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A STUDY ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING
FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
WITHIN THE
GULF OF GUINEA COUNTRIES



OKOLIE-OSEMENE JAMES¹

**A STUDY ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION WITHIN THE GULF OF GUINEA COUNTRIES**

Abstract:

This paper reviews the available literature on human trafficking for sexual exploitation within the Gulf of Guinea countries. It situates the context, nature and networks of human trafficking in order to identify the intersection between the sources, transit and destination of the illicit trade. The study also pinpoints the human right implications of human trafficking and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the anti-trafficking activities. By so doing, it sets out the current trends in the existing literature on human trafficking with a emphasis on West Africa

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I. Introduction

The issue of human trafficking has gained scholarly attention in the fields of criminology, geography, border studies, conflict studies, feminism, history, psychology, social work among others in recent times. However, the approaches and context dynamics differ with methodological innovations. The crime of human trafficking worldwide has created a number of clichés namely people trafficking, trafficking in persons, sex trade, runs, hustling, traffickers and slaveholders, young women on the move, male-on-female sexual assault, anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling interventions, all representing forms of trafficking in humans. The problematic is that human trafficking is arguably not about sexual partnership but all about the objectification and commodification of women's bodies (in most cases) for remuneration by the givers of sex (in cash) while the receivers of the sex pay for the deal. The incremental wave of sexual exploitation which promotes prostitution is an unlawful carnal knowledge that downplays human dignity. Additionally, human trafficking networks have become so sophisticated that the syndicates go as far as paying the bride price of their supposedly victims or luring them into leaving for the citing through spurious promises owing to their desperate desire to travel and enjoy modest habitation. On arrival, their destinies are mortgaged by the syndicates' use of voodooism and threats to use magical powers to compel the victims to work as cash machines. The commodification of bodies portrays how humans are traded through human trafficking which facilitates sexual exploitation.

The objectives of this study are to situate and examine the context, nature and networks of human trafficking for sexual exploitation around the Gulf of Guinea in order to identify the intersection between the sources, transit and destinations of the illicit trade, interrogate the human rights implications of human trafficking for sexual exploitation around the countries of the Gulf of Guinea on the one hand, and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the anti-trafficking activities on the other hand. In responding to the foregoing objectives, it analyses the current trends in the existing literature on human trafficking with specific emphasis on West Africa.

Methodologically, as a review of state of understanding on human trafficking, the study utilises qualitative document analysis of secondary and primary sources, namely the Country-ranking of the 3P Anti-trafficking Policy Index from 2012-2014, media reports, journals articles, chapters in edited volumes, policy reports by international organisations and archival materials relevant to the article with the aim of extracting data on human trafficking related exploitative sexual encounters involving the trafficked victims within existing networks around the Gulf of Guinea.

Findings reveal that in spite the existence of anti-trafficking policies, the sources, transit and destinations of human trafficking have increased in recent times with attendant exploitation of the vulnerable groups. Worse still, the health hazards associated with sexual risk of having multiple partners notwithstanding, the phenomenon of human trafficking for commercial sex (monetary gains) is on the increase in West Africa. Specifically, the dreaded HIV/AIDS has not deterred the perpetrators (commercial sex workers, syndicates and clients) of the illicit business who usually adopt the camping strategy to change the names of the trafficked persons before departing for their destinations where the sexual exploitations occur.

Although sexual exploitation is not peculiar to women alone as some men are also the victims, patriarchy, gender inequality and male-on-female sexual assault also offer more insight into the prevalence of trafficking for sexual exploitation around the Gulf of Guinea countries. Any legal or legislative intervention that targets the menace of human trafficking through the syndicates without considering the clients cannot totally nip the problem in the bud. The push factors which sustain the phenomenon of “sending states” can be managed by upholding the native custom of not permitting young girls to leave their homes until they reach the age of puberty on the one hand, and also the traditional value of legitimate work on the other hand.

II. Conceptual Clarification and Context

i. Definitions

Human Trafficking: Trafficking refers to the exploitation of humans for easy profit by syndicates (Roelofse, 2013:148). According to Farhana and Easin (2015:68) human trafficking refers to the illegal and immoral buying and selling of human beings as commodities to meet global demands for commercial sexual slavery or forced labour. The exploitation begins to occur the moment that victims are transported and enlisted into prostitution especially when payments are expected by the traffickers, whether it is internal or external trafficking.

Prostitution: Prostitution is the offering of sexual services or sex trade without romantic significance (Moen, 2014:74; Jin and Xu, 2016; Fayemi, 2009; Aderinto, 2015; Gibbs et al, 2014; Sobowale, 2014), and a highly remunerative sexual activity (Jin and Xu, 2016), providing the trafficked victims a platform to generate funds from clients for the economic gains of their traffickers. It is an endeavour that services the human trafficking networks. In the context of this study, the author defines prostitution as sexual transaction that involves the demand for unlawful carnal knowledge, and offering of the body to clients for monetary gains to the

giver, and pleasure to the receiver. It deprives the sex givers their inalienable rights and human dignity as most of the victims do not actualise utility particularly because they do not derive any satisfaction from the transactional sex.

ii. **Trends in Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking is an issue of international concern. The need for sexual satisfaction, sexual desires and economic factors remain the drivers of sexual exploitation across the world. This can also be described as forced labour when the victims are either forced into the business or lured into being recruited as migrant workers in the commercial sex industry.² The problematic aspect of the offer to engage in the business is that victims are promised their lives would change thereafter and that happiness cannot elude them by earning money with their body (BBC, 2015; Uwa et al 2014; Fayemi, 2009; Fitzgibbon, 2003; Pharaoh, 2006; Protection Project, 2010; UNODC, 2015). Given that humans are transported to carry out illicit business, trafficking in persons should be considered as a serious impediment to the development of human resources in the society (Jegele et al, 2011).

