Influence of Migration Stress and Social Support on the Psychological Wellbeing of Nigerian Migrants Abroad

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Abstract

Migration is a potentially stressful process due to the sociocultural changes and the adaptation processes that go along with it. Social support could mitigate the impact of stress and ease the adaptation process and generally contribute to migrants' overall well-being. This study examines the influence of migration stress and social support on the psychological wellbeing of Nigerian migrants abroad. A sample of 67 respondents were obtained through snowball sampling technique which consists of 46.3% males, 49.3% females and 3(4.5%) prefer not to disclose their gender in the study. The survey was conducted with the use of standardized scales designed into Google forms for data collection. Results showed a significant statistical difference in the psychological wellbeing of individuals with high level of social support than those with low levels (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = -1.997, df = 65; p=.043). Furthermore, the result of the second hypothesis showed that the joint contribution of migration stress dimensions on psychological wellbeing was significant. The relative contributions are rejection (β = .646, p<.05), homesickness (β = .533, p<.05), hopelessness (β = .061, p>.05) and discrimination (β = -.371, p<.05). It was concluded that higher levels of social support improved psychological wellbeing of Nigerian migrants. Based on the findings, it is recommended that there should be intervention policies from the government to curb the negative consequences arising from migration in the country. Furthermore, psychologists should be seen as important in the chain of migration phases as they could help to improve mental health outcomes among migrants in their host countries.

Keywords: Migration stress, social support, psychological wellbeing, Nigerian migrants, abroad

Introduction

Migration is a global phenomenon that encompasses the movement of individuals or groups from one geographical location to another, often driven by various factors such as economic opportunities, political instability, or seeking refuge. The experience of migration can be exciting, dangerous and challenging, involving significant adjustments in various aspects of life, including social relationships, cultural adaptation, and overall psychological wellbeing which may be pleasant or traumatic (Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016; Concepcion Zayas, et al., 2019).

Migrants/Immigrants refer to those who left their host countries to live in another country for an extended period. Literature use these terms interchangeably with migration/immigration and they refer to the same meaning (Eggerth & Flynn, 2020). Migration in Nigeria, though not a new phenomenon, has taken the adoption of a colloquial term called Japa syndrome. Professor Toyin Falola described Japa as reported in Premium Times (2022) as a Yoruba word that means to flee, and once achieved, a celebration comes with it as it feels more like gaining freedom at last.

Nwalutu et al. (2016) observed that the 'new normal' in Africa's regular or irregular migration can be directly traced to the last two decades. Furthermore, Nigeria has failed to provide its increasing population with job opportunities, basic infrastructure, security, and other essentials which has resulted in massive outmigration of Nigerians (Odeyemi, 2021). There have been extensive researches in Nigeria to project the migration phenomenon (Akinyemi & Ikuteyijo, 2009; Hammond, 2015; Ikuteyijo, 2020; Okunade, 2021a; Adhikira et al., 2021; Nwosu et al., 2022). Furthermore, these studies explored the push and pull factors responsible for migration. Specifically, factors such as poverty, unemployment, political instability amongst others were identified.

Migration is a process involving certain phases. Stress may occur when migrants do not prepare adequately, have difficulty in adjusting to the new environment, encounter language difficulties and cultural disparities. Moreover, a lot of psychological problems arise from the migration process which relates to factors like negotiating loss and separation from country of origin, family members and familiar customs and traditions; exposure to a new physical environment; and the need to navigate unfamiliar cultural experiences. Migrants usually experience stress and trauma across all the various stages of migration and this places them at a high risk of mental issues such as anxiety, PTSD and depression (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2011). Idemudia & Boehkne (2020) viewed migration from the theoretical lens underpinning mental health and wellbeing.

