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# **CYBER SLAVERY: A MODERN FORM OF DIGITAL EXPLOITATION**

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## **Abstract**

Cyber slavery is an important development of the exploitation paradigm in the twenty-first century because human trafficking is now combined with cybercrime. However, unlike traditional exploitation practices, the victims are coerced into participating in cyber schemes, using sophisticated methods of monitoring and restricting freedom of movement. The current paper discusses the processes that enable people, specifically young employees seeking better job opportunities, to be deceived by false promises of employment and brought to scam locations located mostly in Southeast Asia. In this regard, the technological ecosystem involved in cyber slavery schemes is considered, namely the surveillance systems employed, monitored electronic devices, artificial intelligence programs used in scams, as well as fake websites designed to deceive individuals and lure them into working for the scamming group. In order to illustrate the complexity of the situation, a Five-Tier Victimisation Model is presented, depicting the evolution of cyber-slavery starting from financial instability to human trafficking, enforced crimes, and victimisation. Moreover, the legal and ethical aspects associated with cyber slavery are analysed, as well as their implications for the victims, with emphasis on the flaws inherent in the current frameworks, such as the Palermo Protocol.

## **Introduction**

The notion that slavery is something from the past is being increasingly contested by current information. Global statistics reveal that there are millions of people who still exist in an environment of exploitation, even though it has changed considerably over time. The one of the most disturbing forms of slavery is cyber-slavery, wherein people are forced into committing internet fraud. The recruitment process usually starts with job ads published on various social media sites, message services, and other sources. In these job offers, it is guaranteed that people

can earn hefty salaries without having any particular skills and will be placed in another country. Such offers appeal to many youths who struggle financially. Nevertheless, the truth is that things take a completely different turn once the victim reaches their destination. The victim claims that his passport is taken away from him, that he is unable to talk to anyone who is not there, and that he has been confined to a compound that is secure. The victim is compelled to work for long periods of time, usually over sixteen hours per day. In many cases reported, victims are forced to act as professionals like bankers, police officers, or financial experts to deceive people online. The main difference between cyber-slavery and regular human trafficking is that cyber-slavery has a more subtle entrance into the system. The first approach taken by the offender doesn't seem to be violent but looks like a better future for the victim (INTERPOL, 2023). In addition, the repercussions are not limited only to the victims themselves. Cyber-slavery results in a much larger problem of cyber-crime in general, including financial losses and identity theft, which leads to a loss of faith in online communication systems

**Keywords:** Scam Compounds, Forced Criminality, Transnational Organised Crime, Digital Exploitation, Five-Tier Victimisation Framework

### **Legal Framework and Cyber Slavery.**

The legal framework dealing with cyber-slavery continues to be disjointed and, in many ways, inadequate. The traditional framework against trafficking, such as the UN Palermo Protocol, was developed for handling physical coercive measures. The applicability of such laws to cyber-slavery demands interpretation, especially when it comes to understanding other kinds of non-physical coercion like digital monitoring and mental coercion. One major challenge in this area concerns the concept of non-punishment. In many cases, victims coerced into committing cybercrimes end up being seen as offenders. Unless it is clear that the crime was a result of coercion, the victim can be punished despite the intention behind such anti-trafficking laws (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025). The issue of jurisdiction becomes another problem. Cyber-slavery operations can involve victims from one jurisdiction, facilities in another, and operatives from yet another one. It is hard to coordinate law enforcement between the jurisdictions and conduct an investigation within the framework of the existing legal processes. Another important aspect in relation to this crime is linked to gathering evidence. Traditional evidence is difficult to gather in cases of cyber

slavery because of the peculiarities of these crimes — digital artefacts become the major evidence, and they include blockchain entries, messages, etc. These pieces of evidence need special knowledge for interpretation. Finally, a new and rapidly developing field concerns the role of corporations and platforms providing tools that enable cyber slavery operations. Their involvement in these crimes is indirect, but there are growing trends toward making them accountable and requiring the observance of duty of care principles.

### **Cyber Slavery: Technological Tools and Techniques.**

Technology works as a tool of both control and exploitation in the cyber slavery operation. This is important to understand so that one can grasp the magnitude of the problem at hand. There are two uses of the technology employed; first, that of control and trapping of the workers, and secondly, perpetrating fraud on the workers from across the world.

#### **1. Tools to Control the “Cyber Slaves”**

In many cases, the journey can start out in what seems to be a normal manner: with an online ad for a lucrative tech or customer service position — in some instances, even a position that involves relocation and housing. These people come here with the hope that everything will be better for them, but they soon realize that they have no jobs waiting for them here. Upon arriving here, they have to give up their passports and cell phones, preventing them from contacting their family members and even the embassy. It is at this point that technology plays an essential role in making people slaves.