Arguably, adequate data and scientific research on the human trafficking phenomenon for prostitution are scarce in spite wide media reportage (Lehti and Aromaa, 2007:123). Historically, trafficking in persons is but traceable to the early civilisations since the antiquities and also the advent of slavery and slave trade (Pourmokhtari, 2015:157). Also, the warring attributes within the states in the Central and Western Sudan were occasioned by the institutionalised slavery and slave trade that made raids and incursions into territories (Sani, 2013:107). From Nigeria to Gold Coast (Ghana), most people (males and females) were trafficked to other parts of Africa, Europe and the Americas. Young girls were also trafficked to other parts of British West Africa for prostitution during the colonial era. This made Nigeria a supplier of trafficked females for the sex industry in destination countries. UNESCO (2006) posits that the oil boom in the 1970s also made Nigeria have a reputation for being one of the leading African countries in human trafficking with cross-border and internal trafficking.

According to Pourmokhtari (2015), the evolution of human trafficking is traceable to the postwar international order, especially the disintegration of the Soviet Union that paved way for a new form of globalisation. As one of the threats to crime control in Russia and former Soviet Republics like Ukraine and Moldova, human trafficking remains prevalent due to the

² Julia Muraszkiwicz (2016) sees this lure as the “means” before exploitation occurs.

economic situation in Russia as women are easily exported and enlisted into the illicit trade owing to their inability to get paid jobs or provide their families' food and shelter needs (Das, 2016). Clark (2003:247) maintains that "trafficking in persons is a distinct manifestation of globalisation." This can simply be referred to an era of a new world order after the Cold War between Communist Soviet Union and Capitalist USA. This period also marked an era of intra-state armed conflicts in most African states which occasioned internal displacements, refugee flows, and the incremental wave of orphaned female children.

Different countries serve as transit or destination for the crime (Farhana and Easin, 2015; Agustin, 2006). For instance, most of the women and girls trafficked from Ethiopia is done through the use of service 'agencies' and human smugglers who facilitate the process of migration along many routes (Kubai, 2016). The erosion of traditional social values in North Eastern region of India because has also contributed to the recruitment of women into sex trade eight states - Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim (Das, 2016). In Iran, the government intervened through the anti-trafficking law enacted and passed in 2004, considering the trafficking of women and children for prostitution to the touristic countries in the world such as the Persian Gulf surroundings and some European and American countries (Marandi, 2015:91). The existing anti-trafficking law in Ghana is Human Trafficking Act of December 5, 2005 which has three crucial components namely, (a) prevention of human trafficking; (b) protection of trafficked persons; and (c) prosecution of traffickers (Sertich and Heemskerk, 2011:2). This was a legislative intervention aimed at countering the hearts of trafficking. Also, the government of Ghana funds the meetings of the Human Trafficking Management Board (HTMB) in order to eradicate human trafficking. Apart from the immoral Traffic Preventing Act 1956, legal instrument against trafficking and Prime Minister's 1998 National Plan of Action to combat trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of women and children, the Article no. 23 (1) in Indian Constitution provides that, 'trafficking in human beings are prohibited and any contravention of this prohibition shall be an offence and punishable (Das, 2016:10). The foregoing legal instruments and others in most countries all show that various governments are now taking steps to counter the illicit business.

Additionally, there is enormous demand for sexual services in Western societies (Agustin, 2006). It is noteworthy that sex workers belong to the irregular economy in some countries including the United States which receives immigrants who compete for jobs (Healey, 2008:32). In Rhode Island, the desperation of traffickers has culminated in online prostitution advertisements used in marketing victims to sex buyers using ethnicity of

the victims who are attracted by advertisements (Skodmin et al, 2016:1). From a legal perspective, Nevada is the only state in the United States that makes prostitution a legal act which protects sex workers (Dunn, 2012:349). The United States has also established an advisory Council on Human Trafficking. The fact that National Human Trafficking Resource Centre (2015) report reveals that the threat of human trafficking is prevalent in cities and suburbs across the 50 states in the USA³ also indicates that it is not peculiar to networks in West Africa.⁴ Considering how the cases of sex trafficking involved interstate transportation of victims, four of the six cases showed that traffickers brought the victims to Rhode Island from Massachusetts, New York, or Indiana between 2009 and 2013 (Skodmin et al, 2016). Sex workers are found in the public spaces more than the labourers and nannies. In Papua New Guinea, the criminalisation of sex workers is usually adopted by the police to justify inflicting inhuman and degrading pains on them through rape and other forms of sexual abuse in their custody (Schuetze, 2016). Apart from the police, pimps, brothel owners, clients also violently abuse the victims in most scenarios (Phinney, n.d). Furthermore, there is growing evidence for the involvement of Nigerian criminal networks in this illicit trade (Uwa et al, 2014:10).

Although Nigeria also serves as a provider, receiver, transit and stop over locations in the illegal and clandestine immigration (Park, 2003:352; Okanlawon et al, 2013), the issue of human trafficking is not peculiar to Nigeria as many countries in Europe, Asia and America also have their problems closely linked with trafficking for sexual exploitation with over 160 countries across the world directly affected by the illicit business (Araujo, 2011; Aderinto, 2015; Farhana and Easin, 2015; Marandi, 2015; Shretha et al 2015; Danna, 2007; Danso, 2013; Fitzgibbon, 2003; Farley et al, 2015; Earp and Moen, in press). In fact, in Africa, especially many counties in West Africa, women have been in the throes of forced labour exploitation and commercial sexual exploitation (Pati and Shaik, 2015). Such exploitation undermines women's role in contributing to the development of West Africa through legitimate endeavour.

The historical deficiency in the enforcement and administration of laws against human trafficking type of prostitution to the advantage of some syndicates notwithstanding (Fayemi, 2009), the prohibition of human

³ This led to the adoption of the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

⁴ The highly informative latest publication by on "State Laws Addressing Human Trafficking: Education of and Mandatory Reporting by Health Care Providers and Other Professionals" by Atkinson et al (May 31, 2016) identifies the vulnerable groups, areas where common and the regulatory and legislative bodies that should be involved in curbing the crime.

trafficking for sexual exploitation remains paramount to the enhancement of women's dignity across the Gulf of Guinea. The enactment Trafficking in Persons (prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administrative Act (2003), also strengthened the war against trafficking in Nigeria.

In spite various policy interventions, law enforcement agencies have not been able to identify and track all existing networks and operational oversight of the syndicates, which all make it difficult for the trafficked victims to boldly create awareness on the abuses recorded.

