

Assessing the Contribution of NAPTIP's Interventions to Public Awareness of Human Trafficking in Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

Human trafficking remains a major social and human rights challenge in Nigeria despite sustained government efforts to combat the crime through prevention, protection, and prosecution initiatives. This study assessed the contribution of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP)'s interventions to public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, Nigeria. The study was anchored on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory and adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population comprised 1,406,776 registered voters in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, from which the researchers selected a sample of 384 respondents using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. The researchers retrieved and analysed 379 valid questionnaires using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. The findings showed that NAPTIP's interventions have positively contributed to increasing public awareness of human trafficking, with a grand mean of 3.26, indicating respondents' agreement that the agency's campaigns have enhanced public knowledge. Specifically, respondents agreed that NAPTIP's awareness campaigns increased their knowledge of human trafficking (Mean = 3.41), exposed them to anti-trafficking messages through various communication channels (Mean = 3.39), and improved awareness through school and community sensitisation programmes (Mean = 3.34). The study concludes that although NAPTIP's interventions have improved public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, gaps remain in the accessibility of awareness campaigns and knowledge of reporting channels among some segments of the population. The study recommends that NAPTIP expand awareness campaigns to underserved communities, strengthen the use of digital and local-language communication platforms, and receive increased government support to sustain and periodically evaluate its public enlightenment programmes for greater effectiveness.

Keywords: Human trafficking, NAPTIP, public awareness, awareness campaigns, Diffusion of Innovations Theory, Abuja, Nigeria.

Introduction

Human trafficking remains one of the most pervasive violations of human dignity in the contemporary world, affecting an estimated tens of millions of people across both developed and developing nations. Otite (2023) described human trafficking as a modern form of slavery, involving the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons through force, coercion, deception, or abuse of vulnerability, for purposes of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude, and organ removal.

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol), which supplements the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, remains the foundational international instrument defining trafficking and obligating signatory states to adopt prevention, protection, and prosecution measures (United Nations, 2020). Nigeria occupies a particularly troubling position in the global trafficking landscape, functioning simultaneously as a source, transit, and destination country for trafficked persons (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

Nigerian women and girls have been widely documented as victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, particularly along established routes to Europe, notably Italy, while internal trafficking for

domestic servitude, street hawking, and forced labour persists across the country's urban centres (Aghatise, 2024). According to Adepoju (2025), poverty, weak family structures, low educational attainment, and cultural practices around fostering and apprenticeship have historically combined to make Nigerian children and young women especially vulnerable to traffickers who exploit the promise of better economic opportunities elsewhere.

In response to mounting international pressure and the scale of the domestic trafficking problem, the Nigerian government established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in 2003, later strengthened by the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act of 2015 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015). Okojie (2019) opined that NAPTIP was granted a broad mandate encompassing the prevention of trafficking, protection and rehabilitation of victims. It also prosecutes offenders and has since expanded its operations to include a strong public enlightenment and awareness component, delivered through school outreach programmes, media campaigns, community sensitisation exercises, and partnerships with civil society organisations.

Abuja, as the Federal Capital Territory and Nigeria's administrative nerve centre, offers a unique context for examining the effectiveness of these awareness interventions. The city's rapid urbanisation, high population influx from surrounding states, informal settlements, and status as a hub for domestic and international travel make it both a significant transit point and a site of heightened vulnerability, particularly for young migrants seeking employment. Over the years, NAPTIP's zonal command in Abuja has intensified awareness campaigns targeting schools, motor parks, religious institutions, and market associations. However, anecdotal and survey evidence suggests that public knowledge of trafficking indicators, reporting channels, and NAPTIP's existence and functions remains inconsistent across population segments (UNODC, 2020).

