

Interrogating the nature and push factors of human trafficking in Benin-city, Edo State Nigeria in the context of the Africa we want.

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Abstract

Background: Human trafficking is a global crime which negates the African union agenda 2063 and the aspirations of the Africa we want. Nigeria is notorious as home for most victims of human trafficking. However, few studies exist on the push factors that drive the practice in the area, especially when such knowledge could be very critical in the quest for solutions to this global problem.

Data and methods: The study combined qualitative and quantitative methods. Structured questionnaire was given to 300 victims and 25 in-depth interviews from the cohort; 60 opinion leaders, key informants were interviewed and focus group discussions conducted.

Findings: Push factors like inheritance rites, serial polygyny/polyandry, belief in witchcraft and weak family support systems were identified as drivers of human trafficking while the abysmal conditions of poverty created vulnerabilities.

Conclusion: Inheritance rights should include women and children; conditions of poverty improved and cultural practices that promote vulnerability of women and children discouraged.

Keywords: Interrogating; Nature; Push factors; Human trafficking; Nigeria.

Introduction

Trafficking generally refers to the frequent illegal movement of goods, substances, or persons from one destination to another, within or across national borders at a particular point in time. However, the concept of human trafficking or trafficking in person has become so complex that an obvious challenge exists with regards to its definition and actual meanings (Kara 2017; Peters 2015). The definition of human trafficking has sometimes been contested by scholars, (Coomaraswamy 2000; Bassiouni et al 2010)), though the term has been used by different actors to describe activities that range from voluntary migration, to the exploitation of prostitution, to the movement of persons through the threat or use of force, coercion or violence for certain exploitative purposes.

However, United Nations Article 3, paragraph (a) of the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons defines trafficking in persons as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion or abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person for the

purpose of exploitation, (UNODC, 2011). It further noted that exploitation shall include at a minimum the exploitation of the prostitution of others, forced labor or services, slavery or the removal of organs. Trafficking in persons from the above definition has three constituent elements: the act or what is done (recruitment, harboring, transportation etc) the means or how it is done (threat, coercion, abduction, deception, payments etc) and the third element which is the purpose or why it is done (exploitation) (UNODC, 2013; Aronowitz 2009). All three elements must be present to constitute trafficking in persons in international law. Despite the contestations, there is no doubt that human trafficking is a global problem, (Batstone, 2007; Shelley, 2010; Bales 2012). Kara, (2017) in a study of sex trafficking involving 900 cases in 41 countries documented a total of 1, 590,000 victims with estimated profit of \$52.1 billion. Human trafficking is very inimical especially for the victims who experience repeated physical, sexual and psychological abuse, torture, confinement, threats and starvation which often lead to trauma and depression (Kara 2017; Aronowitz 2009). According to United States Department of States, trafficking in persons report, (USDS, 2018), for the past five years,

Nigeria has consistently remained a source, transit and destination country for trafficking in women and children. UNICEF earlier elaborated this trend when it estimated that over 60% of girl trafficking victims for commercial sex in Italy are from Nigeria (UNICEF Report, 2002). Over 50% of Nigerian girls, repatriated as victims of trafficking from Italy between 2000 and 2010 were from Edo State (Ruhfus, Einsiedel and Caprio, 2011; Ghia, 2011).

Though some of these figures were not derived from pure empirical research, which is lacking, they point to the existing global problem of human trafficking, especially in Nigeria and specifically in Edo State, (Kempadoo, 2005; Gozdzia and Collet 2005). Human trafficking greatly retards the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and contrary to aspiration three and six of the African Union agenda 2063. Therefore, the need to find lasting solutions to this global challenge cannot be over emphasized. Generally, few empirical studies have been done to provide evidence on the push factors that drive the practice in Nigeria and especially in Edo state. Therefore this study is an important and under studied site for investigation which addresses a significant empirical gap in the global trafficking in person's literature.

Review of empirical literature

The renewed global interest in human trafficking has led to the existence of some studies on the phenomenon. However, a lot needs to be done through research to find solutions to various aspects of the problem. Butegwa, (1997) conducted a study on human trafficking in some West, Central and Eastern African countries. The study conducted interviews and administered questionnaire in Uganda, Kenya, Mali, Cameroun, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and Nigeria. The respondents included trafficked women, victims, recruiters, government officials and others. The study highlighted the difficulties in conceptualizing trafficking in women from human right perspective. However, it failed to examine the push factors of human trafficking in these countries.

International Office on Migration, (IOM, 2003) conducted a study in Southern Africa which covered Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa. The study focused on the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation and trafficked victims, sex workers, traffickers police and government officials, media and NGO's were interviewed. However, the samples were small, compared to the countries covered and non random, hence the results cannot be generalized in view of variations within countries. The study focused on prevalence and experiences and no attention was given to the push factors of trafficking which is the focus of this study.

Diarra, (2000) carried out another study in Mali involving 155 repatriated victims of trafficking. In contrast to the studies in Benin, 97% in this case were male and 3% female. These children who were mostly repatriated from Cote d' Ivoire, worked on plantations. Most of them were from families with large size. In Togo, Aballo, (2000) also conducted a research in which 96 respondents were interviewed, all of them repatriated victims of trafficking. About 70% of these victims were girls and this was explained with the fact that in Togo, parents place more value on their sons than the girls. Also, 74% of the families are polygynous and about 82% had more than 5 children, they are also predominantly poor.

