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HUMAN TRAFFICKING, CHILD LABOUR AND THE GROWING MENACE OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

ROSEMARY .O. ANAZODO (Ph.D)

Department of Public Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State
Email: ro.anazodo@unizik.edu.ng

CHIJIOKE .I. OJIAKO

Department of Public Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State
Email: ci.ojiako@unizik.edu.ng

NWAFOR, ANGELA EBELE (Ph.D)

Department of Public Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,
Anambra State, Nigeria.
Email: ae.nwafor@unizik.edu.ng
Orcid Id: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6351

Abstract

Nigeria, and indeed, many countries in the Sub-Saharan African region is continually plagued with cases of human trafficking, child labour, growing menace of 'Out-of-School' children, as well as other related social vices, particularly in recent times. However, findings from contemporary research have shown that the aforementioned challenges are linked to increased rate of unemployment, growing poverty, rising cases of insecurity, as well as mismanagement and maladministration on the part of government. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to determine the interplay among these variables and its implication for sustainable Human Capital Development in Nigeria. Data for this study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The study is anchored on Social Contract Theory as a framework for analysis. Findings show that the inability of Nigerian government to fulfill her part of the Social Contract is largely responsible for the proliferation of human trafficking, child labour, growing menace of 'Out-of-

School' children, as well as other related social vices in the country. It concludes that policy makers, law enforcement agents and Human Rights Activists have not done enough to remedy these negative social development effects. This paper recommends that there is need for effective legislation on the part of policy makers and prompt actions on the part of law enforcement agents to curb this anomaly and forestall future occurrences.

Keywords: Human Trafficking, Child Labour, Out-Of-School Children, Human Capital Development, Social Contract.

Introduction

Over the decades, there has been a radical shift away from the binary into the non-binary of the understanding surrounding the phenomenon of human trafficking. The media play a significant role in influencing public views of crime and developing legal responses to it. Despite the eradication of the slave trade, human trafficking has continued to take on specific shapes and forms over the decades. Forced labor replaced slavery, and human trafficking replaced the slave trade, now known as modern-day slavery (Kara, 2011). Next to the sale of illegally obtained weapons and drugs, human trafficking has been rated to be the fastest-growing and third most lucrative organized crime globally (Miko, 2004). Even though anti- trafficking efforts have been adopted globally to curb human trafficking, many nations still struggle to find a lasting solution to end its prevalence.

Human trafficking has existed in many parts of the world in various forms but was not considered a serious social problem until recent official discourse and media reporting (Weitzer, 2014). Slavery, the precursor of human trafficking became an issue in the 19th century following advances in transportation and technology, which resulted in increasing rates of migration. With industrialization came the migration of people from rural to urban areas. Technological advances of 19th century helped to bring about the new and greater international mobility of labour and this made it possible for traffickers to react quickly to the growing demand for sex trade and cheap labour (Badejo, 2016). The beginning of mass migration and technological development is significant because it is a trend that has continued to the present. Technological advancement and globalization enabled and encouraged people to migrate to places with better economic and social opportunities. This means that as many people migrate legally, many were forced to migrate illegally inform of child trafficking. Advances in technology and globalization also made it easier and more efficient for

those involved in the trafficking process to network and operate more efficiently. Over the years, child trafficking has been identified as a heinous crime which exploits the most vulnerable in the society (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2013).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- Identify

Conceptual Review

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is possibly the worst human development outcome linked to increasing global mobility. Human trafficking has been described as a form of modern-day slavery which deprives people of their human rights and freedoms.

The United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT) was born out of a renewed commitment by world leaders in the battle against human trafficking to end this crime, one of the most egregious violations of human rights in the world today. Formally launched in March 2007 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and made possible by a generous grant from the United Arab Emirates, UN.GIFT is a call to action, reminding Governments, civil society actors, the media, the business community and concerned individuals of their common commitments to fight trafficking in persons, and that this battle cannot be fought, or won, alone.

As at 4 December 2007, 116 nations had ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, thereby providing a common framework for international efforts. Only by joining forces, pooling knowledge, expanding the scope and number of stakeholders and cooperating across borders can we hope to eradicate human trafficking.

The 2008 Trafficking in Persons Report (DOS, 2008), notes that –Human trafficking has a devastating impact on individual victims, who often suffer physical and emotional abuse, rape, threats against self and family, and even death. But the impact of human trafficking also has wider implications for human development, because –trafficking undermines the health, safety, and security of all nations it touches (DOS, 2008, p.5).

