

Consented or Coerced? Trafficking of Nigerian Women and Girls for Sex Work in Italy.

**BY**

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\* The Association “Pellegrino Della Terra Onlus (The Pilgrim of the Earth)” (PEDETO) is a Non-governmental organization that began in 1996, in response to a significant increase in trafficking of Africans for sex work in Palermo, Italy. With support from Associazione Buon Pastore Onlus, funded by Tavola Valdese (Waldensian Church Italy) and Methodist Church England, the Association is involved in rehabilitative projects and HIV/AIDS intervention projects especially in the area of access to healthcare care in diagnosis, treatment and preventive services among African migrants.

## **Rationale and Objective**

According to USAID Strategic Treatment for the Asia Regional Anti-Trafficking initiative 1999 <sup>1</sup>,

*“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 gain. Trafficking is a health problem, as trafficked women and children are most at risk from HIV infection. It is a gender problem, as unequal power relations reinforce women’s secondary status in society. Lastly, it is a legal problem, as its victims are stripped of their human rights and lack any access to redress for the crimes committed against them”.*

Globally, trafficking of women and girls for sex work has increased over the past several decades. To consider all women and girls who engage in sex work abroad as trafficked is mistaken and inaccurate. Hundreds of thousands of Nigerians have migrated to Europe, and many of them have relied on human smugglers to do so, and many have also been victims of trafficking.

The concepts of migration, human smuggling and trafficking overlap. In relation to Nigerian migration to Europe it is natural to see them in conjunction (Carling, 2006)<sup>2</sup>. Due to the overlapping natures of migration, human smuggling and trafficking, it is important to define what trafficking is and what it is not. A Parliamentary Briefing paper on the issue noted that “trafficking is confused with smuggling when viewed simply as an illegal immigration issue or threat to national security and not as a human rights violation” (Carrington and Hearn 2003: 3)<sup>3</sup>.

“Trafficking” is also frequently conflated with “migration for work” in some contemporary discussions. “Migration” is defined as the movement of a person from one country to another, whether by legal or illegal means. It is often assumed that “migration” is voluntary and “trafficking” involuntary. However, migration can also be involuntary or “without consent”, such as when people are displaced because of war or famine.

Trafficking is always involuntary, in that while a trafficked person may have consented to being moved across borders, the UN Trafficking Protocol <sup>4</sup> (Palermo Protocol is the first universal instrument that addresses all aspects of human trafficking) states that the use of coercive means and the subsequent exploitation of that person nullifies the notion of consent. That is, people who voluntarily migrate can end up being trafficked. It is the coercive nature of the means used to get that person across borders, and their exploitation once they arrive, that distinguishes trafficking from migration. Definitions and interpretations of trafficking are complex and highly politicised.

With this backdrop, this paper attempts to investigate the consent/ coercive conditions of migration among Nigerian Female Sex Workers in Palermo, Italy. This includes the circumstances and terms of agreement of migration and methods and means of trafficking. In addition, this paper will highlight some of the Associations' approaches to rehabilitating and reintegrating migrant sex workers both in Nigeria and Europe.

### **Data source and Methodology**

A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among 285 Female Sex Workers (FSWs) purposively selected among Nigerian migrants in Palermo, Italy between June and August, 2008 using both quantitative and participatory methodologies. Specifically, 5 focus group discussions (FGDs), 10 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and structured interviewer administered questionnaires were used to obtain data from the sample.

Ethical considerations include data being kept confidential, participation being made voluntary and purpose of the study was explained to respondents. Conditions of inclusion in the study are being a Female Sex Worker (FSW) and a Nigerian.

Returned questionnaires were subjected to thorough screening, checking for consistency and finally edited. The pre-coded nature of the questionnaire facilitated easy entry of the data and statistical analysis. The data collected were subjected to basic analysis with the SPSS software version 11. Information from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were transcribed and organized under broad headings that depict different aspects of the discussions. The transcribed information were analyzed descriptively (qualitatively) and used to corroborate results of quantitative analysis where and when necessary.

### **Findings**

The preliminary results showed that 147 FSWs (51%) reported that they consented to migrate for sex work; 86 FSWs (30%) reported that they consented to migrate for reasons other than sex work while the remaining 52 FSWs (18%) reported that they were coerced. Multiple regression analysis revealed that at ( $P < 0.05$ ) some selected socio-demographic variables like ethnicity, socio-

economic status, parental educational background, religion and place of residence were predictors of conditions to migrate.

Summarily, the findings revealed that many women and girls who consented or were coerced to migrate internationally were compelled or made vulnerable by economic circumstances and social inequalities.

### **Implications for policy**

This paper highlighted circumstances and terms of agreement of migration, methods and means of trafficking, associated risks and some of the Associations' good practices to rehabilitating and reintegrating migrant sex workers both in Nigeria and Europe. Behavioural intervention programs which aim to get women and girls to recognize their own vulnerability to trafficking rely on their accurate information, perception and knowledge about the risks associated with trafficking. Given the increasing vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking, it is of program and policy relevance to better understand the benefits of creating awareness and sensitization about trafficking as a means of training females to have accurate information, perception and knowledge about the risks involved in being trafficked. The findings will be helpful to policymakers, program developers, health educators and NGOs which provide support and guidance to women and girls to better understand the context of trafficking of Nigerian women and girls for sex work abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> 'USAID Strategic Treatment for the Asia Regional Anti-Trafficking Initiative.' May 5, 1999 (draft). Washington, D.C., 1999, USAID.

<sup>2</sup> Carling, Jørgen, 2006. 'Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe'. Geneva: International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

<sup>3</sup> Carrington, K. & Hearn, J. (2003), "Trafficking and the sex industry: From impunity to protection", *Current Issues Brief No. 28 2002-2003*, Information and Research Services: Information, Analysis and Advice for the Parliament (Kerry Carrington, Social Policy Group and Jane Hearn, Law and Bills Digest Group), 13 May 2003, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/CIB/2002-03/03cib28.pdf>, accessed 1 September 2008.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations General Assembly (2000), "Revised Draft Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime", A/AC.254/4/Add.3/Rev.5, Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Seventh session, Vienna, 17-28 January 2000, [http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/crime\\_cicp\\_convention.html#final](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/crime_cicp_convention.html#final), accessed 1 September 2008.