

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND ITS EFFECTS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: A SEARCH FOR CHRISTIAN SOLUTION

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Abstract

Human trafficking remains a pervasive global issue with profound consequences for individuals, communities, and societies. In the Nigerian context, where vulnerabilities intersect with socio-economic challenges, the impact of human trafficking reverberates deeply. This research explores the intricate effects of human trafficking within contemporary Nigerian society, emphasizing the pivotal role of the church in addressing this issue. Drawing from a comprehensive review of scholarly literature, governmental reports, and NGO documentation, this research examines the far-reaching consequences of human trafficking in Nigeria. It delves into the socio-economic, psychological, and cultural dimensions of trafficking, shedding light on its effects on victims, families, and communities. Moreover, it underscores the ways in which human trafficking perpetuates cycles of poverty, exacerbates gender inequality, and undermines human dignity. Central to this discussion is the role of the church as a moral compass and social advocate within Nigerian society. The paper explores how churches, through their networks, resources, and moral authority, are uniquely positioned to combat human trafficking. It highlights the efforts of religious leaders and faith-based organizations in providing support to victims, raising awareness, and advocating for policy change. In conclusion, this abstract underscores the urgency of addressing human trafficking in contemporary Nigerian society and the indispensable role of the church in this endeavor. It calls for collaborative efforts between religious institutions, government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners to effectively combat human trafficking and uphold the dignity and rights of all individuals.

Keywords: *Human Trafficking, Effects, Nigeria, Christian, Solution.*

Introduction

The contemporary Nigerian society has in recent times being confronted with the challenge of human trafficking. This phenomenon and its menace in the society are rapidly on the increase. Trafficking of person is a serious crime and a grave violation of human rights. It is a crime against the human person because of the violation of the victim's rights of movement through coercion as well as their commercial exploitation. In the works of Bales (1999), human trafficking is viewed as a modern-day slavery that transcends international boundaries thus posing across border insecurity whose approach to containment call for analysis.

Iwuoha (2019) clarifies the air by saying that:

Human trafficking is a common practice to persuade a young woman to leave home and to move to a wealthy town/country where she can work in domestic service, child or adult care, or as a waitress in a restaurant or a bar. Upon arrival, her passport, visa, and return tickets are taken from her and, effectively, she is imprisoned, either physically or financially or mentally. She is made to work as a domestic slave or as an

agricultural or factory worker, under slave-like conditions, or in a brothel. She sees virtually none of the money that she earns, and eventually she may be sold out. (p. 559).

In addition, Okafor (2015) denotes that human trafficking connotes abuses which include, the sale of children, child prostitution, the exploitation of the child for the purpose of labour, the sexual molestation of female children, the use of children in armed conflict, debt bondage, the sale of human organs, the exploitation of the girl-child for prostitution, and certain other practices which captures the purpose of human trafficking. It is against this background that growing concerns about human trafficking and the rapid growth of its activities that this research seeks to address. The church as a religious institution, the government and society at large also has a role to help eradicate this menace.

This research furthermore exposes the weakness of security agents which leads to the neglect of some African values and it dents the image of Nigeria as a nation. Human trafficking and the falling status of Nigeria governance entails a social contract by which the governed submit certain aspects of their rights to government in return for government's provision of security and social welfare. This shows that government agencies campaigns have so far not been able to curb this social menace. This also shows a security gap since traffickers move their victims along the road where there are noticeable security checkpoints to their camp and demand for ransom.

To this end, the church, government and other relevant agencies in the society are to rise to this occasion to ameliorate this social malady. This could be done by formulating appropriate policies to reduce the incidence of human trafficking in Nigeria. Churches should organize seminars and conferences in order to educate members on the issue of human trafficking. Also, creating employment opportunities and helping the girl-child. Hence this research sets out in finding a lasting end to human trafficking and then it is pertinent to address the factors that have sabotaged every effort to curb human trafficking with the view of process solution to the problem.

Scholar's Views On the Concept of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a phenomenon that is difficult to conceptualize and this has produced confusion among many scholars. Scholarly investigations on human trafficking have researched on the issue from different vantage points, others with many similarities. Nonetheless, their works are valuable as they provide a broad-based analysis for the study.

