

## THE CURSE OF FAMILIAR FACES AND THE PREVALENCE OF RURAL TO URBAN RECRUITMENT FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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### ABSTRACT

There is developing literature on the trafficking of women from West Africa for sexual exploitation in Europe. However, while a growing number of women and children are trafficked from rural to urban settings in Nigeria, often leading to sexual exploitation, little attention is directed towards understanding the triggers, patterns and factors reinforcing its prevalence. This paper builds from on-going research on reintegration processes for survivors of human trafficking in West Africa. The article explores the sexual exploitation of women and children in urban areas and the silent, previously ignored traffickers that sustain its persistence. Several survivors attest that they are at risk of trafficking/exploitation through recruitment, that could be peers/friends, ultimately leading to commercial exploitation; or by relatives to work as house helps, exposing them to sexual exploitation by male members of the household. The survivors' narratives indicate that the same route into trafficking protects from detection and prosecution for their traffickers/exploiters. The helplessness of survivors is amplified in their narratives of deceit, indebtedness, lack of familiarity with the environment, low self-esteem, and shame. More awareness about potential risks to trafficking must be undertaken in rural areas.

**Keywords:** Commercial Sexual Exploitation; Rural to Urban Recruitment for Trafficking; Trafficking and Women and Children; Familiar Faces and Trafficking in Nigeria; Recruitment Patterns and Detection

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**Introduction**

Urban crime in Nigeria and its association with human trafficking feeds the horrors of hapless women and children recruited for trafficking from rural to urban areas. The stories undermine the agency of the survivors and excuse the peculiar socio-economic decadence in rural areas that drive or push them away from home. The information that persists, while projecting the dehumanizing treatment received by affected persons that violate their fundamental human rights, usually provides one-sided reporting that reinforces government, development organizations, anti-trafficking and NGO efforts while leaving hapless women and children the way they started. Research show that some women and children saw their trafficking as an escape route from the rural settings (Olojede et al., 2020), family disintegration (Okeshola, Adenugba, 2018; Ogwezzy, 2012), early marriage (Mbakogu, 2016a, 2004; Fong, 2004), poverty (Nnachi, 2017), and to resolve household problems, including indebtedness (Mbakogu, 2020). When discussions are one-sided, the resulting interventions and programs fuel political agendas. They do not address the root causes of women and children's departures from home into risky trafficking efforts. The paper recognizes that trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation is dehumanizing. Yet, the circumstances leading to women and children's involvement should be centerstage in offering strategies that enable survivors to meet their potentials, whether in rural or urban areas and reduce their involvement in trafficking. The paper will project the voices of children and youth participating in trafficking by situating the problem of rural to urban recruitment for trafficking, describing modalities for children and youths' participation in the study, presenting critical findings of the research and engaging in a discussion of the results with emphasis on the unexplored impact of familiar faces on children and youth's susceptibility and persistence in trafficking in Nigeria.

*Urban crime and rural to urban recruitment for trafficking in Nigeria*

The social problems existing in rural areas that remained unaddressed spur rural-urban migration for young people seeking alternative sources of survival and likely falling prey to traffickers (Amrevurayire, Ojeh, 2016). A study conducted by Amrevurayire and Ojeh (2016) in a rural town in Ughelli South Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta State, Nigeria, revealed that majority of the residents were willing to migrate to urban towns to pursue higher education as they had only acquired basic education. This unfortunate reality presents an easy opportunity for traffickers to deceive and lure unsuspecting victims in desperate search of greener pastures. Without doubt, the simple lifestyle of rural dwellers is likely to render social problems persisting within rural areas invisible (Edward et al., 2009). Furthermore, service providers and parents may be defensive, hope and/or believe that trafficking other than for child or youth placement purposes occurs within their terrains (Olayiwola, 2019; Adesina, 2014).

Moreover, with access to social media, girls in rural areas connect and engage in conversations with diverse individuals via the internet, WhatsApp, and Facebook where they are recruited for trafficking (Devasahayam, 2019; Ukachi, Attoh, 2020). Many women and children are trafficked by persons known to them (Adesina, 2014). The victim-trafficker relationship or level of familiarity of victims with their traffickers is a factor in detection. Victims may protect their traffickers, allowing them to elude detection by anti-trafficking agents or law enforcement (Mbakogu, 2016a). The push factors could be moderated by family disintegration, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, death of parents (Mbakogu, 2016). The push factors also determine traffickers' hold on their victims, deciding their vulnerability when faced with threats and violence. Moreover, with limited social interaction with other residents in urban areas due to the precarious nature of their work or trafficking, survivors are unlikely to report to law enforcement.

