

RESEARCH ARTICLES

“They Have Better Opportunities over there”: Rationalizing Emigration of Young Family Members by Left behind Older Adults in South-East Nigeria¹

Samuel O. Ebimgbo², Ngozi E. Chukwu³ & Uzoma O. Okoye⁴

Abstract

A significant trend in human mobility in recent times is an unbroken upward trend in the number of people that migrate to other countries daily. The increasing migration is as a result of globalization as well as technological improvement in recent times, especially in the areas of communication and transportation which have made movement easier, cheaper, and faster. International migration is therefore a reality of our contemporary world. About 272 million international migrants were recorded across the globe in the year 2019. In Nigeria also, the number of young persons living outside the shores of the country has increased greatly in recent years. With the increasing number of young Nigerians migrating to other countries and given the supportive roles they play in the life of older adults, one expects a more challenging future for the left-behind. Left-behind older family members are found to report cases of chronic diseases, presence of depressive symptoms, and self-perceived loneliness. The study therefore sought to ascertain the views of older adults on emigration of younger family members in South-east Nigeria. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) Theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to generate data on a sample of (N = 58), left-behind older adults aged 60 years or older. The generated data were subjected to thematic analysis and the findings revealed that the young family members have more opportunities abroad than in Nigeria. The left-behind older family members indicated that they fully support the migration of their young family members because of the economic conditions of the country. The study therefore recommends functional policies that address proper well-being of these older adults. Further we recommend social work interventions aimed at ensuring the strengthening of family ties and maintaining adequate social support to left-behind older adults.

¹ This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) and was accepted for publication on 6/9/2022.

² Samuel O. Ebimgbo is a lecturer I at the Department of Social Work of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

³ Dr. Ngozi E. Chukwu is a senior lecturer at the Department of Social Work of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

⁴ Dr. Uzoma O. Okoye is a professor for Social Work at the Department of Social Work of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

Key Words:

Migration, left-behind older parents, social policies, social workers, south-east Nigeria

1. Introduction

International migration is currently seen as an unbroken upward trend because the number of people that migrate to other countries increase daily (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2017). The report of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) (2017b) shows that about 272 million international migrants were recorded across the globe in the year 2019 which was roughly 3.5% of the world population. India was found to record the highest number of people residing abroad, followed by Mexico, Russia, and China. About 60% of the international migration is prevalent in more than 30 high income countries while the remaining 40% of migration experience occurs in 170 low and middle income countries including Nigeria (Population Reference Bureau, 2013). The population of Nigerians living outside the shores of the country increased greatly between the years 1990 and 2013 ranging from 465,932 to 1,030,322 (Isiugo-Abanihe et al., 2016). Also, a total of 48,725 Nigerian citizens of which 74% were between the ages of 18 and 34 applied for asylum in different countries across the globe in the year 2016 (Eurostat, 2017). With the increasing number of young Nigerians migrating to other countries and given the supportive roles of young family members to older adults especially in south-east Nigeria, the left-behind older adults are poised to live at life's edge, facing a wide range of difficulties unaided. International migration thus has overwhelming impacts on older adults in the absence of formal social security in Nigeria (Odo et al., 2022).

Scholars have queried whether migration is a source of blessing or a curse for family members left behind (Gassmann et al., 2017). In the views of Gassmann et al. (2013), international migration reduces household poverty especially in families whose source of income lies hugely on remittances. Waidler et al. (2018) aver that the receipt of remittances helps older adults to buffer old age depressive symptoms, and is also an indicator for improving well-being. However, McAuliffe et al. (2017) posit that international migration affects people's daily living and activities. The migration of working-age family members affects the traditional filial support systems which may result in a decline in the welfare of left-behind older adults (Böhme et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2018) which usually results in poor general health and well-being, higher levels of emotional distress, increases risk of illness, and higher mortality rates (Adhikari et al., 2011; Antman, 2012; Bailey et al., 2018; Khanal et al., 2018). International migration causes poor emotional/psychological well-being such as sleep disorder, depressive signs, insomnia, loneliness, sadness, and mood disorder on left-behind older adults (Ashfaq et al., 2018; Ashfaq et al., 2016; Evandrou et al., 2017; Ghimire et al., 2018; Khanal et al., 2018). Older adults with migrant children are found to report cases of chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease (Falkingham et al., 2017).

The study was structured on the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) Theory developed by Stark et al. (1985). The NELM Theory posits that migration decisions are usually made by members of the household for the well-being of the family as a whole especially as a means to improve the economic conditions of the family. Certainly, migration is always viewed to be mutually beneficial for both the migrants and the sending household as the household will shoulder the costs associated with migration expecting

to be rewarded with remittances (Massey et al., 1993; Stark et al., 1985; Taylor, 1999). International migration has been a constant trend in human mobility across the world not just because of globalization (McAuliffe et al., 2017) or recent technological improvement in the areas of communication and transportation that has made migration easier and cheaper, but because people are beginning to respond to the global socio-economic and political stimuli (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2017a).

The origin and continuation of migration have been explained by inequalities, harsh socio-economic, socio-cultural and political conditions in African countries (Ogu, 2017). Among Nigerians, international migration is occasioned by some socio-economic conditions which are also situated within global trends. These include an increase in population, poverty (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2018) and unemployment. Nigeria is the world's seventh largest country in terms of population after China, India, United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Brazil, and remains first in Africa (Worldometer, 2020). According to the projection of UN DESA (2017a), the population of Nigeria will surpass that of United States to become the third most populated country in the world by 2050. Consequently, migration of younger ones will increase as one of the measures to ensure a better standard of living for many households in the nation (Deotti et al., 2016). Also, poverty is rife among Nigerians and has been identified as one of the propellers for the migration of younger family members. The World Bank (2021) report shows that in 2018, 83 million people Nigerians which was about 40% of the entire population lived below the poverty line, while about 53 million (approximately 25%) were found to be vulnerable. Also, Sasu (2022) revealed that in 2022, over 88 million Nigerians are living in extreme poverty as over 12 percent of the global population in extreme poverty were found in Nigeria as of 2022. The report of the National Bureau of Statistics as revealed by Adegboyega (2021) shows that one in every three able bodied Nigerians were unemployed in the fourth quarter of 2020 indicating that Nigeria's unemployment rate rose to 33.3 per cent or about 23.2 million people.

