Life after trafficking: reintegration experiences of human trafficking survivors in Nigeria

Uwafiokun Idemudia, Nnenna Okoli, Mary Goitom and Sylvia Bawa

Abstract

Purpose – *Reintegration programs have emerged as part of the regimes of care for survivors of human trafficking. However, empirical analysis of the reintegration outcomes for survivors remains limited in the African context. Hence, this paper aims to examine the challenges and opportunities of reintegration assistance programs for survivors of human trafficking in Nigeria.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Drawing on qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with repatriated women who have accessed reintegration assistance in Nigeria, and data was analyzed using thematic analysis.*

Findings – *The findings suggest that while the reintegration programs might address the procedural aspect of reintegration, the achievement of substantive reintegration remains incomplete. This is because of the structural conditions of the context within which reintegration is supposed to occur.*

Practical implications – *There is a need to take seriously the distinction between the reintegration of survivors into a new community or a former community in the design of a regime of care for survivors of human trafficking in Africa. Crucially, the focus on procedural reintegration should not also divert attention away from the structural conditions and reforms needed to ensure survivors achieve substantive reintegration.*

Originality/value – *This paper contributes to the limited literature on life after trafficking and demonstrates the strengths and limitations of reintegration programs as a regime of care for survivors of human trafficking. In addition, this study empirically grounded the theoretical distinction between different aspects of the process of reintegration.*

Keywords *Human trafficking, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Protection and assistance, Africa, Nigeria*

Paper type *Research paper*

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Introduction

Human trafficking is a multifaceted transnational phenomenon that is estimated to affect millions of people globally (USDOS, 2018). It involves the gross exploitation and violation of trafficked persons' dignity, autonomy, security and rights that are protected under international human rights laws (Rijken, 2009). As such, victims of human trafficking tend to experience physical, emotional and psychological trauma long *after* trafficking. Consequently, Henriksen (2018) has argued that scholars of trafficking, sex work and migration should move beyond moral panic and the urge to rescue women and instead focus on documenting the long-term realities of life *after* trafficking. Implicit here is also the need for the regime of care provided to survivors to shift emphasis from just *recovery* to include *reintegration* of survivors (Stephen-Smith, 2007; Besrup, 2016).

Reintegration assistance typically entails the provision of services relevant to the physical, psychological, economic and social recovery of human trafficking survivors (Amadasun, 2020). The fundamental objective of these protection services is to strategically position

them for self-sufficiency as well as ensure their economic and social reintegration into society *after* trafficking (Stephen-Smith, 2007). It has been suggested that without adequate reintegration assistance for survivors there is an increased risk for re-migration and re-trafficking among them (Pennington and Balaram, 2013). Yet, the empirical analyses of the reintegration outcomes associated with reintegration assistance programs remain scarce (Dell *et al.*, 2019; Amadasun, 2020). Harkins (2017) has argued that a key challenge is that reintegration programs have barely been subjected to adequate evaluations. As a result, Amadasun (2020) has suggested that future research needs to examine the reintegration experiences of survivors of human trafficking to determine the factors influencing their integration into mainstream society. Against this background, this paper seeks to:

- examine survivors' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities of reintegration assistance programs in Nigeria; and
- consider the policy implications for reintegration policies and programs in developing countries.

Process of reintegration among trafficking survivors: a review of extant literature

The notion of reintegration has no universally accepted definition (Donger and Bhabha, 2018). However, assisted reintegration is broadly understood to mean a complex, durable and non-linear process that requires the dedicated provision of services to cater to the needs of survivors of human trafficking (Surtees, 2013; Dell *et al.*, 2019). As a result, Gallagher (2012) sees assisted reintegration as a critical aspect of measures aimed at preventing re-trafficking, promoting resilience and restoring survivors' physical, psychological, economic and social well-being after trafficking. The traumatic and exploitative experiences of survivors during trafficking often leave them with a variety of social and health problems such as sexually transmitted infections, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, paranoia and substance addiction (Greer and Scott, 2014). In some cases, these health problems are further exacerbated when survivors lack any form of social support from either family or friends upon returning home owing to stigmatization and ostracization that arise from negative societal perceptions of trafficked persons (McCarthy, 2018; Brunovskis and Surtees, 2013). As a result, Lisborg and Plambech's (2009) have argued that survivors of human trafficking tend to struggle with feelings of anger, fear and shame within their communities. Together these social and health problems constitute a threat to the recovery and well-being of trafficking survivors and are often the target issues that reintegration assistance programs seek to address.

