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## ADOLESCENT PROSTITUTION IN SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND RISK FACTORS.

**Babatunde A. Olofinbiyi<sup>a</sup>, Sogo A. Olofinbiyi<sup>b</sup>, John L. Oyefara<sup>b</sup>, Omotayo O. Adeniyi<sup>c</sup>, Olusola P. Aduloju<sup>d</sup>, Rebecca O. Olofinbiyi<sup>d</sup>, Olusola Benjamin Fasubaa**

<sup>a</sup>*Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Ekiti State University College of Medicine Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.*

<sup>b</sup>*Department of Sociology, School of Postgraduate Studies, University of Lagos, Nigeria.*

<sup>c</sup>*Kings College London*

<sup>d</sup>*Department of Nursing, Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria*

<sup>e</sup>*Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and perinatology, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State*

### ABSTRACT

**Context:** Adolescent prostitution, an interesting area of reproductive health focus, is of great socio-economic and medical burden in Nigeria.

**Objective:** This study aims to determine the demographic characteristics and risk factors for adolescent prostitution in Nigeria

**Method:** This was a cross-sectional study using ethnographic method of in-depth interview based survey of adolescent sex workers in Oyingbo and Yaba communities of Lagos State, Nigeria. This study was conducted between 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 2014 and 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 2014. The interview was conducted face to face.

**Result:** A total of 290 adolescent sex workers were interviewed. The mean age of adolescent prostitutes in the study was 16.9 years. While 97.9% of the respondents were of Christian faith, 1.7% belonged to Islam. Financial gain was the commonest reason (90.7%) for involvement in adolescent prostitution in the study.

**Conclusion:** Adolescent prostitution is a significant social and medical problem in Nigeria. Prompt and holistic multidisciplinary approach is required to address this social problem.

**Keywords:** Key words :Adolescent, prostitution, reproductive health, demographic characteristics, risk factors, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescent prostitution, a relatively new and interesting area of reproductive health focus, is of enormous socioeconomic and medical burden in any nation's development. It has been described as the sexual exploitation of girls within the age bracket of 10 and 19 for remuneration in cash or kind mostly arranged by a third party (1). The clandestine nature of the practice of adolescent prostitution has practically made the objective definition of its prevalence difficult; nevertheless it is a pandemic

issue. A report from Global March Against Child Labour revealed the alarming exploitation of children worldwide ;with Africa and Asia carrying the bulk of the burden of adolescent

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**Correspondence: Dr Babatunde Ajayi Olofinbiyi**

*Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*

*Ekiti State University College of Medicine*

*Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.*

*Email: tundeolofinbiyi@gmail.com*

prostitution(2). It is also interesting to find out that Nigeria has been shown to be a notable provider of domestic labour in cross-border child trafficking for prostitution(3). Although the act is globally declared as being illegal and barbaric, it may have reached epidemic level in most communities. Although the adolescents form the bedrock of any nation It is pathetic to find out that most nations have failed to meet the basic health needs of these adolescents. In Nigeria, corrective health and legal policies designed to combat the menace of adolescent prostitution have not been put into action because the required political will is lacking. Adolescent girls' involvement in prostitution have been strongly linked with defective upbringing, peer group influence, low educational level and poverty(4,5). Therefore, impacts of prostitution on adolescent girls include sexually transmitted infections especially HIV(5,6), unwanted pregnancy and induced abortion with its complications, myriads of obstetric complications including maternal death, physical assault and negative psychological reactions including suicidal tendency and nation image tarnishing(6,7). Most studies done on prostitution in Nigeria have focused on women of reproductive age group(6,8), there is dearth of data on the segment of these women that are adolescents who are the main template upon which continued sustenance of human race hinges. Findings from these study will not only help appreciate the nature of and the factors influencing adolescent prostitution in Nigeria but also help design appropriate preventive strategies for the problem.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

This was a cross-sectional questionnaire and ethnographic method of in-depth interview based survey of adolescent sex workers in Oyingbo and Yaba communities of Lagos State, Nigeria; conducted between 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 2014 and 30<sup>th</sup> of

September, 2014. The reason for this was to generate both quantitative and qualitative information for the study. The study population covered those female adolescent sex workers within the age limit (10-19) in Oyingbo and Yaba communities of Lagos State, Nigeria. A total number of 300 copies of questionnaire were administered only to female adolescent sex workers. A total of 300 female adolescent sex workers from 10 different brothels were interviewed in the general survey through a method of personal interview (230 female adolescent sex workers from 6 brothels in Oyingbo community and 70 female adolescent sex workers from 4 brothels in Yaba community). The survey questionnaire was structured in such a way that adequate information was elicited on the research questions, objectives and hypothesis.

