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Women's Health, Sex Work and Trafficking in Nigeria



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ABSTRACT

Sex work or prostitution is the exchange of sexual services, performances or products for material or financial compensation. Prostitution has taken a new dimension with modernization and the breaking down of all norms guiding marriage. The downtrodden in the recent economy has warranted an endless search for greener pastures. Young girls have been reported trading their life treasures for money. Trafficking in women and children recently emerged as a global issue. Human trafficking is largely a form of slavery. Nigeria is a country of origin, transit, and destination for human trafficking. This paper attempts to articulate the vulnerability of the victims of sex work and female trafficking, the health risks, abuse and consequences and the Nigeria legal instruments to curb the menace. Sex workers and trafficking victims are exposed to unprotected sexual intercourse with multiple partners. They are also hired for pornography and bestiality. These experiences make them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), HIV/AIDS inclusive and other female reproductive health challenges. The Nigeria laws, local and international agencies make efforts to curb sex work and trafficking. Fighting Sex work and trafficking in Nigeria is all encompassing because it requires synergy of efforts to create public awareness of the crime, address the poverty situation in the country, create employment for the youths, reinforce relevant national laws, organize counseling, rehabilitation and reintegration programme for the victims and allow them access to government subsidized services for HIV/AIDS and other female reproductive health care programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Sex work or prostitution is the exchange of sexual services, performances or products for material or financial compensation. Prostitution has taken a new dimension with modernization and the breaking down of all norms guiding marriage. Both sexes mix freely and take decisions on their sexual affairs exclusive of their parents. The downtrodden in the recent economy has warranted an endless search for greener pastures. Young girls have been reported trading their life treasures for money (Egunjobi, 2001). Among the ladies especially those in higher institutions in the country, the illicit act has become a profession involving a contractor and the women serving as the articles of trade (Olu-Olu and Babatunde, 2009). The trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation is a high profit, low-risk trade for those who organize it, but it is detrimental to the millions of women and children exploited in slavery-like conditions in the global sex industry (Abdulraheem and Oladipo, 2010). This trade which the former UN Secretary General, Kofi AAnnan has called an outrage and a worldwide plague (Annan, 2000), is conducted throughout the world with near impunity, in many cases carrying penalties far less than drug trafficking.

In many societies, sex work (female sex work (FSW)) is illegal, resulting in clandestine practices. Nigeria is no exception, with a constitution that is silent on sex work. As a result, sex workers, brothel operators, implementing partners, and even policymakers are uncertain of the legal status of sex work. Nigeria is guided by two legal frameworks, the penal code which operates in Northern Nigeria and criminal code which operates in the Southern Nigeria. Both Codes criminalize sex work and therefore hinder advocacy efforts on behalf of sex workers' rights (Onwuliri and Oluwatoyin, 2015). The recent adoption of the Moslem Sharia Law in some Northern parts of the country has resulted in sex work going underground or relocating to other more conducive environments, making it more difficult to reach FSWs with intervention. FSWs in Nigeria are characteristically poor, marginalized and stigmatized. They lack both formal education and empowerment.

The frequency of sex with multiple partners and a high burden of STIs place them at high risk of HIV infection. They often engage in unprotected sex and other risky sexual behaviors, such as substance abuse as people may be at risk of contracting HIV by using drugs of abuse, as research has shown that drug and alcohol can impair judgement and increase the likelihood of engaging in unplanned and unprotected sex (Nwoke, Nwagbo, and Okafor, 2006)

Surveys have consistently shown a high and rising HIV prevalence among sex workers, who are said to be the major reservoir of HIV infection. In some states such as Lagos, the rates have increased from 2% in 1988-1989 to 12% in 1990-1991 to a whopping 70% by 1995-1996 (USAID, 2002). In Jos, a 52% infection rate has been recorded among brothel-based FSWs (Each et al; 2003).

Trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at minimum, the exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (United Nations, 2000) while the trafficker is the person responsible for, or knowingly participating in the trafficking of women. In this report, perpetrators of trafficking include recruiters, agents, pimps, madams, pimp boyfriends, employees, or owners of venues that exploit trafficked women.

