

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC COSTS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AFRICA: EXPERIENCE FROM NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Human trafficking is a global crisis that cuts across borders, cultures, and economic systems, undermining human rights and economic stability. The United Nations estimates that millions of people are trafficked annually for forced labor, sexual exploitation, and organ trade, making it one of the most lucrative forms of organized crime worldwide. While international frameworks, such as the Palermo Protocol, and national legislation have sought to combat trafficking, its persistence indicates deeper systemic failures. In Africa, poverty, conflict, and weak governance encourage and further exacerbate human trafficking, with countries like Libya serving as key transit hubs for traffickers exploiting migrants seeking better opportunities in Europe. Nigeria, one of Africa's most affected nations, is both a source and destination country for trafficking. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) reports that thousands of Nigerians, especially women and children, fall victim to trafficking networks that promise them economic opportunities abroad but ultimately subject them to exploitation. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8.7 specifically addresses the need to eradicate forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking; however, progress remains slow. Although existing literature on human trafficking often focuses on its legal and social dimensions, insufficient attention is paid to its economic costs. The economic burden includes the loss of human capital, decreased productivity, and increased public spending on victim rehabilitation and law enforcement. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining both the human and economic toll of human trafficking, shedding light on its implications for sustainable development. Beyond the human suffering involved, human trafficking disrupts national economies by fostering illicit financial flows, reducing workforce productivity, and straining public resources allocated to social services. Ultimately, the study underscores the urgent need for stronger policies, international cooperation, and economic empowerment strategies to mitigate the devastating effects of human trafficking. Addressing both the human and financial costs of trafficking is essential for fostering inclusive economic growth and upholding human dignity.

### Introduction

There is growing literature on human trafficking as abundant studies straddling the fields of history, political science, sociology among other disciplines are replete with overwhelming evidence of this recurring phenomenon at the global level. Some of these studies such as Becky and Amber (2022); Bryant and Todd (2020) examine the evolutionary trends and dynamics of human trafficking at the global level. Studies by Magesa and Kitula (2020) and Meshelemiah and Lynch (2019) highlight the socio-economic conditions and migration pathways of victims and survivors of human trafficking at the global level. Several works including those by Vageshjith and Gurleen (2022) assess the linkages between the vulnerability factors and the means (such as violence and fraud) and purpose of trafficking. Sandra, Claudia, Rebeca Kornilia and Maria (2023) and Robin et al (2023) interrogate the health implications and gender dimensions of human trafficking. Ayodele Aborisade (2018) has also examined how historical forces, economic and policy dynamics shaped social issues including human trafficking in post-colonial Nigeria. Similarly, Afolabi and Seriki (2020) examined the role of regional economic integration mechanisms on trafficking in persons with particular focus on the role of regional multilateral institutions such as the ECOWAS. The human rights dimensions of human trafficking are rigorously examined by studies such as Foot, Toft & Cesare (2015). A few other studies focus on partnership advocate for either developing or strengthening channels or structures for information exchange and international collaboration to address human trafficking as well as other solution strategies for combatting this global criminal issue. Most of these studies interrogate the phenomenon of human trafficking from different theoretical lens, perspectives and interpretations.

From the literature, the phenomenon of human trafficking is one that is widespread in the modern world, with almost every country being affected as either States of origin, transit or destination. Human trafficking remains a pressing global issue and a lucrative criminal venture across continents around the world. As a transnational organized crime at the global level, human trafficking continues to defy concerted efforts, measures and strategies aimed at combatting it as it is estimated that about 40.3 million people worldwide remain trapped in modern slavery, generating \$150 billion annually at the global level (Aborisade and Aderinto, 2009). The modus operandi of this dynamic crime is such that while forced labour and sexual exploitation are the core purposes and sources of the financial returns, sexual exploitation which has comparatively lesser victims produces more financial returns (Ibrahim & Omoregbe, 2020; Aborisade and Aderinto, 2009). Sub-Saharan Africa, especially West Africa, Human trafficking has been one enduring historical experiences and a social phenomenon marring the socio-economic development of societies before, during and after colonial rule. The sub-region of West Africa is severely impacted by this problem, with Nigeria being the largest source of trafficked victims. Annually, about 100,000 Nigerians are trafficked for sexual and labour exploitation, often across borders, with the Nigerian and Benin Republic borders serving as hotspots for such activities (Alexandra, 2021)

