THE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Human trafficking is a phenomenon that is currently generating a lot of concern globally, especially in countries like Nigeria. the vulnerability of prospective victims are exploited in many respects: the victims most of whom are pre-teens, teenagers and mostly females are taken away from their home lands to cities within their country or across national boundaries and exploited for optimum economic benefits. Many of them are engaged in cheap labour such as domestic servants, beggars, commercial sex workers or put into other forms of servitude akin to slavery. All these are done to the victims to the detriment of their health. This paper x-rayed the phenomenon, its trends in Nigeria, motivations for trafficking in Nigeria, health implications, ways of combating the evil and finally recommendations for addressing the problem.

Introduction

Human trafficking is one of the largest and most profitable crimes in the world, affecting all sectors of society. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), (2005) approximately 2.5 million people are trafficked every year. Human trafficking, a gross violation of human rights and human dignity, has been identified by numerous government leaders as one of the priority issues of our time. (Todres, 2011). The trafficking victims protection act of 2000 provides for protection of victims, prosecutions of traffickers, and international prevention strategies to address this crime. This law defines trafficking as any commercial sex act induced by force, fraud or coercion or in which the person induced to perform acts is not 18 years old. This definition includes recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person of a person for labour or services, servitude, dept bondage, or slavery (Trafficking Victims Protection Act, TVPA, 2000).

Jordan (2007) opined that human trafficking is part of a pattern of migration, within and across countries, human trafficking removes migrants from the protection of their communities and severes them from their system of social support. This means that human trafficking takes place intranationally and internationally. For whichever one, the activities remain the same as well as the purpose.

The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (2010) identified five stages of human trafficking process to include-pre-departure stage, travel and transit stage, destinations stage; the detention deportation and criminal investigation stage; and the integration and re-integration stage. Once, the trafficked reaches the destination stage, the individual is made aware of the debt incurred and thereafter placed under debt bondage.

Nigeria is not the only country perpetrating human trafficking, nor is it the only country suffering from its effects. It is estimated that one to million people are trafficked round the world every year-mostly women and children, but increasingly men and boys as well-generally for forced prostitution, agricultural bondage, or other forms of indentured servitude (Transparency International and key Centre of Ethics Justice and Governance, 2001). One estimate indicates that approximately 50,000 of those trafficked around the world are taken to the United States, (Uzor, 2001).

Human trafficking is a phenomenon that is currently generating a lot of concern globally, especially in countries like Nigeria, where it is highly prevalent. The vulnerability of prospective victims are exploited in many respects; the victims most of whom are pre-teen, teenagers and mostly female are taken far away from their homelands to cities within their country or across national boundaries and exploited for optimum economic benefits. Many of them are engaged in cheap labour such as domestic servants, hawkers, beggars, prostitutes or put into other forms of servitude akin to slavery. Expectedly, the global outcry generated against-this phenomenon is informed by the obvious, human degradation which accompanies this racketeering. A number of global initiatives, many to which Nigeria is a signatory, have been put in place as a way of addressing this challenge (Dave-Odigie, 2008).

Human Trafficking Trends in Nigeria

Keefer (2006) asserted that human trafficking ranked the world's third largest crime. Perhaps the nefarious activities of human traffickers in Nigeria would have remained hidden and uninhibited despite general concern but for the intervention of the office of the wife of the Vice President of Nigeria with the collaboration of the wife of Edo State Governor in 1999. The suffering and indignity meted out to trafficked victims in the process of transporting them at the various destinations, especially those abroad, had become a huge source of embarrassment to Nigeria's integrity as a nation with responsibility to safeguard the interest of its

nationals.

Internal trafficking of women and children is a new phenomenon. It has been going on with the trafficking of people from rural communities to major cities such as Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Calabar, Warri and Port Harcourt. Trafficking for organized begging takes place mostly in the Northern part of Nigeria where physically challenged are lured into begging business in major cities such as Kano and Kaduna. Furthermore experienced adult beggars traffic children under their custody (Toye, 2009).

Baby harvesting is another type of human trafficking in Nigeria. In states like Ebonyi, Abia and Lagos, there are cases of hospitals, clinics, orphanages, doctors and nurses who keep teenage and single mothers who do not want to keep their babies after birth to provide them shelter and care while they are pregnant and sell off their babies for a premium to couples that need them (UNESCO, 2009). They are made to sign papers renouncing their rights to the babies as well as swear to oaths of secrecy.

