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Changing Status of Women and the Phenomenon Trafficking of Women for Transactional Sex in Nigeria: A Qualitative Analysis

By Clementina A. Osezua¹

Abstract

This paper examines the changing status of Bini women occasioned by the upsurge and endemic nature of the phenomenon of trafficking of women for the purpose of transactional sex. It engaged ethnographic methods of data collection with the use of family based interviews, focus group discussions using vignette stories, life histories, and key informant interviewing. Data were analyzed based on emerged themes. Findings revealed that “successful” trafficked Bini women enjoyed high socio-economic status in their families of procreation especially where family members were the direct recipients of the proceeds from transactional sex. Most mothers of “successfully” trafficked victims wielded greater influence in family of procreation than was the case in traditional Benin family structure and prior to the era of trafficking in the study area. In addition, girl children that are “successful” victims of trafficking are highly revered by their older male siblings, as long as they sent “hard currency” from overseas. The paper concluded that many uneducated women still perceive trafficking and transactional sex as empowering initiatives to protect women from the oppressive culture, which hinder their access to critical economic resources, but privileged the male gender.

Keywords: Women status, trafficking, international transactional sex, Bini Women, Nigeria

Introduction

In recent times, trafficking of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation is one of the risky sexual behaviour that has continued to attract global attention. An estimate showed that about 5-7 billion US Dollars is realized through women trafficking and transactional sex all over the world (International Organization for Migration 2001). Globally, sub-Saharan Africa region including Nigeria accounts for over sixty per cent of those involved in illegal migration for transactional sex (UNESCO, 2005). In Nigeria, the phenomena of trafficking women and transactional sex have continued to generate much concern from the government due to the increased proportion of women and minors who are largely recruited clandestinely. A recent

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report by the United States yearbook described Nigeria as a leading source, transit and destination country for those involved in human trafficking for the purpose of labor and sexual exploitation (US, Department of Homeland Security, 2010).

Globally, sub-Saharan Africa region including Nigeria accounts for over Sixty per cent of those involved in illegal migration for transactional sex (UNESCO, 2005). Similarly, in Nigeria, the phenomena of trafficking women for the purpose of transactional sex have continued to impact negatively on her image abroad. For example, available data indicate that about 10,000 Nigerian girls are on the streets of Italy transacting sex (Germano, 2001). Another estimate reveals that over 50,000 Nigerian girls, who are illegal migrants, are engaged in transactional sex on the streets of Europe and Asia (Loconto, 2002). The trend of increase in those involved is clearly shown by Ojomo's observation (2001) that in 1997, only 10 people were repatriated. This increased to 225 in 1999, 1,092 in 2000, in connection with illegal migration to Europe for the purpose of transactional sex. The number of these deportees had increased to 1,957 at the end of 2002 (UNICRI/UNDOC, 2003). The number of women deported from Europe over illegal migration, for the purpose of sexual transaction, has continued to soar even afterwards. Consequently, the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) particularly labelled Nigeria as a leading country in human trafficking especially as regards trafficking of the under aged or minors (Skogeth, 2006).

Incidentally, the majority of those deported back to Nigeria are women who were trafficked for sexual purposes, are from a particular ethnic group in Nigeria, popularly known as '*Binis*'. Benin City is the ancestral home of indigenous *Binis* and the capital of Edo State in the Southern part of Nigeria. It is currently regarded as a major market for cross border commercial sex work in Nigeria (Aghatise, 2002; UNICRI/UNDOC, 2003). To buttress the stance of the Nigerian government towards women trafficking, Nigeria is a signatory to some international conventions, which are directly targeted at eliminating all forms of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, yet there the phenomenon has continued unabated.