Discrimination has been found to be a common stressor related to migration stress. Experiences of discrimination as a result of one's ethnicity, immigrant status, or both are connected to worse mental health outcomes. Lee & Zhou (2020) found that discrimination toward Latinx immigrants has been widespread in the US sociopolitical climate. This also manifests as prejudice, social attitudes, and restriction of equal opportunities (Ayon, 2015). The literature has linked higher levels of acculturative stress with a higher prevalence of psychosomatic, depression, anxiety, and general psychiatric disorders (Fajardo, et al., 2008; Sánchez & López, 2008; Bekteshi & Van Hook, 2015; Torrealba, et al., 2017). Specifically, migrants in Chile have shown a high prevalence of acculturative stress. Studies have reported that migrants informed higher levels of nostalgia for their home country alongside experiences of discrimination, adaptation difficulties, and problems with their migratory regulation process, which implies several issues in obtaining access to health care, jobs, and housing, among others. Moreover, Chilean people struggle with the same concerns, which converts the migration to Chile into a highly challenging settlement (Baeza-Rivera, et al., 2022; Urzúa, et al., 2018; Urzúa, et al., 2016).

Migration stress is the stress experienced by migrants which is largely associated with adapting, integrating or assimilating to the new culture. Navigating the complexities of a new society can be highly pressurizing, which happens immediately upon arrival at the new location. Learning a new language and foreign customs is extremely difficult, hence, migrants experience social, psychological, and cultural change when adapting to their new home – a process called acculturation (Demes & Geeraert, 2015). This process is a challenging one that involves considerable psychological adjustment associated with tension and stress. This concept is also known as acculturative stress which is advanced by psychologists wherein they used it to describe the impact of adaption to a new culture. This stress can lead to a higher risk of developing mental health problems. Migration stress also refers to psychological strain to the challenges that people encounter as they adapt to life in a new country. There is an increased attention being given to this important stressor and its potential adverse effects on mental health among migrants (Hynie, 2018; Gleeson, et al., 2020 & Li, et al., 2016). These stressors have been shown to not only have strong negative direct effects on mental health (Porter & Haslam, 2005; Tinghög, 2017; Chen et al., 2017). The migration experiences (stresses) vary across individuals depending on situations in both the place of origin and place of destination (Alexander, et al., 2021).

Social support comes from family, friends, and significant others. Consequently, perceived social support is a fundamental variable for immigrants because it facilitates their adaptation (Hashemi, et al., 2021; Batz-Barbarich et al., 2018 & Wachter, et al., 2021), mitigating the stressful consequences they experience during this process such as mental health problems (Itzick, et al., 2018; Khatiwada, et al., 2021; Koskinen, et al., 2015; Puyat, 2013 & Seawell et al., 2014). Also the pilot study conducted by Labinjo et al (2020) concluded that the stress of internal migration combined with socio-economic challenges and lack of social support resulted in a lack of ability to settle in a new culture (ethnic group) which resulted in poor mental

health. Studies have shown that perceived social support impacts mental health and immigration stress, likewise having support networks to facilitate adaptation and integrating into the norms and values of the new environment (Khan & Hasan, 2019; Chae, et al., 2014 & Ugalde-Watson, et al., 2010). Baeza-Rivera, et al. (2022) also opined that acculturative stress is expected to mediate the relationship between perceived social support and mental health symptomatology.

It is against these backdrops that the current study intends to ascertain how migration stress and social support influences the psychological wellbeing of Nigerian migrants abroad. The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study:

1. Migrants with high level of social support will report significant low psychological well-being compared to those with low level of social support.
2. All the dimensions of migration stress will significantly independently and jointly predict psychological wellbeing.

Method

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The independent variables are migration stress and social support and the dependent variable is psychological wellbeing.

Participants

The participants consist of sixty-seven respondents. The inclusion criteria specified Nigerian migrants overseas who have lived for a minimum of six months in the new country. Because of the peculiarity of the study, especially getting the participants, the non-probability sampling technique was used. Hence, the researcher used the snowball

sampling method. Of the participants, 31(46.3%) respondents are male, 33(49.3%) are female, and 3(4.5%) prefer not to disclose their gender in the study. 5(7.5%) respondents are less than 20 years of age, 25(37.3%) are between 20-29 years, 19(28.4%) are between 30-39 years, 12(17.9%) are between 40-49 years, 4(6.0%) are between 50-59 years, and 2(3.0%) are 60 and above years of age. 5(7.5%) respondents are Secondary/high school graduates, 22(32.8%) are Tertiary/college graduates, and 40(59.7%) had Postgraduate level of education. 37(55.2%) respondents are single, 25(37.3%) are married, 3(4.5%) are divorced/separated, and 2(4.5%) are widowed.

