



Commercial Sex Work in Port Harcourt City: A Sociological X-ray of the Pull and Push Factors  
BY

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**Abstract**

*The study examined the pull and push factors that explain the prevalence of commercial sex work in Port Harcourt. The study survey research design and obtained data using primarily questionnaire and complimented by interviews from 531 participants made up of 521 female commercial sex workers, 5 managers/owners of hotels/brothels and 5 clients of commercial sex workers. It benefited from other secondary data and theoretically triangulated by combining social strain and rational choice theory. Tables were used to present data and the SPSS software used to run the analysis while recorded interview were transcribed and summarized and used to support quantitative results. The findings show that: while socio-economic conditions particularly, unemployment 26.2%, poverty 16.1% and low family income 26.2% constitute the push factors, concentration of oil production activities and presence of many men engaged in petroleum related work with high disposable income 99.1% constitute the pull factors for the prevalence of commercial sex work. The study recommended a holistic approach founded not only on criminalization but also job creation and poverty reduction, women empowerment, education scholarship, rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-prostitutes, tackling the demand side of commercial sex and awareness programs to address the menace.*

Key Terms: **Key terms:** Commercial Sex Work, Sex Workers, Prostitution, Pull and Push Factors

## 1. Introduction

The performance of erotic acts in return for money or other material items developed at some point in the historical development of human society. The trade is gender and age neutral, as male and females of different age bracket, cultures and socio-economic background participate in it (Adeniyi, 2017).

The scope of commercial sex work is largely unclear as it covers sensual and lascivious performances devoid of physical contact with customers such as pornography and stripping, webcam sex, escort services, and high risk unprotected sexual intercourse with clients, street walking and a host of others (Enoch, 2020). Participants cuts across class divisions, from the impoverished 'streetwalkers' with their stereotyped drug habits and exploitative pimps to the high class call girls, courtesans and escort service workers with fashionable clothing and luxuriously furnished living rooms (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2016)

Although the structure and organization of commercial sex work has transformed as reflected in the gradual rise of male participants (Dauda, Ugwuoke and Azibasum 2017; Punch, 2018), still, it is comparatively small to that of the female (Nkala, 2014). In fact, it has been estimated that about 1% - 4% of women in many Sub-Saharan African cities are engaged in commercial sex work, with even greater percentage in cities where transport and employment networks and extractive industry activities have magnified the need for monetized sex (WHO, 2011). It explains the rationale for our focus on female commercial sex work.

Transactional sex among children exists and the number of child prostitute is accentuating daily in many parts of the globe including Nigeria. The mean age of joining commercial sex work is 14 years old. A study conducted by Raphael and Shapiro (2002), reported that 1/3 of females admitted they joined erotic commerce before the age of 15, and 62% of the study sample were in transactional sex earlier than their 18th birthdays. This study was not specifically concerned with investigating children, nonetheless, recognizing that many partake in sensual commerce at such tender age (Ukaegbu, Eze and Agomoh, 2017) is good justifications of the need for devising early intervention programs, as well as a strategic plan for assistance and rehabilitation of full-grown adults in the occupation.

Projections on full-grown individuals that provide sensual services are problematic due to sampling and methodological shortcomings, invisibility of sex workers, lack of exact census and somewhat vague nature of conduct that constitute commercial sex (Benoit, Jansson, Smith & Flagg, 2018). However, estimates reveal that there are between 40 and 42 million commercial

sex workers globally, of which 75% are between 13 – 25 years old and 80% of them are women (Goldmann, 2012).

An estimated 1 million people across the world enter into sensual commerce annually (Children`s Rights World Congress, 2005). Also, in Nilo-Saharan Africa, prevalence is within the range of 0.7% - 4.3%, 0.2% - 2.6% in Asia, 0.4% - 1.4% in Europe, and 0.2% - 7.4% in Latin America separately (Gungul & Audu, 2014).

Even though there are variations in the legal status and societal portrayal of prostitution, it is claimed to be the earliest human profession that satisfies the innate passions of humans in return for money (Nkala, 2014). The economic benefits explain the drive to engage in sexual commerce and the high remuneration earned by female sex workers prompted labelling the trade ‘itinerant gold mines’ (Naanen, 1991),

The upsurge of commercial sex in Nigeria have been attributed to multiple factors, some of which include peer group influence, unemployment, illiteracy, substance abuse, poverty, marriage related matters and a host of others (Bagudu and Yusuf 2019; Oyeoku, 2012). Paradoxically, many families in West Africa prohibit open parley on sexual matters and desires, but allow sexual discourses in coded expressions understood only by members (Ekpo-Out, 2013; Fajewonyonmi, Orji and Adeyemo 2007). For example, people are impelled to remain silent on sensual issues in most cultures in Nigeria as terms traditionally employed to describe erotic desires, menstruation, sex, parts of the body, masturbation are generally abstract and indirect denoting the cultural classification of sex related issues (Otite and Ogionwo, 2006; Izugbara, 2004). Therefore, the presence of hordes of commercial sex workers in Nigerian cities particularly Port Harcourt despite this disposition calls for enquiry. This research therefore, examined the push and pull factors of commercial sex work.

