Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.4 No.3 September, 2021; p.g. 91 – 99; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

PROSTITUTION IN NORTHERN IGBOLAND: IMPLICATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE MORAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This work investigates prostitution in Northern Igboland vis-a-vis the good moral reputation that the people were known for. It as well looks into what led to this instance of moral depravity and regrettable situation. It was discovered that the encounter with people of other cultures and areas were of negative influence, and the sitting of the University of Nigeria by the Federal Government at a time when the number of young men found in this area as undergraduates were many and there was not in any way an equal number of young educated women to offer them companionship. This created market for prostitutes among who were some girls under the age of eighteen, which ab-initio under the traditional morality was unimaginable. Other issues were poverty, family debt and bad economy. This paper looks into the causes and the way to ameliorate this ugly, despicable and contemptible development. The method used in this work is historic-descriptive which implies that prostitution in Northern Igboland was studied, x-rayed, analysed and rationally synthesized.

Keywords: Prostitution, Northern Igboland, Sustainability, Morality, Identity.

Introduction

Prostitution is the enterprise or custom of engaging in sexual activity in give-and-take for payment. A person who works in this area is a type of sex worker and is called a prostitute. The legal states of prostitution, varies from place to place and occurs in a variety of forms. Prostitution along with stripping, pornography and erotic dancing are branches of the sex industry. There are also some other establishments dedicated specifically to prostitution such as Brothels and some hotels and buildings inhabited by prostitutes. This act of prostitution however may take place at the client's residence or a hotel room rented out for this purpose.
Among the Northern Igbos who were noted for their high moral standard, Prostitution is gradually creeping in as a result of migration, emigration and other forms of encounter with other people and cultures; poverty and bad economy have also been included as contributory factors. The people of the zone have to be aware of this rising trend of promiscuity that is creeping in.

The Birth of Nsukka (Northen Igbos)

According to Afigbo (1981:68), the bringing together of towns and numerous village groups in the most northern part of Igbo land was the creation of the British, who gave them the name Nsukka Division after conquering this part of Igboland between 1900 and 1910. The area was administered as part of Okwoga (Okpoga) Division (in the former Benue State) from about 1909. This area is now in Kogi State. The area later was made a division with headquarters at

Obollo-Afor, the headquarter was moved to Nkpologu in 1919 and in 1921 to Nsukka. All the people within Nsukka district or division later came to regard themselves as Nsukka. This is

> *As a result of the strong sense of unity inculcated in the people through sharing the same experience of colonial rule and being discriminated against, despised and misused by their own Igbo government officials from the south of Igbo land (Ocho 2012:5).*

Latter the native administration system of government was introduced by the British colonial officials, through warrant chiefs who collected taxes on behalf of the British, settled disputes through native courts and provided labour for public works.

The moral lifestyle of the people

According to Ocho (2012; 6):

> *From earliest time up to the Biafran war (1967-70) Igbo people had recognized Nsukka people as the most truthful, the most accommodating the most reliable and loyal of all Igbo. This had to do with the education of a typical Nsukka boy or girl. Their education emphasized respect for life, for procreation, for numerous deities and gods (who were all interested in proper behaviour), for truth loyalty and the bonds of blood relationship and friendship. For example, no Nsukka hunter would knowingly kill a pregnant wild animal.*

Among Nsukka people there is this concept of *Amu* or *Nwa Amu*. The English nearest equivalent is the concept of nobility or noble man. However there is a difference, whereas the English emphasizes wealth, *amu* or *nwa-amu* places emphasis on good conduct, this is why Ocho (2012:2, 6) is of the opinion that:

> *Nwa amu is a person whose word is his bond; whose family became rich through transparent and honest means, who abhors mean action or lies, people aspire to be amu or nwa amu. On the other hand, Nsukka people abhorred criminalizing their family name.*

Goodness, Hospitality and Moral Disposition of the people

Nsukka people received the visitors that came to Nsukka and co-operated with them, thus they were integrated into their services, exploiting themselves humanly and materially to entangle them into their folk, hoping that they were doing it to men of good will and conscience (Nweze1997:31). Ocho (2012:11) sustaining this fact writes:

> *Above all Nsukka zone was the most favoured location for civil servants; policemen, interpreters, court judges and local government staff who clamoured, jostled and bribed to be posted to Nsukka. It did not take any person who was posted to Nsukka a long time to make a fortune. These public officers exploited the ignorance of the people and through village agents extorted from the villagers money, goats, palm kernel and oil, land and sometimes young girl whom they included in their harem.*

