THE CHANGING NATURE OF WOMEN TRAFFICKING IN BENIN CITY FROM 2017-2025

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work was carried out by Candy Aigosamowkan Obasuyi in the Department of International Studies and Diplomacy, University of Benin, Benin City, under my supervision.

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Date_____	**Date _____**

DEDICATION

This project is first, dedicated to God almighty for his steadfast love, grace and mercy upon me, and for seeing me through the course of my academic journey in the university of Benin. Also this project is dedicated to my parents and all who in one way or another contributed to my progress in the course of my academic journey.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Women trafficking has long been a serious challenge in Benin City, where many vulnerable women were historically exploited through illegal trafficking networks for years. The city is known as a hotspot for women being trafficked under false promises[1]. It would appear that the pain and suffering caused by trafficking deeply affected not just the women involved but also their families and the wider community. However, a complex dynamic emerged that while victims suffered immense physical and psychological harm, their families back home often appeared to benefit from the financial outcomes of their exploitation. This is evident in the remittances sent back to Benin City, which have contributed to the construction of new and modern buildings and other visible improvements in family welfare, creating a paradoxical situation where exploitation abroad fuels economic gains at home, as evident in the works of Ohonba & Agbontaen-Eghafona[2]. These remittances, while providing financial support, often mask the human cost of trafficking, complicating community perceptions and reintegration efforts for survivors.

However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable and encouraging shift, in the troubling trend of women trafficking in Benin City. This change did not happen by

chance. It is the result of deliberate, concerted efforts by various groups, , government agencies, community leaders, activists, and non-governmental organizations, , all working tirelessly to combat trafficking and protect vulnerable women.

Several factors contributed to this decline. First and foremost, the Nigerian government strengthened its legal framework and enforcement against trafficking[3]. New policies and dedicated anti-trafficking units began to disrupt trafficking networks and prosecute offenders effectively. Alongside this, community awareness programs educated families and potential migrants about the dangers of trafficking, helping many women to avoid falling prey to traffickers' lies.

Equally important has been the role of relevant stakeholders, including NGOs and local organizations, who have offered support services such as counseling, vocational training, and safe reintegration for trafficking survivors. These efforts have empowered women with alternatives that reduce their vulnerability[4].

Furthermore, economic changes and improved access to information have led to a new wave of migration patterns. Today, many women in Benin City are making informed decisions by saving money and seeking legitimate employment opportunities abroad, such as caregiving or social work, especially in European countries[5]. This shift toward legal migration has greatly reduced the number of women subjected to trafficking under false pretenses.

The decline of women trafficking in Benin City is a positive sign of progress but also a reminder that the fight is not yet over. While fewer women are being trafficked through deceptive means, ongoing vigilance and updated strategies are vital, as traffickers often adapt their methods. Understanding these changes, why trafficking has declined and how new patterns have emerged, can help improve policies and community actions to sustain and deepen this progress.

This study focuses on exploring the decline in women trafficking in Benin City since 2017, the dynamic changes behind this trend, and the roles played by different key actors in making this happen. By examining this encouraging transformation, the research aims to offer insights that can support continued progress in protecting women and ending trafficking for good.

Statement Of The Problem

Despite efforts to curb trafficking, many women still find themselves at risk in Benin City. Women trafficking has caused deep social and personal harm, disrupting families and communities. Though there has been progress, the problem has not disappeared. It has evolved. The old patterns of women being forced or tricked into trafficking for sex or work in Europe have lessened, but new challenges and trends have emerged. This study seeks to highlight these changes, investigate their causes, and understand how well ongoing interventions are working.

Aim And Objectives

The main aim of this study is to explore how the nature of women trafficking in Benin City has changed since 2017. To achieve this, the study will:

- Examine the situation of women trafficking before 2017 and compare it with current trends.
- Analyze the role of government policies and community actions in influencing these changes.
- Identify the new ways women migrate and why these changes have occurred.
- Highlight ongoing challenges and recommend ways to improve interventions.

Significance Of The Study

This research is important because it sheds light on a problem that affects vulnerable women and the society they live in. By understanding how trafficking has changed in Benin City, this study will help law enforcement, community groups, and policymakers make better decisions to protect women. It will also support organizations working with trafficking victims by informing them of current realities. Finally, it offers a foundation for further studies and actions aimed at fully ending trafficking and ensuring safe, legal migration for women.

Scope Of The Study

This study focuses on women trafficking specifically in Benin City from 2017 to the present. It examines both the historical background and the recent changes in trafficking practices and migration. The study will include analysis of government efforts, stakeholder roles, and community involvement. While it centers on Benin City, many insights may be relevant to other regions facing similar issues.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the changing nature of women trafficking in Benin City since 2017, focusing exclusively on the perspectives of trafficking survivors. By conducting in-depth interviews with victims or survivors of women trafficking, the research aims to capture their lived experiences, shedding light on the historical and current trends of trafficking, the impact of government and community interventions, and emerging migration patterns. The study will also employ other secondary sources such as published works in books, academic journals, media publications, official documents and even online sources.

Literature Review

In her book "*Human Trafficking and Prostitution Among Women and Girls of Edo State*," Dorothy Ezeh embarks on a deeply moving journey into the heart of a pressing

social crisis that affects countless lives in Nigeria. With a blend of rigorous research and heartfelt storytelling, Ezeh sheds light on the complex web of factors that contribute to the vulnerability of women and girls in Edo State, where dreams of a better life often lead to harrowing realities. Ezeh begins by painting a vivid picture of the socio-economic landscape in Edo State, where many families struggle against the harsh realities of poverty and limited opportunities. In this environment, the allure of migration can seem like a beacon of hope. Young women, driven by the desire for a brighter future, are often lured by traffickers who promise them jobs and prosperity abroad. Ezeh captures the desperation and hope that fuel these decisions, reminding us that behind every statistic is a young woman with dreams, aspirations, and a family that believes in her potential[6].

What sets Ezeh's work apart is her commitment to amplifying the voices of those who have been silenced by their experiences. Through poignant interviews and personal narratives, she brings to life the stories of women and girls who have endured the trauma of trafficking. These accounts are not just stories of suffering; they are powerful testimonies of resilience and survival. Ezeh's empathetic portrayal of these survivors serves as a stark reminder of the human cost of trafficking, urging readers to see beyond the numbers and recognize the individuals behind them. Moreover, Ezeh emphasizes the importance of education and community engagement in preventing trafficking. She believes that empowering women and girls with knowledge and skills is crucial in

helping them resist the temptations of traffickers. By fostering a sense of community awareness and support, Ezeh envisions a future where young women can pursue their dreams without falling prey to exploitation.

When it comes to addressing obvious realities of women trafficking in the broader Nigerian society, "*Modern Day Slavery: Poverty and Child Trafficking in Nigeria*" by O.S Adesina does the job; as it sheds light on the grim reality of human trafficking in Nigeria. The book provides an in-depth analysis of the root causes of this issue, highlighting poverty, lack of education, and governance problems as key drivers of vulnerability. Adesina's work emphasizes the prevalence of modern slavery in Nigeria, with millions of people living in bondage. The author argues that women and girls are disproportionately affected, facing forced labor, commercial sexual exploitation, and forced marriage.The book also examines the government's response to modern slavery, noting that while Nigeria has taken steps to address the issue, gaps remain in protecting survivors and holding traffickers accountable. Adesina's research underscores the need for collective action to combat human trafficking[7].

In Torchlighting the International dimensions of women trafficking in Benin City, Rasheed O. Olaniyi's "*Examination of the global sex trade and women trafficking in Nigeria*" gives a thorough picture into a pressing social issue that affects many women. The work delves into the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the

vulnerability of women in Nigeria, highlighting the socio-economic conditions that drive many to seek opportunities abroad, often with tragic consequences. Olaniyi articulates how poverty, lack of education, and limited job prospects create an environment where women are easily exploited. Many are lured by the promise of better lives in foreign countries, only to find themselves trapped in a cycle of abuse and trafficking. The author emphasizes that this issue is not merely a local concern but part of a larger global phenomenon, where organized crime networks exploit the desperation of women seeking a way out of their circumstances. The discussion is further enriched by an exploration of the cultural and societal factors that perpetuate this cycle. Gender inequality and societal norms often leave women with few choices, making them more susceptible to traffickers. Olaniyi's work sheds light on the need for comprehensive strategies that address these root causes, advocating for better education, economic opportunities, and legal protections for women. Moreover, the author calls for increased awareness and action from both the Nigerian government and international organizations. He argues that a collaborative approach is essential to combat trafficking and support victims. By highlighting personal stories and statistics, Olaniyi effectively humanizes the issue, urging readers to recognize the real lives affected by these global dynamics[8].

Abieyuwa Ohonba and Kokunre Agbontaen-Eghafona's study on "*Transnational Remittances from Human Trafficking and the Changing Socio-Economic Status of Women in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria*" looks closely at how human trafficking affects women in this area. They explore how money sent back home by trafficked women can both help and hurt their families.In Edo State, many women and girls fall victim to trafficking networks that promise them better lives abroad. Unfortunately, the reality is often very different, as many end up in terrible situations. While the money they send home can support their families, it also comes from a source of suffering, creating a complicated situation where financial help is tied to exploitation[9].

The authors point out that these remittances can change family dynamics. Women who send money back may gain some financial independence, which can challenge traditional gender roles. However, they often face stigma and judgment from their communities because of their connection to trafficking, making it hard for them to reintegrate into society. Ohonba and Agbontaen-Eghafona stress the need for better policies to tackle the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty and lack of education. They suggest that efforts should focus on empowering women through education and job training, helping them find legitimate ways to support themselves and their families.

Ngozi B. Ukachi and Franka Attoh's work on "*Trafficked Women, Patriarchy, and Social Media: The Case of Benin City, Nigeria*" explores how social media interacts

with the issues of human trafficking and the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society. The authors focus on Benin City, where many women are trafficked, often under false promises of better opportunities. The study shows how social media can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can help raise awareness about trafficking and give a voice to victims. Women can share their stories and connect with others, which can empower them. On the other hand, social media can also be used by traffickers to lure women into dangerous situations, making it a tool for exploitation as well[10].

Ukachi and Attoh discuss the role of patriarchy in this context, explaining how traditional gender roles and societal expectations can make women more vulnerable to trafficking. In a society where men often hold more power, women may feel pressured to seek opportunities abroad, even if it means taking risks. The authors argue that addressing these gender inequalities is crucial in the fight against trafficking. Overall, the work by Ukachi and Attoh sheds light on the complex relationship between trafficking, gender roles, and social media in Benin City. They emphasize the need for a balanced approach that uses social media for positive change while also tackling the underlying issues of patriarchy and vulnerability that contribute to trafficking. Their research calls for greater awareness and action to protect women and empower them in their communities.

Franca Attoh's speaks boldly and audibly in her literary work, "*Wealth-flow Theory and the Gender Hazards of Female Trafficking: Insights from Benin City, Nigeria,".* She offers a deep and thoughtful look at the complex issues surrounding human trafficking, particularly as they affect women. Attoh's work is important because it goes beyond the surface to explore how economic factors and gender roles contribute to the vulnerability of women in trafficking situations.

At the center of Attoh's argument is the wealth-flow theory, which suggests that the way resources move within families and communities can significantly impact social structures and individual choices. In the case of female trafficking, Attoh shows how economic pressures can push women to seek better opportunities, often leading them into dangerous situations. Many women, motivated by the desire to support their families or improve their living conditions, find themselves targeted by traffickers who exploit their hopes and dreams. This perspective challenges the common view that victims of trafficking are merely passive individuals; instead, Attoh highlights their agency and the difficult choices they face[10].

Throughout the book, Attoh shares personal stories and case studies that bring the issue of trafficking to life. By including the voices of women who have experienced trafficking, she helps readers understand the real impact of this issue. These narratives make the theoretical discussions more relatable and emphasize the human side of

trafficking, allowing readers to connect emotionally with the experiences of those affected. Attoh also examines the broader social and political context in which trafficking occurs. She points out how systemic inequalities and cultural norms can perpetuate the exploitation of women. Traditional gender roles often limit women's opportunities and make it harder for them to escape poverty and exploitation. By addressing these underlying issues, Attoh emphasizes the need for comprehensive solutions that tackle the root causes of trafficking, rather than just its symptoms.

