

Knowledge, attitudes and experiences of sex trafficking by young women in Benin City, South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

Benin City, the headquarters of Edo State, is known to have one of the highest rates of international sex trafficking of young women in Nigeria. This study was designed to determine the knowledge, attitudes and experiences of young women in Benin City, towards international sex trafficking. A random household sample of 1456 women aged 15–25 years was interviewed with a structured questionnaire that elicited information on women's experiences of, and attitudes towards international sex trafficking. The results indicate that 97.4% of the women have heard of international sex trafficking; 70% had female relatives who lived in the receiving countries of Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands; while 44.0% knew of someone who was currently engaged in sex work abroad. Up to 32% of the women reported that they had been approached by someone offering to assist them to travel abroad. Women of poorer socio-economic status (being out-of-school, unemployed, parents uneducated and unemployed) were more likely to report having been offered assistance to travel abroad. Up to 81.5% of the women supported the notion that sex trafficking should be stopped, while 18.5% felt it should be allowed to continue. The perception that sex trafficking leads to wealth creation and economic gains for women was the most common reason proffered by those wanting the practice to continue. By contrast, the fear of adverse health consequences and the need to maintain social and religious morals were the reasons given by those wanting the practice to discontinue. These results suggest that programs that promote the economic well being of women, and social advocacy focusing on harm reduction will be most helpful in reducing the rate of sex trafficking in Benin City.

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Introduction

Trafficking in women (sex trafficking) has been defined as the illicit transportation of women into foreign countries for the purposes of sexual exploitation and for economic and other personal gains (Sandru, 1996; Bertone, 2000). Of recent, this phenomenon has

generated considerable interest in Nigeria due to its high prevalence in some parts of the country. Typically, young women are deceptively led out of the country by a well-organized syndicate with promises of gainful employment in some western country. Sometimes, the girls themselves are aware from the onset that they would be engaged in prostitution abroad and pay huge sums of money to an intermediary who assists them in obtaining papers or in ferrying them illegally to the migrating country. The intermediary would then pay the full costs associated with the migration, with the hope that the woman would re-pay the loan from the proceeds of the prostitution abroad. Under this later

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arrangement, the migrating women are made to carry out various traditional rituals to ensure that they remain bonded to the intermediary until they have been fully exploited financially (Ogunyemi, 2000; Ralston, Murphy, & Mouldon, 1998; US State Department of State, 2000).

To date, reports of trafficking in Nigeria have largely come from Edo and Delta States (especially Benin City), with the women tending to migrate to European countries, especially Italy, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands (Omorodion, 1999; Otoide, 2000; Okonofua, 2002). Recent estimates indicate that for a country such as Italy to which about 2000 women are trafficked annually, 60% are Nigerian women (Ralston, Murphy, & Mouldon, 1998; Orhant, 2002). Among the Nigerian women, 80% come from Edo and Delta States of Nigeria, with a large number coming from Benin City alone (Okonofua, 2002). Data relating to deportations from western countries suggests that the large majority of women deported and who return to Nigeria annually as a result of illegal migration are from Edo and Delta States of Nigeria.

The nature of the “push” and “pull” factors which lead women from Edo State into international migration for prostitution and which perpetuate the practice are not well known. However, we believe that the essential “push” factor may be the low socio-economic status of women in this part of the country, while the significant “pull” factor is the fact that once a cartel for sexual migration has taken root in a European country, new clients are drawn from the same section of the country from which the original participants were recruited.

As a result of the severe consequences of trafficking on the physical, mental, social and psychological well being of women (Ralston, Murphy, & Mouldon, 1998; Muntabhorn, 2002; Costel et al., 2001a; Mikhail, 2002), the practice had been denounced as a form of violence against women and a human rights abuse of women (Costel et al., 2001b; Muntabhorn, 2002). Consequently, efforts are being made at the national and international levels to implement policies and programs to reduce the incidence and prevalence of the practice and seek ways to return and re-integrate trafficked women into their original countries. In Nigeria, the Edo State government has passed a law making trafficking in women a punishable offence (Edo State House of Assembly, 2002) and has mounted intense campaign to stem the practice. In addition, there are now two viable non-governmental organizations at the state and national levels that focus exclusively on the eradication of sex trafficking, and the social re-integration of sexually trafficked women (Okonofua, 2002).

However, despite these efforts, very little has been achieved in terms of actual reduction in the number of new recruits into sexual trafficking. We believe this to be attributable to a lack of empirical scientific evidence

upon which to formulate conceptual approaches for targeting preventative interventions against sexual trafficking. In this regard, it would be relevant to identify the risk factors associated with trafficking, the attitudes of women towards the practice and their beliefs about programs and policies necessary to curtail the practice. Additionally, we hypothesize that women’s poor social status and their inadequate access to means of economic production and sources of livelihood are the predominant “push” factors predisposing to sex trafficking in Edo State. Therefore, it would be critical to explore the nature of any possible relationship between indices of socio-economic status and women’s propensity to support or engage in sex trafficking. Such information could serve as important baseline data, which could form the basis of future evaluation of interventions aimed at preventing sex trafficking in the state.

This study was designed to investigate the knowledge, attitudes and experiences of young female adults in Benin City, Nigeria, about sexual trafficking and its consequences. We believe that the information obtained from the study will be valuable in designing relevant and innovative programs for preventing and addressing sex trafficking in Edo State, the region with the highest rate of trafficking in Nigeria.