Instrument

The research instrument used for collection of data is a well-structured Google survey form comprising measures of migration stress, social support and psychological well-being namely:

Barcelona Immigration Stress Scale (BISS)

The Barcelona Immigration Stress Scale (BISS) is developed by Tomás-Sábado et al (2007). It is a 42- item scale with four subscales: Rejection, Homesickness, Hopelessness, and Discrimination. The scale is rated on a four point Likert type scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of migration stress. The internal consistency in our sample was measured using Cronbach's alpha and was shown to be very good ($\alpha = 0.94$).

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

The Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale (MPSS) was developed by Zimet, et al (1988). It is a 12-item scale which assesses perceived social support from family, friends and significant others using a seven point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale has internal reliability of 0.93 reported by the

original authors. However, for the current study, a reliability coefficient of 0.92 is derived.

Psychological Well-being Scale (PWBS)

The Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWB) was developed by Ryff (1995). The scale subsequently measures six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. It comprises of 18 items using a six point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Sample items include "I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions", In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live" and "I am able to always motivate myself to do difficult task". A Cronbach alpha value of 0.88 is derived for the scale. However, for the current study the scale is used a composite instrument.

Ethical Considerations

An informed consent form that indicated the study's objective, ensured anonymity and confidentiality were provided on the google forms sent to participants. Participation was voluntary and they were also reassured that they could withdraw at any time if they feel they were not comfortable with the study.

Method of Data Analysis

SPSS version 23 was used to analyze the data collected. Demographic data was reported in simple percentages. Hypotheses were tested with t-test for independent sample and regression analysis.

Results

Hypothesis One

Migrants with high level of social support will report significantly on psychological well-being compared to those with low level of social support.

Table 1: Summary of independent t-test showing difference in the psychological wellbeing of migrants with high and low level of social support

	Social support	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
PWB	High	34	90.15	11.130	65	-1.997	.043
	Low	33	86.39	11.132			

Table 1 showed a significant statistical difference in the psychological wellbeing of individuals with high level of social support than those with low levels (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = -1.997, df = 65; p=.043). Hence, migrants with higher levels of social support reported higher psychological well-being compared to those with lower levels of social support in the study. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis two: All the dimensions of migration stress will significantly independently and jointly predict psychological wellbeing.

Table 2a: Summary of Regression analysis showing joint contribution of migration stress dimensions on psychological wellbeing

R	R Square		Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate			
.859	.737		.720	5.92970			
A N O V A							
Model	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	p	Remark	

Regression	6110.025	4	1527.506	43.443	<.001	Significant
Residual	2180.005	62	35.161			
Total	8290.030	66				

Table 2a showed that the joint contribution of migration stress dimensions on psychological wellbeing was significant. The table also shows a coefficient of multiple correlation R = .859 and a multiple R^2 of .737. This means that 73.7% of the variance was accounted for by four predictor variables when taken together. The significance of the composite contribution was tested at α = 0.05. The table also shows that the analysis of variance for the regression yielded F-ratio of 43.443 (significant at 0.05 level). This implies that the joint contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable was significant and that other variables not included in this model may have accounted for the remaining variance.

Table 2b: Summary of Regression analysis showing relative (independent) contribution of migration stress dimensions on psychological wellbeing

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	p
	B	Std. Error	Beta Contribution		
(Constant)	19.415	9.030		2.150	.035
Rejection	0.993	.120	.646	8.285	.000
Home sickness	1.012	.151	.533	6.689	.000
Hopelessness	.061	.073	.061	.829	.410

Discrimination	-.496	.104	-.371	-4.751	.000

Table 2b revealed the relative contribution of the four independent variables to the dependent variable, expressed as beta weights, viz: Rejection (β = .646, p<.05), Home sickness (β = .533, p<.05), Hopelessness (β = .061, p>.05), and Discrimination (β = -.371, p<.05) respectively. Hence, rejection, homesickness, and discrimination were significant i.e. independently and significantly predicted psychological wellbeing of migrants in the study.

