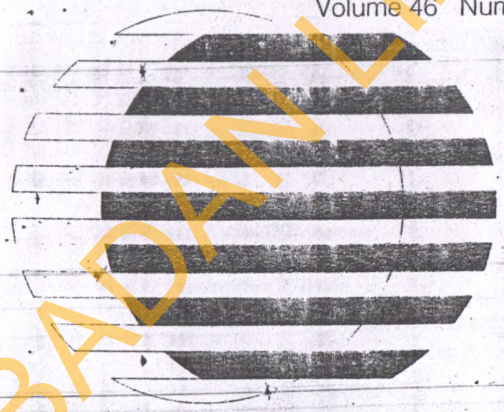


43

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
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Contents

- 519 Guest Editorial: On the Protean Nature of Crime
Julio Arboleda-Flórez
- 522 Psychopathology and Tattooing Among Prisoners
Laura Manuel
Paul D. Retzlaff
- 532 Psychological Profiling of Sexual Murders: An Empirical Model
Richard N. Kocsis
Ray W. Cooksey
Harvey J. Irwin
- 555 Bank Robberies by an Asian Gang:
An Assessment of the Routine Activities Theory
John Z. Wang
- 569 Teenage Prostitution and the Future of the Female Adolescent in Nigeria
Oluyemisi Bamgbose
- 586 Risk-Taking Behaviour and Criminal Offending:
An Investigation of Sensation Seeking and
the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire
Sonja Knust
Anna L. Stewart
- 603 School Violence in the Eyes of the Beholders:
An Integrative Aggression-Victimization Perspective
Ragnit Laskov-Peled
Yuval Wolf
- 619 Book Review
Ralph Slovenko

Volume 46, Number 5

October 2002

Teenage Prostitution and the Future of the Female Adolescent in Nigeria

Oluyemisi Bamgbose

Abstract: Nigeria has a large number of adolescents living and making a living on the streets. This has been attributed to economic factors and exposure to all forms of risks. The result is the proliferation of prostitution among the adolescents with its attendant problems. This article considers the different forms of adolescent prostitutes: those in brothels, street walkers, call girls, and casual, part-time, or floating prostitutes, as well as the trafficking of adolescent girls across international borders. The causes of adolescent prostitution in Nigeria are largely economic, sociological, and socioeconomic factors. A two-dimensional approach was adopted in considering the attitude to prostitution. Coping mechanisms include endurance, self-medication, seeking medical attention, and adaptation. The effects of prostitution are psychological reactions, psychosocial damage, and the political implication, which damages the image of the nation. Approaches to combat adolescent prostitution in Nigeria include legislative steps, governmental efforts, policy making, awareness programs, and the efforts of nongovernmental organizations, community conscientization, and societal measures.

Nigeria, like many developing countries, has a large number of adolescents living and making a living on the streets. According to Osirike (1998), adolescents constitute about 43% of the Nigerian population and make up the lower segment of the active population. They are forced to adopt survival strategies that are necessary to survive on the harsh realities of street life. This situation is contrary to known cultural practices where young children are under the protection of their parents, extended family members, and the community as a whole. It is also contrary to the principles in the International Instruments to which Nigeria is a signatory. The Nigerian government is not supportive of the situation in which the adolescents find themselves and is making every effort to protect these adolescents.

The truth is that in Nigeria, cultural values have broken down. The rights of the adolescents to life and to proper development are being flagrantly abused. This has been attributed to many factors, including societal and economic factors. One of the results is the proliferation of prostitution among the adolescents, with its attendant problems. Farley (1998) said, "At best, prostitution might be called a means of survival if you want a place to sleep, food to eat and a way to get off the street for a short time, then you allow yourself to be sexually assaulted. At its worst, prostitution is kidnapping, torture and the sale of parts of your body for sex by third parties."

