

**HUMAN SECURITY IN NIGERIA-NIGER
BORDER: ASSESSING INSTITUTIONAL
ROLE AND FUNCTION**

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BORDER: ASSESSING INSTITUTIONAL
ROLE AND FUNCTION**

by

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my late father Alhaji Shittu, brother Tauheed Shittu and my grandmother Mallama Aisha Isah, All of blessed memory. And specially to my dear Mother Hajiya Halimat Isah.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B.H	Boko Haram
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
CSPA	Child Soldier Prohibition Act
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
ECOWAS	Economic Communities of West Africa
H.T	Human Trafficking
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOM	International Organization of Migration
ISWA	Islamic State of West Africa
LDCs	Less Developed Countries
NAPHOT	National Action Plan on Human Trafficking
NAPTIP	National Agency for Preventing Trafficking In Person
NIS	Nigerian Immigration Service
NNSS	Nigeria National Security Strategy
TPRO	Trafficking in Person for Removal of Organ
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protection Act
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children Emergency Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USDOS	United State Department of States

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KESELAMATAN INSAN DI SEMPADAN NIGERIA-NIGER: MENILAI PERANAN DAN FUNGSI INSTITUSI

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengkaji dinamik kompleks pemerdagangan manusia di sepanjang sempadan Nigeria-Niger antara 2015 dan 2023, memfokuskan pada kesannya terhadap keselamatan manusia dan analisis institusi. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mencapai beberapa objektif yang termasuk: untuk mengenal pasti bentuk dan kesan pemerdagangan manusia ke atas mangsa, keluarga, dan keselamatan negara; untuk meneroka bagaimana cabaran keselamatan manusia—seperti kemiskinan, pengangguran dan perpindahan—menyumbang kepada kelemahan individu terhadap pemerdagangan; untuk menilai keberkesanan Agensi Kebangsaan bagi Larangan Pemerdagangan Orang (NAPTIP) dan mendedahkan jurang dalam operasinya; untuk menilai bagaimana penglibatan keluarga dan manipulasi psikologi mempengaruhi keengganan mangsa untuk mendapatkan bantuan; untuk mengkaji sumbangan kelemahan dalam kawalan sempadan dan penguatkuasaan undang-undang; untuk menilai had tadbir urus rentas sempadan antara Nigeria dan Niger; dan untuk menyiasat implikasi Dasar Sempadan Tertutup Presiden Buhari terhadap pemerdagangan manusia dan keselamatan manusia di rantau ini. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan rangka kerja dwi teori bagi teori keperluan manusia dan teori institusi untuk mengkaji bagaimana faktor sosio-ekonomi dan institusi bersilang untuk mengekalkan pemerdagangan. Pendekatan kaedah campuran telah digunakan, dengan data utama dikumpul melalui temu bual mendalam dengan mangsa pemerdagangan, pegawai sempadan, wakil NAPTIP dan ahli komuniti, di samping tinjauan terbuka yang dijalankan dalam komuniti sempadan. Data kualitatif dianalisis

menggunakan analisis tematik yang difasilitasi oleh perisian NVivo, manakala data kuantitatif daripada tinjauan terbuka dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif. Penemuan sejajar dengan objektif penyelidikan dan mendedahkan beberapa pandangan kritikal. Pmerdagangan manusia di wilayah sempadan Nigeria-Niger mengambil pelbagai bentuk, termasuk eksploitasi seksual, buruh paksa dan pmerdagangan kanak-kanak, dengan kesan negatif yang ketara terhadap kesejahteraan dan keselamatan negara mangsa. Penyelidikan itu menyerlahkan bahawa kelemahan sosio-ekonomi—terutamanya kemiskinan, pengangguran dan perpindahan—mendedahkan individu kepada rangkaian pmerdagangan, manakala kelemahan institusi seperti rasuah, sumber yang tidak mencukupi dan penyelarasan antara agensi yang lemah sangat mengehadkan keberkesanan NAPTIP dan agensi lain. Manipulasi psikologi dan penglibatan keluarga juga memainkan peranan penting dalam menghalang mangsa daripada mendapatkan bantuan, dengan ramai individu yang diperdagangkan sama ada dipaksa atau terperangkap oleh tekanan keluarga. Tambahan pula, sempadan berliang, penguatkuasaan undang-undang yang tidak mencukupi, dan tadbir urus rentas sempadan yang lemah dengan Niger terus memburukkan lagi aktiviti pmerdagangan. Kajian itu juga mendapati Dasar Sempadan Tertutup Presiden Buhari, bertujuan untuk mengawal penghijrahan haram, secara tidak sengaja telah memburukkan kelemahan keselamatan manusia, menyumbang kepada peningkatan dalam aktiviti pmerdagangan. Berdasarkan penemuan ini, kajian mencadangkan pendekatan pelbagai sektor, meminta rangka kerja institusi yang lebih kukuh, peruntukan sumber yang lebih baik, kerjasama antara agensi yang dipertingkat dan campur tangan sosio-ekonomi yang komprehensif yang menyasarkan punca pmerdagangan manusia. Penyelidikan ini menyumbang dengan ketara kepada pemahaman tentang pmerdagangan manusia

dalam wilayah sempadan Nigeria-Niger, menawarkan pandangan berguna dan cadangan dasar untuk menangani kedua-dua kelemahan keselamatan manusia dan kegagalan institusi yang mengekalkan pemerdagangan.

