

# Human Trafficking In West African Sub-Region: Causes and Implications

Professor Frank-Collins N. Okafor<sup>1</sup> and Agu Chinonyelum F<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science, Caritas University, Amorji Nike Enugu, Enugu State  
07061095402

Email address aguchinonyelum828@gmail.com

**Abstract:** West African sub-region has witnessed continued spate of cross-border crimes ranging from human trafficking, arms trafficking, drug trafficking, armed robbery on the highways, smuggling of various types-petroleum products, cars, cigarettes and other items. Human trafficking is one of the cross border crimes that has taken its toll on West Africa. The objective of this paper is to critically the causes of human trafficking and its implications on West African sub-region. The Framework of analysis adopted in this work is systemic theory. The position of this theory is that reason(s) for any social conflict lie in the social context within which it occurs. The methodology is documentary records-Textbooks, Newspapers, Magazines, Journals, etc usually referred to as secondary sources of data collection. While content analysis was adopted in analyzing the data generated. The causes of causes of human trafficking includes: poverty, globalization. Unemployment, gender based violence, conflicts, while the implications include among others economic implication, social implication, political implication etc. ECOWAS should as a matter of urgency synergize, collaborate and coordinate their activities in order to stamp out this ugly monster in the sub-region. The national governments should address the issue of poverty and unemployment and make education available and affordable at all levels. Corruption is a major issue in governance in West Africa therefore ECOWAS should ensure that corruption is tackled with all seriousness.

**Keywords:** Human trafficking, child-labor, exploitation, socio-economic implications.

## Introduction

West Africa is oriented west of an imagined North – South axis lying close to 10° East Longitudes. The Atlantic Ocean forms the Western and Southern borders of the region. The Northern border is the Sahara Desert with the Niger bend generally considered the Northern most part of the region. The Eastern border is less precise with some placing it at the Benue trough, and others on a line running from Mount Cameroon to Lake Chad. West Africa is vast covering 5,112,903 sq km and comprises sixteen (16) (English, French and Portuguese speaking) countries that initially formed the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), namely; Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. According to Ene (2010) in 2006, the West Africa’s population was estimated at 320 million or 29 percent of the entire African population. About 60 percent (60%) of the populations are illiterate and over 70 percent (70%) lack access to safe drinking water and medical facilities. A large part of the population is unemployed. Most of the citizens live in abject poverty and the countries are highly indebted to western Lending Institutions. Nwoko (2011) politically, most states in West Africa are evolving democratic regimes. However, since 1990s West Africa has witnessed and continued to witness series of cross-border criminal activities, ranging from human trafficking, arms trafficking, drug trafficking, armed robbery on the high ways, child soldiers, terrorism etc. Human trafficking in all its forms constitutes a serious challenge to humanity, affecting millions of women and men, as well as girls and boys, in numerous countries in West African sub-region.

## Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Systemic Theory as its Framework of analysis. Systemic theory provides a sociological explanation for the emergence of violent social conflicts-human trafficking. The position of this theory is that reason(s) for any social conflict lie in the social context within which it occurs. Systemic social, cultural, and economic policies or practices may marginalize or discriminate against individuals-women and children, groups-poor and uneducated, because they are poor, are intellectually or physically disables or because of their gender or ethnicity. As Johnson (1966) notes in the case of political violence –human trafficking, “any analytical penetration of the behaviour characterized as ‘purposive political violence-human trafficking’ must utilize as its tool a conception of the social context it occurs”, this time around the socio-economic conditions of the victims of human trafficking. This paradigm turns our focus to social factors- poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and social exclusion and the effects of large scale and sudden changes in social, political and economic processes that would usually guide against instability. Systemic factors that lead to changes in peoples’ material comfort include environmental degradation occasioned by globalization-(the demand for commercial sex) and depilation of the ozone layer that reduces access to source of livelihood-(unemployment), uncontrolled population growth in urban centres, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and other third world countries, resource scarcity and its allocation through lopsided-(centres of comfort and tension) political processes and competition, the negative effects of colonial and Cold War legacies, breakdown of cherished values and traditions that play crucial social control functions, widespread poverty in the midst of plenty as witnessed in third world countries (particularly in West Africa)