In her book, Attoh advocates for a multi-faceted approach to combat trafficking. She stresses the importance of education, economic empowerment, and legal protections for women. Attoh calls for collaboration among governments, non-governmental organizations, and communities to create an environment that supports women's rights and addresses the socio-economic factors that contribute to trafficking. Her suggestions are not just theoretical; they are practical steps that can lead to real change. Franca Attoh's "Wealth-flow Theory and the Gender Hazards of Female Trafficking" is a vital contribution to understanding the complexities of trafficking and its impact on women. By combining rigorous research with personal stories, Attoh provides a comprehensive view of the challenges women face and the systemic issues that perpetuate their vulnerability. Her work serves as both an academic resource and a heartfelt call to action, urging society to recognize and address the inequalities that lead to the exploitation of women.

In an article co-authored alongside other great academic minds, F.E Okonofua reveals that Benin City, the headquarters of Edo State, is known to have one of the highest rates of international sex trafficking of young women in Nigeria. This study was designed to determine the knowledge, attitudes and experiences of young women in Benin City, towards international sex trafficking. A random household sample of 1456 women aged 15–25 years was interviewed with a structured questionnaire that elicited information on women's experiences of, and attitudes towards international sex trafficking. The results indicate that 97.4% of the women have heard of international sex trafficking; 70% had female relatives who lived in the receiving countries of Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands; while 44.0% knew of someone who was currently engaged in sex work abroad. Up to 32% of the women reported that they had been approached by someone offering to assist them to travel abroad. Women of poorer socio-economic status (being out-of-school, unemployed, parents uneducated and unemployed) were more likely to report having been offered assistance to travel abroad[11]. Up to 81.5% of the women supported the notion that sex trafficking should be stopped, while 18.5% felt it should be allowed to continue. The perception that sex trafficking leads to wealth creation and economic gains for women was the most common reason proffered by those wanting the practice to continue. By contrast, the fear of adverse health consequences and the need to maintain social and religious morals were the reasons given by those wanting the practice to discontinue. These results suggest that programs that promote the

economic well being of women, and social advocacy focusing on harm reduction will be most helpful in reducing the rate of sex trafficking in Benin City.

In 2018, the *Oba* (King) of Benin city in Edo state (Nigeria), Oba Ewuare II, a spiritual and traditional leader with significant authority, made a public, spiritual declaration on Nigerian human traffickers (especially those originating from Edo state) and proclaimed that victims of trafficking who were bound by oaths taken during the *juju* rituals were free. The Nigerian trafficking network relies mainly on *juju* as a control mechanism to keep the victims bound and subservient to them. This article, "*The role of juju rituals in Human Trafficking of Nigerians: A tool of enslavement, but also escape"* by Sarah Adeyinka is based on repeated in-depth interviews with young Nigerian women and teenager teenage victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, and it discusses how *juju* is used by the trafficking networks to keep their victims exploited, enslaved and indebted. Concurrently, the participants' narratives also illustrate the important impact of the declaration of the *Oba* for some women and teenagers in their process to leave the trafficking networks[12].

"Nkechi Lilian in her dissertation "*Prevention Sex Trafficking and Perspectives from Parents in Ogwa Community Edo State Nigeria"* opines that there is a high rate of trafficked girls and women from the Ogwa community in Edo state, Nigeria. The Edo government has developed a top-down centralized approach to the prevention of sex

trafficking that has proved largely ineffective. The holistic involvement of people in the decision-making regarding the strategies to prevent sex trafficking can directly create an impact through policy formulation and implementation[13]. However, few studies have addressed the perspective of parents of vulnerable youth to positively impact the policy outcome on sex trafficking. Hence, the goal of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the perceptions of parents on existing sex trafficking prevention policies in view of influencing policy outcome. The theoretical framework used for this study was Jones and McBeth's narrative policy analysis framework. Data were collected through face-to-face semistructured interviews with 12 parents of young girls and women, aged 13 to 21. The data were coded inductively and subjected to Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method. Some themes that emerged from the data included lack of awareness education, community/government dialogue, intersectoral collaboration, and infrastructural development. The findings were interpreted in terms of a participatory policy analysis approach. By giving voice to parents, policymakers are better able to understand the need for citizen participation as a tool for community engagement in ending poverty, which is at the root of sex trafficking. Any intervention that addresses poverty can have a positive implication for social change for the Ogwa community, especially for young girls and women from low income families.

The 2021 "*NAPTIP Country Report on Human Trafficking*" provides one of the most authoritative Nigerian government accounts of the state of human trafficking, with

special attention to Edo State and the persistent flow of young women from Benin City to Europe. The report synthesizes national data on arrests, prosecutions, convictions, victim rescues, shelter operations, and inter-agency collaborations, while also narrating patterns observed by field officers and zonal commands. A central theme running through the report is that despite incremental improvements after 2017, such as stronger state-level task forces, expanded community sensitization campaigns, and deeper cooperation with international partners, trafficking networks in Edo State remain highly adaptive. NAPTIP highlights how traffickers restructured their strategies in response to heightened surveillance: shifting more recruitment online, diversifying transit routes through Niger and North African hubs, and using more subtle forms of coercion, including psychological pressure and spiritual oaths. The report also acknowledges the continuing role of local recruiters who blend into everyday community life, making detection difficult. Importantly, NAPTIP details the challenges it faces: inadequate funding, the complexity of cross-border investigations, reluctance of victims to testify because of fear of retaliation or juju bonds, and a justice system still struggling to secure consistent convictions. For Benin City specifically, the report emphasizes that the combination of economic hardship, community expectations of migration success, and long-standing trafficking networks makes the region a persistent hotspot. By laying out these realities, the NAPTIP report becomes a crucial primary source for understanding how women trafficking from Benin has evolved since 2017, how state

responses have tried to keep pace, and why the problem endures despite expanded government intervention[14].

In their 2019 study, Bonavenutre N. Nwokeoma and colleagues provide a nuanced exploration of the factors fueling human trafficking in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The research is situated within the broader context of the African Union's Agenda 2063, which aspires to a continent free from the scourge of trafficking. Despite Nigeria's notoriety as a source country for trafficking victims, the authors note a gap in empirical studies that dissect the specific push factors in this region.

Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study draws on data from 300 trafficking victims, as well as interviews and focus group discussions with community leaders and key informants. The findings reveal that human trafficking in Benin City is deeply rooted in a complex interplay of cultural and economic forces. Cultural practices such as exclusionary inheritance rites, serial polygyny and polyandry, and persistent beliefs in witchcraft are shown to create vulnerabilities, particularly for women and children. These traditions often marginalize certain groups, stripping them of social and economic support and making them susceptible to exploitation[15].

Poverty emerges as a central driver, compounding the effects of these cultural practices. The study highlights how abysmal living conditions and weak family support systems leave individuals with few viable options, increasing their risk of falling prey to traffickers. The authors argue that addressing trafficking requires not only economic

interventions but also a critical reassessment of cultural norms that perpetuate gender and social inequalities.

In conclusion, Nwokeoma et al. advocate for reforms in inheritance rights to include women and children, targeted poverty alleviation, and the discouragement of harmful cultural practices. These measures, they contend, are essential for reducing vulnerability and aligning with continental aspirations for social justice and human dignity.

A.A Lawal in his essay derived from a field study executed in 2009, focuses on Benin City inhabited mostly by the Bini group although other groups like the Ishan, Etsako, Akoko-Edo, and Owan, which are also well represented. According to him, it is generally believed that Bini girls/women dominate the sex export to Europe through human trafficking. But there is no reliable statistics to validate this assertion as most commentators engage in a blame game. However, the factors that account for human trafficking include the impact of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and especially the six weekoccupation of the Bendel State by "Biafran" soldiers who raped girls and women recklessly; the corrupt military regimes (1966-1979, 1984-1998); the socio-economic impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)-1986-1993; early physical and sexual abuse of teenage girls; collapse of family values and family honour, owing to prevalent polygamy, polyandry, adultery and prostitution to satisfy the inordinate ambition for affluence in the society. Others are the absence of parental role models; parental pressure, peer pressure and societal pressure to "go get money regardless of how

it is earned" and remit some to build houses, supermarkets and buy custom-made cars. The paper gives the details and recommends some measures for the gradual eradication of the evils of human trafficking. It emphasizes that many Christians, Muslims and shrine priests are involved in the business just as the Yoruba, Edo, Igbo, Hausa, etc. serve as agents and traffickers[16].

The Palermo Protocol established human trafficking (including women trafficking) as a global humanitarian crisis, as well, proposed the scope of intervention to include collaborative non-governmental networks. In Nigeria context, activities of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in one of the Nigerian hotbed states of women trafficking, Edo State, are more pronounced especially in the area of reintegration and rehabilitation. Despite these interventions, activities of women traffickers have not been significantly curtailed, in view of this, it was assumed that relevant NGOs in the state might be treating symptoms instead of causes of the scourge. An exploratory and descriptive study was conducted by Abiola Azeez and Kazeem Ogunbela to re-profile factors enhancing the hydra-headedness of the menace in the state. Data were collected from 129 field operators of relevant anti-women trafficking NGOs selected from the capital city of the state, Benin City. Factors identified as drivers of women trafficking in the state include but not limited to poverty, weak institutions, easy access to internet, globalisation, and greediness of victim's family. In the end, it suffices that finding lasting solution is more to addressing the women exploitation in state, it goes beyond

reintegrating and rehabilitating victim of women trafficking. The Study advises that Governments at all levels should redesign their approach to favour social and economic policies as the key instruments of state intervention against women trafficking[17].

From the perspective of Grace Uzochukwu, Human trafficking has been a historical and global concern as well as a global crime against humanity that violates individual rights, freedom, and privileges. She has made this known in her Dissertation "*Barriers in implementing a unified collaborative policy to combat female sex trafficking in Edo-State, Nigeria*". According to her, Human trafficking has become a growing phenomenon in Edo State, Nigeria, while the existing policy to combat it has proved ineffective. There was a gap in understanding strategies for the unification of the policies at the level of Edo State, Nigeria, and the level of the United Nations (UN) to ensure better outcomes in the fight against human trafficking. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore perceived barriers to implementing collaborative policy unification between Edo state and the UN. The conceptual framework in this study was based on the Narrative Policy Framework of McBeth et al., the Advocacy Coalition Framework developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, and the Victimology Theory of Braimah. Data were drawn from existing documents and qualitative surveys utilizing 14 participants from the various workforces of human services and law-enforcement sectors. The data were subjected to open coding, categorization, and thematic analysis. The most selected themes that emerged were lack of funding for

training, victims' low self f-esteem, and a limited justice system that resulted in ineffective policy implementation. Recommendations for future policy improvement should focus on policy unification and collaboration for disciplinary actions against traffickers regardless of where the crime was committed. Positive social change implications of the study include helping local policymakers, law enforcement, and social services providers in Edo State, improve collaboration with the UN entities and agencies in Nigeria to combat human trafficking[18].

The seminal Human Rights Watch report, "*Human Rights Watch (2019). You Pray for Death: Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria"* serves as a harrowing exposé on the systemic human rights abuses faced by Nigerian women and girls subjected to trafficking, both within and outside the country's borders. It moves beyond merely documenting the scope of the trafficking crisis, which often involves victims being lured by false promises of employment only to be trapped in sexual and forced labor exploitation across Africa and Europe. Crucially, the report dives into the tragic experiences of survivors upon their return to Nigeria. It highlights a painful duality: having escaped the physical and psychological torment of their traffickers, many survivors are confronted by the profound anguish of inadequate state support, social stigma, and crushing poverty back home. The report controversially reveals that government-run shelters, intended as havens, often function as places of further detention and isolation, restricting the survivors' rights and compounding their trauma.

Ultimately, the work is a forceful indictment of the Nigerian government's failure to provide essential services, like comprehensive medical, psychological, and financial assistance, needed for survivors to truly heal and reintegrate, calling for an urgent policy shift from punitive measures to human rights-centered care[19].

This landmark research report by the Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) is critical because it offers some of the earliest and most detailed empirical data on the phenomenon of girl-trafficking originating from Edo and Delta States, areas widely recognized as the epicenter of this activity in West Africa. The work's central contribution is its focus on the push factors at the community and family level. It moves beyond generalized notions of poverty to document the specific social and economic vulnerabilities that make young girls susceptible to deception and coercion. The research illuminates the roles played by family members, close friends, and "madams" (often former victims themselves) in the recruitment chain, exposing the complex local networks that facilitate transnational crime. More importantly, the report doesn't merely describe the problem; it aims for the way forward by advocating for proactive, preventative, and community-led solutions. It argues that combating trafficking requires more than just law enforcement; it demands addressing fundamental issues like gender discrimination, lack of basic functional education, and the need for economic empowerment programs for girls. The GPI’s findings laid a crucial foundation for subsequent NGO and

government interventions, shifting the focus towards girl-child rights and education as the most effective long-term shield against exploitation[20].