HUMAN SECURITY IN NIGERIA-NIGER BORDER: ASSESSING INSTITUTIONAL ROLE AND FUNCTION

ABSTRACT

This study examined the complex dynamics of human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border between 2015 and 2023, focusing on its impact on human security and institutional analysis. The research sets out to achieve several objectives which includes: to identify the forms and effects of human trafficking on victims, families, and national security; to explore how human security challenges—such as poverty, unemployment, and displacement—contribute to individuals' vulnerability to traffickers; to assess the effectiveness of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and uncover gaps in its operations; to evaluate how familial involvement and psychological manipulation affect victims' reluctance to seek help; to examine the contribution of weaknesses in border control and law enforcement; to assess cross-border governance limitations between Nigeria and Niger; and to investigate the implications of President Buhari's Closed Border Policy on human trafficking and human security in the region. The research adopts a dual theoretical framework of human needs theory and institutional theory to examine how socio-economic and institutional factors intersect to perpetuate trafficking. A mixed-methods approach was employed, with primary data gathered through in-depth interviews with trafficking victims, border officials, NAPTIP representatives, and community members, alongside open-ended surveys conducted within border communities. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis facilitated by NVivo software, while quantitative data from the open-ended surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings align with the research objectives and reveal

several critical insights. Human trafficking in the Nigeria-Niger border region takes various forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labor, and child trafficking, with significant negative impacts on victims' well-being and national security. The research highlights that socio-economic vulnerabilities—particularly poverty, unemployment, and displacement—expose individuals to trafficking networks, while institutional weaknesses such as corruption, inadequate resources, and poor inter-agency coordination severely limit the effectiveness of NAPTIP and other agencies. Psychological manipulation and familial involvement also play key roles in preventing victims from seeking help, with many trafficked individuals either coerced or trapped by family pressure. Furthermore, porous borders, insufficient law enforcement, and weak cross-border governance with Niger continue to exacerbate trafficking activities. The study also finds that President Buhari's Closed Border Policy, intended to control illegal migration, has inadvertently worsened human security vulnerabilities, contributing to an increase in trafficking activities. In light of these findings, the study recommends a multi-sectoral approach, calling for stronger institutional frameworks, improved resource allocation, enhanced inter-agency cooperation, and comprehensive socio-economic interventions targeting the root causes of trafficking. This research significantly contributes to the understanding of human trafficking within the Nigeria-Niger border region, offering useful insights and policy recommendations for addressing both human security vulnerabilities and institutional failures that perpetuate trafficking.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Human trafficking remains one of the most significant and pervasive human rights violations globally, affecting nearly every country, regardless of its economic or political stability. It is often described as modern-day slavery, encompassing various forms of exploitation, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, child labor, organ trafficking, and recruitment of child soldiers. According to estimates from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), human trafficking affects approximately 25 million people worldwide, with women and children making up the majority of its victims. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that human trafficking generates more than \$150 billion annually, ranking it as the third most profitable criminal enterprise globally, after drug and arms trafficking. The majority of victims, about 79%, are subjected to forced labor, while 21% are exploited for sexual purposes. Human trafficking is not limited to impoverished or conflict-ridden regions; it is a global issue affecting both developing and developed countries, though the scale and nature of the crime may vary. In countries with strong economies, victims are often trafficked for labor exploitation in agriculture, construction, domestic work, and manufacturing, while in poorer nations, individuals are trafficked for sexual exploitation or forced labor in informal sectors. Factors such as poverty, lack of education, gender inequality, political instability, and corruption create conditions that traffickers exploit, especially in developing countries. Meanwhile, advancements in technology and globalization have facilitated more sophisticated trafficking networks, enabling traffickers to move victims across

borders with greater ease. The transnational nature of human trafficking means that it transcends national jurisdictions, making it challenging for law enforcement agencies to coordinate effectively across borders. Moreover, human trafficking is often fueled by economic disparities, with victims from poorer nations lured with promises of better opportunities in wealthier countries. For instance, victims from Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa are frequently trafficked into Western Europe, North America, and the Middle East, where demand for cheap labor or sexual services remains high. This global demand perpetuates a vicious cycle of exploitation, with traffickers capitalizing on the vulnerabilities of marginalized populations, such as refugees, migrants, and the economically disadvantaged. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the problem, as economic downturns, job losses, and weakened law enforcement responses heightened the vulnerability of at-risk populations to traffickers. In response, international organizations such as the UN, ILO, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have launched various initiatives to combat trafficking, but the clandestine nature of the crime, coupled with institutional weaknesses in many countries, continues to hinder progress.