A majority of the studies previously conducted in relation to women trafficking and international sex trade in Benin City, identified economic depression, occasioned by the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) as the root cause of this imbroglio (WHARC, 2002; Osakue and Okoedion, 2002; UNICRI/UNODC, 2003). There are however no empirical data, which suggest that the *Bini* people are the most adversely affected by the economic downturn in Nigeria. Furthermore, a number of studies on human trafficking conducted in Benin City have verified the gendered nature of trafficking for purpose of commercial sex (WHARC, 2002; UNICRI, 2003, Onyenoru, 2003, Bamgbose, 2005). This suggests that the women who were once restricted with series of taboos and traditional regulations, within a prevailing patriarchal *Bini* culture, are now major 'actresses' in trans-border sexual transactions. These women earn 'hard' currency for their families (UNICRI/UNIDOC, 2003). Yet there are dearths of empirical studies, which have attempted to capture the trajectories in the status of Benin women in the light of the upsurge trafficking women for sexual purposes within the region. This study therefore bridges the gap by carrying out an examination of the changing status of *Bini* women in relation to their involvement trafficking and international transactional sex.

Literature Review: Trafficking of Women for International Sex Transaction

In December 2000, the United Nations convention against transnational crime, adopted a Protocol to combat trafficking in persons, especially women and children. The Protocol adopted the definition of trafficking as:

“Recruitment, transportation, harbouring, receipt of person by threat or use or force, or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud or deception of the abuse of power of position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include as a minimum, the exploitation of others or other forms of sexual exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced abduction or services, slavery practices similar to slavery servitude or the removal of organs” (UNICRI/UNIDOC, 2003:11).

There have been series of campaigns against this Protocol by the pro-sex workers activists, who conceive sex work as labour (Chapkins, 1997). The anti-sex work activists regard commercial sex-work as prostitution. The former are agitating for a review of the United Nations convention on trafficking. Miriam (2005) observes that this apparent opposition is based on the argument of the pro-sex work activists that not all transactional sex is forced rather some are voluntary thereby viewing sex as work or legitimate labour. Thus, transactional sex is regarded as a natural outcome of global economic change.

Nevertheless, available data suggest that trafficking usually involved some degree of coercion or even deception by traffickers. For example, the Human Rights Watch (2001) likened the phenomenon to slave-like practices. Moreover, some of the studies conducted in Benin City in Nigeria on human trafficking for the purpose of sexual transactions have established significant forms of coercions and deception (WHARC, 2002; UNICRI/UNDOC, 2003). Furthermore, Malthazan (2001) disclosed that trafficked women are sold like commodities, many times over, thereby increasing the profits realized by the traffickers. He argues that less risk involved in sexual trafficking of women and the outrageous profits continued to make trafficking for sexual exploitation more attractive to human traffickers than illegal drugs or arms transactions. Giwa-Osagie (1999) argued that organized syndicates that have both local and international network often recruit young women. These syndicates, through some of the known family members, entice the victims with material benefits of travelling ‘abroad’. In some cases, desperate parents have sold property to enable their children travel to Europe for prostitution. The traffickers usually procure travelling documents for these women, which are later confiscated as soon as the victims arrived at their destinations (Parrandang, 1999). This was to ensure compliance to the directives of the traffickers and the *madams*. The *madams* are like the slave owners, to whom the trafficked women are supposed to hand virtually all their earnings from transactional sex (Onosode, 1999).

Ethnography of the Benin People of Southern Nigeria:

The total area of Benin speaking people covers over 4000sq/km (Bradbury, 1957), with a population of 3,233,366 (Federal Government Gazette, 2006). Benin City is located approximately 250 km east of Lagos, the former capital city of Nigeria. Benin City is the

ancestral home of the *Benin* people who trace their genealogy to a common ancestor. Presently, there are different ethnic groups living in Benin City, but these people are different from the *Bini indigenes* since they do not share a common ancestral history. Benin City is also called “*Edo* and individuals who are from Benin City are referred to as “*Oviedo*”, that is, child of Benin, or “*Ovioba*”, which means -subject of the *Oba* (Bradbury, 1957).

In terms of social organisation, pre-colonial Benin, the extended family was the coalescence of the economic, social judicial, religious and political functions, making it the foundation of the Benin social organization Obiyan (1988). Family structure was however made up of several nuclear families ‘*owa* or individual family. This comprised of the father, ‘*ehra*’ with his wife or wives, ‘*iyé*’, who then is the mother and the children, ‘*imon*’. Polygyny was predominant with every wife, who had a male child described as a ‘gate’ (Egharevba, 1949). According to him, the concept of gate, or ‘*uhro*’ played significant roles with regard to inheritance and succession in the Benin family. He also observes that there were distinctions between wives in a compound. These distinctions were based on the status of their husbands. For example, the wife of the eldest male head of a family was referred to as *Okhuo odion*, while the wife of a titled man was referred to as *Eson*. Descent is patrilineal and residences are virilocal or patriarchal.