In another expository scholarly Article on the push factors of women Trafficking in Benin City, Ifeanyi Onyeonoru critically opines that the trafficking phenomenon is not merely an external crime but an intricate manifestation of internal**,** structural socioeconomic failures in Nigeria, particularly in Edo State. Onyeonoru effectively argues that the primary drivers, or "push factors," are not simply poverty, but a deeper combination of highly restrictive gender norms and a crippling absence of viable economic alternatives for young women. The study vividly illustrates how the culture of conspicuous consumption, where success is equated with visible wealth, creates immense pressure on young women. When combined with societal expectations that prioritize male advancement and limit female opportunities, the promise of earning significant money abroad, however dangerous, appears to many as the only logical route to financial dignity and family support. The paper critically examines the gender implications, detailing how traffickers exploit the vulnerability created by low educational attainment and the marginalization of women in the formal economy. By highlighting this systemic interaction between poverty, cultural aspiration, and gender inequality, Onyeonoru provides a powerful, localized analysis that moves beyond victim-blaming, demonstrating that the roots of this transnational crime are deeply embedded in the social and economic fabric of the sending communities[22].

In 2003, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) did a joint report with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), which cannot be described as a mere research document; it serves as a defining blueprint for understanding and combating the specific trafficking pipeline from Edo State, Nigeria, to Italy. It is a work of fundamental importance because it transitioned the understanding of this phenomenon from anecdotal evidence to quantified, policy-relevant data.

Its primary strength lies in its systemic analysis of the entire criminal chain. The report meticulously detailed the mechanisms of recruitment in Benin City, the intricate web of travel through transit countries, and the brutal reality of sexual exploitation in Italian cities. It provided undeniable evidence that this was not a decentralized, opportunistic trade but a highly organized**,** transnational criminal industry characterized by sophisticated debt bondage (the *juju* oath) and structured exploitation. Also, the report's framing as a **"**Programme of Action**"** was highly influential. It offered concrete recommendations that directly spurred greater bilateral cooperation between Nigeria and European nations, leading to focused anti-trafficking funding and the establishment or strengthening of Nigerian governmental bodies like NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons). The document effectively shifted the focus of state responses from simply controlling immigration to actively combating human

rights violations, solidifying its place as a cornerstone text in the Nigerian anti-trafficking discourse[22].

O. C Osazuwa once again lends her pen to the discourse by examining Benin women who migrate for the purpose of cross border sexual transactions. She also assessed the changes in the traditional Benin family structure, mediated by the prevalence of Benin women migrants and their financial contributions to their families. The study relied on qualitative data generated through Household-based Interviews; Key Informant Interviews, Vignette-based Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Life Histories. A total of 18 vignette-based FGDs were held among adult males, adult females and youths (using a story of sex-trafficking that ended on "successful" note and a tragic story of a sex-trafficked victim). Also, five (5) Key Informants who were selected on the basis of their social statuses in the Benin Society were interviewed. Findings showed that the traditional Benin family structure, prior to women migration for the purpose of sexual transaction, which was organized on the basis of age and sex, is fast eroding. Many of these women who have been successful in trans-border sexual transaction, despite their sex or age in the family, are now the centre of authority and pivot of important family decisions. This is as a result of the huge sum of money they remit to their families. Furthermore, findings from showed that Benin women who are direct beneficiaries of transnational remittances from their daughters' sexual transaction overseas, can now access critical resources which were previously inaccessible due to the traditional

inheritance system-rule of primogeniture. Consequently, most of these women in this category have become the shadow breadwinners in their families by providing for the daily upkeep of family members. Also, many of such women have erected edifices for themselves, parents or husbands, while others have provided adequate financial resources for their family members to open up businesses. The study concludes that based on the pervasive notion of the utility of transnational remittances obtained from sex trafficking in aiding family economic advancement in the region, stemming the tide by making anti trafficking laws will at best reduce the incidence for a while but cannot curtail the trend. This has an implication of compromising the integrity of the contemporary Benin family, as a socialization agency for its members[23].

Concluding on this section, we examine Franca Attoh's paper "*Chattels of their families: Trafficking of young women as gender Violence".* The paper interrogates the relationship between trafficking in young women and patriarchy as a form of gender violence. It argues that trafficking in young women is symptomatic of their inferior position within the social structure especially in patriarchal societies. It views this as a form of gender violence in the sense that the majority of those trafficked were impelled into trafficking situations by loose networks of family members. The data for this chapter was derived from the data generated in a survey of young women aged 15-25 years in Benin City, Nigeria. The study adopted an eclectic methodological approach, which involved the administration of questionnaires, key-informant interviews, in-depth

interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). . The study shows that there is a correlation between patriarchy and trafficking in young women because the majority of those trafficked were encouraged and financed by family members. Anchoring the analysis on radical feminism it concludes that trafficking in young women is a form of gender violence associated with the patriarchal structure of Nigerian society[24].

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.CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN TRAFFICKING IN BENIN BEFORE 2017

The prevalence and forms of women trafficking in Benin City before 2017

Before 2017, Benin City in Edo State was widely recognized as the epicenter of one of the most devastating trafficking networks in Africa. This phenomenon was not a sporadic or accidental occurrence; it had developed into an organized trade that penetrated every layer of society—families, local communities, traditional polity, old international/migratory routes. Several scholars have observed that trafficking in Edo State was both a local livelihood strategy and a transnational criminal enterprise, sustained by a mix of economic desperation, cultural practices and global demand[1]. The trafficking enterprise in Benin City was organized with alarming sophistication. Recruiters operated in neighborhoods, local markets, Churches, and Schools, identifying vulnerable girls and persuading them or their families with promises of work and wealth abroad. Often, these recruiters were women who had themselves once been trafficked and returned home as "successful" migrants, giving them credibility and influence within their communities[2].Once recruits were secured, ritual oaths at shrines became the next critical stage of control. Sleep priests and priestesses (or "Juju" priests and priestesses) administered binding spiritual oaths of silence and repayment. These ceremonies instilled a terrifying fear of supernatural punishment (illness, death, or harm to loved ones) that would follow any act of defiance[3]. In this way, traditional cultural

practices were co-opted as instruments of coercion that reached across continents. Beyond the fear of punishment, the rituals also enforced a cloak of secrecy. The girls would not dare expose their madams, report to the authorities, or even whisper their ordeal to family members. The oath sealed their lips as tightly as it chained their bodies, making betrayal or escape feel impossible. For many, the memory of that dim shrine—the cut of the blade, the gathering of hair and nails, the curses—infused in their minds, ensuring silence across borders. This was the ritual that gave more than any contract that constituted the essential backbone of the trafficking process, transforming cultural belief into one of the most effective forms of psychological imprisonment.

The logistical networks of trafficking were equally complex. Transport routes managed the dangerous rides across the Sahara desert and through Libya, where women endured violence, starvation, and the constant fear of death. Others arranged constant Mediterranean crossings, where the journey itself became one of the primary causes of irregular migration. In Nigerian urban centers such as Lagos and Abuja, document forgers and corrupt officials provided passports, visas, or falsified papers, ensuring the victims could travel out of the country undetected.

Finally, upon arrival in Europe in cities like Turin, Naples, Palermo, Amsterdam, and Paris, these women were handed over to madams (often Nigerian women who had previously closed their own trafficking debts) to become core hubs in the transnational chain. They enforced debt bondage, supervised daily prostitution, and ensured regular

remittances back to Nigeria. Their operations were frequently interceded with European criminal syndicates, including the Italian Mafia, which provided protection and access to sex markets[4].Thus, the trafficking system in Benin City before 2017 was not a disorganized set of opportunistic crimes but a structured industry. It drew upon the cooperation of agents across borders—local recruiters, spiritual priests, transporters, forgers, and madams abroad each playing a specialized role in a chain of exploitation scholars have described it as a "hydra-headed industry" made sophisticated accordingly. It is difficult to completely dismantle it, and it affected the global community. Benin City's reputation as a global hub for trafficking was latent but undeniable. After 2017, attempts to disrupt it began.

What made Benin's case especially tragic was the scale of the outflow. Multiple international studies and reports consistently noted that more than 80% of Nigerian women and more than 80% of all girls trafficked from Edo state ended up in the sex markets of Italy originated from Edo State, with Benin City as the primary source[5]. This turned Benin into a shorthand reference in both local and international discussions on trafficking. The figure represented very young adolescent girls and thousands of families and neighborhoods were caught in a web of exploitation abroad. Each percentage point in that 80% translated into real stories of girls as young as 14 and 15 whose lives were shattered. The magnitude or scale of this trafficking was normalized within the City. Families spoke of "going to Italy" almost as though it was a rite of

passage. Communities often celebrated returnees who died en route, or lived under bondage in European cities. The institutionalization of trafficking blurred the lines between victimhood and aspiration, creating a contrast where the same practice that destroyed countless lives was simultaneously a source of prestige and hope for others. In this case, trafficking in Benin before 2017 was a criminal enterprise. It was not just a social system; it transcended the entire city, taking it to be one of the most brutal industries of exploitation in modern African history.

The most common form of trafficking was sexual exploitation abroad. Italy stood as the main destination, with cities like Turin, Rome, and Palermo becoming notorious centers where Nigerian women were visible on the streets and brothels. Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Germany were also part of this transnational web. The victims were victimized under two major narratives. Some were deceived with promises of better jobs such as working in hair salons, shops, or as house helps. But many others entered the arrangement with the full knowledge that prostitution was involved[6]. Recruiters often downplayed the severity, telling girls that it was a "just for a short time" until they repaid their madam, after which they would "...be free to live prosperously in Europe. The truth on arrival was stark and dire. The stability of air travel, strict control, and the shipping debt away, dignity. And so in the new bondage of debt.The trafficking system was the key player. Stress framed themselves as 'Rank City' , who had promised fabulous backstories of women who had conquered their

poverty, had faced everything, confronting a few flights, all expenses, passports, visa, liver clothing. This narrative of generosity and 'help' created a false sense of disparity. Long before they arrived at the brothel, they carried the psychological weight of a debt they felt compelled to repay.

Yet upon arrival in Europe, the supposed "help" was revealed as a trap. Women were informed that they owed staggering sums, typically between £35,000 and £60,000 — figures increased beyond the actual cost of migration, which might realistically fall between £5,000 and £10,000[7]. The inflation was deliberate. Traffickers designed the debts to be impossible to repay quickly, guaranteeing years of servitude. Victims soon discovered that the repayment was structured in a way that amounted to slavery.Clients were forced to see multiple women every night — sometimes as many as 8 to 15 — burning away due to their madam. No portion of their income could be saved for themselves, not those who appeared to them to give other opportunities. Chinese companies, and other firms introduced subsidiary training, trafficked individuals, hiring brothers to attract younger, fulfilling skills training instructed by police, or even social security for those who had to abide by labor and tax regulations. The problem was endemic, the debt was elastic and low skilled to keep women in perpetual subjugation.

The story of Abieyuwa, trafficked in 2012, highlights the cruelty of the system. Unlike some victims who were deceived with promises of caregiving or hairdressing jobs, Abieyuwa admitted that she knew she was going abroad for prostitution. Her

family had raised #1 million (about £5,000 at the time) to secure her passage, believing these sacrifices would be repaid through remittances. But upon her arrival in Europe, she was informed by her new madam that she owed an unholy new and exaggerated debt. Despite the fact that her family had already invested heavily, Abieyuwa was told that she must "settle" her madam with tens of thousands of euros for years of endured brutal conditions, working nights after nights on the streets, often in the freezing weather, facing violence from both clients and pimps. She recalled the inhumanity of her ordeal: the money never finished, I worked for years, but there was always something more to pay. It was like I was carrying a mountain that never moved".[8]

Abieyuwa's testimony reveals a crucial truth: even when women were not deceived about the type of work they were entering, they were deceived about the terms. Knowing that prostitution awaited did not equate to reformed consent when the financial arrangement was deliberately rigged to ensure years of exploitation, the structure of debt bondage meant that women's bodies became chivalric sources of income, while freedom remained an illusion.For minors between the ages of 18 and 14, the system was even more devastating. Adolescents—barely old enough to understand the magnitude of £60,000—were forced into prostitution during their early years. What should have been a period of learning and social development was instead consumed by nightly encounters with strangers. Many spent four to five years under bondage, their adolescence stolen, their bodies broken, and their futures compromised. By the time

some "cleared" their debt, they were no longer teenagers but brainwashed young adults with no education, few prospects, and years of psychological scars.