According to Odo et al. (2022), many older adults in Nigeria are separated from their adult children who they rely on for sustenance due to international migration. Most of these elderly persons are rural inhabitants and do not have access to pension benefits when they reach "retirement age" and thus must depend on their own earnings or the assistance of family members, especially their adult children. The absence of these children due to migration no doubt will challenge the life of their left-behind older parents given that Nigeria has no social security and protection system for these individuals. Migration increases children's economic assistance to their elderly parents, and enough remittance can be utilized to seek domestic help and associated support (Antman, 2012), however the quality of such caregiving of the elderly cannot be ascertained. These situations therefore have policy implications requiring the services of social workers. Migration is a global issue requiring the attention of social work professionals. These older family members have developed some self-support measures as a conventional way of ensuring their economic well-being due to dearth of government support (He & Ye, 2014). So, the professionals seek alternative ways of engaging these older adults by ensuring that they are socially connected for the receipt of care. Social workers equally ensure that left-behind older family members are safeguarded especially vulnerable ones who are self-neglecting, or who are victims of abuse (Cook, 2017). Also, they help left-behind older adults identify their self-strength and its utilization as well as developing good

communication skills that can help them stay socially and economically connected (Mojoyinola & Ayangunna, 2012).

The need for changes in social work migration research to incorporate local, regional and international perspectives has been suggested in literature (Cox & Geisen, 2014). While a plethora of studies have addressed the issues of the migration in several other climes like India (Bailey et al., 2018; Falkingham et al., 2017); Moldova (Bohme et al., 2015; Waidler et al., 2016) and China (Evandrou et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017). Other studies include that of (Ghimire et al., 2018; Thapa et al., 2018; Vanore et al., 2017), we observed a lacuna on the reasons for migration of young Nigerian family members from the views of left-behind older family members. The study becomes important because, migrating to other countries by young family members influence adequate care of their aged parents negatively. This is because adult children and youth who are supposed to provide care and support to older people are becoming unavoidably absent due to migration (Odo & Chukwu, 2022). Importantly, Nigeria has no functional social policies to assist these older adults to adjust to better-living conditions (Aiyede et al., 2015; Shofoyeke & Amosun, 2014). This to a great extent will quash the objectives of international development agenda such as Sustainable Development Goals and African Union Agenda 2063. Our study, therefore will ascertain the views of the left-behind older family members on the migration of their young family members. The study objectives were to: obtain the views of left-behind older adults on the migration of young family members; ascertain the supportive roles of left-behind older adults towards migration of their young family members; present reasons for supporting the emigration of the young family members by older adults with a view of proffering social work interventions.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Design, Setting, and Sampling

This study was developed from the mother project "Challenges and Adaptation Strategies of Left-behind Older Family Members of International Migrants" which was conducted in South-east Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative design to ascertain the views of left-behind older adults on migration of their young family members. The study was carried out in the southeast geo-political zone of Nigeria. Southeast Nigeria is made up of five states namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The choice of the zone as study location was due to the high involvement of southeasterners in international migration (Udenta et al., 2015). The people of eastern Nigeria are usually involved in education, commerce, industry, and philanthropic services. Some of these activities usually occasioned migration of more young southeastern people than young people from other geo-political zones (Isbell & Ojewale, 2018).

Purposive sampling procedures of snowballing and availability were used to select the study participants. Out of the five states in southeast Nigeria, Anambra and Enugu States were purposively selected because they had larger number of migrants in the geo-political zone than the other three states in the zone (IOM, 2017; Isiugo-Abanihe et al., 2016). The states also have airports of which one operates international airlines; the states have numerous commercial transportation companies which make migration easier and cheaper. The report of the National Bureau of Statistics (2017) shows that about 102,236 and 101,084 people considered migrating abroad between the years 2016 and 2017 are from Enugu and Anambra respectively. Two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were

purposely selected from each of the two selected states. The LGAs are Nnewi-North and Idemili-South in Anambra State while Udenu and Udi were selected from Enugu State. In the same vein, two communities were selected from each of the LGAs selected across the states. Thus, Otolo and Umudim were selected from Nnewi-North LGA while Nnobi and Nnokwa were selected from Idemili-South. Imilike and Orba were selected from Udenu LGA while in Udi LGA, Eke and Ngwo were selected.

We adopted snowballing and availability sampling methods to recruit 58 (30 males and 28 females) participants for the study. Through snowballing method, the researchers were able to be linked to other participants who were available to participate in the study. In Anambra state, we selected 32 (18 males and 14 females) left-behind older adults from the four communities selected across the two LGAs. This implies that we selected 20 participants (13 males and seven females) in Nnewi-North LGA, while in Idemili-South LGA, 12 participants (five males and seven females) were also selected. In Enugu State, 26 left-behind older adults (12 males and 14 females) were selected from the four communities across two LGAs selected for the study.

In all, we selected 40 participants for the in-depth interviews (IDIs) and 18 participants for the focus group discussions (FGDs). In the FGD conducted in Anambra State, six left behind male older adults were selected from Otolo in Nnewi-North LGA while in the IDI seven left-behind male older adults and seven left-behind female older adults were selected from Umudim in Nnewi-North LGA. At Nnokwa and Nnobi in Idemili-South LGA, five left-behind male older adults and seven left-behind female older adults were selected respectively. In Enugu State, we selected 12 left-behind older adults (six males and six females) from Ngwo and Eke in Udi LGA for the FGD study while for the IDI, we selected 14 left-behind older family members (six males and eight females) from Imilike and Orba in Udenu LGA. We selected these older adults on the premise of their ages [must be 60 years or older], residence in the study areas, must have at least a son or daughter or both living abroad, and must be willing to participate in the study.

