

SOCIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF WOMEN ENGAGED IN INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE OF CONSUMER PRODUCTS: AN EVIDENCE OF BADAGRY-SEME BORDER OF LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Border communities in Nigeria are found to be engaged in informal cross-border trade, especially smuggling activities. This menace of smuggling and other cross-border businesses particularly illegal female smugglers activities has been neglected. This is the gap that this research aims to fill. The study investigated social profiles, reasons for engagement, types of goods involved and the general experiences of women involved in this illegal business. Gender economic development was the anchored the theory for the study. The qualitative method of data collection was used to obtain information for the study. Specifically, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 women involved in informal cross-border smuggling, selected through the snowball sampling method, and five community members were selected purposively. Findings revealed that the social demographic profiles of females involved in illegal cross border trading along Badagry-Seme border axis cut across all ages, religions, and ethnic groups. The findings further reveal that, the activities of the female cross border serve as a means of survival among the people who are out of organized jobs or work living in the communities around the Badagry axis. The study recommended that, since those actively involved in the illegal cross-border trade are females; who are low social strata of the society, there is need for empowerment and public enlightenment to direct the energy of these vulnerable women's work practices.

Keywords: Female smugglers, Informal cross-border trade, Seme border, Social Networking.

1.1 Background to the Study

Informal cross-border trade represents a significant aspect of economic activity in Nigeria, particularly in Border regions like Badagry-Seme in Lagos. As noted by Ogunyemi (2025) the Badagry-Seme corridor serves as an important nexus for trade between Nigeria and neighboring countries, such as the Benin Republic. This trade forms a crucial lifeline for many petty traders, who often dominate this sector. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) revealed that informal trade represents about 60% of Nigeria's overall trade, accounting for a significant share of this activity. However, border communities in Nigeria are found to be engaged by smuggling activities. Some of these borders' communities, such as Jibia (Kastina State), Kisi (Oyo State), Idiroko (Ogun State), Badagry (Lagos State) and Bama (Borno State),

into informal centres for smuggling activities, thereby encouraging substitute exchange relations of goods (Garuba, 2006).

Furthermore, cross border trade has been seen to have gender dimension; women are more actively involved in border-trading activities such as moving goods through border crossing points as this is one activity women can take-up with little or no resources (Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, 2007). The Involvement of women in Cross Border Trade (CBT) has further equipped them with earnings and resources to contribute significantly to the upkeep of their household and still empowers them with financial independence and control of their own resources (Morris and Saul, 2000). However, their contributions are being neglected and due to their lack of access to credit, knowledge and technology, their businesses do not grow (Aina and Odebiyi, 1998; Osuala, 1991; Erinosh and Fapohunda, 1988). This is not surprising since they are perceived as second-class citizens in patriarchal societies. Despite the lack of formal statistical information on CBT, informal cross border trade tends to go to have gender dimension. Women are seen to be engaged in informal cross-border trade along the borders. Most times women are facing a lot of challenges in trying to transport their goods from customs officials and other security.

The consumer products sector is integral to the economic fabric of Nigeria and it is crucial in fostering economic development, reducing poverty and enhancing living standards (Adeleke, 2020). The large youth population, increasing urbanization and the growing middle class in Nigeria provide a fertile ground for consumer spending, positioning the consumer goods trade as a key driver of economic growth in the country (World Bank, 2021) creating a rise in consumer goods trade leading to substantial investments in the supply chain logistics enhancing logistics capabilities contributing to the smooth transportation of goods from producers to consumers, which is crucial for reducing wastage in the supply chain and improving the shelf life of perishable products (GSSI, 2022). As disposable incomes rise, consumer spending in essential goods tends to increase, driving demand further for not only consumer goods but also ancillary services such as transportation, storage and retail especially for cross-border trading activities between the Badagry-Seme borders axis of Nigeria for communities (AfDB, 2021).

Extant literature on cross-border trading and smuggling appears to have neglected the patterns and activities of female smugglers and their profiles (Adewale & Oyeboji, 2023; Udu & Anyanwu, 2025). According to Adebayo and Fatima (2025) categories smuggle into commercial smuggling and petty smuggling. Commercial smuggling activities entail a large scale of movement of trailer lorries of good items such as numbers of bags of rice, "tokunbo" motor vehicles and spare parts, building materials, etc. Petty smuggling is the most profitable trade among females because it is a quick way to riches and it is informal. Perhaps, petty smuggling involves selling and buying second hand clothes, utensils, cooking ingredients, and other household accessories and other consumables products.

Nevertheless, it could be assumed as a legitimate endeavor. Again, the historical trajectory of the people living around the Badagry-Seme border axis appears to be crucial for the astonishing smuggling dynamics. Many organized criminal groups, according to Ngboawaji (2011), consist of complex secret activities. They do form hierarchically organized chains of

networks. This appears to lead to their international operations with little regard for international boundaries. The essence of the challenge seems not to lie only in the increasing complexity of their activities. The serious challenge they pose in their ability to penetrate and operate with relative impunity is part of the major concern in this study. The illegality of the smuggling enterprises does not only threaten aspects of a nation's sovereignty and security; it appears to be traditionally taken for granted by the necessary agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force and the Immigration Officers (Jawando, Adeyemi and Laguda, 2012). Chukwu and Banwo (2004) found women dominating petty smuggling enterprises and have been seen to be the source of the sustenance of their household as a result of economic imbroglia.

