



## **TRANSITION OF FEMALE MIGRANT PORTERS (KAYAYEI) INTO SEX WORK IN ACCRA, GHANA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of this study was to explore the drivers of the transition of female migrant head porters into sex work. The research was cross-sectional in nature with both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection. Relationship between the concept of female migrant sex work and emerging predictors were structured using Connell's theory of gender and power with respect to labour, behavior and cathexis. One hundred and sixty (160) randomly selected female migrants in the streets of Accra were interviewed with the aid of semi-structured questionnaire. Also, 12 female sex workers were identified through snowball sampling and were engaged in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews on the subject. The findings revealed that 56.2% of female migrant head porters doubled as sex workers. The majority of female migrants were aged between 25 – 29 year olds (41%) and single (60%) with at most primary level of education (55.2%). Also, age and religion were found to be significant predictors of female migrants' involvement in sex work. Female migrants who were less than 20 years were less likely to participate in sex work compared to those with ages above 20 years. The drivers of female migrants towards sex work were categorized into immediate factors, underlying factors and basic factors. The immediate factor was found to be inability to cater for daily necessities in the midst of a strange community where familial and community support are distant. Underlying this problem were social pressure to join sex work, poor returns from Kayayei and transient unemployment. The study concludes that female migrants "is a vulnerable group in Accra. They are susceptible on diverse fronts to entry into prostitution, human trafficking and other dimensions of modern day slavery. National, Civil Society and philanthropic interventions must target the amelioration of the basic necessities of existing migrants and empower through multi-sectorial approaches, environments.*

**KEYWORDS:** Transition, Migrant, Female Head Porters, Sex Work.



## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Sex work rate in Ghana has elevated over the years and the influx of female migrants into the Metropolitan Cities is a contributory factor. The occupation of sex work is fast becoming the dominant income-generating venture among migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (ICRSE, 2016). Migrant sex workers are estimated to be 65% of sex workers in Western Europe as well as 16 to 17 % in Central Europe (ICRSE, 2016). However, the prevalence of sex work and migrant sex work for that matter is unknown in Ghana. The subject of sex and sex for profit is essentially akin to taboo in Ghana and the West African Sub-region. It is believed that this fact affected the little to no measurement of the prevalence of prostitution.

According to Amnesty International, (2016), migration entails movement either voluntarily or involuntarily across international or domestic borders. There are 258 million migrants annually according to recent statistics and 40 million of these migrants are coerced into atypical forms of employment including modern day slavery consisting of sex, drugs and human trafficking (David, Bryant and Larsen, 2019). According to (Weine et al, 2013), female migrants in Moscow Russia were found to be involved in sex work with high HIV-related risk behaviours (minimal protection and risk prevention). The contributory factors for this trend were reported to be inability to earn enough to cater for daily needs, fear of male clients when choosing safe sex options, lack of access to optimal health care.

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are the world's global agenda for positive changes by 2030. SDG 10 indicator seven outlines the world's motive to facilitate orderly, safe and responsible migration and mobility of people. Fruitful execution of these long-term goals would require intersectoral plans and well-managed migration policy frameworks (Achilli, 2018).

Approximately 66.7% of global populations will reside in urban centers by 2050 (UNDESA, 2014). This and other projections for growing cities informed sustainable development Goal 11 (SDG 11) which aims at creating sustainable cities and communities. Rural-urban migrants are an integral part of urban populations. Their activities affect social service provision, healthcare allocations and infrastructural planning. Therefore, structuring urban communities require an understanding of the nexuses of migrant lives with emphasis on female migrants. Female migration is very pronounced in Ghana giving credence to the talk of feminization of migration (Poulin and Beegle, 2013). According to data from Ghana the statistical service (2013), migrants are predominantly female and younger.

Accra is a major destination for labour migration in Ghana. The city is the 11<sup>th</sup> largest Metropolitan city in Africa and rural-urban migration feeds into the size as well as the diversity of the population in Ghana's capital (Mittelmark and Wilson, 2013). Therefore, the city is rife with young, active and reproductively fertile girls of diverse origins within the nation straining social services. Hitherto, the reasons for moving to Accra-Ghana were the need to accumulate wealth, avoidance of bad socio-cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and avoidance of forced/arranged marriages among female migrants (Anarfi and Agyei as cited by Lattorf et al, 2018). Unfortunately, and contrary to popular belief, employment opportunities of Africa's Mega cities like Accra seldom measures up to the demand. Women and migrant girls



are forced to improvise in the face of minimal offers and often end up in high risk, informal, and undercover economic activities such as sex work.

