

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vulnerability of Nigerian Secondary School to Human Sex Trafficking in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Sex trafficking contributes to the cycle of violence against women, and inflicts global social and health consequences, particularly in this era of HIV/AIDS pandemic. This paper is based on a cross-sectional survey conducted in two urban and two rural schools located in Delta and Edo states of Nigeria. The aim is to assess in-school students' knowledge and awareness of, and attitude toward sex trafficking as a way to understanding their personal vulnerability to trafficking. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered in 2004-2005 to a classroom random sample of 689 adolescents in the age range of 16-20 years. The results show that in-school adolescents are vulnerable to sex trafficking due to poverty (77.2%); unemployment (68.4%); illiteracy (56.1%); and low social status (44.5%). Students in co-ed schools showed higher knowledge and awareness of the serious health consequences of trafficking (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2009; 13[2]:33-48).

RÉSUMÉ

Vulnérabilité des étudiants des écoles secondaires nigériens au trafic d'êtres humains. Le trafic de sexe contribue au cycle de violence contre la femme et inflige les conséquences globales sociales et médicales globales, surtout à cette époque de la pandémie du VIH/SIDA. Cette étude est basée sur une enquête transversale qui a été menée dans deux écoles urbaines et deux écoles rurales qui se trouvaient dans les États de Delta et d'Edo au Nigéria. L'étude avait comme objectif d'évaluer la connaissance et la conscience du trafic de sexe chez les étudiants ainsi que leur attitude envers le trafic de sexe comme moyen de leur compréhension de leur vulnérabilité au trafic. Un questionnaire semi-structuré a été administré en 2004 – 2005 auprès d'un échantillon au hasard d'une salle de classe comportant 689 adolescents âgés de 16 ans et 20 ans. Les résultats ont montré que les adolescents encore à l'école sont vulnérables au trafic de sexe à cause de la pauvreté (72,2%), du chômage (68,4%), de l'analphabétisme (56,1%) et une situation sociale inférieure (44,5%). Les étudiants dans les écoles mixtes ont fait preuve d'une connaissance et d'une conscience plus élevées des conséquences graves du trafic (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2009; 13[2]:33-48).

KEYWORDS: Adolescents; Delta State; Edo State; in-school students; Nigeria; sex trafficking

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Introduction

The International Organization for Migration defines the act of trafficking in migrants as occurring when a migrant is illicitly recruited and/or moved by means of deception or coercion for the purpose of economically or otherwise exploiting the migrant, under conditions that violate their fundamental human rights¹. Accordingly, trafficking involves the smuggling of humans for sexual purposes, including acts of sexual exploitation perpetuated by any parent, family members, middle men and women, strangers and kinsmen and women². The UN estimates that “as many as four million people are smuggled into foreign countries each year, generating up to \$7 billion annually in illicit profits from criminal syndicates^{3, 4}. Human trafficking is world wide. Of the victims of trafficking worldwide, Nigeria alone accounts for about 13 per cent^{5, 6}. In addition, of the 2,000 women trafficked to Italy, about 60% are Nigerians^{7, 8}, with a majority (80%) coming from Edo and Delta States of Nigeria^{9, 10}. In this current paper, trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”¹¹.

Globalization has been blamed for this modern commodification of humans^{4, 12-14}, as political and economic factors conspire with the patriarchal power structures of non-Western societies to put women and children at risk. While politicians rely on promulgating stringent laws or legal punishment as the best approach to eliminating trafficking in women and children, mainstream feminists emphasize empowerment of women and girls, through knowledge and education⁴. For example, In Nigeria as a whole, despite the high rate of trafficking, there is no well-detailed plan by the authorities to address the problem in the communities from which trafficking originates. Some Edo State Government of Nigeria passed a legislation known as “Prostitution Law”¹⁵, as a strategy to discourage human trafficking.

Based on the market women’s protest against such government legislation criminalizing human trafficking, there is need to focus on how to prevent young people from becoming victims of what has been called “modern-day slavery”¹⁶. Yet, little is known of adolescents’ perceptions of sex trafficking, a group highly vulnerable to trafficking of human for sex trade.

