INTERROGATING GENDER DIMENSIONS TO SEX TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA

MICHAEL IHUOMA OGU (PhD) Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria.

ogum@babcock.edu.ng

&

OPAKUNBI OYEDAMADE

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria.

&

ADAEZE CHINEDU

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Gender equality is an area of human experience with high complexity, implicit and explicit manifestations, as well as implications for local and international organized crime, such as drug and human trafficking, especially sex trafficking. Sex trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitations are influenced by gender discrimination and oppression. Hence, the main objective of the study was to investigate the gender dimensions to sex trafficking in Nigeria. The research was qualitative, and generated data from both primary sources using structured interview guide and secondary sources like relevant textbooks, journal articles, newspapers and the Internet, and all data were content analyzed. The study found that the nature of discrimination in Nigeria may be reducing, but that poverty and other factors such as patriarchy, illiteracy and culture among others, continue to pose a challenge effective management of sex trafficking in Nigeria. Also, sex trafficking in Nigeria is significantly influenced by gender discrimination, especially, along cultural lines. The study concludes that the phenomenon of gender discrimination in African generally and Nigeria in particular is complicated by the patriarchal nature of the African and Nigerian society. It was recommended that government should make policies that ensure better per-capital income and better standard of living for people living in the rural communities in particular. Also, both government and various other organizations and stakeholders should invest in both formal and informal education in rural Nigerian communities, as education will serve as a viable to sex trafficking in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender, Sex, Gender Discrimination, Sex Trafficking, Violence.

Introduction

Sex Trafficking is a very highly contested area of human experience evoking very profound and contradictory sentiments and perspectives across the literature and even in larger society. Some of the very instructive definitions, among the several definitions of trafficking that exist are those of the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (2013) referring to trafficking as recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving a person through the means of coercion, threat or deception receiving payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. O'Connor and Healy (2016) also argued that sex trafficking can be understood to be the exploitative movement of people either across borders or domestically subjecting victims to forced labour, sexual exploitation amongst other reasons. Considering the above definitions, along with that of Roy (2010), which

defined trafficking as movement of men, women and children from one place to another through force, coercion or deception into situations of their economic and sexual exploitation, it is safe to say that sex trafficking, essentially, is considered an illegal trade in human beings specifically for purposes of sexual exploitation for commercial gains. Sex trafficking have remained a growing global concern, especially following the arguable rise of particularly minors and young women as victims of sex trafficking, as well as persistence of complicating factors of poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment in many parts of the world, and particularly in Africa.

Several states have criminalized sex trafficking activities, and global action has continued to pursue a general legal standard globally that aims to address sex trafficking especially as it relates to women and girls. The European Union, for instance, adopted the Directive 2011/36/EU, in the year 2011, built on the directives of the United Nations Trafficking Protocol and the Council of Europe's Convention on human trafficking. This EU directive also represents a step further from the 2002 Council Framework Decision which focused on crime control and left little room for prevention and protection of victims, and adopts a victim-centered approach and, apart from prosecution of offenders, addresses prevention and support that must be gender-specific (O'Connor and Healy, 2016). It recognizes that women and men are often trafficked for different purposes, and that assistance and support measures should therefore also be gender-specific.

In Nigeria, Aghatise (2012) estimated that 80% of trafficked Nigerians is women. This problem has engendered the signing into law by the National Assembly of the Trafficking in persons (prohibition) Act as amended in 2015. The act aims at addressing the challenge of labour and sex trafficking in Nigeria by establishing a prescribed minimum penalty of five years plus 1 million naira fine, as well as the setting up of an agency known as NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of the Trafficking in Persons and Other Matters) to enforce the anti-trafficking law as well as rehabilitate victims of trafficking. Oyekanmi (2014) observed that other security agencies like the Nigeria Police Force and Nigeria Immigration Service have human trafficking units with the mandate to arrest traffickers and their agents and transfer to NAPTIP for prosecution. Several Non- governmental organizations (NGOS) and humanitarian organizations are also working in the area of assistance and rehabilitation of victims, as well as intelligence gathering and sharing. Despite these various efforts at managing the challenge of trafficking in Nigeria, the menace continues to deepen and assume more complicated and complex dimensions. Okonofua, et.al. (2014), corroborated this by their argument that Nigeria has remained a major source, destination and transmits country for the purposes of forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation. Hence, this study investigated the gender dimensions and implications of sex trafficking in Nigeria.