- **Surveillance Systems**

These facilities are under surveillance by CCTV cameras that operate round-the-clock, monitoring passageways, workshops, living quarters, and sometimes even staircases and elevators. It is virtually impossible for any person to attempt an escape or concealment, let alone communicate with anybody seeking help from outside, without being observed through these surveillance screens.

- **Monitored Devices**

The employees cannot use their personal phones or computers. They are provided with special

computers and cell phones, which have monitoring software pre-installed in them. All messages sent and received by an employee, all keyboard inputs, and all logins can be monitored; therefore, it will be known instantly if someone tries to contact anybody outside of the premises.

- **Biometric Locks and Restricted Movement**

In order to restrict movement within the building, there are many doors and floors that are secured using fingerprint readers and facial recognition technology. Workers cannot access areas beyond their profiled levels, making it highly unlikely that they will escape the complex or move from one part to another without supervision. The combination of such technologies makes the complex a virtual prison: while internet and smartphones are omnipresent, they are all controlled by the traffickers, not the victims.

## **2. Tools and Techniques for Scamming.**

Within these facilities, the trafficked individuals are made to conduct online frauds throughout the day. One of the typical types of fraud is the so-called “pig butchering,” which involves a prolonged period of fraud that combines romantic, friendly, and financial aspects. In this fraud scheme, the victim is gradually “fattened up” through attention, flattery, and fabricated gains until the individual invests large sums of money into illegitimate websites—this is when the “slaughtering” occurs. This fraud is conducted by using an array of technological tools.

- **Social Media and Dating Apps**

The initial step involves targeting likely victims. This is achieved through the creation of carefully fabricated profiles using platforms such as Tinder, Instagram, Telegram, Whatsapp, and LinkedIn among others. The fabricated profile includes high quality images, extravagant lifestyle, and a story revolving around employment in finance or technology sectors.

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deepfakes**

AI-based technologies are employed to create convincing images of individuals or modify existing photographs to make the characters appear more appealing and reliable. Sometimes, the con artists

may even use voice cloning techniques or deepfake videos to pose as other people in video conversations and voice conversations without disclosing their actual identity. As a result, the target perceives the other person as a genuine individual who has a constant appearance and voice but is non-existent in reality.

- **Translation and Language Tools**

The fact that the targets hail from different parts of the globe means that language can act as an impediment, but Using language translation software such as Google Translate, together with powerful language models such as ChatGPT, employees can communicate fluently in many languages. This allows them to compose texts that appear native to the victim's locale, thus allowing them to connect emotionally.

- **Fake Crypto Currency and Trading Platforms**

After gaining the trust of their target, the criminals will slowly begin to present "investment opportunities" using websites or applications that appear identical to real trading systems. On the back end, however, the criminals will have full control over the trading system, allowing them to produce false graphs, balance sheets, and profit margins while quietly draining all real deposits made by the unsuspecting victim.

- **Social Engineering Scripts and Playbooks**

Improvisation is not something that happens often here. The staff receives highly structured scripts and manuals, detailing how they should conduct themselves and what they should say during each stage of their interaction. This script details everything, from opening up an innocuous conversation, acting as a caring lover or mentor figure, dealing with reluctance on the part of the victims, and guiding them to commit more and more of their savings to the process.

### **Why This Matters:-**

The concept of cyber slavery highlights the ways in which technology has been exploited to exert control and inflict injury from afar. It is the very same technologies that bring us closer

together—the social media networks, messaging apps, artificial intelligence, and cryptocurrency—that have been deployed within the confines of closed facilities to cause pain on both ends. An understanding of these methods will help shed light on some of the dangers involved and assist victims in seeking justice and accountability from both governmental organizations and technological corporations.

### **Social Implication of Cyber Slavery.**

The sociological effects of cyber slavery are numerous and varied. One of the foremost effects is the change of the victim into an unwilling accomplice of crime. Those forced to engage in such crimes usually select targets belonging to the same culture or language group, making it easier to deceive them. This process sets off a cycle of victimisation, whereby the exploited person becomes an accomplice in another form of exploitation. After the rescue process is complete, survivors face other issues as well. The main one is that survivors tend to experience ostracism and stigmatization for engaging in fraudulent activities regardless of whether it was done willingly or under duress. Moreover, the existence of such fraud cases results in a general loss of trust in digital systems. As people grow more doubtful of their ability to communicate online, it starts affecting genuine online communications, from work to social life.

