

## Women Trafficking and Women Prostitution in Selected Local Government Areas in Mid-West Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT** The paper examines the socio-economic consequences of women trafficking and Women Prostitution as well as its implications on national development. A sampled representative of 280 respondents comprising 32 victims and 253 other respondents were randomly selected from two states in the mid- west Nigeria for the study. Findings revealed that breakdown in the cultural norms guiding sexual conduct coupled with a stark reality of poverty among others are factors responsible for this. It also highlights the implications of this on the developmental process of the country as a whole. Recommendations were made to rid the Country of this social menace.

### INTRODUCTION

In preliterate African society, especially among the Yoruba nation, premarital fidelity is greatly appraised while sexual un-chastity is viewed with scorn. Both acts are usually rewarded positively and negatively. Where a new-bride is found not to have violated the sexual rule, her family is usually rewarded with largess in appreciation. This involves the presentation of a full keg of palm wine, several big kola nuts among others, but these items are halved to the shame and ignominy of the bride and her family on the night of wedding where she has been found disvirgined before marriage (Adebusuyi 1991). Among other societies such as the Edos in mid-west, a virginity festivals is usually organized where women displayed their bodies to prove their chaste. It is believed that those who have not violated the sexual rule of remaining virgins till marriage would be discovered through a pointed breast. In some cultures where arranged marriage is practiced, such as in the South West-Nigeria, girls are given out at early age and through the socially approved exchange mechanism but the bride is guided from any form of sexual engagement with her spouse. In fact they are not supposed to meet until the night of engagement.

All these were designed to protect the sanctity of marriage and guide against infectious diseases, which usually accompany unguided sexual engagements. In spite of all these checks, pre-marital sex and indeed prostitution were found to be in operation in every known culture though at a reduced rate especially when compared to

what obtains nowadays. It could not be dated with accurate precision but traces of it could be found in the holy bible with several cases of unholy sexual alliances among God's own children. Prostitution has taken a new dimension with modernization and the breaking down of all norms guiding marriage. Both sexes mix freely and take decisions on their sexual affairs exclusive of their parents. The downtrodden in the economy of recent has warranted an endless search for greener pastures. Young girls have been reported trading their life treasures for money (Egunjobi 2001). Among the ladies especially those in higher institutions in the country, the illicit act has become a profession involving a contractor and the women serving as the articles of trade. The former acts as the agent between the female trader and their male counterpart; based on an agreed commission. She keeps the register of ladies as well as of men and pairs them based on their choices. This, of recent has been interna-tionalized as some of these women have gone across borders to such areas as Europe (notably Italy) and America for better market for their services. This is called 'Italiana' or 'Women trafficking'. It could therefore be defined as the transportation of women as articles of trade from one location to another (usually across borders) for the sex trade (Olalere 2001; Egunjobi 2001; Cuest 2000).

As said inter-alia, the issues relating to women trafficking was a strange occurrence among the Africans as it has always been seen and considered the stock in trade of the Asians and Latin Americans (Olagbegi 2004) but the 1990's saw African women more than any other race entrance

into the unwholesome act (Hughes, Laura, Chirgwin, Nadine and Mendelson 2001). Olagbegi (2004) and Botti (2000) reported that the proportion of women traffickers from Africa far out-numbered that of any other part of the globe, with Nigeria being the largest source and Edo and Delta States as major locations in the country. The European Race Audit Bulletin (1997) reported that young girls usually within the age bracket 14 and 18 and less frequently of those within the ages of 19 and 24 are mostly involved in this act. This has serious implications for the country especially in an era of HIV/AIDS.

A study conducted by Botti (2000), gunjobi (2001) and UNICEF (2005) revealed that several of the victims were lured into the trade. They were often deceived of the real intention of some of these professional sex contractors (net workers) who take the lion share of the proceeds accruing from the business. The little earned by the victims are usually spent on drugs. This was confirmed by Mutua (2003: 2) when he asserted:

The international sex Industry is a multi-million dollar industry but trafficked women are not the real beneficiaries. African women lured into the sex trade in Europe and the middle – East see very little of the money they earn. Many of them have to spend much of the little they get on drugs. Usually when they arrive in the country of destination, their travel documents are confiscated so that they cannot escape....”

