

INEVITABILITY OF ECONOMICALLY INDUCED SEX WORK IN NIGERIA: A MARXIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH

Ikezue, Clement Emeka, Ph.D

Department of Sociology/Anthropology

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

clemikez@yahoo.com or ec.ikezue@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

Commercial sex work is arguably one of the oldest professions on the planet. So many people are involved in the trade either passively or actively. The trade appears to have taken a new dimension with some form of sophistication. The inevitability of economically induced sex work is apparent and disturbing. This paper tried to examine why commercial sex work has persisted in the society even when people paint a sanctimonious posture of themselves. This is against the background that even in the face of seemingly clampdown by the law enforcement agents, the workers appear undeterred. The paper adopted the Marxian Political Economy Approach in explaining the persistence of commercial sex work in Nigeria. Qualitative method of data collection was used in the study. This involved the use of the In Depth Interview (IDI) as instrument for data collection. Collated data were analyzed using the thematic method of qualitative data analysis. It was found in the study that several factors were responsible for the persistence of the economically induced sex work in Nigeria. Prominent among them is the necessity to survive the non friendly economic reality in the country. Lack of empowerment of the female persons in many communities also account for the perpetuity of the trade. The paper recommended among others the empowerment of the female persons in the country with a view to mitigating the non friendly economic reality they face.

Keywords: Commercial sex work, commercial sex worker, transactional sex and Marxian theory

Introduction

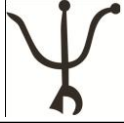
Commercial sex work is perhaps the oldest profession on earth. It is as old as the history of man (Hussaini, 2016). It is one of the oldest trades in existence in our contemporary era. Ojo (2007) sees sex trade as the act of performing or offering or agreeing to perform a sex act for hire; engaging in or agreeing or offering to engage in sexual conduct with other persons under a fee arrangement with that person or any other person. It includes also any lewd act between persons for money or other considerations. Why it has persisted in the modern time is also a source of concern. At the root of economically induced sex trade is problem of unemployment in the country. In Nigeria, unemployment rate increased by

nearly 30 percent in 2018 to 16 million, according to a November report by the National Bureau of Statistics. Another two million were expected to be unemployed by the end of the year (Obiezu, 2018). He contends that less than forty percent of Nigeria's nearly 200 million people are fully employed. It is worthy of note that Nigeria overtook India recently as having the largest number of people living in extreme poverty — 87 million — according to the Washington-based Brookings Institution (Obiezu, 2018).

It is instructive to state that a great number of these people living in extreme poverty are females, many of whom are in their active reproductive ages. The increase in extreme poverty may likely put some people in a confused state of mind including but not restricted to taking dangerous decisions geared towards ameliorating the palpable adverse condition they found themselves in. One of such decisions may include taking to sex trade especially by the female persons as an escape route. There is plethora of studies which indicates that transactional or commercial sex is common throughout sub-Saharan Africa (Castle and Konate, 1999). Several reasons were adduced for involvement in sex trade. Some of which include, but are not limited to receiving money for subsistence, the need to take care of education related expenses and cater for family members (Chatterji, Murray, London and Anglewicz, 2004). Though several studies have documented the factors that made people to engage in commercial sex work, it appears that emphases in those studies were not directed on the inevitability of the economic factor in sex work. This paper is therefore hinged on the premise that economically induced sex work will continue to persist due largely to the prevailing economic realities on ground until there is a paradigm shift on the part of the ruling class and the ruled.

Literature Review

People are motivated into taking certain actions by the prevailing circumstances surrounding their material condition at a particular point in time. Commercial sex trade is often an offshoot on many intervening variables. According to Gungul and Audu (2014), people go into sex trade due to lack of funds, unemployment; absence of husband to marry them, frustration from former husbands and to get sexual satisfaction. They see lack of fund as a major determining factor for going into sex trade. In a related development, people who go into commercial sex trade confirmed that they were able to have access to their basic needs, sponsor their siblings to school, emotional stability, formal education and



sexual satisfaction (Gungul and Audu, 2014). It could then be said that commercial sex trade provide to some extent the wherewithal for upkeep of the persons involved in it. This could also explain why it may still persist in the country even in the midst of seemingly sanctimonious inclination of members of the society and disregard for the persons involve in the trade. Nnatu (2018) also pinpointed the factors leading to commercial sex trade. They include poverty, unemployment, discrimination against women, lack of parental guidance and friendship with the opposite sex. Still reoccurring in her submission on the factors leading to sex trade are the economically inclined determinants. According to Bullough and Bullough (1987), in developing countries, poverty is the main reason for prostitution. Similarly, Barrett and Beckett (1996) viewed poverty as precondition for prostitution in many societies. Most analyses of prostitution suggest that both men and women enter prostitution either professionally or temporarily as relative amateurs for economic and monetary reasons (Hussaini, 2016).

