

**Young women and girls are more vulnerable to sex trafficking compared to young men and boys. Awareness of sex trafficking is high. Traffickers employ strategies to lure and entice vulnerable victims. Peers and parents, particularly mothers, heavily influence the decisions of young women and girls. Survivors face significant stigma and discrimination.**

## Understanding the dynamics of sex trafficking in Edo State towards reducing the vulnerability of young women and girls.

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### Background

Edo state, Nigeria is a hotspot for human trafficking within Nigeria, and particularly sex trafficking, with IOM reporting in 2019 that an astounding 94% of all Nigerian women trafficked to Europe for prostitution hailed from Edo State.<sup>1</sup>

### Objective

To use media and communication to contribute to reducing young women and girls' vulnerability to sex trafficking in Edo state.

### Method

Formative qualitative research was conducted to explore the dynamics of sex trafficking in Edo state, including vulnerability factors, influencers and social norms. In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, while focus group discussions involved young women, families and community members. Individual story telling interviews with survivors provided deeper insights.

### Results

- Young women and girls are more vulnerable to becoming victims of sex trafficking compared to young men and boys.
- Awareness of sex trafficking, particularly among young women and girls, is high, with traffickers typically women who are based abroad.
- Strategies employed by traffickers include appearing generous and kind, posing as saviors, often displaying wealth to lure and entice vulnerable victims etc. These are known to some of the vulnerable populations.
- The chain of sex trafficking involves multiple individuals, including family members.
- Societal expectations and individual factors like perceived success and parental coercion contribute to the prevalence of sex trafficking, with poverty identified as a primary driver.
- Peers and parents, especially mothers, influence decisions of young women and girls, but survivors' experiences suggest that final decisions are often made by trafficked individuals.
- Survivors face significant stigma and discrimination upon return, especially if they do not return with wealth or come back with medical conditions such as sexual transmitted diseases (STDs).

### Conclusion

Sex trafficking is prevalent in Edo State, spanning local and international borders, and historically dating back to the 1980s. The media has a role to play in addressing sex trafficking, with radio, TV and social media adjudged to be appropriate for addressing the topic. However, a multi-level approach is recommended especially to address social norms influencing sex trafficking; community engagement, insights from research, and collaborative interventions are therefore vital for reducing vulnerability.



### Young women and girls are at higher risk of sex trafficking Compared to young men and boys



Fig. 1 Vulnerability profiling



"... I was already like 8 months my stomach was coming out... the man that will manage to see me and work with me 5,000, 10,000 sometimes 5, 10 to 15 men in a day until I put to bed [birth]..."

Blessing, a 19-year-old ran away from home due to a strained relationship with her father. She ended up pregnant, for who provided her shelter, whose friend exploited her, promising to take her to Senegal but deceived her and took her to Cotonou by road for sex trade.

### Awareness of sex trafficking among young women and girls is high. However, survivors claimed they were unaware and did not understand the risks involved in the journey at the time they were trafficked



Fig. 2 Identified sources of information on sex trafficking



"... I spent three weeks in the desert, people urinate and drink it, when you use your barefoot to walk there, your legs will burn and develop sore"

Favour, 18 years old was a secondary school student when she was trafficked. She developed an interest in traveling abroad when she saw pictures of her secondary school friend on social media but was unaware of the details of what she was getting into.

