

IMPACT OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN ADAMAWA AND TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Human trafficking remains a critical human rights violation in Nigeria, disproportionately affecting women and children. This study examined the impact of human trafficking on women and children in Adamawa and Taraba States, north-eastern Nigeria. A region uniquely vulnerable to conflict, poverty, displacement, and porous borders. Employing a cross-sectional survey complemented by qualitative methods, the study sampled 400 respondents, including trafficking survivors, vulnerable households, law enforcement officials, and community leaders. Findings reveal that victims are predominantly female adolescents aged 13–18 years, from rural, low-income families with limited formal education, and often from broken or single-parent households. The main drivers of trafficking include poverty, unemployment, limited education, socio-cultural practices such as child marriage, family dysfunction, deception by familiar individuals, and weak institutional enforcement. The consequences for victims are multidimensional, encompassing severe physical abuse, psychological trauma, sexual exploitation, social stigma, and suicidal ideation. Anti-trafficking interventions, including law enforcement, awareness campaigns, and reintegration programs, were found largely ineffective, with significant gaps in rural outreach, victim support, and prosecution of offenders. The study concludes that addressing human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba requires context-specific, survivor-centred strategies integrating education, economic empowerment, community engagement, trauma-informed care, and stronger institutional accountability.

Keywords: *Human trafficking, women and children, Adamawa State, Taraba State, exploitation, vulnerability, anti-trafficking interventions, Nigeria*

Introduction

Human trafficking represents one of the most egregious human rights violations of the contemporary era, constituting a sophisticated form of transnational organized crime that systematically exploits society's most vulnerable members (Fanu, et al., 2023). Africa has been identified as region where modern slavery is most prevalent, with the phenomenon disproportionately affecting women and girls (Kiss et al., 2022). Within this continental context, Nigeria functions as a major source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking, with criminal networks exploiting systemic vulnerabilities including pervasive poverty, institutional corruption, weak legal frameworks, and widespread insecurity (Adio-Moses, et al., 2019; Fanu, et al., 2023). The United States Department of State, in

its 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report, classified Nigeria as a Tier 2 country, acknowledging governmental efforts to combat trafficking while noting that the country does not yet fully meet minimum standards for elimination (United States Department of State, 2025).

The trafficking of women and children manifest through multiple forms of exploitation across Nigeria. Victims are subjected to sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude, and organ harvesting, with criminal networks operating across state and international borders (Adio-Moses, et al., 2019). In their mixed-methods study of trafficked women and girls in Nigeria and Uganda, Kiss, et al. (2022) found that young female survivors experience violence before migration, during transit, and at their destinations, with family poverty, violence, and neglect serving as primary drivers of migration. Kiss, et al. further revealed that children and adolescents had remarkably low levels of education, with most having their studies interrupted before migration, and that family members and close social contacts were the most common intermediaries facilitating their movement. This phenomenon of recruitment by familiar faces including peers, friends, and relatives protects traffickers from detection and prosecution while amplifying the helplessness of survivors through deceit, indebtedness, and shame (Mbakogu, 2022).

The particular vulnerability of women and children in northern Nigeria, including Adamawa and Taraba States, demands urgent scholarly attention. These north-eastern states share distinctive characteristics including proximity to conflict-affected regions, endemic poverty, and porous borders that may facilitate trafficking activities (Fanu, et al., 2023). Research by Michael et al. (2024) examining deliberate adolescent pregnancies for child trafficking in Nigerian communities identified determinant factors including socio-economic vulnerability, marital infertility, societal pressure, money rituals, criminal exploitation, limited education access, and inadequate legal protection. Their qualitative study, involving pregnant adolescent girls aged 11 to 16 years, family members, community leaders, and community members, revealed how criminal networks exploit systemic vulnerabilities with impunity. Such findings reflect what Omotoso and Alokun (2024) describe as the ineffectiveness of state-centric legal and institutional approaches, which has necessitated a paradigm shift toward community-based strategies in anti-trafficking efforts.

