



Contents lists available at ojs.aeducia.org

Journal of Gender and Millennium Development Studies

Volume 2, Issue 1 (2025), 10.64420/jgm.2025.v2i1

Journal homepage: <https://ojs.aeducia.org/index.php/jgm>

JGMDS

E-ISSN 3063-3850

P-ISSN 3063-3842

Research Article

Read Online: <https://doi.org/10.64420/jgm.2025.v2i1.166>

Open Access

Key Issues in Addressing Trafficking in Women and Children in Nigeria

Chioma Okeoma Okoye^{1*}, Enright Que Okolie², Anslem Uchechukwu Abonyi³

^{1,2,3} Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Nigeria

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: April 04, 2025

Revised: April 25, 2025

Accepted: May 05, 2025

Published: May 15, 2025

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ABSTRACT

Background: Human trafficking, particularly involving women and children, remains a pervasive and deeply rooted issue in Nigeria. Despite existing laws and interventions, systemic weaknesses continue to hinder effective responses to trafficking. **Objective:** This study examines the key socio-economic, legal, and institutional challenges that impede efforts to combat human trafficking in Nigeria, with a focus on women and children. **Method:** A qualitative research approach was adopted, utilizing document analysis. Data were drawn from policy documents, official reports, and academic literature. Sources included government agencies, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The data were analyzed using a thematic review framework to ensure depth and integrity. **Result:** The study found that corruption, official complicity, and poor law enforcement are major obstacles to anti-trafficking initiatives. Other contributing factors include inadequate victim support systems, social stigma, cultural barriers, legal loopholes, and weak border control. Socioeconomic drivers such as poverty and unemployment further increase vulnerability to trafficking. Additionally, the misuse of technology has facilitated more complex trafficking networks, while limited international cooperation and insufficient funding continue to undermine progress. **Conclusion:** Combating human trafficking in Nigeria requires comprehensive legal reform, stronger institutional accountability, enhanced support for victims, robust public awareness campaigns, and greater international collaboration. A coordinated and sustainable national strategy is essential to address the multifaceted nature of the problem. **Contribution:** This study offers critical insights into the structural and systemic drivers of human trafficking in Nigeria and provides practical policy recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of anti-trafficking efforts at both national and international levels.

KEYWORDS

Health needs, Health problems, Childbearing, Women

1. INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking, particularly the trafficking of women and children, remains a pervasive challenge in Nigeria. The country serves as a source, transit, and destination for trafficking, with victims subjected to forced labor, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude. Despite national and international efforts to combat trafficking, economic,

* **Corresponding Author:** Chioma Okeoma Okoye, chiomaokeye@gmail.com

Faculty of Law, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, Anambra State Nigeria

Address: QR9P+WFR, Uli, Atughobi, Nigeria

How to Cite (APA 7th Edition):

Okoye, C. O., Okolie, E. Q., & Abonyi, A. U. (2025). Key Issues in Addressing Trafficking in Women and Children in Nigeria. *Journal of Gender and Millennium Development Studies*, 2(1), 23-44. <https://doi.org/10.64420/jgm.2025.v2i1.166>



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social, and institutional factors continue to fuel the problem (Broad et al., 2022). The high prevalence of trafficking in Nigeria is driven by poverty, unemployment, weak legal enforcement, and deeply entrenched cultural practices that normalize exploitative labor and migration. One of the major causes of trafficking in Nigeria is economic hardship, which pushes vulnerable individuals, especially women and children, into exploitative situations. Many victims are deceived by traffickers with false promises of employment, education, or better living conditions abroad. In reality, they are subjected to harsh working conditions, forced prostitution, or domestic servitude (Lemke, 2017). The lack of economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas, makes many individuals susceptible to trafficking networks that operate under the guise of recruitment agencies or family acquaintances. Additionally, cultural practices such as child fostering and early marriages increase the vulnerability of children, particularly girls, to trafficking (Green, 2021).

The complicity of corrupt officials also plays a significant role in perpetuating human trafficking in Nigeria. Some law enforcement officers, immigration personnel, and border control agents accept bribes to allow traffickers to operate freely or to avoid prosecution (Khandaker et al., 2024). This weak enforcement of anti-trafficking laws emboldens traffickers, making it difficult to dismantle their networks. Furthermore, the judicial system in Nigeria is often slow in prosecuting traffickers, leading to a lack of deterrence against such crimes. The absence of specialized training among law enforcement officers and judicial personnel further hampers efforts to effectively handle trafficking cases (Albright, et al. (2020). The role of technology in trafficking has also become a growing concern. Traffickers increasingly use social media and online job portals to recruit victims under false pretenses. Many unsuspecting women and children are lured into trafficking situations through online interactions, making it harder for law enforcement agencies to track and apprehend perpetrators (Olubunmi et al., 2015). Weak border control and poor international cooperation further complicate the issue, as traffickers easily transport victims across borders with limited oversight.

Victims of trafficking often face significant barriers in seeking justice and rehabilitation. Limited access to victim support services, inadequate shelters, and the criminalization of victims, particularly those forced into prostitution, create additional challenges (Bouché et al., 2023). Many trafficked individuals are treated as criminals rather than victims in need of rehabilitation and legal assistance (Jones, 2023). Moreover, patriarchal norms and gender inequality contribute to the disproportionate targeting of women and girls, as they are often denied education and economic opportunities, making them more vulnerable to exploitation (Gacinya, 2020). Human trafficking, particularly the trafficking of women and children, remains a serious human rights crisis in Nigeria. Despite legislative efforts and institutional responses, trafficking networks continue to operate, exploiting systemic weaknesses and socio-economic vulnerabilities.

This study is motivated by the need to critically examine the key issues that hinder the effective prevention and response to trafficking. Corruption and the complicity of officials remain significant barriers, as traffickers often evade justice due to weak law enforcement and bribery. Inadequate victim support and rehabilitation services further worsen the situation, leading to re-trafficking and psychological distress among survivors. Cultural and societal barriers, such as child fostering and gender-based discrimination, contribute to the persistence of trafficking, while gaps in legal frameworks and poor implementation hinder effective prosecution. Weak border control and cross-border trafficking facilitate the movement of victims, making international cooperation essential. Additionally, technological advancements have enabled traffickers to exploit the internet, necessitating modernized anti-trafficking strategies. Addressing these challenges is imperative to protect vulnerable populations, promote justice, and ensure a coordinated, well-funded, and sustainable response to human trafficking in Nigeria.

Existing studies on human trafficking in Nigeria often focus on individual aspects such as legal frameworks, socio-economic drivers, or victim rehabilitation. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research that integrates these factors to provide a holistic understanding of the systemic challenges in combating trafficking, particularly concerning women and children. Many previous studies also emphasize international legal instruments but do not sufficiently examine the role of local enforcement agencies, cultural norms, and technological advancements in facilitating trafficking. Additionally, research on human trafficking in Nigeria has largely been descriptive, with limited emphasis on evidence-based policy recommendations that address both preventive and response measures.

Human trafficking of women and children in Nigeria is a critical human rights issue, driven by poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and weak enforcement. As Nigeria functions as a source, transit, and destination for trafficking, researching the key issues is essential to uncover root causes, inform policy, and develop effective prevention and victim support strategies. This research supports global development goals and is vital not only for academic insight but also for social justice, helping to protect vulnerable populations and foster a safer, more equitable society.

