

The role of social workers in re-integrating deported international migrants into the Nigerian society

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Abstract

The spate of intra- and international conflicts and economic challenges in most developing countries means that states are enacting more restrictive and insensitive immigration laws to prevent or deport irregular immigrants. As such, the deportation of Nigerians in contemporary times has taken on a new dimension. In the past, deportation was mostly from developed states. However, there has been an increase in mass deportation of Nigerians from South Africa and North African countries like Libya and Morocco, where immigrants are reportedly imprisoned, exploited and/or enslaved prior to their deportation. Review of literature shows that beside the severe debilitating experiences during the course of their migration and forceful return, deportees further face incapacitating economic challenges and impaired social functioning resulting from a feeling of indignity attributable to failed personal and familial expectations. This paper contends that social work rests on the principles that practitioners have an ethical obligation to challenge unjust policies, practices and social conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatisation and subjugation. Utilising ecological theory, the paper analyses situations that inhibit people's social functioning. Finally it discusses the diverse challenges of irregular emigration and realities faced by deportees as well as potential ways in which social workers through the mandate of social work can play a pivotal role in responding to these issues.

Key words: deportation, migration, Nigeria, reintegration, social workers

Introduction

Every year, thousands of people emigrate from Nigeria to various parts of the world particularly US, Europe, Libya, Italy and South Africa, in search of safety, education, better living conditions and economic prosperity. The number of Nigerians living outside Nigeria more than doubled between 1990 and 2013, from 465,932 to 1,030,322 (Isiugo-Abanihe & International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2016). In recent years, there seems to be an influx into China, India and other Asian countries that hitherto had very few Nigerian citizens. The most preferred destinations in Europe were the United Kingdom (184,314), Italy (48,073), Spain (36,885), Germany (22,687) and Ireland (18,540) (Isiugo-Abanihe & IOM (2016). For instance, in recent times, more 25,000 Nigerians have migrated into Italy, one of the 28 countries in the EU, in search of a new life. According to statistics from the Italian Interior Ministry, the number of Nigerians migrating into the country has shot up to 37 per cent in 2016, far more than what it was in 2015.

Since, most deported migrants are undocumented migrants (Plambech, 2018), they often travelled through precarious routes that sometimes involved very high risks, back and forth migration that are more often than not, perilous terrains. Moreover, studies and reports have shown that undocumented migrants journeying from Nigeria to Europe had often travelled from Nigeria to Niger, then from Niger to Libya, from Libya to Algeria, or to Morocco, from where they and other migrants cross through the Mediterranean Sea to Spain or Italy in an overcrowded boat (Ratia & Notermans, 2012; Pennington & Balaram, 2013; Adepegba et al., 2017; Molenaar & El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017; Plambech, 2014, 2018).

The drivers of such risky emigration include high level of unemployment, economic situation in Nigeria (Odozi, Awoyemi & Omonona, 2010; Pennington & Balaram, 2013), although there is no inextricable link between poverty and migration (Ratia & Notermans, 2012, Bagnoli & Civilini, 2017; Plambech, 2018). Furthermore, ethno-religious conflicts, militancy, Boko Haram insurgency with their resultant displacements and associated insecurities, kidnapping, human trafficking of women and young girls, as well as young ladies forced to sell themselves by their own families making them vulnerable to slave trade have been variously reported as causal factors of undocumented emigration in Nigeria (Bagnoli & Civilini, 2017). On the part of destination or transit countries, more border control regulations, stringent immigration laws, and migration-related detention have become increasingly widespread necessitating deportation and further affecting the lives of undocumented migrants, their families and communities' at large (Esposito *et. al.*, 2015). For example, Bagnoli and Civilini (2017) aver that the main cause for this spike in deportations is the European Commission Action Plan. For instance, Italy and Germany have been taken to task for the insufficient number of repatriations they carry out each year. As a result, both countries have stepped up their efforts, at the expense of the easiest target: the community of undocumented Nigerian migrants because bilateral agreements are in place with Nigeria for fast-tracking deportations (Bagnoli and Civilini, 2017). Nigerian immigrants are mostly affected due to increasing difficulty in securing visa, increased risks in migration via Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Sea and challenges of employment and residency in their destinations due to undocumented status. Such Nigerian emigrants are mostly undocumented.