Some studies had been conducted in Nigeria. Hodges (2001) and Ebigbo, (2004) published studies on child trafficking in Nigeria conducted by ANPPCAN on behalf of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The research which was carried out in Sokoto, Kano, Maiduguri, Owerri, Calabar, Port Harcourt and Lagos interviewed a total of 2,100 children. It was discovered that 19% of the school children, and 39% of the street children were trafficked and almost all of them were within 10-16years.

The study aptly established the existence of child trafficking in Nigeria and the scope of the study was also enlarged to include towns in the North. However, Hodges, (2001) pointed out that the study did not provide nationally representative data. He also noted that the proportion of trafficked children seem extraordinarily high. Generally, this study was centered on child trafficking to the exclusion of the larger problem of human trafficking. They also focused more on internal trafficking and less on the international dimension.

Nwokeoma, (2018) further conducted a survey of 600 respondents on the demographic and cultural factors of human trafficking in Imo state. The study established high awareness of human trafficking in the area and preference for large families fueled by the traditional practice of multiple births by women. However, the study focused on demographic factors and not the push factors of human trafficking.

In Edo state, Women's Health and Action Research Centre, (WHARC, 2002) conducted a community based study to estimate the extent of sexual trafficking in Benin City. The results of the study confirmed the high prevalence of sexual trafficking in Edo State. Indeed 32% reported that somebody had recently offered to assist them obtain papers to travel abroad.

In another study, Girls Power Initiative, (GPI, 2004) examined sex trafficking in Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. The study sought to know why girls were being trafficked from Nigeria,

and measures that could help them to resist being trafficked. About 299 victims were interviewed and it was found that girls were more susceptible to trafficking because there is demand for their sexual services. The majority of the victims are girls between the ages of 15-25 years.

A specific study on trafficking of Nigerian girls to Italy was conducted by Okojie, (2004) for United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), with a focus on Edo State. The researcher interviewed 29 victims and held focus group discussions and target interviews. Most of the victims were between 18-20 years.

The above research reports also showed a high knowledge of trafficking in women in Edo State. Further, the average age of the victims was 15 and 25. Though the first two studies by WHARC and GPI focused on sex trafficking, the study by Okojie and UNICRI related trafficking in girls to a specific location, Italy. The findings also showed a preponderance of women victims to males. The reason adduced for this trend was only demand based. However, there may be some inherent factors in the place of origin that also functions to facilitate this development.

Owobu, (2014) conducted a study on incidence of female trafficking and prostitution in Ikpoba- Okha. The study which is a survey of victims of trafficking sampled 87 respondents and used the questionnaire for data collection. The findings confirmed the existence of female trafficking in the area and unemployment and search for greener pastures abroad were found as the major reason for the practice. The study subject was the victims of female trafficking, but the sample frame was wrongly extended to the entire population which eroded the inclusion criteria of the sample. The study was based in Ikpoba –Okha one of the areas for this study, but it excluded Oredo another core area and only the quantitative data was used. However, this study failed to have a holistic view of the push factors of human trafficking in Edo state.

Though the empirical works so far reviewed had contributed immensely to an understanding of human trafficking, the study under discussion promises to do more. It hopes to undertake a comprehensive study of human trafficking which include both child and women trafficking. It would focus on collecting and organizing the main elements which permit a better understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of the areas of origin of the victims. The research would collect data and also carry out analyses on the push factors which may be encouraging this practice in the place of origin.

Theoretical framework

The social strain theory of Robert K Merton shall form the theoretical framework for this study (Merton, 1968 & Crossman, 2019). Strain theory explains deviant behavior as an inevitable outcome of the strain individuals experience when society does not provide adequate approved means to achieve culturally valued goals. Strain refers to the discrepancies between culturally defined goals and the institutional means available to achieve the goals (Libretexts, 2019). In this theory, Merton presented a typology of deviance based upon two criteria: a person's motivation and adherence to cultural goals and a person's belief in how to attain the goals.

Merton explains that society consists of systems of norms and values which establish the goals that individuals pursue, and also the means for the achievement of these goals. Some of these goals could be: respect, possession of economic wealth, status, power, authority etc and the accepted means could be acquisition of education, skills, employment, good business, capital, etc. However, the institutionalized means of attaining the culturally defined goals are not evenly available to every member of society. This discrepancy therefore creates a condition of strain on the individual who may respond in five different possible ways. One process of response is Innovation; in which a person may accept the goals of material success, and abandon the approved normative means of the society which in itself is not even available. Individuals in this condition may therefore adopt unconventional, unapproved and unlawful means to success. They may engage in human trafficking which is unapproved and unlawful as a means to achieve the goals of material and social affluence, especially when the society is very permissive like in Nigeria.

According to the social strain theory, the economic, political and social structures of society produce enormous strains which put tremendous pressure on some individuals, and make them to engage in criminal behavior. Also similar social strains on the socio economic realities of individuals constitute the push factors that form the bases for the vulnerability of possible victims. Some features of the strains could be widespread poverty, hunger, unemployment, insecurity, economic and social tension, etc.

