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**VICTIMS, ACTORS AND VIOLENCE:  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
AND PROSTITUTION  
IN COMMUNITIES ALONG  
NIGERIA-BENIN REPUBLIC BORDER**



MODUPE ADELEYE<sup>1</sup>

**VICTIMS, ACTORS AND VIOLENCE: HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
AND PROSTITUTION IN COMMUNITIES ALONG NIGERIA-  
BENIN REPUBLIC BORDER**

**Abstract:**

A multiscalar phenomenon, human trafficking can be studied at the national and international levels, rendering the border a significant analytical object. This paper questions the specificities of the Nigerian-Benin border as affecting human trafficking. Based on field research undertaken in the communities of Shaki and Seme, the study examines how border dynamics affect the framing of networks and actors involved in the human trafficking process. It illustrates the gradual entanglement of human trafficking with other traffics and economic activities at play within bordering communities

Keywords: borders, human trafficking, transborder trafficking, Nigeria,  
Benin

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Human trafficking for sexual and domestic reasons is not a new phenomenon. Overtime, men, women and children have been trafficked for the profiting of members of criminal syndicates. More recently, humans have been trafficked for the retrieval of their organs and a lot of these victims have been left to serious health challenges and death. Trafficking for sexual and economic exploitation is considered as a modern form of slavery and a serious violation of the rights of victims especially because human trafficking always comes with issues of physical, mental and psychological violence, coercion, fraud and manipulation. Martti & Kauko (2006) posit that in tackling the menace of trafficking and smuggling, we must begin to look at the growing trend in migratory prostitution and border communities serving as viable source and transit hideout for human traffickers.

Martti & Kauko (2006) further point out that the expansion of human trafficking may be connected to increasing socio-economic inequalities between industrialized and Third World countries. From this assertion, we may also posit that the growth in the incidences of human trafficking for prostitution in border communities may also be linked to the wide disparity in the economic opportunities that are available in urban communities compared to the lack of such opportunities in border communities. Prostitution and related trafficking offences have been linked closely to other crimes like drug trafficking and human smuggling; these crimes are most common in border zone. It becomes easy to source for vulnerable girls and women who may be trafficked as sexual slaves.

The trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation is becoming one of the leading illegal economic activities along with drug trafficking and arms smuggling (Salt, 2000). The exposure of women and girls domicile in border communities to human trafficking has become acute. In addition, a lot of females who hitherto were been smuggled out of the country find themselves stranded at the border communities for several reasons and thereby become easy prey to human traffickers. Research has indicated that location and environment are key factors to consider in the sustenance and spread of trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation. Researchers like Melrose (1999) posit that attention should shift from studying factors and causes from individual pathology to socio-economic and situational pathology. In other word, we should begin to look at how prevailing situations and circumstances in an environment predispose the members of such environment or community to certain patterns of living. Researchers have begun to visit the exposure and threat to the human security of exploited females, in reference to particular volatile locations such as military base, border communities and communities with prevailing rate of poverty (Espach & Haering 2012).

The interplay of transnational border space, commercial and human mobility, presence of organised crime network and a prevailing poverty level in the communities surrounding the border area fosters a thriving sexual industry and a conducive atmosphere for recruiting and trafficking women and girls for sexual exploitation (Dallen 2002). Wonders & Michalowski (2001) suggest reasons for the increase in human trafficking and expanse in prostitution in border communities. One of which is that, although the border area keeps expanding and flow of money is constant because of the commercial and illegal activities, the common indigenes of the communities are still, largely unemployed and poor (Joana 2004). Furthermore, Greenbaum (2014) posits that environmental, societal, and community dynamics are some of the risk factors that make people more susceptible to human trafficking.

Bryan (2014) and Greenbaum (2014) both assert that geographical communities with international airport, exit and entry points by land or sea, large percentage of transient male population, high crime neighbourhood, among others are such that allow for higher risk to human trafficking for sexual exploitation. In addition, communities where hard drugs can be more easily sourced and accessed, those with higher rate of prostitution and communities where members are less likely to have standard education and thus less employment opportunities are also more prone to trafficking. Border communities are prime locations where all these risk factors are present; it adequately serves as a conducive community where victims of trafficking can be sourced. Such communities serve as exit route for both the traffickers and the victims (Zhang, 2010). Despite widespread focus on human trafficking for sexual exploitation, there has been little empirical study on the pivotal role of location and environment in the source, nature, process and increase in sex trafficking. Thus the fieldwork location for this study, are two major border communities along the Nigeria-Benin Republic border area.

The fieldwork for the study began in December 2015. The data was primarily gathered from Seme and Shaki border communities. The choice for both communities was hinged on the fact that Seme is the most commercial border community along the Nigeria-Benin Republic border area while Shaki is a popular human trafficking and smuggling route. These attributes justified the choice of the border communities. The data for the study was sourced from key actors in the sex and human trafficking industry. Victims of trafficking, law enforcement agents, staff members of a non-governmental agency who are involved in organising advocacy and intervention programmes for the victims of trafficking in border communities were interviewed. In addition members of staff of National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons were interviewed and through the agency, the researcher had access to the case files of victims

rescued by the commission and suspected human traffickers operating at border communities.