The history of human trafficking dates back centuries, intertwined with the evolution of early civilizations and the global demand for cheap labor. From the ancient empires of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome to the kingdoms of Africa and Asia, slavery was an institutionalized practice, deeply embedded in the socio-economic systems of these regions. Conquered peoples, prisoners of war, and marginalized groups were regularly captured and sold as slaves, their labor fueling the growth of empires. In Ancient Rome, for instance, slaves were integral to the economy, working in households, farms, and even in gladiatorial combat for public entertainment. As civilizations expanded, the practice of trafficking humans for labor

and exploitation spread, evolving into more organized and widespread forms. The most notorious historical manifestation of human trafficking occurred during the transatlantic slave trade from the 16th to the 19th centuries, where an estimated 12 to 15 million Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas to work on plantations. This trade, driven by European colonial powers, reshaped the global economy, with the forced labor of enslaved Africans becoming the backbone of the agricultural economies in the Caribbean, North America, and South America. The human cost of this period is staggering, with millions dying during the harrowing Middle Passage and countless more subjected to lives of brutality and exploitation. However, human trafficking did not disappear with the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in the 19th century. Instead, it transformed into other forms, including indentured servitude, forced labor, and prostitution. Throughout the 20th century, as global conflicts and economic disparities intensified, human trafficking adapted, becoming a transnational crime facilitated by organized criminal networks. The rise of industrialization in the West created a demand for cheap labor, which traffickers exploited by targeting vulnerable populations in developing regions. By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, globalization, coupled with advancements in technology, further enabled traffickers to expand their operations across borders, making it harder to detect and dismantle these criminal enterprises. Despite international efforts to combat the issue, such as the establishment of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (also known as the Palermo Protocol) in 2000, human trafficking continues to thrive in many parts of the world. The persistence of trafficking is fueled by ongoing economic inequalities, armed conflicts, political instability, and a lack of robust legal frameworks in many countries. As we turn to Africa, the historical context of human trafficking in the

continent is deeply tied to the transatlantic slave trade, but it has evolved into modern forms of exploitation, shaped by the continent's socio-economic and political realities.

Human trafficking in Nigeria is a deeply entrenched issue, driven by a combination of socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that have persisted for decades. Nigeria is both a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking, with thousands of men, women, and children falling victim to exploitation every year. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Nigeria is one of the largest hubs for human trafficking in Africa, with a significant number of Nigerian victims trafficked internally and internationally, particularly to Europe and the Middle East, for purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation (UNODC, 2020). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that approximately 80% of Nigerian women who migrate to Europe through irregular routes end up being trafficked for prostitution, with Italy being a primary destination. Within Nigeria, internal trafficking is rampant, with children and women often trafficked from rural areas to cities for domestic servitude, forced labor in agriculture and mining, or sexual exploitation (Eselebor, 2019). Factors such as extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of education, and cultural practices like child fostering and early marriage contribute to the vulnerability of Nigerians to trafficking networks. Despite various efforts by the Nigerian government to combat the issue, including the establishment of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in 2003, human trafficking continues to thrive, driven by weak enforcement, corruption, and porous borders that facilitate the movement of victims.

Historically, human trafficking in Nigeria can be traced back to the pre-colonial and colonial periods, when slavery was deeply embedded in the socio-

economic systems of various ethnic groups. The trans-Saharan slave trade linked northern Nigeria to North Africa and the Arab world, where slaves were captured and sold for domestic service, military roles, and agricultural labor. In southern Nigeria, kingdoms such as Oyo and Benin were known for capturing and trading individuals as part of their military conquests, a practice that intensified with the arrival of European traders in the 15th century during the transatlantic slave trade (Lovejoy, 2012). Nigeria's coastal regions became critical points for the export of enslaved Africans to the Americas, with millions being forcibly taken from the region between the 16th and 19th centuries. The abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in the 19th century marked a shift in the nature of human trafficking in Nigeria, but the exploitation of labor persisted under new forms, such as colonial forced labor practices and indentured servitude, particularly in agriculture and infrastructure projects (Falola, 2001). During the colonial era, British authorities sought to suppress slavery, but local resistance and economic interests often perpetuated forced labor under different guises, particularly in the northern regions where Islamic laws allowed the continued practice of slavery (Asiwaju, 1979).