However, Besrup (2016) has noted that there is a need to differentiate a *procedural* conception of reintegration from the *substantive achievement* of reintegration within receiving social groups and institutions. According to him, the procedural conception of reintegration is concerned with the end-stage process of assistance delivery to survivors once they return home, but the substantive achievement of reintegration entails rebuilding social, political, and economic relationships in either a new environment or in a former community. While the *procedural* conception of reintegration is related to the legal obligations of nation-states and thus emphasizes the protection of survivors negative rights and the promotion of their social rights by providing them with material resources, the attainment of substantive reintegration is concerned with building or rebuilding mutually affirming relationships so that local socio-cultural relationships, institutional arrangement and economic processes help to prevent re-victimization of survivors. The value of this analytical distinction is that it can facilitate the design of more efficacious protection assistance.

However, not all trafficking survivors have a desire to be reintegrated into their home countries (Surtees, 2017). For example, in their study of Nigerian sex workers and sex trafficked persons in Norway, Skibrei and Tveit (2007) discovered that both groups had fears and reservations about returning to Nigeria to settle owing to fears of poverty, lack of opportunities, criminalization, reprisal attacks from traffickers and the perceived inability of

the government to provide necessary reintegration assistance. The implication is that the desire for reintegration in home countries can also be hampered by the same socio-economic and familial situations that pushed survivors into trafficking (Lisborg and Plambech, 2009). This might also partly explain why some survivors might choose not to pursue assisted reintegration.

Consequently, some scholars have suggested that the notion of reintegration is problematic for a variety of reasons. First, reintegration invariably implies that survivors of human trafficking were in some sense previously outside of society and are now in need to be *re-integrated* into society. This implicit assumption often results in the obfuscation of structural conditions and cultural norms that made survivors vulnerable to human trafficking in the first place. Indeed, in instances where survivors' families were instrumental in their trafficking or in cases where they do not support survivors when they return, these social relationships can harm their reintegration. Second, Slocomb (2006) has highlighted how reintegration discourses tend to minimize the agency of survivors but maximizes the power of the *integrator*. This minimization of the agency of survivors results in them being constructed as the "Other," as criminals and incapable, with material consequences for their daily lives *after* trafficking. Yet, it is widely acknowledged that reintegration is a deeply personal process with each survivor experiencing the process differently depending on their identity (i.e. class, gender and ethnicity) and nature of their environment (i.e. family and the larger community) in which they attempt to reintegrate (McCarthy, 2018). The fact that the notion of reintegration can discursively and materially minimize the agency of survivors that need to develop their self-autonomy is troubling.

Third, the proliferation of human trafficking reintegration assistance programs has also not necessarily resulted in the successful reintegration of trafficking survivors because of poorly funded and designed rehabilitation programs that are ill-equipped to meet survivors' complex needs (Brennan and Plambech, 2018). For instance, evidence suggests that some survivors of human trafficking end up being re-trafficked even after accessing reintegration assistance. Ratia and Notermans (2012) noted that several non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives recounted numerous stories of returnees whom they had helped but had gone back to Europe. Hence, Surtees (2017) has argued that there is a need for individualized reintegration plans. This is because there are bound to be variations in reintegration outcomes among survivors based on the peculiarities of their pre-trafficking and post-trafficking needs. While some survivors may require reintegration support, some may reintegrate faster than others and some may require regular assessments and continuous support post-reintegration. Nevertheless, Crawford and Kaufman (2008) have argued that reintegration programs remain useful and can be effective even under difficult conditions.

Surtees (2017) imagines that successful reintegration can be gleaned by examining survivors' physical and mental well-being, safety and security, economic well-being and opportunities, living conditions, interpersonal/social relationships, education and training opportunities, the well-being of families and dependents, legal status and protection, and fair representation in legal processes against their traffickers (Table 1).

Human trafficking and reintegration assistance in Nigeria: an overview

Nigeria is a major source, transit and destination country of human trafficking (Idemudia and Okoli, 2020). For example, Nigerian women and girls were reportedly the most identified trafficked persons in the European Union (EU) in 2015, and they were identified in over 40 countries in 2017 (USDOS, 2018). The trafficking networks within Nigeria range from highly organized and structured criminal organizations to loosely structured informal groups (Carling, 2006). Within these criminal networks, several intermediary actors play crucial interdependent roles. The first group of actors is the recruiters that contact the potential candidate or her family members to arrange her journey. The second group is the

