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PEER GROUP INFLUENCE AND UNDERGRADUATES' PRONENESS TO BEING VICTIMS OF TRANSNATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SOUTH-SOUTH OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of peer group on undergraduates' proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking. To achieve this, one research hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. The study was correlational, which made use of a sample of two thousand one hundred (2100) male and female undergraduates spread across the Universities in the South-South zone of Nigeria. The selection was done through stratified random sampling technique. Human Trafficking Questionnaire (HTQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face validation by experts in Measurement, Evaluation and Educational Psychology. The reliability coefficient estimate of the instrument was 0.81 established through Cronbach reliability coefficient. The data analysis technique used in the study was Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient which was thereafter converted to t-value and tested at 0.5 level of significance. The result of the analysis showed that peer group does not significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking. It was at this point recommended among others that parents should give their children a good moral upbringing.

Keywords*:* Peer group, Proneness, Victims, Transnational and Human trafficking

Introduction

The incidence of trafficking in persons commonly referred to as "human trafficking" has in recent times become a worrisome phenomenon in Nigeria, especially in some states in the South-South Zone. It was the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2000) that first created awareness of the incidence of human trafficking, particularly in the third world.

Human trafficking is, of course, a form of modern-day slavery. Traffickers often prey on individuals who are poor, unemployed or who may lack access to social safety nets predominantly women and children. Victims are lured with false promises of good jobs and better live, then forced to work under brutal and inhuman conditions (Salt, 2016).

To enhance their trade, traffickers recruit victims through fake advertisement, mail order bride catalogues and casual acquaintances. Upon arrival at their destination, victims are placed in conditions controlled by traffickers while they are exploited to generate revenue. Many are

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physically confined; their travel or identity documents are taken away and they or their families are threatened if they do not cooperate. Women and girls forced to work as prostitutes are blackmailed by threat that traffickers will inform their families. Trafficked children are dependent on their trafficker for food, shelter and other life basic necessities. Traffickers also play on victim's fear that authorities in foreign countries will prosecute or deport them if they ask for help (Taylor, 2017).

It is worthy to note that trafficking in persons is a global problem, which involves serious human rights violation. This problem has been reported by the United Nations to be the fastest growing form of transnational organized crime. It recognizes neither boundaries nor borders. Profits from human trafficking are fed into the coffers of organized crime. Trafficking is fueled by other criminal activities such as faking of documents, money laundering and migrant smuggling (UNICEF, 2016).

In addition, ILO research in 2000 confirmed the existence of internal and external trafficking in Nigeria. In internal trafficking, children are procured to work as domestic and agricultural workers, while external trafficking provides girls and women for prostitution rackets in Europe and Middle East. The Nigerian immigration service has identified Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ondo, Rivers, Ebonyi, Imo, Enugu, Lagos and Kano as source states (Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation - WOTCLEF, 2015).

Undoubtedly, concerted efforts have been made at various levels to sensitize the Nigerian public on trafficking and child labour, for instance, the Nigerian press such as "Daily Sun" has published cases in human trafficking and child labour. Conferences organized by the Nigerian government and NGOs, with support from international agencies, have also contributed immensely to creating awareness of the existence of human trafficking in Nigeria, yet trafficking still persists.

In the South-South Zone of Nigeria where this study is carried out, human trafficking as a deadly disease has brought about increased prostitution, forced labour, street hawking, kidnapping and other vices (Odion, 2015). However, some schools of thought believe that human trafficking is mainly a product of poverty. If this assertion is correct, then, the question that needs to be asked is: What are then the factors that make undergraduates prone to being victims of transnational human trafficking?

It is in answering this question that this study seeks to find out the influence of peer group on undergraduates' proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking in the South-South zone of Nigeria. Indeed, peer group influence and its role in international human trafficking have garnered significant attention from researchers in recent years. Scholars have explored various aspects of this complex issue, including the recruitment process, trafficking routes and the impact of peer networks on both victims and traffickers. In the light of this, Smith (2018) noted that peer group influence plays a crucial role in the initial stages of human trafficking, particularly in the recruitment of vulnerable individuals. He maintained that traffickers

often leverage existing peer networks to identify potential victims. Corroborating his views Johnson, Davis and Martinez (2019) posited that peer group dynamics create a sense of trust and familiarity, making it easier for traffickers to deceive and recruit individuals who sometimes are undergraduates.