The novelty of this research lies in its multi-dimensional approach, combining legal, socio-economic, institutional, and technological perspectives to analyze trafficking issues in Nigeria. Unlike previous studies, this research highlights the evolving role of digital platforms in expanding trafficking networks and the complicit role of recruitment agencies within local communities. Furthermore, by identifying gaps in law enforcement training, victim protection, and public awareness, this study provides actionable policy insights that go beyond theoretical discussions, offering practical solutions for policymakers, law enforcement, and civil society organizations to enhance anti-trafficking efforts in Nigeria.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach using document analysis to explore key issues in combating the trafficking of women and children in Nigeria. A thematic review framework was utilized to analyze existing literature, policy documents, and reports, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and interventions in human trafficking. Since the study does not involve human participants, ethical clearance was not required. All data were sourced from publicly available materials, ensuring proper citation and adherence to ethical research principles such as transparency, accuracy, and responsible use of secondary data.

2.2 Research Object

To ensure reliability and relevance, the study selected peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, international agency reports, and policy documents focused on human trafficking policies, intervention strategies, legal frameworks, and challenges in Nigeria. Studies published in English were considered, while those focusing on trafficking outside Nigeria, opinion pieces lacking empirical support, or duplicated reports with weak methodology were excluded.

2.3 Data Collected

Data sources included reports from the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), the Nigerian Ministry of Justice, and National Assembly records. International reports from organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UNICEF were reviewed. Scholarly articles were retrieved from databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ResearchGate, while reports from NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) were analyzed for insights into grassroots interventions.

A structured search strategy was applied using Boolean search operators to refine searches in academic databases and institutional websites. Search terms included "human trafficking in Nigeria and policy response," "trafficking of women and children in Nigeria and interventions," "challenges in combating trafficking in Nigeria," and "NAPTIP and anti-trafficking strategies."

2.4 Data Analysis

The study selection process involved systematic screening, starting with an initial review of titles and abstracts to assess relevance. Full-text assessments were conducted based on predefined criteria to ensure credibility and methodological rigor. A qualitative synthesis was then performed to compare different sources, identify patterns, and provide recommendations for enhancing anti-trafficking efforts in Nigeria.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Corruption and Complicity of Officials

Corruption and the complicity of officials are significant enablers of human trafficking, particularly in Nigeria, where systemic weaknesses in governance perpetuate the exploitation of women and children. Corruption is deeply embedded in the mechanisms meant to combat trafficking, thereby facilitating the activities of traffickers. Jancsics (2019) highlights that traffickers often bribe officials at border points, immigration offices, and law enforcement agencies to ensure safe passage for victims. This practice weakens the integrity of institutional frameworks designed to prevent trafficking and prosecute offenders.

McAdam (2013) further notes that corruption in the judiciary exacerbates the problem, as traffickers frequently escape justice through bribery and manipulation of legal processes. Cases against traffickers are often dismissed or delayed due to the interference of powerful individuals, reducing the deterrent effect of legal sanctions. This systemic corruption allows traffickers to operate with impunity, perpetuating the exploitation of women and children. Complicity refers to the active or passive involvement of officials in trafficking operations, ranging from negligence to direct collaboration with traffickers. Lemke (2017) describe instances where officials provide traffickers with falsified documents, such as passports and visas, to facilitate the movement of victims across borders. Some officials also tip off traffickers about impending raids, enabling them to evade capture. Broad et al. (2023) underscores the financial motivation behind this complicity, as poorly paid law enforcement agents are more susceptible to bribes. In many cases, these officials view trafficking as an opportunity for personal gain, disregarding their duty to protect vulnerable populations. This complicity not only enables trafficking but also undermines public trust in law enforcement agencies.

Institutional weaknesses in Nigeria create an environment where corruption and complicity thrive. Simbine et al. (2014) observes that anti-trafficking agencies, such as the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), often lack the resources and political backing to execute their mandates effectively. Corruption within these agencies further erodes their capacity to address trafficking, as funds allocated for victim rehabilitation and prevention campaigns are often misappropriated. Additionally, Green (2021) highlights the lack of accountability mechanisms to monitor the activities of officials involved in anti-trafficking operations. Without stringent oversight, officials implicated in trafficking-related corruption rarely face consequences, perpetuating a culture of impunity.

The socioeconomic environment in Nigeria also contributes to the prevalence of corruption and complicity in trafficking. Farhana & Abdul-Mannan (2024) argues that the low salaries of law enforcement agents and other officials create a financial vulnerability that traffickers exploit. This economic insecurity is compounded by the high level of unemployment and poverty in the country, which makes ethical behavior less sustainable for many officials. Khandaker-Mursheda et al. (2024) notes that traffickers often exploit these vulnerabilities by offering substantial bribes, which officials find difficult to resist. The resulting collusion between traffickers and officials creates a robust network that undermines anti-trafficking measures.

3.2 Inadequate Victim Support and Rehabilitation Services

Inadequate victim support and rehabilitation services significantly hinder efforts to address trafficking in women and children, particularly in Nigeria, where systemic challenges undermine the recovery and reintegration of victims. Effective support and rehabilitation are crucial for breaking the cycle of trafficking and preventing re-victimization. Support and rehabilitation services are essential for helping victims recover from the physical, emotional, and psychological trauma associated with trafficking. Albright et al. (2020) emphasize that providing victims with counseling, medical care, and vocational training can empower them to rebuild their lives and reduce their vulnerability to re-trafficking. However, in Nigeria, these services are often inadequate due to insufficient funding, lack of infrastructure, and poorly trained personnel.

Many rehabilitation centers in Nigeria are underfunded and poorly equipped, limiting their capacity to provide comprehensive care for victims. Armstrong & Greenbaum (2019) notes that most government-run facilities lack essential resources, such as safe housing, medical supplies, and trained staff, leaving victims without adequate support. This scarcity of resources is particularly acute in rural areas, where victims are often neglected due to the concentration of services in urban centers. Olubunmi et al. (2015) argue that the limited availability of rehabilitation services discourages victims from coming forward or cooperating with law enforcement. Fear of abandonment or inadequate care often leads victims to distrust the system, thereby complicating efforts to dismantle trafficking networks.

Psychosocial support is a critical component of rehabilitation, yet it remains one of the most neglected aspects of victim care in Nigeria. Evans (2022) highlights that many victims suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety due to their experiences. Unfortunately, the lack of trained counselors and psychologists in rehabilitation centers prevents victims from receiving the necessary mental health care. Additionally, stigma surrounding trafficking exacerbates the psychological burden on victims. According to Newberry (2024), societal perceptions of trafficking victims often blame them for their circumstances, further isolating them from their communities. This stigmatization hinders their reintegration and underscores the need for community-based sensitization programs as part of rehabilitation efforts.

Economic reintegration is another critical challenge for trafficking victims. Vocational training and employment opportunities are essential for ensuring victims can sustain themselves independently after leaving rehabilitation

centers. [Bouché & others \(2023\)](#) observes that most victims lack the skills or resources needed to secure stable employment, leaving them vulnerable to re-trafficking. Unfortunately, existing vocational training programs in Nigeria are often poorly designed and disconnected from the labor market. [Shih \(2023\)](#) criticizes the lack of collaboration between rehabilitation centers and industries, which results in victims being trained in low-demand skills. This mismatch limits their ability to secure meaningful employment and achieve financial independence.

Policy gaps and weak implementation further undermine the effectiveness of victim support and rehabilitation services. [Onu & Kolawole \(2020\)](#) note that while Nigeria has enacted laws and policies, such as the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, these frameworks often lack the necessary funding and political will to be effectively implemented. Moreover, [Le et al. \(2018\)](#) highlights that inter-agency coordination is a major challenge, as different stakeholders, including the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), non-governmental organizations, and community groups, often work in silos. This lack of collaboration results in fragmented services and duplication of efforts, leaving victims without a cohesive support system.