Table 1 Reintegration framework and descriptions of outcomes

<i>Reintegration outcomes</i>	<i>Description of reintegration outcomes</i>
Economic well-being and opportunities	Ability to steadily meet basic needs, access economic opportunities, such as employment, and have a sense of satisfaction and security about one's financial status
Physical and mental well-being	Satisfactory physical and mental condition including confidence, happiness and dignity
Education and training opportunities	Access to school re-enrolment and opportunities for educational advancement
Safety and security	Freedom from threats of or acts of violence from traffickers or any other source. To be physically safe
Healthy social environment and interpersonal relationships	Absence of stigma and ostracism in relations with friends, family, spouses/intimate partner and wider community
Satisfactory living conditions	Access to an appropriate and safe place to live

Source: Adapted from "Supporting the Reintegration of Trafficked Persons. A Guidebook for the Greater Mekong Sub-Region," by Surtees, R., 2017. Bangkok, Thailand: NEXUS Institute, UN-ACT, and World Vision. Copyright 2017 by NEXUS Institute, UN-ACT, and World Vision

smugglers that facilitate the trans-border movement, which include complicit law enforcement and immigration officials in the home, transit and destination countries. Finally, there is also the madam or pimp who bears the financial costs of transportation and controls the trafficked persons at the destination country (Okojie, 2005). A common aspect of human trafficking in Nigeria is the use of *voodoo* or *juju* to cement a covenant between the madam and the person being trafficked (Ritia and Notermans, 2012). These *juju* rituals are used as a mechanism of psychological control and intimidation against trafficked persons to ensure that they are compliant and committed to repaying the debts incurred in their transportation (Millet-Barrett, 2019).

The prevalence of human trafficking in Nigeria is tied to the structural socio-economic and political conditions in the country. Despite the abundance of natural resources in Nigeria, citizens are unable to derive any meaningful developmental benefits from resource revenues because of the widespread incidence of corruption and revenue mismanagement by the political elites (Idemudia *et al.*, 2010; Okoli and Idemudia, 2020). For example, 46.7% of Nigeria's population (86.9 million) live on less than \$1.90 a day and are in extreme poverty (Kazeem, 2018). This prevailing socio-economic challenge together with patriarchal gender norms tends to serve as push factors for immigration, while the imagined socio-economic opportunities readily available in the advanced capitalist societies act as pull factors.

Given the grave realities of human trafficking in the country and its outlined obligations under international and regional agreements, Nigeria has ratified the UN Trafficking Protocol and the ECOWAS Initial Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons. Similarly, the Nigerian Government enacted the 2003 Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (later re-enacted in 2015) that established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). The agency is charged with the "coordination of all laws on traffic in persons and related offenses; collaboration with other agencies or bodies, both nationally and internationally to eradicate traffic in persons; elimination and prevention of the root causes of human trafficking; and coordination of the rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked persons" (Okogbule, 2006, p. 71).

To fulfill its rehabilitation and reintegration mandate, NAPTIP collaborates with government agencies such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, NGOs and international agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This partnership is guided by protection policies such as the National Policy on the Protection and Assistance of Trafficked Persons (2008), the Strategic Implementation Framework (2011) and the National Referral Mechanism (2015). For instance, through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in Nigeria, NAPTIP and its partners receive, profile and identify

human trafficking survivors among returned migrants upon re-entry into the country. Identified survivors are temporarily sheltered and cared for in NAPTIP's closed transit shelter for a maximum of six weeks. Survivors who desire medium- to long-term rehabilitation and reintegration assistance are then moved on to NGOs with the capacity to meet their ongoing and long-term needs such as transitional housing, ongoing medical and psychological care, education and vocational skills training such as bead-making, hairstyling, tailoring, catering and so on.

After completing the 3–24 months reintegration assistance programs at the NGOs' closed/open shelters, survivors are transferred to the principal referring organizations, i.e. NAPTIP, IOM or the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development. These organizations then trace and contact their families and provide the final reintegration package which consists of grants, rented stores and houses and relevant equipment for the vocational skills they acquired. The IOM especially does not offer cash to survivors but makes direct payments to third party merchants with which survivors conduct transactions to ensure that survivors' allocated funds are not supposedly mismanaged. All the organizations also carry out post-reintegration assistance monitoring to ensure that survivors successfully navigate their new lives in society.