The study was a strictly qualitative research using the in-depth, focus group discussion, field observation and deductions from conversations held with major players in the sex and human trafficking industry in a naturalistic environment. This significance of the study is based on the hypotheses that human trafficking especially for sexual reason might find the socio-economic environment and the peculiar border community dynamics conducive for the sourcing, recruitment and trafficking of female residence of border communities. In addition, it is also hypothesised that some risk factors may be present in the border communities due to the interplay of border structure, activities and personalities that frequent border communities.

### **Nature and Trend of Human Trafficking in Border Communities**

Human trafficking for prostitution typically conjures an image of vulnerable men, women and children who have been sold into the world of sexual servitude. Usually these victims are forced, deceived and traded into sexual slavery by members of an organised criminal syndicate who derive financial benefit from these illegal activities. We must mention here that the process, nature and the persons involved in this trade differ from location to location, also the time frame, beginning from the period of initiation of the victims to the when they are actually sold and begin their lives as sexual slaves also may vary. According to Andrea & Nina (2009), trafficking for sexual exploitation may be grouped under four major categories; these typologies may not exist in all location, at the same frequency and at the same time but usually sexual exploitation may be (1) War induced sexual slavery (2) Ritual sexual slavery of women and girls (3) sexual slavery as a result of forced marriage (4) trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Findings from the fieldwork suggest that some of the victims of trafficking interviewed fall into some of these categories except ritual sexual slavery of women. It was deduced from the data gotten from various respondents that the pathway of the victims into human trafficking in border communities varies. A lot of the victims said that they got attracted to the promises of the traffickers due to the urgent need to escape forced marriages, domestic violence from their spouse and financial constrain in their marriages. There were reported cases of victims of sexual exploitation, whose pathway started as illegal immigrants but got stranded in the border communities. This is an attempt toward enabling the traffickers to process their passage out of the country. Some of the girls and women wait, they are forced to prostitute to fend for themselves and also pay the expenses of the pimps or traffickers.

The interviews with victims of trafficking and from the case files of suspected traffickers from the border communities studied suggest that many of these traffickers are skilled in determining and approaching women and girls who they suspect as financially vulnerable, who are socially isolated and those who suffer from physically and domestic violence Wonder & Michalowski (2001). Adamson (2006) in studying the nature and trend of human trafficking in border communities agrees with the field findings by positing that victims of sexual exploitation are usually those who have moved further away from their support group or displaced by unsuccessful migration to locations like border communities. Such victims are exposed to sexual violations in more proportion compared to those who are still within their original family structure and those in the cities.

A common trend and pathway in the study of human trafficking for sexual exploitation can be deduced from the reasons a lot of the interviewed victims of trafficking gave for their journey into sexual exploitation. Many of the victims stated that lack of alternative means of livelihood and the attractive picture of luxury painted by the traffickers were major pull factors for being trafficked. Aside from hawking and domestic labour, which are also common route which human traffickers explore to source for females who are vulnerable to be sexually trafficked, it is discovered that there is little or no other engagement that can be financially beneficial to the average female in Shaki and Seme border communities. Some of the socio-economic differences between border communities and urban cities include (1) income generation of the indigenes of the communities (2) intersection of nationalities (3) types of occupation available in the border (4) educational and vocational opportunities (5) age disparity (6) sex and sexuality. These peculiarities in the border communities may be responsible for the difference in the nature and trend of human trafficking for sexual reasons and other social issues on border locations.

To further buttress the fact that seeking better financial status is a major pull factor for trafficking for sexual exploitation, the community head of Okerete community (the border community on the Shaki border zone closest to Benin Republic) stated that the quest for better financial status propel a lot of foreigners from Benin Republic and Togo to be trafficked to Shaki. He stated that the majority of these victims are usually underage boys and girls who are initially told that they are being transported to Nigeria to work as domestic slaves or to become farm hands; but many of the girls are later forced into prostitution. Some of the members of the Shaki community attest to the fact that Shaki is usually just a passage, a major entry point for victims of trafficking and traffickers coming from Benin Republic and Togo into Nigeria. Their final destination is usually Ibadan, Abeokuta and Lagos. Shaki also serves as point of exit for

Nigerians who are being trafficked out of Nigeria enroute western countries.

The situation is different in Seme border community. Here, there is evidence of a vibrant sex industry fuelled by human trafficking. Unlike Shaki that seems to be a route for the movement of trafficked persons, Seme appears to be both an exit and entry point, a source for the recruitment of victims of trafficking and a venue where victims operate. Many of the respondents were promised better financial life; they were told that they will work as petty traders, petty smugglers and work in relaxation spots at the border community but find themselves forced to prostitute alongside working as escort or fronts for smugglers. According to one of the case files of a suspected smuggler, some of the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation initially began as escorts, they were sent to ensure that the smuggling route are safe from security personnel and sometimes they are sent to placate and entertain the security personnel to enable the smugglers have a thorough fare through the many illegal routes.

