



## Communicating the Dangers of Illegal Migration: A Mixed Impact of Japa Syndrome on South-South, Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explored the communication dynamics surrounding migration from Nigeria, popularly referred to as Japa syndrome, especially from the South-South region of the country, where some residents engage in illegal migration. The study investigated the information sources, awareness level, and potential for deterrence of danger-related messaging among regional residents. This study utilizes Knowledge Gap and Agenda Setting theories to analyze the risks of illegal migration. Knowledge Gap theory suggests that access to information varies among groups, impacting their views and decisions. Concurrently, agenda-setting theory highlights how media shapes public opinion and government responses by focusing on dangers, impacts, and root causes of migration. Data collected from questionnaires and a Question Guide indicates that residents primarily obtain migration information through social media, TV, radio, films, friends, and newspapers. Despite high awareness of the dangers of illegal migration, this didn't significantly deter residents from considering such journeys. It's recommended that media messages about migration should be clearer and include not only the risks but also the underlying causes of migration aspirations and tangible alternatives. Comprehensive communication strategies should address both the dangers and motivations behind illegal migration.*

**Keywords:** communication, deterrence, illegal migration, japa syndrome, media

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## INTRODUCTION

The gregarious nature of man makes him move from one place to another for various reasons. International migration for work, study, humanitarian, colonisation, socio-political insecurity, extended war, a high unemployment rate, and lifestyle reasons are increasingly commonplace, representing an unprecedented movement of people globally (Marzouk, Hemminki & Khyatti, 2014; Gomes, 2024). More so, international law allows persons to move freely inside and between countries as long as they follow local laws (Guanah & Obi, 2019). Furthermore, in countries that domesticate the United Nations (UN) Charter, unrestricted movement is guaranteed (Claiming Human Rights, 2009).

De Haas and Miller (2014) note that international migration is transnational by definition. Given the growth in scope and diversity of international migration in recent decades, practically all countries in the modern age are influenced by it. Development economist Sir Paul Collier expects immigration to rise in the future decades (The Economist 2021). To curb migration into the UK, Euronews (2024) reports that the government plans to involve influencers on TikTok in its campaign to discourage illegal immigration to its shores. The TikTok influencers are to warn migrants against crossing the Channel.

World Migration (2008a) estimates that 440,000 Africans emigrated yearly from 2000 to 2005, the majority to Europe, totaling 17 million African migrants. The annual population growth of 2.6% is offset by 0.44 million African emigrants, which accounts for only 2% of Africa's population growth. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development-OECD, (2006, as cited in World Migration, 2008b), 10,000 West African migrants heading for Europe were stranded in Nouadhibou, Mauritius, in 2005, and 20,000 sub-Saharan African migrants were waiting in Spanish enclaves in North Africa to cross to Europe. The International Organisation for Migration rescued 7,831 Nigerians in Libya in May 2018, while Nigeria's Federal Government found 5,000 more in Libyan prison centres (Premium Times 2018a). According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), from January to June 2018, nearly 1,000 migrants drowned in the Mediterranean (Premium Times 2018b).

According to a 2011 World Bank report, a significant number of people would consider living in another nation if given the option: Ghana 75%, Nigeria 74%, Kenya 54%, South Africa 51%, Senegal 46%, and Tanzania 43%. In the early

1990s, Spain and Italy required Maghreb migrants to have visas, which increased illegal Mediterranean migration. Since 2000, illicit migration has expanded to sub-Saharan Africa (de Haas 2008).

Many Africans travel to Europe in a risky search for a better life. In Morocco, Mauritania, and Libya, trafficking people to Europe is more profitable than narcotics trafficking. Undocumented migration to Europe by water or land in Ceuta and Melilla has garnered international news. Most rejected asylum seekers are repatriated to Africa (International Organisation for Migration, 2018; Mbugua, 2012). Many migrants risk significant injury or death on their route to Europe. AP News (2018) reports thousands of deaths trying to traverse the Sahara and Mediterranean to Europe.

