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International Borders and Human Trafficking in Taraba State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
International borders play a significant role in facilitating movement, trade, and social interaction among nations; however, they also create opportunities for transnational crimes such as human trafficking. This study examines the relationship between international borders and human trafficking in Taraba State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on how border conditions, migration patterns, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and security challenges contribute to trafficking activities. Taraba State's location near Nigeria's international boundary with Cameroon, coupled with its porous border routes and rural communities, creates conditions that are exploited by trafficking networks. Previous studies have identified Adamawa and Taraba as vulnerable areas where trafficking routes extend through Cameroon and other destinations, particularly affecting women and children. The study examines the factors responsible for the persistence of human trafficking across border areas, the methods employed by traffickers, the experiences of victims, and the effectiveness of existing border control and anti-trafficking measures. It adopts a qualitative research approach that involves analyzing relevant literature and official reports, and conducting interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including security agencies, community leaders, and anti-trafficking organizations. The study found that weak border surveillance, poverty, unemployment, limited awareness, and inadequate coordination among enforcement agencies increase the vulnerability of communities to trafficking. The study recommended that the Taraba State government should strengthen border management strategies through improved surveillance technology to reduce human trafficking across border communities in the State.

Keywords: *International borders, human trafficking, border security, migration, Taraba State, Nigeria.*

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Introduction

Human trafficking has arisen as one of the most pervasive forms of transnational organized crime and a grave violation of human rights across the world. The crime involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons through force, coercion, deception, abuse of power, or exploitation for purposes such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced marriage, child labour, and organ removal (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2024). Unlike traditional crimes, human trafficking is sustained by complex interactions amid poverty, unemployment, weak governance, irregular migration, globalization, armed conflict, and the growing demand for cheap labour and commercial sexual exploitation (Limoncelli, 2009; Motseki & Mofokeng, 2022). Globalization has significantly increased the movement of people, goods, and services across international borders, creating enormous opportunities for economic integration and regional development. However, these developments have also facilitated the expansion of transnational criminal networks, including human trafficking syndicates, which exploit weak border controls and vulnerable populations. Scholars argue that international borders have become strategic transit corridors through which traffickers recruit, transport, and exploit victims within and across countries (Limoncelli, 2009). Consequently, border governance has become an important component of international efforts to combat human trafficking.

In Africa, the challenge of human trafficking has been aggravated by porous borders, weak migration governance, political instability, poverty, and inadequate institutional capacity. Many African countries possess long, poorly monitored international boundaries characterized by numerous unofficial crossing points, limited security infrastructure, and extensive socio-cultural interactions among border communities. These conditions facilitate irregular migration and create favourable environments for traffickers to transport victims across national boundaries with minimal risk of detection (Obikaeze et al., 2021). Regional economic integration and the free movement of persons within parts of Africa have further increased cross-border mobility, making effective border management an increasingly important issue in anti-trafficking efforts. Nigeria occupies a strategic geographical position in West and Central Africa, sharing international boundaries with the Republic of Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. While these borders promote regional trade and cultural integration, they also present significant security challenges due to their extensive length and numerous illegal crossing routes. Human trafficking has become one of the transnational crimes associated with poor border governance in Nigeria, with victims trafficked internally and across international borders for forced labour, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, child begging, forced marriage, and other exploitative purposes (Ifeanyi-Aneke et al., 2021). The persistence of these crimes has continued despite the establishment of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and other institutional responses aimed at preventing trafficking and protecting victims.