In the post-colonial era, human trafficking in Nigeria evolved into more organized and transnational forms, driven by economic disparities and globalization. The oil boom of the 1970s created vast economic inequalities, and many Nigerians, especially women, began migrating in search of better opportunities, often falling victim to trafficking networks that promised employment but instead led them into forced labor or sexual exploitation abroad (Falola, 2001). By the late 20th century, Nigeria became a significant player in the global human trafficking chain, with organized criminal networks operating across borders to traffic Nigerians to Europe, North America, and the Middle East. The trafficking of Nigerian women for

prostitution, particularly to Italy, has been well-documented, with traffickers using deceptive practices, coercion, and religious rituals to control their victims (Ezeilo, 2011). These trafficking networks are highly organized, with connections in both source and destination countries, making it difficult for law enforcement to dismantle them effectively. At the institutional level, Nigeria's weak legal framework and inadequate enforcement mechanisms have allowed trafficking to persist. Although NAPTIP has made significant strides in prosecuting traffickers and rescuing victims, its efforts are often undermined by corruption, the involvement of powerful elites in trafficking rings, and the sheer scale of the problem (Okojie, 2009). Furthermore, Nigeria's porous borders, particularly in the north, facilitate the movement of trafficked individuals to and from neighboring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, further complicating efforts to combat the crime (UNODC, 2020).

Today, Nigeria's place in the global human trafficking chain is significant, not only as a source country but also as a transit and destination point for trafficking activities. The country remains a major source of trafficked persons to Europe, with Nigerian women accounting for a large proportion of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation in Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands (IOM, 2016). Additionally, Nigeria is a key transit point for trafficked individuals from West and Central Africa, many of whom are en route to Europe or the Middle East for forced labor or sexual exploitation. This global network of trafficking is sustained by systemic issues within Nigeria, including widespread poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, and weak institutional responses. As a result, despite international efforts to combat human trafficking and reduce the vulnerability of victims, Nigeria continues to play a critical role in the global trafficking industry, with traffickers exploiting both local and international loopholes to continue their illicit trade.

One of such loopholes is the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) protocol which permit unrestricted movement among ECOWAS citizens and countries. This protocol has also contributed to the surge of this crime in recent years. Although this initiative was to promote regional integration and brotherhood among Africans which was interrupted by the arbitrary boundary creation by the colonialist. Criminal elements also use this window provided by the protocol to perpetuate their criminal activities such as human trafficking, drugs, and arms smuggling (Adams, 2013).

The above explains why the human trafficking is high among West African countries and Nigeria, also remain prominent in global report of trafficking in persons. For instance, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) report showed that most Nigerian trafficking victims used the central Mediterranean route through Niger and Libya to travel to Italy. Italy is the favorites destination especially for sex trafficking victims. Other forms of exploitation indicated by the report include child trafficking for forced labor and organ harvesting. EASO report also shows that Nigeria trafficking victims are found in Italy, Germany, France, UK, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Netherland, Spain, Grece, Ireland, Finland, Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, with Italy, Germany, UK, Austria having largest number of Nigeria victims (EASO, 2021). Source from Nigeria Immigration Service indicate that about 10,000 died in first half of 2017 while trying to cross Mediterranean Sea and the dessert (Adepegba, 2017).

As stated earlier, the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Person (NAPTIP) which was established by the Nigeria government in 2003 and given the legal backing to sensitize, prevent, arrest, prosecute as well as support victims of the crime is Nigeria's leading institutional framework against trafficking

in conjunction with existing security agencies like Nigerian Police, Immigration Service and Nigerian Customs Service. The agency has been performing in the execution of the mandate given to her by law.

However, despite awareness campaign, arrest, and prosecution by NAPITIP to prevent the menace, the illicit business continued to grow unabated. For instance, in the first quarter of year 2022 about 193 human trafficking victims were rescued in various borders of Nigeria and Niger Republic in the North-western part of the country. The destination of these rescued victims were Niger, Libya, Italy, Canada, and other parts of Europe. It is worthy to note that out of 193 rescued victims 125 were females and 68 males. The underlying factors influencing their involvement in this act is the high level of poverty in the country and the desired for greener pasture to help themselves and family (Oyelere, 2022; Innocent, 2021; The Guardian, 2022; The Nation, 2022; Olowogba, 2022).

Nigeria's role as a source, transit, and destination country in the global human trafficking network is largely exacerbated by its porous and unmanned borders, which create ideal conditions for traffickers to operate with minimal detection. The geographical and strategic location of Nigeria, bordered by countries such as Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, makes it a critical hub for both internal and cross-border trafficking. The country's northern borders, in particular, are vast and poorly monitored, enabling traffickers to smuggle victims across the Sahel region and into other West and North African countries, or onward to Europe and the Middle East. Official entry points in Nigeria are limited to 84, but the number of illegal routes across its borders is estimated to be between 1,400 and 2,000, according to Iyanda and Nwogwugwu (2016). This vast network of unmanned routes makes border control an almost impossible task, especially when compounded by the

limited manpower of the Nigerian Immigration Service, which has fewer than 23,000 officers to manage over 4,000 square kilometers of territory in a country with a population of over 200 million people. These factors allow traffickers to easily evade law enforcement and transport victims through unregulated and remote areas where state presence is virtually nonexistent.