In this study, commercial sex work was used interchangeably with prostitution. This was so because sex worker’s right movements are opposed to the term ‘prostitution due to its derogatory implication’, instead preferred ‘sex workers’ due to its connotation as a form of paid occupation.

Having discussed background to the study, the subsequent sections present statement of the research problem, research questions, scope of the study and pull/push factors and state response to commercial sex work.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Commercial sex work is outlawed in Nigeria, yet brothels exist in many cities. In Port Harcourt like many other cities, residents can unmistakably point to venues, time and best deals in erotic

market. In fact, participants are now demanding for respect from the society (Igwe, 2018; Ogunkan, Omoruan and Fawole, 2010; Aloba and Ndifon, 2014; Dauda et al., 2014; Badejo, 2012)

There are serious concerns about occupational hazards associated with the trade (Bagudo and Yusuf, 2019; World Bank, 2009; Nwankama, 2015; Gungul and Audu, 2014)

Commercial sex work has received considerable scholarly attention, but there are limited studies that focused on the push and pull factors particularly in Nigeria oil rich region where Port Harcourt city is located. The alarming rate of commercial sex work despite criminalization and the obvious hazards posed to participants and society at large calls for empirical inquiry. This study therefore investigated why commercial sex work thrives by identifying the pull and push factors in order to come up with effective means of addressing it

### **3. Research Questions**

To investigate the problem, responses were sought to the questions:

1. What are the pull and push factors of commercial sex work?
2. How are sex workers negatively affected?
3. Why have state responses to curbing the menace ineffective?

### **4. Scope of the Study**

Port Harcourt City was for administrative convenience geographically divided into five zones, A, B, C, D and E. Zone A, covers Rumuokoro, Rumuokeni, Rumuosi and Choba, while zone B consist of Rumuokrushi, Artillery, Oil Mill and Obi-Igbo. Zone C includes Birabi, Woji Road, Tombia, and King-Perekule which is an area called New GRA or GRA phase II. Zone D was made up of Diobu Mile 1, 2, 3 and 4, while Zone E Covers Old GRA, Moscow Road, Lagos Street and Creek Road. These were the epicenter of commercial sex activities and female sex workers operating in these zones constitute the population of study

### **5. Push/Pull Factors and State Responses to Commercial Sex**

Most adolescent girls and full-grown women engaged in sexual commerce see it not just as means of unlocking avenues of earning income but as an opportunity to be civilized (Ekpo-Out, 2017). Port Harcourt was considered by them as a settlement of ample opportunities with regards paid jobs, associating with comparatively well-remunerated oil workers and untying the ropes of cultural inhibition. Petroleum development had made the agrarian basis of survival unattractive.

The village inhabitants of the Niger Delta region constrained by diminishing prospect of the agrarian sector owing to the ascendancy of oil as the primary foreign exchange earner for the country had to migrate to Port Harcourt. Although social reality in the city indicates lack, social disenfranchisement, and disappointment with the popular perception of urban life, they were unable to retreat to their traditional homes owing to stigma of failure (Ekpo-Out, 2017).

The principal requirement for participating in transactional sex is the female body, making enlistment effortless for various category of women. Many female migrants had to delve into trades that do not require any special education but come innately such as sexual commerce. Within a short period, these ladies transformed into a class pace-setters, traveling between Port Harcourt and the rural areas showcasing the latest trends in the fashion world and consequently, attracting more entrants to the booming business.

It has been revealed that concentration of soldiers in a particular area tend to encourage sex work as shown in thriving commercial sex work around army settlements such as Ikoyi, Ijora, Surulere, Cumberland, and Yaba (Aderinto, 2010). Oil related conflicts and insecurity forced the state to militarize Port Harcourt and its environs thus promoting sexual commerce. The presence of many soldiers deployed to protect oil installations and foreign staff to guarantee hitch free oil production created the demand for sex that was satisfied by transactional sex.

