

# From Trust to Trauma: The Psychological and Relational Impact of Cyber-Enabled Cybercrimes

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**Abstract:** Crimes facilitated by the Internet, such as romance scams, pose psychological and relational challenges for victims. This study identifies the opportunities these tech-facilitated deceptions afford for intimate partner betrayals. Despite the appearance of innocence, these digital devices serve as vacuums for intimate partner betrayal. Key findings indicate that men and women have used the Internet and smartphones to commit deceitful acts against their spouses. Deceived partners, upon discovery, react with feelings of rage, sadness, or even relief because they now understand the reasons behind their unexplainable intimate relationship dissatisfaction. To illustrate these vital research points, case studies have been developed around real-life instances of betrayal. This study highlights the critical role of cyberpsychology in understanding, preventing, and treating the lasting consequences of marriage-related cybercrimes.

**Keywords:** Cyber-Enabled Crimes, Digital Infidelity, Sextortion, Betrayal Trauma, Cyberpsychology, Online Deception, Emotional Manipulation, Digital Betrayal

## Introduction

Marriage cybercrime is becoming rampant since many couples are adopting advanced technology and living worldwide. These are crimes such as fraud, wherein people initiate affairs with others with an ill intent to defraud them; sextortion, where one partner assumes the identity of the other; and digital unfaithfulness, which takes advantage of the advancement in technology to harm those who are in intimate relationships. Cybercrime is causing loss or gaining an advantage over others by employing computer technology; social engineering is a part of cybercrime. For instance, Martineau, Spiridon, and Aiken (2024) describe how opportunities for digital infidelity due to social media and postmodern communication distort marital interpersonal communication, resulting in conflict, cheating, breakups, and related distress. In the same way, Rogers et al. (2023) explore technology-facilitated abuse dynamics, showing that cyberstalking, online harassment, and digital manipulation contribute to psychological abuse in marriages. These studies highlight the role of further investigation into the relationship between cybercrime and intimate relationships.

Marriage-related cybercrimes are studied best through the lens of cyberpsychology since the theory encompasses the psychological effects on victims' thinking and feelings. It is crucial to note that the impacts similar to real-life betrayal related to digital interactions also cause emotional distress, anxiety, and PTSD (Baba & Misra, 2023). The utilization of the digital platform aggravates the experience of victimization since the offenders are unknown and continue to intrude on people's space. Such research in cyberpsychology can

analyze the nature of conflict, massive confusion, and social impacts that victims face, especially when their online counterparts betray their trust via digital intimacy. These aspects should help in the formulation of coping measures and legal recourse necessary to protect victims from cyber-induced trauma (Martineau, Spiridon & Aiken, 2024).

This paper aims to identify the psychological and relational impact of marriage-related cybercrimes while prioritizing the outcome from the point of view of the victim and the potential significance of these crimes on intimate relationships. This will be done by categorizing the different types of cybercrimes that affect marriages and then analyzing the effects on psychology. After that, it will elaborate on relational consequences, preventive measures, and support for the victims. Based on research done on current literature and case studies, this paper seeks to use literature to understand how digital deception and cyber-enabled abuse lead to trust violation, emotional distress, and marital unhappiness.

### **Understanding Marriage-Related Cybercrimes**

Marriage-related cybercrimes refer to criminal activities involving the use of technology for domestic partnership manipulation, as a result of which both offline and online victims experience severe emotional, financial, and psychological repercussions. They include romance scams in which the offenders embark on intimidating relationships to plunder emotional and monetary resources from identified victims. Bilz et al. (2023) on how victims are emotionally engaged and how they lose a lot of money. Another is sextortion, which involves using intimate images or videos to compel the victim to do something or refrain from doing it by threatening to publish the material (Tzani et al., 2024). Furthermore, cyber criminals operating within marriages use their partners' information fraudulently, usually known as identity theft. Stojakovic et al. (2023) stress that this crime contributes to long-term financial vulnerability and the breakdown of trust in partnership.