Their findings showed that, on average, 60% of these petty smuggling activities cut across all ages, religions, and ethnic groups. Notably, petty smuggling activities can have some collateral damage, like revenue loss for government, unfair competition for formal businesses, and potential security risks if not regulated properly. The petty smuggling enterprise appears to be central to the people living in the border axis; however unrecognized, it forms the component of the West African sub-Sahara economy. The study examines the socio-demographic characteristics, push and pull factors, types of goods or items, experiences of the females' involvement in the informal cross-border trade and the reasons for and pattern of their involvement. The root causes of these activities are essential for economic stability and enhancing regulatory frameworks within these communities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Communities located along Nigeria's borders are increasingly involved in unregulated cross-border trade, with a notable prevalence of smuggling activities, largely driven by economic necessities and the ease of crossing porous borders. The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (2025), asserted that informal cross-border trade is a dynamic and indispensable part of Nigeria's trades landscape, with thousands of small-scale traders, mostly youths and women, engaging daily in agricultural products, manufactured and artisanal goods trade across Nigeria's border, thereby creating opportunities for both legal and illegal commerce.

Similar to this, literature revealed that the rise in smuggling activities can be attributed to several factors, including economic necessity, regulatory challenges, and the pursuit of cheaper goods. They are often compelled to participate in these clandestine operations due to limited access to legitimate trade opportunities and financial resources. The smuggling activities reflects broader socioeconomic challenges faced by border communities (Centre for Regional Studies, 2024). This menace often leads to substantial loss of revenue to the economy's GDP

As noted by Oni (2023), the sector accounts for an estimated 42.5% of Nigeria's GDP and over 80% of employment, operates largely outside formal regulatory framework, leading to lost tax revenue and undermining economic planning. A study conducted by Central Bank of Nigeria notes that ICBT contributes to macroeconomic imbalances and revenue losses affecting the country's economy growth (Businessday, 2025). Moreover, ICBT is linked to revenue thefts, security challenges, arms robbery banditry, kidnapping and human trafficking, which further strain Nigeria's economic development (Research gate. ng, 2022).

Thus, the absence of formal trade data hinders Nigeria's ability to engage in foreign trade negotiations; thereby diminishes the contributions of informal traders, particularly women, youth and MSMEs due to its long and porous borders. This pattern underscores the complex interplay between local economies and cross-border dynamics, revealing how market demand often dictate the nature of trade. Given the empirical evidence regarding women's involvement in ICBT along the borders. Thus, understanding the socio-demographic profiles of these women, such as age, marital status, educational attainment and financial literacy can provide insight into their experiences and impact of informal trade on their lives and livelihood, there is the need to critically study the socio-demographic characteristics, push and pull factors, types of goods or items, experiences of the females involved in the trade and the reasons for and pattern of their involvement.

This study aims to investigate the need to critically study the socio-demographic characteristics, push and pull factors, types of goods or items, experiences of the females involved in the trade and the reasons for and pattern of their involvement. It is in view of the foregoing that the social profile of females involved in smuggling activities was examined in this study. The root causes of these activities are essential for economic stability and enhancing regulatory frameworks within these communities, especially along the axis of Seme borders. The study seeks to address specific research questions in order to gain deeper understanding of the nexus between WICBTs and consumer products.

- (i) What are the socio-demographic characteristics of females in illegal cross border trade activities?
- (ii) What are the push and pull factors of females in illegal cross border trade activities?
- (iii) What are the types of goods and items female in illegal cross border trade activities engage in?
- (iv) What are the female smugglers' experiences in illegal cross border trade activities with law enforcement agencies?

On the other hand, the objective of this study was to investigate the social profiles and patterns of illegal cross-border trade among females along the Badagry-Seme border axis. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- (i) Identify the socio-demographic profiles of females in illegal cross border trading activities;
- (ii) Investigate the reasons for female involvement in cross border trade activities;
- (iii) Examine the types of goods and items that women in illegal cross border trade activities are involved in; and
- (iv) Investigate the experiences of arrested women in illegal cross border trade activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review examined different related studies on the independent and dependent variables.

2.1 Conceptual Reviews

2.1.1 Informal Cross Border Trade (ICBT)

The informal sector is defined by Nnadi and Okoro (2025) as the sector of the economy that does not comply with labour market legislation and does not provide workers benefits. This

history of Cross border exchange is tied up with the emergence about twenty years ago of floating exchange rates and the Eurobond market (Adebayo & Fatima, 2025). Informal Cross Border Trade (ICBT) developed in the aftermath of the 1980s economic crisis in Africa. It has been ongoing for several years and is an important. Women dominate this trade, engaging in activities like selling agricultural produce and manufactured goods, often without formal protections, making them vulnerable to harassment and extortion.

The Nigerian government and organizations like Customs Officers' Wives Association have launched initiatives to support women traders, including the Green Border Initiative launched in 2025, aiming to promote environmental sustainability and empower women and youth. ICBT contributes significantly to Nigeria's economy, with informal export transactions exceeding \$1.8 million in some months of 2024. The Nigerian Export Promotion Council and National Bureau of Statistics have partnered to improve data collection on ICBT, recognizing its importance in economic planning and trade negotiations. The challenges faced by women are constraints and unfavorable work environment, ICBT is on the increase in Nigeria particularly, on the Lagos-Seme border axis, as more women are daily opting for this trade.

Despite these studies, there remains much to be understood on the effect of ICBT on consumer products within the same border axis. This study addresses this gap by providing the effect of WICBTs of smuggling activities in the border. It also provides women and youth with economic empowerment and means to support their families, in border communities. Oni (2024) asserted that ICBT can enhance foods and other essential goods and at the same time drive entrepreneurship, with many traders scaling up to become large-scale entrepreneurs.

