

## Human Trafficking and Sexual Abuse: Evidence from Female Libya Returnees in Edo State, South-South Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Human trafficking which is arguably one of the biggest organized crime in the World today has been generating increased global attention and condemnation especially since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century because of its dehumanization and exploitative nature. Nigeria has been identified as one of the countries largely involved in this ignominious criminal industry with considerable numbers of her citizens frequently falling prey as victims. This study based on evidence and shared experience from selected female victims of human trafficking returned from Libya by the joint efforts of the Nigeria government and the International Organization of Migration (IOM) explains the harrowing experience the victims go through. In-depth interview was conducted with thirty nine (39) purposively selected female Libya returnees of Edo State origin between January and March 2018. Findings reveal that the victims were sexually abused; fell prey to exploitative labor; engaged in unavoidable 'survival sex'; had unwanted pregnancies and fatherless children. It is recommended, amongst others, that concerted efforts by the government and other stakeholders to work assiduously to launch a vigorous campaign against gender discrimination and other cultural and societal attitude that portray women and girls as second fiddle and sexual instrument. Full implementation of the anti-trafficking laws to bring traffickers' to book will address some of the major drivers of trafficking.*

**Keywords:** *Returnees, Human Trafficking, Survival Sex, Sexual Abuse, Women/Girls*

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### Introduction

Victims of trafficking in persons are mostly exposed to various forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. Human trafficking and sexual abuse are both traumatic crimes which are built upon the power, control, abuse and exploitation of another human being. Sexual abuse can take different form which can be verbal, visual, physical or any other form that pushes a person to be subjected to or engage in unwanted sexual interaction (Edosomwan, 2018). This abuse can occur in the form of unapproved touching, rape, attempted rape, fondling, voyeurism, exhibitionism etc. Sexual abuse which may include requests for sexual favors an obscene and suggestive language is not only unlawful in its own right; it can also result in sexual assault. Traffickers and perpetrators of sexual abuse main target the marginalized,

oppressed, minorities, economically disadvantaged members of the society (Freedom Network USA, 2015 and Walt & Lee, 2011).

Trafficked women and girls have always complained of abuse especially sexual abuse on their way to and for the period in which they stay in transiting countries. A study conducted by Association Women's Link Worldwide shows that 63% of the women who transit via Morocco affirmed to have suffered abuse in the process of their journey, specifically, 17% suffered from sexual abuse. In 2013 the Spanish authorities reported that traffickers rape their victims or sell them to men in transit countries for sexual service and make their victims to believe that when they were pregnant or had a child in transit countries while attempting to avoid deportation when they cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe by being under the Art 57, clause 6 of the Organic Law 4/2000 11<sup>th</sup> January (Pascoal 2017).

United Nations refers to human trafficking as well known transnational organized crime which at present is ranked as the second heinous crime in the world (Gyamfi 2016). According to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), it is estimated that seventy-nine percent of all human trafficking is for the purpose of sexual exploitation, while International Labour Organization (ILO) report indicates that ninety-eight percent of people trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and girls (Christensen 2011). They are usually potential victims to trafficking largely due to the patriarchal nature of the society that attach little/no importance to the value, dignity and worth of the girl child; resulting in lack of employment opportunities and favorable mobility for the female youth.

The nature, custom, tradition and culture in Nigeria and the global society in general hold a negative attitude towards women and girls as second fiddle. They are regarded to be created for sex or sex instrument and domestic work of bearing and rearing children. This explain why the naked body of women and girls are shown in music, films, advert and women and girls are place in front of hotels in order to attract the attention of customers. But when the naked body of a woman or girl is not display in any of these the marketing power/force of such music, films and advert will be very poor and this further make women and girls susceptible to trafficking. Women and girls are mostly traffic victims because of their capacity to render sexual service and they are seen as valuable and marketable sexual commodity in the international market than men. Christensen (2011) posits that each year estimates of four million people are trafficked across international borders and two million of these figures are women and girls. Akor (2011), Manbe

(2016), Okeshola and Adenugba (2018) and other scholars have argued that women and girls are vulnerable to trafficking and traffickers as a result of poverty.