Sex work for the purpose of this study refers to the trade of sexual services for material or financial gain. This includes direct physical contact between the sex worker (the seller) and their male clients (the buyer) in acts of direct or indirect sexual stimulation. This term is different from sex trafficking, which has an element of coercion and non-consensual sexual relations (Valadier, 2018). A female migrant sex worker is any girl who has left their native community to another place and engages in sex work for cash or in-kind remuneration. This definition was derived from the international migrant workers' convention's definition of a migrant worker which states "a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national" (UN General Assembly, 1990). This definition encircles female migrant sex workers as migrant workers.

The predominant push factor in rural urban migration is the need to seek gainful employment and work to earn substantive income streams that will enhance standard of living. Weine et al (2013) in their work on female migrant sex workers in Russia reported increased adoption of prostitution with high HIV risk behaviours owing to economic hardships. Thus, the pursuit of economic emancipation and better living standards may be a driver for both migration and debut of sex work among female migrants.

By examining the factors that influence women's migration for work and the conditions that perpetuate their entrance into the sex industry, there is need to take into account the limited choices in today's global economy that compel women to engage in sex work. It is also questionable to criminalize the act of migrant sex work as is the case in most developing countries, but it is essential to focus on protection through creation of human rights awareness (Robinson, 2006). In most instances, when female migrants experience economic hardships in towns that they have little to no subsidiary social support networks, then sex work becomes a last resort to make ends meet (Mezentseva, 2011; Weine, 2013). According to Mezentseva (2011), other push factors for female migrants' transition into sex work include tightening of legal restrictions on migrants limiting their ability to be gainfully employed. This entails the use of work permits for immigrants in Developed countries. Migrants without work permits, student passes and valid Visas are considered illegal immigrants and are susceptible to police raids, arrests and brutalities.

### **Conceptual Issues**

According to David, Bryant and Larsen, (2019), migrants are considered vulnerable to sex work under "where" and "when" conditions. Migrants are predisposed to engage in sex work under circumstances where; (a) state authority is unable to protect them (b) the state or institutions lack the capacity to help or lack the supportive policy frameworks and (c) migrants are simply neglected. Also, migrants are vulnerable to entrance into the sex industry when; (a) migrants are fleeing conflict zones or worse circumstances (b) migrants are separated from community or family support networks (c) Migrants are working through irregular channels, the black market or under shady bosses.

In developed countries, undocumented migrants are the most at risk of entering into sex work. Female migrants without the right "papers" are discriminated against, stigmatized and put through inhuman forms of social exclusion as a result of the legality of their migrant status.



According to Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants -PICUM (2019), migrants without visas, work permits and various clearances to live successfully in their new surroundings are stifled into the sex industry that operates outside such organizational paraphernalia.

Researches on female migrant sex workers in different settings have documented the following statistics. In Ghana, 90% of all migrants (GSS, 2013) and 37.4% of female migrants are internal migrants or non-international (Lattof, Leone, Coast and Nyarko, 2018). According to Lattof and his compatriots, working-age migration is the norm among female migrants and economic emancipation is the prime driver. In addition, unmarried female migrants are more pronounced than married female migrants.

The push factors for migration of young girls are as follows; lack of social and economic opportunities in origin communities, the drive to improve individual and household economic situations, the need to escape oppressive family arrangements (early marriage, betrothals), patriarchal relations and homophobia (ICRSE, 2016). Anarfi and Agyei (2009) studied the concept of migration in Ghana and reports that the push factors for female migrants are the need to accumulate resources for marriage, to avoid harmful sociocultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) as well as arranged marriages.

There are three major drivers of migrant sex workers, this include escape of punitive measures, escape from stigma and discrimination and to pursue higher incomes and better living standards (NSWP, 2017). As a consequence of religious and sociopolitical opposition, migrant sex workers constantly migrate in search of safer working conditions. For instance, crackdown on sex workers in China, Bangladesh and Nepal force migrant sex workers to flee to India. Also, sex work is still criminalized in Sub-Saharan Africa (Robinson, 2006). Community bye-laws against sex trade compromises enabling environment for migrant to participate in sex work. In Ukraine, rising HIV/AIDS prevalence is fuelling State protest against migrant sex work (CONNECTA project, 2013).

