

Stopping Traffic: The Movement To End Sex Trafficking In Ghana



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Introduction

Sex trafficking is a type of violence perpetrated on women that takes place in diverse settings and usually involves many different actors. It is an aspect of human trafficking that is becoming pandemic in society and possibly, the fastest growing human rights violation in the world today. It has generated a lot of concern worldwide and it is taking roots in Ghana. Sex trafficking in females resembles the ancient dehumanizing slave trade. In most cases, it involves involuntary servitude and is therefore, commonly referred to as modern day slavery.

Sex trafficking thrives and goes on with impunity because, several countries do not have tough anti-trafficking legislation in place and even when there are legislations in place, such laws are often not enforced to check the menace of sex trafficking. Over the years, government policies and programs to end trafficking have all being geared towards preventing child trafficking. Initiatives such as the standard operating procedures to combat human trafficking in Ghana - with an emphasis on child trafficking was out-doored; child protection compact partnership (CPC) was signed with the United States of America to develop jointly with Ghana a multi-year plan to implement new and more effective policies and programs to reduce child trafficking and improve child protection in Ghana.

Over the years, sex trafficking has not been accorded the needed attention. Women trafficked for the purpose of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation is gradually taking roots in Ghana. Ghana is becoming a source, transit and a destination country for trafficked young females in the sub-region.

Causes of Sex Trafficking

Varied reasons have been canvassed for sex trafficking; poverty is a major reason for victims' vulnerability to it. Coupled with lack of formal education, as well as the absence job opportunities, Ghana is gradually becoming a major source of supply fueling the global sex trade.

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (Rossi 2000), defines trafficking as follows: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control ... organs.

The United Nations estimates that 2.5 million people are trafficked annually. Sex trafficking deprives people of their human rights and freedoms, it is a global health risk, and it fuels organized crime. Victims of trafficking are forced or coerced into labor or sexual exploitation. Labor trafficking ranges from domestic servitude and small-scale labor operations to large-scale operations such as farms, sweatshops, and major multinational corporations.

According to the International Labour Organization, (Geneva, 2005), this industry “has become highly diversified and global in recent years.” On its part, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women Oral Statement on Eradicating Commercial Sexual Exploitation said:

“Commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls of all ages, including prostitution, pornography, the internet bride industry and sex tourism, is one of the most devastating and escalating practices of gender-based violence assaulting the human rights and dignity

of women and girls. No society that purports to uphold gender equality should tolerate and accept the sexual commoditization of women and girls". (Human Trafficking, Trafficking of Humans Coalition Against Human Trafficking, 2005)

The 3 forms of Sex Trafficking in Ghana

1. Internal

I. Rural Urban Migration

Rural-urban migration has been prevalent over the past few decades as people move in search of employment and better social services and infrastructure. This migration trend contributes significantly to rapid urban growth in Ghana. In addition to other factors such as the natural increase in urban populations and the reclassification of formerly rural areas as urban. Since the 1960s, population censuses have consistently revealed that six regions in Ghana; namely the Central, Eastern, Volta, Northern, Upper East and Upper West have largely been net out-migration regions, with the three northern regions having the highest out-migration rates. In contrast, the Greater Accra, Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti and Western regions are in-migration areas. These patterns of internal migration are a reflection of regional disparities and differential rural-urban poverty in the country (MOI, 2014). The existing disparities have led to a situation of lack of job opportunities for a huge section of the youthful population, compelling them, especially the young girls, to migrate in search of jobs in the Southern parts of the country. Consequently, young females who migrate to the in-migration regions; Greater Accra, Ashanti Region; Brong Ahafo; Western Region in search of non-existing jobs may be lured by the economic benefits of sex trafficking.

