

. Research Article

## Psychological Impact Of Child Trafficking On Trafficked Children And Their Families In Togo

Kossi B. Kounou<sup>1</sup>

University of Lomé, Faculty of Human Sciences and Society, Department of Applied Psychology, Lomé – Togo<sup>1</sup>

[benkounou@hotmail.fr](mailto:benkounou@hotmail.fr)

Boussanlègue Tchable<sup>2</sup>

University of Kara, Laboratoire de Recherches et Etudes en Linguistique, Psychologie et Sociétés (LaRELiPS), Kara – Togo<sup>2</sup>

[tchable10@gmail.com](mailto:tchable10@gmail.com)

---

### Abstract:

Background: Few researches have been made in sub-Saharan Africa to evaluate psychosocial impact of child trafficking. The current study's objective is to examine the psychological impact of child trafficking on children victims of traffic and their families.

Methods: It is a cross-sectional study across the whole Togo territory over 24 children returned from trafficking and the members of their families. The clinical interview and the projective test (Patte Noire) were used to collect the data with well detailed case studies.

Results: The traffic of children brought psychological disorders, depressive reaction and post-traumatic stress amongst most of the children's who were rescued or taken out of the traffic. Members of the family developed depressive reactions and self-guilt symptoms. The lack of adequate structures for an adapted follow up of the children's returning from the traffic has been noted.

Conclusions: Our results confirm previous works realized in other sociocultural contexts and suggest that a better support of children's in specialized centers by psychologists, social workers or other specialized personnel would be best. Future longitudinal studies on a greater sample, in sub-Saharan Africa to assess the long term consequences of child trafficking over the whole family would be justified.

**Key Words:** Child Trafficking, Psychological Impact, Child, Family, Togo.

---

### Introduction:

The results of previous works support the existence of a link between child trafficking and mental health (Abas et al. 2013; Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light & Watts, 2010). More specifically, the subject victims of child trafficking develop later the symptoms of post-

traumatic stress (Ottisova, Smith & Oram, 2018), affective disorders (Ottisova et al. 2018) and anxiety (Iglesias-Rios, Harlow, Burgard, Kiss & Zimmerman, 2018). There is a rarity of research in sub-Saharan Africa to evaluate the connections between the child traffic and their mental health and the one of their entourage.

Fleck (2004) had already found that children are the principal victims of traffic in Africa. Fleck indicated that all 53 countries brought back the existence of human traffic which expressed itself by poverty, armed conflict, instable cultural practices and early marriage. Fleck found in his research that in Togo, girls victims of traffic served as domestics. Hounmenou (2016), in his study in Burkina Faso, explored deep causes of prostitution over 83 sites in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. The study of Hounmenou did not concern the social and psychological consequences of child traffic. The problem of human traffic is real in Africa. In Ethiopia, in a literature review, Beck, Choi, Munro-Kramer and Lori (2017) have found that poverty, political instability, economical problems and sexual discrimination were risk factor for human traffic. The study of Adjei and Saewyc (2017) realized in Burkina-Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Ouganda has concerned the sexual exploitation of teenage boys in sub-Sahara Africa but did not look into child traffic and its consequences. For over 30 years, the African continent looks into, interrogates itself and acts against the problem of "child traffic" being domestic, economical, sexual or military. It is proof of the formal adhesion of the government to different Human and Child Rights convention and the engagement of numerous Non-Governmental Organizations and Associations to eliminate the phenomena. Despite the best effort of different organisms and states, the phenomena exist. The absolute cause, consensual is poverty (Beck *et al.* 2017) for the children victims of domestic traffic, economical, sexual and political instability for child soldiers. We have looked for the meaning of the traffic and its consequences over children and their family in the Togolese context. In Africa, there should exist an ancestral culture of child trafficking (Discusses, 2005). Indeed, there was a time where men, chiefs, decided the sharing and donation of children, of women, widows, etc. There was a time where parents left their children and other family members with wealthier parents for the hope to see their