The presenting conditions in Nigeria make it difficult for those in rural areas to access jobs and survive. The minimal access to education in the rural areas, where priority is given to male children over daughters' limits girls to traditional farming roles or to learn new trades (sewing, baking, event management) which they cannot afford or yield the demands of traffickers. There are also limited educational and economic advancement opportunities for girls in rural areas (Fayemi, 2009). In addition, girls coming from female-headed households with limited ownership of lands or access to credit facilities to establish or grow their businesses (Mbakogu, 2016a; 2020a), polygamous homes with many children to care for (Ogwezzy, 2012), or either working with parents or alone to contribute to household income (Salihu, Chutiyami, 2016), further contribute to their risk of being recruited and exploited. The role of women and their children in agriculture in rural settings and the absence of lands for these purposes make them susceptible to others who may lease lands to them and/or offer them credit to purchase crops or seeds for cultivation. Women also find themselves and their girl children burdened with providing alternative income that is often directed to the care of their brothers (Mbakogu, 2016). Limited information about trafficking (Adesina, 2014; Akor, 2011), the offered job and the trafficker's intent allows girls and their family members to be willing victims (Fayemi, 2009), giving their consent to trafficking and exploitation.

When girls arrive at the urban location, they operate in closed settings, are unfamiliar with the terrain, and cannot reach their family members. Within these circumstances, girls are more likely requested or expected by extended family members to take on new roles or accept opportunities in rural areas to support family members (Mbakogu, 2016). These opportunities are, in most cases, to fulfil the selfish intentions of traffickers with close affiliation to the victim or the victim's family. There are various sites for the recruitment of girls in rural areas. These could

include schools, centres for extra-mural classes or skill development (sewing institutes), hair-dressing salons, markets, and farms. Ignorant parents are made to believe that their girls will be attending school or helping in the house, shop, or restaurant of recruiters. Still, these are usually facades to access girls for sexual exploitation.

Commercialization of women and children for sexual purposes in Nigeria could take the form of prostitution, pornography, exotic dancing, or recruitment in strip clubs in exchange for food, shelter, clothing, and money. Nigeria's degenerating social and economic conditions provide an adequate breeding ground for traffickers to easily exploit unsuspecting women and children (Fayemi, 2009). Then again, there are gaps in the literature for understanding how traffickers operate in rural communities and the techniques explored to bring victims into urban areas. The literature is inundated with the ignorance of parents (Olayiwola, 2019) and the deception of relatives. Victims should give more voice to vivid depictions of their trafficking journeys that introduce new players and a newer understanding of persistence and resistance. The link between victims and friends (peers, neighbours, church members) in their trafficking needs to be explored (Mbakogu, 2016a; 2020). Several commercial, family, social, and institutional stakeholders benefit from the exploitative trafficking of women and girls (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The high demand for their services in the household or commercial establishments highlights why the trade flourishes (Aransiola, Zarowsky, 2014).

Notwithstanding Nigeria's leadership role in addressing international, regional, and internal trafficking of women and girls, the illicit trade persists with ingenious methods and new stakeholders introduced to devise new ways to recruit victims. The persistence of trafficking in persons in Nigeria poses questions across international spheres as to the seriousness with which government ensures women and children's social and economic advancement. It also trivializes

the efforts made to provide legal backing in the drive to address human trafficking in Nigeria, through a bill establishing the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, (NAPTIP) that the National Assembly passed in August 2003 (amended in 2005). Moreover, Nigeria operates within difficult circumstances as a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking (Mbakogu, 2016a), making it difficult to prosecute victims and traffickers within its trafficking laws (Akor, 2011). Nigeria also maintains the lead in having a functional law and structured agency to assist in removing victims from trafficking and prosecuting traffickers. But the agency's complaints of limited funding/resources, little awareness and sustainable public enlightenment, and the length of time it takes to prosecute or convict traffickers remain gnawing hindrances (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Mbakogu, 2016a; Refworld, 2017). These hindrances are more frustrating for trafficking survivors who want to move on with their lives (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Mbakogu, 2016a).

### **Methods**

Regardless of Nigeria's position as an oil-producing country with the largest population in the African continent, the high rate of poverty and unemployment, particularly among the youth (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016), making up about 50% of the population, drives high likelihood for involvement in risky employment among the youth. This also fosters rural-urban migration. Besides, the more comprehensive the social network of young people, the more likely they will find employment. This paper projects narratives of children and youths removed from trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation as drivers for understanding the nature of recruitment and mode of entry into trafficking and how these might limit detection and reintegration of affected persons.