Motivations for Human Trafficking in Nigeria

ILO (2000) opined that although Nigeria has enormous natural and human resources, corruption takes a serious toll on the country's economy. Nigeria has been rated one of the poorest countries in the world and so widespread poverty abounds even in the midst of abundant resources. Thus, poverty has been identified as the principal driving force behind this trade and the most visible cause of the vulnerability of women and children to trafficking in Nigeria. In their report they found out that 40% of Nigeria's street children and hawkers are trafficked persons. These children are from poor and deplorable backgrounds and due to lack of opportunity at home and with or without their consent are trafficked.

Obviously, there are close linkages between poverty and widespread illiteracy as well as unsafe and uninformed migration. Due to the high rate of many Nigerians of school age are not in school because they cannot afford it, thus those with minimal education and who skills required to secure good jobs often fall easy prey to traffickers who deceive them with tales of good jobs in the cities. According to NAN (2007) negligence accounts for why most of the trafficked victims pass through immigration with fake visas which are undetected at the point they are checked. Negligence may be attributed to poor salaries for the security agents or to corruption as some victims claimed that some security agents connived with the traffickers

who let them pass security checkpoints at the airports or land borders unchecked.

The motivation for human trafficking in Nigeria is multifaceted, poverty is identified as a major cause but unemployment, ignorance, illiteracy, collapse of the protective environment and the decline in cultural and traditional values are contributory factors.

Health Implications of Human Trafficking

Victims of human trafficking are unable to leave their employers. The trafficker forces them to work using a multitude of exploitative means including but not limited to: physical force, emotional coercion, fraudulent promises, threats to the victim or victim's family; confiscation of identification documents and debt bondage, isolated, enslaved and scared. Victims of human trafficking may be subjected to physical and psychological abuse. Persistent and severe abuse combined with long working hours and poor living conditions, can lead to a multitude of physical or psychological health problems for the victims (Dolenz, 2011). Human trafficking is a global public health issue. Health issues are ignored until they are critical or life-threatening. Dirty and crowded living conditions, couple with poor nutrition, cause health conditions such as scabies, tuberculosis and other communicable diseases.

The health implications of human trafficking could be categorized into four categories namely physical sexual and reproductive, psychological and social implications.

Physical health implications

APHA (2011) pointed out some physical health problems associated with human trafficking to include chronic back pains; hearing and vision problems occurring from working in dangerous agriculture, sweet shop or construction conditions. Long-term untreated issues such as cardiovascular or respiratory problems, diabetes or cancer may be present. Bruises, scars and other signs of physical abuse and torture may be visible. Malnourishment may be present especially in child victims, as are dental issues.

Dolenz (2010) opined that a survivour of trafficking who was stabbed in the arm by his trafficker may continue to feel pain in this arm long after the wound has healed due to the destructive psychological impact of the incident. Many of these survivours suffer from depression, insomnia, acute anxiety and stress as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which is common among them. Psychological trauma can also be an underlying cause of physical symptoms such as stomach pains and

headaches.

Sexual and reproductive health implications

According to Dolenz (2011) most women who worked as sex workers reported having 10 to 25 clients per night, while some had as many as 40 to 50 per night. Gyneacological complications were the most commonly reported health problems. Due to the sexual abuse incurred by victims of trafficking they are vulnerable to the following health problems thus: HIV/AIDs, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and related complication including pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), urinary tract infection (UTI), cystitis, cervical cancer and infertility. Acute or chronic pain during sex, tearing and other damage to vagonal tract. Negative outcomes of unsafe abortion, including cervical incontinence, septic shock, unwanted birth, irritable bowel syndrome, stress-related syndromes and inability to negotiate sexual encounters (Zimmerman, Yun, Watts, Adams et al 2007).

Psychological health implications

A number of studies have identified the serious and often complex mental health needs of victims of human trafficking (Alexander, Kellogg & Thompson, 2005). The majority of research related to the mental health of this population focuses on the significant levels of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Victims of human traffick have often "experienced, witnessed or confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or others". In addition to PTDS, victims of human trafficking have been found to suffer from other anxiety and mood disorders including panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and major depressive disorder.