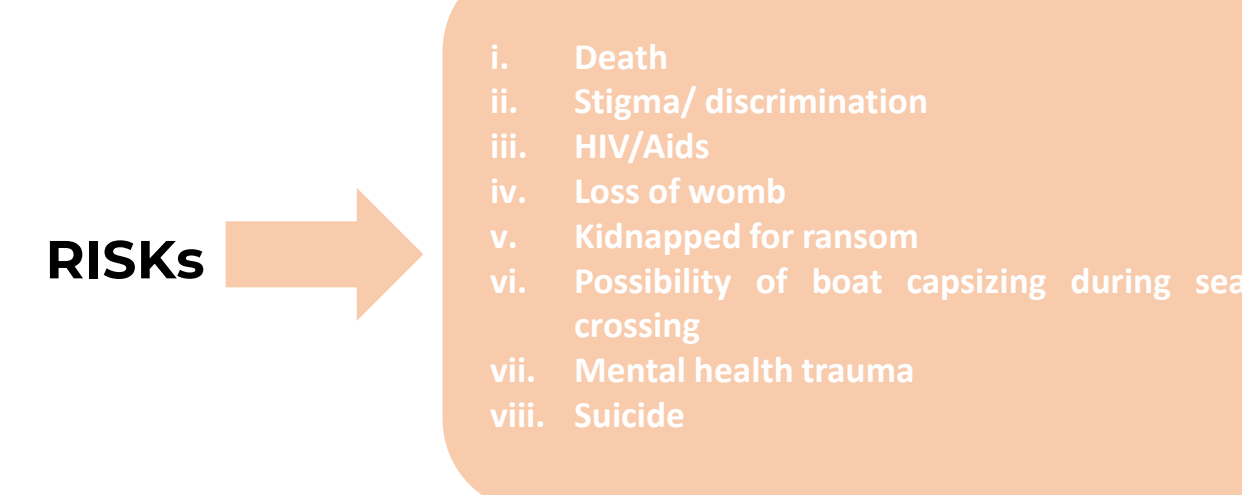


Fig. 3 Some risks research participants are aware of

### Traffickers could be anyone; but typically, women who are based