In an attempt to define human trafficking, Ankrah (2019) states that human trafficking is that which involves the acquisition and transportation of humans across local, national and international borders for servitude, with or without the consent of the trafficked persons. Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) recognizes human trafficking as a crime against humanity and a modern form of slavery. Fayomi (2009) averred that, trafficking is a demand driven business with a huge market for cheap labour and commercial sex. Human trafficking means an illegal act of moving human beings to another location in order to harm them physically, sexually, emotionally or engaging them in illegal production or economic activities at the expense of their welfare, education and peaceful living (Adebayo, Nwachukwu, Olalekan and Umar, 2009).

Furthermore, Fedele (2019) defines trafficking in persons as sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion or the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labour or services through the use of force,

fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt, bondage or slavery. He further claims that a victim needs not to be physically transported from one location to another for the crime to fall within the definition.

According to Adoba (2004), human trafficking is:

The illicit and clandestine movement of persons across national, international borders, largely from developing countries in transition with the end goal of forcing women, children into sexually or economically oppressive and exploitative situations for the profit of recruiters, traffickers, crime syndicates as well as all other illegal activities related to trafficking such as forced domestic labour. (p. 38).

Moreso, Njoku (2015) says it involves carrying human beings particularly women, children and other able-bodied youths from one place to another, at times across national and international borders by the traffickers for the purpose of subjecting the trafficked persons to prostitution, drug peddling or child labour. Some youths were also lured into various crimes such as armed robbery, fraud and membership of violent gangs etc. as they found themselves in foreign countries.

Contextually, the UN (2000) defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. The import of this definition is that human trafficking is a crime against humanity, marked by the intent to deceive and exploit. On the other hand, Agbu (2003) submits that though the fact of human trafficking is not difficult to understand on its own, its dimensions and categorization continue to multiply by the day. He further submits that human trafficking include forced and child prostitution, domestic servitude, illegal and bonded labour, servile marriage, false adoption, sex tourism and entertainment, pornography, organized begging, organ harvesting, and other criminal activities.

Historical Analysis of Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Human trafficking which is a modern method of slavery has been with us from time immemorial. Thus from ancient Roman era, humans were sold, battered, mutilated, abandoned and maltreated. Human were used as tools when necessary and at the pleasure of their masters and care takers. Nigeria has a similar history. Human Rights First (2017) explains that there was an estimated 9.2 million Africans who were victims of modern slavery as of 2016, accounting for 23% of total global modern slavery. After decades of political instability, the porous nature of many land borders in Africa, the entrenchment of corruption within law enforcement and the growth of well-oiled international crime syndicates, Africans are vulnerable to human trafficking under the disguise of economic opportunities. Examples of these can be seen in the sexual exploitation of women from central and west Africa in Italy and the forced bonded labour of domestic workers mainly from East Africa in the Middle East. Sadly, Mashil (2005) states that African governments have thus far failed to stop the emergence and entrenchment of trafficking syndicates and this has seen a huge number of Africans trafficked to regions such as Western Europe and the Middle East. Humans were sold depending on what society or the master felt about them. Ojomo (2000) explains further that, Nigerians are traditionally farmers and are known for their trade and travel in West and Central Africa.

This propensity for travel encouraged easy migration across the borders. For many Nigerians, especially those from the Southeast, the civil war (Nigeria Biafra) of 1966-1970, created

conditions that made migration to neighbouring countries very attractive. In addition, the oil boom of the 1970s saw many other West African nationalities migrating into Nigeria. In Northern Nigeria, close ties with the Arab world have seen people move freely to and fro the Middle East for trade and religious pilgrimages. This has created avenues for migration that has begun to be exploited for International trafficking in children for labour and prostitution. However, trafficking of Nigerians to Europe most especially Italy began to take place in the 1980s pursuant to the demand for low-skilled labor both in agriculture, mining, construction and other services. The menace of human trafficking crops up within the Nigerian borders, in neighboring states, and in several European borders owing to the fact that they are able to convey women and children within a syndicate network in order to expand their markets. That is the reason Kara (2009) avers that Nigerian syndicates have already shipped a very large number of women into the sex markets in Italy, Netherlands and Spain. Studies and records have also shown that Italy has the largest population of Nigerians victims of human trafficking as many as over 10,000 Nigerian prostitutes in have found themselves in the country (Kara, 2009).

