

The Activities of Ritual Killings and the Responses of National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in Fighting Cross Border Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Akinwale Victor, Ishola¹

Department of Peace, Security and Humanitarian Studies,
University of Ibadan

Mercy Funso, Olumuyiwa²

Department of Peace, Security and Humanitarian Studies,
University of Ibadan

Abstract:- Ritual killings, linked with the complex web of cross-border human trafficking, represent a grim reality in Nigeria's socio-political landscape. This study delves into the nexus between these phenomena, unveiling their interconnectedness and the profound implications for individuals and society at large. Trafficked individuals have overtime been ensnared in clandestine networks of exploitation, become unwitting victims of ritualistic practices aimed at appeasing occult beliefs or fulfilling nefarious agendas. The intricate dynamics of cross-border trafficking exacerbate the vulnerability of victims, facilitating their exploitation and eventual victimization in ritual killings. This study therefore examined the activities of ritual killings, the causes, the efforts and the challenges of National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in fighting cross border human trafficking in Nigeria. The study is premised on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Routine Activity Theories. Using a mixed research method and survey design, the primary and secondary data collected were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The causes of human trafficking were identified to range from political, cultural to social factors. The efforts of the NAPTIP were discovered to include investigation, arrest and prosecution, integration and rehabilitation while the challenges of NAPTIP were also noted to range from poor resource funding, lack of interagency cooperation and poor intelligence gathering. The study therefore recommends that there should be an interconnected activities in improving the status of NAPTIP in combatting cross border human trafficking in Nigeria.

Keywords:- *Ritual Killings, Cross-Border, Human Trafficking, NAPTIP.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Cross-border human trafficking stands as one of the most pressing global challenges of our time, and Nigeria is no exception, drawing significant attention. Undoubtedly, human trafficking transcends borders and permeates every stratum of society worldwide. In recent times, this phenomenon has evolved, encompassing heinous acts such

as organ harvesting and ritual killings, particularly exacerbating the situation within Nigeria. Notably, the escalating incidence of human trafficking and its profound implications on human security have sparked extensive discourse within the country, permeating both formal and informal dialogues. Furthermore, the emergence of new manifestations of this criminality, including heightened occurrences of rituals across borders, underscores the urgency to comprehensively grasp the dynamics and implications of ritual killings within the context of cross-border human trafficking. The determinants of cross-border human trafficking in Nigeria and other climes have undoubtedly evolved in recent times. Beyond traditional motives like commercial exploitation for purposes such as prostitution, job opportunities, and promises of a better life, a disturbing trend has emerged which is trafficking for ritual killings. While the quest for affluence through ritualistic practices is not unprecedented in human history, the escalating prevalence of these incidents is both troubling and alarming.

In contemporary Nigeria, individuals are increasingly enticed into ritual killings through sophisticated networks. Integral to these nefarious activities is the pervasive issue of corruption, which enables and perpetuates these criminal acts. Such endeavors would not be viable without the complicity and collaboration of corrupt officials within key security agencies, including the Police, Customs, Immigration, and the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons. It is imperative to recognize the significant increase in cases of human trafficking in Nigeria in recent years. According to a report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2005), a staggering 89 percent of African countries are implicated in the trafficking of persons, underscoring that no nation on the African continent is immune to this scourge. Human trafficking encompasses a range of atrocities, including sex slavery, child soldiering, and forced labor. Defined as the trade in persons, often for purposes of sexual slavery, forced labor, or commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking represents a grave violation of human rights (UNODC, 2011).

In recent times, cross border human trafficking has been a problem most associated with the African Continent of which Nigeria is one, with more emphasis on ritual killings. The phenomenal of ritual killings as a new trend of human trafficking is emerging as a social problem in Nigeria on a daily basis. The impacts of these criminal act cannot be overemphasized as it cut across so many facets of the society. This menace has affected the socio-economic development of the country. Despite a plethora of condemnations by various stakeholders it is evident that cross border human trafficking with a new dimension of ritual killings has continued to bedevil the Nigerian state and other neighboring regions. Those who have firsthand experience with trafficked individuals can attest to the profound human suffering and enduring pain endured by victims. Advocates vividly recall encounters with emotionally scarred and physically abused individuals, serving as poignant reminders of the stark realities of human trafficking and serving as powerful motivation to persist in the ongoing fight against it.