Conceptual framework

Sex trafficking is increasingly recognized as an important phenomenon with immense implications for global security and societal cohesion. Since it essentially involves women from under-developed countries being trafficked to more developed countries for sex work, the practice has been described as a manifestation of the North/South, East/West political-economic divide (Bertone, 2000). Earlier versions started with women from Eastern European countries being trafficked to Western European countries because of the comparative economic disadvantages suffered in Eastern European countries. There have also been reports of Nepalese women being exported to Asian and Middle Eastern Countries (Poundel & Shrestha, 1996) and reported high rates of sex trafficking in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Philippines, Cambodia and Thailand (Bennet, 1999). In recent times, sex trafficking has been increasingly reported from many parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

Several theories have been put forward to explain this intriguing phenomenon. These include population expansion, growing urbanization and poverty (Bennet, 1999). As countries face economic difficulties due to rapid population growth, there is increasing unemployment and extreme poverty. Such circumstances provide strong incentives for women as vulnerable members of society to see prostitution as a soft option and to enter

or continue with sex work. Migrating into a more prosperous country for sex work is then seen as more likely to rapidly correct the economic difficulties than sex work within an already impoverished country.

Human rights abuses and social dislocation, which occur during civil wars also account for some cases of sex trafficking as has happened in the case of the Shan States of Burma (Beyrer, 2001). The severe economic problems and civil wars suffered by a number of African countries in the last decades may have contributed to the increasing rate of sex trafficking in some countries in the region. Thus, countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda that experienced civil wars and severe economic difficulties witnessed a large number of their women being trafficked to other countries for sex work.

Nigeria is currently the most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite being the fifth producer of petroleum in the world, its human development index is abysmal. Years of political instability, pervading corruption and mismanagement of the economy have left the country one of the poorest in the developing world. In 2003, UNDP estimated that over 70% of Nigeria's 125 million people live below the poverty line, with income per capita being a mere USD\$ 800. Unemployment is high and rampant, with women being more severely affected. Thus, it is not surprising that the rate of out-migration from Nigeria has been rising steadily in the last couple of years. In the circumstance, many young Nigerians consider leaving abroad as their best option, even if they have to do the most menial or degrading jobs in those countries, including prostitution.

Population and methods

Study population

The study was carried out among young female adults aged 15–25 years in Benin City, Edo State of Nigeria. Edo State is one of the 36 States of Nigeria located in the south-south geopolitical part of the country. Benin City, its administrative headquarters, is one of the prominent cities in Nigeria, with considerable historical and cultural significance. Although Edo-speaking people (Bini, Esan, Afemais) principally inhabit the city, it equally has a large concentration of migrants from other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Benin City had an estimated population in 1999 of nearly 1 million people, with young people (10–25 years old) accounting for approximately 40% of the population. Despite its political significance, the city is poorly industrialized and has limited opportunities for meaningful income-earning activities. Consequently, although Edo State presently has one of the highest rates of school enrolments in the country, the state also has one

of the highest rates of unemployment among youths. In addition, in Edo State, women are culturally not permitted to inherit the properties of their husbands. Consequently, women are under considerable pressure to create their own wealth to protect their future. These reasons probably account for the high craving among female young adults in the city to seek employment and sources of livelihood abroad because of their perception that living outside the country fetches wealth more rapidly.

Study design and sampling

The study was a population-based cross-sectional household survey of young female adults aged 15–25 years in Benin City. The purpose was to obtain a representative sample of young female adults within the age group that are most susceptible to sexual trafficking, with a view to documenting the extent of the problem and to obtain information for targeting interventions. The baseline survey was carried out in the three administrative Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Benin City—Egor, Oredo and Ikpoba-Okha LGAs.

A sample size of 1200 young female adults was calculated based upon our estimation of the level of knowledge of sexual trafficking being 50%. However, because of possible refusals and invalid responses, we targeted a total number of 1600 female youths for inclusion into the study. We planned to identify these adolescents in randomly selected households in the three LGAs, and to administer a structured questionnaire using trained interviewers. For the survey, we defined a household as individuals living under the same building. Based on the assumption that 2–3 youths would be found living in each household, we decided to cover 720 households in the city (240 in each LGA) in order to obtain our sample size of 1600 female youths.

Multi-stage random sampling was used to select the households, and to identify eligible female youths. In the first stage of sampling, we obtained the maps of the three LGAs and identified all designated streets within the LGAs. Thereafter, we randomly selected 24 streets from each LGA, for a total of 72 streets in the three LGAs. All households in each street have officially designated numbers that are clearly printed on the buildings. Thus, in the final phase of the sampling, we identified the number of houses in each selected street, and randomly selected ten houses from each street. All female youths identified in each selected household were included in the study sample.

The questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was designed to elicit information on sexual trafficking from the youth. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. In the first

section of the questionnaire, we solicited information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the adolescents and those of their parents. In the second part of the questionnaire, we asked questions on the sexual health of the adolescents, especially their knowledge of HIV/AIDS, and the methods they use to prevent STDs. In the final part of the questionnaire, we obtained information on their knowledge, attitudes and experience of sexual trafficking. As an indirect measure of the extent of sexual trafficking in the area, we asked questions on their knowledge of female youths who had been trafficked and whether or not they themselves have been approached for trafficking. We also asked questions about their attitudes towards the practice and their beliefs about the effectiveness of programs designed to abolish the practice.