Research questions:

The central concern of the study is to unravel the push factors that drive the trafficking of women from Edo State Nigeria to Europe. The relevant research questions are:

- What is the local knowledge and awareness of human trafficking in Edo State Nigeria?

- What are the victims account about human trafficking in Edo State?
- What are the characteristics of the victims of human trafficking in Edo State?
- What are the push factors that drive human trafficking in Edo State Nigeria?
- What are the solutions to the problem of human trafficking in Edo State?

Materials and methods

Study design and sites:

This study combined both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments. The structured questionnaire was administered to 300 former victims while in-depth interview was conducted with 25 victims who volunteered to participate. The trafficked victims were enrolled in the two major victim shelters in Benin city, the Idia renaissance shelter and the Committee for the Support and Dignity of Women, (COSUDOW) shelter. The study was designed to allow an exploration and documentation of the push factors that drive human trafficking in Edo State, Nigeria. Oredo and Ikpoba-Okha local government areas (LGAs) in Edo State were purposively selected for the study based on previous reports. Previous studies confirm that many of the women trafficked to Europe are from Edo State with a net prevalence in the LGAs within and around Benin City (Pearson, 2003; Prina, 2003; Daskalopoulou, 2011; Ruhfus, Eisendel and Caprio, 2011; Rupp, 2012). Edo state is the nucleus of the old Mid-western region created in 1963 and became a distinct state in 1991. Oredo which is one of the study areas occupy a central location in Benin City the capital of Edo state and is also made up of some urban slums. It is a local government headquarters and hosts most parts of the Edo state capital. While some part of Ikpoba Okha are partly urban and some are rural, with a high concentration of urban slum in the area. The people of the state engage mostly in agriculture. Benin City is also the only major metropolis in the state. The poverty level in Benin City is about 53.3%, (National Bureau of Statistics, NBS 2017) and the youths have abandoned agriculture and now depend on wage labor which is not available.

Study participants

The study participants consist of 360 persons comprising victims that were formally trafficked and community opinion leaders. The former victims were enrolled in the two victim shelters; the Idia renaissance and COSUDOW shelters in Benin City. They were included in this study because they have been through the process of trafficking and are better informed and knowledgeable on the issue. They are

also a hard to reach cohort whose accounts are hardly documented. The opinion leaders in these communities were also relevant to the study because most of them were born and have lived in the area for over forty years and are like the culture bearers of the locality. Officials of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on human trafficking and rights of women as well as government agencies such as Nigerian Immigration Services and National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) were included in the study. These agencies were selected on the basis of the relevance of their activities to the issue of human trafficking. The NGO's are mostly concerned with advocacy, rehabilitation issues while the Immigration service and NAPTIP are mostly concerned with enforcement, prosecution and also rehabilitation of victims.

Instruments and methods of data collection

The structured questionnaire was administered to 300 former victims from which the In-depth structured Interviews (IDI) was conducted with 25 victims. An additional 60 respondents were also purposively interviewed on the basis of their position, background, profession, knowledge and experience in relation to human trafficking. The respondents include 300 former victims of women trafficking from existing shelters in the State, 20 opinion leaders from the two Local governments, the heads and 4 staff each of two specialized NGO's and agencies, Idia Renaissance and Committee for the Support of the Dignity of Women, (COSUDOW) who maintain shelters for rehabilitation of victims in Benin City. Ten personnel each from the two main enforcement agencies like Nigerian Immigration service and National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Person, (NAPTIP) in charge of human trafficking were also interviewed. Also 10 key informant interviews were conducted in the two Local governments. Four (4) sessions of Focus group discussions, (FGD) were further conducted with adult males and female youth in Oredo and adult female and male youth in Ikpoba Okha.

The interview was conducted with a carefully prepared IDI guide with provisions for probing questions. Also, the FGD was conducted using an FGD guide. All the processes of instrument administration were tape recorded and noted by trained note takers for the purpose of transcription and reference. The tapes were dully transcribed and analyzed using relevant themes and analytical statistic. The victims were those that were enrolled in the two shelters. In Idia renaissance with an enrollment of about 260 persons, most of the victims were not resident, they come from their homes to under go

skill acquisition programs in the shelter. However in Cosudow, with about 40 persons, most of the victims were either resident or in foster homes. The opinion leaders were purposively selected one each from the 20 communities in the two local governments. The inclusion criteria for the FGD adult male and female group were adult community members from 25 to 55 years while that of the youth group were male and female youth from 15 to 24 years and each group was made up of 8-10 participants

Findings of the study:

Prevalence of human trafficking in Oredo and Ikpoba Okha of Benin City, Edo State

Generally most of the study participants, including the former victims agree that Benin-City is a known and popular City from which people especially women travel (locally it is not seen as trafficking) abroad. A participant in an FGD with adult females described the situation like this, "Oredo is a metropolitan area, it is both a local government headquarter and a state capital. So, it is a high target area for human trafficking." Another participant described Oredo as "a melting ground of people from Edo and other places...". This led to the existence of many urban slums in the area.

Ikpoba Okha on the other hand was described as "the 'Italy' and 'Spain' of human trafficking in Nigeria ...". Yet another participant said "...it is a major centre for traffickers..." The head of anti trafficking section of Nigeria Immigration service in Edo State further said that "...there is hardly any house in Benin here that a girl is not abroad, feeding their family..."

