



REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS IN NIGERIA: EVIDENCE FROM MEDIA REPORTS ON NAPTIP ACTIVITIES

Akinwale Gbenusola A.¹,  Ayodeji Foluso²,  Ojakorotu Victor³,  and Uchechi Chukwuma⁴ 

1. School of Government Studies, North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa. Email: gakinwale@unilag.edu.ng.
2. Department of Psychology, University of Lagos.
3. Department of Political Studies & International Relations, North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa.
4. Department of Psychology, University of Lagos.

Article Information:

Article Type:
Research Article

Manuscript Received:
13 February 2026

Final Revision Received:
12 May 2026

Published Online:
31 August 2026

Keywords:
Rehabilitation,
Reintegration, Human
trafficking, Psychology.

Human trafficking remains a major organized crime with severe implications for human development, exposing victims to exploitation, abuse, and long-term psychological trauma. This study evaluates the effectiveness of the rehabilitation activities of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in Nigeria. Using a qualitative research design, the study systematically reviewed thirty-two NAPTIP-related headlines published in *The Guardian* newspaper between 2021 and 2025. Media reports were used as an analytical lens to examine the agency's rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Data were collected through keyword searches, including human trafficking, victims, rehabilitation, NAPTIP, and reintegration. Findings indicate that NAPTIP demonstrates considerable effectiveness in rescue operations, prosecution of offenders, awareness creation, provision of shelters, and some forms of economic empowerment for survivors. However, the analysis reveals inconsistencies in long-term rehabilitation services, particularly in the provision of structured mental health and psychosocial support. Evidence suggests limited follow-up monitoring systems and insufficient individualized rehabilitation plans, raising concerns about the sustainability of survivors' reintegration. The study concludes that while NAPTIP performs strongly in immediate intervention strategies, there is a significant gap between rescue operations and holistic rehabilitation. Strengthening trauma-informed psychological services, structured follow-up programs, and multidisciplinary rehabilitation frameworks is essential for promoting sustainable recovery and reducing the risk of re-trafficking. The study highlights the critical role of psychologists in strengthening rehabilitation outcomes for trafficking survivors in Nigeria.

Cite this article: Akinwale Gbenusola A, Ayodeji Foluso, Ojakorotu Victor and Uchechi Chukwuma (2026). Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Human Trafficking Survivors in Nigeria: Evidence from Media Reports on NAPTIP Activities. *The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy*. Vol. 18:2. 583-612. DOI: 10.4314/jsdlp.v18i2.22.



© The Author(s)

Publisher: Institute for Oil, Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development (OGES Institute), Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is one the most recorded organized crime against humanity, that has an overwhelming impact on human development and sustainable development. Within the recorded statistics are real humans: children, women, and men whose lives are disrupted by deceit, corruption, exploitation and the development of traumas emerging from the inhumane treatment experienced by being a victim of trafficking. However, human trafficking is a cross-cutting issue that is also covered under other SDGs 5, 8 and 10. SDG 5 on Gender Equality emphasises the need to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including trafficking and sexual exploitation. Also, SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, item ensure that we must take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour. Lastly, SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities categorically states in target that we all must facilitate safe, orderly, and responsible migration, which helps reduce vulnerabilities that often lead to trafficking.

Human trafficking remains a major global challenge that undermines the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and it is sad to note that Nigeria is ranked as one of the spotlights in the migration debate in West Africa. Due to poverty and economic hardship, more people from Nigeria, Mali, Niger or Senegal decide to undertake these journeys, hoping for a better life in Europe or elsewhere, a part of these group willing to subject themselves for this gruesome experience believing that the end will be worth it, some individuals are being kidnapped, coerced and use for collateral to pay up debts they knew nothing about by individuals they trusted or never had a relationship with before. It is estimated that globally, a total number of individuals affected by human

trafficking is around 20.9 million people¹, and Africa contributes to about 7 million of the number².

To combat this phenomenon, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) was established in Nigeria in 2003 through the trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act. NAPTIP is widely recognised as the agency in charge of prosecution and punishment of perpetrators in Nigeria. Beyond law enforcement and prosecution, its services include the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims and survivors, which is not just a policy framework but has become one of the cornerstones of its overall mission. The rehabilitation and reintegration policy provides a balance between criminal justice and the restoration of hope and dignity for victims, thereby addressing the psychological distress they face due to their experiences.

This paper seeks to provide a practical evaluation of how the agency responds to the invisible wounds of trafficking survivors. Taking a psychological viewpoint, victims' rehabilitation programs are essential for healing and should be able to move victims from helplessness to empowerment, bearing in mind that healing is the most profound form of freedom. Thus, understanding the activities, challenges, and impact of NAPTIP's rehabilitation programs is not only a matter of policy evaluation but a quest to assess human resilience and the importance of an organization like NAPTIP building on institutional empathy and holistic support of survivors under their care.

NAPTIP Mandate on Rehabilitation

The National agency for the prohibition of trafficking in persons was established on 14th of July 2003 by the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition)

¹ S Hemmings, S Jakobowitz and M Abas, 'Responding to the health needs of survivors of human trafficking: A systematic review' (2016) 16 *BMC Health Services Research* 320. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-016-1538-8>

² S Martina, 'Human trafficking and trade a growing threat for Africa' (Deutsche Welle, 2024) <https://www.dw.com/en/human-trafficking-and-trade-a-growing-threat-for-africa/a69799652#:~:text=Martina%20Schwikowski>,

Enforcement and Administration Act 2003, as a response by the federal government of Nigeria to addressing the rising cases of human trafficking, and also in fulfilment of its international obligation under the Trafficking in person protocol to prevent, suppress and punish the act of human trafficking, especially children and women supporting the United Nations Transnational Organized Crime Convention (UNTOC).

