

	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 29/06/2007</p> <p>Public libraries as sources of information for the disadvantaged groups in societies: A study of the information and educational needs of prostitutes in Kano, Nigeria</p> <p>by Ghaji Badawi (PhD) Department of Library and Information Science Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria</p>
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Abstract

For over fifty years, a community of women whose lives have been violated either physically, mentally or financially have been settling down as prostitutes in Gada village outside the predominantly Muslim city of Kano in northern Nigeria. The community started with four prostitutes in 1957 but has now grown to be one of the largest communities of prostitutes in Nigeria with 1831 living permanently in 187 houses and 78 lodgings accommodating couples on a nightly basis. Over 90% of the prostitutes are not educated at all, and as such are not aware of and do not use any protection against sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Kano is a Sharia state and as such prostitutes are shunned and untolerated both by the government and by their families. The level of death in childbirth and of diseases related to pregnancy and childbirth is very high among these prostitutes. They have no means of furthering their education or engaging in legitimate work. The number of prostitutes is growing and so also their problem. This paper is a personal attempt by a female local librarian to find out how libraries in Kano could study and help to meet the needs of these women in terms of education, health and economic empowerment, by reporting to the government and non-governmental organizations in Kano to demand appropriate action. Libraries as information providers can empower these women and change them from social misfits to social “mostfit”.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries as advocates for the empowerment of women in Nigeria

An issue of concern for women since the last few decades is to make positive difference in the lives of all women no matter what creed, color or culture (Adado:2006). This concern has been taken very seriously by female librarians in most countries of the world but with far less enthusiasm by female librarians in Nigeria. Female librarians in Nigeria are more concerned

with issues within the walls of their libraries and do not venture out to delve into social issues because most of them think that their work is limited to within the library building. One of the goals of this study is to show fellow female librarians in Nigeria that librarians can involve themselves in other community services that could bring about positive changes in the lives of people around them.

The research subject

The researcher chose to study female prostitutes in Kano state because Kano is a Sharia state and prostitution is 'Haram' or forbidden. Female prostitutes are abhorred by the government and are also considered as a disgrace by their families. Most people would have nothing to do with them publicly. Special interest was given to Gada prostitutes because the population of prostitutes in Gada village has been growing very rapidly, the rate of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases is so alarming and the extent of destitution is so pathetic as to warrant this research *now*.

Female prostitution is defined by Zubair (2003) as a "situation where a female agrees to engage in sexual intercourse with a man (or woman) for money or other benefits agreed before hand, by both parties". This study aims to seek information from the prostitutes in Gada about what they need in terms of education, healthcare and economic empowerment, the three factors that could enable them change their lives positively. The researcher brings the story of these women into limelight and acts as a link between them and their governments and non - governmental organisations in the state, with the aim of arousing public interest, compassion and action.

Gada village in Kano, Nigeria

A community of prostitutes has existed for the last 54 years in a small transit village about twenty kilometers from the city centre of Kano along the main road to the capital city of Abuja. The company constructing the first highway linking Muslim northern Kano city to the southern parts of the country and the then capital city of Lagos first established this small village to serve as its base. As a result of the number of labourers working there, two houses were constructed by two individuals, a male pimp and a local prostitute, living near the construction site. These houses were then rented out to the labourers. Single women were encouraged to settle there as prostitutes and cooks for the labourers. In 1973, there were less than 50 prostitutes living in Gada. By 1993, this community had grown to over 900. The village boasts over 1830 female prostitutes now.

There are 187 houses with an average number of seven rooms per house rented out to female prostitutes in Gada on a monthly basis. There are 78 lodgings with an average number of nine rooms rented to passers-by (couples) needing the use of a room for a night or two. There are 19 beer parlours in Gada village. All these are owned by men. There is no school or clinic in Gada village.

Objectives of the study

This study has multiple objectives, as follows:

- To find out the demographic variables of the prostitutes in Gada.

- To discover the reason why women in Gada choose to become prostitutes.
- To find out the type and level of social services in terms of health, education and information available in Gada.
- To report the findings of this research to the Government and Non-Governmental organizations in Kano State for appropriate action.
- To establish advocacy and partnership between the public library and Gada village.
- And finally, to sustain the relationship between the public library and the prostitutes in Gada in terms of acquiring, organizing and dissemination of information and information materials they need to develop their lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why bother?

There has been an alarming increase in the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in Nigeria in general and Kano in particular. HIV/AIDS cases in the states of northern Nigeria were insignificant at first, in fact Kano state recorded no known AIDS cases between 1980 and 1987 (Musa, Hussain and Muazzam 2004). These researchers found out that HIV/AIDS and STDs had increased and were spreading more rapidly now in some northern states where prostitution is mostly forbidden than in the south of Nigeria where prostitution is not a state crime. This they said was because men in the north hardly use protection and they would also not allow their female sex partners to use any either. Because prostitutes in Gada needed all the money they could muster to survive, they almost always had to succumb to what their male customers wanted.... and to the consequences!

