FEMALE COMMERCIAL SEX WORK IN LAFIA: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS

PAUL YAKUBU KIGBU
Department of History and International Studies, Federal University of Lafia
kigbup250@yahoo.com 07033200031

AHMADU UMAR SANDA
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Nasarawa State University Keffi
ahmadusuhan@gmail.com 0009-0009-2188-6879

CHARLES USEER
Department of History and International Studies, Federal University of Lafia
Charlesuseer8@gmail.com 0009-0004-62382646

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Abstract

Research Problem: *This study examines female commercial sex work in Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Against the fact that there are array of studies on commercial female sex work, in Nigeria as it is elsewhere in Africa, as an antisocial activity which has deep historical roots that have shaped its contemporary dynamics, in Lafia and by extension Nasarawa State, the phenomenon is scholarly unexplored area of research, particularly as it relates to lafia Nasarawa State, Nigeria.*
Methods/theory: *The study adopted a qualitative approach in historical construction of the history of female commercial sex work in Lafia, Nasarawa State where sources were drawn from primary source particularly, the oral interview, while library research at the Federal University of Library, where books and journal articles were consulted and the secondary sources. The also study adopt Marxist feminist theory, a theory which provides a valuable framework for understanding the historical study of commercial female sex work in Lafia,*
Results: *Findings reveals that, colonial economic and infrastructural development such as the telegraph and railway, account for both the migration of men and women to Lafia as well as the ability to pay for the services, socio-cultural factors, and legal frameworks surrounding sex work were the forces responsible for the development of female commercial sex work, this paper highlights the intersections between economic necessity, gender norms, and societal marginalization.*
Conclusion: *The study addresses the implications for contemporary discussions on public health, human trafficking, child abuse, human rights violations, and policy formulation. Through a combination of historical analysis,*
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The study contribute to knowledge by tracing bringing to light the history of female commercial sex workers in Lafia and thus, advocating for inclusive policies that address the socio-economic vulnerabilities of female sex workers while mitigating stigma*

and promoting social integration.

Introduction

Female sex workers are generally regarded as a social category, as women who do not adhere to sexual and other behavioural norms; pitied or despised, they are excluded from mainstream society, their lowly and marginal position analogues to that of a low caste or minority ethnic group. Sex work (prostitution) has been euphemised as "the oldest profession." Sex work has had a long and visible place in the history of the world. Prostitution is well documented in antiquity and is alleged to have financed the production of some of Egypt's pyramids,(Ditmore, 2006). The stratification of sex work in Ancient Greece is widely reported through various sources, including historical texts, plays and poetry. Japanese geisha and hetaerae in Ancient Greece were cultural treasures for their extensive training in the arts of music and dance, (Ditmore, 2006).While the "sex work" world had clear levels or ranks, and some of those people were highly respected as artists and intellectuals, there is no clarity of the practice of sex work in Lafia and hence the importance of this study.

Commercial sex work is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been a significant part of many societies throughout history. It continues to fascinate and exists in all societies, even in enforced closed situations such as prisons. Covert and overt Commercial sex is easily found in contemporary urban locations, and all cautions against commercial sex only serve to increase the fascination, (Amoo, 2011). However in Lafia there are no reliable records on whether there has been commercial sex work before the advent of colonialism and its economy. Commercial sex takes myriad forms and occurs in an enormous variety of venues. Kingsley Davis, (Davis, 1937) has clearly stated that, although economic want is a motivating factor for sex workers, it is not the sole factor; however, not all poor women sell sex. Whereas the need for money is a strong push, it is not the only push into the commercialisation of sex. Indeed, most needy people do not engage in sexual commerce. Thus, bringing to the fact that sex work has been powered by a variety of factors, including economic disparities, social inequalities, migration, urbanisation, and changing norms around sexuality. As it has been the case with most towns and cities in Nigeria, particularly northern Nigeria in this first quarter of the twenty first century.