Debt bondage also carried a psychological dimension[9]. Because sponsors framed repayment as a moral obligation, "...Many women internalized guilt and responsibility for the suffering they believed paying the debt would not only discharge their families but made spiritual retribution, like Juju, over those who resisted. This gave traffickers immense economic advantage over the system of debt. Keeping the system intact was physically difficult.For traffickers, the system was economically viable. The woman who repaid £40,000 in up to three years could generate several times that amount for her madam, given the number of clients she served. Once the victim was released, another was recruited, ensuring an uninterrupted flow of revenue. For victims, however, the end of repayment rarely meant freedom. Many, like Abieyuwa, returned home physically and emotionally drained, with little to show for their years abroad. Families who had invested in their departure often expressed disappointment, deepening survivors' shame and isolation.

Benin City was also a growing ground for internal trafficking. Many girls were first trafficked from rural villages into Benin itself, where they underwent orientation in 'training houses.' They were taught how to dress seductively, how to negotiate with men and most importantly how to obey their madams without question. Though sex trafficking dominated, other firms existed, including forced domestic labour and child

begging. Yet these were overshadowed by the larger scale of sexual exploitation. What tied all these forms together was coercion, whether through lies, spiritual manipulation, debts or threats of violence. By 2017, trafficking in Benin City was no longer a hidden vice- it had become a normalized system embedded in the city's social fabric.

Factors Contributing to Trafficking

The prevalence of trafficking in Benin City was sustained by multiple factors: Poverty and Unemployment. Benin City, the capital of Edo State, was plagued by chronic poverty and high unemployment, particularly among the youth. Economic opportunities were scarce, and the collapse of industries that once offered stable jobs (such as textiles and rubber processing) never adequately filled by government or private initiatives. This economic stagnation meant that for many households, survival was a daily struggle. Families often giving an illusion that low earnings were their only viable hope for upward mobility.

For many Parents, sending a daughter abroad was not perceived as a reckless gamble, but rather as a calculated investment in the family's future. The remittances from relatives abroad, no matter how small, often exceeded what local girls could provide in years. Stories circulated in neighborhoods about returnees who had opened shops, built modern houses or bought cars for their families. These narratives of "success" created a powerful social pressure, family migration as a proven route out of

poverty[10]. The hidden realities of exploitation, abuse or even death were overshadowed by the visible signs of prosperity displayed by returnees.

Poverty stripped families were left vulnerable to manipulation by traffickers who positioned themselves as benevolent “helpers”. With promises to finance travel documents, cover transportation costs, and provide initial settlement abroad, traffickers presented themselves as offering a lifeline. Families desperate for change were often willing to overlook the terms of repayment or the vague conditions of work abroad, believing that any hardship would be temporary compared to their current suffering.The desperation poverty created is evident in the testimony of Christiana Obasuyi, trafficked to Italy in 2013 under the "false promise of a hairdressing job," is evident. She explained: 'My family was struggling, and my younger brothers needed school fees. Everything. Though going to Italy would solve everything. They took my passport and said I owed about 30,000 euros. I'd had to work on the streets to survive.'

Her story captures how poverty and family responsibility pushed young women into the arms of traffickers. Migration was seen as an act of sacrifice and duty—of lifting of keeping siblings in school or lifting families out of hardship. For many women like Christiana, the dream of securing a better life for loved ones was weaponized against them, turning poverty into the single most potent driver of trafficking in Benin City before 2017.

Social Aspiration and Peer Influence

Beyond poverty, social pressure to migrate could influence the depth of despair. Migration was not merely seen as an option for survival but as a pathway to social status, dignity, and respect. In neighborhoods across Benin, young women who returned from Europe with visible signs of wealth- generous gifts, flashy cars, modern houses and designer clothes- became symbols of aspiration. Their success stories, whether real or exaggerated, circulated widely within communities and created an atmosphere in which migration was equated with prestige[12].

Community celebrations of returnees reinforced this allure. Lavish welcoming parties were often organized for women who had "made it," with music, feasting, and public displays of generosity. These celebrations cemented the narrative that migration was the ultimate route to social mobility. Even when the true nature of their work abroad was overshadowed by the material gains, moral concerns sometimes elevated families to positions of powerbwithin the community, intensifying the pressure on others to follow suit.

Peer influence was equally significant. Young women were told stories of classmates, neighbors or cousins who had gone abroad and returned successful, and this created a cycle of comparison and competition. The shame of being left behind, of remaining poor while others prospered, was powerful. Girls who expressed reluctance

to migrate were sometimes mocked as lacking ambition or courage. In a society where opportunities for women were limited, failure by attempt migration could even be perceived as a failure to live up to family expectations.

Ikpea Osatohamwen trafficked in 2011 under the false promise of a social work position, recalled the pressure she felt: "I wanted us to have something to show for my suffering... All my friends were talking about people who had built houses abroad. I didn't want my family to look like we were the only ones still poor."[13] Her words reveal how aspiration for family pride and the desire not to be socially excluded pushed many young women into the hands of traffickers. Migration thus became more than an individual desire; it was a communal expectation, tied to honor, competition, and the pursuit of status.

This powerful mix of aspirations and poor influence created a climate where trafficking thrived. Women were not only driven by the need to escape poverty but also by the pressure to achieve recognition and avoid being left behind.

Cultural and Spiritual Control

One of the most insidious tools employed by traffickers in Benin City was the use of traditional oaths and rituals performed at shrines. Such as Ayelala, a deity of justice and retribution, and Ogun, the god of iron and oaths. These rituals were not mere

symbolic gestures; they functioned as a system of psychological bondage that operated across borders and often proved more powerful than physical chains.

Before embarking on the journey abroad, victims were taken to shrines where they were compelled to swear binding oaths of secrecy, loyalty and repayment[14]. The ceremonies involved elaborate, including the collection of personal substances such as fingernails, pubic hair, menstrual blood, or underwear, which, within the culture, were believed to contain the victim's spiritual essence. These items were then consecrated in the presence of a priest or priestess, with imprecations made to deities known for their unforgiving punishments. Victims were required to promise that they would repay their 'travel debt', obey their traffickers' instructions, and never reveal the truth about the trafficking arrangement to authorities.

The consequences of breaking such oaths was believed to be catastrophic. Victims feared that disobedience would lead to insanity, sudden death, or misfortune befalling their loved ones. Many women reported later on that they feared the gods more than the police, and this belief cemented obedience even when escape appeared physically possible. As one trafficking survivor explained: 'I thought if I spoke, my mother would die. A fear better to suffer abroad than to curse my family.' Such testimonies demonstrate how traffickers manipulated deeply spiritual beliefs to maintain control, transforming culture into a weapon of subjugation.The impact of these oaths was multi-dimensional. Firstly, they stifled trust and whistle-blowing. Victims refrained from

seeking help from law enforcement, NGOs, or even friends abroad, believing that speaking about their ordeal would trigger supernatural retribution[15]. Secondly, the oaths acted as a form of debt enforcement from thousands of miles away. Traffickers called 'soul reminders' often via simple voice notes saying, 'Remember what you swore,' that reignited terror and compelled repayment. Thirdly, these oaths entangled family members in the victim's bondage. Because many ceremonies explicitly involved the safety of parents or siblings, women were less concerned about their own suffering than about the presumed danger to their family should they default.

The psychological toll of these practices was immense. Survivors frequently reported nightmares, feelings of spiritual contamination, and unexplained illnesses that they attributed to the oath[16]. Continued reassurances from law enforcement, such as promises of police protection, were often ineffective as victims trusted the power of the gods over the power of the state. For this reason, anti-trafficking advocates in Benin City eventually recognized the need for culturally sensitive interventions. Some partnered with progressive shrine custodians willing to publicly revoke oaths, while others engaged in public education campaigns that reframed such rituals as instruments of coercion rather than sacred obligations.

The manipulation of traditional spirituality by traffickers illustrates how cultural practices, when weaponized, can lead to exploitation. It reveals how trafficking

networks did not rely solely on economic vulnerability or social aspiration but also exploited the deeper layers of belief and identity to maintain control.

Weak Law Enforcement and Corruption

While Nigeria formally established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in 2003, on paper, the creation of NAPTIP represented a progressive step toward aligning Nigeria with international conventions on human trafficking, particularly the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in persons (2000). However, in practice, the agency's (NAPTIP's) impact was hampered by chronic underfunding, insufficient manpower, and a lack of cooperation with local law enforcement[17]. Edo State, which had already become the country's epicenter of trafficking, remained largely outside the effective reach of NAPTIP's interventions. One of the greatest obstacles was corruption within law enforcement and border control agencies. Many traffickers operated openly in Benin City, confident in their ability to bribe police officials or immigration officials. Survivors have testified that traffickers often boasted of their 'connections' with the authorities, which discouraged victims from attempting escape or reporting abuse. Arrests, when they have occurred, were frequently undermined by compromised investigators, missing evidence, or deliberate sabotage by officials being paid by the traffickers. These organized trafficking networks thrived under the protection of corrupt enclaves within the system.The result was low prosecution and conviction rates.

According to UNODC and local research, Nigeria's anti-trafficking laws, such as the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act of 2003, were inconsistently enforced, and traffickers frequently escaped justice due to bribery or lack of evidence[18]. Even when cases did reach the court, they were delayed; poor witness protection often led to dismissals.

Another problem was the criminalization of victims themselves. Women intercepted en route to Libya or Italy were sometimes decided as offenders guilty of irregular migration rather than as survivors of trafficking. As a result, they were detained, fined, or deported without adequate psychological support. The case of Blessing Igbinedion, who was intercepted in Libya, illustrates how victims were subjected to abuse and detention abroad, with little protection.

Weak enforcement also stemmed from decentralization. Coordination between NAPTIP, state police commands, and immigration was often poor. Local authorities in Edo State lacked the technical expertise to investigate transnational trafficking cases. In some instances, community leaders themselves helped the traffickers either out of fear or because of the remittances flowing back into the community.

Global demand for sexual service

While poverty, peer influence, and weak governance created the conditions for trafficking to thrive in Benin City, this cannot be understood without examining the pull

of international demand, particularly in Europe. The European sex industry's appetite for African women was a central driver of the trade.

By the early 2000s, policy reports consistently noted that over 60-80 percent of Nigerian women in European sex markets originated from Edo State."

This segment highlights the significant problem of victim criminalization and the institutional weaknesses (lack of coordination and expertise) that further enable traffickers. It then shifts focus to the crucial "pull factor": global demand for sexual services, particularly in Europe, noting that a vast majority of Nigerian women in these markets originated from Edo State. "...cities such as Turin, Naples, Palermo, and Amsterdam became hubs where Nigerian women were concentrated. Nigerian women were frequently portrayed as 'exotic,' 'submissive,' and 'sexually adventurous' stereotypes that dehumanized them while also making them highly marketable to white clients seeking difference from local or Eastern European sex workers[19].

Importantly, the sex industry in Europe operated as a commercial driver of the market, generating the revenue for every woman who managed to pay off her trafficking debt. The escape, exploitation, and torture of survivors in Benin City meant that sexual acts, the more were packaged to hike her price. The profitability of the system was immense. Women like Christiana Obazenu, who was forced into prostitution in Italy, were fined with 'debts' of up to €30,000.

The role of organized criminal networks in Europe cannot be overlooked. Nigerian trafficking rings collaborated easily with local mafias, pimps, and brothel owners who relied on Nigerian women to meet rising consumer demand. In Italy, for instance, Nigerian 'madams' and their lieutenants integrated into existing mafia structures, controlling street prostitution in several regions. Reports by Europol and UNODC confirm that Nigerian trafficking groups were among the most organized African criminal networks in Europe, largely because their business model was sustained by reliable demand from sex buyers[20]. Moreover, the legal and policy approach to prostitution in sending states (like Nigeria) and receiving states (such as Italy, the Netherlands, and parts of Germany) where the industry thrived, criminalized those being trafficked instead of the traffickers. Where demand was policed, it did not disappear but instead pushed the trade underground, making it even more dangerous for sex workers. Either way, consumer demand remained constant, ensuring that the trafficking pipeline from Benin City to Europe continued uninterrupted.

This global demand was not only commercial but also symbolic within communities in Benin. The fact that trafficked women could send home remittances despite the hardships of sex work reinforced the perception that Europe's sex markets offered lucrative opportunities.

