Understanding Vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons (TIP) in Ghana

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Abstract

Much of the efforts to combat human trafficking have targeted rescue of victims and prosecution of the perpetrators of this heinous crime. Though the Government of Ghana is making steady progress in fighting this crime, the need to assess the level of understanding of the populace on this phenomenon was deemed crucial. The objectives of the study included assessment of the level of awareness on trafficking, identification of vulnerability factors and population at risk of trafficking. The study employed qualitative research approach and gathered qualitative data through guides for key informant interview and focus group discussion, and semi-structured questionnaire. Respondents included households in selected communities and subject matter experts, representatives of institutions dealing with the phenomenon. The main findings were high level of awareness on trafficking and identification of poverty, violent conflicts, gender inequality and lack of knowledge as factors exacerbating vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons. It also emerged that the media constitutes the main source of information on the phenomenon. The paper recommends renewed efforts toward poverty reduction, empowerment of youth, women and girls, peaceful resolution of violent conflicts and awareness creation to combat human trafficking.

Keywords: *human trafficking, exploitation, vulnerability, migration, victims, poverty*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Trafficking in Persons (TIP) is strongly considered as a serious crime affecting people all over the world and a threat to human development (Foulvand & Ward, 2019, Segrave *et al*., 2018). In spite of its clandestine nature which makes it extremely difficult to obtain accurate data on victims, TIP is significantly increasing [UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2017), International Centre for Migration Policy Development (2018), and International Organization for Migration (2019)]. In contemporary times, it constitutes a form of slavery which has negative consequences on the victims, their households and entire societies. In view of this, it has been described as a crime against humanity and various attempts are being made to fight this canker.

Trafficking basically involves movement across space, and as such can occur within a country or across borders (Foulvand & Ward, 2019). It is important to note that human trafficking differs from human smuggling (carried out with the consent of the individual[s] involved to enter the destination country of their choice possibly at an agreed fee). Basically, with human smuggling the relationship between the smuggler and smuggled person(s) is terminated upon arrival at the destination. However, in the case of human trafficking, transportation of the persons involved constitutes the first phase of

the practice. Thus, in trafficking, transportation is a means to reach the target of getting labour to exploit (Logan *et al.*, 2009). It should also be noted that, in some instances the smugglers of migrants turned out to be traffickers (Foulvand & Ward, 2019).

It is estimated that TIP constitutes the third largest high yielding activity in the trafficking chain following illicit drugs and weapons. Though there is no exact figure for persons who have become victims of trafficking, conservative estimates indicate that over 10 million persons can be regarded as victims. In 2016, it was estimated that 76,520 persons were identified as human trafficking survivors globally (U.S. Department of State, 2017). According to Poucki & Bryan (2014), trafficking among women and girls is very high and this poses significant threat to peace and development.

It is believed that TIP is sustained by huge profits that accrue to the perpetrators in the chain. What makes the venture relatively lucrative include the following: traffickers gain from the fees that they charge the victims and net returns from the victim's labour. It has been found that traffickers increase their earnings by minimizing their cost of operations. Thus, operational expenses are kept relatively low by not paying the victims or paying them an insignificant fraction of their actual earnings; accommodating them in poor, unsanitary and crowded living conditions; and or ensuring that the victims work for relatively long hours (Neville & Martinez, 2004). Another way for minimizing their expenses is cutting down on the feeding and health care bills relating to the victims; and any of these practices contribute to the gains of traffickers.

It has been observed that some of the victims of trafficking are compelled by their circumstances to be involved in illegal activities such as prostitution, drug abuse and use of fake documents. Any of these situations can make the victims become afraid to report abuses meted out to them because of their status. Thus, victims of human trafficking constitute part of an underground group that is hidden from public scrutiny. According to Logan *et al.* (2009: 6), '*the victims are walled off from society and from their family and they are not on the books for tax or other employment records. In the strict legal sense, they do not exist and since their activities are often illegal, they dare not become visible'.* In essence, both the victims and traffickers must cooperate effectively in order to keep the crime hidden and this also contributes to make it a flourishing venture. In recent years, decriminalising the victims has become a major theme in anti-trafficking discourse (Poucki & Bryan, 2014).

