



## Child Trafficking as a Modern Day Slavery in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*It is widely claimed that slavery could take several forms. It can be human or child trafficking, abduction, the use of house maid or domestic servitude, commercial labour or enslavement, operating slave trade or baby factory and any other form of human or child abuse. The trafficking of children for the purpose of domestic service, prostitution and other forms of exploitative labour is a widespread phenomenon in Nigeria. Historically and religiously, slavery cannot be prevented, but it can be effectively controlled. However, it remains a serious public health concern in many parts of the world particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. This paper explores the problem of illegal recruitment and movement of children for the purpose of exploitation in contemporary Nigeria. The work discovers that the phenomenon of baby factory which has become very common in some parts of the country has led to young girls being mobilized into the trafficking cycle and giving birth to children for sale in black markets. The methods adopted in this study are the sociological and interactive models of enquiry. These methodologies are appropriate due to the nature of the study, which is multi-disciplinary. Various health implications associated with trafficking exist, these include physical, mental or sexual consequences. Thus, the paper attempts to suggest ways of controlling the menace as a practical demonstration of human freedom desired in contemporary Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Child trafficking, Slavery, Baby factory, Contemporary Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Human trafficking refers to the unlawful and immoral buying and selling of human beings as commodities to meet global demands for commercial sexual slavery. Child Trafficking has become a cankerworm which has eaten deeply and structurally into the Nigerian contents despite international and local policies that exist on it. It remains a serious public health concern in different parts of the globe especially in third world

countries such as Nigeria (Eluma, 2014). Human trafficking is undoubtedly considered as an organized crime and in fact modern day slavery. Deception and force are the two major ways the traffickers used to capture their victims in recent times. Human trafficking has been a recurring event in Nigerian society because of secret agreement among security, immigration, embassy, airline officials and traffickers (Igboin, 2011).



Human trafficking involves unlawful recruitment and movement of children for the intention of exploitation. Several factors influence trafficking in the country, mainly due to social, political or economic reasons. Of recent, the phenomenon of baby factory becomes very common in some parts of the country, leading to young girls mobilized into the trafficking cycle and giving birth to children for sale in black markets (Dagin, 2005). Trafficking occurs either locally within the country or internationally through various routes, across all the geopolitical zones of Nigeria with various health implications and physical, mental or sexual consequences.

Human trafficking in Nigeria has assumed inconceivable height in the last two decades due to multidimensional factors which include globalization, economic recession, poverty, conflicts, weak legal system, and lack of adequate legislation and of political will (Joshi, 2002). Thus, human trafficking is a criminal act. This crime has been on for some time in the society, without much government attention being drawn to the matter. The first notable concern was drawn to the idea of human trafficking by Mrs. Titi Atiku, the wife of the former Vice President of Nigeria. This afterward resulted in the formation of her pet programme called Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF). In furtherance of her dream and to redeem the image of Nigeria in general and dignity of women in particular, a

bill was proposed to set up an agency to be given specific mandate to tackle the problem of human trafficking in Nigeria (WOTCLEF, 2002). The agency is known as the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Matters (Babandede, 2005). This Agency is charged with the responsibility of monitoring, arresting and prosecution of human traffickers as well as rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking. Underlying the heinous crime of trafficking in humans is the fact that globalization has created inequalities and inequities resulting in the migration of the poor to the rich regions of the world. Accompanying this also is the related dimension of security of states and individuals, significantly jeopardized by activities of international criminal gangs or networks of crime specializing in money laundering, arms trafficking, advance fee fraud and human trafficking (Ogwu, 2002). An increasing number of African migrants got drowned in the Mediterranean seas in their bid to cross to Europe. Many met their deaths in the deserts of North Africa. There is also massive deportation of undocumented or illegal migrants mostly Nigerian women and girls (Omelaniuk, 2005).

The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act in FRN (2006) defines trafficking as all acts and attempted acts involved in the recruitment, transportation within or across Nigeria borders, purchases, sales, transfer, receipt or harbouring of



a person involving the use of deception, coercion or debt bondage for the purpose of placing or holding the persons, whether for or not involuntary servitude (domestic, sexual or reproductive) in forced or bonded labour, or in slavery-like conditions. Human trafficking according to Article 3(a) of the United Nations Palermo Protocol, is defined as “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force, other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation” (Adesina, 2015).