Aside these illegal activities which some of them were initially aware of, sexual demands are made by the smugglers whenever it pleases them. At this point, the elements of force, threat and deceit come into the picture because these traffickers usually fully armed and violent. There are various reports of sexual servitude, incidences of rape, physical and psychological violence experienced by the victims who in most times are under the domination of the traffickers and smugglers. In addition, some of the victims stated they become hopeless and helpless in the face of sexual exploitation because they have become addicted to hard drugs; thus they need to remain in the sexual slavery to sustain their drug addiction. For example, a 23 year old victim of sexual trafficking said that at a point she could actually have stopped being used as a sexual object by the trafficker but she felt she could not survive without having access to drugs which is readily available within Seme border community.

Well... I would have left Seme but how will I survive with my daily dose of cocaine...

How do I remain happy? It is only when I have injected this substance that I feel

Comfortable to face the work and the world. I really do not know how to stop being addicted to cocaine and I have no one to help me instead I am abused and insulted



From the findings got from various other respondents, human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Seme border is sustained largely by the availability of drug addicts who are forced to become prostitutes in order to maintain their supply of drugs. The pathway for each victim is different, some were trafficked for sexual reasons and afterwards introduced to drugs to help them manage the scourge and trauma of prostitution, while some others prostitute to sustain their drug addiction. Prostitution and addiction to hard substances are mutually reinforcing, it thus becomes extremely difficult to quit one without the other especially in a community that is bereaved of professional help. Dependency is quite easy to be encouraged and sustained in border locations; drugs, arms, contraband goods and humans are smuggled and trafficked on a daily basis. Thus each on this spectrum of illegal activities feeds, reinforces and sustains the other.

Kabeer (2001) and Cusick & Anthea (2003) while discussing the peculiarity and nature of the border community, empowerment and disempowerment trajectories, and vulnerability of the indigenes to human trafficking, posit that some situational factors that are more visible in border space makes it easier for people to become prey for traffickers. They argue that situational factors like childhood experiences of parental abuse or neglect, early childhood exposure to drugs, approval or subtle tolerance of exchange of sex for incentives or other illegal activities in the immediate social milieu, poor work histories and lack of educational or vocational skills are some of the causes for increase of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in border communities. The community heads of Shaki and Seme communities both stated that they are aware that human traffickers and smugglers exist in their community.

While the community head at Shaki did not agree that women and girls from Shaki community are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, the community head at Seme subtly stated that there is a possibility that some of their girls are trafficked as prostitute and some others operate within the community. In his attempt at justifying the flow of illegal activities in the community, he stated that these illegal transactions fuel and sustain the economy of the border community. He further adds that although Seme border has potential for wealth creation because of the large scale commercial activities in the border, the indigenes are still poor. A report by the United State- Mexico Border Health Commission supports this assertion as a general characteristic of most borders. The report states that in border communities, wealth contrasts with poverty. "Border lives are characterised by complex and sometimes seeming contradictory factors... it is both a bustling area engaged in international business and a poor region with few prospect for economic growth"(pg 11). It is popular because of its usage as a revenue generating zone for the government, at

the same time largely ignore in terms of provision of amenities that will benefit the members of the community.

The border share some features of urban and rural communities. It can be densely populated and commercial and at the same time lacking in socio-economic amenities typical of rural communities. These contradictions put the average female in border community at a disadvantaged and vulnerable situation. Aside from menial jobs and aiding illegal transactions, prostitution becomes a more profitable and financially attractive occupation for the indigenes of the border. An indigene of Seme, stated that she cannot say exactly how or when she began to prostitute. She pointed out that it is usually a process, starting from the point from which they are introduced to the possibility of a more financially promising job, as a domestic help in a restaurant, brothel or petty smuggling to when they are introduced to having sexual intercourse with smugglers and trafficker, and the eventual point when they are forced or threatened by their partners to become ladies who sexually service men in the community or are transported to another locality and sold to a madam or pimp in a brothel. The eventual end point for many of the ladies that are not educated or not gainfully employed in the community is to finally end up as prostitutes. From the discussion held with her, it was discovered that many of the girls start from hawking contraband goods, smuggling petty goods and working as beer parlour girls but the madams in such beer parlours find a way of ensnaring them with display of wealth by the smugglers and traffickers.

A resident of Shaki said that Shaki is an entry point for victims of trafficking coming from Benin Republic, Togo and Ghana. He claims that the victims view Nigeria as a country where there are more economic opportunities compared to their countries.

*Majority of the girls who are victims of prostitution are being introduced to sexual exploitation by their relative, friends and sometimes spouse who have been established here in shaki. Many of them go back to their villages to bring ladies here telling them that Shaki is a business zone and that there is a lot of money to be made in Shaki ( interview held at Shaki)*

Thus, economic incentives are major factors that encourage the increase of human trafficking in Shaki border community. For instance,

According to the findings in Shaki, the nature and trend of trafficking for sexual exploitation is complex. Trafficking for sexual exploitation and for

domestic reasons is interwoven. It was discovered that most times, the initial exposure of women and girls who are trafficked starts from their being domestic helps to sexual exploitations. A lot of incidents were reported of young girls who were smuggled from Benin Republic to Shaki to work as farm hands or domestic helps but they alleged that they are maltreated by their bosses and thus decide to move to Ibadan, Lagos or Abeokuta to become sex workers. One of the respondents insists that most times the girls on their own volition decide to work as prostitutes but few of them are approached by owners of brothels in the community to become prostitutes in their brothel. The members of the community state categorically that trafficking within Shaki is not so bothersome compared to the international trafficking through Shaki.

