

Prostitution In Obollo-Afor: The Underground Economy Of A Rural Igbo Community, 1978-2020

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Abstract: The influx of ladies to Obollo-Afor is no longer a strange phenomenon to most Nigerians as the name of the town rings bell in the minds of Nigerian commuters on business trips. Obollo-Afor is the gateway to both the northern and the eastern states and due to its strategic location, prostitution related activities thrive in the town. However, this prostitution has become a salient feature of the town that portrays the town in negative light. The thrust of this work is to interrogate the economic impact of prostitution in Obollo-Afor as an underground economy of a rural Igbo Community. The economic reasons behind this trade and the fact that it is waxing stronger in Obollo-Afor at this 21st century. The paper adopts qualitative research methodology and makes use of both primary and secondary sources such as relevant books, institutional publications, and oral interviews among others. It was discovered in the course of the research that the economic benefits at the disposal of the prostitutes and the owners of their brothels as well as non-taxation by the relevant government agencies have contributed immensely to the continued proliferation of brothels in Obollo-Afor.

Keywords: Prostitution, Underground Economy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Obollo-Afor is the headquarters of Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. It forms the arrowhead of the Igbo drive northwards. It is bounded on the north by Amalla and Idoma in Benue State, on the northwest by Enugu-Ezike, on the East by Ikem and on the South by Umundu, Igugu and Imilike people. Obollo-Afor enjoys a strategic location. It is the gateway to both the northern and the eastern states and due to its strategic location, prostitution related activities thrive in the town (Odoh,2015). The town is also blessed with various establishments of government such as the Nigeria police Division, the High Court, Agricultural Extension Services and produce inspection offices as well as other private establishments.

As earlier stated, it is strategically located on the major road to the northern states from the eastern states, on the Enugu/Makurdi highway. This major road or highway is popularly called "New Road" in Obollo-Afor. The tanker drivers conveying petroleum products from the refinery in

Port Harcourt and other travelers, especially, businessmen and women conveying goods to and from the northern states, most often make a stopover or pass the night at Obollo-Afor (Odoh,2015). This situation has substantially increased the number of people demanding social services. Accordingly, Obollo-Afor as a town has the highest single concentration of brothels, hotels, motels, bars, restaurants and petrol filling stations in Enugu North senatorial zone (Nwafor,1978). It is a transit town.

It is obvious that the increase in number of people demanding social service in Obollo-Afor have actually led to the high concentration and influx of prostitutes in the town. Prostitution has come to stay and opinions are divided among different stakeholders as to whether prostitution should be coined a social ill or an accepted act. Prostitution is silently abhorred and privately accepted by Nigerians and Obollo-Afor people in particular as a normal way of one going about one's business and earning a living.

At nightfall, the expected thing is that people should retire to bed after their daily routine. In the shadows of this dark

cloud, our society is endangered by various kinds of immoralities and one of the greatest social ills that nightfall unleashes is prostitution-the offer of sex to someone in return for money (Mbah,2006). This is perhaps the oldest profession in the world. In some countries, it is as legal as the conventional stock market. The clock clicked 9pm, Nigerian time and like soldiers on parade, ladies in body hugging and body exposing clothes are on single file ready to do business. Some lean their lascivious body on parked lorries along a major road, while others are busy whispering nasty phrases to the passers-by. Take a good look at a close range and you will see negotiation going on. When these whores have succeeded in turning on the pleasure circuit of any customer, the barely clothed girls will lead the customer to their single room apartment, where they will engage in sex. While the customer is busy satisfying his erotic desires, the prostitute is busy looking at the stopwatch (Mbah,2006).Time to them is money. Life goes on fully here from dusk to dawn and the soul of this revel is sex.

The above scenario looks like what we see in movies, it is indeed a reality. It is what happens in Obollo-Afor, in Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria owing to its strategic location.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

PROSTITUTION: According to Benson C & Mathew R (2000) Prostitution is the sale of sexual services for money or other kinds of return, a person selling sexual service is a prostitute. In view of the above definition, a prostitute could be a male or female depending on the person who sells the sexual services for pecuniary benefits.

According to Hodgson J (1997) Prostitution is the act of engaging in sexual activities with stranger or other persons with whom the individual has no affectional relationship but in exchange for money and the valuable materials.

Longman Modern English Dictionary defines prostitution as an act, practice or profession of offering the body or part of it for sexual intercourse for money. While the above definitions could be accepted, it should be expanded to mean indulgence in promiscuous sexual relationship not only for money but for favour and a total lack of emotional element, which is sine qua-non for the socially approved sexual relationship.