Response of the Nigerian government at various tier to the rising rate of commercial sex has been that of criminalization, involving clampdown on brothels, raids and arrest, prosecution and jailing sex workers, which has largely been ineffective in dealing with the menace (Ekp-Out, 2017). For example, under the Nigerian Criminal Code section 223 and 224 the establishment and running of cathouses and soliciting in public places constitute offences liable to incarceration. Other legal framework that directly or indirectly make commercial sex work an offence are notably; the United Nations Organization (UNO) treaty abolishing human trafficking (2000; 2002), Labour Act (1974) and penal codes among others.

Unlike some states in Southern and Northern Nigeria that have come up with legislations criminalizing sex work (Ojo, 2007), Rivers State policy on sex work is dictated by provisions of the Criminal Code and Child Rights Act (2003). In any case the Child Rights Act focuses more on international child trafficking and prostitution without attention domestic commercial sex work. The subsequent sections present the theoretical framework, methodology, findings, discussion and recommendation.

## **6. Social Strain and Rational Choice Theory**

This study theoretically triangulated by adopting social strain and rational choice theory.

Major proponents of social strain theory are Emile Durkheim, Robert Merton, and Ronald Agnew. Agnew (2006) contended that commercial sex is a function of individuals experience of strains and stressors. The primary thesis of the strain theory is that it is the feeling that emanates from a negative relationship with others that push women into sexual trade. The prevalence of female sexual commerce is thus seen as corrective responses to coping with socio-economic realities.

Petroleum and gas related activities have compounded the situation by increasing the drift of women into commercial sex in Port Harcourt. People massively moved into the city due to the ascendancy of oil as prime determinant of the economic direction and the collapse of the agrarian basis of sustenance. The jettisoned agricultural sector was compounded by contamination and degradation of farming spaces via petroleum and gas oil related exploration activities. The new entrants had difficulties getting employment due to scarcity. The triple problems of unemployment, poverty and lopsided sharing of oil money forced many individuals to devise new coping strategies, one of which was sexual commerce.

Rational choice theory as constructed by Cornish and Clarke (1987) assumes that human beings are rational and self-interested beings who are affected by the consequences of their actions. The position of this school is that criminal behaviour is no different from noncriminal behaviour in that it is conduct that persons intentionally choose to undertake and the reason that they choose to commit crime is that they think it will be more rewarding and less costly for them than noncriminal behaviour.

Therefore, commercial sex workers are rational and self-interested individuals who choose sex work on the basis of their assessment that it would be rewarding or profitable or satisfy some needs. The decision to join sexual commerce is dictated by considerations of cost and benefits. Some sex workers are conscious of the dangers associated with sex work yet opt to join because they have evaluated the cost to be less than the benefits. Some may be poor decision makers because they were wrongly informed about the benefits of joining the trade, they are decision makers nonetheless, and if they do not possess perfect rationality, they do at least possess minimal or limited rationality

Applied to this research, many young girls and women were pulled to sex work because of the prospect of making money from well-paid oil workers. It is thus a rational response to the experience of relative poverty, unemployment and contradictions of an oil capitalist economy.

## 7. Research Design and Methodology

This study adopted a survey design and the target population consisted of the totality of female commercial sex workers who solicit for customers in zone A, B, C, D and E, male clients and managers of hospitality and entertainment outfits specifically, hotels, brothels and night clubs. Due to the clandestine operation of commercial sex workers arising from criminalization and stigmatization, the investigators were unable to determine the accurate size of the population. However, the total of all erotic related establishments in the five zones was 871

Table: 1 Statistics of Hotels, Brothels, Night Clubs and Massage Parlors in the Zones

Zones	Hotels	Brothels	Night Clubs	Massage spot	Total
A	61	32	70	12	175
B	75	21	62	11	169
C	126	0	32	20	178
D	55	102	31	1	189
E	73	20	59	8	160

Source: Field Compilation 2020

Considering the prohibition and sensitivity of commercial sex in Nigeria, 531 respondents were evaluated, made up of five hundred and twenty-one (521) female commercial sex workers, five (5) clients of commercial sex workers, five (5) managers of hotels.

The study employed purposive and snow ball technique (chain –referral), while questionnaire was used as the primary instrument of data collection and complemented with interviews.

