

Voodoo and Human Trafficking in Nigeria: a Nation's Albatross

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Abstract

Trafficking in persons involves a forceful and deceitful acquisition, sale and resale of persons especially women and young girls. The focus of this paper is on voodoo and human trafficking of women and young girls for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation from Nigeria to outside world. The work finds voodoo is a major oiling wheel of trafficking in women and girls in Nigeria for sexual exploitation. The work further found that various reasons ranging from flimsy to serious ones contribute to the trafficking in women and young girls for sexual exploitation. Another disclosure is that in the process of the victims' desperation to migrate, the traffickers dragged them to voodoo shrines where voodoo rituals are used to coerce them into working for their sponsors. They are then transported on an often fatal journey through a number of West African countries until they reach their departure where they are sold to their "madams". It is a fact also that belief in voodoo is very strong in some parts of Nigeria, and the women are often forced to make an oath by one of the voodoo priests, in which they swear obedience to their traffickers. The paper recommends among others that there must be mass anti-voodoo education in order to effectively disabuse peoples' minds about the myths of voodoo. The paper concludes among others that trafficking in persons is a global problem for both sending and receiving countries and it is evil, inhuman and against the law and investigators handling cases involving voodoo oaths should try new methods to get victims' cooperation for them to speak out. In spite of the fact that trafficking in persons is a crime, it has become a global business that affects almost every country and reaps enormous profits for traffickers and their criminal intermediaries. It has become a burden on various governments in Nigeria that has defied all legislations.

Keywords: Welfare, Cognitive behavioral therapy, Social work, Employment, psychological problems

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Introduction

In this paper, we intend to examine voodoo and human trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation using Nigeria as a case study. Nigeria is a multicultural country with diverse ethnic and religious identities and estimated population of 180 million people lumped into 36 administrative states, a Federal Capital Territory and 774 local government councils. Over 70% of the population live below poverty line, with women and children, especially those living in the rural areas form a greater part of this. Many families, unable to cope with the exorbitant costs of education, are forced to withdraw their girls from schools, little wonder therefore that there is high rate of illiteracy among this group as they can barely read or write.

Today, 70% of women contribute to the domestic economy, as farmers, petty traders, domestic workers and homemakers. Their work is grossly unrewarded and to further worsen their condition, they have no direct access credit facilities because of their low income and lack of collateral. Their lack of formal training means that they are not able to access other opportunities available in the better paying employment sectors of the economy. Consequently, they have become prime target of recruiters involved in trafficking for sexual commercial exploitation.² Lure of a better life in the urban areas and advanced countries, cultural and social pressures such as domestic abuse, harmful traditional practices, overbearing parental control; growing sex markets in developed countries and urban areas, growing appetites for pornography and the ease in controlling the vulnerable women and girls are among other factors facilitating traffic in women and girls.³

In Nigeria, voodoo priests are often used to seal financial transactions often with a threat of a deadly curse for the wrong doer. Therefore, traffickers in persons, especially in women and girls or prostitution gangs parlay this fear to their advantage. Therefore, thousands of women and girls seeking transport to Europe sometimes with false promise of legal work undergo voodoo rituals that can involve drinking blood from cuts and taking nail and hair clipping as totems.

² Giovanni German, Human Trafficking as a Transnational Problem: The Response of Destination Countries.

³ Joseph Famakin, Sex Work and Human Trafficking of Women and Girls for Sexual Exploitation, being a paper presented at the 1st Annual Conference on Sex Work, Abuse and Human Trafficking of Women and Girls for Sexual Exploitation, organized by Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alienation in conjunction with Lydia Grace Foundation at NECA House, Plot A2, Hakeem Balogun Street, CBA Alausa, Lagos on 31st July, 2013

The Nigerian networks frequently use voodoo, a set of traditional beliefs to intimidate and manipulate their victims. Despite this, NAPTIP has put in place some measures to cope with the rising cases of trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation.

In this paper we intend to examine voodoo, sex work and human trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation. The paper is for this purpose divided into ten parts. The first part is the introductory. The second part spells out trafficking in women and girls in Nigeria. In the third part, attention is focused on conceptual clarifications. In the fourth part, causes of trafficking in women and girls for sexual purposes are considered. The fifth part is devoted to mechanisms in trafficking in women and girls while part six deals with stages of sex trafficking. Part seven highlights internal and external trafficking of women and girls in Nigeria. Parts eight and nine are devoted to voodoo and human trafficking and strategies for combating human trafficking in Nigeria respectively while part ten treats international dimension and cross-border elements of trafficking. The paper ends with some concluding remarks and recommendations.

II. Trafficking in Women and Girls in Nigeria

Trafficking in persons or human trafficking in human beings is in short, modern form of slavery that is unfortunately growing in scale and repercussions. Although, very difficult to quantify, it is hugely underestimated because of its insidious, complex and dynamic nature. People are trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery or practices similar to slavery or the removal of organs. As one of the fastest growing criminal activities in the world, trafficking in persons results in serious breaches of human rights and dignity of trafficked persons. Trafficking occurs within and across national borders, often with victims crossing many borders to reach their final destination.⁴

Trafficking in persons involves a forceful and deceitful acquisition, sale and resale of persons especially women and children and has constantly featured in both global and national criminal agenda.

⁴ See Report of Joy Ezeilo, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children-Doc. A/HRC/10/16 of 20th February, 2009 and presented to the Human Rights Council on 12th March 2009; also UN General Assembly Doc.A/64/290 of 12th August 2009 presented on 23rd October, 2009.