As such, over the last decade, thousands of Nigerians have been forcefully ejected from their destinations and thrown back to Nigeria with nothing to fall back on (Eze, 2017). According to Bagnoli and Civilini (2017), the first major documented repatriation flight from Italy to Nigeria departed on March 6, 2007 with 40 Nigerian nationals from Italy (the organising member state) along with 30 more coming from Austria, Germany, Spain, and Romania. Since then, 48

aircrafts have flown from Rome to Lagos, deporting a total of 1,394 Nigerians who had been targeted with expulsion orders (Bagnoli and Civilini, 2017). Later, the European Union (EU) announced that it would deport migrants from Nigeria in exchange for economic aid to the country. Bagnoli and Civilini (2017) reported that in 2012, 180 Nigerians were ejected from the European nations and the US deported 33 Nigerians for various reasons while the Republic of Ireland sacked 46 persons. In December 2015, 28 Nigerians were deported from Italy, Switzerland and Belgium for not having valid immigration documents.

Furthermore, in March 2016, about 172 Nigerians were deported from Libya after being held in various camps for weeks. In 2017 alone, a total of 16,387 Nigerians were deported from different countries (Salau, 2018). Of this figure, 5,980 were evacuated from Libya, 3,836 from Saudi Arabia while South Africa and other European countries deported 6,643. Also many young girls who were trafficked for sex work were also deported. Eze (2017) reported that about 41 Nigerian girls who were victims of human trafficking billed to be taken to Europe through road and sea were deported from Mali. In an interview, the South-West Zonal Director of National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCRMI), Mrs. Magret Ukegbu, revealed that a total of 3,480 young Nigerians, mostly girls, were deported from Libya within 10 months in 2017 (Chuka, 2017).

It has been revealed that deportees suffer various psychological, social, economic and health effects after deportation (Headley and Milovanovic, 2016, Dako-Gyeke & Kodom, 2017; Boodram, 2018). Among these are the deepening economic opportunity losses and inability to pay off debts incurred during the initial departure and despair arising from shame of failure and the suspicions of family and community members (Schuster & Majidi 2013). Scholars have also noted that the hostile experience of deportation is likely to make reintegration difficult and could create some incentives to re-migrate (Orozco & Yansura 2015; Dako-Gyeke & Kodom, 2017). Fonseca, Hart & Klink (2015) noted that reintegration is essential in forced return migration because it encompasses the re-inclusion or re-incorporation of persons back into their communities or countries of origin. They however advised that the process should be designed in manner that deported migrants would be able to participate in all spheres of the socio-economic and political spheres of the society (Fonseca et al., 2015).

In view of the above, it is essential to examine post-deportation challenges and how social workers can assist in reintegrating deportees into the society. Our central questions are: what are the effects of deportation on deportees and what can social workers do to help deportees? To answer these research questions, this paper made use of secondary sources of information on the consequences of deportation and the role of social workers in reintegrating deportees into the

society. It is hoped that analysis carried out in this paper will go a long way in facilitating the formulation of policies and stimulating further studies in this area.

Conceptual framework

This paper is premised on ecological model which emerged from the early works of Germain (1973 cited in Pardeck, 1988) and offers perspective for examining factors that inhibit reintegration of deportees. The ecological model posits that an individual's well-being is a result of the dynamic interplay between intrapersonal (micro level), social (mezzo level), and subsistent structural environment (macro level) that frames people's experiences (Boodram, 2018). The intrapersonal and relational conditions that shape individuals' experiences include their psychological, emotional, and physiological attributes, as well as their interactions with their environments. Similarly, the economic and social milieu of an individual may affect levels of functioning across the life course. As with intrapersonal and relational conditions, the subsistence or socioeconomic status, family income, education, and occupational status of an individual may also fluctuate as his/her condition changes like with deportation and loss of remittance. This is associated with the social support networks available to an individual. The social capital, or resources which an individual can leverage on to gain opportunities, can influence the quality and type of experiences of the deported migrants. Finally, the policies, legislations and larger structural values of the country or society may further apply pressures on the realities of the deported migrants.

On the other hand, the ecological model can be extrapolated to explain the role of social workers in reintegrating deported migrants into the country's social milieu because it provides strategies that permit social workers to move from a micro level of interactions vis-à-vis interventions to macro level social treatment and advocacy. It will enable the social worker to impact a client system through advocating for policies, planning activities and helping to pacify socio-cultural impediments to counselling, psychotherapy or other micro-level approaches (Ervin, 2017).