NAPTIP reintegration assistance programs aim to “re-instill confidence in traumatized and dehumanized [survivors in order to] reintegrate them as functional and effective members of the society” (NAPTIP, 2008, p. 4). The extent to which existing reintegration programs in Nigeria have facilitated the reintegration of survivors of human trafficking remains unclear. This is because very few studies have examined life *after* trafficking in Nigeria (Okoli and Idemudia, 2020; Amadasun, 2020). To address this gap, our study seeks to privilege the voices of survivors of human trafficking in our attempt to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing reintegration programs in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study is based on a four-month ethnographic fieldwork in Lagos, Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative methods in data collection and analysis. We interviewed 13 female survivors of human trafficking (aged 20–46) who had accessed rehabilitation and reintegration assistance at least one year before the data collection. Bryman (2004) states that qualitative interviews are advantageous for research concerned with exploring the voices and experiences of marginalized groups as it captures their experiences in their language. Also, five rehabilitation officials were interviewed including a representative from the IOM, NAPTIP, and three trafficking rehabilitation and reintegration NGOs, and this brought the total number of conducted interviews to 18. Our preliminary means of recruiting survivors was via the NGOs that had assisted them when they initially returned to Nigeria. We also adopted a snowball sampling strategy by asking survivors to also recommend other prospective participants for interviews. This technique has been noted to be very valuable for reaching populations that are not readily accessible like survivors of human trafficking (Morgan, 2008). Hence, all 18 participants in our study constituted “information-rich cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 242). Indeed, Romney *et al.* (1986) have noted that where purposive sampling is carefully undertaken to ensure information-rich respondents, a small sample of four is enough to meet the research objective.

The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the research ethics board of York University, Canada, and the authors adhered strictly to research codes of practice guiding research with high-risk groups like human trafficking survivors. We strove to mitigate the risks of emotional and social harm to research participants through our careful selection of question types, question delivery methods and even interview locations. For example, we avoided questions that would require trafficking survivors to recount their trafficking ordeals to prevent emotional harm, and if they felt distressed by the questions, they were at liberty to decline or end the interview at any point. To further manage the risk of emotional trauma,

we referred all participants to counseling resources if it was required after the interviews. Social risks associated with stigmatization because of participation in our research were minimized by prioritizing participants' privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process. During data analysis, for instance, we discarded our participants' real names and assigned identification codes. Overall, we engaged with participants, not as "powerless victims," but as strong and resilient individuals that have endured and survived trauma.

All interviews were conducted primarily in English and lasted for 30–50 min on average after obtaining either verbal or written informed consent from participants. Interviews were conducted in-person at participants' preferred locations or over the telephone and digitally recorded where permitted by participants. Before any interview, we explained in detail the goal of our research and allowed our respondents sufficient time to decide whether they are willing to participate.

Data analysis began by rereading, disintegrating, examining and comparing texts to identify and name relevant themes enclosed within the data, i.e. open coding (Seale, 2004). This process produced first-order deductive and inductive codes. First-order codes were then examined to determine their connections with each other and consequently grouped to produce second-order themes (axial coding). These were further analyzed by identifying a core category that illustrates the relationship among all other themes and grouping them under the category accordingly. To ensure rigor in the coding process, the first two authors undertook coding separately and compared notes. Selected codes were those which occurred frequently within several participants' accounts about their reintegration experience. To ensure the trustworthiness of our findings, during the process of data collection and analysis we paid close attention to the four principles of ensuring methodological rigor in a qualitative study as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). For instance, credibility was confirmed via the use of purposive sampling, the triangulation of data sources and the use of standard interview protocol (i.e. all respondents were asked a core set of common questions). To support confirmability, feedback from respondents after reviewing data presentation and interpretation confirmed that there was no bias on the part of the researchers.

Reintegration experiences of survivors in Nigeria: opportunities and challenges

The extant literature suggested that there are bound to be differences in survivors' reintegrative experiences because of individual differences, differences in the provision of reintegrative assistance proper and the community where survivors choose to reintegrate, i.e. a new environment or their former community (Derk, 1998). Survivors' perceptions of the reintegration assistance they accessed in Nigeria seem to reflect this pattern. Indeed, most respondents believed that the programs were useful. For instance, a respondent stated:

The program helped me reintegrate because I don't know where I would have been without them. Now I am married, and I have a son. Even in my community where I am living now, people respect me. They can't even think or smell that I passed through those things [trafficking] or rehabilitation. I would say if not for God I wouldn't have gotten to this extent. It is a success story. God blessed me. . .at least I have work, a husband, and a child [R1].

However, a few shared the opposing view. As one respondent noted that:

The program didn't help me reintegrate oh! I had not finished with them, but they abandoned me. The program did not give me support in society like a house and work as they promised. They didn't help me. How can you send me away empty-handed? [R9].

