

Weaponizing Prostitution as Product of Poverty and Societal Malady in Ogun State, Nigeria

Balogun, Olukunle Olagunju

Taisolarin University of Education
Department of Adult and Development Education
College of Specialized and Professional Education
Email: balogunoo@tasued.edu.ng

&

Aderinto, Idowu Dare

Department of Industrial Technical Education
Tai-Solarin University of Education
Email: Idowudare36@gmail.com

&

Balogun, Tolulope Adeola

Sikiru Adetona College of Education, Science and Technology
Department of Social Studies
Omu-Ijebu, Ogun State
Email: Tolulopeadeola83@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examined weaponizing prostitution as product of poverty and societal malady in Ogun State, Nigeria. This study employed descriptive survey research design where questionnaire was used to acquire necessary data for the research work. Population comprises all women in Ijebu East Local Government, Ogun State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select one hundred and fifty (150) as sample for the study. Two (2) research questions were raised and answered in this study. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation statistical tools. Findings revealed that, poverty is a catalyst for prostitution which manifests through the absence of basic necessities, education, and access to employment. However, findings also revealed the interconnectedness of poverty; limited employment opportunities, gender inequality, human trafficking, and the lack of legal protection contribute to the vulnerability of individuals, especially women, to prostitution. Efforts to combat prostitution must go beyond mere regulation and legal measures. Economic empowerment programmes, education, and skill development initiatives emerge as crucial components in breaking the cycle of poverty-driven sex work. It is therefore recommended that government should implement targeted economic empowerment programmes that provide alternative sources of income, vocational training, and entrepreneurial opportunities in order to mitigate prostitution in the society.

Keywords: *Weaponizing, Poverty, Societal malady, Prostitution, Product*

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. Garner (2019) defines prostitution as the act or practice of engaging in sexual activities for money or its equivalent. Prostitution is also referred to as commercial or public sex workers.

Prostitution in Nigeria, like in many parts of the world, is a complex and multifaceted issue deeply intertwined with the socio-economic fabric of the nation. It is crucial to understand the underlying factors that drive individuals, particularly women, into this profession. Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa, grapples with a high incidence of poverty, exacerbated by a myriad of societal maladies (Manis, 2017). The intersection of poverty and societal issues has resulted in the weaponization of prostitution, transforming it into a survival strategy for many vulnerable individuals.

According to a study by Ojukwu (2019), Nigeria faces significant economic challenges marked by stark income inequality and a scarcity of employment opportunities. These economic disparities often leave marginalized individuals with limited choices for livelihood, pushing them towards alternative means of income generation, such as engaging in sex work. The cycle of poverty becomes a driving force, perpetuating the issue and deepening the vulnerability of those involved in prostitution.

Poverty in Nigeria is intricately linked to profound economic disparities, creating a landscape where a substantial portion of the population struggles to meet their basic needs. Ojukwu (2019) notes that income inequality has become a pervasive issue, with a significant gap between the affluent and the impoverished. The unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and wealth fosters an environment where vulnerable individuals, particularly women, face limited alternatives for economic sustenance. The lack of viable employment opportunities compounds the economic challenges faced by many Nigerians. Adepoju (2017) emphasizes that the scarcity of formal jobs economic exploitation, limited employment opportunities, human trafficking networks, gender inequality and exploitation, healthcare disparities, stigmatization and mental health etc leaves individuals with little choice but to explore alternative means of income generation. In such circumstances, engaging in sex work according to Adediran (2019) may emerge as a pragmatic survival strategy, driven by the urgency of securing financial resources to meet immediate needs. The desperation induced by pervasive poverty often leads individuals to make choices that they might not consider under more favorable circumstances. The work of Ojukwu(2019) reveals that the cycle of poverty perpetuates the involvement of individuals in sex work, creating a feedback loop where economic disenfranchisement pushes individuals toward prostitution, which, in turn, reinforces their marginalized economic status.

The link between poverty and prostitution manifests not only in economic disenfranchisement but also in profound public health implications. The lack of access to healthcare services for sex workers in impoverished communities contributes to the heightened risk of the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Aghaizu, 2015). The precarious economic situations of sex workers often result in limited resources for health protection measures, exposing them to greater health risks. The impact extends beyond the sex worker population, with potential consequences for the broader community. A comprehensive understanding of this dynamic is essential for crafting interventions that not only address the economic root causes but also prioritize public health concerns.

Stigma and societal discrimination against sex workers compound the mental health challenges faced by individuals engaged in prostitution. Okafor (2018) emphasizes the psychological toll of societal condemnation, with sex workers experiencing heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The intersection of poverty and mental health further complicates the ability of sex workers to seek help or access adequate support systems. Prostitution as a consequence of poverty reflects a systemic failure that extends beyond economic implications. By addressing the mental health challenges faced by sex workers, interventions can strive towards holistic solutions that acknowledge and mitigate the multifaceted impact of poverty on vulnerable individuals (Lautt, 2014).