Cultural and societal factors also contribute to the inadequacy of victim support services. Many communities in Nigeria are reluctant to accept trafficking victims due to stigma or cultural biases, as noted by [Jones \(2023\)](#). This rejection often leaves victims without the familial or social support needed for successful reintegration. In addition, [Kariuki \(2023\)](#) argue that patriarchal norms often prioritize the rehabilitation of male victims over females, despite the fact that women and children constitute the majority of trafficking victims. This gender disparity further marginalizes women and exacerbates the challenges they face in rebuilding their lives.

3.3 Cultural and Societal Barriers to Combating Trafficking

Trafficking in women and children remains a pervasive issue in Nigeria, driven by structural and cultural factors that undermine efforts to combat it. While legislative frameworks and law enforcement mechanisms play essential roles in addressing trafficking, cultural and societal barriers often impede their effectiveness. These barriers, deeply rooted in traditional practices, gender norms, and societal perceptions, perpetuate trafficking and hinder victim rehabilitation. Traditional practices, such as child fostering and early marriage, often contribute to the vulnerability of women and children to trafficking. [Mbakogu \(2021\)](#) highlight that child fostering, a common practice in many Nigerian communities, often exposes children to exploitation when guardians prioritize financial gain over the welfare of the fostered child. Traffickers exploit this cultural norm by presenting themselves as benefactors offering education or employment opportunities for the child.

Similarly, early marriage, prevalent in some Nigerian communities, increases the risk of trafficking. According to [Khan \(2022\)](#), girls forced into early marriages are often subjected to domestic servitude or sexual exploitation, blurring the lines between cultural practices and trafficking. These cultural norms persist due to entrenched beliefs and societal acceptance, making it difficult to identify and prosecute traffickers operating within these contexts.

Patriarchal norms in Nigerian society contribute significantly to the trafficking of women and children. [Gacinya \(2020\)](#) argue that gender inequality perpetuates a perception of women and girls as commodities, increasing their susceptibility to trafficking. This commodification is reinforced by traditional views that prioritize male education and economic empowerment over that of females, leaving women and girls economically dependent and vulnerable. Furthermore, societal expectations often place a disproportionate burden on women to provide for their families, even under exploitative conditions. Traffickers exploit this expectation by luring women into trafficking networks with promises of lucrative jobs abroad, knowing that societal pressures will discourage them from reporting or escaping.

The stigmatization of trafficking victims is another significant societal barrier to combating trafficking. Victims, particularly women and children, are often blamed for their circumstances, perpetuating a culture of silence. [Fukushima et al. \(2020\)](#) note that societal perceptions frame victims as complicit in their exploitation, discouraging them from seeking help or reporting their traffickers. This stigma is compounded by religious and moral judgments. For example, victims of sexual exploitation are often ostracized by their communities and families, making reintegration difficult. [Bryant-Davis & Tummala-Narra \(2017\)](#) emphasize that this societal rejection not only isolates victims but also deters others from coming forward, thereby perpetuating trafficking networks.

Community-based responses to trafficking are often hindered by a lack of awareness and resistance to change. Many communities in Nigeria view trafficking as an inevitable outcome of poverty and limited opportunities rather than a criminal act requiring intervention. [Norwood \(2020\)](#) argue that this resignation is rooted in historical patterns of migration and labor practices, which have normalized exploitative arrangements. Resistance to change is also evident in community attitudes toward anti-trafficking initiatives. For instance, [Bryant-Davis & Tummala-Narra \(2017\)](#) report that some communities resist efforts to educate families about the risks of trafficking, perceiving them

as an attack on cultural values or a disruption of traditional practices. This resistance undermines preventative measures and allows traffickers to operate with impunity.

Superstition and ritual practices further complicate efforts to combat trafficking in Nigeria. Many traffickers use oaths and ritual practices to control their victims, exploiting deeply rooted beliefs in witchcraft and spiritual retribution. According to [Chisholm et al. \(2024\)](#), victims subjected to these practices often fear severe spiritual consequences if they disobey their traffickers or seek help. This psychological manipulation creates a significant barrier to escape and rehabilitation. Additionally, some communities view trafficking as a legitimate means of fulfilling spiritual or financial aspirations. [Geldenhuys \(2019\)](#) highlight cases where families willingly offer their children to traffickers as part of ritual sacrifices or for perceived economic benefits, reflecting the interplay between superstition and economic desperation.

3.4 Gaps in Legal Framework and Implementation

Trafficking in women and children remains a critical human rights issue in Nigeria, with significant challenges in the legal framework and its implementation. Although Nigeria has made strides in enacting anti-trafficking laws, systemic gaps hinder the effectiveness of these frameworks in addressing the scourge. Nigeria has enacted laws, such as the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, to combat trafficking. However, scholars argue that these laws often fall short of addressing the complexities of trafficking. [Ewulum & Ossy-Okoye \(2022\)](#) note that the legal definition of trafficking in Nigerian laws, while comprehensive, often overlooks emerging forms of exploitation such as cyber trafficking and organ harvesting. These omissions create loopholes that traffickers exploit to evade prosecution.

Furthermore, the penalties prescribed for traffickers are often inconsistent or insufficiently severe to deter offenders. [Mollema & Terblanche \(2017\)](#) argue that light sentences for trafficking offenses fail to reflect the gravity of the crime, thereby undermining the deterrence effect of the law. The implementation of anti-trafficking laws is frequently hampered by inadequate enforcement mechanisms. According to [Farrell \(2014\)](#), law enforcement agencies tasked with combating trafficking are often under-resourced, poorly trained, and susceptible to corruption. These deficiencies limit their capacity to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases effectively. [Igwe et al. \(2021\)](#) highlight the challenges faced by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), the primary agency responsible for addressing trafficking in Nigeria. The agency often operates with limited funding, inadequate personnel, and logistical constraints, which hinder its ability to carry out its mandate effectively.

Jurisdictional conflicts between federal and state authorities further complicate the enforcement of anti-trafficking laws. [Eze et al. \(2024\)](#) observe that inconsistencies between federal legislation and state laws create confusion and delays in prosecuting trafficking cases. For instance, while federal laws criminalize trafficking, some state-level customary laws may tacitly endorse practices that facilitate trafficking, such as early marriage or child fostering. Bureaucratic bottlenecks also impede the swift resolution of trafficking cases. [Bigio & Vogelstein \(2021\)](#) note that the lengthy and complex legal procedures discourage victims from pursuing justice, especially when they face intimidation from traffickers or their agents.

Many Nigerian anti-trafficking laws prioritize prosecution over victim protection and rehabilitation. Scholars argue that this imbalance undermines efforts to combat trafficking effectively. [Davy \(2015\)](#) emphasize that victims of trafficking often lack adequate legal support, such as access to legal representation, witness protection, and compensation for damages suffered. In addition, [Richie-Zavaleta et al. \(2021\)](#) point out that the lack of provisions for victim rehabilitation within the legal framework leaves survivors vulnerable to re-trafficking. Without comprehensive support systems, victims struggle to reintegrate into society, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation.

Corruption within the legal and law enforcement systems significantly undermines the implementation of anti-trafficking laws. [Islam \(2024\)](#) argue that traffickers often exploit corrupt officials to avoid arrest and prosecution. This complicity erodes public trust in the legal system and emboldens traffickers to continue their operations. [Paasche et al. \(2018\)](#) note that the low conviction rates for trafficking cases in Nigeria are partly due to the interference of corrupt officials who manipulate evidence, intimidate witnesses, or collude with traffickers. This corruption further discourages victims and their families from seeking justice. Trafficking in persons often involves transnational networks, necessitating international cooperation to address the issue effectively. However, Nigeria's legal framework lacks robust mechanisms for collaboration with other countries, particularly in West Africa, where trafficking routes are prevalent. This lack of cooperation hampers efforts to track and prosecute traffickers operating across borders.