Nigeria and Italy are heavily affected by the problem of human trafficking in minors and girls for sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation includes exploitation of prostitution and pornography. Generally, people are trafficked from developing to developed countries in search of better opportunities. They started leaving the country on promises of fantastic and well-paying jobs in Europe, in factories, offices, and farms. They arrived in Italy only to find themselves sold into sexual slavery and they were forced to engage in prostitution (Aghatise, 2005). The objectives of this study are to identify the reasons for the vulnerability of victims of Sex work and female trafficking, health risks, and consequences and Government Efforts to combat them.

REASONS FOR VULNERABILITY OF VICTIMS

The vulnerable women and girls easily become prey for traffickers.

The lure to find a lucrative job abroad and earn a fat pay becomes clearly irresistible because of the devaluation of the naira and humiliating pangs of poverty in the country (Enaikele and Olutayo, 2011).

Nigerians are generally poor financially, with about two-thirds living in rural areas and earning less than \$1 per day. The income level amongst the population and level of education, especially amongst women is very low.

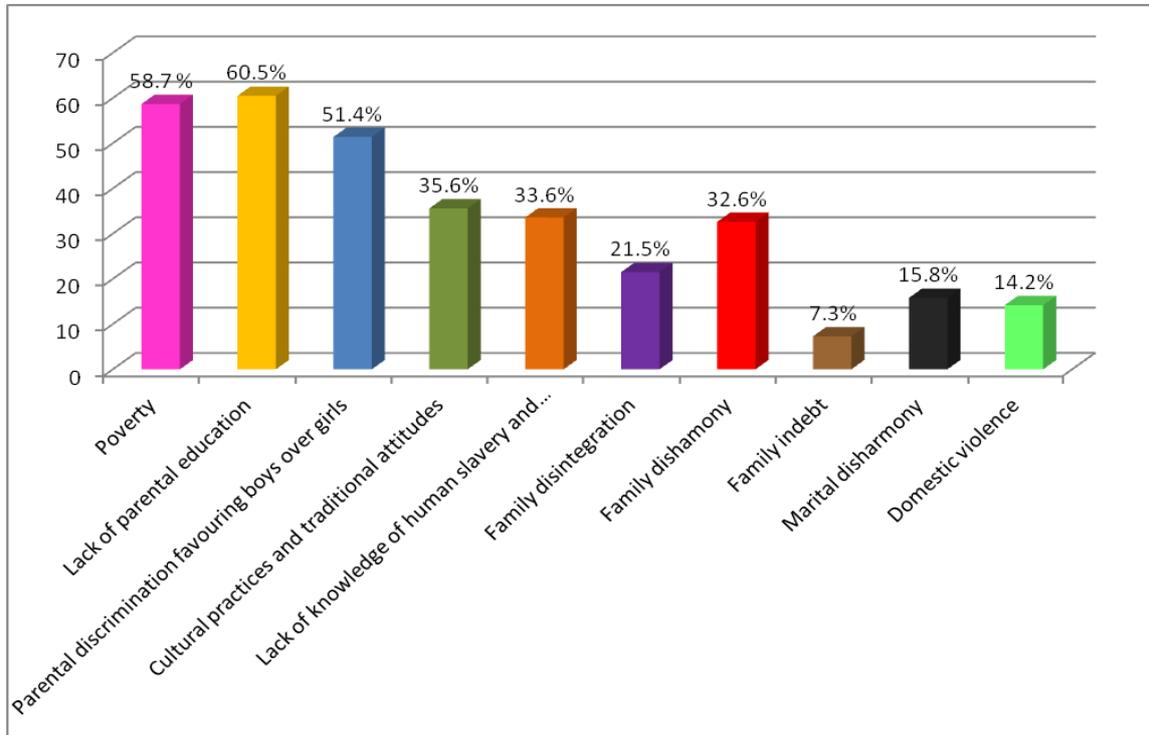


Figure 1: Reasons for Vulnerability of Victims (Abdulraheem and Oladipo, 2010).