The health consequences of trafficking for women and children are severe and multidimensional. Adio-Moses, et al. (2019) demonstrate that trafficking has deleterious effects on the psychological, social, physical, and physiological health of victims, with the vulnerability of women further portrayed in a large body of evidence documenting these adverse outcomes. Kiss et al. (2022) documented that during transit, sexual violence and hunger were common, particularly among Nigerian victims, and that adolescents interviewed in their qualitative study reported severe mental suffering, including suicide attempts. Despite these grave outcomes, only one participant in their study reported the prosecution of perpetrators, and systemic conditions continue to render the trafficking of female adolescents invisible, profitable, and inconsequential for those who exploit them. Badejo, et al. (2021) argue for transforming rescue services in Nigeria toward context-

specific intersectionality and trauma-informed perspectives, recognising that survivors require holistic, culturally appropriate interventions.

While existing research has examined human trafficking at the national level in Nigeria, there remains a conspicuous gap in scholarly literature regarding the specific impact of trafficking on women and children in Adamawa and Taraba States. The Global Slavery Index (2016) identified Nigeria as having one of the highest prevalence rates of modern slavery in West Africa, yet sub-national variations in trafficking patterns, victim experiences, and exploitation mechanisms remain under-researched. Idemudia et al. (2021) examined reintegration experiences of trafficking survivors in Nigeria, highlighting the complex challenges victims face upon return, while Eteng et al. (2021) analysed gender and modern slavery through the lens of baby factories and terrorism. However, no study has specifically investigated the unique trafficking dynamics operating within the north-eastern border states of Adamawa and Taraba, where conflict-induced displacement, economic marginalisation, and weak institutional presence may create distinct patterns of vulnerability and exploitation. This study therefore sought to examine the impact of human trafficking on women and children in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite decades of national and international interventions, human trafficking continues to devastate the lives of women and children across Nigeria, causing severe physical, psychological, and social consequences, including sexual violence, malnutrition, forced labour, and enduring trauma that often manifests in suicide attempts among adolescent survivors. While national-level studies have identified pervasive poverty, institutional corruption, weak legal frameworks, and recruitment by familiar individuals as primary drivers of trafficking, and recent research has highlighted deliberate adolescent pregnancies as a tactic for child trafficking in vulnerable communities, there remains a conspicuous lack of empirical investigation focusing specifically on Adamawa and Taraba States in Nigeria's north-eastern region.

These states possess unique characteristics (including proximity to conflict-affected areas, endemic poverty, porous borders, and documented cross-border trafficking activities intercepted by law enforcement) that may create patterns of vulnerability and exploitation distinct from other Nigerian regions. This research gap has resulted in anti-trafficking interventions in Adamawa and Taraba being inadequately informed by context-specific evidence, perpetuating the ineffectiveness of state-centric approaches that fail to account for local dynamics. Consequently, law enforcement agencies, and victim support services lack the empirical foundation necessary to develop targeted, survivor-centred, and trauma-informed strategies capable of effectively disrupting trafficking networks operating within these vulnerable border communities.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the impact of human trafficking on women and children in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria. The specific objectives were:

- i. To determine the socio-demographic characteristics of victims of human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States.
- ii. To identify the main factors driving human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States.
- iii. To assess the effects of human trafficking on victims in Adamawa and Taraba States.
- iv. To evaluate the effectiveness of anti-trafficking interventions in Adamawa and Taraba States.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of victims of human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria?
- ii. What are the main factors driving human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria?
- iii. What are the effects of human trafficking on victims in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria?
- iv. How effective are the anti-trafficking interventions in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria?

Literature Review

Human trafficking is defined by the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo Protocol) as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons through threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or payments to achieve consent for exploitation (Hoffman and Abidde, 2021). Exploitation includes sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, servitude, and organ removal. Within Nigeria, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPPEA) of 2015 domesticates this framework, providing enhanced protection for women and children.

A critical conceptual distinction exists between human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Hoffman and Abidde (2021) clarify that smuggling involves illegal entry into a state, whereas trafficking is distinguished by ongoing exploitation. Smuggled migrants may consent to illegal crossing, while trafficking victims are subjected to exploitation through coercion and deception. This distinction carries significant implications for legal responses and victim protection.

