

Transnational Organised Crimes: An Assessment of Human Trafficking and the Challenges Militating against a Total Elimination in Nigeria



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ABSTRACT: Transnational crimes have remained one of the menaces that has continued to threaten global security, peace, and tranquillity, hence requiring a multilateral and multilevel approach in effectively curtailing them. One among these transnational crimes is human trafficking, which has been estimated to be generating \$150.3 billion annually (IMF, 2018), with the Asia-Pacific region ranked as the most lucrative. It is against this background that this paper examines the crime of human trafficking in Nigeria, tracing the evolution of human trafficking in general, the efforts at tackling the crime in Nigeria, as well as some of the challenges hampering the total elimination of the crime in Nigeria. Using secondary sources of data for analysis, the paper identified some of the major drivers of the crime in Nigeria to include but not limited to, poverty and underdevelopment, weak laws and inadequate enforcement, systematic corruption, stigmatization, sophistication and financial war chest of cartels, influence of the social media, traditional and cultural practices, among others. To mitigate the crime of human trafficking in Nigeria, the paper proffers: the addressing of social inequality, creation of more employment opportunities, awareness campaigns at all levels, and the use of “triangulated nexus of human-trafficking enforcement” among countries, among others.

KEYWORDS: Human trafficking, modern slavery, NAPTIP, Nigeria, transnational crimes.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the absence of oil in international trade, slavery was the most lucrative global trade (Wright, 2008). Though there are staggering dates of when the slave trade was exactly abolished around the world. For instance in Britain, it came into effect through the slavery abolition act of 1833 (Opal, 2020). In the United States of America it became official in 1862 by the proclamation of the then President Abraham Lincoln; through the proclamation of slave emancipation, which took effect from 1st January 1863 (Kitson et al., 2020). However, slavery seems not have ended at that level, as it has metamorphosed into other forms, such as human trafficking (Masango and Olisa, 2019). Human trafficking is an international crime that can be at best described as modern slavery, replacing the hitherto traditional slave trade (Winterdyk, 2020). Long after these formal declarations, the slave trade has continued to flourish in modern times (Frank, 2012). Painting a damaging picture of the situation, the former US President, Barack Obama described it as; “the most debasement of our common humanity” (Sorensen, 2019).

Though, there have been several aggressive measures and laws put in place by governments, and international organisations to checkmate the thriving of this international crime across borders, but all to no avail (Wade, 2020). To demonstrate its seriousness in creating an awareness for this crime, in 2013, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed resolution A/RES/68/192, and in the resolution set aside July 30th of each year as the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, creating awareness and pontificating the dangers of this crime to all nations of the world (Purka yastha and Yousaf, 2018). Although it has been very difficult arriving at an accurate data on human trafficking, and the total financial net worth of the crime globally, but information from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Walk Free Foundation in a joint report in 2017; estimated that about 40.3 million people may have been used in modern slavery, which is one of the active motivations of human trafficking (Index, 2018; Free, 2018).

This paper examines this crime in Nigeria in particular, the efforts made by the Nigerian Government at mitigating the crime, especially the establishment of National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) act 2015, the major drivers of the crime in Nigeria, as well as a recommendation of some ways of addressing the menace.

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2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

A sufficient definition of what constitute human trafficking has been very tricky and challenging. Many of the contradictions are rooted in cultural, historic backgrounds, among others (Bello and Olutola, 2018). Take for example, an act of an under aged child, given out to her relations, who must work on the farm sometimes or even hawk items to support the family. This may be vehemently considered in the western world as child abuse, child labour, and may attract serious criminal charges. But this same act in a typical African setting can be considered reasonably okay, as part of family support and training of a child to grow up to become resilient and self-reliant(Buck et al., 2020; Brown, 2019). Also, a situation where someone for economic reasons, may consent to selling of his or her organ, like the kidney for economic survival, may be sufficiently viewed as okay (Yanto et al., 2021; Columb, 2015; Budiani-Saberi and Columb, 2013).