The eldest son, ‘*omordion*’, in Benin custom played significant roles in the organization of the family. Hence, Igbafe (1979) buttresses that primogeniture is the general custom in Benin. Under this system, rights and ritual offices are passed to the eldest son. Other movable properties are however shared among the senior sons according to the number of ‘gates’. Consequently, the family estate known as ‘*igiogbe*’ was usually an all male affairs. Women did not inherit husbands’ property. In the same vein, widows could be inherited in the same way properties are inherited (Bradbury, 1957).

Furthermore, a woman was considered as stranger in her natal home after marriage, since she was seen as another man’s property (Ebohon, 1996) Marriage to a ‘white man’ was considered abominable (Igbafe, 1979). Women could be inherited in much the same way as property (Bradbury, 1957). Divorce among Benin women is viewed as a colonial impact; however, it was granted to women of noble parentage (Usuanlele, 1999).

Women’s quarters were separate from the men. Women are also perceived as an inversion of the ideal; hence, they were put under several ritual restrictions, *awaa* (Curnow, 1997). Curnow further explains that sexual contact was minimized with women, in order not to abate the potency of protective charms, which were commonly used by men in pre-colonial era. To avoid spiritual contamination, bathrooms, buckets were gender segregated. After sexual contacts, a man must thoroughly cleanse himself in order to keep his spiritual powers intact. It was also contrary to Benin customs for a woman to live separately from the husband that is outside the same geographical location except in cases of illnesses or a disagreement.

Theoretical Orientation

The Feminist Political Economy and Feminization of Survival

In explaining the changing status of Bini women, the Feminist Political Economy, FPE provides a macro insight to economic factors and the kind of social relationships mediated as a result of the structural location of women within the existing political structures. Hence, FPE deconstructs the traditional political economic theory that assumes social relations determined

economic systems of production without giving a critical analysis to the existing inequality of social relations. Although the traditional political economic theory appeared more integrative than ordinary economic principles of demand and supply by attempting a description of the societies, the corresponding economic systems of production that stem from such social configuration are usually ignored. Traditional political economic theory failed to capture the inherent inequalities between female and male gender, in relation to access to economic resources within the family, in virtually all human societies. Hence, Intra Pares, (2004) defined FPE concerns as economics of groups, families, communities, neighbourhoods, localities and regions as well as individuals. Its utility lies on its focus on people as social political and economic subjects or agents. The holistic integration of the social cultural and political conditions in which the subject operates constitutes the basis of such analysis.

Furthermore, Riley (2008) posited that the macro, meso and microeconomics systems are highly gendered, as there are evidently structural inequalities within the social structure from which the subjects or social actors make economic decisions. FPE identifies gender as a critical component of social relations that significantly influences political relationships and structures of power thereby culminating in differential access.

Sassen (2002), consider the phenomena of trafficking for the purpose of sexual transaction as gendered processes of contemporary globalization. She argued that a crusade against international prostitution was indeed a refusal to appreciate the wider “social-moral” context in which these phenomena occur. She added that that the occurrence and pervasiveness of sex trafficking was an indicator of the “feminization for survival” of highly vulnerable migrant women (Sassen 2002: 274).

In identifying theoretical relevance of FPE, one would readily observe that the adoption of neoliberal economic policies in the global South, with specific reference to Nigeria had a debilitating effect on livelihood of many Nigerian. Indeed, the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) adopted by the Nigerian government, a macro-economic policy in Nigeria in order to restructure the economy, has been argued to be a major catalyst of trafficking of women for the and international sex trade in the region (Oyeonoru, 2001; Aghatise, 2002). In the face of severe economic crunch experienced by majority of the populace, the need to devise economic strategies for survival became imperative. The mass retrenchment, employment embargo, freezing of public service salary and the devaluation of the domestic currency, coupled with the rise in inflation, all had delirious effects on the Nigerians and on family dynamics and structures, with women becoming the major recipients of the economic toll in Nigeria (Oyediran and Odusola 2004). Poverty level in Nigeria rose with the introduction of SAP and women and children were greatly affected due to the gendered orientation of poverty in Nigeria. The above theory largely explained the macro social environment in which women trafficking occur in the region but obscured the micro level relationships within the family structure.

