



## **Health and Safety Risk of Female Trafficking in Nigeria: Implications for Border Security Transformation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Human trafficking has become one of the most worrisome phenomenon and Nigeria acts as origin, transit and destination point for trafficking. The country is ranked as a third tier country in 2018 Global Terrorism Report. Weak border control and governance has been reported to play significant role in promoting trafficking in persons globally, especially in Nigeria. The disadvantageous stereotype attributed to the female gender is another contributory factor and it is more pronounced in the African highly patriarch society. Trafficking is a gendered phenomenon that has women as the most vulnerable group with adverse health effect. The vulnerability of women in trafficking is further portrayed in large body of evidence which demonstrates that trafficking has deleterious effect on psychological, social, physical and physiological health of its victims. This paper attempts to put the gender dimension of trafficking into perspective in relation to its adverse health effect on women and girl children. Addressing the issue through effective border control as a strategy to combating and preventing female trafficking in Nigeria was also discussed.

**Keywords:** border-control; gender; human; victims; vulnerability



## Introduction

Faith was approached by a woman who promised her a job at a Nigerian restaurant in Italy. Faith thought this was her chance to begin a new life, especially as she saw some fellow Nigerians return from Europe better off than when they left. When Faith arrived in Italy, however, she was informed she had to pay back more than \$50,000 in debt before she could leave. Her traffickers forced her into prostitution, telling Faith they would kill her if she did not comply ... (U.S. Department of State Service, 2018).

Throughout history, many actors and practices have threatened human health, safety and well-being. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is one of these practices that shook human existence and co-existence to its core. The wounds of trade in humans during this era have remained open and unresponsive to every healing attempt. Many African states, including Nigeria, that were major trading points in humans during the slave trade era have consciously moved to preserve the harrowing memories of the evil trade by preserving monuments and historic sites, maybe, as an effort to conscientiously discourage the act. The world heaved a sigh of relief at the abolition of slave trade but unfortunately, the trade has reared its ugly head again as a hidden economy and as 'modern slavery.' In its new guise, trade in persons has become trafficking in person with its usual deleterious heavy toll on psychological, physical, physiological and social health and well-being of its victims. Trafficking in persons has become one of the most notable public health problems at the turn of this new century. Unlike the crude method of force and brutality, conquest and capture, used solely during slave trade era, the modern day trade slave, human trafficking, utilises deceit fuelled by poor standard of living, hopelessness and avarice to lure people away from their immediate environment and use them as objects of economic gains to the traffickers.

The recent human trade market in Libya busted by CNN caused a global outrage just as fairly constant unfortunate deaths of thousands of young Africans trying to illegally migrate to Europe in search of greener pastures. Addressing the problem of human trafficking has assumed an international dimension with state actors having major responsibilities. Part of these numerous responsibilities is effectively manning their borders to prevent international trafficking and track down syndicates. Nigeria security challenges are numerous, stating that its porous borders contribute significantly to the myriads of security concerns, including trafficking, is stating the obvious. This paper attempts to x-ray the vulnerability of the female gender to human trafficking as well as quantify its effect on their health and well-being as gleaned from extant literature. Combating trafficking in persons using border transformation as a tool is further advanced as efforts aimed at finding a lasting solution to this hydra-headed monster continues. This is most important considering that Nigeria is ranked a tier 3 country in the Trafficking in Persons Report of 2018 (U.S. Department of States, 2018). This ranking implies that Nigeria does not meet the least minimum standard of preventing trafficking in persons and is not even making significant effort to do so.



### **Human Trafficking: Conceptual Clarification and Global Trend**

Human trafficking has been conceptualised and described using variegated terminologies and specific to differing conditions and circumstances. However, the most widely cited conceptualization of the term is that proposed in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (2000). This proposition as reproduced by WHO (2012) defined human trafficking as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the 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.