children evolve in the ideal they had of them. There was in the ancestral culture a parental tendency to discharge responsibility like an unconscious confession of his helplessness. In 2002, the United Nations of International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) denounced child trafficking in West Africa as a violation of the rights of the child to be protected against all forms of economic exploitation, to maintain family ties, and to grow up in a loving family environment. To understand slavery phenomenon with Ivorian women in France, Discusses (2004) has discovered that more than child trading transactions between Ivory Coast and France, it would be domestic "slavery" that should find their sources in certain traditions or practices of placement of children in Ivory Coast. In a study on child trafficking in Cameroon, Abega, Abé & Mimche (2007) found that parents were complicit in the trafficking of their children because of poverty. In Burkina Faso, Boursin (2007) found that early employment in the domestic or rural economy, leaving labor migration in a city or foreign country, etc. are all practices that find their foundation in traditional society. Does this historical practice continue to be transmitted in the educational context as a cultural value? The cultural values must be a starter for the development and not for enslavement of the human being. In Togolese context, there is a paucity of research examining long term consequences of child trafficking. The purpose of our study was to point out and analyze, in a clinical frame, the psychological and social impact of living the traffic, upon children and their families. Our hypothesis is that children victims of traffic would suffer of traumatic stress disorder; of depression or various psychological disorders and that their family would have a negative mental health.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Study design and participants**

It was a National cross-sectional study done in Togo with children and teenagers victims of traffic and their families. Our study started in the "Savannah Region" in the north of the

country, mainly in Dapaong, then in the “Kara Region” where children and families were presented to us in their living environment, in Bassar, Kpindi and Bafilo in dedicated spaces. The mission went on in the “Central Region” in Kolowaré, then in the “Plateaux Region” (Atakpamé, Gléi and Kougnohou) and finished in Lomé in the “Maritime Region”. In the “Maritime Region”, we have met with 4 children who were just returning from the voyage (left the traffic). We have met with 24 children and 14 direct members of the families (the father or mother only), 6 indirect members of the families (uncle, aunt, or grandfather). For 4 of the children, we have not been able to meet the families. They had already left back to their village or did not have time with regards to their activities. Data were collected with 44 participants in the study.

**2.2. Data Collection:**

The collection of data of our study took place within to the clinical interview and the projective test especially “*Patte Noire (PN)*”. The study fits in a qualitative approach. The clinical set up of the interview We have firstly tried to understand and know the parents, their story, their personality, the way they have invested their children on the emotional plan and the quality of their relation, this in the presence of the child whenever possible. We have analyzed their speech and made a psychological interpretation. We have then heard the children alone, upon their life before the “voyage”, to spot their psychological functioning mode, their lack, their needs, their desires, and their conscious and unconscious

**Table 1:** Distribution of children by children

Age range (years)	Sex		Total	Percentage (%)
	Male	Female		
<b>8-10</b>	1	2	3	12,50
<b>11-13</b>	5	5	10	41,67
<b>14-16</b>	5	3	8	33,33
<b>17-19</b>	2	1	3	12,50
<b>Total</b>	13	11	24	100

age and sex ( $N = 24$ )

Motivations. We have heard their experiences during the voyage and analyzed their functioning towards their modification, their suffering and its consequences, their feelings. We have spoken of their state at their return, of their situation and their desires. We searched for the latent meaning in their speech. It should be noted, however, that the choice of persons heard were left to the terrain’s partner and that there therefore may be a slight distortion in the analysis of our study which is beyond our control.

*The projective test*

It allows psychologists to study the dynamic structure of the child’s personality, to obtain that tendency which are forbidden by the self-defense manages to express themselves. The projective test “*Patte Noire*” has been used. Its timing is of 1 h30 to 2 hours in average. We have also had to adapt to field circumstances. The clinical interview was sometimes long, given the confusion state and emotive state of the child or his difficulty to intellectualize. However we have been able to recover 5 projective tests.

**2.3. Ethical Considerations:**

Our study protocol was approved by the Togolese Social Affairs Ministry which helped and facilitated data collection on every site and mainly in Loma. Informed consent was obtained with all participants for our study.

**2. Results**

**3.1. Sociodemographic Characteristics Of The Sample**

Our sample comprised of 24 children, aged from 11 to 19 years and their families (20 persons). The details and sociodemographic characteristics related to the age and sex of the children are represented in table 1. It is to be noted that 17 children (71%) are from rural background and 2/3 of the sample was neither going to school nor doing any apprenticeship. The traffic concerns more the polygamous families, 58.3% against 41.7% of monogamous families. As to the presence or absence of parents, there is no difference.