In the past several years, considerable interest in issues pertaining to adolescents has developed in many countries. Therefore, there have been many outcries

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concerning the violent situation in which adolescents live, especially those who lead a life of prostitution. Prostitution is not per se a crime in Nigeria. It is, rather, a crime in relation to persons who assist, induce, encourage, trade, aid, or abet prostitution. Under the Criminal Code (1990) and the Penal Code (1990) applicable in Southern and Northern Nigeria, respectively, the following are some criminal acts relating to prostitution of adolescent girls in Nigeria:

1. having unlawful carnal knowledge with a girl under the age of 16,
2. householders permitting defilement of young girls on the premises,
3. hawking custody or care of a girl under 16 years and causing or encouraging prostitution,
4. procuring girls under the age of 18 years to have unlawful carnal knowledge with persons in or outside Nigeria or to become a prostitute,
5. procuring a young girl to leave Nigeria with intent to become an inmate of a brothel in or outside Nigeria,
6. abduction of young girls with intent of having carnal knowledge with such girls,
7. trading in prostitution,
8. managing or keeping a brothel, and
9. aiding or abetting prostitution.

The problem of prostitution is not peculiar to Nigeria. A report released by the Global March Against Child Labor ("Worst Forms of Child Labour," 2001) showed the shocking exploitation of children in almost every part of the world. Africa and Asia, however, host most problems of child prostitution. Child prostitution is prevalent in many of the countries in West Africa. It is widespread in Ghana ("Child Labour Prevails in Ghana," 2001). It drew the attention of the government in the Republic of Benin following the saga of a suspect slave ship in the region in April 2001 ("Child Slavery on Agenda," 2001). In Togo, child prostitution is a serious problem (Hughes, Sporcic, Mendelsohn, & Chirgivin, 1999). In a single month, January 1998, a total of 199 Togolese children were brought back from various countries in West Africa and returned to their legitimate parents. Ivory Coast also has its share of child prostitution problems ("Ivorian Government Blames Industry," 2001). The Ivorian government has put the blame for this type of child slavery on the industries.

Contrary to popular belief, prostitution is practiced by both males and females, although females are in the majority. This article, however, draws attention to prostitution among female adolescents in Nigeria. The author, being a Nigerian, is concerned about the rights of the children and the adolescents. Statistics have shown that in cross-border trafficking of children for prostitution, Nigeria is one of the countries known to be the main provider of child domestic labor (UNICEF, 1996). Young girls are tricked into prostitution in the belief that they will be housemaids. In 1997, about 700 children were found by law enforcement agents on the Nigerian-Benin borders and returned to their parents ("Child Peddling a Serious Problem," 1998).

Coupled with this fact are the frequent international news reports about the prevalence of Nigerian children involved in prostitution both within and outside the country. There is a concern because of the serious implications of the effects of prostitution on the female adolescent. The female physiological structure, especially in relation to the reproductive life cycle, encompasses important events such as the onset of puberty. According to Owuamanan (1995), this is a period of intense sexual drives, sexual experimentation, and exploration. The research methodology adopted in this article is basically a descriptive study and a literature review of adolescent prostitution in Nigeria. The article discusses the history, trends, and causes of female adolescent prostitution in Nigeria and the emergency caused by it. Its implications and present efforts at combating the problems and the various legal and nonlegal strategies for preventing and eliminating this form of prostitution are highlighted.

HISTORY AND EMERGENCE OF FEMALE ADOLESCENT PROSTITUTION IN NIGERIA

Adolescent prostitution is now out in the open in Nigeria after decades of what has amounted to a cross-cultural conspiracy of silence. It is a phenomenon also thought to be taking place in some Asian and Latin American countries where, according to Sack (1996), it has assumed the proportion of a multibillion-dollar industry with adolescents being sold and traded like other mass-produced goods. It is no longer restricted to certain parts of the world; it has penetrated into Nigerian society and is now a thriving business in most Nigerian cities. Writing on the history of prostitution in Nigeria, Naanem (1991) traced the rise of commercial sex workers, an aphorism for prostitution, to colonialism and the sexual habits of the colonist. Colonization, it was said, led to an increasingly monetary economy where sex could be bought like any other commodity. Many decades ago, there was an inaccurate conception that only young widows or separated wives were involved in prostitution. It is now clear from recent revelations that the sex industry is also flooded with female adolescents.

The disturbing fact of this recent development is that some parents and guardians of the young girls involved in this illicit trade are quite aware of this problem. And some government officials and unscrupulous barons choose not to talk about it as a serious problem, either because they are directly or indirectly benefiting from the proceeds of such heinous activities or they are simply not bothered.