Breakdown of Education and Social Support Systems

Education is often described as the most effective long-term safeguard against exploitation, but in Edo State, structural weaknesses meant that many adolescents, particularly girls, were unable to remain in school[21]. The result was a generation of young women left vulnerable to traffickers who presented migration as the only pathway to survival and dignity.

High dropout rates among adolescents where widespread poverty was the most significant cause. Families struggling to meet basic needs often withdrew their children from school, unable to afford fees, uniform, textbooks, or transportation.

The collapse of education pathways left thousands of girls with limited options for advancement without certificates, vocational training, or employable skills. Young women faced a situation where petty trading or domestic work provided only meagre incomes. Traffickers capitalized on this by offering promises of training or employment abroad as caregivers, hairdressers, or shop assistants. They tapped into the aspiration of girls who knew that education had already failed them. The testimonies recorded in oral interviews highlight this sense of hopelessness. For instance, Christiana Obazenu explained that her decision to accept a trafficking sponsor's offer stemmed from the inability of her family to pay her younger brother's school fees, a responsibility she felt compelled to shoulder[22].

Nigeria's weak welfare infrastructure meant there were few state programs or support outside of school. Children, or families living below the poverty line. NGOs filled some gaps, but their reach was limited compared to the scale of need in Benin City. This left young girls exposed. Many girls came to view migration, not as an option, but as the only viable route to improve their lives and support their families.

Impact of Trafficking on Victims

The consequences for victims were devastating, cutting across health, economic stability, social status, and chronic survival.

Physical and Health Consequences

The physical toll of trafficking on women from Benin City before 2011 was severe, often involving unbearable conditions, or extreme exploitation that left lasting scars on their bodies, reproductive systems, and overall health. Trafficked women were typically faced with multiple sexual encounters daily. The priority for traffickers was financial profit, and clients frequently demanded unprotected sex, believing that African women were either disease-resistant or more "fertile." This exposure resulted in high rates of HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among trafficked Nigerian women in Europe. Studies by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have consistently reported elevated infection rates among returnees, many of whom contracted diseases during their years of exploitation[23].For underage victims, the

consequences were particularly devastating. Girls as young as 14 or 15, whose bodies were not physically matured enough for repeated sexual activity, often suffered pelvic injuries, vaginal tears, and long-term gynecological complications. "...somewhere left infertile after years of abuse, while others developed chronic conditions such as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). The harm extended beyond sexual health. Women suffered physical violence from traffickers, pimps, and clients, ranging from beatings to burns to forced starvation. Survivors like Blessing Igbinedion, who was trafficked under the guise of a nanny job, received violence and medical neglect during her journey, including while she worked in Libya.

Access to healthcare was severely limited in Europe. Trafficked women, especially those undocumented or feared deportation, often avoided seeking treatment. Language barriers, fear, and lack of insurance restricted the quality of care they received. In Nigeria, the situation was no better. Many returnees came back gravely ill, only to find fragile health systems incapable of providing adequate support. The tragic case of Oseretin, a young woman lured to Spain with the promise of a nanny job, who returned home ill with AIDS and never received any proper medical care, passed away after three years of exploitation. Her story underscores how the lack of medical access and support turned trafficking into a death sentence for many[24].

Psychological Trauma

The psychological trauma of trafficking was as devastating as the physical Injuries included for women trafficked from Benin City before 2013. Fear was a central thing for them. This fear included the dread of their "a madam" (or "a demand") strict obedience and repayment. The terror instilled by oath rituals at shrines such as Alelata and Ogu, and the humiliation of being forced into sexual exploitation, together, these created a chronic psychological stress and trauma that survivors carried with them long after their physical captivity ended. Many women developed symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety. Survivors often described recurring nightmares, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts that forced them to relive their abuse[25]. Some reported panic attacks triggered by seemingly ordinary stimuli—a loud voice, a smell of foods, or the sight of uniforms—that reminded them of past traumas. The environment of trafficking eroded self-esteem and personal identity, leaving victims feeling worthless, dehumanized and ashamed.

The fear instilled by spiritual oaths added to their psychological burden. Victims believed that breaking their promises to traffickers could lead to death, madness or disaster upon their families. Several women confessed that even in safe houses or shelters in Europe, they remained so frightened to speak about their ordeal, convinced that the gods would punish them for their their disobedience. he relationship with madams also left deep scars. These women, who were often other Nigerians that had

themselves been trafficked, maintained control through intimidation, threat, and violence. Survivors frequently recalled their madam's voice long after escape. Such experiences highlight how trauma infiltrated the memories of victims.

In addition, many survivors reported profound feelings of shame and humiliation—the stigma associated with prostitution weighed heavily on them, especially in communities where a woman's worth was tied to chastity, respectability, and their ability to elevate family status. This social stigma compounded mental health struggles, leaving survivors isolated and unable to share their experiences with family members upon return[26].Clinically, trafficking survivors in Nigeria and across Europe have been shown to experience complex trauma arising from prolonged and repeated abuse. Despite the severity of their psychological wounds and need for mental health care, resources remained scarce. Nigeria's Mental Health System was underfunded and overstretched.

International NGOs and NAPTIP shelters offered some psychological support, but many confessed the help was only minimal. They were often left to battle trauma alone—for them, the journey home did not mark the end of suffering, but the beginning of a long, often invisible struggle with mental health.

Loss of Adolescence, and Education

One of the most tragic consequences of trafficking in Benin City before 2017 was the theft of childhood and aldolescence. Most victims were minor or barely out of their teenage years when they were recruited. At an age when they should have been in classrooms learning skills, or enjoying the innocence of play with peers, they were forced into the brutal world of exploitation. Their formative years, which should have been defined by personal growth, friendships, and dreams for the future, were consumed by debt bondage, fear, and survival.For the girls trafficked between the ages of 14 and 17, the disruption of education was especially devastating. Once withdrawn from school, either due to poverty or under the influence of traffickers, they were denied access to the very opportunities that could have protected them from exploitation.The loss of adolescence also had profound psychological consequences. While their peers went through natural stages of teenage development, trafficked girls were forced into adult responsibilities under the most dehumanizing conditions. Many survivors have described feeling as though their youth had been 'strayed,' leaving them unable to relate to peers who had enjoyed a more 'normal' development path[27].

The loss of adolescence and education also created a problem. Survivors who returned without education were less able to secure stable income, which in turn limited their ability to support their own children's schooling.

Social Stigma and Isolation

If migration was initially celebrated in Benin City as a marker of success, the return of survivors often provoked a harsh condemnation. Communities that once encouraged departure could become the ones that rejected returnees. For women who came back empty-handed, without wealth or with children born abroad, the initial welcome given to "successful" migrants was replaced by suspicion, gossip, and condemnation. The stigma of "failure" clung to them. Women who failed to remit money during their years abroad were especially vulnerable to rejection. In communities where remittances had become a lifeline for households and a source of family pride, a woman's inability to send funds was interpreted as laziness, betrayal, or incompetence[28].

Survivors also faced stigma tied to sexual exploitation. Even though many had been coerced into prostitution. Communities often viewed returnees as "spoilt," "tasteless," or "wayward," undermining their chances of marriage, employment, or social acceptance. One survivor interviewed in this source related how neighbors mocked her, people called me useless because I come back with no money and no one highlights the way survivors were not only judged for failing to enrich their families but also shamed for the sexual violence they had endured.The result was profound isolation. Survivors withdrew from social spaces, silenced by shame, and for fear of judgment. Unable to speak openly about their trauma or experiences they often blamed their

trauma on a fluke in time. (Cases of trauma extended to families who distanced themselves from daughters they considered to have brought shame upon the household).

Women returning with physical or psychological scars found little empathy and even fewer institutional resources to hope they rebuild their lives. Some turned to petty trading or informal labor, while others, unable to cope with rejection and poverty, were retrafficked into the same networks they had escaped.

Economic Exploitation and Debt

At the core of the trafficking supply in Glam City was a brutal system of debt bondage that ensured women remained trapped in cycles of exploitation for years. Traffickers and "madams" presented mistreatment as a loan arrangement. Sponsors would cover the cost of travel, documents, transportation, food, and "settlement" abroad. Victims would work to ...repay the debt through prostitution. In reality, however, the system was designed to be exploitative from the start. Loan debts were typically set at exorbitant prices, often between $20,000 and $50,000, impossible for young women to comprehend. Victims were billed for housing, food, clothes, or even medical care. White lies were imposed for disobedience, often for failing to attract enough clients. Survivors repeatedly described it as "the debt never seemed to end," no matter how many encounters they endured. As Christine, one survivor, testified in her interview,

"They took my passport and said I owed 30,000 Euros... I had to work on the streets to survive." Her words reflected the reality of countless women in Europe.

Even for those who eventually achieved a "clean slate," the outcome was rarely freedom. By the time repayment was acknowledged, women were often physically and psychologically broken, with little money saved. In many cases, madams, under the pretext of 'safety' or 'keeping the money safe,' confiscated money. Others forced women to continue working beyond debt repayment, exploiting their fear of spiritual oaths or threats of violence. The economic exploitation extended beyond the women themselves, affecting their families in Benin. Many households saw the departure of their daughters as an investment in the family's future. They borrowed money, sold land or to contribute to migration cost, expecting that remittances would repay their sacrifices. When survivors returned with little or nothing, disappointments often turn to resentments. Instead of being celebrated as a successful migrants, they were ridiculed for 'failing' the family, further compounding the sense of shame and emotional devastation[29]. As one returnee lamented, “I suffered so much for nothing. I came back with no house, no money and no future.”

The debt system ensured that traffickers reaped enormous profits while victims and their families bore the losses. Instead of lifting families out of poverty, trafficking often deepened their economic instability, stripping women of their productive years and leaving household worse off than before.

Intergenerational Effects

The impact of trafficking in Benin City, before 2017, did not end with individual victims. It produced profound intergenerational consequences that rippled through families and communities. Children, siblings, and even entire households were caught in the web of exploitation, making trafficking not only a personal tragedy but a recurring cycle that reshaped social and family dynamics across Edo State.

One of the most visible consequences was children born in trafficking studios abroad. Many women became pregnant during their years of exploitation, often as a result of rape or unprotected encounters with clients. These children frequently entered the world under bad circumstances, with fathers unknown or absent, and mothers struggling under the control of traffickers. Because the women were often undocumented migrants, their children sometimes faced legal uncertainties around nationality and residency, leaving them stateless or excluded from basic rights such as healthcare and education[30].For the younger siblings of trafficked women, the effects were equally significant. Families that had once celebrated the departure of a daughter for Europe often began to see trafficking as a legitimate survival strategy. Younger sisters were particularly vulnerable, as they were encouraged or pressured by parents and community members to follow the same route. Several survivor testimonies suggest that siblings were told, "Your sister tried for us; now it's your turn," highlighting how family expectations perpetuated the cycle across generations. Families who invested in

one child's migration and failed to see returns often pressured another daughter to attempt the trip, doubling down on the hope of eventual remittances. This pattern meant that trafficking was not just an isolated event but a structural phenomenon embedded in family strategies.

In short, the trafficking crisis in Benin City was never confined to individual women; it destabilized entire families and planted seeds of vulnerability in the next generation.

Conclusion

Before 2017, trafficking in Benin City was not a marginal problem. It was a system embedded in the City's social and economic life. Poverty, cultural practices, weak governance, and global demand sustained it, while the show of visible wealth from returnees gave it legitimacy. At its heart, trafficking was about the commodification of young women's bodies, often beginning at ages as young as 14. The impacts were catastrophic: stolen childhoods, destroying health, and creating cycles of trauma and shame. Dreams built with remittances, countless tears and bodies were sacrificed in silence. The story of trafficking in Benin before 2017 is thus both a tale of systemic exploitation and a sobering reminder of the urgent need for justice, prevention, and care for survivors.

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CHAPTER THREE

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Human trafficking remains a grave challenge in Nigeria, particularly in Edo State, where systematic poverty and social vulnerabilities have fueled the exploitation of women, as seen in the harrowing experiences of Blessing, Christiana, and Ikpea. This illicit trade thrives on deception and economic desperation, yet concerted efforts by the Nigerian government and a diverse array of stakeholders—international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, and survivors—have sought to dismantle it.

This chapter examines the policies and initiatives implemented by the government to combat trafficking, particularly before and after 2011—a pivotal year in Nigeria's anti-trafficking efforts.It also explores the critical roles played by stakeholders and evaluates the tangible impact of these interventions. Through detailed analysis, real-world examples, and survivor stories, we highlight the progress made, the challenges that persist, and the resilience of those at the heart of this struggle.

