



Human Trafficking and Teenage Labour Experiences in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State

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Abstract

Trafficking in human beings, particularly teenagers, is a historical phenomenon that has taken alarming new dimensions at the global level. Trafficking for labour, rooted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade era, has evolved significantly over the centuries. Contemporary trafficking in teenagers for labour and sexual exploitation is a major issue in Nigeria, often exacerbated by economic hardships, poor governance and social instability. Taraba state is particularly vulnerable due to factors like poverty, unemployment, broken homes, and weak legal systems. Consequently, this study aims to examine the experiences of trafficked teenagers in the Central Senatorial District of Taraba state, Nigeria, shedding light on the social characteristics of teenagers trafficked for labour, the trend of trafficking, the factors contributing to trafficking, the effects of trafficking on teenagers and the challenges of controlling the rate of teenage trafficking. Relying on the theory of parental callousness and the routine activity theory, this study explored the underlying experiences of trafficked teenagers in central senatorial district of Taraba state, Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative research design on a population of 139 trafficked teenagers from five (5) local governments in Taraba state which are: Bali, Gashaka, Gassol, Kurmi and Sardauna. The findings further revealed that most victims were trafficked by strangers, though family and peer influence also played significant roles. Economic desperation was the primary motivator for teenagers leaving home to seek better living conditions. The findings also revealed that large family sizes, economic hardships, and false promises of education were identified as major factors contributing to teenage trafficking in central senatorial district of Taraba state, Nigeria. The implications of this study indicate a critical need for comprehensive intervention strategies addressing the socio-economic and legal vulnerabilities that facilitate teenage trafficking in Taraba state Nigeria, strengthening educational access, economic opportunities, and family support systems, alongside robust legal frameworks and civil society involvement, are essential factors that can mitigate the factors leading to trafficking and to protect at-risk teenagers from exploitation.

Key words: Human trafficking, Teenage Labour, Taraba State, Social characteristics, Trend, Factors

Introduction

Trafficking in human beings, especially young person's precisely teenagers is apparently not a new phenomenon. Historically it has taken many forms, but in the context of globalization, it seemingly has acquired shocking new dimensions. According to Bravo (2007) and Davidson (2017) as cited in Usman (2020), trafficking for labour on the planet emerged hundreds of years ago and is linked to the trans-Atlantic slave trade or triangular slave trade era. Eliot

(2019) and Newman (2017) respectively claimed that contemporary trafficking in human dates back to the early nineteenth century. Whereas trafficking teenagers for labour gained momentum in the late nineteenth century. According to them, the act of slavery is centered around exploitation of humans for labour and teenage children were often trafficked out of Africa to Europe to fill in as mine workers, wives or as cocotte (commercial sex workers); a condition that exposes them to severe torture, oppression and subjection

to cruel and inhuman treatments (Bryant et al., 2017).

According to a report by Caritas International (2016), the Continent of African has a history of forced labour and slavery. That the activities of the colonial masters seemingly infringed on the rights of colonies by introducing different forms of compulsory or even forced labour that lasted for many years on them. However, in contemporary African Society, victims of forced labour are mostly exploited within the private economy and often within the informal sector and the route from Africa has seen victims trafficked to places like the Middle East, Europe, Asia and other destinations. According to the report, trafficking for forced labour exploitation has been a difficult reality for many African societies for decades.

In Nigeria human trafficking according to Ikeora (2018), is a practice that predates even colonial rule and dates back to a time when labourers were moved from the hinterlands to meet up with the demands for plantation work by the slave masters. While such practices appeared to have ended at the advent of independence in 1960, Nigeria continues to face new forms of human trafficking. The United States Department for Trafficking in Persons Report (2016), revealed that, Nigeria is a country that produces victims, serve as a passage for traffickers and victims and also a final stop for women and children enslaved to force labour and sex trafficking. The reports note that child traffickers who often pose as intermediaries usually lure parent in rural areas to connect their children to wealthy individuals in bigger cities for better education and job prospect but end up selling them into

forced labour; majorly as commercial sex workers.

The report further indicated that, Children in Nigeria as a result of the poor economic background of their parents, are exposed to been exploited as domestic helps, errand wards and are even forced to engage in Agricultural services, street begging and hawking for their supposed benefactors. Beyond national frontiers young men and women are lured to Morocco, Libya and Algeria including the Middle East and Europe by fraudulent internet marriages proposals or offers of well-paid jobs but afterward they become victims of forced labour, variously engaging in commercial sex work for the economic benefits of their host; not exempting functioning as domestic servitude with little or no income of their own (Ikeora, 2018). As a result of prevalence of human trafficking in Nigeria, she has been placed on Tier two watch list in the trafficking in person, this is because the government does not adequately meet the minimum standard for the eradication of trafficking which comes from the fact that the government does not provide enough funding or resources to the anti-trafficking social unit or inter-ministerial anti trafficking committee (United State Department Trafficking in Person Reports, 2016)

Trafficking in persons within Nigeria is seemingly not limited to a particular region or locality and it has been attributed to several impending social problems. In Taraba state, trafficking in persons, particularly teenagers, has been grossly attributed to factors such as: poverty and unemployment, deception for better job opportunity in other countries, inability to afford a decent living, lack of parental care, broken homes amongst others. The

2023 National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking In Persons (NAPTIP) report shows that teenagers trafficked for labour are mostly exploited, dehumanized and marginalized due to the incessant social crises that has instilled abject poverty in Taraba State; in addition to the desire to migrate to study and work in urban cities and abroad. Other contributory factors according to this report include, Weak legal systems, porous borders, corrupt government officials, organized crime networks with global connections and limited capacity of law enforcement officers to control borders.