2.1.2 Smuggling

Smuggling, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, is a crime of bringing, goods secretly and illegally into or out of a country. Smuggling activities have been described as the covert importation and /or exportation of goods from one place to another. The secret operation can involve the importation or exportation of prohibited goods (for example, drugs) or the evasion of customs duties on legal goods that are liable to duty (such as precious stones and cannabis). However, smuggling is an unlawful act and, therefore, prohibited because most of the goods being brought by smugglers are banned goods (Oladeji, 2010; Defiem and Kelly, 2001).

Informal trade has persisted in Africa despite the effort to implant it into the formal economy in developing countries (Ogunyemi, 2025). On a regular basis, sixty per cent of trade is informal in African countries (Economic and Policy Research, 2024). Customs Service (2024) define informal trade as the sector of the business activities that does not comply with the government legislation and does not provide much benefit to the players in the sector. Informal trade in this context reflects trade transactions that are not recorded officially by the government agencies at the border and does not necessarily mean illegal trade.

2.1.2 Women Cross Border Traders (WCBTs)

Since the colonial era, West African women have been involved in trade, both within their country and across borders, particularly in the distribution of food and small consumer items and in the trade in services. Their active involvement in small-scale trade is linked with the gendered construction of the colonial economy and society, which allowed male access to

formal education and employment in the colonial bureaucracy and other forms of formal employment. Residential regulations during this period restricted women's access to urban areas and confined them to rural areas under the jurisdiction of chiefs. These circumstances resulted in the gender segmentation of the labour force, requiring women to restrict themselves to the margins of the colonial order, delivering much needed services to male migrants and establishing themselves in the informal distribution of goods and services.

Women trading activities have always been integral to the region's rural and urban livelihoods. Conventionally, Women Cross-Border Traders (WCBTs) were engaged in the sale of unprocessed and processed food (fish, salt and foodstuffs). As a result of the segmentation of labour in production and distribution, men and women have traded in distinct products in the marketplaces. (Economic Commission for Africa, 2010). Originally confined to jobs such as food-selling and shop-assisting in businesses at border crossings, they are now involved in cross-border trade, involving a range of goods and services, which has created informal distribution networks and credit systems that sustain livelihoods. Cross-border trading has resulted in new transnational networks, supported by commonalities in language, culture and kinship. (Economic Commission for Africa, 2010)

WCBTs both within countries and crossing borders, occupy three categories; retailers, wholesaler, retailers and wholesalers on the basis of the volume and value of their trade, the particular commodities they sell and their relationships with other traders ((Zafirovski, 2016; Titus and Adu, 2019). Wholesalers import from manufacturers in their region (Dejene, 2001) Wholesalers-retailers trade in manufactured goods purchased from wholesalers. Retailers are the majority, as most WCBT enter into cross border trading as retailers. This is because this kind of business requires little working capital and can be carried out on a flexible schedule (Charmes, 2000 in UNIFEM, 2010; Randriamaro and Budlender, 2008). Working conditions and lack of recognition of their that WCBTs have positive image of themselves.

The disturbing issue as noted by Okwemba, (2011) is that, the above attitudes and perceptions have percolated through government institutions directly responsible for ensuring the well-being of ICBTs. He also noticed that rarely do these institutions integrate women traders in programme geared towards improving regional trade. National government, regional bodies and most civil society organizations seldom educate or empower these women with knowledge on how they can participate meaningfully in regional trade WCBT. Often rely on each other for socio-economic support and information (Morris and Okwemba, 2011). Many researches on WCBTs have identified a lot of challenges and constraints encountered by inadequate public and private transportation, multiple control posts, multiple and arbitrary taxation of goods, insecurity and harassment, limited market information along cross-border axis in Badagry-Seme of Nigeria.

2.1.4 Consumer Products (Goods)

Kotler and Keller (2016), consumer products (goods) are defined as products that are bought for personal consumption, which can be classified into three categories namely; durable goods (e.g., appliances, cars), nondurable goods (e.g., food, clothing) and services (e.g., haircuts, education). United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), consumer goods trade refers to the international exchange of these goods, impacting economic

development, trade policies and consumer behavior (UNCTAD, 2021). The National Bureau of Statistics Nigeria (2019), consumer goods trade is closely tied to industrial development in Nigeria, particularly in the manufacturing sector and further stated that exchange of consumer goods stimulates local production, enhances industrial capacity and supports economic diversification (National Bureau of Statistics Nigeria, 2020). Trade of automobiles is a significant aspect of consumer goods trade.

For example, the export of cars from Germany to the United States implies a substantial segment of countries' involved trade activities (German Automobile Industry Association, 2022). The exchange of food products such as fruits and vegetables are another example. Countries often export these goods to meet local demands or during off-seasons. For instance, the U.S. exports large quantities of agricultural products, contains cottons and corn, to countries worldwide (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2023). The rise of e-commerce platforms such as Amazon has transformed consumer goods trade. Consumers can easily access a wide variety of products, from electronics to clothing, often from suppliers located in different countries. This globalization of trade shows the importance of online platforms in today's consumer marketplace (Cohen, 2021). These goods can be categorized as tangible items purchased by consumers to meet their everyday needs or wants.