These cybercrimes are made possible by using social media accounts and other online dating sites, which have increased the vulnerability of individuals in the digital world. Imperato et al. (2023) explore how social media, particularly Facebook and dating apps, facilitate how offenders engage in partners' monitoring, coercion, and deception, leading to cases of online romantic jealousy and digital abuse. Such social platforms enable the creation of fake identities by the perpetrators, thus making it convenient for them to interact with their victims with the intention of emotionally or financially draining them. (Baba & Misra, 2023). Moreover, these footprints that remain on digital platforms turn into mechanisms of domination and violence, especially in cases of sextortion and financial abuse within intimate spaces.

Marriage-related cybercrimes are a global concern, and their effect is worse in African countries, inclusive of Kenya, where illiteracy and poor security increase vulnerability among vulnerable persons. Criminal acts such as cyber fraud, love scams, and other forms of digital financial exploitation have also been witnessed in Kenya, as is the case globally (Bilz et al., 2023). Moreover, there are cultural taboos that stop the victims of cyber crimes from pursuing legal action or even seeking counseling. Addressing challenges regarding marriage-related cybercrimes among the connected population requires action in three strategic areas to strengthen cybersecurity policies and procedures, increase digital literacy, and improve legal measures on a national and international level among African societies.

### **Psychological Impact of Marriage-Related Cybercrimes**

The psychological impacts of marriage-related cybercrimes are severe, thus leading to emotional suffering among the victims. The first and probably one of the most significant impacts is loss of trust, resulting in betrayal trauma. Internet crime victims, like in cases of

romance scams, sextortion, and identity theft involving a life partner, are shocked into believing that the person they had trusted is a fraud. According to Villora, Yubero, and Navarro (2019), the perceived social loss complicates the recovery process of trust because the victims of romance fraud suffer from self-doubt and self-blame. This betrayal results in long-term relationship problems such as fear of intimacy, constant suspicion in single relationships, and isolation in future relationships. The feelings of betrayal that come with such deception are as bad as surviving physical or emotional abuse, proving just how bad it can get.

Besides betrayal trauma, other mental health outcomes resulting from cyber exploitation include anxiety and depression. Aggression against personal and emotional spaces through the use of fake profiles can produce severe post-traumatic stress, especially for patients with robust relational incursions. According to Thumboo and Mukherjee (2024), the victims of digital romance fraud, especially women, are likely to experience depression symptoms due to feelings of humiliation and hopelessness. As we have seen, the emotional aspect is highly manipulative in such cyber-crimes; hence, the victim may constantly doubt themselves and feel guilty. Notably, the constant threat of being exploited again, mainly when the shared content is graphic, aggravates anxiety, which results in sleeplessness, panic disorders, social isolation, and other issues.

Another emerging psychological impact related to marriage cybercrimes is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When victims have been subjected to prolonged manipulation or coercion, it leads to changes in memory and feeling that cause intrusive thoughts, involuntary recollections, and emotional detachment. As Alotti et al. (2024) have pointed out, romance fraud results in symptoms similar to de Clérambault's syndrome, characterized by a fixation with the perpetrator of the fraud owing to the psychological coercion experienced by the victims. This leads to psychological entrapment, and this causes the victims to experience a cycle of distress, for they cannot escape the traumatic event. In addition, a sextortion survivor or a victim of spousal identity theft might be forced into isolation due to further exposure or embarrassment on social media platforms. The constant abuse causes them psychological trauma, which dissuades them from seeking help and treatment (Quilty & Flynn, 2025).

Marriage-related cybercrimes, including cyberstalking, are other factors that lead to considerable psychological disturbance. Constant stalking results in effects such as fear, emotional exhaustion, and paranoia in the victims, as they are constantly watched and harassed. Kanwal et al. (2023) highlight how victims of online stalking are much more distressed than before, and many of them show signs of depression and anxiety, as those who have been abused domestically. They cannot avoid such intrusions and get high levels of chronic stress that impact their emotions and social interactions. Since cyberstalking also translates to physical harassment, victims become overly sensitive when going about their day-to-day activities. However, the tiny effects of marriage-related cybercrimes are not only limited to the virtual arena, but they leave severe psychological effects that affect a victim's emotional/mental health (Quilty & Flynn, 2025).