The survey

Female adolescents aged 15–25 years were trained to administer the questionnaires on the sampled female youths in their homes. The interviewers received a 2-day training followed by practical field-testing of the questionnaires in the community. After the field-testing, the questionnaire was further modified, and the final copy produced. The interviewers were trained to approach the selected households with great sensitivity and carefulness. They were first required to explain the purposes of the study and to seek permission from the heads of the households to enter the households to interview the youths. Upon identifying the youths, they further explained the study and sought consent from them, and only those who gave their consent were after full explanation of the study were finally interviewed. The youths were assured of confidentiality of information they provided, and their names were not identified anywhere in the questionnaire. The Human Ethics Committee of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital approved the study protocol.

The interviews were conducted in the evenings when all adolescents were expected to be at home. In particular, all eligible youths in the selected households were interviewed privately without the presence of other youths. Selected youths who were not met at home in the first visit were re-visited until they could be found and interviewed.

Data analysis

Data from the questionnaires was entered into a computerized database and analysed with SPSS Pc+. The dataset was cleaned by investigating whether outlying values were consistent with the responses in the questionnaires and by checking the validity of outlying values with the study interviews. For analysis, both univariate as well as bivariate analyses were used to

describe the data. In addition, we sought the views of the youths regarding whether or not they thought the practice of sexual trafficking should be abolished. We then identified the background socio-demographic variables that predicted women's likelihood to give a negative answer to this question (implying lack of support for abolishing the practice) by conducting a multivariable logistic regression. Through this analysis, we hoped to identify the women most likely to support sex trafficking and who need to be targeted for specific interventions.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics

One thousand, five hundred and one eligible women aged 15–30 years were identified in the sampled households. However, 30 women refused to participate in the study while 15 questionnaires could not be used because of incomplete data. Thus, the total number of young female adults finally included in the study was 1456, giving a participation rate of 97.0%.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the women are shown in [Table 1](#). The mean (SD) age of the women was 22 (4.3) years. Nearly 42% of the women were aged 15–19 years, while 58.2% were aged between 20 and 24 years. As shown in [Table 1](#), 83.3% of the women were unmarried, while 15.5% were married and 0.9% was divorced. The large majority of the women professed Pentecostal religion (60.2%), followed by those who professed Catholic (24.2%), Protestant (6.7%) and Traditional (4.8%) religions. Only 2.4% of the women reported that they were Muslims. Women from the indigenous ethnic groups in the area accounted for the large proportion of the sample, and consisted of Binis (44.5%), Esans (16.4%), and Etsako/Owan (8.2%) ethnic groups. The rest were made up of migrant ethnic groups from other parts of Nigeria.

The educational backgrounds of the women showed that only 10 (0.7%) had not been to school, while 13.8% had primary education, and over 71% had secondary education. Slightly over 14% of the respondents had university or other post-secondary education.

Socio-economic backgrounds of respondents

We used the educational and social backgrounds of the parents as proxies to determine the socio-economic status of the respondents. The results, presented in [Table 2](#), show that 13% of the fathers of the respondents had no formal education compared to 18.8% of their mothers who had no formal education. Of the 1456 respondents, 77.7% reported that one or both of their parents while alive, while 22.3% had only one or no

Table 1
Socio-demographic characteristics of interviewed women in Benin City, Nigeria ($n = 1456$)

Characteristics	n (%)
<i>Age</i>	
15–19	609 (41.8)
20–24	473 (32.5)
25–30	374 (25.7)
<i>Marital status</i>	
Single	1213 (83.3)
Married	226 (15.5)
Divorced	13 (0.9)
Widowed	4 (0.3)
<i>Religion</i>	
Pentecostal	877 (60.2)
Catholic	352 (24.2)
Protestant	97 (6.7)
Traditional	70 (4.8)
Muslim	35 (2.4)
Others ^a	25 (1.7)
<i>Ethnic group</i>	
Bini	648 (44.5)
Ishan	239 (16.4)
Igbo	175 (12.0)
Delta	169 (11.6)
Etsako/Owan	119 (8.2)
Yoruba	66 (4.5)
Others	40 (2.8)
<i>Educational background</i>	
None	10 (0.7)
Primary	200 (13.8)
Secondary	1035 (71.1)
University	168 (11.5)
Other post-secondary ^b	43 (2.9)

^a Jehovah witness, Cherubim & seraphim, Celestial, CAC.

^b Polytechnic (OND), NCE, School of Health Technology.

surviving parents. As shown in Table 2, among those reporting that one or both parents were not alive, 64.6% reported that their fathers were not alive, 22.5% reported that only their mothers were not alive, while 12.9% reported that both of their parents were not alive.

In Benin City, the place of current abode of young women is an important determinant of their social status, and can influence their attitudes and pattern of social behavior. Thus, we asked questions about where the respondents currently live, their occupational backgrounds and their sources of income. The results are presented in the bottom panel of Table 2. Nearly half of the women (50%) indicated that they lived with both of their parents, while 12.0% lived with their mothers only and 4.4% lived with their fathers only. A sizeable

Table 2
Indices of socio-economic status of the respondents

Characteristics	n (%)
<i>Father's educational background</i>	
None	182 (13.0)
Primary	225 (16.0)
Secondary	566 (40.3)
University	424 (30.2)
Other post-secondary ^a	6 (0.4)
<i>Mother's educational background</i>	
None	267 (18.8)
Primary	372 (26.2)
Secondary	532 (37.4)
University	220 (15.5)
Other post-secondary ^b	30 (2.1)
<i>Percent with one or more parents alive</i>	1131 (77.7)
<i>Parents not alive</i>	
Father	210 (64.6)
Mother	73 (22.5)
Both	42 (12.9)
<i>Who do you live with at present?</i>	
Both parents	728 (50.0)
Boyfriend/fiancé/husband	189 (13.0)
Mother	174 (12.0)
Alone/friends	81 (5.6)
Father	64 (4.4)
Guardian	56 (3.8)
Relations ^c	54 (3.7)
In-laws/step-parents	4 (0.3)
<i>What are you doing at present?</i>	
Schooling	707 (48.6)
Learning skills	204 (14.0)
Doing nothing	200 (13.7)
Trading	187 (12.8)
Hairdressing	30 (2.1)
Teaching	27 (1.9)
Others ^d	5 (0.3)

^a Polytechnic, NCE.