Globalisation and the rise of international travel and trade have facilitated the movement of sex workers in and across borders, leading to the spread of female commercial sex work to different parts of the world, as the case may be, (Alex, 2002). Commercial female sex work varies in prevalence and forms across different continents. Like in some parts of Asia, sex work is highly stigmatised and underground, while in parts of Europe and America, it may be more visible and regulated. However, each country has its laws, policies and social attitudes towards commercial sex work. Some countries have legalised it or decriminalised sex work, while others have criminalised it, (Amesberger et al., 2015).

Commercial sex has particularly taken a worrisome and indeed despicable turn on the African continent through trafficking in persons and violation of people's human right and these have become major issues in West Africa, (Human Rights Action, 1997). In recent times, commercial sex has become a lucrative business in Nigeria, especially among the youths, (Ikpe, 2008). However, it is important to note that while the business has become lucrative, many sex workers, especially young ones, have been face exploitation, abuse, and significant risks to their health and safety. Onah (Onah, 2000), is

of the view that there are different forms of sex workers, those that stay in the brothels, those that stand on the road side, those that operate from home, etc.

In Nigeria, commercial sex work is an illegal business because the law prohibits it, which is derived from the Criminal Code Act and the Panel Code Act; however, no active action has really been taken against it by the government. However, the Criminal Code Act applies in the southern part of Nigeria and contains provisions relating to offenses such as prostitution. Section 223 of the Criminal Code Act criminalises 'soliciting for prostitution' and punishes offenders with imprisonment for up to one year, (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1990). The Panel Code Act applies in the northern part of Nigeria and also includes provisions on offenses related to prostitution. Section 183 of the Panel Code Act prohibits 'soliciting in public for immoral purposes' and describes penalties, including fines or imprisonment for offenders, (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1990).

As mentioned earlier, there is no expansion of commercial sex work without the growth of urbanization in Lafia town, which was perpetuated by the colonial interest over the people of Lafia area, (A. Saka, personal communication, January 21, 2026). Population increase in Lafia during the colonial period therefore means increase in sex labour and this was possible because of the construction of the railway line across Lafia to the northern part of Nigeria around the 1920s which gave the amalgamation advantages of rapid growth and expansion, especially the establishments of new settlements along the railway line area, such as *Rimi Uku, TudunGwandara, DashenGwamna, Sabon Pegi, UngwanJaba, Tudun Kauri*, Timber Shed, among others, (H. Umar, personal communication, January 21, 2026).

No doubt, most brothels, hotels and guest houses in Lafia are concentrated along railways, rail stations and where the imperialist trading companies were set up. It thus suffices to say that the colonial authority erected infrastructures such as railways and roads for easy conveyance of cash crops and other commodities to the sea ports for onward transportation abroad for their industrial development, (Plateau Agricultural Development Programme, 1986). Thus, because of the nature and structure of colonial rule and policies in Africa and other places, some African scholars, including Samir Amin, Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, among others, writing on dependency paradigm and underdevelopment strongly argued that colonialism is a crime against humanity, (Ikime, 1980). However this did not stop at exploitation of raw materials for their industrial development, it also led to the rise of this phenomenon (female sex work) that is not peculiar to Lafia town.

Statement of the Problem

Thus, it is a given that commercial sex work is as old as human history and it spreads across all societies in human history. However, it origin and development in Lafia and to some extent in Nasarawa State remain a recent phenomenon dating back to colonial era, with lots of uncertainty that needs clarity. More to that, there is also the lack, or absence of literature that interrogate the dynamics, social and economic impactof the phenomenon in Lafia, Nasarawa State.More importantly, there are few or lack of historical studies specifically focused on commercial female sex workers in Lafia, which is the capital of Nasarawa State in North Central Nigeria. This study is timely with enormous importance, as it provides the necessary and accurate historical interpretation on the causes, effects, new dimensions/ approaches and remedies to commercial female sex work in Lafia, Nasarawa State, from 1976 to 2006.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to undertake a historical study of female sex work in Lafia from 1976 to 2006. While the specific objectives are to;

i. examine the development of women sex work in Lafia,

ii. Identify the dimensions and the causal factors of women sex work in Lafia.