As showed in table 1, the phenomena of traffic touch more children between 11 to 13 years old and 14 to 16 years old. The slice from 8 to 10 years old corresponds to children of which the parents organize the voyage without asking for their opinion. The trafficked children are more taken to Nigeria than to other countries. The majority of girls go to Gabon, the other in Nigeria or Benin; one has gone to Burkina Faso. The boys in majority go to Nigeria (see table 2).

**Table 2:** Distribution of the sample in accordance with the destination

Destination	Number of children	%
<b>Nigeria</b>	11	45,82
<b>Gabon</b>	4	16,67
<b>Côte d’Ivoire</b>	4	16,67
<b>Bénin</b>	2	8,33
<b>Ghana</b>	1	4,17
<b>Burkina</b>	1	4,17
<b>Nowhere</b>	1	4,17
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>

The duration of the voyage was between 0 to 6 months for 7 children and of 6 months to a year for 7 other kids, these durations were the most represented. Two children have made more than 3 years. These were the children those parents made to travel around 8 years old. The quest for money is the main reason for the voyage either in the child’s speech or the parents’. Material possessions are the after the fact explanation for both the child and parents.

**3.2. Psychological Consequences Of The Traffic;**

Most of the children’s were traumatized following the voyage, almost 2/3 of the children victims of traffic. The quantity of children having positive benefit is the 1/3 of those which have had negative aftermath. Other children did not seem to have been touched by the traffic. Less than ¼ of the children reached their objectives at the end of the traffic. The great majority has therefore been deceived by the traffic. It is to be mentioned that upon the 24 children met, two

did not express clearly their desire to renounce later. The 22 other children did confess that, given what they lived, they would never again attempt to travel. Table 3 shows psychological consequences of children trafficking with trafficked children.

**Table 3:** Characteristics of psychological repercussions mentioned by trafficked children

Benefits (Consequences)	Number of cases	%
<b>Negative repercussions (traumatism, stress)</b>	15	62,50
<b>Positive effects (psychological maturity)</b>	5	20,83
<b>None</b>	4	16,67
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>

**2.3. Life Stories And Projection Test:**

We will provide you with the stories of the children’s parents or substitution parents implicated in the traffic, in the feeling of the reality and experience. A well detailed case will be presented to illustrate the experience of the children and their families after the traffic. In the view of our deontology code and to guarantee the anonymity of the subject we have gone for the alphabetical initials.

*Case of Child A:*

My name is A, I am 17 years old. I was in the middle class but I had to stop in 2012. I was a good student, I enjoyed mathematics and French. Dad had a third grade; Mum did not go to school. I wanted to continue if there was money until university to become an office clerk. I was living with my parents at the time of my departure. I preferred school. When I was doing something stupid, daddy would scold me, hit me, and advised me never to do it again, but it was not very often. I prefer mum; when I had done something bad, dad was hitting me and mum was coming to rescue me. What was missing most before was money and more school, I was sad. Outside of money problems, I was happy. At a certain time,

people from the village were saying that there was a place where to find money. I have searched and found. The man has come to the village by car. I went to him; he told me that there was work over there. I said I was interested. He told me that we were leaving the next day. There were other persons present. They already had an appointment. He informed me that we were going to Nigeria but did not give any precisions as to the work. He said there were all sorts of work for me to get money. He did not precise the duration; he said that when I have found money, I could come back. He said nothing about the salary. He said the bike, the cassette player and that I would come back with enough money, clothes etc. Right away I said I was in agreement. The man said not to inform my parents, I did not notice that it was odd not to inform my parents. The man said to wait for me on the way to Lomé. I took a few cloth, did not inform anyone. I left a Saturday morning at 8 am, in a car with Nigerian plates, but via secondary roads. I do not remember what month it was. I was the only one of the village but after that we were 14, all boys, some were younger than me and some older. I did not know them. I was not scared. We took the road to Benin, we arrived on the same day, and spent the night in the bus. They took us to men which were speaking between them. Five children left first, they returned the next day to take five other. I left with 3 other kids in the house. Arrived there, I understood I had made a mistake that my parents would be very worried and would be looking for me. The man said there was no one for us; he took us to a pasture, to a cattle breeder. There we did not get any food; the trafficker did not come with us, he returns 2 to 3 times a week. We sleep with the cattle breather in the same room, a makeshift tent of fortune. We stayed 2 to 3 months; we were not talking with the cattle breather. We were insulted. During the day, if I found any, I was eating raw cassava. When the trafficker returned, I said I wanted to go elsewhere. He told me that it was there that he had found, it was there I had to say. I was discouraged, angry and with the other 5, we