A retinue of factors were seen to be responsible for sex trade according to Hussaini (2016). These factors include illiteracy, peer group pressure, poverty, unemployment and trafficking in women. Other factors also associated with involvement in the trade are parents' over-reaction on their children, personal life style and laziness. He still maintains the prominence of poverty and unemployment as precursors to sex trade in the country. Furthermore, Qayyum, Iqbal, Akhtar, Hayat, Janjua and Tabassum (2013) contend that some women voluntarily get into sex trade because of poverty, hunger, economic crisis, family pressure or illness. Domestic responsibilities, economic crisis and lack of household economy forced women to involve in prostitution (Wawer et al., 1996). The poverty faced by the women in Africa has led them for taking decision to sell sex in exchange for money and favours in order to support their children (Cabrera, 1998). This is consistent with Bamgbose (2002) who stated that a large number of people especially the adolescents are living and making living on the streets. This according to him has been attributed to economic factors. It could be deciphered that sex trade in Nigeria has very serious economic undertone. This explains why economically induced sex work has persisited in

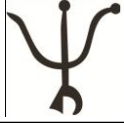
the country and calls for a total departure from the dysfunctional system which impedes the economic viability of the people.

Sex trade has so many attendant consequences. Qayyum, et al. (2013) stressed that the consequences of prostitution are very bad and have worse impact on women's health and social life. One of the worst consequences of sex trade is the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections and diseases. Commercial sex workers working in brothels are the most exposed to face the risk of HIV infection (Paudel & Carryer, 2000). The prices for sex trade tend to be higher when condoms were not used and this exposes the workers to severe health hazards (Gertler et al., 2005). For female sex workers, money is more important to survival and thus may not afford to take the threat of acquiring AIDS seriously (Hosain & Chatterjee, 2005). This further corroborates the maxim that economic factors may perpetuate the existence of sex trade in so far as the social structural problems inherent in the societies are intact and unaddressed.

Prostitution leads to un-wanted pregnancy, drug addiction, conflict, HIV/AIDS which often end up in death (UNESCO, 2003). Caldwell (1995) maintained that in Nigeria, high-risk population includes sex workers, pimps and other men who visit sex workers, such as long-distance truck drivers and itinerant workers. Similarly, Bongaart (1996) adumbrated that sex industry is the most significant factor in creating a self-sustaining and expanding AIDS epidemic especially in the developing countries. Commercial sex workers are at risk of being killed by ritual killers (Alobo and Rita, 2014). Sex trade may also lead to pregnancy. The workers sometimes suffer physical assault, violence and rape. Prostitution in Nigeria and in many other countries is considered illegal activity (Ojo, 2007). There are no laws or policies to protect the rights of commercial sex workers because it is illicit in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the Marxian Political Economy Approach as its theoretical thrust. Marx (1859) wrote a preface to his work "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy". According to him,



The first work which I undertook to dispel the doubts assailing me was a critical re-examination of the Hegelian philosophy of law; the introduction to this work being published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* issued in Paris in 1844. My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term “civil society”; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy (Para. 4).

Marx continued however, that “the study of this, which I began in Paris, I continued in Brussels, where I moved owing to an expulsion order issued by M. Guizot. The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarized as follows”;

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness (Para. 5).

In Marx’s views, the history of hitherto all existing society is that of class struggle and class domination. According to the tenets of this theory, commercial sex workers engaged in the trade by virtue of the economic position they occupy which is independent of their will. The precarious economic position they found themselves left them with little or no choice than to engage in sex trade. From the Marxian perspective, commercial sex workers are just

trying to survive the harsh economic climate forced upon them by the capitalists. It appears that the way and manner the society is structured tend to give credence to Marx's political economy approach. Marx argued that the capitalist society is divided into the haves and the have nots. The haves control the economic substructure of the society which determines the operations of the superstructures of the society such as the political, legal, religious etc. Marx advocated for an egalitarian society where the have nots will have equal access and opportunities like the haves. To Marx, the commercial sex workers were denied the legitimate economic rights and were therefore forced into sex trade because of the manner in which the capitalist society is organized.

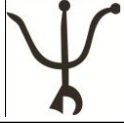
Method

This is a qualitative study. The paper adopted the qualitative method of data collection which involves the use of In Depth Interviews (IDI) for data collection. Six (6) commercial sex workers resident in the Gariki in Ugwuogba were purposively selected and interviewed for the study. Collated data were transcribed and analyzed using the thematic method of data analysis.

Results

Study participants were asked to state why they took to sex trade in the first place? Several responses were given for their involvement in the trade. However, virtually all of them cited economic concerns as the major motivating factor for engaging into sex trade. One of the study participants, a 28 year old female sex trader from Ebonyi state who identified herself as Loveth said:

I do not like what I am doing now. I was forced into it by situations around me. I lost my father when I was 9 years old and my mother could not take care of us. We are seven in my family. My two elder brothers were not doing anything at all. The hardship in my family was too much for us. It was a friend that introduced me into this business. We started it in my state before I came to this place. It was not my intention to do this before.



Similar response was echoed by Tina, who was 31 years old. She was from Cross River state. According to her:

Ashawo no be work ooo, na management. Na hunger force me into this. I no fit dey suffer just like that. Our landlord dey always harass us for house rent for where we dey stay before. Na him I go stay with my cousin house. Na that my cousin teach me how to dey follow man. At least I dey get something wey I dey take home to help my younger brothers. Na me be their senior sister. E no easy my bros. Na condition make crayfish make e bend.