CONSEQUENCES

Victims' health is affected by the trafficking process itself and also by sexual exploitation. The Clandestine migration often requires sub-optimal means of transportation, putting the victims at risk of starvation, drowning, suffocation and exposure to the elements. Numerous reports of accidents and deaths have caused the International Organization for Migration to identify trafficking as the most dangerous form of migration (Gushulak and MacPherson, 2000). Other health risks in transit include exposure to violence and communicable diseases. Nwoke et al (2006) in their own study reported that they are faced with Psychological problems like depression and fear from occult initiation, brutal treatment, and diseases. Also social problems like being seen as social misfit, outcasts, and restrictions. They are equally faced with malnutrition and sexually transmitted diseases.

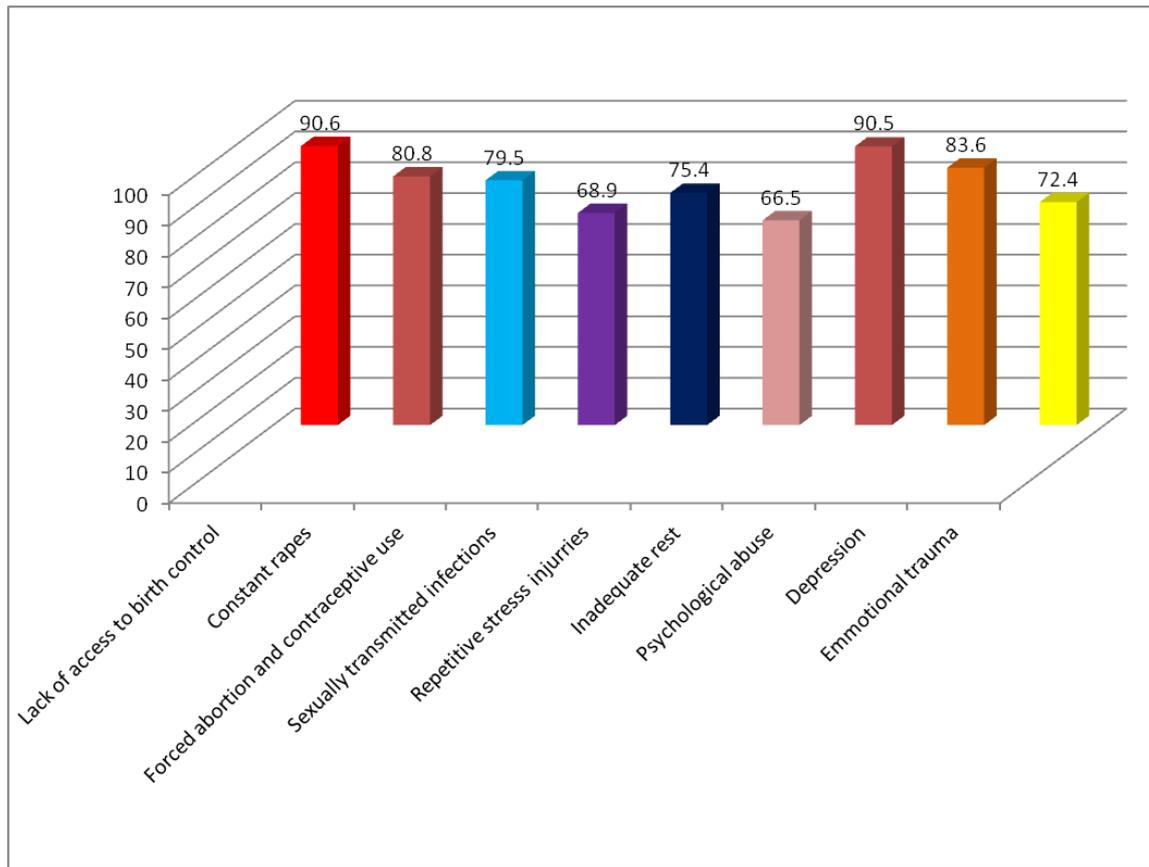


Figure 2: Consequences (Abdulraheem and Oladipo.2010).

Yukoshko (2009) further reported that victims are more likely to experience fear, guilt, sense of betrayal, lack of trust and suspicion. Also the sense of apathy, shame, withdrawal, resignation to fate, hopelessness, extreme form of submissiveness, maladaptation, and a sense of loss of personal autonomy; initiative and integrity. The report also adds that victims tend to turn to drugs, as well as being much more likely to inflict self-injury or even commit suicide. Yet also, victims stand the risk of being arrested, face detention, prosecution, and deportation.