The differences in perspective and experience might be because of differences in the nature and extent of the reintegration assistance that survivors received. In the former case, it seems the respondent was able to access full reintegration assistance and in the other cases, the process of reintegration seemed to have been incomplete or at best minimal. This is not surprising given that the quality of protection assistance that a survivor accesses

is likely dependent on the reintegration strategies adopted in the different programs they access, the availability of resources within each program at the point of enrollment and the individual's unique recovery rates. These suggest that differences among reintegration programs can also inadvertently exacerbate inequalities among survivors. Nevertheless, we draw on [Surtees' \(2017\)](#) reintegration outcome framework to interrogate survivors' experiences in detail [1].

After reintegration: survivors' economic well-being and opportunities

Survivors identified their economic prospects as a key factor that shapes their well-being. This is because limited economic opportunities exacerbate their vulnerability and undermine their resilience in their fight against re-trafficking. As such, economic self-sufficiency was often cited as one of the main reasons for enrolling in the rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

Most of the survivors interviewed were employed in jobs that ranged from irregular odd jobs to stable well-paying jobs. They held positions such as matron, sales attendant, elementary school teacher, receptionist and secretary. The highest monthly salary reported was 100,000 naira (\$260) while the lowest was 12,000 naira (\$31). Two survivors owned a tailoring business where they made clothes and sold non-perishable food items. The businesses generated 7,000–8,000 naira (\$18–21) and 20,000 naira (\$52), respectively. Two survivors who were not provided with financial support at the end of their rehabilitation had no stable source of income from either a job or business. When asked about her strategies for survival, she replied: "I don't have a good job, I don't have somewhere I get money from [...] I don't have something I depend on" [R3]. Even though she was scheduled to commence a job as an assistant hairstylist with a monthly salary of 8,000 naira (\$21), she lamented:

As I am now, I am not doing well because I was expecting [the reintegration package] so I can move on. Since I have no money, I am just staying at home. So even now that I am going to start this job, I am still feeling somehow because they are not going to pay well.

While all the jobs and businesses that respondents were doing were not directly linked to the skills obtained during the programs, respondents still believed it was beneficial in various ways to their well-being. A respondent commented on the impact of vocational skills:

I have a job now as a receptionist but before I got it, it was the skills I learned that helped me survive. I learned so many things like tie and dye, batik, how to weave bags, wrap books with *ankara* fabrics, and also beads making. It helped me a lot because after I finished with my program, I started teaching people. They call me here and there to teach beads and crafts and they were paying me before I now finally got this job [R7].

However, another respondent also explained that the skills acquired via the reintegration program are not very lucrative in the labor market with implications for their economic autonomy. This is consistent with what Shih (2014) has previously referred to as an *anti-trafficking rehabilitation complex* where NGOs offer survivors training in vocational skills that practically guarantee very low income. Indeed, one respondent noted that:

When I was doing beadwork, what I had then was a call to teach bead making maybe once in two months. So, I was looking for a job. I went to so many places. You know beadwork is not a skill that they can use to employ you in many places [R7].

Overall, only a few of the respondents suggested that they were financially self-sufficient to meet their basic needs. One of such remarked, "I feel very happy by God's grace. I feel I am living life on my own, paying all the bills and not depending on anyone for support" [R11]. But most of the respondents expressed the difficulties they experienced daily owing

to limited economic resources. This is unsurprising given the low incomes that they have to subsist on every month – most of which amount to living below the poverty line of \$1.90 daily. For example, a respondent noted:

There are a lot of things that I am struggling with! For example, for feeding now, sometimes I would just be at home and I won't be able to eat anything. These men will just come and try to lure me with money because I don't have anything. I won't lie, there was a time that I was sick and didn't have money for treatment. There was this man who usually comes to the bar that I worked at and he offered me money to sleep with him. I did it and got 5,000 naira (\$13). I had no choice that day [...] I regret it [R9].

For these respondents, limited economic resources mean that they are unable to afford necessities like food.

Sometimes I eat twice a day. It is not because I am not hungry. I just control my eating so that I will not get used to it and be spending my money on food too much. Because I have trained myself like that, the day I don't have anything in the house to eat, I just go to bed like that [R8].

I eat twice a day [...] sometimes once when I don't have money. When I don't have money at all I stay hungry the whole day [R4].