In spite of the fact that it is a crime, it has become a global business that affects almost every country and reaps enormous profits for traffickers and their criminal intermediaries.⁵ Therefore, because of its clandestine, low cost /low risk yet high returns nature, the “industry” is one of the most lucrative and fastest growing global crimes with burgeoning demand for humans.⁶ Human trafficking rakes in an estimated \$32 billion per annum.⁷ An African child taken to the United States, for instance, might net a trafficker \$10,000-\$20,000.⁸ The trafficking in persons from Africa to Europe alone has a turnover in excess of \$300 million per annum.⁹

III. Conceptual Clarifications

Trafficking in Persons

For a better understanding of the discussion that follows, it is worth quoting the most recent definition of trafficking in persons. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children 2000 (Known as Palermo Protocol), defines “Trafficking in Persons” in its Article 3 as follows:

The recruitment, harbouring, transportation, transfer or receipt of persons, by means of 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 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 shall include at minimum, the exploitation of the 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.

⁵ Joseph Famakin, *Sex Work and Human Trafficking of Women and Girls for Sexual Exploitation*, being a paper presented at the 1st Annual Conference on Sex Work, Abuse and Human Trafficking of Women and Girls for Sexual Exploitation, organized by Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alienation in conjunction with Lydia Grace Foundation at NECA House, Plot A2, Hakeem Balogun Street, CBA Alausa, Lagos on 31st July, 2013

⁶ Prat, A.N. *Human Trafficking: The Nadir of an Unholy Trinity*, *European Security*, Vol. 13, pt. 1, 2004, pp. 55-71

⁷ International Labour Organization, *Forced Labour Statistics Factsheet*, 2007

⁸ Fitzgibbon, K, *Modern Day Slavery? The Scope of Trafficking in Persons in Africa*, *African Security Review*, p. 12

⁹ UNODC Report, July, 2006

The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, (TIPLEA) 2003 (as amended, 2005) also defines human trafficking as:

“Trafficking” includes all acts and attempted acts involved in the recruitment, transportation within or across Nigerian borders, purchases, sale, transfer, receipt or harbouring of a person involving the use of deception, coercion or debt bondage for the purpose of placing or holding the person whether for or not in involuntary servitude (domestic, sexual or reproductive) in force or bonded labour, or in slavery-like conditions.

From the foregoing definitions, there are three elements of human trafficking:

- a. There must be an ACTION consisting of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons;
- b. By MEANS of threat or use of force or coercion, abduction, fraud, deception or abuse of power or a position of vulnerability; and
- c. For the PURPOSE of exploitation.¹⁰

It should be pointed out that this definition fell short of the Palermo Protocol, which is the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, 2000, which Nigeria is a state party to.

According to Joy N.Ezeilo, trafficking definition covers the use of minors for commercial sexual activity even if there is no force, fraud, or coercion. Trafficking also covers people who are held against their will to pay off debt; this is known as peonage. Accordingly, a victim's initial agreement to travel or perform the labour does not allow an employer to later restrict that person's freedom or to use force or threats to obtain repayment.¹¹

¹⁰ Simon Chuzi Egede, Trafficking Destinations from Nigeria: An Official Perspective, being a paper presented at the Round Table on Emigration: An Emerging Syndrome on 17th May, 2011 at the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Lagos, p. 4

¹¹ Joy N. Ezeilo, Migration and Human Trafficking: Emerging Trends in Nigeria and Beyond, being a Key Note Address presented at a RoundTable on Emigration: An Emerging Syndrome organized by The Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Lagos, 17th May, 2011, p. 2

A. Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation is the sexual abuse of women, girls and youths through the exchange of sex or sexual acts for money, drugs, food, shelter, protection, or any other basic necessity of life. Sexual exploitation also involves engaging of women and girls in pornography and creating explicit websites.¹²

IV. Causes of Trafficking in women and girls for sexual purpose

Trafficking in human beings, particularly women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation, is a complex phenomenon whose roots are deeply embodied in social-cultural conditions as well as the economic structure of societies. The persistent of human trafficking in Nigeria can be ascribed to a number of factors and conditions that make the country a perfect “harvest field” for it.

Studies, particularly by the International Organization for Migration (I.O.M), indicate that the causes of migration related to trafficking in women can be found in the lack of opportunity in the countries of origin, poverty in many developing countries, marginalization of women in the source countries, poor or non-existent education world-wide, feminization of poverty, women’s unequal rights and access to formal labour and women’s restricted abilities to gain power over their own lives in their home countries.¹³

The current world economic crisis has further exacerbated the desperation and the quest for human security, survival and development. Trafficking for labour exploitation is more likely to escalate particularly during this global economic crisis and increasing poverty caused by massive unemployment and employer’s tendencies to use cheap labour in order to cut costs and maximize profits.¹⁴

¹² Ibid

¹³ A.O.Popoola, *Criminality of Human Trafficking and Smuggling: Issues, Challenges and Prospects*, being a paper presented at the Roundtable on Immigration and Emigration organized by the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Lagos, 17 May, 2011, pp. 4-5

¹⁴ See UN General Assembly Doc. A/64/290 of 12th August 2009, presented on 23rd October, 2009

According to Joy N.Ezeilo, trafficking by its nature, characteristics and consequences is intertwined with violence chiefly directed at female gender and shares underlying causes with violence against women, which includes unequal power relations, gender inequalities, discrimination, feminization of poverty, sexual objectification and commercialization of women and ingrained sex stereotypes and gender based discrimination reinforced by cultural and religious tenets.¹⁵

V. Mechanisms in Trafficking in women and girls

Trafficking in persons, especially in women and young girls, and the involvement of organized crime groups have become an issue of major concern due to their rapid expansion in the last couple of years. These phenomenal increases at national and international levels make the menace transnational in scope. Over the last decade, there is an upsurge in the volume of human trafficking from Nigeria to most European countries, especially Italy. With this, more routes have sprung up and have become increasingly tangled hence the activities of individual and criminal organization have had to assume a very high level of sophistication aided by improved communication and information technology.