Teenage trafficking is a high profit, low risk business which allows traffickers to generally operate with impunity. Globally, in 2021, there were only a total of 10,572 prosecutions (up from 9,876 in 2020) and 5,260 convictions (up from 5,011 in 2020). Of all the global victims, only 90,354 were identified (down from 109,216 in 2020). In Africa, a total of 1,686 prosecutions (up from 1,493 in 2020) and 659 convictions (up from 382 in 2020) were generated in 2021. A total of 11,450 victims (considerably down from 28,538 in 2020) were identified. Nigeria remains a source, transit and destination country when it comes to teenage trafficking. ReliefWeb (2018) global index indicated that Nigeria ranked 32/167 of the countries with the highest number of slaves.

According to NAPTIP statistics from 2019- 2022, 61% of teenage trafficking in Nigeria happens internally, while 39% is generated from cross-border trafficking. Trafficking in Persons in Nigeria is considered the third most common crime, after drug trafficking and economic fraud (UNESCO, 2006). The trend is different in Taraba State as her

vulnerability is reflected in her loosed borders with six states in Nigeria and Cameroon; the condition that makes her prone to being a transit and destination route for teenage trafficking. According to Atsev (2000), Sometimes teenagers are trafficked from Katsina, Kano and Maiduguri in guise of promoting the Almajiri system of education but may end up being used as destitute to ferment trouble within the society. The social dispositions of these trafficked teenagers has made them lost touch with parental love and affection as normal children; thus, predisposing them to cruel, degrading, anti-social and inhuman conditions that are detrimental to society.

In an analysis of causal factors for teenage trafficking, Ahmad (2012) blamed the condition on poor family planning, which results in uncontrolled and large family size in Africa and Nigeria in particular. According to him, the promotion of polygamous family for the purpose of sustaining the prevalent agrarian culture which is a major source of livelihood, led to the overcrowding of rural settlements and creation of slums; thereby making the means of livelihood cumbersome. Consequently, adolescents strive to find solace outside the home and the inability of parents to provide basic needs for their offspring, resulted in the leasing of wards to urban dwellers as a strategy to support the home front and eventually the trafficking in young persons.

Although the Nigeria Government is a signatory to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) law and has adopted Convention 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, there are still gaps in the implementation processes especially in the

area that has to do with the protection of children from trafficking, as well as dearth in the ratification of the Child's Right Act across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

These gap has correspondent effect on other laws and policies such as the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act, the Children and Young Persons Act, the Immigration Act, the Criminal Code and Penal Code respectively. Teenage trafficking apparently is a serious global problem and all attempts by the Nigerian government to control it had been met with challenges; despite several partnership with International Organizations. The need create more awareness on the spate of this problem especially within developing regions in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the experiences of teenagers trafficked for labour in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State.

Statement of the Problem

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023) global assessment of one hundred and fifty five (155) countries of the world revealed that, despite the fight against trafficking in persons, the cases are still on the rise; as 79% of human trafficking is commonly for sexual exploitation while 18% is on forced labour and 20% of persons trafficked on are children. This indicator generally shows that the act of trafficking in persons is primarily labour related. As it stands, trafficking in persons seemingly challenges the strive towards achieving the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) in the continent of Africa, Nigeria and Taraba State in particular.

The trend however appears to be more prominent in crises laden areas particularly in Africa and Asia. The effect of Rwanda's Genocide, the Apartheid in South Africa, the civil war in Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya and of course Nigeria; all witnessed a massive displacement of persons mostly children and these sparked heightened emigration of persons to new environment for safety and sustenance. The long run effect of this wanton displacement of persons gave rise to the contemporary trafficking in persons vis-a-vis trafficking in teenagers. This does not, however, exempt the impact of trafficking during the era of the Atlantic slave Trade.

Beside the crisis factor, Ahmad (2012), attributed the hike in human trafficking particularly teenage trafficking to unplanned and uncontrolled family structure that is commonly linked to polygamy; a system of marriage that allows for cohabitation of multiple spouses. Trafficking in teenagers in Nigeria beside the aforementioned has been attributed to several social characteristics such as; illiteracy, social/physical disabilities, poverty, social displacement, conflicts, among others. The act seemingly has major economic, physical, psychological, emotional and health consequences on the social wellbeing of the victims, his/her family and the society at large.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Nseabasi and Abiodun, (2010, p. 190) "each stage of human trafficking presents physical, sexual and psychological abuse as well as violence. It creates deprivation and exposes victims to torture, force use/abuse of substances, manipulation, economic exploitation and

abusive working and living conditions. The process grossly contravenes fundamental human rights, denying people basic and broadly accepted freedoms with broad economic, social and cultural consequences". As a criminal act, human trafficking seemingly violates the rule of law, threatening national jurisdictions and international law, it further redirects the benefits of migration from migrants, their families, community and government or other potential legitimate employees to the traffickers and their associate. Consequently, victims most likely suffer physical and emotional injuries, that predisposes them to several forms of mental disabilities in addition to social stigmatization as a result of the outcome of being a trafficked victim (Ojo-Ajibare, 2013).

Despite the national and international campaign against the practice, teenage trafficking is apparently a stock in trade within the Central Senatorial District of Taraba State. Evidentially, children are still being used to raise income to fend for themselves and to provide for their family. Parents on the other hand, consciously or unconsciously trade their wards to traffickers in attempt to give them a better life and lessen the economic burden of fending for them. Although these conditions have often been blamed on ignorance and poverty, the negative impact it has on this geopolitical zone, is yet to be properly understood. Drawing inference from historicity that defines the Senatorial District as crises laden, UNODC (2008) explained trafficking expose young persons to antisocial activities such as, drug misuse/abuse, rape, commercial sex work, kidnapping, banditry, rustling amidst armed robbery and other forms of social vices that threatens the eminent survival, sustenance

and progression of a normal life style within the environment.