II. Local Apprenticeship

Children have always occupied a special position in Ghana because, they are considered the custodians of the future. In the pre-colonial days, children were the most precious of one's possessions (Gyekye, 1996). Although no child welfare system existed per in the pre-colonial Gold Coast, it was customary for the extended family, through kinship foster care and other community networks, to provide care and protection for children whose parents were unable to do so (Goody, 1966). Orphans were also cared for by childless members of the clan. Community members were also committed to the welfare of children because, they believed it "took a village to raise a child". Therefore, when children did not have biological families to care for them, the community felt indebted to provide guardianship (Ansah-Koi, 2006). The advantage of this system for children was that they always had more than two adults whom they could depend on and who were concerned about their welfare. This system of care involves sending children to learn a trade. In the process of learning the trade as an additional duty they are coerced or lured by their mistresses or masters into embracing the business of sex trade with interested clients.

III. Sex Tourism:

The growing demand for sex tourism is equally met by a growing supply base made up of university students. This is as a result of the existing economic challenges especially, in getting jobs. Parents inability to secure jobs, are unable to cater for their wards in the tertiary level. Thus, students tend to look for unconventional means to sustain themselves whiles in school.

2. Migrants

Cross boarder trafficking occurs in Ghana, and there is evidence of it happening especially for sexual exploitation of women and children. Young girls and women are trafficked from Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire, Togo, Benin etc. into Ghana. Through coercion and sometimes consent they engage in the business of sex trade. Many are spiritually manipulated into the trade. They are therefore, scared of escaping due to spiritual consequences as they have been conditioned to believe.

3. Activities of Travel Recruitment Agencies

For most women, cross country trafficking or illegal migrant smuggling is connected with fraudulent recruitment agencies, recruiting young females to Europe, America and the Arab world including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to do non-existent jobs promised to them. Ghanaian women are trafficked to Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, the Gambia, South Africa, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States for forced labour and sex trafficking.

The Supply Chain of Sex Trafficking in Ghana

The past decade has seen considerable increase in domestic and international trafficking of Ghanaian, Francophone and Nigerian women and children. Ghanaians have been trafficked to various parts of the world including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. A new emerging trend has seen the emergence of the trafficking of Ghanaian women to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to work as domestic servants and in some situations, promised non-existent blue and white collar jobs. In situations where Ghanaian migrants are unable to acquire jobs promised by travelling agencies, they are coerced into accepting sex trade as means of survival or paying for debts owed to travel agents and their new masters. This trend has led to some young Ghanaian ladies coerced into the act of sex trade.

To understand and formulate the needed policies to arrest this situation, there is the need to understand the business perspective that informs the processes and business model used by traffickers. Trafficking can thus, be compared to international trade processes with the trafficked victims serving as “goods” which are bought, sold and made use of as commodities. The adoption of the term “goods” is for the understanding of the business model being used as in the case of international trade.

However, unlike other commodities or cargo, human beings are more complex. This makes this business model a peculiar one. The need for care during the process of transporting them may not always be legal. Victims are often under coercion to function in a particular way, often being denied of any kind of choice or location and the mode of performing that function. Based on this assumption, the model to be used will illustrate business model behind trafficking. The model may not be perfect; however, it serves as lens for further understanding of how traffickers operate.

Three (3) major links are used;

1. Supplier;
2. Assembly/Manufacturing;
3. Retailer/Service Provider;

Supplier

The traditional supplier is concerned with how to transport and bring the products to the market. So, like raw materials, these victims are located and extracted from their original location with the use of force.^[1] Several methods are used by traffickers in locating and recruiting victims. Recruitment agencies recruit friends and family members and “pimps”^[2] to recruit and sometimes via social media platforms. Victims are provided with travel documents and are then transported willingly or unwillingly via legal or illicit means. Transportation may include actors like corrupt border officials and criminal activities like irregular migrants (Richard, 2010).

For instance, in Ghana, Travel Recruitment Agencies exploits unsuspecting vulnerable youth who are in desperate search of employment opportunities. They are provided with fraudulent recruitment documents with the promise of good salaries and benefits. Many are transported to countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Russia, etc. On arrival, promises made proved to be null and non-existent.

Their documents are confiscated and they are coerced into domestic servitude which later evolves into sex trade and slavery like practices. Many of such scenarios have been published[3].