Again, it is noteworthy that the permissible casual view of sex (Moen, 2014:74), motivates the commercialisation of sex in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa in spite the apparent risks of such service delivery around various farms, mining companies, oil industries, institutions, terminals and markets.

In spite having some remarkable anti-trafficking policies as the only West African country that improved from score 8 in year 2000 to 14 in 2009, and aggregate score of 13 in 2013, Nigeria's poor protection policy has manifested in the country's sluggish attitude towards the protection of the trafficked persons that increased human trafficking flows considering how syndicates in neighbouring countries take advantage of the lapses.⁵ As a criminal endeavour, the problem associated with human trafficking for sexual exploitation also made the National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other related matters (NAPTIP) to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) for mainstreaming trafficking of persons issues into the basic and senior secondary school curricula in the country Nigeria.⁶

iii. **The Issues related to Human Trafficking**

The violation of human rights and criminality are some of the issues that relate to human trafficking. It is evident that various groups and individuals are under the bout of human rights violations in most parts of the world, from repressive government policies to physical violence and internecine violence targeted at the vulnerable groups by non-state armed groups. However, the issue of human trafficking has gained scholarly attention in the fields of criminology, geography, border studies, conflict studies, feminism, history, psychology, social work among others in recent

⁵ The Anti-trafficking Policy Index 2009. It identifies the significance of prevention, protection and prosecution in the task of anti-trafficking.

⁶ Report from the Daily Trust. 2014 July 31

<http://www.latestnigeriannews.com/news/714071/naptip-partners-nerdc-on-human-trafficking-in-school-curriculum.html>

times. The approaches and context dynamics differ with methodological innovations. Prostitution has been problematised by Frej Klem Thomsen who argues that it is a major source of harm to the prostitutes and that prohibiting it will reduce harm to prostitutes (Thomsen, 2015; Earp and Moen, in press). Also, the problem is based on arguments that prostitution encourages people to sell something deeply personal and emotional (Moen, 2014). As a matter of fact, the foregoing demands the first step to be taken in enhancing protection mindset in the context of human rights perspective of addressing the trafficking for sexual exploitation. Human rights and human trafficking are interrelated in the sense that the practice of human leads to the violation of human rights as vulnerable groups are usually exploited sexually. Luyt (2011:1-3) maintains that as inalienable rights, “the notion of human rights can hardly gain universal application in establishing an improved universal humanity, despite being the rights that one enjoys simply by right of birth.” As an activity or endeavour that violates the rights of victims, human trafficking deprives them the privilege of enjoying equal treatment as humans, downplaying the truism that they have the right to human dignity.

The global sex industry is a sexually objectifying environment (Szymanski, 2011; Civile et al, 2016). Globally, with more than 20 million individuals already vulnerable, human trafficking constitutes a fundamental violation of humanity with majority of women being exploited in an assault manner (Atkinson et al, 2016; Babatunde, 2013; Fitzgibbon, 2003; Mohamed, 2008; Pourmokhtari, 2015). It explains why there are numerous narratives on the trading of young women as commodities in the sex industry especially on the media (Mathews, 2015). No wonder there are now emerging issues on the categories of people that pay for sex and those that ought not to pay for the commodity or sexual services (Earp and Moen, in press).

Indeed, scholars are in agreement human trafficking is not only a source of human rights abuses in various forms, but also a highly organised criminal activity which makes it a non-conventional security threat with attendant short- and long-term psychological implications to the vulnerable groups (Atkinson et al, 2016; Das, 2016; Dimitriadi, 2016; van der Putten, Wetzling and Kamerling, 2014; Danso, 2013; Babatunde, 2013; Njoh and Ayuk-Etang, 2012; Jin and Xu, 2016; Okanlawon, Adebowale and Titilayo, 2013). This is apparently because it is generally described as a transnational crime⁷ which encourages deprivations of

⁷ According to reports by UNICEF and Interpol, syndicates generate huge profits from human trafficking which is only surpassed by arms trade and drug trafficking in West Africa sub-region. Observers maintain that trade liberalisation and free movement of persons (ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons), greatly increased the spate of human trafficking. In addition, Nwogu Victoria I., a

women, children some of whom are not educated (Park, 2003). Even most migrant prostitute women are regarded as victims of sex trafficking and at the same time criminal migrants (Crowhurst, 2012). This is based on the way they gain entry into transit and destination countries through illegal means, especially wrong routes and sometimes through national borders.

In fact, Schulze (2014:21) regards the sex industry which pulls human trafficking as a transnational and multi-billion Euro market. It is recognised as a multibillion-dollar global criminal enterprise which rather serves the interest of the traffickers, being regarded as the third largest crime after economic fraud and the drug trade (Atkinson, 2016:112; Das, 2016; UNESCO, 2006:11). Part of the problem is that it also triggers insecurity and border dispute between states, having the capacity to escalate trafficking-related cross-border violence (Stepanova, 2012:6; Amadi, Imoh-ita and Roger, 2015:6; Ate and Akinterinwa, 2011). Even the National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other related matters (NAPTIP) sees human trafficking as the fastest growing crime. The foregoing can exacerbate trans-border risks.

As a risky endeavour, the criminality associated with the threat of human trafficking cannot be downplayed given that it is an avenue to exploit the vulnerable groups and an aspect of globalisation which unfortunately overwhelms many counties' law enforcement agencies that have poor border security strategies (Babatunde, 2013; Clark, 2003; Moen, 2014). Similarly, as gross human rights violation, sexual exploitation is a modern form of slavery (Karim and Beardsley, 2016; Farhana and Easin, 2015, Jegede et al, 2011).