Due to the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society, the females are already more exposed to poverty with limited choices and discrimination in education, employment and wages. This leaves them with very few options for supporting themselves and their families. Dreaming of a better life in the city, or a foreign country, they become vulnerable to traffickers' false promises of high-paying jobs in Europe. Even though they might feel uneasy about the travel circumstances, despair over their current situation and the prospects and hope for a new life can easily outweigh any sense of danger. According to Phinney (2017), in this way poverty and gender inequality create a large pool of potential and seemingly willing "recruits" for trafficking.

Women and girls are the most economically disadvantaged group in the society. They are faced with gender equality in the labour market with income disparity and they are tied to less paid domestic work. Human trafficking has attracted numerous attentions and extensive research has been conducted about the menace of human trafficking as local, national and international problem. However, there is dearth in literature on how abandonment, frustration, been stranded in the trafficking process and in transit countries lead trafficked victims into survival sex and how it expose them to sexual abuse. Also no research has been conducted about human trafficking with a focus on Edo State Libya returnees. Thus, this study is an attempt to fill the identified gap in the literature.

The objective of this study is to examine the challenges returned trafficked victims pass through in their aborted journey through Libya to Europe. Also to find out the factors that predisposed the respondents to fall victims to traffickers

### **Literature Review**

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women oral statement on eradicating commercial sexual exploitation argues thus: sexual exploitation of women and girls of all ages, including prostitution, pornography, the internet bride industry and sex tourism, is one of the most devastating and escalating practices of gender-based violence assaulting the human rights and dignity of women and girls. Hence, any society that wishes to achieve gender equality should not tolerate and accept sexual commoditization of women and girls (Ugiagbe 2018). 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” (Duru & Maurice 2012).

Trafficking of women and girls is usually motivated by several “push” and “pull” factors. The “push” factors generally refers to those driving forces which influence people to decide to move from a particular location (within or outside their home country) in search of a better quality of life in another country(usually wealthier/developed country). These driving factors include but not limited to the following: deep-root poverty, domestic violence, separation from spouse, divorce, accompanied with broken marriage, gender inequalities, devaluation of local currencies such as the Nigerian Naira, unfriendly socio-economic environment, family pressure etc. The “pull” factors are the attractions in countries of destination which includes: favourable socio-economic opportunities, available job opportunities with higher wages and good working conditions, low skilled labour etc. (Edosomwan 2018).

### **Sexual and other Related Abuse and Health Implications**

Traffickers have control over victims because of the ceaseless physical, sexual, emotional violence and manipulation they are subjected to. Some may be subjected to forcible rape, prostitution, unprotected sex, unsafe termination of pregnancy (TOP), sexual humiliation, and coerced misuse of oral contraceptives or others. These various form of sexual abuses experience by victims of trafficking is also accompanied with serious health implications such as: sexually transmitted infections, urinary tract infections, irregularity in menstrual cycle, acute or chronic pain during sex, vaginal injuries, unwanted pregnancy, and complications from unsafe abortions (Shandro; Chisolm-Straker; Duber; Findlay; Munoz; Schmitz; Stanzer; Stoklosa; Wiener & Wingkun 2016). During trafficking, some victims initially hired for domestic work are sexually abused by their traffickers or they decide to sell them for sexual services to brothel owners in order to make more money (Russell 2014). The brothel owners mostly employ coercion, physical abuse and repeated threat to compel trafficked victims into submission. This practice serves as a link way between trafficking and HIV due to the fact that physical and sexual abuse may increase the incidence of HIV disease. This results through direct injury to the vagina, causing mucosal breaks and irritation that increase the tendency of disease to occur as a result of exposure. This act can also have a devastating effect on the victims’ self-esteem, potentially undermining both her motivation to protect her health and her ability to effectively discuss on the use of condom. For instance, a study conducted in West Bengal, India, found 2-fold increase odds of HIV disease among female sex workers who had experienced

sexual abuse within a short time of joining the sex trade (Wirth; Tchetgen; Silverman & Murray 2013). Also the result of a study conducted in South Africa agreed with this relationship in a general population of young adult women. The result reveals that, women who experienced multiple episodes of sexual abuse were 50% more likely to acquire HIV. The age at which sex-trafficked persons enter prostitution may also contribute to higher HIV infection rates. Sex-trafficked women tend to be younger than those who enter the industry voluntarily, and young women may be more vulnerable to HIV due to larger areas of cervical ectopy (i.e., immature epithelium of the cervix) (Wirth et al; 2013).