However, in the qualitative research method, focus was also be placed on female adolescent sex workers; and a total of eight (8) in-depth interviews were conducted in the study using unstructured interview with "guide" questions. The respondents interviewed in this section were as follows: 6 female adolescent sex workers, 1 brothel manager and 1 brothel madam. The reason for including this set of people in the study was to know their own personal opinions towards this category of people they work with. It is also imperative to note that respondents for the in-depth interviews and survey were drawn from the two sampled local government areas. This made the data generated from the technique represent a true picture of adolescent prostitution in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria.

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select respondents in the survey, while in the in-depth interview method, respondents were selected using both purposive and accidental sampling techniques (this selection method was based on convenience, chance, availability and relevance of

the respondents to the theme of the study). Both descriptive and content analyses were utilized to analyze the generated data. Data obtained from the study were analyzed using SPSS version 17; while categorical variables were expressed as frequency, continuous variables were expressed as mean, median and ranges.

## **RESULT**

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The majority of the female adolescent sex workers were between the ages of 15 and 19 years. However, their mean age was 16.9 years. The data showed that 284(97.9%) of the respondents were of Christian faith, while 5(1.7%) of the respondents were Muslims. While 128(44.1%) and 4(1.4%) of the respondents were from Igbo and Yoruba-speaking ethnic groups respectively, only 1(0.3%) was of Hausa/Fulani ethnic group(the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria);and 157(54.1%) respondents were from other smaller ethnic groups in Nigeria. With respect to nationality, 279(96.2%) of adolescent prostitutes were from Nigeria and 11(3.8%) were from other countries. Two hundred and eighty three (97.6%) of the respondents were single, 4(1.4%) were married and 3(1.0%) were divorced. It was discovered that 263(90.7%) of the respondents had secondary education, 19(6.6%) primary, 5(1.7%) tertiary; while 3(1.0%) had no education. The findings in this study showed that 263(90.7%) of the respondents gave financial gain as reason for their involvement in prostitution business and 3(1.0%) said the reason was for both financial gain and social connection.

## **DISCUSSION**

The outcome of this study shows that the practice of prostitution cuts across all ethnic groups in Nigeria. However, the study recorded that the practice was most common among the Igbo ethnic group while the

lowest percentage was recorded among the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups ;these represent the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, all in different geopolitical zones .The lower percentage recorded in Yoruba ethnic group does not really mean that the Yoruba girls are rarely involved in the practice; but might be connected with the fact that the study location is within the Yoruba society(their home) where the adolescents believe they might be quickly seen and openly recognized by their kith and kin. Interaction with the very few married and divorced respondents indicated that they were deserted by their husbands and needed to support their children and their entire families. With respect to nationality, 279(96.2%) of adolescent prostitutes were from Nigeria and 11(3.8%) were from other countries; this finding is not in agreement with Ayodele's finding that adolescent girls cross border being trafficked in deceit into African countries for prostitution under the care of retired Nigerian prostitutes who pose as their madams(9). Outcome of the research work also shows that peer group influence plays a dominant role in paving ways for how female adolescents get into the business of prostitution in Nigeria; this finding is in line with Portard's work that revealed a predominant influence of peers on risky sexual behaviour during adolescence(10). In this regard, the kind of friendship that an adolescent girl keeps at a point in time goes a long way in determining the kind of moral rectitude she will exhibit in society. The study also revealed that most of the respondents (51.0 per cent) received between #20000 and #25000 as their weekly income and majority of them still struggled for their daily living. Although most of the adolescent prostitutes are unhappy with their lifestyle and profession, they have found no meaningful alternative to sustain their lives and that of their families.

Two hundred and sixty-three (90.7%) of the

respondents said the reason for their involvement in the business was for financial gain, 23(7.9%) of them said it was both for financial gain and to earn a living, 3(1.0%) said the reason was for both financial gain and social connection; various sources have given economic factor as one of the commonest reasons for adolescent prostitution (7,11,12).

Findings from in-depth interview showed that most adolescents in prostitution enterprise are driven by poor financial conditions and socio-economic instability of their neighborhood. To them, the only means to survive this condition is to go into prostitution which promises a quick and more promising reward.

