Analysis of the Consequences of Female Gender Based Commercial Sex Activities in Nigeria

By

Salem Igyundu-Iyorwuese, Ph.D
Institute of Governance and Development Studies, Nasarawa State University Keffi
E-Mail: sigyundu@gmail.com (+234) 7032644919
Enebechi Monica Okwuchukwu, Ph.D
Institute of Governance and Development Studies Nasarawa State University, Keffi,
E-Mail: chic9598@yaoo.com (+234) 8083753714
Obayi Titus, Ph.D
Institute of Governance and Development Studies, Nasarawa State University Keffi,
E-Mail: tiokwid@yahoo.com (+234) 8036862783
Salifu Isa Egah
Institute of Governance and Development Studies, Nasarawa State University Keffi
E-Mail: isa.salifu2@gmail.com (+234) 8033419451

Abstract

Crime and poverty are prevalent issues in countries all around the world. Poverty has hindered the ability of developing countries like Nigeria to reach their potentials. Crime has played a similar role in the development of these nations. The consequences of commercial sex work are multifaceted. Sex work affects individual in the profession as well as the society. Female Gender Based commercial sex activities are at risk of contracting *HIV*/AIDS and other sexually transmitted disease. This paper duel on Analysis of the Consequences of Female Gender Based Commercial Sex Activities in Nigeria. The objective is to ascertain why female gender engage in commercial sex, to ascertain the likely causes of female gender based commercial sex activities, to find out the consequences of commercial sex activities on our society and to find out the possible solutions to commercial sex work in Nigeria. The Functionalist Theory was used for this paper. The findings is that commercial sex work has a negative effect on the individual and its host

community. Many sex workers have contracted all types of diseases through prostitution. The recommendation is that Nigerian government should promulgate laws to regulate sex work which will consider commercial sex activities as a criminal activity and also give a strong disapproval of it, this will definitely reduce the total dependence on sex work as a profession, more research should be carried out to identify the appropriate methods of sanitizing the public on commercial sex activities and the various effect on the health, Government should provide employment since, unemployment and poverty are some of the causes of commercial sex work in our society today, all hands should be on desk to tackle this social problem by exposing and tracking down the people behind the shameful business of sex work.

Keywords: Female Gender and Commercial Sex

Introduction

In country like Nigeria, prostitution is termed as deviance and unhealthy in the society. It is also a big embarrassment to the government and the families who their youths are involved in such acts, such families will lack their respect from people in the society no matter their position in the society, (Onah, 2000). The people involved in commercial sex experience negative effect even though they still make out from it. Lex (1992), argued that, sex work has been identified as the core group for transmission of HIV/AIDS and STD; Thus, they face discrimination throughout the world. Due to the diseases that befall these people on daily basis, sex work has been considered a menace in the society and also violence against humanity, (Lex, 1992). These negative effects includes untimely death, frustration, unwanted pregnancy etc. one of the major challenges is that, some of these sex workers are illiterates, they neither attain seminars nor listen to news on television where they could be enlightened on the risk of their work. These work has then, become their life style, therefore, making it difficult for the government to cope with.

Commercial sex is basically sex for money. It is not restricted to any culture, its global and it transcends all age barriers as some cases girls as young as eight years are involved. Commercial sex has evolved over the last two decades, (National Behaviour Survey 2004). According to the National Behaviour Survey (2004),

commercial sex work has indeed become complex in different ways as there are male sex workers in Nigeria who have sex with men for commercial reasons and there is an organization0 that support them which based in Ibadan, Oyo state. Commercial sex has particularly taken a worrisome and indeed despicable turn on the continent through trafficking in person and violation of people's human right and these have become major issues in West Africa (Human Right Action, 1997). In recent time, commercial sex has become a lucrative business in Nigeria especially among the youths (Ikpe, 2008). Research has it that, 31% of sex workers are students particularly in Nigeria institutions (Onah, 2000). Onah (2000), is of the view that, there are different forms of sex workers, those that vii stay in the brothels, those that stand on the road side, those that operate from home etc. Furthermore, sex work has now become an occupation especially for the girls in countries like Netherland, Brazil, Norway etc, sex work serves as one of the sources of revenue for government, hence, taxes are paid to the government (Aday, 1990). Aday further says that, sex workers face systematic discrimination throughout the world and are therefore, at risk of variety of abuses, these include police extortion, arbitrary detention and other. Violations of their human and labour rights which in some cases even amount to slavery. In Nigeria, sex work is an illegal business because, the law prohibits its, but no active action has really been taken against it by the government (Onah, 2000).