To well-meaning Nigerians, the issue of adolescent prostitution is a national tragedy. This is because, traditionally, premarital virginity is expected and cherished. This culture was so valued that the families that protected their daughters from premarital sex were honored. In addition, virgins were treated with greater respect and esteem (Feyisetan & Pebley, 1989). Considering the great importance attached to virginity, parents exercised control over their daughters and prevented them from waywardness. However, these customs are disappearing.

What is being witnessed now is the gradual but pervasive erosion of the traditional premarital sexual norms and the indiscriminate sexual activities of female adolescents.

Attention must be given to this new development because of the sheer size of the adolescent population. According to Makinwa-Adebusoye (1991) and Faleyimu (1997), about one in every five people in Nigeria is between the ages of 10 and 19, a little more than 26 million people. The adolescent stage is also a time of hope, expectation, and excitement with immense prospects. It is a period of constant change in a person's life—physically, emotionally, and intellectually—a crucial period that can determine the future. It is expected that the stage should normally end in the emergence of an emotionally mature adult equipped to lead a socially and economically productive life. With the above facts, the trend and forms of female prostitution will be discussed.

FORMS AND TRENDS

The underground nature of the activities of these prostitutes and the illegal nature of the industry makes it difficult to gather reliable data. As stated above, the traditional importance of premarital virginity is gradually breaking down, and the trend is for some female adolescents to engage in premarital sex and prostitution. As observed by Nakajima (1994), the rate at which this trend is growing is alarming. Presently, the trend is that adolescent prostitution is given a new orientation with more glamour and sophistication. The consequence is the creation of different classes of prostitutes.

The trend in prostitution in Nigeria has changed from the way it was a few decades ago. Present trends show that younger girls are now taking over this illicit business from the older women who hitherto were the dominant practitioners. As will be discussed later in this article, the men who patronize the sex industry prefer these younger prostitutes. This does not mean that older women no longer engage in prostitution. Older women are still found in prostitution, either as practitioners with fewer clients or, now, commonly as pimps or "madams" who procure and train the younger prostitutes.

There are different forms of adolescent prostitution. Adisa (1997) and Olutayo (1997) identified the forms of prostitution as including those in brothels, street-walkers, call girls, and casual, part-time, or "floating" prostitutes. Unlike the traditional prostitutes who are usually older women, adolescent prostitutes start their career in prostitution in more comfortable hotel rooms or in a more sophisticated style. This is what gave rise to the form of prostitution termed the "Sugar Daddy Syndrome." Under the Sugar Daddy Syndrome, young girls patronize men, usually older in age, for sexual pleasure. Such older men who are wealthy are usually referred to as "sugar daddies" or "man friends." They are the favorites of adolescent girls who seek financial and material support in return for their services. The duration of this relationship lasts longer than a one-night stand, and the economic

power wielded by such older and wealthy men irrespective of educational status puts the young girls involved in a particularly vulnerable position.

Another form of prostitution in which the adolescents are mostly found is that referred to as “night brides.” According to Adisa (1997), these female adolescents adorn the major streets and junctions of the cities at night waiting for would-be customers. Such young girls take any person who is ready to pay for their services, and preference is given to foreigners who are able to pay in foreign currency. The fee depends on the nature of arrangement and the timing. One important aspect of prostitution among adolescent females is that some are involved in it as a part-time activity, whereas others take it as a full-time job. Many of the part-timers are students in secondary schools and universities who combine prostitution with schooling. They need the money to pay fees or acquire material things, such as clothes and shoes.

Similar to the night brides are the “floating prostitutes.” These categories of adolescents are found in motor parks and markets in the daytime, either loitering or involved in petty trading. It has been found that their mates or older men sexually abuse many of these girls in exchange for small amounts of money or gifts, which some of them hand over to their families.

The Women’s Right Monitor (1995), a nongovernmental organization in Nigeria, uncovered a sex haven in Lagos. Most of the victims were discovered to be street kid hawkers lured into sex for money. In many of the cases, the girls had a desire to go into the numerous film houses located in the area but could not afford the gate fees. Unscrupulous men who are found around the film houses take advantage of the girls by paying the gate fee to watch X-rated films. The girls are then encouraged to put into practice what they had watched. Sources revealed that the girls often find it a delight to go back having in mind that they can be “helped out.”