Nigeria contributes to the global problem of human trafficking of young women and girls mainly for sexual exploitation as a major country of origin of the victims. In Nigeria, trafficking-in-person or human trafficking has a long history, according to some records, traceable to colonial and immediate post-colonial times (Ayodele, Olawale, Olubayo-Fatiregun & Adeleke, 2020; Chia, 2018). The rationale for this claim is cultural and historical ties that facilitated the forced migration of many Nigerians from different parts to Europe through land and maritime trade routes (Olasupo & Ile-Ife, 2012). From the reports of irregular movements across the African continent and specifically Nigeria, it could be rationalized that these routes have been rejuvenated for irregular cross-border migration especially those involved in trafficking in person. Irrespective of the motivations and patterns of movement for trafficking, existing national and international reports presents very worrying data on the state of human trafficking in Nigeria especially for sexual exploitation (Ibrahim & Omoregbe, 2020). Destinations for trafficked Nigerians include the neighbouring West African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon and Guinea), European countries (Italy, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom), North Africa (Libya, Algeria and Morocco) and Middle Eastern countries (Osimen, Pedro, Daudu and Adeniran, 2018). Recently, South America has also become a point of destination for trafficked persons, particularly Venezuela.

However, while there is an increasing body of literature on different aspects of human trafficking, so far, a review of the human and economic costs or implications of this phenomenon remains underexplored, particularly in Nigeria which is a major epicenter of this global crime in the West African sub-region. This is the gap this study attempts to fill. While it is a truism that the social and health problems connected to human trafficking in Nigeria has been trashed by existing studies, it is highly imperative to subject human trafficking in Nigeria to economic interpretation focusing on the economic costs of this menace. Thus, the main objective of this study therefore, is to interrogate human and economic implications of human trafficking on Nigeria. This article reviews the broad literature on human trafficking regarding its various associated human and economic costs in contemporary Nigeria. The paper is broadly structured into sections. Section one is the introduction followed by conceptual issues. The third segment interrogates the origin, trajectories and developments in human trafficking. Section four examines the motivations and dimensions of human trafficking in Nigeria. The fifth section x-rays the human and economic costs of human trafficking in Nigeria. The sixth section is the conclusion.

### **Conceptual Issues on Human Trafficking**

The concept of human trafficking has become a domain of great interest to scholars of different disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, particularly those in the field of sociology or craniology. Social scientists and scholars in other related disciplines have attempted conceptual analyses of human trafficking providing the conceptual variables for our analyses in this paper from different but related contexts. Considering the mix-up and misconceptions that surrounds the term 'human trafficking', it is necessary to attempt proper clarifications. Conceptually, human trafficking as a concept has been subjected to different interpretations and conceptual analyses from country to country. The magnitude of this illicit trade in humans and the development of levels in different countries are important factors that shape the concept of human trafficking. This fact is illustrated by the juxtaposition of the attitudes of the governments of Nigeria and Italy towards the concept of human trafficking. While the Nigerian state seriously frowns at human trafficking, the Italian state takes it with some light attitude because it booms its sex industry. Thus, the conceptualization is determined by a number of variables and peculiarities from country to country.

Vageshjith and Gurleen (2022) conceptualize human trafficking as kind of the movement of a number of people or the amount of goods moved from one place to another by road, rail, sea or air. Human trafficking is the trade

of humans for the purpose of forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others (Vageshjith and Gurleen, 2022). This may encompass providing a spouse in the context of forced marriage or the extraction of organs or tissues including for surrogacy and ova removal. The UNO's Assembly (1995) provides a similar conceptualisation of human trafficking positing that it is better explained as all forms of secret, illicit and clandestine conveyance of individuals across international boundaries specifically from developing polities to developed societies. Based on the conceptual meaning ascribed to human trafficking by the UNO's Assembly, the ultimate goal behind this illicit trade in humans is to force vulnerable individuals including women and children into economically oppressive, exploitative and profit situations and forced domestic labour. Similarly, the United Nation Palermo Protocol (2000) added that the concept of human trafficking is holistically represented as follows:

Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (United Nation Palermo Protocol, 2000).

Clemente (2023) provides feminist conceptual framework on human trafficking. According to her, the attempt to explain the concept of human trafficking and fight this phenomenon has revived older feminist battles over consent and agency in sex work as feminists who believe that the act of selling sex cannot really be voluntary, migrant women in prostitution are coerced, and to the extent that coercion is a significant element of the definition of trafficking, such women are indeed trafficked. Supporting this feminist interpretation of the concept of human trafficking, Bernstein (2018) posited that the concept is stringently attached to what she calls "carceral feminism" which emphasizes the place of gender in the conceptual framework on human trafficking.