In Nigeria, Japa is referred to as the act of emigrating, or fleeing the country for greener pastures. Although Japa syndrome is not limited to Nigeria because it is a global phenomenon, the toll on the well-being of the nation is enormous. Nigeria is witnessing a generation of young lecturers from tertiary institutions, medical doctors, lawyers, bank professionals, health workers, footballers, sports professionals, tech entrepreneurs, and various professionals abandoning the country for better opportunities abroad. Professor Ali Pate, the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, says brain drain, also known as ‘Japa Syndrome,’ has cost Nigeria its top health sector talents, with 16,000 doctors leaving the country for better opportunities abroad (Ovuakporie 2024). The Deputy Registrar of the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), Dr Victor Kolawole, says only 58,000 doctors renewed their annual practice license in 2023 out of the 130,000 registered doctors in the country. This is attributed to the increase in migration of doctors out of the country (Brandpower 2024).

The pace of japaing is perhaps never witnessed before in Nigerian history, to the extent that Nigerians are ready to do anything to leave the country. For instance, in desperation to escape from Nigeria, a Nigerian approached the Lagos State Police Command spokesperson, SP Benjamin Hundeyin, and requested that he be declared wanted by the police. He said he needed the police declaration as evidence of persecution for his asylum application. He told the Police spokesman that he applied for asylum at an Embassy, and during the interview, he told them

that he was being persecuted to the point of being declared wanted by the Police. He said he would have provided them a forged ‘wanted’ declaration when he was asked for one, but he did not do so because he knew the Embassy would approach the police for verification, hence his approaching him because he wanted it to come from the police (Leadership News 2023).

People encounter a lot of hazards when they decide to migrate illegally. Since it is not a crime to migrate, the appropriate channels can be explored to obtain the right documents to travel with. However, some people are bent on travelling out of the country, even when they do not have the needed requirements to do so, depending on the country they intend to travel to. Out of desperation, this set of people embarks on illegal trips and exposes themselves to varied dangers. Therefore, this Paper took a keen look at the dangers inherent in illegal migration vis-à-vis the role of communication as it relates to information about immigration at the disposal of would-be emigrants.

**Statement of the Problem.** The fact that a vast majority of Nigerians who have the opportunity to travel are departing the shores of the country in droves for foreign lands is never in doubt. Daily, Nigerians leave the country through legal and illegal means and routes. Some even risk their lives by offering to be drug couriers for those who offer to sponsor their trips, while some others go through the Mediterranean Sea with the hope of eking out a living when they arrive at their destinations.

Many of such migrants do not even arrive safely because they are either arrested at the borders of the country they travelled to, on arrival, and are promptly deported, or are thrown into jail, while the unfortunate ones die at the Mediterranean Sea due to boat mishaps. Some who are even lucky to arrive at their supposed “Eldorado” eventually find themselves in slavery where their freedom is taken from them completely. Akeregha and Godwin (2018) report that, when she was six months pregnant, Lewisa Comfort, 23, narrates her experience to The Guardian: “The Nigerians who collected money and took us to Libya usually betrayed us. They did sell Nigerian ladies to Arab men for about N200,000, and the Arab men would use the girls as sex machines and for house cleaning jobs, and with all these, we would only be given one dry bread to eat per day without water.”

The media, foreign and local, tend not to be very concerned about the dangers associated with illegal migration; foreign media are more interested in

heightening the polarisation on immigration issues (Suro 2008a) while local media tend to focus more on the better life emigrants are likely to enjoy as compared to the hardships they face in their countries at present.

Although the media do disseminate information about the dangers that are associated with illegal migration, they do not seem to be adequate, or they do not serve as a sufficient deterrent to intending migrants, especially from the South-South region of Nigeria. This has had a mixed impact on outward flows from the region. Hence, research like this is needed to understand how information delivery formats and trusted messaging sources can optimise deterrence efforts.

Objectives of the study: This study aimed to: (1) ascertain the sources of migration news/information the residents of South-South, Nigeria, are exposed to, (2) determine the awareness level of the residents of South-South, Nigeria, about the dangers associated with illegal migration, and (3) investigate the extent the information about the dangers associated with illegal migration can deter the residents of South-South Nigeria from migrating illegally.

Theoretical Bases. The study is foregrounded in the Knowledge Gap Theory and the Agenda Setting Theory. The Knowledge Gap Theory, also known as the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis, explains how information dissemination through mass media can lead to disparities in knowledge acquisition between different segments of society. The theory was first proposed in 1970 by three scholars, including Phillip Tichenor, George Donohue, and Clarice Olien. They explained that as mass media information increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status acquire this information at a faster rate, leading to an increasing gap in knowledge (Drew 2023).