Transition of migrants into sex work is an issue of vulnerability of the migrants in the said setting. According to the International Organization on migration (IOM), vulnerability is susceptibility to harm among migrants relative to the general population as a consequence of selective exposure to a certain type of risk (in this case, sex work allures and pressures). The exposure factor here is a new opportunity to earn relatively better income through sex work.

The question is can sex work be viewed as just any form of occupation? Sex work has been criminalized in most African countries using sociocultural lens of deduction (Robinson, 2006). The practice of sex for money is frowned upon and has been checked with taboos and community-based bye-laws for eons. Van der Geugten et al (2013), opined that negative cultural attitudes towards sex work in Ghanaian communities have the tendency to ostracize migrant girls who venture into the industry to make a living. Tenni, Carpenter and Thomson (2015) carefully studied the dynamics of Ghanaian prostitution laws and concluded that sex work is deemed criminal. Manoek (2012) observed that in Africa where sex work is deemed illegal, law enforcement agencies capitalize on punitive clauses of the constitution to organize assaults on sex workers.

In the European setting, (X:talk project, 2010) noted that declaring the practice of migrant sex work illegal fueled police raids and frequent immigration task force rescue operations that



resulted in the cloaking of migrant sex work. According to the author, the cloaking of sex work or its clandestine nature is the prerequisite for migrant entrapment in human trafficking, unfair workplace practices and abuses of inhuman degrees.

International Organization on Migration (IOM) in the year 2018 pinpoints that the four (4) dynamics of migrants' susceptibility to entrance into the sex industry are individual factors, family/household factors, community related factors as well as structural/legal factors. The latter encompasses legal instruments foreshadowing the practice of sex work. These dynamics are the various dimensions of push and pull factors that underlie commencement of prostitution among female migrants. According to (ICRSE, 2016), refugees, undocumented female migrants and asylum seekers might be coerced into selling sex as a consequence of poverty, repressive migration laws and lack of employment opportunities.

The work of Kanchana (2017) is an analysis of G20 countries on labour laws and migrants' vulnerability to domestic servitude. According to the author, labour laws in the G20 countries do not cover the activities of domestic migrant workers; increasing their vulnerability to high-risk activities and occupations. Also, Bressan and Abalo (2015) discovered increased vulnerability of migrants under circumstances where accommodation is linked to employment terms giving landlords, employers and other third parties undue control over the lives of migrants. In the same vein, factories and mine works with limited government jurisdiction exposes migrants in such locations to exploitations as observed by (Kharbhih, 2013)

According to (NSWP, 2017), limited social, civic, cultural, labour and legal rights for migrants engineer their marginalization and risk of exploitation including recruitment into sex trade and drug trafficking. In worst case scenarios, migrants might be trafficked across international borders where the state will have little to no control of their wellbeing.

There is little concern for the plight of female migrants and female migrant sex workers in Ghana. The European Union established a charter of rights and privileges for migrant sex workers. Little can be said for the selfsame cohort of persons in African countries. State negligence of at risk groups such as migrants and sex workers compromises well-laid social development plans for urban centers. Scientists and advocates have called for multilevel intervention strategies in dealing with the gender and power factors that increases risk of migrants entering into sex trade and its associated health implications (Weine et al, 2013).

This study aims to assess in detail; a) the prevalence of female migrant sex work in Ghana using the Accra Metropolis as a proxy for all Urban towns, b) the factors that debilitate their entrance into the sex work occupation, c) the organization of migrant sex work.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study design adopted for this study was cross sectional using mixed method approach analysis. The study spanned the period 01/01/2020 to 01/06/2020. Quantitative and qualitative survey methods were used concurrently to elicit data on female migrants' biodata, experiences as migrants' female porters and as migrant sex workers. One-on-one interviews and in-depth key informant interviews were used to gather data with the aid of structured questionnaire, interview guide and key informant interview guide respectively. In this study, one hundred and sixty (160) female migrants were randomly recruited from Tema Lorry station of the Accra





Metropolis. The eligibility criteria for inclusion include being a female migrant within fertile age (Women in fertile age). It was also ensured that eligible participants could speak English, Twi, Dagbani, Ga or any of the major Ghanaian languages commonly used as L1. This set of respondents participated in a general survey involving the use of questionnaire.

Also, twelve (12) female migrants with history of participation in sex work were purposely recruited for in-depth interviews. This encompassed all female migrants who have ever traded sex or sexual intimacy for monetary or in-kind favors. Taking into consideration a pre-studied organization of the sex work modus operandi, potential study participants were identified by research assistants posing as clients soliciting for sex. This allowed trained interviewers to easily identify with the sex work system and gain access to a first set of respondents without toppling the apple cart by causing fear and panic. Sex work is frowned upon and migrant sex workers are envisaged to be in constant lookout for government authority figures or the police.