According to Sibanda (2023), the human trafficking covers all processes that promotes the commodification of human bodies and reduction of the same to objects of trade that can be purchased, exploited and discarded at various levels. Sibanda posits further that the concept of human trafficking is an embodiment of three important elements. This according to him include: an act, a means and a purpose. The "act" element of human trafficking concept relates to the control of a person by another by virtue of the enumerated actions, for instance, harbouring or recruitment. The second element, "means", points to the involuntary aspect of the relationship between the person and the entities who are exercising control over the trafficked person (Blanton & Peksen, 2016). This is illustrated by words such as coercion, deception or abuse of power to describe the relationship. Last, but not least, is the element of exploitation of the person (Mende, 2019). This element requires that perpetrators recruit, harbour, transfer or receive another person for the purpose of obtaining some benefit at the expense of the trafficked person. This could be for the purpose of financial gain, free/cheap labour services or obtaining the benefit of an organ donation (IOM, 2008).

### **Origin, Trajectories and Developments in Human Trafficking**

The origin and evolutionary trajectories of trans-border trade in humans can be traced to different epochs from the local stage to the global level. For as long as humans have existed, *human trafficking* has existed. It occurred in every corner of the world. The earliest indication of this form of trans-border trade in humans surfaced around 7<sup>th</sup> century following the boom in the trans-Saharan trade between West Africa and North Africa through the Saharan routes. During this period, human beings were sold as slaves in exchange for other goods, a resemblance of what is known in modern times as human trafficking. Thus, the origin of this obnoxious trade in humans can be traced to the evolution of the trans-saharan trade.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, human trafficking had assumed a more intercontinental dimension as the frontiers of trade in humans expanded significantly between Africa, Europe and the Americas with the triangular or trans-Atlantic trade. Indeed, the numerical strength and demographic structure of has been traced to the emergence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Human trafficking is to this extent a form of modern day slavery on account of its resemblance to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade which lasted between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indeed, the period between 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was that of remarkable and significant change in the character and complexity of trafficking in human beings came as many people from African continent were shipped across the Atlantic as slaves in what later became known as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The intercontinental slave trade which involved Europeans and Africans was carried on through from continents of Europe, Africa, America and Latin America. The European countries involved in the transatlantic slave trade include chiefly, Portugal, Britain and Spain. The major African countries involved in the slave trade includes, Nigeria, Congo, Angola, Sierra-

Leone, Chad, Gambia, Kenya, Cape-Verde, Madeira Island etc. Latin American countries include chiefly, Brazil, Chile and the Caribbean etc. (Allain and Bales, 2012).

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century specifically around 1807, human trafficking characterized by the triangular trade was adjudged unconstitutional and frantic efforts towards its end began to gather momentum. This anti-slavery campaign appeared first in England and the quest to put an end to trafficking in persons in this age-long intercontinental trade was accelerated. Under the banner and concern for humans, the English parliament prohibited the slave trade with the slave Act in 1807 which became effective first of January 1808 (Lee, 2013). England, utilising its naval power, diplomats and armies, continued to nullify slavery and in 1833 through her colonies, territories authorise the abolition of the slavery policy throughout the globe (Andreas & Nadelmann, 2008). It is important to state that while the campaigns were strongly coordinated in Europe, the trafficking in human beings continued unabated in some other continents such as Asia, the Middle East and the Americas as this obnoxious transaction entered into the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

International efforts towards ending human trafficking further recorded significant progress in 1902 following the decision of the League of Nations to adopt an international abolitionist agreement against slavery in Paris. About 100 governments in sixteen countries formally endorsed and adopted this international agreement aimed at combatting this scale of human trafficking (Irwin, 2017; Khalid, Islam & Ahmed, 2019). Again, in 1904, another crucial legal instrument or the international convention for the repression of the persons for slavery was adopted and was targeted at dealing with deceitful and coercive recruitment especially white women for prostitution at various levels. The 1904 legal framework was one of the first of kinds to formalize the characterization of trafficking for prostitution as an ethical issue identified with slavery and was also planned to address the internalisation of European women into different parts of pre-revolutionary colonies for prostitution.