War against Human Trafficking

In the year 2000, the United Nations enacted supplementary protocols to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to give meaning to the fight against TIP. These included the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; and the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. This was considered as a major attempt by the international community to address the global challenge of this transnationally organized crime and referred to as the Palermo Protocol (UNODC, 2000). These protocols provide a legal and conceptual framework for checking TIP. Among other things, the Palermo Protocol requires ratifying States to criminalize such practices and address the abuse of victims' rights, provide assistance to, and protection for victims of trafficking.

The Palermo Protocol adopted this as definition of TIP: "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation

includes, at a minimum, the exploitation for the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (UNODC, 2021:42). This definition constitutes the basis for defining country-specific trafficking laws by State Parties.

In Ghana, efforts being made to effectively check human trafficking include enactment of relevant legislations, capacity building and resourcing of law enforcement agencies. For instance, Act 29 of 1960 has been amended to prohibit customary servitude (Section 314A) and check TIP. Section 17 of the Criminal Code Amendment Act of 1998 (Act 554) makes it a criminal offence to send and or receive or participate in any ritual or customary activity in respect of any person with the purpose of subjecting that person to any form of ritual or customary servitude or any form of forced labour related to a customary ritual. Any person who commits this offence is liable upon conviction to imprisonment for a term not less than three years (Republic of Ghana, 1998).

Besides the enactment of the requisite legislation, the necessary institutional framework has been put in place to facilitate effective prevention, detection and arrest of offenders. For instance, Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) and Anti-Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons Unit, AHSTIP) have been set up in the Ghana Police Service and the Ghana Immigration Service respectively to deal with the human security aspects of TIP.

In spite of all these, there are accounts of trafficking of human beings and suffering of the victims. It is reported that Ghanaian women and children are trafficked abroad and CTDC estimates that 1,206 Ghanaians were victims of TIP globally (IOM, 2020). The ordeals of the victims include little or no remuneration for services rendered, hazardous work, debt bondage, confiscation of travelling documents (passport), long working hours, physical, psychological and sexual assaults and treats of harm. It is abundantly clear that all these elements constitute violation of the fundamental human rights and an affront to human dignity (Logan *et al.*, 2009). Thus, the practice of human trafficking puts the victims in a situation that undermines respect for their fundamental human rights guaranteed by international law and the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana.

Problem Statement

Ghana has been described as a source, transit and destination country for Trafficking In Persons. Internally, men, women and children are trafficked, subjected to forced labour and sexual exploitation. The 2019 United States Department of State's Report on Trafficking In Persons indicated that Ghana does not fully meet the minimum standards for elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to comply[1]. Though the country was commended for making remarkable strides in the fight against trafficking by increasing its efforts in specific action areas, there is the need to assess the level of awareness and understanding of the people on this phenomenon. This is because more efforts are geared toward the *post facto* end of the phenomenon (rescuing of victims and prosecution of offenders). However, equal attention ought to be given to understanding of what facilitates the practice to ensure effective prevention of this heinous crime.

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[1]Tier 2 refer to countries whose governments do not fully comply with all of Trafficking Victim Protection Act's (TVPA) minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance.