At the micro level of analyses, the unified gender and kinship model as posited by Yanagasiko and Collier (2004) in analyzing social whole is adopted as ancillary to the feminist political economy theory. The relevance of this model stems from the fact that there is an assumption of ‘systemic inequality’, which suggests a prestige structure that calls for analysis. Yanagasiko and Collier (2004) explain that cultural analysis involved gaining insights into the nature of social relationships within specific context. They conclude by stating the need to adopt a historical and comparative analysis in gaining understanding into the relationship between gender, kinship, and change. They further posit that such analysis will enable one understand subjective meanings of given ‘facts’ as well as structural location of the respondents. Yanagasiko

and Collier (2004) maintain that cultural analysis, which involves the nature of social relationships within specific context, the people's evaluation, and prestige models, which are encoded in their description and interpretations of events or social relationship, must be investigated. Such will require the adoption of a historical and comparative analysis in the light of the facts and meanings attached to words or events and such facts and meanings cannot be ahistorical. This theoretical model is relevant to the current study in that it emphasizes a culture-specific gender relation analyses. This will no doubt provide adequate insight to the specificity of illegal migration and international sex transaction among the *Binis*.

Methodology

Data for this paper were generated from a larger study on changing family structures, women trafficking and international prostitution among the Bini of Nigeria. The research was limited to *Oredo*, *Egor*, and *Uhumwode* Local Government areas out of the seven local government areas, which constitute Edo South Senatorial district, Edo State since the region is most widely affected by the phenomena of trafficking and international transactional sex (UNICRI/UNIDOC, 2003). Forty households were purposively selected from each local government, based on two inclusion criteria: ethnic origin and socio-economic status. One Hundred household / family based interviews were conducted in all. Household heads were targeted to provide information on their households. In addition, 18 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) using vignette stories were conducted among three categories of people: adult women, adult men, and youths. The vignettes stories were in two parts (a) the story of trafficked victim that ended on a "happy note" and (b) the story of a trafficked victim that ended on a "tragic note." In each local government, the three categories of participants were exposed to both the "happy" and the "tragic" stories. Each focus group discussion session comprised an average of eight participants and lasted for an average of one and half hours. Four (4) key informants interviews were held with a male and a female that were versed in Bini culture and the family institution, a representative of a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) who had done extensive work on trafficking among the *Binis*, an opinion leader, and a government official.

With the assistance of key informants from the University of Benin and NGOs that have done extensive work on human trafficking in Metropolitan Benin City, twenty-five trained female and male field workers were recruited for this study. The rationale of inclusion was their familiarity with the geographical and social terrain of the locations selected for the study, fluency in Bini and English language, and previous experience in social research. The interviewers were trained for a week in order to be able to negotiate a successful interaction with the household heads. The field workers were trained with the interview schedules. Role-playing was conducted severally under the supervision of the author in order to test for accuracy of questioning and reporting. The field workers actively participated in conducting the household/family based interviews, while the authors handled the focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Majority of the interviews were conducted in Pidgin English (the unofficial lingua franca in Nigeria), a few in Bini language and the rest were in English Language. Triangulation approach was adopted in the analysis of all the data generated.

Data Analysis

With the consent of the participants, all the interviews were audiotaped, interviews held in Pidgin English were translated into English, and transcribed. The approach used to analyze the interviews was content-based as suggested by DeVault (1990); Woods, Priest and Roberts (2002). All the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. The transcripts were rereads several times by the authors and thematic patterns that emerged from the participants perspectives were observed. To achieve this, all the transcribed data were reviewed line-by-line to analyze the main concepts, and these concepts were given codes. Second, the codes were compared for interrelationships and organized into thematic categories. However, this produced broader codes than the initial ones. Common themes that emerged through this process reflected a shared understanding among participants of the phenomena of women trafficking and transactional sex. To provide an indication of the accuracy of theme generation and allocation, three well experienced social researchers in qualitative techniques were approached to participate in the data coding process as suggested by Woods, et al (2002). From the transcripts coded in this manner, a resulting level of agreement (70%) was achieved. Thereafter, all the thematic narratives were built into context.

