



Epidemiology of Child Trafficking in Niger-Delta of Nigeria-Proffering a Panacea

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author AG designed the study, performed the statistical analysis and wrote the protocol. Author NCT wrote the first draft of the manuscript, managed the analyses of the study and literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Child trafficking dehumanizes the child and relegates to the background. Victims are treated as modern slaves wherever taken to within or outside their domain, Niger Delta inclusive. Child trafficking is the third most common crime in Nigeria after drug trafficking and economic fraud. This paper examines child trafficking in Niger Delta and proffers solutions. Results from extensive review of literature shows that NAPTIP report of 2017 in pathfinder blog of 2018 showed that male victims are below 11 years whilst, the female are above 18 years out of 40.3 million victims worldwide 25% are children. Three thousand (3,000) children are trafficked daily and are used for sexual exploitation, begging, sale of organs like kidney represents 5 – 10% of transplant, sold to couples for adoption at very high prices. Another trend of child trafficking is baby factory. Determinants of child trafficking in the region are exploration of oil, weak legal system, poverty, changes in standard of living, infertility and adoption to mention but a few. Child trafficking is an aspect of child abuse, it is a major social problems. To put an end to this scourge, the legal system should be fortified to take stringent measures against traffickers. The government/private sectors should employ the citizenry as to meet their daily demands. The Minister of Health should put in place services to

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assist infertile couples to have their own children. The ministry of health should also abolish baby factories to put an end to the use of girls in making babies for sale at exorbitant prices like commodities.

Keywords: Child trafficking; Niger Delta; modern slavery; determinants.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child trafficking dehumanizes the child and relegates to the background. Victims are treated as modern day slaves wherever taken to, within or outside their domain. It involves relocating of a child to a different destination with an ulterior motive of enslaving and exploiting the child. It is largely a hidden crime, notably the third most common crime in Nigeria after drug trafficking and economic fraud. This menace is not limited to a particular region, it spreads across the world, Nigeria and even the Niger-Delta region is a culprit. The Niger Delta area is found at the peak of gulf of guinea on the west coast of Africa, and on the south-south geopolitical zones of Nigeria, with a population of about 31 million people, having a land of about 75,000 km² resulting to about 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. The Niger-Delta is among the richest river basins and very vital wetland and coastal marine ecosystems in the universe [1,2]. The States that make up the Niger Delta region are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers.

Certain states in this region- Edo, Delta and Rivers- have been identified as recruitment centres for trafficking [3]. According to Pathfinders, Edo state has been given international recognition as trafficking hub, having built infrastructures and network to enable the sale of human bodies [4]. For a start, some use psychological manipulation to handle their victims [5]. Some children who lacked love in their homes are easily deceived by these traffickers by showing them false love and calling of pet names just to flatter them. Others make a combination of force and beating [6]. Most victims are children with history of sexual abuse, low self-esteem, minimal social support who could be caught along the road, schools, playground, handed over by peer groups or wicked relatives even by some ignorant parents. The children are lured into fake promises of better jobs, studying abroad, better life, good food and care in every aspect [6,7]. In most cases, these jobs are reversed to become sex work in sex bars, raping is common, sex worker serving many customers a night. What a living

nightmare, humiliation with little or no escape. They are forever indebted to their madams even to pay for their food, drugs for addiction hence, any attempt to run away can end up in jail [8]. Children are further vulnerable due to loss of parents, war, internal crises, separation from family, illness, national disasters, kidnappings, as stressed by [9].

In addition, Kamala-Raj stated that, your quality of being a man or woman affects your reasoning of child trafficking [10]. Furthermore, Akowe's report from ILO revealed that out of 80 million Nigeria children, 25% are age 14, they are involved in economic activities, half of them are exploited in different forms [11]. Of a truth, the exact number of children trafficked are not known due to the fact that, undetected victims are off-record and it is a problem; Children are voiceless to report the crime to law enforcement agencies as to do a follow-up [12]. In addition, some victims are taken straight into sex work, house helps, force marriage, farming, criminal exploitation, suicide bombing, marijuana production, 5-10% into kidney organ trans-plant, [13,14,15]. Others find it difficult to report due to fear of the authorities and the way they were indoctrinated [16]. It is expedient for Nigeria to know the number of children trafficked [17]. Bale & Soodator opined that today's slavery is twice the number of olden day's slavery [18]. Modern day slavery is used by traffickers to control and exploit others [4,19].

