

## Human Trafficking among Youth in Nigeria: A Modest Explanation from Benin City, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Human trafficking among youth is a major social problem in Nigeria. This study therefore examines youth involvement in the menace with a modest explanation from Benin City. From the population, 96 respondents were used as the sample population. The questionnaire was the major instrument adopted for this study while the interview guide was used to assist semi-literate or illiterate respondents in filling the questionnaire. The chi-square method was used to bring all figures to the same base for easy testing of hypotheses. The following are the major findings of the study: there is a significant relationship between poverty and involvement of youth in human trafficking; youth from problematic homes are more likely to be victims of human trafficking and there is a significant relationship between delinquent peer relationship and involvement of youth in human trafficking. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made towards effective control: proper parental monitoring of children, discouraging values on quick-get-rich syndrome, effective law enforcement and the support of NGOs to eradicate poverty.

**Key words:** Human trafficking, youth, social problem, population, involvement

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### INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking has become an issue of global concern. On daily basis, human especially youth are being trafficked across the world for a variety of reasons among which is prostitution. According to the United States Department of Justice and Right Division (2005), more than 800,000 people are trafficked annually across international borders for sexual exploitation.

Like other major crimes from the grassroot, human trafficking has systematically evolved to be a global multi-million dollar business with key players and contractors spread over the world. In the third world nations with low level of development, human trafficking has helped to increase the margin between the rich and the poor. The Nigerian situation cannot be underemphasized because a prominent region in the country has been known in time to undertake the provision of its glamorous feminine species for the purpose of this horrendous overseas trade (Otiode, 2002).

The first sign that something was amiss began around 1996 with various waves of mass deportation. But by far the most widely reported was the deportation on 16th of March 1999 of 64 Nigerians, 47 females and 17 males from Italy for involvement in prostitution in that country, in June 1999, another set of 83 Nigerians were deported, 66 of whom were from Edo State, the myth of

the returnees as good daughters were beginning to shatter. According to Olateru (2002), trafficking in human is now considered the third largest source of profit for organized crime behind only guns and drugs trafficking.

The problem of human trafficking has continued to generate a lot of concern for both governmental and non-governmental organizations nationally and internationally. In spite of the global and especially Nigerian government's efforts to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons especially in women and children, the menace has ironically increased among youth in Benin City.

Human trafficking has become a serious social problem and has raised issues of fundamental sociological importance because it has suddenly become a point of controversy. There is a gap in the social dynamic equilibrium in the society where this trafficking is rampant. The resulting problems include moral degradation, psychological imbalance, possibilities of life long organ damage, social disapproval, high probability of acute psychosis and trauma (Fayeye, 2006).

The United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (1993) claimed that 6 million children in African under the age of 13 years are working for long hours, underfed and poorly paid. Not only that, many Nigerian youth are trafficked out of the country for dehumanizing activities like prostitution and slave

labour. Succinctly, the traceable source that can be attributed to this problem is poverty. Absolute poverty has been proven to motivate individuals to think beyond normal realms. This shows the extent to which social forces, sanctions, norms, values and culture have been weakened. Even when backed by law, people still engage in victimless crimes because they obliterate any form of repercussion that might be generated.

From a sociological point of view, there are many problems inherent in such a social phenomenon, but the most agonizing ones have been stated above. Furthermore, the increasing incidence of human trafficking suggests a great danger to the socio-economic and political order in the society (Ogbu, 2004; Abubakar, 2006).

In the light of the above, the following questions form the basis of the research problem:

- To what extent is poverty is a factor in human trafficking?
- Can involvement with delinquent peers promote incidence of human trafficking?
- To what extent are youths from problematic homes more likely to be victims of human trafficking?

**Historical and conceptual background:** Human trafficking in the form of slavery has been in existence since the earliest times. It flourished in the ancient empires of Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome and in domestic forms; it was a recognized institution in Africa with human servitude associated with certain rites before its discovery by Europeans in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The trans-Atlantic slave trade spanned for four and half centuries. Following the first contact of white men with Negroes, first as explorers and later as slave merchants, with help of traditional rulers, thousands of able-bodied men and women were captured and transported by sea to American households and expansive plantations in South America.

The classical turning point on the odious traffic was reached on 22nd June 1772, when Lord Mansfield ruled that slavery had no standing in the law of England. A writ of habeas corpus was issued to release the slaves from ships still lying on the Thames. Thereafter for a hundred years, the abolition battle was waged first on a national level and later on the international front. The climax was the American Civil war of 1843-46, which was won by the abolitionists and this led to the proclamation of the freedom of all the slaves.

Nigeria started exporting women to Italy to engage in sex work since the 1980's, since then the trade has grown and traffickers have moved in to take advantage of the

poverty and collapse of social programmes that occurred under military rule. Italian authorities estimate that over 10,000 Nigerian prostitutes work in Italy, many of them victims of traffickers (International Organization for Migration, Trafficking Migrant No 23, 2001).