This study was essentially qualitative. Primary data were generated from intereviews with officials of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffickingin Persons (NAPTIP), Lagos, using structured intereview guides. Secondary data were also generated from relevant textbooks, journals articles, newspapers and the internet. All data generated for this study were content analyzed; primary data were initially transcribed before being subjected to content analysis.

Arguments Around Gender Equality

Gender as a concept simply refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. According to Otiode (2010), gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men. Bales (2015) explained that gender refers to the social roles that men and women play and the power relations between them, which usually have a profound effect on the use and management of natural resources. According to Oyekanmi (2014), gender is not based on sex, or the biological differences between men and women. Rather, it is shaped by culture, social relations, and natural environments. Thus, depending on values, norms, customs and laws men and women in different parts of the world have assumed different gender roles. Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures (Ali, 2016). Further, Okonofua et.al. (2014) argue that gender roles of women and men include different labour responsibilities, decision-making processes, and knowledge, and such roles and expectations are learned, so they can change over time and they vary within and between cultures.

Gender discrimination, drawing from the various perspectives above, describes the situation in which people are treated differently simply because they are male or female, rather than on the basis of their individual skills or capabilities. Discrimination on the bases of gender is evident in the differences in the status, power and prestige women and men have in groups, collectivities and societies. In the context of workforce, it can be defined as the giving of an unfair advantage (or disadvantage) to the members of the particular group in comparison to the members of the other group.

Gender discrimination takes many forms. Many social, religious and cultural practices appear to have discountenanced women to the background of economic mainstream, thus bearing significant economic consequences for several aspects of society as the inherent talent in such discriminated gender, particularly women, are not properly harnessed. The unequal or disadvantageous treatment of an individual or group of individuals based on gender, including sexual harassment also qualify as gender discrimination, only that this is a form of illegal gender discrimination, and forms the main focus of this study.

The discourse around gender remains a topical issue in the global society, and among the most pressing issues societal issues even today. It is instructive to begin by interrogating the various factors that encourage discrimination among gender, in its various manifestations, including sexual relationships.

Factors Motivating Gender Discrimination

Several factors have motivated and sustained the various dimensions of discriminations relating to gender. Unfortunately, it is evident in literature that most of these discriminations have been against the female gender by the male gender. It is important to understand these various motivations, as they provide significant insight into the various forms and manifestations of discrimination that many women suffer, including sexual violence and abuse in the form of sex trafficking.

1. Socio-Cultural Factors

The African culture, and even aspects of Western culture, arguably subjugate women to men to a very large extent and undermining the potentials of women in the society. Although there are various instances of women holding influential and significant positions even in traditional societies, it is still evident that this recognition of women has largely remained almost non-existent in modern society. Over the years, sociocultural discrimination against women have been the central focus of anthropological, sociological, sociocultural studies and research by different authors and writers on the subject. Section 21(a) of Nigerian Constitution requires the State to protect, preserve and promote only Nigerian cultures that enhance human dignity and consistent with the fundamental objectives as provided in the chapter, however, harmful practices based on tradition and culture still abound that discriminate against women, and rob male and female of equal opportunities and equal access to opportunities to advance socially, economically and politically.