Table 2: Breakdown of participants interviewed

FCSWs	MCCSWs	MHB	Total
A1	B1	C1	
A2	B2	C2	
A3	B3	C3	
A4	B4	C4	
A5	B5	C5	
5	5	5	15/450 minutes

Table 2 above shows that a total of fifteen (15) participants were interviewed made up of five (5) female commercial sex workers (A1-A5), five (5) male clients of commercial sex workers (B1-B5) and five (5) manager/owners of hotel/brothels (C1-C5)). Each interview session took minimum of 30 minutes

**Data Collection Procedures:** The researchers obtained permission from the police headquarters at Moscow Road Port Harcourt to conduct the study in the selected areas. The police approval allowed the researcher to fraternize unhindered with sex workers and should there be any invasion by of the police the researcher would be cleared. The collected data was presented in clear descriptive statistics employing frequencies, percentages and tables

## 8. Data Analysis Findings and Discussion

**Table 3: Age, Highest level of education and charges per sexual transaction**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 18 years	63	12.2
18 - 25	205	39.7
26 – 30	163	31.6
31 -35	49	9.5
36 and above	36	7.0
Total	516	100
<b>Highest level of Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Primary Scholl leaving Certificate	29	5.6
SSCE/WAEC	183	35.5
NCE/Diploma	240	46.5
HND/BSc/BA	58	11.2
MSc and above	5	1
Other/Specify	1	0.2
Total	516	100
<b>Charges per sexual transaction</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than N2,000	42	8.1
N2,001 – N4,000	176	34.1
N4,001 – N6, 000	212	41.1
N6,001 – N8,000	32	6.2
N8,001 - N10,000	18	3.5
N10,001 and Above	36	7.0
Total	516	100

Table 3 reveals that majority of the respondents 71.3% collectively falls within the ages of 18-25 and 26-30, while Juvenile constitute 12.2%. The age of a sex worker is an important variable for attracting clients. A participant said:

Young secondary school girls know that oil workers and other clients like them better than very matured women. This consciousness partially account for why many young girls jettison school and migrate to Port Harcourt to compete for oil worker. Some are even in school but combines it with Ashawo work. How they are able to do it is still a mystery (A3)

Table 3 indicate that respondents with the least educational qualification (PSLC) constitute 5.6%, indicating that all respondents could read and write, thereby justifying the use of questionnaire instrument. It also nullifies previous findings that sex workers are largely made up of uneducated, school drop-outs and run-away girls from home, Furthermore, the large number diploma and degree holders in sex work is pointer to the push factor of unemployment in Nigeria. For many who had finished school, had no social support and no jobs had to consider the next possible deviant option (commercial sex) to survive or to be successful.

The table also shows that majority of the respondents earn an average of N35,000 weekly if they had one customer per day. It corresponds with empirical findings which discovered that sexual commerce has helped improve household earnings and attenuated crime rates. In fact, earnings



from poorly remunerated street prostitution often triple full-time earnings in occupations with comparable skills requirements.

Variation in charges per night for sexual contact point to the stratified nature of commercial sex work. Some Call girls practicing their trade in Port Harcourt charge between ₦25,000 and N50,000 per night: it is a pull factor and explains the influx of girls from different part of the country into the city.

**Table 4: Pull Factors of Commercial Sex Work**

<b>Presence of oil companies that pay high</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agreed	102	19.8
Strongly agree	372	72.1
Neutral	38	7.4
Strongly disagree	3	6
Total	515	99.8
<b>Presence of military personnel</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agreed	168	32.6
Strongly agreed	333	64.5
Neutral	7	1.4
Disagree	7	1.4
Strongly disagree	1	2
Total	516	100
<b>Many hotels/night clubs promoting CSW</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agreed	379	73.4
Strongly agreed	92	17.8
Neutral	35	6.8
Disagree	9	7.8
Strongly disagree	1	2
Total	516	100
<b>The environment is socially tolerant of CSW</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agreed	374	73.5
Strongly agreed	82	16.1
Neutral	42	8.3
Disagreed	10	2.0
Strongly disagree	1	2
Total	516	100
<b>Port Harcourt oil status attracts migrants</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agreed	137	26.6
Strongly agreed	368	71.3
Neutral	9	1.7
Strongly disagreed	4	4
Total	516	100

Table 4 shows that 72.1% of the respondents indicated that they strongly agree that the presence of many oil company workers that pay high sometimes in foreign currency is a push factor that accounts for prevalence of commercial sex, while 0.6% of the respondents strongly disagree. It indicates an overwhelming concurrence 91.9% with the proposition of this study that the presence of many oil company workers with relatively higher disposable income constitute a pull factor to commercial sex work in Port Harcourt.