Thus, the primary premise of the ecological approach is that it is derived from the complex interplay of psychological, social, economic, political and physical forces (Pardeck, 1988). This theoretical approach accords due recognition to the transactional relationships between environmental conditions and the human condition. Moreover, this perspective allows the practitioner to effectively treat problems and needs of various systemic levels including the individual, family, the small group, and the larger community. In essence, the practitioner can easily shift from direct practice and administration of services like counselling and case management to a policy and planning role within the board framework of state apparatus and agencies.

Methods

The study adopted systematic literature review. Secondary sources such as books, journal articles, online news reports (both national and international) informed the analyses and inference. Only documents that were strictly on deportation, post-deportation and reintegration with preference for recency and contextual to Nigeria were included. Nevertheless, exceptions were given to exemplary articles or reports that focus on related issues. Search for literature were carried out through the use of the Google search engine and JSTOR. Consequently, thirty-two literature met the inclusionary criteria and were used in the paper. Through the conceptual framework developed for the study, researchers built a framework of themes that should guide the study. They include the prevalence of irregular migration; factors driving the issue; interventions, and implications for social workers. The aim is to understand the issue through the lens of various studies, which would definitely impact remedies.

Findings

The findings from the reviews are presented under the following themes: Agencies in charge of deported migrants, reintegration of deported migrants in Nigeria, impact of deportation on the deportees and role of social workers in reintegration of deported migrants

Agencies in charge of deported migrants in Nigeria

Several government agencies in Nigeria interface with deported migrants on arrival back to the country. These agencies include the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), and the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). NAPTIP was established to enlighten people against the dangers of human trafficking, to rescue victims of trafficking and oversee to detainment and arrangement of perpetrators. Among the other services provided by NAPTIP are shelter, healthcare, counselling and rehabilitation of repatriated (deported or otherwise) trafficked persons, as well as their empowerment through vocational training and funding to establish a small business (NAPTIP, 2018).

On the other hand, NEMA is saddled with the responsibilities of attending to all forms of natural and manmade disasters; from coordinating and providing reliefs to victims of flooding, to providing shelters and other social services to internally displaced persons from conflicts and terrorism. Nevertheless, among the numerous functions of the NEMA, the agency is also expected to receive and provide reliefs as well as rehabilitate deportees from foreign countries. The above stated responsibilities of providing reliefs and rehabilitation according to the agency is within the purview of the Relief and Rehabilitation Department (NEMA, 2018).

Others are the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), the Department of State Services (DSS), the Nigerian Police, the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), the Aviation Security (AVSEC) and the Port Health from the Federal Ministry of Health. The services provided by these agencies are mostly limited to reception and screening of cases of the returnees on arrival (Adekunle, 2017; Plambech, 2018). Moreover, it is important to mention that there are no specific state policy, programmes or intervention packages for deported migrants; with the exception of trafficked persons.

Reintegration of deported migrants in Nigeria

Evidently, there are some structures put in place to receive deported migrants in Nigeria, however the reintegration component appears inadequate, because those structures are not specialised and tailored to the challenges of the generality of deported migrants. NAPTIP is limited because its obligations are primarily to intervene, protect, receive and rehabilitate trafficked persons only. While the scope and activities of NEMA are too verse, they are limited in terms of addressing the needs of deported migrants. Compounding the issue is the fact that Nigeria, rarely have reintegration policies, nor state agency specifically for deported migrants. While studies (Plambech, 2014; 2018) have reported that even when NGOs attempt to mitigate the apparent lack of specialised stated driven service provision, they have limited financial capability and are less focused on reintegration but rather are focused on awareness about human trafficking, or as a reactionary measure, for reception, and at best, shelter and vocational skills; often for trafficked persons only. Thus, in the cases of returning trafficked persons, several NGOs in partnership with NAPTIP aid victims of trafficking in their readjustment by providing services. As such, non-trafficked migrants who are often deported without money find themselves stranded or solely relying on family and friends (Plambech, 2014; 2018).

