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# HUMAN INSECURITY AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS FROM NIGERIA VIA THE LIBYA TRANSIT ROUTE

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## ABSTRACT
Human trafficking is contemporary slavery. It is one of the fast-growing organised crimes in the world. Human trafficking has devastating consequences on the victims. Efforts are made from different quarters to eradicate this crime. But for sustained success to be achieved there is the need to ascertain the major causes of this phenomenon, which prompted this investigation. Using secondary data and situating the study in the context of the structural violence theory, the study investigates the causal relationship between human security and human trafficking and discovered among other things that human trafficking thrives well in an environment characterised by human insecurity. It noted that both in the state of origin of those trafficked and the transit routes, human insecurity plays a fundamental role. The investigation also reveals that the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi on 20 October 2011 and Libya's proximity to Europe makes it a famous transit route for trafficking. Finally, the paper recommends a shift of emphasis from national security to human security to cater for the economic, social, and political challenges that create enabling environment for human trafficking to flourish.

**Keywords**: Human security, human trafficking, National security, Organised crimes, Bad governance, structural violence

## Introduction
In recent years, the world continued to witness the growth of transnational and international crimes that are threatening human security and infringing on human rights. Some of the notable crimes in the contemporary world include but are not limited to cyber-crime, drug trafficking, weapons trafficking, illegal mining, illegal wildlife crime, trafficking in persons, and other non-traditional crime which create a lot of problems and ruin people's lives. Although the United Nations convention for the suppression of trafficking in persons and the exploitation of the prostitution was implemented in 1949, trafficking in humans become a focal point in the mid-1990s (Broad & Turnbull, 2019). Human trafficking, particularly trafficking in women is one of the fast-growing illegal activities out of the aforementioned illegitimate trade globally. It is also tagged as one of the most profitable criminality in the world, behind drug and arms trafficking. This illicit trade violates the human rights of its victims as it denies them the inherent right to be free.

It is based on the infringement of human rights that article 4 of the universal declaration of human rights prohibits all forms of slavery or servitude. Despite the prohibition of slavery, modern enslavement has taken different dimensions, which includes trafficking in persons. The act of human trafficking is said to be influenced by the prevailing human security conditions of the state of origin of the persons prone to trafficking and the transits states. To curb the lingering effects of trafficking in person, actors such as governments, non-governmental organisations and international organisations have made collaborative efforts in tackling the phenomenon. Examples of International organisations are the United Nations (UN), the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Apart from the above, researchers have made tremendous efforts to fight against trafficking in persons.

Why human trafficking constitutes a global problem, in Africa, human trafficking remains a major problem that exploits susceptible individuals such as women, children, and men for forced labour as well as prostitution. The causes of human trafficking in Africa are alleged to be poverty, corruption, and political instability (Opara, 2007; Wheaton, et al., 2019). In most cases, Africans vulnerable constitute civilians fleeing their states to escape political conflicts, economic hardship, and poverty. All these point to the fact that African states are yet to switch from national security to human security. Amazingly, women who have abundant potential to support the advancement of the African continent are the highest victims of trafficking. During trafficking, African women are exposed to various levels of inhuman treatment. Some are tortured, raped, and forced to marry terrorist members.

In Nigeria for instance, poor young women and girls are marketed either from rural to urban regions or overseas for domestic works and sex exploitation (Okeshola, et al. 2018). Those bound for overseas are usually trafficked from Nigeria through the North African countries with poor human security records. Some of the North African transit states are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. The proximity of these states to Europe and the poor human security conditions pave the way for the trafficking of humans to Europe and other places in the world to flourish. In recent times, Libya has become one of the well-known trafficking routes. Libya has become famous for women trafficking because of the lack of central government in Libya, resulting from the ousting of Muammar Ghaddafi. This incident is alleged to be responsible for the political and economic instability in Libya. This situation has given room for human insecurity in the country which in turn created enabling environment for vulnerable civilians and migrants to be trafficked to Europe, Asia and other parts of the world.