There is abundant evidence suggesting that the concentration of oil and other extractive industry workers with relatively high disposable income in a particular area leads to the prevalence of erotic commerce. In support of the above findings, a participant explained:

Truly sex work in Port Harcourt is booming. The presence of many oil workers with big money, oil contactors, oil tanker drivers and military people involved in oil bunkering makes prostitution attractive and highly rewarding. From GRA II, Old GRA, Diobu, Victoria Street to the outskirt areas of Choba, Artillery, Obi-Igbo sexual commerce continues to thrive in the oil city. Sex work in this city pays a Nigerian female degree holder better than government work (A3)

In agreement that oil production activities produce condition that serve as pull factors to sex work in Port Harcourt, a respondent opined:

Port Harcourt is an oil city and there are oil company workers here that earn really good pay. It has attracted too many young girls and women into the city in search of better life. But because there are not enough jobs to cope with the number of job seekers, many are selling their body to keep life going (B1)

The table also shows that 71.3% of the respondents strongly agree that commercial sex work is prevalent because the concentration of oil operations in and around Port Harcourt attracted many migrants seeking for jobs in the well-paid oil industry while 0.4% strongly disagree. The overwhelming concurrence of respondents 97.9% in the above data correlates with findings from many other studies that there has always been migration of people seeking greener pastures or better paid employment into areas with high concentration of industries.

**Table 5: Push Factors of Commercial Sex Work**

<b>Reasons for involvement in CSW</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A desire for an affluent life	58	11.2
Early childhood sexual and physical experience	26	5.0
All my friends are engaged in CSW	36	7.0
Low family income	135	26.2
Poverty	83	16.1
Unemployment	135	26.2
To pay for education	43	8.3
Total	516	100
<b>Benefits gained from CSW</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Access to basic needs of life	140	27.1
Ability to take care of my family	78	15.1
To get the good things of life	36	7.0
Enabled me to sponsor my education	118	22.9
Provides me with temporal employment	130	25.2
Others/specify	14	2.7
Total	516	100

Table 5 shows that 26.2% and another 26.2% of the respondents were pushed to commercial sex work because of, the stress of unemployment and the need to earn additional income to support the family. Hence the most important push factor to the trade was the need to source income for

survival and the household. It points to the economic motivation for involvement in sex work as revealed in many studies. Correlating the above, one interviewee said:

I was constrained to join this work three years ago to support myself. I was no longer in school, graduated four years ago and since then, I was not able to secure any job to do. It was difficult for me to continue to be a burden to my parents. I needed to support them financially, and in all honesty, my parents are convinced that I am a worker, and that is why I don't reveal my real identity (A2)

However, the findings above did not indicate that economic factors alone can explain the motivation for involvement in sex work. An interviewee said:

A girl who likes for fashionable clothes, shoes and fine handbags would easily join sex work. She would opt to sell her body to oil company workers who will pay her well to sustain the lifestyle. It is about lifestyle and not poverty, or why is that when they get some money that could be used to open a petty business, they still do not stop? Some of them make enough that you will agree with me that it is more of morality otherwise they will quit (A5)

In a related development, a participant said:

Some adolescent girls involved in Ashawo work are really not from poor family. They join the work to emulate other prostitutes that appear to be doing well. It is therefore a matter of peer influence on young girls to copy those they see to be doing 'great' in the job (A4)

The above opinions are indicative of the multiple motivations for joining sex work. However, the reasons why women join sex work differ from why men particularly oil workers' pay for sex. Explaining the reason why he has been patronizing sex workers. A respondent who works in an oil rig said:

I am a normal human being so I need sex because it is a basic need for adults. However, I cannot fly back to my country to meet my wife every time I feel the need to have sex. Also, it is difficult to just meet a young girl on any street and ask her for a relation. The best option therefore is to visit night clubs and get young girls that you can have sex with in exchange for money without any responsibilities. Majority of the young girls are poor so all they need is good money. And some time I pay them Dollars (B1)

**Table 6: Occupational Hazards of Commercial Sex Work**

<b>CSWs are at a higher risk of disease infection</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	325	63.0
Strongly Agreed	141	27.3
Neutral	18	3.5
Disagreed	23	4.5
Strongly disagree	9	1.7
Total	516	100
<b>CSWs are stigmatized and excluded</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	164	31.8
Strongly agree	362	63.2
Neutral	26	5.0
Total	516	100
<b>CSWs experience violence and harassment</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	240	46.5
Strongly agree	270	52.3

Neutral	6	1.2
Total	516	100
<b>It portrays society in negative light</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	416	80.6
Strongly agree	72	14.0
Neutral	28	5.4
Total	516	100
<b>CSWs are prone to frequent abortion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	217	42.1
Strongly agree	92	72.8
Neutral	79	15.3
Disagree	90	17.4
Strongly disagree	37	7.2
Total	515	99.8

Table 6 shows that 52.3% of the respondents indicated that commercial sex workers experience violence and harassment from clients, pimps, police and armed robbers while 1.2% of the respondents were neutral about the statement. The majority concurrence 98.8% of respondents affirm findings of many studies on the many risks associated with sex work. The rise in ritual killings of sex workers in Nigeria also supports the above findings. Narrating her horrible experiences in sex work, an interviewee said:

Many people often use derogatory labels on me such as ‘Ashawo’ or ‘Oshoro.’. In terms of health, I am exposed to several hazards. First, I have no any form of security, so some customers end up beating me after sex, but because I need the money I just endure. In fact, one of my friends almost died from the brutality of a client here in Port Harcourt. For many of us, our respect and dignity as women have been eroded. Few of us may be lucky in this business, but many are rendered sorrowful. The situation has turned many of us into drugs and alcoholism and in some cases resulted to some committing suicide (A1).