In a Nigerian newspaper report (“Blind Man Rapes Schoolgirl,” 2000), a blind man who was in the habit of sending young schoolgirls on errands, after which he gave them a small amount of money in return for sexual gratification, was arrested. He was arrested when a young girl who had been indulging in such acts for a token of money that she thought was a show of appreciation for errands carried out for the blind man, decided to introduce another young girl to the “benefit.” This shows the effect of enticement on the adolescent.

Another form of prostitution popular amongst female adolescents in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria is a more organized form involving “call girls.” In such cases, male and female pimps get in contact with already known and available females whenever there is a demand for them. The male clients in this form of prostitution are usually rich and influential men in the society. This fact suggests the oppressive nature of prostitution. The pimps live on the commission for making the contact.

The last form of prostitution discussed is the trafficking of adolescent girls across the international borders. It has assumed a trade dimension denting the image of the nation (Ayodele, 2000a). It is a highly organized form of prostitution by syndicates. The strategy adopted by the syndicate is to lure the girls by deceit in

the name of better living conditions. These girls later find themselves engaged in prostitution. On the other hand, some girls go into prostitution willingly because of the material benefits and the imagined changes in status that the proceeds from prostitution will bring. It is shocking that in a country where family ties are proudly flaunted as being closely knit, parents and guardians are also involved in the trafficking in exchange for material and financial benefits/rewards. Recently, concerned persons, government officials, and nongovernmental organizations have expressed great concern about this situation and have condemned prostitution, especially the aspect of trafficking. Teenage prostitution within and outside the country has been an embarrassment to the government of the country and damages the country's image ("Sex for Sale," 1993).¹ *Time* magazine, the *National Concord* (1987), and The Nigerian Television Authority (1999) all have reported stories on trafficking of adolescent girls.²

It has been the belief that the practice of prostitution was the result of poverty and that mostly females from poor family backgrounds indulged in prostitution. The facts now available on prostitution show that this is not the case. Social values, consumer lifestyles, and maintaining status in a declining economy have brought about this change. Adolescent girls from wealthy families are also found in prostitution. It is therefore important to consider the causes of adolescent prostitution in Nigeria.

THE CAUSES OF PROSTITUTION IN NIGERIA

The adolescent sex industry in Nigeria points to a fundamental injustice in the current materialist world order. It is an indication of a global willingness to sacrifice society's most vulnerable members for the sake of other economic and sexual gratifications. The truth is that with the involvement of the adolescents in prostitution, their future is being mortgaged.

The causes of prostitution are examined below.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Unless there is a change in the economic situation in Nigeria, prostitution will continue to thrive. The explosion of the adolescent sex trade comes down to the two basic forces of supply and demand. The widening gap between the rich and the poor is producing more potential exploiters for the sex industry, and family members generally condone prostitution as long as it brings economic benefit. A study by Orubuloye, Caldwell, and Caldwell (1994) attributed female involvement in prostitution to the need to meet the educational expenses. Davis (1971) had earlier affirmed this and said that in many of his research works on prostitution, the economic factor was seen as a major cause.

Odiagbe (1994), in a study in the Nigerian state of Edo, also found reasons why female adolescents are into prostitution. The reasons given include the lack of any

other job and the enjoyment of a relatively high income compared with workers in the civil service. It is obvious from these studies that high remuneration remains the driving force, and it is said that prostitution is a relatively easy means to earn and save money, which could be invested in other activities. The sustenance of prostitution is the economic motive, and many have remained in it because of the economic benefit rather than for any other reason. The high rate of unemployment, poverty, and economic hardship unleashed by the 1986 Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Nigeria contributed considerably to the thriving of adolescent prostitution.³ The resultant effect of SAP was the need for survival that then became a prime consideration rather than morals. The survival strategies and coping mechanism adopted by the females and their families to face the declining real income include "the offering of a girl of her body for purposes amounting to lewdness for payment," which is the legal definition for prostitution (Saunders, 1969) and was adopted with approval in a court decision (Webb, 1963).

The economic motive for prostitution is so strong that Emeke (1996) said it engenders a state of helplessness amongst the prostitutes with respect to when, where, and whom to have sex with and whether or not to use a condom in the act. This strategy is adopted in a desperate effort to save themselves and families from economic destitution. It is tragic that parents and guardians offer their children and wards to indulge in such acts. In 1994, for example, a woman thought to be a destitute sat under a tree in the heart of the city of Lagos with her children—three girls aged 10 to 13. She offered them as prostitutes to men in exchange for a token fee of 200 Naira (less than two dollars). The truth of the matter was that the woman, a widow, was one of those displaced by a demolition exercise without resettlement and, unable to pick up the pieces of her shattered life, she resorted to this criminal act unperturbed that her daughters could be murdered or assaulted.