UNDERGROUND ECONOMY: The underground economy refers to economic transactions that are deemed illegal, either because the goods or services traded are unlawful in nature, or because transactions fail to comply with governmental reporting requirements (Smith,1997). In otherwords, the underground economy consists of all commerce in which application of taxes and/or regulations of trade are being avoided. The term is also often known as underdog economy, shadow economy, black market economy, informal economy. Be that as it may, an underground economy typically involves commercial activity that is unreported for tax purposes. In modern societies, the underground economy covers a vast array of activities unreported for taxation, such as prostitution (Mirus & Smith,1997). It is generally smallest in countries where

economic freedom is greatest or guaranteed and becomes progressively larger in those areas where corruption, regulation or legal monopolies restrict legitimate economic activity like in Obollo-Afor.

However, prostitution is illegal or highly regulated in some nations throughout the world and the study area inclusive. In these areas, it is a classic study of an underground economy because of the consistent high demand from their clients or customers as well the high pay, and low skill aspects of the work attract a continued supply of sex workers.

Finally, in underground economy, the amount of money realized on daily basis by the people in the business is neither reported nor quoted in the stock exchange despite the huge money or wealth accumulated by the people .Business that fall in this category include drug trade, oil bunkering, armed robbery and prostitution in Obollo-Afor which is waxing stronger in spite of non-direct-revenue generation to the government.

III. CAUSES OF PROSTITUTION

Prostitution in Nigeria and Obollo-Afor in particular has various causes among which are the desire to acquire material wealth, the need to satisfy the biological drive, attainment of social equality, lack of parental care, lack of employment, divorces, early marriage and poor working conditions.

IV. THE DESIRE TO ACQUIRE MATERIAL WEALTH

The luxurious living standard set by the wealthy in our society has instilled achievement motivation into their young girls and costumed their perceptions towards material things. In an interview with Asogwa, a patent medicine dealer who observed that it is due to ungainful employment to meet their desire to acquire economic and material wealth, most of them have resorted to prostitution in order to satisfy the imbibed materialism in them(Asogwa,2020).

These young girls in order to meet up economically associate themselves with the activities of the so-called sugar daddies that demand for the service of the young prostitutes. Sugar daddies are comfortably married men driving flashy cars with gray hair all over and white hairs. They entice these girls with different kinds of gifts as well as take them to expensive hotels, buying them all sort of snacks, wine and beer, drinks and ice cream. They took them to shopping where they buy expensive clothes, shoes, watch, jewelleryes and expensive phone with sugarcoated promises. The sugar daddies finally coax them into immoral act hence having canal knowledge of them. The men do these things to get a momentary satisfaction to their libido and selfish interest.

The economic hardship has actually led some girls into prostituting in order to meet up with their economic needs. According to Charity in an interview on the reason for her involvement in the business, she had this to say:

“I do it purely for economic reasons. I am in 300 level in the university, and I have not gotten #1,000 from my parents since I gained admission into the university. I am of the students whose parents cannot cater for properly. So, I do it to

make money to maintain myself and also make valuable connections for the future (Okafor,2020).

Grinding poverty due to the economy of the nation was also the reason cited by Faith, a full-time prostitute at Obollo-Afor, for her plunge into the sleazy business. Before she migrated from her homestead in Benin, Edo state in January 2006 she said it was practically difficult for her parents to get one square meal for the family per day, let alone send the children to school. At the rate ₦500 per man, she makes an average of ₦4,000 per night and pays ₦7,000 per week for the small room she occupies in Moon Light Hotel (Nwokedi,2020). It is obvious that the desire to acquire economic and material wealth is being identified as one of many causes of prostitution in Nigeria and Obollo-Afor in particular.

V. THE NEED TO SATISFY THE BIOLOGICAL DRIVE

Another cause of prostitution deduced from this research finding has been to satisfy the biological drive. There might be a thousand and one prostitutes on the street but the truth is that not all of them are doing it for the monetary gain. In an interview with Mama on the causes of prostitution in Obollo-Afor, he observed that some of the prostitutes are doing it in order to satisfy their biological drive or sexual urge. Naturally, some women have higher sexual drive than others. This can be seen in some women who cajole members of the opposite sex or spend their resources on them (the men) in quest for sex(Mama,2020). Some of these prostitutes engage in the act owing to the sexual satisfaction derivable from such immoral act. Examples are seen with married ladies who openly acknowledged engaging in prostitution because their husbands sex starved them of sexual satisfaction and therefore, leave their matrimonial home for prostitution from time to time.(Mama,2020) The biological drive has been identified as one of the causes of prostitution in our society, in quest to satisfy this biological drive or sexual urge leads women into prostitution.