This gap between institutional effort and measurable public awareness raises important empirical questions. While government reports and NAPTIP's own publications routinely highlight statistics on rescued victims, prosecutions secured, and enlightenment programmes conducted, independent scholarly assessment of whether these interventions have translated into a genuinely more informed and vigilant public in Abuja remains comparatively limited. Without such assessment, it becomes difficult to determine whether current strategies are reaching the populations most at risk, whether messaging is being retained and acted upon, or whether resources devoted to public enlightenment are yielding proportionate returns. Against this background, this study investigated the contribution of NAPTIP's interventions to public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, with a view to generating evidence-based insights to strengthen future anti-trafficking enlightenment strategies in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite NAPTIP's establishment over two decades ago and its sustained investment in public enlightenment programmes across Abuja, human trafficking continues to persist, with recruitment, transit, and exploitation cases still being reported alongside these interventions. This persistence raises a fundamental concern: NAPTIP's enlightenment activities appear concentrated in identifiable institutional settings such as schools, motor parks, and religious centres, while migrants in informal settlements, domestic workers, and residents of peri-urban satellite towns, arguably among those most vulnerable to trafficking, may fall largely outside the reach of these structured campaigns. Where the populations most exposed to trafficking risk are the least reached by current messaging, the overall protective value of these interventions is called into question, regardless of how frequently campaigns are conducted elsewhere.

Compounding this is a notable disconnect between the volume of NAPTIP's reported activities and the depth of independent evidence confirming their actual effect on public knowledge. Existing reports

emphasise outputs, such as the number of campaigns held or schools visited, rather than outcomes- that is, whether residents can correctly identify trafficking indicators, understand reporting channels, or retain campaign messages over time. Without such outcome-focused, independent assessment, it remains unclear whether NAPTIP's awareness interventions are producing genuine, measurable improvement in public vigilance in Abuja or merely fulfilling procedural obligations, leaving policymakers and the agency itself without an empirical basis for refining strategy. This study addresses this gap between institutional activity and demonstrated public awareness outcomes.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which NAPTIP's interventions have contributed to increasing public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, Nigeria.

Research Question

To what extent have NAPTIP's interventions contributed to increasing public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory developed by Everett M. Rogers (2003). The theory explains how new ideas, knowledge, and innovations spread through a population over time using various communication channels. It posits that adopting new information depends on communication effectiveness, audience characteristics, and the social system in which information is shared. Rogers identified communication channels, time, innovation, and the social system as the key elements that determine the successful diffusion of information. The theory also emphasises that mass media, interpersonal communication, opinion leaders, and community networks play significant roles in raising awareness and influencing behavioural change.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory is appropriate for this study because NAPTIP employs diverse communication channels, including mass media campaigns, school sensitisation programmes, community outreach, religious institutions, and social media, to disseminate information on human trafficking. The theory provides a basis for assessing whether these interventions have effectively increased public awareness by improving residents' knowledge of trafficking indicators, reporting mechanisms, and NAPTIP's anti-trafficking efforts. Because the study examines the extent to which NAPTIP's awareness campaigns have influenced public understanding of human trafficking in Abuja, the theory provides a suitable framework for explaining the relationship between NAPTIP's interventions and public awareness.

Empirical Review

Bello and Okonjo (2025) examined the effectiveness of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in combating human trafficking in Nigeria. The study primarily aimed to evaluate NAPTIP's enforcement mechanisms, including rescues, prosecutions, and victim reintegration efforts. The authors employed a comparative case study design, drawing on experiences from Nigeria and similar agencies in Ghana and South Africa to assess NAPTIP's performance. This qualitative study used a thematic analysis of case studies from various anti-trafficking agencies to derive key insights. It identified challenges faced by NAPTIP, such as resource constraints, judicial delays, and gaps in victim support, which hinder the agency's effectiveness. The study also highlighted best practices in combating human trafficking, including integrating technology and community reintegration programmes, as shown by successful initiatives in Ghana and South Africa.

Okereke et al. (2023) investigate the drivers of cross-border human trafficking and their impact on security in the Seme-Idiroko border communities. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, including

surveys, in-depth interviews, and secondary data analysis. The findings highlight that poverty, lack of effective border security, and the porous nature of the Seme-Idiroko borders contribute significantly to the high rates of human trafficking in these areas. The study recommends stronger security measures and poverty-alleviation programmes to address the root causes of trafficking. Data were analysed using weighted averages, narrative analysis, and relational-content analysis, offering a comprehensive view of the issue in the border communities. While the study focuses on cross-border trafficking, it offers valuable insights into how NAPTIP's interventions can be tailored to address these drivers better.

Zhang and Price (2024) conducted a study on diagnosing human trafficking victims in a global context. The study aimed to review global efforts to define and identify trafficking cases, focusing on health-related diagnostic criteria. It explored international definitions of trafficking and aimed to establish standardised clinical and public health indicators to improve diagnostic accuracy and victim identification globally. The methodology includes a review of key studies and global data on human trafficking definitions and diagnostic practices.