Objectives

Among other things, this article is intended to unearth the issues that make some people facilitate activities of perpetrators of TIP and thereby help both state and non-state actors to bring an end to all forms of trafficking (forced labour, slavery and human trafficking) as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)[2] - UNDP, 2017. The specific objectives included the following:

1. To assess the level of awareness of human trafficking among the population;

2. To identify the vulnerability factors facilitating trafficking in persons in Ghana;

3. To analyse the underlying factors which contribute to vulnerability to TIP; and

4. To determine which segment of the population is at risk of victimization.

Vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons

Vulnerability refers to exposure and defenselessness that an individual or household faces. In other words, vulnerability denotes susceptibility or living on the edge. There is a generally accepted view that all humans are vulnerable (Fineman, 2014). This view is based on the fact that, all human beings irrespective of race, age, gender or status are susceptible to diseases, violence, hunger, economic deprivation, disruption of social relationships, etc. There is evidence that, majority of victims of human trafficking is really "vulnerable, not just in the 'ontological' sense that all humans are vulnerable, but in the sense that their situation makes them more vulnerable than others" (Foulvand & Ward, 2019: 40). Thus, vulnerability refers to risk of deprivations that an individual, household or group faces, and this could be greater for some people and bearable, at certain periods, than for others (IOM, 2018). Thus, all humans experience vulnerability of varying degrees at different periods. This paper focuses on what creates situational vulnerability to TIP and what can be done to effectively check it.

In the context of human trafficking, "vulnerability" is typically used to refer to those inherent, environmental or contextual factors that increase the susceptibility of an individual or group to being trafficked (UNODC, 2012). Analysis of the Trafficking Protocol further indicates that vulnerability implies the individual concerned has no practical means of survival (absence of realistic alternative) but to succumb to the abuse involved. Thus, individuals most vulnerable to this phenomenon are those with few or no alternative livelihoods and lacks capacity to deal with negative situations. In view of this, dealing with vulnerability is central to the success or otherwise of the fight against TIP owing to the fact that, it underscores the basis for the practice to thrive. Vulnerability is caused by combination of interrelated factors which make it possible for traffickers to take advantage of their victims (Lutnick, 2016; Schwartz *et al.*, 2019).

Studies have revealed that, vulnerability is occasioned by factors such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, lack of awareness (knowledge), etc. which contributes in diverse ways to creating conditions that restrict choices of individuals in life; and this provides opportunity for traffickers, abusers and exploiters to operate (Poucki & Bryan, 2014). On the link between poverty and vulnerability, Schwartz *et al* (2019) argue that financial weaknesses create despairing conditions which could fuel trafficking.

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[2]Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The literature reveals that some people may work with traffickers because to them, it constitutes a strategy for coping with their precarious economic circumstances (absence of resilience) owing to the failure of other means for survival. In Albania, it was found that owing to economic hardships, trafficking was facilitated by friends and close relatives of victims (Tota & Mecka, 2015). For instance, in a situation that households find it extremely difficult to cater for their basic needs, if somebody offers to take a child or relative elsewhere and cater for their needs, they (households) may feel relieved and voluntarily agree. In the case of children, they may offer to pay for their education and even dash the parents some money. To poor households, outmigration of some members either adult or children would mean less mouths to feed (Agyei, 2012).

The results of some studies have revealed that, some people resort to smugglers or traffickers in their attempt to acquire resilience through migration; and unfortunately end up as victims. This is experienced in both internal and international migration, as some households feel that through migration they could exit poverty (Adeleke, 2021, Agyei *et al.*, 2021, Awumbila *et al.*, 2014). Thus, economic hopelessness that some households find themselves could serve as a driver to migration (push factor) and in view that, potential migrants become targets for TIP (Schwartz *et al.* 2019).

Similarly, there are instances where victims themselves facilitate trafficking in attempt to find economic 'salvation'. Some victims may buy into the deceit and manipulations of traffickers posing as travel agents and or "connection men". These include young females who are lured to travel abroad to work as domestic workers and sales persons but end up in servitude. According to Logan et al (2009), 'lover boy' strategy has been used to lure some young women into prostitution. This is where the victim is manipulated into seeing the perpetrator as boyfriend and willingly travels with him.