The trade of consumer goods encompasses various sectors, including retail, e-commerce, and wholesale, and plays a crucial role in the global economy. Consumer goods trade is an essential component of the global economy, includes a wide array of products essential for daily living. Understanding its definitions and examples can provide insight into consumer behavior and the dynamics of smuggling across the borders. The Central Bank of Nigeria (2021) opined that consumer goods serves as a key driver of employment creation in Nigeria, offering job opportunities in manufacturing, distribution, retailing and related services. This contributes to human capital development and poverty reduction.

For the purpose of this study, consumer products refer to smuggles items meant for the buying and selling of products that are intended for personal or household consumption in order to earn a living. This involves mostly nondurable goods (e.g., food, clothing) and services (e.g., haircuts, education).

2.3 Theoretical Review

The theories closely related to this study are rational choice theory and the theory of gender economic development were adopted for the explication of female traders' involvement in illegal cross-border trading.

2.3.1 Rational Choice Theory

One the theories examined for this study is the rational choice theory. The rational choice of crime theory states that criminals have a strong intention beforehand to commit the crime. According to these theorists, humans are opportunity seeking actors who weigh resources and goals, costs and benefits and make rational decisions (Cornish and Clarke, 1986). The women in the cross-border trade (actor) himself as an individual; People need to maximize their goals. and people interested personally. Offenders basically think about themselves and their personal goals (Gul, 2009). The rudimentary doctrines of rational theory emerged from

neo-classical economics, based on a variety of models according to Yusuf (2014) who assembled together what they described as a 'skeletal' model of rational choice theory. This theory is used for designing socio-economic and individual behavior based on an individual's actions. According to Zafirovski (2016), rational choice systematically and constantly maximizes satisfaction derived by consumers or gains by producers as a way of maximizing profit.

The major focus of this theory is that any action by an individual is an intentional behavior which is beneficial for the actor in one way or the other and it was based on this premise that the rational choice theory was used to explain the activities of those involved in trans-border trading activities. According to rational choice theorists, individual behavior is a function of their wants, needs and goals targeted at some particular challenges that are premised on the information at the disposal of the individual which he/she acts on. The theory shows that criminals do so after considering the risk of crime detection and punishment (risk assessment) and the benefits (personal, financial, etc.) of successfully carrying out these actions. Conversely, non-actors believe that law enforcement is too risky or not worth the benefits.

Hukportie (2014), traders involved in trans-border trade are more comfortable with goods purchased or bought at the border because they are sold at cheaper rate due to border traders evasion of, and non-payment of customs duties and taxes on these products, or as a result of under-invoicing of goods at border posts and sometimes non-declaration of actual merchandise which enables them to make maximum profit from selling these products. Since it is not possible for an individual to achieve all of his/her set goals, it is inevitable that choices must be made after a careful decision from alternatives available, hence the issue of rational behavior becomes imperative. A rational human being (consumer) *ceteris paribus* will choose that goods or product with minimal cost that will give him maximum utility (benefits). The reason is that human wants are insatiable and as a result one want will be satisfied at the expense of the other. In the case of the cross-border trader, he/she will prefer the option that gives the highest profit yield with little investment than run at a loss.

2.3.2 Theory of Gender Economic Development

The theory examines how gender roles and inequalities impact economic outcomes, focusing on how improving women's status can drive overall economic growth. This theory emphasizes the importance of integrating gender considerations into economic development initiatives to achieve sustainable growth. Thus, the rationale behind the gender economic development theory is rooted in several reasons, such as, economic empowerment, labor force participation, and formal and informal roles. While several scholars and organizations have contributed to the development of gender economic theories, one of the prominent figures is Amartya Sen (2012), particularly through his work on capabilities and human development. Sen's capability approach, articulated in works such as "Development as Freedom" (1999), argues for the importance of empowering women as a means of enhancing not only individual capabilities but also broader economic development.

The International Trade Centre (ITC, 2023) underscored that women constitute a significant portion of the informal cross-border trade in Nigeria. In Badagry, Lagos State, women account for over 70% of the traders at the border, engaging in the exchange of consumer products such

as textiles and food items. This highlights their essential role in the economy and underpins the theoretical of gender economic development. Research conducted by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) shows that women engaged in informal trade contribute significantly to their households' incomes, often spending their earnings on education and health care for their families. Such reinvestment of income into the household enhances community welfare. A study by the Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS, 2023), however reported that women face numerous barriers, including lack of access to finance, complex regulations, and safety concerns. These challenges restrict their potential economic contributions. Understanding these factors aligns with the gender economic development theory, which calls for structural changes to enhance women's economic participation. It should be noted that the applicability of the gender economic development to social demographic analysis of women engaged in informal cross-border trade cannot be underrated. The theory of gender economic development remains relevant in analyzing and improving the socio-economic status of women involved in informal cross-border trade in Nigeria. By addressing structural inequalities and empowering women, there is potential for significant economic development that benefits not only individual house.

3.1 Methodology

Exploratory and cross-sectional descriptive research design were adopted for this study. A combination of primary and secondary sources was employed to collect data from the study population, with the aim of describing the nature and patterns of smuggling activities of women along the Badagry-Seme border axis. The study focused on profiling of female smugglers along the Badagry-Seme border of Nigeria and Benin Republic. The study employed the qualitative data collection technique to gather data from the respondents. These included case studies, key informant interview (KII), in-depth interview (IDI), observation and photography. The study covers the socio-demographic characteristics, push and pull factors, types of goods or items, experiences of females involved in the trade and the reasons for and pattern of their involvement. Snowball sampling was employed to draw sample from the pool of female traders involved in illegal cross-border trading along the Badagry-Seme Border axis. The reason for this is because female smugglers were unknown making access to them difficult.