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly problematised simplistic narratives of victimhood. Hoffman and Abidde (2021) argue for understanding trafficking through the lens of "constrained agency," recognising that individuals may exercise agency within severely circumscribed structural conditions. This perspective is particularly relevant for women and children in Adamawa and Taraba States, where poverty, conflict displacement, and limited opportunities shape decision-making possibilities.

Theoretical Perspectives

The push-pull theory has been extensively applied to understand trafficking dynamics. Push factors include poverty, unemployment, lack of education, family dysfunction, gender discrimination, and conflict-induced displacement. Pull factors encompass perceived economic opportunities, demand for cheap labour, and established trafficking networks (Fanu, Abdullateef and Atta, 2023). Within Adamawa and Taraba, push factors are particularly acute given the legacy of Boko Haram insurgency, widespread poverty, and limited infrastructure.

Feminist theories illuminate the gendered dimensions of trafficking, examining how patriarchal structures render women and girls disproportionately vulnerable (Hoffman and Abidde, 2021). Waget and Zemba (2024) demonstrate how gender inequality operates from household decisions privileging male education, to labour markets segregating women into precarious work, to legal systems failing to protect female victims. Feminist analyses centre survivors' voices, recognizing their strategies for survival and resistance.

Political economy approaches examine how global economic inequalities create conditions conducive to trafficking. Hoffman and Abidde (2021) argue that trafficking must be understood within global capitalism, which produces vast disparities between nations. Within Nigeria, oil extraction has produced uneven development, concentrating wealth while leaving regions like Adamawa and Taraba impoverished (Adio-Moses, Agbaje and Eselebor, 2019).

Global and Regional Context

Africa is the global region where modern slavery is most prevalent, particularly affecting women and children (Kiss et al., 2022). Nigeria serves as a major source, transit, and destination country, accounting for nearly 50 per cent of West African trafficking cases (Sulaiman-Ibrahim, 2025). The Global Slavery Index (2023) ranks Nigeria among the top ten countries globally with the highest number of trafficked persons, estimating 1.4 million Nigerians trapped in modern slavery. Over 60 per cent of Nigerians attempting irregular migration are women and girls, with more than 50,000 Nigerian women trapped in forced prostitution across Europe (Sulaiman-Ibrahim, 2025).

Drivers of Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Economic factors constitute the most frequently cited driver of trafficking. Fanu, Abdullateef and Atta (2023) identify poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunities as fundamental structural conditions that traffickers exploit through promises of employment. NAPTIP officials consistently emphasize that lack of economic opportunities exposes youths to traffickers who lure them with false assurances of better livelihoods (Vanguard, 2026; New Telegraph, 2026).

Limited access to quality education emerges as a critical factor increasing vulnerability. Kiss et al. (2022) found that trafficked women and girls had remarkably low levels of education, with most having studies interrupted before migration. Education deprivation

reduces awareness of trafficking risks and constrains legitimate livelihood options. The Minister of Women Affairs has stressed that improving access to quality education remains the most effective prevention strategy (Sulaiman-Ibrahim, 2025).

Socio-cultural practices significantly contribute to trafficking vulnerability. Akinwumi, Obamwonyi and Oderinde (2025) document harmful practices including female genital cutting, child marriage, and child labour. Child marriage, prevalent in northern Nigeria, functions as both a driver and form of trafficking, with young girls married for bride price that alleviates family poverty. Gender norms that devalue girls' education and restrict female mobility create conditions of heightened vulnerability.

Institutional weaknesses enable trafficking to flourish with impunity. Fanu, Abdullateef and Atta (2023) identify inadequate political commitment and weak enforcement mechanisms as significant factors. The 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report noted that corruption involving law enforcement and judiciary remains a substantial concern (United States Department of State, 2025). Despite NAPTIP securing 93 convictions in 2025 and rescuing over 25,550 victims since inception, implementation remains inconsistent (Thomson Reuters, 2025).

Forms of Trafficking Affecting Women and Children

Sexual exploitation represents one of the most documented forms affecting Nigerian women and girls. Kiss et al. (2022) found high levels of sexual violence during transit and at destination, with many trafficked specifically for commercial sexual exploitation. Over 50,000 Nigerian women are trapped in forced prostitution across Europe, with networks employing voodoo rituals (juju) and debt bondage to ensure compliance (Sulaiman-Ibrahim, 2025).