The internationally recognized definition of trafficking is set forth in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol), which supplements the United Nations Convention against

Transnational Organized Crime. According to the Document, 'Trafficking in persons' shall mean:

- 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 labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;
- The consent of the victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in the subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;
- 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; and
- Child means any person under the age of 18.

Human Traffickers include those who recruit, transport, harbor, obtain, and exploit victims, often using force, threats, lies, or other physical and psychological methods of control Essentially, human traffickers can be anyone who is willing to exploit another human being for profit. The traffickers lure and ensnare individuals into labor trafficking and sex trafficking situations using methods of control such as force, fraud, or coercion. A wide range of criminals, including individual pimps, family operations, small businesses, loose-knit decentralized criminal networks, and international organized criminal operations, can be human traffickers.

Human traffickers prey on people who are poor, isolated and weak. Issues such as disempowerment, social exclusion and economic vulnerability are the result of policies and practices that marginalize entire groups of people and make them particularly vulnerable to being trafficked. Natural disasters, conflict and political turmoil weaken already tenuous social protection measures. Individuals are vulnerable to being trafficked not only because of conditions in

their countries of origin, however. The allure of opportunity, the relentless demand for inexpensive goods and services and the expectation of reliable income drive people into potentially dangerous situations where they are at risk of being exploited.

In February, 2009, UNODC published a second Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, based on information collected in 155 countries by 10 UNODC researchers during the period 2003- 2007. The UNODC report highlights some important trends:

- Over 21, 400 victims of trafficking were identified in 2006 among the 111 countries reporting victim data for that year
- Sexual exploitation is by far the most commonly identified form of human trafficking (79%), followed by forced labour (18%)
- The number of countries having anti-trafficking legislation more than doubled between 2003 and 2008, but many of the poorest countries in the world in Africa still do not have legislation on human trafficking
- As of 2007/2008 two out of every five countries covered by the UNODC report had not recorded a single conviction against human trafficking

In most of the reported cases, victims of trafficking were moved across internationalborders but usually within the same region

- Internal trafficking was reported in only 32 countries but is likely under-detected due torestrictive definitions of trafficking and poor data collection systems. (UNODC, 2009)

The human and social consequences of trafficking are compelling. From the physical abuse and torture of victims to the psychological and emotional trauma, to the economic and political implications of unabated crime, the impact on individuals and society is clearly destructive and unacceptable. While human trafficking is a global phenomenon that knows no international borders, it is within individual countries and societies that its far-reaching and pervasive consequences are felt. More than 130 countries are affected by human trafficking. Some of the most notable social, political and economic impacts of human trafficking are identified, as also important policy considerations in each of those areas.

Child Labour

The menace of child labour has been rampant worldwide in human history. Globally, every five minutes, a child dies from maltreatment (Ahad et al., 2021).

According to Anurioha (2024), various forms of child labor exist in Nigeria that bother down on child abuse. Millions of children are deprived of childhood innocence because of these traumatic experiences. Children are forced to do jobs that can be termed child labor in the guise of family duties. In the opinion of Nwazuoke and Igwe (2016), work is considered child labor if it is exploitative or harmful to any component of the child's developing personality. Rosemary O. A., Nwafor, A.E. Ojiako, C.J (2025), reported that Child trafficking and child labour which have been identified as modern forms of slavery, are generally caused by poverty and other related severe economic challenges. However, there are other immediate and remote causes of child trafficking and child labour which include, but not limited to ignorance linked to cultural beliefs, desperation, the promotion and commercialization of sex unplanned migration, increased rate of unemployment and harsh economic condition, among others.

Trafficking for forced labor is less frequently discovered and reported than trafficking for sexual exploitation. It is difficult to distinguish victims trafficked for forced labor from migrant laborers. These victims often work in hidden locations, such as agricultural fields in rural areas, mining camps, factories and the private houses in the case of domestic servitude. As a consequence, the trafficking victims of forced labor are less likely to be identified than the trafficking victims of sexual exploitation. Along with women and girls, both adult men and boys are also the victims of trafficking for forced labor but the trafficking cases of men are extremely underreported. Victims of forced labor trafficking are often recruited with a promise of work, generally through personal contacts and also through job advertisements on newspapers, television, billboards and the Internet. Some victims enter the country legally on work visas while others enter illegally. The IOM reported in the case of labor trafficking of men in Belarus and Ukraine that recruitment generally mimicked legal migration. These male victims often made what they thought were legally binding agreements with reliable companies, employment agencies and recruiters. Confusion between trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants prevents victims from receiving protection and support as their fundamental right.