Conceptual Clarification

Female

The concept of "female" can be understood from both biological and social perspectives. Biologically, in biology, the term "female" designates the sex that produces ova (egg cells). This is a fundamental distinction in sexual reproduction, where the fusion of a female gamete (ovum) with a male gamete (sperm) initiates development. Socially, Societies often assign specific roles, behaviors, and expectations to women and girls, collectively known as gender roles. These roles are culturally constructed and can vary significantly across different societies and time periods. The understanding of this concept is important as it applied to how the female folks are seen in the study area.

Sex work

The term “sex work” was coined by sex worker activists, (Leigh, 1980). Its use became popularized after the publication of the anthology, Sex Work Writings by women in the sex industry in 1987. The work titled ‘prostitution as a form of deviance’ has since spread into much wider use, including academic publications by labour unions and by government and inter-governmental agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), among others, (Leigh, 1980). Augustin (Augustin, 2007), in her writing, explained that the terms “sex workers” and “sex work” were coined by sex workers themselves to redefine commercial sex, not as the social or psychological characteristic of a class of women, but as an income-generating activity or form of employment for women and men. As such, it can be considered along with other forms of economic activity. An employment or labour perspective is a necessary, if not a sufficient, condition for making sex work a part of the mainstream debate on human, women and workers, and workers’ right at local, national and international levels.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopt Marxist feminist theory, a theory which provides a valuable framework for understanding the historical study of commercial female sex work in Lafia, from 1976 to 2006. The theory was propounded by a number of thinkers over time, beginning with Engels, in the late 1960s and 1970s by figures like Margaret Benston, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, and Silvia Federici, who focus the analysis on women's unpaid domestic labor and social reproduction, and thus postulates that an analysis of gender oppression must be situated within the wider framework of capitalist exploitation and class struggle.

In the context of the study on commercial female sex work in Lafia, Marxist theory helped to illuminate the economic factors that shaped the experiences of women engaging in this sex work. The capital mode of production creates conditions in which women are disproportionately impacted by poverty, oppression, economic opportunities, and systemic exploitation. This can often drive women to engage in sex work as a means of survival.

Marxist feminist theory combines the insights of Marxist theory and feminist theory to analyse the ways in which capitalism and

patriarchy intersect to oppress women. With its major tents and principles of the theory to include: capitalism and patriarchy work together to create a gender division of labour, in which women are assigned domestic and caring work that is unpaid or underpaid, the intersection of gender, class, race, sexuality and other social categories in shaping women's experiences of oppression.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach in historical construction as a valuable tool for studying the history of commercial female sex work in Lafia, 1976 to 2006. In this methodology, sources are drawn from primary and secondary data to understand past events and developments. The data was classified into two categories, primary and secondary data. The primary data comprise oral history, archival materials, oral interviews, songs, poems, proverbs and field work. The field work was conducted within Lafia and its environs, mostly places where there are brothels, hotels, dark world of entertainment. For example, UnguwarJaba, Akurba, TudunGwandara, UnguwarAlago, UnguwarwajenLalle, TudunKawari, and Sabon Fegi are all in the Lafia metropolis. Secondary data in form of books, newspapers, journal articles, theses, dissertations and projects were gathered from Federal University of Lafia library.

The Development of Female Sex Work in Lafia

The growth of Female commercial Sex work in Lafia according to sources is link to colonialism and colonial economic relations with Africa in form of trade and infrastructural development, (NAK/MAKPROF, n.d.). The trade relations between the people of Lafia area and their European counterparts in export crops as elsewhere in Nigeria and Africa have been to the advantage of the European firms, this followed after the introduction of cash crops and monetary capitalist cash economy, (Obuje, 2016). Thus for colonial administrative convenience and the need for the supplies of raw materials for British industries and to create markets for European manufactured goods, labour became monetized as people's attention was geared towards the consumption of the white man's goods and payment of taxes. This also propelled some youths to move to urban centres thus was to the advantageous to the growth of Lafia not just as an administrative centre, but also a commercial, this growth of Lafia also attracted many women of easy virtue as well who gathered there, (Charles, 2023). This single movement which was predominantly by the youths to Lafia from the neighbouring area became a source of market for the women sex workers who were trooping into Lafia town.