#### Socio-Religious Overview of Child Trafficking as a Modern Day Slavery

Historically, slavery has been regulated, supported or opposed on religious grounds. In Judaism, slaves were given a range of treatments and protections, they were to be treated as extended family members with certain protections and could be freed. Religion has been described as a means of enslaving and cheating another man. This was the basis of Auguste Comte's and Karl Marx's theories of religion (Odudele, 2006).

Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery. It is an unlawful business and a social problem. Human trafficking is a social problem because it affects many people. It affects different categories of people. It is a social problem because

of the magnitude, the trend and pattern it has taken over the years. This business has unleashed untold hardship on victims who are mostly women and children (Foundation of Women's Forum, 1998). For most crimes to succeed, there must be a giver and a taker. For the crime of trafficking to succeed, there must be people who aid or facilitate the movement and transportation of victims to a defined destination.

Human trafficking is an organized crime in which many people are involved. It is a chain or continuum, with people in the crime performing specific tasks. In this organized crime there are recruiters. These are people who go to villages to deceive young girls and boys through their parents. They give the impression of assisting their relations for a better education, employment without the full knowledge of what await their children. Recruiters include sisters, brothers, in-laws, driver, business men and women, law enforcement officers, etc (Women's Health and Action Research Center, 2002). The would-be victims move from one stage to another until they get to their final destinations where these young girls and boys are distributed to madams and “ogas” who need their services. It must be noted that the two weapons used by traffickers to get their victims are deception and through force. Human trafficking is a crime. Those who engaged in trafficking persons are often friends, relations, neighbour and familiar people to victims. Human trafficking has continued to strive in



Nigeria because of collusion among security, immigration, embassy and airline officials and traffickers. These officials often take bribes in exchange for facilitating smooth passage across the borders for traffickers and their victims.

The practice of entrusting poor children to more affluent friends or relatives may create vulnerability. Some parents sell their children, not just for the money, but also in the hope that their children will escape a situation of chronic poverty and move to a place where they will have a better life and more opportunities (Adepelumi, 2015). According to Okeshola (2007), trafficking in persons can take four different forms within the country:

- \* Rural-Urban Trafficking: This is where victims move from rural areas to urban areas.
- \* Urban-Rural Trafficking: This is where victims move from urban area to rural areas. People in this category are usually trafficked for farming purpose.
- \* Rural-Rural Trafficking: This is a situation where traffickers move victims from one rural area to another.
- \* Urban-Urban Trafficking: This is where traffickers move victims from one urban area to another.

Within Nigeria, women and girls are trafficked primarily for domestic servitude and commercial sexual exploitation. Boys are trafficked for forced labour in street vending, agriculture, mining, stone quarries and as domestic servants. There is high

demand for child workers at the household level, agricultural, construction, quarries and brass melting mostly in the informal sector (Adepelumi, 2015). It is highly unfortunate that human trafficking is one of the most profitable and successful criminal industries in the world. It has sometimes direct and sometimes indirect connections with the illegal arms and illicit drug trade industries. Commercial sexual exploitation and sex slavery form the major chunk of demand that drives human trafficking numbers higher with forced labour constituting a proportionately smaller ratio of the demand for human beings as commodities.

### **Contributory Factors to Child Trafficking in Contemporary Nigeria**

#### **Poverty**

Poverty is pervasive and is the root cause of child trafficking in contemporary Nigerian society. It is the principle driving force behind this trade, propelling vulnerable people into the hands of traffickers. Nigeria with all the abundant resources is a poor country with majority of her population living in abject penury. The continuous presence of child trafficking deepens poverty in any society. According to Osiruemu (2007), poverty breeds poverty. This is because poor people have high probability of staying poor since the children are denied educational opportunities and therefore take poverty after their parents.





### **Conflict**

The World Bank report showed that more than 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by violent conflict. Conflict is a push factor for trafficking, migration and poverty. In Nigeria prone conflict zone, Boko Haram trafficked children and use them as soldiers and militias. They kidnapped young girls, sell them into slavery and forcefully married them. Boko Haram, is recruiting and using child soldiers as young as 12-years-old, as well as abducted women and girls in the northern region of Nigeria, some of whom it later subjected to domestic servitude, forced labour, and sex slavery through forced marriages to its militants (Adesina, 2015).

### **Weak Legal System**

Porous borders, corrupt government officials, the involvement of international organized criminal groups or networks and limited capacity of our commitment by immigration and law enforcement officers to control borders are contributory factors to human trafficking in Nigeria (Kara, 2009). Majority of our law enforcement agents do compromise and collude with traffickers in exchange for money which is bribery and corruption.