2.2. Data Collection

The IDIs and FGDs were our only data collection sources. We opted for semi-structured interview schedules and discussion guides as the instruments for collection of data. The instruments we prepared in semi-structured format enabled us to delve into further probing that were not initially included in the study but within the topic under study. We prepared the instruments in English and the researchers were fluent in the local language. This way we were able to administer the instrument to participants who chose to be interviewed in Igbo. However, when the participants opted to be interviewed in the English language, the researchers consented.

We recruited some of the participants with the help of community leaders in the selected communities. These assisted us in identifying initial left-behind older adults who subsequently linked us to other participants that met the study requirements. While recruiting them, the decision for their preferred date, time, and venue for the interviews and discussions was made and agreed upon. Also, other necessary information regarding the aims of the study, the expected risks, and benefits were related to them. We also sought their permission to use an electronic recorder to capture the verbal communication while the field notes were used to capture non-verbal communication. We assured them of their confidentiality and anonymity and as well as their right to withdraw from the study.

Each of the interview sessions was structured to last between 25-40 minutes while 55-60 minutes were allotted for the FGD sessions. We approached 72 left-behind older adults for the study but 14 of them declined to participate due to their unavailability and for the insecurity in the south-east geo-political zone. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Health Research Ethics Committee at the University of Nigeria, Teaching Hospital, Enugu (ref: NHREC/05/01/2008B-FWA00002458-1RB00002323).

2.3. Data Analysis

We adopted the inductive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse the transcripts and field notes. We did a manual analysis without any assisted computer software to ensure we retain and present the original data as we obtained them from the field. The audio files that contained the participants' responses were transcribed first in Igbo language and later translated into English language to ensure similar meaning in both languages. We did an initial coding to generate many categories and codes without any reservation (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage, we identified opinions that emerged which were in line with the objectives of the study. We moved to the second stage to eliminate, combine, or subdivide the coding categories we initially identified in the first stage of our coding. We were able to achieve this by reading and re-reading the transcripts for familiarity with the recurring themes. We paid attention to the recurring thoughts, as well as the wider themes that were connected to the codes (Charmaz, 2006; Krueger, 1994; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Three themes that were central to the objectives of the study were identified and used for the reporting of the study findings.

Table 1. Guide of questions for FGD and IDI, emerged themes, and sub-themes

S/N	Key Questions	Themes	Sub-themes
1.	What are your thoughts over the migration of young family members in the community?	a. Feelings towards migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessity and good adventure • Development through hard work • Distinguished from others
2.	Were you in support of the migration of young family members?	a. Willing to support the migration b. Reasons for the support to migration of young family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully supported • Made the necessary arrangement ▪ Poor economy ▪ Better opportunities ▪ Hope over future

Source: Researchers' field work 2021

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The analysis as shown in Tables 2 and 3 revealed that 30 males and 28 females participated in the study. The ages of the participants ranged from 60 to 90 years, only one participant being a female indicated adherence to the African Traditional Religion (ATR) while others were Christians. A greater number of participants (36) were married while 22 were widowed at the time of the study. The analysis shows that 23 participants were traders. 16 participants were found to earn less than ₦30,000 [\$72] monthly. While 13 participants had university education as highest level of educational attainment, 15 of them had no formal education and others have their primary and secondary education.

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the male participants by LGA, age, marital status, educational level, occupation, and monthly income

Participant	Pseudo Name	LGA	Age	Religion	Study	Marital status	Educational qualification	Occupation	Monthly income
1	Mr. Ben	Udi	70	Christianity	FGD	Married	Primary	Trader	₦45,000 [\$108]
2	Mr. Pat	Udi	68	Christianity	FGD	Married	Secondary	Trader	₦28,000 [\$67]
3	Mr. Pet	Udi	72	Christianity	FGD	Widower	Secondary	Retiree	₦35,000 [\$84]
4	Mr. Max	Udi	60	Christianity	FGD	Married	University	Civil servant	₦60,000 [\$144]
5	Mr. Wil	Udi	78	Christianity	FGD	Married	Secondary	Trader	₦30,000 [\$72]
6	Chief Joh	Udi	69	Christianity	FGD	Married	University	Trader	Un-disclosed
7	Mr. Iku	Nnewi-North	82	Christianity	FGD	Married	No education	Unemployed	Un-disclosed
8	Mr. Eme	Nnewi-North	80	Christianity	FGD	Widower	No education	Unemployed	Un-disclosed
9	Mr. Emma	Nnewi-North	62	Christianity	FGD	Married	Secondary	Trader	Un-disclosed
10	Mr. Mba	Nnewi-North	70	Christianity	FGD	Married	No education	Artisan	Un-disclosed
11	Mr. Ben	Nnewi-North	72	Christianity	FGD	Widower	No education	Trader	Un-disclosed
12	Mr. Geo	Nnewi-North	66	Christianity	FGD	Married	University	Retiree	Un-disclosed
13	Mr. Gody	Nnewi-North	60	Christianity	IDI	Married	Secondary	Farmer	Un-disclosed
14	Mr. Isa	Nnewi-North	69	Christianity	IDI	Married	No education	Trader	Un-disclosed
15	Mr. Mik	Nnewi-North	65	Christianity	IDI	Married	University	Pastor	Un-disclosed
16	Mr. Sim	Nnewi-North	79	Christianity	IDI	Widower	No education	Unemployed	Un-disclosed
17	Mr. Lui	Nnewi-North	74	Christianity	IDI	Married	Secondary	Working	₦47,000 [\$113]
18	Bar. Edo	Nnewi-North	61	Christianity	IDI	Married	University	Lawyer	Undisclosed
19	Mr. Sol	Nnewi-North	88	Christianity	IDI	Widower	Primary	Trader	₦25,000 [\$60]
20	Mr. Uge	Udenu	82	Christianity	IDI	Widower	No education	Farmer	₦2,000 [\$5]
21	Mr. Bon	Udenu	86	Christianity	IDI	Married	No education	Farmer	Un-disclosed
22	Mr. Goda	Udenu	72	Christianity	IDI	Married	No education	Driver	Un-disclosed