The menace of human trafficking poses a significant threat not only to the human security of Nigerians but also to national security. Despite efforts by the Nigerian government, such as the establishment of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and collaborations with international organizations, cross-border human trafficking persists, often accompanied by the disturbing trend of ritual killings. Vulnerable individuals across the country continue to bear the brunt of these crimes. While existing literature primarily focuses on the increase and root causes of human trafficking, there remains a notable gap in addressing the reality of ritual killings as a new dimension of cross-border human trafficking. Furthermore, scant attention has been given to assessing the effectiveness of NAPTIP's role as a key institution tasked with combating cross-border human trafficking within Nigerian society.

➤ *Objective of the Study*

The basic aim of the study is to investigate the roles of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in combating cross border human trafficking in Nigeria.

• *The Specific Objectives of this Study are as Follows:*

- ✓ To investigate the underlying causes of human trafficking from Nigeria between 2000 and 2003.
- ✓ To assess the validity of claims regarding ritual killings of trafficked individuals from Nigeria.
- ✓ To examine the responses of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in addressing cross border human trafficking.
- ✓ To explore the challenges encountered by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in its efforts to combating human trafficking in Nigeria.

➤ *Research Questions*

The following questions were listed to guide the study.

- What are the underlying causes of human trafficking from Nigeria between 2000 and 2023?
- Are there claims of ritual killings of trafficked individuals from Nigeria?
- What has been the responses of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in addressing cross border human trafficking?
- What are the challenges encountered by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in its efforts to combating human trafficking in Nigeria?

➤ *Conceptual Framework*

• *Human Trafficking*

Human trafficking, as defined by Article 3(a) of the United Nations Palermo Protocol, encompasses the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of individuals through various means, including threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, or abuse of power. It involves exploiting a person's vulnerability and exerting control over them to facilitate their exploitation, often through the provision or receipt of payments or benefits (United Nations Palermo Protocol, 2000).

Adepelumi (2015) contends that human trafficking constitutes a transnational organized crime with far-reaching consequences, affecting not only individual victims but also society as a whole. Megumi Makisaka (2009) defines human trafficking as the systematic recruitment of individuals from their communities and countries of origin, followed by their transportation to destinations where they are subjected to various forms of exploitation, including forced labor, prostitution, domestic servitude, and other exploitative practices.

Human trafficking is not merely an isolated act but a complex process, as highlighted earlier. It encompasses various stages and involves active participation from multiple actors. Okesola (2018) aptly notes that human trafficking operates through two main channels: the sellers, typically individual's adept at procuring victims often in collaboration with trafficking or travel agencies, and the buyers, who seek to acquire humans for resale, personal use, or other purposes. Human trafficking, in the context of this research study could mean the systematic recruitment, transportation, and exploitation of individuals for the purpose of ritualistic practices, including the harvesting of organs or body parts for ritualistic purposes. This heinous form of trafficking often entails coercive means such as abduction, fraud, or deception, with victims subjected to extreme forms of exploitation and violence.

From the forgoing, cross-border human trafficking in this paper refers to the illegal transportation of individuals across international borders for the purpose of exploitation. It involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons through various means such as threat, use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, or deception.

- *Ritual Killings*

According to Igbinovia (1988), ritual can be broadly defined as a sequence of actions that incorporate gestures, specific language (with particular intonation and syntax), various objects such as roots and herbs, and sometimes animals or human body parts as sacrificial materials.