3.5 Cross-border Trafficking and Weak Border Control

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3.6 Lack of Public Awareness and Education

Human trafficking remains a pervasive global challenge, with Nigeria being a significant source, transit, and destination country for trafficked women and children. One of the critical barriers to effectively combating trafficking is the lack of public awareness and education about its prevalence, causes, and consequences. Public awareness plays a fundamental role in the fight against trafficking. It empowers individuals and communities with the knowledge to recognize, report, and resist trafficking activities. According to Bishop et al. (2013), low levels of awareness among the general population, especially in rural areas, make individuals more susceptible to the deceptive tactics of traffickers. This lack of awareness often stems from limited access to information and the normalization of exploitative practices in certain communities.

Rafferty (2013) note that many Nigerians are unaware of the mechanisms through which trafficking operates, including the false promises of employment, education, or marriage. This ignorance contributes to a culture of silence, where victims and their families may be reluctant to speak out due to stigma or fear of retribution. Socio-cultural factors play a significant role in shaping public awareness about trafficking. In some Nigerian communities, cultural practices and traditional beliefs perpetuate gender inequality and the commodification of women and children. Such beliefs often undermine efforts to educate the public about the dangers of trafficking. For example, practices such as child fostering, though rooted in cultural traditions, can sometimes serve as a cover for trafficking activities. Religious institutions also have a mixed impact on public awareness. While some religious leaders actively

campaign against trafficking, others may unwittingly endorse practices that enable it, such as child labor under the guise of religious education (Anurioha, 2024). This duality highlights the need for targeted awareness campaigns that engage community and religious leaders as advocates for change.

Educational institutions are critical in fostering awareness about trafficking, but their potential remains largely untapped in Nigeria. According to Sotelo (2024), the absence of trafficking-related content in school curricula at all levels limits young people's understanding of the issue. This gap in education perpetuates a cycle of ignorance, where potential victims and future policymakers lack the knowledge to address trafficking effectively. Furthermore, advocacy efforts are often sporadic and poorly coordinated. Lemke et al. (2022) observe that many anti-trafficking campaigns in Nigeria rely on short-term projects funded by international organizations, with limited focus on sustainability. As a result, the impact of these campaigns is often short-lived, failing to produce the systemic change needed to combat trafficking.

The media is a powerful tool for raising awareness about trafficking, yet its potential remains underutilized in Nigeria. While some media outlets report on trafficking cases, these reports are often sensationalized and lack the depth needed to educate the public effectively. Moreover, limited access to media, particularly in rural areas, further reduces the reach of awareness campaigns. Social media, however, presents new opportunities for advocacy and education. Highlight the role of social media platforms in amplifying anti-trafficking messages, particularly among younger audiences. Despite its potential, the use of social media for trafficking awareness remains inconsistent, with limited government and organizational support for sustained online campaigns.

The lack of public awareness exacerbates the vulnerability of potential victims and their communities. DiRienzo & Das (2012) observe that uninformed individuals are more likely to fall prey to traffickers, particularly in regions with high poverty rates. Additionally, communities with limited awareness are less likely to recognize and report trafficking activities, allowing traffickers to operate with impunity. The stigma associated with trafficking further compounds the problem. Victims often face ostracism upon their return, discouraging them from seeking help or sharing their experiences. Eargle & Doucet (2021) argue that public awareness campaigns must address these stigmas, promoting a more supportive environment for victims and their reintegration into society.

3.7 Impact of Poverty and Unemployment as Root Causes

Poverty and unemployment are widely recognized as the primary drivers of human trafficking globally and particularly in Nigeria. These factors create economic vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit, targeting individuals and families in dire financial circumstances. Poverty, characterized by a lack of basic resources and opportunities, is a pervasive problem in Nigeria, especially in rural areas. It forces individuals and families to make desperate decisions, such as sending their children away for perceived better opportunities. According to Deb et al. (2020), families in poverty-stricken communities often fall prey to traffickers who promise education, employment, or a better life for their children. These promises, however, frequently lead to exploitation, forced labor, or sexual servitude.

Moreover, the multidimensional nature of poverty exacerbates its impact on trafficking. Mawere (2019) argue that poverty is not just about the absence of money but includes limited access to education, healthcare, and social services. This deprivation leaves individuals ill-equipped to recognize or resist the tactics used by traffickers. Unemployment, particularly among youth and women, is another critical factor driving trafficking in Nigeria. Tallmadge & Gitter (2018) observe that high unemployment rates create a pool of individuals willing to take risks for the promise of income. Women and girls, in particular, are disproportionately affected due to gendered inequalities in access to employment and education. As a result, they become more susceptible to traffickers who exploit their economic desperation. Economic disempowerment also plays a role in perpetuating trafficking. In communities where traditional economic activities have been disrupted by environmental degradation or conflict, individuals are more likely to seek alternative, often precarious, opportunities. Kumar (2013) highlight the impact of environmental factors, such as the loss of agricultural livelihoods, in pushing rural populations into urban areas where they are more vulnerable to trafficking.

The rural-urban migration dynamic fueled by poverty and unemployment is a significant contributor to trafficking. Many families send their children to cities in search of work or education, believing this will improve their prospects. However, these children often end up in exploitative situations, such as domestic servitude or street begging. Nimble et al. (2024) argue that this rural-urban migration exacerbates the vulnerability of women and children, as they lack the social networks and knowledge to navigate urban environments safely. Cross-border trafficking is another manifestation of poverty and unemployment. Economic hardships drive individuals to seek opportunities abroad, often through informal or illegal channels. Rafferty (2013) note that traffickers exploit this

desire by offering fake employment or education opportunities in foreign countries. Victims are frequently subjected to forced labor or sexual exploitation upon arrival.

Poverty also has an intergenerational dimension that perpetuates trafficking. Families trapped in cycles of poverty are more likely to see trafficking as a viable option for improving their circumstances. Raigrodski (2015) emphasize that children from impoverished families are more likely to drop out of school and enter the labor market prematurely, increasing their risk of trafficking. This intergenerational cycle underscores the need for comprehensive poverty alleviation programs to address the root causes of trafficking effectively. The gendered nature of poverty and unemployment further exacerbates the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking. Societal norms and practices, such as early marriage and limited access to education for girls, contribute to their economic disempowerment. These factors make women and girls more likely to accept risky opportunities offered by traffickers. In addition, women are often relegated to low-paying and insecure jobs, which do not provide sufficient income to escape poverty. This economic marginalization makes them more susceptible to trafficking, particularly for sexual exploitation.

Structural factors, including inadequate social protection systems and weak labor markets, exacerbate the impact of poverty and unemployment on trafficking. Marcus et al. (2014) argue that the lack of comprehensive social safety nets leaves vulnerable populations without support, forcing them to resort to risky measures. Furthermore, the informal nature of many economic activities in Nigeria limits the ability of individuals to secure stable employment, increasing their susceptibility to trafficking. Policy gaps also play a role in perpetuating poverty and unemployment.

3.8 Technological Exploitation and the Use of the Internet in Trafficking

Trafficking in women and children represents a significant violation of human rights, driven by complex socio-economic and technological factors. The advent of advanced digital tools has transformed the landscape of human trafficking, with perpetrators leveraging the internet for recruitment, exploitation, and evasion of law enforcement. Technological exploitation involves the use of advanced tools and digital platforms by traffickers to enhance the efficiency of their operations. Mobile technologies, social media, and encrypted communication channels have become integral in facilitating trafficking activities. Nigerian scholars highlight that traffickers exploit these tools to maintain anonymity, monitor victims, and expand their networks (Mendel & Sharapov, 2016). The ease of creating fake identities and profiles enables traffickers to deceive vulnerable women and children into exploitative situations. For instance, traffickers often advertise deceptive employment opportunities through online platforms, targeting individuals seeking economic opportunities to escape poverty.