The data informing this paper is from an ongoing 24-month Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded qualitative research (acknowledging COVID-19 delays), with personnel of anti-trafficking agencies (ATA), survivors of trafficking and their family members from a previous study and 40 children (7-18 years), and youth (19 -35 years) dwelling in multiple shelter locations operated by NAPTIP or other ATAs in West Africa. The researcher also interacts with family members to identify the reason for children and youth's involvement in trafficking, their knowledge of the trafficker and/or destination, and parents' participation in the 'rescue' and reintegration processes. Conversations with participants and their family members within their homes rather than agency settings will provide more insight into challenges that children and youth could face leading them into or away from trafficking. Information was obtained from trafficking survivors by adopting individual interviews and focus group discussions lasting between thirty minutes to one hour to enable participants to share their experiences. Ethics approval for the study was obtained from Dalhousie University's Research Ethics Board.

### **Results and Discussion**

Seven themes guide the findings – deceit, indebtedness, lack of familiarity with the environment, familiar faces and protective faces, shame, low self-esteem and coming to terms, generated from analysis of collected data.

#### ***Deceit***

When interrogated about their journey into trafficking, several trafficked persons begin with narratives of deceit. Understanding the impact of these narratives of deceit on survivors requires isolating their experiences based on: relationships with traffickers, age of survivors, level of



dependency of survivors, family dynamics and decision-making processes in families that push survivors into or away from trafficking.

*I was 9 years. That was in 2001 when I left home. So, the woman said she wants me to follow her. I said I can't follow her. Unfortunately, my grandmother came out and said I should go and pick up my things fast that she doesn't want anyone to enter the house and see me behaving. I said no that she should call my mother, if my mother says yes that I should follow the woman, then I will follow the woman. I did not know that it was a plan by my mother and my grandmother. In fact, she is a very rich woman. I don't know where she gets her money from. Before we left, I picked up my picture, my mother's picture, and my father's picture. But my grandmother collected them and burned them –Ogonna 24--*

Ogonna's narrative as a child who reluctantly left home, with so much doubt about her travel companion and her unknown destination, draws attention to diverse forms of encounter with deceit even for children. Her grandmother's (and mother's) deceit was further reinforced by the act of burning memories of self and attachments to home that will sustain her and assure her of a future return to the place she calls home. The act of burning memorable images for the nine-year-old remained several years after rescue from sexual exploitation, indicating that a home is a place that she may never find or return to. Moreover, there is an overemphasis on women as victims of trafficking (Nwokeoma, 2018; Mbakogu, 2016; 2020) for commercial sexual exploitation, downplaying the fact that women and girls could be perpetrators of trafficking crimes to other persons who could be their peers or relatives (Mbakogu, 2020). Women like Ogonna's mother and grandmother could also collude with traffickers to sell their children into trafficking for sexual purposes with little concern about the child's age and feelings (Mbakogu, 2020), including the comfort they may have received from pictorial memoirs of home (Mbakogu, 2016a).

Women's role in commercial sex trafficking takes various forms, as users, procurers, transporters, with survivors attesting to deceit at diverse levels of interaction with the recruiting madams. Such as women recruiting other women or girls by using agents that offer deceptive employment opportunities and terms of employment. Women are implicated in recruitment because parents and children are likely to consider them more trustworthy (Adesina, 2014) in providing care than men.

*I was in my home and one man, our neighbour, came to tell me that he has a sister that lives in Lagos and that the sister needs five girls to work in a restaurant. So, I went to tell my friends and they said they will follow me and go. And the woman told us that she will be paying us 20,000Naira a month. But immediately we came to Lagos, the restaurant she told us was not a restaurant. It was this prostitution work. We told her that we cannot do the work, after all we are small. The work is too much for us. She said we will give her N2000 every blessed day for one month. Then N1000 is for house rent. Her madam, another person will be collecting that. If we told her we will not do the work, then she will hurt us. So, me and my sisters, went back to talk. We said we will calm down, do the work and then if we have a chance to escape, then we will escape. So, we agreed that we will do the work. As we are doing the work, she will be collecting the money while people are sleeping with us. Money that is left for us we will use to eat.*

*When we were discussing with her, we were staying in a place---they do the places as batcher house (a wooden plank house), like kiosks, where people sell wares, then they put mattresses in them. I was with my friend and the other girls. We were paying 1000naira a month for that batcher. We worked for a week –Cleopatra 19--*

When unsuspecting girls from the rural areas arrive to take on their city jobs, deceit takes another form as their madams take advantage of presenting circumstances in the lives of young girls and their families.