### **Relational Consequences of Cyber Victimization**

Cybercrimes related to marriage significantly distort intimacy in relationships, hence causing emotional and psychological instability. Since trust forms the basis of a marital relationship, betrayal through cyber fraud or digital infidelity is virtually impossible to overcome. The study by Agbo et al. (2023) pointed out that digital infidelity may harm open 'behind-the-screen' communication, thinning the wall of trust by bringing suspicion and resentment into the relationship. People who lose money in sextortion or romance scams face the challenges of disentangling authentic emotion from exploitation, which

creates significant issues in restoring one's feeling of safety. Such a breakdown of trust is not only manifested in the current relationship, but it also perpetuates into future relationships, where victims cease to believe in intimacy.

Apart from experiencing emotional distress, victims experienced increased divorce/separation rates, as well as legal and financial consequences of cyber deception. Pirdaus et al. (2024) note that excessive usage of social media manifests in factors like online gambling, leading to money-related conflicts, litigation, and divorce. This often complicates how the couple approaches the issues and touches on properties and children, contributing to the separation's emotional strain. Such trials add to it in engaging the digital traces of cybercrimes – the sextortion materials or financial transactions as part of intimate extortion; the effects of cyber assault not only circulate severed relationships. Social cost includes stigmatization and exclusion from society after being conned, especially if the target was already in a marriage. According to Rogers et al. (2023), victims of sextortion or public shaming avoid interacting with other people because they feel judged or stigmatized.

Cyberbullying has negative repercussions, causing individuals to lose their self-esteem and thereby struggle to find new relationships or maintain friendships. Hence, in cultures where people do not look for help after being raped, it could be because they cannot find appropriate support in conservative cultures in which victim blaming is rife. Sexuality is magnified in the consequences of cyber victimization, where women are mainly targeted in the context of romance scams (Thumboo & Mukherjee, 2024). We found from our study that single women are the most vulnerable group. They are coerced into providing their financial and emotional data to be defrauded by culprits offering fake companionship. While both sexes are victims of cyber persecution, women are more sensitive to societal shame and stigmatization. This means that efforts to address the problems associated with cyber crimes must be directed towards specific populations, including gender-sensitive criminal laws and public awareness creation (Mayoyo, 2025).

### **Cybercrime Prevention and Victim Support**

The rising incidence of cybercrimes related to marriage requires sound legal support for the cases to protect the parties involved and penalize the offenders. In most countries around the world, there is legislation in place to prevent instances of identity theft, sextortion, and most other types of scams. Stojakovic et al. (2023) suggest that intimate partner identity theft may lead to both financial abuse and emotional control; it, therefore, needs to be legally addressed. Most countries in the world, including Kenya, have developed laws on cybercrime, such as Kenya's Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act of 2018, which addresses issues of identity theft, cyberbullying, and unauthorized use of computers. However, these problems exist: people fail to report the crimes because they are embarrassed, or there is no means of investigation. Enhancing the usage of judicial activism, training the police personnel, and ensuring that the legislative measures are favorable to the victim are significant in eradicating cyber-marital exploitation (Mayoyo, 2025).

In addition to legal strategies, increased computer literacy and cybersecurity should be implemented to reduce the possibility of vulnerability. Bilz et al. (2023) noted that people's ignorance of the various tactics employed in online fraud enhances vulnerability, particularly to romance and sextortion. Minimizing the rate of cheating in marriages can be achieved by learning how to avoid fake profiles, protecting our details, and using safe passwords. Various government measures, including Kenya's Kenya National Cybersecurity Strategy, encompass awareness creation and personnel training in the digital frontier. Still, there is a need to extend prevention efforts to schools and other community

domains to ensure that the entire population is equipped to avoid falling victim to these malicious organizations.

