

ADDRESSING PROSTITUTION CONCERNS IN NIGERIA: ISSUE, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

This paper discusses the origin of prostitution, the different types of prostitution as well as causes/factors responsible for such deviant abnormal behaviour. Some theories that explain these factors are discussed. The consequences that flow from this analysis is that prostitution gravely impair women's health and firmly belong in the category of violence against women considering its emotional and physical harmful effect. The paper emphasises that prostitution creates a setting whereby crime against women become a commercial enterprise thereby providing a congenial environment for the alienation, abuse and dehumanisation of women. It suggests that in addition to needing health services prostitutes must be provided with the economic, social and psychological means to leave prostitution. The authors conclude by proffering a socio-legal solution to the menace.

Keywords: Prostitution, issue and Nigeria

Introduction

Prostitution is widely described as the oldest profession; the practice of selling sex for cash or other immediate compensation has existed across cultures and times from the ancient Greeks. Prostitution also crosses class lines, from the poor 'streetwalker' with their stereotyped drug habits and abusive pimps to the high class brothel and escort service worker with designers' cloths and stylish apartments.

While the prostitutes technically sells a service, namely sexual intimacy, the ways in which prostitution is discussed suggest that at least to modern sensibilities, she or he is selling far more than that. A common misconception of prostitution is that a significant majority of prostitutes are

women. Women prostitution is easily talked about, than male prostitution at least since the ancient times.

The practice of prostitution is at an alarming rate in Nigeria, it is seen as a deviant sub-culture in Nigeria and it is practiced by prostitutes in private homes, in brothels, and in hotels as an adaptation to poverty, unemployment and as a feasibility way for them to make money. The prostitutes sell sexual favours and their bodies to their customers who pay them huge sum of money in exchange. This dirty and highly immoral profession is associated with social problems as marital instability, sexual harassment, divorce, overcrowding, environmental pollution, alcoholism, fighting, drug addiction, violence crime and delinquency, unwanted pregnancy. Unsafe abortion and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS, gonorrhoea, syphilis etc.

Most analyses of prostitution suggest that both men and women enter prostitution either professionally or temporarily as relative amateurs, for economic and monetary reasons. Some girls go into prostitution in other to challenge repressive gender role which restrict women sexuality to a romantic ideology and oppressive marriages.

Origin of prostitution

Prostitution is often described as “the world oldest profession”. Prostitution at least in the modern sense cannot have emerged before the emergence of money which can only have taken place after the emergence of several trades; however, prostitution has been noted in Bonobo chimpanzee behaviour based around access to food and gift and in penguin in regards to access for suitable stones for nest building. Until the age of industrialization the world was basically agrarian, so goods and services were most often obtained by barter. Any item normally exchange for other goods was likely acceptable for a prostitutes sexual services.

One of the first forms of prostitution is sacred prostitution supposedly practiced among Samaritans. In ancient sources there were many traces of sacred prostitutions, starting perhaps with Babylon where each woman had to reach once in their lives the sanctuary of “Militia” and there have sex with a foreigner as a sign of hospitality for a symbolic price. It was common in Israel too, but some prophets like Hosea and Ezekiel strongly fought it. It was assumed that it was part of the cults of cannan were a significant portion of prostitutes were male.

In the Bible there is a story in which a woman name Tamar poses as a false prostitute to seemingly commit incest with her father in-law Judah. In actuality, she was performing a levirate marriage; but Judah, taking her for a harlot promised to give her a kid from the flocks in other to sleep with her. In

Jericho, a prostitute's name Rehab assisted Israelites spies and she eventually married a member of the Jewish people.

In ancient Rome while there were some commonalities with the Greek system, as the Empire grew prostitutes were often foreign slaves caught, bought, or raised for that purpose, sometime by large-scale prostitutes farmers. Enslavement into prostitution was sometimes used as a legal punishment against criminal free women.

However, in most villages in Cross River State, Nigeria, prostitution originated when girls leave the village to cities in search for greener pastures. While there, these girls pass through difficulties in securing a job, so on the alternative there will resort to prostitution for money which there send to their poor parents in the village. During festive periods like Christmas, there will travel down to the village with beautiful gifts items, clothing's, shoes and food items for members of their families. As a result, other village girls will be attracted and would desire to travel to the cities with them with little or no idea of what these girls do to get money. Parents also encourage their daughters to go to cities to work and bring money for the family upkeep. Some of these girls return with HIV/AIDS, some come back confessing what they do in city and some others came back very sick and at the point of death. Those who came back with HIV not knowing their status spread the diseases and other sexually transmitted diseases to men who had sexual intercourse with them. This became a social problem that affected significant number of people in villages.