According to the Nigerian Embassy in Rome, Italy is the main destination for trafficked women and girls from Nigeria; and it is estimated that there are about 10,000 Nigerian prostitutes in Italy. So what are the other mechanisms responsible for the upsurge? According to Owasanoye¹⁶, mechanisms of trafficking in persons are myriad, clandestine and variable. Their systematic consideration is however in order. Victims of trafficking are usually recruited by "intermediaries", "middlemen" or "agents". It is interesting to note that like other forms of abuses and human rights violations, middlemen are usually not entirely strangers but relatives like "uncles", "aunties", "brothers", "sisters" and notable citizens of victims' nations. The challenge of this is that the mutual and primordial relationships of victims and agents douses suspicion and makes refusal, investigation and prosecution difficult if not impossible.¹⁷

¹⁵ Joy N.Ezeilo, op. cit, at p. 11

¹⁶ Bolaji Owasanoye, Voodoo and Human Trafficking in Nigeria, being a paper presented at a Roundtable on Emigration: An Emerging Syndrome organized by The Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Lagos, 17th May, 2011, p. 6

¹⁷ Ibid

The axiom in these societies is the end justifies the means. Once an agent is a successful person therefore, walking his/her ropes and connections is easily accepted. Also, ex-victims act as agents and recruiters and use image of credibility, deceit and power. The power relations are always imbalance and tilt to the advantage of the agent/syndicate. The power relations hinge on political connections, financial connections and metaphysical connections. Regrettably, weak status of victims and their families diminish capacity to resist or challenge notion of power or influence. This background and mechanisms suggest that trafficking in person is a formidable threat especially when interfaced with belief systems/voodoo.¹⁸

VI. Stages of Sex Trafficking

Three notable stages emerge in the trafficking of human beings from Nigeria to other countries. These are the recruitment stage, transportation stage and exploitation stage.

A. The Recruitment stage

The traffickers resort into using deception, false promises, abduction and influence of authority over the victims to convince and recruit the women and young girls. The would-be victims are mostly from rural, socially and economically disadvantaged background.¹⁹

B. The Transportation Stage

Traffickers are able to obtain travelling documents for the women and girls from people genuinely issued with such documents by European Embassies in Nigeria or by corrupting other countries' border control officials. Recruited victims are transported by air across other West African countries, in particular Ghana and Ivory Coast, and in some cases South Africa, from where they are transported by sea to Italy. Turin seems to be the main destination of these trafficked women and young girls. Through over land where the victims are transported through various routes-Benin, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali crossing the Sahara desert to North African countries like Morocco and Libya and then by sea to Europe. The victims may also resort to using boats, ferry or foot as alternative means of transportation.

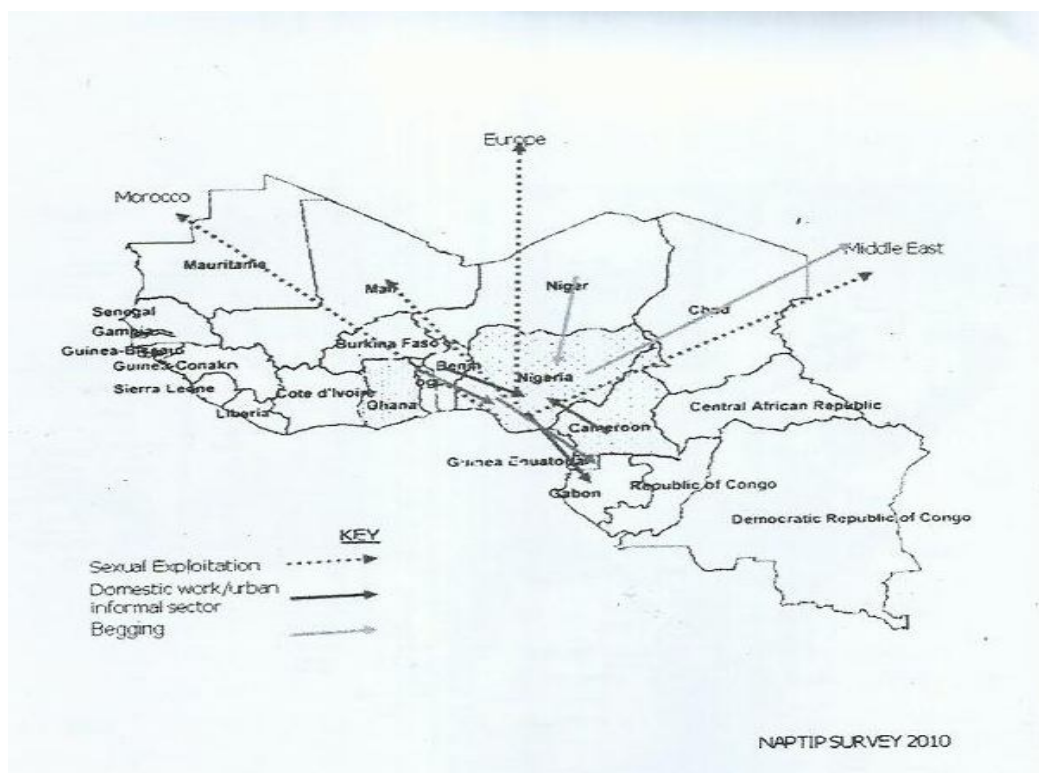
¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Simon Chuzi Egede, *op. cit.*, p. 7