In Nigeria, money rituals are typically classified into three distinct categories. The first category entails the utilization of human body parts, such as the head, tongue, eyes, heart, and genitals, which are considered sacred symbols and objects for ritualistic sacrifices. The second category involves the use of wild animals, often combined with roots and herbs, for similar sacrificial purposes. Conversely, the third category revolves around the utilization of amulets, charms, and the recitation of specific incantations believed to bestow fortune upon the user. Among these categories, the first is widely perceived to possess greater potency, reliability, and durability compared to the other two. Consequently, individuals seeking to engage in money rituals often gravitate towards this category. (Falae, 2018)

According to Boge (2020), ritual killings may be defined as the deliberate act of taking human lives with the intention of appeasing deities or seeking spiritual and magical benefits. Perpetrators believe that by sacrificing lives, they can obtain favors from the deities, such as transformation, immortality, healing, and societal purification.

➤ *Theoretical Framework*

- *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

Maslow's hierarchy of needs stands as a foundational theory in social work, shaping much of the field's approach to practice. Represented as a pyramid, it illustrates the essential progression of needs towards achieving optimal well-being. At its base lie the physiological and safety needs, forming the bedrock of basic necessities (Maslow, 1943). The subsequent tiers encompass belongingness, love, and esteem needs, constituting the essence of psychological fulfillment (Maslow, 1943). Finally, self-actualization tops the pyramid, epitomizing the pursuit of self-fulfillment (Maslow, 1943). Maslow posits that the attainment of self-actualization hinges upon the prior fulfillment of more basic human needs (Maslow, 1943). For instance, when essential needs like hunger and shelter remain unmet, the individual's focus shifts entirely towards satisfying these needs, impeding the pursuit of personal interests (Maslow, 1943). It's important to note that while Maslow's hierarchy provides a structured framework, human experiences rarely follow a linear trajectory, challenging the notion of a straightforward path to self-actualization.

Relating human-trafficking with ritual killings, Maslow's hierarchy of needs can help understand why victims are drawn to and controlled by traffickers. Risk factors for victims include homelessness, prior neglect and abuse, and poverty level. A lack of housing, food, clothing, safety and financial security cover most of the two rungs of

basic needs in Maslow's hierarchy. Traffickers are able to offer these things to victims, which both draws victims to traffickers as well as makes it difficult to leave (Hopper, 2016; Hopper & Hidalgo, 2006; Stotts & Ramey, 2009). Traffickers also offer intimate relationships and friendships, even if temporarily, meeting some aspects of psychological needs and further bonding victims to them, this is especially true in the case of sex trafficking of minors and as well as organ harvest (Reed, Kennedy, Decker, & Cimino, 2019; Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009). In curbing human trafficking involving organ harvest, service providers must work up the pyramid to be effective; first addressing basic needs like housing, clothing, food, and a sense of security and safety from their trafficker (Gezinski & Karandikar, 2013; Hopper, 2016). Once basic needs have been met, psychological needs can be addressed through group settings, therapeutic interventions, trauma therapy, and a sense of accomplishment.

- *Routine Activity Theory*

The Routine Activity Theory which was initially proposed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979 and subsequently expanded upon by Felson, stands as one of the most extensively referenced and influential frameworks within the realms of criminology and crime science. Diverging from conventional theories of criminality that predominantly center on the individual perpetrator and the psychological, biological, or social drivers behind criminal behavior, Routine Activity Theory shifts its focus to the dynamic nature of crime events. It underscores the interplay between spatial and temporal elements, emphasizing the ecological context in which crimes occur and the consequential implications thereof.

Routine Activity Theory, as proposed by Cohen and Felson in 1979, highlights that crime is likely to occur when three key elements coincide: (1) a motivated offender, (2) a suitable target, and (3) the absence of a capable guardian. This theory considers the routine activities of both offenders and potential victims, emphasizing how the convergence of these elements increases the likelihood of criminal incidents.

In relations to this study, human trafficking and ritual killings could occur with the existence of the three factors earlier mentioned. The motivated offender could signify traffickers and ritualist, the suitable target could also represent the victims, individuals being trafficked for the purpose of ritual while the whole activity is made possible due to the lack of a capable guardian such as the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) to effectively fight the menace of human trafficking for ritual killings and other barbaric purposes.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research work, though a mixed research method employed survey design. This design enhances the researcher's ability to investigate the issue of human trafficking and the phenomenon of ritual killings vis-à-vis the roles of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in combating cross border

human trafficking in Nigeria. This design was adopted to ascertain both the claims and the nature of ritual killings of trafficked persons from Nigeria. All these can best be understood within the framework of exploring the opinions of stakeholders over a period of time.