Nigeria became a signatory to the Transnational Organized Crime Convention and its Trafficking in Persons Protocol on 13th December 2000. Article 5 of the Trafficking Protocol enjoins States Parties to criminalize practices and conduct those subject human beings to all forms of exploitation, which includes, in the minimum, sexual and labour exploitation. The establishment of the agency was legalized by a mandate that contains the acts and services of the agency. Apart from other articles of interest in the Act, the counselling and rehabilitation section is of great importance to this study.

The NAPTIP mandate on victims' rehabilitation is outlined in section (5), which lists the functions of the Agency, and specifically subsection (m), which states the protection, assistance and rehabilitation of trafficked persons.

Also, in section 11. - (1) For the effective conduct of the functions of the Agency, there shall be established for the Agency the following Special Departments-

- (a) Investigation and Monitoring Department.
- (b) Legal and Prosecution Department.
- (c) Public Enlightenment Department.
- (d) Counselling and Rehabilitation Department.
- (e) Research and Programme Development Department.
- (f) Training and Manpower Development Department; and
- (g) such other Departments as the Agency may establish with the approval of the Board from time to time.

The duties of the (4) The Counselling and Rehabilitation Department shall have responsibility for-

- (a) counselling, aftercare, rehabilitation, social reintegration and education of trafficked persons
- (b) the promotion of the welfare of victims of trafficking in persons.
- (c) supporting, advising and facilitating access to legal aid services by victims.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL REVIEWS

Victims Of Trafficking and Rehabilitation

The first international agreement on the definition of trafficking is found in the 2000 UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime⁵: “‘trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for exploitation” (Trafficking Protocol, Article 3a).

A victim of trafficking is any person who has been recruited, transported, transferred, harboured, or received by means such as threat, use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or giving or receiving of payments to achieve the consent of a person having control over another, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes, at a minimum, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery or practices like slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs³.

Under Nigerian law, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015, defines a victim of trafficking as any person who is the subject of trafficking in persons or related offenses and who suffers physical, emotional, or psychological harm because of such acts.

³United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (UNODC 2023). <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html>

This legal definition forms the basis for NAPTIP's protection and rehabilitation mandate.

Victims' rehabilitation is defined as the comprehensive process of restoring the physical, psychological, emotional, social, and economic well-being of individuals who have suffered harm because of human trafficking or related exploitation. The process is a holistic and person-centred intervention designed to help victims regain control of their lives, rebuild self-esteem, and reintegrate meaningfully into society³. According to the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015, rehabilitation involves the provision of shelter, counselling, medical care, legal assistance, vocational training, and education to victims of trafficking. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) is specifically mandated to implement these rehabilitation measures as part of its broader victim protection framework⁴.

Importance of victim's rehabilitation

Rehabilitation of trafficking victims requires a thorough and multi-dimensional approach, as the impact of their experience is far-reaching and can affect individuals in different ways; however, prominent among its effects is the psychological distress faced by victims, as individuals are not just "rescued persons," but survivors of profound trauma whose autonomy, safety, and dignity have been violated. Their victimisation often leads to severe emotional and psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and difficulties with social reintegration. ^(5,6) alluded to the fact that some adolescents dropped out of school and became trafficked victims; similarly, another study found

⁴ National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, 'Counselling and rehabilitation services' (NAPTIP, 2024) <https://www.naptip.gov.ng/counselling-and-rehabilitation> accessed 14 August 2026.

⁵ S Altun, M Abas, C Zimmerman, LM Howard and S Oram, 'Mental health and human trafficking: Responding to survivors' needs' (2017) 14(1) *BJPsych International* 21. doi: 10.1192/s205647400000163x. PMID: 29093930; PMCID: PMC5618827.

⁶ GA Akinwale and V Ojakorotu, 'School Dropout in Nigeria: A Threat to Sustainable Development and Generational Progress' (2026) 17(2) *The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy* 369-389. DOI: 10.4314/jsdlp.v17i2.17.

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) as a common reason for adolescents' involvement in drug use, pregnancy and trafficking⁷.

A comprehensive rehabilitation include a program that provides s safe living condition, basic human needs like food, clothing, counselling, medical Care, legal aid, vocational training and income generation activities as listed in the activities of the NAPTIP in act but beyond providing the basic, to achieve wholistic healing and recovery from the traumatic experiences, the individuals requires a more detailed psychological intervention to be able to process and heal from their psychological injuries and traumatic experiences.

The Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) were agreed by the UN member states in 2015, and the agreed upon goals are targeted to be achieved in 2030. Out of the 17 SDGs issues around human trafficking has overwhelming impact in achieving goals 5 (Gender Equality), goal 8(Decent Work and Economic Growth), and goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and apart from taking immediate measures to eradicate forced labour, and modern day slavery, and human trafficking, a shift to focus on the reinforcement of the protection, and rehabilitation of survivors would lead to growth the inclusive resilience of survivors against vulnerabilities and circumstances that can leading future to manipulation, and re-trafficking.

Victims' rehabilitation cannot be seen as a single event but a process which may take some time and must only be rendered by experienced professionals and psychologists. These experienced professionals and psychologists have the enormous task of helping the victims overcome shame, fear and anxiety.

Victim rehabilitation is a crucial priority in the accomplishment of the framework of the Human Trafficking Eradication Law. A thorough rehabilitation considers integration of physical, psychological, and social

⁷ GA Akinwale and BA Aroyewun, 'Exploring the interconnection between adverse childhood experiences and the psychological well-being of emerging adults in a rural community in Lagos, Nigeria' (2023) 3(2) *KIU Journal of Health Sciences* 10- 24. <https://doi.org/10.5958 /KJHS-2023-3-2-02>

rehabilitation mechanisms. Government responsibilities must include the provision of psychosocial support, educational services, mental health interventions, and psychiatric care through collaboration with non-governmental institutions, and such collaboration would ensure the victims receive comprehensive support vital for life restoration after experiencing trafficking-induced trauma⁸.