Ethical Consideration

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, participation was voluntary. Attempts were made to explain the objectives of the research to the various categories of participants included in this study and their decision for anonymity was respected. All participants were duly informed of their right to withdraw at any time from the study.

Findings

The findings from all the data collected were combined and presented as a set of intertwined themes: Gender and decision making in traditional Bini Society; and Family structure and women involvement in transactional sex.

Gender and decision making in traditional Bini Society

Emerged evidence reflects a modification of women's status in the Bini family structure, which hitherto limits women involvement in many respects within a patriarchal system. From the family/household based interviews, majority of the interviewees argued that women were less significant in decisions making in traditional Bini family. Among the household heads in Egor, a high proportion explained that women did not participate in traditional Bini family structure, while only six of the household heads argued against this view. Similarly, in Oredo, more than average of the household or family heads opined that traditional Benin family structure did not give opportunity to women to make any decision at the home front, while about 10 household heads insisted that women played minor roles and contributed to the decision in which the family reached. In Uhumwode, a high proportion of the household heads also observed that women had no role in decision-making process, while eight household heads argued against that observation. On the overall, it is obvious that majority of the participants expressed the view that women in contemporary Bini are more involved in decision-making compared to their traditional folks. However, despite the slight variations in opinions, a number of the participants painted a

marginalised picture of women in traditional Bini society even at the family unit as alluded by a participant:

When decisions were made, women were not allowed. It was for the man's family and the male elders in that compound.

Member of a household in Oredo (Female).

Another male household head further corroborated this:

Their (women) opinion was not important; they are relegated to the background when decisions are reached. Their role is just to implement.

(Household head from Oredo (Male)).

Drawing an inference from this stance, women frequently grow with this orientation and operate at the level of auxiliary, where they act passively in decision-making and provide a friendly framework that aids the realisation the patriarchs' desires. Some of the women interviewed in the households were very mindful of their cultural status as portrayed in their opinions:

We were simply executors. This has been on ground before we the women came. We do not decide on anything within the family. We do not have right on decisionmaking.

(Household head from Egor (female)).

More succinctly:

When there is talk in the family a woman cannot talk, no the talk is for the males. Women cannot talk for the matter 'wey man dey' (where there are men)

A male key informant provided further description of the traditional status of women in Benin thus:

Traditionally, a wife was economically self sufficient in that she provided for her children from the piece of land given to her by her husband to cultivate. Also women were exposed to different informal schools like poultry, animal husbandry, music or even traditional medicine. Some of them understood human physiology. This is because a woman was said to be very close to nature in Benin philosophy. Hence, in Benin, a married woman could not shake hands with another man. She could not stretch her legs out for another man to cross over, if a man were to stare at her lecherously, then she was expected to report the incidence to her husband; otherwise she would incur the wrath of the ancestors. Adultery incurred the wrath of the gods which could ultimately lead to the death of the husband by the gods. The women were put under traditional oaths of allegiance

since this was the only means to test fidelity of a woman for reproductive purposes.

Male Key Informant

Another female key informant further elaborated:

When a woman came into a family, whatever the family forbade is what she forbade. When the woman was menstruating, she could not reach the apartment of the husband. She must not cook or even touch anything that belonged to her husband. She could not even greet the husband. She would need an intermediary to do so. In the palace, as at today, all these practices are still in operation. The man and his wife cannot use the same bucket for bathing.

The above views expressed by these the key informants are descriptive of the status of women in traditional Benin society. The need to put women under some of these ritual restrictions is seen from the views expressed above in which the key informants revealed that the traditional conception of the Benin woman is that she is very close to nature. These conceptions are closely linked with the ideological base of the Benin society of which there are prevailing beliefs in ancestral worship and therefore made the need to tame women imperative. A male key informant described the sexual restrictions and ritual associated with a traditional Benin wife.

A married woman must be faithful to her husband; once she was suspected (to be unfaithful), she must swear to the gods if she must remain in that husband's house. If it was a man, nothing was done since men were quite at liberty. If a man talked to a married woman about sex, she must immediately spit out and also confess to her husband what she was told otherwise her own children would be affected. That is, they will bear the consequence.