These responses point to the severity of deprivation that some trafficking survivors endure despite accessing reintegration assistance. This suggests that access to reintegration assistance does not necessarily guarantee the economic well-being of trafficking survivors. As such, it appears that the use of vocational training as means for survivors to secure their economic self-sufficiency in the Nigerian context is at best turning them into survivalist laborers, and at the same time diverting attention away from the real structural economic and political reforms needed to enable survivors secure their long-term economic well-being.

After reintegration: survivors' physical and mental well-being

All survivors praised the health-care services provided such as counseling, medical checkup and the treatment of their ailments. One respondent stated that “even though you say you have a headache there, none of us in the home takes over-the-counter drugs. Before you take any drug, the doctor will come and test you. We have 3 hospitals that we usually visit” [R10].

Thus, it is not surprising that most respondents reported that they had no enduring physical health complications immediately after completing the programs. This had positive impacts on their sense of well-being and their ability to earn an income. However, one respondent was still suffering from complications from a sexually transmitted infection and did not have the resources to get proper medical care:

I don't do regular medical checkups, but I went once, and I was told I have Pelvic Inflammatory Disease. I was given medication, but I was still seeing the symptoms. I have been unable to collect my scan results because I owe the hospital 8,000 naira (\$21). I don't have the money [R4].

Unfortunately, after completing the programs, the economic insecurity of survivors affected their ability to access quality health-care services as much as they did while in the programs. This issue seems to be pervasive as respondents admitted that the lack of funds means that whenever they fall ill, they resort to self-medication as a cheaper alternative to visiting the hospital for proper treatment. As one respondent stated: “the hospital treatment is costly but for the chemist, you just carry small money there and they will give you whatever drugs you want” [R5]. Another respondent also noted that “When I am ill, I have to treat myself. There is no money to go to the hospital” [R13].

In terms of survivors' mental well-being, most survivors expressed that they were self-confident and believed this self-confidence was linked to the assistance they received from the programs. Indeed, one respondent noted: "They taught me how I can stand as a woman among my mates [...] I now feel that I know my worth and I am not worthless" [R12]. However, most respondents linked their mental well-being to their economic conditions. As Surtees (2017, p. 51) observed, "economic well-being also impacts personal identity, self-esteem and social recognition" which are all key indicators of survivors' mental well-being. This is captured by another respondent:

I am somehow unhappy because sometimes I feel as if I could have moved on and gone far as a person in this life. But I feel bad because I don't have any money. I am just sitting like that [...] no help. But as long as life continues, I will be okay [R5].

For some respondents, their state of satisfaction and happiness with life was tied to their families' well-being; especially those who are the primary providers in their family. They were mainly concerned with meeting their families' needs and this affected their reintegration process:

I am unhappy because the way I was when I traveled is the same way I am now. When I traveled, the house was very dry, and I was very angry. The years are going by and I couldn't stay and watch my family with no money. I did not know it was that kind of work that I would be doing but God rescued me through NAPTIP. Now that I am back, I still feel sad because there is no money for me to help them. I am a grown-up girl [...] at least by now; I should be doing something big [R8].

It seems that most survivors enjoyed positive physical and mental well-being as they are exiting the program. However, their ability to maintain their physical and mental health after exiting the program was at best minimal. Unfortunately, this can constitute a threat to the long-term ability of survivors to earn money and successfully reintegrate (Surtees, 2017).

After reintegration: survivors' education and training opportunities

Creating opportunities for formal education training is one of the backbones of comprehensive reintegration assistance, especially as education can facilitate economic upward mobility within developing countries. Most survivors were interested in acquiring education while they were in the programs. However, only a few were able to achieve this while in the programs. Some of the respondents that were trained through secondary school while in the program were able to pursue further education in universities and polytechnics after they left the program. However, a majority were unable to get to the tertiary level because of limited funds. For one respondent, she had to sacrifice the funds she saved for school to treat a sick family member:

When I came out, I planned to go back to school. I was working as a salesgirl then to gather money while seeking admission. My mum fell ill because she was poisoned. I had to use the money I had saved to pay the hospital bill. I had to finish that before I could gather money for my education again [R7].

This is largely consistent with Ratia and Noterman's (2012) findings in Nigeria where women often used the idiom of suffering to stress their willingness to sacrifice themselves for their family.

Nevertheless, some respondents blamed the NGO that assisted them for their inability to further their education after the programs. These respondents were beneficiaries of philanthropic individuals who had committed to sponsoring their education to any level. However, the NGO severed communication between them and their sponsors once they completed the program:

I had 3 sponsors, but nobody gave me their numbers for me to locate them. The program director refused. That year, I got admission, but I lost it. I told the director and she said I should budget money to write exams again the next year, but my family doubted that the director would help me again [...] I didn't even have the sponsor's number [R11].