The first set of migrant sex workers were recruited and employed as liaison to recruit other female migrant sex workers through the snowball effect. Selection and recruitment was done in a fairly controlled manner to avoid bias. All participants were purposefully selected as result of their capacity to provide valid responses on the research instruments. The recruited participants were asked to select a place for the interview that suit their convenience and provides them privacy. Potential participants for both the survey and the in-depth interviews were furnished with information sheets containing the purpose, rational and potential significance of the research. Those who could not read were verbally informed on the content of the said information sheets to be abreast with what the research entails. Afterwards, signed informed consent forms indicated acquiescence to participate in the interviews. These consent forms were obtained from the ethics review board of the University for Development Studies, Tamale. Respondents were assured of the anonymity of their responses through the use of codes instead of actual names.

Forty female migrant sex workers were approached and 32 consented to the interviews. This number was deemed theoretically reliable and sufficient to answer research objectives.

## **Interviews**

All interviews were conducted in English, Twi or any other local language that is considered L1 to respondents. Each interview session was audio-taped with participants' permission and later transcribed in English. The research interview guides focused on the following: socio-demographic characteristics of migrant female porters, experience as migrants, factors that triggered entry into sex work, reproductive health risks as sex workers and finally access to health care services and voluntary counselling and testing services. The data was refined through pilot testing and iterative process of mock data collection and reincorporation of emerging components.

## **Techniques of Data Analysis**

Quantitative survey data was analysed using SPSS v.18 and the findings presented as frequencies, charts, cross tabulation and inferential statistics. A predictor variable was adjudged significant when the p-value of the test of association was less than 0.05. Risk ratio (RR) was adopted as a measure of strength of association between dependent and independent variables. This statistic is the ratio of the cumulative incidence in exposed group by the cumulative incidence in the unexposed group:



$$RR = \frac{CI_e}{CI_u}$$

Where  $CI_e$  is the cumulative incidence in the 'exposed' group and  $CI_u$  is the cumulative incidence in the 'unexposed' group. If the risk ratio is 1 (or close to 1), it suggests no difference or little difference in risk (incidence in each group is the same). A risk ratio  $> 1$  suggests an increased risk of that outcome in the exposed group. A risk ratio  $< 1$  suggests a reduced risk in the exposed group.

Qualitative data were transcribed, coded and emerging themes surmised using Atlas TI software. The dominant themes on female migrant sex work and notable quotes were used to triangulate quantitative data and provide succinct answers to research questions.

## RESULTS

### Socio Demographics Characteristics of Respondents

Female migrants interviewed were 160 with no non-response proportions since the interviews were face-to-face to ensure consent before questionnaire administration starts. Out of that number, 12.9% (21) of respondents were aged 15 to 19 years. Also, 20 to 24 year olds were 25.7% (41) and the majority were 25 to 29 year olds constituting 41.0% (66). Female migrants above 30 years of age were 20.0% (32) of respondents.

Further, using the chi-square test of significance showed that the occurrence of sex work disaggregated by age group was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(1, n = 160) = 21.52, p = .000082$ ). This portray that there was a marked difference in the occurrence of sex work practice between various age categories. A binary analysis of this phenomenon revealed that the teen and adolescent group were less at risk relative to female migrants who are 20 years and above ( $RR=0.79$ , 95% CI: 0.31 – 1.13,  $p= .1120$ ). However, this test was not significant.

Majority of female migrants (i.e 60.0%, 96) presenting at the capital city were single. Close to a fifth of them (19.4%, 31) were cohabiting and 15.6% ( $n = 25$ ) were married. In addition, five percent (8) of respondents were through a divorce. Marital status was not significantly related to female migrant sex work practice given that the p-value for chi-square test of significance was less than 0.05 as shown ( $\chi^2(1, n = 160) = 4.57, p = 0.206$ ).

On educational level attained, Majority of respondents 55.2% ( $n = 88$ ) schooled up to primary school level. This was followed by those who had no formal education at all constituting 25.7% ( $n= 41$ ) of respondents. Respondents who schooled up to JHS level were 17.6% (28) and approximately 3% ( $n= 5$ ) had Senior High School Education.