Another critical factor that plays a significant role in reducing the impact of marriage-related cybercrimes is psychosocial support. Cyber violence leads to feelings of fear, apprehension, loneliness, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which call for intervention approaches. According to Martínez-Valderrey et al. (2023) and Martineau, Spiridon, and Aiken (2024), specialized and organized counseling programs, Internet safety advocacy, and community-level interventions would be helpful in approaches to preventing the psychological effects of cyber victimization. One non-governmental organization that helps the victims is the Kenya Women's Rights Awareness Programme (WRAP), which offers legal aid and counseling to victims of digital abuse. Enhancing these support structures and adopting mental health services as part of the strategies to address cybercrime may help the victims regain their trust and emotional stability.

Another example of cybercrime involving marriage in Africa is the rising cases of romance fraud targeting women in Kenya. According to the reports, people who become scammers' targets lose their money and, in addition, go through emotional suffering and a tarnished image (Villora, Yubero, & Navarro, 2019). Pressing incidents that involve cases of digital deception, perpetrating fraudulent marriages, or forcing willing participants in financial transactions have surfaced with perceived loopholes in the legal systems and inadequate recovery authority to assist the victims (Villora, Yubero, & Navarro, 2019). These issues need to be solved on multiple levels, with external changes driven by the legislators and policymakers as well as internal changes focused on education of the general population on safety and establishment of the psychological first aid organizational structures on both the organizational and individual level to include prevention and for those who experienced being threatened or harassed, the means of healing and recovery.

## **Methodology**

### ***Data Collection***

This research utilized a qualitative research paradigm to assess the psychological and social effects of marital cyber grooming. Research techniques used were interviews, case studies, and questionnaires, which helped elicit the experiences and observations of victims. This paper includes first-person accounts of people who have been victims of three specific crimes: romance fraud, sextortion, and spousal identity theft; studying their experiences allows for understanding the psychological and interpersonal impacts of these crimes. Also, analyzing publicly available cybercrime cases enables the understanding of victimization trends and the society's response. Surveys conducted with married individuals and with those of cybercrime-supporting organizations offer a general sense of the frequency and recognition of marriage-related cybercrimes. In this research, multiple data sources were collected to enhance the study's findings' reliability and analyze the phenomenon under consideration.

Due to the sensitive nature of research on cybercrime victimization, it is prudent to consider the ethical issues that must be addressed. Data anonymity of the participants was ensured, and all identifiable information was erased from the dataset. All subjects signed a consent form that educates them regarding the specific goals and objectives of the research, possible hazards, and the subject's ability to withdraw from the study freely at any given point, as well as any other relevant information. Due to the sensitive nature of the discussion, participants were offered valuable links to the psychology resources in case they experienced emotional distress while sharing their stories. The study also followed institutional ethical considerations of human subjects' research and respected the dignity and welfare of participants during the research study.

### ***Data Approach***

Specifically, the study used thematic analysis to identify the psychological and relational effects of marriage-related cybercrimes. This approach involved identifying patterns in participant accounts to gain a sophisticated understanding of victim profiling. Hence, the initial coding of the interviews and survey data of common psychological consequences, including betrayal trauma, anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Ray & Henry, 2025). Moreover, antithetical phenomena, including trust degradation, broken relations, and isolation, were described systematically. Sources based on personal case studies support the arguments based on first-person testimonies and give practical examples of how cybercrimes interfere with marital relationships.

This paper reviews how the thematic analysis framework allows for a systematic yet non-rigid formation and exploration of affective and socio-experiential studies. As Ray and Henry (2025) pointed out, using cyclical analysis of qualitative data allows the findings to be grounded in the actual experiences and viewpoints of the study's participants. This is especially relevant to investigating cyberpsychology issues since such a phenomenon entails the possibility of analyzing the differences in people's emotional reactions to various types of cybercrime. In addition, by comparing the findings with those of other studies, the study provides strengthened conclusions and adds to the literature on digital victimization in an intimate context (Ray & Henry, 2025).

