

YOUTH PROSTITUTION IN A DECLINING OIL ECONOMY: THE ROLE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

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Abstract

Prostitution is the practice of selling sex and sexual activities for money. The influx of expatriates and oil workers in the 80s due to oil exploration and exploitation in Port Harcourt, the oil city of Nigeria accelerated the rate of prostitution in the region. Interestingly, a good number of female prostitutes at that time made sufficient money in the sexual enterprise. One would have thought that due to the declining oil economy in this region and Nigeria in general the rate of prostitution would have drastically reduced but reverse is the case. Many youths and university students enter into prostitution and to some of them as a "survival strategy". The trend of prostitution during and after the oil boom era in the region were discussed. Different types of prostitutions that are directly and indirectly practiced, precursors that contribute to entry into prostitution and consequences of prostitutions on the youths and the society at large were further x-rayed. The counselling implications advocate for the role of guidance and counselling as an intervention tool to combat this social and behavioural deviations. The intervention will help the youths, the university students and the nation to acquire knowledge on how to make a rethink in order to make a positive change and seek appropriate ways to survive for sustainable and optimal development in a life after oil period.

Keywords: Youth Prostitution, Declining Oil Economy and Campus Prostitution.

Introduction

Most businesses in Nigeria engage in buying and selling of commodities and services, but when this service is sex, the business transaction becomes controversial. Prostitution otherwise known as commercial sex commonly

called "Ashawo" in Nigeria is the practice or business of selling sex and sexual activities on a relatively indiscriminate bases for cash as opposed to spouse and friendship sexual relationships. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defined prostitution as a practice or business of direct exchange of sex for money or to put money in front of sex with multiple clients, often without much emotional involvement. Sex can also be exchanged for other utilities such as clothing, food in very poor places. It is like hiring a woman for sex just like you hire a car (Le Roux, 2016). Non-monetary retributions such as promotions, opportunities, gift, accommodation, clothing, food or jewelry can also be battered for sex. Prostitutes satisfy man's natural urge for sex in return for money, mostly serving men's sexual needs and women's economic needs (Kester, 2002). Thus, making it illegal to buy sex would push prostitution out of the eyes of the public and law enforcement and increase the dangers of prostitution rather than stop the practice. For example, men who have high sex urge are alien to the society, lack negotiating power or effort and time necessary for development of intimate relationship may take sex by force. Oil exploration and exploitation activities in Port Harcourt, the oil city of Nigeria accelerated the rate of prostitution in the region (Proma, David and Jackson, 2015). Based on these researchers' findings, one would have thought that prostitution rate will drop drastically in declining oil economy of this region and Nigeria in general but this is not the case. This paper reviews the trend of prostitution during and after oil boom in the area of study.

Prostitution is an age long profession often referred to as the world oldest profession (Nussbaum, 1999). It exists in every society and among all classes, ranging from the poorest of the poor, to students, employees, pimps in high class hotels and escorts who adorn themselves in the designer's cloths and render their services in highly furnished apartments (Alobo and Ndifon, 2014). Technically, prostitution can be viewed as a service industry where sex professionals provide services to prospective customers for financial gains. This viable industry though mostly illegal and often stigmatized has received a boost from digital technology which has made the sell and purchase of sex much easier. Internet and social media have helped to redefine procurement procedure in sex industry and also reduce the visibility of prostitution to the Police and general public. The profession is no longer synonymous with prostitutes standing around bars and street corners waiting to be called by

buyers. Prostitutes now use internet and chat lines to solicit and conclude deals outside of public eyes. The industry employs about 40-50 million people and generates revenue of about 186 billion dollars per year around the world, 75 percent of workers employed in this industry are between the ages of 13 to 25 years (Schulze, Novo, Mason, and Skalin, 2014).

It is important to note that the stigmatization of this profession is waning with civilization. Coomaraswamy (1997) stated that prostitution is increasingly viewed as a personal choice, and a private matter between consenting adults. Jeffreys (2003) added that prostitution in recent time is seen by many as legitimate sex work and the legal approach across countries are in favour of prostitution reforms to shift away from old idea of prohibition (Mossman, 2007). Criminalization of prostitution has not eradicated this age long profession, new reforms should target the ills associated with the trade such as exploitation of sex workers and safety concerns, sexually transmitted infections, drugs, trafficking of persons and nuisance to society. It is important to note that most of these new laws are often met with fierce controversies (Barneth and Casavant, 2014). The fight for the protective rights of prostitutes will remain controversial for very long.