As a result, Nigeria functions as a source country, with thousands of Nigerians trafficked every year, particularly to Europe and the Middle East. Victims, mostly women and children, are lured by promises of better job opportunities abroad, only to find themselves trapped in forced labor, sexual exploitation, or domestic servitude (UNODC, 2020). Simultaneously, Nigeria also serves as a transit country for traffickers moving victims from neighboring West and Central African countries. Many traffickers exploit the chaotic border situation, smuggling victims through the porous northern borders en route to Europe via Niger and Libya. These victims, originating from countries such as Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Cameroon, are often trafficked into Europe through the central Mediterranean route, which has become notorious for human trafficking activities.

Nigeria's role as a destination country is less discussed but equally significant. Internally, traffickers transport victims from rural areas to cities such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt for forced labor and sexual exploitation. Additionally, foreign victims are trafficked into Nigeria from countries such as Mali, Niger, and Cameroon, with many ending up in mining sites or as domestic workers. The lack of effective border surveillance allows for these cross-border movements, with traffickers using both official and unofficial routes to evade authorities. As Iyanda and Nwogwugwu (2016) argue, for every trafficker apprehended, there are likely hundreds more who have successfully used these illegal routes to traffic

victims across Nigeria's borders undetected. The scale of the problem is vast, and with the limited resources and personnel of immigration services, traffickers continue to operate with impunity, taking advantage of the gaps in border control and the institutional weaknesses that allow human trafficking to thrive across Nigeria. The relationship between Nigeria's unmanned borders and its role as a key player in the global trafficking chain underscores the need for a more robust and coordinated approach to border management, as well as international collaboration to disrupt these trafficking networks.

It is true that numerous institutions exist and several policies have been put in place to combat human trafficking in Nigeria, with organizations such as the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) leading efforts in prosecuting traffickers and rescuing victims. Nigeria has ratified international conventions, and there are frameworks aimed at curbing trafficking, yet the menace remains prevalent, especially along the Nigeria-Niger border. Despite these efforts, trafficking continues to thrive, raising the crucial question: why? This issue cannot be treated in isolation because the Nigerian environment is plagued by deep-rooted human security challenges. Poverty, unemployment, corruption, and weak law enforcement not only create vulnerabilities but also hinder the effectiveness of anti-trafficking measures. Human trafficking in Nigeria, particularly along the Nigeria-Niger border, is intertwined with broader human security concerns, making it essential to examine the relationship between the institutions established to fight trafficking and the human security challenges that perpetuate this illicit trade.

It is against this background that this study will investigate the issue of human trafficking and human security, with particular focus on the Nigeria-Niger border as a critical area for understanding how these dynamics intersect. The focus

on the Nigeria-Niger border is particularly pertinent. This border, the second longest in Nigeria, is notoriously porous, with illegal routes numbering in the thousands, far outstripping the capacity of the Nigerian Immigration Service to patrol effectively. The border is a known hotspot for human trafficking, with frequent reports of arrests and the rescue of victims by border security forces. Yet, these incidents only scratch the surface of the broader trafficking network that flourishes in this region. The Nigeria-Niger border is a critical transit point, linked to Libya, which serves as a major hub for West Africans attempting to reach Italy and other European countries via the central Mediterranean route. Many Nigerian trafficking victims are transported through these illegal routes, coerced into dangerous journeys toward Europe, where they often end up in forced labor or sexual exploitation. The choice to focus on this border is due not only to its size and permeability but also to the consistent evidence of trafficking operations in the area, making it a crucial region for understanding the nexus between human security, border management, and trafficking. Furthermore, this border has historically been linked to illicit activities due to its proximity to Libya, a well-known transit route for Nigerians and other West Africans seeking to reach Europe. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of trafficking in this border area can shed light on the broader challenges facing Nigeria in addressing human trafficking, especially as it pertains to institutional capacities and human security vulnerabilities.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Human trafficking has had a devastating impact on Nigerians, with thousands of individuals falling victim to this illicit practice both within the country and internationally. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

(UNODC), Nigeria is one of the top sources of trafficked persons in West Africa, with many Nigerians, especially women and children, trafficked for forced labor and sexual exploitation. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that over 80% of Nigerian women who migrate to Europe through irregular channels end up being trafficked, predominantly for prostitution, with Italy being a prime destination. Internally, trafficking remains rampant, with children and women trafficked from rural areas to cities for domestic servitude, labor in agriculture, and the mining industry (UNODC, 2020). Victims are often subjected to inhumane conditions, including physical and sexual abuse, extreme labor exploitation, and psychological manipulation. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) has recorded thousands of cases annually, rescuing victims and prosecuting traffickers, yet the scope of trafficking continues to grow. According to NAPTIP's 2022 report, over 20,000 Nigerian victims were trafficked between 2015 and 2021, with only a fraction of the traffickers brought to justice. The economic and social cost of this crime is immense, as trafficking not only robs individuals of their dignity and freedom but also undermines the country's economic stability by depleting its human resources. Entire communities are affected, with the trafficking of children eroding family structures and the trafficking of young women contributing to a cycle of poverty, as they are often forced into debt bondage and are unable to remit earnings back home. Moreover, trafficking tarnishes Nigeria's international reputation, as the country is frequently placed on global watchlists for human rights violations related to human trafficking. Despite international and domestic efforts, human trafficking continues to thrive, leaving a lasting impact on the lives of countless Nigerians and highlighting the deeper issues that enable this

practice to persist. This challenge, however, cannot be viewed in isolation, as it can be linked to the broader human security challenges facing the nation.

