**Migration Of Young Nigerians And Skilled Persons To Foreign Countries: Challenges And The Role Of Social Work  In South East, Nigeria**

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### Abstract

Migration has remained a persistent and historical feature of human societies, marked by the voluntary and involuntary movement of individuals across regions and borders. In Sub-Saharan Africa, international migration is particularly prominent, surpassing levels observed in many developing regions (Bhardway & Sharma, 2023). Scholars like Oluwabukunm interpret migration as a facet of globalization that fosters cross-cultural, socio-political, and economic interactions, ultimately shaping societal development. Historically, African migration has evolved through significant phases—most notably, the transatlantic slave trade between the 15th and 19th centuries, during which millions of Africans were forcibly relocated to Europe and the Americas for labor. Later, during colonial rule, large numbers of Nigerians migrated to neighboring countries such as Ghana, Cotonou, and Equatorial Guinea, where they engaged in labor-intensive sectors including rail construction, cocoa farming, and gold mining (Mbere & Pongon, 2010). This historical context underscores the enduring significance of migration as both a driver and a reflection of broader socio-economic and political transformations.

**Key words: Migration, Foreign countries, social work**

### Introduction

Migration has been a constant and age long phenomenon in the history of human existence. In other words, many societies have at one point or the other witnessed voluntary or involuntary relocation of her members from their place of abode to other places either within the same region or outside their region. A greater percentage of people in Sub-saharan Africa are involved especially in international migration compared to those of developing countries (Bhardway & Sharma, 2023). Oluwabukunm see this development as an instrument of globalization meant to promote interactions among people of diverse cultural, socio-political and economic backgrounds  as well as affect the development of societies. Mbere and Pongon (2010)

also noted that between 15th and early 19th century, this phenomenon took the form of slave trading as millions of Africans were captured and taken down to Europe and America to work in their plantation and mining sites. Similarly, during the period of colonialism in most African states, thousands of Nigerians were found in Ghana, Cotonou, Equatorial Guinea and other countries within the sub-region where they worked in railway lines, cocoa farms, gold mine and other areas.

In the same vein, after the Nigerian independence in 1960, many young Nigerians were sent to United Kingdom, America and other European countries for educational pursuit to boost the human capital development required to cope with the administrative challenges in the emerging nationhood. Many of these young Nigerians who benefited from this programme later returned with valuable skills and which was injected into the nation building both in the civil service, corporate organizations and academics. However, migration has taken a different dimension especially in Nigeria since the era of military regime and democratic government in 1999. This development has become one of the identified social problems threatening Nigeria and other developing nations in the past few years (Shabu, 2023). Most of the people that are hurriedly leaving or migrating to other countries are youths with tremendous potentials/skills. In other words, they are the young ones with highly competitive skills in such critical areas like medicine, law, academics, engineering, pharmacy, telecommunication, Journalism and so on. The main purpose of migration seems to be related to individual's aspirations which in most cases are induced by how an ambition can be achieved in one place other than one's state of residence (Bohme, 2012, Flahaux & De Hass, 2016). The most popular destination for these migrants include United Kingdom, America, China, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan amongst others (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). In 2022, information from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) indicates that about 486,869 young Nigerians applied for travelling visa to United Kingdom only (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023).

Studies have shown that migration of young Nigerians to other countries is linked to both endogenous and exogenous factors (Duvell et al, 2016, Schuring, 2017, Okunade & Bakere, 2020, Iseolorunkanmi et al, 2021, Ikuteyijo, 2021 Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). The endogenous factors according to the researchers include poor economic conditions, high level of poverty, endemic pursuit, unemployment, high level of insecurity, political instability, discrimination,

marginalization/increasing inequality in the distribution of national wealth, population upsurge, incessant strikes in educational institutions, malnutrition/infectious diseases and so on. On the other hands, the exogenous factors include the desire for greener pasture or idealized vision of good life in foreign countries, desire to acquire international academic qualification, greed and so on. For the mere fact that wages are much higher in foreign countries compared to those working in Nigeria makes most of the young people to undertake any form of risk associated with migration (Ellis et al, 2011). In some cases, family members as a whole will invest whatever they have to sponsor one or two members of their family with the hope that once the person crosses over, the economy and social standing of the family are bound to change for the best. Many people although may not have the necessary travelling documents go to the extent of  using illegal routes. Malakooti (2016) opines that the use of illegal route in travelling out of one's country is fraught with such dangers as falling into the hands of smugglers/kidnappers or dying off in the desert because of the long distance.