Another participant in the interview became emotional when lamenting her ordeals as a sex trader. She introduced herself as Tessy from Imo state. She was 24 years old. In an emotion filled voice she bemoaned:

It all started when I was forced to drop out of school because my poor parents could no longer afford to pay my school fees. I was given admission to study Accountancy in Imo state University six years ago. My parents managed to pay my school fees for the first year when I got admitted into the school. They were petty traders who hawk items around the market place in Owerri. They were forced out of the place by government and things became too difficult for us. I could no longer feed nor pay my fees. I left school in my second year. I was introduced to this profession by one of the girls in our areas who saw how we were suffering. I send money to my mother every month from what I get here. Life has been unfair to me. I am the person taking care of my younger ones. It is so painful that this is what I have to do to help myself and my family.

Other participants in the interview maintained similar reasons for their involvement in the trade.

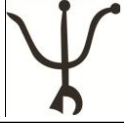
The participants were asked to state the challenges they face in the trade and their views were quite revealing. One of them who is 27 years old said her name is Cindy and hails from Akwa Ibom stressed;

This work is too dangerous. Just two weeks ago my neighbour went away with her customer and gave me the keys to her room. We have not heard nor seen her since then. Nobody knows whether she is still alive. Sometimes some people will refuse to pay and will even beat you up. The worst is that people who know they are HIV positive will come here and force you to have sex with them without condom. I have decided I will no longer go with a man to outside this place. We pay so much to remain here. Every week we contribute money to settle the police people so that they will not disturb us. There is too much risk in this business.

One of the interviewees who earlier introduced herself as Loveth said she narrowly escaped death recently. According to her,

I was with a man who has become my friend because he comes here almost every week. He asked to go with him to his house and I accepted to do so. The place was lonely and difficult to locate. At the middle of the night, I noticed that the man was performing some ritual activities and saying some funny things. I became afraid and started shouting. The man wanted to stop me but I refused. It is likely his charms did not work on me. We started fighting and I was able to run away. Since then, the man has not come to this place again. This is how some of us always disappear without anybody knowing where to find them.

The study participants were asked to suggest what they think will be done so that they will no longer engage in the trade. This question prompted several responses from them on what could be done to forestall sex trade in the country. According to Tessy;



There is too much hardship in the country. It is because of hardship that I abandoned my educational pursuit. Poor people should be assisted. If my parents were not forced out of their market place, perhaps I could have finished my studies by now. Government should implement policies that will help the poor ones and not make them poorer. Create conditions that will make people to be productive. Many people will still join us in this work because there is hopelessness in the country. The poor people should be assisted to be productive.

Furthermore, Cindy suggested that they need help. She continued that;

We need government to give us job. There is no job in the country. If they cannot give us job, they should be able to give us loan to start our own business. With the right amount of money and guide, I can do some other things instead of prostitution. It is because of hardship that I become a prostitute. If I am given an opportunity to develop myself, I will not continue in this work.

Lastly but not the least, Loveth was of the view that skill acquisition and enabling environment could solve their problems. She said;

Teach me how to produce something and give me the money to do it. I will quit this work. The problem is that I do not know what to do and do not have the money to start it. We should be taught what to do and how to do it. Then loans should be given to us to start the business. I will not like to do government work. I will rather prefer to be self employed. If I can get something doing and will be getting enough to take care of myself and my younger ones, I will begin to live normal life again. It is difficult to stop this

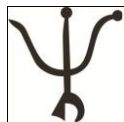
work when you are not sure of what you will do to survive. Government and good people of this country should help us to become better persons.

Going by the foregoing, it is decipherable that at root of sex trade in Gariki Uguwoba is economic considerations. The prevailing economic realities could be seen as a major determinant and motivation for involvement in sex trade. In as much as the dangers inherent in the trade are obvious to the sex workers, they still continued in it due to lack of viable opportunities. This is consistent with Marx's position that in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. Sex workers were forced to engage in the trade independent of their will. The economic realities surrounding them forced them into the trade. The way out still lies in Marx's submission that the society should be made to cater for the need of all and make life better for all and not just for the few who dominate the affairs of the society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Commercial sex trade has been in existence from time immemorial. It may continue to be in existence if concerted efforts are not made to control it. It is in the opinion of this paper that economically induced sex work will continue to be in existence until concerted efforts are made to address it. The trade becomes inevitable when nothing or too little is done to improve the lot of the people. People should be empowered. Development in human capitals is the highest form of development. Emphasis should be on skill acquisition especially to the vulnerable ones in the society. Granted that government may not have the potentials or capability of employing everybody, however, it can create enabling environment for businesses to thrive. Fighting crime and terrorism can only make sense when the motivating factors to crime and terrorism are removed. This can happen through human capital development. The over 200 million Nigerians could be a potent force to be reckoned with if the bulk of the people are developed and empowered.

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