Trafficking was earlier confined to movement between countries or regions. Globalization with its attempt to create one world is also creating a world without borders for trafficking. The global trade in human beings persists and is expanding in unimaginable scales.

According to Fayeye (2006), trafficking of humans involved moving men, women and children from one place to another and placing them in condition of forced labour. The practice includes forced prostitution, domestic servitude, unsafe agricultural labour, construction of restaurant work and various forms of modern-day slavery.

According to the report released by the European Union's Justice and Home Affairs Commission (2000), young women and girls are particularly vulnerable to trafficking because of the low status of women, poverty and lack of educational and professional opportunities. Policy makers in many countries are recognizing the need to address these problems by promoting gender equality. Youths who have greater opportunities for education, shelter, food, employment, access to legal and political systems and freedom from violence will be less vulnerable to being trafficked.

**Causes of human trafficking:** According to the United State Department of Justice (2005), the victim's peers are considered the most facilitative factor in the activities concerning the trafficking of human. Victims are lured into trafficking networks by their peers through false promises of good working conditions and high pay as domestic workers, factory and farm workers, nannies, waitresses, sales clerk or models. Once in the receiving country, many suffer extreme physical and mental abuse, including rape, sexual exploitation, torture, beating, starvation, death threats and threats to family members. In application of this proposition to the contextual background, both social and economic standards on the average of Benin youth especially ladies still falls below international expectation, given the general situation of the country. Global practices now approve dual-career families whereby the provider status can either fall on the women or man. This motivates the women, as the cultured mandate to gain economic independence. Such an individual is more or less ready, given peer influence to agree to work in geographical locations envisaged to dispense a better socio-economic status, whether ascribed or achieved on them.

Otoide (2002) asserted the reason why there is still the prevalence of human trafficking among youths in Nigeria is due to the poor economic situation of the country. He conducted a study in Benin City to ascertain the level of peer influence, home factors, poverty and delinquency on the position of victims. This study showed that young girls were more marketable than boys relatively because, they exhibit a less discontented morale, they do send their earning home and do not usually break oaths and agreements. Responses acquired tend to suggest a strong discontent with the prevailing condition of living in the community. In addition, it would appear that the evidence of new found wealth displayed by successful migrants who are usually peers is a strong factor influencing the decision to migrate. It is evident to note also that successful migrant usually have their way not only by displaying such superfluous wealth but by logically offering financial assistance to victims and their families to facilitate acquisition when necessary.

A critical analysis of the position shows that the economic situation of the country is so unpromising that individuals have realized that there are more than one way to get to the top and they wouldn't mind giving it a try. The significance of Otoide's research shows why young female sexual trade is thriving in the community, especially among youths; reasons derived drew a strong link between peer pressure as well as family pressure. Respondents gave lack of job opportunities as a factor propelling trafficking. "Less commonly mentioned reasons were laziness greed and deception".

**The theoretical precept:** In the late 1940's, Edwin Sutherland developed a theory to explain the common observation that kids who grow up in neighborhoods where there are many delinquents are more likely to be delinquent themselves. Differential association theory explains that people learn to be deviant when more of their associates favour deviance than favour conformity. This theory stems largely from the structural school of symbolic interaction. People develop a deviant identity because they are thrust into a deviant subculture. The situation determines identity.

Since nobody is exposed totally to conformists or to deviants, several factors determine which influence will be the stronger. One is the intensity of contacts with others; a person is more likely to be influenced by deviant friends or peer-group members than by more distant acquaintances who are deviant. Another is the age at which the contacts take place; influences in childhood and adolescence are more powerful than those occurring later in life. Another is the ratio of contacts with deviants to contact with conformists; the more one associate with deviants rather than conformists, the more likely one is to become deviant.

In pluralistic societies with multiple sub-cultural groups like Benin, there is difference in some of their values and expectation for behaviour. Human trafficking among youth in Benin City emphasizes that interaction and association with others who are regularly engaged in human trafficking especially within primary groups and particularly peer groups, is the major cause of human trafficking. It explains, therefore, that crime and delinquent acts among youth like human trafficking are not instinctual but learned through interaction with peer members.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Survey research was adopted for this study. The population are youth who are involved in human trafficking or whom may be vulnerable to human trafficking and members of the community in Benin. From the selected respondents, 96 people were used as the sample population. The questionnaire was the major instrument adopted for this study while the interview guide was used to assist semi-literate or illiterate respondents in filling the questionnaire. The chi-square method was used to bring all figures to the same base for easy testing of hypotheses.