23	Mr. Igwe	Udenu	69	Christianity	IDI	Married	Primary	Farmer	₦25,000 [\$60]
24	Mr. Geo	Udenu	61	Christianity	IDI	Married	Primary	Trader	₦100,000 [\$240]
25	Mr. Sew	Udenu	60	Christianity	IDI	Married	University	Civil servant	₦40,000 [\$96]
26	Mr. Nel	Idemili-South	79	Christianity	IDI	Married	Primary	Retiree	Un-disclosed
27	Mr. Pau	Idemili-South	61	Christianity	IDI	Widower	Primary	Trader	Un-disclosed
28	Mr. Jul	Idemili-South	72	Christianity	IDI	Married	Secondary	Unemployed	₦2,000 [\$5]
29	Mr. Ken	Idemili-South	68	Christianity	IDI	Married	University	Retiree	Un-disclosed
30	Mr. Mel	Idemili-South	60	Christianity	IDI	Married	Primary	Trader	₦8,000 [\$19]

Source: Researchers' field work 2021.

Further analysis of the transcripts, though not contained in the tables showed that 31 participants were healthy while 25 participants indicated that they were unhealthy. A greater number of the participants (47) indicated that they had male migrant young family members while 11 participants indicated that they had female migrant family members. The analysis also shows that 18 participants indicated that their children migrated to Europe, 15 within Africa, 11 to Asia and seven to North America, respectively. A greater number of participants (34) indicated that their children have sojourned overseas less than 10 years.

Table 3 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the female participants by LGA, age, marital status, educational level, occupation, and monthly income

Participant	Pseudo Name	LGA	Age	Religion	Study	Marital status	Educational qualification	Occupation	Monthly Income
1	Mrs. Gin	Udenu	91	ATR	IDI	Widow	No edu.	Farmer	Un-disclosed
2	Mrs. Ngo	Udenu	62	Christianity	IDI	Married	University	Trader	Un-disclosed
3	Mrs. Jane	Udenu	66	Christianity	IDI	Married	Secondary	Trader	Un-disclosed
4	Mrs. Oge	Udenu	60	Christianity	IDI	Married	Secondary	Trader	₦20,000 [\$48]
5	Mrs. Nke	Udenu	63	Christianity	IDI	Married	Primary	Trader	Un-disclosed
6	Mrs. Fide	Udenu	65	Christianity	IDI	Widow	Primary	Trader	₦4,000 [\$40]
7	Mrs. Kate	Udenu	65	Christianity	IDI	Widow	No edu.	Farmer	₦10,000 [\$28]
8	Mrs. Mar	Udenu	68	Christianity	IDI	Married	No edu.	Trader	₦20,000 [\$48]
9	Mrs. Ndi	Udi	84	Christianity	FGD	Widow	Secondary	Retiree	₦25,000 [\$60]

10	Mrs. Ije	Udi	80	Christianity	FGD	Widow	Secondary	Trader	₦15,000 [\$36]
11	Mrs. Alli	Udi	65	Christianity	FGD	Married	University	Retiree	₦45,000 [\$108]
12	Mrs. Reb	Udi	68	Christianity	FGD	Married	Secondary	Trader	₦22,000 [\$53]
13	Mrs. Odi	Udi	71	Christianity	FGD	Married	No edu	Unem- ployed	₦20,000 [\$48]
14	Mrs. Ebe	Udi	73	Christianity	FGD	Widow	No edu	Unem- ployed	₦25,000 [\$60]
15	Mrs. Gra	Nnewi- North	85	Christianity	IDI	Widow	Primary	Unem- ployed	Undisclos- ed
16	Mrs. Luc	Nnewi- North	85	Christianity	IDI	Widow	Primary	Farmer	₦30,000 [\$72]
17	Mrs. Mon	Nnewi- North	61	Christianity	IDI	Married	Primary	Unem- ployed	₦50,000 [\$120]
18	Mrs. Ngoz	Nnewi- North	60	Christianity	IDI	Widow	Secondary	Trader	Un- disclosed
19	Mrs. Brig	Nnewi- North	62	Christianity	IDI	Widow	No edu	Trader	₦20,000 [\$40]
20	Mrs. Joye	Nnewi- North	60	Christianity	IDI	Widow	Primary	Unem- ployed	Un- disclosed
21	Mrs. Anth	Nnewi- North	64	Christianity	IDI	Married	Secondary	Trader	Un- disclosed
22	Mrs. Vic	Idemili- South	62	Christianity	IDI	Married	University	Civil servant	₦45,000 [\$108]
23	Mrs. Com	Idemili- South	79	Christianity	IDI	Married	University	Civil servant	Un- disclosed
24	Mrs. Roso	Idemili- South	76	Christianity	IDI	Widow	University	Retiree	Un- disclosed
25	Mrs. Graco	Idemili- South	70	Christianity	IDI	Widow	Primary	Unem- ployed	Undisclos- ed
26	Mrs. Fel	Idemili- South	73	Christianity	IDI	Widow	Primary	Trader	Un- disclosed
27	Mrs. Bene	Idemili- South	75	Christianity	IDI	Widow	Secondary	Unem- ployed	Un- disclosed
28	Mrs.Afor	Idemili- South	66	Christianity	IDI	Married	University	Retiree	Un- disclosed

Source: Researchers' field work 2021.