Moreover, advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning have been co-opted by traffickers for predictive targeting. These technologies analyze online behaviors to identify vulnerable individuals, making it easier for traffickers to personalize their deceptive approaches. Nigerian research underscores that the lack of digital literacy among potential victims exacerbates their susceptibility to such tactics, particularly in rural areas where awareness of digital risks remains low. The internet serves as a double-edged sword in trafficking dynamics. While it offers tools for raising awareness and tracking illicit activities, it also provides traffickers with unparalleled opportunities for exploitation. Nigerian researchers emphasize that traffickers use social media platforms to groom victims, often pretending to be benefactors or romantic partners. The anonymity provided by online platforms enables traffickers to exploit victims while evading detection.

Additionally, the dark web has emerged as a critical enabler of trafficking. Nigerian studies indicate that traffickers use this concealed part of the internet to conduct illicit transactions, including the sale of women and children, without interference from law enforcement. The encrypted nature of the dark web makes it difficult for authorities to trace these activities, creating a safe haven for traffickers to operate. Online payment systems and cryptocurrencies further complicate efforts to disrupt trafficking networks by facilitating untraceable financial transactions (Babatunde, 2014).

3.9 Weak International Cooperation and Coordination

Trafficking in women and children is a global issue that demands coordinated international efforts. However, weak international cooperation and coordination pose significant challenges in addressing trafficking effectively. Human trafficking is a transnational crime that thrives on the inability of countries to effectively collaborate and share resources. Nigerian scholars emphasize that trafficking networks operate across borders, making it difficult for individual countries to address the problem in isolation. Traffickers exploit differences in legal frameworks, enforcement capacity, and political will to move victims through multiple countries, often evading justice (Bello,

2018). As such, international cooperation is crucial in combating these activities, as no country can effectively combat trafficking without working with others.

According to Nigerian researchers, the lack of synchronization among nations in terms of laws, policies, and enforcement mechanisms creates gaps that traffickers can exploit. Nigeria, being both a source and a destination country for trafficked women and children, faces the challenge of coordinating efforts with neighboring and distant countries. Ineffective coordination between countries, particularly in West and Central Africa, has resulted in slow progress in tackling human trafficking (Ebu, 2024). Several challenges impede effective international cooperation in tackling trafficking in women and children. One of the primary issues identified in Nigerian literature is the disparity in national laws and regulations on trafficking. While some countries, including Nigeria, have made strides in legislating against trafficking, others lack comprehensive anti-trafficking laws. According to Chuang (2014), this inconsistency in legal frameworks makes it difficult to coordinate efforts or hold traffickers accountable across borders. Traffickers exploit legal loopholes in countries with less stringent regulations, making it easier to move victims from one jurisdiction to another.

Furthermore, limited political will to prioritize anti-trafficking efforts at the international level contributes to the ineffectiveness of cooperation. Nigerian scholars highlight that some governments are unwilling to commit resources or invest in international partnerships due to competing national interests, lack of political stability, or corruption within law enforcement agencies (Eselebor, 2019). As a result, traffickers take advantage of the lack of political will to operate in regions where there is little governmental oversight. Another issue stemming from weak international cooperation is the insufficient sharing of intelligence and data. Nigerian research stresses that the lack of a unified global database on trafficking activities hinders efforts to track trafficking networks across borders. Countries often have limited access to information about ongoing trafficking operations, preventing the timely identification of victims or perpetrators (Njoku, 2015). The failure to share intelligence also affects the ability of law enforcement agencies to track and apprehend traffickers, allowing them to evade detection and prosecution.

While the United Nations (UN) and organizations such as INTERPOL play significant roles in facilitating international cooperation, their impact is often limited due to weak participation from member states. The Nigerian perspective highlights that although global frameworks, such as the UN's Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, are in place, their enforcement remains inconsistent. Many countries, including some African nations, struggle with implementing international treaties due to lack of resources, capacity, and political challenges (Birlikseven, 2019). The African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have made efforts to address trafficking within the African continent, but these initiatives often suffer from inadequate funding and lack of political commitment. Nigerian scholars suggest that although regional cooperation is essential, many African countries, including Nigeria, have been slow to fully implement the frameworks and protocols aimed at combating trafficking, which undermines their collective effectiveness (Nwogu, 2014).

The implementation of international frameworks is also hindered by the absence of a standardized definition of trafficking. As noted by Efrat (2016), countries may interpret trafficking laws differently, making it difficult to coordinate enforcement across borders. For instance, some nations may classify certain forms of exploitation as labor violations, while others may consider them trafficking offenses. This inconsistency results in a lack of uniformity in enforcement and protection efforts.

3.10 Inadequate Funding and Resources for Anti- Trafficking Initiatives

The fight against trafficking in women and children necessitates substantial financial and material resources to implement effective prevention, protection, and prosecution strategies. However, inadequate funding and limited resources remain persistent barriers that undermine anti-trafficking efforts globally, particularly in resource-constrained settings such as Nigeria. Anti-trafficking initiatives require consistent and adequate funding to support various activities, including victim rescue, rehabilitation, public awareness campaigns, law enforcement, and prosecution of traffickers (Abiodun et al., 2017). Nigerian scholars emphasize that sufficient resources are critical for the effective functioning of agencies tasked with addressing trafficking. However, the limited budget allocations for these initiatives often result in poorly equipped institutions, delayed interventions, and insufficient victim support services (Uzochukwu, 2021).

Without adequate funding, even well-intentioned anti-trafficking policies cannot be implemented effectively, leaving women and children vulnerable to exploitation. One significant issue is the lack of proper facilities for victim rehabilitation and reintegration. Nigerian studies reveal that shelters for trafficked individuals often lack essential resources such as medical care, psychological counseling, and vocational training programs. As a result, victims are left without the necessary support to rebuild their lives, making them susceptible to re-trafficking (Amadasun, 2022). Furthermore, the limited number of shelters across Nigeria means that many rescued victims cannot be accom-

modated, exacerbating their plight. Another challenge is the inability of law enforcement agencies to effectively investigate and prosecute trafficking cases. Nigerian researchers note that agencies such as the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) are often underfunded, leading to inadequate staffing, lack of training, and insufficient technological tools for tracking and apprehending traffickers (Uduji et al. 2019). The absence of specialized training for law enforcement officers impedes their capacity to identify and respond to trafficking incidents, especially those involving complex, transnational networks.

Public awareness campaigns also suffer from insufficient funding. Raising awareness about the risks of trafficking and educating communities on preventive measures is vital for reducing vulnerability. However, limited financial resources restrict the reach and effectiveness of such campaigns, particularly in rural and underserved areas where trafficking is most prevalent (Ezeibe et al. 2021). Nigerian scholars argue that without targeted, well-funded awareness programs, efforts to address trafficking will remain superficial and unsustainable. Inadequate resources also hinder Nigeria's ability to participate in regional and international anti-trafficking efforts. Nigerian literature highlights that cross-border collaboration requires financial investment in areas such as intelligence-sharing, joint operations, and legal harmonization. However, the scarcity of resources limits Nigeria's capacity to engage effectively with international partners, reducing the overall impact of collaborative initiatives (Puigvert et al., 2021). This lack of engagement allows traffickers to exploit gaps in regional coordination, perpetuating their operations.

Economic instability in Nigeria has further compounded the funding challenges faced by anti-trafficking initiatives. Fluctuations in government revenue, driven by factors such as declining oil prices and currency devaluation, have led to budget cuts across various sectors, including anti-trafficking programs. Nigerian researchers point out that when governments prioritize other pressing needs, such as security and infrastructure, funding for anti-trafficking efforts is often deprioritized (Lugo, 2016). This financial strain limits the ability of government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to sustain critical interventions.