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS

Societal effects play a prominent role in influencing behavior. Factors such as rapid urbanization, increased rural urban migration, and high unemployment are identified as causes of adolescent prostitution. In the southern part of Nigeria, many of the young girls now have a secondary education and many school graduates feel insulted to engage in traditional employment, thus contributing to the high unemployment rate. Prostitution is, therefore, seen as an avenue of employment for some females in Nigeria; hence, they refer to themselves as commercial sex workers. The quest for material things, peer influence, changing social values, and new consumer lifestyles makes young girls ready prey for the so-called sugar daddies mentioned earlier. The deep-rooted gender discrimination that blurs the perception of violence committed against girls is another reason for the thriving and increase in adolescent prostitution.

The economic and societal factors discussed above are not peculiar to the females or the adolescents alone. However, the female adolescents are mostly affected. The stage in the life of the adolescent being at an experimental age, vul-

nerability, exposure to the harsh realities of the outside world, exploitation, frequent changes in fashion, the quest for material things, greed, the weakened economy that has resulted in the high rate of unemployment, pressure from peer groups and, surprisingly, from parents and guardians, and the available clientele who patronize and prefer the younger prostitutes make female adolescents more susceptible to prostitution than other groups.

ATTITUDES TOWARD PROSTITUTION

There are two different attitudes toward prostitution in Nigeria, namely the societal attitude and the attitude of the prostitutes, both of which are discussed below.

SOCIETAL ATTITUDE

The attitude of society toward prostitution has not been the same over the years and there have been changes in recent times. This varies from outright condemnation of prostitution in the past to a more liberal attitude at present. This has been attributed to factors such as modernization, economic factors, and socioeconomic factors.

According to Busia (1950), before colonization in 1960, the societal attitude was that prostitution was disgraceful and the kinsmen of a prostitute did not condone it. In many communities in Nigeria, great importance was attached to the community's reputation and prostitution was frowned on. Young girls involved in prostitution were repatriated and stern measures were taken against them on their return to the community. For example, certain clans debarred prostitutes from attending union functions (Little, 1973). The prostitutes were restricted to their home areas and had to obtain permission to leave the village area. In other tribes, rites of purification were carried out and the disability of prostitution status had to be formally removed (Little, 1973).

According to Caldwell (see Little, 1973), as a result of the anathema associated with prostitution, there was a very strong emotional pressure exerted on girls to stay in the village, and this was based on the fear of getting involved in prostitution. With colonization and modernization, things have changed. There is a more liberal outlook toward prostitution than the way it was in the past. Although prostitution is still not considered as morally acceptable, economic realities have caused adjustments in moral attitudes. Prostitutes who are able to give financial support to their extended family members are now tolerated.

Among the Nigerian Hausas, prostitution is now an institution. It is seen as a way of salvation for women secluded by Muslim law and forced to marry against their will. It is seen as a way out of traditional conditions and situations that women had to bear.

ATTITUDE OF THE ADOLESCENT PROSTITUTES

The studies by Emeke (in Little, 1973) and Olutayo (in Little, 1973) showed that economic reasons are the overriding consideration in prostitution. Indeed, a large percentage of the young girls are not ready to quit prostitution. While a large number are ready to do some other legitimate businesses in the daytime, they indicated a preference to return to sex work in the evenings. Many claimed that the stigma on them after being prostitutes would not allow them to live a normal life out of prostitution. According to Akinnawo (1995), the young prostitutes have adopted coping mechanisms that include seeking medical attention, endurance, self-medication, adaptation, and consulting traditional doctors and herbalists.

THE EFFECTS OF PROSTITUTION ON ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The trauma of being prostituted is devastating. This vice, if not checked, becomes a great nuisance. The health of many of the participants may be jeopardized and other evils associated with it may manifest themselves. The multifaceted effects are discussed below.

