SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN EGOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Egor Local Government Area; Human Trafficking; Rehabilitation of Victims; Sexual Exploitation; Socio-Economic Factors

Abstract

Egor Local Government Area is a significant push centre for human trafficking to Europe and the Local Government Area is experiencing a profound crisis marked by the increasing exploitation of adolescent girls and young women as a result of economic difficulties. These individuals encounter perilous dangers, such as coerced sex work, elevated incidences of HIV/AIDS, mental distress, and lethal travel circumstances across the Mediterranean. This predicament depletes the community of essential human resources and significantly undermines its social standing. The study employed a survey methodology, utilizing a structured questionnaire as the tool for data acquisition. The study population comprised inhabitants from the Egor Local Government Area, which includes 10 wards, with a sample size of 100 participants purposively selected for the research. The collected data were analyzed utilizing inferential statistics, incorporating tables, frequency distributions, and basic percentages. The research's theoretical foundation is grounded in Robert K. Merton's anomie or opportunity theory (1938). Human trafficking, a modern manifestation of slavery, causes considerable anguish to several young girls and women in the Egor Local Government Area and elsewhere who have been subjected to trafficking. Multiple factors have been identified as contributory reasons, including poverty, affiliation with educationally disadvantaged groups, unemployment, dysfunctional families, and the quest for improved prospects. The study's key findings indicated that socio-economic issues, such as poverty, inadequate educational attainment, unemployment, and the pursuit of better opportunities abroad, significantly contributed to the increased frequency of human trafficking occurrences in the area. The study advocates for both governmental entities and the private sector to create

employment and empowerment possibilities for the unemployed, particularly the significant demographic of at-risk young women susceptible to trafficking.

Introduction

International frameworks like those established by the United States Department of State (2010) classify Trafficking in Persons (TIPs) as a localized offence involving forced labour and sexual servitude, this legal definition does not adequately reflect the pervasive crisis occurring in developing countries such as Nigeria. The fundamental concern is that human trafficking has transformed from sporadic criminal activities into a widespread, deeply rooted worldwide industry that systematically exploits the inherent weaknesses of children, teenagers, and women. This crisis reveals significant deficiencies in domestic law enforcement and socio-economic safeguards by relegating individuals to mere commodities in a profitable global market, thereby converting what is legally categorized as a "crime" into a neglected humanitarian disaster that necessitates localized empirical examination.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2011) defines human trafficking as the illicit transportation of individuals, primarily for the purposes of sexual slavery, forced labor, or commercial sexual exploitation for traffickers or others. According to Ukhurebor & Amadasun (2022), a widely acknowledged definition of human trafficking is articulated in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, particularly women and children, referred to as the Trafficking Protocol or the Palermo Protocol, which defines human trafficking as:

> "Human trafficking pertains to the recruitment and transportation, transfer, concealment, or acquisition of individuals through the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of authority, exploitation of susceptibility, or the provision or acceptance of payments or benefits to secure consent from a person in control of another, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes, at a minimum, the utilization of others' prostitution or other types of sexual exploitation, coerced labor or services, slavery or similar practices, servitude, or organ removal (United Nations 2000, p. 42)".

The aforementioned definition of trafficking encompasses three elements:
(i) Act: comprising recruitment, transit, transfer, harbouring, or receiving of an individual.
(ii) Means: through intimidation or other coercive tactics, such as kidnapping, deceit, manipulation, exploitation of authority or vulnerable situations, and the offering or acceptance of monetary incentives or advantages to secure permission from a person exerting control over another;

(iii) For the objective of: Exploitation, which entails at a minimum, the trafficking or sexual servitude of others, several forms of sexual exploitation, involuntary labour, slavery or comparable activities, servitude, or organ extraction.
All three factors must be present for the situation to qualify as human trafficking. If these three characteristics are absent, the conduct may be classified as migrant smuggling or illegal migration. Human trafficking, defined as the illegal movement of individuals within and across national borders for exploitative purposes, is prevalent in Nigeria, particularly in Edo State, with Benin Metropolis serving as the epicenter,

specifically within the Egor local government area. A significant variety of variables contribute to the epidemic of human trafficking, notably in the Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. According to Ukhurebor (2002), the predominant socio-cultural causes are high family size, the disintegration of the extended family system, inequality, and peer isnfluence among individuals engaged in trafficking. Additional socio-cultural aspects include elevated fertility rates, swift population expansion, child fostering, and the practice of oath-taking for confidentiality.