Human trafficking has attracted the attention of national and international agencies of human rights with various efforts to combat the rapidly growing problem across the world (Njoh and Ayuk-Etang, 2012:30). The foregoing occasioned the mobilisation of individuals and groups towards the actualisation of "anti-trafficking for sex agenda" such as the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) and the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) among others. This paved way for neo-abolitionism which refers to a new form of abolitionist movement which questions the exploitation of women through commodification and "consent", as Neo-abolitionists maintain that buying of sex is psychological terrorism, and that travelling to other countries to engage in prostitution is equivalent to asking for a license to be raped (Danna, 2007:245). The human rights costs of trafficking are traceable to

Nigerian lawyer and human rights activist notes that despite economic advantages, migrants are easily exploited due to lack of effective access to legal protection. This explains why most victims of human trafficking can hardly report the syndicates to law enforcement agencies even when they witness physical violence in the process.

some families and communities which willingly collect money from traffickers to travel with them.⁸ The foregoing explains the essence of a feminist rights-based approach to curbing sexual exploitation which questions the profiteering that characterises the phenomenon of commodifying female bodies considering the agony of trafficked victims whose most basic human rights are violated in the process (Pourmokhtari, 2015:164). This can greatly preserve the dignity of those involved.

Another crucial issue that has not received adequate scholarly attention is funding. According to Sertich and Heemskerk (2011) funding is one of the main protection challenges confronting the anti-trafficking activities in Ghana despite the Fund's establishment in 2008. The essence of funding is to counter human trafficking syndicates through advocacy, law enforcement, protection of the victims as well as the prosecution of culprits, but adequate funding can be guaranteed when all sectors including communities are carried along with adequate accountability of implementing agencies.

III. The Way Human Trafficking has been Treated

Human trafficking occurs when victims are collected forcibly or through deceit from their various primary residences and handed over to some other persons who subsequently sell them off to local or international consumers (Jegade, Anyikwa and Igwe, 2011:18). These consumers can easily be described as merchants due to their involvement in the sale of sex.

The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 in Bangladesh treats human trafficking as the selling, buying, recruitment, receipt, transportation, transfer or harbouring of any person for the purpose of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation or any other forms of exploitation whether inside or outside of Bangladesh by means of (a) threat or use of force or other forms of coercion or (b) abduction, fraud or deception, or of the abuse of any person's socio-economic, environmental or other types of vulnerability or (c) of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person (Farhana and Easin, 2015:68). While revealing that human trafficking is more prevalent in Southsouth region of Nigeria, Attoh (2009:167) posits that trafficking in young women is a criminal act of transporting young women across international borders for certain exploitative purposes. The pull factor is usually economic development to the detriment of a less developed part of a society.

⁸ eNews Channel Africa. 2013. Gabon, UNICEF gear up to combat human trafficking. Thursday 11 July. <https://www.enca.com/africa/gabonunicef-gear-combat-human-trafficking>

Additionally, when people are trafficked, it is believed that they are involuntarily recruited and transported to communities or towns where their services are required by syndicates and clients who take advantage of the victims by exploitation. In most cases, the problem in this regard as noted by Andrijasevic (2016:59) is that it lacks consent of the victims. The criminality makes human trafficking a process rather than a single event as it is carried out from minimal act of recruitment to a full trafficking for exploitation (Jokinen, 2016).

In fact, women have been in the throes of forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation in Africa (Pati and Shaik, 2015). In terms of causation, the contributory factors to the rise in human trafficking in Nigeria and other countries around the Gulf of Guinea are, continuing subordination of women as reflected in economic, educational, and work opportunity disparities between men and women at the detriment of the latter who are culturally and socially marginalised, as well as high demand for sex workers (Babatunde, 2013:201; Attoh, 2009). It is noteworthy that the emerging tradition of gender inequality in this regard has also exacerbated the problem (Okolie-Osemene and Udeke, 2013). It should be recalled that sexual exploitation is a manifestation of male-on-female sexual assault which is motivated by the social construction of male supremacy and sustained by history of patriarchy across the world (Mohamed, 2008:172).

In terms of current emerging debates on the subject matter, the argument that “the orchestration of trafficking of women and prostitution is propelled by racial connotations” as noted by Ikpe (2007:374-77) who also identifies a common perception of African women as sexually out of control and the associated Euro-American stereotype of African women as passionate about sexual activities, is not adequate. If it is racial connotation, what about those women and girls that are trafficked within the Gulf of Guinea, whose syndicates engage fellow Africans including security forces as clients? Even if they are trafficked to America or Europe, are there no African males that patronise the women? A noteworthy fact is that racism does not adequately explain the prevalence of the illicit business. Whether white or black, internal and external, trafficking is prevalent owing to the portrayal of women as commodities that should be purchased and used when needed. This increases the risks of more women becoming people in need of sources of livelihood rather than people needed for legitimate service delivery. The foregoing further offers insight into while the illicit trade engages the services of native doctors. Simply put, the menace of trafficking for sexual exploitation is occasioned by the existing gender inequality which deprives women the opportunity of participating in the development process across the world.

Consequently, the objectification theory propounded by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) explicates that when women are sexually objectified, they

are treated as an object to be valued for its use by others; especially a situation where sexual desire makes them to single out and separate a woman's body or body parts from her as a person and see her as a physical object for sexual satisfaction (Szymanski, 2011:7-8; Bartky, 1990; Civile et al, 2016; Gerassi, 2015; Mohamed, 2008). Thus, sexual violence occasioned by objectification of women's dignity usually aggravates their body shame (Davidson and Gervais, 2015; Fayemi, 2009). There is a probability that a woman who has experienced abuses in the process of sexual exploitation would be subjected to psychological trauma because of how syndicates and clients violated her human dignity.

The perception that females' bodies belong more to others and less to them, rather portrays a woman's body as public domain with the capacity to arouse feelings and attract attention (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997:194). Obviously, it is the objectification of women, owing to patriarchy and usually sustained by gender inequality that drives human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Notable factors are the socio-economic impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)-1986-1993, early physical and sexual abuse of teenage girls, collapse of family values and honour, owing to prevalent polygamy, polyandry, adultery and prostitution, the absence of parental role models, parental pressure and peer pressure (Lawal, 2013). The need for sex workers and cheap labour in farms can also be regarded as the drivers of human trafficking (UNESCO, 2006).