The above examples highlight how culture and historic background alone can make it complicated, when attempting to define human trafficking in a way that will be accepted to all. Be that as it may, a comprehensive and encompassing definition of human trafficking is captured by Article 3 of the United Nation Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking and Persons, especially Women and Children, which define human trafficking to include: -

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force, of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation, which at minimum includes the exploitation, of prostitution, of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal or organs”(Aronowitz, 2019; Allain and Bales, 2020).

3. THE GLOBAL BOOM OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Several reasons have been adduced to explain the reasons behind the flourishing of human trafficking globally. Formal indications, economic factors have been identified as the most motivating factor for human trafficking(Ravlik, 2019).A Global Report(GR) on Trafficking in persons published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has estimated economic worth of this crime to be anything in the range of \$5billion and \$42billion as at 2017(Bouché and Bailey, 2020).While an IMF report in 2018 indicate that the trade in human trafficking is wart \$150.3 billion (IMF,2018). According to Deb et el ,other drivers for human trafficking globally include for the reasons of; sex slaves, organ harvesting, forced labour, mercenary and facilitations of other crimes such as drugs trafficking among others(Deb, Sunny and Majumdar, 2020). Several international conventions, convention, protocols, and laws by various governments to help mitigate this ugly trend have been put in place. Some of the conventions include the United Nations Protocol to prevent ,suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the European Union (EU) Council Framework Decision on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings; the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Humans Beings, among others(Gallagher, 2010).

Much as these frame works have been put in place, there are still some agitation as to the adequacy of these legal frameworks to bring to an end this very lucrative crimes of marketing human beings (Österdahl, 2009). These position has been echoed by Bear up, who argue that hence the crime of human trafficking is transnational in nature, nations need to take more stringent majors beyond the minimal to end this modern day crime against humanity(Bear up, 2020).Though all the above mentioned have been taken in the fight and understanding of this international crime. This paper shall seek to further provoke knowledge, by delving deep to unearh and analyse some of the factors that has continue to make this crime so flourishing in Nigeria and the world in general.

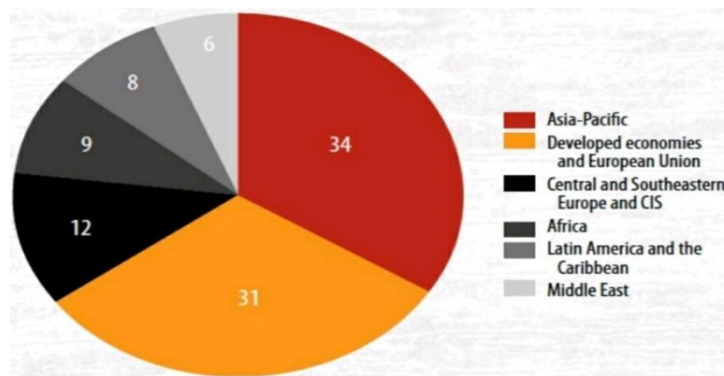


Figure 1: Estimated worth of human trafficking, generating \$150.3 billion profit per annum globally. The Asia-pacific region is the most lucrative.

Source: International Labour Organisation ILO, 2015: The Economics of Forced Labour Force

Note: CIS= Commonwealth of Independent States.

Source: (IMF, 2018).

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Human trafficking has come to be the most lucrative illegal global trade, next to the trafficking in arms smuggling and drugs (Benlarabi, 2019). According to Ravlik, the financial returns in human trafficking are honestly very tempting, considering that a “pimp” for instance, can sell one woman as many times as possible, unlike arms or drugs trafficking which have a single face value (Ravlik, 2019).

