

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AMONG WOMEN IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

There have been an increased number of researches that address the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). This concept describes crimes of a sexual nature committed mostly against women, children and adolescents that involve exploitation for financial or other gains. This paper seeks to evaluate the implication of commercial sexual exploitation by women in Kogi State. The data adopted for this paper was empirically done using both primary and secondary sources and it aims at finding out the possible ways in which these problems can be eradicated in Kogi State. Existing literature demonstrates that commercially sexually exploited youth typically experience significant and ongoing trauma. The literature teaches that these youths have a unique set of health risks, including violence-related injuries, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, and a variety of mental health problems. The paper also examined how development in information and communication technology allows commercial sex workers to make connections with clients through internet and sell sex on this platform. Globalization processes have also changed the pattern of this business but organized criminal syndicates are using this development to traffic some women and children with the false promises of getting a lucrative business for them from overseas but ultimately subject them to sex exploitation. To this end, the paper recommends that more research into the prevention, identification, intervention, and multidisciplinary management of commercial sexual exploitation of mostly women, children and adolescents is needed.

Keywords: Critical Evaluation, Human Sexuality, Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Womanhood, Kogi State.

Introduction

Commercial sexual exploitation especially among women and children, as a social phenomenon has been in existence for thousands of years in human history. The earliest record of commercial sex appears in ancient Mesopotamia, where priests engaged in sex to promote fertility in the community. All women were required to do temple duty, and passing strangers were expected to make donations to the temple after enjoying its services. Since then, the use of sex for non-sexual ends (Abdullahi, 2009) continued to be transformed.

Modern commercial sex has its root in ancient Greece, where Solon established licensed brothels in 500 BCE (Siegel, 2008). Famous men openly went to the prostitutes for the purpose of intellectual, aesthetic, and sexual stimulation. The Greek prostitutes were prevented from marrying because their earnings were used to pay for the temple of Aphrodite. During the middle ages, though prostitution was a sin under canon law it was widely practiced and considered a method of protecting “respectable” women who might otherwise be attacked by young men (Siegel, 2008). In 1358, the Grand Council of Venice declared that prostitution was

“absolutely indispensable to the world.” Some church leaders such as St. Thomas Aquinas condoned prostitution; St. Augustine wrote, “If you expel prostitution from society, you will unsettle everything on account of lusts.” Nonetheless, prostitution was officially condemned, and working girls were confined to ply their trade in certain areas of the city and required to wear distinctive outfits so they could be easily recognized (Davis and Farge, 2003; Siegel, 2008).

The commercial sex industry has passed through a series of social and legal interpretations from “non-predatory sex crime” (Glaser, 1978), “deviant act” (Clinard and Meier, 1998), “legally institutionalized enterprise” (Davis and Farge, 2003), “consensual crime” (Leone-Guerrero, 2005) “organized form of crime” (Holmes, 2007), “victimless crime and public order crime” (Siegel, 2008), to an “illegal sector of informal economy” (Flanagan, 2010). As its definitions and interpretations metamorphoses, nomenclature of its actors has also been going through repeated transformations that is from prostitutes and other derogatory terms, such as ‘whores’ or ‘sluts’ to the present one-commercial sex workers. The social and legal backups are possibly the reasons why the commercial sex industry has penchant for thriving. Now it is believed to achieve increased vitality (Abdullahi, 2009) and gathers more momentum to a point that, advertisement of sexual objects, in some cases sexually explicit activities, are symbols of civilization, freedom and self-fulfillment.

Irrespective of its legality, prostitution has a number of sociological implications. And while the duty of sociologist is not to decode the normative judgment of outright evil or good of any behavior or culture, which could lead to bias Kothari (2004), it is a moral obligation and professional burden upon the sociologist to assess both potential and practical outcomes of the behavior in question. Prostitution takes place in a variety of forms in the current wave of globalization. From the unification of Western and Eastern Germany, Bretzlaff (2008) studied that, prostitution has been going through a series of dramatic changes. She attributed this trend to some noticeable factors: globalization and expansion of Europe Union (EU) following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the legalization of the prostitution in 2002.

Understanding the Concept of Commercial Sexual Exploitation

There is no fixed or legal definition of commercial sexual exploitation. There has been limited public debate on what makes the difference between something being sexually explicit and sexually exploitative. The Women’s Support Project defines sexual exploitation as a practice by which a person achieves sexual gratification, financial gain or advancement through the abuse or exploitation of a person’s sexuality by abrogating that person’s human right to dignity, equality, autonomy, and physical and mental wellbeing; i.e. trafficking, prostitution, prostitution tourism, mail-order-bride trade, pornography, stripping, battering, incest, rape and sexual harassment. Sexual exploitation includes offering drugs, food, shelter, protection, other basics of life, and/or money in exchange for sex or sexual acts (Women’s Support Project). The Scottish Government definition of commercial sexual exploitation notes that it is harmful “irrespective of whether individual women claim success or empowerment from the activity”.