This theory posits that individuals with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire information at a faster rate than those with lower socioeconomic status when exposed to mass media, resulting in a widening gap in knowledge between these groups (Drew 2023). The theory highlights the challenges in disseminating information effectively, especially regarding complex social issues like irregular migration. In the context of communicating the dangers of illegal migration, this theory implies that certain groups may have better access to information than others, affecting their perceptions and decisions regarding migration.

The theory suggests that efforts to communicate the dangers of illegal migration must address information inequalities among different groups. Tailoring communication strategies to reach marginalised communities or vulnerable populations can help bridge this gap and ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the risks involved.

The Agenda Setting theory, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 (McCombs & Shaw 1972), explores how the media influence public opinion by determining what topics are considered important and worthy of attention. This theory suggests that the media's selection and emphasis on certain issues can shape the public's perception of what is significant, ultimately influencing what people think about and discuss. (CommunicationTheory.org 2011)

Agenda Setting theory focuses on how media coverage influences public opinion and policy priorities. In the case of illegal migration, media play a vital role in shaping public perceptions and government responses. By highlighting specific aspects of irregular migration, such as the risks involved, the impact on host countries, or the root causes, the media can influence what the public considers important and what policymakers prioritise.

Agenda-setting theory emphasises the power of the media in shaping public discourse. By framing illegal migration as a complex issue with multifaceted risks, the media can influence public attitudes towards migrants, government policies, and the allocation of resources for communication campaigns. The media can change the narratives and discourse focus by emphasising the numerous dangers associated with illegal migration, with the intention of dissuading Nigerians from japaing illegally.

Tenable Situations in Africa before Colonisation. Migration has been from the outset of human existence; due to man`s companionable nature, he migrated from one place to the other in search of pasture for his flocks. For instance, in the olden days, the Izon ethnic group of Nigeria were known to prefer to migrate, looking for arable land and riversides to settle because their occupations were primarily farming and fishing. However, such movements were within specific geographical locations, that is, within a country or continent.

African forefathers were enjoying their lives in the serenity of their respective domains before the Europeans encroached on the quietude of their

settlements and forcefully carted them away like goods in demeaning conditions to Europe to work on their plantations and help them to build their cities as cheap labour. They deceived the traditional rulers and cajoled them into selling off blacks and their subjects in slavery to foreign buyers for gifts such as mirrors, wall clocks, tobacco, alcohol, guns, glass cups, wine, necklaces, food, plates, sweets, and other insignificant items.

Godiam.org (2016) accounts that European traders forced Africans onto slave ships and carried them across the Atlantic Ocean for over 300 years. Up to 3 million British slaves were transported to America and the Caribbean as labourers on plantations, helping London prosper. Forced migrants faced 12 hours of work in extreme heat, lashes, and legbites. Slaves were branded with hot iron to prove ownership, flogged to death, and sold when they became too weak to work on their plantations. “Today, the wealth built on the foundation of slavery can be seen in most parts of Europe” (p.1).

Today, the scenario is different, politicians and leaders in Europe and America now repeatedly demonise illegal immigrants in their public statements with hardline rhetoric about immigration; to the extent that Donald Trump of United States once referred to immigrants as those that want to “pour into and infest our country” while Hungary’s Viktor Orban says Africa “wants to kick down our door”, and Italy’s Matteo Salvini, has called for a census of the Roma community which opponents see as having echoes of measures targeting Jews in the past (vanguardngr.com 2018).

The disdain against immigrants extends to the way Europeans address African migrants; as an anonymous writer said, when they move from Europe to Africa it is Voyages of discovery; when we move from Africa to Europe it is Illegal immigrants; a group of Africans in Europe are called Refugees but a group of Europeans in Africa are called Tourists; a group of Africans in the bush are Poachers but a group of Europeans in bush are addressed as Hunters or Researchers; black people working in a foreign country are seen as Foreigners, but white people working in a foreign country are addressed as Expatriates. There should be nothing wrong with Africans traveling to European countries to enjoy the fruits of their forefathers` sweat.

Media and Immigration Issues Reportage. The media are a sine qua non in society. If society is to be properly governed, the media must be dependable sources of varied developmental information for both the government and the governed. When this happens, the indispensability of the media cannot be denied due to their inevitable roles in society.

The media have the ability to cause a matter hitherto considered inconsequential to be top in the list of public discourse. Any report from the media is the encounter of the media's thirst with that of the public (audience); the media thirst that the public may thirst for their offerings. Therefore, the media role in society are not for self-aggrandisement, but a call to duty of service to mankind and the society.