^b Parents, Auntie, Uncles.

^c Arabic, NCE, Nursing school.

^d Corper, prophethood and farming.

proportion (12.2%) lived with their husbands, boyfriends and fiancés. More than 7.0% of the women lived alone while the rest lived with guardians, aunts, uncles, other relatives and friends.

When asked what they were doing at the time of the survey, the results in Table 2 indicate that 48.6% reported that they were schooling; 14.0% were learning some skills; while 12.8% reported that they were trading. Interestingly, 13.6% of the women reported that they were doing nothing, i.e. they were neither in

school, learning a trade or engaged in any employment. A few were however, engaged in jobs such as teaching (1.9%), civil service (2.1%) and hairdressing (6.6%).

When asked whether they liked what they were doing, up to 17.7% of the women responded that they did not. Of these, more than 25% indicated that they would like to further their education but lacked the means to do so, while 15% said they needed funds to start small scale businesses, and 14.5% said they needed paid employments. Interestingly, up to 5.6% of the women reported that they would like to travel out of the country to earn bigger incomes. The major sources of income reported by the women were husband/boyfriends (62.8%), guardians (15.6%), relatives (13.0%), and friends (2.1%). Only 5.8% of the women reported that they earned sufficient incomes to meet their daily needs. In general, the majority of the women reported that they lacked sufficient funds to take care of their daily needs.

Sexual and reproductive health experiences and knowledge of respondents

The knowledge and experiences of sexual and reproductive health among the respondents are presented in Table 3. About 70% of the women reported that they were sexually active. The median age of first sexual exposure of the women was 17.9 years, with nearly 80% of the women experiencing their first sexual intercourse between 10 and 19 years. About 6.5% of the women reported that they had more than one sexual partner in the 1 month preceding the survey.

We used the women's knowledge of HIV/AIDS as a measure to assess their knowledge of risks associated with sexual behavior. The results showed that 98% of the women have heard of HIV/AIDS, while 9.5% knew of someone currently living with HIV/AIDS. When asked whether they knew of someone who had died from HIV/AIDS, 25.6% of the women reported that they did. As shown in Table 3, such a person was most likely to be unrelated to them but some also knew of close relatives such as brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles and aunts who have died from HIV/AIDS. Regarding the preventive measures they adopted against HIV/AIDS, 623 (43.8%) of the women reported that they used nothing, while only 31.3% said they used condoms. A sizeable proportion of the women also reported the use of non-effective methods such as pills, injectable contraceptives, coils, salt and water, safe period and ingestion of raw Lipton.

Among women reporting the use of condoms during sexual intercourse, only 12.8% reported that they use condoms all the time, while 25.5% reported the use of condoms at their last sexual intercourse. The most important reason they gave for not using condoms was that they did not like condoms, followed by the fact that their partners did not like

Table 3

Analysis of knowledge of sexual and reproductive health of the respondents

Characteristics	n (%)
<i>Have you ever had sex?</i>	
Yes	1000 (69.8)
<i>Number of sex partners in the past 3 months</i>	
None	104 (10.8)
1	797 (82.6)
2–3	60 (6.2)
4–5	4 (0.4)
<i>Have you heard of HIV/AIDS?</i>	
Yes	1427 (98.0)
No	29 (2.0)
<i>Do you know anybody living with HIV/AIDS?</i>	
Yes	138 (9.5)
No	1318 (90.5)
<i>Do you know anybody that has died of HIV/AIDS?</i>	
Yes	370 (25.6)
No	1074 (74.4)
Refused to answer	12
<i>What preventive measures do you use concerning sex?</i>	
Not sexually active	456 (31.3)
No method used	182 (12.5)
Use condoms	455 (31.3)
Others	145 (10.0)
Ask partner to be faithful	102 (7.0)
Abstinence	98 (6.7)
Avoid multiple partners	17 (1.2)
<i>How often condoms were used in the past 3 months</i>	
Never had sexual experience	416 (30.5)
Never used condoms	392 (28.7)
Used condoms sometimes	282 (20.7)
Used condoms all the time	175 (12.8)
Used condoms rarely	100 (7.3)

condoms. Other reasons given included the high cost of condoms, being shy to purchase condoms in pharmacies, not being married, being a Christian and not knowing how to use condoms.