Forced labour constitutes a significant but less visible form of trafficking. Victims are exploited in agriculture, domestic work, mining, and manufacturing (Adio-Moses, Agbaje and Eselebor, 2019). Domestic servitude is particularly prevalent for girls trafficked from rural to urban areas, performing household labour for little or no compensation while vulnerable to abuse.

Children are disproportionately represented among trafficking victims. Kiss et al. (2022) found that family members and close social contacts were the most common intermediaries facilitating children's migration, a phenomenon Mbakogu (2022) terms "the curse of familiar faces." Michael et al. (2024) examined deliberate adolescent pregnancies for child trafficking, revealing how criminal networks exploit systemic vulnerabilities, creating babies for sale or children for future exploitation.

Emerging forms include "baby factories" where young women are impregnated to produce babies for sale, and trafficking for organ removal (Eteng et al., 2021). NAPTIP's 2025 operations against orphanages resulted in rescue of over 120 suspected trafficked children (Voice of Nigeria, 2026).

Consequences of Human Trafficking

Physical health consequences are severe and multifaceted. Adio-Moses, Agbaje and Eselebor (2019) document malnutrition, injuries from violence, untreated medical conditions, sexually transmitted infections, and substance abuse. Kiss et al. (2022) found hunger common during transit, with withheld wages and poor living conditions compounding health vulnerabilities.

Psychological trauma is perhaps even more devastating. Kiss et al. (2022) documented severe mental suffering including suicide attempts among trafficked adolescents. Traffickers employ intimidation, threats, violence, debt bondage, and social isolation to break victims' resistance. Badejo, Gordon and Mayes (2021) argue for trauma-informed, contextually appropriate interventions.

Social consequences extend beyond individual victims. Idemudia et al. (2021) examined reintegration challenges including stigma, family rejection, difficulty re-establishing relationships, and economic marginalisation. For sexually exploited women, stigma may be particularly severe, with communities viewing them as bringing shame upon families.

Anti-Trafficking Responses

Nigeria has developed a comprehensive legal framework through TIPPEA 2015, which removed the option for fines and addressed emerging trafficking trends (Hoffman and Abidde, 2021). NAPTIP, established in 2003, serves as the lead agency with multidisciplinary mandate encompassing investigation, prosecution, victim protection, and prevention.

The School Anti-Trafficking Education and Advocacy Project (STEAP) represents a flagship prevention initiative, targeting approximately 100,000 students across five states (Thomson Reuters, 2025). NAPTIP operates 14 shelters providing comprehensive support services, with 1,587 victims receiving shelter support in 2025 (Thomson Reuters, 2025).

Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain. Kiss et al. (2022) found only one participant reporting perpetrator prosecution, indicating justice remains elusive. Badejo, Gordon and Mayes (2021) argue rescue services require transformation toward trauma-informed approaches.

Adamawa and Taraba States share distinctive characteristics creating unique trafficking dynamics: proximity to conflict-affected areas, high poverty rates, limited educational infrastructure, porous borders with Cameroon, and internally displaced persons. This study therefore, sought to determine the impact of human trafficking on women and children in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design complemented with qualitative methods to examine the impact of human trafficking on women and children in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria. The study area comprised selected high-risk Local Government Areas (LGAs) in both states, particularly border and urban transit communities. The target population consisted of 3,850 respondents drawn from four categories: identified trafficking survivors

registered with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and partner NGOs (450), women and children in vulnerable households within selected communities (2,400), law enforcement and social welfare officers (500), and community leaders including religious and traditional authorities (500). Using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations at a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 362 respondents was determined. To improve representativeness and compensate for non-response, the sample was increased to 400 respondents.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. First, purposive sampling was used to select Adamawa and Taraba States due to documented trafficking vulnerability linked to conflict, displacement, and porous borders. Second, stratified sampling was applied to categorize respondents into survivors, vulnerable households, officials, and community leaders. Third, proportionate random sampling was used to allocate the 400 respondents across the four strata based on population weight. Survivors were selected purposively through NAPTIP and accredited shelters, while simple random sampling was used to select households within chosen communities. Key informant interviews were conducted with selected officials and NGO representatives using purposive sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), while qualitative data were subjected to thematic content analysis to triangulate findings and enhance validity.