It is based on this justification that most of those involved in the business find it difficult to see the act as a social evil (John & Ken, 2005). Moreover, apart from the moral question that may fault the justification of the sex industry, the Christian and Moslem faiths condemn the act in totality. Some problems contributing to commercial sex work is that in Nigeria today, there is a high rate of divorce among families. The resultant effect of this is that the responsibility of taking care of the children falls on the single parents who have to struggle to make ends meet. For the girl child whose parents do not have the means to cater to them, prostitution becomes the only way of making ends meet. Sex workers have sex with different categories of men daily in exchange for money as a result of financial constraints to satisfy their needs. The rate of their sexual involvement with different men in society is alarming, particularly with high-risk groups such as long-truck drivers, Okada men, drug-injected men, and so on as customer is king in their sex business. Apart from bringing international shame to Nigeria, prostitution has assumed a

more sinister dimension with the invasion of the tertiary institutions by older male members of the privileged class to fetch girls from the schools to be used as commercial sex workers.

Female sex work (FSW) is an ancient and widespread profession. Worldwide it is estimated that more than 40 million people work as sex workers (Audet, 2013). In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of FSWs in the capital cities ranged between 0.7% and 4.3% and in other urban areas between 0.4% and 3.9% in 2010 (Vandepitte, 2006). They are ostracized, marginalized and they experience discrimination from the society. In Pakistan, sex workers experienced verbal abuse from religious groups, human rights abuses from their relations and stoning by community members (Mayhews, 2009). Within the sex industry they do not fare any better, as FSWs in India experienced high levels of physical and sexual violence from clients, 'madams' and the police (George, 2011). In relationships, sex workers were more vulnerable to violence from their main intimate partner or other nonpaying partners in India (Deering, 2013). Violence is a common experience in the lives of many FSWs. In India, 70% of sex workers reported being beaten by the police and more than 80% had been arrested without evidence (World Health Organization, 2013). In Bangladesh, between 52% and 60% of street-based sex workers reported being raped by men in uniform in a 12 month period, and between 41% and 51% reported being raped by local criminals (Banghadesh, 2008). Similarly high rates were found among FSWs in Vancouver, Canada where 57% of FSWs experienced gender based violence over an 18 month follow-up period and in southern India 50% and 77% of FSWs reported work-related physical and sexual violence (George, 2011). The purpose of this study is to analyze the consequences of female gender based commercial sex activities in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Female Gender

An organism's sex is female if it produces the ovum, the type of gamete that fuses with the male gamete during sexual reproduction. A female has larger gametes than a male. Females and males are results of the anisogamous reproduction system, wherein gametes are of different sizes.(Wikipedia). The female gender is used to refer to the nouns and pronouns naming the female counterparts of human

beings, animals and birds. The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines the feminine gender as "belonging to a class of words that refer to female people or animals and often have a special form" (Wikipedia)

In the 14th century, *female* appeared in English with such spellings as *femel, femelle,* and *female.* The word comes from the Latin *femella,* meaning "young woman, girl," which in turn is based on *femina,* meaning "woman." In English, the similarity in form and sound between the words *female* and *male* led people to use only the *female* spelling. This closeness also led to the belief that *female* comes from or is somehow related to *male.* However, apart from the influence of *male* on the modern spelling of *female,* there is no link between the origins of the two words. Female is sometimes used in disparaging contexts: a gossipy female; a conniving female. Lady meaning "refined, polite woman" is a term of approval or praise: *a real lady in all things; to behave like a lady.* When used as a form of address, Lady may be polite or neutral in tone: Ladies, did you hear about the new brunch menu with bottomless mimosas? However, in the singular it is often perceived as rude: Hey, lady, I don't have all day (Dictionary.com).