However, the imposition of colonial economy in Lafia had changed the nature and structure of the pre-colonial system of trade. In line with the indirect rule policy, the people were introduced and encouraged to produce specific cash crops which were later exported. Crops such as cotton, groundnuts, beni-seed, palm oil and shea butter nuts, were needed by the British expatriate firms. Suffice it to say that the internationalisation of the people's economy meant that a certain class of people must have emerged.

The emergence and rise of middle men, as earlier mentioned in the aspect of cash crop trade, was instrumental to the day-to-day activities of the British government and the multi-national Corporations (MNCs) in transacting trade with the people, (Obuje, 2016). In a nutshell, weather colonial administrative structure or business expanded, the more the chances of a general economic prosperity in Lafia town, and this by implication meant that people had more money to spend for pleasure, of which

naturally most people will opt to buy sex from women who could make it available.

As mentioned earlier, there is no expansion of women sex work without the growth of urbanization in Lafia town. Population increase in Lafia during the colonial period, therefore, means increase in labour and this was possible because of the construction of the railway line across Lafia to the northern part of Nigeria around the 1920s (NAK/MAKPROF, n.d.,), which gave the amalgamation advantages of rapid growth and expansion, especially in the establishments of new settlements along the railway line area, such as Rimi Uku, TudunGwandara, DashenGwamna, Sabon Pegi, UngwanJaba,Tudun Kauri, Timber Shed, among others,(A. Saka, personal communication, January 21, 2026).

No doubt, most brothels, hotels and guest houses in Lafia are concentrated along railway lines, rail stations and where the imperialist trading companies were set up. It thus suffices to say that the colonial authority erected infrastructures such as railways and roads for easy conveyance of cash crops and other commodities to the sea ports for onward transportation abroad for their industrial development, (Plateau Agricultural Development Programme, 1986). Thus, because of the nature and structure of colonial rule and policies in Africa and other places, some African scholars, writing on dependency paradigm andunderdevelopment strongly argued that colonialism is a crime against humanity, (Ikime, 1980). However, this did not stop at the exploitation of raw materials for their industrial development. It also led to the emergence of social disorder (women sex work) that is not peculiar to Lafia town.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to state precisely when sex work began in Lafia. This could be closely linked with the construction of rail line through Lafia in the 1920s. The construction of the rail line led to the establishment of labour camps for migrant workers who had to pay for sex with women who moved along with the labourers as the rail line extended from Enugu-Makurdi-Lafia-Kafanchan, (Umar,2026). Gradually, the disposable cash which the labourers had was scare; these lured women within into the trade. Other developments such as Second World War, conscription of labour at mines as well as the Nigerian civil war which utilized Lafia as a mobilization centre made sex work more profound, (Emankhu, K. D. Moh'd and S. Mua'zu 2015). This is because the expansion of activities in the town attracted more people who left their wives in the villages and were willing to patronize sex workers in the town. While some of the sex workers rented rooms specifically for sex trade, others hid behind the trade of commodities like the sale of foodstuff to ply their trade.

In the developing town of Lafia, sex workers saw the business as a source of income. Those sex workers were made up of impoverished widows as well as other women who migrated to urban centres in search of livelihood. The introduction of money by the colonialists significantly facilitated commercial activities in areas like Lafia, among other places. Some migrant workers had enough money to attract young women in the growing towns, (A. Saka, personal communication, January 21, 2026). These young women needed money to survive the challenges of monetised economy.

