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PROSTITUTION AND CHANGES IN SEXUAL MORALITY A CASE OF UYO URBAN (NIGERIA)

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the present situation of prostitution in Uyo Urban, the headquarters of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria and the social attitudes toward it. Information about the socio-economic characteristics of prostitutes and social attitudes toward them was collected from fifty prostitutes in five randomly selected locations in Uyo Urban with the use of an interview schedule. The following main results were obtained:

1. There is greater social approval of prostitution than in the early 1960s.
2. Prostitutes in Uyo urban are mainly secondary school dropouts who are largely unemployed but strikingly, the result also shows that undergraduates are gaining access to the profession.
3. The main reason for becoming a prostitute is economic.
4. The fees charged vary according to the category of prostitutes.

The paper concludes that since prostitution is perceived as a nobler means of earning income than other unconventional socio-economic ways in our society by secondary school dropouts, Government should legalize the profession.

INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of licensed brothels for commercial sex in Greece in 550 B.C. prostitution has survived over several centuries of human existence in spite of attempts to suppress it by government agents or religious bodies or other moralists. Its defiant resistance to extermination is due, according to Kingsley Davis (1961), to its functionality for society. According to Davis, "even in a totally sexually permissive society, not everyone would be able to find willing sexual

partners. Some would still have to buy sexual favours from others". It is only in a society in which "there were no sexual taboos whatsoever that prostitution would cease to exist."

The profession of prostitution, despite its strong survival potential has undergone various changes; in the types of prostitutes, modes of operation, its incidence and causes, social organisation and types of clients who patronize them and in the overall supply and demand conditions for prostitutes in many countries.

In spite of its prevalence in Nigeria, there has been a dearth of information regarding the characteristics and operations of the members of this profession in the country. Apart from Falola's historical survey of 'Prostitution in Ibadan, 1895 - 1950', there has hardly been any other published works in this important area of social life. It is, therefore, the intention of this paper to examine the various aspects of prostitution with a sociological insight in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The main objective is to look at prostitution in situations and times more modern than Falola's study and therefore to provide an updated information regarding the characteristics and operations of prostitutes in Nigeria. By paying attention to key points in Nigeria's history such as the Civil War and Structural Adjustment Programme years the paper seeks to provide an understanding of prostitution in terms of the social context in which it operates.

PROSTITUTION

It seems trite to define prostitution or prostitute since it appears every adult in society knows its meaning. The variations found in prostitution and among prostitutes however demand some kind of definition or clarification.

A prostitute has often been seen as a woman who accepts monetary reward in exchange for an essentially unsaleable commodity. In general, prostitution has been defined 'as the granting of non marital sexual access established by mutual consent of the prostitutes, their clients and their employers, for remuneration'. This definition is seen as sexually neutral since, according to Larry (1989), prostitution can be 'straight or gay, male or female'. Recent analysis has, however, led to the amplification of this definition in order to take cognisance of the conditions of prostitution usually present in a commercial sexual transaction. This broad definition includes activities ranging from sexual intercourse to exhibitionism, and to

oral sex, the acceptance of things of economic value other than money in exchange for sexual gratification and the absence of affection even though participants may know one another (Larry, 1989).

The prevalence and persistence of prostitution has been a source of concern to many governments, religious bodies, moralists and researchers for many centuries. Prostitution has been condemned on moral grounds: it debases a natural act meant for procreation and so its persistence is seen as destructive to the family unit (Davis, 1961). Davis has, however, argued that by defining certain coital techniques as immoral and hence out of bounds for wives and sweet hearts 'the moral order gives advantage to the prostitute'. He states that the man who is in a stable relationship with a woman may nevertheless find his sex life with her thwarted by the vicissitudes of interpersonal relationships of the staleness of age or familiarity.

Prostitution has been cited as an index of the measure of the health of a government and its environmental conditions. Wilson and Roy (1963) see prostitution as a sign of an unhealthy government and of social conditions unwholesome for youths and adults, while Freedman et al (1952) asserts that prostitution can only thrive in slums or squalid locations within countries.