The study’s target population for qualitative instrument are the officials of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), who have not only been actively involved in anti-cross border human trafficking but who also have dealings with the victims and the culprits of cross border human trafficking in Nigeria. While for quantitative segment, non-official of these agencies were engaged so as to ascertain their perception as regards the causes of cross border trafficking among the victims.

Officials of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS), and Nigeria Police Force (NPF) were purposively selected for the qualitative part, while, simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents for the quantitative sample. This method availed every

concerned stakeholder’s involved equal chance of being sampled in the study. The study area for this research work was Ibadan. The area was selected on the basis of ease and purpose. Ibadan was selected in respect to the case study for this research work which is the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS), Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and other concerned stakeholders. This research work embraced both quantitative and qualitative styles, in this view, content analysis was adopted as a method of data analysis for the interview part while descriptive statistics was used to analysis the quantitative part of the instrument.

III. ANALYSIS BASED ON RESEARCH QUESTIONS

➤ *Research Question I:*

What are the underlying causes of human trafficking from Nigeria between 2000 and 2003

To what extent do you perceive the following factors causing cross border human trafficking in the country?

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics Showing the Respondents’ View Towards the Extent to which the following factors causing Cross Border Human Trafficking in the Country

Items	Mean	S. D
Poverty Factors		
Poverty forces like inability to meet up with basic human need make people vulnerable to exploitation by involving them in trafficking	3.67	0.65
Lack of access to education makes people vulnerable to trafficking	2.09	0.49
Lack of gainful employment cause people to be vulnerable to cross border trafficking	2.31	0.50
People from impoverished family are usually prone to cross border trafficking	2.50	0.53
Poor standard of living cause people to be vulnerable to cross border trafficking	3.67	0.65
Political Factors		
Lack of economic development initiative by the people in the helms of affair is considered as politically motivated cause of cross border trafficking	3.05	0.58
Bad economic situations as occasioned by political institutional arrangement can cause people to be even more vulnerable to cross border trafficking	2.05	0.48
Government inability crack down and put a check cause people involvement in cross border trafficking.	3.01	0.61
Weakness in the capacity of domestic political institutions cause people involvement in cross border trafficking.	3.50	0.75
Cultural Factors		
My cultural setting give room for cross border human trafficking	1.52	0.07
My societal value usually accommodates cross border human trafficking	1.02	0.10
Our way of life makes people to involve in cross border trafficking.	1.01	0.13
People’s Involvement in cross border trafficking is a mean of promoting my culture	1.50	0.17
My culture promotes people’s engagement in cross border trafficking	1.22	0.15
War Factors		
War makes people vulnerable to cross border human trafficking	3.67	0.65
War in form of religious clash makes people vulnerable to cross border human trafficking	3.67	0.65
War originating from electioneering process make people vulnerable to cross border trafficking	3.01	0.61
War makes people feel insecure which in turn make them vulnerable to cross border trafficking	3.50	0.75
Illiteracy Factors		
Lack of adequate knowledge as occasioned by people’s inability to read make them vulnerable to cross border trafficking	3.67	0.65
Lack of adequate knowledge as occasioned by people’s inability to write make them vulnerable to cross border trafficking	3.67	0.65
Lack of adequate knowledge as occasioned by people’s inability to effectively understand any manipulated information make them vulnerable to cross border trafficking	3.67	0.65

- *Decision Value:*

Weak = 0.00 – 2.00

Moderate = 2.01 – 3.00

High = 3.01 – 5.00

Table 1 indicated the participants' perspective towards the extent to which poverty, political, cultural, and social as well as illiteracy factors have necessitated peoples' vulnerability to cross border human trafficking in the country. The empirical findings revealed that poverty factors such as peoples' inability to meet the basic needs of life-food and shelter, lack of access to education, inability to secure employment, low socio-economic status and their poor living standard make them vulnerable to cross border trafficking as having mean values of 3.67, 2.09, 2.31, 2.50 and 3.61 respectively, which are within the decision region of moderate and high degree.