### ***Justification of Approach***

A qualitative cross-sectional approach is most appropriate for this study because it seeks to gather thick descriptions of victims' psychological and relational statuses (Kaya & Şakiroğlu, 2023). While quantitative research techniques predominantly deal with quantitative images, qualitative research captures the essence of emotional suffering, deterioration of trust, and relational deterioration that arise from experiences of marriage-related cybercrimes. In this context, Stojakovic et al. (2023) suggest that cyber-enabled intimate partner abuse differs in very personal ways, and these warrant contextual analysis. This approach reduces cybercrime incidents to mere numbers because it focuses on reporting and exploring victims' experiences (Kaya & Şakiroğlu, 2023).

Also, the descriptive research approach allows for an empathy and victim-oriented understanding of the impact of cybercrime. Such interviews enable participants to articulate their own stories and therapeutic endpoints in dealing with psychological trauma and consequences, thus offering better insights into the subject (Martineau, Spiridon, & Aiken, 2024). Besides, case studies provide more understanding of different cybercrime cases and help to divide them into shared and specific types of victimization. It could, therefore, be postulated that qualitative research is still crucial today in identifying new specters of cyber abuse and policy interventions that are legal and within the social domains of cyber victimization. (Martineau, Spiridon, & Aiken, 2024).

### ***Findings***

This paper identified that marriage-related cybercrimes have a highly detrimental psychological impact on victims, including severe emotional distress and mental health issues. Previous research indicates that the victims often suffer from betrayal trauma, anxiety, depression, and, sometimes, post-traumatic stress disorder (Alotti et al., 2024; Gauci, 2023; Kanwal et al., 2023; Martineau, Spiridon & Aiken, 2024). Cyber fraud, which is one of the common cybercrimes, involves romance scams that lead to severe psychological loss and feelings of shame among the victims who build an emotional attachment with non-existent figures (Bilz et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2023; Thumboo &

Mukherjee, 2024). Research also shows that technology-inflicted betrayal related to infidelity and stalking leads to high stress levels and marriage dissatisfaction among victims (Agbo et al., 2023; Kanwal et al., 2023; Stojakovic et al., 2023). There is social rejection and shame to accept that one has become a victim of these crimes, meaning most victims continue to endure the torture without seeking help.

Social effects of cyber victimization include deterioration of trust, divorces, and increased interpersonal conflict. A study has shown that the majority of couples do not regain trust after experiencing cyber betrayal, mainly because other forms of betrayal are considered equally as painful as sexual cheating (Agbo et al., 2023; Imperato et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2023). Additional research shows that financial losses resulting from romance scams and spousal identity theft bring about economic challenges and litigation to marriage, worsening marital strife (Bilz et al., 2023; Stojakovic et al., 2023; Pirdaus et al., 2024). Sextortion is another common type of cybercrime that not only undermines intimate partnerships but also leaves the victims open to coercion and continued psychological abuse, which eventually results in severe trust issues and a lack of willingness to engage in new romantic relationships in the future (Thumboo & Mukherjee, 2024; Tzani & Vasiliefs, 2024; Villora, Yubero, & Navarro, 2019). These patterns imply that through cyberspace, conventional forms of comradeship or bonding are again diminishing the traditional boundaries of intimacy in those relationships where trust has become a digital affair.

Current developments suggest that legal interventions through policy, digital awareness, and support for victims should be advocated for and implemented. The literature shows that several relationship crimes facilitated through cyber-enabled technology are not adequately covered within existing legal systems, and many victims are left with few means in which to seek justice (Bilz et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2023; Stojakovic et al., 2023). As for cyber victimization, awareness-raising activities and psychological intervention have been proposed as essential factors in preventing the consequences of cyber victimization (Martínez-Valderrey et al., 2023; Tzani et al., 2024; Pirdaus et al., 2024). Likewise, the authors highlight the need to incorporate online safety awareness, especially with vulnerable victims, to minimize the risk of cyber fraud and trickery (Bilz et al., 2023; Gauci, 2023; Kanwal et al., 2023). The fact that more and more people become victims of marriage-related cybercrimes phoenixes the need for an interdisciplinary approach and legal, technological, and psychological solutions to help the victims and preserve the marriage.