Brown and Williams (2020) on their part remarked that understanding the routes and mechanisms used in international human trafficking is essential to combat this crime effectively. They pointed out that traffickers frequently rely on established connections within communities to facilitate the transportation of victims across borders. This they undoubtedly noted highlights the interconnectedness of peer group influence and the global nature of human trafficking for which undergraduates may also be victims.

Research by Garcia (2017) revealed that undergraduate who are socially isolated or marginalized are particularly susceptible to peer group influence leading therefore to exploitation. He opined that, vulnerable undergraduates often seek belonging and protection within peer groups, making them targets for traffickers who exploit these vulnerabilities.

Another research by Ngban, Maliki and Asuquo (2009) indicated that peer groups can play a significant role in facilitating undergraduates to being victims of human trafficking. They admitted that peers can exert influence through recruitment, coercion and normalization of trafficking activities. For instance, a study conducted by Chisolm-Straker, Baldwin, Gaigbe-Touchais, Ndukwe, Johnson, Richardson and Sze (2017) found that peer-to-peer recruitment is a common method used by traffickers, where undergraduates who have already been trafficked recruit others for exploitation purposes. This no doubt highlights the influence of peer networks in perpetuating the cycle of trafficking.

Musto (2019) maintained that the influence of peer groups on undergraduates' proneness to human trafficking can be attributed to various factors, including socialization process, economic factors and power dynamics, He noted that peers may provide individuals with a sense of belonging and acceptance, making them more susceptible to recruitment into trafficking networks. Additionally, he further posited that economic factors such as poverty and limited employment opportunities can make undergraduates more vulnerable to exploitation and peers may offer false promises of better lives or economic opportunities through trafficking. He therefore, emphasized that there is need to address the underlying socioeconomic factors that contribute to vulnerability and peer influence in trafficking situations.

It is true that peer group exerts strong influence her members. Ngban (2003) remarked that peer group performs several essential functions in a child's development. He noted that it offers the child both primary (earned) status and secondary (derived) status as a member of a recognized group. Therefore, by becoming a member of peer group and conforming to norms of dress and behaviours such as homosexuality, prostitution, drug trafficking or even human trafficking, the child derives secondary

status that supplements the status formerly earned from the family.

It is important to note that the influence of peer groups on human trafficking is not limited to the recruitment stage but can extend to other aspects of the trafficking process. For instance, Laczko and Gramegna (2018) observed that peer networks can play a role in facilitating the transportation, control and exploitation of trafficked undergraduates. This can include providing logistical support, enforcing control mechanisms or participating directly in the exploitation of victims.

Jensen (2018) emphasized how economic disparities within peer groups can drive undergraduates to participate in trafficking as a means of financial survival and influence by the promises of better economic prospects by following undergraduates who constitute the network. Cho, Dreher and Neumayer (2020) on their part highlighted the role of peer facilitators who are already involved in trafficking and recruitment of others from their social circles. They noted that peer facilitators who are sometimes undergraduates exploit trust and relationships to lure fellow undergraduates into trafficking.

Furthermore, peer groups can contribute to the normalization of human trafficking within certain communities or social context. In a study by Musto and Boyd (2017), it was found that dynamics and social norms can shape undergraduates' perception of human trafficking as a viable option or a normalized practice. This normalization, they noted can make it difficult for undergraduates to recognized that they are being trafficked or to seek help. In a similar development Smith (2018) remarked that individuals involved in trafficking often become desensitized to its moral and legal implications due to peer group normalization of these activities. He admitted that peer pressure can lead to the acceptance of human trafficking as a routine part of life by undergraduates.

Again, Musto and Boyd (2017) found out that peer groups often play a pivotal role in recruiting vulnerable undergraduates into human trafficking networks. These networks, they posited may exploit shared cultural or societal ties to exert their influence. Also, Johnson (2021) maintained that in certain religions, human trafficking is normalized, making it easier for peer groups to exert influence. He noted that cultural and social norms can significantly impact on undergraduate's likelihood of engaging in human trafficking.

However, Turner (2019) maintained that peer groups do not influence one's proneness to human trafficking. Instead, he pointed out that peer groups are formed more on the basis of similarity of ambition. It might then follow that once formed, such peer groups will strive to develop the ambitions that brought them together. Expectedly, where the factors that brought them together are academically oriented like doing of homework, attending of classes and the habit of reading in the library, the influence of the peer group will simply be to maintain this goal. This is because by coming together, their collective influence reinforces one another towards the maintenance of the goals that brought them together.

