

Eradicating the Criminal Enterprise called Women's Involvement in Child Trafficking an Impediment to Social Development in Cross River State, Nigeria: A Glimpse from Research Implication

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ABSTRACT

The persistent outcry of women indulging in the Criminal Enterprise called Child Trafficking most commonly practiced by young ladies and aged women who are so desirous of monetary rewards has seriously exposed young girls to forced child labour, child maltreatment and child marriage and sexual exploitation have major concern in Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State, Nigeria, this has attracted local, national and international attention from world leaders, academics, the mass media, advocacy groups, the clergy and humanity in general. Honestly, trafficking has posed a lot of challenges to the country's image ranging from social, religious, economic and political. Several factors have been considered to be the remote and immediate cause of trafficking in the state ranging from Several factors, among them poverty, unemployment, ignorance and family size have been implicated as being reasons why women fall easy prey to the antics of traffickers. It will continue to occupy the central position of our economy if those who are seriously in this act are not brought to book with immediate effect. Seeing how lucrative and easy to trap victims in trafficking, it becomes very possible for the common man to indulge in such criminal business even without any capital outlay to start with. This paper, therefore, pinpoints some major issues and ways in which trafficking among women can be put to a total halt to maintain our international reputation.

Keywords: Eradicating, Criminal Enterprise, Child Trafficking and Social Development

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking has been a long-time business since the early 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. But with modernization, the act has gradually died in most western world but is fast growing in some African countries. Surprising to say that India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, and China, are in the top five (5) countries with the largest number of trafficking victims around the world. India is at the top of the list with 14 million victims, China comes in second with 3.2 million victims, and Pakistan comes in third with 2.1

million victims. These nefarious activities have spread in tentacles deep into the fabric of many African countries. Human trafficking is one of the most serious human rights violations, often targeting people and children from marginalized communities, regardless of age, ethnicity or gender identity. There has been an outcry by scholars and international organisations including human rights activists who have strongly condemned this crime and called for governments to implement stronger legislation that aims to prevent trafficking and provide better support for child victims. Trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, to exploit them for profit. It is no gainsaying that individuals may fall victim to trafficking for various purposes, such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, criminal activity, and forced marriage.

Child trafficking is seen as the illegal trading of people for slavery The United Nations (UN) defines “trafficking in persons” as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons using the threat of force or other forms of coercion of abduction of fraud of deceptions, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments achieve the consent of a person, having control over another people for exploitation.

No type of trafficking is more serious or harmful than another they all disempower the people who are subjected to it and can leave devastating physiological and psychological impacts. Gender norms play a key role in child trafficking and most of the resources and research around child trafficking are focused on girls. While it is extremely important to acknowledge that the numbers clearly show that girls are more likely to be affected by child trafficking, it is also true that trafficking remains a challenging issue to report on and monitor as a lot of data is lost or unavailable. It is not hard to imagine that child trafficking, about boys and young men, is more difficult to detect. Children are sold for different reasons and their gender is closely related to the type of trafficking they are victims of. For example, girls are mostly trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation and also to act as domestic servants, while boys are usually trafficked for manual labour and sexual purposes.

United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund; UNICEF (2000) informed that human trafficking in Nigeria context of two main categories namely; internal trafficking and external trafficking. To them, internal trafficking is concerned with the trafficking of children procured by middlemen who pretend they are in search of domestic and agricultural workers. This has forced most parents who are abjectly poverty to give their children to foster parents who engage these children in street hawking and domestic work. While external trafficking deals with initiating children and women into forced prostitution for monetary gains. In the words of Hughes, Sporcic, Mendelson and Chirgwin, (2005), informed that in the

context of Nigeria women and young girls, hoping to escape poverty and racial discrimination in their country, voluntarily migrate to other parts of the world in response to white-collar offers. This may be motivated by their quest for survival. In this regard, they fall as victims of trafficking. Quite unfortunately, upon arrival in their country of destination, many of these women discover that they have been misled. Pearson (2002:9) quoting the Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings in Lagos, said, “Some Nigerians believe it is because the Ibo are especially enterprising and have a history of migrating”. Adducing a possible reason for the predominance of women from Edo and Delta States among victims of trafficking, the author also attributed the trend to poverty but added quickly that these States are not the poorest part of Nigeria.