## Conclusion

Marriage-related cybercrimes, such as romance scams, sextortion, and identity theft targeting a spouse, bring about severe psychological harm to relations and relational security. Some of the common psychological issues here are betrayal trauma, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Alotti et al., 2024; Gauci, 2023). Such cybercrimes weaken the trust between partners, resulting in elevated divorce rates, social exclusion, and decreased relationship satisfaction (Kanwal et al., 2023; Pirdaus et al., 2024). The digital nature of these offenses also makes it difficult to prevent them because the offenders like to remain anonymous and thus prey on their victims with pretenses, leading to continued psychological and financial abuse (Bilz et al., 2023; Stojakovic et al., 2023).

Combating these crimes does not only entail establishing and changing laws; there is also a need to support mechanisms for the victims, and there is a need to put in place measures that propel digital enlightenment. First, improving the current cybersecurity laws and enforcement authority is crucial to prosecuting offenders and preventing such feats in the future (Rogers et al., 2023; Stojakovic et al., 2023). Moreover, safety education that encompasses cyberspace may keep people wary of cyber-enabled deception (Bilz et al.,

2023; Tzani et al., 2024). Also crucial to its survivors, psychological support, including trauma counseling and victim advocacy services, is critical to victims' healing and case management after instances of online exploitation (Martínez-Valderrey et al., 2023).

Marriage-related cybercrimes lead to the understanding that as the rates of technological advancement grow, the need to advance preventative methodologies will also increase. Further studies could explore longer-term effects and consequences for the victims and the efficacy of intervention programs. Leaders in the government, cybersecurity sector, and mental health sector must come together and form systems that would protect people from digital abuse. The negative consequences of cybercrime on marriage and well-being can be avoided by raising awareness and enhancing protective mechanisms.

### **Future recommendations**

The continually increasing cases of cybercrimes related to marriage make it essential for the policy to be strengthened to protect the victims adequately. Governments worldwide must ensure that they enhance the laws on cybercrime, which will address issues related to romance fraud, sextortion, and identity theft against spouses. As formulated by Stojakovic et al. (2023) and Kim and Ferraresso (2023), the apparel of laws must provide more meaningful ways to address individuals who use technology to perpetrate abuse in intimate partnerships. Lastly, there is a need to facilitate cooperation between these agencies since most cybercrimes occur across borders. Enhancing the admissibility of digital evidence laws and improving the channels of reporting these cases can ensure that the victims do not suffer from retribution and the loopholes taken advantage of by the offenders.

In addition to legal reforms, there is a great need for effective victim services such as counseling or other forms of rehabilitation. Cyber-based marital infidelity results in immense psychological suffering to the victims, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Martínez-Valderrey et al., 2023; Kim & Ferraresso, 2023). More awareness of the psychological counseling centers and other online and offline facilities will assist the survivors in managing their trauma and reconstructing their lives. Also, there should be support programs for people who lose monetarily through inverse crimes like online scams or identity theft. Another source of potential support is again in the form of support groups or advocacy network forums where victims can share stories free from vitriolic abuse.

Finally, there is a necessity to advance nationwide cybersecurity education to avoid further abuse. Most people still do not fully understand the tricks used by cybercriminals to take advantage of individuals and their finances, which is why there is a need for awareness campaigns (Bilz et al., 2023). Schools, workplaces, and community organizations must ensure that individuals are educated on identifying when something looks wrong, and their information has been compromised or potentially stolen. Additional scholarly studies on an individual and relational level should also be carried out to evaluate the long-term psychological effects of marriage-related cybercrimes. Tzani et al. (2024) mention that more research should be conducted on personality and emotional factors associated with increased risk of exposure to cybercrime. More studies on this phenomenon will provide legislators and practicing therapists with knowledge about prevention and treatment, working with the enhancement of safer interactions within intimate relationships.



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