Women Trafficking and Forced Prostitution in a Changing Economy in Nigeria: A Theological Perspective.

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Abstract

This paper deals with the challenges of women trafficking and forced prostitution in a changing economy in Nigeria with special focus on theological perspective. In Nigeria, persons are trafficked for prostitution, to work as domestic servants, plantation "slaves", street traders etc. They are exploited in agricultural work, brass melting, stone digging and scavenging. Thousands of women and girls are trafficked into the sex industry, especially into Europe, so much so, that people in Nigeria came to equate trafficking with prostitution. On reaching their destinations, trafficked persons' body parts such as pubic hairs, finger nails, menstrual flows, as well as under wears are taken from them and sent to juju priests to ensure obedience. Furthermore, this ugly scenario has led to baby factories springing up in cities in which young girls trafficked form the country side are used as sex objects for making babies that are sold to ritualists. The study highlighted that women trafficking and forced prostitution have become a menace and all hands must be on deck to curtail this problem.

Introduction

Trafficking in human beings, especially women and girls, is not new. Historically it has taken many forms, but in the context of globalization, has acquired shocking new dimensions. It is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon involving multiple stakeholders-at the institutional and commercial level. It is demand driven global business with a huge market for cheap labour and commercial sex confronting often insufficient or unexercised policy frameworks or trained personnel to prevent it. Nigeria has acquired a reputation for being one of the leading African countries in human trafficking with cross-border and internal trafficking. Trafficking of persons is the third largest crime after economic fraud and the drug trade.

Decades of military regimes in Nigeria have led to the institutionalized violation of human rights and severe political, social and economic crises. This negatively impacts the development of community participation, especially of women and children, despite international institutions designed to advance their causes. In addition, the oil boom in the 1970's created opportunities for migration both inside and outside of the country. This created avenues for exploitation for international trafficking in women and children, for

forced labour and for prostitution. Nigeria is a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking. Destinations for trafficked Nigerians include the neighbouring West African Countries.

The commercial sex industry greatly expanded as it was globalized and integrated with other aspects of modernization. The demand factors dominating conmercial sex work requires a constant supply of women and children. The commercial sex industry is inextricably linked with tourism, both domestic and foreign, and some countries are specifically promoted for "sex tourism". Widespread gender discrimination that denies women their rights, as well as attitudes that tolerate violence against women and consider women and girls inferior result in subjectification and support the existence of trafficking that delivers women and girls into appalling living and working conditions. Destitute families are vulnerable to persuasion to hire out or sell their children because they lack adequate resources to provide for their family. Girls are most vulnerable to this form of commercial exploitation. Despite international conventions, there remains indifference and a lack of domestic commitments to protect those most at risk through legislation, awareness, information and training of the authorities responsible to provide protection.

Women Trafficking: The Nigerian Experience

Although Nigeria has enormous natural and human resources (Nigeria is the 11th largest producer of oil in the world), debt burden and institutionalized corruption takes a serious toll on the country's economy. Nigeria has been rated one of the six poorest countries in the world with a per capita GNP of about US #280 Dollars for a population of over *150* million people. Nigeria is a country rich in resources but with widespread poverty.

Hope of continuing education or working abroad, traditional migration patterns of labour within the country, the practice of children being loaned/sent to better-situated family members to be raised and casual border procedures all contribute to acceptance and expectations of unregulated movement. Poverty is the most visib1e cause of the vulnerability of women and children to trafficking in Nigeria. An ILO/IPEC report found that 40% of Nigerian street children and hawkers are trafficked persons.

Within Africa, the main destinations for trafficked persons from Nigeria are Cote D'Ivoire. Equatorial Guinea Island, Cameroon, Gabon, Guinea, Mali and Benin. Italy Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom are the main European destinations. Saudi Arabia is also a country of destination.

Road links between northern Nigeria and the Niger Republic provide routes to North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. In particular, the Malam Aminu Kano International Airport is a key transit point providing international air links for criminal gangs flying trafficked persons to the Middle East and other parts of Europe. Despite the widespread nature of the phenomenon, research on human trafficking is concentrated on southern Nigeria with Edo and Cross River States being the main focal points consequently, the northern sector of the country has received relatively little attention. This incorrectly suggests that women trafficking and forced prostitution is not a problem in northern Nigeria. The trade in human beings is as prevalent in northern Nigeria as in other parts of the country. Extensive land sea boundaries are difficult and expensive to patrol effectively. There is an estimated 1,800,000 AIDS orphans living in Nigeria, particularly vulnerable to being trafficked.'

