

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND HUMAN
TRAFFICKING: IMPLICATIONS ON NIGERIAN
CITIZENS**

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Abstract

Human trafficking is one of the gross violations of human rights and has been a major challenge in Nigeria where contemporary manifestations of exploitation are on the rise. The recent spurt of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) has set additional levels to this issue because the new digital technologies can be used by criminal networks to further streamline and disguise the trafficking-related actions. This paper discusses the connection between AI and human trafficking in Nigeria, and the way it relates to citizens in particular. The paper follows a descriptive approach and discusses how AI-related devices like data-based targeting, online communication platforms, and digital surveillance methods can be abused in the future to recruit, control, and abuse victims. The analysis notes that the women and children are being targeted because they have the socio-economic vulnerabilities. It also explains the effects of trafficking, such as financial exploitation, trauma, physical injuries, and the social implications of the situation, which are seen in the long term among the victims and their families. The paper supports the argument that the incorporation of sophisticated technologies into the work of the traffickers makes the detection and intervention more complicated. To overcome this obstacle, it advocates a multi-faceted response to include enhanced legal enforcement, greater digital surveillance, sensitization of the citizens and responsible

application of AI by the security agencies to identify and thwart trafficking operations. The study concludes that the mitigation of AI-enabled human trafficking needs a concerted level of effort by government institutions, tech specialists, and the civil society to ensure the Nigerian citizens are properly secured.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Human trafficking, Digital technology, Victimisation, Law enforcement.

Introduction

Human trafficking is a problem of great challenge because it threatens and occur throughout the globe. Nigeria is one of the nations that is greatly affected. Victims of the problem are commonly youths and girls who are lured into compelled labour, sexual harassment and lots of different sorts of means of slavery. Recent studies indicate that human trafficking is one of the most widespread forms of modern slavery, involving the recruitment, transportation, transfer, and harbouring of individuals through coercion, deception, or abuse of vulnerability for exploitative purposes. Report has shown that trafficking affects virtually all regions of the world, with women and children constituting the majority of identified victims (The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024). In more recent research, it was also asserted that approximately 50 million people are currently trapped in situations of modern slavery, including forced labour and forced marriage (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2025).

Growing profitability of human trafficking has made it one of the most profitable types of organised crime in the world, on a par with illegal trades like drug and arms trafficking (Klabbers et al., 2023). Criminal networks exist in well-organized and coordinated networks, which in most cases use poor governance, poverty, and unemployment to recruit vulnerable people. The International Organisation of Migration (IOM, 2025) reports that the country has remained a source, transit, and destination point of trafficking activities especially among the youth in the country in search of economic opportunities elsewhere. This is all to suggest that trafficking is a high-profile topic in Nigeria that not only governs the people but also the economic and business standards. Even though the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2025)

reports that poverty has remained the cause of human trafficking in Nigeria, other elements, including governance, bribery, and corruption contribute to human trafficking in the nation.

Moreover, the technological progress has been a major factor in the modern-day trafficking activities. Additional studies indicate that the trend towards recruiting, controlling, and exploiting victims involves the growing use of digital platforms (Gezinski, 2024). The digital communication tools, online advertisements, and social media are often employed to trick and manipulate people thus making the trafficking networks bigger and more complicated (Mukherjee, 2025). Based on these trends, human trafficking is no longer physical movement only but it has become more and more integrated with digital technologies, such as new Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. This change highlights the necessity of new policy responses and institutional frameworks to be able to fight the crime and safeguard the vulnerable groups.

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced a new method of handling traffic, acting like a double-edged sword, offering both advantages and disadvantages to the country (Gezinski, 2024; Mukherjee, 2025). It enables the anti-trafficking agencies of their efforts to identify traffickers, rescue victims, and steadily lessen the rate at which trafficking takes place. However, the traffickers also exploit these AI tools, using them to gather information on how to navigate routes and as a means of surveillance for their escape. This, then, implies a gap to be filled, which is the main focus of this study. AI tools are best engaged when they are used for the betterment of human society; however, when they are used for illegal activities, their purpose becomes irrelevant. According to studies such as Klabbers et al. (2023) and Mukherjee (2025), human trafficking can be reduced through the adoption of emergent technology, and not worsened by it. The present study, therefore, explores the roles of AI in human trafficking with a focus on implications for Nigerian citizens.

Trends in Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Human trafficking has evolved from historical systems of exploitation into a highly organized and transnational criminal activity in contemporary society. Although earlier forms of human exploitation can be linked to events such as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, modern

human trafficking has taken on new dimensions, particularly since the late twentieth century. Over the past decades, it has grown much bigger as nowadays it is a significant issue on the international scale that needs to be addressed by the joint efforts of the countries (Musto, 2022).

The Transatlantic slave trade was initiated in mid-15th century (1441-1444) as Portuguese traders ventured into the coast of West Africa (Kupperman, 2012).

People were captured to work as labour in Europe and the Atlantic islands. The trade grew rapidly to fill labor shortages in the Americas during the 16th century, driven by plantation agriculture. In Nigeria, this experience led to leadership issues as local leaders were accused of selling their people out for slavery. The Badagry port was one of the popular spots where slaves were bought and forcefully taken to Europe. After the end of the slave trade in 1848, the trend started again in the 1900s in the form of human trafficking (Kupperman, 2012).