3.2 Views on Migration of Young Family Members

The analysis of transcripts revealed that almost all the participants expressed positive views and feelings towards international migration of young family members. All the participants in the FGDs conducted with both males and females in the study areas indicated that they perceived the migration of young family members to be a good adventure. While some of them indicated that migration of their children abroad have improved their well-being and life satisfaction, others revealed that it has changed the status of the family. Mrs. Mon, who is from Nnewi-North; aged 61, and had primary education said, "my thought and feeling towards migration is that it ensured the well-

being of the children and the family". Some of the opinions of the participants are expressed in the quotes:

"Personally, I like their migration to other countries because, there is no hope here. If not that one of my children is over there, we would have been suffering. He is the one we have as our God. So, I appreciate their move, and the government is not thinking about the society and the youths." (Mr. Pat; 68 years; secondary education; Udi LGA)

"By the grace of God, three of my children are living abroad and they are all women. So, when they were leaving, they graduated here and finished their youth service, two of them, and the other one graduated there. So, it was painful at their initial exit but we are enjoying their exit. As elders, we depend on them. My children sometimes say »papa take this for your upkeep« and it gives joy." (Mr. Pet; 72 years; secondary education; Udi LGA).

Similar views were expressed among the IDI participants who indicated in affirmation that migration is a necessity for their children. Some of them noted that migration helps to improve their children by inculcating hardworking attributes in them. A female participant in an IDI conducted in Udenu LGA, Mrs. Fide, who is P6 and had primary school education, said, "*I see it as helping children to be more reasonable and hardworking because if they continue to stay at home, they may continue to depend on their parents and may not be serious with their lives*". Other participants noted that migration distinguishes the migrants from other people in society. A participant in IDI said:

"Yes, what I have to say is that there are some parents like the wealthy individuals in the society that would not want their children to stay within the locality. This is one way to ensure that they are different from their age mates as well as for the family to be different from other families within the community. When you look at some of the families in this community that have children living abroad, the difference is clear. This is one of the reasons for the migration of children." (Mr. Mel; 60 years; Idemili-South; primary education)

"What happened is that they are seeking greener pasture because if you are staying where you are and those that migrated return and started making more exploits then you start making plans on how to migrate with them. Sometimes people think that in Nigeria you are earning in small portions but over there "they call it "ego mbute" (bulk money); although there are people who labour within the country to make earnings but those who migrate make it more. So, when these people that migrated come back with the kind of money they spend around, you will be tempted to join in traveling out." (Mr. Nel; 81 years; Idemili-South; primary education)

Other participants noted that the migration to other countries by young family members is hugely dependent on their desires to choose where they thrive in their quest to pursue life goals. A female participant in Udenu LGA said:

"Children's traveling out depends on the condition. Some of them may not want to stay at home and you do not have to force them to stay back because they may have been destined to make it outside our country. It is fine wherever they travel to, provided they make it there." (Mrs. Nke; P5, primary education)

The view of another female participant corroborates the view initially expressed by Mrs. Nke but in a different dimension. According to Mrs. Ngoz, who is P17 from Nnewi-North, and had secondary education,

"It is something good in my opinion because our people say that »Anaghị anọ ofu ebe enene mmanwu.« (You don't watch or view masquerade while standing at a point). It is obvious, all of us cannot stay back home to make a living. Some people are destined to travel abroad

before they make it while some can stay back and also make it. It is good that anyone who determines to travel abroad goes."

3.3 Willingness to Support the Migration of the Young Family Members

The researchers probed further to ascertain the willingness of the left-behind older family members to support their young family members to migrate to other countries. From the findings, many of the participants appear to support the migration of their children. With the exception of only three participants, all the other participants indicated that they will support any of their children who indicates interest to migrate to other countries. Some of the participants noted that migration is good for young ones and their families. Mrs. Gra, who is from Nnewi-North and had primary education, said, *"I am fully in support of their moving to other countries. It is good that they migrate because if they don't and all of us stay at home, it won't be nice"*. Another female participant, Mrs. Joye, from Nnewi-North, who had primary education, said,

"Well, I support their migration because when they stay back, they tend to join the bad groups, especially as finding employment is very difficult in this country. But if the child is far, he will be more concentrated and have a better opportunity to be employed".

Other expressions of the participants are reflected in the following quotes:

"I support anyone that wants to migrate especially those that have nothing to do here in Nigeria, he or she is free to leave in search of greener pasture. My thought is that when he goes to another country and be able to make it, he will use the resources to care for the left-behind family members." (Mr. Ken; 68 years; university education; Idemili-South)

"I support their migration. In the case of my son, I made every necessary arrangement for his move because he was doing well here in Nigeria and at a certain time, he had some challenges. He moved to Abuja to do Okada business but it was not favourable because he complained about fever after the days' activities. So, I assisted in his leaving Nigeria to the country he is in right now." (Mr. Igwe; primary education; 61 years. Udenu LGA)

3.4 Reasons for Supporting Migration of Young Family Members

From the analysis it was revealed that the participants articulated several reasons for supporting the migration of their young family members. Greater number of the participants revealed that young migrants have more and better opportunities in other countries than remaining in Nigeria. Other participants also revealed that migration to other countries will give the younger ones the maximum concentration over the tasks ahead of them. Mrs. Jane ,who is P3 from Udenu LGA, and had secondary education, said, *"I think they have more opportunities there. I think so because they are not close to us, and they may not have hindrances in their business"*. Another participant stated that these children are happier and will make more progress while living abroad. Mrs. Afor from Idemili-South, who had university education, said,

"I saw that they are happier abroad than here, and the children have more opportunities there. So, they are better there. Yes, I supported it because life is better for them over there, and they progress".

The view of a female participant was captured in the quote:

"They have better opportunities there. That place they are gives them more edge over Nigeria. God blesses them over there more than in this country. I am always happy to see them migrating to other countries to discover their blessings from God. Also, I think that they have

more opportunities for employment over there than in this our Nigeria that has no employment opportunities for our young people. Even those who are employed are not well paid. Staying here is very frustrating to young people and their families." (Mrs. Mon; 61 years; Nnewi-North; primary education)

"They leave because they have more opportunities there than in Nigeria because so many things that happen there no longer happen in Nigeria, like industries. Some of them study there and still work. Does this kind of thing happen in Nigeria? Some, at times, they choose to remain there which is very bad. Government should task each state to build at least one industry in two years' time. We need to have enough jobs in the country, look at the thousands of graduates trooping out of the universities every year without jobs. It is very bad. (Mr. Max; P4; Udi LGA; 60 years; university education)."