Nevertheless, the exit of these young, dynamic and skillful individuals from Nigeria to other countries have had far reaching consequences in all spheres of the country's national life-health, Agriculture, education, military, construction, leadership and administration. Ogbenike (2019) states that the Nigerian government has failed to provide the enabling environment or opportunities for the young ones to explore their proficiency in the areas of God's  given talents. Shabu (2023) also remarks that the young people are the engine house for innovation and productivity of any nation and as such, their departure to other countries could be a threat to development and technological progress of their native land. This is because majority of these young people that have been trained in Nigeria and acquired the required skills now migrates to other countries where they become resourceful to them while abandoning their country of origin underdeveloped (Adeyemi et al, 2018).

In 2022, the Nigerian Medical Association alerted the government on the dangers of mass drift of Nigerian medical personnel to other countries leaving an abysmal ratio of one medical doctor to 10,000 people which is far below the global standards spelt out by the World Health Organization (WHO) of one medical personnel to 600 people. Ogbenike (2019) relates the situation to what Nigeria experienced in 1970s and 80s when there was a mass influx of Nigerian medical doctors to Saudi Arabia for greener pasture. Alabi (2015) argues that loss of

revenue and low economic growth could be among the consequences of mass migration to other countries as only very few people will now be left in Nigeria to work and pay tax to the government. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) shows that the Nigerian government lose about ten billion dollars annually due to migration of Nigerian citizens to other countries. This colossal capital flight seems to impact negatively on the nation's exchange rate and promote inflation (Shabu, 2023). More so, the huge expenses incurred by family members for the oversea trip her member(s) may have depressive outcome on the psychological state of relatives left behind, as part of the money may have been gotten as loans from friends or financial institutions (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). Oluwabukunmi (2021) also argues that the absence of this high skilled workforce impact negatively in the country's socio-economic and political progress as they are expected to be in charge of various offices and activities required to uplift the development of the nation.

Social Work as a profession is committed to promoting the responsiveness of organizations, communities and other social institutions to individual's needs and social problems. Higham (2006) argues that since migration has become a global trend and one of the defining characteristics of the 21st century social world, Social Workers have come to become abreast with global governance which involves knowledge of human right legislations and policies, state regulations, non-governmental agencies and all forms of environmental concerns necessary to address problems related to migration. They employ professional skills and techniques such as counselling, advocacy, mediation, social assistance, education and so on in addressing cases related to migrant wellbeing (Wegmann, 2014). Awosusi et al (2021) argues that the attraction of an idealized life in the foreign countries and total display of ignorance by the youths on the dangers associated with migration has led to the death of many Nigerians along the Mediterranean. However, since Social Workers are not part of the agencies working in the nation's border or members of the interview panel in visa application for intending migrants, the accessibility of information underlying migration for this dynamic young and skilled persons pose a serious problem. Prior studies dwells more on the societal and economic consequences associated with migration and brain drain (Alabi, 2015, Adeyemi, 2018, Ogbenika, 2019, Oluwabukunmi, 2021, Okunade & Awosusi, 2023, Shabu, 2023). None of these studies had ever made attempt to examine the issue on the associated challenges of migration and the role of Social Work especially in the Southeast zone of Nigeria. This study is poised to fill this

knowledge gap. The study is therefore aimed at examining the challenges and role of Social Work in view of the current migration of young Nigerians and skilled persons to foreign lands with particular reference to South east, Nigeria. The following formed the specific objectives of the study: (i) To find out the erroneous perception of young Nigerians and skilled persons towards migration to other nations (ii) To find out the challenges posed to family members/relatives left behind and the public institutions by this migration upsurge (iii) To examine the role of social work in addressing issues related to migration of young and skilled individuals to foreign lands and finally, (iv) To ascertain the problems experienced by Social Workers in handling issues related to migration of young Nigerians to other lands.