Nigeria as a Source Country

Internationally trafficked Nigerians come from all parts of Nigeria but some states tend to provide more trafficked persons than others. These states include Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ebonyi, Kano, Delta, Ogun, Oyo and Lagos. West African destinations countries for Nigerian trafficked women and children are Republic of Benin, Togo, Cote d'ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon and Guinea where trafficked persons are destined to work mostly as domestic servants and on farm plantations.

More specifically, women and children recruited from Shaki in Oyo State are mainly trafficked to Guinea, Mali and Cote d'ivoire to work as hawkers and domestic servants. Recently, Nigerian women and young girls were also trafficked to Benin for prostitution. Most of these trafficked persons find themselves deceived into believing that their destination would be Europe where they will be engaged on a very decent job but to no avail.

There is equally a noticeable and growing trend in the trafficking of Nigerian women and young girls to the United Kingdom to work as domestic servants. An increasing number of young girls claiming asylum in the United Kingdom are in fact, trafficked persons. Nigerian women and girls' en-route to Europe spend many months in the deserts African and are forced into labour and prostitution to survive during the journey. With, the mounting anti- trafficking campaigns, however, traffickers are moving away from urban centers and into the countryside. The Middle East is another destination, especially Libya and Saudi Arabia. The recruitment of girls trafficked to Saudi Arabia come predominantly from the northern part of Nigeria especially Kano, Kwara, Kaduna, Niger etc.

Purposes of Trafficking in Women and Children

In Nigeria, persons are trafficked for prostitution, to work as domestic servants, bus conductors and street traders. They are exploited in agricultural work, brass melting, stone digging and scavenging.

Prostitution — Nigerian women and children are trafficked both internally and externally for sex. In the last decade, thousands of women and young girls were trafficked into the sex industry, especially into Europe, so that many people n Nigeria came to equate trafficking with prostitution alone and not with other forms of labour. Traffickers recruit girls from country —side markets, salons and other public places. Usually such persons are instructed not to tell their parents that they are planning to travel out of the country. With the help of corrupt immigration officers, traffickers 'switch pages from stolen passports having valid visas with those of the trafficked persons, giving fake names, ages and other particulars. The trafficked persons arc then to claim that they have been travelling in and out of the country, whereas they may never have even left their villages. Upon arriving at their destination they are deprived of their travel documents and made to sign agreements to pay back their madams.

In addition, prior to their travels or on reaching their destinations, trafficked person's body parts such as pubic hairs, finger nails, menstrual flows, as well as underwear and photographs are taken from them and sent to juju priests in Nigeria to ensure obedience. Many of the girls are also coerced with threats to kill their parents and other relatives if they do not cooperate.

- **Domestic Help:** Migration and poverty have saturated the labour market especially the informal labour market, and led to the systematic reduction of the cost of labour. As a result, cheap labour in the informal sector, particularly domestic labour, grew as the economic crisis, obliged every member of the family to work outside their homes to sustain family finances. The above narratives capture the experiences of trafficked children in Nigeria for domestic help.
- **Rituals for Blood Money: A** form of trafficking currently under investigation takes place in the northern part of Nigeria and involves the luring of young children to Saudi Arabia to be killed for blood money known as "diya".
- Begging: Another type of trafficking is the trafficking for organized and high profile begging. Physically challenged or disabled parents such as the blind and crippled are lured into the begging business in major Nigerian cities. Contractual beggars are taken beyond the borders to Middle East for begging. The "investors" only release the trafficked person when he has made sufficient profit.

- **Baby Factory or Harvesting:** In states like Abia, Ebonyi and Lagos, many cases have been reported to clinics, doctors, nurses and orphanages who help pregnant teenagers and other women who do not want to keep their babies at birth. They care for such girls at pregnancy and provide money and shelter. Upon delivery the babies are sold to couples who pay a premium for the babies of their choice. They young mothers are paid off.

Women trafficking have become a menace and all hands must be on deck to curtail this problem. However, women trafficking whether compelled or voluntary is an evil that must be stopped and I want to contribute my quota to the fight against this modern-day slavery by suggesting the following possible solutions on how to stop human trafficking in Nigeria.