Several scholars have argued that porous international borders remain one of the major factors facilitating human trafficking in Nigeria. Weak border surveillance, inadequate logistics, shortage of security personnel, corruption, poor inter-agency collaboration, and insufficient intelligence gathering have reduced the effectiveness of border management. Consequently, traffickers exploit unofficial routes to evade immigration controls and transport victims across international boundaries (Obikaeze et al., 2021). Similarly, Idris et al. (2025) contend that reliance on conventional border surveillance alone has proved inadequate in addressing trafficking because traffickers continually adapt their operational strategies by

utilizing remote and unregulated border communities. The authors therefore advocate community-based border policing as a complementary strategy to improve intelligence gathering and disrupt trafficking networks. Taraba State occupies a unique strategic position within Nigeria because it shares an extensive international boundary with the Republic of Cameroon. The state's border is characterized by mountainous landscapes, forests, rivers, and numerous informal crossing routes that connect communities on both sides of the international boundary. Historically, these communities have maintained strong ethnic, cultural, commercial, and family relationships that encourage regular cross-border movement. Although these interactions contribute to economic development and social cohesion, they also present opportunities for criminal networks engaged in human trafficking, migrant smuggling, arms trafficking, and other transnational crimes to exploit weak border governance mechanisms (Idris et al., 2025).

In addition to geographical vulnerabilities, Taraba State has experienced various socio-economic and security challenges that increase the risk of human trafficking. Persistent poverty, youth unemployment, limited educational opportunities, communal conflicts, farmer-herder clashes, internal displacement, and inadequate infrastructure have contributed to increased vulnerability among women, children, and unemployed youths. Individuals facing economic hardship are also persuaded by traffickers through false promises of employment, education, marriage, or migration opportunities both within Nigeria and abroad (Motseki & Mofokeng, 2022; Limoncelli, 2009). Furthermore, the transboundary nature of many communities along the Nigeria-Cameroon border complicates border control efforts. Consequently, frequent movement for farming, trading, religious activities, and family visits often occurs through unofficial routes that are difficult for immigration authorities to monitor effectively. Criminal groups may exploit these established movement patterns to conceal trafficking activities, making detection and prosecution more difficult. The interaction between porous borders and socio-economic vulnerabilities therefore creates conditions that facilitate the recruitment, transportation, and exploitation of trafficking victims.

Although several studies have examined human trafficking in Nigeria, most have concentrated on Edo State, southern migration routes to Europe, the Nigeria-Niger border, or national anti-trafficking policies. Comparatively few empirical studies have specifically examined how the international border between Nigeria and Cameroon contributes to human trafficking in Taraba State. Existing studies on border governance largely focus on border security, migration management, or general transnational crimes without adequately addressing the specific relationship between border porosity and human trafficking in Taraba State. This gap in the literature highlights the need for an empirical investigation into the relationship between international borders and human trafficking in Taraba State. Such a study will contribute to a better understanding of how geographical, institutional, socio-economic, and security factors interact to facilitate trafficking within the state.

Causes of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a complex global phenomenon driven by interconnected economic, social, political, and institutional factors. Rather than being caused by a single factor, scholars generally agree that trafficking emerges from the interaction of structural inequalities, individual vulnerabilities, organized criminal networks, and the demand for exploitable labour and commercial sex (Limoncelli, 2009; Motseki & Mofokeng, 2022). Contemporary studies also emphasize that understanding these root causes is essential for designing effective prevention strategies rather than relying solely on criminal justice responses (Sibanda, 2023).

Poverty is consistently identified as one of the strongest drivers of human trafficking. Individuals living in extreme poverty often lack access to education, employment, and social protection, making them susceptible to deceptive recruitment practices. Traffickers exploit people's desire for better livelihoods by offering false promises of employment, education, or migration opportunities (Motseki & Mofokeng, 2022). Similarly, Limoncelli (2009) argues that globalization has widened economic disparities between countries and within societies, increasing the supply of vulnerable individuals willing to accept risky migration opportunities. Economic inequality also contributes to trafficking by creating significant income gaps between source and destination countries. Victims often perceive migration as the only means of escaping poverty, making them vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers who manipulate these aspirations (Limoncelli, 2009). Similarly, high unemployment and the lack of economic opportunities, particularly among young people and women, increase vulnerability to trafficking. The absence of decent employment opportunities encourages individuals to seek work through informal recruitment agencies or illegal migration channels, where traffickers frequently operate. Research indicates that traffickers specifically target unemployed individuals by advertising fraudulent jobs abroad or in urban centres (Motseki & Mofokeng, 2022). This is because labour trafficking is particularly prevalent where informal labour markets are poorly regulated. Workers employed in agriculture, domestic work, construction, fishing, and manufacturing often experience exploitation due to weak labour protections and inadequate monitoring (Cockbain et al., 2018).

