to approach vulnerable girls and young women (Husain, 2024). Recruitment typically involves the promise of overseas employment, romantic relationships, or social media fame.

The TikTok trafficking ring, 2021 is the most well-documented case. Operating across Jashore, Satkhira, and Dhaka, traffickers used TikTok videos and chat features to lure teenage girls, some as young as 14. Victims were deceived into thinking they would be married or gain online fame and were subsequently smuggled into India for sexual exploitation. According to the Rapid Action Battalion and The Daily Star, over 30 girls were trafficked to brothels in Hyderabad and Bangalore (Anam, 2021; Khan, 2024). Despite clear signs of deception and cross-border movement, initial arrests were made under Sections 372 and 373 of the Penal Code, with delayed or absent application of Section 3(1) of the PSHTA, 2012.

5.2 Target Profiles: Gendered and Socioeconomic Vulnerability

Trafficking victims are primarily adolescent girls aged 13–19 from rural and peri-urban regions, often characterized by poverty, school dropout, and limited digital literacy. Though precise figures from BRAC Legal Aid Services' 2023 report are unavailable, BRAC's annual reporting emphasizes the vulnerability of this demographic (BRAC, 2023).

Care (2023) reports that many of these girls are deceived through online grooming strategies involving false job offers, romantic propositions, or promises of fame on platforms like TikTok and Facebook. A documented case involved two sisters from Mymensingh, aged 15 and 17, who

were contacted by a recruiter on TikTok posing as a modeling agent. After being lured into a private chat, they were manipulated into producing explicit content and later blackmailed when they attempted to exit the arrangement.

In urban settings, digital trafficking often targets unemployed youth from low-income neighborhoods. An investigative report by The Business Standard highlighted cases in Dhaka and Chattogram where young women were recruited via Facebook Messenger with fake job offers in the Gulf. One 19-year-old from Jatrabari, Dhaka, submitted her passport and ID photo expecting a visa, only to be extorted and threatened with exposure if she withdrew (TBS, 2024).

Among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, the situation is more severe. According to Alam et al. (2023) and the Ahmed and Hölz (2024), traffickers exploit displacement and lack of protection by posing as marriage brokers. A documented case involves a 15-year-old Rohingya girl trafficked to Penang, Malaysia, where she was confined and abused until her family paid a ransom.

5.3 Forms of Exploitation and Coercive Mechanisms

Exploitation manifests in three primary forms:

a) **Sexual Exploitation**: Victims trafficked to brothels, particularly in India Anam (2021).
b) **Forced Domestic Labor**: Especially under the Gulf's Kafala system (Azad, 2019).
c) **Digital Sexual Exploitation**: Coerced pornography and blackmail using intimate images (Care, 2023).

Care (2023) report highlights that over 40% of their caseload involved victims being coerced to share intimate content which was later weaponized for extortion. Coercion through psychological pressure, such as threats to release videos or shame victims publicly, aligns with trafficking definitions under PSHTA's Section 4.

5.4 Legal and Investigative Misclassification

The principal obstacle to effective legal action is the misclassification of digital trafficking cases. Many such cases are pursued under the DSA, 2018 (which is now CSA, 2024) or Penal Code sections rather than PSHTA. According to the State (2023), Bangladesh's anti-trafficking convictions remain low due in part to these procedural shortcomings. Kasper and Chiang (2024) report on digital trafficking acknowledges the lack of forensic tools to recover deleted messages or identify online traffickers. The absence of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with tech companies like Meta and ByteDance further impedes investigations.

Table 1: Summary of Documented Digital Trafficking Cases

Case & Year	Platform Used	Victim Profile	Exploitation	Law Applied / Gap
TikTok Ring (2021)	TikTok, WhatsApp	Girls aged 14–19, Satkhira/Dhaka	Sexual exploitation in India	Penal Code 372/373; PSHTA delayed
Rohingya Case (2023)	IMO, voice calls	15 years refugee girl	Sold into marriage in Malaysia	No formal charges filed
Malaysia Job Scam (2023)	Facebook Messenger	Young women from Dhaka & Chattogram	Forced domestic work abroad	Cases prosecuted under Penal Code; PSHTA not invoked
Coerced Sextortion (2022)	WhatsApp, IMO	Teen girls from Sylhet, Mymensingh	Digital sexual exploitation & extortion	DSA Sec. 29; no PSHTA charge

Sources: TBS (2024), Care (2023), Alam et al. (2023), Anam (2021)

6. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight a disturbing change in the way human trafficking is happening in Bangladesh. Instead of using physical force or transporting people across borders, traffickers are now turning to smartphones, social media, and online messaging to trap their victims, mostly young women and girls. These platforms allow traffickers to hide behind fake names, make false promises, and build emotional connections, all while staying out of sight. Yet our current laws still focus mainly on physical movement and traditional forms of trafficking, leaving a major gap when it comes to dealing with crimes that begin online.

