



Commercial Sex Business and University Towns: The Amassoma Situation

Erebagha Theophilus Ingiabuna

Department of Sociology, Niger Delta University,
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
erebaghaingiabuna@gmail.com

Woyengitari Imbazi

Department of Sociology, Niger Delta University,
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
imbaziwoyengitari@www.gmail

Abstract

The study examined the emergence of the sex industry in University towns in Nigeria with Amassoma, the host community to the Niger Delta University. The emergence of sex “joints”, brothels, masseur parlours and covert and overt negotiation for sex service by girls leaving their contacts with hoteliers is fast becoming a common practice in many university towns. This paper unearths the causal factors, dominant categories of commercial sex practitioners and clients and well as the socioeconomic implications. Questionnaires were administered to respondents at identified joints in Amassoma and four hotels. The research discovered high number of singles, unemployment; high student population and urbanization as causal factors, while majority of practitioners and clients were students and artisanal staff/trainees. Brothels were uncommon, while event and call girls were prominent. The resultant effects include high school dropout, spread of venereal diseases and of course, self-sustenance by some females while in school/training. Provision of scholarships/bursary, legislation and employment would reduce the rate of involvement by many.

Keywords: Commercial Sex Business in University Towns

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INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta University was established in the year 2000 and academic activities started in the 2001/2002 session. At this period Amassoma was a relatively rural community which only accessible through river transportation, with no road linking it to other towns. As such it was relatively peaceful and orderly for visitors and residents. As a homogenous society checks and balances were in place to restrain deviants, by 2006 Amassoma was accessible by road and many

persons including staff, students, business men and women, land speculators, the employed and unemployed, etc. moved in to explore new opportunities. The great in-migration meant that social norms hitherto prevalent in the society gradually gave way. Overt sexual business, cultism, house rent frauds, indecent dressing, living together without marriage by youths begin to soar uncontrolled, which later lead to a paradigm shift from the old to the new ways.

As overt sexual business activities exits, so commercial sex centres (brothels and ‘joints’) begin to spring up and some male students, workers, traders and other residents started patronizing such places. With modern hotels, many female students negotiate to leave their contacts for possible invitation by hotel managers to satisfy the needs of their clients. What could be responsible for the new lifestyle in Amassoma where commercial sex practice is fast becoming an acceptable norm?

Often time, universities are often located in suburbs of towns and villages with well cultured ethics where decency, morals and laws or regulations prevail. While suburbs are often communities where hustling and bustling are often low with criminal activities and other unacceptable practices well check mated. These societies reject indecent or disrespectful behaviours such as commercial sex practice or the negative concept of prostitution. Such societies hardly conceive of commercial sex business as an emerging activity but as a threat to society norms and moral. However, the arrival of universities in equilibrated societies come with the inflow of staff, students, casual/menial workers, traders, the self-employed, trainees and the unemployed of various social backgrounds which gave rise to these unacceptable practice. The atmosphere of such societies is subjected to strains, stress and ultimately changes with new behavioural patterns emerging. Sociologists note that when different individuals meet, there is tendency for them to influence each other, thereby new patterns of behavior or culture was likely to emerge (Ekpenyong, 2013).

Many visit, work, school or live in University towns without socially approved sexual partners and with the natural urge for sexual feelings, some begin to seek for casual sexual partners. Many students often begin to have dates (‘boy’ or ‘girl’ friends), sometimes cohabiting. Staff members begin to acquire students or other community residents or visitor as lovers or ‘stop gap’. With time many females both from rich and poor backgrounds begin to monetize their sexual practice. Thus over time many university towns become cities where commercial sexual practice was overtly and covertly practiced.

The University environment has both physical and social aspects. The physical refers to mankind and things he can feel, touch and taste, or smell. These also include the realm of acting individuals and conditions which impinges on and act to influence the behavior of the individual (Anele, 1999). On the other hand, the social consists of the norms, values and traditions of the people which define individual, institutional or organizational behaviors as right or wrong sees it from their own perspective. The socialist also defines the acceptable survival strategies which draws the nexus between man and nature. To find out what categories of persons practice and patronize the emergent business and the social effects of this in the University town of Amassoma is the core of this paper.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing rate of commercial sex activities in Amassoma is worrisome and attracts the attention of many social workers, including sociologist and psychologists who concentrate on the analysis of man in group behaviours and relationships respectively. Before the population explosion and the burgeoning sex industry in Amassoma, sex was a preserve for adults especially the married. Youths now openly solicit and patronize ‘sex joints’ and students, especially girls brazenly negotiate and leaving their contacts with hoteliers for possible contacts by needy

clients. This is now a serious social problem. What factor(s) may have accounted for the increasing commercial sex business, who are involved, what category of commercial sex workers are prominent and how could this abnormal situation could be contained forms the basis of this paper.