### **Lack of Adequate Legislation and Political Will**

Lack of adequate legislation, political will and commitment to enforce existing legislation or mandates are other factors that facilitate child trafficking. The Government of Nigeria maintained strong anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

The 2003 Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act, amended in 2005 to increase the penalties for trafficking offenders, prohibits all forms of human trafficking. The law prescribes penalties of five years' imprisonment or a fine not to exceed the equivalent of approximately \$645 or both for labour trafficking offenses. These penalties are not sufficiently stringent, because the law allows convicted offenders to pay a fine in lieu of prison term for labour trafficking or attempted trafficking offenses. The law prescribes penalties of 10 to 15 years' imprisonment for sex trafficking offenses or a fine of the equivalent of approximately \$1,250, or both. For sentences that include only a fine, penalties are not (Nnadi, 2013).

Human trafficking had become a major source of concern to all societies in recent time and it has put Nigeria on the map of the notorious nation in the world. The problem has assumed wider dimensions not only to the individual traffickers, but also to the nation and societies at large. This problem of human trafficking among Nigerians has called for a search of immediate solution as the traffickers have destroyed the image of Nigeria among the comity of nations. Human trafficking leads to shady business which is a crime against humanity (Kazeem, 2010).

### **Religious Assessment of Baby Factory and Health Effects of Child Trafficking in Nigeria**

Baby factory is a new phenomenon in Nigerian society and it was described by Makinde (2009) as the system that



promotes child trafficking which creates room for exploiting young girls with undesirable conception. It is worthy of note that despite the widely publicized awareness campaigns, this ugly trend is on the increase (U.S. Department of State, 2006). Hence, baby factories could be considered as buildings, hospitals or orphanages to places for young girls and women to give birth to children for sale in the black market, often to infertile couples, or into trafficking rings (International Labour Organization, 2005). This new form of abuse operates in a shadow simply because of the stigma attached to undesirable conception by teenagers, and poor economic status poses them to offer themselves for little financial gain and societal expectation on couples to have children (Omeire, Iheriohanma, Osita-Njoku, and Omeire, 2015). It has about 3-4 actors namely; their landlord, the girls, the buyers and men who impregnate them. Thus, compulsory primary education is of paramount importance if this menace will come to an end.

According to the United States Trafficking in Person's Report (2006) and Adesina (2015), trafficking has several health implications from physical, mental as well as sexual. The sexual health effects involved undesirable conception, hepatitis B, long-term pelvic pain, HIV/AIDS along with high rates of abortion leading to the destruction of reproductive organs (Beyrer and Stachowiak, 2010). Also, infertility, cervical cancer, as well as sexual trauma leading to hysterectomy (surgical removal of the uterus) are

some of the complications (Willis and Levy, 2015). According to Konstantopoulos (2008), the victims develop some mental conditions ranging from committing suicide, inability to sleep (insomnia) to drugs addiction. Tsutsumi (2008) further maintains that the victims suffered anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders. Likewise, emotional neglect, absence of parental guidance and care, violence within self, alcoholic abuse, cigarette smoking, eating or tating disorders and lack of trust are some of the mental health challenges (Hossain, 2010).

Moreover, the victims are subjected to abuse ranging from constant punishment, murder, lack of care and its consequences, as well as the transfer of diseases (Salihu and Ajio, 2009). Others are physical neglect which involved not providing appropriate clothing for the weather, educational neglect as well as organ harvesting. Furthermore, Adesina (2015) added accidents in the course of their journey as part of the challenges. In like manner, Zimmerman (2008) submitted that all body systems are affected in a trafficking situation. In addition to the three health implications mentioned by United States Trafficking in Person's Report above, there are other additional effects, such as lack of shelter and work related hazards. Moreover, lack of shelter predisposes them to rape and other related abuses.

Lastly, restriction of freedom regarding choice and decision-making is also a factor. Globally, child or human trafficking has become the third biggest criminal business, after drug



trafficking and trafficking in weapons and the continuous growth of the rate at which girls are being trafficked for sexual exploitation is alarming and increasingly disintegrating the moral values of the Nigerian society (Dzurgba, 2007). Within Nigeria, girls are primarily trafficked for domestic servitude and sexual exploitation while boys are for forced begging by religious teachers, forced street hawking, and labour exploitation in agriculture, mining, stone quarries and as domestic labour.