the domination and marginalization of minority groups (gender inequality) by those in the majority, (domination of women by men) and ethnicity. Systemic theory also seeks to explain the relationship between modernization and political disorder and see movements between different periods of economic and political history as containing large amounts of "pull factor" –increase demands of commercial sex, globalization, arms conflicts, tension and crises that create conditions of internal conflicts and instability. Pye (1966) for instance identifies identity crisis, legitimacy crisis, penetration crisis, participation crisis, integration crisis, and distribution crisis as six key issues within modernization projects that generate conflict. The inability to manage the challenges that result from these produce the immediate factors that lead to negative development within the system- which manifest in the high level of criminalities in West African sub-region. This theory is apt to this study as it tries to make us understand that human trafficking in West African sub-region is systemic because of high level of corruption, poverty, unemployment, and weak and fragile political and economic institutions.

### Conceptual Analysis

Human Trafficking is a crime under international law and both the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), the Council of Europe Convention on Trafficking in Human Beings (Council of Europe Trafficking Convention) and (ECOWAS CONVENTION Article 84 of the Revised Treaty).

The exploitation of one human being by another is the basest crime, and yet trafficking in persons (TIPs) remains all too common. The crime of trafficking in persons affects virtually all regions of the world. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines human trafficking or trafficking in persons:

*"Trafficking in Persons" ... mean[s] 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. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (Article 3, paragraph (a)).*

The Protocol further elaborates that the consent of a trafficked person may be rendered irrelevant when obtained through improper means:

The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used; (Article 3, paragraph (b)). In the case of trafficked children, the Protocol elaborates that the vulnerable status of children makes it impossible for them to consent regardless of whether any improper means were used or not:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article; (Article 3, paragraph (c)).

"Child" shall mean any person under eighteen, (Article 3, paragraph (d)). Exploitation shall include at a minimum the exploitation the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs, consent of the victim becomes irrelevant within the context of this definition. The Protocol assumes that adults and children of both sexes can become victims of human trafficking. It also postulates that individual free will of victims must have been manipulated, constrained, subdued in some manner to allow for exploitation. The process of trafficking in human beings has essentially been divided into three phases namely recruitment, transferal and exploitation in the country of destination.

The global Report (2017,P.34) recorded that:-

*From a regional perspective, the increases in the numbers of detected victims have been more pronounced in the Americas and in Asia. These increases can be the result of enhanced national capacities to detect, record and report data on trafficking victims, or to a growth in the incidence of trafficking, that is, that more victims have been trafficked. Enhanced national capacity to detect victims could be achieved through strengthened institutional efforts to combat trafficking including legislative reforms, coordination among national actors, special law enforcement capacities and improved victim protection efforts, to mention some. In countries with a long-standing anti-trafficking framework, with no major recent legislative or programmatic initiatives, more detections may be more likely to reflect an increased number of trafficked victims.*

Some of the commonest routes are by land from Nigeria through the neighboring countries of Republics of Benin and Togo to Ghana or Mali where orientation and change of identities are conducted for those to travel by air.

### Types of Human Trafficking in West Africa

**Bonded Labor**, or debt bondage, is probably the least known form of labor trafficking today, and yet is the most widely used method of enslaving people. Victims become "bonded" when their labor, the labor which they themselves hired and the tangible goods they have bought are demanded as a means of repayment for a loan or service whose terms and conditions have not been defined, or

where the value of the victims' services is not applied toward the liquidation of the debt. Generally, the value of their work is greater than the original sum of money "borrowed".

**Forced Labor** is a situation in which victims are forced to work against their own will under the threat of violence or some other form of punishment; their freedom is restricted and a degree of ownership is exerted. Men are at risk of being trafficked for unskilled work, which globally generates 31 billion USD according to the International Labor Organization. Forms of forced labor can include domestic servitude, agricultural labor, sweatshop factory labor, janitorial, food service and other service industry labor, and begging. Some of the products that can be produced by forced labor are: clothing, cocoa, bricks, coffee, cotton, and gold. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the single largest global provider of services to victims of trafficking, reports receiving an increasing number of cases in which victims were subjected to forced labor.