The study proposed that developing a consensus on trafficking definitions and diagnostic criteria, similar to the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) approach, will improve global tracking and comparison of trafficking prevalence. The study found that a lack of standardised diagnostic criteria complicates global efforts to collect comparable trafficking data. Zhang and Price recommended the adoption of common clinical indicators to facilitate better identification and support for trafficking victims.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The quantitative population comprised 1,406,776 registered voters in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, based on the INEC register. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, the quantitative component adopted a sample size of 384 registered voters.

A multistage sampling technique was employed to select respondents across the FCT. In the first stage, the FCT was stratified into its six Area Councils to ensure geographical representation. In the second stage, wards or communities were selected from the Area Councils using proportionate sampling, such that the number of respondents selected reflected the relative population distribution of the respective areas. In the third stage, registered voters within the selected wards or communities were selected using simple random or systematic sampling. This procedure ensured geographical coverage across the FCT and improved sample representativeness.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed NAPTIP Interventions in Human Trafficking Questionnaire (NIHTQ). The questionnaire was structured into sections containing items designed to obtain respondents' views on NAPTIP's interventions and their contribution to public awareness of human trafficking. The items were measured using a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The four-point scale was adopted to obtain clear responses without a neutral midpoint.

A total of 384 questionnaires were administered, out of which 379 were retrieved, representing a 98.7% response rate. The 379 retrieved questionnaires constituted the basis for the data analysis.

The instrument was subjected to expert review to establish its content validity, yielding a reported validity index of 0.82. A pilot test established its reliability, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency.

Before administering the questionnaire, respondents were informed of the study's purpose and assured that their responses would be treated confidentially and anonymously. Participation was voluntary, and the information obtained was used strictly for academic purposes. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages and mean scores. For the four-point scale, a mean of 2.50 and above was interpreted as Agree, while a mean below 2.50 was interpreted as Disagree.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question: To what extent have NAPTIP's interventions contributed to increasing public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, Nigeria?

Table 1

Extent to Which NAPTIP's Interventions Have Increased Public Awareness of Human Trafficking

S/N	Statement	Mean	Decision
1	NAPTIP campaigns have increased my knowledge of human trafficking.	3.41	Agree
2	I understand the signs of human trafficking because of NAPTIP awareness programmes.	3.28	Agree
3	I know where to report suspected trafficking cases.	3.19	Agree
4	NAPTIP's media campaigns are easily accessible.	3.05	Agree
5	School and community sensitisation programmes have improved public awareness.	3.34	Agree
6	NAPTIP collaborates effectively with the media to educate the public.	3.16	Agree
7	I have personally seen or heard NAPTIP awareness messages.	3.39	Agree
8	NAPTIP interventions have reduced ignorance about human trafficking.	3.27	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.26	Agree

The findings indicate that respondents generally agreed that NAPTIP's interventions have contributed to increasing public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, with a grand mean of 3.26. Respondents particularly agreed that NAPTIP campaigns have increased knowledge of human trafficking (Mean = 3.41) and that they have seen or heard awareness messages disseminated by the agency (Mean = 3.39). They also agreed that school and community sensitisation programmes have enhanced public awareness (Mean = 3.34). Overall, the findings suggest that NAPTIP's awareness interventions have made a positive contribution to public knowledge of human trafficking among residents of Abuja.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that NAPTIP's interventions have positively contributed to increasing public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, Nigeria, with an overall grand mean of 3.26 indicating respondents' agreement that the agency's awareness programmes have enhanced public knowledge.

Respondents particularly agreed that NAPTIP campaigns have increased their knowledge of human trafficking, exposed them to awareness messages through various media, and improved understanding through school and community sensitisation programmes. These findings suggest that NAPTIP's sustained public enlightenment efforts have succeeded in disseminating information about human trafficking and have contributed to improving awareness among residents of the Federal Capital Territory. The outcome is consistent with the assumptions of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003), which posits that effective communication through multiple channels facilitates the spread and adoption of new knowledge and behavioural change. NAPTIP's use of mass media, schools, religious institutions, and community-based campaigns appears to have enhanced the diffusion of anti-trafficking information among the public.