Assembly/Manufacturing;

The next stage involves the manufacturing and assembling of goods which are prepared for commercial purposes. Similarly, victims of trafficking can be manipulated in order to make them functional as planned. The process attempts to guarantee the following: (1) the victims need to be able to perform their tasks; (2) Victims will not have to object or refuse the command of traffickers. Submission must be made possible to the highest degree. At this stage, traffickers use an assortment of threats, physical pressure and psychological pressure to dehumanize victims to keep them in check. With the objective of satisfying clients; traffickers and their business counterparts often employ different mechanisms to test their products and victims. Traffickers with the intention to sell victims may in the process exploit the victim for a while in the same way that his client may do. The analysis will therefore present concrete cases that reveal how the mechanisms work.

Typical example is that of the character Amina as described by “Myjoyonline.com”, who was locked, stripped naked, and had his slave master did some incantations, sprinkled water on her and locked her inside a room. Amina did all the cleaning in every space within the five-storey building. She had her head smashed against the wall by her employer for 'offences' such as unsatisfactory cleaning. These actions were done to dehumanize and make her subdue to engaging clients arranged for her.

Retailer/Service Provider;

This stage is followed by the service of the retailer. Trafficked victims are offered up for use and exploitation. The retailer provides interactions that presents goods or offers a service for purchase by customers. Through the need to offer girls to the prospective customers, triggers the need for necessary marketing. Decisions are then made as to how to market the product and how to make contact with the customers. This may therefore, involve trafficked victims to illicit businesses which employs domestic servants. Alternatively, traffickers must decide on how to market trafficked victims to clients who require the use of prostitutes and this is done through formal and informal communication channels. In the case of formal communication channels, travel recruitment agencies advertise for jobs abroad which may ultimately lead to sex trade. Recent happenings where university students and beauty pageants[4] have been alleged to serve as escorts for high ranking officials. Also, involved are selected hotels and escorts agencies. These are the notable ways smart sex traffickers use in acquiring sex workers for their clients.

Conclusion

Trafficking in persons is a form of modern day slavery which deprives people of their fundamental human rights. Trafficking is a threat to society at large. Human trafficking has taken a multi-dimensional problem which is troubling the world. Human Trafficking for whatever purpose impacts negatively on the livelihood of society. Trafficking pose challenges to public health of victims; as they suffer various degrees of physical, psychological and sexual abuses. Sexual Transmitted Infections like HIV/AIDS undermines the Public Health of victims. Sex trafficking is inherently demeaning, harmful and indeed violates fundamental human rights of life, liberty, dignity and freedom.

Ghana is largely affected by the pandemic violation of the rights of women. The passage of laws such as the recent Human trafficking legislative Instrument and other policies on trafficking have all being targeted to the protection of women. However, the lack of co-operation and synergy between agencies who implement the law and the lack of expertise and the parochial approach in fighting human trafficking has led to the rise in cases of sex trafficking.

Moreover, the lack of expertise; logistics and collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Immigration Service in streamlining the activities of Travel Recruitment Agencies have facilitated the growth of sex trafficking.

Ending human trafficking in both its causes and consequences should be a matter of urgency for the government of Ghana. Fostering partnership both local and international to bring about prompt prosecution and possible conviction to deter would be traffickers should be a top most aspiration of the government of Ghana. It is also imperative for the government and civil society organizations to rigorously campaign, educate and sensitize the public about the evils of sex trafficking. The government of Ghana should consider adopting the “Swedish Model” (a ban on the purchase of sex) to arrest any future rise in the activities of sex trafficking and human trafficking in general.

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[1] (*United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2010*)

[2] a man who controls prostitutes and arranges clients for them, taking part of their earnings in return.

[3]<https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2015/April-2nd/abused-gang-raped-and-left-pregnant-aminas-one-year-hell-in-saudi-arabia.php>

[4]<https://www.myjoyonline.com/entertainment/2017/december-18th/audios-miss-ghana-winners-say-pageant-is-escort-service-organisers-hold-panic-meeting.php>