However, as a concept, commercial sexual exploitation is a term that encompasses a range of crimes. The Institute of Medicine (2013) enumerates these crimes, which include the following: trafficking for sexual purposes; prostitution; sex tourism; mail-order-bride trade; early marriage; pornography; stripping; performing in sexual venues; children and adolescents engaging in “survival sex” to earn money, food, shelter, or other basic necessities; and children and adolescents engaging in sexual acts for money or for perceived excitement or adventure.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation and child sex trafficking are a severe form of sexual abuse and a fundamental violation of human rights. Although sex trafficking is often considered an international phenomenon, there is growing recognition that it does occur in the U.S. and typically involves American citizens and legal residents (Banks and Kyckelhan, 2011). Due to its criminal nature, the lack of a centralized database, variations in definitions and data collection methods, reluctance of victims to disclose their status, and lack of identification by authorities and service providers, estimates of the true prevalence of CSEC and child sex trafficking are difficult to obtain and no reliable estimates are available (Stansky and Finkelhar, 2016; UN, 2016). In 2015, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center received information on 1,621 cases of child trafficking; the actual prevalence of CSEC and child sex trafficking is believed to be much higher (National Human Trafficking Resource Centre, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Differential Association theory by Edwin Sutherland (1947, as cited in Croall, 2010) and Social Exchange theory by George Homans (1961, as cited in Ritzer, 2011) are the two theories that is used to explain the institution of prostitution or commercial sex industry. However, both theories are explaining at micro-levels of social analysis, they can contribute in understanding why some Nigerian women in particular and all prostitutes’ world over joined the sex trade as a source of living.

In his widely celebrated *Differential Association* theory, Sutherland (1947) advanced one of the best known sociological explanations of deviance and crime. The theory is built based on the proposition that, like conformity, criminal behavior is learned in the course of interaction with others; most people come into contact with those individuals who think that laws can be broken. In other words, the principle of differential association states that, a person becomes criminal because of a stronger exposure to law breakers than law abiding others. This is likely to be qualitative rather than quantitative.

The theory of differential association is based on two key notes; learning takes place within intimate personal groups and the content of what is learned include not only techniques for committing crimes, but also motivates attitudes and rationalization. In trying to understand why Nigerian women engage in transnational commercial sex, it is pertinent to cast a cursory look at the priority these girls and their poor families place on means of survival through the material outcome of the business. The duration they take living with professional transnational criminals (acting here as pimps) is also a process of socializing the women in this direction. In addition, the intensity of influence and pressure by the pimps, friends, and other desperate but veteran prostitutes is a reason enough to lead the women into transnational prostitution. In other words, people learn to engage in commercial sex because

of the intensity and duration of socialization and the priority they place on the business and its profit.

Exchange theory, on the other hand, is rooted from Rational Choice approach, which sees human behavior being guided by hedonistic principle or pleasure-seeking. The leading figure in exchange theory is Homan (1961). Homan's main interest was on the history of rewards and costs, which lead people to do what they do. Basically, Homans argued, people continue to do what they have found to be rewarding in the past. Conversely, they cease doing what has proved to be costly in the past. To understand behavior, we need to understand an individual's history of rewards and costs. Because of the reciprocal nature of sexuality, sex is always a form of trading. Thus, using *Exchange Theory*, commercial sex work and receiving are turn for offering sex can be explained in terms of give and take. It involves give and take because the commercial sex workers receive money from client before or after offering the sexual service. That is the reciprocal aspect of the industry.

From a broader perspective, sex is also an instrument of social exchange that brings certain desired and desirable aspects to intimate relationships, too. Sexual interaction can be viewed thus through the perspective of social exchange theory or sexual economics. Even in its most limited forms, people are trading touching and some degree of sexual pleasure. For the most part, various feelings and wanting to give pleasure to the partner are also part of the exchange. The exchange is of a different nature if sex is used as an item to trade for some other type of benefit or for actual compensation. This is the case in commercial and paid sex. Pornography is included in this context because of the economic values associated with it.

The social exchange theory presents a view of how the sexual negotiations and actions that occur in relationships are organized and linked together in a social system. In social exchange theory, people's choices are affected by the costs and benefits they entail. In social interaction, everyone gives something and receives something in return. In this kind of exchange, people try to maximize the benefits for themselves. Social interaction is usually maintained only when all parties are getting more out of the deal than they are losing. Often, sexual services are exchanged for other services, such as gifts or money.