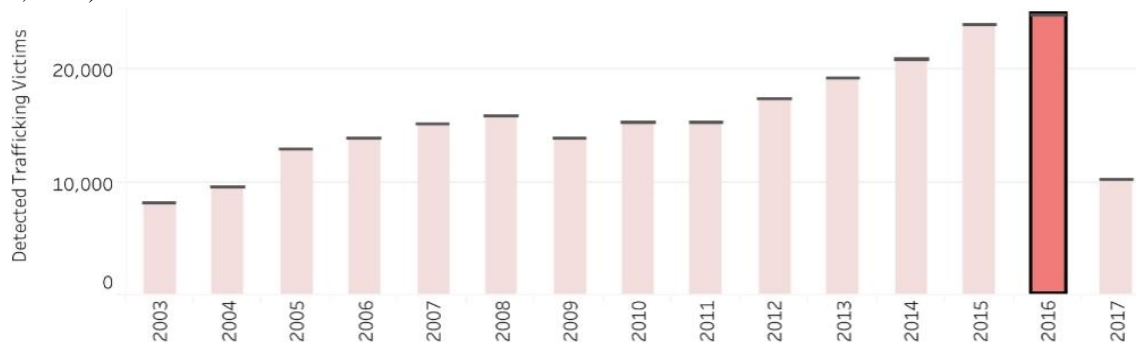


Figure 2: Global outlook of human trafficking victims, from 2003-2017.
Source: (UNODC, 2020).

From Fig. 2 above ,between 2003 and 2017, the year 2016 was recorded as the worst in human trafficking, with more than 20,000people recorded as victims of human trafficking, while 2003 was recorded as the lowest, with less than 10,000 cases documented in the year.

4. HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA.

Nigeria in the last years has gained a very negative reputation, as a result of a high rate of human trafficking, notoriously for prostitution in countries like Italy, Libya, Lebanon, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, among others(Carling, 2006; Noah, 2021).This development according to Benevento can be viewed from the perspective of active exploitation, and an indictment of the recipient countries, because, without their patronage, the crime would have ended natural(Benevento et al., 2021). This position has been collaborated by Sabon, who averred that human trafficking is oppressive in all its ramification, and intentionally paid attention to persons in poverty, the disadvantage, the vulnerable people especially children and women (Mika’I and Muhammad, 2020; Sabon, 2018)A 2017 report by the International Organization for Migration IOM indicated that 119,000 trafficked persons arrived Italy in a year, of the number 18,185 were from Nigeria, and 5,425 were women, with 94% coming from Edo State (Edegebe and Imafidon, 2021; Noah, 2021). When human trafficking is mentioned especially in Nigeria, most people are always tempted to conclude that it is only the girls or ladies that are victims of this crime (Poli, 2010; Ikuteyijo, 2020). But according to a European Asylum Support Office (EASO) report, young boys as also tricked into human trafficking in Nigeria, in the guise of recruiting them for the purpose of football or facilitating them into professional football in Europe, but when they arrive, the reality on ground becomes quite different (EASO, 2021).



Figure 3: Map of Nigeria showing Edo State, the most prevalent state in human trafficking. Source: Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (2015).

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Worried by the high incidents of human trafficking over the years, the Nigerian government took some drastic actions, which lead to the enacting of the law establishing the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), 2015 (Mika'II and Muhammad, 2020).According to The Nigerian (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons act 2015);

“Any person who recruits, transport, transfer, harbours, or receive another person by means of threat, use of force or other forms of coercion; abduction, fraud, deception, abuse, of power, or of a position of vulnerability; or giving or receiving of payments, or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over other persons, for the purpose of exploitation”.

(Usman, Ariffin and Othman, 2021; Kwangyang, 2016; Obagboye, 2020).

Beautiful as this law is, there is a school of thought that believe these alone cannot achieve much in the fight against human trafficking in Nigeria. Arguing in this direction Ezeibe and Adepitan avers that; proper investment in the countries education sector, and quality education will be a more effective tool against the fight against the crime (Ezeibe et al., 2021; Adepitan 2020). Credit must be given to the Edo state government, and the traditional institution in the state, who have done much in the recent years in helping in the repatriation of victims, training of young ladies in skills acquisition, and cash incentives to promote self-reliance and awareness of the dangers of human trafficking (Adepitan, 2020; Ezeh, 2017; Agwu et al., 2020).When other states in Nigeria borrow the example from Edo State, these together with the efforts of law enforcement agencies will significantly help in bringing down the numbers of cases of human trafficking.

5. DIFFICULTIES AND MAJOR DRIVERS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA

There have been several factors that have been adduced for the thriving of human trafficking around the globe. However, it is instructive to note that, similar as they these factors may appear, they seem to be more contagious based on the level of societal development; developed vs underdeveloped countries. In Nigeria, some of the identified factors includes.