The data above shows that Oredo and Ikpoba Okha, the two major areas that make up Benin City are very fertile grounds for trafficking in person. It was also observed that Oredo is a melting pot of a sort. It is one of the most ancient locations of the old Bini Kingdom, the home of the Bini monarch, the local government head office and also the State capital. Therefore, it attracts people from all over the state and beyond, including both traffickers and potential victims. There are also adjoining peripheral urban, rural, and many urban slums within the area. Ikpoba Okha also is the location of most of the urban slums in Benin City, like Ikpoba hill and Ikpoba slope areas. Most poor people who migrate from the surrounding rural areas live in these slums.

Local knowledge of human trafficking

The study further conducted an assessment of the knowledge of human trafficking generally, and specifically among the victims in Oredo and Ikpoba-Okha LGAs. In the study population, all the victims 100%=360 are aware of human trafficking. But among those who are aware, 90%=324 do not

know the connection between intention or actual travelling abroad and human trafficking. For the victims, 80%=240 of them are not aware of the connection pre victimization and before they travelled, while only 20% =60 are aware. However after the travel and post victimization, all of them 100% (300) are aware of this vital connection, obviously from experience. Most of the victims (80%=240) do not know that the movement to travel abroad will involve sexual and other exploitations and so constitute human trafficking. They were made to believe that it was to enhance their wellbeing and improve their poor conditions. This was captured by one of the victims:

before I traveled, I was doing hair dressing in Benin, but I was deceived that I will be doing hair plating and saloon in Europe, but even before we reached Europe, they have started using (sexual exploitation) our body to make money (Irene age 19, Victim, Oredo).

Another victim also said

My father was not with us in the village, but my mother was told that when I travel, I will work as a maid to white woman and make money to help my other siblings, we traveled by land through the border to Libya to Europe. But I was forced to prostitute and they took all the money, (Sarah age 20, Victim, Ikpoba-okha)

Also the level of awareness is higher in the urban areas than in the rural areas. The explanation is that most of the people in the urban area have access to both electronic and print media, and listen to news, jingles and adverts concerning human trafficking. On the other hand, the people in the rural areas are less educated and do not have access to the media.

In the FGD with adult females in Ikpoba okha, a participant said that;

"... the people are aware, but they still decide to travel because of many problems they face at home..."

A male FGD participant also stated that

there is a reasonable level of awareness in the area. Access to television, radio and the media is good, so there is awareness..." Yet another male puts it thus; "... people in this area are aware of the issue of trafficking, the NGO's on ground are working hard (FGD, adult males, Oredo)

These are obviously the case in the urban areas, but the rural areas presented a different outcome. Most of them said they are not aware of human trafficking. A female rural participant stated that "...In the

village, I do not have radio or television, I don't know, I spent most of my time in the farm. ...”

Victims account of human trafficking: (Victims only)

All the victims said they met the traffickers in Edo State, 54% said they met the trafficker in the Urban slums of the City, while 46% said they met them in the rural areas and followed them to Benin-City from where they traveled. Slightly more than half, 54% said they were first approached by a man and 36% said they were first approached by a woman, while 10% said they were approached by a family member. On who the traffickers were, 60% of the victims said the agents and catchers were mostly male and 56% said most of the Madams were female. However, 80% of the victims stated that these Madams were former victims of human trafficking.

They further indicated that 75% of the traffickers were from Edo State. On the reason they were trafficked, most of them said it was due to poverty, they were economically deprived and socially excluded, so travelling out was meant to change their poor conditions, some said their father abandoned their mother with their siblings and some said their mother married another man, so they had to struggle to survive. However, 4% said they were forcefully trafficked. All the 300 victims indicated that when they arrived their various destinations, they were forced to engage in prostitution. On how they came back, some of them were rescued by church groups, some ran away to religious communities, while some were arrested by enforcement officers and deported. Majority of them (96%) came back through deportation while few (4%) came back through the church groups. Since they came back, 85% were enrolled at the victim shelters to learn skills, computer operation and other vocational work, while 10% had finished and were engaged in petty trading and 5% were preparing to go back to school. The awareness of the victims were in three categories. Some of the victims are actually aware of human trafficking, (2%), but still had the intention to travel in order to help their poor families. Some are also aware but would not want to engage in prostitution (18%). However, the third category of victims (80%) did not know anything about human trafficking and accepted the falsehood of the traffickers as genuine assistance. According to one of the victims,

I met this woman, she asked me if I will travel to Italy, I said yes, but I won't go there to do prostitution, she said no problem, I will work in saloon, but all are lies, she deceived me with her lies, (Joy age 22, Victim, Oredo Edo)

But another victim Maria said ... I know, but I made up my mind to go and struggle for the sake of my two children, I want to give them a good life. Their father abandoned us and married another woman. I will not allow the kids to suffer (Maria age 23, victim Oredo)

There was also the case of a victim who was trafficked, deported and wants to be re-trafficked because she wants to take care of her mother and younger siblings. On further probing, it was revealed that the mother is the fourth wife of the father, and was neither provided for nor had any hope of inheritance. However Jane, also a victim said that

the Aunty (trafficker) promised my mother that she will help me to travel abroad where a job of super market attendant is already waiting for me. However when I arrived Italy, she forced me out on the street to do prostitution (Jane age 21, Victim interview, Ikpoba okha)