Given the aforementioned, one then begins to wonder what the gains of these unfortunate victims were, how they cope both in Europe and upon their returns to Nigeria. It is of importance to also know the socio-economic and the psychological effects of their actions on them as well the political implication of all these on the nation at large. Women trafficking is a transitional crime, socio-economic issue and of course of political and public health concern. The study in the main therefore examines the effects of women trafficking and prostitution on Nigerian women. It further seeks the following objectives from the main aim above:

- (a) Understanding the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.
- (b) Identifying the attractions and prospects (if any) of the trade
- (c) Highlighting the coping mechanisms of the victims in their various countries of destination.
- (d) Assessing the extent of women trafficking

and prostitution as well as the effects on the country.

- (e) Suggesting possible solutions based on the findings of the research.

## METHODS

A sample of two hundred and eighty-five (285), respondents comprising thirty-two (32) victims of trafficked ladies and two hundred and fifty-three (253) people who are neighbours of these victims, were randomly selected from two states in the mid-western part of the country. The rationale for this is that this area recorded the highest number of deportees who are victims of this sex trade in Nigeria. The choice of involving mostly the neighbours of these victims was to know their agony arising from this obnoxious act, societal perception of the act as well as to be able to explore further into the private life of some of these victims who may not be willing to volunteer information vital to the success of the research.

A well designed questionnaire (open-ended) which consist of four sections were administered to the respondents with the help of community based leaders in the areas. The first section of the questionnaire seeks information on the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, while section B, focuses on the societal perception of the sex trade and the principal actors (i.e. the traffickers /agents); and the trafficked ladies/victims). The third section contains questions posed for the unfortunate victims of women trafficking. It elicits information on their harrowing experience(s), how they got involved in the business and their awareness of HIV/AIDS as well as their coping strategies in this era of sexually incurable diseases. The last part of the questionnaire addresses the various intervention programmes aimed at eradicating this societal menace. This was however complimented with in depth interview of forty-two respondents with a view to cross-checking the findings arising from the questionnaire method. The data were collated and analysed using simple percentage.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the field survey reveal a large proportion of the victims below age thirty. Forty-three (43.8) percent were actually below the age of twenty while about one-third (31.3%) percent falls within age-group twenty-one and twenty-

five. Well above one-tenth (12.5) respondents were in the age-group twenty six and thirty. This shows that a sizeable number of the female younger generation is involved in the sex trade. Only a negligible proportion of the sampled populations are above the age of forty (3.1%).

This is unlike the second group of respondents where a simple majority (50.2%) was found within age group thirty six and forty. About one-fifth (20.2%) were below the age of twenty five. On sex, it was found out that, there were more female respondents than male in the two groups sampled. This is not unexpected as the issue bothered much on the female gender than male. In the first sampled group, no male was involved since they are not directly involved. Well above half of the population (56.9%) in the second group were female while the male respondents represent forty-three percent of the total population.

In both sampled population, Christianity is the dominant religion as the followers of this faith were far above those of other religions. They represent 56.3% of the first group and 72.3% of the second group. The Islamic worshippers in both populations represent less than one-tenth. About same number shows preference for traditional religion in the two groups with 12.5% and 11.5% respectively.

While one-quarter (25.0) respondents declared their faith in other forms of religion among the trafficked population, only about 8% of these religious sects represent the other group. Very many of the victims population falls within this category. This explains in part the level of promiscuity among this group. It is bewildering the level of promiscuity in this predominantly Christian population. This of course could be attributed to the diminishing social values and norms guiding against sexual un-chastity. The proliferation of churches even by people of doubtful characters coupled with the nefarious activities of some of these religious leaders is another factor for this ugly development in the society.