The activities and reports of National Agency for the prohibition of Trafficking in Person (NAPTIP), United Nation office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and other Civil Society Organizations, mostly revolve around statistics of trafficked persons with little or no accounts of how this act affects the social wellbeing and overall social development of the people of Central Senatorial District of Taraba. Scholars (Ukwayi et al., (2019); Abiodun (2022); Anyo et al., (2021)), mostly link the issue to consequences of poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria and Africa and the quest for safe haven.

However, there seem to be more to the act of trafficking especially on teenagers; as there are assumptions that the illicit practice is an economic venture by the traffickers and cannot be unconnected to the escalating cases of conflict and social insecurity within the region. It is therefore on this premise that this study seeks to examine the effects of human trafficking on teenage labour experiences in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State in Northeast Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following were the research questions for this study:

1. What are the Social characteristics common among teenage trafficking in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State?
2. What is the trend of trafficking of teenagers in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State?

3. What are the factors contributing to trafficking in teenagers in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to assess the experiences and consequences of teenagers trafficked for labour in central senatorial district of Taraba State.

The specific objectives are:

1. To determine the social characteristics common among victims of teenage trafficking in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State.
2. To describe the trend of trafficking teenagers in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State.
3. To examine the factors contributing to trafficking teenagers in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State.

Conceptual Review

Concept Trafficking in Persons

There is seemingly no consistency in the definition of trafficking in persons (TIP), as it varies depending on environmental and cultural dispositions (Healey, 2012). However, in 1994, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, 2022) depicted that TIP is a reflection of illicit and clandestine movement of persons across national and international borders, largely from developing countries and some countries with economies in transition, with the end goal of forcing women and girl children into sexually or economically oppressive and exploitative situations, for the profit of recruiters, traffickers and crime syndicates, as well as other illegal activities related to trafficking, such as forced domestic labour,

false marriages, clandestine employment and false adoption.

This definition might be challenged on the basis that it is considered to be narrow in its scope because it focuses on the movement of people from developing countries and some countries with economies in transition (United Nations General Assembly, 2022). In addition, the UNGA definition limits TIP to women and girl children. In doing so, other categories such as men and boy children are ignored. However, it should be noted that in this definition a number of the end purposes of TIP have been included, such as 'forced domestic labour, false marriages, clandestine employment and false adoption' as well as sexual exploitation.

The Inter-American Convention on International Traffic in Minors (1997) viewed Trafficking in Persons as the abduction, removal or retention, or attempted abduction, removal or retention, of a minor for unlawful purposes or by unlawful means. It is noteworthy that this definition has a strong effect on the definition of TIP that was adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2000. Illustratively, this definition used expressions such as 'unlawful purpose' and 'unlawful means' which comprise the purpose and means elements of TIP, and which were incorporated in the 2000 UN definition (Gallagher, 2011).

Article 3 of the United Nations (2004) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking states that trafficking is "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of

deception, of the abuse of power or of a 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. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, trafficking for sex and others forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. This definition requires three elements in order for a case to constitute trafficking. The first is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons; the second is the use of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, force, threat, abuse of power, or payments; and the third is that the first two elements are for the purpose of exploitation. The exploitation includes forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, and servitude.

There is some discussion on the first element of this definition, insofar as whether it covers internal movement or even if trafficking includes all forced labour regardless of whether or not any movement occurs at all. The US chooses to focus on the enslavement aspect of trafficking, that is, the exploitation, and as long as that occurs they consider trafficking to have occurred (United States Department of States, 2010). The occurrence of trafficking without a movement dimension is also supported by Bakirci (2009), who acknowledge that the transportation of a person does not always occur, and by definition trafficking only requires the recruitment, harbouring or receipt of a person. With the US definition of trafficking, trafficking does not just focus on migrants, but also the possibility of nationals being trafficked into a position of slavery.

The US definition certainly has the advantage of a broad scope of inclusiveness of the protections and opportunities for redress that a victim of trafficking has under the UN Protocol, letting less trafficking victims slip through the gap because of technicalities. This is still valid on an international level, because recruitment, harbouring or receipt of a person can occur without movement, and in fact transfer could refer to a change of the person in possession or harbouring the victim, rather than physical movement over some distance.

Sussanu (2019) defines human trafficking as the Recruiting, transporting, transferring, sheltering or receiving people by threat of force or by using force or other forms of coercion, kidnapping, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability or by offering or accepting payments of benefits to obtain the consent of a person who has control over another person for exploitation. Human trafficking is a deprivation of the most basic entitlements of life. Therefore, it is not just stealing someone's labour or violating someone's privacy; it is the theft of an entire life (Logan et al., 2009). The exact number of victims and offenders involved in trafficking is unknown. Out of more than 26,000 calls related to international human trafficking, over 4,500 calls received directly from victims of human trafficking, and more than 8,500 human trafficking cases in 2017, only 21,242 human trafficking victims were identified (Polaris, 2021). The number of victims is undoubtedly much higher than this.