Consider the case of the child who leaves home because of their inability to stand their mother starve and face ill health so that younger family members could survive:

*My mother did not have money to pay the children's school fees. She will be going to farm to work, to get money to pay our school fees. Because she did not have any help...it is getting to 15 years that I have never seen my dad. So, we started having bad friends because there is no money. Sometimes she [mother] will go to shop she will not have any money even to give us food. One week, my mum couldn't work we had to beg people, our neighbours for food to eat. We didn't have any money to eat. Before we now start to suffer, we start... my sister started working for people as salesgirl. My older brother will work for people and they will not pay. So, we didn't have anything to eat that day and my mum she didn't work. In the night, my mother fainted because there was no food to eat. We were lucky that somebody dash [gifted] my sister N500 naira that day. So, she used the 500 naira to go to buy things for our mother to eat. ---Jane 18--*

Narratives of deceit abound in international trafficking of Nigerian girls from rural areas. Of 76 survivors that were interviewed in a study by Human Rights Watch (2019), most of them reported that they were lured into trafficking by familiar adults who deceived them with promises of a better life through either paid work, vocational training, or education. Human Right Watch (2019) narrated a similar tale of an 18-year-old girl named Adaura who was made to believe that she was being taken to Libya for domestic work but was brought in to work as a prostitute. The “Madam” in Libya also forced Adaura and other girls to work to pay back a \$4000 debt which she claimed was the cost of bringing them into Libya. The madam’s request inflated repayments of travel expenses that require victims to work in brothels for indefinite periods to repay their debts. Several participants in the study shared similar experiences. They reported that they were devastated to

find out that they would not be receiving an income as domestic servants as promised but are expected to pay their traffickers ambiguous ever-growing debts.

### ***Indebtedness***

Narratives of survivors show that debts incurred by girls and their family members could be repaid at any time - repayment periods could be immediate, specified or delayed to a future period. Ogonna was taken away from home when she was nine years old, and repayment was not mentioned until she turned fourteen.

*She said I should follow the woman then I followed the woman. The woman said that she gave my grandmother money on my behalf. That the money she gave my grandmother she is going to collect it from me. I said how will you collect the money from me that I don't even know anything about it... I was not going to school; I was going to school in my grandmother's house. I was in primary 4. The woman was taking care of me till I was 14 years...So, she said this age that I am, that I need to pay her money back. I was just with her. Till I entered 14 years. I was not doing anything I was in the house; she was feeding me. I wanted to go to school but she said that I should not worry that when it is time, she will take me to school---*  
*Ogonna 24---*

The madam kept Ogonna sustained while in her care, ensuring that her body was formed adequately for the sexual exploitation to commence. Ogonna did not know how much the woman paid her grandmother and how many years she would have to engage in prostitution before the debt was completely paid off. Some child victims are brave enough to ask questions, but answers are never provided, and even when they are provided, they come with sad repercussions. Although many victims are aware that they will be required to pay back a certain amount of money, they are often shocked by the excessive amounts the traffickers claim as debt once they arrive. A Human

Rights Watch (2019) report narrated the experience of a young woman who knowingly agreed to be trafficked to Russia for prostitution. However, before leaving Nigeria, she was deceived about the total debt she would repay. She was under the impression that the debt was about \$350 but her traffickers informed her upon arrival in Russia that it was \$56,000. She ended up working for four years to repay this debt. She chose to return home to Nigeria afterwards but was welcomed with hostility as her family was unhappy that she did not return with the money.

### *Lack of familiarity with the environment*

The major problem facing girls trafficked to urban areas for commercial sexual exploitation is a lack of familiarity with the new city, the lifestyle, and restrictive living arrangements that make it challenging to socialize and seek support to leave trafficking. Girls are forced to endure exploitation until an opportunity is provided for escape. Such options for escape should be explored immediately they are presented.

*Before the woman, our neighbor started asking me, "I want you to follow me to Abuja" I have a big restaurant. The woman sent her brother. Her brother now told me everything. I said okay. But the mistake I made, I didn't tell my mum I was coming to Abuja. The boy now carried me to come to Abuja. I came back from school that day, my mother was in the shop. They now carried me to Abuja, and said it is prostitution work I will be doing... The woman finished washing the clothes, she took me to salon plait my hair, fix my eyelash, fix nails. When we reach house, I now start asking the woman, "but aunty, this place is hotel, but I think you said it is your house". She said yes that this is where she used to work. I said "which work", she said it is prostitution work. I now start telling her that I want to go to school, that this is not what I came to this Abuja to do if you can help me. The woman said there is no how she can help me that this is the thing she used to work. I continue stay there, two months,*

*before one boy, he used to come there to drink...helped take me out from there. I stayed with the boy. The boy called my mum and told her the truth. My mother said that she can see that it is because she does not have any money, that is why her daughter went to Abuja to do prostitution work --Jane 18--*

Though unfamiliar with the environment, others like Mimi escaped shortly after arrival due to a previous experience with another familiar acquaintance that deceived her into regional trafficking for prostitution.