The above all-encompassing and encapsulating proposition covers all aspects of human trafficking and the methods employed by the traffickers. From the proposition above, it could be seen that trafficking in persons is not solely by deception but also has the brute force and coercion characterized by the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The stage or operational modality adopted, trafficking is informed, propelled and sustained by exploitation. While economic gain underlies this exploitation, there could also be other forms of exploitation which might be congruent or incongruent with economic benefits. For instance, trafficking persons for sexual exploitation could be using these trafficked persons as sexual objects for personal satisfaction or for monetary purpose. This form of trafficking could be said to be the most pronounced especially in developing countries where hopelessness and destitution force young girls to become sexual objects of traffickers in the developed world. While developing countries are largely seen as trafficking hot spots, Besler (2005) argues that almost every part of the world is involved in trafficking in persons. This is because trafficking does not begin or end in the origin of trafficked persons but also involves transiting countries that serve as destination points.

While human trafficking is a common practice in the world with variegated regional and national dimensions, situating its prevalence is extremely difficult because it operates a hidden economy. Meanwhile, due to diverse conceptualisations and jurisdictions, what is criminalised as trafficking in a particular country might not be in another country. Meanwhile, Oram (2011) observed that situating trafficking in persons as regards reliable data of prevalence is difficult because of various reasons. Notable among these reasons are the fact that trafficking in persons is illegal, often invisible and of different nature. Again, the range and severity of trafficking activities; and variations in how trafficking is defined in different jurisdictions also affect data on the actual number of people trafficked at any point in time.

Painfully, available statistics shows that trafficking in person is increasing while governmental actions is not increasingly matching the trend in rising profile of cases in the African context. The table below presents trend in human trafficking in a seven-year period the U.S. States Department.



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Year	Victims Identified	Prosecutions	Convictions	New or Amended Legislation
2011	8,900 (5,098)	340 (45)	217 (113)	2
2012	10,043 (6,544)	493 (273)	252 (177)	4
2013	10,096 (2,250)	572 (245)	341 (192)	7
2014	9,523 (1,308)	811 (49)	317 (33)	4
2015	12,125 (3,531)	1,517 (53)	719 (8)	6
2016	18,296 (13,205)	1,293 (54)	1,120 (21)	4
2017	24,138 (5,902)	1,733 (98)	454 (34)	2

*The numbers in parentheses are those of labor trafficking prosecutions, convictions, and victims identified*

Source: US Department of State – Trafficking in Persons Report 2018.

An analysis of the figures in the table shows that while there is increasing cases of victims' prosecutions and convictions do not reflect correspondingly, the increase in the crime. More painfully, governmental actions tend to be stable and low. Specifically, while 8,900 cases of trafficking were reported in 2011, only two new legislation or amendment actions were recorded. In 2017 when cases of trafficking jumped to 24,138 efforts of new or amended legislation was still two. This could have necessitated the reason why almost every African country especially sub-Saharan African countries are listed in the lowest tier three ranking. The low level of actions by state actors in relation to rising cases of trafficking is also lamented in the 2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (UNODC, 2016). There is therefore need for strategic actions in tackling trafficking in persons in Nigeria as it deleterious effect on health and well-being cannot be quantified. The next section attempts an overview of the vulnerabilities of the female gender to trafficking and its health effect on them.

## **Trafficking as a Gendered Phenomenon**

Trafficking in persons is a phenomenon that has some members of the society as its most vulnerable groups. This population is largely represented by women and children. As a result, trafficking is a gendered phenomenon that has the female gender as its most vulnerable group compared to the male gender. Although gender in this sense does not denote sex but the socio-cultural distinction of people as males or females; the term as used in this paper encompasses the biological sex distinction of being a woman. The major reason for the vulnerability of women in trafficking person is because of the use of these trafficked women as sexual objects. Scherrer and Werner (2016) in a report for The European Union estimated that 90% of trafficking cases in the region is for sexual exploitation.