Definition of concepts

Prostitution: Prostitution is the act of engaging in sexual activity, usually with individuals other than a spouse or friend in exchange for immediate payment in money or other valuables. Prostitutes may be of either sex and may engage in either heterosexual or homosexual activity, but historically most prostitution has been by female with males as clients.

Garner (1999) defined prostitution as the act or practice of engaging in sexual activities for money or its equivalent. It is a criminal act in the United States. Prostitution is also referred to as commercial or public sex workers. It is estimated that over 92,000 men, women and juveniles are arrested yearly for prostitution (FBI, 2000). The number of juveniles engaging in prostitution is estimated at between 100,000 and 300,000 per year.

Sociologist agreed on three points in defining prostitution, namely:

1. It is sexual in nature, and the reward for performing the sexual act is either money or other material goods exchange at or near the time of the act.

2. The relationship between the provider and the recipient of sexual services involved neither love nor affection.
3. Because there is an exchange of services for material reward, prostitution is either full or part time vocation. Furthermore, prostitutes are not necessarily females or adult; male and female prostitutes of various ages provide sexual services for both the opposite and the same sex.

Social problem: Horton (1965) defined social problem as a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable about which it is felt that something can be done through collective social action. A situation where people begin to say “this is horrible, why can’t something be done about it”; then we have a social problem. Thus a condition becomes a social problem only when a valued judgement is made that the condition is undesirable and curable.

Fuller (1938) defined social problem as representing a social condition which is regarded by a considerable number of people as undesirable and hence these persons believed that something ought to be done about the situation.

Manis (1977) defined social problem as “those conditions identified by scientific inquiry and values as detrimental to the well-being of human societies”. Examples include poverty, prostitution, abortion, drug addiction, homosexuality, child abuse, wife battery, armed robbery, unemployment etc.

Types of prostitution

There are different types and ways in which people engage in prostitution. These are;

1. **Street Prostitution:** In this type of prostitution, the prostitute solicits customers while waiting at street corners or walking alongside a street, usually dressed in skimpy, suggestive clothing. Often the prostitute (commonly called a hooker”, “street hooker or “street walker” to distinguish them from other sex workers) appears to mind his/her own business and wait for the customers to initiate contact. Street prostitution differs significantly from “indoor prostitution”, which refers to call girls, escort agencies, and worker in bars, brothels and massage parlours.. Generally the indoor prostitution is safer for the workers as she has little or no negative impact on the surrounding community, it is highly paid than street prostitution and the worker are more satisfied with their work than street prostitutes (Weitzer 2000, 2005).

2. **Escort/ out-call Prostitution:** Escort agencies maintain a data base of employees of different types in order to cater for a wider client base. Some agencies may specifically deal in a certain type of prostitution. There are male-for-male, female –for male, and female-for female escort agencies, as

well as few male –for-female agencies, Agencies commonly specialise in only one sex. Transsexual prostitutes are available from some escort agencies.

3. **Sex tourism:** Some sex tourism organize themselves around a number of websites where there boast about their conquests, share photo of their sex partners, discuss tip on finding prostitution at the best possible rate in foreign countries and how to avoid detection both at home and aboard.

4. **Window or doorway prostitution:** this has to do with a brothel with sex worker on public display. Window prostitution is preferred in cold climates while doorway prostitution is preferred in warmer places.

5. **Massage parlour:** this is a premises ostensibly dedicated to providing massage, but a range of sexual services may be provided.

6. **Door knock or hotel prostitution:** here clients are approached in their hotel rooms or boarding houses.

7. **Survival sex prostitution:** this is a matter of degree where starvation or other serious deprivation is imminent, particularly for dependent, food; security may be the currency rather than money.

8. **Bondage and discipline prostitution:** here sexual fantasy through role play involves the inflicting of pain, but genital contact is not routine.

9. **Beer girl's prostitution:** here young women are hired by major companies to promote and sell products in bars and clubs. Sexual services are sold to supplement income.

10. **Transport prostitution:** here the sex worker man board vehicles to service the crew or passenger or pick up client at the station and terminals.

CAUSES/FACTORS OF PROSTITUTION

1. **Poverty:** this is one of the major reasons that cause prostitution business. Poverty is the system that commonizes and dehumanizes the bodies and person of women and children of both sexes for the use and profit of men. Prostitution in Nigeria is a serious social problem and its solution has been rendered difficult by the problem of poverty.