It has also emerged that, the migration process has some embedded risks which could make migrants vulnerable at the origin, transit and or destination. These include loss of travelling documents, inadequate financial resources to enable the victim continues the journey in safety and dignity, and greater exposure to criminal elements (IOM, 2018). Any one or combination of these risks can trigger their helplessness which could be capitalized by smugglers and traffickers because of absence of or limited access to services to offer them the needed care. In such a situation, the migrants involved would be at risk and therefore, cannot enjoy their human rights effectively. IOM used terms such as "vulnerable migrants", "migrants in vulnerable situations", and "migrants vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse" to refer to such persons in distress (IOM, 2018).

IOM (2018) propounded determinants of migrant vulnerability model which considers risk factors (contributing to vulnerability) and protective factors (improving capacities to avoid, withstand, cope with or recover from harm) but in an interactive manner. The Determinants of Migration Vulnerability (DoMV) outlines factors responsible for vulnerabilities which include individual, community, structural and interactive factors.

According to DoMV, individual factors determining vulnerability include societal status; physical and biological characteristics; histories and experiences; beliefs and attitudes; individual's emotional, psychological and cognitive characteristics as well as physical, mental health and well-being. Other factors such as household size and structure, socioeconomic status, migration histories, livelihoods, education levels, gender and family dynamics could play crucial role in one's ability to either withstand or yield to the ploys of traffickers.

Disasters have been identified as one of the factors that exacerbates vulnerability and result in trafficking. According to Datta (2017), natural disasters can change the circumstances of individuals, households and communities by pushing them over the edge, and this is worse for women, girls and children. Disasters such as flooding, earthquake, fire outbreak, drought, etc. can bring about homelessness, absence of livelihood, food insecurity, dropping out of school, and other calamities which deprive people of their ability to cope with challenges. For instance, bush fires could destroy farms and speed up soil and result in declining soil fertility and household food security. Thus, vulnerability occasioned by disaster snatches assets, houses, farms, land, business and thereby worsen the plight of victims.

Some disasters result in displacement within a country or forced migration which worsens the victims' situation and render them powerless. Such a condition predisposes the victims to give in to the lures and deceptions from traffickers. Any of these changes in life circumstances can make the victims particularly, females become easy prey for traffickers who are quick to lure them. Parents or relatives of people affected by disasters may be disparate and accept offers from someone to help a household member without prior investigation (Schwarz et al., 2019).

The Community factors which could also have bearing on vulnerability to TIP are economic, cultural and social structures, strength of community's social networks as well as access to and control over resources. In addition, availability of quality educational opportunities, health care and social services, livelihood (income-generating) opportunities as well as social norms and behaviours prevailing in a particular community will affect vulnerability situation of its members. According to Nichols (2016), individuals live and operate in communities with institutions and processes which could facilitate or hinder trafficking. He argues that there are "macrostructural forces that create a social environment where sex trafficking and exploitation can flourish" (p. 273). He indicates that ineffective social institutions coupled with absence of social safety nets could create a conducive environment for trafficking to thrive.

Owing to cultural orientation that places emphasis on masculinity in some societies, it is observed that women and girls have limited opportunities for livelihoods. This includes access to credit, acquisition of land and other relevant productive resources as well as limited leadership roles. Generally, there is limited training, empowerment and resources available to women and this leads to low understanding and appreciation of gender mainstreaming (i.e. inadequate gender budgeting). These could trigger vulnerability of a person at the place of origin, transit and or destination; and make them yield to the maneuvers of traffickers.

The structural factors on vulnerability of persons to trafficking include historical, geographical, political, economic, social and cultural conditions prevailing at national and international levels and institutions influencing overall environment where individuals, families, communities and groups are situated (IOM, 2018). These contribute significantly to shape beliefs, decisions and behaviours which ultimately determine vulnerability status of individuals and groups. Other structural factors include conflict, political systems, migration policies and governance, respect for human rights, rule of law, participation in decision-making process, etc. Consequently, extent to which society is structured contributes to build the capacity of individuals and households to be susceptible or resilient.