In all indications, Nigeria remains an originating center, transit and as well the destination state for human trafficking where women and children are usually subjected to forced labour and forced prostitution (Dodo, 2012). The dynamics of human trafficking in the country are geographical in nature and involve internal and cross-border trafficking. Therefore, the cross-border aspect of human trafficking in Nigeria is revealed by syndicates that procure travel documents, transportation resources and accommodation for the victims that are much desperate to leave the country in search of greener pastures in American and European states, and others (IOM, 2002). These vulnerable young women or girls easily fall victims for the traffickers as the urge to find a gainful employment abroad, earning huge incomes following the irresistible nature of the Nigerian Naira devaluation and the abject poverty in the land. It is only on arrival at their destination that the women and girls are confronted with the harsh realities that they have been deceived, and are actually lured or coerced into commercial sex (Musikilu, 2008).

In the last three decades, trafficked Nigerian victims are usually recruited from rural areas and most of them, women and girls are used for various sexual exploitations, domestic servitude, and the boys among them are used for forced labor in domestic servitude, and alms begging (Ajagun, 2012). These women, young girls and children are transported or conveyed from Nigerian societies to other West and Central African states, and most especially at times, it could be: Togo, Gambia, Cameroon, Ghana, Chad, Benin, Niger, and Burkina Faso, among others. Also, victims from West African states like Ghana, Benin, and Togo where there is easy entry protocol as stipulated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are usually forced to work when conveyed to Nigeria while others even are subjected to harmful jobs like in mining (NAPTIP, 2009). Meanwhile, various Nigerian women and young ladies are conveyed to the various countries in Europe, most especially Italy and Spain, the Middle East and North Africa, for forced prostitution and domestic exploitations.

More so, victims may also have suicidal feelings which can result to an untimely death (Shelley, 2010). It brings about a loss of identity. People are sometimes trafficked to places with strange languages and culture. In such situations, people are coerced to lose their identity. They are forced to learn different languages and communicate in new ways. Also, they imbibe new ways of dressing and lifestyle. This may have some negative implications on the lifestyle of individuals. People may drop good values and embrace bad behaviours. For instance,

African traditional cultural values such as diligence, hard work, honesty, decency and integrity may be replaced with undesirable conducts (Gallagher, 2008).

Increased likelihood of HIV infection is often cited as a risk among women trafficked for sexual exploitation owing notably to a lack of bargaining power concerning condom use and other potentially dangerous sexual practices. Trafficked women are also less likely to be beneficiaries of medical or educational services made available to non-trafficked women working in prostitution. Lack of information about HIV/AIDS, as well as prevalent popular misconceptions, including that sexual intercourse with a virgin will cure the disease and that younger girls are disease-free, has increased the demand for younger victims and increased the vulnerability of children to infection (Shelley, 2010). Relentless anxiety, insecurity, fear and physical pain and injury will have significant effects on the mental health and well-being of trafficked victims. Symptoms of psychological trauma reported by trafficked persons include post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, alienation and disorientation. These individuals report feelings of extreme sadness and hopelessness about the future. They may be suicidal, have cognitive impairment and memory loss, and may be withdrawn. They may also have difficulty concentrating and show aggression and anger. Studies indicate that trauma worsens throughout the duration of the trafficking process. Initial trauma commonly experienced either before they were trafficked or when they first discovered that they were trafficked, will be continually increased by the process of the trafficking. The longer victims remain under the control of their traffickers, the more severe and long-lasting are the effects of their trauma. The symptoms may persist for a long time after the trafficking experience unless support and appropriate counseling is provided (UNO, 2008)

Trafficked victims may be subjected to substance abuse by their traffickers. Some trafficked women have described how they were forced to use drugs or alcohol to ensure their compliance and to enable them to take on more clients, work longer hours or perform objectionable or risky acts (Gallagher, 2008) Trafficked persons may also turn to substance abuse to alleviate the pain of their situation, often resulting in addiction, organ damage, malnutrition, needle-induced infections, overdose and death. In addition to the tragic impact on individuals, human trafficking has now reached such a scale that it has begun to influence the domestic and foreign policies of many of the countries where the problem has become particularly noted. Because trafficking involves the movement of people across international borders, one of the most important areas of debate is migration policy. However, because trafficking in persons is also a deeply human issue, it has become a major issue of discussion and concern in human rights circles (UNO, 2008).