**Table 7 Failure of government strategy in curbing the menace**

<b>Do you support legalization of CSW?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
No	409	79.3
Yes	107	20.7
Total	516	100
<b>Would having a different job make you quit CSW?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
No	64	12.4
Yes	452	87.6
Total	516	100
<b>What can make you quit CSW?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Employment	234	45.3
Marriage	44	8.5
Money to start a trade	143	27.7
When there are no clients	59	11.4
Others/specify	36	7.0
Total	516	100
<b>What should government do to address CSW</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Create more job opportunities	255	51.9

Re-orientation of youths on the side effects of CSW	6	1.2
Enact law to sanction clients of CSWs	47	9.6
Women empowerment	76	15.5
Improved education scholarship to indigent children	32	6.5
Improved poverty alleviation programs	66	13.5
Ban Immoral and seductive clothes on campus	4	.8
Legalise commercial sex work	4	.8
Others	1	.2
Total	491	100

Table 7 shows that majority of the respondents 79.3% indicated that they did not endorse legalization of commercial sex work while 20.7% are in support. The findings correlate with submissions of other studies that counters legalization /decriminalization policy. Critics of legalization policy insist that it makes the situation worse by given legislative endorsement to an anti-moralist industry that promotes the use of women as sex toys. Moreover, countries such as Holland, Germany and Sweden that opted for legalization have not fared any better. Furthermore, religious, ethical and cultural values of Nigeria are opposed to the legal endorsement of sexual commerce considering the sacredness associated with sexuality

The 20.7% of respondents who supported legalization policy also correlates with studies that are opposed to criminalization. For example, Nigeria elected the path of criminalization as counter strategy to the rising rate of commercial, leading to clampdown on brothels and arrest, prosecution and jailing sex workers, which has been largely ineffective. Therefore, beyond criminalization and legalization as strategy for managing and controlling commercial sex, the findings point to the need for interventions predicated on multiple perspectives occasioned by practical based research on specific socio-economic and cultural realities of societies concerned.

The table also shows that 45.3% of the respondents would quit commercial sex work when they get employment while 7.0% gave other conditions. Thus, addressing the poor socio-economic conditions of women would yield better outcomes than either criminalization or legalization of commercial sex. A comprehensive empowerment of women and girls through job creation, skills training, monetary aids and re-orientation. A participant put it this way:

Government needs to step up its effort at creating conducive economic environment for the manufacturing and informal sectors to thrive and create jobs. It must step up its women empowerment program and equip NAPTIP to carry out sensitization exercise on the hazards of sex work to discourage entry into the trade. In fact, criminalizing sex work is not the solution. These people are mainly poor, unemployed with no family support in most cases. Attack the root and not the symptom of an ailment. For example, many Ashawo who are undergraduates, are forced do so to sponsor their education (C2)

From the above findings, it is clear that policies on commercial should be driven by the desire to improve the well-being of sex workers and not how to punish them.

#### **4.13 Discussion of the Major Findings**

The findings are discussed in line with objectives of the study.

##### **a. Socio-demographics of respondents**

The study discovered that majority of sex workers were young between age 18-30, single, under parental guidance and literate. They are composed of girls who have concluded secondary school, undergraduates and graduates seeking for employment. Although the findings agree with Rosen's report (1982) that majority of whores are young, it disagree with the other findings that they are majorly uneducated and comes from separated households. Also, the findings are in line with Gungul and Audu (2014) who posited that most commercial sex workers are young, single and had a minimum of secondary school certificate. Therefore, contrary to the view that sex workers are uneducated and school drop outs, the findings are in line with Sekyi, et al (2021) stand that there is an appreciation in the number of educated girls involved in sex work, although many of them operate in online workspaces instead of streetwalking. This pattern is most likely connected to the rate of joblessness and thus pushing many educated people to sex work.

Interestingly, low percentage of older women in sex work affirms the report of Poindexter (2002) who opined that client prefer younger girls, so the older you are in prostitution the less attractive you become to clients. The discovery suggests that government counter strategy is defective since several decades after the criminalization of commercial sex, many young individuals still engage in transactional sex, and the rate is alarming among Nigerian girls and women.

