

---

## Prostitution and its Adverse Effects on Nigerian Society

Nnatu, Stella (Ph.D)

Department of sociology/anthropology, Nnamdi azikiwe university, awka

---

**Abstract:** Prostitution has long been in existence right from pre-modern societies to the contemporary world today. In almost every country in the world, there has been a propensity towards the concentration of growing population in cities particularly in developing countries like Nigeria where rural-urban migration has become a common feature. The flooding of urban centres by rural dwellers both the educated and non-educated youths in search of limited job opportunities gives rise to various social problems like unemployment, crime, kidnapping and worst of all prostitution. Following the economic downturn as a result of oil drop and the policy of structural adjustment programme, our economic situation was depressed and this heightens the incidence of prostitution. It is noteworthy that apart from these conditions, the following are the factors that instigate prostitution; poverty, unemployment, discrimination against women, lack of parental guidance and friendship with the opposite sex. Women are those who fall victims to this social menace. Although some join the profession voluntary, there are those who are coerced into prostitution by being transported across national borders. The consequences are grave. There are incidences of violence and murder, sexually transmitted diseases, robbery, financially ripped off etc. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that government should criminalize prostitution and enact a law to ban its existence. There should be campaign against prostitution by both the Government and Non-Governmental organizations educating people on the negative effect of prostitution on health. Government should invest more in the creation of jobs for females. Good parental upbringing that will enhance the moral standard of children. These will help to proffer solutions to prostitution and possibly lead to the abolition of this social malaise.

**Keywords:** Prostitution, Brothels, Poverty, Pimps.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Prostitution is an act of indulging in sexual activity in exchange of monetary reward. James (2007) defined prostitution as the business or practice of engaging in sexual relations in exchange of financial rewards. Loy (1994) and Paul (1993) viewed prostitution as an act of offering oneself for money. All these definitions justify the fact that prostitution itself is voluntary and it is only for financial rewards. Prostitution is one of the branches of the sex industry. Others are pornography, stripping and erotic dancing.

Since the sex industry is constantly targeted at obtaining financial reward, those involved in this industry have been given different names such as hookers, call-girls, harlots, sluts and courtesans. But generally, a person who works in the field is known as a prostitute despite the fact that sex workers' activists group rejected the names since late 1970 and preferred to be called sex workers. However, sex workers can as well mean anybody who works within the sex industry or whose work is of sexual nature and should not only be specifically limited to prostitutes. Prostitution occurs in varieties of ways such as full time prostitution, some engage in legitimate business in the day time and go into prostitution at night while some indulge in it as an auxiliary service.

Prostitution was said to have existed in Nigeria right from time immemorial. On Wikipedia, it was discovered that the demographic and commercial changes that took place in Lagos expanded the rendering of sex services and by 1910 commercial sex services had reached to a certain stage where it had been on increase. During this period, commercial sex work was tolerated as long as it did not lead to public nuisance.

The rapid growth of towns due to the process of urbanization and industrialization has led to a great number of people migrating from rural to urban areas of our country. That has resulted in the emergence of different social problems like prostitution, unemployment, poverty, crime, etc. One can as well say that the rate of prostitution in Nigeria increased as a result of the adverse economic effect of the drop in oil price in the early 1980s followed by the implementation of structural adjustment programmes in the middle 1980s.

It was during this period that brothels started to spring up in the cities and prostitutes were charged daily rent for accommodation. This marked the inception of call-ups or part-time prostitution by young graduates and students. It is noteworthy that brothels are seen in almost every major city in the country. They are located in highly populated areas or slums within the city. The most common form of sex work is found within brothels or residence of sex workers. Nowadays, there is a steady rise in young students, unemployed graduates who use sex to earn income and acting as part time prostitutes or call girls. It has become a lucrative business in Nigeria especially among youths (Ikpe, 2008). Research has it that 31% of prostitutes are students in Nigeria institutions (Onah, 2000).