Several literature like Carling (2006), Okojie (2009) have established the fact that Shaki border is a transit route for international human trafficking for sexual exploitation. However, in addition to Shaki being an international transit route out of Nigeria for trafficking and smuggling of persons, this study has shown that Shaki is also a route where indigenes of border communities in Benin Republic and Togo are smuggled into Nigeria, and also trafficked to urban cities like Lagos and Ibadan for sexual exploitation and as domestic helps. The significance of the above nature of trafficking in Shaki is that the community becomes a hotbed for trafficking and thus exposes the indigenous girls and women to the risk of being ensnared by traffickers and smugglers. Okojie (2009) supports this assertion by stating that rural and border areas are being targeted by traffickers for easier transportation and migration to other countries and communities across the border. This is due to increased awareness in urban areas, and the increasing difficulty the smugglers and trafficker encounter in the process of transporting the victims without being caught by law enforcement agents.

UNESCO (2006) identifies Shaki community as an endangered community because it is an example of a localised international trafficking route. It is a transit community where some victims may be stranded and subsequent interactions may occur among victims of trafficking. Traffickers and vulnerable females in the community may be used as a ploy by traffickers to deceive the female into believing that migration and trafficking is a viable option to prevailing poverty in the border community (Carling, 20006). Myriam, Jenny & Peter (2013) capture the interplay of nature, trend and factors of trafficking for prostitution in border communities succinctly thus: “trafficking is an issue that exist in between the gaps of regulation, welfare, survival, service delivery (service demand and supply) and border control.

### **Recruitment pattern of victims of trafficking in the border locations under study**

In order to effectively study, understand and proffer a solution to the menace of trafficking for sexual exploitations in different locations, it is of utmost importance to understand the different patterns adopted by traffickers to source, recruit and transport these victims from one location to another. Studies like Kabeer (2001), Cameron & Newman (2008), Rahman (2011) have argued that studying the intricacies of human trafficking in each location can as well be the means by which an elimination of trafficking will be possible. Cameron & Newman (2008) further posit that the forms and structure of trafficking are multifaceted in dimension; its patterns are also determined by geographical and regional location.

The findings from Seme and Shaki border communities confirmed the truism in the above statements. It was discovered that although both locations are border communities and share similarities in terms of how vibrant and obvious the human trafficking activities are, the patterns of sourcing and recruiting victims are different. The structure of human trafficking at Seme is more multifaceted and complex. It is a chain of processes, involving many people and syndicates. There is evidence of structure in the recruitment of the victims, the transportation of the victims, the sale of the victims and the process by which the victims are forced, indoctrinated and integrated into sexual exploitation. Each of these arms in the structure is handled by people who consider themselves professional and view the sale of women and girls as an occupation. The levels of involvement in Seme border, include the indigenes of the community who are fully aware of the demands, profit and consequence inherent in the “business”. These indigenes assist in pointing out the females who are more susceptible and will be easy prey in their community to the traffickers, and also assist in fast tracking the transportation of those who intend to smuggle the girls across the border.

Human trafficking in Seme, as against Shaki is a business; it is considered as one of the blessings and dividends of living in a border community. For example, an indigene of Seme community argues that human trafficking is not a bad business; it is what the indigenes can survive on. Infact, she insists that the female being trafficked are only being introduced to a better economically viable life than what is obtainable in the border community. She concludes that usually, some parents are aware that girls are being trafficked to other locations, some assume that the reason for the trafficking is for domestic reasons while others are aware that the girls are used for sexual purposes but chose to ignore the realities of such action. As far as such parents are concerned that is the only outlet from prevailing poverty in the community. Most times, the girls are not in the know of the

arrangement but are only told they are travelling to meet a relative in an undisclosed location. The general consensus in the community is that, it is only the favoured parents and girls that are privileged to be trafficked.

A bonafide member of the community must have been involved in the business of transporting girls and also in the 'fayawo' (smuggling of contraband goods, cars or persons across illegal border routes) we always say that the border is our Niger Delta, where we do things to earn a living. What you people call illegal activities is how we survive (interview held at Seme Border).

Out of 20 girls interviewed at Seme community, 12 of them are orphans and children of widows. The recruiters who are usually community members of Seme community select females who are in urgent need of financial aid. Many of the victims got involved in prostitution through referrals from those who are already involved in the business. While interviewing the victims of sexual exploitation, we were careful to differentiate a member of community who because of hardship takes the sole decision to be sexually exploited from the actual victims whose entrance into sexual exploitation falls within the scope of trafficking. This was a bit dicey because not all victims interviewed had the features of transportation and the visible elements of force. Many of the victims could not qualify themselves as victims of trafficking. This was not surprising because a lot of them do not understand the concept of human trafficking and do not associate it with illegality or a crime against the human right. This is an advantage to the recruiters who are the first stage of contact.