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Commenting on the influence of peer groups on adolescents' behaviour, Cialdini and Trost (2018) observed that given this fundamental human need for social companionship, it is not surprising that people often conform in order to be accepted by others. They reported that conformity for normative reasons occurs in those situations where people do what other people in their peer groups are doing not because they are using them as a source of information but because they will not attract attention, be made fun of, get into trouble or be rejected. Therefore, if members of a peer group are pre-occupied with human trafficking activities such as drug trafficking, street trading, prostitution, domestic or agricultural labour then, other members will as a matter of fact conform in order to avoid a situation where they would be made fun of, get into trouble or be rejected by the group. Thus, normative social influence occurs when the influence of other people leads some people to conform in order to be liked and accepted by them.

Statement of the problem

The current incidence of human trafficking is increasingly becoming worrisome because of the growing number of victims it leaves in its toll day by day. More worrisome are the various measures adopted by traffickers to recruit their victims such as false promises of good jobs and better lives, fake advertisements of various job opportunities and sometimes fake marriage promises. Given the poor condition of living in Africa, particularly Nigeria, where undergraduates find it difficult to feed well, pay their school fees, buy textbooks, pay for accommodation, buy clothes, pay hospital bills and sometimes meet up with some basic necessities of life, it becomes most mind-boggling if these conditions will not increase the chances of undergraduates becoming vulnerable to transnational human trafficking.

Consequently, there have been blames and counter blames on either parent, peer group pressure and poverty as being possible factors that may cause undergraduates to be prone to being victim of transnational human trafficking. It does appear that the factor(s) responsible for such proneness have not yet been ascertained. For instance, Convention for the Eradication of all form of Discrimination against Women - CEDAW (2017) suggested factors such as oper borders, wrong government policies and poor parenting styles as being responsible while Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2017) on its part mentioned poverty as the principal factor that could push people to becoming vulnerable to trafficking. Surprisingly, up till date nothing has been done to the best of my knowledge aimed at identifying this specific factor(s).

The problem of this study, therefore, is to identify if peer group influence makes undergraduates in the South-South Zone of Nigeria prone to being victims of transnational human trafficking with a view to suggesting ways that this social malady can be addressed.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between peer group influence and undergraduates'

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proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking in the South-South Zone of Nigeria.

Research question

1. To what extent does undergraduates' peer group influence relate with their proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated for the study.

1. Peer groups' influence on students has no significant relationship with their proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was the correlational design. Correlational design was used because the research concerned itself with discovering or clarifying relationships among variables through the use of correlation coefficient. South-South Zone of Nigeria was the research area for the study. The area comprises six (6) states namely: Edo, Delta, Cross River, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Rivers State. There are one hundred and nine (109) Local Government Areas. The target population of this study consists of 393,194 undergraduates made up of 214,054 males and 184,840 females in all the 36 universities spread across the South-South Zone of Nigeria. The researchers adopted a stratified random sampling technique. Stratification was based on ownership to ensure that the federal, state and private universities are adequately represented in the study. The researchers used simple random sampling technique to select the respondent. A sample size of 2100 respondents was used for the study.

The instrument that was used was Peer Group Influence and Undergraduates Proneness to being Victims of Transnational Human Trafficking Questionnaire (PGIUPVTHTQ). The instrument had two sections. Section A elicited information on demographic data of the respondents such as student's university, gender, age and family size. Section B had two parts. Part one 15 items which measured the respondents' proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking while the second part had 6 items which measured the influence of peer group.

Copies of the questionnaire were face validated by two research experts in the University of Calabar. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a trial testing was done using thirty (30) undergraduates who were not included in the study. The data generated was analyzed to establish its internal consistency using the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient Method. The result showed that the reliability estimates of the sub-scales ranged from 0.71 to 0.88. The questionnaire was administered by the researchers with the assistance of fellow lecturers in the sampled universities. A return rate of 99% was achieved since the collection was done directly. See table I for sample.