Twenty (20) female smugglers were sampled at the Badagry-Seme-border transportation corridor using the snowball sampling method, these were comprised of Nigerians and Non-Nigerians. Nevertheless, the study did not involve the activities of small arm smugglers, or those that smuggle rice with trailer truck. The Seme-border community includes a large surface of lagoon and marshlands in the Queme valley, which has traditionally been used as trade routes. There are multiple and interwoven local markets found along the border line. The east to the west of the community are the mainstay for the active network of exchange of goods that take place in both rural and urban settings of the Badagry-Seme Border of Lagos State was the location of the study, with the following target population:

Study Population

3.1.1 Female smugglers: The female smugglers in this study comprised the traders who come from various ethnic communities in the Republic of Benin and Nigeria.

3.1.2 Law enforcement officers: The law enforcement agencies in this study comprised the following:

- (a) Officials of the Nigeria Customs Services,
- (b) Officials of the National Drugs and Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA),
- (c) Officials of the Nigeria Immigration Service, and
- (d) The Nigeria Police Force.

Key informant interviews were conducted with the law enforcement agents in their offices and duty posts along Badagry-Seme Border. The rationale for the inclusion of law enforcement officers in this study was the fact that they are the authorities in charge of the control of the menace of smuggling activities in the border axis.

3.1.3 Community members: Interviews were conducted with community members which comprise the indigenes and non-indigenes living in towns/villages around Badagry-Seme. Community members in the border territories of Benin Republic were engaged in Focus Group Discussion. They were adults of between 18 and 50 years (male/female) from different ethnic groups who resided in the border territories and within the Badagry Local government areas. The reasons for their inclusion in this study were that community members assist smugglers to keep smuggled items in a situation where the smugglers could not convey their items outside the border jurisdictions. The members of the community also serve as informants to the smugglers if there is going be raiding operations by law enforcement agents.

Interviews were also conducted with available Law enforcement officers in their offices and those on duty posts during field work. Three (3) officers each were selected from the Nigeria Customs Service, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Nigeria Immigration Service and the Nigeria Police Force. Moreover, Five (5) females were selected for this study among the residents living in towns/villages along the Badagry/Seme Border community areas and the other adjacent towns/villages within Benin Republic. The convenience sampling technique was used to select these community members.

Table1: Specific Objectives of the Study and Research Instruments

S/N	Specific Objectives	Case Studies	IDI	KII	N/S/O
1	Social profile of the female smugglers		x	x	X
2	Reasons for females' involvement in smuggling	X	x	x	X
3	Types of goods and items smugglers are involved in		x		X
4	Experiences of arrested and released female smugglers	X	x	x	X

Source: Researcher's Exhibit

In-depth interviews: This was conducted among female smugglers along Badagry-Seme Border. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 female smugglers at the border transportation corridor, and these were comprised both Nigerians and Non-Nigerians.

Key informant interviews: Data was gathered from the key informants. The key informant persons are the well-informed insiders who live and have the knowledge of the peculiarities associated with the female smuggling activities within Seme-border axis. They were willing to share information they know about the female smugglers with the researcher. Three (3) key informants each were interviewed from the Nigeria Customs Service, the Nigeria Immigration Service, the National Drug and Law Enforcement Agency, the Nigeria Police Force and the members of the community.

Case studies: This study provides case study reports from two categories of female smugglers:

- (a) Not yet arrested female smugglers and
- (b) Arrested and released female smugglers

Official records: Available records of female smugglers were collected from the law enforcement agencies. They included records on some smuggled goods and items that were seized; destroyed and kept as exhibits.

Non-structured observation method: Data were obtained through un- obstructive observation method. This was carried out to enrich the methodology. The observation the researcher had made prompted him to delve into this research work through proximity of his residence in the Badagry-Seme Border axis.

Methods of data analysis: Information gathered from Case Studies, IDI, KII and unobtrusive observation was coded, transcribed and analyzed using content analysis.

Fig. 1: The Units of Analysis (Variable Measurements and Analysis tools)

Objectives	Variable Measurement	Analysis Plan
Social profile of female smugglers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of international trade laws • Low-income young women. • Determined to make money 	In-depth interview (IDI)
Reasons for female involvement in smuggling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support my household. • It brings quick money. • Proximity to my residence 	In-depth interview (IDI)
Types of goods and items that female smugglers are involved in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imported rice, pastry, vegetable oil • Chicken and fruits, beef • Textile materials, Ankara, Guinea Brocade, Lace. • "okirika". Different types of wears, shoes and bags and bed spreads. 	In-depth interview (IDI)

Experiences of arrested female smugglers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stigma• Sexual gratification,• Bribe,• Sleeping in Nigerian Customs cell	Case study
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Source: Researcher's Exhibit

The distribution of age of the respondents indicate that the majority of the female smugglers were in the age group of 31 to 40 years. This constituted 45 per cent of the respondents. The respondents of the age category of 41-40 years represented 30 per cent of the respondents while those in the age group of 51-60 years constituted 10 per cent.

The study discovered that the bulk of the sample were quite young and active women who were married (10%), widowed (35%), divorced (30%), and separated with their spouses (25%). As for marital status, the majority of the respondents were widowed (35%), 25% were separated from their spouses, and the others were divorced (30%). Thus, the majority of the respondents were single parents. However, there were married (10%) women whose husbands were unemployed. It was observed that the female smugglers in this category were by means of this trade are financially responsible and support their families.