**Conceptual Issues: Human Security, Human Insecurity, and Human Trafficking**

**What is Human Security?**

Human security is a political tool aimed at transforming individuals from the situation of exploitation and domination to that of political participation and accountability (Aning & Lartey, 2019). The concept of human security is broadly referred to as ‘freedom from want' and ‘freedom from fear' (Newman, 2010). Human security is people-centred security. It is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they use their many alternatives, how much access they have to market and social opportunities and whether they live in conflict or peace (UNDP, 1994), and it involves the protection of the vital freedom of the individual. Daud, Othman and Ramli (2015, p.23) perceive human security as ”economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and the rule of law”. This means that human security is far beyond the absence of violent conflicts. They noticed a close relationship between human security and human development. They further argue that human development is a more encompassing term and refers to human security as the people who can exercise their choices safely and freely.

More so, human security does create an enabling environment for human development to strive. It is for this reason that, the idea of human security in our contemporary time was muted and championed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The concept of human security originates from the policy statement of the United Nations in the 1990s. Deducing from the UN policy statement, Kerr (2010) observes that to ensure human security, there is a need to address economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security concerns. The aforementioned are the core values of human security.

The main goal of human security is to highlight important issues like poverty, intra-state conflicts that are not well addressed by the state-centric military security approach

(Nnabuihe, 2016). This means that human security is an emerging paradigm that seeks to throw more light on universal vulnerabilities. The proponents of this new paradigm challenge the long-established notion of national security. As stated above, this does not mean human security is a negation of the state-centric security arrangement. Rather, it shows that the state-centric security approach is not adequate, because of its inability to sufficiently address the security concerns of the people within the state. Most of these unresolved security concerns of the masses are perceived to be responsible for terrorism.

**What is Human Insecurity?**

Human insecurity is a complex term with many facets that endanger people's stability and well-being. From a conceptual standpoint, it encompasses not just physical safety but also aspects related to the economy, food, health, environment, personal life, community, and politics, indicating the interdependence of contemporary challenges. Financial and employment instability are two aspects of economic insecurity. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) emphasises how a major factor in economic insecurity is job loss and income fluctuation, which are made worse by occurrences like the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO, 2021). This instability may have a cascading impact that affects people's ability to get necessities such as healthcare and education.

Besides, economic insecurity, variations in the availability of sufficient and nourishing food is a sign of food insecurity. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) projects that approximately 768 million people would go hungry in 2022, with key contributing factors being economic challenges, conflicts, and climate change (FAO, 2022). On the part of health insecurity, disease exposure and inadequate access to healthcare are the main causes of health insecurity. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), health insecurity is more common in low-income states since their healthcare systems are frequently insufficient (WHO, 2022).

Climate change and the depletion of natural resources are related to environmental insecurity. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) notes that threats to livelihoods and relocation stem from environmental issues such as resource depletion and natural catastrophes (UNEP, 2023). Personal insecurity includes things like crime and violence that pose a risk to one's own safety. High rates of violence and crime, which are frequently connected to organised crime and conflicts, are identified by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as major factors compromising personal security (UNODC, 2022).

Furthermore, governance and social cohesiveness are related to political and community insecurity. These fears are made worse by social marginalisation and shoddy governmental structures, which feeds instability. Human insecurity is strongly correlated with political instability, according to the Fragile States Index (FSI) (Fund for Peace, 2023). Fundamentally, human insecurity is a wide-ranging and intricate notion that necessitates comprehensive and coordinated approaches to lessen its effects in multiple domains.

**What is Human Trafficking?**

Human trafficking is described as the recruitment, conveyance, transfer, concealing or receipt of people, employing threat or other methods of coercion which could include swindle, abduction, and deception of the vulnerable. It involves the giving or receipt of payments to achieve the approval of a person having domination over others, for exploitation (UNODC, 2018). For an act to be qualified as trafficking in persons, it is expected to exhibit three crucial elements: the first is recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of

persons. The second element is the deployment of threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse and the third element is the reason. The reason could be to exploit the vulnerability of others, forced labour, sexual exploitation, slavery, and organ harvest.