The research findings also revealed that an overwhelming majority of the trafficked population were single as at the time of the research (90.6%), none of this group was married to any husband as at the period of survey as the remaining less than one-tenth (9.4%) reported that they were either separated or divorced. This therefore explains the domination of the singles population in this group. In the second group of

respondents, well above one-third (36.1%) were yet to marry as at the period of this research while Forty-three (43.6 %) percent were already married. The proportion of those who are either separated or divorced from their spouses in both populations sampled were significance in this study. While about one-tenth (9.4) was recorded for the trafficked prostitutes, one) fifth (21.1%) represents the second group. This again may confirm the break-down of the institutional norms guiding marital engagements.

On educational status, it was found out that a very large proportion of the sampled respondents are learned. Not less that 43.8% of the respondents in the first group had post-secondary education while another 38.0% had at least a secondary education. Over twelve percent had primary school education. Only 6.3% respondents did not go to school. This goes to show that the sex trade is a highly sophisticated trade involving high class ladies. The other studied group also has majority of the respondents having not less than secondary school education (58.6%). About one-tenth (11.6%) had no formal education. For this society to parade a high number of quality graduates of higher institutions could be explained in terms of the numerous educational institutions in the area. The high literacy level of the society generally is due to the fact that it is an English speaking society. The society since the colonial era has adopted (its brand of English language known as 'pidgin' English' as a means of communication between the natives and the whites. This is not unconnected with the fact that the society is multilingual comprising of over thirteen ethnic groups.

Polygyny was widely practiced among the studied population with over three-quarter (78.1%) respondents among the first group and over three-fifth (63and 1%) of the second group of respondents. Very many of the respondents from polygynous homes were ranked fourth and above among fathers children while their mothers were not even positioned among the first three-wives (Table 1). It is not unexpected therefore that some of the parents may not have given adequate attention to child care and child upbringing which do often precipitate all forms of immoral behaviour.

A glance at the table on father's occupation and the occupations of respondents in the other group reveals that in spite of the literacy level of this society, there is very little to show for it as

**Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents**

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency victims</i>		<i>Percentage neighbours</i>	
		<i>%</i>		<i>%</i>
<i>Age</i>	N=32		N = 253	
Below 20	14	43.8	28	11.1
21-25	10	31.3	23	9.1
26 – 30	04	12.5	35	13.8
31 – 35	02	6.3	40	26.1
40+	01	3.1	61	24.1
<i>Sex</i>	N = 32		N = 253	
Male	-	-	109	43.1
Female	32	100.0	144	56.9
<i>Religion</i>	N = 32		N = 253	
Christianity	18	56.3	183	72.3
Islamic	02	6.3	021	8.3
Traditional	04	12.5	029	11.5
Others (specify)	08	25.0	020	7.9
<i>Marital Status</i>	N = 32		N = 241	
Single	29	90.6	87	36.1
Married	-	-	105	43.6
Separated	02	6.3	23	9.5
Divorced	01	3.1	28	11.6
Widowed	-	-	06	2.5
<i>Educational Status</i>	N = 32		N = 241	
No Formal Education	02	6.3	28	11.6
Primary Education	04	12.5	67	27.8
Secondary Education	12	38.0	80	31.2
Post-Secondary Education	14	43.8	66	27.4
<i>Family Type</i>	N = 32		N = 233	
Monogamy	07	21.9	086	36.9
Polygyny	25	78.1	14.7	63.1
<i>Mothers Position among Fathers' Wives</i>	N = 32		N = 14.7	
(Polygynous only)				
First	09	28.1	021	14.3
Second	08	25.0	043	29.3
Third	11	34.4	64	43.5
Fourth and above	04	12.5	19	12.9
<i>Position among Fathers Children</i>		N = 222		
1 <sup>st</sup> Child	02	6.3	066	29.7
2 <sup>nd</sup> Child	06	18.8	44	19.8
3 <sup>rd</sup> Child	01	3.1	18	8.1
4 <sup>th</sup> and above	23	71.9	104	46.8
<i>Occupation</i>	Father's		Self	
	N = 32		N = 248	
Farming	11	34.4	64	25.8
Business/Trader	08	25.0	95	38.3
Civil Servant	06	18.8	23	9.3
Artisan	07	21.9	66	26.6
<i>Income</i>	Father's		Self	
	N = 32		N = 236	
Below N75,000	23	71.9	139	58.9
N76,000 - N15,000	06	18.8	41	17.4
N15,000 - N25,000	01	3.1	37	15.7
N26,000 - N35,000	03	9.4	07	3.0
N35,000 +	-	-	08	3.4