Trauma-informed care (TIC)

According to SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, "trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being"⁹.

TIC approach is grounded in clinical and implementation literature spanning across mental health, social services, and human rights. The theory recognises the overwhelming impact of psychological distress which victims of trafficking usually faces in their journey and the need for behavioural health practitioners, and organizations that provides rehabilitation services to recognize that this distress may lead to the development of trauma on survivors and outlines the principles that can be adopted as a guideline in working with survivors experience these includes Safety, Trustworthiness and transparency, Mutuality and collaboration, Peer support, Cultural, gender and historical sensitivity, and Empowerment, voice and choice.. The theory elaborates the occurrence and persistent impact of trauma on individuals and the importance of developing programs and services that are trauma-sensitive and responsive. Understanding the trauma-informed approach in victims' rehabilitation services helps the service providers structure their interventions around safety, compassion and empowerment, thus moving interventions from service- centred models to a survivor-victim model

⁸ H Susanti, S Syafrinaldi and WA Hajri, 'Perbandingan aturan hukum tentang tindak pidana perdagangan orang di Indonesia dan Malaysia' (2022) 4(1) *Jurnal Kodifikasi* 95.

⁹ SAMHSA's National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, 'Report of Project Activities Over the Past 18 Months, History, and Selected Products' (NCTIC 2012). Available from: http://www.nasmhpd.org/docs/NCTIC/NCTIC_Final_Report_3-26-12.pdf

leading to more psychological recovery, reintegration and overall wellbeing of survivors.

TIC has become one of the most widely used theories in rehabilitation because it recognises the six pillars of rehabilitation that grant a high tendency of wellbeing after a traumatic experience.

Evidence from trafficking and gender-based violence contexts shows that trauma- specific interventions like Trauma- focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TFCBT) and Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR), reduce PTSD and depression symptoms and improve functioning, while non-specialised psychosocial support and empowerment activities improve social reintegration and economic empowerment¹⁰.

The results from the thematic analysis have shown that the agency rehabilitation services are underreported in the newspaper under review, and most of the psychosocial support mentioned is usually in discussion with economic reintegration; the lack of adequate information makes it a challenge to evaluate if the services provided are trauma-informed or not.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Albert Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory is found within the social cognitive theory, and it is relevant in understanding how trafficking victims regain autonomy and confidence to continue living a healthy life. Victims' rehabilitation involves a restoration of psychological, social, physical and economic functioning of survivors after a prolonged exposure to distressing experiences¹¹. The traditional rehabilitation method focused on the provision of shelter, medical support and other basic services.

¹⁰ L Ottisova, S Hemmings, LM Howard, C Zimmerman and S Oram, 'Prevalence and risk of violence and the mental, physical and sexual health problems associated with human trafficking: An updated systematic review' (2016) 25(4) *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* 317-341

¹¹ A Bandura, 'Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioural change' (1977) 84(2) *Psychological Review* 191-215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>

Recently, rehabilitation discussions have been tending towards the importance of empowerment, restoration of agency and psychological recovery as the foundation of long-term reintegration.

The theory provides the four sources of self-efficacy to include mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and emotional and physiological regulation, thus showing that rehabilitation is not just about building safety and providing basic survival services but helping survivors believe in themselves by rebuilding their confidence and personal capability to change to achieve a specific goal as the key determinant of their emotional reaction, actions and motivations. These will then provide a psychological pathway through which rehabilitation inputs connect to positive outcomes.

By integrating self-efficacy in the core approach to rehabilitation programs, survivors will be better equipped with the internal belief in their capacity to heal and thrive. Understanding the self-efficacy framework by service providers will help them in designing effective programs that promote empowerment, independence, and resilience, thus enhancing comprehensive rehabilitation.

3. GAPS IN THE EXISTING FRAMEWORK

How well has NAPTIP done in carrying out their rehabilitation activities? This question can be answered in so many ways, including

- Conducting key informant interviews with NAPTIP service providers (psychologists, counsellors, law enforcement agencies, and partnering organizations.
- Conducting in-depth interviews with the beneficiaries of the services provided.
- Survey/ structured questionnaires
- Direct observation by visiting the shelters to evaluate their services to beneficiaries.
- Case files review and NAPTIP annual reports that can show the number of victims and the ones that received rehabilitation support.
- Comparative analysis of international best practices, comparing the global, regional and rehabilitation activities in Nigeria. These

and many other ways of data collection can be used to answer the above question, but this study is done using newspaper reporting of 32 newspaper headlines from the Guardian Newspaper from 2021–2025 on NAPTIP activities.

- The existing gap in the literature is explored using a qualitative research design to assess the human trafficking rehabilitation program of NAPTIP as reported in the media. Qualitative research was appropriate in understanding how meanings are created through language and media representations¹².

Data Source

Secondary data were drawn from newspaper reports published in The Guardian (Nigeria). The choice of the Guardian newspaper is based on the fact that it is one of Nigeria's most decent national dailies with regular reporting of social, political, and humanitarian issues, including human trafficking, rehabilitation, and victim support. The use of secondary data for analysis was also deemed adequate to analyse publicly available information¹³.

The data consist of news articles and editorial reports on human trafficking and victim rehabilitation retrieved from The Guardian's online archive using relevant keywords, including human trafficking, victims, rehabilitation, NAPTIP, and reintegration. Articles published between 2021–2025 were used to guarantee relevance and contemporaneity of results.

Scope of the Data

The timeframe (2021–2025) depicts the post-pandemic era and makes the advancement of narratives, heightened public awareness and policy discussions around human trafficking and rehabilitation, and reintegration of trafficking victims in Nigeria. A total of thirty-two (32) articles were

¹² JW Creswell and JD Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th edn, SAGE Publications 2018).