Male household head in Oredo

In those days, another man did not use his hands to cross another man's wife's neck. A married woman did not shake any man anyhow. A married woman could not go to the front of a house and urinate whether during the day or night time. The clothes of a married woman are properly kept in the home.

Male head of household in Uhumwode

If a woman had an evil intention to kill her husband or harm any member of the family, the "ehinwinowa" will react negatively against the woman.

Male household head in Egor

Male informants were overtly explicit in recalling the sexual culture, which the Benin woman was made to adhere to. Spitting out is symbolic. It is a cultural response to what is perceived as an abominable act and consequently viewed as a crime against the gods. Spitting out implied that there was not consent from the woman to sexual overtures from males. Based

on the Benin traditional values, the family structure was a superstructure, which reflected these values. Hirschson (1984) has observed that in classical patriarchy, older men controlled women and children but usually ensured that the honour of a family was significantly tied to the honour of the females in that society. This explains one of the reasons why several restrictions were usually targeted towards the women in order for that family to enjoy certain prestige within the society.

Changing Women's Status and the Endemic Phenomenon of Women Trafficking

The phenomena of trafficking and transactional sex have created multiple effects on the social perception of women status within the family structure and the society. There was a consensus by the categories of the FGD participants and some of the family heads as they expressed the view that the phenomena had ambivalent effects on the family structure. Similarly, the key informants proposed and cited instances of adopting trafficking and transactional sex as liberating tool by women of low social economic class. Toeing this stance, many of the participants in the FGD and Interviews also expressed the opinion that less educated women were more likely to adopt trafficking as a form of economic empowerment than those who are well educated. Here are some of the responses by a male participant in an FGD were they were exposed to vignette A (*the tragic story*):

'You don't know how many homes this abroad thing and trafficking have broken in Benin. Many homes have scattered because the woman now gets money in dollars so the husband cannot control her again'.

This observation is in line with the view that women trafficking in the area had granted women of this region, greater access to critical resources like economic resources, land and credit facilities, there is a commensurate improvement in her status in the family and society. This was an obvious departure from what obtained in traditional Bini society as expiated by scholars of Bini History (Egarevba, 1949, Bardbury, 1952) when they described the family structure as a co-operative unit. It is clear that there is a major alteration from an essentially co-operative kin unit to co-operation to an inherently competitive relationship where the father and mother do not plough on the same field any more. A key informant elaborated on the social implications of the phenomena on the social dynamics of the Bini family system:

'The phenomenon of trafficking which is an economic design to have people from another country and use them for their selfish purpose, have impacted negatively on the Bini family structure. It has destroyed the virginity of the female children which represented one of the core values of the Binis and made the girl child a money making venture. Secondly, it has broken down the structure of marriage in many homes. When a woman finds out that her daughter is the economic mainstay, she will raise her shoulder against her husband'

(Male key informant)

The female key informant expressed further on the perceived functionality of the phenomena on the status of Bini women. She remarked thus:

'The Bini woman has some control over her family now. At 40, she already has her own house. Before now, the husband needed to be aware if she had to build a house, hence the husband could be involved in the foundation ceremony called 'Olu'. Nowadays some of these things have changed. A Bini wife does not inherit property in the event of the death of her husband, by custom, so she has to fend for herself. Now she is able to get those things, which the culture denied her of since some of them started getting involved in trafficking. Those women who are properly educated are not usually involved in sex trafficking'

(A female key informant).

In the same vein, some of the household heads and the FGD participants argued in support of trafficking and transactional sex, describing the phenomena as major catalyst of changing the status of Bini women. Hence, a female member of household in Oredo maintained:

'My husband is irresponsible. My daughter in Italy built this house and bought this small car. If not for her, I wonder what my fate could have been in this world. (She begins to pray for her)

(Female Member of household).