had a runaway plan. One night we ran away, we did not know where to go but we wanted to go elsewhere. We walked until the market. We told the women that we had been deceived. We were sleeping in the market in a corner without a door; we were scared someone would hurt us, abduct us to do anything. We did the market for 6 months. One day we saw the trafficker at the market. We went to see him for the money. He wanted that we return to the car, we refused. We ran to warn the women. She talked with the trafficker saying that he would be arrested, that it was robbery and he ran away. Following this, the police was informed. The police went to the cattle breeder who said he did not know the trafficker. He was arrested. The police took us to the Togo embassy and we returned to Togo. I returned around Christmas 2012. My worst souvenir was the lack of eating, of food. I was thinking a lot about my parents. I was thinking that they were looking for me or that they thought I was dead. I was suffering a lot but did not think I would die. If I had been alone, I would not have been able to stand it. Over there, I did not feel like myself. I did not have any freedom. I very much regretted my decision. It was a sin not to inform my parents. When I returned, I cried with relief but I pitied myself, following all that happened. I was a bit proud but I say that over there was not a good place. I feel different from others, late in relation to school. I still remember over there and it saddens me. The dismissal of my father touched me very much, it was my fault. I feel guilty. When I asked forgiveness, dad told me that what I did was not good and that I was lucky to return. I am not mad at the trafficker; I should never have accepted.

#### *The Projective Test Of A:*

A situates his story with the picture kiss, in the sphere of his Oedipal problematic, desire to stay with the mother, to evacuate the father. He speaks to us of his difficulty to contain to sort out in himself this bizarre choice and its consequences: the persons "fighting". The anxiety is present and he needs to regress to reassure himself, with the picture *Breastfeeding I* but "he is a gown up, he is

two and mum chases him away". He tries again with *Breastfeeding 2* right after, saying that his PN cannot breastfeed any longer. He seems to want to assume his position but the need for security is omnipresent and he is looking for a substitution mother which is "in agreement". The fight is hard; it is the picture he likes the less: "PN hunts all the other little brothers, he does not want to share". He sets the scene for a brotherly rivalry to express all his aggressively and inherence guilt: "PN must be forbidden to chase the little brothers". It is not sufficient; punish him because he expressed aggressively and chooses the Jars picture is the first image he says he loves. He identifies himself to the little brother "because he is obedient and daddy came to the rescue when the bird took him". His need for recognition and repairs of an imaginary mistake is deep so as his guilt. The choice following the *Hesitation* image is revealing. He does not like this image at all and "PN must be removed as he is not obedient and he is not given any food". All the pictures chosen express his attempts to be a nice obedient boy. And he finds a man in a cart which abducts children's. "The parents accepted that he takes only PN because he is not obedient. PN is alone in the bush crying". He is into anxiety and total incomprehension. The content of the following two pictures, *Departure from the hole*, is to this measure: "it is PN, he does not see the parents, the father; he looks for the parents without finding them and cries; he looks in vain. He became sad. PN is alone in the bush; no he cannot be changed; yes he has to be changed, he goes home"; "There he remained alone in the bush until nightfall. He fell (picture of the mother) and he screams but there is no one to save him". He attempts to one last securing search with *Scope* but it is always the expression of his suffering: "what does PN, it never pleases the parents". This feeling of rejection is intense. He manages at last for his aggressively to explode, his truth, his need for recognition and identification with the picture *Dirty game* in which he throws something onto the father's head and onto PN's head to which he identifies. It is urgent

to access to his desire and do a sewing apprentice. This space will allow installments of his roots and his own ideal.