### Data presentation and analysis

**Hypothesis one:** There is no significant relationship between poverty and involvement in human trafficking (Table 1).

**Decision rule:** From the calculation,  $X^2C$  value (59.7) is greater than  $X^2t = 9.488$ , therefore, the alternative Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted while ( $H_0$ ) null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between poverty and involvement of youth in human trafficking. Hence, we can say that youth from poor background are more vulnerable to human trafficking. This is because the youth want to uplift their family from poverty level.

**Hypothesis two:** Youths from problematic homes are not likely to be victims of human trafficking (Table 2).

**Decision rule:** From the calculation,  $X^2C$  value (22.36) is greater than  $X^2t = 5.991$ . Therefore, the alternative

Table 1: Cross Tabulation of Poverty and Vulnerability of Youth to the involvement in Human Trafficking

Poverty	Vulnerability to human trafficking			Total
	Yes	No	Averagely	
Yes	46	3	12	61
No	2	1	8	11
Averagely	2	16	6	24
Total	50	20	26	96

$X^2C = 59.7$ ,  $N = 96$ ,  $Df = 4$ ,  $X^2t = 9.488$

Table 2: Cross Tabulation to determine whether youths from problematic homes are likely to be victims of human trafficking

Youths from problematic homes	Rate of victim's involvement in human trafficking		Total
	High	Low	
Yes	39	10	49
No	4	15	19
Average	21	7	28
Total	64	32	96

$X^2C = 22.36$ ,  $N = 96$ ,  $Df = 2$ ,  $X^2t = 5.991$

Table 3: Cross Tabulation between Delinquent peers and involvement of Youth in human trafficking

Delinquent peer	Influence of Peer			Total
	Yes	No	Averagely	
Yes	39	6	4	49
No	6	3	10	19
Average	7	12	9	28
Total	52	21	23	96

$X^2C = 32.47$ ,  $N = 96$ ,  $Df = 4$ ,  $X^2t = 9.488$

Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted while the  $H_0$  null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, youth from problematic homes are more likely to be victims of human trafficking. Youth from abusive families, divorced homes, negligence by parents, etc have high propensity in making their youth vulnerable to peer pressure and involvement in human trafficking.

**Hypothesis three:** There is a significant relationship between delinquent peer relationship and involvement in human trafficking (Table 3).

**Decision rule:** From the calculation above,  $X^2$  value (32.47) is greater than  $X^2t = 9.488$ . Therefore, the alternative Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted and the null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between delinquent peer relationship and involvement of youth in human trafficking. This finding is similar to the work of Oganija (1996), who asserted that the interaction of a youth with a group of delinquent peer might make such a youth to share delinquent peer sub-culture which in-turn refers in his behaviour.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The empowerment of youth is an essential precondition for the elimination of human trafficking. It has however been demonstrated that human trafficking is higher among youth. This is because they are more vulnerable to human trafficking with great influence from peers. Also, human trafficking is higher among youth because of their virility and not solely on the peer-pressure factor. The study also confirmed that most of the youth involved in human trafficking are from poor and problematic homes with low socio-economic status. This

study also indicated that human trafficking has its antecedents problems such as poverty, unemployment, peer pressure, association with delinquent peers, greed, self-fulfilling prophecy, emphasis society places on wealth and so on are all factors that predisposes youth to human trafficking. Human trafficking on the basis of this study is the recruitment, transfer, harboring or receipt of person (especially youth) for the purpose of engaging them in an exploitative economic activity. This is done sometimes with the consent of the person through peer influence or parents themselves or mostly done through the means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction of fraud, or deception of the abuse of power, or of 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 economic exploitation.

## CONCLUSION

Human trafficking among youth is a major social problem in Benin city and the country at large. Human trafficking should be seen as one manifestation of the comparative social disadvantages suffered by youth in Benin. The victim's peers are considered the most facilitative factor in the activities concerning the trafficking of human. Association with delinquent peers helps to fan up the criminal tendencies inherent in the youth. They are lured and cajoled in trafficking networks by their peers through false promises of good working conditions and the superfluous reward of rich migrant. The study has found that human trafficking is a youth crime because it is perpetuated mostly by youth between the ages of 16-25 years with implications on the society, the individual and the law enforcement agents.

Human trafficking as a social problem will continue to grow in proportion if urgent measures are not taken to curb it. To start with, parents should be more interested in their children, improve relationships with them by getting closer to them and showing interest in them and what they do. The society also should stop honouring both the traffickers and the trafficked affluent "returnees" with titles and recognition during public occasions.

Government should establish at national and local level, an enforcement mechanisms to pursue an effective poverty alleviation programme to improve the standard of living of masses. Youth themselves should stop desiring to make it fast. They should be resistant to materialism and "get-rich quick" syndrome. On the whole, immigration unit should be adequately equipped and galvanized by government so that so that they can help to reduce human trafficking especially through porous borders and routes.

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