Dolenz (2010) pointed out that victims of trafficking may suffer feelings of helplessness, shame, humiliation, denial, disbelief of culture shock from being in a strange country. Findings from a European study, observed that victims of this circumstances have feelings of memory loss, memory defects, diminished coping capacity, somatic conditions (chronic headache, stomach pain or trembling) and immune suppression, aggressiveness, substance misuse, addition. Individuals with traumatic histories of physical an/or sexual abuse have also been found to be at increased risk for the development of dissociative disorders which are characterized as a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception (Williamson

Dutch & Clawson, 2005).

According to Ekaterina (2006) opined that studies indicate that trauma worsens throughout the duration of the trafficking process. The longer the victims remain under the control of their traffickers, the more severe and long-lasting the effects of their trauma. The symptoms may persist for long time after the trafficking experience unless support and appropriate counseling is provided.

Social health implications

Findings from a European study observed that while in the trafficked situation women were isolated as a result of restricted movement, time and activities, absence of support and linguistic cultural and social barriers. None of the women reported feel free to do as she liked. Some were physically confined, others were under regular surveillance. The majority of women had little to or no contact with family members. Implications or effects as a result of trafficking includes feelings of isolation, loneliness and exclusion; inability to establish and maintain helping or supportive relationships, mistrust of others, social withdrawal, personal insecurity; difficulty with (re)integration, difficulty developing healthy relationships, helplessness, re-trafficked, re-entry into high-risk labour and relationships.

Combating Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Besides global intervention, Nigerian Government and NGOs are involved in efforts to combat human trafficking. Dave-Odigie (2008) asserted that to stem the rising tide in human trafficking in Nigeria, the government has set up machineries and embarked on legislations while aligning with international protocols as both preventive and deterrent measures. In 2001, it ratified the United Nations protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in person especially women and children as well as passed a national law in 2003. Through this act, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTP) was established. However, the non-governmental organization like Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) has also been involved in the prosecution of traffickers, protection of victims, rehabilitation, retraining and counseling of repatriated trafficked people and their activities have received worldwide support as well as local recognition for the contribution towards combating or curbing the menace.

The media plays an indispensable role in educating abound the manifestations of global human trafficking presenting the

problem in human terms and in all its painful detail. The media illuminates the problem, provides a help line: it is ethical and respectful for media to protect victims by altering details of identity and personal story.

Enacting a comprehensive law that will cover most aspects of human trafficking, specify severe punishment for traffickers, rehabilitate victims and give officers adequate investigation tools.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, human trafficking especially the cross-borders trafficking is a fast growing international organized crime. It is motivated and continues to thrive because of poverty, ignorance, selfishness, greed and lack of state capacity to translate policy into action. The results of the harsh economic realities in Nigeria have contributed to its sustenance. Nigeria is part of the global system and thus must respond and be seen to be responding responsibly to trends of any form. The country might be confronted with grave challenges like the prevalence and the depriving of the country of its human resources and HIV/AIDs. It is a social vice that needs to be curbed by addressing the issue holistically through policy, action and co-operation of stakeholders.

Efforts at addressing the problem of human trafficking would just have to revisit the issue of corruption in high and low places especially in government bureaucracy and other relevant agencies. Personnel of these agencies have to be made to understand the implications of their actions and inactions on issues pertaining to trafficking in women and children.

Recommendations

1. Due to the revolving trends of human trafficking there should be ongoing research into it, such research will lead to synergies between the government, NAPTIP, security agencies, EFCC, NGOs and various stakeholders to co-operate and co-ordinate their efforts towards finding lasting solution to the problem.

2. Public opinion should be critically mobilized behind a concerted campaign to put a stop to the inhuman trade and this can be done by conducting public enlightenment programmes like organizing seminars, workshops and conference of stakeholders, documentaries to inform the people on the pernicious impact of human trafficking.

3. The police on whom the primary responsibility for crime detection, prevention and control rests on as well as the immigration and custom service need to be properly equipped and professionalized as demoralized police and immigration personnel would be incapable of providing efficient service.

4. Since women are more vulnerable to trafficking, a social security policy should be put in place to enhance their access to education by providing scholarships. This will sustain the millennium development goals of ensuring the girl-rights and child education.

5. Since the government is not living up to expectation which includes providing for the basic needs of its people, people will continue to seek for their own ways of making ends meet be it legal or illegal. The government can achieve good governance in bringing lasting solution to this problem by promoting polices which reduce the level of poverty and ensure equity in the distribution of resources among citizens.

6. Government should strengthen bilateral agreements to garner international co-operation and also enter into ones towards tackling the problems of human trafficking. This includes the co-ordination of laws, investigation and the seizure of crime proceeds.

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