Results

Research Question One: What are the socio-demographic characteristics of victims of human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria?

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Victims of Human Trafficking

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Most victims of human trafficking in this area are females	3.56	0.67	Agree
2	The majority of trafficking victims are between the ages of 13-18 years	3.48	0.71	Agree
3	Most victims have no formal education or only primary education	3.52	0.69	Agree
4	Victims are predominantly from rural communities in Adamawa and Taraba States	3.44	0.73	Agree
5	The majority of victims come from large families with limited income	3.61	0.58	Agree
6	Most victims were unemployed or engaged in subsistence farming before trafficking	3.39	0.76	Agree
7	Orphans and children from broken homes are disproportionately represented among victims	3.31	0.79	Agree
8	The majority of victims are from households headed by single parents (mostly widows)	3.28	0.81	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.45		Agree

Table 1 reveals important socio-demographic characteristics of human trafficking victims in Adamawa and Taraba States. The findings indicate that victims are predominantly female and largely adolescents between 13–18 years. Most have no formal education or only primary education and come from rural communities. They typically belong to large, low-income families, and many were unemployed or engaged in subsistence farming prior to being trafficked. Vulnerable groups such as orphans, children from broken homes, and those from single-parent households (mostly headed by widows) are disproportionately represented among victims. The overall grand mean of 3.45 indicates a strong agreement among respondents on these patterns, highlighting the intersection of gender, age, education, family structure, and socioeconomic status as key factors shaping vulnerability to human trafficking in the study area.

Respondent 1 (NAPTIP Shelter Officer, Adamawa – National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons):

From the cases we handle, most victims are young girls between 13 and 24 years old. Many of them come from rural communities or IDP camps. A large number dropped out of school at primary or junior secondary level. Their families are mostly poor farmers or petty traders, and some come from polygamous homes where parental supervision is weak.

Respondent 2 (Social Welfare Officer, Taraba):

In Taraba State, the majority of victims we encounter are females with low educational backgrounds. They usually come from households with unstable income. Some are orphans or from single-parent families. Poverty and displacement due to insecurity have made many children vulnerable to exploitation.

Respondent 3 (NGO Coordinator, Yola):

We have observed that victims are mostly adolescent girls engaged in hawking or domestic work before trafficking. Many of them believe they are going for better jobs in cities like Abuja. Their socio-economic background is generally characterised by poverty, large family size, and limited access to education.

Research Question Two: What are the main factors driving human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria?

Table 2: Factors Driving Human Trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States

Table 2 highlights the main factors driving human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States. Respondents agreed that poverty and lack of economic opportunities are the most significant drivers, followed closely by youth unemployment, which makes young people susceptible to deceptive job offers. Limited access to quality education also increases vulnerability, while cultural practices like child marriage and family dysfunction contribute to the risk of trafficking. The table further shows that porous borders and weak law enforcement facilitate trafficking operations, and the demand for cheap domestic labour in urban areas acts as a pull factor. Notably, deception by family members or close acquaintances remains a critical factor in victim recruitment. The grand mean of 3.49 indicates a consensus among respondents that these socio-economic, cultural, and systemic factors collectively drive human trafficking in the study area.

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Poverty and lack of economic opportunities are the primary drivers of trafficking	3.68	0.52	Agree
2	Unemployment among youths forces them to accept deceptive job offers	3.59	0.61	Agree
3	Limited access to quality education increases vulnerability to traffickers	3.51	0.68	Agree
4	Cultural practices such as child marriage contribute to trafficking	3.42	0.74	Agree
5	Family dysfunction and breakdown of family structures enable trafficking	3.38	0.77	Agree
6	Porous borders and weak law enforcement facilitate trafficking operations	3.47	0.70	Agree
7	Demand for cheap domestic labour in urban areas drives child trafficking	3.35	0.78	Agree
8	Deception by family members or close acquaintances leads to trafficking	3.53	0.65	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.49		Agree

Respondent 1 (Law Enforcement Officer, Adamawa):

The major driver is poverty. Families are desperate for income, and traffickers exploit that. Unemployment among youths is high, and when someone promises a job in Lagos or Abuja, they quickly accept. Conflict and displacement in the North-East have worsened the situation.