*Below is the story of A's aunt*

I am the aunt, A has been with me since he was 2 years old. At one year old, as her mother was not looking well after him, I took her with me. She is the 9<sup>th</sup> child of the family. It is with me that she learned how to walk, speak, and eat. Then, I left the village for my activities and the mother took P back at 3 years old. A was with them. His mother became sick, was no longer eating, and had to go to hospital. His father got loans to look for him; he did no longer go to work and lost his job, he became sick as well. When he returned he was dirty, thin, down, he could no longer speak. He stayed alone, calm. He would only cry or lock himself in the bedroom, not eating sleeping a lot. It lasted one month and a half. After 5 days, he did manage to tell crying. He started over as before but now has no friends. His father loved him very much, he is embarrassed not to be able to send him to school or in an apprenticeship. But he does not have sufficient funds, it is because of the departure of B; they did not think he could leave. They are not proud of their child, angrier, enervated

#### **4. Discussion:**

To our knowledge, this is one of the first study conducted in Togo, at the national level, examining the psychosocial effects of child trafficking on child victims and their families. The trafficked children and their families mostly revealed post-traumatic and depression symptoms. More than 60% of trafficked children expressed negative repercussions during and/or after the traffic. These negative effects of traffic are in line with previous studies (Iglesias-Rios et al., 2018; Ottisova et al., 2018). The deleterious effects on the trafficked child and his family will be discussed before, during, and after the child's traffic.

#### **4.1. The Child And His Family Before The Child Trafficking:**

Children have their own identity, stemming from their personal history which is primarily based on the parents' desire for their arrival, their place, siblings, parental investment and the establishment of the structuring emotional bond. Its psychic balance then the parental capacity to hold, maintain its role in a social, economic and cultural environment. We first listened to parents talking about their child and we heard their suffering, their life difficulties, and their inability to manage sometimes their sons. Most of them told us that their child, was calm, quiet, obedient, courageous and without any particular problem. They scolded or tapped them when the child did something wrong. Our psychological analysis here identifies outbursts of drive, negative emotions, expressions of identity not taken into account, manipulative frustrations that structure the psyche of the child in a state of ambivalence and paradox. It also made us identify in some children, a great psychological fragility linked, first of all, to an emotional emptiness. These are mostly children who are orphaned or abandoned by one of the parents and whose foster care cannot effectively play the role of surrogate parents and a safe and painful environment for the child. Child fragility also comes, in some cases, from the educational setting, the natural evolution needs of the child taken in multiple siblings, the lack of genuine communication. The child will seek to be noticed and to make it clear that he exists. He will then use the journey as a symbol of identity quest, a call to help himself. On the other hand, other children are very early in the role of elder and their responsibilities. These are either older children in a natural way or put in the position of seniors after the death or departure of others. The parental order is strong and the child internalizes this role which values it on the narcissistic level. He will play the adult since it is in this position that he is recognized and loved. He will decide as an adult to leave and sacrifice himself to save the situation. This is a not insignificant benefit on the psychological level. Children then use the phenomenon of traffic as a springboard to solve their teenage

crisis. They emphasize poverty, suffering but, unconsciously, they organize the break-up, the detachment to challenge themselves and act as an opposition to parents who are often ignorant of the psychic phenomenon and culturally unable of accepting the opposition of a child to their vacillating authority. We heard the story of a father or mother abandoning their child, taken care of by other members of the family who had to take care of the child and to whom the child had to return the daily services. We heard their latent complicity, their incomprehension, their confession of helplessness, their ignorance of the child. The hypothesis of some parents' complicity is in line with Deshusses findings in 2005, high lining cultural explanations of child traffic.