Educational level was compared with practice of sex work and no statistical significance was attributed to the test ( $\chi^2(1, n = 160) = 0.14, p = 0.99$ ). A binary assessment of those that have ever been to school vis-à-vis those that have no formal education revealed that the relative risk is unity ( $RR=1.02$ , 95% CI: 0.19 – 2.52,  $p=.23$ ). This indicates that any association between education and involvement in sex work might purely be as a result of chance occurrence.

Christians made up 28.1% (45) of respondents while Muslims were 71.9% (115). Further comparison between religion and sex work practice showed a significant relationship between



the two variables ( $\chi^2(1, n = 160) = 9.48, p = .0021$ ). This means that there is a significant difference in the level of sex work practice based on the religion of the respondent.

**Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Socio-demographic variable (n=160)	Count	Percentage [%]
<b>Age categories</b>		
15 to 19	21	12.9
20 to 24	41	25.7
25 to 29	66	41.0
30 & above	32	20.0
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	96	60.0
Married	25	15.6
Cohabiting	31	19.4
Divorced	8	5.0
<b>Education</b>		
No formal education	41	25.7
Prim	88	55.2
JHS	28	17.6
SHS/Vocational	5	2.9
<b>Ethnicity (n=160)</b>		
Dagomba	58	36.2
Mamprusi	68	42.4
Tamplinsi	36	22.4
Others	3	1.9
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	45	28.1
Muslim	115	71.9

*Field Work, 2019.*

**Table 2: Occurrence of Sex Work by Socio-Demographic Characteristics**

Socio-demographic factor	Have you ever engaged in sexual intercourse for money?			Inferential statistics
	Yes	No	Total	
10 to 14	3 (11.8)	18 (9.19)	21	$\chi^2(1, n = 160) = 21.52, p = .000082$
15 to 19	27 (23.06)	14 (17.9)	41	
20 to 24	45 (37.12)	21 (28.88)	66	
25 & above	15 (18.00)	17 (14.00)	32	
Marital status (n=160)				





Single	54 (53.3)	42 (42.7)	96	$(\chi^2(1, n = 160) = 4.57, p = .206).$
Married	10 (14.4)	15 (11.6)	25	
Cohabiting	21 (17.8)	10 (14.2)	31	
Divorced	5 (4.4)	3 (3.6)	8	
Education (n=160)				
No formal education	23 (22.5)	17 (17.5)	41	$(\chi^2(1, n = 160) = 0.14, p = .99)$
Prim	49 (48.9)	38 (38.1)	88	
JHS	15 (15.8)	13 (12.2)	28	
SHS/Vocational	3 (2.8)	2 (2.2)	5	
Religion				
Christian	34 (25.3)	11 (19.7)	45	$(\chi^2(1, n = 160) = 9.48, p = .0021)$
Muslim	56 (64.7)	59 (50.3)	115	

*Field Work, 2019*

### Female Migrant experiences and Wellbeing

A myriad of reasons underlies the presence of female migrants in the city. The study results showed that 65.2% of respondents migrated to the city because of economic reasons; of that proportion, 12.8% reported that they could not stand the poverty in their families and thus moved to seek greener pastures. Almost 5% of female migrants said they came to Accra because what their friends told them about the city and the trophies their friends brought back.

Family circumstances and threat of arranged marriages also forced 25% of female migrants to come to the city. The remaining 9.8% of female migrants stated that they moved to the city as a result of inadequacy of employment opportunities in their rural environs coupled with disturbance by boys.

The predictors of female migration disaggregated by age category revealed that; the majority of respondents that moved to seek greener pastures were under 20 years of age. This entails, movement to work and earn income for their individual benefit and those of poor families back home. Among this generation of female migrants, some come to the city as a result of the perceived glitter and glamour of city life. Those over 20 years of age migrate for the money and other more mature reasons. One of them include fleeing family pressure to marry, bad sociocultural practices and prospecting for sustainable employment like learning hair dressing, tailoring and cosmetic production among others.

The female migrant's life and experiences in the city consists of involvement in various occupations. The predominant occupation is head porting of goods (*Kayayei*) for people in the hustle and bustle of city life. This include people who are doing shopping, trading and travelling with heavy luggage. Other occupations include street hawking for retail and wholesale storekeepers, learning trades and handwork among much more structured migrants and being store assistants. The female migrants spend the whole day standing in the markets, close to supermarkets, at lorry parks/bus stops and at street corners of busy streets for luggage to haul on their heads. This is their major work that female migrants are known for.