Source: Authors Field Survey 2004

Note: Figures may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

majority of them are either into farming or trading or combining two or more of these professions. On the income distribution, over two-third of both sampled population reported fathers' income and

personal income within the Nigeria minimum wage, as far below the world standard.

The second set of data generated sought peoples opinion on the causes as well as the

effects of women trafficking. Findings from the research reveal a high poverty rate (33.5%) as the major reason for the act. About one-quarter (27.8%) attributed it to the desire to get rich quick while about one-fifth (22.2%) were of the opinion that the institution of the family has been shirking in its responsibility as the basic unit of the society and a primary agent of socialization. All these factors confirmed our earlier findings on Income, and occupation of both the respondents and their parent.

Equally, over half of the respondents (53.6%) perceived women trafficking as immoral and another form of slavery, 22% sees it as a lucrative business while another 10% could not see anything wrong with it as it is a victimless crime. A large proportion of the population believed the act as having negative implications for human health as well as reducing interest in education. Findings from the field survey revealed that some still believe that nothing is seriously wrong with anybody trading what belongs to him or she for survival in a world of winners takes all. This is bewildering in an era of HIV/AIDS, more so as the area has been identified as having a high prevalence of people living with HIV/Aids. This has serious implications for youth development (Table 2).

On the involvement of the trafficked women in the sex trade, over half (53.1%) of the sampled population reported that they were tricked to join their colleagues for lucrative business abroad without knowing the actual job. Some (6.3%) reported being forced to participate in the sex trade having had their traveling documents confiscated. However, a courageous few (8) representing 25% of the population of the victims opened up that they willingly registered with the traffickers not actually minding what business they have to do in their country of destination (Table 3). The in-depth interview conducted with one of them confirmed these findings. A young lady within the age bracket 21 years and 25 years has the following to say.

For one to survive in this age of penury, one must use what he/she has. With the absence of a father and any husband as the bread winner, there is no choice than to do exactly that to survive more so as the men only want to peck and go, never ready for marriage..."

It was also discovered from the interview that very many of these victims have always been sponsoring themselves through men friends

**Table 2: Perception on women trafficking**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Fre-</i> <i>quency</i>	<i>Per-</i> <i>centage</i>
<i>Causes of Trafficking/</i>	N = 248	%
<i>Prostitution</i>		
High poverty rate	83	33.5
Lack of parental care	55	22.2
Urge to get rich quick	69	27.8
Lack of Education	7	2.8
All of the above	34	13.7
<i>Trafficking as a form of Abuse</i>	N = 250	%
It is a form of slavery	90	36.0
It is derogatory/immoral	44	17.6
Lucrative	56	22.4
It is a way of life	30	12.0
It is a victimless crime	30	12.0
<i>Effects of Trafficking on Victims</i>	N = 234	%
Reduces interest in Education	49	20.9
Exposes victims to diseases	101	43.2
Victims are highly exposed	24	10.3
(in terms of knowing places)	60	25.6
<i>Effects on Culture/Tradition/</i>	N = 249	%
<i>Society</i>		
A form of cultural debasement	121	48.6
A normal change/break from tradition	66	26.5
A way of measuring modernity	23	9.2
It dampens morale and the need to achieve	40	1.6
<i>Effects on a Country's Image</i>	N = 272	%
It has bad social implications	110	45.5
It boost the Economy of the nation	30	12.4
It has negative consequences politically	84	34.7
All of the above	18	7.4

Source: Authors Field Survey 2004

Note: Figures may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

known as sugar daddies. One respondent who actually had the privilege of undergoing University education through this means confided in the researcher as follows:

When my father died in my year one in school, a friend introduced me to a fairly old man who treated me more like a daughter than a wife, or girl-friend. He actually sponsored my education but when I started nursing the ambition of settling down with him, he bolted away. To continue surviving I had to look for another man and in the process met those who perfected my papers for the advanced trade, call it business if you like.