When people come up to say that they want to sponsor somebody, they would not want the girl to have the contact of the person sponsoring her. Since I left, I have not been able to communicate with my sponsor and I am struggling to pay my fees for my final year [R4].

While it is unclear why this policy exists in these organizations, one can speculate that the management either wanted to maintain control over every aspect of the program or avoid situations where the survivors solicit help from their benefactors beyond their education. At any rate, it seems that the NGO continues to see these survivors as deviant and vulnerable victims that are incapable of managing their affairs even after reintegration. Alternatively, this issue raised by survivors could be an indication of gross mismanagement and misappropriation of donor funds by the organization in question. Indeed, a survivor explained that while she was in the university during her reintegration program, the organization collected her school fees from her sponsors, but refused to pay the fees to her school, barred her calls and lied to her sponsor that her school fees were covered. This kind of situation is not surprising because of the high incidence of corruption in Nigeria that also has devastating consequences for trafficking survivors whose very survival is often dependent on the provision of comprehensive services. This participant's experience highlights one way corruption serves as a barrier to the substantive reintegration of survivors of trafficking.

After reintegration: survivors' safety and security

Trafficking survivors and their families have been known to suffer threats of reprisal attacks from traffickers. Hence, when providing survivors with assistance services, caution is exercised to ensure that they recover in a safe and stable environment. However, as [Brunovskis and Surtees \(2008\)](#) have pointed out, the vulnerability of trafficking survivors to this envisaged danger is often exaggerated by assistance service providers. None of the respondents in this study reported any security or safety issues such as threats or violence from their traffickers, families or communities.

Those who expressed any kind of security concerns attributed such concerns to the poor national security infrastructure in Nigeria rather than threats of violence from individuals based on their trafficking experience. This finding seems to contradict [Esposito et al.'s \(2016, p. 144\)](#) assertion that survivors on return to Nigeria "may be killed by their traffickers because they denounce them, or just because they failed to pay back their travel debt." The possible explanation for the low levels of security concerns among survivors might be because all the survivors we interviewed have sought reintegration in a new community within a large city like Lagos as opposed to returning to their community of origin. For example, the shelters for survivors in Lagos are not easily identifiable, and as a result, survivors can enjoy some degree of anonymity that they probably will not have if there were to return to their rural community of origin.

Therefore, it can be gleaned that survivors did not face threats from their traffickers, families or the immediate community. Our finding here thus supports [Surtees's \(2017\)](#) assertion that the cases of survivors with active threats to their safety and security when they exit trafficking are few.

After reintegration: survivors' healthy social environment and interpersonal relationships

Survivors' relationships with their families and friends *after* trafficking are a key determinant of successful reintegration because a supportive social environment can facilitate their

recovery and vice versa (Brunovskis and Surtees, 2013). This is particularly important given the incidence of family tensions, stigma and ostracism among trafficking survivors. However, most of our respondents confirmed that they had good relationships with their families while only a few were not on cordial terms with their families. In terms of their general interactions with their communities, some respondents described their level of engagement as very strong; most described it as somewhat strong, and a few described it as somewhat weak. This is because most of our respondents were members of community groups where they interacted with other members weekly – this was mainly through church gatherings and activities:

I interact with my neighbors well. I am an easy-going person and people like me a lot and help me a lot. One time I fell sick and they all contributed money to take me to a private hospital. I easily make friends [R8].

This finding is also supported by Ratia and Notermans' (2012, p. 157) assertion that "all in all, one can say that migrant women are not stigmatized." A possible explanation is that when survivors are reintegrated into new communities in urban spaces like Lagos, they likely do not face the same moral geographies they would have faced if they had returned to their communities of origin.

On the other hand, survivors' relationships with the opposite sex were impacted by their trafficking experience. Indeed, some respondents stated that they had an unpleasant view of and no desire for affectionate relationships with men, while others had recovered and were set to get married:

The experience affected me. It took so many months like maybe a year before I was able to adapt and enter a relationship. Starting afresh was difficult but now I am ready. In fact, when I traveled in December, I went for my engagement ceremony [R10].

The implication is that the traumatic ordeal of trafficking is likely to continue to shape the lives of survivors even after reintegration assistance.