These excerpts above portray that the phenomenon of trafficking is challenging the age long power structure that the Bini men had wielded over women for a long time. There was a consensus among the various categories of participants that women who get proceeds from children abroad among the Binis become proud, thereby culminating into what many considered as significant factor causing marital insubordination of the female folks to their husbands in the study area. In addition, there were instances some married women connived with their friends to travel abroad for the purpose of trans-border sexual transactions without their husband's knowledge. One of the FGD participants in Egor revealed how a trafficker helped a bosom friend to Europe whom she felt was suffering too much. She stated that the husband was not aware of the plans and that when her friend's husband confronted her; she lied and claimed total ignorance. She further revealed that it was after the woman had settled down there (Italy) that she contacted the husband. The FGD participant further added that the woman had built a house and bought a car for her husband now, that this woman comes home during Christmas period, and that she was still happily married to her husband. When asked whether this was not a taboo in Bini custom, she opined:

...any time my friend comes, she will kill a goat for sacrifice and resume her duty as a wife, since she has done the required cleansing rites.

In another FGD conducted among the women in Oredo, one of the participants observed that in certain instances, married women, chose to go to Europe for prostitution in agreement with their husbands. She cited a woman who happened to be her neighbour who refused to allow her daughter to be trafficked but insisted that she would rather go herself. She eventually made contacts with a syndicate group and travelled out for transactional sex:

'That was how that woman trained her six children, 4 are graduates now, and the last two are in good schools here in Benin City. Whenever she comes home, she will kill a goat. They say that there is no taboo on the male organ of a white man anymore. The man is still married to her and has only one wife'.

Discussion of Findings

The paper examined the changing status of Bini women occasioned by the upsurge and endemic nature of the phenomenon of trafficking for the purpose of transactional sex. The findings showed that a number of women especially the uneducated women conceived trafficking as an empowering process and one that brings prestige to one. This was supported by success stories of women that have achieved success and social recognition, social relevance and prestige within their families and the larger society through cross-border transactional sex. With such achievements, it becomes an impetus for other women to get involved in the "business". Consequently, most of the stories that were told in the process of data gathering were usually success stories of those whose decision to travel outside the shores of Nigeria to transact sex were greatly rewarded. In cases where they ended tragically, victims were condemned as well as perpetrators. Preference was often given to success stories. For instance, in the accounts of married women cited, the women were portrayed as fortunate despite the deception involved in the first case. In some cases when there was a joint agreement between couples on the wife's involvement in international transactional sex, consequently such marriages were not threatened by such women's involvement in transactional sex.

Similarly, younger women who are involved in international sex transaction among the Binis appeared to be held in high esteem within their families of orientation. Their words were not contested since it is the case of "he who paid the piper dictates the tune".

Access and control to scarce resources were not the same as one of the key female informants argued. She opined that it was not in all the cases that women who are trafficked have control over what to expend the money or the booty from such sexual trans-border transactions. Therefore, she concludes that the phenomena of trafficking and international transactional sex have continued to enhance the men's statuses in the Bini family structure and in the society. It appears from the above submissions that women who are involved in transactional sex, with commensurate financial benefits enjoying more positive perception from their family of orientation than what was reported by Izugara (2007). In the study, Izugbara reported how sexworkers plying their trade locally were disowned and avoided by their relatives or significant others. However, findings from this study, which focused on international transactional sex where foreign currencies are earned, presents a different picture. In many instances, where young girls are trafficked successfully and they begin to send remittances to their families, they are viewed as economic liberators and their roles are perceived as "messianic."

The recruitment of female children from this extraction is greatly rewarding as a significant number of them are viewed as "successful" in sex work since large amount of foreign currencies are remitted to their families. This supports findings from similar studies (e.g. Longo & Telles, 2001; Naaneen, 1991; Khus, 1991). Earlier studies among Bini people have confirmed that the Western Union operated by the First bank PLC had its busiest office in Benin City, as a result of many illegal migrants, including trafficked victims who send monies to their parents in form of remittances (UNICRI/UNODC, 2003). In terms of behavioural traits, Curnow (1997)

portrayed the Bini men as typically “arrogant” or “proud” and “showy “ or “loud “ hence the opposite characteristics were expected from the women in traditional Bini society. The same attributes were expected of those who were married. Thus, the traditional married Bini woman and the unmarried females were expected to be the opposite of the boisterous and arrogant Bini man. This corroborates Whitehead’s (2006) assertion that relations between husbands and wives are marked by behavioural components of inferiority and superiority, deference, and so on.