abroad, and operating through local agents

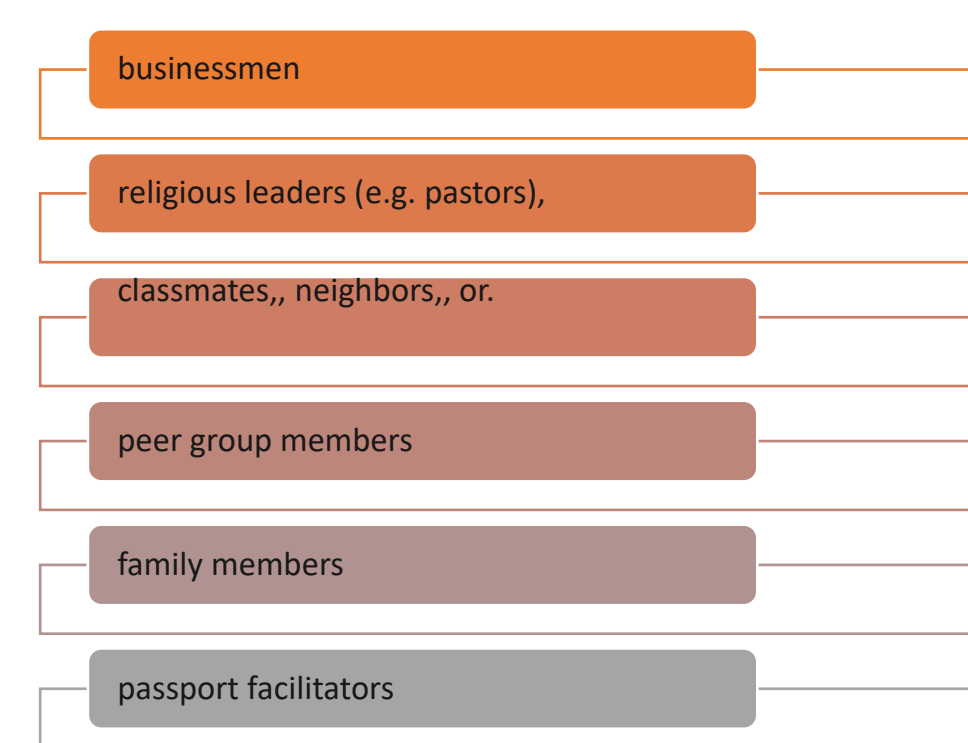
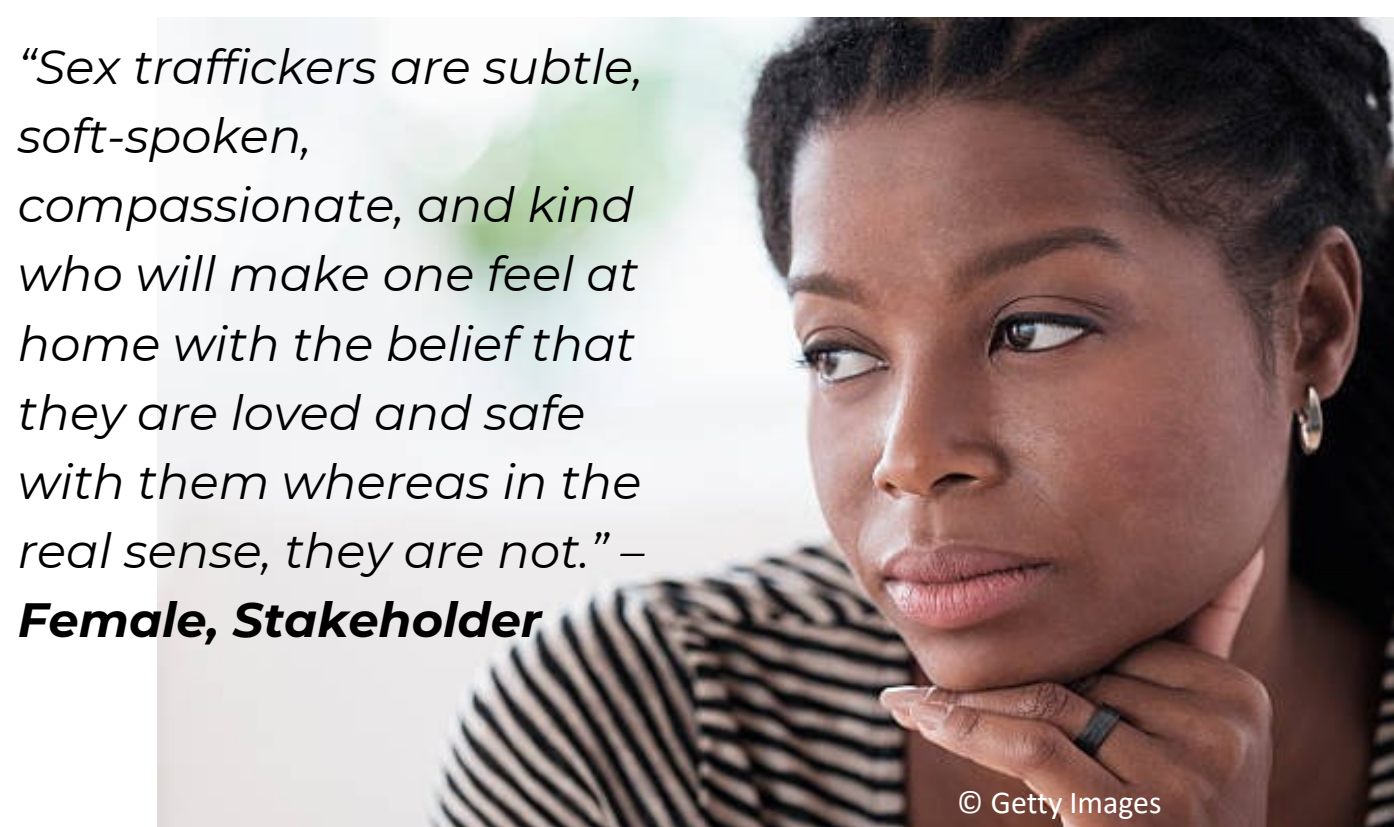
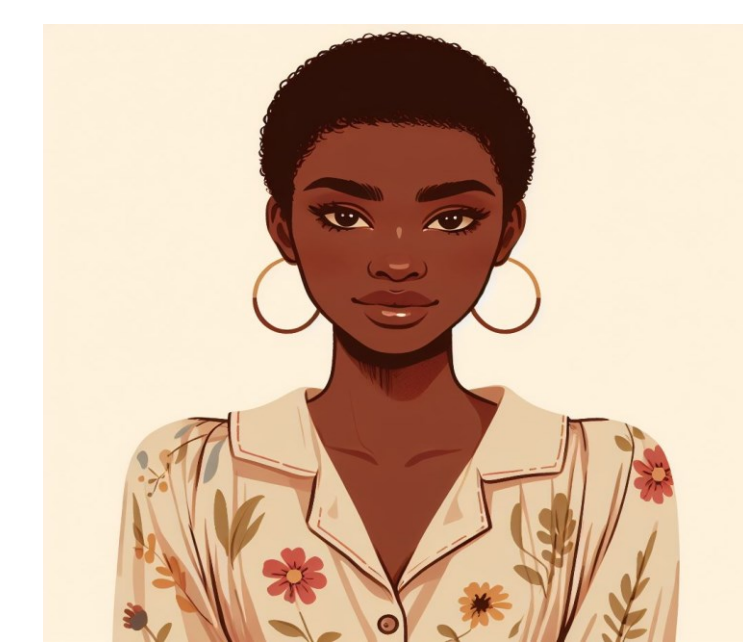