The interactive factors in vulnerability of migrants and households, families, communities and groups include related violence, exploitation and abuse before, during and after migration

process as well as capacities to avoid, resist, cope with or recover from crises. These contribute in diverse ways to shape resistance or vulnerability of people towards trafficking (which basically involves movement whether within or across borders).

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was based on qualitative research approach due to sensitive nature of the issues involved (Creswell 2003). It utilized data and information from both primary and secondary sources. The information from secondary sources was collected through desk study to provide the basis and perspectives on the phenomenon of vulnerability to trafficking. The study site adopted for this study was the Dormaa Municipality in the Bono Region of Ghana.

The data from the primary sources were gathered through administration of structured questionnaire as well as guides for key informant interview (KII) and focus group discussions (FGDs). These research instruments covered issues relating to awareness of trafficking and factors that result in vulnerability to and suggestions for prevention.

Purposive sampling techniques were used to select the respondents who were deemed most appropriate to provide data to facilitate attainment of the research objectives. Thus, the key informants were selected based on their knowledge, experiences and insights into the issue under investigation. The key informants comprised personnel of selected state agencies, focal persons, NGOs, whilst FGD participants consisted of selected households (affected or unaffected by trafficking). It would have been very significant to include some persons who have been trafficked, as they have unique information about the phenomenon, but it was difficult to find them. Separate protocols were developed for the different respondents in the study (3 FGDs, 5 KIIs and 8 IDIs). In order to ensure integrity of data and sensitive nature of the issues relating to TIP, ethical considerations were highly adhered to.

The qualitative data generated from in-depth interviews, KIIs and FGDs were organized and summarised in accordance with the themes developed. Thematic approach adopted for analysis of qualitative data ensured careful interpretation of meaning and content.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Background of Respondents

The survey respondents included selected households and officials of some institutions involved in the fight against TIP. In terms of age, the respondents were between 26 and over 60 years, and majority of them were aged between 30 and 50 years. Regarding their level of education, the majority of FGD participants have ever been to school. Comparatively, more males were literate that their female counterparts. Farming was the main source of livelihood for majority of them. Other occupations mentioned by the participants were teaching, artisanship, trading and food vending.

4.2 Awareness of Trafficking

On awareness of TIP, it was revealed that an overwhelming majority of the respondent households (97%) were aware of the phenomenon. However, less than one-third of the respondents (32.0%) in the household survey indicated awareness of TIP.

The study attempted to find out the sources of information on human trafficking to the household respondents. Table 1 shows that the electronic media comprising television, radio and internet was the most important source of information about TIP as more than one out of every two households (52.9%) mentioned them. Besides the media, neighbours and friends also featured prominently as sources of information as they accounted for 29.9 percent.

Table 1: Sources of information on Trafficking identified by Respondents

Source of Information on TIP	Number	Percentage
Television	37	25.2
Radio	34	23.2
Friends	24	16.3
Neighbours	20	13.6
Internet (Online)	11	7.5
Rumours	11	7.5
Community	9	7.1
Posters	1	0.6
Total	147	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The findings of the study revealed that household respondents' awareness about trafficking at the community level is relatively high. FGD participants explained further that, the trafficking phenomenon involves people deceiving other community members of a better life elsewhere and promises of well-paid jobs, which do not always turn out to be true. They feel that returned migrants do not tell the whole story regarding their experiences and people have the view of abroad as 'Paradise'.

Analysis of conversations obtained through KIIs point to existence of well-organized lucrative trafficking businesses that specialize in recruitment and transportation of persons to the Gulf States and Europe. According to them, given the high youth unemployment rate particularly, among graduates of tertiary institutions and economic hardships, both males and females from poor households are vulnerable to the ploys (deceit and coercion) of traffickers posing as migration intermediaries.

Some of the FGD participants were of the view that, cross-border trafficking is widespread as there are many entry and exit points along Ghana's borders with its neighbours which are not effectively policed. Conversation with key informants from GIS agreed with this view. They also attributed this to implementation of ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons which enables people to move within the sub region without much difficulty and documentation.