With undaunted honesty and fear of God they served them without knowing that they were dealing with wolves in sheep's clothing. This is because they took every man as good. As a result of this immeasurable service, humility, truthfulness and co-operation, all the civil

servants, businessmen across the country who needed a confidant as a servant, maid, accountants other confidential service started looking for an Nsukka man, who would serve without complaint and would be busy until his last energy is exhausted, who does not bother how much he would earn or the type of risks involved. In this Nweze (1997: 31) is of the opinion that: It was through this process that the beneficiaries of "*Nwa* Nsukka kindness and graceful gestures started abusing the privilege. They started taking "*Nwa* Nsukka for a ride. Some who looked for an apprentice or a servant within the Eastern part of the country would look for an Nsukka boy or girl. The reason behind the person's request for an Nsukka man was that he wanted a dedicated, devoted, respectful, truthful, humble and of course hardworking person which is not easy to come by in other places. Today in many areas in Nsukka, these qualities are eroding away. The contact Nsukka people had with numerous visitors has negatively influenced these admirable qualities.

The decay of moral values

In discussing morality in the African context there is a great deal of temptation which most African scholars have succumbed to; this is:

> *To regard their moral values as founded on religion, to assume that their moral values of good and bad or right and wrong derive from the commands of some supernatural being or beings, and that their moral beliefs and principles can be justified only by reference to religious beliefs and doctrines. This view of the religious basics of African moral values is greatly mistaken (Gyekeye 1996: 56).*

The people do not have access to the commandments of God to use as the basis of their moral system. This is why African Traditional Religion is not a revealed religion. The priests claim occasionally to receive "messages" from the deities they serve. They may have some relevance and moral import for the people of a community but they can hardly constitute an elaborate and coherent basis of the moral values of the people. The people in any case, before these messages descended on them since these messages were sporadic in character, were already in possession of some moral values.

African Traditional Religion is a natural religion arising out of the people's own experience and view of the world as distinct from a revealed religion. It would be more correct to say from all these that African moral values derive from the experience of the people in trying to evolve a harmonious and a common social life. In this connection Gyekye (1996; 57) opines that: "The moral values of the African people have a social and humanistic basis, rather than a religious basis and are fashioned out of the nature of human society, human relations, human goals and the meaning of human life".

Among the Nsukka people of northern Igboland, they have a set of moral codes arising from their experience as a people within the same environment, culture and circumstance. On marital fidelity for instance they have other demands on married men and women which appear related to sex but which are there to shield people from the circumstances that may lead them into adultery. On this Nweze (1997:24) affirms that;

> *That is why a man who is not related to a married woman either through marriage or blood is not allowed to stay in a room with her while the door is closed. Any man who is not related to a married woman should not talk to her when she is taking her bath. A man who is not a relation of a married woman or relation of her husband is not allowed to knock at the woman's bedroom when the woman is inside with the door closed.*

Accepting monetary gifts from men who are neither her relative nor her husband was never allowed, the reasons are obvious. On the other hand a woman was not allowed to give money to her relations without her husband's permission. In Nsukka today this culture is no longer respected as before. It has been done away with especially among the elite class.

Another major influence on Nsukka is the opening of the University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1960 by the then government of Nigeria. A large concentration of students suddenly descended upon village people who hitherto were only very lightly touched by modern influence. At the initial stage, the teaching staff were made up of about half Americans and the other half Nigerians and British. So it was an international group. To this end Ilogu (1974:101) narrates that:

> *The first noticeable moral problem was "child prostitution" The attraction of a large number of young men as undergraduates concentrating in this area where there was not an identical number of educated young women to offer companionship, created a "market" for prostitutes, among whom were some girls under the age of eighteen, which under the traditional morality was unthinkable.*

This goes on to show that apart from the positive dimensions brought about by the establishment of the university, there were also other negative aspects, that were detrimental to the people of Nsukka. According to Achebe;

Nsukka people also called prostitutes "*akwuna*" or *akwunakwuna*. In its original context, the word referred to a town in the Oburubua "Division of Calabar land, where such women were believed to have originated. By 1948 the town of Akwunakwuna had acquired such a reputation for prostitutes that a colonial officer reported that the name had become "The household term for harlot throughout Nigeria and to a large extent … The Gold coast.