2. **Trafficking:** The trafficking of Nigerian girls and women into Italy for prostitution started around the second half of the 1980s following the increasing economic difficulties cause by the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the then Nigerian Government on the order of the International Monetary Fund. They started leaving the country on promises of fantastic well-paying jobs in Europe, in factories, offices and farms. They arrived in Italy only to find them sold into sexual slavery and force to prostitute themselves to pay the so called debts which they are told they incurred in being helped to come to Europe.

3. **Parent overlook on their children:** Some parents have formed the habit of sending their children away for unnecessary reasons due to one thing

or the other which is very bad and can lead the child into any business like prostitution. Most parent do not give the children the proper guidance and counselling, they over pamper them, they allow them mingle with the wrong peers and this could lead to deviant ant criminal behaviour as well as prostitution.

4. Laziness from youth: Laziness is a disease that affects our youth today and can lead to prostitution that is seen as an easy business that generates fast money. Some youth need manner from heaven, in fact, they do not want to suffer to make a living and this is affecting the society, they see prostitution as a free business one can do without employment and stress.

5. Unemployment: if there is no employment, women particularly may resort to prostitution as a means of occupation in order to earn a living. And also most girls whose parents are unemployed go into prostitution to train them in the higher institution while some girls do so because of greed for money.

6. Otengwo (2002) observed that many ladies turn themselves to prostitution just for the sake of purchasing power and they have unaccountable ways of seducing those they perceived as rich people, meaning that most of the ladies today do not believe in the philosophy of hard-work but rather prefer selling themselves instead of working to get what they want.

7. Lault (1984) Identified three causes of prostitution: these are;

- a. Exploitation:** This is associated with teenage runaways who are approached by exploitative pimps at bus stations etc., offered food, and then later convinced or coerced into paid sex.
- b. Recruitment by a big-sister figure:** This involves sexually active youth who hang together, party together and offered each other support for adventure and excitement. After receiving occasional payment for partying, sex for fun gradually becomes sex for profit. Those in the group already accepting money for sex convince newcomers to redefine the meaning of their sexual activity.
- c. The independent pragmatic decision:** This involves more mature individuals, 18-24, who make a pragmatic decision to enter the profession based on economic necessity; given a poor job market and limited skills, they can simply make more money that way. In addition to these points, some people also take up prostitution because they are emotionally attached to someone-a “friend” or “lover” that encourages them to take up the trade.

Theories of prostitution

There are at least three theories about prostitution: Functionalist, Feminist and Social-Psychological. The first two focuses on explaining why

prostitution persists despite effort to eradicate it; the later focuses on the individual prostitute- explaining why some women are more likely than other to become prostitutes.

The functionalist theory, rooted in the work of Kingsley Davis (1971), assert that there are two reasons why prostitution exists. The first is the system of sexual morality that ostensibly condemns prostitutes, but has the unintended consequence of encouraging it. This create advantages for prostitution in two ways: dividing sex into “meaningful” (with one spouse), and “meaningless” (with a prostitutes). This has the effect of encouraging men to go to a prostitute if they want to have “meaningless” sex. Second by defining certain sex act like anal or oral sex as immoral, not to be indulged in with one’s moral spouse, the moral order encourages men to turn to immoral women for these sex acts. The moral systems in effect create a demand for prostitution.

The second reason for the existence of prostitution is also ironic; prostitution functions to strengthen sexual morality. This act as a contrast or counterpoint that keeps the wives as the daughters or the respectable citizenry pure. The sex industry encourages men to go to prostitutes for premarital sex, extramarital sex or other immoral sex so that they don’t have to pressure or persuade respectable women to engage in the same immoral sex. By thus preserving the sexual morality of conventional women, constituting nearly half of human kind, the level of society’s morality should be higher than if any woman engages in the same sexual immoralities.

Hence, Davis theory suggests that prostitution exists because the moral system paradoxically encourages it, and in turn serves the important function of preserving feminine virtue.

Social psychological theory: Under this view, a combination of social and psychological factors causes some women to become prostitutes. These include:

1. **Predisposing factors:** Struggling with parental promiscuity, parental neglect, child abuse, or other traumatic events.
2. **Attracting factors:** The belief that a woman can have an easy life or lots of money as a prostitute.
3. **Precipitating factors:** Being unemployed, meeting a prostitute friend or being pressured by a pimp to sell sex.