Although trafficking survivors have often been treated as a unitary population of sexual slaves, research is

beginning to highlight significant differences between the subgroups of sexual trafficking and labour trafficking (Hopper, 2018). Sex trafficking involves restrictive conditions, confinement, lack of compensation, no access to medical care, social exclusion, and a constant threat of physical violence. In contrast, labour trafficking entails long hours, little to no pay, health hazards, an unsanitary environment, and an absence of communication between the employer and the employee (Lutya, 2010). Even in 2020, there is still controversy in the literature about the numeric extent of sex trafficking versus labour trafficking. Indisputably, sex work is more public and easier to investigate due to the higher probability of acquiring DNA evidence, which may explain the higher number of reports in this domain (Logan et al., 2009).

In 1996, another view of trafficking was proposed by ‘a Plan of Action commissioned by the Council’s Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men to include situations where a woman is exploited in a country other than her own by another person (natural or legal) for financial gain, the traffic consisting of organizing (the stay or) the legal or illegal emigration of a woman, even with her consent, from her country of origin to the country of destination and luring her by whatever means into prostitution or any form of sexual exploitation’ (Hirsch, 1996, cited by Wijers & Lap-Chew, 2018, p.26).

This definition was criticized because it was not clear in terms of whether the concept of TIP will be applied to the process and the end result of TIP. Along with this, the definition of trafficking has also been criticized for being narrow by limiting its scope to one category (women).

Furthermore, the end purpose of TIP, according to this definition, is limited to prostitution and sexual exploitation. Additionally, a Joint Action was issued by the Council of the European Union in 1997, claiming that, Any behaviour which facilitates the entry into, transit through, residence in or exit from any territory of a member state for the purposes of (a) sexually exploiting a person other than a child for gainful purposes where use is made of coercion, in particular violence or threats, or deceit is used, or there is abuse of authority or other pressure which is such that the person has no real and acceptable choice but to submit to the pressure or abuse involved; (b) trafficking in persons other than children for gainful purposes with a view to their sexual exploitation is considered as trafficking in persons (Council of the European Union Joint Action on Trafficking, 1997, p.21).

This definition was criticized for being narrow. To be more specific, the migratory aspects were strongly emphasized. Likewise, according to this definition sexual exploitation was visualized as the solitary potential end result of trafficking (Gallagher, 2011). Furthermore, a recommendation on trafficking was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the European Union; this recommendation defined trafficking as, “The procurement by one or more natural or legal persons and/or the organization of the exploitation and/or transport or migration - legal or illegal - of persons, even with their consent, for the purpose of their sexual exploitation, inter alia, by means of coercion, in particular violence or threats, deceit, abuse of authority or a position of vulnerability” (Council of Europe Treaty, 2005).

This conceptualization includes the main elements of TIP which are: the action element, the means element, and the purpose element, devoid of any attention to a particular gender. Furthermore, the consent of trafficked victims is not taken into account in TIP. However, this definition could be criticized on the basis that it focuses on sexual exploitation and ignores the other end purposes of TIP. Moreover, shortly before the adoption of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, hereinafter referred to as the Trafficking in Persons Protocol (TIPP), in 2000 the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women proposed that “Trafficking in persons means the recruitment, transportation, purchase, sale, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons: (i) by threat or use of violence, abduction, force, fraud, deception or coercion (including the abuse of authority), or debt bondage for the purpose of (ii) placing or holding such person, whether for pay or not, in forced labour or slavery-like practices, in a community other than the one in which such persons lived at the time of the original act” (United Nations, 2000).

The effect of trafficking affects both men and women and occurs for a number of exploitative purposes. The process of trafficking in-persons is a chainlike situation that includes both the process of trafficking in persons (the action element) and the result of trafficking in persons (the purpose element) (Gallagher, 2011). Significantly, Trafficking in Persons entails, the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons,

by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a 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 (United Nations, 2000).

It could be argued that Article 3 of the TIPP has defined the term ‘Trafficking in Persons’ for the first time in international law (Gallagher, 2011). Furthermore, the definition of TIP aims to give consistency to and consensus on the trafficking phenomenon all over the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2008). In particular, this definition is considered to be a guideline for states parties to this Protocol to adopt the most effective legislation to criminalize TIP. Additionally, this definition classifies TIP as a crime against all persons, not just women and children. Along with this, the definition of trafficking visualizes a number of purposes of trafficking, apart from sexual exploitation. A point to note, however, is that the definition of TIP in the TIPP is considered to be the most accepted and agreed definition of TIP worldwide.

The definition of TIP in the TIPP was preceded by the Roundtable on 29th January 1998 on the Meaning of “Trafficking in Persons”: A Human Rights Perspective’, which seeks to define TIP, because it realizes that there is a pressing need to understand what TIP means in order to address and prevent this crime (Quirk, 2011). The Roundtable on the Meaning of Trafficking in Persons raises the issue of who might be protected according to this definition, because trafficked victims include males, females,

adults, and children. Therefore, the best expression is 'Trafficking in Persons' since this expression includes all categories without any distinction between victims according to their sex, colour, and age, or any other types. It might be argued that distinctions are still made between categories included in the definition of TIP. The definition of TIP does not solve the distinction between male and female, adults and children. An example of this is that children should be given greater protection than other categories, and their status should be considered separately from trafficking in adults. In this regard, it should be stressed that reaching the age of 18 is what distinguishes childhood from adulthood (International Labour Organization, 2017).

It is worth noting that the connection between women and children in the TIPP creates some problems for women's rights for the following reasons. First reason is that it deals with women and children as the same category, assuming they have the same rights, and often treating women as legal minors with less legal capacity. Secondly, it illustrates that women's only role is that of caretakers of children, despite the fact that their role has other concerns and rights. Thirdly, is that, if the intent is to combine women and children on the basis of gender discrimination, the expression should be 'women and girls' (Quirk, 2011). However, this might be challenged on the basis that according to both 'the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women' and 'the Convention on the Rights of the Child', the connection between women's and children's rights might enhance the protection of those categories of rights by combining them on

the basis of gender and age (Goonesekere & De Silva-de Alwis, 2005).