VI. THE ATTAINMENT OF SOCIAL EQUALITY

The attainment of social equality is another factor that has caused an increase in the high rate of prostitution in our society and Obollo-Afor. In Obollo-Afor just like most other part of Igboland, the researcher discovered that the women occupy subordinate positions in marriage, offices and in the society as a whole. In an interview with Sabina Abah on the cause of prostitution, she observed that some men as a result of these subordinate positions of women mete out unfair treatment to the women. Isolate them from certain jobs and discriminate against them for these reasons some women who could not bear these injustices associated with their subordinate positions get into prostitution to equate with men economically in social gatherings. It should not be forgotten that ladies become socially equal with men after having canal knowledge of them(Abah,2020). The need to attain social equality has been found as one of the causes of the social deviance called prostitution. When the researcher visited

Obollo-Hotel, some of the idle prostitutes were seen sitting flirting with different men in the hotel, leading a free and easy life unchecked.

VII. LACK OF EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment also has its contribution to this ugly situation. It is obvious that most of the prostitutes in Obollo-Afor and other rural Igbo communities were lured into the business because they were not gainfully employed. Prostitution is a means of survival for the majority of the unemployed youths in most rural Igbo communities and Nigeria in general. Unemployment is actually a social problem that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society, Obollo-Afor inclusive and it has been identified as one of the major reasons for the high rate of prostitution. It is not uncommon that a substantial proportion of able bodied employable young males and females of rural Igbo communities and Obollo-Afor in particular are presently unemployed. Paulina Chima in an interview observed that due to lack of white collar jobs in Obollo-Afor and its surroundings most young girls engage in hawking of fruits on the express road, leading to northern part of the country popularly known as “New roads. These young girls who had left their home or village to Obollo-Afor are lured into prostitution and other crimes (Chima,2020). It is often said that “an idle man is the devil’s workshop” little wonder crime wave has risen in Obollo-Afor for instance drug addiction, armed robbery are also on the increase and of course prostitution is waxing stronger every day. It is on record that most of the prostitutes interviewed by the researcher had nothing to blame but the government for not providing employment for its teeming population.

VIII. THE ISSUE OF POLYGAMY

The issue of a man marrying more than one wife has been identified as one of the causes of prostitution in Obollo-Afor and Igbo rural communities in general. A man’s wealth in Igboland is demonstrated by the number of wives and children he has. Gilbert Abonyi in an interview cited the case of Chief Ohabuanyi Ugwuabonyi, the first traditional ruler in Obollo-Afor who had so many wives during the colonial administration in Nigeria. It is often said that Ohabuanyi did not know the number of children he had until his death in 1956(Abonyi,2020). These children were not catered for adequately and therefore struggle to survive through any means available.

The more wives a man has, the wealthier he is assumed to be. Because of the slump in the Nigerian economy, most of these men are presently unable to adequately cater for their wives and children with meager income. In the long run, some of their wives find it increasingly difficult to cope with the resultant hardship and so prostitute in exchange for money and/or favours in order to augment the family’s income. Polygamy is discovered as one of the leading causes of prostitution in most of rural Igbo communities and Obollo-Afor not excluded.

IX. EARLY MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Early marriage and divorce were discovered to be a strong cause of prostitution in Obollo-Afor and rural Igbo communities in general. These early marriages usually forced, do not always last long, thus, resulting in broken homes, because the union did not start on mutual ground. The outcome of a broken home would be that the ladies find their ways to hotels or rent an apartment, prostituting in order to make a living since most of them never intend re-marrying. In an interview with Agwu Chinwe, a prostitute on the reason for her involvement in this business and she had this to say *"I was not up to fifteen (15) years old when my parents gave me out in marriage and I quit the marriage after having five sons for the man"*.(Agwu,2020) It is obvious that she quits the marriage renting an apartment for herself and her two younger sons prostituting for survival.

X. PROSTITUTION AND THE ECONOMY OF OBOLLO-AFOR

Prostitution is one of the businesses that greater percentage of young girls indulge in that has been unreported economically. Though enough profit or income is realizable in the act of prostituting in our society today, such income had eluded the tax authorities. This is why prostitution is referred to as an underground economy or black market, which involves all commerce in which applicable taxes, and/or regulations of trade are being avoided (Idoko,2020). The prostitutes actually accumulate wealth, which must have made them to remain committed to their ungodly act of prostitution.

Also, we do not have access to the level of economic accumulation through prostitution because proceeds from prostitutions-related activities, as a result of their illegal status, belonged to the 'off the book' sector of Obollo-Afor economy. Suffice it to say that the fact that it flourished in Obollo-Afor is an indication of its profitability (Idoko,2020). Suggestively, it would not have developed into prominent socio-sexual and economic relations if it were not associated with accumulation of resources.