## 2. Literature Review

In this section, efforts were made to establish from literature the erroneous perception of young Nigerians and skilled persons in their migration upsurge to foreign countries, challenges posed to family members/relatives left behind and public institutions, and the role of Social Work. Attempts were also made to find out some of the hiccups experienced by Social Workers in tackling the challenges of this mass movement of Nigerian youths to other climes. This situation if not addressed effectively with professional touch may deplete the nation and wipe away the claim of Nigeria as the giant of Africa.

### (a)Erroneous perception of young Nigerians and skilled persons on migration

Studies have shown that most of the young and skilled persons that migrates or have intention of migrating from Nigeria to other countries at the initial stage are beclouded by an imaginary life in foreign lands which they see as far better than what we have in Nigeria (Reynolds, 2002, Nwalutu, 2016, Ikuteyijo, 2021). Many of the migrants when they discover themselves in the foreign lands become frustrated as they cannot find suitable jobs in the relevant fields but resort to work as a taxi drivers or mortuary attendants, security guards and other low skilled occupations (Reynolds, 2002). In other words, majority of these young people especially those of them that arrived at their destination country through illegal route tend to engage themselves in dirty, dangerous and demeaning jobs (Ikuteyijo, 2013). Recently, the picture of a young man from Enugu State, Southeast zone of Nigeria who travelled to France and ended up sleeping in the bush for more than two weeks was circulated in social media as the Nigerian

agent who brought him into the country through illegal means abandoned him after collecting huge amount of money from him. The implication is that intending migrants are fed with distorted information that try to convince them that a lot of opportunities exist in foreign lands (IOM, 2019). Similarly, reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023), reveals that many of the migrants in a bid to beat down the institutional procedures and emigration policy go ahead to forge their international passports, visas and other travel documents, and sometimes engage in fake marriage relationship with  foreigners located through face book and other social media networks in order to facilitate their green  paper or resident permit.

Ikuteyijo (2021) also reveals that most young people in Nigeria have been brain washed about their desire to travel out without considering the implications of such movement especially going through the illegal routes. Most of the youths see their trip to overseas as practical solution to their survival. They assume that those in foreign lands such as Canada, United States, Australia, Dubai, South Africa and others enjoy better quality of life  (constant electricity, good diet, better weather, better health services and secured environment) in addition to promoting their social status. In other words, these young people seem to be too desperate to leave the country no matter what it takes to carve out alternative opportunity that will change their living conditions.

**(b) Challenges posed to family members /relatives left behind and public institutions**

The increasing number of Nigerian youths and skilled personnel migrating to other countries seems to have negative consequences especially to members of the families left behind and the entire public institutions. Adeyemi et al (2018) emphasized that as long as most competent and highly skilled labour force continues to leave Nigeria to live in foreign lands, our country of origin will remain underdeveloped. The authour argues that almost every sector of our national lives have been affected by this mass movement.

Okunade and Awosusi (2023) posits that the financial expenses involved in processing travelling visa and other documents dislocate many families and push them to selling their landed and personal properties or go for loans with Banks, friends and other financial institutions. Mbere and Pongon (2010) also maintain that many family members and relatives tend to overstress themselves to raise any amount of money involved in seeing that one of their members

travel out with the assumption that wages are much higher abroad and it will only take little time to recoup whatever amount that was spent. In many cases, once this dream was not realized, the situation could result to depression and frustration among family members  and relatives left behind as they cannot cope effectively with the family expenses and personal needs. Similarly, Roestenburg (2013) argues that family members squeezing themselves to raise huge amount required for oversea trip by one of their members could result to development of depressive behaviour, sadness, sleep disorders, loneliness, anxiety attacks and loss of appetite for the left behinds. Equally, failure of family members to contact any of their relatives that travelled abroad for a long period could result to traumatic experience that may not be easy to overcome by the left behinds, hence the need for support system to mitigate the detrimental effects. Demurger (2015) remarks that despite the fact that remittances from migrants help in easing family budget constraints, poverty alleviation, healthcare needs, nutrition, sanitation and payment of childrens' school fees, it has negative impact on the psychological state of family members and relatives left behind.