The population of Nigeria is 50.7% males and 49.3% females (National Census Commission, 2006) but yet statistics from Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital (AKTH: 2007) revealed that from January 2006 to December 2006, of the total number of people tested positive with HIV, 59% were females. This is because men most often are more informed as to where to go for an HIV test and counseling. Men seldom tell their girlfriends or wives where to get such services and women often only know they are infected after they are taken to hospital ill with full blown AIDS.

It was through schools, advisory centers, libraries, media houses and workplaces that most people in Nigeria came to know about HIV/AIDS and how they could protect themselves from getting infected. It is also through the acquisition of education that people in society normally better their lives economically, socially and politically. Prostitutes in Gada have no institutions like a library, a school, an advisory centre or even a clinic. They are on their own.

METHODOLOGY

Research technique employed

A survey methodology using a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions was used to collect responses from 183 prostitutes in Gada town. Because 92% of the respondents could not read or write, the questions were first translated into the local language and were then read to the women and their answers either ticked off or written down as they were given.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

One of the disturbing aspects of what this research revealed is that more than 54% of the prostitutes in Gada were women under the age of 25, and that there were prostitutes as young as 11 years of age in Gada town at the time of this study.

The birth rate was high in this community because a majority of women there were not aware of contraception or in many cases, even if they knew about birth control they often could not afford it. Poverty was the highest factor in driving women into prostitution in Gada.

Life of prostitutes in Gada village

Of the prostitutes in this study, 28.7% were motivated to settle down as prostitutes in Gada by their girlfriends who were already prostitutes there. A whopping 71.3% were encouraged to become prostitutes by their male friends who rent them rooms and pay for their feeding, and in return women and young girls are kept by those men in sexual subjugation.

Respondents were asked how long they had been living in Gada village as prostitutes; the data collected showed that 79.77% of the respondents were in Gada for a period of one to over four years. When asked about the extent to which they were faithful to their sex partners, 93.44% said they had numerous sex partners and were not faithful to any one of them. Only 6.56% said they kept to one sex partner.

Again the respondents were asked whether they can vouch for their boyfriends' faithfulness to them. 91.72% said they knew their sex partners had other girlfriends. 74.41% of the respondents' boyfriends were married; the majority of them had more than one wife. So one can only imagine how much HIV/AIDS and STD was generated and disseminated in Gada and other places like it in Nigeria.

Of the respondents 84.15% had never used any protection against HIV/AIDS, STD or unwanted pregnancy. When those who never used protection were asked why they did not, 60.07% said that their boyfriends would not let them and 39.93% could not afford to buy what they needed to protect themselves. More than half the respondents of this study had never been tested for HIV or for any of the common sexually transmitted diseases.

Nearly all the respondents have heard about HIV/AIDS. Nearly all the respondents have seen somebody they knew died of AIDS.

The future - if any

Respondents were asked what they were planning to do with their lives in the future. The majority of them reported that they were willing to quit prostitution if given a job or some other trade to earn a living. All respondents showed keen interest in acquiring education. They also said that they would join adult education centers and use information centers if set up in Gada.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher having spent 5 months studying prostitutes in Gada has come up with the following recommendations:

1. One overwhelming finding was that majority of respondents were not educated at all. It is recommended that a minimum of secondary education should be made mandatory for girls before they are married off. This level of education will ensure that every girl could get employment should she find herself divorced or widowed later in her life.
2. Again many of the respondents for this study went into prostitution in their early teens. The governments of Nigeria in general, and Kano in particular, should take shared responsibility for the elimination of sexism and redefining of oppressive gender roles which repress and discourage women from participating fully and equally with men in education, economic activities and politics.
3. The government should open adult education centers in prostitution villages like Gada, supporting programs of affirmative action for possible future transformation. It should be free, and women in Gada should be informed about it and encouraged to join.
4. The government of Kano state should open a health center adequately equipped for women and children in Gada. Many of the prostitutes could not afford to buy condoms and birth control pills; these should be provided free or at a subsidized price. It is of paramount importance that female condoms be provided to women in Gada free of charge. With the collaboration of the Federal Ministry of Health, the state government could arrange this.
5. The Kano State Public Library Board should open up in Gada a permanent branch of the library with seasoned personnel and the right collection. The public library once opened in Gada must integrate itself into its community so that they use it for education, recreation and information. The public library through advocacy and partnership with other women's NGOs in Kano should encourage debate and analysis on the barriers and obstacles women face in the society and how these can be surmounted.

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