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Factors Predisposing Young Female Adults into Prostitution in Sokoto Metropolis: Implications for Adult Education Provisions

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Abstract: After the ban imposed on prostitution in the year 2000 by the Government of Sokoto State, brothels have again sprung up in some areas in Sokoto. This study sought to understand the factors that push young female adults into prostitution. The study revealed that poverty, forced marriage, family frustration, peer group influence, satisfaction of sexual desires, and drug addiction are the factors that push young female adults into prostitution in Sokoto.

Introduction

It is thought that there is an increase in young female prostitution and sex related activities among young people. Although young female adults involved in prostitution are likely to be a hidden population (Cusick, Martin & May, 2003), a field survey undertaken by undergraduate students in the Adult Education programme of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto in 2011 revealed that majority of the prostitutes found in Sokoto metropolis are between the ages of 17-25. The report from Sokoto Prison Service in 2010 also indicated that 49 people were kept in their custody in connection with involving young girls in prostitution during the year. The proliferation of Gidan Karuwai (prostitution houses) in some areas in Sokoto is also on the increase despite the fact that Sokoto State Government had banned the Gidan Karuwai since year 2000. Some of the young prostitutes stay in the houses in different parts of Sokoto metropolis under the pretext that they are tenants. The increase in the number of these houses is a threat to the present generation of young adults and generations yet unborn in Sokoto and the whole country. The prostitutes are young female adults who are expected to shoulder the responsibilities of home making, child bearing and rearing and contributing to the development of society.

Prostitution can be defined as a way in which somebody sells sex or exchanges sex for a price, usually money. It can also be defined as an act of providing sexual service to another person in return for payment. The person who provides the sex and receives the payment is called a prostitute. Prostitution, according to Yabo (1999), is an act taken by some women to sell their pride to other men whom they are not married to. The implications of this act are inimical not only to the existence and general wellbeing of the prostitutes and their patrons but also the continuity of the values that society cherishes. This act has a number of risks which put the prostitutes, their patrons and the larger society in danger. A number of risk factors associated with young female adults' involvement in prostitution include: absence from home or school, drug misuse, sexually transmitted infections, negotiation for the use of contraception or pregnancy termination, absence of decent

careers and professional development, harbouring of criminals, losing human dignity, stigmatization, and above all sin to the creator (God).

Adults who sell sex have sought to legitimize prostitution, by giving it an occupational conception, and re-naming it 'sex work' (Cusick, Martin and May, 2003, p. 6). No matter the nomenclature attached to it, prostitution is not acceptable in African society. The traditional and religious values and teachings of Africans, including the values that Sokoto people hold dear, are against prostitution. Prostitution is also a threat to national development since a proportion of our female population may be left out in the development of our nation because of their involvement in the illicit act of prostitution. This situation calls for worry among social workers including adult educators.

Earlier writers on sex work such as Coombs (1974) and Davis (1981) have linked engagement in sex work to psychological predisposing factors like latent homosexuality; oedipal fixation; retardation; low intelligence; emotional disturbance; sex role confusion; and poor self-image. In recent years however, social and situational factors said to underlie motivations to sell sex include: various implied imperfections in the raising of children such as 'broken homes'; parental (especially maternal) promiscuity; deprived socio-economic background; childhood experience of parental abuse or neglect, among others (Coleman, 1989; Jesson, 1993; Kirby, 1995; Shaw & Butler, 1998).

Given this background, this study sought to examine the factors that drive young female adults into prostitution in Sokoto metropolis and to suggest the roles of adult education in addressing the menace.

Objectives of the study

- i. To investigate factors that drive young female adults into prostitution in Sokoto metropolis;
- ii. To investigate the perception of young female prostitutes on their involvement in prostitution in Sokoto metropolis; and
- iii. To suggest interventions from adult education to reduce young female adults involvement in prostitution in Sokoto metropolis.

Research questions

1. What are the factors that drive young female adults into prostitution in Sokoto metropolis?
2. What are the perceptions of young female adults on their involvement in prostitution in Sokoto metropolis?
3. What are the interventions from adult education to reduce involvement of young female adults in prostitution in Sokoto metropolis?

Methodology

In order to understand the factors that drive young female adults into prostitution in Sokoto, a qualitative research design was found to be suitable. Ferreira (1999) argued that qualitative studies enable researchers to learn about the lived experiences of participants in a research. Qualitative methods gave room for the researcher and the respondents to discuss their ideas freely. The population for the study consists of all young female adult prostitutes between ages of 17 and 27 in Gidan Karuwai. Twenty-two (22) young female adult prostitutes within the ages of 17 and 27 agreed to take part in the study. An in-depth interview guide and a Focused Group Discussion (FGD) guide were used to collect relevant data on factors predisposing young female adults into prostitution and what they feel about their conditions. Twenty-two in-depth interviews were conducted, and four (4) focused group discussions were held. Each focus group had between five and six participants in attendance, and discussions were held at four (4) different Gidan Karuwai. This was possible with the cooperation of the prostitutes' pimps popularly called 'Magajia' and 'Kawali' after the researcher had paid them and the participants had agreed to a price. Data from in-depth interview and focus group discussion were transcribed, translated, sorted, analysed using thematic and detailed descriptive analysis.

Findings and discussions

Factors predisposing young female adults into prostitution in Sokoto

The major reason given by prostitutes for engaging in prostitution was *poverty*. Almost 80 per cent of our sample of young prostitutes began prostitution due to a desire to escape poverty and a lack of opportunity to escape poverty through other means. They therefore saw prostitution as their only alternative means of survival. Some respondents believed that poverty is not good and it must be fought at all costs. One of them remarked that "*after the death of my parents life became miserable for me as no one was there to assist me I thought of survival which pushed me into prostitution.*" The worst part of the story is that one of the prostitutes confessed that her husband is aware of her being a prostitute. And she does it with his consent because he cannot cater for the basic needs of the family.