Many scholars, such as Limoncelli (2009) and Barrick et al. (2024), argue that trafficking persists because of sustained demand for inexpensive labour and commercial sexual services. Limoncelli (2009), on his part, argues that businesses seeking to minimize production costs may knowingly or unknowingly benefit from trafficked labour, while the commercial sex industry creates profitable markets for sexual exploitation. Therefore, traffickers respond to these market demands by recruiting vulnerable individuals through coercion, deception, or abuse of power. Barrick et al. (2024), on their part, posit that the profitability of trafficking has made it one of the world's largest illicit industries. Hence, high financial rewards combined with relatively low risks of prosecution encourage organized criminal groups to continue trafficking operations. However, Barrick et al. (2024) and Limoncelli (2009) did not pay attention to how weak governance and corruption induce human trafficking.

Motseki and Mofokeng (2022) submit that weak governance significantly contributes to human trafficking. According to them, countries with ineffective law enforcement, poor border management, political instability, and widespread corruption often provide favourable conditions for traffickers. This is because corrupt officials facilitate illegal border crossings, issue fraudulent travel documents, or ignore trafficking activities in exchange for financial benefits. Nevertheless, Motseki and Mofokeng (2022) did not examine poverty and economic inequality as factors contributing to human trafficking. Furthermore, Cooper et al. (2024) emphasize that criminal justice systems frequently face inadequate resources, insufficient training, and legal inconsistencies that limit successful investigations and prosecutions, and that these institutional weaknesses reduce the apparent risks associated with trafficking activities. Notwithstanding their near-excellent argument, Cooper et al. (2024), failed to explain how the demand for cheap labour and commercial sexual exploitation encourage human trafficking. Limoncelli (2009) further argues that conflict, war, natural disasters, and humanitarian emergencies substantially increase the risk of trafficking. He maintains that displacement disrupts families, weakens community protection mechanisms, and creates large populations of vulnerable migrants and refugees. Women and children are particularly vulnerable during these periods because they often lack access to legal documentation, employment, and social support. According to Limoncelli (2009), political instability also weakens government institutions responsible for protecting citizens, allowing traffickers to exploit displaced populations with minimal interference.

Motseki and Mofokeng (2022) also assert that gender inequality and social discrimination remain significant structural causes of human trafficking. They argue that women and girls often experience unequal access to education, employment, inheritance, and economic resources, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation. Cultural norms that tolerate gender discrimination, child marriage, or violence against women further heighten trafficking risks. For them, children are similarly vulnerable due to discrimination, orphanhood, family breakdown, and inadequate child protection systems. Motseki and Mofokeng (2022) are not far from the truth because the above-listed conditions increase susceptibility to forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and forced marriage. Again, Motseki and Mofokeng (2022) do not see armed conflict, political instability, and humanitarian crises as factors contributing to human trafficking. This neglect is one of the weaknesses that humbles a researcher and provides an impetus for further exploration. Similarly, globalization has facilitated increased international migration, improved transportation networks, and expanded communication technologies. While these developments provide legitimate economic opportunities, they also enable traffickers to recruit, transport, and exploit victims more efficiently across borders (Limoncelli, 2009). This is correct because restrictive immigration policies may unintentionally increase trafficking by forcing migrants to rely on smugglers and informal migration networks that expose them to exploitation. Consequently, migration itself is not the cause of trafficking; rather, unsafe migration pathways increase vulnerability.