Respondents' experiences of sexual trafficking

To determine the respondents' experiences of international travels, we first asked them whether they have ever traveled out of the country. The results are presented in Table 4, where it is shown that 4.9% of them reported that they have previously traveled out of the country. The countries they most commonly visited included Cote d'Ivoire, Italy, United Kingdom, Benin Republic, USA and Spain. When asked the purposes of

Table 4
Experiences of International travel by respondents

Characteristics	n (%)
<i>Have you traveled out of the country before?</i>	
Yes	71 (4.9)
No	1383 (95.1)
Refused to answer	2
<i>For what purpose did you travel?</i>	
Trade/business	5 (7.1)
Visitation	25 (35.7)
Hairdressing/nanny	1 (1.4)
Lived there	19 (27.1)
School/education	8 (11.4)
Attend a wedding/function	3 (4.3)
Sport	3 (4.3)
Honeymoon	2 (2.9)
Prostitution	2 (2.9)
Health reasons	1 (1.4)
<i>Would you like to travel abroad if you have the opportunity?</i>	
Yes	1007 (70.7)
No	418 (29.3)
Refused to answer	31

the travels, they most frequently reported that they went for business, or to visit or that they lived there. Interestingly, two of the respondents reported explicitly that they went for sex work (prostitution). A large majority of those who traveled out of the country reported that they returned between 1995 and 2001, and nearly 70% indicated that they would like to travel back if they had the opportunity.

When this question was posed to the entire sample, 29.3% of the women replied that they would like to travel abroad if they had the opportunity. The most important reasons they gave for wanting to travel outside the country were to further their education and to obtain higher income to assist their families. These two sets of reasons were provided by 72.5% of those who wished they could travel out of the country. Other reasons given include their desire to avoid the economic difficulties in Nigeria, to join spouses who live abroad, to meet family relations, for sightseeing and to marry a westerner. Among those who would not want to travel abroad, a large proportion (61.1%) reported that they were not interested in traveling abroad as they have all their need in Nigeria. Other reasons given by this group for not wanting to travel abroad were that people might think they went for prostitution, having a boyfriend or husband in Nigeria, not having relatives abroad, not wanting to leave old parents, being a strong Christian and the shame associated with being repatriated from another country.

Table 5
Women's experiences of having been approached with assistance to travel abroad

Characteristics	n (%)
<i>Has anybody approached you to assist you in going abroad?</i>	
Yes	464 (31.9)
No	978 (68.1)
Refused to answer	14
<i>What kinds of jobs were you told you would do abroad?</i>	
Hairdressing/nursing/cleaner	151 (33.5)
Was not told	144 (32.0)
Education	70 (15.5)
Prostitution	38 (8.4)
Trade/business	35 (7.8)
To marry	8 (1.8)
Learn skills	2 (0.4)
Visit	6 (0.4)
Meet parents/lived there	1 (0.2)
<i>Do you have relatives living abroad?</i>	
Yes	837 (57.7)
No	614 (42.3)
No answer	5

In Edo State, young women may have their preferences but they are often encouraged into sexual migration by friends and adults with suggestions that they would do better by traveling abroad. We sought to determine the extent of this problem by asking the women whether anyone has ever approached them to assist them in traveling abroad, who these persons were, the countries that were suggested to them and the reasons given for the proposed travels. As shown in the Table 5, 31.9% of the women reported that they had been approached with assistance to travel abroad. The results indicate that these suggestions were most likely to be made by their friends and their immediate relatives (aunt, uncle, brother, sister and parents). Others who approached them included strangers, "sponsors" (an acronym for trafficking barons), traditional medicine practitioners, Church members and mother's friends. Interestingly, 17 married women reported that their husbands had been putting pressure on them to migrate abroad for sex work to assist the family in meeting their economic difficulties.

The countries for which the women were offered assistance were Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and France, USA, UK and Germany in that order. A large proportion of the women (33.5%) were told they would work as hairdressers, babysitters and cleaners in the countries, while 31.9% of the women were not told what they would be doing. Over 15% were told they would further their education while 38 (8.4%) of the women

were told explicitly that they would be doing commercial sex work in the countries to which they would be sent.

To document the approximate extent of involvement of women in international migration in the city, we asked the respondents whether they had male or female siblings who currently lived outside the country and the countries they lived in. The results show that 57.9% of the respondents indicated that they had immediate relatives leaving abroad. Further questioning revealed that the estimated number of respondents' relatives living outside the country was about 1200. Analyses of the countries where the relatives currently reside indicate that the male relatives were most likely to be in the USA, UK and Germany in that order. By contrast, the female relatives were reported to be in Italy (more than 25% overall were reported to be in Italy), USA, Spain and the Netherlands in that order.

Finally, we asked the respondents a direct question as to whether they have heard of women being taken abroad for commercial sex work. As shown in Table 6, 97.4% of the women reported that they have heard of the practice in Edo State. When asked whether they knew someone who had traveled abroad for prostitution, 44.8% answered yes. The most mentioned person was a friend reported by 85.5% of the respondents, while others were mostly relatives. Four young women reported that their mothers currently resident abroad were living on the proceeds of commercial sex work.

The countries where the women reportedly practiced their sex work were Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany and Belgium in that order. Nearly 83% of the respondents reported that the women were still leaving in these countries while 17.4% reported that they have returned to Nigeria. Among the 109 women who were reported as having returned to the country, 87 (79.8%) were deported while the remaining returned to the country on their own. In terms of what the returnees were currently doing, it was reported that 38.5% are looking for ways to return to the countries from where they returned; 19.6% were doing nothing; 4.9% were reported as prostituting locally; 6.9% were learning a skill; while 27.5% owed viable businesses.