After the Nigerian Civil War, and later the Local Government Reform of 1976, from which Lafia was made a local government area out of the defunct Native Authority, more sex workers migrated to this area to meet up with and take advantage of the emerging opportunities, (Emankhu&Ubangari, 2015). It was during this time that brothels and hotels sprang up in Lafia to accommodate sex workers to carry out their occupations, these include; Awala Hotel, GidanKatako, One

Nigeria, LungunAkotou, UngwanJaba, Social Gathering, Noga, GidanShatu, Wadata, among others, all located along the railway line.

In addition, the creation of Nasarawa State on 1st October, 1996 and the emergence of Lafia as the state capital witnessed the influx of sex workers, where more brothels, hotels and guest inns emerged to house them, like National Hotel, State Hotel, Chukwu House, Veema Hotel, Pina Hotel, Hero Point, OgaDimdim House, Benue Hotel, Man of God Hotel, Mimido Restaurant, On Top Hotel, New life, Gidan Mama Tivy, Good Evening among others. Some of these hotels were on short-time basis while some organised both short-time and long-time activities. Sex trade does not only happen in brothels, hotels, or motels, but also in the students occupied areas that have continued to spring up in the vicinity of Isa Mustapha Agwai Polytechnic (IMAP) Lafia, College of Agriculture Lafia, and Federal University of Lafia as a result of lack of accommodation on campus. This in one way or the other encourages commercial sex work in Lafia town.

Drivers of Women in Sex Labour

To discuss the dimensions of sex work, it is better to start with discussing the motivating factors of sex work and those factors peculiar to Lafia. There are various reasons which make or push people into this deviant act and this study or research has the purpose to determine the root cause of women choosing commercial sex work as a vocation, and also to look at the motivating factors that cause women to choose sex work as a vocation. They are as follows: -

i. Men, the buyers of commercial sex acts

ii. The exploiters, including traffickers, pimps, brothel owners, organised crime members, and corrupt officials make up what is known as the sex industry

iii. Poverty/economic situation

iv. Lucrative nature of the business

v. Peer groups and Friends play a primary or principal role in facilitating this phenomenon, (Stein, Rees, Hicks, &Gorin, 2009).

Categories of Sex Work in Lafia

The proliferation of brothels and hotels for sex workers in most urban centres and Lafia particularly is not only noticeable, but also, the increasing number of sex workers' rings in the area is tangible, (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005). To identify the categories or dimensions of sex work and the social context in which it occurs. It is worthy of note that every country and every region and town has a different composition to its sex industry; and this is shaped by history, social and economic factors, legal framework and policing practices. It is also a fact that sex workers are a heterogeneous group. Women make up the majority of the sex work population, with some estimates suggesting the proportion is around 85-90 percent, which is why this study focused on women sex works, (Scambler& Paoli, 2008), whilst the remaining population comprises of both male and transgender sex workers. In Lafia, it suffices to indicate that the numbers of male sex workers are not insubstantial; however, there is close to the absence of the transgender sex labour. In this study, a number of types, forms and dimensions of sex work were identified.

Street Prostitution

Street walkers earn relatively little money and are vulnerable to exploitation. Here, clients are solicited on the street, parks or other public places, and services rendered in street corners, vehicles, or short stay premises,

as the workers are usually dressed in skimpy and suggestive cloths. Often, the prostitutes (commonly called hawkers", "street hawkers or "street walkers" to distinguish them from other sex workers) appear to mind their own business and wait for the customers to initiate contact. This form of sex work is a popular type which is found in most cities, towns, or urban areas across the globe, (Ogunkan, Omoruan, &Fawole, 2010). In Lafia, street walkers are sighted around entertainment and relaxation premises, mostly in the evening time, within the metropolis, in such areas like stadium junction at Bukan Sidi, trailer park at Duduguru, Isa Mustapha Agwai Polytechnic, College of Agriculture at Ombi, Total, and Roundabout among other public places in Lafia.