Theoretical Framework

Several explanations of human trafficking have been put forward, including rational choice theory, strain theory and social control theory. From a Rational choice perspective, human trafficking is driven by contextual

factors, which defines and limits available and accessible opportunities for human behaviour¹⁷⁻¹⁹. Closely related to the structural opportunities available to an individual is the willingness to take risk and to trust the actions of significant others. Hence, individuals fall victims of trafficking partially due to the trust we have on the traffickers, who are willing to take additional burden of risk to attain their ultimate goal of accumulating wealth.

From the strain theory perspective, the societal pressure to accumulate wealth and enhance social status, tend to increase the vulnerability of individuals and groups particularly the marginalized and socially disadvantaged into deviant behaviour or anomie, such as trafficking for sex trade²⁰. It is within this context that females exchange their bodies as a survival mechanism not just for themselves, but also for their families.

Moreover, according to Hirschi²¹ Social control theory holds that human trafficking is a form of social bonding between family members, who rely on the economic, social and emotional support of the family as an institution. Within such social support and network, women and children are most vulnerable due to their dependence on the primary head, often the men. Hence victims are lured into being trafficked by those whom they trust and have grown dependent on, particularly family members. Ultimately, protecting the fundamental rights of women and children of all ages requires action on human trafficking particularly for sex

trade with its documented social and health consequences. Women's rights as humans continue to be affected as economic and political instability increase their susceptibility to violence, abuses and exploitation. Just like poverty and famine, trafficking seems inevitable in the absence of a welfare state and the continued imbalance between the rich western countries and the poor countries of Africa^{22, 23}.

This current study departs from its acknowledgement that the failure of the Nigerian society to create opportunities for the marginalized to cope with the economic strain pushes them into seeking alternative strategies such as human trafficking as a means to accumulate wealth and enhance their social status in a society that adores monetary success and personal wealth.

Population and Methods

Study Communities

The study was conducted in two urban and two rural communities located in Delta and Edo states. These states were chosen because together they accounted for largest number of victims and/or survivors of trafficking deported from western countries^{9, 10}. The urban communities were Asaba and Benin City, the capitals and administrative centers for Delta and Edo states respectively, and Ibusa and Ubiaja represented the rural communities.

Edo and Delta states are two of the federal republic's 36 states and both are located in the Niger Delta Region, in

the most southerly part of the country. Delta State, which is both multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic, includes the following major ethnic groups: Ibos, Urhobos, Isokos, Ijaws, and Itsekiris. Because these ethnic groups have a wide range of languages and dialects, Pidgin English remains a common language of communication. This state's history abounds with tales of ethnic conflict, particularly among the Itsekiris and the neighbouring groups, the Ijaws, Urhobos and Isokos. Clashes between the Itsekiris and Ijaws have frequently disrupted human and economic activities in the region, resulting in the kidnapping of expatriate oil workers and the loss of lives and property.

The political makeup of Delta state makes the area highly susceptible to ethnic conflict as its peoples struggle over the natural resources, particularly crude oil revenues, which continue to enrich other states of the federation while the oil-producing communities remain impoverished in comparison to others. The political makeup of Delta also reflects the diverse allegiance of its main ethnic groups to differing traditional political systems. The Asaba, Itsekiri, Ijam, Urhobo and Isoko all retain political processes that contribute to their cultural distinctiveness.

Edo State, which is also multi-ethnic, has enjoyed a more peaceful existence because of the historical link among the Edo-speaking population, comprising the Benin people, Esan, Etsako, Owan and Akoko Edo.

Although the dialects differ, they share common features and all groups owe allegiance to the Benin monarch, who is seen and respected as the head of the Edo-speaking people. Such recognition is displayed in social gatherings where the presence of a Benin man, irrespective of his age, gives him the privilege of breaking the kola nuts. Such privilege is vested and demanded by the Benin people because of the historical links between the ethnic groups, which hold that the founders of Esan, Etsako, Akoko Edo, and Owan were brothers, with the most senior as the founder of the Benin People²⁴. Despite the proliferation of municipal governments, called local government councils, this is a rite signifying seniority and links between the groups. Consequently, such privilege and practice still exists and extends beyond the shores of Nigeria to other parts of the world.