### **Ethical Implication of Cyber Slavery**

The issue of cyber slavery involves deep ethical considerations at the nexus of technology, laws, and human rights. A key ethical question here revolves around coerced crime. From an ethical perspective, neglecting coercion will be tantamount to upholding unethical actions, since it is possible that such coercive actions can end up harming more people in a way that the legal system overlooks when emphasizing consequences over context. The other ethical aspect that needs consideration relates to how these operations are often characterized by dehumanizing the victims. The latter are often regarded as mere tools to achieve some objectives. The dependence on digital evidence brings about issues of algorithmic biases since the use of automated systems and investigation using big data could ignore contextual information. It is hence a matter of “algorithmic criminalisation.” Furthermore, it is essential to consider the role that corporations play. Technology firms or companies providing service could indirectly contribute to exploitation by allowing it via their networks.

## **Five-Tier Victimization Framework in Cyber Slavery.**

In order to get to grips with how cyber slavery functions, it is important to understand that the phenomenon is often considered as a series of steps that lead to a repetitive cycle of victimisation. This particular model consists of five distinct tiers showing how individuals become involved and manipulated into cyber slavery. Firstly, the process starts with financial exploitation. The victims get trapped with promises about good employment prospects in other countries. In order to receive these fictitious job offers, they are forced to pay recruitment fees or take out loans, thus becoming indebted prior to travelling to other countries. Afterwards, victims are subjected to trafficking. They are transported to other regions and have all of their documentation taken away. Once there, they are locked up in compounds with limited access to the outside world and are solely reliant on their oppressors for survival. The third phase entails forced criminality. The victims have to be made to commit cybercrimes compulsorily; otherwise, there will be threats or even torture for them. For those victims who get away, too, they will also encounter some problems, such as legal consequences or social issues. They may get into trouble for having violated their immigration regulations or visa limitations. In contrast, they might find themselves rejected by their respective communities because of their inability to accept coercion. Finally, there is the criminalisation process. In most cases, the victims are viewed as offenders by the justice system. With the digital evidence available, the prosecution can easily proceed without looking at the underlying factors leading to their involvements. Cyber slavery is a contemporary trap in which one may fall victim through false job opportunities and subsequently be made to conduct scams on the internet. Below is an original guideline on how to avoid cyber slavery and take necessary actions.

### **Forced Digital Crimes**

In the case of forced cybercrimes, the culprit forces someone else, usually the victim of kidnapping or threats, to commit an internet fraud scam. The victims in these cases are not criminals; rather, they are coerced and afraid, committing the acts for survival while simultaneously hurting innocent people on the internet.

## Types of Forced Digital Crimes:

- Pig Butchering Scams

Consider yourself confined in a room where you have to woo people and pretend that you are falling in love with them for months. You have gained their confidence until they have invested all their money in a fictitious crypto site through you. When the time comes to withdraw your money, the money is nowhere to be found. The victims of this fraud are like "Mei," a girl from Southeast Asia.

- Digital Arrest Scams

The traffickers instruct the victims to wear police uniforms on video calls, berating frightened people for offenses such as drugs. Victims are threatened with being "arrested," and money transfer is demanded from them to prove their innocence. Visualize Raj, the coerced youngster impersonating officers from a poorly lit room, shaking in fear while witnessing families being drained of their resources.

- Online Gambling Fraud

They control their fraudulent casino applications by making their victims make large amounts of winnings that entice more gamblers, after which they use fraud tactics to make the gambler lose their money or even disappear. They are forced to constantly check on chat rooms, looking for desperate gamblers. Just like worker Ali, who makes his victims believe in jackpots.

- Romance Scams and Sextortion

By using stolen photographs, they portray themselves as dream dates who tell tragic tales about their lives in order to solicit money. In sextortion, they trick individuals into providing them with personal photographs and use the threat of revealing them to extract additional money. The trauma experienced by one victim named Sarah was evident when she told her story, which made her cry.

- Forced Crypto Mining

This may not be as glamorous but definitely exhausting. The victims either work in "click farms" creating false crypto hype or slave in scorching and toxic "server farms" illegally mining coins. As they work without any fresh air or breathing space due to continuous supervision, their job is exhausting. Like brothers stuck in a closed factory building, they choke on dust while continuously clicking on scams.

These narratives uncover the secret pain of scared people, away from their homeland and coerced

into committing crimes, desperately seeking assistance. The actual labor camps in locations such as Myanmar can house tens of thousands; increasing awareness will facilitate their shutdowns.

### **Emergency steps if you are in danger**

In case you are or any of your acquaintances are stuck inside a scam center or being forced into defrauding individuals online, it is essential to report it quickly.

- Dial 1930, this is the helpline for all forms of cyber crimes reported in India. Mention that the individual is under force to carry out fraud activities online and provide as much information as you have (name, contact number, place, bank account details, etc).
- File your case on [cybercrime.gov.in](https://cybercrime.gov.in). You will be able to report your cyber-crime via the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal where you can submit your complaint along with the requisite evidence in the form of messages, call logs, IDs, or social media handles.
- Reach out to the Indian Embassy or Consulate in your area. In case the person in question is stranded in some other country, this may be their sole avenue for getting legal aid, travel documents, or other assistance for rescue and repatriation.
- Notify your bank and freeze your accounts. If you have already lost your money, then contact your bank, request that your accounts/cards be blocked, and report any other unusual transactions.