Maicibi (2007) identified socio-economic variables, including poverty, lack of empowerment, adverse economic conditions, and the desire for rapid wealth accumulation, as contributors to the vulnerability of women and girls trafficked to foreign nations. The excessive aspiration for rapid wealth, coupled with the enticing portrayal of Eldorado in foreign nations by questionable promoters, appears to lead girls and women, particularly in Nigeria and Edo State, to be trafficked and subsequently coerced into exploitative labour and sex work.

The current absence of a judicial framework and the inadequate enforcement of anti-trafficking laws appear to cultivate the vulnerability of potential victims who are exploited in various ways. The victims of trafficking in persons (TIPs), predominantly minors and a small number of adult females are forcibly separated from their spouses or loved ones in the Egor Local Government Area and transported to urban centers within the country or across international borders. A significant number are employed as inexpensive labour in their destination nations or towns, occupying roles such as household staff, street vendors, panhandlers, sex workers, or subjected to various types of servitude resembling slavery by the traffickers and their accomplices. Persons are generally trafficked from underdeveloped nations to industrialized countries in search of better prospects and are coerced into labour, violating Section 34 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which ensures the right to human dignity.

Consequently, it is stipulated that “Every individual is entitled to respect for personal dignity; therefore, no person shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, no person shall be held in slavery or servitude, and no person shall be compelled to perform forced or compulsory labor.” Additional pertinent provisions in the constitution include those that protect the rights to movement (Section 451), personal liberty (Section 35), and those that prohibit torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, slavery, servitude, and forced labor (Sections 34 (1) (a), (b), and (c)).

Statement of the Problem

The problem of human trafficking is a significant developmental and humanitarian issue in Nigeria, particularly pronounced in Edo State. The Benin Metropolis, encompassing mainly the Oredo, Egor, and Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Areas, has emerged as a significant source area allegedly responsible for a substantial proportion of individuals trafficked from Nigeria to Europe, particularly Italy. Although previous data revealed that married or separated women were the main victims, modern trends demonstrate a rising risk among teenage girls and young women who emigrate under economic strain to aid their relatives.

The crux of the dilemma is rooted in the profound socio-economic and physical threats experienced by these individuals, in addition to institutional inadequacies in resolving the crisis. Victims regularly face coercive tactics, including mandatory oaths of silence, indebted servitude, labour exploitation, and coerced prostitution due to the absence of feasible employment options abroad. This exploitation yields grave outcomes, encompassing

increased susceptibility to sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS, mental anguish, and a considerable frequency of fatalities throughout treacherous travels across land routes and the Mediterranean Sea.

The confluence of these individual threats intensifies the systematic erosion of human capital in the Egor Local Government Area, which undermines the community's access to youth crucial for regional progress. In addition, endeavours to address this crisis are profoundly hindered by institutional shortcomings: law enforcement and social workers suffer from a lack of specialized training, victim-witness protection schemes are either lacking or inadequate, and there is a dearth of effective local systems intended for prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

The lack of an in-depth understanding of the exact socio-economic influences and the operational techniques of traffickers in this region limits the ability to create quantifiable intervention tactics. Thus, this analysis rigorously explores the socio-economic elements impacting human trafficking in the Egor Local Government Area of Edo State to furnish the empirical groundwork essential for sound policy creation and community-driven preventive efforts.

Research Questions

This study is directed by two research enquiries, which are outlined as follows:

(i) What socio-economic factors influence human trafficking in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State?

(ii) What are the solutions for reducing the high frequency of human trafficking in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State?

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study include:

(i) To investigate the socio-economic determinants affecting human trafficking in Egor Local Government Area.