The feeding, healthcare, accommodation, cost of using places of convenience and daily protection fee to senior porters all comes from their proceeds from *Kayayei*. The proceeds from their daily haulage of goods is seldom enough to cater for all expenses. In a city where some of them have little social support networks as well as family, the burden could be overwhelming.

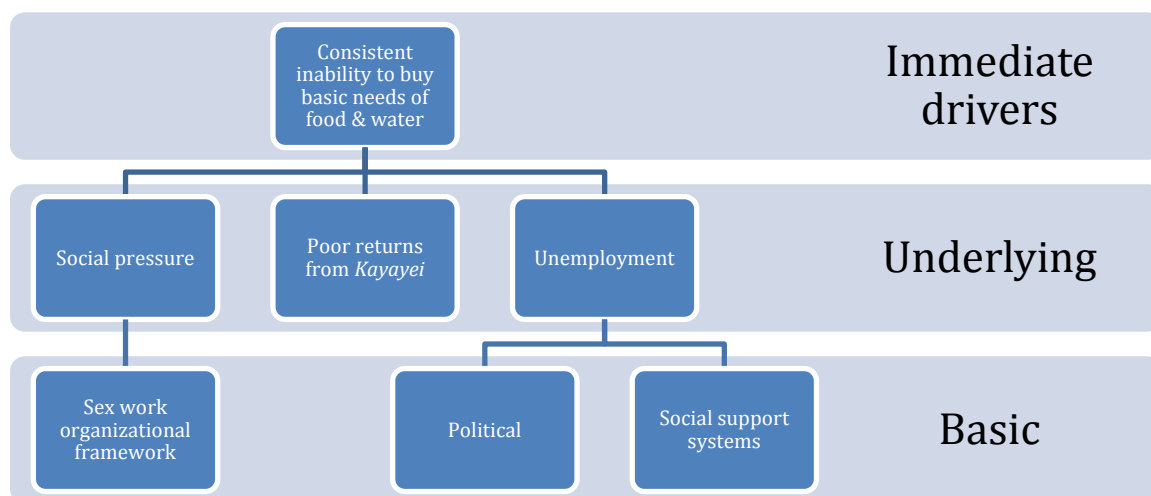
### Prevalence of Sex Work Practice among Respondents

The practice of sex work was measured by asking the question; “Did you or do you have sexual intercourse with people for money sometimes?” It was not a question most respondents easily answered. Others did amidst emotion and on one or more occasion the interview came to an abrupt halt at that point in data administration. The findings gleamed showed that 56.2% (90) of respondents were into the sex trade as against 43.8% (70) of female migrants that were into the mainstream head porting of goods (*Kayayei*). This portrayed that more than half of all female immigrants into the city are roped into sex work.

Meta-analysis of respondents’ involvement in sex work in relation to their background characteristics such as age, educational level attained, marital status, and religion showed that; any respondent’s involvement in sex work was significantly associated to their age and religion. On disparities with respect to age, it was found out that female migrant workers less than 20 years of age were less at risk of joining the sex trade compared to those beyond 20 years of age.

### Factors That Mediate Female Migrant Porters Entry into Sex Trade

The factors that show varied nexuses with prevalence of migrant sex work could be classified as immediate, underlying and basic risks. The immediate risks have a tendency to agree with Maslow’s theory of hierarchical needs. This theorem stipulates that basic needs such as food, water, shelter and safety among others must of necessity be met before people persevere to actualize themselves. The study findings showed that the lot of female migrants hardly makes ends meet per day of business activities. Therefore, basic needs such as food, water and places to sleep are a problem.





Money concerns is crosscutting as a the most significant predictor for both migrations to the city and entry into sex work. In most instances, it is the need for it to defray debts, pay utilities, afford daily necessities and save some for remittance purposes. However, for more ambitious female migrants, it is the zeal to acquire money for properties that will guarantee a permanently comfortable lifestyle of less work and pleasure.

The underlying factors uncovered through key informant interviews were social pressure to join the sex business, consistently poor returns from *Kayayei* and unemployment in the form of transient unavailability of work for the head porters.

From the study findings, female migrants were constantly under pressure from peers and seniors in the practice of sex work to join the business. In addition, that, subtle coercion and influence was reported to be coming from an already organized system behind the sex industry. This consisted of pressure from *mbeli* (senior & resident female migrants), neighborhood thugs (acting as pimps), male migrants of the same tribal descent as the female migrants and bosses in the actual sex trade.