Asaba is the capital and administrative seat of Delta state. The Asaba people are historically linked to the Benin people as they are believed to have migrated from Benin City. However, the actual influence of the Asaba people has been weakened, partly as a consequence of the civil war, and in recent times by settlement in the town of neighbouring Igbo people from across the river Niger. The town of Asaba has a population estimated at more than 500,000, with young people accounting for nearly 40% of the total number²⁵. Despite its status as a new capital created in the '80s, the city is expanding and helped

by revenue from crude oil, new infrastructure and buildings are being constructed, helping reverse the neglect that followed the civil war. Still, Asaba appears relatively undeveloped relative to other major towns such as Warri.

Benin City, with an estimated population of nearly 1 million people in 1999, remains principally inhabited by Edo-speaking people, plus a large population of migrants from other Nigerian ethnic groups, principally the Ibo and Yoruba people. Young people aged 10-25 years account for approximately 40% of the 1 million people. Despite its administrative role, Benin City heads one of the least industrialized states of the federation. With increasing oil finds, this picture may change in the near future. With the proliferation of migrants in both the state and the city (which explains the title often bestowed on it – mini-Nigeria) Edo state continues to have one of highest enrolments in all levels of education, while at the same time recording the highest rate of unemployment, particularly among young persons²⁵.

The two rural towns – Ibusa and Ubiaja – were among the early administrative centers for missionary schools with the result that two of the earliest post-primary schools were located here in what was known as the western region of Nigeria before the creation of states. According to 1999 population counts, both towns are of similar size at about 100,000 people²⁵. Despite the presence of schools, missionaries and colonial

administrators, both towns remain undeveloped, with no running water and little in the way of modern facilities. For these reasons, this study has classified the two communities as rural.

In both states, patriarchy remains the foundation of the political and social organization. One small exception occurs in Asaba where women run a political system, somewhat parallel to that of the monarchy, which provides a political role for the Omu, the Queen, who oversees the affairs of women²⁶. Otherwise, the political structure and processes offer no role for women. As well, gender inequality pervades all aspects of life. Women generally are excluded from inheritance and therefore cannot share or inherit land from either their patrilineage or matrilineage. In addition, inheritance is strictly by primogeniture, with the most senior son becoming the custodian of their father's property and liability. Marriage is permissible only between persons not related by blood, and is expected to be heterosexual. For many of the people, adultery, homosexuality and incest are classified as abominations that often require cleansing through rituals to prevent calamities befalling the families of those who offend. Women, however, can accumulate wealth by buying directly in the open market, often in places not connected to their lineage. Under these stringent conditions, females struggle to make their fortunes. Such conditions may explain the

increasing desire among young persons, particularly women, to seek alternative sources of wealth generation, considering the limited resources for a populous nation of 130 million.

Study design and Instrument

The study was based on a classroom survey of adolescents and young people aged 15 to 25, attending three categories of schools: (1) all female; (2) all male; (3) co-educational. These were schools that the principals consented to participate in the study. The sample of students who volunteered to participate totalled 689. These students were in senior secondary school levels II and III. We targeted 1,000 in-school youths based on our estimation that more than 60% of the pupils would have known about trafficking. Multi-stage random sampling was used to select the schools and to identify the participants from those who had given their consent.

The study used a modified version of the Population Council/The Asia Foundation Adolescent Girl Survey Questionnaire²⁷ to elicit information on sexual trafficking from the youth. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. In the first section of the questionnaire, we solicited information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the adolescents and those of their parents. In the second part of the questionnaire, we asked questions about the sexual health of the adolescents, especially their knowledge

of HIV/AIDS, and the methods they used to prevent STDS (sexually transmitted diseases). In the final part of the questionnaire, we obtained information relating to their knowledge, attitudes and experience of sexual trafficking. As an indirect measure of the extent of sexual trafficking in the area, we asked questions about their knowledge of female youths who had been trafficked and whether or not they themselves have been approached for trafficking. We also asked questions about their attitudes toward the practice and their beliefs about the effectiveness of programs designed to abolish the practice.