More so, the educational system in Nigeria is currently failing especially at the University level as a result of migration of Nigerian lecturers to other countries occasioned by the inability of the government to provide the necessary infrastructural facilities, poor conditions of service and welfare of Lecturers, poor funding of the educational sector amongst others (Musa et al, 2022). The authour noted that in 2022, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria embarked on a nationwide strike that lasted for eight months and which paralyzed all academic activities. This situation pushed many lecturers in Nigeria to seek for greener pastures in foreign lands especially United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Australia, Middle East, South Africa and others. The strike also made it difficult for many postgraduate students in Nigerian Universities to finish their programme and which would have enhanced their chances of getting desired jobs. Anonaba (2015) noted that instability in academic calendar in many Nigerian Universities has been accountable to the increasing rate of Nigerian students drifting to study in foreign lands with exorbitant school fees. In many Universities, some programmes were closed down as there were only few lecturers left  while other programmes were merged.

On the health sector, Yakubu et al (2023) remarks that in 2021 alone, 4,880 Nigerian medical personnel and 5,543 Nurses left to  United Kingdom. Oluwabukunmi (2021) and Ajoseh

et al (2024) attributed this mass migration of Nigerian medical personnel to other countries to inadequate medical facilities and poor policy formulation which has posed a threat to fund allocation and welfare of medical officers. The authours also noted that the persistent migration of medical officers to foreign lands has placed doctor-to-population ratio to 1:5000 which falls below the doctor-to-patient ratio of 1:600 recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

**(c ). Role of Social Work  in Migration of youths/skilled persons**

Social Work involve activities directed at improving human and social conditions as well as the alleviation of human distress and social problems (Ahmed, 2016). It is a profession that assist individuals as they go through life changes (Hardy, 2016). In other words, the essence of the profession is to enhance the coping mechanisms of the individuals or groups trapped by poverty, unemployment, discrimination/social exclusion, emotional problems, domestic violence and others (Higham, 2006). The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) reveals that many young and skilled persons in Nigeria do not comply with travel requirements resulting to increase in number of people embarking on illegal migration. According to the report, males are most culpable with 51.9% compared to the females with 44.8%. Moreover, the absence of proper documentation and approval for foreign trips had exposed many migrants to all sorts of dangers: exploitation, human trafficking, smugglers, armed attack and death in the desert or ocean although this has not still reduced the rate at which young people aspire to leave for other countries (Susu, 2023). The implication is that the number of people applying for visa to foreign countries continues to multiply on daily basis. It is therefore expected that issues related to migration and different forms of hardship undergone by migrants are brought up for social work intervention even if they are unable to meet up with the needs of migrants (Williams & Graham, 2014), after all the goal of the Social Work is to promote the wellbeing of all and ensure that social justice is maintained (Rostenburg, 2013).

Social Workers employ professional skills such as counselling, advocacy, social assistance, education, mediation and other forms of techniques to assist migrants trapped with one problem or the other especially during documentation, arrival in the destination country, hardship and employment (Wagmann, 2014, Popescu & Libal, 2018). Counselling for instance, is a skill used by Social Workers to find solutions to problems of a client using the principles of

relationships. It is the process through which an individual or group who experience difficulties in overcoming their impediments are given the necessary guidance, encouragement and inspiration in the process of creating and managing relationships needed for growth (Harris, 2002). Similarly, Okeke and Anih (2006) see counselling as a face-to-face encounter where an interpersonal relationship is established to help individuals resolve areas of conflict that could not be resolved in the past. Social Workers therefore try to re-orientate the youths and other skilled persons using counselling therapy and focusing on the need of clients to change their attitude, behaviours and emotions. In addition to encouraging the individuals that intend travelling out to follow the laydown regulations and guidelines, counselling therapy could be used to motivate social action and economic improvement on the part of the government since economic hardship, unemployment and poor working environment are among the reasons for this uncontrolled mass drift to foreign countries.