Human trafficking can take countless forms: various people may be transplanted within or between states by various means for different purposes, including organ harvesting, sexual exploitation, domestic slavery and exploitation in many other legitimate and illegitimate labour markets. Regardless of this inherent variety, the focus of the trafficking field has long been twisted towards sexual abuse (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). Human trafficking is a methodical crime involving many people. It is a continuum, with people in the crime executing specific tasks.

> In this organised crime there are recruiters. These are people who go to villages to deceive young girls and boys through their parents. They give the impression to parents of assisting their relations for better education, employment without the full knowledge of what awaits their children. Recruiters include sisters, brothers, in-laws, drivers, businessmen and women, law enforcement officers, etc. The would-be victims move from one stage to another until they get to their final destinations where these young girls and boys are distributed to madams and "ogas" who need their services (Okeshola & Adenugba 2018, p.41).

The two tools utilised by traffickers to catch their victims are deceit and force. Since trafficking in humans is a crime, those involved are usually relations, friends, neighbours and acquaintances of the victims

**Human insecurity as a cause of human trafficking in Nigeria**

Many Nigerians who are victims of forced labour are humanly unsecured. Their search for jobs or greener pasture makes them vulnerable. Forced labour strives in an environment of human insecurities and in turn increases the volume of human trafficking (Yousaf, 2018). In Nigeria, the high rates of human insecurity are responsible for the escalation of the number of people leaving their homes and are prone to exploitation. Some of the threats to human security include natural disasters, health, social, poverty, environmental, and food security (Dajahar & Danfulani, 2018).

In recent times, human security concerns in Nigeria are enormous and serious due to the series of internal conflicts going on. For example, the issue of Boko Haram terrorism in the Northeast, armed banditry in the Northwest, herders'/crop farmers clash in the Northcentral and secessionist move by the Igbos of the southeast to mentioned a few. All these coupled with the high poverty level in the country and the government's inability to create enabling environment for citizens to exhibit their potential have pushed many people into illegal activities. Recently, the Nigerian state is experiencing a geometric increase in arms trafficking, drug trafficking and trafficking in persons (TIP).

The mammoth internal strife and ethnic fragmentation also constitute an aspect of human insecurity responsible for human trafficking (Akee, et al, 2010). Women are trafficked into Italy, Spain Netherlands, and other countries to work as prostitutes due to internal conflicts and ethnic fragmentation. Poverty has encouraged the practice of child fostering in Nigeria. This is a situation in which poor rural parents send their children to family members in urban areas for better education and employment opportunities. In most cases, these children end up working as child labourers. Furthermore, poor socio-economic status such as being jobless, out of school, and parents uneducated and unemployed prompt young women to move from

rural areas to cities and from cities to Europe (Okonofua et al, 2004). While some of these girls and young women know the implications of such moves, the majority are unaware of the dangers involved. Many believe that despite the dangers, sex trafficking with its attendant dangers (STDs and HIV/AIDS) would change their economic fortunes.

Human insecurity is responsible for the recent heavy flow of asylum seekers and migrants from Africa to Europe (Giménez-Gomez, et al. 2018). Nigerians and Africans who attempt to migrate to the EU are either fleeing from poverty, violent civil conflicts, political persecution, human rights abuses, or ethnic tensions in their home states. Nankobe (2018) posits that Nigerian women working as sex workers in Italy are motivated by unemployment, high income, family assistance, and the quest for quick money and poverty. To buttress the above point, Okeshola and Adenugba (2018, p.41) stress that:

> ILO/IPEC report shows that 8 million Nigerian children engaged in exploitative child labour and 40% of Nigerian street children and hawkers are trafficked children due to poverty… the desire of Nigerian potential victims to migrate is exploited by offenders to recruit and gain initial control or cooperation, only to be replaced by more coercive measures once the victims have been moved to another state or region of the country, which may not always be the one to which they had intended to migrate.

The majority of the Nigerian sex workers in Italy are victims of human trafficking. There are indications that Nigerians working as sex workers are helping their families financially back home.