Respondents' attitudes towards sexual trafficking and commercial sex work

To determine the attitudes of the respondents towards sexual trafficking, we asked them whether they think there are benefits to be derived from the practice. The results are presented in Table 7. A sizeable proportion of the respondents (47.4%) answered that they believed that there are positive benefits to be obtained from sexual trafficking. Some of the benefits mentioned include "brings wealth to the family", "gives women ability to own houses, cars and other investments", "improves standard of living of women", "provides

Table 6
Respondents' knowledge of international sex trafficking

Characteristics	n (%)
<i>Have you heard of women being taken abroad for prostitution</i>	
Yes	1411 (97.4)
No	38 (2.6)
Refused to answer	7
<i>Do you know anybody that has traveled abroad for prostitution?</i>	
Yes	645 (44.8)
No	796 (55.2)
Refused to answer	15
<i>If yes, how is the person related to you</i>	
Friend	283 (44.6)
Not related	259 (40.9)
Cousin	32 (5.0)
Aunt	29 (4.6)
Sister	21 (3.3)
Niece	5 (0.8)
Mother	4 (0.6)
Others ^a	2 (0.2)
<i>Is the person still there or has returned?</i>	
Is still there	517 (82.6)
Has returned	109 (17.4)
<i>If she has returned, what is she doing presently?</i>	
Planning to go back	42 (38.5)
Owes a business	28 (27.5)
Nothing	20 (19.6)
Learning skills	7 (6.9)
Others ^b	7 (6.9)
Prostituting locally	5 (4.9)

^a Stepsister, sister-in-law.

^b Married, schooling, visiting.

public visibility to women" and "reduces level of unemployment among women".

When asked whether sexual trafficking had any disadvantages, 88.3% of the respondents answered yes to the question, while 11.7% replied in the negative. Among those who reported that there are negative consequences, the most frequently mentioned was that it exposes to STDs and HIV/AIDS. Other disadvantages included inability of the women to marry later in life, early death (probably from HIV/AIDS), the fact that the practice brings shame to the country and the inequity of being made to work like slaves in foreign countries.

We asked the women whether or not they feel the practice of sexual trafficking should be stopped. A large majority of the women (81.5%) felt the practice should be discontinued while 18.5% responded that the practice should be allowed to continue (Table 7). We then carried out a logistic regression analysis to identify the factors that predict women's support for sexual trafficking in

Table 7
Respondents' attitudes towards sexual trafficking and commercial sex

Characteristics	n (%)
<i>Are there benefits associated with international trafficking?</i>	
Yes	582 (47.4)
<i>Are there disadvantages associated with the practice?</i>	
Yes	1076 (88.3)
No	142 (11.7)
<i>Generally do you think the practice should be stopped?</i>	
Yes	1051 (81.5)
No	238 (18.5)
<i>Reasons for wanting the practice to stop</i>	
Prostitution is risky/not a good practice	404 (39.0)
To avoid spread of diseases	266 (25.7)
Brings shame to family/state/nation	78 (7.5)
Reinstall lost image of girl/nation/protect image of women	68 (6.6)
Word of god /bible against it	61 (5.9)
Lead to death/ruin life	46 (4.4)
Destroys women's lives/potentials/self pride/degrades girls	44 (4.3)
They corrupt the society/young ones	13 (1.3)
To save their homes and future family life	11 (1.1)
Nigerian girls are looked down on as prostitutes	10 (1.0)
Increase population in other countries/reduce population of girls in Edo State	6 (0.6)
Against our traditional beliefs	6 (0.6)
Destruction of reproductive system	5 (0.4)
To protect future generation	5 (0.4)
Live a miserable lives/prostitution is too rampant in Edo State	3 (0.3)
Women should stay back and take care of their family	3 (0.3)
Make government responsible	2 (0.2)
Nigeria will look like a family with no future	2 (0.2)
Encourage them to study	1 (0.1)
To stop greed prevailing in the society	1 (0.1)

order to determine possible points of leverage for targeting interventions to stem the practice. The results are presented in Table 8.

The data clearly showed that four major factors namely religion, ethnicity, education and marital status predicted the likelihood of young women supporting sex trafficking, at least in the study population. The findings indicate that people of traditional religion are about six times more likely to support sex trafficking as compared to Catholics. Also, Binis were four times more likely than Etsako people to support female trafficking. Women who did not complete primary education, and those with no education at all were more likely to

Table 8
Results of logistic regression of factors predicting women's likelihood to support sexual trafficking in Edo State

Variable ^a	Number (%)	Crude odd ratio	95% CI
<i>Age (20–24)</i>			
15–19	609 (41.8)	1.299 ^b	0.935–1.807
25–30	374 (32.5)	1.213	0.849–1.731
<i>Religion (Catholics)</i>			
Traditional	70 (4.8)	6.133 ^b	4.404–11.050
Protestant	97 (6.7)	1.350	0.724–2.515
Pentecostal	877 (60.2)	1.220	0.858–1.736
Muslim	35 (2.4)	0.998	0.331–3.009
<i>Ethnic group (Etsako)</i>			
Bini	648 (44.5)	3.792 ^b	1.340–10.672
Ishan	239 (16.4)	2.092	0.707–6.227
Owan	119 (8.2)	2.333	0.656–8.299
Yoruba	66 (4.5)	2.606	0.764–8.886
Ibo	175 (12.0)	2.096	0.725–6.059
<i>Marital status (Single)</i>			
Married	226 (15.5)	1.008	0.681–1.494
Divorced	13 (0.9)	7.303 ^b	2.364–22.566
Widowed	4 (0.3)	2.282	0.205–25.296
<i>Level of education (University)</i>			
None	10 (0.7)	3.247	0.584–18.051
Primary not completed	56 (5.2)	5.074 ^b	1.988–12.949
Primary completed	144 (8.6)	2.633 ^b	1.404–4.936
Secondary not completed	350 (23.2)	1.966 ^b	1.121–3.448
Secondary completed	685 (48.1)	1.749 ^b	1.007–3.037
Others ^c	43 (2.9)	0.902	0.286–2.847
<i>Travel out before (No)</i>			
Yes	71 (4.9)	1.985 ^b	1.137–3.467
<i>Travel abroad if have opportunity (No)</i>			
Yes	1007 (70.7)	2.199 ^b	1.533–3.155
<i>Approached to travel (Not approached)</i>			
Approached/offer assistance	464 (31.9)	1.671 ^b	1.251–2.233
<i>Have relative abroad (Yes)</i>			
No	645 (44.8)	1.222 ^b	0.921–1.621

^aThe reference categories are in parentheses.

