



## **CHILDREN IN THE FACE OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION**

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### **Abstract**

*The involvement of children in migration remains a major issue in the migration discourse. It is very vital for Governments and civil society organizations to pay attention to migrant children who are forced to isolate themselves from home and family ties because of situations. This can be done by providing security and economic strength, education, and health initiatives, building a robust, responsive, and child protection system security and economic strength that offers a powerful tool in preventing dangerous migration. The paper discusses children and migration in relation to education, health and welfare. It was established that insecurity and natural disaster may be some of the factors responsible for migration of children. They are therefore exposed to psychological trauma of separation from their homes. Also, they suffer mental and physical injuries that result from malnutrition, lack of medical attention, sexual and physical abuse, forced labour, and they eventually drop out of schools. It was then suggested that proper system that responds to children affairs and prevent them from dangerous migration should be set up by the government.*

**Keywords:** *Migration, Children, Education, Health and Welfare, Government, Civil Society Organizations.*

### **Introduction**

Migration is the movement of people from place to place. It is a worldwide phenomenon that has always been part of human history. It occurs at every age therefore not strange to any generation and can affect people at any time.

It has its causes in lack of insecurity and environmental factors like war, famine, flood, drought and earthquake. Hence, Jonathan (1995) asserts that it is also believed that migratory or circulatory movements of labour from rural areas to primate cities or regional centres can easily be explained by overall macro-economic factors. Whenever immigration happens, children are easily affected because of their vulnerability. Children migration however has impact on them in variety of ways including their education, health and general welfare. Boyden and Joanna (2004) identify the following as ways children become migrants or refugees- becoming lost while fleeing from attacks on villages, trying to escape forced recruitment into military service, or simply searching for food. Parents may die while travelling or fleeing, they may be killed, or they may abandon children because they or the child are too weak to continue. Some parents leave their children at a hospital or refugee camps, believing their chances of survival are better if left in the care of others. Others send their children away, in the hope that they will escape danger and reach asylum in a neighbouring country. Some children choose to leave their families in order to gain employment, to fight in the war, to reduce the financial burden on their parents, to seek safety or to escape abuse.

In line with this, Madhya (2014) is of the opinion that migration is greatly influenced by the level of economic development. Migration, in general flows from the areas of limited economic opportunities and retarded social development to the fast developing areas where migrants can expect greater economic gains and consequently, a better level of living and an improved socio-economic status. By implication therefore migration can come out of search for greener pasture. Reflecting on this, Rosicky (2016) states that one of most significant root causes of child migration is that many children are not safe from violence in their home communities. Also, sometimes, they are being returned to their communities without sustainable approaches to connect them with services that address the economic and psychosocial needs to keep them safe. Whichever form it takes, be it forced migration, whether it is internal or across borders or migration out of better opportunities, children are being affected greatly as in the feeling of Bruce (2001) that during every migration, there are children who become separated from their families. It is estimated that between two to five percent of a given displaced population is composed of separated children. Unfortunately, such children are often exploited and suffer not only the psychological trauma of

being separated from their families, but the mental and physical injuries that result from malnutrition, sexual and physical abuse, forced labor, lack of medical attention, and lost education. Accordingly, Migrant families especially women and children face several problems like problem of housing and shelter, education of children, occupation, health and other adjustment problems arising due to change in cultural settings as in the mind of Madhya (2014).

### **Migration and Education of Children**

Obviously, movement of people will affect their life styles especially if it is not planned. Children will be more affected in a situation like this. They must move far away from their homes and sometimes their country. Finding their feet in the new environment may take some time. Settling down in a given camp that is far away from school bring a question mark on how to educate children in such a situation. Also, Feng (2013) observed that migration of adult household members can affect the education of the children who are left behind in several ways. First, the absence of adult household members, and especially of parents, can lead to a lack of supervision, the development of psychological problems, or the need to take on extra work in the household for left-behind children. These kinds of problems may have negative effects on the education of the children in these households. Sharing this view, Shernavaz (2001) opines that some of these migrated children spend their childhood years working and living on the streets, and have no opportunities for play or school. Some street children live with families who adopt them for purely economic reasons.