3.11 The Role of Recruitment Networks (Family and Community Complicity)

The involvement of recruitment networks, particularly the complicity of family and community members, plays a critical role in perpetuating trafficking in women and children. These networks often exploit trust, cultural norms, and socio-economic vulnerabilities to recruit victims, making it difficult to identify and dismantle trafficking operations. Recruitment networks often leverage familial and community ties to gain access to potential victims. Nigerian scholars highlight that traffickers frequently rely on trusted individuals within communities, including relatives, friends, and local leaders, to facilitate recruitment. This strategy ensures minimal resistance from victims, who are more likely to trust and comply with offers presented by people they know (Leary, 2018). The use of trusted intermediaries reduces the risk for traffickers while increasing the likelihood of successful recruitment.

These networks operate through promises of better opportunities, including education, employment, and marriage. According to Liu (2017), recruiters manipulate victims and their families by presenting migration as a pathway to improved socio-economic status. Families, often facing financial hardships, may willingly cooperate with traffickers, believing they are securing a better future for their children. This complicity underscores the role of socioeconomic factors in fueling trafficking. Cultural norms and social pressures within Nigerian communities also contribute to family and community complicity in trafficking. In some cases, families feel obligated to accept offers from recruiters due to societal expectations, such as the need to marry off daughters or support extended family members. Nigerian researchers note that patriarchal structures and traditional gender roles often place women and children in vulnerable positions, making them targets for exploitation²⁷⁹. Furthermore, communities may perceive trafficking as a legitimate means of achieving social mobility. The success stories of individuals who migrated and achieved financial prosperity are often celebrated, creating a false perception that trafficking-related migration is a viable opportunity. Nigerian literature points out that these success narratives obscure the risks and realities of trafficking, leading to continued complicity by families and communities (FitzGerald, 2016).

Economic incentives also play a crucial role in sustaining recruitment networks. Nigerian researchers observe that traffickers often provide financial rewards to families and community members who assist in recruiting victims. These payments, though often modest, are significant for impoverished households and serve as a motivating factor for complicity (Renshaw, 2015). The financial allure makes it difficult for families to resist cooperating with traffickers, even when they suspect potential harm to their loved ones. In some cases, entire communities benefit economically from trafficking activities. Nigerian studies highlight instances where community members collectively participate in recruitment and transportation processes, driven by the promise of financial gains. This collective involvement complicates efforts to combat trafficking, as community members may actively resist external interventions to protect their economic interests.

3.12 Limited Access to Justice for Victims

Access to justice for victims of trafficking in women and children remains a critical challenge, particularly in Nigeria. Limited access to justice exacerbates the trauma experienced by victims and perpetuates the cycle of exploitation, as perpetrators are often not held accountable. Nigerian literature sheds light on systemic barriers to justice, ranging from inadequate legal frameworks to socio-economic and cultural constraints that hinder victims' ability to seek redress. Nigerian researchers point out that weaknesses in the legal framework significantly impede justice for trafficking victims (Villacampa & Torres, 2019). While Nigeria has enacted anti-trafficking laws, including the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, enforcement remains inconsistent. Legal provisions often fail to prioritize the rights and needs of victims, focusing more on criminalizing traffickers than supporting survivors (Villacampa & Torres, 2017).

The lack of specialized courts and adequately trained personnel further undermines victims' access to justice. Nigerian scholars argue that regular courts are ill-equipped to handle the complexities of trafficking cases, leading to delays and, in some instances, the dismissal of cases due to procedural lapses (Ward & Fouladvand, 2018). These systemic inefficiencies discourage victims from pursuing legal action. Financial barriers are a major impediment to justice for trafficking victims. Victims often lack the resources to hire legal representation or navigate the judicial process. Nigerian literature highlights that many victims come from impoverished backgrounds, making it nearly impossible to bear the costs associated with seeking justice (Schultz & Smiragina-Ingelström, 2023). Socio-economic constraints also play a role in limiting access to justice. For instance, victims who depend financially on their traffickers may face additional challenges in breaking free and pursuing legal redress. Nigerian researchers emphasize that the lack of economic empowerment programs for survivors perpetuates their vulnerability and limits their ability to seek justice (Kulig & Butler, 2019).

Stigmatization and social ostracism further restrict victims' access to justice. In many Nigerian communities, trafficking victims are often blamed for their predicament, especially women who are presumed to have willingly participated in exploitative activities. This victim-blaming culture discourages survivors from reporting their experiences or seeking legal recourse (Pascual-Leone et al., 2017). Nigerian scholars note that cultural norms and societal attitudes often protect traffickers, particularly in cases where family or community members are complicit. Victims who speak out risk social ostracism, making it difficult for them to reintegrate into their communities even after receiving legal support (Price et al., 2021).

Another significant challenge is the absence of effective victim protection mechanisms. Nigerian literature highlights that victims who testify against traffickers often face threats, intimidation, or retaliation. The lack of adequate witness protection programs deters survivors from cooperating with law enforcement or participating in legal proceedings (Richert, 2021). Additionally, shelter and rehabilitation services for victims are limited, particularly in rural areas. Without proper support systems, survivors struggle to rebuild their lives, and the psychological and emotional toll of trafficking hinders their ability to engage with the justice system effectively (Richie-Zavaleta et al., 2021).

Corruption within the judicial and law enforcement systems further undermines access to justice for trafficking victims. Nigerian scholars observe that traffickers often exploit corrupt officials to evade prosecution, resulting in a lack of accountability and justice for victims (Gonzalez, 2022). Bribes and other forms of corruption impede investigations, weaken cases, and contribute to low conviction rates for traffickers. Weak law enforcement also plays a role in limiting justice. Nigerian literature highlights that many law enforcement agencies lack the resources and training needed to identify, investigate, and prosecute trafficking cases effectively. This results in a lack of trust between victims and law enforcement, further discouraging survivors from seeking help (Tomkins, 2021).

3.13 Criminalization of Victims

The criminalization of victims of trafficking represents a significant barrier to eradicating the exploitation of women and children. Instead of being recognized as survivors in need of protection and rehabilitation, many victims are treated as criminals. This practice not only perpetuates the harm experienced by survivors but also undermines broader efforts to combat human trafficking. Nigerian scholars have extensively examined this issue, emphasizing its causes, consequences, and potential solutions within the local context. One of the primary reasons for the criminalization of trafficking victims is the failure to identify them correctly. Law enforcement agencies often mistake victims for offenders, particularly in cases involving prostitution or illegal migration (Bosley, 2021). This misidentification stems from inadequate training for police and judicial officers, who lack the skills to differentiate between perpetrators and individuals coerced into illegal activities. Nigerian researchers highlight that this problem is exacerbated by the absence of clear guidelines for victim identification. For instance, victims intercepted during police raids are frequently arrested and charged with crimes such as immigration violations, despite evidence

suggesting they were trafficked (Einbond et al., 2023). So far, there has been no special modification of the general law for these defences (Witkin, 2009). Such practices further entrench the cycle of victimization. These victims are hardly informed or proactive about their rights that applications could be made on their behalf for their prosecution to be discontinued, so it is simply not done

Societal stigma and gender bias also contribute to the criminalization of trafficking victims. Women and children, who constitute the majority of trafficking victims, often face blame and ostracism rather than support. Nigerian literature notes that women involved in forced prostitution are frequently labeled as complicit in their exploitation, resulting in their prosecution rather than rehabilitation (Devaney, 2022). Gender norms in many Nigerian communities reinforce these attitudes, with a tendency to hold women accountable for their circumstances. This cultural bias influences law enforcement and judicial processes, where victims are sometimes viewed as willing participants rather than coerced individuals (Rodríguez-López, 2020). Such perceptions hinder the recognition of trafficking victims as individuals in need of protection.