Also, human trafficking is increasingly associated with organized criminal enterprises that operate across national borders. According to Barrick et al. (2024), these networks exploit legal loopholes, corruption, digital technologies, and international transportation systems to recruit, transport, and exploit victims. This argument is not out of place because traffickers operate as adaptive business enterprises capable of responding rapidly to changing economic and legal conditions

Gap in Literature

From the review of the extant literature on the causes of human trafficking, it is apparent that extensive works were done on the causes of human trafficking across the globe. Several scholars identified causes of human trafficking to include poverty and economic inequality, high unemployment and the lack of economic opportunities, gender inequality and social discrimination, availability of organized criminal enterprises, sustained demand for inexpensive labour and commercial sexual services, weak governance and corruption, armed conflict, political instability and humanitarian crises, among other factors. However, in the extant literature reviewed, scholars did not explain how porous international borders, especially the Taraba-Cameroon border, contribute to the persistence of human trafficking in Taraba State. This is the gap the study intends to fill and the contribution it makes to knowledge.

Methodology

Methodologically, the study depended on ex-post facto research design and adopts a qualitative research approach involving the analysis of relevant literature, official reports such as the report of National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Taraba State Command, interviews, and a focus group discussion with key stakeholders, including security agencies, community leaders, and staff members of anti-trafficking organizations such as the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), particularly, NAPTIP Taraba State Command. In their responses, respondents consistently confirmed that porous international borders, especially the Taraba-Cameroon border, also induced human trafficking in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Several theories such as the Social Disorganization Theory developed by Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay (1942), the Push-Pull Theory of Migration developed by Everett S. Lee (1966), and the Routine Activity Theory, developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979), are suitable for explaining international borders and human trafficking in Taraba State. However, this study employs Routine Activity Theory, developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979, as the most appropriate theory because the theory directly explains the relationship between porous borders and trafficking opportunities in Taraba State, Nigeria. The Routine Activities Theory (RAT) was developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979 to explain how everyday patterns of human activity influence the occurrence of crime. Unlike theories that focus on offenders' motivations, Routine Activities Theory argues that crime occurs when opportunities arise through the convergence of three essential elements in time and space. The theory has become one of the most influential environmental criminology perspectives and is widely applied in the study of property crime, cybercrime, and victimization. Routine Activities Theory is based on several key assumptions that explain how crime occurs, arguing that crime occurs when three elements converge.

The central assumption of the theory is that crime occurs only when the following three elements come together at the same time and place: A motivated offender; a suitable target; and the absence of a capable guardian. According to Cohen and Felson (1979), the presence of these three conditions creates an opportunity for crime. If any one of these elements is missing, the likelihood of crime is greatly reduced (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Routine Activities Theory assumes that motivated offenders are always present in society. Rather than explaining why individuals become criminals, the theory focuses on the circumstances that allow offenders to commit crimes. As Felson and Clarke (1998) argue, criminal motivation is less important than the opportunities available for offending (Felson & Clarke, 1998). The theory also assumes that people's daily activities, such as working, shopping, attending school, travelling, or engaging in leisure activities, shape the opportunities for crime. Changes in routine activities can increase or decrease exposure to potential offenders and suitable targets. For example, increased female participation in the workforce and more homes being left unoccupied during the day were identified as factors contributing to rising burglary rates in the United States (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Routine Activities Theory further assumes that some targets are more attractive than others. Felson (2002) explains that target suitability depends on factors summarized by the acronym VIVA:

Value - the target's worth to the offender.
Inertia - the size or weight of the target.
Visibility - how easily the target can be seen.
Accessibility - how easily the offender can reach the target.