According to NAPTIP²⁰, the following routes have been identified for trafficking In women and girls from Nigeria:

1. Nigeria (Kano)-Saudi Arabia (Middle East) -(for prostitution and begging)
2. Nigeria-Niger Republic-Libya-Europe-(for prostitution)
3. Nigeria-Burkina Faso-Mali-Morocco-Europe-(for prostitution)
4. Nigeria-Morocco-Middle East-(for prostitution)
5. Nigeria-Cote d'Ivoir-Burkina Faso-Mali (graduated from transit to destination)
6. Nigeria-Cameroun-Gabon and Equatorial Guinea-(domestic and agricultural labour)

Table 1-Various routes used for Trafficking Women and girls to outside Nigeria



Source-NAPTIP

²⁰ Simon Chuzi Egede, op. cit. at p. 11

C. The Exploitation stage

On arrival at the destination, Italy especially, the girls/women sold to “madam” who places them on streets for prostitution. The madam is responsible for handling all the money earned from their prostitution to repay the debts incurred in their transportation. The debt ranges from \$50,000 to \$70,000. This takes up to two or three years working night and day to pay off. The physical and psychological debts are enormous. Hence, they are constantly monitored and supervised while in the brothel. Narrating a gory story by a Nigerian prostitute in Germany, Ritha Ekweza said that²¹:

It’s not easy to stand and say something, but the thing is, when they bring the girls here, they will just tell them that everything is good, everything is easier, but when you come here it’s not the same situation. They will bring you and take advantage of you. Once Ekweza was brought to Europe, her traffickers informed her that she had to back some €60,000 (\$80,000) to them for her flight and other expenses. She worked as a prostitute seven days a week, sometimes attending to more than 18 men a day, to pay off the debt.²²

According to the Telegraph newspaper²³:

Once the women were in Spain they began their work as prostitutes but were not allowed to keep any of the money they made, as it was required to pay their travel debt

All the money which the women earned was kept by the ring until they had paid off the debt they incurred to make the trip to Spain, which typically amounted to €50,000 (£44,000). On getting pregnant, the victims are forced to have abortion performed by quack doctors or chemists and sent back to work the next day. When the victims are no longer productive or have contacted diseases, they are disposed off. Victims are constantly moved to different locations to prevent them from establishing relationship with other victims and clients. Any attempt to escape leads to threats, physical or sexual violence towards them or their loved ones in Nigeria.

²¹ Germany-Traffickers use voodoo to threaten Nigerian victims into prostitution, available at <http://www.dw.com/en/traffickers-use-voodoo-to-threaten-nigerian-vic...> Accessed on 11 July 2015

²² Ibid

²³ <http://www.hufingtonpost.com/2009/05/22/nigerian-voodoo-forced-p...> Accessed on 10 July 2015

The exploitative nature of the trafficked women and young girls' jobs has been sadly painted by Popoola²⁴ as follows:

Evidence abounds that a growing number of women who went in search for work abroad are deceived by traffickers into leaving their countries, believing that they will work as "dancers" or "hostesses" or will be placed in other gainful employment, really end up not only performing services in the forms of prostitution, pornography, "escorts" etc and in most cases live under slave-like conditions where their fundamental human rights are abused by the profiteer pimp.

The picture, which has emerged, is that the trafficked woman, particularly women:

- (a) are trafficked into prostitution in the host country to pay the traffickers fee;
- (b) live in unhealthy conditions, particularly brothels;
- (c) are forced to maintain an average of ten (10) customers per day, and to observe a "code of conduct". If the code is breached, they are forced to pay a fine;
- (d) are forced to work in sex clubs or massage parlours;
- (e) are lured into marriages with foreigners or under false pretence like promise of jobs in modeling agencies, night clubs etc;
- (f) are forced under the influence of drugs or by the use of physical violence and threat kept under control and from escaping.²⁵

Therefore, to the chagrin of many, the pasture was not greener at destination countries while returning was often impossible for so many reasons which include the fear of being described as failure, incapacity to repay emigration loans and being trapped within emigration/trafficking syndicates systems.²⁶

VII. Internal and External Trafficking of women and girls in Nigeria

Nigeria is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. Trafficked Nigerians are recruited from rural and to a lesser extent, urban areas within the country.

²⁴ A.O.Popoola, op. cit, at p. 10

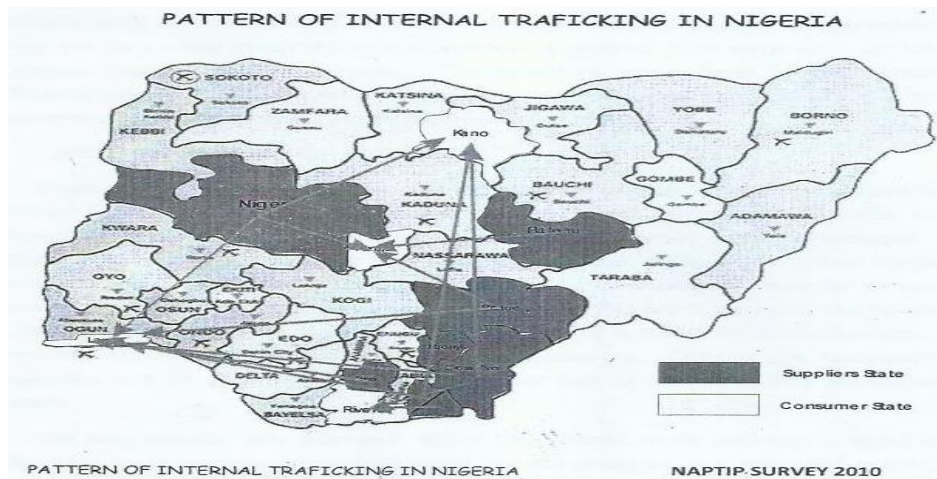
²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ See O.Akanle, (2009) Immigration Cultism and the Nigerian Migrants: Tidal Dynamism in the Age of Globalization in A.G.Adebayo and O.C.Adesina (eds) *Globalization and Transnational Migrations: African and Africa in the Contemporary Global System*, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 181-200