Nigeria is plagued by a wide range of human security challenges that contribute to the vulnerability of its population. These challenges, which include widespread poverty, unemployment, political instability, and corruption, have created an environment in which basic human needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education are often unmet. According to the World Bank, more than 40% of Nigeria's population lives below the poverty line, with rural areas being disproportionately affected. The lack of employment opportunities, particularly for young people, fuels desperation, driving individuals to seek better opportunities, often through irregular and dangerous migration routes that expose them to exploitation by traffickers. In conflict-ridden regions such as the Northeast, the activities of insurgent groups like Boko Haram have displaced millions, further exacerbating the vulnerability of already impoverished populations. Inadequate access to education and healthcare only deepens these vulnerabilities, leaving large sections of the population without the skills or resources to improve their situation. In addition, corruption within government institutions weakens efforts to address these human security challenges, as resources meant for development are often siphoned off by corrupt officials. This unstable environment, marked by insecurity and economic deprivation, creates fertile ground for traffickers to exploit. Individuals desperate for survival or better livelihoods become easy targets for traffickers who promise them false hopes of jobs or education abroad. Consequently, the lack of human security leaves the population highly susceptible to trafficking networks, which prey on their vulnerabilities. This connection between human security and trafficking highlights the critical need to examine how these broader issues are

linked, and how they interact to sustain the trafficking crisis in the country. Leading to a broader scholarly discourse, several scholars have attempted to address these issues within their studies but significant gaps remain in the literature.

In studying the issue of human trafficking, many researchers focus on the socio-economic vulnerabilities that facilitate trafficking, identifying factors such as pervasive poverty, high unemployment rates, and weak governance as fundamental enablers of this crime (Duru & Ogbonnaya, 2012; Adesina, 2013). These studies underscore that human trafficking flourishes in environments where individuals are deprived of security and access to essential resources, a view also held by scholars like Sakiko and Carol (2012) and Kaldor (2007). Furthermore, the literature critically examines the effectiveness of institutional interventions, particularly the efforts of organizations like the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). Scholars such as Eselebor (2019) and Njoku (2015) highlight that these organizations often struggle to address the enormity of the trafficking problem due to persistent inefficiencies in border management, law enforcement, and overall governance. Issues such as corruption and the existence of porous borders are frequently cited as significant barriers to effective intervention (Shelley, 2014). However, while these works shed light on the structural and institutional challenges confronting Nigeria in its fight against trafficking, they often overlook the critical relationship between these institutional deficiencies and the socio-economic vulnerabilities that leave individuals exposed to exploitation. This disconnect creates a significant gap in understanding how institutional weaknesses and socio-economic factors interact and mutually reinforce one another, perpetuating the cycle of human trafficking.

Again, despite the breadth of scholarship on human trafficking around the world and in Nigeria, the Nigeria-Niger border remains underexplored in existing studies. Much of the current research tends to emphasize either the institutional failures or the socio-economic factors driving trafficking, without adequately analyzing how these dimensions interact in the specific context of this particular border region. The Nigeria-Niger border is especially significant due to its designation as the second longest border in Nigeria, characterized by a myriad of illegal routes that traffickers readily exploit to facilitate their operations. However, existing studies have largely neglected this geographical and socio-political context. Furthermore, while scholars have critiqued the performance of agencies like NAPTIP and noted the inadequacies in law enforcement, there is a conspicuous absence of thorough assessments regarding the effectiveness of cross-border governance between Nigeria and Niger in combating trafficking. This oversight is critical; the porous nature of the Nigeria-Niger border and the cooperation between the two countries and its impact on anti-trafficking efforts needs to be explored.

Finally, the existing literature has not adequately explored the impact of President Buhari's Closed Border Policy on human security vulnerabilities and its implications for trafficking along this border. This lack of attention to the specific dynamics at play highlights the urgent need for a nuanced investigation into the factors that drive human trafficking within the context of the Nigeria-Niger border, especially in terms of how institutional inefficiencies, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and border management challenges intersect. By addressing these significant gaps, this study aims to provide a more holistic understanding of the human trafficking crisis along the Nigeria-Niger border and Nigeria as a whole.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study research objectives are:

- i. To identify the forms and effect of human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border on victims, family and national security.
- ii. To examine how human security challenges influence the vulnerability of individuals to human traffickers along the Nigeria-Niger border.
- iii. To assess the effectiveness of NAPTIP's institutional interventions in reducing human trafficking and identify operational gaps along the Nigeria-Niger border.
- iv. To identify the major victims and factors that contribute to victims' reluctance to seek help as well as the role of familial involvement in perpetuating human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border.
- v. To examine the contribution of weaknesses in border control and law enforcement institutions to the persistence of human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border.
- vi. To evaluate the limitations of cross-border governance and their impact on anti-trafficking measures along the Nigeria-Niger border.
- vii. To examine the impact of President Buhari's Closed Border Policy on human security vulnerabilities and its implication on human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border

1.4 Research Questions

In pursuance of the objectives of this study, stated above, the following research questions serve as guide to the study.