Factors Promoting Human Trafficking in Nigeria

It is paramount to look at the causes of human trafficking in Nigeria. According to Ojomo (2005), several factors are associated with trafficking in persons in Nigeria. These include ignorance, low level or lack of formal education, poverty, large family size, and lack of effective law enforcement against trafficking in persons. He also emphasized on large family size which is the combination of ignorance and certain religious beliefs and traditional practices including polygamy which transformed women into baby factories. Other factors are: globalization of sex industry, cultural stereotype, and weak immigration policies. In this research, we would look at factors that have stimulated human trafficking. They are as follows:

Poverty

Poverty is one of the major reasons for human trafficking in Nigeria. It has also been acknowledged as the main driving force behind human trafficking (Naik, 2018) People living

in abject poverty are usually very eager to leave immediate environment for other places to secure a better standard of living. This gives the human traffickers the opportunity to lure people to relocate to other places. Some parents consider it as an avenue to send their children away for a while in order to make money (Massarath, 2019). Others sell their children not just for money, but with expectations that such children will escape poverty and live a better life with good prospects (Adepelumi, 2015). Children from divorced or separated parents are also exposed to various forms of indecent treatments. Such children may fall victim are liable to human trafficking because in some cases, the parents do not have the time to cater for them. However, it is material poverty that the public perceives to be the root cause of trafficking and intellectual poverty reflected in ignorance, low level or lack of education, and other education related factors are mostly the root cause of trafficking than material poverty.

Unemployment

The issue of unemployment has increased the level of human trafficking in Nigeria as many people are jobless and unable to provide for their families and meet other financial needs. In view of this, some people consider human trafficking as a lucrative business which can serve as an avenue to cater for their needs. Social or cultural values such as lack of women rights make women and girls vulnerable to trafficking (Niewiarowska, 2015). On the contrary, where women are economically empowered and thus financially independent to a certain degree, they are less likely to turn to desperate means of achieving employments. Young men and women who are struggling to get a source of livelihood often fall prey to the hands of these traffickers.

Political Stability and Natural Disaster

Natural disasters can displace individuals or entire families. When people are forced to flee their homes and communities, they can experience financial hardship, homelessness, and culture shock. Children who have lost their parents, for example, are easy targets for traffickers. According to Naik (2018), without a safe place to call home or a guardian to provide for and protect them, these children become vulnerable to abuse, unfair treatment, and trafficking. For instance, it has not been the best of times for the residents and business owners around Okporo, Ihioma, Umutanze, Orsu Ihitteukwa, Mgbidi -Awo, Nnenas, Okwudor among others in Orlu senatorial zone of Imo State since the security unrest in the area rose to an alarming level.

Adedeji (2022) narrates that:

Some residents of the area hurriedly rush home before 6pm to avoid being caught in what has become a regular occurrence of shooting in the zone between unknown gunmen and security operatives. He said since the guns began to boom in the state, the once bubbling council areas have become ghost towns as persistent attacks and kidnappings have forced many residents to relocate to safer places (p. 15).

Poor Educational Opportunities

Lack of educational opportunities can lead one to be trafficked into hard labour. As globalization opened up national borders to greater exchange of goods and capital, human trafficking also increased. Less wealthy countries have fewer options for livable wages. The economic impact of globalization pushes people to make conscious decision to migrate and be vulnerable to trafficking. Gender inequalities that hinder women from participating in the formal sector also push women into informal sectors. In some communities in Nigeria, women are devalued or abused children. Some are not allowed to access quality education (Ajagun, 2012). They are seen as second class citizens. This has ingrained into the minds of men and women which creates a huge opportunity for traffickers. A parent may be willing to sell a daughter and send her into a world of exploitation.