(ii) To provide solutions aimed at decreasing the prevalence of human trafficking in the society.

Literature Review

(a) Socio-economic factors influencing human trafficking

It should be noted that there are several researches that try to explain why trafficking occurs among particular groups of people. According to Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010 (cited in Anegbode & Alonge, 2015), poverty, joblessness, and inadequate educational achievement are socio-economic challenges that impact individuals, especially women and girls, rendering them susceptible to trafficking. Anegbode & Alonge (2015) empirical findings supported our line of thought with respect to the socio-economic factors influencing human trafficking. However, we differ in the sense that our study further focussed on the vital factor that has apparently been overlooked. This was in the area of anti-trafficking laws that have not been implemented to the letter by the various governmental as well as non-governmental agencies in charge of prosecuting offenders of human trafficking. This would have served as deterrence to traffickers as well as potential traffickers when they see their compatriots been sentenced accordingly.

(UNAFRI, 2007, & Okojie, Eghafona, Vincent-Osaighae & Kalu, 2003) also emphasized how young girls and women vulnerability and subsequent trafficking were caused by the desire to get rich quick syndrome and deception, as well as the effects of large family sizes on family members and the phenomenon of broken homes. They claimed that because many parents are unable to provide for their children due to a lack of

resources and that many individuals who came from large families were not been taken care of. As a result, they are at risk of being taken advantage of by traffickers. Emenyonu (2009) conducted an investigation into the factors contributing to human trafficking in Edo State. The objective was to ascertain the factors contributing to human trafficking and the methods for tackling the problem in Edo State. The investigation utilised a survey methodology. The study's population consisted of all personnel of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in Edo State. The entire populace participated in the study. The data was collected utilizing the questionnaire method. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, were employed for the analysis. The research indicated that elevated poverty rates and inadequate educational attainment in Nigeria were the principal factors contributing to human trafficking. It was proposed that NAPTIP be granted increased authority and motivated to collaborate with the government in combating TIPs within the state. It should be pointed out that the findings of Emenyonu (2009) supported our line of thought with respect to the socio-economic factors that led to the causes of human trafficking. However, we also differ as our study articulated the ubiquitous phenomenon of the desire to get rich quick in life as well as the fervent desire of the young girls and women to travel out of the shores of Nigeria in order to make it quick in life as the prominent socio-economic factors responsible for their vulnerability to trafficking.

(b) Solutions to Eradicate Human Trafficking

On the empirical review of human trafficking with respect to remedies to eradicate it, Mba (2017), asserted that human trafficking has been discovered to be one of the fastest growing criminal industry in the world. It ranks with the illicit arms trade as the second most lucrative, following the narcotics trade, generating an estimated annual revenue of $32 billion for the offenders. Solutions advanced by Mba (2017) towards the eradication of human trafficking in Nigeria include investment in education, social orientation in the form of awareness/sensitization of the rural dwellers by NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons) and government as well non-governmental organizations since they are the more vulnerable group; resolution of conflicts in the country; proper monitoring of human movements across the borders; using social media to report cases of human trafficking and to partner with telecommunication companies on how to expose the evils of human trafficking. It should be pointed out the findings of Mba (2017) to a very large extent supported our line of thought but we differ on the ground that we also looked at the non-implementation of the anti-trafficking laws to the letter by the various governmental agencies and others involved, as turning over a new leaf will bring about a drastic reduction in human trafficking perpetration. This is so because when traffickers and their collaborators are prosecuted and sentenced according to the law, it will serve as deterrence to potential traffickers in the society.

Furthermore, there is need for world leaders to address global poverty (Kriftcher, 2019, United Nations, 2021). The findings of Kriftcher and United Nations for world leaders and Nigeria inclusive to address poverty of the people they govern supported our line of thought as poverty-stricken people seem to be vulnerable to trafficking. However, we further looked at other factors which characterized the present-day young boys and girls which is the desire to get rich quick in life and the belief that they can only make it quick in life when they travel outside the shores of this country. Changing the mindset of the youths will

prevent their further vulnerabilities to trafficking.