Targets possessing these characteristics are more likely to become victims (Felson, 2002). Another assumption is that effective guardianship discourages criminal behaviour. A capable guardian may include police officers, security personnel, neighbours, family members, surveillance cameras, or even attentive bystanders. The greater the level of guardianship, the lower the opportunity for crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson, 2002). Routine Activities Theory posits that opportunities play a major role in determining criminal behaviour. Criminal opportunities are not evenly distributed; they depend on environmental conditions and daily routines. Clarke (1997) argues that reducing opportunities through situational crime prevention can significantly reduce crime rates (Clarke, 1997). The theory also argues that changes in society alter routine activities and therefore affect crime rates. Urbanization, technological developments, increased mobility, online activities, and changes in work patterns create

new opportunities for offending. This assumption has enabled the theory to be extended to cybercrime and other modern forms of victimization (Leukfeldt & Yar, 2016). In summary, the Routine Activities Theory explains crime as a product of opportunity rather than solely offender motivation. Its basic assumptions emphasize that crime occurs when motivated offenders encounter suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians, and that routine patterns of everyday life create or reduce these opportunities. The theory has had significant influence on criminology, policing, and crime prevention by highlighting the importance of environmental design, guardianship, and opportunity reduction.

Theory Application

Routine Activities Theory (RAT), developed by Cohen and Felson (1979), provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of human trafficking across international borders. The theory argues that crime occurs when three essential elements converge in time and space: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. This framework is particularly relevant to the study of international borders and human trafficking in Taraba State, Nigeria, because the state's extensive border with the Republic of Cameroon creates opportunities that traffickers exploit. In the context of Taraba State, motivated offenders are represented by organized human trafficking syndicates, recruiters, transporters, smugglers, and other criminal networks that exploit vulnerable individuals for purposes such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, child trafficking, forced marriage, and other forms of exploitation. These offenders are motivated by the substantial financial gains associated with human trafficking, which has become one of the most profitable forms of transnational organized crime (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2024).

The suitable targets are individuals who are vulnerable due to poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment, insecurity, displacement arising from communal conflicts, and limited access to economic opportunities. In Taraba State, women, children, unemployed youths, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and migrants seeking better livelihoods are particularly susceptible to deception and exploitation by traffickers. Many victims are lured with false promises of employment, education, marriage, or improved living conditions either within Nigeria or across the border into Cameroon (NAPTIP, 2022). The third element, the absence of capable guardianship, is especially significant in explaining human trafficking along the international border. Although agencies such as the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), and other security organizations are responsible for border security, several factors weaken their effectiveness. These include numerous illegal border routes, inadequate manpower, insufficient surveillance technology, poor logistics, corruption, limited inter-agency coordination, and the difficult terrain along the Nigeria–Cameroon border. These conditions reduce the level of capable guardianship, thereby increasing opportunities for traffickers to move victims across borders with minimal risk of detection (UNODC, 2024; NAPTIP, 2022).

Routine Activities Theory also explains how daily cross-border activities create opportunities for trafficking. Communities along the Taraba-Cameroon border engage in legitimate cross-border trade, farming, cattle rearing, fishing, family visits, religious activities, and cultural exchanges. These routine movements make it easier for traffickers to conceal illegal activities among lawful travellers, reducing suspicion and facilitating the transportation of victims across international boundaries. Consequently, the normal routine activities of border communities inadvertently create opportunities that organized trafficking networks exploit. Furthermore, the theory helps explain the influence of border porosity on trafficking. Taraba State has numerous unofficial crossing points that are difficult for security agencies to monitor effectively. The availability of these unregulated routes lowers the risks faced by traffickers

while increasing their ability to transport victims undetected. From the perspective of Routine Activities Theory, porous borders significantly reduce capable guardianship and increase criminal opportunities.

The theory also highlights the importance of situational crime prevention in combating human trafficking. Since crime is viewed as opportunity-driven, reducing opportunities through stronger guardianship can significantly decrease trafficking. Measures such as strengthening border surveillance, increasing patrols, deploying modern technologies such as drones and biometric border control systems, improving intelligence sharing among security agencies, enhancing community policing, creating public awareness of trafficking, and promoting cross-border cooperation between Nigeria and Cameroon can reduce opportunities available to traffickers. These measures increase the perceived risk of detection and arrest, thereby discouraging trafficking activities.

