



Child Trafficking in Nigeria: Causes, Outcomes and Interventions

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Abstract

Trafficking of persons is a global problem with serious consequences for individual victims as well as communities and countries. This paper took a closer look at child trafficking in Nigerian: causes, outcomes and interventions. Human trafficking is the business of taking children, women and men away from their homes, transporting them elsewhere, to be put to use by others, usually for the sole purpose of exploitations and money making. The paper discusses the concept of human trafficking and reasons for human trafficking such as sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, domestic work, forced marriage and illicit adoption. The major causes of child trafficking are classified into two namely; demands for child and adult labour, sexual exploitation. The problems associated with child trafficking in Nigeria include educational deprivation, physical, psychological, behavioural and health problems. Child trafficking in Nigeria could be prevented through educating the public about trafficking and its associated consequences, investment in educational programmes, poverty alleviation, protection of children's right and appropriate legislative and enforcement. Everyone in the society needs to fight against human trafficking from the local to international levels.

Key words: Child, Trafficking, Child trafficking, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation

Introduction

Human trafficking is a global problem with serious consequences for individual victims as well as communities and countries. It involves a range of human rights violations which in the long term may have serious physical and psychological effects on victims especially children and women. It is a process of people being recruited in their communities and countries of origin and transported to the destination for the purpose of forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others (Amnesty International, 2011).

Human trafficking report indicates that there are over 24.9 million victims of all human trafficking in existence, with the vast majority of these victims being women and children (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), 2017). The trafficking of young individuals includes activities such as domestic labour, hard labour, and sex trafficking and is believed to involve 71% of trafficked victims each year (ILO, 2017). Nigerian women, teen girls and children account for 70% of those trafficked to Italy (Akor, 2011)

Nigeria has being one of the leading African countries in human trafficking with cross-border and internal trafficking. Trafficking in persons in Nigeria is the third largest crime after economic fraud and the drug trade in Nigeria (Policy Paper Poverty Series, 2006). Nigeria is a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking. There is also evidence of internal trafficking (Hassan, 2012). Destinations for trafficked Nigerians include the neighbouring West African countries (Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Benin Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon and Guinea), European countries (Italy, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom), North Africa (Libya, Algeria and Morocco) and Middle Eastern countries (Saudi Arabia, Japan and Pakistan) (Trafficking in Persons Reports, 2017).

The Nigeria Government in several times and the world at large have put in efforts to address human trafficking by enacting laws and penalties including economic empowerment and reintegration programmes. Despite these initiatives, trafficking in person remains a critical problem in the world especially including Nigeria where children are suffering for child trafficking (Adepelumi, 2015). The persistence of harmful cultural practices, the growth of the reach and influence of organized crime and the persistent loss of young women and children to sexual and forced labour exploitation require concerted and constant attention to fight human trafficking in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper shall be discussed under the following sub-headings: Concept of Trafficking, Causes of Trafficking, Routs and Destinations of Trafficking in Nigeria, Consequences of Trafficking, Prevention and Recommendation.

Concept of Trafficking

Adesina (2014) asserted that trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children and adults by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments, benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over the child for the purpose of exploitation.

The UN convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (2011) defined trafficking as “ The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, of abuse of power giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person, having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation” “exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”

Thus, in line with the above definition, trafficking generally refers to the business of taking children away from their homes, transporting them elsewhere, to be put to use by others, usually to make money (Dottridge, 2004). Trafficking is a form of human adoption which involves the movement of people, most often, against their will for the purposes of sexual or labour exploitation. The International Labour Office (2014) stated that exploitation of people may come in the form of abusive conditions to which the victim is subjected, including physical and mental abuse or confinement, inadequate or non-existent health care, poor accommodation and hazardous work. They further stressed that exploitation can occur at any point in the chain of events that, when taken together, are recognized as trafficking, forcing a child or persons, or misleading him/her with false promises in the recruitment or transportation process is also considered exploitative.

Causes of Child Trafficking

The causes of child trafficking are traceable to two major factors:

- 1) Demands for child labour and sexual exploitation of children.
- 2) Abundant supply of children from poverty-stricken families who are easy prey for traffickers (Ogundele, 2004; Makinde, 2015), However, some of the side causes of demand and supply factors includes the followings:-
 - a) **Economic Growths:** Economic growth tends to result in increasing demand for cheap migrant labour, as the domestic work force is able to move away from low skilled and low wage employment.
 - b) **Rising Demand for Children Sexual Exploitation:** Rising demand for children for exploitation in commercial sex can be traced, among other things, growth in the sex industry at the national and international levels as virgin girls are highly priced around the world.
 - c) **Poverty and the Desire for Better life:** poverty is an important root cause of child trafficking. Children from poor or indebted families, communities, countries or regions especially in Nigeria are vulnerable to the “pull” of higher wages and standards of living. They or their care-givers often believe or expect that they will be able to provide for their family if they relocate for work in cities or another country. Also, poor families are often unable to provide for all their children and thus see no choice but to send one or more of them to urban areas where they can support themselves.
 - d) **Lack of Education Opportunities:** Children within no access to education often have little alternative but to look for work at a very early age. In Nigeria as claimed by Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) (2001), a considerable number of trafficked victims in prostitution in the country have only completed primary school education or have dropped out of secondary school. They also lack vocational training.
 - e) **Political Conflict and Transition:** Political conflict often lead to massive migration flows both within countries and cross borders, as people flee to avoid getting caught up in the violence. Troubled political and economic transition can also increase extreme poverty, small-and large-scale crime, and child trafficking.
 - f) **The cultural Context-** Many cultures in Nigeria have a long tradition of children labouring to help their families at home or in the field. This traditional attitude often results in the inadvertent placement of a child in a situation of exploitative labour. In many African countries especially Nigeria for example, sending children to work in faraway places is seen as a socially acceptable norm and often occurs in the context of family dysfunction related to large family size or an inability to care for children because of a death in the family, displacement, severe economic stress or other factors.
 - g) **The Legal and Regulatory Environment:** These exist in many countries legislature loopholes for trafficking and/or commercial sexual exploitation. Also, many countries suffer from tax regulatory

measures and under-funded regulatory mechanisms such as police, customs or border guards, and judiciary. In Nigeria, the trafficking specific legislation, as well as open borders that allow relatively easy trans-national movement. Restrictive legal immigration may also contribute to the desperation of families and children looking for other ways to enter a country, thus putting them at the mercy of exploiters. Other causes include Globalization, greed, and ignorance/illiteracy.

Routes and Destinations of Child Trafficking In Nigeria

There are many means at which victims are trafficked from Nigeria, among which are: the air ports, for those who got a visa through falsification of documents in collaboration with corrupt immigration officials, most specifically those with up to date schengen visa where many victims used one passport (Carling, 2006). Others are by road via desert, where they are smuggled by ships to European countries (Salihu & Ajio, 2009). Equally important are the seaports, crossing borders as well as beach and ocean craft.

Nigeria has many recruitment centers for trafficking. Carling (2006) submitted that children are recruited from different parts of the country, but the central zones are Kano, Abuja, and Kaduna from the North of Nigeria, in the south west we have Lagos and Ibadan while Niger Delta has Edo, Delta, and Rivers State. Furthermore, Adesina, (2014) opined that most of the trafficking within the country are from rural to urban settings and mostly from “Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, Bayelsa, Ebony, Imo, Abia, Anambra, Benue, Niger and Kwara States to most cities such as Lagos, Abeokuta, Abuja, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Calabar and Port Harcourt.

The actual destination for trafficked Nigerian children depends on the purpose of their exploitation. However, for most of the female victims Italy is the most prepared target from Nigeria. And those that were not able to reach Europe end up being trapped in North African Countries (Carling, 2006), to buttress the fact Okejuwon, (2008) submitted that the estimates by the Italian authorities shows that about 10,000 Nigeria prostitutes live in Italy, other countries includes Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Belgium, Australia, Canada, Spain, Lebanon and Germany (Adesina, 2014). Similarly, within Africa children are also trafficked to Cote d’Ivoire, South Africa, Togo, Guinea, Benin, Mali, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Niger Republic, Cameroon, Gabon, and Liberia (Carling, 2006). Internally, within Nigeria, it is more common in the South-South (Carling, 2006; Adesina, 2014). The trafficking routes involved all neighbouring countries that shared borders with Nigeria.

Consequences of Child Trafficking

Traffickers use psychological manipulations and coercive methods to maintain control over their victims and to make their escape virtually impossible by destroying their physical and psychological defences. However, the major effects on the victims includes:

- 1) **Educational Deprivation:** Children who are trafficked are robbed of the few educational opportunities available to them and, thus, deny them a chance to improve their future economic situation. Related research has identified adverse outcomes of educational deprivation among victims of neglect and abuse, (outcomes include developmental delays, language and cognitive difficulties, deficits in verbal and memory skills, poorer academic performance, and grade retention (International Organization for Migration, 2007).
- 2) **Physical Health Problems:** Victims of child trafficking experience inhumane living conditions, inadequate diet and hygiene, beatings and abuse, neglect and denial of their basic human rights to health care and protection, resulting in lasting health problem (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking International, 2007). Victims of commercial sexual exploitations are further threatened by unsafe sexual practices, heightening risks of unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, complications from frequent high-risks pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDs (Mitchels, 2004). HIV/AIDs and other sexually transmitted diseases are prevalent among victims who have been trafficked. Related research has also identified a number of adverse health outcomes for victims who have been abused, maltreated, and victimized especially children that were trafficked for forced labour and soldiers (ECPAT, 2007).
- 3) **Emotional Health Problems:** The experiences associated with trafficking can lead to lasting psychological challenges, victims of trafficking experience physical and emotional trauma associated with removal from their families, homes, and communities, their subsequent encounters involve substantial harm through physical, emotional, and sexual abuse (Mitchels, 2004). Case studies have reported adverse emotional effects among trafficked victims, including depression, hopelessness, guilt, shame, flashbacks, nightmares, loss of confidence, lower self-esteem, and anxiety (ECPAT, 2006). The negative messages they routinely receive can influence their sense of worth, leading to feelings of self-blame.