4.3 Factors Facilitating Trafficking Vulnerability

The participants indicated that, the customs and traditions permit adult persons to decide for teenage girls to marry or to go and live with a person chosen by parents or adult care takers. For instance, the discussants stated that among certain Ghanaian cultures, girls are given in marriage at a very tender age (sometimes as early as 10 years) through abduction, force or deceit to either pay off debt or secure support for the family. They however, indicated that

owing to rise in literacy level and social development, the practice is on the decline.

Discussions with subject matter experts and people with in-depth knowledge[3] revealed that in many poor communities (rural, peri-urban and urban) in Ghana, unequal access to and control of wealth and resources creates a system of structural poverty and limited stability which nurture conditions that could increase TIP vulnerability. The poor people in society are forced by economic deprivations (poor living conditions and occupations) to accept some options which they believe could bring positive change to their circumstance (which can make them vulnerable to TIP). Thus, high incidence of poverty creates conditions of vulnerability for some individuals, households or groups; and traffickers capitalize on it to boost their trade. According to them, the perception that a better life is possible somewhere abroad is widespread in the society and this has become a driving force behind both legal and illegal migration.

This is how a 47-year-old woman expressed the desire to have family member travel outside the country: "*every family is making serious efforts to have some of its members outside the country as a survival strategy. This is because family members abroad provide support to us in times of need. To this end, households are going into debt (borrowing) or sale of property i.e. land to finance this venture and sometimes the agent engaged could be among the bad nuts*".

It emerged from KIIs conducted that, both rich and poor households are vulnerable to TIP but not to the same extent. Thus, the poor are much vulnerable as they are confronted with the challenge of meeting their basic needs. Thus, they are much susceptible to give in to traffickers' demands, in order to reduce their economic burden and/or gain some form of monetary return. The rich could also be vulnerable to TIP as they look for options to send some of their household members outside the country. The prospective emigrant may end up in the dragnet of visa contractors and travel agents who could be disguised traffickers.

The socio-cultural and economic dynamics exacerbating vulnerability to TIP also relate to Ghanaian society's socially constructed notion about success which serves as motivation for migration both within and across borders. Discussions during the fieldwork point to such a culture and tradition among the people. The social pressures from the immediate family and the community to migrate is relatively high as they perceive such endouvours to lead to improvement in social life and economic success. Thus, some persons eager in their search for livelihoods outside their localities or country become easy prey to trafficking. This could be due to dearth of knowledge on safe migration policies in the destination country.

Discussions with some experts revealed that violent conflicts also tend to increase the number of internally displaced persons which fuel migration and asylum-seeking. This contributes to vulnerability to exploitation both enroute (transit) and at destinations. Analysis of KIIs showed that, whilst Ghana has not seen any major armed conflicts in recent times, inter and intra ethnic conflicts that have rocked parts of the country constitute a sufficient condition to result in vulnerability and thereby induce trafficking. For instance, FGD participants mentioned Konkomba-Nanumba, Bawku, Dabgon crisis (Abdul-Andani conflict, Yendi), Nkronya-Alavanyo conflicts as well as numerous chieftaincy clashes as examples of violent conflicts experienced in Ghana. They believed that these caused vulnerability to some households and individuals and thereby triggered forced migration (displacement of persons internally). They indicated that these conflicts have resulted in displacement of large number

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[3]These experts include academics, public sector professionals and key informants who speak on authority from research and experience background.

of persons internally. According to them, such situations compelled some residents to fall easily for the tricks of perpetrators of TIP.

The FGD participants were of the view that, inability of the state and other institutions to provide protection for persons fleeing violent conflicts and disasters could trigger vulnerability. In their view, since the National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO) lacks capacity to evacuate persons and families adversely affected by disasters and conflicts, trafficking would continue to thrive. To them, the support from NADMO does not go far to give relief to victims of natural disasters and conflicts. In view of this, people rely on the goodwill and benevolence of their kinsmen, town folks, neighbours and philanthropists to move out of troubled spots. Some of these benefactors may be working with traffickers and take advantage of persons in distress.