After reintegration: survivors' satisfactory living conditions

Immediately after exiting the rehabilitation shelters, the next housing arrangement or environment that survivors move into is critical to their reintegration. Typically, the organizations initiate the family reunification process for survivors eligible to return to their families. For survivors who are unable to return to their previous communities due to probable dangers arising from traffickers or their family members, some organizations arrange for alternative accommodation. A respondent recounted her experience when the program ended, "I left the shelter in December and they got me an apartment close to my workplace. They paid for just 1 year and then I was on my own" [R2]. All respondents confirmed that they had comfortable living arrangements in a new setting. Most lived in one-room apartments that had at least two of the following amenities: power supply, water supply and good security.

The organizations also conduct post-program monitoring to follow up with survivors' progress. Reintegration is often achieved years after exiting trafficking and within this time, survivors are bound to encounter challenges and setbacks that could threaten their reintegration process. Therefore, even after program completion, assistance providers maintain communication with survivors, visit occasionally and in necessary cases assist them in addressing challenges beyond their control. Some respondents shared their differing experiences with post-program monitoring:

If you have a challenge that is more than you, you call them, and they are there for you anytime. So far as you didn't go back to your old ways. They put people in charge to monitor me [R8].

Follow up? They didn't do anything. Even when I got pregnant, they didn't ask about me again. It is only when they want something that they call [. . .] I will not lie to you. Like now, that she called me for you. Only when they want me to narrate the story of my life that they will call me [R4].

These two respondents were beneficiaries of different rehabilitation programs, and this might account for their differing experiences with post-program monitoring. Respondents also alluded to the constant change in the staff of organizations which prevented them from reaching the staff that had guided them through rehabilitation. Rehabilitation officials also complained that their efforts at post-program monitoring are hampered by survivors who change their contact details and become inaccessible when they leave the program. Although some survivors enjoyed post-program monitoring, those who were unable to benefit from this long-term management for any of the reasons stated above may have faced some setbacks with no formal assistance from the organizations. As such, this may have affected their reintegration.

Discussion and conclusion

There are three main emerging issues. Firstly, while reintegration programs seem to have provided some opportunities for procedural reintegration through the delivery of useful reintegration assistance services, the achievement of substantive reintegration appears to be largely incomplete. Indeed, most of our respondents acknowledged the positive contributions that the reintegration programs made to their life after trafficking but given that a majority continue to experience the same kind of challenges they faced before trafficking; the prospect of re-trafficking remains high. At issue here is the fact that reintegration programs merely use a short-term individualistic and technocratic approach to assisting survivors which leave the structural conditions that exacerbate survivors' vulnerability to trafficking unaddressed. Hence, even though they are assisted with services to prepare them for a dignified life in society, various factors such as extreme poverty and high unemployment rates limit the possibility of substantive reintegration. Evidently, the process of reintegration does not take place in a vacuum, and from a policy perspective, stakeholders must ensure that the emphasis on the procedural aspect of reintegration does not divert attention from the structural conditions and the reforms needed to ensure survivors achieve substantive reintegration.

Secondly, by focusing mostly on survivors' social reintegration into their origin communities, previous literature has tended to emphasize the importance of socio-cultural relational processes for the successful reintegration of survivors. Yet, our findings seem to suggest that when survivors seek reintegration into new communities, it is their ability to secure their socio-economic well-being that significantly shapes their everyday life *after* trafficking. Hence, governments and NGOs need to take seriously the destination community within which reintegration would occur in the design of reintegration programs. This would ensure that on the one hand, they are able to mitigate risks that specifically tend to arise from reintegration in origin communities like stigma and on the other hand, focus on addressing socio-economic priorities of survivors that are reintegrating in new communities. Besides, the assumption that survivors' entry into low-wage jobs via vocational training can be a solution to human trafficking also needs to be reconsidered.

Thirdly, if reintegration assistance in Nigeria is to be more effective, they would need to better reflect the actual experiences of survivors rather than be driven by the political imperatives of the government. Privileging the voices of survivors would allow for scarce available reintegration resources to be directed to where they are most needed and ensure these programs are useful to survivors. In conclusion, our study shows that reintegration is a complex process that is experienced differently by different individuals with varied associated outcomes for them. Indeed, while the process of reintegration does offer some opportunities for survivors, it can also inadvertently reinforce inequalities among them. As such, reintegration programs are important, but they are not a panacea for transforming the lives of survivors.

Note

1. The legal status and protection aspect of the model was omitted as all survivors were indigenes of Nigeria with authorized residency in the country. In addition, none of the respondents included in the study was involved in any legal processes to convict their traffickers hence their fair representation in legal processes could not be assessed. No substantial data was collected on the well-being of their families and dependents as most respondents did not feel comfortable divulging in-depth information about their families.

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