### **Domestic Servitude**

Involuntary domestic servitude is a form of human trafficking found in unique circumstances—work in a private residence—that create distinct vulnerabilities for victims. It is a crime in which domestic workers are not free to leave their employment and are abused and underpaid, if paid at all. Many domestic workers do not receive the basic benefits and protections commonly extended to other groups of workers—things as simple as a day off. Moreover, their ability to move freely is often limited, and employment in private homes increases their vulnerability and isolation. In addition to facing involuntary servitude, domestic workers, especially women, confront various forms of abuse, harassment, and exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence.

### **Child labor**

This is a form of work that may be hazardous to the physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development of children and can interfere with their education. According to the International Labor Organization, the global number of children involved in child labor has fallen during the past decade – it has declined by one third, from 246 million in 2000 to 168 million children in 2012. Child exploitation may also involve forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, the removal of organs, illicit international adoption, trafficking for early marriage, recruitment as child soldiers, for use in begging or as athletes such as child camel jockeys or football players. Traffickers in children may take advantage of the parents' extreme poverty. Parents may sell children to traffickers in order to pay off debts or gain income, or they may be deceived concerning the prospects of training and a better life for their children.

### **Sex trafficking**

Trafficking for sexual exploitation was formerly thought of as the organized movement of people, usually women, between countries and within countries for sex work with the use of physical coercion, deception and bondage through forced debt. Trafficked women and children, for instance, are often promised work in the domestic or service industry, but instead are sometimes taken to brothels where they are required to undertake sex work, while their passports and other identification papers are confiscated.

### **Child Sex Trafficking**

When a child (younger than 18 years of age) is recruited, enticed, harbored, transported, provided, obtained, patronized, solicited, or maintained to perform a commercial sex act, proving force, fraud, or coercion is not necessary for the offense to be characterized as human trafficking. There are no exceptions to this rule: no cultural or socioeconomic rationalizations alter the fact that children who are exploited in prostitution are trafficking victims. Sex trafficking has devastating consequences for children, including long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDS), drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism, and even death.

### **Unlawful Recruitment and use of Child Soldiers**

Child soldiering is a manifestation of human trafficking when it involves the unlawful recruitment or use of children—through force, fraud, or coercion—by armed forces as combatants or other forms of labor. Some child soldiers are also sexually exploited by armed groups. Perpetrators may be government armed forces, paramilitary organizations, or rebel groups. Many children are forcibly abducted to be used as combatants. Others are made to work as porters, cooks, guards, servants, messengers, or spies. Young girls can be forced to marry or have sex with commanders and male combatants. Both male and female child soldiers are often sexually abused.

### **Forced Marriage**

A forced marriage is a marriage where one or both participants are married without their freely given consent. *Servile marriage* is defined as a marriage involving a person being sold, transferred or inherited into that marriage. According to ECPAT (2013) Child trafficking for forced marriage is simply another manifestation of trafficking and is not restricted to particular nationalities or countries. A forced marriage qualifies as a form of human trafficking in certain situations. If a woman is sent abroad, forced into the marriage and then repeatedly compelled to engage in sexual conduct with her new husband, then her experience is that of *sex trafficking*. If the bride is treated as a domestic servant by her new husband and/or his family, then this is a form of *labor trafficking*.

### **Labor Trafficking**

Labor trafficking is the movement of persons for the purpose of forced labor and services. It may involve bonded labor, involuntary servitude, domestic servitude, and child labor. Labor trafficking happens most often within the domain of domestic

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work, agriculture, construction, manufacturing and entertainment; and migrant workers and indigenous people are especially at risk of becoming victims. People smuggling operations are also known to traffic people for the exploitation of their labor, for example, as transporters.

### **Trafficking for Organ Trade**

Trafficking in organs is a form of human trafficking. It can take different forms. In some cases, the victim is compelled into giving up an organ. In other cases, the victim agrees to sell an organ in exchange of money/goods, but is not paid (or paid less). Finally, the victim may have the organ removed without the victim's knowledge (usually when the victim is treated for another medical problem/illness – real or orchestrated problem/illness). Migrant workers, homeless persons, and illiterate persons are particularly vulnerable to this form of exploitation.

Trafficking for organ trade often seeks kidneys. Trafficking in organs is a lucrative trade because in many countries the waiting lists for patients who need transplants are very long.