In 1910, trafficking in humans was further placed under international scrutiny following the expansion and widening of the scope of the 1904 international convention aimed at combatting this trans-border trade in human beings. Under the 1910 expanded international agreement, the trafficking of girls and young women within and across countries' borders was vividly captured in the criminal definition of the trade globally and this was aimed at bring it to a significant halt. Besides, in 1921, about eleven years after the expansion or widening of the initial international convention against human trafficking, trafficking of young boys was additionally incorporated as part of the consolidation of anti-trafficking efforts across borders. That is the international convention for the suppression of traffic in women and children.

Another important effort was made in 1933 to further tighten the fight against trafficking in persons. This marked the adoption of a crucial instrument popularly referred to as the international convention for the suppression of the traffic in women. Under the 1933 new global agreement, all forms of illegal and illegitimate recruitment of vulnerable persons particularly women, relating to prostitution or any form of trafficking in persons at all were proscribed and outrightly banned. In addition, the 1933 convention incorporated another dimension to human trafficking as it vehemently stated that the consent by a trafficked woman was not an indication of protection to the menace of universal trafficking (Farrior, 1997). In the same vein, the four mentioned global instruments were consolidated by the United Nations to create a robust convention for the suppression of the traffic in persons, and of the exploitation of the prostitution of others in the year 1950 (Usman, 2020). It is subsequently viewed as the primary merged trafficking in person convention internationally. Nevertheless, it is cited to have focused only on prostitution (Chuang, 1998). This covenant constrained its scope to force trafficking for prostitution across borders, which is prohibited or criminalized (Usman, 2020).

It is important to state that the colonial economic policies and British interests impacted the historical trajectory of social issues such as human trafficking in Nigeria particularly in the 1950s and 1960s (Abolorunde, 2019; Ogbogbo and Aborisade, 2018). Consequently, the year 1956 witnessed a newly captured provision identified as a supplementary convention was enacted to abolish slavery, the slave trade, and practices similar to slavery. This instrument broadened the meaning of slavery and slavery-like practices by proscribing child servitude, debt bondage, servile marriage, and serfdom (Usman, 2020). The 1956 supplementary convention concentrated to end the slave trade and similar practices (Wong, 2011). The convention never in any way define the phrase 'right of ownership', which made it possible for the correlation between human trafficking and slavery (Usman, 2020).

Towards the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s a fresh enthusiasm for the issue of trafficking in humans resurfaced internationally. This was impacted by advancements in regard to migration flow, prostitution, sex tourism, HIV/AIDS endemic and the movement of the feminist (Doezema, 1999). In Southeast Asia, sex tourism and trafficking of girls and young women from poor nations to North America and Western Europe raised worry amongst the public and policymakers for the fact that no new pact was embraced. The new developments in the

1980s and 1990s had significant impact on human trafficking at the regional continental and international levels. To a very large extent, these new advancements produced huge influence on prostitution, sex trade and tourism across borders.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new international legal instrument was mobilized by the United Nations for arresting the phenomenon of human trafficking. This was the Palermo protocol adopted by the intergovernmental organization. Indeed, in November 2000, the UN General assembly embraced the Palermo protocol. The significance if the U.N Palermo protocol on human trafficking cannot be overemphasized.

**Motivations and Dimensions of Human Trafficking in Nigeria**

Different pull and push factors and motivations account for the prevalence of human trafficking in societies particularly Nigeria. These issues range from political, economic, cultural, social and legal factors all of which contribute one way or the other to the phenomenon of human trafficking in Nigeria. Indeed, Nigeria has acquired a reputation for being one of the leading African countries in human trafficking with cross-border and internal trafficking.

Table1: Push and Pull Motivations for Human Trafficking in Nigeria

S/N	Push Factors	Pull factors
1	Poverty / Ignorance	Perceived opportunities elsewhere
2	Lack of Education	Lack of workers
3	Demand for cheap labour/sex	Good social measures
4	lack of Positive economy	Positive economic situation, opportunities in home communities
5	Political and social stability Cultural factors	
6	Deception and Intimidation	

Source: Omoehin, Aruna and Alausa, 2023

As vividly captured in the above table, profound vulnerability driven by poverty offers opportunities for the thriving of human trafficking business in Nigeria. Vulnerable individuals who live in difficult conditions have developed desperation which makes them vulnerable for human trafficking in the country. Poverty does not only create results in trafficking but when it is combined with other factors socially creates a higher risk for being trafficked. Studies have shown that a significant number of vulnerable Nigerians lured into human trafficking were left with little or no choice as a result of poverty. Poverty is the principle driving force behind this trade, propelling vulnerable people into the hands of traffickers, who belong to both small-scale, local enterprises with extensive criminal networks and to large scale multi-commodity businesses (Osimen, Pedro, Daudu and Adeniran, 2018). The nexus between human trafficking and poverty is seriously echoed as follows:

Trafficking is a complex development issue. It is an economic problem as the vast majority of women seeking to escape poverty are lured into trafficking by the false promise of economic gains (USAID, 1999).

