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Women and Human Trafficking in Nigeria: A Way Out

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Abstract:

The number of Nigerian women involved in human trafficking both as traffickers and the trafficked is enormous. It is heinous for a woman who is supposed to be a mother and custodian of human life to be a human trafficker. Trafficking in human beings is a historical phenomenon, right for the time of slave trade. Humanity fought against slave trade and slavery and managed to stop it and abolished it completely. But it has surfaced in our 21st century due to greedy and inhumanity of man to man under the deception of helping the poor women to get job in Europe and other countries. Nigeria has acquired a horrible reputation for being the leading African nation in human trafficking across trans-border. The objective of this paper was to analyze the activity of women in this criminal trade with a view of suggesting how the problem can be dealt with effectively in Nigeria. The paper utilized secondary data to study the involvement of women as traffickers and trafficked in Nigeria. The study finding showed that the major reason for women involvement in trafficking was poverty and greed. The paper made far reaching suggestions which included government to be more serious in its poverty reduction policy for women and more sensitizing campaign against human trafficking among others.

Keywords: Human, trafficking, women, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Human trafficking is a form of modern slavery characterized with marginalization, exploitation, imperialism, violence and subjugation of victims by superior personality for selfish motive. According to Bales (2004) human trafficking is a social and economic relationship in which persons are controlled through violence or are paid nothing, and are economically exploited. It is a global crisis that is inextricably linked to the current move of globalization in the sex industries involving women and children (Hoque, 2010). Trafficking in human beings is a historical phenomenon, right for the time of slave trade. Humanity fought against slave trade and slavery and managed to stop and abolished it completely. But it has surfaced in our 21st century due to greed and inhumanity of man to man under the deception of helping the poor (especially women) to get job in Europe and other countries. Trafficking is reported to involve nearly every part of the world such as places of origin/recruitment, transit or destination – and this illegal trade in humans is believed to garner enormous profits for trafficking agents (International Labour Organization, 2005).

Nigeria has acquired a horrible reputation for being the leading African nation in human trafficking across trans-border. Human trafficking of Nigerian women to Italy began to occur in the 1980s because of the demand for low-skilled labor in agriculture and services. International Organization for Migration (IOM) data show that Nigerians made up 20 percent - the biggest share - of a record 181,400 migrants who reached Italy by boat from Libya last year seeking a better life in Europe. Whether its leading position in the criminal trade is due to its largeness or the societal culture of getting rich quickly is not fully understood. The astonishing thing about this illicit trade is the involvement of women both as traffickers and trafficked. The objective of this paper was to analyze the activity of women in this criminal trade with a view of suggesting how the problem can be dealt with effectively in Nigeria

2. Research Method

This study is based on analysis of data from researches in the literature. Consequently, the paper was essentially exploratory research and depended on secondary data such as internet, newspapers, and documentaries for the examination of issues surrounding the involvement of Nigerian women in human trafficking.

3. Theoretical Perspective

The Marxist theory is used to analyze the cause of human trafficking and to support the opinion of the study. Marxist theoretical perspective is based on the modern communism propounded by Karl Marx (1818-1883). It perceives

the prevalence of crime from the materials basis of society. The Marxists believed that capitalist society is characterized conspicuously by inequality in wealth and power between individuals and the inequality is the root cause of crime. They observe that power is largely held by those who own and control the means of production. That the capitalist society reflects the relationship between the bourgeoisie (owners of production) and the proletariat (the workers), and the definition of crime reflects and serve the interests of the bourgeoisie. According to the Marxists, laws are not expressions of value consensus but rather a reflection of ruling class ideology and the general commitment to law on the part of the members of the society as a whole is an aspect of false class consciousness. A sociologist, Livingston worked on this ideological framework and adopted the concept of underclass. According to him, the under-class is similar to Marx's concept of proletariat.

He opined that the under-class experience material deprivation, inequality, and marginalization and social exclusion. His argument is that under-class criminality is caused by what they experience in the capitalist society. That is to say, because of these problems, there is a greater pressure on the under-class within the social structure to deviate and commit crime (Enaikelé and Olutayo, 2011).