*When we got to Abuja, we got there, and they are selling beer there. I thought it was only beer, but it was prostitution. So, I told her that I will not do the work. I ran away, I ran to Area Two, I slept there because it was night. The next day in the morning I saw one elderly man passing. So, I asked him " please sir I am looking for work." He now asked me that I should go to a Redeem church, maybe they will help me and give me work. He took me to the Redeem church. The people said that before they give me work, they will have to take me to NAPTIP. If the NAPTIP people say they can do something about it, then they can give me work. But my sister is here, she is married in Kuchi, Abuja. I did not have money to go there. The money I had was not enough to go to Kuchi—Mimi 18--*

One would have expected Mimi to notify her sister that she would be coming to Abuja for work. Girls are committed to believing that the offered opportunity will be the needed change required in their lives. Based on their optimism about the offered job, several girls fail to tell close acquaintances (parents, siblings, and grandparents) of their destination (Mbakogu, 2015), hoping to call home when they have started earning their monthly salaries. Traffickers often use different fear tactics with their victims, such as threatening their lives and those of their family members

should they fail to comply with their instructions; threatening to sell them off, and seizure of crucial documents (Human Rights Watch, 2019)

### *Familiar faces and protective faces*

Several familiar faces, friends, neighbours, aunties, and uncles are implicated in the trafficking of women and girls from rural areas for prostitution in urban areas. Based on trust reposed in familiar faces, victims do not inform parents and other family members about their movement away from home. They also accept the nature of employment offered by familiar acquaintances without conducting intensive investigations ahead of leaving home.

*My aunty called me and asked me everything. I told her that I am going, if there is a way for me to continue my school and make my dreams come true, because I wanted to be an actress. She said I should go. We left on December 1. We had to call when we got to Abuja - opposite First Bank. She had to come and pick us up. When we reached there, I thought she wanted to see her friend, or she wanted to do something. I didn't know that was where she wanted me to be working, in a hotel. There were two of us. She dropped us in the hotel, and we asked her, " ma, this is not what we agreed." She said that is the way she knows to help me, I didn't say anything, I continued working in that place. First, that night they called the doctor. That is when she now asked me, if I have boyfriend when I was in east. I said yes, I have but I have not done anything with them. She said, okay no problem. She called a man, one officer... The man first said he could not, he brought Vaseline with other cream, for them to disvirgin me that night. No one could help... I had to endure it. They introduced me to drink. They wanted to introduce me to smoke. I could not do that. I started drinking and after that I kept on working--Adanna 19--*

When girls try to find their way out of the situation, they have found themselves; those trying to assist them in exiting trafficking are intimidated into exposing their whereabouts. Girls could also be forcefully returned to their forced participation in commercial sexual exploitation due to the complicity of law enforcement officers who could be benefiting from trafficking.

*So, we had to go back. She told me that maybe the man may help, that we should wait. Not knowing that they noticed that we are no longer there again and asked the man where he kept us. The man had to tell them where he told us to go and stay. We saw police cars drive inside our compound, that was on Friday, we didn't know what was going on. We thought that they just came to survey the environment. The way they used to come when we were there. We didn't know they (police) were looking for us. They now got us back ... Because the woman knows them, and they used to come there. One of them that broke my virginity that always works with them, was there. So, when we reached, they talked to the DPO that morning. It's like they bribed the DPO, he now accepted everything. He said that we were lying, we had no option but to go back and continue our job. We had to go back--Adanna 19--*

The implication of law enforcement officers in the trafficking of women and girls for prostitution explains the reluctance of some survivors to report their traffickers for fear they could be reporting to those in league with their traffickers. In some cases, girls could be requested to pay money to open their case files at the police station (Mbakogu, Odiyi, 2021), a strategy that silences cash-strapped victims. The Refworld (2017) Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report draws attention to corruption and complicity of law enforcement efforts to address human trafficking. The allegations permeated all levels of government and affiliated security agencies and impacted the number of convictions within the reporting period.

***Shame***



The shame resulting from believing them and knowing that there is no simple exit from prostitution is linked to falling prey to the manoeuvres of familiar faces. Related is the case of Beauty, who was looking for an outlet to advance her education. She responded to a job offer moderated by a friend and ended up in a hotel, where she must learn to hustle to repay the madam and make ends meet.