¹³ MP Johnston, 'Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come' (2014) 3(3) *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries* 619–626.

identified and reviewed for inclusion based on their relevance to the research focus.

Data analysis

The collected newspaper reports were subjected to thematic analysis, adhering to the six-phase model by¹⁴. Thematic analysis was used because of its depth and versatility in analysing views, opinions, and varied perspectives while still helping the research develop a deeper understanding of the research topic.

Ethical Considerations

There is no ethical risk to humans since the study uses publicly available newspaper content. The interpretation of the data was done objectively.

Thematic Analysis of Guardian Newspaper Reports (2021 – 2025)

This thematic analysis examines selected Guardian newspaper reports published between 2021 and 2025, focusing on the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and its mandate as an anti-trafficking agency. The study seeks to identify key patterns and themes in the agency's operations, with specific interest in their rehabilitation services. Results are presented below

Date	Headline	Central Themes	Key Insights on Thematic focus
17 Sept 2025	NAPTIP backs foundation drive to protect women from exploitation	Empowerment	The excerpt shows NAPTIP's support for a mentorship programme designed to reduce the vulnerabilities of women and girls at risk of exploitation and trafficking. Its core theme is empowerment , demonstrated through the Daurama Foundation's 12-week Samira Buhari Mentorship

¹⁴ V Braun and V Clarke, 'Supporting best practice in reflexive thematic analysis reporting in Palliative Medicine: A review of published research and introduction to the Reflexive Thematic Analysis Reporting Guidelines (RTARG)' (2024) 38(6) *Palliative Medicine* 608-616.

			Programme, which builds leadership, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy skills. Key subthemes include capacity building, vulnerability reduction, and prevention, as NAPTIP stresses that such initiatives align with national efforts to break generational cycles of risk. Another important subtheme is institutional collaboration, reflected in NAPTIP's commitment to working with partners to create safer, more resilient futures for young women
17 Sep 2025	NAPTIP rescues eight children stolen from Delta orphanage	Rescue	The excerpt focuses on NAPTIP's rescue of eight trafficked children found in a privately run orphanage in Asaba, Delta State. The central theme is Rescue , highlighted by the coordinated operation that uncovered children suspected to have been stolen and trafficked from Kano and other northern states. Subthemes include multi-agency collaboration , demonstrated through the involvement of the DSS, Nigerian Police Force, state ministries, and civil society organisations.
14 Sep 2025	NAPTIP, media partner against stigmatisation of human trafficking survivors	Awareness	The excerpt highlights the growing challenge posed by human trafficking in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing that survivor silence is worsening the situation. The central theme is awareness of stigma, particularly how societal, psychological, and negative public reactions discourage

			survivors from sharing their experiences.
25 Jul 2025	Traffickers now lure victims via online loans, sextortion, baby factories – NAPTIP	Awareness	The excerpt highlights NAPTIP's warning about increasingly sophisticated trafficking tactics in Nigeria, underscoring a central theme of awareness about evolving exploitation methods driven by digital platforms and transnational criminal networks. Subthemes include deceptive recruitment strategies such as fake scholarships, job offers, online loans, and organ-harvesting schemes as well as the use of social media to lure youths into exploitation, including prostitution and online fraud.
18 Jul 2025	Trafficking: NAPTIP cautions parents against keeping children with neighbours, friends	Awareness, Prosecution	The excerpt centres on NAPTIP's renewed warning to parents amid rising child-trafficking risks, highlighting a core theme of awareness about child protection and preventive vigilance . Subthemes include collaboration, rescue and prosecutions , demonstrated by the successful rescue and reunification of five-year-old Rahama Ibrahim through coordinated efforts between NAPTIP and the DSS.
18 Aug 2025	Syndicates using Abuja as muster point for human trafficking, NAPTIP warns	Awareness, Prosecution	The excerpt underscores a central theme of awareness of trafficking networks' evolving operational tactics , particularly the use of Abuja as a strategic coordination and transit hub for recruiting and assembling victims destined for Middle Eastern domestic labour. Additionally, the

			successful interception of 25 women in Wuse II points to strengthened prosecution and rescue operations by NAPTIP , emphasizing the agency's role in disrupting trafficking routes and safeguarding at-risk groups.
29 Jul 2024	NAPTIP canvasses increased anti-human trafficking awareness	Awareness	The excerpt emphasizes awareness and prevention as a central theme in combating human trafficking, focusing on educating parents, guardians, and caregivers about traffickers' deceptive methods.
18 Aug 2025	NAPTIP rescues 25 trafficked women enroute to Saudi Arabia	Rescue	The excerpt underscores rescue and protection as the primary theme, detailing NAPTIP's intervention to prevent labour exploitation of 25 women en route to Saudi Arabia. Another subtheme is enforcement and surveillance , reflected in NAPTIP's intensified monitoring of trafficking hotspots and the ongoing manhunt for a travel agency central to the network.
16 Sep 2025	NAPTIP rescues eight children from trafficking syndicate in Delta	Rescue	The excerpt emphasizes rescue and protection of children as the central theme, detailing NAPTIP's successful operation to intercept eight trafficked minors from Northern to Southern and Eastern Nigeria. Subthemes include inter-agency collaboration , highlighted by the joint effort across multiple security, governmental, and civil society actors.
27 Jun 2025	NAPTIP declares Darlington Okoye wanted over alleged rape case	Prosecution	The excerpt underscores enforcement and prosecution as the central theme, with NAPTIP taking formal action against Darlington Okoye