### **Causes of Human Trafficking in West Africa**

A complex set of factors fuel human trafficking, including poverty, unemployment, social norms that discriminate against women, commercial demand for sex, institutional challenges, and globalization.

### **Poverty**

Poverty and lack of educational and economic opportunities in one's hometown may lead women to voluntarily migrate and then be involuntarily trafficked into sex work. As globalization opened up national borders to greater exchange of goods and capital, labor migration also increased. Less wealthy countries have fewer options for livable wages. The economic impact of globalization pushes people to make conscious decisions to migrate and be vulnerable to trafficking. Gender inequalities that hinder women from participating in the formal sector also push women into informal sectors. Long waiting lists for organs in the United States and Europe created a thriving international black market. Traffickers harvest organs, particularly kidneys, to sell for large profit and often without properly caring for or compensating the victims. Victims often come from poor, rural communities and see few other options than to sell organs illegally.

### **Globalization**

Globalization and the rise of Internet technology has also facilitated sex trafficking. Online classified sites and social networks such as Craigslist have been under intense scrutiny for being used by johns and traffickers in facilitating sex trafficking and sex work in general. Traffickers use explicit sites and underground sites (e.g. Craigslist, Backpage, MySpace) to market, recruit, sell, and exploit women. Traffickers and pimps use the Internet to recruit minors, since Internet and social networking sites usage have significantly increased especially among children.

### **Political and institutional challenges**

Corrupt and inadequately trained police officers can be complicit in sex trafficking and/or commit violence against sex workers, including sex trafficked victims. Human traffickers often incorporate abuse of the legal system into their control tactics by making threats of deportation or by turning victims into the authorities, possibly resulting in the incarceration of the victims. Criminalization of sex work also may foster the underground market for sex work and enable sex trafficking. Difficult political situations such as civil war and social conflict are push factors for migration and trafficking.

### **Commercial demands for Sex**

Abolitionists who seek an end to sex trafficking explain the nature of sex trafficking as an economic supply and demand model. In this model, male demand for prostitutes leads to a market of sex work, which, in turn, fosters sex trafficking, the illegal trade and coercion of people into sex work, and pimps and traffickers become 'distributors' who supply people to be sexually exploited. The demand for sex trafficking can also be facilitated by some pimps' and traffickers' desire for women whom they can exploit as workers because they do not require wages, safe working circumstances, and agency in choosing customers.

### **Arms Conflicts**

Armed conflict amplifies the risks of human trafficking for vulnerable populations by increasing economic desperation, weakening rule of law, decreasing the availability of social services, and forcing people to flee for their safety. Armed conflict often results in broken governments, judicial systems, job markets, and community support structures that would normally offer citizens protection from disasters and crime, including human trafficking. Many contributing factors, such as high unemployment rates, homelessness, limited social services, and weak law enforcement oversight, are amplified in conflict zones and exploited by traffickers. Young women and girls are often forced to marry or have sex with commanders and male combatants. The terrorist organization Boko Haram, for example, has abducted and forced women and children into sexual slavery in Nigeria. The UN (2018) reports that armed conflicts in some region of West Africa are likely to increase vulnerability to trafficking.

### **Disability**

Owing to cultural and societal stigmas, people with disabilities, including individuals with physical, sensory, mental, cognitive, behavioral, or other visible and invisible disabilities, often lack access to social support networks. Prejudices contribute to biases in law enforcement or judicial systems and often to unequal treatment by employers and government service agencies. Social support networks serve as one means by which persons with disabilities can pursue social and economic inclusion. Without

these networks, and without effective enforcement of robust non-discrimination laws, fewer safeguards exist to protect against a variety of human rights abuses, including trafficking in persons. Children and young adults with disabilities are especially vulnerable to the risks of human trafficking. Children with disabilities have been targeted by traffickers, for example, by being forced to beg because their disabilities—especially if highly visible—draw sympathy and charity from the public.

### **Statelessness**

A stateless person is someone who is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law. UNHCR (2015) estimates 10 million people, approximately one-third of whom are children, are stateless today. In many countries, stateless individuals lack identity documents, access to education, and economic opportunities. It is easier for unscrupulous employers to coerce undocumented workers into debt bondage or other exploitative conditions. Even if family members suspect or report a loved one has been subjected to human trafficking, it is difficult for authorities to trace an individual who lacks formal identity documents.