Similarly, Social Workers play advocacy role in advancing the rights and interest of migrants. Advocacy is a crucial part of Social Work concerned with building capacity or interest of the individual/ group (Lymbery & Postle, 2007). The essence is to counter practices or policies that are inimical to the wellbeing of the individuals or groups. Williams and Graham (2014) observed that migration has become a global trend and as such, Social Workers need to equip themselves with national and international policies and legislations governing migration as they work in partnership with other professionals with the aim of advising the young people on the consequences of breaching the laydown procedure or involving themselves in illegal migration. According to the author, Social Work is a profession with network of stakeholders including families and conventional institutions. Almutairri (2015) argues that sometimes, Social Workers try to address some barriers from foreign countries that brings in some restrictions and undue exploitation of migrants or fail to provide the necessary social services. Reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) shows that many Nigerians are unaware of the government's policies on migration as well as Migrants Resource Centres.

Research evidence has shown that economic hardship, poor salaries and deteriorating working conditions, unemployment, poor standards of educational system, insecurity, marginalization and lopsided infrastructural development amongst others have been the driving force on migration of young Nigerians to foreign countries (Kirwin & Anderson, 2018, Ikuteyijo,

2021, NBS, 2023). Viola et al (2018) noted that Social Workers are well versed on the needs and desires or issues related to migrants who frequently face some hurdles in Visa processing/documentation and are expected to advocate for policy change or dismantling of systemic barriers in the critical areas. In other words, they try to help the youth navigate the complex system and exercise their rights without placing favoritism and tribal sentiment first. Social Workers are also made to lobby on behalf of the individuals or groups to access services, challenge injustice or lack of access to services, advise individuals or groups on the best option to meet their needs as well as enable individuals or groups to represent their views appropriately (TOPSS UK, 2002). Ogbenika (2019) remarks that apart from anti-development programmes which the Nigerian government had unleashed on the masses, the government is said to have failed woefully in providing the enabling environment necessary for the citizens to contribute substantially in national development.

(d) **Problems experienced by Social Workers on migration of Young Nigerians**

Right from its development, Social Work has been so much concerned with promoting the wellbeing and optimal functioning of the individuals, groups or communities. In other words, emphasis has been placed on ensuring social justice and social change in the life of the individuals and communities. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2000), Social Work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment/liberation of people to enhance wellbeing. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social system, Social Work intervenes at the point where people interact with their environment.

In Nigeria, the number of young people that go for foreign visa apart from those using illegal routes continues to soar on daily basis. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019), one in every three young Nigerians and skilled persons want to travel out of the country. The mostly preferred destinations include United Kingdom, America, Australia, Germany and others. This situation pose a very big challenge to Social Work as they cannot obtain detailed information especially those who used illegal routes. For the mere fact that Social Workers are never part of the visa interview panel or among the agencies working in the nation's border makes it easy for intending migrants to hide certain information pertaining their lives when confronted by Social workers (Jordan & Duvell, 2002). The implication is that

Social Workers are handicapped and cannot develop appropriate intervention plan. Many of the migrants are uncertain on the consequences of opening up or giving comprehensive information related to their personal life circumstance/family background and therefore had to hide these vital information before the practitioner. In contrast to what is obtainable in developed economies, there seems to be some institutional difficulties and complete absence of clear policy frameworks, training and specialist supervision for Social Workers in migration. This may imply that Nigerian Social Workers handling cases of migration are just working at the limit of their personal skills and abilities (Kohli, 2002). In addition, many Social Workers lack access to internet facilities and constant electricity to keep themselves updated on knowledge bordering on the activities of the government on migration from time to time.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Relative Deprivation Theory. The major tenet of the theory is on economic inequality. It is assumed that if people perceive that there is a gap in terms of what they are currently getting and what they deserve to get, it create a kind of discontent which portray the feelings that the society owes them. In other words, the theory tries to explain the discrepancy that exist between what the individual is entitled to from his or her society and what they have actually gotten. According to Daramola (2006), the relative deprivation theory emanates from one's judgement regarding his or her status in the society. The perceived deprivation tend to create grievances on the part of the individuals or groups.