Different countries' media portray migration and immigration concerns differently. In the United States (US), the media have been accused of hindering immigration policy-making for decades (Suro 2008b), with their impact growing due to industry evolution. American journalism has led the public to identify immigration with illegality, catastrophe, controversy, and government failure.

New media advocacy voices have mobilised public resistance to policy efforts, often by exaggerating the immigrant narrative provided by traditional news organisations (Suro 2008b). The goal is to create an impasse on a difficult issue that will likely reemerge on the public agenda.

The famed Philadelphia Inquirer and New York Times editor Eugene Roberts distinguished between “break” and “ooze” articles. Immigration is an eye-catching news story. Slowly developing, its full impact can only be measured over time. Immigration coverage has been episodic, with surges and dips. Guanah and Obi (2019) refer to this as the Vulture Reporting Hypothesis, which compares the media to a “hit-and-run” vehicle that leaves an accident site and may never return. The media report immigration stories when they are “hot” and “breaking,” then move on to other topics. Guanah and Obi (2019) compare it to a husband who neglects his wife at home for a new bride, only to abandon the new wife again after seeing yet another beautiful bride.

Dramatic events like the Elian Gonzalez affair, congressional debates, and protest marches have caused spikes in America. The public and government now view immigration as a sudden, crisis-like event due to increased coverage. The 2006–2007 congressional discussions caused the highest spike (Suro 2008b).



Suro (2008b) emphasises that immigration-related criminality, crises, and controversy produces news. Immigrants and political actors lead these dramas, while the public watches. For years, this pattern has repeated with increasing intensity as the media have transformed. The frenzied, on-and-off coverage—more opera than ooze—mischaracterized a decades-long demographic event that generally occurred legally.

Dangers Associated with Illegal Migration. Migrants who embark on illegal migration encounter a lot of risks. Lewisa Comfort, one of the Nigerians evacuated from Libya by the Federal Government, said the desert was worse than the sea. In her set, 14 Hilux vans carrying 27 passengers each left Nigeria, but only 10 survived. More than 1,000 persons are said to have died in the desert. Some of them paid between N600,000 and N800,000 to cross over to Italy, but regretted that their hopes were dashed. (Akeregha & Godwin 2018). Albert-Makyur and Mbanaso (2022) list some of the dangers associated with irregular migration as: Human Trafficking, Xenophobia, Insecurity, Exploitation, Health Risks, and Legal Vulnerability.

Vulnerable migrants, especially women and children, are at risk of falling prey to human traffickers who exploit them for forced labour, sexual exploitation, or organ harvesting. Also, migrants face discrimination, rejection, and violence in host countries due to xenophobic attitudes, leading to social exclusion and marginalization. Likewise, migrants flee conflict zones and unstable regions, exposing themselves to danger and threats in search of safety and protection.

Furthermore, migrants may be exploited by smugglers and traffickers who subject them to dangerous routes, hazardous conditions, and extortionate fees, putting their lives at risk. Irregular migrants often lack access to healthcare services, exposing them to health hazards and diseases during their journey.

A lot of emigrants are overworking themselves by running different work shifts at different places just to make ends meet. According to Quardri (2024) in a BBC report, these expose them to all kinds of diseases which shorten their life spans. Quadri (2024), an emigrant Nigerian nurse who has lived in the United Kingdom (UK) for more than 20 years, posits that there has been a high rate of death among emigrants to the UK from 2021, and the majority of the victims are

below 40 years. She attests that most of them were those who japed from Nigeria. In addition, irregular migrants are at risk of detention, deportation, and a lack of legal protection, leaving them susceptible to abuse and exploitation.

In their study, Obi, Bartolini, and D'Haese (2021a) identified the dangers associated with irregular migration to include: Risk of the Journey, Predicaments of Irregular Immigrants, Debt and Exploitation, Control by Traffickers: Psychological Abuse, Kidnapping and Torture, and Increased Risk of Death.

The desperate journey from Nigeria to Europe involves significant risks, including dangers during transit through various countries, such as desert crossings and sea voyages. Also, once irregular migrants reach Europe, they face various challenges and risks, including exploitation, abuse, and difficult living conditions. Female victims of trafficking often end up working as prostitutes to pay off their traffickers, accumulating excessive debts that can amount to more than EUR 50,000. Human traffickers, known as "madams," exert control over victims, both in Nigeria and Italy, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation and abuse.