- i. How do various forms of human trafficking crimes perpetuate along Nigeria-Niger borders and what are their effects on victims, family and national security?
- ii. How do human security challenges influence the vulnerability of individuals to human traffickers along the Nigeria-Niger border?
- iii. How effective have NAPTIP's institutional interventions been in reducing human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border, and what gaps exist in their operations?
- iv. Who are the major victims and how do victim identification strategies and psychological manipulation tactics contribute to the reluctance of victims to seek help, and what role does familial involvement play in perpetuating human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border?
- v. How do weaknesses in border control and law enforcement institutions contribute to the persistence of human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border?
- vi. Why is cross-border governance between Nigeria and Niger limited, and how does this contribute to the ineffectiveness of anti-trafficking measures?
- vii. What are the impact of President Buhari's Closed Border Policy on Human Security Vulnerabilities and its implication on Human Trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger Border?

1.5 Research Hypothesis

In pursuance of the research questions of this study, stated above, the following research hypothesis were proposed:

- i. Internal and external trafficking are common along the Nigeria-Niger border and human trafficking has a devastating effect on victims, family and national security.
- ii. Economic hardship, insecurity, and lack of access to basic services significantly increase individuals' vulnerability to human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border.
- iii. The effectiveness of NAP TIP's interventions in combating human trafficking is limited by institutional weaknesses such as resource constraints, poor inter-agency collaboration, and corruption.
- iv. Victims of human trafficking are reluctant to seek help due to psychological manipulation, fear of stigmatization, and familial pressures, which contribute to continued exploitation.
- v. Weaknesses in border control, such as corruption and inadequate training of law enforcement personnel, significantly contribute to the persistence of human trafficking in border regions.
- vi. The lack of harmonized legal frameworks and inadequate cooperation between Nigerian and Nigerien authorities facilitates human trafficking across the Nigeria-Niger border.
- vii. Buhari's Closed Border Policy has exacerbated human security vulnerabilities by increasing economic hardship, which in turn has intensified human trafficking activities in the Nigeria-Niger border region.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study extends both theoretically and practically, offering critical insights into the complex dynamics of human trafficking and human security along the Nigeria-Niger border. Theoretically, this research contributes to existing literature by being the first to integrate human needs theory and institutional theory, providing a comprehensive analytical framework to understand how socio-economic vulnerabilities and institutional failures intersect to perpetuate human trafficking. This innovative approach fills a significant gap in the academic discourse, as previous studies have typically examined either socio-economic factors or institutional responses in isolation. By bridging these theoretical perspectives, the study not only enriches the scholarly dialogue but also serves as a reference material for future research endeavors, paving the way for more nuanced analyses of trafficking dynamics in various contexts.

On a practical level, the study holds substantial policy relevance for Nigeria, particularly concerning the enhancement of border security strategies. By examining the specific vulnerabilities along the Nigeria-Niger border, the findings will inform the development of inclusive security measures that address both the needs of at-risk populations and the institutional deficiencies that allow trafficking to persist. This research will serve as a springboard for other scholars and practitioners focused on human trafficking management and human security provisioning, highlighting comprehensive strategies to combat this pervasive issue. Furthermore, the study aims to reveal the effectiveness—or lack thereof—of existing policies designed, thus offering critical insights into areas for improvement. For security analysts, the findings will provide a framework for evaluating government performance in trans-border security initiatives. Ultimately, this research will contribute significantly to

the existing literature on human trafficking management and human security, equipping policymakers and practitioners with the knowledge necessary to implement effective interventions and mitigate trafficking incidents in Nigeria.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the Nigeria-Niger border. The Nigeria-Niger border stretches through Sokoto, Katsina and Kebbi States of Nigeria. These area was chosen due to their strategic relevance in cross-border activities, particularly in the context of human trafficking and trans-border crimes. The Nigeria-Niger border, being one of the most porous in West Africa, plays a critical role in facilitating illicit activities such as human trafficking. This axis is historically significant as major transit points for traffickers who exploit the lax security along these borders to move individuals, especially women and children, across borders for forced labor and sexual exploitation. Furthermore, the Nigeria-Niger border is directly linked to trafficking routes that lead to Libya and Europe, making it a critical location for understanding the complex dynamics of transnational trafficking. The selection of this border for study is also influenced by its socioeconomic and political importance, as its security challenges directly impact both national and regional stability.