Objectives of the Study

The principal objective of this paper is to examine the alarming increase in commercial sex business in University towns with particular reference to Amassoma. The specific objectives are:

- To know the cause(s) of the high rate of commercial sex practice in Amassoma and category of persons involved;
- To determine the dominant category of commercial sex practitioners in the towns and their major clients/patrons;
- To evaluate the socioeconomic effects of commercial sex practice in University towns and measures to reduce same.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated as guide:

- What are the causative factors in commercial sex business in Amassoma and who are the major practitioners?
- Which is the dominant category of commercial sex practitioners and who are the major clients/patrons?
- What are the socioeconomic effects of commercial sex practice in the University towns and how can it be ameliorated?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prostitution, which in contemporary times is referred to as commercial sex work seems to have existed from the early days of human. Sex work is often classified by many as the world's oldest profession. Evidence suggests that prostitution existed prior to monetization of sex (Chukwuedozie, Kalu & Chidi, 2019). Also, in the Middle Ages and up to the 19th century, commercial sex work in brothels existed in some European cities and was an important source of revenue to both the owners and the sex workers (Alobo & Ndifon, 2014). Commercial sex workers are persons who exchange sexual activities for materials possessions, which may take a variety of forms (Casas, 2009; Knowles, 2019). Commercial sex is also associated with singlehood as many singles maintain multiple sexual partners to make ends meet (Ingiabnuna, 2012).

Mandelbaum (2012) argues that regulation and criminalization of commercial sex may result in stigmatization of those involved, and thus increase sexual violence, and other unpleasant effects on society. In many instances criminalization only popularizes the very activity we intend to curb, such as pornography. Weitzer (2009) summed up the motivating reasons for men to choose to pay for sex as: desire for fun with someone with certain physical look, lack of steady sexual partner or not satisfied with ability/attitude to sex with a partner; the thrill of having fun with a commercial worker; and the desire for casual sex without emotional commitment.

The Islamic penal code criminalizes commercial sex work in Nigeria's Northern States, while in the South brothel ownership is penalized under sections 223-225 of the Nigeria Criminal Code. The ban and criminalization notwithstanding, commercial sex work flourishes both in the North and South. In the Northern States, Sabangari (strangers quarters) exist in almost all major cities where a number of activities such as commercial sex work, sale and consumption of alcoholic drinks forbidden in the inner city are allowed to thrive. Commercial sex workers epitomize or are indicative of a segment of the population who suffers stigmatization and is yet underrepresented in family therapy and marriage (Knowles, 2019).

In 2009 the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in the U.S. estimated that sexually transmitted diseases like HIV, gonorrhoea and syphilis have increased in the last 10 years, with high sexual behavior as a dominant cause of transmittal (CDCP, 2009). In the US, commercial sex is illegal in many states, except Nevada, yet Kinsey Institute (1987) reported an estimated 15.5% of men have solicited sex in their life time. Alexander (1987) said on the average, 70% female, 20% non-female, and 10% customers are arrested by the authorities (1987). Thus, commercial sex exists in many places criminalization, stigmatization and regulation notwithstanding.

METHODS

Research Design

Survey research design is adopted for this study. This method is chosen because it follows a logical sequence and connects empirical data to the study's research objectives, questions and conclusions. The study utilizes broad theoretical and empirical perspectives to effectively evaluate the trending issues of commercial sex business in University towns. This method describes specific characteristics of the target population and involves the collection of data from the population under investigation. It is believed that it best identify the issue of commercial sex practice, identifying the practitioners, clients as well as the challenges associated with the practice and ways of eradication.

Population of Study

The population of study consists of all residents of Amassoma and environs. The sample population comprises of 300 respondents, including hotel staff, commercial sex workers, residents of Amassoma town, including staff and students of Niger Delta University.

Instrumentation

The study used a specially prepared questionnaire designed to illicit respondents' opinion on the existence and practice of commercial sex work in the University town of Amassoma. The instrument was designed to capture (1) the demographic variables of the respondents, and (2) specific information on the issue of commercial sex business in University towns. While section A comprised of five items, Section B comprises of 7 items.

Scope of Study

The time frame for the study is from 2006 to 2019. The year 2006 marked Amassoma's access by road transportation which also marked the large in-migration as well as increase in student

population due to increased intake. The study centres on the burgeoning commercial sex business, actors and implications.

The Study Area

The study area comprises of the University town of Amassoma and environs. Flashpoints in the town were covered. These include 3 points along the waterside road – Anglican Church area, the landing jetty area and DSP waterfront; two points along the interlock road – the T-junction, the town hall area; and 3 points along the Sandfill road – the Winners church area, the Deslyn Bar area, and the Motor Park area, otherwise called ‘Endng Pele.’ Similarly, four hotels were purposely chosen for the study - Keetop, Glamour, Ebi-Ogbo and Amafini.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Dominant factors for increase in Commercial Sex and Major Practitioners in Amassoma