### **Sociological Implications of Child Trafficking in Contemporary Nigeria**

It has been observed that the victims of human trafficking are not permitted to leave upon arrival at their destination. They are held against their will through acts of coercion and forced to work or provide services to the traffickers. The arrangement may be structured as a work contract, but with no or low payment or in highly exploitative terms. In some cases, the arrangement is structured as debt bondage with the victim not being permitted or able to pay off the debt. All the acts above are infringements to rights of persons as spelt out in Nigeria Constitution of 1999, chapter 4, section 30 which states that: every Nigerian has the right to life which the traffickers violate by the use of physical coercion that sometimes leads to death; persons rights to personal liberty, which the traffickers deprived victims from enjoying through the forced labour and the rights to freedom of movement, which are been deprived, except

approved to do so by their pimps/madams (Ajagun, 2012).

### **Trafficked Victims**

Trafficked victims from Nigeria are exposed to psychological problems such as: social alienation both in home and host countries, stigmatization, social exclusion, and intolerance to make reintegration into their local communities difficult. The above are infringements to human rights of Nigerians which violates 1999 constitution, chapter 4 section 30 that: Nigerians must have the rights to freedom of thought, conscience; rights to freedom of movement; rights to freedom of expression; rights to property; rights to private and family life which the victims cannot enjoy both at home and abroad.

### **Sex Trafficking**

Sex trafficking is a type of domestic violence perpetrated on women or children that take place in diverse settings and usually involves many different actors. It is an aspect of human trafficking that is becoming pandemic in society and possibly, the fastest growing human rights violation in the world today. Sex trafficking in females resembles the ancient dehumanizing slave trade. It entails involuntary servitude and is usually referred to as modern day slavery. Sex trafficking flourishes and goes on with impunity because several countries do not have tough anti-trafficking law in place and even when there are legislations such laws are often not enforced to check the menace of sex trafficking due to very influential



people involved in this disgraceful act.

It is painful to know that once these women reached their destinations, they discover that they have been deceived and learn the true nature of work that they will be expected to do. To some extent, many of the women were deceived with lies regarding the financial arrangements and conditions of their employment, later to find themselves in coercive situation in which escape is difficult. Sex trafficking involves international agents and brokers who arranged travel and job placement for women from Nigeria. These women who are the victims are lured to accompany traffickers based on promises of lucrative opportunities unachievable in Nigeria. They fell as victims to these deceptions because of high poverty rate in the country.

### **Child Labour**

Child labour involves children carrying out domestic activities, hawking and farm work whether paid or unpaid. This act violates 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which states that every Nigerian child has the right to life and quality education. Child labour is hazardous to the physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development of children in Nigeria (Terkura, 2019). It refers to occupying and employing children at regular and sustained labour.

### **Domestic Slavery**

This is when someone is being treated as slave engaged in several domestic and other jobs of his/her owner or master. It is the least known form of labour trafficking today, and yet it is

the most widely used method of enslaving people. Domestic slave can be identified through bondage, lack of freedom, complete submission of oneself to the master and lack of self-liberty. The slave person is put under any kind of servitude without enjoyment of any right to land or property which is described as bondage (Egbefo, 2019).

### **Concluding Remarks**

There is no time that the issues of slavery will be discussed without evoking emotions in reasonable and responsible people. This is one point that this paper has demonstrated. The struggle for freedom, it is stressed, must always start from the oppressed. Thus, the impact of child trafficking on the image, economy and family of the trafficked person is no doubt more negative than positive, which invariably, according to Christian utilitarianism, is ethically wrong. The wrongness is both on the trafficker and the trafficked child, as the information gathered revealed the understanding and participation of the trafficked person in the business as being affirmative. An ethical and moral society would improve the quality of life in Nigeria. There is no doubt that one of the major contributory factors to child trafficking and slavery in Nigerian society is poverty as earlier discussed. That is to say, majority of the people in Nigeria live in penury with low standard of living as a result of no financial initiatives and wealth creation. This is because Nigerians do not want to take risk for investment opportunities.





## Recommendations

The work focus on child trafficking as a modern day slavery in Nigeria. Based on the above discussion in the paper, it is recommended that:

1. The laws on human trafficking should be strictly enforced while culprits should be allowed to face the wrath of the law.
2. Compulsory primary education of good quality should be encouraged in contemporary Nigerian society. This will encourage children to stay at school so as not to be deceived by fallacious impression about trafficking.
3. The government should address the issue of massive unemployment and poverty in Nigeria through financial empowerment for the youths.
4. More enlightenment campaigns should be carried out using all available means to educate parents on the dangers of child trafficking.

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