Many researchers have, however, concentrated on factors which condition individuals into prostitution. Economic circumstances and opportunities are seen as central issues which constrain individuals to practice prostitution (Bierstedt, 1974). The crucial economic conditions include poverty, lack of occupational skills and unemployment.

Onoge (1978) stresses that prostitution is largely caused by poverty and that it provides an outlet for escapism from depressing poverty and low socio-economic status, deprivations and poor standards of living.

Dynes (1964) insists that poverty was generated by capitalism at the beginning of the industrial revolution. Peasants flocked to the cities in large numbers in search of employment but their conditions of livelihood was brutal: they lacked the simplest types of amenities while malnutrition, long hours of work with subsistence wages and living in squalid environments are believed to have influenced the access to prostitution and other deviant behaviour. Bierstedt (1974) accepts that 'Bad conditions drive many women into prostitution: cruel, biting poverty and unemployment opportunities', and thus prostitution is seen by Akindiji (1986) as the oldest form of profession that offers economic means of livelihood and social

relationships in society. Lenski and Lenski (1978) argue that although it is not always the case that the very poor are the only ones found among prostitutes, economic factors still constitute the major cause of the incidence of prostitution.

Two periods in Nigeria - the Civil War and the SAP years - have been characteristically associated with economic hardship in the country. These periods have engendered poverty, malnutrition, disease and unemployment which are closely associated with the structural arrangements of the country.

Edet (1989) has observed that there may be other reasons for involvement in prostitution. According to him 'most of them (prostitutes) are civil servants, students, graduates and housewives who engage in prostitution, not because they cannot help it, (but because they want) to satisfy their insatiable sexual hunger and as a revenge against their promiscuous husbands'.

For King and Koller (1974) prostitution is functional to society. He, however, locates the cause of prostitution in the social structure. According to him, prostitution reduces the rate of adultery and rape in the society. He argues that if prostitution is legalized - since it does not harm anyone - it will release the police and the court for more serious crimes against persons, states and property. He sums up: 'it is an institution that co-exists with society and functions to bring about order in society as it helps to reduce emotional urge by providing outlets for sex drives that would otherwise be vented in more harmful ways to society'. With the equal prevalence of AIDS and prostitution, this position can hardly be supported in full.

HISTORY OF PROSTITUTION IN UYO

The incidence of prostitution in Uyo dates back to the 1940's when, as the Headquarters of the then Uyo Division, the little village started showing signs of developing some sort of urban features like laid out streets, shops, relatively better roads, a huge market and a cosmopolitan population which flowed in from all over the Eastern provinces. This mixture provided the necessary anonymity for persons who cared to sell their bodies, and the impunity for buying. Abak Road was the acclaimed centre during the period.

Increase in both the number of prostitutes and areas of operation was much noticed during and after the civil war in Nigeria, 1967 - 1970. By then

prostitutes had a recognized residence at No.2 Ikpa Road with ten girls in residence - three from Ibibio-speaking area and the rest from other states in the country.

Today, prostitution has been well established in Uyo with its No. 2 Ikpa Road location still maintained along with the establishment of other locations in the various parts of the State Headquarters. Uyo became the capital city of Akwa Ibom State in 1987. This has resulted in the influx of a large number of people into the town, both residents and commuters. New locations include Ekpenyong Street, Itam Junction, Brown Street, Ikot Ekpene Road (opposite the Park) Ikpa Lane, Itu Road among others. Prostitutes in Brown Street are often seen in the night time from 8.00 p.m. till 12.00 p.m.

METHODS

A total number of 50 prostitutes out of an estimated number of three hundred volunteered to provide information. They were selected from 5 out of the 8 locations yet identified. The locations were randomly selected.