HEALTH RISKS

Prostitution constitutes a health risk to both the actors and to society at large. The health implications include HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). In fact, prostitutes are significant HIV transmitters (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1993). AIDS has become a major public health issue in Nigeria. The World Health Organization's figures show that approximately 70,000 Nigerians have developed full-blown AIDS, and 1 out of every 100 Nigerians between the ages of 15 and 45 years is infected by the dreaded disease. The first case of AIDS in Nigeria was identified in 1984, involving a sexually active 13-year-old girl (Grange, 1990).

Female adolescents involved in prostitution are confronted with other health risks: (a) unwanted teenage pregnancy, (b) illicit and illegal abortion, (c) untimely death (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1991), (d) higher risks of maternal death, (e) low birth weight of babies, (f) premature birth, and (g) higher risk of infant morbidity and mortality.

Pregnancy in very young girls under 18 years of age is most dangerous to mother and child. There is a higher likelihood of death for the young adolescent mother during childbirth than older women in their 20s (Grange, 1990).

In Nigeria, abortion is not legalized. It is a crime. In many cases, female adolescents involved in prostitution who become pregnant resort to abortion by unskilled practitioners. The implication is that it increases the mortality rate of expectant mothers.

PSYCHOSOCIAL DAMAGE

Alongside the health risks is the psychosocial damage inflicted by prostitution. This causes a hazard to the life of the young girls. The effect is that at such an early stage of life, the young prostitutes are plunged into a reality in which violence, distrust, shame, rejection, and low self-esteem are the norm (Reid & Bulman, 1992).

PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS AND PHYSICAL ASSAULT

It has been discovered that many of these young prostitutes suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a psychological reaction to extremely stressful events. These reactions include depression, anxiety, irritability, flashback, insomnia, nightmares, avoidance of memories of the event, and a general numbing response to life situations. Other effects that are physical in nature are incidence of rape, physical assault, and threat with dangerous weapons. The psychological reactions may be a result of the physical assaults that occurred during the sexual exploitation (Reid & Bulman, 1992).

SOCIOLOGICAL EFFECTS

The society reacts to prostitution and prostitutes alike. Prostitutes are often shunned, ostracized, and considered unmarriageable. Another aspect of the sociological effect is the spread of HIV/AIDS from the urban to the rural areas. Sex traffickers are known to send young prostitutes who are infected with STDs back home to the village, where there is usually no medical care. The infected young prostitutes, who invariably are found unmarriageable, continue in prostitution and the virus spreads farther. Stigmatization is another sociological effect of prostitution. There is no opportunity for the reintegration of prostitutes into the society without the stigma and label of prostitution. Child abandonment is another social repercussion of prostitution. To avoid the stigma often attached to extramarital sexual involvement or prostitution, female adolescents are known to have abandoned babies conceived as a result of the illicit acts.

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Half a century ago, it was reported that the remittance alone from prostitution into a part of Southeast Nigeria amounted to more than double the public revenue (see Reid & Bulman, 1992). Prostitutes claimed that they enjoyed a relatively high income compared with workers in the civil service (Reid & Bulman, 1992). However, it must be emphasized that no matter the contribution of the trade of prostitution into the revenue of the country, prostitution damages the image of a country ("Prostitution: Envoy Chides Benin Girls," 2000; *The Punch*, 2000). Young

female prostitutes from Nigeria had often been deported back into the country. There had been features in the international newspapers about the nuisance such girls cause to the government of such countries. A traditional ruler in the Nigerian state of Edo expressed great concern on the issue of female prostitutes and their activities abroad. He sent a petition to the Nigerian federal government and advised that young girls from his domain should be refused visas into some specific countries where they cannot justify their reasons for relocating. The traditional ruler further appealed to indigenes currently involved in prostitution in Italy to return home in view of the fact that rehabilitation programmes had been put in place for them ("Erediauwa Recalls Benin Prostitutes," 2000).⁴

The present situation of prostitution in Nigeria is complex and requires a multi-faceted approach in finding a solution. It is therefore pertinent to consider present efforts and future steps to combat adolescent prostitution in Nigeria.

COMBATING THE ILLS OF PROSTITUTION IN NIGERIA

The approach adopted in combating the ills of prostitution in Nigeria has been the pooling of efforts by the various sectors. It has been complex and demanding. This is due to the nature of the practice, which is done in secret, in many cases by willing partners in the sense that one partner is involved for money or material gain and the other party for pleasure. The success comes from providing illegal services to a cooperative public that includes the actors and sometimes parents and guardians of a willing or coerced victim. Both internationally and nationally, there has been an effort to address and combat this problem. These efforts are discussed below.

LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

Nigeria is a signatory to some international instruments that contain provisions that condemn the sexual exploitation of girls and women. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women of 1981 (CEDAW, 1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (CRC, 1989). In the CEDAW (1979), Article 6 provides that countries that have agreed to the provisions of this convention must do everything within their power to stop the selling or buying of women. They must also ensure that women are not being sold into prostitution or for any economic gain. The CRC in Article 34 provides that state parties must undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. In that provision, state parties are enjoined to take all appropriate national bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent engagement of children in any unlawful sexual activity and exploitative use of children in prostitution.

At the regional level, instruments aimed at combating adolescent prostitution include the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR, 1989). Article 18 provides for the elimination of all discrimination against women and also ensures the protection of the rights of the woman and the child as stipulated in International Declarations and Conventions.

There are many national laws in place in Nigeria. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) very nobly highlights the rights and privileges of the adolescent. They are legally accorded protection from abuse such as prostitution. However, where there is an absolute lack of social and economic security, the reality is that the female adolescent has the brutal choice between any type of work including prostitution and starvation. Other legislation is The Children and Young Persons' Act (1958), which ensures the welfare of young persons.

GOVERNMENTAL AND NONGOVERNMENTAL EFFORTS

The Government of Nigeria has not been complacent in combating prostitution. There have been the concerted efforts of both governmental and nongovernmental agencies in addressing this problem. However, there is room for improvements from both kinds of agencies. Some actions taken so far by these agencies are highlighted and expectations in the nearest future are examined. The agencies considered are the law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, and the nongovernmental organizations.

The Law Enforcement Agencies

The police especially play a crucial role in enforcing the laws enumerated above. There is no doubt that the control of prostitution is demanding because some members of the public condone it and the highly placed barons have vested interest in it. However, the police have continued to display courage and to maintain integrity in pressing charges against persons encouraging such acts. This should continue without fear or favor of personalities involved. The activities of the security operatives in Nigeria on this issue are commendable. They have acted swiftly in combating prostitution, especially in the area of trafficking. However, there is room for improvement (Effah, 1996).

Security operatives at the borders have tightened up security and are alert to cases of smuggling children in and out of the country. It may be argued that open borders symbolize friendship between nations, but to many innocent young girls, it is a passport to hell. There is a need for internal cleansing of unscrupulous and corrupt security officers who take bribes from traffickers and agents and look the other way while they cross the borders with their human cargo.

Recently, the federal government established a national committee on human trafficking in the country to help fashion out an enabling policy to guide the government in finding a lasting solution to the problem. The committee, made up of three subcommittees—enforcement, publicity, and legislation—is charged with

the responsibility for formulating measures that would adequately address the illegal human trade ("FG Tackles Prostitution," 2000).

The Judiciary

Generally, due to many factors, the process of prosecution in Nigeria is lengthy. A speedier and more efficient system of adjudication and disposition of cases involving adolescent prostitution should be adopted. Traffickers found guilty should be punished to serve as deterrence to others.

Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

In Nigeria, NGOs have played a crucial part in combating the ills of adolescent prostitution. Organizations such as the Nigerian Venereal Disease Association, Center for Youth, Family, and the Law, Legal Research and Resource Development Center, Association for Reproductive Health, and many others have made an impact in this area. They are encouraged to continue the struggle to ensure the enforcement of the rights and the emancipation of the adolescent.

POLICIES

The federal government in Nigeria recently lifted the embargo on employment and embarked on a recruitment exercise for all categories of persons. Jobs have been given to thousands of unemployed persons, and it is hoped that this will reduce the incidence of prostitution. There are many more policies that the government should put in place to combat adolescent prostitution in Nigeria. These include economic policies aimed at eliminating poverty and hunger, which are a major causes of prostitution. Other policies that should be put in place are the Youth Welfare Policy addressing the peculiar problems of the adolescent and the Rehabilitative and Adolescent Health Policy that will design rehabilitative programs and support mechanism. These will be beneficial to those who are ready to quit prostitution or were rescued from traffickers and would discourage other adolescents from being enticed into prostitution. This will include counseling with a built-in strategy for behavioral change and cognitive restructuring and an alternative means of livelihood. This recommendation was made in Nigeria by the coordinator of the Task Force Against Human Trafficking ("FG Tackles Prostitution," 2000).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the above, the following are some recommendations aimed at reducing or totally eliminating the incidence of prostitution amongst female adolescents in Nigeria.