Furthermore, transient unemployment was found to be bothersome for the female migrants who thrive on their daily earnings. Respondents stipulated that the residents of the city have grown accustomed to carrying their own weights (in the literal sense). Women who come to the market to buy provisions in bulk come with their own cars and in some cases, they prefer the services of male migrants who use wheel barrows. Added to this was the fear of theft owing to rising crime rates in the city.

Another source of unemployment was the incidence of the Corona Virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The prescribed prevention protocols which included locked down of the Accra Metropolis, social distancing, and stay home campaigns brought business as head porters to an abrupt halt.

*“The last day of active work was on the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March, 2020 when everyone was cautioned to stockpile food stuff and provisions for the lockdown. And now, two months after the lockdown restriction were eased, business is still slow”*

On basic factors, various social, legal, economic and political variables were shown to be at play in female migrants’ lives that act as drivers into the sex work industry. Some of these factors deduced from extracts of key informant interviews were as follows; open disrespect and derision for female migrants, difficulty accessing health services, lack of state support and protection under both gender realms and migrant work occupational rights, poverty and urban restrictions.

*The coronavirus pandemic has push some of us into sex work. We used to sleep in groups in front of shops but with the outbreak of the virus we are forced to look for accommodation. Some of us exchange sex for accommodation and other work as sex workers to gain two things that is nightly charge of twenty Ghana cedis and a place to pass the night*

One factor of social occlusion and stigmatization that female migrants are constantly battling is derision of these migrants on racial and occupational grounds. Although there have been no physical assaults, the verbal and gestural contempt exists affecting female migrants emotionally and psychologically. The vast majority of them were from the northern parts of



the nation, Ghana. This study finding portray that the name calling used on migrants of Northern descent have far graver consequences than is let on. According to one of the respondents;

*“There are sometimes, I just want to get up, pack what I have and go back home. However, I have been working for over a year now as a head porter and I still don’t have what I came to work for. So I cannot just go yet. They will have to call me ‘Teniii’ until they tire themselves out.”*

This factor served as an impetus for female migrants to strive to better themselves economically but any means necessary. One of the readily available means is to indulge in sex work.

More so, inadequate economic access to essential social services such as health care informed the entrance of many female migrants into sex work. Optimum health is necessary for wellbeing and livelihood. Female migrants have difficulty accessing health services owing their lack of health insurance, inadequacy of funds to pay for services, language barrier with health professionals and plain fear of hospitals. Thus, these female migrants do what they can to obtain enough money to pay for hospital bills and access basic primary health care services.

There is little state support for female migrants. According to them, several Non-Governmental Organizations in one way or the other tried to take female migrants off the streets with self-help initiatives like dress making, hair dressing, bakery and pastry making among others. However, such programmes lacked the needed sustainability to pass out their trainees and recruit new ones. The ministry of Gender, Women and Social Protection hardly rolls out any projects to the benefit of migrant girls. Apparently, the agencies interested in their matters are shady recruitment agencies for foreign countries and individual agents popularly referred to as “connection man”. However, these migrant girls have heard too many stories and ordeals of human trafficked victims to be deceived.

The consequence of poor state intervention is Metropolitan cities over run with migrant girls seeking life and livelihoods in foreign territories. These predispose the girls to organizers of sex work, human traffickers, drug peddlers and foreign companies that exact a great deal of human labour for little pay. The industries like the sex trade that ply on innocent migrant girls are not under the auspice of National labour laws leaving their workers at every whim and caprice of their employers.

### **Organization of Sex Work in Ghana**

The findings of this study also shed light on the systemic organization of the practice of sex work including the modus operandi of migrant workers. It was uncovered that sex workers in general were in categories, the lone rangers who were not attached to any networks and those recruited into a network or organized body of sex workers. The latter group is usually headed by a “Boss man or woman” who works with local thugs akin to pimps. The lone rangers are constantly pressured to join the organized bodies.

Female migrant sex workers reported that in most instances when they run out of money for basic necessities, their prelude to sex trade occurs under circumstances where they ask for help from migrant boys of like tribes as they are. It begins with the “boys” asking for sexual exchanges in place of whatever cash or in-kind favours they provide the migrant girls.



However, given that the *Kayayei* and these boys are from the same tribe and probably from same villages, the affairs are kept secret.

Female migrant sex workers who got emboldened to join the full scale street hawking of their bodies at night did so under consistent financial strain and inability to fend for themselves. They start off as lone rangers and are later recruited into sex work gangs through the influence of pimps, friends who are already practicing and seniors in the migrant work (*Kayayei*).