Discussion

Hypothesis one stated that migrants with high level of social support will report significant low psychological well-being compared to those with low level of social support. Results showed that migrants with higher levels of social support reported better psychological well-being compared to those with lower levels of social support in the study. This result is in line with the findings of du Plooy, et al. (2019) who found that all sources of support were significantly associated with mental health. Also, High psychological distress was linked to lower support only from family, friends, a partner, acquaintances, work colleagues and social groups. Furthermore, Segovia-Lagos, et al. (2023) in their study consisting of a population of immigrant children and youth, they reported that stress indicators are related to the social networks they had in their new country (social support). Moreover, Baeza-Rivera, et al. (2022) also concluded that when migrants had perceived social support, their levels of acculturative stress decreased and they also reported fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Similarly, Novara, et al. (2023) concluded in their study that social support is an important factor in the well-being of migrants and their integration into the host community. Additionally, Teixeira & Sonia (2018) emphasized the importance of family ties in the host country for the psycho-physical well-being and health of foreign-born people, beside labor market integration.

Hypothesis two stated that all the dimensions of migration stress will significantly independently and jointly predict psychological wellbeing. The result showed that the joint contribution of migration stress dimensions on psychological wellbeing was significant. Furthermore, rejection, homesickness, and discrimination independently predicted psychological wellbeing of migrants. This result corroborates the findings of Segovia-Lagos, et al. (2023) who found in their study that there existed correlations between some items of the homesickness and differences with the country of origin dimension and the acculturation stress scale and psychological wellbeing. Likewise, the items of the adaptation to school, family and peer relationship dimension of the acculturation stress scale correlated with the psychological well-being scale Segovia-Lagos, et al. (2023). Furthermore, correlations were obtained between items of the discrimination experiences dimension of the acculturation stress scale and the positive relationships dimension of the psychological well-being scale (Segovia-Lagos, et al., 2023).

In the same vein, Kiang, et al. (2010) found that greater social support was associated with lower depression and comorbidity. Bernstein, et al. (2011) in a study of Korean immigrants in New York City found that higher exposure to discrimination was associated with higher depression symptoms.

One of the factors of acculturative stress that increased adaptation difficulties is the discrimination or unfair treatment by persons or groups from the host country (Bekteshi & Kang, 2020; Tartakovsky, 2007). These interactions are characterised by an unfavourable, uncontrollable, and threatening social evaluation that negatively impacted the immigrants. Thus, those who are discriminated against (i.e., immigrants) experienced negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, uncertainty, and frustration, more frequently (Gómez-Pérez, et al., 2021; Zeiders et al., 2012). For their part, these negative emotions have been connected to various adverse mental health outcomes

such as psychosomatic illnesses, distress, depression, anxiety, and stress (Oritz et al., 2016; Baeza-Rivera, et al., 2019; Baeza-Rivera, 2015; Flynn et al., 2011; Flynn et al., 2015 & Fleming et al., 2017). Experiencing negative emotions associated with discrimination, immigrants adjusted the expression of their emotions to a cultural context different from that of their country of origin.

Segovia-Lagos, et al. (2023) reported that stress indicators are related to the feeling of missing the country of origin (homesickness) among a population of immigrant children and youths. Acculturative stress has been linked to mental health symptomatology in North America, Europe, Latin America, and Chile (Urzúa, et al., 2018; Urzúa, et al., 2016; Mera-Lemp, et al., 2020; Urzúa, et al., 2019; Silva, et al., 2016; Waldman, et al., 2019; Choy, et al., 2020 & Ugalde-Watson, 2010).

Conclusion

This study concluded that migration stress, social support from family, friends, and significant others impacted psychological wellbeing among Nigerian migrants abroad. One major limitation of this study is the relatively low sample size which prevented us from achieving a heterogenous population. However, this did not deter the purpose of the study. Hence, it is recommended that there should be intervention policies from the government to curb the negative consequences arising from migration in the country. Furthermore, psychologists should be seen as important in the chain of migration phases as they could help to improve mental health outcomes among migrants in their host countries. Advocacy is also encouraged for migrants.

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