Another economic issue responsible for the prevalence of human trafficking in Nigeria is unemployment and unfree recruitment. The concept of unfree recruitment includes circumstances of deceptive, forced recruitment and the use of scam and all forms of intimidation by a third party. It also covers deceit about the nature of work, working conditions, salary and wages. In Nigeria, traffickers target unemployed individuals and often use deception to persuade them to leave home and take a job in another city or country. The position may initially sound promising, but once the individual arrives at the destination, it is often much different than what was described. To keep them from leaving, traffickers are fond of confiscating their victims' passports. They might

also pay for transportation, shelter, clothing, or food so their victims are indebted to them and feel obligated to work. This economic vulnerability allows this phenomenon to fester in the Nigerian polity.

As an addendum, biting economic hardships after the oil glut that was misused by Nigerian leaders between the 80s and 90s has further exacerbated human trafficking crises in Nigeria. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian state, joblessness, homelessness and financial hardship are at the heart of human trafficking. Nigerians who are bedeviled by the phenomenon financial and economic hardship are prone to human trafficking. These are some of the economic risk factor that motivate human trafficking in Nigeria.

The problem of political instability, war situations as well natural disasters are important motivations driving the phenomenon of human trafficking in Nigeria. The displacement of individuals or entire families increases the risk factor in luring people into the obnoxious trade in humans. With individuals sometimes forced to flee their homes and communities, they experience financial hardship, homelessness, and culture shock which make them pray to the tricky strategies deployed by human traffickers. War situations and conflicts in Nigeria have put children who have lost their parents to vulnerable situations that make them easy targets for human traffickers. Indeed, conflict is a push factor for trafficking, migration and poverty. In Nigeria prone conflict zone, Boko Haram trafficked children and used them as soldiers and militias. They kidnapped young girls, sell them into slavery and forcefully married them (Anti-trafficking Alliance, 2017).

Political instability with its attendant policy somersaults in Nigeria accounts for the survival of human trafficking in the Nigerian society. The instability in the political sphere is partly explained by decades of military regimes which have led to the institutionalized violation of human rights and severe political, social and economic crises. This negatively impacts the development of community participation, especially of women and children, despite international institutions designed to advance their causes (Osimen, Pedro, Daudu and Adeniran, 2018). In addition, the oil boom in the 1970s created opportunities for migration both inside and outside of the country (Osimen, Pedro, Daudu and Adeniran, 2018). This created avenues for exploitation, for international trafficking in women and children, for forced labour and for prostitution. Nigeria is a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking.

At the heart of this problem is the issue of ignorance on the part of the victims regarding the fate that await them in their country of destination. To be sure, the situation is such that many of these vulnerable Nigerians are easily carried away by the picture of good lives painted by their sponsors. Some scholars have also blamed trafficking on family size (Omosehin, Aruna and Alausa, 2023). Nigerians with a large concentration of polygamous family for the purpose of egalitarian settlements in the villages and slums where means of livelihood became cumbersome, hence adolescents strive to find solace outside the home, thereby making them vulnerable to the tactics of traffickers (Rotimi, 2001).

Corruption is an important driver of human trafficking in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian society. The issue of corruption does not only facilitate or fuel human trafficking but also worsen the associated response mechanisms aimed at combatting it. The clandestine character of corruption creates some fears for victims and prevents them from divulging important information that can aid the arrest and prosecution of human traffickers in Nigeria. In addition, the preponderance of corruption in Nigeria allows human traffickers free and undisturbed operations with little or no risks of being arrested by corrupt anti-trafficking officials. Thus, with corruption a flourishing environment that supports human trafficking is created in the country.