The chosen timeframe for the study, from 2015 to 2023, is equally important. This period allows for a thorough examination of the border dynamics under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, whose government introduced several key policies affecting border control and trans-border crime, including the Closed Border Policy. This policy, while aiming to curtail smuggling and illegal migration, had significant implications for human trafficking, making the chosen

timeframe relevant for assessing the policy's effectiveness and its unintended consequences on trafficking networks. Additionally, focusing on this timeframe enables the study to capture a comprehensive picture of how political changes and regional cooperation efforts influenced border security and human trafficking over time.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the complex relationship between human trafficking and human security challenges along the Nigeria-Niger border so as to identify the forms and effects of human trafficking perpetuated along the aforementioned border areas. It seeks to investigate how human security vulnerabilities, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education, increase individuals' susceptibility to trafficking networks. By examining these human security challenges, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the conditions that traffickers exploit in these border communities. Another important objective is to assess the effectiveness of institutional responses, particularly the role of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and other border security agencies, in combating trafficking. The study will also explore the operational gaps within these institutions, focusing on their capacity to manage the porous border and their limitations in addressing trafficking comprehensively. The study will also evaluate how familial involvement, cultural practices, and psychological manipulation contribute to victims' reluctance to seek help or cooperate with authorities, thus perpetuating the cycle of trafficking along this border and examine the issue of cross-border governance and their impact on anti-trafficking measures along the Nigeria-Niger border. Finally, the study will ascertain the impact of the closed border policy of President Buhari on human security vulnerabilities and its implications on human trafficking along the border.

The study focuses on a specific population that includes trafficked individuals, border security personnel, and institutional stakeholders involved in combating human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border. The target group is drawn from communities situated along the Illela and Jibia axes, which are particularly vulnerable to trafficking activities due to their proximity to the border and their socioeconomic challenges. The inclusion criteria for the study focus on individuals who have direct experience with trafficking, either as victims, border security personnel, or members of local communities with intimate knowledge of trafficking activities. Exclusion criteria will apply to individuals who are not involved in or affected by human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border, as their experiences may not provide relevant insights into the study's objectives. The study's focus on this specific population allows for a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to trafficking, as well as the institutional responses and challenges in addressing the issue.

The research design employed for this study is a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. This approach enables a comprehensive examination of human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border by integrating quantitative data from open-ended surveys with qualitative insights gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations. Data collection methods will include interviews with trafficked victims, border security personnel, and NAPTIP officials, as well as open surveys conducted within border communities to assess the socioeconomic conditions that make individuals vulnerable to trafficking. Additionally, secondary data from institutional reports, academic studies, and government policy documents will be analyzed to provide a broader contextual understanding of trafficking dynamics in the region. Data analysis

will involve both descriptive statistical analysis of quantitative data using frequencies and percentage and thematic analysis of qualitative data to explore the lived experiences of trafficked individuals and the operational challenges faced by border security agencies.

Theoretically, the study combines both human needs theory and institutional theory as its theoretical framework, providing a dual lens through which to understand human trafficking along the Nigeria-Niger border. Human needs theory emphasizes the link between unmet human security needs, such as economic stability, personal safety, and access to education, and individuals' vulnerability to exploitation. This theory is particularly relevant as it shows how the deprivation of fundamental needs can drive individuals into trafficking networks, making it a suitable framework for examining the socioeconomic conditions that perpetuate trafficking in this region.

Institutional theory, on the other hand, focuses on the role of institutions—such as NAPITIP, border security forces, and legal systems—in either mitigating or exacerbating human trafficking. It examines how institutional weaknesses, such as corruption, lack of enforcement, and insufficient resources, contribute to the persistence of trafficking. By integrating institutional theory, the study not only analyzes the root causes of trafficking from a human security perspective but also critically evaluates the effectiveness and limitations of institutional responses. The combination of these two theories provides a comprehensive understanding of the trafficking crisis, addressing both the vulnerabilities of individuals and the systemic failures that allow trafficking to thrive along the Nigeria-Niger border.

Despite its comprehensive scope, this study is not without limitations. One major limitation is the difficulty in obtaining accurate data on trafficking activities due to the clandestine nature of the crime and the reluctance of victims to report their experiences. Furthermore, the vast and poorly monitored Nigeria-Niger border presents logistical challenges for data collection, as many trafficking routes are located in remote, inaccessible areas. Another limitation is the reliance on institutional reports, which may not always reflect the full extent of trafficking activities due to underreporting or bureaucratic inefficiencies. However, these limitations are mitigated by the study's use of a mixed-method approach, which allows for triangulation of data from multiple sources to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the trafficking problem. Additionally, while the focus on the Illela and Jibia axes provides valuable insights into trafficking along this section of the border, the findings may not be generalizable to other border regions with different dynamics and security challenges.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Human Trafficking

Human trafficking refers to the illegal recruitment, transportation, harboring, or receipt of individuals through coercion, deception, or exploitation for purposes such as forced labor, sexual exploitation, or organ trade. This crime is often transnational, crossing borders and involving complex networks of traffickers. Victims are frequently lured with promises of employment or better living conditions, only to find themselves trapped in conditions of slavery. In the context of this study, human trafficking specifically involves the exploitation of vulnerable