Remarkable debates on the subject are how neo-liberal enclosure, agrarian revolution and emerging commercialisation of land in Africa for industrial purposes also motivated the explosion of transactional sexual risks that facilitate the exploitation of young female peasants whose images of powerlessness and voiceless remain undisputable (Uadiale, 2015:5; Chatterji, 2004:1; Allen, 2010; Moen, 2014). The health risks notwithstanding, one factor that drives young women into transactional sex is the quest for material things owing to the adverse economic conditions in some communities or cities (Chatterji et al, 2004; Jewkes, 2012). However, a contribution to knowledge is that the difference between transactional sex and commercial sex is the exploitation that characterises the latter as usually facilitated by syndicates who violate victims' inalienable rights. By implication, they are easily recruited into prostitution after lure without monetary gains as promised thereafter.

The incremental wave of migrant workers seeking opportunities through national borders in West Africa and sometimes transported to other continents has also been linked to poverty and the denial of the right to

education considering how little or no access to formal education increases the vulnerability of the victims to the advantage of the syndicates.⁹

IV. What we know about the Actors/Victims/Mechanisms

This section presents various studies on the networks, actors, victims, mechanisms that sustain the illicit trade as well as the risk factors. Trafficking in persons presents a scenario in which the victims are lured into working for other people and end up earning a living against their will even when suffering is involved due to life threatening forms of coercion such as the use of violence and passport seizure (Dottridge, 2005). Most of the crisis ridden areas occasioned by armed conflict are prone to human trafficking, just like the in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002 when women were trafficked as a source of income for rebels on the one hand, and also the demand for sex workers by peace-keeping forces on the other hand (Wolte, 2004; cited in Roelofse, 2013:151). Many of such scenarios during armed conflicts are also motivated by the increase in the number of orphans who may not have any guardian to protect them from bad influence thereby making them prone to trafficking syndicates.

In terms of victims, those vulnerable and trafficked as commodities are mainly children, 85-90% of young women and girls, with little men on a comparatively smaller scale (Atkinson et al, 2016; International Labour Organisation, 2015; Jegede, Anyikwa, and Igwe, 2011; Onyeonoru, 2004). Although available literature reveals that the age of entry for young people's initial sex trade experience is between 10 to 17 years of age, with a median age of 15 (Gibbs et al, 2014:3; Atkinson, 2016:111), not only teenagers are enlisted.

Furthermore, it is not disputable that more women and children are trafficked than men thereby portraying females as victims and males the perpetrators (Attoh, 2009; Babatunde, 2013:195; Farhana and Easin, 2015; Gibbs et al, 2014; Jegede et al, 2011). This means that it is highly associated with female gender.

A significant example is the experience of two girls, 24 and 19 years respectively, trafficked from Nigeria to Okah in the Northern part of Cote d'Ivoire where they were sexually exploited at mining fields, being coerced into having sex with numerous men at \$2 per night to enable them pay for the \$2,600 trip (UNODC, 2015). In Ghana, trafficking has become more prevalent in the Volta region and the Western region where is oil

⁹ In their work on Human Trafficking as the Bane of Human Capital Development: The Nigerian Perspective, Jegede et al (2011), also revealed how the inability of the victims to be educated makes it easier for the traffickers to recruit them into the illicit business.

produced.¹⁰ The foregoing manifests in spite the efforts of the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of the Ghana Police Service (GPS) which investigates the cases of trafficking. Ghana's scenario is different from others in the Gulf of Guinea due to more cases of internal trafficking than transnational trafficking as the victims migrate from rural and low income areas to cities in search of well paid jobs.

Women in their 20s and above are also trafficked voluntarily or lured into the illicit business. Married women in Benin City also embark on a journey for sex trade outside Nigeria after they are convinced on the lucrative nature of the business. A survivor of human trafficking reported that "to men who buy us, we are like meat, and to everybody else in society, we simply do not exist" (US Department of State, 2015:18). This is simply a setback to women's dignity considering a situation where clients and syndicates place higher value on the sexual pleasure and money generated from prostitution respectively rather than the safety of the vulnerable groups.

Girls and women with economic, social, and family problems such as poverty, illiteracy and unstable family are usually targeted to be recruited into human trafficking (Dottridge, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2003; Kubai, 2016; UNESCO, 2006; UNODC, 2015). The foregoing corroborates the eight years experience of a young girl who was trafficked from Benin City embraced a new life of sacrifice to salvage her family that saw her trip as foreign investment from abject poverty (Anuku, 2016). According to an officer of the Nigeria Immigration Service, apart from poverty, ignorance, greed, get rich quick syndrome, illiteracy, identity or moral bankruptcy, high demand for cheap and submissive child labour, false impression of preparation for marriage, unemployment, child marriage, child fostering, inequality in the society, disregard for education, large family size, as well as those orphaned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic are the factors responsible for the illicit business of trafficking in persons (Ayegbusi, 2009)¹¹. The foregoing points to the fact anti-trafficking cannot succeed without adequate attention to provision of employment opportunities and enforcement of law. Generally, exploitation occurs through the inhuman routes/channels that the migrants' lives and human rights are jeopardised in order to obtain material gains especially for their

¹⁰ U. S. Department of State, Diplomacy in Action, 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report on Ghana's Tier 2 Watch List. Available at <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2016/258773.htm>

¹¹ The US Department of State's 2015 report on Trafficking in Persons also reveals that the demand for cheap labour and weak rule of law, coupled with high unemployment in developing countries, foster the phenomenon of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

selfish interest of profit maximisation at the expense of the victims (Spena, 2016:38).

Apart from the difficulty men that are involved in sex work face in seeking justice owing to the violation of their inalienable by the police, clients and syndicates who exploit them in the process, the stigmatisation of male sex workers by their female counterparts who usually accuse them of depriving females the opportunity of profiteering through their supposedly clients is one of the sources of dispute between the two groups who exhibit aggressive behaviour that is further heightened by the clients' preference for anal sex with men rather than vaginal sex, as well as the operation of gay-friendly hotels in which they clash with female sex workers as gay-friendly hotels (Okanlawon et al, 2013:29). The networks which service the human trafficking for sex are numerous and highly formidable. It is noteworthy that most of these existing networks facilitate the trading of destinies from their geographical locations to unknown terrains where their worth and dignity as vulnerable groups receive little or no consideration from the traffickers and their clients. Some Nigerians are trafficked to the following destinations namely, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Mali, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sierra, Ghana, Leone and Guinea.