Empirical research on child maltreatment has identified numerous adverse consequences for victims. Psychological abuse associated with on-going threats, isolation, and witnessing the abuse of others negatively

affects self-concept, personal goals, and relationships with others, and seriously jeopardizes emotional well-being (Sneddon, 2003). However, multiple experiences of victimization during childhood increase risk for mental illness and psychiatric difficulties in adults who were victimized as children (Elliot & Urquiza, 2006).

4) **Behavioural Outcomes-** Adverse behavioural outcomes including attachment difficulties, mistrust of adults, antisocial behaviours, and difficulties relating to others, have been reported among children who were trafficked (ECPAT, 2006). He further revealed that several reports suggests that commercial sex exploitation is a risk factor for sexualized behaviour and that some adolescents may turn to prostitution, drug abusers, and commit several crimes because they feel worthless, that their lives have been spoiled, and that they have nothing left to lose.

Elliot and urquiza (2006) linked hostile and aggressive behaviour in children who were psychically abused to the aggressive manner in which they are treated. Children who were physically or sexually abused experience suicidal behaviours, emotional problems, and difficulties relating to their peers. They are at greater risk for substance abuse, violence, antisocial behaviour, and related problems.

Prevention of Child Trafficking In Nigeria

Ogundele (2004), UNICEF (2007) and United States Department of States (2018) believed that prevention of child trafficking is the duty of every individual, Governmental and non-Governmental- both at local, national and international levels. However, the following could be done to prevent the phenomena or, at least, reduce the incidence to the minimum. Thus, the immediate solutions are:

- 1) To educate the public about trafficking and the dangers to victims of the most exploitative and abusive forms of child labour and to mobilize governments and societies to combat them.
- 2) Poverty alleviation programs should be put in place by Government and non-Governmental agencies to address the socio-economic status of the people.
- 3) Investments in primary education, which contributes to liberation of children from work and yield major economic, social and politics for all.
- 4) Improving children's access to educational and vocational opportunities and increasing the level of school attendance, in particular by girls and minority groups.
- 5) Creating alternative employment opportunities for adults is also a key to reducing the pressures of children to work in order to supplement the family income. Micro-enterprises development and private sector development generally may contribute to providing such opportunist for poor families.
- 6) Implementing measures to reduce "the invisibility of exploitation" a multi-agency programme of monitoring, administrative controls and intelligence gathering on the labour markets and, where applicable, on the sex industry, will contribute greatly to this objectives.
- 7) Addressing the problem of unprotected, informal and often illegal labour, with a view to seeking a balance between the demand for inexpensive labour and the possibilities of regular migration.
- 8) Government should deal appropriately and decisively with the identified offenders so as to serve as a deterrent to others who may want to do the same.
- 9) Appropriate legislations and enforcement will also help to reduce the incidences of child trafficking in Nigeria especially that of protecting the right of the girl child.

Conclusion

Human trafficking is a serious global issue. It involves the business of taking children and other victims away from their homes, transporting them elsewhere, to be put to use by others, usually to make money. Human trafficking inflicts on the victims great physical, psychological, educational, and health consequences. The major causes of human trafficking include ignorance and poverty, child labour and sexual exploitation of children. Interventions will require the development, implementation, and evaluation of strategies to prevent human trafficking as well as psychosocial programmes to address the needs of those who have been trafficked.

Recommendations

In view of the review, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government, stakeholders and other relevant agencies should embark on health education and awareness campaign on the dangers of child trafficking.
2. Government and non-Governmental Organizations should partner to put adequate measures in place to empower the youths and its populace by creating functional and free skill acquisition opportunities as a way of alleviating poverty.



- 3 Governments should intensify their efforts at creating jobs, especially for vulnerable adolescent females who are easily lured into the illicit trade due to hardship.
- 4 Government should collaborate with international agencies to create a child friendly environment to surmount the baby factory scourge and take pre-emptive actions against the culprits.
- 5 Law enforcement agencies should implement Child Life Protection Act to prohibit and punish persons caught in child trafficking in Nigeria.
- 6 Government and non-Governmental Organizations should improve children's access to educational and vocational opportunities and increase the level of school attendance, in particular by girls and minority groups.

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