			(Speed Darlington) for alleged sexual abuse and online exploitation.
30 Jul 2024	NAPTIP partners Meta to oust Sextortion	Awareness, Collaboration	The excerpt highlights creating awareness of digital exploitation as the central theme, focusing on rising cases of sextortion in Nigeria. Subthemes include international collaboration , as NAPTIP partners with Meta to address the issue, and youth vulnerability
22 May 2024	Lagos remains hub of human trafficking, says NAPTIP. 2,074 persons trafficked in five years, 27 convicted	Awareness, Prosecution	The central theme is awareness of trafficking patterns and hotspots , with Epe, Ikorodu, Agege, Apapa, and Iganmu noted as endemic areas. Subthemes include victimization trends , with 2,074 persons trafficked over five years, and suspect demographics , detailing arrests and prosecution of both male and female suspects annually from 2019 to 2023.
19 Feb 2025	NAPTIP dismantles Nigeria-Iraq trafficking ring, rescues 13 victims	Rescue, Prosecution	The report highlights NAPTIP's rescue operations through prevention and interception of trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation . The excerpt also emphasizes regulatory enforcement and prosecution , citing the Trafficking in Persons (Control of Activities of Organizations and Centres) Regulations 2019, which empower NAPTIP to monitor and authorize travel agents, tour operators, and shelters, reflecting systemic measures to curb trafficking. Finally, awareness and advocacy emerge as subthemes, as the DG

			calls attention to the physical and psychological harm suffered by victims abroad, highlighting ongoing risks and the importance of coordinated intervention.
26 Mar 2024	NAPTIP rescues 2,112 victims, secures 67 convictions in one year	Rescue, Prosecution	The report underscores NAPTIP's rescue, reception, and support of trafficking victims , with the central theme being victim protection and assistance . Another subtheme is legal enforcement and prosecution , exemplified by convictions of high-profile traffickers through mutual legal assistance with Belgium and Spain, alongside ongoing national court cases. Partnership and collaboration emerge as key subthemes, highlighting cooperation with international bodies (UNODC, governments of the Netherlands and Switzerland), local agencies, civil society organizations, and the media to strengthen anti-trafficking efforts.
15 Jun 2025	NAPTIP rescues 14-year-old IDP abused, tortured by Abuja socialite	Rescue, Rehabilitation	The excerpt highlights rescue and prosecution as the central theme. Bashariyya Usman, a 14-year-old from Zamfara State, was recruited under the guise of domestic work and education, but was later rescued by collaborative efforts of NACTAL and NAPTIP. The Director-General, Binta Bello, coordinated her urgent medical care (rehabilitation) and airlift to Abuja.
31 Jul 2022	Lagos NAPTIP secures conviction of five human traffickers in 2022	Prosecution, Rehabilitation	The excerpt underscores prosecution and enforcement , illustrated by NAPTIP securing five offenders and

			collaborating with IOM and other partners to repatriate and rehabilitate victims.
3 Jun 2025	NAPTIP rescues 26,000 victims of human trafficking	Rescue, Prosecution, Collaboration	The excerpt highlights victim rescue, education, and anti-trafficking advocacy as central themes. NAPTIP's disclosure of 26,000 rescued victims , including over 700 convicted traffickers, underscores the scale of its enforcement efforts, while the employment of some survivors to educate others reflects a capacity-building and empowerment subtheme. Collaboration with STEAP was also highlighted.
26 Apr 2021	Ministry, NAPTIP join forces against human trafficking in Lagos	Collaboration, Awareness	The excerpt highlights multi-stakeholder collaboration as a central theme. The, pledged partnership with NAPTIP and CLEEN Foundation to address human trafficking, prostitution, and child labour, was reported. Subthemes include awareness creation, protection services, and policy development , informed by the 2020 gender audit report on trafficking.
4 Aug 2022	NAPTIP warns against sponsorship of female children on irregular migration, prostitution	Awareness	Edo State NAPTIP Zonal Commander, Nduka Nwanene, warned that parents pressuring their female children into migrating abroad for financial gain are contributing to trafficking for sexual exploitation , while men are trafficked for organ harvesting. Subthemes include awareness and sensitization, child protection, and the role of technology in facilitating trafficking.

5 Dec 2023	NAPTIP cautions youth on human traffickers, posing as helpers	Awareness	The excerpt highlights youth awareness on early prevention and community engagement as central themes in combating human trafficking. Collaboration with schools, principals, and organizations like the Ford Foundation emphasizes institutional partnership and community responsibility by NAPTIP
5 Dec 2024	NAPTIP rescues 3,900 trafficking victims, secures 692 convictions	Rescue, Prosecution	The excerpt underscores victim rescue, justice (prosecution), and empowerment as key themes in NAPTIP's fight against human trafficking and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). Subthemes include shelter provision, psychosocial support, vocational training, and rehabilitation . Collaboration and partnerships form another central subtheme, highlighted by NAPTIP's work with UNODC, the European Union, and civil society organizations.
7 Nov 2021	NAPTIP receives 88 victims of human trafficking from Ivorian govt	Rescue, Prosecution	The excerpt highlights cross-border collaboration, victim rescue, and anti-trafficking enforcement as central themes in NAPTIP's work. Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire have jointly facilitated the rescue and transfer of 88 trafficking victims to Nigerian authorities, building on long-standing cooperation since 2014. Subthemes include awareness, rehabilitation, asset forfeiture, and intelligence sharing , emphasizing that convictions alone are insufficient without