Theoretical Framework

Robert K. Merton's anomie or opportunity theory (1938) serves as the foundation for this study's theoretical framework. Robert K. Merton created the anomie or opportunity theory, also known as the strain theory or means to an end theory, in an attempt to explain or provide context for abnormal or illegal behavior in society. American sociologist Merton believed that anomie could account for both the high prevalence of deviant behavior in the United States relative to other societies and the distribution of deviant behavior among various actor groups based on factors such as class, race, and ethnicity (Maicibi, Babandede, and Gyong, 2007). Merton's analysis does not focus on the reasons why some people depart while others do not. However, Merton contends that at the level of groups and societies, as seen by varying rates of deviance, deviation is a product of society's culture and structure rather than pathological people. In other words, he diverges from Durkheim by asserting that the fundamental cause of deviation in society is a social structure that presents identical goals to all members while failing to furnish them with equitable means to attain those goals, as opposed to a sudden social transformation as proposed by Durkheim. Deviant behavior in society results from this lack of integration between what the structure allows and what the culture demands. Therefore, deviance is a sign of the social system. To put it another way, criminal activity, particularly among the lower classes, occurs in an effort to make ends meet due to opportunities that are denied since the structure cannot allow what the culture demands.

The theory is relevant to the study because it examined Nigerian society, which is marked by economic downturns or recessions, high unemployment, inflation in the cost of goods and services, poverty, and high living expenses. All of these factors cause stress, discontent, conflict, and ultimately deviance in society.

Method

Population of the study was made up of the inhabitants of Egor Local Government Area, who were residents of the Area under study. The projected population of Egor Local Government Area in 2026 is estimated at 554,210. In 2006, the population of Egor was 340,287. Egor has grown in the last year, which represents a 2.4% annual change (World Population Review Internal Projection, 2026). The targeted demographic population for this study consisted of the inhabitants of Egor Local Government Area (LGA). A multi-stage cluster random sampling method was utilized to choose the participants. In the initial phase, the 10 administrative wards within the Local Government Area functioned as clusters. Employing a straightforward random lottery technique, five wards were chosen: Ward 6 (Ogida 2), Ward 7 (Uselu 1), Ward 8 (Uselu 2), Ward 9 (Okhoro), and Ward 10 (Ugbowo). To guarantee uniform representation among the selected clusters, an approach of equitable allocation was implemented. A sample size of 100 participants was purposively determined, with 20 questionnaires methodically allocated to respondents in each of the five chosen wards.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the socio-economic factors influencing human trafficking in Egor LGA?

Fig. 1: Social-economic factors influencing human trafficking in Egor Local Government Area.

	Response	**No of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
`Question 1: Does Poverty, unemployment, the desire to get rich quick syndrome and the fervent desire to travel out of the country in order make it quick in life, make the less privileged to be vulnerable to human trafficking?	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree	60 28 02	66.67 31.11 2.22
Total		**90**	**100.00**

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

According to Fig 1, 60 individuals (66.67%) of the surveyed population strongly concurred that poverty, unemployment, the aspiration for rapid wealth, as well as the fervent desire of the young girls and women to travel out of shores of Nigeria contribute to their vulnerability to trafficking. Twenty-eight respondents (31.11%) concurred that individuals from impoverished and disadvantaged backgrounds are more susceptible to human trafficking due to factors such as poverty, unemployment, and the aspiration for rapid wealth accumulation, as well as their fervent desire to travel out the shores of Nigeria in order to make it quick in life. Whereas, only two respondents (2.22%) expressed disagreement. Socio-economic factors as described above influence human trafficking, as evidenced by the 60 respondents (66.67%) who strongly agreed. This finding partly confirmed the findings of Mba (2017), Awogbenle and Alonge (2015), UNAFRI, (2007), Okojie et. al (2003), that poverty, employment, inadequate educational opportunities etc. were the socio-economic factors responsible for human trafficking among young girls and women in the society. This study differs on the ground that it went further to highlight other salient factors such as the desire to get rich quick in life as well as the fervent desire of the young girls and women to travel out of the shores of Nigeria in search of greener pastures in order to make it quick in life.