The findings corroborate Bello and Okonjo (2025), who reported that NAPTIP has made significant progress in combating human trafficking through awareness campaigns, victim rescue initiatives, and community engagement programmes. Their study emphasised that public enlightenment remains one of the agency's strongest preventive strategies despite operational challenges such as inadequate funding and judicial delays. Similarly, the present study shows that respondents reported increased knowledge of trafficking indicators and greater awareness of NAPTIP's activities, suggesting that the agency's educational interventions are achieving their intended preventive objectives. Likewise, the findings align with UNODC (2020), which observed that sustained public awareness campaigns are among the most effective approaches to reducing vulnerability to trafficking by empowering citizens with knowledge of recruitment tactics, reporting mechanisms, and available support services.

The result is also supported by the findings of Zhang and Price (2024), who argued that increasing public understanding of human trafficking is essential for improving victim identification and early reporting. According to the authors, awareness programmes help the public recognise trafficking indicators and enable timely intervention by relevant authorities. The respondents' agreement that they now understand the signs of human trafficking and know where suspected cases can be reported lends empirical support to this assertion. This suggests that NAPTIP's awareness interventions are contributing not only to general knowledge but also to strengthening the public's capacity to identify and respond appropriately to trafficking-related incidents.

Furthermore, the findings align with Okojie (2019), who argued that NAPTIP's shift from enforcement to extensive public enlightenment campaigns has improved public engagement in anti-trafficking efforts across Nigeria. The present study similarly found that respondents had widely encountered NAPTIP awareness messages and acknowledged the effectiveness of school and community sensitisation programmes. This indicates that the agency's collaborative approach involving educational institutions, community organisations, and the media has enhanced the visibility of anti-trafficking messages among Abuja residents.

However, while the findings show positive outcomes, they only partially support UNODC (2020), which noted that despite increased awareness campaigns, public understanding of trafficking indicators and reporting channels remains uneven across population groups. Although respondents in this study generally agreed that NAPTIP interventions have improved awareness, the relatively moderate mean scores for accessibility of media campaigns (Mean = 3.05) and knowledge of reporting channels (Mean = 3.19) suggest that awareness has not reached an optimal level. This implies that certain vulnerable populations may still have limited access to NAPTIP's enlightenment programmes, thereby validating the concern raised by UNODC regarding disparities in awareness coverage.

Conclusion

This study assessed the contribution of NAPTIP's interventions to public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, Nigeria. The findings showed that NAPTIP's awareness initiatives have positively contributed to improving public knowledge of human trafficking, as respondents generally agreed that the agency's campaigns have increased their understanding of trafficking, enhanced recognition of trafficking indicators, and improved awareness of reporting mechanisms. The findings further show that NAPTIP's use of multiple communication platforms, including mass media, school sensitisation programmes, and community outreach, has improved the dissemination of anti-trafficking information among Abuja residents, supporting the Diffusion of Innovations Theory's assumption that effective communication facilitates the spread of knowledge.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also revealed that public awareness has not yet reached an optimal level, particularly regarding the accessibility of awareness campaigns and knowledge of reporting channels. This suggests that some vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations may still have limited exposure to NAPTIP's enlightenment programmes. The study therefore concludes that while NAPTIP's interventions have positively contributed to increasing public awareness of human trafficking in Abuja, there remains a need to strengthen the coverage, inclusiveness, and sustainability of awareness campaigns to ensure that anti-trafficking information reaches all segments of the population and further enhances prevention efforts.

Recommendations

- i. NAPTIP should expand its public enlightenment campaigns to underserved and high-risk communities such as informal settlements, satellite towns, motor parks, and locations with large migrant populations by adopting community-based outreach strategies in collaboration with traditional rulers, religious leaders, community-based organisations, and local government authorities.
- ii. NAPTIP should strengthen its communication strategy by increasing the use of digital platforms, local language radio and television programmes, social media, and mobile awareness campaigns to improve the accessibility of anti-trafficking messages and ensure that residents are adequately informed about trafficking indicators, reporting channels, and available victim support services.
- iii. The Federal Government and relevant stakeholders should provide increased financial, technical, and institutional support to NAPTIP to enable the agency to sustain regular awareness campaigns, periodically evaluate the effectiveness of its public enlightenment programmes, and use evidence from such evaluations to improve the design and impact of future anti-human trafficking interventions.

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