			targeting traffickers' illicit wealth.
6 Mar 2024	Delta overtakes Edo in human trafficking, says NAPTIP	Awareness	The excerpt highlights the need for awareness of regional trends, vulnerability, and institutional support in NAPTIP's anti-trafficking efforts.
30 Jul 2023	NAPTIP educates PWDs on new human trafficking trends	Awareness	The excerpt emphasizes awareness and prevention in NAPTIP's anti-trafficking efforts. Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) in Edo were sensitized on emerging methods of human trafficking and organ harvesting, highlighting their vulnerability, especially among deaf and non-verbal individuals. Subthemes include inclusion and empowerment , reflecting NAPTIP's policy of leaving no one behind.
16 Dec 2023	House of Reps committee hails NAPTIP for tackling TIP effectively	Policy Formulation	The excerpt highlights NAPTIP D-G's emphasis on the agency's mandate and policies on enforcement, protection, and prosecution in safeguarding Nigerians against trafficking, despite resource strains and the complexity of criminal networks.
12 Jun 2024	NAPTIP to rehabilitate rescued Nigerian girls from Ghana	Rehabilitation, Rescue, Prosecution	The excerpt highlights NAPTIP's collaborative rehabilitation efforts for Nigerian girls rescued from human trafficking in Ghana, in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs . The Minister of Women Affairs reinforced the role of public advocacy and skills empowerment as part of comprehensive anti-trafficking interventions.

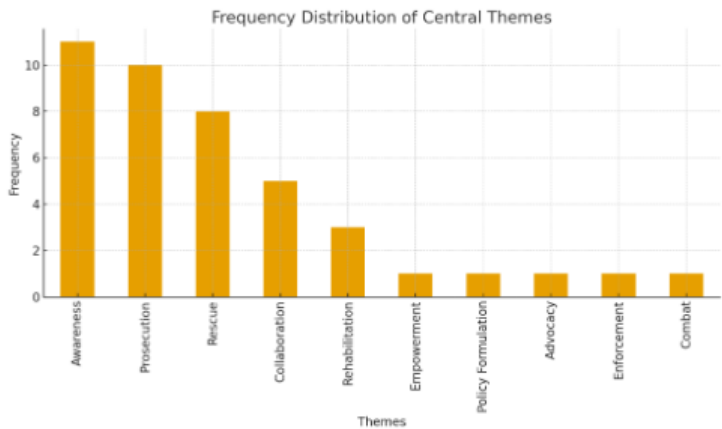
6 May 2021	NAPTIP, NGO collaborate to tackle forced migration, trafficking	Awareness, Collaboration	The excerpt highlights a collaborative capacity-building initiative by CLEEN Foundation, NAPTIP, and UN Women aimed at addressing forced migration and trafficking of women in Nigeria . Other themes include awareness and empowerment for community-based women-led organizations .
29 Nov 2023	NAPTIP deepens stakeholder collaboration on SGBV advocacy	Collaboration, Advocacy	The excerpt highlights NAPTIP's advocacy and collaborative efforts to combat Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Nigeria. The sub-themes include strengthening multi-stakeholder engagement to prevent, report, and prosecute SGBV cases effectively .
22 May 2023	Regulation 2019: NAPTIP issues last warning to defaulting shelters, homes	Enforcement	The central theme here focuses on NAPTIP's bid to enforce the 2019 Regulation governing travel oversight and the rehabilitation of trafficked persons. The regulation was created to curb exploitation disguised as labour migration or cultural trips and to ensure shelters operate lawfully and humanely.
2 Feb 2022	NAPTIP nabs transnational human trafficker, rescues three	Rescue, Collaboration, Prosecution	This was a report about NAPTIP, in collaboration with INTERPOL India and Delhi-based NGO Vihaan-WMS, arresting and prosecuting Joy Okah , a Nigerian trafficker operating in India. The agency rescued three of her victims.
30 Oct 2018	Over 180 trafficked persons return	Collaboration, Empowerment	NAPTIP highlighted its ongoing collaboration with customs, police, and federal

	weekly, says NAPTIP		ministries, and encouraged the public to report cases of abuse and help raise awareness on human trafficking. The agency's South West Zonal Commander, emphasized that these individuals would be received into NAPTIP's care for sensitisation and empowerment.
12 Dec 2021	NAPTIP seeks arms-bearing squad	Combat	In this report, NAPTIP has called for the establishment of an arms-bearing squad for combat activities to provide better protection for its operatives during anti-trafficking operations.
12 Jan 2024	NAPTIP secures 68 convictions in 2023, picks Lagos as hub	Prosecution	In this excerpt it was reported that 68 traffickers were convicted (prosecution) in 2023, underscoring the agency's ongoing progress in enforcing anti-trafficking laws. At the inauguration of a new five-room office for the Lagos State Anti-Human Trafficking Unit, funded by the U.S. and the Netherlands and implemented through UNODC (collaboration), she created awareness about Lagos being Nigeria's largest transit and destination hub for trafficking, with hotspots such as Agege, Ikorodu, Epe, Apapa and Iganmu

Frequency Distribution of Central Themes

The bar chart illustrates the frequency distribution of central themes identified in the reviewed NAPTIP-related Guardian reports. It provides a visual summary of the focus areas highlighted in media coverage,

allowing for a clear comparison of which aspects of NAPTIP’s mandate receive the most attention.



The bar chart displays the distribution of central themes emerging from the reviewed NAPTIP-related reports. A visual inspection reveals that “Awareness” is the most dominant theme, appearing 11 times. This suggests that the majority of NAPTIP’s reported activities and the media narratives surrounding them prioritize sensitization, public enlightenment, and preventive communication as core strategies for combating human trafficking. The prominence of awareness-related items highlights the agency’s sustained emphasis on prevention through information dissemination, community outreach, and strategic communication. Closely following is “Prosecution,” with 10 occurrences, underscoring NAPTIP’s parallel focus on enforcing legal consequences for traffickers. The high frequency of prosecution-related references indicates active involvement in securing convictions, strengthening criminal justice procedures, and signalling deterrence. Together, the dominance of *awareness* and *prosecution* suggests a dual strategy: preventing trafficking through public education, while ensuring accountability through the justice system. The third most frequent theme is “Rescue” (8 occurrences), reflecting the agency’s ongoing interventions to extract victims from exploitative conditions. This theme’s strong presence demonstrates that operational field action remains a core part of

NAPTIP's mandate, involving raids, coordinated operations, and inter-agency responses aimed at immediate victim protection. **“Collaboration,”** which appears **5 times**, highlights the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in anti-trafficking efforts. Whether through joint operations, information-sharing, or partnerships with NGOs, community actors, and international organizations, collaboration serves as a cross-cutting enabler of effective rescue, prosecution, and awareness initiatives.