The current migration of young Nigerians and skilled persons to foreign countries could be associated with deprivation of good employment opportunities, good working conditions, inequitable resources allocation and infrastructural development, inability of the government to protect the lives of the citizens and others. Duhu (2016) argues that in many countries especially in Sub-saharan Africa, young people are marginalized as they do not have access to good education and employment, while grabbling with economic mismanagement and bad governance orchestrated by the ruling class.

## 4. Materials and Methods

### Study Design

The study adopted cross-sectional survey research design and using qualitative approach to elicit information from participants.

## 4.1. Study setting

The study was conducted in South east, Nigeria using employees of selected federal establishments in Enugu and Ebonyi state. These two states are among the five states that make up the South east zone of Nigeria and also share similar boundary. The dominant occupation of the people within the two states include farming, trading and other allied activities although with many engaged in civil service. Christianity also forms the dominant religion in the states with handful of Islamic adherents. Each of the states have federal ministries located in its capital city ( Enugu and Abakaliki).

## 4.2. Instrument for data collection

Indepth Interview formed the primary instrument for data collection for the study with secondary data sourced from extensive literature search via Journal articles, conference papers, internet materials, policy documents, Newspapers and text books as well as unpublished thesis. These materials were reviewed based on currency and interrelatedness to the study objectives.

## 4.3. Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage sampling technique was used with South east, Nigeria stratified into five according to the number of states that make up the zone. Simple random sampling was used to chose two states (Enugu and Ebonyi) out of the five states that make up the South east zone of Nigeria. Purposive sampling was then employed to select three federal establishments from each of the states. These Institutions are; Federal Ministry of Interior, Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. These Institutions appear to be more abreast with the subject under study. Three participants within Grade Level 08 and above from each of the establishments were also chosen purposively (ie 18 participants on the whole ) and subjected to In-depth interview. Participants' experiences on issues related to migration may be linked to contact of intending migrants with these formal institutions. The interviews which lasted between 60-90 minutes were conducted in each of the Ministries between the months of September and November, 2024. Before the onset of each interview session, participants were

given relevant information related to the aims and objectives of the study and oral informed consent obtained. Two postgraduate students of Social Sciences were used as research assistants.

## 4.4. Analysis of Data

Data collected from the In-depth interview and secondary sources were then analyzed using content analysis. The interview transcription and texts were reviewed or re-read severally in order to develop a sense of the whole. Thereafter, all parts of the texts and transcriptions related to the study objectives were categorized into themes and coded.

## 5. Results

The current migration of young Nigerians and skilled persons to foreign lands has remained a burning issue that calls for attention by patriotic Nigerians and Social Work professionals. This development has continued to worsen since the coming in of the military and democratic government in Nigeria despite the huge material resources in the country.

(a) **Erroneous perception of intending migrants:** The study revealed among other findings that many young people and skilled persons in the current dispensation who are highly desperate to leave the country are beclouded by their idealized vision of life in the foreign lands as being far better than what we have in Nigeria. A male participant in Federal Ministry of Interior, Abakaliki had this to say:

> Most of our young people want to make it within the shortest time not minding the consequences. They forget that not everything that glitter is gold. That is why you see many of them dying on daily basis in an attempt to cross the borders (P.5).

Another male participant in the same Ministry says:

> Many young people in Nigeria live in fantasy. They fail to understand that economic hardship is a global issue. Travelling abroad now does not mean you will make it. Personally I don't pray for my child to take such risk especially embarking on illegal travelling (P. 3).