Female smugglers with Nigerian nationality (80%) formed the majority of the respondents. Other nationalities involved were Togolese, Ghanaians, and Beninese. The study also enquired about the years of residency of the females in the study community. The results indicated that the majority of the women had spent just 1-10 years (60%), while 30% and 10% had spent 11-20 years and 21-30 years, respectively. This finding showed that, as the female smugglers were getting older, they diverted into other ventures. Many of them relocated to other places as they were getting older. Some of them also relocated to reside with their children in the city.

Reasons for female involvement in illegal cross border smuggling

The findings in this study showed that the main reason female involvement in smuggling activities is that they need to take care of their children, specifically, school fees, feedings and clothing, etc. This is corroborated with Olutayo (2005) who posits that husbands no longer accept the responsibility to take care of their wives and the children. Wives have always funded the bills of the family survivals through their personal efforts on trading activities.

A 42-year-old female involved in petty smuggling activities for over 20 years, in an interview, affirmed:

I don't have other means to take care of my children school fees and clothing. Petty smuggling brings fast money to support my children. (Female / 42 years/ IDI/ October, 2024)

Similarly, there are numerous influences that could motivate female to engage in petty smuggling activities. Culturally, women are expected not to be involved in smuggling, however, taking care of children school fees and provision for other needs in a situation where the husband is late or economically weak and not buoyant to performs their responsibility, makes the care of the family to fall on the women.

Another female smuggler in her early 40's, popularly called Mama Monitor, said:

I don't have other way to generate income to pay my children school fee. I am not opportune to acquire education I need to find means to make sure my children to be educated. I have to support my husband who had lost his job since for over ten years. I decided to take up this trade and after they have graduated, I will get a shop to start selling things. (Female IDI/ 40 years/ September 2024)

Another respondent also explained one important motivating factor:

This business brings quick returns on investment and I am trying to make use of opportunity of living in this location of (Badagry- Seme border axis). (Female IDI/ 40 years/ September 2024).

For some women, smuggling was an added advantage to increase their income because of the nearness of their residence to the border Seme - Border axis. A female smuggler, a cleaner in a private primary school, interviewed said:

I an involved in cross border trading because my salary is not sufficient to meet my financial obligations. I will endure as a cross-border trader until I get another job (IDI/ 38 years Female / August, 2024)

The interview revealed that economic hardships pushed most of the women to engage in smuggling activities to get more income to attend to their family's needs; while some others engage in it as a result of bandwagon effects. One of the two females interviewed asserted thus:

Our team is known as league of Women; two of us started the informal cross border trade and gradually many other women joined us. It was through friends and other relatives we are introduced to this trading activity (IDI/ 38 years, 42 years Females / August, 2024)



The picture above shows the discussions between female smugglers at the smuggling depot, Ijanikin, opposite Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, on what had transpired in Seme-Border. The woman with bag of rice on her head just arrived from Seme-border telling her fellow female cross border traders what she had experienced with law enforcement agents.

Types of items or goods that female illegal cross border traders are involved in

The findings showed that female smugglers engage in exchange of dissimilar commodities such as livestock products and also rice, tartlet, vegetable oil, beef and fruits such as apple, grape and latus for salad. Others are cloth materials, like Ankara, Guinea Brocade, and lace materials, and second-hand clothes, popularly called "Akube". "Akube" includes different types of used female and male wears, used shoes, used bags and bedspreads.

A key informant interviewed was on this stand:

The international trade policies are very clear, and not recognise women from the local cultural perspectives; immediately she makes a decision to leave her country to resides or trade in another country. However, most of the female in petty smuggling activities do not care to know about the law that guides international trading. They are supposed to be registered with ECOWAS Liberalized Policy to enjoy the full advantages therein. (Law enforcement agent/49 years/November, 2024)

Because of the established social network among the cross-border traders, they get quick information about goods or items that are available in different markets in Benin Republic, and also information about customers' demands in the markets in Nigeria.

In terms of the types of items or goods that the female smugglers get involved in, one respondent had this to say:

Every one of us has her own specialization, like me I deal in turkey, beef and cooking oil. (IDI/ 43 years Female / August, 2024)

Another interview with respondent revealed that:

In sourcing for different items or goods, we do explore various market locations in Benin republic to buy our choice of items or goods we needed. (Female IDI/ 38years/ August, 2024)

An interview with a Customs officer corroborated the above:

It is observed for several years that petty traders do not have legal documents needed to facilitate their trading activities. Most of them do not have ECOWAS passport and international means of identifications. Majority of the women traders are uneducated, in terms of necessary business initiatives and are so desperate while starting in the business. The well-educated ones among them that have awareness on necessary documents are very few. (KII/Customs Officer/51 years/ November, 2016).

Here the female smuggler is sorting out smuggled items. After sorting, she will trans load to her shop at Okokomaiko or Mile 2 bus terminus where people from Lagos (Idumota Market) will buy every items.

Another female smuggler asserted that:

Once we have paid the driver sufficiently his transport fare and the money to bribe in various checkpoints. The uniform men are no longer our problems (IDI/54 years/November 2016)



This place is mile 2 bus terminus where bus drivers are ready to transport the smuggled rice to the place of delivery

A female smuggler arrested, identified as Iyalaje, narrated her smuggling odyssey:

I entered smuggling business 25 years ago; I remembered the year my goods were seized by government authority when arrest took place around **Gbagi** Customs checkpoint. My curve status attracts the leader of the team; he approaches me that he will command the team to give me leverage if I can succumb to sexual demands. Since there is no any difference from the one I do with my husband at home, I think my husband need to understand.