“Rehabilitation” (3 occurrences) appears less frequently than rescue, indicating that while victim recovery and reintegration are acknowledged, they receive comparatively less emphasis in the sampled reports. This may point to resource limitations, lower media visibility of rehabilitation activities, or a greater focus on crisis-oriented actions (rescue and prosecution) in reporting. Themes such as Empowerment, Policy Formulation, Advocacy, Enforcement, and Combat occur only once each. Their lower representation does not necessarily imply low importance; rather, it suggests these themes are more specialized, appear in specific contexts, or are less frequently highlighted in media releases and public communications. From a holistic perspective, the chart demonstrates that NAPTIP's activities, as captured in these reports, align strongly with the 3P framework (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution), with prevention (awareness) taking precedence, followed by prosecution and protection (rescue). Lesser-emphasised themes illustrate the breadth of NAPTIP's mandate but also reveal potential gaps or areas requiring stronger visibility, such as long-term rehabilitation and empowerment.

Insights on gaps in Rehabilitation from the Reports

Insight into the 3 reports with rehabilitation as a central theme shows that there is inconsistent or limited follow-up rehabilitation services. The reports reveal that while NAPTIP demonstrates significant capacity in rescuing victims of human trafficking and prosecuting offenders, there is a recurring gap in the continuity and comprehensiveness of post-rescue rehabilitation services. This theme is most evident when examining the experiences of individual victims and broader operational patterns described in the reports. In the June 2025 Bashariyya Usman case, the challenges of follow-up rehabilitation are illustrated. Bashariyya, a 14-year-old internally displaced girl from Zamfara State, was trafficked to

Abuja under false promises of formal and Islamic education. She suffered prolonged physical abuse, malnutrition, and psychological trauma, and was eventually returned to Sokoto in a severely debilitated state. Although NAPTIP successfully intervened, securing her immediate medical care and hospitalization, the report offers little information about structured, long-term rehabilitation plans to address the deep psychological, emotional, and social impacts of her abuse. There is no mention of ongoing therapy, counselling, educational reintegration, or vocational training. This reflects a reactive rather than proactive approach to rehabilitation, where rescue is prioritized, but subsequent support is inconsistent or minimally structured.

Similarly, in the Lagos 2022 report, the Zonal Commander acknowledges that NAPTIP receives numerous repatriated victims daily and works in collaboration with international organizations like IOM. However, she admits that the exact number of victims rehabilitated is unknown because “the number is enormous.” This statement highlights a critical gap in tracking and systematically following up with rescued victims. While legal interventions and prosecutions are well-documented, there is little evidence of consistent, individualized post-rescue programs to ensure victims achieve meaningful recovery and social reintegration. Furthermore, in the June 2024 Ghana repatriation case, NAPTIP, in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, initiated plans for rehabilitation of Nigerian girls rescued from human trafficking networks abroad. The report emphasizes preventive strategies, public advocacy, and empowerment through skills training or education. While these measures are promising, they remain largely aspirational in the report, with no concrete timelines, structured programs, or measurable outcomes for ensuring the victims’ sustained rehabilitation.

Across all three reports, a clear pattern emerges which shows that NAPTIP excels in the initial stages of rescue and prosecution but exhibits inconsistency in follow-up rehabilitation services. Immediate medical and safety interventions are prioritized, yet systematic psychosocial support receive limited emphasis. The absence of comprehensive monitoring systems and individualized rehabilitation plans suggests that while victims are rescued from immediate harm, their long-term recovery and social

reintegration remain uncertain. In essence, the reports highlight a gap between rescue operations and holistic rehabilitation, thereby emphasizing the need for NAPTIP to strengthen structured follow-up programs, track rehabilitation outcomes, and integrate psychological, educational, and vocational support to ensure that survivors can fully recover and rebuild their lives. While these gaps are apparent in the selected reports, it is important not to draw broad conclusions that NAPTIP has underperformed in its mandate of rehabilitation. The findings highlighted here serve primarily as indicators, pointing to the need for further investigation using more qualitative approaches, such as on-site observations, in-depth interviews, and key informant discussions. The reports also suggest that NAPTIP could benefit from placing greater emphasis on the **depth and comprehensiveness of its reporting** on rehabilitative services.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE APPROACHES FOR ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

NAPTIP collaborates with government agencies to fulfil its rehabilitation and reintegration mandate, agencies that they collaborate with includes the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, NGOs and international agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a relationship guided by protection policies such as the National Policy on the Protection and Assistance of Trafficked Persons (2008), the Strategic Implementation Framework (2011) and the National Referral Mechanism (2015). Their collaborative effort includes activities on rehabilitation and reintegration; the thematic analysis has shown significant vagueness in reporting of the rehabilitation activities carried out by the agency. Yes, the newspaper report may not be enough to categorical say that the agency is not carrying out rehabilitation programs, but it can raise curiosity for a more robust study using primary data for in-depth analysis.