Cultural factors contribute to the problem of human trafficking in Nigeria. Cultural beliefs and practices are crucial to the prevalence of human trafficking in Nigeria. Hawking by women and children (especially girls) and begging, even for twins, are commonly accepted practices all over the country. It makes trafficking children in particular a common thing even in the open without people paying attention to it. Relegating the personality of women and girls is a persistent cultural factor linked to human trafficking. When women and girls are relegated and not considered as human beings deserving rights and respect, they become the first group to be targeted by traffickers.

Existence of weak legal system also contributes to the cases of human trafficking in Nigeria. Porous borders, the involvement of international organized criminal groups or networks, capacity of or commitment by Immigration and law enforcement officers to control borders; and because of adequate legislation and a political will and commitment to enforce existing legislation or mandates are other factors that facilitate trafficking in persons (Ibrahim & Omoregbe, 2020). Although there are It is important to note that the widespread practice of entrusting children to more affluent friends or relative may create not only vulnerability in Nigeria but one of the causes of human trafficking (Ibrahim & Omoregbe, 2020).

In terms of dimension, human trafficking encapsulates a number of dynamics including sexual exploitation, forced labour, labour trafficking, domestic servitude, forced marriage, servile marriage, organ trafficking among others (Omosehin, Aruna and Alausa, 2023). One prominent dimension of this phenomenon is sexual exploitation which occurs in many forms including escorts, brothels, street prostitution among others. The prostitutes in this case are victims of human trafficking. Another dimension of it is forced labour which refers to a wide range of activities in which victims of human trafficking are forced, defrauded and coerced with view of being exploited by traffickers. The third dimension is labour trafficking which involves the use of all sorts of tools or instruments such as violence, threats and lies to lure victims into debt bondage, involuntary child labour, forced labour among others.

### **Human and Economic Costs of Human Trafficking in Nigeria**

The human and economic costs of human trafficking on Nigeria are not only substantial, but prolonged, and overwhelmingly skewed towards women and children. It will analyze the domains and levels of the cost, as well as the factors accounting for the costs. Beyond the travails and the suffering experiences recorded by individual victims of this obnoxious trade, it leaves a very deep financial scar on the Nigerian public system, businesses and taxpayers. Thus, the economic cost of human trafficking, which is the explanation most often offered by scholars, other types of costs, for example, psychological, emotional, and physical are investigated in this section of the paper. The human and economic costs of human trafficking are summed up by the former President of the U.S as follows:

It is a debasement of our common humanity. It ought to concern every community because it tears at our social fabric. It ought to concern every business because it distorts markets. It ought to concern every nation, because it endangers public health and fuels violence and organized crime. I'm talking about the injustice, the outrage of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name – modern slavery (Jones and Coker-Kolo, 2024: 50).

In terms of human costs, one major consequence of human trafficking on Nigeria is the loss of productivity as potential quality human capital and workforce is lost to the trade. On a yearly, a significant number of people are trafficked in Nigeria and this human population and never return to the workforce or education system without proper care and resources. In addition, survivors of human trafficking face long gaps in employment, leaving them unable to contribute economically to the growth and development of the Nigerian society (Sibanda, 2023). Still on the loss of human capital, the victims of human trafficking in Nigeria who have potentials to contribute to the development of their countries are subjected to exploitation and often times they may not function effectively in the society.

The human costs of human trafficking stretch to the massive death, abuse, hunger, disease and torture of affected victims of the obnoxious trade. Indeed, thousands of victims of human trafficking die every year as a result of abuse, hunger, disease, torture among others (Wheaton, Schauer and Galli, 2010). Children who are victims and are often subjected to labor and sexual exploitation experience irreparable, severe trauma for life, robbing victims of normalcy, and setting some on the path to perpetuate the cycle of abuse onto others (Wheaton, Schauer and Galli, 2010). Adolescent victims of trafficking in persons are also forced or tricked into servitude are psychologically (and often physically) damaged for life as well.

The human cost of human trafficking covers human and legal rights violations of the victims. In addition, Laguarda said, people trafficking hinders the educational processes and capacity development for the victims, especially children and teenagers. Besides, it negatively affects the victims' physical and psychological health, as they are sometimes excluded from society due to the trauma of their experiences of exploitation. On a more subtle level, Laguarda also pointed out how people trafficking jeopardize each person's integrity of those involved. Indeed, human trafficking constitutes a gross violation of human rights. The fundamental rights of trafficked individuals to make their own decisions, to move freely, and to work for whomever they choose are violated by traffickers, who treat them like a commodity. Based on the Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR), human trafficking is a gross violation of the established human rights that are due everyone starting at birth (United Nations, 1948). On this, Jones and Coker-Kolo (2024) posit that all people should have certain rights irrespective of any status held to include race, sex, ethnicity, nationality, religion and others.