Many of the victims come from poor or remote areas, often with little education or access to support. Some are part of already vulnerable communities, like the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. What they all have in common is that they are targeted because of their difficult circumstances. The traffickers take advantage of their hopes whether it's the hope of a better job, a stable marriage, or a new life abroad and use those dreams as a trap. In many cases, the first contact is made on platforms like Facebook, TikTok, or WhatsApp, where the trafficker pretends to be a recruiter, romantic partner, or talent scout.

But when these cases reach the police or courts, they are often treated as something else. Because the laws don't clearly define digital trafficking, officers may file charges under general cybercrime or criminal laws that don't fully reflect the seriousness of the offense. This means that many traffickers are never held accountable for what they've done. In some cases, investigations

don't even begin because the evidence, like chat messages or online posts has disappeared or is stored on servers outside the country.

The institutions responsible for stopping trafficking are also not fully prepared to handle crimes that take place online. Most investigators and prosecutors don't have the tools or training they need to collect digital evidence or understand how traffickers operate on social media. There are no clear agreements between the government and major tech companies to help track down online traffickers or remove harmful content. Because of this, a lot of survivors don't get justice, and the persons who hurt them are still free to do so. For the people who lived through it, the damage goes beyond what happens to their bodies. A lot of people suffer profound mental damage, especially when traffickers threaten to reveal private images or recordings to shame or manipulate them. Sadly, there aren't many secure methods for these survivors to tell what happened, and even when they do, the court system often makes them feel blamed or not believed. There aren't many support options available yet, especially for people who were targeted online. These include psychotherapy, legal aid, and online safety tools.

Changes are being made in other countries. The Philippines and India, for instance, have changed their trafficking rules to encompass online grooming and digital abuse. They've also made specific courts and speedier ways to report these cases so they can be handled better. These actions can help Bangladesh. All these improvements need to happen making the law clearer about digital trafficking, teaching police and judges how it works, and making it simpler for survivors to obtain aid. It's evident that human trafficking doesn't have to happen in dark alleyways or across large distances anymore. It often starts in a chat room or video call these days. And if Bangladesh doesn't take this transition seriously and adjust how it reacts, traffickers will keep finding new ways to take advantage of people without getting in trouble. There is still time to act—but the window for meaningful change is narrowing.

7. Recommendations

Tackling the digital trafficking of women and girls in Bangladesh requires more than awareness. It calls for a complete rethink of how the country's legal, technical, and support systems are built and how they respond to this growing threat. The strategies used by traffickers are changing rapidly, and if responses don't keep up, the justice system will continue to fall short in protecting those most at risk. Based on the findings of this research, the following practical steps are recommended:

7.1 Update the Law to Clearly Address Digital Trafficking

The current anti-trafficking law, the PSHTA, 2012 does not directly mention online platforms, digital grooming, or internet-based recruitment. Because of this, many digital trafficking cases don't get charged as trafficking at all.

a) The law should be amended to include clear definitions of online grooming, recruitment through digital means, and coercion carried out via messaging apps or social media.

b) A dedicated section on trafficking through digital technology should be added to the PSHTA, following examples set by countries like India and the Philippines.

7.2 Improve How Digital Evidence is Collected and Used in Court

Police and prosecutors often don't have the tools or knowledge to collect and use digital evidence, such as messages, videos, or online posts, which are crucial in these cases.

a) Clear guidelines should be developed for collecting, preserving, and presenting digital evidence under both the PSHTA, 2012 and the Cyber Security Act.

b) Rules must ensure that digital records, like chat histories or shared images are accepted in court and not rejected for technical reasons.

c) Every district should have trained staff or dedicated teams who can investigate digital evidence, recover deleted data, and track online behavior linked to trafficking.

