

**NIGERIA BEYOND 2007:
ISSUES, PERSPECTIVES
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Chapter Eighteen

The Menace of Female Prostitution in Nigeria

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Introduction

Prostitution as a social problem is a world wide social phenomenon. The consequences of prostitution as a social problem affect a significant part of all human societies. Prostitution and prostitutes have become part and parcel of all human societies despite the fact that almost all human societies frown at them. Specter (cited in Thio 2001) posits that prostitution is a fast-growing multibillion dollar global business. According to Thio (2001), every Saturday night as many as 300 young women line the side of a 7 mile street of a highway from Prague to Berlin in Eastern Europe. The highway of cheap love is described as the world's longest brothel where travelers can stop to buy sex from one of the women for \$30.

According to Truong (2000), many old Babylonian religions have close ties with prostitutes and these prostitutes played great role in the ritual of these religions. He stated further that in the 19th century Europe and America, prostitution was ordinarily regulated like any other business in some form but not outrightly outlawed.

Nigeria, a developing country has her share of the social phenomenon. The disturbing nature of the problem has compelled the federal government to legislate and tag prostitution as a crime punishable with imprisonment. According to the criminal code, the law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, section 249 (1990) every common prostitute shall be deemed guilty of simple offence and shall be liable to imprisonment for one month.

The law has not succeeded in cheking prostitution in Nigeria. Instead it has attracted the attention of non-governmental organizations (NGO) and wives of serving state governors, local government chairmen who are waging war on the eradication of this scourge in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the law enforcement agencies seem to be helpless and fast losing the war against prostitution, which is regarded as the oldest occupation in the world Matsuada (1995). This is so despite the fact that in state like Zamfara, Kano, Sokoto, Bauchi and Katsina, just to mention a few, where the Islamic legal system (*Sharia*) is practiced, and the act of prostitution carries death penalty. Even in these states, there are designated places or areas where prostitutes are allowed to operate freely. The best way to describe the helplessness of the law against prostitution is, "if you can't stop prostitution, permit it". There is hardly any big town or city in Nigeria where prostitutes are not seen operating openly.

There are two common patterns of prostitution in Nigeria. The first involves women who sell sex to heterosexual men. The second common pattern of prostitution involves male homosexual prostitutes who sell sexual favour(s) to gay men. In the southern part of Nigeria, it is very common to see female prostitutes soliciting for clients (male) openly. While in the northern part of the country, both male and female prostitutes, operate freely. The male prostitutes are known as 'Dan-Dawudu' in Kano State.

In this chapter, the problem under discussion is the issue of female prostitution as a social problem in Nigeria and it will be examined under the following sub-titles:

- A. The concept of prostitution as a social problem.
- B. Theoretical explanation for prostitution.
- C. Types of prostitutes
- D. Factors that encourage prostitution.
- E. Effects of prostitution
- F. Conclusion and policy issues.

The Concept of Prostitution as a Social Problem

The concept of prostitution is defined by Davidson and Layder (2001), as the exchange of sexual favour(s) for money or favours(s). To them, there are prostitutes from both sexes; the predominant form of the phenomenon is the female prostitution, which involves women selling sex to men. According to Dorling Kindersley (2005), the term prostitution refers to a woman or girl, a man or boy that engages in sexual activity for monetary gain(s) or favour(s).

To Bullough and Bullough (1987), prostitution is the institutionalized market place for the sale of sex. Conklin (1989) asserted that prostitution, unlike many other crimes is a victimless crime; it is an offense that is consensual and it lacks a complaining participant. Prostitution remains the only crime for which at least more women than men are convicted; although it takes a man and a woman, at least, to commit the offence (Mc Anulty, 1995).

Prostitution as a social problem can be seen, from the perspective of Horton and Leslie's (1974) who believed that the concept refers to a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable; the solution to which can only come through collective social action.

Based on the above definitions, coupled with the government efforts on reducing the upsurge of prostitution and public outcry against the ills of prostitution, prostitution can be described as a social problem that deserves urgent attention in Nigeria.

Theoretical Explanation for Prostitution

There are theories that explain why people indulge in prostitution. Some of them include functionalism, feminist theory and social psychological theory.

According to Davis (cited in Thio 2001), the functionalist theory of prostitution posits two major reasons why prostitution exists in human society. The first reason is sexual morality, which derives from the social system that condemns prostitution but unintentionally causes prostitution to exist by creating advantages for it in at least two ways. Firstly, the moral system of society divides sex activities into types: sex with one's spouse is "meaningful" while sex with a prostitute is "meaningless". This division encourages men to go to prostitutes when they want to have "meaningless" sex. Secondly, by defining certain sexual acts such as oral or anal sex as immoral and hence not to be indulged in with one's "moral" wife or girl friend. The moral order encourages men to turn to "immoral" women-prostitutes, for these sexual acts and therefore, by implication, the moral system creates a demand for prostitution.