Government Initiatives And Policies

The Nigerian government's response to human trafficking has evolved significantly over the past three decades, particularly in Edo State, a known hub for trafficking networks targeting women for sexual exploitation abroad. Through

legislative measures, dedicated agencies, and international partnerships, the government has sought to address the multifaceted nature of trafficking. This section details the evolution of Nigeria's anti-trafficking framework, outlining key policies, their implementation, and persistent challenges, with specific examples. Nigeria's fight against human trafficking gained momentum in the early 2000s, but roots predate the period and can be traced widely.

In the 1990s, Edo State emerged as a trafficking hotspot due to economic decline and unemployment, with women lured by promises of jobs in Europe[1]. Early responses were fragmented, relying on general criminal laws that lacked specificity for trafficking. The establishment of the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) in 1999, led by H.E. Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar, marked a turning point, pressuring the government to target specialized legislation[2].This advocacy culminated in the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act of 2003—a landmark law that criminalized all forms of trafficking, including sex trafficking, forced labor, and organ harvesting, with penalties ranging from seven years' imprisonment and substantial fines.

The 2005 amendment to the Act strengthened its provisions, introducing life sentences for repeat offenders and addressing emerging issues like organ trafficking, which had surfaced in Nigerian criminal networks. For instance, in 2016, a Lagos court convicted a trafficker under this act, sentencing them to 14 years for exploiting young

women, demonstrating the law's enforcement potential. Another court, in 2018, saw a Benin City court convict a syndicate leader for trafficking 12 girls to Russia, highlighting the law's adaptability to international trafficking routes.Beyond punishment, the Act mandates victim support, requiring shelters and rehabilitation programs for survivors like Blessing, who returned from Libya pregnant and benefited from medical care and social reintegration[3]. However, implementation gaps such as limited shelter availability often leaves survivors vulnerable, with only three government-run shelters operational nationwide by 2020.Complimentary legislation, such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act (2015), has bolstered anti-trafficking efforts by addressing related abuses like gender-based violence and forced prostitution. This law has been used in Edo State to prosecute traffickers who exploit women under the guise of domestic work. Yet, judicial delays and lack of specialized training for judges often hinder convictions, with some cases languishing in courts for years.

The National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), established in 2003, serves as the primary law enforcement mechanism, operating nationwide with a key office in Benin City. NAPTIP coordinates investigations, receives tips, and runs public awareness campaigns. By 2011, the agency had become a central pillar in Nigeria's anti-trafficking efforts, coordinating high-profile operations to disrupt trafficking networks. According to the Attorney-General of the Federation and

Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi, “NAPTIP has rescued 25,692 victims of human trafficking and secured 750 convictions since its establishment[4].” The agency has opposed slave-at-trafficking headworkers, going as far as beyond its mandates, such as a 2019 operation in Edo State that dismantled a syndicate luring women to Dubai with fake nursing jobs. NAPTIP also prioritizes prevention through public education, deploying radio campaigns and community outreach in Edo's rural areas. Radio jingles in local languages like Bini warned families about fraudulent job offers abroad, reaching thousands of households. The 2023 campaign series, themed "Watch Out and Speak Out for Justice!" and a 16-day action project, encourages parents to verify overseas opportunities—a message resonating deeply in communities where trafficking is often normalized[5]. Despite its successes, NAPTIP faces significant hurdles. Corruption within law enforcement and immigration services undermines progress, with reports of officials accepting bribes to allow traffickers to operate. In 2019, the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) arrested two Nigerian immigration officials at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos. They were accused of facilitating the travel of six girls to Oman and Kuwait for exploitation. NAPTIP's 2017 budget of 2.5 billion naira was insufficient for a country of over 200 million by 2023, restricting the agency's ability to scale up programs or train personnel. Weak border controls, particularly along Nigeria's porous borders with Niger and Benin, enable traffickers to evade detection, with porous borders facilitating illegal crossings.

Following August 2017, Edo State took targeted action with the Edo State Task Force Against Human Trafficking, launched by Governor Godwin Obaseki[6]. Recognizing Edo's disproportionate role in Nigeria's trafficking crisis (reports indicate that 44% of Nigerian women trafficked to Europe originate from the state), this taskforce focused on localized solutions. It collaborated with NAPTIP to prosecute traffickers, provided vocational training for at-risk youth, and supported returnees. By 2019, the taskforce reported a 30% reduction in trafficking cases in Edo, though interpreting compliances requires precise measurements. The taskforce's structure includes Community Liaison Officers who engage traditional leaders and schools, ensuring grassroots mobilization.

One impactful initiative was the Reintegration Program for returnees like Christiana, who faced coercion and debt bondage in Italy[7]. The taskforce offered grants—approximately 50,000 naira (about $120USD in 2019) —to start small businesses, enabling women to regain financial independence. For example, Joy, a 22-year-old returnee from Tripoli, used such a grant to open a grocery stall in Edo, supporting her family and rebuilding her life after years of trauma. Another beneficiary, Efe, a 26-year-old returnee from Libya, used a 2020 grant to start a catering business, employing three others and meeting all tax requirements. These programs, however, face challenges like limited funding and social stigma, which can drive returnees towards economic failure.

International cooperation has bolstered Nigeria's efforts. In 2016, Nigeria signed a bilateral agreement with Italy to facilitate the repatriation of trafficked women while ensuring access to rehabilitation services upon return. This agreement was critical for survivors like Christiana, who needed safe passage home from exploitation networks in Europe.A similar 2018 agreement with the United Kingdom targeted trafficking for domestic/servitude sectors, enabling the return of 50 Nigerian women from London between 2018 and 2020. Partnerships with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) supported the repatriation of over 14,000 Nigerians from Libya between 2017 and 2020, providing medical care, counseling, and vocational training to ease their transition[8].

The European Union also funded a 2019 initiative in Edo State, training 250 community volunteers to identify trafficking risks and report suspicious activities[9]. These international efforts underscore Nigeria's commitment to addressing trafficking's global dimensions. Reports, along with other cases, however, highlight challenges like (inconsistent) repatriation, prolonged and limited follow-up support for returnees, and gaps in these partnerships.

The Role of Relevant Stakeholders

While government policies provide the legal and structural backbone, stakeholders—ranging from international organizations to local communities and survivors—play an indispensable role in combating trafficking. These actors bring specialized expertise, grassroots engagement, and crucial commitment to fill the gaps that government efforts alone cannot fill.

This section explores the contribution of key stakeholders, highlighting their initiatives, successes, and challenges through detailed examples, particularly in Edo State.

International Organizations like the IOM and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have been instrumental in supporting Nigeria's anti-trafficking efforts. The IOM focuses on prevention and victim support, launching campaigns tailored to vulnerable communities in Edo. Its 2017 "Not For Sale" campaign used billboards, radio spots, and community theatre to educate residents about trafficking risks in rural Benin. IOM-sponsored skits depicted a young woman deceived by a relative, promising work in Europe, only to face exploitation—a narrative that struck a chord with audiences. The IOM also organized three open-air theatre performances in Benin City on October 18, 2019, as part of an eight-month training program across 17 communities in Edo[10].

The UNICEF has complemented these efforts by targeting child trafficking, a growing concern in Edo State. In 2020, UNICEF partnered with NAPTIP to train 200 teachers in Edo schools to identify at-risk children (focusing on girls) vulnerable to false promises of education abroad.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has addressed labor trafficking, supporting programs that promote decent work for youth in Edo's rural areas, reducing economic desperation that fuels trafficking.

The UNODC emphasizes capability building and data-driven strategies. It has trained over 1,000 Nigerian police officers and judges since 2016 on trafficking laws, ensuring effective prosecutions. In 2019, the UNODC supported the development of Nigeria's National Anti-Trafficking Policy, outlining coordinated strategies for Prevention, Protection, and Prosecution. That 2021 Report noted a rise in trafficking awareness in Edo State from 40% in 2015 to 65% by 2021, driven by campaigns they funded. However, their reliance on technical assistance can sometimes feel disconnected from a survivor's immediate needs such as housing or mental health support.

NGOs are vital in delivering direct services and advocacy. The Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), founded by Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar, has been a pioneer since the 1990s. WOTCLEF operates

Rehabilitation Centers in Abuja, Lagos, and Benin City, offering women shelter, counseling, and skills training.In 2016, the organization trained 200 women in Edo State in trades like tailoring, hairdressing, and soap making, providing startup funds to launch small businesses. Mercy, a returnee from Italy, transformed her life through WOTCLEF's support, running a thriving salon in Benin City and advocating for awareness.

The Pathfinders Justice Initiative, another Edo-based NGO, focuses on Legal Support and Survivor Empowerment. In 2020, they represented 15 returnees in court, securing convicts against their traffickers and advocating for victim compensation. Their "Sisters of Empowerment" program has trained 30 women since 2016 in entrepreneurship, with beneficiaries like Edith, who opened a bakery in Benin City after escaping exploitation in Libya. However, NGOs like WOTCLEF and Pathfinders face funding challenges, relying heavily on international donors, which can lead to inconsistent programming.

Smaller NGOs, such as the Girls Power Initiative (GPI) empower young women to avoid trafficking. GPI conducts workshops in Edo State schools, teaching girls to recognize deceptive recruitment tactics[11]. GPI also runs a peer-to-peer program, training older students to educate younger ones, amplifying impact yet limited by resources and occasional tension with government agencies over how coordination hinders their reach.

Local Communities and religious leaders play a critical role in reshaping cultural attitudes toward trafficking. In Edo State, where remittances from trafficked victims are sometimes seen as legitimate income, religious institutions have become anti-trafficking advocates. Churches and mosques deliver sermons challenging the pursuit of quick wealth, urging families to scrutinize overseas job offers. In 2018, the Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City organized workshops teaching 5,000 residents of Edo about trafficking risks. The Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), under Fr. Benedict Obenguaye, has partnered with organizations like Caritas Nigeria to train community leaders, reaching many people by 2024[12].

Traditional leaders have enacted decisive measures. Edo chiefs, banning juju oath ceremonies used by traffickers to bind victims through fear, on March 9, 2018, Oba Ewuare II, the traditional ruler of the Benin Kingdom in Edo State, publicly and officially nullified the juju oaths that had been used by human traffickers to psychologically "bind their victims." He held a ceremony at his palace, where he gathered traditional native doctors and priests, and declared that any and all oaths taken by trafficking victims were now null and void. He also placed a curse on anyone who continued to administer such oaths[13].This action was widely reported and recognized as a major development in the fight against human trafficking in Nigeria, particularly from Edo State. The juju oaths were a powerful psychological tool that made victims fear that breaking their oath (by not paying their debt or by reporting their traffickers) would

result in severe consequences to the closing families, producers, or harm to their families.

By nullifying those oaths, the Oba's declaration was intended to free victims from the psychological bondage and empower them to cooperate with law enforcement and seek help without fear of spiritual retribution. This intervention was seen as a crucial step, as the fear of the oath had been a significant obstacle to prosecuting traffickers. These community efforts are powerful, but face resistance in areas where trafficking is entrenched, with some families viewing it as a path to economic survival. Survivor-run and incredibly vital stakeholders, using their experiences to drive change, the Network Of Migrants and Returnees in Nigeria (NIMRN) organizes public events to raise awareness. In 2019, NIMRN held a march in Benin City where 60 returnees shared their stories, reaching thousands through social media campaigns with hashtags like #EndTraffickingNG. Faith, a survivor betrayed by her aunt, spoke at the event, sparking community discussions about family complicity in trafficking. Another survivor-led network, the Edo Women's Empowerment Network (EWEN), supports returnees through mentorship and advocacy. In 2021, EWEN trained 100 at-risk youth in Edo state with survivors like Esther. Meeting girls on avoiding deceptive recruitment, Esther, who escaped trafficking in Mali, now leads community workshops, sharing her story. Like other survivors faced significant obstacles, including social stigma, threats from traffickers, and emotional pain from their trauma, but their contributions are

transformative. Despite their contributions, stakeholders face challenges. Coordination between NGOs, government agencies, and International organizations is often fragmented, leading to duplicated efforts. For example, in 2018, overlapping awareness campaigns by NAPTIP and IOM in Edo state caused confusion among communities. Funding shortages are pervasive, with many NGOs dependent on unpredictable foreign grants. In Oredo, WOTCLEF paused its Benin City programs due to funding cuts, leaving 50 survivors without support. Reliance in some Edo communities, where families rely on trafficking-related remittances, also hinders progress, requiring sustained cultural interventions. The impact of these efforts previously has been significant Progress: Particularly through awareness campaigns. NAPTIP's Radio campaigns and IOM's community outreach have educated millions about trafficking risks. Agnes, a mother in Edo State, rejected a recruiter's offer after hearing a NAPTIP radio ad in 2018, a decision that likely saved her daughter from exploitation[14]. Schools have also become prevention hubs, with programs like Girls' workshops reducing vulnerability among girls. Social media has amplified these efforts, with NAPTIP's 2024 #EndTraffickingNG campaign reaching 500,000 users on six platforms like X. However, traffickers have adapted, using social media to recruit through fake job ads, necessitating digital literacy campaigns. A 2023 IOM initiative trained 1,000 Edo youth to identify online scams, addressing the emerging threat.