The fact that victims see trafficking as the quickest way of making money makes them more vulnerable. Unfortunately, a recent finding reveals that most of the trafficked victims are constantly under check thereby making it very difficult for them to escape the ordeal which includes occasional psychological attack reminding them the huge sums of money spent on them to get to such wealth generating destinations.¹² It portrays such women as living but dead beings on arrival, when they finally return to Nigeria. For instance, a married Benin woman had to return after she was forced to have intercourse with three men at the same time in her desperate journey for wealth.

Human trafficking around the Gulf of Guinea countries is facilitated by trans-border migration of girls and women from source and transit countries just like Nigeria to Ghana for the purposes of prostitution which remains a profitable and well organised trade, that seems to receive the motivation of the communities and societies where the women belong. This is occasioned by the management of the trade by representations of groups in destination countries receive and establish the women on their arrival. A case in point is Obubra, where most families benefited from the trade while the elders admitted that they received a fee, from the women

¹² Anuku, C. E. O. 2016. Human Trafficking: Arrival in Italy. *The Nigerian Observer* Wednesday, June 1. P. 16.

practicing the business outside the country.¹³ There is little awareness of relatives on how trafficked victims are coerced to exchange sexual services for shelter in some Ghanaian cities rather than offering them monetary compensations (Sertich and Heemskerk, 2011). This manifestation of criminality offers the syndicates the opportunity to continue violating the inalienable rights of the vulnerable groups through sexual exploitation.

The involvement of women in the trafficking for sexual exploitation rather makes them the violators of their own rights to sustainable livelihood around the Gulf of Guinea. Of course, while it is agreed that one must be trafficked before becoming an international prostitute, it also takes bad company to be associated with a network that enrolls women into the illicit business. Being the violators of their own rights manifests in their objectification and antisocial behaviours that are inimical to their survival as far as homicide and suicide associated with sexual exploitation are concerned, especially when what they desired is not achieved.

Notably, the first welcome activity of the trafficked women is that they are raped as a way of introducing them to the 'real business,'¹⁴ just like the experienced of a Benin girl who was raped by the people that received her after she was successfully trafficked. The act exposes the victims to risks, namely reproductive and mental health challenges occasioned by dehumanising and imposed lifestyles like drug abuse, sexual objectification with attendant anxiety about physical safety (Szymanski et al, 2011:9; Okanlawon, Adebowale and Titilayo, 2013).

Tabular presentation of Nigerian Prostitutes in the Gold Coast

	Number of prostitutes	Ethnic Group	Location of Residential Address
1	5	Oshimili (Asaba Division)	Benin Province
2	2	Igbo	Benin Province
3	1	Asakaa	Benin Province

¹³ B.H. Bourdillon, Governor, July 1941. NAI/B.P.1959.

¹⁴ Phinney, Alison. nd. Trafficking of Women and Children for Sexual Exploitation in the Americas. Inter-American Commission of Women (Organization of American States) and the Women, Health and Development Program (Pan American Organization).

<http://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/Trafficking-Paper%5BEN%5D.pdf>

Source: Extract from a report on Nigerian Prostitutes in the Gold Coast, Secretary Western Provinces' letter No. 17963/12, 15th November, 1940.

As seen from the table above, the majority of the prostitutes in the Gold Coast (Ghana) as at 1940¹⁵ were mainly from Southern Nigeria as contained in the intelligence report provided by the Secretary, Western Provinces, Ibadan. The ethnic groups of the named prostitutes include: Igbo, Oshimili, and Asakaa. From the table, the residential addresses also reveal that all the prostitutes were trafficked from their homes in the Benin Province. The girls disclosed their identity to the Gold Coast Police.¹⁶ The fact that they were trafficked from Nigeria to that country for the purpose of prostitution indicates that human trafficking for sexual exploitation did not start recently but has only become more sophisticated.

Unfortunately, the District Officer at Asaba Division maintained that none of the girls was known after inquiries were made, and requested for more details about the named girls, like the names of relatives, villages as well as the quarters of residence for proper identification.¹⁷ By implication, the Council was not aware of any case of trafficking involving the girls.¹⁸ The foregoing reveals that in most cases, victims of trafficking are missing unless the syndicates allow them return to their homes after using them or when they eventually become unhealthy.

The investigations conducted showed that the trafficking was confined to the Eastern Provinces in Ghana. The foregoing report affirms UNESCO's (2006) report that most Nigerian trafficked women came from Benin City and other towns in Delta States. The towns were under the Benin Province during the colonial era. The trafficking further showed that the girls were transported from Nigeria through Benin Republic, Togo and then Ghana thereby portraying the trafficking of destinies of the victims and exploited across the border. The work on journey to work by Aderinto (2015) revealed that the cost of transportation was not a problem to most West Africans involved in this illicit business popularly referred to as the white slave trade due to the involvement of colonies.

V. The mechanisms and networks

In fact, Nigeria's scenario portrays the modus operandi where well known women or relatives approaches the parents of those (girls) involved with an offer to train them in Lagos or to find a husband for them so much so

¹⁵ Saheed Aderinto's work on Journey to work also shows that transnational prostitution was so prevalent in British West Africa in the 1930s.

¹⁶ NAI/B.P.1. 1959. Traffic in Girls to the Gold Coast, 19th November 1940.

¹⁷ NAI/A.D. 560/5. 11th December, 1940

¹⁸ NAI/B.P. 1959/4. Acting Resident, Benin Province. Traffic in Girls to the Gold Coast.

that a woman or man can go as far as paying a dowry without delay to demonstrate seriousness; they influence their perceptions about sustainable livelihoods, which increases the desperation to travel to urban areas or cities (like Abuja, Lagos, Lome, Accra) in search of opportunities that often lead to human trafficking especially when little is known about the destination city.¹⁹ This is also further worsened by ‘spurious promises’ and the desire for a modest habitation which paves way for prostitution.