Commercial Sex

The term "commercial sex act" means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person (LII / Legal Information Institute). Prostitution is widely described as the oldest profession; the practice of selling sex for cash or other immediate compensation has existed across cultures and times from the ancient Greeks. Prostitution also crosses class lines, from the poor 'streetwalker' with their stereotyped drug habits and abusive pimps to the high class brothel and escort service worker with designers' cloths and stylish apartments. While the prostitutes technically sells a service, namely sexual intimacy, the ways in which prostitution is discussed suggest that at least to modern sensibilities, she or he is selling far more than that. A common misconception of prostitution is that a significant majority of prostitutes are women. Women prostitution is easily talked about, than male prostitution at least since the ancient times. The practice of prostitution is at an alarming rate in Nigeria, it is seen as a deviant sub-culture in Nigeria and it is practiced by prostitutes in private homes, in brothels, and in hotels as an adaptation to poverty,

unemployment and as a feasibility way for them to make money. The prostitutes sell sexual favours and their bodies to their customers who pay them huge sum of money in exchange. This dirty and highly immoral profession is associated with social problems as marital instability, sexual harassment, divorce, overcrowding, environmental pollution, alcoholism, fighting, drug addiction, violence crime and delinquency, unwanted pregnancy. Unsafe abortion and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis etc. Most analyses of prostitution suggest that both men and women enter prostitution either professionally or temporarily as relative amateurs, for economic and monetary reasons. Some girls go into prostitution in other to challenge repressive gender role which restrict women sexuality to a romantic ideology and oppressive marriages (Alobo et.al, 2014.Pg. 36:37).

However, in most villages in Nigeria, commercial sex work originated when girls left the village for cities in search of greener pastures. While there, these girls pass through difficulties in securing a job. In the alternative, they resort to sex for money so that they can send their poor parents in the village money. During festive periods like Christmas, they will travel down to the village with beautiful gift items, clothing, shoes, and food items for members of their families. As a result, other village girls will be attracted and would desire to travel to the cities with them with little or no idea of what these girls do to get money. Parents also encourage their daughters to go to cities to work and bring money for the family's upkeep. Some of these girls return with HIV/AIDS, some come back confessing what they do in the city and some others come back very sick and at the point of death. Those who came back with HIV not knowing their status spread the disease and other sexually transmitted diseases to men who had sexual intercourse with them. This became a social problem that affected a significant number of people in villages (Alobo et.al, 2014.Pg. 36:37).

Garner (1999) defined commercial sex work as the act or practice of engaging in sexual activities for money or its equivalent. It is a criminal act in the United States. Prostitution is also referred to as commercial or public sex workers. It is estimated that over 92,000 men, women, and juveniles are arrested yearly for commercial sex work (FBI, 2000). The number of juveniles engaging in prostitution is estimated at between 100,000 and 300,000 per year.

Sociologists agreed on three points in defining prostitution, namely:

1. It is sexual in nature, and the reward for performing the sexual act, either money or other material goods exchanged at or near the time of the act.
2. The relationship between the provider and the recipient of sexual services involves neither love nor affection.
3. Because there is an exchange of services for material reward, prostitution is either a full or part-time vocation. Furthermore, prostitutes are not necessarily females or adults; male and female prostitutes of various ages provide sexual services for both the opposite and the same sex.