Working in Nigeria may not allow them to assist family members financially through the provision of food, rent, and school fees. Unemployment is a problem in Africa. In Nigeria, the situation is not different. There is high number of youths unemployment in Africa, thus getting employment with satisfactory wages is difficult. Due to this situation, Women in desperate need of employment are deceived and they fall victim to human trafficking. People without economic resources are effortlessly lured by the desire for better livelihood and can undoubtedly be deceived by traffickers. Nkem (2021, p. 155) avers that:

> Unaware of the possible consequences such people will often consent to travel through undocumented migration routes to affluent cities and countries and are in the process caught up either domestic or international human trafficking. Unemployment in Nigeria has always been high. Every year many young people graduate from secondary and higher institutions with no employment. After years of working the street in search of non-existent jobs, they are ready to go anywhere to do anything, just as long as they can be gainfully employed.

Even the issue of forced labour can be viewed from human insecurities perspective. Forced labour proliferated by human insecurities is responsible for widespread human trafficking. Mounting human insecurity accelerates the number of people who leave their homes and become susceptible to exploitation.

**Theoretical Framework**

The structural violence theory serves as the theoretical foundation for this investigation. This theory was propounded by Johan Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist in 1969 as a reaction to the shortcomings of earlier theories of violence. Galtung included more subtle and systematic types of harm that social, economic, and political structures foist on people and communities in addition to the overt forms of violence. Galtung (1969) defined structural violence as the systemic injustices and inequities that are ingrained in society and that consistently disadvantage some groups while elevating others. In the same vein, Obassi (2020), views

structural violence as a term used to describe the systemic elements that oppress people and restrict their capacity to achieve their fundamental needs, leading to human instability.

According to the theory, people are deprived of chances, rights, and necessary resources without being directly forced (use physical force) but because of institutional structures and power dynamics. According to Chrobak (2022, p. 175), structural violence can be noticeable in three ways:

> (1) as social injustice in the absence of any acts of violence in the narrow sense (for example, lack of access to the education system), (2) as an act of direct violence caused by an unjust social or institutional system (brutality of prisoners, suicide) and (3) as a constant threat, inscribed somehow in the social system, of launching a reaction based on violence (docility of the discriminated minority to unjust law because of fear of possible reprisals).

From the manifestations of structural violence, it is glaring that the theory provides a perspective for grasping the general roots of injustice and disparity in society. It exposes the covert means via which aggression is propagated. It is such overt and covert aggressions that drive people into illegal migration and make them victims of human trafficking.

Besides the above-mentioned manifestations, Galtung (1969), identified three central assumptions that explain structural violence theory**.** The theory assumes that violence encompasses more than just physical harm. It also refers to the denial of fundamental human rights and needs. From hunger and prejudice to exploitation and marginalisation, this viewpoint expands the concept of violence to include a range of experiences. The theory further posits that social, economic, and political structure, which support injustices and trigger harm over time are profoundly entrenched with structural violence. These structures include organisations that influence people's possibilities and chances in life, such as the state, economy, educational system, and judicial system. The structural violence theory also avers that the idea of structural violence highlights how privilege and power relationships contribute to the continuation of inequality.

Employing the structural violence theory to human security and human trafficking in Nigeria through the Libya transit route exposes an intricate interaction of systemic injustices that enable the exploitation and exposure of persons along the trafficking paths**.** These systemic injustices are seen in the economic, political, and social spheres of the society. Both in Nigeria and Libya the underlying structural problems that give rise to human trafficking are economic imbalances. Nigeria exhibits notable disparities in income, with a substantial segment of the populace subsisting in poverty. Due to the lack of economic prospects brought about by high unemployment rates, especially for young people, traffickers do often deceive them by promising them better lives or jobs abroad (Okafor, 2019). Moreover, economic inequality is made worse by institutional corruption in government, which also makes it more difficult to implement policies effectively. The number of Nigerians seeking to *japa* in order to improve their circumstances due to economic inequality, pervasive poverty, and a lack of sustainable livelihood alternatives is on the rise.