Value system in Nigeria has a strong relationship with what the Marxists theory has propounded. This value system contributes to human trafficking, where conspicuous consumption has become a pattern and an acceptable way of life. People give priority to success and relatively little importance is given to the accepted ways of achieving the success. In order to belong to bourgeoisie class and be perceived as a success, human trafficking becomes an option to the criminals. This situation provides a huge tendency to reject the rules of the game and strive for success by any alternative means such as human trafficking and women are not left out of this dangerous inhuman criminal activity. Their role in human trafficking in Nigeria is enormous. The involvement of women as traffickers is shameful and alarming. Women who are supposed to be custodial of life are now taking part in destroying it by being in this illicit trade.

4. Involvement of Nigerian Women in Human Trafficking:

This section discusses how Nigerian women are involved in the human trafficking as trafficked and traffickers. It begins with the causes of trafficking

4.1. The Cause of Human Trafficking Amongst Nigerian Women

The causes of human trafficking in Nigeria are numerous. The first is vulnerability. Many Nigerian women live in abject poverty and this creates a very difficult condition for them and their immediate family particularly their children. It is well known that the poorest of the poor are women and most of these women are women who are heads of their households (especially the single mothers). How to cope with the situation of meeting the needs of their children is a serious predicament they face daily, therefore, they become vulnerable to traffickers who strike at the opportunity by deceiving them to release their young women to them under the pretext that they would train them, or find job for them (Micah Hartmann, 2018). These vulnerable mothers receive some token amount of money, with promise of sending them some amount of money on monthly basis from these deadly women traffickers, to willingly let go of their girls. Some of these young women their mothers may never see again.

Second reason for trafficking in Nigeria is Unemployment. The lack of job opportunity that confront the Nigerian youths late 80s have cause many of them to look for greener pasture outside the soil of Nigeria make them prey to the traffickers (<https://www.standard.co.uk/>). The number of female Nigerians arriving in Italy by boat surged to more than 11,000 last year (2018) from 1,500 in 2014, with at least four in five forced into prostitution (International Organization for Migration, 2018). The major victims of the trafficking business are Nigerian young women, many of whom are illiterate or semi educated. In the desperation of looking for job many traffickers use job offer to lure them into Europe where they are turned into prostitute (Pearson, 2002), IOM (1996). Before they discovered that they have been deceived it became too late for them to get out of the trap. To keep them in perpetual bondage the traffickers may confiscate their passports, because they paid for their transportation, shelter, clothing, and food, so they become indebted to them (traffickers) and are obliged to work for them. Some traffickers even go as far as using diabolic means to keep their victims in perpetual slavery. A typical example of this diabolic act was the case of Josephine Iyamu who according to The National [Crime Agency](#) (NCA) said Iyamu forced victims to take oaths that bound their loyalty to her under pain of death (evening Standard).

The third cause is displacement as conflict is a push factor for trafficking. Over decade now Nigeria has been facing serious crises due to Boko Haram insurgence which caused many people in the North-East to be displaced from their homes. When people are forced to flee their homes and communities, they can experience financial hardship, homelessness, and other shocks. These displaced persons are easy targets for traffickers. The traffickers may approach them offering to help them out of their predicament; they can easily the fall into their trap. The most susceptible amongst the displaced people are children who have lost their parents, without a safe place to call their home or a guardian to provide for and protect them; these children become exposed to abuse, unfair treatment, and to trafficking.

The fourth cause is lack of experience: Inexperience had led some young Nigerian women to become victims of human trafficking. Most especially inexperience teenage girls have accepted attractive job offer from traffickers, they might had seen it as a great opportunity of earning much money at such a young age, not knowing they are heading to their doom. Data had shown how many young women from Edo State of Nigeria had left their homes for Libya in order to cross to Italy in the hope of getting rich quickly but fell into the hands of traffickers due to lack of experience (International Labour Organization, 2005). Also, literatures have revealed that runaway young women, who are homeless, unloved or are running away from relations who had abused them in the past, may be willing to take great risks when traffickers offer to help them and may even find comfort living with a trafficker.