^bSignificant odd ratios.

^cPolytechnic (OND), NCE, School of Health Technology.

support female trafficking as compared to University graduates. Using marital status as a predictive factor, the regression analysis showed that divorced women were 7 times more likely to support sex trafficking than unmarried young women. Additionally, young women

Table 9
Respondents views on how to stop sexual trafficking in Edo State

Characteristics	n (%)
<i>What do you think will be the most effective ways of stopping the practice?</i>	
Government should provide jobs/money to start business	460 (49.2)
The girls should be repatriated	155 (16.1)
Government reduces cost of living/improve economic standard	67 (7.2)
Government should stop/deal with sponsors	47 (5.0)
Education should be made compulsory/free/less expensive/youths should be told the effect of prostitution	30 (3.2)
Government should pass a law/campaign against it	26 (2.8)
Government should harden immigration laws	23 (2.5)
Prayers/fasting/born again/home discipline	35 (3.8)
Parents should be counseled to stop sending their children abroad	16 (1.7)
Improve the value of the currency/standard of living	12 (1.3)
Nothing they do can stop it	12 (1.3)
Train women/girls to be self-dependent	11 (1.2)
Visas should not be provided for girls traveling to Italy	11 (1.2)
Provision of skill acquisition center/financial support	6 (0.6)
Single girls should not be allowed to travel/monitor	5 (0.5)
Girls should present good purpose for traveling	5 (0.5)
Traditional leaders should discourage them	3 (0.3)
Women should be encouraged to marry /school	2 (0.2)
Should be arrested	1 (0.1)
People should be encouraged to work hard	1 (0.1)

who have the desire and/or incentive to travel abroad were more likely to support trafficking than those who do not.

The most common reason given by those wanting the practice to stop was their belief that sex trafficking could encourage the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. Other reasons given included the perception that sexual trafficking brings shame and disgrace to the family and the nation; that it is against the word of God; and that it is against traditional teachings. Among those who felt the practice should continue, the most common reason was that it is currently the only viable means of economic livelihood for women in Edo State. Another reason was that it could reduce the rate of crime and armed robbery in the state, through providing alternative means of livelihood to youths.

We then asked the respondents what they thought should be done to reduce the rate of sexual trafficking in Edo State. The results of the responses to this question

Table 10
Responses of women to scenario questions on sexual trafficking and programs to address the problem in Edo State

Characteristics	n (%) that agree
Sexual trafficking does not bring prosperity to the family	644 (44.2)
Sexually trafficked women are more likely to have STD/HIV	1110 (76.2)
Sexual trafficking is morally wrong	1326 (91.1)
Sexual trafficking is an abuse to our culture	1289 (88.5)
Sexual trafficking is against religious injunctions	1354 (93.0)
Sexual trafficking is an abuse of the dignity of women	1289 (88.5)
Sexual trafficking should be abolished	1185 (81.4)
Improving of the national economy can prevent sexual trafficking	1292 (88.7)
Sex education in schools can prevent women from being sexually trafficked	1172 (80.5)
Empowering women (through education, increase participation in decision making) can stop sexual trafficking	1231 (84.5)
Media enlightenment can reduce the incidence of sexual trafficking	1098 (75.4)
Legislation on prostitution can stop prostitution	1076 (73.9)
Legislation on sexual trafficking can stop the practice	1084 (74.5)
Involvement of traditional leaders in the campaign against sexual trafficking prevent the practice	1078 (74.0)
Involvement of religious leaders in the campaign against sexual trafficking prevent the practice	1123 (77.1)

are presented in Table 9. Over 49% of the respondents felt the government should provide jobs and means of economic livelihood to women. Other solutions proffered included the need to improve the national economy, the repatriation of women involved in international sex work, media campaign, tightening of immigration laws, women's education, legislation to prohibit the practice, parental counseling and legal prosecution of sponsors and barons.

Finally, we the asked the women to respond to 15 scenario questions to assess their knowledge and attitudes towards sexual trafficking and towards current programs aimed at addressing the problem in Edo State. The results are presented in Table 10. The only point of disagreement among the respondents was in answer to the question as to whether sex trafficking brings wealth to the family. Nearly 50% of the young women believed that sex trafficking brings wealth and prosperity to the family, while 44% believed it does not. For all other questions (see Table 10), the overwhelming majority of

respondents gave answers that suggest pervading negative attitudes to sex trafficking.

Discussion

The study was designed to investigate the knowledge, experiences and attitudes of young women towards sexual trafficking in Benin City, Nigeria. The results indicate that a large proportion of the women have heard of international sex trafficking, and that many knew of someone who was currently abroad for prostitution. In addition, several young women reported that they had female relatives who lived abroad, with the largest proportion reporting that the women lived in countries (Italy, Spain and the Netherlands), to which a substantial number of these women are known to be trafficked. These results are direct and indirect indicators of high levels of knowledge and current practice of international sex trafficking in the state.