Teenage trafficking is a perennial problem, and until communities recognize it, the problem will continue. While this is so, few studies have examined the experiences of teenage trafficked in labour in Nigeria. Terkula (2021) investigated child labour and human security in Benue state. From another perspective, Kwangyang et al. (2016) considers child trafficking, which its consequences, also suggesting the way forward. While these studies abound, no study investigates the experiences of teenage trafficked for labour in central senatorial district Taraba State.

Teenage Labour

A teenager is socio-culturally determined and therefore varies from society to society. Even within the same society the socio-cultural imperatives compel variation in the concept of a teenager. In some societies the maximum age of the child is seventeen (17) while in others the upper limit ranges from twelve to even twenty-one. UNICEF (2002) considers anyone who has developmental disability, regardless of age, as a teenager. The United States Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment of 1994 sees a teenager as anyone under the age of eighteen years (18) (Okafor, 2000). The convention on The Rights of the Child endorsed by Nigeria in 1991 conceptualizes a teenager as; "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to child, maturity is attained earlier" The National Child Welfare Policy in Nigeria defines a teenager as "any person who is twenty years or below" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The Labour Act states that a teenager is a person under the age of twelve years, while the Criminal Procedure

Act assumes any person under the age of fourteen years as a teenager.

The Constitutional Law forbids any citizen who has not attained 18 years from seeking elective position and cannot vote in any election, while the Law of Contracts stipulates that one cannot genuinely enter into a contract until he has attained the age of 18 (Aturu, 1999). The foregoing variations impede an easy pinpointed conceptualization of a teenager. In spite of this, our conceptualization of a teenager shall be influenced by the limit set by the compulsory school age. This is the acute socialization period of a teenager, and we say, for the purpose of this exercise, a teenager is any person below the age of eighteen y (18) years. Let us now see what constitutes teenage labour

Teenage labour has been view by different scholars. According to Suda (2011) the term teenage labour refers to when a teenager is working in any type of work that is dangerous and harmful to their health or the work hinders their education. For Moyi (2011) teenage labour refers to low wages, long hours, physical and sexual abuse. According to Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) teenage labour is viewed as a form of teenage abuse, when they work in bad conditions and hazardous occupations. The meaning of the term of teenage labour also varies among organizations; ILO argues that teenage labour is difficult to conceptualize. It depends on the type of the job and if the age is under eighteen and if the job intervenes the teenager's education and development (ILO, 2004). A teenager, according to the UN 1989 convention on the Rights of the Child, it refers to a person under the age of eighteen. The World Bank assumes that teenage labour can do serious threat to long-term national investment.

Furthermore, according to UNICEF the problem of teenage labour can have more bad consequences besides all the concerns of investment or its relation to economic activity (ILO, 2013; Weston, 2005).

According to UNICEF (2002) teenage labour refers to teenagers working in contravention of ILO standards in convention 138 and 182, that is, all teenagers below twelve (12) years working in any economic activities, those aged twelve 12 to fourteen 14 years engaged in more than light work, and all teenagers engaged in the worst forms of teenage labour. Worst forms of teenage labour refers to teenagers being enslaved, forcibly recruited, prostituted, trafficked, force into illegal activities and exposed to hazardous work. Bhat (2010) asserts that the concept of teenage labour is not simple because it includes three difficult element, which are "teenagers", "work" and "labour". He claims that the term teenager can be observed by age but in some societies, people cease to be teenagers at different ages. The onset of puberty occurs at different ages for different people. Therefore, in the Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999 (No. 182) defines a teenager who is under the age of eighteen years (Bhat, 2010). Concept of teenage labour differs among societies, for example in Africa and Asia they do not consider the work of fifteen years old person as a teenage labour, and they view teenage labour as a good task that teenagers learn skills from work. They distinguish between teenage labour and teenage work, where teenage work is considered to be a part of the children's training to be responsible adults while teenage labour is

thought to be exploitative (Omokhodion & Odusote, 2006).

Not all work that teenagers do is severe, according to ILO reports (2002), if a work does not hinder their schooling or do not affect their health physically and mentally, then it is generally not categorized as teenage labour. For instance, helping parents at home, looking after siblings or working for pocket money after school hours and during holidays. Also, Aqil (2012) assumes that not all work that teenagers do can harm their health or be considered exploitative but it depends on what kind of work they are involved in and how many hours they work. It also depends on work conditions, or environment. However, Weston (2005) argues that any work teenagers do, can be damaging to their health because the work can be abusive, exploitative or hazardous and it can influence their health. Omokhodion and Odusote (2006) argued that any work that teenagers does outside home is classified as teenage labour. According to them working outside home is usually exposed to environmental hazards which may affect their health and safety.

Teenage Labour has been an integral part of the labour force especially in third world countries and enters labour market at tender age (Nanjunda, 2008). It is asserted that any work done by a teenager who is below the age of fourteen years as prescribed by law. The word 'work' means full time commercial work to support and sustain self or to add to the family income. Teenage labour is hazardous to their mental, physical, social, educational, emotional and spiritual development. According to International Labour Organization (ILO), the term 'teenage labour is often seen as work that deprives

teenagers of their childhood, their potential and their dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children and interferes with their schooling by:

depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;

obliging them to leave school prematurely;

requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work

Theoretical Review

In social work, theories are used as a general principle or body of principles offered to explain a phenomenon. Theory should therefore be accurate and predictive description of the natural world. In line with this position, this study relied on Theory of Parental Callousness and the Routine Activity Theory as a means of establishing causative factors and effects drawn from the experiences of teenage, trafficked victims particularly in central senatorial district of Taraba State, Nigeria.