There is also the feminist theory of prostitution as propounded by Thio (2001) which states that patriarchal system encourages prostitution by creating supply and demand for it. According to him, boys are socialized to be dominant over girls and when boys are grown, they are expected to desire sexual domination of women and this can be easily realized through patronizing prostitutes. On the supply side, girls are socialized to be submissive to boys and later as adults, to men at work, play or sex. He further asserted that women are relegated to predominantly low status employment, including prostitution. This explains why prostitution is more prevalent in traditional societies, where gender inequalities abound, more than among people in modern societies. The thinking of feminists' theorists is that the society is not permissive for girls to succeed; they are relegated to lower paying jobs that is if they have any job at all and this can lead to prostitution. The socialization process, therefore, grooms male children to feel superior to their female counterparts.

The psychological theory of prostitution believes that it is the combination of social and psychological reasons that act as a push for women to become prostitutes. According to Brown (1979) cited in Thio (2001), the push factor include promiscuous parents and children going through traumatic events. On the other hand, the belief that it is possible for a woman to live a rich and easy life by becoming prostitutes act as pull factors for prostitution. Other participating factors include unemployment, meeting a prostitute friend, or being pressured by a pimp to sell sex.

The above theory is very relevant to this study because harsh economic conditions like unemployment and poverty, among others, could push a woman into prostitution.

Types of Prostitutes

Ewhrudakpor (1998) opined that prostitutes do not constitute a homogenous category. There are clearly defined classes with typical differences

in form or dimensions of sophistication. The five dimensions, according to him, include level of education, costume, clientele, fee and modus operandi. In this chapter, attention will be devoted to the types that are common or obtainable in Nigeria. The common types include call-girl, street walkers, child prostitutes, Ashewo, gigolo, hustlers and homosexual prostitutes.

Call Girls

The call girls can be described as the highest category of prostitutes in Nigeria. They are highly sociable, well dressed and in most cases, well educated. They meet their customers or clients through powerful contacts, telephones and through references. Their fees are usually high. The clients of call girls are usually from the upper class of the society which includes politicians, captains of industries and top civil servants, among others. Ironically, the call girls do not see or regard themselves as prostitutes. Some female undergraduates in Nigerian higher institutions fall into this category.

Street Walkers

As the name suggests, street walkers are prostitutes that solicit for customers on the streets. They stand along the road, near five star hotels, beer parlours and even close to brothels. Street walkers can be found among students of higher institutions in Nigeria, school drop-outs and illiterates. Street walkers try to reduce the duration of time they spend with an individual in order to have a high number of customers per night and by implication, more money.

Child Prostitutes

According to Thio (2001), child prostitutes are between the ages of 8 to 12 years old and they are often called "baby pros". Most of the child prostitutes have been brought up in poor and chaotic families, where they are used to seeing their mother or older sister engaged in sex with different men. According to Itzin (2000), child prostitutes or "baby prostitutes" are mostly victims of child abuse, while others are runaways.

Ashewo or House Prostitutes

According to Ewurdjakpor (1998), Ashewos are illiterates who have reached menopause. They normally live in cheap brothels and pay rents on a daily basis. They care less about their "appearance", wearing outdated gowns and wrappers. Their patronage includes taxi drivers, truck pushers, apprentices, and disabled poor people, among others.

Gigolo

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines gigolo as a man who is paid to be the lover of an older woman, usually one who is rich. Gigolo is fast gaining ground in Nigeria. Gigolo is often connected to rich single women, divorcees, and widows. They render sexual services to these older women for a

fee or for other rewards. In Nigeria, it is a common trend reporting the activities of male film actors and models that are gigolos by Nigerian journalists.

Hustlers

These categories of prostitutes mostly dress provocatively to seduce clients. Ewurdjakar (1998) asserted that Hustlers use charms to get customers. They also use charm to make their customers pay a high fee. He states further that hustlers engaged in part time jobs in the day but take to prostitution at night.

Homosexual Prostitutes

Homosexual prostitutes are commonly found in the northern parts of Nigeria where they cater for the sexual needs of male clients (gay men). They are commonly referred to as "Dan-dawudu."

Factors that Encourage Prostitution

Willets and Weber (2000) opined that individuals have various reasons and explanations for sex and sexual behaviour. The various factors or reasons that encourage prostitution among females in Nigeria can be discussed under the following sub-heading: socio-cultural and political factors, socio-economic factors and the role of the military.

According to Law (2000), modernization, socio-political realities, and changing values of the society led to an upsurge in the number of people becoming prostitutes. He further posited that the problem of prostitution is a socio-cultural one, which must be addressed, in the overall context of genuine social transformation.

Ashworth (1993) asserted that the major reason why women, more than anything else, go into prostitution is the imbalance in socio-political structure of the society. According to him, the society is a "male society", where men make policies which most often than not favour them to the disadvantage of women. In his own contribution, Hobson (1990) posited that prostitution has both socio-cultural and economic dimensions. Female prostitution is a pointer to woman's inferior status as compared to that of men.