According to Dave-Odigde (2008), some girls and women may leave home willingly if they have been raised to believe they are unequal to men or have few opportunities for work and advancement in their own communities. In traditional cultures where arranged marriages are common, girls are sometimes forced into child marriage, which can also be identified as a form of human trafficking. Sometimes a girl child whose right to education is denied does not have adequate knowledge about her human person can easily be trafficked.

Solutions to Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Skill Acquisition Programme

One of the factors that drive people into human trafficking is poverty. It is the responsibility of the church to tackle abject poverty in our society. One of the best ways to do this is to provide vocational skills opportunities for people. This programme will provide opportunities for trafficked individuals in order to acquire occupational skills that will help them to earn legitimate livelihood. It is hoped that when people have alternative means of livelihood they are likely to quit trafficking and embrace decency. The introduction of skill acquisition in Eastern Nigeria must be credited to the Christian missionaries as part of their evangelization and self-support programme which started way back in the 1840s.

Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) view that Church Missionary Society set up an Onitsha Industrial Mission (O.I.M.) 1900-1903 to train and educate young and capable Christian youths in various traders, carpentry, sewing, brick-making and tailors. An example is Diocese on the Niger that has established vocational schools where skill acquisition is taught. Nwokolo (2018) recalled that there is Diocese on the Niger School of Skill Acquisition (DONSSA) which trains about 219 candidates in the last three years. There are many other students currently obtaining their training in the skill acquisition school. Diocese on the Niger Women's Ministry built Beatrice Onyemelukwe Vocational Education College which offers computer training, catering, saloon and other training services. In 2018, about 110 students graduated from Beatrice Onyemelukwe Skill Acquisition Centre (BOSAC) with various skills as the vision of the project is to assist the government in promoting vocational education which in turn will reduce unemployment by making youths to gain the knowledge and technical know-how in order to be creative enough to be self-reliant. BOSAC through technical and vocational education teach youths various skills that will help them to be self-employed and also contribute in the development of the society. Also the Diocesan Girls Guild has started building a vocational school at Uke. The skill acquisition school has helped and is still helping youths in Anambra State.

Moral and Literacy Education

Illiteracy is a major reason why people engage in human trafficking (Yusuf, 2016). Human trafficking is a disdain and is been abhorred in Nigeria. Human trafficking is alluded as one of the possible causes of the sexual abuse of children (Bagley and King, 1990). Good educational standards are imperative for the realization of national objectives and goals. Without education, it would be difficult to achieve an ideal society. This is why anyone who has gone through the process of formal education is expected to be found worthy in character and in learning. It is important that if the problem of human trafficking is to be tackled, the issues of illiteracy must be addressed. Literacy skills are important skills for human survival. Therefore, opportunities should be given to those who are engaged to enable them acquire the skills of reading, writing and numeracy in order to enable them use the skills in their daily activities including taken decision on what form of livelihood they will pursue. Moral education, according to Kohlberg (1980) has its basis in simulating the active thinking of people about moral issues and decisions. It teaches and instills moral reasoning ability of individuals. The hope is that when moral

education is popularized and taught, people will shun act of sexual abuse and other forms of unacceptable immoral practices that opposes human rights.

With the arrival of other mission bodies, mission schools were scattered all over Igbo territory. Following the footprints of the Church Missionary Society Diocese on the Niger through decisions made in Synod programmes has been proactive in contributing immensely to the growth and enhancement of formal education and promotion of literacy in Nigeria. According to Anambra Broadcasting Station (2023), the Anglican Diocese on the Niger has been in the vanguard of education in Nigeria and will continue to set the pace that will satisfy the people. During the Synod sessions under study, educational reports of the Diocese is given due attention and plans are spelt out on how to continue to promote standard and quality education in the society. Diocese on the Niger has been keen in promoting literacy in Anambra State. It is the wish of the diocese to contribute to national development, and particularly to enhance educational opportunities for the teeming youths in quest of higher learning in order to create an enlightened society and for self-reliance. In order to promote quality education, the Diocese has established many schools and colleges, thus, bringing education to the grass root level. Diocese on the Niger has built many model schools which have won local, state and national prizes. The Diocese has been in the forefront of operation get educated and eliminate illiteracy in the society. It is necessary to point out some of the schools established by the Diocese.