Recruitment in Seme starts with the first level recruiters, who usually are more financially stable and popular members of the community; who is known to be well travelled or a family relative. These recruiters usually approach a widow or guardian, and subtly suggest that the females can do better financially in another location usually across the border to the neighbouring community. Another method used is to tell the parent that their children will work as bar tenders or accountants or personal assistants to wealthy smugglers. After they are released, the girls are transferred to another recruiter who has direct contact with either brothel owners or those whose responsibility in the trafficking chain is to smuggle the girls through illegal border paths across to another community. At that point the use of force, threat and violence is introduced, usually the second or third levels of recruitment is carried out by a member of the syndicate who the victim is not familiar with and thus is probably afraid of. At this point, there is a

shift in the relationship. Whereas, the first level recruiter operate from the point of friendship, care and romance, the second and third level recruiter operates from a position of power to a place of vulnerability and weakness. Force, threat and violence are introduced to ensure fear from the victims and compliance to the instructions of the traffickers.

This pattern of operation is substantiated by Suhana & Ali (2014) stating that the method that traffickers commonly adopt is to use a familiar face or more commonly a mature female member of the syndicate who appears to be a right standing indigene of the community to gain and maintain control and trust from their victims by establishing trust through false friendship and romance. Later on, psychological control, threat, intimidation and violence are introduced. There were accounts given by the victims of spouses and boyfriends who assume the first level of recruitment, and whose major reason for trafficking their partner is hinged on the prospect of international travel for greener pasture. For example, a 23 year old female indigene of Kankon; (who was rescued at Togo by staff of Abidjan-Lagos Corridor Organisation (ALCO), reported that her fiancé introduced her to the recruiter who linked her up with a trafficker cum smuggler who promised to take her to Ghana where her fiancé will meet up with her. Kankon is a community close to Seme border and ALCO is an organisation aimed at tackling issues of trafficking, smuggling, transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases along the border communities. The organisation also organises intervention programs for victims of trafficking and prostitution). The plan was that she will work at border communities along the Lagos-Abidjan border corridor. She was not told the nature of the work. She was raped and tortured severally by members of the trafficking syndicates after they have crossed over to Krake in Benin Republic. The intent of the rape is to introduce the victims to sexual servitude and more importantly to demystify prostitution and make them feel helpless.

The pattern of recruitment, demand and supply of service in the trafficking for sexual servitude in border community is quite different from is obtainable in urban areas. Most of the victims are sourced from the border community, go through traumatic process of reorientation in to sexual slavery and encounter their initial experience of sexual exploitation within the border community. It is also a common practice to move the victims sourced from the border community to work in other border communities. It may be deduced from the findings from the interviews conducted that victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation move around border communities. There was evidence to prove that a lot of the victims were recruited and sold by members of organised syndicate that have well established links in other border communities. In fact there are claims by the victims that some members of security officers are aware of the

presence of the syndicates, and work with them in ensuring that they are not apprehended by agencies responsible for the eradication of human trafficking in border communities. However, this claim could not be substantiated by any security official or suspected trafficker. The victim supported the assertion of collaboration with border security control in the recruitment process by stating that

*The border patrol officers were aware that we were coming on that second night when we wanted to cross from Seme to Krake... in fact, the border security was the one who called us and told us to wait till around 2am since some of the girls do not possess their papers. I was hoping to ask for a rescue at Benin Republic border to Togo but the same thing happened again. I just knew that I may have to escape on my own at that point.*

The movement of trafficked girls is on the increase and becomes easy in border community because of the ease of passage, enabled by the porous border areas and the subtle approval, or like in Shaki ignorance of human trafficking by members of the communities. In addition, literature like Fiona (2006) and Fiona *et al* (2011) explain the peculiarity of increase in recruitment and sustenance of the human trafficking in border communities by alluding that because border communities consist of members of organised criminal syndicates whose illegal occupation in the border is largely dependent on each other and they can cover up for each other, it becomes convenient for traffickers to operate within the border community. Another reason for the preference of border is that the border is known for practices related to other forms of violence. The act of violence can be hidden almost successfully, because border locations are viewed as places where social and legal norms can be ignored, an anonymous, free for all zone and a place where crime, corruption and violence are allowed to flourish.

Flood (2009) identified three factors that feed violence in sexual exploitation and by extension, encourage the flow of trafficking for sexual exploitation in border community. Flood identifies gender norms and relationship pattern in victim's recruitment. The victims interviewed were basically female between the ages of 14-40, the traffickers and smugglers are predominantly male between the ages of 21-60. Except for few first level recruiters who were women, the members of the syndicate are men who assert their gender role and supremacy on the victims. Thus it was not surprising to find out that rape, torture and violence was a common

occurrence in the recruitment patterns. Walker (2009) and Wall (2014) explain rape here as defined by power assertion and the vulnerability of the victims. Ball-Rokeach (1980) posits that rape is performed to psychologically disempower the victims, to take away the victims independence and power. In this circumstance, rape and such violence against the victims becomes normative and expected.

Furthermore, social norms and practices fuel sex trafficking and violence in the recruitment process. Because it is almost accepted that the border is a hotbed for sex work and sex tourism, the illegality of the objectification and sale of the human body is dimed. The members of border community are exposed to early exposure to the sale of sex; females thus view sex as both for pleasure and an economic adventure. Finally access to material and social resources, and patterns of social injustice are other issues while studying recruitment pattern in border. Taking the experience of Tina as an example, it was discovered that members of the border community and victims of sexual exploitation in Seme border did not have a sense of social justice. It is accepted that the border is ruled and dominated by high profile criminal syndicates thus these criminals are feared more than the security personnel. The border is termed a lawless zone, lacking in social resources and justice system that a victim may rely and turn to in hopeless and helpless situations like sexual servitude.