Trafficking of girls and women from Nigeria is said to be especially wellorganized and centres on a female figure called “Mama” or “Madam”, who plays a key role in luring young women to leave their homes for Italy. The trafficking web is organized at three levels; the first centres around “Mama” living in the country of origin; the second centres around the Nigerian “Mama” in Italy; and the third, the “Messengers” who are the persons who transfer the money from Italy to Nigeria (IOM, 1996). As part of the ‘recruitment’ drive, Nigerian girls are contracted in the suburbs of cities such as Lagos or Benin City and the countryside in the south and east. As noted by Pearson, there has been a traditional migration flow from Nigeria to Italy since the late 1980s for agriculture, a trend he said, made many Nigerians settle in Italy and other countries. He explained that it was predominantly these settled Nigerian women, often married to European men, who are traffickers/madams. According to him, trafficked women are generally not aware of the conditions of work that awaited them (in Europe) i.e. confiscation of documents, forced to work long hours on the street every day, forced to serve.

Scriphai and Scriphai (1997) maintained that the trade in human beings is an outgrowth of international labour migration. In their view, people seek to migrate temporarily to work in richer countries to improve their economic standing at home. The duo explained that while job opportunities abound for male migrants in Europe and North America, women migrants who had no access to jobs often take to prostitution as an option for a minimum of clients per day, physical abuse, threats and debt bondage. The Civil Liberties Organization, (CLO, 2000) noted that cartels or cartels behind the exportation of young girls and women overseas to work in the sex trade have largely remained faceless. No matter how many times the women might be deported; they seemed to be able to procure travel documents to return to the same or different foreign lands to continue in the illicit trade. While some entered the trade knowingly- sometimes with the connivance, approval or acquiescence

of their parents' others appeared to have been lured into it with false tales of money to be made from plaiting or weaving hair, or working as maids or children's nannies- tales which though false, could seem reasonable to young women anxious to help reduce the hardship being faced by their families (CLO, 2000).

According to the CLO (2000), once it becomes established, the trafficking business is extremely difficult to eradicate due to the number of other 'small enterprises' which depend on it and service it. These include forgers, disreputable and even fake lawyers who set up "contacts" between the girls and the traffickers, self-styled "evangelists" who pray for them, traditional voodooists who hold the victims to their promises or undertakings, Customs and Immigration officials who receive bribes to look the other way when regular streams of young women with no visible support are escorted out of the country, and in some cases, corrupt embassy officials who facilitate the issuance of visas.

Preventing child trafficking through improved Social development

For any society to gain recognition in the world, it must socially develop its citizen. This is because the success of a society is linked to the well-being of every citizen. Thus, social development deals with improving the well-being of every individual in society so they can reach their full potential. It is a process and a product of integrated and sustainable actions related to the quality of life, well-being, liberty, justice and citizenship. Social development is about improving the well-being of every individual in a society so that they can reach their full potential. When individuals in society are not trafficked but improvement in the well-being of every individual in society is enhanced their full potential can be fostered. In this regard, all barriers should be removed so that all citizens can journey toward their dreams with confidence and dignity. It is about refusing to accept that people who live in poverty will always be poor and can be subjected to all forms of humiliation. It is about helping people so they can move forward on their path to self-sufficiency.

Ojomo (2000) every individual in society must not be victimised hence, must have the opportunity to grow, develop their skills and contribute to their families and communities in a meaningful way. If they are healthy, well-educated and trained to enter the workforce and can make a decent wage they are better equipped to meet their basic needs and be successful. Their families will also do well and the whole of society will benefit.

An affordable, high-quality childcare system is also needed for society to succeed. When people know that their children are being well taken care of, they can be more productive in their jobs. When employers have good employees their business is more likely to succeed. When businesses succeed, the

economic situation of a community is improved. An investment today in good childcare programs can provide many long-term economic benefits for society. In addition, a safe affordable place to live is very important in helping people achieve self-sufficiency. It is the focus of family life; where families can live safely, nurture their children, build community relationships and care for ageing parents.

Impediment/Concerns Involvement in Child Trafficking

Trafficking among women is a global problem affecting large numbers of girls and women. It is lucrative and is linked with criminal activity and corruption, as it is often hidden and hard to address. As pointed out by IOM (1996), women who have been trafficked face a range of dangers, including violence and sexual abuse. In some cases, trafficked women encounter State complicity as they are arrested and detained as illegal aliens.