Even if you feel embarrassed or scared, reporting early gives the authorities a better chance to trace the money and identify the people or networks behind the scam.

#### **► How to recognise a "fake job" trap:-**

Cyber-slavery cases usually start with what appears to be a simple and innocent situation — a very attractive job offer. There are several basic rules that will enable you and your friends to stay away from trouble.

- Visa rule: No tourist visa for permanent jobs. If any company or intermediary offers you a job requiring a tourist visa, consider it a warning sign. Usually, a legal job abroad demands a valid work visa or employment permit approved by the foreign government.
- Passport rule: Keep your passport with you at all times. Never surrender your passport to an intermediary, "HR manager," or "superior." If they demand keeping your passport "in case of emergency" or "while processing documents," you have already become their slave.

- Location rule: Some places require extra caution. It is evident from recent examples that Indians have been trafficked to con centers in countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and the borders close to these places. A job offer of “simple computer work” with a huge salary in such regions should be thoroughly verified.

- Proof rule: Believe only in verified sources. In the case of foreign employment, go for officially recognized or known websites like eMigrate, certified recruitment agencies or firms that are officially registered and can be verified separately. If the person you are communicating with insists solely through WhatsApp/Telegram, is reluctant to show any official documentation, or tries to rush your decision, it is wise to move on from there. Do not fall for their trickery.

A significant number of individuals who have called us and claimed to be “police”, “CBI officers”, or “bank managers” are themselves victims, coerced into following a script and cheating others.

► **Keep a few simple points in mind:-**

- The police do not arrest you over WhatsApp messages. Real police or CBI officials never engage in video call arrests and ask for immediate payment of money to ‘close’ a case. In such cases, when someone shows his/her badge over video call and asks for money, consider yourself lucky as you are not falling into their trap.

- QR codes are one-way payments. There’s no need to scan the QR code of another person to receive money as QR codes always denote a one-sided transfer of money. By scanning another person’s QR code, you might actually send money to him.

- Trick links in urgent/panicking messages - Urgent messages such as "Your bank account will be blocked", "SIM will be deactivated" or "Your electricity bill is pending payment" should not be opened as clicking on them might land you into trouble. Always get in touch with the concerned agency through its website/app.

If anything feels rushed, secretive, or confusing, take a pause, talk to someone you trust, and verify details from official sources before acting.

► **How the world is responding:-**

Though cyber slavery seems intangible, there are efforts by the government and international organizations trying to come to grips with this issue.

- Special investigation teams:- In India, there are specialized

investigation teams within the Ministry of Home Affairs and agencies such as NIA and I4C investigating scammers' networks and rescuing trafficked workers while working with local state police forces.

- Blocking false calls and SMS:-The telecom authority and mobile service providers are identifying large numbers of suspicious mobile numbers and routing SMS, blocking them to minimize fraud call traffic directed at normal customers.
- International raids and joint operations:-With the help of international organizations like INTERPOL, police in different nations have raided scam locations and saved thousands of people trapped in these camps, with most victims being Indians.

This effort alone may not be sufficient to combat cyber slaves, but it indicates that it is possible when various countries and companies come together.

## Conclusion.

Cyber slavery shows how quickly crime has adapted to the digital age. Fake job offers, tourist visas misused for work, and high-pressure online scams are not just “frauds” — they are part of a wider system that combines human trafficking with cybercrime. For Indian youth in particular, the promise of an easy overseas job can turn into months of forced labour inside closed compounds, where they are made to cheat people from behind a screen. At a basic level, prevention still starts with awareness. Simple habits like refusing to travel on a tourist visa for full-time work, never surrendering passports, double-checking offers through official channels, and ignoring panic-inducing scam calls or links can stop many people from ever entering this pipeline. When someone is already trapped, quick use of tools such as the 1930 helpline, the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, Indian embassies abroad and urgent communication with banks gives families and authorities a better chance to respond. At the same time, cyber slavery cannot be solved by individuals alone. It needs stronger laws that recognise forced criminality, better coordination between anti-trafficking and cybercrime units, and more responsibility from tech, telecom and financial companies whose platforms are being misused. International raids and rescue missions led by agencies like INTERPOL and national governments are an important start, but long-term change will depend on whether we treat trafficked online scammers as victims who need protection, not just as offenders to be punished. If societies can combine legal reform, cross-border cooperation and everyday digital caution, we stand a much better chance of

breaking the cycle of cyber slavery before it reaches the next generation of job seekers.

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