Prostitution Explosion during the Oil Boom in Port Harcourt

Port Harcourt is the capital and largest city in Rivers State, Nigeria. It is called the oil city of Nigeria because the head office of most of the oil producing and service companies were located in Port Harcourt. The city was formally known as garden city because of numerous beautiful gardens and flower ornaments that adorned the city. Today, one can hardly see gardens and beautiful flowers around Port Harcourt due to unplanned rapid development resulting from the oil boom. Most residents of Port Harcourt city attested that the boom brought massive amount of infrastructural development including population growth, roads, hotels, restaurants, night clubs, shops on one side and drug, abuse, prostitution, armed robbers, on the other side. This trend is not peculiar to Port Harcourt, rather the developmental trend is in line with Boom Towns Theory which postulates that economic benefits associated with boom from energy development projects may be overwhelmed by fiscal distress, disruption of established ways of life and pathological social disorganization accompanying the rapid development (Cortese, 1982). Population growth of Port Harcourt

during the oil boom days was high and mixed, this disorganized the serenity of the garden city. The city today is regarded as one of the most congested cities in Nigeria (Kio-Lawson and Doktor, 2014). Port Harcourt city population during oil boom rang from experts and wealthy men to unskilled and semi-educated youths who throng the city in search of greener pasture. These youths and indeed many of the migrants to Port Harcourt were disappointed as there were no commensurate jobs for the migrants coupled with high cost of living and some of the girls who succeeded in sex business trend became city trend setters (Proma, David and Jackson, 2015). Emene (2012) vividly described state of prostitution in Port Harcourt as a city where thousands of Nigerian girls and ladies of various ethnicity live in brothels and parading their bodies in exchange of money and those who could not afford to live in brothels for one reason or the other parade the streets of major hotels and strategic joints at night usually referred to as the red light zones to wait for pick-ups from their potential clients or men.

Various factors influence the increase in prostitution in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. They include; Poverty, child sexual abuse, drug and alcohol misuse, quest to belong, sexual pleasure, use of condom and sexual permissiveness by the society. Increase in revenue and influx of wealthy people including experts from many countries resulting from the oil boom and easy money could be identified as the main cause of prostitution explosion in the oil rich city during the boom. Nigeria was then the sixth largest oil producer in the world and Port Harcourt was the oil city of Nigeria and one of the fastest growing cities in the country. Poroma, David, Jackson, (2015: 12) reported that "oil exploration activities which are manifest of expanded production of capital (ERC) accentuate the rate of prostitution in Port Harcourt". This is understandable because oil industry workers are highly paid and are predominately men, most of whom did not relocate to Port Harcourt with their families. Most of these men were ready to purchase sex at a high price. In addition, oil business attracted wealthy tourists in the city including sex tourism. Influx of this category of people increased the demand for sex and suppliers of sex (mostly young ladies) thronged the city to sell sex and make a living out of the market. Sex consequently became an easy to get product in the oil city of Nigeria. Supply often overwhelm demand as many young girls throng public places, streets and drinking places scattered all over the city. The

researcher during her undergraduate days observed some of her classmates who were into this "trade" and some of them were fortunately lucky to be married to some of the white men who met them at the clubs. That became a trend at that time. Many young girls and students with reasonable background also enter in into sexual relationship with wealthy men in order to measure up and sometimes the lucky ones become wives to the white men who are not with their families or have shops opened for them. Oil boom thus, produced sex boom as many of the prostitutes open notable drinking joints, hair dressing salons and shops in the city. Many of the sex workers became major bread winners of their families and some families prefer the income over the moral laxities associated with prostitution. The popular "Ashawo no be work", meaning, prostitution is not employment was debunked as many were gainfully employed as prostitutes during this period.