Jones and Coker-Kolo (2024) argue that another important human cost of trafficking in persons in Nigeria is associated with gender dichotomy it creates. In this regard, the cost of human trafficking is skewed towards girls and women who are used either for commercial sex or labor. Similarly, Lutya and Lanier (2012) suggest three

factors are associated with increasing demands for prostitution. These are the purchasers of sex, cultural attitudes associated with prostitution, and violence towards women. These are part of the human costs for trafficking in persons in Nigeria.

In addition, it leads to the commodification of trafficked persons in Nigeria. While money flows relatively freely from businesses to households in legal markets; in human trafficking, market money flow is disrupted. The targeted victims receive little or no income and further lose some agency. Consequently, once agency is limited, the person is by definition a trafficked individual and is thus commodified. Besides, victims who are targeted for human trafficking have very little income or no income at all and give up their agency or control, relegating them to becoming a commodity (Wheaton et. Al, 2010). Those who hire workers from forced labor are the primary beneficiaries because these employers either underpay workers or do not pay them at all.

The economic costs of human trafficking to the Nigerian government cannot be overemphasized. It causes government a huge amount of money to address, especially in rescuing and rehabilitating the victim. Those who are trafficked have talents and ideas. Thousands of young people with talents and ideas that will benefit a country economically fall victims to human trafficking, and this reduces the human capital of a nation. Human trafficking destroys the future of any society by giving rise to wastage of resources, poor standard of living, and high crime rates.

Human trafficking slows down the economic growth of the Nigerian state. In other words, the phenomenon of human trafficking *slows economic growth*, raises the cost of regional trade and disrupts the transition to a market economy. Because freedom of choice and economic gain are at the heart of productivity, human trafficking impedes national and economic growth and development in Nigeria. Productivity resulting from individual agency and economic gain is a key to national and global economic growth. Human trafficking tears apart the structure of local economies in Nigeria adding to the bureaucratic and law enforcement burden at all levels of government, and destroys people’s lives.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to state that the successive Nigerian governments have made various efforts of aimed at addressing the menace of human trafficking in the country. Successive governments in the country have not been silent in addressing the threat posed by the devilish act of human trafficking as decisive measures including collaborating with relevant national and international bodies, signing of international treaties on human trafficking, establishment of anti-human trafficking agencies such as the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking IN Persons (NAPTIP), Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), collaborating with civil society organisations among others. The efforts of various agencies of government in Nigeria have produced remarkable results in the fight aganaist human trafficking and the attendant economic and human costs on the country. The table below provides some statistics on the response of the Nigerian state to the phenomenon of human trafficking from 2016 to 2023.

Table 2: Response of the Nigerian state to Human trafficking in Nigeria between 2016 and 2023

<b>Year</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>Total Number of Rescued Victims</b>	134	139	163	59	40	44	31	30
<b>Total Number of Traffickers Apprehended</b>	38	1	27	9	10	2	10	22
<b>End User Apprehended</b>	107	1			28			
<b>No of Victims United</b>	117	128	109	40	35	37	44	52
<b>No Repatriation</b>	6	6	39	24	5	3		

Source: Nigerian Immigration Service, Oyo State Command Unit, 2024

## Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is abundantly clear that the human and economic costs of human trafficking in contemporary Nigeria are enormously devastating. This phenomenon continues to increase unabated, with traffickers devising new means and strategies to outsmart and thwart government efforts to eradicate the menace. Like other existing studies, this paper establishes the complexities, dynamics, and trajectories of human trafficking in Nigeria, arguing that vulnerable individuals—including women, girls, boys, and minors—are deceitfully trafficked to various countries in the Western hemisphere. Consequently, Nigeria continues to record significant human and economic losses as a result of this persistent and reprehensible trade in human beings. The study further demonstrates that the human and economic costs of human trafficking have serious implications for the country's economic growth and development. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the Nigerian government, relevant agencies, and stakeholders sustain efforts to raise awareness of human trafficking in both rural and urban areas by organizing workshops and seminars. Government institutions should also strengthen the fight against this phenomenon by adopting holistic approaches that incorporate legal, economic, social, and cultural responses to the problem.

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