Further Achebe is of the opinion that:

> *Okada is the most contemporary word for prostitutes and calls to mind the ubiquitous motorcycle riders that have replaced taxicabs in most parts of Nigeria. The term Okada dates from the late 1980s a rough period in the economic life of Nigeria when motorcycles emerge as cheap alternatives to expensive taxicabs. In Nigeria a prostitute is currently called okada because one hops on her as one hops on the motorcycle hastily.*

Waywardness is not an intrinsic aspect of Nsukka culture but something that came into existence as a result of emigration, migration, interaction and contact with other cultures and peoples. This is not the true characters and identity of the Nsukka person. To compliment this indubitable fact, Ocho (2012) writes:

"That from the earliest time up to the Biafran war (1967-1970) Igbo people have recognized Nsukka people as the most truthful, the most accommodating, the most reliable and loyal of all Igbos". Nsukka people put much premium on virginity, chastity and abhor any forms of sexual immorality. People from neighbouring communities and tribes marry Nsukka girls because from their home training and upbringing adultery is not allowed. Adultery has devastating consequences for any woman who commits it; it could be death, disease or madness. It takes some rigorous cleansing rituals in order to bring about reconciliation and health. This ritual is in African Traditional Religion. Most of the people are not comfortable with credible and lasting solutions from Christianity.

Prostitution

Prostitution has been over the years seen as "the oldest profession. But this has been criticized by some feminist abolitionists, as one of the most persuasive myths". They call it "the oldest oppression" and condemn the notion that prostitution is a job like any other. According to Julie Bindel (2018:1) "the inside of a woman's body is not a workplace."

According to the abolitionists, the commodification of sex debases womanhood. On this premise therefore they condemned every sexual relationship that centres on commercial gains, sex rights; workers on the other hand contend that: In the face of economic challenges and sexual liberalism, the trade should be regulated rather than abolished.

Prostitution has been on the high rate because of unemployment in Nigeria, increased family expectations, and pressure, poverty, etc. despite these demands the prostitute is always at a great risk. According to Farley (2018:1),

> *In the traditional model of consumer risk, the product that is consumed is understood to be the agent that is imbued with risks. In prostitution, it is the woman who is being consumed as a commodity who is at great risk.*

Even though, prostitution is often "erroneously" described as "sex between consenting adults" prostitution comes into play because the person being consumed as a product would not consent to sex without payment from the buyer. Buttressing this fact further Jenkins (2021:2) described prostitution as "the practice of engaging in relatively indiscriminate sexual activity, in general with someone who is not a spouse or a friend, in exchange for immediate payment in money or other valuables," Prostitutes may be female or male or transgender and prostitution may entail heterosexual activity but, historically most prostitutes have been women and most clients men.

Etymology and terminology

Prostitute is from the Latin word *prostitute*, the verb is cited from some sources as a combination of "Pro" meaning "forward" or "upfront" and "*stituere*" meaning, to offer up for sale.

> ***Another school of thought has it that prostitute is a composition of "pro" and "statuere" (to cause to stand, to station, place erect). A literal translation therefore is "to put upfront for sale or to place forward"***

The online Etymology Dictionary explains that:

> *The notion of sex for hire is not inherent in the etymology, which rather suggests one exposed to lust or sex indiscriminately offered.*

Why some women involve themselves in prostitution in Nsukka (Northern Igbos)

1. **Poverty, (Debt and Economic crises)**

   One of the major reasons why some young women get themselves involved into prostitution in northern Igboland is as a result of poverty, unemployment and bad economy. Thus for the survival of the family some girls get themselves involved into prostitution in order to get rid of some family (in formal) pressure. These pressures come often in the form of debt and illness in the family.

   Lack of shelter and unemployment seem among all to be the major predicators of embracing prostitution. According to Kohnid "*foreign illegal sex workers earn more than ten times their usual wage in a period of a month "This provided them sufficient income to support their families and to obtain their basic needs. Due to lack of working experience, youth has less job opportunities in the market."*

   This poor financial condition has forced many in northern Igboland into Prostitution, and has in return provided them with wealthy income.

2 **Women has been tricked into prostitution**

   When compared to women in the urban areas, most women prostitutes in Nsukka (Northen Igboland) who live in rural areas earn lower income in prostitution. Some rural women in Nsukka are often tricked into prostitution with the guarantee of securing a decent job for them in the city or abroad. Therefore, they are endeared to the job in the city offered by the middleman. In some situations some of them are kidnapped and forced to work as prostitutes.

3 **Family expectation and problem**

   Sexual abuse is often a factor common among prostitutes. Some adolescents in (Nsukka) Northern Igboland have left their home as a result of constant sexual abuse from parents. This running away is often a defensive mechanism or a survival strategy that follows sexual abuse and this often in many lead to prostitution. Nadon (1998:214) made a discovery that 68% of female prostitutes in their sample, experienced childhood sexual abuse. When compared to children who had not been sexually abused as children, those who were sexually abused were twice likely to be prostitutes.