Although the response of NAPTIP, NEMA and allied NGOs to deportees are often limited to trafficked persons, the other categories of returnees are ignored and left to their fate. The provision of support to people who have been trafficked is vital, but it is also important to recognise that victims of trafficking are only a fraction of a much larger group of deported migrants, since other categories of deported migrants may also require support to reintegrate into society given their severally precarious migration experiences. Studies and media reports have shown that due to their undocumented status, it was often very difficult for immigrants before their deportation (Pennington & Balaram, 2013). The work they were often engaged in was either illegal, or demeaning or bordering on slavery. With poor remuneration, many remained indebted to agents who helped them find work or had smuggled them into the country, and so, were not able to save as much money as they had believed they would. Moreover, even when they saved, they often do not have access to their money

after deportation due to the abruptness of their arrest and deportation (Akuki, 2017). Thus, it has been revealed that deportees suffer various psychological, social, economic and health challenges after deportation (Headley and Milovanovic, 2016, Boodram, 2018). Moreover, the desire to migrate irrespective of the risk, even among deported migrants who had experienced hardship, humiliation and dehumanising conditions during transit demonstrate the low efficacy of awareness-raising campaigns and services being rendered by NEMA, NAPTIP and allied NGOs in preventing high risk undocumented migration (Ratia & Notermans, 2012; Plambech, 2018).

Impact of deportation on the deportees

Next we try to examine the impact of deportation on the deportees. Ratia & Notermans (2012), Pennington & Balaram (2013) and Plambech (2018) opine that deportees have a resolute disposition of non-belonging and the impossibility of belonging after deportation demonstrating the detachment of deportees from their social framework in the country they have been deported to. Review of literature shows that deported migrants face a host of challenges such as stigmatisation and humiliation (Rietig & Villegas, 2015; Schuster & Majidi, 2015, Zilberg, 2004 cited in Boodram, 2018; Majidi, 2018). In some families, they could be seen as failures and criminals who had gone to waste their times abroad and so deserve no pity (Boodram, 2018; Plambech, 2018). Rejection from their families after the humiliation faced abroad is also very traumatic and can drive them gradually into a state of psychosis, depression or they may begin to develop violent or criminal traits (Galvin, 2014; Schuster and Majidi, 2013; Majidi, 2018; Plambech, 2018).

Boodram (2018) further reveals that settlement into a new culture for migrants poses severe posttraumatic stress symptoms including depression, loss of sleep, isolation, and hopelessness. They also experience challenges such as difficulty in accessing jobs and food, and several health complications (Schuster and Majidi, 2015; Majidi, 2018). Research further shows that deportation results in separation from spouse and children, rejection by family members, an end to remittances and causes economic hardship for relatives of those deported (Haga *et. al.* 2010 cited in Boodram, 2018; Headley & Milovanovic, 2016; Molenaar & El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017; Plambech, 2018). For example, Headley and Milovanovic (2016) reported a study by Thomas-Hope in 2014 which revealed that deported migrants experienced hostility from their communities, stigmatisation, loss of decent homes and means of sustainable livelihood.

Severally, it has been reported that regardless of their unwholesome experiences during their migration process and their experiences of forced expulsion, deportees often find it difficult to reintegrate and are likely to re-migrate (Ratia & Notermans, 2012; Galvin, 2014; Orozco & Yansura, 2015; Reitig & Villegas, 2015; Schuster & Majidi, 2015; Dako-Gyeke & Kodom,

2017; Boodram, 2018; Majidi, 2018). The challenges that make re-integration difficult include:

- The harsh realities that pushed them out are still subsisting, i.e. fear of persecution, continuing conflicts and insecurity, poverty and lack of opportunities;
- Lingering psychological trauma from their experiences during their migration and deportation;
- Unwelcoming social networks who blame them for the failure of their migration;
- Debt incurred when emigrating (some borrowed from several friends and families to ensure their emigration); and
- Social networks or families left behind in deporting country; etc (Schuster and Majidi 2013; Headley and Milovanovic, 2016, Dako-Gyeke & Kodom, 2017; Boodram, 2018).

The role of social workers in reintegrating deportees

The United States of America's National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics states that social workers must pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Deportees need many things to overcome the first few and very important challenges thrown on their paths on arrival in Nigeria for them to be able to survive the harsh terrain. It is not enough to merely release such persons to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other relevant bodies after touching down in the country and also not the best way to help deportees overcome their pains.