### **Effort towards the Eradication of Human Trafficking in Nigeria**

Human trafficking is a social phenomenon that has existed for centuries, but it has only recently come to the forefront of social, political and media attention (Russell 2014). In an attempt to combat the scourge of human trafficking, several efforts have been initiated at the national and international levels. At the international level, Nigeria ratified the UN protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children in 2001 and this led to the enactment of national law against trafficking entitled “Trafficking in persons (prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act of 2003 (Duru & Ogbonnaya 2012). This law led to the establishment of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other related matters (NAPTIP) charged with the responsibility of enforcing, administering and managing the law prohibiting human trafficking and other related matters. The agency was also empowered with the legal capacity to sue and be sued in its corporate name (Okojie 2005). The functions of the Agency as stated in Section 4 of the Act include:

- i. The enforcement and administration of the provisions of the Act;
- ii. The coordination of and enforcement of all existing laws on trafficking in persons and other related offences;
- iii. The adoption of measures to increase the effectiveness of eradication of traffic in persons;
- iv. The facilitation or encouragement of the presence or availability of persons in custody who consent to assist in investigations or participate in proceedings relating to traffic in persons and other related offences;
- v. Enhancing the effectiveness of law enforcement agents to suppress traffic in persons;
- vi. Establishing, maintaining and securing communication to facilitate the rapid exchange of information concerning offences; conduct research and improve international cooperation in the suppression of traffic in persons by road, sea and air;

- vii. Reinforcing and supplementing measures in such bilateral and multilateral treaties and conventions on traffic in persons as may properly be adopted by Nigeria to counter the magnitude and extent of traffic in persons and its grave consequences;
- viii. Taking such measures and or in collaboration with other agencies or bodies that may ensure the elimination and prevention of the root causes of the problem of traffic in any person;
- ix. Strengthening and enhancing the effective legal means for international cooperation in criminal matters for suppressing the international activities of traffic in persons;
- x. Taking charge, supervising, controlling and coordinating the rehabilitation of trafficked persons and participating in proceedings relating to traffic in persons (Okojie 2005).

In addition to these legal frameworks, economic empowerment and reintegration programmes have been introduced to stem the tide of human trafficking in Nigeria. There have also been several awareness-raising activities. At the Non-Governmental level, Nigerian NGOs are involved in efforts to combat human trafficking. Some of which includes: National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), The Women Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON) and WOTCLEF (Geshinde & Elegbeleye 2011; Duru & Ogbonnaya 2012).

### **Theoretical Orientation**

This study adopted the Albert Bandura perspective of social learning theory propounded in 1961. According to social learning theory, certain behaviours are learned because previous actions have been rewarded. This implies that crime results in the society because most unacceptable acts and actions has been increasingly rewarded in time past or presently than social approved behavior. This explain the reason some persons turn out to become criminals and others do not because no two person on earth went through the same socialization process and not all persons are expose to the same anti-social situation of reinforcement.

The main argument of this theory is that members of the society decide to commit and not to commit crime based of their belief. The same can be said of those persons that engage in human trafficking and some other kinds of crime based on their orientation, socialization and moral upbringing the crime is considered a counter-culture, while those that commit crime do so out of their free will because of the

rewards it brings to them and their associates regardless of the pain and danger it poses to the society.