#### **4.2. The Child and His Family During The Child Trafficking:**

The child lives immediately in extreme living conditions. He finds himself in a situation that he cannot escape, that he has to face. The moment when the reality of suffering, in relation to fantasy, arrives and represents the first violent, unpredictable and extremely rapid trauma. He moves from the pleasure principle to the reality principle in an instant, and this reality of maximum suffering immediately brings back the one he has left and the break in the emotional bond that sustained him. Here below are some words from these children:

*"Arrived there, I had to work in the plantations, I had nightmares, my parents missed me, I wanted to come-back"; "I was placed with someone who beat me every day with a stick"; "After a week, I wanted to come-back, I was alone, the work was difficult, hard, the boss bothered too much"; "After a week, I wanted to go back but I was told that I could be killed along the way".*

They found themselves stripped, naked in an unknown space, in a timelessness. The moment of the trauma triggers an upheaval of all the points of reference of the individual, material, emotional, social or sensory. They lived in a very strong anxious emotion,

sometimes panic, at the height of the total destruction of the usual environment.

#### *A risk of death and the fear of dying*

Massive anguish, total and lasting isolation, lack of freedom and feeling of being in prison, complete lack of comfort, use of the same clothes for several months, dirty, torn, precariousness of elementary functions (sleep, food, natural needs ...), physical abuse, psychological torture, threats, manipulation, etc. have been reported by children and adolescents during the traffic. The harmful effects of all these aggressive elements undoubtedly add up and potentiate each other, and should explain poor mental health with these children, according to previous findings (Abas et al. 2013).

There are very few children who have made the decision to leave, with or without parental consent. But for them, it should be this unconscious act of adult (having money) that allows them to hold and control a little bit the painful experience. It seems they do not want to "lose face" and want to keep their inner promise. It is the energizing and polarizing element, a fixation on a symbolic object in which they draw their strength. It is an identity quest that is done by opposing parents.

#### *Feelings of the parents*

At the beginning of their child travel, the parents' feelings and thoughts differ according to their degree of involvement. For parents not informed by the child and having no personal history of trafficking, the anxiety is massive and accompanied by major depressive state in front of the idea of having lost their child. Misunderstanding is coupled with a feeling of guilt at their awareness that they may have "not been able to do" for their child; either they are happy for the child and hope he will come-back with something. They justify the act of the child by the poverty situation in which they live, this is in line with Fleck's study (2004). For the parents who organized the departure of their child, out of necessity, they are on the one hand in the confession of their impotence and on the other hand in a latent depressive state: "At the beginning, she cried a lot, but had no

*choice; I was very worried and deeply sad; I was embarrassed".*

#### **4.3. The child and his family on return**

The psychological state of the child upon return depends on a certain number of parameters that will have an influence on the reconstruction of his personality. It is the duration of the traffic, the involvement or not of the parents in the decision to travel, the communication during the traffic, the degree of mastery and understanding of the experience, the functioning of the structure of the child before his journey and his unconscious motives. We have found through projective tests that some children, before their departure, were suffering in lack of secure images, of a framework capable of containing their desire for recognition, identification and identity, that they were in search of detachment to better find oneself and assert oneself. The child and his / her home environment have multiple ways of experiencing return. Children perceived their journey as humiliation, manipulation. They are less armed and they come-back with a negative image of themselves. They are very marked and tell us to never forget it: "*I can never forget what I lived, it was too difficult*". Many children had post-traumatic symptoms according to prior findings (Ottisova et al., 2018). When children return from the trip with physical effects, their psychological state is also affected. They find themselves in psychological inferiority, the feeling of guilt is deep, latent, difficult to tolerate, discharging into aggression. Two children returned with burns of arm and dislocation of the leg said: "*When I think of my arm or I see it, I see my cousin who deceived me and took me and it hurts me*"; "*I am angry a lot now, etc.*"

When children experience the traffic as an event to overcome, to go beyond as a form of unconscious challenge in the problem solving of their adolescent crisis, their personality at the return seems to be stable. But this is only among a minority of children (5/24). A child tells us, "*I am proud of this trip. My comrades were leaving and if I did not travel, I would*



*not know what was going on. I'm glad I made this trip.*" When the child is welcomed in a reassuring environment, he quickly manages to dramatize his experience of the traffic and to regain his taste for life. The frame is containing his suffering. The parents take an interest in him, ask him questions about the trip, try to find out why he has traveled and, above all, support him. This parental attitude retires the emotional bond, repairs its inner image undermined by the traffic it has experienced. The presence of the family and the entourage can bring out the process of resilience of the child, despite the painful experience of trafficking. The evolution can be positive for the child if there is a framework of resilience. It allows the child, despite what he has lived, to relativize the event and sometimes to give it sense: *"I'm not afraid of hard work anymore"; "I feel stronger"*.