Dominant Factors for Increase in Commercial Sex Business in Amassoma			Major Practitioners of Commercial Sex Business in Amassoma		
Variables	Freq.	%	Variables	Freq.	%
Singlehood	61	20.96	Students	125	42.96
Unemployment	53	18.21	Visitors to town	32	11.00
High Student Population	56	19.24	Unemployed	39	13.40
Poverty	41	14.09	Artisanal trainees/journey persons	71	24.40
Peer Group Influence	22	7.56	Brothel based sex workers	24	8.25
Urbanization	58	19.93			

The study found out that one of the causes of the rising rate of commercial sex business in this hitherto serene town was the influx of the high number of singles (20.96%) those who left their families behind for work or study in Amassoma, as well those who have never answered ‘yes I do’ to anyone. This was closely followed by urbanization – the high rate of emigration into the University town by students, staff, trainees in the informal sector as well as operators of small scale businesses particularly the eateries and ‘business centers’ (desk top publishing outfits) and hair dressing outfits who now see themselves as free to take whatever decisions on their own in the absence of checks and balances from their homes. These account for 58 (19.93%). High student population (19.24%) and unemployment (18.21%) are other factors. The study also discovered that university students were the major practitioners in commercial sex business as 42.96% of the respondents indicated so. This was followed by artisanal trainees and journey persons (24.40%), particularly those from hair dressing outfits, and visitors to town (11%). Brothel based commercial sex work is not so pronounced as this accounted for only 8.25%.

Table 2: Dominant Category of Commercial Practitioners and Clients/Patrons in Amassoma

Dominant Category of Commercial Sex Business in Amassoma			Major Clients/Patrons of Commercial Sex Business in Amassoma		
Variables	Freq.	%	Variables	Freq.	%
Brothel based	17	5.84	Students	136	46.74
Street walkers	28	9.62	Govt/Company Workers	33	11.34
Masseur Parlours	49	16.84	Artisanal trainees/journey persons	41	14.09
Call Girls	64	21.99	Transporters/casual workers	51	17.53
Event Girls	133	45.70	Unemployed	30	10.31

Our research reveal that the dominant category of commercial sex workers in Amassoma are Event Girls (45.70%) people who visit different events ranging from birthday parties, political campaigns, marriage, burial wake-keep, etc. with or without invitation, so as to contact new clients. This was followed by Call Girls (21.99%) girls who keep their phone numbers with hotel managers, political campaigns organizers and other contact persons so as to provide personal service (sex). The brothel based and street workers are not so common, with 5.84 and 9.62% respectively. The study discovered also that university students were the major clients in commercial sex business as 46.74% of the respondents indicated so. This was followed by artisanal trainees, journey persons (14.09%), particularly those from hair dressing and tailoring outfits. Transporters and casual workers follow next with 11.34%. Government/company employees and the unemployed were 11.34% and 10.31%, respectively.

Table 3: Socio-Economic Effect of Commercial Sex and ways of Reducing Commercial Sex Business

Socio-economic implications of Commercial Sex Business in Amassoma			Ways of Reducing Commercial Sex Business in Amassoma		
Variables	Freq.	%	Variables	Freq.	%
Reduction in rape cases	23	7.90	Legislation	73	33.33
High rate of robberies	51	17.53	Scholarship/Bursary	123	42.27
Self Sustenance while in town/school	57	19.59	Employment Opportunities	66	22.68
High school dropout/trainee desertion	72	24.74	Encourage timely marriage	29	9.97
Spread of VD's	59	20.27			
Low Self Esteem	29	9.97			

The existence and practice of commercial sex work have serious implications on society, ranging from spread of venereal diseases (20.27%) to low self-esteem (9.97%), high rate of robberies (17.53%) and high school dropout/trainee desertion. It also had some positive impacts such as self-sustenance while in school (19.59%), reduction of rape cases (17.53%) as men in need simply go to the sex workers to easy off. On the other hand, commercial sex business which is detested in society could be reduced by the award of scholarships and bursary (42.27%). In this way, some indigent students will not go into it due to lack of money to pursue their programmes. Others are legislation (33.33%) and creation of employment opportunities (22.68%), and timely marriage (9.97%).

CONCLUSION

Amassoma's emergence from a relatively isolated community and accessible only through river transportation to one with a network of modern roads, coupled with the establishment of the Niger Delta University where students, business outfits and people from all walks of life throng into, with the gradual urbanization process means that the hitherto prevailing norms could no longer hold sway. Many arrive the town without reliable means of livelihood and when pushed to the wall by situations, found covert casual commercial sex as a means of meeting some of their immediate needs. Many who migrate to the town also came single, and hence the natural urge for sex could only readily be addressed by patronizing these joints and individuals. Many girls in turn visit almost all events to covertly solicit for clients with or without invitation, particularly birthday parties, marriage ceremonies and burials as well as political campaign arenas. Thus over time arise sex vendors and client in Amassoma. However, in the case of Amassoma, the casual factors were high rate of singlehood, unemployment, urban lifestyle and high student population,

while the prominent groups of practitioners and clients were both students and artisans. Event girls, call girls and to some extent masseur parlours dominated the sex business as the number of brothel based and street workers were insignificant.

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