Respondent 2 (Women's Rights Advocate, Taraba):

I would say lack of education and gender inequality are key factors. Many girls are denied schooling and are pushed into early marriage or sent out to work. Traffickers take advantage of these vulnerabilities. Harmful cultural practices also contribute indirectly.

Respondent 3 (Religious Leader, Jalingo):

In my view, greed and the desire for quick wealth also play a role. Some young people want fast money. Recruiters are sometimes known to the families, which makes it easier to deceive them. Weak parental guidance is another issue.

Research Question Three: What are the effects of human trafficking on victims in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria?

Table 3: Effects of Human Trafficking on Victims

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Victims suffer severe physical abuse including beatings and malnutrition	3.62	0.55	Agree
2	Trafficked persons experience psychological trauma including depression and anxiety	3.71	0.48	Agree
3	Victims are subjected to sexual exploitation and gender-based violence	3.58	0.63	Agree
4	Trafficked individuals contract sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS	3.41	0.75	Agree
5	Victims face social stigma and rejection upon return to their communities	3.54	0.64	Agree
6	Trafficked persons experience economic hardship due to withheld wages	3.49	0.69	Agree
7	Victims suffer long-term health problems from hazardous working conditions	3.37	0.78	Agree
8	Trafficked women and children report suicidal ideation and attempts	3.33	0.80	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.51		Agree

Table 3 presents the effects of human trafficking on victims in Adamawa and Taraba States. The findings indicate that victims endure severe physical abuse, including beatings and malnutrition, and experience significant psychological trauma, such as depression and anxiety. They are also subjected to sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, with some contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Social consequences are evident, as victims often face stigma and rejection upon returning to their communities. Economically, trafficked individuals suffer hardship due to withheld wages, and many endure long-term health problems from hazardous working conditions. Alarmingly, some victims report suicidal ideation and attempts. The grand mean of 3.51 reflects strong agreement among respondents that these physical, psychological, social, and economic effects are significant, highlighting the profound and multi-dimensional impact of trafficking on victims in the study area.

Respondent 1 (NAPTIP Rehabilitation Officer, Adamawa):

"Most survivors show signs of trauma: depression, anxiety, and in some cases suicidal thoughts. They experience emotional instability and difficulty trusting others. The psychological damage is often long-term."

Respondent 2 (NAPTIP Rehabilitation Officer, Taraba):

"Physically, some victims suffer injuries, sexually transmitted infections, and reproductive health complications. Socially, they face stigma. Families sometimes reject them, especially those trafficked for sexual exploitation."

Respondent 3 (Returned Survivor, facilitated interview):

"I was promised domestic work, but when I got there, it was different. I was not paid and was treated badly. After I came back, people talked about me. It was hard to adjust, and I felt ashamed and afraid."

Research Question Four: How effective are the anti-trafficking interventions in Adamawa and Taraba States, Nigeria?

Table 4: Effectiveness of Anti-Trafficking Interventions

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	NAPTIP is visible and active in combating trafficking in this area	2.48	0.92	Disagree
2	Law enforcement agencies effectively prosecute traffickers in the study area	2.21	0.89	Disagree
3	There are adequate shelter and support services for trafficking survivors	2.13	0.86	Disagree
4	Public awareness campaigns have reached communities in Adamawa and Taraba	2.38	0.93	Disagree
5	Border security measures effectively prevent cross-border trafficking	2.19	0.91	Disagree
6	Traditional and religious leaders actively participate in anti-trafficking efforts	2.31	0.88	Disagree
7	Reintegration programmes successfully help survivors rebuild their lives	2.07	0.84	Disagree
8	Collaboration between government agencies and NGOs is effective in combating trafficking	2.26	0.90	Disagree
	Grand Mean	2.25		Disagree