Effectively addressing the consequences of prostitution as a product of poverty according to Adediran (2021) requires a dual-focus approach. Firstly, public health initiatives must be implemented to provide accessible healthcare services, including STI prevention and treatment, for sex workers, community involvement and education, implementing economic empowerment programmes to provide alternative sources of income for individuals vulnerable, advocating for legal reforms to ensure adequate protection and rights for individuals establishing support services, including counseling and rehabilitation, for individuals vulnerable(Aghaizu, 2015). These interventions should be sensitive to the economic realities of the population and designed to overcome barriers to healthcare access. Secondly, recognizing and destigmatizing sex work is essential for addressing the mental health consequences. Legal and societal reforms that challenge prevailing norms of discrimination against sex workers are crucial (Okafor, 2018). By integrating mental health support into existing services, interventions can contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty-driven prostitution and promote overall well-being.

Despite the pervasive challenges associated with the weaponization of prostitution in Nigeria, there are ongoing efforts by the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address the issue. Government initiatives have primarily focused on legal and policy frameworks aimed at regulating and controlling sex work (Adediran, 2021). These efforts, however, often lack a comprehensive approach that considers the root causes of prostitution, such as poverty and societal maladies. The work of Smith (2021) provides an insightful analysis of government-led initiatives, shedding light on the strengths and limitations of current legal and policy measures. Addressing the weaponization of prostitution in Nigeria requires a combination of legal reforms, targeted poverty alleviation measures, and initiatives addressing societal maladies. Drawing insights from current initiatives, challenges in implementation, and case studies can inform future prospects and recommendations for a more comprehensive and effective approach.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the research is to examine weaponizing prostitution as product of poverty and societal malady in Ogun State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine ways of weaponizing prostitution as a product of poverty and societal malady in Ogun State..
- ii. Examine ways of fighting prostitution against poverty and societal malady in Ogun State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- iii. What are the ways of weaponizing prostitution as a product of poverty and societal malady in Ogun State, Nigeria?.
- iv. What are the ways of fighting prostitution against poverty and societal malady in Ogun State, Nigeria?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population comprises all women in Ijebu East Local government; Ogun State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 150 women in Ijebu East Local Government, Ogun State as sample for study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The questionnaire contained items on the main title of study. The instrument was given to experts for construct and content validation. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation statistical tools.

Presentation of Data Analysis and Results

Research Question one: What are the ways of weaponizing prostitution as a product of poverty and societal malady in Ogun State, Nigeria?.

Table 1

S/N	ITEMS	AGREED		DISAGREED		Mean (x̄)	S.D
		Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %		
1.	Poverty leads to the economic exploitation of individuals, forcing them into prostitution.	98	65.3	52	34.7	3.65	0.752
2.	Societal maladies, such as limited job opportunities, push individuals into prostitution as a survival strategy.	143	95.3	7	4.7	3.46	0.692
3.	Poverty makes individuals more vulnerable to being exploited by human trafficking networks, leading to their involvement in prostitution.	121	80.7	29	19.3	3.12	0.827

4.	Gender-based economic disparities and societal norms contribute to the weaponization of prostitution, particularly affecting women.	104	69.3	46	30.7	2.86	1.036
5.	Poverty and societal maladies contribute to healthcare disparities among individuals engaged in prostitution.	136	90.6	14	9.4	3.19	0.745
Weighted Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.256 and SD = 0.810							

Table 1 above, shows that poverty leads to the economic exploitation of individuals, forcing them into prostitution. ($\bar{x} = 3.65$, $SD = 0.752$), societal maladies, such as limited job opportunities, push individuals into prostitution as a survival strategy ($\bar{x} = 3.46$, $SD = 0.692$), poverty makes individuals more vulnerable to being exploited by human trafficking networks, leading to their involvement in prostitution ($\bar{x} = 3.12$, $SD = 0.827$), gender-based economic disparities and societal norms contribute to the weaponization of prostitution, particularly affecting women ($\bar{x} = 2.86$, $SD = 1.036$) and poverty and societal maladies contribute to healthcare disparities among individuals engaged in prostitution ($\bar{x} = 3.19$, $SD = 0.745$). From table 1 above, research question 1 has a weighted mean of 3.256 while the benchmark is 2.50. This shows ways of weaponizing prostitution as a product of poverty and societal malady in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Hence, this finding corroborates the findings of Adepoju (2017) who emphasizes that the scarcity of formal jobs economic exploitation, limited employment opportunities, human trafficking networks, gender inequality and exploitation, healthcare disparities, stigmatization and mental health etc leaves individuals with little choice but to explore alternative means of income generation. In such circumstances, engaging in sex work may emerge as a pragmatic survival strategy, driven by the urgency of securing financial resources to meet immediate needs.