### **Incidences of Human Trafficking in West African sub-region**

#### **Benin**

Benin is a source, transit, and destination country for women, children, and men subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Most identified victims are Beninese girls subjected to domestic servitude or sex trafficking in Cotonou. The practice of *vidomegon*, which traditionally provided educational or vocational opportunities to children by placing them in the homes of wealthier families, is sometimes used to exploit children in domestic servitude. Children from Benin and neighboring countries are forced to labor on farms, in commercial agriculture (particularly in the cotton sector) in artisanal mines, at construction sites, or as street or market vendors. Togolese girls are exploited in prostitution in Benin. In northern Benin and Nigeria, marabouts, Koranic teachers, exploit Beninese children in forced begging in Koranic schools.

#### **Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Burkinabe children are subjected to forced labor as farm hands, gold panners and washers, street vendors, domestic servants, and forced begging by unscrupulous Koranic school teachers; girls are exploited in sex trafficking. Burkinabe children are transported to Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, and Niger for forced labor or sex trafficking. Burkina Faso is a transit country for traffickers transporting children from Mali to Cote d'Ivoire, and is a destination for children subjected to trafficking from neighboring countries, including Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Nigeria.

#### **Cabo Verde**

Cabo Verde is a source and destination country for children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking within the country and in Guinea and a destination country for women in forced prostitution. Boys and girls, some of whom may be foreign nationals, are exploited in sex trafficking in Santa Maria, Praia, and Mindelo. Cabo Verdean children engaged in begging, street vending, car washing, garbage picking, and agriculture are vulnerable to trafficking. Children living in impoverished neighborhoods with little state presence are also at risk, especially for sex trafficking.

#### **Cote d'Ivoire**

Cote d'Ivoire is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Trafficking within the country is more prevalent than transnational trafficking, and the majority of identified victims are children. Due to a stronger emphasis on monitoring and combating child trafficking within the country, the prevalence of adult trafficking may be underreported. Ivoirian women and girls are primarily subjected to forced labor in domestic service and restaurants in Cote d'Ivoire but are also exploited in sex trafficking. Ivoirian boys subjected to forced labor within the country in the agricultural and service industries, especially cocoa production. Boys from other West African countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, and Togo, are found in Cote d'Ivoire in forced labor in agriculture (on cocoa, coffee, pineapple, and rubber plantations), and in the mining sector, carpentry, and construction. Some girls recruited from Benin, Ghana, and Togo for work as domestic servants and street vendors are subjected to forced labor.

#### **The Gambia**

The Gambia is a source and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Within The Gambia, women, girls, and boys are subjected to sex trafficking and domestic servitude. Women, girls, and boys from West African countries—mainly Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Benin—are recruited for commercial sexual exploitation in The Gambia. The majority of these victims are subjected to sexual exploitation by European child sex tourists. Many Gambian boys attend Koranic schools led by religious teachers, known as marabouts; some corrupt or unscrupulous marabouts force such boys into begging and street vending.

#### **Ghana**

Ghana is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. The exploitation of Ghanaians, particularly children, within the country is more prevalent than the transnational trafficking of foreign nationals. Ghanaian boys and girls are subjected to forced labor within the country in fishing, domestic service, street hawking, begging, portering, artisanal gold mining, quarrying, herding, and agriculture. Ghanaian girls, and to a lesser extent boys, are subjected to sex trafficking in Ghana. Sex trafficking is prevalent in the Volta region and is growing in the oil-producing Western Region. As part of a ritual to atone for sins of a family member, Ghanaian girls are subjected to servitude that can last for a

few months or several years. Ghanaian girls and young women from the rural northern regions move to urban centers as far south as Accra to seek work as porters; they are at risk for sex trafficking and forced labor.

### **Guinea**

Guinea is a source, transit, and—to a lesser extent—destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Women and children are the most vulnerable to trafficking. Trafficking is more prevalent among Guinean citizens than foreign migrants and more prevalent among children than adults. Girls are sometimes sent to intermediaries who subject them to domestic servitude and sex trafficking, while boys are forced to beg on the streets, work as street vendors or shoe shiners, or labor in gold and diamond mines. Some men, women, and children are subjected to forced labor in agriculture. Children from villages in the Upper Guinea region may be more vulnerable to trafficking due to the region's lack of schools and economic opportunities. Guinea is a transit country for West African children subjected to forced labor in gold mining throughout the region.