Finally, and most important reason for Nigerian women taking into trafficking business is greed, to get rich quickly. Human trafficking is believed to reap enormous profits for trafficking agents and Nigerian women who are supposed to be the custodians of life take into trafficking as a mean of achieving success (International Labour Organization, 2005). They use the country's porous borders and connive with some corrupt embassy officials who assist them in issuing visas to them and their prey

4.2. *The Effect of Trafficking on Nigerian Women*

It is imperative to know that trafficked women are exposed to various degrees of hazards.

Below are the summary of the consequences of human trafficking :

First it has been revealed from the records obtained from the survivors of human trafficking that they had experienced post-traumatic stress, difficulty in relationships, depression, memory loss, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, and other severe forms of mental trauma (Hossain M et al (2010). Many victims also experience physical injuries particularly those who have been sexually exploited by both by their traffickers and customers. On 14th February 2019 about 161 Nigerians who were stranded in Libya were brought back to Nigeria from Libya, these were amongst the trafficked and other immigrants who were sinking for greener pasture in Europe (NAN, 2019). They told the tale of horror, stories of rape and torture even by Libya prison officials where they were detained. Some of the women returned with either pregnancy or children devastated and humiliated. Some trafficked people have lost their lives to the traffickers who harvest human organs to sell to the needy patients of these organs.

Secondly, some studies had pointed out that ostracism is common amongst the survivor of human trafficking who was rescued by the government agencies (WHO, 2012). This may be due to their personal feelings of guilt and shame or because they've relocated and now live far away from their community. Either way, victims can become isolated, withdrawn, and lose contact with most of their relations. Some individuals who return home or escape a trafficking situation may even be excluded from social groups due to stigmatization; they may be shunned by their family and friends and feel unloved and unwanted. Unfortunately, this isolation can make them vulnerable to being trafficked again or lead them to return to an abusive lifestyle they had liberated from.

Thirdly, many victims of trafficker's lack skill due to the fact they might have been trafficked at a young age and were unable to get formal education or learn any trade that they would depend on, in life. After being confined to the same job for a long period of time and not being allowed to learn new skills, victims can become dependent. After gaining freedom, they may have a hard time living on their own.

Fourthly, trafficked persons are usually been economically exploited by the traffickers. Trafficked women rarely have decision making power over what they earn and may be charged by traffickers for 'services' or 'supplies' such as housing, clothes, food or transport. These usurious practices often lead to 'debt bondage' (TVPA, 2017)

Finally, the effects of human trafficking on traffickers are also devastating. Many Nigerian women who are traffickers are tagged as most dangerous individuals who make money using other human being. Trafficking is regarded as one of the worst crimes in the world. The law in Nigeria prescribes penalties of 10 to 15 years' imprisonment for sex trafficking offenses or a fine of the equivalent of approximately \$1,250, or both (Adeplumi, 2015).

4.3. *Efforts to Curb Human Trafficking in Nigeria*

To tackle the rise of human trafficking in Nigeria which put the name of the country in the mud, the Nigerian Federal Government has set up a very powerful agency called Nigeria's Anti-Trafficking Agency (NAPTIP). NAPTIP is stepping up efforts to catch traffickers and support victims. These efforts had been backed by a 7-million-pound aid package announced by Britain's foreign aid department (DFID).

"We are giving vulnerable people more choices to earn a living in their own country and reducing the chances of their suffering from modern slavery," Penny Mordaunt, Britain's international aid minister, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "We have established a local task force to ... increase surveillance intelligence and arrest traffickers

"We have embarked on more aggressive campaigns to create awareness," Julie Okah-Donli, NAPTIP's director, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "We are covering all the schools and rural areas because this is where they get the girls from. "The agency is also rewarding whistleblowers with a share of traffickers' gains. "Since the policy was adopted in October, 2018, we have had more than 50 people coming to us with information," Okah-Donli added. (<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/trafficking-of-youth/federal-efforts>)