Women and girls are used for domestic servitude and sex trafficking. Nigerian women and girls are trafficked to other West and Central African countries and South Africa for sole purpose of prostitution. Nigerian women and girls mainly from Benin City in Edo state are subjected to forced prostitution in Italy, while Nigerian women and girls from other states are subjected to prostitution in Spain, Switzerland, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Greece, and Russia.²⁷ Nigerian women and children are also recruited and transported to destinations in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, where they are held captive in the sex trade or forced labour. Nigerian women are trafficked to Malaysia, where they forced into prostitution and to work as drug mules for their traffickers. In trafficking the Nigerian women and girls for sex trade, the traffickers rely on threats of voodoo curses to control their victims and force them into prostitution.

The most prominent source states for internal trafficking in Nigeria are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Baylesa, Benue, Cross River, Ebonyi, Edo, Imo, Kwara, Osun and Oyo(b)The most prominent destination states for internal trafficking include, Abia, Abuja (FCT), Akwa Ibom, Lagos, Ogun and Ondo. It is interesting to note that UNICEF study in 1998 indicated that about 4000 children were trafficked from Cross River and Akwa Ibom States to other parts of the country.

Table 2-Patern of Internal Trafficking in Nigeria



Source-NAPTIP

²⁷ United States Department of State , *2013 Trafficking in Persons Report-Nigeria*, 19 June, 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51c2f39c15.html> Accessed 8 July 2015

VIII. Voodoo and Human Trafficking

In addition to Christianity and Islam, local religious traditions are strong in Nigeria and have an important link to trafficking. The local religious traditions are related to ancestral spirits and spirits related to certain places. The spiritual connections between ancestry, places and resources are traditionally used to legitimize and consolidate the distribution of financial, political and social goods and rights.²⁸ Different forms of magic can be part of the local religious traditions. These are vital to acts performed for the purpose of influencing the course of events in the world with the help of hidden forces. The local religious traditions are practiced more or less openly by Christians and Muslims throughout large parts of Nigeria. Many young people who are strong in their faiths nevertheless reject these traditions as idol worship. The traditions as such or the magical rituals that are part of them are sometimes referred to as "voodoo". This word is sometimes used because it evokes certain associations in Europeans where the "voodoo" label is used exclusively for evil magic.

(a) Nature of Voodoo

Voodoo originated from Africa, especially with the Efon, Yoruba and Ewe tribes. Geographically, those ethnic groups can be found throughout Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. More than a religion or a cult of death, voodoo plays a major role in everyday life of the people. It comes from the Fon language, spoken in Benin, meaning "a kind of power which is mysterious and, at the same time, fearsome".²⁹ It has considerable influence on each person. The voodoo conceptualization of the world involves the belief in continuity between life and death. In voodoo, death is perceived as a regeneration of all society if the various death rituals and the burial services are well executed. It is believed that the cult of voodoo succeeds in attaining reconciliation between the world of the alive and the world of death.³⁰

²⁸ Metz, H.C, Nigeria, A Country Study, Federal Research Division Library Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁹ Voodoo, Available at <http://www.deathreference.com/Vi-Z/Voodoo.html> Accessed on 11 July 2015

³⁰ Ibid

The Loa or god of voodoo manifests through elements of nature such as the wind and rain, lightning and thunder, the river, the ocean, springs and lakes, the sky, the sun, certain animals, trees and stones.³¹

(b) How voodoo aids human trafficking

Mojeed³², a journalist for the Nigerian online newspaper 234Next.com who has written about voodoo and human trafficking, said voodoo, known in Nigeria as juju, was a fairly common tool of intimidation used by traffickers. The victims are very scared of the power of voodoo, so traffickers tell them that if they do anything funny they will invoke voodoo. They fear death, illness, any misfortune the priest tells them. Therefore, if the voodoo priest tells the victims that they will get smallpox, then they will believe they will catch smallpox.

On the power and potency of voodoo, Uzokwe³³ had this to say:

A major factor oiling the wheel of trafficking in the country is voodoo. Insiders in the trafficking business say that once arrangements for victim's trip abroad are completed, traffickers seal the deal by taking the victims to shrines of voodoo priests for oath taking. There, victims are made to swear that they would never reveal the identities of their traffickers to anyone if arrested whether in the course of the journey or in the destination countries.

The paper further reported:

When traffickers are arrested in Nigeria, victims have often failed to show up in court to testify against them for fear that they would die if they violate the oaths they took. In administering the oaths, traffickers usually collect the finger nails, menstrual blood and pubic hairs of the girls in preparing concoctions.