In addition to the foregoing, victims of human trafficking often endure psychological abuse and manipulation from traffickers, affecting their mental and emotional well-being. African migrants face the constant danger of being kidnapped, tortured for ransom, or even killed during their journey, especially when crossing the desert to Libya. Equally, the stricter border controls in Europe have led to an increase in the number of deaths at sea during migration attempts, with higher mortality rates for migrants crossing from North Africa to Europe.

Empirical review. A study by Okunade and Oluwabunmi (2020) titled "Youth Out-Migration in Nigeria: The Dual Role of Social Media as a Cause and Solution" suggests that there is low awareness. Therefore, there is a need to increase awareness level among Nigerian youths regarding the risks and challenges associated with migration. Some key points related to awareness levels include misinformation; this relates to many Nigerian youth lacking the critical intellectual capability to determine the integrity of migration information products and services posted on social media platforms. This lack of critical analysis skills contributes to the spread of misinformation and the potential for misguided decisions.

It also includes peer influence, whereby youth are influenced by what they see on social media, often without critically evaluating the information presented. The desire for instant wealth and the glamorization of migration as a solution to

economic challenges can lead to impulsive decisions to migrate without fully understanding the consequences.

The duo also mentioned digital literacy. They suggest there is a need to enhance digital literacy among Nigerian youths to enable them to critically analyse information on social media platforms. This includes developing skills to discern between reliable and unreliable sources of information, especially regarding migration opportunities.

Guanah and Obi (2019) study titled "Coverage of the 2017 Libyan Migrant Slavery Saga in Selected Nigerian Newspapers" analyses how Nigerian newspapers covered the issue before and after the Cable News Network (CNN) report on the 2017 migrants' slavery saga in Libya. The study aims to determine the frequency of migration reports in newspapers, if the Libya slavery saga was addressed in editorials, and the prominence of migration stories in *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, and *The Nigerian Observer* newspapers, selected through purposive sampling. The study used content analysis and the coding sheet as its main tools.

The study found that Nigerian newspapers reported few migration stories until CNN revealed Libyans selling migrants. After the Libya selling migrant tragedy, Nigerian publications' migration articles have reverted to low levels. This study suggests that the Nigerian media should investigate the core causes of illegal migration and continue to warn citizens about its hazards through reportage and investigation journalism.

In their study titled "Digitalization and migration: the role of social media and migrant networks in migration decisions. An exploratory study in Nigeria." Obi, Bartolini and D'Haese (2021b) discusses the significant role of social media in influencing migration decisions in Nigeria. It explores how social media platforms have become essential tools for migrants in gathering information, connecting with potential networks, and sharing experiences related to migration.

Social media provide a platform for migrants to access information on job opportunities, visa processes, and living conditions in destination countries. Also, it facilitates communication with family and friends, enabling migrants to maintain social connections across borders. Generally, the study highlights the transformative impact of social media on migration dynamics in Nigeria.

Inyama's (2021) study is titled, "Economic and Risk Perceptions Motivating Illegal Migration Abroad: Port Harcourt City Youths, Nigeria." Content analysis research method was used for this work. The data revealed that the perception of many of the participants on opportunities for decent work abroad is informed by what they see in western films and read on social media platforms.

The study further established that the majority of the youth who embark on dangerous journeys lack in-depth knowledge of the associated risks of traveling through the desert and across the sea, including the dangers of living abroad as undocumented migrants. Based on these findings, the study recommends the need for more awareness creation and enlightenment of the youths to fully understand the risks and negative aspects of the illegal movement.

## **METHODS**

A mixed-research methods approach was used to comprehensively explore the discourse communicating the dangers associated with illegal migration in South-South, Nigeria. This approach allowed for the integration of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Plano Clark 2018).

Quantitative data were collected through copies of the questionnaire administered to a representative sample of residents of Port Harcourt, capital of Rivers State, and Benin City, capital of Edo State; both states are in South-South Nigeria. The survey included structured questions that capture information about the sources of migration news/information the residents of South-South, Nigeria are exposed to, their awareness level about the dangers associated with illegal migration, and the extent the information about the dangers associated with illegal migration can deter the residents of South-South Nigeria from migrating illegally.

Also, qualitative insights were obtained through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including some deported emigrants, family members of victims of illegal migration, and other residents of Rivers and Edo States. The interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and beliefs regarding sources of migration news/information they are exposed to, their awareness level about the dangers associated with illegal migration, and the extent the information about the dangers associated with illegal migration can deter them from migrating illegally. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for

flexibility to delve into emerging themes and gather rich qualitative data. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns in the interview data.