Adepoju (2020) posits that most of the young people are deceived by distorted, exaggerated and misleading information from friends, relatives and social media which influence their decision to travel abroad.

(b) **Challenges posed to family members/relatives left behind and public institutions:** Another finding that emanated from the study shows that travelling outside the country by these young Nigerians pose a serious psychological threat to family members left behind and also impact negatively on the effective performance of public institutions. A male participant in Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Enugu, narrated his experience with a family friend thus:

> In my village, one of my friends sold his car and other landed properties to pay for travelling expenses of his son to overseas. After two years he could not hear from him, the man developed stroke and died. How do you explain this? (P.11).

Similarly, a female participant of the same Ministry who toed the same line stated, ' It is a traumatic when your child or any of your relation travels out and you cannot communicate with him/her for a long time. The shocks that accompany it is enough to kill. I don't pray to have such experience (P. 9).

Going further, a participant in Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State commented thus:

> Our hospitals are now in shamble because most of the competent medical personnel have travelled outside the country. Patients are dying in dozens on daily basis. This is the same with what we see in the universities. I seriously blame the political class. It doesn't mean that these foreign countries absorbing our professionals are richer than Nigeria. It all borders on inability of the government to prioritize it (P.14).

(c) **Role of Social Work:** Findings from the study also revealed that as a result of frustration, death, embarrassment, brain drain and other dangers faced by migrants especially those involved in illegal routes, the role of Social Work therefore becomes highly imparative in tackling the problem. In other words, Social Workers have developed some skills such as Counselling, advocacy, mediation, education, social assistance and other techniques as a

way of addressing the negative effects associated with youth migration to foreign countries. Counselling for instance is regarded as one of the transformative techniques through which these migrants try to redefine themselves and their aspirations (psychological, personal and social difficulties) through professional assistance /guidance by the Social Worker (Pickard & Carroll, 2015). In addition to the use of counselling, Social Workers play advocacy role especially in such areas as policy review and social justice in matters related to visa processing and issuance of passports as well as mediate among family members of the migrant to sustain harmonious relationships.

A female participant at the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Enugu expressed her view this way:

> Social workers can contribute much on cases that has to do with migration utilizing the professional competency. These youths need counselling to know that travelling abroad is not a decision that one takes without weighing it properly. Some of them who go for illegal trips may be doing that unknowingly. We cannot continue to lose these future leaders to other countries (P.1).

Another female participant in the same Ministry who shared related views said:

Our young people need good jobs, good working environment with attractive packages. It is the responsibility of Social Workers to speak to people in authority to take positive steps so as to prevent majority of our young people from the dream of travelling out. This is our country and there is the need for us to ensure that the wellbeing of everybody is seriously addressed by the government.

Similarly, in the Federal Ministry of Interior, Abakaliki, a male participant stated " Social Workers should help families that are traumatized for not communicating with their relations overseas for quite a long time to cope or take necessary steps in re-uniting them"

(d) **Challenges experienced by Social Worker on issues related to youth migration**: Finally, the study findings revealed that Social Workers are often confronted with some challenges such as the inability to get comprehensive information on migrants self identity, family history, life circumstances and so on. A participant at the Federal Ministry of Interior, Enugu remarks thus:

Our problem is on border control. We have inadequate manpower to manage our borders. More over, trained Social Workers are not part of the specialized agencies there. We have the Police, Immigration Officers, Custom officers and other para-military services. It is high time we advocate for inclusion of Social workers as allied staff in the border or passport/Visa issuance of the Federal Ministry of Interior (P.15).

Another participant at the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Enugu stated that most of the migrants do not open up before Social Work Professionals because of fear of what may be the consequences.