It also emerged that some people view migration as their attempt to exit poverty and it has become a source of vulnerability. It was found that, some households have used their scanty resources or even borrowed money to support education and training of their children and wards with the hope that their wards will gain employment. However, upon completion many of them have no jobs and have become dependents instead of earning income to contribute to household welfare. To them, such situations compel people to find other means to exit the vicious cycle of poverty. Thus, people perceive the wheel of education towards desired life to be slow, and as they opt for quicker alternatives, migration has become an obvious choice for survival. In the end, some fall prey to the widely opened arms of criminals acting as visa contractors and travel agents. Thus, they generally adopt 'try and error' approach to migration and sometimes, they end up in suffering.

To buttress this point, 57-year-old male farmer remarked that *"there are people in this community who have used the services of some travel agents in the past, and it worked for them. This has convinced some of us to fall on them in spite of the threat of trafficking"*. However, a female FGD participant recounted how a relative who was residing in Abidjan Cote D'Ivoire convinced a family member to let her daughter join her to undertake trading. According to her, it was later learnt that she introduced the girl into sex trade. The young woman (victim) returned after some years with sexually transmitted diseases and died.

Population at Risk

On potential vulnerability to TIP, respondents agreed that everybody is at risk of becoming a victim since circumstance can be altered at any point in time. In their view, the persons vulnerable to TIP includes children, adults and young females, orphans, unemployed youth, school dropouts, and people from poor households. To identify population vulnerable to this heinous crime against humanity, the study elicited the views of the participants.

Interactions on the field further revealed that people residing in rural areas and deprived communities in Ghana are highly vulnerable to trafficking. This is because in their quest to seek better living conditions and economic opportunities elsewhere, they become victims to traffickers and other perpetrators who promise them non-existing jobs and better living conditions in places such as Kumasi, Tema and Accra, and the victims end up as head porters in the cities in southern part of the country. Similarly, some young people have been lured to these cities and ended up as street hawkers, shoeshine boys, etc. Some of them live in deplorable conditions and have become prostitutes and drug addicts.

Analysis of KIIs revealed that settlements of commercial and administrative significance continue to attract people from other parts of the country considered deprived. This assertion was buttressed by the fact that, the Greater Accra Region receives larger proportion of people migrating internally not only because of its position as capital city but its relatively low poverty incidence in Ghana.

With respect to gender, analysis of the focus group discussions conducted points to deep-rooted beliefs in Ghanaian society anchored around the cultural climate that tends to make females subordinates to their male counterparts. This adversely affects their access to and control over productive resources (livelihood assets) and makes them vulnerable. According to the participants, this has tendency to weaken them and deprive them of economic power and sustainable livelihoods which could result in trafficking. The participants acknowledged that though some policies and programmes including affirmative action, Free senior High School, free Compulsory Universal Basic Education, National Health Insurance Scheme, Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, etc. have been embarked to help address this situation, there are still challenges for females in their quest to rise socially.

The results of the analysis further point to poverty as the cardinal factor for vulnerability. A male FGD participant remarked that "*if poverty is eradicated, the issues of trafficking will not be a challenge of its current magnitude. This is because trafficking continues because of existence of poverty.*" Thus, the respondents believed that there is a strong inverse relationship between poverty and trafficking. To them, a weak financial position certainly makes life extremely difficult for poor households and thereby, creates desperate conditions which fuels trafficking.

It was further revealed that young people constitute another group that is at risk of trafficking. They explained that, Ghana is experiencing an unprecedented high rate of youth unemployment particularly, among graduates from tertiary institutions. A young man (32 years of age) among FGD participants remarked: "*leaving the university without a means to earn a living decently makes the graduates vulnerable. And this situation could make us fall into the lures and deceit of disguised traffickers*". Thus, desperation to exit poverty pushes the youth in contemporary times to work with traffickers (disguised) in their attempt to find greener pastures. Owing to the relatively high cost involved in migration, some young people from poor backgrounds may adopt the 'back door' approach to emigration which could entrap them and result in exploitation.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The relatively high level of awareness on trafficking among the respondents could be attributed to news feed about trafficking as the media constitutes the main source of information on the phenomenon.