The quantitative data provided a broad overview and statistical evidence, while the qualitative data offered in-depth insights, contextual understanding, and personal narratives (Creswell & Plano Clark 2018). The combination of these methods enabled a more holistic and nuanced exploration of the research objectives and provided a deeper understanding of the dynamics between communication and the dangers of illegal migration.

Although the South-South region of Nigeria is made up of six states (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers), the researchers purposively chose to study the state capitals of Rivers (Port Harcourt) and Edo State (Benin City). These cities were chosen because they are cosmopolitan in nature, and a lot of persons have successfully migrated from these cities; some did so legally while some migrated illegally. Similarly, many family members of these migrants reside in these cities. Also residing in these cities are people who were deported from foreign countries for various reasons, and people who have attempted to *japa* from Nigeria at one time or the other through illegal routes. There are also many residents of these cities who are seeking for means to *japa*.

According to United Nations population projections, the current metro area population of Benin City in 2024 is **1,973,000** while that of Port Harcourt is 3,637,000 (World Population Review 2023). This makes the population of this study to be 5, 610,000. Using the Australian Bureau of Statistics Sample Size Calculator (2023), the researchers determined the required responding sample size, standard error, relative standard error, and a confidence interval (95% or 99%) for a proportion estimate, using only one of these criteria as an input. The estimated variance proportion was 0.5 (5%), the confidence interval was 0.05 (5%). From the total population of 5,510,000, the sample size of 384 was arrived at. Proportionate Allocation Formula was used to ascertain the sample size to pick from each city thus:

BENIN CITY:	$1,973,000 \times 384$		
	5,610,000	= 135.05	
	Approximately	= 135	
PORT HARCOURT:	$3,637,000 \times 384$		
	5,610,000	= 248.95	
	Approximately	= 249	
Total			=384

Multi-stage and purposive sampling techniques were adopted by the researchers to select the individuals from each city. Through intensive search, the researchers were able to get 6 residents of Port Harcourt and Benin City, three from each city, who had attempted to *japa* through Libya to Europe but got stocked, and were later rescued by the Federal government of Nigeria. These six respondents were penciled down for oral in-depth interview from the sample size of 384. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the remaining 378 respondents. 365 (96.56%) copies were recovered and analysed. The results were presented in tables and percentages.

#### Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table 1.**

**Sources of Migration News/Information Respondents are Exposed to**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Social media	95	26.03
Television	84	23.01
Radio	10	2.74
Films	79	21.64
Newspapers	61	16.71
Acquaintances	17	4.66
Others	19	5.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2024*

Table 1 shows that the respondents are exposed to diverse sources of migration news and information, though at various degrees. The implication is that they may have some information about immigration and migration, but may not take into cognizance the dangers that come with illegal migration.

**Table 2.**

**Level of Awareness of the Respondents about the Dangers Associated with  
Illegal Migration,**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Very high	110	30.14
High	98	26.85
Can't tell	49	13.43
Low	40	10.95
Very low	68	18.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2024*

**KEYS:** Very high- 90% - 100%; High- 89% - 70%; Can't tell - 50% - 69%; Low- 40% - 49%; Very Low- 1% - 39%.

The data gleaned from Table 2 indicate that the awareness level of illegal migration dangers is high. The interpretation is that the respondents have the knowledge that their voyage may boomerang because of the dangers inherent in it.

**Table 3.**

**The Extent the Information about the Dangers Associated with Illegal  
Migration can deter the Respondents**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Very High Extent	60	16.44
High Extent	73	20
Undecided	4	1.10
Low Extent	107	29.32
Very Low Extent	112	30.68
Others	9	2.46
<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2024*

**KEYS:** Very High Extent- 90% - 100%; High Extent- 89% - 70%; Undecided- 50% - 69%; Low Extent- 40% - 49%; Very Low Extent- 1% - 39%.

Table 3 shows the fact that respondents are not deterred from embarking on illegal migration, if they have the opportunity to do so, even though they are aware of the dangers that may come with such journeys.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that the residents of Port Harcourt and Benin City are exposed to migration news/information through social media, television, radio, films, acquaintances, and newspapers. This finding is supported by the study of Okunade and Oluwabunmi (2020), who highlighted that Social media platforms are identified as both a cause of and a solution to youth out-migration in Nigeria. However, while they can provide valuable information and opportunities for economic benefit, they also contribute to misinformation that leads to misguided decisions among the youth.