From the findings at the border locations studied, one can conclude that the nationality and tribe of the victims of sexual exploitation in brothels and around each border is not random. It is largely determined by link that the brothel owners have with recruitment agents and the proximity of the border location to the nearest country. In addition, the dominant tribe or nationality domicile is also influenced by how commercial and popular the particular border is. For example, victims interviewed from Seme field were predominantly females from Delta, Edo and Abia states of Nigeria; Ghanaians and females from Benin Republic. Since Seme is at the South Western part of Nigeria, one will wonder how the victims got trafficked from the South-South and South- Eastern part of Nigeria to Seme.

One of the victims interviewed said, distance from their locality and the popularity of Seme as the most commercial border in Nigeria were major consideration for the movement to Seme. Most of them said they did not plan to get involved with prostitution but only came to Seme to “hustle” far away from their family and friends. Many of them had an incline they were being brought to participant in one illegality or the other, but it was when they arrived Seme, that they realised that they were brought to the border to be involved in prostitution. In Shaki, the girls who are involved in prostitution are from Togo, Benin Republic and Benue State of Nigeria. This is because many of the victims initially were smuggled from



neighbouring border communities in Benin Republic to Shaki to work as domestic help and farm hands, but later got recruited into sexual servitude.

The pattern of recruitment in Shaki is different from Seme. It does not involve many people, and it is not so professional or organised. From the finding, it was discovered that human trafficking for sexual exploitation is not as accepted and visible as can be found in Seme. For example many of the respondents argue that sexual exploitation does not occur in Shaki but they agree that brothel and sex sell in the community. These seem like a contradiction because when the respondents were asked how they think the brothels are supplied with girls, they claimed ignorance but still insist that indigenes of Shaki do not patronise the brothels. The conclusion reached from the study was that sexual exploitation is usually not the reason for human trafficking in Shaki but at the end, many of the trafficked girls gets ensnared with the sex industry in Shaki and thereby find themselves in brothels and as object of sexual entertainment for smugglers and other members of the community.

According to a respondent who lives and works in Shaki, the pattern of recruitment is less sinister and straight forward. The recruiter goes round Shaki to collect list of possible buyers of victims of trafficked and smuggled children from Benin Republic and Togo. He/she therefore organises a vehicle which goes to the communities outside Shaki to smuggle in the victims who most times are eagerly awaiting their escape from poverty in their country to Nigeria which the recruiters have painted as filled with easy money making opportunities. On the average, the community members do not associate the activities of the recruiters as illegal. As far as they were concerned it is the usual occurrence as long as members of the host community are not in any immediate danger of the activities of the recruiters. The respondent agrees that within a year of staying within the Shaki community, many of the victims leave Shaki to Ibadan or Lagos while some of them meet with international smugglers who smuggle them out of Nigeria through the illegal routes in Shaki.

Human trafficking for sexual or domestic exploitation occurs in many societies, it is a global crisis and efforts are geared towards its eradication, and the protection, rehabilitation and settlement of victims of trafficking. However, it is becoming increasingly imperative to note that as much as human trafficking is of a global concern, the patterns, factors, trend and nature are highly localised. In other words it is important to study the patterns adopted by trafficking syndicates as they operate in each location. The knowledge of this will go a long way to fast track the intervention efforts of community, non-governmental organisations and government. Aside from the study of factors, nature, patterns and trend, understanding the actors involved in the human trafficking business in the border

communities is key to a successful analysis of the border and human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

### **Principal Actors in Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Border communities**

The principal actors are those people who are involved within the chain of trafficking. These also include those whose actions or job knowingly or unknowingly facilitate the process of trafficking, and those whose aim is to eradicate the menace of trafficking. Taking a cue from the findings on the field, about 14 actors were identified as playing one role or the other. Some of the actors play dual roles while some are not aware of their involvement in the process.

**Victims:** The victims are the principal actors in human trafficking. They are the men, women and children who have been objectified and used as a mean of commercial transaction. The victims are those who have been recruited, threatened, sold into sexual slavery. From the findings in Seme and Shaki, majority of the victims of sexual exploitation are female between the ages of 14-40. Most of them are poor, uneducated and financially dependent on a relative or their spouse. We may conclude from our findings that poverty is a major vulnerability factors for the females who are victims of human trafficking. According to Viuhko & Jokinen (2009) poverty is increasing and disproportionately affecting women more than men. In addition, because of gender relationship and inequality, females are more susceptible to violence which further exposes them to trafficking.

It is important to point out that in order to have a victim's centered approach to human trafficking, we must tackle the issue of human trafficking from the perspective of human right violations and not a criminal approach. This will aid an effective victim rescue and assistance.

**Traffickers:** The traffickers are the individuals who source, buy and sell victims of trafficking; both men and women may be involved in trafficking. Although based on the findings from the field, majority of the respondents said women were the initial traffickers while men took off after the sourcing stage. Recruiters are also within the trafficking spectrum. The difference is that the work of the recruiter stops when the victims have been sourced and transferred from her locality to another locality. In the border community, traffickers may be members of the community or from another community but the recruiters are basically members of the community.