The main factor for the evolution of the child and the recovery of his scorned identity is his installation in a school or professional setting. Many children who have started training feel better and end up closing the wounds of the traffic. The professional framework allows the child to restructure himself, to know that he can once again reach his ideal, to assert himself, to take responsibility, to identify with adults. This result is in line with the study of Rafferty (2018) suggesting that mental services are as a vital component of psychological recovery for victims of child trafficking. A stable event makes it possible to guarantee the identity reconstruction of the traumatized subject. Some parents told us, *"Since he started learning, everything is fine"; "Thanks to the Social Affairs competitions that helped her start the sewing, everything is put back in order."* Despite the positive evolution of some children, it is clear that most remain rooted in trauma, present in all its forms. The traumatic journey is constantly relived, even after the return, in the form of repetitive and pervasive memories provoking a feeling of distress and including images, thoughts or ideas in the form of recurring dreams of the traumatic experience, evoking the probable existence of post-traumatic stress, even

months or years after the traffic. This hypothesis confirms the results of our previous work where even two years after the socio-political crisis in Ivory Coast, 86% of Ivorian refugees had symptoms of probable post-traumatic stress (Kounou et al., 2017). According to table 2, almost the majority of the children had gone to Nigeria. This should be explained by the fact that Nigeria is the largest economic power in the West Africa, attracting adults and even children in search of a better social condition, and money. Upon immediate return, we identify a state of post-traumatic stress, reactive depression, psychological fragility, nightmares, auditory hallucinations, massive anxieties, mental confusion, and somatizations. The speeches of the parents and the children allow us to support these pathological states: *"When I came back, I dreamed that I was there working"; "I heard the voice of this lady who called me but I did not answer anymore"; "I was afraid for no reason"; "Once, I dreamed that I was there; I went to dig up the cassava, two people chased me to kill me, I screamed and woke up, etc."* When coming back, children victims of traffic need specific health care to better manage their psychological situation, according to Stanley et al. (2016) research. But unfortunately, in Togo, there is an absence of this kind of specific health service. Some parents tried to repair themselves by attempting to resume their roles and responsibilities, meanwhile abandoned on the pretext of poverty. They reinvest their child, renew the emotional ties but in an overflow that leads to hyper-protection as a way to be guilt of the journey of the child: *"Now I give him everything he wants"; "I try to do everything to give him what he wants."* The resumption of parental function is extended to other children in the form of advice and awareness. Parents are closer to children than before. Guilt and a latent depressive state underlie the parent's life when the child returns. Psychological suffering is often unknown and cannot be named, especially in the Togolese cultural context where certain psychological pathologies such

as depression have no name in national languages.

#### **4.4. Limitations:**

Our study still has some limitations that deserve to be highlighted. We had a total of 24 children and their families in our study. Although conducted throughout all the Togolese territory, we are not able to say that this sample is representative of the Togolese population. Assessment of the psychological state of children, adolescents and their families is done through clinical interview and projective test. This evaluation could be done with precise diagnostic tools, according to DSM-5 criteria, for example. Our study is essentially qualitative, it should be interesting to resume this kind of study with a prospective and quantitative approach on a larger sample to confirm or invalidate our current results. Future research on this topic in Togo and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa should be justified.

#### **Conclusion:**

Trafficking has a destructive and a deleterious impact on psychological state with victim children and their families. Post-traumatic stress or depression occurs in children who are victims. On the social level, the present study reveals a lack of palliative structures to the parental deficiencies inherent to the socio-economic realities, deviant cultural behaviors. Poverty is the main reason for the phenomenon of trafficking. Many children in the traffic were no longer in school. The school is the place where the child structures his thought, from the operational to the formal to the conceptualization of himself and others in front of model masters capable of being depositories of desires, anxieties, and projects of the child to project him into his future. Schooling could play a role in curbing the phenomenon of child trafficking. We suggest the establishment of a social and pedagogic support of educator, social worker, psychologist working in synergy. It seems essential to provide the existing social services with material and human resources consistent

with their mission. The establishment of structures or services which can let children and parents to solve their problems seems essential.