Since their immigration papers were arranged for them by the traffickers, only two of them reported ever having to reappear at the embassy for screening as they couldn't answer some questions satisfactorily well.

All the respondents reported that they were fully aware of the dreaded HIV/AIDS disease but



**Table 3: Reactions from victims of women trafficked/prostitute**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Fre-</i>	<i>Per-</i>
	<i>quency</i>	<i>tage</i>
<i>How they Got Involved</i>	N = 232	%
Willingly	8	(25.0)
Deception/tricked	17	(53.1)
Forced	2	(6.3)
Persuasion	5	(15.6)
<i>Whether they Encountered Immigration Problem During Course of Adoption</i>	N = 32	
Yes	2	(6.3)
No	26	(81.3)
Undecided/No Response	4	(12.5)
<i>Who Introduced them to the Trade</i>	N = 32	
Friend	8	(25.0)
Relations	16	(50.0)
Through Application/Registration	6	(18.8)
<i>Awareness of HIV/AIDS Disease</i>	N = 32	
Never Heard of HIV/AIDS	-	(-)
Yes	32	(100.0)
No response	-	(-)
<i>Coping Mechanism with Sexually Transmitted Disease</i>	N = 32	
Practice safe sex with condom	6	(18.8)
Spends a lot on preventive/curative drugs	10	(31.3)
No option a times	14	(43.8)
Through prayers	2	(6.3)
<i>Ever used Hard Drugs as Stimulant</i>	N = 32	
Yes	22	(68.8)
No	6	(18.8)
No Response	4	(12.5)
<i>Ever Arrested by Police</i>	N = 32	
Yes	10	(31.3)
No	22	(68.8)
No Response	-	-
<i>Views on their Deportation</i>	N = 31	
It is a big relief	24	(77.4)
Back into poverty/problems	7	(21.9)
No Response	-	-
<i>Whether Still Interested in the Trade</i>	N = 32	
Yes; it is a very lucrative business	9	(28.1)
No, it is a very dangerous trade	23	(71.9)
<i>Next Line of Action now in Nigeria</i>	N = 32	
Still thinking	3	(9.4)
Learn basic trade for survival	21	(65.6)
Trying to re-group and go back	4	(12.5)
Don't know	4	(12.5)
<i>Feeling about the Traffickers</i>	N = 32	
Callous and Merciless	16	(50.0)
The New age slave masters	12	(37.5)
God sent messiah	3	(9.4)
No Response	1	(3.1)

Source: Authors Field Survey 2004

Note: Figures may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

since they had no option than to engage in the sex trade. They only developed coping mechanisms such as practicing safe sex with condom (18.8%) and spending a lot of money on preventive and curative drugs against other forms of

sexually transmitted infections (STI's) (31.3%). Only a few reported taking the prayer option while others (43.8%) simply resigned to faith. Many of the respondents seemed to engage the use of stimulant to be able to perform well in the trade. To these categories of commercial sex workers, their deportation was never in their favour more so as the country made no provision for their arrival. However, a good number of them have decided to learn new trades to make ends meet since their chances of returning abroad seem obscured. A few desperate ones (12.5%) are still optimistic of going back. This has a lot of implications for the teeming population of Nigerian youths as they constitute majority of the economically active population.

On whether they were ever arrested by the police, about one-third (30.3%) respondent affirmed this while about 70% respondent says they rather work in close agreement with each other. One of the deported victims of a middle age and an unemployed graduate of a Nigerian University reported thus:

The European police are as corrupt as the Nigeria police although they are more intelligent and efficient. Some of them appeared on a few occasions and threatened but they are soon settled and go away..... They equally like having fun...."