2. Political Factor

Politics by its nature, is largely thought to be a male function, again owing to the highly male dominant culture in many parts of the world, including Africa. The definitions of politics often involve power and decision making, and arguably these are thought to be concepts that are attributed to men against women. This male dominated understanding of politics restricts political activity only in public arena and forms the basis for excluding women from public political sphere and even when women are brought into politics they are entered as mothers and wives, or largely observers. Male domination of politics, political parties and culture of formal political structures is another factor that hinders women's political participation. Often male dominated political parties have a male perspective on issues of national importance that disillusions women as their perspective is often ignored and not reflected in the politics of their parties. Elections in Nigeria are highly characterized by violence, electoral irregularities and various criminal activities, and these traits are also arguably believed to be non-feminine. However, with the exceptions of African states like Namibia and Rwanda in particular, campaigns for women's involvement in the democratic process has yielded only very little.

3. Economic Factor

Economics is another area highly challenged by discrimination against women. On the contrary, the role of women in the economic processes cannot be overemphasized, as they are largely involved in the informal sectors, and they are constantly challenged with low productivity and incomes, poor working conditions, with little or no social protection, including subjection to higher risks of gender-based violence or sexual

abuse. Agbalajobi (2009) emphasis that lack of finance brings hindrance to effective female participation in Nigerian Politics. Similarly, large portion of the Nigerian female population is not as financially strong as their male counterparts, and political campaigns are very expensive and require solid financial backing, hence the men become political financiers or sponsors in the very rear occasion that women intend to run for public office.

Dimensions of Gender Discrimination

The various dimensions and manifestations of gender discrimination include, but are in no way limited to the following.

1. Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment arguably covers a wide range of acts, all sexual in nature, that cause someone to experience harm or discomfort. Although the most common type of sexual harassment is hostility in work environment – a co-worker's or supervisor's behaviour creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment at work – sexual harassment manifests in various other, mostly dehumanizing forms; rapes, assaults, physical torture, among others. Often victims believe they must put up with or respond positively to sexual harassment, whether at the work place or elsewhere. Sexual harassment can take the form of words or actions such as discussing sexual activities, commencing on physical attributes, unnecessary touching or gestures, using demeaning, offensive language or displaying sexually suggestive pictures and actual penetration without consent. Ali (2016) stated that the normalisation of sexual harassment and inaction of bystanders and authorities perpetuate this form of discrimination and limit women's freedom.

2. Objectification and poor representation

Objectification is when a person is treated as a commodity or an object without regard to their personality or dignity. The media is a major culprit of objectifying women by their many showcasing of women in advertisements, emphasizing external appearance of women above other capacities. The entertainment media have also poorly represented women by reinforce damaging gender stereotypes and emphasizing traditional roles.

3. Divisions in the Family

Family is the basic unit of the society. Within this social unit there is a gender division of labour. Women and men have different roles in the family. Often women's roles are considered lesser. The social system of our family is largely patriarchal in nature. Men are naturally believed to be head of the household and women are the 'hearts' of the household – nurture and care for the family and the household chores. Surprisingly, in some contemporary societies women have no choice in the number of children they would have, hence the effort of the United Nations Women and the Family Planning 2020 agenda, encouraging women to be determinants of whether, when, and how many children they want to have.

4. Educational Discrimination

Education is widely recognized as the gateway to economic security in every society, particularly for girls and women. There is little denying the fact that investing in human capital is one of the most effective means of reducing poverty and encouraging sustainable development. Yet, women in developing countries usually receive less education than men. Statistics from the United Nations and many other literature reveal that more girls are out of school that their male counterparts, and the reasons for these are varied.

5. Discrimination in Decision Making

Women in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa, arguably have little control over fertility, sexuality and marital choices, and this systematic discrimination reduces women's public participation, often increases their vulnerability to poverty, violence, and results in women representing a disproportionate percentage of the poor population of the world. Oyekanmi (2014) observed that the continued exclusion and marginalization of the majority of women during decision-making is bad and does not create a strong and healthy democracy for any country. There is need for ensuring the participation of women in the public and private spheres of the nation's economy, promote women's participation in decision-making and election into political positions, as the situation calls for a positive change for women in the political, economic and socio-cultural sectors of every economy. The exclusion of women from decision-making bodies limits the possibilities for entrenching the principles of democracy in a society, hindering economic development and

discouraging the attainment of gender equality, and rob the society of the unique intellectual female-oriented perspectives and contributions to many of societal problems.