I know it is not from my mind to do so, if I refuses, I may lose all I have. I believe many female smugglers may have experienced such. Very soon I will stop this smuggling business after my children were through with their school. Many of us are ashamed but there is nothing we can do to help the situation we found ourselves

(Case Study/54 years/November 2024)



Okada rider delivering smuggled rice

Interestingly, the female smugglers have women agents among the uniformed personnel. These conspirators always have their 'kickback' on every trip assigned to them to be monitor. The women uniformed officers do assist the female smugglers to lead their goods/items to Okokomaiko market axis.

Theoretical discussion of findings

There are divergent approaches to the study of criminology. Some schools of thoughts are of a standpoint of view that people become criminals due to environmental forces. Some believe

that people take a rational calculation into consideration for their action. The discussion of findings in this study is developed within the context of social network and rational choice theoretical viewpoints in Sociology and the unit of analysis of the objectives of this study. Social network theory emphasizes a form of cooperation, collaboration or ties linking or connecting a set of social actors otherwise known as nodes. Through social network of female smugglers resources were accessed in terms of necessary information on goods and items that were available at cheapest price in the Beninese markets and goods and items that were in high demands in the Nigerians markets. Through networking, the female smugglers also accessed the flow and exchange of information on law enforcement agents about the days and times special patrol along Seme Border, ideas and other derivable social benefits.

This study found that female smugglers select the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest pleasure through information accessed within their social network. The basis for this theory is that humans have choice, preference, taste that make them denies the existence of any kind of action other than the purely coherent and align with their choice. Man, as a rational being, perhaps, can be seen as realistically motivated, through his calculations, however, it appears at times, human put actions on a wrong assumption (Scott, 2000).

The factors that propel female smugglers are poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. It was discovered that the bulk of the population in this study were relatively young and active women who were married, divorced, separated or widowed. This group of individuals could not secure gainful employment and they need to do certain things to meet up with their socio-economic needs. However, smuggling appears to be a means of survival among the people that were out of work/job living in the communities around the Badagry axis. Other push influences identified are the peers group companions that attracts female to join the league of smugglers is inherent in the form of the high monetary profits involved. Taken collectively, the closeness of the females to the border's axis, which was considered a route to make easy money, this encouraged and influence the parent to support the chosen path of their children.

Data were obtained from non-structured observation. This was undertaken to enrich the methodology. The observation the researcher had made through proximity of his residence in the Badagry- Seme border axis prompted him to delve into this research. The unobtrusive observation of the researcher revealed the activities of the social network of the female smugglers in the border region. This includes a large surface of lagoon and marshlands in the Queme valley, which has traditionally been used as transport and trade routes and which is very difficult to control and monitor by immigration and customs authorities. The multiple local markets found along the border line from the north to the south are the backbone for the buzzing web of exchange taking place between both countries. These markets also constitute the main places of contact and exchange among people who come from both rural and urban areas.

The data obtained from the non-structured observation were subjected to content analysis. The data were examined from the lens of social network theory that provides a basis for explanations on operational structure of female smugglers and rational choice theory that unraveled the contributions of factors that propel the female smugglers to smuggling activities.

Objective 1 of the research examined the profiles of the female smugglers along the border axis. It was discovered that the bulk of the population in this study were relatively young and active women who were married, divorced, separated and widowed. They claimed that they needed to do certain things to meet their socio-economic needs, such as to take care of their children education.

The majority of the respondents were SSCE holders. Many of them worked as cleaners in private primary and secondary schools and other establishments. The husbands of some of them were unemployed. It was observed that the female smugglers of these categories were using this trade to assist and support their families. The Nigerian female smugglers formed the majority of the respondents; these consisted of the Yoruba and the Igbo. This indicated that the Nigerians constitute a great proportion of the cross-border traders in the Badagry-Seme border axis. The non-Nigerian female smugglers in this study were mainly Togolese, Ghanaians, and Beninese. This indicated that a reasonable number of the respondents in the communities were not indigenous people.

The findings in this study showed that, as the female smugglers were getting older, they diverted into other ventures. Many of them relocated to other places as they were getting older. Some of them relocated to reside with their children in the city, while the non-Nigerians returned to their countries.

Objective 2 of the research explored female smugglers' reason for engaging in smuggling activities or cross-border trade. The study found that the female smugglers did not have other means to support their households. They argued that cross-border smuggling brought quick money. They noted that there was no other way to generate income to train their children and support their husbands who had lost their jobs; thus, they had no choice other than to get involved in this trade.

This finding corroborates Olutayo (2003), who claims that men no longer shoulder all the needs of their wives. Women have always contributed to the survival of the family though their contributions are not often qualitatively valued. Perhaps, these are motivational factors that could influence women entrepreneurial behaviours despite the fact that culturally women are expected to stay at home, take care of children, and play other social roles. of the women were engaged in informal cross border trading as means of survival, for economic reasons and to supplement the family income.

It was also discovered that, in the social networking of women in informal cross-border trading, they quickly become friends. This friendship made it very easy to understand the rules of the game, that is how to cope and succeed in spite of the difficulties associated with the trade. Social network theory is a sociological theory that attempts to explain social interactions of members within a network of relationships. These relationships or ties are the preoccupation of the endeavour of social scientists.