He went further to categorized street children as follows: "Street children" may be categorized as: 1) "children on the streets," or those who are engaged in some street trade and usually return at night to some shelter; 2) "children of the streets," who voluntarily seek shelter, companionship, and livelihood on the streets; and 3) "abandoned children," who survive entirely on their own with no ties to families. These working children are a particularly vulnerable group and must rely on the fragile survival strategies of families and communities suffering from poverty and underemployment. No matter how we see this, children belonging to any of these classes are out of schools and have embraced a different life style. Therefore McGuinness (2000) proposes that whenever children migration occurs, studying the factors that promote the children's adaptation into family life will assist in devising

effective remedial strategies and improve their trends in intellectual and academic performance. By implication, when they are properly settled, they will survive and perform better in their studies.

### **Migration and Health of Children**

Children are exposed to series of dangers during migration. One of them is ill health. It does not necessarily mean that children are the ones migrating. When children have migrating parents, it could also affect them as Lee (2011) reported in the research he conducted on migration and children's Welfare in China: The Schooling and Health of Children Left Behind. He concluded that "a higher percentage of children of migrant parents have smoking habit than did children with no migrant parent." Smoking is often considered an unhealthy habit, and, in sociological literatures, the formation of the smoking habit in one's youth is usually associated with a poor family relationship or with a looser connection to one's parents. Considering this, the long-term separation from parents due to parental migration might be the reason for these children developing smoking habits.

Reacting to the way children are not well attended to especially those with disability, Meekosha and Somers (2012) assert that It is tempting to be pessimistic about the situation of immigrant families with disabled children... "These families have relied heavily on the goodwill of their colleagues and community in order to access the health and disability support services". In the research conducted by Stillman, Gibson and McKenzie (2012), on the Impact of Immigration on Child Health: Experimental Evidence from a Migration Lottery Program; they concluded that migration is found to affect child health, in a manner consistent with increased food intake. Infants and toddlers suffer less stunting after migration, whereas 3- to 5-yr-olds gain weight.

Relating migration to pregnancy, Madhya (2014) viewed thousands of women that experienced complications during pregnancy; many of which are life threatening for the women and their children to poor living environment during pregnancy. The camps may not be conducive enough for pregnant women. He went further to suggest that the dangers of childbearing can be greatly reduced if women are healthy and well-nourished before becoming pregnant and provided with timely health check-up and delivery is assisted by trained hands. Hence, special attention should be given to migrant pregnant women.

## **Migration and Welfare of Children**

It is evident that family unity is essential for child survival at all times. Without parents or care givers, children may be especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, abduction, hunger, malnutrition, disease and death. Boyden and Joanna (2004) is of the opinion that the impact of family separation on children is firmly rooted in dominant understandings of child development, which argue that secure attachment relationships with adults are central to a child's social and emotional development. The idea that the mother is the primary caregiver to her child is implicit as is the notion that the mother-child affiliation is the most important relationship in a child's life.

If parents or proper guardians are not available therefore, little attention will be paid, for example, to a child's daily routine, childcare practices, child-child interaction, and the work that boys and girls are expected to do at different ages. Analysis of these and other measures is critical to understanding the immediate situational circumstances that provide the framework for how children learn to think, speak and behave. It is important to note that from almost as early as they can remember, children begin to learn alongside their parents to do what they see them doing.

## **Conclusion**

Many separated children have not chosen to be apart from their parents; rather, situation has made it inevitable for them. In many cases, separation can be a hurting and difficult experience for both the parents and the child. Although, some stubborn children may run away from home to the streets to struggle on their own and enjoy being with other street children. It is very vital for Governments to pay attention to migrant children who are forced to isolate themselves from home and family ties because of situations. This can be done by providing security and economic strength, education, and health initiatives, building a robust, responsive, and child protection system security and economic strength that offers a powerful tool in preventing dangerous migration.

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