Gender inequality also plays a crucial role in the prevalence of child labor in Nigeria. Among children who worked, girls outnumbered boys by a wide margin. In line with prior findings, gender bias in upbringing targeted training girls for traditional responsibilities of small-scale commercial trades to increase family income (Fetuga et al., 2005). Girls in traditional African societies are more versatile and responsive to parental authority and are more frequently allocated economic responsibilities. Anurioha (2024) added that cultural influence on child raising helps explain the country's high prevalence of child labor.

Out-Of-School Children

The absence of schools in several communities, leading to education apathy and a large scale of poverty in Africa, has aided the exploitation of children who take up jobs as maids in homes and are popularly called "house-help." These children are taken as housekeepers so their parents or guardians might profit from their labor. In some states of the country, mainly the Northern states, girl children are usually prevented from acquiring higher education and are relegated to caring for the home till they are married off, even at a very young age. The boys go to school to acquire an education, as they are required by society to grow up, marry wives, and become the providers and breadwinners of the home. The girl children are commonly seen fetching water with big buckets from the stream, grinding maize on a stone, and doing other household chores to make the home comfortable for their parents and siblings.

According to Agunwa et al. (2021), children used for child labor are prone to miss school and fare less well academically than their peers. The above statistic reveals an 80.5% – No impact on education. This contrasts generalized typical findings that child labor limits schooling, signaling possible normalization. It further changes the stereotypical notions that child labor is very harmful to children's education in Nigeria, frequently leading to students dropping out or staying in school longer. Most kids who engaged in labor- related activities did so under one or both of their parents' guidance to support the household budget, and also went to school. Children of low socioeconomic positions or parents with less education were heavily involved in labor activities. Additionally, there was a strong correlation between child labor and an increased number of children in a family (Fetuga et al., 2005). However, it is essential to emphasize

that not all forms of labor are deemed child labor. For low and middle-income countries like Nigeria, it is typical for children to work together with their parents or other adults on light chores at home that are not harmful to children's social and psychological development, as is still practiced in many African countries today. Data collected revealed that over half (54%) of the participants started working under 17, with 32% beginning at 10 or younger. This confirms that child labor is a common experience and very much prevalent in the country.

The loss of parents or the divorce of spouses often traumatizes children left at the mercy of their stepfathers, stepmothers, or other relatives who exploit their vulnerability for selfish profits through child labor (Igwe & Nwazuoke, 2016). They are sent to live with their parent's relatives, where they are made to do all the work beyond their age. These children do all the home chores and are later forced to wander the streets hawking and trading different wares for their guardian's profit. There is always the tendency to become street kids who end up as juveniles.

Fetuga et al. (2005) observed that declining parental education and socioeconomic class contributedto the prevalence of child labor in Nigeria. The necessity for a developing child to focus on activities that can help them realize their full capabilities and the need to steer clear of potentially "harmful" activities are concepts that properly educated parents are more inclined to comprehend. Additionally, parents are less under pressure to send their kids to work when they have a higher socioeconomic status.

Human Capital Development

There are significant psychological, physical, and social consequences that affect young people involved in child labor, which spread across the community. An in-depth examination of these intricate effects highlights how much more critical reform and preventative measures are. Some individual health problems throughout life may be associated with hazardous child labor. According to the survey, about 20% of Nigerian children face health issues in both rural and urban areas, revealing that child labor can be harmful to children's health and physical development. Simkhada et al. (2018) report that among young people who were trafficked at a young age, there is a higher prevalence of STDs, unsafe abortions, pelvic inflammatory disease, and unwanted

pregnancies. Psychological trauma can also lead to higher rates of suicidal thoughts, violence, sadness, anxiety, PTSD, and attachment disorders (Ottisova et al., 2018). Extended work hours impede children's growth and prevent some from participating in formal education. Lack of access to education limits future socioeconomic opportunities and perpetuates the poverty cycle across generations (Adeleke and Alabede, 2022).

Human Trafficking, Child Labour and the Challenge of Human Capital Development in Nigeria

Human trafficking and Child labor have a financial impact on the economy in the form of lost human capital, decreased productivity, increased healthcare costs, a weakened legal system, and slower GDP growth (Pereznieto et al., 2014). As a result, the consequences range from a single child to structural concerns inhibiting the progress of the entire country.

Global efforts to combat trafficking in persons have focused mainly on the criminalization of trafficking, along with measures to protect and assist victims. Relatively little attention has been given to the relationship between development policy and trafficking. Anti-trafficking policy has been dominated by the prevention, protection and prosecution paradigm, which tends to focus policy primarily on short-term interventions.