The fastest growing prisons in Italy, France, Spain, the Netherlands, United States, Saudi Arabia and South Africa are the ones for the immigrants trafficked for sexual exploitation (Enable and olutayo, 2011) probably most from Nigeria.

The European Study (2015) also reported that they face physical abuse such as murder, physical attacks (beating with or without an object, kicking, knifing, whipping, and gunshots), Torture (ice-baths, cigarette burns, suspension, salt in wounds), Physical deprivation (sleep, food, light, basic necessities), Physical restraint (ropes, cuffs, chains) and confinement as well as withholding medical or other essential care.

They are abused sexually like forced vaginal, oral or anal sex; gang rape; degrading sexual acts, forced prostitution, inability to control number or acceptance of clients, forced unprotected sex and sex without lubricants. They also face the unwanted pregnancy, forced abortion, unsafe abortion, Sexual humiliation and forced nakedness.

Psychological Abuse European Study (2015) reported psychological abuse as intimidation and threats to women and their loved ones, Lies, deception, and blackmail to coerce women, discourage women from seeking help from authorities or others, lies about authorities, local situation, legal status, family members emotional manipulation by boyfriend, perpetrators, and isolation and forced dependency.

Forced and coerced use of drugs and alcohol were also reported as non-consensual administration and coercive use of alcohol or drugs in order to abduct, rape, or prostitute women, control activities, coerce compliance, impose long hours or coerce women to engage in degrading or dangerous sexual acts, as well as decrease self-protective defence, increase compliance and preventing women from leaving or escaping (European Study 2015).

Social restrictions and manipulation they are restricted on movement, time, and activities; confinement, surveillance, and manipulative scheduling in order to restrict contact with others and formation of helping relationships and frequent relocation, the absence of social support, denial or loss of contact with family, friends, ethnic and local community. Also, there is the denial of or control over access to health and other services as well as denial of privacy, or control over privacy.

Sexual and reproductive health like HIV/AIDS, Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and related complications, including pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), urinary tract infections etc

Mental health problems such as suicidal thoughts, self-harm, diminished coping capacity and Memory loss.

Substance abuse and misuse problems like Overdose, self-harm, death, suicide, Participation in unwanted sexual acts, unprotected and high-risk sexual acts, high-risk activities, violence, crime, Addiction, Brain or liver damage (European study, 2015).

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO COMBAT THEM

Human trafficking and sex work are crimes against all known laws. It contravenes both natural and sacred laws. The cross-border nature of human trafficking has given rise to national and international laws, treaties, conventions, and protocols dealing with human trafficking (Goliath, 2008).

At the international level, there are a number of treaties, laws, protocols and conventions that Nigeria is the signatory to. Some are the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) (Declaration and of Action against Trafficking in Persons).

Nigeria provides in section 34(1) that no person shall be subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or held in slavery or required to perform compulsory labor.

In 2003, Nigeria passed the child rights act which comprehensively deals with the issue of child trafficking. Nigeria ratified the UN Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children in 2001 and passed a national law against trafficking in 2003 entitled “Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003”.

The persistence of harmful cultural practices, the growth of the reach and influence of organized crime and the persistent loss of young women and children to sexual and forced labor exploitation require concerted and constant attention.

The rights of the citizens to the dignity of the human person against slavery, servitude, forced labour, prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation is also enshrined in the criminal Code of the Southern Nigeria (Cap 42, 1990) and the Penal Code of the Northern Nigeria (Cap 89, 1963); Labour Act (Cap 198, 1990); and the Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act (National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2003).

There are several provisions (Sections 11 to 29, 32 and 46) of the anti-human trafficking act of NAPTIP prescribing different punishment ranging from one year to life imprisonment for serious offences such as exportation or importation of girls under the age of 18 years for prostitution, forced labour, servitude or removal of organ by means of threat or use of force

or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud or deception (National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), 2009).

CONCLUSION

It is noted that human trafficking is an addition to the dictionary of global woes, the volume of Sex work and human trafficking correlates with the level of corruption in the agencies that directly deal with immigration and direct crime (Nwoke, Nwagbo, and Okafor, 2006). There should be anti-poverty, anti-corruption framework at national and global levels. There should be the holistic sustainable approach to this problem, embracing good governance, accountability, and transparency.

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