### **Guinea-Bissau**

Guinea-Bissau is a source country for children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. The extent to which adults and children are subjected to forced labor or forced prostitution is unclear. Many Bissau-Guinean boys attend Koranic schools led by religious teachers known as marabouts; some corrupt marabouts force such boys into begging in Guinea-Bissau. Some marabouts subsequently transport the boys to Senegal or, to a lesser extent, Mali or Guinea, for forced begging. Unscrupulous marabouts increasingly exploit Bissau-Guinean boys from rural areas in forced begging in cities. The principal traffickers are men from the regions of Bafata and Gabu—often former students of the marabouts, known as talibes, or men who claim to be working for a marabout—who are generally well-known within the communities in which they operate. Bissau-Guinean boys are subjected to forced labor in street vending in Guinea-Bissau and in manual labor in the agricultural and mining sectors in Senegal.

### **Niger**

Niger is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Caste-based slavery practices continue primarily in the northern part of the country and affect some 44,000 people. Victims from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Togo are exploited in sex and labor trafficking in Niger. Nigerien boys are subjected to forced labor, including forced begging, within the country and in Mali and Nigeria by corrupt marabouts (religious instructors). In the Tahoua region of Niger, girls born into slavery are forced to marry men who buy them as “fifth wives” and subject them to forced labor and sexual servitude, a practice known as wahaya; their children are born into slave castes. According to International Organization for Migration (2014) the terrorist organization Boko Haram forcibly recruited Nigerien children.

### **Nigeria**

Nigeria experiences internal and external trafficking of women and girls. Internal trafficking takes the form of recruitment and transportation of women and adolescent girls from rural areas to the urban city centres for exploitative sex work and prostitution. External trafficking is trafficking of across National borders for like purposes. With regards to external trafficking, the recruitment of girls for trafficking route to Europe is predominantly from Edo and Delta States. According to the Nigerian Ambassador to Italy, a survey indicates that over 10,000 (ten thousand) Nigerians are engaged in prostitution in Italy. According to International Criminal Police Organization (2014) Boko Haram continued to forcibly recruit and use child soldiers as young as 12 years old and abduct women and girls in the northern region of Nigeria, some of whom it subjected to domestic servitude, forced labor, and sex slavery through forced marriages to its militants.

## **The Socio-Economic Implications of Human Trafficking on West African sub-region**

### **For the victims**

Sex trafficking victims face threats of violence from many sources, including customers, pimps, brothel owners, madams, traffickers, and corrupt local law enforcement officials. Raids as an anti-sex trafficking measure have the potential to help, and also to protect sex trafficked victims. Victims may also experience physical violence from law enforcement during raids. In addition to coping with their past traumatic experiences, former trafficking victims often experience social alienation in the host and home countries. Stigmatization, social exclusion, and intolerance often make it difficult for former victims to integrate into their host community, or to reintegrate into their former community.

### **Psychological Implication**

#### **Short-term implication – psychological coercion**

The use of coercion by perpetrators and traffickers involves the use of extreme control. Perpetrators expose the victims to high amounts of psychological stress induced by threats, fear, and physical and emotional violence. Tactics of coercion are reportedly used in three phases of trafficking: recruitment, initiation, and indoctrination. During the initiation phase, traffickers use foot-in-the-door techniques of persuasion to lead their victims into various trafficking industries. This manipulation creates an environment where the victim becomes completely dependent upon the authority of the trafficker. Traffickers take advantage of family dysfunction, homelessness, and history of childhood abuse to psychologically manipulate women and children into the trafficking industry. Many women entering into the sex trafficking industry are minors whom have already experienced prior sexual abuse.