Public Enlightenment/ Anti-trafficking Campaign

Public enlightenment is very important in educating and enlightening the youth about reality of life and activities they engage themselves. The Church should involve the security agencies in a seminar for her members where they will be enlightened and educated on some security tips about forms of human trafficking as this will help them to learn ways to detect the crime and how to prevent the menace. They will learn how to help the force prevent crime through giving relevant information to the security agencies in the state. The Church should help in upgrading of the public perception of the security agencies this will help the people to change their negative perception about the security agents and assist them by giving them information concerning the activities that happen in their environment which can help to curb crimes. Also, an aggressive campaign against human trafficking must be done in order to ensure that our young, promising and innocent do not fall into hands of traffickers who may pretend to better their lives. This campaign should be championed by adult educators through writings, public sensitization among others. It is hope that when non-formal educators explore the avenue of National Orientation Agency (NOA) to enlightening the Nigerian youths about desperation to make money and its ugly attendants our youths may shun any act capable of jeopardizing their future prostitution inclusive.

Réhabilitation of Trafficked Victims

Rehabilitation means the process of helping a person to readapt to society or to restore someone to a former position or rank. Rehabilitation is about helping people to feel good about themselves, heal in body, mind and spirit, learn to do daily activities and move around again, earn an income, and remain accepted and valued by others (Hobbs, McDonough and Callaghan, 2002). According to Danish Refugee Council (2008) rehabilitation is an intervention where one builds upon something which already exists however damaged, fragile, disorganized, scattered. The church as an agent of change in the society should help victims of human trafficking recover because of the damage done to them as a result of the assault. These assistances can best be offered through a comprehensive rehabilitation programme. Rehabilitation programme according to Yusuf (2016) can revolve around social, economic, health, psychosocial, behavioural, emotional, therapy, literacy, conditions. The church should

give hope, comfort and succor to all who are in dire need of it as it is the hospital for all depressed. In so doing, rehabilitation can take its full course.

Conclusion

Human trafficking has emerged as a major human rights issue locally, nationally, and internationally, Christians have become increasingly significant players in activism to end human trafficking even though Christian anti-trafficking activism and advocacy is marked by considerable internal variation. Today, Christian anti-trafficking activism and advocacy is far from significant issues which mark the intersection of Christian thought with the issue of human trafficking. This menace poses a challenge to contemporary Nigerian society, affecting countless lives through exploitation, abuse, and the violation of fundamental human rights. This illicit trade not only undermines the safety and dignity of individuals but also destabilizes communities and weakens social structures. The complexities of trafficking are rooted in poverty, corruption, and lack of education which require a multifaceted response to address both immediate needs and long-term solutions. In seeking Christian solutions to combat human trafficking, the church plays a crucial role in addressing the moral and practical dimensions of this issue. The Christian perspective, grounded in the teachings of compassion, justice, and the intrinsic value of every person, provides a way forward for tackling trafficking. By emphasizing moral education and ethical behavior, the church can help foster a society that rejects exploitation and values human dignity. Through a combination of moral teachings and practical support, the church can contribute to creating a safer, more just society where human trafficking is effectively challenged and ultimately eradicated.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that the church and other agencies should put the following actions in place:

1. Governments both at the federal and state levels should first of all address the problems of poverty and massive unemployment in Nigeria.
2. Legislations on human trafficking in the country should be strict and severe punishment should be served to offenders.
3. The children department in churches should be involved in the sensitization on human trafficking. Children should be educated to know more about human trafficking.
4. Churches should advocate for good governance, equal opportunities, justice and provision of facilities, as these will minimize the urge to migrate.
5. Churches should organize seminars and conferences in order to educate members on the issue of human trafficking.
6. Churches in Nigeria should collaborate with other foreign Christian bodies working on human trafficking.

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