Fig. 4 Description of sex traffickers



"Sex traffickers are subtle, soft-spoken, compassionate, and kind who will make one feel at home with the belief that they are loved and safe with them whereas in the real sense, they are not." - Female, Stakeholder.



"...I said, "You shouldn't have just taken me like this without informing me about everything that's been happening. You should have told me to make a decision." He said, Is it easy to take someone on a flight?"

Ese's friend promised her a job as a housekeeper abroad, but she was deceived and traveled by road to Libya. There, she was raped multiple times by different men and became pregnant. The friend, tried to abort the pregnancy, but to no avail until she was taken to IOM by a relative and later returned to Nigeria

### Sex Trafficking driven by poverty, societal pressure, and family influence



Fig. 5 Enablers of sex trafficking



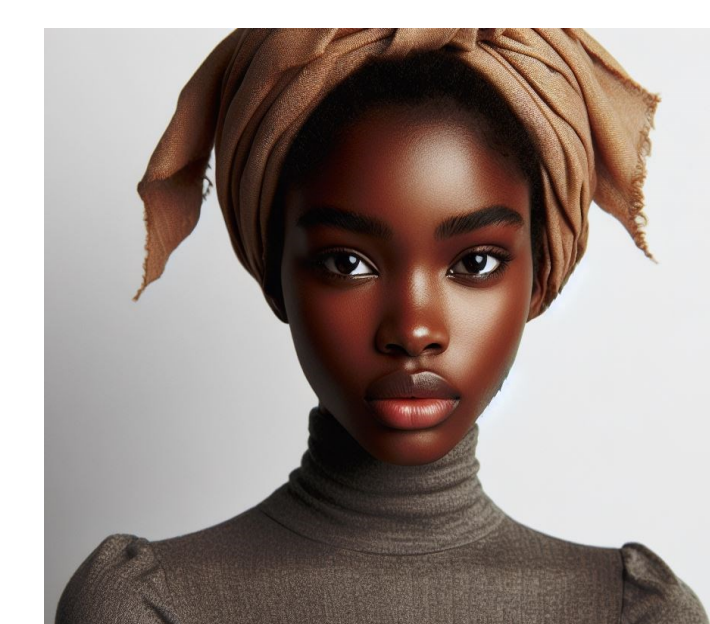
"...the reason why I even travelled out of this country was to help my life, at least for greener pastures, because I don't really like the way my family are, you understand. So, that was why I really took the decision..."

Prisca worked with a food retailer as a marketer before her journey. Encouraged by her friend, she embarked on the journey during which she had a distressing experience; she was kidnapped and sold several times among other experiences.

### Victims of sex trafficking face significant stigma and discrimination from peers, family and community members.



### Young women and girls are influenced by their peers and parents, especially their mothers.



"...And at that time, she had taken my blood, my hair here and from my body, and said as she has taken this, even if I run away, this thing will bring me back"

Sandra was 16 years old in 2020 when a woman in her community offered her a trip abroad. She went without telling anyone, ended up as a sex slave in Mali for about three years and when she returned home,.

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