Objective 3 of this study examined the types of items or goods that female smugglers are involved in. It was found that the women in informal cross-border trade engaged in sale of different commodities. The categories include agricultural products, like rice, pastry, cooking

oil, beef and chicken and different kinds of fruits; textile materials, such as new textile materials, like Ankara, Guinea Brocade, and lace materials; and old second-hand materials called "*okirika*".

Many of the female smugglers were ignorant of the policies that regulate the activities of informal trade. This research found that there are policies that guide international trade. The status of a woman is raised from an ordinary woman to an international trader immediately she makes a decision to leave her country and cross to another country to trade. However, most of the women in informal trade are not knowledgeable about the law that guides international trading. They do not know how to be a cross-border trader. Most of them are not registered to enjoy the full advantages of ECOWAS Liberalized Policy.

In terms of the types of items or goods that female informal cross-border traders get involved in, some of the female respondents interviewed corroborated the position of social network theory. With the established social network ties among the cross-border traders, they quickly enjoyed information about goods or items that were available in different markets in Benin Republic. They can as well have information about customers' demands in the market in Nigeria.

Ironically, the females in cross-border trade showed little knowledge about policies guiding cross-border trading. The fact is that they have to carry their international passports when they cross the border, which most of them claimed they did not possess. The few of them that possessed international passport believed that if they tendered their ECOWAS passport, the law enforcement agents would still delay them at the transit point and would ask them to pay a fee of two thousand naira before they could enter.

The women traders gave several reasons for not being motivated or confident that Immigration will assist them in cross-border trading. They gave cultural reasons as to the fact that they are women who are taking initiatives to train and cater for their children, and assist in household economy. In so doing, they are helping themselves, helping families, their communities, and society in general. The general perception of women in informal cross-border trade is that they are contributing significantly towards the development of nations, through provision of scarce items; therefore, they should not be hindered in conducting their business successfully. Women traders also look at the issue of time and believe that they need to conduct their business quickly in order to return home to take care of their children and spouses. Going through formal process of registration will affect the time they need to conduct their businesses and return home.

However, law enforcement agents refute this by saying that, when Immigration officers on guard prevent some of these women traders from entering the border, they were always ready to beg and plead, appealing that they had to take care of their families. While they allow the policy regulation to override the sentiments expressed by these women, some of them find their ways through the bush paths with the assistance of Beninese. They argued that women traders should show themselves to immigration officer and register because of their safety and inherent danger associated with travelling to another country.

Findings revealed that the female involved in cross-border trading are perceived as smugglers (*onifayawo*). The women in informal cross-border trading are also perceived as “enemy of nations”. This perception creates hatred between the uniformed personnel and women in informal cross-border trading. They argued that custom officers are the main challenge WCBT encounter and some people have had hypertension because of custom officials’ attitudes of seizing their goods. Police and immigration officers are also part of the challenges of WCBT. Due to desperation by the police and customs officers to get money, even when a vehicle is not carrying any contraband goods, they will still attempt to seize goods and demand for money before they can return the goods or detain the vehicle until the driver pays them.

Objective 4 investigated the experiences of arrested female smugglers. The findings revealed stigma of being arrested by the law enforcement agents, sexual gratifications, and bribe, noted in the case studies employed in the research. It was also revealed that women are as active as men in the dangerous business of smuggling. This research found that the female smugglers had to contend with the social stigma that attends their trade, that most female smugglers trade away their chastity, especially to the rampaging Customs officers on patrol. This may allow the female in cross-border trading to succeed in their business ventures. This situation makes it a general consensus that no decent woman would be involved in what is described as “the dirty business of smuggling”, as they (the women) abandon all moral and cultural caution to achieve their goals.

A female smuggler arrested, identified by the name Alhaja Alake, narrated her smuggling odyssey. She started smuggling 15 years earlier. She lost so much money from the goods that were seized by government authority when arrest took place around Gbagi Customs officers checkpoint. She said she had not yet overcome that plight. She has to succumb to the sexual demands of the patrol team leader.

Conclusion

The study concludes that female smugglers across the Seme border axis are low-income women, adult females that do not have any skill, single mothers and widows. Most of the female smugglers trade away their chastity to the Customs officers on patrol, in order to be successful in their business ventures.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

First, female in illegal cross border trading need to be empowered by the governments – local, state and federal. These women did not see their activities as smuggling; rather, they claimed they were engaged in cross-border trade. There should be more public enlightenment to direct the energy of these vulnerable women into a conventional work practice.

Second, the females in cross-border trade show little knowledge about policies guiding cross-border trading. There should be policy document to create a distinction between smuggling and petty cross border trading.

Third, there is need for sound training of officials at the border points. This may comprise workshops to raise awareness of gender issues, not only at the main formal border crossings but especially at the border crossings used by informal traders.

Four, there should be a strategy for integrating female illegal cross border traders into the formal economy. It is also necessary to address key concerns of these traders regarding their lack of access to finance, lack of information on prices and business opportunities and training in basic business practices.

Five, there is the need to create a formal representation of these traders through guild of associations to ensure that their interests are properly represented in public policy. It would also be interesting to further investigate the potential beneficial impact of providing warehousing facilities close to the border and the development of cross-border markets building on the knowledge of the success of bazaars, for example, in central Asia.

Six, the involvement of females in illegal cross border appears to have negative effects on marital stability. Many female youths go into smuggling at the expense of their studies. This has a serious implication for the educational development of the border communities. There is a need, therefore, for the quick intervention of education stakeholders.

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