It was discovered that most of the victims (80%) prior to their travel abroad, did not know the link between the desire to travel abroad and human trafficking. They were not quite aware that they will be abused and exploited. Generally, they share the intention to travel abroad and earn foreign currency (dollar, pound or euro), but do not reckon with the factor of violence and exploitation by the traffickers. The inability to establish this very important connection is mostly responsible for most people still indicating interest to travel. This ignorance is reinforced by the quest for a better life abroad epitomized by few former victims and the deceit and falsehood of the traffickers and their agents. This quest also makes potential victims to believe the lies of the traffickers that they are being helped and assisted to escape from poverty. In all the cases (100%) this is the story line of the traffickers. Some of them wrongly regard the traffickers as “Messiahs” sent to deliver them rather than regarding them as criminals that they are.

Characteristics of the Victims of human trafficking (N=300)

It is remarkable to note that all (100%) the former victims of trafficking in the rehabilitation centers visited are women and also all the victims in this study are women. All the former women victims are also from Edo State. The socio demographics of the former victims in this study shows that all of them are Christians, their age intervals were 15 to 19, 60%; 20 to 25, 40%. Most of the victims, 62% did not complete secondary education while 38% completed

secondary education but did not go further, none of the victims had University education. Prior to their being trafficked, 54% of the victims lived in the rural areas while 46% lived in the Urban slums. The victims were also poor and hail from relatively large families with very poor economic status. About 30% of the victims come from unstable families, either mother or father only. The victims were deported from several countries in Europe, Italy 40%, Spain, 20%, UK 10%, Netherlands 15%, Germany 5%, Greece 5% and Austria 5%. Also most of the victims (96%) travelled through land via the old Trans Atlantic trade route.

The FGD participants confirmed that women are most likely to be victims of human trafficking especially for sexual exploitation. According to a female FGD participant in Ikpoba okha "... the females are much vulnerable, and are much more trafficked ..." a second participant also said "... most of them (victims) are usually young girls and women..." Another participant further gave the age bracket of the girls as "... young girls between 13-22 years..." Yet another male participant in Oredo highlighted the characteristics thus "... young girls, unskilled, from poor homes and large families ..."

Both the male and female FGD youth participants in Oredo and Ikpoba okha also identified the victims of trafficking to be mostly female. One of the victims who was forcefully held in a hotel said:

in that hotel, some girls 13, 14, and 15 years are there working (prostituting) for her (Madam/trafficker) and other madams... some of the girls I met were from Benin and Imo state, but the worst is from Benin, in short many of them are from the Benin area (Esther age 15, Ikpoba okha)

Another victim also said "... Many of the girls I met in Italy came from Edo state, Ishan, Irua, Uromi (communities in Edo State) and Ibo girls, but Edo state is the most..."

The study therefore identified females as the most victims including those as young as 13 years. The victims also come from poor homes, uneducated, unskilled, from large families. None of the victims (100%) interviewed had high education, skilled or from a rich home. The average number of children in their families was between 6-11 children which can be considered large.

The push factors that drive human trafficking in Edo State

From the above interaction with the victims, poverty, lack of education/ignorance, large/unstable families have been found as predisposing factors of human

trafficking in the area. From the interviews with the victims, close to half of them are from single families which include single mothers and single fathers. According to one of the victims,

We are seven children from my mother and others from my father's other wife, my father abandoned us when he married the other wife and my mother was managing to take care of us. As the first daughter, I have to help her to train my younger ones (Ireti, age 18, Victim, Ikpoba okha)

More than half of them are also from multiple family settings made up of polygynous families mostly devoid of parental responsibilities. The study participants indicated that they also practice a kind of serial polyandry in which a woman marries more than one man and gives birth to many children for several men in her life time. This was captured by a victim when she said,

Our mother left us to marry another man, our father also was not taking care of us because he is also marrying another woman. I have no choice than to start hustling to feed myself and my younger ones, that was how I met the aunty who helped me to travel (Favour, age 19 Victim, OredoEdo)

Almost all the victims confirmed that inheritance in their locality is strictly and only through the first son. This means that both the mothers and the other siblings are totally and completely denied all the benefits from the family, including property and land for farming which is the major source of sustenance especially in the rural areas. The situation is worse if the son is from a different mother. One of the victims puts it this way,

My father died when we are still small, our elder brother who is from my father's first wife took over everything. My mother did not even see where to farm in the village, so she came to Benin and started roasting plantain. I started helping her and from there I started meeting some men and one of them said he will help me to travel to Italy. (Lucy, age 20 Victim, OredoEdo)

Data from the FGD discussion corroborates the above views. A male FGD participant identified,

"the existence of single families and the practice of one man marrying several women as the main factor" another participant stated that "Most women in Benin are not staying with their

husband; there are many single mothers, some the husbands have abandoned them and their children(FGD, adult male, OredoEdo)

Also a female FGD participant confirming the assertion above identified some practices like,

single parenthood, men marrying more than one woman, parents abandoning their responsibilities on their children, even the basic minimum and the children growing up into anything happens.(FGD adult female, Ikpoba okhaEdo)

Another relevant factor identified by the participants is single families: single mothers and single parenting. The study area has high tolerance for teenage/under aged child birth. Most of the girls and indeed children are without parental control and support which dispose them to early sexual relationships and teenage birth. Another consequence of this practice is the high level of adolescent first birth with low support. It was further discovered that most of the single parents are mothers who by tradition are denied land, which is the most crucial resource for farming and the major income earning activity in this area. In addition, the women by virtue of the tradition cannot inherit either from their parents or their husbands and do not have any meaningful source of income. Thus they are vulnerable and in some cases give out any of their girls for trafficking. In other cases, the girls especially the first daughters may volunteer to sacrifice and struggle to take care of their mother and siblings. This is called 'huzzling' in local parlance. A vivid example is the case of a girl who was trafficked, deported but still want to be re-trafficked because she wants to take care of her mother and younger siblings.