The study uncovered that despite catering for the well-being of sex workers and their families, majority regret joining the occupation due to many risks and stigma associated with the occupation. The findings are agreement with Chukwuedozie et al (2019) report that sexual commerce has helped improve household earnings and attenuated crime rates. Nevertheless, participants still express concerns about labelling, corps brutality and failure of the state to consider their sufferings as workers. Equally in line with the above findings are reports by Nwankama (2015) and Olagbegi (2014) who indicated that sex workers worry about unwanted pregnancy; unsafe abortion; drug addiction; divorce and many other social problems.

##### **b. Push and Pull factors of commercial sex work**

The study discovered that concentration of oil companies, presence of many well-paid oil workers and military personnel primarily explains the prevalence of commercial sex work in Port Harcourt. For many adolescent girls and women who migrated to Port Harcourt in search of

greener pastures, sex work remains the most rewarding and attractive given the shortage of employment opportunities.

The findings are in agreement with Vanwezenbeeck, (2013) and Duruigbo (2004) who reported that the concentration of oil and other extractive industry workers with relatively high disposable income in a particular area serve as pull factor to sex work. Duruigbo for example, reported that prevalence of commercial sex work in the in Niger Delta oil cities was a consequence of oil activities, and that many adolescent girls who lacked dignifying jobs and whose parents could not cope with the financial burden of tertiary institutions and housing delve into transactional sex to survive. He explained further that many others were simply attracted by the prospect of effortless cash from relatively highly paid oil company workers.

Other contributory factors to prevalence of commercial sex work uncovered in this study include high cost of housing which pushed many girls into sex work, the presence of many romance related businesses as hotels, brothel and night clubs and the socio-legal environment that was tolerant of sex work. It agrees with PCCCIMA (2016) which indicated that 75% of streets in Port Harcourt had either a hotel, guest house, brothel, bar, night club or eatery which served as an attraction to sex work. It is also in agreement with findings of Kio-Lawson and Dekor (2014) who opined that a major problem faced by Port Harcourt residents, particularly the low- income earners beginning from 1980 is housing deficit. Residential houses in the planned areas are completely unaffordable to the poor income earners.

The study discovered multiple push and pull factors ranging from poverty, unemployment, peer group influence, materialistic life style and a host of others. The findings affirm Ndibuagu, et al (2017) report that push factors to commercial sex are primarily unemployment, low family income and economic recession.

### **c. Occupational Hazards of commercial sex work**

The study found out health challenges, violence and abuse, stigmatization and frequent abortions as some of the hazards of sex work. The findings agree with Ladipo, et al (2014) who reported that many female sex workers are injecting drug users and are thus exposed to many health dangers. In line with the findings also, Adelakan et al (2017) opined that sex workers often have multiple sex partners and some do not screen their clients or use condoms and hence they are vulnerable to STDs, HIV/AIDs, unwanted pregnancies, frequent abortions and a host of other health related problems. Munoz et al (2010) also opined that whore are susceptible to HIV because of substance abuse, alcoholism, bare sex, use of unclean tools for tattooing and self-medication.

Also, agreeing with findings of this study, Aloba and Nfidon (2015) found out that STDs spread, stigmatization and abandonment, low chances of getting married, corps brutality and quick aging are some of the dangers in sexual commerce. Although sex workers have developed coping strategies with the challenges, they have been largely ineffective (Izugbara, 2005).

#### **d. Ineffectiveness of state response to curbing the menace**

The study also found out that neither criminalization nor legalization policies are appropriate strategy for curbing the trade. This is because after several decades of criminalizing sex work in Nigeria, rather than attenuating, the rate has increased and has become alarming among young girls. Also, in countries where it has been legalized or decriminalized such as Germany, Netherland and Sweden, the problems of stigmatization and violence against practitioners have continued unabated. Moreover, in a country like Nigeria where there are cultural and religious inhibitions and abhorrence of sexual commerce, its legalization would be antithetical to the nations religious and moral ethos.

The findings are in agreement with Weitzer (2010) who argued that legalization of sexual commerce makes the situation worse because it gives legislative endorsement to an anti-moralist industry that promotes the use of women as sex toys. On the other hand, Kangiwa (2015) also reported that Nigeria's choice of criminalization as a strategy to tackle rising rate of commercial sex, resulting to clampdown on brothels, raids and sometimes prosecution of sex has proved impotent. He explained that criminalization has pushed sex workers into closer ties with criminal gangs, pimps and needless confrontations with the police resulting to oppression and abuse by customers, pimps and law enforcement agents.