There is also the need to help deportees recognise possibilities in their environments that they otherwise may not see. Whilst, social work skills and processes are essential in any effort to drive the reintegration discussion, planning and intervention for any viable change to the situation faced by deported migrants are also important. It is not a mere gainsay that the major role of social work is to equip clients or targeted vulnerable group with skills and coping mechanisms for them to depend on, as well as to use to improve their living conditions and life experiences. As such, social work practitioners must be involved at the different institutions with the aim of assisting in managing the cases of deported migrants and linking them to other professional services that will contribute to their well-being.

Pardeck (1988) in his ecological system perspective identifies six distinct professional roles that will allow social workers to work effectively with five basic client systems such as the individual, the family, the small group, the organization, and the community. In these six professional roles, social workers serve as conferees, enablers, brokers, mediators, advocates and guardians.

1. As conferees, social workers serve as the primary sources of assistance to the deportees in problem solving. Their role may include gathering important documentation, writing detailed reports that can support their client's case, and serving as a primary contact to law enforcement officials.
2. The enabler role focuses on actions taken when social workers structure, arrange, and manipulate events, interactions, and environmental variables to facilitate and enhance system functioning. Thus, the practitioner may assist deportees to recognise and take advantage of their own strengths and powers of resilience even within a seemingly incapacitating milieu. The goal of social work practitioners within this context might be to help dissuade the fears, guide the deported migrant finding resources and how to utilise them in modifying their situations.
3. The broker role is actions taken when the practitioner's object is to link the deportees with goods and services or to control the quality of those goods and services. Social workers connect the deportees to valuable resources (Limestone College Social Work, 2016). Social workers may also work with newly arrived deportees and their families by helping them adjust to their new surroundings. This may include providing job placement assistance, finding appropriate accommodation, supporting clients through social services referrals and much more. Social workers can alleviate some of the challenges of deportees by providing specialised counselling (Limestone College Social Work, 2016). Specialised counselling will help the deported migrants to recover and move on with their lives. Social workers will re-orientate the deportees with our societal values and make them understand that there is indeed no place like home. Children who are deported alongside their parents or guardians must be immediately taken care of and provided with everything that would make them escape the impact of the experience. Social workers can also provide counselling for family members.
4. As mediators, social workers try to reconcile opposing or disparate points of views and to bring the contestants together in united action.
5. Social workers as advocates, secure services or resources on behalf of the deportees in the face of identified resistance or develop resources or services in cases where they are inadequate or non-existent. Advocacy role of social workers will help this group of people by enhancing their individual and collective wellbeing and helping them in the areas of social justice and human rights. Social workers may also become involved in advocacy related issues that impact this population. They help by designing and coordinating community support programmes, advocating for strong services and doing research that can inform and influence policy changes.
6. As guardians, social workers participate in a social control function or they take protective actions when deportees' competency levels are

deemed inadequate. Social workers may need to check deportees for any serious health issues and then their data collected for security, welfare and sundry purposes.

These six roles are found to be very important in reintegrating deportees into their social systems. Importantly, social workers should apply the principles of acceptance and confidentiality particularly for deported women and young girls from Italy.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper succinctly discusses the diverse challenges of irregular emigration and realities faced by deportees as well as potential ways in which social workers through the mandate of social work can play a pivotal role in responding to these issues. In order to understand and explore how social workers can approach the notions of reintegrating of deported migrants, we looked at it from the perspective of ecological system theory. Since social workers need an understanding of the structural systems that may disadvantage or impair the reintegration of deported migrants, as well as understand the dynamics of relational and personal systems that impact their decision making and wellbeing. On the other hand, the ecosystem model also guides our analysis in identifying concrete and practical steps social work and the practitioners can take to mitigate the psychological and structural challenges faced by deported migrants. Based on these, the following are suggested:

- ✓ There is need to educate parents that Europe is not a paradise, that the desert is hot, and the sea is not a river to cross.
- ✓ There is need to promote a greater public awareness of the risks and dangers of irregular migration and that migration is not the only way to make something out of lives. There are positive alternatives to migration. Would-be migrants should weigh their options carefully. People can legally migrate to Europe to work, but also to receive training, to study and for the purpose of family union.
- ✓ People should be encouraged to engage in entrepreneurship to promote job creation and economic growth.

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