AWARENESS PROGRAMS

The level of awareness of the implications of adolescent prostitution should be heightened. There should be more enlightenment programs by the government, health-related institutes, and NGOs emphasizing that adolescent prostitution can bring a nation and her future to ruin. The media, market, and relevant associations should be actively involved in this campaign. Town criers, which are important and reliable means of disseminating information in rural communities, should be cooperating in combating adolescent prostitution (Ayodele, 2000b).

COMMUNITY AND SOCIETAL SENSITIZATION

In Nigeria, there are cultural values where family ties are proudly flaunted as being closely knit; communities play an important part in upholding rules and regulations. Breaches of laid down rules attract sanctions on individuals and for the acts of family members. Legislative restraint and imposition without improvement in the moral fiber of the society will not yield any results. The issue of adolescent prostitution cannot be addressed without considering the attitude of the buyers of sex. Men who patronize these adolescent prostitutes and the agents who procure them should realize that their nonpatronage of the sex workers is a step in the right direction for the building of a healthy nation. In addition, they should be advised that the survival strategy of a prostitute might become a death trap for them as client and many unsuspecting persons yet unborn.

These agents of prostitution include the buyers of sex, the traffickers, the intermediaries, the syndicates that run and own brothels, entrepreneurs that organize sex tours, producers of tourist brochures encouraging the notion that adolescent girls are sexually available, and the apathetic and corrupt officials who look away. There should be a review in the legislature on prostitution in Nigeria. Specifically, the area of soliciting should be looked into. There should be stringent sanctions for those who solicit prostitution. In the past, the raids carried out by law enforcement agents have resulted in the arrest of only the adolescent prostitutes, while the clients are neither arrested nor disciplined. The reason given by the law enforcement agents is that the prostitutes are easily identified by the mode of dressing, whereas soliciting for the clients is not tenable. With more vigilance, shadowing, and diligence, the male clients who solicit and patronize the prostitutes will be caught. This type of surveillance and arrest of those who solicit the prostitutes is being pursued by the police force in the United States of America and is yielding results. In combating the ills of adolescent prostitution, the focus should be more on preventive measures than punitive. Harm must not be done to the future leaders of the nation. No amount of penalty on the prostitutes or the buyers can repair the damages caused to these adolescent girls.

CONCLUSION

We are indeed faced with a disturbing and alarming predicament in Nigeria that concerns the future nation builders—the adolescents. They deserve all the love and protection that can be offered. The nation will have to rely on their resources in the future as moving forces in national development in generations to come. It is crucial that their well-being be foremost in the minds of all Nigerians, noting that their full potentials will not be developed if the abuses and violations caused by prostitution continue. Hopefully, in not too distant a time, the full guarantee of the right against sexual exploitation such as the protection against prostitution and human trafficking will become a reality for the Nigerian adolescents.

NOTES

1. This issue was of such great concern to the Nigerian Ambassador to Italy that he wrote a letter to the House of the Assembly of a particular state in Nigeria stating that out of 40,000 Nigerians in Italy, 10,000 are into prostitution and 80% are from that particular area.

2. *Time* magazine reported the disturbing news that young Nigerian female sex workers were trooping into countries like Italy and Saudi Arabia. In 1987, the *Concord* newspaper (April 15, 1987) reported the story of slave trade involving young girls in a state in Nigeria who were sold to persons who train them to work as prostitutes; the Nigerian Television Authority Network News at 9 p.m. February 6, 1999, gave a report of 11 girls and 3 boys from Nigeria who were intercepted by the police in Bamako, Mali, where they were to be exported to Europe to engage in prostitution.

3. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced in 1986 in Nigeria in the name of economic recovery. It was a recommendation by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. It resulted in the devaluation of the country's currency. In almost all African countries where SAP was implemented, the result has been economic hardship.

4. The wife of the Edo state governor has given support to the effort of the traditional ruler in the fight against prostitution. She launched a state campaign against prostitution that was becoming a menace among young girls. This has caused embarrassment to the government, as many of the girls from the state were being deported daily from other countries.

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