On the part of political factors, the empirical outcomes indicated that lack of viable and sustainable economic empowerment initiative from the people in the helms of affairs necessitate people vulnerably to cross border human trafficking as having high mean value of 3.05. Others include weak institutional arrangement, government inability to put adequate measure to check the menace and weak capacity of domestic political institution would go a long way to make people highly vulnerable to cross border human trafficking as having 2.05, 3.01 and 3.50 mean values felt within the moderate and high decision criterion respectively.

With respect to cultural factors, the empirical findings indicated that cultural influence on cross border human trafficking are very weak. This is because the items comprised my cultural setting give room for cross border human trafficking has mean value of 1.52 which is within the weak decision region. Others consisted of my societal value usually accommodate cross border human trafficking, our way of life make people to involve in cross border trafficking, people's involvement in cross border trafficking is a mean of promoting my culture and my culture promotes people's engagement in cross border trafficking had mean values of 1.02, 1.01, 1.50 and 1.22 respectively which are within the weak region of the decision criterion.

As regards the respondents' perspective on the extent to which war may have caused cross border human trafficking, the empirical results revealed that war makes people vulnerable to cross border human trafficking (mean value = 3.67), war in form of religious clash makes people vulnerable to cross border human trafficking (mean value = 3.67), war originating from electioneering process make people vulnerable to cross border trafficking (mean value = 3.01), and that war makes people feel insecure which in turn make them vulnerable to cross border trafficking (mean value = 3.50). It is inferred that the influence of war on people's vulnerability to cross border human trafficking is very high.

In terms of illiteracy factors, the finding further revealed that lack of adequate knowledge as occasioned by people's inability to read make them vulnerable to cross border trafficking, lack of adequate knowledge as occasioned by people's inability to write make them vulnerable to cross border trafficking and lack of adequate knowledge as occasioned by people's inability to effective understand any manipulated information make them vulnerable to cross border trafficking were perceived to be the major illiteracy factors contributing to people's involvement or vulnerability to cross border human trafficking with the mean value of 3.67 which was within the high region of the decision criterion.

➤ *Research Question II:*

Are there claims of ritual killings of trafficked individuals from Nigeria?

Findings from the field suggest that there have been claims of ritual killings of trafficked individuals from Nigeria. Participants claimed that this act also include organ harvesting of victims.

A Respondent stated that; The trafficking in persons is a shady business in itself which there are shadow parties and great areas in which research is required. The trafficking in persons has several motivations according to research. These include forced labor prostitution, slavery and recently organ trafficking. Researchers have established organ trafficking as a booming trade in the irregular migration routes which lead to death of migrants. In the absence of forensics, casual observers are likely to assume that these killings are due to ritual killings.

- (KII/ Anonymous, Conducted April 2024)

In a similar view, another Respondent notes that;

There have been cases of organ-trafficked returnees who have documented the high incidence of killing-for-organs in the irregular route spanning Northern Nigeria-Niger-Sudan-Libya. Mutilated bodies may be seen as ritual killing but forensic evidence has revealed the dastardly motives of organ harvesting and an illegal but thriving trade in human organs.

- (KII/ Anonymous, Conducted April 2024)

A Respondent also noted that;

We have heard series of cases in respect to organ harvesting of trafficked persons to and fro Nigeria. These individuals are being trafficked for the sake of removal of organs and further being used for rituals.

- (KII/ Anonymous, Conducted April 2024)

➤ *Research Question III:*

To examine the responses of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in addressing cross border human trafficking in Nigeria.

Findings from the study shows that the NAPTIP has engaged in so many activities overtime towards combating human trafficking in Nigeria.