On Wikipedia, it was observed in a survey of commercial sex workers that almost two thirds or about 63% reported that they started commercial sex work before the age of 19. Nearly 99% of those surveyed were single, divorced, widowed or separated while the majority of them 63% work from brothels. Owing to the negative public perception of commercial sex, majority of them working in cities come from distant areas, far from places of their origin.

It is important to note that it was in the mid 1980s, that sex trafficking of women to European countries such as Italy began to gain ground. When the women reach the country of destination, they are immediately indebted to the trafficker for transport and lodging fees and will have to pay off the debt before they become free. Sex tourism according to Kempadoo & Doezema (1998) is a travel planned particularly with the intention of having sex, generally to a country where prostitution is legalized. Paul (1993) noted that women suffer by being part of an oppressed group who fall victims of this social menace. They are principally transported across national borders to either willing or forcefully engage in prostitution.

Nigeria law does not legalize commercial sex work. In the north where Sharia law is maintained, the law forbids prostitution. In the south which is inhabited by Christians, there is stiff opposition to its legalization. Sections 223, 224 and 225 of the Nigerian criminal code try to put in check the activities of pimps/madams, underage prostitution and the establishment of brothels. In spite of the consistent demand of the prostitutes for their trade to be legal, prostitution still remains illegal in Nigeria but no active action has really being taken against it by the government. In countries like Denmark, Finland, Argentina, Canada, Italy, France, etc. where prostitution is considered legal, it is observed there are prohibitions or restrictions against associated activities like owing brothels, solicitation and advertising, street hawking, human sex trafficking and child prostitution.

Although prostitution is not legal in Nigeria, but its practice is quite prevalent in the country. It is said to be one of the major challenges in our country. Prostitution is an active disease vector for sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. It has brought about a moral decadence in our country. The disruptive effects of prostitution affect the sex workers, clients, pimps and madams as well as the entire society.

It is noteworthy that sex workers are trained by older professional or pimp before the commencement of their job. The training lessons are based on how to deal with a difficult man, sexually transmitted diseases and self defence.

This study therefore seeks to address the causes of prostitution and its effects and finally attempt to proffer solutions that could checkmate and possibly eradicate prostitution in Nigeria.

## **2. CAUSES OF PROSTITUTION IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

The causes of prostitution can be seen as follows:

### **Poverty**

Komara (2000) noted that poverty triggered the rapid spread of prostitution in urban areas. It provides those involved a considerable amount of income to support their families as well as supply a steady flow of remittances from urban to rural areas or from prostitutes working overseas. Lamptey (2000) asserted that family expectations and problems are common factors why many people enter into the prostitution business. Women in particular are pressured to pay for their children's education or support a sick family member. Poverty and economic hardship largely predispose women and girls into sex work. The root cause of prostitution seems to be poverty since these women and girls see prostitution as a way of supplementing their low income. Adebajo (2011) in his study in Agbor, interviewed 31 prostitutes and he discovered that the high rate of poverty is the pushing force behind the increasing rate of prostitution.

### **Unemployment**

Unemployment has been viewed to be the reason behind the high rate of crime in urban areas. Adebisi (2012) observed that some girls engage in prostitution after graduating from high institutions and failing to secure gainful employment having roamed the streets for jobs without success and no capital to start any business rather give into men's sexual advances in exchange for money to keep body and soul together. The high rate of unemployment has lured some youths especially women to turn to prostitution so as to make a living for themselves and families. Unemployment is one of the critical problems the country is facing. The years of corruption, civil war, military rule and mismanagement have hindered economic growth of the country. Nigeria is endowed with rich human and natural resources, but those resources have not been effectively utilized in order to yield maximum economic benefits. This is one of the primary causes of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria.

### **Discrimination against women**

Some women are led into prostitution as a result of discrimination. Bethy (2013) noted in a survey of prostitution in Malawi that many people engage in prostitution as a result of alienation and exploitation. According to him, many people have felt disempowered and alienated from society and their parents are the products of abusive homes and they ultimately resort to prostitution as a means.