It is equally important to stress that beyond the fixed biological distinction of women as being used as sexual objects, the gendered stereotype of the female gender in socio-cultural roles also propel the vulnerability of women in the trafficking phenomenon. This view is shared by





D’Cunha (2002) who made a distinction between the concepts sex (fixed biological distinctions) and gender – the different social roles, attributes and conduct that society deems appropriate for men and women, and that vary across cultures. However, most societies tend to stereotype women as wives, mothers and consumers, and men as bread winners, public figures, and producers. Socially determined attributes for women and men are likewise associated with their genteel domestic and productive public sphere roles respectively. The disadvantageous stereotype attributed to the female gender is more pronounced in the African highly patriarch society.

The vulnerability of women in trafficking is further portrayed in the report of The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT, 2017) as reproduced below:

Women and girls account for 71% of all trafficked victims detected globally.

Young girls represent almost three quarters of identified child trafficking victims.

While women still represent the majority of trafficking victims, the proportion of identified male victims has increased from 16% in 2004 to 29% in 2014.

The Secretary General Report on trafficking in women and girls acknowledges that “The harms of trafficking are known to be more severe for women and girls than for men and boys given the exposure of the former to specific forms of exploitation such as sexual exploitation and violence, domestic servitude and forced marriage.”

Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is the most predominant form of global trafficking currently detected, accounting for 54% of all forms of trafficking.

Females represent 96% of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation. Traffickers who exploit women for other purposes, such as forced labour, begging, and domestic servitude, commonly exert sexual violence over victims as a means of coercion and control. The share of victims who are trafficked for forced labour has increased in recent years. About four in ten victims detected between 2012- 2014 were trafficked for forced labour, and out of these victims, 63% were men.

Male victims represent 82% of trafficking for organ removal.

Social researchers have also studied trafficking in persons in the Nigerian context and reported the same global trend of trafficking being a gendered phenomenon. Nwoke (2017) examined women’s health, sex and trafficking in Nigeria and concluded that Nigeria serves as origin, transit and destination for trafficking of women for sexual exploitation and prostitution. Akor (2011) estimated that Nigerian women and young girls account for over 70% of persons trafficked yearly for sexual exploitation in Europe, specifically, Italy. In an empirical study Abdulraheem and Oladipo (2010) investigated the pattern of trafficking in women and children and factors influencing it. Quantitative and qualitative study designs were used. Women and children aged 15 - 49 and 10 - 14 years respectively constituted the study population. A multistage cluster sampling technique was used to select sample. Quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted. Among the interviewed women, 16.8% had experienced trafficking preceding the survey. The most frequent type of trafficking was commercial sex (46.7%) followed by child labour (34.5%). Educated and enlightened people (57.3%) appeared to be the main perpetrators of women and child trafficking followed by intimate/close associate (32.1%). Contributing factors for trafficking in



women and children in this study are poverty (58.7%), parental discrimination favouring boys over girls (51.4%), lack of knowledge of human slavery and trafficking (33.6%) and family disintegration (21.5%) increase in school dropouts, lack of governments' monitoring of trade working environment and poor socio-economic conditions appeared to be significantly associated with trafficking in women and children ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The vulnerability of the female gender to trafficking largely informed the United Nations' 2030 agenda launched in September 2015, to end violence and exploitation against women, including trafficking. The world adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and embraced goals and targets on trafficking in persons. These goals call for an end to trafficking and violence against children; as well as the need for measures against human trafficking, and they strive for the elimination of all forms of violence against and exploitation of women and girls (UNODC, 2016).