Research Question 2: What are the solutions for reducing the high incidence of human trafficking in Egor LGA?

Fig 2: Provision of job opportunities and empowerment, strict implementation of anti-trafficking laws as well as vigorous anti-trafficking campaigns

	Response	**No of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Question 2: Does the provision of job opportunities and empowerment for the vulnerable, the strict implementation of the anti-trafficking laws, vigorous anti-trafficking campaigns and seminars about the evils of TIP will lead to a drastic reduction in human trafficking?	Strongly agreed	72	80
	Agree	10	11.11
	Disagree	05	5.56
	Strongly disagree	03	3.33
TOTAL		**90**	**100.00**

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

According to Fig 2, a significant majority of respondents, totaling 72 (80%), strongly agreed that the provision of job opportunities and empowerment for vulnerable populations, along with the stringent enforcement of anti-trafficking laws and robust awareness campaigns against the atrocities of human trafficking, will result in a decrease in trafficking within society. Additionally, 11.11% expressed agreement with these proposals, while 5.56% and 3.33% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. These findings confirmed the previous studies by Mba (2017), Kriftcher (2019), United Nations (2021). However, the present study differs as its findings included the strict implementation of the anti-trafficking laws as well as the vigorous anti-trafficking campaigns and seminars about the evils of (TIPs) which will lead to monumental reduction in human trafficking in the society.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary

Human trafficking, a contemporary form of slavery, inflicts significant suffering on several young girls and women in Egor Local Government Area and abroad who have been trafficked. Several factors have been recognized as contributing reasons, including poverty, membership in educationally disadvantaged groups, unemployment, dysfunctional families, and the pursuit of better opportunities. It was determined that to diminish the prevalence of human trafficking in society, particularly in Egor Local Government Area, it is imperative that anti-trafficking legislation enforces more severe penalties on offenders. The government and commercial sectors should provide job opportunities and conduct public awareness efforts regarding the detrimental effects of human trafficking throughout the state.

Conclusion

The study emphasizes that all human cultures, regardless of their developmental status, face issues of crime and criminality, particularly with people trafficking in the current context. Despite the anti-trafficking legislation enacted by several federal and state governments, the issue of human trafficking persists unabated, particularly in the Egor Local Government Area inside the Benin

Metropolis, which remains engaged in trafficking activities. Consequently, coordinated measures are essential for its elimination. Collaboration between the government and the populace is essential for the eradication of trafficking from society.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings and the conclusions drawn, the subsequent recommendations were proposed.:

1. The Edo State government, along with the Nigerian government, should undertake substantial initiatives to mitigate poverty, as there exists a significant correlation between human trafficking and socio-economic factors, including poverty, the aspiration for rapid wealth accumulation, unemployment, insufficient educational attainment, and socio-cultural elements such as large family size, the prevalence of broken homes, and gender discrimination. The government ought to facilitate work opportunities and vocational training apprenticeships for capable individuals, including men, women, boys, and girls, to enable them to achieve financial stability and alleviate their poverty-induced vulnerability.

2. A subsequent suggestion arising from the results of this research is that the government ought to implement laws to prevent discrimination against females and guarantee that education for girls is offered at no cost at both primary and secondary tiers. This will contribute to reducing the high incidence of female school dropouts, especially in secondary schooling. Moreover, it will aid in reducing the high prevalence of female trafficking, as educated women are regarded as having a superior ability to withstand such exploitation.

3. The administration of Egor Local Government Council should initiate public awareness programs throughout all areas of Egor Local Area and the entire State regarding the detrimental effects of trafficking. This will illuminate the populace and empower them to combat trafficking.

4. Ultimately, it is recommended that, based on the findings of this study, the inadequate enforcement of existing laws on human trafficking contributes to the exceedingly low conviction rates of violators. Therefore, the establishment of "Special Anti-trafficking Courts" is advised to expedite the adjudication of human trafficking cases, aiming to increase conviction rates for suspects in relation to NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons) and ETAHT (Edo State Government Taskforce Against Human Trafficking and Irregular Migration).

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