Political unrest and violence are also drivers of human trafficking. Nigeria has been plagued by persistent violence and warfare, especially in its northeast and Niger Delta regions. These conflicts topple societal systems; worsen poverty, and foster fear, which puts people at risk of becoming victims of human trafficking (Obasi, 2020). The issue is further made worse by lax rule of law and poor governance, which facilitate traffickers' illegal activity. Additionally, the trafficking of people in Nigerian context is greatly fostered by social and gender inequality.

Gender-based violence, restricted educational and career possibilities, and discriminatory cultural norms disproportionately affect women and girls. Due to their increased likelihood of forced labour and sexual exploitation, these variables increase their susceptibility to human trafficking (Ibeagha & Mgbemena, 2018).

Furthermore, the lack of strong legal protections and ineffective governance contribute to the cycle of exploitation by enabling traffickers to operate with impunity and take advantage of their victims' weaknesses. In addition, human trafficking organisations use the Libya transit route as a conduit because of its porous borders, political instability, and cooperation from both state and non-state actors. Traffickers take advantage of these systemic weaknesses to help people migrate, offering chances for work and a better life in Europe. The truth, meanwhile, frequently entails coercion, abuse, and exploitation along the way. The structural violence theory shows the existence of interactions between human security, structural violence, and human trafficking in Nigeria through the route of Libya. People are prone to exploitation and human trafficking due to a combination of societal injustices, political unrest, and economic inequality.

**Human insecurity: Driver of Human Trafficking in Libya**

Besides its proximity to Europe, human trafficking in Libya is also connected to the absence of adequate human security. Most victims of human trafficking are migrants. Although Libya has been both the final destination for migrants and transit route for those seeking a better life in Europe (Toaldo, 2015), the number of migrants who use Libya as a transit route have greatly increased in the post Arab Spring era. This is due to the prevalence of human security concerns. During Gaddafi's regime, frantic efforts were made to reduce the activities of human trafficking. Gaddafi was able to address some of the human security issues that would make Libyans participate in human trafficking and efficiently push back migrants heading to Europe through Libya.

The sound Libyan economy during Gaddafi attracted migrants to the country. Besides this, the majority of Libyans were enjoying a good standard of living, these drastically minimised trafficking activities. After the ousting of Gaddafi, there were no effective state institutions and central government to coordinate affairs of the state. With the overthrow of Gaddafi 201, the Libyan state was plunged into crisis, which created enabling environment for human trafficking to strive (Lounnas, 2018).

The post-Gaddafi administration in 2011 could not guarantee peace and security in the state. The situation became worse in 2014 and 2015 resulting in the second Libyan civil war. The split and fragmentation based on tribal and armed group sentiments worsen the human security situation in Libya. The state of Libya is composed of more than 140 tribes that were for long divided by various ethnicities. Some of these groups include Berber inhabitants, Arabs and ethnic African tribal groups found in southern Libya. Out of these140, about 30 tribes are most popular and they are more influential, they include Gaddadfa, Warfalla, Tuareg, Berbers and Zuwayyah to mention a few (Lounnas, 2018). The chaos in Libya was influenced by these groups who were fighting to control the affairs of the state. The continued armed conflicts between these groups pave the way for increased human trafficking activities in Libya.

Although elements of trafficking existed in Libya before the ousting of Gaddafi, the post Arab spring period came with new human trafficking practices which involve state military beside terrorism-related militia and organisations (Van Reisen & Estefanos, 2017). The new practices came with trafficking for ransom. This pattern is a situation whereby refugees or Immigrants are abducted by armed gangs and trafficked out of Libya. Immigrants who use

Libya as a transit route are exposed to torture and rape, particularly girls. This new pattern of human trafficking became a booming business for the traffickers, as they do earn more money from victims. Traffickers do request for ransom in other to cross victims from Benghazi in Libya to their destination and also asked the same to free the victims from being captive (Van Reisen, and Estefanos, 2017). Human trafficking is taking place in Libya but it is grossly underreported (Aucoin & Yahia, 2019).