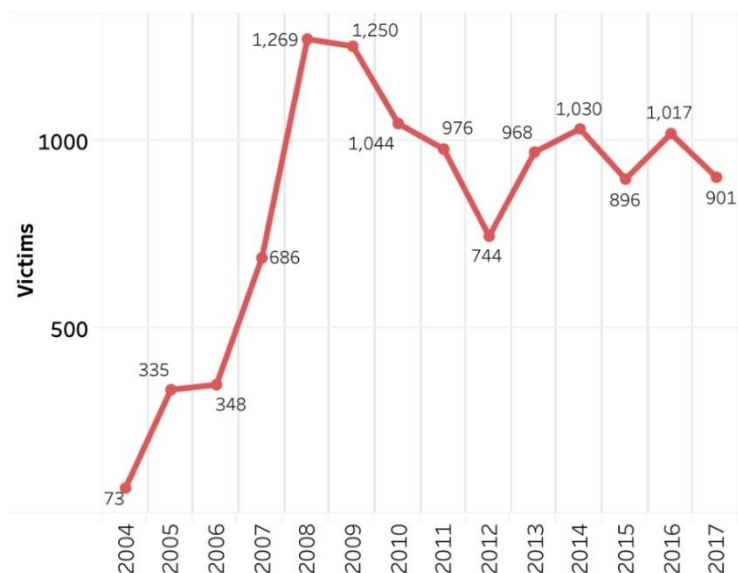


Figure 4: Data of human trafficking in Nigeria from 2004-2017. Source: (UNODC 2020).

Fig 4: The most recent data by UNODC indicating a fourteen years' time series 2004-2017 of human trafficking in Nigeria, with 2004 recording the lowest 73 cases of human trafficking, while 2009 was the highest year with 1,269 cases recorded. The succeeding years however indicated a marginal decrease, an indication of a fair result of the activities of government agencies in the fight against the crime.

5.1 Weak laws and lack of strong enforcement: The human trafficking web is so dynamic and so intertwined in a lot of factors, forces and processes, which are further made more complicated by the lack of strong enforcement, systematic corruption, weak laws, among others (Sarkar, 2020). This has been identified as one of the major reasons human trafficking has continue to thrive (Efrat, 2016). This position has been collaborated by Warnecke, who identified weak laws, inadequate and enforcement of even the existing laws as a major impediment to the ending of human trafficking (Warnecke, 2019).Relatively, Ravlik points out the problem of different legislation and anti-trafficking measures by different countries, makes the matters so complicated in a unified fight against the crime (Ravlik, 2019). She held the view that this kind of efforts are at crossroads, and counterproductive in the effort at combating this crime. She further proposed “the triangulated nexus of anti-trafficking enforcement”, which should be targeted at running a cross country analysis and combined efforts by clustered countries (Ravlik, 2019).In Nigeria, even though several steps have been taken towards the elimination of the crime of human trafficking, including the establishment of the

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National Agency for the Prohibition in Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), the battle is still inadequate as the justice system is weak and penalties sometimes less punitive(Abonyi, 2021; Ede, Chiaghanam and Kalu, 2019; Uduji Okolo-Obasi and Asongu, 2019).

5.2 The social media: The advance technology and advent of internet and by extension the social media has also been an issue of concern in the fight against human trafficking(O'Brien and Li, 2020).For everything that has advantage there is always a disadvantage, the coming of the internet and advancement in technology has enhanced and perfected sophistication of the perpetrators(Sanders, Brents and Wakefield, 2020; Middleton, 2020).In recent times, a typical journey of most victims of sex trafficking often begin with a contact by a **pimp(s)**, on social medial, posing as an interested lover in a romantic relationship, thereby luring the unsuspecting victim, who would later feel secured, and innocently fall prey, and expectedly, the relationship do not mostly end upon a positive note(Russo, 2020; Lugo, 2020).Though the same technology has been very useful in fighting the same crime. Example, the use of encrypting technology to trace records of traffickers by the security agencies, the deployment of the **GPS** technology in tracking down the location of perpetrators and even victims among other uses(Holland, 2020).Though there has been arguments that even pre-technological era, the slave merchants were able to deplore several tactics like the use of local chiefs in Africa, among other local networks to facilitate the slave trade(Bailey, 2005).