7.3 Build Partnerships with Social Media and Tech Platforms

Many trafficking cases begin on platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, or IMO. But at present, there are no formal systems in place for the government to work with these companies to stop or investigate trafficking.

a) The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of ICT should sign agreements with major digital platforms to:

    i. Report suspicious accounts involved in trafficking,

    ii. Share user data when ordered by courts, and

    iii. Create tools that can detect and flag harmful content in Bangla and local dialects.

b) This kind of collaboration has already shown results in other countries and can be adapted to Bangladesh's needs.

7.4 Make the Reporting and Support System Easier for Victims

Many survivors do not report trafficking because they fear being blamed, shamed, or ignored. Existing support systems are also not equipped to deal with digital forms of abuse.

a) A national online portal and phone helpline should be created where survivors can safely report trafficking, including options to remain anonymous.

b) Schools should include basic digital safety and trafficking awareness in the curriculum, especially for girls aged 12 to 18.

c) More support should be given to NGOs and legal aid organizations to offer counseling, legal help, and safe spaces for survivors affected by digital exploitation.

7.5 Train Police, Lawyers, and Judges to Understand Digital Trafficking

A major gap in dealing with digital trafficking is that many people in the legal and law enforcement systems don't fully understand how online exploitation works.

a) Training programs should be built into the curriculum for police academies, law schools, and judicial institutions.

b) A simple, practical guideline should be prepared for frontline officers and prosecutors to help them recognize digital trafficking, apply the right laws, and ensure survivors are treated with respect.

7.6 Keep Better Track of Digital Trafficking Cases

Right now, the government does not keep proper records on how many trafficking cases involve digital platforms. This makes it hard to measure the problem or plan effective responses.

a) Police and courts should begin recording whether digital methods, like social media recruitment were used in each trafficking case.

b) The government, in partnership with international organizations like IOM or UNODC, should publish an annual report that includes this data, broken down by platform, region, and type of exploitation.

7.7 Strengthen Cross-Border and Regional Cooperation

Most digital trafficking cases don't stop at Bangladesh's borders. Victims are often sent to India, Malaysia, or other countries, and traffickers operate across several locations.

a) Bangladesh should work with SAARC countries to improve regional coordination on digital crime, especially where it involves trafficking.

b) New agreements with key destination countries should include joint investigations, faster extradition of traffickers, and easier access to digital evidence.

These recommendations aim to build a system that is not only stronger and more efficient but also more humane. Women and girls victimized via internet platforms merit equivalent legal protection and assistance as any other trafficking survivor. To accomplish this, Bangladesh must promptly address legal deficiencies, invest in digital resources, and regard online exploitation as a grave and pressing offense since for numerous victims, the threat resides not behind a door, but behind a screen.

8. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that human trafficking in Bangladesh is evolving in ways that are both perilous and challenging to identify. Traffickers are now utilizing commonplace digital tools, such as social media, messaging applications, and video platforms rather than physical force or cross-border transit to access and abuse their victims. This transition has engendered novel issues for legal frameworks, organizations, and communities that remain ill-equipped to address threats originating online.

Women and girls continue to be the principal objectives. Most victims are youthful, originating from impoverished or relocated homes, and frequently possess minimal education or computer literacy. They are solicited via fraudulent job offers, counterfeit romantic entanglements, or assurances of travel and prospects. In numerous instances, their trust is established online prior to any face-to-face interaction. The subsequent events frequently constitute a cycle of abuse encompassing sexual exploitation, coerced work, or intimidation involving personal photographs and films.

Although Bangladesh has laws meant to fight human trafficking and cybercrime, these are not enough when it comes to cases that unfold on digital platforms. Too many cases are wrongly filed under general offenses or not followed up at all because the system lacks the tools, training, or access to digital evidence. As a result, traffickers are rarely punished, and survivors are left without justice or support.

This research shows the urgent need for a new approach, one that reflects how trafficking works in today's world. Laws must be updated to clearly recognize digital forms of recruitment and abuse. Investigators and judges must be trained to understand how online exploitation works. Survivors must be given safe ways to report what happened to them, and meaningful support to rebuild their lives. At the same time, technology companies must be made part of the solution, not just part of the problem.

Digital trafficking is not a distant or future problem it is happening now, and it is growing. If action is not taken quickly, more women and girls will be harmed in ways that are harder to trace and even harder to stop. Bangladesh has the legal foundations and institutional experience to lead this fight, but it must act with urgency, clarity, and care before the gap between law and lived reality grows any wider.

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