#### **Long-term implication**

Human trafficking victims may experience complex trauma as a result of repeated cases of intimate relationship trauma over long periods of time including, but not limited to, sexual abuse, domestic violence, forced prostitution, or gang rape. Complex trauma involves multifaceted conditions of depression, anxiety, self-hatred, dissociation, substance abuse, self-destructive behaviors,

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medical and somatic concerns, despair, and re-victimization. Victims of sex trafficking often get "branded" by their traffickers or pimps. These tattoos usually consist of bar codes or the trafficker's name or rules. Even if a victim escapes their trafficker's control or gets rescued, these tattoos are painful reminders of their past and results in emotional distress. Victims may develop STDs and HIV/AIDS. Perpetrators frequently use substance abuse as a means to control their victims, which leads to compromised health, self-destructive behavior, and long-term physical harm.

### **Social implication**

#### **HIV/AIDS**

Trafficking is detrimental to health of the victims in several ways. A report by Sofu (2003), states that victims are usually subjected to "cruel mental and physical abuse designed to break down initial resistance, including confinement, seclusion, threats, humiliation, beatings and sexual abuse. This treatment places the victim under severe stress, often leading to trauma and depression. The risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases is very great. This is especially because trafficked women and girls are not able to negotiate safer sex; they are also highly vulnerable to contracting sexually transmitted infections. Although, statistics are not readily available for the West African situation; in countries such as Nepal, Cambodia and Zambia prevalence is put at 20 percent, 29 percent and 70 percent are infected with HIV, respectively. The Report of the UN Special Rapporteur (2005) also indicates that physical injuries are also common. Unwanted pregnancies among women and girls who are sexually exploited not infrequently lead to dangerous abortions. The physical, mental and social development of women and girls is severely impaired and the victims are usually marked for life by the treatment and experience they undergo. Sex trafficking increases the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. The HIV/AIDS pandemic can be both a cause and a consequence of sex trafficking. On one hand, child-prostitutes are sought by customers because they are perceived as being less likely to be HIV positive, and this demand leads to child sex trafficking. On the other hand, trafficking leads to the proliferation of HIV, because victims, being vulnerable and often young/inexperienced, cannot protect themselves properly, and get infected.

### **Economic Implication**

According to International Labor Organization (2015) every year the human trafficking industry generates 32 billion USD, half of which (\$15.5 billion) is made in industrialized countries, and a third of which (\$9.7 billion) is made in Asia. Since 2000, the number of sex-trafficking victims has risen while costs associated with trafficking have declined: "Coupled with the fact that trafficked sex slaves are the single most profitable type of slave, costing on average \$1,895 each but generating \$29,210 annually, there are stark predictions about the likely growth in commercial sex slavery in the future." Sex trafficking victims rarely get a share of the money that they make through coerced sex work, which further keeps them oppressed. As of 2018, profits from human trafficking were about around 150 billion USD each year ranking it along with drug trafficking as one of the most profitable transnational crimes.

#### **Conclusion**

Human trafficking is a global issue and West Africa is no exception, it has affected virtually all the countries in the sub-region. Several factors are responsible for the increase in human trafficking in West African sub-region these include poverty, globalization. Unemployment, gender based violence, conflicts, marginalization and social exclusion, corruption and bad governance. Human trafficking debases of human dignity and abuses human rights as it tantamount to modern day slavery. It includes child labor, prostitution, domestic servitude and forced marriage. It cuts across gender, however, women and children are mostly affected. It is also exploitative and victims are subjected to all manners of ill-treatment.

The crime of human trafficking is not only a regional issue but also both national and global in nature as victims cut across different countries and continents of the world. It therefore calls for global, regional and national approach in an effort to combat the menace. At the regional level there is need for the countries in West to come together under the auspices of ECOWAS to fight the crime. The Civil Society Organizations, Human Rights Groups, and ECOWAS should as a matter of urgency synergize, collaborate and coordinate their activities in order to stamp out this ugly monster in the sub-region. There is need for advocacy group to educate the West African Citizens against the dangers of human trafficking. At the national level states in West Africa should set up agencies whose sole responsibility will be to combat human trafficking. The national governments should address the issue of poverty and unemployment and make education available and affordable at all levels. Corruption is a major issue in governance in West Africa therefore ECOWAS should ensure that corruption is tackled with all seriousness. National governments should strengthen their extant laws on human trafficking and offenders should be subjected to serious punishment to deter others. Civil Society Organizations and Human Rights Groups should join in the campaign against human trafficking.

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