### **Effect of Trafficking on Women's Health and Well-Being**

Trafficking in persons has an unquantifiable degree of adverse effect on health and well-being of its victims. A large body of evidence demonstrates that trafficking has deleterious effect on psychological, social, physical and physiological health of its victims. In a systematic review, Oram (2012) identified 16 studies, all of which focused on the violence and health problems experienced by trafficked women and girls. It is however instructive to note that a major limitation in the study of consequences of trafficking has been overly based on sexual exploitation and sequeale. Most studies have focused on trafficking for forced sex work with little focus on trafficking for labour exploitation (WHO, 2016) and even for organ removal. Zimmerman (2009) also lamented that health-service needs of victims and survivors have received woefully limited attention. In the same vein, limited attention has been given to law-enforcement and immigration responses to trafficking (van der Laan, Smit, Busschers, & Aarten, 2011). Because research on health and trafficking has been conducted almost exclusively on sexual exploitation (Abdulraheem & Oladipo, 2010; Akor, 2011; Ostrosvchi, 2011; Nwoke, 2017), evidence generally focuses on sexual health, especially related to STIs (Akor, 2011; Nwoke, 2017).

Similar results have been reported in health consequences of trafficking experienced by women especially for sexual exploitation in Europe (Hossain, 2010), Nigeria (Akor, 2011; Nwoke, 2017), Nepal (Tsutsumi, 2008) Moldova (Ostrovschi, 2011), Philipines (McTavish, 2017). A quantitative study in Europe by Hossain, (2010) documented the physical, sexual and mental health symptoms experienced by women trafficked for sexual exploitation. In this multi-site survey of approximately 200 women, the majority reported high levels of physical or sexual abuse before (59%) and during (95%) their exploitation and multiple concurrent physical and mental health problems immediately after their trafficking experience. The most commonly reported physical health symptoms included fatigue, headaches, sexual and reproductive health problems (e.g. STIs),



back pain and significant weight loss. Follow-up interviews with the women revealed that mental health symptoms persisted longer than most of the physical health problems. This thus implies that emotional health effect is more lasting than the physical and physiological effect.

Other health consequences of trafficking generally experienced by victims as documented by the WHO (2012) include:

#### ***Poor Mental Health***

Poor mental health is a dominant and persistent adverse health effect associated with human trafficking. Psychological consequences include depression; post-traumatic stress disorder and other anxiety disorders; thoughts of suicide; and somatic conditions including disabling physical pain or dysfunction.

#### ***Tendency of Substance Abuse***

Forced or coerced use of drugs and alcohol is frequent in sex trafficking. Drugs and alcohol may be used as a means to control individuals and increase profits, or as a coping method or by the trafficked person as a coping method.

#### ***Exposure to Forced Organ Harvesting***

Trafficked persons are exposed to kidnapping in order to forcefully harvest their organs. Human internal organs such as kidney, heart and liver are often in demand hence the reason for existing black markets for them. Victims are prone to poor medical procedure during and after harvesting. Consequently, a trafficked person whose organ has been forcefully harvested is left to face the attendant health complications and in some cases, eventual death. Caulfield T. , [Duijst W.](#), [Bos M.](#), [Chassis I.](#), [Codreanu I.](#), [Danovitch G.](#), [Gill J.](#), [Ivanovski N.](#), and [Shin M.](#) (2016) reported that Physicians and other health care professionals seem well placed to play a role in the monitoring and, perhaps, in the curtailment of the trafficking in human beings for the purpose of organ removal.

#### ***Social Isolation***

Imposed social isolation, such as prevention of family contact or restriction of a person's movements, is used to maintain power over people in trafficking situations, as is emotional manipulation by the use of threats and false promises.

#### ***Economic Deprivation and Exploitation***

Trafficked people rarely have decision-making power over what they earn and may be charged by traffickers for 'services' or 'supplies' such as housing, clothes, food or transport.

#### ***Instruments of Security Threats***

Ignorant elements among trafficked persons could be used by criminals and even so, terrorists (who take advantage of victim's ignorance) in importing dangerous and harmful substances into the



country including armed weapons as well as contraband and substantial goods that can adversely impair the well-being and security of the society.

### ***Legal Insecurities***

Legal insecurities are common for people who travel across borders, particularly when traffickers or employers confiscate identity documents or give false information about rights, including access to health services. This may not only limit people's use of medical services but also lead to unjust deportation or imprisonment. Trafficked people may not be acknowledged as victims of crime but instead treated as violators of migration, labour or prostitution laws and held in detention centres or imprisoned as illegal immigrants.