#### **Acknowledgments:**

We thank WAO Enrique and Plan Togo for funding this national study. Many thanks to Mrs. Genevieve Mau roux, for her translation assistance. Finally, special thanks to children, teenagers and their families who have accepted that their story benefits others.

#### **References**

1. Abas, M., Ostrovschi, N. V., Prince, M., Gorceag, V. I., Trigub, C., & Oram, S. (2013). Risk factors for mental disorders in women survivors of human trafficking: a historical cohort study. *BMC Psychiatry*, 3, 13-204. Doi: 10.1186/1471-244X-13-204.
2. Abega, S. C., Abé, C., & Mimche, H. (2007). Le trafic des enfants au Cameroun : étude d'une forme d'abus à l'égard des "cadets sociaux". *Sociétés et jeunesses en difficulté*, n°3
3. Adjei, J. K., & Saewyc, E. M. (2017). Boys are not exempt: Sexual exploitation of adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 65, 14-23. Doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.01.001.
4. Beck, D. C., Choi, K. R., Munro-Kramer, M. R., & Lori, J. R. (2017). Human Trafficking in Ethiopia: A Scoping Review to Identify Gaps in Service Delivery, Research, and Policy. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 18(5), 532-543. Doi: 10.1177/1524838016641670
5. Boursin, F. (2007). Travail et trafic d'enfants : le cas du Burkina Faso, in F. Compaoré, M. Compaoré, M.-F. Lange et M. Pilon, « La question éducative au Burkina Faso : regards pluriels », CNRST, p. 161-179
6. Deshusses, M. (2004). Les « malheurs » du confiage en France : le cas des « petites bonnes » ivoiriennes. Institut universitaire des études de développement (IUED), Genève.

7. Deshusses, M. (2005). Du confiage à l'esclavage « Petites bonnes » ivoiriennes en France. *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 3-4(179), 731-750.
8. Fleck, F. (2004). Children are main victims of trafficking in Africa. *BMJ*, 28(7447), 1036. Doi: 10.1136/bmj.328.7447.1036-b
9. Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'Enfance (UNICEF). (2002). *La traite d'enfants en Afrique de l'Ouest : réponses politiques*. Centre de Recherche Innocenti, Florence, Italie.
10. Hossain, M., Zimmerman, C., Abas, M., Light, M. & Watts, C. (2010). The relationship of trauma to mental disorders among trafficked and sexually exploited girls and women. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(12), 2442-2449. Doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2009.173229.
11. Hounmenou, C. (2016). Exploring child prostitution in a major city in the West African region. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 59, 26-35. Doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.07.003.
12. Iglesias-Rios, L., Harlow, S. D., Burgard, S. A., Kiss, L., & Zimmerman, C. (2018). Mental health, violence and psychological coercion among female and male trafficking survivors in the greater Mekong sub-region: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Psychology*, 12, 6(1):56. Doi: 10.1186/s40359-018-0269-5.
13. Kounou, K. B., Brodard, F., Gnassingbe, A., Dogbe Foli, A. A., Sager, J. C., Schmitt, L., & Bui, E. (2017). Posttraumatic stress, somatizations and quality of life among Ivorian refugees. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 30, 682-689.
- 14.
15. Ottisova, L., Smith, P. & Oram, S. (2018). Psychological Consequences of Human Trafficking: Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Trafficked Children. *Behavioral Medicine*, 44(3), 234-241. Doi: 10.1080/08964289.2018.1432555.
16. Ottisova, L., Smith, P., Shetty, H., Stahl, D., Downs, J., & Oram, S. (2018). Psychological consequences of child trafficking: An historical cohort study of trafficked children in contact with secondary mental health services. *Plos One*, 8, 13(3):e0192321. Doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0192321.
17. Rafferty, L. (2018). Mental health services as a vital component of psychosocial recovery for victims of childtrafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 88(3), 249-260. Doi: 10.1037/ort0000268.
18. Stanley, N., Oram, S., Jakobowitz, S., Westwood, J., Borschmann, R., Zimmerman, C., & Howard, L. M. (2016). The health needs and healthcare experiences of young people trafficked into the UK. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 59, 100-110. Doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.08.001.