Routine Activity Theory provides a strong explanation for how international borders facilitate human trafficking in Taraba State because a conceptual application would be: Motivated offenders, including Human traffickers and organized criminal networks; Suitable targets, which include women, children, unemployed youths, internally displaced persons, and irregular migrants, and the Absence of capable guardians, which are porous borders, weak surveillance, corruption, inadequate border personnel, and limited inter-agency collaboration. This framework clearly links international border conditions with the occurrence of human trafficking. Indeed, the porous Nigeria–Cameroon border provides numerous unmonitored routes used by traffickers. Similarly, poverty, unemployment, displacement, and low educational attainment make women, children, and unemployed youths suitable targets. Also, weak border surveillance, inadequate personnel, corruption, and insufficient security create an absence of capable guardians. Consequently, organized trafficking networks exploit these conditions to recruit, transport, and exploit victims. The theory therefore explains how weaknesses in border management create opportunities for trafficking. Overall, Routine Activities Theory is highly applicable to the study of international borders and human trafficking in Taraba State because it demonstrates how motivated traffickers exploit vulnerable populations in situations where border security and capable guardianship are inadequate. The theory further emphasizes that strengthening guardianship and reducing criminal opportunities are essential components of effective anti-trafficking strategies.

Analysis of How Border Porosity Contributes to Human Trafficking in Taraba State

Border porosity is widely recognized as one of the major structural factors facilitating human trafficking in Nigeria's border states, including Taraba State. Taraba shares an extensive international boundary with Cameroon and is characterized by numerous formal and informal crossing routes, mountainous terrain, forests, and remote rural communities. These geographical and administrative conditions make effective border surveillance difficult and provide opportunities for traffickers to transport victims with limited risk of detection (Idris et al., 2025). One of the principal ways porous borders contribute to human trafficking in Taraba State is by enabling the unrestricted movement of traffickers and victims across international boundaries. The Nigeria-Cameroon border contains numerous unofficial crossing points that are difficult for immigration and security agencies to monitor continuously. Consequently, traffickers exploit these unregulated routes to transport women, children, and young persons into Cameroon or through Cameroon to other destinations for labour exploitation, domestic servitude, forced marriage, and sexual exploitation. Recent research focusing on Adamawa and Taraba States identifies porous borders as a significant factor increasing trafficking vulnerability in the region because weak border enforcement allows criminal networks to move victims across state and international boundaries with relative ease (Ribadu, 2025).

Border porosity also facilitates irregular migration, which significantly increases vulnerability to trafficking. Many residents of Taraba State engage in cross-border movement for farming, trading, seasonal employment, and family visits because of long-standing cultural and economic relationships between communities on both sides of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. While such mobility is often legitimate, traffickers exploit these migration patterns by disguising recruitment as employment opportunities or educational prospects. Individuals seeking better economic conditions frequently travel through informal routes where they become vulnerable to deception, coercion, and exploitation (Limoncelli, 2009). Similarly, the limited presence of border security personnel in many remote communities further contributes to trafficking activities. Taraba's difficult terrain, including forests, hills, and sparsely populated settlements, creates areas where government presence is minimal. These ungoverned spaces reduce the likelihood of interception by immigration officers, customs officials, or law enforcement agencies. As Idris et al. (2025) argue in their study on community-based border policing, conventional border surveillance alone is often insufficient to address trafficking because traffickers adapt by using isolated crossing points beyond official checkpoints. They therefore recommend complementing state surveillance with community-based border policing to improve intelligence gathering and early detection of trafficking activities.