The culture of the people promote large family size. Oredo and Ikpoba Okha are within the high fertility belt of the State. Most families (80%) in these area record high family size (6-10), and when this is related to the issue of sustenance and the high poverty rate in the area, then the problem of provision and care for these children become a huge challenge and a positive point for vulnerability.

The denial of inheritance to women and siblings other than the first son which is an important push factor was further buttressed and corroborated by other data sources. An FGD participant contributing on the issue of inheritance said,

multiple families, women leaving to another man for the first child because inheritance is linked to it. In this part, a man could have more than one wife, a woman also can leave her husband to

another man so as to have the first son in order to benefit from his inheritance (FGD adult male, OredoEdo)

One of the key informants also said,

In our place (Oredo), it is part of our culture that only the first son of a father can inherit from him. Women have no right to inheritance, but wife's can inherit through their first son. Any wife without a son will also not be able to inherit. The girls and other boys do not inherit anything. (KII male, Oredo, Edo)

In Oredo, especially the Bini area, inheritance is only through the first son and women are completely excluded. However, a woman can only benefit through the inheritance of her first sons. This inheritance is also cherished both in life and death. In life, it attracts extra status to the woman, and in death, it accords her a "befitting burial," a very expensive burial attended by many people and this is very important to the people of this area. Consequently, most women regard giving birth to several first sons as an investment which they expect to reap through several sources of inheritance,— a practice which may be likened to serial polyandry.

Therefore, most women have children for several men in a bid to get first sons because the more first sons a woman has, the more her status, the more wealth she attracts to herself and the more pride she gets. On the reverse the men also marry several women. The first consequence of this is the reality of large children in households; the second and most important is the presence of so many children in households without a mother figure and in some cases a father figure, thus leading to high social disintegration, neglect and lack of support. Most crucial is that since the preference is for the first son, the other sons and mostly the girls are often left to cater for themselves, in most cases very early in life. This situation was found to be very critical to human trafficking in the area.

It was also observed and confirmed through data that the incidence of teenage birth is high in Benin City. This may be most likely due to loose or total absence of parental guidance/control which further adds to the critical problem of human trafficking. According to a key informant,

Girls here have children at a very young age, so they go out to look for money to take care of the baby; single teenage parents who can't take care of the children sometime leave the child or children to their mother or grandmother and go out to look for something to do. The child will

also lack parental guidance and control. (*KII female, Ikpoba okhaEdo*)

The traditional belief in witchcraft, deities and spirits is another important push factor that play significant role in human trafficking in the area. Almost all the victims interviewed experienced this practice and highlighted its role in the trafficking process in Edo State. The Bini people and indeed the whole of Edo State are very traditional people who strongly hold to their traditional practices despite the influence of westernization. This study was conducted within the celebration of the famous 'Igue' festival. It is common to see red, white and other color of cloths tied to some trees within the area. Also at some road intersections it is common to see items of sacrifices like broken calabashes, eggs, toys and domestic animals tied with red cloths as sacrifices.

The victims corroborated this fact in our interview sessions. According to one of them,

most of the madams usually use charms; I believe she used charm on me. When I was there (destination), she brought black soap and powder... she took my hair, armpit hair and hairs from my private part (pubic) and nails and traveled to Benin with them to do medicine (juju) that if I leave her, I will run mad or die...."(*Ose age 19, Victim OredoEdo*)

Though this victim has been rescued and was undergoing rehabilitation at Idia Renaissance skill centre in Benin, she still feels the effect of the charm has not completely left her. According to her,

since I left the madam, I have not died though I have been dreaming about her, sometime I fall sick, this one is different, like spiritual sickness, she (the madam) will be pursuing me in my dream, that why did I report her. (Ose age 19, Victim OredoEdo)

This shows how compulsive and strong these beliefs can be and the extent to which it can literally bind the victim to the traffickers and thus ensure constant exploitation.

Another victim in confirmation also said, I did the juju thing; they took my nails and pubic hairs and said if I run away, I will run mad. They took me to a juju man in Irua who prepared a concoction which they gave me to drink. They said I should not say anything to anybody. (Juliet age 22, Victim Ikpoba okha Edo)

One of the victims further said,

they even gave me a juju portion which was done by a traditional medicine man and they said if I hold it, it will ensure safe and successful journey to Europe. They assured us that with the charm, the road will be clear for us throughout the journey. (Franca age 16, Victim Ikpoba okhaEdo)

The victims indicated that the oat taking ordeal mostly took place in Edo, the Yoruba areas and Republic of Benin. The traffickers subject the victims to take an oath of allegiance and secrecy before a traditional medicine practitioner or a spiritualist. Sometimes the various items taken from the body of the victims will be used to prepare concoctions which the victim is made to drink. The victim is told that if she violates the agreement, the spirits or deity will kill her or inflict her with madness. The belief in the efficacy of witchcraft was also found to negatively affect the efforts of anti trafficking agencies. The victims do not reveal their identity and also shield the identity of the traffickers for fear of being hunted by the spirits.