### ***Social Stigmatization and Stereotype***

Trafficked people who return home may go back to the same difficulties they left but with new health problems and other challenges, such as stigma. For those who try to remain in the location to which they were trafficked, many encounter the insecurities and stresses found in asylum-seeking and refugee populations. People who manage to leave a trafficking situation, whether they return to their country of origin or not, are at a notable risk of being trafficked again.

## **Tackling Trafficking Using Border Transformation as a Tool**

While human trafficking can and does occur within any space, its trans-national dimension is worrisome and of grave concern. This is because people trafficked outside their national borders are extremely vulnerable as they might not even be versed in the local language of their transit or destination points. It is however important to maintain that trafficking, even within the same suburb or precinct is a crime which is dehumanizing and demoralizing. The US Department (2018) identifies national government as major actors in the prevention of trafficking and prosecution of traffickers. A large body of evidence alludes to the fact that a major way of realizing this objective, especially in the Nigeria context is through border control (Akor, 2011; Nwoke, 2017). The high level of trafficking in Nigeria demonstrated by its status as origin, transit and destination country for trafficking in person has been attributed to weak border control.

The weak state of Nigerian border system can be related to Rusev (2013) proposition that trafficking thrives when there is official corruption among border officials and the organised crime and syndicate operational system. Compromised officials who might be linked to trafficking syndicate might and do provide cover for trafficking syndicate to move victims via air, sea or land. As a country grappling with official corruption, it might be rational to state that official corruption in border control and governance plays strategic role in trafficking in persons in Nigeria. Many years after the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) was created, Nigeria is still seen as one of the weakest countries in trafficking prevention and control (Global





Trafficking Report, 2018). There is therefore need for concerted effort to reposition and transform border control and governance in Nigeria so as to move the country to a tier one nation in the global fight against trafficking in persons.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Human trafficking or trafficking in persons is one of the most notable problems confronting mankind. It involves the forceful or deceitful movement of people from one destination to another to be used as objects for economic gains or for the purpose of organ removal. Nigeria has a bleak picture in the global effort to prevent and control trafficking in persons as it is ranked a third tier country in the 2018 Global Trafficking Report. As a third tier country, Nigeria is among countries with the worst indicators in tackling trafficking in persons. The country serves as origin, transit and destination point for human trafficking. While global effort is strategic in combating and controlling human trafficking, the roles of state actors are indispensable. Since evidence shows that weak borders contribute effectively to human trafficking and evidence from the Nigerian context has supported this. A major indicator that all is not well with border control in relation to movement of persons in Nigeria is the recent involvement of the Nigerian Customs Service instead of the Immigration in the monitoring of someone that has been declared wanted by a governmental agency. If such a highly placed agency of government cannot distinguish between the roles of the Nigerian Custom Service and Nigerian Immigration Service in the movement of goods and persons in and out of Nigeria, then, there is a major reason to worry. If the action is described as a political master stroke, it further justifies that Nigerian border agents cannot be trusted.

There is need to overhaul the border control and governance apparatus and strategies. Against this end, the followings are recommended:

- The Nigerian porous border should be declared a state of emergency as it does not only affect trafficking but general security in Nigeria
- The border control arm of the Nigerian Immigration Service must be strengthened and if possible, a unit to specifically focus on trafficking should be created
- Border posts should be built and equipped as well as manned with highly motivated personnel to forestall trafficking in persons in and out of Nigeria
- There is need for honest and objective appraisal of the border control governance with a view to identifying compromised elements and prosecuting them to serve as deterrent to others.
- Strong collaboration as regards inter-agency security apparatus in Nigeria is needed to enforce border movements' laws and trafficking.
- A joint border fund can be drawn from state governors' and the president's security votes to recruit and engage highly motivated force drawn from the nation's security system or the local communities to break trafficking syndicate along the borders and prevent trafficking.



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