The crime of human trafficking has increased in Nigeria, and is believed to be thriving more on land and water routes than the air routes, to the extent that all states across the country experience trafficking in persons at the domestic level which services the international scale (Jegade et al, 2011:22). Also, this has created a phenomenon of ‘sending states’ involving Togo, Mali, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso and Nigeria, which serve as the sources.²⁰ Available report reveals that Nigeria is a source, transit and destination nation for women who are sexually exploited in West and Central African regions, as well as Malaysia.²¹

The reason for high prevalence of human trafficking on the land and sea routes than air is noteworthy. It is easier to transport illegal migrants who do not have any legitimate business, any letter of appointment or admission letter to school in the destination country through the border or sea, than air which requires screening of migrants. Again, more number of victims would easily travel through the national borders considering the cost effective nature of such route or means of transport. This is further aided by the porous and unmanned borders that aid illicit businesses like smuggling and trafficking in persons. An observation at the Seme Border reveals a lot about the complexities of trafficking and how poor border oversight indirectly breeds the crime. Most immigration officials only stamp the passports of passengers without questioning them on the essence of the trip they have embarked upon, with evidence of a legitimate endeavour that led to such a journey. Not even all the travellers have ECOWAS permit or international passports as the case may be in this regard. Secondly, at Aflao border, Condji border and Seme border, the majority of the migrants easily move from one frontier to another through the manned and unmanned borders without much obstacle. From the foregoing, even when the traffickers decide to traffic their victims through the Lagos - Lome – Accra road in any vehicle, they can still get to their

¹⁹ NAI/AG.619 1/07/1943. Child Prostitution in Lagos.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch (2003). *Borderline Slavery: Child Trafficking in Togo*, April 1

²¹ USDOS-US Department of State: *Trafficking in Persons Report 2015 – Country Narratives*, 27 July.

[http://www.ecoi.net/local link/308824/446663_de.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/308824/446663_de.html)

destination unhindered as much as they can provide identity cards or valid passports.

Apart from trafficking to countries like Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Togo, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger from Nigeria, Benin Republic is believed to have multidimensional trafficking routes in the country, most of which also aid the supply of persons to other networks through Nigeria which has a lot of camps in villages between Lagos and Seme border on the one hand and through Togo and Ghana on the other hand. This is the tradition of camping especially around Lagos-Cotonou axis. It is instructive that most studies on human trafficking have not documented how some Nigerian women and young girls are lured into engaging in the business of sex trafficking, through camping while in transit before final transportation to the destination countries where the sexual exploitations occur. During the process of camping, a new name is usually given to the victims and this makes it difficult for anybody to trace them by their identity. According to the reports of the Protection Project (2010) and CIA (2009):

Internal trafficking involves young Beninese women and children who are trafficked from rural areas to cities including Cotonou, Porto-Novo, Parakou, and Bohicon. Children are also trafficked to Togo, Nigeria, Ghana, Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, and Guinea. Each year, more than 10,000 children who were intended to be trafficked outside of Benin are denied access to pass the border. The village of Za-Kpota, notoriously known as the child-trafficking capital of the West African region, accounts for 70 percent of all cases reported in Benin.

It can be adduced that internal trafficking can later be transformed into external trafficking which could also extend to prostitution. This is where teenage prostitutes graduate to adult ones. Destinies of victims are trafficked when they are deceived into the illicit business, to the extent that they get lost as their destinies are jeopardised, finding it more complicated in walking away from such act.

The situation has rather taken a turn for the worse as available reports reveal that many university students utilise the social media to recruit their fellow students into sex trafficking (US Department of State, 2015:18).

The nature of social media which also serves as a platform for social networking makes this easier as people create groups and share updates that can be in the form of advertisements for job opportunities in this regard. Indeed, young people are always eager to know where it is happening and what is up for grabs. This is obviously a frightening dimension of the illicit trade.

The role of spiritism²² in exacerbating the problem of human trafficking cannot be downplayed as the traffickers usually have their way while some of the trafficked victims are sacrificed in the process to appease their gods. This easily occurs because the victims do not understand the terrain. This explains why the illicit activities makes the trafficked persons to lose their passports, phones and money, without any return ticket and knowledge of the environment they find themselves which is usually compounded by their apparent inability to speak the language of the country they find themselves.²³ Ghanaian girls are coerced into long term servitude in a ritual manner with the aim of atoning relatives' sins.²⁴ A life threatening dimension is how the victims are made to sleep with the use of white handkerchiefs powered by charms to wipe their faces for the maximisation of the clients' sexual satisfaction.²⁵ This makes the victims to live a life of regrets. They are also subjected to dependent lifestyles as the traffickers often threaten them on their inability to pay back the expenses made to ensure they arrive at the destinations of prostitution. According to the United States Department of State (2015:18):

When large populations of workers migrate for employment, especially to isolated locations, such as mining, logging, and agricultural camps, the incidence of sex trafficking in those areas may increase. Traffickers often advertise jobs for activities that are directly related to the primary industry, such as food service, mineral-sorting, or retail work in camp stores. Some individuals who take these jobs may

²² Spiritism in this context refers to the involvement of native doctors and the use of charms.

²³ Tobore Mit Ovuorie, I almost lost my life in this undercover project but I have no regret — Premium Times' Tobore Ovuorie
<http://app.premiumtimesng.com/4-tobore-ovuorie/>

²⁴ U. S. Department of State, Diplomacy in Action, 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report on Ghana's Tier 2 Watch List.

²⁵ Anuku's work reveals the spiritual dimension which enables the clients to easily make trafficked victims lose their virginity.

instead find themselves the victims of sex trafficking.