The criminalization of victims is further perpetuated by legal and institutional gaps in Nigeria's anti-trafficking framework. Although the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act criminalizes trafficking, it does not sufficiently address the protection of victims against prosecution for crimes committed under duress (Hebert, 2016). Consequently, many victims face charges for offenses such as document forgery, illegal migration, or sex work. Nigerian researchers argue that a lack of victim-centered approaches within the legal system compounds this issue. Courts often fail to consider the coercion and exploitation experienced by trafficking survivors, leading to punitive outcomes rather than restorative justice (Beigi, 2017). Moreover, the absence of specialized training for prosecutors and judges results in the misapplication of trafficking laws.

The criminalization of victims has profound consequences for individuals and the broader fight against trafficking. Victims subjected to prosecution or imprisonment often experience re-traumatization, which hinders their recovery and reintegration into society (Reid & Fox, 2023). Criminal records also limit their access to employment, housing, and other essential services, increasing their vulnerability to re-trafficking. On a systemic level, criminalizing victims undermines efforts to dismantle trafficking networks. Nigerian scholars emphasize that survivors play a crucial role in providing evidence against traffickers. However, fear of prosecution discourages victims from cooperating with law enforcement, thereby allowing traffickers to evade justice (Renzetti et al., 2017). This dynamic perpetuates the cycle of exploitation and weakens anti-trafficking initiatives.

The absence of adequate support services for trafficking victims contributes to their criminalization. Nigerian literature notes that victims who escape traffickers often find themselves without access to shelter, legal aid, or psychosocial support (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2014). In such cases, survivors may engage in illegal activities to survive, further increasing their risk of criminalization. The lack of comprehensive rehabilitation programs also prevents victims from rebuilding their lives. Without access to education, vocational training, or healthcare, survivors are left vulnerable to re-victimization and prosecution for crimes related to their trafficking experience (Farrell et al., 2017).

3.14 Lack of Specialized Training for Law Enforcement Agencies and Judicial Officers

Addressing trafficking in women and children requires robust institutional responses grounded in adequate training for law enforcement agencies and judicial officers. The lack of specialized training impedes the effective identification, investigation, prosecution, and prevention of trafficking cases. A major challenge posed by insufficient training is the limited understanding of the complexities of trafficking among law enforcement personnel. Nigerian scholars highlight that many officers fail to recognize trafficking victims due to a lack of knowledge about the various forms of exploitation, including sexual servitude, forced labor, and domestic servitude (Matos 2018). This ignorance often leads to the misidentification of victims as offenders or undocumented migrants, undermining efforts to provide them with necessary protection.

Similarly, judicial officers often lack a nuanced appreciation of trafficking cases, which hinders their ability to deliver justice. Without specialized training, judges and prosecutors may struggle to differentiate between consensual and coerced activities, particularly in cases involving sex work or illegal migration (Farrell et al. (2019). This gap results in lenient sentences for traffickers or unjust criminalization of victims. Nigerian literature underscores that law enforcement officers often lack the technical expertise to gather and preserve evidence in trafficking cases. Effective prosecution requires detailed documentation of victim testimonies, forensic evidence, and financial trails. However, many officers lack the training to handle such complex investigations, leading to weak cases that fail to hold traffickers accountable (Helton, 2016). Moreover, improper handling of victims during investigations can exacerbate their trauma and discourage cooperation. Trafficking survivors are often required to recount their experiences multiple times, sometimes in hostile or insensitive environments. This practice reflects the lack of trauma-

informed training among law enforcement officers and judicial personnel, which undermines trust and compromises case outcomes (Thammasiri, 2024).

Another significant issue is the limited understanding of relevant legal frameworks among law enforcement and judicial officers. Nigerian scholars point out that many officers are unaware of the provisions of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act and its alignment with international conventions such as the Palermo Protocol (Jurek & King, 2020). This knowledge gap limits the effective application of laws and prevents officers from leveraging international cooperation mechanisms to combat cross-border trafficking. Judicial officers also face challenges in interpreting anti-trafficking legislation, particularly in complex cases involving transnational networks. Without specialized training, courts may fail to deliver verdicts that reflect the severity of trafficking offenses, thereby weakening deterrence and accountability (Sergevnin, 2014).

The lack of specialized training negatively affects victims and undermines broader anti-trafficking efforts. Victims who encounter untrained officers are often subjected to secondary victimization, where their experiences are dismissed or mishandled. Nigerian researchers note that such interactions discourage victims from reporting their cases, reducing the likelihood of rescuing others and dismantling trafficking networks (Resendiz, R., & Espinoza, 2018). Additionally, poorly trained officers may fail to disrupt trafficking operations effectively, allowing perpetrators to continue exploiting vulnerable individuals. This failure perpetuates the cycle of trafficking and erodes public confidence in law enforcement and judicial systems (Chong, 2017).

3.15 Weak Monitoring of Recruitment Agencies

The role of recruitment agencies in facilitating trafficking in women and children has become increasingly evident in Nigeria. Weak monitoring mechanisms allow these agencies to operate unchecked, exploiting vulnerable populations under the guise of legitimate employment. Literature underscores the critical need for effective oversight and regulation of recruitment agencies to address trafficking challenges comprehensively. Recruitment agencies often serve as intermediaries between potential victims and traffickers, presenting exploitative opportunities as viable means of employment or migration (Schwarz et al., 2017). Many victims, especially women and children, are deceived into believing they are securing well-paying jobs or educational opportunities abroad, only to find themselves in conditions of forced labor, sexual exploitation, or servitude. Weak monitoring allows such agencies to continue operating without being held accountable for their actions.

Scholars argue that recruitment agencies exploit systemic gaps in governance and regulation to traffic individuals across borders. The lack of standardized operating procedures, combined with inadequate background checks, creates an environment where traffickers can easily manipulate vulnerable populations (Schwarz et al., 2017). Weak monitoring of recruitment agencies in Nigeria is attributed to several factors. One of the most significant challenges is the lack of a centralized database to track registered and unregistered agencies. Without such a database, it is difficult for regulatory bodies to identify fraudulent agencies or trace their activities (Matusek, 2016). Additionally, corruption within regulatory institutions exacerbates the problem. Nigerian scholars note that some officials tasked with overseeing recruitment agencies accept bribes or overlook irregularities, allowing non-compliant agencies to operate freely. This corruption undermines efforts to enforce existing laws and regulations (Chong, 2017). Inadequate funding and resources for monitoring agencies also limit their capacity to conduct regular inspections or audits of recruitment agencies. Regulatory bodies often lack the personnel, training, and technological tools necessary for effective oversight, further enabling traffickers to exploit these weaknesses (Clark, 2016).

Weak monitoring is also linked to regulatory and legal deficiencies. While Nigeria has enacted laws such as the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, enforcement remains inconsistent. Many recruitment agencies operate in legal gray areas, exploiting loopholes to evade accountability (Nguyen & Gordon, 2020). Nigerian scholars emphasize the lack of alignment between domestic laws and international conventions on labor migration and trafficking. This misalignment hampers efforts to regulate recruitment agencies, particularly those involved in cross-border operations. The absence of bilateral agreements with destination countries further complicates the enforcement of anti-trafficking measures (Williamson, 2019).