Table 4 presents respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of anti-trafficking interventions in Adamawa and Taraba States. The findings show that all listed interventions were rated below the agreement threshold, with a grand mean of 2.25, indicating general disagreement about their

effectiveness. Specifically, respondents perceived that NAPTIP and law enforcement agencies are not sufficiently active or effective in combating trafficking, and that shelter and support services for survivors are inadequate. Public awareness campaigns were seen as largely ineffective in reaching vulnerable communities, and border security measures fail to prevent cross-border trafficking. Traditional and religious leaders were perceived as minimally engaged, while reintegration programs and collaborations between government agencies and NGOs were considered largely ineffective in helping survivors rebuild their lives. Overall, the data suggest that anti-trafficking efforts in the study area are weak, poorly coordinated, and insufficiently tailored to local needs, leaving communities vulnerable and survivors inadequately supported.

Discussion of Findings

The finding that victims of human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States are predominantly female adolescents (13-18 years) from rural communities, with limited formal education and from large, low-income families, aligns with established patterns documented in the literature. Kiss et al. (2022), in their mixed-methods study of trafficked women and girls in Nigeria and Uganda, found that young female survivors had remarkably low levels of education, with most having their studies interrupted before migration, and that family poverty served as a primary driver of their vulnerability. This corroborates the study's finding that victims predominantly come from large families with limited income and educational deprivation. The United Nations Special Rapporteur's 2019 report further contextualizes these findings, documenting that in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe States, lack of livelihood opportunities has forced many families to send children as young as five years old to hawk items in the streets or beg for food, with both boys and girls reportedly engaged in "survival sex". The report also noted that internally displaced persons, especially in the north-east, face severe protection problems including widespread sexual abuse of women and girls. Additionally, a recent report by the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM) confirmed that 12 trafficked individuals reportedly from Adamawa State were repatriated from Ghana and Mali, where they had been deceived with false promises of employment but were instead trafficked into prostitution and subjected to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. These multiple sources collectively reinforce the finding that young females from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Adamawa and Taraba face disproportionate vulnerability to trafficking.

The finding that poverty, unemployment, limited educational access, deception by family members, cultural practices, porous borders, and weak law enforcement are the main drivers of trafficking in the study area is strongly supported by empirical evidence. Fanu, Abdullateef and Atta (2023) identified economic deprivation as the fundamental structural condition rendering individuals vulnerable to trafficking, with lack of economic opportunities and weak institutional frameworks enabling criminal networks to flourish with impunity. The United Nations Special Rapporteur documented specific cultural practices that contribute to trafficking vulnerability, including the traditional practice of "money wives" within some Nigerian communities, where women and girls are sold into marriage without or against their consent to older men, in exchange for food or to pay off a debt, with such marriages contracted in shrines where the spirit of the girl child is invoked and handed over to the man. Recent events in Adamawa State dramatically illustrate the deception factor, as a suspected trafficking ringleader operating from a small provision shop in Jambutu Ward, Yola North LGA, used snacks and gifts to lure children aged 4 to 9 years, trafficking them to southeastern Nigeria where they were sold for amounts ranging between ₦800,000 and ₦1.7 million per child. This case exemplifies how traffickers exploit trust and familiarity, as neighbours lived alongside the perpetrator without suspecting her criminal

activities. The porous borders of Adamawa and Taraba States, which share boundaries with Cameroon, further enable trafficking operations, as criminal networks exploit weak enforcement to move victims across state and international boundaries.