- *A Respondent Stated that;*

NAPTIP has been active in the prevention of human trafficking, the reception and reintegration of victims of human trafficking. The agency has recorded significant gains in the fight against human trafficking but more remains to be done.

- *(IDI/ Anonymous, Conducted April 2024)*

Another Respondent stated that;

Well, NAPTIP has done averagely well over the years, thou more could still be done in the aspect of intelligence gathering. But averagely, I must say that the agency has demonstrated unwavering resilience in the areas of; arresting traffickers, re-integration and rehabilitation of victims.

- *(IDI/Anonymous, Conducted April 2024)*

- *In a Similar view, another Respondent Stated that;*

While assessing the efforts of the NAPTIP, we can begin to state out their successes and setbacks towards fighting human trafficking in Nigeria. The agency has done beautifully well in the following aspects; investigation of human trafficking related issues, prosecution of offenders, public awareness. The efforts are also extended to rescue missions in various degrees. More so, the agency has been involved in educating the general public on the issue of human trafficking and the consequences. So, averagely we can say NAPTIP has done well but can still do better.

- *(IDI/ Anonymous, Conducted April 2024)*

➤ *Research Question IV:*

What are the challenges encountered by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in its efforts to combating human trafficking in Nigeria?

The findings from the field indicated that; despite the enormous successes of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in addressing cross border human trafficking in Nigeria, the agency has continued to encounter diverse challenges.

- *A Respondent in the Study Area Stated that;*

The agency has recorded significant gains in the fight against human trafficking but more remains to be done. Resourcing is a major problem as the agency has not been adequately resourced enough to make its presence felt in all the borders.

- *(KII/Anonymous, conducted April 2024)*

- *Another Respondent Stated that;*

Interagency cooperation is still a challenge of the NAPTIP. Unhealthy rivalry between the agency and other security agencies has been a problem. There is supposed to be a strong synergy so as to make intelligence gathering smooth and achievable.

- *(IDI/Anonymous, conducted April 2024)*

- *A Respondent in the Study Area Noted that;*

The use of technology for surveillance at the borders is still absent. Also, the agency lacks a proactive stakeholder communication and engagement strategy as more Nigerians are taking to irregular migration routes and are being misinformed into slavery, forced labor, child labor, prostitution and organ harvesting.

- *(KII/Anonymous, Conducted April 2024)*

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study highlights the multifaceted factors contributing to the vulnerability of individuals to cross-border human trafficking within the country. It underscores the interconnectedness of poverty, political dynamics, cultural influences, social conditions, and levels of literacy in exacerbating this pressing issue. Empirical evidence underscores the profound impact of poverty on individuals' susceptibility to trafficking. Factors such as the inability to meet basic needs, including food and shelter, limited access to education, unemployment, low socio-economic status, and substandard living conditions significantly heighten vulnerability. Moreover, the absence of sustainable economic empowerment initiatives from governmental authorities further amplifies the risk.

Political factors also play a pivotal role, with inadequate governance structures and ineffective measures to combat trafficking exacerbating the problem. Weak institutional arrangements and a lack of governmental capacity to address the issue contribute to the vulnerability of populations. Cultural influences, while not as pronounced as economic and political factors, still exert a significant impact. Instances of religious conflict and political unrest heighten insecurity, thereby increasing susceptibility to trafficking. Moreover, societal attitudes towards prostitution and gender norms contribute to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

Illiteracy emerges as another critical determinant, with limited education hindering individuals' ability to recognize and resist trafficking schemes. The inability to read, write, or comprehend manipulated information leaves individuals particularly susceptible to exploitation. These findings align with previous reports, such as the Nigeria Human Trafficking Factsheet (2022), which underscores poverty as a primary driver of vulnerability, particularly among women and girls subjected to sex trafficking. Additionally, the study identifies parental pressure, shifting cultural norms, and limited educational and economic opportunities as additional risk factors.