Specifically, it was also gathered that majority of the female adolescent sex workers are poor and have low socio- economic background with little or no opportunity for life advancement. They are living under the fear of harassment by the police and many of them get arrested and released as many times as possible during the course of the business

This study is strengthened by the fact that it is one of the few studies on adolescent prostitution in sub-Saharan Africa and by the relatively large number of respondents from different geographical locations in a large city. It is limited by the fact that the study population is practically just a segment of female adolescent prostitutes; there are still more female adolescent prostitutes that could not be reached due to clandestine nature of the practice. More aggressive quantitative and qualitative studies are needed to discover more adolescent female prostitutes. In addition, studies exploring the roles of male adolescent prostitutes may also reveal new and hidden findings in prostitution business. There should be widespread awareness of the implications of adolescent prostitution mainly anchored by government, non-governmental organizations, schools, religious movements and so on. More employment opportunities should be provided for

young people with a special focus on women empowerment. There is also need for more strict legislation against prostitution, child trafficking and other related dangerous social practices.

Finally, the study has fully demonstrated that a significant number of adolescent girls in Nigeria is involved in prostitution business. The trend, if not checked ,is grossly inimical to the overall national progress and development. Multidisciplinary efforts are needed for any meaningful and effective prevention of adolescent prostitution.

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic characteristics of the female adolescent prostitutes

|                               |             |               |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| <b>Age group</b>              |             |               |
| <b>10 years</b>               | <b>-14</b>  | <b>years</b>  |
| <b>5</b>                      |             | <b>1.7</b>    |
| <b>15 years</b>               | <b>-19</b>  | <b>years</b>  |
| <b>285</b>                    |             | <b>98.3</b>   |
| <b>Religion</b>               |             |               |
| <b>Christianity</b>           |             |               |
| <b>284</b>                    |             | <b>97.9</b>   |
| <b>Islam</b>                  |             |               |
| <b>5</b>                      |             | <b>1.7</b>    |
| <b>No response</b>            |             |               |
| <b>1</b>                      |             | <b>0.3</b>    |
| <b>Ethnic Background</b>      |             |               |
| <b>Yoruba</b>                 |             |               |
| <b>4</b>                      |             | <b>1.4</b>    |
| <b>Igbo</b>                   |             |               |
| <b>128</b>                    | <b>44.1</b> |               |
| <b>Hausa/Fulani</b>           |             |               |
| <b>1</b>                      |             | <b>0.3</b>    |
| <b>Others specify</b>         |             |               |
| <b>157</b>                    | <b>54.1</b> |               |
| <b>Educational attainment</b> |             |               |
| <b>None</b>                   |             |               |
| <b>3</b>                      |             | <b>1.0</b>    |
| <b>Primary</b>                |             |               |
| <b>19</b>                     |             | <b>6.6</b>    |
| <b>Secondary</b>              |             |               |
| <b>263</b>                    |             | <b>90.7</b>   |
| <b>Tertiary</b>               |             |               |
| <b>5</b>                      |             | <b>1.7</b>    |
| <b>Current marital status</b> |             |               |
| <b>Single</b>                 |             |               |
| <b>283</b>                    | <b>6</b>    | <b>97.</b>    |
| <b>Married</b>                |             |               |
|                               |             | <b>1.4 4</b>  |
| <b>Divorced</b>               |             |               |
|                               |             | <b>1.0 3</b>  |
| <b>Nationality</b>            |             |               |
| <b>Nigerian</b>               |             |               |
|                               |             | <b>96.279</b> |
| <b>Others specify</b>         |             |               |
| <b>11</b>                     |             | <b>3.8</b>    |

**Table 2:** Mode of introduction to prostitution business

| Mode of introduction<br>Percentage         | Frequency |      |
|--|-----------|------|
| Through personal effort                    | 106       | 36.6 |
| Through peer group influence at school     | 133       | 45.9 |
| Through peer group influence on the street | 36        | 12.4 |
| Through mass media                         | 7         | 2.4  |
| Through a family member                    | 6         | 2.1  |
| No response                                | 2         | 0.7  |

**Table 3:** Weekly Estimate Of Income In Prostitution Business

| Weekly income<br>Percentage | Frequency |      |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------|
| ₦10,000-N15,000             | 4         | 1.4  |
| ₦20,000-N25,000             | 148       | 51.0 |
| ₦30,000- N35,000            | 101       | 34.8 |
| ₦40,000- N45,000            | 14        | 4.8  |
| ₦50,000 – N55,000           | 8         | 2.8  |
| ₦60,000 and above           | 14        | 4.8  |
| No response                 | 1         | 0.3  |

**Table 4:** Reasons For Involvement In Prostitution Business

| Reason<br>Percentage                   | Frequency |      |
|--|-----------|------|
| For financial reason                   | 263       | 90.7 |
| For financial reason/social connection | 3         | 1.0  |
| For financial reason/to earn a living  | 23        | 7.9  |
| No response                            | 1         | 0.3  |

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