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TABLE 1: Sample distribution per university in South-South zone of Nigeria

S/NO	UNIVERSITIES	SAMPLE		
		MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1	University of Uyo	70	80	150
2	Federal University, Otuoke	72	78	150
3	University of Benin	76	74	150
4	University of Calabar	75	75	150
5	Nigerian Maritime University, Okerenkoko	79	71	150
6	University of Port Harcourt	73	77	150
7	Akaw Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden	70	80	150
8	Niger Delta University, Yenegoa	80	70	150
9	Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma	77	73	150
10	University of Cross River State	78	72	150
11	Delta State University, Abraka	76	74	150
12	Rivers State University	70	80	150
13	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	80	70	150
14	Arthur Javis University, Akpabuyo	74	76	150
	Grand Total	1050	1050	2100

Results and discussion

In this section the hypothesis is restated in the null form, the variables are identified and results of the statistical analysis carried out to test the hypothesis are presented and interpreted. 0.05 level of significance was used to test the hypothesis.

Null hypothesis

Peer groups' influence on undergraduates has no significant relationship with their proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking. The independent variable in this hypothesis is peer group influence while the dependent variable is proneness to being victim of transnational human trafficking. The statistical analysis technique used to test this hypothesis was Pearson product moment correlation analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in table 2.

TABLE 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between peer groups' influence and students' proneness to human trafficking (N=2100)

Variable	ΣX ΣY	EX^2 EY^2	ΣXY	df	r-value	t-value
Peer groups' influence (X)	31359	474041				
			1180428	2098	0.010	0.458
Proneness to human trafficking (Y)	79034	3060672				

Not significant at 0.05, df = 2098, critical t-value = 1.96

The results on table 2 reveal that the calculated t-value of 0.458 is seen to be less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 2098 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the result is not significant. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. The

import of this result is that there is no significant relationship between peer group association and students' proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking.

Discussion of findings

This section is concerned with the discussion of findings of the hypothesis guiding the study. The results generated from the testing of this hypothesis in this study showed that there is no significant relationship between peer group influence and undergraduates' proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking. These results simply imply that undergraduates' peer group association does not influence them in any manner towards or away from being prone to being victims of transnational human trafficking. These findings could be as a result of the fact that the subjects used for the study are undergraduates and these students look up to a bright future after school rather than end their academic career by falling prey to traffickers. The finding could also be as a result of the good moral upbringing of the students.

However, the finding is in agreement with Turner (2019) who maintained that peer groups do not affect achievement. Instead, he pointed out that peer groups are formed more on the basis of similarity of ambition. It might them follow that once formed, such pear group will strive to develop the ambitions which brought them together. Expectedly, where the factors that brought them together are academically oriented like doing of homework, attending classes and reading in the library, the peer group will simply be to maintain this goal and not engage themselves in anti-social behaviours that will make them vulnerable to trafficking.

Ordinarily, human beings have a fundamental need for social companionship. It is therefore not surprising that people often conform in order to be accepted by others. However, the findings in this study disagree with Cialdini and Trost (2018) who maintained that conformity for normative reasons occurs in those situations where people do what other people in their peer groups are doing not because they are using them as a source of information but because they do not want attention, be made fun of, get into trouble or be rejected. Therefore, if members of a peer group are pre-occupied with the thought of travelling abroad either to school or look for jobs, then other members will as a matter of fact conform by thinking along that line in order to avoid a situation where they would be made fun of, get into trouble or be rejected by the group. Thus, normative social influence occurs when the influence of other people leads some people to conform in order to be liked and accepted by them. When such happens members of such peer group become easily prone to being victims of transnational human trafficking.

Conclusion

Peer group influence plays a significant role in transnational human trafficking. It is true that vulnerable individuals are often lured into trafficking networks by trusted peers. Understanding the dynamics of peer influence is crucial for the development of prevention and intervention strategies. Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that peer

group influence has no significant relationship with undergraduates' proneness to being victims of transnational human trafficking.

Recommendations

As a result of the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. Parents should raise their children in the morally upright manner so that when they grow, they will not depart from it.
2. Government should institute educational programmes aimed at increasing awareness about the dangers of human trafficking and its consequences, targeting not only undergraduates but also the wider community.
3. There should be community-based interventions that involve leaders and mentors. This measure can be effective in countering the influence of trafficking-supportive peer groups.
4. Parent should be advised to have the number of children that they can cater for and be responsible for the proper upbringing of their children until marriage.
5. Students should stop desiring to make it fast. They should not feel obliged to sacrifice their lives to release their parents from poverty while they are still growing up, rather their focus should be on acquiring education and skills first, after which they can help their parents out of poverty when they start working.

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