**Brothel owners:** Brothel owner also double as pimps and madams. The business of the brothel owners depends largely on prostitution which is

also fuelled by human trafficking for sexual exploitation. From the findings, it was discovered that most brothels are owned by community members and community leaders. It is regarded as an entertainment and business venture. One of the victims stated that many of the brothel owners are investors in the trafficking business. They pay the traffickers and recruiters to source for girls and bring from other border communities. Usually, the brothel owners have link and association with other brothel owners in border communities. There is a sort of collaboration and arrangement that ensures that the victims are transferred and moved around border to avoid familiarity and a situation whereby the victims may have established ties or links that may help in their rescue.

**Community boys and leaders:** These are passive actors in the trafficking chain. Many of the respondents argue that they are not involved in trafficking but in actual fact, they play very critical role in ensuring that trafficking in border community is without hitch. The role of the community boys is to lead the traffickers through bush part that security personnel are not aware of. Many of the boys are not aware or interested in what or who is being trafficked or smuggled but they are more conscious of the financial benefits that their duties offer. The role of the community boys is more visible in a porous and highly commercial border like Seme. Seme has about 219 illegal routes known to the commercial boys. The community boys are spies for the traffickers. They inform the traffickers of the movement of the border patrol official and find hideouts for them. In order to tackle human trafficking in border communities, the community boys and leaders have fundamental roles to play. A successful intervention project must include them in their analysis.

**Border security officials:** Border security officials refers to the border patrol officers, border health officers, immigration and police officers, customs officers and other local community security groups whose duty is to regulate movement in the border communities. This set of actors is very crucial in the study of human trafficking in border community. They have vested power by the government and local community to prevent smuggling of contraband goods and humans and the trafficking of humans. However, the reality in the border community is that many of these actors are fully involved in the human trafficking. Many of the respondent attest to the fact that their passage through legal and illegal route through the border was facilitated by border security. In addition, many of the brothels are raided by police and immigration officers only for them to back down when they have been given some amount. Several of the victims assert that many of the security personnel sexual exploit them in exchange for safety and protection.

**Governmental Agencies and Non-Governmental Organisation:** The eradication of human trafficking for sexual exploitation is a battle that cannot be fought by the government alone. In many societies, non-governmental organisations have sprung up in the crusade against trafficking. It is thus not surprising to find organisations like the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor Organisation (ALCO) at Seme border. The aim of this organisation is to organise intervention programs for victims of trafficking and prostitutes in the border communities along Abidjan- Lagos border corridor. However, at the Shaki border, there was no organisation present. The implication is that, although trafficking is on a larger scale at Seme border, there are mechanisms in place to help victims of trafficking, to sensitise them on the evils of trafficking and the possibility of a rescue. On the contrary, human trafficking for various reasons continues unhindered in Shaki community. Although ALCO is not a security outfit and the method it adopts is a subtle; that is, friendly interaction with victims and suspected traffickers, the organisation employs gentle intervention mechanisms. The victims rescued by ALCO are later handed over to National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other Related Offences (NAPTIP) to continue management.

**Prevention and Management of Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Border Communities:** According to Kirsten (2010) human trafficking is one of the negatives of migration, capitalism and globalisation. The commercialisation of humans for sexual exploitation is a trend that responds to the demand and availability of supply of vulnerable females who later become victims of trafficking. Because socio-economic needs is at center of the increase in human trafficking, in addition to the fact that border communities are lacking in social resources and amenities that may help cushion the vulnerability of the average female to trafficking, it is thus necessary to find means that are suitable to the peculiarity of border communities in preventing further increase in trafficking and manage the existing factors which predisposes community members to trafficking.

In recognition of the nature and trend of human trafficking in border community, it has become imperative to prevent and manage the menace by combining the efforts of various stakeholders or actors involved in human trafficking in border communities. Taking a cue from the data got from the locations in this study, one may conclude that a successful intervention and prevention attempt must include community leadership, state and non-state actors, victims and even suspected traffickers. The management mechanism must be victim centered and not criminal centered (Zhang, 2010). The ultimate intension should be to rescue and rehabilitate victims while criminalising and prosecuting suspected traffickers should be secondary. This suggestion is precipitated on the fact

that during the interviews, it was discovered that immediately the victims assume that the interview is being conducted to facilitate the arrest of traffickers, there is a withdrawal.

In addition, based on the peculiarity of human trafficking in border communities, and the dynamics of border space, it is strongly suggested that community based intervention should be at the core of an attempt to provide solution to human trafficking in border communities. Although Seme and Shaki are commercial and popular because of the cross border activities that occur in the communities, they are basically rural in nature. The communal life and interaction still hold sway to a large extent. This means that members of the community relate and rely on each other and can be positively or negatively influenced by each other. This characteristic of the border can be used as a tool to raise awareness, and establish community resolve against human trafficking. In Seme border community, five brothels were identified where victims of trafficking were housed and exploited, out of the five brothels, three are owned by natives of the community who are significant leaders in the border. It thus becomes difficult to eradicate human trafficking when it is what sustains the business of the influential leaders in the community.