It follows therefore, that rather than simply criminalizing sex work as is the case with Nigeria, intervention efforts should be expanded to accommodate redressing the push and pull factors of prostitution. Effort should be geared towards interventions predicated on multiple perspectives occasioned by practical based research on specific socio-economic and cultural reality of societies concerned. Reactions to sex workers should deviate from police protective interventions and concentrate more on the living conditions and empowerment of participants (Enoch, 2020; Menezes, 2019). Government top priority should be a comprehensive intervention program that encapsulates creation of conducive economic environment for private investment to thrive and create job opportunities, empowerment of women through skill acquisition training and financial support which would alleviate poverty, improved scholarship to indigent student's re-orientation of youth on appropriate dressing code and negative effects of sex work, and



providing psycho- therapy for those who are emotionally destabilized by experiences in the profession.

## **9. Conclusion**

The study conclude that commercial sex is a complex phenomenon whose push factors are connected to oil production and related activities which produced conditions that have pulled and pushed young girls and women to commercial sex work. Such conditions include high presence of oil company workers that pay heavily for sex, migration of women and girl from all part of Nigeria to seeker greener pastures, militarization of the area, unemployment, poverty and low family income.

The profession comes with it several risks and negative implications for individual sex workers and the larger society. Criminalization is not a comprehensive strategy for curbing the menace as shown in the experiences of Nigeria a pro-criminalization country.

## **10. Recommendations Based on Findings**

Identifying the underlying push and pull factors of sexual commerce is germane to designing initiatives for curbing it (Faloore, 2009). Based on the findings of this study, we make bold to propose the following recommendations; as practical and realistic step towards lessening the attraction of young girls and women to this occupation

### **a. Job Creation and Poverty Reduction**

Unemployment and poverty rank the high as push factors of commercial sex. Result from this study also indicates that the youths have the highest percentage of participation sex work. Therefore, combating economic deprivation and joblessness among youth and adult citizens should be a top the priority of government (Gungul and Audu, 2014). Creation jobs must be followed by a deliberate policy of equal access to employment opportunities to enable female have equal access to available jobs. Creation and availability would help to combat high levels of poverty that bedevils Nigeria and consequently attenuate the proclivity to drift into transactional sex

### **b. Women empowerment**

This study views commercial sex as outcome of petroleum development, since many young women having migrated to the oil city and find it difficult to get a dignifying job, or those whose parents could not cope with financial burden of tertiary schooling and housing delve into the trade to make ends meet. Therefore, apart from poverty, women have limited access to education and job opportunities thereby making them drift into sex work as a coping strategy.

This study established that better alternative employment and financial aid to start trade would encourage exit. It follows therefore that there should be a deliberate strategy by the state to provide quality and tuition free learning, and training to enhance skills acquisition and start-off monetary aid for defenseless women to boost their economic clout (Bagudo and Yusuf, 2019).

### **c. Education Scholarship**

The findings show that significant proportion of young girls enter sex work on part-time basis to enable them pay for education and a large proportion of respondents agreed that it enables them sponsor their education. In this regards the study recommends that government and other education focused non-state actors should expand the scope of scholarship to indigent students and increase bursary allowances to students in tertiary institutions especially female undergraduates as this may discourage them from indulging in commercial sex.

### **d. Rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-prostitutes**

It is on record that whores manifest pathological backgrounds, therefore, government should provide a means of rehabilitating and reforming them through counselling, vocational training, faith-based care and moral redirection. Also, government should in synergy with welfare agencies provide sporting and recreational facilities for prostitutes that are advanced in age and young women who are found to be emotionally destabilized.

### **e. Demand side of Commercial sex**

Some participants particularly those in support of decriminalization policy insisted that tackling the demand side by sanctioning the male folk would make them quit the trade (Nwankama, 2015). The reason for assuming this stand is that men are the buyers of sex, so if laws are enacted to punish them, the demand would go down and hence a drop in sexual commerce. Therefore, if the government is bent on toeing the path of criminalization, apart from arresting women that offer sexual service for money, buyers of sex should be punished: the male clients, the sex agents profiteering from the transaction (Alobo and Ndifon, 2014).

### **f. Awareness and Re-orientation**

The National Orientation Agency, religious and traditional institutions should vigorously carry out sensitization programme to educate young girls about hazards of commercial sex (Bagudo and Yusuf, 2019; Gungul and Audu, 2014). For example, communities and religious institutions can re-orient young girls to operate within the limits of religious and moral code.

Lastly, the true representative of the sample used in this study was difficult to evaluate. This constituted limitations to the study. To this end, governments are encouraged to embark on

national survey on commercial sex to enable them formulate policies for addressing it. This will also enhance future research on the subject

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