*I finished my JSS3, and I wanted to start my SSI. There was no Money. There is a girl, that said there is a woman from this Abuja selling boutique so I should go so I can make money to come and start my school. I followed the woman and the girl left. We enter night bus. I was living with my parents in Onitsha. No, I didn't tell my parents I was going with the woman. So, in October 2018, we entered night bus we reached Abuja...The girl that brought me to Abuja took me to the hotel and introduced me to one girl. The girl said what I came here to do is Hustle. I said it's not what the one that brought me said to me before we came. The woman said if I want to go back, I will give her the transport money. I do not know the amount; she did not tell me --Beauty 17--*

Shame, as identified by victims, is a sword with several edges (i.e., the shame of returning home to parents who were not informed ahead of their departure, the shame of returning home to face a closed community where everyone is likely to stigmatize them based on their encounter with prostitution, and the shame of facing their friends and family). After returning home, there is also the inability to believe or trust anyone, especially friends.

### ***Low Self-Esteem***

A recurring narrative of girls was their trafficking experiences' impact on their self-esteem. Girls had experienced dehumanizing practices and were forced to engage in acts beyond their years.

They were forced to endure these experiences without support from friends or family while expected to move on each day, with the target of making money that enriches their traffickers.

*When I woke up in the morning, I look out everywhere, nobody, I didn't know anywhere from there. So, I used the little money I have to buy one medicine, rat medicine for me to end my life. Because, the life I was living, I can't continue the pain no more. And no one will actually help. I have already drink half of it for me to drink the other one, a girl threw the thing out of my hand, she kicked it. Asked me who I am, I told her everything. She took me to her house, and she has given birth. She is 20 something, maybe 28. She now advised me that killing myself will not be the end of my life.*

*Another time, I had to runaway... out of that house. I tried to drown myself in one river, two boys came out of that place and brought me out. They asked me who I am and what the problem is. I told them my story, they said they have to call NAPTIP. That is how I came to NAPTIP—Adanna 19--*

Several times, Adanna sought the best outlet for relief. Each time she engaged in self-harm, and each time, she was rescued by strangers until she was finally taken to NAPTIP. A South London analysis of clinical records database comprising 98 adults trafficked girls from 33 countries with over one-third from Nigeria, China and Uganda found that girls are likely to self-harm before and within care (Borschmann et al., 2017). Traditional outlooks on mental health in African communities are likely to compound girls removed from trafficking and housed in temporary shelters. Their counselling or mental health needs are ignored and could be relegated to the realm of spiritual manifestations attributed to oath-taking or other diabolical abuses they faced during trafficking.

*Coming to terms*

After enduring the trauma of trafficking for prostitution, girls also engage in the narrative of acceptance. This is a reflective process of coming to terms with what has happened and accepting that several things were beyond their control. Coming to terms with their present realities allows them to reflect on the past and map out the best strategies for moving on with their lives.

*I am there two months. She said that if I make money she will give me food, if I don't make money, she will not. She said that one person is N2000, and till daybreak (TDB) is N7000. Like one day I made N15000, she just gave me only N1000. But if I make N5000 she will give me only N500 to use and eat. NAPTIP said they don't want my mother to waste money to come, that they want to bring me back home. Even though they have not seen my suspect they will release me. Anytime they catch my suspect, I will come back to collect my money. It depends they said if I want to start school here I can start school, if I want to go back to my mum, they will be sending money to my mum --Jane 18--*

To Jane, coming to terms with her realities involves knowing that other doors and opportunities have opened, including her educational aspirations (which were paramount to her), which can be actualized with the support of NAPTIP.

*A girl. Even when I told the person I am sure is the owner of the baby, he lied that he is not the owner, and the boy told me that he is married. And the wife is in village. Since that time, I said, "God if this is how you want it to be let it be". My baby is not the only one that does not have father in the whole world. And that has made me learn a lesson from people. I now tell people my story. That it is better I should share my problem with people. Since that time, I will never find a place to forgive people in this world. Especially men---Adanna 19---*

And Adanma, who was trafficked to Abuja for prostitution four years ago hopes to come to terms with the present realities of caring for her child as a young single parent.