According to an FGD participant,

what makes it (trafficking in persons) lucrative in this area is our great belief in traditional practices like oat taking, witchcraft, power of the spirits and deities, this helps the traffickers to excel. The traffickers use the juju things to exploit the victims (FGD male, OredoEdo)

One of the key informants also said,

our people do not joke with the traditions of the land. It is true westernization has affected some, but the belief is still very strong. They belief in the ancestors, the power of the land and other strong deities in the land. (KII male, OredoEdo)

These facts are very critical especially because of how it could play out in the trafficking trajectory. Benin which is the epicenter of Edo State is an ancient kingdom and her people the Bini's are a very traditional people despite the incursion of Christianity and western education. So, the traffickers tend to exploit this prevailing belief system to place the victims under traditional oath of bondage and other forms of fetish charms which ensures total compliance of the victims and secrecy of the trafficking act.

Summary of key findings:

- People in the study area are aware of the practice of human trafficking.

- Most of the victims lacked knowledge of the connection between travelling abroad and human trafficking. This same gap in knowledge exists even now within the area.

- Women who are mostly former victims of trafficking play key roles as traffickers.

- The victims of human trafficking were mostly women, poor, uneducated, unskilled with economic deprivation and social exclusion.

- The active push factors identified as drivers of human trafficking in Edo State which are regarded as primary level forces of human trafficking are:

- ✓ The practice of inheritance rights which is strictly through the first son to the exclusion of women, other male and female siblings.

- ✓ The traditional belief in witchcraft, deities and spirits, epitomized in charms, concoctions and oath-taking for compliance of victims and secrecy of the practice.

- ✓ Existence of single families which include single mothers, single fathers and single parenting, which expose the women and off-springs to several vulnerabilities including human trafficking.

- ✓ The existence of multiple families made up of polygynous homes devoid of parental care, responsibility and control.

- ✓ The practice of serial polyandry in which women can marry and give birth to children for several men so as to benefit from multiple inheritance through their first sons.

- ✓ The tolerance of teenage/under aged births due to loose or absence of parental guidance and control.

Poverty and ignorance are found to be the key active push factors of human trafficking which are the natural outcome of the economic deprivation and social exclusion of mostly women necessitated by the cultural practices in the area.

The paradox of human trafficking within the context of Africa that we want

The findings of the study and other existing reports indicates the existence and practice of human trafficking in Nigeria and Africa, (Nwokeoma, 2018; UNODC, 2005; USDS 2004; UNICEF, 2002). The study also found that the victims of human trafficking are mostly women and girls. This is antithetical and contrary to the African Union commission agenda 2063 and the vision of 'the Africa we want'. The objective of this agenda is to attain an integrated and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force in the international arena. However, human trafficking is a bold black spot in the face of this noble aspiration.

Specifically, human trafficking violates the third aspiration which demands respect for human rights,

justice and the rule of law. More than that, it also violates aspiration six which projects an Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by African people, especially its women and youth. Human trafficking further negates goal 17 of the agenda which aims at full gender equality in all spheres of life, women and girls empowerment and end to violence against women and girls. Therefore the urgent need has come for citizens, organizations and nations to say no to the practice of trafficking in women and children in order to achieve the Africa we want. This can be achieved if the AU follows through her plan to remove all obstacles related to women owning and inheriting property, eradicating all forms of violence against women, all harmful social norms, customary practices, promoting access to and control of productive assets.

Discussion of findings

The study indicated a high level of awareness and knowledge of human trafficking in the two locations of Edo State. The study by Nwokeoma (2018) on human trafficking in Imo State, Nigeria also noted high level of awareness of human trafficking. The high level of awareness indicates the common nature of the problem in the area. This is also indicative of the global commonality of human trafficking as captured by Kara (2017) who examined the existence of human trafficking and the estimated profit in all regions of the World with the highest estimated number of victims of 415000 in South Asia and the highest profit of 14.7billion dollars in Western Europe.

The victims in this study were found to be mostly females and made up of two main categories, the very young who just left school or out of school. They are mostly between ages 13-15years, from the rural areas or urban slums and are not quite aware of the concept and practice of human trafficking. They are easily deceived into accepting to travel abroad and make money in foreign currency. The second category of victims are mostly between ages 16 to 24 years, out of school, learning trade, engaged in petty trading or artisan activities. Some are single mothers or from single mothers and in most cases the burden of taking care of their children, mother and younger siblings fall on their shoulder. Some older victims are often aware of the concept of women trafficking, but accept to travel in order to help themselves and their families out of their poor conditions. Therefore the active driving force here is ignorance and poverty. Nwokeoma (2018) also found women to be the most victims of human trafficking. The preference for females seem to be determined by the convergence of the character of the demand, and the cultural,

social and economic conditions which predispose these girls to being victims.