The oil boom affected University environment in profound ways. First, many young sex workers move into private off-campus hostels and pretend to be students in order to boost their level acceptance and income. Nigeria during the boom experienced drastic expansion and enrollment in all tiers of education with concurrent underfunding of University education during this period (Dike, 2008). It is pertinent to state that from the researchers' point of observations as an undergraduate in the 80s and even presently as a lecturer in the university that university students do leave their institutions, abandon their academic activities without parental awareness and traveled abroad in company of their so called sugar daddies and the expatriate workers. Involvement of University students and those who pretend to be students into sex market brought in some level of sophistication into sex trade and made it more acceptable to conservative and high profile wealthy men. The law enforcement could not effectively enforce provisions of the law on prostitution due to corruption and poor training. For example, PM News, Feb.1, 2013 reported that prostitutes keep their business going by paying monthly dues to Police and bribing them with free sex.

Different Types of Prostitution

Various studies have shown that there are different types of prostitutions. Surratt, (2005) is of the view that the services of female sex workers are heterogeneous and usually practiced in series of social and environmental

situations. According to Harcourt (2005), there are at least 25 types of sex work as regards to soliciting of clients for sex in exchange of money. He grouped them under direct and in direct with their demographic distributions in areas of practice. For the purpose of this paper, some various types of prostitution which are commonly practiced by adolescents in Port Harcourt metropolis, who directly or indirectly engage in prostitution are discussed.

Door Knock at Hotel Rooms/Boarding Houses: The prostitutes in this situation go to approach men who do not have female companion in their hotels or their boarding houses to knock at their rooms to ask if they need a lady to spend the night with. This type of prostitution is usually done in city hotels or work site with men on field trips and not usually accompanied by their wives and the bachelors among them see it as an opportunity to have fun.

Street Hawkers Prostitution: This type of prostitution is very rampant among young girls who hawk goods such as ground nuts, garden eggs, or other edible items on the streets. Some of these girls supplement their income with sexual services. These young ladies are ready to have short time sex with their supposedly male clients who in place of buying their goods take them into any corner to have sex with them in exchange for money.

Street Walker Prostitution: Sex workers engaged in this form of prostitution openly solicits from males (customers) on the street corners to sell sex. They either stand on the streets or parade on the high commercial corners of the cities, wearing provocative, transparent, very short dresses that expose various parts of the body such as the breasts, thigh and buttocks all in the bid to seduce men. These prostitutes in the streets are ready to render services at any available premises, in the customers' car, houses or hotels. Street prostitutes are usually exploited as they are usually charged low and often experience molestation or violence from their customers than indoor prostitutes such as those who work in brothels and bar (Weitzer cited in Fuchs, 2013).

Escort/Independent Call Girl: The girls leave their phone numbers at various hotels and advertise their services online. They work for themselves and stay away from the public domain. They earn higher as they work in the upper class of sex industry (Surratt, 2005).

Brothel Prostitution: These are designated locations or places where prostitutes reside and are visited by their customers. Men come to the brothels to ask for sex from these women who own rooms in the brothels. They usually have regular customer who come to patronize them. Prostitutes in brothels run the risk of moderate exploitation and the charges are also moderate. They pay rent to owners of the brothel and often licensed by authorities (Harcourt 2005).

Window or Door Way Prostitution: Here the prostitutes display themselves on the windows of the brothel waiting for the men for patronage.

Beer Girls: These groups of girls are hired by major companies to serve and promote their products usually alcohol drinks in hotels, bars and clubs. Indirectly, these girls are involved in trading sex for money with men who patronize the drinking places in order to argument their income.

Survival Sex: In survival sex the individual is under starvation or deprivation of important basic needs for life such as food, clothing, shelter and security. Individual involved in survival sex then is ready to trade sex for food or security. This type of sexual practice is usually found in refugee camps. Surprisingly most adolescents who are deprived of their basic needs from parents who are not financially buoyant or being retrenched every day and are impoverished to supply most of their needs yield to prostitution as a means of getting those needs. Survival sex has become the most common type of prostitution among Port Harcourt adolescents after the oil boom.