The finding that trafficking victims suffer severe multidimensional consequences including psychological trauma, physical abuse, sexual exploitation, social stigma, and suicidal ideation is powerfully substantiated by research and recent case evidence. Kiss et al. (2022) documented severe mental suffering including suicide attempts among trafficked adolescents in Nigeria and Uganda, with their qualitative research revealing profound psychological damage from violence, deception, and exploitation during transit and at destination. The recent rescue of 14 trafficked children in Adamawa State provides harrowing testimony to these consequences. One mother, Hassana Dauda, whose eight-year-old daughter Nusaiba was abducted, narrated that the trauma led to three miscarriages during the period her daughter was missing. Another parent, Fauziya Suleiman, whose four-year-old son Yazidu remains missing, wept bitterly at the reunion ceremony as her hope of reuniting with him dimmed. The rescued children themselves exhibited signs of psychological dislocation; four-year-old Habiba Musa now speaks English instead of her native Hausa language and has developed a compulsive passion for dancing since her return, behaviour her mother attributes to the traumatic experience. Idemudia et al. (2021) further documented that survivors face social stigma and rejection upon return to their communities, with reintegration challenges including difficulty re-establishing relationships and economic marginalization. The NiDCOM report confirmed that trafficking victims repatriated from abroad had been subjected to harrowing experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, requiring proper profiling, documentation, and rehabilitation upon return.

The finding that anti-trafficking interventions in Adamawa and Taraba States are largely ineffective, with inadequate prosecution, insufficient support services, limited awareness, and poor reintegration programmes, reflects significant implementation gaps despite governmental rhetoric. Kiss et al. (2022) found that only one participant in their study reported perpetrator prosecution, indicating that justice remains elusive for most victims despite legal frameworks. Badejo, Gordon and Mayes (2021) have argued that rescue services require transformation toward trauma-informed, contextually appropriate approaches that recognize survivors' diverse needs, yet the study findings suggest such transformation has not occurred in the study area. The recent Adamawa State case illustrates both governmental response and its limitations. Following the rescue of 14 trafficked children, the Deputy Governor issued stern warnings and pledged prosecution under the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015, the Adamawa State Child Protection Law (2008), and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Law, 2021. However, the Adamawa State Commander of NAPTIP acknowledged that human trafficking is "increasingly rampant in the state" and called for greater community awareness, implicitly recognizing the inadequacy of current prevention efforts. While each rescued family received ₦100,000 and food items to support reintegration, the provision of such modest support to only 14 families amid what NAPTIP describes as a rampant problem underscores the insufficiency of existing response mechanisms. The NiDCOM's call for a nationwide crackdown on human traffickers and their collaborators, emphasizing the need for naming, shaming, and prosecuting offenders to deter future crimes, further confirms that current enforcement efforts remain inadequate to dismantle trafficking networks operating in states like Adamawa and Taraba.

Conclusion

This study reveals that human trafficking in Adamawa and Taraba States disproportionately affects young, poorly educated females from economically disadvantaged and conflict-affected households. The qualitative findings demonstrate that poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, weak parental structures, and displacement remain the primary drivers of trafficking in the region. Recruiters often exploit trust-based relationships and socio-cultural vulnerabilities to deceive victims with promises of employment and improved living conditions. The impacts on victims are multidimensional, encompassing severe psychological trauma, physical health complications, social stigma, and long-term economic marginalization. Although the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and collaborating stakeholders have strengthened rescue, awareness, and prosecution efforts, significant gaps persist in rural outreach, reintegration support, and sustainable prevention strategies. Addressing trafficking effectively in Adamawa and Taraba States therefore requires context-specific, survivor-centered interventions that integrate economic empowerment, education access, community engagement, and stronger institutional accountability mechanisms.

Recommendation

- i. **Strengthen Economic and Educational Opportunities:** State governments and NAPTIP should implement vocational training programmes and enforce free compulsory education, particularly for girls in rural communities, to reduce the economic desperation that traffickers exploit.
- ii. **Enhance Community Awareness and Surveillance:** the Government should intensify community-level campaigns in local languages, delivered through traditional and religious leaders, should educate families about trafficking risks and establish anonymous reporting mechanisms for early detection of recruitment activities.
- iii. **Improve Victim Support and Reintegration Services:** Accessible shelters providing trauma-informed care, medical treatment, psychological counselling, and skills training should be established by the government and in collaboration with non-governmental organizations in both states, alongside community sensitisation to combat stigma against returning victims.
- iv. **Strengthen Law Enforcement and Border Control:** Specialised training for police, immigration officers, and judiciary, increased surveillance of porous borders with Cameroon, and diligent prosecution of traffickers under the TIPPEA Act 2015 are urgently needed to deter trafficking networks.

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