Equally, other participants opined that the economic situation of the country occasioned the migration of these younger ones. All the participants in the FGDs conducted across the study areas revealed that the economic condition of the nation cannot help the younger ones. Some of them revealed that with the current state of the nation, it will be difficult for the young ones to achieve great success. They noted that the nation's economy is so bad, unemployment is at increase, insecurity and other basic needs of life cannot be guaranteed in the nation. To them, these children will be more useful in foreign lands with better organized structures than in Nigeria. So, their leaving was for economic purposes. Also, they prefer their children to be different from others in terms of good life and quality education. Mrs. Reb, P12 from Udi LGA, who had secondary education, said, *"I feel many of them do well there because at least, my child in Israel for example works hard from morning till night but at least he is paid well"*. Another female participant, Mrs. Alli, who is P11 from Udi LGA, and had university education, said, *"I think it is the hardship in this country that pushed them to travel out, since there is nothing they can lay their hands on here"*.

The same views were expressed by the IDI participants. The participants also opined that children migrate to other countries because of poor economic conditions. They expressed the views that Nigeria has no better plans for the development of their young ones; thus they see migration to other countries as alternatives. Mr. Isa, who had no education, and from Nnewi LGA said, *"the reality is that they leave because there is no job in the country. So, they migrate to other countries with hope of securing a better job"*. Also, Mr. Lui, who had secondary education from Nnewi-North LGA said, *"well, my thought is that the situation of the country leads to our children to start seeking greener pastures in another country. It is for their fortune"*. All other opinions of the participants were captured in these quotes:

"The main reason our children migrate to other countries is the poor economic situation of the country. For instance, my son in another country was going to school till I was unable to train him, and there is nothing he can do. So, he indicated interest in migrating to another country, I raised some money for his departure and when he got there, he started doing well to the extent that sometimes he sent something (money) for my feeding but when he got married and bear children, the children are still helping me because if the children are not around, I will be the one to fetch water and fire wood. But it was their leaving that enabled me to do things as I should." (Mr. Ken; 68 years; university education; Idemili-South)

"That my children left the county to another county is for him to seek a better living condition because of the poor economic condition of the country. Their intention is to seek the good of the family especially their mother and I and to provide better care for us. That is why they

said that when they come back with power (made money), we, their parents, will be in a better living condition." (Mr. Emma; P9, Nnewi-North; 62 years; secondary education).

"It is because of bad economy that causes our children migrating to other countries. If Nigeria is good and habitable, what is the essence of our children migrating to other countries? I was once like them because I, too, have migrated at some stage in my life. I have visited so many countries. It is their time; it is the condition one finds him or herself. I was not shocked because I did it when I was their age." (Mr. Gody; P13; Nnewi-North; 60 years; secondary education).

4. Discussions

The study sought to ascertain the views of older adults regarding reasons for the migration of their young family members. It revealed that older adults demonstrated positive attitudes towards the migration of their children to other countries. They perceived international migration of young family members to be a good adventure and a measure to improve their well-being and life satisfaction. According to the findings, migration has given the young ones hope and had led to better means of livelihood, better employment opportunities and better income to care for their left-behind older adults. This may explain the increasing rate of migration of Nigerians which official records indicate has drastically increased between the years 1990 and 2013 (Isiugo-Abanihe et al., 2016). Over 48,000 citizens of Nigeria of which 74% were between the ages of 18 and 34 sought asylum in many different countries across the globe in the year 2016 (Eurostat, 2017). Similarly, Gassmann et al. (2013) found that international migration reduces household poverty especially in families whose source of income lies hugely on remittances. The receipt of remittances helps older adults to buffer old age depressive symptoms, and is also an indicator for improving well-being (Waidler et al., 2018).

The finding of the study revealed that the left-behind older family members are in support of the migration of their children. Some of the participants noted that migration is good for young ones and their families. They revealed that the children ought to migrate to seek greener pasture. This made some of them to make necessary arrangements for the migration of the children to other countries. The findings are in agreement with the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) Theory (Stark et al., 1985) where this study was anchored. The Theory posits that the migration of young family members are orchestrated by the members of the family who usually assimilate the costs and benefits of migration. The decision that a family member migrates is therefore a household one, made for the economic advancement of the entire family unit. International migration reduces household poverty especially in families whose source of income lies hugely on remittances (Gassmann et al., 2013).

A greater number of the participants revealed that young migrants have more and better opportunities in other countries than remaining in Nigeria. Also, migration of these children to other countries gives them the maximum concentration over the tasks ahead of them, caring for their old-adults and other family obligations. The economic condition of the country cannot help these children to attend to their desired height; hence, their migration becomes inevitable. According to the study, some parents were not surprised when their children decided to migrate due to the poor economy because they had also migrated during their productive years of life. This finding is in agreement with the NELM Theory (Stark & Bloom, 1985), that the decisions to migrate to other countries are made to boost the economic conditions of the family unit through remittances. These findings

equally give credence to the push and pull factors of international migration as occasioned by socio-economic conditions such as poverty, over population, and unemployment (UNCTAD, 2018; UN DESA, 2017a). Migration is viewed as a family endeavor in certain Nigerian communities, with family members contributing their physical, spiritual, and financial resources to guarantee that their relatives make the trip to Europe (Odo et al., 2022). Some of the participants in support for the migration of the younger family members for the improvement of the economic situation of the family, indicated that they aided their children in resources for the journey. This has been found in a previous study that families sometimes sell their property and take out loans to ensure that they mobilize the financial resources to assist their children on their journey to Europe, hoping that the returns they would get would compensate for the difficulties they might have experienced (Efevottu, 2021). Migration of younger ones will increase as one of the measures to ensure a better standard of living for many households in the nation (Deotti et al., 2016).