Prevalence of Prostitution in the Declining Oil Economy

Dwindling oil revenue coupled with the increase in crime and kidnapping of oil workers in Niger Delta States compelled oil expert companies to relocate their offices and key staff from Port Harcourt to Lagos. Money inflow into the oil city consequently evaporated. One would have thought that collapse in crude prices with its attendant losses in earnings, dwindling economy and exit of oil workers would deter prostitution in the city but the reversed is the case. Recently, Poroma, David and Jackson (2015) conducted a study to determine the relationship between oil economy and female prostitution in Port Harcourt using 100 prostitutes, 10 owners and 10 managers of hotels and night clubs and 10 men who patronize prostitutes to make up the sample size of 130 respondents. The study area was designated and strategic streets in Port

Harcourt such as Hotel Presidential junction, Polo club, Tombia Street in GRA, Woji Road and Victoria Street where most prostitutes hang out at night for their clients. The study revealed that there is a high rise of prostitution in Port Harcourt. The study further revealed that prostitution in this area is no longer a clandestine or hidden affair as most of the prostitutes beckon on men who are passing by and undauntedly ask for the sale of their bodies without any remorse. From the researchers' observation and interaction one obvious reason for sustained prostitution is that girls who are involved in sex work find it difficult to get out of prostitution even as incomes dwindle because they have tested money and failed to developed marketable skills during the oil boom. In addition, some of the youths who have been conditioned in the past to casual sex life styles easily fall into prostitution to meet their daily needs and maintain a sense of belonging as little or no money can be made from casual sex after oil boom. However some factors are responsible for sustenance of prostitution in a dwindling economy.

Precursors that Influence Youths Entry into Prostitution

Dwindling Family Income: On the basis of present dwindling economic situation, families are characterized with worries and inability to cater economically for the children. Some parents have been disengaged from service due to the trimming down in our industries and the economic meltdown facing the nation. Great majority of these parents cannot afford to provide the necessary and demanding needs of their children and extended relatives. Recently, the Rivers State Governor, Chief Barr. Nyesom Wike, expressed the pervasive poverty in Rivers State and the hardship families were undergoing, he stated that parents are worried in meeting up the challenges of their children's up keep at school and lack of decent jobs for school leavers coupled with continuous violence and crime. To him the Rivers State economy is in a shambles and retrogressing by day (Wike, 2015).

It is generally understood that to raise a girl child is more expensive than to raise a boy child and the patriarchal society of Africa in which Port Harcourt is situated favours the training of the boy child and patriarchal inheritance right which is solely for the male child. Therefore the girl-child whose basic needs cannot be met by the family without any inheritance is at the mercy of what she has. She automatically resorts to selling of her body in exchange for money. To

them it is a means of survival, usually referred to as "survival sex". In respect to this situation, the adolescent girls in Port Harcourt metropolis easily indulge in sexual activities for money with wealthy men who they refer to as sugar daddies or "Aristo" meaning the wealthy nova riche (Okonkwo & Eze, 2000). The name "Aristo" is commonly used in Port Harcourt city among the students to describe prostitution on campus especially with wealthy men. A graduate student of university of Port Harcourt commented that although dating older rich men "Aristo" may be bad it enabled her to pay her school fees, look after herself and reduced her dependence on her poor parents and at the same give financial assistance to her siblings.

Poverty: Poverty is the inability of a person to reach the minimum accepted standard of living, lacking financial resources, the basic needs to enjoy a minimum standard of life. The recent increase in petrol from ₦86.50 to ₦145 per liter has further worsened the economic situation of workers in Nigeria. A worker who receives a minimum wage of ₦20,000 per month can only purchase 138 liters of petrol with his/her monthly wage. Inflation rate in the country has risen drastically. The country leaders did not set any machinery in motion to tackle this challenge and this has resulted to serious hardship as almost every citizens of the country, particularly women and children are the worst hit. Today, Nigeria is rated the sixth poorest country with a very high population of about 133 million people. The effect of poverty is very harmful to both individual and its environment. Prostitution has been linked to poverty or economic deprivation particularly among young adolescents who in their bid to measure and live up to an acceptable standard of living among their fellow counterparts becomes victims. The desire to wear nice clothes, shoes and bags and high profile life in a dwindling economy will continue to pose a challenge luring the Girl-child into prostitution.