Doorways or Brothels

Brothels are dedicated locations where people pay for sex and can include saunas and massage parlours. The prices they charge are "moderate". And brothel workers endure moderate exploitations, since they have to give part of their earnings to the brothel owners. This kind of sex work is one of the popular, if not the most popular, kinds of commercial sex work even beyond Lafia. There are numerous brothels in Lafia, since the colonial administration which facilitated the survival of this act up to date, (Ogunkan, Omoruan, &Fawole, 2010). Most of the brothels in Lafia, if not all the brothels, are located along the railway line such as Awala Hotel, State Hotel, Social Gathering, Good Evening, Veema, One Nigeria, LungunAkotou, among others. In these places, women are often ready to offer sex within the premises or to get hired and be taken to other places. They often advertised themselves around the area even by their dresses, leaving their bodies half-naked and exposed, by calling on the attention of passers-by, pointing directly to the influence of colonial economy and infrastructural development.

Escorts

Clients contact sex worker by phone or via hotel staff. In Lafia, most of the hotels have contacts as well as pictures of ladies who are contacted should a guest need the services of a woman, and from findings, it is revealed that most of the ladies are students of some of the institutions of higher learning around Lafia who engage in this sex trading to keep up with the cost of their studies, and to be able to afford things their parents are unable to afford for them, (Ogunkan, Omoruan, &Fawole, 2010). This is an indication of the worsening dimension of the phenomenon in Lafia, Nasarawa State and Nigeria at large, as it present an emergent dynamics of female commercial sex activities in Lafia

Clubs and Public Bars

These sex workers make initial contacts with men at the bar and have sex on separate locations. Clients are solicited in alcohol vending venues and serviced on site or elsewhere. In bars, some guys pay "bar fees" to leave a club withworker have and spend several days with them. The guys pay the women's expenses during that time, in an arrangement that often confers status on the prostitute. The women earn low-to-moderate salaries. Most of the bars and Lounch in and around Lafia serve this kind of sex work, (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005) such as Eagle Bar by the roundabout in MararrabanAkunza, Kakaki opposite Isa Mustapha Agwai Polytechnic (IMAP), Projector along Kwandare road, Benue Kitchen, Dreams Events, New Life, Social Gathering, Wazobia, all along U.A.C Road, among others.

Club is another avenue or meeting point to carry out this service even beyond Lafia.

The urbanisation of Lafia, due to numerous factors, attracts the concentration of people to the town and club is an avenue to entertain oneself of which sex work is a part, depending

on how they negotiate. This activity is carried out in places like State Hotel and Dreams Events, along UAC road, D D's, Tahiti, A G World all-around [IMAP] among others, (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005).

Hook up

The term 'hook up' is often used in contemporary culture to describe a brief, spontaneous, and often one-time sexual encounter that is purely physical in nature. This is a form of sex work can take place in a variety of settings, such as parties, bars, or through online platforms, and are driven by mutual consent and a desire for sexual gratification without the expectation of emotional involvement or commitment, (B. Bala, personal communication, January 21, 2026).

They are relatively expensive due to the expected low customer turnover and exclusive home service which they offer to their clientele base. They are prevalent in tertiary institutions and their clients include lecturers with whom they trade sex for marks, and a network of middle and upper class men. In Lafia, the presence of institutions of higher learning has made this type of sex work popular and it is mostly practiced among young ladies, particularly students,(B. Bala, personal communication, January 21, 2026) given that there are six institutions of higher learning in Lafia, which include, Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, College of Agriculture, Federal University of Lafia, College of Nursing and Midwifery, College of Heath and Faculty of Agriculture, Nasarawa State University. The students of these institutions often make themselves available through social media platforms, such as the Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, among others, by creating and joining group chats on those social media platforms, which often lead to the exchange of contact and trading of sex. Some of the chat groups include "Nasarawa Youth Forum", "Nasarawa Singles", "Akwanga Single Connect", among others. These social media platforms serve to connect the youths across distances, and apart from socializing, these also serve as platform for engaging in sex labour.