Another important dimension is the interaction between porous borders and organized criminal networks. Human trafficking rarely operates as an isolated crime but often intersects with other forms of transnational organized crime, including arms trafficking, drug trafficking, document forgery, and migrant smuggling. This is because weak border governance allows criminal organizations to establish cross-border networks that recruit, transport, and exploit victims while avoiding law enforcement. These networks take advantage of inadequate inter-agency coordination and limited information sharing between Nigerian and Cameroonian authorities, thereby increasing the efficiency of trafficking operations (Idris et al., 2024). Also, the security challenges affecting Taraba State further intensify the trafficking risks associated with porous borders. Communal conflicts, farmer-herder clashes, population displacement, and localized insecurity have weakened community protection mechanisms and increased the number of internally displaced and economically vulnerable persons. Displaced households often lose their livelihoods and become more susceptible to false promises of employment or assistance made by traffickers. Ribadu (2025) notes that conflict, displacement, poverty, and porous borders collectively reinforce trafficking vulnerability among women and children in Adamawa and Taraba States.

Furthermore, socio-cultural factors also reinforce the effects of border porosity. Many ethnic groups in Taraba, including communities living along the Cameroon border, maintain long-standing kinship, linguistic, and commercial ties that predate colonial boundary demarcations. These transboundary relationships encourage frequent movement across the border with limited documentation or official scrutiny. While these relationships support legitimate social and economic interactions, traffickers may exploit the familiarity and trust within these cross-border communities to recruit victims or conceal trafficking activities among routine movements. Again, weak institutional capacity remains another important contributing factor. Border management agencies often face shortages of personnel, inadequate surveillance equipment, poor road infrastructure, and insufficient logistical support. Corruption may also undermine enforcement where traffickers evade detection through bribery or fraudulent documentation. Such institutional weaknesses reduce the perceived risks associated with trafficking and encourage criminal groups to continue exploiting Taraba's border environment (Motseki & Mofokeng, 2022). However, it is not wrong to suggest that border porosity should not be viewed as an independent cause of trafficking but rather as a facilitating condition that interacts with poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment, gender inequality, and weak governance. In Taraba State, these socio-economic vulnerabilities combine with poorly monitored international borders to create an environment in which

traffickers can recruit, transport, and exploit victims more effectively (Limoncelli, 2009; Ribadu, 2025). In the final analysis, porous borders significantly contribute to human trafficking in Taraba State by facilitating irregular migration, enabling organized criminal networks, limiting effective law enforcement, and increasing the vulnerability of border communities.

Table 1. Showing Trafficked Persons in Taraba State between 2022 and 2025

S/N	LGA	AGE RANGE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	AGE RANGE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	**JALINGO**	4-10	8	3	11	11-21	4	1	5
2	**ARDO-KOLA**	4-10	9	7	16	11-21	3	2	5
3	**LAU**	4-10	1	3	4	11-21	1	2	3
4	**KARIMLAMIDO**	4-10	3	8	11	11-21	35	1	36
5	**YORRO**	4-10	11	7	18	11-21	3	3	6
6	**ZING**	4-10	12	12	24	11-21	3	1	4
7	**GASSOL**	4-10	10	12	22	11-21	4	5	9
8	**BALI**	4-10	10	13	23	11-21	8	2	10
9	**GASHAKA**	4-10	4	2	6	11-21	7	1	8
10	**KURMI**	4-10	9	13	22	11-21	8	1	9
11	**SARDAUNA**	4-10	11	12	23	11-21	8	0	7
12	**WUKARI**	4-10	14	9	23	11-21	6	0	6
13	**TAKUM**	4-10	7	2	9	11-21	1	0	1
14	**USSA**	4-10	3	12	15	11-21	1	0	1
15	**DONGA**	4-10	7	7	14	11-21	3	0	3
16	**IBI**	4-10	1	7	8	11-21	2	1	3
	TOTAL				248				117
	GRAND TOTAL	365							

Source: Compiled by the Researchers with data from NAPTIP Taraba State Command (2026)