Family frustration

Frustration with individual's family situation also pushes young women into prostitution. The story of one of our respondents in this regard is pathetic. This respondent is a native of Kano who lost her father when she was about to marry. She said she wanted to marry the person whom she loved but this was not acceptable to her uncle because he wanted her to marry another person. She added that her decision to marry her husband resulted in a lot of trouble from her family. She was disowned and denied of all her father's property. She was completely frustrated. While she was going through these difficulties, her husband was not supportive, in fact, he was adding to the

problem. This problem really frustrated her, so she sought for divorce. After the separation, she became homeless, helpless and found herself in the midst of some ladies who introduced her to prostitution and found herself in Sokoto in the business.

This story confirms the findings of Benson & Matthews (1995) that experiences of running away and homelessness are strongly correlated with young people's entry into prostitution. Experiences that leave young adults feeling frustrated can become reasons why they end up on the streets; they become exposed to learning alternative means of survival; including prostitution.

Forced marriage

Some respondents said their involvement in prostitution was due to *forced marriage*. They described forced marriage as a barbaric act, which must be fought by all. According to one of the prostitutes, her father married her off to a man whom she did not love. Although her mother did not support the marriage, her father insisted on it. After the marriage, she continued sexual interactions with the boyfriend she had before marriage, and her husband got to know about it. He divorced her, so she left her village for the city, where she got into prostitution to survive. The young woman's story portrays force marriage as a dangerous act that must be discouraged and fought because of its consequences on individuals and societies.

Peer group influence

Peer influence is another factor that is responsible for prostitution by young female adults in the study area. Some of our respondents said that their involvement in prostitution was due to their interactions with some experienced prostitutes. For example, one of them lamented that she used to wash clothes for some prostitutes and overtime she became impressed with their expensive clothes, jewellery, food and spending. Given that what she saw impressed her, she saw prostitution as a lucrative business and an easy way of getting money. She said prostitution has been fetching her good money.

Sexual abuse

Circumstances of sexual abuse has been identified as a reason some young women become prostitutes. A prostitute said that her involvement in prostitution was due to her being sexually abused by the husband of her madam who employed her as a housemaid. On one faithful day, her madam's husband lured her into his bedroom when madam was not around and forced himself on her. Thereafter, whenever madam was not around, her husband would force himself on her. Unfortunately, madam got to know as they were caught red-handed and sent her away. This led her into prostitution.

Satisfaction of sexual desires and drug addiction

Some prostitutes see prostitution as the only way to have their *sexual desire satisfied*. One of our respondents remarked that, “*I did not engage in prostitution for money; I only want to satisfy my sexual desire because a man is not enough for me.*” All our respondents admitted they were drug addicts. And some confessed that they became prostitutes in order to sustain living their lives on hard drugs.

Perception of Young Female Adults on their Involvement in Prostitution

Majority of our respondents felt bad about their involvement in prostitution. They described prostitution as a dangerous business not only to themselves but also to their patrons and the larger society. All of them agreed that prostitution is very risky, because sometimes, their clients do request for ‘skin to skin’ which they do for a high price. Many of them acknowledged the risks associated with their involvement in prostitution such as HIV/AIDs, inability to conceive again, stress, loss of human dignity among others. Although some knew that prostitution is risky, in the same breath, they held the view that risk is normal in life. They added that they are not happy taking the risks involved in prostitution, but survival is necessary and they had to survive.

Some indicated they would quit prostitution if they got decent and lucrative jobs. In this respect, one of the young women asked pointedly: “*how do I get a decent job when I do not have education or vocation?*” She then added: “*government is not facing reality about banning our activities because they don’t provide alternatives.*” In addition, some said they have accepted their fate as prostitutes and they do not think there is any work that can fetch them as much money as prostitution does. One of the respondents said she really doesn’t need any job; what she needs is a good husband, and if she gets one, she will quit prostitution. Even then, one of the prostitutes asked why a woman should not be allowed to have sex with many men to have her sexual desires satisfied. She then added: “*I need more than one man to satisfy my sexual desires*”.

Implications for adult education provisions

Our findings about the factors that drive young female adults into prostitution in Sokoto have far-reaching implications for adult education provisions in Nigeria. As adult educators, we need to strengthen our programmes to tackle abject poverty. This is because many of our respondents said they went into prostitution because of poverty. There is a need for adult education programmes that will get Nigerians to critically examine the reasons they are poor and the way out. Public enlightenment on the dangers of forced marriage must be championed by adult educators. Parents need to understand the negative consequences of forcing their daughters to marry men they do not love. Adult literacy classes can focus on marriage issues, just as some literacy classes focus on environmental issues, HIV/AIDs, etc.

Through existing governmental and non-governmental organizations, adult educators could provide literacy programmes, skills acquisition and remedial programmes that would assist the

process of rehabilitation of prostitutes. Adult educators in the northern part of Nigeria need to devise acceptable ways of preaching sex education to the people. I want to believe that if we develop community-based sex education programmes it will be acceptable to the people of the north. Sex education is very important in our lives and we must not run away from it. This can go a long way to control excessive craving for sex among some young adults.

Conclusion

The study shows that banning brothels in Sokoto cannot put an end to prostitution in the town. The root causes must be identified and addressed. The issues of poverty, culture of forced marriage, proper upbringing of children, sex education, and the rehabilitation of ex-prostitutes must be taken seriously. Adult educators must ensure that government faces reality in tackling social problems like prostitution by removing factors that drive them.

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