³¹ Severina KarunaMayi Singh, A Brief History of Voodoo, Available at http://www.complace.com/articles/Voodoo_History.html Accessed on 11 July 2015

³² The New York Times, Europe Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/23/world/europe/23spain.html?_r= Accessed on 11 July 2015

³³ Belief in Voodoo-A Threat to Holistic Progress in Nigeria (Part 1 of 2) Punch Online, 24 October, 2008, also available at <http://nigeriaworld.com/columnist/uzokwe/111108.html> Accessed on 17 July 2015

NAPTIP's Deputy Director of Prosecution and Legal Services, Mr. Abdulrahim Shaibu, said his agency had had difficulty prosecuting traffickers because victims are afraid of juju and are hardly forthcoming.³⁴ According to the Nigerian National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) about 90 per cent of girls that are been trafficked to Europe are taken to shrines to take "oaths of secrecy."³⁵

Many western countries believe that voodoo is simply a superstition where witches cast spells to control an individual or see into the future. Sadly, controlling victims, either psychologically or supernaturally, voodoo has become a tool used by many human traffickers coming out of West Africa.³⁶

In October 2007 the Dutch police broke up a trafficking ring that had been smuggling and exploiting Nigerian children, mostly girls, and which had also used threats of voodoo curses to gain a hold over them.³⁷ In addition, German federal police said that they had noticed new trend in human trafficking. According to them, some Nigerian traffickers were manipulating a belief in a traditional religion related to voodoo to intimidate their victims. Hence, a recent investigation of 600 brothels by the German Federal Criminal Police uncovered at least 170 Nigerian women illegally as prostitutes that led to the determination of 50 of them as victims of human trafficking.³⁸

In a report on Nigeria-EU Trafficking and Prostitution, where voodoo rites were used, the following graphic situation of the Nigerian prostitute was painted thus: 140 Nigerian girls were forced into prostitution in Europe by a gang of human traffickers using voodoo curse. They were brought into the Netherlands as asylum seekers and had disappeared from asylum centres in 2006 and 2007. They were then forced into prostitution in Italy, Spain and France. Most of them were young at the time, ranging from 16 to 23.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ See more ONDERZOEK/ West African Voodoo: A Technique for Control by Human Traffickers, available at <http://www.ckm.fier.nl/West-African-Voodoo-A-technique-for-control...> Accessed on 17 July 2015

³⁶ See more ONDERZOEK/ West African Voodoo: A Technique for Control by Human Traffickers, available at <http://www.ckm.fier.nl/West-African-Voodoo-A-technique-for-control...> Accessed on 17 July 2015

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Germany-Traffickers use voodoo to threaten Nigerian victims into prostitution, available at <http://www.dw.com/en/traffickers-use-voodoo-to-threaten-nigerian-vic...> Accessed on 11 July 2015

The girls were allegedly sent from Nigeria by the gang with false identity papers and instructions for an asylum application. They used voodoo to influence the girls into submitting and had to give blood, finger nails and pieces of their clothing and make a promise to a voodoo priest to pay back the money spent for their travel to Europe which they were told was between 30,000 Euros and 60,000 Euros each. The women and girls who are far from Nigeria, and in foreign countries and with no way out to liquidate the debts, live constantly in fear of going crazy or dying if they disobey those who brought them.

Spanish police on July 3, 2015 arrested 23 people in multiple cities for their involvement in a Nigerian human trafficking operation that forces women into prostitution with the threat of voodoo. According to the New York Times Report³⁹:

The traffickers lured their victims with promises of a better life in Europe and took them to a voodoo priest before departure, the police said in a statement. The traffickers then smuggled them to Spain, where they told the victims they had to repay a hefty debt for their journey through prostitution or face the wrath of voodoo spirits.

Voodoo no doubt oils the wheel of trafficking of Nigerian women and children. Once arrangements for the women and girls' trips abroad are completed, traffickers seal the deal by taking the victims to shrines of voodoo priests for oath taking.

VIII. (b) Voodoo Ritual Process

For many victims, voodoo and voodoo ceremonies are quite scary and have powerful effect on those involved. In an article written by Emmanuel Mayah⁴⁰ in a Nigerian daily newspaper, he gave a vivid description of a typical voodoo process. According to him, the ritual process through traditional and clandestine is very rhythmic and structured. Importantly, the ritual process is structured in such ways that create fear and reinforce compliance. Most often, voodoo priests or witch doctors recite incantations and requests victims to repeat some lines after them.

³⁹ Nigerian Voodoo Forced-Prostitution Ring Leads To 23 Arrests In Spain, Huffington Post, available at <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/05/22/nigerian-voodoo-forced-p...> Accessed on 12 July 2015

⁴⁰ Europe by Desert: Tears of African Migrants, SUN NEWSPAPER, Tuesday, January 5, 2010

Voodoo priests or witch doctors make victims perform symbolic rituals like picking a gourd from a drawn circle on the floor and hitting it three times on forehead and chest. Voodoo priests or witch doctors perform blood oath by mixing victims' blood with local concoctions. Concoctions often used include hair scrapped from victims' body and victims are made to drink the concoctions. This ritual may or may not be followed by incisions on parts of the body. Incisions are however key components of oath taking and general rituals in African traditional religions.

Victims are asked to say they are beneficiaries of traffickers' kindness and that with their mouths and souls they invite relevant deities to visit them with evils such as, sickness, misfortune, death and so on if they betray traffickers to police, immigration or other authorities at destination countries and if victims fail to pay the amount specified in the 'contract'.⁴¹ Symbols of oath taken from victims are labeled and deposited in the shrines as points of contacts in case of default.⁴²

In September 2011, a lady was summoned to the West African country of Benin to get a visa. The woman was then told to swear on oath to repay the money in a ceremony that involved cutting her armpit and pubic hair and taking finger clippings. The oath she was solemnly required to take was to repay that money, 40,000 pounds, on pain of death if she did not.⁴³

The traffickers had put the women through a juju voodoo ritual that used the victims' finger nails or pubic hair and involved animal sacrifice in front of idols in a temple in order to "guarantee that the women complied with everything they demanded, under threat of death to them and their families".⁴⁴ The zonal commander of NAPTIP, Lagos Zone Office, Joseph Famakin⁴⁵, explicitly put the effect of voodoo on victims thus:

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² M.Babandede, "Nigeria: Country Presentation on Child Trafficking, available at www.childtrafficking.com/.../babandede_nigeria_child_tra_0408.pps Accessed on 11 July 2015

⁴³ <http://www.orijoreporter.com/3-nigerians-face-jail-sentence-human-tra...> Accessed on 11 July 2015

⁴⁴ Fear of Voodoo magic used to control Nigerian women in Spain, available at <http://doubtfulnews.com/2015/06/fear-of-voodoo-magic-used-to-contro...> Accessed on 11 July 2015

⁴⁵ Op. cit

Human trafficking victims are forced to swear oaths at voodoo shrines in their local communities to instill fear in them. They are made to believe that they would die should they refuse to completely obey their 'madams'. Their nail cuttings, pubic hair, blood and other bodily cuttings are used to perform the ritual. If victims do not comply, the voodoo becomes the element of repression of attack. Generally, voodoo is used by traffickers to reinforce contractual obligations by victims, for example, those recruited for work overseas undergo a 'juju ritual' which binds them to their trafficker. The trafficker has a hold over their victim via a verbal or written contract supported by spiritual control.

In a discussion paper by ECPAT UK⁴⁶, the use of voodoo on Nigerian victims was stated as follows:

In Nigeria, traffickers frequently use ritual oaths to make children compliant...These ritual oaths are an essential part of African indigenous or traditional religions...and can have a significant influence over children, particularly since many of the children come from backgrounds where traditional religions and ritual oaths continue to be practiced.

The above was supported by Africans United against Abuse (Africa)⁴⁷ when it stated thus:

Many victims fearful of the repercussions of the oath taken are compelled to endure their suffering in silence without recourse to help or support. The fear of juju makes it extremely difficult for agencies to support victims and for the authorities to investigate, prosecute and bring suspected traffickers to justice.

IX Strategies for Combating Human Trafficking in Nigeria

This segment shall only consider the efforts put in place by National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) to combat human trafficking in Nigeria. In combating human trafficking, NAPTIP has adopted 4 strategies thus:

⁴⁶ <https://thetraffickingresearchproject.wordpress.com/2013/10/18/spell...> Accessed on 11 July 2015

⁴⁷ Ibid

a. Prevention

The government of Nigeria in an effort to prevent human trafficking has raised through campaigns the public awareness about the inherent dangers of trafficking. The NAPTIP's Public Enlightenment Unit has continued to conduct extensive national and local programming through radio and print media in all geopolitical zones of the country to raise awareness about trafficking including warning about fraudulent recruitment for jobs abroad. This also necessitated NAPTIP to carry out advocacy visits to community leaders, opinion leaders, traditional and religious leaders, and government officials at both local and national levels. NAPTIP has also developed a new five-year strategic plan on the coordination of anti-trafficking efforts for 2012-2017.⁴⁸

b. Protection

This involves activities geared towards a successful rehabilitation and reintegration of TIP victims into the society. Accordingly, the government of Nigeria and NGOs identified 480 trafficking victims within the country, including 303 victims of sex trafficking and 177 victims of labour trafficking. Another 92 individuals were identified as victims of trafficking related crimes. All victims identified by NAPTIP received initial screening and assistance by NAPTIP after which 250 victims were referred to government run care facilities for further medical care, vocational training, education, and shelter. In 2012, the Government of Nigeria allocated the equivalent of approximately \$11.9 million to NAPTIP, to help evacuate Nigerian victims who were stranded in Cote d'Ivoire⁴⁹. NAPTIP has also launched the Victim of Trafficking Trust Fund (VTTF) whereby it confiscated assets of the traffickers are deposited in order to compensate the victims of the crime. In addition, the Italian government has set up three important Nigerian based projects to assist the victims⁵⁰:

- i. The first project is the "Assisted Return and Migration Health Based that will be executed in conjunction with the International Organization for Migration. The Italian Government's counterpart funding is US\$ 800,000.

⁴⁸ See more on 2013 Trafficking in Persons Report-Nigeria, United States Department of State, op. cit

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Giovanni German, Human Trafficking as Transnational Problem: The Response of Destination Countries, op. cit, pp.45-47

The project seeks to offer assistance to trafficked people (especially women and children) who wish to return to Nigeria and also to see to their reintegration into the society.

- ii. The second project is an anti/HIV intervention programme for which the Italian Government (through the "Humanitarian Emergencies Department" of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome) has made available the sum of about US\$1.0 Million for an HIV/AIDS prevention programme through enhanced blood safety.
- iii. This is entitled, "Together Against Trafficking in Young Women, Adolescents and Children from Nigeria into Italy for Commercial Sex Purposes. It is prevention based and will have a geographical coverage in both countries with an execution time frame of 18 months. Its total cost is US\$800,000 entirely financed by Italian Government.

c. Prosecution

Traffickers have been tried in competent courts of law in Nigeria and abroad by NAPTIP Legal Department on various offences. Since inception, the Agency has successfully prosecuted more than 1000 cases and obtained 108 convictions as at 2011. Another 143 prosecutions remained pending at the end of 2012. The convicts are serving various jail terms and have had their assets forfeited to the Victims Trust Fund on the orders of the courts.

d. Partnership

This involves adoption of collaborative strategies among agencies in countries in the areas of information sharing, investigation and prosecution to fight TIP. There is therefore collaboration between the office of the Attorney General of the Federation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Prisons Service, Nigeria Customs Service, Welfare Officials and other Law Enforcement Agencies. There is also collaboration with United Nations Agencies such as UNODC, UNICEF, ILO, IOM, ECOWAS, and Foreign Embassies, NGOs (local and international). There has been partnership between NAPTIP and the ONSA, DIA, NIA, DSS and SSO in terms of information sharing on traffickers, trafficking trends, trafficking networks and the routes.⁵¹

⁵¹ Simon Chuzi Egede, *op. cit.* pp. 16-17

X. International Dimension and Cross-Border Elements of Trafficking

It is now obvious that trafficking is an international phenomenon. Even though a good deal of it takes place within every country, the most damning form of trafficking has cross-border elements and international dimensions. Therefore, the clear implication of it is that the problem cannot be tackled effectively at the national level. It requires international cooperation.⁵² Hence, it requires a concerted international assessment and response through genuine multilateral cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination in order to be eradicated.