The beginning of human trafficking in Nigeria can be dated back to the late 1960s, after independence. This was when proper documentation started about this menace. It started in the form of using women for prostitution (Statista, 2025). They were deceived and taken to different countries of work through the Red Sea, where they were used for prostitution. Men who were victims of trafficking were also used for forced labour when they arrived in the country of destination. People below the age of 18 have also been consistently experiencing trafficking, making it an issue that also minors also battle with (Musto, 2022; Statista, 2025).

Human trafficking continues to be a major problem in Nigeria, largely due to the complicated web of corrupt officials across sectors like security, immigration, embassies, and airlines (Obikaeze et al., 2021). These officers are alleged to take bribes, allowing traffickers and their victims to cross borders with relative ease. Obikaeze et al. (2021) point out that Nigerian borders are porous, and traffickers often benefit from corrupt officials and a lack of proper implementation of immigration laws, which fails to act as a deterrent.

Factors Contributing to Human Trafficking

In Nigeria, human trafficking is a multifaceted phenomenon caused by the combination of socio-economic, political, and technical causes. They are armed conflict and displacement, poor institutional structures, poverty, and economic vulnerability, and culture/social practices. These drivers will have to be understood in order to devise effective prevention and intervention measures.

Armed Conflict and Displacement: Armed conflicts put human trafficking at a great risk since they cause displacement and undermine social protection systems (Emmanuelar, 2015). IDPs and refugees usually have no access to basic services, stable livelihoods, and sufficient security, which makes them an easy target of traffickers (Bakari et al., 2026). In Nigeria, the insurgency related to Boko Haram has caused the displacement of a great number of people, leaving the affected ones, especially women and children vulnerable to unchecked exploitation, which includes forced labour and sexual abuse (Carmo et al., 2020).

Economic activities, destruction of infrastructure, and accessibility to markets and transportation channels are also disrupted because of conflict situations. These circumstances lead to high poverty and unemployment rates that can force people to find the opportunity in other places, thus making them more exposed to false recruitment strategies of trafficking networks (Carmo et al., 2020; Bakari et al., 2026).

Weak Laws and Insufficient Enforcement: Despite efforts by Nigeria to put legal and institutional frameworks to fight human trafficking, this has not been sufficiently enforced. Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act offers an extensive preventive, prosecutive, and protective approach to trafficking victims which includes imprisonment, monetary fines, restitution of property, and compensation of victims. Nevertheless, the realization of these laws is hampered by issues of lack of adequate finances, corruption and lack of political goodwill, which has continued to compromise the legality of such laws. Consequently, traffickers tend to run their business with minimal chances of being arrested and charged (Sibanda, 2026).

Poverty and Economic Vulnerability: Poverty has continued to be one of the greatest contributors of human trafficking. People who are economically disadvantaged tend to take risky offers of migration or false employment opportunities to get better living conditions. Unemployment and lack of access to education especially amongst the youths further worsens this weakness. Traffickers often take advantage of such circumstances by making empty threats of employment, education or improved lives in Nigeria as well as in other countries (Sibanda, 2026).

Cultural and Social Practices: There are cultural practices which may contribute to human trafficking unwillingly. An example is the unformalized status of young folks becoming domestic workers in the rich families where they might be prone to exploitation and maltreatment. Although these practices might be based on social or economic systems, they can establish the circumstances in which traffickers can take advantage of forced labour and other acts of abuse (Adewole, 2025).

Role of Artificial Intelligence in Human Trafficking

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought new possibilities and threats to the war against human trafficking. On the one hand, AI technologies are able to increase detection, prevention, and response. Conversely, they can be used by traffickers to enhance the efficiency and disguise their activities. Law enforcement agencies and international organizations are growing more and more interested in using AI-driven tools to fight trafficking. These include:

Data Analytics: The AI systems have the ability to process big data sets and detect possible patterns, trends, and networks related to trafficking operations. The analysis of this information will enable them to identify the patterns, trends, and undiscovered links associated with trafficking operations, which will allow the authorities to comprehend how these networks work and act in a more efficient way (Mademlis et al., 2025).

Predictive Modelling: AI will allow revealing high-risk zones and at-risk groups and targeting interventions. This will enable the authorities and organizations to divert their energy on prevention, devote resources

more effectively, and make specialized interventions of safeguarding the vulnerable individuals and communities (Batra and Erbas, 2025).

Image and Pattern Recognition: Technologies are presently developed to help identify victims using online materials such as suspicious adverts and social media profile. These systems help to find potential victims and warn the authorities by identifying suspicious advertisements, repeating pattern, or other visual signs, thus enhancing the responsiveness rate and the accuracy of investigation (Hnaif et al., 2026).