Likewise, research by Olawale and Ridwan (2021) highlights the significant role of social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, in influencing migration decision-making processes among Nigerian youth. Social media platforms are described as indispensable tools that facilitate inspiration, screening and sorting, operational and emotional preparation, and post-processing stages of migration decisions.

Furthermore, social media are portrayed as a means through which individuals create an "imaginary life" in the diaspora, reflecting on socio-economic and political conditions in their home country and envisioning a better future abroad. The study emphasises how social media enables individuals to explore and engage with information about distant places, shaping their perceptions and aspirations regarding migration destinations.

Also, it was discovered that the awareness level of the residents of Port Harcourt and Benin City of South-South, Nigeria, about the dangers associated with illegal migration dangers was high. This finding aligns with that of Obi (2020) who reported that the awareness level among participants in the Safe Migration Awareness Campaign in rural communities of Edo State, Nigeria was significantly increased. The campaign successfully conveyed important information about the dangers of irregular migration and the realities faced by migrants, leading to improved understanding and knowledge among the students. The use of various



intervention channels, including oral presentations supplemented with visual aids, contributed to the effectiveness of the campaign in raising awareness.

Moreover, the facilitators reported high levels of attentiveness and enthusiasm among the students during the sessions, indicating a strong engagement with the information provided. The tailored messages and the involvement of external volunteers further enhanced the impact of the campaign on the awareness levels of the participants. Overall, the campaign successfully addressed information gaps and increased awareness about the risks associated with irregular migration among the targeted audience in rural Nigeria.

This finding reveals the level of desperation of some Nigerians to japa in search of greener pastures in foreign lands, and away from the supposed hardship they are facing in Nigeria. The implication is that people are still hell-bent on japaing, no matter the dangers associated with illegal migration. In an oral interview, Isaac Kobani, a resident of Port Harcourt, agrees that he is well aware of the dangers that come with embarking on illegal trips out of Nigeria, especially through the desert and the Mediterranean. He said he has a lot of information in his disposal because he carries out numerous researchers in his preparation to japa from as soon as the opportunity comes.

The third finding of this study was that, even though the residents of Port Harcourt and Benin City know the dangers and risks associated with illegal migration, it did not significantly deter them from considering such journeys. This finding agrees with that of Inyama (2021) who opines that the anticipation of a better life and the hope of earning a stable income motivate those who undertake unsafe migration journeys abroad, regardless of the risks. This shows that despite the substantial information on these risks, the residents remain undeterred from engaging in illegal migration. This suggests a complex interplay between awareness, individual motivations, and the perceived efficacy of available legal migration pathways. The findings call for multifaceted communication strategies.

It shows that the dangers associated with illegal migration do not deter people from embarking on dangerous trips, even though they aware of these dangers; this reality is supported by the volume of people who still risks their lives to go through dangerous routes like the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean Sea

just to migrate from the country. For instance, Efosa Elija, a resident of Benin City, during an oral interview, said he will japa if he has the opportunity because he would like to dwell in a society where things work, where there is constant electricity, good roads, and good schools, rather than staying in Nigeria. He said he would not mind embarking on a journey outside Nigeria if he had anyone to tell him how to go about it, no matter the risks involved. He vowed to sell all his property in Nigeria just to raise money to travel, if he could find a person to lead him through the Mediterranean Sea route.

Also, people risk their lives and those of their loved ones by taking whatever option is available to them, as long as it will take them outside the shores of this country. This is so despite the various media messages that highlight the dangers associated with irregular migration. Daily, the media bombards the society with various disasters that have befallen some green-pasture-seeking members of the society yet, the rate at which people take risks in the name of migration has not reduced.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper examined the impact of illegal migration on the Japa syndrome in Nigeria. It combined a review of the literature with quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches. The results of this study provide evidence of the negative physical and mental health impacts of illegal migration of the Japa syndrome on the citizens, including severe anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, and more. It recommended various policy and institutional measures that can be implemented to reduce the prevalence of the Japa syndrome in Nigeria. Overall, this study highlighted the importance of improving awareness of the potential risks posed by illegal migration in order to reduce the detrimental impacts. In addition, it offered valuable recommendations for policymakers on how to address the issue of illegal migration in order to decrease the prevalence of the Japa syndrome.

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