### **Lack of parental guidance**

According to Modebelu (2014), many parents have fallen short of their expected role of preparing and educating their children for them to become successful and responsible adults. Many parents assume they are very knowledgeable in bringing up the children, yet many of these children have derailed from the societal norms. Many youths are exposed to all sorts of pornographic films which appear on magazines and internet. Many adolescents have some copies of pornographic films on their handsets. This will help to increase their sexual urge and can lead them into prostitution.

### **Friendship with the opposite sex**

Friendship based on exchange of sensual pleasure is utterly foul and unworthy of the name friendship. Saint James warned that we flee from the friendship of the world which has no God, for such friendship offends and profanes God, for the friendship of the world is against the friendship of God (James 4:4). Human beings are complex realities consisting of three dimensions; body, mind and soul. A true love relationship between a boy and a girl involves three spheres of their being. It is therefore natural especially for a boy to feel the need for some kind of physical expression of love. But this must not be genital. If these are meant to arouse emotions and passions leading to heavier petting or even to sexual intercourse, they are obviously to be avoided. We must be on guard because if not controlled can culminate in prostitution.

## **3. EFFECTS OF PROSTITUTION ON SEX WORKERS, FAMILIES AND SOCIETY AT LARGE**

Prostitution is a very sensitive issue in feminist thought and activism. Many families are vehemently against prostitution because they view it as a form of exploitation of women and male dominance over women, and a practice which is the result of the patriarchal societal order. These feminists argue that prostitution has a negative effect both on the prostitutes as it reinforces stereotypical views about women who are seen as sex objects which can be used and abused by men.

### **Physical Assault**

Janis (2014) conducted a study with 68 women in Minneapolis who had been prostituting for a long time. He found out that half the women had been physically assaulted by their clients. 23% of those assaulted were beaten severely enough to have broken homes. Two experienced violence so vicious that they were beaten into coma.

Farley (2006) in a study of 475 people in prostitution from five countries; South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, United States of America and Zambia 62% reported having been raped in prostitution while others experienced physical assault.

Kinnel (2006) reported that over the past decades, 86 sex workers have been murdered, confirming that street sex workers in the United Kingdom are twelve times more likely to die from violence than women of their own age.

### **Robbery**

Robbery is focused on indoor sex workers. There is a general assumption that indoor sex workers keep money and as such they are vulnerable to attack. One woman reported her experience while she was in South London. "I worked there for two years and never had a problem and then all of a sudden it happened (robbery). I went into the room to do something and he came in behind me. He said very calmly, I have something for you and he pulled out his knife and said I want your money and that was it".

### **Spread of sexually transmitted diseases**

Prostitution is said to be associated with the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Pauw and Brener (2003) noted that one of the main reasons for the rapid spread of sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhea, syphilis and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome HIV/AIDS in the world including Nigeria is the massive transmission among sex workers and clients. They advocated for prevention campaigns aimed at increasing condom use by sex workers which would attribute to play a major role in restricting the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

### **Attempts to or removal of the condom**

Sanders and Campbell (2007) stated that many women reported encounters with men who either attempted to or were successful on removing the condom. This was considered as a clear violation of the contractual agreement and was a violation of one of the important barriers sex workers used to distinguish sex as a commercial act from sex in a personal loving relationship.

### **Financial rip off**

Sex workers express their anger when clients try not to pay the full amount or get extra time for no extra money although, there is a standard system of the money being taken before the service. There are still instances where men would attempt to pay less than agreed or take some advantage financially.

### **Offensive language, rudeness and disruptive behavior**

Although we may not consider these as being violent, sex workers receive disrespectful treatment through language (use of abusive words). They are associated with social stigma coupled with the negative public perception of their job.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

It is assumed that among all the factors responsible for prostitution, poverty is said to be the major reason that draws people into prostitution. The alarming rate of poverty has driven many people particularly the youths into the urban areas where they see prostitution as a quick way of meeting their needs and those of their families.