Misuse of Artificial by Traffickers

In spite of its advantages, AI is potentially abused by criminal networks in a number of different ways. Firstly, **Online Recruitment and Manipulation:** Cyberspace Traffickers can target victims with the help of social media, automated messaging systems and online ads that are misleading. They tend to make convincing profiles or persuasive messages, which seem to be legitimate. By engaging in repetitive communication, they develop trust and manipulate feelings as well as preying on the weaknesses so that it becomes easy to entice people into the trafficking scenario without any immediate suspicion (Hnaif et al., 2026).

Anonymity and Concealment: The encryption of communication networks and anonymity programs complicate the surveillance of criminal activities by the authorities. Such technologies complicate the process of law enforcement agencies to trace criminals or monitor their conversations. This means that criminal activities can be conducted with minimal chances of detection and makes it harder to detect and stop the existence of trafficking (Pisaric, 2022).

Financial Transactions: Bitcoin among other digital currencies could be utilized to conduct anonymous financial transactions. These payment systems work on decentralised systems, which are more difficult to control and monitor. This allows traffickers to transfer money across the borders within a short period, circumvent the banking systems, and eliminate the chances of the authorities tracking the money (Pisaric, 2022; Hnaif et al., 2026).

Deepfake and Synthetic Media: Artificial intelligences are capable of deceiving the victim or falsifying digital evidence. Such content can be used by traffickers to either deceive a victim or blackmail someone or distort evidence. This makes it extremely hard to check the information and makes it even more challenging to identify the original and distorted digital materials (Iannuzzi et al., 2025).

Avoidance of Detection: Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and proxy servers are some of the technologies through which traffickers conceal their identities and locations. They are able to hide their digital tracks to avoid being tracked by the law enforcers. It makes it difficult to observe, trace, and dismantle trafficking networks effectively by law enforcement agencies (Iannuzzi et al., 2025).

Government Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Nigerian government made a lot of efforts to overcome the issue of human trafficking by creating the institutional frameworks, legal tools, and working in cooperation. One of the greatest achievements in this respect is the creation of the National Agency of the Prohibition of Trafficking in Person (NAPTIP), the main organ of the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of trafficking crimes, and the assistance to the victims (Aina, 2025).

Legislative and Institutional Framework: The anti-trafficking measures in Nigeria are supported by the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act that gives a detailed legal framework on the fight against trafficking. The Act stipulates punishment that includes incarceration and financial fines; as well as confiscation of assets and compensation to the victims. The punishments are differing according to the character of the crime, such as harsher punishments to child trafficking, forced labor, and sexual exploitation. Moreover, the Child Rights Act makes child trafficking and its associated misdemeanors a crime. Nevertheless, its success relies on its implementation and regulations on a state level that is not evenly spread across the country.

Capacity Building and Law Enforcement: Government, with the international partners has empowered the capacity of law enforcement

agencies by using special training programmes. Immigration services, the police, and border control unit personnel are empowered with skills of identifying, investigating, and prosecuting cases of trafficking (Ogbemudia, 2019). Even with these efforts, there are other forms of challenge that do not favour good governance like corruption and poor enforcement mechanisms.

Public Awareness and Reporting Systems: NAPTIP has also been keen on sensitizing the people through countrywide awareness on the dangers and signs of human trafficking. The introduction of electronic reporting systems, e.g. the iReport application, has enhanced the citizen involvement in reporting suspected cases. Such efforts have resulted in the overcoming of more trafficking offence, as the agency has existed (Mukherjee, 2025).

Protection of victims and International Cooperation: NAPTIP offers victim support services to the victims in form of temporary accommodation, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes besides enforcement. The agency collaborates with the international bodies like the United Nations office on drugs and crime to enhance the anti-trafficking efforts and exchange the intelligence level. Cyberspace operations have also resulted in rescue of victims and demolition of transnational trafficking networks.

Migration Pressures and Emerging Trends: The migration processes still affect the pattern of human trafficking in Nigeria. In the past, in 1960s and 1970s, education and economic opportunities highly inspired migration out of Nigeria. Nonetheless, economic differences between the developing and developed nations are becoming determinants of the current migration tendencies. The desire to migrate by most of the Nigerian youths, even using irregular and unsafe methods, has increased due to an improved standard of living in the destination countries. This situation puts the traffickers with a chance to exploit people in search of an improved life elsewhere. Consequently, human trafficking has emerged as a substantial expression of contemporary slavery, thus, denying the victims their basic rights and subjecting them to extreme physical and mental abuse.

Conclusion

This study has discussed the interface between Artificial Intelligence and human trafficking, and how the rights of the Nigerian citizens are infringed upon in different ways in which the acts of human trafficking are practiced. It cited major factors that contribute to this that include the poverty, conflict and misuse of technology and the overall impacts on the individuals and society that includes forced migration, population loss, and loss of human capital development.

Recommendations

There is the necessity of the enhancement of socio-economic statuses through the supply of the most basic types of infrastructures, including good education, medical services, drinking water, and effective security. Secondly, the priority should be given to the economic diversification. An increased funding towards other economic sectors including agriculture and local industrialization, as opposed to relying on crude oil production, will generate employment opportunities and make them less vulnerable to trafficking. Lastly, the introduction of modern technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, into anti-trafficking efforts must be considered in more detail and extended to more efficiently detect and respond to the problem and ensure that the risks of their improper use are considered.

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