Most psychologist stress the predisposing factors, suggesting these lead to prostitution through feeling of loneliness, unworthiness, lack of self control and inability to establish stable relations with others. Sociologist disagrees with this assumption that prostitutes are abnormal even if they have been abused. It seem largely a matter of emotional socialization through parental abuse that teaches one to be a normal prostitute able to detach herself emotionally from anyone who treat her similarly as an object.

With this emotional detachment, she may find it easier to enter into prostitution. In short, some women are more likely than others to become prostitutes not because they are abnormal but because they are normal for being able to withhold affection from their customers in the same way as a normal child abuse victim withhold affection from her parent. But this capacity for emotional detachment may only predispose a woman towards entering prostitution; it is not enough she is more likely to begin selling sex if the attraction and precipitation factors (e.g. money and contact) also appear in her experience as has been suggested by the theory and some research (Perkins, 1991; Henry, 1977).

Feminists theory: They argue that society maintain a sexist view that only promiscuous women are a threat to the moral order, and this is why prostitutes are far more likely to be arrested than their male customers. Why such men aren't considered a threat? Because the moral system reflect the larger, patriarchal, gender stratified system in which dominate and exploit women?

Feminist theory asserts that the patriarchal system encourages prostitution by creating both demand and supply for it. On the demand side, boys are socialized to be dominant over girls, and when adults, to desire sexual domination of women which can be easily realized through sex with prostitutes. If a young man doesn't want to go along, his peers will pressure him. On the supply side, girls are socialized to be submissive to boys, and later as adults to men in work, play and sex. Simultaneously, women are relegated to predominantly low status employment including prostitution. All this explain why prostitution is usually more prevalent in traditional societies marked by great gender inequality, when compared to more modern societies with less gender inequality.

Feminist asserts that the patriarchal system encourages prostitution, while prostitution reinforces patriarchy. This is by perpetuating beliefs that oppress women in many domains of their lives. Hence, by selling their bodies as a commodity, prostitutes convey the message that women can be bought or used as an object-reinforcing the prevailing patriarchal notion that "all women have a price". Hence, men continue to support the patriarchal structure of gender inequality, which in turn encourages prostitution.

Consequences of prostitution

Prostitutes are at risk and are also sometime the target of serial killers who may consider them easy targets, or use the religious and social stigma associated with prostitutes as justification for their murder. Being criminals in most jurisdictions, prostitutes are less likely than the law-abiding to be looked for by police if they disappear, making them favoured targets of predators.

Prostitution is associated with the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as HIV. One of the main reasons for the rapid spread of HIV in Nigeria is the massive transmission among sex workers and clients. HIV is tied to prostitution in Africa with one study finding that encounters with prostitutes produced 84% of new HIV infection in adults, and other sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhoea, pelvic inflammatory diseases and syphilis. The risk for HIV infection is increase because of multiple sex partners and limited safe sex practice. Some customers are willing to pay more for a sexual encounter if they do not have to use a condom. Based on research conducted by the centres for Diseases Control and Prevention, the rate of HIV infection for prostitutes is three times higher if they smoke crack cocaine. Other health issues associated with prostitution are early pregnancy for juveniles, rape, tuberculosis, post traumatic stress disorder, assault and other act of violence.

Considering the economic health issue of prostitution, it is argued that street prostitution is not victimless as it may damage the reputation and quality of life in the neighbourhood and diminish the value of property. Maxwell (2000) and other researcher have found substantial evidence that there is strong co-occurrence between prostitution, drug use, drug selling, and involvement in non drug crime, particularly property crime. Because prostitution is considered criminal in many jurisdictions, its substantial revenue are not contributing to the tax revenues of the state, and it workers are not routinely screened for sexually transmitted diseases which is dangerous in cultures favouring unprotected sex and lead to significant expenditure in health services. Prostitution also lowers the value of property as well as degrades the status of women.

Societal reactions

Prostitution tends to be contentious in the society in which it exists. The religiously inclined may be morally outraged by its presence, viewing it as a threat to the moral codes lay down in their scriptures. Others however are merely curious or view it as a necessary evil. Many feminist and women organizations are opposed to prostitution as they see it as a form of exploitation of women and male dominance over women and as a practice which is the result of existing patriarchal social order. The largest umbrella organization of women association in Nigeria which work to promote women rights and equality has condemned prostitution as an intolerable form of male violence.