There have been few experimental studies to determine what individuals really need as rehabilitation support, especially their psychological needs

after surviving a trafficking experience, even with the growing number of post trafficking rehabilitation programs and policies (¹⁵, ¹⁶). With this, the agency can argue that their rehabilitation programs are geared toward the needs identified by victims; hence, the need for specialized psychological care as one of the challenges of surviving is the need for survival as against wholesomeness and some victims are muted by their experiences and concentrate on surviving to see the next day. With the increasing data available from rehabilitation programs from organizations, it will be most relevant if the information can produce more systematic data outlining relevant and useful information that can be used for post trafficking psychological support for psychological distress and disorders, especially psychological outcomes from violence ¹⁰. This is important in any rehabilitation program for victims of trafficking; it can show what has worked and give program implementation that will help in designing future programs.

The rehabilitation efforts by NAPTIP is central to its success to combating human trafficking. Recognising the profound exposure to psychological, emotional and social distress, which can lead to trauma, is not just enough; these vulnerabilities need professional and specialised support to help these individuals' recovery process. The establishment of shelters, vocational training programs, and other livelihood support measures is important for empowering their reintegration. In the TSA area of providing these services, the agency has done great; according to available data, in 2021, the Agency received, sheltered, and rehabilitated a total of One Thousand, Four Hundred and Seventy (1,470) victims. (Two Hundred and Forty-Four (244) were male and One Thousand Two Hundred and Sixty-Six (1,266) Female)⁴.

Information of this nature should be able to outline the type of support under the rehabilitation program. Looking at the rehabilitation programs

¹⁵ D Okech, N Hansen, W Howard, JK Anarfi and AC Burns, 'Social support, dysfunctional coping, and community reintegration as predictors of PTSD among human trafficking survivors' (2018) 44(3) *Behavioral Medicine* 209-218.

¹⁶ Y Rafferty, 'The identification, recovery, and reintegration of victims of child trafficking within ASEAN: An exploratory study of knowledge gaps and emerging challenges' (2021) 7(2) *Journal of Human Trafficking* 145-167.

of countries like the United states, United Kingdom, Netherlands and even Ghana has shown a more detailed reporting of their rehabilitation activities which showed a more specialized long term trauma focused interventions this aligns with evidence from studies that revealed that survivors need long term ongoing treatment due to stigma, and chronic trauma¹⁷, as against NAPTIP short term psychosocial counselling. Thus, highlighting a critical service gap.

It becomes expedient to ask if these recorded gaps are policy oriented or inability of the agency to deliver on their rehabilitation mandate, the quality of data used for this study may not be able to give a concrete response to these questions, and a more detailed study that uses the mixed method to explore the answers to these research questions will be useful for advocacy and policy reform for the agency.

Recommendations

The rehabilitation space is one of the critical areas where the services of psychologists can be made visible and relevant. Having reviewed the NAPTIPS rehabilitation services and identified the gaps in managing the psychological distress and trauma faced by survivors,

- Engagement in more research is needed in this area to evaluate international best practices, what works and what needs to be done in ensuring that the rehabilitation support can address the mental health challenges faced by victims of trafficking, and provide data that can be used to develop interventions that can specifically address the needs of survivors; this will improve the protection aspect of NAPTIP.
- Longitudinal study to track survivors over a period to assess the impact of the rehabilitation supports on their social, economic and psychological wellbeing as an outcome of the rehabilitation support.

¹⁷ C Zimmerman, M Hossain and C Watts, 'Human trafficking and health: A conceptual model to inform policy, intervention and research' (2011) 73(2) *Social Science & Medicine* 327-335. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.05.028>

- Comparative policy research: studies geared towards comparing NAPTIP legal and rehabilitation framework with international best practices will highlight areas of improvement and support policy reforms towards prioritizing in-depth integration of mental health and psychosocial support as a core of survivor's rehabilitation and reintegration program.
- Research to evaluate the different psychological and psychosocial models of trauma care, exploring the victim's perspective, cultural sensitivities, gender norms, and protective factors that can facilitate the rehabilitation of survivors to ensure reduction of re-trafficking, and return of victims to positions of vulnerability.

Implementation

- NAPTIP should strengthen their inter-agency collaboration strategies, engaging more partners from civil society organizations, government ministries and the donor community to establish a standardized referral mechanism that ensures availability of data on their various rehabilitation programs with the partners.
- Restructure the NAPTIP case management strategy to ensure adequate identification of individuals in need of more specialized psychological and psychosocial interventions starting from the reception to the stage of community reintegration engaging more psychologist as the case management team.
- Psychologist should see the rehabilitation service as our space of relevance, especially as it would offer us opportunities to engage in policy amendment for better trauma-informed care for victims of trafficking.
- It is important for the agency to start documenting the real time mental health and psychosocial outcome from survivors who have used their services as this will serve as evidence of the effectiveness of the rehabilitation program. (NAPTIP,2023, UNODC,2022)

Limitations Of the Study.

The study relied on secondary data collected from only one newspaper in Nigeria; a more detailed comparison from more newspapers, interviews with recipients of NAPTIP rehabilitation support and professional services providers within the agency may give a more robust view of the elements of the agency's rehabilitation services.

5. CONCLUSION

NAPTIP, as an agency of the federal government of Nigeria in charge of combating human trafficking, protection of victims and providing the need support for their rehabilitation and reintegration has done exceedingly well in the reporting of their criminal, legal, protection and economic rehabilitation of the victims, but the mental health and psychosocial activities of the agency has received little or no significant reportage by the newspaper under review.

Counselling and rehabilitation being an important aspect of their services, should also attract the level of media engagement received by these other services they are providing; inability to see that level of media engagement may lead the general public to believe that, it is either the services are not exciting, or they are not significant for the agency to be a centre of their media engagement. This paper is a call to action for more studies that uses both primary and secondary data to get more information, and engagement of professional in developing evidence based trauma-informed care for rehabilitation services that ensures that survivors benefit from a specialized psychological program that has the potential to allowing them a safe space to process, heal and recover from the vulnerabilities, psychological distress and possibly trauma developed due to their gruesome experiences from their trafficking journey.