5.3 Cultural and traditional factors: According to Nwokeoma et al, there has been some deep cultural pressure in African settings for children especially girls of age to either marry or provide support for their families(Yea, 2020; Nwokeoma et al., 2019). This pressurise one the notable drivers of young ladies to submitting willingly into human trafficking with the hope of supporting their families(Deb et al., 2020).Critics feel this alone is not a justifiable reason to be involved in human trafficking(Moges, 2020). Another worrisome dimension in human trafficking in Africa is the use of fetish/witchcraft called “juju” in Nigeria for instance, by the traffickers on their victims,(van der Watt and Kruger, 2020; Baarda, 2016; Ikeora, 2016). For the traffickers, it is aimed at putting maximum fear and control on the victim, this are made possible through the taking of oath of faithfulness and allegiance to the trafficker(s)who are mostly referred to as “master/madam”(Adepitan, 2020; Ikeora, 2016).

On the other hand, victims undergo the ritual with the believe of gaining a spiritual protection against any harm and danger in a strange land. (Geldenhuys, 2019; Nagle and Owasanoye, 2015). In Nigeria the issue became so embarrassing for the government and the Edo tribe, where the practice is known to be more notorious such that the king of Edo people, Oba Ewuare II on the 18th of March 2018 cursed anyone under his kingdom, who administer any oath or witchcraft on any one ,to facilitate human trafficking,(Osisiogu, Osarenren and Kalunta-Crumpton, 2019).These are the many ways the trafficking cartel deplore to continue to perpetuate their act. But this brings to question the role of security and law enforcement agencies.

5.4 Role of security agencies: There has been a strong indictment of the security agencies in the action or in action in the thriving of human trafficking (Agbu, 2003). In many countries security agencies are accuse of compromising and looking the other way when this crimes are been perpetrated(Ortuño and Wiriyachai, 2009). There are arguments as to how these groups continue to have passage if the security agencies are truly doing their work religiously. Though Shelley have countered this narrative, he cited the none usage of old and unknown traditional routes in most cases for the movement by these criminal gangs as one of the challenges posed to security agencies in effectively combating this crime(Shelley, 2013).

5.5 Strong cartel and links: There are strong evidence that traffickers have strong links to powerful individuals in the society and financial war chest, that it will only take extra efforts to get a hold and break the irrefarious activities(Uzuegbu-Wilson, 2019).Some of this links are local ,some national, and some across borders of nations, wherein making it difficult to effectively checkmate the activities of these criminals, hence a need for strong collaborations locally and internationally(International Assoc of Chiefs of and United States of 2020).

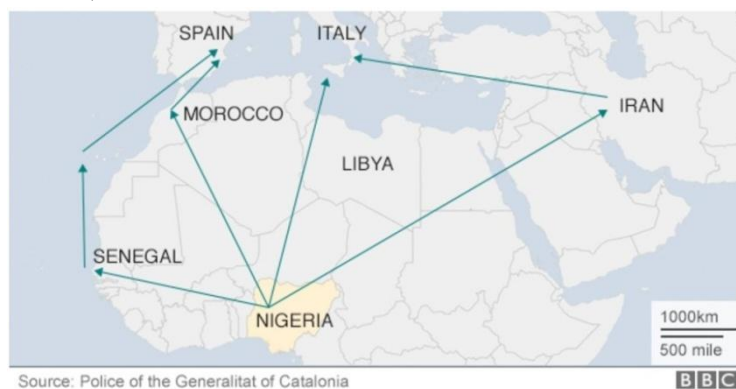


Figure 5: Main overland trafficking routes: Nigeria to Europe, Source: (BBC News, 2015).

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5.6 Poverty and underdevelopment: In most developing countries and especially the sub-Saharan Africa ,most people live on less than a Dollar per day(Ahmed et al., 2007). In Nigeria, 33.3% of the population is estimated to be unemployed, and youth who are below the age of 30 constituting about 70% of the unemployed, (Onwuka, 2021).This kind of negative development index and many other seriously account for why human trafficking has continue to thrive around in Nigeria, because it becomes a desperate move and last hope to improve the economic fortunes of the families ,thereby making the families mostly active collaborators in the crime(Keleta and Asmara, 2019). The big question is, dose this ultimately end poverty in such families? Many condemn this evil in the name of poverty eradication, and further argue that there are better ways of tackling poverty in families rather than resorting in human trafficking(Kim, 2010).Analyst are of the opinion that the way forward to ending this trend can be achieved, through the acceleration of Sustainable Development Goals(SDG) in developing counties ,arguing that this will guarantee a better and a more reliable way of living for the peoples(Gupta and Vegelin, 2016; Moda et al., 2021).