Research Question two: What are the ways of fighting prostitution against poverty and societal malady in Ogun State, Nigeria?

Table 2

S/N	ITEMS	AGREED		DISAGREED		Mean (\bar{x})	S.D
		Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %		
1.	Community involvement and education are crucial in addressing the prostitution	104	69.3	46	30.7	3.09	0.882
2.	Implementing economic empowerment programs to provide alternative sources of income for individuals vulnerable to engaging in prostitution	107	71.4	43	28.6	3.01	0.894
3.	Promoting education and skill development initiatives to enhance employment opportunities and reduce reliance on prostitution.	120	80.0	30	20.0	3.07	0.887
4.	Advocating for legal reforms to ensure adequate protection and rights for individuals engaged in sex work, while also discouraging exploitative practices.	114	76.0	36	24.0	3.12	0.955
5.	Establishing support services, including counseling and rehabilitation, for individuals vulnerable to prostitution due to poverty and societal maladies.	107	71.3	43	28.7	3.14	0.956
Weighted Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.086 and SD = 0.915							

Table 2 above, indicates that community involvement and education are crucial in addressing the prostitution ($\bar{x} = 3.09$, $SD = 0.882$), implementing economic empowerment programs to provide alternative sources of income for individuals vulnerable to engaging in prostitution ($\bar{x} = 3.01$, $SD = 0.894$), promoting education and skill development initiatives to enhance employment opportunities and reduce reliance on prostitution. ($\bar{x} = 3.07$, $SD = 0.887$), advocating for legal reforms to ensure adequate protection and rights for individuals engaged in sex work, while also discouraging exploitative practices ($\bar{x} = 3.12$, $SD = 0.955$) and establishing support services, including counseling and rehabilitation, for individuals vulnerable to prostitution due to poverty and societal maladies ($\bar{x} = 3.14$, $SD = 0.956$) From table 2 above, research question 3 has a weighted mean of 3.086 which is above the benchmark of 2.50. These are ways of fighting prostitution against poverty and societal malady in Ogun State, Nigeria.

The above finding is in congruence with the findings of Aghaizu (2015) who states that addressing the consequences of prostitution as a product of poverty requires a dual-focus approach. Public health initiatives must be implemented to provide accessible healthcare services, including STI prevention and treatment, for sex workers, community involvement and education, implementing economic empowerment programmes to provide alternative sources of income for individuals vulnerable, advocating for legal reforms to ensure adequate protection and rights for individuals establishing support services, including counseling and rehabilitation, for individuals vulnerable.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, poverty was seen as a catalyst for prostitution, manifests through the absence of basic necessities, education, and access to employment. The findings reveal the interconnectedness of poverty, limited employment opportunities, gender inequality, human trafficking, and the lack of legal protection in contributing to the vulnerability of individuals, especially women, to prostitution. The public health implications, including the spread of sexually transmitted infections and mental health consequences, underscore the urgency of addressing this issue comprehensively. However, efforts to combat prostitution in Ogun State must go beyond mere regulation and legal measures. Economic empowerment programs, education, and skill development initiatives emerge as crucial components in breaking the cycle of poverty-driven sex work. Furthermore, community outreach, public awareness campaigns, and destigmatization efforts are essential for creating an environment that supports individuals seeking alternatives to prostitution.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. Government should implement targeted economic empowerment programs that provide alternative sources of income, vocational training, and entrepreneurial opportunities to individuals vulnerable to engaging in prostitution.
2. Government should promote education and skill development programs to enhance employment opportunities, empowering individuals to break the cycle of poverty and reducing the likelihood of resorting to prostitution.
3. Government should conduct community outreach and awareness campaigns to challenge stigmatization and societal norms associated with sex work, fostering a more supportive environment for individuals seeking alternatives.
4. Government should advocate for legal reforms that ensure the rights and protection of individuals engaged in sex work, addressing exploitative practices and providing avenues for legal recourse.
5. Government should improve healthcare access for individuals engaged in prostitution, addressing public health concerns, and offering comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health.
6. Government should establish support services, including counseling and rehabilitation, specifically designed for individuals vulnerable to prostitution due to poverty and societal maladies.

7. There should be collaboration between community policing initiatives and law enforcement agencies to address the root causes of prostitution, ensuring the safety of individuals involved and discouraging exploitation.
8. Government should launch targeted public awareness campaigns to challenge cultural norms that contribute to the weaponization of prostitution, fostering a more inclusive and accepting society.
9. Government should involve local communities in decision-making processes to ensure that anti-prostitution strategies are culturally sensitive, relevant, and reflect the needs of the affected populations.

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