Some ethnic groups in Nigeria do not accept prostitution; they see it as a taboo. For example the Edo (Benin) ethnic group traditionally does not socially accept prostitution. What was considered promiscuous was traditionally sufficient to ostracise any young girl or woman, both by her

family and the society. The social stigma was such that she could never aspire to marry within her social group and remain an outcast if she didn't leave the town. As regard a married woman, it was a taboo for her to so much so let another man who was not her husband to touch her even in the most innocent way. Where a married woman was inadvertently touched by another man outside her home, she was obliged to report the incident to her husband on reaching home. She was obliged to carryout special purification rites to cleanse her from the "cursed" action of the strange man.

Also the Muslim societies react violently to prostitution. Women caught in the act are either stoned to death or ostracised. Historically, abolitionist has dedicated themselves to rescuing women from prostitution, and training women to find alternative carriers or security in marriage. Abolitionist groups want to end the institution of prostitution, envisioning a world where no one sells sexual services for any reason. All members of society react negatively to prostitution because of the stigma associated with it. No one wants to associate with a prostitute or have one as a friend or neighbour because it is a dirty and shameful business.

Views from nigerian laws

There is no known law in Nigeria against prostitution. Social tolerance for prostitution has varied widely; some cultures in Nigeria have accepted it as a natural part of life, regulating it to prevent the spread of diseases or illness, and to prevent abuse of women. Other cultures have turned a blind eye, criminalizing it but not enforcing the law.

The government of Nigeria have not come up with any law that would regulate prostitution, except the law that regulate trafficking in person. However, Religious institution condemns the act through preaching. Therefore prostitution is legal in Nigeria but regulated prostitution is only restricted to particular areas like the Muslim societies where it is punishable by death.

In some countries like the United Nations, prostitution is illegal. The UN General Assembly adopted a convention stating that prostitution and the accompanying evil of trafficking in person for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person, requiring all signing parties to punish pimps and brothel owners and operators and to abolish all special treatment of prostitutes. As of January 2009, the convention was ratified by 95 member Nations including France, Spain, Italy, Denmark, etc.

Solution

In a global patriarchal society where there is legitimate male use of female bodies as disposable commodities, it is not possible to successfully

combat prostitution. To express outrage and call for an end to prostitution and trafficking of young women and children is contradictory and incoherent where we do not first put a stop to commercialisation of women's bodies. As long prostitution is tolerated and government permits it to be practiced as a legal and valid employment alternative, violence against women shall continue to be and it shall not be possible to eliminate prostitution. The following issues should be critically examined as a first step to the proposal of strategies to combat prostitution.

1. The abuse of women which prostitution constitutes and the need to outlaw it and find alternative solutions to men's problems of social identity, their difficulties of relationship and sexuality and sexual identity.

2. The recognition on a global unanimous basis that prostitution is a violation of women's human rights and that it is inherently a humiliation of their dignity as persons, as women and as mothers.

3. That the legitimization of prostitution and its promotion as an employment alternative is a direct cause of the International trafficking of women and children for prostitution and of paedophilia.

4. That prostitution is essentially violence and abuse of persons and should never be tolerated as a valid and healthy social exchange between men and women.

5. That poverty and the feminisation of poverty is one of the root causes of trafficking in women and children for prostitution.

6. The need to create legal possibilities of migration of people from poor countries, taking the economic interests of both immigrants and the receiving country into consideration;

7. The need to put at the fore front the interests of women and children and not the interest of state to combat illegal immigration and organise crime;

8. The need to consider that there can never be "consent" in prostitution because no woman has ever "chosen" to be a prostitute where she has had valid alternatives to prostitution. There are various studies which show this often unmentioned fact;

9. The need for a revival of solid cultural and social values which the so called modernity and urban civilization has eroded in many countries, both developed and developing. These are some of the issues which should be first addressed before one can objectively make proposals for strategies and programmes to combat prostitution.

Conclusion

We believe that only by going to the root cause of prostitution and trafficking, which are the factors that make up the demand, will we end the

sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children through prostitution and trafficking.

We need to urge all governments, NGOs, and religious communities to focus on reducing the demand for victims of sex trafficking and prostitution. All the components of the demand need to be penalized—the men who purchase sex acts, the exploiters, the traffickers and pimps who profit from the sale of women and children for sex, and the culture that lies about the nature of prostitution. The number of victims will be reducing if the demand for them is penalized. If there is no man seeking to buy sex acts, no woman child will be bought and sold. If there is no brothel waiting for victims, no victim will be recruited. If there is no state that profit from the sex trade, there will be regulations that will facilitate the flow of women from poor towns to wealthier sex industry centres. If there were no false messages about prostitution, no woman or girl would be deceived into thinking prostitution is a glamorous or legitimate job.

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