- **Investment in Education:** Government should invest sufficiently in the area of education and education infrastructure as well as introduce topics to enlighten the student on human trafficking into school curriculum both at the secondary and tertiary levels. This would go a long way in enlightening the people as well as make them less vulnerable to trafficking. Also parents should endeavour to maintain small sized families and give their wards minimum level of education as education remains the best legacy a parent can leave for a child.
- **Rural Orientation:** NAPTIP and governmental and non-governmental organizations fighting against women trafficking and forced prostitution should focus their awareness and sensitization more on the rural areas as they are more vulnerable group. Their awareness should also be channeled towards reestablishing lost morals and values in our society.
- **Employment Creation and** Skill Acquisition: Government should also create jobs for the masses as a large number of the trafficked persons were lured into the act due to unemployment and poverty. Skill acquisition centers should also be established to train people on skills necessary to earn a living as well as provide the trained people with soft loans to start their businesses.
- **Resolution of Conflicts in the Country:** Government should also seek for ways to minimize or eradicate the security challenges in the country so as to reduce the number of internally displaced persons and the constant destruction of the people's businesses and property.
- Proper Monitoring of Human Movements at the Borders: Government and its agencies in charge of fighting this menace should work with immigration services to monitor emigration and immigration patterns for evidence of trafficking in person.

- Using the Social Media: Agencies in charge should put In place Google alert so as to help them receive current human trafficking news as well as open websites, blogs and forums where issues relating to human trafficking are reported and discussed.
- Partnering with Telecommunication Companies: Telecommunication companies should also be partnered with to send help lines to the people and encourage them to report suspected cases of trafficking, domestic servitude and other similar trafficking activities to the appropriate agencies through the help lines provided: since we have known that trafficking is evil, we should all support the government in the fight against modern-day slavery.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Women trafficking and forced prostitution should be understood as acts of abuse and violence against women and young people. There should be strategies for increasing awareness and understanding among professionals and the public, women and young girls, strengthening the law's response, as well as research evaluating current and future programmes; creating a digital information - sharing platform to promote communication, also supporting efforts to prevent, identify and respond to women trafficking and forced prostitution.

Increase Awareness and Understanding: There should be training for professionals who interact with women and young — girls especially those who are vulnerable and physically challenged. Public awareness campaigns addressing women trafficking should also be launched.

The department of Justice, the department of Health and Human services, and the department of Education should increase awareness of women trafficking and forced prostitution by supporting the development, implementation and evaluation of national, regional, state and local evidence - informed training for professionals and other individuals who routinely interact with women and young girls.

Strengthen the Law's Response: All national, state, local, trIbal and territorial. Jurisdictions should develop laws and policies and services that are equipped to meet the needs of vulnerable women and girls: these laws will need to be evaluated over time to determine best practices. Commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking are crimes driven, the authorities concerned should strengthen and implement laws that hold exploiters and traffickers accountable for their role and action in trafficking and forced prostitution.

Research Evaluating Current and Future Programs: The department of justice, the department of Health and Human Services and the department of Education should collaborate and partner with others to implement a national research agenda focused on advancing knowledge and understanding of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking which will be designed to prevent women and young girls from becoming victims or exploiters and to assist those who have been exploited; and develop strategies and methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of prevention and intervention laws, policies and programs.

Creating a Digital Information - Sharing Platform: One of the most significant barriers to action by agencies, systems and individual to prevent, identify and respond to trafficking and forced prostitution is lack of reliable and timely information. The authority should create and maintain digital information - sharing• platform to deliver reliable, real-time information on how to prevent, identify and respond to women trafficking and forced prostitution.

Conclusion

There is substantial and compelling evidence that women trafficking and forced prostitution are serious problems with immediate and long term adverse consequences for women and young girls, as well as for families, communities and society as a whole. Efforts to identify and respond to this issue should be intensified and may require collaborative approaches that build upon the core capabilities of people and entities from a range of sectors. There is need for action that will require a national response.

Many say trafficking is the modem day slave trade, yet so little is done, in an effort to stop this problem. We can work together to stop this. As humans we do a great job at interacting with others and sharing our thoughts and ideas as many are not aware of this. We can take the information learned today and inform others about trafficking and forced prostitution and hopefully the word will spread to the point where everyone looks out for this and report suspicious activity when needed. Together we can do it.

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