In Benin City, there are well-organized syndicates that specialize in recruiting young women for international sex trafficking (Otoide, 2000). Often, these syndicates approach young women offering to assist them to travel abroad. The results of this study indicate that a substantial proportion of the women had been approached with such an offer in the past. The European countries of Italy, Spain, Netherlands, and France known to be the main recipients of these women, were the countries to which the offers were most often made. These results suggest that an active program of recruitment of young women for international sex trafficking existed in the city at the time of the study.

We hypothesized that socially deprived young women are the group most likely to be approached with suggestions to be enlisted into international sexual trafficking. This was derived from the theory (Hadley, 2001), which posits that poverty is the primary incentive that drives women to participate in prostitution, whether directly or indirectly, through following the false promises of employment offered by sex traffickers. The results of our analysis indicate that this was indeed the case, as participants most frequently reported that the need to improve women's socio-economic status, as being the reason for their support for international sex trafficking.

Regarding the attitudes of young women towards sex trafficking, the results of this study indicate that up to 81.5% of the respondents believed that the practice should be discontinued while 18.5% thought the practice should be allowed to continue. Furthermore, the results of logistic regression showed that women most likely to support the continuation of sex trafficking included women with primary or no education, divorced women, women from Bini ethnic group, those who have previously traveled or intend to travel out of the country

and women professing traditional religion. Poverty probably explains why divorced women and women with primary or no education were more likely to lend support to sex trafficking. Socially deprived women are more likely to attach significant importance to the perceived economic benefits of sex trafficking, and to see themselves as potential recipients of such benefits.

By contrast, Bini women may be reacting to the fact that a sizeable number of their women have already been trafficked, and therefore a large proportion of the community may have benefited economically from the practice. This may act as an incentive for other women of the same ethnic group to desire to go into the practice. It also probably explains the fact that women who have previously traveled or intend to travel abroad were more likely to support sex trafficking. These results suggest that improving the socio-economic status of young women would be an important first step in efforts to reduce the level of sex trafficking among women in the state. Women need to be able to feel confident that they can achieve economic prosperity within the country rather than believing that going abroad for sex work is the only way to attain this.

The results also showed that women who profess Traditional religion were more likely to support the continuation of sex trafficking as compared to those professing Christian or Muslim religions. This finding probably reflects the fact that practitioners of both forms of religion have publicly campaigned against the practice in the state. It suggests the need to intensify and expand the scope of such campaigns to include populations and communities that may not necessarily profess any form of religion. It does suggest that using a religious platform would be successful in turning public opinion against the practice.

Interestingly, up to 50% of the respondents believed that there are positive economic gains to be made from sexual trafficking as it creates wealth for women. This implies that even among those who wanted the practice stopped, a large proportion believed that sexual trafficking could increase economic opportunities for women. Indeed, this formed the basis of the argument by who favored continuation of the practice.

By contrast, among those who favored discontinuation of the practice, they based their arguments on the negative health and social implications of trafficking, especially their belief that it could predispose women to STDs and HIV/AIDS and bring shame to the country. They also believed that sex trafficking is against the wish of God, and that it is not supported by traditional moral codes. Thus, any program aimed at stopping sex trafficking in the state should be able to counter the notion that it creates wealth and take advantage of the beliefs of the women regarding its harmful consequences. While current programs readily point to the harmful consequences of sex trafficking and therefore

use the harm reduction approach as a strategy to campaign for its discontinuation, there is a need to more systematically address the perceived economic benefits of the practice. A common tendency in Edo State is for people to give examples of young women in the state who have returned from sex trafficking with considerable improvements in their social and economic lives, whereas those at home often face severe economic difficulties. However, programs should point to the fact that such economic gains are not sustainable over time, especially when women have not had the full benefits of proper education, which women who go into sex trafficking often lack. Additionally, women who have succeeded economically whilst working hard within the country should be used as role models and their cases cited to counter the notion that women can only achieve wealth through international sex work.

Clearly, any program aiming to stop sexual trafficking in Edo State must seek to address the economic realities of women's lives. As suggested by the women themselves in this study, a better approach would be to identify ways to improve the overall economy of the country, since experiences from several countries that have faced economic declines of the type currently being faced by Nigeria, suggests that out-migration by the most vulnerable groups is one of the most frequently used coping mechanisms (Ralston, Murphy, & Muldoon, 1998; Mikhail, 2002; Hadley, 2001). When Ghana experienced serious economic declines in the 1970s, several Ghanaian women migrated to other countries for international sex work and other menial jobs. However, now that the economy of Ghana has improved, several of these women have returned, and the rate of out-migration for this purpose in Ghana has decreased substantially. Indeed, a measure of the success of the current economic recovery efforts in Nigeria, is the extent to which it reduces the need for out-migration and international sex work among women.

While national economic recovery efforts are ongoing, short-term economic support and poverty alleviation programs should be put in place to specifically address the needs of women, as an important strategy to reduce the rate of sexual trafficking in Edo State. Intense advocacy should be stepped up, especially targeting groups—Bini Ethnic group, women with primary or no education, Traditional religion and divorced women—who were identified as being more likely to support sex trafficking. Additionally, sexual trafficking should be seen as one manifestation of the comparative social disadvantages suffered by women in this community, which can best be addressed by an approach that seeks to empower women socially, economically and politically.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that international sex trafficking is a major problem among young women in Edo State of Nigeria. We believe this

phenomenon to be due to the prevailing adverse socio-economic realities in Nigeria especially for women, and can be best be addressed by policies that improves the national economy as well as the specific socio-economic empowerment of women.

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