Looking at the concept of prostitution critically, one will understand that prostitution was not as pervasive in pre-modern times as it is today. The process of urbanization has led to a major shift in the structure of our world. Urbanization has led to the growth of capitalism which has given rise to the polarization of classes, making worse the incidence of poverty, unemployment, crime and alienation. This condition has led to a greater prevalence in prostitution as a way people especially females try to cope with harsh economic realities.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The incidence of prostitution is clear cut and intense but it can be eradicated. It is an evil business that does not require mere reduction but should be completely wiped out. It is written in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 16-17; surely you know that you are God's temple and God's spirit lives in you. So if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy them. For God's temple is holy and you yourself are his temple. This implies that our bodies need preservation and should not be sold for money.

2. Government should criminalize prostitution and create a law to ban such an act with strong sanction. If sanction is imposed on it, people will no longer find it an attractive venture.
3. Government should use security agents to check every hotel and arrest any person suspected to be a commercial sex worker.
4. Government should address the socio-economic factors influencing prostitution such as poverty, unemployment and low wages. This can be done by investing more in the creation of jobs particularly for females.
5. Local apprenticeship should be encouraged so that employment opportunities will be created in the private sector. This is to engage the youths in meaningful activities in order not to engage in prostitution.
6. There should be campaign against prostitution by both the Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) educating the people on the negative effects of prostitution on health and the general welfare of the society at large.
7. Government should provide free education up to secondary school level, reduce tuition fees in tertiary institutions and allocate more quota to universities. This will go a long way in keeping the minds of the youth busy and active so as to focus on meaningful things that are helpful to them.
8. Religious leaders should intensify the quality of information they disseminate by laying emphasis on strict moral code and ethical standard.
9. Good parental upbringing: Parents should be aware of their responsibility of training and discipline their children right from the period of childhood. It is noteworthy that 50% of the blame for their children's misbehavior and vices should be from them. Children from broken homes and those who are deficient of socialization process are more prone to prostitution than those with good parental upbringing.
10. Regulation of sexual desires: One should regulate her sexual desire by the avoidance of unhealthy heterosexual relationship (boy and girl relationship), particularly if she knows that she cannot control her passion and emotions. She should avoid indecent dressing that can lead to prostitution.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Adebajo, O. (2012) Prostitution Considered in Relation to its Cause and Cure. Uyo: Macmillan Press
- [2] Adebisi, O. (2012) Urbanization Problems in Nigeria: Enugu Africana Press
- [3] Bethy, N. (2013) Prostitution in Cocks. Cambridge University Press
- [4] Farley, M. (2016) Prostitution, Violence against Women Research and Education. California
- [5] Ikpe, J. (2008) Physical Background in South-South Nigeria. Kaduna: Alaam Publishing Press
- [6] Janis, G. (2014) Prostitution in History. Edinburgh: Sutherland & Knox Publishers
- [7] Kempadoo, K. and Doezema, J. (1998) Global Sex Workers. London. Rutledge Printing Press
- [8] Kinnel, H. (2006) Demonizing Clients: How not to Promote Sex Workers' Safety in M, O'Neil and R., Campbell (eds) Sex Work Now. Cullumpton. Willan
- [9] Lamptey, N. (2000) Criminology: Explaining Crime in the Nigeria Context. Enugu: Great AP Express Publishers Ltd.
- [10] Loy, C. (1994) People Empowerment against Crime. Manila: Buddion Publishers
- [11] Modebelu, A. (2014) Challenges in Adolescents' Moral & Sexuality Issues. Onitsha: Noah Press Ltd.
- [12] Onah, C. (2000) Prostitution in Nigeria: Religion and the Nigerian Nation. Ibadan Enjoy Press.
- [13] Paul, H (1993) The Third Revolution. London: Penguin Books.
- [14] Pauw, I. and Brener, I. (2003) *You are Just Whores – You Can't be Raped. Barriers to Safer Sex Practices Among Women Street Sex Workers in Cape Town*. Culture Health and Sexuality 5(6) 465

[15] Sanders, T. and Campbell, R. (2007) *Designing out Vulnerability, Building in Respect: Violence, Safety and Sex Work Policy*. The British Journal of Sociology Vol.58 No.1

[16] Tarnes, M. (2007) *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach*. USA: Pearson Printing Press