Alienation from Family/Run Away Adolescent: When parents cease to spend time with their children they create a space between them and their children. This space is usually filled by the adolescent peers. The child spends much of the time with peer and perceiving the parental avoidance as lack of affection. Their attachment to peer becomes more influenced because they do not get much attention from home. Their peers become their confidants and more time is spent in the mist of peers. This loose adolescent - family

relationship has been linked to juvenile delinquency such as youth prostitution (Brown, 1979). Research has revealed that girls need someone with whom they can confide in, whom they feel comfortable and someone who will be willing to give them listening ears. (Chesney Lind, Morash & Sterens, 2008). In addition, when conditions outside the home becomes critical for the girls- child to get the money needed to survive, and they cannot run back to their homes, they often fall into the hands of bad friends, female prostitutes and bad boys who offer them opportunity they cannot refuse. They groom them as friends occasionally have sex with them and systematically introduce them to sex trade. These pimps become sex managers to the girls, create conditions that will not encourage the adolescents to run back home or report to law enforcement for fear of being killed. Roe-Sepowitz(2004) in a study of juvenile entry into prostitution on the relationship between sexual abuse and adolescent prostitution using 70 sexually abused children with 35 prostitutes involved children, found out that running away is an intervening variable which showed that children who run away are most likely to be involved in prostitution more than just emotional abuse leading to prostitution.

Youth Unemployment: Unemployment is one of the social problems in Port Harcourt, Nigeria which has grown tremendously since the decline in oil revenue. According to Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 2016), 80 percent of Nigerian youths are either unemployed or underemployed. Youth unemployment has increased the crime rate in the country including kidnapping, robbery, drug abuse and prostitution. Most unemployed youths would rather go into prostitution than other crimes to make ends meet. According to Double Gist (2013), unemployment is one of the causes of prostitution. Many young girls who engage in prostitution have lamented over their inability to gain useful employment. One of the authors has come across many undergraduate girls in her university who tried to confide in her as a professional counsellor that they engage in "survival sex" or "runs" as they refer to it because their parents or relatives are not able to pay their school and personal needs. They cannot secure a reasonable part-time jobs therefore they had to resort to prostitution as an option in order to pay their bills.

Sexual Abuse: children who were victims of sexual abuse are more likely to get involved in prostitution. In Simmons and Whitbeck (1991) conducted a study of sexual abuse among 40 adolescent runaways and a sample of 95 homeless women to investigate direct and indirect models of the effects of early sexual abuse on prostitution and victimization indicated that the harm associated with prostitution is quite alarming and not peculiar to a certain culture or country. In an interview with 475 prostituted individuals from five different countries in the world (south Africa, Thailand, Zambia, Turkey and United States of America) revealed all that were interviewed had experienced violence in their lives and are saddled with mental health problems ranging from depression to suicidal thoughts and are more likely than non-mental health children to have mental problems (Farley, Baral, Kiremire & Sezgin, 1998). Sex abuse is on the increase as many men are no longer gainfully employed. Most men use their idle time to fondle young and innocent girls living around them.

Consequences of Youth Prostitution on the Adolescent Girl and the Society Youth prostitution results into immediate and long term negative consequences on the individuals' wellbeing and mental health. Youth prostitution has remained a global issue eating deep in the fabrics of our society and associated with enormous challenges of sexually transmitted diseases, violence, death, drug abuse, school dropout and debase of womanhood (Fitzpstick & Wyner cited in Clements 2013). Ditmore (2006) called it a social and moral deviation affecting every facets of the society. These Consequences are x-rayed in this paper bringing to bear the counselling implications for a healthy nation the adjustment of the minds of the youths in the positive direction considering the dwindling economy of the nation.

Violence and Abuse: There are several cases of Nigerian female on newspaper whose bodies are found on the streets as victims of murder without accurate information on their person. The feminist still upholds the view that prostitution is a criminal act characterized by violence, a way of violating human's right and debase of women hood. Most prostitutes run the risk of violence attack in various forms of physical, verbal and sexual molestation mostly from their customers and police who occasionally come to raid the environment. The prostitutes are aware that prostitution is not yet legalized so they are often tensed up with anxiety and fear of the authority catching them.