Generally, most of the victims are ignorant of the connection between travelling abroad and women trafficking before they made the trip. This was also found in the works of Aronowitz (2009), when she stated that individuals were promised jobs in the legitimate economy only to find themselves forced into sexual slavery. Nwokeoma (2018) found a similar gap in the study of Imo State, but the gap was between the inability to establish the connection between the traditional practice of giving out children to relatives and human trafficking. This lacuna which is very vital is also found to be very active for most people in this locality who are still indicating interest to travel abroad, a quest which is reinforced by the desire for a better life. According to Prina, (2003), the opportunity offered to girls with precarious economic situations and great aspirations is a strong grip on the girls as it is seen as the only possibility to leave Nigeria and to have a better life for her and the family.

The study found that females play key role in the trafficking network. Close relatives of the victims also play active role in the trafficking chain. Most astonishingly, fathers and mothers of the victims are also part of the trafficking web. Some parents push their children to be trafficked and they benefit from the proceeds.

Certain cultural and traditional practices were also found to be key push factors that give impetus and encourage the practice of human trafficking in Edo state. Specifically the practice of single parenting which weigh most on the female also places a huge burden on the women. Also there was evidence of under aged and adolescent first births. Some of them or their daughters accept to be trafficked in order to improve on their poor hopeless conditions. Alabi, Omisakin and Alabi (2018), also found high under aged child birth and the lowest age at birth in Northwest Nigeria to be 12years The culture of the Benin area also promotes polygyny. In this case the men marry several wives and have multiple families which create the problem of sustenance and inadequate well being. Therefore, human trafficking seems to be an option, especially for the women.

The inheritance system in the Bini area which favor only the first son of each family, completely excludes the female gender and other sons of the family. Therefore for a woman to have any form of inheritance, it has to be through her first son. This practice negates the African Union Agenda 2063, article six. Consequently, most women tend to give birth to as many first sons as possible to several men, in order to benefit from their inheritance thereby engaging in serial polyandry. This practice also has

implications for burial ceremonies in the area. It guarantees huge, prestigious burials for the women. The implication however, is that both the women, girls, and other non first sons are denied any inheritance and often abandoned, neglected and left to their fate, thus enhancing their vulnerability to human trafficking.

The movement of the mother from one man to another further deny the other children the presence and support of the mother figure. In most cases, these children are left by both their father and mother in the care of their elder sisters who start early in life to cater for their siblings. Therefore the core issue of inheritance rights and exclusion of women from inheritance is found to be a major driver to human trafficking in Edo State. This is certainly against the agenda of inclusive growth and sustainable development in Africa.

The traditional belief in oath taking, witchcraft, deities and charms is another important push factor found to promote human trafficking in Edo State. The evidence shows that contrary to the assertion of Kara (2017), that recruitment is done through elaborate juju rituals, the traffickers use these practices which prevail in the area to enforce loyalty and compliance from the victims after recruitment. The traffickers through this process maintain psychological, mental and spiritual hold on the victims and their families. The victims are falsely made to believe that if they contravene the exploitative agreement, the spirits will either make them insane or kill them. The traffickers exploit these prevailing beliefs to place the victims under false oath of bondage and spell. Caprio, (2011), equates this practice to O'mata, the code of silence of the La Cosa Nostra.

Conclusion

The various conditions of the victims and the active push factors which give rise to human trafficking in Edo state as highlighted in the findings of the study are indications of the relevance of liberal gender oppression theory. In this context, all the victims in the study are women. These women share similar conditions of poverty, resource deficit and ignorance which is the natural outcome of their low and disadvantaged position in society. Women in Edo State are placed in a position which gives them less power and ability to realize the need for self actualization. This is against the aspirations and goals of the African Union Agenda 2063 and the Africa we want. For instance when a society permits the practice of under age birth, the child mother will be under the burden of pregnancy and child birth which will definitely affect her ability to go to school, learn a trade or business and her general self actualization. Also a society or culture that does not have

protective safe nets for women and children as is the case in Edo enhances their vulnerability to human trafficking.

The theory posits that the domination and oppression of women in this context are incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into all ramification of society. This is also corroborated in the findings. According to the study, the inheritance right in Edo State is only through the first son to the total exclusion of women and girls. This cultural practice discriminates against women, devalues their value in society and leads to both economic and social exclusion of women. The implication is lack of power, lack of resources and diminished status for women which definitely enhance their vulnerability to human trafficking. However, a core breakthrough of the study is that contrary to the tenets of the gender oppression and radical feminist theories, women also play key roles in the human trafficking chain in Edo state. This serves as a major weakness of this theory with implications for future studies.

From the implications of the findings, the activities of government anti trafficking agencies and non government organizations in Edo State should extend to the rural areas and emphasize the connection between desire to travel abroad and human trafficking in their campaigns thus exposing the lies and deceit of the traffickers. Massive family planning program which discourages under age birth and large family size should be promoted in Edo state. Discriminatory traditional practices of inheritance which totally excludes the women and other male, female siblings should also be modified so as to realize the vision of AU agenda 2063 for self actualization and women empowerment. Relevant agencies should interface with the traditional rulers like the Oba of Benin who are the custodians of the culture and tradition of the people to reform these practices. Finally faith based organizations in the area should mount persistent campaign against traditional belief in deities, spirits and witchcrafts and expose the inherent falsehood in some of these practices.

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