5. Limitations of the Study

The study has some limitations as with other studies conducted across the globe. The study was carried out in south-east geo-political zone which may affect the broader generalizability of the findings to the entire country given that all the participants were mainly from one ethnic group, specifically Igbo. Their narratives may be seen to represent the views of a fraction of the Nigerian population. We suggest that similar studies should be carried out in other geo-political zones of the country. We also envisage that in the process of translation, transcription, and re-translation of data, we may lose meaning of some data because of some dialectical variations of the Igbo language. Hence, some of the statements of older adults may be difficult during translation as the study was conducted in two different states and different LGAs. Nevertheless, we were able to curtail this by making sure that indigenes of the study areas were incorporated during the data collection and analysis as research assistants. Also not captured were the opinions/views of older adults whose family economic situation did not compel their children to embark on the migration journey. Only those with a family history of migration were requested to participate in the study. These limitations, however, did not invalidate the study's findings.

6. Conclusion

The study ascertained the views of left-behind older family members of international migrants on the migration of their young family members. Over 270 million people were recorded migrating to other countries across the globe in the year 2019 (UN DESA, 2017b). Nigeria also experiences this increase in the number of individuals that migrate abroad despite the supportive roles they play in the life of older adults. The study which sought the views of 58 left-behind older adults on the emigration of younger family members in south-east Nigeria revealed that left-behind older family members support the migration of their young family members because of the economic conditions of the country and for the economic improvement of not only the migrant but that of the family as a unit. Migrating overseas held better employment and economic opportunities. The study revealed that some of these older adults were migrants during their productive years. This depicts a cycle of poverty among Nigerians, necessitating the implementation of social policies as the country loses young people who are the country's future. This is because adult children and youth who are supposed to provide care and support to older people are becoming unavoidably absent due to migration. To this end, the Nigerian

Government should implement the National Policy on Migration 2015 which proposed sensitisation of youths on migration, promotion of job opportunities and self-employment, among others (IOM, 2015). The policy seeks to deter Nigerian youth from further migration. Social workers are among the humanitarian agents pushing for the policy's implementation, as well as other policies addressing the economic well-being of young Nigerians. Also, functional policies that address proper well-being of these older adults are needed. These call for social workers in their advocacy role to see to the implementation of social policies that enhance the well-being of people. They are ethically bound to challenge unjust policies and social conditions that contribute to inequality, exclusion and discrimination (Nwanna et al., 2017). Social workers should also ensure that family ties and other support systems are maintained to guarantee adequate support for these left-behind older adults.

References

- Adegboyega, A. (2021, March 16). Nigeria's unemployment rate rises to 33.3% - highest in over 13 years: Nigeria's unemployment rate is the second-highest in the world. *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/449150-nigerias-unemployment-rate-rises-to-33-3-highest-in-over-13-years.html>
- Adhikari, R., Jampaklay, A., & Chamratrithirong, A. (2011). Impact of children's migration on health and health care-seeking behavior of elderly left behind. *BMC Public Health*, 11, 143. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/50265928_Impact_of_children%27s_migration_on_health_and_health_care-seeking_behavior_of_elderly_left_behind
- Aiyede, E., Sha, P., Haruna, B., Olutayo, A., Ogunkola, E., & Best, E. (2015). *The political economy of social protection policy uptake in Nigeria*. Partnership for African Social and Governance (Working Paper 002). <https://www.pasgr.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/The-Political-Economy-of-Social-Protection-Policy-Uptake-in-Nigeria.pdf>
- Antman, F. M. (2012). *The impact of migration on family left behind*. Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA) (Discussion paper No 6374). <http://ftp.iza.org/dp6374.pdf>
- Ashfaq, A., Abbasi, S.U.R., Ali, R., & Habiba, U. (2016). Elderly parents and international migration of sons: Evidence from Pakistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, 10(1), 53-65. http://www.e-migration.ro/jims/Vol10_No1_2016/JIMS_Vol10_No1_2016_pp53_65_ASHFAQ.pdf
- Ashfaq, A., Saud, M., & Ida, R. (2018). Impact of overseas migration of male children on the health of left behind parents: A study of selected cities of Pakistan & Azad Jammu & Kashmir. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 165, 13-17. <https://doi.org/10.2991/iccsr-18.2018.4>
- Bailey, A., Hallad, J., & James, K. S. (2018). 'They had to go': Indian older adults' experiences of rationalizing and compensating the absence of migrant children. *Sustainability*, 10(6), 1-15. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/gam/jsusta/v10y2018i6p1946-d151726.html>
- Böhme, M. H., Persian, R., & Stöhr, T. (2015). Alone but better off? Adult child migration and health of elderly parents in Moldova. *Journal of Health Economics*, 39, 211-227. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2014.09.001>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Charkas, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage Publications Inc.
- Cook, S. (2017). *Social work and its role in tackling loneliness*. University of Plymouth. <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/news/pr-opinion/social-work-and-its-role-in-tackling>
- Cox, P., & Geisen, T. (2014) Migration perspectives in social work research: Local, national and international contexts. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(1), 157-173.