In this new pattern of trafficking, victims are treated differently by their handlers. Christians are forced to convert to Islam and got married to ISIS members, but other young women and girls,' are harassed sexually. The emerging practices of human trafficking in Libya triggered by lack of human security resulted in the increased fragmentation of security systems, organ harvesting, forced marriage and faith conversion. Bearing in mind the situation of migration flow in Libya and the deplorable human security situation, there is no doubt that migrants are more prone to human trafficking now in Libya. In Libya, trafficked victims and migrants are kept in the stores for days or weeks under the control of armed guards until the time they are shipped to Europe (Aziz & Monzini, 2015).

Due to the enhanced surveillance in Mauritania, Egypt, Spain, Algeria and Morocco, traffickers and smugglers have capitalised on the human insecurity in Libya and made it a transit route to Lampedusa or Sicily in Italy not minding the long-distance and attended risk (Coluccello & Massey, 2007). Part of the risk taken by migrants and trafficked persons in Libya include the use of historical camel routes which exposes them to the activities of bandits. The motives for taking such a risk hinged on fear of discrimination, persecution, and political instability. The availability of better human security conditions in Europe, the proximity of Libya to Europe, and the porous nature of the Libyan border made the Libyan transit route famous (Aziz & Monzini, 2015).

Another aspect of human security (state capacity) that contributed heavily to human trafficking in Libya is the rule of law and corruption. Selective enforcement of regulations, legal gaps and incompetent institutions are part of the factor that breeds corruption in Libya (Kamba & Sakdan, 2012, p. 358). In Libya, policymakers who are supposed to enact laws on corruption are the ones involved in corruption due to the inefficient institutions. Indeed, they reported the cost of corruption such as reduction of opportunities for political participation result in little opportunities for citizens to articulate their needs and leads to poor public management and inefficient resource allocation. Once poor public management and inefficient resources allocation resulted in poverty, economic hardship and later led to conflicts and violence.

Corruption strengthened the activities of human trafficking in Libya. This act is common among the local police who are poorly paid. To meet up with the high cost of living in Libya they are exposed to corrupt practices. They are involved in smuggling migrants from Libya to Italy (Coluccello & Massey, 2007). Furthermore, corruption exists in the judiciary system. Apprehended smugglers and traffickers do bribe judicial officers to free themselves from the wrath of the law. Even those who are prosecuted and convicted are engaged in corrupt practices to avoid being prisoned. To corroborate the above position, Kamba and Sakdan, (2012) disclosed the presence of widespread corruption in Libya and argue that the reasons behind it include lack of transparency, lack of law enforcement and lack of political will to fight the phenomenon. In the presence of corruption, it is challenging to implement anti-trafficking laws.

## Conclusion

Human trafficking is not a new phenomenon; it has become pronounced these days and is termed modern slavery. The phenomenon of human trafficking strives well in states that have not shifted their focus from national security to human security. In most cases, young women from economically backward states migrate from their home states in search of a better life elsewhere. In terms of transit states like Libya too, the lack of human security is revealed to be responsible for the striving of human trafficking. This investigation has revealed that the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya or the post Arab spring era changed the pattern of human trafficking. This was a result of the political instability that worsens the human security situation in Libya.

The economic situation, political chaos, and insecurity in Nigeria escalate the number of persons who are willing to migrate out of Nigeria. Most of these people are been deceived and subsequently trafficked to Europe and other places. The lack of effective control over Libyan borders enhances human trafficking via the Libyan route to Europe. From the revelation of this investigation, collaborative efforts are needed to effectively curb the menace called human trafficking. Both Nigeria and Libya need to boost the human security situation of their citizens. This will address the problems of economic backwardness, political instability, poverty, and unemployment that usually push people to be prone to or participate in human trafficking.

There is the need for an effective central government in Libya to formulate laws and take charge of the security system, in other to deter illegal migrants' incursion into Libya. The restoration of democratic governance in Libya is a pathway to peace and security. Since human security concerns are proven to be the push factor of human trafficking in Nigeria and Libya, governments of African states should make effort towards solving their security, political, social and economic challenges.

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