Expressing their dislike for their slave masters (traffickers), 50% respondent says they are very callous and merciless while over one-third (37.5) respondent declared them as the new age slave merchants. A few gave a rather embarrassing response that they are 'God-sent'. They were of the opinion that whatever their seemingly inhuman treatment abroad is far better than staying in Nigeria. One respondent involved in the in-depth interview once declared in deviance of all forms of decorum thus:

We don't have much to do here than to engage in our trade. Do you want to tell me that all men don't have multiple sex partners?. Here men want to sleep with you without paying, but out there, they pay before service. Things are better out there for our profession.

Quite a reasonable proportion of the local respondents 226 (86.9%) were of the opinion that government should improve the standard of living of the people for a reduction in all forms of moral vices in the society. As much as 12.3% were silent on this question while none vociferously disapprove of it (Table 4). About four-fifth (87.1)

**Table 4: Intervention programmes on women trafficking**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>		
	<i>N = 260</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>N/R</i>
Government should improve the peoples living standard	N = 260	226	-	32
Corruption should be curbed to a low ebb	N = 273	-86.9	-	-12.3
The need for education and enlightenment campaign against women trafficking	N = 241	264	-	9
Traffickers should be given outright capital punishment	N = 249	-96.7	-	-3.3
Victims should be properly rehabilitated	N = 251	210	6	25
More job opportunities must be provided to ameliorate suffering	N = 268	-87.1	-2.49	-10.4
People should go back to God	N = 236	210	33	6
Proper Legislation/Enforcement of law against all forms of child abuse	N = 236	84.3	-13.1	-6.4
Education should be made compulsory and Free	N = 247	213	24	14
Country's natural resources should be tapped and more industries should be cited in all states of the federation	N = 224	84.9	-9.6	-5.6
The United States Visa-Programme should be discouraged	N = 255	225	-	43
		-84	-	-16
		158	69	9
		-66.9	-29.2	(3.9
		244	-	15
		-92.8	-	-5.7
		201	38	8
		-81.4	15.4)	-3.2
		195	-	29
		-87.1	-	-12.9
		129	111	15
		-50.5	-43.5	-5.9

*Source:* Authors Field Survey 2004

*Note:* Figures may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

also were of the view that the society needs be informed and educated through enlightenment campaigns that life abroad is not as easy as people use to believe. An overwhelming majority of the total sampled population placed emphasis on corruption as the major scourge eating deeply into the social fabric of the society which has given birth to all other forms of immoral behaviour such as the sex trade. While a sizeable proportion of the respondents (87.1%) were of the view that the international agents (traffickers) should be given capital punishment, quite a few numbers representing 13% vociferously reject this.

Of the total number who responded to the issue of rehabilitation of the victims, approximately 85% response was in the affirmative while just about 5% were silent on this issue. This is apt to play an operative value on the behaviour of those few respondents preferring the sex trade to their deportation. The response to formulate policies and ensure its enforcement to guide against immoral sexual practices received a wide applause of the respondents as over 90% of them were in support. None was against this. It was also believed that the country's natural resources needs be tapped to make room for employment. It is through this that education could be made not only compulsory but also free for all. Eighty seven (87.1%) percent agreed to the former while eighty-

one (81.4%) percent supported the latter's opinion.

Opinions seem divergent on the acceptance of the lottery visa-programme conducted yearly by the United State and other similar programmes operated in Canada and other parts of Europe. Fifty percent of the total respondents still support this programme as laudable while well above 40% rejects the programme in its entirety believing it is one of the very avenues of motivating the youth to go abroad where they are later introduced to all forms of social vices.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The dented image of the country which is acclaimed from government quarters as the giant of Africa needs be redeemed. This could only be done by finding a lasting solution to the social menace that has dragged us to the doldrums. The country is reputed to be one of the first two corrupt nations in the world. This is the more reason why the war against corruption should be fought with all vigor. The war therefore should start from the corridor of power as has been seen in the past few months with president Obasanjo stretching the rod of corruption on a few of his corrupt lieutenants. The leaders of this nation should lead by example

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