The findings from the field thus suggest that an intervention approach that aims at educating the leaders on the evil inherent in trafficking will bring about a sustainable decrease in human trafficking for sexual exploitation in border community. Community members and leaders can be empowered such that they become invulnerable to human trafficking, and are introduced to legal commercial opportunities within the border community that can be beneficial to them. Suhana & Ali (2014) also agree that the involvement of the public in helping the community members understand the evils in trafficking is very important. A staff of NAPTIP interviewed pointed out that the agency makes use of the media to educate and create awareness for members of the public. Nevertheless, during our discussion with the border community members, it was discovered that that method cannot work in a rural border community like Shaki.

Some of the respondents stated that their initial exposure to issues of trafficking came from casual discussion held between them and border health officials and some immigration officers. Such casual, mouth to mouth avenue can be used to facilitate awareness in the communities especially because many of the members of the community do not have access to electronic media. On the average, the community members lacked understanding of the phenomenon; many of the respondents had wrong perspective about human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Some equate victims of trafficking with sex workers and thus saw no reason why it should be discouraged. The members of the community are core actors

within the border community, they understand the terrain and are usually the first level recruiters. Thus, they will play crucial role if they are involved in intervention programmes against human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

In preventing and finding lasting solution to human trafficking, the government of Nigeria established NAPTIP an agency committed to preventing all forms of human degradation and exploitation. The aims of the agency include stamping out human trafficking, rehabilitate and successfully reintegrate victims of trafficking into the society. During the fieldwork, NAPTIP, became an important actor to consult on a research that is centered on human trafficking. As part of the findings from the agency, it was stated that due to the frequency of established cases of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, and the number of victims rescued so far, we can conclude that border communities are a major source, transit and venue for human trafficking for sexual reasons. One will thus expect that such important location such have offices where victims can access first hand protection and intervention when needed.

It was found out that due to logistic reasons, there is no shelter (that is houses) or offices at border locations. This is considered as one of the downsides in the campaign against trafficking and prostitution. NAPTIP relies solely on other security agencies to arrest victims and suspected traffickers and then hand such persons to them. This reliance obviously is not as effective as when the agency itself is positioned to be first contact with victims. The reason for this assertion is that unlike other security agencies, which are trained to use the criminally centered oriented approach, staff member of NAPTIP tend to be more victim centered and subtle in their approach. The subtle approach has been documented to elucidate trust and confidence from the victims to their rescuer and more effective in finding solution to human trafficking menace.

In addition, a staff member of NAPTIP said a major problem the agency has is the prosecution of traffickers. Many of the traffickers and victims are granted bail, facilitated by wealthy member of the trafficking syndicates even before NAPTIP have contact with them. This problem stems from the reliance of NAPTIP on other agencies in border communities who may be familiar with members of the criminal syndicate and thus influenced by them. Many of the victims who hitherto were rescued are also allowed to go without trying to elucidate information that may be useful in tackling human trafficking. Finally the issue of reintegrating victims poses a huge concern for stakeholders in the human trafficking campaign. This problem is more peculiar with victims who are indigenes of border communities. Because of the close knitted communal nature of border communities, the victims are always afraid and ashamed

to be integrated into their indigenous community. There is also the fear that they may be re-absorbed into human trafficking for sexual exploitation if no other financial alternative is provided. The victims are also afraid of being isolated and stigmatised by community members. There is also the fear of an attack organized by the traffickers who may feel betrayed by these reintegrated victims.

### **CONCLUSION**

Human trafficking is a crime that permeates every society. However, this study aims to show the increasing trend in the human trafficking for sexual exploitation in specific volatile and crime infested communities. In addition, the study establishes border communities as an example of endangered and vulnerable community that urgently needs more research and intervention to curb the rise in human trafficking. The nature of the border space, merged with the political and socio-economic peculiarity of the border produces factors that predispose members of the community to illegality and the females to trafficking for several reasons and prostitution. Some of the factors identified within the paper includes, prevailing poverty, lack of social resource and amenities, prevalence of criminal activities and the presence of criminal syndicates. Decrease in access to educational and vocational facilities, the culture framework of the border are also identified as predisposing factors to trafficking and prostitution within the border.

The findings from the study points to the fact that there are several patterns in human trafficking; each of these patterns is determined by location. In addition, human trafficking in border communities is patterned differently from human trafficking in hinterlands and urban community. The knowledge of this fact is paramount in profiling trafficking in border communities and possibly a solution to the menace of sexual enslavement. From the finding, it is further established that different border location may have different pattern of trafficking. The principal actors are also studied in this paper. We may conclude here according to the data that there are several actors within the trafficking spectrum but more crucial are the local community boys and leaders whose role though may seem passive but can define and determine the success or failure of human trafficking in border communities.

Finally, the study has been able to establish that community based intervention, and victims oriented centered intervention are two integral methods that may be adopted to curb human trafficking in border communities. An integration of efforts, both government and non-governmental will yield more positive impact. There is need for future study to find out the particular roles that members of the community can play to ensure a decrease in human trafficking industry. Also further study

may be conducted to see the role of education and awareness in solution gathering. The issue of human trafficking is more of a human right violation; this is not acknowledged by victims, a study on this aspect of human trafficking, sexual exploitation is necessary to unravel the theme of violence and gender.

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