The traditional family based household was thus a hierarchical structure marked by the dependency of the wife and children on the husband whose specific role in the household is marked by the bureaucratic definition of him as its head. However, findings from this study showed an apparent change in this traditional structure as result of trafficking and transactional sex. Women are no longer culturally subservient especially when they are direct beneficiaries of transnational remittances realized from sex trafficking. In addition, there are increased incidences of family disorganization resulting from disagreement over resource control in many Bini families especially those which were hitherto referred to as poor households.

Furthermore, Bini women status occasioned by the phenomena of trafficking, show that uneducated women, viewed sex trafficking as a form of empowerment, through which liberty can be obtained from the conservative and oppressive culture. For them, the advantages or benefits may well outweigh the risks of contacting sexually transmitted diseases or being killed in the process. One of the government officials interviewed in the key informants disclosed that when they go out for anti-trafficking campaigns, they go with police escorts who are well armed. She added that strong resistance from Bini market women often accompany such outings. Some Bini market women opined that it “*Italo*” money or “*ashewo*” fortune that had provided the required capital for them to start businesses which have translated to more comfortable lifestyle. Although, this position did not reflect the generality of women interviewed in the study area, religious beliefs and educational status significantly influenced the disposition of respondents towards relatives or associates that are involved in transactional sex.

In addition, emerging evidence suggests that wealth creation among the Bini people is undergoing a trajectory, as women are now key actors in the process, which the males had dominated during the colonial and early postcolonial era. While this argument may not be over-emphasized due to dearth in literature and available data about those who constitute the trafficking syndicates, but sufficient account of data have revealed that trafficking of women is highly gendered trade with women constituting the bulk of the victims (Aghatise, 2002; Bamgbose, 2005) and extremely lucrative. This underscores a gender switch in respect to wealth creation in the region. For instance males were principally merchants, and largely victims during the sales of slaves to the Europeans (Igbafe, 1979).

Again, there are clear changes in chastity rules with regard to young female children’s sexuality. This is supported by the pressure on many Binis to acquire wealth and belong to the social class of those who have relatives abroad. A recent Bini proverb that tends to exacerbate the phenomenon of cross border sexual transaction is the saying “that the male organ of a white man cannot desecrate the woman’s sexuality runs contrary to traditional precepts about the white men in Traditional Bini Society. Hitherto, marriage to white man was forbidden traditional Bini families. This has further strengthened these practices and weakened the girl-child’s resistance to traffickers.

Conclusions

The family is a crucial socializing agency whose social functions cannot be undermined. The Bini family has to be targeted for a restorative work, to re-position it again; in the light of the imbroglio, it is currently enmeshed. It is evident that most of the women within the region who are not educated have sought for a short-term empowerment, by undermining their sexual rights and thereby threatening or compromising their fundamental rights to bodily integrity. Majority of women in the low economic stratum, with limited educational attainment from this extraction, generally perceive trafficking and prostitution from a positive side. Many of these women have a proclivity for imagining, that their neighbours will be the unfortunate sex-trafficked victims, hence their persistent involvement in women trafficking and international sex trade.

Also, the hegemonic male dominance which has continued to serve as a catalyst for the present crop of uneducated women who are in the lower rung of the economic class of the society who have sought for a change through an unhealthy avenue -- trafficking for the purpose of transacting sex. This study has therefore established that women trafficking among the Binis can therefore not be an outcome of poverty alone, but significantly, feminine protest in response to unhealthy patriarchal practices, which have denied them, access to critical recourses, which they often have access once their socio-economic status changes significantly. This has become a source of reinforcement for many women who are unskilled and has uneducated, creating a form of regional vulnerability to human traffickers.

Conclusively, empirical findings suggest a positive change in the socio-economic status of women who have been successful as well as their immediate families who are usually beneficiaries of the "messianic" mission of women who are trafficked to sell sex. However, the huge question that begs for answer is at who expense?

Efforts should be made to provide adequate and specifically targeted sexuality education and make education available to girls of this extraction in order to rebuild the already damaged psyche about the "get rich" syndrome and the abroad crave that has eaten deep into this region. In addition, cultural practices that tend to heighten gender inequality within the society should be eradicated in order to ensure that women of this extraction enjoy equal rights and access to critical resources like their male counterpart.

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