Routine Activities Theory

The Routine Activities Theory was propounded by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979. The tenets of the theory suggest that crime generally occur when a likely offender perceives a suitable target that is devoid of a capable guardian. In other words, crime is susceptible to happen within an unprotected environment that lacks the protective shield capable of warding off the criminal. The theory concentrates not on individual actors and their motivations only, but on situations or criminal settings in other words, the

environments conducive enough to harbour a define criminal activity.

The proponents of the Routine activities theory where of the opinion that, in order for a crime to occur, motivated offenders must converge with suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians. The likelihood that there is such a convergence is heightened by our routine activities including work, leisure time, friends and family. This theory takes the motivation of the offender while studying the spatial and temporal organization of social activities within an environment to explain crime.

According to this theory, crime can increase if there are more suitable targets and fewer capable guardians present. This theory would call for awareness among suitable targets (victims or potential victims) and increased controls (by capable guardians) to reduce the likelihood of motivated offenders coming into contact with the suitable target. Awareness raising programmes and particularly those targeted at high-risk group or potential victims are examples of measures taken to reduce the likelihood that victims will come into contact with motivated offenders.

According to this theory, the criminal who in this case is the Trafficker in a bid to successfully and skillfully engage in human trafficking, would strategically and tactically carryout a need assessment of potential environment, evaluating their social security dispositions as well economic strength including the parental background of likely trafficked teenagers. The proponents asserts that if the environment is porous and lack oversight mechanism capable of forestalling trafficking in persons, the tendency for the

trafficker to achieve his/her goal becomes real.

To this effect, the Routine Activity Theory is most applicable to environment with weak socioeconomic and social security structures. In other words, environment that is poverty stricken, engulf in constant violent conflicts, suffers dearth in literacy level, poor and unplanned family structure and high population density is susceptible to promoting trafficking in persons. In essence, the theory depicts that criminals are majorly exploitative and opportunist who takes advantage of people and their social conditions to commit crime. In relation to the study area, Central Senatorial District of Taraba houses several communities that are poverty stricken, has porous borders, is constantly experiencing violent conflict, the birth rate and population rate is constantly in the increase with little or no economic base that supports the promotion of a standard lifestyle. As a result of these challenging socioeconomic disposition, majority of residents within these areas suffer displacement and parents, for want of a relative stable lifestyle for their offspring are quick to jump at any offer from a stranger in the direction of supposed assistance to both parents and children without minding the consequence therein.

Theory of Parental Callousness

This theory according to Brown (2012), posits that parents often do not care about the welfare of their children and would seize any opportunity to exploit the rights of their children. This theory hypothetically assumes that parents enforce children to engage in child labor as a means of exploiting them. As a result of this parental condition, most children remain

bound to child labour/domestic servitude and consequently do not really know what they want out of life. This theory emphasized that in their callousness, parents consciously or unconsciously subject children to work for them so as to augment the family income and by so doing endanger the lives of these children by exposing them to social vices such as human trafficking for labour or sex as the case may be.

The parental callousness theory posits that parental exploitative disposition to children is linked to economic factors and outrightly reveals that, parental poverty status is mostly behind the psychological attribution that predisposes children to being domestic servitude. In addition, most parents make their children money earning machine and as a result the child is not allowed to do anything else apart from working for them to bring money. They do not want the children to go to school because they are going to school will make the children stop working and enlightened the children of their status, and this will result in them withdrawing from working for their parents. According to this theory, parents consciously or unconsciously expose their wards to endangered environments and people all in attempts to make up for their shortfalls as parents. In line with the theme of this study, it is not out of place to assert that trafficking on teenagers to a large extent is directly or indirectly promoted by the actions and affirmation of parents.

This theory posits that parental callousness contributes to teenage trafficking in Nigeria. Thus, large poor households usually have more children involved in teenage labour than children from smaller households, which

demonstrates that family size has effects on child labour. Accordingly, parents oblige their children to work because they are not able to manage the demands of a large size family. There is also a gender difference approach to household size; as not everyone in the family is exposed to working as child, for example boys are more likely to attend school than girls and older siblings often contribute more to the family income. In Nigeria particularly Central Senatorial District of Taraba, younger children, are more likely to go to school than older children, and the boys are more likely to attend schools than girls.

The size of the family may therefore be a potential source of child trafficking especially where the family is large and poor. Demographically, the growth rates and the densities of people within the Central zone of Taraba are of such magnitude that available social amenities cannot go round or are too expensive for the average families. Wherefore the family cannot afford the basic necessities of life, either as a result of income insecurity due to unemployment or retirement, the children serve as supplements to providing the basic needs of the family and therefore become categorically victims of human trafficking.

On a general note, both the Routine Activities Theory and the Theory of Parental Callousness are relevant to theme of this study. However, while the former presents the trends and effects of trafficking on teenagers, the later depicts the causative factors responsible for encouraging the trafficking of teenagers in Central Senatorial District of Taraba. However, for the purpose of establishing a rational explanation for illicit practice of trafficking teenagers and the experiences

therein, this study shall rely on Routine Activities Theory by Cohen and Felson (1979).

Research Design

This study adopts qualitative design which is mostly used in social research so that it freely expresses idea, feelings, and motivation about the topic. This design allows for generalization of findings, regarding the concerns, experiences of teenagers trafficked for labour in a given geographical area and beyond.