Collection of data involved the staff of the Center for Population, Environment and Development (CPED), who have been trained in the administration of questionnaires. Refresher training was undertaken in a day and the instrument was tested in a mixed school not participating in the study. The University of Windsor Research and Ethics Board approved the study and the instruments. Questionnaires were administered in a classroom setting to randomly selected students who had consented to participate from the list of participating senior classes. The administration of the questionnaire took place during students' free hours or during general cleaning of the school compounds because we deliberately wanted to avoid interrupting the classes. It took two hours in total to administer the questionnaire. Students returned

completed questionnaires to a box placed in the front of each classroom or hall. During the data collection, questions from individual students were answered.

Data analysis

The questionnaires were edited and coded to ensure that error from data entry would be minimal. Then, the data were entered into a computerized database and analyzed with SPSS 13 software. Both univariate as well as bivariate analyses were used to describe the data. In addition, we sought the views of the youths on whether or not they thought the practice of sexual trafficking should be abolished. Multivariate analysis was also conducted to identify those individual and group factors that predisposed some youths to support trafficking, particularly sex trafficking. This step enabled us to identify those students, schools and location needing urgent intervention to counter the vulnerability of the students to trafficking.

Results

Social Characteristics

Table 1 shows the mean age of the students is 16 years. Overall, 77.5% are between 15-17 years, while 22.1% are aged between 18 and 20 years and 0.4% are 21 years and above. A majority of the students (97.91%) are Christians, followed by 1.2% as Islamic faith, and 0.9% as other religious belief. The ethnic group affiliation of a

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristics	Number	%
Respondent gender		
Male	286	(41.5)
Female	403	(58.5)
School type		
All Boys School	116	(16.8)
All Girls School	209	(30.3)
Mixed with both boys and girls	364	(52.8)
What region are you from?		
Urban	405	(58.8)
Rural	284	(41.2)
State of origin		
Edo	255	(37.0)
Delta	434	(63.0)
Respondent's age		
15 to 17years	534	(77.5)
18 to 20 years	152	(22.1)
21 to 23 years	3	(0.4)
To which ethnic group do you belong?		
Ibo	376	(54.6)
Benin	37	(5.4)
Esan	144	(20.9)
Urohobo	62	(9.0)
Others	70	(10.2)
What is your religion?		
Muslim	8	(1.2)
Christian	675	(97.9)
Other	6	(0.9)
Do you have a radio in your house?		
Yes	614	(89.1)
No	75	(10.9)
Do you have a TV in your house?		
Yes	610	(88.5)
No	79	(11.5)

majority of the students is Ibo, 54.6%; followed by Esan, 20.9%; Urohobo, 9%; Benin, 5.4%; and other ethnic groups, 10.2%. Among the respondents, 58.8% reported an urban residence, compared to 41.2% living in rural communities.

Ownership of a radio and/or television, and being able to access and read newsprint and view videos are also proxies to determine the wealth status of the students' families. Table 1 depicts that 89.1% of the homes of the respondents had radio, compared to 88.5% with television. In addition, 80.6% of the participants read newsprint, compared to 79.8% that viewed videos/movies and cinema.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 depicts that a large proportion of the respondents live in overpopulated households, with an average of 10 persons per household. A majority of the respondents (60.7%) live in a household with a population of 6 to 10 persons. This size is a representation of the average number of children by the parents, which stands at 10.44 for the father and 10.01 for their mothers. Of the sampled students, 50.7% reported their fathers as having 6 to 10 children, compared to 51.4% of mothers having 6 to 10 children.