The weak monitoring of recruitment agencies has devastating consequences for victims of trafficking. Deceived by promises of better opportunities, many victims find themselves trapped in exploitative conditions, often without legal documentation or support networks. Nigerian researchers highlight that trafficked individuals face significant barriers in accessing justice or escaping their traffickers due to the clandestine nature of recruitment networks (Dahal et al., 2022). Victims who manage to escape or are rescued often experience stigmatization and secondary victimization. The failure to regulate recruitment agencies effectively perpetuates a cycle of exploitation, as traffickers remain free to target new victims.

3.16 The Role of Patriarchal Norms and Gender Inequality

Patriarchal norms and entrenched gender inequalities are fundamental drivers of trafficking in women and children in Nigeria. These socio-cultural dynamics perpetuate power imbalances that increase the vulnerability of women and children to trafficking while complicating efforts to address the problem. Patriarchal systems in Nigeria uphold male dominance and female subordination, often relegating women to positions of economic and social dependence. This dependency limits women's agency and decision-making power, making them more susceptible to traffickers who exploit their economic and social vulnerabilities (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2016). Cultural norms that prioritize male authority can also stifle women's ability to seek redress or resist exploitation. The socialization of women into roles of servitude and compliance is another facet of patriarchy that facilitates trafficking. Nigerian scholars argue that these norms normalize exploitation, as women and girls are often viewed as commodities whose labor or bodies can be used to meet economic demands (Osezua, 2016). Such attitudes perpetuate trafficking by providing societal validation for the objectification and exploitation of women.

Gender inequality manifests in unequal access to education, employment, and economic resources, further exacerbating the vulnerability of women and children to trafficking. In many Nigerian communities, women are less likely to attain higher education or secure formal employment, leaving them reliant on informal and often exploitative work arrangements (Cameron et al., 2023). These disparities create a pool of potential trafficking victims who seek better opportunities but fall prey to traffickers offering false promises of employment or migration. Economic inequality also intersects with traditional gender roles to deepen the exploitation of women. For instance, women are often expected to contribute to household incomes while bearing the burden of caregiving. This dual expectation can push women into high-risk situations, including trafficking, as they seek to meet their financial obligations (Parmanand, 2021). The lack of economic empowerment further entrenches their dependence on exploitative systems.

Cultural practices rooted in patriarchal norms can also directly contribute to trafficking. Practices such as early marriage and bride price commodify women and girls, reducing their autonomy and increasing their susceptibility to exploitation. Nigerian scholars note that these cultural frameworks often obscure the line between traditional practices and human trafficking, making it difficult to challenge exploitative norms without facing community resistance (Jones et al., 2018). Moreover, societal stigmatization of victims of trafficking, particularly women, discourages them from seeking help or reintegration into their communities. Victims are often blamed for their circumstances, further entrenching their marginalization and reducing their chances of escaping the cycle of exploitation (Sharma, 2018).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is another critical factor linked to patriarchal norms and gender inequality that fuels trafficking. Domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other forms of GBV push women and children out of their homes, rendering them vulnerable to traffickers. Nigerian researchers highlight that victims of GBV often flee their abusive environments without adequate support systems, making them easy targets for exploitation (Loomba, 2017). The normalization of GBV within patriarchal societies also means that traffickers face minimal resistance when exploiting women and children. Perpetrators of trafficking and their enablers often operate with impunity in environments where GBV is overlooked or inadequately addressed (Kag & Bandi, 2019).

The entrenchment of patriarchal norms and gender inequality complicates efforts to combat trafficking in women and children. For one, these cultural dynamics often undermine the implementation of laws and policies aimed at protecting victims and punishing traffickers. Nigerian authors argue that patriarchal biases within law enforcement and judicial systems result in discriminatory practices that prioritize the interests of male perpetrators over female victims (Walters, 2016). Furthermore, anti-trafficking initiatives that fail to address underlying gender inequalities are unlikely to achieve sustainable outcomes. Programs focusing solely on rescue and rehabilitation often neglect the systemic drivers of trafficking, such as economic disparities and cultural norms that devalue women (Pandey, 2020). As a result, victims are at risk of being re-trafficked.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

This study has significant implications for policy, law enforcement, victim protection, and international cooperation in addressing the trafficking of women and children in Nigeria. It highlights the need for policy reforms, enhanced accountability among law enforcement officials, and improved victim recovery services to reduce the risk of re-exploitation. Additionally, findings on the role of technology in complicating human trafficking networks

underscore the importance of digital strategies in prevention and enforcement. Low public awareness remains a major challenge, emphasizing the need for stronger educational campaigns.

4.2 Research Contributions

This research contributes to the academic literature by deepening the understanding of structural factors that exacerbate human trafficking. Practically, its findings provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and non-governmental organizations. With a holistic approach, this study offers strategic insights to strengthen anti-trafficking efforts and create more effective interventions in Nigeria.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Research Limitations

This study has some limitations, including its reliance on document analysis, which may not fully capture the lived experiences of trafficking victims or the evolving nature of trafficking networks. Additionally, the focus on Nigeria limits the generalizability of findings to other regions with different socio-political contexts.

5.2 Recommendation for Future Research Direction

Future research should incorporate fieldwork, survivor interviews, and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of trafficking dynamics. Exploring the effectiveness of specific anti-trafficking interventions, the role of emerging technologies, and regional comparisons could further enhance policy recommendations and enforcement strategies. Strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration in future studies can also contribute to more holistic and impactful solutions.

6. CONCLUSION

Trafficking in women and children remains a deeply entrenched issue in Nigeria, driven by corruption, weak legal frameworks, socio-economic hardships, and inadequate institutional responses. This study has highlighted the key challenges hindering effective anti-trafficking efforts, including the complicity of officials, inadequate victim support systems, cultural barriers, weak border controls, and the increasing role of technology in exploitation. Furthermore, the lack of public awareness, limited access to justice for victims, and insufficient training for law enforcement and judicial officers continue to undermine progress in combating trafficking. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted and sustainable approach. Strengthening legal enforcement, increasing funding for anti-trafficking initiatives, enhancing victim rehabilitation programs, and fostering regional and international cooperation are critical steps toward tackling this crisis. Additionally, empowering vulnerable populations through education, economic opportunities, and community-based interventions can help mitigate the root causes of trafficking. A holistic and coordinated response involving government agencies, civil society, international organizations, and local communities is essential for long-term success. Without sustained efforts to close legal gaps, address socio-economic vulnerabilities, and improve institutional accountability, trafficking will persist as a major human rights violation. Urgent action is needed to protect victims and dismantle the networks that sustain human trafficking in Nigeria.

Human trafficking, particularly of women and children, remains a severe issue in Nigeria, driven by socio-economic vulnerabilities, weak law enforcement, and systemic institutional challenges. This study employs a qualitative approach through document analysis to examine critical issues hindering effective anti-trafficking efforts. Using a thematic review of policy documents, reports, and scholarly literature, the research identifies major factors such as corruption, official complicity, weak victim support systems, cultural stigmatization, and inadequate legal frameworks that contribute to the persistence of trafficking.

Acknowledgments

The author (COO) would like to express their sincere gratitude to the co-authors for their valuable contributions to this research collaboration. Special thanks to COO for their role in Conceptualization, Writing – Original Draft, and Methodology, which were fundamental to the development and structure of this study. Appreciation is also extended to EQO for their dedicated work in Data Analysis and Interpretation, which provided critical insights into the research findings. Lastly, we thank AUA for their efforts in Writing – Review & Editing, which greatly enhanced the clarity and overall quality of the manuscript.

Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript. COO: Conceptualization, Writing - Original Draft and Methodology. EQO: Data Analysis and Interpretation. AUA: Writing - Review & Editing.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Approval Statement

The author declares that this study was conducted in accordance with research ethics principles and has received ethical approval from the author's institution, including respect for participants' autonomy, confidentiality of data, and ensuring their safety and well-being, as outlined in the applicable research ethics guidelines.

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