Some important aspects of prostitution, which include the accumulation and investment of resources, attracted little or no attention because the economic transactions between prostitutes and their clients belonged to the off-the book sector of Obollo-Afor economy. This is because no attempt was made to consider the multiplier effect of the flow of cash in Obollo-Afor from men who paid for sexual services to prostitutes who collected money for the services rendered (Idoko,2020).

Although, these prostitutes are capable of enjoying a substantial degree of freedom both sexually and economically. Prostitutes personally or in conjunction with others, locate places where they exhibit their profession. They set the prices for their services, determine how to invest resources accrued from the job and decide how to interact with their male customers. Such relationships sometimes involve the provision of extra sexual services including but not limited to providing meals and other comforts of home (Mbah,2006). However, most often some of these prostitutes are taken home for home

delivery service which is left for their host to provide the comfort of home for their guest.

These prostitutes actually have a stipulated price on which most of them operate. The standard fee is N500 for "a round" of sex and N4,000 for "Till day break" sex. Sometimes, it depends on the prostitute's negotiation with her client. After she must have had sex with ten of her customers, she would be N5,000 richer. And if she is lucky to have continued without ceasing she must have had up to N35,000 within a week (Mbah,2006). The price sometimes depends on the outward appearance of the prostitute which might be in age bracket 20-30years. From the above analysis one would conclude that enough money comes to Obollo-Afor which is not reported or taken care of by the Udenu Local Government Council authorities.

Prostitution and the economy of Obollo-Afor cannot be said to be of no benefit to Obollo-Afor economy. This is because prostitution is a two-side coin owing to the fact that the immediate family of a prostitute benefits economically as well as the owners of these brothels in Obollo-Afor (Obieze,2020). This could be seen from the proliferation of brothels, hotels, and motels such as Obollo Hotel, Cabino palace Hotel, Obollo Lodge, Charity Hotel, Obodo-Eze Lodge, Moon light Hotel and the Sodom and Gomorrah called Nkpor villa all in Obollo-Afor, just to mention but few. The number of hotels, brothels, motels and bars in Obollo-Afor express road popularly known as New Road is more than seventy and therefore give clue to the economic benefits accruable to the Landlords and landladies of these places (Obieze,2020).

Prostitution in Obollo-Afor has actually touched the economic, social and educational life of Obollo-Afor sons and daughters. The economic benefits from hosting or accommodating those prostitutes have led to the scarcity of housing accommodation and other structures in Obollo-Afor. The academic status of sons and daughters of these Landlords and Landladies and their social life have increased tremendously due to rents collected from their tenants or prostitutes as they pay on daily basis.

XI. THE INFLUX OF PROSTITUTES TO OBOLLO-AFOR

It is obvious in an interview conducted that the massive movement of people from different parts of Nigeria to Obollo-Afor for prostitution-related activities is common. These prostitutes indulge in this business in areas where they do not have people who could recognize them. Most of the prostitutes in Obollo-Afor are ladies from other parts of Nigeria (Ugwu,2020).

This could be seen from the information which was gathered while the researcher was interviewing one of the prostitutes in Obodo-Eze lodge. Patience told the researcher that they have people from Edo, Anambra, Imo, Cross River, Benue among them. These are the states most of their colleagues come from. She also added that they cannot be fools to stay in their town for prostitution-related activities owing to the fact that they cannot withstand the stigma from such practice (Orabueze,2020).

From the interview conducted by the researcher, it is obvious that these prostitutes prefer a place where their

identity is not known to a place where the identity is known. And that is why most of the prostitutes travel or migrate from their different homes to Obollo-Afor and other rural Igbo communities for their business:

“The most important thing in Nigeria today is wealth and once one acquires wealth in Nigeria, nobody asks one the source of one’s wealth. With this reason, everybody struggles in different ways to acquire the wealth through prostitution in Obollo-Afor. The end justifies the means” (Ezenwa,2020).

Moreover, prostitution is an immoral act or an aspect of social deviance. Young girls came from the surrounding towns and states to “service” traveler, drivers, traders and businessmen at Obollo-Afor. Prostitution being a social deviance, most of the young girls who indulge in this business, operate in areas where their reputation would not be lost.