The information in Table 3 shows that 86.1% of the students have heard of trafficking compared to 13.9% who have not heard. A large proportion (41.1%) also reported that individuals between the age of 16 to 20 years are more likely to be trafficked, followed by those in the 21

to 30 years range (20.8%), those less than 15 years (20.2%), and the least likely to be trafficked (3.8%) are women older than 30 years.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

How many people live in the same household?	Frequency	%
1 to 5	101	(14.7)
6 to 10	418	(60.7)
11 to 15	63	(9.1)
16 to 20	52	(7.5)
21 and above	55	(8.0)
How many children does your father have?		
0 to 5	118	(17.1)
6 to 10	349	(50.7)
11 to 15	77	(11.2)
15 to 20	58	(8.4)
21 and above	87	(12.6)
How many children does your mother have?		
0 to 5	142	(20.6)
6 to 10	354	(51.4)
11 to 15	52	(7.5)
16 to 20	56	(8.1)
21 and above	85	(12.3)

Despite the proliferation of NGOs, engaged in the empowerment of young persons and on eliminating human trafficking in Nigeria, this current study noted that a majority of students (80.6%) relied on print for information on trafficking. In addition, the students reported that community-based organizations and indigenous groups were not participating fully in the dissemination of messages to reduce vulnerability to trafficking.

Table 3: Source of Information on trafficking

	Number	%
Have you ever heard about trafficking		
Yes	593	(86.1)
No	96	(13.9)
What age group is most likely to be trafficked?		
Less than 15 years	139	(20.2)
16 – 20 years	283	(41.1)
21 – 30 years	143	(20.8)
Above 30 years	26	(3.8)
Don't Know	98	(14.1)
Within the past three months, did you hear anything On (any radio and not just home radio) radio about any of these?	Yes	No
Foreign employment	208(30.2)	481(69.8)
Trafficking of Boys or girls	337(48.9)	352(51.1)
HIV/AIDS	493(71.6)	196(28.4)
Domestic Violence	241(35.0)	448(65.0)
Family Planning	328(47.6)	361(52.4)
Women's income generation	153(22.2)	36(77.8)
Women's rights	284(41.2)	405(58.8)
Within the past 3 months, did you see anything on (any) television about any of the following?	Yes	No
Foreign employment	204(29.6)	486(70.4)
Trafficking of girls and boys	366(53.1)	323(46.9)
HIV/AIDS	488(70.8)	201(29.2)
Domestic Violence	249(36.1)	440(63.9)
Family Planning	309(44.8)	380(55.2)
Women's income generation	143(20.8)	546(79.2)
Women's rights?	293(42.5)	396(57.5)
Within the past 3 months, did you read any?	Yes	No
Newspapers, comics, magazines and pocket books	555(80.6)	134(19.4)
Cinema/movies/videos?	550(79.8)	139(20.2)

Source: Survey of Schools 2004

Knowledge of trafficking by Respondents

Table 4a shows that a majority of the students (85.8%) reported that young persons were mainly coerced, misled or

forced into being victim of trafficking while only 14.2% believed that victims voluntarily accepted to be trafficked. A majority of the students (52.9%) noted that blood relations were more involved

Table 4a: Knowledge of trafficking by Respondents

How is the trafficked girl/boy taken out of his/her community?	Yes	No	DK
Voluntarily	63(9.1)	328(47.6)	208(30.2)
Forced	169(24.5)	358(52.0)	162(23.5)
Misled	281(40.8)	262(38.02)	146(21.2)
Family Member in household	176(25.5)	320(46.40)	192(27.9)
Who do you feel are mainly involved in the process of trafficking?			
Local community people	249(36.1)	269(39.0)	171(24.8)
Relative	189(27.4)	326(47.3)	174(25.3)
Family Member	176(25.5)	320(46.4)	193(28)
What do you think are the main causes, which facilitate girls/boys in getting trafficked?			
Poverty	481(69.8)	136(19.7)	72(10.4)
Unemployment	400(58.1)	188(27.3)	101(14.7)
Hope for better life elsewhere	334(48.5)	255(37.0)	100(14.5)
Illiteracy	317(46.0)	270(39.2)	102(14.8)
Low social status	249(36.1)	301(43.7)	139(20.2)
Entrapment	198(28.7)	330(47.9)	161(23.4)
False marriage	159(23.1)	380(55.2)	150(21.8)

Source: *Fieldwork 2004*

in human trafficking, while only 36.1% blamed local community member for perpetuating human trafficking.