Categories of Commercial Sex Work

There are different categories and ways in which people engage in prostitution. These are;

1. **Street Prostitution:** In this category of prostitution, the prostitute solicits customers while waiting at street corners or walking alongside a street, usually dressed in skimpy, suggestive clothing. Often the prostitute (commonly called a hooker ",“ street hooker or “street walker” to distinguish them from other sex workers) appears to mind his/her own business and wait for the customers to initiate contact. Street prostitution differs significantly from “indoor prostitution”, which refers to call girls, escort agencies, and workers in bars, brothels and massage parlours. Generally indoor prostitution is safer for the workers as she has little or no negative impact on the surrounding community, it is more paid than street prostitution and the workers are more satisfied with their work than street prostitutes (Weitzer 2000, 2005).
2. **Escort/ Out-Call Prostitution:** Escort agencies maintain a database of employees of different types in other to cater to a wider client base. Some agencies may specifically deal in a certain type of prostitution. There are male-for-male, female–for male, and female-for-female escort agencies, as well as few male–for-female agencies, Agencies commonly specialize in only one sex. Transsexual prostitutes are available from some escort agencies.
3. **Sex Tourism:** Some sex tourists organize themselves around a number of websites where they boast about their conquests, share photos of their sex

partners, discuss tips on finding prostitution at the best possible rate in foreign countries and how to avoid detection both at home and abroad.

4. **Window or doorway commercial sex work:** this has to do with a brothel with sex workers on public display. Window prostitution is preferred in cold climates while doorway prostitution is preferred in warmer places.
5. **Massage Parlour:** this is a premises ostensibly dedicated to providing massage, but a range of sexual services may be provided.
6. **Door Knock or Hotel Prostitution:** here clients are approached in their hotel rooms or boarding houses.
7. **Survival Sex Prostitution:** this is a matter of degree where starvation or other serious deprivation is imminent, particularly for dependant, food; security may be the currency rather than money.
8. **Bondage and Discipline Prostitution:** here sexual fantasy through role play involves the inflicting of pain, but genital contact is not routine.
9. **Beer Girl's Prostitution:** here young women are hired by major companies to promote and sell products in bars and clubs. Sexual services are sold to supplement income.
10. **Transport Prostitution:** here the sex worker man boards vehicles to service the crew or passenger or pick up client at the station and terminals.

Commercial Sex Work in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

Commercial sex workers have been in business from time immemorial and are viewed as social outcasts by all generations from way back then to date. Commercial sex work in Nigeria has thrived despite religious injunctions and countless laws enacted against it. Though the act of sex work is still practiced in brothels and streets of major cities all over Nigeria today, the dark trade has shifted and is flourishing in Nigeria's higher institutions of learning. Young girls sent to schools to acquire knowledge and become productive citizens in the nation, have found a vocation in prostitution and now practice one of the oldest trades within and outside our institutions of higher learning.

Nigeria no doubt, is a religious nation with Christianity and Islam as the two major religions and the nation's social and moral practices are correlated to its religious norms hence, the practice of sex work is not encouraged which is why it is not legalized. However, there is no gain shying away from the fact especially

considering the research of this magnitude which is aimed at protecting the moral and ethical values of Nigerian society. Commercial sex workers are all over the streets, hotels, and hostels across the major cities of Nigeria. Having pointed earlier, the unjustifiable reasons attributed to economic, social and psychological angles in engaging in prostitution, its negative consequences are better imagined as it ranges from the increase in crime rate, rate of divorce in marriages, human trafficking, sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, genital herpes, Chlamydia, scabies, Bacteria vaginitis, Hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS (Akus, 2012). This has consequently affected the socio-cultural, religious, moral values and health of the nation hence; it is very harmful in practice.

Causes of Commercial Sex Work

There are a good number of reasons why people go into sex work. Some of the reasons are explained below:

a. Poverty: Because of the disintegration of the living conditions of families in Nigeria, hunger as a form of poverty has forced some parents to sell their children for prostitution. Some girls who engage in sex work do so because; they see prostitution as the only means of survival in order to get daily meals. Poverty also led some girls to sell their bodies for money and as a result, become professional sex workers (Onah, 2000).

b. Personal Life Style: These set of sex workers call it adventure (Ewah, 2010). Many sex workers engage themselves in this business just for the fun of human sexuality and not for economic benefit or frustration (Ewah, 2010).