6. Religious Segregation

Religion is another aspect of fundamental right which has generated a lot of discourse in the court. Religion plays a vital role in shaping cultural, social, economic, and political norms in many parts of the world. Similarly, gender roles and the status of women and men in society are deeply tied to the manner in which religion is interpreted and the beliefs that guide individuals, male and female alike. However the discrimination motivated by religion, women play a pivotal role in religious life both within the family and the community at large, passing religious teachings and traditions from one generation to another.

7. Age Discrimination

Age discrimination is often manifested in such organizational practices as limiting other workers from substantive job responsibility or access to job related career development opportunities. This form of discrimination varies from nation to nation. The common form of age discrimination in Nigeria is age specification for job seekers, which must be below 25 years, 35 years working experience, among others. Age discrimination manifests in forced retirement because of age; assigning older workers to duties that limit their ability to compete for high level jobs in the organization; requiring older workers to pass physical examination as a condition of continued employment; and in developed societies, cutting health-care benefits for workers over the age of sixty-five because they are eligible for Medicare. It can also be argued that University graduates who are exempted from the National Youth Service Corps scheme on grounds of age constitutes age discrimination against many older graduates who may be willing to serve this nation.

Radical Feminist Theory

Radical feminism considers the male dominated capitalist hierarchy, which describes sexist as the defining feature of women's oppression. Radical feminists believe that women can free themselves only when they have done away with what they consider as inherently oppressive and dominating patriarchal system. Walby (2011) and Mackay (2015) among other radical feminists have argued that there is a male-based authority and power structure and that, it is responsible for oppression and discrimination, and as long as the system and its values are in place, society will not be able to be reformed in any significant way, hence the call for complete reconstruction of society – by social change or revolution – in order to assist women to achieve their goals

Friedan (1963) in her classic 'The Feminist Mystique' comments on the essence of feminism as a liberation movement, thus she argues that "whenever, wherever in the world where there has been an upsurge of human freedom women have a share of it for themselves. This assertion simply confirms the fact that women have always been the victims of oppression, injustice and exploitation. Radical feminism, therefore, strives to abolish the oppression of women by men in order to liberate everyone from an unjust society by challenging existing social norms and institutions. This includes opposing the sexual objectification of women, raising public awareness about such issue as rape and violence against women.

Manifestations of Sex Trafficking in Nigeria

Nigeria is both a transport and destination focus for trafficking, the country is famous, within the West African sub-region, for local and international trafficking of women and children. The internal trafficking recruits and transports women and children from rural to urban centre, while the international trafficking cuts across the shores of Nigeria. According to UNICEF (2013) most internal trafficking movement happens in the festive periods as well as other cultural celebration activities, and the victims work as house help, servants, scroungers, street hawkers, prostitutes within the country. The issue of internal sex trafficking in Nigeria is not only on the increase within the country but also internationally which comes from all parts of Nigeria.

The increase of sex trafficking internationally tends to rise in states which include Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ebonyi, Kano, Delta, Ogun, Oyo and Lagos (Okojie, 2019). Okojie (2019) further stated that Nigerian trafficking dealers tends to trade with West African destination countries which includes Republic of Benin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon and Guinea mostly as

domestic servants and on farm plantations, also European countries which includes Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom as domestic servants or for prostitution. Arguably above 90% of Nigerians trafficked to Europe for prostitution are from Edo State, arguing that with the growing anti-trafficking movements and crusades, traffickers tend to drift away from urban centers and into the rural side. Other states in Nigeria with relatively high records of sex trafficking include, but are not limited to Imo state, Enugu state, Lagos state, Ogun state, Anambra state and Akwa-Ibom state, although it must be stated that the volume of individuals recruited vary by the states.