Emotional Stress: Prostitutes usually have feelings of anxiety resulting from various challenges facing them. They are often faced with their ability to attract enough customers that will give them enough money to solve their needs, they are also afraid of arrest from the police, rape and sexually transmitted diseases; they often have a sense of low self-esteem, worthlessness, alienation from friends and families resulting in depression and withdrawal from the society. They develop some psychological symptoms such as deviant sexual behaviours, loss of self-esteem, depression and hate, risk of substance abuse, feelings of guilt for participating in sexual acts, mental health problem and suicidal thoughts. According to Ezeugwu (2005) 10 in 1 group of youths interviewed who were involved in prostitution indicated that 71% reported suicidal ideation, 33% had a lethal plan and 14% had previous attempted suicide. In an interview with 475 prostitutes revealed that many of them have suicidal thoughts, depressed and mental problems (Yate cited in Farley, Barral, kiremire & Sezgin, 1998).

Use of Drugs, Alcohol and Cigarettes: The use of alcohol, drugs and smoking are commonest behaviour associated with prostitutes. Most of them use drugs, alcohol and cigarettes as stimulants to give them the power to perform their sexual activities very well so as to please their customers in order to gain their clients favour and high payment for the job. Some of them use drugs as a way of escape from the depression and anxieties characterized with prostitution.

Low Educational Background: kramer and Berg (2003) In a study of 309 women working in street prostitution in Phoenix found out that women engaging in prostitution have limited educational background and do not complete high school. Most of these youths spend most time with their multiple sexual partners, have low self-esteem and these mood indirectly affects their academic activities, poor attendance to lectures resulting into low academic achievement and eventually they drop out of school.

Sexually Transmitted Disease: The risk of contracting sexually transmitted disease by sex workers is high because they regularly engage in unsafe multiple sexual partners. The contracting of HIV among female prostitutes has been widely reported among medical health professionals. It is an occupational hazard facing prostitutes. Medical reports have shown that female infection of HIV to male partner is lower than male infection of HIV to female partner (Padian et al 1991). Thus female prostitutes run the greater risk of contracting HIV from their male visitors.

Counselling Implications

It is very important to note that due to the several factors contributing to the high prevalence of prostitutions and the attendant health and psychological consequences of youth prostitution discussed in this paper there is need for the engagement of professional counsellors to swing into action to fast tackle the situation particularly in this dwindling economy. The youths should not get involve in prostitution or see it as a survival strategy. For those youth who are already into prostitution they need serious empathy, listening ears, education and alternatives as a way out of the prostitution business. Most of them already have made up their minds to be into it and are ready to dam the consequences like in the case of seeing it as a means of settling financial challenges at home. Therefore adolescents who engage in prostitution or are preparing to go into prostitution need guidance and counselling in order to make necessary adjustments, take wise decisions and a rational rethink for maximum and sustainable development. Based on the above, the following recommendations were made.

Recommendations

- * Counsellors should be engaged in delivering comprehensive intervention and therapeutic techniques in helping prostitutes overcome their minds set that prostitution is not an alternative means of livelihood.
- * Counselling programmes should be established by various stakeholders in secondary and tertiary schools to help students who are having difficulties in academic work to overcome their challenges so as not to see prostitution as an easy way out.
- * Counsellors should properly inform and parents and teachers to acknowledge their students' academic abilities and interest in order to encourage students who are not academically inclined to learn vocational trades to maximize their potentials instead of insisting on academic work that may lead to dropping out of school.
- * Parents, Teachers and community should include sexuality education in their environment as a preventive measure against sexually transmitted disease and reducing adolescents' entry into prostitution as a means of livelihood.

- * Government should provide welfare package or programme for families single parents, aged grandparents or the economically disadvantaged adolescents in various communities as most adolescents entry into prostitution is on economic reasons.
- * The government should provide rehabilitation centres for the girls involved in prostitution and not use punitive measure in handling their challenges.
- * Counsellors and the general populace should empathize with girls who indulge in prostitution through dialogue and find out reasons why they are in it and agree on alternative plans for them.
- * Religious Organizations should put in place scholarship programmes and workshops to help sponsor adolescent girl-child who are less privileged.
- * Counsellors should help parents to build strong family ties with theyouths.

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