The influx of people and prostitutes in particular to Obollo-Afor is said to have increased tremendously since the construction of the Enugu/Makundi highway popularly known as “New Road” in Obollo-Afor in 1978. The construction of this express road, which serves as gateway to the eastern and northern part of the country, has actually increased the population of people in Obollo-Afor (Odoh,2015). The people traveling to the eastern or northern part of Nigeria see Obollo-Afor as a place where they could stop over and pass the night. With this, young girls from different parts of the country moved into Obollo-Afor for prostitution-related activities. The main target of these prostitutes are the travelers such as lorry drivers, tanker drivers and businessmen on business trip (Odoh,2015).

According to Chidimma Ezenwa in an interview, *“we are more than forty (40) prostitutes under madam Nkechi and all of us came from different parts of Nigeria (Ezenwa,2020).* This is a clear indication that most of these harlots or prostitutes do not have their origin in Obollo-Afor but different parts of the country to settle in Obollo-Afor for prostitution-related activities.

XII. THE IMPACT OF PROSTITUTION ON OBOLLO-AFOR

Prostitution-related activities in Obollo-Afor have actually influenced the people of Obollo-Afor and people residing in Obollo-Afor negatively. Prostitution is a social deviance and also immoral act that is not welcomed or cherished by 90% percent of the population of the world religion. With this, people who indulge in social deviance and their host communities are regarded as perpetrators of the ungodly behaviour.

Prostitution-related activities have influenced the people of Obollo-Afor in different ways, which depended on individual. This is seen from the statement of Chidiebere Ugwu, a trader in an interview, who has a shop very close to Obodo-Eze lodge:

“We are tired of these prostitutes’ behaviour. The life they live is becoming unbearable to us around this place, every morning after sweeping our environment; we found out that half of the waste to be thrown in waste bin is condom. They litter the environment with condom. Sometimes, they fight each other with bottle, which is harmful to anybody

around. The shops here do not sell anything towards night, which should have been the period of booming for us like people in Apo. Our friends do not visit because people might think they are patronizing these prostitutes” (Ugwu,2020)

From the analysis above shows that the traders within these areas are not comfortable with the bad image these prostitutes have created for them, which have prevented the booming of their businesses. The moral life of the close residents is on danger owing to the fact that littering of condoms around the environment exposes them to ungodly behaviour.

In an interview with a police officer who observed that the negative impact of prostitution could be seen from the high crime rate in Obollo-Afor. This is because these prostitutes lodge armed robbers in their apartments and they also perpetrate this crime by ransacking the place where they lodge with their clients. The police have identified armed robbery as one of the serious problems facing Obollo-Afor (Ameduja,2020). Armed robbers usually attack traders in their resting places (hotels). These robbers act on information. Their informants are alleged to be the prostitutes or workers in the lodge. In 1989 a tanker driver who was alleged to have come from Julius Berger company, Abuja was killed in front of *Igwebuike Hotel* by armed robber (Ameduja,2020) A huge amount of money was taken away by these men and the driver’s private part was cut off.

The bad impression, which people have about Obollo-Afor people, is one that has destroyed their reputation in different places. This is seen from the impression, which Obollo-Afor create in the mind of people when mentioned. This is actually a misconception, which people have about Obollo-Afor. Most people who are not in the field would think the perpetrators or the prostitutes are all indigenous citizens of Obollo-Afor while these prostitutes come from different parts of Nigeria to settle in Obollo-Afor for the business.

According to an interview with Eze, a medical Director in Obollo-Afor who observed that the sexually transmitted diseases are also on the increase in Obollo-Afor owing to the fact that most of the young boys have girl friends from these areas without knowing what the girls do for a living. The high rate of sexually transmitted diseases led to high number of traditional medicine sellers in Obollo-Afor who stay at a strategic location in Obollo-Afor to dispense their drugs to the people who are in need of them (Eze,2020).

The prostitution-related activities in Obollo-Afor have actually done more harm than good because the moral decadence in Obollo-Afor is alarming to the extent of people outside Obollo-Afor regarding all Obollo-Afor people and more especially the hawkers along the highway as prostitutes in disguise.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The research has been able to study prostitution as an underground economy of a rural Igbo Community and actually came up with the conclusion that the income or money realizable from prostitution related activities is invaluable to the stakeholders in the business. This trade as earlier stated is beneficiary to the economy of Obollo-Afor despite the fact

that no direct-revenue is collected by the relevant government agency from the people in the business. However, prostitution has been in existence since the civilization of man and opinions one divided on the issue of legalization, regulation and abolition. Although, concerted efforts in the past have been made by well-meaning individuals and organizations to stop this ungodly act of prostitution but have been largely unsuccessful because some individuals have vested interests and therefore benefits immensely from the trade.

Finally, prostitution is an ill wind that blows no one any good and therefore all hands must be on deck to save our society from the wrath of God and its implications.

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