The initial call to address trafficking of women in Nigeria was ignited by the spate of trafficking of women from Edo State to some European countries, Italy, Spain and Belgium (Mbakogu, 2016a; Ogwezzy, 2012). Girls were mainly trafficked to work as domestic servants in the United Kingdom (Ofuoku, 2010), increasing the number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum (Bokhari, 2008). Initially, girls trafficked to Italy, Spain, Belgium for prostitution were from Edo State but extended to include girls from Delta State, Northern Nigeria, and other parts (Akor, 2011). Several trafficked girls complained of taking oaths to keep them compliant to their madams and making it challenging to leave trafficking for fear of the outcomes to themselves and their family members in Nigeria (Human Right Watch, 2019; Mbakogu, 2016a; Ogwezzy, 2012). Nigeria and Nigerians' negative image galvanized the attention to international trafficking. The international trafficking of women and girls remains an issue in the country. It also contributes to minimized concentration to the flood of internal trafficking in Nigeria. They are coupled with a reduction in the substantial agricultural workforce comprising women and girls that enhance food production in Nigeria (Ofuoku, Uzokwe, 2012). Most trafficked persons are taken from rural areas to such large cities as Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, and Port-Harcourt (Geshinde, Elegbeleye, 2011; Ogwezzy, 2012). Inattention to internal trafficking in Nigeria makes it increasingly difficult to understand the participants and mode of operation, which have become increasingly ingenious with access to mobile phones and social media across rural-urban divides. Victims of internal trafficking are usually exploited to work as domestic help, agricultural sectors, or commercial sex workers (Akor, 2011; Tade, 2014). With economic and educational setbacks, girls are likely to seek work by

moving from rural to urban areas to support both the advancement of self and dependant family members.

*I am from Benue State. I'm living with my Great Grandmother. Yes, my father is late, but my mother is married to another person. So, there is this friend of my brother, my brother's girlfriend. So, she came to my house, I told her I am looking for work to do, so she told me that there is work in Abuja here. So, I tell the girl that my mother is too old to feed me, selling firewood every day to feed me, I am tired that I am supposed to be the one taking care of her. So, she now told me that there is work here in Abuja –Mimi 18---*

Some of the girls are deceived (Mbakogu, 2016a) about the nature of their work, mode of payment and who they will be working for at destination points. Moreover, urban areas have more hidden avenues for the commercial exploitation of girls that remain undetected and prevent escape for affected girls.

The bond between traffickers and their victims presents challenges for exposing trafficking and the nature and forms of exploitation. It makes it problematic to bring justice to victims of trafficking from small rural communities with closed/small, interconnected networks or relationships. The traffickers know the victims and their problems, which they play on, often camouflaging as providers of selfless assistance. To effectively explore the trafficking of women from rural areas to urban areas, we should understand who the trafficking agents are, their relationship with the victims and the processes for gaining access and enticing victims to participate in trafficking. Trafficking networks are extensive and include recruiting agents, fake lawyers, native doctors, forgers, intermediaries, and transporters who could be family members, friends, and users of trafficking.

*The girl that brought me to Abuja, she's my brother's girlfriend, my brother wants to marry her. It's not her fault oh, cos I don't want these people to catch her it is not her fault. Because I am the one that begged her to bring me here, even if I do the work, the prostitution work, the money is my own. I will not be giving her my own. She was just trying to help me but I don't want to do the work---Mimi 18---*

The trafficker, in most cases, is usually a known family member, relative, or friend who wields some influence that enables them to have access to identified victims.

*I told my parents. The guy that was supposed to bring us here. He is our neighbour. I told my brother. My brother knows the guy. I told my brother that it is this man that is taking us to Lagos. He [her brother] said no problem that we can go. Everybody in my house knows that I was travelling. The man, our neighbour said that he knows nothing about all that [working for prostitution], that the lady told him that she has a restaurant. But later, we noticed that the man knows what the lady was planning –Cleopatra 19---*

Prosecution, while slow, is usually effective when carried to term. Their success is usually attributed to the low arrest and prosecution rates, the silence of specific victims, and their practices' illicit nature (Mbakogu, 2016a). It is also essential to know familiar faces' promises to potential victims and their family members to obtain compliance. Bearing in mind limited literature on the internal trafficking of children in Nigeria and its limitation for understanding the nature of deception, promises and compliance, we will also integrate the recruitment of street children. In the bid to escape their traffickers, children trafficked from rural areas are also liable to become street children until they can find the proper support or have adequate funds to return home. Aransiola and Zarowsky (2014) conducted a study in three major Nigerian cities (Kaduna, Port-Harcourt, and Lagos) where they gathered data from street children and several groups directly or

indirectly involved with them (street children). Results highlighted the heightened vulnerability of street children to trafficking given the peculiarities of their lifestyles, street exposure, and the unfortunate fact that they are unlikely to be looked for by anyone if they are recruited for trafficking.