Methods used included direct observation and personal interview. The interview schedule solicited information on a variety of items including the present age of the prostitute and the age when they became involved in the profession, educational qualification, previous encounters with employment, reasons for joining the profession, the major clients, the number of locations, the estimated number of prostitutes, types or classification of prostitutes and their charges, their religion, problems they have encountered, their involvement with alcohol and hope of marriage. The selection of the 50 prostitutes for interview was based mainly on the homogeneity of interest of the prostitutes and their mode of operations.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO PROSTITUTION

From the data on Table 1 below, 80% of the prostitutes interviewed said that they have not ever been condemned openly or criticised directly by the members of the society. This has resulted in the enhancement of the self-image of the prostitutes observed during the study. By implication, the society tends to condone prostitution. This might not be unconnected with the present economic situation in the country.

TABLE 1
PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO PROSTITUTION

Public Attitudes	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Approval	40	80%
Non-Approval	10	20%
Don't Know	-	-
Total	50	100

TYPES OF PROSTITUTES

Prostitutes in Uyo can be classified initially into professional and non-professional types. The professional prostitutes are the ones living permanently in brothels and rented rooms in hotels. This group is similar to Falola's category of 'lodgers'. However, the differences noted were that lodgers in Ibadan operated mainly on Friday and Saturday nights while the professional prostitutes in Uyo operate from Mondays to Sundays both in the day time and night time. In Uyo, unlike Ibadan, the lodgers are both indigenes and non indigenes. Other types of professional prostitutes identified during the study include the Room Prostitute who lives in hired, well-furnished houses for their activities. They are the most sophisticated of professional prostitutes.

The other category of professional prostitutes are called, in Uyo, 'smart or big girls,' similar to what are usually called bar girls. They spend most of their time in bars drinking and waiting to be picked up by clients. The bar girls in Uyo are rewarded with drinks by the clients who patronize the bars.

Non-professional prostitutes include mainly prostitutes not residing in brothels or hotel rooms. They are the street walkers who seem to be in the majority. They are very attractive and dress in sophisticated dresses and jewelry. Others are call girls who are well educated and who hardly admit that they are in the profession. Call girls in Uyo are mostly students from higher institutions of learning.

SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AMONG PROSTITUTES

During the study status differences were observed among the various categories of prostitutes. Call Girls and Room prostitutes assume the highest class because of their educational qualifications

which include N.C.E., HND, and Degrees. They are mostly patronised by top business men.

They charge the highest fee which ranges from N500.00 to N1,000.00 per night, or N80.00 to N100.00 per 'drop' or the consummation of one sexual episode, often referred to by the prostitutes as 'cutting'.

The street walkers occupy the second position. Their charges range from N300.00 to N500.00 a night or N60.00 to N80.00 per drop.

The third category was the lodgers. Their charges range from N280.00 to N450.00 per night or N50.00 to N70.00 per drop.

The prices finally paid to prostitutes largely depend on the clients' bargaining power and the number of clients available.

ESTIMATED MONTHLY INCOME

The monthly income of prostitutes varies from one class of prostitute to another and from month to month depending on the availability of clients. The mean monthly income for Call Girls and Room Prostitutes who have assumed the highest class of prostitutes in Uyo was N10,000.00 while the mean monthly income of the street walkers and lodgers were N8,700.00 and N6,000.00 respectively. It is this high income that tends to attract many unemployed secondary school girls into the profession.

AGE OF PROSTITUTES

The age of prostitutes was found to lie between 15 to 35 years and above.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY AGE

Age	No.	Percentage
15 - 19	7	14
20 - 24	16	32
25 - 29	13	26
30 - 34	7	14
35 and above	7	14
Total	50	100

There was no prostitute less than 15 years of age. Most of the prostitutes were within the ages of 20 - 29. This made up 58% of the number interviewed. Prostitutes older than 35 years were few.

TABLE 3

AGE OF INITIAL CONTRACT IN THE PROFESSION

Age	No.	Percentage
0 - 14	5	10
15 - 19	23	46
20 - 24	13	26
25 - 29	4	8
30 - 34	3	6
35 and above	2	4
Total	50	100

As may be observed from Table 3, only a few of them had their first performance as prostitutes at a very early age or at the advanced ages of 30 and above. The peak years of sexual experience as prostitutes lie between 15 and 24. It appears that women above 30 years have less inclination to start prostitution since the duration of active life as a prostitute would be short.

EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Prostitution in Uyo is clearly dominated by girls who have spent 6 years in the secondary school but have failed to pass the final Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) with adequate number of subjects to qualify either for employment in the public services (which is very scarce) or for entry into higher institutions of learning. This category is justifiably regarded as dropouts whose aspirations for the good, successful life are

TABLE 4

EDUCATION ATTAINMENTS OF RESPONDENTS

Level of Education Attained	No of Respondents	Percentage
No formal education	2	4
Primary Education	3	10
SSCE Attempted	21	42
Diploma/NCE	6	12
Undergraduates	15	30
Graduates	1	2
Total	50	100

frustrated and who only turn to prostitution as the easiest way to make some kind of livelihood. A striking observation is the high distribution of the undergraduates in the data. They, however, are the non-professional prostitutes who engage themselves on a temporary basis for quick money.

Ninety-six percent of the respondents were unemployed by the time they entered the profession. Very few of them such as hair dressers, petty traders, nurses and teachers combined their work and prostitution to enhance their income.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF PROSTITUTES

TABLE 5

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENCE ACCORDING TO THEIR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Religious Affiliation	No.	Percentage
Protestants	30	60
Catholic	18	36
Others	2	4
Total	50	100

From Table 5: most of the respondents occasionally worship in Protestant churches. Only a few of the prostitutes (4%) failed to specify their places of worship.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY PROSTITUTES

The respondents indicated that they encounter a number of problems such as venereal diseases, pregnancies, cost of treating and maintaining themselves in good health, arrests and incessant threats by the police, alcoholism, quarrelling and fighting. Almost all the prostitutes (86%) had lost hope of ever becoming married while the rest still nursed the hope of becoming married.

REASONS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN PROSTITUTION

The main reason for taking to prostitution as a profession in Uyo is economic, poverty, lack of any other means of livelihood, unemployment, hunger and disgraceful levels of living. This category makes up 92% percent of the data. Other reasons included broken homes, child abuse, peer group influence and revenge against promiscuous husbands by married women.

TABLE 6

REASONS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN PROSTITUTION

Reasons	No of Respondents	Percentage
Economic	46	92
Satisfaction of Sexual Urge	2	4
Others	2	4
Total	50	100

In line with Ubak's (1989) findings, urbanization also was seen to be an important factor inducing individuals into prostitution. The urban centre provides anonymity to both prostitutes and their clients.

CLIENTS AND REASONS FOR PATRONAGE

The main clients include drivers and motor park workers, business men, students, soldiers and civil servants.

TABLE 7

MAJOR CLIENTS

Major Clients	No of Respondents	Percentage
Drivers/Motor Park Workers	28	56
Businessmen	15	30
Students	5	10
Soldiers/Civil Servants	2	4
	50	100

Drivers and Businessmen constitute 86% of all clients who patronize prostitutes in Uyo while civil servants and students patronize the least of all.

Prostitutes, however, prefer businessmen because this group of patrons pay higher fees than others. As one of the respondents put it: "I like businessmen, sha". "Dem dey give out real money". Drivers are also preferred because of their generosity in offering drinks to prostitutes.

The main reasons for clients' patronage are satisfaction of clients' emotional/sexual desires, easy sexual access by men who cannot easily

make friends nor require serious involvement with the girls. Some clients patronize prostitutes because of their attractiveness.

CONCLUSION

Our study has shown that prostitution in Uyo is a firmly established functional and lucrative institution in our society. This is evident in the rate of increase in both the number of locations where prostitutes can be found and the number of prostitutes who have joined the profession since its beginning in the early 1940s.

As in pre-marital sex and other sexually linked deviations, society has tended to acquiesce to the existence of prostitution in the face of more menacing and falling standards of morality in the economic, political and social facets of our social life. By implication, the society has demonstrated a high level of indifference to prostitution and even tends to condone it.

In comparison with other socio-economic and political misdemeanours in our society today, prostitution appears to be a nobler means of earning income for a living in the absence of employment and social security measures for the unemployed.

What is required, most probably, is the legalisation of the profession in order to control its anti-social tendencies.

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