Social learning theory posits that behavior is reinforced not only by reward and punishment as in operant learning, but also by modeling after the behavior of others. Bandura, classifies reinforcement into three categories: external reinforcement-which is the foundation of operant conditioning; vicarious reinforcement-which is acquired via the observation of other persons being rewarded or punished and self-reinforcement- which is concern with the feeling of pride and achievement. Members of the society via vicarious reinforcement get attracted to trafficking because of the good life and the assumed wealth the traffickers is able to showcase to entice 'there would be victims'. This is so because of the decrease in societal values where people who acquire wealth through illegitimate means are celebrated and are refer to as the true son of the land with all manner of questionable titles and awards. This has eroded the feeling of accountability, transparency, honesty and positive attitude to hard work. People involved in human trafficking and its deals return home wealthy and have enough money to share to friends and relatives and they are label as heroes and rewarded with chieftaincy titles and all kinds of awards. This development as perceived by this theory as reinforcement because other members of the society will like to join in the business of human trafficking to be equally rewarded and respected in the society, hence the cycle continues.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a cross-sectional research design. Data were collected from 39 female participants. Although trafficking affects both male and female gender, our concentration on female respondents in this study is because they are more involved in this ignominious trade. For instance, females constitute 80% of the approximately 800,000 people trafficked yearly, with 70% of them involved in the commercial sex activities (Cree 2008 cited in Edosomwan 2018). The selected participants were returnees from Libya to Edo State by the joint efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria and International Organization of Migration between January and March 2018. We were able to access the returnees for interview after due approval by the head of the Edo State task force on human trafficking and illegal migration at their temporal shelter for profiling. The participants were selected with the help of purposive sampling technique because the research population was not well known and defined and also some of the participants were not willing to participate. All the returned female migrants that stayed in the shelter were included in the population of the study, while the males were excluded because they did not fit into the particular profile of the research

(Lavrakas 2008). At the end of the field work, 39 respondents participated in the interview and the data was analyzed manually following Walcott (1994) three models of analysis which includes: description, analysis and interpretation. This enabled us to have a clearer understanding of the study and to also integrate other forms of observation and prior readings into the findings.

## Result and Discussion

Table 1: Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	<b>Frequency</b> N = 39	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Age</b>		
15-19	2	5.1
20-24	29	74.4
25-29	8	20.5
39 and above	0	0
Total	39	100
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	27	69.2
Married	6	15.4
Divorce	3	7.7
Separated	3	7.7
Total	39	100
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	35	89.7
Muslim	4	10.3
Total	39	100

Level of Educational Qualification		
Primary School Not Completed	5	12.8
Primary School Completed	10	25.6
Secondary School Not Completed	9	23.1
Secondary School Completed	10	25.6
Tertiary Education Not Completed	3	7.7
Tertiary Education Completed	2	5.1
Total	39	100
Employment status		
Formal Employment	4	10.3
Informal Employment	7	17.9
Unemployed	15	38.5
Apprentice	13	33.3
Total	39	100

Source: Field Work, 2018

The analysis of the social-economic and demographic characteristics (as shown in table 1 above) revealed that majority of the respondents (74.4%) were between the

ages of 20-24. This results supports others studies which stipulates that considerable numbers of people engaged in irregular migration and victims of human trafficking are between the ages of 15 to thirty years(see Okah-Donli 2018). On marital status, 69.2 % of the respondents were single. The table also reveals that a substantial number of the respondents (87.1%) did not have more than secondary education while only 25.6% completed their secondary and 5.1% tertiary education respectively. This result reveals that poor education and its attendant problems of illiteracy, poor information and awareness are driving factors of trafficking in Edo State. In terms of employment status, table one reveals that only 10.3% of the respondents are employed in the formal sector, while 38.5% are unemployed.

### **Traffickers shared experiences**

Data reveals that the respondents who were victims of human trafficking were sexually abused; fell prey to exploitative labor; engaged in unavoidable ‘survival sex’; had unwanted pregnancies and fatherless children. Other findings reveals that majority of the victims are from poor socio-economic background and were largely driven into trafficking by combine factors of family and peer pressure in addition to forces of globalization which gave them access to information to compare their living standard with those other people in other climes especially in developed countries (Asserate 2018, Appadurai 2005).

Majority of the respondents traveled from varying routes within Nigeria to get to the Nigeria-Niger border. Unlike some other trafficked girls who went through a host of West Africa countries like Ghana, Mali, and Senegal before entering destinations like Libya, Morocco and Algeria (Edosomwan 2018) all of the respondents most of whom travelled in the last two years agreed to have passed through similar routes in Nigeria to Niger through the Sahara desert to Libya before attempting to cross the Mediterranean sea to Europe. This supports other findings which posit that the political crisis in Libya since the death of former leader Muamer Gaddafi have contributed immensely to the large influx of migrants en route Libya and Mediterranean to Europe (Gerasimos 2017,Hammond 2015). The experiences of the migrants journey is summarized in three folds: First, the life threatening experience of passing the Sahara desert to Libya; the second is the dehumanizing experience in the hands of Libya militants and others including the migrants’ facilitator they call “Burger”. The last was the life threatening experience which many ‘called escape from death’ when they attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Although not all the respondents experienced these three stages before they were returned to Nigeria as some were earlier arrested, imprisoned and kidnapped before they could attempt to cross the sea.For instance, one of the

respondents Lady J. recounted her experience as follows: “The experience on the road to Libya was very bad, some trucks had accidents, and there was hunger and no water”. She went on to say of her experience in Libya as follows:

“...it was very bad. Libya people are very bad; they kill people during fights between different groups. I had a gun injury on my head and my friend died during the process. We were constantly raped by Libya Police, while those who refused were beaten and not given food. On New Year day five people died of hunger in our detention”.

Another respondent lady K., narrates her experience as follows:

“The journey was hell, it was very bad. Many people lost their lives. We were 24 people that left Agadez to Saba, but only 18 arrived Saba, others died of dehydration because of lack of water, while others fell from the hilux..., when we got to Saba (Libya), I was recommended for a house helping job by some Arabo’s, where I worked for four months at the end of the four months I was not paid any money and was taken to the deportation camp by my oga”.

Similarly, the migrants were randomly kidnapped by the Libya militants and sold for sex and forced labor without pay. A respondent Lady D recounts that she was kidnapped two times and beaten at the detention camp before she could raise 250,000 and 300,000 Naira (currently about 700 to 800 US Dollars) respectively for her release. For lady B., her experience was not different. According to her, the first eight months she spent in the “camp” waiting to board the boat to Europe was very deplorable without good food and water. She added that on the day they embarked on the trip to cross the sea to Europe their boat was deflated on the high sea, before they were rescued by the Libya coast guide and sent to the deportation camp. Other reports corroborate these findings. For instance, as at June 2018, almost 2000 African migrants had been rescued in the Mediterranean Sea (Olukomaiya, (2018) by the Libyan coast guide alone with over 60,000 recorded deaths since year 2000 (Dada. 2018).

Furthermore, as stated above and shown in table 1, most of the respondents fell victims to traffickers and engaged on a perilous journey to Europe because they have poor socio-economic background (Ogajic-Veljanoski & Stewart 2007). Osadolor (2018) puts it thus: “ The key drivers of youth migration and trafficking include escape from poverty and the desire for better living conditions and the inability of Africa leaders to provide basic infrastructure for job and wealth creation”(p.14). In addition to the general poor socio-economic situation in the

country we found out that pressure/influence from friends as was the case of Lady F. is another major driver of trafficking. According to Lady F., she got knowledge of the journey from her friend who introduced her to a trafficker resident in Italy and had an agreement to pay back 3 Million Naira upon arrival in Europe. She entered into the agreement without the knowledge of her mother whom she said would have disapproved of the trip. She explained that she left with 6 other girls who had different 'madam' (traffickers).

### **Conclusion**

This paper espoused empirically the problems of human trafficking and sexual abuse of trafficked victims based on shared experiences of selected Libyan returnees to Edo State in the first quarter of 2018. The findings reveal the excruciating experiences including torture, sexual abuse, kidnapping and force labor that the trafficked victims passed through en route the Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Sea to Europe. It was revealed that different factors including poor economic background of the victims, harsh or unfavorable socio-economic situation in the country in addition to Peer pressure made them vulnerable to trafficking. Lastly, the paper recommends active government intervention in the area of policy formulation and implementation of anti- trafficking and irregular immigration laws in addition to massive reorientation of the youth against the culture of get rich quick syndrome.

### **Recommendations**

The move at eradicating female trafficking must begin with policy context and implementation of government intervention (Osadolor 2018). This should include amongst others;

- a. Concerted efforts by the government and other stakeholders to work assiduously to launch a vigorous campaign against gender discrimination and other cultural and societal attitude that portray women and girls as second fiddle and sexual instrument.
- b. As stated above they should also implement fully the anti-trafficking laws to bring traffickers' to book.

Address some of the major drivers of trafficking such as poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. In this regards, there should be massive empowerment of the youths and young people for them to be able to actualize their potentials and position them to be actively involved in nation building efforts. To achieve these, vigorous efforts

must be made towards reorienting the youths away from the problem of “get rich quick syndrome” and craze to lead flamboyant life at all cost.

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