Research Setting

The research setting for any study can be either natural or controlled. An

uncontrolled or non-contrived setting is the natural environment in which events occur normally. Field studies and field experiments are examples of non-contrived settings. Located in north-east geopolitical district of Nigeria, Taraba State was created out of the defunct Gongola state in 1991 and it is divided into sixteen local government areas which include Ardo Kola, Bali, Donga, Gashaka, Gassol, Ibi, Jalingo, Karim Lamido, Kurmi, Lau, Sardauna, Takum, Ussa, Wukari, Yorro, and Zing, Usa special development area and Nganda special development area.

Population of the Study

Population growth rate for central senatorial district of Taraba State.

District	Population
Bali	332,000
Gashaka	137,100
Gassol	385,500
Kurmi	143,600
Sardauna	352,900

Source: National population commission 2022

Population of Study Area (2015 – 2022)

Local government area	Number of teenagers trafficked for labour
Bali	30
Gashaka	14
Gassol	31
Kurmi	31
Sardauna	33
Total	139

Source: Naptip Report 2022.

Instruments for Data Collection

A one-on-one interview method allows the researcher to interact with the participants and to observe non-verbal cues during the interview process. Through interviews, the researcher intends to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents

with respect to the research variables. The interview method allowed the researcher seek clarity and probe deeper understanding.

Method of Data Collection

In qualitative method of data collection employed in this study, the

research used key informant interview (KII) who were selected from NAPTIP, an agency responsible for human trafficking in Nigeria. The key informant interview (KII) was based on the research questions and objectives of study which is human trafficking and teenage labour experiences. The justification for this method is to get an in-depth understanding and to gather information from the respondents through words, images, attitudes, behavior, beliefs and observation.

Results and Discussion

In this chapter, which is data presentation and analysis contains three major sub-sections which is data presentation, which presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the qualitative data analysis, which presents the findings of the data analysis. Thereafter, the discussions of findings and summary of outstanding work is presented.

Social Characteristics of Trafficked Teenagers in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State

A total of 139 teenagers trafficked for labour in Taraba central senatorial district were interviewed during data collection. Out of the 139 teenagers, 48

individuals were unable to be reached or unavailable during the period of the data collection. The implication is that only 91 teenagers and/or their parents were interviewed for this study. The distribution of the interview records show that 30 were interviewed from Bali, 10 from Gashaka, 20 from Gassol, 20 from Kurmi and 11 from Sardauna as contained Table 3.

In this study, socio-demographic information of respondents were captured as gender, educational qualifications and family background. In terms of gender, females made up 35 (or 38.9%) of those interviewed while males were 55 (or 61.1%) as captured in Figure 1. This implies that males make up a significantly higher number of those interviewed compared to females.

The average age of the respondents was 13.42 with standard deviation of 1.289. In terms of the minimum and maximum age of respondents, the least number of years of the respondents is 10 years while the maximum age of the respondents is 15 years as shown in table 4. The implication is that the respondents are primarily in their early teenage years, a critical developmental period marked by significant.

Table 3
Number of Teenagers Interviewed

Local Government Area	Sample	Not Interviewed	Number Interviewed
Bali	30	0	30
Gashaka	14	4	10
Gassol	31	11	20
Kurmi	31	11	20
Sardauna	33	22	11
Total	139	48	91

In terms of their educational qualifications, 19 (or 21.1%) have primary school certificate which is followed by those with secondary school certificate who are 35 (38.9%). About 36 representing 40.0% are dropouts either at the secondary or primary school levels. The findings reveals that almost 60% of those interviewed have at least primary school certificate as contained in Figure 2.

Trends of Trafficking Teenagers

The focus of this objective was to describe the trend of trafficking teenagers in the central senatorial district of Taraba State. To explore the underlying feelings of the respondents, five questions were used. In the first question, the researcher asked the respondents who and by what means they left their home to work for someone else. Based on their responses, most of those trafficked were trafficked with those people that were not familiar to the victims (24 or 28.2%). The number of words further revealed that the victims were also known to have left their homes (representing 19 or 22.4%) or by family/relatives (17 or 20%). Friends also had a great influence on how the victims were forced to leave their homes (13 or 15.3%). Parents (6 or 7.1%), others (4 or 4.7%) or rescued by the police (2 or 2.4%) accounts for the other reasons.

The second sought their views regarding whether their traveling to live and work in a different environment was because of its economic value. Majority of their views seems to support this position (86 or 95.6%) as against those who hold contrary views of not being for economic reasons (3 or 3.3%) or other reasons (1 or 1.1%). The third question concerning the

trends of teenage trafficking in the central senatorial district of Taraba State sought to explore the underlying feelings of respondents on whether eloping with strangers to live in strange and work in strange environment was influenced by their peers. A summary of their views show that majority affirmed this (78 or 85.7%) compared to those that disputed the claim (12 or 13.2%) or are not sure (1 or 1.1%). The submission is that the trafficked teenagers believe that why trafficking is on the increase is because of the influence of the peers of the trafficked teenagers

This reflects on whether being trafficked has any relationship with the teenager's decision to enjoy a better life. Based on their responses, majority expressed the views that being trafficked was primarily to enjoy a better living condition (87 or 95.5%) compared to those who expressed alternative views (4 or 4.4%). This is further confirmed when asked about their views regarding whether they want to be counted among the rich people in their community. The result showed overwhelming support to the notion that by leaving to work for someone else, their hope of getting rich will be contained (86 or 94.5%) compared to those that answered in the negative (5 or 5.5%) as some of their expressions are captured in Table 5.