Beyond recruitment, Nigeria is also regarded as a transit nation for trafficking. The trafficking route stretches from West Africa through North Africa to Europe and beyond. This transit takes lengthy period either in days, months or even in years under strenuous and terrible circumstances. For instance, the trafficked Togolese women and children to their destinations through the Nigeria transit camps waits for their means of transportation to ship them across the seas. In most cases they are deficient of the basic needs while waiting which might be difficult for them to survive.

Nigeria, interestingly, is also a destination for trafficking in persons. Nigeria arguably receives trafficked individuals, particularly from West African states such as Togo, Benin, Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana. Okojie (2012) observed that Buzu women from the Niger Republic are continuously been trafficked into wealthy homes in northern Nigeria to serve as household helpers and concubines. Occasionally, some of the trafficked Buzu women are coerced into marrying their employers against their will.

Motivations for Sex Trafficking

Several researchers have investigated and examined the major reasons for sex trafficking. Results such as voracious demand for money, covetousness and discrimination, violence, insecurity, self-doubts, internal displacement, illiteracy, among others have topped their findings. Lipede (2007) and Akor (2011) among other scholars have identified causes of sex trafficking in Nigeria particularly and Africa generally. High level of illiteracy, cultural discrimination, weak governance, bad infrastructures, and lack of economic opportunities and high level of demand for cheap labour are some of the factors identified.

Evidence abound that traffickers would most readily recruit girls from countryside and other public places, promise them a good life outside the country, and then instruct not to inform their parents or guardians of any of the plans, they are subsequently transported out of the country with the aid of corrupt immigration officers, and then end up retrieving the travel documents from their victims and get them to sign some kind of agreements under duress. According to UNESCO (2014), there are hospitals and orphanages homes where doctors, nurses and orphanages caretakers assist females not interested in keeping their babies after birth. They take care of these women pre and during pregnancy by providing money and shelter. The babies are then sold to couples in need of babies upon delivery. The couples pay a premium for the preferred choice of babies.

Conversely, push and pull factors are reasons for high level of sex trafficking in Nigeria. The push factors include mass rate of unemployment and lack of economic opportunities for businesses, reduced living standards, devalued currencies, health failure and security challenges of citizens, among others, while pull factors include the good life promised to victims, foreign job opportunities, availability of basic amenities, adequate social security, and improved health care, among several others.

Linking Gender to Sex Trafficking

The respondents believed that gender discrimination has encouraged sex trafficking despite the fact that gender discrimination is not the only cause of sex trafficking in Nigeria. Trafficking for sexual exploitation can take on different forms: more visible ones, as in the case of street prostitution, but mostly clandestine ones, operating in brothels or private homes. Public venues, such as massage parlours and strip clubs can also be used for trafficking and sexual exploitation.

There are several factors which contribute to trafficking in women. Their vulnerability, especially as a consequence of violence, and the demand for their sexual services are two leading factors which have

received increased attention in recent years. Tackling this demand requires addressing prostitution. EU Member States have adopted different approaches to this phenomenon, ranging from criminalisation of all activities related to prostitution to regulation

Trafficking in human beings (also referred to as THB, human trafficking, or trafficking in persons) is a serious crime and a flagrant violation of human rights, recognized as such by the international community. Even if it is not a new phenomenon, human trafficking has acquired a new dimension in the context of globalization and has been facilitated by increased mobility, especially in Europe, and the development of the internet and new technologies. Among the reasons why human trafficking is a flourishing business are involvement of low risks and high profits. As victims, through fear or shame, tend not to declare themselves to the authorities, traffickers are hardly ever prosecuted, and the actual number of victims is difficult to establish.

Trafficking for sexual exploitation can take on different forms: more visible ones, as in the case of street prostitution, but mostly clandestine ones, operating in brothels or private homes. Public venues, such as massage parlors and strip clubs can also be used for trafficking and sexual exploitation. Violence is a common tool used for controlling victims and they are sometimes raped by their traffickers and drugged to prevent them from escaping. Even when victims know that they are being recruited for providing sexual services, they can still end up in exploitive situations and suffer deception, coercion or violence.