Britain's latest pledge to Nigeria was a promise in September, 2018, to double its spending on global projects tackling slavery and trafficking to 150 million pounds. The money will create jobs in sectors such as hospitality, technology and farming in Nigeria, and support victims with safe houses, rehabilitation and training for counselors, declared by DFID. At the global level, in 2003, the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons established a universal trafficking definition and set a goal for countries to prevent and combat trafficking and assist victims. Similarly, the U.S. Department of State's "Trafficking in Persons Report" offers suggestions for nations to comply with the "minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking". Nigeria ratified UN protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons' and passed a national law against trafficking entitled "Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003. An office of National Agency for the Prohibition of trafficking in persons was established

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has explored the concept of human trafficking and the involvement of Nigerian women in the evil trade, and found that the major cause of it was poverty, unemployment and also the greed on the part of Nigerian women traffickers. We have therefore put forward the following suggestions to combat human trafficking in Nigeria

- Federal Government must redress its policy of poverty reduction and be more serious in its implementation since the major cause of human trafficking in the nation is poverty.
- Establishment of anti-trafficking centers is a necessity in each local government headquarters in all the states of the federation. These agencies should provide human trafficking awareness training for individuals, businesses, first responders, law enforcement, educators, and federal employees, among others. The centers should be able to host an awareness-raising event to watch and discuss films about human trafficking. For example, learn how modern slavery exists today; watch an investigative documentary about sex trafficking; or discover how human trafficking can affect global food supply chains. Also, check out CNN's Freedom Project for more stories on the different forms of human trafficking around the world.
- The role of women is vital in curtailing and stopping menace of the evil trade in Nigeria is far reaching. Women are believed to be agent of change and are known to be closer to their children than men. This gives them right position along with the constituted authorities to combat human trafficking. Nigerian women should make every possible effort to give their children formal education. This will invariably give them self-worth, discerning what is good and bad which would expose them to the factors causing human trafficking. Provision of necessities of life to their children is basic so that the female children would not sleep around in search of shelter. Their young women should be induced with the feeling of contentment. Girls with lack of contentment are prone to engage themselves in illicit acts such as prostitution and easy prey to traffickers.
- Individual involvement is every vital. Individuals should be encouraged to raise anti- human trafficking agencies in their areas and get involved on a local level to fight against the evil trade. Also, people must be aware that trafficking happens in places like hotels, shallows, airports and shopping malls and look out for the following signs – where victims are closely watched, excessive security in their workplace or homes. If you suspect someone is being trafficked, try to contact the anti-Trafficking Resource Center line in the headquarters that are in the local government close to you.
- The more knowledge one has about what human trafficking the better prepared and equipped one is to stop it. Educate yourself about human trafficking. Read books and articles, watch videos, listen to experts at any opportunity you may have with them to eradicate human trafficking in Nigeria.
- Also, at individual level try to supporting counter-trafficking initiatives by creating campaigns that raise awareness in your neighbourhood. Try to get contact with your local, state, and federal government representatives to let them know you care about combating human trafficking, and to enable you know what they are doing to address it. Also, an individual can set up or organize a fundraiser and donate the proceeds to an anti-trafficking organization.
- Local schools such as public primary schools, community secondary schools should be encouraged to include modern slavery in their curricula. As a parent, educator, or school administrator or teachers be aware of how traffickers target school-aged children.
- Local religious community or congregation should be sensitized on how they would help stop trafficking by supporting a victim service provider or spreading awareness of human trafficking. They should take a leave from what Catholic Church is doing in many parts of the world in helping to combat human trafficking. The sensitization programme should be extended to university campuses so that students would establish university awareness club about human trafficking and students be encourage to write their term paper / project on the topic concerning human trafficking.
- The state governments and NGOs should provide jobs, internships, skills training, and other opportunities to trafficking survivors. State governments should provide resources to attorneys who offer to assist human trafficking victims' legal service.
- Health Care Providers especially the primary health care units be trained to identify the indicators of human trafficking and assist victims. With assistance from anti-trafficking organizations, extend low-cost or free services to human trafficking victims.
- The social media in Nigeria should involve in anti-human trafficking activities since they play enormous role in shaping perceptions and helping to guide the public conversation and awareness by reporting and narrating stories about human trafficking.

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