Other factors that made young persons vulnerable to trafficking included poverty (69.8%), unemployment (58.1%), hope for better life elsewhere (48.5%), illiteracy (46%), low social status (36.1%), entrapment (28.7%) and false marriage (23.1%). A majority of the students (52.5%) also reported that victims of trafficking are likely not to report being coerced into being trafficked, while 44.0% thought victims tended to have inadequate information before being trafficked. However, only

40.1% believed that parents were ill-informed of human trafficking before succumbing to the trafficking of their child.

Attitude to trafficking

Table 4b also shows that 58.5% of respondents are aware that victims of trafficking experience sexual violence by working as prostitutes; 43.3% of respondents believed that victims experience torture and other forms of violence; 36.4% said victims experience forced confinement; 28.3% of respondents believe victims enter forced

Table 4b: Attitude to trafficking by Respondents

Variable	Yes	No	DK
Why do you think trafficking is successful?			
The girl did not seek enough information about migration or job offer	303(44.0)	386(56.0)	
The parents did not seek enough information about the job offer/marriage	276(40.1)	413(59.9)	
The girl did not discuss with anyone and decided to go with the person who offered her a job, good life or marriage	362(52.5)	327(47.5)	
In your opinion, what happens to someone who has been trafficked?			
Get a well paying job	154(22.4)	535(77.6)	
Torture and violence against her	298(43.3)	391(56.7)	
Forced confinement	251(36.4)	438(63.6)	
Sent overseas to take up a job	133(19.3)	556(80.7)	
Sent to another place for prostitution	403(58.5)	286(41.5)	
Forced marriage	195(28.3)	494(71.7)	
Do you think trafficked persons are subject to:			
Sexually transmitted diseases	527(76.5)	162(23.5)	
Unwanted Pregnancy	390(56.6)	299(43.4)	
Physical Abuse	391(56.7)	298(43.3)	
How does the community treat trafficked girls/boys when they return to their community?			
Treat them normally	182(26.4)	340(49.3)	167(24.2)
Hate and look down on them as if they are a bad person	342(49.7)	242(35.1)	105(15.2)
Viewed as an outcast in society	234(34.0)	299(43.4)	156(22.6)
Cannot Get Married	208(30.2)	325(47.2)	156(22.6)

Source: Fieldwork 2004

marriages and 19.3% said that victims had hoped to work abroad in an office or supermarket when they were trafficked. A large proportion of the respondents (76.5%) believe victims are more likely to become infected with sexually transmitted diseases, 56.7% believed they would experience physical abuse and 56.6% thought they would have unwanted pregnancies.

In addition to the deception and challenges experienced by victims of trafficking, a large proportion of the students (49.7%) said that when the victims return to Nigeria they are hated and looked down upon as ‘bad’ persons; 34% said the community treat them as outcasts in society; 30.2% believe the trafficking victims cannot get married;

and 26.4% think they are treated normally.

Prevention of trafficking

Table 5 shows only 25.8% of the students were aware of a non-governmental organization (NGO) involved in elimination of trafficking while 35.1% were aware of a community-based prevention program. Accordingly, alternative strategies were recommended, 64.7% supported continued efforts to raise awareness about trafficking prevention efforts and legal rights; 59.2% backed efforts to create job opportunities at local level, 56.3% favoured more information focusing on the dangers of traveling abroad without consultation with elders. Similarly, 53.4% urged widespread publicity about prosecution of traffickers, 52.8% suggested instilling greater wariness of strangers among young persons; while 44.1% favoured new policies and programs to control family violence, particularly child abuse and neglect as a means of empowering young girls.

The multiple logistic regression analysis that included all respondents and controlled for age, indicated that single sex school, rural residence, Benin and Esan ethnic affiliation were predictors of students vulnerability to trafficking (see Table 6).

Discussion

Delta and Edo States are the two areas of Nigeria documented as the primary source for victims of trafficking^{9, 10}.

Hence in the last decade, international and national governments, NGOs, private sector organizations and individuals have increasingly become interested in activities to discourage young persons, particularly girls, from being trafficked. The study anticipated that this increased awareness of trafficking among the youth is more likely to produce a negative attitude to trafficking and unwillingness to be trafficked. For this reason, the study was designed to assess the knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of in-school secondary students towards human trafficking, particularly sexual trafficking in Edo and Delta states of Nigeria.