The international labour organization (ILO), reiterated that globally child labour is about 168 million, Nigeria having about 15%, 21 million is into forced labour. Again ILO, observed that, 40.3 million victims of human trafficking globally, 81% are stocked in forced labour, 25% are children; 5.5 million children are trafficked globally [20]. Emphatically, United Nations is of the view that children make up to one-third (1/3) of the total number of human that are trafficked.

Trafficked children are treated without human dignity, no regards for their wellbeing hence, animalistic type of treatment is meted to them. People who have animals as pet cannot do such to their animal pets. They are hurt beyond

imagination, resulting to different pitiable conditions, for instance, 24-56% of trafficked children experience physical violence and 21-56% experience sexual violence. Physical and mental abuse of children gives rise to mental problem, substance abuse, juvenile delinquencies, up to suicidal attempts [21,22,23,24,25]. These maltreatment lead to mental impairment as anxiety, depression, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and also physical imbalances like malnourishment, unkempt appearances, dirty skin, picking things, scabies and the manhandling can also result to fractures, scars, bruises, burns, headaches, migraine, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, Candidiasis, HIV/AIDs and many others, are very rampant among trafficked victims [26]. Victims could be identified by acts such as being tearfulness, avoiding eye contact and lacking trust to disclose secrets. Trafficking business seems growing on daily basis and remains endless owing to the fact that it is highly lucrative, involves little risk of criminal prosecution, those who wants to employ cheap labour places much demands for victims [27]. Trafficking is a social and public health problem. Morality of the society is draft to the mud. No wonder Nigeria was spotted as a key source of trafficking and grouped a notorious country leading to destruction of the country's reputation, [28,29].

In addition, there is a new trend of child trafficking invoke which is termed "baby factory" [30]. It encourages child trafficking and pave way for exploitation of young girls leading to unwanted pregnancy, and after delivery the child is sold to prospective buyers. United Nations recorded that 10 babies are sold daily in Nigeria and about \$33 billion is made yearly. The emergence of baby factory bedeviled our country and the existence of human. Trafficking has been given a comprehensive definition as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, using threat, intimidation or other types of coercion such as abduction of fraud, lies, misuse of strength of position or vulnerability or the giving or taking of rewards or gifts to get the approval of an individual or having control over another person, for the motive of exploitation. This means the victim is helpless at this time due to the environment in question, powers in the surrounding, the torture and trauma attached to the scenario [31].

In certain cases, uninformed and extremely poor parents permit their children to be taken by these heartless traffickers who pretend to be caring. The parents are given some token hence, multiplying the number of children enslaved [32]. This menace is still on the increase, not minding the numbers of NGOs working assiduously to curb this ill practice [33]. However, Nigeria has been placed on Tier 2 watch list for two consecutive years by US government for failure to address trafficking offences by some senior government officials and inability to provide protection for trafficking victims [34,35].

Traffickers go with different names as madams, daddy, johns, pimps and have different mode of operations. They also belong to local, international bodies, social, ethnic and racial groups. Others operate alone with criminal organizations, as seen by [36]. According to Adesina and Young, all hands must be on deck, from the grassroots to international bodies to report and fight this scourge [37,38].

1.1 Aim of the Paper

The aim of the paper was to examine child trafficking in the Niger-Delta region and proffer solutions. Review of existing literatures on the subject was carried out. The subject was reviewed under the following headings:

2. VARIATION IN AGE AND SEX

In his study, Omorodion recorded that the mean age of children trafficked is 16 years, 77.5% for age 15-17, 22.1% age 18-20 years and 0.4% are for 21 years. Majority, (58.5%) of the trafficked persons were females while male made up 41.5% [33].

3. VARIATION OF DIFFERENCE STATES OF TRAFFICKING IN NIGER-DELTA REGION

Report from Okodudu & Akpoghomeh indicated that Akwa Ibom state had the highest number victims 19.1%, while Cross River, Rivers and Abia had 10.2%, 7.8% and 9.4%, respectively. The trafficking between 2010 and 2014 in southern Nigeria revealed that Akwa Ibom had 220 victims, which was top most out of 460 incidences documented. The other states, Cross River, Imo, Rivers and Abia were next in ranking [39].