Human trafficking has an impact on the individuals it victimizes in all areas of their lives. Every stage of the trafficking process can involve physical, sexual and psychological abuse and violence, deprivation and torture, the forced use of substances, manipulation, economic exploitation and abusive working and living conditions. For a number of specified reasons, trafficked persons are at great risk of HIV infection. The trauma experienced by victims of trafficking includes post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, alienation, disorientation, aggression and difficulty concentrating. Studies indicate that trauma worsens during the trafficking process and may persist far beyond the end of any exploitation. Victims may appear to those around them, even support persons, to be uncooperative, irritable, hostile, aggressive or ungrateful. The stigma attached to them as victims has been shown to have a significant and ongoing impact on their lives, including in the trauma experienced by the individual victim as well as the possibility of physical rejection by family and/or community. The long-term consequences of human trafficking for the individual are complex and depend on many factors, with no

guarantee of recovery. Re-victimization is often a further consequence of the experience. According to the Trafficking in Persons Report (2022), published by the United States of America Department of State, Nigeria has a high level of trafficked persons. It has been placed on tier 2, which means the country does not fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, 2000 (TVPA) minimum standards, but it is making significant efforts to comply with these standards. The country made an effort to investigate more traffickers, including two Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) members accused of sex trafficking; to investigate officials accused of being complicit in trafficking crimes; to identify and provide more services to victims; and to develop and implement an expedited form of identifying victims of human trafficking. The government, however, faulted in meeting the minimum required standards in several crucial areas like failure to prosecute any member of the CJTF for prior child soldier recruitment or use, potential sex trafficking in government-run internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, which pose a serious concern, and officials removed fewer children from conditions of forced labor.

As a criminal act, trafficking violates the rule of law, threatening national jurisdictions and International Law. Organized crime is one of the most important mechanisms for unlawful redistribution of national wealth, unduly influencing markets, political power and societal relations. These effects may be acute in countries responding to civil unrest, natural disasters or post-conflict situations. The corresponding challenges faced by Governments are in stark contrast to the opportunities created for human traffickers. The underlying threat posed by trafficking in persons is why the issue is increasingly recognized as one of global security. As a complex manifestation of the global economy, organized crime and violations of human rights, human trafficking causes extreme hardship to the suspected millions of people worldwide who have become victims of it and also has an impact on the financial markets, the economies and the social structures of countries where it is allowed to exist. As a major component of organized crime, with all its financial power, trafficking in persons has a complex and interlocking negative impact across human, social, political and economic spheres. The destabilizing and dangerous consequences of human trafficking range from readily recognized violence, direct economic loss and major migration concerns

to the less easily quantified, equally serious, but more complex effects of risks and harms to environmental, social, health and safety, and violations of human srights.

Global estimates indicate that 30 to 50% of all trafficking victims are children under 18 years of age.26 Not only are children often sexually exploited in the sex industry targeted for child pornography and pedophiles, but children are also trafficked to work on untangling fishing nets, sewing goods in sweatshops, picking cocoa, and begging. Traffickers may lure children and/or their parents into leaving home with the promise of a better life. On some occasions desperate parents will sell their children to a trafficker so that they have fewer mouths to feed.

Forced conscription of children into armed conflict is another form of trafficking which enslaves children in war zones and removes their freedom. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers estimates that there are still tens of thousands of children who are used as combatants and/or sexually exploited in armed forces and groups in 19 countries and territories worldwide (The Child Soldiers Global Report, 2008).

Nigeria is rich in resources, but political instability and widespread corruption have facilitated trafficking in persons and hindered the progress towards reducing poverty. Nigeria is a source, transit and destination country for children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. Trafficked victims from Nigeria are recruited from rural areas, especially the country's southern regions and to a lesser extent urban area. Girls are victims of domestic servitude and sex marriages, and boys are victims of forced labour and bonded labour in street vending, domestic service, stone quarrying, agriculture, and begging (UNODC, 2016). Many of the young boys studying in Quranic schools, commonly known as Almajiri are subjected to forced begging. In Nigeria, Boko Haram forcibly recruits and uses child soldiers and abduct girls in the Northern region. The children are subjected to domestic servitude, forced labour, sexual slavery through forced marriages and suicide attacks in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad Republic (US Report, 2017). The incidence of human trafficking involving many Nigerians began in 1990s as a result of the decline in the economy of the country and consequent increase in unemployment, poverty, inflation, low wages and general social misery among the masses (Njoku, 2016). Consequently, many Nigerians especially the youths began to migrate into Europe, Middle East and lately Asia in search of better economic opportunities (Njoku,

2016).

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