Report from field investigation reveal that gender discrimination in Nigeria is on the decline owing to the nature of women in terms of drive, innovation and passion has reduced in the country. However, Agbalajobi (2010) and Ezeh (2017), argue to the contrary, that women are generally discriminated in areas of politics, education, culture and norms and religion. Although women are becoming increasingly aware of the opportunities open to them, and also informed on how to cease these opportunities, culture remains a critical challenge to gender equality, and male domination arguably continues to be reflected in several policies on governance, education. Poverty has also been identified as a major motivation of sex trafficking. This is not far-fetched, especially as capitalism persists and the rich are getting richer, while the poor remains in worse conditions of poverty. In addition to poverty, illiteracy and ignorance cannot be excused as causes of sex trafficking in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Despite all the efforts from government and other relavant religious and private sector agencies, including NGOs, sex trafficking has remanied a major challenge to the development of national security and protection of the rights of women and girls especially. Public awareness is essential in nibbing this monster in the bud, and iinternational organizations like USAID, DFID, IMF, World Bank, and private organizations must continue to make concerted efforts educating and empowering women and girls with information and knowledge about sex trafficking. While we may need further research to determine the extent of involvement or influence, it is arguable that gender discrimination has be a motivating factor for sex trafficking in Nigeria.

References

- Aghatise, E. (2012). "Trafficking for Prostitution in Italy" Concept paper presented at the expert group meeting on Trafficking in women and girls. Glen Cove, New York
- Akor, L. (2011). Trafficking of Women in Nigeria: Causes, Consequences and the Way Forward, Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy Vol.2 (2), 89–110
- Ali, Y. (2016). "Stateless and Citizenship Rights in the Middle East: the Case of Kuwait." *DOMES: Digest of Middle East Studies* 15 (1):62-76.
- Bales, K. (2015). Understanding Global Slavery: A Reader. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Ezeh, M.D (2017). Human Trafficking and Prostitution Among Women and Girls of Edo State, Nigeria Possibility of Rehabilitation Through Education and Prevention.
- Friedan, B. (1963). The Feminine Mystique, W. W. Norton & Company

- Lipede, A. (2007), "Women Trafficking and Insecurity in West Africa: Character, Trend and Scale in Nigeria" in Barkindo, B.M and A. Lipede (ed.) Human Trafficking and Economic Crimes across Nigeria's International Borders, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited. PP.3 43
- Mackay, F. (2015). Radical Feminism. Theory, Culture & Society, 32(7-8), 332-336.
- O'Connor, M. and G. Healy (2016) *The Links Between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: A Briefing Handbook.* Stockholm: Joint CATW-EWL Publication.
- Okojie, C. (2014), *Measures to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings in Benin, Nigeria and Togo;* Final Report Nigeria, unpublished report submitted to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna
- Okonofua, F.E., Ogbomwan, S.M., Alutu, A.N., Okop, K. and Aghahowa, E. (2014). "Knowledge, attitudes and experiences of sex trafficking by young women in Benin City" South-South Nigeria. *Journal of Social Science and Medicine*, 59 (6), 1315-1327
- Otoide, V.O. (2010). Social dynamics associated with migration and sexual trafficking in Benin City, Nigeria. A paper presented by the institute for African child, Ohio, University, at a project conducted by women Health and Action Research Center in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.
- Oyekanmi, F.D. (2014). "Socio-economic dimensions of gender equality" in Akinboye, S. (ed). *Paradox of Gender Equality in Nigerian Politics*. Nigeria: Concept Publishers.
- Roy, R. (2010), Women and Child Trafficking in India;" India: Akansha Publishing House
- UNESCO (2004). Trafficking in West Africa: root causes and policy recommendations. USA.
- UNICEF (2013), *Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, In Africa,* Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy, September 2013
- UNODC/UNICRI, (2013). Programme of Action Against Trafficking in Minors and Young Women from Nigeria into Italy for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation. Report of Field Survey in Edo State
- Walby, S (2011) The Future of Feminism, Cambridge: Polity Press.