Brussa (1996) remarked that women's physical and mental well-being is harmed by the isolation they suffer by being confined in closed apartments and the restriction of their movements. In addition to the consequences of the trafficking of women highlighted above, there is also the more worrisome health dimension.

The trafficking of women poses a mortal danger to Nigerian women because of the high incidence of Human Immune Virus/Acquired Deficiency Syndrome HIV/AIDS infection among deported Nigerian girls and women (Oshadare, 2004). In fact, in many rural Nigerian villages and even urban centres, it is common to find young women and girls who were sold into prostitution in Italy and elsewhere and who had contracted AIDS and abandoned to their fate (UNAIDS, UNICEF, USAID, 2004). Consequently, most of these children left on their own are easily recruited by traffickers.

In general, women and girls are more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS infection, thus trafficked girls and women are most at risk. In the case of those trafficked for purposes of commercial sex work, Burkhalter (2003) explained that vulnerability is increased in a variety of ways: Trafficked persons are unable to insist upon condom use. Trafficked persons may be forced to perform those sexual practices most associated with AIDS transmission. Trafficked persons are forced to have sex with multiple partners.

Violence in commercial sex is common; especially where women or children are forced to have sex against their will. Injuries sustained during forced sex may increase vulnerability to HIV transmission. The physically immature bodies of young girls are extremely vulnerable to sexual injury. Such

injuries increase their risk of infection. Many trafficked persons have other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) due to forced and unsafe sexual activities. This heightens the risk of contracting HIV by up to a factor of 10 (UNESCO, 2006:40).

UNICEF (2000) summarized the consequences of trafficking in girls and women from Nigeria to include loss of lives, increasing prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, increase in violence and crime rate, increased school drop-out rates, impaired child development, poor national image and massive deportation of Nigerian girls and women.

CONCLUSION

This study is concerned with eradicating the Criminal Enterprise called Women's Involvement in Child Trafficking an Impediment to Social Development in Cross River State, Nigeria: A Glimpse from Research Perspective. It was common to see that trafficking has become a lucrative enterprise for individuals who need fast money without considering the relative dangers of trafficking. Worrying to say that trafficking has posed a negative effect on the country's national and international image. Thus the study concludes that the present government should as a matter of urgency beamed into the then President Olusegun Obasanjo administration policy on the monstrous trade. That is a relook in the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP). And the federal government paramilitary agencies such as the Nigeria Immigration Service, the Correctional Centers (NCC), and Nigerian Customs Service (NCS). Nigeria Immigration Services (NIS); the Nigeria Police (NPF) and other government agencies like the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), whose primary assignments are only indirectly related to human trafficking (Lipide, 2007). This will help in bringing the octopus called child trafficking to rest in Nigeria.

Recommendations

From the conclusion of the present study, it can be recommended that:

1. The quest for white-collar jobs, family poverty level, and high rate of unemployment are some of the major factors that necessitate trafficking in Nigeria. The government should endeavour to improve welfare and social amenities including poverty alleviation in the country. This will help to address the high level of inequalities in the country.
2. The government and other agencies should create sensitization campaigns to help inform the public of the dangers of forced marriage and sexual harassment on the teeming girl child in the country.

3. Since women are more vulnerable to trafficking, a social security policy should be put in place to enhance their access to education by providing them with scholarships.

Glimpse from Research implication

From the research implication, Child trafficking has brought a poor reputation in the state. Most especially in terms of our reputation with international countries of the world since we began on the path of nationhood or society. The main obstacle for striding boldly on this path has been the child trafficking problem because of unemployment. As a result of this, there has been for the past few years a steady drift away of young men into other countries. This has the chain result of our society being left underpopulated or underdeveloped. Furthermore, economically, particularly in contexts where people seeking migration opportunities for employment end up being trafficked, resulting in significant remittance losses. Again, it hurts the health of victims especially those forced into sexual harassment. Women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation are at risk of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, and of spreading the diseases among wider society; people are trafficked in dangerous conditions and often held, even after they reach their destinations, in circumstances that can have long-term detrimental effects on their mental and physical well-being. Finally, child trafficking distorts the rule of law: this is because in most countries the operations of organised criminal groups, whose illicit activities often extend beyond trafficking, can have serious implications for national security.

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