c. Unemployment: Unemployment has been identified as one of the reasons most girls and boys engage in sex work, (Onah, 2000). Due to lack of job opportunities for the increasing rate of graduates, students especially girls resort to sex work as a means of livelihood and survival. Unemployment has also pushed many young people into sex work and in most cases against their will, (Onah, 2000).

d. Illiteracy: With the high rate of illiteracy in Nigeria, many parents can neither read nor write. The youths are not left out in this illiteracy problem. This has resulted in their being deceived into believing that in big cities, milk and honey flow, only to be forced into sex work when they get to the city, (Ewah, 2010).

e. Peer Group Pressures: Maria (2007) is of the view that many young women and girls fall prey to pressure from their peers, who they perceive as

having made it. The young girls and women want to make it too and be able to flaunt their influence like those people, not knowing or caring how they made it.

Consequences of Sex Work on Youth

The consequences of sex work are numerous. The following points below are some of the consequences:

a. Rape: Many sex workers have been victims of rape and many being sexually assaulted. The sexual assaults suffered by sex workers continue unchecked because of shame and ignorance, (Tiemoko, 2002).

b. Death: According to Ewah, (2010), some sex workers have been victims of ritual killings. Some commercial sex workers have been gunned down in the streets by unknown gun-men, while some who are lucky to be alive are left with some bodily harm especially those who have had acid poured on them and those knocked down by vehicles, (Mencken, 2009).

c. Loss of Self-Esteem: Sex workers lack confidence. Akpan (2002) had said that "commercial sex workers consider themselves as nobodies, since there is lack of confidence; they consider themselves as misfits in the society. He went further to say that, the situation has turned them into objects or instruments for others to satisfy the urge of others". Ekong (1991) said that "the low self-esteem has led the sex workers into getting involved in some social vices that have destroyed many of them".

d. Health Problem: The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) observed that, many prostitutes who have been sexually assaulted are believed to have suffered psychological effects of rape and social abuse, those abuses include; rape trauma syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These have done damage to the sex workers because many of them are ashamed and afraid to seek counseling. The reason for this is fear and suspicion of outsiders and authorities. Akpan (2000) stated that, sex work leads to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (S.T.D.), HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, frequent abortion and suicide attempts. Research has shown that, sex workers in brothels live in extremely unhygienic conditions. Most of them live in a 10 x 10 room apartment and medical care is often rare. These girls are forced to work round the clock and can only be excused on grounds that they are very weak physically (Akpan, 2000).

Literature Review

The term sex work was coined by sex worker activist (Leigh, 1980). Its use became popularized after publication of the anthology; sex work writings by women in the sex industry in 1987 (Leigh, 1980). The work 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). Sex workers usually referred to as prostitutes, have occupied an anomalous position in societies throughout history.

According to Weizer (2000), prostitutes 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. Outcast status denied them whatever international, national or customary protection from abuse is available to others as citizens, women or workers. This social exclusion renders the prostitute vulnerable to exploitation. The designation of prostitution as a special human right issue, violent in itself emphasizes the distinction between prostitution and other forms of female or low-status labour, such as clearing or food serving. By dismissing the entire sex industry as abusive, it also obscures the particular problems and violations of international norms within the industry which are of concern to sex workers.

Laura (2007), in her writing explained that, the term sex workers and sex works 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 necessary if not sufficient, condition for making sex work a part of the mainstream debate on human, women and workers, and worker's right at local, national and international level.

In the book entitled; Not Sex Work; Ferlay (1995) points out that, woman gain financially in some way from pornography and that, powerful women have a vested interest in creating pornography. She comments on the edition of feminism that only fight for issues that are of immediate concern to what she sees as their

privileged lives. The view that, prostitution is a choice for all prostitutes seems to be a prevalent view, even among those that oppose prostitution on religious moral terms.