The findings also showed that there have been claims of ritual killings of trafficked individuals in Nigeria. The scholarly findings underscore a disturbing reality as reports have emerged detailing allegations of ritualistic killings involving trafficked individuals within Nigeria. These claims paint a disturbing picture of the depths of exploitation and brutality that some victims go through, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive measures to combat human trafficking and safeguard vulnerable populations. This finding corroborates the work of Shelly (2010) which asserted that while human trafficking in sub-Saharan Africa manifests for various reasons, one particularly harrowing aspect involves the exploitation of individuals for the sinister purpose of harvesting body parts to fulfill occult and ritualistic practices. This phenomenon sheds light on the dark dynamics of human trafficking in the region, where vulnerable individuals are not only subjected to economic exploitation but also to the horrors of ritual killings and mutilations, serving as a stark reminder of the multifaceted nature of this pervasive issue. The efforts of NAPTIP in combatting human trafficking were identified to be; Investigation, arrest and prosecution of offenders, rescue of victims, intelligence gathering, integration and rehabilitation of victims and public awareness.

The challenges of NAPTIP in addressing the menace of human trafficking in Nigeria were identified to range from the issue of resource, lack of interagency cooperation between NAPTIP and other security agencies in border areas, poor intelligence gathering and lack of technological devices. The findings of this research align closely with the scholarly contributions of Adekanye (1998), Wali (2010), Okereke (2016). These scholars have previously highlighted significant issues such as unhealthy inter-agency rivalry and a lack of synergy and information sharing within the context of interagency operations. These factors have fostered an atmosphere of mutual distrust, particularly evident in the coordination of inter-agency operations. By drawing parallels with these seminal works, this research underscores the persistent challenges facing efforts to address human trafficking and emphasizes the critical need for enhanced collaboration and cooperation among relevant stakeholders.

The findings of this research are also congruent with the insights provided by Musa (2013). Musa highlights the pivotal role of a country's border management system in combating human trafficking, emphasizing that its effectiveness is significantly compromised by issues such as insufficient personnel, patrol vehicles, surveillance helicopters, and equipment, as well as the neglect or malfunctioning of intelligence services all revolving round resources. By echoing Musa's concerns, this research underscores the critical need for comprehensive reforms and investments in border security infrastructure and intelligence capabilities to enhance the efforts of NAPTIP in combating human trafficking in Nigeria.

V. CONCLUSION

This study unequivocally concludes that human trafficking represents an endemic global crisis, its repercussions inflicting profound damage, devastation, and despair upon victims, families, and society as a whole. Given the pervasive impact of human trafficking on Nigeria and its citizens' concerted action is imperative at national, regional, and international levels to combat this scourge. Governmental bodies, law enforcement agencies, media outlets, religious institutions, traditional leaders, and civil society organizations must all assume pivotal roles in the collective effort to combat human trafficking, particularly addressing the abhorrent practices of organ harvesting and ritual killings in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ *In Respect of the Findings of this Study, the Following Recommendations are Made;*

Poverty and poor economic activities were identified as a major cause of human trafficking in Nigeria, in addressing this, the Nigerian government should intensify efforts to putting in place structures such as creating job and employment opportunities. This will help reduce the rate of human trafficking and ritual practices.

The Nigerian government should exercise vigilant oversight over the performance of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP), ensuring its efficacy in combating human trafficking. Additionally, there is merit in contemplating the establishment of a dedicated national organization, comprising experts from law enforcement, immigration, and prosecution sectors, with a specific mandate to address trafficking issues within the country. This proposed agency could be entrusted with tasks such as data collection, development of training materials, provision of training programs, and facilitation of coordination among various agencies involved in anti-trafficking efforts. By centralizing and coordinating these activities, such an organization would enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Nigeria's response to the scourge of human trafficking.

More so, continued prevention programs and awareness campaigns should be implemented in states, zones, and villages identified as high-trafficking areas. It is imperative to maintain updated data to identify emerging high-risk areas, as traffickers often adapt their methods of operation. By focusing efforts on these targeted regions and ensuring the timely adaptation of strategies based on evolving trends, authorities can effectively counteract the menace of human trafficking and protect vulnerable populations.

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