4 **Careless Parental Care**

   Some young girls go into prostitution as a result of careless parental care in Nsukka. Explaining this Molopi (2009:2) wrote to say that:

   > *In order to provide a better education for children, parents often send their children to other countries and let them rent cheap rooms. As a result, they are exposed to male predators. Idleness after school and the absence of parents guiding them through their home work causes the youth to spend their time outside the house. In the process, there is a possibility where they will discuss things including making easy money, sex and women*

This lack of attention by parents to read the circumstances surrounding their children's stay in foreign land for studies is culpable and highly regrettable.

Types of prostitution

Street Prostitution

Several types of prostitutes exist, at the bottom of prostitution "hierarchy" are street walkers (also called street prostitutes), who typically find their customers, or are found by their customers, somewhere on the street, then they have a quick act of sex in the customer's car, in an alley way or other secluded spot, or in a cheap hotel. Street walkers are often the subjects in most studies of prostitution, even though, they compose only about one fifth of all prostitutes.

Escort prostitution

They are a group of sex workers who are contacted directly by clients by phone or through a hotel staff. It is relatively expensive; this type of prostitution is rampant where there is a low client turnover. The services are provided at the hotel room or at the client's home. This group of prostitutes work as independent operators in their fatty fancy homes or hotels and charge. Describing this group Weitzer, (2009:213-234) wrote to say that:

> *Call girls work as independent operators in their homes or fairly fancy hotels and charge, a lot of money for their services, which include sex but also talking and dining. Their clients are typically businessmen or other wealthy individuals*

These call girls earn far more than their street counterparts

Buttressing this fact also, Weitzer (2019:213) was of the opinion that:

> *Although they may actually act as an escort to a dinner or show, typically their services include sexual acts. They, too, are generally well paid for their work, but, do not earn nearly as much as call girls because they have to give at least 30 percent of their earnings to their agency.*

Escorts and call girls rank highest in the prostitution hierarchy. Below this but above street walkers, are other types of prostitution. These are:

i. Brothel workers: prostitutes who work in brothels.
ii. Massage parlour workers: this kind of prostitutes work in massage parlors. Many massage parlours do not involve themselves in prostitution but are entirely legal. However some are entirely the harbingers of prostitutes and prostitution. This is where the prostitute masturbates a man and brings him to what is often termed a "happy ending".
iii. The final group: involves prostitutes who work in bar, casino or similar places. They have sex with customers that came into these places and have sex with them elsewhere.

Sex Tourism

This is a type of tourism or trips that are organized from within or without the tourism sector with the primary purpose of using its networks and structures for the sole purpose of affecting a commercial sexual relationship by the tourist with residents at the destination.

Other Methods

A good number of prostitutes also through their managers sometimes market themselves through advertisement; this was why Kambiz (2005:2) wrote to say that:

> *Prostitution can be demanded through various media including notice board, magazines, newspaper, advertisement, sex worker catalogues with mobile phone numbers and the internet via virtual brothels. Services are delivered mostly in brothels and other indoor venues such as apartments.*

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

i. The government at the three tiers; federal, state and the local government should try and improve the standard of living, by creating job opportunities for the youths. In this way prostitution will to a great extent decrease, not only among the Northern Igbos but Nigeria at large.
ii. The three major religions in the area, Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam abhor prostitution. The religious leaders should therefore preach against this assiduously.
iii. Parents should inculcate good moral living in their children and constantly remind them of the detrimental and consequential implications of prostitution.
iv. Non-Governmental Organizations and other Agencies should help in their various capacities to enlighten the youths on the demerits of prostitution.

In our schools, the negative implications of this hydra headed and multifarious evil should be exposed and addressed accordingly and subsequently included as part of the curriculum.

v. Women should also be given equal opportunity with their male counterparts especially in some designated jobs that most often is strictly reserved for men.

vi The government and the religious bodies also should help to promote the girl child education and the government should finance the education of the less privileged girls.

Conclusion

Even though Prostitution solves some socio-economic problems such as sexual satisfaction, self-employment and reduces the level of rape in the society. It is anti-social, inimical and harmful to the Nsukka society and the Nigerian nation at large. Even though prostitution may have helped in the well being of the prostitute, its adverse effects on the individual prostitute cannot be over emphasised. It is catastrophically, cataclysmic, consequential and detrimental to the well being of the individual and the society at large. It promotes human trafficking which is a debasement to human right and freedom.

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