A critical look at the 2009 anti-trafficking index by Cho Seo-Young, reveals that most of the countries around the Gulf of Guinea are prone to the illicit business. The report reveals that the nature of anti-trafficking policy (effective or not) would go a long way to determining the adoption of specific countries as origin, destination or transit routes by the traffickers to sustain their illicit business (2009:4; 2015). By implication, their change of enrolment plans or modalities, and modus operandi can be influenced by existing anti-trafficking regimes in the context of government policies and partnership with other agencies especially special task forces, immigration officials and the judiciary. Considering their roles in prosecution, protection and prevention of this exploitative trade, stakeholders like lawyers, security forces and social workers are now being trained through an ongoing partnership between Government of Gabon, the UNICEF and others to counter the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation from Benin Republic, Togo and Nigeria to Gabon.²⁶

As far as trafficking for sexual exploitation is concerned, enhancing the degree of trust between victims and the authorities or social workers on the one hand, as well as trust between victims and their clients on the other hand (Jokinen, 2016:71). For instance, after being trafficked internally through the promise of employment, a girl that was recruited to work as bar attendant in a hotel ran to people for help when a couple, the owners of the hotel forced her to be sleeping with their customers as prostitute for payment of N1, 000 every Monday in Orita Aperin area of Ibadan where the police was alerted thereby leading to the arrest of the couple and four commercial sex workers aged 20, 22, 20, and 23 years respectively.²⁷ This would go a long way to nipping in the bud, the menace of human trafficking for prostitution in West Africa especially when stakeholders involved in combating the illicit business rethink the adoption of the criminal justice model and penal frameworks that require valid evidence in terms of 'caught in the act'. But the aforementioned approaches can only be effective when the victims are not discouraged by their illegal migrant status or lack of means of identification to report themselves to the security operatives in order to pave way for further investigations.

²⁶ eNews Channel Africa. 2013. Gabon, UNICEF gear up to combat human trafficking. Thursday 11 July. <https://www.enca.com/africa/gabonunicef-gear-combat-human-trafficking>

²⁷ Ajayi, Ola. 2014. Couple arrested over underaged Prostitutes. *Sunday Vanguard*, March 2, p.7

Gender equality can go a long way to enhancing the dignity of women through the following steps as outlined by Pourmokhtari (2015:165), namely: empowering women individually and collectively, through effective policing, legal measures designed specifically to protect their rights (with need for national and international implementation of human rights laws), and effective grass roots and community-based efforts aimed at raising awareness regarding the causes and consequences of trafficking and its implications for women.

In spite the bilateral relations embarked upon by some West African countries to curb the problem, human trafficking still pervades the sub-region. For example, the 2003 agreement signed between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin aimed at collaborating to identify, investigate and prosecute allegations of human trafficking has not been an antidote to the trade in persons for sexual exploitation as transit camps and exploitation zones still exist in both countries. With such bilateral agreements, it was expected that human trafficking would record a decline.

Nigerians and their counterparts in other Gulf of Guinea countries have benefited from the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, but this has also indirectly increased the activities of human traffickers. Therefore, curbing human trafficking demands that authorities decline to admit women from a source country to destination when ‘no good reason’ for entry is adduced, and also repatriate to home country, prostitutes and any other persons having connection with the profession.²⁸ Similarly, as part of contribution to knowledge, this article suggests that the government and visa issuing offices can assist women and girls by preventing them from being enrolled into such illicit activity. By implication, relevant agencies should demand for letters of invitation to programmes, appointment letters given to them by the institutions they claim invited them and also verify authenticity of such claims in destination countries. This strategy if enforced can boost the anti-trafficking activities in affected states.

VI. Concluding remarks

Any discourse on human trafficking for sexual exploitation is concerned with the purchase and sale of sex by syndicates and their clients who lure vulnerable groups into performing sex acts for monetary gains (Gerassi, 2015:80). From the study, it is obvious that the monetary gains involved in sex trafficking for prostitution drive the trade. A major finding from this study is that most traffickers and clients hardly take no for an answer from the trafficked victims (Anuku, 2016). The foregoing further shows that sexual exploitation of women is an aggression and maltreatment of the

²⁸ NAI/Bourdillon, 1941.

victims who suffer the trauma of such objectification. From the study, it is not disputable that the human rights disaster associated with trafficking for sexual exploitation downplays the dignity of victims. The commodification of girls and women involved in prostitution reduces their worth as humans. Human trafficking for sex victims are usually at the receiving end, having little or no idea on how to salvage themselves from such situation. Imagine a situation where trafficked prostitutes are forced to be paid only N1,000 (about \$3) weekly after meeting numerous men. It is apparent that combating the menace of trafficking for sexual exploitation can address the associated non-conventional security threats, but the ability of the victims to muster up courage to alert relevant agencies has grave implications for syndicates.

From all indications, given that there are institutional setbacks in eradicating the menace, the countries of transit and destinations have a role to play by enforcing trafficking legislations to discourage the inflow of trafficked persons from countries of origin as far as nipping the problem in the bud is concerned. An important recommendation could be that authorities across West Africa endeavour to collaborate more in the area of countering the demand for trafficked persons in order to eradicate the sources or pull factors of supply. Proper documentation of the people travelling from one country to the destination countries is crucial in curbing the problem of human trafficking.

While the syndicates are motivated by greed, get rich quick syndrome, the demand for cheap and submissive child labour, desire to exploit existing inequality in the society, the trafficked victims are lured by the need to transform their poor identity, family instability as a result of sickness, death or displacement of members, ignorance, illiteracy, desperation to travel abroad or for marriage, search for well paid jobs. The trafficked persons become victims of spurious promises owing to their desperate desire to travel. Proper investigation of any job offer can save a lot of young girls from specious promises of a decent living and well paid job that later turn into prostitution.

Let it be noted prestissimo, that the era to tackle human trafficking is now, by using various community and state structures. The need for policy options are not only critical because human trafficking is one of the highest revenue generating sources for criminal networks but also based on the human costs especially the fact that the existence of such illicit business deprives the vulnerable groups from actualising their human potentials. Therefore the camps where people are kept for a period of time should be mapped out and raided for legal action.

Given that the erosion of the family values, decline in community brotherhood/values, bad orientation, deceit, cultural disconnect among

others are responsible for the prevalence of human trafficking, there is need for revival of traditional values of hard work, sincerity and create unfavourable environmental for the syndicates to enable them express compunction for their illicit activities. As far as the Swedish movie, *Lilya 4 Ever* where Lilya turns to prostitution in order to survive (Mathews, 2015), is anything to go by, then parents should eschew the attitude of abandoning the female children even when they are yet to become financially independent as young women. This would reduce the likelihood of their being tempted to enrolling into the global sex industry where exploitation is the order of the day. Additionally, parents and guardians can avoid indirectly aiding the enrolment of young Africans in human trafficking by monitoring their children's activities and also providing their basic needs as women.

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