## 6. Discussion

The study was aimed at ascertaining the associated challenges of the current wave of migration of young Nigerians/ skilled persons to foreign countries and the role of Social Work. By using appropriate intervention skills and techniques designed for intending migrants and policy change for government agencies, the inquisitiveness of these young people to leave Nigeria will be highly reduced. One of the findings of the study shows that the young people are deceived by the erroneous perception of better life overseas. This corroborates the view of Ikuteyijo (2021) that young people's wrong perception of the benefits and implications of travelling outside their country of origin especially those that use illegal routes has made many of them to fell into the hands of human traffickers, ritualists and criminals who promise them of better prospects in foreign lands while some got missing or die off in the desert because of the long journey. Duvell et al (2016) in the literature remarks that many young Nigerians are motivated to travel out of the country as a result of success recorded by others and then resort to taking any available risk or outcome even when they are fully informed on the dangers associated with such adventure. One of the Interview participants also emphasized that many of the young people live in fantasy and fail to realize that the present economic downturn is a global issue and not peculiar to Nigeria alone.

The study outcome also shows that the mass migration of young people in Nigeria and other skilled persons poses a psychological threat to family members /relatives left behind and impede the effective functioning of public institutions. Okunade and Awosusi (2023) posits that family members who may have involved themselves in huge migration expenses of their family

member may be hurt psychologically especially when remittances fail. One of the interview participants also narrated how a family friend sold his properties to sponsor the oversea trip of his son and later developed stroke and died. Anonaba (2015) also asserted in the literature that our Universities have been unstable for some years now with  the standards falling as a result of migration of many lecturers to foreign universities where they enjoy better pay and good working environment. Ajoseh et al (2024) also stated that in 2023, not more than 24,000 licensed medical doctors were left in Nigeria after others must have travelled to foreign countries.

Findings from the study also revealed that Social Workers have played some critical roles using some professional skill such as counselling, advocacy, mediation, social assistance, education and other techniques in attending to people who have experienced frustration in the process of migration. This undertaking aligns with the goal of Social work which focuses on enhancing the standards of life of every members of the society as well as promoting social justice (Williams & Graham, 2014).  The Social Worker in the process of counselling makes intending migrants to follow the government's guidelines in processing their travelling documents. Similarly, the advocacy role undertaken by  Social Workers may involve putting in all efforts to represent and speak for the intending migrant and other vulnerables in migration process. The essence of taking up this task is to address all systemic barriers and promote policies that uphold the wellbeing of the individuals and migrants. Wagmann (2014) in the literature also pointed out that Social worker in addition to counselling and advocacy role give social assistance and educate migrants on their expectations during visa processing and documentations.

The study findings further revealed that Social Workers handling issues related to migration have been confronted with such problems like inability to obtain the accurate data of migrants as many of the migrants use illegal routes to reach their destination country. It was also inferred from the study outcome that many of the migrants deliberately do not like to furnish Social Work professionals with genuine information related to their identity, family history, life circumstances and institutional barriers amongst others. This findings may have informed Higham (2006) to argue that there is the need for Social Workers working with migrants to form alliance with other professionals and people in charge of border control and visa issuance in order to intervene effectively. An Interview participant also revealed that lack of adequate

manpower in the the management of Nigerian borders have been a problem and advocated for the incorporation of Social Workers as part of specialized team in border management and visa processing.

## 7. Conclusion

The failure of the Nigeria state to address some structural barriers like economic hardship, unemployment, insecurity, poor working conditions, deteriorating standards of education and uneven infrastructural development have been identified as underlying factors promoting massive migration of young Nigerians and skilled persons to foreign lands. Nevertheless, despite its negative consequences, Social Workers try to ameliorate the situation using their professional competence. Counselling therapy, policy advocacy, mediation, social assistance and education have been revealed as being very effective in stemming down the inquisitiveness of many young people to travel out of the country. Findings from the study shows that lack of accurate information on the life circumstances of migrants, institutional barriers and use of illegal routes have posed a great challenge to Social Work professionals in this respect.

## 8. Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. Social Work professionals should be made part of the border management and members of the interview panel on visa issuance.

2. There is the need for compulsory training on migration for all categories of Social Workers.

3. Migration studies should be incorporated into Nigeria educational curriculum right from primary school to university level.

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**Ethical Approval**

Not applicable

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