A major step taken by the international community aimed at responding to trafficking is the adoption of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2000⁵³, which came into force on 25th December, 2003. However, according to Popoola,⁵⁴ problems could arise as to the effect of these conventions and protocols within a state, which has either signed or ratified them but has not passed any legislation to give them the force of law within the country. Thus, in Nigeria, no treaty between the Federation and other country shall have the force of law except to the extent to which any such treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly.⁵⁵ Therefore, a way out of the problem is to expressly incorporate the relevant conventions and protocols in the trafficking law with a provision that treaties and protocols that the country might enter into the future would also apply⁵⁶.

Recommendations

The root causes of trafficking such as demand for cheap labour, sex tourism, wide spread of poverty, gender discrimination, conflicts, corruption and restrictive immigration policies of favoured countries for migrants should be adequately tackled to effectively combat trafficking. Trafficking in persons result in cumulative breaches of human rights and therefore, it needs to be recognized in any intervention efforts.

⁵² A.O.Popoola, op. cit. p. 14

⁵³ Adopted by G.A Res.25, (A/Res/55/25 of 15 November 2000); annex II, U.N. GAOR, 55th Sess., Supp. No. 49, at 60, U.N. Doc. A/45/49 (Vol.)(2000), entered into force December 25, 2003

⁵⁴ O.A.Popoola, op. cit, p. 14

⁵⁵ Section 12 (1), 1999 Constitution as amended

⁵⁶ A.O.Popoola, op. cit

There should be mechanism put in place to enhance information sharing between states through bilateral and multilateral cooperation and increased data collection capacities, including through the systematic collection of gender and age disaggregated data. There is the need to increase cooperation and capacity of states to handle readmission and reintegration of trafficking victims in line with human rights.⁵⁷ Combating trafficking without addressing the need for women to be able to migrate in safety does not get to the root of the problem. An approach is to allow trafficked persons to regularize their status in the country to which they have been trafficked. Some countries, including the US, have such programs.

The government of Nigeria through NAPTIP should continue strong efforts to prosecute and convict trafficking offenders; and ensure that victims' rights are respected and that they are not detained involuntarily in shelters. Promoting gender equality through the elimination of gender discrimination and gender-based violence will enhance the dignity and human rights of women and girls and prevent their being trafficked. Public enlightenment on the human trafficking and smuggling should be intensified. There should be massive information dissemination, sensitization and training to raise awareness among the general population. Particular attention must be given to people living in areas of recruitment zones.

More efforts should be put in arresting voodoo priests and in the recovering of the articles of rituals to create a sense of confidence in the victim especially as the arrest demystifies the voodoo priests and the oath taking as it will enhance the level of the victims' cooperation. Use of cooperative but psychologically and emotionally rehabilitated former victims to gain cooperation of scared victim is also recommended. Officials could arrange counter rituals within the belief systems that the oaths were taken in the first instance to neutralize effects of oaths.⁵⁸ There must be mass anti-voodoo education in to effectively disabuse peoples' minds about the myths of voodoo. To gain victims cooperation therefore, psychological control must be appreciated and broken.

⁵⁷ Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, *op. cit.* pp.18-21

⁵⁸ Bolaji Owasanoye, *op. cit.* pp.13-15

Since most victims of trafficking in persons profess adherence to either Christianity or Islam in addition to belief in traditional religion, law enforcers can arrange faith healing and deliverance for victims in collaboration with local Pentecostal churches or imams /Muslim clerics .also officials could arrange counter rituals within the belief systems that the oaths were taken in the first instance to neutralize effects of oath. This will boost the confidence of the victims as all the processes are within the familiar belief systems.⁵⁹

Conclusion

In this paper, attention has been focused voodoo and human trafficking. Trafficking in persons is a global problem for both sending and receiving countries and it is evil, inhuman and against the law. While victims are susceptible and subjected to physical and psychological abuse under the control of the oath taken, sending or receiving countries experience systemic, financial and diplomatic burdens and backlash of the crime. While the real effect and outcomes of the oaths and rituals bring evils to the victims in case of default is still doubtful, its impact on the mind is potent and cannot be underrated.⁶⁰ Investigators handling cases involving voodoo oaths should try new methods to get victims' cooperation. Traffickers will continue to evolve and find new ways to control their victims and protect their enterprises, but it is important to understand the use of voodoo and the power that it has over victims of trafficking. No matter how dicey it is, any attempt at holistic development of Nigeria must include a deliberate campaign to debunk certain myths and primitive beliefs that make people do the wrong things or go in the wrong direction.⁶¹ The struggle cannot be won by the struggle of NAPTIP alone but efforts must be made to address the socio-economic conditions which facilitate the trafficking in the first instance, primarily it is important to eliminate the primary conditions which provide the enabling environment for human trafficking-conditions of abject poverty.

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ N. Ade Kwabena-Essien, "A New Look at Juju, available at <http://afgen.com/juju.html> Accessed on 17 July 2015

⁶¹ Alfred Obiora Uzokwe, op. cit