**THE NIGERIAN BABY BLACK MARKET: A CRITICAL EVALUATION**

**IJENU BENJAMIN**

**FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY,**

**NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA**

**Ijenu.benjamin@proton.me**

**ABSTRACT**

Nigeria’s so-called "baby factories" are a booming business, a secret adoption and child trafficking trade in which young women are captured or pressured into selling their newborns after delivery. In these factories, women as young as fourteen are expected to deliver infants for desperate buyers from around the world. The main reasons for the growth of the baby factory in Nigeria include a negative outlook towards sexual education for teenagers, pregnancy outside marriage, and a general distrust and dislike towards open, legal adoption. The paper argues that the Nigerian government needs to take accountability to satisfy the United Nations millennium development goal of ending violence against women.

**Keywords: Baby Factory in Nigeria, Gender Equality in Nigeria, Women’s Right**

**INTRODUCTION**

In a cramped, dilapidated facility outside Umuaka, in Imo, Nigeria, young girls are kept against their will. The girls are dressed in blue overalls, working and waiting for the day that they might be set free. The women in these factories are forced to have children and sell their babies to the highest bidder. They have no rights. Their freedom and that of their children have been stripped from them. The best one of these slaves can hope for is that their child will go to a good home, but in the back of all of their minds, they know they have little reason to be optimistic.

Outside villages seem to have no idea what’s going on within these walls. The factory is cut off from the general public, and broken bottles plastered to the side of the building keep out sound and serve as a reminder to stay away.

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With a negative outlook towards sexual education for teenagers, pregnancy outside marriage, and a general distrust and dislike towards open, legal adoption, many turn towards these baby factories to sell or receive children under the table.

Baby factor "houses" are complex, single-story buildings where young pregnant mothers are housed until they deliver their babies. The children are then sold to the owners of the factories where the women actually get pregnant, who sell them to the highest bidder.

The housing for these pregnant teen mothers is subpar and is not always aimed at the health and wellbeing of the mother and child. Many of the young pregnant girls say they have no option because the factory allows them anonymity from prying neighbors or relatives.

Details about where the babies are kept, where they are sold, who the potential customers are, and how the bidding is conducted remain shrouded in mystery.

Mary, 31, Gita, 29, and Rukmini, 27, all seven months pregnant, have spent many months in the factory, and are all waiting to deliver their babies and go home. The young girls, with no make-up and braided hair, slip into their new uniform of blue and white overalls, the standard uniform for Nigerian schoolgirls.

All of their stories reveal a stolen childhood, giving way to a pregnancy that is not quite their own. Jenny, 17, smiles. "We have nothing to do. We have been abandoned by our family. We have to be here to deliver our baby and move on in life." Rukmini has more reasons for joy. She will soon be free to go home and continue her university education, probably with the money she gets after the sale of her baby.

The president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, has promised to fight for the freedom of these women, yet the streets of Nigeria tell a different story. Despite the tide of change in traditional gender roles across the world, women in Nigeria continue to be treated as second-class citizens.

A study recently conducted by the Nigerian ministry of women’s affairs and social development found that 28% of Nigerian women aged 25-29 have experienced some form of physical violence since age 15. (2021). The UN Women's (2022) latest report on progress on Nigeria’s women's rights states that;

[...]43.4% of women aged 20-24 who were married or in a union before the age of 18The adolescent birth rate is 106 per 1,000 women aged 15–19 as of 2017, down from 120 per 1,000 in 2015. As of February 2021, only 3.6% of seats in parliament were held by women. In 2018, 13.2% of women aged 15–49 years reported having been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Moreover, women of reproductive age (15–49 years) often face barriers with respect to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Despite progress, in 2018, 35.6% of women had their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods.

Last year, Jane was made pregnant in school by a fellow student, who denied the affair. To preserve family prestige, her family decided to give her out to a man three times her age. She was forced to marry a man she never liked under a forced marriage arrangement aimed at helping her get a husband and a father for her baby. Furthermore, her family decided it was the best option for the family, as they lived in abject poverty and could not afford to send her nine siblings to school.

After Jane delivered a baby boy, her new husband brought him home and left Jane alone. The husband just wanted the baby, and not Jane. She was unable to get her child back because, according to the marriage customs of the Igbos in Nigeria, the child belongs to the man because he had performed the customary right of marriage.

Jane has not seen her children for two years after she delivered them. "I will see my baby again when I have the means to fight for justice," she said.

Despite being an oil producing country, 40 percent of Nigeria’s population, or almost 83 million people, are desperately poor (2019). Political instability, a corrupt government, poor education, chronic poverty, and a long-standing traditional system of women being secluded to second-class status are among the reasons why many young girls are easy prey for child traffickers.

In 2001, the Nigerian police raided a home and freed 16 pregnant young women who were allegedly part of the baby factory system. Subsequent cases have hit the headlines when another baby factory was discovered in Enugu in recent years.

The number of factories is yet unknown by the government. However, these powerful child trafficking rings spread across the length and breadth of the country, from Benin through Warri to Port Harcourt, Enugu, Imo, Abia, Anambra, and up to Abuja.

**CONCLUSION**

The baby factory phenomenon has become a critical concern for both the Nigerian government and global human rights activists. Until the Nigerian government fights child traffickers and poverty, which appear to be one of the root causes of the increasing baby factories in Nigeria, the baby factory phenomenon will continue to be part of Nigerian society, endangering the future of Nigerian children and teen mothers.

When will the Nigerian government start fighting against these baby factories? When will the social stigma towards women and general sexual education in Nigeria change? These questions will only be answered when Nigeria takes accountability and satisfies the United Nations security general program "Unite Campaign", designed to end violence against women.

History will judge us on our capacity to solve this era's challenges and opportunities. But history will not correct the injustices happening in Nigeria today. It is up to the government and the people of Nigeria to make a stand.

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