Factors Contributing To Trafficking Teenagers

Regarding research objective three, the study desired to explore the factors that contribute to the trafficking of teenagers in central senatorial district of Taraba State. Like the other objectives, five questions sought to capture the views of the respondents as necessary for achieving the

research objective as captured. The first question sought to understand whether trafficking is a means of employment. An overwhelming majority rejected this assertion that it is a means of employment (73 or 80.2%) compared to those who accepted this submission (18 or 19.8%). In addition, one of the questions identified communal or ethnic crises as one of the factors worsening teenage trafficking in Taraba State. The respondents offered differed viewed which were evenly split between those who supported (48 or 52.7%) or disputed (43 or 47.3%) the claim.

Another factor that the researcher sought to explore was whether a large family size contributes to the worsening situation of teenage trafficking in Taraba State. Majority of those interviewed supported this position (76 or 85.4%) against those who did not support (12 or 13.5%). Only a single respondent was not sure (1.1%). Additionally, the researcher wanted to understand whether a promise of a better education to the trafficked teenager plays a significant role in the worsening trafficking situation in Taraba State. Overwhelmingly, the respondents averred that this plays a significant role (84 or 93.3%) as against those who do not see this as a reason for the worsening trafficking situation in Taraba State (6 or 6.7%). Another likely reason explored in this study was whether the trafficker lured the victim by promising them that it will help them live a luxurious lifestyle in their community. More than two-third expressed such views (66 or 74.2%) compared to only a third that support such views (23 or 25.8%). A cross-section of their views are captured in Table 7.

Discussion of Findings

Research Objective One: To Determine the Social Characteristics Common Among Victims of Teenage Trafficking in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State

This research objective sought to determine the social characteristics common among victims of teenage trafficking in central senatorial district of Taraba State. The questions focused on respondents' social characteristics such as family background, parental provision of basic needs, educational experiences, religious affiliations, and reasons for leaving home to work for strangers. The findings revealed that a significant majority of the respondents (92.3%) came from poor backgrounds whose families are mostly engaged in farming or livestock production with only a small fraction (2.2%) having a middle-class status. When asked about the adequacy of parental provision for basic needs, 73.6% of the respondents reported significant difficulty in meeting these needs, while only a small portion (5.5%) indicated that their parents managed to provide.

Research Objective Two: To Describe the Trend of Trafficking Teenagers in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State

This research objective aimed to describe the trend of trafficking teenagers in the central senatorial district of Taraba State. To explore the underlying feelings of the respondents, five questions were used. The findings indicated that the majority of those trafficked were taken away by people unfamiliar to them (28.2%). A significant number of victims left their homes on their own volition (22.4%) or were trafficked by

family members or relatives (20%). Friends also played a notable role in influencing victims to leave (15.3%) with a small percentage of respondents trafficked by their parents (7.1%). These findings suggest that a combination of unfamiliar individuals, family members, and friends were found to be significant factors in the initial stage of trafficking. The second question explored whether respondents' decisions to travel to live and work in a different environment were economically motivated.

Research Objective Three: To Examine the Factors Contributing to Trafficking Teenagers in Central Senatorial District of Taraba State

The findings from research objective three shed light on the complex and multifaceted factors contributing to teenage trafficking in the central senatorial district of Taraba State. A significant majority of respondents (80.2%) rejected the notion that trafficking serves as a means of employment, which underscores the understanding among victims that trafficking is not a legitimate form of employment but rather a guise for exploitation. Respondents frequently mentioned being promised a luxurious lifestyle that was never delivered, emphasizing the deceit involved in trafficking.

Conclusion

The research revealed that most victims of trafficking in the central senatorial district of Taraba state came from poor farming or livestock-producing families, with minimal representation from middle-class backgrounds. Many victims

struggled to meet basic needs and had dropped out of school, driven by financial hardship, lack of educational opportunities, and the hope for a better life—factors that often led to exploitation. Religion played a secondary role in their decision to be trafficked. Traffickers were typically strangers, though some victims were exploited by family members or friends. Economic desperation and peer influence were significant factors, with the promise of better opportunities often leading individuals into trafficking situations.

The study highlighted the exploitative nature of trafficking, with many victims deceived by promises of a better life. Large family sizes, economic desperation, and the lure of education were identified as key factors contributing to the problem, alongside communal and ethnic crises. The effects of trafficking were severe, including harsh treatment, physical and sexual abuse, inadequate feeding, psychological abuse, and restricted access to parents. The research also identified challenges in addressing teenage trafficking, such as poor socio-economic conditions, porous borders, and social networks that connected parents with traffickers. The absence of civil society activities, particularly in awareness creation, was seen as a significant barrier to combating trafficking, though human rights observance was not viewed as a direct impediment.

Recommendations

- 1) Given the significant findings about the social characteristics of victims, the study recommended that the government and NGO should develop and implement poverty alleviation programs farming or livestock

production targeting vulnerable families that may succumb to the practice of trafficking in. Based on the insights into the trends behind teenage trafficking, the study recommended that government and development agencies should introduce comprehensive economic empowerment programs such as vocational and entrepreneurship trainings targeting vulnerable teenagers and their families as such opportunities can provide alternative paths to financial stability by reducing the allure of trafficking.

- 2) Considering the factors contributing to teenage trafficking, the government and civil society organizations' collaboration on public awareness campaigns to educate communities about the false promises made by traffickers and the real dangers of trafficking is highly recommended
- 3) In terms of the effect of trafficking on teenagers, the Federal, state and Local Governments could establish rehabilitation centers that provide psychosocial support, counseling, and vocational training for trafficked teenagers that are rescued with the hope of reintegrating them back to the society

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