According to Olawale (2002), the political and economic systems in Nigeria derived wrongly from the colonial masters to certain extent affect the status of women in Nigeria. Women are seriously disadvantaged due to one socio-cultural restraint or the other. It is the socio-cultural restraint of not permitting some women to enter into labour market and paid employment that often push them into prostitution. Efiog (2002) collaborated Olawale's position by arguing that socio-cultural restraints and the Nigeria labour laws which forbid women from doing jobs in certain fields worsen the plight of women. One of the resultant effects of that law is prostitution.

Other socio-political factors that encourage female prostitution, according to Evans (1994), are illiteracy, low pay, unemployment, segregation in job

placement, and low political participation. According to her, women's domestic work is not well valued worldwide and therefore, women seek "other forms of work" that can bring additional income and this "other forms of work" could be prostitution.

According to Aina (1995), modernization which involves change in the values of society, also encourages the evolution of prostitution. The traditional values have been eroded by western values to the point that more women today are taking up roles that are traditionally meant for men. For example, he stated that women have taken over the maintenance of the home and the children. It is this additional role that was hitherto meant for men that are forcing women to go into prostitution to generate income for home-keeping.

Socio-economic factors such as poverty, disorganized family life, unemployment, peer influence are some of the predisposing factors that encourage female prostitution in Nigeria. Bamigbose (2002) supported this position when he argued that poverty is the chief causal factor in prostitution. He further pointed out that the incidence of poverty in many Nigerian families has led girls in these poverty inflicted families to get themselves involved in prostitution which to them is a more attractive and lucrative means of supporting themselves and their families.

Perpinan (1994) also corroborated the above position when he said that inadequate housing, unemployment and low wages lead women to offer their sexualities for sale.

The role of Nigerian military also encouraged the growth of female prostitution in Nigeria. When the Islamic legal system (*Sharia*) was introduced in most northern states of Nigeria, the sales and consumption of alcohol and the business of prostitution were banned and regarded as crime punishable by law. But surprisingly, the law was not applicable in the military barracks. As a result prostitutes see military barracks as a safe-heaven or an escape from the wrath of the law. That explains why army barracks particularly "mammy markets" are full of prostitutes of all ages where they are fully protected by the military and their power of the gun. Many teenage prostitutes that run away from home are easily found in "mammy markets", which are within the confinement of military barracks.

The above position is corroborated by Adenle (2001) when he said that prostitution is closely related to the presence of the military and their barracks. According to him, brothels flourish in abundance around military barracks where some military personnel, mostly of the rank and file cadre patronize prostitutes after some bottles of gin at the "mammy markets", and to them, "fun is not complete without sex".

Effects of Prostitution

According to Thio (2001), in ancient civilizations, prostitution was not condemned as evil. It was even considered sacred by some religious sects, so that only priestesses had the privilege to practise it. He further hinted that, nowadays, it is regarded as an evil in virtually all societies but in most societies, it is recognized as an evil that cannot be eradicated.

The effects of prostitution can be discussed under two main headings. This includes negative and positive effects.

One of the negative effects of prostitution if not checked, can lead to the total destruction of the family institution. This is so because sex is supposed to be enjoyed between husband and wife and it has a unifying effect but is gradually been threatened by availability of sex outside marriage.

In addition to the above, the increasing rate of venereal diseases like HIV/AIDS epidemic, syphilis, Gonorrhea, etc., is common with prostitutes (Anderson 2003). Another negative effect is the likelihood of the increase in the rate of drug addiction among the prostitutes, who are most often accomplices to criminals and hardened armed robbers. It is noteworthy also that prostitution degrades women and womanhood; it is fast turning women into mere sex objects. However, female prostitution has its own merit and should not be seen as an entirely evil. For instance, prostitution and prostitutes may act as a shock absorber to the family institution.

Conclusion

The chapter considers female prostitution as a social problem in Nigeria. The concept of prostitution as a social problem was discussed via the use of some theories like functionalism, feminist and socio-psychology theories of prostitution. In the course of the discussion, it was pointed out that there are several types of prostitutes. The different types include call girls, street walkers, child prostitutes, etc. Some of the predisposing factors that encourage prostitution are grouped under socio-political and economic factors, among others. Some of the effects of prostitutions that were discussed include both negative and positive effects.

In order to change the tide of prostitution, there is need for government at all levels to pay adequate attention to the problem of poverty, unemployment and inadequate housing. There is the need for concerted efforts on the part of government at all levels to create gainful employment for the teeming youths in Nigeria.

Secondly, any law meant to check or eradicate the act of prostitution should be comprehensive and not selective in nature. That is, all should be equal before the law. In this vein, the same law that forbids prostitution in any particular location should also be applicable to military barracks in Nigeria.

The criminal code that prescribes a maximum of one-month prison term for prostitution is not stringent enough. The law should be reviewed to attract heavier sanctions that will act as a deterrent to prostitutes and would-be prostitutes. In addition to the above, if the government wants to be taken seriously in its fight against prostitution, let the law punish both female prostitutes and the male customers that patronize them. Finally, to discourage undergraduates from engaging in prostitution while in school, the government at the federal level should consider re-introducing meal subsidy and complete scholarship in our institutions of higher learning.

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