Furthermore, many of the street children were trafficked by members of their community who lured them into trafficking with false promises of assistance. An obvious remedy to protect street children is through housing and other social and economic support facilitated by social welfare workers in their localities. Most of the children that participated in the study had not received social support from government agencies. Of the 44% that had received help, most of the aid took the form of food, accommodation, counselling, and clothing. Support in a genuinely transformational nature in education and healthcare favoured by the children was rarely ever reported. The study also unveiled children's negative perceptions of social welfare workers. Children who were previously in the custody of social welfare agencies attested to their cruel ways and would instead fend for themselves than accept their assistance which some equated with punishment rather than safety. Across diverse narratives, in most cases, children have fallen for promises of education or schooling, learning new professional skills or offers of lucrative jobs (Nnachi, 2017; Nwokeoma, 2018; Mbakogu, 2016a, 2021). These promises summarise the realities for family sustenance that Nigerian policymakers should integrate into annual budget planning, particularly in rural areas and for the sustainable development of women and children (Mbakogu, 2016b).

Some of the findings bear similarities with the global experiences of victims of human trafficking. Several victims are trafficked for prostitution by their family members (UNODC, 2020; UNGIFT, 2008). Victims narrated experiencing psychological turmoil, shame, and low self-

esteem because of their trafficking (UNGIFT, 2008). Others are reluctant to return to home for fear of stigmatization. The widespread phenomenon that is linked to dysfunctional families (facing domestic violence, children in orphanages) in South-Eastern and Central Europe has created a foundation for traffickers to deceive and exploit unsuspecting victims (Aradau, 2004; Stateva, Kozhouharova, 2004; Limanovska, 2005). Studies in India and South Asia highlight the link between rural-urban migration and human trafficking (Yousaf, 2006; UNODC, 2020). According to Kumar (2009), it is common for celebrities, religious leaders, politicians, and other government officials to traffic people within and outside India undetected due to their power and status.

### **Conclusion**

Building from survivors' narratives, is the ongoing discussion of the ignorance of parents, family members and victims themselves enough to eradicate or reduce the persistence of trafficking in Nigeria? What some liken to the ignorance of some parents could also be parents' interpretation of trafficking. Some parents see the movement of their children to urban areas as a strategic plan to provide access to opportunities lacking in rural areas or beyond their potential as poor parents (Adesina, 2014, Mbakogu, 2016a). Even more, does awareness creation based on foundations of ignorance help the case of girls seeking employment and explore the best available means of fulfilling their needs in the absence of social support from the Nigerian government at federal, state, and local levels. Considering the financial constraints facing NAPTIP, the agency's public enlightenment programs adopting radio jingles or televised programs, documentaries, and videos/drama on human trafficking, are unlikely to be accessed by families in rural areas with erratic access to electricity. Anti-trafficking awareness projects appear focused on urban areas that are destination points of trafficked girls rather than the sending communities who are most affected and in dire need of effectively targeted sensitization. There are no attempts to address the realities



facing girls and their families at the macro level. Those realities manifest in the exploitation of the traditional African practice of fostering or child placement with more affluent relatives who supplement the educational and skills acquisition needs of children absent in rural areas (Mbakogu, 2004). Now relatives, who could have acted as effective and dependable foster parents, collude with traffickers to entice and exploit their wards or relatives in urban areas (Mbakogu 2021). What formal supports are provided to parents and families in the rural areas after awareness creation or even after girls return home without viable empowerment or reintegration support? Awareness of trafficking and participation does not address the persistent problems of livelihood absences in rural areas or deal with peculiar situations of affected girls and their female parents (Olayiwola, 2019). The incidences of human trafficking are escalating in Nigeria regardless of protocols and agencies with legislative authority to address the problem in the country (Ikuteyijo, 2020). There is more recorded impact of trafficking on women and girls than other affected populations.

Intervention strategies for trafficked girls should deviate from the individualistic – and extend to include families or communities, particularly sending communities who send a more significant number of women and children into trafficking. An individualized approach to trafficking masks the collective approach to family decisions that are made ahead of departures from home (Brunovskis, Surtees, 2012; Mbakogu, 2016). When Western-styled approaches are applied in resettling girls after trafficking, they omit the need to center on collective healing and support within and for immediate and extended families. Anti-trafficking agencies should also adopt awareness creation, counselling, reintegration, and empowerment levels that align with the cultural, social, religious, and educational realities of survivors they are dealing with (Cunneen, 2005; Gozdzia, 2012; Nwogu, 2014, Mbakogu, 2016a). Undoubtedly, manipulative and exploitative trafficking for sexual purposes will persist if girls' residents in rural areas cannot

complete their education and benefit from free education programs at primary and secondary school levels (Nnachi, 2017; Mbakogu, 2020), and/or have access to sustaining jobs.

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