Theoretical Framework

The Functionalist Theory was used for this paper. The Functionalist Theory, rooted in the work of Kingsley Davis (1971), assert that there are two reasons why prostitution exists. The first is the system of sexual morality that ostensibly condemns prostitutes, but has the unintended consequence of encouraging it. This create advantages for prostitution in two ways: dividing sex into "meaningful" (with one spouse), and "meaningless" (with a prostitutes). This has the effect of encouraging men to go to a prostitute if they want to have "meaningless" sex. Second, by defining certain sex act like anal or oral sex as immoral, not to be indulged in with one's moral spouse, the moral order encourages men to turn to immoral women for these sex acts. The moral systems in effect create a demand for prostitution.

Methodology

This study made use of survey research design. This method was used because, it is the one in which a group of people or teens are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few samples considered to be representative of the entire group. The sampling method used in this research is simple random sampling. This is used in order to have a scientific and true representation of the required sample of hotels to be used. The instrument used was a questionnaire which was developed by the researcher under the approval of the project supervisor and was distributed to the general public. The researcher provided guidance to the respondents by reading to those who were unable to read.

Discussion and Findings

From this research, it can be deduced that sex work is a form of labour especially for females. Commercial sex work can be seen basically, as sex for money where the end product is money making. Thus, this has been a key to the different causes of Female Gender based commercial sex activities in Nigeria. Commercial sex workers have been categorized into various types, but the most common type of sex work is the child/minor prostitution. There are various consequences of

commercial sex work in our society, ranging from HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, untimely death and other STD. It is also noted in the study that, sex work is perceived as beneficial to both the customers and sex workers. Despite these perceived benefits, sex workers face systematic discrimination throughout the world and are therefore, at risk of a numerous abuses.

The results obtained is that commercial sex work has a negative effect on the individual and its host community. Many sex workers have contracted all types of diseases through prostitution. There is no relationship between poverty and sex work in society. Both Federal and State government can curb the menace of commercial sex work by providing the necessary basic tools such as employment and education. Sex work is a form of labour particularly to the girls. Commercial sex work can be seen as basically sex for money, here the end product is money making.

Conclusion

The researcher believes that only by addressing to the root causes of prostitution, which are the factors that make up the demand, will we end the sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children through prostitution. We need to urge the government, NGOs, and religious communities to focus on setting measures and basic societal infrastructures in place to curb prostitution and its demand. All the components of this activities need to be penalized; the men who purchase sex acts, the exploiters, the traffickers and pimps who profit from the sale of women and children for sex, and the culture that lies about the nature of prostitution. The number of victims will be reduced if the demand for them is penalized. If there is no man seeking to buy sex acts, no woman child will be bought and sold. If there is no brothel waiting for victims, no victim will be recruited. If there is no state that profit from the sex trade, there will be regulations that will hinder the flow of women from poor towns to wealthier sex industry centers. If there were no false messages about prostitution, no woman or girl would be deceived into thinking prostitution is a glamorous or legitimate job.

Commercial Sex work is a morally wrong act. According to Ewah (2010), sex work is an expression of lust, spreading diseases that threaten the collective health of a society". This is as a result of its effect in the society. Hence, because of the high

HIV infection rates and large number of sexual partners, sex workers have been considered a core group for the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Commercial Sex work is a universal phenomenon with morals, social, psychosocial and medial implications. Many of those who engaged in sex work were attempting to earn money to escape poverty. But this negativity is not enough reason for people to indulge in this act of sexual immorality.

Finally, Commercial sex work is a menace in the society and thus, should not be legalized. Sex work cannot be eliminated completely so far as the urge for sex by both customers and sex workers are concerned. The more restrictive a society is, the greater the pressure for sex work to provide outlets for those who are not married.

Recommendations

From the findings of this research paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Nigerian government should promulgate laws to regulate sex work. These laws will consider sex work as a criminal activity and also give a strong disapproval of it, this will definitely reduce the total dependence on sex work as a profession.
2. More research should be carried out to identify the appropriate methods of sanitizing the public on commercial sex activities and the various effect on the health.
3. The Nigerian government should provide employment since, unemployment and poverty are some of the causes of commercial sex work in our society today.
4. All hands should be on desk to tackle this social problem by exposing and tracking down the people behind the shameful business of sex work.

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