Data in the table above show key points of the Taraba State Local Government Areas trafficking trends, with the highest volume in Karim Lamido LGA, recording 47 cases between 2022 and 2025. 11 of the victims, representing 17%, are between the ages of 4-10, while 36, representing 83%, are aged 11-21, suggesting labour and sex trafficking. Sardauna LGA recorded the second-highest volume with 31 cases,

which is attributable to the LGA border transit route to the Republic of Cameroon. Of the 31 cases recorded in Sardauna LGA, victims are mostly minors: 23 out of 31 are children. Donga, Takum and Wukari LGAs recorded 17, 10 and 29 cases respectively. This is also because cross-border movement risk in Taraba's southern border LGAs is high. Therefore, community awareness is needed at border markets. Similarly, Ardo-Kola, Bali, and Jalingo as urban+ transit LGAs recorded 21, 33, and 16 cases, respectively. Jalingo LGA, as the State capital, shows a recruitment+ transit hub, while Bali LGA shows an equal child/adult split. Also, Ibi LGA recorded 11 cases, Lau LGA 7 cases, Ussa LGA 16 cases, while Gassol LGA also recorded 31 cases. However, the lower reported cases in some LGAs, such as Ibi. Lau, and Takum, may indicate under-reporting, but not the absence of crime. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen reporting channels.

From the table above, 68% of victims are aged 4-10, which means they are being kept somewhere before movement. Similarly, data in the table above shows that 248 out of the 365 victims recorded in Taraba State between 2022 and 2025 were children aged 4–10 years. Again, male victims are slightly higher: 185M vs 171F. Information in the table above also reveals that LGAs bordering the Republic of Cameroon, Nasarawa and Benue states, are hotspots of human trafficking in Taraba State. The study also found that unregistered homes and shelters are major staging points for human trafficking in the State, and that trafficking remains a major threat to human security, child protection, and public safety. The statistical data presented in this study therefore covers the period 2022–2025, corresponding with the commencement of operations of the NAPTIP Taraba State Command. The data provides valuable insights into reported trafficking trends, victim demographics, operational responses, and emerging patterns within the State.

Conclusion

Human trafficking in Taraba State results from multiple interacting factors rather than a single cause. These factors include poverty, unemployment, economic inequality, demand for cheap labour and commercial sex, weak governance, corruption, armed conflict, gender inequality, unsafe migration, and organized criminal networks, collectively creating conditions that facilitate trafficking. Contemporary studies further suggest that sustainable anti-trafficking policies should address these structural root causes through poverty reduction, improved labour protections, gender equality initiatives, safe migration systems, stronger institutions, and enhanced international cooperation instead of relying exclusively on criminalization. The findings are expected to provide evidence that will assist policymakers, security agencies, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), especially the NAPTIP Taraba State Command, immigration authorities, and other stakeholders in developing more effective border management strategies and anti-trafficking interventions aimed at reducing the incidence of human trafficking along Nigeria's international borders, including the Taraba-Cameroon border.

Recommendations

On the strength of the findings, the study recommended as follows:

i. That the Taraba State government should strengthen border governance along vulnerable border communities through improved surveillance technology and inter-agency collaboration with the NAPTIP, Nigeria Police Force, DSS, NSCDC, Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, local vigilante groups, and traditional institutions to curb the activities of trafficking networks across border communities in the state.

ii. Strengthening the State Task Force on Human Trafficking, providing financial and logistical support to the Taraba State Task Force on Human Trafficking to coordinate prevention efforts, conduct joint operations, monitor implementation of the State Action Plan, and strengthen collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners.

iii. The Federal Government of Nigeria should enhance Nigeria–Cameroon security cooperation, community-based border policing, intelligence sharing, and anti-corruption measures to reduce human trafficking across border communities in the country

iv. The Taraba State government should improve socio-economic interventions, targeting vulnerable border populations to prevent opportunities for trafficking in persons, especially women and children who are more vulnerable. These measures should complement broader efforts aimed at reducing poverty, promoting safe migration, and improving institutional capacity to combat trafficking effectively.

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