4. DETERMINANTS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE NIGER-DELTA REGION

The root causes of child trafficking includes the under listed reasons:

4.1 Exploration of Oil in the Niger-Delta

The presence of oil in the Niger Delta paved the way for the inflow of people from within and outside Nigeria- Expatriates. Oil comes with much money hence, trafficking of children looks easy. Again oil spillage damages the soil nutrients, drastically reduces productivity. Food insecurity leads to starvation and losses [40].

4.2 Poverty

It is unbelievable that the Niger Delta region that produces the crude oil that has so enriched the country is so neglected that majority of the people are poverty stricken [41]. Unbearable living condition and absence of social amenities and infrastructures is a catalyst for traffickers to gain access to overcome their victims [42]. According to Adepelumi, about 8million Nigeria children are in exploitative child labour [43]. Increased poverty often subjects people to untold situation [44].

4.3 Changes in Standard of Living

As people live in fear and much security challenges in the Niger Delta, unemployment, political and communal crises, youth restiveness, cultism, kidnappings and militancy compelled the people to seek a better place of abode, only to end up in the hands of traffickers [45].

4.4 Infertility and Adoption

Infertility and large amount of money made from local and international adoption of children skyrockets baby factories in secret places within the Niger-Delta and child trafficking [46].

4.5 Weak Legal System

It is a multifaceted problem. Nigeria borders are so porous, corrupt government officials, traffickers are affiliated to one international criminal group or the other, immigration laws are not implemented by those concerned as to

punish traffickers, to serve as a deterrent to others [43].

5. SOLUTIONS TO CHILD TRAFFICKING IN NIGER-DELTA

5.1 Educational/Awareness

- The government should embark on enlightenment campaign to educate the masses as to create awareness on the existence of child traffickers and the menace associated with it. Awareness will enable the children to shun fake promises of lucrative jobs and greener pastures used in deceiving the masses out of their places of abode to places where they are converted to modern day slaves immediately.
- Government should recognize baby factory as routes of child trafficking, destroy and extinguish such homes.
- Girls with unwanted pregnancies should not be stigmatized by the society to avoid selling of their babies after delivery.
- Policies should be promulgated by the National Assembly to enhance children to be adopted legally by infertile couples, which will also give the child in question a home of his own. Legalize instead of trafficking child adoption within and outside the country [46,47].
- Government should have an attitudinal change towards infertile couples by giving them a sense of belonging [46].
- Sharing of things in the families should not exclude infertile couples. They should not be denied some traditional rites because they are infertile.
- Stringent measures should be put in place by the government to deal with child traffickers both at international, state and local government level to deter-intending traffickers from indulging in the act [48].
- The multi-national companies operating in Niger Delta should do everything possible to avoid oil spillage so that farmers could have fertile lands to cultivate and make a bountiful harvest to overcome hunger and poverty.

6. CONCLUSION

Child trafficking is a heartless behaviour, inhuman treatment and crime against humanity. All that are involved in it should have a rethink as

to desist from it. Oil exploration also has its own blame coupled with ignorance of some parents about the existence of traffickers around them. The children, mostly from 11-18 years who are most vulnerable should be allowed to live freely like any other person and sure protection be given to them. Proactive measures need to be taken to save lives of victims. The issue of strengthening of our borders cannot be over emphasized. Our uniform personnel should live up to expectation as to arrest and prosecute any trafficker.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information retrieved, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- Traffic networks from nations (especially developing nation) that benefit from trafficking should be disbanded and laws put in place to put an end or drastically reduce its occurrence.
- Knowledge, it is said, is power. Proper awareness and education on the dangers and risks of indulging in trafficking should be carried out especially in rural areas to discourage this process.
- The government should strengthen the Nigeria borders to avoid porosity. Also, to enter a bilateral agreement with other countries so that, any Nigerian trafficked out could be repatriated and rehabilitated thereafter.
- The force should be equipped enough for this task ahead. And any apprehended trafficker should not be allowed to bribe his way through, instead be made to face the full wrath of the law, not minding how highly placed.
- If these stringent measures are put in place, while handling this issue, trafficking will be a thing of the past in the oil rich Niger-Delta.

CONSENT

It is not applicable.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

It is not applicable.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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