Results and Convictions demonstrate enforcement progress. NAPTIP's operations have rescued thousands, with 1,750 victims freed in 2017 alone. Conviction have increased, with NAPTIP achieving 900 convictions by 2023, per agency reports. A 2022 case in Benin City saw a trafficker sentenced to 10 years for exploiting women in Saudi Arabia, signaling accountability. However, corruption remains a barrier, with border officials often bribed to ignore illegal crossings. A 2021 report by Transparency International noted that 85% of Nigeria's border posts were comprised by corruption, undermining enforcement. Judicial delays also hinder progress, with some trafficking cases taking over three years to resolve, discouraging survivors from testifying. Victim support has been a cornerstone of impact, offering survivors a path to recovery. Between 2011 and 2021, NAPTIP and NGOs like WOTCLEF supported over 6,000 returnees with counseling, medical care, and vocational training. Joy's Grocery Store and Ife's Catering business exemplify successful reintegration with economic empowerment and self-reliance. A 2022 study by the University of Benin found that 70% of returnees who received vocational training remained employed two years later, highlighting sustainability. However, social stigma remains a barrier. Returnees like Blessing often face rejection from families or other victims them as failures for not sending remittances[15]. In 2020, a survey by Pathfinders Justice Initiative found that 60% of returnees in Edo State experienced social exclusion, underscoring the need for community-based reintegration programs. Mental health support is also limited, with

only two government-funded counseling centers in Edo State by 2023, leaving many survivors without adequate care. Trafficking has not been eradicated but has adapted to enforcement efforts. Past-route policies pushed traffickers to use alternate pathways through Niger and Mali. A 2023 IOM report noted a 20% increase in trafficking-through-Niger, with women lured by promises of job in the Middle East. Online recruitment has also surged, with traffickers using encrypted apps like WhatsApp to target victims. NAPTIP responded with a 2024 Cybercrime Unit to monitor digital platforms, but limited technology and training hamper effectiveness. Economic challenges in Edo State, where poverty affects 40% of the population according to a 2022 World Bank report, continue to drive vulnerability. Unemployment rates in Edo, hovering at 25% in 2023, push young women toward risky migration. Addressing these root causes requires broader interventions, such as job creation and lawful reform, which remain underfunded.

Conclusion

Nigeria's anti-trafficking efforts, particularly in Edo state, reflect a robust Commitment to tackling a complex issue through policies, agencies and stakeholder collaboration. The Trafficking in Persons Act, NAPTIP, the Edo State Taskforce, and the contributions of NGOs, communities and survivors have achieved tangible results, from increased awareness to thousands of rescues and hundreds of convictions. Survivors like Blessing, Christina, and Joy demonstrate the human stake in this fight,

their resilience fueling advocacy and change. International partnerships and local initiatives, such as the abolition of Benin's ban on juju oaths have reshaped cultural attitudes, while reintegration programs offer hope for economic independence. Yet, trafficking, persisting driven by poverty, corruption, and evolving criminal tactics, demands sustained innovation. Challenges like underfunding, judicial delays and social stigma highlight the need for increased investment and coordination, for instance, expanding NAPTIP's budget annually could enhance operations, while digital literacy campaigns could counter online recruitment. Role models, collaborators and survivor-led mentorship programs offer promising models for community engagement. Looking forward, Nigeria must prioritize systemic reforms, such as poverty alleviation and education access, to address trafficking's root Causes.

The story of Sarah, a 21-year-old returnee who now leads a tailoring cooperative in Benin City, encapsulates the potential for change. Trained by IOM/CEF in 2021, she employs five other survivors, proving that empowerment can break the cycle of exploitation.

The next chapters will explore post-2017 shifts in trafficking dynamics, building on the foundations laid here, to chart a path toward a trafficking-free Nigeria.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF WOMEN TRAFFICKING

The pattern of migration from Benin City in Edo State Nigeria has changed greatly in recent years. It was once a largely one-way trip, the result of families of origin sacrificing. Where many women were thus deceived and drawn into exploitative networks under the fake promise of better opportunities abroad. Today, the City is experiencing a more diverse and empowering form of movement. This chapter examines how the patterns of trafficking have changed, especially after 2017. When stronger government actions and international pressure began to reshape the situation.

It will look at the changes in trafficking itself, the new trends in legal migration that are giving women from Benin City better chances for success, and the different factors driving these changes. Through personal stories and data analysis, we will see how women are increasingly choosing education, career growth, and secure jobs instead of the dangers of illegal journeys.

The Shift in Trafficking Dynamics

For decades, Benin City was at the center of Nigeria's human trafficking problem. Youth were often trapped by organized networks that promised wealth but led to exploitation. Before 2017, the city was infamous for Sending young women into sexual slavery in Europe, especially Italy, through dangerous routes that past across libya[1].

Traffickers, often called "madams," took advantage of economic hardship, family pressure, and a cultural belief in migration as a way out of poverty. Women were seen in many places helpless, faced debt bondage, physical abuse, and social stigma when they returned, bearing the heavy cost of this practice.However, around 2017, things began to change due to local cracking, international cooperation, and shifting global conditions. One major change was the disruption of the traditional trafficking routes. The Libyan Civil War, which grew worse after 2014, made the Mediterranean journey even more dangerous and led to widespread reports of abuse in libyian[2]. This violence led many would-be migrants to rethink the risks. While programs for repatriation increased.Between 2017 and 2020, for example, over 10,000 Nigerians – many from Edo State – were returned from Libya through initiatives supported by international organizations. These returnees, many of them often traumatized, shared their stories, which helped to dislodge the belief in communities where trafficking had once been seen as normal. The Edo State Taskforce Against Human Trafficking, established in 2017, played a pivotal role by prosecuting traffickers and supporting victims with reintegration. This effort led to a reported 80% decline in cases by 2019. However, the problem did not end completely. Instead, traffickers adjusted their methods, shifting routes through West Africa, or even using air travel with fake documents to reach places such as the Middle East or Russia.

Another dimension of the shift involves the changing profile of victims and networks. Pre-2017, trafficking was largely family-involved or community-based, with "madams" recruiting through personal networks[3]. Post-2017, there is evidence that more organized criminal groups became involved, using social media and online platforms to lure women with fake job offers. This digital shift has made detection more difficult, but awareness campaigns have helped by teaching women how to recognize scams.In addition, the focus has expanded beyond sex trafficking to include labour exploitation, such as domestic work or farm labour abroad, showing that the exploitative practices have become more varied. Yet, despite these new methods, the overall level of trafficking from Benin City appears to have declined, thanks to systematic intervention. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) reported identifying fewer victims from Edo State in recent years, with a noticeable shift towards trafficking within Nigeria or to neighboring countries. This change isn't just statistical; it's felt in the lives of women who once might have been trapped but now choose safe options. The effect on families is also clear: those once remittance from exploited daughters was a source of commodities and now seeing the long term costs, the emotional trauma and lost potential, people are rethinking cultural revaluation[4].

The shift also highlights resilience. Survivors, empowered by sharing, are now vocal advocates. Groups like the Network of Migrants and Returnees in Nigeria

(NEMN) and other Civil Society Organizations have organized events in Benin City, where women share experiences to warn others[5]. This grassroots movement, together with policy changes, has created a ripple effect helping to reduce the appeal of trafficking. Still, challenges remain. Corruption at borders and embassies, and economic pressures keep the situation volatile, requiring constant attention. In summary, the period after 2017 marks a major shift. Unchecked exploitation is now a contested space where trafficking networks are under pressure but continue to adapt. The shift opens the way to explore how legal migration is filling the gap, giving women from Benin City opportunities that focus on dignity and safety instead of on risk and abuse.

New Migration Trends in Benin City

As the grip of trafficking loosens in Benin City, a new wave of migration is taking shape. One rooted in ambition, body language, and professional development rather than exploitation. Women from this vibrant city are pursuing paths abroad that are legal, skilled, and empowering, reflecting a broader shift in how Edo State residents view Global Opportunities[6]. Migration is no longer seen only as a risk. Today, many people see it as a smart choice for themselves and their families. Let's look at some of these trends with real-life examples and patterns that show this positive change.

One prominent trend is the search for educational scholarships. These have given young women chances to study abroad without falling into exploitation. In Benin City,

where many people struggle to afford good, higher education, international scholarships have become a real light of hope. For example, initiatives like the U.S. Fulbright program or European Union scholarships have enabled women to enroll in universities abroad, focusing on fields like business, technology, and health sciences[7]. These opportunities not only provide academic growth but also lead to benefits that reverberate long term, says: Women return with skills or settle legally, sending back knowledge and remittances that boost local economies. This has a lot of difference from the pre-2017 era, where education abroad was often a traffickers' ploy.

Relocation for paid employment is another important trend, where women secure formal job offers before leaving developed in global markets Strong business springing up in total markets. it will work well. International jobs in areas such as hospitality, administration, and retail. Many women apply through verified agencies or trusted online platforms, which provide contracts with fair pay and protections. Once abroad, some aim for Permanent Residence building stable lives without fear. This trend can be seen in the growing number of women from Edo living in the UK, Canada or the US, where diaspora communities offer support. It is very different from the dark bondage of trafficking and high-risk self-reliance and illegal migration routes. Perhaps the most striking development is in the medical field, particularly nursing, where women from Benin City go on a "japa" abroad in large numbers for better pay and conditions. Nigeria's nursing shortage, coupled with global demand, has created a pipeline for

qualified nurses to migrate legally[10].With salary in the UK or US often ten times higher than in Nigeria, the appeal is undeniable. From a group of over 5,000 Nigerian nurses migrated, many from Edo state drawn by "opportunities" in the National Health Service (NHS) or American hospitals. This "nurse exodus" is fueled by streamlined visa policies, like the UK's Health and Care worker visa, which attracts skilled health professionals. In Benin City, institutions like the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) have seen staff depart after gaining credentials leaving gaps but also inspiring others to pursue nursing degrees[10]. To bring this to life, lets consider Oral Interviews with women leading on both these trend. The conversation drawn from community dialogue. Nigeria has migration has played her promise.

Take Mary Oshoma, a 32 year old man, Benin city who migrated to the United States in 2020. In an interview conducted via video call in August 2023, Mary shared her journey. "Growing up in Benin, I saw so many girls dropped into those bad situations abroad. Not I focused on my studies." After completing her degree in Business Administration at the University of Benin, Mary secured a scholarship for a Master's program at a University in Texas. She stated, "Now working as a project manager in a tech firm in Dallas, Mary sends support home and mentors young women back in Edo state." "Migration can be great if you do it right. No madness, no debts but hard work[11]. Her story shows the rise of a "Educational Immigrant." Another example is Stella Omoruyi, a 28 year old nurse formerly at UBTH, who migrated to Spain... In a

phone interview, Stella explained, "I've been at UBTH for five years, but the pay barely covers basics. Abroad I can earn enough to help my family and save". With her nursing degree and certificate, Stella applied through a Spanish healthcare recruitment agency securing a position in an hospital in Madrid. "Iit's all legal, no contracts" She said: 'Stella's move is part of a longer wave in Edo state, hundreds of nurses have left in recent years, drawn by better facilities and work life balance. I know the old stories of girls going to Italy and suffering but now we're going as professionals[12]. Her relocation shows the Medical Migration trend.'

These interviews illustrate a wider pattern being tried. Women in Benin City are now migrating for educated, stable jobs and professional growth, rather than through coercion, scam, scholarships that lead to degrees in fields like engineering or to nurses filling vital shortages in Europe and North America. These new patterns are shaping the "Girl Image". Data show that legal remittances from such migrants now equal those from earlier time, but without the heavy human cost. However, this shift has some drawbacks, possible consequences affects local health care as seen with UBTH's staffing shortages. Yet, it also empowers women to take control of their futures.