- Deotti, L., & Estruch, E. (2016). *Addressing rural youth migration at its root causes: A conceptual framework*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5718e.pdf>
- Effeovottu, E. S. (2021). Unravelling the Nigerian irregular migration quandary to southern Europe in the twenty-first century. In P. Moyo, J. P. Laine, & C. C. Nshimbi (Eds.), *Intra-Africa Migrations: Reimagining Borders and Migration Management* (pp. 31-48). Routledge.
- Eurostat. (2017). *Asylum statistics*. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics
- Evandrou, M., Falkingham, J., Qin, M., & Vlachantoni, A. (2017). Children's migration and chronic illness among older parents 'left behind' in China. *SSM - Population Health*, 3(2017), 803-807. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5769113/>
- Falkingham, J., Qin, M., Vlachantoni, A., & Evandrou, M. (2017). Children's migration and lifestyle-related chronic disease among older parents 'left behind' in India. *SSM - Population Health*, 3(2017), 352-357. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29349228>
- Gassmann, F., Berulava, G., & Tokmazishvili, M. (2013). *Economic and social vulnerability in Georgia*. United Nations Development Programme.
- Gassmann, F., Siegel, M., Vanore, M., & Waidler, J. (2017). Unpacking the relationship between parental migration and child well-being: Evidence from Moldova and Georgia. *Child Indicators Research*, 11(2), 423-440. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12187-017-9461-z>
- Ghimire, S., Singh, D. D., Nath, D., Jeffers, E. M., & Kaphle, M. (2018). Adult children's migration and well-being of left behind Nepalese elderly parents. *Journal of Epidemiology and Global Health*, 8(3-4), 154-161. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326727253_Adult_children%27s_migration_and_well-being_of_left_behind_Nepalese_elderly_parents
- He, C., & Ye, J. (2014). Lonely sunsets: Impacts of rural-urban migration on the left-behind elderly in rural China. *Population, Space and Place*, 20, 352-369.
- International Organization for Migration (2017). *Enabling a better understanding of migration flows and its root causes from Nigeria towards Europe*. (Final Report). <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/enabling-better-understanding-migration-flows-and-its-root-causes-nigeria-towards-europe>
- International Organisation for Migration. (2015). *National Migration Policy 2015*. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/national_migration_policy_2015.pdf
- Isbell, T., & Ojewale, O. (2018). *One in three Nigerians have considered emigration, most to find economic opportunity*. Afrobarometer (Dispatch No. 231). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328757562_One_in_three_Nigerians_have_considered_emigration_most_to_find_economic_opportunity
- Isiugo-Abanihe, C., & International Organization for Migration (IOM) Nigeria (2016). *Migration in Nigeria: A country profile 2014*. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mp_nigeria.pdf
- Khanal, P., Ra, S., & Chalise, H. N. (2018). Children's migration and its effect on elderly people: A study at old age homes in Kathmandu. *America Journal of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 1(1), 1001. <http://www.remedypublications.com/open-access/pchildrens-quos-migration-and-its-effect-on-elderly-people-a-study-at-old-age-homes-in-kathmandup-2031.pdf>
- Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Li, Q., Zhou, X., Ma, S., Jiang, M., & Li, L. (2017). The effect of migration on social capital and depression among older adults in China. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 52(12), 1513-1522. <http://doi10.1007/s00127-017-1439-0>
- Massey, D. S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J. E. (1993). Theories of international migration: A review and appraisal. *Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 431-466.
- McAuliffe, M., & Kitimbo, A. (2018). *African migration: What the numbers really tell us*. World economic forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/06/heres-the-truth-about-african-migration/>

- Mojinyinola, J. K., & Ayangunna, J. A. (2012). Social work and welfare of the aged in Nigeria. In H. O. Osinowo, O. A. Moronkola & D. A. Egunyomi (Eds.), *The adults and aged in Nigeria: Issues and researches* (pp. 17-29). Royal People Nig. Ltd.
- Nwanna, R. C., & Oluwu, G. F. (2019). The role of social workers in re-integrating deported international migrants into Nigerian society. *Journal of Social Work in Developing Societies*, 1(1), 73-85.
- Odo, C. O., & Chukwu, N. E. (2022). Family reciprocal expectations and youth irregular migration in Nigeria (pp.253-263). In R. Munck, T. Kleibl, M. dos Santos Goncalves & P. Dankova (Eds.), *Migration and Social Transformation: Engaged Perspectives*. CMD Machdohnil Ltd. Books.
- Ogu, P.I. (2017) Africa's irregular migration to Europe: a reenactment of the transatlantic slave trade. *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science*, 10(2), 49-69.
- Population Reference Bureau (2013). The global challenge of managing migration. *Population Bulletin*, 68(2), 1-17.
- Ritchie, J., & Spencer, L. (1994). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. Bryman, & R. Burgess (Eds.), *Analysing Qualitative Data* (pp. 173-194). Routledge.
- Sasu, D. D. (2022). *People living in extreme poverty in Nigeria 2016-2022, by gender*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1287827/number-of-people-living-in-extreme-poverty-in-nigeria-by-gender/>
- Stark, O., & Bloom, D. E. (1985). The new economics of labour migration. *American Economic Review*, 75(2), 173-178.
- Taylor, J. E. (1999). The new economics of labour migration and the role of remittances in the migration process. *International Migration*, 37(1), 63-88.
- Thapa, D. K., Visentin, D., Kornhaber, R., & Cleary, M. (2018). Migration of adult children and mental health of older parents 'left behind': An integrative review. *PLOS ONE*, 13(10), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0205665>
- The World Bank (2021). *The World Bank is helping to fight poverty and improve living standards for the people of Nigeria with more than 130 IBRD loans and IDA credits since 1958*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria>
- Shofoyeke, A. D., & Amosun, P. A. (2014). A survey of care and support for the elderly people in Nigeria. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(23), 2553-2563. <https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/mjss/article/view/4820/4674>
- Udenta, J.O.E., Nwosuji, E. P., & Chukwuemeka, E. (2015). Migration and national development: A comparative analysis of the attitude of the first generation south-east Nigeria migrants and the new generation. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 5(5), 153. <http://doi:10.4172/2223-5833.1000153>
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). (2017a). *International Migration Policies: Data Booklet* (ST/ESA/ SER.A/395). https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/policy/international_migration_policies_data_booklet.pdf
- UN DESA (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs). (2017b) *International Migration Report 2017: Highlights* (ST/ESA/SER.A/404). https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf
- Waidler, J., Vanore, M., Gassmann, F., & Siegel, M. (2018). Migration and the multi-dimensional well-being of elderly persons in Georgia. *Population Ageing*, 11, 217-238.