Identification of poverty as the key vulnerability factor to trafficking confirms assertions by some earlier researchers (Adeleke, 2021; Schwarz *et al., 2019*; Poucki & Bryan, 2014). This explains the high level of movement from rural and deprived communities to important commercial centres in Ghana; and in this process some of them end up being trafficked. Desperation to exit poverty has compelled some parents or relatives of victims to work with traffickers as it was reported in Albania (Tota & Mecka, 2005). Poverty poses threat to basic survival and thereby predisposes some households to accept any promise of lucrative livelihood abroad (Kelly, 2005).

Another issue related to poverty and vulnerability to TIP is the fact that, poverty has devastating short and long term impact on individuals, households and economy at large. In view of this, several people attempt to exit poverty through migration either internal or external and in the process may become trapped in the trafficking web. Owing to the relatively high cost involved in emigration, the poor may adopt the "back door" approach which could entrap them and result in exploitation (Segrave *et al*., 2018). Thus, the results of past studies which linked trafficking to poverty among immigrants particularly those who are undocumented is confirmed.

Violent conflicts and disasters also emerged as conditions which facilitate trafficking in persons. This finding is consistent with the IOM model on Vulnerability of Migrants (IOM, 2018) other researchers (Datta, 2017).

There is evidence that women and girls bear the greater burden of exploitation, and this is consistent with the findings of earlier studies (Segrave *et al*., 2018; Foulvand & Ward, 2019). This is because very often they are poor and belong to a group which has long been marginalized. Gender biases against females continue to reinforce their subordinate status, thereby deepening their vulnerability.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identified combination of factors which contribute to make some members of the population vulnerable to TIP. They include poverty, gender inequality, violent conflicts, unemployment, etc. The segments of the population who are at risk include unemployed youth i.e. graduates from tertiary institutions, persons displaced by conflicts and disasters, women, girls and children. All of them are vulnerable owing to the fact that their capacity for autonomy may be eroded and as such they are deprived of supportive social networks.

The paper advocates the critical role of policies and programmes intended to reduce vulnerability and at the same time enhance viable alternatives for sustainable livelihoods for the masses. The following recommendations are offered to address this canker:

An effective means for checking human trafficking requires increased efforts toward poverty reduction. Poverty is an enemy to progress and entrap people in servitude. Working to reduce poverty will liberate people and empower them to make decent choices. Since high incidence of poverty levels creates conditions of vulnerability, efforts should be directed towards its eradication to reduce economic helplessness. Initiatives such as YouStart should be scaled up to enable the youth set up and operate their own businesses in order to reduce unemployment. Aligning formal education and skills training with industry or labour market needs will help to boost their employability.

There is the need to intensify efforts at empowerment of women and girls which also has serious implications for poverty and the hopelessness which create conducive environment for trafficking to thrive. Gender inequality adversely affects the female's access to and control over productive resources and decision making; and this significantly contribute to make them vulnerable. Though cultural practices and attitudes may not cause vulnerability to trafficking they play a critical function to sustain vulnerability. Therefore, removal of negative customarily and traditional practices will contribute positively to female empowerment and thereby bolster their defences against trafficking.

There is the need to create awareness among the people on the dangers of TIP. To this end, there should be sensitization campaign to educate households and communities on the risks posed by trafficking, anti-trafficking legislations, and the harmful customarily practices. The National Commission on Civic Education, civil society organizations and the media should sensitize members of the public to understand that working with traffickers constitutes a crime with severe punishment. It is suggested that hot spots for this phenomenon should be identified and targeted for this exercise.

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