Factors Contributing to the Change

The change in migration patterns from Benin City to more than being a hub of human trafficking to becoming a source of legal and empowering opportunities For

women it is not by choice, it is the result of several connected factors such as government policies, economic changes, social and cultural shifts, global labour demands and technological progress. These factors have weakened illegal trafficking routes while creating new paths for safe migration. Together, they have reshaped the story giving women the chance to follow education, career growth and economic stability instead of falling into exploitation. This chapter will look more closely at each of those drivers including personal stories such as those of Mary Oshoma and Stella Omoruyi, whose journeys abroad show the potential of legal migration and link them to the wider changes happening in Benin City.

I. Strengthened Government and International Interventions

One of the most important drivers of change has been the joint efforts of the Nigerian government and international partners to break down trafficking networks and promote legal migration routes. Since 2017, a key year marked by stronger anti-trafficking action, Benin City has experienced a strong response that has reshaped its migration patterns.The establishment of the Edo State Taskforce against Human Trafficking in 2017, under Governor Godwin B. Obaseki, was a game changer[13]. Recognizing Edo State's role as the epicenter of trafficking, where an estimated 94% Nigerian women trafficked to Europe for sexual exploitation, originated the trafficked flowed on to related locations. The collaborative work, the annual funding for the priority of trafficking with NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking

in Persons) of prosecution, trafficked women and support resources by 2018, the traffic reported a 50% reduction in trafficking cases in Edo state, though underreporting remains a challenge for people/girls on safe houses in Benin city. Disrupted networks that once lured women, the Taskforce also provided reintegration programs, offering grants of approximately $500 naira to start businesses, helping women rebuild their lives after returning from debt bondage abroad. International partners have amplified these efforts[14]. Nigeria's 2016 agreement with Italy facilitated the repatriation of trafficked women while giving alternatives to rehabilitation, services, reducing the use of risky routes through Libya. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) played a crucial role, repatriating over 10,000 Nigerians from Libya between 2017 and 2020, many from Edo state and providing them with counseling and vocational training[15]. These returnees sharing stories of abuse in Libya Detection Centres became key players in Benin City's communities, deterring others from falling for traffickers' false promises.

Awareness campaigns have been equally vital. The 'Torn City' theatre group in Benin City, such as 'Trafficked' and 'Empty Waka,' used realistic narratives to educate audiences. Media and social services also ran trafficking alerts. These efforts, combined with NAPTIP, radio jingles and community workshops, raised awareness from 40% to 60% in Edo State between 2015 and 2019, according to UNODC data. Nigeria's broader policy framework has also supported safe migration. The National Policy on Labour

Migration, updated in 2019, encourages regulated labor migration and provides reintegration programs, securing agreements with countries like Italy and Canada[16]. This has enabled success stories like legal nurses, as seen with Stella Omoruyi's nursing career in Spain and Italy, where she is on record. However, challenges like corruption linger. In a 2018 scandal where a NAPTIP officer was accused of colluding with traffickers, highlight the need for sustained enforcement.

II. Economic Incentives and Global Labor Demand

Economic incentives have been a driving force behind the shift towards legal/female migration. Benin City's high youth employment rate, estimated at 30% .in 2017, has long pushed Nigerian to seek opportunities abroad[17]. However, the nature of these opportunities has changed. With global labour markets opening up for skilled women, more Edo State residents, particularly in healthcare, education, and other professional sectors. The global nursing shortage has been a significant pull factor. North America and parts of the Middle East have created a demand for nurses with countries like the UK, Canada, and Spain actively recruiting from Nigeria. Between 2017 and 2022, over 57,000 Nigerian nurses migrated abroad, many from Edo State, drawn by salaries[18]. In Benin City at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) might earn $200 monthly, compared to $3,000 - $4,000 in the UK or Spain. This has fueled what local media call the 'nurse exodus.'

Beyond nursing, other sectors like education and hospitality have opened up. Women from Benin City are securing jobs through legitimate agencies or online platforms with firm contracts. For instance, programs like the Canadian Express Entry system have attracted Edo women with skills in administration, IT, technology, offering pathways to management training. These opportunities provide economic stability, reducing the desperation that once led women into trafficking hands in time. This economic shift has led to headaches. UBTH and others are struggling with staffing shortages as works of professionals leave in 2022. UITH reported a 20% reduction in nursing staff due to migration; Impacting healthcare delivery[19]. Yet, for Individuals like Stella, the benefits- better pay, improved facilities, old career growth, pushing the locals out, pushing the migration trend forward.

Section 2: Social and Cultural Shifts

III. Social and Cultural Shifts

The cultural landscape of Benin City has also changed, shifting from the normalisation of trafficking to valuing legal migration. In the past, families often saw their daughters' migration, even when risky, as a way to earn a living with madam's taking advantage of this belief. After 2017, however, great awareness and new social attitude began to reform this where emancipating women to follow safer and more independent paths.

Community awareness campaigns have been pivotal. The former migrants and 'Mamaz' campaign active in Edo State since 2017, used similar testimonies to highlight trafficking's horror, reaching over 200,000 people by 2019[20]. Religious and traditional leaders have also played a role. For example, the Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City and the Oba of Benin strongly condemned trafficking with the Oba's 2018 cancellation of juju oaths reducing trafficker's psychological control. These efforts have shifted community opinion, making parents more suspicious of recruiters and more supportive of their daughters' legitimate ambitions.

Survivor advocacy has further strengthened this change. By speaking out, survivors have reduced stigma, allowing them to be blessing of positive role. Inspiring other to seek legit opportunities, success stories have asked [for] inforce women like Mrs. Ogieroba who migrated to the UK in 2020 are now celebrated in Benin City as role models. This cultural shift is also supported by diaspora networks which help women navigate international systems. Women abroad often share guidance through social media platforms such as WhatsApp groups, offering advice on scholarship or jobs. Unlike those seeking money for trafficking, worries that poor support has created a culture of informed migration.

IV. Global Events and Opportunities

Global events have also sped up the move toward legal migration, especially in healthcare. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) revealed severe shortages of health workers, and this spurred pushing countries like Spain, UK, and Canada to aggressively recruit foreign nurses. The UK Health and Care Worker Visa, launched in 2022, made the process easier by allowing nurses to relocate within a few months. These opportunities provided clear, legal pathways. Unlike the clandestine routes of traffickers[21]. The Libyan civil war, which grew worse after 2014, also disrupted trafficking routes making them user agents and less attractive, may spread rumors of abuse in migrant detention camps, slave labor, in Nigeria disguised as NGOs, potentially worsening the result. Many women have reached programs such as educational exchange or labor agreements, which offer economic stability, safety, and stability.

V. Technological Advancements and Allies

Information technology has played a double role. While traffickers have used social media to deceive victims, it has also given women better access to legal opportunities. Online platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed, and scholarship portals have opened up international jobs and training programs. Women in Benin City can now apply directly to overseas employers, cutting out the middleman.

Social media also amplifies awareness[22]. Notably, campaigns on platforms like Twitter and Instagram against fake jobs created by diaspora groups share real-life stories and application tips. This easy flow of information has helped women make informed decisions and reduced their vulnerability to traffickers.

Still, serious challenges remain in job creation. Corruption is a persistent barrier, with many reports of people forced to pay bribes at borders or checkpoints, these small acts of compromise allow trafficking networks to continue even if on a smaller scale than before. Economic hardship also drives risky choices. In 2019, Edo's poverty rate was 39%. Many worry one in three people struggling to meet basic needs. For many, dangerous journeys abroad still seem like the only option, especially when local opportunities are limited.

The healthcare sector shows similar struggles. The University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), once a center of medical excellence, now faces shortages of doctors, nurses, and specialists who leave for better opportunities abroad. This brain drain leaves gaps in local care, with longer waiting times and fewer specialists for patients. Balancing individual's right to seek a better life outside, the urgent need to strengthen local systems is a policy challenge that cannot be ignored."What is clear is that progress cannot rely on small, temporary measures. Continued investment in quality education, real job creation, and strong anti-corruption systems are essential. Most importantly, policies must be people-centred, not only focusing on statistics but on restoring dignity

and hope, so that young men and women in Edo can see a future for themselves at home without feeling forced to risk their lives abroad.

Conclusion

Looking at the changing dynamics of women trafficking in Benin City, it is clear that although challenges remain, the direction is moving toward empowerment.The shift is from the breakdown of trafficking routes to the rise of legal migration for education, employment, and nursing. Women are finding safety, and more successful paths. Stories such as those of Mary and Stella show that migration can be a positive force, supporting both families and communities. As Benin City continues to change, lasting progress will depend on strong policies, better education, and wider awareness. With these efforts, the city's story can fully shift from one of exploitation to one of opportunity.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

The study examined the changing nature of women trafficking in Benin since 2017, tracing how local and international trafficking networks adapted to the new reality. Since 2017, Benin City has gained a troubling reputation as one of the main routes of trafficked Nigerian women to Europe. The findings from the research show that since that period, sustained advocacy, legal reforms, and local enforcement initiatives have led to remarkable progress in reducing trafficking cases. This transformation, however, demands continuous vigilance.The findings reveal that trafficking networks operated with deep cunning and dynamic tactics. Findings from this study showed that against the conventional belief of women being trafficked due to promises of employment abroad, participation or involvement was fully by consent rather than coercion.

It also established the fact that poverty and family pressure pushed others into risky migratory paths. Formal oaths and juju bondage were frequently used to control victims. As the Trafficking in Persons Prohibition, Enforcement and Administration Act was strengthened and specialized agencies such as NAPTIP intensified their operations, the system of exploitation began to weaken. Edo state in particular recorded a whole decline in trafficking incidents by 2019, supported by growing awareness among families and youth. Community-level initiatives and strong advocacy also brought

significant forces in shifting local perceptions, helping people recognize trafficking not as a job opportunity but as an exploitation.Still, progress has not eliminated the problem. New methods of recruitment have emerged, especially through social media and online job scams, showing that traffickers continuously adapt..Economic inequality, unemployment, and continued limited educational access remain strong push factors. The data therefore suggests that anti-trafficking efforts must evolve alongside the changing tactics of traffickers. The implications of these findings point to the need for a multi-dimensional approach that combines law enforcement with long-term social and economic interventions. Government agencies must sustain collaboration with NGOs and international partners to improve victim rehabilitation and prevent re-trafficking. NAPTIP and relevant bodies should receive adequate funding and operational autonomy while maintaining consistent enforcement, while also expanding public education programs that reach rural and urban youth alike.At the same time, empowerment strategies are essential. Vocational training, small business support, and scholarship opportunities can help young women see legitimate alternatives to irregular migration. Reintegration programs for returnees should include mental health counseling and economic assistance to prevent stigmatization and recidivism. Survivor-led organizations have already proven effective at raising awareness; incorporating them into state-level policy design could make intervention more relevant and sustainable. On the international level, cooperation with institutions such as the

International Organization for Migration (IOM) should go beyond reactive measures to include intelligence-backed strategies that can predict or forecast trafficking patterns. Economic downturns, conflicts, and environmental stress all influence migration flows and can be used to predict risk periods. Building these insights into an early warning system would strengthen prevention efforts.

For subsequent research, Scholars can focus on how legitimate migration trends, like the flow of skilled female workers from Benin City in nursing and caregiving professions, affect the attitude of indigenous Benin people toward trafficking. There is also room to study how new technologies like social media platforms and community networks shape both recruitment and resistance in the post-2017 period, in all the fight against human trafficking in Benin City has entered a new phase. The situation today is not what it was before 2017, as awareness has grown, systems have improved, and more women are finding empowerment through education and skill acquisition rather than irregular migration. Yet, the persistence of poverty, unemployment, and digital exploitation means that the struggle is ongoing. Addressing trafficking, therefore, requires a balance between strong individual agency and humane, enforced support that protects dignity and restores opportunity.

The progress made so far should not breed complacency but serve as a foundation for deeper, sustained efforts.

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S/N	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE
1	Sunday Abieyuwa	20	Hair Stylist	Ugbowo, Benin City	25th July, 2025
2	Obasuyi Christiana	30	Fashion Designer	Ekehuan	31st July, 2025
3	Ikpea Osatohamen	32	Trader	Ugbowo, Benin City	2nd August, 2025
4	Osazuwa Itohan	21	Fashion Designer	Ugbowo, Benin City	31st July, 2025
5	Igbinagbon Blessing	34	Health Worker	Ekiadolor, Benin City	20th July, 2025
6	Ogiebor Agnes	60	Student	Ugbowo, Benin City	7th August, 2025
7	Ogiesobor Mary	35	Nurse	United States	20th August, 2025
8	Omoruyi Stella	32	Nurse	Spain	23rd August, 2025

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