5.7 Lucrativeness of organ harvesting: In recent times an emerging activity that has So wart he international crime of human trafficking is organ harvesting, due to the very lucrative returns on the sale of body parts, such as kidney, liver, hearth etc that are on high demand globally (Bruckmüller, 2020).According to Meshelemiah, the organ trafficking dimension is one of the most coveted form of human trafficking in modern times(Meshelemiah and Lynch, 2019). He further availed that only 10% of the global legal required transplant has been meet, where in indicating the wide gulf between the required and the unavailable. The above picture clearly aints the picture of how difficult it will be to end the illegal trade in human parts soonest.

Giving further insight on the damaging situation of the demand and pressure for human organs, the America Transplant Foundation 2018 report revealed that; about 114,000 people in the United State of America are on the waiting list for organ transplant, and of this number, one person is added in every 10 minutes(Meshelemiah and Lynch, 2019).All these highlights drive home the understanding to which organ transplant are in high demand globally, and how the demand for human parts may not abate any time soon, hence the need for concerted efforts to critically address this negative trend.



Figure 6: Main detected transregional flows 2018 (or most recent).

Source: (UNODC 2020)

5.8 Inadequate data: Data has been one other challenging aspect in the fight against human trafficking, the actual number of persons trafficked globally is thought to be under estimated, and consequently underreported globally(Godey, 2008; Smith, 2011).As a result, it is believed that this development has denied relevant stakeholders the benefit of truly understanding the enormity and deployment of proportionate strategies in addressing the menace. Closely related to this is the issue of stigmatization and unwillingness of victims to come forward for report and documentation ,which should have greatly assisted in the tracing, tracking down and prosecution of perpetrators(Gulati et al., 2011).

5.9 Stigmatization: Another factor that has worsened the fight against trafficking in Nigeria is the issue of stigmatization (Eteng et al., 2021; Uduji et al., 2019).The situation is most worrisome especially for women who are victims of sex trafficking for instance, as research shows that they later in life find it difficult to be accepted a hand in marriage, especially for some communities that still uphold such values like; virginity before marriage, and even tagged as not a “marriage material”(Ravlik, 2019).Some of the female victims are even made to abandon their communities to go to new environments entirely to begin their

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life afresh (Brunovskis and Surtees, 2010). Though, the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian culture, have no such harsh posture towards male victims of human trafficking(Makama, 2013).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper has been able to trace the origin of human trafficking; it discovered that even though the traditional slave trade may have been long abolished as far back as 1833 in Britain and later all over the world, but it has fallen short of total era dictation, as witnessed in form of human trafficking. The paper was able to also identify most of the factors that have continue to encourage this nefarious international crime in Nigeria, some of which include but not limited to poverty, family pressure, weak laws and inadequate enforcement, inadequate data, stigmatization, systemic corruption, the advent social media and Information Technology (ICT),as well as strong links, sophistication and strong financial war chest of the trafficking cartels, the use of Wit craft and other diabolical methods by traffickers on victims among others.

It is the view of this paper that in a bid to eradicating the menace of human trafficking, the social inequality in the society must be critically addressed to cater for the most vulnerable in the society. The paper also recommends that victims must be given all the necessary assistance as to feel free and not stigmatized. Authorities can also work hand in hand with victims in creating awareness on human trafficking at all levels of the society. Furthermore, there is need for greater synergy among countries in the effort to combating this crime against humanity. As pointed out earlier in this work citing(Ravlik, 2019).There seems to be a crossroad in the legislation and laws in fighting this crime by countries; wherein his proposal of a “triangulated nexus of anti-trafficking enforcement” is strongly endorsed by these papers. Which entails uniform laws and strong law enforcement by a cluster of nations.

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