Dark World of Entertainment (Gidan Solo/Gidan Gala/Gidan Drama/Lanchika)

Dark world entertainment which is locally referred as Gidan Drama, Gidan Gala, Gidan Solo or Lanchika in the local entertainment industry in Hausa language. Unfortunately, many individuals involved in this industry may become victims of exploitation by sex workers. Gidan Gala is gathering momentum in major cities across northern Nigeria, after some of their artists such as ShuaibuLilisco that started gala and Sani Musa Mai Iska graduated to become popular Kannywood stars, thus making it a breeding ground for Kannywood actors and actresses, Daily Trust. (2021). Outwardly, these places seem normal, going by the performances put up, but research shows they are a cover mission, as the girls are mere sex workers. Given that the culture particularly in the northern Nigeria and by extension Lafia, Nasarawa State, and the dominant religions frowned at it open display, hence, Gidan Drama, Gidan Gala, Gidan Solo and Lanchika become arena where sex is yound ladies commercialise sex.

Socio-Economic Implications of Female Commercial Sex Work in Lafia

The socio-economic implications of female commercial sex work in Lafia are multifaceted, involving severe health, social, and legal challenges. Sex workers often face poor living conditions, inadequate healthcare, homelessness, low education, addiction, and social stigma, all of which contribute to poor mental and physical health outcomes. The spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, remains high among

this group due to risky sexual behaviors and inconsistent condom use. The available statistics at the Nasarawa State Aids Control Agency (NASACA) has it that no fewer than 43,500 people are currently living with HIV and AIDs in Nasarawa State. The statistics further reveals that new infections among AYP for 2016, 2017 and first half of 2018 are 1,721; 1,155; and 1,068, respectively. The NASACA's statistics also reveals that in 2017, AYP Counselled, Tested and Received Result (CTRR) cases was 82,151, with 1,155 testing positive to HIV, while in the first half of 2018, AYP CTRR was 75,435, with 1,086 testing positive, (*ThisDay Live*, 2024). Thus showing how vulnerable and socially exploited this group of people are particularly in Lafia town, which is in agreement with the report of AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF)(Suleiman, 2025), on the most vulnerable people to contact the virus.

Violence, including physical assault, police brutality, and ritual killings, is rampant and rarely reported due to distrust of authorities. Drug and alcohol abuse are common coping mechanisms among sex workers to deal with the trauma and distress of their work, leading to further health complications. Additionally, mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD are prevalent. Criminalization and social stigma push sex workers to the margins of society, making them more vulnerable and preventing access to justice or support services. Despite these harsh realities, prostitution persists partly due to the sexual needs it fulfills in society, particularly for those unable or unwilling to engage in traditional marital relationships.

Conclusion

This study offers the understanding of female identity and sex work by putting commercial female sex work in Lafia, the study also provide both conceptual and theoretical insights into within the historical and material conditions produced by colonial capitalism. Conceptually, the findings demonstrate that sex work is not an ahistorical or purely individual phenomenon but a gendered form of survival labour shaped by long-term economic restructuring, urbanisation, and unequal access to resources, thereby redefining the concept of "female" as a socially and economically constructed category within relations of production. From a Marxist feminist theoretical perspective, the study link Commercial sex work in Lafia to colonial infrastructural and economic developments particularly the railway, telegraph, and trade networks facilitated labour migration and urban growth and at the same time,marginalising women from formal employment, compelling many into sexual labour. The Marxist feminist arguments support that capitalism depends on the exploitation of women's bodies and labour within patriarchal systems, while extending the theory by historically situating sex work inlafia to colonial political economy of a Northern Nigerian urban centre that has received little scholarly attention. In relation to previous studies, the findings align with existing literature that identifies poverty, migration, urbanisation, and gender inequality as key drivers of female sex work; however, the study departs from dominant contemporary analyses by tracing these dynamics to their colonial origins rather than treating sex work as a post-independence or modern urban phenomenon. Unlike liberal feminist approaches that emphasise agency without sufficient attention to structural constraints, this study demonstrates that women's agency in sex work operates within exploitative class and gender relations shaped by colonial and postcolonial capitalism. Overall, the study contributes to scholarship by offering a historically informed Marxist feminist interpretation of female sex work that deepens conceptual clarity and advances debates on gender, labour, and exploitation.

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