The two theories: differential association and exchange are all from the mainstream interactionist perspective, but because of its ability to explain the rational aspect of involvement in commercial sex, the Exchange theory is adopted in this paper. This is because by defining prostitution as an object offered to barter with money or gifts, the theory permits us to transcend the meaning of the phenomenon beyond sex as a selling object, but also (especially in Nigerian context) sex as a dilemma. In other words, most of the Nigerian women resorted to the business due to economic reasons that they disregard their birth pride in exchange for some little penny for sustenance.

Kogi State and Commercial Sex Exploitation: An Evaluation

Kogi is a state in the north-central zone of Nigeria. It is popularly called the Confluence State because the confluence of River Niger and River Benue is at its capital, Lokoja, which is the first administrative capital of modern-day Nigeria. It was in Lokoja, while gazing out at the river that stretched before her, that Lord Lugard's wife coined the name "Nigeria." Lokoja is 2-hour drive from Abuja.

The state was formed in 1991 from parts of Kwara State and Benue State. The State as presently constituted comprises the peoples of the defunct Kabba Province of Northern Nigeria. There are three main ethnic groups and languages in Kogi: Igala, Epira, and Okun (similar to Yoruba) with other minorities like Bassa, a small fraction of Nupe mainly in Lokoja, Gwari, Kakanda, Oworo people (similar to Yoruba), ogorimagongo and the Eggan community under Lokoja Local Government.

Considering the influence of globalization on the expansion of commercial sex industry as it transcends national borders, today physical movement across borders by illegal organized syndicates has become commonplace in Kogi State. For instance, in February 2019, The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) has secured the arrest of three suspected human traffickers and rescued fourteen victims of human trafficking. The suspects, who are from the same town with the victims, confessed that they were taking the children to Ekpoma where they would be distributed to various households for labour purposes. They claimed that the parents of the fourteen children gave them consent to take the children and send them to various households for domestic labour. The suspects, were intercepted by men of the Nigerian Army on official duty in Lokoja, Kogi State, and handed over to the Nigeria Immigration Services (NIS) Lokoja, before they were subsequently handed over to NAPTIP (Bature, 2019).

This trend bred the term 'transnational prostitution'. As is evident in some developing countries of the world, such as Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and Ivory Coast women and girls are trafficked to Europe for sexual purposes (Nnadi, 2013). Most girls are made to prostitute under the guise of sex tourism. Sex tourism according to UNICEF Document (as cited in Jekayinfa, 2015) happens when rich men travel during the holidays from the advanced countries of the world to places like Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Thailand etc., to have sexual dealings with children of between 13 and 15years.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, prostitution or its alternative terms: 'commercial sex', 'sex work', or 'sex trade' is responding to globalization forces. Just the way legal and morally conforming businesses are moving with goods and services, sex workers are transporting sexual services at transnational level. It is also true that capitalism has turned all services, including sexual service, to a commodity to be offered in exchange for money. This is why some countries legalize prostitution because they generate income through it. However, legality of it has paved way for opportunistic organized criminals. These criminal organizations are transporting women and children from disadvantaged countries with false promises of securing a job in rich countries, such as European countries. Upon arriving at the country of destination, the visas and passports of these women and children are seized and they are subjected to sex slave or sex trade. Although some women are not aware of that going to prostitute, many of them know that they are going for this type of business.

In view of this, it is necessary for governments, nongovernmental organizations and other transnational agencies, community and families to come up with concerted efforts infighting

this trend. Specifically, the following suggestions are recommended to fight transnational commercial sex by Nigerian women:

1. Fighting poverty and unemployment among youth and adult populations shall be the priority of a government if attainment of security is the primary need of such government. Therefore, in order to curtail all criminal and deviant tendencies, Kogi State government must make jobs available for the teeming Kogi youth and their adult counterparts. This will directly or indirectly fight the high rate of poverty that bedevils the country and, by implications, reduce the tendency for transnational prostitution by Kogi women.
2. Kogi State government shall also make sure that girl-child education is free and compulsory from elementary to completion of female children's high school. Further studies by females up to tertiary levels should also be encouraged. This will enable their women prepare a career development with decent jobs that can provide an alternative to sex industry.
3. There is also a dire need for making sure that, Nigerian agencies established with the objective of fighting human trafficking and smuggling in persons, such as National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other related matters (NAPTIP) are operating effectively. The Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Immigration Service and other law enforcement agencies shall also complement the effort of this agency or even assume its role in its absence.
4. In the communities, religious institution can also play a vital role in calling the attention of young girls who seem to act beyond the religious and moral code to be preached using what they have faith in.
5. Families of a potential commercial sex worker are the primary givers of socialization. The families shall in the first place train their children to become morally upright and to avoid anything that goes contrary to the conventional norms. This will make the image of the family to remain intact and untarnished in traditional societies, such as Nigeria.

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