In an interview with one of the *kayayei* who doubled as a sex worker reported as follows:

*“Hmm I came here to work as a kayayei but one of my friends who is a sex worker and makes a lot of money introduce me to sex trade. She told me that it is the only and easy way of making money. I joined the sex trade and now I do not carry the load anymore and the money I make in a month is three times more than what I use to make as a kayayei”*

## DISCUSSIONS

The socio-demographic distribution of female migrants illustrates that female migrants were mostly in the age ranges of 25-29 years (41%), unmarried (60%) and had up to primary school level education. The lot of them were also Muslims relative to other religious sects. Persons less than 20 years constituted 12.9% of the total number of female migrants. Also, age and religion were found to be significant predictors of female migrants' involvement in sex work. Female migrants who were less than 20 years were less likely to participate in sex work compared to those with ages above 20 years. The immediate driver of female migrants towards sex work was inability to cater for daily necessities in the midst of a strange community where familial and community support are distant. The age range 25 to 29 years can be classified as adulthood. However, past researches observed that migrants in the city are predominantly young and female. This present study's findings associated adult female migrants with moving as a result of financial concerns, marital pressure from family and learning sustainable trades. Some of the trades they indulge in includes learning hand-work and crafts, decorations and event planning, hair dressing, tailoring and petty trading among others. Also, female migrants were mostly unmarried according to this present study's findings. Age category and religion were found to be significantly correlated with indulging in sex work.

This study is in consonance with that of Cwikel J. (200) that a number of studies have assessed the predictors for entry into sex trade. Some of which are cultural, financial motivation and childhood sexual and physical abuse. The study also supported that of Cusick, L (2002) that revealed that loss of self-worth and disrupted family life, homeless and the experience of on the street are the main push factors that pushes these young girls into sex trade.

## CONCLUSION

Female migrant head porters transit to sex work as a result of economic hardships and inadequacy of job opportunities in the city. Gender as well economic inequality discrimination between the people of the origin and the migrant female porters and the residential status are





said to be the driving forces that make the migrants female head porters to transit to sex work in the city of Accra. A holistic approach which addresses unemployment and poverty as well as discrimination between the migrants and the people of the source city is needed to address the issue of migrant sex workers in Accra and beyond. The study revealed that some of the migrant female porters are forced into sex work because of lack of accommodation at their destination. Regardless the factors responsible for migrant to start sex work at their destination, migrants have agency and choices in rendering sexual services as an essential livelihood strategy for many migrants both local and international. It is important for migrants to access decent accommodation at their destination. Underlying this problem were social pressure to join sex work, poor returns from *Kayayei* and transient unemployment. Poor state support for migrants (bordering on negligence), limited economic empowerment programmes for female migrants, inadequate access to healthcare and sex work organizational modus operandi were the basic determinants of female migrants' entry into sex work. There is a high rate of migrant turn-over to sex work and this is mediated by an overlay factors. Primary among them is the nuances associated with immediate gratification of basic needs. *Kayayei* earn very little and this fact was aggravated by the emergence of COVID – 19 with its itinerant restrictive measures for all including female migrants. Social pressure from older migrants with sex trade experience as well as the sex business networks is another predicting factor that explained the draft in to sex work. Underlying all this is the problem of limited state support and provisions for keeping female migrant girls off the streets. *Kayayei* are vulnerable on two fronts; the unprofitability and unsustainable nature of head porting employment as well as the pull to join sex work in the city of Accra.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the authors made the following conclusions toward migrant wellbeing and policy interventions:

*Kayayei* should create self-help groups, pool resources and information to serve as first line of protection against female migrant vulnerability to entrance into sex work.

The Government of Ghana in tandem with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly should endeavor to separate *kayayei* occupation from the influences of the sex trade in the city.

The state should take control of the migrant situation: The Ministry of Women, Gender and Social Protection should set up state monitored homeless shelters for female migrants in Accra with occasional free meals and spending stipends. In addition, counseling, skills training and job recruitment services must be provided to female migrants to better integrate them into meaningful living within the city.

Policy provisions and state interventions should be initiated to permanently salvage *kayayei* off the streets. The police and security services must be initiate interface meetings with female migrants to reduce fear-factor towards them and create grounds for firmer protection of female migrants especially those of young ages.

## Funding

This project was self-financed by the authors



## Acknowledgement

The authors appreciate the views of all the migrant female porters and the opinion leaders which made this study a success.

## Competing interests

The authors declared no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship and publication of this study.

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