Although the data indicate that a large proportion of the students were aware of trafficking for sex work, many students continue to identify poverty (69.8%), unemployment (58.1%), and hope for better life (48.5%), illiteracy (46%), entrapment (28.7%) and false marriage (23.1%) as factors increasing the vulnerability of young persons to trafficking. This finding supports²⁸ claim that poverty and unemployment remained the primary contributors to the success of global trafficking. Moreover, entrapment and forced marriage are indicators of family violence, which support²⁹ finding that human trafficking is a part of the violence against women in non-western societies, which violates their fundamental human rights. As such, human trafficking is also a human right issue. In addition,³⁰ study reported that the existence of well-organized and

lucrative businesses specializing in the recruitment and transportation of persons, mainly females, to international markets in Europe, and the Middle East continue to make trafficking attractive to many marginalized individuals and groups, particularly women and girls from impoverished areas. Such findings partially explain our current finding that students of Edo heritage were least likely to perceive sex trafficking as risky, which may explain the continued exposure and vulnerability of Edo young girls to trafficking for sex trade.

Addressing the risks associated with human trafficking, including the possibility of prostitution, is a step forward in raising students' awareness to the dangers of trafficking, and to reduce their vulnerability to being trafficked. Students were aware of human trafficking, but also of the fact that victims are often them to resist being trafficked and to avoid the stigmatization and serious health consequences arising from trafficking experiences. The study showed that victims of trafficking were stereotyped and isolated as 'bad' persons in their communities, when they are returned to Nigeria.

The study findings showed the relevance to sensitize students to the role that family members and peers play in coercing or to force students into being trafficked. Although parents and family members have been reported to play active role in the socialization and rearing of children, as well as act as their protector and

primary care giver, recent evidence is showing that the family is no longer the heaven it was thought to be. Rather, these same primary care givers exploit and abuse their children by coercing them into being trafficked. Such knowledge is more likely to empower them into being trafficked as a strategy to alleviate their low status.

Establishing shelter homes or centers for young persons to seek assistance and support if being pressured to be trafficked, is more likely to provide an alternative to young persons staying back in such homes where they are being abused and exploited. Otherwise, it becomes difficult is not impossible for vulnerable to escape such abusive environment.

Programs therefore should not overlook the authority and control, which parents and other family members have over their children in strategizing ways to reduce the vulnerability of young persons. Programs therefore need to adopt a two-throng approach that would allow them to empower both adults and young persons against trafficking. It also requires an overhauling of the social policy of Nigeria, to ensure protection and support for the disadvantaged, less privileged and powerless young persons in our society, who often are socialized not to question but simply to obey their seniors and the elderly. Yet, this study noted that these same individuals are the ones that abuse them by putting them into trafficking.

This notwithstanding, this current study partially supports the rationale of market women's demonstration against the legislation in Edo State, the 'Prostitutions Law,' aimed at prosecuting both the victims of trafficking and those businesses and middlemen and women perpetuating trafficking³¹. The data then suggest an urgent need to improve not just the socio-economic status of women as reported in the study by Okonofua¹⁰, but to also to focus on empowering young girls to resist being trafficked.

This current study concludes that trafficking is a social malady that plagues the poor and disadvantaged groups in Edo and Delta states of Nigeria. While the potential exists to eliminate human trafficking for sex trade, this will require a number of structural and legislative changes. Such structural and legislative changes would require an overhauling of the national revenue sharing formula that would see more funds going to Delta and Edo states as oil-producing geo-political entities; a decentralization of the federal government power; promotion of democracy and the protection of the fundamental human rights of all individuals irrespective of their class, gender and age. These changes would guarantee freedom of speech and expression; and the encouragement of constructive criticism of both traditional and "modern" institutions. Constructive criticism is more likely to eliminate gender inequality, the marginalization of the weaker states, population, and

vulnerable individuals such as young persons, poor leadership and corruption at all levels of governance. Otherwise, girls in particular will continue to be victims of human trafficking, despite its serious health consequences.

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